



# AUKUS Alliance: United States Strategic Interest in Indo-Pacific

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## **Abstract**

*This research talks about the United States' interests in Indo-Pacific through an alliance called AUKUS, which consists of Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The United States, as a great power, has its focus on maintaining and strengthening security and alliances in the world. As the conflict in the South China Sea arose, the United States focused its strategy on preventing the conflict in the region; hence, the United States allied with Australia and United Kingdom. The research examines the strategy and national interests of the U.S. in the Indo-Pacific region through AUKUS. This research uses a qualitative method, exploring national interests, the means and ways of foreign policy, and the decision-making process on the United States' interest through AUKUS in Indo-Pacific.*

**Keywords:** *Strategic Interest, AUKUS, United States, Indo-Pacific*

## **1. Introduction**

The United States, as a great power, has a focus on maintaining or strengthening security and alliances in the world. As the South China Sea conflict arises, the U.S. focuses on preventing a conflict, specifically in the Indo-Pacific region. As stated on the U.S. mission to ASEAN, the U.S. has a vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific region that comprises independent, strong, and prosperous nations. Thus, with the vision of free and Indo-Pacific, the U.S. government's effort to advance that vision focused on three pillars: economics, governance, and security (U.S. Mission to ASEAN, 2020).

Since World War II, the U.S. alliances and partnerships have been stable and peaceful Indo-Pacific. Under the Indo-Pacific strategy, the United States increased its cooperation with allies. The U.S. as a nation, stated by the U.S. Department of State,



seeks to build a flexible and resilient security partner to address common challenges by sharing any information regarding any security problems and challenges, and build the capacity of security sector forces to respond to transnational crime, protect the maritime domain, address environmental challenges, and respond collectively to emerging threats. Over the decades, the Indo-Pacific has gone under a transformation where people rise out from poverty, making the region home to world-class businesses and undergoing a transformation that is a significant driver of global economic growth. This transformation was possible because of the stability of the free and open regional order and the fair competition for each country to grow and prosper as a sovereign independent state (U.S. Department of State, 2019).

Indo-Pacific has become the subject of new policy within the Obama administration's "Asia Pivot," Some analysts praised strengthening its major alliances (The Policy Circle, 2021). While under Trump's leadership, the U.S. implemented a whole government strategy of values such as respect for sovereignty and independence; peaceful resolution of disputes; free, fair, and reciprocal trade; and adherence to international law (U.S. Department of State, 2019). Biden and his slogan for diplomacy, "America is back," and his first 100 days as president have seen a noticeable change regarding Indo-Pacific that Obama and Trump never quite managed to do so. With a renewed commitment and dedication to the Indo-Pacific, the U.S. aims to enhance cooperation with allies to respond to the developing demanding situations in the region.

The new Biden administration's primary national security priorities are safeguarding American hegemony, deterring and preventing direct threats to the United States or its allies, and preventing American domination in critical regions. To this end, with the new administration, the United States seeks to lead and maintain a stable and open international system based on strong democratic alliances, multilateral institutions, and rules (King, 2021). The Biden administration then emphasizes that the United States cannot achieve these goals alone and instead



conclude that the U.S. has to rely on their allies, including NATO, Australia, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Singapore, Vietnam, and ASEAN.

Biden's withdrawal from Afghanistan brings questions from people worldwide on U.S. power. From Biden's view, the Afghans do not serve any national security purpose to the U.S., so he shifts his focus on policy towards the security in Indo-Pacific, where therein lies the conflict in the region—the South China Sea, where the U.S. view China's reliance there as a threat. Thus, not long after his withdrawal from Afghanistan, Biden did not waste any time to announce its most ambitious new alliance, the AUKUS, a trilateral security partnership between the U.S., United Kingdom, and Australia. Moreover, with this alliance, Australia welcomes a significant development with the U.S. and other allies eager to join with the U.S. in response to a more complex regional environment and a more robust rules-based order.

Australia is home to one of the region's most advanced Defense Research and Development (R&D) and innovation hubs, and the country also has pre-existing programs on emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence. In particular, its alliance with the U.S. provides access to some of the niche capabilities that the Australian Defense Force requires, but local capabilities have not yet become self-sufficient to provide (Kuo, 2021). And the second partner the special nuclear relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom. In 1958, Congress passed legislation allowing the United States to share secret nuclear technology with the United Kingdom to develop nuclear warheads (Kolodziej, 2021). It has long since held a relation closely regarding its military assets.



## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. ASK US: Recalling Legacies of Anglo-Saxonism and Muffling the Voices of Island Nations by Jeffrey Geiger**

Written by Jeffrey Geiger, the study refers to the AUKUS trilateral security pact and interprets it as countering China's influence in the Pacific and challenging its military and nuclear capabilities. The study sheds light on the history of the Anglo-American Strategic Alliance and the heritage of its empire that may form the alliance now known as AUKUS, where it marks a new turn in the politics of the Anglosphere. The research also concluded that it could be viewed as undermining national interests or as a strategic balance of Chinese power and an omission of the island nations of the Indian Ocean and Oceania in their decision-making processes and regional affiliations and identities.

### **2.2. AUKUS and 'Global Britain': Sub-standard Strategy? by Paul Cornish**

Written by Paul Cornish, this literature points out the national strategy of Britain regarding its security. Although this literature focuses more on Britain's side as one side of AUKUS, it brings some light on the United Kingdom's national strategy that led to the direction of AUKUS. This research covers the AUKUS trilateral pact as Indo-Pacific tilt, covering matters in socio-economics. As the U.K. and the U.S. are nuclear-weapon states (NWS), with both being the parties of the 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), the U.K. declares that they are strongly committed to full implementation of the NPT in all aspects, including nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation, and the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. In addition, this research also covers the main issue where the alliance affects China and France.

## **3. Research Methodology**

The methodology used in this research is the qualitative method. The method is carried out with case studies using theories to analyze and answer the research problems. As Creswell (1998) defines, the qualitative method is an inquiry process based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human



problem. Using the qualitative method, the researcher conducts the study and builds an analysis as a detailed view of reports. This research explores a particular field about the national interests, the means and ways of foreign policy, and the decision-making process on the United States' interest through AUKUS in the Indo-Pacific.

#### **4. Result and Discussion**

##### **4.1. ASK US: Australia, United Kingdom, United States Alliances**

On September 15, 2021, U.S. President Biden, the U.K.'s Prime Minister Boris Johnson, and Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced their trilateral security cooperation called AUKUS with its major initiative to deliver a nuclear-powered submarine fleet for Australia. The quote Scott Morrison in his remarks from the AUKUS announcement. The new partnership will help "protect shared values and promote security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region." Though AUKUS aims to deepen diplomatic, security, and defense cooperation among the three states, AUKUS will also focus specifically on deepening integration in defense-related science, technology, industrial bases, and supply chains, with particular emphasis on cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies and new undersea capabilities (White House, 2021). In general, the core directive of the AUKUS security partnership is to convey balance to the Indo-Pacific region.

This partnership will pave the way towards greater information intelligence-sharing and interoperability between the three countries' armed forces. With the initiative to transport nuclear-powered submarines to Australia, the transfer of this technology represents an unprecedented move from nuclear-armed countries to a non-nuclear-armed countries, demonstrating the most important thing the U.S. has in its alliance (Samaan, 2021). It will also be the first time in 50 years that the U.S. shares its submarine technology, where it had previously only shared with the U.K. According to Patricia O'Brien, this partnership will strengthen Australia's military strength, unite its allies, and create a global network of security agreements to combat China's



massive and rapid global expansion. Moreover, through this alliance, Australia will play a more active role in maintaining the balance of power in the region.

Establishing a local industrial base for building and maintaining nuclear-powered submarines in Australia will allow the United States to support, maintain, and resupply its nuclear-powered submarine fleet more actively. This could help the U.S. relieve pressure on its submarine maintenance and shipbuilding bases (Corben, Townshend, & Patton, 2021). Furthermore, the AUKUS partnership will lead to industrial cooperation in defense, specifically in the military field. In addition to official alliances, AUKUS members already work closely through several security and defense agreements, the most famous of which is the “Five Eyes” agreement, which includes Canada and New Zealand on cooperation in signals intelligence.

#### **4.2. The AUKUS Trilateral Pact: The United States National Interest, Ways, and Means**

For such global challenges, reputations matter, even for great power. Perceived strength, reliability, consistency, and generosity influence other actors, state and non-state. U.S. allies and rivals alike expected something different from Biden. At the United Nations conference, Biden stressed that the U.S. foreign policy was not just about national interest. His focus was on shared global challenges, joint efforts, and a new U.S. commitment to multilateralism and leadership (Jones, 2021). Therefore, AUKUS can be seen as a stepping-stone for Biden’s approach to the Indo-Pacific region through a trilateral partnership. This represents the desire of the new administration to create new security mechanisms to shape the governance of the wider region.

For the U.S., AUKUS supports a long-planned strategic shift. AUKUS leverages the strengths of the U.S. its ability to build mutually strengthening partnerships around the world. AUKUS signifies two critical decisions in U.S. policy. First, it represents the logic of balance of power in the U.S. approach towards the Indo-Pacific. Biden has enmeshed two of its most important allies in an alliance against China with the alliance. Second, it underlines that the U.S. approach in containing China will fully



use its defense technology and its allies. AUKUS emphasizes that the U.S. will not dominate China without a subsequent battle between the great powers. Both technology and the presence of allies bring significant benefits to the U.S. In light of the competition between the U.S. and China, Washington has described the Indo-Pacific command as "the single most consequential region for America's future." It enhances Beijing's influence in the region by increasing its military presence and strengthening its alliances. It also emphasized the need for containment (Zhu, 2021). As China raises unique and growing political and strategic concerns with common sense, it redefines China as the number one concern for the U.S. foreign policy and makes Asia the top setting for the U.S. strategic goals (Miller, 2021).

As mentioned before, the U.S. vision of the Indo-Pacific is linked to the way the U.S. manages its alliances and partnerships. Australia has fought with the U.S. in every U.S. war since World War I and Australia was a key supporter of campaigns. But through the development, the alliance's focus shifts to the Indo-Pacific and China. Competition with China has been central to the Biden administration's national security policy and has become the organizing principle of the U.S.-Australia alliance (Harding, 2021). Any hidden motive under Australia's purpose in developing the nuclear-powered submarine cannot be separated by the U.S.' ambition and interest to restore their hegemony in the region. In result, the United States is the one who has the most interest in the AUKUS trilateral alliance. From that regard, AUKUS is actually a strategy from the U.S. to put down China's influence by strengthening with an ally in the region, which is Australia. And by strengthening the Australian military, Australia could play a role as an offshore balancer to the U.S. as an effort to balance China's power in the Indo-Pacific, which is a priority agenda of the U.S. foreign policy under Biden administration.

As for the U.K. offers credence to their new "Global Britain" strategic outlook after the whole Brexit thing and a chief leap forward on operating greater intent with Australia and the U.S. on demanding situations associated to the Indo-Pacific region





and will increase interoperability with a close partner. This is in line with the expressed interest in being more involved in the Indo-Pacific region and working more closely with the United States and its allies. For this transaction, the U.K. will play a vital role strategically, taking advantage of comparative advantage (Harding, 2021).

To those three countries, they have sincerely committed to keeping the Indo-Pacific "free and open" from the growing impact of China (Joshi, 2021). And In short, the U.S.'s national interest through the AUKUS in Indo-Pacific is to maintain security in the region with its foreign policy implemented is in actuality to weaken the power of China and influence in the region. However, with a subset of AUKUS, the development of nuclear-powered submarines in Australia and the use of foreign policy instruments for the U.S. military superiority has not prevented China from attaining its position, mostly through the use of non-military means for geopolitical gains. Increased U.S. military capacities in the region will not undermine China's political influence.

#### **4.3. Where the Decision Making Lays**

A long-standing obsession with American exceptionalism, supremacy, and unilateralism at the heart of the U.S. elites means that the U.S. has avoided increasing friction with its great rivals such as China and Russia and its allies (Sheng, 2021). The people, experts who formulate and influence U.S. foreign policy—treaty allies are not necessarily significant factors. In fact, in some circumstances, U.S. foreign policymakers may consider treaty allies dispensable (Smeltz, Dina, et al., 2021). Although the U.K. and Australia are U.S. allies, the U.S. had not considered another ally in the decision-making process of the whole AUKUS pact.

A senior administration official at White House mentions that historically, U.K. and Australia are the U.S.' oldest allies. The AUKUS members have a history of innovation and upgrading capabilities (White House, 2021). Morrison, in his speech on AUKUS establishment, also said—that Australia, the U.K., and the U.S.:





“...have always believed in a world that favors freedom; that respects human dignity, the rule of law, the independence of sovereign states, and the peaceful fellowship of nations. Our world is becoming more complex, especially here in our region, the Indo-Pacific. This affects us all. [...] To meet the challenges, to help deliver the security and stability our region needs, we must now take our partnership to a new level – a partnership that seeks to engage, not to exclude; to contribute, to take; and to enable and empower, not to control or coerce.”

The executive branch develops U.S. foreign policy primarily, while the White House sets the agenda and develops national security strategies. The Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defence play an essential role in shaping policy, setting priorities, and executing strategy at the cabinet-level. The U.S. Department of Foreign Affairs trains and employs diplomats serving at U.S. diplomatic missions worldwide to conduct U.S. foreign policy under the auspices of the Department of State (The Policy Circle, 2021).

Policy issues at the crossroads of international security and international economics are increasing concern to Australian and U.S. policymakers. Geopolitics governments use economic policy tools to achieve geopolitical, foreign, and security policy goals. The national technology of geo-economics is not new, but it is taking a new form in competition between the U.S. and China. Australia and the U.S. strengthen cooperation in several geo-economically relevant policy areas, especially in the defense industry, technology, and essential minerals. The newly strengthened trilateral security partnership between Australia, the U.K., and the U.S., demonstrates that the U.S. recognizes the importance of working with allies in these areas. Another critical process issue is to ensure that the agenda of outward geo-economic policy is not involved in domestic and political issues. Australia's defense industry policy has historically kept pace with domestic industry goals and employment policies, imposing resource costs that exceed defense budgets and undermine national security. The policy-making process needs to be more resilient to domestic politics and political interference through robust project evaluation, transparency, and accountability mechanisms (Kirchner, 2021).



To reassure the countries of the region, some Australian policymakers describe AUKUS as merely a long-standing technical cooperation between allies to develop new defense capabilities. These new capabilities, in turn, help Australia better work with regional partners and contribute to a rules-based order (Laksmana, 2021). Western countries have been wary of China's investment in infrastructure in the Pacific Islands and have criticized China's trade sanctions against countries like Australia. Australia could be particularly vulnerable to China due to its geographic location and high dependence on exports to China. Australia have maintained good relations with China in the past, however, the relation has been severed in recent years amid political tensions.

While for the U.K., as one of U.S. allies, after their exit from the European Union, they need some hold of power, and a partnership with an ally could do some good in the U.K.'s part. Moreover, historically, the U.S. has decided to have an AUKUS partnership because the U.S. and U.K. have good relations, and they have been helping one another on military aspects of nuclear technologies, among many other aspects.

This new framework does not accurately represent the transition from previous U.S. policy practices to the Indo-Pacific. Historically, it is based on the benefaction of previous structures such as the ANZUS Treaty and the "Five Eyes" intelligence arrangements. But at the same time, AUKUS provides a clear snapshot of the underlying flow in the region. In particular, it reflects how Australia and U.K.'s perceptions of China have changed over the last decade. It emphasizes the element of continuity between the Biden administration and the previous ones, confirming the new priorities set for the U.S. given to the Indo-Pacific over other regions such as the Middle East and Europe, that was likely the previous scenario (Samaan, 2021).

#### **4.4. The Outcome: Negative Reaction?**

Through the AUKUS agreement, the author can conclude that having allies is essential. With those allies and relationships, a nation could achieve its national interest with its help. Some way, another ally of the said nation could be pushed aside



while the nation is working towards their interest. It is seen through the AUKUS alliance, where France said the alliance had betrayed them. A deal that France and Australia had regarding making their own sale of nuclear-powered submarines to the land down under of \$66 billion French conventional submarines is disrupted by the AUKUS alliance. According to media reports, U.S. officials notified French officials just hours before the public announced the announcement. Therefore, despite hitting France's pride, both the U.S. and Australia remain France's key partners in the Indo-Pacific. Due to common national security interests, this cooperation is essential for all parties, even if the next plenary session is less consensus than before.

The AUKUS decision to alienate France from Asia, particularly those in the South and East China Seas, have potentially adverse strategic implications for the U.S. and the West. Like all European countries, France is concerned with the security of Asia and for the free passage of goods and personnel through the waters of the South and East China Seas. By limiting French influence in shaping the Asian security system, the U.S. has essentially taken unilateral leadership to determine the balance of power in the region and the military strategy that would be pursued to contain China (Kolodziej, 2021). Significantly undermining confidence among allies, undermining France's ambition to play a more strategic role in the Indo-Pacific region, and complicating the process of security cooperation within Europe will result in a possibility of higher long-term costs. The U.S. may have gained a strategic advantage over China, but it still needs a strategic partner in the European Union.

In Southeast Asia, the agreement is seen dividedly. Some of the countries reside and agree with the AUKUS partnership as they see the alliance could bring some security in the region. But, some of the countries like Indonesia and Malaysia feared that the alliance could lead towards an armed race and destabilize and bring more conflict in Indo-Pacific.



## 5. Conclusion

Following from the research, it is concluded that the establishment could see the U.S.' interest in the Indo-Pacific region of AUKUS. Biden administration decidedly hands over more focus of security in the region by developing nuclear-powered submarines to Australia in handling the threat of China. The establishment of AUKUS, moreover, the foreign policy that Biden admitted, could actually be seen as a way to regain power over in Indo-Pacific to step over China's influence. By having the U.K. and Australia as part of the trilateral partnership, the U.S. has more instruments for bringing their interest in Indo-Pacific. How the whole process of the U.S. decision-making of the foreign policy has come up, it could be seen from the U.S. as a great power wanting to have some influence in the region. Furthermore, how U.S. allies, U.K. and Australia, historically have good relations with the U.S. regarding its military power contribution and their interests, intentions, and values of security in the region has led to the making of AUKUS.

## 6. Thank You Note

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