

**Practice of Cold War Tactics Under AUKUS Nuclear Alliance:  
China's Security and Regional Predicaments**  
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**Abstract**

*An important security agreement was declared on September 15, 2021, named AUKUS. The strategic alliance between the US, UK, and Australia aims to share advanced defence technology, information sharing and provide Australian forces with nuclear-powered submarines. Focus intensifies on the partnership's ultimate objective and its potential consequences for other nations, especially: What are Chinese and ASEAN security implications of AUKUS alliance; and how it has reshaped the regional security structure? This paper is aimed to analyse the China's and ASEAN strategic calculation of AUKUS alliance. Since, China perceives itself as the focal point of the newly formed alliance. The ASEAN typically perceives the announcement of AUKUS as exacerbating the geopolitical situation in the region, however individual reactions may differ. The key findings of the papers show that China objects to the deal, contending that the existence of the trilateral AUKUS alliance has the potential to harm the security framework; polarisation of region; destabilise the established balance of power mechanism; incite a competition for weapons; and undermine the concept of international non-proliferation especially the Nuclear Free Zone status of ASEAN region as a result of the advancement of nuclear technology. This study employs qualitative research methodology, using both primary and secondary data sources.*

**Keywords:** AUKUS, US, UK, Australia, China, ASEAN, Indo-Pacific, Nuclear-Powered-Submarine (SSN) Technology.

**Introduction**

Power struggle in international political arena is inevitable phenomenon. The revisionism of yet another containment policy, this time against China, seems unfolding in the Indo-Pacific region. On September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the leaders of the United States (US), United Kingdom (UK) and Australia announced through joint statement the creation of “an enhanced trilateral security partnership” named AUKUS. Under the AUKUS partnership, the signatories agreed to extend cooperation in diplomatic, defence and security spheres in the Indo-Pacific region to meet the requirements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges. In this regard, AUKUS partnership has pledged cooperation in different areas of defence and security. It includes:

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enhancement of joint inter-operability and capability by sharing information, industrial bases, supply chain, cooperation in quantum technology, cyber and undersea capability, and artificial intelligence (AI) (Abas, 2021). The most important provision of the AUKUS partnership which indulges the Asia-Pacific and Indo-Pacific states to revisit the policy approach is the transfer of nuclear-powered-submarine (SSN) technology to Australia (White House, 2023).

The new developments in the region have antagonised many policy calculations of different regional and international stakeholders. The established balance of power in Asia-Pacific region, indeed, has shifted after the announcement of AUKUS partnership. The apprehension, indeed, of regional actors in igniting asymmetric diplomatic and security race is natural outcome in international anarchic power struggle. The Chinese Foreign Ministry expresses grave concerns and termed AUKUS alliance as “extremely irresponsible” (Cheng, 2022). The ministry interpreted the AUKUS development initially in four major areas of concerns. First, it acts as a starting point for arms race in general; and, second, it has the capacity to indulge states in nuclear proliferation in Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region specially. AUKUS has posed much threat to the constructed non-nuclear proliferation paradigm of ASEAN states. In this regard, the multilateralism security approach based on the agreed premise and commitment of ‘Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapon Free Zone’ has greater chances to alter from existing nature. Third, AUKUS has potentially changed the security order of the Indo-Pacific region. The established power balance was based on the conventional military defence systems and small-scale security policy design; however, with the execution of AUKUS in the region, the conventional warfare weapons would be replaced by the technologically lethal systems (Lecaj, 2022). Fourth, AUKUS in near future will disrupt the regional stability. Since from South China Sea (SCS) disputes to South Asian conflicts, there exist multiple spotlights which can pamper direct conflict at any instance. However, the regional organisations, bilateral and multilateral agreements, and, almost equal military capabilities have side-lined and normalised those conflicting interests. With the transfer of nuclear technology under AUKUS alliance, the regional stability possibly be disturbed. The main reason to such ends is the drastic imbalance in the military capabilities in which some will overweight other after acquiring the nuclear or other modern weaponry as response to AUKUS.

In terms of regional politics, the policy concerns under AUKUS for China on both South-east and South Asian political fronts, are more critical in nature. The Southeast Asian political front, on the hand, China’s interprets the development as direct move which can trigger military confrontation because it is in divergence with Beijing’s Taiwan Strait and SCS interests. On the other hand, the mix responses

to AUKUS alliance, with some in support and other in opposition, has much potential to alter Chinese political and military calculation especially in ASEAN region. On the South-Asian political front, India at first has tacit support, but later-on at General Conference of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in September 2022, despite Russia and China strong opposition, the former showed firm support to trilateral security partnership under AUKUS and consequent transfer of SSN-technology to Australia (Lecaj, 2022).

### Literature Review

Michael Shoebridge in his article titled “What is AUKUS and what is it not? How does it connect to the Quad, the Sydney Dialogue, ASEAN and Indo-Pacific security?” described the multiple responses from different ASEAN states and China’s perspective of AUKUS especially in the paradigm of security and stability in the said region. Moreover, the article gave emphasis on the Japanese and Indian approaches to AUKUS alliance and how it will help create an understanding between Quad countries to align with US objectives of minimising the China’s existence and influence in the Indo-Pacific region (Shoebridge, 2021). Poornima Vijaya’s journal article entitled “Australia’s role in the Quad and its crumbling ties with China” further explains the key political shift in the region to alter the Chinese expansionist design policy in the Indo-Pacific region; how the AUKUS alliance will further facilitate the Quad strategies? And, these two alliances have much potential to ignite regional instability by engaging China into many fold conflicts (Vijaya, 2021). Similarly, Mariane Olivia Delanova’s also explains the concerns of regional actors like China, Indonesia and Malaysia concerns of possible regional instability and arms race are most likely outcomes of AUKUS alliance in his article named “Impact of the AUKUS trilateral defence pact on the Indo-Pacific regional condition” (Delanova, 2021).

Along with Asian community, Akmal Tawakal in his article titled “Indo-Pacific and European Union security dynamics regarding the AUKUS alliance” discusses the grievances of European community on the transfer of nuclear technology to Australia as well. The core argument of the article explains how the SSN-technology transfer has violated the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which will have spill-over effect thereby providing grounds for other regional stakeholders to follow the same fate (Tawakal, 2022). Manqing Cheng presented a unique perspective of AUKUS alliance in article named “AUKUS: the changing dynamics and its regional implications”. Cheng’s in a comparative approach describes the future of AUKUS alliance on regional stability by comparing it with Australia, New Zealand and US named ANZUS treaty ratified in 1951 on the same magnitude for security purposes. However, Cheng suggests that like the predecessor AUZUS, Australia should learn lesson from the New

Zealand foot-steps because the political and security environment has witnessed more stability than indulging in the nuclear agreements. He provided the historic theme that how New Zealand in 1984 declared the state as 'nuclear-free zone' and refused to allow the nuclear-powered submarine of the US to visit her ports. However, Australia and US continued following the treaty obligations despite of the fact that the later (US) had halted and suspended treaty obligation toward New Zealand in 1986 (Cheng, 2022). Kristen E. Eichensehr gives emphasis on the role and political objectives of US under AUKUS alliance in his writing published as "The US, Australia and the UK announces 'AUKUS' alliance focused on Indo-Pacific security". He provides an interesting image of how US has played its political-cum-military cards to not only attain the objective of minimising Chinese influence in the region, but also realised on regional stakeholders that the concept of regional hegemony cannot fully subsidises the international hegemonic order (Eichensehr, 2022).

In article "Coherence at last? Transatlantic cooperation in response to the geostrategic challenge of China", Kolja Raube and R. V. Rubio give ample insight on the US policy of Transatlantic cooperation; how it dwindled between coherence and incoherence cooperation; and, why US needs to change it constantly by applying different approaches. The article examined two case studies of: Joint sanction policy of US and shift toward AUKUS alliance. In case of the AUKUS alliance, US failed to achieve a coherent response from Transatlantic community especially in the paradigm of mutual cooperation dealing the China's strategic influence in the region. To such ends, US opted Australia and UK instead. In such scenario of distrust or strict regionalism approach of Southeast Asian nations even has the potential to weaken the AUKUS strategy as well (Raube, 2022). On contrary, Donat Rexha presented the complete opposite picture in his article named "The AUKUS international legal agreement and its impact on international institutions and security". The article explains optimistic approach of the AUKUS alliance and considered it a blueprint of US foreign policy which has the capacity to alter the course of outdated unipolar international security order which has been challenged by China and Russia especially after dawn of 21<sup>st</sup> century. This alliance is aimed to redirect the partners approaches of security interests which have been cosseted in other alternative alliances. Moreover, to best fit the aspiration of European Community, strong allies, who shares more concerns about Chinese economic and military surge in global security order, AUKUS calculation will normalise the existing uncertainty and instability (Lecaj, 2022).

Similar opinions are shared by Audry A. D. Novita in article titled "AUKUS alliance: US strategic interest in Indo-Pacific". The article describes the Biden's policy approach which is based on

building new allies and alliances. Indo-Pacific region and the importance of AUKUS alliance has many dimensions: first, it is aimed to avoid any possible conflict in SCS; second, protection of allies through direct military approach in Asia-Pacific region; third, containing China's expansionist design; fourth, challenging Chinese supremacy in the Indo-Pacific region; fifth, securing strong presence in the region; and, lastly, the region has geostrategic and geoeconomics importance for US in contemporary evolving global security order (Novita, 2022).

#### *Theoretical Framework*

Securitisation Theory is applied to this research article to best describe and analyse the core essence of security issues of different states and how it shapes the behaviour of different actors in the international politics. Securitisation Theory as a concept in international politics investigate those areas in which actors especially states transform different threats and challenges into the matter of national or international 'security' for justifying extraordinary measures. This theory, primarily developed and presented by the Copenhagen School, particularly by authors such as Ole Waever and Barry Buzan (1998), contends that securitisation happens when an actor considers something to be a threat to its survival, thus legitimizing behaviours that would otherwise be considered extreme or out of the ordinary. Key elements of the theory focus on four main steps for an actor to opt any extraordinary measures under the 'security' umbrella. Those are:

First, *Speech Act*: Securitisation starts with a "speech act," in which a state or other actor declares a certain problem to be an existential threat. This may have to do with military, political, environmental, or financial issues. Second, *Referent Object*: What is in danger is the referent object. It might be state itself, identity and values, territorial integrity, or even national sovereignty. Third, *Audience Acceptance*: The audience (the general public, other governments, or international organizations) must acknowledge the problem as a real security risk for securitisation to be successful. This acceptance is necessary for the securitisation process to succeed. Fourth, *Extraordinary Measures*: The employment of extraordinary measures, such as military force, the suspension of regular political processes, or other types of exceptional intervention, is permitted once a problem has been securitised (Buzan, 1998).

Securitisation theory can best explain both dimensions: for instance, how the US, UK and Australia see Chinese expansionist policy design in Indo-Pacific generally and SCS is security threat and consequent extraordinary measures in the shape of AUKUS alliance; similarly, how China's interpret the presence of AUKUS states in the Indo-Pacific region as security threat to national sovereignty and territorial integrity and consequent policy measures taken to protect it.

***Securitisation theory in the context of AUKUS alliance***

*Framing threat under Speech Acts:* First, it could be argued that the establishment of AUKUS was a direct reaction to the increasing perceived danger that China was posing in the Indo-Pacific area. The military build-up, territorial expansion, and influence of China in the region have been repeatedly presented by leaders of the US, UK, and Australia as grave threats to international law, regional stability, and their own national security. Second, the necessity to defend the Indo-Pacific region against coercive and destabilizing acts has been emphasized in speeches and policy documents that support the AUKUS alliance. For instance, the US in many occasions has stated that it is critical to avoid militarization of disputed regions such as the SCS, resist China's increasing influence in regional affairs and upholds freedom of navigation.

*What is going to be protected as Referent Object*

First, Australia's national security is a referent object, particularly in light of its close proximity to China and the growing geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific region. Despite their long geographical distance, UK and US see maintaining a stable power balance in the area and defending their allies as essential to their own national security. Second, the preservation of the current regional order, which is supported by international law, mainly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), is part of the larger referent object for AUKUS. Members of alliance view China's actions as an attempt to subvert and disrupt this order, therefore they feel a need to respond with collective security.

*Legitimising the alliance as Audience Acceptance*

First, domestic audiences – Government representatives in all three nations have worked to win political and popular support for AUKUS by highlighting how existential the dangers posed by China are. This framing aids in justifying the alliance's significant demands for political and financial commitments, like as Australia's purchase of nuclear-powered submarines. Second, international community – the members of the alliance have also worked to win over other regional players, especially in Southeast Asia and the larger Indo-Pacific area. Although opinions have been divided and some ASEAN members have expressed worry about the possibility of an arms race, Australia, UK and US have maintained that AUKUS is essential to preserving peace and stability in the region.

*Justifying military and nuclear technology transfer as Extraordinary Measures*

First, nuclear submarine technology (SSN) transfer; and, second, advanced military technologies sharing. AUKUS is focused on collaboration in fields like cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence, and quantum technologies, in addition to submarines. These are unusual measures, reflecting the gravity of the perceived threats.

*Securitisation Theory in the Context of China's Security and Regional Implications*

*Speech Acts:* By highlighting historical claims (such as the Nine-Dash Line) and the necessity to defend maritime rights from foreign incursion, Chinese authorities and state media persistently portray the Indo-Pacific region as crucial to China's national security. As an essential defensive precaution, the building of artificial islands and their subsequent militarization are advocated.

*Referent Object:* Indo-Pacific as political entity or region is of fundamental importance to China, and the country views its territorial claims there as a matter of national pride, economic stability (because of the region's possible oil and gas reserves), and sovereignty.

*Audience Acceptance:* At home, the Chinese people believe the government's claims that it must take action in the SCS to safeguard national interests. Even if many nations reject China's territorial claims, the Chinese government continues to utilize security rhetoric to legitimize its policies and prevent other nations from standing up to it.

*Extraordinary Measures:* As a result of its efforts to secure Indo-Pacific especially SCS, China has increased its military presence there, deploying naval forces, building military installations on artificial islands, and enforcing maritime claims by coast guard and navy patrols. China claims it must take these measures in order to protect its territory from outside forces, especially the US and regional rivals.

**Methodology**

This study utilises qualitative research methodology keeping in view the nature of the topic. Writer uses interpretivist and analytical descriptive research method in analysing the different aspects of security arises from AUKUS alliance and how it is influencing the behaviour of China in the Indo-Pacific region. The reason for utilising the mentioned approach to give emphasis on constructing sense making which draws certain conclusions based on different attributes instead of giving focus on testing hypothesis and making different predictions. Both primary and secondary data is utilised in this research work. For the primary data collection, semi-structured (open-ended questions) interviews have been carried out from different

academicians of different universities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Islamabad, and defence analysts. Moreover, the government official documents in shape of 'Fact Sheet' or official policy release by US, China and other related stakeholder states are also put into consideration. Similarly, for secondary data, different print and online news columns, journal article and video statements dealing different aspects of AUKUS alliance and China's counter measures are utilised for this study.

#### *US Calculation of AUKUS alliance in Indo-Pacific*

The China's economic and military surge under President Xi's leadership, indeed, has played the role of 'security dilemma' for US unipolar international order. US being surrounded in many-faced challenges at international theatre, there is general consensus of declining US role developed in many key stakeholders' mind. It is evident from the fact that in Europe, Russia has challenged the US international hegemony; while, Middle East and Africa are witnessing increase Chinese role; and, the case is no-different in Southeast Asian region. Under such circumstances, US policy of AUKUS alliance reflect many interests to be achieved under said alliance.

First, there exist a perspective leverage of Chinese influence in many states than tilting or aligning with US. The China's strategy focused on military or political expansion in the sugar-coat of economic and development tactics which create opposing behaviours toward US engagement. With AUKUS alliance in the region, US is trying to divert such perception by engaging China militarily. Second, the Cold War tactics though outdated but still effective up to some extent is once again on the international stage. For-instance, opening of multiple conflict fronts to engage and divert the competitor in meaningless political developments to halt China's economic and military progress. Similarly, Cold War mentality also consist the idea of increasing country's military and defence budget spending to pressurise the general economic spectrum. Moreover, the idea of encirclement was the core element of containment policy seems functioning again in said region. Third, the declining international prestige of US is another factor which drives her to engage actively in the Indo-Pacific region. Along with many other interests, US motive of AUKUS alliance also dispatch the image of marking its presence at the international stage (Novita, 2022).

Fourth, counterbalancing China's influence in Southeast Asian and Indo-Pacific is placed imminent interest of AUKUS alliance. This is possible by boosting regional security and strong military presence. When it comes to regional security, AUKUS is considered as check on China's increasingly aggressive military posture in the Indo-Pacific. Through this alliance, The US hopes to strengthen the military might of important regional allies while also



countering China, which it sees as a strategic rival. Supporting Australia's military might, particularly with nuclear-powered submarines, allows the US to bolster its influence and presence in Indo-Pacific. Fifth, US objective of AUKUS hold the interest of strengthening allies by deepening ties with regional states and technology sharing in different spheres of defence. Fifth, AUKUS bears the interests of maintaining the maritime security in Indo-Pacific region. Navigation freedom of all vital waterways especially SCS is top priority for the US. One-way AUKUS helps protect Australia's strategic maritime lanes from danger - especially from China - is by supplying the country with nuclear-powered submarines. In addition, AUKUS has the capacity of deterrence. Indo-Pacific benefits from the stability that AUKUS members bring to the table through their strengthened military capabilities, which dissuade potential rivals (Reuters, 2021).

Sixth, AUKUS seek to accomplish the promotion of rule-based international order in the region. Since, US, UK and Australia all share a dedication to a rules-based international order, US seeks to promote adherence to international law, especially in disputed regions like the SCS, by bolstering the defence capabilities of its allies. The US also sees AUKUS as a partnership among democratic nations, which helps to advance human rights and democratic values in the region. Lastly, AUKUS holds economic interests of trade routes protection and defence industry facilitation. The Indo-Pacific area is strategically important for international trade, and the US stands to gain economically from keeping these routes open and secure. The defence industry stands to gain from the partnership's shared goals of research and development, innovation, and contract opportunities for the US military. By aiding in maintaining peace in the region, AUKUS assists to protect these economic interests (Tawakal, 2022).

#### *China's Security Concerns*

AUKUS constitutes a concentrated and substantial challenge for China, signifying a further advancement towards establishing a "Asia-Pacific version of NATO." Although official statements do not overtly reference China, the connotations are evident. A critical question emerges: Can China, in contrast to Russia, successfully address this development? The probabilities appear advantageous, considering China's expanding influence and strategic emphasis. Since the end of WWII, Britain and Australia have continuously engaged in practically all US overseas military operations, establishing themselves as the closest allies in the Five Eyes alliance. These three nations possess a shared origin and exhibit no substantial cultural or value disparities. They have sustained a consistent agreement in international policies, with minimal significant clashes. Nonetheless, Australia and Britain both are advancing their respective interests. The UK aims to enhance its international influence post-Brexit, but the US,

facing diminished Anglo-American relations and domestic cultural issues stemming from the Trump administration, perceives AUKUS as a means to restore a "white alliance" and regain its regional leadership (Cheng, 2022).

The second concern is: to what extent is China threatened? China perceives the nuclear submarine as an imminent threat to its security and to global peace and stability. Two primary considerations exist. The initial category is military. A nuclear-powered submarine represents sophisticated military prowess, hence exacerbating regional instability. Since assuming office, the Biden administration has advocated for "value diplomacy," establishing democratic alliances and what China views as a "Indo-Pacific counterpart to NATO" intended to encircle it. AUKUS may exacerbate China's apprehensions, potentially acting as a prototype for enhanced military collaboration. The Quad may enhance its military alliances, and Japan might pursue nuclear submarine technology via the US-Japan partnership or trilateral cooperation with the US and Australia. China is expected to implement certain actions. Moreover, adjacent countries experiencing heightened insecurity may be driven to enhance their military capabilities, so exacerbating regional tensions (Takahashi, 2021).

China is concerned that the inclusion of a nuclear clause in AUKUS could result in a fresh regional arms race, as other nations may also aspire to acquire such capabilities. China has voiced apprehensions regarding the potential of AUKUS to weaken worldwide efforts to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. China argues that this alliance establishes a precedent for the exchange of delicate nuclear technology, even if it is intended for non-military objectives. Such speech acts, presumably, also entail additional security issues. For example, AUKUS is expected to enhance the US and its allies' capacity to carry out freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs) in the SCS, which will challenge China's territorial assertions. China is concerned that the improved naval capabilities resulting from the AUKUS agreement will result in more frequent and assertive Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs), which will weaken its authority over the disputed waterways. If the development proceeds in the same manner as navy exercises, it is inevitable that tensions in the Taiwan Strait would escalate. This is because China perceives AUKUS as intensifying the military danger to its objective of reunifying Taiwan. A primary security concern for China is the potential for these nations to intervene more assertively in the case of a conflict regarding Taiwan.

The collaboration in technology and intelligence can increase the severity of cybersecurity risks. AUKUS encompasses substantial cooperation in cyber capabilities, AI and other cutting-edge technologies. China expresses concerns about the possibility for the

US and its partners to strengthen their intelligence and cyber warfare capabilities, which might pose a threat to Chinese military and government infrastructure. Intelligence sharing can have a significant impact on the Chinese military operations in the SCS. This has the potential to enhance the capacity of AUKUS members to observe and counter Chinese military operations (Davidson, 2021).

China perceives AUKUS as a considerable strategic threat, destabilizing the strategic equilibrium and intensifying regional conflict. Nuclear-powered submarines, if stationed in the SCS, would serve as critical elements of the integrated air, surface, and underwater anti-submarine network of the US and its allies, specifically aimed at countering China's nuclear submarines. Some commentators think that this could compromise China's nuclear retaliation capacity, strategic deterrence, and overall strategic equilibrium. Furthermore, China is apprehensive about a "Asia-Pacific Russification." The US' stance regarding China parallels NATO's 1990s policy of isolating Russia from Europe. Consequently, Russia wields minimal influence over European security and encounters disagreements with the West, even over reasonable concerns. Economically, Russia has been marginalized. The ambiguity of Russia's long-term strategies in Europe persists, however the intensity and ramifications of this dynamic may soon become evident (Cheng, 2022).

#### *Asia-Pacific States Attitude toward AUKUS Worry's China*

The majority of Indo-Pacific nations endorse or remain neutral towards AUKUS, indicating common apprehensions regarding China's expanding military capabilities and aspirations. This assistance could enable AUKUS to recruit additional partners as a framework for peacetime deterrence. The Asia-Pacific's perspectives on AUKUS have shown a transformation in regional security strategies. Japan, a close ally of the US with a strained relationship with China, ardently endorses AUKUS. In February 2023, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida informed Australia's PM Anthony Albanese that AUKUS will bolster peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific in light of a deteriorating security landscape. This corresponds with Japan's National Security Strategy, revealed in December 2022, which characterized China's military endeavours as "unprecedented and the foremost strategic challenge." Japan's primary concerns encompass China's assertion over the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands and Beijing's escalating military pressure on Taiwan. Although Japan is often perceived as a suitable candidate for AUKUS – occasionally termed "JAUKUS"—Tokyo has not formally expressed a stance on membership. The adoption of nuclear technology for combat is improbable due to significant internal political opposition stemming from the historical context of World War II. Japan may prefer non-military AUKUS initiatives, such as quantum computing, as they are

more attractive and politically viable (Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023).

South Korea, a significant US ally, has refrained from commenting on AUKUS, indicating its concentration on North Korea and its intricate balancing between US and China. South Korean President Yoon Suk-Yeol has explicitly opposed China's regional aspirations. In June 2022, he became the inaugural South Korean leader to attend and address a NATO gathering, where the primary focus was on opposing China and Russia. Under Yoon's leadership, South Korea may contemplate joining the Quad, a security alliance designed to oppose China. His administration has initiated efforts to become part of the US-led Chips 4 alliance with Taiwan and Japan in an effort to expand semiconductor production away from China. Although Yoon previously rejected the necessity for nuclear-powered submarines during his 2021 candidacy, North Korea's tests of submarine-launched ballistic missiles may compel him to reassess his position. South Korean authorities have discreetly indicated interest in the strategic benefits of nuclear-powered submarines. Public opinion favours more stringent actions; 71% of South Koreans advocate for the reinstatement of nuclear weapons to oppose North Korea. In January 2023, Yoon proposed that South Korea may require the development of its own nuclear arsenal. Although AUKUS-like agreements may advantage Seoul in the future, Washington is improbable to support such aspirations in the immediate future (Sim, 2023).

Taiwan, frequently subjected to pressure from China, has explicitly embraced AUKUS. In March, Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs endorsed the alliance, asserting that AUKUS will augment deterrence capabilities in the Indo-Pacific and contribute to the preservation of regional peace and stability. Taiwan perceives AUKUS as a mechanism to enhance and broaden defence cooperation, thereby fortifying deterrence against prospective threats or utilizing the alliance in a future confrontation. The Philippines is a significant proponent of AUKUS, serving as a crucial US ally confronting Chinese influence in the SCS (Taiwan), 2023). Manila perceives AUKUS as advantageous to regional security. In 2021, Philippine Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. argued that AUKUS should seek to restore and sustain equilibrium in the region rather than disrupt it (Reuters, 2021).

AUKUS receives cautious backing from ASEAN nations. Singapore hasn't commented since last month's San Diego summit. However, Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and then-Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison discussed the new deal in 2021, hoping it would "contribute constructively to the peace and stability of the region and complement the regional architecture" (CNA, 2021). Vietnam, a growing US security partner, has been cautious but helpful. Vietnam warned that "nuclear energy must be

developed and used for peaceful purposes” in 2021, but did not oppose AUKUS. After the AUKUS meeting, a Hanoi official said “peace, stability, cooperation, and development in the region and the world is the common goal of every country, and countries are responsible for contributing to this goal.” Reading between the lines, China must contribute (Anh, 2021).

Indonesia and Malaysia, despite voicing concerns, seem improbable to categorically oppose AUKUS. Their public apprehensions predominantly focus on the possible hazards of nuclear proliferation. Last month, Indonesia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed its expectation that Australia will fulfil its commitments under NPT and IAEA Safeguards. Malaysia, despite being more outspoken in its criticism, has recognized the defence need of nations. AUKUS must strictly comply with regulations governing the operation of nuclear-powered submarines in its territorial seas. Malaysia reiterated its warning against measures that may incite an arms race or jeopardize regional peace and security, emphasizing the necessity of preserving stability in the Indo-Pacific (TheStar, 2023).

Cambodia, strongly allied with China, has articulated apprehensions regarding AUKUS but has not categorically dismissed it. In 2021, Foreign Minister and Deputy PM Prak Sokhonn communicated to Australia that Cambodia, as a war-torn country, anticipated that AUKUS would refrain from exacerbating unhealthy rivalries or intensifying tensions. Recently, Prime Minister Hun Sen inquired why Cambodia accepted AUKUS' guarantees against the introduction of nuclear weapons in the region, while Western powers disregarded Cambodia's assertions that Chinese building at a southern naval station was non-military. Thailand, a US treaty partner in Southeast Asia, has maintained silence over AUKUS. This certainly indicates its endeavour to sustain amicable relations with China, which Thailand perceives more favourably than numerous other ASEAN countries (Press Release, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Kingdom of Cambodia, 2021).

### **Conclusion**

AUKUS is a trilateral defence pact between UK, Australia, and US, designed to mitigate China's expanding influence, especially in the Indo-Pacific. China's assertive efforts in this region have compelled the US and its allies to implement strategic steps to discourage and constrain its ascendancy. China perceives these initiatives as akin to Cold War strategies, alleging that AUKUS promotes regional instability and exacerbates an arms race. The accord is frequently denounced as "old wine in a new cup," with assertions that it constitutes a Western provocation that jeopardizes regional tranquillity. The development of SSN under AUKUS is perceived by some as a front for the US and its allies to promote a security agenda consistent with their overarching geostrategic objectives.

Cooperation and peace, as opposed to power and deterrence relations, are essential for the advancement of the Indo-Pacific area. The Asia-Pacific region, propelled by the collaborative endeavours of its nations, has emerged as a dynamic and promising area, making substantial contributions to world economic growth. This region possesses a unified vision of tranquillity, advancement, and collaboration. To realize this vision, stakeholders—particularly major powers—must transcend Cold War mentalities, discontinue military deterrence and war, and prevent the initiation of arms races that undermine regional stability. Western nations, especially Anglophone democracies, frequently emphasize dominance and control, neglecting the ascent of developing powers such as China. The history of the Asia-Pacific region highlights the challenges and significance of attaining peace, which must be upheld by all stakeholders. Alliances such as AUKUS, established beyond regional interests, may incite new tensions and destabilise the area, potentially resulting in catastrophic outcomes.

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