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Four Corners: On The Quad's Agenda

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(This editorial is based on the article "Four corners: on the Quad's agenda" which appears in The Hindu on 6th November 2018. It analyses the Quad grouping.)

Officials from the 'Quadrilateral' (Quad) grouping will meet in Singapore on 14 November **to discuss their present challenge of describing what is their common agenda.**

While Washington sees the U.S. and India as "bookends" (occur or be positioned at the end or on either side) of the Indo-Pacific, India, and Japan have included the oceans up

to Africa in their definition.

- During this third round, the four countries are expected to discuss infrastructure projects they are working on and building humanitarian disaster response mechanisms.
- India and Japan have announced they will combine efforts on a number of projects in South Asia, including bridges and roads in Bangladesh, an LNG facility in Sri Lanka and reconstruction projects in Myanmar's Rakhine province.
- Australia has unveiled an ambitious \$2 billion project to fund infrastructure and build maritime and military infrastructure in the Pacific region, on which it is willing to cooperate with other Quad members.
- The four countries are expected to talk about regional developments, including elections in the Maldives, the collapse of the government in Sri Lanka and the latest developments in North Korea.
- As the current Quad talks are being held on the sidelines of the 13th East Asia

Summit, it is understood that issues are going to overlap with other regional groupings like the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) summit and the ASEAN-India informal summit.

What is Quad in International Relations?

- It is the grouping of four democracies – **India, Australia, the US, and Japan.**
- All four nations find a common ground of being democratic nations and also support the common interest of unhindered maritime trade and security.
- The Quad is billed as four democracies with a shared objective to ensure and **support a “free, open and prosperous” Indo-Pacific region.**
- The idea of Quad was first mooted by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007. However, the idea couldn't move ahead with Australia pulling out of it, apparently due to Chinese pressure.
- Finally, on November 12, 2017, India, Australia, the US and Japan, came together and formed this “quadrilateral” coalition.

Agenda

- **It aims at countering China's aggressive** behaviour **in the Indo-Pacific region.**
- India, Australia, and Japan had issued separate statements listing the Indo-Pacific as a major area of the Quad's deliberations and resolved to expand cooperation to uphold a rules-based order and respect for international law in this strategically important region.
- **They agreed that a free, open, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific region serves the long-term interests of all countries in the region and of the world at large.** Quad officials also exchanged views on addressing the common challenges of terrorism and proliferation linkages impacting the region, as well as on enhancing connectivity.

India and Quad countries

- China's blatant violation of international norms in recent years, particularly its construction of military facilities on reclaimed islands in the South China Sea, and its growing military and economic power, pose a strategic challenge to the countries in the Indo-Pacific region, including India, the United States, and its allies and strategic partners.
- Together with the USA and its other strategic partners, India must, therefore, **take the lead in working towards the establishment of an architecture to ensure peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific** and for the security of the global commons – airspace, space, cyberspace and the sea-lanes of communication to enable the freedom of navigation and the free flow of trade.

- **Cooperative security** does not necessarily require a formal military alliance – it entails the sharing of intelligence; joint counter-terrorism and counter-proliferation efforts; upholding the rules and norms governing maritime trade; providing help to the littoral states to meet their security needs; helping to counter piracy, arms smuggling, and narcotics trafficking; and, undertaking joint humanitarian and disaster relief (HADR) operations in the region.

Criticism

- **Despite the potential for cooperation, the Quad remains a mechanism without a defined strategic mission.**
 - When the grouping was first formed following cooperation after the 2004 tsunami, the idea was to better coordinate maritime capabilities for disaster situations. When revived in 2017, the grouping seemed to have become a counter to China's growing inroads into the region, despite denials that any particular country had been targeted.
 - **The entire focus on the Indo-Pacific makes the Quad a maritime, rather than a land-based grouping, raising questions whether the cooperation extends to the Asia-Pacific and Eurasian regions.**
 - Even on maritime exercises, there is a lack of concurrence. **India has not admitted Australia in the Malabar exercises with the U.S. and Japan, despite requests from Canberra, and has also resisted raising the level of talks from an official to the political level.**
 - The fact that **India is the only member not in a treaty alliance with the other Quad countries will slow down progress** somewhat, although each member is committed to building a stronger Quadrilateral engagement.
 - As **protectionism is unfurling** across the globe, **the outcome of this third round in Singapore will be judged by the ability of the group to issue a joint declaration for cooperation.**
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