

Webinar Report
**An Indo-Pacific Axis: Future of QUAD and Maritime
Cooperation in the East**

Organised by: Ananta Aspen Centre

Date: 18 February 2021

Chair: **Ambassador Gautam Bambawale** (Former Ambassador of India to Bhutan, China & High Commissioner to Pakistan; Distinguished Fellow, Ananta Centre)

Key Speakers: **Michael J. Green** (Senior Vice President for Asia and Japan Chair, CSIS; Director of Asian Studies, School of Foreign Service, Georgetown University), **C. Raja Mohan** (Director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore), **Tomohiko Taniguchi** (Professor, Keio University Graduate School of System Design & Management and Special Adviser to Prime Minister ABE, Shinzo's Cabinet (retd.))

Participation from CUTS: Jithin Sabu

1. Introduction

1.1 Amidst the growing geostrategic concerns, QUAD has picked up momentum to integrate four key maritime democracies with a shared vision for promoting security, prosperity and values of democracy. Quad has expanded in scope and upgraded in representation with a growing convergence of US, Japan and Australia with India on the geo-strategic challenges in the region.

1.2 The webinar focused on Quad's ability to formalise economic and technology partnerships alongside security cooperation and expansion to Quad-Plus from the Indo-Pacific region.

2. Key Takeaways

2.1 The Quad should not be limited as an initiative that is meant to counter China's aggressive behaviour in the Indo-Pacific region. The definition of Quad as an opposing mechanism to China is delimiting the scope of the initiative. It should be defined as an idea which can have a crucial role to play in multidimensional areas, as the members of this initiative value more than themselves. They value provision of public goods, share some common values and capabilities.

2.2 Panelists expressed hope that the Biden administration will be very committed to the Quad and will be actively engaging and embracing the Quad initiative, even though the pressure to withdraw from the initiative is high in domestic politics. The Quad itself will be one of the demonstrations that the Biden administration is embracing the maritime strategy for Asia, in close partnership with democratic allies and partners, for senior officials including Kurt Campbell and Jake Sullivan, according to Michael Green.

2.3 The Quad should be institutionalised in the area of maritime security. Establishing a standing naval task force should be a priority of the members of the Quad. Institutionalising in other areas like trade, it will be harder as countries have non-aligning stands and policies. After all, one has to remember that for Australia, Japan and the US, China is the biggest trading partner.

2.4 On the topic of expanding the Quad, the panelists agreed that the four countries have to be the core and therefore it cannot be expanding. It can explore the possibility of giving ad-hoc memberships to other like-minded countries. There should be continuous engagements and reaching out to partners such as South East Asian countries.

2.5 India is crucial in shaping the balance of power in this critical part of the world. The question of what role will India play in the Quad initiative and how enthusiastic is India about this is relevant as it is a non-treaty member, unlike other members. As India has always partnered with countries where it can benefit mutually and since there is a recognition that it is to India's advantage to be part of the initiative, panelists expressed the hope that India will be enthusiastic about the Quad and taking it forward. It is not because of the threat from China that India is interested in Quad, but because it wants a stable Asia and the Indo-Pacific.

2.6 Panelists opined that Brexit is a blessing in disguise for the Indo-Pacific region, as Britain will be looking to showcase its prominence and capabilities as a prominent power and key player in the Indian ocean region partnering with the democratic alliances.

2.7 The Indian Ocean region is going to be the highway and economic corridor for the 21st century business. Therefore, the Quad has to engage even with China, as the peace, security and a rules-based order in the region is important.

2.8 The Quad has to start exploring with joint operations, in the way it is doing the joint exercises. Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) in the eastern Indian ocean will be a good case to start, given the magnitude of disasters in the region. The members also have to share their facilities with each other for the mutual capability building.

2.9 In the economic realm where the Quad has a potential area to cooperate actively is the 5G network development. In this area, policies of all the countries are closely aligned and therefore opens a wide window of cooperation. They can also cooperate in diversification of supply chains to build resilience.

2.10 The Quad is expecting significant progress in the coming years. Two things will be relevant to the Quad in the coming period- the ability to do joint operations beyond the south China sea and the ability to do freedom of navigation operations. Combined efforts with the presence of the democratic countries of the Indo-Pacific region will give China a message that Indian Ocean is not Beijing's lake and that it is an international space.