

AUKUS – Security Grouping

September 17, 2021

Close on the heels of a humiliating exit from Afghanistan that has raised questions over America's commitment towards its allies, the Joe Biden administration announced the formation of a "historic" trilateral security partnership with the UK and Australia. AUKUS have announced they're forming a new security alliance that will help equip Australia with nuclear-powered submarines. The alliance will see a reshaping of relations in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

In news: AUKUS seeks to reshape Indo-Pacific ties

Placing it in syllabus: Foreign Affairs

Dimensions:

- Its impact on geopolitics of Indo-Pacific region
- How it is different and complementary to QUAD
- Australia's angle of nuclear submarines
- Its impact on India

Content:

Its impact on geopolitics of Indo-Pacific region:

- AUKUS is a **new security pact** announced recently between Australia, the UK and the US.
- It would "deepen diplomatic, security, and defense cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region" by the three countries.
- The AUKUS agreement will also **cover the domains of artificial intelligence, cyber, undersea and quantum technologies** but it is the **nuclear naval reactor** bit that has understandably attracted the most attention.
- Australia, the U.K. and the U.S. (AUKUS) will help equip Australia with nuclear-powered submarines provided by the US, along with other forms of technology.

- The **new alliance will help in creating more jobs in the defence sector**. And the submarine project which is going to take a couple of decades will require the most advanced technology.
- The project entails building of 12 state-of-the-art attack class submarines which was earlier meant to be built by the French company Naval Group.

Geopolitics of Indo Pacific:

- The alliance will see a reshaping of relations in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.
- Though no one mentioned China, the new military alliance is going to play a very important role in the Indo-Pacific and to address the strategic environment in the region.
- According to experts, the idea to ensure that the expansion of Chinese presence is curtailed.
- “We undertake this effort as part of a larger constellation of steps, including stronger bilateral partnerships with our traditional security partners in Asia – Japan, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines – and also stronger engagement with new partners like India, Vietnam, and new formations like the Quad,” the White House said in a statement.

Only six countries in the world, **America, Britain, China, France, India and Russia**, currently **operate nuclear-powered submarines**.

Now, Australia will take a place in the list, in a region where China has been desperately trying to get a toehold. Australia and China have had a progressively deteriorating relationship in the past years.

Macro Analysis:

- On a macro scale, this looks to be the **start of a complete shift in foreign policy from the US**, moving

away from Europe and Russia, and looking to China as the biggest competitor of the coming era.

- The evolving situation in the Indo-Pacific region in the wake of China's increasing military muscle-flexing has become a major talking point among leading global powers.
- The Quad and the AUKUS could be the warning shots across the bow to a coming realignment.
- The **deal echoes a similar Cold War-era intelligence-sharing agreement that the UK and US** signed 75 years ago, known as **UKUSA**.
- But, China has condemned the pact, calling it "extremely irresponsible," and accusing it of espousing a "Cold War mentality."

Angry France:

- The first and foremost is the open embarrassment faced by France.
- The French company Naval Group had signed a USD 90 billion deal in 2016, but due to several rounds of design changes, cost escalation and other delays have led to the scrapping of the deal.
- France has lashed out against the AUKUS pact, calling it a "stab in the back" after Australia refused a multibillion-dollar French nuclear submarine deal.
- France, in a strongly worded statement, said the new deal was "contrary to the letter and the spirit of the cooperation that prevailed between France and Australia".

Relegation of EU:

- There is also the added insult to injury that the EU was set to formally announce its Indo-Pacific strategy, to play a role in security and defence.
- This leaves questions over Biden's 'blow hot-and-cold' policy vis-a-vis the European Union, which—contrary to

US protestations—is clearly being relegated to an ancillary role in the Biden foreign policy playbook.

US Shift in Stance:

- Another reason behind the deal raising eyebrows is that the **US is very restrictive about nuclear naval reactor technology** which Washington categorises as “sensitive”, and **up until now had shared the knowhow only with Britain**, and that too in 1958.
- **Reactors powered with highly enriched uranium are considered a security risk** and tantamount to **handing over nuclear capability**.
- For the US, the deal is meant as an assurance to its allies and partners that Washington remains invested in its relationships and is ready to extend commitments.

The move indicates that the **US is ready for sustained pledges in the Indo-Pacific and doesn't flinch from pushing back against China** through enhanced diplomatic and security partnerships.

How it is different and complementary to QUAD:

- The **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD)**, also known as the **Quad** is a **strategic dialogue** between the United States, Japan, Australia and India that is **maintained by talks** between member countries.
- The dialogue was initiated in 2007 by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, with the support of U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney, Australian Prime Minister John Howard, and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.
- The dialogue was paralleled by **joint military exercises** of an unprecedented scale, titled **Exercise Malabar**.
- On the other hand, **AUKUS** is a new **military alliance or a trilateral security pact** among Australia, the UK and the USA.
- Both the US and the UK have already announced that the

three countries will work together and the UK based BAE Systems as well as sharing hi-tech expertise will be put in this project.

- The agreement has been characterized as a successor to the existing ANZUS pact between Australia, New Zealand and the United States; with New Zealand “sidelined” due to its ban on nuclear energy

Complementarity to QUAD

- In a 2021 joint statement, “**The Spirit of the Quad,**” Quad members described “a shared vision for a **Free and Open Indo-Pacific,**” and a “**rules-based maritime order in the East and South China Seas,**” which Quad members state are needed to counter Chinese maritime claims.
- The **Quad was never a military alliance,** and therefore the **development of a trilateral specifically drawn on security has no bearing on its salience.**
- The **Quad has a much broader agenda** and the formation of a security partnership that complements the Quad
- As multipolarity becomes the new global order, there will be a number of issue-based trilaterals, plurilaterals and multilaterals allowing members the space to abstain or join.
- The **Quad and AUKUS may coexist, and even supplement each other** with both and other such groupings **servicing specific goals within the larger architecture of Indo-Pacific.**
- Taken together, the web of alliances and partnerships presents a formidable challenge to the bully in the neighbourhood, China.

Australia’s angle of nuclear submarines

- Under the arrangement, **Australia will build at least eight nuclear-powered submarines using U.S. expertise,** while dumping a contract with France for diesel-electric submarines.

- The US will **supply highly enriched uranium to Australia** to power the submarines; **Australia has agreed not to produce highly enriched uranium itself.**
- This means that **Australia would become only the seventh country to have nuclear submarines**, after the five permanent members of the UN Security Council (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States) and India.
- Nuclear submarines have **greater speed and missile range, can stay underwater for longer, are harder to detect and can carry heavier loads**
- Experts say the **nuclear submarines will allow Australia to conduct longer patrols and give the alliance a stronger military presence in the Indo-Pacific region.**
- The move will vastly **enhance Australia's capabilities as the net security provider** in the Indo-Pacific and its ability to counter China.
- The move to acquire nuclear-powered subs – that are fueled by weapons-grade, highly enriched uranium – **militates against Australia's record as a leader in nuclear non-proliferation movement.**

The move, however, also limits Australia's maneuverability when it comes to China, reduces its space for hedging, and raises expectations that Canberra will take an active part should the need arise for a military confrontation between the US and China.

Its impact on India:

- The Quad is not an Asian NATO or even a mini-NATO. A security alliance is neither on offer, nor is India interested in joining one.
- The Quad grouping is a flexible multilateral partnership that, among other things, seeks to ensure rules-based order in the maritime space of Indo-Pacific and shape China's behaviour through a balancing strategy.
- As the AUKUS grouping pulls UK—another major global

power—into the Indo-Pacific Cold War; the AUKUS would complement Quad, and further push France closer to India.

Mould your thought: How is AUKUS different from QUAD? What are the implications of AUKUS on the Indo-Pacific Region and geopolitics?

Approach to the answer:

- Introduction
- Define AUKUS and QUAD
- Highlight the difference between the them
- Mention the effects of the grouping on the Indo pacific region and Chinese influence
- Discuss the changes to the global outlook about AUKUS
- Discuss its effect on India
- Conclusion