



## Indo-Pacific And AUKUS

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This article is based on **The new AUKUS alliance holds some lessons for India** which was published in the Indian Express on 20/09/2021. It talks about the recently concluded pact AUKUS and its wide ranging impacts on the region.

The heads of government of **Australia, the UK and US** announced the formation of a trilateral security pact, to be known by the acronym, **AUKUS**, the nuclear coalition, which has ignited unprecedented French fury.

Without naming China, the US President announced that “**in order to deal with rapidly evolving threats,**” the US and Britain would share, with Australia, intelligence and advanced technologies in areas like **artificial intelligence, cyber-warfare, quantum computing** and **nuclear submarine construction**.

### Rationale For Formation of AUKUS

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- The UK, US and Australia have announced a historic security pact in the Asia-Pacific, in what's seen as an **effort to counter China**.  
It will let Australia build nuclear-powered submarines for the first time, using technology provided by the US.
- However, the three nations are already allied to each other, in more ways than one — the US and UK are **NATO allies**, and Australia, New Zealand and the US are linked by the **ANZUS pact**.  
All three are also members of the “**Five Eyes**” intelligence alliance.
- This announcement places a question mark over the continuing relevance of this forum and its long-overdue actualisation as there is the **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)** for the Indo-pacific realm.
- The inclusion of a much-diminished, post-Brexit UK in such a long-range alliance is bound to raise a few eyebrows.

### Impact on Indo-Pacific Realm/QUAD

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- There is concern that AUKUS could leave a deep **scar on US-EU relations** and the **North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)**, and weaken the international coalition in the Indo-Pacific.
- France had cancelled a scheduled meeting of the foreign ministers of Australia, France, and India at **the UN**.

In the last couple of years, the trilateral has become an important element in the emerging Indo-Pacific architecture. But the cancellation of the meeting is a blow to the trilateral engagement.

- It is not clear whether the QUAD and AUKUS will reinforce each other or remain mutually exclusive.

There are some beliefs that the **“Anglosphere nations”** — which share common cultural and historical ties to the UK — inspire more confidence in each other.

## Impact on India

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- **India Excluded:** The creation of the AUKUS is an attempt to send a stronger message to China. However, China’s description of this alliance as an **“exclusionary bloc,”** should be food for thought for two members of the Quad/Malabar forums — **India and Japan** — who have been excluded from the new grouping.
- **New USA Partner to Lead in Indo-Pacific:**
  - Some major milestones in the **Indo-US security relationship** have been: Signing of the pathbreaking Indo-US Civil Nuclear Agreement, in 2008; launching of the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative in 2012; accord of the status of **“Major Defence Partner”** by the US Congress in 2016; grant of Tier 1 status to India, enabling export of high-technology items; and institution of **“2+2 talks”** in 2018. Signing of the fourth and last of the key “foundational agreements” in 2020, was supposed to have eliminated the final impediment to closer defence cooperation.
  - But AUKUS may be the beginning of a shift in the US policy which is about finding a new partner to lead in the Indo-Pacific region i.e. Australia.

## Chinese Reaction

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- China called on countries around the world to **oppose “hegemony and division”**.  
China opposed acts that undermine the international order, create confrontation, and create division under the banner of so-called rules setting.
- China has proceeded to create artificial islands, and to convert them into fortified air bases.  
Regular **“freedom of navigation operations”** by the US and allied navies have neither deterred, nor daunted China.

- Even more aggressive has been China’s conduct along the Sino-Indian border, where it has used massive military deployments to stake claims to large tracts of Indian territory, leading to a conflict in mid-June 2020.
  - India, having counter-mobilised, at considerable economic cost, has stood its ground. This dangerous confrontation is likely to continue.
- The Quad has neither created a charter nor invested itself with any substance, fearing that it would be dubbed an “**Asian NATO.**”
  - China, on its part, has dismissed the Quad as a “headline-grabbing idea which will dissipate like sea-foam”.

## Way Forward

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- While the warming of the Indo-US relationship brings comfort to Indians, India should beware of hyperbole, obscuring reality, in the bilateral discourse.
  - American offers of help “**to make India a great power**” and declarations that “**two of the world’s great democracies should also have the world’s two greatest militaries,**” must be taken with a generous pinch of salt.
- China, it is said, owes its pole position to the advanced technology it was given, or it purloined from the US over a 30-year period.
  - All that India has to show for its “strategic partnership,” is approximately \$22 billion worth of military hardware purchased from US companies — a distinctly retrograde step when we seek atma nirbharta and freedom from external reliance.
  - We need all the technologies being offered to Australia, in addition to “know-how” and “know-why” of much else, including stealth fighters, jet engines, advanced radars and nuclear propulsion for submarines as well as aircraft-carriers.
- For India to attain its full potential, it will **need insurance against hegemony**, and a **breathing space to restore its economy.**
  - This respite will enable it to catch up with technology and boost its military muscle.
  - While preparing to fight its own battles, India will need to seek external balancing.
  - If realpolitik so demands, it must break old beliefs and strike new partnerships — wherever there is convergence of interests

- **Build Strong Relations With France and Europe:** For long, Europe was largely a diplomatic backwater for India. As India discovers that every European nation, from tiny Luxembourg to a rising Poland, has something to offer, Europe has become a thriving hub of India's international relations.
  - The last few years have seen an intensification of India's strategic engagement with France. For example, the government has overcome the earlier reluctance in Delhi to work with France on Indian Ocean security.
  - In the last couple of years, India has made a determined effort to build a new partnership with Britain, which is the fifth-largest economy in the world, a leading financial hub, a technological powerhouse, and punches well above its weight in global affairs.
- **India Needs to Remember the Following:**
  - One is to remind France, Australia, the UK and US of the shared interests in securing the Indo-Pacific and the dangers of letting the current quarrel undermine that larger goal.
  - The other is to highlight the region's vast requirements for effective deterrence in the Indo-Pacific; and that there is enough room for the US, UK, France, and Europe to collaborate with Indo-Pacific partners in overlapping coalitions to develop high technology and defence-industrial cooperation in all the areas highlighted by AUKUS — effective underwater capabilities to AI, quantum computing and cyber warfare.

## Conclusion

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India's interests lie in deeper strategic cooperation with France and Europe as well as the Quad and the Anglosphere. India's diverse relationships in the West must be deployed in full measure to prevent a split in the Indo-Pacific coalition.

### ***Drishti Mains Question***

Recently concluded pact among the US, the UK and Australia may bring new dynamics in the Indo-Pacific range. Comment.