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AUKUS PACT: THE HARD HIT ON GLOBAL ORDER

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Summary

The emergence of a trilateral security agreement between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States called the AUKUS pact has stirred intense discussions for the future of global alliances. The US will be sharing its nuclear submarines with Australia waking up China's concerns with its naval power in the Indo-Pacific region.

Key points

- The AUKUS pact will enhance Australia's military and technological powers but have set off France which may stimulate uneasy relations with the EU.
- In the long run, however, the pact has not been entirely a disadvantage for the EU as it will help its members focus their attention on the strategic autonomy and the need to replace their reliance on NATO.

A new chapter has begun on international partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region, shaking the conversation for the future of global security alliances. The US, the UK, and Australia launched the AUKUS pact on September 15, 2021. This agreement centers on the US and the UK collaborating to assist Australia to acquire nuclear-powered submarines. The pact will be a step ahead for Australia's naval power. Once put forward, Australia will be the seventh nation to possess nuclear-powered submarines. Alongside, the agreement will also focus on cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, and additional undersea capabilities.

When the pact was announced, it stirred up France since it initially had a £27 billion deal with Australia in building diesel-powered submarines and was canceled just days before the AUKUS pact was announced. France felt betrayed from its close alliances since the pact was formed behind its back with the US and Australia knowing its interests in the South-Asia region. Now, the French administration is still seeking to find the difference between the Biden and Trump administration, lacking hope for the mending of its transatlantic relationships. With the US in the AUKUS pact, it had left the transatlantic relations and NATO alliance fading.

Furthermore, the AUKUS pact's ambition to expand nuclear-powered submarines is also believed to put pressure on China. Therefore, this policy brief will tackle the implications of the AUKUS pact. It will develop arguments and analyze the position of the nations involved.



Figure 1: The announcement of the AUKUS Pact (Source: Tewari, 2021).

Countering China in the South China Sea

With China's powers rising in Asia, the US struggles to stay at ease. It delayed its desires in the EU and shifted its main priorities to the Indo-Pacific region, where China's naval presence lies. The emergence of the AUKUS pact would help the US prove to China its capabilities, along with a close ally to its side. Australia's growing military and technological powers will be an advantage for the US and pose a threat to China's agenda. The UK prime minister Boris Johnson denied its direct intent to

counter China. Although with their widespread naval power in the Pacific region, it may seem untrue. When discussing power and capabilities, it is fundamental to point out that the agreement involves nuclear-powered submarines, not nuclear weapons. Will Nankervis, Australia's ambassador to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, pledged that his country "will not seek nuclear weapons" nor establish a civil nuclear capability (Kentaro, 2021).

In the case of China, they deeply criticized the pact, which was predictable. They condemned the agreement as "extremely irresponsible" and said that it "seriously undermines regional peace and stability and intensifies the arms race" ("AUKUS: UK, US, and Australia launch pact to counter China", 2021). After China's loss to the Philippines in 2016 in an international arbitration case over disputed waters in the South China Sea, they continue to violate the Philippines' sovereign and maritime rights. The Philippines has been the only state in the region to be internationally recognized for their sea; however, various South-East Asian countries have also yet to fight their part of the waters. Malaysia and Indonesia have raised their concerns about the pact and feared it would worsen the region's "arms race and power projection" (Widianto, 2021). As a result, Indonesia later cancelled a planned visit by Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison.

Thus, China's stance on the pact is anticipated since it undermines the islands they are building and invading in the international waters of the South China Sea. The AUKUS pact's impact on the defense sector would be an increase in the presence of large military forces in the South China Sea's waters. Regardless, China remains tense as its embassy in Washington stated that the pact consisted of a Cold War mentality and ideological prejudice.

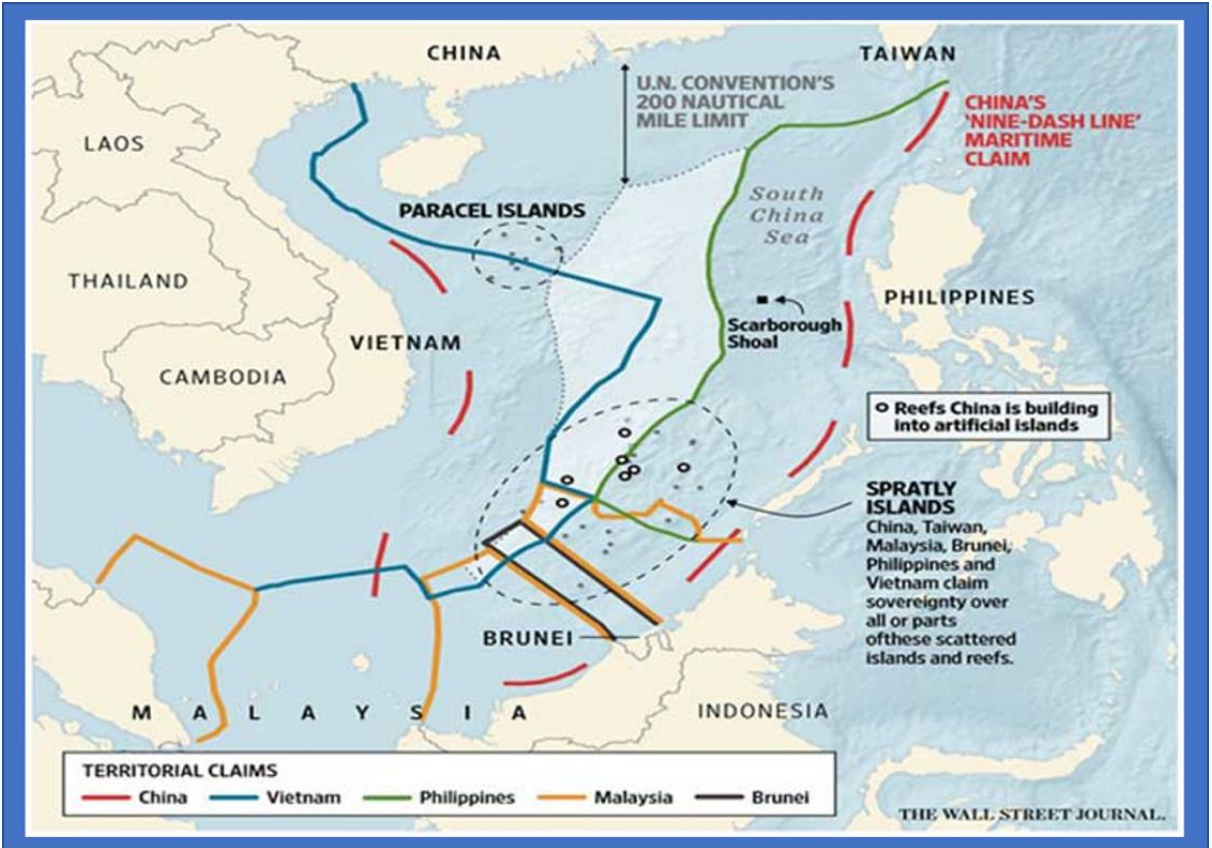


Figure 2: Maritime boundary disputes in the South China Sea (Source: IILSS, 2021).

Additionally, the emergence of nuclear submarines in Australia will complicate China's plans regarding its maritime Silk Road Initiative¹ and their Belt and Road Initiative².

Unpacking France's Anger and the Future of EU's Strategic Autonomy

After UK's Brexit, the pact may exhibit to the EU that they are independent and capable of leading their own foreign relations and diplomatic strategies, showing the EU where the UK stands.

Australia withdrawing its diesel-powered submarine deal and the US not providing the France administration with a heads up regarding the pact left France questioning the relationship it had with the states. As a result, France immediately took back their ambassadors from both Australia and the US. This showed how the choices made with the agreement truly affected France since this decision has never been done amongst its allies; however, after French Prime Minister Emmanuel Macron and US President Joe Biden held talks by phone last week, the French ambassador was ordered to return to his post in the US ("French envoy to return to the US after Joe Biden and Emmanuel Macron hold 'friendly call,'" 2021).

France's anger does not only root from the cancellation of the diesel-based submarine deal and its economic effects, it also comes from the lack of value the US and Australia had towards their alliance.

The sizable military presence in the Southwest Pacific Ocean and overseas region of New Caledonia that France holds, could have played part to create solidarity with its alliances, yet they still ignored France's interests causing its furious sentiments. Currently, France's view to the Australian administration would not be forgotten. While the US took a different approach and has slowly furthered its steps to not end the transatlantic relationship completely.

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue - India & Japan

Tackling on the positions of the nations in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, an often question is why India and Japan were ruled out in the pact.

In recent years, the US has been attempting to reel India closer for partnerships; however, India's differing foreign interests with the US and its priority on its Act East strategy, the direction the AUKUS intends to go upon has not aligned with India's strategies explaining why the nation was not included.

In terms of Japan, its alliance with the US can be an advantage. However, Japan's domestic political and legal conditions do not meet the US' requirements (Xiyu, 2021). The US may focus on helping Australia develop its military strength and make it a US "guard dog" in Asia, but for Japan, it would lack the practical conditions it needs for the pact (Xiyu, 2021).

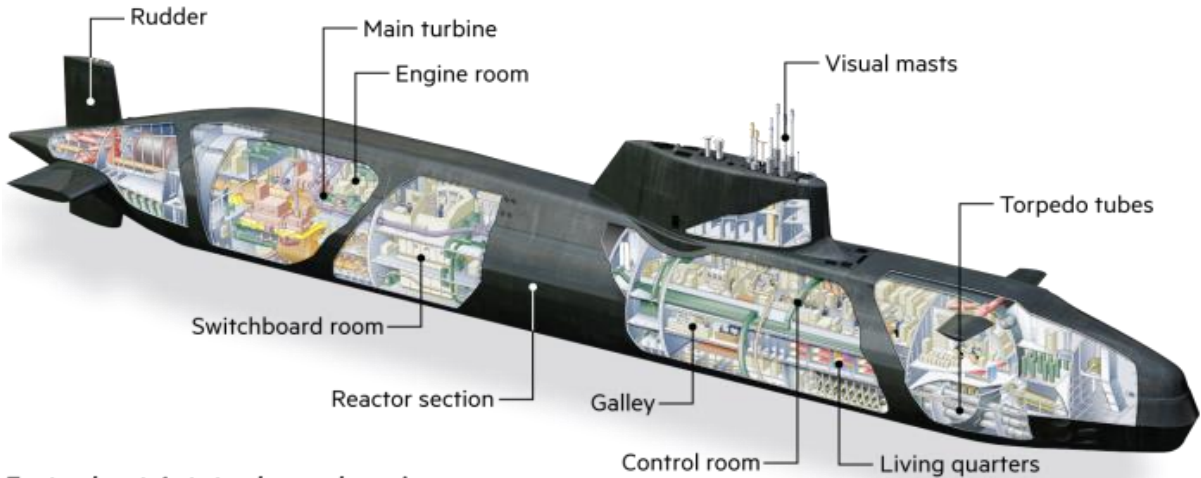
¹ Maritime Silk Road: a key component of China's Belt and Road Initiative, a major development plan that aims to connect China with the rest of Asia, Africa and Europe.

² Belt and Road Initiative, known in Chinese and formerly in English as One Belt One Road or OBOR for short, is a global infrastructure development strategy adopted by the Chinese government in 2013 to invest in nearly 70 countries and international organizations.

Harsh Shringla, the Foreign Secretary of India, mentioned that “Quad and AUKUS are not groupings of similar nature. Quad countries share the vision of a free, open, transparent, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region. Quad has adopted a wide array of initiatives globally on issues like the pandemic, new and emerging technologies, and climate change. AUKUS is a security alliance involving three countries. We are not a party to it. From our perspective, it is neither relevant to Quad nor will have any impact on Quad’s functioning” (Parashar, 2021).

Both countries share common ground on why they have not been involved and it's because of its differing security agendas and the conditions that the pact it is trying to uphold.

Astute class nuclear submarine



Facts about Astute class submarines

- 97m in length and will displace 7,400 tonnes of sea water when fully stored
- Can circumnavigate the world without ever surfacing
- When armed with Tomahawk cruise missiles, Astute class submarines can strike targets up to 1,200km from the coast with pinpoint accuracy

Source: BAE Systems
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Figure 3: Nuclear submarine for Australia (Source: Gross, 2021).

The Future of the Pact

The circumstances that France has faced may dictate the future of transatlantic relations. So far, the EU has defended France’s reaction and demanded apologies from Australia and postponed its preparations for a new EU-US trade and technology council. Most NATO members are also part of the EU and have been steady with the next steps that France will take.

In the long run, the AUKUS pact has not been entirely a disadvantage for the EU as it will help its members focus their attention on the EU’s strategic autonomy and the need to replace their reliance on NATO.

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