



THE QUAD'S GROWING UNITY IN RHETORIC AND GOALS

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An earlier version of this article was published in [The Quint](#).

Over the past year, [China](#) has adopted an increasingly forward-looking defense posture. It has flown its fighter jets over Taiwan, [built air bases](#) in the territories bordering India and, most recently, [voiced its opposition](#) to Australia buying nuclear-powered submarines from the United States and United Kingdom.

Not so long ago, China's Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, denigrated the [Quadrilateral Security Dialogue \(or "Quad"\)](#) grouping, saying it would "dissipate like sea foam" in the Indian Ocean, and called it nothing more than a "headline-grabbing" exercise.

It is worth pondering why a "dissipating sea foam" suddenly warrants such a proactive defense posture.

Following in Trump's footsteps

For starters, Quad nations have begun to turn words into action. Australia cancelled port projects that were part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), embarked on a mission to find alternative markets for its exports, and cemented ties with India and the United States, taking the initiative to diversify its supply chains. India went a step further and instituted Foreign Direct Investment rules that selectively kept Chinese investment out. This measure aided in fulfilling the

Modi administration's [Atmanirbhar Bharat](#) ("self-reliant India") goals, while simultaneously reducing the Indian economy's over-reliance on Chinese imports.

With the erstwhile hesitant partners of Australia and India jumping all in for the Quad grouping, the United States and Japan have capitalized on policy convergence and pulled the Quad along.

In the United States, President Biden has followed in [President Trump's footsteps](#) and doubled down on the Quad grouping by expanding its scope, to address economic challenges such as supply-chain vulnerabilities, acts of economic coercion in the Indo-Pacific region, and the economic underpinnings of [China's human rights violations](#). This includes adding new names to the list of those sanctioned over Hong Kong's eroding freedoms, banning imports tied to forced labor in Xinjiang, and continuing the Trump policy of rejecting student/research visas for those suspected of having ties to the People's Liberation Army. While Beijing once hoped to see a change in the US approach to China with the new administration, recent signs suggest that it now accepts that tensions are here to stay.

Biden's own approach to the Quad appears to be an extension of his overall view of America's role in the world. In the Quad virtual leaders' summit in March, he and the heads of the other three participating states released a statement proclaiming that a "free, open, inclusive, and resilient Indo-Pacific requires that critical and emerging technology is governed and operates according to shared interests and values." In June at the [G7 Summit](#), he revealed that a figure in the Chinese leadership attempted to pre-empt his participation in the Quad ahead of his inauguration, and while he did not reveal that official—or his response at the time—his actions at the G7 reveal his answer: he used the forum as an opportunity to tout [Build Back Better](#), an initiative to meet the infrastructure needs of low-income countries, as an alternative to the BRI.

"I think we're in a contest—not with China per se, but a contest with autocrats, autocratic governments around the world, as to whether or not democracies

can compete with them in the rapidly changing 21st century,” he said at the G7.

The paradox of the Quad

The four countries must now sustain this momentum to secure those values and their economic interests. At times faulted for lacking an economic strategy for the region to match its security objectives, the United States should build off the Biden administration’s supply chain review and call for “resilient, diverse and secure” supply chains. Furthermore, the [Supply Chain Resilience Initiative](#) launched by India, Australia and Japan needs US buy-in.

The Economic Prosperity Network (EPN), announced in the latter days of the Trump administration and expanding beyond the Quad to the nations of Vietnam, South Korea, and New Zealand, must continue.

But to do so will also require careful, almost paradoxical, framing. As Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has put it, the Quad must stand “for something” rather than against something.

Framing the Quad or the EPN as anti-China ventures will be off-putting to Seoul, whose administration is still engaging Beijing both for economic reasons and to achieve better ties with North Korea. Framing them as anti-communist will complicate engagement with Hanoi, which is, despite its populace’s love of the free market, still officially a one-party communist state. Many in Southeast Asia share Vietnam’s reluctance to take sides in the mounting US-China competition. Pushing an anti-China narrative will make the coordination required to thwart China’s ambitions impossible.

Over the past five years, China has used different forms of diplomacy to win [friends and allies in the Indo-Pacific](#), including by coercion, if necessary. From debt-trap to Wolf Warrior to (most recently) vaccine diplomacy, China and its diplomats have not refrained from using any means necessary to attain foreign policy goals. While a few Indo-Pacific nations have resisted Chinese coercion, many do not have the economic or military might to face China’s incursion into their societies, markets, or their sovereign territories.

To meet this challenge, the nations of the Quad should coordinate their resources, but also their rhetoric. The diverging foreign policy priorities of Quad nations has been a perennial threat to a strategy of countering China’s growing influence in Asia. The Quad, therefore, should develop a positive agenda for the Indo-Pacific: upholding rules and norms of behavior in the region, as well as the free flow of goods, services, and ideas.

It just so happens that the greatest challenge to those rules and norms is China, and Beijing is starting to recognize what a coordinated response to its activities might mean.

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