

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MALABAR EXERCISE

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: QUAD and India

Oct 21, 2020-Wednesday

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Australia is set to join the Malabar naval exercises, finally making it a drill which will see the participation of all four Quad countries — India, United States (US), Japan and Australia. While this was expected — especially after a sharp dip in China-Australia ties and a greater degree of convergence between all the four Quad countries on the need to signal determination against any Chinese attempts to impose its hegemony — it is testament to how quickly the international order is evolving.

There is now a consensus, among every major liberal democracy in the world, that China is a threat — to political systems and open societies, economic self-reliance, and a rules-based regime, particularly in the international seas. India has traditionally sought to hedge its bets in larger geopolitics, but it does not have the luxury to do so anymore, because of its geography. The fact that India today faces Chinese aggression makes it incumbent on New Delhi to explore and deepen every international alliance which can serve as a source of symbolic and substantive support, including in the maritime domain where China has obvious vulnerabilities.

There is a view that cementing the Quad, including through naval exercises, will alienate China even more — and make reconciliation difficult. But India's experience shows that Beijing tends to respect power and strength. It is not a coincidence that as India-US ties improved in mid-2000s, China was better behaved. It is only with economic strength and partnerships such as the one that will be manifested in the Malabar exercise that India can broaden its options with China. The road to peace in the mountains may lie through the sea.

END

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