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14. ABSTRACT Over the past decade, China has steadily gained more territory, control, and influence in the South China Sea. Contrary to many scholarly opinions, the author argues the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue has matured and is effectively combating Chinese influence in the South China Sea. First, he dissects the counterarguments to this thesis. Next, he lays out three supporting claims that 1) geopolitical conditions have aligned within Quad members to provide unity of effort, 2) the Quad and international community are successfully combating China's lawfare tactics, and 3) media, public statements, and public opinion have shown the impact from a Quad led strategy to combat Chinese aggression in the South China Sea. Finally, the author provides recommendations to increase deterrence to a level that ensures a stable, accessible, and open South China Sea.					
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The Quad: A Mature Counterbalance in the South China Sea

INTRODUCTION

At first glance, a snapshot of the geopolitical situation in the South China Sea (SCS) may indicate the United States is executing a losing strategy. One might conclude that despite the US military conducting Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) via sea and air to contest China's illegal occupation and construction activities in the Paracel and Spratly Islands, Chinese influence in the region has made significant gains. However, the author argues the opposite case is true. Specifically, recent efforts and initiatives of the United States, India, Japan, and Australia through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, also known as "The Quad," are now maturing into a highly effective counterbalance to Chinese aggression in the SCS. India's Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, put it best when he recently stated, "Today's summit meeting shows that the Quad has come of age. It will now remain an important pillar of stability in the region."¹

The origins of the Quad stem from coordinating efforts of the international response to the 2004 tsunami that devastated Indonesia, Thailand, and many other countries in the Indian Ocean.² Making the relationship official in 2007, the Quad focused on less controversial topics such as disaster response, counterterrorism, and transnational crime. The strategic dialogue stagnated and fizzled out for about a decade. It existed in name only until being revived in 2017 by the heads of state of all four member countries.³ Since 2017, the Quad has become more unified and taken a more open approach to contest China's claims in the SCS, promoting a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) region.

The author will lay out the case for the Quad's success in deterring Chinese aggression in the SCS. First, he will analyze the counterargument that China has made significant gains in the region. This view has been captured in multiple media headlines and is the conclusion of many think-tank analyses. Following the counterargument, three main arguments will be presented, explaining why the Quad is producing a winning strategy against China in the SCS. First, the Quad has unity of effort for the first time since its inception and is reaching its full

¹ Narendra Modi, Remarks by President Biden, Prime Minister Modi of India, Prime Minister Morrison of Australia, and Prime Minister Suga of Japan in the Virtual Quad Leaders Summit, March 12, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/03/12/remarks-by-president-biden-prime-minister-modi-of-india-prime-minister-morrison-of-australia-and-prime-minister-suga-of-japan-in-virtual-meeting-of-the-quad/>.

² Jeffrey Becker, "'Sea Foam in the Ocean' or an 'Asian NATO'? Chinese Views of the Quad," *The Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, Quad Plus: Form Versus Substance, 3, no. 4 (2020): 14.

³ While multiple sources place blame on Australia for pulling out of the Quad in 2010, counterarguments also identify an ambivalence between all four members states during that time. Former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd explains in: Kevin Rudd, "The Convenient Rewriting of the History of the 'Quad,'" *Nikkei Asia*, March 26, 2019, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/The-Convenient-Rewriting-of-the-History-of-the-Quad>.

potential to combat China's aggressiveness in the region. Second, Quad actions in the SCS nullify China's use of Lawfare, and customary international norms will not gradually change in favor of China. Third, the author demonstrates how China is significantly concerned with the Quad's gaining influence by analyzing Chinese media and public-official statements. These three arguments explain how the Quad is successfully combating China's aggressive economic policies worldwide. Their aggressive 'Lawfare' approaches are ineffective, and China's reactive responses to Quad initiatives show genuine concern as regional influence swings back in favor of a FOIP.

BACKGROUND AND A COUNTER-ARGUMENT

A counterargument posits the Quad has failed to slow down Chinese aggression in the SCS. China now occupies 27 outposts in the Paracel and Spratly Islands, has begun a massive dredging operation to build over 3,200 acres of artificial island territory in the past eight years, and has militarized at least three of these islands.⁴ Analysts are approaching this problem set from multiple perspectives (Chinese, United States, and other nations worldwide) claim China has the momentum and will eventually achieve its espoused goal to control all territory and seas within the Nine Dashed Line.⁵ In contrast, the author rebukes these early territorial gains as merely initial gains resulting from an overly aggressive approach.⁶

Chinese strategists believe the Quad can be stunted by positioning China as an attractive economic and political partner for the Quad states and other ASEAN claimant nations.⁷ Other Western analysts agree that international trade between China and Quad members gives too much leverage to China, and Quad members will shy away from

⁴ "Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, accessed August 11, 2021, <https://amti.csis.org/>.

⁵ Jamie Seidel, "China's 'Dangerous' Plan Almost Complete," *News.Com.Au — Australia's Leading News Site*, January 1, 2020, sec. Military, <https://www.news.com.au/technology/innovation/military/we-are-losing-control-chinas-dangerous-south-china-sea-plan-almost-complete/news-story/cc53d07774033f2aa70c8fbe75b5eae3>; Nguyen Xuan Quynh et al., "China Is Winning the Silent War to Dominate the South China Sea," *Bloomberg.Com*, July 10, 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2019-south-china-sea-silent-war/>; Christopher Sharman, "China Is Winning Its Campaign to Control the South China Sea | RealClearPolitics," *RealClear Politics*, May 11, 2020, https://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2020/05/11/china_is_winning_its_campaign_to_control_the_south_china_sea_143164.html.

⁶ The early territorial gains can be compared a stock's Initial Public Offering (IPO). The initial spike is not an indicator or overall performance and will level out as market forces take hold.

⁷ Joel Wuthnow, "China's Shifting Attitude on the Indo-Pacific Quad," *War on the Rocks*, April 7, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/04/chinas-shifting-attitude-on-the-indo-pacific-quad/>.

focusing on controversial topics like the SCS.⁸ While these concerns were valid in the past, Quad members have decreased their weight on a healthy trade relationship with China. They have begun diversifying their supply networks to reduce dependence on Chinese trade.

Analysts and international law experts argue China is deftly using Lawfare to its advantage in the SCS. It is on track to successfully seize the majority of the SCS through brute force and slowly change customary norms. Their use of lawfare tactics is extensive. It spans from initial claims using revisionist historical maps, declaring a sovereign identification zone inside their claimed Nine Dashed Line, building artificial islands, and repeatedly expelling other claimant nations from these contested waters.⁹ Additionally, China has blatantly disregarded the 2016 United Nations tribunal court ruling, hoping an eventual tacit acquiescence from the international community will garner the successes that Russia experienced in Crimea and South Ossetia.¹⁰

Finally, many analysts believe the Quad members will ultimately temper their responses for fear of miscalculation in such a volatile region. This assertion is not valid. Credible deterrence requires a legitimate threat of consequences. The author assesses that all four members of the Quad are poised to enforce a rules-based order and Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), primarily because it aligns with each country's national interests.

ARGUMENT 1: THE NATIONAL INTERESTS ARE ALIGNED

The national interests of all four Quad members are synergistically aligned against a belligerent China. The COVID-19 Pandemic and China's inadequate response have lessened China's role as an international leader. Additionally, China has overplayed its hand with aggressive economic retaliation and provoking assertiveness against Quad members. For example, China intended to neutralize the effectiveness of the Quad by offering trade incentives to India while simultaneously issuing coercive ultimatums to Australia. However, this plan backfired. Instead, it drove a wedge between each Quad member state and China, forging the Quad members closer in every aspect of the DIME (Diplomatic, Information, Military, Economic)

⁸ Jagannath Panda, "India and the Quad Plus Between Pointed-Alignment and Conjectural Alliance," *Indo-Pacific Affairs* 3, no. 5 (2020): 44; Yihan Ma, "China: Leading Foreign Trade Partners Trade Share 2020," June 16, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/257112/main-import-partners-for-china/>.

⁹ Raul Pedrozo, "China's Revised Maritime Traffic Safety Law," *International Law Studies* 97, no. 2021 (n.d.): 14.

¹⁰ Akriti Vasudeva, "US-China Strategic Competition and Washington's Conception of Quad Plus," *Indo-Pacific Affairs*, Quad Plus: Form Versus Substance, 3, no. 5 (2020): 28.

area. It has been 14 years since the Quad was established, and now is the first time all four Quad members have a shared prioritized interest in curbing China's influence in the South China Sea. This section explains why each Quad member has chosen to unite and the actions taken by each country to leverage the Quad relationship to counter Chinese influence in the region.

India's commitment to the Quad is currently at an all-time high. Historically, India's relationship with the United States has experienced highs and lows since its independence in 1947.¹¹ However, increased tension with China has pushed India away from its traditional non-alignment policy, and it now leverages the unified efforts of the Quad to push back on China. As previously mentioned, China attempted economic outreach to India, determined to undermine the Quad, but India was not interested.¹² There are many other tensions in the China-India relationship, such as China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative and renewed border conflicts.

First, China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative has encroached on India's historic economic sphere. China has developed infrastructure agreements with Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh.¹³ India views these recent actions as economic envelopment and a significant source of tension between India and China. Furthermore, India is highly invested in open sea lanes in the SCS. Over 55% of India's international trade passes through the waterways of the SCS.¹⁴ These economic tensions have influenced India to take more interest in the SCS conflict and invest more into the Quad.

Additionally, India has experienced a longstanding border dispute with China. While hedging has been India's strategy of choice, the renewed 2020 border standoff in eastern Ladakh has forced Indian leaders to rethink this approach. They are now more comfortable showing resolve through concrete balancing acts leveraging the Quad.¹⁵

¹¹ India has historically experienced a rocky relationship with the United States and other Western powers. During its border clash with China in 1962, India felt the U.S. neglected to come to its aid. Additionally, during the 1973 war with Pakistan, the United States and United Kingdom aligned more with Pakistan.

¹² Becker, "'Sea Foam in the Ocean' or an 'Asian NATO'? Chinese Views of the Quad."

¹³ Philip Davidson, "Statement of Admiral Philip S. Davidson, U.S. Navy Commander, U.S. INDO-PACIFIC Command before the Senate Armed Services Committee on U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Posture," § U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee (2021); Stephen Nagy, "Quad Plus? Carving Out Canada's Middle-Power Role," *Indo-Pacific Affairs* 5, no. 3 (2020): 183.

¹⁴ Premesha Saha, "India Calibrates Its South China Sea Approach," ORF Observer Research Foundation, July 2021, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/india-calibrates-its-south-china-sea-approach/>.

¹⁵ Jeffrey Gettleman, Hari Kumar, and Sameer Yasir, "Worst Clash in Decades on Disputed India-China Border Kills 20 Indian Troops," *New York Times*, 16 June 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/>; and Rajesh Roy, "Indians Rage at China After Bloody Border Clash," *Wall Street Journal*, 18 June 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/>.

As part of its "Look East" policy, India has expanded its formidable navy and blue water capability into the SCS.¹⁶ While the author doubts the Indian navy will participate in FONOPs in the near term, their presence alone sends a powerful signal.¹⁷ Despite Australia being sidelined for many years because India preferred to avoid provoking China, India invited the Royal Australian Navy to resume participation in the multilateral exercise Malabar, uniting all militaries from the Quad in the South China Sea.¹⁸

Finally, to reduce dependence on China, India has diversified its international trade. The United States recently became India's top trade partner, and foreign military sales between the United States and India are at an all-time high.¹⁹ Throughout this analysis, one of the running themes is China's ability to leverage its economic strength against other nations. However, each of the Quad members is proactively seeking ways to lessen their dependence on China.

Next, the author analyzed Australia. Whereas India has historically tried to balance regional relationships through strategic non-alignment, Australia has been forced to balance diverging economic and security partnerships over the past two decades. Even though Australia has been a long-time ally with the United States through the Australia-New Zealand-United States (ANZUS) Security Treaty, they developed a trade interdependence with China. China is well aware of this interdependency. In the past, China has effectively executed its "divide and conquer" tactic to nullify the influence of international organizations such as ASEAN, the United Nations, and the Quad.²⁰ However, this tactic is no longer working against the Quad.

To understand how Australia is combating Chinese attempts to coerce a more neutral position in the SCS, it is crucial to understand the two countries' interdependence and recent developments. In 2020, Australia exported 42% of its goods to China.²¹ Chinese tourism is also

¹⁶ "Janes: Indian Navy to Send Task Force on Months-Long Indo-Pacific Deployment," accessed August 17, 2021, https://customer-janes-com.usnwc.idm.oclc.org/Janes/Display/BSP_2902-JDW.

¹⁷ In addition to Quad cooperation on SCS military actions, other major European allies are showing presence in SCS to support a FOIP. See "Britain's Return to the Indo-Pacific," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, August 11, 2021, <https://amti.csis.org/britains-return-to-the-indo-pacific/>; Celine Pajon, "France's Indo-Pacific Strategy and the Quad Plus," *Indo-Pacific Affairs*, Quad Plus: Form versus Substance, 3, no. 5 (2020): 165; Larissa Stunkel and Marc Lanteigne, "How a German Frigate in the South China Sea May Upend Beijing-Berlin Relations," *The Diplomat*, August 6, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/08/how-a-german-frigate-in-the-south-china-sea-may-upend-beijing-berlin-relations/>.

¹⁸ Patrick Buchan and Benjamin Rimland, "Defining the Diamond: The Past, Present, and Future of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue," accessed August 16, 2021, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/defining-diamond-past-present-and-future-quadrilateral-security-dialogue>.

¹⁹ Davidson, Statement of Admiral Philip S. Davidson, U.S. Navy Commander, U.S. INDO-PACIFIC Command before the Senate Armed Services Committee on U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Posture.

²⁰ China has historically relegated ASEAN to the sidelines of the SCS situation by employing a "divide and conquer" tactic. Since ASEAN requires a unanimous decision before acting, China buys the votes of Cambodia, Laos, and sometimes Myanmar by using economic incentives. Additionally, their permanent vote on the UN Security Council assures no UN Resolution against them will pass.

²¹ "Australia Exports By Country," October 9, 2021, <https://tradingeconomics.com/australia/exports-by-country>.

a significant source of income for Australia, and over 25% of foreign tourists visit from China.²² One-third of all students who study at Australian universities are international students, and the majority come from China.²³ Furthermore, China invested heavily to influence local and national politics in Australia. Evidence shows China supported multiple candidates who promoted pro-China policies, explicitly targeting a softer stance on China's actions in the SCS.²⁴

All the above concerns reveal the amount of leverage China was developing against Australia. It came to a head when China issued 14 points demanding Australia rectify before normal trade relations could resume.²⁵ These trade tariffs dealt a harsh blow to the Australian economy, but also served as a clear breaking point to Australia's reluctant interdependence with China.

Australia has begun diversifying its international trade portfolio. India, Japan, and Australia are working to establish a Supply Chain Resilience Network (SCRI).²⁶ Australia canceled an agreement that allowed the Chinese tech company, Huawei, to build their nation's 5G network.²⁷ Furthermore, Australia has diversified its mineral exports, diverting large coal shipments (historically destined for China) to India and South Korea.²⁸ All these actions make the Australian economy more resilient while simultaneously presenting additional energy challenges in China. As Australia lessens its dependence on Chinese trade, China is now compelled to search for alternative import options to its increasing mineral demands.

Furthermore, Australia is expanding its military capability. First, it is expanding its navy. As part of a \$400 billion defense-wide plan, the Australian navy will replace older frigates, add patrol vessels, mine-hunters, support ships, and expand its submarine fleet.²⁹ Additionally,

²² Amit Gupta, "Realistic Expectations The China Factor in the Australia–US Perspective on the Indo-Pacific," *Indo-Pacific Affairs*, Quad Plus: Form versus Substance, 3, no. 5 (2020): 257.

²³ Christopher Hughes, "Australia: Chinese Students in Australia 2021," Statista, accessed October 6, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/430276/number-of-chinese-students-in-australia-by-education-sector/>.

²⁴ Amy Searight, "Countering China's Influence Operations: Lessons from Australia," May 8, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/countering-chinas-influence-operations-lessons-australia>.

²⁵ Melissa Conley Tyler, "Australia Can Repair Its Relationship with China, Here Are Three Ways to Start," *ABC News*, December 2, 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-12-02/china-australia-tension-three-ways-repair-relationship/12941506>.

²⁶ Stephen Dziedzic, "Abbott Meeting Triggers New Trade Talks between Australia and India," *ABC News*, August 12, 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-08-12/india-australia-free-trade-talks-to-resume-abbott-tehan/100373390>.

²⁷ Gupta, "Realistic Expectations: The China Factor in the Australia–US Perspective on the Indo-Pacific."

²⁸ Inderpreet Walia, "Can China Do without Coal Imports from Australia?," *Lloyd's List*, September 30, 2021, <https://lloydslist.maritimeintelligence.informa.com/LL1138362/Can-China-do-without-coal-imports-from-Australia>; Jeffrey Wilson, "Australia Shows the World What Decoupling From China Looks Like," *Foreign Policy* (blog), November 9, 2021, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2021/11/09/australia-china-decoupling-trade-sanctions-coronavirus-geopolitics/>.

²⁹ David Axe, "Australia Has A Plan For Battling China—Add Lots And Lots Of Submarines," *Forbes*, July 3, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2020/07/03/australia-has-a-plan-to-grow-its-navy-add-lots-and-lots-of-submarines/>.

Australia recently signed an agreement with the United States and the United Kingdom (AUKUS) a nuclear submarine capability, increasing operating range into the SCS.³⁰ AUKUS is a bold move that shows a commitment to collective defense. Furthermore, Australia is in the final stages of signing a defence and security cooperation treaty.³¹ Finally, Australia's participation in Exercise Malabar this year will improve interoperability between Quad militaries and send a unified message supporting a FOIP.

Japan has been the most steadfast member of the Quad and has a vested interest in events in the SCS. Over 20 percent of Japan's international trade transit through the SCS.³² In addition to the explosive situation in the SCS, Japan shares a similar standoff with the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea. If China achieves its goals in the SCS, it could set a detrimental precedent for the situation in the East China Sea.

Aggressive action between the Japanese Self Defense Force (JSDF) and the Chinese maritime militia in the Senkaku Islands has galvanized Japan to spend more on defense, specifically the naval capacity to combat a belligerent China. Additionally, India and Japan will exercise together this year. The Indian Air Force will teach Japanese fighter pilots how to fight the Russian-made SU-30 aircraft, a proliferated fighter used by the Chinese Air Force (PLAAF).³³ Finally, Japan has fully prioritized teaming with Quad members in support of a FOIP.³⁴

The United States is fully dedicated to a FOIP region, especially in the SCS. This importance is articulated in every primary policy document: the National Security Strategy, the National Defense Strategy, and the State Department's *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision*. Whereas a China threat once received equal weight amongst small wars and skirmishes across the globe, Great Power Competition with China is now a priority across the US government.

That said, aligning the priority of effort between member nations is the most challenging part of advancing policy and achieving goals through multilateral groupings. The author deduces India, Australia, Japan, and the United States have never been more aligned against Chinese

³⁰ Douglas Jackson, "More Than Submarines: Implications of AUKUS in the Air Domain," accessed October 6, 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/more-submarines-implications-aukus-air-domain?fbclid=IwAR2eO0UOxWyBnvhf-zZyNDi5Lqe2BrKnBiCUSMioyKh90tZgALtFAA9GYvE>; Tyler, "Australia Can Repair Its Relationship with China, Here Are Three Ways to Start."

³¹ Story by Reuters, "Australia and Japan to Sign Defense Pact," CNN, January 5, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/01/04/asia/australia-japan-defense-pact-intl-hnk/index.html>.

³² Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), "How Much Trade Transits the South China Sea?," ChinaPower Project, August 2, 2017, <https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea/>.

³³ Kartik Sud, "Japan-India Drills To Feature SU-30 Fighters Like Those Flown By China," *DefenceXP - Indian Defence Network* (blog), September 2, 2021, <https://www.defencexp.com/japan-india-drills-to-feature-su-30-fighters-like-those-flown-by-china/>.

³⁴ Cabinet Decision of Japan, National Defense Program Guidelines 2019, 16.

attempts to seize the SCS. Over the past two years, Beijing antagonized all four Quad partners through tit-for-tat political and economic disputes.³⁵ The Quad is now moving in the same direction and working together to achieve synergistic effects.

ARGUMENT 2: LAWFARE IS NOT WORKING

Chinese attempts to use Lawfare in the SCS are not working. When dealing with the SCS, China has attempted to use what Charles Dunlap calls Lawfare.³⁶ Mark Voyager takes this concept and analyzes Russia's successful seizure of Crimea and South Ossetia through Lawfare.³⁷ There are multiple parallels between Russia's lawfare tactics and those implemented by China in the SCS. However, despite China's best effort to lessen the collective effectiveness of the Quad, members along with the international community are successfully preventing the changing of customary norms in the SCS.

The twisting and permissive reinterpretation of history to support Chinese Lawfare to justify *ex post ante* China's seizure of vast swathes of the SCS are less successful than benchmark historical examples such as Russia's justification for seizing Crimea. Many attempts of the People's Republic of China (PRC) to revive a 1947 edition of a map claiming almost the entirety of the SCS have been met with fierce resistance from Quad member nations, other claimant countries, and the international community. China's claim also exceeds the geographical limits within the United Nations Conventional Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). A typical Chinese counterargument contests the United States is not a signatory to UNCLOS and should not be vocalizing its enforcement. Fortunately, India, Japan, and Australia are signatory members. Their opposition provides significant weight against China's position.

China is attempting to use Lawfare to change customary norms over time. Tacit acquiescence from the international community has historically permitted a belligerent country to achieve territorial objectives.³⁸ However, successful application of Lawfare is not the case with the SCS, and the author assesses there is ample legal opposition to China's claims in the SCS.

³⁵ Wuthnow, "China's Shifting Attitude on the Indo-Pacific Quad."

³⁶ Jr Dunlap, "Lawfare: A Decisive Element of 21st-Century Conflicts?" (NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIV WASHINGTON DC INST FOR NATIONAL STRATEGIC STUDIES, January 1, 2009), <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA515192>.

³⁷ Mark Voyager, "Russian Lawfare - Russia's Weaponisation of International and Domestic Law: Implications For the Region and Policy Recommendations," *Journal on Baltic Security* 4, no. 2 (December 5, 2018): 35–42.

³⁸ Dunlap, "Lawfare"; Voyager, "Russian Lawfare - Russia's Weaponisation of International and Domestic Law: Implications For the Region and Policy Recommendations."

First, the Philippines won its claims against China in a 2016 international court case. The Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled overwhelmingly in favor of the Philippines, determining China's Nine Dashed Line claim was unlawful.³⁹ Second, in 2017, ASEAN member states overcame Chinese influence and produced a communique calling for the non-militarization of the SCS and the halting of island-building.⁴⁰ These two documents provided legal justification against China's case and principally aligned claimant nations with the United States and Quad members' goal of preventing China from controlling the SCS.

Lawfare is effective when opposing forces permit (either passively or actively) the changing of customary norms through a lack of presence. Quad members have been ramping up military activities in the SCS to combat Chinese attempts of shifting the status quo in the SCS.⁴¹ The United States and Australia routinely conduct FONOPS to contest China's territorial water claims around its militarized and non-militarized artificial islands. The Indian Navy and Japanese SDF regularly operate in and around the SCS throughout the Chinese Nine Dashed Line claimed territory. This year, the Quad's militaries all exercised in the SCS for Exercise Malabar, increasing interoperability and familiarizing with the battlespace. There have been multiple examples of revisionist states using Lawfare to obtain national objectives. There is abundant evidence China is also utilizing these tactics in the SCS. However, the international community led by the Quad is effectively countering China's use of Lawfare.

ARGUMENT 3: CHINA'S SHIFTING PERSPECTIVE OF THE QUAD

Historically, China has paid little attention to the Quad as a collective unit. High-level government officials and the Chinese press commonly downplay its significance. In 2018, China's Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, called the Quad "seafoam" that will assuredly dissipate.⁴² The director of a leading Chinese think tank, CASS, stated China could continue successfully driving wedges between Quad members using economic incentives.⁴³ Mu Xiaoming, a professor at China's National Defense University, believes India will hold back the Quad through its desire to maintain "strategic autonomy."⁴⁴ Several Chinese media outlets downplayed the impact of the Quad by accusing the United States of outsourcing its presence in the SCS.

³⁹ Caitlin Campbell and Nargiza Salidjanova, "South China Sea Arbitration Ruling: What Happened and What's Next?," July 12, 2016.

⁴⁰ "Joint Communiqués of the 50th ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting," accessed October 10, 2021, <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/4.pdf>.

⁴¹ Mark Voyager argues the international community chose to avoid intervention in Crimea due to risk.

⁴² Becker, "'Sea Foam in the Ocean' or an 'Asian NATO'? Chinese Views of the Quad."

⁴³ Becker, 20.

⁴⁴ Mu Xiaoming, "New Tricks Keep Coming: U.S. Wants to 'Solidify' Its 'Indo-Pacific

However, recently Chinese political figures and the Chinese press have indicated a genuine concern for the increased influence of the Quad in the SCS region. In stark contrast to the “seafoam” comment, in 2020, Luo Zhaohui, China's deputy foreign minister for Asian affairs, called the Quad a “mini-NATO” and an “Anti-China front.”⁴⁵ Wang Yi, China's Minister of Foreign Affairs, changed his description of the Quad by stating the Quad is part of the US Indo-Pacific Strategy against China. In a recent press conference, China's Foreign Ministry called on the United States and Australia to abandon its Cold War containment mentality against China in the SCS.⁴⁶ In March 2021, a Chinese defense ministry spokesperson accused the Quad of advocating “bloc confrontation” and “blatantly stirring up trouble among regional countries.”⁴⁷ These comments indicate a clear shift in tone, showing China’s rising concern for the Quad.

By identifying at least 36 articles from leading Chinese analysts and Chinese government officials from 2018-2021, China has amped up its rhetoric calling the Quad a US attempt to usurp Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Centrality and disrupt efforts of other regional institutions. This rhetoric reinforces China's concern for the Quad's gaining influence in the region and serves as an attempt to drive a wedge between ASEAN member states and members of the Quad.⁴⁸ Finally, the Lowy Institute conducted multiple polls over five years, and the results show a progressively worse opinion on China's reputation as a trusted international partner (trade or otherwise). This declining lack of confidence in China further reinforces the opportunity for influence in the region and how the Quad is seizing this opportunity.

In summary, China’s reputation among its regional neighbors is declining. It has demonstrated its growing concern for the Quad through its actions. Their changes in the tone of media and government official statements clearly articulate this concern and reinforce the Quad’s strategy is working.

ANALYTIC CONCLUSION

The alignment of the Quad in the South China Sea has rapidly transformed the loose dialogue partnership from a paper tiger to an effective winning strategy amongst like-minded

Strategy? (*Buduanchu XinZhao: Mei “Yintai Zhanlue” Yao “Shixinhua?”* 不断出新招：美“印太战略”要“实心化”?), *People’s Daily*, 6 August 2018, <http://military.people.com.cn/>.

⁴⁵ Becker, “‘Sea Foam in the Ocean’ or an ‘Asian NATO’? Chinese Views of the Quad.”

⁴⁶ Wenbin Wang, “China Urges U.S. to Discard Cold War Mentality,” *News, ECNS*, July 21, 2020, <http://www.ecns.cn/news/2020-07-21/detail-ifzyhpqw4006783.shtml>.

⁴⁷ Wuthnow, “China’s Shifting Attitude on the Indo-Pacific Quad.”

⁴⁸ Wuthnow.

partners in the Asia-Pacific. Quad members are simultaneously decreasing their dependence on Chinese trade while forming closer security ties with each other or additional nations in the region. The Quad and partner nations in the region are successfully countering Chinese attempts to use Lawfare to gradually change the customary norms in the SCS. Through the stark change in tone from high-level PRC officials and Chinese political analysts, it is apparent that the Quad frightens China.

To capitalize on the momentum the Quad has experienced in the SCS, the author has four recommendations for progressing towards a better state. Quad members must continue lessening dependence on Chinese trade by diversifying their trade partners. They must continue promoting Quad initiatives that do not specifically target China to legitimize the Quad as something more than a temporary anti-China club. For example, Covid-19 vaccine distribution, climate change initiatives, and joint exercises in the region are a good start. They should not shy away from explicitly calling out Chinese actions contrary to a FOIP. Additionally, Quad members should continue operating and exercising in the SCS and encourage like-minded militaries, such as the United Kingdom, Germany, and France, to participate in joint patrols and FONOPs.

The author does not believe any party wants a war. However, China is willing to push the limit up to the point of conflict using any means necessary. Conflict is avoided by deterrence. Sometimes deterrence is demonstrated by actions to show one means business. China has gradually gained more control in the SCS over the past eight years. However, the Quad is now more effective than ever. It can stabilize a volatile SCS by compelling China to reconsider its strategy.

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