**China looms large over Biden's meeting with 'Quad' leaders of India, Australia and Japan**

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1. WASHINGTON – China has ramped up its [deadly border dispute](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2020/06/17/china-india-tensions/3204406001/) with India, launched a punishing [trade blockage against Australia](https://apnews.com/article/virus-outbreak-beijing-global-trade-australia-south-china-sea-ea95bc519eb9bf40172edc626caf5537), and stepped up [military patrols](https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/07/27/national/china-japan-senkaku-islands/) around Japanese-controlled islands.
2. On Friday, the leaders of those three countries dealing with tensions with China convened at the White House for a meeting with President Joe Biden. China's growing economic and military prowess wasn't officially on the agenda, but Beijing was the elephant in the room.
3. Friday's meeting of "the Quad" – the diplomatic moniker for this increasingly important alliance among the U.S., India, Japan and Australia – was intended to send a clear signal to Beijing that the U.S. and its allies in the Indo-Pacific are serious about countering China's global ambitions.
4. "We stand here together, in the Indo-Pacific region, a region that we wish to be always free from coercion, where the sovereign rights of all nations are respected and where disputes are settled peacefully and accordance with international law," Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said at the beginning of the meeting.
5. The president welcomed Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga and Morrison, whom Biden met earlier this week, for the first in-person meeting of the Quad partnership. Biden separately met with Modi, who met with Vice President Kamala Harris Thursday, and will later hold a meeting on the sidelines with Suga.
6. "We're four major democracies with a long history of cooperation," Biden told his foreign counterparts. "We know how to get things done and we are up to the challenge."
7. David Shullman, an expert on China with the Atlantic Council think tank and a former U.S. intelligence official, said China's recent aggressions against India, Japan and Australia – as well as its threats against Taiwan and its crackdown on Hong Kong – have given leaders in the region a new sense of urgency and common purpose.
8. "China really gets the lion's share of the credit for making this happen," he said during an Atlantic Council briefing ahead of Friday's meeting.
9. Biden and his foreign counterparts are expected to discuss the pandemic, climate change and the steps each country is taking to bolster critical infrastructure resilience against cyber threats, according to senior administration officials who briefed reporters on condition of anonymity in order to preview the meeting.
10. It's not clear if Friday's session will result in any new agreements, but experts hope the four leaders can cooperate on everything from supply chain problems to the COVID-19 pandemic – arenas where China is already exercising its economic and diplomatic power.
11. The leaders are expected to announce a new supply chain initiative to address a [global semiconductor chip shortage](https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/cars/2021/06/17/auto-sales-car-prices-semiconductor-chip-shortage/5294532001/) and cooperation on 5G technology deployment.
12. The president also announced a joint fellowship that will bring students from all four countries to elite U.S. universities to study science and technology over the next year.
13. Biden said the partnering countries are on track to produce an additional 1 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines in India to boost global supply, a promise that was delayed after India banned international exports of vaccines amid at outbreak in April.
14. India, the world's largest vaccine producer, announced earlier this week it would resume exports in October and prioritize the United Nations-backed global vaccine sharing alliance known as COVAX. The Quad pledged to deliver 1 billion doses throughout Asia by the end of 2022.
15. Modi is among some global leaders who've pressed the World Trade Organization to waive a patent provision that would enable drug companies to share their COVID-19 formulas with other manufacturers, opening up access to poorer nations in desperate need of shots.
16. Friday's meeting comes on the heels of [a high-profile defense agreement](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2021/09/15/national-security-u-s-australia-u-k-form-security-partnership/8349082002/) under which the U.S. and the United Kingdom agreed to help Australia develop a fleet of nuclear powered submarines. China’s navy recently surpassed the U.S. Navy in terms of battle force ships, and the new pact with Australia could serve as a counterweight to Beijing's military might.
17. **A new Cold War?**
18. Chinese officials denounced the deal as "extremely irresponsible" and said it was part of an "outdated, Cold War, zero-sum mentality." They are equally irked by the rise of the Quad, which [one foreign ministry spokesperson](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1875292.shtml) has described as an "exclusive clique" designed to sow discord between China and its neighbors.
19. But Shullman says China is to blame for the Quad's "staying power." He pointed to China's military aggression on the disputed border with India and Beijing's decision to slap tariffs on Australian products after the country's leaders called for further investigation into the origins of the coronavirus.
20. "It points up the fallacy of China's argument that this Quad gathering is somehow a provocation to a stability-loving China in the region," he said. "It's China's coercion and military aggression that has ultimately caused these countries to overcome differences and together deal with what is the manifest threats posed to them by China's growing power."
21. Some defense experts fear the confrontation could mushroom into a new Cold War, particularly as China continues to threaten the sovereignty of Taiwan, moved to expand its control of the South China Sea and deployed vessels into the waters around the Japanese-administered Senkaku Islands.
22. Biden has framed U.S. policy toward China as an ideological battle between democracy and authoritarianism but insisted he's not interested in seeking a new Cold War in [remarks to the United Nations General Assembly](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2021/09/21/biden-america-back-foreign-policy-faces-global-test-un-speech/8378948002/) earlier this week.
23. "Our approach to China is one of competition, and not one of conflicts," White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters Friday.
24. She emphasized the summit was not a security meeting but a chance for the group to discuss cooperation on COVID, climate change, emerging technology and infrastructure.
25. Daniel DePetris, a fellow at Defense Priorities, a Washington-based think tank that advocates for military restraint, warned against any move to [transform the Quad into a military alliance](https://www.defensepriorities.org/explainers/what-the-quad-is-is-not-and-should-not-be). He said doing so could be counterproductive for Japan, India and Australia and leave Washington with a new security burden as the countries would depend almost entirely on U.S. military power to balance China.
26. "If they go down that route, it's the exact opposite of the what the administration is publicly warning against, which is a new Cold War," DePetris said. "I fear that if it does kind of cement itself into a military alliance exclusively against the Chinese military, it could kind of divide the region into democratic and authoritarian blocs, which would make cooperation with the Chinese on issues like COVID and climate change much harder."
27. But Paula Dobriansky, a retired diplomat and national security official, said the Quad can keep the confrontation with China from escalating further.
28. "I see this as a deterrent to not just a Cold War but actually to an outbreak of conflict," she said during the Atlantic Council briefing.