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## AUKUS as a Balance of Power Strategy in Confronting PRC in the Indo-Pacific: Perspectives from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia

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**Abstract.** This study analyzes AUKUS as a trilateral balance of power strategy countering People's Republic of China rise in the Indo-Pacific. Using qualitative document analysis, it examines security architecture evolution from Five Eyes to AUKUS in September 2021. The US pursues integrated deterrence, the UK realizes "Global Britain," and Australia counters the "arc of autocracy." Nuclear-powered submarine technology transfer is the key balance-of-power instrument. While AUKUS strengthens trilateral deterrence, it creates security dilemmas and challenges ASEAN centrality.

**Keywords:** AUKUS, balance of power, Indo-Pacific, PRC, trilateral alliance

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Научная статья

## АУКУС как стратегия баланса сил в противостоянии КНР в Индо-Тихоокеанском регионе: перспективы США, Великобритании и Австралии

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**Аннотация.** Исследование посвящено всестороннему анализу AUKUS как стратегии трехстороннего баланса сил, реализуемой США, Великобританией и Австралией с целью эффективного противодействия активности и наращиванию присутствия Китая в Индо-Тихоокеанском регионе. Цели исследования охватывают три ключевых аспекта: во-первых, анализ восприятия Китая каждым из государств-участников AUKUS как стратегического вызова через призму их национальных доктрин безопасности; во-вторых, раскрытие механизма функционирования AUKUS в качестве интегрированной системы сдерживания на базе сотрудничества по передовым оборонным технологиям; в-третьих, всесторонняя оценка последствий деятельности AUKUS для региональной стабильности, центральной роли АСЕАН и развивающейся архитектуры безопасности в Индо-Тихоокеанском регионе.

Исследование опирается на анализ официальных стратегических и политических документов, белых книг по обороне, обзоров национальной безопасности и официальных совместных заявлений, подготовленных странами-участницами. В качестве теоретической базы используются разнообразные источники академической литературы, включая научные трактовки эволюции архитектуры безопасности, где прослеживается историческая преемственность от Альянса Five Eyes и четырехстороннего диалога по безопасности до учреждения AUKUS в сентябре 2021 г. Кроме того, учитываются дискуссии по теории баланса сил в международных отношениях, региональной безопасности, геополитическим процессам в Индо-Тихоокеанском регионе, а также стратегическим последствиям трансфера военных технологий.

Исследование показало, что AUKUS символизирует сдвиг от пассивного обмена разведанными к полноценному альянсу в сфере оборонных технологий. Этот пакт успешно усиливает возможности трехстороннего сдерживания, интегрируя инновационные технологические платформы для проведения информационных и кибер-операций, искусственного интеллекта, квантовых вычислений и систем гиперзвукового вооружения. Вместе с тем AUKUS порождает дилемму безопасности, провоцируя резкие стратегические контрмеры со стороны Пекина и усугубляя фрагментацию среди государств Юго-Восточной Азии. В результате, хотя AUKUS кардинально перестраивает баланс сил в Индо-Тихоокеанском регионе, он одновременно подрывает центральную роль АСЕАН в механизмах регионального управления безопасностью, усиливает вероятность локальной нестабильности и ускоряет гонку вооружений, что требует дальнейшего мониторинга и дипломатических усилий для минимизации рисков.

**Ключевые слова:** АУКУС, баланс сил, Индо-Тихоокеанский регион, КНР, трехсторонний альянс

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## Introduction

The Indo-Pacific region has become a center of intensifying global geopolitical competition over the past two decades, marked by the evolution of collective security mechanisms rooted in a long history of intelligence and defense cooperation among English-speaking countries. Contemporary security dynamics in the region are inseparable from the historical development of three interconnected pillars of strategic cooperation: the Five Eyes Alliance, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), and the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS). These three mechanisms represent the gradual evolution of bilateral intelligence cooperation into a complex multilateral security architecture, which now serves as the backbone of balance-of-power strategies in the face of People's Republic of China (PRC) increasingly dominant rise in the Indo-Pacific. This shifting balance of power has triggered strategic responses from traditional powers, particularly the United States and its allies, to maintain the regional order that has existed since the end of World War II.

In this context, the Indo-Pacific region not only encompasses a vast geographical area from the Indian Ocean to the Western Pacific, but also represents an arena for strategic competition that will determine the future of global security. Since the 2000s, PRC has experienced spectacular economic growth accompanied by massive military modernization. PRC's military spending increased from US\$151.5 billion in 2018 to US\$207.3 billion in 2021, while the United States maintained its defense budget at US\$754 billion during the same period [1]. However, of greater concern to Washington and its allies is PRC's development of increasingly sophisticated military capabilities, including its rapidly expanding nuclear submarine fleet. The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) currently operates six nuclear attack submarines, six nuclear ballistic missile submarines, and 44 diesel/air-independent submarines, with projections of maintaining 65-70 submarines throughout the 2020s [1].

In response to these dynamics, the United States has developed various collective security mechanisms to strengthen its strategic alliances and partnerships in the region. One of the most significant steps was the establishment of AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom, United States) on September 15, 2021, a trilateral security partnership aimed at *"deepening diplomatic, security, and defense cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region"* [2]. The formation of AUKUS was announced simultaneously by President Joe Biden, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who emphasized that the partnership is designed to *"protect shared values and promote security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region"* [3].

The most controversial aspect of AUKUS is the commitment pillar 1 to provide nuclear-powered submarine technology to Australia. According to a joint statement

dated March 13, 2023, the three countries stipulated that *"SSN-AUKUS will be based on a British next-generation submarine design that will incorporate technologies from all three countries, including the most advanced submarine technology of the United States"* [4]. This plan involves three phases of implementation: increased port calls by US and UK submarines to Australia (2023 onwards), the acquisition of 3-5 US Virginia-class submarines by Australia (early 2030s), and the construction of AUKUS-class submarines based on a British design with US technology (late 2030s) [1].

This strategic decision is inseparable from the growing threat perception of PRC's assertiveness in the region. Australian Defense Minister Richard Marles stated that *"the regional security environment has deteriorated more rapidly than anticipated since the 2016 defense white paper"* [5]. Similar concerns were expressed in a United States strategic document, where the National Security Strategy 2022 acknowledged that *"China is the only competitor intent on changing the world order and possessing the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological capabilities to do so"* [6]. For the United Kingdom, AUKUS represents a post-Brexit repositioning strategy involving trusted partners in strategic nuclear technology projects. For Australia, as a front-line nation in the Indo-Pacific, AUKUS serves as a concrete response to dramatic changes in the regional security landscape, particularly in the face of China's rapid military modernization and aggressive actions in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait as significantly altering regional security dynamics.

The formation of AUKUS has sparked mixed responses from various regional stakeholders. PRC, through Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian, asserted that *"nuclear submarine cooperation between the US, the UK, and Australia has seriously undermined regional peace and stability, intensified the arms race, and undermined international non-proliferation efforts"* [7]. Beijing views AUKUS as a manifestation of a *"Cold War mentality"* designed to contain PRC [8]. On the other hand, responses from Southeast Asian countries have shown significant variation, with Indonesia and Malaysia expressing concerns about *"the continued arms race and power projection in the region"* [9], while the Philippines, Vietnam, and Singapore tend to view AUKUS positively as a means to deter threats from PRC.

The phenomenon of the formation of AUKUS has attracted widespread academic attention, but there is still a gap in the literature that examines the dynamics of the balance of power from a comprehensive trilateral perspective. Mohammad Damayantar and Imam Zarkachi (2023) study examines the impact of the AUKUS defense pact on Indo-Pacific security, focusing on its influence on regional defense technology, military cooperation, and foreign policy. However, it has not specifically analyzed the balance of power strategies of the three member states [10].

Meanwhile, S. Suparman (2024) analyzes the UK's participation in AUKUS, focusing on its unique position outside the Indo-Pacific region and the motivations driven by national role conceptions and prescriptions [11]. However, both studies have not provided a comprehensive analysis of how AUKUS functions as a trilateral balance of power instrument against PRC.

Furthermore, Murad Ali (2024) in his research revealed that "AUKUS represents a more aggressive and coordinated effort by the United States and its allies to counter PRC's rise" [12]. This research identified that this approach has the potential to provoke PRC to take assertive action in regions such as the South China Sea, the Taiwan Strait, and the East China Sea if PRC's regional interests are challenged. However, this analysis is still limited to a unilateral perspective and has not explored in depth how the three AUKUS countries coordinate their balance of power strategies within a cohesive trilateral framework.

From a different perspective, Cikal Jalu Ghazy Farhan (2024) analyzed AUKUS as a manifestation of the balance of power concept in the Indo-Pacific region through the framework of neorealist theory, with the finding that "AUKUS is a strategic response to the global and regional balance of power and reflects Australia's efforts to strengthen its position in facing the security challenges posed by the rise of PRC" [13]. Although this study provides significant theoretical contributions, the analysis is still focused on the Australian perspective and has not yet integrated the strategic perspectives of the three countries comprehensively.

This gap in the literature highlights the need for research that integrates a trilateral perspective in analyzing AUKUS as a balance of power instrument. Most existing research tends to analyze AUKUS from a bilateral or unilateral perspective, yet the essence of AUKUS's strength lies in the strategic synergy of its three member states, which possess complementary capabilities, experience, and geographic positions. The United States provides technological strength and global power projection, the United Kingdom contributes nuclear technology expertise and multilateral legitimacy, and Australia provides a strategic geographic position and operational base in the Indo-Pacific region.

This research is crucial given the ongoing escalation of tensions in the Indo-Pacific region. In this context, the author argues that a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the trilateral *balance of power* through AUKUS is crucial for developing an effective regional security strategy. This research is also relevant given that AUKUS not only represents contemporary geopolitical realities but also has the potential to serve as a model for future alliance configurations in addressing increasingly complex global security challenges.

Based on the background described above, this study aims to analyze how AUKUS functions as a trilateral balance of power strategy in dealing with PRC in the Indo-Pacific region from the perspective of the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia.

### From Five Eyes and Quad to AUKUS

The intensifying strategic competition between the United States (US) and PRC in the Indo-Pacific region has driven a significant evolution in the US-led security architecture.

Over the past few decades, the US alliance constellation has transformed from a more traditional and limited framework of cooperation to a more layered, flexible, and technologically advanced structure. This evolution did not occur suddenly, but rather through a series of stages marked by the formation and development of the Five Eyes intelligence alliance, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) strategic security dialogue, and culminating in the trilateral security pact AUKUS. Each of these formations emerged in response to the geopolitical dynamics of its time, and each new formation was built to address gaps or limitations inherent in its predecessor. An analysis of this evolutionary trajectory reveals a shift in US strategy from post-Cold War intelligence cooperation to defense technology alliances explicitly designed to balance Chinese power in the 21st century.

### Background of the Anglosphere Alliance, History, and Limitations of the Five Eyes

The foundations of modern US-led security cooperation are rooted in the Five Eyes intelligence alliance, the world's oldest and most comprehensive intelligence-sharing network, comprising the US, the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. The alliance arose from successful intelligence cooperation between the US and the UK during World War II, which was later formalized through the UK-USA Communications Intelligence Agreement (UKUSA) in 1946 [14]. Its primary purpose at the time was to counter the global threat posed by the Soviet Union. For decades, the Five Eyes operated as an effective burden-sharing mechanism, with each member nation responsible for monitoring a specific geographic area and sharing the signals intelligence (SIGINT) information it acquired [15].

Despite its great success in the intelligence domain, the Five Eyes has fundamental limitations. In the context of modern strategic competition. First, by design, it is not a formal defense alliance in the classical sense, it lacks a mutual defense clause like NATO, and it lacks a secretariat or coordinating body for military security affairs [16]. Its functions are limited to intelligence sharing, not the development of joint military capabilities or operational interoperability. Second, its exclusive membership and limited membership to Anglosphere states make it less able to adapt to the broader geopolitical dynamics of the Indo-Pacific, where non-Anglosphere states such as Japan and India play crucial strategic roles [15]. Third, its structures and practices, largely inherited from the Cold War era, are deemed in need of modernization to address 21st-century threats such as cyberwarfare, disinformation, and high-tech competition [15]. These limitations create a gap: the US and its allies possess robust intelligence networks, but lack a structured forum for coordinating strategic policy and broader security cooperation among the major democracies in the Indo-Pacific.

### Minilateral Initiatives in the Indo-Pacific The Rise of the Quad and the Remaining Strategic Gaps

Addressing the need for a broader coordination platform in the Indo-Pacific, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), comprising the US, Japan, India, and Australia,

has emerged as a significant multilateral initiative. Originally formed informally in 2007, the Quad was revived in 2017 as a direct response to PRC's growing military and economic assertiveness [17. P. 32]. The Quad's primary goal is to promote a shared vision of a “free and open Indo-Pacific”, grounded in a rules-based order, respect for international law, and freedom of navigation [17. P. 212].

Unlike the Five Eyes, the Quad's focus is much broader, encompassing not only maritime security but also issues such as global health, climate change, critical and emerging technologies, and infrastructure development. The Quad serves as a forum for strategic dialogue to bring together major democracies in the region to address common challenges. However, the Quad also has inherent limitations that leave strategic gaps. Its informal, consensus-based nature makes it not a formal military alliance [18]. US officials themselves explicitly state that the Quad is an “informal association” and “not a regional security organization” and “has no military dimension” [17. P. 261]. India's non-aligned status and the reluctance of some members to form an overtly anti-PRC military bloc make it unlikely that the Quad will transform into an “Asian mini-NATO” [19]. Thus, significant strategic gaps remain, despite the Quad's ability to align policies and conduct joint military exercises such as the Malabar Naval Exercise in 2020. However, it lacks a framework for joint development, technology transfer, and in-depth integration of advanced military capabilities among its members.

#### AUKUS: The Culmination of Evolution Towards a Defense Technology Alliance

The formation of AUKUS on September 15, 2021, represents the most significant evolutionary step in the Indo-Pacific security architecture, precisely designed to fill the gaps left by the Five Eyes and Quad agreements. This trilateral security pact between Australia, the UK, and the US is fundamentally different from its predecessors. While the Five Eyes focused on intelligence and the Quad on strategic dialogue, AUKUS explicitly focuses on the development and sharing of advanced military capabilities. As US President Joe Biden stated at the announcement: “This is about investing in our greatest source of strength – our alliances... because the future of our nation and indeed the world depends on a free and open Indo-Pacific that survives and thrives in the decades to come” [20].

The primary goal of AUKUS is to significantly enhance collective deterrence capabilities in the Indo-Pacific as a direct response to PRC's rapid military modernization. The pact has two main pillars. Pillar One is a historic initiative to help Australia acquire a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines, a technology previously shared only by the US with the UK [3]. Pillar Two focuses on cooperation in a range of advanced defense technologies, including artificial intelligence, quantum computing, cyber capabilities, and hypersonic and counter-hypersonic systems [21].

AUKUS effectively complements existing structures. It leverages the foundation of trust and intelligence sharing that the Five Eyes have built over decades, while providing the military-technological “teeth” that the Quad lacks. As illustrated in **Figure 1**, AUKUS membership forms the

core of the broader Anglosphere alliance, demonstrating strategic overlap between various security architectures.

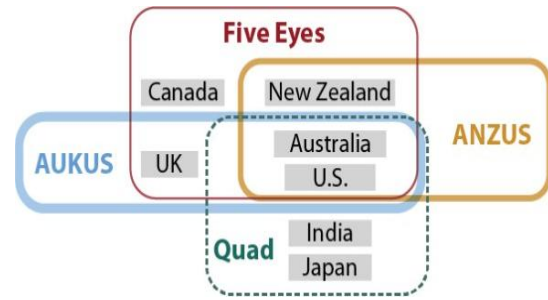


Fig. 1. Overlap of Defense, Intelligence Alliance and Security Groups Membership. Source: Adapted from Congressional Research Service Reports, 2025

Thus, AUKUS is not a replacement for the Five Eyes or the Quad, but rather an evolution that creates a new layer in US strategy. It marks a shift from an alliance based on common defense commitments or policy dialogue to one centered on the integration of the defense industrial base and technological superiority. This move firmly positions Australia as a spearhead in the regional *balance of power strategy*, supported by the transfer of state-of-the-art military technology from the US and the UK, a move that qualitatively changes the security dynamics in the Indo-Pacific.

#### The United States View: PRC as a Systemic Competitor

For the United States, competition with PRC transcends regional power dynamics; it is a fundamental contestation that will define the 21st-century international order. US strategic documents consistently portray PRC not simply as a competitor, but as the only country with the intent and capability to transform the existing world order. The 2022 US National Security Strategy unequivocally states, “PRC is the only competitor with the intent to transform the world order and, simultaneously, the growing economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do so” [6].

This view places PRC in a unique category. Unlike Russia, which is seen as an immediate but disruptive threat, PRC is seen as a more comprehensive and long-term challenge [19]. This perception is based on several key factors. First, PRC's rapid military modernization, particularly the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), now the world's largest navy, is seen as an attempt to challenge US military supremacy in the Western Pacific [22]. Second, PRC's global economic influence through initiatives such as the *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI) is seen as a tool to create dependency and expand its political influence, potentially undermining the US alliance network [23].

This firm stance has also been echoed by senior officials. US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has publicly criticized PRC's “dangerous and coercive actions across the Indo-Pacific” that threaten regional peace and stability, particularly regarding Taiwan and the South China Sea [24]. In this context, AUKUS becomes a logical instrument in US grand strategy. This pact is not only about strengthening

allies, but also part of an integrated *deterrence strategy*, in which the US leverages its technological superiority and the strength of its alliances to create a strategic environment that is unfavorable to PRC. By sharing nuclear-powered submarine technology—an unprecedented move outside the US-UK alliance—Washington is sending a strong signal that it is committed to maintaining the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific and will not allow PRC to dominate the region unchallenged.

### British Perspective: “Global Britain” and the Challenge from PRC

For the UK, involvement in AUKUS is a concrete manifestation of its “*Global Britain*” strategy, a foreign policy vision designed to redefine Britain’s role on the world stage post-Brexit. Central to this strategy is the “*Indo-Pacific tilt*”, a recognition that the world’s economic and strategic center of gravity has shifted eastward, and that the UK must have a credible presence there to protect its interests.

Within this framework, PRC is identified as the most significant security and value challenge. Integrated Review of Security, Defense, Development and Foreign Policy 2021, and its renewal in 2023, in explicit labeling PRC as an “*epoch-defining challenge*” to order international [25]. The document highlights that tensions in the region are rising and the conflict there could have greater global consequences than the conflict in Ukraine.

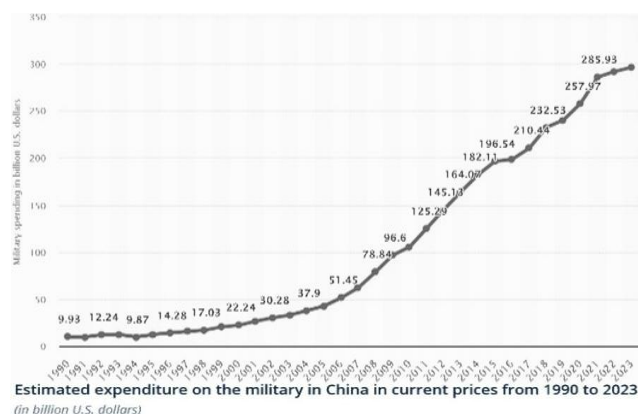
The UK’s involvement in AUKUS is driven by several strategic interests. First, the pact allows the UK to deepen its defense and technology ties with two of its closest allies, the US and Australia, strengthening the Anglosphere alliance network. Second, AUKUS provides a platform for the UK’s defense industry to collaborate on high-tech projects, such as the design of the AUKUS-class submarine, which has the potential to open up new export markets and jobs. Third, by participating in the Indo-Pacific security architecture, the UK can actively shape the strategic environment in a region vital to global trade and security, in line with its ambitions as a global maritime power. Thus, the UK’s perspective on PRC is driven not only by security concerns but also by an ambition to reassert its global relevance, with AUKUS serving as a key vehicle for achieving this goal in the world’s most dynamic region.

### Australia’s Position: Regional Threats and the Urgent Need for Deterrence

Unlike the US and UK, which view PRC through the lens of global competition, for Australia, the challenge posed by PRC is far more immediate, immediate, and existential. Over the past decade, Australian policy has transitioned dramatically from *hedging*, balancing close economic ties with PRC and a security alliance with the US, to asserting a *balance* against PRC [26]. This shift was triggered by a series of Chinese actions that Canberra considered aggressive and coercive.

Economically, PRC imposed punitive tariffs and non-tariff restrictions on key Australian exports such as wine, barley, and coal, after Canberra called for an independent

inquiry into the origins of COVID-19 [26, 27]. This action was perceived as “*coercive diplomacy*” demonstrating Beijing’s readiness to use its economic power as a political weapon. Militarily, the PLA’s rapid modernization and construction of military bases on artificial islands in the South China Sea have fundamentally changed Australia’s regional security environment. Australia’s 2020 Defence Strategic Update concluded that the Indo-Pacific region has become “*more contested*,” and the “*strategic warning time*” for a major conflict is now shorter than ever [28]. PRC’s growing military power, as illustrated by its increasing defense budget, is a major concern for policy-makers in Canberra.



Estimated expenditure on the military in China in current prices from 1990 to 2023 (in billion U.S. dollars)

Fig. 2. PRC’s Military Budget (1990-2023). Source: C. Textor, 2024

In this context, the need for credible deterrence has become a key priority for Australia’s defense policy. The conventional submarines previously planned to be purchased from France are no longer considered adequate to meet these new security challenges. The nuclear-powered submarines offered through AUKUS offer significant qualitative advantages in endurance, speed, and stealth, enabling Australia to project power across the vast Indo-Pacific region.

For Australia, AUKUS is not simply an alliance of choice, but a strategic imperative to safeguard its sovereignty in the face of increasingly dominant and aggressive regional powers. Former Prime Minister Scott Morrison described this move as part of an effort to counter the “*arc of autocracy*” led by PRC [29]. Thus, Australia’s decision to join AUKUS reflects a stark strategic assessment that the era of ambiguity is over, and that its future national security depends on strong deterrence capabilities and a solid alliance with the US and the UK.

The formation of AUKUS is manifestation real from theory balance of power, in which the United States and its allies in a way proactive form coalition for balance strength PRC’s rise in the Indo-Pacific. Instead use approach confrontation military directly, AUKUS implements a balancing strategy through technology transfer defense sophisticated, designed for change calculus strategic in the area in a way term long. However, the steps from Western perspective is considered as effort stabilization This precisely trigger a series reaction chain from its target, PRC, as well as cause dilemma complex security for Southeast Asian countries. This dynamic of action and reaction ultimately has profound implications for the stability and security architecture of the region as a whole.

**AUKUS Pillar: Technology Transfer Mechanism as a Balancing Strategy**

At the core of the AUKUS balance of power strategy is a trilateral commitment to significantly strengthen Australia's defense capabilities, with the transfer of nuclear-powered submarine technology as its main pillar (Pillar 1). This project is multi-decade in nature and is being implemented through a systematic, phased approach designed to ensure Australia is ready in terms of infrastructure, technical capabilities, and human resources to operate a fleet of nuclear submarines.

The implementation of Pillar 1 effectively integrates Australia into the US and UK's undersea defense posture, giving it long-range power projection capabilities that it

previously lacked. Nuclear-powered submarines enable longer, faster, and quieter operations than conventional submarines, a capability considered crucial for operating in the vast Indo-Pacific waters and for counterbalancing PRC's growing submarine fleet.

However, AUKUS is more than just submarines. Pillar 2 of the pact focuses on cooperation in the development of eight other advanced military capabilities, demonstrating the depth of this technological alliance.

These two pillars are collectively designed to build a qualitative technological edge for the alliance, with the ultimate goal of creating a strong and sustainable deterrent effect against PRC. Beijing has consistently criticized AUKUS since its inception, describing it as a provocative act that threatens regional stability.

Table 1

**Implementation of Pillar 1 of AUKUS Nuclear-Powered Submarines**

Phase	Timeline	Activity Details
Phase 1: Initial Preparation	Starting 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased visits by US submarines to Australian ports</li> <li>Placement of Australian military and civilian personnel in US and UK naval and shipbuilding industries</li> <li>Increased visits by British submarines until 2026</li> </ul>
Phase 2: Rotational Force	Starting 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishment of Submarine Rotational Force-West at HMAS Stirling, West Perth</li> <li>Rotation of 1 British Astute-class submarine</li> <li>Rotation of up to 4 US Virginia-class submarines</li> </ul>
Phase 3: Virginia Purchase	Early 2030s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sale of 3 US Virginia-class attack submarines</li> <li>Possible sale of 2 additional ones if needed</li> <li>Subject to approval of the US Congress</li> </ul>
Phase 4: SSN-AUKUS	Delivery UK: late 2030s Delivery Australia: early 2040s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Joint development of the SSN-AUKUS class of submarines</li> <li>Based on the UK's next generation submarine design SNN(R)</li> <li>Using US technology</li> </ul>

Source: C. Edel in The United States, Britain, and Australia Announce the Path Forward for AUKUS, 2023.

Table 2

**Advanced Technology Focus in Pillar 2 of AUKUS**

Technology Area	Description	Status / Example Implementation
Cyber Capabilities	Ability cyber for operation defensive and offensive	Part of the 8 main focus areas
Artificial Intelligence (AI)	AI integration for military operations and decision making	Technology demonstration successfully conducted in May 2023
Quantum Technologies	Quantum technology for communication and computing	Part of the emerging technology focus
Undersea Capabilities	Additional undersea capabilities beyond submarines	Additional focus areas from the initial concept
Electronic Warfare (EW)	Electronic warfare and the electromagnetic spectrum	Existing collaboration through ACURL
Hypersonic & Counter-Hypersonic	Hypersonic weapons and defenses against them	Added as a focus area for 2022
Innovation	Innovation in defense technology development	Focus area general for push breakthrough
Information Sharing	Sharing information and intelligence between partners	The main challenges that need to be overcome

Source: Christianson et al. in AUKUS Pillar Two: Advancing the Capabilities of the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia, 2023.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian accused the alliance of “severely undermining regional peace and stability, aggravating the arms race, and undermining international non-proliferation efforts” [7]. The official Chinese perspective sees AUKUS as a manifestation of a “Cold War mentality” and a US attempt to build an “Asia-Pacific version of NATO” aimed at encircling and containing PRC’s rise [8]. PRC has also argued that the transfer of nuclear submarine technology to non-nuclear-weapon states like Australia is a “case of double standards” that violates the spirit of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

For ASEAN countries, the emergence of AUKUS creates a significant strategic dilemma, exposing rifts in the regional security landscape. Member states' responses can be categorized into two main camps:

**1. Concerned Camp:** Indonesia and Malaysia have been the most vocal in voicing their concerns. Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi stated that Jakarta is “deeply concerned about the ongoing arms race and projection of military power in the region” [5]. Both countries are concerned that AUKUS will trigger an arms race, escalate tensions between great powers, and undermine ASEAN centrality and regional norms such as the Southeast Asia Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ).

**2. Pragmatic / Supportive Camp:** On the other hand, the Philippines and Singapore have shown a more accepting, even supportive, stance. Then-Philippine Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. stated that AUKUS would help “restore and ensure balance rather than disrupt it” [30]. Singapore also viewed AUKUS constructively, hoping the

pact would contribute to regional peace and stability and complement the existing security architecture. This stance is informed by shared concerns about PRC's aggressive actions in the South China Sea, where a stronger military presence from the US and its allies is seen as a necessary counterbalance. Vietnam has also implicitly supported the pact, while Thailand has tended to remain silent to avoid taking sides. This division highlights the challenges to ASEAN's centrality in managing regional security dynamics in the face of intensifying great power competition.

### Implications for the Stability of the Indo-Pacific Region

While AUKUS aims to enhance deterrence and long-term stability from a trilateral perspective, its creation has paradoxically created new dynamics that could potentially lead to instability in the short and medium term. Its main implications can be analyzed through three frameworks: the security dilemma, the arms race, and challenges to regional architecture.

**1. Security Dilemma:** AUKUS is a classic example of a security dilemma. Steps taken by the US, UK, and Australia to bolster their security, which they consider defensive, are perceived as offensive threats by PRC. This triggers PRC to respond by enhancing its own military capabilities, particularly in anti-submarine warfare, which in turn is validated by the AUKUS countries as evidence of PRC's aggressive intentions, creating a cycle of mistrust and escalation that is difficult to break.

**2. Triggering an Arms Race:** PRC's reaction and the concerns voiced by Indonesia and Malaysia are not without foundation. Australia's decision to acquire nuclear-powered submarines, coupled with cooperation in hypersonic and cyber technologies, will almost certainly encourage PRC to accelerate its military modernization. It could also encourage other countries in the region, such as South Korea and Japan, to consider acquiring similar capabilities, potentially triggering a broader regional arms race.

**3. Weakening ASEAN Centrality:** AUKUS, along with other minilateral formats like the Quad, was formed outside the ASEAN framework and without in-depth consultation with its member states. This implicitly challenges ASEAN's central role as the primary architect of regional security. The divergent responses among ASEAN member states to AUKUS further weaken the organization's ability to speak with one voice, risking its marginalization on the region's most pressing strategic security issues.

Overall, the implementation of the *balance of power strategy* through AUKUS has fundamentally changed the Indo-Pacific security landscape. While the pact has strengthened Western alliances and sent a strong deterrent signal to PRC, it has simultaneously increased the risk of miscalculation, triggered a military capability race, and placed Southeast Asian countries in an increasingly difficult strategic position. Regional stability in the post-AUKUS era will depend heavily on how key countries manage this increasingly acute security dilemma.

The formation of the AUKUS defense technology alliance by the US, UK, and Australia is a strategic response to PRC's growing military and economic capabilities in the Indo-Pacific region and its aggressive behavior, particularly in the South China Sea. AUKUS represents a gradual evolution from the Five Eyes intelligence cooperation to the Quad strategic dialogue, culminating in an explicit defense technology alliance (AUKUS). From a trilateral perspective, the US is using an "integrated deterrence" strategy, the UK is realizing its vision of "Global Britain," while Australia is ensuring its sovereignty in the face of the "arc of autocracy."

The transfer of nuclear-powered submarine technology is a key instrument to counterbalance PRC's fleet of 65-70 submarines. Through this alliance, AUKUS has successfully shifted the regional balance of power but created divisions within ASEAN, with Indonesia and Malaysia concerned about an arms race, while the Philippines, Vietnam, and Singapore view it favorably. AUKUS is a crucial step in maintaining the balance of power and preventing unipolar dominance in the Indo-Pacific.

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