



# Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



## POLICY BRIEF

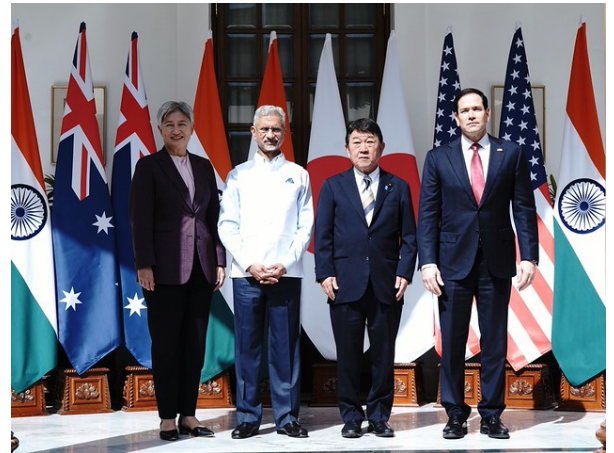
### A Reprieve for the Quad?

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**Delhi Policy Group**

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1. *The Quad Foreign Ministers Meet at New Delhi on May 26, 2026. Source: MEA Photo Gallery*
2. *Quad Foreign Ministers Address the Press at Hyderabad House, New Delhi, on May 26, 2026. Source: MEA Photo Gallery*

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# **A Reprieve for the Quad?**

by

Lalit Kapur

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## A Reprieve for the Quad?

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### Introduction

Sharpened US-India friction during the past one year, the failure to convene a Quad Summit in New Delhi, and the détente between Presidents Trump and Xi have resulted in some analysts sounding the death knell for the Quad<sup>1,2</sup>. The fact that there has been no Quad Summit since September 2024 accentuates this belief. The US National Security Strategy of November 2025 encourages India to contribute to Indo-Pacific security including through continued Quad cooperation<sup>3</sup>, but does not assign to either India or the Quad the same importance that NSS 2022 did. The US Department of War's National Defense Strategy does not touch upon the Quad at all<sup>4</sup>. Nor does the Quad find mention in Secretary Pete Hegseth's speech at the recent Shangri-La Dialogue.

Given this backdrop, the visit by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio to New Delhi and the meeting of Quad Foreign Ministers held on May 26, 2026 appears to provide a lifeline, indicating at least some US interest in the Quad.

The impact of the Rubio visit to New Delhi on the US-India partnership has been analysed by this author separately<sup>5</sup>. This brief seeks to appraise the development of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue since its inception and assess its future prospects.

### Initial Formation and Subsequent Revival of the Quad

The Quad countries came together spontaneously to coordinate emergency relief and humanitarian assistance to affected Asian countries in the wake of the Boxing Day

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Shoebrieger, "The incredible shrinking Quad", September 04, 2025, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/incredible-shrinking-quad>

<sup>2</sup> Derek Grossman, "The Quad is on the Brink of Extinction", April 23, 2026, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2026/04/23/trump-quad-india-japan-australia-modi-china-summit-diplomacy-geopolitics/>

<sup>3</sup> National Security Strategy of the United States of America, November 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> 2026 National Defense Strategy, January 23, 2026, <https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jan/23/2003864773/-1/-1/0/2026-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY.PDF>

<sup>5</sup> Lalit Kapur, "Marco Rubio's First Visit to India", Indo-Pacific Monitor Volume VII Issue 5, May 2026, [https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications\\_file/publication\\_Indo-Pacific%20Monitor-%20Vol%20VII,%20Issue%205.pdf](https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications_file/publication_Indo-Pacific%20Monitor-%20Vol%20VII,%20Issue%205.pdf)

tsunami in 2004<sup>6</sup>. Following that experience, officials from the four Quad partner countries met on the sidelines of the ASEAN Regional Forum Defence Officials' Meeting at Manila in May 2007 for initial talks<sup>7</sup>. The US-India Exercise Malabar had taken place in the Philippine Sea for the first time just before they met, signalling operationalisation of India's Look East Policy. An expanded second edition of the 2007 Malabar exercise was held in early September, for the first time in the Bay of Bengal, involving Australia, India, Japan, the US and Singapore (this expanded five nation exercise was never repeated).

This meeting of officials did not, however, have meaningful leader level commitment, except for Japan. China, which was still hiding its strength and biding its time, and the attractions of whose burgeoning market were considerable, made sharply worded formal demarches to the four countries. Changes of government in Australia<sup>8</sup> and Japan<sup>9</sup>, and the reality that neither Washington DC nor New Delhi were ready to confront China, resulted in the Quad's going into a prolonged hibernation.

The decade commencing 2010 witnessed public US acknowledgement of the Asia-Pacific as the world's most economically dynamic region, the driver of global geopolitics and the need for greater US involvement in the region<sup>10</sup>. An announcement of the US "pivot to Asia" followed<sup>11</sup>. The prevailing paradigm, however, remained one of hope that China would rise peacefully and as a responsible stakeholder<sup>12</sup>.

On coming to power, China's President Xi Jinping spoke to Indonesia's parliament of his vision of the Maritime Silk Road<sup>13</sup>, which would become part of his Belt and Road Initiative<sup>14</sup> (BRI). This speech, coupled with China's unprecedented maritime

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<sup>6</sup>Quad, February 2025,

[https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Unclassified\\_Quad\\_Brief\\_Feb\\_2025.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Unclassified_Quad_Brief_Feb_2025.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> The replacement of John Howard by Kevin Rudd in December 2007.

<sup>9</sup> The replacement of Shinzo Abe by Yasuo Fukuda in September 2007.

<sup>10</sup> America's Pacific Century, Hillary Clinton, October 11, 2011, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/>

<sup>11</sup> Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament, November 17, 2011, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament/>

<sup>12</sup> Robert B Zoellick, Deputy Secretary of State, "Whither China: From Membership to Responsibility", September 21, 2005, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/s/d/former/zoellick/rem/53682.htm>

<sup>13</sup> President Xi gives speech to Indonesia's parliament, October 3, 2013, [https://en.chinadiplomacy.org.cn/2021-01/27/content\\_77158882.shtml](https://en.chinadiplomacy.org.cn/2021-01/27/content_77158882.shtml)

<sup>14</sup> Full text of President Xi's speech at opening of Belt and Road forum, May 15, 2017, [https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyjh/202405/t20240530\\_11341175.html](https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyjh/202405/t20240530_11341175.html)

expansion and its Military Strategy White Paper of May 2015<sup>15</sup>, spelt out a China-centric regional vision, arousing concern regarding the intent underlying China's expanding geopolitical influence and power projection capability. China's shift of maritime strategic focus to far seas operations was seen as the indicator of an intent to project power globally and secure vital Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs). Development and control of infrastructure such as commercial ports, railways and highways (through the BRI) was seen as a covert attempt to enhance the PLA's naval and logistical infrastructure. Unsustainable debt financing, as in Hambantota, Gwadar and Chittagong, was seen as a means to compel recipient nations into making geopolitical decisions favouring China.

China also adopted a coercive outlook, seizing control of the disputed Scarborough Shoal in 2012 and launching an island building spree in disputed reefs in the South China Sea in late 2013. This was followed by militarisation of the newly built islands, contravening a specific assurance provided by President Xi at the White House<sup>16</sup>, and bringing all Southeast Asian capitals within aircraft strike range. The Obama Administration's response to both events was ineffective, and China blithely ignored a binding verdict from the Permanent Court of Arbitration in July 2016 regarding its expansive maritime claims<sup>17</sup>. It began constructing its first extra-territorial base at Djibouti in March 2016; the base became operational in August 2017.

Partners of the dormant Quad opposed or questioned China's BRI and its regional vision and adopted an Indo-Pacific outlook. Australia was the first to change from the prevailing Asia-Pacific paradigm in its 2013 Defence White Paper<sup>18</sup>, broadening its strategic focus to the Indo-Pacific, supporting the US pivot to Asia, prioritising the Southern Pacific and Southeast Asia for regional security, and formally recognising India's status as a major global economic and military power. Australia would go on to formally oppose the BRI in March 2017.

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<sup>15</sup> China's Military Strategy, May 27, 2015, [https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2015/05/27/content\\_281475115610833.htm](https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/content_281475115610833.htm)

<sup>16</sup> Xi specifically said that China does not intend to pursue militarisation during his remarks at the White House during a Joint Press Conference with President Obama. See "Remarks by President Obama and President Xi of the People's Republic of China in Joint Press Conference", September 25, 2015, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/25/remarks-president-obama-and-president-xi-peoples-republic-china-joint/>

<sup>17</sup> The South China Sea Arbitration (The Republic of Philippines v. The People's Republic of China), <https://pca-cpa.org/es/cases/7/>

<sup>18</sup> Defence White Paper 2013, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2013/australia-wp-2013.pdf>

India articulated its vision of a free, open, stable, secure and cooperative Indian Ocean through the Prime Minister's proclamation of SAGAR in March 2015<sup>19</sup>. Its key elements were deepening economic and security ties with the region, recognition of the stakes of extra-regional countries, positioning India as a net security provider for the Indian Ocean, and the commitment to defend India's interests in the region. India formally refused in May 2017 to participate in the BRI Forum<sup>20</sup> and raised concerns on the violations of its sovereignty and territorial integrity by the CPEC project, as well as the lack of financial transparency and creation of debt dependencies. India also set out its Indo-Pacific vision through Prime Minister Narendra Modi's keynote address at the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2018<sup>21</sup>. Exercise Malabar was expanded to permanently include Japan in 2015 and Australia in 2020.

Japan expressed concerns about the BRI in early 2015 and launched the Partnership for Quality Infrastructure to provide Asian nations an alternative to Chinese funding. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe officially unveiled his Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy in Kenya in May 2016<sup>22</sup>, linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans into a single region free from coercion, force or intimidation, believing in freedom of navigation and pursuing economic prosperity through enhanced regional connectivity, underpinned by quality infrastructure, peace and stability.

Together, these developments provided the strategic foundations for the revival of the Quad.

Donald Trump, as the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the US, was instrumental in changing US perceptions about China and shaping a coordinated strategic response to its actions. He co-opted Japan's FOIP and made it a central pillar of US policy. His speech at Da

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<sup>19</sup> Prime Minister's Remarks at the Commissioning of Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) Barracuda in Mauritius, March 12, 2015, [https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/24912/Prime\\_Ministers\\_Remarks\\_at\\_the\\_Commissioning\\_of\\_Offshore\\_Patrol\\_Vessel\\_OPV\\_Barracuda\\_in\\_Mauritius\\_March\\_12\\_2015](https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/24912/Prime_Ministers_Remarks_at_the_Commissioning_of_Offshore_Patrol_Vessel_OPV_Barracuda_in_Mauritius_March_12_2015)

<sup>20</sup> Official Spokespersons response to a query on participation of India in OBOR/BRI Forum, May 13, 2017, [https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings?dtl/28463/Official\\_Spokespersons\\_response\\_to\\_a\\_query\\_on\\_participation\\_of\\_India\\_in\\_ORBRI\\_Forum](https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings?dtl/28463/Official_Spokespersons_response_to_a_query_on_participation_of_India_in_ORBRI_Forum)

<sup>21</sup> Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri-La Dialogue, June 01, 2018, [http://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime\\_Ministers\\_Keynote\\_Address\\_at\\_Shangri\\_La\\_Dialogue\\_June\\_01\\_2018](http://mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime_Ministers_Keynote_Address_at_Shangri_La_Dialogue_June_01_2018)

<sup>22</sup> Address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Opening Session of the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI), August 27, 2016, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/afr/af2/page4e\\_000496.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/afr/af2/page4e_000496.html)

Nang in November 2017 adopted the term 'Indo-Pacific'<sup>23</sup>. His National Security Strategy of December 2017 framed China as a strategic competitor using economic inducements and penalties, influence operations and implied military threats, coupled with rapid military modernisation designed to limit US access to the region and displace it from Asia<sup>24</sup>. It specifically sought increased Quad cooperation with Japan, Australia and India. The US Pacific Command was renamed the Indo-Pacific Command in May 2018 to reflect the connectivity between the two oceans and emphasise the rising strategic importance of India to US defence planning. The US also formally voiced its opposition to the BRI, viewing it as a geopolitical tool to project authoritarian values, expand military influence and establish a unipolar international order. It passed the BUILD Act to provide transparent infrastructure funding to developing countries.

The US strategic response included steps to revive the Quad. Officials from the partner countries met in Manila again, this time on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit in November 2017, for the first Quad consultations in a decade<sup>25</sup>. They met again in June<sup>26</sup> and November 2018<sup>27</sup>. A consensus evolved around promoting a free, open, rules-based and inclusive order in the Indo-Pacific and providing the region with alternatives to China through cooperation in maritime security, quality infrastructure, connectivity, counter-terrorism, cyber security, and disaster response. The military dimension was deliberately excluded from this consensus. Meetings were elevated to the ministerial level in September 2019<sup>28</sup>; a second ministerial meeting took place in October 2020<sup>29</sup>. Areas of consensus were increased to include pandemic response and developing resilient supply chains.

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<sup>23</sup> Remarks by President Trump at APEC CEO Summit, Da Nang, Vietnam, November 10, 2017, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-apec-ceo-summit-da-nang-vietnam/>

<sup>24</sup> National Security Strategy of the United States of America, December 18, 2017, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> India-Australia-Japan-US Consultations on Indo-Pacific, November 12, 2017, [https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29110/IndiaAustraliaJapanUS\\_Consultations\\_on\\_IndoPacific\\_November\\_12\\_2017](https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29110/IndiaAustraliaJapanUS_Consultations_on_IndoPacific_November_12_2017)

<sup>26</sup> India-Australia-Japan-US Consultations, June 07, 2018, [https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29961/IndiaAustraliaJapanUS\\_Consultations](https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29961/IndiaAustraliaJapanUS_Consultations)

<sup>27</sup> India-Australia-Japan-US Consultations, November 15, 2018, [https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/30593/IndiaAustraliaJapanUS\\_Consultations](https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/30593/IndiaAustraliaJapanUS_Consultations)

<sup>28</sup> Japan-India-Australia-US Ministerial, September 26, 2019, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page3e\\_001112.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page3e_001112.html)

<sup>29</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> India-Australia-Japan-USA Ministerial Meeting, October 06, 2020, [https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/33098/2nd\\_IndiaAustraliaJapan\\_USA\\_Ministerial\\_Meeting](https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/33098/2nd_IndiaAustraliaJapan_USA_Ministerial_Meeting)

China's reaction came in Foreign Minister Wang Yi's description of Quad as a headline grabbing idea and sea foam that will soon dissipate<sup>30</sup>. However, as the Quad expanded its activities, China switched from viewing it as transient sea foam to portraying it as an Asian NATO. It actively pursued anti-Quad propaganda targeting ASEAN and South East Asian nations.

## The Biden Administration and the Quad

The Biden administration also adopted Trump's "strategic competitor" approach, designating China as its primary geopolitical rival. Biden's National Security Strategy described China as harbouring "the intention, and increasingly, the capability, to reshape the international order in favour of one that tilts the global playing field to its benefit"<sup>31</sup>. Beijing was seen as having the ambition to create an enhanced sphere of influence in the Indo-Pacific and to become the world's leading power. The India-US Partnership was framed as a "Partnership for the Global Good"<sup>32</sup>. The Quad, along with AUKUS<sup>33</sup>, became among the foremost US plurilateral foreign policy responses to the growing China challenge.

There were differences between the US and India even during the Biden Administration. These included isolation of Russia following the Ukraine war; concerns about India's perceived democratic backsliding; the US policy towards Bangladesh and Sheikh Hasina; the US approval of a sustainment package for Pakistan's F-16s, ostensibly to assist in counterterrorism efforts; the unceremonious US withdrawal from Afghanistan leaving behind a security vacuum; and the US policy of isolating Myanmar. These differences were, however, managed and subordinated to the imperatives of Indo-Pacific engagement and Quad cooperation.

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<sup>30</sup> Quad move will dissipate like sea foam: China, March 8, 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/china/quad-move-will-dissipate-like-sea-foam-china/articleshow/63221055.cms>

<sup>31</sup> National Security Strategy, October 12, 2022, <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> US-India Joint Leaders' Statement: A Partnership for the Global Good, September 24, 2021, [https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/34320/USIndia\\_Joint\\_Leaders\\_Statement\\_A\\_Partnership\\_for\\_Global\\_Good\\_September\\_24\\_2021](https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/34320/USIndia_Joint_Leaders_Statement_A_Partnership_for_Global_Good_September_24_2021)

<sup>33</sup> For an overview of the agreement, see Lalit Kapur, "The AUKUS Alliance: Return to the Past?", DPG Policy brief Volume VI, Issue 33, September 25, 2021, [https://delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications\\_file/the-aukus-alliance-return-to-the-past-2886.pdf](https://delhipolicygroup.org/storage/uploads/publications_file/the-aukus-alliance-return-to-the-past-2886.pdf)

Biden elevated the Quad to a leaders' level summit<sup>34</sup>, transforming what was till then an informal grouping into a premier diplomatic coalition intended to “preserve and strengthen the international order for the global good” and “to provide tangible benefits for the region”<sup>35</sup>. Six summits and six ministerial meetings were held during his term, apart from numerous official level meetings. Areas of cooperation were expanded to encompass Health Security (the Quad Vaccine Partnership which later transformed into the Quad Health Security Partnership and the Cancer Moonshot); Climate, Energy and Critical Minerals (the Indo-Pacific Energy Security Initiative, Critical Minerals Framework and Climate Change Task Force); Agriculture (the AI-Engage Initiative); Technology and Digital Infrastructure (semiconductor supply chains contingency network, Open RAN and telecommunications, space cooperation and cybersecurity); Maritime Security {Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA), Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific (MAITRI), Coast Guard collaboration through the Quad-at-sea Ship Observer Missions and the Quad Ports of the Future Partnership}; the Quad Partnership on Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief including the Indo-Pacific Logistics Network; and Education and Development (Quad Investors Network and the Quad STEM Fellowship). Nine Quad working groups were formed in climate, critical and emerging technologies, cybersecurity, health security, infrastructure, space, HADR, counter-terrorism and maritime security.

The US House of Representatives passed the Strengthening the Quad Act in February 2024, seeking to insulate the partnership from shifting political whims, and ensure funding, oversight and engagement regardless of who occupies the White House. However, the Act was not passed by the Senate, and thus did not become US law.

Summits help in projecting the image of a cohesive, action-oriented platform rather than a diplomatic talk shop. Quad in-person summits were hosted by the US in 2021 and Japan in 2022. The 2023 summit was relocated from Sydney to Hiroshima (to coincide with the G7 summit), as Biden curtailed his trip and returned to the US to manage critical domestic negotiations (regarding the US debt ceiling). The succeeding year, India and the US agreed to swap hosting of the Quad summit to accommodate

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<sup>34</sup> Quad Leaders' Joint Statement: “The Spirit of the Quad”, March 12, 2021, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/33620/Quad+Leaders+Joint+Statement+The+Spirit+of+the+Quad>

<sup>35</sup> Quad Foreign Ministers Joint Statement, Tokyo, July 29, 2024, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100704619.pdf>

Biden's desire to host a farewell summit in his home town. Consequently, the last Quad Summit was hosted by the US at Wilmington in September 2024<sup>36</sup>.

## The Quad and Trump 2.0

A day after the second Trump Administration was sworn in, Quad Foreign Ministers met in Washington DC on January 21, 2026<sup>37</sup>. They reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening a Free and Open Indo-Pacific where the rule of law, democratic values, sovereignty and territorial integrity are upheld and defended, and opposed unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo by force or coercion. They further looked forward to advancing the work of the Quad.

Prime Minister Modi was among the first international leaders to meet President Trump in February 2025. The Joint Statement from that meeting recognised India as a major defence partner and a key Quad partner<sup>38</sup>. It also reiterated Quad principles such as ASEAN centrality, adherence to international law, freedom of navigation and overflight, unimpeded lawful commerce, and peaceful resolution of maritime disputes in accordance with international law. It looked forward to the Quad Leaders' Summit in New Delhi, and said the leaders would activate new Quad initiatives on shared airlift capacity to promote civilian response to natural disasters and maritime patrols to improve interoperability ahead of the summit (The Quad Indo-Pacific Logistics Network was activated in April/May 2025 and the Quad-at-sea Ship Observer Mission in end-June 2025). The outlook for bilateral relations was similarly positive, with progress on defence, trade, energy and technology cooperation being the highlights. The leaders also planned to convene partners from IMEC and I2U2 within six months to announce new initiatives for 2025.

A meeting of Quad Foreign Ministers hosted by the US followed in July 2025, during which the ministers refocused Quad cooperation to four key areas: maritime and transnational security; economic prosperity and security; critical and emerging technology; and humanitarian assistance and emergency response<sup>39</sup>. Significantly, the

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<sup>36</sup> The Wilmington Declaration Joint Statement from the Leaders of Australia, India, Japan, and the United States, September 22, 2024, <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2057454&reg=3&lang=2>

<sup>37</sup> Joint Statement by the Quad Foreign Ministers, January 21, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-by-the-quad-foreign-ministers/>

<sup>38</sup> India-US Joint Statement during the visit of Prime Minister of India to the US, February 14, 2025, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2103037>

<sup>39</sup> Joint Statement from the Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Washington DC, July 01, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/07/joint-statement-from-the-quad-foreign-ministers-meeting-in-washington/>

ministers condemned the Pahalgam terrorist attack and called for its perpetrators to be brought to justice.

Article 1255 of the US National Defense Authorisation Act for 2026 conveyed the sense of the US Congress on the Quad<sup>40</sup>. It directed the Secretary of Defense to broaden US engagement with India, including through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, to advance the shared objective of a free and open Indo-Pacific and to enable greater cooperation on maritime security.

However, fissures between India and US at the leadership level had already started impacting bilateral relations. In May 2025, India launched Operation Sindoor to dismantle terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan as a punitive response to the Pahalgam terror attack. President Trump claimed credit for mediating a ceasefire; India denied the claim. Trump then upgraded the US relationship with Pakistan, hosting Field Marshal Asim Munir at the White House in June 2025 and describing him (repeatedly) as his favourite Field Marshal. In doing this, he effectively negated India's (and the Quad's) anti-terror push, notwithstanding the July 2025 Quad Foreign Ministers' call for perpetrators of the Pahalgam attacks to be brought to justice. The personal chemistry between leaders that undergirded the bilateral relationship during the first Trump Administration was a significant casualty, making ties susceptible to the American leader's impulses and domestic priorities.

As the negotiating period for Trump's Liberation Day tariffs ended, he enhanced "reciprocal" tariffs for India to 25% on August 01, 2025. This was further increased to 50% as a punitive measure for India's import of Russian oil, an action that India's External Affairs Minister publicly described as unjustified and unreasonable<sup>41</sup>. Notwithstanding these differences, both sides kept bilateral engagement alive, renewing the 10-year defence framework agreement in October 2025, signing an agreement on Underwater Domain Awareness, and continuing with negotiations for a bilateral trade agreement.

In parallel, Trump's strategic approach towards China changed, due in no small part to the demonstrated Chinese leverage in critical minerals and essential rare earths that forced a truce in the US-China tariff war. The earlier rhetoric about China's unfair economic model, use of unfair trade practices such as intellectual property theft,

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<sup>40</sup> S.1071 - National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2026, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/1071/all-actions>

<sup>41</sup> Jaishankar hits out at US tariffs, says India will not compromise on farmers' interests, August 23, 2025, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/jaishankar-hits-out-at-us-tariffs-says-india-will-not-compromise-on-farmers-interests/article69967779.ece>

forced transfers of technology, use of subsidies and forced labour, and human rights abuses was abandoned. The focus shifted to conciliation and accommodation, with the objective of building “a constructive relationship of strategic stability on the basis of fairness and reciprocity”<sup>42</sup>. Trump’s apparent acceptance of a G-2 condominium called into question the reliability of the US as an external balancer, a perception that will shape the behaviour of other Quad partners in bilateral negotiations with China.

President Trump’s emphasis on transactionalism and “America First” moved the Quad from a values-based partnership among leading maritime democracies intended to promote the Rules-Based Order to one that focuses on the answer to a simple question: “Does it make America safer, stronger or more prosperous?” It added to uncertainty amongst the Quad partners: there is now underlying concern that the US will strike a deal with China that ignores the interests of India, Australia and Japan, not least because of Trump’s proclivity towards unpredictable and unilateral actions.

### The 11<sup>th</sup> Quad Ministerial

During their meeting in July 2025, Quad Foreign Ministers had projected that the 2026 Quad Ministerial Meeting would be hosted by Australia<sup>43</sup>. However, the continued absence of the New Delhi Quad Summit, the emergence of tensions in India’s bilateral relationship with the US, and the changed US strategic approach towards China resulted in the venue for the 2026 Quad ministerial eventually shifting to New Delhi.

The Rubio visit and the Quad Ministerial underlined the continued role of India in burden sharing in the Indo-Pacific. Rubio described the US-India relationship as the cornerstone of the US approach to the region, adding that the Quad Ministerial in New Delhi was a tangible sign of the important role India plays in the region<sup>44</sup>. US Secretary of War Pete Hegseth also highlighted India’s role at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, describing India as a critical anchor holding the line in the Indian Ocean and acknowledging that a powerful India acting in its own self-interest advances the

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<sup>42</sup> Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Secures Historic Deals with China, Delivering for American Workers, Farmers, and Industry, May 17, 2026, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2026/05/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-secures-historic-deals-with-china-delivering-for-american-workers-farmers-and-industry/>

<sup>43</sup> Joint Statement from the Quad Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in Washington DC, July 01, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/07/joint-statement-from-the-quad-foreign-ministers-meeting-in-washington/>

<sup>44</sup> Secretary of State Marco Rubio and US Ambassador Sergio Gor at a US Embassy Support Annex Dedication Ceremony, May 23, 2026, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/05/secretary-of-state-marco-rubio-and-u-s-ambassador-sergio-gor-at-a-u-s-embassy-support-annex-dedication-ceremony/>

shared goal of maintaining a balance of power across the region<sup>45</sup>. However, Hegseth's remarks about the US role and interests were directed only at the Pacific and made no reference to the Quad. The relative absence of meaningful Quad initiatives in the Indian Ocean, and EAM Dr. Jaishankar's framing of 'India First' in response to the US approach of 'America First'<sup>46</sup> raises the question of continued India-US convergence in pursuit of common interests.

The Quad Ministerial at New Delhi announced a few new initiatives<sup>47</sup>. In maritime security, the partners announced Indo-Pacific Maritime Surveillance Collaboration (IPMSC) with an initial focus on the Indian Ocean, which will enhance information sharing and maritime domain awareness capacity in the region. They also announced that India will host the next edition of the Quad-at-Sea Ship Observer Mission (there are parallels between this and IOS Sagar, both cross-embarkation initiatives that deploy personnel from partner nations on a common vessel). In the field of economic prosperity and security, the partners announced that Quad countries will work with the Government of Fiji to advance port infrastructure and associated initiatives in that country. They further announced a new Quad Critical Minerals Initiative Framework<sup>48</sup>, with the intent of mobilising up to \$ 20 billion in government and private sector support to strengthen critical mineral supply chains across mining, processing and recycling. Another announcement was regarding a new initiative on Indo-Pacific Energy Security to help strengthen regional energy resilience<sup>49</sup>.

While these new announcements about Quad cooperation were significant, differences between stated principles and reality now cloud their credibility. The Quad Joint Statement talks of the commitment to uphold international law and peacefully resolve disputes, ignoring the reality that the US action in Iran contravenes international law and the principle of peaceful resolution of disputes. The stated Quad opposition to changing the status quo through the unilateral use of force or coercion is similarly violated by the unilateral and unprovoked US use of force in Iran.

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<sup>45</sup> Remarks by Secretary of War Pete Hegseth at the 2026 Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore (As Delivered), May 30, 2026, <https://www.war.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/4504755/remarks-by-secretary-of-war-pete-hegseth-at-the-2026-shangri-la-dialogue-in-sin/>

<sup>46</sup> Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Indian External Affairs Minister Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar at a Joint Press Availability, May 24, 2026, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/05/secretary-of-state-marco-rubio-and-indian-external-affairs-minister-dr-subrahmanyam-jaishankar-at-a-joint-press-availability/>

<sup>47</sup> Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting Joint Statement, May 26, 2026, [https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/41233/Quad\\_Foreign\\_Ministers\\_Meeting\\_Joint\\_Statement\\_May\\_26\\_2026](https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/41233/Quad_Foreign_Ministers_Meeting_Joint_Statement_May_26_2026)

<sup>48</sup> Quad Critical Minerals Initiative Framework Among India, Australia, Japan and the United States, May 26, 2026, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/101034344.pdf>

<sup>49</sup> Quad Statement on Indo-Pacific Energy Security, May 26, 2026, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/101034341.pdf>

The call for decisive action to combat terrorism, including cross-border terrorism, sounds hollow from an Indian perspective, given the renewed US engagement with Pakistan. The call for stable, transparent, secure, resilient and open energy markets ignores the disruption to those markets caused by unilateral US sanctions on Russia and Iran. The call for unimpeded freedom of navigation, including in the Strait of Hormuz, conveniently glosses over the fact that disruption in trade flows there was triggered by US actions and has been exacerbated by a US maritime “blockade” against Iran.

China’s response to the Quad Ministerial Meeting was rather muted and on predictable lines, observing that cooperation between countries should be conducive to regional peace, stability and prosperity, and should not target any third party. China opposed the forming of exclusive groupings or engaging in bloc confrontations<sup>50</sup>. The point to note is that the areas discussed by the Quad Ministers are not military or directed towards bloc confrontation. They focus on supply chains, economic resilience, maritime commerce, critical minerals and trusted technologies, all areas where China has developed and exercised coercive leverage.

## Whither The Quad

Notwithstanding the Quad being projected as a four nation partnership, the reality is that the US provides its backbone. The other partners combined lack the informational, financial, technological and security heft that the US brings to the partnership. The US has thus always exercised the power to shape the Quad’s direction. This direction has changed under the current administration.

The first casualty of the change is the commitment to a Rules-Based Order. The US has become a leading agent for destruction of the order it created, prioritising national interest over the global good. Its unilateral actions in Venezuela and Iran, including the blockade, contravene core provisions of the UN Charter against the use of force, infringement of sovereignty and established freedom of the seas, and provide a precedent for other great powers. The unilateral imposition of tariffs and the blocking of appointments to the WTO appellate body have upended the global trading system. Allies and partners alike have experienced US coercion, placing both alliances and partnerships under strain and calling into question their cohesion.

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<sup>50</sup> Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning’s Regular Press Conference on May 26, 2026, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xw/fyrbt/202605/t20260526\\_11918267.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xw/fyrbt/202605/t20260526_11918267.html)

A second casualty is the commitment to deliver public goods. The US is no longer committed to this objective. The USAID infrastructure it had utilised for this purpose has largely been axed. The US has withdrawn from 66 international organisations, including the Paris Climate Change Agreement (climate action was among the earliest Quad areas of cooperation). Curtailment of funding for the UN and WHO, among others, has adversely impacted the working of several key international institutions. The relevance of the Quad, which is essentially a soft power platform, in an era where US has shifted focus to hard power and is investing in enhancing military capability, is questionable.

The Quad's past framing of its identity around the provision of public goods also raises questions about actual commitment of resources and results. The cumulative financial commitment for Quad projects (other than the IPMDA) is estimated to be less than \$ 50 million<sup>51</sup>. In comparison, China has committed more than \$ 222 billion to the BRI in 2025 alone, with a cumulative engagement of nearly \$ 1.4 trillion since the BRI was launched<sup>52</sup>. Consequently, the delivery of public goods under Quad partnerships has been underwhelming. The Quad Vaccine Partnership delivered far short of its promised 1.2 billion doses of Covid-19 vaccines before being transformed into the Health Initiative. The Quad Open RAN network in Palau is still work in progress, with operationalisation expected only in 2027. Pacific Island countries' undersea cable connectivity has been operationalised, but funding was provided largely by Australia and Japan. The Indo-Pacific Logistics Network has been operationalised, as has the Quad Fellowship, but these are relatively low cost initiatives. While the Quad has achieved broad acceptability in the Indo-Pacific, it has not gained credibility as a comprehensive alternative to China.

An initiative that has been operationalised is the IPMDA. Delivery of data under the IPMDA, enabling tracking of dark shipping and IUU fishing, is reported to have commenced. The last segment to become operational was the Indian Ocean. Notably, the US financial commitment to the IPMDA is estimated to be around \$ 125 million, spent largely on the Western Pacific. The operationalisation of IPMDA in the Indian Ocean is largely due to India spending around \$ 131 million for the purchase of Sea Vision software from the US<sup>53</sup>. Moreover, while the Quad brands the IPMDA as an

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<sup>51</sup> Rafiq Dossani, "After 18 Years, Has the Quad Failed?", March 26, 2025, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2025/03/after-18-years-has-the-quad-failed.html>

<sup>52</sup> Christopher Nedophil Wang, "China Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Investment Report 2025", <https://greenfdc.org/china-belt-and-road-initiative-bri-investment-report-2025/>

<sup>53</sup> India - Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness, April 30, 2025, <https://www.dsca.mil/Press-Media/Major-Arms-Sales/Article-Display/Article/4170460/india-indo-pacific-maritime-domain-awareness>

initiative to track dark shipping and IUU fishing, the region sees it as a façade for a military surveillance network.

There is also the perception that the Quad has focused largely on the Asia-Pacific, with limited attention to the 'Indo' part. The Indian Ocean was the last to see an operationalised IPMDA. Disaster management protocols have perhaps been the only other area of success in the Indian Ocean. There is little to show by way of Quad connectivity or infrastructure initiatives in the region. India is largely on its own.

As previously stated, the US strategic approach towards China has changed, with greater priority now being accorded to stability in the military dimension. President Trump sees China more as an economic than a geopolitical rival. He has declared the objective of building a constructive relationship of strategic stability with China on the basis of fairness and reciprocity<sup>54</sup>, accepting a Chinese framing<sup>55</sup>. US National Defence Strategy now seeks to deter China through strength<sup>56</sup>, to build a strong denial defence along the First Island Chain, and to build a favourable and durable balance of power in which no state can impose its hegemony and hold the security or prosperity of the US or allies in question. To deliver this, the US seeks capable allies with real military strength, real industrial capacity and real political resolve<sup>57</sup>. It sees references to 'values' and 'rules-based order' as a distraction.

This changed strategic approach based on "flexible and practical realism" is likely to translate into stronger calls for militarisation of the Quad. The US NSS 2026 expects India to assume greater responsibility for Indo-Pacific security. Japan's Defence Minister has already welcomed the idea of a meeting of Quad Defence Ministers to take Quad defence cooperation forward<sup>58</sup>. But India, focused on 'India First', does not see any gain from militarisation of the Quad; it has little relevance to India's challenges in the Himalayas or on its Western borders. The US and its regional allies are already predominantly focused on the Western Pacific. The Indian Ocean, which is India's

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<sup>54</sup> Fact Sheet: President Donald J Trump Secures Historic Deals with China, Delivering for American Workers, Farmers and Industry, May 17, 2026, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2026/05/fact-sheet-president-donald-j-trump-secures-historic-deals-with-china-delivering-for-american-workers-farmers-and-industry/>

<sup>55</sup> Notably, China's readouts make no mention of fairness and reciprocity. See "President Xi Holds Talks with US President Donald J Trump, May 14, 2026, [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/xw/zyxw/202605/t20260514\\_11910330.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xw/zyxw/202605/t20260514_11910330.html)

<sup>56</sup> US Department of War National Defence Strategy, January 23, 2026, <https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jan/23/2003864773/-1/-1/0/2026-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY.PDF>

<sup>57</sup> Secretary Hegseth's Address at the 23<sup>rd</sup> IISS Shangri-La Dialogue, May 30, 2026, [https://www.iiss.org/globalassets/media-library---content--migration/files/shangri-la-dialogue/2026/transcripts/p1/p1-corrected/petehegseth\\_asdelivered.pdf](https://www.iiss.org/globalassets/media-library---content--migration/files/shangri-la-dialogue/2026/transcripts/p1/p1-corrected/petehegseth_asdelivered.pdf)

<sup>58</sup> Q&A Session at the Fifth Plenary of the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue, May 31, 2026.

core area of interest, remains a peripheral theatre for them. A militarised Quad would only play into China's narrative describing it as an Asian NATO, adding to pressures on nations in Southeast Asia and the Southern Pacific to choose, something they are reluctant to do.

## Conclusion

The Quad no longer has political coherence or consistency. Its reduced relevance is evident from the fact that China's objections to it have become routine. China is conscious that the American wind that whipped up the sea foam Wang Yi talked of has been tamed, at least for the time being. It is no longer worried about Quad militarisation, knowing that India will not go along. It is also conscious of the Quad's poor record of delivering regional public goods.

Kissinger had famously observed, "Word will go out to the world that it may be dangerous to be America's enemy, but to be America's friend is fatal". India is learning the truth behind these words, which emphasised that American foreign policy is guided solely by national interest. The comfort level India had developed over the last 25 years in its relationship with the US has dissipated. People-to-people relations, which had provided a strong bond, have collapsed, Pakistan has again become a favoured partner, and the bilateral relationship has become entirely transactional. A Quad Summit in New Delhi is not forthcoming. Instead, chairmanship of the Quad will either pass to Australia, or Quad leaders may get together on the sidelines of a multilateral event (perhaps the G20 summit in Miami).

Nevertheless, the 11<sup>th</sup> Quad Ministerial is a signal that the US has not entirely abandoned the Quad. Multiple working groups remain active and meet frequently. New initiatives, including a port in Fiji and the mobilisation of \$ 20 billion to support supply chains in critical minerals have been announced. The Quad survives, notwithstanding the erosion of its credibility.

Finally, the regional strategic landscape around India fuses the Gulf and the Indo-Pacific into one interconnected maritime system, as has become evident from the impact of the war on Iran. India's geographic centrality and maritime capacity remain irreplaceable in the Indian Ocean. India's defence cooperation with the US continues, with new areas being added in the maritime domain. India should now focus more on strengthening its strategic positioning in the Indian Ocean and seek enhanced cooperation with Japan and Australia, whose commitment to the Free and Open Indo-Pacific continues unchanged.

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