

## After the tsunami: how the 'Quad' was born

On the morning after Christmas 2004, the staggering death toll (eventually more than 230,000) from the tsunami was still unknown, when a call from Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa to Indian envoy Nirupama Rao made it clear that island nation needed urgent humanitarian assistance. In Washington DC, Indian Ambassador Ronen Sen was also being asked by the U.S. government how much India could help further afield, as the tsunami had wreaked havoc across the area now called the Indo-Pacific. For India, said a senior official, it was time to show that the Indian Ocean was in fact India's domain, and India committed in an unprecedented manner to the effort. Within 12 hours, Indian naval helicopters were in Colombo with relief material. By the next day, two Indian naval ships were in Galle and Trincomalee, while three others were despatched to Male. Two more, INS Khukri and INS Nirupak, were converted into hospital ships and sent to the worst hit-country, Indonesia, within days as well. In all, about 32 Indian ships and 5,500 troops were involved in the international relief effort, not to mention the work the armed forces carried out in Tamil Nadu and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

India, Japan, U.S., Australia hold first 'Quad' talks at Manila ahead of ASEAN Summit

India's effort

"India's full capabilities came as a surprise to the world," recalls Shyam Saran, Foreign Secretary at the time, who received a call from U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, saying the world couldn't wait, and it was up to the countries of the Indo-Pacific that had naval capabilities of scale to move in urgently. On December 29, U.S. President George W. Bush announced that India, the U.S., Japan and Australia would set up an international coalition to coordinate the massive effort required: to rescue those trapped in the waters, rush relief, and rehabilitate those made homeless, and to restore power, connectivity lines as well as infrastructure like ports and roads. By mid-January the coalition handed over charge to the UN, but while their immediate mission had ended, it led to the birth of a new framework: the Quadrilateral, or Quad. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was the first off the block, voicing his long-standing idea of an "arc of prosperity and freedom" that encompassed India, and brought it into a tighter maritime framework, with Japan, the U.S. and Australia, which were already close military allies. The plan for a meeting of the Quad was firmed up when [Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited Tokyo](#) in December 2006.

Even as the idea grew, however, it encountered growing concerns in Beijing. But, the idea born of such intense urgency as the tsunami met a lack-lustre end after its meeting in May 2007. Contrary to public perception, Australia wasn't the first to demur. The U.S. felt that angering China with the Quadrilateral would hamper larger strategic efforts under way, including the move for sanctions against Iran in the UN Security Council, and the six-nation talks on North Korea.

A decade later, the question is: will the [Quadrilateral](#) melt away as before, or is it an idea whose time has finally come?

The definition of harassment needs to be constantly updated, and the process for justice made more robust

END