

QUAD and the Adversarial Drift in Sino-Indian Relations: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

The study has been undertaken to investigate the main reason for the adversarial drift in relations between neighbors in the Indo-Pacific region. This region, for which Quad has been formed, has become the centre of gravity of world politics and economy. The study aims to understand how China views Quad with suspicion, leading to an adverse drift in relations between India and China. It also explores how a new strategic policy has been formulated in this region through the Quad, which is creating problem for china. To achieve this, the paper moves forward to examine these questions in the context of a wide range of research paper analysis methods and synthesize the previous research. It involves more detailed findings drawn from their research experience using descriptive and analytical methods to investigate the relevance of the questions.

Keywords: Indo-Pacific, Quad, Adversarial, Sino-Indian, Strategic Policy.

Introduction

With the advent of the twenty-first century, the ruling party began to move East from the Atlantic, which gave rise to the concept of the Indo-Pacific. The Indo-Pacific is the inflow of two major oceans: the Indian and the Pacific. The geographical area covering this region is of great importance from the geo-economic and geo-strategic point of view. The region is home to some of the major emerging powers including China, India and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). It is an area at the heart of geopolitical rivalry, which is increasingly becoming a centre of competition for these emerging powers. The creation of the term Indo-Pacific along with China's increasingly assertive foreign policy is regarded as a driving force fueling great power competition to influence it. As it seeks to expand its influence in the Indo-Pacific region under its flagship Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China is seen as a counterbalance to the balance of power. China's growing involvement in the region has ramifications not only for India but also for other major powers. The overall principle of current Chinese foreign policy is difficult to 'read'. But there is no doubt that the Chinese leadership intends to make a more active contribution to international governance.¹ As a result, this has prompted the United States to formulate its Indo-Pacific strategy as a way of countering Chinese influence, as well as countering its rise and balancing like-minded powers. The objective of this strategy is to bring them under a unique strategic framework. The Idea of the formation of quad in the Indo-Pacific region is seen as a way to counterbalance the growing Chinese footprint in this area. The adversities in the relations between India and China have been continuously observed since the formation of the Quad. Hence, this paper studies the overall idea of the Indo-Pacific

¹Ferdinand P: Westward ho—The China Dream and 'One Belt, One Road': Chinese Foreign Policy Under Xi Jinping. *International Affairs*. 2016; 92(4): 948–951.

and examines the adverse effects between the two along with the creation of the Quad to manage relations with China.

The Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific is not only about the vast stretches of ocean that lie between countries adjacent to the Indian and Pacific Oceans. It also encompasses the countries that operate within it in terms of trade, culture, and security, even if their heartlands lie beyond marine catchment areas.² It is continuous extension of the Indian Ocean and the central and western Pacific Ocean, with common economic and defence-security interests. It encompasses countries such as America, China, ASEAN Bloc, Japan, South Korea, North Korea, India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Tanzania, Taiwan, Philippines, Australia, Bangladesh, New Zealand, Nepal and Bhutan. The region also included the upper half of the Antarctic and all its surrounding areas, making it a strategic zone.

The Indo-Pacific is a vital region for world trade, as almost half of the world's trade flows through it, and it contributes to 62% of the world's GDP. The region has 38 countries directly connected to it and covers 44% of the world's land. Despite being a diverse region, it contains developed countries like America, Japan, and Australia, as well as countries with the largest populations like China and India, and small island countries whose sovereignty is often in danger.

Due to all these qualities, this region has been at the forefront of political activities. With the world's fastest growing economies, rising military spending and naval capabilities, there is increasing competition for natural resources, which is contributing to the region's momentum of geo-economic competition. Therefore, the key to global security and a new world order lies in the hands of the Indo-Pacific region.

One important area within this region is the South China Sea, where frequent disputes arise between ASEAN countries and China. Another important area is the Strait of Malacca, located near Indonesia, which is significant from both straight and business points of view. Additionally, the Guan Islands and Marshall Islands are strategically important, and the Red sea, Gulf of Aden, and Persian Gulf are areas where India's oil trade takes place, with abundant hydrocarbons. Thus, this sector is vital from both strategic and commercial perspectives.

The Indo-Pacific strategy has been advocating for increasing Indo-US cooperation in the strategically important region. Its importance can also be understood as the creation of an appropriate framework for legitimate and free trade in the Indo-Pacific, movement towards independence and the peaceful settlement of disputes, which are key parts of this strategy. The main participants in this strategy are-

- **America-**

The US is refocusing on the importance of Asia to its long-term interests. It became more active during the reign of former US President Donald Trump. The Trump administration had publicly acknowledged the importance of India-Japan relations to make the Indo-Pacific a "free and independent" region. Trump's Indo-Pacific policy was a revamped version of his predecessor Obama's Asia-centric policy, which is now being adopted by current President Joe Biden with a new strategy that has given it a new direction. It was introduced by Obama in 2011, which was later named 'Asian Rebalancing'. The US is a major stakeholder in the Indo-Pacific strategy, that is why it has changed its Pacific Command Strategy to the new name Indo-Pacific Strategy to achieve its objectives in the Asia subcontinent. It seeks to counter China's rapid

²Doyle T, Rumley D: The Rise and Return of the Indo-Pacific. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2019.

emergence as a world superpower while simultaneously demonstrating its dominance and influence over countries in the Asian region. According to one estimate, by 2027, China will overtake the US to become the world's largest economy. For these reasons, America is projecting India as a big player in the Indo-Pacific region. The US sees India as a great potential in the Indo-Pacific strategy.

- **India-**

India is also an important participant in the Indo-Pacific strategy. It is keen to partner with East Asian countries in trade, economic development and maritime security. Under this strategy, India aims to give tough competition to China, which is emerging as a superpower. Therefore, it seeks help from the US to influence countries located in the Indo-Pacific. The Indian Ocean is the only ocean in the world named after a country, India. India is very serious about the Indo-Pacific region and is trying to establish its dominance in it. It also seeks to formulate a new maritime security strategy with the objectives of promoting peace, stability and free trade in the region. Recently, India conducted a major naval command exercise (Malabar exercise) with the US and Japan, which is part of its security strategy. By conducting such naval exercises with different countries, India aims to become a significant player in the Indian Ocean region. It wants to expand its influence in the countries of East Asia under its Act East policy. Its main objective is to accelerate the process of rapid growth and inclusion in Northeast India. It is widely acknowledged that India is not only a key player, but also a responsible actor in the Indo-Pacific region. India has already assumed greater responsibility in the region and is calling for a bigger and more influential role in the post-COVID world. As a result, India is likely to have greater maneuvering space in shaping the post-COVID international order and is expected to be one of the key drivers in steering policy and defending allied interests in the Indo-Pacific. The COVID-19 pandemic has also expanded the Quad framework, providing an opportunity for key players to take active roles in addressing pressing traditional and nontraditional regional challenges.³

- **China-**

China is investing heavily in infrastructure and connectivity in various countries around the world to transform itself into a world superpower through its 'One Belt One Road' initiative. Its initiative also aims to establish dominance in the Indo-Pacific region. We all know that China is fast moving towards becoming a world superpower. On the other hand, the pace of economic development of other developed economies of the world like America, Russia, and France has slowed down. We are all familiar with China's "string of pearls" policy. Through this policy, China is working on a strategy to encircle India and establish its presence in the Indo-Pacific region. For example, China is a major stakeholder in Pakistan's Gwadar port, the Sri Lankan government has sold the Hambantota port to China, the Chittagong port in Bangladesh is also a strategically important port where China has a presence, and Myanmar's Sittwe project is also part of China's policy. In addition, the Indian Ocean is becoming Beijing's geo-strategic zone, with China occupying its first overseas naval base in Djibouti and several uninhabited islands in the Maldives. Prior to this, China has successfully militarized several artificial islands in the South China Sea. In such a situation, China is encircling the Indian Ocean region under the "string of pearls" policy and trying to establish dominance, due to which India needs to be aware of China.

³ Jash A: The Quad Factor in the Indo-Pacific and the Role of India. The Journal Of Indo-Pacific Affairs. (Spring). 2021; 4(2): 78–85.

- **Japan-**

Japan has an important role in the strategy of the Indo-Pacific region. The concept of balance of power in the Indo-Pacific and the idea of the formation of the Quad were first proposed by Japan. Japan has been keen to strengthen bilateral ties and cooperation with India, which is also part of the Indo-Pacific Strategy. Apart from investments, Japan is looking to increase its presence in the Indian Ocean region by partnering with India to showcase its maritime potential.

- **Australia-**

Prior to the Quad's revival in 2017, Australian policymakers and the broader strategic community had been discussing the possibility of pursuing a security and foreign policy strategy based on shared values with their "natural partners" in the grouping. Following the Quad's first ministerial meeting in 2019, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison expressed his satisfaction with "rebuilding trust" in this "significant forum for Australia and the world".⁴

Australia is surrounded by the Indian Ocean to the west and the Pacific Ocean to the east, making it a central Indo-Pacific state. It serves as a reference point for Australian governments to define foreign and security policy and interests. In terms of trading interests, Australia is increasingly looking to markets in Asia as opposed to its traditional Western allies. However, the increasing influence of China in the Indo-Pacific is creating problems for Australia, and it seeks to separate its business interests from regional geopolitical tensions.

The formation and existence of the Quad is driven by the interests of all four countries involved. As a result, the relevance of the Indo-Pacific region increases.

Formation of Quad (rise, fall and rise again)

The Quad, also known as the "quadrilateral security dialogue," includes the US, Japan, Australia, and India. When these four countries are joined with lines on a map, the shape of a quadrilateral appears. The objective of the Quad Group is to restore and balance peace and power in the Indo-Pacific region and establish an independent and inclusive regional architecture. The Quad Group is committed to ensuring a 'free, open, and prosperous' Indo-Pacific region based on international law, and to address challenges in the region.

The main reason behind the formation of the Quad is China's construction of artificial islands in the South China Sea, which has caused concern among countries such as Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia. The Quad is a policy designed to counter China's growing dominance in the South China Sea, with the US playing the most important role. This is an area that the US considers part of its grand strategy to revive its global position, which is being challenged by China. The Quad was formed for these reasons, which necessitated the restoration of balance of power in the Indo-Pacific.

Quad 1.0 (rise and fall)

In 2004, there was a tsunami in the Indian Ocean, and this event led to the development of the Quad concept. At that time, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe took the responsibility of forming a group of India, Japan, America, and Australia. The purpose of this group was to deal with the tsunami by carrying out an operation to send rescue and relief material. However, the group was abolished in 2004-05.

⁴ Mehra J: The Australia-India-Japan-US Quadrilateral: Dissecting the China Factor. ORF Occasional Paper No. 264. August. Observer Research Foundation, 2020.

In 2006, Shinzo Abe decided to continue this plan with the aim of creating an alliance between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean, as the countries shared the same ideology. He believed that by uniting, they could take their work much further. The first formal meeting between the four countries was held in May of that year. In September, India, Japan, America, Australia, and Singapore conducted the Malabar Military Exercise. However, the alliance had to back out due to China's influence, and India did not lean much towards it due to pressure from China, which called it against itself. In November 2007, Kevin Rudd became the PM of Australia, and in the same year, the Quad alliance broke in 2008.

Quad 2.0 (rise again)

After the alliance broke in 2008, the idea of reforming it in 2017 was brought up. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had returned to power, and at the same time, US President Trump also paid more attention to it. Japan stated that it was time to sit together to counter China. Therefore, Japan proposed to revive Quad, and as a result, the first working-level meeting was held in Manila. With its emergence, Australia repeated its mistake of separating from it and requested India to rejoin, which India accepted. The Quad grouping has emerged as an important component of the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific region with Australia participating in the first phase of the Malabar naval exercise in the Bay of Bengal on 3 November 2020. After coming to power, current US President Joe Biden held a virtual meeting with the four countries as soon as he took office, during which US President Joe Biden, Australia's Scott Morrison, Japan's Suga, and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi held talks and stated that they would all try to deal with the pandemic together. Later in September, these four countries held an official in-person meeting for the first time since the UN meeting. The Indian Prime Minister addressed the first summit of representatives of the QUAD grouping which was organized by the US on a virtual platform. Earlier in the Ministerial meeting of the Quad in February 2021, the issues of military acquisition in the Indo-Pacific region and Myanmar were discussed. The central point of this conference remained on topics like climate change and emerging technologies in context of Covid-19. During the conference, the four countries resolved that the Quad is committed to ensuring an 'independent, free and prosperous' Indo-Pacific region based on international laws. The objective of this commitment is to enable the region to deal with the challenges that are present Indo-Pacific and surrounding regions. Discussions related to China also took place during this meeting, during which the Quad leaders discussed Chinese aggression on the Line of Actual Control (LAC). They also addressed China's pressure on Hong Kong, Xinjiang, Taiwan Strait, and Australia, as well as issues related to the Senkaku dispute. The Quad leaders also discussed Chinese cyber attacks on United States installations such as Microsoft Exchange and Solar Winds, as well as cybersecurity incidents in India, Japan, and Australia. In response to the statements of these four countries, China stated that exchanges and cooperation between Quad countries should be based on mutual understanding rather than targeting third parties. China also urged the Quad to avoid aligning with any particular group and to uphold the principles of openness, inclusiveness, and win-win results. China further emphasized that the Quad should take actions that are conducive to regional peace, stability, and prosperity.

In September 2022, the Foreign Ministers of the Quad met virtually during the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) to sign the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Partnership. The members agreed to coordinate their disaster response efforts in the Indo-Pacific region with other national and international agencies, as well as private non-governmental organizations. During the meeting, the Quad leaders issued a joint statement opposing China's actions that increase tensions. The Quad countries (Japan, India, the United States, and Australia) affirmed their support for the observance of international

law as reflected in the United Nations Convention on the East and South China Sea. They strongly opposed any coercive, provocative, or unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo and escalate tensions. On the eve of the Quad summit, President Biden also launched a new trade agreement with 12 countries in the Indo-Pacific region, aiming to strengthen their economies. According to Biden, the United States is deeply committed to this new initiative and its efforts to secure a positive future for the region. Through the 'Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity' (IPEF), the United States aims to counter China's aggressive trade practices in the region by pursuing strong economic policies.

After their meeting last year, China stated that the Quad was against its interests. It claimed that this was a conspiracy to stop its growing influence and described it as a closed and exclusive group. However, US officials were quoted as saying that the Quad is an informal gathering with no targeted country. The four countries in the Quad - India, America, Japan, and Australia - do not like China at all. They feel that a NATO-like group has formed inside Asia in the form of Quad and that it is part of the US military strategy. China claims that the US formed the Quad on the same lines as NATO, with NATO aiming to contain Russia and the Quad aiming to strategically contain China. It is a coincidence that the four countries involved in this organization have a dispute with China, and its biggest impact is being seen in India-China relations. China considers this organization to be a battle of ideology, with the Quad consisting of democratic systems while having a communist regime. From the beginning, the US has advocated that all countries with democratic values should share a platform, which is why it wants to completely isolate China and Russia based on values and order. NATO and the Quad include countries with similar ideologies and values, and that is why the Quad hurts China more.⁵

Due to China's aggression, the solidarity in neighboring countries is bound to worry China. The Quad organization may put an end to China's expansionist plan. Thirteen countries in the Indo-Pacific region have united with India, Japan, America, and Australia to surround China. In the midst of the India-China border dispute, the Quad has put China in further worry. China has been an opponent of this group. After their meeting last year, China stated that the Quad was clearly an attempt to target its growing influence in the region and described it as a closed and exclusive group. However, US officials were quoted as saying the Quad was an "informal gathering" with no targeted country. On 3 March 2023, a meeting of foreign ministers of the Quad countries was held in Delhi. In this meeting, the commitment of this quad group towards a free and open Indo-Pacific region was reiterated.

Conclusion

The findings of this chapter confirm that India urgently needs effective solutions. The long-standing imbalances in the Indo-Pacific, which have driven the Quad's policy to promote it, are giving it a different direction. To address this lingering strategic imbalance, India needs to may it continue to do so in a sustainable manner and focus more on maritime security than anything else, as well as lay great emphasis on the security of its continental borders. On the other hand, India should be careful not to let security concerns overpower the country's economic needs. The study confirms that India's shift towards the Indo-Pacific region is a rebalancing of strategic and economic concerns aimed at meeting its current security policy and bridging the growing trade deficit it is experiencing with East Asian countries.

In fact, the Quad has emerged as one of the most important multilateral groupings of the 21st century. Much analysis has been dedicated to examining the failure of the Quad during its initial period. However,

⁵ Thakur R: China as the godfather of Quad 2.0. The Strategist. 20 July. 2020; (accessed 20 September 2021).

the issue was not its fundamental purpose, goals, or membership, but instead, its timing. At the time of its inauguration in 2007, China was actively promoting a soft power approach, whereas the four democracies were grappling with achieving consensus within their countries and with external forces regarding the nature of the threat presented by China, and the appropriate measures to counter it. Its first iteration came to a halt early in 2008, precisely when a more self-assured Chinese posturing manifested. Presently, the Quad has resurfaced, given that its justification is more compelling than it was ten years ago, particularly concerning India, previously perceived as the alliance's weakest component. Over the last decade, India's fears of China have mounted, while its confidence in the other democracies has grown.

The growing relevance of the Indo-Pacific with the formation of this quad group can be seen in the fact that the formation of a cluster among the countries will not only strengthen bilateral and business relations in terms of trade and commerce, but also promote people-to-people relations between the countries. The contact of will also increase. China's 'One Belt One Road' initiative and India's 'Act East Policy' aim to develop infrastructure and connectivity for the countries. Therefore, there is a need to integrate both these initiatives for growth. India and China should renounce hostilities in the region and cooperate to bring about peace and harmony. It will strengthen compliance with international rules and resolve territorial disputes. For this, China will have to adopt a policy of not breaking any international law so that the effect of its expansionist policy is not reflected on the small country. In this way, through mutual dialogue and diplomatic relations, the Indo-Pacific strategy can be made successful in the future and only through such efforts can peace and stability be established in the Indo-Pacific region. This is the main reason for the existence of the Quad concept because through the Quad these countries want to establish a balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region and promote world peace.

It is in this context that the Balance of Power doctrine supports our understanding of the current security framework in the Indo-Pacific. The rise of China and its competition with other major powers such as the United States, India, Japan and Australia have led these other powers to view China as a threat to their own security. Therefore, as stated under the framework of balance of power, nations will balance against a power which is considered to be a threat to their security. In the current situation, the United States regards China as a major strategic competitor, as highlighted in the Strategic Committee Act of 2021. China's growing power projection capabilities have also had a huge impact within Indian security and strategic circles, which see China's rise. The recent border conflicts exemplify this perception of the impact on India's security and the growing power competition with China. The current competition in Sino-Australian relations has also strained bilateral relations. Sino-Japanese relations have also been strained by the ongoing territorial dispute regarding the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea. Therefore, the balance of power theory in the Indo-Pacific is centered around the rise of China and its security implications for other major powers. Under these circumstances, the Quad re-emerges to support the structural framework of the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific.

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