

A NEW DIMENSION: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON INDIA-U.S.-AUSTRALIA-JAPAN QUADRILATERAL

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: QUAD and India

In what will be seen as a significant shift of the government's posture towards the [India-U.S.-Australia-Japan Quadrilateral \(Quad\)](#), Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Bipin Rawat stated on Thursday that India believes the Quad would be a "good mechanism" to "[ensure Freedom of Navigation Operations](#)" (FONOPs) in the Indian Ocean and surrounding oceans including the Indo-Pacific. Unless he misspoke, the suggestion is that India is now prepared to join Quad military patrols, which marks a departure from its earlier reticence and public statements by the leadership. The Indian Navy has not taken part in any joint patrols outside of the Indian Ocean, and even within it, held its first one, with France, only recently. In terms of the engagement with the Quad, India has not yet formally announced a decision to include Australia in the annual [Malabar exercises](#) with the U.S. and Japan, although it is expected to do so. However, the move from conducting exercises together to joint operations would take time, something that makes the CDS's assertion significant. It is easy to surmise that his contention that the Quad operations are needed to ensure there is no "fear of any other nation singularly trying to dominate the oceans", is a veiled reference to China. It is also clear that the LAC tensions and clashes, as well as the PLA's refusal to implement border agreements, have convinced New Delhi that new strategies will be required to deal with Beijing. While India continues to engage China diplomatically, and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh have spoken of the importance of a resolution through talks, there is no doubt that an outcome of the tensions will be a strengthening of India's ties with global powers such as the U.S., as well as formations like the Quad. An indication of this is the government's plans to host a ministerial-level meeting of the Quad in the next month, possibly when the India-US "2+2" meet of Foreign and Defence Ministers is held.

While India considers its options, it is necessary to remember some of the reasons for its reticence in terms of militarising the Quad in any way. Prime Minister Modi said in 2018 that India sees the Indo-Pacific as a "geographical concept", not a "strategy or a club of limited members", and it would be important to know whether that formulation has changed. India is the only Quad member not already tied in a treaty alliance with the others, and Mr. Jaishankar's statement that India would never be part of any "alliance system" would run counter to what the CDS suggests. Finally, India is the only country in the Quad that shares a land boundary with China, and it is unclear how the militarisation of the Quad in Indo-Pacific waters would alleviate the territorial threat it faces. If, however, New Delhi's view of its Quad engagement has shifted, clarity and an expansion of Gen. Rawat's statement are essential.

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