

QUAD in Indo-Pacific Region: India's Role and Strategies for Engagement and Cooperation

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Abstract:

India's role within the QUAD is significant and has been evolving over time. As the world's largest democracy and a major regional power, India's participation in the QUAD strengthens the group's overall influence and capabilities. It's worth noting that India's involvement in the QUAD is part of its broader foreign policy approach, which emphasizes free and open Indo-Pacific, cooperative security arrangements, and multilateralism. While India values its participation in the QUAD, it also maintains its strategic autonomy and pursues its national interests within the group's framework. This paper analyzes the QUAD's importance for India's defense and deterrence mechanism.

Keywords: Indo-Pacific region, Choke Points, Geostrategic, Balance of Power, Defense & Deterrence

Introduction

In the shifting dynamics of global politics, the Indo-Pacific area is becoming more and more well-known every day. It is increasingly a battleground for superpower competition because of its growing economic and geostrategic significance. Atlantic Ocean-centric politics and trade persisted until the start of the Cold War. The Asia Pacific later took its place in terms of political, economic, and geostrategic interests terms of political, economic, and geostrategic interests, the Asia Pacific later took its place. A change in the Balance of Power and the focal point of Asian international politics is the shift from the Asia Pacific to the Indo-Pacific.

Different nations have different perspectives on the Indo-Pacific. The US, for instance, defines it as the territory that extends from the western coast of America to the Bay of Bengal, although the Indian and Japanese interpretations are far broader and include the coasts of the African continents.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi outlined his country's goals for the Indo-Pacific region on June 1 at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore. India asks for an open, free, and welcoming environment in the Indo-Pacific region that is based on respect for each other's country sovereignty and territorial integrity, the resolution of disputes via peaceful means and discussion, and adherence to international law. India supports an approach that respects everyone's right to freedom of navigation and overflight on international waters. This idea of the Indo-Pacific region is inclusive and based on shared responsibilities and interests.¹

The US and China are currently engaged in a power struggle that has spread to the Indo-Pacific area. Both are attempting to strengthen their regional domination through various bilateral, multilateral, and strategic coalition alliances. The world has split into two groups as a result of the conflict between

Russia and Ukraine: one led by Russia and China and the other by the Western liberal democratic bloc, which mostly consists of the US and Europe. Therefore, it is currently challenging for developing nations to select only one group. The world is once again expecting India to play a bigger role in this dire situation because India is now a growing Asian Power and has occasionally played a large role in world politics. The Quad appears to be involved in the Ukraine issue also, despite the fact that it has become a difficult diplomatic and geopolitical decision for India.

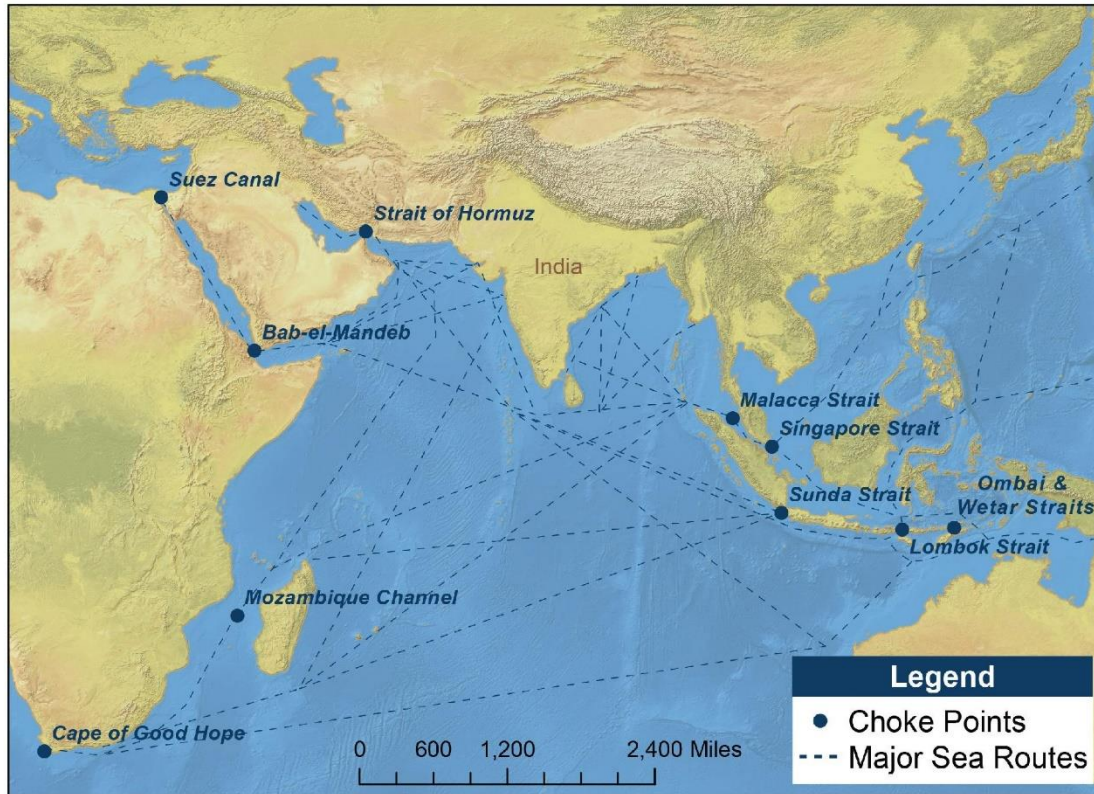
The Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004 prompted the formation of the Quad (officially the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue), a grouping of India, Australia, Japan, and the US. The Quad has since become the focal point of numerous initiatives between the four nations as they work to counter China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region and maintain the region's freedom and openness. The difficulty for India is that it wants to remain in the Quad and it also wants to safeguard its many bilateral ties, despite the fact that the four countries have united with the goal of concentrating on one nation and one region as a result of the Ukraine-like situation.²

The Indo-Pacific Region and India

Due to its growing economic and strategic significance, the huge maritime Indo-Pacific area has recently gained pace. With 65% of the world's population, it generates 46% of global trade and 62% of the world's GDP. Due to its profitable market and supply networks, it is also significant. In addition, the region's important choke points running from north to south and east to west are crucial for ensuring smooth commerce flows and defining the new power dynamics. The region is also rich in various minerals, including those found on the ocean floor, precious metals, offshore hydrocarbons, and fisheries, among others. The region faces a variety of non-traditional challenges because of its significant economic and strategic significance, including terrorism, unlawful piracy, human trafficking, environmental risks, and security threats.

Despite being a major player in the area, India's concern for marine security was secondary compared to its attention to threats from the continent. Thus, shifting from continental to marine threats is a new area of worry for India's foreign policy.³ It has given the region a platform to counteract any unilateral acts by one country. For instance, other players like the US, Japan, Australia, ASEAN, etc. are becoming increasingly concerned about China's expanding influence in the region, in addition to India. China's assertive foreign policy and economic growth have caused several regional and non-regional nations to express grave worries in recent decades. Due to its irresponsible funding and unmanageable debt loads, the Belt and Road Initiative poses a severe economic and strategic threat. China has rejected the Permanent Court of Arbitration's decision that the South China Sea's nine-dash line claim is illegal under the United Nations Convention on the Laws of the Sea. In the Indo-Pacific area, China has built commercial ports including Gwadar Port and Hambantota. Due to their proximity to critical trade routes and choke points, these are of utmost strategic importance. In the future, it could be utilized for military objectives and emergency surveillance. India must therefore take on a more significant role than ever in this predicament.

Key Choke Points in the Indian Ocean



SOURCE: Directorate of Strategy, Concepts, and Transformation, Integrated Headquarters, "Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy," Naval Strategic Publication 1.2, Indian Navy, October 2015, https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/sites/default/files/Indian_Maritime_Security_Strategy_Document_25Jan16.pdf; based on maps from Natural Earth, <https://www.naturalearthdata.com/downloads/50m-raster-data/50m-natural-earth-1/>.

India's Indo-Pacific strategy is dependent on two factors: first, stepping up its national engagement in the area, and second, forging closer ties with nations that share its views. Both will increase India's capacity and national interest while expanding its influence and impact. The Biden administration's new Indo-Pacific Strategy acknowledges that the US cannot achieve its goal of a free and open, connected, economic, safe, and resilient Indo-Pacific by itself. It emphasizes the need for extraordinary cooperation with people who share this goal given the shifting geopolitical landscape and historic obstacles. An appreciation of India's power to influence strategic outcomes in the Indo-Pacific is added to this recognition.⁴

K. M. Panikkar maintained in a writing from the 1940s that "while to other nations the Indian Ocean is just one of the major oceanic regions, to India it is a significant sea." Her safety depends on the freedom of that water surface, which is where her lifelines are concentrated. India's goals in the Indian Ocean region are to expand its influence throughout the area through trade, diplomacy, investment, and strategic partnerships while also strengthening ties with Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia, which contain energy and mineral resources that are essential to India's economic development and aspirations to become a great power.

Through forums like SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region), which promotes India's strategic, geopolitical, and economic interests in the oceans, Indo-Pacific Ocean initiatives, Asia Africa Growth Corridors, connecting ASEAN countries through its Act East Policy, and utilizing its soft power capabilities through the Ministry of Culture's Project Mausam, India supports rule-based, free, inclusive,

and open Indo-Pacific regions. It focuses on how connections across the Indian Oceans have been affected by understanding and manipulation of the monsoon winds and how this has facilitated the spread of common knowledge mechanisms, traditions, technologies, and concepts through maritime channels.

The Indian and Pacific Oceans were combined to form the Indo-Pacific, now considered the new geostrategic reality of the 21st century. India today has a fantastic opportunity to gain international prominence. To offer more substance and sturdiness to regional and bilateral collaborations, it will be necessary to identify new areas of collaboration with nations that share similar viewpoints. India should place greater emphasis on the advantages of coordination and cooperation rather than competition. By expanding regional bilateral and multilateral cooperation as well as its own internal naval and civilian maritime capabilities, the Indian state may then be able to ensure the security and well-being of the people, or "Yogakshema."⁵

QUAD and India

India, the US, Australia, and Japan make up the informal group known as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. Shinzo Abe, the prime minister of Japan, first put forth the idea in 2007, and a meeting to discuss it was conducted alongside the ASEAN group the same year. Enhancing prosperity and inclusive progress in the Indo-Pacific area and making it free and open to all stakeholders in the region are two of the group's main goals. The majority of the countries in the region, with the exception of China, were to be included in the "**Asian Arch of Democracies**," which was intended to be established. This is the reason why it has drawn so many objections and has been dubbed an anti-China bloc, which aims to restrain China's expanding influence in the area. China has criticized India as a negative asset for BRICS and SCO and has called the Quadrilateral talks an "Asian NATO," calling it an attempt to foment conflict that is bound to fail through its mouthpiece Global Times.

Australia ended the quadrilateral talks in 2009, signaling its desire for closer ties with China after the government change. Following that, until 2017, members of the Quad maintained their cooperation through bilateral and multilateral joint military exercises. The idea regained popularity as the US, through its Pivot to Asia policy, switched its emphasis from the Middle East and Europe to the Asia Pacific and Southeast Asia.

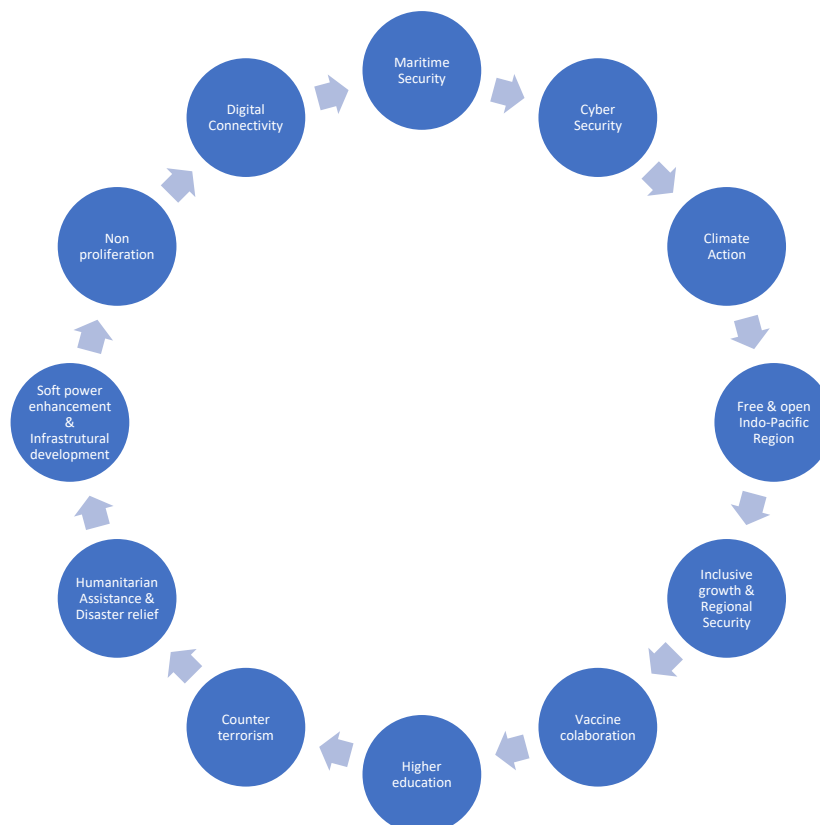
In order to confront China's aggressiveness, the United States' shifting strategy since the Obama administration and the absence of security assurances to its partners and allies presented a severe security challenge to those allies. As an illustration, the US has left the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which was first put up by the previous administration as a means of containing China's economic progress in the area. The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), commonly known as TPP-11, is a free trade deal between Canada and 10 other nations in the Asia-Pacific area. This has forced Japan to take the lead in this new group. The time of the US-centered security system, which had been crucial in preserving peace and tranquility, appears to be coming to an end. Therefore, in that situation, it is imperative that the region's major powers step forward and take a more active role in creating a modern, safe, and stable infrastructure with the assistance of the United States. And now India will have a better opportunity.⁶

The recent clashes at Galwan and Pangong Tso Lake have heightened tensions between India and China. Although historically the Indian Ocean has been India's sphere of influence, China is increasing its footprint there through military and naval bases while also deepening its ties with Pakistan. These issues pose severe threats to regional security for India. The BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa),

AIIB (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank), SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization), RIC (Russia India China), and other multilateral organizations have all been used by India to engage directly with China. But it has been established that none of the aforementioned groupings are actually a platform for conversation, but rather a way for China to exert pressure on India.

Multilateralism may be a likely answer to all the issues in this new framework. With all the like-minded nations in the region, including Australia, Japan, Singapore, Vietnam, South Korea, the African Union (AU), and the ASEAN nations, among others, India should endeavor to establish a new power-centric security and economic framework. In order to establish a safe, stable, and free atmosphere in the region, China and Russia should also be included because their exclusion will be more difficult than their inclusion. Every nation's top objective will always be to protect its national interests through its foreign policy in international relations. India should therefore endeavor to maximize its own national interests through multilateral forums without interfering with the regional power balance or the interests of any other countries. India might act as a net security supplier and balancer in the Indian Ocean region.⁷

The Quad has touched so many areas of collaboration in such a short time compared to other multilateral organizations. The Quad leaders recently met in Tokyo, Japan, and released a joint statement calling for the Indo-Pacific to be a free, open, inclusive, and resilient area. In order to offset China's grandiose Belt and Road Initiative project, they have also committed to providing \$50 billion in support for the development of the region's infrastructure.⁸ In addition to all of these factors, the group can also broaden its agenda for cooperation in areas like humanitarian aid, maritime security, recovery and resilience, rule-based order, ASEAN centrality, the establishment of international rules & regulations, to protect the interests of small island nations, regional environmental protection, etc. The figure below shows more places where cooperation is possible.



Some observers call it Asian NATO, although that is inaccurate. A larger goal was to be achieved by the nations that made up QUAD, a group of like-minded nations. The QUAD will attempt to change the "Unipolar" global order into a multipolar one. China currently poses a military threat to the world, as seen by its territorial claims to the Nine-dash Line, the South China Sea, and the East China Sea. The threat is also technological and economic on another level. Therefore, the QUAD nations should cooperate to address the aforementioned issues in order to create a global, inclusive order where everyone's interests are protected. Even while India is already gaining advantages from a bilateral arms agreement with the US and can counteract more serious threats on its own, QUAD will result in further gains from intelligence and logistics sharing through joint military exercises. India may lessen its reliance on China through new international trade and investment relationships, which will boost domestic investment and manufacturing activity. India's position as a significant power would thus be further strengthened.⁹

Challenges For India

Following the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004, QUAD was developed as a cooperation approach. Since its rebirth, QUAD 2.0 has provided a forum for member countries to communicate and work together in the ocean region, however, there are some restrictions. Its core tenet, according to its member nations, is to build a free, open, and rule-based order in the Indian Ocean region, but no details have been provided regarding what would constitute this rule or how it would apply to all stakeholders. Will it be enforceable or not? In addition, there are various types of skepticism among the countries of South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific over its nature and objectives.

The group has also come under fire for having no real agenda, despite this. Supporters of the initiative claim that this quartet of countries was established to work together on a number of security-related concerns, including maritime safety, cyber safety, the recent COVID-19 pandemic problem and vaccine supply, counterterrorism, humanitarian crises, disaster assistance, etc. All of the aforementioned issues, however, affect all the countries in the region, and several forums, including the East Asia Summit, Indian Ocean Rim Association, and ASEAN Regional Forum, are already available to discuss them. Most importantly, these four states are already members of these organizations.¹⁰ In summary, the group must make its uniqueness clear to its members.

QUAD's Significance for India's Defense & Deterrence Mechanism

Due to the escalating difficulties in the bilateral relations between India, China, and Pakistan, the geostrategic implications of the Indian Ocean have swiftly evolved in recent years. As a result, the stability of South Asian deterrence has consistently been under pressure. The presence of non-state players in the area and their capacity to engage sovereign states in a military and nuclear battle greatly complicate the competition for nuclear deterrence in South Asia. For Indian security, these and other related problems provide a severe deterrent conundrum.

India is concerned that non-state entities based in Pakistan could obtain Pakistan's nuclear resources and use them against the country. In addition, the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan threatens to upset the regional power structure as a whole. Although the Taliban's rhetoric towards India has softened over time, the country is nonetheless concerned about them regaining control since Afghanistan may then become a safe haven for Islamic groups that are hostile to India and other nations. Along with India, Pakistan is likewise concerned about the warming ties between China and China. It was much more realistic for China to use Pakistan as an extended deterrent proxy rather than simply extending its nuclear

umbrella to that country. Nuclear trade between these two has led to increased nuclear proliferation from Pakistan to new governments, which will weaken the regional non-proliferation framework and indirectly advance Chinese objectives in these nations. Both India's need for security and the stability of the region would suffer as a result.¹¹

In this situation, QUAD must contribute by serving as a crucial tool of deterrence in order to establish the region as free and open to all. By doing this, it would be simple to maintain the region's power balance. The best illustration of this is the Malabar exercise. Starting in 1992 as a bilateral exercise between the fleets of India and the US, Malabar has grown into a multilateral war gaming naval exercise involving all four members. Later, the fleets of Australia and Japan also joined the initiative. With each of these countries, India participates in various bilateral and multilateral exercises. Passage Exercises (PASSEX) with the navies of the US, Japan, and Australia are another illustration of this. In addition, the group's member countries are working to strengthen their Quadrilateral Intelligence Capabilities. In order to protect its national interests in the altered geostrategic environment, India should actively participate in all of these activities to strengthen its defense and deterrent mechanism.

Conclusion

Rising maritime powers include developing India and China. Both countries are causing trouble in the waters of the Indo-Pacific, a vast littoral extending from Africa to Australasia, as they develop sizable navies to defend their expanding interests. America, the regional superpower, is becoming involved in the Sino-Indian rivalry that is developing. Despite the stark disparities between China's, India's, and the United States' existing naval capabilities, the three nations are engaged in a triangle conflict that will shape the Indo-Pacific's future.¹²

India has historically overlooked maritime security concerns because it views it as a strategic luxury and instead concentrates on safeguarding its land boundaries in order to protect its interests. K. M. Panikkar describes the significance of the Indian Ocean by stating that despite numerous assaults from India's northwest frontier, the country never lost its independence until it lost control over the sea in the first decade of the 20th century. Now that we are aware of this truth, we must remember that national security comprises both maritime and land border security.¹³ It is past time for Quad to broaden its security perspective, and the member nations should band together to host disaster management, academic, and maritime security workshops with Southeast Asian and South Pacific nations in order to increase their influence in the region.

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