

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT
Press Briefing

“Previewing the Quad Leaders Summit”

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CSIS EXPERTS

Michael J. Green

Senior Vice President for Asia and Japan Chair, CSIS

Richard M. Rossow

Senior Adviser and Wadhvani Chair in U.S.-India Policy Studies, CSIS

Bonny Lin

Director, China Power Project and Senior Fellow, Asian Security, CSIS

MODERATOR

Paige Montfort

Media Relations Coordinator, External Relations, CSIS

*Transcript By
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Paige Montfort: Thank you very much, Operator. And, colleagues, welcome. As our operator said, my name is Paige Montfort. I'm the media relations coordinator here at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Thank you very much for joining us. We have a great briefing lined up for you today. We will be previewing the Quad Leaders Summit, which is going to take place in just about two days' time at the White House, as you all know. And we'll also be reflecting a bit on the recent Australia-U.K.-U.S. alliance announcement.

We're fortunate today to be joined by three leading CSIS experts, who will each give you their analysis on the summit and other recent developments. And after that, we will move into the question-and-answer session, which will be prompted by instructions from our operator. So without further ado, I'd like to introduce our experts.

We have with us today Dr. Mike Green, who is our senior vice president for Asia and our Japan chair. As well as Rick Rossow, a senior advisor here at CSIS who holds the Wadhvani chair in U.S.-India policy studies. And Dr. Bonnie Lin, a senior fellow for Asian security and the director of the China Power Project at CSIS. She will round out the discussion with her analysis on how the Quad agenda will be viewed in Beijing.

And so with that, I'd like to turn it over to Dr. Mike Green to start us off.

Michael J.
Green:

Thank you very much, Paige. Thank you all for joining us.

The four leaders – President Biden, of course, Yoshihide Suga of Japan, Scott Morrison of Australia, and Narendra Modi of India will meet Friday. And this will be their first in-person summit meeting, and the first in-person summit for this grouping now called the Quad. They had a virtual meeting earlier this year. The Quad had its genesis in 2004 and '05. At the time I was the senior Asia person in the White House on the NSC staff. And you'll recall that the day after Christmas our time there was a massive tsunami – earthquake, tsunami that hit the Indian Ocean, causing devastation from Sri Lanka to Aceh, Indonesia, and Phuket, Thailand.

And in the space of basically a day, the U.S., Japan, Australia, and India stood up a joint taskforce, mostly naval, to rescue people and saved thousands of lives. It was very fast. The decision was fast, the deployment was fast. The forces worked together well and were motivated by a common sense of purpose and the need to help people and provide public goods. You know, after that mission ended there was a lot of discussion in all four countries about making this something more permanent. And Prime Minister Abe of Japan, when he first ran for prime minister, ran on a promise to have a Quad summit.

But that turned out to be a bit too much in around 2006, '07, '08. The other governments lost enthusiasm, and the whole thing fizzled. At the time, Hu Jintao in China always was engaging in 2008 in some very positive diplomacy with China's neighbors. But now the Quad is back. And one of the main reasons is that Xi Jinping has taken a much harsher line towards his neighbors with violence against Indian troops in the Himalayan Mountains, a pronounced increase in PLA military and paramilitary operations around Japan's waters, a relentless embargo against

Australia of exports of everything from wine to coal because of Australian government and, you know, expert criticism of China's human rights, and so forth.

So there's an urgency to the Quad now. And it has become really one of the most important parts of the diplomatic toolkit for these four countries. This meeting will probably not have any major new announcements. The big announcements came when they met for the first time virtually earlier this year. They will refocus on vaccine distribution, which was a major feature, a promise of a billion vaccines when they met virtually. But India, which was going to produce many of the vaccines, was clobbered by COVID. So they'll get back to that. They will focus on supply-chain security, semiconductors, where the U.S.-Japan-Australia are largely on the same page. I think Rick can speak to India's position, but India is aligning more with us on these technology issues.

They will also focus in the technology space on cooperating on an open RAN network for 5G telecommunications, climate change, cyber. The four governments engage in regular maritime exercises and intelligence exchanges now. And I suspect they will signal something about AUKUS, this new Australia-U.K.-U.S. alliance, which the French are very displeased with because they've lost a 60 billion-plus-dollar submarine deal with Australia. It will now be built by the U.S., U.K., with Australia for a nuclear propulsion system, a nuclear-powered submarine.

Within the region, that's viewed generally very positively, especially Japan, and I think India, because it resets the balance of naval power vis-à-vis an expanding PLA. But there's a lot of blowback against the U.S. and Australia from France. And I think you'll probably see some effort to talk about the importance of Europe and France in the Indo-Pacific as well.

So this is now a regular feature of the diplomacy in Asia. The Chinese hate it. The Southeast Asians are getting used to it. But for the four leaders, this is now a central part of how they're going to manage an increasingly ambitious and aggressive China.

Over to Rick. Thank you.

Richard M.
Rossow:

Thanks, Mike.

At different periods over the last 15 years, you know, I think, you know, since the sort of false start that we saw, as you noted, after the tsunami, there's quite a bit on people's minds, and sometimes even on officials' lips. But normally I think, during that 15-year period, there were periods where either India or Australia seemed a bit cool on the concept.

But, you know, Mike noted the new pressures that Australia has been facing from China and India as well, and not just simply, you know, the border areas along the Himalayas. But if you talk to Indian officials, you know, concerned about the PLA Navy's expanded presence in the Indian Ocean, including investments in strategic infrastructure and ports throughout the region, cyberattacks, and most notably, I think, encroaching on Bhutanese territory, a real territory grab that we see that's happening from a country that is, you know, to some extent, almost a protectorate

of India. And India has actually put its troops in place to try to head that off in some spaces.

I think, you know, in terms of why suddenly the Quad is taking off, you know, one critical element is the fact that India and Australia have not just seen their own threats, you know, from China, but actually dramatically improved their own bilateral relationship. Any time that you're talking about a four-country organization, if two of them aren't seeing eye to eye it's pretty difficult to take a couple of steps in the same direction.

But, you know, I think India and Australia have done tremendous work in the last couple of years on really expanding their own security cooperation and looking for new spaces to deepen that partnership. And so that, I think, has been a real important element for getting the Quad, you know, to be accelerating its operation so effectively.

As Mike touched on, you know, they announced three working groups earlier this year that really drive the day-to-day agenda, one of them on climate change, one of them on emerging technologies, and one on COVID cooperation. And I think when we think long term about the utility of the Quad, you know, there's different ways that these working groups kind of meet, or in some ways, you know, it's unclear how they're going to meet.

When we think of aspirations for the Quad, climate change – you know, a lot of those discussions are going to be held outside the four. So it's nice to have consultations, but it's unlikely these four are going to drive an agenda from global cooperation on climate change. So I think that's nice to have that aligns with the Biden administration agenda, but not really a space for the Quad to be leaders; simply for consultation.

Emerging technologies. As Mike mentioned, you know, that's an area where the stranglehold that China's had on the manufacturing and development of certain technologies impacts all of our countries. And so I see a lot of scope for cooperation for emerging technologies and opening up new supply chains.

And COVID, while holding great promise, you know, has been moving in fits and starts. Particularly the United States and India, the two big vaccine producers, have put limitations on the export of vaccines, or components thereof, you know, because of domestic compulsions. So whether, you know, a Quad summit and Quad engagement can alter policymaking decisions in capitals are so important for the global fight on COVID. It's going to be fascinating to see what announcements may come out during the summit.

There's a couple of areas, too, that I think, you know, that the Quad can look at as they look at the kind of expanding its mission. As I mentioned, you know, a lot of China's moves into the Indian Ocean region has been in strategic infrastructure. I think these four countries, there's a bit more they can do on regional infrastructure cooperation.

Each of us have our own ideas and plans and some level of overlap, but regional infrastructure, you know, is another space where I think the four countries can work together, and also consultations on how we engage in multilateral institutions to make sure that, you know, those international bodies, sometimes under the U.N. and other agencies, that set standards in different areas, are we effectively putting candidates forward and making sure that we've got good coverage? Because that also is kind of an open space that some of our colleagues at CSIS have been studying where, you know, because of a vacuum, China has been actually looking to take leadership roles.

So I think there's great working groups that are out there. I think there's some other areas, too, that the Quad could, potentially, move into. So excited to see what the leaders are able to gin up and announce.

Let me hand it over to Bonny now.

Bonny Lin:

Thank you, Rick.

As both Mike and Rick have mentioned, China is very much opposed to the Quad and sees the Quad in many ways as very – as pointed and geared towards containing China. So, in general, China's response to the Quad has largely fallen along three components.

The first is China has tended to engage in an information or disinformation campaign regarding the nature and intent of the Quad. China has also, second, actively sought to pressure, divide, and sow discord among Quad countries. And the third, main way that China has tended to respond to the Quad is sought ways to offset Quad influence through other partnerships or other activities with different countries.

So on the information/disinformation front, China has been relatively aggressive in its disinformation/information campaigns in general. This is not – it's not surprising that China is also engaging this against the Quad and trying to portray the Quad in the most negative light possible.

China has tended to portray the Quad in five different ways and has messaged it – has used a different message depending on the audience. So China has tried to portray the Quad as a clique that embraces a Cold War zero-sum mentality set on confronting China, as a – as a military alliance that seeks to promote instability in the Indo-Pacific region. China has also portrayed the Quad as a bloc that seeks to undermine existing regional multilateral institutions, including, for example, pitting the Quad against ASEAN. China has also said – has also tried to portray the Quad as a group led by the U.S. with all three – the other three actors, essentially, as what China calls U.S. pawns. And then China has also tried to portray the Quad as weak and not on the same page with respect to policies on China.

Recently now with the AUKUS, we're also seeing additional messaging that the United States might favor Australia in the Quad because of AUKUS at the cost of Japan and India. In other words, China is now messaging that AUKUS itself will undermine the Quad.

So when you look at the Chinese information/disinformation space, it's, basically, China is trying all different – trying to use all different messages to undermine how the Quad is perceived internationally and undermine how countries, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region, view the Quad.

In terms of China's efforts to pressure or divide Quad countries, China has tended to focus on what it assesses as the weaker links of the Quad; in other words, countries that China assess to be generally less powerful with the Quad or a bit more hesitant to push back against China.

Traditionally, that has been Australia and India. Historically, Australia has more or less borne the brunt of Chinese retaliation and punishment. Mike had talked quite a bit about this in terms of the different sanctions that China has imposed on Australia economically, whether that's on coal, wine, beef, barley, or whatnot. For many of these products now we're finding that Australia has found alternative export markets and Chinese sanctions has not caused Australia to change course or cause Australia to take a different position with respect to the Quad.

I think what's more interesting now, since the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, China is increasingly viewing India as in a more vulnerable position and susceptible to its influence. Chinese analysts have noted that the vacuum created by the U.S. departure has made it more important for India to work with regional countries to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan.

So here, we're starting to see increasing suggestions that Chinese cooperation or coordination with India on Afghanistan, including through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, will be dependent on India improving relations with China or at least act in ways that are not detrimental to China-India relations.

So I'll leave it at that. I'm happy to go back to any of these points.

Ms. Montfort: Thank you, Bonny, Rick, and Mike.

At this point we're going to open it up to questions. For those of you asking questions, if you could first identify your name and your news organization that would be helpful for our transcript, which will be issued following this briefing for those of you who might have joined a few minutes late. And with that, I will briefly turn it back over to our operator to share the queuing instructions.

And our first question comes from Koji Sonoda with Asahi Shimbun. Please go ahead.

Q: Hello. My name is Koji Sonoda of the Asahi Shimbun. Thank you very much.

So the U.S. launched AUKUS, so my question is what do you think of the relations between AUKUS and the Quad? So Dr. Green said nuclear-powered submarine will be working positively for Japan, so I was wondering if there will be some coordination or cooperation between AUKUS and the Quad in the future. Thank you very much.

Dr. Green: So thank you, Sonoda-san. It's a good question.

One of the things we should emphasize about the Quad is it is not a formal treaty like the U.S.-Japan mutual security treaty or ANZUS with Australia or NATO. And so the – it doesn't have a standing headquarters or secretariat. The working groups do their work, the navies cooperate together, the intelligence services increasingly share intelligence, and then the leaders meet. And so the form of cooperation with other countries or with other groups like AUKUS, which of course includes the U.S. and Australia, is going to be, I think, ad hoc.

I think the Quad will stay four members but countries will come in. And I think Britain was keen to be working with the Quad and, through AUKUS, has a, you know, very strong platform to do that. I think you will see Canada, maybe the Netherlands, maybe New Zealand. I would have said France two weeks ago, but I think France is going to be quite cool to the Quad for a little while. Ultimately, I think the French will come around because they share very similar strategic interests in the Pacific, particularly in the South Pacific where France has the largest EEZ and China's encroaching on their territory as well.

The other thing, of course, is the Quad began as a – as a naval taskforce to provide public goods and to help people, but it was also obvious to the entire region that if these four powerful democracies with their strong navies cooperate that will stabilize the Indo-Pacific; you know, it'll provide reassurance that China or any other country won't easily dominate. And so this submarine deal is important and related to the Quad in that context as well. Originally, the Australians were thinking about going with the Sōryū, with the Japanese submarine, but Japan just wasn't ready yet or in a position to do exports of submarines and it didn't become a deal, and so the Australians went with the French. Well, the French weren't providing either the technology or the timeline that the Australians needed, so this will really beef up the undersea warfare, the submarine capabilities of Australia and therefore the Quad as a whole.

And that is a major development, frankly, that relates to the Quad. It isn't a Quad agreement, but I think the Quad countries that are not in AUKUS – Japan and India – are quite pleased with this because it will really for the next 50 years reset the trajectories in naval power in the Pacific and from the perspective of those countries stabilize things as China massively builds up its naval forces. So in that sense, very closely aligned with the Quad but not a formal relationship because the Quad's not really a treaty organization per se.

Operator: And our next question comes from the line of Howard LaFranchi with the Christian Science Monitor. Please go ahead.

Q: Yeah, hi. Thanks for doing this.

I guess I'd like to ask Rick, you know, you sort of laid out in the different sort of portfolios of the Quad what you see coming up in the summit. It doesn't sound like you expect a lot of advancing, whether it's on, you know, vaccine matters or in the

area of technologies. And I'm just wondering if there's a risk of kind of disappointment or the Quad, you know, not looking like it was kind of, you know, cracked up to be. And so I'm wondering about that.

And then, Mike, if I could ask you, you know, as you said, the Quad started as, you know, something aimed at helping people. And I wonder if you see risks of that sort of original purpose? And you know, there was also, you know, sort of an emphasis on extending certain values in the region, whether it was through, you know, rule of law or, you know, the fact that all four members are democracies. And I'm wondering if you – you know, if there is a risk of that purpose of the Quad being sort of watered down or lost if there's a shift to, you know, more focus on stability and military activities, and confronting China.

Mr. Rossow:

All right. Well, thanks, Howard, for that question. I think from, as you talked about, aspirations for the summit later this week, I mean, the Quad is still relatively young and trying to find its footing. So I don't think ultimately a lot of folks are ready to – you know, to say is it accomplishing its mission, because it's still trying to scramble to figure out, you know, what a defined mission for the four countries to get together is going to be. And some areas that I think have a bit of a false start, like COVID cooperation, well, now that, you know, vaccination rates are improving in the two big producer nations out of – out of the four, there is probably more scope for cooperating on delivering vaccines.

And also finding, you know, new partners to produce a lot of precursor chemicals that are important for vaccine production. China dominates a lot of global production and there were periods during COVID when China was talking about limiting the export of some of those precursor chemicals that are important to vaccine production because of domestic concerns. So, you know, it's in the interest of the four countries to work together to break open some new markets that can fill that gap, and at least offer options so that, you know, no one country's got a stranglehold on the precursor chemicals there.

So I think, you know, today there may be a little bit more scope than we saw at the beginning of the year in spaces like COVID. Emerging technology has a great amount of space. And I think that, you know, there's so much that we could do there. Similar, you know, stranglehold that some countries pose on some of those technologies. It's going to involve a delicate dance, though, because most of the development in that space is going to be driven by private sector companies from all of our markets. So, you know, the governments can lead. They can create ideas on opening of new markets and changing supply chains for critical technologies. But it's going to be up to the private sector to take advantage of those opportunities.

So, you know, I'm looking for, you know, what may transpire maybe not during the summit, but as this working group begins to evolve its agenda. How are they going to engage the private sector to make sure that – you know, you have a lot of well-meaning diplomats from the government that are setting an agenda that the private sector's not ready to take up, because that agenda's really setting the table for the private sector to change how they do things. So I think it's still early enough where, you know, if we don't see a lot of dramatic new announcements hopefully there won't be a lot of disappointment.

The fact that they're meeting together for the first time in person at the leaders' level itself, you know, is a historic occasion. And a lot of the details are written out during these – you know, the intersessional working groups that are transpiring there. So, no, I don't suspect that there's going to be a lot of disappointment if you don't have a lot of hard, tangible announcements that move the ball forward. That work will transpire in the middle. But the fact that they're doing it at all, you know, in the middle of a pandemic meeting for the first time in person, is pretty significant. And as Bonny hinted, you know, a number of countries that, you know, may have different values are certainly taking note. So there's also some value in terms of, you know, flashing the space, that the four can cooperate the space.

Let me hand over to Mike for the second part.

Dr. Green: So first, on the disappointment risk, I agree with Rick. I don't think – well, I can't predict what the U.S. media will say, of course. But I don't think the media, and certainly not the governments in Australia, Japan, the U.S., and India are going to be disappointed.

For the reasons Rick said, it's a first in-person summit. That in itself is significant. But also because of what I said earlier, the Quad is not the only game in Asia. It's also not a formal treaty. It's a kind of an umbrella of these four powerful maritime democracies. And within that umbrella, the bilateral and trilateral relationships have continued to strengthen.

The Japan-U.S. alliance is significantly stronger today than it was even a few years ago because of policy and regulatory changes in Japan and the focus of the Trump and Biden administrations on the alliance as part of our overall approach to the world. Australia and the U.S. are obviously, with AUKUS, doing entirely new things together. The trilateral U.S.-Japan-Australia security relationship has quietly advanced leaps and bounds in terms of intelligence sharing, maritime security cooperation, and cooperation on infrastructure. And then, you know, India – the weakest leg was India-Australia, which as Rick pointed out is quickly catching up. And Rick, correct me if I'm wrong, but I think right now the U.S. does more exercises with India than the rest of the world does. So each of the different legs – trilateral, bilateral – within the Quad are producing real concrete cooperation, and this overall umbrella is sort of confirming that and pushing it even further at the summit level.

In terms of militarization, you know, the French in their anger and retaliations for losing this sub deal and being embarrassed by the surprise announcement of AUKUS have started arguing that they're going to pursue a new approach to Asia with India and Indonesia and others that's less militaristic. It sort of characterized this as militaristic. It reminds me of the famous Casablanca scene when the police officer is "shocked, shocked" that there is gambling, because after all France was the one originally providing the military technology to Australia till they lost the deal.

And I don't think this militaristic line is going to resonate that much. A bit in Australia – it'll resonate on the left there in Australia – a little bit in New Zealand. The Chinese will try to pick up on it. Overall, though, I think that the region outside of China recognizes that there are two sides to the Quad and always have been.

On the one hand, it's providing public goods and demonstrating that the maritime democracies are, you know, reinforcing an open Indo-Pacific and not coercing smaller countries and helping in disasters, the tsunami and now the pandemic. That's one side of the Quad.

The other side from the beginning was a recognition that we needed a more strategic – favorable strategic equilibrium as Chinese power and ambitions grew. The Quad in the Bush administration came after the decision to strengthen relations with India as part of this overall strategy not to contain China, but just to have a collection of countries that were committed to an open regional order and opposed coercion – not stopping anyone, but opposing coercion. That latter piece, opposing coercion, has obviously become more important as China has coerced militarily and with embargoes Japan and Australia and India and us. So, yeah, there is more of a military flavor to it, but I think that's in response to what Beijing's doing.

The democracy question's really interesting because we've talked from the beginning about the Quad's common democratic values, and I think that's generally right, but it's going to get interesting because President Biden has promised to hold a summit of democracies – or I guess they're calling it a summit on democracy – later this year. And most of the coordination for that has been with European allies, and it seems the White House is going to set a very high bar for which countries can be invited. And that's a bit awkward for all other members of the Quad in Asia, to be honest, including Australia. The Japanese, Australian(s), and Indians would prefer a much more inclusive and relaxed definition of democracy. I think, although they've not stated it publicly, they would even like to see countries like Vietnam involved because they're worried about China.

And so your question merits watching because the democracy summit that's coming up is going to kind of test how aligned we really are on this issue. Bonny is right that China is saying, ha-ha, they're not aligned. But the reality is, if you look at actions and words by all four members, the Quad countries are much more aligned on democracy with each other than they are with China and the so-called Beijing consensus on authoritarianism, that's for sure. But there are some – you know, the Biden administration's pushing the envelope on democracy, and it'll come back to this theme. We'll probably do a press call on the democracy summit, because the other countries are not quite sure how that fits when the U.S. is pushing a standard for democracy, participation in this summit, that is, you know, a little uncomfortable for a lot of the Asian neighbors of our Quad partners.

Q: Great. Thank you.

Operator: And our next question comes from the line of Brian Dabbs with the National Journal. Please go ahead.

Q: Thank you so much for doing the call.

Rick, I was hoping to follow up a bit on your comments related to climate change. Obviously, this is kind of top of mind at the United Nations this week. Gutierrez

called the rate of temperature – the expected rate of temperature increase a catastrophe.

Could you elaborate a little bit on what you do expect in terms of an announcement coming out of the Quad summit? The Biden administration has said that there will be an announcement, which I think you mentioned. But you also mentioned that this probably isn't the forum where major climate policy is going to be rendered.

And I was wondering why you think that is the case in light of the fact that, you know, the efforts at the U.N. are really – are floundering right now; you know, all of these bleak forecasts. Countries are not really stepping up with new commitments.

Mr. Rossow:

Yeah. Well, I think the area where I think these four countries might have the most space to work together actually flows pretty well from another working group they created, you know, which is on strategic technologies, because, you know, when we talk about climate change, China is a major beneficiary because they, frankly, are one of the largest producers, the largest producer in a lot of the products that go into climate change.

So China's ability to sort of dominate global trade flows could be accelerated by a climate deal that plays, you know, basically into their hands. But if these four countries can find spaces to collaborate on, you know, offering incentives on production of solar panels or electric vehicles, batteries – you know, a lot of the areas that China has really kind of circled to dominate, particularly under its Made in China 2025 program.

So I think the four countries, there's space they can collaborate together. Are they going to be able to come up with a common position on the global talks is kind of what I meant by, you know, there's limitations on what they can do. You know, they might make some good statements in that regard. But, you know, offering contributions ahead of the U.N. summit and tying those, you know, within the four countries, that's what I think is difficult.

So cooperation and looking for, you know, the centers of production that will make them less reliant on China for the steps they want to take to be more carbon-friendly would be terrific spaces for cooperation. But the four countries to use this as a place to tee up, you know, a defined agenda leading to the U.N. summit, that's where I see it kind of limited.

So there is space, but it's just not – this is not going to be, I think, the group that overall tries to define, you know, the U.N. agenda for later this year. I think instead it's going to be, you know, cooperation among the four on ways that'll help make climate commitments, but not allow China once again in this space to kind of dominate the field.

So that's how I look at it. So if you see announcements, I suspect they'll be more along the lines of, you know, agreeing to – you know, maybe they give preferences to each other in some ways on production of equipment, or at least launching a new workstream to look at supply chains and how they can collaborate more effectively in those areas; great space in that area, but not so much defined in the U.N. agenda.

Q: If I can follow quickly, if you don't mind. So at the meeting convened by Guterres and Boris Johnson Monday night, the Indian environmental minister said it was critical – not only climate finance is critical for decarbonization globally, but also transfer of green technology at low cost. So I don't know. I mean, do you see that bring – do you see the U.S., you know, and Japan, I mean, embarking on some new program where they are actually sending technologies at much more preferential kind of rates or some type of conditions to India in order for it to really curb its emissions? I know you kind of alluded to that, but do you have any – I don't know, do you – is there any kind of programs that you see emerging where that's really going to start to – start to happen?

Mr. Rossow: Well, you know, finance – you saw that, you know, climate envoy Kerry was just in New Delhi, and they announced the intention to launch a new workstream bilaterally with India to look at finance. You know, my work – I do a lot of work kind of uncovering what's happening within individual Indian states on meeting their goals on renewable energy and such. And, you know, in India the conversation is still – among voters on climate change – is drive a lot more by are they going to get a lion's share of manufacturing jobs by making these commitments, rather than voters in India still today really voting based on, you know, potential implications of climate change itself.

And there you've got, you know, some inherent conflicts. You know, the United States has actually sued India for programs like its solar policy because of national commitments where you had to manufacture a certain percentage of content locally. India is under dramatic price constraints to try to expand electricity access to, you know, some of the most vulnerable populations. And still today, when you consider the cost of putting renewables in, plus, you know, energy storage and things like that that are still so important, and building out the grid, it's an expensive proposition, versus all this coal-fired and even some gas-fired that they still have on the grid.

And so, you know, this idea of climate finance I think is a pretty important one. And I think the four countries can, again, work collaboratively in this space, and maybe expand that to other developing countries. Basically, can you take the edge of the potential risks that investors face when they – when they build these projects, because of the price constraints that are politically driven in India, and I presume a lot of other emerging markets in the region. So climate finance, you know, you saw the United States announce a bilateral program – or, at least the initiation of work stream recently. That might be a good space for the Quad members to cooperate in.

India already hosts, along with France, the International Solar Alliance. And they're sort of hoping that the United States, you know, would join as a contributing member because, you know, that's India's main platform as a co-chair, to try to, you know, drive the international agenda and help developing countries in access to technology and finance. So I don't know if they want to put a lot of eggs in the Quad basket for bigger global cooperation, because they – you know, the host the ISA in New Delhi itself.

So I think finance makes a lot of sense, access to technology. I don't think you're going to announce at the Quad summit, you know, tariff reductions and that kind of stuff yet. But maybe they're going to hint at a new kind of sub-work stream related to that. But finance, to me, you already see a lot of bilateral momentum. So that kind of makes the most sense. Wider than that, difficult to imagine.

Q: Gotcha. Thanks very much.

Operator: And our next question comes from the line of Robert Delaney from the South China Morning Post. Please go ahead.

Q: Yeah, hi. Thanks very much for doing this call.

I wanted to go back to the point that was made earlier about the Quad still being in a very nascent state and finding its footing. And I wanted to go back – connect that a little bit to the idea of as it's finding its footing it's sort in this position where we've just seen this kind of – a couple of very somewhat destabilizing developments. One being the American withdrawal from Afghanistan and the other being the announcement of AUKUS last week. And I was hoping we could just get a little bit more on what the withdrawal from Afghanistan means in terms of the U.S. standing.

There are some, of course, schools of thoughts saying that it's a sign of America's withdrawal and degree of unreliability. Whereas others kind of point out that it really does point to a sharper focus by the U.S. government on maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific, and that's why it should be – that situation should be regarded more as a positive sign for the Quad. And of course, AUKUS kind of threw a curveball at a lot of analysts trying to figure out how these relationships are going to play out. And maybe if we could get a little bit more about how AUKUS also has maybe affected the Quad as it kind of, you know, quote/unquote, "finds its footing." Thank you.

Dr. Green: If I could start, the Biden administration's withdrawal from Afghanistan was driven by politics, by Joe Biden's own opposition to the surge when he was vice president – so he had some history with the issue and something to prove, I think. But the strategic rationale for people like Jake Sullivan, the national security adviser, was to allow the U.S. to focus more on the Indo-Pacific. It was, you know, to pivot finally. You know, Kurt, and Jake and others who are working the Quad were, you know, the architects of Hillary Clinton's announcement of a pivot to the Pacific in 2011, so that was the main motive strategically.

And in fact, the American people, I think, generally get it. In opinion polls, you know, somewhere between – well, close to about two-thirds of Americans supported pulling out of Afghanistan before we did. But surveys by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, surveys CSIS has done, show that about two-thirds of Americans support defending our allies in Asia. So there's no correlation, in my view, and I think the data bears this out, between American views of Afghanistan and Asia. Americans wanted to get out of Afghanistan but they realized that we have a serious challenge in the Pacific, and all the polls – and you can look at CSIS

China Survey, if you just google that; our surveys of elites and public in the U.S. show a very high risk tolerance, a very high willingness to defend allies in Asia. So it doesn't – and I think that in Australia and in Japan, they knew that, and the governments especially knew that.

The problem is that the way the Afghanistan withdrawal happened raised some questions about execution, about competence, and even AUUKUS, in some ways, has renewed those questions about the administration's ability to execute on its strategy. The French were not going to be happy, but the way it was done was surprisingly indifferent to France's standing. You know, for example, the AUUKUS announcement came out on the day of the EU's new Indo-Pacific strategy rollout, things like that. And, you know, that's a separate topic we should do another phone call on. My view is the people leading the national security policy are very competent, but they are hampered by the lack of political appointees. When I was in government, we sold F-16s to Pakistan; we had to figure out how to manage India – similar kind of problem. We had hours and hours of interagency meetings to figure out how to roll the whole thing out to minimize damage to other parts of our strategy. And the administration just doesn't have people in place. The assistant secretaries who would be in charge of this have not been confirmed, the ambassadors have not been confirmed, and so it's a bunch of really busy people at the NSC trying to keep track of all this. So there's that competence issue and I've heard concerns about that in Asia.

India, I think – you know, Australia is going to be a bit weird about foreign fighters and al-Qaida because they can destabilize Southeast Asia, but I think India probably has the most complications in terms of its geopolitics from the withdrawal, and Rick can speak to that.

Mr. Rossow: Yeah, there's two stands that I think the withdrawal – I think for India it's been baked in the cake for a while. They suspected that there's going to be a pretty fast withdrawal at some point; they thought it would be a couple of years before, so the fact that it got delayed and they had more time to kind of assess and prepare – but they knew that it was going to happen, and it was going to happen pretty quick when it did happen. So I think, to some extent, it was baked in the cake, although I think they also didn't expect such a fast takeover of the entire country by the Taliban.

Mike hinted – I mean, there's two main considerations India has today: number one, you know, will it become a base of operations for terror organizations that are going to strike India? You know, India's view is that it was used before for that very purpose, and so will that be reconstituted? And second, is this going to improve Pakistan's currency in Washington, D.C., you know, for trying to keep a hold on the Taliban and the critical role that Pakistan would play in that? Is Pakistan's voice in policy making suddenly going to get stronger, and will that be tilted against India in some ways?

So those are the two threads that India's going to be watching for, but, you know, those aren't "today" issues necessarily. I don't think they're going to limit the aspirations that India comes to the table with, either in the bilateral relationship with the United States or with the Quad; just two things that hopefully we can

improve coordination on and, you know, kind of counsel some of India's fears and maybe even work collaboratively in some ways on intelligence sharing on terror groups and things like that.

Dr. Green: I think Bonny should jump in briefly because, you know, who's taking advantage of the withdrawal to try to sow seeds of doubt? It's China.

I don't know, Bonny, if you want to speak to that, but China's trying to make the most of the withdrawal.

Dr. Lin: Of course, yeah. As I mentioned, this is one of the messages that Chinese allies have been conveying, that India is in a much more vulnerable position because of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, and what we're seeing now is that China is becoming incredibly active with improving its relations with a variety of Afghanistan's neighbors. And one thing that's been talked about quite a bit in the media, particularly the Indian media, has been this discussion about China's relationship with what the Indian media is calling sort of the new Quad – so China, Russia, Iran, and Pakistan – the increasing engagement with China and these three countries, all Afghanistan's neighbors, and what that means for India.

So there's some concern that China might be using this – these growing relationships with these countries sort of as a counter to the Quad but also as to increase its influence over Afghanistan, but also, in some ways, as a way to put more pressure on India.

But my reading of this is that, unlike the U.S. – I guess, the Western Quad, these four countries, they do not have anywhere close to the same set of, you know, shared interest, shared core values, or even common views of the ideal international order.

So a lot of Chinese activities in Afghanistan or with Afghanistan's neighbors are very much focused on Afghanistan. But I think some of the concerns that these partnerings or activities might be detrimental to India might be a little bit exaggerated just because China, Russia, Iran, and Pakistan, they don't necessarily have the same sort of core values or core alignment that we see that's very much in the Quad involving the United States, Japan, Australia, and India.

Operator: And our next question comes from the line of Julian Borger with The Guardian. Please go ahead.

Q: Hi. Thanks very much.

You've described the Quad as sort of, you know, network without a sort of binding treaty. I wonder if there is an expected direction of travel, whether it is – whether Biden and the other members wanted to evolve towards something more solid.

And I also wanted to ask Bonny if the intention of creating these partnerships is in part to not only contain China but make it change its ways, and I was wondering whether, you know, this increasing network of partnerships sort of aimed at China might make it sort of change directions in some of its policies in the region.

Dr. Green: Well, we – I'll try to do the first one about the direction of the Quad.

The Quad has, for as long as it's been in existence, had a kind of a rheostat on it. So the summitry, the cooperation, kind of turns up and down incrementally, depending on the appetite of the leaders and domestic politics in the four countries and whether or not there's a crisis, like the pandemic, that sort of calls for maritime democracies to cooperate, and whether or not China is bullying countries. And, frankly, right now, you have all three. In all four countries the publics want their governments to stand up to China's coercion and we have lots of crises that warrant the cooperation together.

We've surveyed at CSIS – it's on our website – what foreign policy experts in all four countries think the Quad ought to do. We did the survey before the summit had happened and found, not surprisingly, that people supported a summit. You know, the next incremental things you might see, although I don't think they'll announce this, to be clear, but what you might see in future years would be the Malabar Exercises India hosts might start including not only the Quad countries but, you know, the Royal Navy, Canada, you know, the Netherlands and so forth, as I mentioned. You might see a more deliberate Indian role in infrastructure and infrastructure finance. Right now, the U.S., Japan, and Australia have a formal agreement. You might see more of a role for India. I think you'll see more and more pronounced sharing of intelligence and exchanges of senior military officials and that kind of thing.

You know, further down the road, if Chinese coercion continues to grow, if the Chinese start establishing even more of a military presence in the Indian Ocean or the Pacific islands – for example, if China uses coercive force against Taiwan – you know, if Beijing cranks up the level of coercion and military pressure to include even kinetic, you know, use of force in the region, I personally expect you'll see the rheostat crank up again and I think you'll see perhaps more pronounced military cooperation; maybe a standing maritime joint task force, an actual command-and-control relationship with the four militaries, for example. The Quad navies have the ability to blunt Chinese expansion should they choose to cooperate in a more deliberate way. If Chinese ambitions and expansion and coercion grow, I expect you'd see that.

So a lot of the future of the Quad will depend on China's moves. And for now, China's throwing everything it can at the Quad rhetorically, but we'll have to see where that goes.

Dr. Lin: And if I could add on what Mike said, so I think Mike, Rick, and I are all in agreement saying that the goal of the Quad is not necessarily to contain China. As Mike mentioned, the Quad has – in terms of the Quad's origins, in terms of responding to regional security efforts and regional – including, for example, natural disasters. So I think the fact that there is a – there are these developments associated with the Quad that is pushing back against what China's doing is the nature of the fact that, as Mike and Rick had mentioned, China's becoming more and more assertive and challenging many of our allies and partners in the region.

In terms of whether the Quad has caused China to change directions or change its behavior in the region, I'm seeing very little evidence of that right now, mainly for a couple of reasons including the fact that the Quad is still building up its – it's still relatively nascent. It's still taking on a number of different initiatives and activities. The other is that – the other reason is, as I mentioned before, China is in many ways pushing back against the Quad, right? So in the sense that we hope that the Quad might moderate some of China's, I guess, worst tendencies in the region, we're actually seeing, at least in terms of how China has responded to Australia in the past and some of what China's hinted against India, China is responding to the Quad in its own way using a Cold War mentality viewing Quad as very much geared toward confrontation with China, and as a result actually moving in a direction that's not productive.

What we do see in general is that Quad developments are putting pressure on China, and we could – it is possible that, for example, Xi – President Xi Jinping's recent commitment or pronouncement, I guess, at the United Nations about China's desire to have – to stop financing such new coal-fired power plants abroad, I do wonder if that might have been linked to some of the desire and initiative from the Quad to have – including the working group on climate change, if some of the Quad efforts to demonstrate, you know, our leadership on key issues might create pressure for China to try to also rise up to a similar level and demonstrate its leadership. So on that front, I think there is much to be watched from what comes from the working groups and how China responds, not only in terms of pushing back against what the Quad seeks to achieve but also if China seeks to match some of the efforts that the Quad seeks to provide in terms of those regional goods or international goods.

Dr. Green: It is really interesting that the first Chinese move after the announcement of AUKUS and just before the Quad summit was China's request to New Zealand that it be allowed to join the CPTPP, the big trade agreement. So a successful strategy, I think all four Quad countries would say, is one that sort of presses China to be a more – what we used to call a more responsible stakeholder.

The Chinese announcement that it wants to join CPTPP was partly designed to embarrass the U.S., and in a way I hope it has that effect because if the Biden administration gets more serious about its own trade strategy, you know, you don't necessarily have to have a negative spiral between the U.S. and China. As Bonny points out, there's some scenario where if China's unilateral and coercive moves aren't checked, it may respond in ways to win over support that allow us to get back to modes of cooperation, like CPTPP. But of course, that means we also have to get our act together on things like TPP.

So this is not necessarily a security dilemma with the two sides spinning out of control. There's a – that's not where the Quad leaders, I'm sure, want this to end up. They want a more – they want to get U.S.-China relations back on the track that we seemed to have enjoyed when I was in government 15 years ago.

Operator: And our last question comes from the line of Yasmin Tadjdeh with National Defense Magazine. Please go ahead.

Q: Thank you so much. Yeah, it's Yasmin Tadjdeh at National Defense Magazine.

This is a bit more about AUKUS, but, you know, when it comes to tech exchange obviously it's going to be undersea warfare and there's this big, giant submarine effort. But where else do you see there could be, like, a tech exchange? You know, in terms of, like, AI, land warfare. What do you see there?

Dr. Green: Well, if 80 percent of the deal is the submarines – which is a big deal. I mean, the U.S. has not shared this technology with anyone. We shared it with Britain, but of course Britain helped us develop it. So this is a very almost unprecedented level of technology sharing and capability building to restore a better balance of naval power in the Pacific, which we – which we need and which a lot of countries in the region really want.

They announced that we would cooperate, the U.S., U.K., and Australia, on secure supply chains. A lot of the same issues as the Quad, technology, AI. But the reality is the framework for that already exists with Five Eyes. And the U.S.-U.K. has agreements on defense, industrial, and intelligence, and all kinds of things. To me, the significance of AUKUS, as I said, it's mostly the submarines. But the other significant piece of this it tells us that in Australia – that China has lost Australia.

You know, polls in Australia when Xi Jinping came to power were pretty positive about China. People were making a lot of money. Exports were good. Chinese students were coming to Australian universities. Australian scholars were saying someday, you know, Australia may have to choose between U.S. and China. We should choose China or stay neutral. That was sort of the mode 10 years ago. This AUKUS agreement shows that Australians will not be pushed around, that China's strategy, which Bonny described, to try to beat the weakest partner in the Quad, and it's backfired. And that's a very strong statement of willpower from the Australian side.

And I think Boris Johnson's participation in AUKUS has, as a backdrop, global Britain and the post-Brexit search for a – for a U.K. foreign policy. But it also reflects a complete change in British politics about China. And, you know, the days of Chancellor of the Exchequer David (sic; George) Osborne calling for London to be the European hub for the renminbi and signing onto China's Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank without first telling the Americans – (laughs) – those days are over. I think Boris Johnson is signaling that Britain's made its choice on issues of technology, 5G, and so forth.

So the signal it sends about willpower, almost defiance, in London and Canberra is very, very important. The other bits and pieces we'll cooperate, but we kind of do that anyway – except, of course, for the submarine. Which is very, very new and significant.

Q: Thank you.

Ms. Montfort: Well, everyone, we are just about at 9:00 a.m. So thank you so much for being here with us today. We will have a transcript of today's briefing out within just a couple of hours and we will email it directly to your inboxes. And in addition, this transcript is going to be posted on CSIS.org. To those of you in the queue whose questions we were not able to get to this morning, please do not hesitate to reach out to me, Paige Montfort, or to CSIS's Chief Communications Officer Andrew Schwartz. We are always happy to set up an interview for you with our experts, including, of course, those who are here with us today.

So thank you all once again for joining today. And a big thank you to our panelists as well. Have a great day, everyone.

Dr. Green: Thank you all. Thanks, Paige.

Mr. Rossow: Bye. Thanks.