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The Big Picture: India's Vision for Indo- Pacific

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Why in News?

The Russian Foreign Minister has described New Delhi as an "object" of the West's "persistent, aggressive, and devious" policy against China in the Indo-Pacific. The Russian Minister has also criticised QUAD.

Key Points

- In response to Russia, India has clarified that it has always pursued an independent foreign policy based on its national interest
Its relationship with each country is independent of its relationship with the third country.

- The Prime Minister during **Shangri La dialogue** marked, “India does not see Indo-Pacific as a strategy or a club of limited members or as a grouping that seeks to dominate others”.
- The QUAD, still in its fledgling phase, has the potential to emerge as one of strongest unions.
- China for a very long time has been concerned about expanding its power and asserting its control and has started exercising its power and dominance.
- The ASEAN countries are dependent mainly on China as most of them share borders with the country.

The Shangri-La Dialogue:

- The Shangri-La Dialogue is **Asia's premier defence summit**.
It is an inter-governmental security forum held annually by an London-based independent think tank, the **International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)**.
- In this unique meeting, ministers debate the region’s most pressing security challenges, engage in important bilateral talks and come up with fresh solutions together.
- It was launched for the first time in **2002** at the Shangri-La Hotel in **Singapore**.

India’s Relations with Russia

- **India and Russia** share a very close strategic relationship.
In terms of defence equipment, defence purchases and development of the defence platform, it is not just a buyer-seller relationship but India is also manufacturing these defence equipment.
- In the Nuclear energy sector, Russia is the only country with whom India has a civil-nuclear technology cooperation.
- Russia is the only country which has installed nuclear power plants in India, the first 3 units of these plants installed in **Kudankulam town** (Tamil Nadu) are already functioning.
Six more units are expected to come up in Andhra Pradesh.
- Although both the countries share good relations, the interests of Russia lie with China.

India’s Stand

- **Prime Minister in the Shangri-La dialogue** held that Indo-Pacific Region is neither a strategy, nor a club of limited members directed against any country but a pure geographical construct.

- It is to ensure a free, open and inclusive region in which countries both inside and outside (countries who have stakes in this region) the Indo-Pacific region would participate.
- India has been trying to explain to Russia the basic cause that is to ensure that in the global commons of this region, there should be freedom of navigation, resolution of disputes through dialogue and an international law to regulate all the activities.

China as a Threat to the World

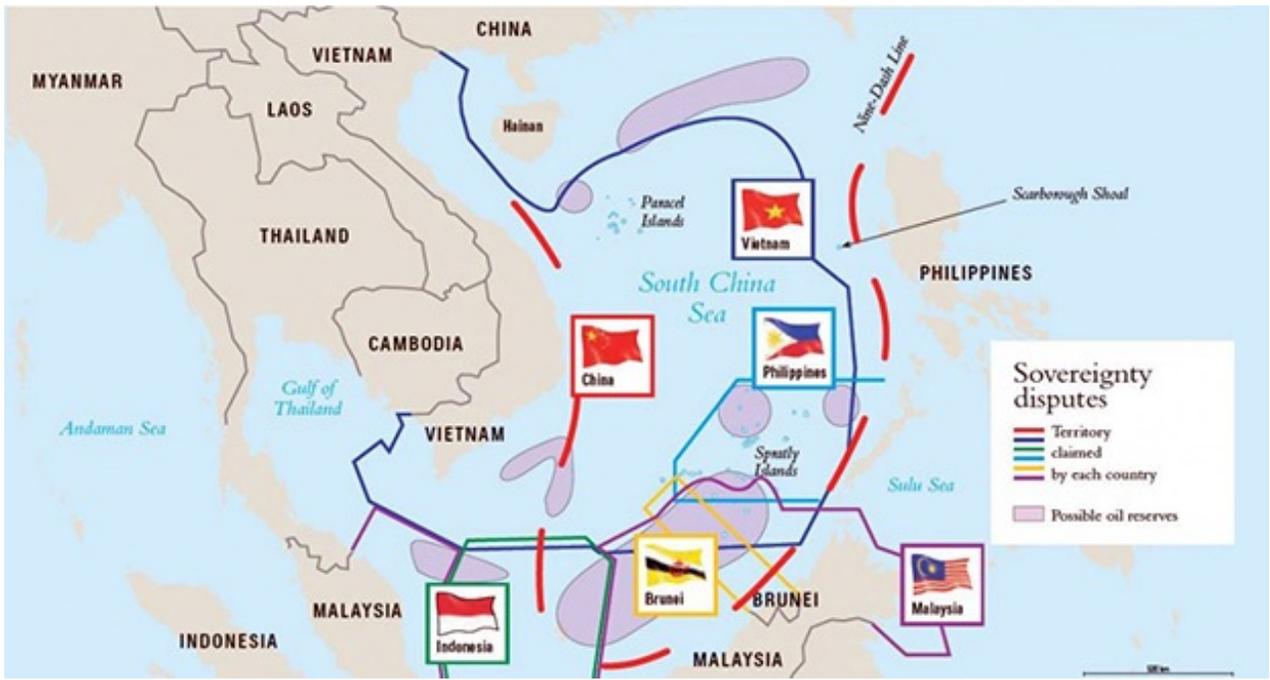
- **Chinese Expansion Instinct:** Chinese are always trying to perceive a shift in balance of power.
 - China has always adopted policies for its unilateral expansion of power like in the South China Sea, the **Galwan Valley Clash** or the **Hong-Kong National Security Law**.
 - China has been flexing its muscles, with its **nine dash line policy** claiming 90% of the south china sea, exercising its control and domination, in terms of ships, overflights, east china sea and Taiwan straits.
- **Weaponizing supply chains:** China has also been weaponizing its supply chains. China has refused to supply PPE kits, the ventilators or any kind of assistance to countries that even suggested that the **Coronavirus** emerged in China.
- **ASEAN countries and China:** Most of the **ASEAN** countries share borders with China and it is obvious for China to exercise control over them.

This is where the Quad comes into play.

The policies of Quad have to be made effective, otherwise other smaller countries will not see it really in their interest to go along with it.

Nine-dash Line

The '**nine-dash line**' stretches hundreds of kilometers south and east of its southerly Hainan Island, covering the strategic **Paracel and Spratly island** chains. China buttresses its claims by citing 2,000 years of history when the two island chains were regarded as its integral parts.



Role of Quad

- The **QUAD** is the grouping of four democracies –India, Australia, the US, and Japan.
- Currently, it is still in a fledgling phase and a clearer image of what it will evolve to is yet to obtain. But a few improvements within the group are taking place in recent times.

In 2017, when the QUAD came into position, the level of performance in terms of meetings and defining agenda was not up to the mark.

There has been an increased participation from all the four countries, they have declared several issues as their agenda of the meeting such as the pandemic, economic recovery, connectivity, infrastructure, cyber security, etc.

- The Quad is believed to have the potential to go from a very loose structure organisation to a very cohesive structure organisation in a very short span of time.

Way Forward for QUAD

- **Geographical limit:** QUAD should define the limits of Indo-Pacific region.
All four member countries have different notions of this geographical region.
- **Common agenda:** Make a common agenda.
At this point of time, the Quad does not have an agenda so it should frame an agenda and completely stick to it.

- **Military component + Economic component:** There has to be a military component to act against the coercive activities of China.
Putting the military component and the economic component together will help QUAD emerge as a very strong alliance as without military muscle all other fields cannot be excelled.
- **Unified strategy at world level:** Bringing in contact the countries like Germany, France and the UK will eventually bring ASEAN nations on board too.
- **Hedging strategy:** ASEAN needs to hedge itself with Quad against China.
Unless these countries have someone else to hedge over with they will continue to go with whatever is available, i.e., China.

Way forward

- **India's maritime space:** India must have the **Indian Ocean Region (IOR)** as its priority. Currently, it doesn't have any navy that can assert itself to distant seas.
 - However, in coordination with other navies like the US Navy, the Royal Navy (UK) and the French Navy, India can participate in the exercises out of the Indian Ocean Area.
 - Also India's navy's share in the defence budget has come down from 18% to 14%. If India wants to emerge as a global power, then it must invest in its navy and strengthen it.
- **Help for small nations:** Smaller countries in the IOR must be on India's top list and it must ensure that these nations are dependent on India only for their security.
 - India should be their preferred security partner.
 - India should also ensure that they do not have to look beyond India with regard to meeting their traditional & non-traditional needs.
 - India should not allow China to have an opportunity to come in between India and these small nations.
- **QUAD's military muscle:** QUAD must have its military muscle to accomplish other areas but it should not be brought to front, it should be kept in the back burner.

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR)

- The IOR consists of the Indian Ocean and several countries and seas around the ocean including India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Madagascar, Australia, Somalia, the United Arab Emirates, Tanzania and Yemen.

- The Indian Ocean region has 30 straits and channels in and adjoining the Indian Ocean. few of them are:
 - **Bab-el-Mandeb** (between South Yemen and Djibouti);
 - **Bass Strait** (between Australian continent and Tasmania);
 - **Strait of Hormuz** (between Iran and Oman);
 - **Lombok, Bali, Sunda and Makassar Straits** (in the Indonesian archipelago)
 - **Singapore Strait** (between Singapore and Riau island of Indonesia)
 - **Malacca Strait** (between Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore)
 - **Mozambique channel** (between Mozambique and Malagasy Republic.

Conclusion

The anti-China sentiment exists at a global level but the world hasn't actually done anything concrete to take on China and that is the biggest problem.

- Time has come for an overly aggressive China to be addressed holistically. The Quad has to be made more effective by militarising it and framing a common agenda.
- Also bringing other like minded countries in the frame and expanding the network of quad and make it more stronger.