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Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD)

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This article is based on "[Quad in the Spotlight](#)" which was published in The Indian Express on 7/12/2019. It talks about the various dimensions of Quad and its implication on Quad-China relations.

Recently, the high level senior official meeting of Quad nations was concluded in Bangkok (Thailand) on the margins of East Asia Summit on 4th November.

In past some time, differences among the **Quad countries** seem to have narrowed down.

There are also common references to the creation of a **free, open and inclusive regional architecture, rules of the road, freedom of navigation and over-flight, and, ASEAN centrality**.

Quad

- **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)** is the informal strategic dialogue between India, USA, Japan and Australia with a shared objective to ensure and support a **"free, open and prosperous" Indo-Pacific region**.
- The idea of Quad was first mooted by **Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007**. However, the idea couldn't move ahead with Australia pulling out of it, apparently due to Chinese pressure.
- In December 2012, Shinzo Abe again floated the concept of Asia's **"Democratic Security Diamond"** involving Australia, India, Japan and the US to safeguard the maritime commons from the Indian Ocean to the western Pacific.
- In November 2017, India, the US, Australia and Japan gave shape to the long-pending "Quad" Coalition to develop a new strategy to keep the critical sea routes in the Indo-Pacific free of any influence (especially China).

Quad Nations and China

- **USA:** USA had followed a policy to contain China's increasing influence in East Asia. Therefore, USA sees the coalition as an opportunity to regain its influence in the Indo-Pacific region.
 - The US has described China, along with Russia, as a **strategic rival** in its National Security Strategy, National Defence Strategy and the Pentagon's report on Indo-Pacific Strategy.
- **Australia:** Australia is concerned about China's growing interest in its land, infrastructure and politics, and influence on its universities.
 - Taking into account its overwhelming economic dependence on China for prosperity, Australia has continued its commitment to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with China.
- **Japan:** In the last decade, Japan has expressed concerns related to China's territorial transgression in the region.
 - Trade volume with China remains the key lifeline to the Japanese economy, where net exports contributed exactly **one-third of Japan's economic growth** since the beginning of 2017.
 - Therefore, considering its importance, Japan is balancing its economic needs and territorial concerns with China
 - Japan has also agreed to involve in the **Belt and Road Initiative** by participating in infrastructure programs in third country. In this way, Japan can mitigate Chinese influence in those countries while improving relations with China.
- **India:** In recent years, China's violation of international norms, particularly its construction of military facilities on reclaimed islands in the South China Sea, and its growing military and economic power, pose a strategic challenge to India.
 - Considering China's strategic importance, India is carefully balancing China on one hand and the US on the other, by remaining committed to **strategic autonomy to China**, which has generally proved reassuring to China.
 - India has also **not permitted Australia** to participate in **Malabar Trilateral Maritime exercises** between India, US and Japan, concerned about what message it would send to China, which is wary of the exercise.
 - The recent **Mamallapuram summit** between President Xi Jinping and PM Modi is a positive development, valued by both sides as key to giving strategic guidance to stakeholders on both sides.

Challenges

- **China's Territorial Claims:** China claims that it has historical ownership over nearly the entire region of South China Sea, which gives it the right to manufacture islands. However, the International Court of Arbitration rejected the claim in 2016.
- **China's Closeness to ASEAN:** The ASEAN countries also have a well-knit relationship with China. The Regional Cooperation Economic Partnership (RCEP) is a recent example of China's increasing influence over ASEAN nations.

- **Economic Power of China:** Considering the economic might of China and the dependence of Quad nations like Japan and Australia on China, the Quad nations cannot afford to have strained relations with it.
- **Convergence among Quad Nations:** The nations in the Quad grouping have different aspirations, aims at balancing their own interest. Therefore, coherence in the vision of Quad nation as a grouping is absent.

Way Forward

- The Quad will need to have a clearer vision for itself. It is important for members of the Quad not to be reactive. It is also important to exhibit openness, and ensure that all talk of a '**Free and Open Indo-Pacific**' is more than just a mere slogan.
- India, Japan, and Australia can take the lead in infrastructural projects, while the US too needs to be more pro-active in pushing ahead the vision of connectivity.
- The Quad should focus on building a robust regional consultation mechanism and coordinate with ASEAN nations on issues of regional importance.
- The Quad framework derives its geopolitical validation from India's association and presents a unique opportunity for India to be an active participant in shaping regional security architecture with global undertones.

Drishti Input:

In the phase of rising uncertainty in geo-politics, examine the relevance and implications of Quad grouping.