

Editorial 1: On the Quad, Define the Idea, Chart a Path

Context

- The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) is an informal strategic forum between the United States, Japan, Australia, and India.
- It is maintained by semi-regular summits, information exchanges and military drills between member countries.
- The second Quad ministerial meeting will take place in Tokyo on October 6.
- In this meeting the Foreign Ministers of the respective countries will discuss the post-COVID-19 international order and the need for a coordinated response to the various challenges emerging from the pandemic.

Idea of Quad in 2007

- Mr. Shinzo Abe was a strategic thinker who thought about the Quadrilateral partnership in Indo-Pacific region.
- In 2007, when Abe proposed Quad, members of Quad had different interests in Indo-Pacific.
- In 2007, America continued to enjoy its 'unipolar moment'.
- The American establishment still believed that it could persuade China to become a 'responsible stake-holder'
- US required Chinese goodwill in dealing with America's priorities, the nuclear issue with North Korea and Iran, and the War on Terror.
- At that time, Japan and Australia were riding the China Boom to prosperity.
- If India was ambivalent at the time, it was because this mirrored the uncertainties of others.

Chinese Opposition to Quad and Reasons behind Opposition

- China's reaction to the idea of four like-minded countries establishing a plurilateral platform was intriguing.
- The Chinese, however, labelled it as an Asian version of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, when idea was barely on the table.
- The real reason for China's hyper reaction was out of concern that such a grouping would "out" China's plans for naval expansion by focusing on the Indo-Pacific maritime space.
- China was hoping that its naval build-up might slip under the radar because the Americans were distracted by continental challenges including Russia, Afghanistan and Iran.
- Once the idea of Quad 1.0 had died down, China gained in confidence to reveal its hand.
- It advanced a new claim the Nine-Dash Line in the South China Sea.
- It undertook the rapid kind of warship building activity reminiscent of Wilhelmine Germany before 1914.
- It built its first overseas base in Djibouti and started systematically to explore the surface and sub-surface environment in the Indian Ocean beyond the Malacca Straits.
- This entire activity was coordinated by a Central Leading Small Group for Protecting Maritime Rights and Interests, established in 2012.
- In 2018 China refused to recognize foreign arbitral award in the dispute with the Philippines on the South China Sea.
- China refused the award on the grounds that the arbitral award violated China's public policy.

- It started brazen militarisation of the disputed islands.
- This unilateral expansionism has once again brought the four countries onto the same page and given a second chance to the Quad.

False Propaganda

- The Chinese are skilled in complicating things to confuse the world.
- They will, perhaps, endeavour to conflate the Quad with the Indo-Pacific vision, and link both to the so-called China Containment Theory.
- The Quad nations need to better explain that the Indo-Pacific Vision is an overarching framework that is being discussed in a transparent manner.
- While the objective of Indo-Pacific vision is to advance everyone's economic and security interests. The Quad, on the other hand, is a plurilateral mechanism between countries that share interest on specific matters.
- There are other such mechanisms in the region.
- In 2016, China itself established a Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism with Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan.
- Earlier this year, they established another one with Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nepal. The Quad is no exception.

The world today

- This time around, the four countries are navigating through more turbulent waters.
- The global pandemic and the faltering global economy are taking a toll on the region's growth and prosperity.
- China and America are moving into a more adversarial phase of their relationship.
- Public opinion about China in all four countries is different from what it used to be in 2007.
- The fact of the meeting itself will signal to China that assertive or aggressive behaviour is not going to derail this mechanism.
- The forthcoming Ministerial meeting will be an opportunity to define the idea and chart a future path.
- Needless provocation of China should be avoided. There is no gain in actions that anger the Chinese with no commensurate benefit to the others.
- In a recent address to the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership Forum (, the U.S. Deputy Secretary of State spoke about making sure that all the countries were moving at the same speed.
- This is an important statement because a plurilateral mechanism should also serve national interest.
- He also suggested that other countries might be invited to join in the future.
- This too is welcome as India has many other partners in the Indo-Pacific.

Way Forward

- An outreach to the Indian Ocean littoral states is especially important.
- There are motivated reports from some quarters suggesting that India is seeking to deny access, or to create infrastructure that impedes the legitimate movement of some extra-regional countries through the Indian Ocean
- A positive agenda built around collective action in humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, anti-piracy operations, infrastructure assistance to climatically vulnerable states, connectivity initiative will re-assure the littoral States that the Quad will be a factor for regional benefit.

Reference

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Editorial 2: Time to Shift Focus to the Maritime Sphere

Context

- In its latest territorial expansion, China has occupied hundreds of kilometers of Indian Territory from Eastern Ladakh region to Northeastern border areas of India.
- Even after six months of border tension and multiple rounds of peace talks, China is not ready to restore Status quo ante of March 2020.
- From 1962 India-China war, India has lost more than 40,000 kms of Indian land to China.
- In addition to this, currently it looks impossible for India to pursue its territorial claims with Pakistan on its western borders.
- For last seventy years India's neighborhood geopolitical strategies have been focused on land borders.
- It appears abundantly clear now that New Delhi's excessive focus on the continental sphere since Independence has not yielded great returns in terms of secure borders, healthy relations with its neighbours or deterrence stability.
- In present scenario, New Delhi's continental options seem restricted to holding operations to prevent further territorial loss
- It is time for India to change its continental approach.

State of Continental Strategy

- The current state of India's continental strategies is hardly flattering.
- The peaceful India-China Line of Actual Control in the Northeast is now a thing of the past with China pushing back New Delhi's claims on Aksai Chin and New Delhi defending against Beijing's expansive territorial claims.
- China has crossed the red line with India and India's LAC with China is not going to be the same ever again.
- In the Northwest, the Pakistan front has also been heating up.
- Ceasefire violations on the Line of Control (LoC) have spiked since last year due to increased infiltration of terrorists across the LoC.
- With the change of the status of Jammu and Kashmir by India, and alteration of political map by Pakistan to include all of J&K, the India-Pakistan contestation over Kashmir has become fiercer.
- Geopolitical collusion between Islamabad and Beijing, to contain and pressure New Delhi from both sides, is a matter of grave concern for India.
- While this is not a new phenomenon, the intensity of the China-Pakistan containment strategy against India today is unprecedented.

Changes in Afghanistan

- The ongoing withdrawal of the United States has reduced India's influence in Afghanistan.
- Due to the withdrawal, India has lost a strategic partner in its neighbourhood.
- The return of the Taliban, with whom India has very little contact, could turn the geopolitical tide against New Delhi.
- The Taliban is no more an outcaste.
- With the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan, the geopolitical interests of Pakistan, China and Russia would broadly converge in the region.
- The change of the geopolitical landscape in Afghanistan and the frictions in Iran-India relations will further dampen India's 'Mission Central Asia'.
- In sum, this is perhaps the end of the road for New Delhi's north-eastern and north-western geopolitical forays.

Deal with Pakistan First

- India needs to find a way out of this situation. One key part of the solution is to creatively deal with its continental dilemmas.
- To begin with, New Delhi must seek ways to break up the 'nutcracker situation' that the Pakistani and Chinese strategies have forced India into.
- To achieve this, India would need to deal with the comparatively easier opponent, Pakistan.
- Pressure from the Pakistan front could be eased by addressing the Kashmir question with Islamabad.
- Re activation of existing mechanisms such as the Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) hotline is another way to deal with the Pakistan front.
- However, there is little appetite in New Delhi to do so.
- So, unless there is political will in New Delhi to put in place a strategy to address the Pakistan front, there will be little respite from the nutcracker situation that it faces today.

Maritime Strategy Explained

- It's time for India to shift its focus from the continental sphere to the maritime sphere.
- New Delhi has already begun to think in this direction with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) establishing a new division to deal with the Indo-Pacific in April 2019.
- The work in this direction, both ideational and practical, needs to be fast-tracked to keep pace with the emerging realities and to make use of new opportunities.

Merits of Maritime Strategy for India

- There are several reasons why a maritime grand strategy would work to India's advantage while still struggling with a continental dilemma.

First

- Unlike in the continental sphere where India seems to be hemmed in by China-Pakistan collusion, the maritime sphere is wide open to India.
- India can undertake coalition building, rule setting, and other forms of strategic exploration.

Second

- There is a growing great power interest in the maritime sphere, especially with the arrival of the concept of 'Indo-Pacific'.
- The Euro-American interest in India's land borders with Pakistan and China is negligible, and more so, there is little any country can do to help India in its continental contestations.
- The situation in the maritime sphere is the exact opposite.

- Great powers remain ever more interested in the maritime sphere and this interest has grown substantially since the coinage of Indo-Pacific.
- For instance, Germany recently released its Indo-Pacific guidelines following the example of France which brought out its Indo-Pacific strategy last year.

Third

- Beijing's bullying behaviour in the South China Sea in particular and the region in general has generated a great deal of willingness among the Euro-American powers and the countries of the region, to push back Chinese unilateralism.
- This provides New Delhi with a unique opportunity to enhance its influence and potentially checkmate the Chinese ambitions in the region.

Fourth

- The maritime space is a lot more important to China than engaging in opportunistic land grab attempts in the Himalayas.
- Thanks to the massive Chinese trade that happens via the Oceanic routes and the complex geopolitics around the maritime chokepoints which can potentially disrupt that trade.
- A revitalized Indian maritime grand strategy may or may not checkmate China in the Himalayas. it may even prompt Beijing to increase pressure there.
- But it will certainly provide New Delhi a lot more space for manoeuvre in the region and message Beijing that its Himalayan adventure could become costly for it.
- New Delhi must use its Indo-Pacific engagements to dissuade Beijing from salami-slicing Indian Territory in the high Himalayas.

Way Forward

- It is high time New Delhi shifted its almost exclusive focus from the continental space to the maritime space.
- The MEA's Indo-Pacific Division is a good beginning
- India has shown its intention by the decision in 2019 to elevate the Quad meetings among India, Japan, the United States and Australia to the ministerial level.
- New Delhi would do well to ideate on the current and future maritime challenges, consolidate its military and non-military tools, engage its strategic partners, and publish a comprehensive vision document on the Indo-Pacific.

Reference

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