Militarisation of Quad

Why in news?

The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat made a statement about the Quad.

What is the statement?

- The CDS stated that India believes the Quad would ensure 'Freedom of Navigation Operations' in the Indian Ocean and surrounding oceans.
- This will be seen as a significant shift of the government's posture towards the India-US-Australia-Japan Quadrilateral (Quad).

What are the suggestions?

- His suggestion is that India is prepared to join Quad military patrols.
- This marks a departure from India's earlier reticence and public statements by the leadership.
- The Indian Navy has not taken part in any joint patrols outside the Indian Ocean.
- In terms of the engagement with the Quad, India has not yet announced a decision to include Australia in the annual Malabar exercises.
- [Malabar exercises are held with the U.S. and Japan.]
- However, the move from conducting exercises together to joint operations would take time, something that makes the CDS's assertion significant.

What is the reference made about China?

- The CDS said that the Quad operations are needed to ensure that no other nation singularly tries to dominate the oceans.
- It is easy to surmise that his contention is a veiled reference to China.

What would be the outcome?

- India is convinced that it needs new strategies to deal with Beijing because of,
    1. The Line of Actual Control tensions and clashes,
    2. The PLA's refusal to implement border agreements.
- Even now, India is engaged with China diplomatically.

- India’s External Affairs Minister and Defence Minister have spoken of the importance of a resolution through talks.
- But, an outcome of the tensions will be a strengthening of India’s ties with global powers as well as formations like the Quad. An indication of this is the government’s plans to host a ministerial-level meeting of the Quad soon.

How did India see the Quad earlier?

- While India considers its options, it is necessary to remember some of the reasons for its reticence in terms of militarising the Quad in any way.
- In 2018, Prime Minister said that India sees the Indo-Pacific as a “geographical concept”, not a “strategy or a club of limited members”.
- It would be important to know whether that formulation has changed.
- India is the only Quad member not already tied in a treaty alliance with the others.
- External Affairs Minister’s statement that India would never be part of any alliance system would run counter to what the CDS suggests.

What is needed?

- India is the only Quad country that shares a land boundary with China.
- It is unclear how the militarisation of the Quad in Indo-Pacific waters would alleviate the territorial threat it faces.
- However, if India’s view of its Quad engagement has shifted, clarity and an expansion of Gen. Rawat’s statement are essential.

Source: The Hindu

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