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INDO-PACIFIC MINILATERAL SERIES: THE QUAD - OPPORTUNITIES TO ADVANCE SHARED GOALS AT THE CROSSROADS OF THE INDO-PACIFIC

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The Indo-Pacific is a geopolitical term referring to the enormous region including the Indian Ocean, Western and Central Pacific Oceans that is distinguished by its strategic relevance, economic significance, diversified political, cultural and security aspects. The phrase "Indo-Pacific" has acquired popularity to emphasise the interconnection and growing relevance of the Indian and Pacific Oceans as a unified strategic theatre. It recognises the two regions growing economic, political and security ties along with the necessity for a holistic strategy to address the problems including the opportunities they brought. The Indo-Pacific region is home to major global powers such as the United States, Japan, India and Australia known as the Quad Indo-Pacific as well as many other countries with vital economic and strategic interests. The Indo-Pacific idea urges the governments to take an inclusive approach to regional affairs, emphasising dialogue, cooperation in addition to adherence to international law and norms. It aspires to foster

regional stability, prosperity and peaceful coexistence. In recent years, governments, research tanks and international institutions have paid greater attention to the Indo-Pacific region as a geopolitical and economic focal point. As a result, several regional initiatives, collaborations and conferences have been formed to improve cooperation and address the Indo-Pacific region's issues as well as its potential.



The Quad Indo-Pacific also acknowledged and established an informal strategic forum in 2007 to enhance the cooperation together with coordination on various regional issues, particularly security and defence. The Quad members share a common interest in promoting a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region that aims to uphold a rules-based international order, promote maritime security, ensure freedom of navigation and support economic development as well as connectivity in the region. The Quad has also expanded its engagement with other regional countries and organisations as well as partnerships with ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) to achieve their aims and objectives. It is important to note that the Quad is not a formal military alliance but a platform for dialogue and cooperation among like-minded countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

The Indo-Pacific region is at a critical crossroads with numerous challenges and potentials therefore the Quad nations see this as an opportunity to advance their regional goals. In order to promote their shared goals, the Quad focuses on key areas primarily maritime security. In this dimension, the members aim to ensure

the freedom of navigation and uphold the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific, including addressing territorial disputes, illegal fishing and piracy. Another important aspect is economic development and connectivity where the members seek to promote infrastructure development, trade and investment in the region, emphasising on high-quality and sustainable projects. Therefore, it can help foster economic growth and enhance regional integration. The Quad also strongly emphasises on promoting democratic values, human rights and good governance. The members support open, transparent institutions that uphold the law and they also aim to collaborate on counterterrorism, cybersecurity including non-proliferation issues to ensure regional stability and security.

Additionally, the Quad recognises the importance of addressing non-traditional security challenges like climate change, natural disasters and pandemics. They aim to enhance cooperation in these areas especially disaster response and resilience building. Overall, the Quad sees the crossroad of the Indo-Pacific as a platform to advance their shared objectives by addressing challenges and seize opportunities through dialogue, cooperation and collaboration.

Recognising ASEAN's central role in shaping regional architecture and able to support their objectives, the Quad took initiatives to enhance cooperation and engagement with ASEAN member countries through:

- a. **Dialogue and Consultations.** The Quad holds regular dialogues and consultations with ASEAN member countries to exchange views, discuss regional security challenges, and explore areas of cooperation. These dialogues provide open and constructive discussions on shared goals and interests.
- b. **Capacity Building and Assistance.** The Quad members provide capacity-building support and assistance to ASEAN countries in maritime security, counterterrorism, disaster response and cybersecurity including training programs, information sharing as well as joint exercises to enhance the capabilities of ASEAN member countries.
- c. **Infrastructure Development.** The Quad members aim to collaborate with ASEAN countries on regional infrastructure development projects,

promoting transparent, sustainable, high-quality infrastructure investments contributing to economic growth and connectivity.

d. **Multilateral Engagement.** The Quad and ASEAN engage in multilateral forums and initiatives to address regional challenges and promote cooperation. This includes participating in ASEAN-led mechanisms such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Summit (EAS), where discussions on various security and strategic issues take place.

e. **Shared Principles and Values.** The Quad and ASEAN share common principles and values such as respect for the rule of law, good governance and promoting democratic norms. They work together to uphold these principles and promote a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.

It is important to note that while the Quad engages with ASEAN, it also respects ASEAN's centrality and its principle of non-alignment. The Quad seeks to complement ASEAN's efforts and partner with ASEAN member countries while promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region.

In other ways, a potential return on investment for Malaysia's involvement with the Quad can be multifaceted and may vary depending on the specific areas of collaboration. Here are a few potential benefits:

a. **Economic Opportunities.** Malaysia can benefit from increased trade and investment opportunities with the Quad member countries. The Quad aims to promote economic development and connectivity in the Indo-Pacific, which are able to create avenues for Malaysian businesses to expand their markets and attract foreign investment.

b. **Infrastructure Development.** The Quad members actively promote infrastructure development in the region. Malaysia can benefit from infrastructure projects supported by the Quad, enhancing connectivity within the country and the wider area. It can improve transportation networks and increase trade flows and economic growth.

c. **Security Cooperation.** The Quad focuses on maritime security and upholding the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. As a maritime nation,

Malaysia can benefit from enhanced security cooperation, including information sharing, joint exercises and capacity building. It can help address security challenges such as piracy, illegal fishing and maritime territorial disputes.

d. **Technology and Innovation.** The Quad members are leaders in technology and innovation. Malaysia can benefit from knowledge sharing, research collaboration, technology transfers in the digital economy, advanced manufacturing and sustainable development. It can contribute to Malaysia's efforts to enhance its technological capabilities and drive economic diversification.

e. **Regional Stability and Cooperation.** The Quad promotes peace, stability, and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. Malaysia's involvement with the Quad can contribute to regional stability, creating a conducive environment for economic growth and investment.

It is important to note that the specific returns on investment will depend on the nature and extent of Malaysia's involvement with the Quad and the country's ability to leverage the opportunities presented by the Quad's initiatives. Malaysia needs to assess its priorities and interests to maximise the potential benefits of engagement with the Quad.

While the Quad has the potential for significant benefits, challenges and concerns are also associated with this multilateral grouping includes:

a. **Differing Priorities.** The Quad member countries have different priorities and strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region. Balancing these diverse interests can be challenging and may lead to disagreements or difficulties formulating a cohesive approach to regional issues.

b. **Chinese Perceptions.** China has viewed The Quad's formation with suspicion, as it sees the grouping as a containment strategy aimed at countering its influence in the region. This perception can complicate efforts to engage with China and may lead to tensions along with potential escalation of regional rivalries.

- c. **Limited Membership.** The Quad currently consists of only four countries - the United States, Japan, Australia, and India. The limited membership may restrict the Quad's ability to effectively address regional challenges and engage with other countries in the Indo-Pacific. It may also limit the Quad's capacity to provide comprehensive solutions to complex issues.

- d. **ASEAN Centrality.** ASEAN member countries have emphasised the importance of maintaining ASEAN centrality in the regional architecture. There is a need to ensure that the Quad's initiatives are inclusive and supportive of ASEAN-led mechanisms, as well as respectful of ASEAN's non-alignment and consensus-based decision-making principles.

- e. **Implementation and Coordination.** The Quad's success relies on effective implementation and coordination among its member countries. Ensuring that commitments are translated into concrete actions and consistent communication and coordination can be challenging, particularly given the different political systems and priorities of the Quad member countries.

Addressing these problems require sustained dialogue, trust-building and a commitment to inclusive and transparent engagement. The Quad must also consider the perspectives and interests of other countries in the region to ensure a balanced and cooperative approach to addressing the complex challenges in the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, the Quad presents opportunities and challenges for its member countries and the wider Indo-Pacific region.

In conclusion, Quad offers potential benefits such as increased trade and investment opportunities, infrastructure development, security cooperation, technology sharing and regional stability. However, it also faces challenges such as differing priorities, concerns about containment by China, limited membership and the need to maintain ASEAN centrality. Sustained dialogue, trust-building and inclusive engagement with other regional countries are crucial to maximise the Quad's effectiveness and address these challenges. The Quad members must also ensure that their initiatives complement existing regional mechanisms and respect other nations' principles and interests. Ultimately, the Quad's success will depend on its ability to balance pursuing its objectives and fostering cooperation

with other countries, including those outside the grouping. By doing so, the Quad can contribute to a stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific region that benefits all stakeholders.