



### INDIA'S ROLE IN THE QUAD

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December 5, 2020

*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*



Quad or Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a group of four democracies including US, India, Japan and Australia was first proposed in 2007 by the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in his 'confluence of two seas' speech that later paved the way for the foundation of the group.<sup>1</sup> The formation of the quadrilateral coalition in 2017 has apparently been attributed to containing growing Chinese assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region. India's preoccupation with Quad has resultantly been accelerating on account of its skirmishes at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China and perceiving its encirclement in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) by Chinese presence.<sup>2</sup>

Through the Quad, India is committed to countering China's clout in the Indo-Pacific region, covering Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the east and the African coastline in the west. Most importantly, India sees Quad as a viable option to oppose China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).<sup>3</sup> New Delhi is on the quest of seeking uninterrupted access to ports across the Indo-Pacific region to deal with China's growing presence. In this regard, New Delhi views Beijing's naval base at

<sup>1</sup> Vaibhav Kullashri, "Quad Grouping and India's Role in It," *The Kootneeti*, July 8, 2020, <https://thekootneeti.in/2020/07/08/quad-grouping-and-indias-role-in-i>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> "Why India Must Exercise the Quad Option," *The Times of India*, October 15, 2020, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/why-india-must-exercise-the-quad-option/articleshow/78676596.cms>.

Djibouti as a threat to its interest in the region.<sup>4</sup> India has also been forging agreements in diverse places including Assumption Island (Seychelles), Duqm (Oman), and Sabang (Indonesia) to secure its naval routes. Without the support of the Quad, New Delhi appears to be a weaker party to preserve its national interest in Indo-Pacific region. India, thus, will leave no stone unturned to capitalize on the Quad as deterrence against China.<sup>5</sup>

Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar in a recent Quad forum said that, "rebalance of global geopolitics is already under way; India is stepping out as never before".<sup>6</sup> But India seeks to do a lot more, for instance, get into the driving seat of the Quad because this could be the core of a new security architecture".<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, participation of Australia in the upcoming Malabar naval exercises emboldens India in cajoling other three Quad members to work in spheres of disruptive technologies, critical materials, cyber security and healthcare.<sup>8</sup>

The first phase of the Malabar naval exercise held from November 3-6, 2020 in the Bay of Bengal culminated in the participation of the United States Navy (USN), Indian Navy (IN), Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force (JMSDF). The first phase of the exercise witnessed advanced naval exercises including, anti-submarine, cross-deck flying, and anti-air warfare drills weapon firing exercises.<sup>9</sup> Intriguingly, the Malabar naval exercise heralded the path to the participation of all four Quad members. Participation by all four members of the Quad in the Malabar naval exercise bore fruitful results for India as far as countering of China in the region is concerned.<sup>10</sup>

India is also trying to promote the US worldview of liberal international order embroiling the Quad countries in Indo-Pacific narrative by castigating China's undemocratic government. The US, on the other hand, considers India as major defense partner and has bolstered its defense partnership by signing Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), the communications, compatibility

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<sup>4</sup> Derek Grossman, "India Is the Weakest Link in the Quad," *Foreign Policy*, July 23, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/07/23/india-is-the-weakest-link-in-the-quad/>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Indrani Bagchi, ET Bureau, "Chinese Belligerence: Whither Goes India, Will Go the Quad and the Indo-Pacific," *The Economic Times*, October 17, 2020, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/chinese-belligerence-whither-goes-india-will-go-the-quad-and-the-indo-pacific/articleshow/78724000.cms?from=mdr>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> "Navies of India, US, Japan, Australia Conclude Phase 1 of Malabar 2020 Naval Exercise," *The Economic Times*, November 7, 2020, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/navies-of-india-us-japan-australia-conclude-phase-1-of-malabar-2020-naval-exercise/articleshow/79097428.cms>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

and security agreement, (COMCASA) and the Industrial Security Annex.<sup>11</sup> A recently concluded agreement on June 4, 2020 between India and Australia on 'Mutual Logistics Support' allows both countries to consolidate their defense partnership, and upgrading the 'Comprehending Strategic Partnership'.<sup>12</sup> Signing of Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) deal on October 27, 2020 between the US and India is aimed at sharing the US satellite and sensor data with India to contain China. China opposes the BECA deal and views India as disposable proxy of the US to counter China.<sup>13</sup>

China has keenly been watching the Quad forum. China's Foreign Minister, Wang Yi maintains that, "In essence, [the Indo-Pacific strategy] aims to build a so-called Indo-Pacific NATO underpinned by the quadrilateral mechanism involving the United States, Japan, India and Australia,"<sup>14</sup> It is pertinent to mention here that Indian policy makers ought to bring home the fact that China does not want to maintain the US Cold War mentality of creating alliances, instead, China believes in a win-win situation. It is pertinent to mention that China is the leading trade partner of the Quad members who are economically more dependent on it. China, on the other hand, has lesser economic dependence on Quad members.<sup>15</sup>

Joining of the Quad by India ostensibly violates its so-called non-aligned policy and bolsters the US Cold War mentality of forging alliances that by and large does not serve the region's interest. The 21<sup>st</sup> century, unlike, the 20<sup>th</sup> century is a globalized century, an era of economic interdependence and win-win situation. New Delhi needs to be wary of the US great power competition with China where the former appears to be making the latter as a scapegoat in this game. China's rise a global power is inevitable; it would be in India's national as well as regional interest to mend ties with rising China. States can change friends and enemies but they cannot change their neighbors. China being a next door neighbor of India would prove more beneficial than distant US.

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<sup>11</sup> Jagannath Panda "India and the 'Quad Plus' Dialogue," *RUSI*, June 12, 2020, <https://rusi.org/commentary/india-strategic-quad>.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> China reacts strongly to BECA). *The Eastern Link*, October 27, 2020 <https://theeasternlink.com/china-reacts-strongly-to-beca/>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Dost Muhammad Barrech "Quad Meeting: In Context of Theory of Complex Interdependence," *Pakistan Observer*, October 13, 2020, <https://pakobserver.net/quad-meeting-in-context-of-theory-of-complex-interdependence/>.