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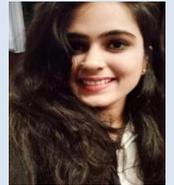
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The Emerging AUKUS and its Implications for Japan



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In September 2021, the leaders of Australia, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) came up with an enhanced trilateral security as well as defence partnership, known as the AUKUS. This agreement is established to deepen cooperation in the areas of security and defence capabilities through defence-related science, technology, supply chains and industrial bases. One of the fundamental ideas of this trilateral initiative is that the UK and the US would together provide Australia with a nuclear-powered submarine (SSN) flotilla.¹ The AUKUS nations possess a level of mutual trust which builds their cordial relations, and this further extends to the intelligence sharing through the 'Five Eyes' partnership and the high-end defence technologies as well.²

Through AUKUS, Australia would be better equipped to diversify its cooperation in the areas of cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence, and undersea capabilities. This would further be useful for the wider Indo-Pacific region. US President Joe Biden said, "this pact is about investing in our greatest source of strength, our alliances, and updating them to better meet the threats of today and tomorrow".³ The utmost priority for the US and other nations is to maintain the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific amidst China's belligerent behaviour. Furthermore, this trilateral agreement is an effective way for Britain to have a stance in the Indo-Pacific region. On the other hand, Beijing opposed the agreement by accusing the member countries of attempting to initiate an arms race in the Indo-Pacific region.

Japan's response to the AUKUS

Japan is a member of the Quad and has been excluded from the AUKUS trilateral arrangement, which has brought mixed responses from Tokyo. Japan's response to this initiative has mostly been welcoming. This framework aims to increase Australia's firm commitment to ensure peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region, which is appreciated by Tokyo. The Australian SSNs are supposed to patrol the South China Sea, which would help the US to maintain the balance of power in line with China's aggressiveness. This would further create opportunities for cooperation between Australia and Japan. Both nations signed a Defence agreement in January 2022, known as the 'Reciprocal Access Agreement' for cooperation between their militaries. It also aims at countering China's growing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region. This agreement further displays that Japan is willing to play a proactive role in the region." This implies that for Japan, diesel-electronic submarines are more feasible for patrolling the East China Sea than having SSNs. Australia's SSNs are most likely to be integrated with that of the US in the South China Sea, which could undermine Japan's role in the US strategy and operations in the region. Moreover, Australia is also about to become the world's seventh nuclear submarine power, which would influence the security and non-proliferation thinking in Japan.

In the current Japan-US alliance's anti-submarine warfare (ASW) plan, Japan has been working on its submarine fleet. The future ASW operations that would have greater missions with partners like Australia. Japan would be better equipped to possess nuclear submarines in the future. Australia's capability in the ASW and medium to long-range strike capability means that it would be involved in the East Asian security dynamics, and Australia's involvement would be desirable for Japan's security in the Indo-Pacific region.

needs to work on sustaining the Free and Open Indo-Pacific together with the AUKUS by enhancing its national defence efforts. The leaders of Japan's defence establishment should take the AUKUS as an opportunity to consider how to establish a similar arrangement with the US and its allies, which would include the UK and Australia. The Quad is already in place with rising enthusiasm among its member countries. Japan could perhaps work with the US and Australia to find ways for a security cooperation framework among the Quad member countries. Japan could help this initiative in other areas such as artificial intelligence, quantum technologies and cyber security for security and peace in the Indo-Pacific region.

As far as India is concerned, it believes that AUKUS is provocative to China which could also destabilise the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean states. Since India and Japan are both vital partners of the Quad, they are content for Australia to receive nuclear submarine technology from the US and the UK. India also fears that the agreement may instigate Beijing to expand its military activities in the littorals and the Indian Ocean, which would be problematic for the Indo-Pacific region.

AUKUS will serve as a vital arrangement for security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region that will be desirable for Japan and other countries in the world. Japan should envision its role in the Indo-Pacific region by partnering with Australia, South Korea and other like-minded countries. However, how AUKUS will take shape in the near future in stabilising the Indo-Pacific remains to be seen.

NOTES

¹ Andrea Moreschi, 'AUKUS, strategic autonomy, and the future of the Indo-Pacific: A French perspective', *Observer Research Foundation*, October 4, 2021, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/aukus-strategic-autonomy-and-the-future-of-the-indo-pacific/> (Accessed on February 5, 2022)

² Raghav Bikhchandani, 'What is 'Five Eyes', the intelligence alliance US wants South Korea, India, Japan to be part of', *The Print*, September 9, 2021 <https://theprint.in/world/what-is-five-eyes-the-intelligence-alliance-us-wants-south-korea-india-japan-to-be-part-of/730475/> (Accessed on February 9, 2022)

³ White House, '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, <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-aukus/> (Accessed on February 5, 2022)