

THE IMPORTANCE OF BOTH QUAD AND BRICS

The Hindu

Paper - II
(IR)

The Quad Foreign Ministers' meeting in Japan end-July, after a long gap of 10 months, comes at a time when the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is paralysed and its reform nowhere in sight, international law is violated with impunity both in the Ukraine war and in the assault on Gaza by Israel, an axis of Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran is gaining traction, and Chinese influence is growing not just in the Indo-Pacific, but elsewhere too.

The U.S. has, in turn, realised that it needs not just allies, but also credible partners in its security architecture, including in the Indo-Pacific, and reached "across the aisle" to "non-ally" countries like India to partner with them in smaller pluri-lateral groupings and joint security initiatives. Further, ASEAN countries are getting increasingly vulnerable, with South China Sea remaining a flashpoint.

While India is a member of many pluri-lateral groups on both sides of the geo-strategic "divide", its engagement in Quad and with BRICS present the country with interesting, and sometimes contrasting, dilemmas.

India has enthusiastically embraced Quad and its strategic objectives. U.S. President Joe Biden's belief in the Quad has given it the necessary fillip at the highest level since 2021. The fact that India, during its presidency of the UNSC in August 2021, held a high-level virtual event on 'Enhancing Maritime Security', presided over by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and attended by Russian President Vladimir Putin, among others, indicates the importance India attaches to strengthening maritime security in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

India's role in the Quad

While Quad has always had a geopolitical security objective vis-à-vis China, India's vision goes beyond this narrow thrust to a much broader redrawing of the security and techno-economic architecture of the Indo-Pacific region. With Quad now working on reorientation of global supply chains of critical technologies and on a range of areas of direct strategic relevance to the region, including digital, telecom, health, power, and semi-conductors, it has underlined that development too has a security perspective which cannot be ignored. India, in its turn, has benefited through enhanced bilateral relations with Quad partners, especially the U.S.

On the other hand, the formation of AUKUS with the U.S., Australia, and the U.K., with a view to enhance their military capabilities, especially Australia's with nuclear submarines, has put securitisation of the Indo-Pacific region and deterrence of China at the centre. The Ukraine war and enhanced focus on NATO has made the West look at Asia too through a military lens. AUKUS may well suit India's geo-strategic interests, but India's reluctance to go the whole nine yards in embracing a purely security vision for Quad is seen as a dampener, in spite of the Indian External Affairs Minister clarifying that Quad is not an Asian NATO and India is not a treaty ally unlike the other three. In fact, I used to tell my Quad colleagues in the UN that the only value-add we have in Quad is India. Instead of factoring in India's viewpoint, if they merely want to convert India to their cause, then they are wasting the opportunity to become inclusive and enhance their overall impact in the region, which includes developing countries with differing compulsions, not all of which are military-centric.

India's independent policy of close relations with Russia and calling for a diplomatic solution to the Ukraine war, both of which are frowned upon by the West, do not distract India from strengthening the Quad. Some Quad members and European countries are themselves enhancing their bilateral engagement with China, underlining their differing bilateral and regional compulsions.

Against the backdrop of India's enthusiastic engagement with Quad, its engagement with BRICS presents a different conundrum. India was an enthusiastic founder of BRICS. In fact, at the 10th annual summit of the BRICS in 2018 in Johannesburg, South Africa, it was Mr. Modi who reminded the leaders that BRICS was founded to reform the multilateral system and proposed for the first time his vision of "reformed multilateralism." However, India's participation in BRICS has fluctuated from enthusiastic to lukewarm. While BRICS' initiatives such as New Development Bank and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement have been pioneering, the attempt by China to use BRICS to grandstand and push its world view on the Global South and now, to push back the West has made India wary of giving BRICS a higher profile.

The potential of BRICS

India had, consequently, been reluctant to expand BRICS. In fact, in 2018, Mr. Putin too underlined his reluctance to expand BRICS by quoting former South African President Nelson Mandela: "After climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb." But after Quad and the situation in Ukraine, Russia too realised the potential of BRICS, which includes pushing back the West, and lined up behind China. The change of guard in Brazil leaves India as the lone member to push back China. A reluctant India decided to accept BRICS's expansion than oppose it and now many more countries are reportedly waiting to join. Even if India has the best of bilateral relations with all the new members, we need to make sure it all adds up to support for India inside BRICS. For this, India cannot afford to be ambivalent about BRICS any more. To counter moves to take BRICS in a direction India does not like, we need to be more engaged, not less. With India being the only country common to both Quad and BRICS, the country cannot afford to downplay one for the other.

Expected Question for Prelims

Que. Consider the following statements:

1. AUKUS group includes America, Australia and UK.
2. The meeting of Quad Foreign Ministers is being held in Japan after 10 months.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1 (b) Only 2
(c) Both 1 & 2 (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Answer : C

Mains Expected Question & Format

Que.: "India is the only country included in both the Quad and the BRICS, so it cannot afford to undermine one for the sake of the other." In the context of this statement, analyze India's strategy towards these two groups.

Approach to answer:

- ❖ In the first part of the answer, discuss India's membership in these two groups.
- ❖ In the second part, analyze India's current strategy towards these two groups and what should be the strategy.
- ❖ Finally give a conclusion giving suggestions.

Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC mains examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.