

AUKUS Inadvertently Opens Diplomatic Opportunities for Russia with France & India

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The Ruckus Over AUKUS

Last week’s announcement of the new trilateral Australia-UK-US ([AUKUS](#)) anti-Chinese military alliance is [already backfiring](#) on America after it unprecedentedly offended its oldest French ally and also resulted in uncomfortable racial optics of Anglo-American superiority within the Quad that strongly implied [India’s “junior partner” status](#) within that structure. These consequences are still manageable though since France won’t leave NATO in protest like some have speculated nor will India abandon the Quad.

The Diplomatic-Strategic Backdrop

Those two countries’ leaderships still believe that their national interests are advanced by continuing to participate in efforts to “contain” China, though there’s discernibly a major trust deficit between their governments and America’s after what just happened. This might reduce the overall effectiveness of their joint measures to “contain” China. It’s this observation that inadvertently opens up diplomatic opportunities for Russia with both of them, which could bolster Moscow’s [balancing act](#) if it successfully capitalizes on this.

France and India regard America as more unreliable than ever before, and this perception likely won’t dissipate no matter how much time passes. Paris naively fell for Biden’s ploy whereby the newly elected Democrat leader promised that “America is back” and that he’d thus respect Washington’s allies unlike his predecessor. New Delhi, meanwhile, was already concerned that Trump’s successor would compromise on its interests since his team seemed not to appreciate their country’s anti-Chinese “containment” role as much as the

Republican did.

France just found out the hard way that the US is untrustworthy regardless of whichever part of the duopoly is officially running its affairs after Washington poached a AUS\$90 billion nuclear-powered submarine deal from Paris with Canberra upon clinching this major military alliance behind its back. As for India, its leadership is more self-conscious than ever before that the US doesn't consider it to be an equal and is thus very worried that this risks dooming the South Asian state to a fate of perpetual second-class status vis-a-vis America.

Russia can take advantage of these concerns as its diplomatic angle of approach for engaging them in order to explore two very exciting diplomatic opportunities. Ideally, Russia would like to regulate its [growing competition](#) with France in Africa (especially in the vast region of "Françafrique" that Paris considers to be its exclusive "sphere of influence") while encouraging India to enter into a meaningful rapprochement with China. These two geostrategic tasks are among the most important ones for contemporary Russian foreign policy.

The Path To Mutually Beneficial Outcomes

They aren't unrealistic to achieve either in light of AUKUS. The French and Indian Foreign Ministers already released a [joint statement](#) pledging "to work on a joint program of concrete actions to defend a truly multilateral international order" in what can be interpreted as a signal to the US of their intense dissatisfaction with that alliance. Those two countries are clearly interested in "multi-aligning" with one another in order to create a more trustworthy axis of cooperation within the world's growing anti-Chinese "containment" network.

This demonstrates several shared desires on both of their parts: increase strategic autonomy vis-a-vis the US; creatively multi-align in pursuit of this end; and potentially go as far as offending America in the process by keeping it out of the loop. None of these interests is contradictory to what Russia could attempt to explore with each of them. To the contrary, they're complementary and strategically consistent. The outcomes that Moscow might advance would be mutually beneficial within this context.

Russian-French Interests

To explain, France is increasingly being forced to accept that Russian influence in Françafrique must be reckoned with since it's too powerful of a factor nowadays to ignore. Instead of remaining mired in a "hybrid" competition, both Great Powers would do better to discretely delineate their new "spheres of influence", both geopolitically and also strategically within those African countries where they overlap. The US wants them to remain at each other's throats there so that it can then swoop in to capitalize on the chaos.

The solution is to negotiate a so-called "non-aggression pact" there whereby France and Russia agree to "freeze" their competition for a certain period of time, cooperate on issues where their interests align like anti-terrorism and socio-economic development, and thus contribute to Africa's stabilization. This would reduce the chances of the US exploiting these competitive dynamics in an attempt to sideline both of their interests as it seeks to advance its own. It would also show how truly independent French foreign policy is becoming.

Russian-Indian Interests

When it comes to India, New Delhi can no longer completely rely on Washington's support when it comes to "containing" China. There's only so far that the South Asian state can go towards this end without suffering unacceptable costs that it now knows that its new ally won't help it shoulder. This growing awareness will naturally compel India to seek some sort of accommodation with China similar to the one that was proposed above between France and Russia, which their shared partners in the Kremlin might help them broker.

Candidly speaking and with full respect to India, its leadership is extremely self-conscious of how their country is perceived and treated by the US, so much so that some observers can convincingly claim that they suffer from an inferiority complex. This isn't being brought up as a criticism but to hint at an opportunity since that same complex could inspire them to behave more independently vis-a-vis the US after being condescendingly treated as its "junior partner" if Russia mediates an improvement of ties with China in response upon their request.

Shared Interests & Solutions

It's more important than ever for France and India to increase their strategic autonomy relative to the US after both were so brazenly disrespected by it through AUKUS. They also have a pressing need to repair their soft power at home and abroad. Their people are upset at America trampling over them in such a humiliating way while the rest of the world is beginning to think that they're just powerless puppets if they don't do anything significant in response. Their geopolitical interests and prestige are therefore on the line.

Both sets of problems can be adequately resolved through the proposed solutions with Russia. France and India would bolster their strategic autonomy by regulating competition with Russia in Africa and with China in Asia, respectively, which would open up a new array of geopolitical opportunities for them that they didn't have before. Their people would be pleased at how independently their leaders are conducting their foreign policy, especially in spite of America's expected misgivings, while the world would be impressed with this as well.

Managing The French-Russian Arms Competition Over India

The only potential wrinkle in this scenario is the emerging French-Russian competition for India's arms market. Paris has recently become one of New Delhi's [top partners](#), which makes its historical ones in Moscow very uncomfortable. Be that as it may, each Great Power could potentially fulfill different military needs for their shared partner. Russia has already carved out a vast "sphere of influence" in this strategic space while France could replace America's present role there if the US [sanctions India](#) for its S-400 air defense purchase.

American-Indian military cooperation isn't anywhere close in terms of value to the AUS\$90 billion nuclear-powered submarine deal that the US poached from France with Australia, but Paris could still make up for some lost financial opportunities by attempting to poach Washington's future deals with New Delhi. In fact, France and the US are more akin to competitors with one another in this space than they are competitors with Russia, whether separately or jointly. Their intensified competition there could advance Russian and Indian interests.

India is one of the world's top arms purchasers and will continue to attempt to "contain"

China even if it doesn't do so to the radical extent that the US demands. Comparatively speaking, the expansion of French influence in India through "military diplomacy" via arms sales would be a more moderating force than its American counterpart. Russia would obviously prefer for neither of them to have this sort of influence over its special and privileged strategic partner, but if it's inevitable to a degree, then it's better for it to be French than American.

From the Indian perspective, it could play France and the US off against one another in order to get the best deals from both. In the event that the US goes through with its threats to sanction the country for purchasing Russia's S-400 air defense systems, then India's strategic autonomy wouldn't be all that adversely affected since it could just multi-align away from America and towards France in order to meet its pertinent military needs that it feels more comfortable relying on Western countries to achieve than on Russia for whatever reason.

Concluding Thoughts

To recap the insight that was shared in this analysis, France and India aren't likely to have any serious rupture in their relations with the US such as leaving NATO and the Quad respectively, but their ties with it won't be the same again due to the enormous trust deficit caused by AUKUS. This presents exciting diplomatic opportunities for Russia to explore a "non-aggression" pact with France in Africa and the possibility of mediating an Indian-Chinese rapprochement, both of which would serve their interests while sending a strong signal to the US.

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