

# The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue: The West's Response to China in the Indo-Pacific

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## ABSTRACT

As China's actions have become increasingly aggressive in the Indo-Pacific, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue's (Quad) growing interconnectedness reveals the West's desire to preserve the liberal order. The Quad-- composed of the United States, Australia, India, and Japan-- was revived in 2017 amidst China's encroachment on the sovereignty of Indo-Pacific nations and international waters. Through increased activity in infrastructure development, military interoperability, and key resource networks, the Quad's renewal marks an acceleration of Western efforts to counter China's growing threats to Western hegemony. By distilling the Quad's activity into these three areas of cooperation, this paper examines the grouping's actions and their implications for Western-China relations. In the area of infrastructure development, the Quad has emphasized a diversification of funding and high-quality practices to reduce reliance on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and it has promoted democratic priorities through the formation of the Blue Dot Network (BDN). Within military interoperability, the expansion of Exercise Malabar to include all Quad nations and the decision to host the exercise in the Bay of Bengal reveals the Quad's increased challenge to China's encroachment on Indo-Pacific oceans. The Quad's desire to reduce Indo-Pacific nations' reliance on China is evident in its efforts to exert influence over key resource networks such as undersea communication cables, Covid-19 vaccines, and global supply chains. The Quad's increased activity within these sectors represents the grouping's elevation to an increasingly concrete alliance, emerging as one of the West's primary measures to counter China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

## Introduction

On September 24, 2021, United States' President Joe Biden hosted the Japanese, Indian, and Australian Prime Ministers, Yoshihide Suga, Narendra Modi, and Scott Morrison, for the first in-person, state-leader level summit of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad). The meeting, held between the highest-level officials of the Quad nations revealed the West's renewed desire to preserve strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific in response to China's antagonism in the region by expanding its efforts within infrastructure development, military cooperation, and key strategic networks. The Quad works to portray its actions as acts of goodwill-- simply offering democratic alternatives to China's practices, thus elevating the significance of the struggle for regional domination to an ideological battle between Western-promoted democratic ideals and Chinese authoritarianism. The Quad is positioning itself to limit China's influence-building in the Indo-Pacific through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by establishing the Blue Dot Network (BDN) to provide a viable alternative to Chinese infrastructure investments. Similarly, the Quad is increasing its cooperative military capabilities to promote the rule of law and deter Chinese challenges to the freedom of the Indo-Pacific oceans. Finally, to limit regional reliance on China for vaccines, internet access, and commercial goods, the Quad has worked to pivot away from Chinese-centered supply chains. In the face of growing Chinese neo imperialism in the Indo-Pacific, the Quad's efforts to preserve the Western liberal order reveals its urgent desire to contain Chinese influence.

## Historical Context

The Quad originally formed in response to a humanitarian crisis. In December of 2004, the Boxing Day tsunami devastated the Indo-Pacific, killing nearly 275,000 people across fourteen countries. In response to the tsunami, the United States, Japan, India, and Australia formed the temporary Tsunami Core Group to address the immediate aftermath of the crisis. Although the Tsunami Core Group was only expected to exist for the duration of the crisis, its ability to rapidly coordinate a massive relief effort affirmed the effectiveness of a quadrilateral structure to address regional challenges, and established a foundation of cooperation between the nations. Realizing the potential of the grouping to address regional problems, leaders of the first iteration of the Quad-- the "Quad 1.0"-- named after its defining structural feature, first convened in May 2007 to explore potential areas of collaboration. After the first meeting, Jennifer Rawson, First Assistant Secretary of the International Security Division, described the Quad as a "natural partnership between countries which share values and growing cooperation," and cited disaster relief as an area for potential collaboration. However, the ambiguity of the Quad's objectives for future collaboration encouraged China's condemnation--in the form of official demarches to all four nations-- of the grouping due to its potential to become a security alliance designed to counter China. China's criticism was untenable to Australia and India due to their economic and political interconnection.

Although the "Quad 1.0" collapsed in early 2008 due to China's disapproval, the "Quad 2.0" emerged in 2017 in response to increasing concerns about China's usurping of Indo-Pacific nation's sovereignty through its construction of militarized islands, encroachment on the Indo-Pacific oceans, and its economic and political expansion through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The Quad reunited with a renewed agenda: securing a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific," and thus established its ideological objective, known as the FOIP policy. The FOIP policy asserts Quad nations' "responsibility of fostering the confluence of the Pacific and Indian Oceans...into a place that values freedom, the rule of law, and the market economy, free from force or coercion." This policy is a critical element of the Quad's self-characterization as a values-driven dialogue seeking to promote democratic practices in the Indo-Pacific. Since the Quad's renewal in 2017, the Indo-Pacific has emerged as a critical region in the West's struggle to maintain established, favorable structures of influence. The Indo-Pacific is a center for trade, as over 50% of global maritime trade transits the region's oceans, passing through critical choke points such as the Strait of Malacca. Because of its resources and geopolitical significance, China has targeted the Indo-Pacific as a strategic foothold for its further expansion. The Quad, revived to counter China's encroachment on the Indo-Pacific, has steadily risen to prominence, advancing from meetings at the ministerial-level to the state leader-level. Although the Quad has claimed its goal is to promote the freedom and openness of the region, its actions indicate an alternative focus on preserving Western hegemony.

## The Development of the Blue Dot Network to Counter the BRI

In 2017, the Asian Development Bank estimated a \$459 billion yearly infrastructure financing deficit in Asia, resulting in insufficient capital to fulfill developing nations' infrastructure needs. China has attempted to address this issue by allocating an estimated USD 200 billion for infrastructure development through the BRI. However, the influx of capital has sparked concerns within the international community because of a lack of transparency around project bidding processes and lifespan costs, and China's underlying goal to expand its influence. To provide alternative financing by mobilizing the private sector, three Quad countries-- the United States, Australia, and Japan-- launched the Blue Dot Network (BDN) in 2019. The Quad countries delegated the operationalization of this network to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which began its development process in 2021, and increased the Quad's capacity to protect Western-economic interests in the Indo-Pacific due to the OECD's supranational status. Due to the OECD's international standing and expertise in the development of high-quality infrastructure, its participation in the operationalization of the BDN allowed the Quad to directly address BRI-related concerns while diverting

claims of political motivation. The Quad's BDN development strategy reveals its veiled efforts to counter China's influence-building through the BRI by promoting Western economic practices and using the OECD to deflect an anti-China characterization.

The development of the BDN through the OECD provides the Quad with an increased capacity to promote its interests because of the OECD's supranational influence. The United States, Australia, and Japan launched the BDN in 2019 to establish a globally recognized certification system for infrastructure projects to increase private sector confidence in initiatives, promote high quality infrastructure, and offer alternatives to Chinese capital. In February of 2020, the BDN gained India's support. In a statement released after the Quad Leaders' Summit at the White House on September 24, 2021, the grouping "reaffirmed [its] interest in continuing [its] engagement with the Blue Dot Network" and emphasized "the importance of supporting open, fair, and transparent lending practice" by calling on "all creditors to adhere to... rules and standards." The Quad envisions the BDN, with the support of the OECD, will help achieve its goal of sustainable infrastructure development in the Indo-Pacific while simultaneously reducing China's influence over the region. The OECD convened an Executive Consultation Group (ECG) composed of "over 170 senior leaders from the private sector, civil society, trade unions and academia" to operationalize the BDN in June 2021. The focus on multi-sector collaboration within BDN development allows the Quad to widely promote Western economic practices while seemingly diluting its influence, ultimately strengthening the framework by avoiding the BDN-BRI dichotomy. The OECD provides the Quad with a transnational institution to guide the development of the BDN, increasing the grouping's ability to protect its economic interests by shifting the discussion around the BDN away from Quad action to OECD support, thereby presenting the BDN as an opportunity for economic growth rather than a mechanism for protecting Western hegemony.

The OECD's supranational structure allows the Quad to challenge the BRI while simultaneously avoiding the critique of explicitly countering Chinese development. The goal of the BDN is to streamline existing standards for high-quality infrastructure, guided primarily by the G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment. Principle 6 of the guideline emphasizes strengthening infrastructure governance by promoting "transparent, fair, informed and inclusive decision-making, bidding, and execution processes." A lack of financial transparency within infrastructure initiatives is also a primary criticism of the BRI. The centralization of the G20 Principles within the BDN reveals the new system to be a challenge to the BRI because it is being developed around a standard designed to prevent the most prevalent issues within the BRI. The OECD's influence over the development of the BDN also promotes ideals of the liberal order as it is an international organization rooted in transnational cooperation, thus proving to be another challenge to China's state-driven BRI. The Quad's delegation of the BDN's development to the OECD furthers its ability to challenge the BRI by promoting Western practices without being criticized as anti-China. Although the OECD claims that BDN certification "is open to all infrastructure projects, irrespective of location, ownership or stage in the life cycle... where the need for quality investment in quality infrastructure is greatest," the OECD is specifically skilled in managing development in the Indo-Pacific. In June 2021, OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann explained the Quad's decision to select the OECD to guide BDN development, stating that the OECD has "experience promoting quality infrastructure investment through [its] regional programmes, including in Southeast Asia." The OECD specifically names its experience in Southeast Asia-- the most critical region within the West's efforts to counter China--as a basis for its collaboration with the Quad countries, suggesting that the OECD's partnership uniquely positions the Quad to promote its interests in the region without appearing overtly Western-driven. By adopting this approach, the Quad can promote its actions as an effort to support regional development while simultaneously challenging China's political leverage obtained through the BRI.

The Quad's promotion of the BDN and its development through the OECD reveals the Quad's interest in utilizing the BDN to reduce China's leverage from BRI initiatives while simultaneously avoiding being characterized as a body for Chinese containment. The Quad's delegation of the development of the network to the OECD increases its capacity to promote its interests in the region because the organization's transnational nature allows the Quad to shift the focus around its actions away from Western political interests. By framing the BDN around the G20 Principles for Quality Infrastructure Investment, it becomes a mechanism of inclusive institutional balancing, assisting the Quad

in deflecting the narrative of Chinese containment. These efforts to shift the focus around Quad action, especially surrounding its opposition to the BRI, reveals the complexity of the Quad's strategy in the Indo-Pacific as it attempts to strike a balance between promoting Western economic interests while avoiding being depicted as a security alliance. Providing an alternative to the BRI is a uniquely challenging objective for the Quad because as it attempts to limit China's influence-building, it contradictorily expands its economic clout in the region.

## Increasing Military Cooperation Through Exercise Malabar

Since 2012, China has constructed over 3,200 acres of artificial, militarized islands in the South China Sea. Through dredging, a large coast guard presence, and a build-up of military supplies on islands, China has greatly encroached on the freedom of Indo-Pacific oceans and now poses a challenge to the West's response capability in a potential military conflict in the region. In response, the Quad has increased its military connectedness through the expansion of Exercise Malabar, a naval exercise that evolved from a bilateral operation in 1992 to include Japan as a permanent member and Australia as a participant in 2015 and 2020 respectively. Through the renewal of Australia's participation in Exercise Malabar, the Quad reveals its growing interconnectedness to counter China's aggression in the Indo-Pacific oceans. The Quad has also demonstrated the importance of perception within its efforts to contain China through its decision to host Exercise Malabar in the Bay of Bengal, a symbolically and geopolitically significant body within the Indo-Pacific oceans. The Quad's increased military action through Exercise Malabar to limit Chinese usurping of the freedom of the Indo-Pacific oceans reveals the elevation of the informal dialogue to concrete alliance.

The evolution of Exercise Malabar to include Australia reveals the Quad's increased military cooperation and convergence of member countries' interests. In 2008, Australia withdrew from Exercise Malabar and the Quad entirely, due to China's condemnation of the grouping because Australia was economically reliant on China--its largest trading partner. In 2020, India's decision to invite Australia back to Exercise Malabar marked a significant increase in the connectivity of the Quad. The Australian High Commissioner to India, Barry O'Farrell, said, "with the benefit of hindsight, clearly...it [withdrawing from Malabar] was a mistake. I suspect...that became a stumbling block, and...was not forgotten in terms of reassembling Australia as part of that exercise." India's decision to invite Australia to participate in the exercise in 2020 reveals an increase in the Quad's interconnectedness; the inclination to ignore past tensions and prioritize Western diplomatic ties over connection to China reflects a shift to a new era of the Quad: the beginning of concrete alliance. The shift of Exercise Malabar to a full Quad exercise highlights the increasing security-focused aspect of the grouping. When Australia announced its participation in Exercise Malabar 2020, Australian Minister for Defense, Senator the Honorable Linda Reynolds CSC said, "Participation in sophisticated exercises like MALABAR not only highlights the strategic trust between the members but also strengthens our collective ability to contribute to regional security." Expanding Exercise Malabar, an exercise designed to increase connectivity and "enhance inter-operability, gain from best practices and develop a common understanding of procedures for maritime operations," shifts the perceived focus of the operation. Instead of solely endeavoring to improve the naval capabilities of participant countries, the addition of Australia joins the diplomatic foundation of the Quad with a focus on military cooperation. This connection marks the beginning of the Quad's ascension to an increasingly connected alliance with expansive military capabilities.

The Quad's decision to host Exercise Malabar in the Bay of Bengal for a majority of the recent editions of the exercise indicates the Quad's desire to flex its military capability in a region geopolitically significant to both China and the West. The Bay of Bengal, located in the center of the Indo-Pacific region, is at the "intersection of the expanding zones of strategic interest of China and India," and is critical to the transit of global energy trade to East Asia (Brewster, 2014). The Bay of Bengal is also especially significant to China because many of its sea lines of communication (SLOCs)-- China's primary maritime routes-- are located in the Bay. During "times of peace, the SLOCs serve as commercial trade routes" and "umbilical cords of [the] state's economy." However during conflict, "these routes are considered strategic paths" (Sakhuja, 2001, p. 1). Because the SLOCs are critical to China's economic expansion and attempts to secure military dominance over the region, the Quad's hosting of Exercise Malabar

in their vicinity underlines its desire to deter China's encroachment on the oceans of the Indo-Pacific by demonstrating its military capability. The Quad has hosted Exercise Malabar in the Bay of Bengal more frequently than any other location. Over its twenty-four editions, Malabar has taken place in the Bay of Bengal six times, more frequently in recent years, occurring in part in 2020 and 2021. Notably, the first time Exercise Malabar occurred in the Bay of Bengal was in 2007-- the first time that all four Quad nations participated. The frequency of hosting Exercise Malabar-- the Quad's demonstration of its military capability-- in the Bay of Bengal serves as the Quad's reminder of its observation of China's actions in the oceans of the Indo-Pacific, marking a clear addition of military action to the Quad's previously diplomacy-dominated playbook. Through its decision to host Exercise Malabar most frequently in the Bay of Bengal, the Quad emphasizes its increasing cooperation and naval capability and reveals a clear shift towards a military alliance.

The Quad's actions in the oceans of the Indo-Pacific underline the West's commitment to increase its cooperation to counter Chinese aggression, especially within the military sphere. The expansion of Exercise Malabar to include all four members of the Quad, especially Australia, reflects this sentiment. Australia's inclusion in the exercise marks the Quad's shift away from previous tensions and the solidification of member countries' prioritization of Western rapport. The Quad's decision to host Exercise Malabar in the Bay of Bengal more frequently than any other location also reveals the Quad's priority of preventing Chinese domination of maritime regions critical to the flow of global trade, thereby attempting to reduce China's influence over the Indo-Pacific oceans. By employing military exercises to inhibit the expansion of China's control over the region, the Quad reveals a new strategic option at its disposal: joint military action. This addition to the Quad's exclusively diplomatic approach underlines the Quad's rise from an informal dialogue to a concrete alliance.

## The Development of Western-Centered Resource Networks

The Indo-Pacific is a region undergoing rapid development. Because the Indo-Pacific presents a unique intersection of Western and Chinese interests, both the Quad and China are competing to be at the center of its development to protect their security interests. The Quad is focusing on reducing reliance on China for manufactured goods by strengthening the resilience of global supply chains through cooperative partnership. In a similar effort to reduce China's ability to disrupt Quad nations' communication capabilities, the Quad has taken overt action to prevent Chinese companies' construction of undersea communication cables connecting to Quad countries' internet infrastructure. To further reduce regional dependence on China, the Quad has attempted to offer more efficacious alternatives to China's vaccine distribution. The Quad is attempting to redirect crucial resource networks to limit China's influence over the Indo-Pacific, thereby protecting long-term interests through relationship building to promote Western-driven exchanges.

The Quad is increasing its cooperative action to secure global supply chains (GSCs) through the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI) to protect Western economic independence and that of Indo-Pacific nations. Although not an action of the entire Quad, the SCRI, launched on April 27, 2021 by Australia, India, and Japan, reflects the priorities of the grouping. The SCRI's goal is to address vulnerabilities in GSCs exposed by the Covid-19 pandemic, and it reveals the Quad's focus on increasing manufacturing capabilities outside of China, an approach commonly known as the "China Plus One" strategy. Within the SCRI, parties agree to the "sharing of best practices on supply chain resilience" and to hold "investment promotion events and buyer-seller matching events for stakeholders to explore the possibility of diversification of their supply chains." While it is improbable and likely impossible for the Quad to pivot GSCs away from China entirely, the SCRI reveals the Quad's goal of diversifying manufacturing, an approach aligned with the "China Plus One" strategy. The SCRI and the "China Plus One" strategy demonstrates the Quad countries' desire to become increasingly independent from China, thereby reducing its leverage over Western powers in the economic sphere. Furthermore, The SCRI clearly emphasizes the Western priority of private sector participation in addressing multinational challenges. Under the SCRI, the Australian government offered \$50 million in grants to Australian companies that developed projects to remedy supply chain vulnerabilities. To identify these

weaknesses, the Australian government “engaged broadly with Australian industry and sector experts to identify and analyse critical products,” concluding that personal protective equipment production was an area of focus. This program marks Australia’s continuation of the Quad’s work to reduce reliance on China’s industries by capitalizing on public and private sector cooperation. The grants are designed to stimulate innovation and demonstrate the Quad’s growing desire to become self-sustaining to limit China’s potential influence over GSCs. The grant opportunities also reveal an attempt to promote Western technological practices by seeking to address supply chain vulnerabilities through domestic innovation.

To reduce China’s influence at the regional level, the Quad is increasing its presence within the development of undersea communication cables by providing funding for and challenging Chinese companies for contracts to protect Western cybersecurity and communications from Chinese tampering. With internet connectivity relying on and nearly \$10 trillion in financial transactions passing through undersea communication cables daily, ensuring their security is a priority for the Quad. The first project under the Trilateral Partnership for Infrastructure Investment between the United States, Australia, and Japan was the financing of the Palau Cable 2 (PC2) in late 2020. PC2, constructed by the American company, NEC Corporation, connects “Palau [to] a large-capacity submarine optical cable that connects Southeast Asia to the U.S. mainland (NEC News Room, 2021). As the first project under the Trilateral Partnership, PC2 indicates the Quad’s priority of connecting Indo-Pacific nations with Quad-infrastructure. Because undersea communication cables provide recipient countries with social and economic opportunity, the Quad’s desire to position itself at the center of their development strengthens its relationships with Indo-Pacific nations and allows the Quad to control the security of the cables. However, another cable--the Coral Sea Cable System (CS<sup>2</sup>)--designed to connect the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea to existing Australian cables, was originally planned to be constructed by Huawei Marine, a Chinese majority-owned company. This deal would result in “Chinese hardware connecting to the backbone of Australia’s domestic internet infrastructure” (Clark, 2021), presenting major security concerns for Australia and the Quad because “Chinese firms are required to co-operate with Beijing’s intelligence and security services” (Barrett, 2020). Undersea communication cables are vulnerable to cyber attacks and data extraction, putting private businesses, citizens, and confidential intelligence passing through the cables at risk. Because of this risk, Australia agreed to fund two-thirds of the cable, valued at approximately USD 30 million and replaced Huawei Marine’s contract. Australia’s funding of the cable marks a continuation of the Quad’s work to separate Chinese technology from Quad infrastructure to protect Western security. By investing in CS<sup>2</sup>, Australia used governmental influence to challenge a contract by a private Chinese business, an escalation in the transparency of its attempts to preserve Western security and generate Western-driven development. Undersea communication cables provide a rare opportunity for China to access Quad communications and potentially sensitive information, establishing the cables as a key area in the Quad’s efforts to control development to protect security interests. The Quad’s intervention in the construction process of undersea communication cables reveals its long-term plan to establish pro-Western exchanges with Indo-Pacific nations and underlines the region’s significance in the struggle to protect Quad security interests from potential Chinese interference.

In an effort to assert Western influence over the Indo-Pacific, the Quad is positioning itself to provide Covid-19 vaccines to the region to prioritize consumption of Western vaccines and reduce the need for Chinese vaccines, thereby limiting China’s political leverage through vaccine diplomacy. The Indo-Pacific region is a key priority for China and the Quad’s vaccine distribution efforts. In March 2021, the “Asia-Pacific region... reported only 8 percent of the world’s COVID-19 cases since November 2020, but has received more than half of all vaccines donated worldwide” (Bollyky, 2021). In May 2022, the Quad had delivered almost 257 million vaccine doses specifically to the Indo-Pacific region. In contrast, China had delivered 326 million doses. The Quad’s efforts to match China’s vaccine delivery underlines its desire to challenge China in the distribution of critical resources to build favorable relations with Indo-Pacific nations. The Quad’s vaccine donation to the Indo-Pacific also assists the Quad in its attempt to deflect its actions’ strategic connotations by portraying its efforts as solely humanitarian in motivation. In a promotion of Western practices, the Quad emphasizes multi-sector cooperation in its vaccine distribution effort. In March 2021, the Quad launched the Quad Vaccine Partnership to help “enhance equitable access to safe and effective vaccines in

the Indo-Pacific.” Through the partnership, the Quad has committed to private sector mobilization by financing the improvement of Biological E Ltd.’s, an India-based biotechnology company, production capacity to “produce at least 1 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines by the end of 2022” and to participate in international partnerships. The Quad reaffirmed its commitment to “strengthen and support...international organizations and partnerships including the WHO, COVAX, Gavi, CEPI, and UNICEF,” which contrasts with China’s strategy of delivering vaccines through primarily state-organized programs (White House Briefing Room, 2022). The Quad’s combination of public and private sector efforts to combat China’s vaccine diplomacy offers further indication of its subtle attempts to advocate for private and public sector cooperation in place of state-driven approaches. The Quad’s donation efforts surpass pure product delivery because of its advocacy for a cooperative approach, thereby supporting key characteristics of the liberal order. As the Quad delivers vaccines, it is also hoping to secure the support of Indo-Pacific nations for democratic practices, thus establishing Western influence at the center of the Indo-Pacific region.

The Quad’s efforts to limit China’s influence over various resource networks in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond reflect the grouping’s goal to protect its interests by generating Western-driven development. To limit China’s growing influence, the Quad has engaged in relationship-building endeavors such as shifting supply chains away from China, funding undersea communication cables to provide internet connectivity, and focusing on exceeding China’s vaccine distribution to promote Western practices. While benefits exist for recipient nations of Quad efforts, the grouping hopes to reduce China’s ability to leverage resources for political favors, thereby promoting Western hegemony. Although the Quad aims to prevent the widespread influence of a singular major power in the region, its attempts to protect Quad interests by establishing Western-dominated development creates the same result: superpowers wielding their diplomatic power to preserve economic interests.

## Conclusion

The Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a critical geopolitical arena in Western nations’ attempts to preserve the established global order amidst increasing competition with China. The Quad’s efforts demonstrate its increasing interconnectedness and goal of reducing China’s influence over regional actors. The Quad challenges key sources of China’s empire-building in the region, such as the BRI. The Quad has developed the BDN through the OECD to counter BRI infrastructure projects and therefore, China’s political leverage obtained through predatory lending practices. As the Quad has adapted to respond to China’s neo imperialism in the region, it is evident that the grouping is approaching a concrete alliance. In an increasingly explicit counter to China’s aggression in the region, the Quad has enlarged its military action to maintain the openness of the Indo-Pacific oceans through Exercise Malabar. The Quad also works to exert Western influence over the development of critical resources and networks in the region to build self-benefiting relationships with Indo-Pacific nations, further reducing China’s influence. The Quad’s seemingly altruistic actions have elevated the power struggle in the Indo-Pacific to a competition between China’s authoritarianism and Western democracy.

On May 24th, 2022, the Quad leaders united for the grouping’s fourth meeting and second in-person summit in Tokyo, Japan. Although the longevity of the grouping has been questioned since its revival, the second in-person meeting reflects the Quad’s resilience and increasing relevance as the dialogue survived leadership changes in Japan and Australia and released plans for increasing its cooperation further. In the meeting, the Quad revealed its growing joint financial commitment, pledging more than 50 billion USD for “infrastructure assistance and investment...over the next five years” and the development of the “Quad Debt Management Resource Portal” to promote debt sustainability. While these efforts are likely an attempt to counter the BRI, the Quad leaders were increasingly transparent regarding China’s action in the Indo-Pacific oceans. The Quad condemned “any coercive, provocative or unilateral actions that seek to...increase tensions” in the East and South China Seas such as “the militarization of disputed features, the dangerous use of coast guard vessels and maritime militia...” The Quad also announced new plans to fight the Covid-19 pandemic, from providing 2 billion USD in “last mile support” to deliver vaccines, to addressing vaccine hesitancy through a “Quad-convened event... at the World Health Assembly.” In addition to concrete

investment in areas critical to Western interests, the Quad reemphasized its motive of expanding democratic practices and providing economic opportunities to Indo-Pacific nations. By underlining the benefits of Quad activity, the grouping attempts to avoid the narrative of being an anti-China body. In the joint leaders' statement, the Quad reinforced that it is "a force for good" and affirmed its commitment "to a free and open Indo-Pacific" untouched by "all forms of military, economic and political coercion." The statements mark a shift towards overt recognition of a threat to the power balance in the Indo-Pacific, and more broadly, the Quad's recognition of China's challenge to the established international order. As the Quad continues to develop, it is increasingly evident that it has matured beyond a dialogue, to an alliance devoted to preserving Western hegemony.

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