Quadrilateral queasiness: On India's stance in Russia-Ukraine crisis

Why in news?

At a virtual meeting of the Quad, leaders discussed the crisis of Russia's invasion of Ukraine along with traditional topics of interest, including territorial and maritime security across the Indo-Pacific.

What does the Quad joint statement reveal?

- **Free and open Indo-Pacific** - The four nations reaffirmed their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific in which the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states is respected and countries are free from military, economic, and political coercion.
- **Sanctions-** They have not only condemned Russia's aggression but have also slapped Russian elites and organisations linked to them with crippling sanctions.
- **Humanitarian assistance**- They agreed to set up a humanitarian assistance and disaster relief mechanism to meet future humanitarian challenges in the Indo-Pacific and provide a channel for communication to address and respond to the crisis in Ukraine.
- Officials said the Quad meeting was held in order to present a united front in the face of the Ukraine crisis but the leaders differed on the emphasis they put on the Ukraine crisis in separate messages.
- **India's stand**- India has abstained from three UN resolutions condemning Russia.
- India's readout only referenced Ukraine in passing, in the context of establishing a new humanitarian assistance and disaster relief mechanism for this cause.
- **Stand of others**- The latest Quad meeting was in part motivated by the concern that India is not explicitly condemning Russia's decision to launch a ground offensive across the Russia-Ukraine border.
- The U.S., Australia and Japan directly called out Russia's attempt to unilaterally force changes to the status quo in Ukraine and vowed not to let such action occur in the Indo-Pacific.

What are the complexities for India?

- Russia's action have posed complex questions for India's strategic calculus, even as New Delhi continues to be guided by the 21st century variant of its non-alignment paradigm.
- Ministry of External Affairs is already well versed at playing hardball with the mandarins at the U.S. State Department over getting a CAATSA waiver for India's purchase of the Russian Triumf missile defence system from Russia.

Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) aims to counter the aggression by Iran, Russia and North Korea through punitive measures. The Act primarily deals with sanctions on Russian interests such as its oil and gas industry, defence and security sector, and financial institutions.

What does this signify?

- The idea that countries can force sovereign nations with a history of non-alignment to pick a side in a complex geopolitical conflict is quite outdated and eminently unviable in today's interdependent global arena.
- Organizations like Quad cannot afford to alienate India, a critical partner in the global-strategic plan to balance the rise of China as a potential Asian hegemon.
- India may find its resolve and patience with Russian occupying forces that commit war crimes and human rights violations in contravention of the Geneva Convention, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

References

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Quick facts

Geneva Convention

- The 1949 Geneva Conventions are a set of international treaties - four conventions, with three protocols added on since 1949.
- The conventions ensure that warring parties conduct themselves in a humane way with –

1. non-combatants such as civilians and medical personnel
2. combatants no longer actively engaged in fighting, such as prisoners of war, and wounded or sick soldiers

- PoWs are usually members of the armed forces of one of the parties to a conflict who fall into the hands of the adverse party.
- **Article 3** of the Geneva Convention on Treatment of PoWs deals with every kind of situation that may arise for a captive and captor.
- All countries are signatories to the Geneva Conventions.
- **Authority** - The Geneva Conventions have a system of "Protecting Powers" who ensure that the provisions are being followed by the parties.
- In theory, each side must designate states that are not party to the conflict as their "Protecting Powers".
- In practice**, the International Committee of the Red Cross** (ICRC) has been mandated under the conventions to ensure the application of the law.
- ICRC visits prisoners, both military and civilian.

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