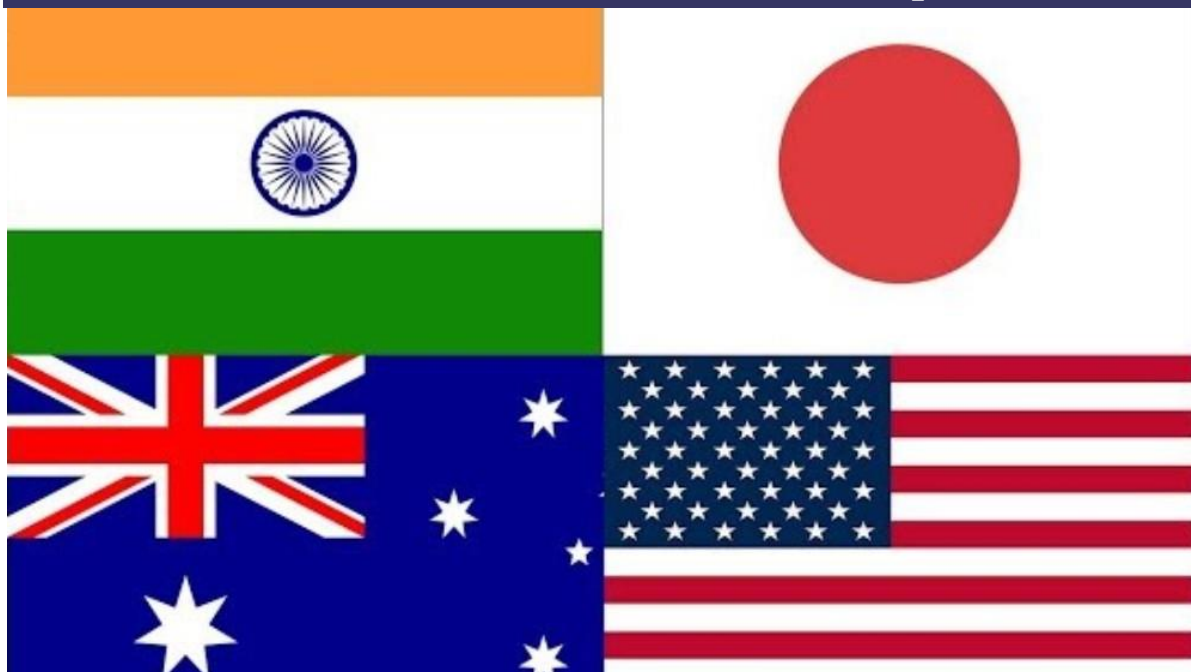




On the Quad, define the idea, chart a path



Context:

- It is reported that the second Ministerial meeting of the four countries (India, USA, Japan & Australia) under the Quad will be held in Japan.

What is the background?

- The grouping's informal origins can be traced to 2004.
- In the wake of the devastating **Indian Ocean tsunami**, Australia, India, Japan and the US launched an ad-hoc humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) mission, which allowed them to come together operationally. Since then the four navies have worked together on several occasions.
- The Quad was formally initiated in 2007 at the prompting of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe.
- Formal Quad meetings were not possible following strong objections from China in 2007.

What were the other reasons which made QUAD a non-starter in 2007?

- The American establishment still believed that it could, somehow, **persuade China** to become a 'responsible stake-holder'.



- **US also required Chinese goodwill** in dealing with America's priorities — the nuclear issue with North Korea and Iran, and the War on Terror – and did not want to antagonize China with QUAD.
- Japan and Australia were riding the China Boom to prosperity.
- If India was ambivalent at the time, it was because this mirrored the uncertainties of others.
- As a result, the idea merely remained on the table and there was no clearly enunciated concept or proposed structures.

What was the real intention behind China's objection?

- The Chinese, however, labelled it as an Asian version of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.
- The real reason for China's hyper-reaction was out of concern that such a grouping would "out" China's plans for naval expansion by focusing on the Indo-Pacific maritime space.
- China was hoping that its naval build-up might slip under the radar if QUAD become a non-starter because the Americans were distracted by continental challenges including Russia, Afghanistan and Iran, and would not look seaward.

What happened once the idea of Quad 1.0 had died down?

- China gained in confidence to reveal its hand.
- It advanced a new claim — the **Nine-Dash Line** — in the South China Sea.
- China undertook the rapid kind of warship building activity reminiscent of Germany before 1914.
- China built its first overseas base in Djibouti.
- It also started systematically to explore the surface and sub-surface environment in the Indian Ocean beyond the Malacca Straits.

What led to revival of QUAD 2.0?

- The manner of China's dismissal of the Arbitral Award in the dispute with the Philippines on the South China Sea and brazen militarization of islands by China once again brought the four countries onto the same page.

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- In 2015 Japan was formally admitted to make Malabar (India-US naval exercise) a tri-lateral event
- In 2020, India has invited Australia to join the trilateral exercise, thus completing QUAD.

How is China responding to QUAD 2.0?

- China's endeavour is to conflate the Quad with the Indo-Pacific vision, and link both to the so-called **China Containment Theory**, which is actually not the case.
- **The Indo-Pacific Vision** is an overarching framework that is being discussed in a transparent manner, with the objective of advancing everyone's economic and security interests.
- **The Quad**, on the other hand, is a plurilateral mechanism between countries that share interest on specific matters. There are other such mechanisms in the region.
- In 2016, China itself established a Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism with Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan.
- More recently, China has established Quadrilateral Cooperation with Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nepal.

What are challenges ahead?

- The global pandemic and the faltering global economy are taking a toll on the region's growth and prosperity.
- The two major Pacific powers (China and America), are moving into a more adversarial phase of their relationship

Way ahead:

- Other countries might be invited to join QUAD in the future given that India has many other partners in the Indo-Pacific.
- A positive agenda built around collective action in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, monitoring shipping for search and rescue or anti-piracy operations, infrastructure assistance to climatically vulnerable states, connectivity initiatives and similar activities, will re-assure the littoral States that the Quad will be a factor for regional benefit and not military alliance as alleged by China.