

US Secretary of State hosts anti-China QUAD meeting in Washington

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On Tuesday, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio convened a foreign ministers' meeting of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue in Washington. The statement issued by the QUAD participants, comprising the US, Australia, India and Japan, did not mention China, but the entire thrust of the gathering was to ramp up American imperialism's aggressive confrontation with Beijing.

That confrontation is one component of an eruption of imperialist militarism that increasingly has the character of a global war.

Less than a fortnight before the QUAD meeting, the US, following Israel, launched airstrikes against Iran, in a blatant act of aggression, that is part of a broader war drive throughout the region including the Israeli genocide in Gaza. In Europe, the US has been in a de facto war with Russia for the past three years in Ukraine. At a NATO summit last week, the European powers pledged the largest increases to military spending since World War II, in line with US demands.

In the Indo-Pacific, the Trump administration has accelerated a protracted military build-up against China, which US imperialism continues to view as its chief threat. That has included bellicose denunciations of Beijing by top US officials, predictions by them of a war over Taiwan within several years and similar demands that allies in the Indo-Pacific dramatically hike their military budgets.

The QUAD statement repeated the usual litany of false US accusations against China used to justify Washington's aggression in the region.

The foreign ministers were "seriously concerned about the situation in the East China Sea and South China Sea." They denounced "dangerous and provocative actions" in the South China Sea, such as "unsafe use of water cannons," interference with "freedom of navigation" and "dangerous maneuvers."

All of that was clearly a reference to China, but it is a complete inversion of reality. In fact, the US has for more than a decade deliberately inflamed low-level territorial disputes in the sea, between China and several Southeast Asian nations, deliberately transforming them into flashpoints for a major war.

US and allied warships have carried out provocative incursions into Chinese-claimed waters, while the cultivation of the Philippines, under far-right leader Ferdinand Bongbong Marcos, into an attack dog for Washington resulted last year in clashes with Chinese forces that could have ignited a region-wide conflict.

The statement condemned North Korea and its ballistic missile program, similarly presenting it as a threat to regional "peace" and a violation of international law.

Such statements are always saturated with hypocrisy, but the context in which the QUAD leaders proclaimed their "commitment to defending the rule of law, sovereignty, and territorial integrity" took that to an even higher level.

Washington's strikes on Iran were blatantly illegal, as is the US-funded and overseen Israeli mass murder of Palestinians, in some of the worst war crimes since the 1930s. Within the US, the Trump regime is seeking to overturn the Constitution, in a frontal assault on democratic rights that is increasingly being replicated in all the Western imperialist centres. The references to a "rules-based order" in the Indo-Pacific simply mean the maintenance of US dominance against China.

Notwithstanding the QUAD's statement of unity, Trump's "America First" program is producing tensions with Washington's military allies. None of the QUAD participants has secured exemptions on the reciprocal tariffs, which are set to be imposed on July 9 after the conclusion of a 90-day pause.

Japan, whose economy is in an anemic state, faces a 24 percent tariff on exports to the US, as well as an

additional 25 percent tariff on auto products. While Foreign Affairs Minister Takeshi Iwaya was meeting with Rubio, Tokyo's Economic Revitalization Minister Ryosei Akazawa was shortly before in Washington condemning the tariff regime and warning that the imposts were "not something we can accept."

The Australian Labor government has been roiled by Trump's announcement of a review into the AUKUS military pact with the US and the UK, under which the country is to purchase nuclear-powered submarines from America. The prospect of the scuttling of that deal, as well as public US demands for a major increase in Australian military spending, have caused substantial agitation in ruling circles.

The QUAD statement did not reference Ukraine, Russia or Iran, reflecting the ongoing balancing act of India, between its deepening military-strategic ties with Washington and its economic relations with Moscow.

Despite those difficulties, Rubio proclaimed the need to turn "meetings and gatherings where we talk about ideas and concepts into a vehicle for action." There has been a longstanding frustration in US and allied national-security circles that the QUAD, which they view as a potential spearhead of the anti-China build-up, meets periodically but commits to few concrete initiatives.

The QUAD statement touted "maritime law enforcement cooperation through regional training initiatives, maritime legal dialogues, and Coast Guard cooperation." Those previously announced initiatives raise the prospect of even more direct US provocations in the South China Sea territorial disputes. The Quad Ports of the Future Partnership will be launched in Mumbai later this year. It aims to develop a network of ports that could be used by the QUAD countries, including for war.

It also stated that a Quad Indo-Pacific Logistics Network event will be held later this year. Under the guise of preparing for natural disasters, the QUAD countries will "strengthen shared airlift capacity and leverage our collective logistics strengths," all of which have a military dimension.

A particular focus of the statement was the need to ensure the "security" of supply chains and to develop them between QUAD participants.

"We are deeply concerned about the abrupt constriction and future reliability of key supply chains, specifically for critical minerals," the statement declared, before announcing the establishment of a Quad Critical Minerals Initiative.

All of that is a reference to China's dominance of the

refining and processing of critical minerals, which are decisive to a raft of modern technologies, from mobile phones and computers to military hardware. China is estimated to control two-thirds of the production or refining of major critical minerals.

Agreements between QUAD countries to deepen collaboration on critical minerals have been struck before, including between the US and Australia, which has substantial deposits. Analysts have noted, however, the difficulties in developing refining capacities.

He Weiwen, a senior fellow at the Center for China and Globalization, told the Chinese-run *Global Times*, "Building a fully developed refining system in the short term will be a highly demanding undertaking, requiring not only massive investment but also a timeline spanning years."

The QUAD participants are hobbled by the destruction of their manufacturing bases, while Western national-security commentators have bemoaned the fact that China has a "decades-long headstart" in the sector.

Due to supply outpacing demand over the past two years, prices have fallen. An International Energy Agency report earlier this year stated that "Lithium prices, which had surged eightfold during 2021-22, fell by over 80 percent since 2023. Graphite, cobalt and nickel prices also dropped by 10 to 20 percent in 2024."

Financial commentators in Australia responded to the QUAD's announcement by noting that the falls and the vast capital outlays required to establish processing and refining facilities from scratch mean that the sector is not a particularly attractive investment for private corporations. The QUAD nevertheless declared that 30 to 40 corporations from member states are being spoken with to develop such capabilities.

Whatever transpires from those discussions, the focus on supply chains underscores the reality that the US is preparing for war with China, not in the distant future, but in the relatively near-term, and is seeking to develop war-related economies to prosecute such a conflict.



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