



A Quantum Leap for the Quad

The Quad countries need to expand the breadth and depth of their cooperation to ensure a stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific region. The recent geo-political developments have made the need for such enhanced cooperation even more urgent. Going forward, the Quad countries should adopt a flexible approach towards their engagements with each other. The Quad should explore opportunities to work together in economic cooperation, infrastructure development, combating climate change, and digital technologies.

The Working Groups announced that climate and emerging technologies are a good beginning. Greater cooperation on non-security fronts will signal the Quad's intent for positive, solution-oriented collaborations and offer avenues for practical collaboration with visible impacts. This will help dispel perceptions of the Quad being only a coalition of maritime democracies that have come together to counterbalance a rising China. The Quad should also fully leverage its democratic credentials to work with other like-minded countries in all these areas.

Introduction

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (“Quad”), comprising Australia, India, Japan and the US has taken centre stage in global geopolitics. Led by a shared vision of a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region, the Quad and its like-minded partners are key stakeholders in international relations today.

The Quad countries are home to over 1.8 billion people and four out of the world's 12 largest economies, with a wide maritime presence and shared democratic values. First brought together by a natural disaster (the grouping was originally conceived [to coordinate humanitarian response](#) efforts after the 2004 Indian Ocean

tsunami), the Quad has had to retreat, reinvent and redefine its role to sync with the evolving regional and global strategic landscape. That it has been able to do so relatively successfully is its biggest strength.

Expanding Cooperation

In line with this approach, it is now an opportune moment for the Quad to reaffirm cooperation in existing spheres and expand its influence into new areas of cooperation, particularly in economic relations and digital issues. By extending its reach into new areas of cooperation, the Quad will also effectively counter the prevailing narrative of the grouping being an

“[Asian NATO](#)” or an alliance primarily designed to rein in a rising China.

A full spectrum engagement including new areas will also provide more scope for practical cooperation with real impacts, such as the proposed [Quad vaccine initiative](#) promises to do. Therefore, the proposed [Quad Climate Working Group and the Quad Critical and Emerging Technology Working Group](#) are steps in the right direction.

The Quad should also facilitate collaboration between the civil society organisations of the Indo-Pacific region as well as between the business and industry.



Back to Beginnings, in a Changed World

The Quad countries first came together in the face of a major natural disaster and responded with resolute and effective action. Their collaborative efforts made a difference and brought a real impact on people's lives in the affected region.

Today, the world has changed beyond recognition since the Quad's first cooperative endeavours in the post-tsunami context. In just the past two years, the world has already witnessed global devastation caused by a once-in-a-century pandemic, the destructive effects of climate change, a further retreat from commitments to multilateralism, and the recent collapse of a

democratic Afghanistan into the hands of the unruly Taliban.

With multiple challenges that adaptable and effective transnational cooperation mechanisms can only tackle in today's dynamic geo-political landscape, the Quad countries must rediscover their original spirit and redouble commitment to work together.

Origins and Early Hesitations

The Quad countries first jointly coordinated with each other in the [Tsunami Core Group](#) to contribute to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) activities after the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami in December 2004. These were complemented by early indications of expanding maritime ties between the countries in the form of joint naval exercises in the same year.

In 2007, the Quad countries undertook an exploratory meeting to deliberate avenues for further cooperation in HADR activities. An essential aspect of the Quad in its earliest avatar was the central role of individual personalities towards ideating a future for the project, most notably that of Shinzo Abe, the then Japanese Prime Minister.

Yet, by 2008, it was evident that the Quad countries' strategic reluctance to engage in broader and deeper discussions at the highest levels. Domestic political constraints compounded this in each Quad country, which ensured that taking any ideas on expanding Quad cooperation forward at that stage would not be politically viable.

Resurrection and a Natural Coming Together

Around a decade later, in 2017, various geo-political developments gave the Quad renewed vitality, and the strategic reluctance from a decade

ago gradually began to be shed. Each of the four Quad countries realised two things.

First, it became clear that their ties with China were undergoing a fundamental reset – there was no guarantee that the Chinese would operate within the contours of a rules-based global order. Frictions emerged on the maritime, economic, technological and strategic fronts. The Chinese actions of economic coercion [against Australia](#) threatening postures in the South China Sea and a tough stance on the [Senkaku](#) islands dispute with Japan raised the alarm. The US-China strategic rivalry was getting further entrenched, with significant trade frictions and technology disputes. Meanwhile, India faced fresh Chinese aggression in its [border areas](#) and diplomatic posturing on vital Indian strategic interest issues, such as Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) membership.

Second, the Quad countries recognised that emphasising a shared democratic values-based cooperative mechanism could lend significantly more diplomatic heft to countering an authoritarian rival. These two factors combined to create a paradigm shift, and the Quad was recognised by its members for its importance as a natural alliance where these two aspects converged.

Attitudes towards the Quad

Since 2017, the Quad has attracted renewed interest from both the international community and strategic commentators. One question often raised is the need for such a grouping when there were already multiple [pre-existing avenues](#) of cooperation between the Quad countries in bilateral and trilateral formats. However, such questions fail to consider the fact that such natural alliances can offer the region more than the sum of their parts.

Going forward, an important part of the Quad's efforts will be dispelling misunderstandings about the framing of the grouping and the nature of Quad collaboration. While certain notions will be difficult to dispel - China clearly considers the grouping as a part of the US-led containment strategy to hold back its strides in strategic domains. The Russian Foreign Minister had earlier indirectly categorised the Quad grouping as an "[Asian NATO](#)", - the Quad can still work on signalling intent to the larger international community.

Its future work programme, particularly the initiatives on climate change and emerging technologies, will be beneficial in signalling the positive nature of Quad cooperation. It will be prudent for the Quad to continue to emphasise to concerned regional and global strategic players that the Quad does not exist only to contain other powers but instead seeks to focus on solution-oriented cooperation to deal with the main global challenges of our time.

2+2 dialogues as a medium to strengthen the bonding

With the India-Australia 2+2 dialogue moving to [ministerial level](#), the growing bilateral relations among the Quad countries are evident. The bilateral 2+2 dialogues between members of the Quad helps in growing stronger bonding through official channels, thereby leading to the growth of relations beyond the objectives of the Quad.



Along with strengthening the bonds between members, the 2+2 dialogues give chances to iron out the existing differences among the Quad member countries. Therefore, the Quad countries have to regularise the bilateral 2+2 ministerial dialogues among them and use the mechanism fruitfully to strengthen their partnership in multiple areas of importance. Bilateral dialogues among the Quad countries should also involve civil society organisations and business groups as key stakeholders.

Scope of Growing beyond the Security Dialogue

The emerging geo-political and geo-economic situation suggests that it is the right time for the Quad to go beyond the security-related arrangement in the Indo-Pacific region. As a solid and influential group in the Indo-Pacific region, there is a pressing need for the Quad countries to cooperate within and with other countries in the region to tackle challenges faced by the region. It will consequently bring peace and prosperity in the region. The Quad countries can expand their cooperation to certain focus areas, which are listed below:

a) *Enhanced Trade and Wider Economic Cooperation*

There is a persuasive case for the Quad countries to increase their cooperation in trade, investment and more significant economic partnership to emerge stronger from the economic turmoil of the COVID-19 pandemic in the region. For example, if the four countries of the Quad can sign a trade agreement by scrapping all the bilateral tariffs, it will help the four countries to [increase](#) their real gross domestic product (GDP) and exports:

Table 1: Increase in Real GDP and Exports, through Scrapping of Bilateral Tariffs				
Indicator/Country	Australia	India	Japan	US
Increase in Real GDP (per year)	0.11%	0.23%	0.05%	0.01%
Increase in Exports (per year)	1.27%	2.4%	0.58%	0.56%

Source: Rahman et al. (2020). Indo-Pacific cooperation: what do trade simulations indicate. Journal of Economic Structures. Available from <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40008-020-00222-4>

Removal of tariffs and reduction in non-tariff barriers will lead to a fall in prices, welfare gains, and more employment through the increased trade and income generation. The countries could improve their allocative efficiency, which will lead to an increase in output and production.

Similarly, suppose the four countries in the Quad can work together to increase their bilateral investments and economic cooperation. In that case, it can alter the economic landscape from China-centred economic globalisation to a new one where all members in the region can emerge as beneficiaries.

b) *Infrastructure Development*

The world, especially the global south, expects the Quad to replace the current debt-trap infrastructure development programmes through transparent and rational infrastructure development initiatives that do not have any hidden conditions associated with them. These initiatives should help foster maritime connectivity and trade while attaining holistic development and accelerating economic cooperation.

A collaboration between the overseas development finance wing of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), India's Development Partnership Administration Division under the Ministry of External Affairs

(MEA), Japan's Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and the US' International Development Financial Cooperation (DFC) on developing sustainable infrastructure under the Quad initiative is the need of the hour.

As a multi-stakeholder initiative that brings government, private sector and civil society together to promote high-quality, trusted standards for global infrastructural developments, the [Blue Dot Network](#) could be a guiding point for the Quad initiatives.

c) Combating Climate Change

Combating climate change is one area which the Quad countries should focus on and persuade other countries to join for global well-being. Along with reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the Quad countries should work shoulder to shoulder with other countries in achieving the [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDG\) 2030](#), SDG 7, 11 and 13 targets in particular. Joint research and manufacturing should be fostered in the green technologies and clean energy space.

The partnership of Quad countries has to build clean technologies needed to decarbonise sectors, including industry, transportation, power, agriculture and construction. Alongside, they have to do capacity building which will enhance the capacity to measure, manage, and adapt to the risks of impacts related to climate change. The production capacity of cleaner energy from sources such as solar, green hydrogen and waste-to-energy plants should be scaled-up and should be distributed to other countries.

d) Technological and Digital Cooperation

As four techno-democracies, the Quad countries have to take the lead in building and adopting secure and transparent cutting-edge

technologies, which will lead to global prosperity and the promotion of liberal values advocated by the Quad countries. They have to counter the efforts of authoritarian countries to set the global technology standards at odds to maintain a free, open, and liberal digital order. The four countries should expand their cooperation in critical technologies and explore the opportunities in emerging technologies such as the 6G network to harvest the first-mover advantage.

The Quad countries have to increase their R&D in semi-conductor production. Currently, in short supply, semi-conductors are the foundation of advanced technologies in civilian and military use. Cyber security and safeguards against data breaches are important areas which demand the overarching cooperation of the four Quad countries. Quad cooperation in constructing undersea fibre-optic cables and developing regulatory frameworks for these cables that carry 95 percent of global data is essential.

Along with widening cooperation and collaboration in advanced defense technologies, jointly researching and developing new fintech, space technologies, AI, edu-tech, health-tech, and transportation technologies, including high-speed rail and electric cars, will help the Quad stay more relevant and engaged.



e) Resilient Supply Chains

There is an increased need for the Quad countries to work together in reshaping the supply chain from a China-dominated system, as currently, any tensions between China and any Quad nation can disrupt the supply chain. A Quad-led supply chain built on its member's manufacturing capacities will be effective in building a resilient supply chain network.

The vaccine production and distribution under the Quad initiative will provide the testing ground for a new and resilient supply chain. Vaccines developed by the US, financed by Japan and the US, manufactured in India, and supported by Australia in distribution through logistics and last-mile connectivity, can help bridge the gap in demand and supply of vaccines globally.

Collaborating on rare-earth metals is another requirement to build supply chain resilience. In 2020, 58 percent of the world's rare-earth metals [were produced](#) by China and it has a near-monopoly on the separation and purification of rare earth. The Quad countries need to collaborate in increasing their production of rare earth as these rare-earth metals are crucial for manufacturing computers, smartphones, high-performance motors, electric vehicle batteries, wind turbines, hard-disk drives, laptops, and components of the decarbonisation infrastructure.

Ensuring peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region by protecting the rules-based order is another way the Quad can contribute towards creating resilient supply chains.

Role of Quad in the Coalition of Democracies

The four democracies of the Quad initiative have laid out a common vision about the Indo-Pacific region, one which is based on a rules-based international order. The Quad coalition should

garner support from like-minded countries and fellow democracies to ensure this order in the Indo-Pacific region, where emerging conflicts will be solved through democratic dialogues and peaceful, diplomatic means.

Attempts of authoritarian powers in the region to unilaterally change the status quo, whether through economic coercion or impeding freedom of navigation, should be jointly countered under the leadership of the Quad. The Quad countries can strengthen the ability of other countries to assess, resist and counter external coercion and interference.

The quadrilateral cooperation of the four democracies in the Indo-Pacific will be significant in catalysing a coalition of democracies in the world. As the largest and oldest democracies globally, India and the US, along with Australia and Japan, as market-based economies and pluralistic societies, can jointly counter the rising global threats to democracies.

The four democracies can jointly assist in developing electoral and civil society capacity, provide economic assistance for building democratic institutions, and strengthen democratic processes across the world. As promised, the successful delivery of the Quad's vaccine initiative will be significant in proving that democracies can and will deliver.

Quad Plus

The Quad should maximise outreach to other like-minded democracies such as South Korea, New Zealand, Taiwan, Vietnam and Bangladesh. It can work together with these countries in multiple areas, such as technology, digital sphere, cyber-security, combating climate change, and ensuring a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region.

Apart from holding regular security exercises with countries outside the Quad, the four

countries should also invite like-minded countries as observers to the Quad meetings. Like-minded countries should also be engaged in Quad missions, where the interests are common. Vaccine delivery and combating climate change are areas where the Quad can work with other countries in the region.

After all, the interest of other countries to join the Quad will depend on the implementation of a cohesive economic and military strategy by the Quad nations. It is also important for the four countries to prove that the Quad is not a security arrangement merely targeted against China. Instead, it is a pro-Indo-Pacific alliance with broader economic and security interests in the region. Its primary objective is to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific region that relies on a rules-based international order.

Conclusion

With non-democratic quadrilateral groupings emerging in the Indo-Pacific region, it is important for the democratic Quad of Australia, Japan, India and the US to broaden and strengthen their

common interests, core principles and shared values. Today's dynamic geo-political landscape poses multiple challenges which adaptable and effective transnational cooperation mechanisms can only tackle.

The Quad countries are well-placed to leverage their shared capacities and vision and play an influential role in this regard. The Quad countries must rediscover their original spirit and redouble their commitment to work together. They should also learn from their experience that prolonged hesitations have ill-served their objectives.

The Quad also needs to strike a balance between showing its strategic coherence as a grouping on the one hand, and working with the differences on the other. The way forward for the Quad is clear – maintain a flexible approach, strengthen cooperation in existing domains, further expand the areas of cooperation, and show practical deliverables that improve the lives of the people in the region. These will be firm pillars that can serve as the foundation to achieve Quad's stated objective of realising a free, open, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.

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