

Delaware summit: The Quad thrives

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The next Quad Leaders' Summit is scheduled to take place in US Delaware, on September 21, 2024. The timing and the venue of this Quad summit have been determined by many factors.



PREMIUM

(FILES) US President Joe Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese arrive for their meeting during the Quad Leaders Summit at Kantei in Tokyo on May 24, 2022. Biden will host the leaders of allies Australia, India and Japan in his hometown of Wilmington, Delaware on September 21, 2024, for talks focused on tensions with China, the White House said on September 12. (Photo by SAUL LOEB / AFP)(AFP)

It should have been India's turn to host the summit this year. But when India proposed a date early this year, US President Joe Biden was in the middle of his campaign and was unable to make the long trip. The upcoming summit will be Biden's last as sitting US President, so it is fitting that it is taking place in his hometown in Delaware. It is a tribute to Biden and his abiding commitment to the cause of Quad. After all, it was Biden who chaired the first-ever Quad summit in Washington DC in September 2021.

It is easy to forget that this is only the fourth time that the Quad leaders are meeting at the summit level. The Quad had a rocky start after the late Japanese leader Shinzo Abe made his famous speech in the Indian parliament in 2007. After a period of hibernation in which the Chinese prediction of the Quad "dissipating like sea foam" was threatening to come true, the

Quad was reactivated only in 2017. Since then, the Quad has amply demonstrated two things: one, it is here to stay and is in fact thriving; two, it delivers strongly on an agenda that is strategic but non-military.

If one were to look at the three Summits held so far, several common themes emerge. One clearly is the initiative regarding Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness, which was launched in 2022 at the Tokyo Quad Leaders' Summit and pursued further at the 2023 Hiroshima Summit. The pilot programmes in Southeast Asia, the Pacific Islands and the Indian Ocean Region are aimed at ensuring transparency and enhancing the capability of regional partners to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific by improving their ability to respond to climate change and to enforce the law near their shores. This is of enormous importance to India, not least because of the inclusion of the Indian Ocean in the scheme of things.

The other big theme is climate. Indo-Pacific nations are at the epicentre of the climate crisis and bear most of the damaging impacts of climate change. At the last Summit, the Quad leaders established joint principles for clean energy supply chains which is expected to transform the way investment is made in clean energy in the region. Similarly, the Quad's Climate Information Services (CIS) initiative commits to building capacity, cooperation, and information-sharing mechanisms for climate data in the Indo-Pacific.

The Quad Indo-Pacific Oceans Research Alliance is a scientific network to exchange data on the Indian and Pacific Oceans and assess their influence on regional and global climate variability, and how sea level rise and climate change are impacting marine ecosystems and Quad member resources. Ahead of the next COP-29 meeting in Azerbaijan in November, the Quad Leaders in Delaware can send a strong message in this area.

Infrastructure has been a consistent theme right from the first summit in Washington in 2021. The Quad Infrastructure Coordination Group was formed early on and since then initiatives such as Quad Infrastructure Fellowship, leading on High-Standards Infrastructure and Quad Partnership for Cable Connectivity and Resilience (focusing on undersea cables) are all essential and it must be hoped that the Delaware Summit will take this issue forward.

Critical and emerging technology has always figured in the leaders' discussions at Quad summits and the Delaware summit should be no exception. The Quad is committed to ensuring that it is leading the innovations of the future and that the benefits of new and emerging technologies are shared throughout the region. In 2021, the Quad undertook to come up with principles on critical and emerging tech standards; it agreed on the principles in May 2023.

Security in cyberspace has always been a longstanding concern for the Quad countries. From cybersecurity to critical infrastructure to software, the Quad is committed to advancing a secure and resilient cyber ecosystem. Cyber-attacks against hospitals, schools, electricity

and telecom systems are occurring with disturbing regularity. Quad partners have developed joint principles for the cybersecurity of critical infrastructure, designed to strengthen the Indo-Pacific countries' defences against cyber threats to critical infrastructure and services.

Health too has been an important area for the Quad countries and will continue to receive focus in Delaware. Launched at the 2023 summit, the Quad Health Security Partnership builds on the success of the Quad Vaccine Partnership. This partnership will support field epidemiology and outbreak responder training, boost disease surveillance, improve data systems, and build the capabilities of national health emergency operations centres, allowing experts to offer faster and better-informed solutions to outbreaks and other health challenges affecting the Indo-Pacific. The Quad hopes to use this partnership to address critical gaps across the Indo-Pacific region in prevention, preparedness and response to outbreaks.

The Delaware summit is taking place at a critical time. At a time like this, it must make sure it gets its messaging right. It must strike the right balance between deterrence and assurance. The message of deterrence must be strongly aimed at discouraging any unilateral attempt to change the status quo by any power in the Indo-Pacific. The message of assurance should be that the Quad is aimed at reinforcing cooperation among like-minded nations on a whole range of strategic, but non-military sectors.

Mohan Kumar is former Indian Ambassador to France and currently Dean/Professor at OP Jindal Global University. The views expressed are personal