

China-India Brief

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Guest Column

Quad as problem solver or security mini-lateral? Bridging security and public goods provision

By Stephen Nagy

China-India relations play out against the background of their relations with other powers. Beijing is watching India's growing involvement in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad). And India keeps a close eye on China's relations with its South Asian neighbours (especially Pakistan) and Russia. The May 2022 Quad summit in Tokyo is therefore important from the perspective of China-India relations.

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The *China-India Brief* is a bi-monthly digest focusing on the relationship between Asia's two biggest powers. The Brief provides readers with a key summary of current news articles, reports, analyses, commentaries, and journal articles published in English on the China-India relationship. It features a Guest Column weighing in on key current issues in China-India relations.

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The summit was significant for several reasons.

First, it demonstrated continuity in agenda by the four partners—Japan, Australia, India and the United States—despite changes in political leadership (in Japan and Australia), the COVID-19 pandemic, and differences on Russia's invasion of Ukraine (as indicated in the Tokyo 2022 [Quad Leaders' Summit Joint Statement](#)).

Second, it established both normative and practical initiatives to expand stakeholder buy-in, while at the same time ensuring that it remained as exclusive a group as possible. Here, the focus on peace and stability and stressing the use of the United Nations as a forum for resolving conflict was material in the mini-lateral's preference for dealing with international disputes through the [UN Charter](#).

This recognition obliquely criticised Russia's aggression against Ukraine but also China's position on the invasion which violates China's [Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence](#), including the principles of mutual respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and mutual non-aggression.

Third, the Quad's practical initiatives with regards to COVID-19 and global health, security, infrastructure, climate change, cybersecurity, critical and emerging technologies, space, maritime domain awareness and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) are all meaningful

initiatives to strengthen partnerships moving forward.

These initiatives expand areas of cooperation based on comparative advantages, emerging needs, and convergence in how the organisation can continue to move forward at different speeds in different areas.

In terms of the normative aspect of the Quad, it was important that the four leaders talked about peace and stability not only within the region but also in extra-regional areas. Concerns about Russia's invasion of Ukraine, its implications for [food security](#), [energy security](#), and the overt challenge to the existing rules-based order which prioritises utilizing the United Nations as the vehicle to resolve international conflict was important in terms of the four countries demonstrating cohesiveness on global order.

Here, critics will argue that the four countries are diverging in terms of their understanding of a rules-based order, especially when it comes to Russia. Castigators aside, we should understand [India's position](#), as Ashley Tellis argues, from the viewpoint of energy security and hard security. Today, according to security commentator Adnan Ahmad Ansari, Delhi still needs to acquire Russian made weapon systems in order to deal with its conflict along the Himalayan border with China given the challenges facing [India's self-reliance campaign](#). Abstaining from the UN

vote did not mean that India accepted the use of force against Ukraine. Rather, it was also abstaining for a practical purpose, i.e., to ensure that its economy could continue to grow and climb out of the COVID-19 pandemic challenges with access to cheap energy imports.

The Quad's concrete initiatives with regards to COVID-19 and global security are clear evidence of a shift towards public goods provision being another pillar of the mini-lateral. Partners agreed to commit over US\$ 5.2 billion to the COVAX Advance Market Commitment (AMC) mechanism. This is important for the provision of COVID-19 vaccines to the emerging world that has left been left largely ignored or under-resourced, not just in terms of vaccines but also financial aid to help recovery from the pandemic.

The commitment of assistance towards infrastructure, cybersecurity, critical and emerging technologies overlap. It is clear that the best way to build inter-regional norms, institutions and a rules-based order is to connect stakeholders throughout the Indo-Pacific. This will require connecting the region through digital connectivity, clean energy, and resilience programs.

The initiatives will be welcomed in Southeast Asia and South Asia as will placing ASEAN at the center of the Quad's Indo-Pacific stakeholder outreach. As noted in the Quad Joint Leaders' Statement:

“We reaffirm our unwavering support for ASEAN unity and centrality and for the practical implementation of ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.”

This explicit recognition of ASEAN centrality resonates with the ASEAN Indo-Pacific Outlook but will help expand the number of stakeholders as well.

The emphasis on cybersecurity and critical and emerging technologies is twofold. Cybersecurity has become an increasingly critical domain of security as ransomware issues, and the distribution of disinformation has created challenges towards sustainable governance and fomenting mistrust between governments.

Critical and emerging technologies are those dual-use technologies that are a challenge to security within the region. Here the common statement and principles on critical technology supply chains will build more resilience into technology supply chains and likely accelerate the bifurcation of technology supply chains from one that is based on like-minded countries, such as the Quad partners, and the other that is based on China and its BRI partners that may or may not include Russia.

Space and maritime domain awareness as well as HADR are also critical areas that the Quad discussed. Space and maritime domain awareness go hand in hand. The availability of 35,000-foot macro views of the region's maritime environment and submarine environment are critical to

enhancing security throughout the region by identifying missile launchers, ship distribution, and submarine resources that can be used as in deterrence but also to attack countries within the region. Moreover, satellite and other forms of maritime and terrestrial domain awareness technologies are critical for observing whether countries are amassing the essential resources for an invasion. Critical to the Indo-Pacific region is China's long-term ambition to re-unify with Taiwan. Quad partner cooperation in the area of full spectrum domain awareness will be crucial to detect the concentrating of military resources to forcefully reunify with Taiwan.

The Quad members acknowledged humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) to be a challenge moving forward as non-traditional security issues continue to multiply both in number and severity. The COVID-19 pandemic is the most recent example, but we should understand that natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunami and large-scale hurricanes also have the potential to fundamentally destabilise Southeast Asia and South Asia which are both home to large populations and centers of food production for their communities and the regional community.

The Quad moving forward will continue to invest in public goods provision throughout the region. It will continue to be a mini-

lateral organisation that will be loosely institutionalized, pragmatic in its focus, and open to functional cooperation on an ad-hoc basis, both in terms of its number of partners as well as the focus of cooperation. Evidence of this functional cooperation on an ad-hoc basis has already occurred in January 2021 with Canada participating in the [Sea Dragon 21 maritime exercises](#) near Guam and the Quad joining the [Perouse exercises](#) in April 2021 alongside France.

Concerns about an [Indo-Pacific NATO](#) emerging in the region built on the skeleton of the Quad as articulated by State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi are a straw man argument. The Indo-Pacific region is too heterogenous in terms of development levels, political systems, and ties with China for an Indo-Pacific NATO. Instead, the Quad will be a mini-lateral problem-solving group that bridges security and public goods provision.

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An Analysis of China's New Bridges Over Pangong Tso

By Neeraj Singh Manhas

Why is this in the news?

Shortly after assuming command of the Indian Army, General Manoj Pande reviewed a security analysis of deployments of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in eastern Ladakh and the Indian posture and level of readiness.

There have been rumours that China is constructing twin bridges connecting the north and south banks of Pangong Tso in eastern Ladakh. These bridges would facilitate speedy troop deployment. China's objective in constructing the bridges is to neutralise India's tactical advantage in the Pangong Tso south bank region. In addition, Chinese armour and Multibarrel Rocket Launch (MBRL) units are stationed at Rudog Base, south of Pangong Tso and Xiadullah, and are able to support PLA deployments in the region. China is also constructing an emergency airbase in the Tashkurgan area of Xinxiang, opposite eastern Ladakh, which is expected to be operational by September 2022. Tashkurgan is situated in the Uighur Autonomous Region, near Ladakh, at an important border crossing between Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

The Indian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also

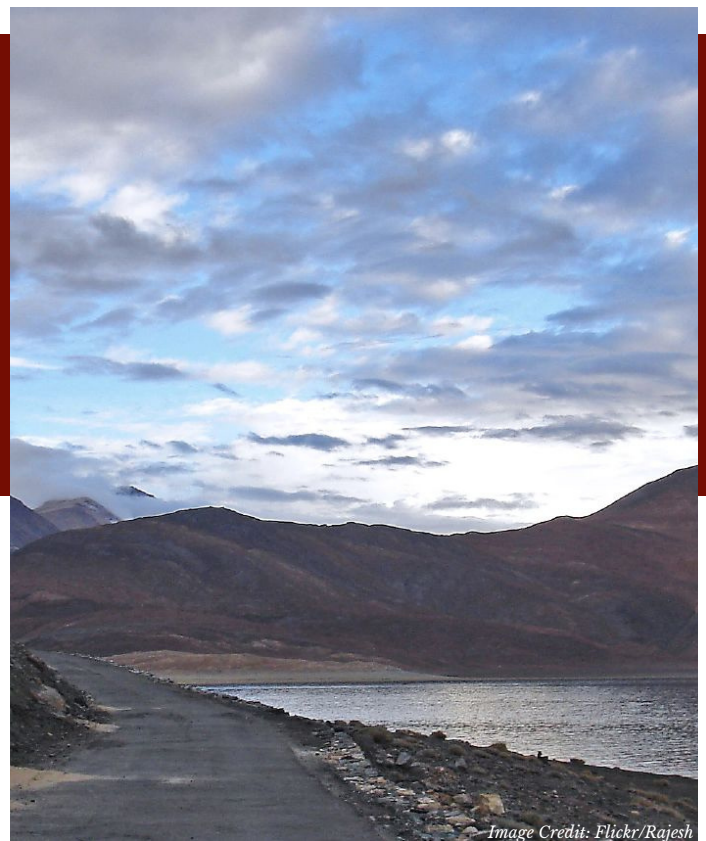


Image Credit: Flickr/Rajesh

acknowledged that China is constructing a second bridge across Pangong Tso. The bridge is located approximately 20 kilometres east of Finger 8 on the north bank of the lake, where the Line of Actual Control (LAC) passes. However, the real road distance between the bridge site and Finger 8 is more than 35 kilometres.

According to a report in the *South China Morning Post*, the Chinese bridges across Pangong Tso could become a new source of tension between India and China. In response to these developments, India's Ministry of External Affairs emphasised that “both of these bridges are in regions that China has illegally occupied since the 1960s.” It further stated that “India has not accepted China’s “unjustified claim” or “such construction activities.” During the BRICS Foreign Ministers meeting, the Indian Minister of External Affairs, S. Jaishankar, focused on the necessity for

members to preserve each other's territorial integrity. The Indian army has also increased its troop presence along the LAC in response to the PLA's fast infrastructure development. On the Galwan river, **seven Indian bridges** are being constructed to handle any military situation.

In light of these developments, the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) held its twenty-fourth meeting on May 31. The two parties agreed to continue diplomatic and military discussions and mooted the prospect of an early meeting of military commanders in order to realise the goal of complete disengagement from all locations of contention along the LAC.

In its yearly threat assessment, the US intelligence community **concluded** that India and China's heightened military presence along their disputed border enhances the likelihood of armed conflict between the two countries.

How will these bridges benefit China and why has China chosen to build here?

The bridges are located near the LAC at one of the lake's narrowest spots. The PLA will be able to transport troops and armoured vehicles substantially faster as a result. With the bridge in place, the induction of troops from the **G219 highway** (Chinese national highway) will be reduced by 130 kilometres.

The constructions are a direct result of the

protracted impasse that began in May 2020. The location of the bridge-site is due to a military operation by the Indian Army in August 2020, in which Indian troops out-manoeuvred the PLA to occupy the heights of Kailash Range in the Chushul subsector on Pangong Tso's south bank. The positions allowed India to control the strategically vital Spanggur Gap, which could have been utilised to launch an offensive, similar to China's actions in 1962.

Additionally, with the Kailash Range manoeuvre India was afforded a clear view of China's Moldo Garrison (their military base), which was a significant source of anxiety for the Chinese. After this action, the Indian Army repositioned itself on the north bank of the lake to look out over Chinese forces. The north bank was one of the first issues of contention to arise in May 2020. The new bridge will allow Chinese troops to reduce the travel time from approximately twelve hours to around four hours.

What is the current status of the impasse and what has India's response been?

In June 2020, India and China retreated from Patrolling Point (PP) 14 in the Galwan Valley, following the tragic confrontation. Then, in February 2021, they disengaged from the north and south banks of Pangong Tso and from PP17A near the Gogra Post. Since then, however, negotiations have stalled. Corps Commanders from both sides have met **fifteen times** since the beginning of the standoff. The dates for the next round of

negotiations remain unknown.

India closely monitors Chinese actions. India has never recognised this occupation, the Chinese claim, or indeed any such constructions on its land. At the same time, India is modernising and developing its northern border infrastructure. In 2021, the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) completed about **100 projects** in border locations, most of which were near the China border. Additionally, India is enhancing its monitoring throughout the LAC.

Conclusion

China has been building its military infrastructure since Indian troops conquered key peaks on the southern side of Pangong Tso in August 2020. The standoff between Indian and Chinese forces along the LAC in the Ladakh sector has just entered its third year. Despite multiple rounds of diplomatic and military discussions, the two parties have been unable to make progress in disengagement and de-escalation at additional friction spots following the withdrawal of frontline forces from Pangong Tso and Gogra. Meanwhile, after the recent Quad summit in Japan, a Global Times editorial highlighted the Quad as a useful instrument for India. Referring to the US-India relationship as representing a convergence of interests between an established power and an emerging power,

the report **emphasised**, "If India becomes a globally prominent force, the United States will not hesitate to restrict and control India as a strategic adversary."

Neeraj Singh Manhas is a Director of Research, Indo-Pacific Consortium, at Raisina House, New Delhi. He has authored four books and has various research interests covering India-China in the Indian Ocean, India's maritime security, and Indo-Pacific studies. His writings have appeared in *The Daily Guardian*, *The Diplomatist*, *Chanakya Forum*, *World Geo-Strategic Insights* and *The Rise*, among other online platforms

News Reports

Bilateral relations

China, India build roads and bridges in disputed Himalayan region

Nikkei Asia, June 17

China is building a second bridge that can accommodate tanks and other armored vehicles across a lake in the Himalayan region of Ladakh, spiking tensions along its border with India two years after a deadly skirmish in the area.

China Removes 2-Year Covid Visa Ban For Indians: Report

NDTV, June 14

China is also processing requests of thousands of Indian students studying in Chinese universities who have conveyed their interest to re-join their Chinese colleges and universities.

China bears no responsibility for border conflicts with India: Chinese Defense Minister

Global Times, June 12

The merits of the China-India border conflicts are very clear, and the responsibility does not lie with China, said China's State Councilor and Defense Minister Wei Fenghe.

Army chief reviews operational readiness in middle sector of LAC with China

The Times of India, June 10

Army chief General Manoj Pande on Friday (June 10) reviewed the operational preparedness in forward areas of the middle sector of the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

China and India in the Region

India-ASEAN Meeting Highlighting Challenges From China-US Rivalry, Ukraine War

Voice of America, June 16

Two-day talks between India and ASEAN foreign ministers opened Thursday (June 16) in New Delhi with calls for stronger ties between India and the regional bloc.

Xi, Putin hold phone call, vow mutual support amid global turbulence

Global Times, June 16

Analysts say this is a signal to the world that the close China-Russia strategic partnership and high-level mutual trust between the two sides remain unchanged.

India Expanding Nuclear Arsenal Amid New Chinese Launchers Getting Operational: Swedish Arms Watchdog

Outlook India, June 13

While the number of warheads with China remained static between January 2021-2022, new launchers meant warheads available to use have increased.

India, Vietnam deepen defence ties as Delhi seeks to boost maritime presence in Indo-Pacific

The Straits Times, June 9

India handed over 12 high-speed patrol boats to Vietnam on Thursday (June 9), a day after inking a mutual logistics agreement allowing the use of each others' military bases in a significant expansion of defence and security ties - all with an eye on China.

India Faces Diplomatic Backlash in Muslim Countries for Remarks about Islam

Voice of America, June 6

India is scrambling to contain a diplomatic storm that has erupted in Islamic countries following controversial comments made by two officials of the ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party.

Trade and Economy

India, EU look to make a fresh start for a trade deal in Brussels

Business Standard, June 16

The launch of fresh negotiations with the EU comes close on the heels of India signing two trade deals, with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Australia.

China takes over as biggest importer of Indian broken rice

The Indian Express, June 14

China is now the top buyer of Indian broken rice, which was earlier exported mostly to African countries.

India and China quibble over trade figures

The Straits Times, June 10

India has claimed that the United States is its largest trade partner, while China maintains that it holds that title.

Left out of the Indo-Pacific deal, China pushes toward the world's largest trade deal

CNBC, June 5

Amid the fanfare of U.S. President Joe Biden's new Indo-Pacific strategy, China flew under the radar focusing instead on growing trade under RCEP.

Energy and Environment

India ranks 3rd globally for total renewable additions in 2021: Report

The Economic Times, June 16

India ranked third globally for total renewable power capacity additions with 15.4 GW in 2021, following only China (136 GW) and the US (43 GW).

China and India now account for about 50% of Russia's seaborne oil exports, as Asian demand props up Moscow's energy revenues

Business Insider, June 14

Half of the Russian oil transported by ship is now heading for Asia — mainly to China and India, according to a Bloomberg analysis published on Monday (June 13).

A new low: India is last in environmental performance index for 2022

Mint, June 8

India scored the lowest among 180 countries in the 2022 Environment Performance Index (EPI), an analysis by researchers of Yale and Columbia University which provides a data-driven summary of the state of sustainability around the world.

China to double wind, solar energy capacity by 2025

Business Times, June 2

The world's biggest polluter earlier estimated it needs to double wind and solar use by 2030 to deliver on its pledges under the Paris climate accord.

Analyses

India's front line battle against autocracy more important than ever

Nikkei Asia, June 16

By Brahma Chellaney, geostrategist and author of nine books, including 'Asian Juggernaut: The Rise of China, India and Japan'.

The risk of renewed skirmishes with China is growing.

India's China Policy Is Confused

Foreign Policy, June 14

By Sushant Singh, Senior Fellow with the Centre for Policy Research in India.

Two years after a deadly border clash, New Delhi appears wary of Beijing but unwilling to partner with Washington. These contradictions leave it open to exploitation.

Modi's Multipolar Moment Has Arrived

Foreign Policy, June 6

By Derek Grossman, Senior Defense Analyst at RAND

India, now courted by all sides, is the clear beneficiary of Russia's war.

Why China holds India in contempt

Hindustan Times, June 4

By Shyam Saran, Former Chairman of India's National Security Advisory Board

The dominant attitude of China towards India is one of condescension, bordering on contempt. Why is this the case?

Can IPEF Reduce India's Economic Dependence on China?

The Diplomat, May 27

By Niranjana Marjani, political analyst based in Vadodara, India

IPEF will have to contend with the same worries that led India to walk out of RCEP.

Books and Journals

India's place in America's world under the Biden presidency: decoding the China factor

The Round Table, The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs Volume III, Issue 2, 2022

By Vinay Kaura, Assistant Professor in the Department of International Affairs and Security Studies, Sardar Patel University of Police, Security and Criminal Justice

The key strategic challenge facing India is Beijing's growing propensity to use coercive measures vis-à-vis New Delhi. As global geopolitics has entered the most uncertain phase, India's strategic embrace of the United States is becoming clearly visible.

Notwithstanding New Delhi's attachment to the notion of strategic autonomy, the Pakistan factor, the Russia factor and the US exit from Afghanistan, China's assertive actions have allowed India and the US to intensify their relationship. The article argues that despite some differences, the Biden administration is likely to continue the Trump administration's policy of placing India at the centre of its Indo-Pacific strategy.

THE CENTRE ON ASIA AND GLOBALISATION

The Centre on Asia and Globalisation is a research centre at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore. It conducts in-depth research on developments in the Asia-Pacific and beyond, and aims to provide academics, decision-makers, and the general public with objective analysis on issues of regional and global significance. The Centre's motto "Objective Research with Impact" reflects its commitment towards ensuring that its analysis informs policy and decision makers in and about Asia.

OTHER CAG PUBLICATIONS

- *Remodelling Indonesia's Maritime Law Enforcement Architecture: Theoretical and Policy Considerations* by Evan Laksmana (Contemporary Southeast Asia 44(1), 2022)
- *India-Australia-Indonesia Maritime Partnership: Shared Challenges, Compelling Opportunities* by Premesha Saha, Natalie Sambhi, and Evan Laksmana (ORF, 2022)
- *India Versus China : Why they are Not Friends* by Kanti Bajpai (Juggernaut Books, 2021)
- *A Fragile Fulcrum: Indonesia-U.S. Military Relations in the Age of Great-Power Competition* by Evan Laksmana (Asia Policy 16(4), October 2021)
- *Winning the Fight Taiwan Cannot Afford to Lose* by Drew Thompson (Strategic Forum, 2021)
- *Routledge Handbook of China-India Relations* edited by Kanti Bajpai, Selina Ho and Manjari Chatterjee Miller (Routledge, 2020)



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