

MP-IDSA *Commentary*

The Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting and Courses for its Future

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Summary

The Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting in May 2026 underscored the Quad's continuing relevance as a provider of regional public goods and services in the Indo-Pacific.

Introduction

The Quad Foreign Ministers’ Meeting was held in New Delhi on 25 May, after a 10-month hiatus. Before the meeting, there was much speculation about the Quad’s continued survival. One piece compared the Quad’s architecture to the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing group, arguing that the Quad should not be judged less efficient or moribund for the lack of summit-level engagement.¹ Another argued along much the same lines, but added that Quad meetings at the sub-leader level are important because they create ‘habits of cooperation’ that are vital to sustaining the momentum. It was argued that a break in summit meetings offered an opportunity to assess progress on delivering the deliverables promised in previous meetings.² At the successful conclusion of the ministerial four-way, it is worth reflecting on what the Quad has yielded over its existence to assess how it could move forward.

Quad Summit Meetings and Deliverables

Since 2021, there have been six Quad summit meetings, with each yielding a host of outcomes. The inaugural summit, held virtually in 2021, outlined the definition and scope of the grouping’s activities as rooted in ‘a shared vision for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific’ and a ‘rules-based maritime order in the East and South China Seas’.³ Two features have since become its distinct hallmarks. The first is the high velocity of leader-level interaction. The second in-person summit meeting was held within months of the first in Washington at the invitation of US President Joseph Biden in 2021.⁴ Subsequent meetings were held quite frequently, initially alternating between virtual and in-person meetings, but after 2023 exclusively in person.

The second distinctive feature of the Quad has been the vast topicality and sheer breadth of the outcomes. The grouping, initially formed to counter Chinese assertions in the East and South China Seas, eventually found itself discussing and formulating responses to crises as varied as the Ukraine conflict and a series of crises in West Asia. The initial focus on Chinese maritime military assertiveness evolved into a desire to counterbalance its broader foreign policy across regions, particularly with the eventual inclusion of the ASEAN region and Pacific Island Countries (PICs). Beyond geography, the range of issues was catholic as well. Along with traditional

¹ Justin Bassi and Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, [“No, the Quad Isn’t Dead. This Week’s Foreign Ministers’ Meeting Proves It”](#), Commentary, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 25 May 2026.

² Premesha Saha, [“Can the Quad Keep Momentum Without a Leaders’ Summit?”](#), Commentary, The Lowy Institute, 25 May 2026.

³ [“Quad Leaders’ Joint Statement: ‘The Spirit of the Quad’”](#), The White House, Government of the United States of America, 12 March 2021.

⁴ [“The Second Japan-Australia-India-U.S. Summit Meeting”](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Japan, 24 September 2021.

touchstones such as maritime and economic security, coverage of human security issues, including infrastructure development, humanitarian assistance, and capability-building, was also emphasised.

This dizzying diversity is emblematised by the sheer number of declared outcomes. In-person dialogues provided the more fertile ground for these declaratory statements, with ministerial-level interactions often playing a preparatory and coordinating role. Therefore, the fourth summit meeting, held in Tokyo in May 2022, became the vehicle for a large number of deliverables spanning debt management, climate change adaptation, cybersecurity and mobile telephony, critical supply chains, higher education, space, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief and maritime security.⁵ The fifth⁶ and sixth⁷ meetings delivered a similar laundry list of new initiatives relating to health security, supply chains, undersea cable connectivity, cancer research, training for regional maritime forces and coast guard cooperation, logistics, digital public infrastructure, port development and AI and emerging technologies.

The 2026 Quad Foreign Ministers’ Meeting: Background and Outcomes

It must be emphasised that the Quad process has remained unbroken at the ministerial level, despite the absence of a leader-level summit in 2025. In January 2025, minutes after Marco Rubio’s inauguration as Secretary of State, the four chief diplomats assembled in Washington for a meeting that set the groundwork for the formal one held on 1 July 2025. The post-meeting statement held fast to the broad contours of the Quad’s *raison d’être*, citing ‘regional maritime, economic, and technology security’ and ‘reliable and resilient supply chains’ as twin pillars of Quad cooperation.⁸

At the July 2025 meeting, the ministers announced the creation of the Quad Critical Minerals Initiative.⁹ However, the summit, scheduled to be hosted by India, remained a mirage, due in large part to the disruptions caused by US President Donald Trump’s tariffs and successive conflicts in West Asia. The 2026 ministerial therefore attained

⁵ [“Quad Joint Leaders’ Statement”](#), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Japan, 24 May 2022.

⁶ [“2023 Quad Leaders’ Summit”](#), Office of the Prime Minister of Australia, Government of Australia, 20 May 2023.

⁷ [“Fact Sheet: 2024 Quad Leaders’ Summit”](#), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 21 September 2024.

⁸ [“Joint Statement by the Quad Foreign Ministers \(January 21, 2025\)”](#), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 21 January 2025.

⁹ [“Factsheet: 2025 Quad Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in Washington D.C. \(July 01, 2025\)”](#), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2 July 2025.

a measure of significance, as it produced a degree of anticipation about whether the decks would be successfully cleared for a summit, as well as a certain amount of trepidation regarding the potential for a permanent split within the grouping.

The 2026 Foreign Ministers’ Meeting proved to be exactly the progressively expansive dialogue anticipated by its champions. The four ministers rehearsed traditional areas of emphasis, with the situation in West Asia, rising tensions in East and South China Seas, North Korea’s provocative actions and shared concern over Myanmar finding space alongside affirmations of support not only for ASEAN, but also the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). A new addition to the list of issues discussed was the proliferation of scam centres in Southeast Asia, which indeed poses a significant human security threat, while simultaneously creating fertile ground for joint action.¹⁰ The ministers reviewed progress on several initiatives, with the Quad Critical Minerals Initiative finally receiving a framework.¹¹

Above all, the meeting reflected collective thinking on the day’s burning concerns, a sure sign of the Quad’s enduring relevance. Increased attention to maritime domain awareness was reflected in the ‘first-ever Indo-Pacific Maritime Surveillance Collaboration (IPMSC) initiative’ to operationalise the Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness Program from 2022, with a commitment towards developing a Common Operating Picture (COP) in the Indo-Pacific.¹² The West Asia crisis engendered a joint response in the form of the Quad Initiative on Indo-Pacific Energy Security, a new project intended to ‘help strengthen regional energy resilience’ by leveraging comparative advantages in technology, policy, market analysis and emergency response.¹³ The formation of the Workshop on Digital Identity Standards supported convergence in digital public infrastructure. These advancements proceeded alongside a review of the state of cooperation on key initiatives from the past, including health security, port infrastructure, open connectivity standards and undersea cable resilience.¹⁴

The Joint Statement issued after the meeting also made a noteworthy point by highlighting the range of existing institutions with which the Quad overlaps. By underlining the PIF and the IORA, the statement deftly broadened the geographical lens beyond Southeast Asia without decentring that critical region. The reference to

¹⁰ [**“Quad Foreign Ministers’ Meeting Joint Statement \(May 26, 2026\)”**](#), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 26 May 2026.

¹¹ [**“Quad Critical Minerals Initiative Framework Among India, Australia, Japan and the United States”**](#), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 26 May 2026.

¹² [**“Factsheet: Quad Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in New Delhi \(May 2026\)”**](#), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 26 May 2026.

¹³ [**“Quad Statement on Indo-Pacific Energy Security \(May 26, 2026\)”**](#), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 26 May 2026.

¹⁴ [**“Factsheet: Quad Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in New Delhi \(May 2026\)”**](#), no. 12.

Pax Silica indicates the overlapping spheres of interest between Quad members (all of whom are parties to that agreement) and a broader group of producers, suppliers, and consumers of critical and emerging technologies.¹⁵ The statement clearly highlights that the Quad works best as a body operating in the interstices of other international mini- and multilateral groupings, coordinating interests among its prime movers, who are also members of those organisations.

Conclusion: The Quad’s Future Course

In the wake of the Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in New Delhi, three general conclusions may be drawn. First, despite trepidation about the grouping's survival, its existence is most likely to continue as long as the security environment around it remains alarming and discomfiting to its members. Therefore, it may be paradoxical, but true, to state that Beijing (and to a lesser extent, Pyongyang) will set the pace of the Quad going forward through their actions, or lack thereof.¹⁶

A second conclusion is that the emphasis on continued dialogue beyond the summit level, while keeping open the door to a summit meeting down the line, is fundamentally correct. In light of frictions between Washington and other capitals, it may be an appropriate time to temporarily focus the Quad’s engagement mechanism to the ministerial level, with a view to delivering what is deliverable until political leaderships in Washington and other capitals reassess the value of leader-to-leader engagement.

The third and the final conclusion to be drawn is that the Quad works best when it focuses on security conceived macroscopically, rather than on narrow national security. Comparisons by certain scholars to countries like the Philippines miss the point, as it is clear that Manila cannot provide the full spectrum of economic, military, and human security that a regional and/or potential global power such as India or Australia can provide through the Quad's special offices. To be sure, each of the Quad partners has strengthened security relations with each other. Australia and Japan have been particularly active, though India has also advanced its cooperation with both countries. However, at the regional level, the Quad needs to continue to provide human security through public goods, services and standards. Such a body has a key role to play in Indo-Pacific geopolitics, instead of merely proliferating security agreements and alliances.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ A point first made by the Director General, MP-IDSA, Amb Sujan R. Chinoy in response to a question at the Indo-Japan Conclave organised by *India Today* on 22 May 2026. See India Today, [“Bilateral Boost: India-Japan in an Uncertain World Order | Sujan R. Chinoy | Indo-Japan Conclave”](#), YouTube, 22 May 2026, especially 26:20. I am indebted to Amb Chinoy for pointing out this valuable perspective.

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