

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue's Path to Institutionalization

A He and Feng Perspective

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Abstract

To maintain the power balance in the Indo-Pacific region, power dynamics are shifting, and small-scale alliances are expanding. This emerging arena of power struggles serves as the battleground for great-power competition, each vying to assert and uphold regional influence. As a counterweight to China's ascendant hegemony, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) emerges as a prominent and viable option within the region. Nevertheless, the institutionalization of the Quad presents inherent challenges. Addressing these challenges, this article employs Kai He and Huiyun Feng's leadership-institution model of institution building to conceptualize the Quad's institutionalization. This model delineates two forms of leadership: executive and ideational, which in combination yield four distinct institutional types. Through this framework, it becomes evident that the Quad possesses the requisite elements to evolve into a deeply institutionalized alliance.

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), comprising Australia, India, Japan, and the United States, sprang into action in response to the devastation wrought by the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004. All four major naval powers united under the banner of the Tsunami Core Group to deliver humanitarian and disaster relief.¹ Spearheading efforts to transform this coalition of democratic nations into an institution was Japan's prime minister, Shinzo Abe. In 2007, Abe formalized these efforts during a meeting of the group, though no official document was released.²

During the Malabar Naval Exercise of 2007, Quad members, including Japan and Australia, participated.³ However, staunch criticism from China, followed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's resignation and the election of Australia's Prime

¹ "The Quad," Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government, 3 August 2023, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/>.

² Brahma Chellaney, "Quad Initiative: An inharmonious concert of democracies," *Japan Times*, 19 July 2007, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/>.

³ Associated Press, "What is the Quad, and how did it come about?," *The Guardian*, 24 May 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/>.

Minister Kevin Rudd in 2017, advocating for a less confrontational approach with China, led to the untimely demise of the group.⁴ Nonetheless, the concept persisted in Shinzo Abe's mind, evident in his 2012 article, "Asia's Democratic Security Diamond."⁵

Each participating government clarified that Quad 1.0, as it was later dubbed, would lack military aspects and would not target any specific country. Despite this, both China and Russia viewed it as a covert military alliance, with China likening it to an Asian NATO.⁶

The idea of Quad was again resurrected in 2017, later termed Quad 2.0. The Quad members convened during the ASEAN Summit in Manila, Philippines.⁷ However, instead of issuing joint statements, the four nations released four separate press releases, each outlining distinct regional strategic goals and preferences.⁸

Despite these disparities, the Quad gained momentum, culminating in its first ministerial-level meeting on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly on 27 September 2019.⁹ In 2021, the Quad furthered its institutionalization, as Quad leaders met virtually in the first leader-level summit on March 12, 2021, and also released a joint statement titled "The Spirit of the Quad."¹⁰ However, the tone of prominent officials from member countries differed on many counts. For example, the Biden administration emphasized the point that "Quad is an unofficial gathering" and added that there was no "military dimension to it or security dimension."¹¹ This was just before the first in-person meeting of the Quad members. Former Indian Army Chief General MM Narvane, on the other hand, stated that, unlike

⁴ Bhupinder Singh and Sarah Teo, "Introduction: Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific," in *Minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific: The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism, and ASEAN*, ed. Bhupinder Singh, and Sarah Teo (Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 8.

⁵ Shinzō Abe, "Asia's Democratic Security Diamond," *Project Syndicate*, 27 December 2012, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/>.

⁶ Shyam Saran, "The Quadrilateral: Is it an alliance or an alignment?," *Hindustan Times*, 25 November 2017, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/>.

⁷ Ankit Panda, "US, Japan, India, and Australia Hold Working-Level Quadrilateral Meeting on Regional Cooperation," *The Diplomat*, 13 November 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/>.

⁸ Jagannath P. Panda, "India's Call on China in the Quad: A Strategic Arch between Liberal and Alternative Structures," *Rising Power Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (2018): 83–111, <https://risingpowersproject.com/>.

⁹ Indrani Bagchi, "Quad foreign ministers to meet on sidelines of UNGA," *Times of India*, 21 September 2019, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/>.

¹⁰ "Quad Leaders' Joint Statement: 'The Spirit of the Quad'" (press release, The White House, 12 March 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>).

¹¹ "Background Press Call by Senior Administration Officials Previewing the Quad Leaders Summit and Bilateral Meeting with India" (press release, The White House, 23 September 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>.

NATO, the Quad would concentrate on military cooperation among its member countries rather than building a military alliance.¹²

The objective of Quad 2.0 was to prevent any single country from exerting dominance over the Indo-Pacific region. Subsequent Quad meetings post-2017 were predominantly focused on security concerns, including Chinese encroachment in the South and East China Seas, upholding a rules-based global order, and advocating for a free and open Indo-Pacific. However, in response to the pandemic, the four governments committed to distributing one billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines to the region.

Concurrently, the Quad countries initiated discussions on broader issues such as climate change and critical and emerging technologies. This led to the establishment of the Quad Climate Working Group and the Critical and Emerging Technology Working Group, aimed at setting standards in technologies like 5G and Artificial Intelligence, while also addressing the escalating threats in cyberspace. Despite being perceived primarily as a counterbalance to Chinese influence, the incorporation of diverse agendas indicates a broader concern for addressing various challenges facing the Indo-Pacific region.¹³

Following the senior-level military commander meeting of the Quad members, which also included the United Kingdom and acknowledged China as an “epoch-defining challenge,”¹⁴ in California on 15–17 May 2023, preceding the Quad leaders’ summit, debates surrounding the Quad’s security orientation resurfaced. The potential addition of security dimensions could propel this group into Quad 3.0 status, yet definitive assertions on this matter remain elusive. Described as a routine gathering to address shared security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, this summit reignited discussions and suspicions regarding the securitization of the Quad, reminiscent of earlier iterations like Quad 1.0. Despite this, the focus on nontraditional security challenges, such as natural catastrophes, underscores the necessity for military involvement in delivering relief efforts.¹⁵

US President Joe Biden hosted the Quad Leaders’ Summit, marking the first in-person gathering of leaders from Quad nations, at the White House. Quad

¹² Press Trust of India, “Quad won’t be military alliance but there will be military cooperation among members: Army Chief MM Naravane,” *Economic Times*, 26 March 2021, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/>.

¹³ Premesha Saha, “First Quad leaders meeting: An agenda beyond security,” *ORF*, 16 March 2021, <https://www.orfonline.org/>.

¹⁴ *Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a more contested and volatile world* (London: UK Government, March 2023), <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/>.

¹⁵ Premesha Saha and Vivek Mishra, “QUAD 3.0: A security-oriented reincarnation?” *ORF*, 8 June 2023, <https://www.orfonline.org/>.

foreign ministers convene annually to exchange perspectives and bolster cooperation on pivotal regional strategic challenges.¹⁶ Additionally, Quad leaders have committed to annual meetings. The Quad Leaders' Summit of 2023 took place in Hiroshima, Japan, convened by Australia on 20 May 2023, underscoring the increasing alignment among Quad leaders within this coalition.¹⁷

The Quad is increasingly prominent due to China's rise and its unilateral and ambiguous policies, notably evidenced in the South China Sea (SCS) through initiatives like the nine-dash line. China's utilization of economic leverage to secure strategic deals with smaller nations further underscores its alternative worldview, which opposes the liberal world order and the rule of law, often characterized by a disregard for human rights and support for dictatorial regimes.

The overt declarations by Xi Jinping, urging China to prepare for war and remain poised to act at a moment's notice, indicate a belligerent stance.¹⁸ The US *National Security Strategy* of 2022 categorizes China as the primary competitor seeking to reshape the international order. This designation is grounded in China's assertive behavior, prompting other nations to take defensive measures to safeguard their sovereignty. The strategy is underpinned by three principal pillars: investment, alignment, and competition. Firstly, the United States aims to invest in bolstering its domestic strengths, focusing on enhancing competitiveness, fostering innovation, building resilience, and fortifying its democracy. These investments are deemed essential for maintaining a competitive edge globally. Secondly, the United States endeavors to align its efforts with its network of allies and partners, acting cohesively with shared purpose to amplify collective influence and shape the global strategic landscape. Thirdly, the United States intends to compete responsibly with the People's Republic of China (PRC) to safeguard its interests and advance its vision for the future. This competition is deemed imperative considering China's articulated intentions and expanding capabilities to reshape the international order. The overarching objective of this strategy is to uphold a world that is free, open, prosperous, and secure, leveraging all facets of national power to outcompete strategic rivals, address common challenges, and influence the establishment of global norms.

¹⁶ "Quad Framework and Engagement" (briefing, Ministry of External Affairs, 29 November 2022), <https://mea.gov.in/>.

¹⁷ "Quad Leaders' Summit 2023" (fact sheet, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Australian Government, 2023), <https://www.pmc.gov.au/>.

¹⁸ John Pomfret and Matt Pottinger, "Xi Jinping Says He Is Preparing China for War," *Foreign Affairs*, 29 March 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/>; and Liu Zhen, "Xi Jinping orders China's military to be ready for war 'at any second'," *South China Morning Post*, 5 January 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/>.

It underscores the importance of international collaboration amid the backdrop of intensifying competition.¹⁹

The Japanese *Defence White Paper* of 2022 unequivocally asserts that China persistently engages in unilateral actions aimed at altering or attempting to alter the status quo through coercion in the East China Sea and South China Sea, posing a significant threat to regional stability and international norms. Moreover, the paper highlights China's explicit intentions concerning Taiwan, emphasizing its readiness to unify Taiwan by force, escalating tensions and shifting the military balance in China's favor. This stance underscores the importance of closely monitoring the situation, especially amid Russia-China convergence and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. The document also underscores the role of shared universal values of democracy and freedom in guiding Japan's solidarity with Taiwan, interpreting China's increased military activities as unilateral attempts to alter the status quo, and calling for international cooperation against such global challenges. Furthermore, it notes that China's heightened aggression, particularly concerning Taiwan, has prompted Japan to adopt a more assertive stance, prioritizing security considerations over economic cooperation. Given the intensified strategic competition between the United States and China, Japan emphasizes its alignment with the United States, which has committed to enhancing engagement with Taiwan, stressing the necessity of developing defense capabilities while increasing cooperation and partnerships with other nations, further bolstering the Japan–United States alliance.²⁰

Former Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat of India asserted that China poses a greater security threat to India than Pakistan, based on his assessment of regional strategic dynamics. This shift in focus from Pakistan to China marks a significant change in India's security outlook, influenced by factors such as China's rapid military modernization, assertive behavior along the India-China border, and growing influence in South Asia. General Rawat's warning about India's readiness to respond to any misadventure by China underscores the heightened tensions, particularly exacerbated by incidents like the Galwan Valley clash in June 2020. This perspective has informed India's participation in the Quad, as part of a broader strategy to balance China's increasing power in the Indo-Pacific. General Rawat's assessment has thus shaped India's strategic approach to regional

¹⁹ *National Security Strategy* (Washington: The White House, 12 October 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>.

²⁰ *Defence of Japan 2022* (Tokyo: Ministry of Defense, 2022), <https://www.mod.go.jp/>.

security arrangements like the Quad, reflecting evolving geopolitical dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region.²¹

Australia's *Defence Strategic Review* of 2023 warns of China's sovereignty claims in the SCS, which threaten the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific, impacting Australia's national interests. Emphasizing the need for closer integration with the United States, the review focuses on countering the threat posed by China's strategic competition. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's government prioritizes the Quad, aiming to elevate its ambition on climate change. The Albanese government's approach to the Quad aligns with Australia's commitment to a free, open, and secure Indo-Pacific, emphasizing international cooperation amid growing competition.²²

All Quad members share a common vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) region and express reservations about China's expanding military capabilities and assertive conduct in the region.

John Hemmings advocated for transforming the Quad into a formal alliance, drawing parallels from historical examples to emphasize the necessity of institutionalizing the Quad. He cited the Triple Entente, comprising France, Britain, and Russia, as an informal understanding lacking defense obligations, which failed to deter Nazi aggression in the lead-up to World War II. Hemmings highlighted the pivotal role of NATO in containing the Soviet Union post-World War II, underscoring the effectiveness of formal alliances in maintaining security. He noted the eagerness of post-Soviet democratic nations to join NATO, indicating widespread support for conventional alliance structures. Hemmings asserted that the institutionalization of the Quad is imperative for preserving the rule of law and the liberal international order amid China's rising hegemonic ambitions in the Indo-Pacific region. He stressed that considering Chinese nationalism and its escalating desire for hegemony, only a complete alliance could serve as the linchpin for regional security.²³

The Quad members possess a myriad of treaties and agreements facilitating collaboration and the capacity to counter China's assertive policies in the region. Among these, the ANZUS Treaty stands as one of the oldest alliances, forged in 1951 among Australia, New Zealand, and the United States to safeguard Pacific

²¹ "China biggest security threat, says General Bipin Rawat," *Times of India*, 13 November 2021, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/>.

²² *National Defence: Defence Strategic Review 2023* (Canberra: Department of Defence, 2023), <https://www.defence.gov.au/>.

²³ John Hemmings, "Should the Quad Become a Formal Alliance?," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* 5, no. 2 (March–April 2022), 65–77, <https://media.defense.gov/>.

security. Established in 1971, the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) further solidified security ties, encompassing Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Malaysia, and Singapore to promote collective defense efforts. The US-Japan Security Treaty, signed in 1951, remains pivotal in guiding defense cooperation between the two nations. Notably, the United States and India have fortified their defense collaboration through the signing of all four basic defense agreements, including LEMOA, COMCASA, and BECA, between 2016 and 2020. Additionally, the initiation of the Critical and Emerging Technology Initiative (iCET) underscores efforts to enhance industrial-military cooperation and strategic technology integration between the two nations' governments, corporations, and academic institutions.²⁴ India and Australia elevated their strategic partnership to a Comprehensive Strategic alliance in 2020, complemented by the signing of the Economic Cooperation and Trade Pact, a free trade agreement, underscoring the deepening of bilateral relations.²⁵ Furthermore, the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement inked between New Delhi and Tokyo in 2020 establishes a framework for supply and service exchange, fostering deeper collaboration between their armed forces.²⁶ The Joint Working Group aims to bolster cooperation across diverse domains, including 5G, Open RAN, Telecom Network Security, underwater cable systems, and Quantum Communication. These multifaceted partnerships and agreements within the Quad lay the groundwork for its institutionalization, marking a significant step toward greater regional stability and cooperation.

Conversely, India and Australia elevated their strategic partnership to a comprehensive strategic alliance in 2020, marking a significant milestone in their bilateral relations. During the same period, the two nations inked the Economic Cooperation and Trade Pact, emblematic of their burgeoning economic ties. Similarly, New Delhi and Tokyo forged the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement in 2020, laying the groundwork for mutual supply and service exchange and paving the way for enhanced military collaboration. The Joint Working Group, established to bolster cooperation across various domains such as 5G, Open RAN, Telecom Network Security, underwater cable systems, and Quantum Communication, underscores the commitment to deepening ties. These alliances and agreements

²⁴ "United States and India Elevate Strategic Partnership with the initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET)" (fact sheet, The White House, 31 January 2023), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>.

²⁵ "India & Australia agree to bolster Comprehensive Strategic Partnership at 1st India-Australia Annual Summit in New Delhi," *All India Radio*, 10 March 2023, <https://web.archive.org/>.

²⁶ Viraj Solanki and Mariko Togashi, "India and Japan enhance cooperation despite their differences," *International Institute for Strategic Studies*, 23 May 2022, <https://www.iiss.org/>.

within the Quad framework not only exist on the surface but also serve as catalysts for the institutionalization of the Quad, heralding a new era of regional cooperation and stability.

The joint military exercises among Quad members further bolster the institutionalization of the Quad. For instance, exercises like AUSINDEX and Austra-Hind strengthen naval cooperation between India and Australia, while the annual Dharma Guardian and JIMEX exercises enhance military ties between India and Japan. Similarly, the Yudh Abhyas and Vajra Prahar exercises between the United States and India serve to deepen their strategic partnership. Additionally, joint and bilateral exercises like Keen Sword involving the United States and Japan, and Talisman Sabre involving Australia and the United States, contribute to interoperability and readiness. The Pitch-Black combat exercise hosted by the Royal Australian Air Force, with participation from the United States and India, further underscores the collaborative efforts within the Quad framework. Notably, the Malabar exercise, initiated in 1992 by India and the United States, has evolved into a multilateral naval wargame, including Japan and Australia, signaling a unified response to China's assertive military posture globally.²⁷

Table 1 contrasts projected key military systems by 2030 and 2040 between China and Quad nations, highlighting the importance of integrating Quad resources to align with China's anticipated capabilities in the future.²⁸

Table 1. Major weapon systems comparison, 2030–2040 estimates. (Source: Justin L. Diehl, "Indo-Pacific Deterrence and the Quad in 2030," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* 4, no. 2 (Spring 2021), 12, <https://media.defense.gov/>.)

Weapon Systems	United States	Australia	Japan	India	Quad Total	China
5th-generation fighters	1,321	72	417	0	1,468	200
Bombers	88	0	0	0	88	150–172
Major surface combatants	78	12	54	22	166	150
Submarines	25	12	22	24	83	70
Aircraft carriers	5	0	0	3	8	2

Note: All US numbers at 50 percent to account for other global activities and US homeland defense. Data drawn from multiple sources.

²⁷ Krishn Kaushik, "Explained: The Malabar Exercise of Quad nations, and why it matters to India," *Indian Express*, 31 August 2021, <https://indianexpress.com/>.

²⁸ Justin L. Diehl, "Indo-Pacific Deterrence and the Quad in 2030," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* 4, no. 2 (Spring 2021): 97–122, <https://media.defense.gov/>.

The Quad nations are collaborating across strategic, political, economic, and digital domains. This cooperation lays the foundation for institutionalizing the Quad. What is needed now is the political will to actualize and mold the group into a mechanism aimed at curbing Chinese hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region.

Application of He and Feng's Leadership Institutional Model

Kai He and Huiyan Feng have devised a model to analyze the institutionalization of the Indo-Pacific, which is now being applied to assess the institutionalization of the Quad.²⁹ Expanding upon Oran Young's insights into Leadership and Rationalist Institutional Theory, they have developed the Leadership Institutional Model. Within this framework, He and Feng introduce the concept of *leadership-institution*, which encompasses two distinct types of leadership: executive leadership and ideational leadership. Executive leadership pertains to a state's capacity to utilize its resources in addressing practical challenges, such as concerns regarding relative gains and collective action issues. Conversely, ideational leadership involves an individual leader's ability to introduce ideas and proposals that influence policy makers' perceptions of common interests in cooperation.

He and Feng outline two prerequisites for states to collaborate within an anarchical international system. Firstly, states must share common interests, a goal facilitated by ideational leadership. Secondly, they must address operational challenges hindering collaboration, including concerns about relative advantage and collective action. Here, executive leadership plays a crucial role in surmounting such obstacles.

Based on the combination of two types of leadership, four types of institutional types are possible:

1. Deep Institutionalization: Characterized by robust executive and ideational leadership.
2. Thin Institutionalization: Occurs when one form of leadership is robust—typically ideational—while the other is lacking, such as weak executive leadership.
3. Ad hoc Institutionalization: Emerges when one form of leadership, often executive, is strong, while the other—ideational—is deficient.
4. Non-Institutionalization: Marked by weaknesses in both ideational and executive leadership.

²⁹ Kai He and Huiyun Feng, "The institutionalization of the Indo-Pacific: problems and prospects," *International Affairs* 96, no.1 (2020): 149–168, <https://doi.org/>.

		Executive leadership	
		Strong	Weak
Ideational leadership	Strong	1 <i>Deep institutionalization</i> (EU)	2 <i>Thin institutionalization</i> (ASEAN)
	Weak	3 <i>Ad hoc institutionalization</i> (Four-country tsunami rescue mission, 2004)	4 <i>Non-institutionalization</i>

Figure 1. The leadership–institution model of institution building

Analysis of the Quad through the Leadership–Institutional Model

The revival of the Quad in 2017 can be attributed to the rapid ascent of China and its assertive policies within the region. Despite its previous dissolution in 2007, the Quad resurged from obscurity fueled by a heightened awareness of the China threat and its divergent global outlook. China’s utilization of economic leverage to bolster its military capabilities compelled the four democratic nations to unite, transforming the alliance into an operational force aimed at addressing China’s expanding influence. As China solidifies its presence, navigating this strategic challenge becomes paramount for the Quad nations. Consequently, applying the aforementioned model could serve as a pivotal step toward institutionalizing the Quad, albeit with inherent challenges.

Ideational Level

At the ideational level, the primary impetus behind the group is to counter China’s hegemonic ambitions. According to a policy brief from the Brookings Institution, China is actively seeking to undermine key pillars of the established order, transitioning from benefiting from to exploiting it for its own gain.³⁰ Furthermore, China is proposing new regimes or institutions to further its interests. Conversely, a report from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace titled “Responding to China’s Complicated Views on International Order” highlights that China’s challenge to the international order directly affects the US–Japan al-

³⁰ Bruce Jones and Andrew Yeo, “China and the Challenge to Global Order,” *Brookings Institution*, 3 November 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/>.

liance and its efforts to reshape regional security. Particularly, China's policy actions in the East and South China Seas pose a significant security challenge to the Washington-Tokyo alliance.³¹

Xi Jinping has introduced the Global Development Initiatives (GDI) and Global Security Initiative (GSI) as components of his strategy to reform the global order. While both initiatives aim to enhance the development and security of all nations, they also serve China's interests by positioning it as a global leader, countering US influence, and offering an alternative to the US-led order. Despite their ambitious goals, the specifics of implementing the GDI and GSI remain unclear.³² Beijing supports institutions such as the World Bank and the Paris Climate Agreement when they align with Chinese interests, but disregards institutional arrangements that contradict its objectives and worldview, such as human rights standards. In emerging sectors like Internet governance, where norms are still evolving, China endeavors to advance its own agenda by promoting authoritarian standards.³³ This model finds resonance among authoritarian regimes, particularly in Asia, Africa, and Eastern Europe, thereby expanding Chinese soft power.³⁴

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken affirmed, "China is the only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it. Beijing's vision would move us away from the universal values that have sustained so much of the world's progress over the past 75 years." During his address, he advocated for coexistence and cooperation with China while also highlighting China's illicit activities and authoritarian policies.³⁵ In an op-ed by Rory Medcalf titled "The Quad has seen off the sceptics and it's here to stay," it was noted that "the new Quad rhetoric is much about spirit and vision, but it is also about defining coexistence with China from a position of strength."³⁶ Hence, the Quad can facilitate the coordination of responses among the four democracies to address shared security challenges in the Indo-Pacific, including China's expanding military capabilities, aggressive actions in the SCS region, and cyber and economic coercion aimed primarily at smaller nations.

³¹ Mira Rapp-Hooper et al., "Responding to China's Complicated Views on International Order," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 10 October 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/>.

³² Michael Schuman, Jonathan Fulton, and Tuvia Gering, "How Beijing's newest global initiatives seek to remake the world order," *Atlantic Council*, 21 July 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/>.

³³ "China's Approach to Global Governance," Council on Foreign Relations, n.d., <https://www.cfr.org/>.

³⁴ Ulrich Menzel, "The Rise of China and the Future World Order," *GIS Reports*, 17 December 2021, <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/>.

³⁵ Antony J. Blinken, "The Administration's Approach to the People's Republic of China" (speech, US Department of State, 22 March 2022), <https://www.state.gov/>.

³⁶ Rory Medcalf, "The Quad has seen off the sceptics and it's here to stay," *Australian Financial Review*, 15 May 2021, <https://www.afr.com/>.

Executive Level

At the executive level, the United States emerges as the preeminent actor. Its extensive global presence, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region, positions it naturally to lead this coalition of democracies. With military alliances spanning numerous countries and serving as a security guarantor for many in the region, the United States plays a pivotal role. The US-led international order faces challenges, especially concerning the SCS, where China's nine-dash line directly challenges the UNCLOS 1982 agreement on freedom of navigation.³⁷ Consequently, the Quad is viewed as a means to bolster the region's security framework by collaborating with existing organizations like AUKUS and the Five Eyes alliance.³⁸ The US *Indo-Pacific Strategy* commits to strengthening the Quad's partnership on various fronts, including climate change and critical technology.³⁹ While the hub-and-spoke model traditionally centered on the United States connecting allies like Japan, Australia, and South Korea, a modified approach, the network-based security system, is emerging. This system sees US allies, with amicable relations and mutual alliances, sharing security responsibilities.⁴⁰ Therefore, as a major Indo-Pacific power, the United States must lead efforts to safeguard freedom of navigation in the region.

Garima Mohan and Kristi Govella delineated three pivotal factors driving India's heightened engagement with the Quad. Firstly, amid border confrontations with China, the Quad symbolizes India's pivot towards deeper collaboration with the West. Secondly, it aligns with India's broader Indo-Pacific foreign policy objectives, bolstering efforts to ensure security in the Indian Ocean and advance initiatives like Act East by strengthening ties with Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands. Thirdly, India's participation in the group contributes to enhancing its capabilities. India's leadership within the Quad is crucial as it facilitates the elevation of its status from a middle power to a great power within the Indo-Pacific construct. This leadership role also bolsters India's Act East and Extended Neighborhood Policy, further solidifying its regional influence.⁴¹ In 2015, New Delhi introduced the SAGAR vision to advance its strategic interests in the Indian Ocean. Addi-

³⁷ Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, "China must honour legally binding UNCLOS verdict on South China Sea," *Economic Times*, 9 July 2021, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/>.

³⁸ Garima Mohan and Kristi Govella, "The Future of the Quad and the Emerging Architecture in the Indo-Pacific," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 3 January 2023, <https://doi.org/>.

³⁹ *Indo-Pacific Strategy* (Washington: The White House, February 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>.

⁴⁰ Satoru Nagao, "India, Japan, and the Dragon's Fire: Making the Quad Work," *ORF*, 10 June 2022, <https://www.orfonline.org/>.

⁴¹ Amrita Jash, "The Quad Factor in the Indo-Pacific and the Role of India," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* 4, no. 2 (Spring 2021): 78–85, <https://media.defense.gov/>.

tionally, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Indo-Pacific Ocean Initiative (IPOI) during the East Asia Summit in Bangkok in 2019. The IPOI aims to ensure stability, security, and safety in the maritime domain, encompassing seven central pillars such as Maritime Security, Capacity Building, and Disaster Risk Reduction.⁴² In 2021, Australia, India, and Japan initiated the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative. Introduced amid the COVID-19 pandemic, it aimed to reduce dependence on China by highlighting the importance of risk management and continuity strategies to prevent supply chain disruptions. Additionally, the initiative reaffirmed their dedication to building robust supply networks.⁴³ Consequently, bolstering defense collaboration and fortifying strategic bonds with fellow Quad members indicates India's proactive engagement and constructive contribution to realizing the objectives and vision of the Quad.

The Quad collaboration stands as a pivotal component of Australia's foreign strategy, with the Australian government underscoring its constructive role in addressing paramount regional concerns such as cybersecurity and maritime security.⁴⁴ Australia's proactive engagement aligns with its Pacific Step-up policy, which aims to foster closer ties with Pacific Island States in response to China's growing influence in the region. This policy encompasses initiatives to enhance security and defense cooperation, invest in infrastructure, and bolster diplomatic presence in Pacific Island nations, consistent with the objectives of the Quad. As the largest development assistance partner in the Pacific, Australia is well-positioned to contribute to initiatives like the Expanded Partnership for Quality Infrastructure led by Japan, furthering the FOIP vision.⁴⁵ Additionally, Australia, alongside the United States and Japan, unveiled the Blue Dot Network in 2019, offering an alternative framework to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and reinforcing Australia's commitment to upholding a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region through expanded partnerships and proactive leadership.

Tokyo and Delhi encounter similar challenges posed by Chinese territorial expansion near their borders. Satoru Nagao outlined three key characteristics of this expansion: first, China's disregard for international rules when annexing additional territories; second, China's tendency to expand its borders in regions experiencing a power vacuum; and third, China's utilization of non-military means,

⁴² *Quad Framework and Engagement* (New Delhi: Ministry of External Affairs, 7 February 2020), <https://mea.gov.in/>.

⁴³ "Australia-India-Japan Trade Ministers' Joint Statement on Launch of Supply Chain Resilience Initiative" (press release, Ministry of Commerce & Industry, 27 April 2021), <https://pib.gov.in/>.

⁴⁴ "The Quad," Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

⁴⁵ Poornima Vijaya, "Australia's Role in the Quad and Its Crumbling Ties with China," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* 4, no. 9 (2021): 136–44, <https://media.defense.gov/>.

such as the BRI, to extend its influence.⁴⁶ Consequently, collaboration between Japan and India becomes imperative, and both nations are making strides in this direction. The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor, launched jointly in 2017, serves as a response to the BRI, and ongoing dedication to this initiative, along with other endeavors in Africa, remains crucial.⁴⁷ Japan, along with its partners, advocates for a FOIP strategy, with Tokyo outlining three pillars to actualize this vision.⁴⁸

The Quad is driven by a shared commitment to upholding the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and free trade, while also striving for economic prosperity and global harmony. Japan's active engagement in the group underscores its significant role within it, particularly given the immediate threat posed by China's expansionist actions. Since its inception in 2017, the Quad has evolved from a mere notion to a deeply institutionalized framework. Despite initial hesitations among its members to openly confront China, there is now a growing consensus to collectively counterbalance its influence. As a result, the Quad has transitioned from a state of thin institutionalization to one of deep institutionalization, indicating a solid foundation for concerted action in addressing Indo-Pacific challenges.

Initially, the Quad emerged with a strong underlying concept, reinforced by the executive leadership of a major power. This leadership ensures that the Quad operates with a clear sense of purpose and direction, leaving no space for non-institutionalization. Moreover, the group has consciously steered away from ad hoc arrangements, especially following its revival in 2017. Since its inception, the Quad has undergone a gradual process of institutionalization, starting from a relatively thin framework and progressing steadily toward deeper institutionalization. Despite some reluctance among its members to openly confront China, there is a growing consensus within the Quad to collectively counterbalance Chinese influence. This consensus reflects a maturing commitment to the Quad's shared objectives, signaling a trajectory towards greater institutional solidity and strategic coherence.

Initially, China viewed the Quad with a degree of nonchalance, but as the group evolved, its stance grew increasingly assertive. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi likened the Quad to "sea foam in the Pacific or Indian Ocean," suggesting it would fade away quickly.⁴⁹ He further characterized the US *Indo-Pacific Strategy* as an

⁴⁶ Nagao, "India, Japan, and the Dragon's Fire."

⁴⁷ Aparjita Biswas, "Corridor in Uncertainty," *Telegraph Online*, 14 April 2022, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/>.

⁴⁸ *Free and Open Indo-Pacific* (Tokyo: Ministry of External Affairs, 24 April 2023), <https://www.mofa.go.jp/>.

⁴⁹ "Foreign Minister Wang Yi Meets the Press" (press release, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC, 9 March 2018), <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/>.

effort to establish a NATO-like alliance in the Indo-Pacific region with Quad members.⁵⁰ Wang claimed, “This strategy advocates the long-outdated Cold War mentality, promotes group confrontation and geopolitical games, and maintains the United States’ dominant position and hegemonic system.”⁵¹ Consequently, China regards the Quad with suspicion and closely monitors its interactions with other regional actors, viewing the group as a containment mechanism aimed at restraining China’s influence.⁵²

Many scholars may contend that the domestic circumstances and cultural dimensions of Quad members have not been thoroughly considered. This paper adopts the classical realism paradigm of international relations, which posits that countries act with a unified purpose, disregarding Waltz’s second image and steering clear of entanglement in domestic and cultural complexities within each nation. Nonetheless, this paper argues that domestic politics and cultural influences have had no significant impact on the evolution of the Quad, nor on the findings presented herein.

However, this model primarily focuses on state actors and their leadership qualities, neglecting the influence of other factors in international politics, such as historical legacies and economic interdependence. Additionally, it presents a static view of leadership and institutionalization, overlooking the Quad’s dynamic nature as a group. The continuous evolution of the Quad complicates the assessment of institutionalization levels, necessitating ongoing analysis and adaptation of the model. Nevertheless, the model remains important as it furnishes a framework for analyzing and discussing the Quad’s evolution and potential future trajectory.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current global landscape underscores the urgency for the institutionalization of the Quad. With the four democracies increasingly aligning their interests amidst China’s escalating assertiveness, advocating for a free and open Indo-Pacific and upholding a rule-based international order has become imperative. Collaboration among Quad nations is essential to collectively address security challenges while simultaneously engaging with China on various fronts. Furthermore, diversifying away from dependence on China through non-military

⁵⁰ “State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi Meets the Press” (press release, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC, 7 March 2022), <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/>.

⁵¹ Global Times (@globaltimesnews), “This strategy advocates an outdated Cold War mentality,” Twitter, 13 October 2020, 3:16 PM, <https://twitter.com/>.

⁵² Zeng Tengjun, “Quad gears up but should mind perils,” *Global Times*, 2 September 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/>.

measures such as establishing alternative supply chains and enhancing critical technology resilience is critical for long-term strategic resilience.

The model proposed by He and Feng offers valuable insights, highlighting the importance of strong ideas and decisive executive leadership in driving deep institutionalization. By bolstering the international order and ensuring stability in the Indo-Pacific, effective leadership within the Quad can effectively counter China's aggressive actions while safeguarding the sovereignty of smaller states. Ultimately, the Quad serves as a pivotal mechanism for navigating the complexities of maintaining, containing, and preserving the existing order in the Indo-Pacific region, offering pragmatic solutions to the multifaceted challenges ahead. 🌟

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