

## US Alliance Policy in Indo-Pacific under Biden Administration

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### Abstract

**Objectives:** This study aims to monitor and analyze the significance and purpose of US alliance policy in the Indo-Pacific under Biden administration.

**Methods:** the study is relying on the balance of threat theory with a focus on Snyder's alliance perception to present a rational analysis to the purpose of the US alliance policy, and its future.

**Results:** The study proved the validity of its hypotheses that there is a connection between alliance policy and the decline of US power, especially against China. The latter has become a very tremendous power so that the US cannot undermine it alone; it needs the allies. Also, there is a direct connection between the existence of shared values among the allies and the Ease of forming and sustaining alliances.

**Conclusions:** the study has concluded that China is the most dangerous strategic challenge to US hegemony, and the Indo-Pacific region is the most decisive region in the US-China struggle for global hegemony. The policy of mobilizing alliances is the optimal or most realistic strategy for the US to undermine China's power, especially in the Indo-Pacific. On this basis, the Biden administration revived the Quad and established the Security Alliance AUKUS. Finally, the US alliance policy faces a set of serious challenges, most notably the growing isolationist trend within the US in light of the dominance of the Trumpism phenomenon.

**Keywords:** Alliances, US, China, Indo-Pacific, Threat, Balance.

### سياسة التحالفات الأميركية في المحيطين الهندي والهادئ في عهد إدارة بايدن

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#### ملخص

الأهداف: تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى رصد وتحليل أهمية وهدف سياسة التحالفات الأميركية في منطقة المحيطين الهندي والهادئ في ظل إدارة بايدن.

المنهجية: تعتمد الدراسة على نظرية توازن التهديد مع التركيز على تصور سنايدر للتحالفات؛ لتقديم تحليل عقلائي لغرض سياسة التحالف الأميركية ومستقبلها.

الخلاصة: أثبتت الدراسة صحة فرضياتها القائلة أن هناك علاقة بين سياسة التحالف وتراجع القوة الأميركية، خاصة أمام الصين، التي أصبحت قوة هائلة جداً بحيث لا تستطيع الولايات المتحدة تقويضها بمفردها، فهي بحاجة إلى الحلفاء، كما أن هناك علاقة مباشرة بين وجود القيم المشتركة بين الحلفاء، وسهولة تشكيل التحالفات واستدامتها.

النتائج: خلصت الدراسة إلى أن الصين هي التحدي الاستراتيجي الأكثر خطورة للهيمنة الأميركية، وأن منطقة المحيطين الهندي والهادئ هي المنطقة الأكثر حسماً في الصراع الأميركي الصيني على الهيمنة العالمية. وتشكل سياسة حشد التحالفات الاستراتيجية المثلى أو الأكثر واقعية بالنسبة للولايات المتحدة؛ لتقويض قوة الصين، وخاصة في منطقة المحيطين الهندي والهادئ؛ وعلى هذا الأساس، أحيت إدارة بايدن كواد وأنشأت التحالف الأمني أوكوس. وأخيراً، تواجه سياسة التحالف الأميركية مجموعة من التحديات الخطيرة، أبرزها الاتجاه الانعزالي المتنامي داخل الولايات المتحدة في ظل هيمنة ظاهرة الترامبية.

الكلمات الدالة: التحالفات، الولايات المتحدة، الصين، المحيطين الهندي-الهادئ، تهديد، التوازن.



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## Introduction

Mobilization of alliances in the framework multilateralism's approach has been President Biden's top priority focus since day one of taking over the White House. Indo-Pacific region has received the largest and most important share of the US focus on alliances. This is in terms of the expanding revival of old alliances such as Quad, or the establishment of other important alliances such as the AUKUS Security Alliance. Also, in this respect, the Biden Administration has reshaped the status of the US as an Indo-Pacific nation.

China's rise is the most serious threat to the US global hegemony. The US has been openly recognizing that since 2008. Since then, confronting or undermining China's rise has become the US's primary concern. In 2010, Obama administration has launched a rebalance strategy to Asia that was designated to undermine China's power or influence, especially in the Pacific region. Trump administration has pursued a private or different policy towards China mainly based on Trade and technology wars.

Two features different from previous administrations distinguished Biden administration's strategy towards China: first, the complete focus on Indo-Pacific, and the mobilization of alliances. Indeed, that reveals, in inter alia, that the critical importance of this region in the context of the US-China hegemony struggle, and the critical importance of the allies in confronting China.

## Study Problem and Questions

The main problem of this study is centered on monitoring and analysis the importance and purpose of US alliance policy in general and under the Biden administration in particular. Also, analyze the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific region in the framework of alliance policy. A set of essential questions can further clarify the study problem, which are:

- What are alliances, and the balance of threat theory?
- Why China, in particular, poses the most serious strategic threat to the US hegemony?
- What is the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific region in the context of the US-China rivalry over global hegemony?
- What are the most important alliances in the Indo-Pacific region during the Biden administration?
- What are the challenges and future of US alliance policy, especially in Indo-Pacific?

## Study hypotheses

The study seeks to test the validity of the following hypotheses:

- There is a connection between alliance policy and the decline of US power, especially against China.
- There is a direct connection between the existence of shared values between the allies and the Ease of forming and sustaining alliances.
- There is a direct correlation between the strength and sustainability of US alliances and the undermining of China's power or influence.
- There is a direct relationship between the growth of isolationism within the US and the deterioration of US alliance policy.

## Theoretical Framework:

### *Alliances and balance of threat*

Balance of power is one of the essential issues of the realism theory, which addresses states' behavior in an international system under the pressure of anarchism and inevitability self-help. Since states' key driver is survival and power in anarchic international system, they have to balance their power with others. Balance of power has two major forms, internal where states maximize their internal power, especially military and economic. And external that is mostly through forging alliances or joining alliances. In an anarchic international system, balances against other are endless process (Anshori, 2020, p.41).

Balance of threat theory coined by Stephen Walt is one of the main branches of the balance of power theory, or rather

a modified version of it. The main difference between the two is that the latter contends that the main driver of the balance is the excess power of others, while the former argues that the main driver is the threat. Accordingly, alliances according to balance of threat are one of the key strategies to achieve the external balance against threat. Since the latter mostly constitutes the main's state motivation to join the security alliances. Hence, the security or defense alliances consider more effective against the persistent strong rivals in a chaotic world. Accordingly, resorting to alliances is not limited to small power only, but also superpowers resort to forming military alliances to confront their powerful competitors, even in the unipolar or bipolar international system (Kireeva, 2022, pp. 101-102). One of the important recent examples of balance of threat is the informal alliance between the Gulf states and Israel to counter Iran's threat that was formed during the Trump era under the Abraham Accords for normalization (Salameh, 2023, pp. 8-9).

According to the balance of threat theory, there are four levels of threat that force states to balance: "aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive power, and aggressive intentions". However, states mostly balance via alliances when the four levels are achieved or materialized in reality at the same time. As such, that can be a balance against threat, not against power. For instance, the aggregate power constitutes a significant factor of threat, but actually doesn't always reflect threat as much as it reflects an imbalance of power. Accordingly, it does not reflect the formation of alliances. The evidence of that the continuation the U.S -South Korea alliance after the end of the Cold War due to the continued threat of North Korea, despite its power, was greatly diminished (Chun, 2000, p.75).

This leads us to a major conclusion that the persistent aggressive intention is the most crucial factor for the states to actually proceed or think in balancing, especially via alliances. The aggressive intentions are mainly just perceptions or expectations gradually forming in the minds of other countries. Therefore, such perceptions are aggravated when the threatening state shows or works on very dangerous or huge developments, such as a significant increase and modernization of its military strength, or plans for regional expansion. Accordingly, the three other factors: the aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive power, especially the latter are important threat factors, however, they are not crucial to encourage the states to form solid alliances, unless the aggressive intentions are greatly appeared, or be sufficiently convincing (Anshori, 2020, p.41).

On this basis, the balance of threat theory provides a fundamental perception about alliances, which lies in the distinction between the latter and bandwagoning. The theory does not consider bandwagoning as balance alliances, but merely a protection strategy that weak or small states often resort to, where they ally with threatened states. Alliances, in return, are mostly among equal powers to balance a great threat by state or alliance (Chun, 2000, p.74).

Lastly, balancing according to balance of power and threat does not aim to wars and instability in itself. But mostly balancing for stability and deterrence. Balancing via alliances in Mearsheimer's viewpoint is the best way to obstruct aggression in a very competitive and chaotic world because the powerful alliances not only fear and deter the aggressors but also usually force the aggressors or whose aggressive intentions to make concessions (Kupchan and Kupchan, 1995, pp. 52-54). For instance, Russia has focused on building strong alliances, especially in the Middle East, based on shared values, including the rejection of the US hegemony, to strengthen its international position within a multipolar international system and deter Western expansion led by the US through NATO in its areas of influence in Eastern Europe. That resulted in, for instance, the failure of the US to remove the Bashar regime in Syria, and to completely weaken the Iranian regime through sanctions (Salameh and Mashagbeh, 2018, pp.32-34).

#### ***Snyder's alliances perception and US alliances***

Based on threat rather than power, the balance of threat theory laid the foundation for the rationale for alliance formation. However, this implicitly means that these alliances are often temporary, or between adversaries, to confront an existing threat and then are dissolved. This is largely in line with realistic logic in international relations.

The alliances led by the US are certainly meant to confront China's threat. However, threat or the common threat is not only sufficient, or not the sole factor to explain the ease of its formation, especially in Indo-Pacific, as well as the high probability of its sustainability. Moreover, there is a fundamental US goal behind the alliance building, which lies in maintaining the US hegemony. The policy of alliances' mobilization has become a strategic priority for the US.

Therefore, the US, as well as its allies, need sustainable alliances, which have to be mainly rested on shared values, plus a common threat.

Hence, Snyder's alliance perception is the most objective to explain the pattern of enduring alliances like NATO after the Cold War because of shared liberal values. And thus, it is also the most appropriate to explain the US alliance policy that the Biden administration has worked from the beginning to establish them as alliances of democracy against tyranny.

Snyder defined Alliances as a "formal associations of states for the use (or non-use) of military force, intended for either the security or the aggrandizement of their members, against specific other states, regardless of these others are explicitly identified".

Despite its official framework, however, Snyder's alliances perception goes beyond such a narrow formal framework. Alliances according to Snyder are purely political, not legal. They are essentially based on solid mutual expectations and interests. In other words, the firm conviction of the members of the alliance to support each other without hesitation, especially in conflicts and wars. Accordingly, the presence of a common adversary or threat forms the bedrock of alliances. Hence, the significance of formalizing alliances lies in consolidating these common expectations and developing these alliances (Snyder, 1990, pp. 104-105).

As a result, unlike other realistic perceptions of alliances, Snyder's alliances perception emphasizes the possibility of permanent or the solid alliances. Besides the existence of a common threat, Snyder emphasizes the issue of shared or similar values as the basis for the sustainability or ease of forming alliances. Accordingly, the shared values or ideologies greatly explain the joining of weak or small states into alliance superpowers-led (Snyder, 1997, pp. 5-8; Snyder, 1990, pp. 108-109). For instance, Shared values, especially the fight against terrorism and piracy, were one of the main incentives of Bahrain to join multiple security alliances and agreements since 2001, as it concluded security agreements with both Britain and France, and it also obtained the status of a major non-NATO ally (Salameh, 2023, pp. 10-11).

Regarding alliances under Biden such as AUKUS and Five Eyes (FVEY) intelligence alliance, one of the most important common features of these alliances is common Anglo-Saxon Culture and History. In addition to China as a common threat. This, in turn, according to Snyder, makes alliances almost permanent, even before they were officially announced or taken as an official framework. Five Eyes alliance's states, for instance, have long-standing power intelligence cooperation (Ufimtseva et al., 2024, p.2).

In short, the threat, and not the power, is the most convenient variable to explain the formation of alliances. Such a threat that requires the balance is a result of aggressive intentions aggravated in the context of the growing aggregate power and the offensive power of the threatening state. Threat is the main factor in forming alliances. However, the presence of common values or shared ideologies contributes to the ease of forming alliances and the greater likelihood of their sustainability.

Based on that, The China's threat is the main common factor for the Biden administration's alliances in the Indo-Pacific region. China for the US and its allies, especially Japan, India and Australia, are mainly a threat due to its aggregate power, offensive power and aggressive intentions. Furthermore, its values that fully contradict with the western values, which in turn fuels the convictions and fears of the allied states regarding China as a serious or eternal threat and not just a major power like India. Especially that China is embarking on several major projects, such as the Silk Road Initiative and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, aiming to establish a new international system established by China's values as an alternative to the liberal system.

### **Indo-Pacific, China's threat and Keep U.S hegemony**

Since 2010 Indo-Pacific region has become represents the major priority for the US's strategic focus. Before that, it was also of strategic importance, and the US presence there was strong, but that importance cannot be compared to post - 2010. In the context of Obama's Pivot to Asia that launched in 2009, Indo-Pacific region has emerged as a strategic concept in the first time in the US official rhetoric, where then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton pointed out in many occasions that the focus in Indo-Pacific has become decisive to the US's future interests. The US's radical shift to Indo-

Pacific is attributed to two key strategic interests. First is the economic strategic significance of the Indo-Pacific region, where the region has become the central of world economy, including commerce, markets and energy. The second and most important is to undermine China's rise (Scott, 2018, pp.20-26)

Since 2008, the US administrations have made no secret of the fact that China has become the most dangerous strategic threat to US hegemony. According to the US National Security Strategy of 2022, "PRC is the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it" (National Security Strategy of the United States, October 12, 2022).

Since the Obama administration, China has been describing as a revisionist power in all the US's official strategies. China's comprehensive power, especially the economy, is rising at a tremendous rate, while the US's power is in a relative decline. China managed to narrow the economic gap with the US, it currently the biggest manufacturer and exports in the world, and enjoys large commercial ties around the world, even with western countries. Also, it has become a fierce competitor to the US in the field of electronics and weapons (Tien and Trang, 2023, p.3).

Moreover, it has been working since 2013 to expand its global influence by several methods, especially via BRI and soft power. That led to challenging the US's influence, particularly in developing countries and the Islamic world. Where China is now seen globally as a benign power that does not rely on hard power and coercion to extend its influence as the US does (Rafique and Zaman, 2024, p.11).

According to the offensive realism theory, establishing the regional hegemony is the key pillar or premise for the global hegemony. Accordingly, the US strategic thinking since 2010 has settled on that maintaining the US hegemony and undermining China's rise requires consolidating the US hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region. The US National Security Strategy of 2022, has echoed that when it says "Beijing has ambitions to create an enhanced sphere of influence in the Indo-Pacific and to become the world's leading power" (National Security Strategy of the United States, October 12, 2022).

Indeed, the region has become the main arena of the Cold War between the US and China. The latter's influence in the region has tremendously grown, as well as it clearly seeks, especially since Xi Jinping to undermine the US's influence and presence there. This definitely indicates China's pursuit of regional hegemony in the region as a starting point for global hegemony. China has become the largest economic power in the region, and an essential trading partner for most of its countries. Besides its expanding ambitions and influence in the most important strategic areas in the region, especially the South China Sea, where it pursues very assertive policies under the pretext of protecting its vital interests. Also, it seeks to reinforce its maritime presence in the region via BRI, and that represents a dangerous development to the US and its allies, especially India (Bush et al., 2022, p.4; Grabowski, 2021, p.3).

In this respect, China's growing presence in the Middle East via BRI poses a major challenge to the US and its alliance policy in Indo-Pacific, as well as the Middle East. The latter enjoys a unique strategic location in the middle of Asia, Africa and Europe, extending from the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean, and includes the most important sea straits in the world, plus the vast reserves of oil. Therefore, it grants China a huge leverage to challenge the US, especially in the Indian Ocean. On the other hand, BRI in the middle East has become a comprehensive alliance led by China that includes most of the major countries in the region, which represents an additional challenge to Biden's alliance policy in general and in Indo-Pacific in particular. China's growing presence in the Middle East via BRI came at the expense of the general American decline in the region. Nevertheless, the region is still significant to the US, and its significance has increased after the Ukrainian war, and Biden's policy of mobilizing international alliances to undermine China. Based on that, The Middle East will be a major pressure card and maneuver in China's hand to pressure and influence US policy in the Indo-Pacific in general. This is in light of the US need to maintain its military bases, the region's oil, and its major countries within the framework of continuing pressure on China within the region and in Indo-Pacific (Khsabah and Salameh, 2024, pp. 436-439).

That's why Obama administration had launched "Pivot to Asia" strategy in 2009, in which the U.S has redeployed 60% of its maritime power in Indo-Pacific. Besides establishing new security alliances with the countries' region,

especially in the South China Sea such as Philippines and Vietnam (Roper, 2024, pp. 1-2). Also, the Obama administration reinforced the ties with India and Australia to consolidate the US position as Indo-Pacific power, which resulted in expanding the scope of Malabar exercises in the Western Pacific and Indian Ocean (Scott, 2018, p.27).

Trump administration has designated the Indo-Pacific region as the key strategic arena in the world to counter China's challenge, as well as its explicit indication that the potential military confrontation with China will greatly erupt there. For these reasons, the Trump administration made some fundamental changes in its strategy in the Indo-Pacific, such as re-expanding the scope of work and deployment of US forces in the Indo-Pacific. Also, Renaming the US Pacific Command (USPACOM) to the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) (Foster and Clark, 2024, pp.3-4).

Regarding Biden administration, it declared Indo-Pacific Strategy in February 2022, in which elaborated its deep strategy there by indicating the US's focus will include every corner of Indo-Pacific. This is mainly because of China's challenge, where China strives through its all powers to become the most influential power in the region and in the world (Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States, February 2022).

### **China and Biden alliances' policy**

Democrats in general and Biden in particular firmly believe that the alliances policy is the ideal strategies to confront or undermine China's power. That's why Trump's Isolationist foreign policy that led to allies' negligence has been fiercely slammed by Biden during his 2020 election campaign. Despite Biden aggressively continued many of Trump's policies towards China, especially trade and technology wars (Guoping, 2022, pp. 277-278).

The firm belief that alliances are the most effective strategy to confront China that adopted by Biden and a broad segment of US politicians stems from a realistic realization of several fundamental facts, the most important of which is the general decline of the US's comprehensive power in contrast to the broad growth of Chinese comprehensive power. This reflects or means that the US is no longer able alone to confront China. For instance, in the context of the US economic decline, the US can't maintain its military superiority against China's rapid military development. At this point, the formation of solid military alliances led by Washington represents a powerful compensatory policy to consolidate US hegemony and deter China decisively.

In general, China differs from any previous opponent of the US, especially the Soviet Union. The latter was only a military power, while China is characterized by a growing superiority in terms of comprehensive power, especially economic power. Therefore, the US confrontation with China is not easy at all because it will require an enormous cost that the US can no longer afford, especially in light of China's overwhelming diplomatic and economic influence globally. Accordingly, alliances become an urgent necessity to confront this overwhelming influence (Lynch, 2021, pp. 24-25; Roper, 2024, p.4).

Biden has literally affirmed that in his article in "Foreign Affairs" 2020, in which he described China as a "special challenge". As it has strategic long blueprint of the global hegemony based on expending its global footprint, enhancing its political model and investing in the very sophisticated technologies. Therefore, he confirmed that building a united front of allies is the most effective way to confront China's challenge ( Biden, 2020, pp.70.71).

In fact, one of the strongest pieces of evidence for the validity of the logic of alliances to confront China is the recognition by the Trump administration, which has taken a unilateral approach to confronting China, of the importance of uniting allies against China. In 2020, Mike Pompeo openly said that facing China alone is difficult for the US, as the latter needs to work with its democratic allies (Guoping, 2022, p.278).

Also, this fact is very clear in the context of the American-Russian rivalry in the Middle East. Where the US permitted to Russia after 2011 to strengthen its influence in the region especially in Syria and form a network of alliances because it can undermine this influence or return to its leading role in the region whenever it wants, and without resorting to strengthening its alliances in the region. This reality reflects the fact that China alone and not any other international powers is the main strategic challenge to the US hegemony, and the Indo-Pacific is the major region of the US-Sino rivalry that requires the full attention of the alliance policy (Salameh and Mashagbeh, 2018, p.33).

Against the backdrop, alliances have been a focus of Biden's attention since his first day in the White House. This is in

terms of restoring previous partnerships and alliances, and forming new alliances, especially from democratic countries or with like-minded. In this respect, Biden returned to the World Health Organization and the Paris Agreement to assert a pluralistic approach and reassuring the allies. In March 2021, Biden asserted during the European Council summit the US's commitment to restore the relations with the EU and reinforce the common policies to uphold the democratic Front Against Tyranny (Zhu, 2024, p.130; Guoping, 2022, p.278)

It should be noted that Biden's alliance mobilization policy, which was its first starting point in Europe, its main purpose was to strengthen the alliance front against China. This is evidenced by Biden's Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative, which he proposed during the G7 summit in July 2021. B3W is a vast project for infrastructure development among the US allies to weaken China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Within B3W, Biden also sought to reaffirm the US's commitment to its EU allies, who welcomed the initiative (Rafique and Zaman, 2024, p.10).

In this regard, the attractiveness and durability of Biden's alliance policy must have been based on a confluence of values and meeting the vital needs of the allies. Through this, Biden also proves to allies the return of the familiar or natural role of the US, which deteriorated due to Trump's America First policy. That's why Biden's initiatives towards the allies were based on reinforcing democracy and human rights, as well as expanding the scope of cooperation in strategic fields such as technology, food security and health (Ye, 2022, p.479).

### **Biden's Key Alliances in Indo-Pacific**

Alliances constituted the essence of Biden's strategy in the Indo-Pacific. That reflected China's threat growth, as well as the great significance of the US's allies and partners to confront China's threat in Indo-Pacific (Zhu, 2024, p.131).

Despite Trump Administration considered China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific is a great threat to the US dominance in the region and globally. Accordingly, it adopted Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy in 2017 as a new mechanism to counter China. Nevertheless, this new strategy did not achieve the desired effectiveness because of the absence of the powerful coordination with the allies, especially the Quad allies. Arguably that, the lack of interest in allies due to Trump's unilateral approach to confronting China had very negative consequences. It, for instance, has exacerbated Washington allies' doubts about the American commitment to the region (Joshi and Atmakuri, 2021, pp. 7-9).

In this regard, Biden affirmed that alliances are the greatest asset to the US in his first foreign policy speech in office. Furthermore, Kurt Campbell and Rush Doshi who are senior advisors on China and Indo-Pacific in the Biden administration, published an article in foreign affairs in 2021, which emphasized that working and coordinating with allies is imperative to restore parity and order, and keeping the leading role of the US in Asia (Wei, 2022, p.5).

According to the US Indo-Pacific Strategy of 2022, "A free and open Indo-Pacific can only be achieved if we build collective capacity for a new age; common action is now a strategic necessity..... and we will pursue this through a latticework of strong and mutually reinforcing coalitions" (Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States, February 2022).

Also, according to U.S National Security Strategy of 2022 "align our efforts with our network of allies and partners, acting with common purpose and in common cause". represents one of U.S key strategic pillars in Indo-Pacific to counter China's efforts to reinforce its influence and undermining the U. S's allies in Indo-Pacific (National Security Strategy of the United States, October 12, 2022).

Consequently, Biden's alliance strategy in Indo-Pacific has been based on expanding the scope of the network of alliances to include the largest possible area in the region, including the outskirts of Europe. That's of course, requires reinforcing the old alliances such as Quad, and establishing new ones. That, in return, will greatly contribute to containing China and enhancing a strong, integrated deterrent network against it in the region (Foster and Clark, 2024, p.14).

### ***Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)***

Quad started as an initiative put forward by Japan in 2007 to forge a quadrilateral political and military alliance that includes the US, Japan, India, and Australia, in a response to China's growing harassment of Japan's sovereign interests in the East China Sea. In April 2007, Quad's states held the first official meeting on the sidelines of the ASEAN Summit. The purpose of meeting was to set the outlines for developing the strategic cooperation within Quad, and

institutionalizing it.

Nevertheless, this meeting made no progress, mainly because of India and Australia's fears that Quad would fuel the conflict with China. Also, China was not a very serious threat to them compared to the US and Japan. Indeed, this meeting has made China consider Quad as a very dangerous security block led by US directed against it, and expressed that openly to Quad's states. That eventually resulted in collapsing the Quad in 2008. However, this official collapse did not prevent the persistence of Quad as a strategic idea in itself, but more importantly, the Quad's members agreed to conduct annual joint naval exercise "Malabar" the first was in May 2007. In a nutshell, the key reason for collapsing Quad in 2008 could be attributed to the lack of solid common perception regarding China's threat (Koga, 2024, pp. 12-13; Heiduk and Wirth, 2023, pp. 1-2).

Trump administration revived what it was called "Quad 2.0" but it didn't give it much attention. Biden administration has revived "Quad 3.0", the fundamental difference between them and "Quad 1.0" lies in the allies' powerful support in reviving Quad even from India and Australia, which were hesitant to develop Quad. Indeed, this is due to the dramatic growing of China's threat. China under Xi Jinping has adopted very aggressive foreign policy, its efforts for regional and global hegemony have become very evident through BRI. Also, its efforts to dominate the South China Sea are no longer hidden. It has built dozens of artificial islands there under the pretext of territorial sovereignty. All this has made the US's allies very panic about their national security and regional roles. Accordingly, the solution is the balance against China's threat via Quad (Deb and Wilson, 2021, p.116).

China is a crucial factor in determining and directing Japan's strategic directions. The two countries are engaged in a long dispute over islands in the East China Sea. Therefore, China's growing capabilities and influence cause a great concern for Japan. For these reasons, Japan initiated to establish Quad, and enthusiastically engaged in multiple regional security arrangements directed against China, such as the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue in 2005 with the US and Australia, and Guidelines for Japan-US in 2015. Japan had a significant role in reviving Quad 2.0 and Quad 3.0 against the backdrop of the dangerous growth of Chinese influence in Asia since 2015, especially via BRI. In addition to its persistent challenge to Japan's interests in East China Sea (Koga, 2023).

China is the driving force behind India's enthusiastic joining of the Quad Alliance. In addition to the serious threats posed by China to India's sovereign interests. China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region poses a serious obstacle to India's ambition to become a leading power in the Indo-Pacific, which is very crucial for India to enhance its status in the multipolar international system. That's why Quad for India is a vital strategy to undermine China's aspirations, especially the Quad's states share a common threat (Joshi and Atmakuri, 2021, p.13).

Quad's importance to India has doubled after the escalation of its border crisis with China in 2020, which could have developed into a war. India has come to view Quad as the most important deterrent to China, especially in light of its inability to achieve an internal balance capable of keeping pace with the rapid growth of China's capabilities. Accordingly, India intensified its military participation in Malabar exercise after it pursued a caution policy in this regard (Tarapore, 2023, pp. 242-243).

Biden considered Quad as the most important security alliance in Iethendo-Pacific to undermine China. That's why since the first day in power, Biden sought to carry out a comprehensive and extensive revitalization process to Quad. In February 2021, Blinken agreed with Quad's members on the importance of strengthening the cooperation in Indo-Pacific within Quad, and expanding this cooperation to include the democracy, counterterrorism, and maritime security. In March 2021, the first virtual Quad summit was held at the presidential level under Biden, in which Biden has reiterated the vital importance of the Quad to reinforce the cooperation in Indo-Pacific. Furthermore, it was agreed to hold regular annual presidential summits in an effort to enhance the institutional character of Quad. Accordingly, Biden has emphasized the vital importance of Quad as a comprehensive tool, not just a military one, to counter China. He has also emphasized to Quad's members the great importance of the US attachment to Quad, which they had lost great confidence in Quad due to Trump's neglect of it (Barbantán, 2024, p.257).

On the other hand, analysts view that Biden's big efforts to expand and consolidate Quad, indeed, reflect the vital role



of the US's allies in the context of collective alliances, especially the democratic to counter China. This is also evident from Biden administration's efforts to reinforce the ties with India, and other East Asian countries are candidates for Quad's membership (Heiduk and Wirth, 2023, pp.2-2).

As such, Biden sought to establish a long-term great and solid alliance to be attractive to all Indo-Pacific nations, or a comprehensive Asian NATO. In this respect, Biden worked on a comprehensive institutionalization of Quad, and under Biden Quad leaders have officially met six times. Also, Quad provided tremendous financial, development, security and training assistance in many fields to Indo-Pacific nations (Preview of President Biden's Quad Summit with Mira Rapp-Hooper, U.S. Department of State, September 19, 2024).

Until 2024, the Quad has achieved some important security developments implicitly directed against China. In 2022, the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) came into effect as a highly sophisticated mechanism for joint maritime surveillance. Also, in 2024, a new regional Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific (MAITRI) has been announced by Quad with the aim of maximizing the joint deterrence against illegal behavior and activities in Indo-Pacific (Fact Sheet: 2024 Quad Leaders' Summit).

### *Trilateral Security Partnership (AUKUS)*

AUKUS is an acronym for three countries, namely the United States, United Kingdom and Australia, which announced in 2021 the establishment of an "enhanced trilateral security partnership" known as AUKUS. According to the analysts, AUKUS constitutes one of the most important long-term security alliances of the US to enhance its security presence and to deter China's threat in the Indo-Pacific. This is largely attributed to the success of the US in convincing Australia and England to form this alliance.

Also, others see that AUKUS is the most critical geopolitical development in Indo-Pacific for decades. As it, plus Quad are the nucleus to form an Asian NATO modelled on NATO. Anyway, AUKUS reflects dominance of the security aspect of Indo-Pacific nations, and the extreme panic of China's rising power, especially its naval power. Under AUKUS, the US and UK pledged to enhance Australia's military capabilities, especially nuclear-powered submarines, which strengthens the deterrence capacity against China (Curtis, 2022, pp. 14-15; Suparman, 2024, pp. 549- 551).

China's threat growth in the Pacific has been Australia's key driver to join AUKUS. Australia has openly clarified that in its Defence Strategic Review of 2023, in which designated China's growing military power as a challenge to Australia's interests in the Pacific. Therefore, the US and UK's support within AUKUS grants Australia a formidable strategic deterrence power against China, especially through nuclear submarines (Gosling, 2024).

England's accession to AUKUS, which is not part of the Asian Indo-Pacific, reflects many important indications. At the top of these indications is the growing seriousness of China's threat to Europeans and not just London. In other words, China has become a common threat, which requires consolidating the current alliances among the Atlantic partners. Also, within AUKUS, London seeks to reinforce its status as a global power, and in Europe seeks to become the most influential and powerful after Brexit. In addition to, England's presence in Indo-Pacific greatly enhances the British economy, especially via reinforce the ties with Commonwealth nations (Suparman, 2024, pp.551-553).

Besides Quad and AUKAS, the Biden administration has also worked to consolidate its partnerships with key regional blocs and support the establishment of others. In this regard, Biden administration has decided that strengthening the partnership with ASEAN is imperative in the context of the US alliance network in Indo-Pacific. The U.S Indo-Pacific Strategy of 2022 had stressed the significance of ASEAN. Where it emphasized the great importance of deepening the US partnership with ASEAN to confront the region's challenges. Also, it emphasized on finding the opportunities to strengthen the partnership between ASEAN and Quad (Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States, February 2022).

Biden sought to prove the great significance of ASEAN to the U.S. In May 2022, for instance, US has hosted for the first time- a special U.S.–ASEAN Summit, in which Biden has emphasized the central role of ASEAN in Asia, as well as the significance of deepening the U.S cooperation with ASEAN in various new fields. Also, he vowed financial aids to the community, exceeding \$150 million (Wei, 2022, p.6).

In the same vein, in 2022, Biden initiated the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) to establish a broad economic alliance in the Indo-Pacific region led by Washington. Dozens of the region's countries have expressed their welcome to the initiative, such as South Korea, New Zealand, Brunei, Japan, Singapore and India. In light of the wide regional welcome, this initiative will pose a huge challenge to China's economic power, especially since one of its main principles is to enable fair economic competition for the region's countries (FACT SHEET: In Asia, The White House, May 23, 2022).

Also, in the same year, the Blue Pacific alliance was officially declared among the US, Australia, New Zealand, Britain and Japan. The alliance is an expanded modification of the Five Eyes intelligence alliance in a response to China's ambitious steps in South Pacific. That became very evident after concluding a security agreement with Solomon Islands in May 2022 (Zhu, 2024, p.132).

It is worth noting that small states in Indo-Pacific that have welcomed Biden's initiatives such as Singapore and Brunei, and they probably will join to Quad in the future, employ the strategic hedging as a security strategy to balance their relations between the US and China. Strategic hedging is a smart compensatory strategy often used by small states when they are trapped in a critical security and geopolitical environment that is intensely contested between two major powers. As such, Strategic hedging allows to the small states to bypass the conventional dangerous strategies, especially bandwagoning, through establishing good relations with the two conflicting powers, which enlarge the margin of maneuver and protection for small countries, especially in the case of severe regional polarization created by the conflict between the great powers. The Arab Gulf states, especially Kuwait, are one of the most prominent small states that depend on the strategic hedging to balance their relations between the US, Iran and Saudi Arabia. Kuwait, for instance, has adopted a smart strategic hedging in the context of escalation of the Iranian-Saudi rivalry in the Gulf after 2011, through supporting some of Saudi's decisions against Iran like *Operation Decisive Storm in Yemen, side by side intensifying the relations with Iran, especially on the economic level*. As such, Kuwait succeeded in distancing itself from the raging rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, not falling into the trap of bias, and maximizing its security and role in the region. In short, the strategic hedging that extensively used by small states with good relations with China in Indo-Pacific, may constitute a major obstacle to expanding the US alliance policy in the region or the dream of forming an Asian NATO, especially since the balance of power between China and the United States is almost equal (Salameh, 2024, pp.1-3/11).

### Conclusions:

China poses the most serious strategic threat to US hegemony since the end of the Cold War. Since 2010, there has been a real Cold War between China and the United States whose, scope is expanding day after day. Indo-Pacific region in particular is the most critical in the context of that war.

Undermining China's rise or power is one of the few things that there is a consensus on in the US, especially among Republicans and Democrats. However, while Republicans prefer the strategy of direct confrontation, Democrats prefer the strategy of building or mobilizing alliances. President Biden, in particular, is one of the most advocates of alliance policy in the US history.

Indeed, the US alliance policy or strategy to counter China is a practical, smart and realistic option. In principle, the US alliance policy reflects a clear US recognition of the decline of its power in the world, and in particular, vis-à-vis China. Therefore, allies have become a strategic necessity to keep the US hegemony and to confront a powerful and stubborn foe like China, since the US really can no longer counter China alone. This certainly implies that Washington's allies are strong and not dependent. They need Washington and it needs them to the same extent.

On the other hand, the main purpose of the alliances is to undermine China's power and influence, not to ignite a military confrontation with it, and this is exactly what the US and China also do not want.

Indo-Pacific region has received the lion's share of Biden's alliances as the consolidation of the US influence there and countering China is the pillar to keep the US hegemony. Forming alliances is essentially an external balancing

strategy to counter a "threat". However, the more common values among the allied countries, the more it is a major factor in the ease of forming and sustaining alliances.

China is a common threat to all the US's allies, and that's the backbone of the US's alliances, particularly in the Indo-Pacific. Nevertheless, the common liberal values among the US's allies have a big contribution in easing the formation of these alliances such as Quad and AUKUS recently, as well as the high probability of their sustainability.

Biden administration has established or consolidated its alliances on the basis of the common democratic or liberal values, as well as the commitment to provide the strategic assistances. Accordingly, that contributed to the strong revival of Quad, and establishing AUKUS. Moreover, deepening partnership with ASEAN, and strengthening the Five-Star Alliance. This would, in turn, strengthen the deterrence front against China and weaken its influence in Indo-Pacific in the medium and long term.

Based on the above, the study reached a set of conclusions, which are:

- Alliances are an external balancing strategy against threat, not power. The speed and sustainability of alliance formation depends on the existence of shared values or ideologies. Alliances are thus a grouping of relatively equal power, not subordinate states.
- China is the most dangerous strategic threat to US hegemony at the present time, and Indo-Pacific is the most critical area in the context of the struggle for international hegemony between Beijing and Washington.
- The US alliance strategy clearly reflects the decline of US power in the world. Hence, the strategic necessity for allies to maintain US hegemony and resist China's threat.
- China's threat is the cornerstone of Washington's network of alliances, especially in the Indo-Pacific. But the existence of shared values also contributes to the speed of forming these alliances, their durability, and the high probability of their sustainability. Accordingly, the balance of threat theory is most appropriate to explore the US alliances network, especially in Indo-Pacific.
- The Quad Alliance is Washington's most important alliance in Indo-Pacific. and if it continues and develops, it will form a solid deterrent front against China.

#### ***US Alliances policy in Indo-Pacific: Challenges and future***

From our point of view, the alliances policy or strategy is the most realistic and appropriate to counter China. It is compatible with the current status of the US and the enormous power of China. It also prevents the outbreak of a catastrophic armed conflict between the US and China. Nevertheless, it faces a set of significant challenges, which are:

- The growing of the isolationist trend within the US, and Trump is clearly reflecting it. This is the most serious threat to the continuation of the alliance policy, as this growth of isolationism will certainly affect the continuation of the US commitment to partners.
- The increasing financial burden of continuing to support allies and demonstrate US commitment and power, especially militarily, in light of the major economic challenges facing the US.
- The fears of Washington's allies and partners, especially in Indo-Pacific, from the possibility of fueling the US-Sino conflict as a result of these security alliances. This, in turn, constitutes a major obstacle to the expansion of these alliances, especially Quad. Some of Washington's partners, including Vietnam, for example, do not want to expand the scope of hostility with China to the maximum limits.

Lastly, the recent conflicts and wars, such as the Ukrainian war and the wars in the Middle East, pose a challenge to alliance policy in Indo-Pacific, because they weaken the US' focus on China's threat. Hence, this will affect the US's commitment to its alliances in the Indo-Pacific.

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