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S. No.	Items	Amount Sanctioned	Amount Utilised	Balance
a).	Hiring of Services/Honorarium for experts	Nil	Nil	Nil
b).	Equipment (Repair) or any accessory, if needed, to the existing equipment	Rs.3000/-	Rs.2950/-	Rs.50/-
c).	Purchase of Minor Equipment(s)	Rs. 82,000/-	Rs.81,990/-	Rs.10/-
d).	AMC's of existing equipment	Nil	Nil	Nil
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Emerging Strategic and Security Partnerships in the Indo-Pacific Region: A Case Study of the AUKUS

**A
Research Report
for
Submitted To the University of Jammu**

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Abstract

The US network of military alliances and security partnerships in the region has allowed it to influence Indo-Pacific affairs. But, a rapid shift in the balance of power in favour of China has threatened the US interests and security commitments with its regional allies. Hence, the Aukus is a continuance of the US strategy of pivoting to Asia conceived by the Obama administration and a part of broader US efforts to balance revisionist China in the Indo-Pacific. Through Aukus, the US has an opportunity to enhance the capabilities of its ally, Australia, to balance aggressive China. Convergence of security and foreign policy objectives with the US has encouraged Britain and Australia to be the parties of Aukus. Aukus would boost Australia's capabilities for shaping its regional strategic and security environment and develop a durable strategic power balance in the region. As a natural ally of the US and Australia, Britain also opposes China's illegal territorial claims and activities in the South and East China Seas and has developed a policy of integrated and collective actions with allies to protect the common interests through the Aukus partnership.

Key Words: Balance of Power, Nuclear-Powered Submarines, Trilateral Security Partnership, Defence Capabilities, Indo-Pacific

Shifting Balance of Power and The Formation of AUKUS in the Indo-Pacific Region

I. Introduction

When a state enhances or applies its power more aggressively with revisionist objectives, in the absence of a supranational authority in the anarchical international order, the threatened states often try to aggregate their defence capabilities and develop balancing security partnerships and military alliances with other states (Waltz, 1979: 122-127; Walt, 1985: 8; Walt, 1987: 5). Security partnerships and military alliances are a useful tool for aggregating the capabilities for creating deterrence as an antidote of power against the threatening revisionist state (Schroeder, 1976; Bearce, Flanagan & Floros, 2006). These are also built by the existing dominant states to maintain the status quo if it is threatened by ascending revisionist power. Balancing prevents an ascending revisionist state from imposing its will on or interfering with the interests of other states. Pursuing a status quoist approach, existing dominant states build geography-based alliances and partnerships with other states for surrounding, blocking and containing the ascending revisionist states. The presence or emergence of common threats and the convergence of strategic and security interests among states bring them together for alliances and partnerships. The history of international relations is full of various instances when threatened states have opted for balancing by entering into security partnerships and military alliances with other states (Walt, 1985). For example, the rising power of Athens had triggered the formation of an alliance of Greek city-states under Sparta's leadership, who felt threatened by the Athenian power. The alliance had defeated Athens in the Peloponnesian War (431 BC-404 BC) and restored a balance of power among the Greek city-states. During the Cold War, the United States (US) pursued a policy of containment towards the Soviet Union by building various military alliances and defence partnerships in Europe and Asia.

The US has continued with these alliances and partnerships in the post-Cold War era and developed more new security partnerships and agreements with different countries. In September 2021, it formed a trilateral security partnership known as 'Aukus' with Australia and the United Kingdom (UK). While asserting the commitment to a 'free', 'open' and 'international rules-based order' in the Indo-Pacific region, US President Joe Biden, along with Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, announced the creation of a tripartite security partnership of Aukus on September 15, 2021. Through this partnership, these countries agreed to enhance trilateral diplomatic, security, and defence cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region to deal with various challenges of the 21st century (The White House, 2021). Since nuclear-powered submarines are seen as relevant to the military problems in the Indo-Pacific, under the Aukus agreement, the US and Britain have agreed to assist Australia in acquiring at least eight nuclear-powered submarines. At present, only six countries – the US, Russia, China, Britain, France and India – have nuclear-powered submarines in the world. Hence, Australia would be the seventh country in the world to possess nuclear-powered submarines.

Before this, the US had shared its nuclear submarine technology with Britain only under the US-UK Mutual Defence Agreement in 1958 (Erickson, 2021). However, under the Aukus deal, Australia would be the first non-nuclear weapon state to acquire nuclear-powered submarines and as it has reaffirmed its commitment not to obtain nuclear weapons and fulfil its obligations accepted under the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Treaty(NPT) and other agreements signed with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)(Department of Defence, 2022). Apart from this, under Aukus, these countries have also agreed to cooperate for

boosting their joint 'cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence and other quantum technologies and undersea capabilities' so that sustainable peace, security and stability are achieved in the Indo-Pacific region (The White House, 2021).

Before Aukus partnership, in 2016, Australia had signed a deal with France's Naval Group for 12 conventional Shortfin Barracuda-based attack class diesel-electric submarines to replace its existing six Collins class submarines. However, nuclear-powered submarines possess more enhanced capabilities vis-a-vis the conventional submarines as these are powered by a nuclear reactor, generate more power and not snort for recharging their engine batteries. These submarines also possess more superior qualities of 'stealth, speed, manoeuvrability, survivability, and almost limitless endurance' as compared to conventional submarines (Department of Defence, 2022a). Besides, these are capable of deploying unmanned underwater vehicles, carrying more advanced weapons and operating in contested areas with a lower risk of detection and deterrence for their actions against the enemies (Department of Defence, 2022a). Since these submarines provide powerful deterrent capabilities to its possessors even without nuclear weapons, Australia scrapped its agreement of purchasing the conventional submarines from France and decided to enter into the Aukus agreement for acquiring the nuclear submarines with the help of the US and UK. However, as France had not received any prior indication of the trilateral move of Aukus and also lost a defence contract of \$66 billion, it labelled the allegations of backstabbing, betraying of trust and taking unilateral decisions against the US and Australia (Erlanger, 2021).

Although the US, Britain and Australia have clarified that the Aukus is not against any one country but aimed at advancing their common strategic and security interests and upholding the rules-based international order and promoting peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific, yet, it has been interpreted as a 'carefully measured' strategic move and 'timely act of collective defence' of these three countries to '...serve as a deterrent against China', by creating a balance of power in the region (Walt, 2021). China has also termed the Aukus as a product of the Cold War mentality of the US and its allies and an attempt to promote the arms race, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and disturb regional peace (Consulate-General of People's Republic of China, 2021).

Hence, the present article describes the circumstances under which three parties have entered into this tripartite security partnership. It is based on the hypotheses that the Aukus has been created by the US to fulfill its security commitments, restore its credibility among its allies and, also maintain a balance of power vis-a-vis the revisionist China by aligning with and boosting the security capabilities of its ally, Australia in the Indo-Pacific region. Both, Britain and Australia, also, have economic and security considerations for entering into the Aukus partnership with the US. Apart from the historical ties, the three parties of the Aukus partnership have a convergence of financial, strategic and security interests in the region, and China has emerged as a significant threat to these shared interests forcing them to forge the Aukus partnership. The article is descriptive and analytical in nature. The main argument is built on the basis of documentary sources using the content analysis method.

II. Shifting Balance of Power

Since the end of the Second World War, the US had occupied a dominant position in the Indo-Pacific region as it had been a major source of foreign investment for and trading partner of the regional countries and had also developed an extensive network of military alliances. Due to its allies and partners, it has exercised a deep influence over the Indo-Pacific region's political, economic and security affairs (Ling, 2021). But, in recent years, the balance of power has

increasingly shifted in favour of Beijing because of the rapid expansion of China's economic and military capabilities. Beijing rejects the term 'Indo-Pacific' and promotes a China-centric regional and global order. Under Xi Jinping's leadership, China has rapidly enhanced its military capabilities. Its People's Liberation Army (PLA), the world's largest military force, constitutes the second largest defence budget. It has a five per cent share of global arms export and has emerged as the second largest arms exporter in the world (Nan & Fei, 2020). Although the US still has a huge military edge over China, yet, its power and capabilities' gap vis-a-vis China has reduced rapidly in the region (Edel, 2022).

China has pursued its economic expansionism through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which contains the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB), Maritime Silk Road (MSR) and Digital Silk Road (DSR). Started in 2013, the BRI is a transcontinental project of infrastructure development investments of China which has been joined by 138 countries (Liu, 2022). Under the SREB and MSR projects, China has made huge investments in developing roads, railways, airports, sea ports and power plants in Asia, Africa and Europe. China has embraced colonial practices and emerged as the world's 'biggest official creditor'. It leverages state-sponsored loans to advance its geopolitical interests by extending huge loans with strings attached to financially vulnerable countries. This method has increased its leverage over these countries, pushing them into sovereignty-eroding debt traps (Chellaney, 2021). Using these techniques, through BRI investment projects, Beijing has enhanced its influence in the Indo-Pacific region. Moreover, through its DSR project, China is developing critical digital infrastructures including terrestrial and submarine data cables, 5G cellular networks, data storage centres and global satellite navigation systems. In 2016, it established two research centres in Hainan and Xinjiang to gather space-based remote sensing data for its BRI projects in South and South East Asia. It has also successfully launched its global satellite navigation system, BeiDou. Various Asian countries such as Pakistan, Thailand, Laos and Brunei are using the Chinese satellite navigation system as an alternative to the American global positioning system (GPS). In 2017, Chinese company Huawei Marine completed submarine cable projects in Indonesia and the Philippines. Also, it started constructing the Pakistan East Africa Cable Express (PEACE) to connect Pakistan to Kenya and Djibouti. Through the DSR, Chinese tech companies such as Huawei, Alibaba and Tencent are strengthening China's digital connectivity with the world and promoting a more Sino-centric digital order. Thus, the DSR project of China also challenges the dominance of the US digital value system (Chan, 2019; Ghiasy & Krishnamurthy, 2021).

Apart from economic expansion, China has pursued an assertive policy of territorial encroachment and expansionism towards its neighbours. China has 17 territorial disputes with its neighbouring countries on land and sea boundaries in South, South East, and East Asia. Apart from its war of 1962 with India, it has entered into various military standoffs with India, including Doklam and Galwan. Its claims over most South China Sea are against international legal norms. It continuously threatens to annex Taiwan. It also disputes over Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea with Japan. China has militarised the South China Sea by converting tiny atolls and shoals into permanent military structures to strengthen its claims. Moreover, forcibly occupying the islands belonging to some of South East Asia countries, it has challenged the territorial integrity of the littoral states. It has carried out incursions, sunk foreign ships, established new districts, given Chinese names to islands and built new artificial islands to alter the ground realities (Bell, 2021; Krishnankutty, 2020).

Contrary to the provisions of International Law, on January 22, 2021, China enacted China Coast Guard Law (CCGL) to exert its authority to threaten its neighbouring countries and alter the status quo in the South and East China Seas. Such activities of China endanger the

freedom of navigation of other littoral and non-littoral states. The South China Sea contains some of the world's most significant shipping sea lanes of communication. Along with the Strait of Malacca, it is the main route to and from the Indian Ocean ports and Pacific, from where one-third of the trading ships of the globe pass carrying over \$3 trillion in trade of essential commodities such as energy and raw materials. Under the CCG, the Chinese Coast Guard (CCG), which possesses superior combat capabilities than the majority of the Asian navies and is considered the strongest coast guard in the world, has been allowed to demolish economic structures of other countries in the disputed waters and, also, to fire on, and expel the foreign vessels (Wong, 2021). The PLA Navy has also continued its maritime aggression and intimidate the claimant countries, particularly the US ally, Philippines in the South China Sea. In March, 2021, 200 Chinese vessels and, in October, 2021, 150 Chinese vessels had incursed within the EEZ near the disputed Spratly Islands and blocked access to Whitsun Reef to the Philippines (Krishnan, 2021).

China also passed a new Maritime Traffic Safety Law (MTSL) on August 28, 2021 which threatens the freedom of navigation to other countries in the South China Sea. Under the MTSL, a range of vessels are required to provide detailed information to Beijing when passing through the 'territorial waters', most of which are embroiled in disputes. The MTSL is applied to submarines, nuclear ships, vessels carrying radioactive substances, watercrafts carrying bulk chemicals, oil, liquefied gas and other toxic and harmful materials, and other vessels that may threaten the maritime security of China. Under this law, China's Maritime Safety Administration is authorised to dispel or reject a foreign vessel's entry into 'Chinese waters' if it threatens China's security (Siddiqui, 2021). Further, the Haiyang Dizhi-10, a Chinese survey ship, also entered Indonesia's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) on August 29, 2021. Apart from this, on September 8-19, 2021, the PLA Navy did a series of exercises in the South China Sea to demonstrate China's capabilities for conducting operations to seize Taiwan (Cohen & Vivona, 2021). Hence, China's illegal control over the South and East China Seas violates the maritime territorial sovereignty of other states and threatens the freedom of navigation and free sea trade of other countries.

China has also expanded its power and influence in the Pacific through its foreign economic and military aid programmes. Traditionally, the South Pacific is considered 'an American lake' or Australia's sphere of influence. China's growing presence in the Pacific brings a strategic and security challenge to the doorsteps of the US and its allies. China's presence in the Pacific areas is 'detrimental', not only to the Pacific Islands, but also to the national security of the US and its allies as three Pacific Islands countries - Palau, Marshall Islands, and Micronesia - have special agreements, known as Compacts of Free Association (COFA), with the US. Under these agreements, the US military has exclusive access to the land, sea, and air routes of the region. In return, it is committed to providing financial assistance and other essential services to these countries. In 2014, President Xi Jinping visited Fiji and established China's 'strategic partnership' with eight island countries (Zhang, 2015). Further, in November 2018, President Xi visited Papua New Guinea to attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit and promoted the BRI project among Papua New Guinea, Cook Islands, Micronesia, Fiji, Niue, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu. In September 2019, under Chinese influence, Pacific countries Solomon Islands and Kiribati severed their diplomatic ties with Taiwan while shifting their loyalties towards China. Besides, China has 'pragmatic military cooperation' with Pacific island countries, especially Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Tonga, and Vanuatu. From 2006 to 2019, 24 delegations of the PLA have visited the Pacific Islands. Out of them, more than 60 per cent involved the PLA naval ships (Siddiqui, 2021a). Furthermore, it donated eight military trucks to

Tonga and 14 military vehicles to Vanuatu. It also gave Fiji a hydrographic and surveillance vessel in 2018 along with 47 military vehicles in April 2020 (Denghua, 2021). Reportedly, it had also planned to build its military base in Kiribati and Vanuatu. Thus, China's engagement in the Pacific countries has reduced the US and its allies' influence in the region and enhanced their security concerns.

III. US Interests and Commitments

The US has various interests and security commitments with its allies in the Indo-Pacific.

Freedom of Seas and the US Foreign Policy

The US considers 'freedom of the seas' as a key principle of its foreign policy. Hence, it opposes the global proliferation of 'excessive' maritime claims of the coastal states, which claims are contradictory to international law and threatens the freedom of navigation upon the seas. Control over the seas can obstruct the shipping routes and is not in the larger interest of free maritime trade. Thus, since 1979, the US has been conducting freedom of the seas operations against the claimant coastal states, sending its warships through contested maritime areas. In this way, it deliberately challenges the illegal territorial claims of coastal states and ensures that claimant states cannot control the critical sea areas by default (O'Rourke, 2022). Therefore, the US concerns for freedom of navigation and unhindered maritime trade through the South and East China Seas are also a reason for its opposition to China's illegal maritime territorial claims activities in the Indo-Pacific. As China's territorial expansionism has continued uninterruptedly in South and East China Seas, threatening the freedom of navigation and having adverse consequences for free global trade along the maritime territorial sovereignty of US allies, the Biden Administration decided to boost the military alliances in the region. In recent years, it has conducted numerous freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea. For instance, the US naval warships, the USS John S. McCain (DDG-56) on February 5, 2021, the USS Russell (DDG-59) on February 17, 2021, the USS Curtis Wilbur (DDG-54) on May 20, 2021 and the USS Benfold (DDG-65) on July 12, 2021 conducted freedom of navigation operations by the sailing through the disputed waters of South China Sea. After the enactment of MTSL by China, again on September 8, 2021 the USS Benfold (DDG-65) sailed through the South China Sea, challenging China's maritime territorial claims and its newly enacted MTSL (O'Rourke, 2022). Parallel to this, the Carl Vinson Carrier Strike Group of the US Navy also operated in the South China Sea. The Southern Theatre Command of China had termed the US destroyer passage through the area as illegal as it had not sought the approval of China. That is why the PLA's Air Force had done its follow-up surveillance and warned it to drive away from the disputed waters. In September 2021, the USS Barry, an Arleigh Burke-class guided destroyer of the US Navy, had also sailed through the Taiwan Strait. The Eastern Theatre Command of the PLA has called it the US attempt to destroy the peace, security and stability in and across the Taiwan Strait (Cohen & Vivona, 2021).

Regional Security Commitments

Apart from the freedom of the seas as its prime national interest, the US has developed a global network of military alliances with 60 countries to protect its and allies' interests more effectively. Under its 'hub-and-spokes' network of military alliances, the US has accepted various security obligations and commitments with its allies in the Indo-Pacific. In the beginning of the Cold War, the US had made it a priority to be involved in European affairs. However, after the Korean War in 1951, it shifted its focus towards the Indo-Pacific and developed a huge network of military

alliances known as the 'San Francisco System' with the small countries of the region. It signed a Mutual Defence Treaty with the Philippines in August 1951, Security Treaties with Australia and New Zealand in September 1951, Security Treaty with Japan in April 1952, Mutual Defence Treaties with South Korea in October 1953 and with Republic of China in December 1954 and a Communique with Thailand in March 1962. Under these security treaties, the US and its Indo-Pacific allies developed a bilateral collective defence mechanism. Although this system of military alliances has been highly asymmetric as it involves states having different power status, yet under it, the US has pledged to provide military protection in the contingency of a security threat and economic access through trade to its Indo-Pacific allies. During the Cold War, this system allowed the US to contain the Soviet threat and exert its power and influence over the Indo-Pacific region(Cha, 2010; Chen, 2020). The US alliance system is viable even today for it, and its allies as its traditional sphere of political and military influence is also being challenged by the assertive China and its allies are also facing various security threats from China. Hence, the US also pursues some security-related policies towards Taiwan under its Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 and acts as a security provider for its other regional allies. But, in recent years, the role of the US as a security provider to Asian countries has been explicitly questioned by China. In the Fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures (CICBM) in Asia, Shanghai in 2014 President Xi given "Asia for Asians" slogan while stating that Asians should "run the affairs of Asia, solve the problems of Asia and uphold the security of Asia" (Xi, 2014). In other words, China has threatened the US leadership role and its long-term security commitments towards its regional allies. Due to its increasing economic and military capabilities, even some US allies, especially the Philippines, are also seen opting for bandwagoning with China, indicating the reduction of US influence in the region(Hemmmings, 2020). Hence, Aukus can be seen as the US attempting to strengthen its power and influence, fulfil its long-term security commitments and maintain a favourable balance in the region.

Restoration of Credibility

The US pursued the 'pivot to Asia' policy under the Obama Administration to consolidate and reinforce its leadership in the Asia-Pacific region (Ling, 2021). During the various crises, President Barack Obama had reaffirmed US security commitments towards its allies. In 2009, President Obama accepted that the US treaty alliances with Japan, South Korea, Australia, Thailand, and the Philippines are not merely historical documents but also abiding commitments that are fundamental to the shared security of the US and its allies(Obama, 2013). When North Korea conducted its nuclear test, Obama had pledged a continuing commitment of extended deterrence, including the US nuclear umbrella to defend Japan and South Korea. President Obama also negotiated a massive trade deal known as the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) of 12 countries to counteract China's economic power. Policies of the Obama Administration upheld the credibility and legitimacy of the US among its allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region. The Trump Administration also prioritised the Indo-Pacific region, and even had a trade war with China. President Trump had legislated to provide \$425 million maritime-security assistance to the US allies in the region under the Indo-Pacific Maritime Security Initiative (IPMSI) and enhanced its defence cooperation with Vietnam and Indonesia (O'Rourke, 2022). The US Pacific Command was renamed the Indo-Pacific Command in 2018. It also tried to convert the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue(Quad) into a security architecture for balancing the Chinese power in the Indo-Pacific, but failed to produce any effective result as its key member India pursues a policy of staying away from military alliances(Cohen & Vivona, 2021). The US alliances and partnerships had formed on a trust basis, but the Trump Administration took some

unilateral steps breaching the trust of its allies and weakening its alliance system. President Trump abandoned the TPP and Paris Agreements signed by the Obama Administration. These decisions had greatly damaged the US credibility and legitimacy among its allies. Exploiting the situation, in November 2020, China signed the world's largest trade deal, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), with the countries that previously signed the TPP. Moreover, President Trump had overlooked the enormous advantages of the US military alliances, repeatedly termed them as 'unfair' and 'obsolete' arrangements and pursued the 'America first' policy calling its military allies and security partners for 'equitable burden-sharing' (Ford & Goldgeiger, 2019). Hence, due to its 'America first' policy, the Trump Administration neglected its regional military allies and partners while putting the credentials of the US alliance system in a state of limbo (Das, 2019; McTague & Nicholas, 2020).

In January 2021, the Trump Administration was replaced by the Biden Administration in the US President Joe Biden repeatedly asserted that "alliances are America's greatest asset" and pledged to repair and reinvest in them after the disruption to these alliances under the Trump Administration. Furthermore, President Biden argued that when a country strengthens its alliances, it amplifies its power and capabilities and disrupts the threats even before reaching their territories (Edel, 2022). Hence, moving away from the 'America first' policy of the Trump Administration, on June 10, 2021, Biden Administration signed the New Atlantic Charter of eight points with the UK to promote rules-based international order, protect the key principles of foreign policy such as freedom of navigation, overflight and other legal uses of the seas and affirmed its shared responsibility of maintaining the collective security against the full spectrum of threats (The White House, 2021a). The New Atlantic Charter was also seen as the Biden Administration's attempt to boost its relationship with its traditional ally and re-establish the US as the prominent defender of the international liberal order, which China is threatening. Similarly, Aukus is the US attempt to restore its credibility among its allies and strengthen the military capabilities of their allies.

IV. Australia's Concerns and Commitments

Australia's participation in Aukus has also resulted from its various security concerns and commitments.

Security Ties With US

Historically, Australia has been a vital defence partner and security ally of the US. Its forces have fought together with the US in various military conflicts including First and Second World Wars, Korean, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq and also in operations against Al Qaeda and the Islamic State (ISIS). As Australia relies on the US for its security, it signed a tripartite defence treaty known as ANZUS in 1951 with it and New Zealand, which is a pivotal aspect of Australian foreign policy. Australia is strongly interested in maintaining freedom of navigation, overflight, and other lawful uses of the sea, including in the South China Sea (Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, 2020). It supports a robust US presence in the Indo-Pacific. It is one of the largest defence customers of the US and purchases over \$27 billion of defence-related material from the US under the Flexible Manufacturing System (FMS). Its significant purchases from the US are Apache helicopters, Chinook helicopters, MQ-9B UAS, M1 Abrams Tanks, M825A1 155mm White Phosphorous projectile munitions, M782 Multi-Option Fuze for Artillery, M762A1 electronic-timed fuzes, M231 and M232A2 propelling charges, 200 Javelin FGM-148E missiles, 200 AGM-158C, and Long Range Anti-Ship Missiles (LRASMs)(Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, 2021). It also receives other US defence goods and services for its Surface Combatant

Programme, AEGIS Combat System equipment, MH-60R Multi-Mission Helicopters, ALE-70 Radio Frequency Countermeasures and F/A-18E/F Super Hornet upgrades along with assorted missiles, bombs and tank ammunition. Australia is also one of two countries with a Defence Trade Cooperation Treaty with the US that allows the licence-free export of specific defence articles between the countries to support combined military operations, cooperative defence research, and other projects. Canberra has also signed other agreements with the US, including the Agreement concerning the Status of United States Forces in Australia (SOFA) of 1963, Logistics Support Agreement (LSA) of 1989, the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) of 2010, Treaty concerning Defence Trade Cooperation of 2013, and the Force Posture Agreement of 2015 enhancing the greater defence and security cooperation with Washington. It also conducts the joint military exercise 'Talisman Sabre' to train the security forces for planning and performing Combined Task operations (Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, 2021).

Strained Relations With China

Canberra has close security relations with Washington. However, it had also moved towards China as its closest trade partner due to its signing of the China-Australia Free Trade Agreement (ChAFTA) with Beijing on June 15, 2015. The ChAFTA enhanced Australia's competitive position in China's market by making 95 per cent of Australian exports to China tariff-free, boosting its economic growth and creating more job opportunities (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2022). Canberra had expected that its strategic alliance would not create any problems for Australia in the long run. Despite the US pressure, Australia retained its trade relations with China and resisted choosing between the US and China (Turkcan, 2021). It has been keeping away from any security partnership or alliance with its close defence partner Washington against Beijing as China has been the largest trade partner of Australia. Australian leadership was interested in preserving 'lucrative commercial ties' as Canberra considered that opposing the growth of China's power was not in the interest of Australia (Walt, 2021). In 2018, Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison openly asserted that Canberra does not require to choose between the US and China.

Despite this, China's revisionist activities have played a decisive role in pushing Australia to side with the US more forcefully (Turkcan, 2021). As China's involvement in 5G technology created a fear of security vulnerabilities in Australia, in 2018, Canberra barred China's telecommunications company Huawei Technologies from building a 5G network for Australia and tightened its foreign investment laws (Crossley & Needham, 2021). Furthermore, Canberra's demand for an independent inquiry into the outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020 received a hostile response from Beijing as it imposed unprecedented trade restrictions against Australia. Contrary to Canberra's thinking, its trade dependency on China adversely affected Australia (Amarasinghe, 2021). China blacklisted 35 per cent of Australia's beef exports, imposed an 80 per cent import tax on barley imports from Australia and an anti-dumping tariff ranging from 107.1 per cent to 212.1 per cent on imported wine from Australia, and blocked coal imports from Australia entirely due to which Australia lost \$4 billion in exports to China (Jacob, 2021; Wilson, 2021). Amidst these activities of economic coercion, China, through its Embassy in Australia, released a list of its 14 grievances with Australia. China's Foreign Ministry spokesman suggested Australia not make China its enemy while asking Canberra to back away from the policies on those issues of grievances. Australia deemed it as an open security threat. In June 2020, Australia openly opposed China's newly enacted Hong Kong National Security Law (HKNSL). On April 21, 2021, it also scrapped its BRI project-related agreements with China, and introduced the Blue Dot Network with the US and Japan to counter the BRI (Jacob, 2021).

Seismic Changes and Emerging Security Threats

Amidst its deteriorated ties with Beijing, Canberra also observed a ‘seismic transformation’ in its strategic and security environment. In 2020, the increasing Chinese power and influence in the Pacific areas forced Australia to set new strategic objectives for its defence planning, including force structure, force generation, international engagement and operations to assist it in shaping its strategic environment and deterring the actions against its national interests and, also, responding, if required, with a credible military force (Department of Defence, 2020). In South East Asia, Australia is already conducting maritime surveillance patrols in critical sea lanes in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea, contributing to maritime security in the South West Pacific region. Moreover, in 2020, Canberra directed its Department of Defence to prioritise the areas ranging from the North-Eastern Indian Ocean through maritime and mainland South East Asia to Papua New Guinea and the South West Pacific (Department of Defence, 2020). To build a ‘more potent, capable and agile force’ for holding adversary forces and infrastructure at risk, Australia is investing in developing its long-range striking capabilities by acquiring Tomahawk Cruise Missiles, Long-Range Anti-Ship Missiles (LRASM), Joint Air to Surface Standoff Missiles, Hypersonic Missiles and Precision Strike Guided Missiles (Department of Defence, 2022b). Amidst the seismic changes, Australia has considered nuclear-powered submarines essential for safeguarding its maritime approaches, sea-lanes of communication and supporting a range of national and regional security needs. Hence, the formation of Aukus can also be seen as a result of its security needs resulting from the seismic changes in its strategic and security environment. As a part of a suite of military capabilities after acquiring nuclear-powered submarines through Aukus, Australia would be capable of shaping its strategic environment, deterring the actions of hostile powers against its interests and also responding with credible military force (Department of Defence, 2022a; Department of Defence, 2022b). Thus, the seismic transformation resulting from the growing threat of China has played a critical role in siding Australia more forcefully with the US in its balancing efforts against China.

V. Britain and the Aukus

British participation in the trilateral security structure has been determined by various historical and contemporary factors and diverse economic, strategic and security interests of Britain and its allies in the Indo-Pacific.

Britain as a Natural Ally of the US and Australia

Britain is a ‘pre-eminent’, ‘indispensable’ and ‘natural’ ally and security partner of the US and Australia. It has the ‘broadest, deepest and most advanced’ defence cooperation with the US in the world. It has also collaborated and participated with the US in various wars and joint military operations. It had alliances with the US during the First and Second World Wars and fought collectively in the Korean, Persian, Iraq and Afghanistan wars. It is a founding member of the US-led North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and Five Eyes Intelligence Alliance (FEIA) and has shared defence, security and foreign policy objectives on regional and global issues. It has signed the Defence Trade Cooperation Treaty with the US in 2007 to facilitate the movement of specific categories of equipment and security information between the two countries. Its military cooperation with the US was further expanded in 2009 due to their joint operations in Helmand (Ministry of Defence, 2021).

Along with the US, Britain has historically also close defence relations with Australia as its forces had fought alongside the Australian troops in various wars and conflicts, including in

the Mahdist War of Sudan(1881-1899), Anglo-Boer War(1899-1902), First and Second World Wars, Korean War(1950-1953), Malaysian War(1948-1960) and Indonesia-Malaysia Confrontation(1963-1966), Iraq and Afghanistan Wars and against the Islamic State(ISIS). It also continued its security linkages with Australia through the FEIA of 1955 and the Five Power Defence Arrangements(FPDA) of 1971(Huxley, 2017). In 2013, Britain signed a Defence and Security Cooperation Treaty with Australia, providing nine Type 26 frigates to the Australian navy. The British military, including the Royal Gurkha Rifles, have also conducted joint training exercises with the Australian military (Prime Minister's Office, 2021). Hence, historical military ties and convergence of its interests with the US and Australia have encouraged it to cooperate with its allies and enhance their capabilities as its allies and partners provide it various strategic advantages by sharing security responsibilities and giving its force a multiplication effect in diverse areas (Ministry of Defence, 2021).

Economic and Security Interests

Apart from being a natural ally of the US and Australia, Britain also considers the Indo-Pacific crucial for achieving its economic and security interests and global foreign policy objectives. Apart from submarines, it sees Aukus offering various lucrative defence and security opportunities for its industry involved in the development of cyberspace, artificial intelligence and quantum technologies (Brooke-Holland, Curtis & Mills, 2021). Moreover, Britain views the Indo-Pacific as a 'centre of intensifying geopolitical competition', having motley embryonic flashpoints, including unresolved territorial disagreements in the South and East China Seas. It has various overseas territories and 1.7 million citizens residing across the Indo-Pacific region. Due to its vital economic and security interests, Britain is interested in strengthening regional defence and security partnership with other countries to mitigate the growing threats and uphold the freedom of navigation and international law. Earlier, Britain had a relatively minimal permanent presence in the Indo-Pacific as it had only one naval facility for visiting its warships in Singapore. But, in 2018, it developed a new maritime facility in Oman. It was the first permanent base of Britain in the Western Indian Ocean since the withdrawal of its forces from the East of Suez in 1968. It has seven 'permanent points of presence' – Bahrain, Brunei, Diego Garcia, Kenya, Oman, Qatar and Singapore – in the Indian Ocean. It has maximised its regional engagement by deploying its Carrier Strike Group and Offshore Patrol Vessels in 2021. Apart from pursuing close defence ties with ASEAN countries, it is further deploying a Littoral Response Group and giving Type-31 frigates to its FPDA allies. Hence, in this way, its primary objective is to be European partner of its allies to deal with shared threats with its broadest and most integrated presence in the region (Ministry of Defence, 2021: 32).

Freedom of Seas: A Matter of Principle for Britain

Like the US and Australia, Britain observes seas as the primary avenues for communication, cooperation and collaboration among states. It ogles freedom of navigation vital for free global trade through sea routes to ensure global economic growth and development. All the state ships, including naval ships have the right to innocent passage in the territorial sea and freedom of navigation in the contiguous zone(CZ) and the EEZ under the United Nations Convention on the Law of Seas(UNCLOS) of 1982. Although in 2016, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) had rejected the Chinese claims over the South China Sea, yet, Beijing had outrightly rejected the decision of the ICJ and escalated its revisionist activities in the area (Ignatius, 2021). Britain is a party to, and has also ratified the UNCLOS and, therefore, along with its allies, especially the US and Australia, does recognise China's territorial claims and illegal encroachments in the South

China Sea. It argues that the law of seas that recognises the right to innocent passage, freedom of navigation and overflight also applies to the South and East China Seas regardless of the sovereignty claims of China. Hence, based on this principle stand, since 2016, it has started to emphasise the freedom of seas, especially in the context of the South China Sea and began to conduct the freedom of seas operation in the area. In August 2018, HMS Albion, a British warship had completed a freedom of navigation operation in the Paracel Islands. In 2019, another Royal Navy ship, the HMS Enterprise, a British survey vessel, navigated through the South China Sea. In September 2021, the HMS Queen Elizabeth, a British Aircraft Carrier and its Carrier Strike Group passed through the disputed areas of the South China Sea along with the US personnel and equipment. The British Carrier Strike Group had also undertaken a series of exercises with Australia and other partners (Prime Minister's Office, 2021). China criticised Britain's freedom of seas operations, blaming London for still carrying its colonial mentality in international affairs.

Deteriorated Sino-Britain Ties

Despite sharing close military ties with the US, under the Prime Ministership of David Cameron, Britain also pursued a positive policy of deep economic engagements towards China. From 2010 onwards, the British Govt. had never talked about the human rights violations, freedom of navigation upon seas or any Chinese threat to the liberal international order. Britain was the first of the G-7 countries to join the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and London emerged as a significant offshore hub for trading renminbi (RMB) outside China. Hence, between 2010 and 2015, Britain became the best partner of China in the West, so Beijing termed this period the "Golden Era" of Sino-Britain relations (Mitter, 2021). However, in the post-Brexit period, under the leadership of Theresa May, Britain started to support the freedom of navigation in the seas. Britain began to conduct freedom of navigation operations along with the US and Australia in the South China Sea. Despite these operations, it had cordial relations with China. But in 2020, the Sino-British relations deteriorated as China passed the HKNSL threatening the erosion of the 'one country, two systems' in Hong Kong. Hong Kong was a former British colony given back to China in 1997. China had established the 'one country, two systems' in Hong Kong after negotiating with Britain. However, as the new law threatened the agreed status of Hong Kong, Britain opposed the HKNSL, offered its citizenship to British National Overseas Passport holders of Hong Kong and also enacted a new National Security and Investment Act (NSIA) to prevent companies related to countries such as China from buying sensitive assets in Britain. In March 2021, it imposed sanctions against the Chinese officials involved in persecuting ethnic Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang. Besides, it also banned China's Huawei tech from its 5G network project because of security apprehension regarding its use for spying activities by the govt. of China (Warnell & Parker, 2021).

China as a 'Systemic Competitor'

Amidst its strained ties with China, Britain has observed that the Indo-Pacific is an engine of global growth and development and vital for its economic and security interests. Parallel to this, it has started seeing China as a source of threat to its economic and security interests in the region. Hence, its official documents 'Global Britain in a Competitive Age' and 'Defence in a Competitive Age', published in March 2021, portray China as an 'authoritarian state', posing the 'biggest state-based threat' to the British economic interests. Moreover, as a 'systemic competitor' China, with its enhanced power and capabilities poses a 'systemic challenge' to freedom of seas, free global trade and liberal international order in the region. Conversely, Britain

has a generational commitment and interest to protect and promote shared security, prosperity and values in the region. Therefore, it has declared to play 'a more active part' in sustaining an existing international order and supporting shared economic and security interests and values in the Indo-Pacific (Ministry of Defence, 2021). Furthermore, due to intensifying geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific, Britain favours collective actions with its allies and partners, including the US and Australia to achieve shared interests and objectives in the region. That is why in 2019, it opened three new diplomatic posts in Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu and started working closely with its allies US and Australia, in the Indo-Pacific. The Aukus is also a concrete articulation of the British interests and commitments to cooperate with its partners to protect vital common interests in the region.

VI. Conclusion

In a nutshell, China's enhanced economic and military capabilities are resulting in a shift in the balance of power against the historically dominant position of the US in the Indo-Pacific. The Indo-Pacific region is essential for the economic, strategic and security interests of the US and its allies. The US has maintained its military alliances and security partnerships with various countries in the region, allowing it to maintain its presence and exert power and influence in Indo-Pacific affairs. The shifting balance of power favouring China in the Indo-Pacific is an explicit threat to US security interests and commitments with its regional allies. Hence, the Aukus is part of broader US security efforts to balance and contain revisionist activities of China in the Indo-Pacific region. Since the Obama Administration, the US has prioritised the Indo-Pacific region. However, pursuing its 'America first policy', the Trump Administration terminated various international agreements and discouraged its military allies by asking for equitable burden sharing from them. The Biden Administration has shown determination to reinvigorate the US alliances neglected by the previous Trump Administration so that its allies are empowered, its credibility can be restored, and its drive for balancing China can be strengthened with more robust defence capabilities of its allies. Hence, the Aukus allows the US to empower its allies and integrate them into its supply chains and industrial planning for balancing aggressive China. The formation of Aukus is a continuance of the "pivot to Asia" strategy developed by the Obama Administration, continued by Trump Administration and reinvigorated by the Biden Administration for its balancing act supported by Britain and Australia against China to deter Beijing's attempts to become the dominant power in the Indo-Pacific.

In this context, Australia has historical and natural security ties with the US and also shares common interests of freedom of navigation in the seas, mainly containing essential sea lanes of communication in the Indo-Pacific region. Australia has also undergone a sea change in its security and foreign policy as its relations have deteriorated with China. Due to China's increasing activities in the regional strategic and security environment, it faces various security threats emerging from the seismic transformation. The nuclear-powered submarines are considered relevant by Australia to security problems posed by revisionist China in the Indo-Pacific as the enormous defence and operational capabilities of these submarines provide powerful deterrent capabilities to the possessing states. Acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines would not only boost Australia's capabilities for shaping the regional strategic and security environment, deterring the actions of hostile states against its interests and responding with credible military force, but also contribute towards the development of a durable strategic power balance in the region.

Being a natural ally of the US and Australia, Britain also has common security interests, commitments, and foreign policy objectives in the Indo-Pacific. It has historical security ties with the US and Australia. It observes freedom of navigation as a fundamental issue of its foreign policy and also does not recognise the illegal territorial claims of China in the South and East China Seas. As a signatory to the UNCLOS, along with the US and Australia, Britain also opposes China's revisionist activities in the South and East China Seas and, after its Brexit in 2016, has been conducting freedom of navigation operations in the concerned areas for which it has been often by China for still possessing the colonial mentality. Moreover, Britain sees the Indo-Pacific as vital for its economic and security interests as it possesses overseas territories in the region and has developed various security bases for their safety in the region. Its bilateral ties with China have deteriorated after passing the HKNSL by China in 2020 against its commitments with Britain. Moreover, China has also been seen as a 'systemic competitor' and threat to its economic and security interests along with its allies, the US and Australia, in the region. Hence, it sees integrated and collective actions with partners to protect the common interests in the Indo-Pacific region. Its participation in and cooperation through Aukus with the US and Australia is a step in that direction.

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