

FOUR CORNERS: ON THE QUAD'S AGENDA

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India- Other groupings and agreements

As officials from the 'Quadrilateral' [grouping of India, Australia, Japan and the U.S.](#) meet in Singapore on Wednesday, their challenge will be to accurately describe their common agenda. The Quad is billed as four democracies with a shared objective to ensure and support a "free, open and prosperous" Indo-Pacific region. During this round, the four countries are expected to discuss infrastructure projects they are working on, and building humanitarian disaster response mechanisms. Over the past few months, India and Japan have announced they will combine efforts on a number of projects in South Asia, including bridges and roads in Bangladesh, an LNG facility in Sri Lanka and reconstruction projects in Myanmar's Rakhine province. Australia has unveiled an ambitious \$2 billion project to fund infrastructure and build maritime and military infrastructure in the Pacific region, on which it is willing to cooperate with other Quad members. The four countries are expected to talk about regional developments, including elections in the Maldives, the collapse of the government in Sri Lanka and the latest developments in North Korea. With Quad talks being held on the sidelines of the East Asia summit, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership summit and the ASEAN-India informal summit, discussions will include some of the overlapping issues among these groupings.

Cornered by the Quad?

However, despite the potential for cooperation, the Quad remains a mechanism without a defined strategic mission. In 2007, when the grouping was first formed following cooperation after the 2004 tsunami, the idea was to better coordinate maritime capabilities for disaster situations. When revived in 2017, the grouping seemed to have become a counter to China's growing inroads into the region, despite denials that any particular country had been targeted. Even a common definition of the geographical area encompassed has yet to be found. While Washington sees the U.S. and India as "bookends" of the Indo-Pacific, India and Japan have included the oceans up to Africa in their definition. The entire focus on the Indo-Pacific makes the Quad a maritime, rather than land-based, grouping, raising questions whether the cooperation extends to the Asia-Pacific and Eurasian regions. Even on maritime exercises, there is a lack of concurrence. India has not admitted Australia in the Malabar exercises with the U.S. and Japan, despite requests from Canberra, and has also resisted raising the level of talks from an official to the political level. The fact that India is the only member not in a treaty alliance with the other Quad countries will slow progress somewhat, although each member is committed to building a stronger Quadrilateral engagement. The outcome of the third round in Singapore will be judged by the ability of the group to issue a joint declaration, which eluded it in the first and second rounds.

Firm intervention is needed to end the unsavoury controversy in the CBI

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