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Quad complex



The Quad has some way to go before it can become a group as powerful in Asia as Nato is in Europe

India, the US, Japan and Australia view the threat of an increasingly aggressive China as so serious they met face-to-face in Tokyo in the midst of the pandemic to discuss the issue. But there, unity ended. The Quad meeting's aim was to send a strong message that overly assertive Chinese behaviour, whether in Ladakh or the South China Sea, would encounter resistance. But the language used showed there are still wide differences in Quad members' approach to China. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo blasted China's ruling Communist Party for "coercion and corruption." But India, Japan and Australia didn't even name China. Foreign Minister S Jaishankar spoke only of the need for "respect for territorial integrity." There was also no post-meeting joint statement. It certainly wasn't the birth of an 'Asian Nato', as some claimed it would be. For that, we must ask the question: would the Americans or Japanese come to our aid if fighting erupted in Ladakh? For that matter, would India dispatch naval ships to Japan's aid if a conflict occurred over the Senkaku Islands that China also claims?

Washington is locked in a trade war with Beijing, Sino-Australian ties have been deteriorating and India and China are facing off along their border. Still, there's the question whether any of the four countries will want to take on China long term, especially given their strong economic links with the country. Japan's new Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga says he wants "stable" Sino-Japanese relations. There are 35,000 Japanese firms in China compared to 1,500 in India. Despite current bilateral hostility, the Australians have built a booming economy by selling their commodities to China. The Sino-Indian economic partnership isn't as deep but China has been supplying India with vital start-up money. Both US presidential contenders have spoken of "decoupling" from China but Beijing's betting the US ultimately won't be able to resist China's massive market.

China lashed out against the Quad meeting with the state-controlled *Global Times* branding it “an ideological” Cold-War-style camp that “seeks to contain China.” However, even if a military alliance doesn’t come into being, China should worry as the four countries feel the need for a regional alliance to rein in its ambitions. But there’s no sign Beijing’s ready to modify its behaviour despite global flak. India shares a 4,000-km border with China that has led to it playing a balancing act. China’s aggression in Ladakh has changed that equation and India recognises it may have to reach out to other countries to take on its neighbour. India’s answer to China’s moves shouldn’t only be land-based but also be in the Indian Ocean and exploit our nearness to the Malacca Strait. India and Japan have signed a treaty allowing the Japanese to use Andaman’s port facilities and we’ll now be able to use Japan’s Djibouti base. A similar pact could come with Australia. We must hope such ties will help convince the Chinese that it’s not worth their while to try and push India around.

Four for one: On Quad, India and the U.S.

Whatever the benefits of Quad, India should not be led by the U.S. on regional initiatives

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, Shinzō 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.

The hole in the middle: On Physics Nobel

The physics Nobel celebrates both theoretical work and observational studies

This year's **Nobel Prize in physics** awards studies that **established the existence of black holes**. It celebrates theoretical work as much as it does dedicated observation. Andrea Ghez is only its fourth woman recipient. Roger Penrose, now at Oxford, who gets half the prize, ingeniously used mathematics in the 1960s to theorise under what conditions black holes must form. This was a time when the reality of black holes as a solution to Albert Einstein's field equations of the General Theory of Relativity was not accepted by many prominent physicists. Within a couple of months after Einstein proposed his General Theory of Relativity in 1915, Karl Schwarzschild published a solution to the field equations that exhibited singularities, or points where physical quantities grew infinitely large or vanished. Today, this is understood as the event horizon — the point of no return beyond which even light cannot escape the black hole's gravitational attraction. While more solutions were found to Einstein's equations that suggested black holes, they all required special symmetries and their realisation under general astrophysical conditions was doubtful. Penrose, through the singularity theorems, identified the formation of trapped surfaces as the condition for the formation of black holes in a generic manner. In this climate came observational hints of supermassive black holes, through the discovery of what were initially called quasars that were supermassive and found at the centre of galaxies.

The other half of the prize is jointly awarded to Reinhard Genzel, at the Max Planck Institute for Extraterrestrial Physics, Garching, Germany, and Prof. Ghez, of the UCLA, U.S., for showing that the dense region in the centre of our galaxy — the Milky Way — is indeed a black hole. Towards the end of the 1960s it was clear that the region named Sagittarius A* occupies the centre of the Milky Way, which is about 26,000 light years away. Around this, all stars in the galaxy orbit. In the 1990s, when telescopes and equipment were developed that could tackle this distance, Prof. Genzel and Prof. Ghez

set up independent groups to explore this region. They built unique instruments and pursued research from Very Large Telescope, in Chile, and the Keck Observatory, Hawaii, respectively. For three decades, the groups tracked nearly 30 stars, in particular one named S-2 (or S-O2). This star's orbit has been nearly completely tracked. These stars followed elliptical, Keplerian, orbits, which can only imply a central concentrated massive object — a supermassive black hole. Thus, the prize strings together theoretical research from the 1960s driven by conviction, and a three-decade long observational study that started in the 1990s. It reiterates that in the pursuit of truth, time is but a twinkle.