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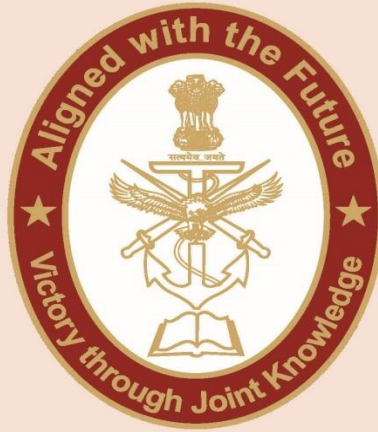
ISSUE BRIEF

QUAD IN THE INDO- PACIFIC: INDIA'S PRISM

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QUAD IN THE INDO-PACIFIC: INDIA'S PRISM



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Abstract

Indo-Pacific, a region that has the potential of changing the world power dynamics is a bone of contention among the most formidable forces in the world. The world's largest economies are in the Indo-Pacific region namely, China, India, Japan, Indonesia, South Korea, Thailand, Australia, Taiwan, Malaysia and Philippines. A tragedy has the potential to form alliances, these alliances continue to be in force but far-reaching changes in the power dynamics is never envisaged. The main purpose behind the formulation of Quad in the Indo-Pacific was concerted efforts towards provision of humanitarian aid in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. The United States of America, Australia, Japan, and India formed a loose alliance known as the Quad, officially recognized as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue.

This paper is an attempt to scrutinize the alliances and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific from India's point of view. New Delhi provides a strategic position for countering and balancing China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region, and as a result, it has taken on a crucial role in the foreign policy of the United States, Australia, and Japan. Several partnerships have been fostered and several agreements have been signed by the Quad members

in order to move towards a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific, however what is in it for India - is the question that this paper seeks to explore.

Background

The Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe made an attempt to formalise the Quad in 2007 and emphasised the value of having a dialogue between like-minded nations in the Asia-Pacific region about issues of mutual interest. Due to the divergent interests of the Quad members at that point, this attempt was unable to be realised, and the Quad remained largely inactive and dormant for more than a decade.¹ At the ASEAN and East Asia Summit meetings in November 2017, the four countries held a noteworthy meeting. Separate announcements were made rather than a single statement, and each one emphasised the same set of objectives: a free and open Indo-Pacific; a rules-based order; freedom of navigation and overflight; and respect for international law and maritime security.² It was in March 2021, that the Quad leaders held their first virtual meeting wherein a joint statement was released by the leaders underscoring their commitment towards a “free, open rules-based order, rooted in international law to advance security and prosperity and counter threats to both in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.”³

China’s increasing assertiveness, expansionist tendencies and regional dominance in the Indo-Pacific region led to the realigning of interests of the Quad. While the interests of the Quad converge on a broader canvas, there are individual battles that each of them are fighting with China. India has deep-rooted concerns about China’s naval operations in the Indian Ocean region; Sino-Indian territorial disputes and border clashes as well as growing Sino-Pakistan ties. Australia is worried about China’s growing influence on Australia’s domestic policy, Chinese acquisition of Australian businesses and China’s increasing activity in the South China Sea.⁴ On its part, Japan shares its concern with Australia over the rise of Chinese militarization in the South China Sea. Meanwhile, the U.S. wants to maintain⁵ strategic primacy in the Indo-Pacific region and promote a liberal economic order while preventing China from establishing illiberal spheres of influence and dominance.

Quad’s Agenda

The Quad’s agenda has been evolving over the years and the convergent interests of the four member countries now include trade, infrastructure, maritime security, health, climate change and emerging technologies.⁶ As much as the Quad is central to enhancing relations between the four member countries, it is also directed towards providing an alternative to

regional states, particularly in the Indo-Pacific, who more often than not get trapped without a choice in China's helm. The Quad however is not a formal alliance and appears to be filling an institutional vacuum in the Indo-Pacific region. It is a loose grouping of like-minded countries that are working towards an issues-based agenda trying to navigate through China's increasing dominance and expansionism in the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific region. While it has forged an image of an evolving coalition of democracies, steadfast on its principles, there will be areas of disagreements between the four countries that will have to be traversed and manoeuvred carefully.

Quad's Vision in the Indo-Pacific

In the Indo-Pacific region, the Quad has adopted a multifaceted strategy with the goal of focusing its efforts on the delivery of COVID-19 vaccinations, humanitarian aid and disaster relief, the environment, maritime security, counterterrorism, cybersecurity, thwarting foreign disinformation campaigns, preventing economic coercion, and setting standards for crucial emerging technologies. While these are the areas of convergence for the Quad where agreements have been signed and partnerships have been forged, the areas where there is reduced semblance is the Russia-Ukraine conflict. New Delhi has been extremely cautious of keeping its engagements with Russia separate from its involvement in any alliance. While India has demonstrated its support for the primacy of international law, the United Nations Charter, and territorial integrity and sovereignty in the aftermath of this crisis, it has maintained trade relations with Russia. It is worth noting that, in recent years, India has come out of its shell when it comes to remaining neutral with China and has shed its hesitancy in standing up to the Chinese in order to protect its own territory, economy, and strategic interests. Recognizing the rise of the Quad's hard power initiatives in the region, as well as India's crumbling relations with China, India will need to renegotiate its Indo-Pacific strategy and collaborate with its Quad partners to build alternate supply chains, minimise its economic reliance on China, build resilient health infrastructure, and strengthen its own R&D system. Quad's current Priorities in the Indo Pacific currently revolve around enhancing cybersecurity, providing the region with public goods, overcoming debt issues, augmenting the IPMDA, meeting the Indo-Pacific's infrastructure needs and building a Quad Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Package.

The "Spirit of the Quad," a joint statement from the presidents of the Quad countries, was released in March 2021. They made a commitment in this declaration to strengthen their support for the Quad and combine their nations' resources in the fields of medicine, science, finance,

manufacturing, delivery, and development. Additionally, they planned to create a working group of vaccine experts to carry out their commitment towards safe and efficient vaccine distribution in the Indo-Pacific region. They also resolved to start a working group focused on crucial and emerging technologies in order to promote collaboration in the development of cutting-edge technologies that meet international standards. The Quad vowed to create a working group on climate change to boost global climate initiatives as part of its commitment to work toward mitigating climate change. Furthermore, they indicated that they hoped to develop alliances through this enhanced participation that would empower the most dynamic region to adapt to historic challenges so that the Indo-Pacific would become a free, open, and diverse region.

India's Engagement with the Quad.

In order to shape India's Indo-Pacific strategy which is now required to be comprehensive and multi-dimensional in nature given India's vision of establishing an economic and military foothold in the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific region and expanding its supply chains, the Ministry of External Affairs set up the Indo-Pacific division. The Indo-Pacific division provides a coherent framework for India's Indo-Pacific vision by integrating the dynamics of the Indian Ocean Rim Association, the ASEAN and the Quad.⁷ Enfolded within its narrative ASEAN's centrality, it is India's Act East Policy which forms the foundation of India's Indo-Pacific⁸ strategy. India is not a notable economic or military player east of the Malacca Straits, but it dominates the western end, perched atop key sea lanes. With its geography, India serves as a propeller and holds a key position in any policy that connects the Pacific and Indian Ocean regions.

Indo-Pacific Visions and Strategies

The members of the Quad have signed several agreements and forged numerous partnerships bilaterally and multilaterally with the Indo-Pacific region at its centre. The key documents that India is a signatory to are the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness, the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement and the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement with the United States of America. Several other key remarks have been made with reference to the Indo-Pacific region in joint statements made by the Quad members and in the defence and economic strategies of the four member nations. Additionally, the ASEAN and significant emerging economies such as the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Germany and France have also presented their outlook and vision towards the Indo-Pacific region. In order to assess India's position in the Indo-Pacific, it is of immense importance to examine New Delhi's

theatre of opportunity within the strategies and visions outlined in these documents.

US Indo-Pacific Strategy

In February 2022, the United States of America unveiled its Indo-Pacific Strategy, which aims to advance its Major Defense Partnership with India and strengthen its position as a security provider. In an effort to encourage the maintenance of regional stability, expand collaboration in the areas of health, space, and cybersecurity, and strengthen economic and technological cooperation, it guaranteed continuous support for India's ascent and regional leadership. It acknowledged India as a like-minded partner and described it as a driving force behind the Quad and a regional leader in South Asia and the Indian Ocean in its statement.⁹ The Indo-Pacific provides India with a platform to leverage partnerships to expand its strategic and security interests. India's collaboration with the Quad members will help in bridging capability gaps while also allowing India to engage with the island nations in the Indo-Pacific which will come to define India's security environment in the region.¹⁰ While the Quad and its vision in the Indo-Pacific brings with itself a picture of strengthened democracies, enhanced economies and advanced military strategies, it is for India to adjudge whether it wants to maintain the Indian Ocean region's position in its foreign policy as its primary maritime priority or expand it to include the Indo-Pacific

The ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific

(AOIP) was proposed at the 34th ASEAN Summit in Thailand in June 2019. It seeks to establish ASEAN's centrality within the evolving Indo-Pacific status quo. While ASEAN does not intend to create a new mechanism, it believes it is important to establish an agenda for Indo-Pacific cooperation among ASEAN member states. There are two important dimensions that require immediate focus from the ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific region: economic cooperation and the maritime domain. The AOIP is currently focusing more on development-oriented issues as compared to security matters. However, with China's increasing assertiveness in the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific region and multiple military footprints, it has become essential for ASEAN to reformulate its Indo-Pacific strategy to include security issues.¹¹ The AOIP is committed towards formulating policies that boost the advancement of an economically open Indo-Pacific region which is the juncture at which the IPEF and AOIP's agenda align thereby showing signs of convergence. As for India, the AOIP acts as a regional understanding in its more comprehensive alliance with the Quad thereafter providing it with a

foundational structure for its foreign policy in its deliberations with the Quad over its Indo-Pacific vision.

India's Vision of the Indo-Pacific

India and the United States of America jointly published a strategic vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean region in 2015. In the statement, they made a commitment to forming a cooperation in order to promote inclusive development from East Asia to Africa. By working together with other interested partners to solve poverty challenges, they highlighted the necessity of enhancing regional connections. The two countries committed to fostering infrastructural connectivity, economic growth, boosting free trade, and strengthening people-to-people ties in order to strengthen regional economic integration. Furthermore, they addressed the security concern by reaffirming their commitment to preserving maritime security and ensuring freedom of navigation and overflight throughout the Asia-Pacific region, particularly in the South China Sea. Given that India's economy is an integral component of the Asian economy, the United States of America applauded India's decision to express interest in joining the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum. They outlined a five-year strategy, pledging to intensify trilateral discussions with other nations, strengthen regional dialogues, look into multilateral involvement prospects in the Asia-Pacific, and focus on areas where peace and prosperity may be achieved in the region.¹²

Prior to the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue speech, New Delhi was cautiously weighing the costs and benefits of pursuing an active foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific, while Canberra, Tokyo, and Washington had already established their perspectives on the region, emphasising New Delhi's role in the evolving geopolitical architecture. India was attempting to strike a balance between its engagements with the United States and China, while also developing a new strategy to counter China's growing dominance in the Indian Ocean, Indo-Pacific, and Southeast Asian region.

In his address at the Shangri La Dialogue in 2018, Prime Minister Narendra Modi outlined India's vision for the Indo-Pacific and defined the geographic boundaries of the Indo-Pacific as being stretched from the shores of Africa to that of the Americas. Four significant ideas were underscored in the Prime Minister's speech each of which provides a policy framework of its own. First, it was laid down that partnerships and collaborations in the Indo-Pacific are imperative to establish a common rules-based order, freedom of navigation, unimpeded commerce and settlement of disputes in accordance with international law. India proposed shifting its policy framework away from isolation and toward active engagement in the Indo-Pacific region. Second, while expressing its

willingness to forge strategic partnerships in the Indo-Pacific, India made it clear that it will not be party to any alliances of containment. This message was sent out loud and clear in order to assure its neighbouring countries in the ASEAN that they will not be pulled into any great rivalries or power play between the U.S. and China or China and India. Furthermore, it wanted to position itself as the lead player in the region providing a security umbrella to its neighbouring countries. Third, India recognized the shifts in global power that would come with establishing strategic partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region with the Quad and ASEAN. It declared its support for a new order that is free, open, and inclusive, with strong values and principles that respect the rule of law, dialogues, rules, customs, and norms. Fourth, it was established that New Delhi would place regional groupings such as the ASEAN at the centre of its Indo-Pacific strategy while pushing for a multipolar world. India established that if the geopolitical architecture of the world was changing, India would be one of the founding pillars of the new architecture.¹³

(a) **The Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative**. The Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) was proposed by India at the East Asia Summit in Bangkok on 4 November 2019. The aim of the initiative is to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific and to manage, conserve, sustain and secure the maritime domain.¹⁴ It borrows from existing regional mechanisms to expand its area of influence and secure its strategic interests in the region through bilateral and multilateral agreements motivated by the IPOI. It aims to focus on seven pillars which revolve around maritime security, ecology, resources, capacity building, resource sharing, risk reduction and management, science, technology and academic cooperation, trade connectivity and maritime transport.¹⁵ The idea that India proposed was that every pillar should be spearheaded by one or two countries making it a collaborative effort that promotes transparency and inclusivity. The IPOI finds a confluence with the objectives of the IPMDA launched by the Quad. While the IPMDA provides a framework for data sharing and monitoring of the seas, the IPOI provides a larger canvas that calls for a cooperative and consultative process in the dimensions of enhancing blue economy, security and resource sharing. The IPOI functions on three P's: purposive partnerships, a pluralistic policy and power promotion. As for purposive partnerships, the objective is to secure within the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific region, wealth generation, welfare promotion and win-win strategies. A pluralistic approach is highlighted by the integration of ASEAN's centrality, Indo-Pacific connectivity, sustainable infrastructure and economic cooperation within India's IPOI vision. Power promotion is reflected through India's involvement in the Quad's initiatives in the Indo-Pacific region and the trilateral and multilateral naval exercises carried out in the Indo-Pacific along with the U.S. and Australia.¹⁶

(b) **Bilateral Security Agreements with USA.** The Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) was signed between India and the United States of America on 27 October 2020 which combined with the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) and Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) forms a trinity of pacts that underscore the military cooperation between the two countries. BECA will provide India with real-time access to American geospatial intelligence which will elevate the accuracy of automated systems and weapons such as drones and missiles giving India an advantage in terms of aeronautical and topographical data which will enhance India's navigation and targeting systems. Therefore, allowing it to monitor the Indian Ocean region against China's threat and simultaneously offer a security umbrella to its neighbouring countries. Meanwhile, LEMOA provides the two militaries with the platform to access each other's bases, supplies, spare parts and services from one another's land facilities, air bases and ports, liable to reimbursement in the future. LEMOA becomes extremely significant in Navy-to-Navy operations given that the Indian and U.S. Navy are closely involved in operations in the Indo-Pacific. Under COMCASA, the U.S. can share its encrypted communications equipment systems with India to provide U.S. and Indian military commanders to securely communicate with each other during times of both war and peace. This allows the two countries to enhance their interoperability and operations in the Indo-Pacific.¹⁷

ASEAN's Centrality and Unity in India's Indo-Pacific Vision

ASEAN's centrality in its Indo-Pacific vision has been long established by India in order to ensure that it stands by its Act East Policy while also taking a step toward emerging as the Southeast Asian region's security provider and thus gaining an economic and political foothold. Given its strategic, economic, and political importance in establishing dominance in the Indo-Pacific region, the four proponents of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) - the Quad - have held ASEAN's centrality close to the Quad's vision. India's policy of Security and Growth for All in the Region, in conjunction with India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, provides the interface for India's Act East Policy and ASEAN's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.¹⁸ In the face of China's growing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region, India and the ASEAN countries pledged in October 2021 to maintain transparency, inclusivity, openness, and respect for sovereignty, as well as non-intervention. In their joint statement promoting peace and cooperation in the region, India and ASEAN outlined the two entities' convergent interests in the Indo-Pacific and highlighted the similarities in ASEAN's Outlook on the Indo-Pacific and India's Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative. They also committed to enhancing peace, security, and stability

in the South China Sea in the throes of China's military flexing in the region and ASEAN states' territorial disputes with China.

The region's Sino-US rivalry has made it difficult for ASEAN nations to choose which party to align with. While Cambodia threatens ASEAN unity, Vietnam and Indonesia are the leading ASEAN voices seeking to join the Indo-Pacific bandwagon. The Quad countries are therefore trying to wade their way through bilateral ties with Indonesia and Vietnam so that a pro-Quad narrative could be cultivated with the ASEAN. However, given every nation's distinct economic, political and trade relationship with Beijing, the Quad countries will have to proactively interact with all ASEAN nations by formulating separate policies for all engagements. In addition, ASEAN nations will have to find a formidable approach towards enhancing ASEAN's unity and a common 'ASEAN way' to their larger interests in the Indo-Pacific.¹⁹ Here the Quad Plus, offers an approach that can be undertaken by the ASEAN nations to further the interests of the Southeast Asian nations. The Quad Plus countries offer an opportunity for India to "promote a regional paradigm of "shared leadership" among the three major Asian powers—India, China and Japan".²⁰ India could establish its role as a net security provider and simultaneously prevent China from furthering its revisionist approach by integrating the Quad Plus within its foreign policy framework.

India's Agreements and Partnerships in the Indo-Pacific Framework/Constrict

In order to comprehend and unravel the relationship between India and the Quad, as well as India's position within it, it is necessary to examine the treaties, agreements, and partnerships to which India is a signatory, as well as those that affect India's strategic, economic, and political interests in the Indo-Pacific region.

- (a) **The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework**. (IPEF) was launched by US President Joe Biden on 23 May 2022 in Tokyo. The four pillars of the IPEF include: trade; supply chains; clean energy, decarbonisation and infrastructure; and tax and anti-corruption. The Framework has been accepted by the U.S., Australia and all South East Asian nations except Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar. The IPEF is not a free trade agreement neither has it promised to remove any tariffs or provide free access to markets in the near future, however, it aims to provide a geoeconomic heft to the Quad's Indo-Pacific strategy demonstrating that the Indo-Pacific vision is more than just a geostrategic or geo-security framework. While the Southeast Asian

nations do have their reservations with the IPEF who do not have a clear vision of the consequences it entails, however, the reason they have agreed to become part of the framework is because they do not want to miss out on substantial returns in case there are any.²¹ The point of contention for India arises in the conversation around digital economy, clean energy, decarbonisation, labour and environmental standards. Countries from India to Vietnam follow their distinct policy frameworks when it comes to cross-border data flows, data localisation and data privacy and they may be unwilling to adopt US digital trade standards. Furthermore, in terms of decarbonisation, India may be unable to meet the IPEF targets for fear of contradicting its goals under the Paris Agreement. Furthermore, India has always kept its labour and environmental standards separate from trade agreements.²²

(b) **The Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness**. (IPMDA) was launched by the Quad on 24 May 2022 in Tokyo. The aim of the IPMDA is to jointly monitor the movements of ships and submarines in the Indo-Pacific using satellites. The IPMDA is likely to transform the security environment in the Indo-Pacific by providing commercially available satellite data to Southeast Asian states alerting them of any illicit maritime operations or activities such as smuggling, piracy, or illegal fishing in their territorial waters. Four information fusion centres located in India, Singapore, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu will provide access to the data to the signatories of the IPMDA.²³ This initiative is likely to enhance the collaboration between the ASEAN nations and the Quad which have separate strategic interests in the region and do not see eye-to-eye on all matters regarding the Indo-Pacific. The data collected through the IPMDA will thus help to identify trends and challenges in the region and inform policy and military actions. Additionally, it will help in expanding the Indian Navy's presence and visibility in the region which is essential for operational reasons and maintaining a balanced status quo in the IOR and Indo-Pacific region. Augmenting the confluence of three regions - the Indo-Pacific, the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia - the data will provide India with an increased strategic and security foothold in the Indian Ocean and Indo-Pacific region which is currently threatened by China's rising dominance.

The Indo-Pacific (Quad) through India's Prism

(a) **Economic**. Indian Prime Minister Modi stated that economically it was necessary for the Quad as a platform to demonstrate its ability on the ground. He said that by introducing the IPEF, the Quad was finally laying down an economic framework in the Indo-Pacific. In addition, as a counter

to China's Belt and Road Initiative, the Quad has agreed to extend more than \$50 billion to the Indo-Pacific region over the next five years to develop infrastructure in the region. In view of China providing predatory loans and pushing countries into debt, the Quad aims to fund projects that are sustainable, demand-driven and meet specific needs of the Indo-Pacific countries. At the Quad Summit in May 2022, Prime Minister Modi highlighted the need for the Quad to take committed initiatives towards climate financing and sustainable development and underscored the requirement for setting up appropriate platforms for the integration of industries and businesses with the Quad's Indo-Pacific vision, the IPEF and the development of emerging technologies.²⁴ During the Quad Summit in September 2021, the Quad leaders underscored the need for establishing supply chains for semiconductors, supply of rare earth minerals, enhancement of trade and infrastructure development.²⁵ India's Quad Membership can be leveraged economically. The Quad countries are committed towards becoming self-reliant in the production of semiconductors. India can further the Quad's ambitions by offering its Quad partners the incentive to set up their production plants in India becoming a local and global market for silicon chips. Additionally, the Quad countries aim to enhance their 5G telecommunications and have put a ban on Chinese companies to test these technologies for fear of interference in their domestic issues. However, there are several Indian companies that have reached an advanced stage in 5G telecommunications and this situation can be grasped by India to further its economic benefits. Furthermore, the Quad nations have been grappling to import rare earth minerals and are highly dependent for it on China. Given that India possesses 6% of the global reserve of these minerals and the Quad nations want to establish alternate supply chains and provide alternate choices to countries in the Indo-Pacific, India and the Quad could formulate policies on this end, thereby enhancing Indian exports and strengthening the Quad's portfolio as a force for good.

(b) **Debt Issues**. The Quad is making an effort to address the debt issues of the countries in the Indo-Pacific region. They resolve to strengthen the capacity of the countries to overcome debt issues under the G20 Common Framework and aim to work collaboratively with the finance authorities of relevant countries to promote debt sustainability and transparency by incorporating the Quad Debt Management Resource Portal within the framework of operations which consists of multiple bilateral and multilateral capacity building assistance.²⁶ This joint statement was made without naming Sri Lanka, however, the aim was to put out the message that the countries in the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asian and Indo-Pacific region have an alternate choice, one which is sustainable and solution-oriented. What does it mean for India? Sri Lanka's instability impinges on India's political and security environment

thereby providing India an opportunity to resolve and address the issue with utmost urgency. While Sri Lanka's caught up in China's debt trap diplomacy, India can use her membership of the Quad as an advantage to leverage the Quad's resources towards saving Sri Lanka from the crisis, thereby establishing its strategic and economic foothold in the island nation which provides access to key sea lanes²⁷ and sea lines of communication.

(c) **Naval Exercises**. In 2020, the Indian Navy and the US Navy conducted joint naval drills in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and Australia joined the Quad members in the Malabar exercise, sending a clear message to China that the Quad is actively engaged in the maritime domain to counter China's expansionist tendencies, adding a military quotient to the Quad. Furthermore, India signed the Mutual Logistics Sharing Agreement with Australia and Japan, as well as the BECA with the United States, furthering its collaboration with the Quad members and demonstrating mutual trust within the alliance by sharing valuable assets.²⁸ Given its Logistics Sharing Agreements with Australia, USA and Japan, India can potentially increase its presence in the Diego Garcia, Cocos Islands or Okinawa military facilities of the US, Australia and Japan respectively. This would help augment India's MDA capabilities since these islands provide critical chokepoints to key sea lanes. As for the Quad, India should allow for MDA collaborations from the Andaman and Nicobar islands such that a convergence is found in the divergent interests of the Quad members. Islands possess immense strategic and security importance and therefore India must explore the potentials of island diplomacy and commit itself to working

(d) **Infrastructure**. With regards to infrastructure projects, India and Japan have been forging relationships around the Indo-Pacific region since 2016 in wake of China's increasing economic and strategic dominance in the area. In 2016, New Delhi and Tokyo underscored the importance of connecting Asia and Africa through the Indian Ocean giving rise to the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor which was viewed as a counter to China's Maritime Silk Route. Furthermore, in terms of infrastructure development in the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asian and Indo-Pacific region, China was threatening Tokyo and New Delhi's position thereby giving rise to extreme imbalance in Japan and India's relations with their neighbours. At this juncture, the two decided to expand their influence in the region by dividing their roles, while India played a strategic role in the Indian Ocean region, Japan initiated projects in the Southeast Asian region. However, given the rigid bureaucracies in both countries and the disparity in capabilities, the majority of projects initiated by the two governments appear to be in an exploratory phase.

(e) **New Delhi's Island Diplomacy.** New Delhi appears to be restructuring its policy with island nations in the Indo-Pacific given their increasing importance in the evolving geopolitical status of the region. India had pushed the countries to the periphery of its engagements due to the big power dynamics that it had been trying to establish for the past two decades, however these island nations have now assumed a critical role in the maritime domain that forms a part of India's Indo-Pacific vision. Separate from the Quad, it has become essential for India to build friendly relations with the Pacific Island countries to establish a foothold in the region in cognizance of their location near critical choke points and sea lanes beyond the Indian ocean. Over the past few years, India has made an effort to establish strategic and diplomatic relations with island nations in the Indo-Pacific, specifically the Caribbean islands. New Delhi met the Pacific Island Developing States (PSIDS) at the United Nations General Assembly in 2019 and extended a grant of \$1 million to the member states for high impact projects of their choice. In addition, they announced a credit line concession of \$150 million to Pacific Island countries for projects in solar power, renewable energy sources and climate change. India needs to forge an increased alliance with the PSIDS in order to further its diplomatic outreach and foothold in the region, one that is strategically and economically viable.²⁹

(f) **Climate and Energy Security.** While having discussed the economic, security, maritime and strategic dimensions of the Quad, it becomes essential to discuss nontraditional areas such as the climate and energy crisis as well. In this process, it is important to determine India's position within the Quad as a contributor towards a solution-oriented future with regards to climate change as well as examine the role the Quad can play in helping India achieve its energy and climate objectives. In May 2022, the Quad launched the Quad Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Package which is committed towards decarbonization in the Indo-Pacific and will require substantial efforts from all governments. India is the third largest emitter and is said to become the largest market for global energy demand by 2050 in view of its growing population, increasing energy access as well as rising temperatures. Coal is of immense importance to India's economical and energy needs and accounts for 70% of India's power generation. Under the Modi government, several commitments were made to grow 220 gigawatts of clean energy capacity in India by 2022 and to extend that to 450 gigawatts by 2030. With India's growing energy demands and a rigid bureaucracy it is perhaps unnerving to imagine India paving its path towards a net zero carbon energy system. In the face of this, it now becomes immensely important for the Quad especially the U.S. to help India move towards a robust process of decarbonization. New Delhi and Washington signed the US-India Climate and Clean Energy Agenda Partnership in 2021 which

demonstrates USA's increasing attention and involvement within India's decarbonization mission which needs elaborate planning in the fields of market design, grid development, and the empowerment of a nascent clean energy technology sector. The Quad can play a major role in helping India achieve its energy and climate objectives as well as enhance Washington's capability of resolving India's energy crisis. The four countries are the largest economies in the Indo-Pacific region and can carve a path towards developing transparent and secure energy markets in the region. Each of them come with capabilities that could help enhance the value, depth and speed of India's decarbonization. By focusing their capital, resources and technical assistance towards India's clean energy commitments, the Quad will not only aid in contributing towards climate goals but also establish sustainable and well-governed supply chains in the Indo Pacific. This will also provide a platform to countries like the UK, France and New Zealand to support clean energy initiatives in the Indo-Pacific. What does it mean for the Quad? Augmenting clean energy deployment in India by financing new decarbonization technologies, the Quad will contribute to an evolving environmental and geopolitical structure. India's enhanced capabilities in advancing clean energy initiatives will be a major boost for Southeast Asian countries' capacities to do the same thus positioning the Quad as a key player and major stakeholder in the Indo-Pacific, Indian Ocean and Southeast Asian region.³⁰

Indo-China Relationship in the Backdrop of Quad

An increase in plurilateral meetings and agreements between India and the Quad, India and ASEAN, and the Quad and ASEAN necessitates a thorough examination of India's involvement in the Quad and its relationship with China. In the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asian region, China poses a significant security and strategic threat to India. Furthermore, through its Two Oceans strategy, which seeks to integrate the Indian and Pacific oceans under Chinese leadership and dominance, China is challenging the Indo-Pacific security, strategic, and economic architecture, bringing the Quad into the discourse. While India is at loggerheads with China in terms of border disputes and clashes, it shares a significant trade relation with the country - therefore the Quad's agenda of thwarting Chinese dominance could reactivate severe tensions between India and China.

As for regional groupings, India and China are a part of BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and India's assertiveness in the Quad could become

counterproductive to India's role in these regional organisations, given China's economic and strategic dominance in the region. India needs to be extremely careful that it does not get pulled into a policy of Chinese containment within the Quad which would have a manifold effect on India's position in the Southeast Asian region given the economic gains India and the ASEAN nations derive from China. Furthermore, the Quad's inability to deliver on its agreements in the Southeast Asian and Indo-Pacific region, especially with the launch of the IPEF and the \$50 billion investment in infrastructure, India's position in the region can get hampered given China's Belt and Road initiative and the excessive dependence of India's neighbours on China.

India views China as a multilateral partner and a competitive political power and seeks to establish a power-partner policy with Beijing. This allows India to remain watchful and cautious on one hand and carry forward trade and economic partnerships with China on the other. India is making an attempt to demonstrate its assertiveness in the region not by actively engaging in a 'contain China' camp but by exhibiting its comprehensive national power. India's Indo-Pacific policy with the Quad therefore is therefore aligned with achieving its national interests and establishing its foothold in the region, reaping economic gains rather than containing China actively. Given India's economic interests in China, the Quad should therefore serve as an avenue for India to further its self-reliant goals in the Indo-Pacific and pool resources to meet shared challenges. Wary of China's BRI initiatives and String of Pearls strategy, India therefore needs to invest capital and resources in its strategic projects with the Quad nations furthering its "necklace of diamonds" strategy. With an assertive China on the border exhibiting expansionist tendencies through their "wolf-warrior diplomacy" it has become essential for India to secure its energy and water resources, establish maritime trading lanes and a rules based regional order which given the heated environment directly affects national security dimensions.

It becomes pertinent to note that given Beijing's comprehensive and broad defence budget and capital surplus, China will be able to surpass geographical disadvantages in the IOR by acquiring logistics facilities. This will put India at crossroads because the Chinese navy will then gain inroads into the IOR, stationing its defence operations and carrying out its operations with utmost ease. Therefore, New Delhi needs to be extremely careful while formulating its Quad policy in relation to Beijing which threatens India at its borders and in its territorial waters. India needs to take measured steps to deter Beijing and increase the cost of confrontation should Beijing choose to engage in a strategic maritime or territorial competition or confrontation.³¹ In order to establish its foothold

and dominance in the region and in its neighbourhood, it is essential for India to build strategic policy frameworks to exercise its island diplomacy.

The Indo-Pacific, Ministry of External Affairs's Vision

(a) **MEA's Vision**. Witnessing a shift in the strategic interests of the USA, Japan and Australia - in order to realise Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of the Indo-Pacific at the Shangri La Dialogue in 2018 as a potential theatre of opportunity for New Delhi - the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) set up the Indo-Pacific division. With the increasing significance of the term 'Indo-Pacific' in the foreign policy framework of the Quad, it became essential for the MEA to set up this division as a natural corollary to the vision. It became essential for India to lay down a structure for its Indo-Pacific vision and policy. The Indo-Pacific division of the MEA provides a framework for integrating the strategic, economic and security dimensions of the Indo-Pacific, the Indian Ocean Rim Association, the Association for Southeast Asian Nations and the Quad. The Indo-Pacific Division deals with matters concerning the Indo-Pacific, India-ASEAN relations, East Asia Summit, Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC) and Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS).³²

The Indo-Pacific Division promotes a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific as highlighted by the Prime Minister in his speech in June 2018. India stands for freedom of navigation and overflight for all in the seas. It places ASEAN at the centre of its negotiations and agreements in the Indo-Pacific and calls for cooperation and collaboration in the region given the need for shared responses to shared challenges. So far the Indo-Pacific division has been focussing on security and strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific, however, with the rising challenges and threat in the region given China's assertiveness, it has become essential for the division to divert its efforts towards economic gains and non-traditional sectors such as climate and energy. Therefore, the region needs a far more comprehensive policy elucidating India's vision towards commercial activities, connectivity projects and the climate and energy crisis in the Indo-Pacific.³³

While all the Quad members stand for inclusiveness in the Indo-Pacific, it is rather difficult to find convergence in all projects. Given India's complex relation with China, India will have to strike a balance between the interests of all stakeholders such that India does not lose out on its strategic or economic interests in any regional grouping. The Indo-Pacific division of MEA will therefore have to traverse this policy framework very

carefully. While on a larger canvas of issues, the Quad has convergent ideas and values that should be upheld in the Indo-Pacific, the approach and policies of each vary to meet their own specific interests. The Indian Ocean is of greater interest to India than the Pacific given that the core interests of its Indo-Pacific policy are rooted in the IOR, while Japan and Australia's priorities lie in the Indo-Pacific and the interests of the United States are divided between the IOR and the Indo-Pacific. Given this conglomerate of policy frameworks and divergent interests, it becomes the Indo-Pacific division's responsibility to navigate the country's foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific in a manner that safeguards all our interests - be it in the Indo-Pacific, the Indian Ocean region or in Southeast Asia.

Conclusion and Recommendations

(a) **Need for Issue-Based Partnerships.** The four members of the Quad have long-established their convergent interests in the Indo-Pacific, with a focus on health and the provision of COVID-19 vaccinations, humanitarian aid and disaster relief, the environment, maritime security, counterterrorism, cybersecurity, thwarting foreign disinformation campaigns, preventing economic coercion, and setting standards for critical emerging technologies. However, within each of these interests, the members have specific policy frameworks that guide their strategic, economic, and political gains in the region, and thus the Quad needs to establish a framework within which issue-based partnerships that operate on a burden-sharing model are formed.³⁴

(b) **Prevent Falling into Containment Politics.** In its partnership with Quad members, expansionist China by enhancing her own capabilities and resources in the region. Along with the Quad, New Delhi needs to provide the Indo-Pacific and Southeast Asian countries a platform for planning a self-sufficient and self-reliant future by augmenting their economies and resource capital. India's goal in the Indo-Pacific must remain clear, that is, to use the region to advance its strategic interests and respond to an evolving security environment.

(c) **Address Bilateral Challenges with the Quad.** For India to further its engagements with the Quad members there are certain challenges that it will have to overcome with the US, Japan and Australia. India and the United States have unresolved differences in COVID-19 vaccination and climate change, which means the two countries have vaccine supply chain issues and different approaches to climate policy that must be worked out for effective collaboration.³⁵ India and Japan are witnessing territorial threats from China that lie independent of the Quad's Indo-Pacific strategy.

The two have long been pegged together by security and strategic concerns, however, it is time for the two countries to augment their economic relationships in the wake of China's rising economic dominance in the Southeast Asian and Indian Ocean region. In order to challenge China's growing influence in the region, it is rather essential for India and Japan to materialise their infrastructure and investment projects. As for India and Australia, they are yet to work out their free trade deal which is supposed to be concluded by the end of 2022. Furthermore, Australia's access to the bases in the Andaman and Nicobar islands are yet to be determined under a bilateral defence deal.³⁶ In addition to these issues, India needs to be extremely cautious about the foreign policy pathway it picks to address its relationship with China and Russia.

(d) **Extend its Collaboration Beyond the Quad.** It is worth noting that despite convergent interests and common strategic opportunities, the roadmap to achieving the Indo-Pacific vision will remain separate for each of the Quad members. The pace of implementation of the projects planned for the Indo-Pacific will be different for each of the four countries given their strategic, economic and political priorities and their policy frameworks. For India to establish a secure foothold in the Indo-Pacific region, it is important for India to extend its collaboration beyond the Quad. While Australia, Japan, the United States and for that matter France are India's natural partners in becoming the pillars of the new Indo-Pacific architecture, India must seek to enhance its ties with major actors in the continent of Africa, and countries such as Indonesia, Oman, Singapore, Canada and New Zealand. As mentioned in this paper, India must strengthen its island diplomacy with the Caribbean communities and the Pacific Island Developing States. Furthermore, India's relationship with Russia and China will provide an in-depth understanding of India's domestic and international priorities in the larger security architecture and the evolving Indo-Pacific dynamics.

(g) **Explore the Potential of the Quad Plus.** Quad Plus was a concept that was initiated by former US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun in March 2020. The Quad Plus is an extension of the Quad which brings to the table five more countries - New Zealand, South Korea, Vietnam, Israel and Brazil. In order to bolster power-balancing in Asia, India seeks to transform its image from China's partner to its peer which requires India to spread its area of influence. Over the years, India has fostered defence collaborations with South Korea, Vietnam, Israel, and Brazil, bolstering India's position in the South China Sea region. The Quad Plus countries offer an opportunity for India to "promote a regional paradigm of "shared leadership" among the three major Asian powers—India, China and Japan".³⁷ India could establish its role as a net security provider and simultaneously prevent China from furthering its revisionist approach by

integrating the Quad Plus within its foreign policy framework. In order to protect and enhance India's territorial resources and maritime domain which are under threat from China, it is pertinent for India to bolster security and economic synergy within coalitions such as the Quad and Quad Plus.

(h) **Enhance Project Mausam, SAGAR, and Sagarmala.** The integration of India's Indo-Pacific strategy with the various projects and initiatives launched by India in the maritime domain provide for a comprehensive plan to secure India's strategic and security foothold in the region. Project Mausam seeks to understand the monsoon patterns, cultural routes and maritime landscapes³⁸ that connect the Indian Ocean littorals thereby providing a platform to comprehend India's historic maritime ties and furthering them in the twenty-first century on the foundation of shared history and culture. SAGAR, that is, Security and Growth for All in the Region, is a vision that calls for strengthening of security and economic ties among India and its maritime neighbours. In order to further the vision, New Delhi is required to enhance cooperation by exchange of information, coastal surveillance, and augmenting infrastructural and maritime security capabilities.³⁹ The Sagarmala project initiated by the Ministry of Shipping aims at breathing new life into India's 7500 kilometre long coastline and seeks to enhance India's logistical competitiveness and maritime economy.⁴⁰ India could boost its position in the Indo-Pacific by integrating these projects and visions with its Indo-Pacific policy framework thereby providing for a well-rounded plan to assert India's regional power.

(j) **Strengthen Existing Partnerships with the Quad.** In order to further its Indo-Pacific vision and augment its comprehensive national power, India needs to maintain its strategic role and position in existing partnerships with the Quad. While having discussed several partnerships in the paper, there are several other specific agreements and visions also that India needs to enhance as part of its Indo-Pacific Strategy. With Japan, India needs to ensure that it remains committed to the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" and keeps benefitting from Japan's 'Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure' under which capital is being invested in India's power, communication, transportation and technology initiatives.⁴¹ As for Australia, New Delhi and Canberra are at the nascent stage of maritime partnerships - however the integration of India's IPOI with Australia's 'Pacific Step Up' initiative provides a large room for defence, strategic and economic partnerships between the two countries. With the United States, India needs to explore the potential of Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity Partnership (DCCP) and the Infrastructure Transaction and Assistant Network (ITAN) in which India could act as a crucial partner. Along with Australia and Japan, India needs to bolster the

Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) and the Blue Dot Network (BDN) along with the U.S. and Japan.

(k) **Elevate the Importance of Bay of Bengal and A&N Islands.** The Bay of Bengal is of critical importance for South and Southeast Asian countries. It acts as a key transit zone between the Indian and Pacific oceans and has occupied a position of centrality and economic prominence in India's collaboration with Southeast Asian nations. Furthermore, the Andaman and Nicobar islands hold a certain level of control over the Six Degree and Ten Degree channels - which provide access to vital sea lines of communication. In its competition with emerging powers and in the wake of an evolving geopolitical architecture, the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman and Nicobar islands provide India with a secure and strategic foothold in the maritime domain. Therefore, New Delhi should amplify the importance of the Bay of Bengal and Andaman and Nicobar islands in its Indo-Pacific vision which provide a base for India's sea power projection.⁴²

(l) **Balance New and Old Partnership.** In charting its Indo-Pacific course, New Delhi will have to balance out its new and old partnerships, economic and trade activities with Russia and China and strategic, security, and non-traditional collaborations with the Quad. A variation and divergence in theatre of opportunities and regional dynamics within the Quad requires New Delhi to construct its own profile by securing its strategic and economic interests through issue-based partnerships with the Quad and other non-conventional partners. Undertaking an approach which reflects a shift in India's foreign policy with evolving geopolitical structures rather than a continuation of India's reaction to a dominant and assertive China, will allow India to augment its limited resources and capacity restraints and enhance its foothold in the new security environment. As has been established earlier in this paper, India's actions, policies and strategies in the Indo-Pacific will act as a base to India's position in the new global security and strategic architecture.⁴³

CERTIFICATE

The paper is author's individual scholastic articulation. The author certifies that the article is original in content, unpublished and it has not been submitted for publication/ web upload elsewhere and that the facts and figures quoted are duly referenced, as needed and are believed to be correct.

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