India and security dynamics of the Quad: Q & A

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The third ministerial meeting of the Quadrilateral alliance members being held now, has evoked a lot of interest. Here are my answers to two questions raised by an international news agency on India’s perceptions on the QUAD, particularly in the context of current downslide in the relations between India and China.

**Question 1**

Certain news reports have suggested that the US is keen on holding a leadership level discussion within the Quad framework.

Is it possible to understand what possible backlash could it have for India, from China? New Delhi and Beijing recently completed a troop withdrawal plan from a face-off site at the disputed land border between the two countries?

**Answer 1**

Future of America's fractured relations with China is one of the challenging issues President Joe Biden is facing. It will have far reaching effects, not only on US strategic security, trade and economy, but also on America's global leadership role.

President Xi Jinping is trying fast to realise his Chinese Dream of creating a new world order, where China hopes wrest the leadership role from the US and its allies. This has made Indo-Pacific theatre the hot bed of the emerging Cold War 2.0 taking shape now.
Cold War 2.0 will be unlike the "us versus they" of America's earlier version, with less distinct contours of participants and type of warfare. It will be impacted by use of technology to wage hybrid warfare fought on multiple fronts, with no clear beginning or end.

President Donald Trump's decisions to further American exceptionalism during his tenure, had come at the cost of side lining some of the traditional allies in Europe and Asia Pacific.

In spite of this, Biden administration probably appreciates Trump's initiative to promote the 4-nation Quadrilateral security initiative (QUAD) to check China's rapid inroads into the Indo-Pacific theatre and beyond. The future of QUAD under Biden leadership needs to be examined in this broad framework.

QUAD initiative is in the making. So far, only two formal ministerial level meetings of member countries had taken place and the third one is in the making. Each member has its own strategic priorities, not only in their bilateral relations with China, but also its impact multilaterally, because China has globally increased its strategic and economic muscle power.

So, we can expect the present ministerial meeting to focus on understanding the Biden administration's perspective on QUAD's shape and scope. This will provide an opportunity for Americans to understand the perceptions of member countries, particularly India and Japan, which have been experiencing the effects of PRC’s confrontation politics.

The US has other concerns beyond QUAD and Indo-Pacific theatre, in its larger spectral relationship with China. So the US may not be in a rush to assume leadership role of QUAD, unless it has a well-structured outline of the organisation and the issues it is likely to confront.

So, I do not see "backlash" effect on QUAD in India-China talks, just because of US' leadership change, as it would have already been factored in their security perception. Bilaterally, Biden administration has already expressed its solidarity with India on the LAC issue in Ladakh. It has also rushed to fulfil urgent military equipment requirements of India to beef up its operations there.

**Question 2**

I am also hoping to know how you see India's role in the QUAD, particularly in the South China Sea. Would a greater role for India serve its interests, like they serve US?

**Answer 2**

India sees QUAD as part of its overall strategic security scheme to protect its national interests. In this overall framework, as far as South China Sea is concerned India has two commitments. First, to ensure international sea lanes are free in terms of UNCLOS and respond
appropriately to any threat to it. Secondly, it has established strong strategic security links with Vietnam and Japan and some of the members of ASEAN and it can be expected to respond suitably to assist them. On these issues, by and large, there is a lot of convergence between India and USA.

So, India is likely to further its role in South China Sea in the larger context of Indo-Pacific, particularly as a dominant naval power of Indian Ocean, with ability to deal with any external threat to its interests.

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