



DAILY EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

TOPIC

**QUADRILATERAL SECURITY
DIALOGUE (QUAD): INTERREGNUM
OR STRATEGIC CONTINUITY**

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Context

- In 2025, the **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD)** entered a period of strategic pause, often termed a '**year of interregnum**', as it faced significant headwinds that tested QUAD's cohesion, purpose, and long-term viability.

About Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD)

- **Evolution of the QUAD:** The QUAD's origins trace back to 2004, when India, Japan, Australia, and the US coordinated humanitarian relief following the **Indian Ocean Tsunami**. It sowed the seeds for **multilateral cooperation**.
 - In 2007, **Japan proposed a formal** 'Quadrilateral Security Dialogue' **supported by the US, Australia, and India**.
 - But, in **2008**, Australia withdrew from it, citing concerns about antagonizing China.
 - **Revival in 2017:** During the ASEAN Summit in Manila, under a backdrop of **China's assertive activities** in the **South China Sea and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**. Since then, ministerial and leaders' summits have institutionalized the dialogue.
 - **Between 2021 and 2024:** QUAD held **six leader-level summits**, strengthening cooperation across defense, infrastructure, technology, and supply chains.
- It continued to hold significance as a forum committed to advancing a **free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific**.

Role of Member Nations

- Each member nation brings unique capabilities: **Japan's technology and finance, US military reach, India's geographic centrality, and Australia's regional presence in the South Pacific**.
 - **India:** Focuses on strategic autonomy, maritime security, and balancing China's influence in the Indian Ocean. Promotes 'Security and Growth for All in the Region' (SAGAR).
 - **United States:** Sees QUAD as central to its 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' strategy, a means to uphold maritime freedom and counter authoritarian expansion.
 - **Japan:** Advocates rule-based maritime order and FOIP policy.
 - **Australia:** Ensures regional stability, energy security, and diversification of partnerships beyond China.

Significance & Importance of QUAD

- **Ensuring a Free and Open Indo-Pacific:** The QUAD serves as a **geopolitical counterweight** to coercive practices and unilateral assertions in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the **South China Sea and East China Sea**.
 - QUAD enhances **collective maritime security** and upholds the UNCLOS, by fostering maritime domain awareness and joint exercises such as **Malabar**.
- **Balancing China's Assertiveness:** QUAD represents '**strategic balancing through cooperation**', and offers an **alternative power structure** to China's BRI, emphasizing transparent and sustainable development.
 - It provides smaller Indo-Pacific states with a **non-coercive, democratic choice** for infrastructure, connectivity, and technological cooperation, thereby countering debt-trap diplomacy.
- **Reinforcing the Rules-Based International Order:** All four QUAD nations emphasize adherence to **international law, sovereignty, and the sanctity of global commons**.
 - Thus, the QUAD is central to defending multilateralism in a fragmented world order, complementing institutions like ASEAN, the UN, and G20.

- **Supply Chain Resilience and Economic Security:** QUAD established the **Resilient Supply Chain Initiative (RSCI)** and later, the **Quad Resilient Supply Chain Council (2025)** amid the disruptions caused by pandemic and geopolitical tensions.
- **Technology and Innovation Cooperation:** The QUAD promotes collaboration in **critical and emerging technologies**, including 5G, AI, quantum computing, and biotechnology.
 - ◆ In 2025, members launched the Quad Innovation Partnership and an **AI Ethics Charter** to ensure transparency, accountability, and democratic governance in tech ecosystems.
- **Health Security and Pandemic Preparedness:** The Quad Vaccine Partnership (**2021**) laid the foundation for collaborative health responses.
 - ◆ It expanded into the **Quad Global Health Security Network in 2025**, enhancing vaccine distribution and pandemic preparedness in **South and Southeast Asia**.
- **Climate Action and Clean Energy:** The **Tokyo Summit (2025)** introduced the **Quad Climate Infrastructure Fund**, pooling investments from several global institutions to promote **green hydrogen and coastal sustainability**.
- **Diplomatic and Geopolitical Importance:** QUAD symbolizes the **collective democratic will** to uphold liberty and sovereignty in global governance.
 - ◆ It maintains a **non-treaty, non-military character**, allowing flexibility and inclusivity, unlike NATO.
 - ◆ It ensures that regional partners, including ASEAN states, can engage without being drawn into rigid blocs.

Concerns & Issues Surrounding QUAD

- **Strategic Ambiguity:** One of the most persistent concerns is the **lack of clarity regarding the QUAD's exact nature and objectives**.
 - ◆ It is neither a formal military alliance (like NATO) nor a fully institutionalized organization.
- **Divergent National Interests:** The four QUAD nations, while united by democratic values, have **distinct threat perceptions and strategic priorities**, affecting decision-making, particularly in security and defense coordination.
- **China's Perception and Reaction:** China has consistently termed the QUAD as an attempt to form an '**Asian NATO**', reiterating that the QUAD '*undermines regional peace and promotes bloc confrontation*'.
- **Absence of a Permanent Secretariat:** QUAD lacks a permanent **institutional framework or secretariat** (though discussions began in 2025 to establish one in Singapore).
 - ◆ It limits continuity, accountability, and operational follow-through.
- **Overlapping Minilateralism:** The Indo-Pacific is witnessing a proliferation of *minilateral* forums such as **AUKUS, IPEF, and FOIP dialogues**.
 - ◆ It leads to **coordination fatigue** and resource duplication.
- **Perception of Exclusion and ASEAN Concerns:** '**ASEAN's centrality**' in Indo-Pacific architecture remains a **sensitive issue**.
 - ◆ QUAD initiatives, particularly maritime and infrastructure projects, operate **outside ASEAN mechanisms**, undermining its leadership.
 - ◆ Countries like Indonesia and Malaysia have voiced concerns that QUAD could 'split the region into competing spheres of influence';
- **Economic and Technological Competition:** Although QUAD promotes cooperation in supply chains and technology, it exposes **competitive tensions** among members:
 - ◆ USA and Japan lead semiconductor technology; India and Australia are primarily consumers and resource suppliers.

- Differing data governance and privacy standards complicate digital cooperation.
- Persisting Funding Gaps: QUAD's infrastructure financing remains modest compared to China's BRI (\$60 billion vs. BRI's \$1 trillion).
- **Other Risks:**
 - **Fragmentation Risk:** If national priorities diverge further, QUAD could revert to symbolic diplomacy.
 - **Escalation Risk:** Increased militarization or defense signaling could provoke regional arms races.
 - **Reputational Risk:** Failure to deliver tangible regional benefits could erode legitimacy.
 - **Coordination Risk:** Lack of formal integration with ASEAN or EU Indo-Pacific strategies might limit effectiveness.

Key Initiatives Reinforcing Cooperation

- **Quad-at-Sea: Ship Observer Mission (June 2025):** It enhanced **Coast Guard-level coordination** across member nations.
- **Ports of the Future Partnership:** Its **first meeting** held in **Mumbai, India, in October 2025**, emphasized building **sustainable and resilient port infrastructure** in the Indo-Pacific.
- **'Malabar' Naval Exercise:** The exercise, conducted in **Guam**, deepened **maritime interoperability** among the four navies, symbolizing the QUAD's enduring maritime focus.
- **Future Relevance**
- **Vision 2030:** The '**Quad Vision 2030 for the Indo-Pacific**' outlines a comprehensive roadmap:
 - Building a regional digital commons and cyber defense framework
 - Enhancing maritime governance and ocean sustainability
 - Integrating QUAD+ **partners (Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia)** into sectoral dialogues
 - Expanding educational, cultural, and technological exchanges through the Quad University Network.
- It positions QUAD as **the cornerstone of Indo-Pacific security and economic architecture** over the next decade.

Source: TH

Daily Mains Practice Question

[Q] Examine whether the recent developments within the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) signify a temporary interregnum or reflect a deeper strategic continuity.

