



MAINS iMPACT 2025

05-07-2025

QUAD

SYLLABUS:

GS 2 > International relations > Strategic Groupings > International groupings

REFERENCE NEWS:

- The Quad Foreign Ministers — from India, the U.S., Australia, and Japan — recently met in Washington, D.C. for a Foreign Ministers' Meeting.

QUAD FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING: KEY HIGHLIGHTS

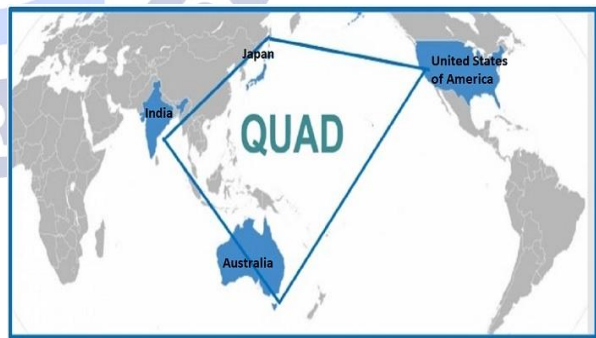
- The **Quad Foreign Ministers** strongly condemned the terror attack in Pahalgam, which killed 26 people. The joint statement called for the **perpetrators, organisers, and financiers** of the attack to be **brought to justice without delay**.
- It urged **UN member states** to **cooperate under international law and UNSC resolutions**, though notably, it referenced "relevant authorities" instead of "Indian authorities".
- **External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar** emphasized India's **right to defend its people** and called for recognition of India's counterterrorism efforts.
- The Quad reaffirmed its **commitment to counterterrorism cooperation**, explicitly denouncing **cross-border terrorism**.
- The Ministers expressed **serious concern** about developments in the **East China Sea and South China Sea**, highlighting:
 - **Coercion and militarisation**
 - **Interference with offshore resource development**
 - **Obstruction of navigation and overflight**
 - Use of **unsafe tactics** like **water cannons, ramming, and blocking**.
- While **China was not named**, the actions described clearly point to **People's Liberation Army's conduct**.
- The Quad reaffirmed opposition to **unilateral attempts to alter the status quo by force**, particularly in the Indo-Pacific. The group

underscored respect for **international maritime law**, especially the **UNCLOS** framework.

- A new agenda was announced with **four priority areas**:
 - **Maritime Security**
 - **Economic Prosperity and Security**
 - **Critical and Emerging Technologies**
 - **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response (HADR)**
- Unlike past statements, this Quad joint statement **omitted references** to the **Russia-Ukraine war** and **Israel-Gaza conflict**. This marks a shift to a **narrower geographical focus** centered on the **Indo-Pacific**, indicating a recalibration under the new **U.S. administration** (Donald Trump's second term).
- **Key Initiatives Announced**:
 - **Critical Minerals Partnership** (The Critical Minerals Partnership aims to build secure mineral supply chains and reduce reliance on China)
 - Quad Ports of the Future Conference – Mumbai, Oct 2025
 - 'Quad-at-Sea' Observer Mission – from Palau to Guam
 - Second Maritime Legal Dialogue – to uphold maritime order

WHAT IS QUAD?

- The **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue**, also known as the Quad, is an **informal strategic dialogue** between the **United States, Japan, Australia and India**.
- **Objectives of the Quad**:
 - One of the primary objectives of the Quad **is to work for a free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region**.
 - According to the **Spirit of the Quad** (shared commitment and vision of the Quad), the group's primary objectives include **maritime security, addressing the risks of climate change, combating the Covid-19 crisis**, especially vis-à-vis vaccine diplomacy, creating an ecosystem for **investment in the region and boosting technological innovation**.
 - Though **not stated explicitly**, one of the major bases for the grouping is **to check China's growing influence in Indo-Pacific region**.



TIMELINE: GENESIS AND EVOLUTION

2004	FORMATION OF THE QUAD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Quad is formed by Australia, India, Japan, and the United States, to coordinate relief efforts after the Indian Ocean Tsunami.
2007	TRANSFORMATION INTO A STRATEGIC DIALOGUE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The first Quad officials' meeting takes place and focuses on shared interests in the Indo-Pacific region.
2008-2012	DISSOLUTION OF THE QUAD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Australia withdraws from the Quad over concerns of antagonizing China, however Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan later calls for a revival of the partnership in 2012. He proposed the "Democratic Security Diamond" concept, involving Australia, India, Japan, and the US to ensure maritime security across the Indian Ocean to the western Pacific.
2017-2024	REVIVAL OF THE QUAD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Quad was revived in 2017 with a meeting of Joint Secretary-rank officials of the four countries. In 2020, the Malabar naval exercises, originally between India, the US, and Japan, expanded to include Australia. This significant event marked the first joint military exercises among the Quad nations. March 2021 was the first time the leaders of the four nations met virtually for an official Quad summit, releasing for the first time a set of objectives for the grouping in a joint statement called 'The Spirit of the Quad'.
	EXPANSION OF COOPERATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Quad now includes joint military exercises, six working groups, and an investors network, among other initiatives.

2021-2024	LEADERS' SUMMITS CHART THE PATH FORWARD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual Quad Leaders' Summits have provided high level guidance through joint statements on shared goals and principles.
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CONTRIBUTION OF THE QUAD TO REGIONAL STABILITY AND PROSPERITY:

- **Health Security Partnership:**
 - The Quad, through its **Vaccine Partnership** (later renamed the Quad Health Security Partnership), significantly enhanced health security by distributing vaccines across the Indo-Pacific during the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - This initiative leveraged the **manufacturing capabilities of India, financial support from Japan, vaccine development expertise from the United States, and logistical support from Australia**. By 2023, the Quad had delivered over **1.2 billion COVID-19 vaccine** doses across the Indo-Pacific. (Source: ORF)
- **Climate Action and Clean Energy:**
 - Demonstrating a robust commitment to climate initiatives, the Quad introduced the **Quad Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Package (Q-CHAMP)** in 2022 and issued the **Statement of Principles on Clean Energy Supply Chains** in 2023, focusing on emission reduction, renewable technology advancement, and enhancing climate resilience.
 - The **2025 meeting** reiterated support for **climate-resilient infrastructure and clean energy cooperation**, particularly in small island nations.
- **Critical and Emerging Technologies:**
 - In 2021, the Quad initiated the **Semiconductor Supply Chain Initiative**, aiming to secure and diversify supply chains for essential technology components, which has fostered global cooperation in fields like **artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and 5G network deployment**.
 - In 2025, the **Quad reaffirmed technology cooperation** as one of its four key priority areas.
- **Maritime Security and Domain Awareness:**
 - Launched in 2022, the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness has bolstered regional maritime security by enhancing capabilities to monitor illegal fishing and shipping

activities across the Pacific Islands, Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean.

- The 2025 FMM announced the **second Maritime Legal Dialogue** and ongoing cooperation through the **Quad-at-Sea Observer Mission**, currently deployed from **Palau to Guam**, further bolstering maritime transparency and law-based order.
- **Counterterrorism:**
 - The **Quad Counterterrorism Working Group**, established in 2023, has been instrumental in strengthening collective capabilities to counter terrorism through **enhanced intelligence sharing, tabletop exercises, and strategic policy coordination**.
 - In recent meeting (2025), the **Quad strongly condemned the Pahalgam terror attack**, reaffirming its **unified commitment to counterterrorism**, including **cross-border threats**, and calling for accountability under **UNSCRs**.
- **Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief:**
 - Since its establishment in 2022, the Quad Partnership on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief has coordinated effective responses to natural disasters, facilitating swift and efficient relief efforts in the Indo-Pacific through **regular exercises and biannual meetings**.
- **Sustainable and Transparent Lending Practices:**
 - The **Quad Investors Network**, established in 2023, has contributed over **USD 48 billion in infrastructure financing** from 2015 to 2021, promoting sustainable, transparent lending practices as a **democratic alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative**, enhancing regional economic prosperity and stability.

WHY IS THE QUAD IMPORTANT FOR INDIA?

- **Support to strategically countering China:**
 - The Quad provides a **platform to India to seek cooperation from like-minded countries on various issues** such as ensuring respect **for territorial integrity and sovereignty and peaceful resolution of disputes**.
 - For example, as there is a **rise in the Chinese hostilities on its borders**, India can take the **support of the other Quad nations to counter it**. Also, support of Quad partners can be used to counter **Chinese strategy of surrounding India through String of Pearls**.

- India is working with Quad partners to offer **alternatives to the China's Belt and Road Initiative**, a project that **undermines India's territorial sovereignty and regional primacy**.
 - For example, as an **alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative**, the Quad pledged over **\$50 billion for Indo-Pacific infrastructure**, and in 2025 launched the **Critical Minerals Partnership** to reduce dependence on Chinese-controlled supply chains.
- **Strengthen India's role in Indo Pacific region:**
 - India has **strengthened its naval ties with each of the other Quad countries**, and there have been more interactions, formal and informal at the official, political and military levels.
 - This benefits India's position as **a net security provider in the Indian ocean region**.
- **Free and Open Indo-Pacific:**
 - India supports a **rules-based, balanced and stable trade environment in the Indo-Pacific region**.
 - QUAD has a **shared commitment to a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific** and the importance of upholding the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and peaceful resolution of disputes.
 - For instance, the 2025 Quad statement reiterated opposition to **unilateral changes to the status quo** and emphasized **UNCLOS-based maritime order**.

Strengthen Act East Policy of India:

- QUAD provides India with a powerful **platform to advance and further strengthen its Act East policy**.
- **Enhance strategic partnerships and defence capabilities:**
 - Quad has offered an opportunity to strengthen partnership with the like-minded countries through **military exercises, joint patrols, exchange of strategic information, strategic dialogues, technical agreements and coordinated activities etc.**
 - For example, all four members of the Quad have been participating in the **Malabar exercise since 2020**.
- **Converging interests:**
 - India has **converging interests with other Quad members** on a variety of **issues such as connectivity and infrastructure development, security including counter-terrorism; cyber and maritime security; reform of multilateral institutions, etc.**
 - Support from Quad members on these issues would help India to realize its strategic and economic goals.

- For example, in Quad leaders' summit at Tokyo 2022 , **Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA), Quad's Common Statement of Principles on Critical Technology Supply Chains, Quad Partnership on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR)** etc., were launched.

CHALLENGES TO QUAD:

- **Economic relations between Quad countries and China:**
 - Though Quad is countering the growing influence of China, **all Quad countries have complex economic relations with China.**
 - China is either the **first or the second largest trading partner, or a key import/export partner** for all of the Quad countries.
- **The formation of AUKUS:**
 - Australia, the UK and the US has created **AUKUS to take up security challenges in the Indo-Pacific.**
 - Though US said that AUKUS and the Quad would complement each other, **AUKUS will definitely affect the strategic choices of Japan and India.**
 - **Japan, India and Australia were nominally equal partners of the US under the Quad framework. But the US offered special treatment to Australia** through formation of AUKUS. This will negatively impact the Quad.
- **Lacks institutional structure:**
 - The Quad is not structured like a typical multilateral organisation and **lacks a secretariat and any permanent decision-making body.**
- **India's stand in Russia-Ukraine conflict:**
 - Three members — **US, Japan and Australia** — **have taken a stand against Russia's aggression**, while **India's position has been one of studied neutrality** that calls for respect of territorial sovereignty and integrity and the UN charter, **but does not criticise Russia.** India's separateness on the issue may affect the Quad.
- **Differing views on Chinese threat:**
 - Each members of Quad views the Chinese threat differently.
 - For **the US, it is about trade and Taiwan** and for **Australia too, trade was the** biggest issue until the **recent establishment of a Chinese military base in the Solomon Islands** brought a new dimension.
 - **Japan and India** are closest to China, **and both face belligerent Chinese claims to territory.**

- **Unfavourable history:**
 - **Historically, Cold War military alliances** in South and Southeast Asia- such as SEATO, CENTO, ANZUS – **were all failures** because of the unwillingness of regional powers to cooperate. Even today, nation states value their diplomatic manoeuvrability than ceding their interests to a revisionist group.
- **Nuclear threat:**
 - Almost **6 countries possessing nuclear weapon** lies in the Indo-Pacific (including North Korea) and even a small trigger can have grave consequences for peace and stability of the region.

WAY FORWARD:

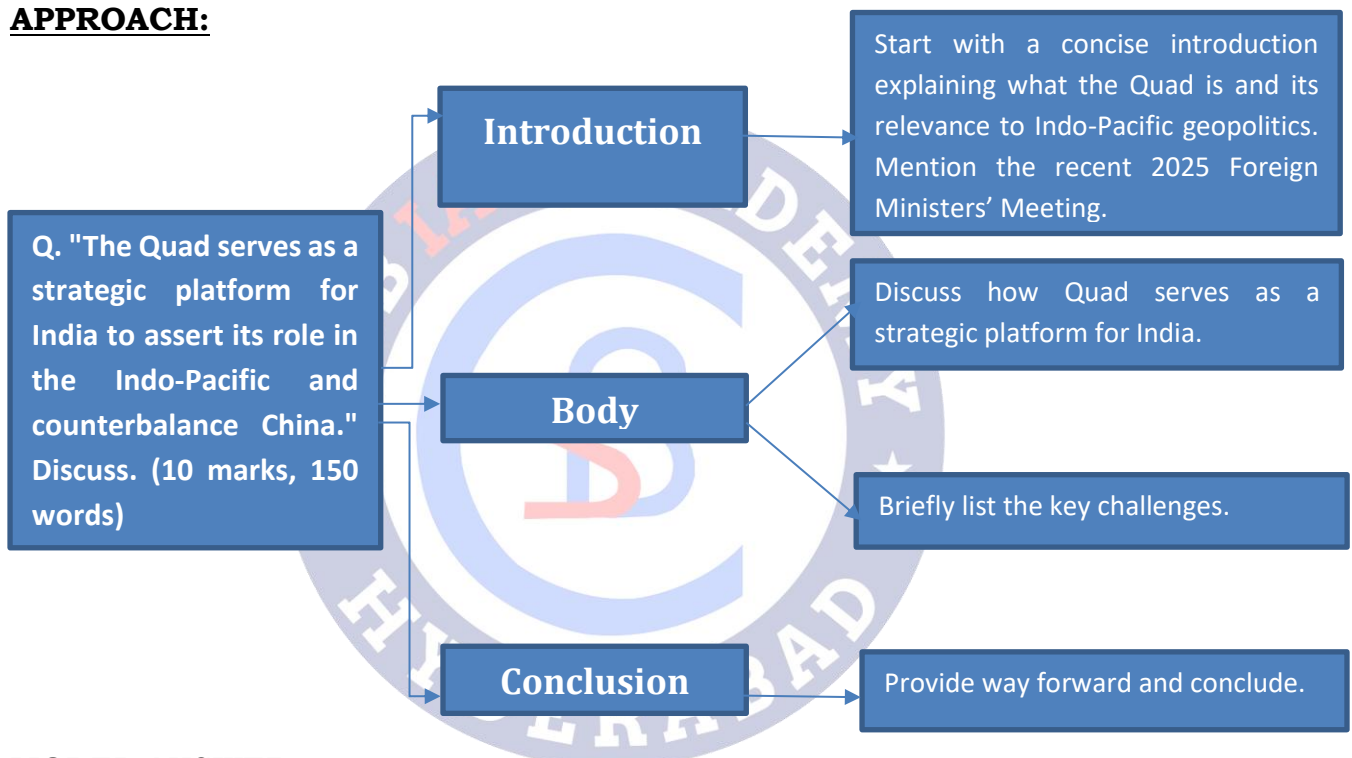
- **Strengthen Institutional Mechanisms**
 - Establish a **permanent secretariat** or coordination cell to improve continuity, follow-up on initiatives, and operational efficiency.
- **Balance Strategic and Developmental Focus**
 - Continue strategic cooperation while scaling up initiatives in **health, technology, climate action, disaster response, and infrastructure** to enhance regional trust and relevance.
- **Enhance Maritime Cooperation**
 - Expand joint efforts under **IPMDA**, operationalise outcomes of the **‘Quad-at-Sea’ Observer Mission**, and deepen coordination on maritime law enforcement and legal frameworks.
- **Formalise Quad+ Engagement**
 - Institutionalise Quad+ mechanisms with **South Korea, Vietnam, New Zealand, and ASEAN** for broader regional legitimacy and collective deterrence.
- **Address Internal Divergences**
 - Create space for **diverse national positions**, especially on global geopolitical issues like Ukraine, while maintaining unity on Indo-Pacific objectives.
- **Build Resilience Against Chinese Pressure**
 - Develop a **coordinated, flexible China strategy** that blends deterrence with diplomacy, while avoiding bloc-based confrontation.
- **Improve Public Perception and Soft Power**
 - Increase visibility of Quad’s **developmental contributions**—vaccine delivery, disaster relief, infrastructure—in partner nations to counter China’s narrative.

CONCLUSION:

- The Quad has emerged as a key pillar of stability in the Indo-Pacific, especially for India. To remain credible and effective, it must evolve into a more **coherent, inclusive, and action-oriented grouping** with both strategic depth and developmental outreach.

PRACTICE QUESTION:

Q. "The Quad serves as a strategic platform for India to assert its role in the Indo-Pacific and counterbalance China." Discuss. (10 marks, 150 words)

APPROACH:**MODEL ANSWER:**

The **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)**, comprising India, the U.S., Japan, and Australia, has evolved from a tsunami relief mechanism (2004) into a key strategic grouping for ensuring a **free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific**. The **recent 2025 Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Washington** reaffirmed this role, particularly in maritime security, counterterrorism, and reducing dependence on China. For India, the Quad provides both strategic leverage and regional leadership.

Quad as a Strategic Platform for India:**1. Countering China's Assertiveness**

- Enables India to coordinate with democracies to resist Chinese aggression on the LAC and Indian Ocean.

- The 2025 statement condemned coercion and militarisation in the South China Sea, implicitly supporting India's strategic concerns.
- 2. **Providing Alternatives to the BRI**
 - Quad pledges like the **\$50 billion Indo-Pacific infrastructure** fund and the **Critical Minerals Partnership** help India counter China's BRI and reduce dependence on Chinese supply chains.
- 3. **Enhancing Naval and Maritime Reach**
 - Participation in the **Malabar exercises**, **Quad-at-Sea Mission**, and **IPMDA** strengthen India's maritime surveillance and role as a **net security provider** in the region.
- 4. **Supporting Technological Sovereignty**
 - Through Quad-backed initiatives in **semiconductors, AI, and 5G**, India enhances its tech resilience and strategic autonomy.
- 5. **Strengthening Act East Policy**
 - Deepens India's engagement with Japan, ASEAN, and Australia, reinforcing its **Act East strategy**.
- 6. **Promoting Rules-Based Maritime Order**
 - Quad reinforces UNCLOS norms and opposes unilateral status quo changes, supporting India's maritime interests.
- 7. **Projecting Soft Power and Developmental Leadership**
 - Vaccine diplomacy, disaster response (HADR), and clean energy cooperation position India as a **regional development partner**.

Challenges to India's Strategic Leverage in Quad:

- **Divergent threat perceptions** among members (e.g., Taiwan vs. land border threats).
- **AUKUS alliance** may shift U.S. focus toward Australia, diluting Quad's balance.
- **India's neutrality on Ukraine** creates friction with other members.
- **Lack of institutional structure** limits operational efficiency.
- **Quad members' strong trade ties with China** constrain assertive postures.

Way Forward:

- **Institutionalise the Quad** through a permanent coordination mechanism.
- **Expand Quad+** with ASEAN, South Korea, and Vietnam for greater regional acceptance.
- **Operationalise maritime initiatives** like IPMDA and Quad-at-Sea missions.

- Balance strategic focus with **developmental initiatives** in climate, health, and infrastructure.
- Respect **strategic autonomy** while maintaining unity on Indo-Pacific concerns.

The Quad has become a vital pillar of India's Indo-Pacific strategy. It enhances India's ability to **counterbalance China**, **assert its maritime leadership**, and project itself as a **responsible regional power**. To sustain its relevance, India must shape the Quad into a **cohesive and inclusive platform** that blends strategic depth with developmental outreach.

