

The Impact Of The Aukus Alliance On China's Influence In The Indo-Pacific Region

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Abstract

On September 15, 2021 United States President Joe Biden, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison agreed on a new defense pact, called AUKUS . AUKUS can be said to be a continuation of America's strategy in an effort to counteract the development of China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region which has become increasingly massive due to several Asian countries' policies, such as the Nine Dash Line, One China Policy, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), to economic improvement and significant military annually. Previously, the US had also strengthened the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) cooperation up to Five Eye as an effort to counter China's developments. China, which views the defense pact as a highly irresponsible threat and an open challenge to their growing influence in the Indo-Pacific. This paper will analyze China's influence in the Indo-Pacific Region after the emergence of the formation of the AUKUS alliance . The topics were analyzed using the Regional Security Complex Theory using a qualitative descriptive method. Upon further analysis , it can be seen that there were significant differences in China's influence before and after the formation of the AUKUS alliance in the Indo-Pacific Region.

Keywords : AUKUS, Indo-Pacific, Regional Security

INTRODUCTION

AUKUS the English abbreviation for three member states: Australia, United Kingdom, United States of America, is a trilateral security pact between Australia, United Kingdom and United States of America (US). Under the pact, the United States and Britain will help Australia develop and deploy nuclear-powered submarines, as well as deploying Western militaries in the Pacific region. Despite the joint announcement by Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, and US President Joe Biden not to name any other countries, anonymous White House sources alleged that the pact was designed to counter the People's Republic of China (PRC) influence in the region. . Indo-Pacific, a characterization agreed upon by analysts.

Some analysts and media have also characterized the alliance as a way to protect the Republic of China (Taiwan) from Chinese expansionism. As a first step, this cooperation focuses on building nuclear-powered submarines for the Royal Australian Navy. That means Australia will become the seventh country in the world to operate a nuclear-powered submarine. The technology for building nuclear-powered submarines will be provided by the United States, which previously only shared the technology with Britain. The technology will allow Australia to have submarines that are faster and more difficult to detect than a conventional submarine fleet. Nuclear-powered submarines can stay submerged for months on end and can fire missiles farther, although Australia insists it has no intention of deploying nuclear warheads. This, according to some analysts, is perhaps the most significant defense pact the three countries have concluded since World War II. It really shows that the three countries have drawn a line and counteracted China's aggressive move," said Guy Boekenstein of the Australian Asian Society (Yudo , 2021).

On the other hand, the AUKUS deal will help Australia build at least eight nuclear powered submarines using US technology and expertise. Even though it made the country turn away from the contract for the supply of diesel-electric submarines from France, and caused

disappointment from the country led by Emmanuel Macron. The possession of nuclear-powered submarines for many experts will enable Australia to conduct longer patrols to maintain the security conditions of the Indo-Pacific region which is often disrupted by China's strong military presence in the region (Perry, 2021). For China, AUKUS is considered to be very detrimental to regional peace and stability, as well as endangering efforts to stop the proliferation of nuclear weapons. So that the US and UK's move to export nuclear technology to Australia will damage the bilateral relations that are owned by Australia and China, although some observers state that even though it will cause chaos at the beginning, AUKUS in the future will be very beneficial for Australia and the region (Vuving, 2021).

China's strong response was marked by the statement of their Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Zhao Lijian who stated that: "The most urgent task for Australia is to correctly recognize the reasons for the deterioration in relations between the two countries, and think carefully whether to treat China as a partner or a threat . " " (McGuirk, 2021). It is seen that China, as a country that is experiencing a significant strengthening of influence in the region through its economic and military strength, immediately responded by submitting an application to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) . For many parties, this step is a balancing step from Beijing to strengthen efforts for economic integration in the region through multilateral trade agreements and a strategic step in containing the possibility of the US to strengthen its resistance against them in the region through a scheme of economic multilateralism in the future and that made China lose its position. their strategic position in the region (Zhang & Martin, 2021).

The concern of countries in the Indo-Pacific region towards China stems from the country's aggressive actions in several areas in the region, especially in the waters of the South China Sea (LCS). It is noted that China does not hesitate to carry out direct confrontation with other countries (such as the Philippines) and has committed several border violations in the region (for example, border violations in Indonesia). This prompted Australia to better prepare its forces to deal with this aggressiveness and ensure that other nations' sovereignty could be protected from China's predatory visions through the nine-dash line map, supported by their ability to use economic coercion and the use of force. military to achieve its diplomatic goals (Goodman, 2017).



Figure I : Infographic of the AUKUS Alliance in the Indo-Pacific. course: Kumparan.com

RESEARCH METHODS

The author uses the library study method according to M. Nazir in his book entitled 'Research Method' suggests that what is meant by: "Library study is a data collection technique by conducting a review of books, literature, records, and reports that have a relationship with the problem being solved (Nazir, 1988: 111) In this method the explanation is detailed to explain where the research focus is. This methodology allows researchers to develop a variety of data to explain how the formation of the AUKUS alliance impacts China's influence in the Indo-Pacific Region . This research is presented as a narrative attempt to analyze the influence of china before and after the formation of the AUKUS Alliance . In this study, data collection techniques were carried out with the help of a literature review, the purpose of which was to collect information about the subject under study. Data analysis technique is done by reducing the data, namely. Finding and sorting information that is considered appropriate to the subject matter of this research, which is then supported by the underlying theory related to the problem under study, and presenting the data, namely. Presents a clear story and finally draws a conclusion.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

a. China 's role in the Pacific region is growing

Although small geographically , the Pacific region remains a concern of China because of its population and economic potential. If we look back at its history, China is not entirely a new player in this region. Since the late ninth century Chinese immigrants have set foot in the South Pacific. Crocombe (2007) also stated that the Austronesians who were the origin of the Chinese nation had set foot in the Pacific around 10,000 years ago, which then migrated to various places and spread to various places in this region. There are at least a number of Chinese descendants living in the Melanesian region, namely the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and New Caledonia, as well as Micronesia, namely, Kiribati, Nauru, Tonga, Cook Islands, some of whom are traders, laborers, immigrants, and of Chinese descent who no longer have attachment to their ancestral lands (Willmott 2007). However, China is also not a traditional player in the region.

In addition, efforts are continuously being made to strengthen good relations with these countries with the aim of strengthening its interests in the Pacific region, China acts as Observer at PIF (Pacific Island Forum) and active observer at MSG (Melanesian Spearhead Group), a country-based organization Race Melanesians provide various assistance such as infrastructure assistance. However, China is more involved in MSG because there is no involvement from traditional players in MSG (Brady 2015). At the China

- Pacific Island States Economic Cooperation and Development Forum in 2006, China said it would increase the amount of its funding with countries with which it has bilateral relations. This effort was made by China to increase its influence in the region (Brant 2015). At the regional level, China is recorded as a very significant donor on a par with the region's traditional players. However, if you look at it, Australia still dominates as a donor largest in this area. Although still dominating, Australia is still worried about China's influence which is very significant in the Pacific region. According to data recorded at the Lowy Institute, China has held two regional meetings to strengthen economic development and diplomatic engagement with the region. China seeks to provide support to the main regional organization in the region, namely the Secretariat of the Pacific Islands Forum. Such as assistance - assistance in bilateral programs as well as providing support to regional organizations. Not only investing in infrastructure, China also provides a number of scholarships for students in the Pacific islands as well as human

resource training for government officials. This has made China the largest donor in several countries and has rivaled traditional players such as New Zealand. To expand BRI, China seeks to establish cooperation with regional countries by providing various economic assistance and long-term concessional loans, which can be seen by the construction of a port on Penhryn Island in Cook and so on. Then Tonga got relief in paying its debts (Ellis & Devonshire, 2019).

b. Formation of AUKUS as a *Balance of Power*

The emergence of Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (AUKUS) made China an equal opponent in the Indo-Pacific region. According to Patrick Wintour in his writing in *The Guardian*, AUKUS is basically cooperation between the three countries namely Australia, Britain and the United States in the field of security to make nuclear-powered submarines, but on the other hand sees a political message in this cooperation for regional stability. Indo-Pacific. The United States can be said to have succeeded in creating security stability in the Indo-Pacific region towards China as a country that has power, with the United States cooperating with Australia and Britain to create new powers to contain China's rise.

The cooperation of the three countries will make China face new opponents in the Indo-Pacific and will at the same time restrain China's military development which is getting stronger from time to time. AUKUS can be a direct response from America and its allies to contain China's expanding influence. It is known that western countries have concerns about China's involvement in fighting over the South China Sea. AUKUS, with the basis of cooperation in the form of strengthening maritime military defense, is believed to be an additional force for western countries to fight China which will then create a *balance of power*, because when the two powers are balanced, it is believed that they will not fight each other. On the other hand, AUKUS needs to be prepared for China's response, because when China believes AUKUS' efforts are an arms race or defense against China, China will prepare to strengthen its military. Referring to the article from Mick Tsikas in *The Conversation* that apart from America, Britain and Australia have their respective implications for the formation of AUKUS cooperation. Certain sources stated that Britain saw AUKUS as an opportunity after Britain left the European Union to show its influence on the world. Australia will be a new force against China. With additional strength in the military sector from the results of the AUKUS collaboration, Australia can become a country that stabilizes regional conditions.

The formation of AUKUS can create a balance of power (balance of power) in the Indo-Pacific region, seeing as China's military is growing from time to time. AUKUS can become a new obstacle and enemy for China. At least in the Indo-Pacific region, there are two forces that are balanced, with the hope that they will not attack each other, because if there is a power struggle, the two forces will certainly face huge losses.

c . China's Response to the Formation of AUKUS

The dominance of China's power in various aspects, both military and economic in the Indo-Pacific region, has made AUKUS a way of distributing power in the region, not just China's domination of power in the region. fending off and even opposing the development of military power from China in the Indo-Pacific region. The Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, articulated that there are dangers from AUKUS including a weak nuclear non-proliferation regime and increased nuclear competition (Stockholm, 2021). Beijing's view is indeed opposite to that of AUKUS. However, the opportunity for increased nuclear competition can occur, especially in dominant countries. (Delanova 2021) .

In the last 5 years, China has continued to increase its military budget, this can be seen from the increase in the budget from year to year increasing by a significant amount, as shown below:

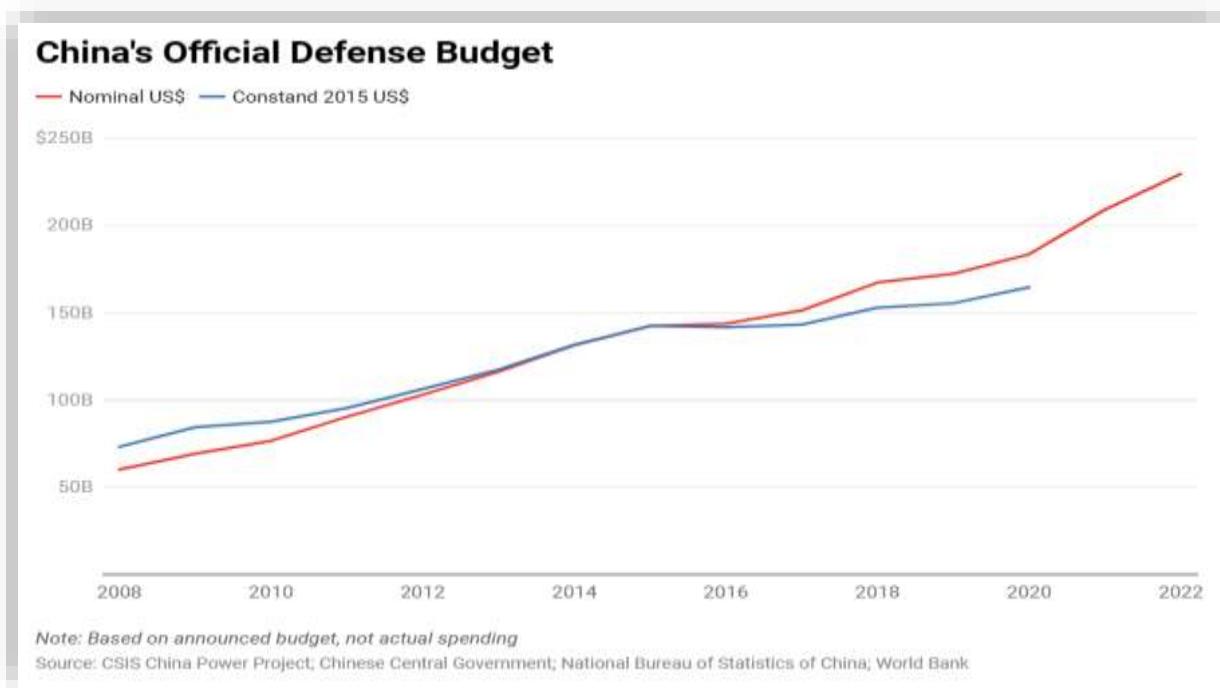


Figure 2: China Official Defense Budget
(course: chinapower.csis.org/military-spending/)

The Chinese government publishes spending information every year. In March 2022, China announced an annual defense budget of RMB 1.45 trillion (\$229.6 billion), marking a 7.1 percent increase over the 2021 budget of RMB 1.36 trillion (\$209.2 billion). This continues the recent trend of having seen annual percentage increases in the upper single digits. However, it should be noted that the 2022 budget marks the only time in the past decade that the budget growth rate has increased two years in a row. While China issues an official defense budget, how much it actually spends on its military is widely debated. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) estimates the 2021 overall figure to be \$293.4 billion and the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) puts the figure at \$270 billion.

Based on the data above, China continues to strengthen its military system by updating its military equipment and efforts to modernize China's military which are strengthened by aggressive military activities carried out with its closest ally, namely Russia. This can be seen from the joint training activities with 10 warships consisting of 5 warships belonging to China and the rest belonging to Russia in the western Pacific. For China, this activity is a form of overall strategic coordination carried out by Beijing and its ally Moscow. This aims to jointly increase the operational capabilities of the military fleets of the two countries. Russia also supports this by considering that the joint military exercise is proof of Russia's and China's commitment to maintaining security and stability in the Asia-Pacific region (Lendon, 2021). In the midst of threats from the United States and its allies against China's dominance in the Indo-Pacific region, China is also starting to think about balancing the alliance by building military cooperation with its ally, Russia.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of the formation of AUKUS is a maneuver and a turning point for the three countries in fighting the domination of the People's Republic of China which they feel threatens the interests of the alliance, as well as disrupting the stability of the Indo-Pacific regional security. However, on the one hand, AUKUS has actually become a driving factor for regional security stability which has become increasingly chaotic as a result of the nuclear-powered submarine discourse, which of course will lead to an arms race. It is undeniable that the existence of AUKUS can have an impact on security dilemmas and complex security issues in the Indo-Pacific. Then it seems that AUKUS can also become a new springboard for the United States in the Indo-Pacific in responding to China's power. Most of the reasons why the projected influence of AUKUS in the Indo Pacific region is quite frightening is because the reactions are divided, ranging from objections, support to neutrals targeting the dilemma of several influential countries in the region, so that it will be difficult to reach a clear consensus in overcoming the possible impact of AUKUS. China realizes that the presence of AUKUS will indirectly hinder and disrupt its interests in the region. In this regard, China was forced to take some urgent measures in response the AUKUS pact. At present, there are two Chinese actions in response to AUKUS , the first of which is carrying out an anti-AUKUS campaign and criticizing it AUKUS parties in several international agendas. The campaign strongly rejects the presence of AUKUS because it is considered to undermine the principle of international non-proliferation and threaten the region stability.

Second, China is also modernizing its military by developing its military system to prepare itself alone for AUKUS pressure. This is evidenced by the actions of the Chinese government in increasing its military budget which is very significant from year to year as a form of response to support for its military modernization. Chinese action seems to want to convey to the international community, especially those involved in AUKUS, that China ready to face anything from the presence of the AUKUS Alliance

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