



An Indian Perspective on the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD)

OE Watch Commentary: On 6 October, the foreign ministers of India, Japan, Australia and the United States met in Tokyo as part of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or QUAD—an informal strategic forum. As the accompanying passage in *Swarajyamag*, an Indian monthly print magazine, reports, the QUAD was initiated in 2007, but was mostly inactive until November 2017, when it was resurrected “to counter China’s growing influence over the South China Sea, its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), debt-trap diplomacy and expansionism.” The magazine, which reports favorably on the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, featured an article that discussed the pros and cons of the QUAD from an Indian perspective.

The article starts out by providing some background of the group, noting that it has faced criticism over its lack of formal structure. It points out that there have been calls for institutionalization, to formalize the group as a formidable anti-China bloc. It notes that India has historically been hesitant to explicitly define its “anti-China associations,” but the recent border confrontations at Ladakh gives it reason to reconsider the benefits of such formalization.

The article then briefly describes how each member state “has faced the heat of China’s increased aggression” in recent years: trying to influence Australia’s domestic policies and imposing punitive tariffs on the country; engaging in the border confrontation with India; and flaring up territorial disputes with Japan regarding the Senkaku Islands. And with the United States, the article notes China “is battling a fully-fledged trade war.” Meanwhile, it also points out that China has exported a deadly virus to the world and refused to take responsibility. Therefore, the article argues that the resurrected QUAD has greater potential because the four member countries have “greater grudges against the dragon than they did during QUAD 1.0.”

The article points out how the recent meeting did not yield a common statement, but rather each country issued individual statements, with the United States being the only country “to specifically call out the Chinese Communist Party.” It points out, “The United States is keen on institutionalizing the QUAD and wants to shape it on the lines of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), an Asian NATO of sorts. It seeks to militarize the alliance.”

From an Indian perspective, the author claims there is much to be gained in cementing military ties with the QUAD, writing, “such an alliance would be a useful counter to China’s string of pearls and its all-weather friendship with Pakistan.” On the other hand, he writes that the present structure, “or rather the lack of one has its own benefits. It allows India significant diplomatic posturing without negating the scope of de-escalation with China.” The Indian Foreign Minister’s opening comments during the meeting signaled “India’s desire to keep out external interference in its bilateral matters.” Furthermore, the author writes that the loose, informal structure prevents the QUAD from becoming a closed, exclusive club; and enables it to have external participation, noting for example, a teleconference regarding the coronavirus pandemic between the QUAD and New Zealand, South Korea and Vietnam. Overall, the author appears to favor the QUAD as “a geostrategic vision and a foreign policy instrument for India to balance China via global networking,” rather than a formalized anti-China alliance. **End OE Watch Commentary (Kaya)**



Secretary Pompeo Participates in the US Australia Japan Strategic Dialogue, 2019.
Source: U.S. Department of State from United States, via Wikimedia Commons, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Secretary_Pompeo_Participates_in_the_US_Australia_Japan_Strategic_Dialogue_\(48430172021\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Secretary_Pompeo_Participates_in_the_US_Australia_Japan_Strategic_Dialogue_(48430172021).jpg), Public domain

“QUAD is, through its intent, a label, a geostrategic vision and a foreign policy instrument for India to balance China via global networking.”



Continued: An Indian Perspective on the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD)

Source: “Here are the Profits and Pitfalls for India if we Formalize an Anti-China Bloc,” *Swarajyamag.com*, 16 October 2020. <https://swarajyamag.com/world/quad-here-are-the-profits-and-pitfalls-for-india-if-we-formalise-an-anti-china-bloc>

On 6 October, the foreign ministers of India, Japan, Australia and the United States met in Tokyo amidst the coronavirus pandemic as part of their continued efforts to revive the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or QUAD.

This grouping of four democracies was revived in 2017 to counter China’s growing influence over the South China Sea. The dragon’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), debt-trap diplomacy and expansionism are concerns that have led to fairly regular interactions between the member states both in 2018 and 2019.

However, despite renewed efforts, the QUAD has faced criticism over its lack of formal structure. There have been calls for institutionalization, a formal agreement to transform the group into a formidable anti-China bloc. While India has been historically hesitant over explicitly defining its anti-China associations, the recent border confrontations at Ladakh give us enough cause to reassess the profits and pitfalls of such formalization.

... Each member state has faced the heat of China’s increased aggression. China has grown in might and influence and is keen on picking up fights. After attempting to influence Australia’s domestic policies, it slapped punitive tariffs on the country. It is engaged in what has become a routine border confrontation with India. China has flared up territorial disputes with Japan with regards to the Senkaku Islands and is battling a fully-fledged trade war with the United States. It has exported a deadly virus to the world and has refused to take responsibility for the pandemic. The four countries today have greater grudges against the dragon than they did during QUAD 1.0. Therefore, the reincarnated QUAD has greater potential.

The recent Tokyo meet saw the iteration for a “free and open Indo-Pacific” however, what was also displayed was a lack of commitment. There was no joint statement, instead each country issued individual statements. Amidst oblique references, America was the sole country to specifically call out the Chinese Communist Party.

The QUAD is often called a coalition without commitment. It, in its present form, is nebulous without a structure or a secretariat. The United States is keen on institutionalizing the QUAD and wants to shape it on the lines of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), an Asian NATO of sorts. It seeks to militarize the alliance.

The Indian Perspective

So far the QUAD has operated in the realm of strategic dialogue, white paper iterations and occasional military drills. As Japan and Australia already have military alliances with the United States, the success of formalization hinges on India’s participation. Delhi has been cautious in its approach. It has much to gain in cementing its military ties. Such an alliance would be a useful counter to China’s string of pearls and its all-weather friendship with Pakistan.

Steps have already been taken to further cooperation in this regard. India has conducted joint exercises and maritime drills in the Indian Ocean with Japan and the US. India, Japan and the US are part of the annual Malabar Military Exercise, and India is planning to extend Australia an invite — a move it earlier held off out of fear of antagonizing China.

Apart from military gains, institutionalization through mutual assistance treaties can provide clear geostrategic goals.

However, the present structure or rather the lack of one has its own benefits. It allows India significant diplomatic posturing without negating the scope of de-escalation with China.

Delhi has recognized QUAD’s potential as demonstrated by Foreign Minister S Jaishankar’s opening remark at the Tokyo meet: “The fact that we are meeting here today in person despite a global pandemic is a testimony to the importance that these consultations have gained, particularly in recent times.”

However, his veiled references to China and the QUAD falling shy of collectively naming the dragon signals India’s desire to keep out external interference in its bilateral matters.

The loose structure also prevents the QUAD from becoming a closed exclusive club. It accommodates the interests of the member states while providing for incipient expansion and multilateralism.

For example, in March this year, a teleconference regarding the coronavirus pandemic with the QUAD members saw the participation of New Zealand, South Korea and Vietnam. This allows India to use the platform to enhance engagement with not just stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific region but also amongst countries world over that regard China as a global threat.

Additionally, the QUAD has served the function of taking off the heat from the diplomatic networking India has performed on the sidelines. India has successfully upped its bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral engagements with members of the QUAD in terms of both defense and trade partnerships.

QUAD is, through its intent, a label, a geostrategic vision and a foreign policy instrument for India to balance China via global networking. When a tipping point is reached, it provides scope for the forging of an alliance amongst the world’s most formidable militaries. Until then, the QUAD’s future as a platform for multilateral engagement is secure.