

INDIA'S STRATEGIC BALANCING CHALLENGES THE QUAD

Özge Emine ÖZÇELİK

Scholar in Residence

Analysis No : 2026 / 3

21.01.2026

Since 2017, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) has gained momentum, but it encountered a setback in 2025 when the summit expected to be hosted by India did not take place. During this period, Indias continued engagement with China and its ongoing dependence on Russian oil have drawn attention and raised questions about its relations with the United States. The tensions that emerged between India and the U.S. as a result of these developments have pushed QUAD cooperation into a noticeable deadlock. The heavy tariffs of around 50% imposed by Washington last August, along with new visa restrictions affecting Indian citizens, further heightened tensions. Shortly afterward, Indian Prime Minister Modis meeting with Chinas President Xi for constructive talks signaled the kind of rapprochement often described with the Dragon □□□□□□□□ tango metaphor.[1] This, in turn, has fueled more questions about QUADs future. Overall, the process reflects a critical test for the sustainability of the U.S. □□□□□ strategic partnership and for Indias position within the broader great-power rivalry.

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue was formed as a strategic platform aimed at providing rapid and organized humanitarian assistance and logistical coordination after the humanitarian crisis caused by the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami. Its four main members are the United States, Japan, India, and Australia. The pragmatic, humanitarian, and operational cooperation among these countries was later conceptualized in the literature as QUAD 1.0. In 2007, under the initiative of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, QUAD held its first official meeting and gained public visibility, but it lost momentum until the 2017 ASEAN Summit. At that summit, the four countries reconvened, this time with a different strategic focus, to counter Chinas growing influence in the Indo-Pacific. The new format that emerged a decade later came to be known as QUAD 2.0. Although India, Japan, and Australia were cautious about China, Beijings expanding presence in the region eventually came to be viewed as a threat by these countries. This became clearer in March 2021 when the QUAD members, in their joint

statement, emphasized the goal of a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific and stressed the need to resist unilateral pressure.[2] In the following stage, described as QUAD 3.0, the agenda expanded beyond security to include technology, health, supply-chain security, and climate. Chinas strategic pressure played a key role in this shift. However, the broadening of the agenda also exposed differences in priorities and coordination challenges among the members. Consequently, this new phase of QUAD has brought the alliances structural limitations more clearly into view.

After the last summit held in Wilmington during the Biden administration, the next meeting was scheduled for 2025 in New Delhi. However, this period coincided with a moment when internal balances within QUAD, especially between the U.S. and India, were being questioned once again. In Trumps second term, Washingtons shift toward a more protectionist approach in technology and trade, combined with Indias stronger emphasis on strategic autonomy, revealed clear limits in bilateral cooperation. This situation revived discussions not only about the future of U.S.-India relations but also about the overall coherence of QUAD.

Although India has tried to reduce its dependence on Russian oil, its growing economy and increasing energy demand make it nearly impossible to cut off this supply completely.[3] The Trump administrations imposition of tariffs reaching up to 50% reflected Washingtons long-standing pressure on New Delhi to reduce its purchases of Russian oil. Nevertheless, Indias continued energy trade with Russia and its ongoing diplomatic and economic engagement with China show its determination to maintain an independent strategic line.[4] From Washingtons perspective, however, this dynamic complicates efforts to form a more unified QUAD stance toward China. Indias multi-directional policy both demonstrates its strategic autonomy and makes the recent tensions within QUAD more visible.

In India-China relations, Beijings call for closer cooperation, captured by the Dragon □□□□□□□□ tango metaphor, has become more prominent in recent discourse. President Xi Jinping has used this term to emphasize that the two countries should move beyond their historical crises and work together in economic and diplomatic areas.[5] In 2025, steps such as reopening border trade and reactivating diplomatic channels following border tensions have been interpreted as attempts at normalization.[6] However, long-standing structural issues, such as border disputes, regional rivalry, and mutual distrust, prevent this rhetoric of rapprochement from turning into concrete progress.[7] Indias tango-like balancing strategy with China reflects its pursuit of strategic autonomy, but it also creates uncertainty and concern for the U.S. and other QUAD members.

Indias foreign policy today follows a balancing strategy based on strategic autonomy, combining both competition and cooperation with the United States and China. The commercial and diplomatic tensions with Washington, together with the cautious but ongoing dialogue with Beijing, demonstrate that India does not want to fully commit to any single alliance. This stance generates both uncertainty and strategic fragility within QUAD. Ultimately, the future of QUAD will largely depend on how India manages its

disputes with Washington and how it defines the boundaries of its unavoidable engagement with Beijing. The way India navigates between these two axes will shape the role the dialogue can play in the regional balance of power in Asia.

*Picture: *Asia Times*

[1] https://news.cgtn.com/news/2025-04-02/Why-realizing-Dragon-Elephant-Tango-is-right-choice-for-China-India-1Cf7KsMpJiU/p.html

[2] https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/33620/Quad_Leaders_Joint_Statement_The_Spirit_of_the_Quad

[3] https://www.thehindu.com/business/india-falls-to-3rd-position-in-russian-fossil-fuel-imports-in-december-as-reliance-slashes-crude-buy/article70505064.ece

[4] https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/enerjiterminali/enerji-diplomasi/hindistan-abd-ile-tarifeler-nedeniyle-gerilirken-cin-ile-yakinlasma-arayisinda/51581

[5] https://www.reuters.com/world/xi-says-china-india-should-strengthen-ties-dragon-elephant-tango-2025-04-01/

[6] https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/hindistan-ve-cin-5-yillik-aranin-ardindan-sinir-ticaretini-aciyor-/3663874

[7] https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/09/modis-sco-summit-visit-shows-china-and-india-want-reset-relations-dragon-elephant-tango

About the Author :

Özge Emine Özçelik graduated from the Department of English Language and Literature at TED University in 2026. She completed a secondary field in International Relations. She has been working as a Scholar in Residance at the Center for Eurasian Studies since October 2025.

To cite this article: ÖZÇELİK, Özge Emine. 2026. "INDIA'S STRATEGIC BALANCING CHALLENGES THE QUAD." Center For Eurasian Studies (AVİM), Analysis No.2026 / 3. January 21. Accessed November 22, 2026. https://avim.org.tr/public/en/Analiz/INDIA-S-STRATEGIC-BALANCING-CHALLENGES-THE-QUAD

Süleyman Nazif Sok. No: 12/B Daire 3-4 06550 Çankaya-ANKARA / TÜRKİYE
Tel: +90 (312) 438 50 23-24 • **Fax**: +90 (312) 438 50 26
@avimorgtr
https://www.facebook.com/avrasyaincelemelerimerkezi
E-Mail: info@avim.org.tr
http://avim.org.tr

© 2009-2025 Center for Eurasian Studies (AVİM) All Rights Reserved