

The Impact of the Strategic Partnership AUKUS on the Geopolitical Situation in the Indo-Pacific Region¹

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Abstract

The purpose of the AUKUS strategic alliance is to develop cooperation between the member countries (Australia, the UK, and the U.S.) in the field of security and defence in the Indo-Pacific region. The agreement provides for the supply of submarines powered by nuclear reactors to Australia. The emergence of this new strategic alliance was caused by the following factors: the increased power of China in the region, the weakening of the U.S. position in the Indo-Pacific, the desire of the UK to implement the “global Britain” strategy in practice, and the need for the U.S. to have reliable allies to contain China. These factors reveal the true purpose of AUKUS—containment of China and opposition to its active policy in the region.

In this article, the author uses comparative analysis to reveal the different goals and geopolitical interests of the AUKUS countries. The systematic approach helps to describe the essence of the complex geopolitical system developing in the Indo-Pacific region. The theories of new institutionalism and constructivism make it possible to identify both continuity and gaps in the security policy and foreign policy of regional actors.

Australia’s participation in AUKUS allows it to strengthen its political ties with influential partners—the United States and Great Britain, receive additional security guarantees from them in the context of increased activity of Chinese policy in the region, raise the country’s status in the regional hierarchy, and strengthen its defence capability. Australia’s entry into AUKUS means the formation of a new, anti-Chinese strategy in the region.

For the UK, membership in AUKUS allows it to expand its naval presence in the Indo-Pacific region, strengthen its special relations with the United States, improve its image (which was shaken after the country’s exit from the European Union), and restore traditional ties with Australia.

For the United States, AUKUS is the implementation of the strategy of pivot to Asia and the creation of a new alliance that has greater opportunities for military-strategic cooperation in the face of the threat from China to use the Pacific Ocean to oust the United States from a leading position.

There are some potential regional geopolitical consequences of AUKUS. They include escalation of tension and the nuclear arms race of the opposing parties, a new cold war with China, expansion of the club of nuclear powers because of Australia, imbalance of geopolitical forces in the region, the undermining of transatlantic unity, and the emergence of a common strategy in the foreign policy of European countries and the United States.

Keywords: AUKUS, strategic alliance, Indo-Pacific region, balance of power, Australia, USA, UK, China

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Introduction

The Indo-Pacific region (IPR) has recently begun to play an important role in world politics. The stability of the global political system largely depends on the dynamics of the processes taking place in the region, an arena in which the strategic activities of the great powers and their geopolitical rivalry are being played out [Medcalf, 2020].

New trends have emerged in the development of the region with the creation of a security pact between Australia, the UK, and the U.S.—AUKUS—announced in September 2021. As a strategic alliance, AUKUS is positioned as “a new enhanced trilateral security partnership.” Its official goal is to ensure “peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific over the long term” and “to better meet the threats of today and tomorrow” [The White House, 2021].

AUKUS does not include a provision on mutual defence of its members along the lines of Article 5 of the treaty that established the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).² The main content of this partnership is the technological cooperation of the parties and assistance to Australia to deploy its own nuclear attack submarines. Deepening cooperation among the three members in the field of security and defence in the IPR [Chinoy, 2021] provides for the supply of submarines with conventional weapons operating on nuclear reactors to Australia [The White House, 2021]. These submarines are equipped with quiet propulsion systems (which means they have less chance of being noticed) and high-precision, long-range systems and are able to travel much greater distances.

The member countries officially emphasize that AUKUS has a defensive purpose only, and that military cooperation is the main content of its activities. However, the characteristics of military equipment indicate that it can also be used for offensive purposes.

Other important tasks of AUKUS, as stated by U.S. president Joe Biden at a briefing on its proclamation, are to “expand our edge in military capabilities and critical technologies, such as cyber, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, and undersea domains” [The White House, 2021].

The purpose of this article is to identify how the creation of AUKUS and the strengthening of the partnership mechanism of the participating countries might affect the geopolitical situation in the Indo-Pacific region.³

Literature Review

The topic of the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region [Medcalf, 2020], new trends in its development, its role in world politics, and the geopolitical rivalry of the great powers is widely covered in the work of scientists outside of Russia. According to M.R. Auslin, geopolitical competition in the IPR is escalating and is beginning to threaten stability not only in Asia, but also around the world [2020]. R. McGregor believes that the determining factor for the balance of power in the region is the trilateral relationship between the United States, China, and Japan—the strengthening of China and the weakening of the United States could change the balance of power and destroy the existing security structure [2018].

² Article 5 states: “The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area” [The North Atlantic Treaty, 1949].

³ For more information about the balance of power in the ITR that developed before the appearance of AUKUS, as well as about the strategy of the United States and China in the ITR, see: M. Barthwal-Datta and P. Chacko [2020], P. Chacko [2016], R.J. Heydarian [2020], S. Kumar, S.S. Verma and S.H. Kumar [2020], and O.G. Leonova [2021].

Researchers have paid great attention to the role of the United States in the *Asia-Pacific* region, and later, after a new name reflecting its geopolitical expansion was established in the political discourse, in the *Indo-Pacific* (IPR), as well as the sub-regions of East and South-east Asia.⁴ In 2016, when the term IPR had not yet been officially adopted, J. Kennedy and H.W. Pant devoted their research to the study of the consequences of the American strategy of pivot to Asia, and in particular to the Asia-Pacific region [2016]. A number of works consider U.S. foreign policy in the region during the presidency of Donald Trump, the reaction of regional powers to it, and the consequences for the balance of power [Akaha, Yuan, Liang, 2021; Heydarian 2020; Hiebert, 2020].

The focus of M. Green's work is the problem that determines U.S. policy toward East Asia, namely the threat from China to use the Pacific Ocean to oust America from a leading position [2019]. Researchers are also interested in the problem of U.S.-China rivalry in this strategically important area. R. Hass predicted that competition would remain the dominant feature of their relationship, but that they will have to interact in solving common global problems [2021].

J.J. Mearsheimer believes that a growing China will seek to dominate Asia and the desire of the United States to maintain its leading position in the region will inevitably lead to a clash of interests between the two great powers [2014]. R.D. Kaplan, analyzing the interests of the United States in the Asia-Pacific region, also interpreted them in the context of the increasing activity of China's policy [2015]. A book by R. Doshi is devoted to the description of China's strategy to become a global superpower and oust the United States from the position of leader in East Asia [2021]. Similarly, D. Shambaugh [2020] and S. Strangio's [2020] research is devoted to the strategic competition between the United States and China in Southeast Asia. According to them, the outcome of this competition depends on whether the Southeast Asian countries will leave the sphere of American influence and fall under the influence of China. A.M. Denmark, describing the dynamics of the geopolitical situation in the Indo-Pacific region, noted the weakening of the U.S. position and the strengthening of China's influence and believes that American allies and partners can play a decisive role in the competition between the two countries [2020].

A special group consists of studies on the role of Australia as a middle power and its ability to influence the geopolitical situation in the region [Reus-Smit, 2021; Strating, Westendorf, 2020; Turnbull 2021]. A number of articles are devoted to Australia's foreign policy and its defence strategy, including the history, essence, and goals of the alliance with the United States [Erskine, 2022; Henry, 2020; Sheng Hao Chai, 2020; Wirth, 2019]. There are also quite a few studies that trace the evolution of Australia's relations with China, noting their deterioration and the growth of tension between the countries [He, 2021; Hewes, Hundt, 2022; Johanson et al., 2019; Köllner, 2021; Medcalf, 2019; "The Deterioration," 2020].

However, the problem of the influence of AUKUS on the geopolitical situation and the balance of power in the region requires a separate study.

Hypothesis

AUKUS continues the trend toward deepening the geopolitical split in the IPR, turning the region into an arena of military-political confrontation and may lead to a change in the balance of power. AUKUS helps to accelerate the formation of a local bipolar system: on the one hand, the anti-Chinese (pro-American) bloc (U.S., Australia, and Japan), on the other hand, China. To prove this hypothesis, it is necessary to identify the factors that caused the appearance of AUKUS, formulate the goals and objectives of Australia's participation in AUKUS

⁴ For more information see: W. Choong [2019], T. Doyle and D. Rumley [2020], M.A. Kuo [2018], and M.S. Pardesi [2020].

and its political consequences, describe the position of the UK and its goals and objectives of participation in the alliance, reveal the interests of the U.S. and the role of AUKUS in their implementation, and show the interrelation of the goals and interests pursued by the parties on the formation of a new geopolitical situation in the region.

Research Methods

A comparative analysis method is used, which allows for the study of the dynamics of the political situation in the IPR, as well as the political processes and the correlation of political forces. This method makes it possible to identify the difference between the goals, interests, and positions of the AUKUS countries. Structural and functional approaches help determine the goals, objectives, and positions of stakeholders. The systematic approach reveals the trends in the formation of a new geopolitical situation in the region, where the interconnection and interdependence of the leading elements forms a complex developing geopolitical system. The theories of new institutionalism and constructivism help to show both continuity and gaps in the security policy and foreign policy of the leading actors in the IPR.

Factors Contributing to AUKUS

The appearance of AUKUS was due to a number of factors. First was the increased power of China in the region [He, 2021; Mearsheimer, 2014] and its claim to the status of regional leader [Sheng Hao Chai, 2020], which has long been a matter of concern to the United States and Australia [Hass, 2021; Shambaugh, 2020]. As stated in the new Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States, “the Indo-Pacific faces mounting challenges, particularly from the PRC” [The White House, 2022, p. 5]. In recent years, China has made major investments in military modernization and it now has the world’s largest naval and submarine forces. In the western Pacific, it has already achieved parity with the United States, and, in some areas, it may even have gained superiority [Doshi, 2021].

The second factor, according to a number of researchers, was the weakening of the U.S.’ position in the IPR, [Auslin, 2020; tarting, Westendorf, 2020], which was quite obvious during Trump’s presidency [McGregor, 2018]. Therefore, in order to maintain its dominance in the region, the United States needed allies that could share the risks and costs associated with confronting a growing global power, including an arms race [Denmark, 2020; Strangio, 2020].

The third factor was the strategy of “global Britain,” to which Brexit had dealt a tangible blow.

Thus, the emergence of AUKUS was due to the convergence of the strategic interests of the three member countries [Blaxland, 2021], and in the ideological sphere it was supported by their “democratic” identities.

Therefore, undoubtedly, the real goals of AUKUS are to confront China and its active policy in the region [Curran, 2021] and to preserve the United States’ regional leadership in Asia.

Goals, Objectives and Interests of the Parties

Australia’s Position

The emergence of the AUKUS partnership showed that Australia has made its final strategic choice [Turnbull, 2021]. It has clearly defined its positions in the growing competition with China for influence in the region. For a long time, Australia tried to “sit on two chairs at once”

and took an ambivalent position, believing that it can ensure its security through an alliance with the United States [Henry, 2020; Wirth, 2019] and its prosperity thanks to its economic partnership with China [Johanson et al., 2019]. Different Australian governments have openly criticized China's policy in the region [Hewes, Hundt, 2022] and positioned themselves in the vanguard of anti-Chinese opposition. Because of Beijing's active policy in the Pacific region, which western countries regard as "naval expansion," Australia has embarked on a fundamental revision of its policy toward China [Chinoy, 2021; He, 2021; Medcalf, 2019].

Recently, the relationship between Australia and China has deteriorated significantly, despite the fact that they have been close trading partners for a long time. It was Australia that called on other governments to conduct an independent investigation into the origin of COVID-19 ["The Deterioration," 2020], expressed concern about the treatment of Uighurs,⁵ and was "one of the first countries to bar Chinese 5G communications technology from its infrastructure over security concerns" [French, 2021].

China's reaction was harsh: as part of its sanctions policy, it imposed tough economic tariffs against a wide range of Australian goods, including wine and beef, annual exports of which are estimated at about \$3.5 billion ["The Deterioration," 2020].

In this context, Australia's participation in AUKUS accomplishes several important tasks. First, it allows Australia to deepen and develop its traditional partnership with the United States and Great Britain by strengthening political ties with them through the AUKUS partnership [Henry, 2020; Wirth, 2019]. Second, it is believed in Australia that membership in this pact increases its status in the regional hierarchy.⁶ Relying on the support of two other global powers, it can now realize its ambitions for leadership in the IPR, the geopolitical importance of which has increased dramatically recently, and even "go global" [Reus-Smit, 2021]. Third, experiencing tension due to China's policy in the region, Australia is counting on the support of the United States and Great Britain. Australian prime minister Scott Morrison, speaking at a briefing on the creation of AUKUS, called it "a next-generation partnership built on a strong foundation of proven trust" [The White House, 2021]. Traditionally, the two countries' close security ties have been reinforced by Australia's willingness to participate in United States' operations and missions in the region and beyond. Fourth, the country's defence capability is strengthened in the face of the growing power of China, whose policy Australia considers aggressive [Medcalf, 2019], and which a number of researchers believe threatens Australia's safety [Johanson et al., 2019; Köllner, 2021]. Australia is concerned about the country's growing economic dependence on trade with China, its cyber-attacks, alleged interference in the internal politics of other countries in the region, territorial claims and the construction of islands in the South China Sea, and threats to free maritime navigation in the region [Blaxland, 2021]. All of these are regarded as challenges posed by China that must be countered, including by increasing Australia's defence capability.

The rise of China and its increasingly active role in the region has become a problem for Australia. Therefore, it relies on the United States as its ally and leader in creating a new security architecture in the IPR, counting on its expanded and permanent presence in the region. As a middle power, Australia believes that it can influence the situation in the region only through cooperation with other institutional agents [Erskine, 2022]. Joining AUKUS marked the emergence of a new Australian strategy in the region, the final point of the formation of its anti-

⁵ Uighurs are a national minority professing Islam and living in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region of China.

⁶ For more information about the factors affecting the dynamics of a country's geopolitical status and its position in the global hierarchy, see: I. Rossi [2020, pp. 105–23, 1031–44] and I.V. Ilyin and O.G. Leonova [2017, pp. 45–52].

Chinese policy, and the culmination of a foreign policy doctrine, the core of which has become the idea of the “Chinese threat.”⁷

There are plans to build new submarines in Australia, in Adelaide [The White House, 2021]. As a result, Australia will become a unique naval ally of the United States in the Indo-Pacific region. At the same time, Prime Minister Morrison emphasized that “Australia is not seeking to acquire nuclear weapons or establish a civil nuclear capability” and that it will continue to fulfil its nuclear non-proliferation obligations [Ibid.]. The AUKUS deal, according to J. Curran, may be “the biggest strategic gamble” in the history of Australia [2021]. Australia has finally made a bet on the United States, counting on its long and permanent presence in the Pacific Ocean.

Participation in AUKUS will bring Australia political dividends, but it also has its drawbacks. First, Australia is losing billions of dollars due to sanctions in trade with China. Second, the first submarines will arrive in the country by the end of the 2030s; until then, Australia will have to rent submarines from the United States at a considerable cost. Third, Australia has no experience with nuclear technology and therefore it will have to train the staff urgently. In addition, the need to rely on the supply of submarines from abroad maintains the country’s dependence on its technological partners. The downside of such dependence on the United States may be a further weakening of Australia’s sovereignty and loss of freedom of political manoeuvre in foreign policy. Thus, it once again confirmed its readiness to take the side of the United States in any future military conflict with China, for example, over Taiwan.

However, Australia also needs to take into account the reaction of its neighbours in the region, since relations with them are an important vector of its foreign policy. The country made a diplomatic mistake by not informing its Asian neighbours in the region about the impending deal, and this provoked negative reactions [Chinoy, 2021].

The United Kingdom’s Position

For the UK, membership in AUKUS is important for the implementation of its “global Britain” strategy, as it allows the UK to consolidate its naval presence in the Indo-Pacific region. Second, by participating in AUKUS, the UK is able to emphasize its special relationship with the United States, which increases its international status. Third, membership strengthens strategic relations with the United States, which allows the UK to compensate for the geopolitical losses from Brexit and patch up the gaps in its political image that appeared after the country’s exit from the EU [Blaxland, 2021]. Fourth, it allows for the reanimation of its traditional historical ties with Australia, whose importance as a partner, thanks to AUKUS, has undoubtedly increased. Finally, with AUKUS there is the possibility of developing its military-industrial complex. This deal will not only bring financial dividends, but will also help solve social problems, namely, “creating hundreds of highly skilled jobs across the United Kingdom, including in Scotland, the north of England, and the Midlands” [The White House, 2021]. It will undoubtedly contribute to improving the overall standard of living in the country, as Prime Minister Boris Johnson stated in his speech at the briefing on the proclamation of AUKUS [The White House, 2021].

⁷ After the Morrison government was defeated in the Australian federal election, there were hopes that there would be a “soft reset” of relations with China. However, they do not seem to have been justified. This became clear after April 2022. Beijing signed a security agreement with the Solomon Islands, which evoked a negative reaction from the United States, Australia and Japan. The position taken by China on the conflict in Ukraine and its refusal to comply with the demands to put pressure on Russia confirms forecasts in favour of the likelihood of Australia continuing its anti-Chinese policy, regardless of the change of government in the country.

Thus, the UK, through participation in AUKUS, is preparing to expand its role in Asia as a part of its “global Britain” strategy [Bhatia, 2021].

The U.S.’ Position

The AUKUS agreement is a logical consequence of the American strategy of pivot to Asia, and in particular to the Asia-Pacific region, proclaimed by the Obama administration [Kennedy, Pant, 2016]. U.S. policy is dictated by its national interests [Kaplan, 2015] and the threat by China to use the Pacific Ocean to oust the United States from a leading position [Green, 2019].

The new edition of the Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States notes that the region has strategic value and that its influence in the 21st century, as well as its importance for the United States, will only grow [The White House, 2022, p. 4]. Therefore, the United States intends firmly to gain a foothold in this region, is determined to strengthen its long-term positions there, and believes that America’s role in the region should be more effective and sustainable than ever [Ibid., pp. 5–6].

The United States views AUKUS as a new stage of trilateral security cooperation with its traditional allies—the United Kingdom and Australia [The White House, 2021].

Previously, American nuclear submarine technology had never been transferred to third countries [Blaxland, 2021] as it was believed that this could undermine the U.S.’ global maritime dominance. The delivery of such submarines to Australia shows that the United States, feeling its vulnerability, hopes to enlist the support of Australia and Great Britain in consolidating the status quo in the region and maintaining its position as a regional leader and guarantor of the security of Pacific countries. Therefore, the United States needed a regional grouping with potential great opportunities for expanding military-strategic cooperation. Washington obviously took into account the deterioration of Australia’s relations with China, which were on the verge of rupture, and the difficult situation in the country due to Chinese sanctions. Therefore, the U.S. was sure that Australia would side with the United States in the event of an open dispute with China. This became an additional motive for choosing Australia as a member of AUKUS. I. Johnson believes that helping Australia create a fleet of nuclear submarines will help the United States find an important military ally to counter the growing naval power of China, as well as strengthen its alliances in the Pacific [2021]. The intention of the United States, contrary to its tradition, to share nuclear submarine technology with Australia, shows its serious intentions and willingness to take decisive steps to respond to China’s challenge. The provision of submarines with nuclear technology on board will also strengthen diplomatic and military ties with Australia and reanimate the traditional military-political alliance with it [Jackson, 2021]. The joint use of these technologies with Australia clearly demonstrates American concerns about maintaining the U.S.’ faltering status in the IPR and the importance of having reliable partners at the forefront of the conflict with China.

The AUKUS defence partnership, including the deployment of all models and variants of American aircraft in Australia, will strengthen the U.S. position in strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific region [Jackson, 2021] in several ways. First, it allows the U.S. Air Force to practice and improve the developing concept of flexible combat use (ACE), which involves the dispersal of the air force and the projection of combat power from many places at the same time. Second, the planned joint exercises and the exchange of strategies and tactics contribute to improving the interoperability and interaction of allied armed forces. Third, the United States receives guaranteed access, basing, and overflight of their aircraft from airfields in Australia. This will help to avoid the difficulties in obtaining permission from third countries for an air corridor.

The United States seriously expects that AUKUS will serve as a deterrent to Beijing's behaviour in the region [Jackson, 2021]. Now, the U.S. will direct its efforts to attracting to its side those countries that have not yet made a choice between the United States and China and are not sure whether they need to make such a choice at all [Akaha, Yuan, Liang, 2021]. Thus, the countries of the region face a dilemma: they must either bet on the United States, which together with Australia will have a dozen new submarines, or on a trade pact headed by China (the Comprehensive Regional Economic Partnership) in which participation is very attractive to countries with dynamically developing economies.⁸

The Geopolitical Consequences of AUKUS

AUKUS is an integral part of the Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States and, according to its official version, corresponds to the proclaimed goal of creating a “free and open, connected, prosperous, secure, and resilient” region [The White House, 2022, pp. 7, 18].

The formation of a new alliance may be one of the most important geopolitical realignments of the post-Cold War era [French, 2021]. This seemingly private deal between the United States, Great Britain, and Australia for the sale of submarines means the practical implementation of the United States' pivot to the Asia-Pacific region as its most important foreign policy priority. This strategy was formulated during the presidency of Barack Obama [Kennedy, Pant, 2016], but it has not yet received its effective implementation. AUKUS will undoubtedly make a certain contribution to it. Its creation, according to H.W. French, will have “profound ramifications” for the geopolitics of not only the region, but also the world as a whole [2021].

According to the AUKUS member countries, the creation of this alliance represents an important step forward in the West's efforts to ensure comprehensive containment of China and to victory in an era of strategic competition. Although this partnership does not involve a NATO-style collective defence mechanism, the sum of the interaction of the three partner countries, and especially the rapprochement of Australia with the United States, actually leads to the deployment of a new cold war with China [Curran, 2021]. A new defence pact backed by an arms race (nuclear-powered submarines) could lead to an escalation of tensions in the region, and, in the worst-case scenario, to a military conflict with China. The risk of nuclear submarine collisions is growing as the navies of China and the United States increase the deployment of nuclear capabilities in the waters of the Pacific Ocean. This is especially true of the disputed waters of the South China Sea. The AUKUS deal (which actually means the creation of a nuclear submarine fleet of another country, Australia) significantly increases this risk [Zhou, Ng, 2021].

A representative of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs criticized AUKUS as an “an exclusive bloc” and “clique” that seriously undermines regional peace and security and reflects a cold war mentality [Chinoy, 2021]. Undoubtedly, China will try to maintain its strategic advantage in this sea and in the region. Therefore, this may motivate it to take retaliatory actions, including joining the nuclear arms race. In any case, an increase in the number of nuclear submarines cruising in the Pacific Ocean may upset the balance of power in the region.

There is another important geopolitical consequence of the formation of AUKUS: previously, only six countries had nuclear submarines, and all six are members of the nuclear club of powers engaged in the development of nuclear weapons. Australia's accession to this club marks a break with this historical norm and, in the future, the emergence of another country with military-grade nuclear technologies.

⁸ About Comprehensive Regional Economic Partnership see: the ADB [2022], D. Mukherjee [2019], and S.C. Park [2021].

Further developments may lead to an escalation of the nuclear arms race in the region. South Korea has already set itself to the task of developing its own nuclear submarine, and Japan may also think about it. And, perhaps the AUKUS members' attempt to use their advantage—advanced nuclear technologies—will push China to further strengthen its economic, political, and military power and more actively draw other countries into its orbit [Johnson, 2021].

There is no unity in the EU in relation to AUKUS. Some European countries consider partnerships with China as promising great economic opportunities. Others believe that its growing dominance in Asia is leading to a new cold war and the formation of bipolarity, which are not in the interests of Europe. These countries view the strengthening of naval and technological capabilities to combat China within the framework of AUKUS very positively [Bhatia, 2021].

The creation of the AUKUS pact demonstrated to Europe the contemptuous attitude of the United States toward their European allies and undermined the credibility of their policy, which had already been damaged due to the unilateral decision of the United States to withdraw troops from Afghanistan.

Previously, France had signed a contract worth \$66 billion for the supply of submarines to Australia [French, 2021]. This deal was of particular importance for France, which wanted to strengthen its geopolitical influence on Australia (which is an outpost in the Indo-Pacific region), as well as to increase its global significance and status. The announcement by the U.S. president of the AUKUS deal came as a complete surprise to France [Kupchan, 2021]. The decision of the government in Canberra to abandon a multibillion-dollar submarine contract with France (without prior notice) in favour of American technologies and a new security pact with the United States and Great Britain was regarded by President Emmanuel Macron as a betrayal [South China Morning Post, 2022], a breach of trust, and as undermining allied commitments.

All this compromises the efforts to develop a common transatlantic strategy to counter China's growth. All attempts by European countries together with the United States to develop a common policy toward China have been called into question. The behaviour of the United States has demonstrated the risks of such cooperation, which will now be difficult to restore in full.

C. Kupchan believed that the AUKUS deal “has produced a diplomatic setback to advancing transatlantic unity” [2021]. However, recent events indicate the opposite—the involvement of the European Union and NATO in the American policy of containing China and Russia in the IPR.

And if, for the UK, this is a step forward in implementing its concept of “global Britain,” then for other European countries which remain outside this bloc it is undoubtedly a step back and undermines transatlantic ties.

As the AUKUS partnership strengthens, namely, by the time Australian submarines are deployed in the late 2030s, the geopolitical situation in the Indo-Pacific region will look different. The countries of the AUKUS group do not name the power they are called upon to resist, although it is obvious to everyone—China. The creation of a new bloc may spur the development of an open conflict in the Pacific with China, the trigger of which may be a new hot spot—Taiwan. Beijing makes it clear that, if necessary, it is ready to use force to keep it as part of Greater China and a part of its sovereign territory. The United States is equally determined to fight with China for the preservation of Taiwan's autonomy, so we can expect that the economic competition between the two powers will be complemented by a full-scale military-strategic rivalry under the slogan of preserving security in the IPR. The creation of AUKUS raises the stakes in this confrontation.

The overlooking of France, which was not invited to AUKUS, is explained not only by the desire to intercept a lucrative contract for the supply of submarines and get a significant profit.

Indeed, the allies in the new bloc were sure that France would never risk its business interests with China for the sake of achieving political superiority over it in this region.

French believes that the United States is making a mistake with the AUKUS partnership. “By so greatly privileging military answers to challenges, Washington is inching toward the classic hammer dilemma. When that’s your only tool, every problem starts to resemble a nail. The danger is that, in East Asia, the nails are connected to detonators” [2021].

Russia, being a Pacific power, has its own national interests in this region, which may conflict with the actions of the AUKUS countries. Russia needs to clearly define its position in this situation, formulate a strategy in the Indo-Pacific region, and include it in the new edition of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation.

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