China's Concerns on Quad

What is the issue?

- In a recent speech, the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that the "Quad" would ensure that "China retains only its proper place in the world".
- In this context, here is a look at China's concerns about the "Quad."

What is Quad?

- "Quad" is a multilateral grouping among Japan, Australia, India and the United States.
- Quad convened recently at the level of senior officials on the margins of the East Asia Summit in Bangkok.
- Nuanced differences among the Quad countries seem to have narrowed down in the last 2 years.
- There are common references to the creation of a free, open and inclusive regional architecture, rules-of-the-road, freedom of navigation and over-flight, and, ASEAN centrality.

What is China's views on the Quad?

- There is a general understanding that the Quad would not take on a military dimension against any country.
- The strategic community in China, nevertheless, had branded it an emerging "Asian NATO".
- Notably, Japanese PM Shinzo Abe's "Confluence of Two Seas" address to the Indian Parliament gave a fresh impetus to the Quad concept.
- He had recently spoken of a new definition of a "broader Asia" taking shape at the confluence of the Indian and Pacific Oceans.
- This recognised the economic rise of India.
- It also brought Japan and India together as part of an immense network spanning the entirety of the Pacific Ocean, the US and Australia.
- It was seen as an open and transparent network that would allow people, goods, capital, and knowledge to flow freely.

What are China's key concerns?

- Beginning with maritime-centric concerns, Quad was gradually seen by China as a means to an end.

- China sees Quad as involving the use of the wider Indo-Pacific theatre to target China.
- It believes that the concept of the Indo-Pacific, and more particularly the Quad, is a plot by the US aimed at containing China's rise.
- It is particularly seen as opposing the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), questioning its developmental finance and connectivity projects.
- Quad is seen as the foundation for a military alliance to undermine China's future.
- China, notably, remains wedded to "Asia-Pacific" for building an inclusive regional cooperative structure.
- So, for China, a switch to "Indo-Pacific" implies an erosion of its pre-eminence.
- In this backdrop, China sees ASEAN centrality as an opportunity to steer the Indo-Pacific away from a security agenda focused on China.

What are China's plans in this regard?

- Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi's recent remarks to foreign and Chinese journalists gains importance in the above context.
- His five-point formula entailed -
    1. making greater efforts to work together on the BRI
    2. forging China-ASEAN digital cooperation, including in 5G
    3. fully implementing the China-ASEAN FTA
    4. finalising regional rules-of-the-road based on the negotiating text of the Code of Conduct (proposed by China)
    5. engaging in joint maritime exercises (already undertaken between China and ASEAN in October 2018)
- China has also signed bilateral agreements with ASEAN countries to advance transportation routes.
- These include the existing economic corridors, China-Thailand Railway, China-Laos Railway and Jakarta-Bandung high-speed Railway.

Where does India stand in this?

- India's commitment to "strategic autonomy" has generally proved reassuring to China.
- It suggests that India would never agree to fully align itself with the US against China.
- The recent Mamallapuram summit between President Xi Jinping and PM Modi is a positive development.
- China is, however, worried about the advantages that the Quad process might offer to India in the Indo-Pacific.

- Much, though, will depend on China’s actions and how others perceive her capabilities and intentions.

Source: Indian Express

