




G2 Shadows over the Indo-Pacific: Mapping India's Quad-Plus Strategy

¹ Arvind Singh , ² Dr. Sushil Kumar Singh * 

¹ Department of Defence and Strategic Studies, Prof. Rajendra Singh (Rajju Bhayya) University, Prayagraj-211006

² Department of Defence and Strategic Studies, Prof. Rajendra Singh (Rajju Bhayya) University, Prayagraj-211006

Article Info:

Received: 01 Dec. 2025

Revised: 01 Dec. 2025

Accepted: 02 Dec. 2025

Available online: 15 March, 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70381/rjv1wa48>

This article is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)



Publisher's Note:

The Nation State: Journal of National Security and Geopolitics and Bharti Publication stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Abstract

The paper will reflect on the changing strategic environment of the Indo-Pacific against the background of the re-appearance of the so-called G2 paradigm by the United States and China and how India has taken a proactive approach towards this by its Quad-Plus strategy. Drawing on the strategic decisions of India, diplomatic outreach, and institutional innovation, the work puts the issues of middle powers in perspective as they attempt to find new types of agency and cooperative security due to the shadow of G2, where high-level bilateral bargaining is a factor. Based on qualitative analysis of policy documents, strategic doctrines and the latest developments of the Quad, Quad-plus, ASEAN-based networks, the research has identified how India has navigated the Quad, Quad-plus and ASEAN-based networks without jeopardizing its strategic autonomy. The major results show that the Quad-Plus approach by India does not just insure against the uncertainty of US commitment but make India a system-shaper within the regional technology, maritime governance, and blue economy efforts. The prognosis section provides possible futures, including G2 accommodation to multipolar bilateralism with the role of India in guaranteeing a sustainable, inclusive order. Finally, the paper will conclude that the Quad-Plus approach toward great-power competition adopted by India is a viable and a visionary approach to consider regional security, institutional strength, and inclusive leadership across the Indo-Pacific.

Keywords: Indo-Pacific, Quad, Quad-Plus, ASEAN, Maritime, Multipolar.

Corresponding Author- * Dr. Sushil Kumar Singh

Department of Defence and Strategic Studies, Prof. Rajendra Singh (Rajju Bhayya) University, Prayagraj-211006.

Email Address: sushilsinghdefence@gmail.com

How to Cite this Article- (APA)- G2 Shadows over the Indo-Pacific: Mapping India's Quad-Plus Strategy. (n.d.). The Nation State: A Journal of National Security and Geopolitics. <https://doi.org/10.70381/rjv1wa48>

Introduction

The Indo-Pacific region has never been merely a grouping of sea lanes or a mosaic of countries; it is a place upon which the fortunes of powers are won and lost. Over the last few years, two conflicting logics have been recrafted as strategic grammar in the region: the G2 vision of co-management between the United States and China, and the emergence of flexible minilaterals such as the Quad and its variant, Quad-Plus. The antagonism of a potential US-China condominium and the shared goals of regional stakeholders is the centre of the Indian security calculus transformation. The Trump-Xi summit of 2025 and the very mention of the concept of G2 language have brought back the old fears of deals between great powers being brokered above the heads of other stakeholders.

It is on this background that the Quad-Plus strategy of India can be considered both of a protection and a catapult. It has some insurance against the possibility that the Quad may lose its strength as US interests change but, more importantly, it is also a tool of establishing a leadership role of its own on regional norms, trade standards and maritime order. India has its unique advantages to this task: its history of non-alignment, its rising economic power, its blue-water navy and its capacity to forge connections between various policy communities. Meanwhile, the difficulty of collaborating with various partners and striking a balance between relationships with the US and China is a matter of the utmost strategic tact.

The paper attempts to make the drama more human by the way in which India, with its own decisions and alliances is defining not only its strategic future but that of the Indo-Pacific region at large. It follows the manner in which G2 talk throws shade over the regional building, anticipates the Indian diplomatic actions to institutionalise Quad-Plus and examines the actual practical limitations and potential directions relating to India emerging status in the decades ahead.

Conceptual Framework

This requires one to have an understanding of the competing logics in India before one is able to understand the response of India. It is not merely diplomatic jargon that the G2 is: it is, to the democracies in Asia, still the fear that the outside forces could once again cut deals with none much consideration of regional concerns. A hypothetical US-China duopoly, albeit in an informal form, would have widespread implications of connectivity, technology, security and governance across the Indo-Pacific.

Another alternative came up in Quad. The Quad was a product of anxiety about an emerging China in the world and was precipitated by the common cause of democracy and shared openness, including free, fair, and open Indo-Pacific order. The four members of it assumed that the durable US engagement will place everything in place. The strategy of India has been somewhat different, though: in the case of New Delhi, the idea of strategic autonomy still is at the center of the stage, which was developed during the cold war and now must be transformed to correspond with the new reality of interdependence. The Quad is viewed by India as a means to maximise influence not to align automatically with China or anybody.

This is also the reason why India is highly promoting the Quad-Plus format. Quad-Plus resilience is

the idea of resilience achieved by redundancy: in case of unagreement between the core four, or even a member recalibrates, the rest of the network can take over. Certainly, by involving Vietnam, South Korea, Brazil, and other allies, India forms alliances not only concerning the insurance of its interests in case of China ambitions, but also against the G2 thinking. India can see a concert of middle powers capable of formulating the rules, rather than receiving them.

The intellectual rationale of Indian position is in the so-called multiplex order thinking according to which regional stability is not maintained by domination or duopoly, but rather through forms of netting. To India, this is not a dead theory: it entails having the relationship with the US strong, but also is able to change with the changing conditions in the world and region.

G2 Shadow & Quad Implications

Every state in the Indo-Pacific has the long shadow of the spectre of G2, which is rebuilt by American and Chinese leaders trying to maintain flashpoints on the world order on their own. Was the Trump-Xi 2025 overture pragmatics perhaps, but it was a question of urgent concern: Would the US security commitments be shaken, should Washington believe itself safe in its own interests? Could Beijing use such a deal to gain other countries to be more accommodating to its standpoints on maritime boundaries, critical technologies or Belt and Road corridors.

In the case of the Quad, the consequences were far reaching. Both Australia and Japan, which were strongly dependent on the US security blanket, started to re-evaluate their defence budgets and their foreign policy calculations. In the case of India, there was a more delicate balance of the risks and opportunities. On the one hand, New Delhi would be able to rely on its strong tradition of the independent foreign policy and its credibility of the naval force. But the fact was that there could be no escaping the reality that in case the US turned the other way around, the Quad would be hollow.

Face-to-face discussions between the United States and China on technology standards, digital governance or even primary maritime thoroughfares are threatening new lines of demarcation-smaller and middle-power nations are forced to adapt to newly negotiated frameworks without their presence. The Quad has been forced to once again underscore its value of an agenda setter. Recent Quad summits have been operational-oriented: joint maritime training in the Bay of Bengal, port resiliency in Mumbai and critical mineral coordination. Not just are these beneficial to regional security, but project a message to both Beijing and Washington- regional states can be the leaders and not the followers.

The institutional insurance policy in this equation is Quad-Plus. Pragmatically, it transforms the Quad, which could be reactive, into being innovative and forward-looking, capable of bringing together bigger alliances and not rely on the will of one great power. The G2 shadow remains, yet collective agency, specifically that of India, has become more apparent and more decisive.

India's Quad-Plus Strategy

Quad-Plus strategy in India was necessitated by the need and desire. With the international system approaching multipolarity as well as unilateralism, New Delhi found Quad-Plus to be the most appropriate to pursue its own interests and provide its public goods to a region that feared the

hegemony of either of the two superpowers.

This strategy has its operational heart in the Indian Navy that has been transformed in terms of both outreach and mindset. The past few years have not only witnessed increased Malabar exercises with Quad partners and a first time Quad-at-Sea observer mission, but also the coordination of anti-piracy and humanitarian missions with partners such as Vietnam and Indonesia. The SAGAR doctrine and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) are feasible models: they are open to the idea of maritime resource sharing, capacity building, ecological management and digital connectivity.

Quad-Plus is also concerned with statecraft in the economic field. The Blue Dot Network, which India has led, is compatible with the international infrastructure standards and provides a substitute to the Belt and Road model that is debt-oriented. The objective is to create the norms of connectivity, be it the safe port development as well as data governance, where India is a norm-setter and not a norm-taker. India uses its emerging technology and collaborations in semiconductors, clean hydrogen, and digital public infrastructure and works with Quad-Plus members on regulatory alignment and joint research cooperation. Technological sovereignty is considered not only as an economic resource, but a strategic requirement in the era of digital competition that Washington and Beijing are coexisting in.

More importantly, Quad-Plus is also the response of India to ASEAN centrality and inclusive regionalism. New Delhi has continuously made it clear that the vision of Indo-Pacific is not an anti-China approach, rather it is pro-stability and pro-growth. It can be the increased interaction with the ASEAN countries or the efforts to reach out to Africa and the Middle East, but India sends the message that its emergence is not a zero-sum game. Quad-Plus assists India to triple their allies, spread their bets, as well as protect themselves against a world that might otherwise be brought back to duopoly.

Strategic Autonomy under G2

The grand strategy of India still is based on the principle of strategic autonomy, yet the term has long since ceased to be understood in the Cold War language of non-alignment. It is a pose of movement and confidence today with an emerging economic and military gravitas of India. Instead of trying to keep a distance between the major powers, India invites them to approach it in their own terms and this expands its strategic space at the same time not binding itself to any commitments. This strategy has gained significance following the expedited changes that are experienced in the Indo-Pacific region such as U.S.China rivalry to unilateral arrangements and fragmentation of technology supply chains. The demand of India to remain strategically independent is thus not a defensive instinct but rather a calculated attempt to have the space to manoeuvre in a regional order that is becoming more and more contested.

This is reflected in the spread of the Indian diplomatic presence in the Indo-Pacific forums like the East Asia Summit, IORA, IPEF and other naval cooperation platforms. Such interactions are an indication that New Delhi will not permit external actors to influence the form of Asian security without contribution. Simultaneously, India has maintained a secret line of communication with Washington and Beijing, where both sides had discussed trade issues, border control, emerging technologies, and crisis deflation. It is a thinly sliced balance India fears any U.S.and China

accommodation that marginalizes the regional states, but it also appreciates that lasting Indo-Pacific stability will demand cautious participation with both giants. The two aspects of this policy as assertive multilateralism and cautious bilateral diplomacy are a measure of India realizing that influence is not to be gained by picking the camps but rather by having an influence on the space in which others play.

This freedom of choice has a practical manifestation within the Quad. India enhances maritime collaboration, engages in advanced technologies projects, intensifies intelligence and logistics sharing, and endorses the rule-based regional order. But it does not have any obligation to treaties or actions that would limit their future decisions. It has continued to engage with the United States on a large but not uncritical scale; any change in U.S. political priorities, defence budgets and Indo-Pacific focus is closely followed. In order to offset uncertainties, India has strengthened its relationship with Japan, Australia, France, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Southeast Asian allies, developing various pillars of support. As India counters the coercion by China, in terms of diplomatic links, through border positions, maritime drills and alliances in the Indian Ocean, India maintains diplomatic lines open. This balance between firmness and involvement brings out this point that India believes that its long-term security rests in its flexibility, diversified relations, and flexibility to cooperate or dissent at the national interest. It is even an attempt to maintain as much agency as possible in a world where strict alignments are more and more inappropriate to the complex geopolitical realities.

Quad-Plus as Hedging

The Quad-Plus model expansion is far beyond a semantic shift; a move based on strategic insurances of institutional redundancy and cooperation hedging. India realizes that it cannot afford to put all its eggs in a single basket i.e. the United States, fragile Quad, or the forums led by ASEAN as the global behaviour of great powers might change at any time.

Quad- Plus partners like Vietnam and South Korea are not only an added diplomatic resource, but also regional credibility. They assist in entrenching the group even further into the Indo-Pacific through discussions and shared projects. The extension of India diplomatic presence out of the Asian-centric past is seen in the co-development of infrastructure and technology projects in Israel, or logistical capabilities development with Brazil. However, the actual meaning of Quad-Plus is its flexibility. In the event that the US gets distracted or reduces its Indo-Pacific presence, the platform will be able to survive; in the event of greater Chinese aggression, the network will add to deterrence. More informal, issue-based coalitions are also possible in the format: based on the issue, various subgroups of countries may form - on a disaster relief, semiconductor supply chains, or even new ones like AI standards.

Domestically, the model can aid in maintaining the involvement of ASEAN on board. India not only makes Quad-Plus an assuring partnership by making it an open club at all times, it also makes its objectives part of the bigger picture of stability and prosperity in the region. This open and multipurpose design serves as a restraint to the potential duopolistic tendencies of Washington and Beijing in the future. By this all, India has always been the spider in the centre of the web, constantly re-weaving new threads and relationship, never too sure of the danger that the current affiliation may not be there to-morrow.

Critical Challenges

The Quad-Plus experiment is despite its seemingly apparent success, causing real-life headaches. The problem of institutional fragility is a reality that is experienced: in spite of the claims of unity of the public, the differences in priorities, lack of resources, and domestic political changes by member states tend to weaken these claims.

In the case of India expenses are compound. Slowly, bureaucratic and technical abilities may not keep up with operationally scaling up cooperation with such a vast and diverse group. India has to reconcile the variable levels of military equipment, maintain confidentiality of data in technological partnerships and align policies in waterside safety. The issue of interoperability is still urgent, especially considering the fact that the military equipment of India consists of high levels of Russian equipment, which makes it more difficult to conduct joint exercises with the Western allies.

The need and incentive to invest in critical minerals, in digital infrastructure, and in blue economy capabilities is often financially and technologically straining on the budget and technical capacity of India. Although, such flagship projects as the Quad Critical Minerals Task Force are welcome, long-term implementation over years is a question mark because of domestic considerations and regional rivalry of the same funds. Quad-Plus is also prone to external opposition. China is not lazy: the Belt and Road Initiative is still hot in most countries of the ASEAN and Indian Ocean. Beijing is integrating infrastructure transactions with what has been termed as digital diplomacy and its Digital Silk road is of much appeal to developing countries eager to expedite (though obscure) technological progress.

Lastly, there is intra-Quad and intra-Quad-Plus uncertainty, which is an issue in day-to-day management. Abrupt policy change can be caused by US political cycles, change of government in Australia and Japan or even disturbance in the ASEAN. India should therefore spend as much in maintaining the software of trust, as it does the hardware of combined projects or naval coordination.

Prognosis and Future Trajectories

India and its Quad-Plus allies face a number of plausible strategic paths, each of which is defined by the changing pace of the U.S. relations with China, as well as the flexibility of the regional institutions. Should Washington and Beijing be able to maintain a stable accommodation, earning it through limited détente, crisis-avoidance strategies or pragmatic economic understanding, then India will be forced to strive extra to make the Indo-Pacific a sphere of choices and not defaults. In that case, the priorities of New Delhi would be in terms of deepening the institutional construct of the Indian Ocean Rim: broadening the mandate of the Indian Ocean Rim Association, operationalising IPOI pillars, making SAGAR a common regional agenda, and accelerating connectivity and blue-economy initiatives with ASEAN, Japan, Australia, and the EU. This would enable India to maintain the multipolarity in the region despite the adoption of a more limited, interest-oriented approach by the U.S.

In case U.S.China rivalry remains framed by diplomacy and guard-rails, the Quad is set to become even more real at the pragmatic, than the symbolic, level. The collaboration in the area of emerging

technologies, secure supply chains, maritime domain awareness, critical minerals, and climate resilience can be enhanced even without the commitment to the alliance. On that note, India is the strategic hinge in such an environment, it is the sole member in a strategic position between access to American capital and technology on the one hand, and wide acceptance in Southeast Asia, West Asia, and the Indian Ocean region on the other. This will provide India with room to influence discourse of digital governance, regulatory standards, resilient infrastructure, and development finance. The reason is that its capacity to address various audiences such as Washington, Tokyo, capitals of the ASEAN and even Beijing when the need be makes it key to maintaining a steady, inclusive Indo-Pacific order.

The most active and, perhaps, most realistic route is the rise of a layered and seemingly most realistic Indo-Pacific in which issue-based coalitions are created, developed, and dismantled as circumstances demand it. India, with its rising diplomatic presence and its rising economic heft is poised to be the natural coordinator of this space. It may be disaster relief, cyber norms, green hydrogen, or maritime connectivity, but in any case, the New Delhi may become the actor to engage various partners with no ideological taint. This leadership habit will not rely on rhetoric, rather on how India can provide a set of concrete public goods, which include consistent logistics routes, credible production systems, strong ports, digital infrastructure, and climate technologies. In the end, the future of the Indian question will be decided by their ability to keep pace with strategic aspiration by continuing the investment on the domain of diplomatic skills, scientific potential and the structures of government required in an age where power is acquired by achievement rather than posture.

Conclusion

The Quad- Plus inclusion of India is not merely another step of defining the ambiguities of a potential G2 structure, but rather a pointer of an attempt to ensure that the political and economic future of the Indo-Pacific will be defined by a group of stakeholders broader than hitherto. Rather than embracing a region that is binary as defined, India promotes an architecture that is dynamic i.e. flexible, participative and owning the architecture. It is a strategy of strategic independence and never-ending institution-building, which can be seen in its leadership in the Indian Ocean, its digital governance practices, and its cooperation in disaster relief and its greater connection with ASEAN, the Gulf, Africa, and Europe. It is a nation that is willing to share the burden rather than dictate what to do owing to its focus on open seas, transparent infrastructures and diversification of the technology ecosystems. This model is very powerful and coincides with a time where most states would like to be having strategic space without necessarily being being sucked in the great-power camps.

This vision is bound to be challenged in the coming decade. New stressors of regional institutions and partnerships will be economic coercion, climate shocks, maritime tensions, and technological fragmentation. Although Quad-Plus mechanisms are not the solution to all the challenges, when India is able to increase networks, invest in resilient supply chains and provide practical form of public goods, it is providing a stabilizing agent in a region that can hardly be predicted. Through the reinforcement of the diplomatic capacity, scientific collaboration, and multilateral programs, India offers a platform to nations that would depend on sustainable agency instead of frail agreements that are reliant on foreign powers. The decision before the Indo-Pacific is no longer defined by the

gravitas of the United States and China but by the prospect of a more diffused, sustained and inclusive regional order, which means India is a shaper, not a balanced between powers, but one which creates access points that allow the region space to expand, evolve and choose its own destiny.

References-

1. Phodo, C. (2025, November 4). G2 vs QUAD: Global Power Shifts and Strategic Implications - Civils Phodo. *civilsphodo*. <https://civilsphodo.in/g2-vs-quad-global-power-shifts-and-strategic-implications/>
2. Sharma, M. (2025, November 4). With 'G-2', Trump elevates Xi as equal, carves spheres of influence with China. *Firstpost*. <https://www.firstpost.com/world/donald-trump-xi-jinping-summit-g2-sphere-of-influence-us-china-trade-deal-rare-earths-agreement-trade-war-truce-13947661.html>
3. QUAD: a testbed for India's strategic autonomy. (n.d.). *Drishti IAS*. <https://www.drishtiiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-editorials/quad-a-testbed-for-india-s-strategic-autonomy>
4. Yadav, G. (2025, July 8). QUAD grouping- significance and challenges- explained Pointwise. *Free UPSC IAS Preparation Syllabus and Materials for Aspirants*. <https://forumias.com/blog/quad-grouping-significance-and-challenges-explained-pointwise/>
5. CFR Editors. (2024, December 16). India between Superpowers: Strategic autonomy in the shadow of a Pacific conflict. *Council on Foreign Relations*. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/india-between-superpowers-strategic-autonomy-shadow-pacific-conflict>
6. India and the 'Quad Plus' dialogue. (n.d.). *Royal United Services Institute*. <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/india-and-quad-plus-dialogue>
7. Bels, M. (n.d.). : Kalinga Institute of Indo-Pacific Studies. *Mind Bels*. <https://kiips.in/details/between-strategic-autonomy-and-strategic-partnerships-indias-quad-strategies>
8. Sharma, A. (2021, March). NIAS GP debate on Quad. *Global Politics*. *National Institute of Advanced Studies*. https://globalpolitics.in/view_cir_articles.php?ArticleNo=450&url=NIAS+GP+Debate+on+Quad&recordNo=545&pk=1
9. India and the QUAD: strategic balancing or containment of China? (n.d.). <https://www.cescube.com/vp-india-and-the-quad-strategic-balancing-or-containment-of-china>
10. Quad: a force for global good in the Indo-Pacific. (n.d.). In *Quad* (pp. 1–5). https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Unclassified_Quad_Brief_Feb_2025.pdf
11. Week, I. M. (n.d.). *India Maritime Week 2025*. <https://imw.org.in/imw/programmes/ports-of-the-future-partnership-a-quad-initiative/> [12] *The Quad's steady resolve: A blueprint for*

Indo- ... <https://pacforum.org/publications/pacnet-57-the-quads-steady-resolve-a-blueprint-for-indo-pacific-stability/>

12. *Minerals at the Frontline: India and QuAD's Critical Minerals initiative in the Indo-Pacific.* (n.d.). <https://www.vifindia.org/print/14099>

Declarations:

Conflict of Interest: *The authors declare no conflicts of interest that could influence the research presented in this manuscript.*

Funding: *This research was not funded.*

Acknowledgments:

AI Usage Disclosure: *The authors declare that Chat Gpt, an AI-based tool, was used solely for language refinement and improving clarity and coherence in this manuscript. The tool was not involved in research design, data collection, analysis, or the generation of substantive content. All intellectual and analytical contributions are entirely those of the authors.*

Declaration- *I/We, the undersigned author(s), hereby declare that the article submitted to **The Nation State** is an original work that has neither been published elsewhere nor is under consideration for publication by any other journal. I/We permit its adaptation, preparation of derivative works, or non-commercial distribution. The author(s) take full responsibility for any instance of plagiarism, and **The Nation State** shall not be held liable. The publisher or editorial board bears no responsibility for any damage or injury arising from the manuscript's content, and the author(s) are solely accountable for all facts, views, and opinions expressed. All necessary permissions for copyrighted material have been obtained, and the manuscript contains no unlawful, defamatory, or infringing content. I/We authorize **The Nation State** to publish the work in any medium and to transfer it for indexing purposes.*