

POTENTIAL EXPANSION OF QUAD: COMPELLING MOTIVATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

China's desire for power by trying to intimidate various countries into submission through the creation of friction points, both at the land borders and in the seas encompassing other nations' Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) has put various countries on a confrontational path. There are countries which nurse a deep mistrust towards China but are entangled economically with it and any belligerent action by them may cost them economically. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), though it has not taken off in full earnest, can pose stiff challenges to China when the concerned stakeholders in the region are brought inside the fold. The inclusion of Indonesia and France in the expanded Quad would effectively ensure that the USA alone cannot be the deciding factor in the region and the other stakeholders also would have a say in the scheme of things.

It would not be an exaggeration to speculate that international policy ironically towards China, for the past five decades, has been

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shaped solely by the USA, and its leaning towards China began with the presidency of Richard Nixon and his confidante Henry Kissinger, and was followed by successive presidents, barring Donald Trump. It was a continued line-up of U.S. presidents who facilitated China's none too spectacular acceleration, ensured its inclusion in various international establishments, and assisted its entry into the World Trade Organisation (WTO) which was accomplished through the US-China Relations Act in 2000. The USA realised a little too late that its suicidal flirting with China has created a Frankenstein monster which was going all out to oust the USA as the sole superpower. The path followed by China to achieve this status has been through military bullying, economic blackmail and technological espionage.¹

The Quad, which informally got together in 2004 to work towards tsunami relief, saw a quiet death once the relief work was completed. It was as late as in 2016 that the Quad was given a new lease of life with both the USA and Japan taking leading roles in bringing together the four maritime democracies. Needless to say, the USA will continue to be the dominant partner in the Quad. India and Japan are directly affected by the Chinese territorial bullying and Australia is a victim of its economic blackmail and electoral interference.² The acts of China have forced the Quad members to think of a strategy of maintaining a robust presence in the Indo-Pacific and ensuring that China does not hinder the freedom of navigation. The coming together of India, the U.S., Japan and Australia is being viewed as a strategic partnership to deal with China's rise and its sabre rattling. China's rise has been far from peaceful and has presented a serious challenge to a rules-based international order.

The grouping of the Quad is a definite necessity to counter a belligerent China, but confining it only to four members may not meet the ends of justice. If India is to actively participate in a coalition like the Quad, it would not be suffice to have a coalition of countries located in different corners, and dominated by one country; it needs

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1. Nicholas Yong, "Industrial Espionage: How China Sneaks out America's Technology Secrets," *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-64206950>. Accessed on February 26, 2025.
 2. Parliament of Australia, "Foreign Interference in Australia," https://www.apf.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Foreign_Interference_through_Social_Media/ForeignInterference47/Report/Chapter_2. Accessed on February 26, 2025.

to include other countries in the region that face Chinese territorial aggression and are also major powers with vested interests in the region and whose foreign policy cannot be dictated by the Americans. In view of the above, it is felt that the expansion of Quad is an inevitable necessity. It is proposed that South Korea, Vietnam and Indonesia, in addition to France be included to form part of an expanded Quad as dynamic changing discourses are required. Reassurance without deterrence does not create a sustainable balance.

CONCERNS OF GENUINENESS

There have always been creeping doubts in the minds of the Quad partners about the sincerity of the Americans towards the alliance. The election of Donald Trump as the 47th American president has only reinforced the fears, as he is known to be both mercurial and unpredictable. All the three members of the alliance have their own issues with the Americans and that is one of the primary reasons why the Quad should be expanded, with more regional stakeholders who are both powerful and have an independent line of thinking.

India continues to be wary of America's motives, and its dealings, as the Americans have a long history of baiting India. The USA accuses India of being less tolerant with its minorities but has never bothered to condemn Pakistan where the minorities live in a perpetual state of terror. The USA sides with Canada and accuses India of carrying out extra-territorial executions while the Americans have had no qualms about executing Osama bin Laden, General Suleimani, and Al Zawahri, all outside the USA. They cite shared values, but are not wary of harbouring known Khalistani sympathisers like Gurupatwant Singh Pannun who openly threatens India and has been instrumental in vandalising Indian embassies in America. The silence it maintained when the Chinese aggressed in Doklam in 2017 have left Indians wondering about America's sincerity. The U.S.' criticism regarding India's internal affairs issues like the arrest of former Delhi Chief Minister Kejariwal does not bode well for good relations between the two countries, with India feeling that it is being treated like an underappreciated partner by the U.S.

The U.S.-Japan Mutual Cooperation and Security Assurance Treaty was signed in 1960. It contained certain provisions that

offered the USA an overwhelming privilege to operationalise defence centres in Japan and also formalised the presence of the American troops stationed there. As a result of the agreement, the United States received a kind of outpost for operations in East Asia. Japan is effectively a state that is largely dependent on the U.S. for military protection and the recent U.S. threat to walk out of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) due to inadequate spending by its members has got Japan worried about its military pact with the USA. President Trump criticised the US-Japan Security Treaty, highlighting the fact that the US is obliged to defend Japan under the agreement but Japan does not offer the same security guarantees in return. Trump's displeasure with the treaty has stoked fears in Japan that he will eventually set his sights on extracting a new security or trade deal from Tokyo. Even if China decides on aggression on Japan, there would be a lingering doubt in the minds of the Japanese about whether the U.S. would go to war with China to protect its ally.

The United Nations expressed grave concern after the U.S. president signed an Executive Order authorising sanctions on the International Criminal Court, its personnel and individuals or entities who cooperate with it; this has not been received well by the Australians also.³ If Trump unilaterally decides to reduce the U.S. role in Australia's regional security on similar lines as he is proposing towards NATO, Australia may be forced to increase its defence spending significantly to compensate for the gap. This additional spending would place a strain on the Australian national budget and also force a reassessment of military dependencies. The business-first strategy of the Trump Administration prioritises economic gains over historical alliances, making it clear that allies must now offer tangible benefits to secure favourable treatment from Washington. If U.S. aid and security guarantees are tied to financial interests rather than shared democratic values, Australia will need to reconsider the foundation of its alliance with America.

3. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "United States: UN Experts Condemn Sanctions Against the ICC," <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2025/02/united-states-un-experts-condemn-sanctions-against-icc>. Accessed on February 27, 2025.

WHAT AILS THE QUAD

There are certain issues which have been stumbling blocks on the full operationalisation of the Quad.

- (i) The Quad's reluctance to explicitly focus on security challenges, thus, displaying strategic ambiguity which renders the partnership vulnerable.
- (ii) Certain strategic divergent issues need to be addressed such as India's historical non-alignment, Australia's rebuilding of economic ties with China, and Japan's pacifist stance.
- (iii) Though the Quad primarily stands for freedom of navigation, there has been no joint Freedom of Navigation Operation (FONOP) by the Quad.
- (iv) It is yet to make any tangible progress on climate change which has a huge impact on the Pacific nations.
- (v) The Quad has no plans for collective defence.

AMERICAN BINARY CHOICES

The USA knows well that it faces almost zero armed threats from countries in its periphery, or from China, the only potential adversary at this juncture, as the distance between the two countries is so vast that the biggest ocean, the Pacific, separates one from the other. The USA also is not concerned about the threats China poses to a number of nations in the Peninsula of Asia, including India. The credit for understanding the dangers of misplaced optimism while dealing with China has to be singularly granted to Donald Trump who has been orchestrating changes in the foreign policy dealing with China and the multi-dimensional challenges it continues to pose to the world order. Trump himself has acknowledged that the U.S. "created a monster."⁴ The formal formulation of the Quad was certainly given an impetus by Donald Trump in his first term as the president of the United States of America.

China will use its supplier clout with US big businesses to influence the Trump Administration which is going all out to put an end to Chinese economic exploitation through high tariffs, and

4. B. Chellaney, "Biden Lacks Strategic Clarity on China", *The Japan Times*, December 10, 2020, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2020/12/10/commentary/world-commentary/joe-biden-foreign-policy-china/>. Accessed on February 12, 2025.

has pushed the Chinese onto the back foot. China understands that merely retaliatory tariffs may not work but it can tighten the screws on the American companies that have huge investments in China, subtly threatening them of consequences for their clear and imagined violations of Chinese laws. The business conglomerate in the USA may force the Trump Administration to go easy on China.

The Americans will probably weigh both options and may choose a path which suits their national interests and nothing else. Donald Trump is known to reverse his decisions as quickly as he makes them. The absence of a wholehearted approach by the USA in support for the Quad may weaken the organisation and it is, therefore, essential to bring on board countries which are both strong and not unduly influenced by US policies, and potentially expand the organisation; the criteria can be based on military capability and enduring interest in the region, without the infringement of business interests.

CLOSENESS WITHOUT COMMONALITY

It was in May 2007 when the Quad officially met in the backdrop of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and had the first dialogue in Manila, where the bloc dabbled on zones of parallel stakes and spoke of decisive and attainable goals in multiple fields, including piracy, climate change and management of calamities posed by natural causes, through relief works.⁵ This was followed by a series of Malabar Naval Exercises. In 2007, the exercise saw the participation of Japan, Singapore, and Australia, with the first edition held in the Bay of Bengal and a second in the Western Pacific, according to the Ministry of External Affairs.⁶ While Australia withdrew from the exercise after 2007 due to China's objections, it rejoined in 2020, making the Malabar Exercise a quadrilateral event once again.⁷ The

5. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Unclassified Quad Brief", https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Unclassified_Quad_Brief_Feb_2025.pdf. Accessed on February 25, 2025.

6. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, Annual Report 2007-08, https://www.mea.gov.in/uploads/publicationdocs/169_annual-report-2007-2008.pdf. Accessed on February 25, 2025.

7. Andrew Greene, "Australia to Rejoin 'Quad' Naval Exercises in Move Certain to Infuriate Beijing", *ABC News*, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-10-20/australia-rejoins-naval-exercise-in-move-certain-to-anger-china/12784186>. Accessed on February 25, 2025.

four members' geopolitical bonds and contradictions with China are quite different.

Since 2007, the Quad has seen many ups and downs, with due seriousness accorded only when Donald Trump became the US president in 2016. It was the Chinese coercive behaviour in Doklam with India and its muscle flexing in both the South China and East China Seas, rattling many nations, including Japan, that saw the Quad moving closer together to form a strong alliance.

India has long been somewhat suspicious of the Quad as there is a lot of difference between pledges and actions; India's fears were not totally unfounded as proved when the Australians chose to walk out of the grouping. Australia was unwilling to face the wrath of China, its sword arm and situational ethics. The then Australian Foreign Minister Stephen Smith, showed flawed impression management when he announced the decision to pull out from the Quad, sticking around the Chinese foreign minister, and signalling his country's acceptance of dependence, as China perceived the Quad as a military alliance in the making and aimed to checkmate it.⁸

Australia rejoined the Quad in 2017 after a series of calculated provocations by China, including numerous attempts to influence the Australian political process. It was around the same time that India played a major role in trying to revive the Quad but was deeply disappointed when it received no support over the Doklam issue when the Chinese intruded into Bhutan's territory bordering India and threatened its sovereignty. It is pertinent to mention that neither the USA nor Australia condemned the Chinese aggression in Doklam in 2017.⁹ It was only Japan which voiced support and branded the Chinese behaviour as belligerent.¹⁰ The failure by both Australia and the USA to join Japan was an ample indicator of the lack of seriousness

8. Daniel Flitton, "Who Really Killed the Quad 1.0?", Lowy Institute, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/who-really-killed-quad-10>. Accessed on February 26, 2025.

9. Thomas F. Lynch III, "A Failure of Strategic Vision: U.S. Policy and the Doklam Border Dispute", Institute for National Strategic Studies, <https://inss.ndu.edu/Media/News/Article/1428958/a-failure-of-strategic-vision-us-policy-and-the-doklam-border-dispute/>. Accessed on February 26, 2025.

10. Prabash K Dutta, "Why Japan Lent Support to India Against China Over Doklam Standoff", *India Today*, <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/japan-india-china-doklam-standoff-1030287-2017-08-18>. Accessed on February 25, 2025.

of the grouping, and almost tantamounted to the moral endorsement of China's actions, thereby portraying the American credibility in a poor light. This did not go unnoticed by many Pacific nations, as the sincerity of the Americans in protecting their security interests came into question. As for the China-India border disputes, the Quad grouping will not be able to offer any physical help to India except for some scarce intelligence sharing and India may have to counter China by itself, which it is more than capable of doing.

Despite the reservations of the other nations, Japan was the only country willing to push forward the agenda of forming the coalition despite its huge business interests in China. The Quad has not progressed beyond periodical strategic symposiums, position paper repetitions and rare joint exercises, and has dwelled more into supply chain security and strategic technology, while Pacific Ocean Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR), and military security have been relegated to secondary status. Both Japan and Australia already have an ongoing trilateral military pact with the United States and there is a great level of emphasis and expectation on India's formal access and participation. The members support the principle of freedom of navigation, but there seems to be reticence from India, Australia and Japan to take the lead from the USA and venture into the 12 nautical mile zone around the disputed areas in the South China Sea.

The Quad was formed basically by maritime democracies to uphold the democratic ethos but, at times, it presents a dichotomy when the USA has strong ongoing partnerships with ruling regimes in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and certain Latin American nations, all of which have poor track records on human rights. The Quad is neither an alliance nor formalised, with virtually no reciprocal obligation among its members.

SEIZING THE MOMENT: A US STRATEGY—BIRTH OF 'SQUAD'

On parallel grounds there is an emerging regional block, unofficially dubbed the 'Squad', a four-way counter-balance that links Australia, Japan, and the United States with the Philippines to counter the increasing Chinese belligerence against the Philippines, which was formed in May 2024 at Hawaii by the defence ministers of the four

countries.¹¹ The former US Defence Secretary General Lloyd Austin mooted this proposal, forcefully ensuring that the alliance took shape. This alliance was for strengthening the Philippines' maritime security as well as advancing and continuing maritime cooperation.¹² As per media reports, this grouping of four has been named 'Squad' by Pentagon officials. The Quad remains committed to regional security, while the Squad offers a localised reaction by brandishing hard power, when warranted, to ensure security for the allies. The Philippines has been added to this grouping and it does not have India as one of its members.

This alliance is likely to grow into an active well-coordinated and continual cluster, in view of the members' pivotal economic stakes in the disputed waters of the South China Sea and East China Sea, and also to provide increased security assistance to the Philippines whose territorial integrity is being constantly threatened by China, and which has borne the brunt of Chinese assertiveness. Both Japan and Australia that are members of multiple alliances together have strengthened their partnership and have been in the forefront to condemn China's continuous attempts to alter geography through force in the region. It is no surprise that this alliance has been formed as Japan has experienced numerous attempts by Chinese trawlers to violate the sanctity of its territorial waters in and around the Senkaku Islands. Where the Squad stands apart from the Quad is the fact that it tends to portray an aggressive military posture against any aggression, and would show no hesitation in responding in kind.

BLESSINGS OF DIVERSITY

There had been speculation that the Quad countries would seek to expand the present Quad to involve more like-minded partners as part of an endeavour to build a strong federation of willing countries against Chinese aggression. However, the vested interests of each

11. Sayantan Haldar and Abhishek Sharma, "Squad and the Rise of Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific", Observer Research Foundation, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/squad-and-the-rise-of-minilateralism-in-the-indo-pacific>. Accessed on February 26, 2025.

12. Collins Chong Yew Keat, "The Squad And The Quad: New Fears And Power Equation In The Indo-Pacific—Analysis", *Eurasia Review*, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/15052024-the-squad-and-the-quad-new-fears-and-power-equation-in-the-indo-pacific-analysis/>. Accessed on February 26, 2025.

nation in the region are not exactly on the same trajectory. There are a number of customary hazards facing the Indo-Pacific nations but, unfortunately, there are certain diverging objectives also, when these nations do not see eye to eye. The approach adopted by the four different Quad members are at slight variance as they view their own specific interests in the Indo-Pacific and then tend to prioritise their responses accordingly. The South China Sea and East China Sea are strategically crucial to both the USA and Japan. The Australians are concerned about Chinese transgression into their neighbourhood island nations, and India has more pressing concerns in the Indian Ocean.

India's primary priority on matters of security and grey zone warfare will always be Pakistan, as witnessed in the recent standoff between the two nuclear neighbours. But Pakistan would never feature as a priority for Japan or Australia. On similar lines, India is bound to be minimally concerned about the lingering threat from North Korea to Japan or South Korea. The Australians are wary of being swamped by the Chinese in their country, terming it as "yellow peril"-prompted interference in their domestic politics, and China trying to erode their traditional stronghold among the small Pacific nations.¹³ The common threat, in addition to other existing ones, that binds them all is the one being posed by a belligerent China, and though it is not a partnership of equals, they see a convergence in countering the threat by China. The Quad countries have yet to push for a Quad expansion officially, but the emerging "Quad Plus" framework has considerable potential for adding more members.

There's no real policy gain or strategic profit in bringing in more nations as proposed by the USA, as it would automatically assume a leadership role due to its dominance and will try to ensure that the coalition aligns with its own strategic objectives and vision. Further, it will have a greater say when it comes to strategic directions and resource allocations. The USA can either involve nations in a crisis like Australia was involved in the Afghanistan campaign despite

13. Kara Němečková, "Breaking Down China's Interference Activities with Justin Bassi", China Observers in Central and Eastern Europe, <https://chinaobservers.eu/voice-for-choice-41-breaking-down-chinas-interference-activities-with-justin-bassi>. Accessed on March 1, 2025.

not being a member of NATO and can also abandon nations during a crisis as it did to South Vietnam in 1975. A number of countries are feeling the heat of Chinese territorial transgressions but only a select few have the capacity to take on China. The stronger among the affected countries, that include South Korea, Vietnam and Indonesia, have their own political compulsions to openly rally against China.

SOUTH KOREA: POSITIVE GLANCES

South Korea faces a clear and present danger from the North Koreans who are supported to the hilt by the Chinese, and faces a possibility too bitter to contemplate.¹⁴ It has all the compelling reasons to seek a multi-nation alliance like the Quad. Though South Korea is not generally considered a major power in military parlance, its growing middle power potential, impeccable democratic credentials, being a technical powerhouse, with cutting edge technology and increasingly robust strategic relationships with the Quad's present participants, make it an ideal partner to join the Quad. It has shown a strong interest in playing a larger regional role. It is unfortunate that South Korea's limited role in regional security networks is in contrast to the influence it wields as one of Asia's robust democracies, East Asia's third largest economy, and one of the region's more capable military powers. If South Korea is asked to exercise its choice in joining the Quad, it should seize the opportunity and can, thus, effectively counter-balance both China and North Korea. It can fittingly assimilate itself into the existing group which is firmly established, with all the protocols in place. It also has naval cooperation with all the four members of the Quad, making it easy to integrate. On January 9, 2024, the Quad countries and South Korea held a multinational exercise, Sea Dragon 2024, validating the joint operational doctrine.¹⁵

14. Marcus Garlauskas, "The U.S. Must Prepare to Fight China and North Korea at the Same Time", *Foreign Policy*, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/08/06/war-north-korea-china-taiwan-kim-xi-prepare-pentagon-defense>. Accessed on May 14, 2025.

15. From Commander, Task Force 72 Public Affairs, Australia, India, Japan, Korea, and the U.S. Complete Multilateral Exercise Sea Dragon 2024, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/3662123/australia-india-japan-korea-and-the-us-complete-multilateral-exercise-sea-dragon>. Accessed on March 1, 2025.

There is space for South Korea to participate in the Quad, as it is highly adept at operations involving its fledgling coast guard, possesses a comprehensive understanding of activities involving the maritime environment, and carries out regular patrols in the South China Sea.¹⁶ South Korea is among the select countries comprising Russia, China, Japan, the USA and India that deliver surface vessels to Vietnam and the Philippines to resist the unlawful poaching of maritime species in their designated EEZs.¹⁷ There is a growing bonhomie between South Korea and Japan, and, hence, a more structured and conventionalised security mechanism for the inclusion of the nation as a Quad member may be considered.¹⁸ This will mitigate the possibilities of the United States being a mediator between Japan and South Korea to sort out their political differences, and the members will have the option of acting independently, in consonance with the larger interest of the group. Although South Korea's strategic outlook is focussed on Northeast Asia and the challenges posed by North Korea, the former shares the principles of the Quad such as freedom of navigation, commitment to a rules-based order and uninterrupted maritime trade. South Korea also has tremendous capabilities with regard to health resilience.

It is strongly felt that the inclusion of South Korea into the Quad would ensure that it amplifies its influence well beyond the affairs in the Korean Peninsula and can effectively incorporate its promising democratic potential by assuming enhanced regional power responsibility. A mechanism for enhanced maritime security collaboration with the Quad members is already in place. Apart from exhaustive harmonisation with the Quad militaries, it also sends a positive message to the area that the association between elected democracies and reliable security mechanisms is incredibly

16. Christy Lee, "South Korea Steps up Commitment to South China Sea, with Limits", *Voa News*, <https://www.voanews.com/a/south-korea-steps-up-commitment-to-south-china-sea-with-limits-/7823614.html>. Accessed on March 1, 2025.

17. Amparo Pamela Fabe, "Ties that Bind: Reinforcing South Korea-Philippine Security Cooperation", Korea Institute for Maritime Strategy, <https://en.kims.or.kr/issubrief/kims-periscope/peri359/>. Accessed on March 1, 2025.

18. Corey Lee Bell and Elena Collinson, "The China Factor in Japan and South Korea's Rapprochement: Implications for Australia", University of Technology (Sydney), <https://www.uts.edu.au/news/2024/10/china-factor-japan-and-south-koreas-rapprochement-implications-australia>. Accessed on March 1, 2025.

important at a juncture when the rules-based regional order is under unprecedented threat.

VIETNAM: CAUTIOUS OPTIMISM

For Vietnam, China poses a clear and present danger despite their communist commonality. To counter the ever-growing threats, Vietnam has cautiously accelerated the ante, and probably for the first time since the Vietnam War with the USA, is enhancing the possibility of close defence cooperation with various powers. It is cooperating with Russia, India, Japan and South Korea and is keen on including the United States as a constructive defence partner. Further, Vietnam is seriously contemplating taking the South China Sea dispute to the International Court of Justice after the positive ruling in favour of the Philippines and against the Chinese for their territorial violations. Vietnam has been the strongest critic of the Chinese unlawful claim in the nine-dashed-line and, along with Japan, is strongly opposed to this claim, as both feel that borders are non-negotiable. Vietnam's deft management of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) during its chairmanship stint has substantially elevated its position in the region, and its compelling role as a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has enhanced its standing globally. Vietnam has emerged as a significant country in the Southeast Asian region, with robust economic growth, and harbours a well-trained military machine. In stark contrast to other Southeast Asian countries that abhor China's maritime expansion but are hesitant to voice their protest, Vietnam has been vocal in expressing its views on this issue. Vietnam also proved its mettle in the war against China in 1979 when China suffered heavy losses and failed to achieve its aim despite going all out to prove itself.¹⁹

Vietnam would be an automatic choice for inclusion in a China-focussed Quad Plus. Increasing the scope of participation in the Quad and including a prominent Southeast Asian country would automatically negate China's narrative that the Quad is merely a group of out of the area players striving to contain Chinese

19. Charlie Gao, "Shocking Defeat: How China Lost to Vietnam in 1979", National Interest, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/shocking-defeat-how-china-lost-vietnam-1979-137797>. Accessed on March 1, 2025.

aspirations. Vietnam has been steadfastly following the principles of no alliances, not offering military bases in Vietnam to foreign powers, and avoids siding with a second country against a third country. These factors all tend to limit Vietnam's capacity to participate in a group directed at opposing China. However, there is a possibility of Vietnam's participation if one takes Vietnam's last Defence White Paper into consideration, which provides a ruling that Vietnam may overturn this policy if there is a potential threat to its territorial integrity.²⁰ The other claimants in the South China Sea unfortunately remain reluctant to express their support for freedom-of-navigation operations, in contrast to the Vietnamese Defence White Paper which reads: "Vietnam welcomes vessels of navies, coast guards, border guards, and international organizations to make courtesy or ordinary port visits or stop over in its ports to repair, replenish logistics and technical supplies."²¹ This is considered a bold step by a nation that has no qualms about going all out to protect its territory. Vietnam enjoys excellent relations with India, Australia, South Korea and Japan and has forged greater cooperation with the USA.

Vietnam would be a desirable ally in the areas of defence and security, all made possible due to its excellent geographic location, with long coastlines, naturally bestowed deep-water bays, and, most importantly, a common border with China. The Vietnamese People's Army is well trained, disciplined, adequately equipped with the latest inventory and can continue to dominate the Gulf of Tonkin and the Halong Bay area. Further, Vietnam is increasingly focussed on expanding its military-technical cooperation, with a constant military budget, and can be considered to add positively to the Quad. On similar lines, Vietnam continues to be an active partner in the spheres of trade and commerce, especially when the Quad members are drawing up plans to minimise trade dependency on China. In many spheres, Vietnamese goods can become an alternative to Chinese

20. Ministry of National Defence (Vietnam), "2019 Vietnam National Defence White Paper, <https://mod.gov.vn/en/intro/!ut/p/z1/tVJNT8MwDP0tO>. Accessed on March 1, 2025.

21. Dereck Grossman and Christopher Sharman, "How to Read Vietnam's Latest Defense White Paper: A Message to Great Powers", *War on the Rocks*, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/12/how-to-read-vietnams-latest-defense-white-paper-a-message-to-great-powers/>. Accessed on March 1, 2025.

goods, especially in view of the ongoing transfer of production facilities to Vietnam. Hence, it is felt that Vietnam would be a welcome addition to the Quad.

INDONESIA: DYNAMIC ASSET

Indonesia has the world's fourth-largest population and a highly strategic geolocation and can certainly dictate terms in the region. Indonesia should have made efforts to enhance its global contour to assume the status as a 'Third Asian Giant' alongside China and India, but it has been sluggish in doing so, for reasons unknown. There is a lurking doubt in the minds of the Indonesians about the reliability of the USA continuing its positive view towards Indonesia, as the Americans, on a number of occasions, have been harsh in condemning Indonesia's track record on human rights. Indonesian military officers are generally wary of the USA intervening in the country's domestic affairs and do not forget that it was the Clinton Administration that put undue pressure on Indonesia to forego East Timor and also inflicted a military embargo on it that pushed Indonesia's armament programme back by a number of years.²²

However, Indonesia may not be totally averse to joining the Quad Plus as it shares an excellent rapport with India, Japan, and Australia. If Indonesia is convinced that the USA may not be the all-shots calling partner, it may be willing to join the bandwagon as it is becoming weary of China's constant muscle flexing. Indonesia, which also happens to be Southeast Asia's largest maritime state, that also has an intrinsic desire to shore up its maritime prowess and shares the Quad's values of democracy, management of climate change, anti-terrorism, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, disarmament and health as core principles.

In addition, Indonesia enjoys an excellent rapport with both Australia and India and they remain the strategic centres in the Indo-Pacific region. Indonesia is blessed by geography and is favourably located at the junction of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. India lies to the north of the region, while Australia lies to the south of Indonesia.

22. "U.S. and EU Suspend Military Ties with Indonesia", Arms Control Organisation, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/1999-09/us-and-eu-suspend-military-ties-indonesia>. Accessed on March 1, 2025.

Both countries have mutual interests in the region and are bound by a realistic approach to guaranteeing the peaceful growth of the region through discourse and empowerment. Further, Japan and Indonesia have enjoyed a lasting alliance and a steady 60 years of tactful ties, which have prospered into one of East Asia's strong diplomatic relationships.

With Indonesia sharing growing relations with all the countries in the Quad, there would be minimal hesitation in it joining the alliance, and an assurance from the USA that it would be more than willing to accommodate Indonesia, with minimum fuss, would ensure that Indonesia would be a value addition to the Quad.

FRANCE: CAPABILITY ENHANCEMENT

France is not a freshman in the Indo-Pacific region. Its holdings define its former colonial empire and currently consist of a multitude of islands (La Reunion, Mayotte, New Caledonia, the French Southern and Antarctic territories Wallis and Futuna, and French Polynesia) that preferred to remain under French rule rather than declaring independence back in the 1960s.²³ These prized possessions cover a vast maritime space, ranging from the Indian Ocean to French Polynesia in the Pacific, and accord France a massive nine million sq km EEZ which is the second largest in the world. These islands boast of a population of over 1.6 million and provide France a strategic say in the area. France has significant economic assets and citizens in place and, therefore, it is natural that it needs to defend these contested maritime waters against threats to life or property. It is not surprising that the French who have 93 per cent of their EEZ in the Indian and Pacific Oceans are certainly seeking a greater role to increase their military footprint in the Indo-Pacific.

France happens to be a permanent member of the UN Security Council with a veto power. It is an acclaimed nuclear power and boasts of robust armed forces considered as the seventh strongest in the world, controls an extremely well-oiled defence industrial complex and is making great strides in the field of arms production.

23. Bertil Huger and Manavik Raj, "France: A Balancing Force In Quad and The Indo-Pacific", *The Diplomatist*, <https://diplomatist.com/2021/05/21/france-a-balancing-force-in-quad-and-the-indo-pacific/>. Accessed on March 1, 2025.

This accords the French the status of the world's second-largest arms exporter, as specified by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.²⁴ The French Navy is one of the world's most advanced navies, mustering 180 ships, including a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, several air defence destroyers easily at par with the latest versions and is one of the few nations which has indigenously built its nuclear-powered aircraft carrier. It has its own hypersonic missiles which it tested to perfection in 2023.²⁵ France enjoys a thoroughly independent nuclear deterrent and an autonomous finely tuned industrial base. It owns indigenously manufactured ballistic missile submarines built in its own shipyards that are designed to carry French devised missiles fortified with French warheads which is an indicator of its indigenous prowess. To add to its conventional punch, France also sustains its own air and ground-based nuclear deterrent using the Rafale aircraft and the ASMP (Air-Sol Moyenne Portée) missile.²⁶

The French have always laid great emphasis on soft power as soft power is a fine measure of global influence and can be a highly effective way to exert influence. It also has the inherent ability to encourage collaboration, build networks and relationships. France happens to be the only country from the European Union (EU) that fields a permanent military force in the Indian Ocean. The formation of the AUKUS alliance of Australia, UK, and the US, followed by the scrapping of the \$86 billion submarine deal awarded to France was a blow to France's prestige and its trust in the allies. French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian was vocal when he called out the scrapping of the submarine deal agreed to by the AUKUS as evidence of "duplicity", "treachery" and a "stab in the back". These

24. Mathew George and Katarine Djokic, "Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2024", Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2025-03/fs_2503_at_2024_0.pdf. Accessed on March 2, 2025.

25. Elise Vincent, "Test Firing of V-MAX Brings France into Exclusive Club of Countries with Hypersonic Missiles", *Le Monde*, <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/06/28/test-firing-of-v-max-brings-france-into-exclusive-club-of-countries-with-hypersonic-missiles>. Accessed on March 2, 2025.

26. "Focus: What Are the Nuclear Capabilities of France After President Macron's Offer to Protect Europe Against Russia?", *Army Recognition News*, <https://armyrecognition.com/news/army-news/2025/focus-what-are-the-nuclear-capabilities-of-france-after-president-macrons-offer-to-protect-europe-against-russia>. Accessed on March 2, 2025.

were strong words by a senior member of the French Cabinet but only expressed the French anguish over the Australian betrayal.²⁷ The real obstacle to France joining the Quad comprises the Franco-Australian relations. The damage to Franco-Australian relations may persist for years to come unless both agree to resolve their differences.

If the other Quad nations can prevail upon France to join the coalition, it would be a huge capacity enhancement for the Quad. It is pertinent to mention that France shares an excellent rapport with Vietnam.²⁸ In addition, Indonesia's relations with France are excellent and both enjoy the status of strategic partners in Southeast Asia. Further, both France and Indonesia can effectually benefit from their association with the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean naval symposiums.

ADVANTAGES OF AN EXPANDED QUAD

There are certain inherent advantages of having an expanded Quad which include the following:

- (i) There is a possibility of future cooperation in the area of shipbuilding in India by the Quad members combined as India has a well-oiled shipbuilding industry in place.
- (ii) The maintenance of the ships of the Quad fleet deployed for maritime piracy operations can be repaired and maintained at Indian bases to ease the burden due to the distances involved. These ships can stay in the Indian Ocean continuously, and only crew replenishment would be required, which can be effected through civilian or chartered flights. This would be an effective use of military resources.
- (iii) The nations share commonality in aerial domain equipment.
- (iv) Each other's territories can be used for practice deployment.
- (v) Strategic lift capability and simulations of power projections can be effectively demonstrated to send strong messages.
- (vi) Regional integrated intelligence can be emphasised.

27. Olivia Salazar, "Were the French Blindsided by the AUKUS Submarine Deal?", *France 24*, <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20210921-were-the-french-blindsided-by-the-aucus-submarine-deal>. Accessed on March 2, 2025.

28. "Vietnam Upgrades Ties With France to Highest Level", *Reuters*, <https://www.reuters.com/world/vietnam-upgrades-ties-with-france-highest-level-2024-10-08/>. Accessed on March 2, 2025.

- (vii) Horizontal and vertical supply chain vulnerabilities can be tackled.

INDIAN GAINS

What does India stand to gain from expanding the Quad?

1. It offers New Delhi a heavy-duty pivot to further its strategic stakes in East Asia, and formulate approaches with resourceful allies in and out of the region, and add more strength to its Act East initiative.
2. India has gradually expanded the Quad's joint military exercises, which started in the maritime domain, to the land and the aerial domains, simulating threats and counteractions thereof, primarily keeping China in mind as the adversary. The latest iteration is the Tarang Shakti Exercise held in India in September 2024, involving a number of nations, including the Quad members.
3. Through the expanded Quad, India is seeking to reaffirm structured global governance to oppose China's growing muscle flexing and dominance through use of force, if the need so arises.
4. The security dividend that India may gain is bound to be significant, though not immense, since India is more than capable of tackling the more severe threats to its security, as was evident during the recent showdown with China during the Ladakh faceoff. India is also significantly benefiting from bilateral U.S. arms transfers which facilitate seamless military exercises with other Quad countries which operate similar weapon systems. The-to-be augmented Quad is bound to generate further gains from knowledge sharing on intelligence and logistics and the lessons derived through the military exercises.
5. A greater dividend is anticipated from the systematic restructuring of both regional and international trade, and investment collaboration focussed on gradual wealth build-up, which is bound to lower India's reliance on China and usher in an escalated financial inflow and production process from other major nations.
6. India's status as a major power with high democratic credentials is bound to grow exponentially due to its enhanced

participation in the restructuring of a reorganised global system invulnerable to Chinese leverage and also related with more widely acknowledged principles.

7. The countries have also agreed to preserve rare earth materials and other natural resources essential for the production of electric cars to basically balance Chinese monopoly in this domain.
8. If the expanded Quad sees this as a template for its long-term engagement, India would stand to gain immensely through modernising of Indian agriculture to give a boost to its green economy and to developing the much required defence technology. It would also facilitate building clean energy solutions for India's ever-growing energy needs and for improving the quality of India's education sector to make it a sought-after educational hub.

CONCLUSION

In the larger scheme of things, an expansion of the existing coalition with more resourceful entrants would be a strategically sound move. This would send a powerful message to all nations that a powerful coalition would not just sit and watch over transgressions in the Indo-Pacific region. In essence, the coming together of these four plus four powers will work in the coalition's favour. The members will need to formulate plans for conducting regular military cooperation through exercises in the maritime domain, with an emphasis on intelligence sharing and enhancing logistics management. This would bolster and offer iron-clad clarity that can deter China from aggressive intent and may force it to carry out its international obligations. Following the Quad order of business, which has largely changed to lay focus on a wide gamut of non-military issues, all involving the Indo-Pacific, there will be no barriers for the suggested countries' engagement with the existing members. This expanded coalition can ensure a rapid reaction to upcoming eventualities and can also serve as a deterrent to threats when faced with economic coercion. The coming together of these eight countries will not only add muscle to the coalition but will enable it address the multiple challenges that are becoming increasingly complex by the day.