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**1. AEI - Beyond AUKUS: 5 practical recommendations**

September 21, 2021

The AUKUS deal announced last week is a watershed moment for Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. I have argued for years that Australia should acquire nuclear-powered submarines, so it should come as no surprise that I believe this is a major breakthrough. When they come online, these and other announced systems will not only be able to assist in Australia’s own defense, but could also help to stabilize the deteriorating military balance in Asia and reassure some countries of America’s own commitment.

Since the AUKUS announcement, however, much attention has focused on French frustration with the deal, rather than on the next steps to build upon this agreement. There is no question that policymakers in Washington, Canberra, and London need to practice careful diplomacy with Paris in the coming days. But the ruckus over AUKUS has distracted from its larger strategic implications.

With that in mind, here are five practical recommendations to capitalize on AUKUS’s momentum:

1. Establish a trilateral forum with Indonesia: In the long-term, the third-party most affected by the AUKUS deal may well be Indonesia. Nuclear-powered submarines will give Australia the ability to better monitor critical maritime chokepoints running through the Indonesian archipelago. Done right, this could deepen Australian cooperation with Indonesia and increase both countries’ security. Done wrong, it could be a long-term irritant in not only Australian relations with Indonesia, but American ties as well. Therefore, the United States and Australia should move expeditiously to set up a trilateral forum with Indonesia. This could help to reassure Jakarta that Washington and Canberra are intent on using this enhanced capability in consultation with, and to the benefit of, Indonesia. After all, the last week has demonstrated the importance of careful early outreach to concerned partners.

2. Accelerate AUKUS capabilities and posture shifts: Back in Australia, there is an opportunity to speed up the delivery of new capabilities. Australia wants a domestically-built system, but needs new submarines before they would be produced in the mid-2030s. One alternative is to go with a proven design, likely the Virginia-class submarine, and to lease several boats from the United States. This would require adding capacity to the existing Virginia-class production line, but that is something US leaders should already be doing. If Washington funds a new shipyard in the massive infrastructure bill, this would allow production of three Virginia-class boats per year, making it possible to lease several to Australia before the end of the decade. American and Australian crews could then train together on these ships, giving Australia early practice in nuclear-powered submarine operations and the United States more experience operating from HMAS Stirling in Perth. Chinese leaders have an apt label for this: win-win cooperation.

3. Consider sharing B-21s with Australia: Unfortunately, a handful of nuclear-powered submarines will not be sufficient to surveil all of Australia’s approaches. There is good news, however: Yesterday, the US Air Force confirmed that five B-21 bombers are currently under construction in the United States. These aircraft will do in the sky what nuclear-powered submarines do below the water — provide a stealthy long-range surveillance and strike capability. Although technology sharing issues would be challenging, Washington and Canberra have shown that they can overcome them with some of the most sensitive military technology in existence. This would be reminiscent of Australia’s acquisition of F-111s 50 years ago; that too was a smart move for both allies.

4. Co-develop ground-based missiles with Japan: Some have asked why other US allies in Asia weren’t involved in the AUKUS deal. But America’s other regional allies have very different needs than Australia. Tokyo, for example, does not want nuclear-powered ships, but it does want deeper cooperation on long-range strike capabilities. To this end, Japan and the United States should co-develop a ground-launched long-range anti-ship cruise missile. Co-developing this type of system would deepen the US-Japan alliance in much the same way that nuclear-powered submarines will deepen the US-Australia alliance. If done right, this system would also be an attractive option for other allies and partners in the region, including Australia, the Philippines, Vietnam, and even Taiwan.

5. Bring America back to the trade table: It should come as no surprise that China’s response to the AUKUS announcement was not military but economic. Within 24 hours, Beijing had formally applied for membership in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). China hopes to flip the script on the United States, which had pitched TPP as a way for Washington to write trade rules, rather than Beijing. Now the pressure is back on the Biden team. It has shown that it can surprise experts when there’s a strategic rationale; now it is time to do the same on trade. If China trying to enter CPTPP can’t spur US leaders to action on trade, then it seems nothing will. AUKUS was a home run, so it would be a shame if Washington lets Beijing steal home.

**2. CFR - More Than Submarines: Implications of AUKUS in the Air Domain**

The benefits of AUKUS for Indo-Pacific competition transcend nuclear submarines.

*October 5, 2021*

The Biden administration’s moves to strengthen diplomatic and military ties to Australia by — among other actions — sharing U.K. and U.S. nuclear-powered submarine technology through the creation of the AUKUS defense partnership, has garnered significant attention among national security scholars and practitioners. Although the trilateral submarine agreement understandably attracted the majority of interest, several of the tactical, bilateral aspects of the partnership between the United States and Australia could have important implications, particularly in the air domain. Through cooperative, diplomatic actions, the U.S. will likely enhance its capability to compete strategically in the Indo-Pacific.

On September 16, U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin outlined AUKUS-associated initiatives “to co-develop advanced defense capabilities” with Australia. Australian Defense Minister Peter Dutton amplified the strategic intent of the AUKUS agreement by foreshadowing efforts aimed at “enhancing our force posture cooperation, increasing interoperability, and deepening alliance activities in the Indo-Pacific.” These deepening alliance activities will include “rotational deployments of all types of U.S. military aircraft to Australia.” The Commander of the United States Pacific Air Forces also recently affirmed that strategic intent as he described a willingness to send all available U.S. aircraft in the region, including fifth generation F-35 Joint Strike Fighters, to Australia as an element of these expanded rotations. These aircraft deployments will supplement the existing Marine Rotational Force Darwin, which is a contingent of 2,500 U.S. Marines on annual, six-month deployments to Australia.

Consistent, rotational deployments of all models and variants of U.S. aircraft to Australia are likely to enhance the U.S. position in Indo-Pacific strategic competition in three ways. The first and perhaps most significant potential effect of the agreement is to enable U.S. air forces to practice and refine the burgeoning agile combat employment (ACE) concept. ACE is a concept designed to confound an adversary’s targeting processes by using multiple airfields in one region to disperse air forces and project combat power from many locations. These potential airfields range from robust international airports to austere airstrips. By pursuing a dispersion of force capability, the U.S. is tacitly acknowledging that the concept of a fixed, centralized air hub of operations used in the post 9/11 conflicts of the last two decades — for example, at Ramstein Air Base, Germany; Al Udeid Air Base, Qatar; and Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan — is probably less effective against current U.S threats.

The ACE concept, which originated five years ago to counter technological advances by near-peer powers like China, relies on networks of willing partner states that welcome coalition training within their borders. Despite Australia’s considerable air distance from China, Australia offers an array of alternatives from which future ACE operations could be launched against China. Moreover, ACE locations in Australia would provide additional options for logistical resupply that are more distant, and thereby less susceptible to attack, than current options in Japan, Korea, and Guam. In short, as Derek Solen has concluded, “the more countries that host … dispersed units, the greater the dilemma that Beijing will face.”

A second potential impact of the AUKUS-related U.S. aircraft deployments to Australia is improved interoperability between the two militaries. As learned through North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) experiences, including conflicts from Libya to Afghanistan, coalition military operations present complex challenges; impediments to effectiveness persist in spite of NATO’s vigorous coalition training. By codifying recurring aircraft and associated personnel deployments to Australia, the two countries have established a framework for mitigating interoperability challenges through exercises and exchanges of tactics and procedures. Furthermore, because the inventory of the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) includes so many aircraft also operated by the United States, maintenance and logistical support of these aircraft will benefit from economies of scale. Interoperability also will serve as a force multiplier for RAAF assets, which are now are largely reliant on U.S. aerial refueling capability to extend their reach.

A third potentially noteworthy benefit to U.S. air domain capabilities from the AUKUS agreement is expanded access, basing, and overflight (ABO) permissions in the region. ABO permissions are a standard assumption of contingency planning; however, as the United States experienced in 2003 when it was forced to amend plans for a northern assault into Iraq from Turkey, ABO permissions are never guaranteed. By making a “definitive strategic choice” through ratification of the AUKUS partnership, however, Australia has effectively chosen sides in the escalating competition with China. This decision makes U.S. ABO permissions in Australia a reasonable assumption going forward and potentially serves as a deterrent to Beijing’s behavior in the region.

One should not underestimate the importance of the agreement to share U.S. and British nuclear-powered submarine technology through the creation of the AUKUS partnership. This technology may eventually create a uniquely-capable maritime ally in the Indo-Pacific. One would also be equally prudent to recognize the deeper and more immediate connections that the AUKUS partnership will facilitate, particularly in the air domain. Collectively, these key elements of the trilateral security agreement represent a major step forward in Washington’s efforts to assure integrated deterrence in order to prevail in the era of strategic competition.

**2. AEI -The AUKUS agreement and its significance for the defense of Taiwan**

October 6, 2021

On September 15, 2021, the leaders of Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States announced the establishment of AUKUS, “an enhanced trilateral security partnership.” The historic agreement, which Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison referred to as a “forever partnership,” will allow for far greater cooperation in the realms of security, defense, technology, and industry. The headline initiative for AUKUS is joint development of a new nuclear-powered attack submarine for Australia. The implications for Taiwan are potentially significant.

Australian Concerns about the Taiwan Strait

In July 2020, in the joint statement on the annual Australia-US Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN), “the Secretaries and Ministers re-affirmed Taiwan’s important role in the Indo-Pacific region” and “reiterated that any resolution of cross-Strait differences should be peaceful and according to the will of the people on both sides, without resorting to threats or coercion.” This was the first time that an AUSMIN joint statement directly addressed issues pertaining to Taiwan.

The 2021 AUSMIN joint statement used even stronger language. Dropping references to “unofficial” relations, the secretaries and ministers “stated their intent to strengthen ties with Taiwan, which is a leading democracy and a critical partner for both countries.” To the extent that there is daylight between Canberra’s and Washington’s approaches to Taipei, that daylight is diminishing.

Three months before this year’s AUSMIN, Australia and Japan held their ninth round of the “2+2 Foreign and Defense Ministerial Consultations.” In a joint statement, the ministers said that they “underscore the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait and encourage the peaceful resolution of cross-Strait issues.” This was the first time the Australia-Japan 2+2 publicly alluded to concerns about the Taiwan Strait. In August, the ministers participating in the first-ever Australia-France 2+2 similarly called for peace and stability in the Strait.

Australia, which had long been cautious in its approach to the Taiwan Strait, is shedding its wariness. As Brendan Taylor described in a Lowy Institute policy brief last year, “the potential for a regional security crisis is becoming less remote” and “the stakes for Canberra are high.” In a previous issue of the Global Taiwan Brief, I described the potential strategic consequences of Chinese success in an effort to force unification with Taiwan:

In such a scenario, the United States would have either sat out the conflict, proving itself a paper tiger, or would have seen its military defeated in conflict with the People’s Liberation Army (PLA). Either set of circumstances would significantly undermine the US alliance system in Asia and embolden China to act even more assertively vis-à-vis its neighbors, including Australia, in the future.

Second, and related, Chinese annexation of Taiwan would give the PLA easy access to the Pacific Ocean, enabling it to more readily threaten Guam, Hawaii, Alaska, and the Continental United States. Additionally, Chinese control of Taiwan would make Japan far more difficult to defend in the event of a Sino-Japanese conflict and would facilitate Chinese control of the South China Sea. These are all adverse outcomes for Australia, given its approach to national defense that places the US alliance front and center.

It seems likely that growing concerns about the Taiwan Strait—where the PRC has carried out a concerted pressure campaign on Taiwan for five years and counting—interacted with similar concerns about the South China Sea and the Sino-Indian border, and with Australia’s own experiences dealing with Beijing over the last year, to create a policy environment conducive to AUKUS.

British Concerns about the Taiwan Strait

The United Kingdom has been less outspoken when it comes to Taiwan, but it, too, has begun to “lean in.” On June 13, it signed on to a Group of Seven communiqué, in which the G7 leaders “underscore the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait” and express opposition to “any unilateral attempts to change the status quo and increase tensions” in the East and South China Seas. The NATO communiqué, released the next day, did not mention Taiwan, but explicitly raised a number of concerns with respect to China, including its “stated ambitions and assertive behavior.”.

London announced its “Indo-Pacific tilt” last spring as part of its “Global Britain” vision. That tilt envisions deeper engagement across the region, including in the security realm. The UK has followed that commitment with action. In early September, two Royal Navy patrol vessels embarked on a five-year deployment to the region. There they joined the HMS Queen Elizabeth carrier strike group, which is spending half of the year in the Indo-Pacific conducting a variety of engagements. On September 27, the HMS Richmond, a member of the strike group, sailed south through the Taiwan Strait.

Allied Submarines and the Defense of Taiwan

Although the submarine announcement caught observers by surprise, the idea is not new. “From a strategic perspective,” wrote Zack Cooper, Iskander Rehman, and Jim Thomas in a 2013 report, “the case for an Australian nuclear-powered submarine force is compelling, given their endurance, stealth at high speeds, and greater payloads.” They highlight, in particular, the question of endurance:

[W]hile diesel-electric submarines may prove more stealthy in shallow waters, they would take considerably longer to arrive on station, and remain on station for a far shorter amount of time. These limitations would grow along with the distance at which they are deployed, rendering it extremely challenging for Australian submarines to play any meaningful operational role in the northern Indian Ocean or South China Sea.

A figure included in the report, published by the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, indicates that diesel electric submarines departing from HMAS Stirling—Australia’s one and only submarine base—would be able to remain on station in the South China Sea for less than two weeks and have no ability to remain on station in the East China Sea. On the other hand, nuclear-powered submarines would be able to remain on station for well over two months in each location. Those submarines would have the potential to shape the security environment in ways conducive to the allies and to Taiwan.

In peacetime, regular Australian submarine operations in the China seas could force the PLA to spread thin its anti-submarine warfare (ASW) assets or lead Beijing to invest limited resources in ASW at the expense of other needed capabilities. The knowledge that additional submarines are lurking in contested waters, moreover, could encourage greater restraint in China’s approach to smaller neighbors. In wartime, Australian nuclear submarines could contribute to allied blockade operations, interdict naval forces in the South China Sea seeking to support an assault on Taiwan, and carry out strikes on the Chinese mainland. If Australian submarines are operating in coalition with the United States, they might also free up more American subs to stalk Chinese ballistic missile boats.

What is more, American and Australian submarines may have company in performing these tasks. Days after the AUKUS announcement, The Times reported on discussions about the potential for British SSNs to operate out of Australia. “Senior government sources” see AUKUS as potentially paving the way toward British Astute-class submarines “undergoing deep maintenance in the region so that they can stay deployed for longer rather than returning to the Faslane naval base in Scotland.” (Of note: the AUSMIN 2021 also raised the prospect of a new access arrangement for US SSNs, with the joint statement endorsing “enhanced maritime cooperation by increasing logistics and sustainment capabilities of US surface and subsurface vessels in Australia.”)

It will be a decade or more before Australia fields its own nuclear attack subs and Royal Navy submarines sail from HMAS Stirling, should such access ever be arranged. But if that future comes to pass, Taiwan will benefit. In contemplating any use of force against Taiwan, China will have to grapple with the prospect of an allied intervention beneath the waves—one which could harass Chinese shipping and PLA Navy surface vessels, threaten the Chinese coastline on multiple fronts, soak up PLA resources perhaps better deployed closer to the Taiwan Strait, and undermine China’s sea-based nuclear deterrent.

To be sure, an Australian SSN fleet is not a silver bullet in responding to China’s military advancements, nor is it intended to be. Beyond submarines, the AUKUS joint statement did not go into details about how the three countries “will foster deeper integration of security and defense-related science, technology, industrial bases, and supply chains,” but there are a number of areas for potential collaboration. As three of the “Five Eyes,” Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States participate in an existing intelligence-sharing apparatus; cooperation to enhance intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities and operations in the Indo-Pacific should be a natural next step for AUKUS.

The United States and Australia, meanwhile, are already working together on hypersonic technology, so trilateral missile cooperation may be in the cards as well—indeed, the AUSMIN statement took note of Australia’s intention to establish a “Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordnance Enterprise” and, on the day of AUSMIN, the Australian government announced plans to acquire from the United States Tomahawk cruise missiles (for its Hobart destroyers), Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missiles (Extended Range), Long-Range Anti-Ship Missiles (Extended Range), and precision guided missiles for its land forces. Going forward, it would not be surprising to see air-to-air and anti-ship missile programs rolled into broader air defense and anti-surface warfare initiatives within AUKUS as PLA aviation and surface warfare capabilities continue to advance. Put simply, if AUKUS fulfills its promise, it will serve as a platform through which the participating countries will counter existing and emerging PLA advantages.

Of course, neither the United States nor Australia nor the United Kingdom is bound to intervene in a Taiwan Strait conflict. Nor is AUKUS a new trilateral alliance—the three states will remain free to pursue independent responses to Chinese aggression against Taiwan. But AUKUS is arguably an alliance-in-being. There is a reason the partners will develop a new submarine for Australia “with a focus on interoperability, commonality, and mutual stability,” as the joint statement put it. They want to be able to fight together, hoping that ability will help ensure they never have to.

The main point: AUKUS, and in particular its joint submarine program, will enhance Taiwan’s security by complicating China’s ability to successfully use force to compel unification.

4. **heritage- China Is Rapidly Expanding Its Nuclear Force: Should the U.S. Be Concerned?**

Sep 29th, 2021 3 min read

Last month, experts discovered more than 100 new intercontinental-range ballistic missile (ICBM) silos under construction in China. This week, Matt Korda of the Federation of American Scientists uncovered a second site that could also house over 100 new silos. Together, the two discoveries suggest, in Korda’s words, “the largest expansion of China’s nuclear force ever.”

Historically, China’s strategy has been one of minimum deterrence, choosing to maintain the fewest nuclear weapons possible to deter nuclear attack. According to a 2020 Defense Department report, the number of nuclear warheads in Beijing’s arsenal is in the low-200s. In comparison, the United States deploys 1,550 nuclear weapons, as dictated by the New START agreement with Russia.

Proponents of U.S. nuclear disarmament have tried to use this disparity in numbers to justify unilateral reductions in the U.S. nuclear stockpile. Even if China doubles its stockpile by the end of the decade, they note, it will still be dwarfed by that of the U.S.

These recent discoveries, however, appear to confirm warning after warning that China’s nuclear expansion must be taken seriously. Adm. Charles Richard, commander of U.S. Strategic Command, had cautioned that China should not be mistaken for a “lesser case.” Noting that China is becoming a nuclear peer to the U.S. and Russia, he has also stated that Beijing will likely more than double its nuclear arsenal by the end of the decade—possibly even tripling or quadrupling it.

Indeed, according to Korda, the number of new Chinese silos under construction exceeds the number operated by Russia and represents more than half those operated by the U.S. Perhaps more importantly, the discovery demonstrates China’s capacity to change its arsenal rapidly. The discovery of two massive construction projects in just a month leaves one wondering how else China might be expanding its nuclear forces.

These discoveries make it hard to continue arguing that China’s nuclear forces are insignificant compared to those of the United States. But numbers aside, China’s expansion should be analyzed against the purpose and structure of U.S. nuclear modernization efforts.

With the exception of two minor supplemental capabilities proposed by the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review, the U.S. nuclear modernization plan is simply to replace, on a one-for-one basis, the force agreed upon in 2010 under New START. But when that agreement was inked, the Pentagon’s 2010 Nuclear Posture Review considered Russia no longer to be an adversary, and China’s nuclear expansion wasn’t even on the radar screen.

Prudence would dictate that the overall force be modified to respond to a decade’s worth of geopolitical change. Yet for now, Washington is focused on merely modernizing our existing Cold War-era warheads and delivery platforms.

Replacing antiquated systems postured for a more benign security environment with 21st century technology should be a no-brainer. Yet disarmament hardliners are still debating the merits of even the modernization program. In addition to opposing the replacement of our superannuated weapons, they call for eliminating U.S. ICBMs altogether and cutting our overall nuclear force by one third.

>>> Getting Nuclear Posture Review Right Is Critical for U.S. Defense

As the U.S. now faces two peer competitors for the first time in its history, it is difficult to see how now is the right time to draw down our forces below what was needed to assure a safer world in the past. The nuclear threat to the U.S. is vastly greater now.

Thankfully, Congress is waking up to this point. Last week, the Democratic-led Senate Armed Services Committee agreed to a provision in its annual defense authorization bill expressing the sense of the Senate that the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent is necessary for U.S. national security. House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith also agreed that “we’ve got to keep [the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent program] alive.”

China’s rapidly expanding nuclear arsenal puts the United States’ modest nuclear modernization efforts into perspective. At the very least, proposals to cut current nuclear modernization programs should be put to rest. The U.S. would be better off debating ways we can adjust our capabilities to account for these changes. After all, our national security depends on maintaining a nuclear deterrent that addresses the world as it is—not the one we wish existed.