

THE RISE OF MINILATERALISM

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August 21, 2024

(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



Introduction

In the 21st century, minilateralism has emerged as a network of like-minded states addressing shared concerns. Prominent minilateral blocs include the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), Australia-UK-USA (AUKUS), Chip 4 Alliance, and India-Israel-US-UAE (I2U2). These groups collaborate across various sectors such as security, economy, and technology. However, concerns have been raised about the potential impacts of these minilaterals on global peace. This issue brief will outline some of the most active minilateral groups and examine their positive and negative effects on the global strategic landscape.

The Quadrilateral Alliance Dialogue

The Quadrilateral Alliance Dialogue (QUAD) formed in 2007 between the U.S., India, Japan, and Australia. Since 2017 the group has expanded its activities in various areas such as collaborating on vaccines, competing with China in providing loans to the Indo-Pacific nations, and cooperation on cyber-security and space.¹ During the QUAD Leaders' Summit 2024, the group stated its vision of a stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific region and reaffirmed its collaboration with the ASEAN and other

¹ Muhammad Faisal Bin Abdul, Rahman, "The QUAD's Public Goods Approach: Countering the BRI," *9Dashline*, 23 March 2023, <https://www.9dashline.com/article/the-quads-public-goods-approach-countering-the-bri>

Pacific nations. The group also ensured the Pacific nations of cooperating with them in the areas such as climate change and Ocean Health, all being part of the Positive Agenda of the QUAD.²

Australia-UK-USA

Established in September 2021, Australia-UK-USA (AUKUS) is a three-way strategic alliance³ collaborating on information and technology, hypersonic missiles and development of nuclear-powered submarines for Australia.⁴ The group aims to improve innovative technology, enhance defense cooperation and strengthen the ties between member countries⁵ and maintain Indo-Pacific open and free.⁶ AUKUS functions on two pillars:

Pillar I. Development of nuclear powered submarine for Australia, and

Pillar II. Technology sharing and increased interoperability between the member countries.

In their latest round of meetings in April 2024, the group emphasized advancing technology collectively and reaffirmed their commitment to leveraging national strengths for enhanced collaboration among member countries on technological opportunities.⁷

India-Israel-US-UAE

Formed in October 2021, the India-Israel-US-UAE (I2U2) is an intergovernmental partnership bloc between India, Israel, the U.S., and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), to bolster geo-economic cooperation. In 2022, the group held a Leaders' Summit, which pledged to meet shared challenges, especially through investments and initiatives in health, energy, transportation, food security, and space.⁸ The group focuses on infrastructural development to connect the crucial trade links of

² "QUAD Leaders' Joint Statement," *Prime Minister of Australia*, 20 May 2023, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/quad-leaders-joint-statement>

³ Patrick Wintour, "What is the AUKUS Alliance and What are its Implications?," *Guardian*, 16 September 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/sep/16/what-is-the-aukus-alliance-and-what-are-its-implications>

⁴ Patrick Wintour, "What is AUKUS Alliance and What are its Implications," *Guardian*, 6 September 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/sep/16/what-is-the-aukus-alliance-and-what-are-its-implications>

⁵ Lauren Kahn, "AUKUS Explained: How Will the Trilateral Pact Shape Indo-Pacific Security?," *CFR*, 12 June 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/aukus-explained-how-will-trilateral-pact-shape-indo-pacific-security>

⁶ Girish Luthra, "AUKUS: The Submarine Program Pathway for Australia," *Observer Foundation Research*, 17 March 2023, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/aukus-the-submarine-programme-pathway-for-australia>

⁷ "AUKUS Defense Ministers' Joint Statement," *US Indo-Pacific Command*, 8 April 2024, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3734561/aukus-defense-ministers-joint-statement/>

⁸ "The I2U2 Minilateral Group," *IISS*, 11 November 2022, <https://www.iiss.org/en/online-analysis/online-analysis/2022/11/the-minilateral-i2u2-group/>

Middle East to various other regions and aims to reduce the trade reliance on Bab-al-Mandeb strait and Suez Canal and plans to create an alternate passage to streamline the sea lines of communication and boost regional trade.

The Chip4 Alliance

The Chip4 Alliance is a group of four states i.e. the U.S., Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. The group was formed in 2022 mainly to cooperate on manufacturing sustainable semiconductors.⁹ Semiconductors are the key components of modern technology-based devices. As the tensions in the South China Sea grow, western countries along with Japan and South Korea have shown increasing interest in protecting the critical supply lines in case of any potential negative scenario. There are three main focal points of the Chip4 alliance:¹⁰

1. Diversify the semiconductor manufacturing base and relocate the crucial supply lines to other countries by supporting industry and investment efforts.
2. Protect the intellectual property (IP) of companies in Member countries.
3. Promote exports of the most advanced semiconductors by policy development.

In their last round of dialogue, the group discussed strengthening the resilience of semiconductor supply chains.¹¹

Impacts of Minilaterals on Global Peace

The geopolitical divisions of international order have many consequences for global peace. Although the multilateral groups are created to ensure peace on the surface, they can create more tensions. The impacts of these can be both positive and negative.

Positive Impacts:

1. Minilateral blocs can bolster the security of smaller nations—such as the Philippines, South Korea, Japan, and Vietnam—by reducing the likelihood of aggression against them.
2. Cooperation among these minilaterals in infrastructure and investment can improve regional connectivity between the involved countries.

¹⁰ "Meet the Chip 4 Alliance," *Cadence*, <https://resources.system-analysis.cadence.com/blog/meet-the-chip-4-alliance>

¹¹ Sarah Wu, "Taiwan says U.S.-led 'Chip 4' Group Discussed Supply Chain Resilience," *Reuters*, 30 September 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/technology/taiwan-says-us-led-chip-4-group-discussed-supply-chain-resilience-2022-09-30/>

3. MBs have the potential to drive economic growth in the region, benefiting member nations and fostering greater social cohesion through development and prosperity.
4. The issue-specific focus of these minilaterals allows for more effective solutions to targeted concerns.
5. Unlike regional blocs, the informal and flexible nature of minilaterals makes it easier for states to participate according to their specific interests.

Negative Impacts:

1. The greatest negative impact is the misunderstanding created by these groups between core powers i.e. the U.S. and China. China has even called some of the groups as an Asian version of NATO.¹² This perception can be dangerous as China may also make some efforts to counter these efforts, putting the regions in the line of fire.
2. Another issue is the arms race, which these groups can encourage among the coastal states. AUKUS, for example, has spurred indirect tensions within the Indo-Pacific region. Even Indonesia¹³ and Malaysia¹⁴ have shown concern over the security crisis that AUKUS can unleash.
3. Besides, the smaller countries are becoming more reliant on big powers. Japan and South Korea have become completely dependent on the U.S. For example, a Reuters report recently said that the U.S. wants critical changes in the command structure of Japanese forces.¹⁵ This dependence is dangerous for smaller powers that can push them to unimaginable crises.
4. Additionally, the informal nature of these MBs makes it more difficult for them to shape interests, policies, and behavior.
5. These minilaterals can also increase the power competition in the world where the trend of division between the groups led by the U.S. and China is emerging.

¹² "U.S. Trying to Create Asian NATO with Blocs to 'Suppress' China: FM Wang Yi," *Business Standard*, 7 March 2022, https://www.business-standard.com/amp/article/international/us-trying-to-create-asian-nato-with-blocs-to-suppress-china-fm-wang-yi-122030701343_1.html

¹³ Denial Hurst, Indonesian Ambassador Warns Australia AUKUS Pact Must not Fuel a Hypersonic Arms Race, *Guardian*, 2 November 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/nov/03/indonesian-ambassador-warns-australia-aukus-pact-must-not-fuel-a-hypersonic-arms-race-in-the-region>

¹⁴ Katharine Murphy, "Malaysian Foreign Minister Says Concerns Remain about AUKUS Pact after Meeting with Penny Wong," *Guardian*, 28 June 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/28/malaysian-foreign-minister-says-concerns-remain-about-aukus-pact-after-meeting-with-penny-wong>

¹⁵ Tim Kelly, Yukiko Toyoda, and Laura Sanicola, "U.S. Eyes Change to Military Command in Japan as China Threat Looms, Sources Say," *Reuters*, 25 March 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-japan-plan-biggest-upgrade-security-pact-more-than-60-years-ft-reports-2024-03-24/>

Conclusion:

The emergence of minilateralism has reshaped the global strategic landscape. This trend, which initially gained momentum in the Indo-Pacific, is gradually spreading to other regions. Recently, Northern African nations, including Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, formed a security alliance to collaborate on military and economic matters.¹⁶

¹⁶ "Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso Establish Sahel Security Alliance," *Aljazeera*, 16 September 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/amp/news/2023/9/16/mali-niger-and-burkina-faso-establish-sahel-security-alliance>