

FOUR FOR ONE: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON QUAD, INDIA AND THE U.S.

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: QUAD and India

With the second meeting of the Australia-India-Japan-United States Quadrilateral Strategic Dialogue of Foreign Ministers in Tokyo on Tuesday, [the Quad](#) has entered a decisive phase. The Ministers, who had last met at the UN General Assembly, made a considered push to hold the meeting, despite the COVID-19 pandemic. In a departure from the earlier secrecy, they made public a large part of their deliberations, including the decision to make the FM meeting an annual event, to cooperate on combating the pandemic, and on building infrastructure, connectivity and a supply chain initiative in the region. As the host, Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga dispelled any notion that he might not be as proactive as his predecessor, Shinzo Abe, who originally conceived the idea in 2007. Australia's Foreign Minister Marise Payne attended despite the two-week quarantine that she faces on return, and India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar undertook the journey despite the government's preoccupation with the LAC standoff. But it is probably the U.S. that displayed the most eagerness to hold the meeting, just weeks before the Presidential election. [Mr. Trump's COVID-19 illness](#) and sudden hospitalisation prompted U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to cancel other scheduled stops, in South Korea and Mongolia. But in Tokyo, he made it clear that his mission was to direct the Quad towards building a coalition to counter Beijing's aggression in the region, saying that their partnership was not "multilateralism for the sake of it". He [called on the entire Quad to "collaborate to protect" the region from what he called the "CCP's exploitation, corruption, and coercion"](#), pointing to the LAC standoff, as well as Chinese aggression in the South and East China Seas. What he seemed to propose was not just a coalition of democracies committed to a free and open Indo-Pacific, as the Quad's informal charter has thus far stated. Instead, the U.S. seems keen on turning the Quadrilateral into a full-fledged military alliance of countries facing tensions with China.

The government should not downplay the import of such openly stated intentions. While Japan and Australia are bound by alliance treaties to the U.S., New Delhi has thus far charted its course on strategic autonomy. Mr. Pompeo's words could well be bluster borne of politics ahead of the U.S. elections, but they point to an interest in bringing India into bilateral tensions in the Indo-Pacific, while inviting the Quad to take a role in India-China tensions as well. The Modi government has rebuffed such suggestions, and any shift would be unwise now. India has much to gain strategically and in terms of capacity building from the Quadrilateral dialogue, but little from the impression it is being led by Washington on an important initiative for the region in which India is an equal and important stake-holder.

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