

Editorial

From Quad to AUKUS

Recently, Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States have entered into an alliance that is being termed as a trilateral security deal between these three countries, entailing a commitment to safeguard the Indo-Pacific from China's dominance by building a class of nuclear-propelled submarines. This trilateral security deal has come to be known as AUKUS that is said to be a military alliance wherein Washington and London have committed to assist Australia in building and deploying nuclear-powered submarines. Emergence of AUKUS takes place at a time when the Quad already exists in the Indo-Pacific region. The Quad or Quadrilateral Security Dialogue initially comprised Australia, India, Japan, with the US supporting it. However, in the wake of growing tensions between the US and China, Australia under the tenure of Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, withdrew from the Quad. In the meanwhile, India, Japan and the US continued to conduct joint naval exercises in the Indo-Pacific region.

In the wake of growing military activities of China in the South China Sea, Australia again joined the Quad in order to counter China via military and diplomatic means. China's increasing military and maritime prowess in the Indo-Pacific region and its assertive attitude and strategy in the South China Sea has been instrumental in bringing Quad member countries more aligned to each other. In November 2020, Quad member countries participated, and thereafter, in March 2021, American President Joe Biden convened a virtual Quad summit wherein decisions were taken to set up working groups to address COVID-19 vaccinations, focusing on climate change, technological innovation, and supply-chain resilience. Admittedly, not much detailed information is available about AUKUS; nonetheless, it primarily aims to assist Australia acquire a nuclear-powered conventionally-armed submarine fleet. With the formation of Quad and AUKUS in the Indo-Pacific region, question is bound to arise as to what extent both groupings do have similarities and dissimilarities. In the very first place, AUKUS is construed as a military alliance whereas Quad is regarded as a diplomatic alliance where diplomatic and global issues are discussed in tandem with a security dialogue. Besides, the AUKUS specifically deals with security and military situation in the Indo-Pacific while Quad deliberates on global issues, as it did in March 2021 by focusing on COVID-19 and climate change.

Many experts have opined that AUKUS exclusively focuses on the military developments in the Indo-Pacific region, and decision of the UK and the US to help Australia acquire a nuclear-powered conventionally-armed submarine fleet recently is a testimony to this. On the other hand, focus of the Quad is on multilateral issues that vary from economy to security matters to international affairs. Moreover, AUKUS is a trilateral military alliance designed to safeguard Indo-Pacific region from Chinese dominance and it is also designed to protect the global order, whereas the Quad works on the shared interests of all of its members. One similarity that is discernible between the Quad and the AUKUS is seemingly that of existence of both alliances in the Indo-Pacific region with some common member countries.

Formation of AUKUS is specifically designed to contain China by equipping the like-minded Western countries in the periphery of the Pacific Ocean by the United States and the UK. The US

and UK decision to supply nuclear-powered submarine fleet to Australia has dismayed France; nonetheless, efforts are likely to be made to elicit the support of France, including its membership of the AUKUS in coming months. The military character of the AUKUS also entails the potential of eliciting the cooperation to begin with of ASEAN member countries with Quad and gradually efforts could be made to entice some of the ASEAM member countries to join AUKUS, once its membership is opened to countries.

Undoubtedly, India is an active member of the Quad; nonetheless, prospects of India getting membership of AUKUS are remote for the time being. Any anti-China alliance sponsored by the Western countries is not going to help India in its dealings with China because both India and China have many complex problems that can be resolved through bilateral negotiations and not via intervention by any third country. At the same time, India can ill-afford to annoy China by joining any Western-sponsored military alliance. India has to devise its policy and strategy that best serves its interests.

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