

IN SIGNAL TO CHINA, U.S. RAISED INDIA TIES DURING ALASKA TALKS

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One reason for that is the successful holding of the virtual Quad summit between India, the U.S., Japan and Australia on March 12, seven days before the U.S.-China Alaska talks. Although the Biden administration's message was it did not want to push any country beyond its comfort level and was willing to keep in mind their respective China concerns — hence the absence of any reference to China in the joint statement and the focus on deliverables such as the vaccines initiative — India's immediate expression of willingness to go ahead with the summit and the "clarity" with which it put forward its agenda eased many concerns in Washington that New Delhi, amid the on-going disengagement process with China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), might waver in its commitment to the grouping. If India has made clear it will not be part of any formal alliances, it has also suggested it is more willing to push the bar with China than previously.

The broader reason for the smooth transition in India-U.S. relations is the new administration's emphasis on a bipartisan approach to India and other key foreign policy issues, despite the divisiveness at home on the domestic agenda. One indicator of that was Mr. Biden's insistence that a video prepared for the Quad summit would begin by, at the very start, acknowledging former President George W. Bush's legacy in building the Quad, which first came to life following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. India's familiarity with three of the key interlocutors in the new administration's Indo-Pacific agenda — Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, who chaired the meeting in Alaska, as well as the newly announced "Indo-Pacific coordinator" Kurt Campbell — has also helped.

On Thursday, China's military hit out at the Quad, describing it as a mechanism "promoted by the United States" and said it "adheres to the Cold War mentality, believes in group confrontation, is keen on geopolitical games, and uses the so-called 'China challenge' as an excuse to 'form cliques' and openly provoke relations between regional countries".

"We are firmly opposed to this," PLA Senior Colonel and Ministry of Defence spokesperson Ren Guoqiang said. "Seeking peace, development, and seeking cooperation and win-win is the trend of the times. Anything that goes against the trend of the times and satisfies one's own selfishness is untimely, unpopular and is doomed to failure. China has always insisted on being a builder of world peace, a contributor to global development, and a defender of international order. We urge the United States to take up its responsibilities and refrain from making mistakes and do more things that are conducive to regional peace and stability," he said. On the LAC disengagement, he repeated China's earlier statement that both sides had positively viewed the disengagement at Pangong Lake and had "agreed to maintain communication through military and diplomatic channels so as to promote the settlement of other issues" such as in the Gogra-Hot Springs area, which the next round of military talks is expected to take forward.

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