Challenge of Holding the Quad Together

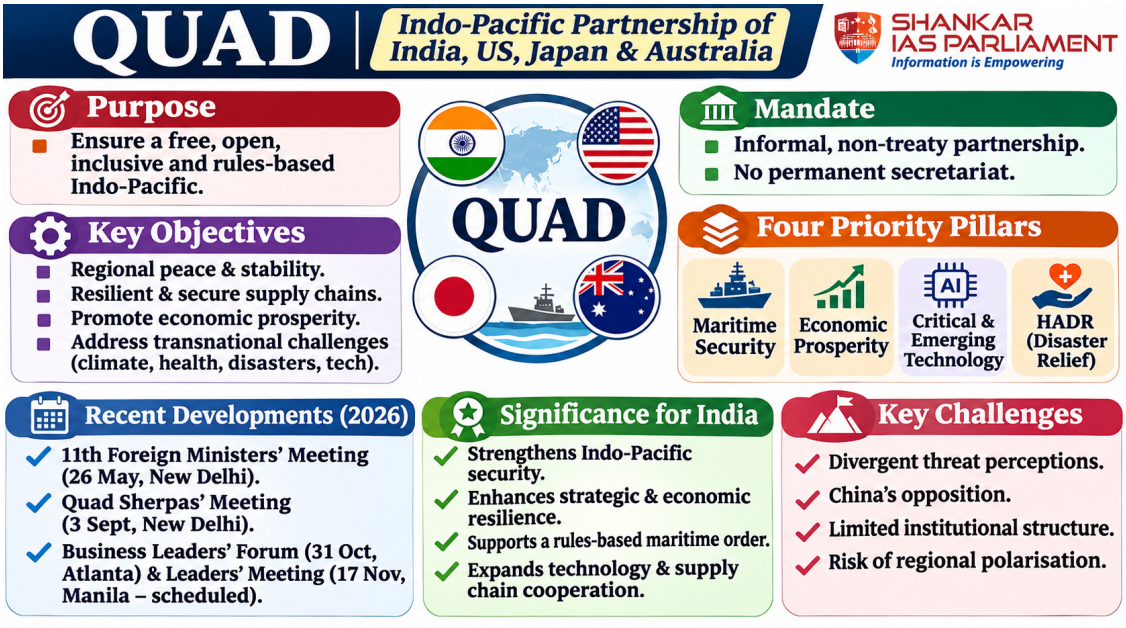
Mains: *GSII – International relations*

Why in News?

The Quad leaders are expected to meet in Manila in November 2026 alongside the ASEAN Summit, marking their first summit-level meeting since Trump's second term began.

What is the Quad?

- **Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue)** – An informal strategic grouping comprising India, the United States, Japan and Australia.
- **Origin** – Initially formed in 2007 and revived in 2017 to strengthen cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.
- **Objective** – Promote a free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific.
- **Nature** – It is *not a formal military alliance and has no permanent secretariat or binding treaty obligations.*
- **Cooperation Areas** – Maritime security, defence cooperation, critical technologies, resilient supply chains, infrastructure, health and disaster management.



- **Recent Developments**
- **Previous Summit** – Held in Wilmington, U.S., in 2024.
- **Foreign Ministers' Meetings** – Members held two meetings in 2025 and three in 2026, despite political differences.

- **Maritime Cooperation** – The Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness initiative was elevated to the Indo-Pacific Maritime Surveillance Collaboration framework in May 2026.
- **Proposed Manila Summit** – The Philippines is expected to host the next leaders' meeting alongside the ASEAN Summit, reinforcing ASEAN centrality.
- **JAI Cooperation** – India, Japan and Australia held a Defence Ministers' meeting in Cebu, demonstrating continued trilateral cooperation.

What are the Major Challenges Confronting the Quad?

- **Uncertainty over U.S. Commitment** – Trump's focus on Russia–Ukraine, NATO and West Asia creates uncertainty over U.S. Indo-Pacific engagement.
- **Burden-sharing and Strategic Differences** – U.S. demands for greater defence burden-sharing and its review of AUKUS raise concerns among regional partners.
- **Growing Chinese Assertiveness** – China's expanding maritime presence and tensions in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait threaten regional stability.
- **Institutional Weakness** – Absence of a permanent secretariat and binding framework makes the Quad dependent on political commitment.
- **Divergent Strategic Priorities** – Differences in threat perceptions and India's strategic autonomy create challenges to collective strategic alignment.

What are the Strategic Responses by Indo-Pacific Countries?

- **Japan** – Strengthening security partnerships through the OCEAN framework.
- **Australia** – Expanding defence ties with India, Japan and Pacific countries.
- **India** – Following strategic autonomy and multi-alignment while diversifying defence partnerships.
- **JAI Cooperation** – India, Japan and Australia deepening trilateral defence cooperation.
- **France** – Expanding strategic engagement with Indo-Pacific countries.

What is the Strategic Significance of the Proposed Manila Summit?

- **ASEAN Centrality** – Holding the summit alongside the ASEAN Summit reinforces ASEAN's central role in the Indo-Pacific security architecture.
- **China's Assertiveness** – The Philippines' maritime disputes with China provide strategic significance to the summit's location.
- **Rules-Based Order** – Quad leaders are expected to reiterate respect for sovereignty and international law in the South and East China Seas.
- **U.S. Strategic Reassurance** – The summit provides an opportunity for Washington to reaffirm its Indo-Pacific commitments.
- **Regional Stability** – Strengthening coordination among Quad members can contribute to a balanced regional security environment.

What is the Way Forward?

- **Sustained Political Engagement** – Institutionalise regular leaders' and foreign ministers' meetings to maintain strategic continuity.

- **Strengthen Maritime Cooperation** – Expand maritime domain awareness, intelligence-sharing and coordinated responses to maritime threats.
- **Respect Strategic Autonomy** – Recognise differences in national interests and avoid imposing alliance-like obligations on members.
- **Deepen Economic Cooperation** – Expand cooperation in resilient supply chains, critical minerals, semiconductors and emerging technologies.
- **Strengthen ASEAN Centrality** – Ensure that Quad initiatives complement ASEAN-led regional mechanisms.
- **Promote Regional Public Goods** – Enhance cooperation in disaster management, infrastructure, healthcare, climate resilience and connectivity.

What lies ahead?

- The Quad's future depends on its ability to maintain strategic coordination despite changing political priorities and divergent national interests.
- While U.S. engagement remains critical, India, Japan and Australia must strengthen independent regional partnerships.
- The Quad should evolve as a flexible strategic partnership based on shared interests rather than a rigid military alliance, supporting a free, open and rules-based Indo-Pacific.

Reference

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