

The Growing minilateralism and the future of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)

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Given its geopolitical significance, the Indian Ocean Region has become the center of attention in international politics. In fact, it is safe to say that this region is the Chessboard where the great battle for supremacy in world politics is being played. Both regional and extra-regional players are now showing great interest in the region and the competition is unprecedented. One major development in the region is the creation of small-scale military/strategic alliances. Today, there are several such initiatives including AUKUS and the Quad. This growing presence of such minilateral initiatives indeed makes a significant impact which is worth looking at. The main objective of this research is to examine the impact of such minilateral initiatives on the IOR. The study focuses on the AUKUS and the Quad as both have gained greater significance in the present geopolitical setup and at the same time, they have already made a significant impact on the power structure in the region. This is a qualitative research based on secondary data. Looking at the theoretical design of the study, it looks at these developments from the neorealist perspective. The study remains significant for a number of reasons. First and foremost, these minilateral initiatives have come to the forefront at a time when there are a number of regional initiatives such as IORA, BIMESTEC, and SAARC are present in the region. Even ASEAN has shown keen interest in the region. Secondly, looking at the purpose, one major objective behind the establishment of both AUKUS and QUAD is to deter the growing Chinese influence in the region. It is also important to note the role of extra-regional forces in the IOR. As far as the findings are concerned, first, it is important to underscore the main reasons behind establishing such initiatives. First and foremost, it is the geopolitical and geoeconomic significance. This century is termed the Asian Century where the region of Asia is set to lead international politics in the coming years. This region is home to a number of emerging economies including India, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Myanmar, the United Arab Emirates, and Iran. Moreover, the external powers also attempt to make a significant presence in the region. The main reason behind the growing significance of the IOR has been to ensure uninterrupted trade via maritime trade routes. Taking the case of China, as a country highly dependent on international trade, it is vital for China to ensure uninterrupted trade. This growing geostrategic significance has paved the way for the creation of minilateral security setups such as AUKUS and QUAD. The research finds that these multilateral setups on one hand have a significant impact on the overall balance of power in the region while they also face some challenges of their own. On the other hand, such minilateral initiatives have a better chance of succeeding as they are smaller groupings in contrast to other regional setups. It also makes the region highly vulnerable as now countries are working collectively to attain their geostrategic interests. However, there is also a possibility that such initiatives could fail. Looking at these initiatives, it is important to understand that despite countries being willing to work together, their own national interests rest above the others. However, alliance building of this nature is to have a profound impact on the future of IOR.

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