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U.S. INDO–PACIFIC STRATEGY: THE UTILIZATION OF THE U.S.– AUSTRALIA MILITARY ALLIANCE AS PART OF THE U.S. BALANCE OF POWER STRATEGY TO RESPOND TO CHINA INFLUENCE IN INDO–PACIFIC REGION

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Abstract

One of the U.S. intentions in Indo–Pacific is to counter a new rising giant of China. The U.S. government has recognized China as a competitive actor. An effort to promote U.S. security interests in the Indo–Pacific region serves as an option to safeguard their national interest. The U.S. alliance network is considered one of the most lasting and successful parts of U.S. Foreign Policy since World War II. The member of its alliance has adapted to several changes in international events, including in the post-Cold War era, the rivalry tended to be centered between two major powers. Australia is not the exception. Several bilateral and multilateral approaches to implementing its Mutual Defense Treaty have been integrated and enhanced. This study aims to elaborate on the U.S.–Australia Military Alliance as part of the U.S. Balance of Power Strategy to respond to China's Influence in Indo-Pacific Region. The study will use an explanatory research method by explaining rather than describing the studied phenomena that depart from the qualitative approach. In the end, the study concludes that the U.S. is actively involved with Australia as its military alliance through ANZUS, the Quad, and AUKUS; those all considered the effort encountered by the U.S. to respond to China's Influence in the Indo–Pacific Region.

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INTRODUCTION

“We will focus on every corner of the region from Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia, to South Asia and Oceania, including the Pacific Islands”, President Joe (The White House, 2022)

The Indo–Pacific region faces several major challenges, and it started from the non-traditional issue, including the environmental and COVID-19 issues, as well as the threats coming from state actors of the Democratic People's Republic of

Korea and not to mention, China's assertiveness in the region, especially in the South China Sea. The U.S. government understands that those issues must be faced by working closely with its allies and partners toward its vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific that is more connected, prosperous, secure, and resilient. This effort is considered the national strategy of the U.S. committed to success (The White House, 2022). On many occasions, the U.S. highlighted that China's assertiveness in the region is perceived as a security threat. The U.S. claimed that China is combining its economic, technological, diplomatic, and military might draw its influence in the Indo-Pacific to become the world's most influential power by spanning through coercion and aggression (The White House, 2022).

A previous publication by the United States Institute of Peace was highlight a closer look at Biden's Indo-Pacific Strategy following the release of the White House Indo-Pacific Strategy 2022. The publication has mentioned that the Biden administration put a greater emphasis on cooperation with the regional allies and partners. The releases tend to focus and give particular attention to "supporting India's continued rise and regional leadership" where India had historically been reluctant to align closer with the U.S. It seems that Biden wants to leverage stronger cooperation with its partner like India (Freeman, Markey, & Singh, 2022).

Even though India has consistently welcomed deeper U.S. engagement in the region and the fact that India and China have engaged in a series of skirmishes due to the land border issue, since India is not part of the U.S. alliance, it will be hard for it to put pressure to India for representing their national interest by the balance of power. Thus, this study discusses from the other angle to see how the U.S. rely on its alliance, especially Australia who is played a major role in the region. Even though its allies are sovereign, the 'allies' titled attached to them leverage the U.S. ability to

control where not to mention these countries, of course, have received several benefits in working with the U.S. Thus, the U.S. intended to renew its focus on innovation for its military operability in the rapidly evolving threats. One of the tools that the U.S. has used for decades is the utilization of its regional combatant Command.

Figure 1 shows the Indo-Pacific region, covering the Pacific and Indian oceans. More than that, it is one of the six geographic combatant commands defined by the U.S. Department of Defense's Unified Command Plan (UCP), namely the United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM). This combatant command must integrate the U.S. Army, Navy, and Airforce within the USINDOPACOM Area of Responsibility; The U.S. encountered this approach to achieve its national security objectives were also to safeguard its national interest in the region (U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, n.d.). The interesting thing from this combatant command, especially in this region, is that the U.S. has five nations allied through a mutual defense treaty, which are Japan in 1960, the Republic of Korea in 1953, the Philippines in 1951, Thailand in 1950, and last but not least Australia on 1951. Despite only laying on the utilization of this command center, the fact that it has several allies in the coverage command is something that needs to be used as best as possible.

As the biggest nation compared to those five, Australia holds a duty as an ally in the Southern part of the USINDOPACOM Area of Responsibility (AOR) as written in the 115th U.S. Congress Public Law 409 Act, related to the Security Treaty between Australia and the United States of America, stated;

- (2) recognizes the vital role of the alliance between the United States and Australia in promoting peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region; and (3) calls for the strengthening and broadening of diplomatic, economic, and security ties between the



Figure 1. The coverage area of United States Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM)
 Source: U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, n.d.

United States and Australia (U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2018).

The U.S. intention in Indo-Pacific is also a strategy to counter a new rising giant of China. The U.S. government has recognized it as a competitive actor. An effort to promote U.S. security interests in the Indo-Pacific region serves as an option to safeguard their national interest. In the same act, Page 132 STAT. 5392 the U.S. government has blatantly stated that:

Countering China's Influence to Undermine the International System.—Amounts appropriated according to subsection (b) shall be made available for United States Government efforts to counter the strategic influence of the People's Republic of China, by the strategy required under section 7043(e)(3) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2014 (division K of Public Law 113-76; 128 Stat. 536) and in consultation with the appropriate

committees of Congress (U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2018).

However, the US.-led alliance in this region is considered as a foundation of U.S. political and military hegemony in Indo-Pacific. The U.S. also realizes the uncertainty since and the changing balance of power between the U.S. and China perceived as their biggest challenge in the alliance that has been formed from the 1950s. Someway, the U.S. government expects its allies to support them when this happens and enforce the sense of belonging of worrying China and be closer to the U.S. (Lukin & Korotich, 2017).

The U.S. has clarified that it will be consistent with the broader strategic approach and will prioritize its single greatest asymmetric strength which refers to the U.S. network of security alliances and partnerships by deepening the interoperability and developing the

advanced warfighting capabilities. This statement is quite rational since the U.S., for this reason, supports its allies and partner in defending their citizen and sovereign interest (The White House, 2022).

Departing from all the elaboration above and several other issues that the U.S. in the region is facing, this study tries to analyze how the U.S. utilized its military alliance with Australia as a U.S. balanced power strategy to counter China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

METHODS

The study will use an explanatory research method by explaining rather than describing the studied phenomena. The explanatory research lets the study explore why something occurs despite the limited information available. Thus, in correlation, the study assesses through a qualitative approach by adopting and collecting data from primary resources, including official documents and publications retrieved online, and secondary resources that include scholars' publications (journals, papers, books, reports, etc). To comprehensively understand the theory and concept being used in this paper, this study highlights several important elaborations based on the literature review and how they could contribute to and correlate to this study.

Geopolitics

The struggle for control over geographical areas with a global and international scope, as well as the utilization of these areas for political gain elaborates the common definition of geopolitics. The complexity of the world we live in today can be easily understood by this approach, it may be defined as the particular use of power that explains how states and non-state actors compete to control a particular geographical area which can help those actors to reach their goals or objectives (Flint, 2016). The distance between U.S. and China is about 7,000 miles away, but it seems for a state that far from the U.S., China is perceived as

a vital threat that may give a negative impact on the U.S. geopolitical control. Especially, when it comes to Indo-Pacific region which covers a very large area. This concept will become the baseline for the U.S. to project its national interest in the specific geographical location of Indo-Pacific.

Balance of Power

The concept of balance of power is considered one of the core principles in international relations, even though scholars do not agree to accept one definition. This is supported by Hans J. Morgenthau by stating:

Whenever the term Balance of Power is used without qualification, it refers to an actual state of affairs in which power is distributed among nations with approximate equality (Danilovic, 2002).

Commonly, the concept can be understood as a state of international order where power is balanced in such a way that nations avoid aggression out of fear of forceful retaliation (Walden University, n.d.) or a system in which the authority that states own and exercises within it is restrained and balanced by the power of other states. This concept is also commonly linked to the distribution of power that defines the situation that exists when one state possesses the special role of holding the balance (called the balancer), thereby maintaining an even distribution of power between two rival sides (Schweller, 2016).

This concept reflects the effort of the U.S. toward its ally, which becomes the core variable in this research. The U.S., at the moment, avoids using force and attack that can increase more significant conflict and cause a domino effect. Thus, the balance of power in the way of utilizing its alliance to hold a more effective control over the region is chosen, even though it can still be perceived as a negative move for China.

Military Alliances

Alliances are not new in international

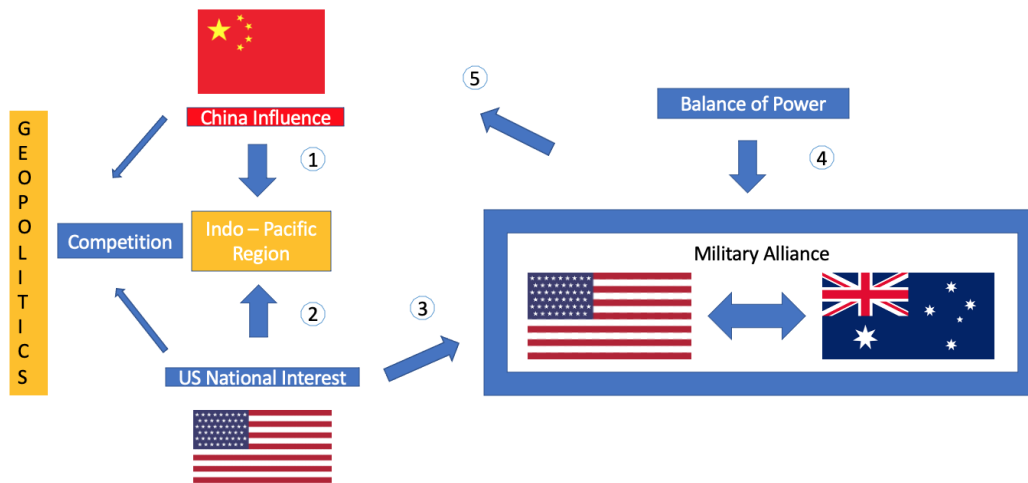


Figure 2. The elaboration of the U.S.–Australia Military Alliance as part of the U.S. Balance of Power Strategy to respond to China's Influence in Indo-Pacific Region

Source: Processed by the Author, 2022

Politics. It could be found even in the ancient times when states formed alliances to pursue their national interest. Stefan Bergsman, departing from the fact that yet there exists no accepted definition of the military alliance concept, articulated the alliance alone as an explicit agreement among states in the realm of national security in which the partners do the favor for mutual assistance in the form of the substantial contribution of resources in the moment of particular contingency arise. Since the alliance may be possible to refer to the non-military form of cooperation, Bergsman initiates to focus on the element of military alliances, which is the ‘assistance’ clause (Bergsman, 2001). Thus, this concept fulfilled the U.S. approach to its vision in the Indo-Pacific region by utilizing Australia for mutual assistance in the condition where they perceived China's assertive influence in the region is considered a threat to regional security and stability. This concept will sharpen the focus of the study related to the relations between the U.S. and Australia. This concept limits how far this type of alliance is being articulated. By the general definition, this study able to determine several military alliances effort that will be emphasized in the result and discussions section.

This study limits its discussion to the interaction between the U.S.–Australia allied relations projected to balance the rise of China that derived from U.S. rebalancing policy in the Indo-Pacific region. The issue discussed is around geopolitics over the area and the balance of power to safeguard the U.S. political hegemony. China is considered a competitive actor that caught U.S. attention, and the utilization of its ally, Australia, was chosen by several bilateral (or trilateral with another state) strategies in the form of military alignment or military alliance under the Mutual Defense Treaty. In the end, this research will conclude how effective the U.S.–Australia's efforts are in balancing China's Influence in the region.

Figure 2 as a conceptual framework emphasizes how China's Influence in Indo-Pacific region has created a sense of competition for the U.S. as they also pursue their national interest (The U.S. Vision in the Indo-Pacific). The geopolitics in this region have urged the U.S. to utilize its long-standing military alliance in the area. Based on the limitation of the discussion, it will be limited to the U.S.–Australia Military Alliance under their Mutual Defense Treaty and several initiatives conducted in the recent period. This process is asses under the concept of Balance of Power and is purposed to respond to and

deter China's influence in Indo-Pacific Region.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Elaboration of China's Main Developments

Countries compete to utilize any momentum for enhanced their national interest. A realist perspective seeks power as the main pillar-like or not is still relevant to depict how the international phenomena are shaped. When it comes to China, the changing pattern in the post-Cold War era is used to project the Grand Strategy its government announced the creation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, recognized as China's ambitious grand strategy to dominate the regional and international order; it has invested a lot of funding and built infrastructure networks across Eurasia and Eastern Africa (EurAsian Times Desk, 2018).

Figure 3 shows the String of Pearls adopted by China, and many consider it its regional and theatre strategy. China is investing in geopolitically important ports from its neighbor, Hong Kong, to an African country in Sudan, expert says that it is a monopoly strategy of China in the strategic choke points of the Indian Ocean region. China was also building its first overseas military bases in Djibouti and might add to another country along with the

implementation of its grand strategy (EurAsian Times Desk, 2018). China also has ongoing development in the South China Sea by building military bases in the contested area where other state claims (that follow international law) is one of the assertive gestures that China is trying to show following their mass emergence in the economy and military.

The Elaboration of the U.S. National Interest: Free and Open Indo-Pacific

In a simple bullet, the U.S. vision in Indo-Pacific is stated as below:

The United States' vision for the Indo-Pacific is a free and open region comprised of nations that are independent, strong, and prosperous. Advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific is a whole-of-government effort focused on three pillars: economics, governance, and security (U.S. Mission to ASEAN, 2020).

Through the document published by the U.S. Department of State titled "A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision", the study would like to give more attention to the part discussing its vision of 'Ensuring Peace and Security'. It says that the U.S. seeks to create a flexible, resilient network of like-minded security partners to address common challenges. It defines the common challenges as transnational crime, protecting the maritime domain, addressing

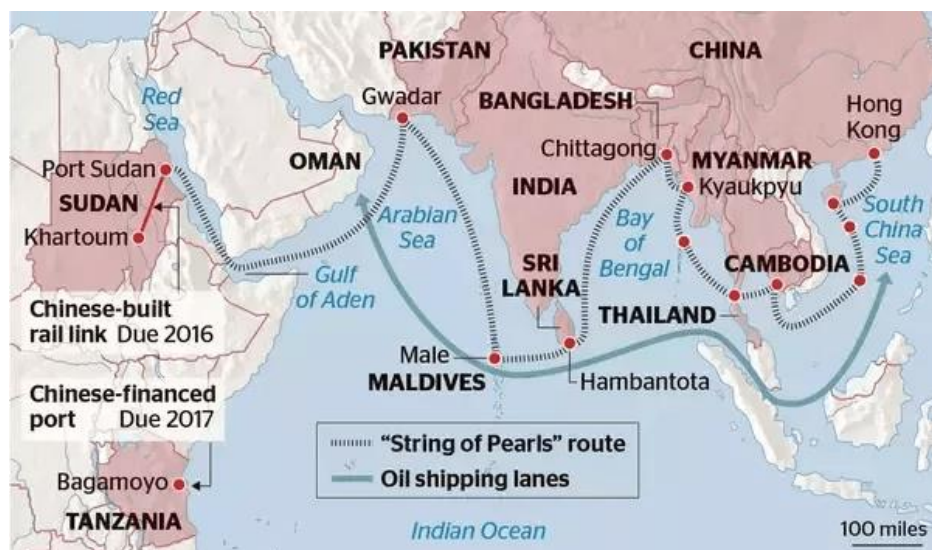


Figure 3. The map of China's String of Pearls Strategy
 Source: Dorsey, 2017

environmental challenges, and responding collectively to emerging threats. It also ensures that the U.S. will maintain its interoperable capabilities to deter adversaries and its allies, including Australia. Interestingly, it also highlights the China maritime claim in the South China Sea, which is unfounded, unlawful, and unreasonable. China's claim is based on no legal, historical, or geographic merit and urged that it has given an actual cost to the other countries, including the claimant and non-claimant states (Department of State United States of America, 2019).

The U.S. stance is quite firm. It explicitly mentions China toward several assertive behaviors that China enforces within the region. On the other hand, this statement also may be used to get countries in the region's sympathy that makes an impression that the U.S. be on their side. Many experts argue that the U.S. has responded to the regional contest as it rebalances policy which can be seen and introduced in the early administration of U.S. President Barack Obama in 2010. There are explicit changes that are perceived to differ from the previous administration. The U.S. started to engage a more than symbolic relations within South and South East Asia countries. Moreover, it views the region as a crucial driver for them to safeguard their economic growth and prosperity throughout the 21st century (Perwita & Rizkiya, 2014).

The U.S. is not only laying to its alliance. The more it engages, the more opportunities for it to reach the national interest can be achievable. The U.S. understands its partner in the region also own particular sentiment toward China due to the South China Sea issue and China's growing economic development.

The Utilization of the U.S.–Australia Military Alliance

The U.S. alliance network is considered one of the most lasting and successful parts of the U.S. Foreign Policy since World War II. The member of its alliance has adapted to several changes in international events,

including in the post-Cold War era, the rivalry tended to be centered between two major powers. Today's challenge is more formidable, the rise of China and its development in economic, military, and technology sectors demand this alliance to equalize the power projection stemming from growing China collectively. The U.S. itself has started to retool its partnership in Europe and Indo–Pacific more seriously in facing the challenge posed by China. However, the U.S. must encounter more effort since China is not only playing its geopolitical and geostrategic roles but also leveraging its economic competence to influence the domestic and international fragment of the U.S.-built alliance (Ford & Goldgeier, 2021).

The balance of power strategy costs an enormous amount of money. The enhanced military alliance with Australia can become China's excuse to put more economic pressure on the U.S.-built alliance. Besides that, to maintain the alliance, there is no free lunch in the context that the U.S. has to contribute through grants or Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to Australia. After the Cold War era, Australia maintained its relationship with the U.S.. Several bilateral and multilateral approaches to implementing its Mutual Defense Treaty have been integrated and enhanced (Baker & Glosserman, 2013). To implement the U.S. rebalance to Asia policy, the Obama administration decides to deploy the U.S. marines and Air Force in Australian territory. Experts perceived that Australia became the central pillar of Obama's Pacific Pivot in the region (Vaughn & Lum, 2015).

The plans to make the Australian Defense Force more capable of independent operations are in line with the provision to extend the U.S. deterrence in the region fully supported by Australia. The U.S.–Australia bilateral and defense relations have been built for more than 100 years. Even though it continuously evolves due to the changing international politics, it remains strong. It was marked by the first

military-to-military contact by U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt in 1908 when the Great White Fleet arrived in Australia due to the fear of Japanese expansion. However, many argue that the long-standing alliance between the two has strengthened during President Barack Obama's administration (Congressional Research Service, 2020). Many events become proof of this statement; One of them, in October 2014, Former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott sent eight aircraft, doubled hundred special forces, and 400 support troops in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) against the Islamic State in Iraq along with the U.S. (Griffiths, 2014).

On the Australian side, the alliance with the U.S. is considered the fundamental basis of its security policy and perceived it could strengthen its imperative role in leading the regional security environment along with China's assertiveness that significantly impacted Australian politics. Another concern is that Australia sees China's rising power and influence undercuts Australia's influence in the Indo-Pacific region. The U.S. and Australia are concerned about projecting their influence over the Pacific Islands by countering the surging Chinese presence and as has a mission to become the option for those countries in the region as their partner of choice (Chase & Moroney, 2020).

The study will highlight several key points that become the strategic partnership between the U.S. and Australia in the military alliance. The study will assess and describe how it formed and its relations with rising China, especially in Indo-Pacific. It must be noted that this kind of alliance contains both countries. However, it will still specifically explain per limitation of the discussion between the U.S. and Australia.

The ANZUS Alliance

The treaty that was signed between Australia, New Zealand, and the U.S. in 1951, the treaty bore at the same time when the Japanese empire was trying to resurgent

and grow, wherein the other side, the U.S. was also concerned about the growth of the Soviet Union (Congressional Research Service, 2020). The treaty also formed around the time when the Chinese Communist Party had won its war and was followed by the declaration of the People's Republic of China on 1 October 1949, three days before the ANZUS was being negotiated. The event that happened during this period when China became the core combatant also involved three ANZUS partners (Callick, 2021).

In today's era, many say that the treaty is also used to project the focus toward China, even though what happened to China right now is far way different from what it was in the past. The ANZUS response towards China's influence contains more routine regular military exercises that also involve New Zealand. New Zealand was ever leg of the ANZUS alliance. There is a different contention between the U.S. and New Zealand over nuclear policy in the mid-1980s, whereas, on the other side, the relations with Australia continued (Congressional Research Service, 2020). Not as a generalization, but Australia's commitment catches the U.S.'s trust to put them as and uses them as the spearhead in facing China's influence in Indo-Pacific.

The Quad

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, usually known as the Quad, is a strategic dialogue between the United States, Japan, India, and Australia established for the first time in 2007. It is usually gathered for talks between member states. Before it was formed, the previous trilateral security dialogue was convened between senior officials of the US, Japan, and Australia in 2002 and upgraded to the ministerial conference in 2005 (Tow, 2008). The primary purpose of the Quad to this day is to form a signal of unification of a like-minded state to counter China's influence in the Indo-Pacific and also as a medium to maintain a rules-based international order. From the Australian side, in 2019

Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade stated the Quad senior official meeting in 2017 stated:

A shared vision for increased prosperity and security in the Indo-Pacific region and to work together to ensure it remains free and open. The officials examined ways to achieve common goals and address shared challenges in the region. This includes upholding the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific and respect for international law, freedom of navigation and overflight; increasing connectivity; coordinating efforts to address the challenges of countering terrorism, and upholding maritime security in the Indo-Pacific (Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2017).

President Trump, on another occasion, perceived that the U.S. strategic conceptualization of Asia is considered similar to what has been defined by Australia by its Indo-Pacific worldview (Congressional Research Service, 2020). The Quad contains countries directly or indirectly stating that China threatens their national interest or sovereignty. Both Japan and India even bordered China and contested several events related to the border issue. The Quad's recent summit in March 2021 caught China's attention, and some say that it seemed rattled. The Quad members did not implicitly mention the meeting with China directly, but China might articulate it with their interpretation (Asthana, 2021)

For the U.S. National Interest, according to the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), this strategic dialogue is an effort to adapt to China's economic strength in Asia-Pacific and the series of alliances among the democratic countries is seen as:

It is precisely because of the rise of Chinese power and the longer-term trend towards multipolarity in the international system that values can and should serve as a tool of American statecraft today (Campbell, Patel, & Singh, 2011).

Another critical point is that the Quad dialogue parallels a joint military exercise called Exercise Malabar. The permanent members contain the U.S., Japan, and India,

which was started for the first time in 1992 between U.S. and India. It is conducted annually and includes several activities such as fighter combat operations, anti-submarine warfare, amphibious operations, diving salvage operations, counter-piracy, cross-deck helicopter landings, and anti-air warfare operations (India Defence Consultant, 2008).

Australia took part in Malabar Naval Exercise in 2020 following its free, open, and rule-based Indo-Pacific national interest concept. Something interesting since this is the first time all members of the Quad joined together in Naval exercises (Roche, 2020). Those activities become more convincing that the U.S. is utilizing the military alliance and providing more room for Australia together balance the power over the region. This opportunity also can be seen as momentum for Australia to show its commitment to the alliance and to show off the result of the defense cooperation that has been carried out by both countries, especially in the defense industry, for procuring defense armament through joint defense capability.

The AUKUS

This is about investing in our greatest source of strength – our alliances. The United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom have long been faithful and capable partners who are even closer today ... because the future of our nations and indeed the world depends on a free and open Indo-Pacific enduring and flourishing in the decades ahead, U.S. President, Joe Biden (Daniels. Gabriel & Martin, 2021).

More or less, this statement covers the purpose of creating the AUKUS, the abbreviation of the three countries involved, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the U.S.. The Military alliances which kind to shook international relations not just cover the issue of the utilization of nuclear-powered submarines (SSNs), but also how it can influence the strategic environment in the region and the utilization of Artificial Intelligence and other technologies that are considered the most significant defense

partnership in this decade (BBC News, 2021). Mainly, Australia is becoming the central point where expert says that AUKUS is the representation of the move by the U.S. and U.K. aimed to counter China which is in line with its influence within Indo-Pacific region. It is, in the end, put aside the French-designed diesel submarines' multi-billion-dollar contract and trust the U.S. and the U.K. with their SSN submarines plus to play a significant role in the region. Through the Integrated Operating Concept, Australia and its ally can have freedom of action against rivals through non-hostile means the SSNs owned by Australia can potentially constrain China's activity (Daniels, Gabriel & Martin, 2021).

AUKUS can help the U.S. strategic focus shift. This alliance can also put the foundation for a significant expansion it presents in the Indo-Pacific. From the operational side, we can see that once the submarines are stationed in Australia, it will be easier for the U.S. to control the region, especially underwater. The nuclear-powered submarines will leverage the U.S. and its alliance to be undetected in a deep sea. China is the only country in the region with this type of submarine. The U.S. decision to work with Australia at least can deter any suspicious underwater activity encountered by China. For the Australian side, by sitting at the same table with the U.K. and the U.S., it has gained a great and powerful friend to safeguard their national security, meaning Australia could most likely have the power to support any potential attack that may harm their sovereignty.

CONCLUSIONS

The U.S. Free and Open Indo-Pacific serves as its core national interest in the region. One of the intentions is to deter China's growing presence, which is perceived as a threat to the U.S. The U.S., in many statements, has highlighted its engagement that focuses on the alliances and its partners. However, this study has

shown several proofs that while spurring its influence in Indo-Pacific region. The alliance network is still being utilized now, especially when it comes to Australia, where bilateral and defense relations have been built for more than 100 years. Australia is perceived as a state with a long story partnership and successful military alliance under Defense Military pact with a similar vision with the U.S. on a free and open Indo-Pacific. Compared to other countries, Australia can potentially balance the power contest in the region.

The military alliance engaging both countries includes ANZUS, The Quad, and AUKUS. AUKUS, as the last established military alliance, demonstrates the interest of the U.S. to maintain a longer relationship with its alliance and to place a higher trust in Australia to work with. The military alliance agreement and the activity underneath it provides more room for Australia, together with the U.S., to balance the power over the region and safeguard their national interest in the middle of China's assertive behavior.

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