



## India's Strategic Pivot: Shaping the Future of the Quad in the Indo-Pacific

Abhishek Tiwari

Assistant Professor

*The affiliation and address: Seventh Day Adventist Arts & Science College, Haripura Rd, Maninagar East, Ahmedabad Gujarat - 380008*

Date of Submission: 06-10-2024

Date of Acceptance: 18-10-2024

### Abstract

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad, is a strategic partnership between India, the United States, Japan, and Australia to promote stability, prosperity, and openness in the Indo-Pacific region. Formed in response to shared concerns, particularly related to China's rise, the Quad engages in a variety of activities including joint military exercises, summits, and information sharing. This paper explores India's significant role within the Quad, analyzing how the alliance aligns with India's strategic interests, such as enhancing its influence in the Indo-Pacific, countering China's assertiveness, and promoting maritime security. Additionally, the paper addresses the formation of the Quad, its underlying principles, and key areas of cooperation such as global health, climate change, and infrastructure development. It also delves into India's maritime and trade opportunities, its strategic positioning in the Indian Ocean, and how the Quad enables India to bolster its Act East policy. Finally, the paper highlights potential challenges and recommendations for India's continued engagement in the Quad, emphasizing the need for collective action, formalization of the alliance, and a clear vision to ensure long-term success.

**Keywords:** *Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), Indo-Pacific Strategy, India's Maritime Security, China's Influence in Indo-Pacific, Act East Policy*

### I. Introduction

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad for short, is a partnership between four key democratic nations: India, the United States, Japan, and Australia. It's a strategic alliance that brings these countries together to address shared concerns, particularly around the Indo-Pacific region. The Quad is focused on promoting a stable, prosperous, and open Indo-Pacific, where the rules of international order are respected and upheld.

The Quad members collaborate in various ways—holding regular meetings, conducting joint military exercises, sharing information, and hosting occasional summits. These activities aim to strengthen the bonds between the countries and create a united front in dealing with challenges like security, regional influence, and economic cooperation.

This paper will explore India's important role within the Quad and consider the future for India's involvement in this alliance. Through this analysis, we'll look at how India's participation benefits both the Quad and its own strategic goals in the region.

### Formation of QUAD

The QUAD began its operations in 2007 following the formation of an ad-hoc grouping known as Tsunami Core Group which was created to respond to the Boxing Day Tsunami that took place in 2004. Quad's existence originates from its humanitarian collaboration following the 2004 Tsunami, thereby setting uniting principles on democracy and inclusive Indo-Pacific (Kutty & Basrur, 2021). The four nations came together and swiftly helped in the rescue, recovery as well as rehabilitation of the affected families. However, it was soon disbanded after this mission and its objective became to address regional issues.

Quad assumed an ideological component in 2006 when Shinzo Abe, the Prime Minister of Japan came up with the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity. The arc envisioned bringing countries to the Eurasian continent to promote rule of law and freedom. In 2017, the first Quad meeting was constituted in an ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in Manila. It discussed various regional issues such as disaster relief. September of the same year saw the institution of the first Quad military exercise. The second MALABAR exercise took place in the Bay of Bengal and constituted the US and Japanese navies (Roy-Chaudhury & Estrada, 2018). The military personnel engaged in drill interactions in multi-carrier and sea



control operations. In 2008, there was discord in the grouping that saw Australia pull out from the forum. It withdrew its interests due to the growing political pressure from the Chinese government following its feud with the US over the Asia-Pacific region. However, in 2010, there was enhanced military cooperation between Australia and USA leading to its comeback to Quad. Since Quad's formation, the four nations have congregated periodically over the years. In 2012, the Japanese PM floated the idea of Asia's 'Democratic Security Diamond', leading to the first Quad official talks that were held in the Philippines in 2017. The Quad leaders have showcased a willingness to enlarge their partnership in what is dubbed as Quad Plus which seeks to accommodate countries such as New Zealand, South Korea, and Vietnam in the Quad grouping (Panda, 2020). The expansion of the Quad process has also accommodated Brazil and Israel.

### Principles of Quad

Quad was formed with various objectives in mind such as keeping strategic sea routes, especially in the Indo-Pacific area ensuring that the area is free from any political or military influence. Quad seeks to establish a rule-based global order with a liberal trading system free from any Chinese domination and freedom of navigation. It also seeks to provide alternative debt financing for countries in the Indo-Pacific area. When the Quad leaders meet, they discuss various global issues like cyber security, emerging technologies, humanitarian assistance, climate change, disaster relief, and pandemics.

#### a) COVID and Global Health

The Quad members have initiated projects that seek to vaccinate the world. The Quad countries have pledged to donate over 1.2 billion vaccine doses (Lee, 2021). These countries have shown the importance of establishing a secure and open supply chain that engages in vaccine production. Japan has established a partnership with India and through the Japan Bank for International Cooperation established key investments in the healthcare sector that seek to save lives through vaccine and treatment drugs.

#### b) Infrastructure

Since 2015, Quad nations have provided over \$48 billion in boosting infrastructure in the region. The grouping seeks to provide high standards of infrastructure and often meets to assess regional infrastructure needs.

#### c) Climate

Quad nations have established a green shipping network as a move to address climate change. This move seeks to decarbonize the shipping value chain and showcase the nation's dedication to greening. They have established a clean hydrogen partnership that seeks to lower costs in the clean hydrogen value chain. It has also established both bilateral and multilateral hydrogen initiatives. Quad has also been involved in climate adaptation, preparedness, and resilience in the Indo-Pacific region.

### Significance of Quad for India

The Indo-Pacific is an issue of great concern in the 21st century spurring political & security concerns, technology, and innovation. India is well placed due to its peninsular geography and topographical location to provide trade connections. By joining Quad, India's position in the Indo-Pacific is more pronounced. Quad offers India an opportunity to champion East Asia's interests and advance its Act East policy. Saha (2018) indicates that by working with ASEAN, Asia hopes to create a regional security architecture that focuses on settling disputes amicably. Therefore, India must participate actively to support the Act East Policy in the Quad and ensure that its objectives are not compromised. The ASEAN perspective must be understood in the context of the Quad.

India's position in the Quad was stated clearly by its Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi in 2015 in his analysis of the concept of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR). The first significant point on SAGAR talks about India being a net security provider. The second point talks about enhancing India's maritime security power in the region. The third aspect speaks about advancing security and peace through cooperation and action (Sarangi, 2019). The fourth point delves into developing sustainable development in the region. The last point of SAGAR cements the ability to maintain stability, peace, and prosperity in the region.

The Quad arrangement allows India to work on various initiatives that foster a free Indo-Pacific region.

#### a) Counter China's Military and Economic Rise

One of the most discussed issues in the Quad's forums is China's aggressiveness and coercive nature. As a member of the Quad, India can depend on other nations to counter China's military and economic rise. India can depend on other nations to support its



efforts to address Chinese hostilities, especially within its borders. In 2021, the United States, under the leadership of its President Joe Biden conducted a virtual summit that was attended by the Quad leaders. At the summit, the leaders vowed to have a free and inclusive Indo-Pacific region that is free from coercion. The Quad leaders released a statement that they titled, "The Spirit of the Quad" that highlighted the forum's objectives and strategies (Limaye, 2022). Through Quad, India can conduct strategic explorations, especially in the Indo-Pacific region without fear of retaliation and opposition.

In November 2017, QUAD established a new strategy that would maintain critical sea routes in the Indo-Pacific area free from any influence including China's influence in this strategic region. China's presence is a topic of discussion and debate as it claims the disputed South China Sea. Countries such as Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Brunei also claim ownership of the sea. Beijing has gone ahead to establish its presence in the sea by building artificial islands and military institutions in the South China Sea. China is also in conflict with Japan over the East China Sea. China has constantly opposed the Quad's formation citing it as a forum that seeks to pit regional powers in Asia against each other. It sees Quad as a strategy that seeks to trample it as a country and has initiated talks with Bangladesh pressuring it from actively participating in its initiatives.

#### **b) Maritime Agenda**

Over the years the maritime sphere has been a decisive space for emerging powers and has been used greatly to shape regional dynamics. India recognizes that the maritime space is bound to bring about present and future challenges that can be addressed collectively to contain geopolitical competition. By using the "Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative". India seeks to support the establishment of rules-based regional architecture that looks at issues like maritime security, capacity-building ecology, resources, disaster risk reduction, and management (Bhaskar, East, West & Ocean's Initiative, 2021). India seeks to advance this agenda by ensuring freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific. It hopes to become a net security provider that strengthens peacekeeping efforts and participates in anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. India hopes to use its military equipment, training, and exercises, to strengthen relationships with other countries in the region.

#### **c) Trade Opportunities**

India is regarded as a new destination for investment as more countries move their production from China. For instance, Apple partnered with Foxconn to establish a manufacturing base in India. Samsung which was initially based in South Korea moved its manufacturing operations from China to India. As a country, India is preferred due to its cheap labor and large market size. India is intensifying its role in the global supply chain by establishing large land parcel o land that can support investments. Therefore, India is emerging as a key player in the Indo-Pacific region. It has assumed greater responsibility for various issues and is showcasing its interest in supporting policies and defending the interests of the Indo-Pacific.

#### **d) Role of the Indian Ocean**

The Indian Ocean region has emerged as a central area in power rivalry. Clarke (2019) states that the Indian Ocean has become a geopolitical sideshow with a future that is uncertain, Quad provides a multilateral platform that can influence strategies and incident strategies. India's biggest advantage and challenge is the Indian Ocean. While India has a geopolitical and geographic centrality to Indo-Pacific, it must grapple with the growing presence of China in the Indian Ocean. India faces security concerns following China's encirclement policy that has seen them establish port facilities in India's territory in areas such as Hambantota and Gwadar. The development of Gwadar Port by China has angered India since it's close to the hydrocarbon states of Central Asia and critical energy lanes. Gwadar seeks to form a link between maritime and overland components of the road strategy and the Chinese belt (Gale & Shearer, 2018). Additionally, the overland Silk Road is known to pass through disputed territory in India's Kashmir region which brings about issues of territorial integrity and sovereignty.

China poses an economic importance for India as its biggest trade partner and the two countries complement each other. However, China has intensified geopolitical competition that has forced India to change its strategy and move further to establish meaningful partnerships. Enhanced defense cooperation from the US and Japan has boosted India's stance. China has also intensified its maritime presence in the South China Sea which is an issue that India needs to counter. In 2017, China established a naval presence through its military base in the Indian Ocean increasing India's concerns and China's strategy of encirclement. Indian Ocean is important to India as an economic strategy as it



can increase trade flows and sea lines of communication.

India must respond to the geo-strategic arena that Indo- the Pacific presents as a means to define its role in the Quad. It must address issues such as trade dependence, globalization, and connectivity of the maritime as well as the ever-changing maritime threats. India must ensure that it champions safe seas to enable trading. The timing of these issues is further aggravated by China's rise and prominence in the South China Sea, the East China Sea, and the Indian Ocean.

#### e) **India's Strategic Weight**

Indo-Pacific provides India with an opportunity to move from its middle-power status to join powerful nations like Japan and US. Quad has allowed India to develop and maintain strategic relationships that can help to advance India's power aspirations. By joining QUAD, India can boost its Act East Policy as well as Extended Neighborhood Policy. It also helps to establish a close relationship with ASEAN members like Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, and Myanmar.

By establishing a relationship with the US, India has been able to develop foundational agreements such as the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement, Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement, and General Security of Military Information Agreement. The relationship between the two has also benefitted India's military agenda as the US has increased arms exports. It has also seen an increase in military exercises such as Tiger Triumph that helped to develop comradely and interoperability between the two countries. Being part of the Blue Dot Network has become essential for India to challenge China's Belt and Road Initiative. The Indo-Pacific provides the US with an opportunity to strengthen and influence Afghanistan-Pakistan-Taliban policies positively for the benefit of the Indian subcontinent. Indo-Pacific enables economic growth with a focus on market adaptation that increases employment opportunities in India. India recognizes that by partnering with powerful nations, it gets a chance to change its economic and military position. India's strategic role is further strengthened by the relationship between India and Australia as witnessed in the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership signed in 2020. Canberra signed a nine arrangement with India highlighting key issues such as Defense Science and Technology Implementing Arrangement and Australia-India Mutual Logistics Support Arrangement.

During COVID-19, India responded to the crisis by offering medical assistance to its neighbors which included Sri Lanka, Maldives, Seychelles, and Mauritius. It also offered medical aid to Iran and Italy which were the worst hit. It also sent medical rapid response teams to Kuwait and Comoros. It was at the forefront of championing virtual summits geared towards building a global response. These summits include the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) web conference organized on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2020. On 26<sup>th</sup> March 2020, it established the extraordinary Virtual G20 Leaders' Summit.

#### **Analysis**

The four countries have converging interests, but their underlying motivations are different. However, there are a few reasons that need to be addressed if the quadrangular alliance is to be realized. First, the concerns that led to the demise of the Quad back in 2008 continue to be experienced. For instance, economic dependency on Beijing and territorial disputes with China have increased. The four states should have raised interest in containing the rise of China through coalition building, yet they continue to provoke Beijing which could end up being costly for everyone. Second, Quad maintains that it's focused on shared values such as the commitment to having open trade. However, this remains at a rhetorical level and could undermine the legitimacy of the format. The four countries insist on regional connectivity and openness when responding to China's BRI. However, the US retreat from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) under the leadership of Trump, and their threat of imposing tariffs on Japan sits uneasily.

Thirdly, domestic issues could provide an obstacle to the success of Quad if the leaders that support it either resigned or their term ended. Each respective country must find a way to have a solid stance as a country when it comes to addressing Quad objectives.

#### **II. Recommendations**

The Quad needs to establish a clear vision and ensure that it lives to its objective of presenting a free and open Indo-Pacific. India, Australia, and Japan can spearhead infrastructural projects and the US can be proactive in championing connectivity. China continues to be a threat to the Indo-Pacific and has accelerated collective fears. China conflicts with the four nations in one way or the other. For instance, China has a trade war with the US.



Australia faces economic coercion and cyber war, and Japan's sovereignty is always a subject of debate with China over its islands. On the other hand, India has a stand-off with China over its Line of Actual Control.

Below are some of the recommendations that can be adopted for the success of Quad and cementing of India's position.

**a) Collective Action**

Quad needs to copy the example of organizations like NATO that works by safeguarding the freedoms and security of its member nations using both military and political actions. Collective security needs to be carried out by all if they need to counter China and its aggressive policies.

**b) Formalization of QUAD**

Quad leaders need to NATO and advocate for more countries to join it. For instance, India could request its neighboring countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia to join Quad. It needs to create a robust regional structure and encourage territorial integrity.

**c) The posturing of an alliance**

Quad needs to establish a joint alliance with a Cold War mentality if it hopes to counter China's influence in the region. It also needs to promote diplomatic ties with other nations and ensure that the nations do not work against the interests of others. If the stability of the Indo-Pacific is to be realized, Quad must show a united front.

**d) Clear Vision**

Quad needs to establish a clear vision that is understood by all so that it becomes easier to join it and support its objectives. Additionally, the member states must know that their interests such as economic and security issues will be respected. By gaining assurance through a clear framework, member states can see the benefits of being in Quad. Quad has been criticized for lacking a substantive agenda and common purpose. Le Thu (2018) asserts that although Quad was formed to address certain issues, none can be considered inclusive to Quad. Quad partners are being called to articulate their rationale for this cooperation.

**III. Conclusion**

The shift of economic power to the East from the West has seen Asia become an important continent. It has attained a geo-political and geo-strategic importance that has contributed to competition and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

region. Indo-Pacific has brought about new trends that create both opportunities and challenges for India. Indo-Pacific cannot become a free and secure region without collaborative efforts from all the nations. Through Quad, India has tried to develop engagement with its regional neighbors and other powerful nations in a bid to protect its interests. It has established a strategic relationship with the US and ASEAN and by so doing created a strategic space for itself. The future of India is not certain with all the uncertainties surrounding it, but by being in Quad, India can find a way to establish a strong footing through alliances that secure its future.

**References**

- [1]. Bhaskar, N. J., East, A., West, A., & Oceans' Initiative, I. P. (2021). India's developing economic ties with the Indo-Pacific. Observer Research Foundation.
- [2]. Clarke, B. (2019). Pakistan and the quadrilateral security dialogue: Current and future perceptions. *IPRI Journal*, 19(1), 30-55.
- [3]. Gale, J. B., & Shearer, A. (2018). The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and the Maritime Silk Road Initiative. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).
- [4]. Kutty, S. N., & Basrur, R. (2021). The Quad: What it is—and what it is not. *The Diplomat*, 24.
- [5]. Le Thu, H. (2018). Southeast Asian perceptions of the quadrilateral security dialogue. *ASPI Special Report*, 2018-10.
- [6]. Lee, L. (2021). With the vision of a 'free and open Indo-Pacific', Quad leaders send a clear signal to China.
- [7]. Limaye, S. (2022). Focused on the "Quad" And Border Disputes with China. *Comparative Connections: A Triannual E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations*, 23(3).
- [8]. Panda, J. P. (2020). India, the Blue Dot Network, and the "Quad Plus" Calculus. *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, 3(3), 3-21.
- [9]. Roy-Chaudhury, R., & de Estrada, K. S. (2018). India, the Indo-Pacific, and the Quad. *Survival*, 60(3), 181-194.
- [10]. Saha, P. (2018). The Quad in the Indo-Pacific: Why ASEAN Remains Cautious. Observer Research Foundation, 26.
- [11]. Sarangi, S. (2019). Unpacking SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region). *USI Occasional Paper*, (2).