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Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, AUKUS Agreement



US President Biden speaks alongside United Kingdom Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison in 2021. Photo credit: SCMP Laura Zhou

Sarah Velez

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Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States: AUKUS Defense Agreement

On September 15, 2021, the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia announced the news of their newly formed trilateral defense partnership. As one of the most significant defense agreements established in the past decade, the defense agreement, titled AUKUS, was developed to strengthen diplomatic and military ties through sharing U.S. nuclear submarine technology with Australia. Through deepened cooperation, the partnership aims at sharing critical information and technology, including cyber and artificial intelligence. The Alliance focuses primarily on providing Australia with nuclear-powered submarine information to build for the future. However, it is also a way for the three nations to combine efforts in Southeast Asia in order to counter a growing Chinese naval threat. The announcement of AUKUS was a surprise for many in the international community. Yet, as issues continue to develop in Southeast Asia, this alliance will provide an opportunity for better communication and handling of China's increase in strength in the region.

The creation of AUKUS was a strategic step in deepening defensive ties between the three nations. By the U.S. sharing its nuclear-powered submarine technology with Australia, it opens the doors for Australia to one day have a nuclear-powered fleet of its own. Although the U.S., U.K., and Australia already share critical information through the Five Eyes security alliance, including Canada and New Zealand, AUKUS will focus primarily on military capabilities. As tensions heighten in Southeast Asia, enhanced military capabilities and unity amongst allies are necessary to prevent conflict from occurring. Nuclear-powered submarines are long-range as well as being faster and harder to detect compared to standard submarines. Being provided access to this information would offer Australia assistance in dealing with China and other issues in the region.



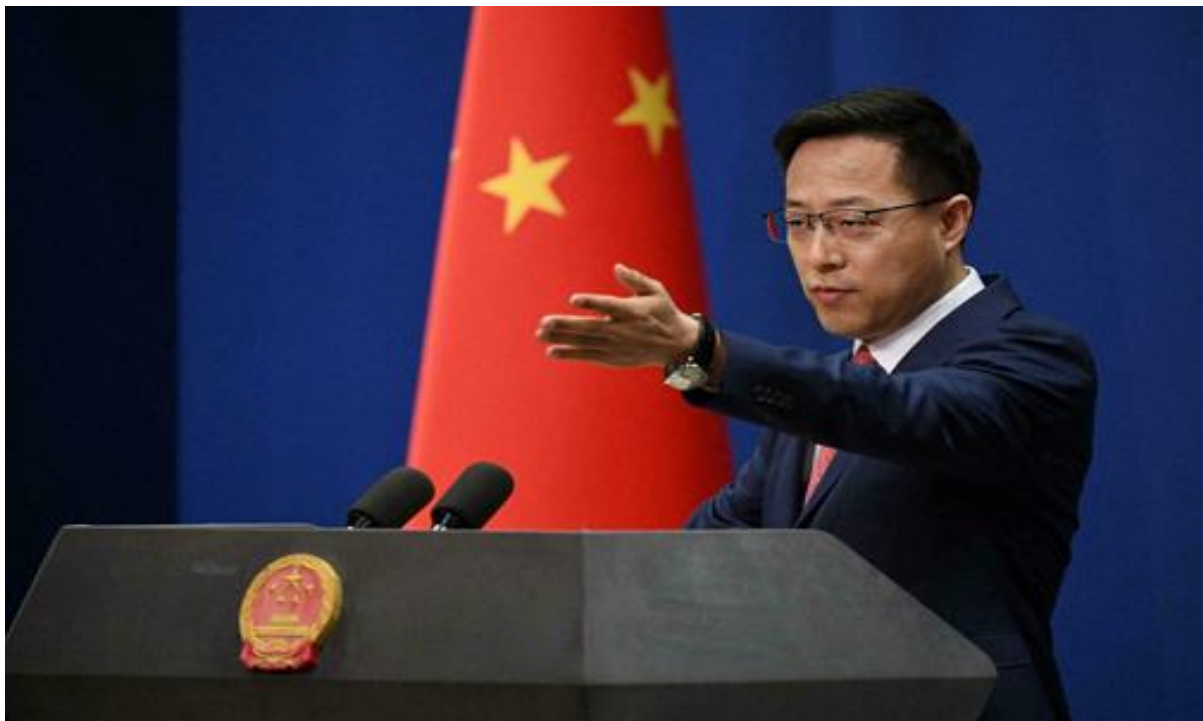
Royal Australian Navy Submarine HMAS Rankin. Photo Credit: Australian Defense Force

Through the AUKUS Alliance, each nation will also share information on cyber, artificial intelligence, and quantum computing. In doing so, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States will further deepen defense ties with one another. When the announcement of the Alliance was made, President Biden did not go into detail regarding how cyber will be handled. However, over the past year, cybersecurity has become even more relevant as cyber-attacks have been deployed by both China and Russia. The U.S. and U.K. are likely to also share their cyber offensive and defensive strategies with Australia to boost military capabilities in the region. Australia, the U.S. and the U.K. have each dealt with various cyberattacks that have been detrimental to their nations at some point over the past year. By sharing this information, it will create a unified understanding of how to deal with growing cybersecurity threats, while also improving each other's cyber capabilities.

By establishing AUKUS, Australia is opening itself up to U.S. influence in the region. The United States views the growing threat of China as a dire issue politically, economically, and militarily. As a result of the U.S. aligning itself with both Australia and the U.K., it is creating the space for coordination on how to handle any conflicts that may evolve. Because nuclear-powered submarines take years, even decades to build, there is a growing need for a U.S. naval presence in

Australia to assist in any developments. By Australia importing expertise from the U.S., it could lead to Australia shaping certain military decisions based on U.S. influence. An increased U.S. presence in the Indo-Pacific region would also impact the landscape of future U.S. military and foreign policy plans in the area as well as any future conflicts that may occur.

The announcement of AUKUS came as a surprise to many nations in the international community, especially France and China, who have already expressed their dissent for the alliance. For France, the trilateral partnership came ultimately as a shock as France soon lost \$60 billion worth of contracts to sell submarines to Australia. Upon hearing about AUKUS, France felt left in the dark about the information. France felt that it was disrespectful of its Allies to do this without discussing the matter first. The U.S., U.K., and Australia have all expressed remorse as to how AUKUS did not mean to impact France the way it did. The three nations all agree that the growing threat China poses have become an important reason to form the Alliance. However, in response to the news, France decided to withdraw its Ambassador from Washington. The impact that this has on AUKUS is minimal since France is only upset about the Alliance overall. Yet, discussions are occurring in order to rebuild France's trust in their relationships.



Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Zhao Lijian during a press conference. Photo Credit: France 24

Upon hearing about the news of the AUKUS Agreement, China conveyed its feelings of condemnation. To China, the Alliance “seriously undermines regional peace and stability and intensifies the arms race” (BBC). China went on to say how the three nations have a “cold war mentality and ideological prejudice” (BBC). The news was a surprise to all nations but for China, it comes as a threat to its long-term strategic goals in the region. China views the Alliance as a way to target it and portray it negatively to the rest of the world. The impact this has on the U.S., U.K., and Australia is uncertain as China could increase its military presence in the Indo-Pacific region or intensify economic or political approaches to diminish any progress the Alliance makes in the future. The issues surrounding Taiwan have become of extreme relevance to the United States since China took control of Hong Kong in 2019. China may also take the agreement as a sign to move forward in its plans of reunification with Taiwan earlier than anticipated. This would pose issues for the U.S., U.K., and Australia as well as other nations in the region. If China would take Taiwan by force, it would provide China with greater access to the East China Sea and control of major shipping and trading lanes. As the details of AUKUS continue to develop, all three nations will continue to face the issue of China and its growing power and ambitions in the area.

Looking forward, the future of AUKUS and its plans are still unknown. The Alliance may be viewed as a good decision in the short term but in the long term, it faces many challenges ahead. This new alliance between the U.S., U.K., and Australia has been built on a solid foundation as these nations are already close allies. However, in sharing its nuclear-powered submarine information, the U.S. is ultimately opening the door for itself to have greater access to Australia and the Indo-Pacific region. U.S. influence in the area will impact how the U.S. handles future foreign policy issues, and Australia will be under U.S. watch for years to come. There are many benefits to increasing the spread of information between one another when it comes to nuclear-powered submarines, cyber, AI, and quantum computing. It will foster stronger ties between the nations militarily. However, considering the responses from both France and China, the alliance will affect relationships with other nations. France is upset and angry about AUKUS and could pursue stronger relations with other nations if damages are not fixed. China is also angry about the alliance but is likely to pose a greater challenge if it intend to take military action in the region or continues to threaten Taiwan. The AUKUS Alliance will take time to develop fully. However, for this Alliance to work, each nation must be carefully assessing the new geostrategic realities developing in the Indo-Pacific region.

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