

CASE STUDY

The shape of the international order: the case study of AUKUS

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Abstract

This article argues that in the 21st century, international order has not only become unstable but also short-term in nature and issue-based, which has led to the emergence of a number of alliances whose functionality can be questioned. A number of alliances are being formed and are in existence but without any clear goals and objectives. This hypothesis is applied to understand the nature of the recently formed AUKUS—Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States’ alliance in the Indo-Pacific region. The paper, taking the framework of international order, argues that AUKUS would be one such alliance that has started with a lot of promises but its fundamental proposition to counter the rise of China in the Indo-Pacific region—although it does not mention the name of the country—is impractical. Given the economic rise of China as well as the example of the Five Eyes (FVEY) of intelligence sharing mechanism of the Anglophone countries formed during the early years of the Cold War, the AUKUS may survive the test of time but it also may exist as an example of the patterns of the current international order—that is another alliance without a clear path. This article also takes into account of the reaction of the Southeast Asian nations and criticisms against AUKUS in Australia. It points out how Australia’s security should be viewed more comprehensively.

Keywords

AUKUS, Indo-Pacific, Quad, International Order, China's Rise

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Author roles: Zaman RU: Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Writing – Review & Editing; Yasmin L: Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Writing – Review & Editing

Competing interests: No competing interests were disclosed.

Grant information: The author(s) declared that no grants were involved in supporting this work.

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How to cite this article:

For printed version: Zaman Rashed Uz and Yasmin Lailufar. “The shape of the international order: the case study of AUKUS”. *Stosunki Międzynarodowe – International Relations* 57, (2021): 180–191. Printed 2022. <https://doi.org/10.12688/stomiedintrelat.17420.1>.

For online version: Zaman RU and Yasmin L. **The shape of the international order: the case study of AUKUS.** *Stosunki Międzynarodowe – International Relations* 2022, 2:6 <https://doi.org/10.12688/stomiedintrelat.17420.1>

Introduction

The nature and characteristics of international order have shifted in the 21st century. While there were clearly discernible locations of power in the 20th century, 21st century power politics is equally indefinable and volatile. Relationships among states, their patterns of engagements, and rules of the game are shifting rapidly. Such changes at the structural level rather went mostly unnoticed initially, due to the fact that there was no clear pattern of balance of power emerging after the demise of Soviet Union. Rather, scholars were writing about the rise of multipolarity or of actors like Germany etc. By the second decade of the century, as China boldly shed off its ‘biding time, hiding intentions’ strategy and moved to an assertive foreign policy, easternization of the world gradually caught attention. Similarly, the vulnerability of the Western countries to act in unison was also tested by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the concomitant annexation of Crimea. More fissures among the Western allies who held a unified alliance during the Cold War period gradually opened up, one of the latest manifestations of which can be found in the recently formed AUKUS—a union among Australia, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States (US).¹

This article discusses the particular trends of international order traceable in the 21st century with specific reference to AUKUS. The central research question of the paper is to understand what the nature of the international order is. To explain the research question, this study takes AUKUS as a case study. It argues that in its rudimentary form, AUKUS may seem to be an attempt to forge stronger ties among three Anglophone countries but its viability to sustain this alliance in the long run is questionable. In other words, this article argues that AUKUS carries the trends visible in the patterns of alliance formation and cooperative arrangements of the 21st century, which are short-term interest based and, therefore, have seldom shown any actual functionality. To prove this hypothesis, the paper follows a qualitative methodology. The structure of the paper is divided into three sections apart from an introduction and a conclusion. In the first section of this article, it elaborates upon the central research question and the methodology of the paper. In the next section, it outlines the trends of international order in the 21st century. The discussions on AUKUS are addressed in the third section that draw upon the main argument of the article and assess the viability of AUKUS. The article concludes by summarizing the major points of discussions and identifying the validity of the argument of the article—that AUKUS stands as a testament to how alliances are hurriedly done but may have few substantial contributions in terms of the way alliances function. It is in this context that the next section discusses the central research question and methodology of the paper.

¹ “Joe Biden announces Indo-Pacific alliance AUKUS with UK, Australia ahead of Quad summit,” *First Post*, 16 September, 2021, located at <https://www.firstpost.com/world/joe-biden-announces-indo-pacific-alliance-aucus-with-uk-australia-ahead-of-quad-summit-9968881.html>, accessed on 14 December 2021.

Methods

This article traces the patterns of the current international order and argues how it has become more volatile as well as often based on short-term considerations. As an empirical case study, it looks into the latest alliance formed among the US, the UK, and Australia—AUKUS. As the alliance has emerged in mid-September, 2021, the study follows a qualitative methodology and uses discourse analysis to deliberate the arguments. Discourse analysis of government issued documents, policy papers, and interviews are used as primary materials to analyse the aims and objectives of AUKUS, which are also substantiated by secondary materials. More particularly, this paper uses research articles and books published by Routledge, Springer, Oxford University Press (OUP) and the likes. It has probed into the US State Department reports as well as interviews and analyses published in *The Diplomat*, *The Guardian*, and *The New York Times*, among others. The data collection process followed the use of the Google search engine and later on through different academic accesses to find the latest materials published on the issue in this article. AUKUS is chosen as a case study as a part of an inductive strategy to understand how alliance systems in 21st century are often short-term interests driven. This particular security alliance is chosen as a case study due to a few reasons. It is the latest of its kind that validate the claim of the paper which argues on security alliances are formed on a short-term strategic need. Also, AUKUS has drawn considerable attention as a security alliance that seemed to have challenged the concept of Asia's security and brought external actors in Asia's vicinity. The aim of this paper is to open the discussion on a fresh topic—that is AUKUS – so that it can lead to further discussions on a bigger scale regarding other alliances, such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad),² and their larger viabilities in the current international order.

International order and strategic environment in the 21st century

The idea of international order is fairly recent in origin only after the state system was considered as stable political organizations based on the principle of sovereignty. The world somewhat reached a geopolitical stability after the end of World War II, which saw a rigorous scrutiny on the nature and characteristics of the future international order. The US' intention to actively engage in international politics, driven by its reluctant involvement in two World Wars, made it shed off its policy of isolation, outlined under the Monroe Doctrine.³ This led to two distinct

² S.N. Kutty and R. Basrur, "The Quad: What It Is – And What It Is Not," *The Diplomat*, 24 March, 2021, located at <https://thediplomat.com/2021/03/the-quad-what-it-is-and-what-it-is-not/>, accessed on 14 December 2021.

³ M. Mariano, "Isolationism, internationalism and the Monroe Doctrine," *Journal of Transatlantic Studies* 9, (2011): 35–45.

but interrelated developments in America—the study and research on international relations (IR) became a central focus to understand state behaviour and policy responses to shape international order as a superpower. The birth of a liberal international order can, thus, be traced since the middle of the 20th century, based on realist assumptions, which clearly outlined the locations of power as West-centric. While the liberal international order is considered as “an ideational and normative” project,⁴ it did emerge out of a Western consensus to maintain a particular type of ideological hegemony over the rest of the world, where representation of non-Western countries was not seen as pivotal. In other words, Asian, African, and Latin American countries, who were emerging out of decolonization, were considered as passive actors in this liberal international order than having any active roles, albeit with the exception of the presence of the People’s Republic of China (China) in the highest table of global governance being a part of the permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). International order, thus, has been organized as an amalgamation of rule-based order with sovereign equality of nation-states, albeit hierarchical in nature, universal in scope which would be maintained by a specific group of countries.⁵ The central thrust of international order can be summarized as composed of “the institutional order, the demonstrated propensity toward multilateral action, and the core group of states”.⁶ While the political core of the order lied in democratization, the economic core lay in maintaining a liberal economic order, which received further impetus with the dissolution of Soviet Union and the capitalist economic system standing as the only viable alternative. With China’s accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001, the capitalist economic system became omnipresent with a global net wealth increasing from USD \$358 trillion in 2000 to USD \$514 trillion in 2020.⁷ This latest report released confirms that China has overtaken the US as the wealthiest country of the world.

China’s integration with the capitalist economic system without political reforms internally has raised much cause of concern in recent years, especially since China has declared its flagship Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) in 2013⁸ and expressed a desire to create a new international order. China defines its version of international order as rule-based international order that respects sovereign equality

⁴ R. Alcaro, “The Liberal Order and its Contestations. A Conceptual Framework,” *The International Spectator* 53, no. 1 (2018): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2018.1397878>.

⁵ G.J. Ikenberry, “Liberal Internationalism 3.0: America and the Dilemmas of Liberal World Order,” *Perspectives on Politics* 7, no. 1 (March, 2009): 71–87.

⁶ M.J. Mazarr and A.L. Rhoades, “Testing the Value of the Postwar International Order,” *Rand Corporations* (2018): x.

⁷ “China overtakes US as world’s wealthiest country: McKinsey report”, *Arab News*, 16 November, 2021, located at <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1969181/business-economy>, accessed on 16 November 2021.

⁸ M.H.T. Chan, “The Belt and Road Initiative – the New Silk Road: a research agenda,” *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies* 7, no. 2 (2018): 104–23.

of states and the applicability of international law for state actors.⁹ In essence, one can argue that both the Western and the Chinese versions of international orders resonate in terms of their substance, although one can argue the fundamental area of divergence lies in who would act as the gatekeeper of the international order. Similarly, scholars have argued that instead of China acting as a revolutionary power, it rather acts as a revisionist power,¹⁰ as the US retreated from undertaking global responsibilities especially under the Trump administration, and while China plans to act as a responsible power and a keeper of international order.¹¹ The Trumpian vision of the world order distanced the US from its European allies due to lacking a coherent foreign policy with regard to the future of the international order.¹² It has also been argued that given the current state of international politics, there is a possibility of the emergence of two parallel international orders—a liberal international order led by the US and its allies and an authoritarian-capitalist international order led by China.¹³

This brings us to the question of fluidity in the nature of international order and the strategic environment that we are witnessing in 21st century. During the Cold War period, allegiances and interests were ideology-based and led to the formation of strong alliances for the US and Soviet Union. The physical embodiment of the Cold War, to this day, remains in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), although the nature of allegiance and security co-binding of states have been less pronounced in the absence of a clearly defined enemy at the structural level. Regional organizations remained less active or even in some cases dormant during the Cold War period, while the UNSC itself often experienced periods of inactivity due to superpower rivalry. The 21st century saw significant diplomatic manoeuvrings with a number of alliances; cooperative organizations were formed

⁹ H. Wang, “Emerging International Order and China’s Role,” in *China’s Global Rebalancing and the New Silk Road*, B.R. Deepak (ed.), (Springer, 2018): 227–47; L. Yasmin, “Understanding the Concept and Vision of BRI: The Economic, Cultural and Historical Aspects,” *Peace and Security Review* 8, no. 19 (Fourth Quarter, 2018): 24–39.

¹⁰ M. Rapp-Hooper *et al.*, “Responding to China’s Complicated Views on International Order,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, 10 October, 2019, located at <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/10/responding-to-china-s-complicated-views-on-international-order-pub-80021>, accessed on 16 November 2021.

¹¹ L. Benabdallah, “Contesting the international order by integrating it: the case of China’s Belt and Road initiative,” *Third World Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (2019): 92–108, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.1529539>; S.M. Walt, “China Wants a ‘Rules-Based International Order,’ Too,” *Foreign Policy*, 31 March, 2021, located at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/31/china-wants-a-rules-based-international-order-too/>, accessed on 31 March 2021.

¹² J. Peterson, “Present at the Destruction? The Liberal Order in the Trump Era,” *The International Spectator* 53, no. 1 (2018): 28–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2018.1421295>; S.D. Sharma, “Trump and the End of an Era? The Liberal International Order in Perspective,” *The International Spectator* 55, no. 3 (2020): 82–97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03932729.2020.1786927>; J. Noonan, “Trump and the Liberal International Order,” *International Critical Thought* (2020): <https://doi.org/10.1080/21598282.2020.1779601>.

¹³ J.M. Owen, “Two emerging international orders? China and the United States,” *International Affairs* 97, no. 5 (September, 2021): 1415–431.

that redefined both the idea of region as well as the motivations for forming such frameworks. Often, these included competing countries within the same bloc, while the same members are targeted through the formation of rival blocs. The formation of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—famously known as BRICS—contradicts with the proposal of Quad, formed with the US, Japan, India, and Australia, where the latter targets China as a disruptor of the rule-based international order, without mentioning its name. Within the Quad, trilateralism emerged involving India, Japan, and Australia.¹⁴ However, under the Biden administration's leadership, Quad 2.0 has emerged as an effective alliance and with plan of actions to counter China's BRI, although it does not mention as such in any official statements or policy papers. The US also advances its Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy (FOIP) as an alternative for the East Asian countries to counter China's dominance in the Indo-Pacific region.¹⁵ The latest alliance, so far, has been the emergence of AUKUS, where three Anglophone countries are determined to create their own strategic alliance based on mutual interest. The trust between the US and its European allies was already in decline, which particularly became more pronounced during the Trump administration,¹⁶ but the emergence of AUKUS, which shall be discussed in more details in the next section, has brought it out in the open. Europe's lack of trust on the US to act as a security umbrella with the emerging Russian assertiveness and China's geopolitical advances has led it to rethink its own security organization.¹⁷ The idea of a European defence force is not a new one, but the looming euphoria surrounding it and the actions being pursued are certainly something to take note of while charting the strategic environment of this century.

The nature of 21st century alliances and cooperative frameworks is fluid, short-term interest based, and hurriedly compiled to address the need of the hour. Often, these frameworks are a mixture of similar type of actors, which make these overlapping and leaves few clear goals and objectives. In an age of complex

¹⁴ F. Kliem, "Why Quasi-Alliances Will Persist in the Indo-Pacific? The Fall and Rise of the Quad," *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* (2020): 1–34.

¹⁵ "A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision", *Department of State*, United States of America, 4 November, 2019, located at <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf>, accessed on 23 November 2021.

¹⁶ K.L. Nielsen, "Beware the Folly of Pride: Europe, Trump and the Enduring Need for the Transatlantic Alliance," *Dans L'Europe en Formation* 382, no. 1/3 (2017): 63–81; D. Whineray, "Trump Has Irrevocably Changed American Relations With Europe—and Biden Probably Can't Fix It," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* 6 May, 2020, located at <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/05/06/trump-has-irrevocably-changed-american-relations-with-europe-and-biden-probably-can-t-fix-it-pub-81739>, accessed on 23 November 2021.

¹⁷ B. Mações, "How America fell out of love with Europe," *Politico* 9 July, 2021, located at <https://www.politico.eu/article/joe-biden-united-states-europe-transatlantic-relationship-russia-china/>, accessed on 23 November 2021.

interdependence, especially as the world is witnessing a pandemic, instead of cooperation there is a sudden rise in diplomatic activities, alliance formation, and the arms race. Interestingly, unlike the previous centuries, there are a few particular trends visible in these areas. The centre of gravity of diplomatic activities has shifted to the Indo-Pacific region. Alliance formations are targeted to counter China's rise and global domination. Last but not the least, the arms race has particularly reached to the Indo-Pacific region, where technological advancements of the countries of this region, particularly of that of China, have reached to such a height that often they do not need to entirely depend upon a Western source to develop their own arsenals. According to a Pentagon report published in November 2021, China is pursuing a policy of "active defense" keeping in mind of "the policy of great rejuvenation of Chinese nation" by 2049 and actively targeting to increase its military arsenal specially the nuclear stockpile.¹⁸ The report caught wider attention as a 'clarion call' to pay attention to China's future intentions in global politics. The report was highly criticized by the Chinese authorities as being "full of prejudice" and a "hype".¹⁹ The report also stated a possibility of China looking for establishing military bases in Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, United Arab Emirates, Kenya, Seychelles, Tanzania, Angola, and Tajikistan. Chinese authorities pointed out that the US retains about 750 military bases worldwide which have political, economic, social, and environmental implications, an example that China is not inclined to follow.²⁰ Under the Biden administration, the world saw a significant American diplomatic manoeuvring throughout the world, as the US took a firm stand on making the Quad 2.0 work, the making of the AUKUS pact, and introducing its competing infrastructure plan Build Back Better World (B3W), vis-à-vis the BRI,²¹ the Biden administration experiences significant challenges domestically. While B3W and BRI could be seen as complimentary,²² B3W continues to present itself as an alternative to BRI and as a

¹⁸ "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China," *Annual Report to the Congress*, U.S. Department of Defense, 3 November, 2021, located at <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Nov/03/2002885874/-1/-1/0/2021-CMPR-FINAL.PDF>, accessed on 20 November 2021.

¹⁹ "To US Report On 1,000 Chinese Nukes By 2030, Beijing Says "Prejudice";" *NDTV*, 4 November, 2021, located at <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/pentagon-report-on-china-pentagon-report-on-china-weapons-full-of-prejudice-china-dismisses-us-report-on-nuclear-arms-expansion-2599234>, accessed on 20 November 2021; L. Xuanzun and G. Yuandan, "New Pentagon report hypes 'Chinese nuclear threat' to serve US hegemonic goals," *Global Times*, 4 November, 2021, located at <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202111/1238200.shtml>, accessed on 20 November 2021.

²⁰ S.R. Mohan, "China 'Likely Considered' Setting Up a Military Base in SL," *Ceylon Today* 6 November, 2021, located at <https://ceylontoday.lk/news/china-likely-considered-setting-up-a-military-base-in-sl>, accessed on 20 November 2021.

²¹ G.W. Meeks, "The Build Back Better World Partnership Could Finally Break the Belt and Road," *Foreign Policy*, 28 June, 2021, located at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/06/28/the-build-back-better-world-partnership-could-finally-break-the-belt-and-road/>, accessed on 23 November 2021.

²² K. Zhu, "'Build Back Better World' and the Belt and Road Are Not Necessarily at Odds," *The Diplomat*, 28 June, 2021, located at <https://thediplomat.com/2021/06/build-back-better-world-and-the-belt-and-road-are-not-necessarily-at-odds/>, accessed on 23 November 2021.

representation of a particular group of countries with specific objectives to pursue.²³ Also, in terms of appointing its top diplomats, especially in the Indo-Pacific countries, the Biden administration is lagging behind while China's diplomatic manoeuvres are at full swing.²⁴ At this point, the article brings in the discussion on AUKUS, its formation, and its functionality, which provides the empirical evidence of the major argument of the paper.

AUKUS and its implications

The talk of an impending 'new Cold War' between the US and China was in vogue already,²⁵ although a number of scholars argued that the nature of strategic rivalry between the two countries is qualitatively different than the Cold War between the US and Soviet Union for a number of reasons. As stated before in this article, Chinese scholars have unequivocally stated that China's goals are not revolutionary in nature, which certainly marks a qualitative difference in the case of the US-China competition in its current form. The announcement of a trilateral security alliance, AUKUS, on 15 September, 2021 took the world by surprise and brought back the discussion of a 'new Cold War' in the strategic parlance once again.²⁶ The AUKUS stands as a reminder of the Five Eyes (FVEY) of intelligence sharing mechanism among the Anglophone countries,²⁷ which began between the US and the UK in the 1940s, signed in 1946, and gradually expanded to include Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.²⁸ Therefore, terming the AUKUS as an indicator of a

²³ C. Quinn, "Biden Plans Belt and Road Competitor at COP26," *Foreign Policy*, 2 November, 2021, located at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/11/02/biden-plans-belt-and-road-competitor-at-cop26/>, accessed on 23 November 2021.

²⁴ K. Mahbubani, "In Asia, China's Long Game Beats America's Short Game," *Foreign Policy*, 12 December, 2021, located at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/12/12/china-us-asean-trade-geopolitics/>, accessed on 12 December, 2021.

²⁵ A. Dupont, "The US-China Cold War Has Already Started," *The Diplomat*, 8 July, 2021, located at <https://thediplomat.com/2020/07/the-us-china-cold-war-has-already-started/>, accessed on 23 November 2021; Y. Yeng, "The New Cold War: America's new approach to Sino-American relations," *China International Strategy Review* 3, (June, 2021): 20–33, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42533-021-00071-1>; H. Brands and J.L. Gaddis, "The New Cold War: America, China, and the Echoes of History," *Foreign Affairs* (November/December, 2021): 10–21.

²⁶ S. Roggeveen, "How nuclear subs could transform Australia, its alliance and Asia," *The Interpreter*, The Lowy Institute, 16 September, 2021, located at <https://www.loyyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/how-nuclear-sub-could-transform-australia-its-alliance-and-asia>, accessed on 20 November 2021; Prof. N.A. Guney, "Analysis-Third front of New Cold War expanding in Asia-Pacific," *Anadolu Agency*, 24 September, 2021, located at <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/analysis-third-front-of-new-cold-war-expanding-in-asia-pacific/2373757>, accessed on 20 November 2021; L. Kapur, "The AUKUS Alliance: Return to the Past?" *DPG Policy Brief* VI, no. 33 (25 September, 2021): 1–13; S. Oue, "AUKUS has a significant part to play in the 'new Cold War' against China," *The Japan Times*, 2 November, 2021, located at <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2021/11/02/commentary/world-commentary/aukus-china-cold-war/>, accessed on 20 November 2021.

²⁷ M. Saikia, "AUKUS: A new Cold War against China," *The Pioneer*, 14 November, 2021, located at <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2021/columnists/aukus--a-new-cold-war-against-china.html>, accessed on 20 November 2021.

²⁸ J.V. Tossini, "The Five Eyes – The Intelligence Alliance of the Anglosphere," *UK Defence Journal* (14 April, 2020), located at <https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/the-five-eyes-the-intelligence-alliance-of-the-anglosphere/>, accessed on 20 November 2021.

‘new Cold War’ particularly within the geographic sphere of the Indo-Pacific might seem relevant, although it also indicates that the US-China relations is advancing from being a relationship of competition to a relationship of confrontation. Keeping in mind the geopolitical centrality of the Indo-Pacific region as well as China’s unbounded economic and military rise, the pact is identified as a means to counter China in its own region, although like the Quad or other Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategies, the AUKUS pact does not refer to China as its target.

The nature of AUKUS pact begins with sharing sensitive nuclear technology by the US and the UK with Australia to help acquiring a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines (SSNs). While this does not indicate that Australia would receive nuclear weapons, as prohibited under the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), the technology is considered critical as the US and the UK submarines are enriched with uranium of 93–97 percent, which is considered as nuclear weapons-grade. The US and the UK experts shall work with their Australian counterparts for the next 18 months of consultation period about how the project shall materialize although, due to technical reasons, Australia would not receive the submarines till the year 2040.

The AUKUS pact is critical for various reasons. It shows, first, the instability of the international order that sweeps this century where states are redefining their relationships without paying attention to long terms goals. To form the AUKUS, Australia cancelled its USD \$37 billion contract to purchase 12 submarines from France.²⁹ This sudden decision created not only mistrust between Australia and France, but also further distanced the UK from continental Europe. BREXIT, that is the UK’s exit from the European Union (EU), already created a chain of events on how the UK and continental Europe would maintain their relationship, the cancellation of the defence contract created more distrust between the two entities. The diplomatic spat between the UK and France continued; as a preliminary response, France recalled its ambassadors from Australia and the US. As French President Emmanuel Macron termed the Australian decision as “highly irresponsible”,²⁵ the Prime Minister of UK Boris Johnson responded to France’s reaction by suggesting France should “get a grip” (“prenez un grip” in a mix of French and English) and “donnez-moi un break” (“give me a break”).³⁰ France is set to resend its ambassador to Australia,³¹ although this will leave a permanent scar in the trilateral relationship.

²⁹ M. Walden, “How can Australia repair its relationship with France after the AUKUS submarine row?” *ABC News*, 23 September, 2021, located at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-09-23/how-can-australia-repair-its-relationship-with-france-aucus/100480270>, accessed on 20 November 2021.

³⁰ “Boris Johnson tells Macron: Donnez-moi un break over new pact,” *BBC News*, 22 September 2021, located at <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-58654624>, accessed on 20 November 2021; M. Zhu, “Explainer | Aucus alliance: what is it, what does it have to do with China, and why is France angry?” *South China Morning Post*, 10 October, 2021, located at <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3151700/aukus-alliance-what-it-what-does-it-have-do-china-and-why>, accessed on 20 November 2021.

³¹ “France to send ambassador back to Australia amid Aucus row,” *BBC News*, 7 October 2021, located at <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-58824604>, accessed on 20 November 2021.

Australia's decision to shift its defence priorities from France to UK has revived the idea of Europe's own defence mechanism so that it does not have to depend on any external forces for its security. The discussion on Europe's strategic autonomy is not a new idea. It has, however, resurfaced recently, especially with the rise of Trump's 'America First' policy.³² European leaders have had contradictory positions on the issue though although with the American withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, the idea resonated as a viable plan among Germany, Finland, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Slovenia to create Europe's own military unit.³³ The AUKUS pact—termed as a 'moment of truth' for Europe—created yet another ripple effect that perhaps it was time for Europe to seek for its military independence from the US given how the deal was reached. Although Europe was divided on the proposal to form its own forces after the AUKUS row, understandably due to Central and Eastern European countries apprehensions about losing NATO's security umbrella against Russia,³⁴ the idea of Europe's autonomous army is not yet off the table. The contribution of AUKUS, in this particular context, can be evaluated as creating further division in Europe as well as a possible militarization of the continent that has already experienced two devastating world wars. True, states act on the basis of their national interests—but they cannot ignore the long-term implications of their actions.

The AUKUS pact has also made the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) rethink their position in the Indo-Pacific region as well as in the calculations of great powers. There is much apprehension that the pact might affect ASEAN's centrality in the region once again, like during the Cold War period which stalled the function of the organization. Similarly, concerns rose over the great power rivalry heading to the Indo-Pacific region, which would have multifaceted implications for the region and, more importantly, might dethrone ASEAN's centrality in terms of decision making for the region.³⁵ On the one hand, the revival

³² B. Kunz, "Europe's Defense Debate is All about America," *War on the Rocks*, 4 March, 2020, located at <https://warontherocks.com/2020/03/europes-defense-debate-is-all-about-america/>, accessed on 21 November 2021.

³³ "Germany, 4 EU states launch military reaction force initiative — report," *dw.com*, 21 October, 2021, located at <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-4-eu-states-launch-military-reaction-force-initiative-report/a-59574641>, accessed on 21 November 2021.

³⁴ T. Stickings, "Europe divided on plans for its own army after Aukus submarine row," *The National News*, 6 October, 2021, located at <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/europe/2021/10/06/europe-divided-on-plans-for-its-own-army-after-aukus-submarine-row/>, accessed on 21 November 2021.

³⁵ G. Singh, "The ASEAN disunity over AUKUS," *RAISINA Debate*, Observer Research Foundation, 27 October, 2021, located at <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-asean-disunity-over-aukus/>, accessed on 21 November 2021; W. Choong, "Why AUKUS Alarms ASEAN," *Foreign Policy*, 19 October, 2021, located at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/10/19/asean-aukus-china-us-rivalry/>, accessed on 21 November 2021; L. Singarimbun, "The AUKUS alliance and ASEAN's waning centrality," *Asia & the Pacific Policy Society*, 8 November, 2021, located at <https://www.policyforum.net/the-aukus-alliance-and-aseans-waning-centrality/>, accessed on 21 November 2021.

of the Quad shifts focus from ASEAN being the key decision maker of the region, and on the other, the emergence of AUKUS further increases the same fear for ASEAN. While observers believe that Japan might act as a significant player in the region to reduce such concerns for ASEAN by building a bridge between the organization and the other great powers,³⁶ it does not however diminish ASEAN's central concern of heightened geopolitical rivalry heading to the region.³⁷ As the former Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating mentioned, Australia was rather finding its "security from Asia rather than in Asia" by engaging with outside players like the US and the UK.³⁸ In fact, one of the most viable criticism came from the former Prime Minister who argued that China's economic rise has led to a 'testosterone' driven response from the great powers and Australian plan to acquire SSNs looked "like throwing a handful of toothpicks at the mountain". True, by the time Australia takes delivery of the SSNs I 2040, China will have advanced far ahead in technological and military arenas. Thus, the emergence of AUKUS is seen as though "it subtracts rather than adds" to regional instability, as "[I]f this was the start of a new "anti-hegemonic coalition" to balance China's rise, it has not quite blown up on the launchpad, but nor has it taken off as smoothly as intended".³⁹ It has been argued, on the other hand, that AUKUS is not only about submarines but, at its heart, technology transfer as well as making Australia's defence, the closest Anglophone country, fool-proof by making it stronger in the domain of air power as well.⁴⁰

Conclusion

International order, its stability, and its functioning have come under much scrutiny in recent years. Scholars have argued about the viability of the liberal international order, especially with China's economic arm reaching far and beyond in different continents. This has created an alarm in the West, specially to the US

³⁶ R.J.P. Irsadanar, "Can Japan Be a Bridge Between AUKUS and ASEAN?" *The Diplomat*, 26 October, 2021, located at <https://thediplomat.com/2021/10/can-japan-be-a-bridge-between-aukus-and-asean/>, accessed on 21 November 2021.

³⁷ Y. Purnama, "Understanding ASEAN's silence behind AUKUS agreement," *The Conversation*, 11 October, 2021, located at <https://theconversation.com/understanding-aseans-silence-behind-aukus-agreement-168661>, accessed on 21 November 2021.

³⁸ D. Hurst, "'Throwing toothpicks at the mountain': Paul Keating says Aukus submarines plan will have no impact on China," *The Guardian*, 10 November, 2021, located at <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/nov/10/throwing-toothpicks-at-the-mountain-paul-keating-says-aukus-submarines-plan-will-have-no-impact-on-china>, accessed on 21 November 2021.

³⁹ P. Wintour, "As China threat rises, can Aukus alliance recover from rancorous birth?" *The Guardian*, 23 November, 2021, located at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/23/as-china-threat-rises-can-aukus-alliance-recover-from-rancorous-birth>, accessed on 23 November 2021.

⁴⁰ D.D. Jackson, "More Than Submarines: Implications of AUKUS in the Air Domain," *Council on Foreign Relations*, 5 October, 2021, located at <https://www.cfr.org/blog/more-submarines-implications-aukus-air-domain>, accessed on 21 November 2021.

in that it is diplomatically being proactive by forming a number of alliances. In fact, forming alliances and cooperative partnerships have become a defining characteristic of 21st century, which have competing countries as members, and thus, render the activities of these frameworks often ineffective. Also, the security implications of these pacts are often not evaluated before they are formed and thus, instead of ensuring 'security', these pacts, like AUKUS in question, are turning into drivers of insecurity, competitions, and possible confrontations. China's economic rise, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, has remained unchallenged. The shape of the international order has become volatile in this manner and alliances may lose their relevance in terms of their functionality. The AUKUS, as this article did a detailed analysis, is a testament to this argument. It has made Asia, and in particular the Indo-Pacific region, more vulnerable and conflict-prone.

Data availability

No data are associated with this article.