



The Quad in 2024: A Combined Strategic Vision for the Indo-Pacific

By Lucas Myers

Executive Summary:

For an international multilateral grouping with clear buy-in at the highest levels in Australia, India, Japan, and the United States, the Quad remains **malleable and amorphous**. At times, the Quad **highlights its identity as a values-based grouping of Indo-Pacific democracies**, but the four countries often disagree on issues such as **democracy promotion**. Others see it as a **primarily security-oriented grouping** quietly balancing against China. The grouping itself has also changed over time, adding to the confusion. Under pressure from external and domestic actors worried about a new cold war, the four countries quietly changed the name from “Quadrilateral Security Dialogue” to “the Quad” amid its revival in the late 2010s. The rebrand emphasizes the **provision of public goods**—especially after 2021—but the pace of policy implementation has **disappointed some in the region**. There are also concerns about the Quad’s **sustainability** in the event of leadership transitions and changing political calculus, which dismantled the first iteration of the grouping in 2008.



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But the Quad's flexibility and malleability are perhaps the point. It is not a treaty or alliance with defined and constraining obligations. The Quad is instead best described as a shared strategic vision from Australia, India, Japan, and the United States of a free, open, inclusive Indo-Pacific and a developing, but loose, policy mechanism to advance it. Importantly, this vision goes beyond traditional hard power security and non-traditional security (public goods) by merging the two together in a holistic approach to regional security and prosperity.

At the same time, although it is not directed at any one threat, it is undeniable that the foremost challenge to that vision is a revisionist People's Republic of China. Moreover, an often-underappreciated value-add of the Quad is India's growing linkages with traditional US hub-and-spoke security architecture and its role as a voice from the Global South in favor of a rules-based order.

For these reasons, the Quad is here to stay. It plays a vital role in coordinating the highest levels of policy in four of the leading countries in the Indo-Pacific and it advances their shared strategic vision. The key is to ensure that its policy agenda remains flexible and effective.

Policy Implications:

- The Quad should continue to avoid direct mention of China while working to provide an attractive alternative vision to China's view of international order. It should also continue to emphasize that its efforts are complementary to regional organizations, not a replacement.
- The Quad should encourage participation from regional actors and institutions in a Quad Plus format but remain limited in formal membership to the original four members.
- The Quad must ramp up the effectiveness and swiftness of its public goods provision, which has arguably been too slow and small scale to serve as an alternative to Chinese offerings.
- The Quad should consider establishing a formal secretariat or, at a minimum, dedicated Quad envoys and interparliamentary groups to deepen institutionalization and ease cooperation across policy issue areas.
- The Quad's holistic approach to security (publicly de-emphasizing traditional hard power security in favor of public goods and non-traditional security) makes sense given the all-encompassing challenge to the rules-based order, as well as alternative hard power-oriented groupings like the Squad.
- Dedicating effort to sharing views and aligning as much as possible is important for strategic and policy coherence across the four member states. Ensuring regularity at the Summit level is vital for sustainment.

Questions About the Quad

Perhaps due to its loose nature, debate as to the Quad's role in a world of proliferating partnerships, multilaterals, minilaterals, and alliances has arisen in recent years. Similarly, [questions](#) about its importance emerged after delays in the 2024 Leaders' Summit and the rise of alternative groupings like [the Squad](#) and a variety of trilaterals in the Western Pacific.

Indeed, regarding traditional hard power security, the Indo-Pacific already appears well equipped without the Quad. NATO [increasingly turns towards the Indo-Pacific](#), and AUKUS plays a key role for Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Australia and Japan have mutual defense treaties with the United States and engage in a [Trilateral Strategic Dialogue](#). In recent months, [the Squad](#), made up of Australia, Japan, the Philippines, and the United States, looks to shore up security cooperation within the first island chain.

The most apparent difference between these and the Quad is the inclusion of New Delhi. Indeed, adding in India makes sense given its embrace of the other three Quad countries, and defense cooperation with New Delhi is proceeding apace in [all three capitals](#).

But, India [holds its strategic autonomy dear](#), and odds are slim of it ever obligating itself via mutual defense treaty to enter a military conflict with China for the other members unless directly attacked itself. Nor would it expect direct American boots on the ground in its own territorial dispute with Beijing.

Fittingly, hard power security is not part of the Quad's remit. In fact, the grouping has quietly rebranded away from "Quadrilateral Security Dialogue" to the Quad in its public messaging

during the grouping's second iteration. For example, the [2007 Malabar naval exercise](#) signaled the Quad countries growing closer on defense issues, but in more recent years, the Quad and Malabar remain officially separated. The grouping instead emphasizes the provision of public goods for the Indo-Pacific.

In addition to India's strategic autonomy, this shift also came in response to concerns in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific about a new cold war with China and perceptions of the Quad's role as a balancing coalition against Beijing—a perception China [amplifies with its propaganda](#). These concerns are especially prominent in Southeast Asia, with many in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) concerned about the Quad undermining its "centrality" in regional diplomacy.

The Quad's [public goods message](#) aims to mollify these concerns and provide tangible benefits for the region to shore up resilience against revisionist actors. The Quad now features [six working groups](#)—health security, infrastructure, climate, critical and emerging technologies, space, and cyber—to provide the region with useful and practical public goods. To demonstrate progress, the [2023 Quad Leaders' Joint Statement](#) listed out several key deliverables, including a Quad Infrastructure Fellowships Program, the delivery of 400 million COVID-19 vaccine doses, and the planned establishment of Open Radio Access Networks (Open RAN) in Palau, among others. Notably, the [Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness](#) aims to assist regional states with greater real-time information on the Indo-Pacific maritime space.

With a holistic approach to security, the inclusion of India, and public goods as an alternative to Chinese offerings in mind, the Quad is best

The Quad in 2024

described not as a minilateral or a network but rather a strategic vision and the policy mechanism to support its implementation. Indeed, the Quad explicitly depicts its **objective** as a “vision:”

Our vision for a region that is peaceful and prosperous, stable and secure, and respectful of sovereignty—free from intimidation and coercion, and where disputes are settled in accordance with international law. We seek a region in which all countries and peoples can exercise free choice on how they cooperate and trade based on partnership, equality and mutual respect. We share the belief that engaging openly, transparently and constructively creates more opportunity, greater economic vitality and better understanding of shared challenges, to the benefit of all.

This statement and **others like it** depict a rules-based order updated to accommodate a more multipolar world, the rise of the Global South, and serve as an attractive alternative to the one promised by the loosely aligned but determined revisionist coalition.

To enact this vision, Australia, India, Japan, and the United States have come together as “the Quad.” As stated in the **Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in 2023**: “The Quad is a diplomatic network of four democracies committed to supporting a free and open, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific that is inclusive and resilient.”

Above all, the Quad is more than simply a traditional hard power security or diplomatic minilateral. It is decidedly not an “Asian NATO,”

because New Delhi does not want nor expect an Article 5-style mutual defense treaty with the other members. It is a more flexible and, hence, inclusive grouping than that. The Quad is also more than simply a security “dialogue.” The terms “diplomatic partnership,” used by the **Australian government**, and “diplomatic network,” as used in the **2023 Foreign Ministers’ Meeting**, also fall short given the Quad’s emphasis on concrete deliverables and public goods provision. Instead, the Quad is best understood as a shared strategic vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific and the (flexible) policy mechanism to accomplish it.

A Flexible, Holistic Approach to Indo-Pacific Security

The Quad’s public goods agenda and policy actions since its revival warrant additional attention.

The Quad is fundamentally about advancing a holistic conception of regional security that incorporates non-traditional security issues like climate and pandemics. Public goods ensure a resilient, prosperous, free, and therefore *secure* Indo-Pacific.

During its second iteration after 2017, an overt security element became politically unpalatable, both **domestically** and in the wider region. Yet, even with the Quad deemphasizing hard power security cooperation under its auspices, public goods contribute to security by offering regional states alternatives in a **region increasingly pulled in a cold war direction**. As the **2023 Leaders’ Vision Statement** describes, “[the Quad members] seek a region in which all countries and peoples can exercise free choice on how they cooperate and trade based on partnership, equality, and mutual respect.”

The Quad in 2024

The Quad's current iteration therefore merges non-traditional and traditional security with the view that prosperity and the freedom to choose contribute to regional security in a complementary manner to hard power initiatives. A holistic approach to security mirrors a rethinking underway in the policymaking community, particularly in Washington, that reduces the conceptual barriers between hard power and non-traditional security.

Shoring up regional resiliency through public goods is an increasingly urgent need. Over the past decade, China has expanded its diplomatic and economic footprint in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific. Countering these efforts by providing alternative investments, technical capacity, and other public goods both stabilizes the region and offers states the freedom to choose for themselves. From the technology standards-setting Quad Principles on Technology Design, Development, Governance, and Use to securing supply chains, the Quad actively advances a rules-based order.

Cooperation via the Quad framework is important because none of the Quad states can compete dollar for dollar with China's BRI on their own. A coordinated approach taking advantage of respective comparative advantages and strengths is necessary to provide quality and attractive alternatives to Chinese investments, infrastructure projects, and diplomatic pressure.

The Quad's maritime security efforts are perhaps the clearest example of the benefits of the grouping for the region. Indeed, the Quad was born in an ad hoc effort by the four members to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief after 2004's Indian Ocean tsunami. The four navies set a precedent for non-traditional security operations via the Quad, with their

humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts continuing today. For instance, the Quad recently organized to provide help during the 2024 landslide disaster in Papua New Guinea.

Even absent an explicitly hard power security agenda, many of the Quad's non-traditional security efforts, notably humanitarian assistance and disaster relief and maritime law enforcement, also contribute to traditional hard power security capabilities by improving contingency coordination between the four member states and providing a forum for discussing strategic issues. As some have argued, the Quad "should be able to better leverage and network their respective capabilities to advance a collective approach to defense cooperation on key maritime security tasks of mutual interest and significant value to the region." Through Quad consultations, dialogue, and maritime security activities, the four members gain experience and interoperability for traditional security in the event of a future crisis, even if that is not the primary focus.

The Quad's holistic security approach speaks to how its flexibility and ambiguity constitute a strength rather than a burden. Flexibility can satisfy India's strategic autonomy, as well as differing domestic politics in all four states on issues such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine or democracy promotion. It enables the grouping to come together around shared interests and bypass stumbling blocks. Ambiguity also relieves some of the concerns raised by states in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Ocean regarding regional securitization, as well as counters Chinese propaganda about the Quad.

Moreover, this flexibility extends to the level of policy implementation. The Quad can accommodate a variety of initiatives and sub-arrangements. Indeed, the four members desire

The Quad in 2024

the flexibility to pursue their [vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific](#) unilaterally, bilaterally, and in other [multi-](#) and [minilaterals](#). For instance, the newer [Squad minilateral](#) focuses narrowly on hard power security in the first island chain, an issue where [India](#) may not be as willing to partner at the current juncture. The Quad also remains conducive to [ad hoc arrangements](#) and partnerships with other actors through the Quad Plus framework. As this author and others from all four Quad states [argued in 2023](#), “ambiguity and informality allow the group to align and move ahead in areas where there are conflicting interests.”

At a strategic and bureaucratic level, the Quad also provides a vital coordinating function and networking effect that often goes underappreciated. In discussions with Quad diplomats, the increasing tempo and closeness of interaction between each nation’s bureaucracies emerges as an important deliverable. In other words, the Quad is “[building bureaucratic muscles](#).” Quad diplomats and officials regularly communicate and share information in a fast and responsive manner, which [reportedly paid dividends in addressing the disaster](#) in Papua New Guinea. Additionally, regular high-level interactions at the annual Foreign Ministers’ Meeting and Leaders’ Summit build relationships and align priorities across the Quad in ways that seldom reach the public eye but have important policy impacts.

The Quad’s Importance: The Role of China, India, the Global South

Examining the wider strategic context and the shifting circumstances between its 2004 to 2008 iteration and today, it also becomes apparent that the Quad should be considered one of the premier diplomatic efforts in the Indo-Pacific

today, even if its 2024 Leaders’ Summit has been delayed. Whereas other minilaterals, [such as the Squad](#), focus on one or two issues, the Quad operates at the level of regional grand strategy. It is more than just a mechanism to provide public goods. It reinforces the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.

Two developments are key to this understanding: one, the Quad is not about countering China but rather countering China’s revisionist vision for the region, and two, India’s participation is perhaps the Quad’s greatest value-add to the rules-based order, because it directly incorporates a leading voice from the Global South.

The Quad first coalesced in 2004 outside the bounds of US-China competition, through which it is often framed in the [media discourse](#) and in [Chinese propaganda](#), but the China factor led to its early demise. Indeed, following the first formal meeting of the Quad in 2007, China reacted negatively. Concerns in some Quad capitals about blowback from China, combined with political transitions, [laid the first Quad to rest in 2008](#).

The Quad, including in its post-2017 resurrection, both is and is not about China. It is not an explicitly anti-China coalition but rather a strategic grouping of democracies with shared interests in regional stability. However, as the leading revisionist actor in the Indo-Pacific, China looms large as the elephant in the room, and its reaction prematurely ended the first Quad.

Considering China’s [designs on dominance of its immediate periphery](#) and the security threat Beijing poses to each Quad member state, a revisionist China threatens and challenges a free and open Indo-Pacific. Thus, the Quad implicitly balances against Beijing, because the People’s

The Quad in 2024

Republic of China is the largest threat to the Quad's vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Lending further credence to this argument, the Quad reemerged in 2017 to 2021 precisely at a watershed moment in all four capitals when the geopolitical threat posed by China sharpened. In Washington, the Trump administration's [2018 National Defense Strategy](#) and [2017 National Security Strategy](#) highlighted China as the greatest threat facing the United States and signaled a bipartisan consensus on competition with Beijing. In Canberra, 2020 saw [Chinese economic coercion deployed against Australia](#), torpedoing bilateral relations. Thinking in Tokyo had also [shifted towards viewing Beijing as a threat](#) with Prime Minister Abe Shinzo (perhaps the primary driver behind the first Quad) [pushing again for the grouping in the 2010s](#). For New Delhi, rising competition with Beijing across South Asia certainly played a role, but the [2020 clash along the Line of Actual Control](#) marked a sea change in India-China relations for the worse, locking in Sino-Indian rivalry for the foreseeable future. It is no coincidence that the first Leaders' Summit occurred in 2021 following these developments. While the Quad states' strategic interests in a secure and stable Indo-Pacific are not necessarily about China, they face their biggest threat in Beijing.

Importantly, the second strategic element raising the Quad's importance is India's continued and growing role in it. India provides a crucial value-add for the grouping: New Delhi's leadership within the Global South.

If the only countries prominently advocating for a rules-based order against China and other revisionist states are the United States and its traditional allies and partners — or, if the rules-based order is too status quo bound or out of touch with non-Western states — many

dissatisfied countries in the Global South will remain unpersuaded. The memory of the US-Soviet Cold War and colonialism, as well as [perceptions of Western hypocrisy](#), cast a long shadow in the Indo-Pacific. It informs some of the widespread concerns over potential fallout from US-China competition among small and medium-sized states in the region. With Beijing [presenting itself as the leader of the Global South](#) and [demanding reform of the international order](#), the Quad countries need a counter-narrative.

India's [buy-in to the rules-based order](#) and participation in the Quad is critical here, even if New Delhi [diverges with the other Quad members](#) or [acts contrary to established norms at times](#). At the same, India's partnership with the United States and its allies and partners in US security initiatives in the Indo-Pacific accelerates the transition from the traditional hub-and-spoke model to a [latticework model](#). India complements existing Australian, Japanese, and US efforts—among those of other [regional allies](#) and partners—to integrate capabilities and strategies beyond the traditional “[siloes](#),” as described recently by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

As relative US power declines and expectations of US allies and partners rise, bringing in new voices and redistributing responsibilities naturally evolve the rules-based order and other institutions in line with a changing world. [As Secretary Blinken describes](#): “When our allies shoulder their fair share of the burden, they'll reasonably expect to have a fair say in making decisions. We will honor that. That begins with consulting our friends early and often.” As such, India's role in the Quad serves to broaden the grouping from yet another arrangement for existing US allies and partners to one that can help modernize the rules-based order in

The Quad in 2024

ways that attract states in the Global South who distrust—often with good reason—aspects of the existing international order.

The risks of a Quad that fails to appeal to the Global South are clear, separate from China’s own revisionist narratives. For example, during the Quad’s beginnings in the 2004 Tsunami Core Group, Indonesia [expressed concerns](#) regarding the presence of foreign troops on its soil conducting humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations. In large part, this stems from Indonesia’s emphasis on sovereignty as a result of its experience with Western colonialism.

India, along with many states in the Global South, shares similar concerns. Although India’s role is not a panacea for this issue for a myriad of reasons—not least of which is the wide diversity of views in the Global South and [ASEAN’s worry about the Quad](#) undermining its own centrality—a Quad inclusive of India is far better than one that does not. Fundamentally, the contest between China’s revisionist vision of the future of global order and a rules-based one will be waged in the Global South.

With India presenting itself as a [competing leader of the Global South](#), welcoming its growing participation in an adaptable rules-based order is a critical alternative to China’s revisionist appeals. Indeed, [Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar directly laid out](#) how India sees this responsibility for itself in the Quad at the 2023 Quad Think Tank Forum. For Foreign Minister Jaishankar, the Quad accomplishes a variety of purposes in that vein:

One, it reflects the growth of a multi-polar order. Two, it is a post-alliance and post-cold war thinking. Three, it is against spheres of influence. Four, it expresses the democratizing of

the global space and a collaborative, not unilateral, approach. And five, it is a statement that in this day and age, others cannot have a veto on our choices.

Like China, India chafes at many aspects of the post-war system, but New Delhi views the Quad as a mechanism for updating the rules-based order in a more equitable way.

Although India and the other Quad states do not always see eye-to-eye, New Delhi appears to bet that being an insider is better than calling for change from the outside. Indeed, the fact that the [Quad’s 2023 Leaders’ Statement](#) mentioned the Russian invasion of Ukraine, however obliquely, and referenced “territorial integrity and sovereignty of all states” points to real progress through consultation via the Quad. As demonstrated in India’s 2020 clashes with China, a dismantled rules-based order and an Indo-Pacific dominated by an unconstrained Beijing hold very real risks for New Delhi. The Quad is in India’s interest, and it in turn broadens the Quad’s appeal to the Global South where the future of international order will be decided.

By considering the Quad in the proper strategic context of a revisionist China and growing convergence with India, the Quad’s importance and role in the Indo-Pacific’s rules-based order becomes clear. One, the Quad is not necessarily about China, but Beijing’s threat to the four members’ strategic vision means that the alternative the Quad offers is a counter to China’s revisionist vision. Two, India’s involvement in the Quad, driven by a converging strategic outlook on the Indo-Pacific and rules-based order, is a crucial element rendering the Quad more competitive against China’s alternative vision in the Global South.

The Quad in 2024

Policy Implications for 2024 and Beyond

Overall, the Quad represents a shared strategic vision for the Indo-Pacific and constitutes the premier policy coordinating mechanism for Australia, India, Japan, and the United States to jointly reinforce the rules-based order in the region. Importantly, the Quad re-emerged in the context of seismic geopolitical shifts in the region, specifically the revisionist challenge from China and India's growing embrace of relations with the other Quad members and the rules-based order. Its importance, and potential to reshape the region, should not be overlooked.

Based on this understanding of the Quad's importance and regional role, there are several policy areas for the Quad to target in 2024 and beyond to amplify its existing efforts and improve its effectiveness in providing public goods.

One, the Quad should continue to assiduously avoid direct mention of Beijing. This is to undermine Chinese propaganda aimed at dividing the Quad internally and from the region, as well as to better appeal to skeptical audiences in the Indo-Pacific wary of a new cold war. Message discipline in public settings is important.

Relatedly, the Quad should continue to emphasize that it is complementary to existing regional multilateral organizations, such as ASEAN, the Pacific Islands Forum, and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. In particular, many in Southeast Asia harbor serious doubts about the Quad and its impact on ASEAN centrality. The Quad should therefore work to demonstrate that it does not seek to replace or supplant existing architecture but rather to coordinate between the four member states in their engagements and initiatives in the region.

Two, the Quad should encourage participation from regional actors and institutions in the Quad Plus format. Encouraging interested actors from the region to partner on shared issues and public goods provision is necessary to amplify and integrate Quad efforts in the Indo-Pacific.

However, although there is expert discussion of [other countries joining the Quad](#), the Quad should remain limited in membership to the four existing member states. The four Quad members share a strategic alignment on the Indo-Pacific and the threat from China, and the Quad prides itself on its organizational flexibility. Expanding beyond the initial four members risks slowing the Quad's initiatives by introducing more veto points and raises the risk of strategic misalignment on China.

Three, the Quad should ramp up the implementation of its public goods agenda, which has arguably been too slow to serve as an alternative to Chinese offerings. For example, the Quad's vaccine pledge [proved slower and less ambitious](#) than originally anticipated. China provided its first delivery of doses to Cambodia—a [key battleground state for influence](#)—in [February 2021](#), while the Quad only managed to ship its first order to [Phnom Penh in April 2022](#).

Beyond vaccines, the [Quad has focused particularly on technical capacity](#) through education, fellowships, and other activities aimed at building up partner resilience behind the scenes, but traditional infrastructure projects also remain necessary. ASEAN and the Pacific require upwards of [\\$184 billion](#) and [\\$3 billion](#) in annual infrastructure spending respectively.

The US Development Finance Corporation investment of \$500 million into the [Port of Colombo](#) in Sri Lanka alongside India's Adani

The Quad in 2024

Ports is a good model for the Quad to follow, but the port deal has not been publicly identified with the grouping. Relatedly, the Quad should also attempt to integrate with, or at least co-brand, projects of shared strategic interest, such as those under [the G7](#) and [G20](#). It will also need more buy-in from the private sector, such as through the [Quad Investors Network](#), as well as with civil society actors operating at the local level. While public goods provision takes time, the Quad must act more rapidly and devote more resources to its efforts.

Four, the Quad should consider establishing a formal secretariat or, at a minimum, dedicated Quad envoys. While the Quad's flexibility is an underappreciated strength, establishing a secretariat, dedicated Quad envoys from each country's foreign ministry, or an interparliamentary group could deepen collaboration and institutionalization.

All four member states have distinct bureaucracies, norms, and strategic cultures, which can create friction. The Quad features distinct tracks, the Leaders' and Foreign Ministers', with commensurate bureaucratic divisions. As an example, US State Department's Quad responsibilities are divided across regional bureaus. The Quad also covers a wide range of issue areas, from space and cyber to maritime security and infrastructure, that demand a diverse range of technical experts and policy levers.

As such, establishing a formalized office or dedicated envoy with staff to serve as the primary bureaucratic clearinghouse could assist in deepening the Quad within each country's government and facilitating greater interaction. A formalized secretariat staffed by diplomats on Quad assignment could rotate between the countries annually with the Summits, smooth

out administrative planning, and feature officers tasked with spearheading specific issue areas within the Quad's working groups. Importantly, however, this should not replace or compete with existing Quad responsibilities in the bureaucracies but rather complement them. Moreover, this should be done in a manner that avoids becoming too institutionalized to the point that it limits the Quad's flexibility.

Recent US legislation, [Strengthening the Quad Act](#), passed the House of Representatives, calling for the establishment of a Quad interparliamentary group is a good first step. Fostering these kinds of efforts could further deepen Quad cooperation.

Five, the Quad should regularize its schedule. Since 2021, the Quad has made a concerted effort to hold a rotating series of Leaders' Summits and Foreign Ministers' Meetings annually. However, political and international circumstances have gotten in the way at times. In 2023, the Quad hastily reorganized the originally scheduled Australia-hosted Leaders' Summit on the sidelines of the G7 in Hiroshima on account of [US domestic political concerns](#).

As of spring 2024, there is no publicly announced date for India's turn as host due to [uncertainties about the US president's schedule](#) for the election in November. Due to the deeper strategic convergence that undergirds the current iteration of the Quad compared to the first, this does not spell the grouping's end in the manner that 2008 did, but it does create a sense of inconsistency and lower prioritization. In order to deepen the Quad's institutionalization, the four member states should commit to holding the Leaders' Summit on a fixed schedule. Luckily, it is more likely than not that the Quad leaders will meet after the US election in November 2024.

The Quad in 2024

Six, the Quad's holistic approach to security makes sense given the all-encompassing challenge to the rules-based order. For instance, the Quad should keep the annual Malabar naval exercises de-linked from the Quad. It should also ramp up efforts to engage and partner with other countries in the Indo-Pacific on non-traditional security issues, such as [humanitarian aid and disaster relief](#).

Beyond this, the Quad also serves as a useful mechanism for sharing information, aligning views, and creating communication channels between the countries. Although the Quad is unlikely to become an Indo-Pacific NATO, it can ensure that the four member states remain on the same page and that the leaders have crucial face time on an annual basis.

Seven, despite alignment on the broad contours of a free and open Indo-Pacific, the four Quad countries still have serious disagreements on a variety of individual issues. While India's diverging views on Russia's invasion of Ukraine are well known, there are disagreements about approach within the Indo-Pacific. This is a long-term problem for strategic coordination, and there is a risk of the Quad members working at cross purposes on important issues in the Indo-Pacific.

Dedicating effort to sharing views and aligning as much as possible in the Indo-Pacific is important for ensuring strategic effect. For example, the United States is the most forward-leaning on democracy promotion, while the other three remain reluctant to close doors completely. Following Myanmar's 2021 military coup, the [Quad issued strong statements calling for a return to democracy](#). Although the United States soon issued sanctions and ramped up support for the pro-democracy resistance, Australia and Japan were disinclined to apply much pressure on the military junta in Myanmar out of concern

it would drive the military into China's orbit. India, meanwhile, driven by similar fears of Chinese influence and the added complexity of its [unstable Northeast, engaged the Myanmar junta in Naypyidaw](#). Myanmar is a [highly strategic country in the Indo-Pacific](#), and the Quad's division undermines its overarching strategy in Southeast Asia.

Expecting consultation via the Quad to resolve all policy differences and diverging interests is naïve, but alignment on key issues within the Indo-Pacific is critical to avoid wedges opening inside the Quad that could lead to its weakening.




Above all, from a US policy perspective, the United States should prioritize the Quad's continued institutionalization (while remaining flexible), as its success is a strategic force multiplier. Washington alone cannot compete with Beijing, and the Quad aligns and coordinates the four members' vision for the region and provides a welcome public goods agenda. For Washington, the Quad is an invaluable addition to US Indo-Pacific policy.

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