

China dismisses Indo-Pacific quad plan as 'speculation'

Mutual interests: President Donald Trump with his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in Hamburg, Germany, in June. APSaul Loeb

China on Tuesday dismissed the proposed Indo-Pacific security arrangement among the U.S., Japan, India and Australia to contain China's rise as "media speculation" and timed its remarks ahead of the arrival in Beijing of U.S. President Donald Trump.

In response to a question, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hua Chunying signalled that the Indo-Pacific region was part of the global commons. She said the Indo-Pacific — an area in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean on either side of the Malacca straits — was a "dynamic region" with great potential.

She stressed that that "stability and peace" in the Indo-pacific was of great importance to ensure the prosperity of the region.

Ms. Hua's observations follow the remarks made by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Monday. At a joint Tokyo press conference with President Trump, Mr. Abe said Tokyo and Washington "concurred" that they should beef up cooperation to realise "a free and open Indo-Pacific", Japanese media reported.

Mr. Abe unveiled his 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy' last year. According to *Nikkei Asian Review*, the Premier's approach involving the U.S., India and Australia as the other partners "is partly intended to keep in check China's growing presence in the region".

But China is confident that Beijing and Washington will be able to establish a special relationship, based on mutual interests. "The U.S. is still using a 2010 strategic White Paper which indicated that the way to contain China was to use India, in alliance with the Philippines, Australia, Japan, Taiwan and South Korea as part of a containment strategy," said Einar Tangen, a Beijing-based political commentator.

In a conversation with *The Hindu*, he pointed out that only India, Australia, Japan and the U.S. remain possible participants. "Given the uncertainty around Trump's long-term strategy, South Korea may not commit to China containment and a sea change in Australia's direction is possible, given Prime Minister Tony Abbott's domestic problems and Australia's reliance on China for trade."

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