

INDO-ISRAEL RELATIONS WITH A FOCUS ON THE USA'S INTERFACEEdiga Lakshmana^{1*}, Dr. D. Chandramouli Reddy²Research scholar^{1*}, Sr. Assistant Professor²^{1,2}Department of Political Science and Public Administration,
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e.lakshmana@gmail.com^{1*}, cdevarinti3@gmail.com²**Abstract**

Owing to the fact that the United States has chosen to shift its focus on security from the Middle East to the Asia-Pacific region, other significant countries are being evaluated as potential players who may fill the void in Middle East security. A further demonstration of the fact that India is one of these players is provided by the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor, which was only recently introduced to the public. There has been a substantial change in India's approach to West Asia due to the country's participation in the quadrilateral cooperation known as I2U2. Because of this event, the culmination of "India's building strategic partnerships with the United Arab Emirates and Israel," there is a growing convergence between the United States and India in West Asia. This event underlines this convergence. India aims to integrate with and develop a connected, cooperative Gulf-Mediterranean area as a pushback mechanism against the rising Chinese economic footprint and political engagement in the region. India is undertaking this initiative. Specifically, this is a reaction to the United States' efforts to coordinate its policies with those of the Indo-Pacific area and the Middle East. India will continue to battle to retain its own strategic vision of West Asia despite its recently demonstrated willingness to engage with "the United States of America and its regional allies." This study aims to evaluate the political dynamics in West Asia influenced by US intervention and analyze how India's foreign policy has adapted to its evolving position in the rapidly changing global order.

Keywords: *Mini-lateral, Strategic alliance, Middle East, West Asia, Indo-Pacific*

INTRODUCTION

The United States' shift in security focus from "the Middle East to the Asia-Pacific" area has prompted the consideration of other significant countries as potential replacements for ensuring security in the Middle East. India's participation in global economic affairs is seen by its involvement in the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor, which was recently introduced. India's West Asian policy has undergone a notable change due to its participation in the quadrilateral cooperation group called I2U2. This event signifies a growing alignment between the United States and India in West Asia, reflecting India's bolstering strategic partnerships with the United Arab Emirates and Israel. India is keen to collaborate with and establish a connected, cooperative Gulf-Mediterranean region to counter the growing Chinese economic influence and diplomatic engagement. This is a reaction to the United States' attempts to harmonize its policies for the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific

area.^[1] India is willing to cooperate with the United States and its regional allies but will persist in defending its independent strategic outlook on West Asia. The purpose of this article is to make an effort to evaluate the politics of West Asia in light of the meddling of the United States of America and investigate how India's foreign policy has influenced and assimilated its new position in the rapidly shifting global world order.

US shifts focus on West Asia via a mini-lateral approach:

A small group of governments forms mini-laterals with a profound grasp of each other's needs and capabilities. They work together to address common difficulties, mostly stemming from bilateral solid relationships and similar interests between the states. "I2U2 originated from India's strengthening strategic alliances with the UAE, the US, & Israel."

The 2020 Abraham Accords, negotiated by the US, normalized relations between “Israel and the UAE and Bahrain, as well as other Arab nations, creating opportunities for US-led regional projects, including Israel.”^[2] The Biden administration promotes “regional cooperation and integrates its extensive network of friends and partners in the Middle East and Indo-Pacific to reassure its regional allies concerned about the US retreat from the area.” The 2022 US National Security Strategy emphasized the need for the United States to prioritize practical steps over ambitious plans to promote US interests and support regional partners in establishing stability and prosperity in the Middle East for both the local population and Americans.^[3]

The US is shifting from its “traditional position as an external security guarantee via bilateral alliances to becoming an ‘integrator’ of regional mechanisms to counter the influence of competing countries such as China and Russia. This approach is seen in the post-Accords regional efforts supported by the US, which include the Negev Summit (March 2022), the East Mediterranean Gas Forum, and the I2U2.”^[4]

India-US Convergence in West Asia:

These “mini-laterals” are notable for the fact that they are issue-specific in nature, which is their defining characteristic. It is essential to differentiate them from alliances characterized by a long-term commitment to security between allies. They often include a more comprehensive range of diplomatic, technical, and economic responsibilities on their agenda. Delhi highlights the regional convergence between India and the United States in West Asia by participating in these quadrilaterals.

“This convergence is based on their shared vision of an ‘interconnected’ region or network.”^[5]

Considering “that small regional states like the United Arab Emirates and Israel are intent on simultaneously strengthening their ties with a constellation of powers like the United States of America, China, India, and Russia, mini-laterals are mechanisms that are flexible and informal, and they do not involve significant political costs.”^[6] At the same time, they strengthen these states’ ability to manoeuvre in the face of competition from great powers. To improve the capacity of regional

governments to cope with shared difficulties, mini-laterals like I2U2 help build such skills. At the same time, “they can constrain the potential hegemonic plans of big powers that are making inroads into the area since they are a regional mechanism.”

In addition, the fact that India is a member of the I2U2 framework with Israel is evidence “that New Delhi has not only de-hyphenated its bilateral relations with Israel and Palestine but is also playing a significant role in the process of integrating Israel with the region on mutually advantageous terms. From Israel’s perspective, to make this de-hyphenation permanent, it seeks to strengthen and broaden the ties across the board. This is done to ensure that the relationship with Israel will become so widely accepted and beneficial that it will not be affected by the change of government in New Delhi, just as it is in Washington.”^[7]

Because of “the issue-specific and flexible” character of “mini-laterals,” it is also possible for nations to align themselves with distinct groupings of countries on topics that are different from one another. Therefore, it is very improbable that India’s involvement in these frameworks would impact the country’s heritage of maintaining a “balanced approach towards the area. Doval met with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in Riyadh to examine the possibility of establishing a railway network among Gulf states. This network would be connected to an Indian port in the Arabian Sea and an Israeli port in the Mediterranean. This corridor would be known as the India-Arab- Mediterranean corridor.”^[8]

To undertake meetings with high-ranking Iranian authorities, including President Ebrahim Raisi, Doval had been to Tehran one week before the event. The situation in Afghanistan, the potential for resuming commercial connections via the activation of the rial-rupee system, and the possibility of working together in the Chabahar port, which India and Iran are jointly building “as a significant transit hub between the Persian Gulf and Central Asia” were the primary topics of discussion during their conversations.

The I2U2 Business Forum’s efforts to maintain economic statecraft:

“The I2U2 Business Forum” is a business forum that promotes commercial collaboration prospects by facilitating interaction between members of the I2U2 group from the private sector and government representatives. It demonstrates the beneficial effects that the normalization of the area has had. “The Director-General of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” Ronen Levi, emphasized that the Forum demonstrates the potential for development in the Middle East and beyond that can be achieved via partnerships and the Abraham Accords. During the first meeting, various partnerships were addressed. These agreements included the possible investment of two billion dollars “in integrated agricultural facilities in India and the construction of a wind and solar hybrid power plant in Gujarat with a capacity of three hundred megawatts. To facilitate cross-regional geopolitical and economic integration in the Middle East, South Asia, or the more prominent regional panorama, West Asia, the I2U2 Business Forum intends to develop the I2U2 into a platform.” By gathering member states and representatives from their respective corporate sectors, the Forum offers the possibility of aligning the goals of vibrant regional economies. Through the facilitation of “dialogue between policymakers and representatives of the private sector, as well as the mobilization of private capital and expertise to enhance collaborative efforts, the Forum supports the geo-economic objectives of the I2U2 Group.”^[9] This is in contrast to “traditional multilateral trade agreements primarily focused on regulations and market access.” When one considers the historical difficulties linked with economic cooperation on a bilateral and international level in the face of geopolitical conflicts, these geo-economic goals are very ambitious.

I2U2: An effort focused on commerce and technological collaboration:

In the last two years, “the I2U2 has developed as a technological and trade cooperation effort that utilizes the strengths and trade synergies of four countries: the UAE’s money, Israel’s technical expertise, India’s market size, and manufacturing capacity. During the inaugural I2U2 virtual summit in July 2022, held when US President Joe Biden was

visiting Israel, an agreement was made to further shared investments and projects in energy, food security, health, space, transportation, and water.”^[10] “India has been collaborating with the UAE and Israel on a bilateral basis” in the technology-energy-climate change nexus, focusing on energy, food security, and water.

In 2020, due to “the COVID-19 pandemic highlighting the significance of robust supply chains for food security, companies like Dubai-based Emaar group, DP World, and other private sector entities pledged investments of up to US\$ 7 billion over the next three years in incorporated mega food parks, related warehousing, and logistics infrastructure in different Indian cities under the India-UAE Food Corridor.”

Israel, a prominent figure “in climate technology, has been collaborating with India to address climate change issues affecting food security and agriculture. The Indo-Israel Agricultural Cooperation Project, initiated in 2008,” has been successful. It has developed 30 ‘Centres of Excellence’ around India to promote best agricultural practices and provide professional training programs for capacity development.”^[12]

After “the I2U2 Summit, the UAE committed to investing US\$ 2 billion “in creating integrated food parks in India. This initiative will involve the participation of “the US and Israeli private sectors to provide their expertise and innovative solutions to enhance the project’s sustainability.” At the I2U2 conference, “the second collaborative project unveiled was a hybrid renewable energy project in Gujarat worth US\$ 300 million, consisting of 300 MW of wind and solar power. In April 2023, a combined business coalition of the I2U2” was formed to attract private sector investment and knowledge for collaborative initiatives in sustainable and renewable energy, which are the UAE’s current priorities leading up to hosting COP-28.”^[13]

Washington is entering a new age of commerce: Much change has occurred in trade policy, initiated by the Trump administration and continued by Biden. The US approach to China is comparable to this change. During this change, industrial sectors

are favoured while free trade is opposed. On the contrary, a labour-based strategy is desired. It is projected that this will continue to be the case following the presidential elections in 2024, and it symbolizes the predominant orientation of the United States' approach to trade. Giving access to the market in the United States is becoming less common in return for alignment with the United States' foreign policy. Not even the I2U2 Business Forum is exempt from this change in perspective. A more complex but more practicable route that strikes a balance between will and ability has been selected by the United States of America with the Forum.^[14] Washington's objective is to highlight the advantages of trade agreements headed by the United States while simultaneously working to undermine "China's attractiveness as an economic partner to players in West Asian countries."

Establishing a Model of the IPEF in West Asia:

It is impossible to draw parallels between the I2U2 Business Forum and conventional "trade agreements. It is more similar to the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)," which is an organization that aspires to promote trade and technological cooperation between the United States of America and several Asian nations "(including India) rather than to negotiate market access between states." Among the United States of America and its Pacific allies, the International Partnership for Economic Development "(IPEF) is committed to fostering resilience, sustainability, inclusivity, economic development, justice, and competitiveness. The United States of America, Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam are some of the countries that are members of this organization. Four key pillars are the foundation upon which the Framework is built: the connected economy, the resilient economy, the clean economy, and the fair economy. Trade, supply chains, renewable energy, decarbonization, infrastructure, taxation, and anti-corruption measures will be the primary topics of discussion during in-depth discussions in the future."^[15] It is important to note that the IPEF allows partners to choose and participate in the pillars that are of particular importance to them rather than requiring them to participate in all four.

The International Commerce and Economic Forum (I2U2) is akin to the International Political Economy Forum (IPEF) in terms of its fit "with a new age in international commerce that arises at the junction of global geopolitics and economic interaction." At the same time as the I2U2 Business Forum is working to enhance cross-regional economic integration among its four member nations, there is a chance to broaden this development to include other West Asian players and to create greater interconnection within the larger area. This is an opportunity that must be explored. Additionally, incorporating other states, including "Egypt and Saudi Arabia, into this geo-economic and geopolitical Framework will be an essential component of its capability to transform West Asia's economic landscape. Within the Framework of an increasing I2U2 format, there are existing historical projects in the Middle East that have the potential to serve as a source of inspiration for economic integration across regions. A significant example is the Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZ) developed by the United States of America to encourage industrial enterprises in Egypt, Jordan, and Israel."^[16] These zones enhanced economic interdependence and strengthened the security measures stipulated in the Eternal Peace Accords.

India functioning as a pillar of the West Asian economy:

As shown by "Delhi's choice to opt out of the trade pillar" of the International Promotion of Economic Cooperation (IPEF), India's involvement in global economic frameworks is measured. Piyush Goyal, the Minister of Commerce for the Union of India, said India chooses those with "the national interest of people and businesses in mind." He cited the possibility that the Framework may include "conditionalities" that might be discriminatory against developing countries.^[17] The issue is the possibility of legally enforceable agreements concerning trade-related environmental and labour concerns. India may also be prepared for a model similar to the IPEF in West Asia. This would give India a higher degree of leadership in the format, providing it with greater power "to ensure compliance with Delhi's strategic and economic goals. Considering this, the I2U2 has the potential to serve as the platform India may use to

establish itself as an economic anchor in West Asia and lead the area economically. By leveraging greater cooperation under a multilateral architecture that aligns with the geo-economic vision that India and the other members of I2U2 have formed, an extended format would also invite regional allies Egypt and Saudi Arabia to participate.”

The role that India plays in the I2U2:

As a result of the group's efforts to link West Asia and South Asia with the Pacific Ocean, each member will surely reap the advantages of the I2U2 initiative. As for the United States, the organization will make it possible for them to broaden and repair their relationship in the Middle East and further undermine the strategy that Trump has implemented toward the area. Conversely, the United Arab Emirates strengthens its position in the region's geopolitical landscape. It helps it gain a competitive advantage in the Persian Gulf, an essential maritime route for oil transportation. In the context of Israel, the I2U2 will strengthen Israel's connections with the Arab world, in addition to the Abraham Accord and the Negev Forum that took place not too long ago. With the recent improvement in ties between India and Israel, India would be able to assist Israel in bridging the gap between Israel and Arab nations.^[18]

India has always advocated for peace and stability in the Middle East since the Arab Spring of 2011, as well as the significant geopolitical events that have taken place in the region. As India has maintained robust contact with West Asia since the Indus Civilization, the country considers the area its extended neighbourhood. This perception is significant in India's strategic Framework about the Middle East region. The United States of America decided to include India as an essential member of the International Union of Unions (I2U2) in its outreach campaign toward West Asian nations since India has a strong reputation among the countries located in West Asia. A former Israeli National Security Advisor, Major General Yaakov Amidrov's comment is significant when considering India's position in West Asia. Amidrov believes that India's membership in the organization is an important step forward.^[19]

To maintain the stability of its bilateral ties with West Asian nations, India has maintained a safe distance from the geopolitical situation in the Middle East over many years. India can improve its commercial links with the countries of the Middle East and participate in a more in-depth engagement in the geo-economics of West Asia thanks to the I2U2, which is an unusual arrangement.^[20] India is a desirable market for the I2U2 because it has a vast consumer market and manufacturing facilities for high-tech and highly sought-after items.^[21] In the meanwhile, the I2U2 provides India with several benefits, including political, economic, and social advantages; it will also help India strengthen its relationships with Israel and the Arab nations. The participation of India in the I2U2 increases its worldwide stature after the completion of QUAD. These advances align India with other major countries such as Russia, Europe, and China to handle its nation's strategic and regional issues.^[22]

CONCLUSION

As a result of the United States' decision to move its security emphasis from the Middle East to the Asia-Pacific region, other major nations are being considered as prospective actors who may fill the hole in Middle East security. The fact that India is one among these players is further shown by the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, which was only recently unveiled. There has been a significant shift in India's West Asian strategy due to its membership in the quadrilateral cooperation known as I2U2. An increasing convergence between the United States and India in West Asia is highlighted by this event, which is the conclusion of India's strengthening strategic alliances with the United Arab Emirates and Israel. India is eager to integrate with and build a linked, cooperative Gulf-Mediterranean area as a pushback tactic against the expanding Chinese economic presence and diplomatic activity in the region. This is in response to the United States' efforts to synergize its policies for the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific region. Even though India has recently shown a readiness to collaborate with “the United States and its regional allies,” the country will continue to fight to preserve its autonomous strategic vision of West Asia.

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