



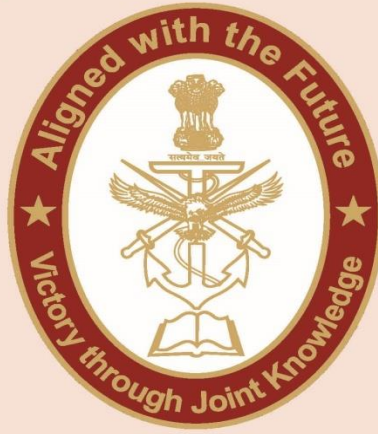
CENJOWS

WEB ARTICLE
WA/3/25

QUAD'S MAITRI INITIATIVE IN ADVANCING INDIA'S MARITIME VISION: AN ANALYSIS

DR ULUPI BORAH

CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



CENJOWS

QUAD'S MAITRI INITIATIVE IN ADVANCING INDIA'S MARITIME VISION: AN ANALYSIS



Dr Ulupi Borah, is a Senior Fellow at CENJOWS, New Delhi.

Introduction

The new regional 'Maritime Initiative for Training in Indo-Pacific (MAITRI)' is a collaborative effort by the four QUAD members to enhance training in the maritime operations and addressing other defence related issues. Its main focus is "to monitor and secure their waters, enforce their laws, and deter unlawful behaviour".¹ In Sanskrit the word "MAITRI" means amity, friendship and benevolence which in a way perfectly aligns with the objectives of MAITRI initiative symbolising cooperation, collaboration, trust and respect among the countries of the region.

The Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs, Nancy Izzo Jackson stated: "We are also proud to announce a new regional maritime initiative for training in the Indo-Pacific or MAITRI with an inaugural symposium in 2025 that will be hosted by India".²

This would enable New Delhi to promote its broader objectives in the maritime domain involving joint naval exercises and other capacity building workshops.³ Such efforts

could be extended to the other maritime countries of the Indo-Pacific region. It also seems to be aligning with India's vision of the "Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)". The framework is seen as an outcome of the "sixth summit level meeting" of the QUAD countries.

The paper makes an effort to analyse how MAITRI as a maritime initiative aligns with India's free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific and how it would enhance India's maritime vision in the region.

No Country Dominates or No Country Should be Dominated

In the Wilmington Declaration 2024, the QUAD leaders stated: "We expresses deep concern over the recent dangerous and aggressive actions in the maritime domain. We seek a region where no country dominates and no country is dominated—one where all countries are free from coercion and can exercise their agency to determine their futures. We are united in our commitment to upholding a stable and open international system, with its strong support for human rights, the principle of freedom, rule of law, democratic values, sovereignty and territorial integrity, and peaceful settlement of disputes and prohibition on the threat or use of force in accordance with international law, including the UN Charter".⁴

It can be seen that in the Wellington Declaration that the QUAD members did not precisely name any country but it was obvious that they referred it to the expansionist behaviour of China in the South China Sea and the East China Sea.⁵ There are several instances which exhibit China's coercive and intimidating attitude in the waters of the region.⁶

Such actions have created tensions in the region as they have challenged the international rule-based order. This motivated the QUAD nations to restate their obligation and commitment towards the framework in maintaining peace, security and stability in the region. They wish to make it clear that the status quo of the region should not be changed due to any unilateral action.

In light of this, the four members realised the significance of monitoring the waters of the region. This is achievable only by enhancing the maritime capabilities of the region

and promoting joint training and collaborative initiatives amongst these countries. Hence, programs like MAITRI and IPMDA have been launched to support the regional partners in securing the sea routes while encouraging a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Meena Shankar, a former Indian Ambassador to the US, stated that the Chinese incursions in the Indian Ocean is rising and remains a concern for New Delhi considering its territorial proximity. She further told ANI: “The QUAD leaders have taken the decision to expand the maritime domain awareness programs to the Indian Ocean. Hitherto it was confined to the Pacific and the South China Sea and so on, but now it is being expanded to the Indian Ocean and India will be making its own contributions in this process”.⁷

Such a concern from the Indian side is legitimate as China’s naval presence has not just been limited to the East China Sea and the South China Sea. Sri Lanka too remains very crucial because China has already made forays into it.⁸ Hence, Shankar stated the importance of maritime domain awareness to mitigate such upcoming challenges.⁹ MAITRI as a training program has the ability to complement MDA by achieving its objectives.

MAITRI Built on the Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) and Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) Programs

The objectives of MAITRI seem to be aligning with that of the IPMDA and is built on the foundation laid by the latter. The main focus of IPMDA is to share information among the Indo-Pacific region. This incorporates data related to various maritime activities including vessel movements.¹⁰ Such information enables countries to monitor their waters. At this point, the role of MAITRI is to enhance the capability provided by IPMDA through capacity building workshops, joints naval exercises etc. MAITRI also aims to offer enforcement strategies to deter unlawful activities while IPMDA helps in tracking illegal activities such as illegal fishing, human trafficking and smuggling.¹¹

Nonetheless, there exists a gap in terms of technical expertise in most of the smaller maritime nations in the Indo-Pacific region. As such, they are unable to utilise the data and information provided by IPMDA. In such instances, MATRI plays an important role by offering simulation based training and other collaborative exercises. Overall, both

the initiatives make a significant effort in enhancing trust among the nations and this enhances the regional security network by capacity building.

Analysing MAITRI: Opportunities and Challenges

In the preceding paragraphs, it can be seen that QUAD's MAITRI initiative has various capabilities to leverage India's maritime vision but at the same time, it is important to understand the associated drawbacks. Some of those opportunities and shortcomings have been discussed in the following paragraphs:

- **Aligns with India's SAGAR Vision:** SAGAR focuses on a strategic framework which would promote economic growth, maritime security and sustainable development.¹² At the same time, through SAGAR, New Delhi aspires to tackle regional issues ranging from humanitarian assistance to piracy and terrorism. Furthermore, China's growing presence through its "Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)", particularly in the "Indian Ocean Region (IOR)" remains a concern.¹³ However, such issues and objectives cannot be effectively addressed or achieved by India independently. There has to be exchange of data and information for which cooperation from other maritime nations of the region is needed. One of the main goals of MAITRI is regional cooperation. It fosters training and capacity building measures for the maritime nations to mitigate the issues that are highlighted in the SAGAR vision of India thereby, aligning MAITRI with the objectives of this framework.¹⁴
- **Leverages the Role of a Vishwa Bandhu:** New Delhi aspires to play the role of "Vishwa Bandhu (a global friend)" and rise to global prominence through its vision of "Viksit Bharat". In the maritime domain, MAITRI could play an important role in enabling India to bolster its regional and global image making it a significant leader in the Indo-Pacific region.
- **India's Geostrategic Location:** India's geostrategic location makes it one of the most relevant countries in the region. Being a maritime nation and its proximity to the Indian Ocean gives New Delhi the access to some of the most importance sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) and chokepoints such as the

Malacca Strait. This geographic advantage positions New Delhi to hold a key position in a maritime frameworks like the MAITRI.

- **Strengthens India's FOIP Initiative:** India envisages a “free, open, inclusive and peaceful Indo-Pacific” predicated on a rules-based order, sustainable and transparent infrastructure investment.¹⁵ Today, New Delhi has positioned this region at the core of its engagement strategies with rest of the world. Prime Minister Narendra Modi at his keynote address at the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2018 announced India's “free, open, inclusive Indo- Pacific (FOIP)” and stated the vision for a prosperity in the region.¹⁶ He also emphasised the advantages of collaborations based on common interests and ideals.¹⁷ MAITRI as a platform could enable India to cooperate with most of the like-minded countries to fulfil the objectives of its FOIP.
- **A Cost-Effective Framework:** MAITRI involves various training and joint exercises. This requires a sufficient amount of budget. India must be prepared to sustain such a financial investment if it wishes to take a lead in the MAITRI framework.
- **Antagonise China:** China might consider such a framework as a direct countermeasure to its maritime objectives in the Indo-Pacific region. This could eventually lead to creation of tensions and pose some challenges to New Delhi. India should be conscious of this fact but must give primacy to its national interests.

Conclusion

The main objective of MAITRI is to promote maritime security while fostering capacity building. India being a maritime nation, such a framework is not just a collaboration among the QUAD members but offers an opportunity at a strategic level to achieve its maritime objectives in the region. MAITRI aligns with most of the goals outlined in India's SAGAR and FOIP initiatives. China's assertiveness in the waterbodies remain a shared concern for India as well as other QUAD members launched MAITRI. To mitigate this, various joint exercises and trainings are encouraged and an effort should be made to bridge the technical gaps between the maritime countries of the region.

The platform should be utilised by New Delhi in a manner to achieve its goal of becoming a Vishwa Bandhu top further its national interests.

DISCLAIMER

The paper is author's individual scholastic articulation and does not necessarily reflect the views of CENJOWS. The author certifies that the article is original in content, unpublished and it has not been submitted for publication/ web upload elsewhere and that the facts and figures quoted are duly referenced, as needed and are believed to be correct.

Endnotes

¹ The Economic Times, (2024), "Quad launches MAITRI maritime initiative in Indo-Pacific; India to host first training workshop in 2025", [Online: web], Accessed 27 December 2024, URL: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/quad-launches-maitri-maritime-initiative-in-indo-pacific-india-to-host-first-training-workshop-in-2025/articleshow/113585927.cms>

² DD News, (2024), "Quad Launches MAITRI Maritime Initiative In Indo-Pacific; India To Host First Training Workshop In 2025", [Online: web], Accessed 27 December 2024, URL: <https://ddnews.gov.in/en/quad-launches-maitri-maritime-initiative-in-indo-pacific-india-to-host-first-training-workshop-in-2025/>

³ Ibid

⁴ The White House (2024), "The Wilmington Declaration Joint Statement from the Leaders of Australia, India, Japan, and the United States", Government of the United States of America, URL: https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/09/21/the-wilmington-declaration-joint-statement-from-the-leaders-of-australia-india-japan-and-the-united-states/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁵ Lim Jeong-Won, (2024), "Quad denounces North Korea's nuclear pursuit in Wilmington Declaration", URL: https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/2024-09-22/national/northKorea/Quad-denounces-North-Koreas-nuclear-pursuit-in-Wilmington-Declaration/2138841?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁶ Ibid

⁷ ANI, (2023), "QUAD launches MAITRI maritime initiative in Indo-Pacific, India to host first training workshop in 2025", [Online: web], Accessed 27 December 2024, URL: <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/us/quad-launches-maitri-maritime-initiative-in-indo-pacific-india-to-host-first-training-workshop-in-202520240923100705/>

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ The Economic Times, (2024), "Quad launches MAITRI maritime initiative in Indo-Pacific; India to host first training workshop in 2025", [Online: web], Accessed 27 December 2024, URL: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/quad-launches-maitri-maritime-initiative-in-indo-pacific-india-to-host-first-training-workshop-in-2025/articleshow/113585927.cms?from=mdr>

¹¹ Ibid

¹² DrishtiiAS, (2023), "SAGAR Vision", [Online: web], Accessed 27 December 2024, URL: <https://www.drishtiias.com/daily-news-editorials/sagar-vision>

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Rahul Roy Choudhury, (2018), "Modi spells out free, open, inclusive Indo-Pacific policy", IISS, [Online: web], Accessed 27 December 2024, URL: <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2018/08/modi-free-open-inclusive/>

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid