

Biden hosts Quad meeting directed against China

Oscar Grenfell
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Over the weekend, US President Joe Biden hosted a leaders' meeting in Delaware of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), a de facto alliance of the anti-China military powers in the Indo-Pacific—America, Japan, India and Australia.

As with all such gatherings, the meeting was couched in platitudes about “development” and “cooperation” in the Indo-Pacific. Biden administration officials claimed that the Quad was not directed against any particular country.

Those assertions were refuted in a “hot mic” moment that exposed the real thrust of the alliance.

Apparently unaware that his microphone was still live, Biden told the other government leaders that “China continues to behave aggressively, testing us all across the region, and it’s true in the South China Sea, the East China Sea, South China, South Asia and the Taiwan straits.” He added that this was “true across the scope of our relationship, including on economic and technology issues.”

Those remarks were an exercise in projection. In reality, the US has engaged in a full-court military, diplomatic and economic press against China, based on explicit fears that Beijing’s economic growth threatens the regional and global hegemony of American imperialism.

While falsely assigning blame to China, Biden’s remarks did point to the scope of the confrontation. He identified flashpoints across the entire region as well as the critical issues of economic and technological development.

Even in comments that were intended to be private, there was an evident contradiction. Amid a slowdown of the Chinese economy, Biden stated that President “Xi Jinping is looking to focus on domestic economic challenges and minimise the turbulence in China’s diplomatic relationships.”

But, Biden hastened to add, Xi was simply seeking to “buy himself some diplomatic space, in my view, to aggressively pursue China’s interest.” It was a change of “tactics,” not “strategy.”

Media coverage has focussed on the “embarrassment” of the “hot mic” incident. Biden’s remarks are revealing, however. They underscore the reality that whatever Xi and the Chinese leadership do, the US is determined to press ahead with its aggressive confrontation. Biden’s message also had the character of an insistence to the allied leaders that they not let

up in their own involvement in the US-led anti-China activities, whatever Beijing’s shifts and manoeuvres.

The “hot mic” episode is the framework within which the 6,000 word “Wilmington Declaration,” adopted by the leaders, should be read. It does not explicitly mention China, but it includes the usual host of thinly-veiled US accusations against Beijing. The entire purpose of the Quad over more than a decade has been to deepen the collaboration of its four constituent parts against China.

A particular focus was the South China Sea. The declaration states: “We continue to express our serious concern about the militarization of disputed features, and coercive and intimidating maneuvers in the South China Sea.” It references the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which Washington continually invokes against Beijing, despite refusing to sign on to the agreement itself.

The declaration insists on the right to “freedom of navigation” exercises, which have entailed US and allied warships sailing in or near waters claimed by China in provocations that risk a shooting war. Similar points were made in relation to the East China Sea.

An entire paragraph is dedicated to a related denunciation of North Korea’s “destabilizing ballistic missile launches and its continued pursuit of nuclear weapons,” with its government accused of violating international law and threatening “peace and stability.”

Those allegations, against a beleaguered tinpot regime, are absurdly hypocritical coming from American imperialism, which has waged continuous war for the past 30 years and is currently setting entire regions ablaze. The dictatorship in Myanmar was also denounced over its human rights violations, with the real concern no doubt being its ties to Beijing.

The concrete measures outlined in the statement are largely directed toward facilitating and extending maritime aggression targeting China.

The declaration hails the Quad’s 2022 establishment of an “Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA).” Essentially this is a pact for the surveillance and monitoring of the Indian and Pacific Oceans by the US and its allies. That includes the establishment of a data monitoring/spying centre in India and the rollout of data to

countries throughout the region.

The statement says this will help countries to “monitor the activities in their exclusive economic zones—including unlawful activity. Australia commits to boosting its cooperation with the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency to enhance regional maritime domain awareness in the Pacific through satellite data, training and capacity building.”

The four leaders announced a “new regional Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific.” This would enable allies to “monitor and secure their waters, enforce their laws, and deter unlawful behavior.” A parallel legal commission is being set up to “uphold the rules-based maritime order in the Indo-Pacific”—code words for US dominance.

As part of its more than decade-long military build-up in the Indo-Pacific, the US has deliberately inflamed territorial disputes between China and several regional states, transforming them into trigger points for a potential war.

Over the past year, this agenda has been ratcheted-up still further. The Philippine government, under the right-wing President Bongbong Marcos, has provoked clashes with Chinese coast guard and civilian fishing vessels in disputes over territorial control of elements of the South China. Under conditions where the Marcos regime is closely integrated with the US military, these clashes have posed the imminent threat of a far broader war.

It is in that context that the Quad leaders announced that “the US Coast Guard, Japan Coast Guard, Australian Border Force, and Indian Coast Guard, plan to launch a first-ever Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission in 2025, to improve interoperability and advance maritime safety, and continuing with further missions in future years across the Indo-Pacific.” That will be a joint expedition in support of anti-China provocations.

Some media outlets jumped the gun and reported that the joint coast guard mission would focus on the South China Sea. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese refused to confirm or deny that when asked during a press event. Such a move would be a major escalation, posing the risk of direct clashes between US and Chinese forces.

While pontificating about “peace,” “freedom” and the like, the Quad leaders solidarised themselves with the Israeli regime and its genocide of the Palestinians. They denounced the October 7 Palestinian military operation, but said nothing about Israel’s terrorist attacks in Lebanon the previous week.

The US-funded genocide and moves to a regionwide Middle Eastern conflagration are one front in a developing global war, which also includes the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and the US confrontation with China in the Indo-Pacific.

While expressing “deepest concern over the war raging in Ukraine,” the statement was somewhat muted on that conflict, under conditions where the US is moving to authorise Ukrainian strikes deep inside Russian territory, in a policy that threatens all-out war between NATO and Russia. The muffled

language was likely because India, while fully-committed to the anti-China aggression, maintains substantial economic ties with Russia.

The response of hawkish military-intelligence commentators to the gathering was mixed. Persistent frustrations have been voiced that the Quad has not implemented even more aggressive and concrete measures against China, and that its intermittent meetings often feature the announcement of already-unveiled initiatives.

The political crisis of capitalist governments internationally was also a feature of the leaders’ summit. Biden is a lame duck president, with his successor to be chosen in the November 5 election and inaugurated next January 20. Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida announced his resignation in August. Albanese faces an election by next May under conditions of mass hostility to his government, including over the cost-of-living crisis and its support for the Gaza genocide.

Of the four leaders, Indian President Narendra Modi’s position would appear to be the most secure, but that only underscores the bogus character of the references to “human rights” and “democracy.” Modi is an autocratic figure whose rule, based on Hindu nationalism, has included a crackdown on civil liberties and the murder of political opponents abroad.

Notwithstanding this political crisis, the Quad leaders emphasised that the pact would continue, including in the event of a Trump presidency in the US. The pact forms part of an entire US-led network of military and diplomatic alliances in the Indo-Pacific, all directed at preparing for war against China.

Whatever the upheavals, the leaders were insisting the war drive would proceed. It is the only response that the imperialist powers, led by the US, have to the historic crisis of the global capitalist system.



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