

U.S. Strategy in Indo Pacific in The Battle of U.S. – China Competition

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Abstract

The purpose: To get more clearer understanding about U.S. foreign policy, I try to research about U.S. foreign policy in Indo Pacific. Why I choose Asia Pacific as a case, there is an interesting situation that occur in Asia Pacific region, that's related with U.S. foreign policy. The conclusion: With AUKUS, U.S. will strengthening its relations with U.K. and Australia, although with this trilateral cooperation, the U.S. is still become the leader of this cooperation. It will be used by U.S. to run its foreign policy in Indo Pacific. Especially to face the rising China. This trilateral cooperation describe the U.S. intention to control and manage Indo Pacific region by its policy.

Keyword: Strategy, Indo Pacific, U.S. Competition



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INTRODUCTION

In this new world era, the global security landscape has changed. The spectrum of threats are becoming more wider and complex. The United States of America realize that to face this change of global security, they should change their own foreign policy. As we know in Biden's administration there is three vital national interest that become its priority to conduct, which is : (Biden Jr. 2021)

- To protect the security of the American people
- Expanding economic prosperity and opportunity
- To realizing and defending the democratic values at the heart of the American way of life

With these priority, U.S. have to engaged the fundamental action to ensure their national security, such as: (Biden Jr. 2021)

- Defend and nurture the underlying sources of U.S. strength, including people, economy, national defense, and democracy at home;
- Promote a favorable distribution of power to deter and prevent adversaries from directly threatening the U.S. and its allies, inhibiting access to the global commons, or dominating key regions; and
- Lead and sustain a stable and open international system, underwritten by strong democratic alliances, partnerships, multilateral institutions, and rules.

From this strategy, U.S. already made a plan about their foreign policy in global security. In the context of international relation, U.S. still plays its role to maintain the security, stability, and politics in the same objects, such as:

- In the middle east, U.S. is still maintain the commitment with Israel to protects the country and also to deter the Iranian Nuclear program.
- In Africa, partnership building and also investing in civil society and strengthening long standing political, economic and cultural connection.
- U.S. will build deepest connection to Indo Pacific, Europe and the western neighbour.
- The nuclear weapon is still to become the biggest concern of U.S. Foreign Policy.

Besides these policies, there is a change and new way of U.S. concerning about this global security. U.S. will make a smart and discipline choices regarding their national defense and the responsible use of their military, while elevating diplomacy as tool of first resort. This strategy plan will strengthen enduring advantages, and allow U.S. to prevail in strategic competition with China or any other nation.

Overall, the strategy of the U.S. that would be use in their foreign policy consists of:

- Building back better economic foundations.
- Reclaiming their position in international institutions.
- Lifting up their values at home and speaking out to defend them around the world.
- Modernizing military capabilities while leading with diplomacy.
- Revitalizing U.S.'s network of alliances, and the partnerships that have made the world safer for all of their peoples.

By this security strategy plan, U.S. want to strengthening their democracy and bring back their influence to the world as a leading country or great power country. This strategy is related with the concept of national interest. The use and understanding of the term "national interest" is relatively straightforward. It refers to the self-interest of nations, how states envision their defence and projection of power beyond their borders. In this regard, traditionally, national interest has been divided into those interests that states consider core or vital, such as security, and those that relate to the promotion of more secondary interests. (Coicaud and Wheeler 2008)

In International Relation, National Interest is traditionally linked with what has been labeled by scholars as a billiard ball approach to foreign policy, in which the nation-state is defined and treated as a unitary actor, more important than the "cobweb" of national and transnational connections that others see to be important to an understanding of foreign policy (Deighton 2017)

In foreign policy, there is four instrument that usually uses to achieved their main goal of the policy related to national interest : Diplomacy, Information, Military and Economic. With this definitions, we can describe that's in several decades, U.S. has become the country that always use their military forces to achieves their national interest. With this new strategy, U.S. have changed their foreign policy to rather not using their military forces in physical dimension but to maximize their diplomacy and relations to its allied. This paper will explain more deeper about this two of instruments in foreign policy.

Case Study – U.S. Foreign Policy in Indo Pacific

To get more clearer understanding about U.S. foreign policy, I try to research about U.S. foreign policy in Indo Pacific. Why I choose Asia Pacific as a case, there is an interesting situation that occur in Asia Pacific region, that's related with U.S. foreign policy.

Recent condition

Loewy Institute, in Asia Power Index 2020 reported that The United States remains the most powerful country in the region but registered the largest fall in relative power of any Indo-Pacific country in 2020. (Lemahieu and Leng 2021) In this report, although U.S. still leads, but the gap between China is narrowing. China leads in three aspects: economics relationship, economics capability and diplomatic influence.

According to document of Powermetric Research Network, both in 1992 and 2018 there was no "superpower" in terms of economic power. The United States maintained the position of a "superpower" in the field of military and geopolitical power. In 1992, China had the status

of "regional power" in all categories of power, but in 2018 it achieved the status of "world power" in terms of economic power (ahead of the United States for the second time in a row)) and "great power" in terms of military and geopolitical power. (Kiczma and Sulek 2020)

Over the past decade, China's more aggressive approach to its unlawful claims in the South China Sea has directly challenged core Australian interests and the global rules-based order. In the coming years, Australia will face greater and new challenges in the South China Sea. (Cook 2021) This SCS conflict involved many U.S. allied in this region, there are : Philipine, Japan, Australia, South Korea.

The newest one is the defence cooperation between U.S., U.K. and Australia in the name of AUKUS Pact that's aims to cooperate in the fields of defence, technology and Artificial Intelligence. Established in 15 September 2021, the AUKUS Pact is starting by a project of U.S. and U.K. assistance to help Australia build eight nuclear power submarines. To begin the partnership, naval officials and technical specialists from the three countries will work together over the next 18 months to equip Australia with the technology to deploy nuclear-powered submarines. Currently, only six countries in the world have this type of weapon: the United States, the People's Republic of China, Russia, France, India and the United Kingdom. But given the complexity of the technology, Australia's nuclear submarine fleet may not be operational until about 2040. (Zhu 2021)

The U.S. Policy

Biden's administration has engaged the foreign policy in Indo Pacific. It is obviously, that U.S. are more proper to implemented their Military and Diplomacy approach in Indo Pacific. With the case of AUKUS, it is clear that U.S. want to builds the military capability in Indo Pacific, with deploying Nuclear Power Submarine to Australia. The Strengthening of military capability in Indo Pacific is needed for U.S. to maintain the region into peaceful condition, and also to anticipated the aggression of China military in South China Sea. The other instruments is U.S. start to re strengthening the relation to its allied in the region. Even though the relationship with U.K. and Australia has existed for a long time, but it seems with AUKUS, U.S. want to begin the new strong relation within this two country, to support the U.S. foreign policy in Indo Pacific.

Analysis

U.S. foreign policy in Indo Pacific region are dominated with their national interest in the perspective of security. In the past decades, the priority of U.S. foreign policy in the context of security is dominated with military acts into middle east region. Especially after the tragedy of 9/11, U.S. is massively exterminate the terrorists came from middle east, such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda, etc. But, after Joe Biden elected as the President Of The U.S. there is a big changes of their foreign policy. In 30 April 2021, President Biden announced the end of war of Afghanistan after they carry out military operations for almost 20 years.

Biden's administration realizes that in this new world era, using a military forces as an approach to maintain the security is not proper anymore. Because, it takes a lot of costs. Especially in this pandemic era, that's almost occur for two years. Domestically, it hit the economic stability of U.S. In the other hands, the growth of China as a rising power has encourage U.S. to be able to reduce and to compete with it, especially in economics and its influence.

The establishment of AUKUS Pact is one of new security strategy of U.S. to compete with China in Indo Pacific. This project will be considering to Increase military capability and

diplomacy for U.S. in Indo Pacific. This cooperation also have a negative sentiment to other countries that's accused U.S. will trigger the arms race in Indo Pacific.

Although this is trilateral cooperation, it is obviously will become bilateral cooperation with U.S. as the central actor.

- **US - Australia**

We are know that both countries geographically located in Asia Pacific. For defence or military approach, U.S.location is quite far enough from China. It is more proper to U.S. to cooperate with Australia and builds the military defences in this country to engaged with China aggression in South China Sea. Australia is a trusted treaty ally, has been U.S. partner in every conflict for the past century, and is a Five Eyes intelligence partner with a proven history and track record of protecting highly sensitive technology. Australia's Collins class submarine fleet is near the end of its useful life and having those ships replaced in a streamlined process with modern, fit for purpose nuclear powered vessels contributes to deterrence and stability in the Indo Pacific. (Culvahouse Jr. 2021)

The nuclear submarine plan fits into a number of existing alliance initiatives. Using the 2020 Australia-US force posture working group, this year's AUSMIN is expected to deliver upgrades to the 2014 US-Australia Force Posture Initiative and 2017 Enhanced Air Cooperation program, possibly by adding a maritime component to the US Marine Corps and US Air Force initiatives underway. It is conceivable that this will include increased rotations of US submarines through HMAS Stirling in Western Australia. Operating US submarines out of Australia will significantly shorten their transit times to Western Pacific flashpoints from Guam, Hawaii or the continental United States, enabling a more persistent and robust forward US military presence. (Corben, Townshend and Patton 2021)

The agreement is also welcome in the context of operationalising Australia's involvement in the US National Technological Industrial Base (NTIB). Australia has been party to this agreement since 2017, but a combination of legislative, commercial and export control hurdles has limited the NTIB's ambition to become a kind of defence free-trade zone among trusted partners. Many thought the Biden administration's "worker centric trade policy" and "Buy American" agenda would restrict NTIB progress, potentially frustrating Australian efforts to build the Sovereign Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordnance Enterprise. Biden's embrace of AUKUS has changed the equation, signalling presidential support for empowering close allies through defence industry cooperation and raising expectations of progress through the NTIB process. (Corben, Townshend and Patton 2021)

For U.S. this cooperation could establishing a local industrial base to construct and maintain nuclear-powered submarines in Australia and will enable the United States to undertake more sustainment, maintenance and resupply of its nuclear-powered submarine fleet here. This has operational advantages: making Australia a more valuable hub for Indo-Pacific maritime and submarine operations and potentially opening the gateway for more expansive US-Australian posture arrangements.

It could help the United States relieve some pressure on its own submarine maintenance and shipbuilding base. The US submarine-building industrial base is under strain, pressures which are projected to significantly reduce the numbers of submarines available to the US Navy over the coming two decades. A recent Congressional Budget Office report estimated that, without major change, US submarine maintenance requirements would exceed shipyard capacity in 25 out of the next 30 years. COVID-19 has disproportionately affected submarine construction programs, which now require significant funding to put back on track, let alone get ahead of requirements.

These pressures are incentives for the US to transfer sensitive technology to Australia – with the UK assisting in submarine reactor technology – both as a way of building-up the submarine fleet of a close ally while US submarine numbers are strained and as a way of integrating Australia into its submarine supply chain to provide redundancy and surplus capacity in a critical part of the Indo-Pacific.

On the other hands, after U.S. withdrawal their troops in Afghanistan and Syria, and declared the end of war in Afghanistan, it has an impact to U.S. defence industry. With AUKUS, U.S. will take an advantages to supply, influences even to control the capacity and capability of Australian Defence Forces. Another effects of this pact also can trigger an arms race in Indo Pacific country. If it happen, the more benefit for U.S. to supply its weapon and technology from their defence industry.

In economics field, with this cooperation China has launched unabashed economic coercion, banning or severely restricting imports of Australian barley, wine, thermal coal and beef. This is exactly something expected by U.S., because it would impact the China resources supply, and possibility for U.S. good to fullfil the need of China resources. The most implication impact to China is about the coal supply. China as the biggest user of coal to its energy power, starting to limits the use of electricity in their province and also in their factory.

The US demarche ultimately underscores the fundamental contradiction of the US Indo-Pacific policy, which accentuates hostility towards China while weakening the cohesion of American alliances. In that sense, Biden’s foreign policy clearly resembles Donald Trump’s. Interestingly, the situation is hardly different for other US allies, including, ironically, Australia and the UK. American security guarantees for Australia come at the cost of a considerable delay, at best, of any prospects for the Australians to develop a submarine industry of their own, increasing their dependency on the US.

• US – UK

The important questions to answer about this AUKUS Pact is, what is the purpose or interest of U.K to join this pact. Because, it is not located geographically in Asia Pacific region. As in Nuclear Power Submarine deals that builds for Australia, U.K. is one of the six countries that already have this technology.

There is an interesting moment that The AUKUS announcements is exactly the day before the launched of the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Although resting on a compromise between the different positions of the 27 member states, the new document represented a qualitative step towards a true investment by the EU in the Indo-Pacific region, which is increasingly the epicentre of global politics. The EU strategy envisages bringing new financial means to bear on key issues such as connectivity. More generally, it constituted a useful strategic framework for the assertion of European interests in the Indo-Pacific, including in the realm of security. (Grare 2021)

For U.S., the role of U.K is also needed in order to suppress China, namely with the issue of climate change. The nation’s role is crucial to efforts on climate change because China produces 28% of global emissions, compared with the UK’s 1%. China is now emitting more CO2 than all rich nations put together, according to some estimates.

As U.K. as the host of the Cop26 climate conference in Glasgow, it is pursuing two contradictory policies that undermine its chances of success. On the one hand, it is seeking a unified global response to the climate crisis with nations agreeing to targets for the reduction of their coal and petroleum emissions. But at the same time, it has joined the US in escalating a new cold war directed at confronting China and Russia at every turn.

The two policies have polar opposite objectives in trying to persuade China, responsible for 27 per cent of global carbon emissions, to cut back on building new coal-fuelled power stations, but at the same time demonising China as a pariah state with whom political, commercial and intellectual contacts should be as limited as possible. (Cockburn 2021)

• **U.S. and other countries in Indo Pacific**

For U.S. allied in Indo Pacific, the establishment of AUKUS have a positive reaction, especially when China aggression is getting high. India and Japan, as two largest economics country in Asia Pacific are very welcoming about AUKUS. It seems not only these countries are welcoming about this pact, Singapore as a country that always carefully balanced its relations with the US and China also welcomed the agreement.

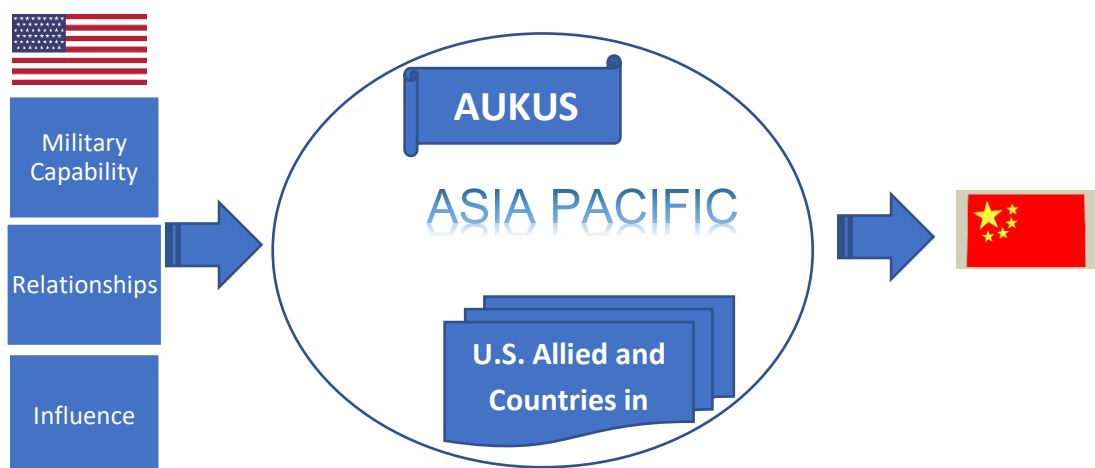
The strengthening of collective security arrangements in Asia is ultimately aimed at deterring Chinese power, much as Nato deters Russia in Europe. The Indo-Pacific alliance structure is unlikely to mirror Nato precisely. (Rachman 2021) With the AUKUS, we see that rather than a single alliance, U.S. want to built network of powers that can protect this region from Chinese domintation.

The potential membership of that network can be discerned by the countries that have recently undertaken naval exercises with the US and Australia. They include the UK, Japan, Canada, South Korea and India. If and when relations with Paris are repaired, the French may rejoin. (Rachman 2021)

Until the nuclear submarine project is completed and accepted by Australia, U.S must immediately conduct diplomacy to its allies and other countries in Asia Pacific that have the potential interest to cooperate with them. The U.S. relationship with Asia Pacific countries also become important strategy beside built military capability in this region.

• **U.S. – China**

In the end, the U.S. foreign policy in Asia Pacific is to deter the Chinese power in this region. Biden’s Adminitration realize that it is need more than just military power to compete with China. But, it also important to use bring alliances and supports from other countries to fight together. This strategy is more proper for U.S. because of after pandemic hit, there are several domestic problems occurred especially in their economics stability. To compete with china has become U.S. concerned and prioritize in their foreign policy.



CONCLUSION

With AUKUS, U.S. will strengthening its relations with U.K. and Australia, although with this trilateral cooperation, the U.S. is still become the leader of this cooperation. It will be used by U.S. to run its foreign policy in Indo Pacific. Especially to face the rising China. This trilateral cooperation describe the U.S. intention to control and manage Indo Pacific region by its policy. This argumentation related to the condition of U.K. and Australia. For Australia, it will be useful to have Nuclear Power Submarine to strengthening its military capability. But in the future, it will be bounded with U.S. policy. And for the U.K., this cooperation will be very important for the UK to get support from US after the Brexit. In the other hands, for U.S. the involvement of U.K. in this cooperation directly show that U.S. still involving European country into Indo Pacific foreign policy.

With the AUKUS, U.S. is start playing its role as guardian country to Indo Pacific and also to balancing China's military aggression in South China Sea that in couple of years already increase. The other purpose with this AUKUS cooperation is to engaged or to renew the relationship of U.S. with its allied in Indo Pacific. Biden has learns from his predecessor that the relationship with allied is equally important as engaging military operation. We can see in the past decade, especially in Trump's era, the war that U.S. engaged with its allied to fight against terrorism has become the war of U.S. only "America Alone" because of U.S. domination. Whereas its allied has focusing for strengthening the economics stability instead give full support to U.S. in war.

This National Security Strategy should be follow with other strategies, such as economic capability, economic relationship and diplomatic influence. In addition, the coronavirus has contributed to a loss of US prestige. (Lemahieu and Leng 2021) The reputation of the U.S. to handling these pandemic is definitely become one of factors that China surpass U.S. No less important, U.S. should anticipate about the climate change issue and the energy crisis. In future, both of U.S. and China have to deal with this crisis. The renewal energy program will brought the country to win this battle too. In the end, the success keys to this strategy is rely on Biden's administration to conduct a better communication and influence to other countries in this region. In other words, U.S. have to significantly changes their behaviour related to its foreign policy to use more soft power approach rather than hard power. These AUKUS cooperation is not the only one solution for U.S. to win competition with china, but its relation and influence to other country and other global condition would be another dimension that U.S. should engaged.

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