

THE AUKUS ALLIANCE. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES

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Abstract: Major state actors are in a constant race for supremacy in different environments, which offers new perspectives on international relations and also changes the old world order by reversing roles in the global ranking of political and military importance. Massive investments are also being made to modernise militaries, resulting in changes in international strategic importance.

Security is the most important factor for a state, and to this end consistent measures are taken to ensure optimal conditions for the way of life of the population. Of course, this cannot be achieved individually by each state, but it is the *de novo* task of achieving close links across state borders in order to achieve the goals of security and stability. The Second World War led to the creation of two of the world's most important organisations, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the United Nations, but the current international situation has led to the formation of new alliances, including the AUKUS (Australia-United Kingdom-United States of America) tri-partite that has emerged in response to the rapid development of technology and changes in economic and military power centres.

The world seems to be undergoing geopolitical, geostrategic and economic change more rapidly than at any time since the Cold War, which is why the vigilance of international organisations, whose objectives are world peace and security, must be at its highest in order to keep pace with these rapid developments, which seem to generate a climate of unpredictability.

Keywords: peace, security environment, AUKUS, China, United States, Australia, United Kingdom

*Motto: „ A fact is only then history
when none of its roots touch the present.”
Nicolae IORGA*

Introduction

At the international environment, the actors who compete to have control and power over different fields and channels, that allow them to achieve the established goals, are forced to create interstate bond that can provide them with safety and security in obtaining results as close as possible to the initial objectives. In this sense, they resorted to the establishing of formal connections, as alliances, so that one of the newest

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partnerships is represented by the AUKUS alliance; this one was announced as a pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America on September 15 2021 and that was provided for cooperation in several areas between the three states, including: artificial intelligence, the development of underwater capabilities and electronic warfare.

In as much as the instability at the level of international relations has increased, the need for the realization of this pact was constituted, as the main factor, by the security environment in the Pacific Area under the influence of China's tendencies to expand its sphere of control at an economic and military level over the countries in that region and with greater reach over other areas of the globe.

The threat posed to some Pacific Ocean countries by China, which is showing increasing military development, has prompted some of them, such as South Korea, Japan and Australia, to make massive efforts to equip their armed forces with equipment that can deter and defend themselves against the hostile intentions of the People's Republic of China. Australia has thus felt the need to expand its military capabilities beyond the dependence on current equipment that hampers its fleet when it is operating missions at considerable distances from supply sites, and has therefore embarked on a programme to equip itself with nuclear-powered submarines.

Given a number of characteristics of the three states, Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, such as geographical location, economic strength, military power, international influence and long-term interests, we can situate this alliance as a strategic one. The aim is their cooperation in raising the level of security in the Pacific area through the acquisition of nuclear-capable submarines by Australia. Another reason behind the pact is the expansionist attitude of the People's Republic of China, which is seeking both economic and military influence over other states, trying to subjugate them and draw them into its sphere of influence.

The Pacific area needed more recognition from a geostrategic point of view, all the more so since the events of recent years have exposed a series of circumstances in which the People's Republic of China has been the protagonist, attempting intimidation actions with the aim of conquering the Taiwan area, so this agreement, concluded by the Australia-UK-USA triplet, appears precisely to combat the intentions of the great giant from the Pacific Ocean.

It is worth noting that the acceptance of the sharing of nuclear-powered submarine technology by the US and UK with other states comes for the first time some six decades after the conclusion of the nuclear pact between the two in 1958. It also underlines the critical security situation in

the Pacific and the geostrategic and military importance attributed to Australia.

The creation of this new alliance comes at a time when the international framework of inter-state ties is about to take new turns. If until almost autumn 2021 the most important military focus was on the Middle East, after September 15, coinciding with the signing of the trilateral pact between the three states, the attention of the major state actors will be focused on two areas with a strong economic, geopolitical and geostrategic impact, Eastern Europe and the Pacific.

On the one hand, the European Union is in an ongoing attempt to recover economically from the 'separation' of the United Kingdom and the aftermath of the COVID-19 virus, factors that have caused difficulties for even the largest European economies, which felt increasingly dependent on economic ties with the People's Republic of China, actions that were in contradiction with US policy.

On the other hand, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation finds itself unable to manage the tensions that lie beyond its sphere of action, thus a predominantly diplomatic crisis arises, offering the possibility of setting up this new international framework by giving Australia a status it has never had both regionally and internationally.

1. AUKUS strategic objectives

The main interest of the United Nations is to maintain world peace as it committed itself to at the end of the Second World War, and the effort is all the greater in the current context of international relations, with Russia's war in Eastern Europe and the threat from the People's Republic of China in the Pacific. Although there is already an alliance in the region consisting from the United States of America, Japan, India and Australia, and its goal is common to that of AUKUS, namely a free world in the Indo-Pacific region, based on stability and security in the region, the QUAD does not use the same means to achieve its objectives, but rather relies on diplomatic and political methods to accomplish its mission, being an alliance open to other members. The QUAD¹ is the name most often used in the literature and online environment and serves as an acronym for the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, to which the four countries mentioned above belong. With a relatively recent appearance, in 2007, this dialogue, initiated by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe², was conferred, in the international sphere, the quality of response to the growth of the economic

¹ Jagannath P. Panda, *Quad Plus and Indo-Pacific*, Routledge, New York, 2022, p. 1.

² Ash Rossiter, Brendon J. Cannon, *Quad in the Indo-Pacific: Role of Informality in Countering China* in *Institute for Security and Development Policy*, February 7, 2023, p. 3.

and military power of the People's Republic of China, which attributed to this diplomatic arrangement the name of "Asian NATO". AUKUS, on the other hand, is a much more militarised but non-military alliance whose short-term aim is to increase Australia's capabilities through the help of the United States and the United Kingdom.

Ultimately, the AUKUS alliance can be said to have emerged as a complement to the QUAD, which resulted from the very fact that, as a diplomatic dialogue, the QUAD had no solid leverage for eventual military development among its members. Even after the "resuscitation" of the alliance in 2017³, under the Trump administration, its objectives were to create an economic balance in the Indo-Pacific through political and diplomatic channels. The emergence of what is now known as QUAD PLUS is a legacy left by the Trump administration and continued by the Biden administration, which maintains the same vision of how to counter China's expansionist initiatives in the economic-military sphere, but which has focused primarily on defending against COVID-19 and is expected to continue to take factually strengthened action on maintaining the state of economic and military security in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

To come back to the title of this article, I will now analyze the main strategic objectives of the AUKUS alliance according to the official website of the US Department of State⁴, giving as clear a picture as possible of the intentions of all three states:

- 1. Enhancing security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region;*
- 2. Supporting Australia's defence capability;*
- 3. Strengthening trilateral relations between the US, UK and Australia;*
- 4. Promoting technological development and innovation.*

Enhancing security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region is an objective which, as mentioned earlier, is also reflected in the Quad Four alliance. The way to fulfil this objective is different for the two alliances, which is why the Quad has had a break of almost a decade, or rather stagnation, a period of passivity largely due to Australia, which did not want to be directly involved, given its economic relations with China. Activity in this alliance resumed in 2017 at the insistence of the Trump administration and later the Biden administration, which saw the need to build a strong Indo-Pacific pivot to blunt as much as possible the expansion of China's

³ Jagannath P. Panda, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁴ ***, *Implementation of the Australia – United Kingdom – United States Partnership (AUKUS)*, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/-2022/04/05/fact-sheet-implementation-of-the-australia-united-kingdom-united-states-partnership-aucus/>, accessed on 01.04.2023.

influence. For AUKUS, the way to increase the level of stability and security in the Pacific area is through a military development of Australia by equipping it with capabilities in the form of nuclear-powered submarines that can operate independently over much longer distances than conventional submarines. Of course, the first country to oppose this pact is China, because it is the first country to be targeted when it comes to security and stability, as it is seen as the state that is endangering these matters in South-East Asia. Australia has stood by the United States in every major war the United States has fought in the 20th century, and this is one of the most important factors that laid the foundation for the start of this partnership.

Another impediment to the development of the Quad alliance has been the overwhelming economic influence of the People's Republic of China, as demonstrated by the dependence of ASEAN member states whose import/export ratio indicates a directly proportional dependence on the Chinese market. This was probably another reason behind the pact that resulted in AUKUS. The need to create a secure and stable environment in that area led to the formation of this trio covering 3 key points around the globe and expected to increase the level of security, at least from a military point of view in South and East Asia.

Supporting Australia's defence capability is another major strategic objective the alliance is aiming for. The United States needs more support in its efforts to maintain stability in Southeast Asia, and is seeking to forge strong ties with states in the region by drawing them on its side, in return for international security guarantees. Australia is an actor that has shown itself to be trustworthy as one of the states that has a say in China's military and economic expansion, but it needs support in achieving this goal. The United States has suffered constantly from assuming the role of mediator and the role of maintaining global security in this part of the world for cultural reasons or rather because of the misunderstanding of Eastern societies. Incidents that have occurred, such as the one in South Korea in 2002⁵ in which two young South Korean girls died in a collision with a vehicle belonging to the US armed forces, have been on the scale of those that have hampered the long process of maintaining stability and security in the South East Asian region. The incident resulted in protests by South Korean activists against US armed forces on the peninsula and a loss of credibility towards the US military. The alliance between Australia and the United States is facilitated by shared ideologies and similar societal characteristics, not least communication being facilitated by the use of the same language.

⁵ ***, *Solidarity in South Korean Civil Movement against the U.S. Forces*, 2003, available at <https://www.peoplepower21.org/english/38523>, accessed on 04.04.2023.

The strengthening of trilateral relations between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America is also another major objective that the three countries are pursuing by making every effort to increase the level of trust on several levels such as political, diplomatic, economic, etc. The threat that China poses to the security environment in the Indo-Pacific area and the seas to which it has access has led to the creation of a strong connection between these three countries which are the founding members of the AUKUS pact.

Beyond the speculations that have appeared in the media about intentions other than those officially declared by the legal representatives of the members of the Alliance, Australia has moved towards the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines out of the need to catch up militarily and technologically with China. It understood the threat and acted accordingly in order to redress the balance in its zone of influence, and so preferred to acquire capabilities superior to those it was to acquire as a result of its partnership with France. This decision, which Australia made, showed that beyond diplomatic or economic relations is the need for stability and security, and that it is important to perform in conditions that fall within normal parameters in terms of the security environment.

Promoting technological development and innovation is the fourth strategic objective, which includes the development of cyber infrastructure between the three countries and is also of particular importance for the common future within the AUKUS alliance. In particular, the objective aims at developing underwater capabilities, namely nuclear-powered submarines. On this issue, the 3 countries want to increase their common level of work, more precisely the level of interoperability. If for the member states this partnership only brings common benefits, for the People's Republic of China this development process is rather a threat to stability in the Indo-Pacific area, stating also that an imbalance is created by equipping Australia with nuclear equipment, referring to the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Some countries in the region have expressed their disagreement with the policy of this alliance, such as Malaysia and Indonesia⁶, presenting a situation that would lead to an acceleration in the development of military systems between the Pacific countries. South Korea, unlike the two, took a neutral stance, welcoming the establishment of the new alliance in the context of maintaining the security situation at a normal level, while Japan and the Philippines expressed a positive attitude towards the trilateral initiative, stressing the need to create a counterbalance with regard to

⁶ Louisa Brooke-Holland; John Curtis; Claire Mills, *The AUKUS agreement*, 11 octomber 2021, pp. 6-7.

military power in the South-East Asia region, with specific reference to China's military position.

2. Implications of AUKUS on NATO

AUKUS focuses its attention primarily on developing Australia's military and thereby maintaining a balanced security environment in the Indo-Pacific by responding to potential threats that may arise with the increasingly rapid evolution of technology. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation has little involvement in this area, the only states directly involved being France and the United States, but in a manner independent of the Alliance. Of course, NATO and AUKUS have similar interests, wanting security stability in the Indo-Pacific area because indirectly the outbreak of a military conflict in this area would also have repercussions for Alliance members, if not militarily, then on the economic side.

At the international level, the conclusion of the trilateral pact has generated both pro and con attitudes, and even members of the North Atlantic Alliance and the European Union have been vocal and not positive. In this regard, an example of an attitude against the signing of the pact came from Portugal and Greece, which supported France's cause⁷, including voices within Germany being on the French side, even though at European level the latter was seen as a mediator between the United States and France to ease tensions created as a result of what the French politic called "a knife in the back". This pact overshadowed the European Union's management power, demonstrating an inability on the part of its members to control and understand the situation in Southeast Asia. The European Union's strong point was France, which had to manage the situation in the Pacific region, especially with regard to the attitude of the People's Republic of China, and which was supposed to result in the supply of conventional submarines to Australia, being refused in the end in favour of the United States. The EU accused the AUKUS of "forcing" the pact through by causing a series of negative acts on Europe's ongoing economic relations with China.

As for the direct implications for NATO of the creation of the AUKUS alliance, these cannot be measured at this time, but can be seen from the fact that NATO's military force is still the United States of America, with the other members having virtually failed to assert themselves militarily and diplomatically on the international stage. But there is also the possibility of a direct collaboration between AUKUS and NATO on the Indo-Pacific, developing a bilateral relationship to maintain peace and security in the region.

⁷ Marta, Marafona , *European Reactions to AUKUS and Implications for EU Strategic Autonomy in JOINT*, No. 5, November 2021, pp. 3-4.

In the context of NATO's vision of international politico-military stability, it seems that there are different views among the members of this alliance, so that the United States of America is offering a new perspective on the stability of the security environment in the Indo-Pacific area and how this issue should be handled. The renunciation of formulating individual responses to the various forms of threat emerging in this region may indicate both that the People's Republic of China is an adversary that can no longer be addressed as it has been, given its influence over the Pacific Ocean states and its military capability, and the relaunch of a common working point such as that which was active during the Cold War in the form of SEATO. The latter is an alliance⁸ that was born on September 8 1954, after the signing of the Manila Pact, where the 8 signatory members (France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Thailand, Pakistan, the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand) were driven by the desire to progress and to be able to defend themselves against the threats to their security that existed at the time, emphasising that no nation can stand alone without being part of a community.

Activity beyond NATO has been a regular issue for the US, but the formation of AUKUS raises suspicions among allies and others alike, although assurances from President Joe Biden⁹ serve NATO's interests in the fact that two alliances with shared interests are appearing, and the US dual presence is not a decline for the North Atlantic Alliance.

The fact that this new alliance includes two NATO member states and a third member from the Pacific area, may suggest the idea of forming an alliance in this area that would represent the equivalent of NATO in the Pacific and that would oppose Chinese expansionist thinking.

Drawing a hypothetical parallel between the current NATO and a future alliance opposing the Beijing regime may suggest positive views given that with the outbreak of war in Ukraine, the North Atlantic Alliance has performed appreciatively in offering support to Ukraine, showing itself as an alliance that can stand up to possible direct Russian actions.

⁸ ***, *Story of SEATO*, 2002 available at <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP83-00036R001100170006-5.pdf>, accessed on 24.04.2023.

⁹ ***, *Remarks by President Biden, Prime Minister Morrison of Australia, and Prime Minister Johnson of the United Kingdom Announcing the Creation of AUKUS*, September 15 2021, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/-2021/09/15/remarks-by-president-biden-prime-minister-morrison-of-australia-and-prime-minister-johnson-of-the-united-kingdom-announcing-the-creation-of-aucus/>, accessed on 23.04.2023.

3. Implication of AUKUS on the Indo-Pacific countries

The main state to take a negative stance on the trilateral pact was the People's Republic of China which, through its spokespersons, expressed its indignation at the formation of AUKUS, claiming that it would destabilise the security environment in the region and also that it would violate the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty by equipping Australia with capabilities requiring the use of this type of technology. In the same context, as I mentioned earlier, there have been other states that have supported China's point of view, as well as states that have viewed with positivity and interest the emergence of a new alliance designed to 'resuscitate' the military situation around China.

The ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) group of countries will face a new dilemma, namely that of security¹⁰. While until now there have been states with conventional submarines such as Indonesia or Malaysia, which have procured such capabilities from Russia or Germany, the new prospect offered by Australia's purchase of nuclear-powered submarines will give rise to a military acquisition race for all states in the region. This perspective is also offered by the fact that Australia will change its status from a mid-tier military power to a status that goes beyond this barrier, towards the upper limit, so that the centres of power in the region will change and other states will have to take action to raise the capability of their armed forces.

Also on the same stage will be the strategic perspective in the field of international relations of the countries that until now have been at an impasse in terms of choosing which side to take, China on the one hand and the United States on the other. Certainly for countries such as Thailand or Myanmar, which are directly in China's neighbourhood, it will still be a difficult decision to make, but there is a new perspective to consider.

It is worth noting that AUKUS is the first formal alliance of which the United States is a member and which targets the Indo-Pacific region. From this it can be concluded that the US view of this region has changed, giving it greater importance at least as far as the military side is concerned. The mission that the US has taken on is becoming more important and at the same time more difficult to manage, both on the Taiwan Strait and on other states.

The idea that the three AUKUS members are advocating with regard to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is contradicted in the view of the Indo-Pacific states by the very action of equipping a non-nuclear country

¹⁰ M., Cheng, *AUKUS: The Changing Dynamic and Its Regional Implications in European Journal of Development Studies*, 03 February, 2022, pp. 4-5.

with weapons that rely on such a capability. These facts will weigh heavily in the decisions that states in this area will make regarding the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

The question will be whether there will be an arms race in this respect too, and also how the People's Republic of China will act on nuclear development among its allies. The submarines that will be added to Australia's navy have the capacity to carry nuclear weapons, making it the 7th country in the world to have this capability, after the US, India, the UK, France, China and Russia. The idea of equipping with this kind of submarines can only be favourable to possible nuclear proliferation.

Conclusions

This region seems to be more and more contested lately because it is one of the economic engines of the whole world. The population density is also high and the rapid development of the countries in the region means that the attention of Western countries is focused on this area of the world. The withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan gives them more freedom of movement and allows resources to be concentrated in other 'hot' areas of the world. While the conflict in Ukraine is now more of a regional issue, a possible conflict in the Indo-Pacific could easily escalate into a global conflict, depending on the states involved and the means used.

AUKUS, it can be said, is an alliance that has emerged at an opportune moment to stabilise relations in Southeast Asia, which could not be achieved by involving the other alliances present in the world. Even if not everyone had a positive attitude towards the signing of this pact, in practice the formation of the alliance is considered necessary. Despite the fact that official sources have not confirmed this, in my view, the conclusion of this treaty, in the year prior to the one that corresponded to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, may be a countermeasure to China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific area. Thus, the United States did not have to expand on two fronts in the event of an armed conflict breaking out in the Taiwan Strait as well.

The development of such a core ultimately reflects the tenacious and strategic way in which the United States has pursued its foreign policy and which can still assess its military supremacy in relation to the capabilities of the states with which it is in constant competition, here referring to China and Russia.



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