**The US in West Asia**

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Having seemingly managed to entangle Russia in the Ukraine war and re-energised Quad 2.0 under the Indo-Pacific strategy, the US has now turned its focus towards West Asia ostensibly to counter Iran but also China as a by-product. Last year in October 2021, there was news of the forming of the Western Quad which sooner than later dissipated. It appeared that the formation between the US, UAE, Israel and India was merely rhetorical for the sake of the fashion of forming “Quads.” However, in the month of June 2022, it remerged as I2U2; “I2” for India and Israel and “U2” for the US and the UAE, which signifies the matter is serious. The alliance of this group intends to cooperate chiefly in the fields of infrastructure, maritime security, trade etc.
Despite having four countries it has been perhaps deliberately named other than any type of “Quad” to signify its intended target and that seems to be Iran. There could be multiple reasons for such an alliance at this point in time. The alliance was announced last year and was either worked upon to bring it in a better shape or was put on the back burner in the wake of emergent challenges. Three out of four members have sheer enmity with Iran while India enjoys good relations. The alliance therefore apparently seems to be against Iran yet India can serve as the interlocutor on behalf of the alliance.
Since taking over, President Biden has been giving signals of easing out on Iran and a deal to reinvigorate JCPOA is around the corner. Israel, UAE and KSA have not been happy with the US overtures to Iran. President Biden faces a multitude of challenges on the domestic front which include rising inflation, soaring petroleum prices and an economic downturn. In addition, he has to commence a donations campaign for his next term in 2024.
The USA-KSA relations during this administration have been in the doldrums so far. Earlier, President Biden wasn’t speaking to the Crown Prince and now there is no response from the KSA to the USA. While the US needs KSA badly, it is time to entice KSA against Iran. I2U2 in fact, could be the way ahead. President Biden is scheduled to visit West Asia in mid-July this year and shall announce the formal launching of I2U2 along with the leadership of the other three countries just as in the case of Quad. He is also scheduled to hold talks with the Crown Prince and it just can’t be precluded that KSA formally becomes part of it before that announcement.
The US has put in efforts to contain China through arrangements under the Indo-Pacific strategy. But those arrangements are being contested by China; politically, economically and militarily. So the US may feel it’s still not enough. By having arrangements of a similar kind in West Asia it may attempt to further constrict space for China by leveraging her influence in the region through closely knitted connections with important countries.
For India, this is a tricky matter. On one hand, it has to please the US which is not very happy with India’s stance over the Russia-Ukraine conflict. On the other hand, it is right now not on very good terms with the Muslim countries including KSA and the UAE on the issue of blasphemous remarks by some ministers about the Prophet (PBUH). Also, the atrocities against Muslims in India don’t go unnoticed and India is being seen as under the tight rule of Hindutva ideology. India in this situation would be much obliged to become part of such an arrangement even if it is at the cost of its relations with Iran.
For Pakistan, this new setup has a variety of challenges. It is India Pakistan has to be worried about as any gain for India will directly affect Pakistan. Also, Iran is our neighbour and we can’t remain oblivious to any conflict situation in our neighbourhood. With China we have a strategic partnership and obviously any move against her won’t bode well with us also. Moreover, Pakistan may be pressured for some decisions not in national interests especially if KSA becomes part of I2U2. Pakistan, therefore, has to be cautious in dealing with this US presence in West Asia and its repercussions.