



The Quad's importance to India's strategic autonomy

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(GS 2: India and its neighborhood- relations & Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate)

Context:

- The maiden Quadrilateral Security Dialogue summit of the leaders of Australia, India, Japan and the U.S. on March 12 was a defining moment in Asian geopolitics.
- It was a meeting at the highest political level, occasioned a productive dialogue, and concluded with a substantive joint statement is indicative of its immediate significance.
- The summit showed that the “Quad has come of age”, as underlined by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. If it leads to tangible action and visible cooperation, it will impact the whole region.

China's reaction:

- Global Times, the Chinese newspaper, published an essay, speculating on the implications of the historic Quad summit for the BRICS – the forum that was the very symbol of India's much celebrated “strategic autonomy”.
- Global Times called the Quad as India's coalition with the US and its Asian allies, Australia and Japan – a “negative asset” for the BRICS.
- The paper further argued that “In moving closer to the US and the US-led Quad in recent years”, Delhi has worsened India-China and India-Russia relations and halted progress in the development of BRICS and SCO.
- From Beijing's perspective, India has taken advantage of the BRICS on issues like terrorism and gained access to regional cooperation in inner Asia.
- At the same time, Beijing sees Delhi's mobilising the Quad as balancing or even “blackmailing” China.
- Global Times warns that if Delhi continues to get closer to Washington, India “will eventually lose its strategic autonomy” and become America's “hatchet man against China”.

India's strategic autonomy and the U.S.:

- India's "strategic autonomy" is the framework which guided Delhi's international relations since the Cold War.
- In the early 1990s, strategic autonomy was about creating space for India against the overweening American power after the collapse of the Soviet Union.
- Ideological inertia, however, prevented Delhi's foreign policy discourse from recognising a fundamental transformation in India's external environment over the last three decades.
- In his first term (1993-97), President Bill Clinton questioned the legitimacy of Jammu and Kashmir's accession to India and declared the US's intent to resolve Delhi's Kashmir dispute with Pakistan.
- On top of its Kashmir activism, Washington insisted that rolling back India's nuclear and missile programmes was a major objective of US foreign policy.
- If Pakistan fanned the fires of a fierce insurgency in Kashmir, the US declared that J&K was the world's most dangerous nuclear flashpoint.
- All this changed over the last three decades. Under Clinton's successors, George W Bush, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump.
- Washington discarded its itch to mediate on Kashmir, resolved the nuclear dispute, and widened economic and political cooperation with Delhi to become India's most important strategic partner.

Expansionist china, concern for India:

- A rising China has emerged as the biggest challenge to India and the US.
- With China's growing military power, the PLA has become more assertive on the contested boundary.
- Amidst the breakdown of peace and tranquillity on the border, the support from the US and its Asian allies has been valuable.
- On the Kashmir question, it is China that rakes up the issue at the UNSC while the US is helping India to block China's moves.
- On cross-border terrorism, the US puts pressure on Pakistan and China protects Rawalpindi.
- The US has facilitated India's integration with the global nuclear order while Beijing blocks Delhi's membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.
- The US backs India's permanent membership of the UNSC, China does not.
- Delhi now sees the trade with China hollowing out India's manufacturing capability. Its objective on diversifying its economy away from China is shared by the US and the Quad partners.
- India opposes China's Belt and Road Initiative as a project that undermines India's territorial sovereignty and regional primacy.
- Delhi is working with Quad partners to offer alternatives to the BRI.

- Delhi sees China's rising military profile in the subcontinent and the Indian Ocean as a problem and is working with Washington to redress the unfolding imbalance in India's neighbourhood.

India's approach:

- The trend lines have evolved over a period of time and the Quad summit is an important part of India's response to the extraordinary challenge that China presents.
- The BRICS was part of India's strategy in the unipolar moment that dawned at the end of the Cold War.
- Delhi's current enthusiasm for the Quad is about limiting the dangers of a unipolar Asia dominated by China.
- This does not mean India will walk away from the BRICS. Delhi will continue to attach some value to a forum like the BRICS.
- After all, the BRICS forum provides a useful channel of communication between Delhi and Beijing at a very difficult moment in the evolution of their bilateral relations.
- The BRICS is also about India's enduring partnerships with Russia, Brazil, and South Africa. India also values its ties with the Central Asian states in the SCO.

Conclusion:

- The summit and 'The Spirit of the Quad' – the inspired title of the joint statement – represented a giant leap forward.
- Now is the time to back political commitment with a strong mix of resolve, energy, stamina and the fresh ideas of stakeholders.
- As the global scenario gets more complex and India's ambitions increase, a cohesive strategic vision would give substance and drive to India's pursuit of its interests over the long term.

MORE TO KNOW:

About the QUAD:

- The **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue**(also known as the **QUAD**) is an informal strategic forum between the United States, Japan, India and Australia that is maintained by semi-regular summits, information exchanges and military drills between member countries.
- The initiation of an American, Japanese, Australian and Indian defense arrangement, modeled on the concept of a Democratic Peace.
- The forum was initiated as a dialogue in August 2007 by then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan on "seas of freedom and prosperity".

- The dialogue was paralleled by the signing of the Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation in March 2007, and joint military exercises between the United States, India, Japan, and Australia, titled Exercise Malabar, in September.
- The diplomatic and military arrangement was widely viewed as a response to increased Chinese economic and military power.
- The first iteration of the Quad ceased to exist following the withdrawal of Australia in February 2008.
- After negotiations which started during the 2017 ASEAN Summits, with Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull of Australia, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan, Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, and President Donald Trump of the United States agreeing in Manila to revive the security pact.
- India, Japan, and the United States continued to hold joint naval exercises as Exercise Malabar through 2019.
- In 2020 Australia joined the Malabar exercise after an invitation from India making it the first time all members of the Quad will be engaged on a naval basis.
- Now, the maiden Quadrilateral Security Dialogue summit of the leaders of Australia, India, Japan and the U.S. was held on March 12, was a defining moment in Asian geopolitics.