**I2U2: A geopolitical perspective**

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Geopolitics is about enhancing influence and power and is often fostered through coalitions and interest groups. Countries pool strength to enhance politico-military and economic leverages and to negotiate shared challenges. In the same context a new block of Israel, India, USA, and UAE known as the I2U2, was conceived during the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the four countries in October 2021. The stated aim of this group is to cooperate on “joint investments and new initiatives in water, energy, transportation, space, health, and food security”. A cursory glance at the group members reveals a fair understanding of what could be there for the individual countries in this coalition. For India, it’s the solidification of politico-economic alignment with all important Middle East which automatically translates into an indirect potential of marginalizing Pakistan from its traditional allies. For UAE, it is both economic dividends, especially in large Indian markets, and an enhanced sense of security through deepening relations with Israel and the power giant US. For Israel, there is an opportunity to consolidate the Abraham accords and make deeper inroads with its high-end technology into the soaring markets of UAE and India. For the US, it is advancing partnerships in West Asia, and curtailing China’s influence in this region. I2U2 is also referred to as QUAD of West Asia, although there are many dissimilarities in its orientation.

[Elton John’s Glastonbury triumph attracts 7.3 million TV viewers](https://www.nation.com.pk/27-Jun-2023/elton-john-s-glastonbury-triumph-attracts-7-3-million-tv-viewers)

Whereas the strategic relationship of all three countries with the US is established either in distinct or recent history, the expanding ties of Israel and UAE are seen with interest. In August 2020, the United Arab Emirates became the first Gulf Arab country to establish diplomatic ties with Israel, bringing a radical shift in the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East. For some in the Muslim world, these ties appeared to challenge the traditional Arab solidarity and tarnish the consensus view on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. However, UAE justified its move as a means to influence Israel’s policies towards Palestine. Since 2020, Israel and the UAE have engaged in multiple collaborations spanning trade, tourism, technology, security, and culture. Israel and the United Arab Emirates also signed a free trade pact in 2023, reducing or removing tariffs on more than 90% of goods. The UAE-Israel relations can also be seen as a regional effort to counter-balance Iran’s influence because Iran is seen as a threat by both countries, though with different prisms.

[Mitsotakis’s conservatives clinch landslide Greece election win](https://www.nation.com.pk/27-Jun-2023/mitsotakis-s-conservatives-clinch-landslide-greece-election-win)

The bilateral ties between India and UAE have significantly strengthened, driven by shared interests and mutual benefits. The Indian expatriate community in the UAE is nearly three million. Indian exports to the UAE include petroleum products, precious metals, textiles, and engineering goods whereas the UAE has major investments in Indian infrastructure, real estate, and energy. Under the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) signed between both countries in May 2022, the bilateral trade is expected to boost from USD 60 Billion to USD 100 Billion within the next 5 years. The first leadership summit of I2U2 in July 2022 announced the first initiative of this group which is an investment of USD 02 Bn by UAE in India to develop food parks and a hybrid renewable energy project.

India’s open and frank friendly relations with Israel, although a departure from her rather cautious and secretive nature in the distinct past, align with the changed world order. Both countries have commonalities in their threat perception, and both confront an ideological freedom struggle. India is the largest importer of Israeli weapons and has imported missiles, drones, surveillance systems, and other advanced weaponry from Israel. The bilateral merchandise trade between these two countries has also reportedly touched a record USD 10.12 Bn in CFY. Indian foreign minister Jaishankar made a recent tweet on the bilateral relations that said, “The main pillars of our strategic partnership – Agriculture, Water, Defence & Security – are taking our ties forward.” The Israeli Foreign Minister during his recent visit to India on 09 May 2023, besides other agenda items, also discussed cooperation under the framework of I2U2. He said, “India is the gate from the east to the west and we analyze it economically - if you will see that the trades that come from India will go to Saudi Arabia, and then by train till Haifa Port in Israel and from there to the markets in Europe.” This statement radiates credibility when seen in the backdrop of a meeting of the national security advisers of the United States, India, and the United Arab Emirates with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia Mohammed bin Salman on 07 May 2023, only a few days prior to these comments. There is already speculation about I2U2 expanding to include Saudi Arabia and Egypt, although, in the case of Saudi Arabia, it would largely depend on the status of her diplomatic relations with Israel. The US government’s official statement is also significant that said that this meeting of national security advisors was aimed to “advance their shared vision of a more secure and prosperous Middle East region interconnected with India and the world”. The inclusion of India by the United States in the I2U2 scheme is interesting but understandable from multiple geo-strategic dimensions. India has partnered the US in QUAD and I2U2 which both directly or indirectly affects the Chinese interests but in different realms.

[Ukraine forces recapture new Russian-occupied settlement](https://www.nation.com.pk/27-Jun-2023/ukraine-forces-recapture-new-russian-occupied-settlement)

The meetings, statements and I2U2 manifesto points to a determined effort spearheaded by the US to strengthen its geopolitics in the Middle East through a viable economic game plan. The initiative can also be seen as a US strategy to curtail Chinese rising influence in this region which is important for Chinese energy needs as well as Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). However, other than the US which has the stated objective to ‘Outcompete’ China, other coalition states would not approve of any I2U2 anti-China enterprise although by design its endeavours will impact Chinese interests.