

The Quad 2.0: A Foundation for a Free and Open Indo–Pacific

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

In November 2017, almost 10 years after it first collapsed, the “Quad”—a strategic dialogue among the U.S., Japan, India, and Australia—was reborn.

The Quad’s revival was catalyzed by increasing cooperation among the four capitals, India’s growing comfort with the group, and shared threat assessments of China.

The U.S. should continue to provide strong leadership for the Quad, elevating the importance of the dialogue and adding new layers of form and functionality.

In November 2017, an international grouping declared dead in 2008 was reborn. That month saw the first meeting of a new iteration of the “Quad”—an assembly of government representatives from Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S. In some ways, it was the physical manifestation of several complementary geostrategic trends: growing comfort and convergence among the four democracies, growing apprehension about China’s rise and threats to international rules and norms setting, and an emerging shared vision for the Indo–Pacific region.

In the decade prior, the four democracies saw a crystallization of concerns about China’s aggressive maneuvers on both its land and sea borders, and its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The four democracies also witnessed an unusual alignment of forward-leaning governments in Canberra, Delhi, Tokyo, and Washington.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/bg3481>

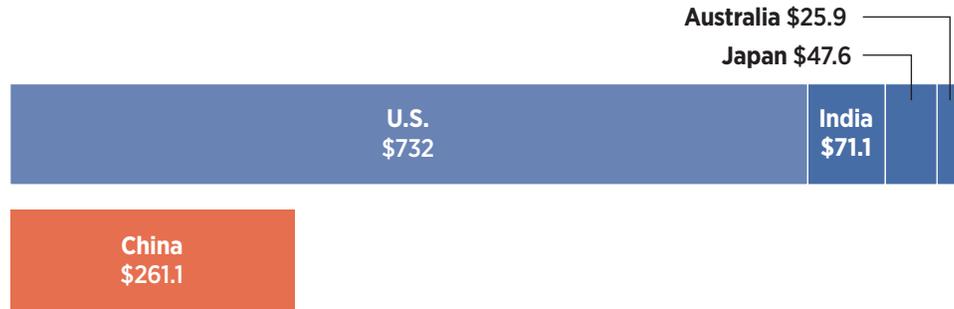
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CHART 1

Defense Spending: China vs. the Quad

IN BILLIONS OF U.S. DOLLARS, IN 2019



SOURCE: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "Military Expenditure," <https://www.sipri.org/research/armament-and-disarmament/arms-and-military-expenditure/military-expenditure> (accessed May 7, 2020).

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As it was during the Quad's first iteration in 2007, the Quad 2.0 has been shadowed by critics who insist the grouping is either too provocative, or too powerless, to be effective. That has not stopped the group from meeting regularly since late 2017, upgrading the level of the dialogue and adding new components to the Quad along the way.

Despite the disproportionate attention it receives in the press, many questions about the Quad remain—questions that will be answered in this *Backgrounder*. How and why was the Quad formed in the first place? Why did the Quad 1.0 disband in 2008? What was the impetus for the group's revival almost a decade later? How should the Quad be defined, and what is its appropriate role? How valid are the criticisms of the Quad? And, finally, how can the Quad be strengthened in the years ahead?

Background

What was the deadliest natural disaster in modern history? Few might have guessed it was the December 26 Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004. The cataclysmic waves generated by an undersea megathrust earthquake off the coast of Indonesia killed a shocking 230,000 people along the rim of the Indian Ocean that year. The magnitude of the devastation was unprecedented and sparked a unique response.

Two days later, U.S. President George W. Bush announced that America would join Australia, India, and Japan to coordinate emergency relief efforts. This regional “core group” would serve as first responders before handing over the mission to the United Nations in mid-January 2005.¹ The grouping quickly disbanded thereafter, but the seeds of a new geopolitical entity were planted—one that is leaving its imprint on balance of power politics in the 21st century.

The mid-2000s were a period which saw significant evolution in the Indo-Pacific security landscape. The U.S. was busy strengthening coordination with two long-standing democratic allies in the region, Australia and Japan, while courting a new strategic partnership with India.

Three months before the December 2004 tsunami, the U.S. signed a novel cooperation pact with India. The Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP) committed the two sides to greater cooperation in civilian nuclear activities, space programs, high-technology trade, and missile defense.² It was the culmination of a rapprochement that began late in the Clinton Administration following India’s 1998 nuclear test, and which was accelerated by the George W. Bush Administration after 9/11. By 2005, the NSSP had opened the door to a groundbreaking 10-year defense framework agreement and an unprecedented civil nuclear deal that eventually welcomed India into the community of accepted nuclear powers.

The following year, Australia, Japan, and the U.S. upgraded a trilateral strategic dialogue among them to the ministerial level.³ In March 2007, Japan and Australia signed their own “historic security declaration,”⁴ cementing the third leg in an emerging Australia–Japan–U.S. triangle.

Two weeks earlier, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had welcomed an influential visitor to Tokyo, U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney. The two discussed the possibility of building on the cooperative experience of the tsunami core group and forming a new quadrilateral security dialogue. Vice President Cheney then traveled to Canberra where he briefed Australian Prime Minister John Howard on the plan. The Australian government welcomed the idea in principle, but did “not wish to hurry the process and wants to ensure that the heightened relationship with Japan is settled before embarking on any new arrangements.”⁵ Nevertheless, the new initiative moved quickly.

The following month, in April 2007, India and the U.S. welcomed the Japanese navy to the annual India–U.S. Malabar naval exercise for the first time. Rather than being held in the traditional venue, the Indian Ocean, the Malabar exercises of 2007 were held in the Sea of Japan. By this time, China had begun to take notice. *The People’s Daily* mused: “It is absolutely

not new for Japan and the U.S. to sit down and plot conspiracies together but it is rather intriguing to get India involved.”⁶ The paper pointed to a report in the Japanese press that suggested the exercises were designed to “check” or “contain” the Chinese navy.

The Birth of the Quad

One month after the naval exercises, on May 25, 2007, the four countries held the first Quadrilateral Strategic Dialogue (QSD) on the sidelines of an Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum meeting in Manila. The gathering of mid-level officials⁷ was billed as an “exploratory meeting.” According to Australia’s participant, Jennifer Rawson, the new QSD “reflected the natural partnership between the countries sharing some fundamental values and interested in growing cooperation.”⁸

The QSD had no formal agenda and produced no joint statements or plans for future gatherings, but its significance was felt across the region. In each of the four democratic capitals, the meeting generated a degree of anxious skepticism and varying degrees of concern about how such an arrangement would be perceived by China. Shortly before the first meeting, Beijing had sent demarches to each capital inquiring about the purpose of the gathering.⁹

Despite these reservations, in September 2007, the four countries pressed ahead with another novel idea: a maritime exercise joining the four navies, along with Singapore, in a special edition of the India–U.S. Malabar exercise. India and the U.S. had expanded the exercise to include Japan in March, but this was a different matter. Conducted in the Bay of Bengal, the naval drills included nearly 30 ships and 150 aircraft, including three aircraft carriers (two U.S. and one Indian).¹⁰

Then, less than one year after its inception, the QSD collapsed under the weight of domestic politics in Australia and Japan. In September 2007, one week after the special Malabar exercise, Japanese Prime Minister Abe resigned following a poor electoral showing in the summer. The Indian government was still struggling to subdue criticism from communist parties skeptical of the U.S. while American officials were signaling that their main priority was to promote trilateral cooperation with Australia and Japan.¹¹

As the final nail in the coffin, in November 2007, the government led by Prime Minister John Howard in Canberra was replaced with a new coalition led by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, a Mandarin speaker who was more enthusiastic about the prospects for engagement with China. In May 2008, the new Australian Foreign Minister, standing next to his Chinese counterpart, signaled that Canberra was no longer interested in the QSD.

The Quad ended with a whimper. Perhaps the great irony of its demise was the timing: While shared concerns about China were ostensibly a motivating factor, the QSD collapsed in early 2008, at the dawn of a new, more assertive chapter in Chinese foreign policy. It is now widely accepted that China's trajectory shifted in 2008, the year of the Beijing Olympics, the global financial crisis, and, of course, the disbanding of the Quad.

China on the Mind

All of which raises an important question. Conventional wisdom says that Beijing's ties with the democracies at the time were comparatively stable and Chinese foreign policy was relatively subdued. If China was still firmly in its more moderate chapter of "hide and bide" in 2007, what was the catalyst for the Quad 1.0? Upon closer examination, by 2007 there were already several signs emerging of the friction to come between China and the Indo-Pacific democracies.

In 2006, China and India found themselves at something of a high-water mark after years of thawing diplomatic ties that resulted in an agreement to manage their long-standing border dispute in 2005. However, in March 2006, during a round of negotiations over the disputed border, Beijing seemed to backtrack on a prior pledge that any final resolution would refrain from disturbing "settled populations." The obscure reference signaled to India that, contrary to popular belief, China was not prepared to accept a "status quo" territorial swap and had not dropped its claims to the sensitive border town of Tawang in the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh.¹²

Then, in November 2006, ahead of a visit to India by Chinese President Hu Jintao, Chinese Ambassador to India Sun Yuxi caused a stir in Delhi when he told the local press: "In our position the whole of the state of Arunachal Pradesh is Chinese territory.... We are claiming all of that."¹³ The dual events appeared to stall the momentum driving progress in border negotiations and a broader rapprochement—momentum that has yet to be recaptured.

One month earlier, in October 2006, a U.S. Navy convoy conducting military drills in the waters between Taiwan and Japan received an unexpected guest.¹⁴ A Chinese *Song*-class diesel electric submarine slipped through a defensive ring of U.S. Navy vessels and surfaced within torpedo range of the U.S. aircraft carrier *Kitty Hawk*. The event was described by officials as a "wake up call" and a "major embarrassment for the Pentagon." As the *Daily Mail* reported at the time:

The encounter has forced a serious re-think of American and NATO naval strategy as commanders reconsider the level of threat from potentially hostile Chinese submarines. It also led to tense diplomatic exchanges, with shaken American diplomats demanding to know why the submarine was “shadowing” the U.S. fleet while Beijing pleaded ignorance and dismissed the affair as coincidence.¹⁵

The Child of Abe

Despite these early signs of friction, it was not India or the U.S. that emerged as the driving force behind the Quad. In 2004, it was Japan that unveiled new defense guidelines, which explicitly pointed to China as a potential threat.

That year, a game of military brinkmanship had begun to unfold around disputed islands in the East China Sea administered by Japan but claimed by China. (Japan calls them the Senkaku Islands; China calls them the Diaoyu Islands.) Chinese aircraft had begun venturing near and into the airspace around the disputed islands with growing frequency. Japan was forced to scramble fighter jets 13 times in 2004 in response; by 2006, the number of Japanese scrambles grew to 107. Meanwhile, in November 2004, for the first time, a Chinese submarine was spotted transiting through Japan’s territorial waters near Okinawa.

In 2005, Chinese warships organized a show of strength near a controversial gas field along the “median line” in the East China Sea, aiming their guns at a nearby Japanese surveillance plane. As U.S. Admiral Eric McVadon observed at the time, the message from China was clear: “We used to be inferior to you. Now we have to be taken seriously.”¹⁶ A Japanese government report soon called for an increase in naval patrols around the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi entered into talks with Washington to promote greater defense cooperation.¹⁷

In July 2006, with bilateral tensions rising, Abe, then a member of Japan’s parliament, published a book titled *Towards a Beautiful Country: My Vision for Japan*.¹⁸ In it, he urged Japan to strengthen collaboration with Australia, the U.S., and India.

Two months after the publication of his book, Abe was elected prime minister. In a speech by Foreign Minister Taro Aso that November, Tokyo promoted the idea of an “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity...along the outer rim of the Eurasian continent,” identifying Australia, India, and the U.S. as targets for enhanced strategic cooperation.¹⁹

When Abe welcomed Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to Tokyo in December 2006, Singh reportedly warmed to his idea of greater

quadrilateral cooperation. In March 2007, Abe persuaded Vice President Cheney of the virtues of the Quad, opening the door to the first meeting of the QSD two months later.²⁰ Australia's Jennifer Rawson later explained that the first Quad meeting was "a proposal from the Japanese government."²¹

In July 2007, Abe's Liberal Democratic Party suffered a major defeat in Upper House elections, but Abe declined to resign right away. He was scheduled to deliver an address to the Indian parliament in a few weeks titled "Confluence of the Two Seas," one in which he articulated a vision for an "immense network spanning the entirety of the Pacific Ocean, incorporating the U.S. and Australia [with India and Japan]. Open and transparent, this network will allow people, goods, capital, and knowledge to flow freely."²² The concepts proved a precursor to the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" concept that Abe would later champion, one that would be replicated and adopted by the Trump Administration in 2017.

Abe remained in office long enough to deliver the address to the Indian parliament in August and witness the Quad (plus Singapore) Malabar naval exercises in September. Eight days after the exercises, the prime minister resigned.

The Long Road Back

Ironically, the dissolution of the Quad came in early 2008, just as Beijing was charting a new, more assertive course in its foreign policy. In the years to follow, the impetus for a more concerted balancing effort among the four democracies only grew stronger as they began a long, slow journey back toward realizing their initial vision.

In 2009, Japan was again welcomed as a participant in the annual Indo-U.S. Malabar exercise, and in December 2012, Abe's Liberal Democratic Party swept elections, returning him to the prime ministership. In his first weeks in office, Abe repackaged his Quad proposal, calling for the four countries to unite in defense of a rules-based order: "I envisage a strategy whereby Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S. State of Hawaii form a diamond to safeguard the maritime commons starting from the Indian Ocean Region to the Western Pacific," Abe stated, insisting that he was "prepared to invest the greatest possible extent, Japan's capabilities in the security diamond."²³

The national security strategy released by the Abe government in 2013 again promoted the idea of enhanced cooperation among the Quad members. In 2015, Abe revised the U.S.-Japan bilateral defense guidelines for the first time in nearly 20 years, allowing defense cooperation outside the

immediate vicinity of Japanese territory. Later that year, India and the U.S. invited Japan to become a permanent partner in the Malabar naval exercises after its periodic participation in 2007, 2009, and 2014.²⁴ Abe then elevated ties with Australia and India to a “Special Strategic Partnership” and a “Special Strategic Global Partnership,” respectively, while initiating talks with Australia on a Visiting Forces Agreement.

In the absence of a quadrilateral mechanism, the four capitals continued strengthening multilateral defense coordination under the auspices of a trio of complementary strategic dialogues. To complement the Australia–Japan–U.S. trilateral dialogue, India, Japan, and the U.S. formed their own trilateral strategic dialogue in 2011, which was upgraded to the ministerial level in 2015. The same year, a new Australia–India–Japan strategic dialogue was inaugurated. It reportedly involved a “full day discussion on China.”²⁵

These new arrangements—further buttressed by a handful of non-government dialogues including a “Quad-Plus” dialogue hosted by The Heritage Foundation²⁶—achieved “through three overlapping security triangles, a quadrilateral security arrangement by other means,” according to Australian analyst Rory Medcalf.²⁷

The Return of the Quad

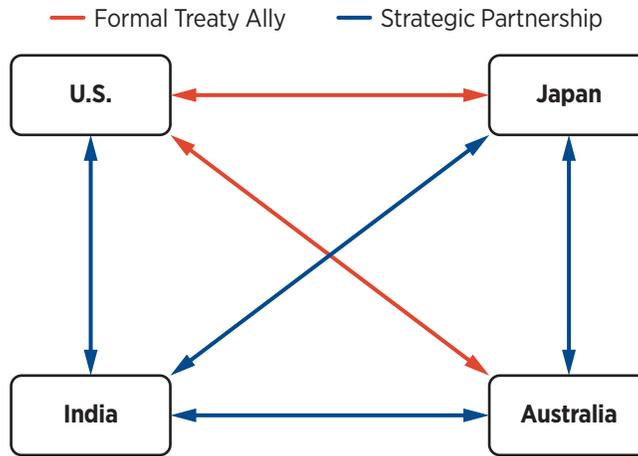
In November 2017, almost exactly 10 years after the initiative collapsed, the Quad was reborn. Amid mounting shared concerns about Chinese foreign policy and growing trust, comfort, and compatibility among the four democracies, discussions about formally reviving the Quad had been percolating in Washington, Delhi, and Canberra for years. And, for years, India rebuffed each overture. By 2017, however, the conditions were ripe to revisit the idea formally.

In its first year in office, the Trump Administration warmed quickly to the Quad concept, and in August 2017, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson discussed its revival with the foreign ministers of Australia and Japan on the sidelines of an ASEAN summit in Manila. The proposal was raised with India on a trip to Delhi by U.S. Defense Secretary James Mattis the following month, and was again endorsed in an October speech by Secretary Tillerson in Washington.²⁸

On October 25, 2017, just days after the Japanese electorate granted Prime Minister Shinzo Abe a new mandate, Foreign Minister Taro Kano revealed that Tokyo would formally propose a new meeting of the Quad to be held in November on the sidelines of a series of multilateral summits in Asia.²⁹ Kano’s proposal was backed by the Trump Administration two days later.

FIGURE 1

Treaties and Partnerships Across the Quad



SOURCE: Heritage Foundation research.

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Delhi soon signaled it was amenable to the idea. “India is open to working with likeminded countries on issues that advance our interests and promote our viewpoint,” a government spokesman explained.³⁰ The first meeting of the Quad 2.0 was held less than one month later on the sidelines of the 31st ASEAN summit in Manila—the same venue where the four democracies had gathered almost one decade prior.³¹

Attended by two Indian joint secretaries, the U.S. Acting Assistant Secretary for South Asia, Japan’s deputy foreign minister, and Australia’s deputy secretary for foreign affairs and trade, the two-hour meeting included discussion on ways to achieve common goals and address common challenges in the region.³² One month later, the Quad received an explicit endorsement in the Trump Administration’s National Security Strategy of December 2017, which pledged to “increase quadrilateral co-operation with Japan, Australia and India.”³³

Why Now?

What was the catalyst for the return of the Quad? On one hand, it seems obvious: Between 2008 and 2017, cooperation among the four countries strengthened considerably, commensurate with rising threat perceptions vis-à-vis China. By 2017, Australia had become embroiled in a high-profile spat with Beijing over Chinese interference in Australia’s internal affairs.

The Trump Administration found itself sparring with Beijing over trade tensions, China's conduct in the South China Sea, human rights abuses in Tibet and Xinjiang, espionage concerns related to Chinese technology firms like Huawei, and Beijing's suppression of freedoms at home and abroad.

Yet, the Quad's fate has always rested in the hands of its most reluctant member, India. In the years following the Quad's collapse, India had considerably strengthened ties with the three other members, including buttressing the weakest link: Indian–Australia ties. In 2014, Australia and India reached a landmark nuclear cooperation deal that ended a contentious legacy on nuclear issues. In September 2015, the two held their first joint naval exercises.³⁴ Their first joint army exercises followed in 2017, the same year in which Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull visited Delhi and announced a new Australian–Indian “2+2” defense and foreign secretaries dialogue.³⁵

The greatest change, however, was seen in the transformation of India–U.S. relations. The two countries forged their first “Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia–Pacific and Indian Ocean Region” in 2015, the same year they renewed their 10-year defense partnership agreement. In 2016, after more than a decade of contentious negotiations, India and the U.S. inked a foundational “enabling” military interoperability agreement, the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA).³⁶ In June 2017, Prime Minister Narendra Modi became the first foreign leader hosted by President Trump for a dinner at the White House, and in July a new iteration of the Malabar exercise saw participation from Indian, Japanese, and U.S. aircraft carriers for the first time.³⁷

Meanwhile, ties between China and India had taken a turn for the worse. Prime Minister Modi entered office in 2014 confident he could turn a new page in the troubled relationship, but his early efforts to extend an olive branch to President Xi Jinping were, in Delhi's view, not reciprocated. President Xi's inaugural visit to Delhi in late 2014 was undermined almost before it began. Less than two weeks before his arrival, a Chinese submarine docked in neighboring Sri Lanka's Colombo port for the first time, a port that handles a large proportion of India's transshipment trade. Three days later, the People's Liberation Army launched an intrusion across the disputed China–India border in Ladakh, Kashmir, prompting an intervention by Indian border patrols and a 16-day military standoff that poisoned the atmosphere of Xi's visit.

In 2015, a Chinese firm agreed to assume control of Pakistan's Gwadar port, Beijing inked a pact to sell Islamabad eight submarines in its largest-ever defense export deal, and China unveiled plans to invest more than \$46 billion in a new Chinese–Pakistani Economic Corridor (CPEC) that

traverses Indian-claimed Kashmir.³⁸ In 2016, Beijing underestimated the ferocity of Delhi's reaction when it effectively blocked India's bid to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group,³⁹ undermining a U.S.-led effort to integrate India into the international nuclear regulatory regime. Later that year, China vetoed an attempt to sanction the head of a notorious Pakistan-based terrorist group at the United Nations.⁴⁰

Finally, in summer 2017, Chinese and Indian border forces found themselves locked in a confrontation in the Himalayas, the longest standoff between the two militaries over disputed territory in decades. The 73-day standoff on the Doklam Plateau near the tri-border junction where the Indian, Chinese, and Bhutan borders meet was resolved amicably, with Indian forces holding their ground until a mutual withdrawal was agreed. But it may well have played a role in India agreeing to the Quad's revival a few months later.

The Quad and the Belt and Road Initiative

It seems likely that the downturn in Chinese–Indian relations between 2014 and 2017 contributed to India's decision to support the Quad's revival. It is worth noting that, while tensions over the border disputes, nuclear issues, and terrorism played a role, it was another Chinese initiative that may have helped catalyze the Quad's rebirth.

First unveiled in 2013 and later billed as President Xi's signature foreign policy and external economic initiative, China's BRI represents an ambitious trillion-dollar infrastructure and connectivity road map for the Eurasian supercontinent. In a surprising break with its more deferential traditions, India quickly emerged as the lone and vocal critic of the BRI. Even as its neighbors moved to embrace the BRI—and the U.S. and Japan took a “wait-and-see” approach—Delhi refused to send participation to China's Belt and Road Summit in May 2017 while publicly and privately airing its concerns about the strategic implications of the BRI.

Some of India's complaints relate to CPEC, the multibillion-dollar sub-component of the BRI that traverses disputed territory in Kashmir. When Prime Minister Modi visited Beijing in 2015, he reportedly “very firmly” explained to President Xi that CPEC “is not acceptable to us.”⁴¹ Beyond these sovereignty-related concerns, Delhi repeatedly expressed reservations relating to (1) the lack of inclusivity and external consultations with the BRI; (2) suspicion of hidden strategic ambitions motivating China's economic investments; (3) concerns over the quality and environmental standards applied to BRI investments; and (4) the possibility that

participating nations would fall victim to a Chinese “debt trap,” breeding geopolitical subservience.

When it assumed office in early 2017, the Trump Administration assumed the same ambivalent posture toward the BRI adopted by its predecessor. It sent mid-level representation to the 2017 Belt and Road Summit but refrained from articulating a definitive position on the Chinese initiative. That changed in October 2017. With momentum building toward the revival of the Quad, just days after returning from a trip to India, U.S. Defense Secretary Mattis signaled for the first time that the U.S. harbored serious concerns about the BRI: “In a globalized world, there are many belts and many roads, and no one nation should put itself into a position of dictating ‘one belt, one road,’” Mattis declared in testimony before the U.S. Senate.⁴²

Within days of Mattis’s testimony, echoes of the U.S. shift on the BRI could be heard in Australia, when Frances Adamson, the secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs, became the first Australian official to voice reservations about the initiative: “Let’s look at the financing arrangements, let’s look at the governance arrangements because we know...infrastructure projects can come with very heavy price tags and the repayment of those loans can be absolutely crippling,” she warned.⁴³

Weeks later, Secretary of State Tillerson solidified America’s shift on the BRI, echoing many of the concerns raised by Delhi.⁴⁴ BRI investments, he explained in an October 2017 speech, were saddling countries “with enormous levels of debt,” while

too often foreign workers are brought in to execute these infrastructure projects. Financing is structured in a way that makes it very difficult for them to obtain future financing and oftentimes has very subtle triggers...that results in financing default and the conversion of debt to equity. So this is not a structure that supports the future growth of these countries.⁴⁵

One month after Secretary Tillerson’s speech, the Quad was reborn.

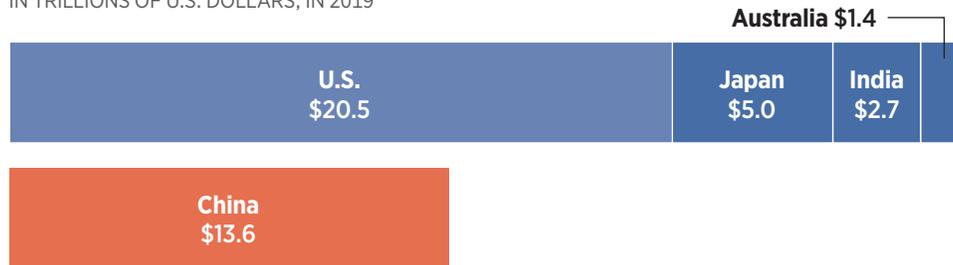
The Quad 2.0

Since its revival in late 2017, the Quad met twice a year in 2018 and 2019 and has pledged to keep that pace. At the January 2018 Raisina Dialogue in Delhi, top naval chiefs from the four countries were assembled on stage together. It was described as “no accident of scheduling but a calculated signal to the world—and most pointedly to China.”⁴⁶

CHART 2

GDP: China vs. the Quad

IN TRILLIONS OF U.S. DOLLARS, IN 2019



SOURCE: The World Bank Group, “GDP (current US\$)—China, Australia, Japan, India, United States,” https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?contextual=default&end=2018&locations=CN-AU-JP-IN-US&most_recent_value_desc=false&start=2000&view=chart (accessed April 1, 2020).

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As the gatherings became regularized, the U.S. and Japan began pushing to upgrade the Quad meetings to the level of ministers and Cabinet secretaries, but as late as September 2018, India, as it had done in the past, was “politely declining,” preferring to keep the meetings at the working level (assistant secretaries and joint secretaries).⁴⁷

By 2019, however, India was warming to the Quad and the Indo–Pacific concepts. In April, India established a new “Indo–Pacific division” in its Ministry of External Affairs. The move was designed to “integrate the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), ASEAN region and the Quad to the Indo-Pacific table.”⁴⁸ In May, former Foreign Secretary Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, a supporter of the Quad, was appointed India’s external affairs minister. In June, during a G20 summit in Osaka, Japan, Prime Minister Abe seated the four leaders of the Quad together, directly across the table from President Xi.

In New York in September 2019, with officials gathered for the 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly, the four countries held the first ministerial-level meeting of the Quad “to discuss collective efforts in our shared commitments and close cooperation on counter terrorism, mentoring, assistance in disaster relief, airtime security, cooperation, development, finance and cybersecurity efforts.”⁴⁹

The State Department readout explained that “the discussions really reflected shared values. It was a very forward leaning and ambitious conversation.”⁵⁰ It further noted that “Ambassadors and other senior officials

from our embassies have also met in several countries throughout the Indo-Pacific region to discuss ways to deepen cooperation among ourselves and with our partners.” According to a senior State Department official,

there’s recognition that in the past we didn’t have that similar likemindedness necessarily among the four partners, and over the past two years we’ve been able to demonstrate what’s changed. We have a shared evaluation of the security threats and the threats facing the region.... We each have different strengths and weaknesses. We each play different roles in different parts of the globe. But we have the same approach about what needs to animate diplomacy and economic development in the region.⁵¹

Two months later, on November 21 and 22, 2019, the four capitals hosted the first Quad counterterrorism (CT) exercise in India at the country’s National Investigation Agency. The tabletop exercise was designed to “assess and validate CT response mechanisms in the light of emerging terrorist threats as well as to provide opportunities to share best practices.”⁵²

In March 2020, representatives from the Quad assembled again for a videoconference to discuss the COVID-19 pandemic. This time they were joined by several new partners when officials from South Korea, Vietnam, and New Zealand joined the call. While it was not formally billed as a “Quad” initiative, it was described by *The Times of India* as a “Quad Plus video-conference.”⁵³ According to India’s Ministry of External Affairs, the seven countries “shared their assessments of the current situation with respect to COVID-19, and discussed ways to synergize their efforts to counter its spread.”⁵⁴ The seven participants “are expected to continue the conference call on a weekly basis, covering issues like vaccine development, challenges of stranded citizens, assistance to countries in need and mitigating the impact on the global economy.”

The Detractors

In a span of two years, the Quad was not only reborn, but expanded and upgraded. Yet, as it has been from the outset, the group is shadowed by its critics. In November 2017, Australian analyst James Curran claimed the Quad was “one of the most poorly explained concepts in recent strategic memory.”⁵⁵ He argued:

The chances of the Quad developing into an Asian NATO are fantasy. At present, it stands as little more than a diplomatic carcass hastily exhumed from

the graveyard of Asian regional architecture...questions remain. Not only about the Quad's credibility as a counterweight to China, but how it overcomes a complex array of competing national interests among the four: over border disputes, trade and maritime tensions.⁵⁶

As Dhruva Jaishankar argues, criticism of the Quad generally occupies one of two themes, both of which “fundamentally mischaracterize the Quad and its objectives.... One is alarmist: the Quad is a military alliance to contain China and its very idea is provocative, divisive and unnecessary.” The second reaction is one of scorn: “For skeptics, the Quad has never amounted much and is unlikely to, given various countries’ hesitations.”⁵⁷

In a speech delivered in November 2019, former Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating suggested that “the so-called ‘quadrilateral’ is not taking off.”⁵⁸ India’s former patron, Russia, has also been a consistent critic of the Quad, with Russian officials cautioning Delhi not to embrace the concept. In December 2017, for example, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov “made his displeasure clear over New Delhi’s warming up to the idea of a [Quad]. He suggested ‘that sustainable security architecture in the Asia Pacific region cannot be achieved through a bloc arrangement.’”⁵⁹

In March 2019, Admiral Phil Davidson, head of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, noted that in the past, India’s naval chief had “made it quite clear that there wasn’t an immediate potential for a quad.”⁶⁰ Quad critics immediately seized on his comments as evidence of Indian skepticism toward the grouping, unaware that he was referring to the potential for a loosely defined “naval quadrilateral.”

Defining the Quad

“When the Quad decides what it is and what it is doing, we will know what the impact is. I don’t know yet what it is about,” former Indian National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon pondered in May 2020.⁶¹ The supposed ambiguity surrounding the group and its purpose has offered its critics ammunition to portray the Quad in whatever critical light they see fit. As Dr. Tanvi Madan argues,⁶² the Quad “has variously been described as a U.S.-led project, an alliance, an axis of democracies, a security diamond, or a way to contain China.”

Such lofty descriptions persist today. One article from the *South China Morning Post* described the Quad as an “aegis” of democracies with “the potential to develop into an Asian NATO and dramatically change the region’s security landscape in the decades ahead.”⁶³

According to Indian External Affairs Minister Jaishankar, part of the problem is that “people are assigning to the Quad roles and responsibilities and expectations which were never intended to be those of the Quad.”⁶⁴ He argues:

This obsession that [the Quad] must have political-level visibility or that it must somehow be weaponized in some way—“the naval side is too weak”—I think this is just misunderstanding what it was about. It was meant as a diplomatic consultation and coordination forum of countries who have convergences, who do not agree on every issue but have substantial common ground. And to my mind you should leave it alone. It works. It has a good agenda [and] has continued to function well.... The quality of relations among the Quad, bilaterally, trilaterally, plurilaterally, it’s all good. And I think the Quad kind of pulls all the threads together.⁶⁵

Another source of confusion stems from the occasional mixed messages from the four governments. While the group has made no secret that shared concerns about China are a binding agent among the four democracies, the group’s members have consistently tried to stress that it does not constitute a China-containment alliance. Japanese Prime Minister Abe, for example, has argued: “This idea is not to contain China, nor to stand against [a] rising China. If China agrees with [the Free and Open Indo–Pacific] concept, of course we will work on them [sic] coming into the group.”⁶⁶ By contrast, during an October 2019 address to The Heritage Foundation, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo seemed to get ahead of his counterparts by suggesting that the Quad would “prove very important in the efforts ahead, ensuring that China retains only its proper place in the world.”⁶⁷

As this author has argued in the past, the Quad is best described as a symbolically and substantively important addition to an existing network of strategic and defense cooperation among four particularly capable democracies of the Indo–Pacific. What makes the Quad unique is that its members enjoy the will and the political, economic, and military capabilities to resist various forms of Chinese coercion and ensure that the Indo–Pacific remains free and open.

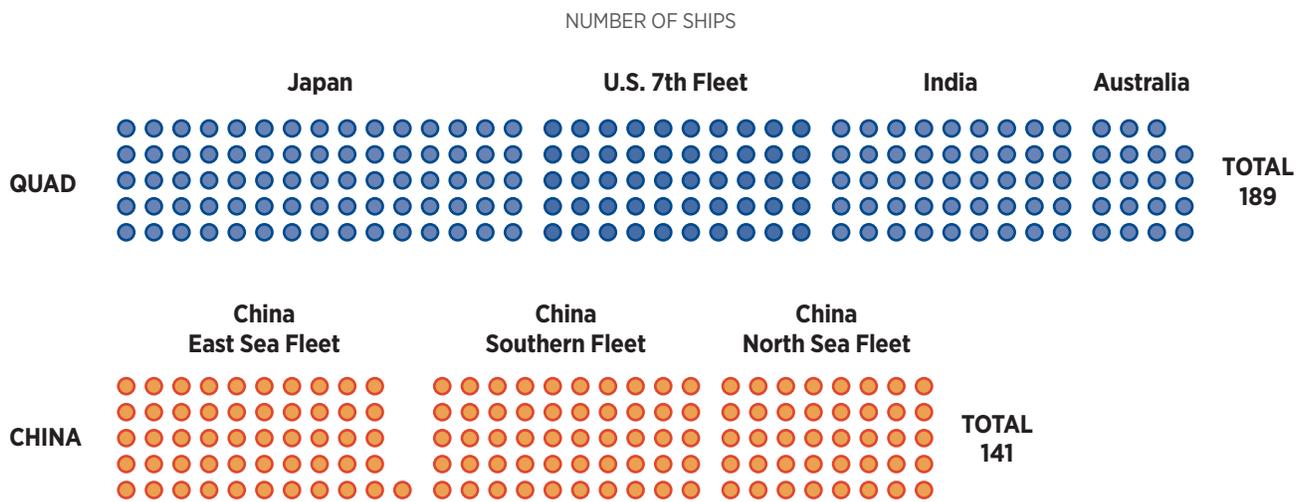
Recommendations for the U.S.

In order to sustain the momentum behind the revival and enhancement of the Quad, the U.S. government should:

FIGURE 2

Chinese and Quad Naval Forces in the Indo-Pacific

All three of China’s naval fleets operate in the Indo-Pacific, whereas the U.S. Navy is stretched across the globe. Only the U.S. 7th fleet has responsibility for the Indo-Pacific. When combined with the navies of Australia, Japan, and India, however, the Quad’s combined naval power in the Indo-Pacific exceeds China’s.



NOTES: Figures are estimates. Figures exclude patrol boats and other vessels smaller than a frigate.

SOURCES: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2019* (New York: Routledge, 2019), and Heritage Foundation research and analysis.

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Add Crisis Response, Humanitarian Aid, and Disaster Relief to the Quad’s Agenda. The first Quadrilateral Security Dialogue was held in 2007, but the group’s origins date back three years earlier. In 2004, a deadly tsunami ravaged the Indian Ocean region, killing more than 230,000 people. In response, Australia, Japan, India, and the U.S. organized an unprecedented quadrilateral naval relief effort, laying the groundwork for future quadrilateral cooperation. Humanitarian aid and disaster relief is an area where the four countries are highly capable, face little political resistance, and can expand their soft power reach in the Indo-Pacific. They should look for new ways to incorporate humanitarian assistance and disaster responses and activities into their regular agenda.

To this end, it was encouraging that on March 20, 2020, representatives from the Quad countries organized a video conference call to discuss ways

to combat the COVID-19 virus and were joined by officials from South Korea, Vietnam, and New Zealand. This group of seven countries should continue to meet regularly and coordinate responses to the pandemic. Doing so will offer the Quad a valuable opportunity to gain experience forming functional coalitions with Plus partners to tackle pressing regional challenges.

Organize a Quad Leaders Meeting. At the 2019 Group of 20 summit in Osaka, Japan, Indian Prime Minister Modi, Japanese Prime Minister Abe, and U.S. President Donald Trump held a trilateral meeting and shared a ceremonial “fist bump.” It was the second time the three leaders met in a trilateral format.

At a future venue they should seek a similar show of solidarity, albeit with the addition of Australia’s prime minister to provide a leaders-level endorsement of the Quad. President Trump should extend an invitation to the leaders of Australia, India, and Japan to hold a separate meeting and photo opportunity during the U.N. General Assembly in September 2020. India is often described as the most reluctant member of the Quad, and an appearance by Prime Minister Modi with other leaders of the Quad countries would send a signal to India’s bureaucracy and strategic community that the initiative has the full and enthusiastic endorsement of the prime minister’s office. There is ample precedent: Modi has taken the stage with Chinese and Russian leaders during gatherings of the Russia–India–China (RIC) trilateral meeting and with the leaders of Brazil, Russia, China, and South Africa during BRICS meetings.

Harness Quad Consensus. To date, the Quad countries have yet to issue a joint statement after meetings of the group, offering their own individual readouts instead. After the first Quad ministerial meeting in 2019, a State Department official downplayed concerns about the lack of a joint statement: “I think there’s been unnecessary Kremlinology in trying to parse statements that are issued by the participating countries.... [I]t’s what unites all the statements. And that is the avowed expression of support for the values that undergird a Free and Open Indo–Pacific, and there we’re rock solid.”⁶⁸

While it is true that there have been only slight variations in the readouts offered by each government, failing to issue joint statements is an unnecessary display of disunity in the face of overwhelming convergence and consensus. As noted, the four countries have articulated near-identical views of the underlying tenets and principles of the Free and Open Indo–Pacific strategy, including freedom of navigation, democratic governance, peaceful dispute settlement, a rules-based order, zero tolerance for terrorism and state sponsors of terrorism, respect for international law, the centrality of the ASEAN, and infrastructure and connectivity initiatives that are transparent, high-quality, and financially sustainable.

The Quad should consider issuing not just joint statements after their meetings, but also joint vision statements on a range of relevant and important topics that affect Indo–Pacific security. India, for example, has already issued joint vision statements on the Indo–Pacific with Japan⁶⁹ and the U.S.,⁷⁰ as well as with France.⁷¹

Coordinate to Give the Region More Infrastructure Options. While the Quad members are increasingly in alignment on the principles of the Free and Open Indo–Pacific strategy, there are several overlapping and redundant infrastructure initiatives currently underway.⁷² The Indo–Pacific democracies would be well-served by consolidating and unifying these visions and initiatives in ways that play to the relative strengths of the four parties while leaving the door open to collaboration with sympathetic external partners. During the Quad ministerial in late 2019, the four countries “explored ways to enhance coordination on quality infrastructure based upon international standards such as the G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment, and discussed strengthening partnerships with existing regional frameworks.”⁷³

President Trump took a step in the right direction in February 2020 when he and Prime Minister Modi supported a “partnership between USAID and India’s Development Partnership Administration for cooperation in third countries.” What’s more, President Trump announced that America’s new International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), which expands the U.S. government’s authorities and capabilities to support U.S. private-sector infrastructure investments abroad, would be establishing a “permanent presence in India this year.” The DFC will provide a “\$600 million financing facility for renewable energy projects in India.”

Fix the Better Utilization of Investments Leading to Development (BUILD) Act of 2018. In addition to enhancing practical cooperation on infrastructure with Quad members, the U.S. should reform the BUILD Act, the legislation that created the new DFC. Specifically, it should make countering Chinese influence in strategic arenas an explicit goal of the new institution. When it was proposed, the DFC was billed as a new tool to advance U.S. strategic interests and provide alternatives to countries seeking infrastructure investments without the strategic baggage accompanying China’s BRI. This should be made explicit in the DFC’s statement of policy, purpose, the establishment of enterprise funds, and in the reporting requirements.

Build the Blue Dot Network (BDN) with Strategic Purpose. At a time when China’s BRI has attracted growing global scrutiny, the U.S., Australia, and Japan, have unveiled the BDN initiative, designed to promote “high-quality trusted standards for global infrastructure development.” According to the State Department’s webpage on the initiative, the BDN will:

- “[B]ring together governments, the private sector, and civil society under shared standards for global infrastructure development,”
- [C]ertify infrastructure projects that demonstrate and uphold global infrastructure principles,” and
- This certification “will serve as a globally recognized symbol of market-driven, transparent and financially sustainable development projects.”

Given that three of the four Quad members are already involved—the U.S., through the DFC; Australia, through its Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; and Japan, through its Bank for International Construction—the group should welcome India as a key member of the BDN. During his trip to India in February 2020, President Trump discussed the BDN with Prime Minister Modi who “expressed interest in the concept.”

Appeal to ASEAN. Contrary to conventional wisdom, ASEAN does not view the Quad in overly negative terms. In one October 2018 survey by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, “a majority opinion (57%) across the ASEAN respondents supports the Quad initiative as having a useful role in regional security; only 10% of respondents oppose it, while 39% indicate they would support it in future if the Quad successfully materializes.”⁷⁴ A plurality of respondents thought the Quad “complements” existing ASEAN-centered regional frameworks. And while 19 percent feared that the anti-China nature of the Quad was dangerous, nearly twice as many, 35 percent, thought an “anti-China bulwark” was necessary.

Similarly, an ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute “State of Southeast Asia” survey released in January 2020 showed that 45.8 percent of respondents thought the Quad had a “positive” or “very positive” impact, while only 16.2 percent thought it had a “negative” or “very negative” impact. Some 38 percent believed it had no impact at all.⁷⁵ Meanwhile, 61.6 percent of all Southeast Asians surveyed thought their countries should “participate in Quad activities” versus 38.4 percent opposed. Overall, Cambodians and Laotians had the least-positive views of the Quad; Filipinos and Vietnamese had the most-positive views.

In their vision for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, Quad members have repeatedly stressed the importance of “ASEAN centrality” as a key feature of the regional diplomatic architecture. In June 2016, ASEAN released a strategy document titled “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific,” which stated: “ASEAN may also seek to develop, where appropriate, cooperation

with other regional and sub-regional mechanisms in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions on specific areas of common interests to complement the relevant initiatives.” The Quad should seek to harness consensus with ASEAN as a whole, emphasizing the shared interests among the two as articulated in the Outlook’s “Principles” section, while promoting cooperation in the areas prioritized in the Outlook’s “Areas of Cooperation” section: maritime cooperation, connectivity, U.N. sustainable development goals, and economics.

Close the Loop with India and Australia: 2+2 and Malabar. Three of the four Quad countries enjoy ministerial-level “2+2” defense and foreign ministers dialogues with one another. India established ministerial level “2+2” defense and foreign ministers dialogue with the U.S. in 2018, and with Japan in 2019. It currently enjoys a “2+2” with Australia established in 2017, but the meeting is at the level of defense and foreign secretaries, one rung below a full ministerial meeting. The two should upgrade their “2+2” to the ministerial level to close the loop and complete the square.

Despite public and private requests every year since 2015, India has been notoriously reluctant to invite Australia to participate in the Malabar naval exercises, which have become an India-Japan-U.S. trilateral affair. Ideally, Delhi would overcome long-standing but unconvincing reservations about Australia’s participation. In the event it does not, there are numerous other naval-exercise formats and groupings that should be explored. For example, in early May 2019, the navies of India, Japan, the Philippines, and the U.S. conducted joint transit and routine exercises in the South China Sea, coincidentally overlapping with a U.S. freedom of navigation operation near one of China’s artificial islands.⁷⁶

Explore New Forms of Defense Cooperation. The Trump Administration’s proposed National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) 2021 included a plan to train air force pilots from Australia, India, and Japan at the Anderson Air Force base in Guam. This, and other creative multi-lateral training exercises and initiatives involving Quad militaries should be supported by Congress. For its part, India might also consider hosting a series of exercises at its Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) with Quad members. Positioned at the entrance to the Indian Ocean, at the mouth of the Strait of Malacca, the ANC would also offer an ideal location for a maritime-domain-awareness fusion center. In June 2020, amid a prolonged standoff at the China-India border, former Indian Ambassador to Japan Sujan Chinoy urged the Indian government to “open up” the Andaman and Nicobar islands “to the friendly navies of the US, Japan, Australia and France, among others.”

Boost Non-Traditional Security Cooperation. As Indian analyst Anil Wadha has argued,⁷⁷ there are numerous areas where the Quad countries can explore greater collaboration in non-traditional security arenas. He recommends elevating collaboration on mine-sweeping technologies, anti-piracy operations, pollution control, pandemic responses, joint escorts of international shipping, force structuring, coast guard collaboration, counter-proliferation initiatives, and exchange of information on white shipping.

Expand Cooperation on Space and Maritime Domain Awareness. The Heritage Foundation's Dean Cheng has argued⁷⁸ that it is in the mutual interest of all Quad members to add space cooperation to their agenda and to enhance coordination "on such issues as space situational awareness, space industrial policy, and perhaps even key space measures." He suggests the creation of a common pool of commercial imaging data that could "be used by each state to support their respective security policies, but with a common set of analytical methods." He further urges the four countries to increase information sharing on the formulation of best practices in space, noting that all but Australia are already members of the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee.

Cheng also recommends expanding cooperation in maritime-domain awareness and data sharing, suggesting "the Quad nations' navies and maritime law enforcement agencies interact more regularly, in order to familiarize themselves with each other's operating patterns, as well as the local environmental conditions."⁷⁹ He adds: "Consideration should be given to forward deploying, or at least regularly rotating, ships from the respective coast guards to each other's ports, in addition to naval visits."

Conclusion

The Quad is one of the most important new multilateral groupings to emerge in the 21st century. As a recent report⁸⁰ from The Heritage Foundation observes,

The Quad represents not just a quarter of the world's population (1.8 billion people) but a little over a quarter of the world's economic activity (measured by GDP). A quarter of all global foreign direct investment flows (averaging over \$380 billion a year) comes from Quad countries. And by 2018, the Quad held a foreign direct investment stock of \$8.7 trillion – or roughly one dollar for every four dollars ever investment abroad.

A great deal of ink has been spilled dissecting the failure of the Quad during its first iteration. Its great flaw, however, was not its underlying

purpose, agenda, or membership; it was its timing. In 2007, Beijing was still effectively marketing a soft power offensive while the four democracies were struggling to reach internal and external consensus on the nature of the challenge that China was posing, and the appropriate response.

The Quad 1.0 collapsed in early 2008, at the dawn of a new, more assertive Chinese disposition. The Quad has returned because its reason for being is more compelling now than it was a decade ago. That is especially true for India, once considered the group's weakest link. Over the past decade, India's concerns about China have risen, as its comfort with the other democracies has grown.

Since its revival in November 2017, the Quad has met five times, upgraded the dialogue to the ministerial level, and added new elements to quadrilateral discussions, including cybersecurity and counterterrorism. At each turn, it has defied critics that have sought to portray it as either too aggressive toward China, or as too weak and toothless to be effective. Even if the Quad is moving at a deliberative pace, the institutional framework for quadrilateral cooperation has been established and can be scaled up quickly in response to future threats.

Despite gaining some momentum the past few years, the Quad 2.0 still faces some important questions. For example, it has yet to survive a major change in government among any of its member states. All four governments are currently led by conservative-leaning parties seen as more favorable to the Quad as well as to more forward-leaning initiatives in the Indo-Pacific. At this time, there is nothing to suggest that mainstream liberal parties in the four democracies are disinclined toward the Quad or would pursue its disbanding. The sting of the dissolution of the Quad 1.0 still lingers.

Nevertheless, changes in government are unpredictable and it is at least worth acknowledging the unusual alignment that now exists: It is hard to envision another four governments more favorably inclined toward the Quad than those in power today. They have used the time wisely to establish a solid foundation for the Quad; they should now focus on consolidation through some of the recommendations listed in this *Backgrounders*.

Ultimately, the Quad is likely to endure because the four democracies have a shared interest in seeing it endure, and because it is undergirded by the fundamental principle that countries speak with a stronger voice when they stand together. It is also worth remembering that China's rivalries with India and Japan predate its contemporary friction with the U.S. Their conflicts of interest and competing territorial claims are deeper and sharper than America's grievances with China, even if Delhi and Tokyo do a better job diplomatically masking their differences with Beijing. They both have

compelling strategic incentives to align more closely with the U.S., whose intelligence and military capabilities, strategic influence, and global reach remain unrivaled.

For its part, Australia has an abiding interest in preventing its neighborhood from becoming a sphere of Chinese domination and a history of intimate strategic collaboration with the U.S. And, America recognizes that confronting the challenges posed by a rising China will be exponentially more difficult without committed and capable partners in the Indo-Pacific.

The Quad still has some work to do developing the weakest side of its square, which will require overcoming some Indian reservations about Australia. The country is still seen in some influential corners of Delhi as the least reliable and least valuable member of the Quad, at best, and indebted to China and compromised by Chinese influence, at worst.

It is an assessment largely detached from reality. After Japan, Australia is America's most reliable and capable military ally in the Indo-Pacific. More important, Canberra has demonstrated as much resolve in dealing with Beijing as has any of its Indo-Pacific neighbors. That China is Australia's largest trading partner is irrelevant: China is the largest trading partner of all four members of the Quad.

Australia is the only member of the Quad aside from the U.S. doing its own version of freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea. Most important, Canberra took a key stand in opposition to two of China's most important and divisive initiatives: 5G technology and the BRI. In fact, Australia led the global charge as the first country to bar Chinese telecom operator Huawei from developing its 5G infrastructure.

With India taking the lead in opposing the BRI, and Australia taking the lead in opposing China's 5G expansion, two strategic bellwethers of this era, it is notable that all four countries of the Quad now oppose two of President Xi's key initiatives. In some ways, that is what sets the Quad apart: the ability and willingness of its members to say "no," and to resist Chinese coercion tactics.

When China tested Japan's resolve around the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, and tested India's resolve on the Doklam plateau, both democracies stood their ground. When the Chinese military tried to intimidate Australia and the U.S. from operating in portions of the South China Sea, they persisted, unwilling to compromise their freedom of navigation.

What binds the Quad's members and separates them from other groupings is their cumulative power, their shared threat assessments, their shared vision for the region, and their willingness to defy Beijing when necessary.

In short, they have maintained their sovereignty and independence in the shadow of China's rise and, if they stick together, chances are good that it will stay that way.

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