

India in QUAD Group: A Concern for China

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Abstract: *This paper presents the background for the formation of QUAD in the backdrop of China's increasing economic and military power in the Indo-Pacific region. The study aims to evaluate India's role in the QUAD. The paper further analyses the impact of the India-QUAD partnership over the Chinese presence in the region. India is an emerging Asian power with a growing economy and security attributes. It has consistently advocated for upholding regional security, stability, and peace. China has always been India's major dominant competitor in the region. The increasing footprint of China in the Indo-Pacific region particularly in the Indian Ocean has been a cause of concern for India. India has realized that regional security challenges cannot be tackled single-handedly and require the cooperation of multiple partners with similar strategic interests. Further India's bilateral relations with China worsened with recent border clashes such as the Doklam Standoff (2017), the Galwan Valley clash (2020), etc. All these events and China's strong presence in the Indian Ocean encouraged India to be part of QUAD. The participation of India in QUAD is one of the significant moves from India to deter China's aggressiveness. By focusing on the India-QUAD alliance the research looks at India's role, and contribution within QUAD, and seeks to analyze China's attitude towards the partnership.*

Keywords: China, Indo-Pacific, Indian Ocean, Strategic, QUAD

1. Introduction

India lies at the intersection of South Asia and Central Asia. It is a southward extension of the Asian continent. It shares land borders with Bangladesh, Myanmar in the east, Pakistan, Afghanistan in the northwest, China, Nepal, and Bhutan in the north. Its sea neighbours are Sri Lanka and Maldives. India is the largest country in South Asia in terms of territory and population and the seventh largest country in the world. Strategically India is located in the Indian Ocean and boasts a huge stretch of Indian Ocean coastline. India, therefore administers sea pathways connecting Oceania, Southeast Asia, Far East Asia, Europe, and Africa. Its geographical features have made it strategically significant and allowed India to build contacts with other countries.

India's foreign policy is shaped by the neighbourhoods it consists of. India's foreign policy is intertwined with its neighbor's security and stability, which is inhabited by various ethnic groups connected by family and shared social and cultural interests. Its foreign policy is characterised by the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM), Panchsheel, Disarmament, anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, elimination of racism, peaceful settlement of International Disputes, just and equal law and order, support to the United Nations, and respect for International Law. Since, 78 years of its independence, India made a major shift in its foreign policy in response to regional challenges, global shifts, and domestic concerns. Nonetheless, the principle of upholding regional security, stability, respect for territorial integrity, and sovereignty continues to be the same. India's foreign policy has the element of change and continuity. In the present global politics maritime domain has been a great determinant in shaping regional dynamics. In this regard, the Indo-Pacific has emerged as a new geographic space representing a new geopolitical competition in the twenty-first century. Therefore Indo-Pacific, particularly the Indian Ocean has entered as a new domain in India's foreign policy. India's maritime policy stands for addressing threats originating from the sea; providing assistance, support, and escape routes to the Indian diaspora; maintaining stability in the nation's maritime neighbourhoods; establishing and preserving geostrategic

maritime position; and developing and expanding a "blue economy." Besides this, India champions the idea of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) to promote peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region.

The Indo-Pacific is identified as an integrated region that combines the Indian and the Pacific Ocean and other land masses surrounding them. It stretches from the Eastern Coast of Africa to the islands of the South Pacific and includes four continents Asia, Africa, Australia, and America. The region is notable from both strategic and economic perspectives. The area is economically active contributing 2/3rd of the global economic output, 46% of the world's merchandise trade, and 62% of the world GDP. It is home to important maritime trade routes (e.g. Strait of Malacca, Suez Canal, Lombok Strait, Bab el Mandeb Strait, Ombai Strait) facilitating trade between Asia, Europe, and Africa. The region has a profile of rich forests, marine resources e.g. offshore hydrocarbons, Methane hydrates, sea bed minerals, fisheries, etc., and natural resources like energy, water, oil, minerals, etc. Because of its strategic importance, the region has become an arena of conflict and competition between great powers such as the United States of America, China, Australia, India, Japan, etc.



Figure 1: Map showing countries that fall in Indo-Pacific region

Source: <https://www.sciencespo.fr/ceeri/en/content/lindo-pacifique-quels-contours-quels-enjeux-0>

Increasing China's encroachment through economic expansion, and militarisation in the Indo-Pacific region, has become a cause of concern for major stakeholders. India's geographical proximity, maritime policy, and geo-political aspirations have led other countries to view it as a potential competitor to China and a force to contend with. India's vision for the Indo-Pacific has become broader. Furthermore, it opposes China's hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region. These reasons propel India to foster cooperation with the immediate and extended neighbours to join several major power organisations such as G-20 (Group of Twenty), G-7 (Group of Seven), BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council), Shanghai Cooperation, ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), etc. to ensure regional security and make the Indian Ocean a peaceful zone. Among all these organisations QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) is another effort of India to reduce China's dominance in the Indo-Pacific region. QUAD has brought new changes to India's security policy. India is trying to counterbalance China's dominance by growing its strategic partnership with QUAD.

2. Objectives

The research article aims to study the evolution of QUAD and the driving forces for establishing QUAD. It examines India's strategic partnership with QUAD. It also seeks to find out whether India's involvement in QUAD threatens China's position in the Indo-Pacific.

3. Methodology

The research paper has been written using both analytical and descriptive methodologies. Both primary and secondary sources have been used in the information-gathering process. The government website has been accessed as the primary source, and websites, periodicals, and journals have been consulted as secondary sources.

4. History of QUAD



Figure 2: Members of QUAD

Source: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/defining-diamond-past-present-and-future-quadrilateral-security-dialogue>

QUAD stands for "Quadrilateral Security Dialogue". It is a strategic forum of four members which includes countries of India, the USA, Australia, and Japan. The QUAD group was created to address concerns related to the Indo-Pacific, particularly China's increasing aggressiveness in the region.

The QUAD countries collectively account for 24% of the world population, 35% of GDP, and 18% of world trade. The history of QUAD can be divided into three distinct phases. The QUAD was first established in 2004 as an ad-hoc group following the Indian Ocean Tsunami. The objective was to synchronise disaster relief and humanitarian aid. A "Tsunami Core Group" was formed with the United States of America, Australia, Japan, and India to coordinate emergency response and humanitarian assistance. However, China's increasing footprint in the Indo-Pacific region prompted Abe Shinzo, the then Prime Minister of Japan to advocate for the institutionalisation of the QUAD. Hence in 2007 the Japan came up with the proposal to formalise the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) to promote maritime security near the "Confluence of the Two Seas" and facilitate cooperation among the four countries to restrict China's influence. Stepping ahead with this idea in May 2007 the QUAD countries convened their first meeting on the sideline of the meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum in Manila and conducted Malabar naval exercises. Nonetheless, the QUAD was dissolved in 2008 following distinct interests among the four nations, and China's resentment of the new group.

The second phase of QUAD's formation began in 2012 when the Japanese Prime Minister initiated the proposal for developing the QUAD group following China's increased activities in the South and East China Seas. He called for a "democratic security diamond" strategy to counter China's increasing aggression in the Indo-Pacific region. In 2016, Japan endorsed the idea of a "free and open Indo-Pacific" strategy wherein he called Australia, India, the United States of America, and Japan to form a diamond to protect the maritime extending from the western Pacific to the Indian Ocean region. During the sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development organised in Nairobi, Kenya, Japan put forward its idea of a "free and open Indo-Pacific" which has three pillars: the political pillar aims at upholding democratic principles throughout the area, from an economic standpoint, the strategy aims to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by fostering infrastructure development and the economic connectivity, and on the security side the strategy intends to boost security partnership with the QUAD members and establishment of stronger connections with Southeast Asian nations. Ultimately, the QUAD was resurrected in November 2017 by the four nations during the 31st ASEAN Summit in Manila, and in November 2019 the QUAD was elevated to ministerial-level dialogue from senior official-level dialogue. In its first ministerial-level dialogue the members discussed various topics such as maritime security, "Free and Open Indo-Pacific", North Korea, connectivity, counterterrorism, etc. From this stage, QUAD began to hold foreign ministers and defence official meetings at regular intervals.

2020- to date marked the third phase in QUAD formation. It converted QUAD into a more institutionalised structure. The QUAD was promoted to the leader-level summit in March 2021. The QUAD held its first virtual leaders' summit in March 2021 where they released the joint statement "The Spirit of the Quad". In September 2021, it holds its first in-person Quad Summit. The Quad is now working to promote real-world collaboration on matters of common concern. In addition to pooling resources among members and like-

minded partners to compete more effectively with China, they are attempting to transform the Quad into a preeminent informal strategic consultation platform by offering "public goods" e.g. vaccine distribution, technology cooperation, climate change, infrastructure development, etc. to boost its appeal and sway the developing regional order in its favour.

5. India's Position in QUAD: Threat to China

5.1 Role of India in QUAD

The dynamics of India's relationship with Quad have evolved with time. Initially, India was reluctant to join the QUAD group however India's deteriorating relations with China during the Doklam border clash in 2017 strengthened India's desire to join QUAD and the 2020 India-China standoff near Galwan Valley further motivated India to deepen its ties with QUAD. China aspires to become a predominant power in the Indo-Pacific region. India ensures that China's expanding interest in the Indian Ocean is not given free rein. India's Indo-Pacific strategy has focused on forging alliances based on shared interests and deepening alliances with countries with similar perspectives to confront a changing security and geopolitical landscape. India's growing interaction with nations such as the United States, Japan, and Australia, among others, strongly indicates this. India is interacting with these nations in mini-lateral forums such as the QUAD.

India holds a significant place in the QUAD. India is working to make QUAD an institutionalised forum capable of addressing China's expansionism and the emerging issues in the Indo-Pacific region. For maritime security, it launched Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) in 2015 and 2018. In 2018, India made an effort to match the Quad's goals via SAGAR and IPOI to restrain Chinese aggression in the oceans. India actively and regularly participates in QUAD meetings. Since India joined, the Quad has evolved into a venue for international cooperation on issues and has hosted many ministerial sessions. One such exercise was the Quad Counter-terrorism table-top exercise (CT-TTX) which was held in Delhi, India in November 2019. 2018–2019, 2020's Raisina Dialogue, India's premier geopolitical gathering, featured senior military commanders on Quad-plus panels.

India is building not only multilateral but also bilateral relations with QUAD members. India is developing its security cooperation with Australia inviting the latter to join the US-India-Japan Malabar exercise. Both nations have signed an information-sharing agreement and mutual logistics support agreement. In addition, both nations have had discussions on defence strategy and marine security and have taken part in bilateral military drills like AUSINDEX (Australia India Exercise) and AUSTRALIA HIND. It has upgraded its relationship with Japan by conducting bilateral military exercises on land, in the air, and at sea, and holding ministerial-level meetings, etc. Further, both countries have ratified accords like the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) and the reciprocal exchange of goods and services. India's relationship with the US marked a major turn when the United States recognised India as its major defence partner. With agreements like the General Security of Military Information Agreement

(GSOMIA), the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), and the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), India and the United States have strengthened their defence relations. Along with bilateral military drills like COPE INDIA, Tiger TRIUMPH, YUSH ABHYAS, VAJRA PRAHAR, and others, both nations have trained peacekeepers jointly. India is building trilateral networks with Japan and the US. It is collaborating with QUAD on various issues like climate action, technology development, and sustainable development.

India reflected significance of QUAD for them during the Virtual Summit held in March 2021 where Prime Minister Modi stated that *"we are united by our democratic values and our commitment to a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific. Our agenda today-covering areas like vaccines, climate change, and emerging technologies makes the QUAD a force for global good. I see this positive vision as an extension of India's ancient philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, which regards the world as one family. We will work together, closer than ever before, to advance our shared values and promote a secure, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific. Today's summit meeting shows that QUAD has come of age. It will now remain an important pillar of stability in the region"*.

5.2 India in QUAD: A Concern for China

India and China share a bitter relationship on various issues. They have differences over border, water, and maritime security issues. Due to their differences, they are referred to as 'Asian Rivals'. Following recent border clashes between the two nations, China views India's active role in the Quad as a border strategy to counter its presence. India's involvement in QUAD has become a major concern for China. India's presence in QUAD has shifted the regional power balance in the Indo-Pacific. India being the most populous, economically, and strategically potential member of QUAD established itself as China's counterbalance. Moreover, India's geographical location is vital for controlling important maritime lanes in the Indian Ocean, which are accessed by China for trade and importing energy. India's bilateral relation with the Quad countries would obstruct China from propagating its regional and economic diplomacy like BRI. Particularly, India-U.S. broader defence and security ties could lead to the formation of united front causing marginalisation of China in region. India's growing influence in QUAD and its idea of a "free and open Indo-Pacific" might challenge China's hegemonic ambition of expanding its territorial claims in the region. Besides, China is concerned that India's burgeoning global influence would undermine its vision of global governance. China is concerned that India's focus on building resilient supply chains with QUAD in sectors of technology, infrastructure would reduce China's economic dominance thereby impacting its economic growth.

China characterizes QUAD as an "Asian NATO". It is conscious that India's presence in QUAD can threaten China's potential position in the Indo-Pacific. India's increasing partnership with QUAD members particularly with the United States of America has invited criticism from China citing it as a site of ganging up in the Asia-Pacific region. China views

India's participation in QUAD as a strategy to contain its rise in the Indo-Pacific. India through maritime cooperation and naval exercises with QUAD members is attempting to secure sea lanes and restrict China's influence in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea. India's QUAD approach extends beyond security, including cooperation in infrastructure and economic and technological development.

6. Conclusion

India with its participation in QUAD confronts China with a multi-dimensional challenge, which encompass strengthening military deterrence in the Indo-Pacific to lowering China's impact on the economy and geopolitics. Its presence in QUAD is noteworthy as its inclusion provides a crucial strategic counterbalance to China's expanding control in the Indo-Pacific region. India's participation in the QUAD has enhanced security cooperation, joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, and coordination on maritime security issues among the member countries. Its membership in the Quad Forum complicates China's strategic calculus and minimizes its potential to unilaterally restructure the regional order. Therefore, its participation in QUAD has threatened China's presence in the Indo-Pacific region. Although it does not pose a direct military threat to China, India's role and activities in QUAD could limit China's strategic ambitions and dominance in the region.

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