



QUAD: First Summit

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This article is based on **“The rationale and future of Quad”** which was published in The Hindustan Times on 14/03/2021. It talks about the significance of the recently concluded Quad Summit.

Recently, the leaders of the **four nations of Quad grouping** met digitally for the first-ever virtual summit-level meeting. The outcomes announced by leaders of Quad countries include a vaccine initiative and joint working groups to cooperate on critical technology as well as climate change.

Apart from it, the joint statement of the meeting called for “The Spirit of the Quad” and commitment to an open Indo-Pacific “free from coercion”.

In widening the forum’s focus away from military security and towards the provision of public goods in the vast Indo-Pacific littoral, the first summit of the Quad has improved its own long-term political prospects.

Therefore, countering any perception that the Quad is merely a “talk-shop”, the summit contained both broad substance and deep symbolism.

Significance of Quad Summit

- **America is Back Policy:** For the US, the early push for the Quad engagement is part of Joe Biden’s promise that “America is back” in terms of global leadership, reaffirming regional alliances, and taking on the growing challenge from China.
Earlier, Biden at the Munich Security Conference tried to win back European allies such as Germany, France, and the United Kingdom, by proposing a transatlantic alliance to counter China.

- **Maritime Concerns of Japan & Australia:** Due to maritime tensions with China, trade, and telecommunication issues, Australia and Japan are keen on taking the Quad partnership to deeper levels of cooperation.
 - Quad partners such as Japan and Australia were unhappy over India's decision to stay out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.
 - If Quad emerges as an economic powerhouse, it will be beneficial to the entire region.
- **Broadening India's Geopolitical Horizons:** For India, the new terms of the Quad will mean more strategic support after a tense year at the LAC with China.
 - It will also provide a boost for India's pharmaceutical prowess, opportunities for technology partnerships, and more avenues for regional cooperation on development projects and financing infrastructure.
 - India's insistence on an inclusive approach was in keeping with the sentiments of many smaller countries in the region, which may not take an explicit anti-China position.
 - This could also pave the way for India to become the manufacturing destination for Quad countries, thus reducing dependence on China.
- **New Narrative for the Quad:** Quad member countries took the decision to pool their resources (American technology, Japanese finance, Indian production capacity, and Australia's logistics capability) to produce a billion doses of Covid-19 vaccine for distribution in the Indo-Pacific.
 - Further, the Quad countries agreed to ensure emissions reduction based on the Paris accord as well as cooperate on technology supply chains, 5G networks, and biotechnology.
 - This would help the four countries develop a new narrative for the Quad.

Associated Issues With the Quad

- **RECP Operationalization:** For Japan and Australia, China remains the biggest trading partner, a relationship that will only grow once the 15-nation RCEP gets operationalized.

In this context, it would be difficult for Quad members countries like Japan and Australia to strategically align with the US and India.
- **India's Reservations:** India, given its own ties with China, sensitivities over ongoing LAC disengagement talks, and its other multilateral commitments at the BRICS and SCO groupings, also displayed caution in the Quad engagement.
- **Anti-China Rhetoric:** Since the first steps towards the Quad's construction in 2007, China has sought to define the regional discourse by describing the forum as the "Asian NATO" and the harbinger of a "new Cold War".

The conflation of the Quad with the annual Malabar naval exercises added to the image of the Quad as a military formation and generated much unease across the Indo-Pacific.

Way Forward

- **Need For Clear Vision:** The Quad nations need to better explain the Indo-Pacific Vision in an overarching framework with the objective of advancing everyone's economic and security interests.

This will reassure the littoral States that the Quad will be a factor for the regional benefit, and a far cry from Chinese allegations that it is some sort of a military alliance.
- **Expanding Quad:** India has many other partners in the Indo-Pacific, therefore India should pitch for countries like Indonesia, Singapore to be invited to join in the future.
- **Need for a Maritime Doctrine:** India should develop a comprehensive vision on the Indo-Pacific which would ideate on the current and future maritime challenges, consolidate its military and non-military tools, engage its strategic partners.
- **Recalibration Needed From China:** As the Quad summit has done well to shed the image of Anti-China bias, it is up to China now to rethink its current aggressive policies and seek cooperative relations with its Asian neighbors and the US.

Conclusion

The challenges posed by the pandemic presented a perfect setting for the Quad nations to demonstrate their commitment to the broader agenda that is in tune with the urgent requirements of the region.

In this context, the repurposing of the Quad to deal with shared challenges in the Indo-Pacific ensures the forum's political sustainability over the longer term.

Drishti Mains Question

Development, deterrence, and diplomacy should be the way forward for Quad. Discuss.