

EXPLAINED – INDIA BETWEEN BRICS AND QUAD: NAVIGATING STRATEGIC AUTONOMY.

*By Aryaman Singh, Research Associate Intern, Centre for Indian Foreign Policy,
Indosphere Foundation of World Affairs (IFWA)*

BRICS and the QUAD are two distinct groupings with different purposes, memberships and geopolitical orientations. BRICS brings together emerging economies and has increasingly positioned itself as a platform through which countries of the Global South can seek a greater voice in global governance and advocate reforms to the existing international order. The QUAD, comprising India, the United States, Japan and Australia, is a diplomatic grouping with a strong emphasis on cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

The two groupings have also evolved through different trajectories. The QUAD originated in humanitarian cooperation among its members following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and held its first official meeting in 2007. After a period of limited engagement, it was revived in 2017 (U.S. DOS, n.d.; Saran et al., 2024; Watson, 2022; Mohan, 2017). While this background is relevant, the more important question today is how India operates within both groupings despite their different strategic orientations.

India's simultaneous participation in BRICS and the QUAD is a reflection of its broader foreign policy approach of strategic autonomy and multi alignment. Within BRICS, India engages with countries such as China and Russia on issues concerning global governance, economic cooperation and the interests of the Global South. At the same time, through the QUAD, it cooperates with the United States, Japan and Australia on issues including maritime security, connectivity, technology, supply-chain resilience and the wider Indo-Pacific. Rather than viewing these platforms as mutually exclusive, India treats them as separate avenues through which it can advance different sets of interests.

HOW DOES INDIA NAVIGATE BETWEEN BRICS AND THE QUAD?

India's approach is based on maintaining issue-based partnerships rather than allowing membership in one grouping to determine its position in another. In other words, participation in

the QUAD does not require India to distance itself from BRICS, just as its engagement with BRICS does not prevent it from deepening cooperation with the United States and its other QUAD partners.

This approach was particularly visible following Russia's special military operation in Ukraine in 2022. When questioned about India's continued purchase of Russian oil, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar defended India's position by pointing to Europe's own energy purchases from Russia and argued that European concerns should not automatically become the world's concerns (PTI, 2022; Barman, 2022). The larger message reflected in India's position was that its foreign-policy choices would be determined primarily by its own national interests rather than by pressure to align completely with any particular geopolitical bloc.

The same logic can be seen in India's broader engagement with BRICS and the QUAD. India can cooperate with Russia and China within BRICS on issues where their interests converge, while simultaneously working with the United States, Japan and Australia through the QUAD in the Indo-Pacific. Cooperation in one forum, therefore, does not automatically translate into alignment across all other issues.

This is the essence of India's balancing act. India does not seek to choose between BRICS and the QUAD; instead, it seeks to derive strategic and diplomatic space from both groupings. The greatest challenge for New Delhi would be to make sure that growing geopolitical competition between the US and China does not take away this strategic leverage.

REFERENCES

- Barman, S. R. (2022, June 4). *Europe has to grow out of mindset that its problems are world's problems: Jaishankar*. The Indian Express.
<https://indianexpress.com/article/india/europe-has-to-grow-out-of-mindset-that-its-problems-are-worlds-problems-jaishankar-7951895/>
- Bose, S. (2022, July 2). *Quad Cooperation on Disaster Management Prospects for Revitalizing the Partnership*. The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR).
<https://www.nbr.org/publication/quad-cooperation-on-disaster-management-prospects-for-revitalizing-the-partnership/>
- Mohan, C. R. (2017, November 17). *India and the Resurrection of the Quad*. Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore.
https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/media/isas_papers/ISAS%20Briefs%20No.%20525-%20India%20and%20the%20Resurrection%20of%20the%20Quad.pdf
- PTI. (2022, April 12). *Lesser Than Europe Does In An Afternoon: S Jaishankar On Russian Oil Deal*. NDTV.
ndtv.com/india-news/india-buys-lesser-oil-from-russia-in-a-month-than-europe-does-in-an-afternoon-s-jaishankar-2880327
- Saran, S., Pant, H. V., Connell, L., Mishra, V., Namur, A., McCoy, R., Rozario, A. D., & Limaye, S. (2024, June 14). *Two decades of the quad: Diplomacy and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific*. orfonline.org.
<https://www.orfonline.org/research/two-decades-of-the-quad-diplomacy-and-cooperation-in-the-indo-pacific>
- US DOS. (n.d.). *The quad*. United States Department of State.
<https://www.state.gov/the-quad>
- Watson, M. R. (2023, October 30). *Australia and the Quad : A Watering Can or a Hammer?* The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR).
<https://www.nbr.org/publication/australia-and-the-quad-a-watering-can-or-a-hammer/>