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Quad summit heightens threat of US-led war against China

The first face-to-face leaders' summit of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or "Quad" took place in Washington yesterday, hosted by US President Biden with the prime ministers of Australia, Japan and India—Scott Morrison, Yoshihide Suga and Narendra Modi respectively.



President Joe Biden walks to the Quad summit with, from left, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, in the East Room of the White House, Friday, Sept. 24, 2021, in Washington [Credit: AP Photo/Evan Vucci]

The summit, following the first online leaders' meeting of the Quad in March, is part of an escalating US-led drive to confront, undermine and subordinate China, by military means if ultimately necessary, to the "international rules-based order" dominated by Washington.

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White House press secretary Jen Psaki insisted that the Quad summit was not about “security”—that is, the military build-up against China—but was about “COVID, climate, emerging technology and infrastructure.” She emphasised to reporters that “the focus is not [on] a security meeting or security apparatus.”

To deny that the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue has anything to do with “security” obviously flies in the face of reality.

The Quad summit followed immediately the declaration by the US, Britain and Australia of a new AUKUS military pact, which includes the provision of nuclear-powered submarines to Australia. That announcement has fuelled further tensions with China and threatens to fracture US relations with France—an American ally that regards itself as a Pacific power—and more broadly with the European Union.

By announcing AUKUS just a week before the Quad meeting, the Biden administration put both Japan and India on the spot as to their commitment to the escalating US confrontation with China.

Suga, however, is standing down as Japanese prime minister amid public anger over his handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and was in no position to make categorical statements. Moreover, Tokyo is still hampered by widespread public opposition to abandoning the so-called pacifist clause in its constitution that bars it from waging war.

For its part, India’s reaction to the AUKUS announcement has been muted. While New Delhi has developed close strategic relations with Washington over the past decade, it was in the past a close partner with the former Soviet Union and is not a formal US ally. It is an observer member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, initiated by China and Russia to counter US influence in Central Asia.

Nevertheless, the Quad has all the hallmarks of a quadrilateral military alliance in the making—Australia and Japan are already formal US allies and host American military forces, while India, particularly under Modi, has been strengthening its strategic partnership with the US. India has signed agreements not only with the US but also Japan and Australia to provide military logistics support and all four militaries now participate in India’s annual Malabar naval war games with the US.

The initial comments of the Indian, Japanese and Australian prime ministers prior to the summit copied Biden's catch-phrase of promoting "a free and open Indo-Pacific." Even as all four governments make deep inroads into democratic rights, the leaders posture as defenders of "democracy." While China was not mentioned by name, despite being routinely and hypocritically denounced by the US over "human rights," it was clearly the target.

Morrison was the most explicit, declaring that "we are liberal democracies that believe in a world order that favours freedom." He continued: "[W]e wish to be always free from coercion, where the sovereign rights of all nations are respected and where disputes are settled peacefully in accordance with international law."

In fact, the US has been engaged in waging one predatory war after another in the Middle East and Central Asia over the past three decades in a bid to shore up its global dominance. Australian governments have backed Washington to the hilt and committed military forces to the illegal invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Despite its debacle in Afghanistan, the US is building alliances in preparation for what is potentially an even more disastrous conflict with nuclear-armed China, which Washington regards as the chief threat to its global hegemony. Biden, who was vice president when Obama launched the "pivot to Asia" in 2011 against China, has continued all the Trump administration's anti-China policies.

Behind closed doors, the four leaders undoubtedly focussed on countering China. All the topics listed for discussion contained an element of rivalry and confrontation with Beijing: whether it was the provision of COVID-19 vaccines to the region, a new fellowship for students from the four countries or the more overtly strategic issues of addressing cyber security, collaborating on "critical technologies" and securing supply chains.

China has reacted to the AUKUS announcement by condemning it as a return to "Cold War mentality." The danger, however, is not that the world is returning to the decades of standoff between the US and the Soviet Union. Rather it is facing the threat of a military conflict between the largest and second largest economies, both nuclear armed.

An opinion article by Edward Luce in the *Financial Times* was headlined “A US-China clash is not unthinkable.” It reflected fears in sections of the ruling class in Britain and internationally of the danger of war. Luce pointed out that for all of Biden’s talk about diplomacy and working with China on common issues, “the strongest winds, however, are towards confrontation” amid a “hawkish domestic US consensus on China.”

Luce warned that unlike the Cold War confrontation with the Soviet Union, “Cold war 2.0 offers a different spectre—escalating geopolitical rivalry between the world’s two largest powers with no clear exit ramp.”

Behind Washington’s escalating tensions with Beijing is the historic decline of US imperialism. Unlike the Soviet Union, China, by virtue of its sheer economic weight and requirements for raw materials, energy, parts and technologies, presents a challenge to continuing US global dominance. No longer able to rely on an unchallenged economic superiority, the US ruling class is determined to use all means, including its residual military might, to subordinate China to its interests.

Luce concluded his comment with a half-hearted appeal to Biden to reduce the risks by acknowledging “the possibility of a US-China collision—by accident or ignorance.” In reality, the Biden administration is actively preparing for such a conflict on all fronts—including the consolidation of military alliances and partnerships such as AUKUS and the Quad.

The danger of war will not be averted by appealing to the likes of Biden, Morrison, Suga and Modi, but by building a powerful unified movement of the international working class, based on a socialist perspective to abolish the profit system that is the source of the war drive.

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