

THE QUADRILATERAL FORUM BETWEEN INDIA, ISRAEL, UAE AND US: A NEW ALLIANCE

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Just as multilateralism is on the decline, the world is witnessing the emergence of fresh alliances and the formation of new blocs between countries with converging economic and strategic interests. Traditional multilateralism seems to be fading, whereas new ‘minilateralism’ is on the rise, as can be seen with the formation of new alliances in the shape of quads such as the newly established Quadrilateral Alliance between India, Israel, United Arab Emirates and United States in October 2021.¹ The first in the pursuit of such alliances was the QUAD inked in 2007 between the US, Australia, Japan and India, which was aimed at countering China’s growing influence in the Indo-Pacific, with India and the US as its most active players. Similarly, AUKUS signed in September 2021, an alliance announced as a historic security pact in the Asia-Pacific between the United Kingdom, US and Australia, which will cover Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other technologies, is regarded as one of the biggest defense partnerships in decades in an alleged effort to counter China.²

Although the new Quad reflects the US’s attempts to deepen strategic partnerships and alliances, the inclusion of the UAE, makes this initiative significant as it is the first Gulf state to enter into such

1 Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, A Quad for the Middle East, *The Diplomat*, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/10/a-quad-for-the-middle-east/>

2 Aukus: UK, US and Australia launch pact to counter China, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-58564837>

a grouping. The fundamental shift in Arab Israeli relations actually came about with the Abraham Accords signed in August 2020 culminating in the diplomatic relations between Israel and the UAE.³ Equally, the inclusion of Israel makes it noteworthy and could be a part of the US greater Middle East plan - as the US has played a key role in UAE's recognition of Israel. The new QF is important because of the growing alliance between the UAE and Israel. It seems that QF, like the Quad and AUKUS appear to be two parallel tracks that the US is adopting in order to maintain influence. In the same manner, this new Quadrilateral signals a deeper and stronger relationship between the four states and opens vistas for further cooperation and engagement and also paves way for new avenues to cooperation order to tackle regional security challenges exacerbated by the climate crisis. Deeper engagement between these states has been instrumental in leading towards such alliances, as is also evident from the signing of a deal between the UAE and India to build infrastructure in Indian occupied Kashmir.⁴

The QF aims to augment cooperation in areas of infrastructure projects in several realms like technology, transportation and among others trade and economics. While the UAE has been the US's closest strategic partner in the Middle East, its growing ties with China may add some strains to the alliance's future, as trade between the UAE and China has also been growing significantly and the UAE has signed deals worth US 3.4 billion dollars under China's Belt and Road Initiative.⁵ Three parallel initiatives, QUAD, AUKUS and now the QF signify the US's encirclement of China in the military as well as the economic realm. Over the last two decades, China and Israel have built a secure relationship based on investments and economic ties. Thus, they appear to have managed their regional differences and priorities.⁶ While it appears that the previous Quad as well as the new one is aimed at countering China's influence, however, with the inclusion of UAE and Israel who continue to maintain their relationship with China, it remains to be seen how the initiative will pan out. Therefore, it is fairly early to determine what shape this QF will take as there are contradicting interests of the member states.

While China may be a uniting factor, the formation of this Quadrilateral Forum, like the previous QUAD initiative appears to be another proposal with little substance, and may simply be used as a tool for diplomatic pressure. These new alliances in the shape of this newly formed QF are likely to

3 AbdulKhaleq Abdulla, The Two Pillars of the Abraham Accords, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/two-pillars-abraham-accords>

4 Dubai signs deal to build infrastructure in occupied Kashmir: Indian govt, Dawn, October 19, 2021 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1652953>

5 UAE signs deals with China under Belt and Road Initiative, http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=1857968369&Country=United%20Arab%20Emirates&topic=P_7

6 Sean Mathews, China's ties with Israel are tested by Gaza, but not sorely, Al Jazeera <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2021/6/7/chinas-ties-with-israel-are-tested-by-gaza-but-not-sorely>

be low key affairs as the above mentioned contradictions may keep the new alliance from becoming far too influential or ambitious as it may seem at present. The recent AUKUS arrangement between Australia, UK and the US is yet to prove its effectiveness. The only new factor in this new alliance is the US's reach out to the UAE, thus establishing a new footprint with regards to containing China's economic and diplomatic outreach to the Middle East at large.

As mentioned earlier, the formation of this new Quadrilateral signals a new shift in the Middle Eastern landscape, although the future of this alliance remains uncertain, it nonetheless further puts on the backburner the two state solutions with regards to the Palestine Israel conflict. The Middle Eastern geopolitical landscape is experiencing rapid changes, in the shape of deepening bilateral relations between countries which are members of this Quadrilateral. This is because China has begun to seek closer relations with Israel and the UAE and from the US's perspective, such an alliance would help push these states from seeking closer ties with Beijing. In a nutshell, this Quadrilateral alliance is a clear and open acknowledgment by the Biden administration to actively respond to China in multiple regions just as China's rise at various levels needs to be tackled.