

US's New Group SQUAD

Why In News

- Defense chiefs from the **US, Australia, Japan and the Philippines** gathered in Hawaii for their second joint meeting, lining up yet another regional group dubbed the "**Squad**" by **Pentagon officials**, while vowing a strengthened alliance among the four countries. An emerging regional bloc linking Australia, Japan, the Philippines and the United States is expected to evolve into a more permanent or institutionalised grouping.



- But for now, analysts say the **informal alliance will allow Manila** to “borrow the strength” of the other three nations in countering challenges from China, and in elevating the Philippines’ status beyond that of a “junior partner”.

All You Need To Know

- **US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin** met counterparts from Australia, Japan and the Philippines as Washington sought to deepen ties within the rising regional group that Pentagon officials had privately **nicknamed the “Squad”**, according to a Bloomberg report.
- The quadrilateral marks the latest regional partnership Washington has forged to counter Beijing’s growing assertiveness in the region. There is also the Quad comprising Australia, India, Japan and the US, and Aukus, a defence pact among Australia, the United Kingdom and the US.



- Austin said the so-called Squad would **undertake more maritime exercises** and provide greater security help to the Philippines, which in recent months had been caught up in several naval skirmishes with Chinese vessels in the South China Sea.
- He added that Washington had made clear to all nations, including China, that Beijing's recent behaviour in the disputed waterway was **"irresponsible" and "disregards international law"**.



- Jagannath Panda, head of the **Stockholm Centre for South Asian and Indo-Pacific Affairs** at the Institute for Security and Development Policy, said it would be unsurprising if the Squad grouping turned into a more institutionalised bloc

like the Quad. **“Squad countries are strong maritime nations**, having keen commercial interests in the conflicting South China Sea to the East China Sea.

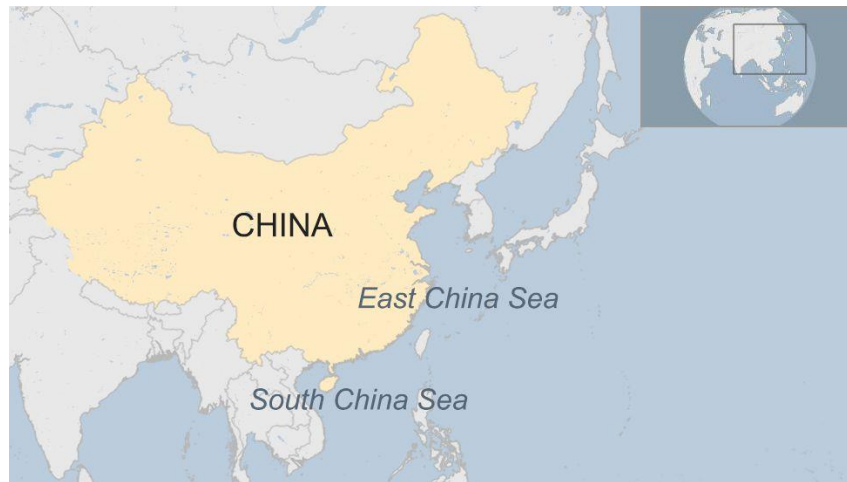
- “Having official backing among the navies of these four countries makes sense, and hence eventually the Squad might emerge as a more institutionalised or formalised grouping,” Panda said.



- “This includes **security help to the Philippines** in terms of both hardware and human resource training,” Sato said, adding that integrating the Philippines into the **Quad to turn it into a five-member grouping** did not materialise as none of the five countries wanted to diminish the Quad’s coherence.
- “The two overlapping **four-party arrangements** allow more cohesion within each group, allowing both India and the Philippines to work within their comfort levels” with Australia, Japan and the US, Sato added.

China’s Statement

- **China’s state tabloid the Global Times** said the Squad grouping would pose “a more targeted challenge” to Beijing as it allowed the US to “manage the security situation in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait”.
- Citing Chinese analysts, the daily also warned that the **Philippines had become increasingly** “manipulated by the US, is losing its autonomy and becoming a pawn of the US in the region”.
- Espeña said China had forced the Philippines to form minilateral arrangements due to its aggression and flouting of international laws. **“China must treat the Philippines not as a US pawn**, but as a sovereign state that has legitimate security concerns over its maritime claims.”



- By assembling the "**Squad**," the US seeks to make use of Australia's homeland, defense budget and military to expand the US' influence overseas, while extending the US' military presence in the "Indo-Pacific" region through the Philippines' military bases.



- However, the **military capabilities of these** two countries are limited, and the US regards them as pawns, the military analyst explained. Over the years, the China-ASEAN relationship has continually developed in the political, economic and cultural spheres, bringing tangible benefits to both sides. Both parties cherish peace and stability in the region and should work to preserve it, Gu said.
- However, the consequences of the **Philippines drifting further away** could have detrimental effects on the bilateral relationship between China and the Philippines. It is important for both parties to manage their differences and prioritize their shared interests.
- It is crucial for the current **Philippines' leaders to prioritize** the common interests of China and the Philippines, maintaining and nurturing the friendly relationship between the two countries for the benefit of both sides