



## **Expanding and Strengthening the ‘Quad’: A Case for a Pacific Region Defense Pact**

*By: Audrey Kuhnle*

*Audrey Kuhnle is a Master of International Affairs student at the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University. Her primary interests include cyber policy, military and defense policy, and grand strategy.*

The United States is not the global hegemon it once was. Being challenged by the rising strength of China, the United States needs to concentrate on balancing the power of China. If the United States stays on its current trajectory, China will shift the world to be bipolar and eventually overtake the United States in the global world order.

The United States must turn to geographically advantaged partnerships in order to counter the rising threat of China and ultimately maintain the United States’ role as a global hegemon. Indo-Pacific powers who will play a major role in a potential conflict stand the most to gain by joining a formal cooperation or defense treaty headed by the United States. These powers include the ‘Quad’ (Australia, India, and Japan), South Korea, and Vietnam. This is the most promising strategy to successfully counter and balance the power of China.

Japan is already in argument with [China over the Senkaku Islands](#). India is [disputing the Himalayan borders](#). Australia and China are currently in a rising trade war, [where Australian goods are being banned in China](#). South China Sea regional powers, such as Vietnam, are [disputing China over control of the Sea](#). South Korea is [currently stuck in the crossfire between China and the United States](#). These countries may face different security threats but do share an overriding one in common: China.

It is simply not in the United States’ or other states’ interests to see a war break out in the Indo-Pacific region. However, there is no room for two global hegemons. One of the missions of the Quad is to focus [“on collective efforts to advance a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region.”](#) By expanding this focus to a larger number of players, the success of the mission is likely to be greater.

Building a defense pact between the Quad, Vietnam, and South Korea is one of the United States’ best options to get [China to abide by international law](#). A defense pact would allow members to take a clear stand against Chinese actions through joint military exercises while still maintaining their own autonomy. A NATO-like structure would take too much autonomy from members. It would be important to ensure that this pact does not follow the structure of NATO for fear of a public backlash in the United States against carrying the primary burden.

Some argue that a formal alliance would provoke China and increase the likelihood of conflict. Overall, the likelihood of conflict between China and the United States has increased and seems to be increasing continually. China will not be pleased with a formal alliance, but the United States must act in a proactive manner to head off the threat. By expanding and strengthening the “Quad”,



the United States would be taking a proactive stance against the rising power of China, and ultimately limit the chances of war. Furthermore, many countries' economies are highly dependent upon China. Risking economic uncertainty may not seem worth it for many countries; but, historically, [economic interdependence has not been sufficient to prevent war](#).

According to the Global Conflict Tracker by the Council on Foreign Relations, the dispute in the [South China Sea is critical and continually worsening](#). This situation needs to be an utmost concern of the United States' foreign policy agenda in the near future. 40% of the world's natural gas trade and a total of \$3.37 trillion USD have passed through since 2016. If China were to completely seize the region, it would prove catastrophic to the United States and the world.

The United States needs to take control of this situation and lead the region away from a worsening territorial dispute. The region is too economically vital to be controlled by China. A defense pact would provide a hard power balance to China's power and expansion.