

# French Reactions Towards the Establishment of AUKUS

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

In this study, we want to assess France's reaction to the establishment of AUKUS and its implications for French diplomacy around the Asia-Pacific area. Australia said in September 2021 that it would join the AUKUS armed union, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and is seen as a catalyst for a strategic realignment of global powers in the region. France felt forgotten in the formation of AUKUS. France has problems in maintaining its presence and defence interests around the Asia-Pacific area. The study is qualitative in nature. The study's analysis focused on geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geostrategic variables. This research applies Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat theory, which holds that a nation's security is formed not just by the need to preserve a balance of power, but also by perceived dangers, which are mitigated by international cooperation. This study uncovers a complex interaction of security and geopolitical dynamics around the Asia-Pacific area after the establishment of AUKUS. AUKUS has far-reaching consequences outside France, causing conflicts and changes that might have a significant influence on regional security and stability. According to the research, France has taken strategic steps to address changing security dynamics in the Asia-Pacific area.

**Keywords:** AUKUS, France, Asia Pacific, Defense Diplomacy, Regional Security, Geopolitics.

## INTRODUCTION

The core of this study is to see how France feels about the formation of AUKUS, which includes Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, and what it means for French policy all through the Asia-Pacific area. Australia announced in September 2021 that AUKUS is a military alliance and is seen as a catalyst for a strategic realignment of global powers in the region. France felt forgotten in the formation of AUKUS. France has problems in maintaining its presence and defence benefits in the Asia Pacific territorial region. This research is mostly qualitative. This research investigated geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geostrategic issues. This research applies Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat theory, which holds that a nation's security is formed not just by the need to preserve a balance of power, but also by perceived dangers, which are mitigated by international cooperation. This study uncovers a complex interaction of security and geopolitical dynamics in the Asia-Pacific area after the establishment of AUKUS. AUKUS has far-reaching consequences beyond France, inciting conflicts and changes that may have a significant influence on protection in the area. According to the research, France has taken strategic actions in response to changing security dynamics in the Asia Pacific territorial region.

The dominance of the USA and China in the Asian region will have an impact on the risk of war in the Asia Pacific territorial region. The increasing security tension may pose a significant danger to French interests. While deterrence and military reaction policies in the this area depends heavily on the United States, France should have been prepared for this worldwide ramifications from economic problems and significant conflict in the Taiwan Strait, North Korea, or the South China Sea and Indian Ocean. In such a situation, France will face at least three significant problems. They must protect their territory and citizens abroad, secure maritime trade routes for the movement of natural resources, and retain their position as a major player in the Asia

Pacific territorial region and beyond. The validity of France's presence in the Asia Pacific territorial region is also being investigated. (Pajon, 2023).

The AUKUS collaboration, using the United States' superior technology and expertise, will assist Australia in the building of at least eight nuclear-powered submarines. The government has terminated its previous agreement with France on the production of diesel-electric submarines, causing France to express its displeasure. The acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines would let Australia to increase its patrols inside the Indo-Pacific region, increasing its ability to safeguard the area from China's significant military presence (Perry, 2021). The three nations' trilateral relationship is focused on Australia's plan to create nuclear-powered submersibles. The USA and the UK will transfer nuclear submarine construction technologies to Australia. This alliance concerns France, which signed an agreement in 2016 to furnish Australia with conventional submarines. France has voiced unhappiness with Australia's unexpected decision to abandon its previous commitment to buy five semi-electric submarines in favour of pursuing nuclear-powered submarines from the USA. France expressed its dissatisfaction by calling the alliance a betrayal (Angelique, 2021). As a result, the French business DCNS lost a lucrative defence contract for AUS \$50 billion. The agreement planned to replace the decommissioned Collins-Class submarine with 12 conventional submarines produced via a partnership between France and Australia. Australia's unhappiness with France stems from a lack of information over the contract's termination during Australia-France Ministerial Meetings.

China's increasing popularity in the Asia-Pacific region has raised concerns among some neighboring countries. China's increased military capabilities and influence have had a significant political, security and economic effects on the Asia-Pacific environment, especially since China has declared that part of the South China Sea is its territory. Many countries in the region believe that China's ascent has shifted the power balance in Asia-Pacific. Furthermore, China's economic might enables it to wield significant influence over various Asian countries via investments, trade agreements, and infrastructure finance under the Belt and Road Initiative or BRI, previously the Belt and Road Initiative, also known as OBOR, is China's ambitious program to build an infrastructure network across continents. The program began in 2013 has resulted in the establishment of over 3,000 collaborative projects and investments totalling more than USA \$1 trillion, primarily in the development of ports, railways, and energy infrastructure. This has improved connectivity and economic growth in the participating countries (Setiawati, 2023).

The BRI has made numerous countries in the region heavily dependent on China. It has also increased China's influence over the economic development of various Asia-Pacific nations via debt diplomacy. Furthermore, the upgrading of the military is expected to strengthen its position in the Asian territory. The development of modern weaponry has alarmed surrounding countries, raising concerns that China may use them to strengthen its territorial claims in the South China Sea. China's strong engagement in several global forums and organisations enables it to influence regional norms and policies. This influence might have either positive or negative consequences. This strategic activity causes conflict between China and foreign naval forces, primarily the United States and its allies, Australia and the United Kingdom, with long-term geopolitical and geostrategic implications for the region. China often takes aggressive moves in the Indo-Pacific area, unilaterally establishing territorial claims in the South China Sea via the nine-dash line. China's unilateral claim strategy comprises regional border disputes with various South-east Asian nations (Purwantoro Putro, 2021).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Douglas Peifer's essay, "French Anger over AUKUS Trilateral Security Partnership," covers French diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific area. The study investigates France's reaction to the establishment of AUKUS as well as ramifications for French diplomacy in the region. approved by the USA, UK and AU in September 2021 an agreement to improve defence cooperation. This alliance is expected to drastically change the dynamics of global players in the region. France is facing difficulties in preserving its presence and defence interests in the Asia-Pacific area as a result of the formation of AUKUS. Simultaneously, France feels ignored. The geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geostrategic components of the region are examined utilising a qualitative research approach and Stephen Walt's 'Balance of Threat' theory. The development of AUKUS affects France, causing tensions and substantial changes in the regional security and stability situation. The study's findings highlight the complex security and geopolitical problems in the area. This writing was conducted to demonstrate the complexity of these processes. The article finishes with an evaluation of the potential strategic steps that France may take in response to shifting security in the area.

A number of nations in the region have become more reliant on China as a result of its strategic initiatives, such as the Belt and Road Initiative. Furthermore, it has aided China's capacity to influence the economic development of several Asia-Pacific countries via a strategy known as debt diplomacy. The military's upgrade is seen as an attempt to increase its dominance in Asia. The progress of sophisticated weaponry has caused concern among surrounding nations, who worry that China would use them as a supporter of his motives in the claimed area. The proactive attitude of this country engagement in a variety of international forums and organisations enables it to define the rules and policies that govern the region. This effect may have either positive or negative implications. This strategic manoeuvre raises tensions between China and foreign maritime powers such as the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom, all of which have long held geopolitical and strategic supremacy in the region.

AUKUS might be seen as a response to geopolitical and security trends in Asia, notably in the Indo-Pacific area. Concerns about China's influence and military capabilities are growing, particularly on the dispute in the South China region. These issues are particularly noticeable in that location. As a consequence, the USA, UK, and Australia have resolved to strengthen their defence cooperation. The AUKUS alliance was formed to address challenges such as nuclear proliferation and make the area stable and safe. The AUKUS members aspire to increase their collaboration in security, intelligence, and military technology to address the increasingly complex regional security concerns posed by China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific area. They want to do this by focusing on the development of nuclear submarine technology in Australia, with technical support from the United States and the United Kingdom. Furthermore, the Indo-Pacific area is an important international marine hub, particularly for the USA of America. Furthermore, the region is densely populated and serves as a hub for the import and export of several goods. The formation of the cooperation has caused alarm in France, since it prompted Australia to reject a USA \$90 billion commitment for conventional submarines in favour of building nuclear-powered submarines with USA assistance. This argument emphasises the complex dynamics of international relations in the Asia-Pacific area, as well as its capacity to have a significant impact on global geopolitics.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The "Balance of Threat" hypothesis, developed by Stephen M. Walt in his book "Origins of Alliances" (1990), holds that nations react to perceived threats rather than alterations in the balance of power. This approach differs from the classical and neorealist "Balance of Power" theory, which holds that nations must balance their strengths in order to avoid domination by any one country. According to the "Balance of Threat" theory, physical strength alone does not determine how dangerous a situation is. Geographic location, offensive capabilities, and aggressive intent are all key contributors. This thesis questions the "Balance of Power" paradigm, which highlights material power as the fundamental effect on a country's decision-making.

Walt says that states are more likely to see another state as a threat based on its perceived threat level rather than its actual power. Additional factors, such as geographic location, offensive capabilities, and aggressive purpose, might influence a state's appraisal of another state as a threat. Walt contends that understanding the origins of alliance formation is critical for both scientific research and practical political decision-making (Walt 1990).

Australia's goal of increasing force projection is consistent with the United States' goal of maintaining stability in the area in order to remain competitive with China. The United States' status has been weakened by a lack of faith in its ability to exercise influence over China in Central Asia and the Indo-Pacific regions. US and European countries' ties of which France is a member, has grown increasingly tense with the end of President Trump's term and the implementation of Brexit. Because of their lengthy history, the United States has sought a military relationship with Australia and the United Kingdom. Within an anarchic international environment, the United States and the United Kingdom engage in security cooperation and technology exchange with other countries in order to gain political and military support. AUKUS is the best way for the United States to ensure its role in preserving security in this strategically important region (Cheng, 2022).

The AUKUS plan, which includes the building of nuclear submarines, may exacerbate security instability in South-east Asia (Purnamasari, 2023). Australia's geographical closeness to Asia-Pacific nations, notably ASEAN, contributes to this phenomenon. Furthermore, territorial disputes with China involving numerous ASEAN countries, including Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei Darussalam, Taiwan, and Indonesia, might exacerbate instability. Furthermore, Australia's plans to build a nuclear submarine may jeopardise the South-east Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (SEANWFZ) treaty, which reinforces ASEAN's commitment to creating a region free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in order to improve international peace and security.

Concerns are developing over the proliferation of nuclear weapons in Asia. This threat is worsened by the strong influence of major states like as the United States and the United Kingdom, which included Australia in the AUKUS security pact despite France and Australia's earlier agreement to acquire conventional submarines. AUKUS was a pragmatic move for emerging states, since participation in global geopolitical processes is seen as critical. The pact's major goal is to strengthen military force and capabilities to counter the challenges posed by Chinese predominance in the Indo-Pacific region. Despite its commitment to defending the Indo-Pacific region, AUKUS excludes ASEAN, the region's leading body (Purnamasari, 2023).

The formation of AUKUS has displeased French authorities, who felt they were aligned with the interests of the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom in enhancing regional security and stability in the Indo-Pacific. The French were both startled and outraged to learn that they were not notified of the new trilateral security pact until hours before it was announced, and that they were barred from participating (Peifer, 2021). Walt's Balance of risk Theory lists four variables that define a nation's potential risk level (Walt, 1990).

1. Aggregate power refers to a country's overall resources. The amount of a country's resources is proportionate to its potential danger to other nations.
2. Geographical proximity refers to the distance between possible competitors. Walt thinks that a shorter distance increases the capacity to project power and heightens the potential threat.

3. Offensive capability refers to a country's military strength or potential. A nation's offensive capabilities are directly proportional to its potential threat level. Offensive capability is highly related to overall strength as well geographical proximity.
4. Hostile intentions about a nation's perception of possible competitors. Walt emphasises that nuclear weapons are capable of causing the same level of havoc as conventional weapons. Thus, the components identified by Walt in the Balance of Threat theory—aggregate power, geographical closeness, offensive capability, and hostile intent—are critical in analysing and quantifying possible threats between nations.

## METHODOLOGY

This research seeks to understand the importance of AUKUS's emergence in the Indo-Pacific region. The research adopts a qualitative technique, presenting studies in a detailed and complete manner using data gathered from relevant quotes. The approach for data collection and analysis is a literature review, using secondary data gathered from scientific papers, books, journals, and other relevant resources that support this research report.

The foundation of AUKUS has left France feeling abandoned in its attempts to protect its survival and defence interests in the Indo-Pacific region from the looming threat of China's increasing might. The research adopts an analytical framework that includes geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geostrategic considerations. The Balance of Threat theory, proposed by Stephen Walt, provides an analytical framework. This theory contends that a country's security is influenced not just by the balance of power, but also by threat perceptions and international cooperation.

### Research Approach:

1. **Document Analysis:** Document Analysis: This step comprises gathering and reviewing relevant documents such as articles, reports, and official statements from governmental and international institutions, especially those pertaining to defence strategy, diplomacy, and regional cooperation
2. **Text Analysis:** Text analysis comprises scrutinising the text of articles, reports, and statements to identify emerging trends, subjects, and viewpoints, as well as comprehending various stakeholder perspectives.

### Research Steps:

1. **Data Collection:** Documents and accompanying texts are obtained from a variety of sources, including academic publications, government reports, news articles, and official statements.
2. **Identifying Theoretical Framework:** An appropriate theoretical framework for the research is identified and created, with a focus on Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat theory.
3. **Document and Text Analysis:** Documents and texts are rigorously examined using a well-known theoretical framework to reveal patterns, themes, and features relevant to the study's objectives.
4. **Data Processing and Interpretation:** The collected data is processed, key findings are identified, and analytical results are interpreted in accordance with the theoretical framework.
5. **Drawing conclusions:** Data analysis leads to conclusions, which are then connected to the theoretical framework and presented in their entirety.

### Research purposes:

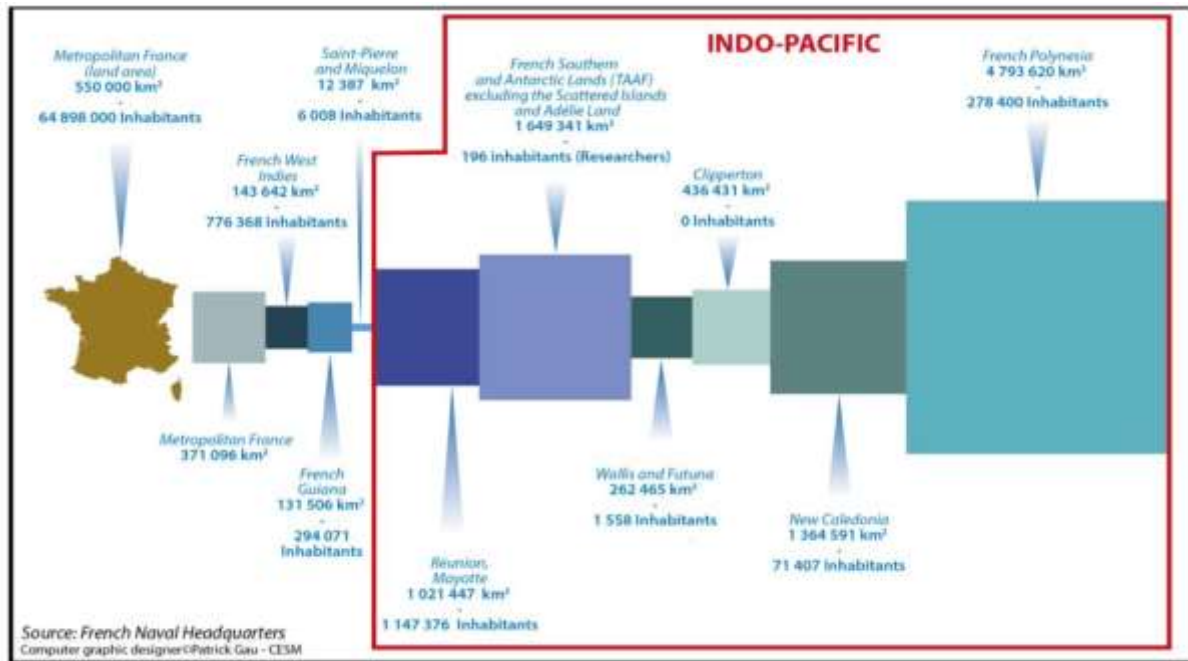
The purpose of this research is to examine the AUKUS alliance's response and consequences for geopolitical and security dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region, with a focus on the responses of France and other regional governments. The research aims to investigate the implications of this defensive partnership for regional defence policy, diplomacy, and security stability.

This method attempts to give complete insights into the Asia-Pacific region's complex dynamics and their impact on global policy and security.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Indo-Pacific region is facing a potential military crisis, which might imperil French interests. France has significant economic interests in the region, and any destabilisation might disrupt the production and supply chains of critical components for its industries and maritime transportation. The creation of AUKUS resulted in France's termination of its submarine purchase deal with Australia.

In 2013, the French White Paper on National Defence and Security (Défense, 2022) said that France does not support the multilateralism promoted by the USA government. France prioritises the security of the Indian and Pacific Ocean regions, describing itself as "a sovereign power and a participant in the security of nations in the Indian and Pacific Oceans." However, Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian's description of France as a "Asia-Pacific power" during the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore was met with scepticism. "For us, France is in Europe," said Chinese Admiral Li Ji (Kauffmann, 2013).



**Figure 1: The Area of the France Exclusive Zone, Worldwide.**

Source: The Headquarter of the French Navy, 2018

French officials have identified many geostrategic changes in the last decade that might threaten France's basic interests in the region. China's maritime expansion in the East and South China Seas represent a significant threat to the concepts of free navigation and peaceful dispute settlement. The building of China's military station in Djibouti in 2017 has sparked serious concerns. The One Belt and Road Initiative has faced criticism from its inception in 2013, particularly for the economic and political reliance it generates in underdeveloped countries. As a result, the French foreign and economic ministries are developing more specifically stated policies for China, notably in the Indo-Pacific region (Ekman 2018).

AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom, United States) was formed in response to the Asia-Pacific region's security and geopolitical dynamics. The military power and influence of China, as well as the spread of nuclear technology, are raising worries, prompting the three countries to collaborate on defence measures. The founding of AUKUS has sparked outrage and controversy in other nations, notably France, which feels excluded from the alliance's development. This demonstrates the complexities of inter-state interactions in the Asia-Pacific area and its effect on global geopolitics.

In contrast to other major nations, France's involvement in the Indo-Pacific region is not driven by economic factors. France's primary commercial partners are in Europe, Africa, and the Americas, with just 8% of its product trade passing via the South China Sea (Ang, 2021). France's desire to increase its influence in the Indo-Pacific is motivated by geographical and geopolitical factors. The overseas territories situated in the Indian and Pacific Oceans account for 93% of its exclusive economic zone, with over 1.6 million French residents in the area. With the Indo-Pacific region growing importance worldwide, France's unique geographical position enables it to influence crucial issues like as multilateralism, the protection of shared interests, and the assurance of navigational freedom (Diplomacy, 2020).

The security and geopolitical dynamics of the Asia-Pacific region have gotten more complicated as a result of China's rising influence and the reactions of other governments, as seen by the founding of AUKUS. Stephen Walt's Balance of Threat theory sheds light on the aspects determining inter-state threats, such as overall strength, geographic proximity, offensive capacity, and aggressive intent. The French military sector has a significant presence in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly in South-east Asia. France has sent frigates to Singapore, submarines to Malaysia, and patrol boats to the Philippines. Covering the years 1999 to 2018, France was the third-largest armament supplier to the region, behind Russia and the United States (Aude, 2020). Thales, a well-known defence contractor based in Paris, employs 2,100 people in Singapore, which exceeds the combined workforce of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (Ikhtisar, 2022).

This journal investigates the People's Republic of China (PRC)'s expanding influence in the Asia-Pacific region, a development that has raised concerns in several countries. China's growing military strength and capabilities, particularly its territorial claims in the South China Sea, have radically changed the political, economic, and security dynamics of the region. This situation has called into question the primacy of regional powers and sparked concern in several Asia-Pacific nations, ultimately leading to the formation of AUKUS as a strategic countermeasure to China's strong influence. The foundation of AUKUS trilateral cooperation has incited France's wrath due to its exclusion, resulting in the cancellation of the submarine purchase agreement between Australia and France. China's economic prowess, particularly via the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has

strengthened its potential to influence neighbouring nations through strategic investments, trade agreements, and infrastructural development. China's strategic efforts, such as military advances and territorial claims in the South China Sea, have heightened tensions with neighbouring countries. China's strategic initiatives, particularly its involvement in regional multilateral organisations and forums, strengthen its power to shape regional norms and policies. However, this has heightened tensions with international marine troops, particularly the USA and its allies.

The formation of AUKUS can be seen as an attempt by the United States to maintain its dominance in the Indo-Pacific region amidst the rise of China. This alliance has the potential to exacerbate regional tensions and trigger an arms race. The transfer of nuclear technology to Australia, although claimed as a defensive measure, could increase the risk of nuclear proliferation in the region. In addition, AUKUS could also weaken regional diplomacy and cooperation efforts in addressing common challenges such as climate change and maritime security. Despite the fact that the USA and Britain not directly connected, their collaboration via AUKUS allowed them to achieve their goal. AUKUS has complicated uncertainty of state stability and security in disputed areas. This partnership wants to develop nuclear-powered submarines while reducing China's future dominance.

## CONCLUSION

With the existence of AUKUS, it can be concluded that the Asia Pacific territory is affected. This research uses the Balanced of Threat theoretical framework to investigate the impact of AUKUS development on geopolitical dynamics and regional security. The founding of AUKUS has far-reaching implications, having significant impact on a global scale. This article investigates France's reaction to AUKUS is formed from countries AU, UK and USA, and the implications for French diplomatic endeavours in the Asia-Pacific region. The development of AUKUS, a defence alliance announced in September 2021, provoked a strong reaction from France, especially in light of the cancellation of a substantial submarine deal between France and Australia signed in 2016. This marked a dramatic shift in regional security dynamics, with the potential to significantly change the global power structure. This study uses Stephen Walt's Balanced Threat Theory as an analytical framework within geopolitical theory. This theory claims that states react to threats rather than just power dynamics. This theoretical framework is used to examine France's reaction to AUKUS and its consequences for security dynamics in Asia-Pacific countries.

According to the study's findings, the development of AUKUS is more than simply a response to China's rising military capabilities; it is also a strategic move meant to reduce China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region. This action not only concerned China, but also sparked resentment in other nations, especially France. France felt excluded during the formation of AUKUS, which weakened its diplomatic and defence aims in the region. This report stresses China's significant impact on the Asia-Pacific security landscape. China's economic power, notably via the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has allowed Beijing to exert more influence on other countries in the region. China's strategic objectives, notably in terms of military victories and territorial claims in the South China Sea, have sparked tensions with neighbouring countries.

This research also emphasises the complexities of relationships between important nations in the Asia-Pacific. The development of AUKUS, which is intended to solve increasingly complicated security challenges, has a significant impact on inter-state relations. France's fury over the termination of the submarine accord with Australia emphasises the need of communication and consultation among nations when forging alliances or security relationships. This research reveals that security dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region are getting more complex, owing to China's expanding influence and the responses of other countries, as shown by the founding of AUKUS. This research provides important insights into key nations' reactions to developing regional security dynamics and the implications for global stability.

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