

THE NEO-REALISM IN AUKUS

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Abstract

Indo-Pacific is a very crucial region as many of defense activities from many countries are happening here. As the U.S., United Kingdom and Australia see the importance of the region they then created an alliance to create a free and open Indo-Pacific and make it as a region that is free from coercion and respects human rights. This security arrangement also will provide Australia with nuclear-powered submarines for their defense capabilities. However, this raised concern among many parties that believed there are personal reasons behind the establishment of AUKUS. In short, AUKUS is a media to achieve and protect their national interest. This is in line with neo-realism theory that believed the main goal of every states is to survive and they will create alliances in crucial time. Hence, this paper will discuss the neo-realism in AUKUS. This paper is using a qualitative-descriptive method to better explain neo-realism in AUKUS.

Keywords: AUKUS, National Interest, Neo-Realism

INTRODUCTION

The international audience was surprised by the establishment of trilateral security arrangement that consist of Australia, The United Kingdom and The United States of America on 15 September 2021 (The White House, 2021). The announcement was delivered by the U.S. President, Mr. Joe Biden. Australia's Prime Minister, Mr. Scott Morrison and the UK's Prime Minister, Mr. Boris Johnson. The news shocked almost all countries around the world as there is no single word coming about AUKUS in previous events although there might be a moment to at least give some hints regarding the issue. This security arrangement between Australia, UK and the U.S. could be considered as diplomacy because according to the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, diplomacy is the mean done by the states to conduct their affairs and make sure a peaceful relations with other states with the main purpose is to protect their national interest (Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA, 2008).

This defense diplomacy behind the establishment of AUKUS was driven by the needs of each countries to protect and fulfill their national interest as was explained by the realism and neo-realism theory. In his essay, Mearsheimer explained that states will do anything to protect and fulfill their national interest (Mearsheimer, 2001). There were a lot of factors for each AUKUS countries to finally come to a decision where they decided to establish AUKUS, and it is more likely will be for their own safety, their national interest. This statement is supported by Mearsheimer, where he stated that the world is anarchy and they have to stand on their own feet to survive. However, he continued that it will be more advantageous for them to create alliance especially in threatening situation (Mearsheimer, 2001). Basically, what he was saying is that states are selfish, they will protect their own interest and even though in the end they have to create alliances and cooperate with other parties, it is all for their own national interest, for their own sake. According to Mearsheimer there are 5 main point in neo-realism;

- State is the only main actor in the anarchy of international system

- States possess active military capability
- States could not be certain about each other's intention because it cannot be empirically verified
- Main goal of every states is survival
- State is the only rational actor

Morgenthau explained that national interest is the essence of foreign policy and power will be needed to reach and protect their national interest and it will determine how they will act towards another (Morgenthau, 1948). It is important for a state to have a what they believe is enough power to be able to survive in international system. However, power is objective. Power used to face one particular state might be not enough to face the other or maybe just a little power is enough to give a deterrent power so that they could protect their interest.

The same thing goes for AUKUS. Many parties are questioning their intention behind their said genuine reason to maintain regional stability. Many parties are also concerned about the possible impact of AUKUS. Concerned was also raised by Indonesian Foreign Minister, Retno Marsudi, that said AUKUS will possibly bring arms race and security dilemma especially in the Indo-Pacific region (Reuters, 2021). So, instead of maintaining order, AUKUS might as well turn into stability disruption in the region.

However, the expressed concerns might be not happening if AUKUS countries could be more transparent behind their intention. Hence, this research will try to explain the reason behind the establishment of AUKUS and saw it through neo-realism eyes.

RESEARCH METHODS

To understand AUKUS through neo-realism eyes, this research will be using literature review to obtain the data that is believed to be needed. This research will be using the descriptive-analytic method to analyse AUKUS and the intentions of each countries so that it could be examined by using the neo-realism theory. The data will be obtained from relevant journals, books also from some of the official documents and statements that were published.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

As was stated before, it is really hard for a country to conduct action for mutual prosperity. It is not impossible, but most of them will be based on their national interest, how the action that was decided could help them to fulfil their national interest. The same goes for AUKUS countries. From the Joint Leaders Statement, it is stated that AUKUS will be a media to support Australia to acquire nuclear-powered submarines for the Royal Navy (The White House, 2021). However, if we see it from a different perspective there must be other reason for the U.S. and UK to be so willingly help Australia improve their military capabilities.

National Interest of Each AUKUS Member Countries

The United States saw China as a country that seriously challenged U.S. in every aspects (Cheng, 2022). Many scholars also think that AUKUS is a media for the U.S. to contain China's growing power especially in the defense and security sector. President Biden's new foreign policy is to renew the ties with its allies and spread powers across the Indo-Pacific (Edel, 2021). This is because according to him alliances are a great asset for the purpose of security which will push threats as far as possible from American land (Edel, 2021). With the rising of power in the Indo-Pacific region, which the U.S. see as one of the important region. They even stated in their Indo-Pacific strategy that Indo-Pacific has long served the U.S. for their security interest (The White House, 2022). Even though under different leaderships, the

U.S. always put it in mind that Indo-Pacific is a crucial region for their security and they feel the urge to always be involved in every corner of the region. They want to be involved with every Indo-Pacific countries to ensure their security.

However, as China continue to grow to be the rising power of Indo-Pacific, the U.S. feel bothered and concerned. It is stated in their Indo-Pacific strategy, as quoted, '*The PRC is combining its economic, diplomatic, military and technological might as it pursues a sphere of influences in the Indo-Pacific and seeks to become the world's most influential power. The PRC's coercion and aggression spans the globe, but it is most acute in Indo-Pacific... Our allies bear much of the cost of the PRC's harmful behavior,*' (The White House, 2022). From this statement alone, we could see how much the U.S. look at China as their rival and rejected the idea that there is another great power that will grow in their critical region. China possessed 12 nuclear-powered submarines, 47 conventional submarines with 3 aircraft carriers (Lendon, 2022). As the neo-realism stated, there is no state that could be sure about the other state's intention because it cannot be verified and the intention could be concealed, the U.S. has the urge to contain their allies, to pull their allies under their wings in order to protect their national interest. This is also stated in their Indo-Pacific strategy, that they will continue to nurture the relationship with their allies by connecting their industrial bases, pursuing the defense supply chains and provide their allies with advanced technologies that will eventually benefit the U.S. to avoid conflict as far from their homeland as possible.

Australia, as one of the U.S. important ally is located in the Indo-Pacific. By pursuing security cooperation with Australia, it will help the U.S. to prevent the rising power of China. However, AUKUS also bring some benefits to Australia's security. This is because, before AUKUS, Australia did not have any nuclear-powered submarines meanwhile China have a complete gear for offense and defense. Australia believed that Indo-Pacific is the 'centre of strategic competition,' (Australian Government, 2021). As there are tensions exist between Australia and China, they feel the need to improve their own military capability so in case there is an attack coming to Australia in the future, they already have the capabilities to tackle it. This possible attack is feared because there are some tensions after issues behind them. One of them will be the tight relationship between the U.S. and Australia which may add reason for a growing tensions between two countries. This then be the reason of their strategic interest and might trigger the possibility of conflicts.

The other reason on the involvement of Australia in AUKUS is that Australia believe that Indo-Pacific is a challenging region and it is important for them to take part in managing the region's balance of power. They think, Indo Pacific is a challenging region as there are more competition in many aspects such as economy and defense in the region (PWC Australia, 2022). As stated in the Fact Sheet, AUKUS will provide Australia with, as quoted, '*a conventionally armed nuclear-powered submarine capability at the earliest possible date while upholding the highest non-proliferation standards. Advance capabilities as AUKUS will develop and provide joint advanced military capabilities to promote security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region,*' (Australia Government Department of Defence, 2022). Australia already saw China's rising power especially in military expansion. By involved with AUKUS, it will help Australia to safeguard their maritime activity and tackle the growing dynamic in the region as they see Indo-Pacific as a centre of strategic competition (Australian Government Department of Defense, n.d.).

As for British, after the Brexit issue, it is important for the UK to be involved to maintain their role as security actor since the withdrawal from the east of Suez (Camroux, 2021). With the involvement of AUKUS, British will gain the advantage to gain a proper position for their nuclear-powered submarines in Australia and eventually will gain a stronger naval existence in Indo-Pacific (Camroux, 2021). However, AUKUS helped the UK gained contract with BAE Systems and Rolls-Royce to work on a new design of nuclear-powered

submarines for the Royal Navy. It is important for the Royal Navy as BAE System is a company with strong presence in the market.

Discussion

As the neo-realism says that no states will be sure about the other's intention as it could be concealed by the policy maker. They never know when a state will attack them because this intention would not be announced publicly. This action of defense and offense is an act to protect or to achieve national interest as once again the main goal of every state is for survival.

AUKUS is just the perfect example how to picture neo-realism in a real life event. State is a selfish entity. They will do anything to protect their national interest even maybe by disrupting the other state's interest. Although, neo-realism did not deny the existence of alliance as they believe it will be beneficial at some points especially if the states are facing the same dangerous situation.

This is believed as what is happening with AUKUS countries. They have their own national interest to be protected even when some of them have their own common enemies or for their own purpose. Because Australia could not be sure about what will happen to their relationship with China and they saw the tensions between them. With their tight relationship with the U.S. create a different strategic interest between them that might be the trigger for future conflict. This will stimulate the insecurities within Australia, as they take notes of some China's military capability such as the possession of nuclear-powered submarines. China possessed 6 nuclear-powered submarines as it will provide China with the capabilities to do a clandestine land-attack options with the length of 197m and the maximum speed will reach 30k (Naval Technology, 2023). As before AUKUS, Australia did not have any nuclear-powered submarines and only own some conventional submarines. This then be a concern for Australia, there is insecurity as China might attack them with the nuclear-powered submarines. However, with AUKUS, Australia will be provided with submarines that will be a tools for them to safeguard national interest especially in maritime sector.

As for the U.S., there is the urge for them to be involved with their allies in every continent and one of them is Indo-Pacific. Many believed that AUKUS is a media for the U.S. to prevent China's power for raising so globally and challenging the U.S. interest (Cheng, 2022). AUKUS is the perfect position for the U.S. to strengthen their naval power.

Image 1. World Map



Source: The Springfield School

As you can see, the U.S. geographic position is placed between the Atlantic ocean and the Pacific ocean. As was stated in their Naval Doctrine Publication, seas are their source and has provided them with security and prosperity (United States Government US Navy, 2020). From their geographic position, it is already hard to be able to attack U.S. mainland, and with their presence with AUKUS, it will strengthen their position in both oceans and prevent an attack to come to their land.

CONCLUSION

The establishment of AUKUS will help Australia and the U.S. to face the common enemy in the Indo-Pacific region. For the U.S. it is important for them to be able to contain China's growing power, regionally or globally. As for Australia, they will never know when will threats come to them, regardless it is from China or not. However, since China is one rising power and exist in the same region with Australia, it is possible if they are actually insecure of an attack coming from China.

Even though the establishment of AUKUS seems like a genuine purpose to maintain regional stability, it is actually lay on their national interest. It is important how they could create an alliance with the purpose of protecting or achieving their national interest. This is in line with the main pillars of neo-realism. They don't know what other state's intentions are. The U.S., UK, and Australia did not know what other state's intentions are especially China. This is because they faced or feared the same enemies so they create alliances because they are facing the same dangerous enemy. Because of this insecurities, they create alliances and improve their military power because there is no limitation on how much a state could own military power. They faced the same enemy, they create alliances and improve their military capabilities because the ultimate goal is to survive. All this phenomenon could be seen in the establishment of AUKUS, hence, AUKUS is the real-life picture of neo-realism in modern era.

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