

US-led Quad meeting menaces China with naval build-up

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A meeting in Tokyo on Monday of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), a de facto military alliance of the US, Japan, India and Australia, threatened China and proclaimed Washington's determination to maintain dominance in the Indo-Pacific, including through a further naval build-up in the region.

The meeting was held at the foreign-minister level and included US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. In his remarks, Blinken referenced the full gamut of US imperialist operations globally, including its push for a coup in Venezuela, its proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and the "war in Gaza," i.e., the American-armed and -financed genocide of Palestinians.

However, Blinken and his counterparts in their separate remarks and joint statement emphasised the centrality of the Indo-Pacific to imperialist geopolitics. Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong stated that the US allies were facing "the most confronting circumstances in our region in decades."

The joint statement included generalities about "peace" and "prosperity" in the Indo-Pacific, as such documents always do. But the central thrust was a clear and bellicose denunciation of China.

Very prominent was a declaration of the importance of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which the US has always refused to sign, but which it nevertheless uses as a battering ram against Beijing.

The Quad foreign ministers stated: "We are seriously concerned about the situation in the East and South China Seas and reiterate our strong opposition to any unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo by force or coercion." That was a barely veiled reference to longstanding territorial disputes between China and countries in the region, particularly the Philippines, which the US has deliberately inflamed over the past 15

years.

The statement added: "We also express our serious concern about the dangerous use of coast guard and maritime militia vessels, the increasing use of various kinds of dangerous maneuvers, and efforts to disrupt other countries' offshore resource exploitation activities."

Over recent months, with aggressive US support, the Philippines has come to the brink of open conflict with China over the Second Thomas Shoal and other disputed features in the South China Sea.

The statement then outlined a series of measures that, taken together, represent a further naval build-up directed against China.

These included a "geographic expansion" of the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness. It is essentially a US-led network for intensive surveillance of the seas and oceans of the Indo-Pacific. Blinken declared that the US was seeking to integrate into this network, involving "signal location data and satellite technology," "countries all across the region."

Among the first priorities is the opening of an Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region in Gujarat, India, which will pool surveillance from participating countries, with a particular focus on South Asia. The increasing integration of India and particularly its navy into the US-led war drive against China is one of the central purposes of the Quad.

The leaders declared that they would expand naval exercises throughout the region, under conditions where provocative US allied operations, including by Australia, have led to near-clashes with Chinese forces.

They pledged to develop a "Quad maritime legal dialogue," which would "focus our expertise on international law of the sea issues in support of our efforts to uphold the rules-based maritime order in the

Indo-Pacific.” That would be an instrument for bolstering the territorial claims of Chinese adversaries such as the Philippines, and for seeking to criminalise Beijing’s naval operations.

The Chinese Foreign Ministry responded with a statement accusing the Quad meeting of “artificially creating tension, inciting confrontation and containing the development of other countries,” and of seeking to tar China’s “normal military development and national defence policy.”

The response was undoubtedly motivated by the fact that the Quad meeting was part of a broader regional push by the US. Straight from Tokyo, Blinken together with US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin flew to Manila, for the first two-plus-two leaders’ meeting in the history of American-Filipino relations.

Blinken and Austin declared that they would upgrade their alliance with the Philippines and announced half a billion dollars in military aid, which is part of a \$2 billion fund approved by the US Congress for the region, explicitly aimed at “confronting Chinese aggression.”

The week prior to the Quad meeting, Australia was a particular focus of this offensive. On July 26, the Chiefs of Navy for Australia, the United Kingdom, and the US held a joint meeting in Perth, Western Australia, where they pledged to deepen a military build-up under the AUKUS pact between the three nations.

The chiefs issued a “Statement of Intent for Lethality,” pledging to press ahead with plans to upgrade the naval capabilities of each of the countries. That includes plans for a vast acquisition of missile and strike weapons for Australia’s naval fleet, as well as its acquisition, under the AUKUS pact, of nuclear-powered attack submarines, to be purchased first from the US and then jointly developed with Britain.

Given the intense political instability in the US and Britain, the meeting had the character of an assertion by the military-intelligence establishment that nothing would be permitted to get in the way of the military expansion.

An article in the *Australian Financial Review*, for instance, noted the “unprecedented” character of the visit. “The chiefs of the US and British navies have reassured Australia about their commitment to AUKUS, after the recent change of government in Britain and the rising prospect of Donald Trump

coming back as American president,” it declared.

The visit by the US and British military leaders toured the strategically located HMAS Stirling naval base in Perth, Western Australia, adjacent to the Indian Ocean.

The chiefs emphasised their determination to proceed with plans for the expanded basing of US and British naval assets, including nuclear-powered and nuclear-capable attack submarines. Visits by such craft have already begun to accelerate, and Stirling is set to become a de facto US and British naval base by 2027 at the latest.

The US and British naval chiefs were then the headline speakers at the annual Indian Ocean Defence and Security Conference. The three-day event in Perth was titled “Where AUKUS Meets the Quad,” pointing to the central role of Australia and particularly the Stirling base, to US efforts to ring China militarily.

Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles hailed the gathering as the “single biggest gathering of defence security ever in Perth.” It underscored the “geostrategic significance” of Perth as “the literal fulcrum between the Indo and the Pacific,” he said, a city that would be “home of the Submarine Rotational Force-West, which is one of the key early expressions of AUKUS.”

The flurry of activity in the Indo-Pacific, clearly directed against China, again underscores the global character of the US-led war drive. Even as it is setting the Middle East ablaze in partnership with the fascistic Israeli regime, and actively engaged in a proxy war with Russia in Eastern Europe, American imperialism is recklessly confronting China which is viewed as the chief threat to US capitalist dominance.



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