

New Developments in the United States' Strategic and Defense Ties with Australia

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The Biden Administration is pushing to strengthen the U.S. alliance and is making it a cornerstone of a broader Indo-Pacific strategic architecture. On September 15, the White House announced a new Australia-United Kingdom-United States ([AUKUS](#)) [trilateral security partnership](#). The three countries formed the new pact during the 70th anniversary year of the 1951 Australia-New Zealand-United States (ANZUS) Treaty, and some in the region have labeled AUKUS as [ANZUS 2.0](#). The AUKUS agreement was announced just prior to the 2021 Australia-United States Ministerial (AUSMIN) meetings held on September 16, and President Joe Biden will host Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison as part of the Quadrilateral (Quad), meetings with their counterparts from Japan and India on September 24, 2021, suggesting additional initiatives may be announced. Australia's strategic ties with the United States now operate through the ANZUS alliance, the Five Eyes intelligence sharing group, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, and the new AUKUS agreement. Congress may be interested in these developments as part of its oversight of alliance relations and the United States' strategy toward the Indo-Pacific region or due to potential large arms sales.

AUKUS

Some observers have described the [AUKUS security pact](#) as the most significant security arrangement between the three nations in a generation “in what’s seen as an effort to counter China.” [President Biden stated in announcing the pact](#) that AUKUS will “update and enhance our shared ability to take on the threats of the 21st century just as we did in the 20th century: together.” Biden referenced that the three nations have “stood shoulder-to-shoulder” and fought together in WWI, WWII, Korea, and the Persian Gulf, and that AUKUS seeks to “maintain and expand our edge in military capabilities and critical technologies, such as cyber, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, and undersea domains.”

The pact focuses mostly on developing military capability, and opens the way for Australia to build [nuclear-powered submarines](#). Australia reportedly plans to build approximately eight nuclear-powered submarines in Adelaide. Currently there are six nations that operate nuclear powered submarines, and the UK, and now Australia, are the only nations with which the United States shares nuclear propulsion technology. Nuclear-powered submarines do not have the same limitations as conventional submarines

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and can stay submerged for many months. The French Foreign Minister described Australia's decision to scrap a previously signed A\$90 billion (approximately \$66 billion) deal to purchase 12 French-designed submarines to replace its current fleet of six Collins Class diesel-electric powered submarine as "a stab in the back." Australia will reportedly also acquire long range missiles, including Tomahawk cruise missiles on its Hobart Class destroyers, anti-ship missiles for its Super Hornet aircraft, hypersonic missiles and unmanned underwater vehicles. The pact is a significant collaboration on capability development and in the view of some "means China faces a powerful new defence alliance in the Indo-Pacific."

Observers view AUKUS as a response to growing power and influence by China in the Indo-Pacific region. China's trade sanctions against Australia, which have grown since Australia called for an inquiry into the origins of COVID-19, and China's efforts to influence Australian politics and expand its own presence in the South Pacific have contributed to Canberra's concern about China. China responded to the AUKUS announcement by stating that the agreement undermines regional peace and stability and intensifies the arms race. The *Global Times*, a nationalist Chinese tabloid, described Australia as a "running dog" of the United States, adding that "since Australia has become an anti-China spearhead, the country should prepare for the worst."

AUKUS also bolsters Prime Minister Boris Johnson's post-Brexit efforts to reassert a global role for the United Kingdom (UK), as does the 2021 deployment of HMS Queen Elizabeth carrier strike group to the Indo-Pacific. BAE systems is currently building nine Hunter class frigates for the Royal Australian Navy and builds the Royal Navy's nuclear-powered Astute class submarines.

AUKUS does not include New Zealand, which was once a full member of ANZUS. New Zealand has a history of anti-nuclear policies, and has banned nuclear-powered and nuclear-armed ships from entering New Zealand. New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, however, welcomed the increased engagement of the United States and the UK in the region, and stated that AUKUS does not change New Zealand's relationships with its Five Eyes partners, which include Australia, the UK, the United States, and Canada.

AUSMIN

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin hosted their Australian counterparts, Foreign Affairs Minister Marise Payne and Defense Minister Peter Dutton, on September 16, 2021, for AUSMIN consultations at the Department of State. Their Joint Statement emphasized "shared values" and the need to "strengthen the rule-based international order." It also discussed several initiatives, including; AUKUS and Australia's acquiring nuclear powered submarines; enhanced force posture cooperation and alliance integration; strategic capabilities cooperation; and cooperation on industry, technology, and innovation. Areas of future force posture cooperation identified in the Joint Statement include "enhanced air cooperation through rotational deployments of U.S. aircraft of all types ... enhanced maritime cooperation by increasing logistics and sustainment capabilities of U.S. surface and subsurface vessels ... [and] enhanced land cooperation," among other measures. The Joint Statement also highlighted "the positive progress made in hypersonic weapons and electromagnetic warfare cooperation." The two governments also signed a classified *Statement of Intent on Strategic Capabilities Cooperation and Implementation*.

The Quad

On September 24, 2021, President Biden will host Prime Minister Morrison, as well as Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India and Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga of Japan, in the first in-person summit of leaders of the Quadrilateral group. At their virtual meeting in March 2021, the leaders reaffirmed their commitment to quadrilateral cooperation and stated that the group is "united in a shared vision for the free

and open Indo-Pacific ... anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion.” The four nations also agreed to work together “to meet challenges to the rules-based maritime order in the East and South China Seas,” to produce and distribute COVID-19 vaccines, and to address climate change, among other provisions.

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