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RESEARCH**

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Chief Editor

Dr. R. Jayakumar

Associate Professor, Siga College of Education, Villupuram, Tamil Nadu,
India

Co-Editor

Dr. Raja Reddy. Duvvuru

Associate Professor, Department of Electrical & Electronics Engineering,
Malla Reddy Engineering College (A), Hyderabad, Telangana, India

Dr. Arun Kumar

Associate Professor and H.O.D, Department of History, Mahila College,
Patliputra University, Khagaul, Patna, Bihar, India

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Phone No. – 9711224068, 9911215212

Email – akinikbooks@gmail.com

Chief Editor: Dr. R. Jayakumar

Co-Editor: Dr. Raja Reddy. Duvvuru and Dr. Arun Kumar

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Chapter - 9
**AUKUS Trilateral Defense Pact: Will there
be War after the Pandemic is over?**

Authors

Posma Sariguna Johnson Kennedy

Universitas Pertahanan Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia

Yudi Sutrasna

Universitas Pertahanan Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia

Haetami

Universitas Pertahanan Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia

Chapter - 9

AUKUS Trilateral Defense Pact: Will there be War after the Pandemic is over?

Posma Sariguna Johnson Kennedy, Yudi Sutrasna and Haetami

Abstract

This study wants to examine whether there is an opportunity for war in the Indo-Pacific region. The method used is the literature review. An optimistic view of regional peace is the basis of this analysis, even if there is a realistic thought. War will harm both parties. So, China and America themselves and all countries are responsible for maintaining regional stability.

Keywords: AUKUS, war, indo-pacific, Australia, China, America

1. Introduction

At the international level, each country or actor aims to achieve each other's national interests. The strategic environment becomes an external factor that influences a country's defense and security policy. The strategic environment can be scanned through various dimensions, such as security, economics, politics, society, technology, Etc. Owen (Ling *et al.*, 2010) reveals that “The strategic environment has VUCA characteristics, namely volatility, full of uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Volatility is a rapidly changing nature of the strategic environment. When the nature of change so quickly gives birth to the nature of uncertainty in a strategic environment. The relationship between elements in the strategic environment is complex. Planning and decision making is becoming increasingly difficult in a strategic environment due to ambiguity” (Putra & Hakim, 2016; Siagian *et al.*, 2021; Pangestu *et al.*, 2021).

The strategic environmental situation in the Indo-Pacific region began to escalate, namely the competition between two superpower countries, China and the United States. ASEAN countries, including Australia, feel this. “What has been done by Australia is implementing a hedging strategy, namely playing two legs between the United States and China. This strategy has been implemented since the reign of Prime Minister John Howard in 1996” (Thomas, 2015). It was done to realize two equally important Australian

interests, namely the continuity of the ANZUS alliance, which simultaneously maintains the existence of the United States in the region and accommodates China's development into the security architecture in the region. Asia-Pacific. The ANZUS Treaty was a security alliance between Australia and the United States in 1951. It is stated that the United States promised to help Australia (in a military context) if under attack by another country (Fraser, 2001). (Mas'udi, 2020)

The main reason hedging is done because Washington and Beijing will continue to have the same interests. “Australia supports this by becoming a third party that can unite them instead of being trapped in bipolarity. Based on a survey conducted by the Lowy Institute in 2014, as many as 87% of Australians believe that Australia can maintain good relations with these two great countries” (Thomas, 2015). Both the United States and China have their respective superiorities. The United States is superior in military terms. No single country can even come close to the United States in this regard. It is the same with China. No single country can compete with China in terms of consumption, making it the largest market in the world. Moreover, China will get bigger, both in terms of population and economy, so both America and China need each other.

The realist view that states make their military strength or capacity their goal is a concrete idea that keeps repeating itself. Taking actions that will make the country weak or vulnerable will never be a rational choice (Antunes & Camisão, 2018). The state will be self-help and continue to strive to pursue power (Donnelly, 2005:29-33). (Asrudin, 2014).

Based on this realist view, Australians began to worry that their country could not anticipate an aggressive attack from China (Hurst, 2021). Rationally, the defense pact is felt to be indispensable to provide physical security for the state and as an effort to prevent China's actions from expanding external borders through their predatory actions (Ruggie, 1993). It shows Australia's efforts to prioritize security over the economy. This step departs from the norm of sovereignty, which guarantees the sovereign identity of the country (Wendt, 1992) above other interests. Despite the huge risk to Australia's economic conditions due to deteriorating relations with China. (Delanova, 2021)

The AUKUS Pact is “an agreement between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States regarding international security agreements. The pact includes cooperation in artificial intelligence, cyber, quantum, underwater systems, and remote attack capabilities”. The purpose of making this agreement is to balance China's military power, which is considered

expanding and has the potential to endanger the Indo-Pacific region. (Tawakal, 2022) Thus, the AUKUS pact significantly improved Australia's military capabilities, making their military capabilities stronger and more respected in the region and no longer afraid of China's military capabilities (Mao, 2021).

The AUKUS Pact shows Australia's concern about a war in the Indo-Pacific region due to the ongoing escalation. This problem continues to heat up, in contrast to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has begun to decline. This study wants to examine whether there is an opportunity for war in the Indo-Pacific region. An optimistic view of regional peace is the basis of this analysis.

2. Literature review

On September 15, 2021, Australia announced a new trilateral security pact in the region, which was carried out in collaboration with their traditional partners, namely the United Kingdom and the United States, under the name AUKUS (PM Australia, 2021; Secretary-General of the Indonesian Parliament, 2021). The name AUKUS is taken from the acronym of the three countries that initiated the agreement, namely Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Tawakal, 2022). AUKUS is an alliance step taken by Australia to establish collective security. Collective security refers to applying the principle of one for all and all for one (Organski, 1958). So it can say that AUKUS functions as a collective defence agreement that protects its members (especially Australia) from direct security threats from China. This country is considered an aggressor. (Delanova, 2021)

Despite the joint announcement by Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, and United States President Joe Biden did not name the other countries. The pact was suspected to be designed to counter China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region (Reuters, 2021). Some analysts have also characterized the alliance as a way to protect Taiwan from Chinese expansionism (The Guardian, 2021; The Independent, 2021). The formation of AUKUS is a surprising phenomenon for countries in the Indo-Pacific region. Even though the agreement was born from a traditional partnership bond that goes beyond calculating national interests between the three countries, AUKUS will be a decisive choice for the future of Australia and the Indo-Pacific region (Delanova, 2021).

The AUKUS agreement will help Australia build at least eight nuclear-powered submarines using US technology and expertise (Greene, 2021). Although it turned the country away from the contract for the supply of diesel-

electric submarines from France, it caused the disappointment of President Emmanuel Macron. “Nuclear submarines have greater speed, stay underwater longer, and carry heavier loads than conventional submarines. Currently, only six countries have nuclear submarines, the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and India” (BBC, 2021a). America will supply enriched uranium to Australia to power submarines. Australia has agreed not to produce enriched uranium itself (Sanger *et al.*, 2021). (Wikipedia, 2021)

Possession of this nuclear-powered submarine will allow Australia to carry out longer patrols to maintain the Indo-Pacific region's security condition, which is often disrupted by China's strong military presence in the region, which is considered expanding and potentially expanding endangering the Indo-Pacific region (Perry, 2021). “The agreement also covers key areas such as artificial intelligence, cyber warfare, underwater capabilities, and long-range attack capabilities. It also includes a nuclear component, possibly limited to the United States and the United Kingdom, of nuclear defence infrastructure” (Ward, 2021). “The agreement will focus on military capabilities, separating it from the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing alliance, which also includes New Zealand and Canada” (BBC, 2021). (Red Square, 2021)

For Australia, this close collaboration shows that they do depend on protection from the US. Not to mention they would lose strategic autonomy because, in the future, a truly independent military initiative of any scale would be impossible if America objected. Not to mention that this partnership will also make the trade relationship between Australia and China, as their most important market, even more complicated (Ott, 2021). Meanwhile, for the US and UK, AUKUS will be the best way to ensure their involvement in ensuring security conditions in a very influential region. (Delanova, 2021).

The establishment of AUKUS seems to have forgotten that the collective security it seeks to create requires coordination and willingness from other countries in the region. It is natural when the announcement of the agreement regarding this defence pact invites criticism and concern from other countries, which feel that they are minimally taking aggressive actions (Delanova, 2021). China criticized the AUKUS Pact's implementation, which could disrupt regional stability. The European Union also voiced their disapproval of the agreement because it is expected to impact the economy of their region, especially for the country of France (Tawakal, 2022).

3. Research methods

The research method in this study uses a fully qualitative approach. The type of data used in this research is secondary and comes from various scientific articles and related news and literature related to defence and security policies.

4. Discussion

It is not easy to make war decisions in this modern era because many considerations must be considered and taken into account. Some of these factors are:

- 1) War must be detrimental to both parties, the loser and the winner. There will be many resources to be prepared/expended and destroyed on both sides.
- 2) There is an attitude of mutual need in the economic relations between the United States and China so far.
- 3) China does not want to replace the United States' position as the region's ruler and the world.

According to Clausewitz (2009), “War must have a political purpose because war is only a means to achieve a goal”. War is about what goals are to be achieved after the war. In this case, the United States may have a strong political reason to go to war with China, namely maintaining its dominance in the region or even throughout the world. For China, war is an arena for showing off between the new powers and the old rulers. However, what will remain if the two countries play a role. “The war between the two will only cause damage. Another side effect, which is no less important than the damage, is the destruction of the world economy because the United States and China are the two rulers of the global economy. A war between the two would only be a global catastrophe” (Mas'udi, 2020).

According to Thucydides, “Three things can cause a war to occur. The three things are money, fear, and honor”. In this case, the last two things have a significant role in encouraging both the United States and China to go to war with each other (Mas'udi, 2020)”:

- The United States considers it important to maintain its influence in the Asia-Pacific Region and fears China will seize the position.
- China feels that the presence of US military personnel in its backyard is a real threat to its sovereignty. As the most powerful country in the region, China does not want to be under the control of the United States”.

If these things can cause war between countries, then one of them can be a strong antidote to the occurrence of war. “Despite their fears and honor, both parties must realize how important the economic role exists in their relationship. Especially in this era of globalization, where everything is interconnected. Collaboration, partnership, machinability, and engagement are the language of this century, just as international competition was the language of the last century” (Henry, 2016). So, considering the economic dependence factor, the war between the United States and China will not bring benefits to anyone. (Mas'udi, 2020)

While visiting America in February 2012 as Vice President, President Xi stated that China emphasizes the "elements of non-conflict, non-confrontation, mutual respect, and mutually beneficial cooperation” (Xinbo, 2014). This statement reflects Beijing's honest desire to avoid the Thucydides Trap. The new pattern of relations between the great powers promoted by China is an effort to embrace the United States to manage the international system, so their relationship should be mutually beneficial. President Obama welcomed the idea at the time. China does not want to be the only “major power” in the world because becoming the world's ruler is neither easy nor cheap. According to Robert Sutter, “it is clear that no other power or coalition of forces is able or willing to bear the costs, risks, and commitments of the United States in maintaining regional stability and development for the common good” (Sutter, 2015).(Mas'udi, 2020)

However, judging from what China and America have done, especially in the Indo-Pacific region, they do not show any goodwill to be responsible for maintaining regional stability. Moreover, China's interests are only for business, nothing else.

5. Closing

The AUKUS Pact shows Australia's concern about a war in the Indo-Pacific region due to the ongoing escalation. The optimistic view needs to put forward the need to maintain regional peace, which gives why there is no need for war. War will harm both parties, both the loser and the winner. There is an attitude of mutual need in the economic relations between the United States and China so far. Moreover, China does not want to replace the position of the United States as the ruler of the world. For this reason, China and America themselves are responsible for maintaining regional stability and countries in the Indo-Pacific strategic environment, especially ASEAN.

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