

Prospects and Contestations- Quad's Import

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Abstract:

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (hereafter mentioned as Quad) is the brainchild of ex-Japanese Prime Minister and statesman Shinzo Abe whose acute diplomatic foresight was par-excellence. As early as in mid 2000s, he had envisioned the Quad as a cumulative gathering of the four most prominent powers of the region- India, Australia, USA and Japan, to facilitate the growth and prosperity of the entire region. China's insatiable territorial ambitions and its tendency of bullying the smaller countries into submission, its overarching Belt and Road initiative (BRI) had a key role in precipitating the realization of the platform. Quad's manifestation is underpinned by the cherished objectives of aiding the regional powers in meeting their developmental and humanitarian needs, in an atmosphere free from any animosity and undue interference in their internal affairs. It further seeks to create a healthy atmosphere in the Indo-Pacific so that all the countries can flourish together and work upon one's strength for the sake of betterment of the whole region. Indo-Pacific was envisioned as **a single strategic space** where any tumultuous activity in one area would inevitably cause churn in the other. This paper focuses upon the promises, outlook and inherent challenges that lay within the whole premise of the superstructure of Quad. Effort has been put to lay bare, its genesis and the need behind its effective functioning.

Keywords: Indo-Pacific, Asian Arc of Democracy, Strategic, Quad, Humanitarian.

Introduction

The genesis of Quad can be traced back to the year 2004 when USA, Japan, India and Australia came together in the aftermath of tsunami, to devise strategies to ensue relief operations in the affected region. Shinzo Abe in 2007 had posited the novel idea of 'Asian Arc Of Democracy'. However, the idea couldn't materialize as Australia pulled out in the face of sustained Chinese pressure. However then, its economy was deeply entangled with that of China. In December 2012, Abe did again put forward the concept of Asia's 'Democratic Security Diamond'. The motive was again to push the four countries towards devising concrete measures so as to guarantee maritime security and freedom of navigation in the global commons, from Indian Ocean to the Western Pacific.

In November 2017, all the four partners finally came together to save and revive the waning idea of Quad coalition. China anxiously noted Quad's revival, its Foreign Minister Wang Yi caustically likened it to a "foam in the ocean, destined to dissipate soon." The meeting aimed at forging the Indo-Pacific region into a space, free from any overwhelming malicious influence, specifically from China. In 2020, a trilateral Malabar exercise was conducted in an expanded format by including Australia. It was the first joint military exercise of the four countries, conducted to send a message across, of collective resolve, a shared purpose, synced unity and a coming of age diplomatic cohesion.

The Quad differs from NATO in a way that the former doesn't contain any provision, pertaining to collective defence. A joint statement entitled 'Spirit of Quad' was released at the May, 2022 Tokyo summit of Quad leaders, which stated that a major initiative to improve maritime domain awareness would be undertaken. The Quad's core objectives of promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region was reiterated. A robust cooperation in the areas of debt sustainability, supply chains, clean energy, connectivity and capacity building was stressed upon. The humanitarian issues emanating from the Russia-Ukraine conflict were discussed at length. The Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi again cited the importance of dialogue and diplomacy to solve the outstanding issues. Other pressing issues like the situation in South East Asia, the Indian Ocean region and the Pacific Islands were also deliberated upon. PM Modi emphasized upon the need to swear by the principles of UN Charter in letter and spirit, international law and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. The leaders further pledged to keep up the tempo for the forthcoming summits.

In the wake of emerging global and regional scenario, the following questions emerge as to what are the pertinent reasons behind the revival of Quad and what are the prospects of the grouping in the current global power dynamics? The present study begins with the assumption that formation of Quad is not limited to containment of China in Indo-Pacific only but it has the promise of attracting like-minded countries sharing similar ethos and concerns. This paper seeks to add further value to the corpus of works done previously on the chosen topic, enriching the literature even more. In the face of continued new developments in the international arena, ground realities are in a constant flux. Hence, meticulous effort has been put to provide the meaningful contexts in sync with changed scenarios. The earlier arguments forwarded about the Quad's imperative through the realist lenses has been posited on account of the evaluation of emerging trends in the Indo-Pacific.

Among the leading published commentaries on the issue, a few are being reviewed here. While traversing through the sources distinctly cited under the reference section, it became evident that a decent amount of research work on the topic and its relevance has been done previously. *Happymon Jacob* in his article "Lessons for India from the Taiwan standoff" (dated 6th August, 2022, The Hindu Newspaper) argues that this soft-peddling of the Quad in the 2000s by both Australia and India, when China objected to it was a strategic mistake. It is only in the last two years or so that we have witnessed renewed enthusiasm around the Quad. In retrospect, appeasing Beijing by almost abandoning the Quad was bad strategy. *Indrajit Roy* in his column "Bringing Eurasia Closer" (dated 1st August, 2022, The Hindu Newspaper) argues that India's leading role in both the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the Quad testifies to its deviation from non-alignment to multi-alignment. The INSTC mechanism renders a platform to India to join the forces with Russia, Iran and Central Asian republics. Even when two of its members are suffering on account of a range of Western sanctions, India didn't hesitate from working along with the U.S., Japan and Australia as part of the Quad to create and safeguard a free and open Indo-Pacific. Critics of Indian foreign policy have failed to notice the nuanced shifts in Indian foreign policy from **non-alignment to multi-alignment**. In The Hindu newspaper, dated 25.05.22, (**Quad is a 'force for good': Modi**) column, it was mentioned that the leaders of the Quad countries had announced the formation of the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) in order to build a "faster, wider, and more accurate maritime picture of near-real-time activities in partners' waters. The benefits of this (maritime) picture are vast: it will allow tracking of "dark shipping" and other tactical-level activities, such as rendezvous at sea, as well as improve

partners' ability to respond to climate and humanitarian events and to protect their fisheries, which are vital to many Indo-Pacific economies”.

However, there is a need to take up this topic with renewed zeal on account of the dynamic nature of the field of international relations. New dimensions of climate change, vaccine diplomacy, e-commerce, labour laws, skill training, intellectual property rights, increased nuclear cooperation for civilian purposes, renewable energy, space and medical cooperation, 5G technology, artificial intelligence, cyber security and robotics, laying of the supply chains of critical goods imperative for sustaining any future shocks, regular patrolling and flag exercises in the Indo-Pacific in a more comprehensive manner, have emerged on scene.

The major contention to the studies and opinions on the facet of Quad done till date is that the different dimensions in the overall scheme of Indo-US relations, in the post-Covid 19 era haven't been explored sufficiently. Since the Galwan valley clash of June 2020, India's relationship with China has been fraying. Even after the 16th round of military talks held on 17th July 2022, friction points remain in eastern Ladakh. In this situation, it is hoped that India's presence in Quad may act as a deterrent for China, in case, it tries to indulge in any adventurism. Hence, the paper seeks to engender the idea that apart from the goodwill factor that the Quad carries with itself, of a non-militaristic nature, in no time can it evolve into a military alliance if Pakistan and China tries to thrust a two-front war upon India. However, if the four partners help each other in economic and trade terms and they are in the position to display large-heartedness towards the dependent smaller island countries dotting the Indo-Pacific region, the above prospect can materialize.

Further, since supply lines of critical goods have been hit, earlier due to Covid-19 pandemic and later due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict since February 2022, the Quad countries have got a shot in the arm to meet the exigencies and ensure a reliable and robust supply chain mechanism in future. Climate crisis in 2022 has baffled the people world all over the world, with extreme record heat and erratic weather patterns, landslides, flooding, forest fires wreaking havoc, Quad is providing a platform to devise strategies and methods to lead a more sustainable and eco-friendly lifestyle. Quad critics, however, have pointed out the Quad's underwhelming performance in vaccine diplomacy. The Quad has delivered less than half of its pledged one billion doses by July 2022. For many countries, the Quad's donations pale significantly in comparison to China. Beijing sold nearly two billion doses of Covid-19 vaccine worldwide and has further donated nearly 250 million doses on top of it.

On these accounts, a few gaps were observed in the present corpus of literature and commentaries around the theme of Quad. This paper endeavours to analyze the happenings around this grouping which has ramifications for the entire region and in shaping the contours of the global power dynamics of the 21st century. Through the blended lenses of the Neo-Realist, Grotian (Liberal Realism), Cognitive theories school as well as the Constructivist approach to the International relations, the paper has been attempted. While going through the extant reference points on the literature related to the topic, it was adduced that the aforementioned theories needed better application in understanding the plethora of phenomena occurring around us in the international arena.

Methodology

So far as the methodology of the study is concerned, Qualitative research method has been used. Both primary and secondary data from a few well-researched newspaper columns and articles, research

papers, books having relevance to the chosen research paper's topic has been referred to in close details. Analytical approach resonated aptly with the scope and objective of the paper.

Content

The primary objectives of Quad are to ensure maritime security, collaborate with each other and like-minded countries to effectively deal with Covid-19 crisis including robust vaccine outreach. It further includes combating climate change, fine-tuning investment ecosystem, boosting technical innovation. It was further envisaged to expand the remit of cooperation via Quad plus mechanism by including South Korea, Vietnam and New Zealand.

China has termed the grouping as Asian NATO and further alleged that the group fosters cold war era exclusionary policy, calling it a 'clique'. However, the member countries have denied any military notions behind the idea of Quad. Its key domain areas lie in providing alternative debt to finance countries' emergent and critical needs in the region. Sustaining a rule based order is central to the group's core aim. Ensuring free navigation and trading, collaborating on critical and emerging tech, pooling resources for connectivity and infra projects, cyber-security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations, education etc. lie on the group's agenda. Key takeaways from the recent summit are that the region over the next five years will receive USD 50 billion in infra and investment projects. Quad climate adaptation and mitigation package (Q-Champ) will be created. A fellowship program will help hundred students reach USA every year to pursue UG in STEM field. Further, Indo-Pacific partnership for maritime domain awareness (IPMDA) is being raised to combat illegal fishing. The group's major significance lies in fomenting a capable platform to tackle Chinese hostilities and emerging challenges. It also makes for a formidable way for USA to advance its East Asian interests and align it strategically deeper with India's Act East Policy. It further helps New Delhi build much needed diplomatic capital in nudging USA's policies in Afghanistan and Pakistan towards India's geopolitical interests. India can also conduct strategic explorations in the region with its sizeable and modern naval equipments.

Focusing on Climate change, A Quad Shipping Taskforce was also formed with the participation of ports, including Los Angeles, Mumbai Port Trust, Sydney and Yokohama, so as to form a network dedicated to the greening and decarbonizing of the entire shipping value chain. The Clean Hydrogen Partnership will also go a long way in strengthening and cost-cutting across all elements of the clean hydrogen value chain. A Climate and Information Services Task Force will be convened and a new mechanism through the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) will cater to technical-knowhow of the smaller island countries. The seriousness of the purpose can be gauged from the fact that The Third Quad Senior Cyber Officials Meeting was held on 15th of September, 2021 via video conference.

Opportunities:

- >harnessing commercially available data using existing technologies,
- >can create an unprecedented thread by combining automatic identification system and radio frequency technologies,
- >Quad vaccine partnership and global health security – The partners have supplied over 260 million safe dosages in the region so far.

>technical exchanges on test bed activities to enhance inter-operability and telecommunication cyber security through a new memorandum of cooperation on 5G Supplier diversification and open Radio Access Network (RAN).

>space- combining experiences to trade satellite data and emerge as space leaders.

Challenges:

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is causing a major upheaval in Europe. Its reverberations are being felt all over, in this age of a global village like world. Stoppage of exports of wheat and sunflower oil has led to spiralling inflation in the importing countries. Food crisis is on the offing in Africa. Gas and fuel prices have touched new highs and has made a remarkable dent in the economies on a path to post-Covid recovery. Developing and other low-income countries are finding it increasingly tough to provide for their impoverished populations. If the situation persists, social strife might be seen in several of these poorly-resourced countries. In retaliation of the mounting and strict sanctions over Russia by the West, Russia has severely reduced its gas supply to European countries causing much distress over there, especially in Germany with prolonged power cuts and the affected governments have come up with several supply rationalization measures in order to tide over the crisis. Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline has become a casualty.

Further, a distracted USA is not in the interest of anyone, especially for those whose priority at the moment is to uphold the international rules based order and preserve the ethos of civility in the realm of diplomacy. Russia and China at the moment, seem to be hell bent on changing the global power dynamics by unilateral measures. With a sanguinary war raging in the heart of Europe, which was unthinkable barely six months ago, things have changed for real in a quick time. NATO is been alarmed as well and is now re-aligning itself in the face of harsh lessons meted out in the Ukraine quagmire. India's stand on Russia however has been perceived as a tad soft by West's yardstick. The other three members of the bloc unequivocally held Russia responsible for this brazen attack on Ukraine's sovereignty and rebuked it openly without mincing any words. Given India's own compulsions in the face of aggressive Chinese military posturing for the last two years in eastern Ladakh and its dependence upon Russia for legacy reasons and also for nearly 70 percent military hardwares, oil and gas supplies at relatively far moderate prices to reign in domestic inflation, India has rightfully taken a balanced stand keeping its strategic interests above anything else. India at this juncture can ill afford to push Russia more closer to China, hence this much-needed balancing act.

Cutting edge tech, pharmacy and infrastructure have evolved as important battle grounds in which the Quad can prove to be a boon for the region for competing with the Dragon on non-security initiatives as well. To tame China's overambitious designs to emerge as the uncontested and undisputed power of Asia, a powerful and confident India still is the West's best gambit. A unipolar Asia is not in the interest of anyone as the two power centres will manifest before us, the ghosts of Cold War 2.0 in its full glory. Given the historical lessons, the world needs strong multi-lateral or plurilateral forums and diffused centres of power so that no one or two country can single-handedly call the shots when it comes to actions whose ramifications easily penetrate national borders. The world is so enmeshed with each other that any crisis has the potential to cause flux even in countries located thousands of miles away.

CONCLUSION

Quad is well positioned to contribute to the ideal conception of a free, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific as the members are well aware of each other's approaches and standings on critical issues and

also share core ideals of democracy, human rights and freedom. Their commonalities if worked upon sincerely, can far outweigh the differences and can reap rich dividends for the entire humanity. Working tirelessly on shared goals to help the forum stay relevant and afloat is pertinent and the countries should focus upon delivering tangible outcomes on the ground so as to not seem like just another talking-shop. During the first in-person meeting of Quad leaders in September 2021, it was decided to map the capacities, identify vulnerabilities and firm up supply chains for the hassle free supplies of semi-conductors and other critical minerals round the year. The recently held Tokyo meeting in May 2022 further agreed upon a collective unanimous compact to preserve Indo-Pacific as a free, inclusive and prosperous region for the foreseeable future. Quad partnership on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations is further envisioned. It is pretty much obvious that the most critical factor behind this urgency of fomenting QUAD as an effective, flexible platform lies in the China's increased belligerence and its unrelenting acrimonious display of raw power around the world, increasingly in the last three years. Aided by its economic clout, China is literally on a rampage and has scant regards for the international norms and laws. Its unwavering sabre-rattling in the East and South China seas as well as in the strategic Taiwan strait provide a case in point. Post-Covid resurrection of economies is another point of convergence among the four countries. The stakeholders of the process need to devise ways to tackle climate change, shoring up the investment and FDI in India's growth story in the territory of renewable energy, particularly solar energy. Being the 2nd most populous country of the world, India has other compulsions in bringing nearly 30 crore people out of poverty. So its transition from a coal based economy to non-fossil based needs a sustained helping hand for the next 15-20 years at least. Weather science and other satellite based services can be pooled to provide other relatively smaller island countries of the region, some breathing space and avoid the deleterious impacts of rising sea levels to a certain extent.

The security build-up of the forum is yet to fructify. May be due to China's aspersions, there is delay. China has opened its new military base in the Solomon islands further causing alarm in Australia. Some US officials have hinted at probable naval confrontation in the South Chinese Sea as well, seen recently between the USNS Impeccable and Chinese naval vessels near Hainan Island. Further, there can arise a contingency-like situation in the Taiwan strait any time soon as China is threatening to reunify Taiwan with itself, citing One-China principle. It is the need of the hour to formalize the conception a secretariat to engender multilateral cooperation among the Quad members, thus ensuring seamless coordination and precluding knee-jerk responses. Quad also makes it feasible for India to enjoy a satisfactory defense cooperation with the other members, without narrowing its options by opting for alliances.

The surprising manifestation of AUKUS (Australia, UK, USA) in the month of September, 2021 raised quite a few eyebrows in the foreign policy circles as USA was going to share strategic technology with one Quad partner while giving cold shoulder to the other. When France was kept out of loop and it lost out on a multi-billion dollar submarine sale deal, it was visibly fuming at the slight. Since India enjoys a close and healthy defense relationship with France, atmosphere in Delhi too became a shade suspicious of Washington's motives. This event helped vindicate India's decision to keep pursuing its means to diversify its defence sourcing modes without committing the folly of keeping all eggs in one basket. By playing second fiddle to other members especially when it comes to posturing of the group as essentially anti-China, India can deftly play the diplomatic game by avoiding direct confrontation. Security architecture is dictated by bilateral two plus two dialogues (defense and foreign minister meetings) among the individual Quad countries.

Another aspect which needs critical attention is the possibility of using the group as a platform to seed its goal of promoting democracies on other shores. But India would not be on same page on this issue as it has historically avoided propagating democratic and liberal principles in conducting its foreign policy. There are some differences as well regarding the spatial extent of Quad for USA and what it is for India. India stresses more on the Indian ocean vis-à-vis Pacific ocean and the framework stretches from the east coast of Africa to the western and southern Pacific, thus incorporating parts of the Middle-East as well. Contrarily, USA's ideation neither includes Africa nor the Middle East.

Findings

Towards the fag end of 2017, the discussions pertaining to the formalization of Quad had begun to be dispersed among the public due to vigorous Chinese military exercises in the eastern and western parts of the Indian Ocean. In October, the then Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Kano publicly endorsed the revitalization of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue in an interview with newspaper The Nikkei. A couple of days later, the U.S. acting assistant secretary for South and Central Asian affairs, Alice Wells did dismiss the inhibitions about Chinese perceiving of Quad, as a stratagem to contain it, noting, “[I] think it's hard to see a meeting of diplomats from four countries as a plan to contain China. I think it's a natural expression and convergence of interests between democratic countries in the Indo-Pacific region and it's a natural stepping stone from the very productive trilateral conversations, exercises, and cooperation that we've seen between India, Japan, and the United States.”

Seven themes were underpinned in the very first meeting of the Quad held in November, 2017. These were - **rule-based order in Asia, freedom of navigation and overflight in the maritime commons, upholding of international law, deepening connectivity, maritime security, the North Korean menace and non-proliferation, and the scourge of terrorism.** However, the official minutes of the meeting varied at length, both in emphasis and particularity. The Indian statement dropped any reference to the freedom of navigation and overflight, regard for international law and maritime security. The Japanese statement as well disapproved of any notation of “connectivity”. Only the Australian and the United States' statements used the term “quadrilateral”. These omissions and variances were relatively trivial, but they underscored a point in that strategic geography, threat cognitions, and the changing dynamics with respect to China, among the parties to the security dialogue are diversified. Working through these divergences will require deft tackling if Quad 2.0 is to thrive. Other countries of the Indo-Pacific in future, may object to their inclusion in the grouping unless it is seen to cater to the larger regional interests. Even so, the interests of the Quad countries and other like-minded allies throughout the region are bound to converge at a certain point of time, with the balance of power shifting gradually along the tides of time. The conventional status quo will also come under severe stress. Together with their shared values, variegated capabilities and complementary geography, this underlying structural platform shall provide a strong foundation on which the member countries can build a workable, functional agenda for regional cooperation that embraces economic and diplomatic elements along with sturdy security collaboration. In the process they can tangibly conduce a blooming and an inclusive Indo-Pacific.

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