

The Role of AUKUS in Australia's Military Capacity Building Strategy

Lia Aulia Lubis^{1*}, Anak Agung Banyu Perwita², Rizerius Eko Hadisancoko³
Defense Diplomacy Study Program, Faculty of Defense Strategy, Republic of
Indonesia Defense University

Corresponding Author: Lia Aulia Lubis liaulialubis@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role of AUKUS in enhancing Australia's military capacity amid evolving Indo-Pacific geopolitics. The AUKUS partnership between Australia, the UK, and the US aims to increase Australia's defense capabilities, focusing on nuclear-powered submarines, cyber security, AI, and underwater warfare. The analysis shows how AUKUS addresses Australia's military challenges by offering advanced technology and strategic support. The SSN-AUKUS submarines symbolize a major advancement in Australia's naval capabilities. The partnership also promises economic and social benefits, including job creation and infrastructure development. However, the study also notes potential drawbacks, such as increased regional tensions and the risk of an arms race, highlighting the need for balanced diplomatic efforts.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the global and regional geopolitical context has undergone significant changes, driven by the increasing competition of major powers, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. This area has become a global focal point due to its major trade routes, abundant natural resources, and complex political and military dynamics (Nath & Klingebiel, 2023). Australia, situated in this region, faces growing security challenges. Therefore, enhancing military capacity is crucial to ensuring that Australia can maintain its sovereignty, protect its national interests, and contribute to regional stability (Hallen, 2016).

AUKUS is a trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, announced in September 2021, aimed at strengthening Australia's defense and security capabilities. This partnership involves various aspects, including technology transfer, the development of nuclear-powered submarines for Australia, and collaboration in cyber security, artificial intelligence, and underwater capabilities. AUKUS is expected to significantly boost Australia's military capacity, enabling the country to address increasingly complex security challenges (Novita, 2022)

Before the formation of AUKUS, the Australian military faced various issues and challenges, including limitations in military technology, the need for equipment modernization, and deficiencies in training and capability development. These limitations hindered Australia's ability to operate effectively in an increasingly dynamic and risky security environment. Moreover, threats from countries with more advanced military capabilities added urgency for Australia to strengthen its military (Frühling et al., 2023). AUKUS emerges as a potential solution to these problems. With access to advanced technology and support from strong allies like the United Kingdom and the United States, Australia has the opportunity to significantly enhance its military capacity. However, the exact contributions of AUKUS to enhancing Australia's military capacity require in-depth analysis (Adamy, 2022).

This study aims to analyze the role of AUKUS in Australia's military capacity-building strategy. The primary focus is to evaluate the extent to which AUKUS has succeeded in addressing the challenges faced by the Australian military before this partnership and to assess the real impact of initiatives under the AUKUS framework on enhancing Australia's military capabilities. This research is essential for various stakeholders, including the Australian government, the military, and the academic and research communities in security and strategic studies. For the Australian government, the research findings can provide a basis for strategic decision-making in defense and security policy. For the military, the research results can offer insights into the effectiveness of AUKUS programs in enhancing operational capacity and combat readiness. Meanwhile, for academics and researchers, this study can enrich the literature on international security partnerships and their contributions to regional and global stability. The research will not only examine the technical aspects of military capacity enhancement but also

consider the strategic and geopolitical implications of AUKUS and how this partnership can shape the future of security in the Indo-Pacific region.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Security Dilemma

The Security Dilemma is a key concept in international relations theory that describes a situation where actions taken by one country to enhance its security can lead to increased insecurity in other countries. This often prompts those countries to take similar actions, potentially triggering an arms race and escalating tensions (Wivel, 2017). In the context of AUKUS, Australia's efforts to increase its military capabilities through the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines and advanced defense technologies are intended to strengthen its defense and deter potential threats. However, these actions may be perceived as threatening by neighbouring countries, particularly China. China's subsequent tightening of regulations and military strengthening has heightened Australia's fears, exacerbating the security dilemma. The formation of AUKUS and Australia's military build-up could provoke a security dilemma in the Indo-Pacific region, with neighbouring countries responding by enhancing their own military capacities, potentially leading to an arms race and regional instability (Wende, 2022). Addressing this security dilemma requires strong diplomatic efforts to ensure transparency, build trust, and prevent misunderstandings that could lead to conflict.

Balance of Power

The Balance of Power theory posits that international stability is maintained when power is distributed among various countries such that no single country or coalition can dominate the others. This is often achieved through alliances, military build-up, and strategic partnerships (Kaufman et al., 2007). AUKUS represents a strategic alliance between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, aiming to balance the rising influence and military capabilities of China in the Indo-Pacific region. By enhancing Australia's military capacity, AUKUS contributes to maintaining the balance of power in the region. The presence of advanced military assets such as the SSN-AUKUS submarines serves as a deterrent against potential aggression. A balanced power structure can enhance regional stability by preventing the dominance of a single power. However, this also requires careful management to avoid unnecessary provocation.

Defense Diplomacy for Capacity Building (DDCB)

Defense Diplomacy involves the use of military cooperation and engagement with other countries to achieve diplomatic and strategic goals. This includes activities such as joint training, military exchanges, and technology transfer aimed at building capacity and fostering international cooperation (Drab, 2018). AUKUS facilitates significant technology transfer and joint training programs, enhancing Australia's military capabilities. This includes the development of nuclear-powered submarines and advanced defense systems.

The partnership promotes close military cooperation among the three member countries, improving interoperability and collective security efforts. Joint exercises and shared military doctrines enhance understanding and operational coordination. Through defense diplomacy, AUKUS not only strengthens Australia's military capacity but also contributes to broader regional security by promoting a collaborative approach to shared security challenges. This capacity building is crucial for addressing complex threats and maintaining peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore and analyze the role of AUKUS in Australia's military capacity-building strategy. This approach is chosen because it allows researchers to gain a deep understanding of complex and dynamic phenomena and to identify factors influencing the success of AUKUS in specific contexts. Data for this study is collected through several methods, including document studies to analyze official documents such as government statements, military reports, and policy publications related to AUKUS and Australia's defense strategy. Additionally, academic literature and relevant journal articles on the research topic are reviewed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Indo-Pacific region holds profound strategic significance, particularly due to its main trade routes connecting East Asia with Europe and the Middle East. However, this region also faces various complex maritime security threats and challenges (Tertia & Perwita, 2018). Territorial disputes in the South China Sea are a major source of tension. China claims a large portion of this sea through the "nine-dash line," contested by countries such as Vietnam, the Philippines, and Malaysia (Rossiana, 2022). China's military activities, including artificial island construction and military facility placements, have heightened tensions with neighboring countries and disrupted regional stability (Vanaga, 2014).

Role of AUKUS in Maritime Security

AUKUS was formed in response to the complex security dynamics in the Indo-Pacific, with the primary goal of strengthening Australia's defense capabilities and enhancing regional stability through close trilateral cooperation (Gumantiara et al., 2024). One of AUKUS's main initiatives is the construction of nuclear-powered submarines for Australia. These submarines, equipped with advanced technology, enable Australia to enhance its detection and counter-threat capabilities underwater. Nuclear-powered submarines offer advantages such as longer range and extended operational time compared to conventional submarines (Novita, 2022).

Moreover, AUKUS strengthens intelligence information exchange between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, enabling early detection and rapid response to maritime threats (Nicastro, 2024). This cooperation includes monitoring military activities and ship movements in the

Indo-Pacific region. Collaboration in cyber security also helps protect critical maritime infrastructure from cyber attacks. AUKUS focuses on developing technologies and strategies to protect military communication networks and information systems. Joint military exercises among the navies of AUKUS member states enhance interoperability and combat readiness. These exercises involve scenarios including maritime patrols, counter-underwater threat operations, and rescue operations. They also help in developing joint doctrines and operational tactics (Varadharajan, 2021).

SSN- AUKUS Design and Technology



Picture 1 nuclear powered submarine - SSN AUKUS

The AUKUS alliance—comprising Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States—has marked a significant milestone in naval defense with the introduction of the SSN-AUKUS, a new class of nuclear-powered submarines. This development integrates advanced technologies from the three partner countries, aiming to enhance Australia's naval capabilities and strengthen trilateral defense cooperation (AUKUS, 2023).

The SSN-AUKUS submarines will be based on the UK's next-generation submarine design, incorporating state-of-the-art technologies from all three AUKUS partners. This innovative design will include advanced US submarine technology, such as advanced propulsion systems, common vertical launch systems, and sophisticated weapon systems. Specifically, the partnership will also facilitate the development of a joint combat system, expanding existing US-Australia combat technologies (AUKUS, 2023).

On March 21, 2024, the Australian Government announced the selection of BAE Systems and ASC Pty Ltd to build a new fleet of nuclear-powered submarines as part of the trilateral AUKUS security pact between the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia (Australian Government, 2024). This move is an important part of Australia's efforts to independently build and operate nuclear-powered submarines. This article will discuss the SSN-AUKUS design and technology and its implications for Australia's capacity-building strategy in deterrence in the South China Sea.

The SSN-AUKUS design will combine technologies from the three countries, based on the UK's next-generation design led by BAE Systems. BAE Systems serves as a long-term partner in submarine design and construction in the UK, while ASC Pty Ltd brings local expertise in Australia. This

collaboration will lead to the formation of a long-term Joint Venture incorporated in Australia (Mills, 2023).

In the UK, BAE Systems has been working on the SSN-AUKUS design and development with over 1,000 people involved in the program. Significant investments in infrastructure are also being made in Barrow-in-Furness to support the development of these submarines. The SSN-AUKUS will be the largest, most powerful, and most advanced attack submarines ever operated by the Royal Navy, replacing the Astute class starting in the late 2030s. Australia is expected to deliver the first SSN-AUKUS submarine in the early 2040s (Mills, 2023).

The selection of BAE Systems and ASC Pty Ltd not only supports military development but also has significant economic and social impacts in the three countries. In the UK, the development of the SSN-AUKUS has driven BAE Systems' workforce up to 17,000 people at its peak. In Australia, this collaboration will build a lasting and sovereign nuclear-powered submarine construction capability (Mills, 2023).

The main challenges in this project include technology transfer and the development of adequate infrastructure in Australia. However, collaboration with the experienced BAE Systems will ensure an integral relationship between the design in the UK and the construction strategy in Australia. Moreover, this project opens significant opportunities for Australia to enhance its military capabilities and play a key role in maintaining regional stability and security in the South China Sea (U.S Department of Defence, 2024).

Impact Analysis

AUKUS has various positive and negative impacts on the Indo-Pacific region. On the positive side, with access to advanced technology and support from AUKUS, Australia's military capacity has significantly increased. The technology of nuclear-powered submarines, advanced surveillance systems, and cooperation in intelligence and cyber security give Australia a strategic advantage in maintaining maritime security (Wende, 2022). AUKUS also contributes to regional stability by presenting a military force capable of balancing the dominance of other major powers in the region, especially China. This provides additional security assurance for Indo-Pacific countries and supports collective efforts to maintain freedom of navigation (Adamy, 2022).

However, the presence of AUKUS can also exacerbate tensions with countries that feel threatened by Australia's military strengthening, particularly China. This could trigger an arms race in the region and increase the risk of military conflict. Some countries and international observers criticize AUKUS as a step that could heighten the risk of conflict and disrupt diplomatic efforts. They argue that focusing on enhancing military capabilities might overshadow diplomatic solutions and multilateral dialogue (Rimapradesi et al., 2023).

Patrol operations in the South China Sea demonstrate how AUKUS technology and support help Australia enhance its patrol operations. Nuclear-powered submarines and advanced surveillance systems enable Australia to monitor Chinese military activities more effectively and enforce international

law in disputed areas. Joint exercises involving maritime defense scenarios show significant improvements in interoperability and rapid response to maritime threats. For instance, exercises in the Indian Ocean involving simulations of underwater threat countermeasures demonstrate the effectiveness of trilateral cooperation in crisis situations (Adamy, 2022).

Challenges and Criticisms

The implementation of AUKUS faces various challenges. Integrating new technologies and operational systems from AUKUS encounters technical and logistical difficulties. This process requires adjustments in military doctrine, personnel training, and the development of appropriate infrastructure. Some countries in the region, including Indonesia and Malaysia, have expressed concerns about AUKUS, viewing it as a step that could heighten tensions and disrupt regional stability. Large investments in new technology and systems from AUKUS raise questions about economic sustainability and the allocation of Australia's defense budget. Significant spending on military capability enhancements could affect other national budget priorities (Nurfauzi et al., 2022).

The effectiveness of AUKUS is evident in the rapid and significant increase in Australia's military capacity, allowing for better responses to maritime threats. However, this approach also poses the risk of escalating tensions and conflicts in the region. Enhancing Australia's military capabilities through AUKUS can strengthen its strategic position in the Indo-Pacific but also has the potential to provoke negative reactions from countries that feel threatened, particularly China. Balancing military capability enhancement with effective diplomacy is a major challenge for Australia and its AUKUS partners (Muntasyir & Santoso, 2022).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

AUKUS plays an important role in Australia's military capacity-building strategy amidst the complex security dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region. Through this alliance, Australia gains access to advanced technologies, particularly in the development of nuclear-powered submarines, which enhance its capabilities in detecting and countering underwater threats. Collaboration with strong allies like the United Kingdom and the United States strengthens Australia's strategic position and increases regional stability through improved interoperability and intelligence cooperation. However, AUKUS also faces challenges and criticisms, including the potential for increased tensions with neighboring countries, especially China, and concerns about a regional arms race. The implementation of new technologies and operational adjustments requires significant investment and adaptation in military doctrine. Despite these challenges, AUKUS has great potential to address Australia's previous military limitations and make a significant contribution to maritime and regional security. Ultimately, the success of AUKUS in enhancing Australia's military capacity will heavily depend on

balancing defense capability improvements with effective diplomacy to maintain stability and peace in the Indo-Pacific region.

FURTHER STUDY

Future research could explore deeper into several areas to build on the findings of this study. First, a comparative analysis of AUKUS and other international military alliances could provide insights into the unique advantages and potential pitfalls of the AUKUS framework. Second, an in-depth examination of the long-term economic impacts of AUKUS on Australia's defense budget and broader economy would be valuable. This should include an analysis of the opportunity costs associated with high defense spending. Third, a study on the regional perceptions of AUKUS, particularly from the perspective of ASEAN countries, could offer a broader understanding of the alliance's implications for regional diplomacy and security dynamics. Finally, research on the practical implementation challenges of integrating advanced technologies and operational systems within the Australian military would provide actionable insights for policymakers and military planners.

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