

How Quad is Redefining Indo-Pacific

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad, comprising India, Australia, Japan and the United States (US), convened its [recent](#) summit on 21 Sep 2024. The summit was attended by the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese of Australia, and Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan and hosted by President Joe Biden of the US.

The [evolution](#) of Quad from a senior-level security dialogue to a leader-level summit since 2017 reflects its strategic importance and the shifting geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific. The idea of Quad emerged after the 2004 tsunami when it was used to coordinate humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. In 2007, the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe took [steps](#) to turn it into a more formal security dialogue. However, the grouping fell apart and it was again revived in 2017 amidst rising tensions with China. Finally, in 2021, Quad was upgraded to a leader-level summit, when in Sep 2021, the first in-person [summit](#) between leaders of four nations was held.

An Eye on China

Criticism of Quad has focused on the loss of momentum and clarity in strategic objectives, particularly as the US has shifted the focus on other global issues like the Russia-Ukraine War and the Middle East conflict. However, the fourth leader-level Quad summit has addressed some of these concerns, as the meeting has highlighted a renewed focus on collaborative efforts in response to increasing competition from China.

The [joint statement](#), with a clear focus on China, underscored the importance of international law, as in the case of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS). Quad leaders expressed concern about growing militarisation in the South East China Sea, where China has been intimidating nations by using coast guards and maritime militia vessels. Recent tensions between the Philippines and China, despite the 2016 UNCLOS judgements, reveal China's intent in the region.

At the start of discussions between the four leaders, Joe Biden was caught on a hot mic [saying](#) how China's President Xi Jinping is "Looking to buy himself some

diplomatic space, in my view, to aggressively pursue China's interest". This assessment holds merit as Xi Jinping has focused on domestic economic challenges, including low industrial growth, struggling real estate sector and high debt levels.

Moreover, Quad has been usually compared with the AUKUS in countering China's influence in the Indo-Pacific. Multiple questions were raised on the relevance of Quad after the formation of AUKUS, consisting of the Australia-United Kingdom and the US as a security alliance. While AUKUS has the military muscle, Quad has shifted its focus to addressing China's dominance in the global economic sphere. The relevance of Quad in countering China was evident by the vaccine partnership in 2021, which delivered 400 million COVID-19 vaccines to the Indo-Pacific region, countering China's vaccine outreach.

Strategic Cooperation: Maritime, Semiconductors and Infrastructure Initiative

At the summit, significant progress has been made on the issues of maritime safety and security in the Indo-Pacific. A key development [includes](#) the "Quad-at-Sea-Ship Observer Mission", which enhances interoperability among the coastguard services. This will strengthen cooperation in maritime security of the Indo-Pacific region. This initiative will allow personnel from the US Coast Guard, Japan Coast Guard, Australian Border Force and Indian Coast Guard to operate together on US vessels. It will strengthen the region's collective maritime security and foster a unified response to regional threats. Secondly, the launch of the "[Quad Indo-Pacific Logistics Hub](#)" was announced. It will focus on shared airlift capabilities to bolster Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster relief (HADR) in case of natural disasters. Thus, by leveraging the strengthening of collective logistics, the Quad aims to bolster HADR operations across the Indo-Pacific. Third, a new training mechanism, the Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific ([MAITRI](#)) was introduced to enhance regional capabilities further. This program will enable partner nations to maximise tools provided through existing frameworks like the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness. MAITRI aims to build regional forces with the necessary skills to monitor their maritime space effectively and deter unlawful activities. These initiatives reflect a shift in Quad, moving from a focus on agenda-setting in the past to the implementation of concrete action plans.

The Quad leaders also finalised the Memorandum of Cooperation on the [‘Semiconductors Supply Chain Contingency Network’](#). The US and India reached an agreement to set up a semiconductor fabrication plant in India. The plant will [focus](#) on three essential pillars for modern warfighting: advanced sensing, advanced communications and high-voltage power electronics. This is a watershed moment, as [mentioned](#) in the joint release, and aims to position India as a manufacturing hub and to counter China’s dominance in the sector.

Other than the security and manufacturing cooperation, commitments include [“Quad Cancer Moonshot”](#), a health partnership where India will contribute USD 7.5 mn in Human Papillomavirus (HPV) kits, and the Serum Institute of India will provide up to 40 million HPV doses. Further, the Quad scholarship has been expanded to support STEM education by offering 50 scholarships worth USD 500,000 to students from the region. These initiatives underscore a comprehensive approach taken by Quad to address challenges facing the present world.

Relevance of Quad in the Indo-Pacific

While the Quad has gained momentum in recent years, criticism has persisted about the Quad as a strategic alliance. The Quad has faced criticism regarding its effectiveness and purpose. Sceptics of the Quad have pointed out differences in the geopolitical and economic priorities of member states and thus questioned the long-term viability of the grouping. Moreover, the critics of Quad have targeted it for its broad agenda and called for a focused approach to counter China. Nevertheless, since the upgrade of Quad to a leader-level summit in 2021, Quad has demonstrated functional cooperation rather than just alignment against China. And thus, it has continued to defy its critics. It must be remembered that Quad is a [work-in-progress](#) as it brings together four nations with a common vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific, but their means are different. For instance, the semiconductor supply chain initiative benefits all member-states by securing critical technological components, and maritime initiatives like MAITRI address shared concerns in the Indo-Pacific.

The recent summit was crucial for significant reasons, particularly concerning the relevance and need of the Quad raised by countries like China, North Korea, etc., with China characterising it as 'Asian NATO'. However, with the fourth in-person meeting of Quad leaders, such doubts have been cleared. In response to a reporter's inquiry on the Quad's future beyond November, Biden [asserted](#), "Challenges will come, the world will change, but the Quad is here to stay". In his opening remarks, Prime Minister Modi further [emphasised](#) that Quad is "here to stay, assist, partner and complement". Thus, despite suggestions of improvement in India-China relations, as indicated by External Affairs Minister Dr S Jaishankar's statements, the Quad leaders understand that China presents a permanent threat to the Indo-Pacific region, underscoring the continued significance of Quad. As China continues to expand its reach in the South China Sea through its Belt and Road Initiative, the Quad serves as a coalition to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Thus, the Quad presents a critical alliance in contemporary global affairs, reflecting a collective commitment to address traditional security challenges in the region and cooperate on emerging issues. In the coming years, Quad's relevance, and cooperation among nations in the Indo-Pacific is going to grow, as China is presently focused on domestic economic issues; however, it will continue to act as an aggressor in the near future.

Endnotes:

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