**FGD Report (October 30th)**

**­***-Sagnik Sarkar,*

*Intern, AGA*

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**Asia in Global Affairs organized a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) on ‘Strategic and Spatial Realignments: Aukus and Quad’, on 30th October 2021**, where some interns present their views on certain themes falling under the ambit of the broader topic of discussion. Present in the FGD was Professor Ishani Naskar, Professor at the Department of International Relations, Jadvpur University, who provided her valuable feedback for every presentation made in the FGD.

**Raunak Bhattacharjee(Intern, AGA) presented a paper on the theme ‘Against The Dragon: An Indo-European Joint Response’: -**

He maintained his focus on a coordinated Indo-European approach to address the rising assertiveness of China. The EU-India Leaders' Meeting has opened up the discourse for a dialogue, but there is greaterneed to delve into a more intricate analysis for comprehending the convergencesand divergences. The multipolar world order is slowly drifting towards a new form of bipolarity. His paper focuses on Braudel's long-term strategy to grasp the complex relationship between the EU and India, as well as infer the plan for a required Naval Security arrangement (based on Mahanian knowledge) that shall provide a much-needed infrastructure for ensuring regional free trade, and also serve as a deterrent to pirate raids, as well as a means of combating the spread of the region is dominated by the Chinese.

**Ankita Chatterjee (Intern, AGA), expressed her views on the topic “Is China in a quandary over Quad and the Aukus?”. The main points from her discussion are mentioned here below: -**

China has identified a major challenge to its dream of a China-centric Asia Pacific. Quad's priority of countering China's growing power is rankling the communist leadership in Beijing. Some Chinese analysts even went on to brand the Quad as an incipient "Asian NATO". 'Divide and Rule' policy would simply mean creating conflicts among the members. China has been using coercive trade practices to target Australia.

Some Chinese strategists took Quad coalescence in 2020 as a signal to refocus attention on sidelining the Quad from larger regional institutions. China is embarking on one of the biggest military spends in history. It is growing its navy and air force at a rapid rate and has been accused of raising tensions in disputed territories. Aukus seems to be another step towards reconfiguring the Indo-pacific balance of power. China mishandling its relations with its ASEAN neighbours like Vietnam and Philippines is a strategic blunder that the Trump and Biden administrations effectively exploited. The Aukus marks the consolidation of China's worst fears and can be taken as crucial for sharpening the claws of the Quad.

China's recent engagement with the US, Japan and India is part of a drive by Beijing to weaken the Quad as well as the Aukus military pact. China has always tried to deal with every country on bilateral terms, using its Comprehensive National Power (CNP) to its advantage. In any forthcoming bilateral engagements with the US, Japan and India, China will continue to aim for weakening the Quad, by some bilateral concessions. All in all, admittedly, both the Quad and the Aukus have emerged successful in pushing the dragon into a quandary.

**Aakansha Tiwari (Intern, AGA), then presented her views on the theme ‘QUAD: A Holistic Reassessment’. Her arguments can be found below: -**

A response to escalating Chinese regional belligerence, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or QUAD, eventually took off. The consortium's founding in 2007 was not accompanied by a significant commitment from the countries that comprised it. Since then, the union has met several times and shares the same vision to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific. The Indo-Pacific, which straddles two seas and many continents, is vital to the U.S maritime interests. Australia and Japan are treaty allies of the United States, while India is a key strategic partner. Other concerns among Americans include China's human rights policy and environmental degradation. China's assertiveness over Arunachal Pradesh's Aksai Chin region is causing problems for India and the Indians who live there. In 2017, China and India experienced a 73-day military standoff over border tensions. China has also been assertive in its operations in the Indian Ocean, posing a security hazard to India. Australia's decision by China to impose an 80 per cent tariff on Australian barley exports could result in major losses for the industry. China's ambassador to Australia warned that Australia risks inflaming hostility among Chinese parents. Quad seems to be more vital than ever to de-escalate the ever-increasing tensions arising from Chinese aggression.

**Ratnadeep Maitra(Intern, AGA), presented his ideas on the topic ‘Decoding AUKUS: Splits, Shifts and Strategic Concerns,’ which can be found below: -**

The new trilateral security arrangement of AUKUS is reflective of the growing disquiet amongst the Western bloc to a Chinese resurgence, with concomitant threats to an unquestioned American hegemony in a liberal world order. The collaboration would entail the construction of nuclear-powered submarines by Canberra assisted by Washington and London. AUKUS may prove to be an exemplary masterstroke, for Biden seems to have placated the White supremacists, anti-China warmongers and wannabe imperialists in London, all at once. AUKUS has conclusively scaled up the element of strategic autonomy, as an integral derivative of the European security calculus, especially following the contentious Brexit. India has been caught off guard, given its contemporary obsession with Quad and Indo-Pacific. The adoption of high-end nuclear arsenal by the Australian Navy may jolt New Delhi's position as regional sea power. For India to actualize any gains from AUKUS, it will need to shoot up its economy to an impressive trajectory.

**Finally, Debayan Ghatak(Intern, AGA) expressed his views on the theme ‘Decoding AUKUS: Splits, Shifts and Strategic Concerns’. His main points are here: -**

India's Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla made it clear that the AUKUS does not have any relevance to the Quad, while not affecting the latter's functioning in any conceivable way. However, some skeptics in the Indian strategic circle, have raised a complaint concerning the AukUS to be an exclusive club. The AUKUS is an active measure to counter Beijing's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific. It adds a strong military component to this arrangement only, while helping to build up a larger political and strategic consensus as well. The objective of both the groupings is to eventually overpower and diminish China's growing belligerence. ASEAN's AUKUS may play a seminal role in rectifying regional strategic imbalances. However, other ASEAN nations seem to harbor a mixed response with relation to the alliance. Malaysia has decided to send its defence minister to China in order to understand the latter's reaction. The U.K. was the only country, which had remained institutionally aloof from the various U.S.-led initiatives aimed at countering China's assertiveness. It must also be taken note of that following the abrupt withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan, Washington's allies have been raising doubts about the latter's commitments towards its enduring partnerships.