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Comprehensive Review and Strategic Analysis of Maritime Power Dynamics in the Indo-Pacific Region with Emphasis on the Quad and AUKUS Groupings.

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Abstract

Maritime strategy constitutes one of the most critical dimensions of the grand strategy of major powers. Although the prominence of this domain, initially underscored by Alfred Thayer Mahan in *The Influence of Sea Power upon History*, diminished with the evolution of global power structures, it has re-emerged as a central arena of geopolitical competition among great powers over the past two decades.

The Indo-Pacific region, alongside the establishment of new security architectures such as the Quad and AUKUS, has become a pivotal locus in the strategic contest for global influence. Against this backdrop, this article examines the fundamental question: What role does the Indo-Pacific region occupy within the geopolitical equations of maritime powers, with particular emphasis on the Quad and AUKUS groupings?

The findings of this descriptive-analytical inquiry reveal a progressive shift in the global economic and political center of gravity from the Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific. This transition, reinforced by emergent military and security coalitions, is expected to intensify rivalry and heighten tensions among leading maritime powers, particularly the United States and China.

Keywords: Maritime strategy, Indo-Pacific, Quad, AUKUS, sea power, United States, China.

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, both regional and extra-regional powers have demonstrated growing interest in shaping the strategic landscape of the Indo-Pacific. This stems primarily from the region's critical role in global energy flows, maritime trade, and strategic connectivity.

China, as an ascending power, has sought to anchor its geopolitical ambitions in the Indo-Pacific through initiatives such as the *Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)*, urging states to align their national strategies with frameworks of cooperative development. Analysts argue that such initiatives—and the increasing presence of multiple powers in the region—reflect an evolving geopolitical and geoeconomic reality shaped by great-power rivalry, a dynamic evident since the mid-1980s. The simultaneous rise of China and India, coupled with the expansion of their spheres of influence, has further highlighted the Indo-Pacific's strategic centrality, particularly in the context of Beijing's "New Silk Road" project.

The Indo-Pacific also functions as a contested strategic arena separating two principal great powers—the United States and China. From Beijing's perspective, Washington is firmly committed to containing China's rise, a strategy manifested through US-led regional arrangements, including the Quad and AUKUS partnerships, which are widely perceived in China as inherently anti-Chinese. While the United States and its allies consistently emphasize the non-military dimensions of these frameworks—highlighting maritime cooperation, technological collaboration, and joint investment in critical industries—China interprets such measures as mechanisms designed to generate systemic economic and technological asymmetries, posing long-term strategic threats to its national interests.

Against this backdrop, maritime power has re-emerged as a decisive element of global strategy, giving rise to new rivalries among major powers. Accordingly, this article seeks to examine and analyze the role of the Indian Ocean and the broader Indo-Pacific in the geopolitical equations of maritime powers, with particular emphasis on the Quad and AUKUS groupings.

2. Theoretical Foundations

Coalitions and alliances, as two fundamental concepts in the history of international relations, have been interpreted through diverse theoretical lenses. In this study, the concepts of "networking" and the "complex and networked security system" are employed as analytical frameworks to examine cooperation and competition among maritime power blocs in the Indo-Pacific, with particular emphasis on the Quad and AUKUS groupings. Accordingly, the discussion first addresses the concept of networked deterrence, followed by an explanation of the complex and networked security system.

2.1. Networked Deterrence

Deterrence represents one of the most widely employed strategic mechanisms through which states seek to counter external threats in the prevailing international security environment. Patterns of deterrence define security strategies in accordance with the evolving national security imperatives of states (Talebi & Abbasi, 2016: 63).

In today's multipolar context—characterized by persistent instability in the international system and intense rivalry among both global powers and regional actors—states increasingly deploy diverse levers of power to safeguard their existence, vital interests, and strategic partners. As outlined in deterrence theory, such a

system presupposes the presence of one or more aggressor actors and a corresponding perception of threat by another actor, who then mobilizes internal capabilities alongside external alliances to neutralize that threat (Fathi, Eivazi & Pirani, 2020: 269).

Networking constitutes one of the most salient manifestations of deterrence. A networked deterrence system emphasizes the creation and expansion of both intra-network and inter-network linkages, structured around "rings" and "hubs." The central objective is to preserve order and restrain adversarial behavior by harnessing communication flows across these interconnected nodes. In practice, this involves channeling, weakening, or reinforcing linkages to deter hostile action.

The logic of networking rests on the interconnection of strategic and geopolitical units. When one node is attacked, the repercussions cascade across other nodes, thereby elevating the overall costs of aggression and reinforcing deterrence (Emamirad, Barzegar & Zakarian, 2021: 5). Networks thus transcend geographical boundaries by converting them into communication spaces, underscoring their utility in conditions of military asymmetry.

Key Applications of Networking in Deterrence (Ghasemi & Shokr, 2009: 192):

1. Exposing the adversary to vulnerabilities through interconnected links.
2. Generating systemic disruptions that entangle the adversary in simultaneous crises.
3. Expanding the number of actors engaged in crises, thereby intensifying restraining pressures.
4. Enhancing the probability of alliance and coalition formation against the adversary.
5. Increasing the likelihood of horizontal escalation, as crises spread from national and regional arenas to the global level.
6. Elevating the risk of vertical contagion, drawing additional thematic domains into the conflict.

2.2. A Complex and Networked Security System

The concept of the **security system** occupies a central place in strategic and realist studies. At both regional and global levels, security systems are defined by patterns of power polarization, the distribution of capabilities, and the interactions among state units in managing threats and vulnerabilities.

Cantori and Spiegel (1970: 51) identified three broad types of security systems: the dominant system (global), the subordinate system (regional), and the internal system (domestic). Each subordinate system is composed of states with geographic proximity, where security issues emerge and are addressed through the interactions of the constituent units. Based on four variables—the degree of coordination, the nature of connections, relative power levels, and relational structures—subordinate systems may be further divided into central, peripheral, and intervenor powers.

Later scholarship expanded this framework. Building on Buzan and Wæver's notion of regional security complexes, Lake and Morgan (1997: 60) emphasized the role of great powers and the dynamics of *interests* rather than purely *threats*. Unlike Buzan, they argued that security complexes are shaped not only by threat perceptions but also by historically and geographically contingent

interests. Patterns of friendship and enmity within territorial groupings reflect variations in these factors. From this perspective, great powers directly participate in most security complexes, both shaping and being shaped by regional dynamics.

At the meso-regional level, the analysis of power relations requires attention to bilateral and multilateral dynamics, the role of intervening powers, and mechanisms of crisis management. Lake and Morgan argue that these interactions reveal layered security logics in which local, regional, and global actors simultaneously influence outcomes. The networking of security systems has produced new forms of linkage across regional and global domains. These linkages, characterized by positive and negative securitization as well as de-securitization, create overlapping strategic arenas in which states pursue competitive or cooperative behaviors. In such networked systems, the exercise of smart power—the calibrated use of both material (hard) and ideational (soft) resources—becomes essential. States employ smart power to manipulate nodes within the network, redistribute threats, and adjust the strategic balance with competitors to construct a security order favorable to their interests (Eftekhari, 2013).

Consequently, networked security systems may take mono-centric, bi-centric, or poly-centric forms, depending on the distribution of power and the configuration of interconnections. Moreover, their degree of influence and resilience varies with the extent of linkages to other regional and global systems. This interconnectedness underscores the increasing complexity of security architectures in the contemporary international system.

3. Research Methodology

Given that this study seeks to analyze the strategic equations of maritime powers within the framework of the Quad and AUKUS groupings in the Indo-Pacific region, the research adopts an argumentative approach. The research is classified as applied-developmental in type and employs a descriptive-analytical method.

In the argumentative approach, the objectives, intentions, and interrelationships among phenomena are identified and interpreted on the basis of available evidence. Accordingly, the present study relies on library and documentary sources, drawing upon relevant books, academic articles, official documents, and expert opinions in the field.

The process of data analysis has been conducted through content analysis, enabling both the identification of objective findings and the interpretation of subjective perspectives. By integrating theoretical insights with a strategic lens, the research undertakes a qualitative analysis of data. Furthermore, through the application of collective intelligence, the study synthesizes diverse viewpoints to arrive at its key findings and conclusions.

4. Environmental Research Area: The Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific constitutes a pivotal global economic hub, linking the Indian subcontinent, China, Australia, Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, and Oceania with both the United States and the European Union.

Historically, oceans served as physical and cultural barriers separating nations. Today, however, they function as maritime highways, facilitating unprecedented connectivity and exchange. The region generates more than half of global GDP, is home to

some of the world's largest shipbuilding industries, and hosts critical maritime corridors through which nearly one-third of global shipping—particularly via the South China Sea—transits. Moreover, approximately one-fourth of U.S. exports are destined for Indo-Pacific markets, while trade with China and India has more than doubled over the past decade.

Demographically, the region accounts for over half of the world's population. Strategically, it encompasses 11 of the world's 15 most powerful states, several of which possess or are believed to possess nuclear weapons. The defining geopolitical characteristic of the Indo-Pacific is its maritime dimension. Island and peninsular states are uniquely positioned to leverage their geographic advantage in global trade, but this heavy dependence on maritime commerce also renders the region acutely vulnerable to disruptions.

The sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) and strategic chokepoints of the Indo-Pacific—narrow straits and confined seas linking the region to global markets—are of exceptional importance. As a result, many island states rely heavily on the maritime and air power of the United States to secure these vital shipping routes (Cohen, 1999: 57).

Since the end of the Cold War, the Indo-Pacific has emerged as one of the most fiercely contested regions, marked by competition among the United States, China, Japan, India, and other actors. Often described as the “New Economic Silk Road” within the global free-market system, the Indo-Pacific’s security environment nonetheless remains precarious. Strategic uncertainty and fragile relations among key powers continue to elevate the risk of miscalculation.

Thus, in the post-Cold War era, the Indo-Pacific stands as a sensitive and strategically decisive region, whose economic and trade significance profoundly shapes the dynamics of contemporary international politics.

The Quad

The origins of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) can be traced to the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami of December 26, 2004. In response to the humanitarian crisis, U.S. President George W. Bush announced that the United States would coordinate emergency relief efforts with Australia, India, and Japan. By early 2005, this ad hoc grouping had successfully delivered large-scale assistance to tsunami-affected areas. Although the arrangement was dissolved shortly thereafter, it planted the seeds of a strategic partnership that would later shape the balance-of-power politics of the 21st century.

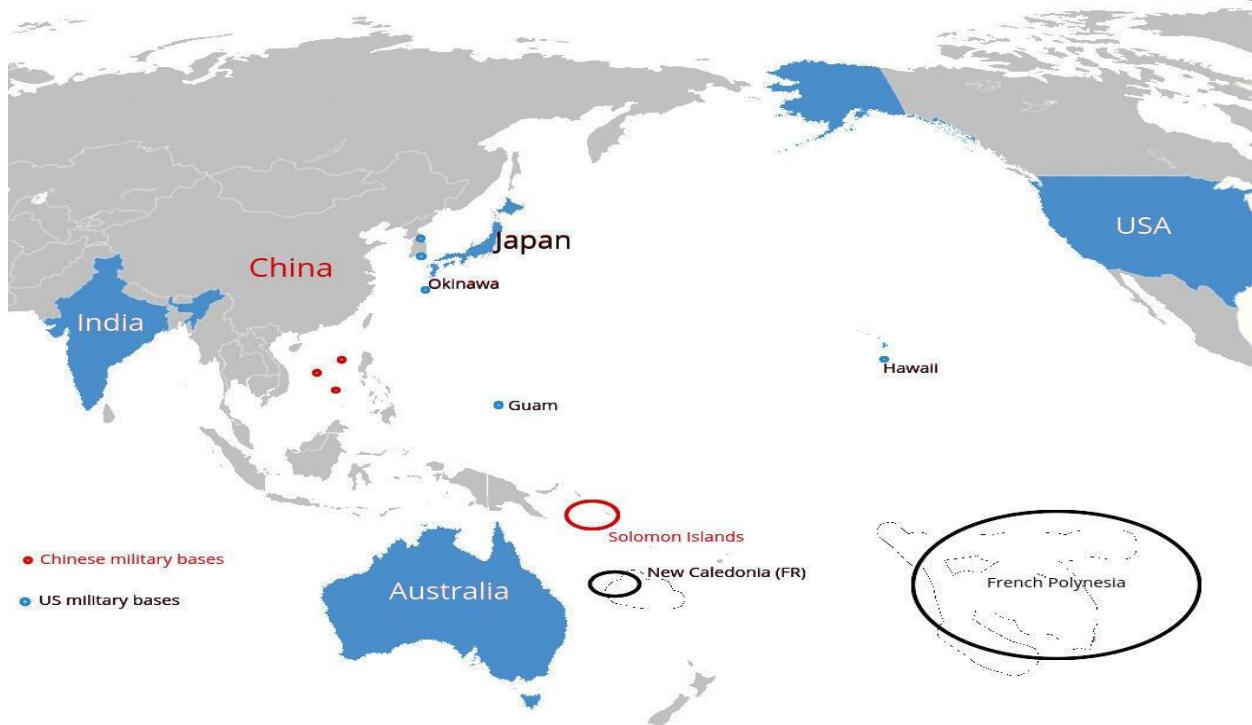
In 2007, following a series of diplomatic consultations, the four countries formally established the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. However, its initial momentum was short-lived. With the election of Kevin Rudd as Australia's prime minister in late 2007—who favored engagement with China—and the electoral defeat of Japan's Shinzo Abe, one of the Quad's chief advocates, the initiative lost traction and was effectively suspended (Lee, 2020).

A decade later, amid mounting concerns about China's assertive foreign policy, the Quad was revived. In November 2017, high-level consultations in Washington, New Delhi, Tokyo, and Canberra signaled renewed interest in formalizing the dialogue. The convergence of strategic outlooks among the four democratic powers created a foundation for deeper coordination.

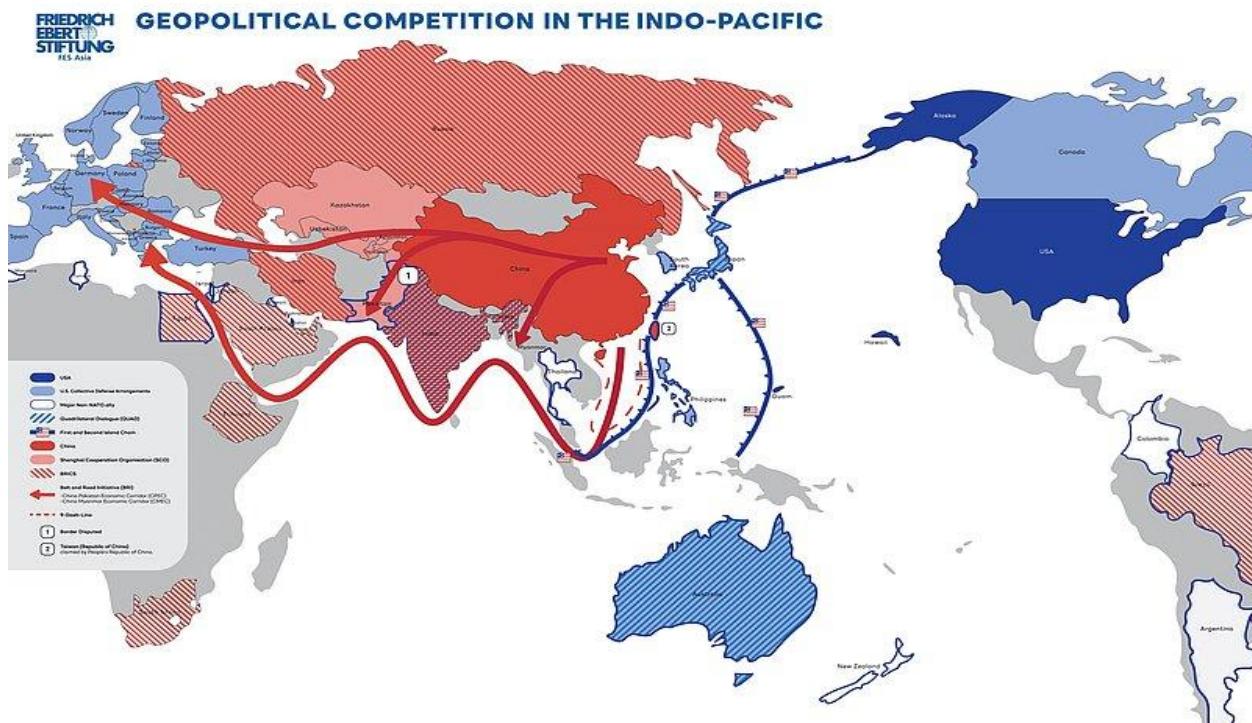
During the first year of the Trump administration, the Quad quickly gained prominence in U.S. strategic discourse. The National Security Strategy of December 2017 explicitly endorsed

the Quad, affirming Washington's commitment to strengthening cooperation with Japan, Australia, and India (Cannon & Rossiter, 2022: 6–10).

Image No. 1 – Spheres of influence of China and the Quad in the Indo-Pacific



Source: Diehl (16, 2021)



AUKUS

In September 2021, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia announced the formation of a trilateral security pact known as AUKUS. This initiative is widely interpreted as a strategic effort to counterbalance China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific. AUKUS is designed to strengthen defense cooperation through the sharing of advanced technologies, with stated objectives that include enhanced intelligence and technology

exchange, as well as deeper integration of science, industry, and supply chains (Budiarti, 2022: 5–6).

According to its security-oriented charter, AUKUS is envisioned as a long-term framework that could shape the Indo-Pacific's strategic environment for decades, serving as both a stabilizing force and a deterrent to regional instability.

AUKUS also parallels, and in some ways complements, the existing Five Eyes intelligence alliance. While the two groupings are institutionally distinct, their overlapping memberships provide potential opportunities for information sharing and strategic coordination.

Although there are no immediate plans to expand AUKUS, shifting geopolitical dynamics and evolving power balances may

eventually lead to the inclusion of other actors—particularly New Zealand and Canada from the Five Eyes, as well as key Indo-Pacific partners. However, any such expansion would likely exclude the most sensitive areas of cooperation, such as nuclear propulsion technology (Panda & Swanström, 2021: 15–16).

Figure 4: Geographical location of the Quad member countries



Source. <https://tinyurl.com/3ck8kedc>

5. Research Findings

A. Power Confrontation and Competition in the Indo-Pacific

In the Indo-Pacific region, the strategic interests of the United States, India, and China are clashing with increasing intensity. Each of these powers pursues its own national objectives, often at the expense of the others.

The United States' approach to countering China in the Indian Ocean mirrors its strategy toward the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Several Asia-Pacific states—including Japan, Australia, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, and New Zealand—share deep concerns about China's expanding influence. Believing that they cannot prevent Chinese regional hegemony without American support, these states actively seek closer alignment with Washington (Goin, 2021). Similarly, India and the United States have drawn closer in the past decade, largely due to shared anxieties about China's rise.

As Walter Russell Mead argues, since the end of the Cold War, China, Iran, and Russia have sought to undermine the U.S.-led world order. These states collectively threaten America's global influence, requiring Washington to abandon its post-Cold War optimism that rising powers could be integrated into a Western-dominated system (Mead, 2014: 23–46). Likewise, Madeleine Albright emphasized that the United States, by virtue of its global policing role, is compelled to confront such threats (Mearsheimer, 2011: 19).

The implication is clear: the United States will remain deeply engaged in the Indo-Pacific to prevent China from emerging as the uncontested regional hegemon. Militarily, Washington allocates nearly half of global defense expenditure and maintains a dominant presence in the Asia-Pacific. Many strategists argue that American power is fundamentally proactive, whereas China's military posture remains largely defensive (Cordesman & Toukan, 2014: 30). Yet Beijing recognizes that any weakness would invite greater U.S. intervention in its strategic environment.

The U.S.–China rivalry is not only geopolitical but also ideological. While China and the United States diverge fundamentally in political ideology, Beijing has adopted a market-oriented economy and does not seek to export its model of state capitalism. Furthermore, China is deeply embedded in global trade networks and engages actively with Western economies, thereby reducing the likelihood of ideological confrontation escalating into systemic conflict (Jie, 2020: 184–185). By contrast, the United States continues to pursue the global diffusion of liberal-democratic values, although recent military setbacks in Afghanistan and Iraq may temper Washington's ideological ambitions.

The stability of the Indian Ocean is therefore contingent on the evolving dynamics of U.S.–China relations. Both powers, alongside India, maintain long-standing strategic objectives to secure influence over the coastal states of the Indian Ocean (Marrier d'Unienville, 2019: 4–8). China, in particular, faces the enduring challenge of safeguarding its vital sea lanes—especially

the three maritime chokepoints linking the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, through which much of its energy imports transit. Dependence on Persian Gulf oil underscores Beijing's imperative to control at least one of these critical routes, inevitably drawing both China and the United States into sustained maritime competition.

This geopolitical contest has transformed the Indo-Pacific into a zone of militarization reminiscent of the Cold War. During the bipolar era, the Indian Ocean became heavily securitized, overshadowing urgent transnational challenges such as deforestation in Indonesia and Sri Lanka, climate change, the AIDS epidemic along Africa's coast, and persistent ethnic conflicts in Kashmir. Regional security cooperation and economic integration were repeatedly postponed. The creation of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) in 1997, though significant, was hampered by the vast geographic diversity of its 19 member states, limiting its effectiveness as a cohesive security or economic bloc (Hong & Ciyuan, 2018: 153–156).

More recently, analysts such as Allison (2019: 20–25) contend that the U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)—initiated during the Obama administration and formalized under Donald Trump—further expanded China's strategic latitude in the Indo-Pacific. This vacuum has encouraged other global powers to recalibrate their national strategies in the region, thereby intensifying the competition that defines the Indo-Pacific's strategic environment.

B. U.S. Alliance Building in the Indo-Pacific

Alliance-building has been one of the most enduring and successful elements of U.S. foreign policy since World War II. These alliances have continuously evolved, particularly in the post-Cold War era. However, in recent decades, they have faced a new geostrategic challenge: the growing economic, military, and technological influence of China. Countering Beijing's rise has therefore become the primary strategic task of Washington and its partners.

At the same time, China has increasingly leveraged its economic power to exploit both domestic divisions and international gaps within U.S.-backed coalitions (Clinton, 2011). This has created friction within allied networks, even as their overall economic and military strength remains substantial.

The United States and its allies collectively dominate global economic and defense structures. Among the world's ten largest economies, the United States ranks first, followed by Japan (3rd), Germany (4th), the United Kingdom (6th), France (7th), Italy (8th), and Canada (10th). On the defense side, the United States, together with NATO members, Japan, South Korea, and Australia, accounts for around 60 percent of global military spending. Yet China's defense budget has expanded by nearly 85 percent over the past decade, highlighting the magnitude of the strategic competition.

Despite their collective strength, the United States and its allies often lack a unified approach toward China. Divergent perspectives on trade, technology, and regional security have allowed Beijing to repeatedly exploit divisions between Washington and its partners. Nevertheless, most U.S. allies broadly acknowledge the geostrategic challenge posed by China's rise and agree on the need for collective responses (Lindsey & Goldgeier, 2021).

The Indo-Pacific occupies a central place in these strategic calculations. As Robert Kaplan argues in *Monsoon: The Indian*

Ocean and the Future of American Power, the region serves as the connective tissue linking Europe, West Asia, Africa, Asia, and Australia, through submarine fiber-optic cables and maritime trade routes (Bergeron, Iorio & Jeff, 2021). Control over this maritime geography is therefore critical to sustaining American influence.

Since the early Cold War, the United States has developed a layered architecture of alliances across the Indo-Pacific. Historical milestones include:

- **ANZUS (1951)**, a security treaty with Australia and New Zealand;
- **Five Eyes (1956)**, an intelligence-sharing network among the U.S., U.K., Canada, Australia, and New Zealand;
- **Bilateral defense treaties** with the Philippines (1951), South Korea (1953), and Japan (1960);
- The **Quad (2007)**, a quadrilateral security dialogue with Japan, India, and Australia;
- **Most recently**, the AUKUS pact (2021) with the United Kingdom and Australia emphasizing advanced defense technologies (Verluse, 2022; Bezamat-Mantes).

Taken together, these alliances represent Washington's long-standing strategy of shaping the Indo-Pacific's security architecture. Among them, the Quad and AUKUS have emerged as the most dynamic instruments of U.S. strategic engagement in the region. The following subsections analyze these two alliances in greater detail.

C. Consequences of the Formation of the Quad in the Indo-Pacific Region

Western experts argue that the central program of the Quad is to establish, by 2030, a coordinated framework to counterbalance China's expanding economic and military power. The four member states—the United States, Japan, India, and Australia—possess significant geographical, economic, military, and political capabilities. Given their overlapping interests, the Quad functions as a mechanism of deterrence and balance in the Indo-Pacific.

Each member state's defense strategy highlights its own priorities, yet collectively they converge on containing China's assertiveness. Japan continues to strengthen the Japan Self-Defense Forces, while India expands its military posture on its northern borders. The United States pursues military modernization to sustain its position as the world's leading power, and Australia emphasizes military capability-building as a guarantor of regional balance (Diehl, 2021: 2–3).

Some analysts, such as Zeno Leoni of King's College London, interpret the Quad less as a hard-power military bloc and more as a platform for economic and technological cooperation tied to regional security. Leoni characterizes it as an instrument of American soft power, capable of obstructing China's economic ambitions—particularly those embedded in the Belt and Road Initiative (Seibt, 2021).

From Washington's perspective, maintaining balance and fostering order in the Indo-Pacific remains a top priority, shared by like-minded regional partners. Beyond military deterrence, the Quad promotes democratic norms, free trade, and open sea lanes as pillars of stability. Yet, soft-power approaches alone have proven insufficient. Beijing has effectively neutralized external pressures

by leveraging military expansion, intellectual property theft, coercive trade practices (e.g., against Australia), and large-scale initiatives like the Belt and Road.

Moreover, China's sustained investment in long-range missile systems, fifth-generation aircraft, and naval power projection has

further reduced the effectiveness of traditional deterrence. Against this backdrop, the United States—present in the Pacific since 1945—is intensifying its efforts to create a credible and multifaceted deterrent to Chinese ambitions by 2030 (Nicolini Gabriel et al., 2020: 58–59).

Table 1: Major Comparison of Quad Group Weapon Systems Compared to China, Estimated 2030–2040

Weapons Name	United States	Australia	Japan	India	All Quad Member Countries	China
5th Generation Fighter	1321	72	147	0	1540	200
Bomber	88	0	0	0	88	172_150
Military Ships	78	12	54	22	166	150
Submarines	25	12	22	24	83	70
Aircraft Carriers	5	0	0	4	8	2

Source (Diehl, 2021:12)

Chinese officials regard the formation of the Quad as unnecessary and potentially destabilizing, often referring to it as an “Asian NATO”. Beijing perceives the grouping as primarily designed to counterbalance Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific.

India, however, approaches the Quad with caution. Given its geographic proximity to China and the border tensions of 2017 and 2020, Delhi seeks to avoid transforming the Quad into a flashpoint for confrontation. From the Indian perspective, the Quad primarily serves to facilitate maritime trade and advance the blue economy, rather than act as an overt instrument of U.S. foreign policy. Despite global economic disruptions, including those caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, India continues to expand its trade relations with China, reflecting the pragmatic balance it seeks between economic engagement and strategic alignment (Cannon & Rossiter, 2022: 12–13).

The Advanced Battle Management System (ABMS), tested by the United States Air Force on September 3, 2020, exemplifies the Quad's collective defense orientation. Military analysts assert that no single country can deter China independently, emphasizing the need for a coordinated effort among Quad members to establish a unified force capable of credible deterrence. Each of the four Quad powers is committed to sustaining this role through joint military integration and capabilities development by 2030.

In recognition of China's rapid advancements in military technology, Quad members have increasingly prioritized joint exercises, force integration, and the establishment of operational bases. The United States, for example, is enhancing its strategic footprint across the Indo-Pacific, leveraging major air and naval bases in Guam while expanding access to facilities in Papua New Guinea, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and northern Australia. This dispersed posture aims to mitigate future threats from China and its allies and strengthen collective deterrence in the region (Diehl, 2021: 2–4; Lee, 2020).

A. Implications of the Formation of AUKUS in the Indo-Pacific

The AUKUS coalition represents a cornerstone of the United States' evolving security architecture in the Indo-Pacific, designed under the Biden administration to counter the expansion of China's

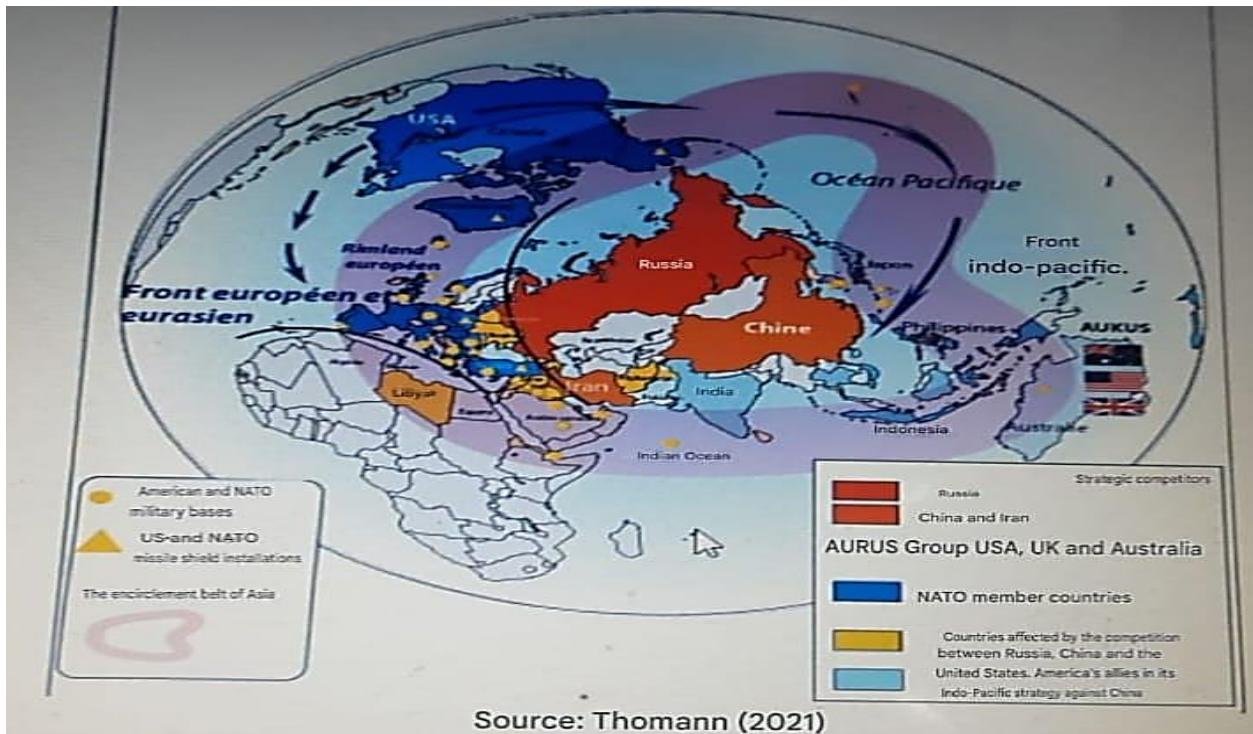
political and military capabilities. For the U.S.'s principal allies—Australia, the United Kingdom, and key regional partners such as Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Taiwan—AUKUS serves as a security-guaranteeing framework, complementing the Quad and other defense alliances in the region.

This alliance forms part of a broader global strategic coalition led by the United States, providing operational and technological support to the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” concept. In doing so, it embodies a grand American strategy that seeks inclusivity and collaboration, enhancing deterrence and security assurances while promoting redefined burden-sharing among regional partners (Thomann, 2021).

Although Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan are not formal members of AUKUS, they stand to benefit from the strategic technological advantages offered by the United States in its competition with China. These countries possess significant innovation and research capacities, particularly in cutting-edge fields such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and nanotechnology (Niquet & Péron-Doise, 2021: 4–6).

Geopolitically, AUKUS exemplifies classic balance-of-power dynamics amid a regional security dilemma. While the treaty does not explicitly reference China, it is widely interpreted as a coordinated response to China's growing and potentially threatening presence in the Indo-Pacific (Péron-Doise, 2022: 13–14). Canberra's security concerns are driven by China's enhanced maritime capabilities, prompting Australia to equip its submarines with nuclear-powered systems, thereby augmenting deterrence. Alongside other Quad members, including India and Japan, this capability aims to bolster regional security and strategic influence.

However, the strategic objectives of AUKUS are long-term and are unlikely to immediately constrain the Chinese Communist Party or Xi Jinping's ambitions. At the same time, China's ongoing efforts to project sea power and control critical maritime lines of communication complicate the regional security environment, challenging U.S. allies and highlighting the complexity of establishing an effective balancing coalition in Asia (Thomann, 2021; Péron-Doise, 2022: 14–16).



Implications of AUKUS Formation and Regional Responses

The establishment of the AUKUS coalition has accelerated the militarization of the Indo-Pacific, eliciting mixed reactions across the region. Beijing has strongly opposed this initiative, conducting extensive military exercises, including operations in Taiwan's territorial waters and joint drills with Moscow in the Tsugaru Strait between Japan's Honshu and Hokkaido islands. Chinese warships also entered Japanese territorial waters near Kagoshima, marking the first such occurrence since 2017. These maneuvers were accompanied by clear messaging from Beijing to Washington, warning that if AUKUS is interpreted as confirmation of renewed U.S. strategic intervention, America's objectives in the region would remain unfulfilled (Niquet & Péron-Doise, 2021: 3). From China's perspective, AUKUS threatens regional peace, exacerbates the arms race, undermines non-proliferation efforts, and potentially violates the Rarotonga Treaty (Budiarti, 2022: 6).

The United Kingdom's increasing presence in the region reflects its "Global Britain" strategy. In September 2021, the aircraft carrier Queen Elizabeth, along with vessels from the Netherlands, the U.S., and Japan, conducted exercises near Okinawa. London views these actions as part of its broader effort to promote stability and security in the Indo-Pacific and to diversify NATO's strategic engagement in East Asia (Neill, 2021; Brooke-Holland, 2021). The UK's Indo-Pacific Framework, published in March 2021, underscores its intent to counter China's influence while supporting global economic stability (Goin, 2021).

The European Union, particularly France, has expressed reservations about AUKUS. The alliance was announced without EU consultation, at a time when European defense markets were already strained by COVID-19. This move highlighted the need for the EU to pursue strategic autonomy and strengthen its collective security capacity. While Europe remains cautious about entering a direct U.S.-China confrontation, the lack of involvement in AUKUS signals Washington's expectation that Europe may adjust its regional perception and preparedness. France's extensive maritime territories and exclusive economic zones in the Indo-

Pacific were overlooked in favor of the UK, reflecting London's geostrategic and nuclear deterrence capabilities within NATO (Thomann, 2021; Swanström & Panda, 2021: 14–15). The AUKUS announcement, coinciding with the EU's own Indo-Pacific strategy paper, underscored a division between the United States and Europe, potentially prompting the EU to accelerate efforts toward strategic independence, especially in light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022.

Japan has welcomed AUKUS as a reaffirmation of the U.S. commitment to regional stability. Nevertheless, the new security coalition complicates Tokyo's balancing act between Washington and Beijing. Japan's active engagement in multilateral groups and investment initiatives reflects its preference for rules-based approaches over confrontation (Péron-Doise & Niquet, 2021: 2–4). India has adopted a measured stance, recognizing AUKUS as a potential deterrent to Chinese aggression while maintaining balanced relations with both the alliance and European powers, particularly France. Despite India's exclusion from AUKUS, the alliance presents opportunities for strategic diversification, prompting New Delhi to reassess its approach to regional partnerships and pursue bilateral strategic autonomy (Swanström & Panda, 2021: 16).

Conclusion:

Sea power has historically been one of the most critical dimensions of great-power strategy and remains so today. Although its prominence diminished during the Cold War due to advances in technology and shifts in the global distribution of power, maritime strategy has regained heightened significance over the past few decades. These developments have fostered new rivalries among the major powers in the international system.

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as a pivotal arena in this evolving strategic landscape, driven by the intensifying competition between the United States and China and the gradual shift of the global geopolitical center of gravity from the Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific. In pursuit of maintaining its hegemonic order and containing

China, the United States has promoted the creation of strategic groupings and alliances, including ANZUS, the Quad, and AUKUS, in collaboration with regional partners.

The primary objectives of these alliances are to defend shared interests, enhance information and technology sharing, counter emerging threats, and prevent the regional dominance of competitors. At present, the United States employs two key strategic instruments in the Indo-Pacific: the deployment of advanced military capabilities and the consolidation of alliances with regional actors. The effectiveness of AUKUS in complementing or potentially undermining the long-term objectives of the Quad will largely depend on the ability of the United States and Australia to rebuild trust with other strategic partners, including the European Union and India.

The announcement of AUKUS has already reshaped regional arrangements and alliances, prompting concerns in Beijing, which perceives the alliance as destabilizing and has labeled it the “Asian NATO.” Nevertheless, the strategic equilibrium between China and the United States in this maritime domain necessitates the cooperation of their respective allies.

Taken together, these dynamics illustrate the increasingly complex and contested role of the Indo-Pacific in the global balance of maritime power. As the center of global economic and political gravity continues its shift from the Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific, and as new military and security alliances consolidate, the region is poised to witness heightened competition, rising tensions, and accelerated militarization among the major maritime powers.

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