



QUAD's Maritime Security Initiatives in the Indo-Pacific: Imperatives for India

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ABSTRACT

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), which comprises of Australia, India, Japan and the United States, has once again positioned itself as a minilateral structure in the Indo-Pacific at a time when maritime security has become the point of convergence of order in the region. This paper questions how the Quad has evolved in this area and questions the drivers that guide the Indian involvement to Quad related efforts. It starts by mapping the conceptual formation of maritime security as well as the Indo-Pacific as a strategic arena and goes further to trace the formation of the Quad and its key maritime tools, which include the Indo-Pacific Partnership in Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA), naval and coast-guard consultation, and normative advocacy of a free and open Indo-Pacific. Based on the academic literature, governmental reports, and rigorous policy analysis, the paper argues that India is involved in Quad maritime projects because of five mutually supporting imperatives: (1) securing sea lines of communication (SLOCs) vital to commerce and energy; (2) regulating the growing naval and grey-zone presence of China without acceding to a formal alliance; (3) supporting the aspiration of India to become a



provider of net power in the Indian Ocean; (4) leveraging Quad mechanisms to develop technology, information, and capacity building, and (5) shaping the normative and institutional architecture of the Indo-Pacific while preserving strategic autonomy. At the same time, India faces issues pertaining to the lack of capabilities, a different perception of the threat in the Quad, a need to maintain the multiplicity of regional alliances, and the threat of Chinese countermeasures. The paper ends by offering policy recommendations to perfect India Quad maritime relationship to achieve optimal strategic and economic returns without harming autonomous and inclusive Indo-Pacific stance.

1. Introduction

The global trade is mostly maritime: more than eighty per cent of the bulk of the international trade transits through the sea lanes, and even higher proportions in most developing economies (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD], 2024). The recent UNCTAD data indicate that key chokepoints, such as the Suez Canal, the Red Sea approaches, and the Strait of Hormuz, are increasingly vulnerable to geopolitical rivalry and climate-driven interference, which cause rerouting, high prices, and increased volatility in trade flows (UNCTAD, 2024; UNCTAD, 2025). In the case of India, where the maritime sector constitutes approximately 95 per cent of its trade in terms of volume as well as approximately 70 per cent of its trade in terms of value, SLOCs security and resilience are an existential economic necessity (Times of India, 2025).

At the same time, the Indo-Pacific has become the main focus of great-power rivalry and order changes in the twenty-first century (Smith, 2025; Sullivan de Estrada, 2023). The Quad states have been at the forefront of the popularisation of the Indo-Pacific region as a strategic location that connects the Indian and Pacific oceans and in the expression of the vision of the free and open Indo-Pacific based on international law (Dian, 2023; Heiduk and Wirth, 2023). The agenda of the Quad has also expanded to cover maritime domain awareness, infrastructure, critical technology and capacity building in addition to its initial area of focus on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) with maritime security always at its centre (Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [DFAT], n.d.; Edwards and Bradford, 2025).



Historically viewed as a continental power India has, in the last decade, become more and more maritime-oriented. The 2015 speech by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on maritime security and connectivity in Mauritius, and his later allusions to an expanded MAHASAGAR framework, is an indication that India is now shifting its focus towards making maritime security and connectivity central to the country's foreign and security policy (Ministry of External Affairs [MEA], 2015; Government of India, 2025). This development has been aligned with India experiencing an increasing interest in the Quad and general Indo-Pacific structures.

The following question is raised in this paper: **What are the imperatives behind Indian participation in the maritime security projects of the Quad in the Indo-Pacific and what are the parameters that guide New Delhi in her strategic decisions?** In response to this, the paper is divided into six sections. Section 2 is a review of the conceptual literature of maritime security and the Indo-Pacific. Part 3 follows the development of the Quad and its sea policy. Section 4 looks at the maritime strategy of India and how it has converged with the Quad priorities. Section 5 examines the major imperatives of India in its outreach to Quad maritime efforts. The major obstacles and limitations are discussed in section 6. Policy recommendations are given in section 7, and finally, a synthesis is given.

2. The Indo-Pacific: Maritime Security and Conceptual and Strategic Context

2.1 The concept of maritime security as a multidimension

Over the last 20 years, the concept of maritime security has become a dominant concept in the domain of international security (Bueger, 2015). Bueger (2015) argues that, although the idea is still debatable, it has an analytically useful role since it is an umbrella that connects different groups of issues, such as classic naval threats, maritime boundary conflict, piracy and armed robbery at sea, maritime terrorism, trafficking and illicit, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, and environmental hazards and the protection of the blue economy. Maritime security can be perceived as the preservation of the good order at sea, whereby, legitimate maritime activities are upheld, and illegal ones are repressed instead of following a single, fixed definition (Bueger, 2015; Xu and Tan, 2023).

This broad conception can also be seen in the position of key players, which are likely to integrate traditional naval power with coast-guard collaboration, maritime law enforcement, and maritime governmental and resilience backing (Bueger, 2015; Edwards and Bradford, 2025). Maritime security in the Indo-Pacific is also complicated with the density of critical sea lanes of communication (SLOCs),



multiple claims to the same jurisdiction in the South and East China seas and the growing presence of non-state actors, such as pirates and smugglers to private security companies.

2.2 The Indo-Pacific as a regional construct

The Indo-Pacific has been theorised as a macro-region or a so-called macrosecuritized constellation, which connects the hitherto separate Asian and maritime security complexes (Smith, 2025). The term became popular in the strategic discourse of the late 2000s and 2010s, especially in Japan, the United States, Australia, and India, before being applied (usually with varying priorities) by European and ASEAN actors (Dian, 2023; Heiduk and Wirth, 2023).

In the case of India, the Indo-Pacific conceptualization is an extension of the older concept of the Indian ocean as a region of strategic interest, most notably the concept of K.M. Panikkar in the middle of the 20th century, but it expands it to the East and the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea (Parmar, 2024; Singh, 2024). Sullivan de Estrada (2023) shows that India views the Indo-Pacific as not only a geographical location but the place where the transitional order is fought because, in this way, New Delhi tries not to transform into a security community, firmly attached to alliances led by the U.S.

Though each country has its own approach to the matter, many Indo-Pacific policy documents are similar: they advocate a rules-based maritime order, respect to international law (especially the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea [UNCLOS]), freedom of navigation and overflight, and the focus on ASEAN centrality (Dian, 2023; DFAT, n.d.). These are also the notions that are on the forefront of QUAD statements and the normative background of its maritime undertakings.

3. The Quad and its Changing Maritime Agenda

3.1 Tsunami Core Group to strategic minilateral

The Quad has its roots in the ad hoc group of the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004, the so-called Tsunami Core Group, which coordinated the disaster response and united the navies of India, the United States, Australia, and Japan (Heiduk & Wirth, 2023). In 2007, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe convened the four countries in a Quadrilateral Security Dialogue under the auspices of an arc of democracy but domestic politics and Chinese rejection of the same led to a break in 2008.

The grouping was reinstated in 2017, with the officials of the four countries meeting on the side of the ASEAN and East Asia Summits. The story was written in a more restrained fashion, where it advocated a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific, instead of explicitly balancing it with China (Heiduk and Wirth,



2023; Singh et al., 2024). The Quad has been raised to the status of the leaders since 2019, with frequent summits and meetings of foreign-ministers, and an increasing number of working groups in the area of vaccines, critical technologies, infrastructure, climate, and maritime security (DFAT, n.d.).

Even though Quad leaders reiterate that it is not a military alliance and it lacks mutual commitments to defend each other, it is commonly understood as a primary component of U.S. and partners approach to deal with the emergence of China and consolidate an order based on rules in the Indo-Pacific (Heiduk and Wirth, 2023; Sullivan de Estrada, 2023).

3.2 Mainstream maritime security tools.

The maritime security agenda of the Quad may be divided into four main clusters:

1. Maritime domain awareness (MDA).

It includes the Indo-Pacific Partnership of Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) declared during the Tokyo Quad leaders summit in May 2022. The goal of IPMDA is to deliver near-real-time and integrated data of the maritime domain to partner nations within the Pacific Islands, South East Asia, and the Indian Ocean using commercial satellite-based radio-frequency (RF) data, Automatic Identification System (AIS) tracking, and other sensors (Chen, Zhang, and Xu, 2024).

2. Cooperation between the navy and the coast-guards.

Originally a bilateral India-U.S. naval exercise, the Malabar naval exercise serves as an essentially effective Quad naval exercise with the addition of intricate anti-submarine, carrier, and air-defence operations (Singh et al., 2024). More generally, the phenomenon of coast-guard collaboration has now emerged; Edwards and Bradford (2025) contend that Quad coast-guard involvement has become a form of informal networked regional governance by exchanging practices, and by cumulative exercises.

3. Infrastructure and capacity-building.

Among the most frequent activities of the quad are partner navy and coast guard training, the supply of patrol ships and spy tools, and collaboration in key maritime infrastructure like undersea cables (DFAT, n.d.; Heiduk and Wirth, 2023).



4. Normative and legal agenda.

Quad statements focus on compliance with the international law, especially with UNCLOS, advocacy of freedom of navigation and overflight, peaceful resolution of conflicts, and, primarily, in the South and East China seas (Heiduk and Wirth, 2023; Singh et al., 2024).

Practically, these clusters are overlapping, such as the example of IPMDA, where technological capacity-building, legal, and political issues of collecting, sharing, and possible operational utilization of maritime surveillance data are combined (Chen et al., 2024).

4. The Maritime Strategy of India and its convergence into the Quad

4.1 Between SAGAR and Indo-Pacific and MAHASAGAR

The modern maritime policy of India has experienced a radical change that has been experienced in the decade. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has highlighted the SAGAR vision in his 2015 speech in Mauritius where he emphasized five main pillars: the development of continental and island India, the enhancement of economic and security relationships with friendly states in the beauty of the Indian Ocean, multilateral counter-measures to natural disaster and non-state maritime aggression, the profitability of the Indian maritime environment, and the responsible use of the maritime connection (MEA, 2015).

Following scholarly commentaries and official statements have ended in placing SAGAR as the ideological backbone of Indian activities in the Indian Ocean Region (Parmar, 2014/2024; Tongli, 2024). This strategy integrates traditional naval diplomacy with humanitarian aid and disaster-recovery, anti-piracy actions in the Gulf of Aden, and capability-building measures to smaller littoral states, in contrast to focusing on inclusivity and compliance with international law (Parmar, 2014/2024; UNCTAD, 2024).

Since 2018, India has actively adapted the Indo-Pacific paradigm and senior leaders have presented the Indian Ocean as the core of a larger Indo-Pacific mosaic and described an Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), in 2019, which consists of seven pillars, including maritime security, capacity-building and resource sharing, disaster risk reduction, and maritime ecology (Sharma, 2024). Towards 2025, the Indian diplomats and analysts started to present an extended MAHASAGAR concept according to which regional SAGAR and Indo-Pacific projects are connected to the global perspective on the sea, predicting the appearance of an overt Global South vision (Government of India, 2025; Deka, 2025).



These models are not substitutes of each other, but the layers of the Indian maritime intellectual framework, which includes an Indian Ocean-based approach, an Indo-Pacific approach, and an approach with almost a global maritime identity. They give the conceptual framework on which India is assessing Quad maritime initiatives.

4.2 Indian Maritime Potential and Limitations

India has planned a broad naval modernization plan to increase the size of its fleet in the waters to a value estimated at about US \$40 billion over a decade with the aim of increasing its surface fleet, purchasing both conventional and nuclear submarine as well as upgrading the air and naval infrastructure in the island territories like the Andaman Islands and the Nicobar Islands (Financial Times, 2025). To a certain degree, this urgency is motivated by the concerns about the naval build-up by China, its ports accessibility, and military stations in the Indian Ocean which is often referred to as a string of pearls (Parmar, 2014/2024; Singh, 2024).

At the same time, India is faced with serious capability challenges. The functioning of the Navy is hindered by delays in the acquisition of submarines, the outdated platforms, and the paucity of resources compared to continental requirements to create, as well as maintain a genuine blue-ocean navy (Financial Times, 2025). A good part of Indian trade shipping remains as a foreign flag, and even though the domestic shipping is on the rise, it remains lower than China and some East Asian economies (Indian Institute of Strategic Studies and IRIS, 2025).

Under these conditions, technology, information, and logistical support, including partnerships that are inherent in the Quad can serve as force multipliers, although India must be able to incorporate these capabilities without undermining its strategic control (Sullivan de Estrada, 2023; Heiduk and Wirth, 2023).

5. India and its demands in Quad Maritime Security Initiatives

This paper presents and discusses five imperatives that influence India Quad maritime activity in the Indo-Pacific.

5.1 Acquiring SLOCs and Economic Strength

The paramount need of India is to protect the sea lines of communication (SLOCs) on which relate to its trade and energy security. According to the statistics gathered by UNCTAD and Review of Maritime Transport, over 80 percent of world trade in terms of volume is performed over the sea, and disturbances



at the main bottlenecks have already forced the need to take more complicated and expensive routes (UNCTAD, 2024; 2025). In the case of India, 95 percent of the trade volume flows via marine paths, which leads to a direct effect of the growth, inflation and supply chain strength in times of international shipping volatility (Times of India, 2025).

The maritime activities of the Quad promote the SLOC security in various aspects. The Integrated Platform of Maritime Data Analytics (IPMDA) positively impacts the process of analyzing illicit actions, such as piracy, trafficking, and covert shipping, which are dangerous to commercial vessels (Chen et al., 2024). Maritime and coast guard drills enhance interoperability and crisis preparedness in the context of protecting sea lanes, which was evidenced by recent joint drills (Edwards and Bradford, 2025; Singh et al., 2024). Furthermore, the capacity-building of smaller littoral states, such as the supply of patrol ships and training, can minimize these points of weakness on the important proportions of the Indian ocean and the western pacific (DFAT, n.d.).

With UNCTAD alarming that since the Suez Canal was closed in 1967, maritime disruptions have been higher than ever with like-minded partners, India will be greatly influenced to partner with them to ensure that the Indo-Pacific SLOCs stay open, lawful, and resilient (UNCTAD, 2025). The Quad provides an avenue to do so without any formal commitment of alliance.

5.2 Striking a balance between China and absence of alliance Entrapment.

A second mandate entails dealing with the growing China maritime presence and aggressiveness without being committed too sternly to alliances to ensure that India is restricted in its freedom of action. The naval modernization of China and its increased presence in the Indian Ocean, in addition to the militarization of the features of the South China Sea, are well-known as the sources of the development of the Indo-Pacific concept and Quad coalition (Heiduk and Wirth, 2023; Singh et al., 2024).

Edwards and Bradford (2025) reveal the organization of workplace cooperation of Quad coast-guard and best-practice transfer as the standardization of operational norms and the improvement of response capability to grey-zone challenges by the members. Chen et al. (2024) investigate IPMDA as a key element of US- and Quad-led attempts to influence the maritime information environment such that it impedes Chinese operations in particular the South China Sea. According to Sullivan de Estrada (2023), India engages in these types of initiatives and, at the same time, opposes the efforts to construct the Quad as a highly integrated security community and instead favours less binding and issue-specific cooperation that does not exclude any room to manoeuvre.



Such a measured approach is indicative of the greater tradition of Indian foreign-policy. New Delhi is interested in deterring or making Chinese coercion in the maritime space, the possible steps into the Indian Ocean, but retains strong financial relationships with China and not declaring its sides to the US alliance systems (Sullivan de Estrada, 2023; Khan, 2025). Based on this, Quad maritime cooperation is a means to stabilize China without opining the entrapment of an alliance.

5.3 Strengthening the Indian Strategic Identity as a Net Security Provider.

Indian policy-makers are increasingly describing India as the provider of net security in the Indian Ocean, i.e. as a state that is a positive contributor to the stability of the region because it is a provider of the good and not a hegemon (Parmar, 2014/2024; Tongli, 2024; Deka, 2025). This story compares with the recurring, humanitarian aid and disaster relief (HADR) operations, evacuation operations, and anti-piracy patrols made by India shipping out warships throughout the western Indo-Pacific.

The programs of quad maritime allow India to upscale and justify this role. India can also provide smaller Indian Ocean littoral states along with the island nations with maritime information through IPMDA which helps them monitor illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing, smuggling, and environmental dangers (Chen et al., 2024; Indo-Pacific Studies Center, 2024). The example of the Quad engaging in coast-guard and naval cooperation, outlined by Edwards and Bradford (2025), contains examples that India can implement in bilateral and trilateral communication with its partners in southeast Asia and East Africa.

Through Quad-linked endeavors where India commits its assets, training, and diplomatic faculties, India makes it clear that it is a provider of maritime security and governance as per SAGAR and MAHASAGAR and not an inferior member in the US-led strategies (Government of India, 2025; IMPRI, 2025).

5.4 A Making use of Technology, Information and Industrial alliance.

Fourth imperative is to be able to utilize Quad frameworks to reach superior technologies, data, and industrial opportunities of the maritime field. The example of IPMDA is not confined to using commercial RF satellite data, advanced analytics, and data-fusion platforms to provide near-real-time marine situational awareness (Chen et al., 2024). In the case of India, engagement in IPMDA has not only provided it with operational advantages but to access to the latest technologies in MDA that would have cost it an exorbitantly expensive price to have developed on its own.



Likewise, Quad dialogue about resilience of undersea cables, cyber-security of maritime infrastructure, and defense of critical undersea resources facilitates the weaknesses of India and its desires in these domains (Heiduk & Wirth, 2023; DFAT, n.d.). The reports based on the government and think-tank suggest that the country has to increase domestic ship-building and make Indian shipyards the places where the ships of allied countries can be repaired and refitted and maintained (Indian Institute of Strategic Studies and IRIS, 2025).

Indian shipyards are already involved in quad-related arrangements, as with Australia and India agreeing to enhance defense industrial collaboration, such as to assist each other in submarine rescue and maintenance (Reuters, 2025). This type of co-operation incorporates India in advanced industrial chains of maritime trade leading to improved economic and security performance.

5.5 Indo-Pacific norms: shaping whilst maintaining strategic autonomy.

Lastly, India is also very much interested in shaping the normative and institutional frontiers of the Indo-Pacific element in sculpture. The current official statements always stress that the Indo-Pacific position of India does not target any nation, but is based on the respect towards international law, especially UNCLOS, and the promotion of freedom of navigation and overflight (R. Singh, 2025; MEA, 2015).

Sullivan de Estrada (2023) argues that India is on the warpath challenging the existing discourse of the Quad and the Indo-Pacific, proffering ideas of order that include the concept of strategic autonomy, multipolarity and the Global South. On this note, Quad maritime initiatives are agreeable to India provided they can be presented to an open and inclusive order that affords compatibility with ASEAN centrality and a complement to other institutions like the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) (Ghosh, 2023; Parmar, 2014/2024).

India can encourage Indo-Pacific order to be less bloc-like and more plural and overlapping by engaging in Quad maritime legal dialogue, advocating the Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) and also joining up joint statements reinforcing UNCLOS-based norms (Heiduk & Wirth, 2023; Khan, 2025). Such normative role plays the key role in the self-image of India as a great power and as the representative of the Global South.

6. Challenges and Constraints

With these imperatives and points of convergence, India is limited to participate in Quad maritime activities due to a number of challenges.



- **Limitations of capability and resources.**

Today, as is widely known, the naval modernisation programme of India has delays and budget constraints and is still lagging behind China in fleet size, number of submarines and overall shipbuilding program (Financial Times, 2025; Indian Institute of Strategic Studies & IRIS, 2025). This inhibits the size and pace of India being able to put assets into Quad maritime operations or maintain a forward presence in broader Indo-Pacific.

- **Perception differences of threat in the Quad.**

Although the four Quad members express their concerns regarding the assertiveness of China, they have different priorities theatres. The East and South China seas, the Taiwan Strait are the major concerns of Japan and the United States, the Southwest pacific and the Southeast Asia dominate the challenges of Australia, and the South and the Himalayan land border is the most significant to India (Heiduk and Wirth, 2023; Singh et al., 2024). It is difficult to put such priorities into a consistent maritime plan that does not overstretch India.

- **Striking a balance between other relationships.**

India needs to balance its Quad involvement with key ties to Russia (also key defence provider), ASEAN and IORA (which provide its centrality), and non-aligned partners in Africa, West Asia and Latin America (Ghosh, 2023; Deka, 2025). Too strong adherence to a supposedly Western or anti-China camp might make such relations more difficult and a narrative of the Indian leadership as a Global South questionable.

- **Chinese reactions.**

The Quad and IPMDA are frequently described by Chinese governmental and academic sources as the means of border work that endangers maritime rights and growth of China (Chen et al., 2024). Further intensified Indian involvement in Quad maritime projects may also result in a more aggressive Chinese action across the contentious land boundary or even the deployment of even more naval forces in the Indian Ocean. Controlling the risk of escalation and meanwhile indicate resolve is an ongoing issue.

- **Organizational institutional coordination.**

The successful involvement in multifaceted projects like the IPMDA involves strong coordination of the tasks of the navy, coast guard, intelligence services, space and meteorological units, and various



ministries of the state in India. Through the analysis of MDA activities conducted in India, the lack of organizational transparency, issues with the data sharing, and misalignment of capacities are found to persist (Indo-Pacific Studies Centre, 2024; NatStrat, 2024). Unless there are organisational reforms, India could fail to exploit the opportunities of Quad maritime initiatives.

7. Policy Recommendations to India.

To derive the benefits of the Quad maritime cooperation, preserving the strategic autonomy and maintaining a balanced regional stance, India can take the following policy directions.

7.1 Enhance and focus IPMDA integration.

IPMDA should be one of the fundamental facilitators of its SAGAR and MAHASAGAR ambitions by India. This endeavour requires:

- Investing in national MDA infrastructure, including chains of coastal radar, naval and coast-guard information centres and satellite integration such that IPMDA is part of a solid national picture and not running parallel.
- Building human resources: special training on maritime analysts to be able to integrate data obtained through multiple sources and provide custom products to the littorals of the Indian Ocean.
- Demoting India as a supplier of IPMDA-facilitated services, including IUU fishing alerts, or tracking of so-called dark ships, to the smaller states in the Indian Ocean, thus strengthening India as a net security provider (Chen et al., 2024; Indo-Pacific Studies Center, 2024).

7.2 Focus on unconventional security and HADR.

India can use the maritime profile to shape the Quad by focusing on non-traditional security matters that are not as politically full of fervor but most relevant to the regional states: HADR, IUU fishing, marine pollution, and climate resilience. Joint HADR in the Bay of Bengal and Western Indian Ocean, a continuation of the Tsunami Core Group, would reflect the public-goods nature of the Quad and fit well within the pillars of SAGAR/IPOI (Bueger, 2015; Sharma, 2024).

7.3 Claim Quad industrial connections to spur maritime self-reliance.

This is because India needs to use Quad defence-industrial and technological partnerships to speed up domestic shipbuilding and maritime industrial capacity. This might include:



- Establishing Indian shipyards as key refit/maintenance partners to Quad navies operating in the Indian Ocean on top of the already established links with Australia and others (Reuters, 2025; Indian Institute of Strategic Studies and IRIS, 2025).
- Co-development or licensed construction of specialised ships (survey ships, MDA platforms, coast-guard cutters) which can be used by the Indian and partner requirements.
- Cooperation with undersea cable surveying and repair ability that could serve both business and strategic goals (Heiduk & Wirth, 2023).

These would assist in making sure that Quad cooperation is strengthening, and not replacing India in maritime *aatmanirbharta* (self-reliance).

7.4 Promote a multi-layered Indo-Pacific design.

India can alleviate the attitudes toward bloc politics by becoming actively connected between Quad activities in relation to ASEAN-based and Indian Ocean organizations. This could involve:

- Organizing Quad maritime projects in coordination with IORA and IONS agendas, in particular, capacity-building and HADR.
- Otherwise, supporting ASEAN-based attempts to conceptualise its own Indo-Pacific Outlook in manners that support and not rival Quad values (Dian, 2023; Ghosh, 2023).
- Recruiting IPOI as a platform of openness and issues where all participants (both Quad and non-Quad states) are able to engage in, making stiff alignments less pronounced (Sharma, 2024).

7.5 Ensure effective strategic communication regarding inclusiveness.

India needs to keep on projecting the story that its policies in the Indo-Pacific and Quad are not China-approach based and neither do they target any given state. The example of such messaging is the clarification by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh that India is not currently taking any position as Indo-Pacific, but as a policy to enforce rule of law and UNCLOS (R. Singh, 2025).

The clear association between Quad maritime projects and the serious needs of globally common goods, such as safe SLOCs, disaster response, climate resilience, can also help to convince partners in the Global South that India will continue to cooperate with major industrial democracies, which does not conflict with its overall South-Southern solidarity.



7.6 Enhance the domestic maritime governance and coordination.

Lastly, institutional reforms need to be considered in India to enhance inter-agency coordination on maritime issues which includes:

- Having a high-level maritime security coordinator or an integrated maritime theatre command to coordinate the naval, coast-guard and air-maritime capabilities.
- Strategic formulation of protocols to exchange data and privacy issues in IPMDA-related business to combat sovereignty concerns raised in legal reviews (Chen et al., 2024).
- Strengthening analytical ability within think tanks and universities to analyze intricate MDA and legal matters, and consequently course inform policy and negotiation arguments.

These reforms would make India more capable of ingesting and moulding Quad maritime endeavours to conditions of its independent choice.

Conclusion

The Quad maritime security efforts have been one of the central focuses in changing the strategic environment of the Indo-Pacific. They unite four key maritime democracies to their common concerns: preserving SLOCs, controlling expanding Chinese maritime presence, confronting non-traditional threats as well as defending a rules-based maritime order based on UNCLOS.

To India, these initiatives are overlapping with a decade long repositioning of its strategic gaze and towards the seas indicated by SAGAR, IPOI and MAHASAGAR. The main imperatives of India in its participation in the Quad maritime cooperation are ensuring imperative trade routes, balancing China without being entangled into a formal alliance, strengthening its involvement as a net provider of security in the Indian Ocean, exploiting technological and industrial connections, and influencing the norm and institutions of the Indo-Pacific without encircling itself with a formal alliance.

Yet, India's approach is necessarily cautious. Limitations exist in terms of capability disparities between the Quads, perception difference of the threat whereby some partners are more prone to perceive as having alternative partners or facing Chinese countermeasures. Based on the research on order transition and regional security complexes, it is expected that minilateral groupings such as the Quad are not going to replace other portions of the institutional framework but, instead, exist alongside them (Sullivan de Estrada, 2023; Smith, 2025).



New Delhi faces the central policy issue of calibration then, both to have the strategic and economic advantage of being deeply involved with the initiatives of the Quad in the maritime domain, and yet not to have this involvement become elevated into a broader, multi-vector Indo-Pacific policy. Assuming India is successful, the Quad maritime security agenda can support, and not distort, the India long-term vision of the Security and Growth of All in the Region, and ultimately, more stable, inclusive and lawful Indo-Pacific maritime order.

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