



## ***20 YEARS OF THE QUAD: AN ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE***

BY ERIK LENHART AND MICHAEL TKACIK

*Erik Lenhart ([erik.lenhart1@gmail.com](mailto:erik.lenhart1@gmail.com)) holds an MA in political science from Charles University and is a former Deputy Chief of the Mission of the Slovak Republic in Tokyo.*

*Michael Tkacik ([mtkacik@sfasu.edu](mailto:mtkacik@sfasu.edu)) holds a PhD from the University of Maryland and a JD from Duke University. He has published articles in a variety of journals. Tkacik's current research interests include the implications of China's rise, China's behavior in the South China Sea, and nuclear weapons policy across Asia. He is a professor of government and director of the School of Honors at Stephen F. Austin State University in Texas.*

### **Quad's Institutionalization**

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, commonly known as the Quad, has evolved significantly since its inception. The Quad, comprising the United States, India, Japan, and Australia, was initially formed in response to the devastating 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami. This natural disaster catalyzed the collaboration of these four nations, which came together to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. What began as an emergency response has grown into a robust partnership aimed at ensuring a free, open, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.

One of the pivotal figures in the institutionalization and strategic direction of the Quad was Japan's former prime minister, Abe Shinzo. In 2012, Abe articulated the concept of the "Asia's Democratic Security Diamond," which envisioned a strategic alliance

among Japan, India, Australia, and the United States to safeguard the maritime commons stretching from the Indian Ocean to the Western Pacific. Abe's vision was instrumental in shaping the Quad's strategic framework, emphasizing the importance of democratic values and maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region. Abe further refined his vision in 2016 in the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy. The objective of FOIP is to establish a rules-based international order and consolidate principles such as free trade, freedom of navigation, and the rule of law, which are essential for the stability and prosperity of the region of the Indo-Pacific. In 2017 Japan expanded its definition of the Indo-Pacific geographic boundaries. Foreign Minister Kono Taro stated in a [speech at Columbia University](#) in September 2017 that "the Indo-Pacific Ocean links rapidly growing Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and North America." The Quad experienced a period of dormancy during the administrations of US President Barack Obama and Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. Both leaders prioritized engagement with China and sought to avoid actions that could be perceived as containment. This approach led to a temporary halt in Quad activities, as the focus shifted towards bilateral and multilateral engagement with China. The interruption of the Quad during this period highlighted the challenges of balancing strategic interests and diplomatic relations in the Indo-Pacific region.

The Quad was revived during Abe's second tenure as prime minister and further bolstered under the Trump administration. Abe's persistent advocacy for the Quad and his strategic vision laid the groundwork for its revival. In 2017, the Quad was reconstituted, signaling a renewed commitment to regional security and cooperation. The Trump administration played a crucial role in institutionalizing the Quad, with regular meetings at the foreign ministerial and leaders' levels. Despite then-President Donald Trump's transactional approach to foreign policy, the Quad's revival under his administration demonstrated a strong commitment to countering China's assertiveness in the region.

Under President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Kishida Fumio, the Quad has further institutionalized its efforts, underscoring the importance of the Quad as a key component of both states' Indo-Pacific

strategies. The Quad Leaders' Summits have become a regular feature, with the 2024 summit marking the fourth such meeting. The institutionalization of the Quad has involved the establishment of dedicated working groups and initiatives across various domains, including maritime security, cybersecurity, infrastructure development, and health security.

### **Quad initiatives and achievements**

Over the past two decades, the Quad has undertaken numerous initiatives aimed at addressing the region's most pressing challenges. These initiatives span various domains, including maritime security, cybersecurity, infrastructure development, and health security. One of the notable achievements of the Quad is the establishment of the Quad Fellowship program, which fosters educational exchanges and research collaboration among the member countries.

In recent years, the Quad has also focused on enhancing regional maritime security through initiatives such as the Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific and the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness. These initiatives aim to improve the region's capacity to monitor and respond to maritime threats, thereby ensuring the safety and security of the Indo-Pacific waters.

Furthermore, the Quad has made significant strides in addressing global health challenges. The Quad Health Security Partnership, launched in 2023, seeks to enhance health security coordination in the Indo-Pacific region. The Quad Cancer Moonshot, another notable initiative, focuses on combating cervical cancer in the region. These efforts underscore the Quad's commitment to improving the well-being of the Indo-Pacific population.

The Quad has also focused on delivering public goods in infrastructure building. The Quad Infrastructure Investment and Development Partnership aims to mobilize resources and expertise to support high-quality infrastructure projects across the Indo-Pacific region. This initiative seeks to address the region's infrastructure needs while promoting sustainable development and economic growth.

### **Quad's vision for the future: Potential and challenges**

As the Quad looks to the future, it envisions a region that is peaceful, stable, and prosperous, underpinned by effective regional institutions and a commitment to democratic values. However, the path forward is fraught with potential challenges that could impact the Quad's effectiveness and cohesion.

One of the significant challenges is the return of Donald Trump to the US presidency. While Trump's first administration did contribute to the revival and initial momentum of the Quad, his second term could present challenges for the grouping. Trump's foreign policy, marked by unpredictability could undermine the Quad's efforts to present a united front and maintain a coherent strategy in the Indo-Pacific. His focus on bilateral engagements over multilateral cooperation, coupled with strained alliances due to demands for increased burden-sharing, could weaken the Quad's collective efforts. Additionally, Trump's history of disengagement from multilateral agreements and a potential focus on domestic issues over international commitments might hinder the Quad's ability to implement long-term strategies and address regional challenges effectively.

Another challenge lies in the leadership and international experience of Japan's new prime minister, Ishiba Shigeru. While Ishiba has extensive experience in Japanese politics, his lack of strong factional support within the Liberal Democratic Party and limited international exposure could pose challenges to his leadership. In contrast, former prime ministers Abe and Kishida had more robust international profiles and were able to navigate complex diplomatic landscapes effectively. The fact that Ishiba leads a minority government forces him to mainly focus on domestic issues, which leaves him less space for international politics.

India's relationship with Russia adds another layer of complexity to the Quad's dynamics. India has historically maintained strong ties with Russia, which has implications for its alignment with other Quad members on certain security issues. India's reluctance to fully align with the Quad on some security areas, particularly those involving Russia, underscores the challenges of achieving complete cohesion within the grouping.

The Quad members—United States, India, Japan, and Australia—all have uneasy relations with China. China is an important trade partner for these countries, but it is also perceived as a security risk. The Senkaku Islands dispute between Japan and China, China's assertive actions in the South China Sea, and clashes with India in the Himalayan border region are key points of contention. These tensions highlight the delicate balance the Quad must maintain between economic interests and security concerns.

Despite these challenges, the Quad remains committed to its vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific. The grouping's focus on addressing complex regional challenges, from climate change to cybersecurity, positions it as a critical player in the region's future. As the Quad continues to evolve, its ability to adapt to changing geopolitical dynamics and maintain strong leadership will determine its long-term impact on the Indo-Pacific region.

### **Recommendations**

In 2025, the Quad could focus on enhancing joint naval exercises and maritime patrols to ensure freedom of navigation and counter illicit activities in the Indo-Pacific. Additionally, developing strategies to bolster supply chain resilience, particularly in critical sectors like semiconductors and rare earth elements, would help mitigate disruptions and reduce dependency on single sources. Clearly articulating that the Quad is not an anti-China alliance would also help gain broader acceptance and cooperation from other nations in the region. By concentrating on these areas, the Quad can enhance its strategic partnerships and contribute to a stable, prosperous, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region.

*PacNet commentaries and responses represent the views of the respective authors. Alternative viewpoints are always welcomed and encouraged.*