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Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness Initiative

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Introduction

Oceans serve as the most important player in the day-to-day life of every single citizen. The majority of interstate commerce still takes place on the high seas. To secure these trade routes, a lifeline to the state's economy, it is in the national interest of the concerned state to overlook the security of these waters. Maritime security plays an essential role for an array of reasons, including financial, ecological, strategic, and humanitarian implications.¹ These vast, interconnected sectors not only sustain the global economy but also play an important role in national security, diplomatic connections, and global collaboration. Additionally, seas store crucial resources, regulate temperature, and are critical to global health.² The protection of undersea cables, along with the strategic relevance of particular maritime chokepoints, highlights the essential component of maritime security initiatives.³ A maritime chokepoint is a natural source of congestion between two more extensive and crucial navigational pathways. Given their strategic location, maritime chokepoints naturally restrict shipping lanes that carry substantial freight. They are essential for global trade.⁴ Humanitarian problems are also vital, as the oceans nourish countless livelihoods. The maritime is thus a shared responsibility of the international community, protecting the welfare of nations as well as the well-being of our planet.

Given their complex roles in global geopolitics, economy, environment, and culture, the Indian and Pacific Oceans are of tremendous significance. These immense bodies of water not only affect the lives and fates of the countries that border them, but they also have a major effect on the rest

¹ WION. 2021. "YouTube." *Gravitas Plus: The Quad: Past, Present & Future*. March 21. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWdpVzo-NoI&ab_channel=WION.

² Ibid

³ Network, MI News. 2021. *What are Maritime Chokepoints?* March 6. <https://www.marineinsight.com/marine-navigation/what-are-maritime-chokepoints/#:~:text=A%20chokepoint%20refers%20to%20the,because%20of%20their%20strategic%20locations>.

⁴ Ibid

of the world. Several of the world's most strategically vital waterways, islands, and territories are located in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.⁵ These include waterways such as the Gulf of Aden, the Bay of Bengal, and the Strait of Malacca,⁶ as well as islands such as those of Kiribati and Papua New Guinea.⁷ These are key places for global commercial routes, military strategies, and diplomatic ties.⁸ The South China Sea, the Malacca Strait, and the maritime lanes of the Indian Ocean are essential for world security and stability.⁹

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) and the Indo-Pacific

The Quad is a partnership initiative between the United States of America, Japan, Australia, and India. This grouping was formed after the December 26th, 2004, Indian Ocean tsunami, when the four countries formed the Tsunami Core Group to aid those disaster-stricken regions.¹⁰ Together, these four countries contributed over 40,000 troops, humanitarian responders, a dozen of

⁵ Baruah, Darshana M. 2021. *What Is Happening in the Indian Ocean?* March 3. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/03/03/what-is-happening-in-indian-ocean-pub-83948>.

⁶ CIA. 2023. *The World Factbook: Indian Ocean*. November 14. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/oceans/indian-ocean/>.

⁷ (Darshana M Baruah 2023).

⁸ CIA. 2023. *The World Factbook: Indian Ocean*. November 14. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/oceans/indian-ocean/>.

⁹ Baruah, Darshana M. 2021. *What Is Happening in the Indian Ocean?* March 3. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2021/03/03/what-is-happening-in-indian-ocean-pub-83948>.

¹⁰ WION. 2021. "YouTube." *Gravitas Plus: The Quad: Past, Present & Future*. March 21. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWdpVzo-NoI&ab_channel=WION.

helicopters, cargo trucks, and planes.¹¹ This ad hoc group jointly collaborated and provided tsunami relief and even reconstruction.¹² This grouping was dissolved post-crisis due to the withdrawal of Australia from the initial grouping.¹³

After the overwhelming success of this grouping, along with showcasing a new form of diplomacy to the world, the former Prime Minister of Japan, the late Shinzo Abe, proposed an “**Arc of Freedom and Prosperity**” in 2006 to promote and enhance the spread of freedom and the maintenance of the Rule of Law. This grouping was later taken into consideration by the then-Indian Prime Minister and the then-American Vice President, subsequently meeting in 2007 in New Delhi.¹⁴ This meeting of the Quad that former PM Shinzo Abe devised based on peace and democracy was held on the sidelines of the ASEAN Regional Forum, hosted in Manila.¹⁵ Since 2007, the Quad has been an informal protector of the Indo-Pacific Region and all the countries that comprise it, namely: Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei, Cambodia, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, Laos, Malaysia, the Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan (Republic of China-ROC), Thailand, Timor-Leste, the United States, and Vietnam.¹⁶ Most of these countries have disputes with the People’s Republic of China (PRC); majorly, the U.S. and Australia have trade disputes, while India, Vietnam, Japan, and Nepal have land disputes with PRC.¹⁷

¹¹ Ibid ¹² Ibid

¹² Ibid

¹³ Flitton, Daniel. 2020. *Who really killed the Quad 1.0?* June 2. <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/who-really-killed-quad-10>.

¹⁴ Chellaney, Brahma. 2007. "'Quad Initiative': an inharmonious concert of democracies." *The Japan Times*.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ WION. 2021. "YouTube." *Gravitas Plus: The Quad: Past, Present & Future*. March 21. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWdpVzo-NoI&ab_channel=WION.

¹⁷ Ibid

Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness

The Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness Initiative (IPMDA) has been evolving as a critical framework in the concerned Indo-Pacific arena, owing to the growing strategic and tactical importance of the maritime domain in the coming years. It is a technology and training initiative aimed at boosting marine domain awareness and transparency in the Indo-Pacific region's essential waterways.¹⁸ IPMDA uses modern and innovative technology, such as commercial satellite radio frequency data collection, to supply partners in Southeast Asian nations, the Indian Ocean region, and the Pacific with near-real-time information on maritime activity.¹⁹ The advanced maritime domain awareness by IPMDA raises Indo-Pacific partners' ability to recognise and react promptly to a wide range of challenges involving unlawful maritime activities, such as unregulated fishing, adverse climate occurrences, and humanitarian crises.²⁰ It also includes regional information centres, that aim to develop a unified operational image of the Indo-Pacific maritime area.²¹

Upholding maritime security across the whole maritime realm with a varied array of parties and interests requires extraordinary situational awareness. While situational awareness of the whole

¹⁸ Cabinet, Australian Government: Department of the Prime Minister and. 2023. *Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness*. Accessed 2023. <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resources/quad-leaders-summit-2023/indo-pacific-partnership-maritime-domain-awareness#:~:text=Purpose%20of%20IPMDA,transparency%20to%20its%20critical%20waterways>.

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Cabinet, Australian Government: Department of the Prime Minister and. 2023. *Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness*. Accessed 2023. <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resources/quad-leaders-summit-2023/indo-pacific-partnership-maritime-domain-awareness#:~:text=Purpose%20of%20IPMDA,transparency%20to%20its%20critical%20waterways>.

²¹ Ibid

maritime environment may not be possible or necessary, MDA in areas of interest is critical. The Indo-Pacific area is one such locale that has gained global interest in recent years as a result of China's rise.²²

Challenges

With a rise in the need for maritime security, the Indo-Pacific region has become a playground for naval vessels. According to the Stockholm Peace Research Institute (SPRI), the regions of Asia, Oceania, and even the Middle East have witnessed more than 70% of arms imports, mostly of naval components, over the past 10 years. Coastal regions have seen a drastic increase in spotting naval ships and submarines constantly patrolling the waters, such as in the Strait of Malacca²³ and around the South China Sea.²⁴ The presence of numerous vessels builds up the geopolitical tensions that affect the common man's day-to-day life.

To ensure that the IPMDA is more effective, the Quad will need compatibility between devices, which, compared to the case of military forces, will be challenging to build because the majority of MDA tasks are carried out using accessible technological equipment.²⁵ Due to hardware variations, that is, the heterogeneity of technologies among the members, the IPMDA is anticipated to face problems with this.²⁶ Although Australia, Japan, and the United States are familiar with

²² AK Chawla (Vice Admiral), PVSM, AVSM, NM, VSM, PhD (Retd.). 2023. *Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) in the Indo-Pacific and the Way Ahead for Indo-Pacific Partnership for MDA (IPMDA)*. June 27. <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2023/june/27/Maritime-Domain-Awareness-in-the-Indo-Pacific-and-the-Way-Ahead>.

²³ CIA. 2023. *The World Factbook: Indian Ocean*. November 14. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/oceans/indian-ocean/>.

²⁴ Scott, David. 2019. "China's Indo-Pacific Strategy." *McFarland & Company* 94-113.

²⁵ Singh, Ridipt. 2022. *CESCUBE: Understanding Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness Initiative*. July 14. <https://www.cescube.com/vp-understanding-indo-pacific-maritime-domain-awareness-initiative>.

²⁶ Ibid

working jointly, the issue is unlikely to be unreasonable for the countries; however, India will likely lag behind owing to technological and hardware differences, as equipment acquisition and development in India is done through an assortment of both international and domestic sources.²⁷

Rise of China's Maritime Dominance

China's Indo-Pacific geopolitics focuses mainly on three maritime zones: the South China Sea, the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and the broader Indian and Pacific Oceans.²⁸ China is an Indo-Pacific maritime state with a presence and interest in the greater Indo-Pacific seas, but it is geopolitically confined and handicapped by the arc of neighbouring Indo-Pacific nations and their respective Indo-Pacific agendas.

China has territorial claims over the majority of the South China Sea, which is increasingly being viewed as a "core interest."²⁹ China claims control over the Paracel and Spratly scatterings of islands, rocks, atolls, reefs, their respective exclusive economic zones, and most of the South China Sea under the 'nine-dash line.'³⁰ This claim has triggered conflicts over maritime and territorial sectors with Brunei, Indonesia, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Malaysia.³¹

With growing conflicts with China over maritime security, the PRC has become a serious threat to the peacekeeping of these crucial waterways. The PRC has blindsided globally accepted maritime laws, such as the United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Seas,³² along with

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ Scott, David. 2019. "China's Indo-Pacific Strategy." *McFarland & Company* 94-113.

²⁹ Scott, David. 2019. "China's Indo-Pacific Strategy." *McFarland & Company* 94-113.

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid

³² Organization, International Maritime. n.d. *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea*. <https://www.imo.org/en/ourwork/legal/pages/unitednationsconventiononthelawofthesea.aspx#:~:text=The%20United%20Nations%20Convention%20on,the%20oceans%20and%20their%20resources.>

challenging the rules-based order. An amalgamation of Chinese behaviour towards maritime security and continuous territorial claims over islands, including building man-made ones, China's growth has threatened peace and security.³³

India's Role in the Indo-Pacific

India's geographical and geopolitical relevance in the Indo-Pacific serves as a counterbalance to China's expanding dominance in the Indian Ocean. The requirement for such a balance is fuelled primarily by India's security concerns, which are primarily focused on China's confinement policy through port facilities in India's neighbourhood—specifically, Gwadar and Hambantota—as well as the desire to uphold and safeguard open and free waterways of communication amid fears regarding China's chokepoint in the South China Sea and growing maritime presence in the Indian Ocean under the guise of "antipiracy operations."³⁴

Growth of the Indian Navy

After India gained independence, the Royal Indian Navy consisted of 32 obsolete boats that could only be used for coastal patrol, as well as 11,000 officers and troops.³⁵ The senior commanders were selected from the Royal Navy, with Rear-Admiral John Talbot Savignac Hall, CIE, serving as the first Commander-in-Chief post-independence.³⁶ The prefix 'Royal' was eliminated on January 26, 1950, once India became a republic.³⁷ The modern Indian Navy can be traced back to

³³ WION. 2021. "YouTube." *Gravitas Plus: The Quad: Past, Present & Future*. March 21. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWdpVzo-NoI&ab_channel=WION.

³⁴ Josh, Dr. Amrita. 2021. "The Quad Factor in the Indo-Pacific and the Role of India." *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* 78-85.

³⁵ Bhattacharyya, Subhasish. n.d. *Scribd: List of Active Indian Navy Ships PDF*. <https://www.scribd.com/document/467061033/kupdf-com-list-of-active-indian-navy-ships-pdf>.

³⁶ Navy, Indian. n.d. *Genesis of Indian Navy*. <https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/node/1410>.

³⁷ Ibid

1612 when Captain Best fought and shattered the Portuguese. As a result of this confrontation, as well as the difficulties brought about by pirates, the British East India Company was compelled to keep a small fleet at Swally, near Surat (Gujarat)³⁸. On September 5, 1612, the first squadron of combat ships arrived, making up the Honourable East India Company's Marine,³⁹ which was in charge of defending the East India Company's commerce in the Gulf of Cambay and the Tapti and Narmada River mouths.⁴⁰ This force's officers and troops went on to play a crucial role in surveying the Arabian, Persian, and Indian coastlines.

The Indian Government has started a new phase of the Indian chapter in terms of making and producing indigenous products and equipment for its defences. With the Royal Indian Navy having outdated ships that were only patrol-worthy, the Indian Navy currently stands tall as one of the only few countries that can manufacture aircraft carriers, ballistic missile capable-submarines, and nuclear-powered submarines.⁴¹ With the recent induction of INS Vikrant in 2022, India's first indigenous aircraft carrier (IAC-1), India's fleet of ships has grown and has the potential to grow even more. Along with aircraft carriers, the Indian Navy possesses about 150 ships and submarines and about 300 aircrafts.⁴² Specifically, 1 nuclear-powered submarine, 14 diesel-powered submarines, 2 aircraft carriers, 1 amphibious warfare ship, 9 landing ships, 24 destroyers and frigates, 25 corvettes, 7 mine countermeasure vessels, 47 patrol vessels, 4 replenishment ships, 6 support ships, 10 research and survey ships, 4 training vessels, 19 tugboats, and 24 miscellaneous crafts.⁴³

India and the Quad Relations

³⁸ Ibid

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Bhattacharyya, Subhasish. n.d. *Scribd: List of Active Indian Navy Ships PDF*. <https://www.scribd.com/document/467061033/kupdf-com-list-of-active-indian-navy-ships-pdf>.

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Ibid

The Indo-Pacific security conditions cannot be examined without comprehending India's vital role in this context. The Quad, a dynamic strategic forum comprised of the United States, Japan, Australia, and India, has had a profound effect on the regional power balance. As a key member of this quadrilateral agreement, India has reiterated its commitment to maintaining a rules-based international order, in addition to the necessity of an inclusive and cooperative approach to resolving regional and global uncertainties.⁴⁴

Alongside conventional security issues, the Quad has broadened its scope to incorporate economic cooperation, technological developments, healthcare initiatives, and climate action.⁴⁵ India's active participation in the Quad facilitates the country's promotion of regional prosperity and stability through the incorporation of its unique traits, such as its extensive consumer market, tech-savvy workforce, and maritime stakes in the Indian Ocean.⁴⁶

For India, Quad is one such platform that counters the rise of China. India has been a forerunner in calling the Quad just a partnership and not the Indo-Pacific version of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).⁴⁷ India, in comparison to the other members of the Quad, has not yet given its full attention to defence expenditure when it comes to jointly securing peace and the rule of law over the Indo-Pacific waterways.⁴⁸ India, still rooted in the principles of non-alignment, prevents the Quad members from getting dragged into a NATO Article 5 scenario.⁴⁹ Quad is a grouping of

⁴⁴ Scott, David. 2019. "China's Indo-Pacific Strategy." *McFarland & Company* 94-113.

⁴⁵ WION. 2021. "YouTube." *Gravitas Plus: The Quad: Past, Present & Future*. March 21. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWdpVzo-NoI&ab_channel=WION.

⁴⁶ AK Chawla (Vice Admiral), PVSM, AVSM, NM, VSM, PhD (Retd.). 2023. *Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) in the Indo-Pacific and the Way Ahead for Indo-Pacific Partnership for MDA (IPMDA)*. June 27. <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2023/june/27/Maritime-Domain-Awareness-in-the-Indo-Pacific-and-the-Way-Ahead>.

⁴⁷ —. n.d. *What is NATO*. <https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index.html>.

⁴⁸ Darshana M Baruah, Nitya Labh. 2023. *Understanding the Indo-Pacific: The Island Way*. March 28. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/03/28/understanding-indo-pacific-island-way-pub-89384>.

⁴⁹ NATO. 2023. *Collective defence and Article 5*. July 4. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_110496.htm.

important players in the Indo-Pacific that have some sort of relationship with China, especially when it comes to the United States, which has trade disputes with China along with bringing Taiwan under its own umbrella.

Conclusion

The IPMDA Initiative highlights the pressing significance of preserving the Indo-Pacific region's broad extent. This endeavour was born as a vital tool to promote maritime security, partnership, and stability in the face of numerous economic, environmental, and geopolitical challenges. The IPMDAI effort has improved the region's ability to respond quickly to a range of challenges, from illicit fishing to humanitarian disasters, by facilitating the seamless coordination of resources, information, and knowledge. It has created an environment for Indo-Pacific states to collaborate, boosting regional unity and global security.

Subsequently, the Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness Initiative and India's quadrilateral involvement are interwoven, fundamental components of the region's expanding security infrastructure. These methods reflect Indo-Pacific states' commitment to preserving and protecting the maritime domain, ensuring economic development, environmental sustainability, and regional peace and stability. They emphasise the importance of cooperation and shared responsibility for dealing with the Indo-Pacific's varied problems, leading to a more secure and prosperous future for the region and the globe.

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