



## THE MESSAGE IN ALASKA, FROM WASHINGTON TO BEIJING

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**(Mains GS2: India and its neighborhood- relations & Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.)**

### **Context:**

- After 12 march summit of QUAD, the first Leaders' Summit of the Quadrilateral Framework, the message of the virtual meeting between leaders of Australia-India-Japan-the United States was delivered directly to Beijing.
- Now on 19 march, the first high-level meeting between U.S.-Chinese officials under the new Biden administration got off to a chilly start.
- Senior American diplomats accusing China of threatening world stability and Chinese officials alleging America is a human rights hypocrite due to its mistreatment of Black citizens.

### **Quad in focus:**

- Under the new U.S. President, "America is back" in terms of its desire to play a leading role in other regions and it views China as its primary challenger for that leadership.
- The Quad partnership is ready to mount a counter-challenge, albeit in "soft-power" terms at present.
- Quad partners had raised their issues with China, including: "[China's] coercion of Australia, their harassment around the Senkaku Islands, their aggression on the border with India".
- For both Japan and Australia, that are military allies of the U.S., the outcomes of the summit, both in terms of the "3C's" working groups (established on COVID-19 vaccines, Climate Change and Critical Technology), and in terms of this messaging to the "4th C" (China) are very welcome.

- For India, however, the outcomes of the Quad Summit need more nuanced analysis.

### **Vaccine diplomacy:**

- On the “3C’s Working groups”, New Delhi is on board, but with some riders.
- The vaccine initiative, for example, is a major boost for India’s pharmaceutical prowess, which has already been proven during the current pandemic.
- India is not only the world’s largest manufacturer of vaccine, it has already exported 58 million doses to nearly 71 countries worldwide as commercial shipments, grants and those funded by the Gavi COVAX initiative.
- Manufacturing a billion doses for South East Asia (under the Quad), over and above its current international commitments will require a major ramp up in capacity and funding, and will bear testimony to the power of Quad cooperation.
- However, the effort could have been made much easier had India’s Quad partners also announced dropping their opposition to India’s plea at the World Trade Organization
- Which it **filed along with South Africa in October 2020**, seeking waiver from certain provisions of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights for the prevention, containment and treatment of COVID-19.
- It is surprising that the summit did not seek to bridge differences over this issue when the leaders discussed how to increase India’s production capabilities.

### **Climate change and technology:**

- On climate change, India has welcomed the return of the U.S. to the Paris accord.
- However, while Mr. Biden has promised to restart the U.S.’s funding of the global Green Climate Fund, India still awaits a large part of the \$1.4 billion commitment by the U.S. to finance solar technology in 2016
- S. might also consider joining the International Solar Alliance, founded by India and France, which the other Quad members are a part of, but the U.S., which promised to do so in 2016, has resisted

### **Critical technology:**

- The Quad working group will set up to cooperate on critical technologies.
- India will welcome this as it reduces its dependence on Chinese telecommunication equipment and in finding new sources of rare-earth minerals.

- But India would oppose any move by the other Quad partners to weigh in on international rule-making on digital economy, or data localisation which had earlier led New Delhi to walk out of the Japan-led “Osaka track declaration” at the G-20 in 2019.

### **Handling china:**

- It is still unclear that how India will respond on collaboration, including in maritime security, to meet challenges to the rules-based maritime order in the East and South China Seas.
- India shares the deep concerns and the tough messaging set out by the Quad on China, especially after the year-long stand-off at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and the killings at Galwan.
- India is the only Quad member not a part of the military alliance that binds the others, the only Quad country with a land boundary with China
- India is also the only Quad country which lives in a neighbourhood where China has made deep inroads.
- Indian officials are still engaged in LAC disengagement talks that have thus far yielded phase-1 disengagement at Pangong Lake.

### **Indian strategic planning:**

- The violence at the LAC has left three long-term impacts on Indian strategic planning:
- First, the government must now expend more resources, troops, infrastructure funds to the LAC than ever before, in order to leave no part of the once peaceful LAC unmanned and ensure no recurrence of the People's Liberation Army April 2020 incursions.
- Second, that India's most potent territorial threat will not be from either China or Pakistan, but from both, or what the Indian Army Chief Manoj Mukund Naravane called a “two-front situation”.
- Third, that India's continental threat perception will need to be prioritised against any maritime commitments the Quad may claim, especially further afield in the Pacific Ocean.

### **Way forward:**

- The Indian government has said that it sees the Quad formation as it does its other multilateral commitments including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), BRICS (or Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation etc.
- Thus India seeks to broaden the space for its principle of Strategic Autonomy; not narrow its bilateral choices.

- In that sense, the Quad’s ideology of a “diamond of democracies” can only succeed if it does not insist on exclusivity in India’s strategic calculations.
- The truth is, despite last week’s Quad Summit, India’s choices for its Quad strategy will continue to be guided as much by its location on land as it is by its close friendships with fellow democracies, the U.S., Japan and Australia, across the seas.

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