

Quad and India take second place as US, China cement ties

Washington has restructured its foreign policy but remained firm on US interests that keep New Delhi in an asymmetrical position and lower grade.

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India's External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar with Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong, Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio at a Quad Meeting in New Delhi on May 26. | [Dr. S. Jaishankar @DrSJaishankar/X](#)

On May 16, Presidents Donald Trump and Xi Jinping formally acknowledged what has long been in motion: a paradigm shift in US-China relations. Beijing frames it as “constructive strategic stability”; US Secretary of State Marco Rubio calls it a “strategic stability point.”

For the first time in decades, the United States concedes that China now matches it in both economic and military weight – an equilibrium no other nation has achieved since the Cold War.

This recognition cements US-China ties as the axis of global order and international security. It also signals a new deterrent reality: China can now enforce its red lines, especially on Taiwan, curbing unilateral US

moves. [Confrontations have cooled](#) – for now – ushering in a phase of managed competition across the Indo-Pacific.

In this context, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue formed in 2007 by Australia, India, Japan and the US with the intent of countering Chinese power, is being given a secondary role.

The role envisaged for QUAD was dictated by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio in the [QUAD Foreign Ministers meeting](#) in Delhi (May 26, 2026); the US wants the QUAD members to assist access to critical minerals, enhance US energy sales, and help boost maritime surveillance and port infrastructure across the Indo-Pacific.

Yet, this functional repositioning comes against the backdrop of a larger strategic shift. While Washington and Beijing have declared a new phase of “strategic stability,” fundamental differences remain.

The US continues to seek dominance, while China insists on parity. Washington has floated the idea of a [G-2 arrangement](#) – spheres of influence within a bipolar order – but [Beijing has repeatedly rejected it](#).

Instead, China remains committed to a [multipolar global system](#) anchored by major powers within BRICS, a stance reinforced in the joint [China-Russia declaration](#) of May 20, following Trump’s visit to Beijing.

The US is restructuring its foreign policy, shifting its primary security theatre from Europe to the Asia-Pacific – a process set in motion with Obama’s “[Pivot to Asia](#)”, and now fully evident in the Trump administration’s tensions with NATO allies. Structural changes mark a departure from the traditional hub-and-spoke alliance model: allies are graded by utility to US interests, with diversification beyond NATO.

At the top tier are the “most favoured nations” such as Australia, Japan, and South Korea, with whom Washington is building a denser, networked security architecture. Japan is the lynchpin. Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi has pledged Japan’s readiness for [kinetic war in defense of Taiwan](#), positioning the country as a proxy, much like Ukraine in Europe. [Tokyo operates across alliance structures, mini-lateral groupings](#) like QUAD, and defense-industrial partnerships.

Under the [October 2025 US-Japan bilateral agreement](#), Japan is not merely a host for US bases but a defense supplier and geopolitical connector in the Indo-Pacific.

South Korea is envisioned similarly. Leveraging Seoul's security anxieties over North Korea, Washington extracted a \$150 billion commitment to [bolster the US shipping industry](#), at the expense of South Korea's own. This underscores the transactional nature of the new grading system. Its third security partner in the Indo-Pacific is Australia (as usual) and the [fourth is the Philippines](#) with expanded logistics and basing agreements to support US operations.

These partners form the basic structure of the new Asia-Pacific strategy of the US.

In its drive for global domination under the "Make America Great Again" banner, Washington is leveraging allies like India, Brazil, and the UAE for distinct purposes. The US builds on regional security anxieties to sustain arms sales, secure supply chains, and deepen economic integration.

India's pledge to invest \$500 billion in the US economy – [a move the Financial Times termed "bizarre"](#) – illustrates how New Delhi is being integrated as the "back office" for American technology firms and water-intensive AI plants. Across the board, the common denominator for US allies is production capacity, rare earth minerals, and energy flows – particularly, sales of US oil – all vital to American industry and financial interests.

Within this paradigm shift, both India and the Quad have been relegated to secondary positions. India had long pressed for a QUAD summit and a Trump meeting, finally securing one, but Washington's priorities lie elsewhere: China, the Gulf conflict, and regime-change agendas in Latin America.

More tellingly, the US prioritised a [major defense agreement with Indonesia](#) on April 14, 2026. The strategic logic is clear: the Straits of Malacca, just 2.8 km wide, carry 70% of China's oil imports daily and account for 24% of global seaborne trade. Control of this chokepoint underscores America's focus on constraining China's lifelines rather than elevating India or the QUAD.

Rubio has tried to smoothen some ruffled Indian feathers but has remained firm on US interests that keep India in an asymmetrical position and lower

grade. India will buy US weapons, more oil from the US and countries directed by the US such as the UAE and Venezuela, while the US will decide when and how India can buy cheaper oil from Russia or Iran.

India will bend to the US tariffs and sanctions regime, go slow on the International North-South Transport Corridor on which it has invested millions of US dollars. Moreover, India will consider the US sensitivities in the important BRICS meeting, which India chairs and will host in September 2026.

The US has shifted to economic nationalism and recognises its co-dependency with China. It sees Russia as European military power with access to the Arctic and leverage with the South. In this geopolitical chess board, the US retains the security threat rhetoric about Russia and China, a narrative that keeps its allies in Europe and Asia together.

In this new framework, India is seen as a strategic cog in the US wheel and Pakistan as a “tactical” partner; NATO is the primary instrument for US Atlantic agendas, even as the Quad countries serve US interests in the Indo-Pacific.

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