



Scope of Civil Society Engagement in Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD) or QUAD

A Study Report



**HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
INDIA**

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FOREWORD



The QUAD or QSD, a multilateral grouping consisting of the United States, Japan, India, and Australia, began as a “Tsunami Core Group,” which was formed extempore, in response to the lethal tsunami of 2004. Further on, the group became a forum of four nations, with an aim to mobilise and coordinate disaster relief and humanitarian aid to survivors during a disaster. Slowly, the group gained popularity and relevance due to its strategic role and partnership.

The QUAD nations together, have a population of 1.8 billion, and contribute to over \$30 trillion to the global GDP. The QUAD partners invested more than \$48 billion in infrastructural development. During the QUAD Summit held on September 24, 2022, building on the G7’s announcement of Build Back Better World (B3W)—an infrastructure partnership focused on digital connectivity, climate, health and health security, and gender equality infrastructure, was committed to—the Quad will rally expertise, capacity, and influence to strengthen ongoing infrastructure initiatives in the region and identify new opportunities to meet the needs there (MEA). Further, the Covid-19 pandemic has harmed the global economy, including the QUAD nations, in areas ranging from employment to investment. Thus, by bolstering their economic ties for greater freedom and cooperation, the group will facilitate a faster recovery from the pandemic’s effects. Therefore, there are numerous reasons to invest more and increase collaboration with QUAD nations.

Being an eminent platform, engaging to device strategic solutions towards challenges related to global health, international infrastructure, climate change, digitalisation, education and knowledge building, cybersecurity and space, gives the civil societies of the QUAD nations to be a relevant part of the forum. Therefore, it becomes critical to analyse the scope of engagement for the civil society with the QUAD.

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Best Regards,

**Harsh Jaitli,
CEO, VANI**

Abbreviations

QSD- Quadrilateral Security Dialogue

USA- United States of America

ASEAN- Association of South-East Asian Nations

GSOMIA- General Security of Military Information Agreement

LEMOA- Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement

COMCASA- Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement

BECA- Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement

IAF- Indian Air Force

BRICS- Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa

BRI- Belt and Road Initiative

AUKUS- Australia, United Kingdom and United States

ACSC- ASEAN Civil Society Conference

APF- ASEAN Peoples' Forum

SDGs- Sustainable Development Goals

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Introduction

What is the Quad?

Known as the ‘Quadrilateral Security Dialogue’ (QSD), the Quad is an informal strategic forum comprising four nations, namely -- United States of America (USA), India, Australia, and Japan. One of the primary objectives of the Quad is to work for a free, open, prosperous, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region.

The Quad began as a loose partnership after the 2004 Indian ocean tsunami, when the four countries joined together to provide humanitarian and disaster assistance. The group met for the first time in 2007 on the sidelines of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). It is considered an alliance of maritime democracies, and the forum is maintained by meetings, semi-regular summits, information exchanges, and military drills of all the member countries.⁽¹⁾

History

Since its first senior official-level meeting in 2007, the Quad, among Japan, the USA, India, and Australia has operated both as a meeting format for senior officials to discuss regional security issues and as the basis for a single naval exercise and a single tabletop exercise. The four countries first formed a “core group” during the joint response to the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami. This cooperation provided the basis for the first iteration of the Quad; it met briefly in 2007 before coming apart in 2008. However, eight further years of destabilization in the region led to a growing convergence in foreign policies among the four states, with a focus on securing a free and open Indo-Pacific, taking joint action against terrorism, and promoting a rules-based system. Resultingly, the Quad re-formed in 2017 and began convening on a bimonthly basis. From the outset, the Quad’s ideological and geographic foundations were envisioned by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, whose “Confluence of the Two Seas” speech provided the foundations for the grouping. Indeed, this ideological and geographic bounding has naturally led to contrasting presumptions about the intent and future of the Quad: that it is the genesis of an “Asian NATO,” that it is a network to contain the rise of China, or that it is simply a disparate grouping of countries that will never unite behind a common strategic vision.⁽²⁾

Principles of Quad

The Quad has certain principles and commitments that it aims to achieve. They are briefly mentioned below:

- 1) It strives for a region that is free, open, inclusive, healthy, anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion.
- 2) It is committed to promoting a free, open rules-based order, rooted in international law to advance security and prosperity and counter threats to both in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. We support the rule of law, freedom of navigation and overflight, peaceful resolution of disputes, democratic values, and territorial integrity.
- 3) Pledge to respond to the economic and health impacts of COVID-19, combat climate change, and address shared challenges, including in cyber space, critical technologies, counterterrorism, quality infrastructure investment, and humanitarian-assistance and disaster-relief as well as maritime domains.
- 4) Join forces to expand safe, affordable, and effective vaccine production and equitable access, to speed economic recovery and benefit global health.⁽³⁾

First In- person Quad Summit in 2021

In March 2021, the first and foremost summit of the Quad leaders was hosted by the President of the US, Joe Biden, in a virtual format. It vowed to strive for an Indo-Pacific region that is free, open, inclusive, anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion, sending an apparent message to China.

The leaders, during the summit proposed progressive initiatives to strengthen the inter-country partnerships and enhance cooperation on the most demanding challenges the world is facing right now: emerging strong from the COVID-19 pandemic and overcoming it, ensuring easy, safe and enough production and access to vaccines, enhancing the infrastructure, addressing the dangerous consequences of climate change, encouraging the use of new and emerging technology, and nurturing the youth in all the member countries to safeguard the future.

Global Health:

- Under the health vertical, the leaders of the member countries agreed on promoting vaccine access across the world on all grounds, by expanding the manufacture of vaccine doses, finance production of vaccines, deliver them from one country to another, amongst other efforts.
- Enhance key investments in the healthcare sector related to COVID-19, including vaccine and treatment drugs.
- Prepare the member countries with better preparedness plans and means to combat any future pandemic and further strengthen their science and technology cooperation to have safe and effective vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics available now and into the future.

Infrastructure:

The Quad concentrated on building infrastructure which promotes digital connectivity, climate resilience, health and health security, and is gender equal. In this context, the Quad agreed to bring in experts and required capacity to strengthen and upgrade the infrastructure of the Indo-Pacific region.

- Introduce a Quad Infrastructure Coordination Group, with infrastructure experts from across the member countries that will meet and share the requirements on a regular basis, ensure transparency and an upgraded infrastructure.

Climate Change:

The Quad countries were committed to deploy efforts in accordance to the 2030 SDG Agenda and achieve the targets of greenhouse gas emissions, phasing out fossil fuels and shifting to renewable energy, etc.

- Form zero- emission shipping corridors by 2030 by launching a Quad shipping task force and ensuring efforts in this direction.
- Establishing a clean- Hydrogen Partnership by technology development and efficiently scaling up the production of clean, development of delivery infrastructure to safely and efficiently transport, store, and distribute clean hydrogen for end-use applications, and stimulating market demand to accelerate trade in clean hydrogen in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Strengthen Adaptation, Resilience, and Preparedness towards Climate Change by improving critical climate information-sharing and promoting disaster-resilient infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific region.

Fostering the Youth:

The Quad countries were committed to focus their energies on the youth of today as they will be the future of the countries and will be the leaders, innovators and pioneers of tomorrow.

- The Quad Fellowship was launched by the Quad members, aiming to sponsor the post graduate and doctoral degrees of 100 students in a year, 25 from each Quad country. A taskforce including leaders from the non-governmental sector, the private sector and academicians will be formed to oversee this fellowship.

Emerging Technologies:

The Quad leaders were committed to creating a technological ecosystem that is free, accessible and secure.

- The Quad will launch a statement of principles on technology design, development, governance, and use aiming towards a responsible, open, high-standards innovation.
- The Quad will establish contact groups focusing on standards-development activities as well as foundational pre-standardization research.
- Quad partners will launch a joint initiative to map capacity, identify vulnerabilities, and bolster supply-chain security for semiconductors and their vital components.
- Quad partners will jointly facilitate enabling environments for 5G diversification, including with efforts related to testing and test facilities.
- The Quad will monitor trends in critical and emerging technologies, starting with advanced biotechnologies, including synthetic biology, genome sequencing, and biomanufacturing.

Cybersecurity:

Quad will launch new efforts to bolster critical-infrastructure resilience against cyber threats by bringing together the expertise of our nations to drive domestic and international best practices.

- A Quad Senior Cyber-Group shall be formed, in which leaders of cybersecurity from the four countries shall meet and discuss on adopting and implementing shared cyber standards, development of secure software; building workforce and talent; and promoting the scalability and cybersecurity of secure and trustworthy digital infrastructure.

Space:

A new working group for space cooperation shall be formed to exchange satellite data, monitor and adapt to climate change, enhance disaster preparedness, and respond to challenges in shared domains.

- The Quad will start discussions to exchange Earth observation satellite data and analysis on climate-change risks and the sustainable use of oceans and marine resources.
- These countries will engage in enhancing capacities of other countries of the Indo- Pacific region in space related domains to expand on technologies of mutual interest.
- The Quad will also consult on norms, guidelines, principles, and rules for ensuring the long-term sustainability of the outer space environment.⁽⁴⁾

Significance of Quad for India

According to popular belief, the Quad was formed to counter China's economic and military rise. In this context, it will be beneficial for India to take help from the other Quad countries in case the tension between the Indian and Chinese armies increases on the borders. In addition, India can even take the help of its naval front and conduct strategic explorations in the Indo-Pacific region.

However, the Quad exists not only to serve the purpose of countering the rise of China, but the aggression and pressure with which China comes forth in making its point, is definitely a popular topic of discussion amongst the Quad members.

With the help and assistance of the other Quad countries, India has a great opportunity to explore multiple initiatives that aim to create an Indo Pacific region which is free and open. In addition, India's geographical location is such, making it centrally located in the Indo- Pacific region, making it have widespread trade and cultural connections with the Indo-Pacific coastlines.⁽⁵⁾

The Indo-Pacific structural construct brings New Delhi in a position to advance its interests in East Asia. India joining a group of powerful allies like USA, Japan and Australia, advances its power and stature amongst the other countries of the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. India being less developed than the other counterparts in this partnership, makes it even more powerful and makes it rise above its middle-power status.

Apart from this, New Delhi's growing presence in the Indo-Pacific region automatically bolsters India's Act East Policy and Extended Neighbourhood Policy. This hike is also supported by New Delhi's association with members of the ASEAN.

In the context of defense against rival countries, the strengthening ties between India and the United States also adds the much-needed weightage. This is exemplified by increased engagements between New Delhi and Washington as noted in terms of the four foundational agreements signed between the two countries, comprising the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA, 2002); Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA, 2016); and Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA, 2018); and finally, Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA, 2020)– promoting interoperability between the two militaries and making provision for sale and transfer of high-end technologies. Additionally, because of this increasing friendship between the two countries, America has significantly increased the arms exports to India, from almost nil to 15 billion USD.

After the India- Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2020, India's role in the Indo-Pacific and the Quad was boosted even further. Additionally, Canberra and New Delhi signed nine arrangements, key among these being the Australia-India Mutual Logistics Support Arrangement and the Defence Science and Technology Implementing Arrangement providing a framework to deepen defense cooperation between the two countries.

India was also amongst the first countries to provide its neighbouring countries like Maldives, Mauritius, Sri Lanka and Seychelles, with medical aid. In addition, New Delhi was also amongst those providing help to the hardest hit by COVID-19, Iran and Italy. India also provided rapid response teams to other countries to tackle and mitigate the pandemic. Additionally, India evacuated nine Maldives nationals from Wuhan, China, the epicenter of the coronavirus outbreak.

India was also at the forefront in tackling the pandemic together with a global response. New Delhi established a SAARC Emergency Response Fund for COVID-19, with an initial 10 million USD contribution from India. Additionally, India's Armed Forces have been actively engaged in carrying forward India's mission abroad. In February, an Indian Air Force (IAF) relief aircraft evacuated 76 Indians and 36 foreign nationals from Wuhan. In cooperation with the Indian Army, the IAF launched the 18-hour Operation Sanjeevani to deliver 6.2 tons of essential medicines and hospital consumables to the Maldives, and the Indian Navy's warship INS *Khatri* (5,600-ton landing ship) deployed under Mission Sagar, carrying medical teams, consignments of essential medicines, and food supplies to Maldives, Mauritius, Madagascar, Comoros, and Seychelles.

Apart from India championing the pandemic response, it is also considered as one of the most suitable destinations for investment, after China. After the recent turbulence with China, many investors are looking for opportunities to extract from China, and invest elsewhere. India becomes a preferred choice for them, viz a viz its large market size and inexpensive labour costs. This further adds to India's role in the global supply chain system.

This argument ensures the emerging role of India as a key contender for advancing the Indo- Pacific region. With New playing such vital roles in the past and currently, it seems India has already taken up a larger and more meaningful responsibility on its shoulders. Emerging strong in the post- pandemic world assumes India to be one of the pioneers in steering policies and defending allied interests of the Indo- Pacific.⁽⁶⁾

Is the Quad good for India?

Being a member of the Quad with other developed nations is both advantageous and challenging for India. As already discussed, the Quad can definitely help India to counterbalance the rise of China in the Indo- Pacific region. With this association with major powers of the world, India can also rise above its middle- power status and create an impact in the Indo- Pacific region and beyond. Also, India's Act East Policy and Extended Neighbour policy boost India's engagement in the Indo-Pacific.

As also mentioned, the association between these Quad countries will also make India the investor's favourite destination to put their money into. The increasing exchange of information, signing of mutually benefitting agreements, defence related agreements, amongst others, makes it a favourable situation for India and strengthens the ties between these countries. Especially, in the post pandemic world, the Quad can be seen as a great opportunity for India to assert its leadership and prove itself as a pharmaceutical maestro. Even during the pandemic, India was seen making efforts to provide COVID-19 vaccinations world over.

However, like every phenomenon has its own pros and cons, similarly, the Quad also poses a few challenges for India, apart from its advantages. As Quad appears as an effort to suppress China as a superpower, this may create tension between the two countries. Therefore, it becomes crucial for India to not compress the Quad's role to just a partnership against China. In addition, not to forget that India and China are both part of other international platforms like the BRICS. Therefore, every action of India in the Quad space shall also determine its presence with other such groupings.

Apart from this, India is also dependent on other countries like Iran and Myanmar for much of its energy and trade requirements. Interestingly, China is also supremely active in these states through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This overlapping may cause Iran and Myanmar to turn away from India. In addition, if India indulges in the Quad on the military front, it might be hazardous for India, more than the other Quad countries, given that India shares its border with China and this gives a direct opportunity to China to backfire.

Lastly, India's fiasco in delivering on its promises on providing connectivity and security to its immediate neighbours, has caused major concerns for the Indo-Pacific region. In addition to this, a few of India's neighbours have already been experiencing China's footprints in their territories, that has further reduced India's dominance in those regions. If this continues and India does not take control of the situation, delivering on Quad projects in the future might also be a failure, owing to India's deficit in delivering its promises.⁽⁷⁾

Civil Society Experiences with Previous Groupings similar to Quad

The Indo-Pacific region has emerged as the choicest space for the world traders to invest in as it comprises of large and powerful economies like India, the US, Japan and China. However, the trade war between US and China and the increasing dependency of other countries on China, has given rise to the speculation of limited scope of these multilateral forums. This has in turn pushed these countries to find alternatives to sustain their stand in the Indo-Pacific region. China's attempt to transform its military base and modernize it, has also led to heavy militarization across borders, which has disturbed the existing balance between the power distribution of economies.

As a result, to contain the rise of China, and address security concerns, the other countries in the Indo-Pacific region have been forming multiple informal groupings like the Quad and the AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom and United States). AUKUS is however, relatively new and emerging, there have been similar kind of multilateral forums in the past as well, to address similar concerns. One amongst them is the ASEAN.

ASEAN

ASEAN was established in August 1967 with the purpose of accelerating the economic growth, social progress, and cultural development, and promoting regional peace and stability, in the South-East Asian region.

A report by the ASEAN Civil Society Conference/ASEAN Peoples' Forum (ACSC/APF) found out that in between 2005 to 2015, civil society participation and engagement with ASEAN had been continuously resisted by all the ASEAN member countries. The document also highlighted the poor response and attention given by the ASEAN members to civil society recommendation during all the included time period.

The report concluded with a few concerns that the CSOs raised with respect to engagement with ASEAN. A few of them were:

(1) lack of popular participation in ASEAN decision-making; (2) rising inequalities between and among member countries; (3) weakening democracies and the prevalence of authoritarian governing modes; (4) human rights deficits and the absence of sanctions against rogue regimes; (5) dominance of an elite-centered development strategy and the resulting failure to attain inclusive growth; (6) competition rather than complementarity in trade and investment relations; (7) lack of a regional identity and unity; (8) weak social protection for all residents and migrants; and (9) ongoing inequality between genders.⁽⁸⁾

Another finding of the review highlighted that the ASEAN governments seemed more comfortable with the private sector and the academic and research think tanks than the civil societies of those countries.

“ASEAN and its member governments have been seen to be more comfortable with the private sector and academic and research think tanks than with civil society. Where key ASEAN members have shown themselves to open doors for civil society, whether at their home countries or at regional fora, individual ASEAN member countries have consistently resisted and vacillated with regards civil society participation and engagement. –How to involve people has become a question because of national contexts”. Various reasons for not engaging with civil society have been cited. Among these are the questionable representation of constituencies; lack of independence and promotion of values and agendas of foreign governments/entities, owing to their acceptance of foreign grant funds; identification with opposition parties and agendas, and therefore having questionable motives and agendas.

High expectations for people's participation in ASEAN, encouraged by the promise of 'a people-oriented ASEAN' and the hope of approximating established practice at the UN system, are thus not met, leading to frustration amongst those in civil society who have chosen to engage ASEAN at various levels. Civil society views ASEAN's openness to participation as very crucial. But the level of commitment of ASEAN is perceived to be only on the level of rhetoric, and not as intentional, owing to the fact that enabling environments are not present to facilitate people's participation.⁽⁹⁾

Conclusion

Given that a vast range of activities and commitments come under the ambit of the Quad, it is indeed emerging as one of the vital platforms for emerging strong, especially in the post- pandemic era. Ranging from global health to climate change, from cybersecurity to quality education, the Quad covers it all. It also commits to some of the major challenges that the civil society of India has also been striving to combat since time immemorial. Although the civil society might not be a good fir to address issues of cybersecurity, space and military activities, but it can definitely explore the scope of participation in domains related to health and wellbeing, equal vaccine access, quality education, skill development for the youth of the nation, amongst other Quad's focus areas.

To further the view points of the country, the Government usually voices its opinions on various multilateral fora. Similarly, the Indian Government has also conducted dialogues with other Quad nations on issues that are common to all and need a unified approach to handle. India has undertaken three such consultations in the past, one in 2017 and two in 2018.

As a result of these international dialogues, few common interest areas that emerged were advancing connectivity, achieving the sustainable development goals, counter-terrorism, non-proliferation and maritime and cyber security, in order to maintain peace, non- violence and stability in the Indo- Pacific region and beyond.

As recognized by the 2030 Agenda, the civil society plays a critical role in implementation of SDGs, given their wide connectivity with the communities. The civil society is engaged in awareness building and mobilization, capacity building with regard to SDGs, designing and implementation of projects with the help of the communities, providing research-based policy recommendations, data collection, and hold the government accountable for the promises made by them.

The Scope of Civil Society Engagement

The role of the sector can be gauged by its previous engagements with similar groupings and the gaps that made those experiences deficient. Therefore, the civil society might be beneficial in playing the following roles:

Knowledge and information sharing: There is an evident lack of understanding and awareness about the existence of the Quad in the Indo-Pacific region, and there is also a significant gap in the networking efforts. Since, there is inability to reach out to one another, therefore, there is a lack of information and knowledge exchange amongst different bodies in the member countries, which needs to be filled in for enhancement of the effects and achievement of the desired results. This role can be well played by the civil society, keeping in mind their expertise in capacity building and networking.

Research and documentation: Learning from previous experiences and advancing the efforts based on them, is always a good practice. The CSOs, owing to their vast experience in conducting research studies, can prove beneficial in monitoring the efforts of the Quad and build a database of good practices and highlight the inadequacies of the group. Research studies of this type will further develop and scale-up the efforts made by the Quad countries. Engagement with the civil society will bring in more inputs and data from the ground that are not readily available to governments.

First responders in a crisis: The civil society has always been the first ones to respond to a crisis and provide services in the remotest of areas. Playing this crucial role for those in need and addressing the issues of local communities and the grassroots, keeping in mind their closeness and proximity to the communities, put them in an advantageous position over the governments. This feature of the civil societies will definitely prove handy in a problematic situation and helpful to the governments.

It is therefore evident that the contributions and engagement of the civil society may prove as an important element in forwarding the agenda of the Quad. Therefore, the Quad must try and involve the civil society in the process and seek inputs from them to advance their efforts. Allowing an opportunity to the civil society to provide a meaning and back the efforts of the Quad, in certain focus areas, can be agreed upon as essential to achieve the desired goals and amplify the process. Each Quad country is responsible for contributing to this space of mutual interest amongst the Indo-Pacific region, and there is definitely some scope for the civil societies of the respective countries to take ownership and contribute to this process of making the Indo-Pacific region, a free, open and inclusive space.

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About VANI

As a platform, it promotes voluntarism and creates space for voluntary action. As a network, it attempts to bring about a convergence of common sectoral issues and concerns for building a truly national agenda of voluntary action in the country. It also facilitates linkages of various efforts and initiatives of the voluntary sector.