

# An Agenda for the 2021 Quad Summit: Five Next Steps

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## KEY TAKEAWAYS

The Quad is made up of four democracies with common security concerns, a shared strategic outlook, and the collective power and will to resist Chinese coercion.

The first-ever in-person meeting of Quad leaders this week will send a powerful signal to adversaries abroad and critics at home that the Quad is here to stay.

The Quad must seize the opportunity to elevate cooperation even further while advancing a positive agenda for security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.

The Quad, the multilateral grouping joining Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S., is thriving. Revived during the Trump Administration in 2017 after a 10-year hiatus, the Biden Administration wasted no time demonstrating its commitment to the Quad and is this week set to take the initiative to new heights structurally. The leaders are meeting for the first time in person. The substance of the discussions should be similarly ambitious.

The Biden Administration organized a ministerial meeting of the Quad countries just weeks after its January inauguration. In March, the leaders of the four Quad countries held their first-ever virtual summit. There they issued a “Spirit of the Quad” joint statement that committed them to “promoting a free, open rules-border, rooted in international law to advance security and prosperity and counter threats both in

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the Indo-Pacific and beyond.”<sup>1</sup> They also formed a new COVID-19 Vaccine Partnership, a Climate Working Group, and a Critical and Emerging Technology Working Group.

The Quad capitals also committed to holding a future Quad summit in person. This ambition is set to be realized on September 24 in Washington, DC, one day before the U.N. General Assembly meets in New York. President Joe Biden will host Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, who recently announced he would be stepping down following new elections on September 29. (The Quad enjoys strong support across the political spectrum in Japan, and a change of government will not affect Japan’s commitment.)

The in-person Quad summit represents the culmination of two years of remarkable progress and bipartisan support for the Quad. Since 2019, the four capitals have upgraded regular Quad meetings to the ministerial level and revived the quadrilateral Malabar naval exercise. They have also formed a Quad-Plus group of seven countries—adding New Zealand, South Korea, and Vietnam—to coordinate responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, the Quad has broadened its agenda to include counterterrorism exercises and, more recently, COVID-19, climate change, and emerging technology cooperation. Meanwhile, mid-ranking diplomats and embassy officials from the four democracies now meet periodically in Quad and non-Quad countries to compare notes and coordinate strategies.

While this progress is to be applauded, there is still more to be done. What follows are five next steps that should be addressed at this week’s Quad summit.

## Recommit to COVID-19 Deliverables

At the virtual Quad summit in March, the four countries pledged to “join forces to expand safe, affordable, and effective vaccine production and equitable access” and establish a vaccine “expert working group.”<sup>2</sup> The U.S. also committed to “produce at least 1 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines by the end of 2022.”<sup>3</sup> Japan, meanwhile, is in discussions to provide concessional loans for the Government of India to expand manufacturing for COVID-19 vaccines for export.

Many of these commitments were made before India suffered a devastating “second wave” of COVID-19 in the spring, and before the Delta variant produced a rise in cases in the U.S. and beyond. Despite these challenges, the Quad must remain committed to delivering on its vaccine promises. The

world is watching, and the Quad needs to demonstrate that it can effectively wield soft power and contribute to global public goods. Many countries, including in Southeast Asia, see this as even more important than the Quad's contribution to regional security.

## Put Taiwan on the Agenda

At the August 2021 Quad “Senior Officials Meeting,” the four countries “discussed the importance of peace and security in the Taiwan Strait.”<sup>4</sup> Whether in a joint statement or individual statements, all Quad members should make it known they are actively discussing, and concerned about, the threatening gestures China is making toward Taiwan.

Members should also make clear they are looking for ways, in the context of their own China policies, to support Taiwan. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, urgent support is needed for Taiwan's meaningful participation in the World Health Organization/World Health Assembly as recently endorsed by the G-7. Other organizations could include the International Civil Aviation Organization and InterPol.

## Consider Observers for the Malabar Exercise

The Malabar exercise began as a bilateral affair between India and the U.S. in the 1990s. In 2007, after the first meeting of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a special edition of the Malabar exercise included all four Quad countries (plus Singapore). This expanded Malabar exercise was abandoned when the Quad 1.0 collapsed in early 2008, but Japan rejoined Malabar as a permanent participant in 2015, and Australia followed suit in 2020.

While permanent membership in Malabar should remain fixed for now, the Quad should consider inviting partner nations to serve in temporary roles, either as observers or Malabar-Plus partner participants. The British and French navies are making growing numbers of forays in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea and have been active in helping monitor compliance with U.N. sanctions on North Korea. Given their capacities, the recently concluded AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom, United States) agreement, and steadily growing U.S.–France naval cooperation in the broader region, the U.K. and France would make strong candidates. Indian Ocean countries like Bangladesh, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka could also be considered as rotating observers or temporary participants, as could the Philippines, Singapore, and South Korea.

Other opportunities for Quad-plus exercises, like the French-led La Perouse exercise in the Bay of Bengal in early 2021, should also be pursued.

## Improve Quad Cooperation on Regional Infrastructure

Quad members are increasingly aligned in their vision for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific and their concerns about China's Belt and Road Initiative as the dominant regional infrastructure initiative. Quad countries have already "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."<sup>5</sup>

Yet while the four capitals have launched several parallel unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral regional infrastructure initiatives in recent years, there has been no signature Quad infrastructure initiative. The four countries should remedy that, recognizing that there is an urgent need for infrastructure investments and a growing appetite among regional capitals for higher-quality, more reliable alternatives to the Belt and Road Initiative. An enterprise initially targeted at the island states of the Indian Ocean and Oceania would make strategic sense and would serve as a valuable "test bed" for a project that could be scaled up and expanded in the future.

## Explore New Forms of Quad Defense Cooperation

The 2021 National Defense Authorization Act included a plan to train air force pilots from Australia, India, and Japan at Anderson Air Force base in Guam. This, and other creative multilateral training exercises and initiatives involving Quad militaries should be supported and explored further. 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 mouth of the Strait of Malacca, the ANC is ideally positioned for intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea and might be considered to host a future Quad maritime domain awareness fusion center.

## Conclusion

The Quad has consistently defied skeptics and the first-ever in-person meeting of Quad leaders this week will send a powerful signal to adversaries abroad and critics at home that the Quad is here to stay. As four

democracies with common security concerns, a shared strategic outlook, and the collective power and will to resist Chinese coercion, the Quad must seize the opportunity to elevate cooperation even further while advancing a positive agenda for security and prosperity in the Indo–Pacific. The world is watching.

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## Endnotes

1. Press release, "Quad Leaders Joint Statement: The Spirit of the Quad," White House, March 12, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/12/quad-leaders-joint-statement-the-spirit-of-the-quad/> (accessed September 23, 2021).
2. Ibid.
3. White House, "Fact Sheet: Quad Summit," March 12, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/12/fact-sheet-quad-summit/> (accessed September 23, 2021).
4. News release, "U.S.-Australia-India-Japan Consultations (the "Quad") Senior Officials Meeting," U.S. Department of State, August 12, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-australia-india-japan-consultations-the-quad-senior-officials-meeting/> (accessed September 23, 2021).
5. News release, "U.S.-Australia-India-Japan Consultations ("The Quad")," U.S. Department of State, November 4, 2019, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/u-s-australia-india-japan-consultations-the-quad-2/index.html> (accessed September 23, 2021).