

India's Strive to be an Indomitable Power in the Indo-Pacific Region: A Minireview

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Abstract

The Indo-Pacific region has been considered of utmost importance by India, to safeguard its strategic interests in order to achieve its current economic growth and power ambitions. India has implemented a strong focus towards improving India's business interests, investment and economic development in the Indo-Pacific region. China's increasing activism has been a major threat to world politics for both strong and weak nations. Quad was formed constituting of America, Japan, India and Australia, with an aim of joint action against the growing terrorism in the Indian Pacific, open avenues free trade, promotion of rules-based system while maintaining a protective attitude toward each other with harmony. These further expanded in the avenues of maritime security, technology, infrastructure, counter-terrorism, human assistance and connectivity, health security and Mekong regional cooperation. The relation between India and Seychelles has been considered very important in the present government. India's maritime strategy has shown a vast change and India is being considered as an important power among the coastal nations of the Indo-Pacific region. India's diplomatic initiative has been a continuous renewal of maritime security proposals. This review entails the formation and function of Quad and India's major steps towards becoming a strong nation in the Indo-Pacific region.

Keywords- Indo-Pacific, India, Quad, Seychelles, Maritime

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1. Introduction

India has emerged to play a key part in each nation's policies as nations like Australia, Japan, and the US started to identify the Indo-Pacific as the new arena for strategic cooperation. China's growing influence across the Indo-Pacific posed a shared strategic issue for Canberra, New Delhi, Tokyo, and Washington, despite the fact that their agendas and capabilities continued to diverge (Saha, 2022) As India started to face similar difficulties in the Indian Ocean and South Asia, post-Cold War era, New Delhi was able to play a significant role in the region while also ensuring that the Indian Ocean was favorable and secure for its strategic objectives (Baruah, 2020). India's foreign policy decisions under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's administration has to be reviewed due to China's emergence as a new and maybe alternative security supplier. India's main obstacle while developing its Indo-Pacific discourse was outlining and articulating New Delhi's strategy for the brand-new construct (Baruah, 2020). Finding the ideal balance between China and its friends on one side and the United States and its allies on the other was a major problem. New Delhi and Tokyo agreed on a vision statement, recognising the Indo-Pacific as a territory that included the Indian Ocean for the first time. The joint vision statement from New Delhi and Tokyo from 2015 was actually published before Japan's own vision statement on the Indo-Pacific, which was published in August 2016 (Baruah, 2020). This review, recollects India's continuous efforts to be an indomitable power in the Indo-Pacific region through its association with the QUAD, its changing maritime strategies and its bilateral relations with Seychelles.

2. The QUAD: it's formation and function

Following the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, the biggest natural disaster of the twenty-first century, the United States, along with Australia, India, and Japan, spearheaded the worldwide rescue effort, coordinating armed troops to offer relief and establishing the way for future multilateral collaboration. The notion was started in Japan. As Tar, the country's foreign minister, proposed a sweeping arc of freedom and prosperity stretching from north-east Asia to central Asia and the Caucasus, then to Turkey, central and eastern Europe, and the Baltic states, to encompass a slew of countries committed to freedom, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. In August 2007, Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo spoke to the Indian parliament about the confluence of the two seas, a concept intended to serve as the foundation for a broader Asia evolving into an open and transparent network spanning the entire Pacific Ocean, including the United States and Australia, and allowing people, goods, capital, and knowledge to freely circulate (Kumar, 2008) Tokyo, frightened by China's rapid increase in defense spending, took the initiative to gather top officials from the Quad countries together for the first time in May 2007, on the eve of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum (ARF) summit in Manila in an unpublicized meeting so as not to irritate Beijing. It was referred to as a QUAD endeavor in a Japan Times article about the event. Exercise Malabar, a military exercise involving the four Quad warships and

Singapore, took place in the Bay of Bengal in September 2007 (Akimoto, 2022). However, the four countries were not on the same page at the time when it came to the risks facing the region. Abe stepped down as Prime Minister a few weeks after the naval exercise, and the idea of strategic collaboration lost steam. The premature termination of the grouping activities in early 2008 was also suggested as a result of a leadership transition in Australia and Canberra's desire to become closer to Beijing. China's assertiveness over the last decade has raised awareness of the threat it poses to the Quad countries. Abe proposed for a democratic security diamond, a type of Quad reboot, in 2012, just before his re-election as Japan's prime minister. Quad 2.0's journey began with its disintegration on security-related problems, related to bilateral and trilateral cooperation (analysts call it "minilateralism"). For a long time, Japan and Australia have had military ties with the US. The US, Japan, and Australia have had a trilateral strategic discussion (TSD) since 2006, and in 2014, they held their first trilateral summit, when they declared a trilateral partnership in Indo-Pacific infrastructure projects. The first trilateral summit between the United States, Japan, and India took place in December 2018. The biennial US-India Malabar naval exercise, which began in 1992 and Japan joined permanently in 2015, is an early example of a military exercise carried out by the alliance. Since 2009, India and Australia have been strategic partners, and their security cooperation has improved dramatically, hugely owing to their 2014 security cooperation framework, with maritime cooperation developing through the biennial AUSINDEX exercise. They have been holding foreign and defense secretaries' conversations since 2017, and had planned to raise them to ministerial level in 2020. Japan has also participated in joint military exercises between Australia and the United States, such as the Talisman Saber biannual exercise (since 2015) and the yearly Southern Jackaroo exercise (since 2013). Japan and India (together with France) have recently joined Pitch Black, a biennial multinational air power exercise sponsored by Australia, in which the United States was the first foreign participant in 1983 (Kobara and Nose, 2021).

The Quad has developed into a distinctive collaboration that immensely contributes to Indo-Pacific stability, security, and development. The Quad countries, well aware of each other's approaches, had worked together to revive and maintain the group by focusing on areas of mutual interest. The first summit of world leaders, held in March 2021, voiced a wide vision, to work cooperatively and collaboratively in order to address mutual challenges and seize present and potential possibilities. The group does not resemble any Cold War military alliances or structures, despite the fact that security cooperation, particularly maritime security is a major focus. In the run-up to the conference, a number of actions shall be taken to shape the framework and agenda. Given the partnership's extensive scope, it must stay active and visible in between summits. Quad has developed to be one of the primary multilateral forums devoted to greater security partnership in the post-COVID-19 world order, owing to the increasing pace and scope of the group's operations. Furthermore, an active Quad has dispelled the long-held belief that the Indo-Pacific is essentially inactive. With the stakes higher than ever, each of the Quad's members should play a greater role in balancing the Indo-Pacific and power moves. Every step forwarded by the Quad might be able to nip down Beijing's "great-power" objectives, therefore, unnerving China as a united front advocating for a free and open Indo-Pacific region (Cannon, 2022).

3. India-Seychelles Strategic Partnership in Indo-Pacific Region

Seychelles, an assembly of 116 small islands, is located in the Indian ocean (MEA, 2015), one of the newly emerging nations in the field of economic and strategic engagement in Indo-Pacific region. Diplomatic ties between India and the Seychelles were established shortly after the Seychelles gained independence in 1976. Since that time, India and the Seychelles have cultivated a strong friendship, mutual understanding and respect, and collaborative attitude towards each other. To maintain as well as further strengthen the relationship with Seychelles, India must hold its ground firmly, especially as a military power in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), particularly in the waters from the Malacca Strait to the middle of the African coast, is a prerequisite necessity. India changed its military position in the Indo-Pacific when the entire world economy collapsed during the Covid-19 pandemic (Cabestan, 2021). Moving forward in this sequence, India will not shy away from reviewing China's relations with. The Indo-Pacific region is one of the most important strategic places in the world from the point of view of trade as it is responsible for 75% of the world's maritime trade and 50% of the daily global oil import-export. Due to this, India aimed at strengthening its military and economic power, primarily. This in turn might help India to be an indomitable power against China's backyard strategy, and its relations with Sri Lanka, Maldives, Myanmar and Seychelles, which is a potential threat to India (Chinoy, 2019).

President Pratibha Devi Singh Patil had visited Seychelles in 2012, with an aim to initiate ties from strategic and commercial point of view. However, there has been significant changes in political relations between India and Seychelles, since 2016. India has given special attention to engage Seychelles in the Indo-Pacific region, under the Modi Government. From this context, India has a vision to establish a strong relation with Seychelles in the coming time, to be an indomitable power against China and check on its activities in the Indo-Pacific region (Bhatnagar, 2012). Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Seychelles was a turning point from diplomatic and strategic point of view. It is primarily engaged in strengthening and protecting the Indian Ocean

with Seychelles. India has provided approximately over 50 percent of Maritime and air assets to Seychelles. Some notable vessels being PS Topaz (2006), PS Constant (2014), Patrol Boat Hermes (2016), PS Zoroaster (2021). Again, around 70 percent of capacity development with respect to training, exercise and human resource expertise is provided by India to Seychelles (Baruah, 2020). The Seychelles People's Defense Forces have sent their senior military officers to take training in the Indian Military Academy to strengthen themselves. India always wants to make Seychelles capable and competent with a vision to maintain cordial and collaborative relation between the two nations from economic and military point of view. The biggest challenge for India now is to counter of China from access to India. China is countering with Seychelles in the Indo-Pacific region, in order to weaken India, by giving loans under China's expansionist policy (Thakker, 2022) In 2018, after the political turmoil in Seychelles, under the mixed government, the Seychelles Head of State visited India. He discussed about taking forward the projects and all the MoUs that was signed. Seychelles was also finding itself uncomfortable with the increasing interference of China in the Indo-Pacific region, because it was intimidating Seychelles to keep any nation under its own pressure by giving loans under China's expansionist policy. For this reason, the Head of State of Seychelles was pressurizing that the criteria of relations with India will have to be taken forward with necessary steps for development apart from the military sector (Pant, 2018, Revi, 2020).

James Mitchell, National President of Seychelles, stated Seychelles a role model for India in its efforts to establish peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region, that has been plagued by piracy. China has imposed a major threat to the politics of the entire world, through its several activities and newer policies. Among several such policies and activities, some mention worthies are, Beijing's Belt and Road (BRO), deployment of Chinese commercial ships in Indo-Pacific region, investment in projects in countries such as Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Nigeria, as well as several islands of the Indo-Pacific, and strengthening Maritime Silk Road (Panda, 2020). However, there is criticism regarding China's investment on several such specified projects, including roadways, railways and ports, which can directly connect China with Asia, Africa and European countries, due to the fact that these countries might be buried under economic debt (Sacks and Hillman, 2021) The biggest concern for India is the China Pakistan Economy Corridor passing through PoK, which is a project of the Belt and Road part. Call it China's diplomacy or the trap of greed spread under expansionist policies, it has often lured the leaders of countries with unstable economy to invest in their nation. India has always firmly placed itself on the map of the world in terms of military and security, and while worrying about security, after examining any aspect of any nation or anything, it responds immediately, in which retaliatory actions like 1965, 71, 99, air-strikes on Myanmar and Pakistan can be seen (The Diplomat, 2022)

India however, is required to increase its scope and power in the maritime sector to further strengthen its side in front of China. In 2013, Delhi spent about 2 lakh 3 thousand 672 crores on defense investment, (Navbharat Times, February 2013) which after the present government came to power, increased to Rs 4,71,378 crores (PRS Legislative Research). Bay of Bengal, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, has been facilitated too, as India has invested, Rs 56.5 billion, for the development of infrastructure in terms of security, in these places (Roy, 2022)

4. Indian Navy

The Indian Navy is in charge of the military effort to implement New Delhi's Indo-Pacific strategy, while India's MEA is in charge of the diplomatic operations. The IOR is regarded as the Navy's theatre and domain of authority. The Indian Navy is assured of its supremacy during this period of strategic war with Beijing despite its scant operational experience in the IOR. India showed operational strength is China's Malacca Dilemma, which Beijing has actively worked to resolve. The Indian Navy's Indo-Pacific strategy has a dual focus in the marine sphere. The approach's initial step is to establish Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) throughout the Indian Ocean. MDA seeks to assist policy and military decisions by delivering information on all movements and changes that occur throughout the Indian Ocean. The Indian Navy has expanded its presence, readiness, and missions as Beijing has progressively increased its engagements and presence throughout the IOR. There is little question about Beijing's plans to position itself as a security provider in the Indian Ocean area, despite New Delhi's continued conviction that Beijing poses no danger to India's military presence (The Times of India, 2022)

5. Conclusion

QUAD and Indo-Pacific arrangement has given India the chance to advance its strategic objectives while adapting to shifting security conditions. However, despite political zeal on the side of New Delhi and its allies, the speed of implementation and the roadmap for achieving the Indo-Pacific goal remain constrained. New Delhi has to look for newer alliances based on mutual interests. while concentrating on Indo-Pacific issue-based collaborations. In addition, New Delhi has to look for new alliances based on mutual interests (Kamal, 2022). Although there haven't been many exchanges, India could now focus on other unconventional players with a lot of promise. The initiatives taken by New Delhi in the region should not be seen as responses to Chinese

incursions but rather as a continuation of a strategic alliance centered on shared economic and security interests. India should keep strengthening its relationship with France, which has recently seen significant interest convergence between the two countries. India's soft power without the support of hard power may not give it the clout to achieve its aims through cultural diplomacy alone in international politics, where a realist notion of state-to-state relations still predominates. It can be said with confidence that Indian leaders of the twenty-first century seem to understand the value of soft power while formulating foreign policy.

6. References

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