AUKUS: The Changing Dynamic and Its Regional Implications

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ABSTRACT

A historic security deal was announced on 15 September 2021. The strategic partnership amalgamating the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia is contrived to share advanced defence know-how and equip Australian forces with the nuclear-powered submarines. Attentions mount to the partnership's ultimate purpose and implications for other countries. France expressed fury over its loss of the lucrative submarine deal by the scuppered pact. China sees itself as the target of the new grouping. Although reactions vary, the ASEAN generally views the enunciation of AUKUS as deteriorating the geopolitical situation in the region. Why have the three member states initiated such trilateral defence agreement? This article analyses that the audacious enlistment marks a shift in US global strategy, redistributing its forces by empowering its allies to strengthen military capabilities around the Indo-Pacific. It represents Australian eager to project power up to shape the security environment more in Australia's favour, enhance its status and influence within the American alliance system and heighten its Anglophone identity. This article contends that the advent of a new inner Anglosphere core has disturbed the regional order by potentially escalating arms race, increasing regional tensions and undermining relevant institutions of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Keywords: Arms Race, ASEAN, Asia-Pacific, AUKUS, China, Indo-Pacific, Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons

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I. INTRODUCTION

In September 2021, the Australian government ushered in a harvest season. After Morrison's hard work in recent years, Australia finally obtained a high recognition and reward from the United States. After celebrating 70 years of the US-Australia alliance on 1 September 2021, in another historic step, the US and Australia jointly announced the creation of an enhanced trilateral security partnership called "AUKUS" with the United Kingdom on 15 September 2021 to promote security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region and realize a high degree of integration of the three countries in defence-related science, technology, industry and supply chain. As a gesture of good faith and as the "first initiative" under the AUKUS banner, the US committed to provide Australia with a nuclear-powered submarine (SSN) flotilla. The last time it did so was with its close ally Britain in 1958. PM Morrison (2021) hailed it as Australia's "single greatest initiative to achieve these goals since the ANZUS alliance itself" and described their relationship as "a forever partnership for a new time between the oldest and most trusted of friends."

Meanwhile, Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne and Defence Minister Peter Dutton held '2+2' ministerial dialogue with Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Union Minister for Defence Rajnath Singh on 11 September 2021. India and Australia are part of the strategic Quadrilateral Security Dialogue group, the Quad, as it is colloquially called, along with the US and Japan. Ahead of the UN General Assembly, on September 24, a first in-person summit of the heads of the Quad group of countries was held at the White House. A series of high-profile events and important statements have demonstrated the unbreakable strength of the US-Australia alliance that made Australia proud of being among the countries the US trusts and relies on most in the Indo-Pacific.

AUKUS is essentially a trilateral security alliance in traditional international politics, but historically it is the only newly emerging multilateral military alliance in the Asia-Pacific region in the past three decades. The US and UK commitment to facilitate Australia's acquisition of a nuclear-propelled fleet of at least eight boats to replace its aging Collins class conventionally powered flotilla will make Australia the seventh country in the world with a major symbol of military power. The new AUKUS fits well with the Biden administration's foreign policy vision of reinvigorating US alliances and partnerships, as well as engaging China from a position of strength, which is "the only country with the economic, diplomatic, military and

technological power to seriously challenge...all the rules, values and relationships that make the world work the way” the U.S. wants it to. The headline announcement of military alliances, the commitment of nuclear armament and the targeting of a specific rival indicate a substantial Cold War flavour, making AUKUS almost entirely symbolic.

II. THE AUSTRALIAN UNEASE

The actual submarine deal that resulted in the abrupt withdrawal from the existing French “contract of the century” of A\$90 billion with the supplier Naval Group stung Paris. Why did Australia turn to the AUKUS agreement with the nuclear submarine as its central pillar at all hazards of severing the Franco-Australian ties?

The mainspring given by Australia is that French nuclear-powered subs are envisaged to arrive much too late to help them to address the disturbing strategic circumstances during the decade that is as dangerous as the 1930s. Australia regards the retrofit of six aging Collins-class vessels and the whole submarine replacement program executed by various governments both Liberal and Labour over the last 20 years as a national failure. The extended procurement timeframe made Australia will not be able to deploy the necessary capability of post-Collins conventional subs fleet until the 2050s (Mole, 2021). Now, Australia aspires to transform their strategic outlook and become serious again about making submarines to cover their capability gap. Therefore, if the US has a greater stake in protecting treaty allies including Australia in the pivotal Indo-Pacific region, why wouldn't Australia opt for a cheaper and expedient measure such as AUKUS to take a major leap forward for Australian security? (Wilkins, 2021)

But there are more pressing needs for Australia to do so. First, to appease domestic criticism against ANZUS alliance. Domestic politics in Australia prevents the nation from sophistically engaging and enhancing trust with the diverse players in the region. In recent years, in order to uphold US hegemony, Australia has been willing to be the vanguard of anti-China, leading to a sharp decline in Sino-Australia relations and setbacks in economic and trade cooperation. Key members of the Biden administration have been vocal in their support of Australia, but failed to deliver, and American companies have been quick to fill Australia's lost market in China. Morrison Government has made an urgent appeal to the US for excess expiring Pfizer doses but proved unsuccessful (Davis, 2021). Despite Australia has been fighting with the US in every major conflict since the World War II, Australia has barely got a phone call amid the US withdrawal from Afghanistan (Sky News Australia, 2021). All these have raised questions in domestic Australia about the reliability of the ANZUS alliance, imposing pressure on Morrison's government. The AUKUS pact, on the other hand, gives Morrison an opportunity to flaunt his power.

Second, to enhance Australia's status and influence in the region. Although Australia is a middle power in the region, it has long been in the identity dilemma of “neither East nor West”. Its body is in Asia, but its soul is in Britain and America. The formation of a new security alliance by the three Anglophone democracies will undoubtedly remit Australian identity anxiety to a large extent and become the most secure and belonging cooperation mechanism for Australia. The generosity of the US and the UK is expected to make Australia the world's seventh country with a nuclear submarine. From Australia's point of view, AUKUS is poised to “bolster” Australia's position along with the Quad and the Five Eyes Alliance, which are clearly far beyond the proper configuration of a middle power.

Third, to help transform Australia's domestic economy. In recent years, for the national interests of economic development and national security, Australia has significantly increased its investment in high-end manufacturing sector represented by the defence industry to get rid of its dependence on resource export to China. Based on the high level of mutual trust of the US-Australia alliance, Australia has been able to receive high-end military technology from the US in areas such as hypersonic missiles and military drones. The new AUKUS mechanism will further clear the way for Australia's cooperation with the US and the UK in defence industry. Morrison has immediately announced plans to build a future nuclear submarine project in South Australia, where the shipbuilding industry is strong, supporting more than 8,000 jobs.

However, the seemingly smart strategic decision of the Morrison government to bind to the American chariot is gradually pushing Australia into a situation of isolating itself from Asia and Europe. At a time when many countries in the region are making efforts to maintain peace and stability, Australia is still clinging to the Cold War mentality and stirring up tensions. Instead of cooling down the region, Australia's moves will only add fuel to the flame, which will eventually burn itself out. After all, Australia is a close neighbour to Asia and a major trading partner. Former Australian Prime Minister Keating pointed out that it was a disgrace for the Morrison government to pin Australia's future on the US. Australian politicians' policy of being used as cannon fodder by the US is nothing more than to gain short-term political capital at the expense of the Australian nation and people. The lessons of Vietnam and Afghanistan are not so distant, but they are nothing compared with Australia's current determination to arm itself as a battlefield.

III. THE AMERICAN CALCULATION

The United States has sometimes deviated from the global nuclear non-proliferation regime. In the 1970s, for example, South Korea's Park Chung-hee administration secretly attempted to develop nuclear weapons under the guise of civilian nuclear technology. The US had pressured South Korea to give up its program to avoid another war on the Korean Peninsula over nuclear proliferation. At about the same time, Chiang Kai-shek and the Chiang Ching-kuo group in Taiwan were also secretly pursuing nuclear weapons. Considering the overall situation of Sino-US relations for the time, the US eventually sent personnel to dismantle relevant nuclear technological research and development facilities in Taiwan. By the late 1990s, the South Asian nuclear race had broken out. America initially had imposed tough sanctions on India for nuclear proliferation. But after India showed that its nuclear weapons could keep China at bay, the US not only quickly lifted sanctions, but also signed a separate nuclear energy cooperation agreement with India, in violation of international non-proliferation principles.

From this perspective, it is not hard to understand why the US and the UK are actively offering nuclear submarine technology to Australia. On the one hand, the U.S. has a history of exporting and transferring nuclear technology in order to rally its followers. Although military technology such as nuclear submarines is extremely sensitive, perhaps Australia's status as an Anglo-American ally will reassure the US and the UK. On the other hand, the fact that the US has transferred contentious gordian military technology to Australia, knowing that such move would inevitably ignite an international uproar, reflects its determination to shift the strategic focus to the Indo-Pacific region. As a key strategic anchorage in the South Pacific region, Australia is undoubtedly in the front position for the US to advance its Indo-Pacific strategy. America's leadership is widely questioned by its allies after the hasty retreat from Afghanistan. The Biden administration has had to take some concrete actions to strengthen the alliance and assert its dominance. After Australia obtains the nuclear submarine technology, the country is doomed to cooperate with various claims of the US under the Indo-Pacific creed. Its strategic intention is self-evident.

The establishment of AUKUS marks a major shift in US global strategy. This shift is based on two irreversible realities that American elites recognize. One is that China's rise is unstoppable and difficult to reverse. The other is that the US no longer has or has lost the confidence to keep China down on ground, especially in Eurasia. On the one hand, the "comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination" between China and Russia, two Eurasian land powers, is hard to shake. On the other hand, the estrangement between the US and Europe has widened since Former President Trump; and Brexit marks the end of the era of sea power controlling continental European affairs since the Industrial Revolution, and Europe led by the land powers of Germany and France is bound to resist the ordering of the US and increasingly pursue "independence" for its own interests.

In this regard, AUKUS is essentially the cornerstone of America's new strategy of "retreat as advance". The fundamental purpose of it is to command the seas and then maintain strategic dominance in international affairs, especially in the competition with China. Historically, one of the key factors that enabled Britain to defeat Germany, whose overall strength was higher than itself, in the two World Wars was that Britain always firmly grasped the sea power. The prime mover for the US to reverse the situation in the World War II and defeat Japan was also the ruling of sea control. During the Cold War, the US continued dominance of the sea was a basic ingredient that ultimately wore down the Soviet Union. The fundamental rationale of the strategy of "whoever rules the waves rules the world" under the guidance of Mahan's concepts of sea power is that, in contrast to the open and free access of the sea, countries in various regions on land have always been isolated from each other due to poor transportation, hostile by political confrontation, blocked by economic closure, and excluded by cultural discrimination. Therefore, as opposed to the divided and closed land, commanding the open and free sea will hold the strategic initiative.

In a strategy aimed at controlling the seas, the three powers of AUKUS are strategically positioned almost perfectly. As the only island in the world facing both the Pacific and Atlantic oceans, not only does America's maritime capability of crushing superiority make any conventional attack on the US mainland difficult to achieve, but also, once freed from the burden of land warfare, the mighty US navy could manoeuvre freely in the Atlantic and Pacific. Although the sun was setting, Britain's naval power remained the greatest in Europe. Backed by the US and buffered by Europe, AUKUS allows the UK to defend and secure the Atlantic alongside the US when retreat as well as to attack and assist the US to seize the Pacific when advance. Once Australia has possessed nuclear submarines, Australia's weakness of being far-flung and isolated will instantly upgrade to an indispensable strategic strength. The vast South Pacific and Indian Oceans are not only Australia's natural security barriers, but also provide the most ideal hiding place and manoeuvring space for its nuclear submarines. If needed, Australia's nuclear submarines can stealthily meet the enemy at any time, forward out of the first island chain in the Western Pacific, to assist the US blockade of the main sea lanes. By contrast, the island nation of Japan, though more powerful than Australia and is also following America's lead, from the perspective of sea power, its proximity to China and Russia makes it only an outpost for the US to consume its opponents, but not an ideal stronghold for the control of marine.

IV. THE ASEAN PREDICAMENT

Sitting across the sea from Australia, ASEAN will also face a tough challenge from AUKUS. AUKUS puts ASEAN to the test in three respects.

First of all, ASEAN would be caught in a security dilemma. On the one hand, the provision of nuclear-powered submarines by the US and UK for Australia will certainly incur a new round of arms race in the Indo-Pacific region. Since the beginning of the 21st century, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and other ASEAN members have actively introduced conventional powered submarines and other types of surface vessels from Germany and Russia. Especially since 2010, the situation in the South China Sea has been heating up, countries have accelerated the modernization of their naval forces through procurement. However, nuclear-powered submarines have overwhelming advantages over conventional submarines. In addition to strong cruising ability and high navigational speed, nuclear-powered submarines can usually be equipped with nuclear missiles, thus their offensive, lethality and deterrence are not comparable. As a result, ASEAN countries will face a neighbour who is approaching with rapidly rising military power. On the other hand, ASEAN countries have always adopted the strategy of great power balance to ensure security. With the creation of the AUKUS, a “giant” will emerge from Southeast Asia to the South Pacific, and the original balance of power distribution in the region will be upset. Compared with the EU, the political and security integration of ASEAN is still at a low level, and the common security, foreign and defence policies among ASEAN members are far from being formed. Member states cannot rely on the collective defence of ASEAN to seek “common security” but can only rely on independent military capacity building. Therefore, under the cruel reality, ASEAN will fall into an imperilment of scrambling for accelerating military strength to balance forces.

The security dilemma also arises from the potential that AUKUS could undermine ASEAN’s pursuit of preserving a nuclear-free area. In December 1995, in order to establish “the Southeast Asian region as a region free of nuclear” and to contribute “towards international peace and security”, ASEAN members signed the Treaty of Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone [hereinafter SEANWFZ Treaty], declaring a ban on the manufacture, testing, having control over and possession of nuclear weapons in Southeast Asia. Unlike China who was the first among the five states with nuclear weapons to support the SEANWFZ Treaty and announce its willingness to sign a protocol to this end, the US claimed that the text of the Treaty and Protocol does not meet all fundamental US concerns and thus refused to give serious consideration to signing the Protocol.

Secondly, AUKUS would escalate the already fierce competition among major powers in the region, making the potential risk of arms race and major power confrontation further undercut regional prosperity, peace and stability. For ASEAN countries, how to maintain “centrality” and coming through the whirlpool of great power competition unscathed has always been an ineluctable topic at the diplomatic and strategic level. Although the US has repeatedly emphasized that it has no intention to force ASEAN countries to choose between China and the US, the establishment of AUKUS alliance has shown that the anti-China camp led by the US has begun to take shape. Southeast Asia is a region to play a critical role in determining the future of Asia and whether the US can successfully implement its strategy to sustain itself as an Asia-Pacific power. On the one hand, the US will not easily accept that its containment policy against China will be compromised or even obstructed due to ASEAN’s lack of cooperation. On the other hand, China is ASEAN’s natural neighbour and irreplaceable economic and trade partner. ASEAN is well aware that any attempt to “take side” will tear itself apart and cause fatal consequences. However, the birth of AUKUS will undoubtedly increase the pressure on ASEAN on this issue.

Thirdly, AUKUS would split the ASEAN and impede its political and security integration process. ASEAN members’ responses to AUKUS have been mixed. Philippine Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. backs AUKUS, conceiving that the “enhancement of a near abroad ally’s ability to project power should restore and keep the balance rather than destabilize it.” (Mustafa, 2021) But Malaysian Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob is wary of that AUKUS will spark a nuclear arms race in the contested Indo-Pacific. Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi also expressed concerns about an intensified “arms race and power projection in the region that will threaten security and stability.” (Lamb & Beo Da Costa, 2021) Differences in security policymaking, varying demands for security protection and cooperation from the US, and diverse cognitions of China’s threats directly lead to various perspectives and reactions among ASEAN members to the AUKUS pact. It is difficult for ASEAN countries to adopt a common position on the AUKUS deal, and the polarized positions among them will hinder the process of regional political and security integration and the realization of the blueprint of ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint 2025. AUKUS also does not fit ASEAN’s rosy vision of the “Indo-Pacific”. In recent years, the alleged “Indo-Pacific” has gained popularity among many players in the region. ASEAN also released its own ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific in 2019. Based on the principle of “strengthening ASEAN Centrality”,

the Outlook provides that the Indo Pacific is a region “of dialogue and cooperation instead of rivalry” and a “region of development and prosperity for all”. Certainly, it is a primary goal for ASEAN to maintain and consolidate its central and strategic role as a regional multilateral framework. Nonetheless, as a measure of the Indo-Pacific strategy of the US, the closed-off and antagonistic nature of AUKUS is a serious erosion of the multilateral mechanism shaped and dominated by ASEAN, let alone is a flagrant defiance to the centrality of ASEAN.

AUKUS is the first new formal US alliance in the Asia-Pacific region in three decades but will by no means be the only one. In the face of the resulting turbulence, ASEAN’s original aspiration and mission should not be forgotten. All member states should actively safeguard the unity and empower the ASEAN to continue to play the central role in the evolution of regional order.

V. THE ASIA-PACIFIC TURBULENCE

First and foremost, AUKUS would disrupt the international security process and shake the foundation of relevant institutions. Although the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons [hereinafter NPT] does not explicitly prohibit such technology transfer, the US and the UK, as nuclear weapon states, openly help Australia, a non-nuclear weapon state, to obtain military nuclear submarine technology, which clearly runs counter to various purposes and obligations of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime. AUKUS took advantage of a loophole in the NPT and, while not crossing the red line, actually stepped on it, thus opening a Pandora’s box for proliferation. This will lead to the proliferation of delivery vehicles for weapons of mass destruction. Although the nuclear submarine is not a nuclear weapon, nor is it a nuclear explosive device, but it has the potential to carry nuclear weapons, belonging to a necessary platform for the delivery of weapons of mass destruction. There are only six countries in the world with nuclear submarines: the US, Russia, China, the UK, France and India, and all of which have nuclear weapons. It is evident that nuclear submarines are inextricably linked to nuclear weapons. Furthermore, the security issue of sensitive nuclear material involved in the technology transfer and the possibility of further proliferation by Australia will continue to be a source of widespread international concern. Helping Australia develop nuclear submarines would spread fissile material that could be used to produce nuclear weapons. In accordance with the NPT, “Each State Party to the Treaty undertakes not to provide: (a) source or special fissionable material, or (b) equipment or material especially designed or prepared for the processing, use or production of special fissionable material, to any non-nuclear-weapon State for peaceful purposes”. Because of the military implications of nuclear materials used in nuclear submarines, the International Atomic Energy Agency [hereinafter IAEA] has no authority to supervise. This objectively creates conditions for Australia to build nuclear weapons. It is noteworthy that Australia had a history of making atomic bombs, and the first British nuclear tests were conducted in Australia. It could also lead to the proliferation of uranium enrichment technology. Both American and British nuclear submarines use highly enriched uranium, and Australia is rich in uranium reserves. If the US and UK transfer the technology of uranium enrichment to Australia to make it self-sufficient in nuclear fuel, it would be somewhat on a par with the international nuclear black market that came to light in the early 2000s.

Hence, the practice of the US, the UK and Australia sharing military nuclear technology in a small circle has made the international community full of doubts about the authority of the international nuclear non-proliferation regime. This may make it more difficult to resolve the Korean nuclear issue and the Iranian nuclear issue and set off the impulse of other non-nuclear countries to get their hands on military nuclear technology, thus causing endless risks and profound negative impact on international security and stability. This is going to be a terrifying precedent.

Secondly, at present, relevant countries in the Asia-Pacific region are competitively expanding arms, conducting frequent military exercises and actively purchasing advanced weapons. The situation of regional peace, security and stability will be more worrisome. To illustrate, South Korea allocated about \$48 billion for its 2021 defence budget, which was about 9.4 percent of government spending and roughly 2.9 percent of the country’s \$1.6 trillion GDP (Lee, 2021). The cabinet of Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio approved on defence spending in the fiscal 2021 supplementary budget (Takahashi, 2021). While marginal, India’s overall defence budget allocation for 2021-22 has seen a hike of around 1.4 percent, which is still significant and indicates the shifting priorities of the government considering the huge negative economic impact of the pandemic (Rajagopalan, 2021). Singapore announced the new allocation of defence budget for 2021 that amounts to about 15 percent of total government and is a 12.7 percent increase over the revised 2020 defence budget (Grevatt & MacDonald, 2021). Philippines outlined defence budget for 2021, which represents a rise of 11 percent over the original allocation for 2020 (Grevatt & MacDonald, 2020). Malaysian Ministry of Defence has received an increase of 1.8 percent in allocation as announced in the 2021 Budget (Malay Mail, 2020). The Philippines, Malaysia, Vietnam and other countries have all made appeals to purchase advanced weapons and equipment (Strangio, 2020; Tran, 2020; Abas & Cazalet, 2021).

Australia's enhanced underwater attack capability is no good news for its neighbours. Australia's peace record in the Indo-Pacific is not unblemished. There were Australian troops in those unjust wars in North Korea, Vietnam, and Afghanistan. Provoking the military expansion in the Asia Pacific will coerce those governments with economic and welfare difficulties to overstretch in spending extra defence budget. Neighbouring countries may therefore be forced into a vicious circle of arms races for the sake of their own safety. AUKUS guarantee on "peace, security and stability in the region" seems deceitful in this wise.

VI. THE CHINESE CONCERNS

None of the three specifically name China in their statements. They didn't have to.

For China, AUKUS is a targeted and substantial threat to be reckoned with. This is another historic move in the process of forging an "Asia-Pacific version of NATO". So, the first question to China is, can they make it this time? The odds are good, at least in terms of willingness.

Since the second World War, Britain and Australia involved in almost all the overseas combat operations of the US, and within the Five Eyes alliance, America's core alliance, the two countries are the closest to following. By contrast, New Zealand and Canada are relatively weak in their own capabilities and compliance to participate. On the one hand, as mentioned above, these three countries share the same origin and endure no cultural and value barriers. In history, there have been almost no major conflicts between them, and they have kept the same pace on international occasions. On the other hand, Britain and Australia now have burning desires. As for the UK, it longs for strengthening its influence in international affairs after Brexit. At the same time, it urgently needs a "white alliance" to recover itself due to the setbacks in Anglo-American relations under the Trump administration and the rupture of cultural cognition in the US.

The second question is, how much threat is there to China? Once the nuclear submarine is built and eventually deployed, China will regard it as a destructive impact on the security of its periphery as well as international peace and stability. The threats are two-fold.

One is from the sphere of military threat. The nuclear-powered submarine itself is a representative embodiment of military capability, which will exacerbate the regional security dilemma. After taking office, the Biden administration has actively been promoting its value diplomacy, namely the democratic alliance construction, the formation of a small circle perceived by the Chinese side, so as to hammer out an "Indo-Pacific equivalent of NATO" and encircle China. AUKUS is viewed by some as potentially having a demonstration effect that would alarm the Chinese. The conjectures are that the Quad may follow suit in military cooperation. Japan may also seek to acquire nuclear submarine technology under the US-Japan alliance or the US-Japan-Australia trilateral cooperation mechanism. In light of this, China will take targeted countermeasures, and other neighbouring countries that consider themselves under security menace will have no choice but keep elevating their military levels.

The other is from the sphere of strategic threat. AUKUS would endanger the strategic balance and escalate the conflict. Once deployed to the South China Sea, the nuclear-powered submarine should act as an imperative link in the air, surface and underwater anti-submarine net assembled by the US and its allies, whose intention to target China's nuclear submarine is abundantly clear. Some analysts believe that this will pose a threat to China's nuclear retaliation capability, undermine China's strategic deterrence, and thus sabotage the existing strategic balance. Moreover, China will endeavour to avoid 'Russification' in Asia-Pacific. What the US is doing against China is almost a reproduction of the strategy of using NATO as a tool to expel Russia in Europe since the 1990s. The consequence is that Russia has almost no meaningful voice in Europe on security, and even its legitimate security concerns are ultimately being fulfilled in fierce conflict with the West; and economically, Russia has also been left out.

VII. CONCLUSION

Development in the Asia Pacific and Indian Ocean regions requires peace and cooperation, not deterrence and checks and balances. Thanks to the efforts of all countries over the years, the Asia-Pacific has become the most dynamic and promising region in the world and a major engine driving world economic growth. Peace, development and cooperation are the shared vision of the Asia-Pacific region. To achieve the goal, especially in the context of the pandemic, actors in the region, especially great powers, must abandon the Cold War mentality, stop military deterrence and armed confrontation, and avoid inducing arms race and disrupting regional order. Some western powers, especially the so-called Anglophone democracies, are too obsessed with that they cannot lose control and dominance over some region. They are always clinging on to a narrow geopolitical concept and fail to squarely treat the rise of developing countries, including China. The evolving history of the Asia Pacific shows that peace in the region never came easily and should be valued by all parties concerned. Knocking together a small circle like AUKUS will only arouse the new issues not by virtue of regional interests and the Asia-Pacific will be fraught with inexhaustible disastrous

aftermaths.

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