

Quad summit in Tokyo ramps up confrontation with China

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Yesterday's face-to-face meeting in Tokyo of the leaders of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) marked a sharp and systemic stepping up of the US-led war preparations against China.

On every front—military, economic, maritime surveillance, supply chains, and cyber and space warfare—the government heads from the US, Japan, India and Australia endorsed aggressive measures to encircle, isolate and provoke Beijing.

The summit was a key feature of US President Joe Biden's five-day trip to South Korea and Japan to display what the White House called a “powerful message” that, even as Washington escalates its proxy war against Russia in Ukraine by pouring in another \$40 billion of weaponry and support, it is prepared to fight a war on two fronts, against both Russia and China.

Biden set the tone as the summit began. “This is about democracies versus autocracies, and we have to make sure we deliver,” he insisted. In reality, the White House war drive is about reasserting the US post-World War II hegemony over the Indo-Pacific and extending it to the strategic Eurasian landmass.

The event was dominated by Biden's deliberate declaration at an international media conference, standing alongside Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, that the US would intervene militarily if China sought to incorporate Taiwan, which is recognised internationally as part of China.

Kishida followed suit. In formally opening the summit, he repeated previous denunciations of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and linked it to US allegations of Chinese threats to Taiwan. “We should never, ever allow a similar incident to happen in the Indo-Pacific,” Kishida said.

Regardless of subsequent White House claims that Biden's statement did not represent a ditching of the five decades-old US policy of “strategic ambiguity” on the issue of military intervention, the shift was clear. Today's editorial in the *Australian* noted: “The US President, however, has said virtually the same thing on three occasions since August last year—a point not lost on Beijing.”

The editorial said Biden's “timely warning in Tokyo should disabuse the leadership in Beijing” of assuming that the US “would be unable to afford a two-front war.”

Notably, the US shift was welcomed yesterday by editorials in the *Washington Post*, which praised it as “less ambiguous and more strategic,” and the *Wall Street Journal*, which urged Biden to go further by including Taiwan as a nation-state member of the new anti-China economic bloc unveiled at the Quad summit.

As with the US-NATO operation against Russia, the US ruling class is seeking to goad Beijing into a reaction over Taiwan that could become a pretext for war, with reckless disregard for the risk of a catastrophic nuclear conflict.

The official Quad communiqué was bland, as is customary, and avoided overt mention of China. But its language and every initiative announced at the event were directed at accusing China of aggression and blocking Beijing strategically and economically.

The four government leaders said they “strongly oppose any coercive, provocative or unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo” in the Indo-Pacific. These included “the militarization of disputed features, the dangerous use of coast guard vessels and maritime militia, and efforts to disrupt other countries' offshore resource exploitation activities”—all accusations levied against China's activities in the South China Sea.

The Quad leaders reaffirmed their resolve to “uphold the international rules-based order where countries are free from all forms of military, economic and political coercion.” Far from standing for “freedom,” these are code words for maintaining the “order” erected and dominated by the US and its allies since World War II.

Two new programs were unveiled at the summit. One was a “Maritime Domain Awareness Initiative.” Under the guise of cracking down on alleged “illegal Chinese fishing,” this will ramp up US-led maritime monitoring and intervention. It will connect existing surveillance centres in Singapore, India and the Pacific to track vessels across South East Asia and the entire Indo-Pacific. The use of satellite imagery and active intelligence sharing has obvious military implications.

The other initiative was an anti-China economic bloc, labelled the “Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity” (IPEF). Unlike supposed “free trade zones,” this 13-member bloc is clearly protectionist, designed to bolster

US and allied access to regional markets without offering reduced tariffs or greater access to US markets. The White House said it would enable the US and its allies to “to decide on rules of the road.”

The IPEF dovetails with other measures, expanded at the summit, to strengthen global supply chains—which will be vital in a war against China, the world’s second largest economy—reinforce “digital security” by excluding Chinese telecommunications companies, and develop cyber and space war capacities.

In a bid to counter Chinese investment and aid, the four leaders said they would “seek to extend more than \$US50 billion of infrastructure assistance and investment in the Indo-Pacific, over the next five years.” They claimed to be “committed to bringing tangible benefits to the region,” but the real thrust is to block Chinese programs.

Moreover, the funds promised, even if provided, are drops in the bucket compared to the needs throughout the impoverished former colonial territories stretched across the strategic ocean.

Likewise, the much-promoted focus on climate change is about escalating US and allied “security” operations, especially in the Pacific, to counter Chinese moves, such as Beijing’s recent security agreement with Solomon Islands.

As if to reinforce that reality, Biden was accompanied at the summit by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, national security adviser Jake Sullivan and Indo-Pacific adviser Kurt Campbell. Last month, Campbell visited Solomon Islands to warn that the US would “respond accordingly” if its government allowed China to establish any military presence.

For all the purported and belated concern for the impact of global warming on the Pacific islands, the newly-elected Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, in his opening public statement to the summit, directly linked “climate action” to the “security of our region.”

Albanese’s presence at the event, and the commitments he gave there, underscored how much is at stake for the US. Biden effusively praised the Labor Party prime minister for jumping on a plane to join the summit just three hours after being sworn into office on Monday following Saturday’s national election.

It would have been a blow to US credibility if no Australian leader had attended the summit, especially given the strategic importance of Australia as a platform for any war against China, as it was for the US war against Japan in World War II.

Albanese was at pains to swear allegiance to the Quad, saying it was “an honour that this is my first act as prime minister, to attend this important Quad Leaders’ meeting here in Japan.” He was anxious to dispel any doubts in Washington about his government’s commitment, after the last Labor government pulled out of the Quad in 2008, concerned for its impact on relations with China, Australia’s largest export market.

A White House statement released following a side meeting between Biden and Albanese said the pair had also reiterated their support for the US-NATO war against Russia and the

“swift progress” of the AUKUS security pact with the UK, a military alliance against China that features the supply of nuclear-powered submarines and hypersonic missiles to Australia.

“He (Mr Biden) commended Australia’s strong support for Ukraine since Russia’s invasion, and the leaders agreed on the importance of continued solidarity, including to ensure that no such event is ever repeated in the Indo-Pacific,” the statement read.

That language indicates that Albanese understood and embraced the US shift on military intervention in Taiwan, despite his later nervous insistence that Australian policy had not changed.

Evidently, Biden made little progress in his ongoing efforts to strongarm the Indian government into lining up behind the US war on Russia, with which New Delhi has longstanding strategic, economic and military ties.

A White House readout of Biden’s meeting with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Biden “condemned Russia’s unjustifiable war against Ukraine,” adding that the two leaders committed to providing humanitarian assistance. But India’s government made no mention of Ukraine or Russia in its readout.

Instead, an Indian foreign ministry spokesman said Biden and Modi “discussed ways to strengthen cooperation in trade, investment, technology, defence” and “concluded with substantive outcomes adding depth and momentum to the bilateral partnership.”

This was the fourth Quad summit in less than two years, following an in-person gathering in Washington last September and two virtual events. That underscores the increasing importance of this alliance, which has been revived and placed at centre stage by the Biden administration as an essential spearhead of its offensive against China.

Provocatively, US national security advisor Sullivan said Biden’s trip, capped by the Quad summit, sent a message that “will be heard everywhere” and “we think it will be heard in Beijing.”



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