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Nuclear Weapons
and Putin's War

by Nick Ritchie

The Quad and ASEAN:
Challenges and Prospects
for Cooperation

by Poornima Vijaya

Can Political Science Contribute
to Human Life and Death and
Biomedicine Issues?

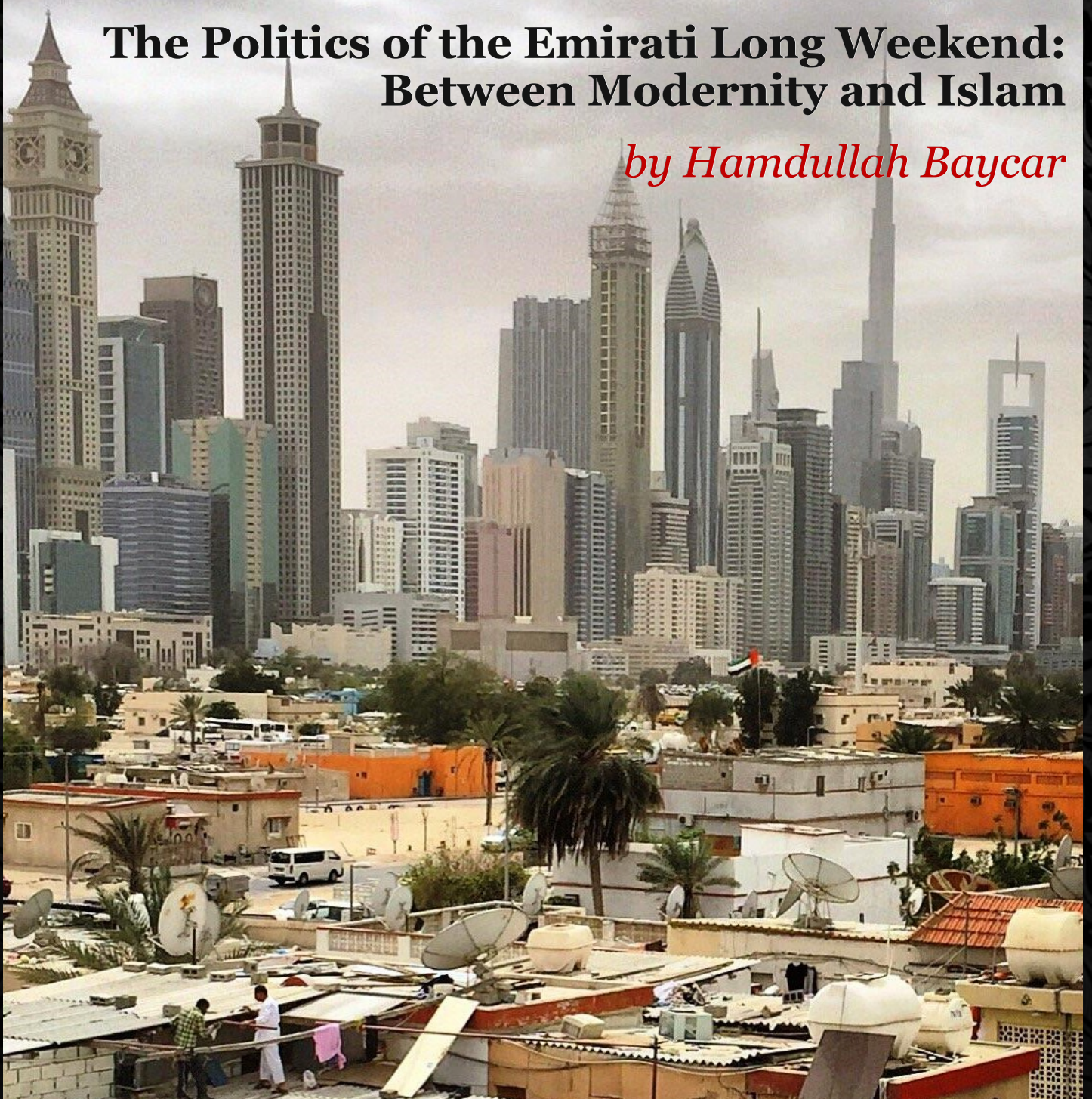
by Yukio Sakurai

India and Central
Asia Foreign Policy:
An Overview

by Chitra Rajora

The Politics of the Emirati Long Weekend: Between Modernity and Islam

by Hamdullah Baycar



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“ADVANCING DIVERSITY”

Contents

- World News 05 - 09
by Ahmed Yesevi Taşçı
- 11-18 Nuclear Weapons and Putin’s
War
by Nick Ritchie
- The Quad and ASEAN: 20 - 25
Challenges and Prospects for
Cooperation
by Poornima Vijaya
- 27 - 31 Can Political Science Contribute
to Human Life and Death and
Biomedicine Issues?
by Yukio Sakurai
- The Politics of the Emirati Long 33 - 36
Weekend: Between Modernity
and Islam
by Hamdullah Baycar
- 38 - 43 India and Central Asia Foreign
Policy: An Overview
by Chitra Rajora

The Quad and ASEAN: Challenges and Prospects for Cooperation

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The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) of Australia, Japan, India and the United States has risen as a crucial grouping amidst the geopolitics of Asia. Pioneered by the former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007, this association has stretched the dimensions of cooperation from military exercises to comprising health, economics, infrastructure and digital standards (White House, 2022). The Quad countries have unmistakably held shared uneasiness on Chinese actions and ambitions in the region; however, the fact that the Quad fails to mention China in their joint statements leads one to wonder about the purported Chinese centrism of the grouping. Furthermore, prioritizing Chinese containment as the foremost agenda will sideline vital spheres of cooperation in climate security, technology, investments, global health and other domestic considerations.

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The Quad is committed to providing public goods in a region vulnerable to interacting stressors with the advent of global economic centres, technological hubs, social mobility and political diversity combined with susceptibility to climate and geopolitical pressures (Smith, 2020). For instance, the ongoing crisis in Sri Lanka results from internal corruption, fiscal imprudence, and bad governance. External shocks arising from the pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine have additionally led to economic instability in Sri Lanka with conceivably grave implications for regional security.

Since last year, the Quad leaders have highlighted various lines of efforts in emerging technologies, space, global health, climate, and cyber and maritime domain awareness.

The rise of the Quad indicates the reception and recognition of the members and beyond. The Indo-Pacific strategic concept initially noted by the former Japanese PM, Shinzo Abe, in his speech the "Confluence of the Two Seas" at the Indian Parliament, the conventional notion of the idea of Asia-Pacific and what it constitutes began to change. The Quad today characterizes a maturing of thinking by the major powers with crucial stakes in the region's security, stability and prosperity (Ng, 2021). For India, the Quad membership signifies an evolution in the strategic thinking

of the Act East Policy (Pant & Mattoo, 2021). Australia has come to the realization that the Indian Ocean is as essential as the Pacific Ocean to its maritime interest of maintaining open sea lanes of communication and safeguarding the law of the seas (Vijaya, 2021). For Japan, the membership serves as an extension of the traditional narrow confines of the Northeast Asian security complex, and the US gains a larger ambit of interest stretching 'from Hollywood to Bollywood', thus aiming to establish their sphere of influence (Pant & Mattoo, 2021).

In this quest to achieve its goals, the Quad has strengthened its military activities and undertakings in recent years- gaining momentum and attention globally. For example, the high-profile Malabar exercises witness the participation of the navies of the member countries. Additionally, bilateral military relations are intensified through military exercises and defence agreements (Buchan & Rimland, 2020). The high-level ministerial dialogues between the member nations have increased over the last three years, thus making them a regular occurrence in their diplomatic calendars. To be specific, the group's members recognize that while security deterrence and political cooperation are essential components of their *raison d'être*, they are also inadequate. A broader-ranging approach to address the region's vital challenges is the need of the hour, considering the more significant aspiration towards building an effective partnership to safeguard norms and values and defend the regional order.

The virtual summit of the Quad leaders in March 2021 echoed precisely on confronting these emerging challenges. With the rise of COVID-19 infections, the meeting leveraged upon the distinctive strengths in pharmaceutical manufacturing, medical technology, and distributional logistics to formulate their Quad Vaccine Partnership with an aspiring goal of providing one billion doses by the end of 2022 (White House, 2021). With the global commons under threat from a worsening climate crisis, all four powers agreed to form a Quad Working Group on Climate. The Quad's Critical Technologies Working Group exemplifies this collaborative effort to address common challenges. By coming together to jointly develop new technologies and global design standards and build resilient supply chains, the Quad is displaying its commitment to shaping technologies for the future in the image of the values shared by all four. The Quad, additionally, declared its joint commitment and cooperation in spheres of counterterrorism (Mehra, 2022).

However, the future is not devoid of its challenges for the Quad. Numerous predicaments emerged with the pandemic. India's devastating crisis, especially in April and May 2021, at the peak of its second wave, led many to reconsider the Quad's ability to deliver on its aspiring vaccine production and distribution goals. Likewise, questioning their contributions to the climate action frameworks indicates lassitude in what some may cogitate as humanity's most significant problem. On technology, the member states disagree on data localization and certain spheres crucial for technology transfers. US withdrawal from Afghanistan under the Biden Administration and the re-emergence of terror networks in fragile states could weaken their

joint commitment to combat terrorism, raising questions on American readiness to recommit and reengage resources towards the painstaking task of tearing down existing and new terror nexus. The absence of a comprehensive economic plan to build and secure supply chains jeopardizes the Quad's deep concerns regarding economic statecraft and integration. Most importantly, the Quad must persuade highly suspicious nations, particularly in Southeast Asia, that it provides partners with more than merely military support and security (Stromseth, 2021).

A significant challenge for Quad countries will be to align the approaches of allies and partners outside the Indo-Pacific construct, namely the ASEAN and NATO. In the current circumstances, aligning positions on the escalating Ukraine crisis may have trialed the Quad's broadening purpose to incorporate extra-regional issues, such as India's moderate stance on Ukraine and its strategic need to keep any mention of Russia out of the official joint statement, which indicates the future challenges (Cogan & Mishra, 2022).

The Quad and ASEAN: What lies ahead?

Now, the Quad is emerging as a crucial multilateral player in the region. With the meeting of Quad leaders in May 2022, the grouping has shown progress. Initial uncertainties about their sustainability have given rise to firmer beliefs that the arrangement is a persistent facet of the region's security architecture.

Concerns do linger on their potential to intensify tensions vis-à-vis China and its challenge to ASEAN centrality; however, the grouping seems to garner more support lately. This shift in perceptions is, perhaps, due to their continuous support for ASEAN and diversification to include broader security issues, such as climate action and health security at the fore. The same result was visible in the Joint Vision Statement from the ASEAN-US Special Summit as it welcomes the Quad Vaccine Partnership Program. It is pertinent for the ASEAN nations that the US maintains a decisive engagement and security in a regional power structure (Teo, 2022). The primary goal of ASEAN-led dialogue forums is to enmesh the US and other key players in the region's security. The Quad, besides serving as an offer for public goods and partnerships, is also a platform to keep the US engaged and committed in the region.

ASEAN nations are, individually and collectively, engaging with the Quad for wide-ranging interests. The State of Southeast Asia Survey report in 2020 released by the Singapore-based, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute) concludes that the support for Quad remains soft, with different nations carrying varying degrees of ambivalence. The same survey report indicates- Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Malaysia and Indonesia are the prominent sceptics; at the same time, the Quad has yielded the most considerable support from Vietnam and the Philippines (Mun et al., 2020). Vietnam displayed active participation in pandemic-related talks with the Quad members. However, most of ASEAN continues to remain suspicious of the grouping. By viewing the Quad as a challenge to

ASEAN centrality, it seeks to provide the essential platforms to anchor regional institutions, norms and values (Kwek, 2021). The Indo-Pacific strategic discourse is reflected as a bleak strategy of Chinese containment, with possibly destabilizing ramifications. Many Southeast Asians are apprehensive about China's rising influence and aggressive activities in the South China Sea; however, ASEAN prefers to manage China's growth by integrating and engaging Beijing in the institutional forums and mechanisms instead of depending on a counter-coalition of power rivalry.

Despite such foreboding, ASEAN has welcomed the Quad initiatives of expanding beyond maritime security. Summits during the pandemic included a new vaccine partnership program and resilient plans in emerging technologies and climate change (Bhatia, 2022). Thus, the evolving Quad is not limited to a grouping of like-minded democracies with a shared concern for China but is also a prospective source of public goods in the region.

Therefore, the Quad and ASEAN have a common interest in safeguarding US presence and building up the capacity of regional states in approaching non-traditional security issues. The distinction is in their methods of collaboration. ASEAN seeks inclusion, whilst the Quad seeks exclusive collaboration (Teo, 2022). Although the Quad may eventually expand its partnerships, it will likely primarily include US allies and close partners. However, the existence of an inclusive multipolar global order remains the best defence against regional tensions and instability. In addition, the ASEAN model has ensured that smaller countries have a voice in regional decision-making and that competing regional powers have a neutral channel for communication and participation.

In recent years, the Association and its forums, such as ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Defense Ministerial Meeting- Plus (ADMM+), and East Asia Summit (EAS), have been scrutinized for their inability to combat regional challenges (Heydarian, 2020). The advent of the Quad could simply be construed as a possible solution to the rising tensions, institutional failure, and geostrategic instability caused by the changing dynamics of the major powers in the region.

However, the vast array of political, ideological, and economic diversity increasingly accentuates differences rather than commonalities. An inclusive and pluralistic international system is perhaps the model for sustaining stability and decreasing tensions (Lakshmana, 2020; Teo, 2022). In the absence of such an order, the countries are susceptible to divisions and expected to bandwagon with major powers, thus, forcing them to align.

To avert such a predicament, the Quad may gain from further integration into a regional architecture focusing on ASEAN as it continues to grow institutionally. This would contribute to ASEAN's importance as the region's least problematic agenda-setting committee in the region. ASEAN, for its part, should be willing to work with the Quad. Certain ASEAN member states may require greater convincing than others, but

apprehensiveness to collaborate with the Quad risks locking ASEAN out of the regional architecture.

The Quad is, undoubtedly, a brilliant strategic manoeuvre with greater prospects of cooperation and collaboration in the coming years. Despite its intrinsic limitations, the Quad is succeeding immensely. For those who are cynical of the emergence of a Chinese order, we have a collective interest in making Quad an integral pillar in the region.

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