
The Implementation of AUKUS in American Foreign Policy in the Indo-Pacific

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine the implementation of AUKUS in the Indo-Pacific. AUKUS is a trilateral security partnership between the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, to enable Australia to acquire nuclear-powered submarines. The transfer of the submarines under AUKUS raised tensions between the U.S. and China and some Southeast Asian countries. They slammed the U.S., claiming the partnership could destabilize security in the Indo-Pacific. Despite these rising tensions, the U.S. continues to advance AUKUS. This research seeks to explore the implementation of AUKUS, discussing how the American government achieves the objective of the partnership. This research uses Graham Allison's Rational Actor Theory and employs a qualitative method to examine the calculation of costs and benefits behind the establishment of AUKUS and to analyze its implementation, with interviews and a literature review in place. This research finds that the U.S. is gradually implementing AUKUS by initiating training programs and joint military exercises aimed at preparing Australian personnel to operate nuclear-powered submarines effectively. Despite growing protests against AUKUS, the U.S. remains committed to maintaining this partnership due to its strategic benefits: enhancing power projection, expanding influence, and strengthening deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. This research contributes to enriching literature on AUKUS.

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INTRODUCTION

On September 15, 2021, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia launched the trilateral security cooperation AUKUS in the Indo-Pacific region. This pact showcases their vigorous commitment to enhancing their military power by enabling Australia to acquire nuclear-powered submarines with assistance from the U.S. and the U.K. These submarines are faster and harder to detect than conventionally powered fleets, with the additional capacities of staying submerged for extended periods and launching missiles over greater distances (BBC, 2021). American President Joe Biden explained that the three countries saw AUKUS as a way to strengthen ties among U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific, promoting collaboration and harmony in the region (Mada, 2021).

AUKUS, however, reflects Biden's foreign policy to deter China and counter its growing influence in the Indo-Pacific, according to existing studies. Yida (2024) analyzed that the U.S. formed AUKUS to challenge China's expanding regional power by sharing nuclear submarine technology with Australia as a means of

balancing military power. Saputro, Ulung, & Abdurrohim (2024) also viewed China's rising dominance in military, economy, and infrastructure as a cause for U.S. concern; thus, Biden positioned Australia at the forefront of advancing American interests there. They opined that the U.S. perceived China's assertiveness—especially regarding territorial disputes involving U.S. allies—as threatening its position in the region. Santoso et al. (2023) also argued that China's unilateral claim over the disputed South China Sea motivated the U.S. to establish AUKUS. They explained that the U.S. used AUKUS as a way to balance China's power, safeguard its allies, and maintain regional dominance.

The existing studies mainly explore why the U.S. established AUKUS (Korwa & Wambraw, 2023; Novita, 2022; Santoso et al., 2023; Saputro, Ulung, & Abdurrohim, 2024; Tsuruoka, 2021), describe how China and Southeast Asian countries responded (Darmawan & Karmilawaty, 2023; Oktavianto, 2023), and predict how the pact might affect security dynamic across the Indo-Pacific (Imannurdin et al., 2024; Li, 2022; Saputro, Ulung, Abdurrohim, et al., 2024; Yida,

2024). They, however, have yet to examine how AUKUS is being implemented - a gap that I would like to address in this research. I intend to explore how the U.S. put the pact into effect in implementing its foreign policy towards the Indo-Pacific. Therefore, a research question raised in this research is: "How did the U.S. implement AUKUS?" This inquiry serves as a novelty of this research.

This research found that the American government implemented AUKUS progressively through initiatives such as training Australian forces on operating nuclear-powered submarines alongside joint exercises involving all three countries—the U.S., U.K., and Australia—thereby enhancing interoperability among their militaries. This article contributes to adding valuable knowledge about both the practical application and strategic significance of AUKUS beyond existing literature.

METHODOLOGY

To address the research question, I employed a qualitative method that included both a literature review and interviews. For data collection, I conducted interviews with two lecturers from the International

Relations Department at Universitas Indonesia: Edy Prasetyono, Ph.D. in July 2022 and Prof. Evi Fitriani in August 2022. I also reviewed books, journal articles, and news reports, combining the data from the interviews with extensive literature reviews to discuss how the U.S. implemented AUKUS in its foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific, with Graham Allison's Rational Actor Theory in place. Therefore, in this section, I provide an overview of the concept of foreign policy as well as Allison's rational actor theory.

Foreign Policy

Foreign policy refers to the strategies and actions a country employs to reach national objectives beyond its exclusive territories. It involves a government's planned approach to managing relationships and interactions with other nations on the global stage. Therefore, foreign policy comprises a goal that state representatives seek abroad, values that underlie the goals, and the instruments that they use to pursue them (Kegley & Blanton, 2010).

According to Joseph Frankel, foreign policy is a combination of decisions and actions that shape how countries relate to one another. A set of actions

in foreign policy is formulated within a country's borders. The government then directs the actions towards external forces to reach national interests abroad. Foreign policy, therefore, foreign policy encompasses both its formulation and execution. It shapes how a country behaves internationally to benefit its citizens at home (AS, 2018, p. 2).

Foreign policy refers to the sum of external actions carried out by a country to reach advantageous outcomes abroad for the country (Joffé, 2008). According to Adeed Dawisha, foreign policy has three scopes: the influences of foreign policy, the decision-making process, and the implementation of foreign policy. The influences of foreign policy revolve around domestic and international factors that influence the formulation of foreign policy. The decision-making process describes how foreign policy is formulated at home. The implementation of foreign policy explains how the government executes foreign policy to reach desired outcomes (Setiawati, 2023, p. 23).

Graham Allison's Rational Actor Theory

Graham Allison offers the Rational Actor Theory as a framework for understanding the decision-making process in international relations. In this theory, Allison argues that actors, from individuals to states, use rationality in making decisions, meaning that they calculate costs and benefits to get maximum utility. Therefore, in international relations, states play rational actors that formulate foreign policy rationally to pursue national interests (Allison, 1971).

National interest means what benefits the state as a whole. It encompasses areas such as national security, economic growth, political stability, and the country's reputation on the global stage. Rational Actor Theory treats national interest as an objective set of preferences or goals that guide rational decision-making by the state. The government acts to maximize these interests through calculated choices. National interest represents the aims or targets that a nation strives to accomplish or safeguard through its domestic and foreign policies (Allison, 1971).

Allison (1971) views government action as the basic

unit of analysis in this rational actor theory, arguing that governments will select actions that will maximize their strategic goals and objectives. He conceives the government as a rational decision-maker. This decision-maker has a set of goals and options, with consequences that constitute costs and benefits. The rational actor evaluates the costs and benefits to obtain a value-maximizing option. The actor ranks the options and then rationally chooses the option with the highest benefits. This process is grounded in logical calculation rather than randomness or emotion. Once a decision is made, the entire government machinery works cohesively to carry out the chosen policy efficiently without significant deviation or conflict among agencies (Allison, 1971, p. 33).

DISCUSSION

Employing Graham Allison's rational actor theory, I argue that the American foreign policy of establishing AUKUS illustrates a rational and calculated decision by President Joe Biden to reach the U.S.'s national interest in the Indo-Pacific: balancing China's growing military and economic power and deterring its aggressive actions in the region.

According to Allison (1971), states act as rational actors. The rationality drives them to roll out a foreign policy that can maximize benefits in pursuit of national interest. Therefore, states calculate the costs and benefits of making foreign policy before they act. States weigh the potential costs against the expected benefits of their foreign policy. With Allison's rational choice theory in place, Biden's calculation of costs and benefits when he decided on AUKUS will be explained first. After that, how the American president implemented AUKUS in the Indo-Pacific to take the benefits in pursuit of the expected national interests will be described.

Launching AUKUS: Biden's Rational Choice

AUKUS is a trilateral security partnership formed by the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia on September 15, 2021. In an interview with Universitas Indonesia lecturer Edy Prasetyono, he deemed AUKUS as a military technology collaboration among the three countries because it contained the U.S. and U.K.'s commitments to supply Australia with nuclear-powered submarines (Prasetyono, interview, July 2022). The nuclear aspect of these submarines has sparked

criticism and protests from several countries including Indonesia due to concerns that AUKUS could destabilize regional security in the Indo-Pacific. Indonesian President Joko Widodo, for example, expressed apprehension that AUKUS would provoke an arms race and intensify rivalry in the Indo-Pacific, expecting the three countries to follow nuclear non-proliferation obligations in the region (Li, 2022, p. 271).

Despite the protests, AUKUS holds immense strategic importance for the U.S. The White House senior official said:

This is a fundamental decision – fundamental – that binds decisively Australia to the United States and Great Britain for generations. This is the biggest strategic step that Australia has taken in generations (The White House, 2021).

The Biden administration claimed that AUKUS aimed to sustain peace and establish stability in the Indo-Pacific (The White House, 2021). However, Tsuruoka (2021) analyzed that the U.S. set up the security partnership to strengthen its military posture in the Indo-Pacific to confront China. Therefore, the U.S. needed to involve its ally in

the region: Australia. AUKUS will benefit the U.S. because it will give the country access to locate its submarines in one of the Australian military bases: RAN Stirling base near Perth, Western Australia, or a new facility near Darwin, the Northern Territory that has closer proximity to the South China Sea (Tsuruoka, 2021, p. 3). The use of the military base represents one of the benefits that the U.S. expects to get from AUKUS. This logistical benefit aligns with Graham Allison's rational choice theory, which says that states evaluate expected gains versus risks when formulating foreign policies designed for maximum utility. The benefits expected from AUKUS comprise:

Strengthening Deterrence in the Indo-Pacific

AUKUS will help the U.S. bolster its deterrence capabilities in the Indo-Pacific. The U.S., therefore, intends to initiate the trilateral security cooperation because it will enable the country to equip Australia with nuclear-powered submarines and other forms of advanced military technology to deter China.

Biden has set deterrence as one of the primary national security priorities in his foreign policy. With

deterrence, the president intended to prevent direct threats against the U.S. and its allies while safeguarding its global hegemony. He acknowledged that cooperation strengthened the alliance's deterrence. As such, the country sought to team up with allies like the U.K. and Australia, culminating in AUKUS (Novita, 2022).

The strategic rivalry between the U.S. and China became a major catalyst for forming AUKUS. As tensions escalated, Washington adopted this trilateral security framework as a new approach to deter China's growing power (Li, 2022, p. 283). Chong (2021) deemed AUKUS the U.S.'s signal of pursuing military deterrence against China in its foreign policy. Koga (2024) revealed that the American, British, and Australian governments have shared strategic concerns about containing China since 2010 because Beijing keeps challenging international orders in economy, military, and diplomacy.

China's aggressive territorial claims in the Indo-Pacific motivated Australia to acquire submarines as its strategic deterrence to improve naval capabilities and ensure the freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific. The U.K. has

bolstered its nuclear power industry to increase its defensive and diplomatic presence in the region. Meanwhile, the U.S. has underscored this region's importance since 2017 by emphasizing it in its National Security Strategy and committing to share nuclear technology with Australia (Koga, 2024, p. 15). In an interview with University of Indonesia lecturer Prof. Evi Fitriani, she explained that the three countries formed AUKUS because they felt threatened by China. Therefore, they sought to deter and counter China through AUKUS. She said:

The U.S.-China rivalry will intensify. That's why the U.S. will take all necessary steps to counter China (Fitriani, interview, August 2022).

Like Fitriyani, Edy Prasetyono of the University of Indonesia also argued that AUKUS aimed to contain China's expanding geopolitical and security influences in the Indo-Pacific. He explained that the U.S. set up AUKUS as a robust American-led security umbrella above existing security partnerships, such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) and intelligence alliance The Five

Eyes (Prasetyono, interview, July 2022).

Reinforcing Influence in the Indo-Pacific

AUKUS will enable the U.S. to reinforce its strategic influence across the Indo-Pacific through the development of nuclear-powered submarines in Australia. This trilateral security cooperation will solidify the strategic alliance between the U.S., the U.K., and Australia and strengthen their alignment to address shared security challenges and ensure unified efforts against potential common threats.

The transfer of nuclear-powered submarine technology from the U.S. to Australia in AUKUS will give the U.S. expanded operational reach in the Indo-Pacific because it allows the country to deploy its aircraft, facilitate joint exercises, and give it access to Australian airfields in the region. The collaboration of the three countries in AUKUS will enhance the collective military capabilities of their alliance, including U.S. naval capacities, and give the U.S. a stronger position in its rivalry with China (Leonova, 2022).

Biden sought to reinforce American influence in the Indo-Pacific through AUKUS because

he saw the region had crucial strategic value for the U.S. The new edition of the Indo-Pacific Strategy of the U.S. highlighted the value and influence of the Indo-Pacific in the 21st century. Biden said:

We will focus on every corner of the region, from Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia to South Asia and Oceania, including the Pacific Islands (The White House, 2022, p. 6).

In the Indo-Pacific, Australia also expects the U.S. to increase its regional engagement for its security. Australia's security has depended heavily on the U.S. since the two countries signed the ANZUS treaty in 1951. The signing of the treaty marked the cornerstone of Australian foreign policy as it formalized its alliance with the U.S. AUKUS will make Australia's security more dependent on the U.S. Cox et al. (2023) argued that Australia had a fear of abandonment in its strategic culture. Australia always fears that the U.S. will abandon it because the country believes that its core security can only be assured through US support. Australia also perceives its alliance with the U.S. as a fundamental pillar for regional stability in the Indo-Pacific amid geopolitical changes (Thomas et al., 2013, p. 2).

The fact that the U.S. is a security umbrella for Australia makes Australia expect the U.S. to be more present in the Indo-Pacific after AUKUS is established. Australia needs AUKUS to expect US support to counter and balance China's influence in the Indo-Pacific. Prof. Evi Fitriani of the University of Indonesia elaborated that Australia fears China on three levels. On a domestic level, Australians have anti-China sentiments. At a regional level, Australia fears China for its aggressive moves in unilateral claims in the South China Sea dispute. On a global level, the intense U.S.-China rivalry worries Australia (Fitriani, interview, August 2022). Like Fitriyani, Edy Prasetyono also echoed similar views emphasizing how Canberra consistently regards Beijing as an existential threat requiring firm allied responses (Prasetyono, interview, July 2022).

Increasing Military Power in the Indo-Pacific

AUKUS will benefit the U.S. because the trilateral security cooperation enables the country to strengthen its military power in the Indo-Pacific. AUKUS allows the U.S. to develop its defense technology because it facilitates the country to collect research and

development resources and foster innovation in certain areas, from cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence, to hypersonic missiles. This defense technology cooperation will increase the U.S. military capacities in the Indo-Pacific, providing the country with a decisive edge against China. With AUKUS in place, the U.S. can share secure information and establish trust with its allies, something important for the three countries to maintain regional stability and address emerging threats (Dolan, 2024).

For the U.S., initiating cooperation in the aforementioned areas is important. In the cybersecurity area, for example, the U.S. is also a target of cyberattacks. In 2020, the country was attacked by the SolarWinds Hack and the Colonial Pipeline ransomware. This ransomware attack disrupted energy distribution across the U.S. Cyberattacks from state or non-state actors disrupted networks, crippled financial systems, destabilized government, and dislocated social life (Dolan, 2024, p. 6).

The U.S. also seeks to strengthen the military power of its traditional allies in the Indo-Pacific, particularly Australia, through AUKUS. Australia has an important

position in American foreign policy. In 2002, former American president George W. Bush even deemed Australia as "America's sheriff" in the Asia-Pacific region (ABC News, 2003). Consequently, Washington expects Canberra's unwavering support during any conflicts involving China. However, according to Leonova (2022), the U.S. had never transferred nuclear submarine technology to other nations before the formation of AUKUS. The government previously believed that transferring nuclear submarine technology could weaken its global maritime dominance. As such, Leonova (2022) opined that the transfer of nuclear-powered submarines in AUKUS showed growing American apprehension about China's expanding influence across the Indo-Pacific. The U.S. perceives itself as vulnerable amid Beijing's assertive regional actions, hoping Australia and the U.K. would support the U.S. in keeping its position as a regional leader and security umbrella in the Indo-Pacific. Such vulnerability also played a part in motivating the U.S. to make AUKUS with the U.K. and Australia (Leonova, 2022). From the Australian side, Australia also needs nuclear-powered submarines from the U.S. According to Edy Prasetyono, Australia expects new

submarines to replace the existing Collins-class submarines that the Australian government deems outdated. The Royal Australian Navy has operated the Australian-built diesel-electric submarines since the 1990s. The Australian government had plans for submarine modernization well before establishing AUKUS (Prasetyono, interview, July 2022).

Despite such benefits, President Joe Biden was also aware of the costs behind the decision to make AUKUS. In rational choice theory, Allison, p. (1971, p. 33) explains that an action will produce a series of consequences, which constitute benefits and costs. The cost of making AUKUS is that this cooperation has raised the eyebrows of China and some countries in Southeast Asia.

Facing objections from Southeast Asian countries

The foreign policy of making AUKUS causes the United States to face anti-nuclear protests because this trilateral security cooperation facilitates Australia's acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines. The launch of AUKUS led to the rise of objections and protests in Southeast Asia because the transfer of nuclear technology from the U.S. to

Australia in AUKUS could destabilize the region and undermine nuclear non-proliferation norms.

AUKUS sparks objections and protests from Malaysia and Indonesia because the trilateral security cooperation involves their close neighbor, Australia. Both countries have expressed apprehension about potential nuclear proliferation risks stemming from this cooperation. The Indonesian government criticized AUKUS, warning that procuring nuclear-powered submarines from the U.S. to Australia might fuel the arms race and increase power projection in the Indo-Pacific. Australia's decision to join AUKUS and acquire nuclear-powered submarines made Indonesia wary, prompting reminders for Australia about its obligations under nuclear non-proliferation agreements. During a meeting with Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, Indonesian President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo conveyed his concerns that AUKUS could escalate regional rivalries (Li, 2022, p. 271).

Like Jokowi, Malaysian Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah also worried that AUKUS would prompt an arms race, increase tension among superpowers, and involve them in aggression in the Indo-

Pacific, particularly in the South China Sea. Malaysia rejected great power interference in the Indo-Pacific, stressing the importance of keeping peace and security in the region, including disarming nuclear weapons, promoting nuclear non-proliferation, and using nuclear technology for peaceful purposes (Umar & Santoso, 2023, p. 442).

Facing China's Strong Opposition

China slams the United States for establishing AUKUS in the Indo-Pacific. This trilateral cooperation elicits significant objections from the Chinese government, primarily because of its strategic implication in the region. China perceives the sharing of advanced military technology in AUKUS as a direct attempt to curb its regional influence, viewing that the cooperation will trigger an arms race, increase nuclear risks, and revive the Cold War atmosphere in the Indo-Pacific.

For China, AUKUS describes the irresponsibility and narrow-mindedness of the United States and its traditional allies in their foreign policy. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said that the security pact would harm regional peace and

intensify arms competition across the Indo-Pacific countries. He continued to criticize AUKUS for displaying the obsolete Cold War mentality, believing that the pact would backfire on the interests of the three countries. Chinese state media also denounced the cooperation, slamming the United States for using AUKUS to drag Australia into the U.S.-China rivalry and turn Australia into an adversary of China (BBC, 2021).

Zhao Lijian called the three countries out on AUKUS, labeling the policy of exporting nuclear-power submarine technology to Australia as an irresponsible double standard. The technology transfer drove him to question Australia's commitment to nuclear non-proliferation. He demanded the three countries remove the Cold War zero-sum mentality, discard narrow-minded geopolitical concepts, and respect regional peace and stability (Davidson & Blair, 2021).

China's backlash against AUKUS has drawn the attention of scholars. Yida (2024) argued that AUKUS reflected a major shift in the geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific to counter China's influence. China understood the objective of AUKUS, perceiving it as the U.S.'s way to provoke the

rivalry between the two countries. Therefore, AUKUS can exacerbate the security dilemma in the region. Unlike Yida, Kalanuzza (2023) suggested that these diverging perceptions between Washington versus Beijing fueled escalating tensions over this pact. For the U.S., AUKUS represents essential defense against what it perceives as a Chinese threat; meanwhile, China views the U.S. itself as threatening regional stability through such alliances – thus neither side believes these moves will foster lasting peace or security throughout the Indo-Pacific waters. Their conflicting viewpoints continue deepening hostility following the launch of this trilateral agreement.

Implementing AUKUS

Using Graham Allison's rational actor theory above, I argue that establishing AUKUS is a rational foreign policy made by President Joe Biden to respond to China's expanding influences and aggressive moves in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in its territorial issues with some Southeast Asian countries in the South China Sea. For instance, around Thitu Island, China has demonstrated aggressive actions by deploying vessels to intimidate the Philippines and assert its claim over the

island. These military maneuvers near Thitu exemplify China's broader strategy to assert control over the entire South China Sea (Karmilawaty & Janvy, 2024, p. 204). AUKUS enables the American president to reach three benefits in the Indo-Pacific: strengthening deterrence, reinforcing influence, and increasing power. However, initiating AUKUS has strained relations between the U.S. and some Southeast Asian countries like Indonesia and Malaysia while also heightening tensions with China. Despite the rising tensions, AUKUS remains a rational choice that maximizes benefits for the U.S. With those benefits in place, Biden intends to reach the U.S.'s national interest: balancing China's rising military and economic power and deterring its aggressive moves in the Indo-Pacific.

AUKUS has two major pillars. The first pillar aims to develop nuclear-powered submarines and enhance maritime capabilities (Dolan, 2024, p. 2). The second pillar focuses on the development of advanced technologies, interoperability, and integration in eight functional areas. They comprise hypersonic missiles, artificial intelligence, undersea capabilities, advanced cybersecurity, quantum technology, autonomous weapon systems, information sharing, and innovation. This second pillar seeks to facilitate the U.S., the U.K., and Australia to strengthen their collaboration and trust while addressing emerging threats in the Indo-Pacific (Dolan, 2024, p. 3).

This research finds that since the establishment of the trilateral security pact in September 2021, the United States has placed greater emphasis on advancing the first pillar of AUKUS to counter China. The U.S. has carried out this agreement by providing training to Australian military and civilian personnel, enhancing their expertise and ability to operate nuclear-powered submarines. Additionally, since 2021, the U.S. has organized multiple high-level meetings and

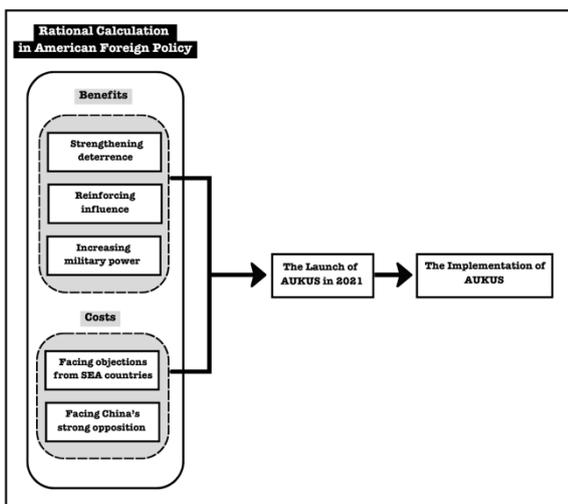


Figure 1. The Calculation of Costs and Benefits in the Making of AUKUS

discussions focused on strengthening the defense partnership among the three nations, including negotiations related to submarine agreements. Details about these submarine deals were made public during a joint announcement in March 2023 by U.S. President Joe Biden, U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. They revealed that Australia would receive between three to five Virginia class submarines from the U.S. by the early 2030s. The U.S. decided to sell its submarines to Australia, naming them SSN-AUKUS. Biden stated:

The ultimate goal isn't just selling subs to Australia. It's developing something new together. We're calling it the SSN-AUKUS. This new state-of-the-art conventionally armed nuclear-powered submarine will work - that will combine U.S. submarine - U.K. submarine technology and design with American technology (The White House, 2023b).

The U.S. operates 115 submarines (Ragheb, 2011, p. 25), with over half being nuclear-powered vessels actively deployed in naval operations. Ragheb (2011) shared these nuclear-powered submarines constitute roughly 40% of America's combatant fleet, highlighting their

strategic significance in modern maritime warfare.

The United States operates various types of nuclear submarines, primarily Ballistic Missile Submarines (SSBNs) and Attack Submarines (SSNs). The Ohio-class SSBNs function as strategic deterrents by carrying long-range nuclear missiles designed for second-strike capability. Meanwhile, SSNs like the Los Angeles class, Seawolf class, and Virginia class perform diverse missions such as tracking enemy submarines and surface ships, conducting intelligence operations, and deploying special forces.

Power Plant	Single S9G PWR Single shaft with pump jet propulsion One secondary propulsion submerged motor
Displacement	7,800 tons, submerged
Length	277 ft.
Draft	33 ft.
Beam	34 ft.
Speed	25+ knots, submerged
Horizontal tubes	Four 21 inches torpedo tubes
Vertical tubes	12 Vertical Launch System Tubes
Weapon systems	59, including: Vertical Launch System Tomahawk Cruise Missiles Mk 48 ADCAP Heavy weight torpedoes Advanced Mobile Mines Unmanned Undersea Vehicles
Special warfare	Dry Deck Shelter
Sonars	Spherical active/passive arrays Light Weight Wide Aperture Arrays TB-16, TB-39 and future towed arrays High frequency chin and sail arrays
Counter measures	1 internal launcher 14 external launchers
Crew	113 officers and men

Figure 2. The Specifications of Virginia Class Submarines
Source: Ragheb, M. (2011, p. 27)

Before the planned sale of U.S. Virginia Class Submarines

in the 2030s, the U.S. began implementing the AUKUS agreement by initiating training and development programs for Australian military and civilian personnel. Starting in 2023, Australian personnel were embedded within U.S. Navy submarine industrial facilities as part of this program (The White House, 2023a). For instance, in early 2024, over 20 sailors and officers from the Royal Australian Navy underwent training through the U.S. Navy Submarine Training system to complete the naval nuclear power training pipeline. Upon finishing their training, these individuals served aboard U.S. Virginia Class Submarines (The White House, 2024). The U.S. government also announced plans to expand this program so that more than 100 Royal Australian Navy personnel will participate across various locations in the United States to ensure Australia's preparedness for operating its own Virginia Class Submarines starting in the early 2030s (The White House, 2024).

Beginning in 2023, the U.S. also increased SSN port visits to Down Under, with Australian sailors joining U.S. crews for the training and development program designed to build operational proficiency on

Virginia-class submarines (The White House, 2023a). To further implement AUKUS, the U.S. will also conduct Submarine Rotational Force-West (SRF-West) in early 2027. In SRF-West, the U.S. presents up to four U.S. Virginia class submarines in a rotation at HMAS Stirling near Perth, West Australia. These submarines are equipped with advanced propulsion systems—specifically an S9G pressurized water reactor providing virtually unlimited range—and weapons systems including Tomahawk cruise missiles and Mk-48 torpedoes. This rotational presence also involves the U.K., with one UK Astute class submarine joining the program. SRF-West aims to help Australia build operational capabilities and stewardship skills and operate its fleet of nuclear-powered submarines. The U.S. readies Australia to grow its defense and industrial workforce for SSN-AUKUS (The White House, 2023a).

To establish SRF-West, the U.S. and Australia finalized a Foreign Military Sales (FMS) case to obtain submarine training devices, including submarine training simulators. The U.S. will use the simulators to train Royal Australian Navy personnel on the U.S. Virginia Class

Submarines before Australia operates its own Virginia class submarines. The FMS case also facilitates training programs for Australian Defense and Industry personnel in the U.S. In March 2024, for example, 20 Australian industry personnel completed training at Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard and Intermediate Maintenance Facility (The White House, 2024). In January 2024, 37 Royal Australian Navy sailors joined training in the USS Emory S. Land in Guam to gain the skills of maintaining submarines. The U.S. trained the Australian sailors on maintenance activity because Australia needed the skills to sustain US nuclear-powered submarines in preparing for the establishment of SRF-West (The White House, 2024).

According to Biden, SSN-AUKUS will become a best-in-class submarine for Australia's long-term defense needs. The president explained that SSN-AUKUS would also become Australia's future attack submarine. Therefore, the U.S. combined its advanced technology with the United Kingdom's submarine design to develop SSN-AUKUS. Australia will start building SSN-AUKUS in its domestic shipyards before the end of this decade, with the first Australian-built SSN-AUKUS coming to the Royal

Australian Navy by the early 2040s (The White House, 2023a).

In the implementation of AUKUS, the American government will also assist Australia in developing the capability of managing radioactive waste and nuclear fuel in its nuclear-powered submarine program. This assistance aims to help Australia securely manage radioactive waste domestically and follow nuclear non-proliferation obligations and commitments (The White House, 2023a). The U.S. collaborates with the U.K. to provide Australia with nuclear material in complete, welded power units. These power units will not require Australia to refuel during their lifetime. The U.S. ensures that Australia cannot use the nuclear fuel it receives for nuclear weapons, confirming that SSN-AUKUS will meet the highest non-proliferation standard. President Biden said:

And I want to be clear. These subs are powered – not nuclear-armed subs. They're nuclear-powered, not nuclear-armed. Australia is a proud non-nuclear weapons state and has committed to stay that way. These boats will not have any nuclear weapons of any kind on them (The White House, 2023b).

To support the U.S. and AUKUS needs, the American government invests an

additional 2.4 billion dollars over the fiscal years of 2023 to 2027 in the submarine industrial base to increase construction capacity and meet U.S. national needs. The government also added 2.2 billion dollars to the submarine maintenance budget from 2024 to 2028 to improve the maintenance of Virginia Class Submarines. The Australian government also supports the American government by committing to invest in the U.S. submarine industrial base to speed up the delivery of the Virginia Class Submarines (The White House, 2023a).

It can be argued that AUKUS marks the revival of Pivot to Asia in American foreign policy. The launch of AUKUS in 2021 showed that President Joe Biden revived Pivot to Asia in the implementation of American foreign policy under his administration. Pivot to Asia refers to a strategic orientation in American foreign policy that focuses on the Asia-Pacific region. First introduced by former president Barack Obama in 2011, Pivot to Asia marked the shift in the U.S.' focus from Europe and the Middle East to the Asia-Pacific in the implementation of Obama's foreign policy. In his foreign policy, Obama focused on Asia-Pacific to address the

rising influence of China and strengthen partnerships with emerging powers in Asia Pacific to reach American national interests in economy, politics, and military in the region (Llanos-Antczak, 2024; Ulung, 2013). Although the Pivot to Asia appeared to lose momentum after Donald Trump succeeded Obama, Biden, who served as Obama's vice president, revitalized it upon taking office through AUKUS. Biden said:

The United States is a Pacific power, because we're on the Pacific Ocean. We are a Pacific power. The United States has safeguarded stability in the Indo-Pacific for decades to the enormous benefits of nations throughout the region, from ASEAN to Pacific Islanders to the People's Republic of China.

Kumar (2023) opined that AUKUS continues Obama's pivot strategy by seeking to balance China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region. The Biden administration recognized that China was rapidly shifting regional power dynamics in its favor—a development threatening U.S. national interests—and thus used AUKUS as a means to bolster Australia's military capabilities so it could assist America in countering China's assertiveness (Kumar, 2023).

Like Kumar, Wei (2022) says, AUKUS underscores how critical the Indo-Pacific is for U.S. security and prosperity goals. He explains that AUKUS embodies Biden's broader Indo-Pacific Strategy aimed at asserting America's role as an Indo-Pacific power with five key objectives: fostering a free and open region; enhancing connectivity within and beyond it; promoting regional prosperity; strengthening security frameworks; and building resilience against transnational threats. The U.S. established AUKUS as a crucial new partnership at the frontline of its security architecture in the Indo-Pacific, involving Australia in the partnership to help the U.S. reach the five objectives, including containing China (Wei, 2022, p. 6).

CONCLUSION

This research article found that the United States implemented AUKUS by preparing nuclear-powered submarines for Australia alongside training Australian military personnel both technically and operationally. The U.S. allocates a special budget and provides Australia with assistance and training programs to develop Australian human resources. This research contributes to enriching literature on AUKUS, arguing that this trilateral partnership

showed the revival of Pivot to Asia in American foreign policy. However, this research has limitations. The major limitation is time constraints. This research explains how the American government implements the AUKUS pact, but the findings of its implementation were limited from 2021 to 2024. The lack of explanation on the implementation of AUKUS from 2025 onwards is a research gap that other researchers can try to fill in future research. Additionally, further research should explore how effective AUKUS has been at balancing Chinese power or deterring its actions within the Indo-Pacific arena.

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