The Middle East and the Quad Plus

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Abstract

This article explores the actions and reactions of Middle East states to the Quad Plus, a currently US-led effort to strengthen engagement with counterpart states under the strategic ambit of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue grouping. Because the Middle East is a large and highly diverse region, the article will focus on three important states—the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, and Iran—as illustrative case studies. A qualitative methodology is employed comparing interview results, media articles, and government statements to test a hypothesis: the Quad Plus is viewed with suspicion or disinterest in the Middle East because it is US-led and therefore construed as an anti-China proposition. The findings demonstrate that Iran has no wish to see the power of its primary economic and security partner, China, curtailed by the Quad Plus. For Turkey, the Quad Plus is a US-led initiative directed against China and is geographically irrelevant given Ankara's current capabilities and national security interests. The United Arab Emirates, contrariwise, relies on the United States for its security, has good relations with the Quad states as well as Israel, and views Iran and Turkey as security threats. Invitations to join Quad Plus initiatives like supply-chain resilience or pandemic response will therefore likely meet a warm reception in Abu Dhabi. No such invitations from Quad capitals will likely be forthcoming to either Turkey or Iran.

Introduction

The Middle East is too diverse economically, politically, and socially to safely make sweeping statements about policy directions or region-wide interests.[1] Accordingly, this article will focus on Turkey, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to explore the interests, actions, and reactions of three important and highly influential Middle Eastern states to Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) states and their overtures via the Quad Plus.[2] This exploration of the Middle East–Quad Plus nexus will analyze the alignment and enduring national security interests of these three states to test the article's primary hypothesis: the Quad Plus is viewed with suspicion or disinterest because it is US-led and is therefore construed as an anti-China proposition. Using a qualitative and comparative methodology, the article uses interviews and examines media articles and government statements to extrapolate the emerging positions of Middle Eastern states to the

increasingly confrontational stances taken by China, on the one hand, and the Quad on the other.

Distributions of Power and the Quad Plus

The Quad Plus, led by the United States but supported strongly by Japan, Australia, and India, certainly has some resonance in the Middle East in a way that the Quad itself does not. The latter, while not officially so, is largely a military-security mechanism to stymie China's pursuance of national security interests—many of them alarming to neighboring states such as Japan, Taiwan, and Vietnam—in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. The Quad Plus, on the other hand, seems to be a more informal and inclusive mechanism that holds out the possibility of international cooperation between the Quad and other states and includes security but moves far beyond this to cover contingencies such as pandemic responses and supply chains.[3]

Scholars of international relations (IR) generally subscribe to the theory that the world is an anarchical system of states with finite amounts of power on hand. At the very least, scholars agree there is no global policeman to enforce rules and laws. While much separates realists from liberal institutionalists, the control of power and its largely zero-sum nature remain the bedrock of IR theories. In this anarchical global system, significant changes to distributions of power—shifting from one state to another state or grouping of states—over a relatively short period create greater uncertainty; thus, making the global state system even more anarchical.

Multiple IR theories have attempted to grapple with these questions of rising and falling state power and the uncertainty that accompanies shifts in distributions of power. Power transition theory, for example, predicts that shifts in the balance of economic and military power are often a sufficient trigger for a rivalry where previously none had existed.[4] Today's rising powers such as China and India, or Germany in the late nineteenth century, compete for power and influence to impose their will on the global order. When this rivalry occurs between a hegemon and the rising power, the ensuing competition exhibits a gravitation pull that drags other states in—willingly or not.

If power transition theory broadly explains the rise of Germany in Europe and the resulting two world wars, it also offers a great deal in relation to the even more meteoric rise of China in the late twentieth century. However, key differences separate Germany's rise from that of China. First, while the United Kingdom ruled the waves and possessed a global colonial empire, Germany was only one of the multiple European states, including the United Kingdom, that vied for economic and political dominance on the continent as well as overseas.

To the contrary, the rise of China has occurred largely during an age of US dominance. While certainly not a unipolar world, the fact remains that the United States is currently China's only strategic competitor in terms of size and power capabilities. This is not to say that China's rise has not spurred other would-be major powers such as India or global economic powers such as Japan to take actions to safeguard their national security interests. Tokyo's and New Delhi's shifting stances toward China demonstrate the conundrums faced by many states as they attempt to grapple with what is increasingly perceived as a "China threat," on the one hand, and the "peaceful rise of China" on the other.[5] That is, China is both a welcome partner offering development, financing, and expertise and an unwelcome actor as its increasing share of power, bellicose rhetoric, and military capabilities coincide to fundamentally threaten the foundations of a post–World War II US-led world order. Beijing's demands for disputed territories or its dismissal of international court rulings may rankle states such as Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam, but it is China's actions such as hostile takeovers of port operations in Sri Lanka to island-building in the disputed South China Sea to its massive military build-up, including a powerful blue-water navy, that reinforce the dangerous array of threats posed by Beijing.

One of the results of these shifts in global power from West to East and the uncertainty accompanying them is the Quad and, subsequently, the Quad Plus: a broad coalition of states willing to question not only China's controversial actions but act against it. Like-minded states have proliferated, with Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia not only voicing their serious concerns about China and Chinese actions but drawing closer to the United States and its Quad partners for security. This newfound resolve, however, is tempered by the fact that China remains the largest trading power for not only three of the four Quad states but also for the Southeast Asian states. The Quad also wishes to avoid being simply an anti-China bloc. Its leaders, while criticizing singular Chinese actions such as freedom of navigation issues in the Taiwan Strait, continue to soothe China by arguing for inclusion rather than exclusion, making it abundantly clear that New Delhi, Canberra, and Tokyo would prefer a friendly China in the room rather than an aggressive China outside it.

The Quad Plus–Middle East Nexus

The Quad Plus is analyzed and described in greater detail elsewhere in this issue. The author therefore focuses less on what the Quad Plus will or will not do and instead explore interests, actions, and reactions of the three Middle East states to the Quad states and their overtures via the Quad Plus. In terms of the Middle East, the Quad Plus and related efforts such as the Blue Dot Network (BDN)

seem to hold relevance for states on the periphery of the Indo-Pacific, like the Middle East, rather than the Quad states themselves or China's Southeast Asian neighbors. This means that the Quad Plus may offer substantive alternatives to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) or more localized efforts in alleviating the serious infrastructural and developmental deficits that bedevil many parts of the Middle East.

It may take some time and convincing to bring Middle East states around to the Quad Plus. This is because China's BRI, whatever else it may be, is certainly clear, present, and tactile in nature. It produces railroads, ports, pipelines, and other forms of infrastructural, economic, and, naturally, political connectedness to Beijing. To its credit, the Quad Plus proposition makes it clear that the Quad states understand this and have begun to actively engage regions like the Middle East using some of China's strategies while eschewing some of Beijing's more alarming tactics. A statement made by India's External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, perhaps summed up the Quad Plus best when he noted it is "for something" rather than "against someone." However, capital investment on a scale at least approaching China's billions invested in its BRI and related Maritime Silk Road not only need to be pledged by like-minded states but need to result in finished projects. Nonetheless, the Quad Plus and BDN are perhaps the beginning of an alternative to China and its BRI on the developmental and economic fronts. Whether alternatives are being sought or even thought about in the Middle East depends on the state's interests as informed by security burdens and geopolitics.

The Middle East is well-acquainted with China's BRI, not the novel Quad Plus. Iran, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt all have extensive and ongoing BRI projects, funded by loans from Chinese state-backed or owned banks. Iran is integral to both China's maritime "belt" and terrestrial "road." The gravitational pull of China felt in the Middle East through its increasing economic and political influence via the BRI is, nevertheless, beginning to be resisted, albeit unevenly. The UAE, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia rely on the United States, China's strategic competitor, for their security. This US security architecture, particularly in the Persian Gulf, has been perceived as being under threat for two primary reasons. First, Washington's pivot to Asia, begun by Pres. Barrack Obama and continued by Pres. Donald Trump, redeployed US military forces in increasing numbers toward the western Pacific, albeit not from the Middle East. Second, the tone-deaf approach of the Obama administration to the security concerns of the Arab Gulf states about Iran encapsulated with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), followed by the Trump administration's haphazard and uneven engagement, resulted in exacerbating the rift within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). This is a two-way street, however, and

Washington has its own highly public misgivings about the deals made by Abu Dhabi, Riyadh, and Cairo with China for everything from 5G to nuclear power to military hardware such as drones. On the periphery of the Middle East, and unlike Iran and the UAE, Turkey has largely remained immune to the BRI's appeal. As its economic health and relations with the United States and Europe continue to decline, nonetheless, Ankara has muffled its criticisms of Beijing over its treatment of its Muslim Uighur minority in Xinjiang and looked to China for much-needed loans.[6]

Security Burdens and Interests

A state's extant and enduring security burdens often, but not always, define its strategic choices. Security burdens are often divided into two tiers: first-tier security burdens can be understood as those coming from states possessing the extant and enduring capability and intent to cause catastrophic harm to the national security of the state in question. Second-tier security burdens may be defined as those emanating from states possessing the possible capability and intent to cause enduring, extant, and serious harm to the national security of a country.[7]

Middle East states are no different than the states of Southeast Asia or South America: the leaders and policy makers of those states define and make strategic choices that are necessarily limited depending on the amount, proximity, and tiered nature of their security burdens. This includes not just "hard" security matters, such as those involving the military and other security services, but economic and social matters as well. States engage in relations with other states to hedge and counter these security burdens, which are necessarily impacted by a state's geographic location and history as well as population.

All states can be said to have national security interests that influence the government's or leadership's policies vis-à-vis internal and external threats, regardless of their genesis. States in the Middle East such as Turkey, Iran, and the UAE are therefore primarily interested in propositions and alignments such as the Quad Plus or China's BRI to further these national security interests.

Iran

Iran's national security interests are tightly bound up in its relationship with the United States. Three factors have generated Iran's national security priorities: the 1979 revolution, Iranian foreign policy against Israel, and the attacks of 9/11. These have led the United States to adopt increasingly intransigent and harsh policies in relation to Iran, including sanctions that have significantly curtailed Iran's economic and military growth. Not only is the United States a seemingly omnipresent

adversary with a significant military presence in Turkey, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Persian Gulf, but it also has over-the-horizon missile and nuclear capabilities that leave Iran's leaders even less secure.

Iran also faces a host of regional threats from medium to small states. In a nearly 20-year-old testimony that remains highly relevant today, Dr. Nasser Hadian informed the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee: :

> Iran's "anarchical" regional environment has all the ingredients of an strategic nightmare: Too many neighbors with hostile, unfriendly or at best opportunistic attitudes, no great power alliance, a 25 years face-off with the greatest superpower in history, living in a war infested region (5 major wars in less than 25 years), a region ripe with ethno-territorial disputes on its borders (Iran has been a major regional refugee hub), and with a dominant Wahabi trans-regional movement which theologically and politically despises Iran, and finally a region with nuclear powers; Pakistan, Israel, and India. Iran is located at the center of the "uncontrollable center" of post-Cold war and post-9/11 world politics.[8]

Iran has adopted a "self-help" approach to foreign policy and looked for strategic alignments wherever it can get them. This has meant Tehran has actively engaged states with adversarial relations with Washington to lessen the enduring security burdens heaped upon it by the United States. The "golden ring" axis of Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, and China may be one such proposition. While short on details, it could eventually form a significant anti-US bloc across Eurasia and, in the process, strengthen Iran strategically, militarily, politically, and economically.[9] Iran, however, has longstanding divergent interests with all these states except China, but China is by far the most relevant and useful to Tehran, not least because China sees Iran as its most important trade partner and hydrocarbons source in the Middle East. For Beijing, Iran represents a way out of what China is increasingly convinced is a US policy of containment. Accordingly, China relies on Iran to diversify its energy supply. Doing so helps China's oil imports avoid passing through the Strait of Malacca, which is controlled by US allies in Southeast Asia. China plans to overcome this strategic predicament by ensuring Iran's gas flow is connected to the pipelines stretching from Gwadar Port (part of the BRI-related China–Pakistan Economic Corridor [CPEC]) in Pakistan to China. This, in turn, explains China's readiness to invest in the development of Chabahar, the southeastern Iranian port currently under construction, from which Beijing can also access Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Russia. For Iran, "the BRI represents an opportunity at a time when Western powers are withholding much-needed investment and advanced technology to develop its oil and gas infrastructure and transportation capacity."[10]

Beijing may be wary of getting pulled into festering and complicated regional conflicts, but its interests do align with Tehran on one level: it sees much utility in building stronger relations with Iran to thumb its nose at Washington. Indicative of this is the 25-year Strategic Partnership signed between Iran and China in mid-2020 that emphasizes security and underscores Beijing's long-term weapons transfer programs with Iran, such as the development of long-range antiship missiles and the reported purchase of Chengdu J-10 fighter jets.

Iran also has a choice of additional partners, including traditionally nonaligned states such as India. New Delhi has historically warm relations with Iran and, until recently, remained a significant investment partner along with other states aligned with the United States such as France, Germany, and Japan. The departure of the United States from the JCPOA and the subsequent financial and economic sanctions made it clear that the Trump administration considered Iran near the top of threats to the United States and its allies. US sanctions coupled with US financial clout on a global scale meant that investments by Indian, French, and Japanese companies were no longer viable given the threat of US retaliation, and Iran became even further isolated.

Turkey

Turkey's enduring security burdens, like Iran's, are wrapped up in its history and geography. The fall of the Ottoman Empire and its attempted dismemberment by secret treaties between European powers and Russia have led to a collective, long-running and almost paranoid emphasis on Turkey's territorial integrity. Russia, in particular, continues to pose the largest and most powerful threat to Turkey's existence. This threat drove the newly minted secular republic to seek an alliance with the West, particularly the United States, after World War II. However, Turkey was always an uncomfortable partner for the West, and Ankara—while useful from a strategic and tactical standpoint to the United States and its NATO partners—never fully trusted its allies. Appearances were kept up because the threat of Soviet (Russian) domination during the Cold War was so great. The serious differences that did flare up between Turkey and the West—from Cyprus in 1974 to the military coups d'état that overthrew three civilian Turkish governments—were papered over.

The decrease in tensions accompanying the end of the Cold War led to an opening up of Turkey's political, economic, and social spaces that witnessed the rise of mildly Islamist politicians and their eventual democratic election to power in 2002. Led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the Justice and Development Party (JDP) has been reelected to power several times and has ruled Turkey since then. Turkey's transition to democracy and the rise of Erdoğan, however, resulted in cooler

rather than warmer relations with the United States and Europe. The reasons for this are legion, but a primary cause was the advent of a more powerful Turkey with a more muscular foreign policy, sometimes delivered in coarse, undiplomatic language by Erdoğan. As Turkey failed to gain support from Europe first on EU membership and then with issues of migration, market access, and Kurdish separatism, Turkey's JDP government also became more authoritarian, escalating dramatically in the aftermath of the attempted military coup in July 2016.

Turkey's relations with the United States similarly soured, based on almost willful misunderstandings on both sides, vis-à-vis the Syrian crisis, Kurdish separatism, and arms sales/transfers. Fraying relations with the West, however, only increase Turkey's isolation and security burdens. Turkey remains wary of Russia, for example, even though relations have warmed considerably. Tacit cooperation with Moscow in Syria and Ankara's purchase of a Russian missile system cannot hide the fact that its security interests are incongruent with Russia's in Libya, the Caucasus, and Syria. Indeed, while relations with the West remain abysmal, Ankara's interests remain more congruent with those of the United States than either Europe or Russia.

What of Turkey's Middle Eastern neighbors? Largely ignored by the republic until the early 2000s, Turkey's Islamists see efficacy in currying favor with the Arab Street and strongly support the Palestinian cause and Hamas. However, mistrust and bigotry on both sides—dating back to Ottoman times—as well as competition for the mantle "leader of the Arab World," stymie Erdoğan's efforts. Iran, a revolutionary Shi'a state, holds even less appeal as a partner for Turkey's Sunni Islamists. But very much like Iran, Turkey's security burdens are suffocating. Turkey often feels threatened by states surrounding it, though this is offset some by the presence of seas surrounding Turkey and offering a watery buffer. Turkey also relies on self-help and follows the adage that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" (in Turkish, *düşmanımın düşmanı dostumdur*). The problem faced by Ankara is that neither Russia nor the United States, adversarial as they may be to one another, can be considered Turkey's strategic partner for long.

The clear choice for some alleviation of Turkey's security burdens is China: far enough away to not be an overt threat, close and powerful enough to be of assistance. However, Turkey's relations with China remain tepid, largely for reasons of politics. Turkey's current regime sees itself as the defender of Muslims ala the Ottoman sultans, and China's treatment of the Uighur—ethnic Turks, no less—negatively affects relations. Additionally, Turkey's historical, strategic and ethnoreligious interests in the states of Central Asia—also largely populated by ethnic Turks—are now complicated by China as well as Russia. As such, Turkey has been slow to warm to China's BRI. Instead, Ankara has rolled out its own

vision of economic and transport connectivity, the Middle Corridor (in Turkish, *Orta Koridor*). Essentially a rail link stretching between China (Xian) and Turkey (İzmit-Köseköy), the idea is to bind Turkey ever closer to the hydrocarbons, minerals, and markets of Central Asia and the Caucasus.[11]

United Arab Emirates

The security of the UAE and that of its regime are reliant to a large degree on its ability to export its significant share of hydrocarbons, mainly oil. Given the UAE's geographic position as well as its reliance on the export of oil, maritime shipping lanes in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea must remain open. For the UAE, throughout its first four decades of existence, this has meant the Strait of Hormuz has been the primary security concern.[12] However, with natural changes in leadership after the death of the UAE's founder, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan in 2004, coupled with a steady increase in wealth, the UAE's leaders have placed increasing emphasis on its extraregional and international standing as a small-to-medium power.[13] Accordingly, the UAE's leadership has overseen an extensive overhaul of the country's armed forces and intensified its weapons acquisition programs. The UAE joined Saudi Arabia in Yemen, for example, to roll back the territorial gains and power of the Houthi, Zaydi Shiites hailing from the north and northwest of the country and supported by Iran.

The UAE's current foreign adventurism is made possible because of the security umbrella provided by the United States in the Persian Gulf and Washington's strategic alignment with the UAE that dates back to the Cold War. This close relationship has ensured the UAE's survival in the face of threats from larger neighbors such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Iran. In turn, the UAE's emphasis on developing a highly tolerant society, a stable economy, a capable military, and close relations with other US allies, including (in mid-2020) Israel, have meant the UAE is even more secure as Washington's partner.

The UAE's reliance on the United States, however, comes at the price of insecurity should America ever choose to leave the region. Abu Dhabi has recently turned to the East, establishing warm relations with China. As a partner in China's BRI, the UAE signed a Strategic Partnership with China in 2018 and 3.4 billion USD in deals with Beijing in 2019. However, the UAE's leadership remains wary of China's ultimate aims in the region.[14] Accordingly, Abu Dhabi continues to look to the United States for its security, eschewing the vast array of weaponry on offer from China except for drones, rockets, and rifles. These were reportedly only purchased on account of speed of delivery and cost as well as political roadblocks in Washington for US drones.[15]

Beyond regime security and stability for the country via the sale of hydrocarbons, the UAE's leadership worries deeply about the threat of militant Islam. The breakdown in the regional order following the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings led the UAE to adopt a more assertive and interventionist foreign policy ranging from Libya to Egypt to Yemen to counter what it perceived as Islamist threats to its security. It culminated in the severance of relations with Qatar, a fellow GCC member, by the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain in 2017. The UAE accused Qatar of supporting Muslim Brotherhood (MB) causes linked to political violence in places ranging from Somalia to Egypt to Palestine. When Turkey, led by Islamists with strong MB ties, strengthened its relations with Qatar by stationing more troops in the country and expanding its military facility there, the UAE's leadership quickly perceived the threats facing the country to now be double-barreled, pitting the Arab World led by the UAE and Saudi Arabia against the Turks and the Iranians.

Results

The promises of the Quad Plus, and its expansion to like-minded states concerned about China, certainly hold potential for the Middle East. For reasons of geopolitics as well as security burdens and national interests, however, the Quad Plus may be viewed with disinterest or outright hostility in certain quarters. The Quad Plus, for example, is problematic on two fronts for Iran: it is a US-led initiative and therefore is automatically construed as an anti-China proposition. Likewise, Turkey is currently mistrustful, even antagonistic toward the United States and therefore US-led initiatives. Of the three states, the initiative may resonate most with the UAE given its potential to deepen its security relations not only with the United States and India but also the Plus member states of the Quad, like Israel.

Iran

Iran has little desire to see China's power curtailed. Because Iran relies on China and expects little but confrontation from the United States, the Quad Plus—even given its promise of integrating supply chains between non-Quad states such as South Korea and Vietnam—holds little interest for Iran. The Quad Plus proposition, for example, would likely not result in assistance to Iran for COVID-19 or a future pandemic given Washington's intransigent stance. Iran, however, readily accepted assistance from China for test kits and other medical equipment.[16] Additionally, the Quad Plus would not be used as an informal or-

ganizational platform by the United States in any future negotiations with Iran, with Washington preferring a go-it-alone approach or the P5+1.[17]

Iranian commentary—not surprisingly—has been dismissive of the Quad, the Quad Plus, and the broader Indo-Pacific visions, viewing them as US Trojan horses to further bolster US power across the globe and curb those of states such as Iran and China. The word "containment," for example, is used most often in Iranian commentary about the Indo-Pacific and the Quad Plus. The concept is viewed as American-led, designed, and operated, thus making it antithetical to Iran's strategic goals. According to one Iranian analysis of the emerging geopolitical alignment, "[US President] Trump is working on getting India more involved in regional initiatives by reviving [former US President] George W. Bush's plan for closer cooperation between Japan, Australia and India as a four-member Quad. In this way, by bringing India into power equilibrium equations against China, it [the US] will work with regional coalitions to contain this emerging superpower."[18] Reporting about the Quad Plus by Iran's official media organization accused it of being an overreaction by the Quad states to China's actions in the South Pacific and of playing copycat to Beijing's BRI, albeit on a smaller scale and without offering anything new.[19]

Turkey

Turkey's security situation is as grave as it has ever been since the founding of the republic almost 100 year ago. Domestic and international actions taken by Turkey not only pit Ankara against its former allies but have added to Turkey's long list of extant and enduring security burdens. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these tensions; it is the second hardest hit Middle Eastern states after Iran. Instead of receiving help from its Western allies, however, Turkey received over 350,000 rapid detection kits from China.[20]

What does this mean in relation to Turkey's potential interest in the Quad Plus? First, there is the issue of geopolitics. Turkey, as a G20 member with the fifth-largest diplomatic representation, is an international actor. Yet, for all its strides on the global stage over the past two decades, Turkey's interests and capabilities mean it remains focused on its near abroad. In contrast, the Quad Plus, indeed the Indo-Pacific Partnership itself, remains a concept that is wedded—by nomenclature as much as interests—to the Indian and Pacific worlds. Turkey is not yet an active actor in either region. It is simply too far away.

When asked about Turkey's interest in the Quad Plus, for example, a senior Turkish official drily noted, "We are here [in the Mediterranean/Middle East]; the Indo-Pacific is way over there. Why would we be interested?"[21] Adding to this, the official noted that Turkey perceives the Quad as a US-led effort against

China, with the Quad Plus simply being more of the same with a new name. "Turkey doesn't want to be part of an anti-China front," declaimed the official.[22] Arguing for robust Turkish sovereignty and freedom of action—domestically and internationally—the official opined that the Quad Plus may limit Turkey's sphere of outreach to other states such as China, adding that Ankara did not see any use in joining the Quad Plus simply because it makes the United States feel "more secure."[23]

Searching for other evidence about Ankara's position or potential role in the Quad Plus, the author conducted a search of Turkish media outlets for stories on the Quad, the Quad Plus, or the Indo-Pacific (in Turkish, *Hint-Pasifik*). These yielded only descriptive articles and no editorials arguing for or against such a proposition. On the contrary, a search of China's One Belt, One Road/Belt and Road Initiative (in Turkish, *Bir Kuşak, Bir Yol* or *Kuşak-Yol Projesi* or *Kuşak ve Yol Sanayi ve Ticaret Birliği*) showed it is an intensely well-known and controversial topic in the Turkish press. These searches, therefore, seem a good indicator that Turkish officials either have yet to take notice of the Quad Plus, have no interest in it, or both.

United Arab Emirates

Contrary to the positions of Turkey and Iran, both of which the UAE considers as political and strategic adversaries, Abu Dhabi may take a neutral-to-positive position vis-à-vis the Quad Plus. While requests for interviews with UAE officials regarding the Quad Plus went unanswered, the author's searches of UAE media outlets seemed to support the somewhat ambiguous-to-positive stance the UAE may take vis-à-vis the Quad Plus. Articles revolving around the topics of the Quad, Quad Plus, and the Indo-Pacific, for example, contained reporting largely reprinted from other news sources of events, such as joint military exercises in the Indian Ocean or ministerial meetings in Australia. When editorials did surface, they were written by outsiders from one of the Quad states.[24] An article in the official news agency of the UAE, however, quoted the Washington-based Hudson Institute's report that placed the UAE as an example of state-to-state cooperation. It argued that Washington's Indo-Pacific strategy be patterned on the UAE's recent efforts at cooperation with India.[25] These may indicate that the UAE's leadership has either not taken notice or has not made decisions yet regarding a likely invitation to participate in the Quad Plus.

The BDN's supply chain initiatives as related to manufacturing and military security as well as discussions on environmental security in the Indian Ocean basin certainly should interest the UAE. Abu Dhabi, for example, is already involved a 3 billion USD strategic investment fund for emerging markets and technologies es-

tablished by the UAE, Israel, and the United States.[26] In addition, defense-related propositions are likely of particular interest to the country's leaders, and the Quad states offer much that is desirable to the UAE in this field. This is because the UAE has been diligently attempting to become an arms manufacturer and exporter and taken steps similar to Japan and India (as well as its political and ideological adversary, Turkey).[27] To do so, it has relied largely on a robust offsets program that has funneled money and expertise into the country, building infrastructure for weapons parts and products in the process. The lion's share of this has been performed by US defense companies, and the UAE has consistently been one of the top buyers of US defense equipment in the world.

The UAE remains assiduous in courting Beijing's investments and partnerships in everything from education to oil extraction to ports construction and operations. It will also continue selling its oil and participating in Chinese ventures ranging from 5G to COVID-19 vaccines.[28] This does not mean Abu Dhabi will forge stronger security relations with Beijing.[29] China's close relationship with Iran naturally complicates matters for Abu Dhabi. Equally important is Beijing's own reticence to take an active security role in the region. This is because, firstly, China can continue to act as a freeloader on US security guarantees and, secondly, because China does not wish to be dragged into a Middle Eastern conflict where it would need to choose sides. In other words, an invitation to the Quad Plus—and with it the possibility of drawing closer to the United States and Israel without angering China—would likely be received favorably in Abu Dhabi.

Conclusion

The Quad Plus is supposed to be about something more than China and certainly more than the current Quad of the United States, Japan, Australia, and India. Washington sees China's problematic response to the COVID-19 pandemic as something of an opening, a reset. It is therefore meant to address not only China's BRI but also the very serious economic, political, and security threats posed by China, particularly to its close neighbors. Additionally, for states further afield, such as Brazil and Israel, the Quad Plus opens doors to cooperation on projects that address concerns about Chinese products such as Huawei and 5G networks but also offers collaborative prospects to develop something even better. In the Middle East, however, two large and powerful states, Iran and Turkey, view the Indo-Pacific initiative and related initiatives as almost entirely US-led.

Iran has no wish to see the power of its primary economic and security partner, China, curtailed by a proposition like the Quad Plus. It is therefore concerned about the web of closer relations being spun between the Quad states. Viewing Australia as a US lackey, for example, Iranian analysis views Washington's closer

engagement with Japan with unease. However, it is Washington's steadily growing friendship with India that worries Tehran's clerical, civilian, and military leaders the most. Even India's and Japan's working—even warm relations with Iran—will be unlikely to result in Tehran being engaged vis-à-vis the Quad Plus. This makes Tehran's involvement in the Quad Plus proposition a nonstarter from both the Iranian and Quad sides.

For Turkey, the Quad Plus, indeed the Indo-Pacific Partnership itself, remains a concept that is wrapped up with the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Turkey is not active in either region; it is also geographically too distant to affect outcomes. These contingencies seem to mean that even if Turkey were interested in the Quad Plus, a combination of Turkey's limited capabilities and geopolitical location, coupled with its highly adversarial relations with the United States and its increasingly warm relations with Pakistan, mean that the Quad Plus will not come calling on Ankara anytime soon.

A second potential issue bedeviling the Quad Plus in the Middle East is that of corresponding interest from Washington, Tokyo, New Delhi, or Canberra. States like Israel and Brazil, for example, have been earmarked as potential Quad Plus participants. These states are of interest for highly political reasons that have much to do with currently warm relations between the United States and Brazil as well as Israel. This is decidedly not the case with either Turkey or Iran. It takes two to tango, and it seems both parties—Iran and Turkey on the one hand and the Quad states on the other—are not interested in dancing together.

In contrast to Iran and Turkey, the UAE's importance and good reputation in Washington means that Abu Dhabi will likely be on the shortlist of potential Quad Plus participants. The UAE occupies a strategic location on both the Persian Gulf and the western Indian Ocean, exports huge amounts of oil to not just China but also India and Japan, and maintains good relations with New Delhi, Tokyo, and Canberra. Its recent diplomatic recognition of Israel makes it even more likely that an invitation to the Quad Plus will be forthcoming. Given these contingencies, the UAE will likely chart a course that takes advantage of more apolitical offerings from the Quad Plus. There are limits, however, to what the UAE's leadership would be willing to sign up for vis-à-vis the Quad Plus. Any policies or partnerships that appear to be anti-China may be a bridge to far for the UAE's leaders. ✪

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Acknowledgments

The author thanks Dr. Eric Lob for his research and comments about Iranian reactions to and statements about the Quad Plus and the Indo-Pacific.

Notes

1. For reasons of expedience and in attempt to dodge rather than end the debate, the Middle East referenced in this article includes Egypt (the only Middle East state in Africa), the Arabian Peninsula states, the Levant, Iran, and Turkey.

2. Iran, Turkey, and the UAE are used, in part, because they can be said to be representative of the three primary ethnolinguistic and religious groupings of the Middle East: Turkish (Sunni Muslim), Persian (Shi'a Muslim), and Arab (majority Sunni Muslim), thus providing potentially rich case studies with which to test this article's hypotheses and answer its research questions.

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