

AUKUS - All You Need to Know

Australia, the U.K. and the U.S. (AUKUS) have come together to establish a new trilateral security partnership for the Indo-Pacific called the AUKUS. What is the AUKUS? What does it mean for India, the Quad and the larger Indo-Pacific? In this article, we answer all these questions and more for the [UPSC exam](#). AUKUS is an important topic for the international relations segment of the [UPSC syllabus](#).

AUKUS Formation Background

The unparalleled rise of China has been one of the most notable geopolitical phenomena. It espouses greater ambitions and under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, a newly-assertive China is pursuing a sophisticated strategy that exploits all elements of state power to strengthen its position in the world.

- Across much of the Indo-Pacific region, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is using military and economic coercion to bully its neighbours.
- This predatory conduct increases the risk of conflict.

Issues

- **Australia** banned Chinese telecom giant Huawei in 2018 and its PM called for an investigation into the origins of COVID-19.
 - China retaliated by imposing tariffs on or capping Australian exports.
 - Australia thus has felt increasing pressure from an assertive China.
 - In order to balance this threat, Australia has been trying to strengthen its partnerships with India, the U.S. and the U.K to strategically balance out China.
 - The **U.S.** too has been shifting its focus to the Indo-Pacific region given the potential of the region and also the increasing assertiveness of the Chinese whom it considers a challenger to its global dominance.
 - In this regard, it has been focusing on strengthening bilateral partnerships with its traditional partners in Asia like Japan, South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines, and new partners like India and Vietnam.
 - It has also been promoting new formations like the [Quad](#).
 - The **U.K.** has expressed its vision to engage more deeply with the Indo-Pacific.

What is the AUKUS?

AUKUS

Australia - UK - US

TRILATERAL SECURITY PARTNERSHIP

Focus on defence and security related science, supply chains, industrial bases and technology

US & UK will provide Australia with nuclear-powered submarine technology

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Under the 'AUKUS' alliance, the three partners UK, US and Australia are jointly going to increase the development of joint capabilities and technology sharing.

- The focus of AUKUS will be on integrating all defence and security related science, supply chains, industrial bases and technology.
- The partnership would also involve a new architecture of meetings and engagements between the three countries and also cooperation across emerging technologies like AI, quantum technologies and undersea capabilities.

Nuclear-Powered Submarines

- It is expected to help Australia acquire nuclear-powered submarines in a bid to counter China's growing power in the strategically vital region.
 - Australia has ratified the nuclear Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and has vowed to abide by its tenets, notwithstanding the highly sensitive technology transfer implied in the latest proposal.
 - Nuclear powered submarines can be deployed for longer periods and need to surface less frequently. They have longer ranges and are more capable compared to the conventional diesel-electric submarines.

Pre-existing similar arrangements

- It complements similar arrangements for the region such as the Five Eyes intelligence cooperation initiative, [ASEAN](#) and the Quad.
 - The Five Eyes (FVEY) is an intelligence alliance comprising Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
 - ASEAN is an economic union comprising 10 member states in Southeast Asia.
 - [QUAD](#) is an informal strategic dialogue comprising India, Japan, Australia and the US.

AUKUS Geopolitical Implications

The AUKUS alliance will have a profound impact on the various stakeholders in the region and will also result in the reshaping of relations in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

1. **United States of America:**

- This development seems an extension of the U.S. policy of pivot to Asia which emphasizes the need to focus more attention on the Indo-Pacific region while pivoting away from conflicts in West Asia.
- This is also an extension of the U.S.'s Asia Reassurance Initiative Act (ARIA) announced in 2018, which authorises US\$1.5 billion in spending for a range of US programmes in East Asia and Southeast Asia to “develop a long-term strategic vision and a comprehensive, multifaceted, and principled US policy for the Indo-Pacific region.”
- The Indo-Pacific region has assumed great significance in the United States’ foreign policy calculus as its tensions with China have only grown.

2. **United Kingdom:**

- Leaving the EU under BREXIT has left Britain seeking to reassert its global position. As part of this effort, it has increased focus towards the Indo-Pacific.

3. **Australia:**

- Australia has come under increasing pressure from an assertive China. In order to balance this threat, Australia has been trying to strengthen its partnerships with India, the U.S. and the U.K to strategically balance out China.
 - Balancing encompasses the actions that a particular state takes in order to equalise the odds against more powerful states; that is to make it more difficult and hence less likely for powerful states to exert their military advantage over the weaker ones.
 - Unlike hard balancing which encompasses traditional balancing of power using military capabilities and formal military alliances like [NATO](#), limited hard balancing relies on informal alliances or strategic partnerships, where there is some military coordination.

- Under the arrangement, Australia will build at least eight nuclear-powered submarines using U.S. expertise. The nuclear submarines will increase Australia's maritime security capacity and also give the alliance a stronger military presence in the region.

4. **China:**

- Though none of the countries mentioned China while announcing the deal and also clarified that the alliance was not targeted against any one country, the Counter China policy is very evident in the new trilateral security partnership with an emphasis on aspects such as upholding the international rules-based order, and promoting peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific in the light of China's assertiveness in the region.
- The transfer of nuclear propulsion technology to an ally was intended to send a message of reassurance to countries in Asia.
- China has cautioned that the new pact would undermine regional peace and stability and "intensify" an arms race and undermine international non-proliferation efforts.

5. **India and Japan:**

- Notably, the Australian Prime Minister said he had called the leaders of Japan and India to explain the new alliance. This is crucial given that Japan, India, Australia and the U.S. already have a strategic dialogue known as 'the Quad' which too seeks increased cooperation among the member nations in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Notably, India and Japan share an uneasy relationship with the increasingly assertive neighbour China.
- The trilateral grouping would be complementary to arrangements such as the Quad.

6. **France:**

- In 2016, Australia had selected French shipbuilder Naval Group to build a new submarine fleet worth \$40 billion to replace its more than two-decades-old Collins submarines.
- With the alliance in place the contract that Australia had for building submarines with the French company has been scrapped.
- France has criticized this move.

7. **New Zealand:**

- New Zealand wasn't asked to be part of the alliance despite sharing strategic relations with the U.S.
- New Zealand has a long-standing nuclear-free policy that includes a ban on nuclear-powered ships entering its ports. This stance has sometimes been a sticking point in its otherwise close relations with the U.S.

- The omission of New Zealand would prevent it from sharing a range of information, including [artificial intelligence](#), cyber and underwater defence capabilities.
8. **ASEAN:**
- There has been no official statement from the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a forum.
 - Except for Malaysia and Indonesia, none of its 10 member-states has shown signs of protest at the formation of AUKUS.
 - Even with these two states, the concerns seem hinged around the fear of a ‘nuclear arms race’.
 - However, Australia has unambiguously reassured its commitment to ASEAN centrality and its continued support for the South Pacific Nuclear-Free Zone Treaty as well as the Treaty of Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone.

AUKUS Significance

In this section, you can read about the significance of the AUKUS development.

- The move will promote stability in the Indo-Pacific and support shared values and interests.
- It will ensure a peaceful and rules-based international order.
- US
 - It may safeguard the interests of partners.
 - In the Pacific, the U.S. and others have been concerned about China’s actions in the South China Sea and its antipathy toward Japan, Taiwan and Australia.
 - The Quad and AUKUS are distinct, yet complementary.
 - The Quad initiatives straddle the Indian and the Pacific Oceans but the AUKUS is Pacific-centric.
 - Such a strategy could potentially strengthen Japan’s security as well as that of Taiwan in the face of China’s mounting bellicosity.
 - Shifting AUKUS’s fulcrum to the Pacific Ocean could reassure ASEAN nations.

Concerns/Challenges:

Doubts have been raised over the actual effectiveness of the AUKUS. The newly announced trilateral security arrangement is unlikely to be a game changer in the Indo-Pacific region as envisaged by the member countries.

- Given the formidable military presence of the U.S. in the Indo-Pacific region and its collaboration with like-minded countries via platforms such as the Quad, Five Eyes, it is unclear what AUKUS will help achieve for the U.S.

- There are doubts over whether the AUKUS will be effective in deterring China's strategic calculus across the region, particularly relating to its maritime ambitions and territorial expansionism.
 - In fact AUKUS has the potential to cause a recalibration of China's plans with respect to nuclear-powered submarines.
 - It could heighten Beijing's anxiety over its nuclear-powered submarine fleet and push it towards building more such platforms giving rise to an arms race in the region.
- It is very likely that it would be well over a decade before the submarine construction plans come to fruition. This large time frame could as well witness drastic changes in the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific.

AUKUS and India

India has distanced itself from the AUKUS grouping. The Foreign Secretary of India has stated that the new partnership is neither relevant to the Quad, nor will it have any impact on its functioning.

- Despite the professed indifference towards AUKUS, India may derive secondary benefits from the AUKUS arrangement having three advanced nations with arguably the most sophisticated military know-how in the world coming together to support a free and open Indo-Pacific in the light of the increasingly assertive attitude of China in the region. This could provide some degree of deterrence to China.
- Also, India's concerns regarding 'encirclement' by China may be partially mitigated by AUKUS.
 - China has made massive inroads in India's neighbourhood in terms of infrastructure development projects and presence.
- There is apprehension that the deal could eventually lead to crowding of nuclear attack submarines (SSNs/submersible ship nuclear) in the Eastern Indian Ocean, eroding India's regional pre-eminence.

Additional Information

South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone (SPNFZ) Treaty

- It is also known as the Treaty of Rarotonga. It bans the use, testing, and possession of nuclear weapons within the borders of the zone.
- It formalises a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the South Pacific.

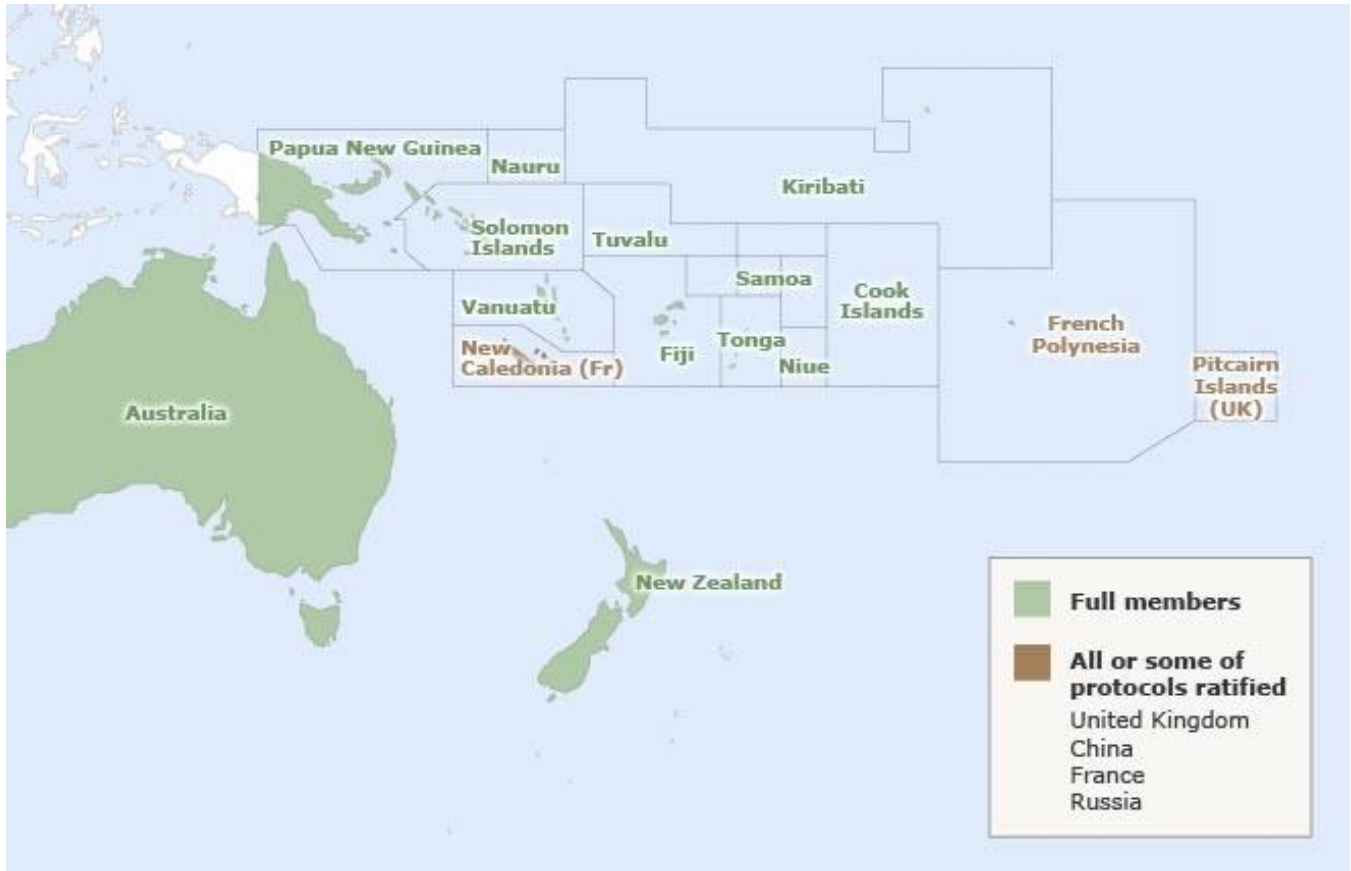


Image source: <https://teara.govt.nz/>

Treaty of Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ Treaty)

- The Treaty is also known as the Bangkok Treaty.
 - The Treaty obliges States Parties not to develop, manufacture or otherwise acquire, possess or have control over nuclear weapons, station or transport nuclear weapons, or test or use nuclear weapons.
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