

Comparative Analysis of the Quad Members' Strategic Interests

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Introduction

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), comprising the United States, Japan, India, and Australia, represents a significant strategic alliance in the Indo-Pacific region. Initiated as a response to the rising geopolitical challenges¹, particularly those posed by China's increasing assertiveness,² the Quad aims to promote a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific. Each member brings unique perspectives and interests to this coalition, reflecting their geopolitical priorities and concerns.

The Quad is a pivotal element in the United States' Indo-Pacific strategy.³ The U.S. aims to reinforce its leadership in the region, ensuring freedom of navigation and countering China's growing influence.⁴ America's involvement is also driven by its broader strategic objectives, including promoting democratic values and linking regional economic interests.

Japan's participation in the Quad is shaped by its post-war defense policies and evolving regional security approach.⁵ Facing a complex security environment characterized by DPRK threats and Chinese maritime assertiveness, Japan sees the Quad as a mechanism to bolster its security and to play a more proactive role in regional affairs.

India's engagement with the Quad aligns with its "Act East" policy and strategic autonomy doctrine. India views the Quad as a platform for securing its maritime interests in the Indian Ocean and countering China's influence.⁶ New Delhi seeks to enhance maritime security, counter-terrorism, and connectivity cooperation while carefully balancing its relations with China during a period of heightened tensions stemming from a decades-old Himalayan border dispute.

Australia's involvement reflects its interest in maintaining a free, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region. Australia sees the Quad as an opportunity to deepen its engagement with other regional powers and manage the challenges posed by China's growing power and influence.⁷

As these nations navigate the complex dynamics of the Indo-Pacific, the Quad has emerged as a crucial multilateral forum for addressing common challenges and deepening strategic ties. This comparative analysis aims to explore the diverse strategic interests of each Quad member,

¹ Fraser, Dominique. "The Quad: A Backgrounder." Asia Society, 16 May 2023, <https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/quad-backgrounder>.

² Mohan, C. Raja. "Why China Is Paranoid About the Quad." Foreign Policy, 17 May 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/05/17/india-china-quad-summit-modi-xi-biden/>.

³ United States. Dept. of Defense. "Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States." February 2022, p. 9, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>.

⁴ United States. Dept. of Defense. "Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States." February 2022, p. 4, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>.

⁵ "Japan, the Quad and the Indo-Pacific." The Asan Forum, 23 June 2021, <https://theasanforum.org/japan-the-quad-and-the-indo-pacific/>.

⁶ "Engagement, not Entanglement: India's Relationship with the Quad." Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, 1 May 2023, <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2023/05/01/engagement-not-entanglement-indias-relationship-with-the-quad/>.

⁷ Vijaya, Poomima. "Australia's Role in the Quad and Its Crumbling Ties with China." Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs, Winter 2021, <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Dec/12/2002907693/-1/-1/1/JIPA%20-%20VIJAYA.PDF>.

offering insights into how these interests both converge and diverge within the framework of this emerging alliance.

United States

The Quad is a cornerstone of Washington's broader strategic objectives in the Indo-Pacific region. Since the end of the Second World War, the U.S. has been a dominant power in the Indo-Pacific, underpinning the regional security architecture through a latticework of alliances and partnerships. The reinvigoration of the Quad is in line with America's enduring interest in maintaining a balance of power in the region, ensuring freedom of navigation, and promoting a rules-based international order.

1. **Strategic Shift to the Indo-Pacific:** The U.S.'s pivot to the Indo-Pacific, initiated under the Obama administration, underscores the region's growing significance in U.S. foreign policy. The region's economic dynamism and strategic challenges, particularly China's increasingly aggressive posture, are areas of U.S. strategic calculations.⁸
2. **China's Rising Influence:** The U.S. views the Quad as a critical forum for collaborating with vital regional democracies to counterbalance China's assertive policies and actions in the Indo-Pacific.⁹ Concerns over China's military modernization, territorial claims in the East and South China Sea, and its Belt and Road Initiative have further solidified the U.S.'s commitment to the Quad¹⁰.
3. **Maritime Security and Freedom of Navigation:** A primary U.S. interest within the Quad framework is to ensure freedom of navigation and overflight in the Indo-Pacific waterways, particularly in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. This aligns with the U.S. Navy's role in safeguarding maritime trade routes critical for the free flow of global commerce.
4. **Promoting Democratic Values:** The U.S. also sees the Quad as a platform to promote democratic values and institutions in the region. This ideological component is essential for creating a counter-narrative to China's governance model, which supports a Marxist-Leninist and economic system.¹¹

⁸ Cooper, Zack, and Adam P. Liff. "America Still Needs to Rebalance to Asia." *Foreign Affairs*, 11 August 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2021-08-11/america-still-needs-rebalance-asia>.

⁹ "The 'Quad': Cooperation Among the United States, Japan, India, and Australia." Congressional Research Service, Updated January 30, 2023, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11678#:~:text=The%20four%2Dcountry%20coalition%2C%20comprised,fourth%20in%20Sydney%20in%202023.>

¹⁰ "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China: A Report to Congress Pursuant to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2000, as amended." Page 11.

¹¹ "Quad Joint Leaders' Statement." The White House, May 24, 2022, [URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/24/quad-joint-leaders-statement/#:~:text=We%20strongly%20support%20the%20principles,which%20are%20essential%20to%20the>].

5. Economic Engagement: Beyond security, the U.S. is interested in using the Quad to foster greater regional economic cooperation and connectivity. This includes initiatives like infrastructure development, which is viewed as a counter to China's influence gained through its economic ventures.¹²

America's engagement in the Quad is multifaceted, encompassing security, ideological, and economic dimensions. It reflects a broader strategic approach that seeks to balance China's rising influence while reinforcing the U.S.'s role as a pivotal power in the Indo-Pacific.

Japan

Japan's strategic interests in the Quad are deeply intertwined with its post-World War II security policies, regional dynamics, and evolving defense posture. As a nation with significant economic and security interests in the Indo-Pacific region, Japan views the Quad as an instrumental framework for addressing regional challenges and enhancing its strategic autonomy.

1. Post-WWII Defense Policy and Evolution: Japan's defense policy has traditionally been constrained by its pacifist constitution. However, in recent years starting under the Abe administration in response to the deteriorating security environment, there has been a gradual shift towards a more proactive security stance driven by regional threats and the need to play a more prominent role in international security. Participation in the Quad is part of this broader strategic reorientation.¹³
2. Balancing Regional Power Dynamics: Japan's engagement in the Quad is motivated by concerns about China's military buildup and assertive actions in the East China Sea, including over the Senkaku/ Islands.¹⁴ The Quad provides a platform for Japan to strengthen security cooperation with other major democracies and to balance China's influence in the region.
3. Economic and Security Interests: Japan has vital economic interests in the Indo-Pacific, particularly regarding sea lane security for its energy imports and exports. The Quad's focus on maritime security and domain awareness aligns with Japan's interests in ensuring safe and open sea lanes.
4. North Korean Threat: Japan also faces security threats from North Korea, particularly its nuclear and missile programs. The Quad offers a forum for Japan to collaborate with key

¹² "Quad Leaders' Summit Fact Sheet." The White House, May 20, 2023, [URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/20/quad-leaders-summit-fact-sheet/>].

¹³ "December 16, 2022:3:40 PM EST" which seems to contain a typographical error. The correct date should be "December 16, 2022."

¹⁴ "Quad ministers vow to address challenges in South and East China seas." Japan Times, March 3, 2023, [URL: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/03/03/asia-pacific/politics-diplomacy-asia-pacific/quad-foreign-ministers/>].

partners on responses to North Korean provocations and to discuss broader regional security strategies.¹⁵

5. Promoting a Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Japan has strongly advocated the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" vision, which aligns with the Quad's objectives.¹⁶ This vision encompasses security, economic, and infrastructural initiatives to promote stability, prosperity, and adherence to international rules and norms.

Japan's active participation in the Quad reflects its strategic priorities in the Indo-Pacific, balancing its traditional defense posture with new regional realities. Japan seeks to bolster its security through the Quad, address regional challenges, and enhance cooperation with vital democratic partners.

India

India's engagement with the Quad reflects its evolving foreign policy and security concerns in the Indo-Pacific region, which have moved from traditional non-alignment to a more pro-Western worldview. India's approach to the Quad is shaped by a complex interplay of regional challenges, strategic autonomy, and growing global aspirations.

1. Strategic Autonomy and "Act East" Policy: Similar to eighteenth-century America, India has pursued a policy of strategic autonomy that eschewed formal alliances since gaining independence from the United Kingdom. Its involvement in the Quad aligns with this new approach, offering a platform for strategic collaboration without the constraints of a formal alliance. This participation also complements India's "Act East" policy, which focuses on strengthening economic and strategic relations with Southeast Asian nations as well as the broader Indo-Pacific region.¹⁷
2. Counterbalancing China's Influence: A critical driver for India's participation in the Quad is the need to manage the strategic challenges of China's rising assertiveness, especially along the Himalayan border and in the Indian Ocean Region. The Quad provides a multilateral framework for India to collaborate with other major powers to maintain a traditional balance of power in the region.¹⁸

¹⁵ Hitkari, Cherry. "The Pyongyang Problem for the Quad." Lowy Institute. [URL: <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/pyongyang-problem-quad>].

¹⁶ "Quad Joint Leaders' Statement." The White House, May 24, 2022, [URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/24/quad-joint-leaders-statement/>].

¹⁷ Jaishankar, Dhruva. "Acting East: India in the Indo-Pacific." Brookings Institution, October 24, 2019, [URL: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/acting-east-india-in-the-indo-pacific/>].

¹⁸ Malhotra, Aditi. "Engagement, not Entanglement: India's Relationship with the Quad." Georgetown Journal of International Affairs (GJIA), May 1, 2023, [URL: <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2023/05/01/engagement-not-entanglement-indias-relationship-with-the-quad/>].

3. **Maritime Security Concerns:** Given India's vast coastline and dependence on maritime routes for trade, maritime security is paramount. The Quad's emphasis on ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific, with secure sea lines of communication, resonates with India's strategic interests. India should also strengthen its maritime security approach bilaterally with the U.S. When President Joe Biden hosted Prime Minister Narendra Modi for an Official State Visit in June 2023. The two leaders announced joint initiatives in the maritime awareness domain, including selling MQ-9s and fracturing G-414 engines in India.¹⁹
4. **Economic and Connectivity Initiatives:** India views the Quad as a potential vehicle for advancing regional connectivity and economic cooperation, which is vital for its economic growth and regional influence. This includes initiatives like the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, which India champions. The initiative is a strategic framework championed by India within the Quad coalition, aiming to promote a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region. It focuses on enhancing regional connectivity and economic cooperation, which is crucial for India's economic growth and regional influence. The initiative encompasses seven pillars: maritime security, ecological preservation, sustainable resource management, and disaster resilience. By fostering collaboration among Quad countries (Australia, India, Japan, and the United States), the IPOI seeks to ensure a rules-based international order, countering challenges like maritime security threats. This initiative underscores India's commitment to regional stability, economic prosperity, and strategic collaboration in the Indo-Pacific.
5. **Defense and Security Cooperation:** While toeing its traditional non-alignment stance, India has shown increased willingness to engage in defense and security cooperation with other Quad members, including joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, and defense technology collaboration.²⁰

India's participation in the Quad reflects a nuanced balancing act — it aims to deepen strategic engagement and security cooperation with key partners while navigating its complex dynamics with neighboring China. This approach, however, underscores India's role as a pivotal player in the Indo-Pacific geopolitical landscape.

Australia

Australia, a nation with significant geopolitical and economic interests in the Indo-Pacific, sees the Quad as essential in its broader strategy to promote regional stability and security.

1. **Strategic Reorientation Towards the Indo-Pacific:** In recent years, Australia has been increasingly focused on the broader Indo-Pacific region, recognizing its critical

¹⁹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/06/22/joint-statement-from-the-united-states-and-india/>

²⁰ Malhotra, Aditi. "Engagement, not Entanglement: India's Relationship with the Quad." Georgetown Journal of International Affairs (GJIA), May 1, 2023, [URL: <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2023/05/01/engagement-not-entanglement-indias-relationship-with-the-quad/>].

importance to Australia's security and prosperity.²¹ The Quad aligns with this strategic reorientation, offering a structured platform for engagement with vibrant, diverse economies.

2. **Concerns Over China's Regional Ambitions:** A primary factor driving Australia's participation in the Quad is the concern over China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific. Australia's relationship with China has soured following trade disputes and the COVID-19 pandemic in recent years. Increased engagement with Quad members helps Canberra readjust its reliance on Chinese exports and lean more heavily on cooperation with fellow democracies in the goods and services sectors.
3. **Commitment to Regional Security and Stability:** Australia's engagement in the Quad is underpinned by its commitment to maintaining peace and stability in the region and strengthening its ties to India, Japan, and the U.S. Aside from the Quad, Australia has sought to improve its relations independently with each other member, most notably, however, with the United States as part of AUKUS.
4. **Economic and Trade Interests:** The Indo-Pacific region is crucial for Australia's economic and trade interests. The Quad provides a forum for discussing and promoting initiatives that enhance regional economic integration and development²².
5. **Defense and Security Collaboration:** Australia views the Quad as an opportunity to deepen defense and security ties with the United States, Japan, and India. This includes joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, maritime security, and cyber defense collaborations.
6. **Climate Change and Other Global Challenges:** Beyond traditional security issues, Australia recognizes the importance of addressing global challenges like climate change, a key concern for each corner of the region. The Quad offers a platform for collaborative efforts on a host of transnational issues.²³

Australia's active participation in the Quad demonstrates its intent to contribute to a stable and balanced power dynamic in the Indo-Pacific region. It highlights Australia's role as a key player in shaping the regional order and addressing the complex challenges that the region faces.

Comparative Analysis

²¹ "The Quad." Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), [URL: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/international-relations/regional-architecture/quad>].

²² Watson, Mark R. "Australia and the Quad: A Watering Can or a Hammer?" Roundtable from the John M. Shalikhvili Chair in National Security Studies, October 30, 2023, [URL: <https://www.nbr.org/publication/australia-and-the-quad-a-watering-can-or-a-hammer/>].

²³ "Quad Leaders' Summit 2023 - Climate." Australian Government, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, [URL: <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resources/quad-leaders-summit-2023/climate/>].

The Quad brings together four nations with distinct strategic cultures and interests. A comparative analysis reveals both convergences and divergences in their approach to the Indo-Pacific region, shaping the dynamics within the Quad.

1. **United States:** The U.S. sees the Quad as a critical element in its Indo-Pacific strategy, focusing on maintaining regional stability and freedom of navigation and countering China's growing influence. The U.S. approach is driven by a combination of security, economic, and ideological factors, aiming to reinforce its leadership role in the region.
2. **Japan:** Japan's participation in the Quad is part of its strategic shift towards a more proactive security role in the region. Concerned with China's assertiveness, particularly in the East China Sea, and the threat from North Korea, Japan seeks to strengthen regional security cooperation and ensure maritime security, aligning closely with the U.S. perspective.
3. **India:** India's involvement in the Quad aligns with its policy of strategic autonomy and its "Act East" policy. While India shares concerns about China's regional behavior, its approach is more cautious, balancing its Quad participation with its independent foreign policy tradition. India's focus is on maritime security, counter-terrorism, and regional connectivity.
4. **Australia:** Australia's engagement in the Quad is driven by its strategic reorientation towards the Indo-Pacific and concerns over China's regional ambitions. Australia shares America's and Japan's interest in a rules-based order and maritime security but also strongly emphasizes economic and trade issues and global challenges like climate change.

Convergence and Divergence within the Quad:

- **Convergences:** All four nations share concerns about China's assertive policies in the Indo-Pacific and the need to ensure a free, open, and inclusive region. There is a common interest in maintaining freedom of navigation, regional stability, and a rules-based international order. Joint military exercises and defense collaborations are areas of significant convergence.
- **Divergences:** Despite shared concerns, there are divergences in priorities and approaches. For instance, the U.S. and Australia have a more direct approach towards China. Japan and India adopt a more nuanced stance, balancing their security concerns with economic and diplomatic engagements with China. Moreover, India's emphasis on strategic autonomy sometimes leads to a cautious approach toward initiatives that might seem to contain China, creating a bilateral irritant in Chinese-Indian relations.

The Quad, therefore, operates within a framework of shared concerns but also respects the individual strategic imperatives of each member. This balancing act is crucial for the sustainability and effectiveness of the Quad as a strategic forum in the Indo-Pacific region.

Challenges and Opportunities for the Quad

The Quad faces unique challenges and opportunities that shape its role and effectiveness in the Indo-Pacific region. Understanding these factors is critical to assessing the Quad's future trajectory and impact.

Challenges:

1. **Diverse Strategic Priorities:** The differing strategic priorities and approaches of the Quad members can lead to challenges in forming a cohesive and unified strategy. Balancing these diverse interests, especially with India's focus on strategic autonomy and the varying willingness to confront China, poses a significant challenge.
2. **China's Counter-Strategies:** China's diplomatic and military response to the Quad, including its efforts to increase influence in the Indo-Pacific through vehicles like the Belt and Road Initiative, represents a strategic challenge. China's approach to individual Quad members, often attempting to isolate them diplomatically or economically, adds complexity to its functioning.
3. **Maintaining a Consistent Commitment:** Ensuring a consistent and sustained commitment from all Quad members is a challenge, especially in the face of domestic political changes and shifting global priorities. Rising protectionism in the U.S. also erodes the strength of the Quad's trade dimension.
4. **Risk of Escalation and Regional Stability:** China may view increased cooperation among Quad members as a containment strategy, potentially leading to heightened regional tensions and destabilization.

Opportunities:

1. **Collective Diplomatic and Security Weight:** The Quad provides a platform for its members to collectively address shared security challenges, enhancing their diplomatic and strategic weight in the region. This platform includes addressing non-traditional security threats like cybersecurity, terrorism, and climate change and opportunities like technology and people-to-people exchanges.
2. **Economic and Infrastructure Initiatives:** The Quad offers opportunities for collaborative economic and infrastructure initiatives that can provide alternatives to China's Belt and Road Initiative, promoting sustainable regional development.

3. **Strengthening Rules-Based Order:** The Quad can play a vital role in upholding and strengthening the rules-based international order in the Indo-Pacific, countering tendencies towards unilateral actions and coercion.
4. **Enhancing Regional Connectivity and Cooperation:** Beyond the security realm, the Quad has the potential to foster more robust regional connectivity and economic integration, strengthening cooperation in areas such as technology, healthcare, and education.
5. **Building Broader Alliances:** The Quad can serve as a nucleus for broader alliances in the Indo-Pacific, engaging with ASEAN and other regional players to create a more inclusive approach to regional security and development.

In summary, while the Quad faces considerable challenges, it also has significant opportunities to influence positively the strategic landscape of the Indo-Pacific. Balancing these factors will be critical to the Quad's effectiveness and resilience as a strategic forum.

Conclusion

The Quad represents a significant strategic coalition in the Indo-Pacific region, uniting the United States, Japan, India, and Australia in a shared vision of a free, open, and inclusive region. This analysis has explored the diverse and unique strategic interests each member brings to the Quad, highlighting both the convergences and divergences that shape the coalition's dynamics.

The Quad's evolution from a loosely aligned strategic forum to a more structured dialogue reflects the growing importance of the Indo-Pacific in geopolitics and the necessity for collaborative approaches to address complex regional challenges. The United States, with its pivot to the Indo-Pacific, Japan's evolving defense posture, India's balancing act between strategic autonomy and collaborative security, and Australia's focus on regional stability and rules-based order all contribute to the Quad's multifaceted nature.

Despite facing challenges such as divergent national interests, China's counter-strategies, and maintaining consistent commitments, the Quad presents significant opportunities. It stands as a testament to the importance of multilateralism in addressing contemporary global challenges. The Quad's role in upholding the rules-based international order, fostering economic and infrastructural development, and enhancing regional connectivity and cooperation is invaluable. Looking forward, the Quad's resilience and effectiveness will depend on its ability to navigate these challenges while capitalizing on the opportunities for collective action. Its members' continued engagement and cooperation will be crucial in shaping the Indo-Pacific region's strategic landscape and ensuring a stable, prosperous, and secure future.

This analysis underscores the importance of understanding the diverse perspectives and strategic objectives within alliances like the Quad. Such insights are vital for policymakers, strategists, and analysts in crafting nuanced and effective foreign policy and defense strategies in an increasingly interconnected and complex global environment.

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