



Perspective: AUKUS-Geopolitical Impact

Why in News

Recently, a new [trilateral security partnership AUKUS](#) was announced between **Australia, UK** and **USA** for the [Indo-Pacific](#) region.

Key Points

- **Nuclear Submarines to Australia:** As part of this initiative, **Australia will acquire nuclear-powered submarines** with help from the UK and the US.
 - This step is significant because the **US has only shared nuclear submarine technology once** before, with Great Britain in 1958.
- **China's Response:** China, expectedly, has **strongly criticised AUKUS** and the submarine deal as promoting instability and stoking an arms race.
- **Areas of Cooperation:** This alliance is considered to be the **most significant security arrangement** between these three nations.
 - AUKUS will also involve the sharing of cyber capabilities, [applied AI](#), [quantum technologies](#) and undersea technologies.
- **US' Solace to India:** The US has meanwhile briefed India on this new trilateral pact stressing it will not detract from either the bilateral cooperation with India or multilateral ones like QUAD.

The AUKUS Partnership

- **Relevance of AUKUS:** The main purpose of the partnership is to share the nuclear submarines so that Australia can **become one of the six nuclear submarines operating nations** in the world (including India).
 - It couldn't have been done under the existing alliance arrangements as nuclear sharing has been kept in very tight partnership between the UK and USA.
 - The [QUAD](#) represents an implicit understanding between the four countries but there is **no official military relationship** between them.
 - The western-pacific has essentially a **non-Chinese security structure** for US' bilateral military alliances.
 - However, it doesn't have any multilateral structure for those allies to defend each other against China.
 - NATO is also focussed mainly around Western Europe; the Indo-Pacific region is quite large for any such military alliance.
- **A China-Centric Move:** Australia has **shifted its long-standing policy against having nuclear submarines** and the UK and US have also shifted from their long-standing policy of sharing nuclear technology with only each other.
 - The reason for this is that they have a **common assessment around the systemic challenge from China** and it requires this much tighter accelerated capability of trilateral partnership.
 - It is much of a digital trilateral arrangement as a lot of the capability improvements and increased deterrence of China will come out of the digital parts of this arrangement.

- **Discontent of European Allies:** The European allies of the three countries have **not been happy** about this new trilateral partnership.
 - **France has ordered the recall of its ambassadors** to the US and Australia **accusing them of betrayal** by negotiating defence partnership with the U.K. without informing European allies.
 - The EU has also announced its own strategy to boost political and defense ties in the Indo-Pacific.
 - **Cause of France Discontent:** Australia had signed a \$90 billion submarine contract with France to procure its nuclear submarines; so **it had an enormous impact on the French economy.**
- **Non-Inclusion of Other Five Eyes Nations:** The [Five Eyes alliance](#) is an intelligence-sharing arrangement between the US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.
 - New Zealand has a long-standing policy of not allowing nuclear-powered warships to enter its waters.
 - Canada has also not expressed any interest in obtaining a nuclear submarine.

Impact on India

Significance

- **Powerful Allies Equals Powerful India:** The AUKUS partnership strengthens the QUAD and **gives more weight to important partners like India, which provides** the military balance in the Indo-Pacific region.
- **Strengthening QUAD:** AUKUS will also accelerate the capabilities of the QUAD in fields like cybersecurity, Artificial Intelligence, Quantum technology and advanced missiles.
 - It also opens up opportunities for cooperation in these areas for India and Japan.
- **Net Positive Against China:** Any alliance or partnership that benefits the multilateral structure opposed to China is a **net strategic positive for India.**
 - China's aggressive response to AUKUS is a sign for its benefit to India.

Concerns

- **Change of Power in Indo-Pacific:** A worry for India is that the U.S. is now promoting a security partnership with its English allies which India is not a part of.
 - It might possibly **upset the balance of power in the region, and set off new tensions to India's east** while substantial turbulence in India's west is caused by the [recent change of government in Afghanistan](#).
- **Crowding of Nuclear Submarines:** The deal could eventually lead to a **crowding of nuclear submarines** in the eastern Indian Ocean, **eroding India's regional pre-eminence.**
 - The Indian Navy presently dominates the space, but its conventional underwater capability has been shrinking.
- **Skepticism About Loyalties:** It raises the question, "what the future might hold for India".
 - France, a big [NATO](#) ally to the US and Australia, considers this partnership as an act of betrayal.
 - The chances are likely for the two countries to look up to their own advantage if a similar condition arrives in future that involves India.

Way Forward

- **India and Its Navy:** India operates only one indigenously-built [Submersible Ship Ballistic Missile Nuclear - INS Arihant](#) after returning the [Submersible Ship Nuclear - INS Chakra](#) on lease from Russia.
 - Following the AUKUS partnership, India may persuade France in a deal for procuring the nuclear attack submarines. It would **fill up a huge gap in India's naval capacity.**
- **Bolstering Indo-France Relations:** As a major Indo-Pacific power, France is an important part of the regional security calculus.
 - The recent setback from Australia may **spur France to focus afresh on partners such as India.**
 - Also, India must strike a balance between continuing imports and implementing the

all-important [Atmanirbhar Bharat](#) in defence manufacturing.

- **Faster Multilateralism:** Minilateral partnerships including the QUAD and AUKUS should **add more partners to their alliance in the near future.**
 - For instance, Taiwan and South Korea can be brought into QUAD when assistance is needed in the field of [semiconductors](#), electronics, telecommunication or information technology.

Conclusion

- In tandem with the US and the UK, **Australia is all set to play a more robust role in ensuring peace** and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.
- In absence of any giant alliance specifically for the Indo-Pacific region, partnerships like AUKUS are likely to come into play.
- Meanwhile, **India can look forward to France as a possibly bigger ally**, especially when the latter has had a setback from its own allies.
 - The two now have a **better chance at mutually cooperating**, economically as well as for ensuring security in the Indo-Pacific.

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