



RSTV: Big Picture: QUAD: Opportunities and Challenges

CONTEXT:

- **First Virtual Summit of QUAD leaders** was recently held.
- In March 2020, two rounds of talks between the **Quad-Plus countries**, on the continuing coronavirus pandemic were held.
- The seven countries — **India, US, Australia, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand and Vietnam** — explored ways to facilitate trade, sharing technologies and movement of people and also to look forward to see how to put the global economies back on their feet.

HIGHLIGHTS OF QUAD LEADERS' JOINT STATEMENT- "THE SPIRIT OF THE QUAD":

- Leaders reaffirmed their commitment to quadrilateral cooperation between Australia, India, Japan, and the United States.
- Leaders are united in a **shared vision for the free and open Indo-Pacific**.
- They strive for a **region that is free, open, inclusive, healthy, anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion**.
- They pledged to strengthen cooperation on the **global devastation wrought by COVID-19, the threat of climate change, and security challenges** facing the region.
- They committed to promote a free, open rules-based order, rooted in international law to advance security and prosperity and counter threats to both in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.
- They reaffirmed to address shared challenges, including in **cyber space, critical technologies, counterterrorism, quality infrastructure investment, and humanitarian-assistance and disaster-relief as well as maritime domains**.
- They support the rule of law, freedom of navigation and overflight, peaceful resolution of disputes, democratic values, and territorial integrity.
- They also reaffirmed **strong support for ASEAN's unity and centrality as well as the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific**.
- They took pledge to **join forces to expand safe, affordable, and effective vaccine production and equitable access, to speed economic recovery and benefit global health**.
- They called for:
 - transparent and results-oriented **reform at the World Health Organization**.
 - keep a **Paris-aligned temperature limit** within reach.
 - **complete denuclearization of North Korea**
 - urgent need to **restore democracy in Myanmar**.

BACKGROUND:

- In the aftermath of Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, Australia, Japan, India, and America formed a **Regional Core Group in 2004**.
- The quadrilateral template gained an ideological component when Japanese PM Shinzo Abe proposed an **"Arc of Freedom and Prosperity"** in 2006.
- The **first meeting of the initial Quad was held in May 2007** as officials gathered for the ASEAN Regional Forum meeting.
- Japanes PM Shinzo Abe after returning to office called for a **"democratic security diamond,"** a Quad 2.0 in all but name.
- The **momentum came to a head in October 2017** with then US Secretary of State and Japanese Foreign Minister proposing a resumption of the quadrilateral dialogue format.



THE QUAD 2.0:

- The move to set up the quadrilateral also comes in the backdrop of growing Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea and China's aggressive posturing.
- Since its revival in late 2017, the Quad met twice a year in 2018 and 2019.
- At the January 2018 Raisina Dialogue in Delhi, top naval chiefs from the four countries were assembled on stage together.
- In New York in September 2019, the four countries held the first ministerial-level meeting of the Quad "to discuss collective efforts in shared commitments and close cooperation on counter terrorism, mentoring, assistance in disaster relief, airtime security, cooperation, development, finance and cybersecurity efforts."
- In November 2019, the first Quad counterterrorism (CT) exercise was held in India.
- In March 2020, representatives from the Quad assembled again for a videoconference to discuss the COVID-19 pandemic.

SIGNIFICANCE OF QUAD- GROUPING:

- First, all four nations share a deep interest in maintaining a **stable balance of power in the Indo-Pacific and preventing a regional state from becoming dominant**.
- Second, all four states share an interest in **detering the use of forceful or coercive practices to resolve political and territorial disputes** in the region.
- Third, as trading nations all Quad members share a deep interest in **maintaining a maritime order based on the free movement of goods and services across the world's oceans**.
- Fourth, all four states are committed to the current **rules-based economic order in the Indo-Pacific**. This is based on free trade, open investment environments, open competitive tendering, the rule of law, and standards of good governance from which all continue to benefit.
- Fifth, a less emphasised common interest of all four nations is that of **supporting and strengthening liberal democratic governance within the Indo-Pacific**. The region has not been immune to the global decline in observance of political rights and civil liberties.

HOW IS CHINA RESPONDING TO QUAD?

- China's endeavour is to conflate the Quad with the Indo-Pacific vision, and link both to the so-called **China Containment Theory**.
- In 2016, China itself established a **Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism with Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan**.
- More recently, China has established Quadrilateral Cooperation with Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nepal.
- The strategic community in China, nevertheless, had branded it **an emerging "Asian NATO"**.

Quad Nations and China

- **USA** had followed a policy to contain China's increasing influence in East Asia. Therefore, USA sees the coalition as an opportunity to regain its influence in the Indo-Pacific region.
- **Australia** is concerned about China's growing interest in its land, infrastructure and politics, and influence on its universities.
- **Japan** has expressed concerns related to China's territorial transgression in the region.
- China's violation of international norms, particularly its construction of military facilities on reclaimed islands in the South China Sea, and its growing military and economic power, pose a strategic challenge to **India**.



INDIA AND QUAD:

Significance for India:

- **Act East Policy:** It gives a powerful platform to advance its interests in East Asia, coordinate strategies with powerful friends and add more strength to its Act East initiative.
- It will deepen India's ties with US, Australia and Japan and will provide New Delhi significant leverage in shaping US policies in Afghanistan-Pakistan to the benefit of India.
- Through QUAD India seeks to reassert rule based world order to counter China's growing power and assertion.
- India has held that the Quad was more about sharing democratic experiences than a security arrangement directed at China.
- **Defence-related spending:** In this time of COVID pandemic and fund crunch associated with lockdowns, Quad will provide heavyweight to India's interests.
- **Challenges on the continental sphere:**
 - China is neither keen on ending the ongoing border stalemate nor reinstating the status quo with India as of March 2020.
 - The situation has been aggravated by geopolitical collusion between Pakistan and China.
 - India relations with Taliban, US withdrawal from Afghanistan and deteriorating Iran-India relations.
- **Sustainable Development in the Indian Ocean Region:** India holds the responsibility to act as the net security provider in the Indian Ocean region.
- **Issue-based alliance or minilateralism:** India has moved beyond non-alignment towards an issue-based alliance with no formal agreements. Therefore, joining Quad will be in line with the present foreign policies of the government.

CHALLENGES:

- Translating intent into action will require a **strengthening of ties in existing fields, as well as non-traditional areas** such as cyber/information security, energy and climate change, disaster management, etc.
- The growing **divergences between US political and military opinion on their regional priorities** could stymie Quad aspirations.
- Further, **poor Indian and Japanese financial and logistical bandwidth** to competitively invest in the IPR compounds the Quad's shortcomings.
- Any significant commitment by India to the Indo-Pacific poses the **risk of overextending critical military assets** and de-prioritising existing undertakings in the Indian Ocean Region.
- Primary hurdle that remains is the **complex economic relationships between the Core Quad and China** – for all Quad members, China is either the first or the second largest trading partner, or a key import/export partner.
- If the Quad begins a Quad-plus initiative, it will not only be confronting these challenges, but will also have to contend with other issues such as **disputes even amongst members, and differing dispositions towards China.**

CHALLENGES FOR INDIA:

- **Non-alignment:** India is abandoning its "sacred" tradition of non-alignment.
- **Trustworthiness of US:** US military alliances with Japan and the Philippines has not provided any challenge to Chinese aggression in the region.
- **No clarity on objectives:** India wants advancing the security and economic interests of all countries having legitimate and vital interests in the Asia-Pacific region whereas US is pitching for mutating the Indo-Pacific Quad into a more formal security grouping modelled on NATO.
- **Individual visions of the Indo-Pacific:** It would be difficult to align the combined vision of the grouping with that of their individual visions regarding Indo-Pacific.
- **Internal economic changes:** If India wants to engage the Quad partners on reforming the China-centred economic globalisation, it also requires to engineer many changes on trade-related aspects, which might prove to be difficult, given India's drive for self-reliance



CRITICISM:

- Experts claim that the Quad was one of the **most poorly explained concepts** in recent strategic memory and it stands as little more than a diplomatic carcass hastily exhumed from the graveyard of Asian regional architecture.
- Questions remain not only about the **Quad's credibility as a counterweight to China**, but **how it overcomes a complex array of competing national interests among the four: over border disputes, trade and maritime tensions**.
- Russia criticized Quad by saying that **sustainable security architecture in the Asia Pacific region cannot be achieved through a bloc arrangement**.
- Further there is **ambiguity surrounding the group and its purpose**.
- Another source of criticism stems from the **occasional mixed messages from the four governments**.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GREATER COLLABORATION AMONG QUAD MEMBER GOVERNMENTS IN THE YEARS TO COME:

- ❖ **Establish Working Groups On Defense And Infrastructure:** Broadening the current Quad format of foreign ministry senior official-level meetings to include representatives from defense ministries would be a necessary first step toward creating a whole-of-Quad "working 2+2."
- ❖ **Develop An Indo-Pacific Infrastructure And Development Coordination Working Group:**
 - it would ensure that all four Quad nations are committed to creating a roadmap to sustainable, high-quality infrastructure for developing countries.
 - It would further permit the streamlining of various inter- Quad infrastructure initiatives, including the Japan-India sponsored Asia-Africa growth corridor.
- ❖ **Pursue An Annual Meeting Of Joint Operational Commands And Encouragement Of Exchanges:**
 - Attaching a meeting of joint operational commands would be a natural extension to a civilian working group on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.
 - The promotion of personnel exchanges would be a further outgrowth of the above activity on joint operational command exchanges and the development of Quad working groups.
- ❖ **Add Crisis Response, Humanitarian Aid, And Disaster Relief** to the Quad's Agenda.
- ❖ The Quad should consider issuing not just joint statements after their meetings, but also joint vision statements on a range of relevant and important topics that affect Indo-Pacific security.
- ❖ **Appeal To ASEAN:** The Quad should seek to harness consensus with ASEAN as a whole, promoting cooperation in the shared interests among the two.
- ❖ **Close The Loop With India And Australia: 2+2 And Malabar:** Three of the four Quad countries enjoy ministerial-level "2+2" defense and foreign ministers dialogues with one another. India and Australia should upgrade their "2+2" to the ministerial level to close the loop and complete the square.
- ❖ **Boost Non-Traditional Security Cooperation:** elevating collaboration on mine-sweeping technologies, anti-piracy operations, pollution control, pandemic responses, joint escorts of international shipping, force structuring, coast guard collaboration, counter-proliferation initiatives, and exchange of information on white shipping.
- ❖ **Expand Cooperation On Space And Maritime Domain Awareness.**



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