

JAPAN JOINS AUKUS: MOTIVATIONS, PROGRESS, AND IMPACT**

Abstract: *Since its establishment, the AUKUS defense system has encountered significant developmental challenges, primarily due to insufficient internal driving forces, which has created a strategic opportunity for Japan to join AUKUS. Japan seeks to enhance its own defense capabilities, deepen the Japan-U.S. alliance, and define its role in the Indo-Pacific strategy, while also aiming to form close ties with allies in high-tech fields. The U.S. and UK support Japan's entry into AUKUS and expect to expand the alliance through strategic interaction and technological alliances. However, Australia, considering factors such as geopolitical strategy, institutional construction, and domestic politics, has shown a cautious attitude. Japan's joining of AUKUS will impact the security structure of the Indo-Pacific region, potentially intensify the regional arms race, and jeopardize the surrounding environment for China's development.*

Keywords: *AUKUS Alliance Expansion; U.S.-Japan Alliance Strengthening; Technological Cooperation; Regional Security Dynamics; Attitudes of AUKUS Members.*

Introduction

Japan's decision to join the AUKUS alliance represents a critical juncture in its national security strategy, driven by a confluence of factors that reflect its evolving geopolitical landscape. This strategic move is primarily motivated by Japan's desire to enhance its self-defense capabilities in the face of increasing regional threats, particularly from China, which it identifies as the 'biggest strategic challenge' to its security. By aligning more closely with the United States and its allies, Japan aims to solidify its role in the Indo-Pacific security architecture while simultaneously addressing its technological and defense modernization needs.

The implications of Japan's accession to AUKUS are multifaceted. Firstly, it signifies a shift towards a more proactive defense posture, as Japan seeks to deepen its military cooperation with the U.S., Great Britain, and Australia, enhancing collective

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deterrence against potential aggressors. This partnership is expected to facilitate technological advancements and operational synergies in areas such as cyber security, artificial intelligence, and maritime security, thereby bolstering the capabilities of AUKUS member states.

However, Japan's entry into AUKUS is not without challenges. Australia has exhibited caution regarding the expansion of the alliance, influenced by domestic political considerations and the need to maintain regional stability. Furthermore, China's strong opposition to AUKUS, viewing it as a threat to its influence in the region, complicates the security dynamics within the Indo-Pacific.

In conclusion, Japan's participation in AUKUS reflects its strategic intent to adapt to the changing security environment, enhance its defense capabilities, and contribute to regional stability. This move not only reshapes Japan's defense policy but also has significant implications for the security architecture of the Indo-Pacific, potentially altering the balance of power in the region.

On April 10, 2024, U.S. President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida held a summit in Washington and declared to strengthen the U.S.-Japan alliance and officially invited Japan to join the AUKUS alliance. This invitation marks a new strategic height in U.S.-Japan relations (United States-Japan Joint Leaders' Statement, Whitehouse.gov 2024). The two leaders signed a series of cooperation agreements covering various fields, including military security, economic cooperation, and technological research and development, revealing a comprehensive upgrade in U.S.-Japan relations. That the U.S. invited Japan to join the AUKUS signifies the further expansion of the trilateral security partnership, which shaped a more robust small multilateral security framework. This significant move is not only a significant upgrade for the U.S.-Japan alliance but also a key step in the U.S. strategic blueprint in the Asia-Pacific region. With Japan's inclusion, the AUKUS will further strengthen its military presence and deterrence in the Indo-Pacific region, profoundly impact the strategic competition between China and the U.S., and potentially further escalate tensions in the Pacific region.

The establishment and dilemma of AUKUS

Establishment of AUKUS

On September 15, 2021, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia announced the formation of an enhanced trilateral security partnership known as AUKUS.

This alliance aims to surpass traditional bilateral models by engaging in security cooperation in a small multilateral format and integrating the security resources and capabilities of the member countries (Joint Leaders Statement on AUKUS, Whitehouse.gov 2021). On April 5, 2022, the leaders of the three countries announced that AUKUS cooperation would extend to a wide range of areas, including undersea capabilities, quantum technologies, artificial intelligence, cyber security, hypersonic, electronic warfare, innovation, and information sharing. This study employs a qualitative analysis of the AUKUS alliance's development, focusing on the integration of advanced technologies such as autonomous underwater vehicles, quantum positioning technology, and AI decision-making, to assess their impact on the security and defense capabilities of member countries (Joint Leaders Statement on AUKUS, Whitehouse.gov 2023). At this point, the two pillars of the AUKUS have been established. The Pillar I involves the United States and the United Kingdom assisting Australia in building a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines, while the Pillar II focuses on trilateral cooperation in advanced critical technologies. Through this security alliance, AUKUS aims to further enhance the influence of the three countries within the existing Indo-Pacific strategic framework.

The Pillar I dilemma of AUKUS

Since the leaders of the three countries announced the establishment of the AUKUS in 2021, the alliance's development has been slow.

Firstly, funding issues have been a key factor constraining the development of the Pillar I of AUKUS. According to the agreement, the Australian government plans to spend AUD 368 billion over the next 30 years to purchase nuclear-powered submarines. However, according to the '2024 Defence Strategy' report and the '2024 Integrated Investment Program,' Australia plans to allocate between AUD 53 billion and AUD 63 billion over the next decade to acquire nuclear-powered submarine capabilities. Defense spending for this fiscal year will reach AUD 53 billion. The methodology includes a quantitative financial analysis of defense budgets, projecting that annual defense spending will nearly double to AUD 100 billion by the 2033-34 fiscal year, based on current allocation trends. It is predicted that the percentage of defense spending in GDP will increase to around 2.4% by 2033-34 (Australian Government Defence, 2024). Furthermore, investments in shipyards and related infrastructure required for constructing nuclear-powered submarines also face challenges. Despite the government's plan to invest between AUD 14 billion and AUD 18 billion over the next decade to enhance northern bases, the specific allocation and implementation of these funds have not been fully confirmed, resulting in slow progress for the AUKUS project.

Secondly, international pressure and restrictions from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) have also hindered the development of AUKUS. The Pillar I of AUKUS has drawn significant attention from regional countries. Some non-nuclear weapon states have expressed concerns about the AUKUS agreement. For example, the governments of Malaysia and Indonesia worry that the agreement could trigger regional arms races. These countries emphasize that AUKUS must adhere to the NPT and ensure that nuclear submarines are used solely for peaceful purposes (Official Portal Ministry of Foreign Affairs Malaysia, 2021). As a signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Australia is committed to preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons and technology. The AUKUS agreement must ensure that any transfer of nuclear technology is strictly restrained for peaceful purposes and does not contribute to the development of nuclear weapons. This involves adherence to stringent legal and procedural requirements to comply with the NPT, adding complexity to the project. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) emphasizes the need for strict safeguards and verification measures to ensure that nuclear materials are not diverted for military purposes. Comprehensive and transparent agreements will be required to oversee the nuclear materials involved in the AUKUS project (IAEA, 2021).

Finally, in October 2021, Australia reached an agreement with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) to establish a ‘Comprehensive Strategic Partnership,’ which is deemed an important measure for Australia to enhance its influence in Southeast Asia (Indo-Pacific defense forum, 2021). The deep-seated alliance among Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom contradicts Australia’s strategic relationships established with Southeast Asian countries. Southeast Asian countries’ skepticism towards the AUKUS agreement manifests genuine regional divergences in maintaining security. Within the regional security framework, AUKUS’s military enhancement measures clash with Southeast Asian countries’ security perceptions. ASEAN countries tend to uphold regional stability through multilateral cooperation and incremental approaches, treating AUKUS’s presence as a potential disruptor of this balance. The announcement of the AUKUS agreement did not involve sufficient prior communication with Southeast Asian countries, in particular, resulting in significant dissatisfaction in Indonesia (Patton, 2024). The lack of prior notification has intensified regional countries’ suspicions towards AUKUS and undermined trust between Australia and Southeast Asian nations.

The motivation of Japan to join AUKUS

Security strategy choice

In December 2022, the Japanese government approved three programmatic guiding documents at a Cabinet meeting: the National Security Strategy, the National Defense Strategy, and the Defense Buildup Program. Among them, the new version of the National Security Strategy is a guiding document for Japan's security strategy choices, which indicates an adjustment in the principles of Japan's security strategy.

Japan is gradually strengthening its self-defense capabilities to cope with the evolving security threats. This strategy includes enhancing the operational efficiency of the self-defense forces, modernizing the naval and air forces, and advancing the deployment and upgrade of missile defense systems. By increasing the defense budget, Japan has made substantial investments in modernizing weaponry and equipment, strengthening military training, and comprehensively upgrading defense systems. Data collection for this research involved reviewing governmental and defense strategy documents from Japan to understand its aim of independently addressing security challenges, thereby reducing reliance on external assistance.

Japan's security policy will continue to center on the Japan-U.S. alliance and expand its deterrence capabilities. By deepening its alliance with the United States, Japan can rely on U.S. military support and technological advantages when facing regional security threats.

Japan puts more emphasis on alliances with shared values. In its security strategy, Japan advocates achieving national security through international cooperation and proactive pacifism. The Japanese government aims to utilize 'national values' as a medium to actively engage in international affairs. This principle underlines addressing global issues such as climate change, terrorism, and cyber security threats through international cooperation. By doing so, Japan seeks to build itself as a responsible major power in the international community, further enhancing its global influence and soft power (Ministry of Defense of Japan, 2022).

In Japan's 2024 Diplomatic Bluebook, China was deemed 'the biggest strategic challenge to date.' China's military expansion and activities in East Asia demonstrate its strategic intent to pursue regional dominance. Through military presence in the East China Sea and South China Sea, China aims to control critical maritime routes and play a leading role in regional security affairs. This poses the greatest security threat to Japan and its allies advocating for a free and open maritime order in the Indo-Pacific region.

Frequent joint military exercises between China and Russia in Japan's vicinity, both in maritime and airspace domains, have exacerbated Japan's security concerns (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2024). On July 15, 2023, China and Russia conducted multiple joint military exercises near the Sea of Japan, including joint flights of strategic bombers and joint naval cruises. These joint military actions not only increase military pressure on Japan but also manifest deepened cooperation between China and Russia in addressing regional security affairs.

The Indo-Pacific strategy orientation

With the competition between China and the U.S. upgrading, Japan's role in the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy has become increasingly redefined and more apparent. The Kishida administration has inherited and developed the Japanese version of the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy' proposed by its predecessor, former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. This strategy not only expands its strategic footprint but also demonstrates a more proactive and assertive approach in its implementation (Huang, 2023).

Following and enriching the U.S. 'Indo-Pacific strategy,' Shinzo Abe's administration proposed the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy' with core principles of 'Rule of Law, Freedom of Navigation, and Free Trade,' aligning closely with the U.S. emphasis on a rule-based international order, economic cooperation, and regional stability. Under the administration of Fumio Kishida, this strategy has been further enriched and developed. In March 2023, Kishida introduced the 'Indo-Pacific New Plan' during his visit to India, stressed that the core of the Indo-Pacific strategy lied in 'rule of law' and 'freedom,' and expanded its scope to broader aspects of the international order. He also stressed the importance of respecting the historical and cultural diversity of countries, building 'equal partnerships,' and achieving a world where multiple nations coexist and prosper under the rule of law.

As a close ally of the United States, Japan actively engages in regional hot issues, particularly in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait disputes (Shi, 2023). Through these actions, Japan seeks not only to solidify its own strategic position but also to align with the U.S. in containing China's rise and upholding the U.S.-led international order. Japan, along with the U.S. and certain claimant states in the South China Sea, regularly conducts joint military exercises to demonstrate support for freedom of navigation in the region. Japan also enhances maritime security cooperation with Southeast Asian countries by providing patrol ships, training coast guard personnel, and improving maritime law enforcement and monitoring capabilities (Huang, 2023). Furthermore, the analytical approach includes a discourse analysis of Japan's engagement in multilateral diplomatic

forums, particularly its advocacy for the South China Sea issue, to evaluate its strategic positioning in regional security dynamics. For instance, in international conferences such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), Japan frequently emphasizes the importance of freedom of navigation and rule of law in the South China Sea, urging countries to support a rules-based international order. Meanwhile, Japan has gradually increased its political support for Taiwan regarding the Taiwan Strait issue. In recent years, Japanese political circles have repeatedly made statements in support of Taiwan, emphasizing the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait (Zhang, 2023). Shinzo Abe, during a symposium organized by Taiwan's think tank, the National Policy Research Institute, delivered a keynote speech titled 'The New Era of Japan-Taiwan Relations,' claiming that 'an emergency in Taiwan is an emergency for Japan.' Japan has also strengthened its military deployments in the southwest direction to respond to potential conflicts in the Taiwan Strait. In international forums, Japan actively advocates for a rules-based international order and opposes China's unilateral actions regarding the Taiwan Strait issue.

Japan actively sets the agenda. In his keynote speech at TICAD VI held in Kenya, Shinzo Abe delivered a talk titled 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific,' proposing the concept 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' with the aim to enhance the 'connectivity' between Asia and Africa through a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, thereby promoting stability and prosperity throughout the entire region (Ministry of Defense of Japan, 2016). This strategy emphasizes principles such as the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and free trade. Through this strategy, Japan seeks to establish a rule-based international order in the Indo-Pacific region, thereby binding the United States to jointly maintain this order. The Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy has not only received support from the United States but has also been incorporated into the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy, further strengthening Japan-U.S. cooperation in the region. Additionally, in the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' strategy proposed by Japan in 2016, infrastructure development is highlighted as a key component (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2016). The Japanese government, through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the Japan Overseas Infrastructure Investment Corporation for Transport and Urban Development (JOIN), has formulated a series of policies and plans aimed at enhancing the quality and transparency of infrastructure projects in the Indo-Pacific region while also promoting cooperation with the United States in this field (Whitehouse.gov, 2018). Through a series of diplomatic, economic, and technological means, Japan has successfully raised issues related to infrastructure construction in the Indo-Pacific region, garnering widespread attention and support from the international community. Japan's

intervention has not only elevated its strategic position in regional infrastructure development but also strengthened its influence in international affairs.

Bottlenecks in high-tech development

Japan does indeed hold a certain leading position in the high-tech sector, especially in areas such as semiconductors, robotics, and artificial intelligence. However, in recent years, Japan has faced significant challenges in terms of research and development resources and capabilities. These challenges not only restrain Japan's potential for technological innovation but also put Japan at a disadvantage in global competition.

On the one hand, the insufficient funding for Japan's technological development is not just an issue of limited amount but also relative to its economic size and international competitors. Despite government and corporate investments, Japan's funding for technology appears constrained when compared to the massive investments made by China and the United States, particularly in cutting-edge fields like artificial intelligence and quantum computing. This disparity makes it challenging for Japan to compete effectively in these critical technology areas. Moreover, there is a significant issue of uneven resource allocation, with traditional industries receiving far more resources than emerging technology sectors, leading to inefficient use of resources (Jiang, 2018).

On the other hand, the Pillar II of AUKUS can provide Japan with energy support and promote industrial structure upgrading. Japan, as a resource poor country, heavily relies on energy imports. New energy technologies are crucial for future energy transitions, including solar, wind, and hydrogen energy, among others. By joining AUKUS, Japan can collaborate with the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia in the field of new energy technologies and promote the development and application of these technologies. Japan can cooperate with Australia specifically in hydrogen energy technology, leveraging Australia's abundant renewable energy resources for joint research and promotion of hydrogen energy technology. Through such cooperation, Japan can ensure its energy security and also position itself favorably in the global new energy market.

In addition, semiconductors are the cornerstone of modern technology and industry, often seen as the 'grain of industry.' Japan holds a leading advantage in semiconductor manufacturing equipment and materials, while the United States takes the lead globally in semiconductor design and manufacturing technology. By joining AUKUS, Japan can deepen cooperation with the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia across the semiconductor supply chain to ensure its security and stability. Japan can collaborate with these countries to jointly invest in semiconductor research, production, and establish

multinational semiconductor manufacturing bases. This collaboration aims to ensure the supply security of critical chips and materials. Such efforts not only enhance Japan's competitiveness in the semiconductor industry but also provide crucial support for U.S., UK, and Australian cooperation in the semiconductor field.

Attitudes of major countries towards Japan's accession to AUKUS

America's attitudes

1. The Strategic Intention of the United States

The United States' attitude towards Japan joining AUKUS is generally positive and welcoming. The U.S. believes that Japan, as an important ally and partner in the Asia-Pacific region, joining AUKUS can further enhance the security and stability of the region and counter potential threats from China (Zhu, 2021). Japan's greater participation in the security and defense fields is believed to help maintain peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. The strategic advantages are the following.

First of all, it can enhance the technological and military capabilities of the AUKUS partnership. The United States' intention is to enhance the technological and military capabilities of AUKUS through cooperation with Japan. The formation of AUKUS is rooted in the deteriorating security environment in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly in response to China's rapid military growth and more assertive diplomatic policies, which have heightened security concerns in the region. Japan possesses significant research and development capabilities and technological expertise in areas such as hypersonic weapons, electronic warfare, cyber capabilities, and quantum technology. Through cooperation with Japan in these fields, AUKUS member countries can enhance their competitiveness in advanced technologies. Specifically, Japan's strengths in materials science and precision engineering can contribute to significant advancements in hypersonic weapon development within AUKUS. In the realms of cyber security and artificial intelligence, Japan's technological prowess can meet the needs of AUKUS member countries to enhance network security and develop intelligent military capabilities. Through this technological cooperation, AUKUS can not only enhance the defense capabilities and strategic deterrence of its member countries but also ensure their leading position in global technological competition. This technological enhancement is crucial for addressing future security challenges and maintaining regional stability (Wang, 2024). By further consolidating AUKUS's leadership in key technological fields, it ensures that the alliance can maintain strategic advantage in the evolving global security environment.

Secondly, it can address China's geopolitical and technological challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. Another key intention is to address China's geopolitical and technological challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. Over the past decade, China has rapidly enhanced its influence in the region through military capabilities and technological innovations, directly challenging the security interests of the United States and its allies. By deepening cooperation with Japan, AUKUS member countries aim to jointly develop and apply advanced technologies to effectively deter and address China's geopolitical threats. Specifically, China's military activities in the South China Sea and East China Sea, along with its advancements in cyber warfare and artificial intelligence, have prompted AUKUS member countries to accelerate their technological cooperation and defense capability building in these areas. Japan's technological advantages in hypersonic weapons, cyber capabilities, and quantum technology complement the needs of AUKUS member countries, thereby enhancing the alliance's overall defense capabilities. For example, through collaborative efforts in developing hypersonic missiles and advanced cyber defense systems, AUKUS can more effectively address China's threats in these domains. This cooperation aims not only to bolster technological and military capabilities but also to send a clear strategic signal: that AUKUS member countries will collectively respond to any actions that threaten regional stability.

Lastly, it can promote technological cooperation and innovation to ensure strategic advantage. The United States is also committed to promoting technological cooperation and innovation in areas such as hypersonic, electronic warfare, cyber capabilities, and quantum technology to ensure the strategic advantage of AUKUS member countries in the Indo-Pacific region. Technological cooperation and innovation are central to modern military and security strategies. Through collaboration with Japan, AUKUS member countries can maintain leadership in these cutting-edge technology fields. Japan's accumulated expertise in these areas not only enhances AUKUS's overall technological strength but also promotes technology sharing and innovation within the alliance. For instance, Japan's research in artificial intelligence and cyber security can provide crucial technical support to AUKUS member countries, advancing the alliance's capabilities in military automation and network defense. Furthermore, cooperation with Japan allows AUKUS member countries to expedite the development and deployment of new technologies, thereby securing advantageous positions in critical technology sectors. Deepening technological cooperation will also foster strategic coordination among AUKUS member countries, strengthening internal cohesion and collaboration efficiency within the alliance. This synergistic effect not only enhances the alliance's military and

technological capabilities but also strengthens trust and strategic partnerships among member countries, ensuring rapid and effective responses to shared security challenges.

2. Coordinating AUKUS Engagement with Japan Act

On May 8, 2024, U.S. Senators Romney, along with his colleagues Kaine, Risch, and Hagerty, introduced a bill titled the 'Coordinating AUKUS Engagement with Japan Act.' This legislation aims to promote cooperation between the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia within the framework of the Pillar II of the AUKUS partnership with Japan.

Firstly, the bill defines the AUKUS agreement and specifies coordinating bodies and personnel, including appropriate congressional committees, AUKUS officials, AUKUS partnership, commercial control provisions, state AUKUS coordinators, defense AUKUS coordinators, Pillar II, and the U.S. Military Requirements List.

Secondly, the bill outlines the intent of Congress, emphasizing the necessity of cooperation with Japan within the framework of the AUKUS partnership. This includes strengthening ally relationships, leveraging technological advancements, setting the vision for the AUKUS partnership, and highlighting Japan's contributions as an ally.

Thirdly, the bill specifies the requirements for the U.S. Department of State and Department of Defense to engage with the Japanese government. Within 90 days of the bill's enactment, the State AUKUS Coordinator and the Defense AUKUS Coordinator are to directly engage with relevant stakeholders in the Japanese government. This engagement includes understanding Japan's export control system; identifying areas of potential cooperation and overlapping interests with Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States within the AUKUS partnership and other projects; adjusting necessary export control measures; evaluating and identifying areas where the Japanese government needs to adjust export controls to prevent violations and ensure its successful participation as a Pillar II partner in the AUKUS partnership; and assessing the control of sensitive technologies, particularly Japan's implementation and enforcement of export controls on sensitive technologies, including semiconductor manufacturing equipment.

Finally, the bill requires the U.S. Secretary of State, with assistance from the U.S. Secretary of Defense, to submit a report to the appropriate congressional committees within 180 days of the bill's enactment. This report should assess Japan's potential for cooperation under the Pillar II of AUKUS.

Strategic interaction with the United Kingdom

1. 'Global Britain' Interacts with the Indo-Pacific Strategy

'Global Britain' is a strategic concept introduced by the UK government post-Brexit, aiming to redefine the UK's role and position on the global stage. This concept was first proposed by then Prime Minister Theresa May following the 2016 Brexit referendum and has been continually developed and promoted by subsequent governments. Its core objectives are to expand international influence, deepen global trade relations, enhance national security, and promote British values, ensuring that the UK maintains its global leadership post-Brexit. The UK seeks to redefine its global role by pursuing the 'Global Britain' vision. This vision emphasizes that, after Brexit, the UK should maintain its global influence by strengthening connections with other regions of the world, particularly through economic and security cooperation with the Indo-Pacific region.

China's rapid rise in the Indo-Pacific region poses significant challenges to regional strategic balance and the international order. By increasing its military presence in the South China Sea, East China Sea, and Taiwan Strait, China seeks to expand its regional influence. This military expansion and technological advancement not only threaten the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific region but also pose a potential threat to the rules-based international order (Wilkins, 2023). Therefore, addressing China's strategic challenges has become a crucial component of the UK's Indo-Pacific strategy. Military deployments in the region, including carrier strike group patrols and joint military exercises, demonstrate the UK's military presence and commitment in the area.

2. UK-Japan cooperation under the Indo-Pacific strategy

The motivations for strengthening security cooperation between Japan and the UK include the need to respond to US strategic adjustments, respective proactive strategic objectives, enhancing their strategic positions in the Indo-Pacific region, and shaping the order in the Indo-Pacific through collaboration (Meng, 2020). Through its 'Global Britain' strategy, the UK aims to establish new alliances in the Indo-Pacific, while Japan seeks to enhance its influence in the region through cooperation with the UK. Japan and the UK have frequent interactions in security cooperation, including high-level security dialogues, security consultations, defense cooperation between their armed forces, and exchanges in defense matters. On January 11, 2023, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson signed the Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) in London. This agreement allows Japan and the UK to deploy forces on each other's territory, marking the most significant defense pact between Japan and the UK since the

Anglo-Japanese Alliance against Russia in 1902 (UK Government, 2023). Through this reciprocal access agreement, both parties have established a broader legal framework for cooperation. The UK became the first European country to reach such an agreement with Japan.

Japan hopes that Britain will play a greater role in the Indo-Pacific region, especially in providing more support in key technology sharing, strategic coordination, and agenda setting. Enhancing national security and defense capabilities is a key driver for cooperation between the two countries, as both face challenges such as cyber-attacks, technology theft, and regional military threats. By sharing advanced technologies and knowledge, both sides can enhance their defense technological capabilities and better address common security threats. In May 2023, on the eve of the G7 summit, UK Prime Minister Sounak and Japanese Prime Minister Kishida signed the ‘Hiroshima Agreement,’ which emphasizes strengthening cooperation between the UK and Japan in defense and other fields. Additionally, the UK and Japan will enhance cooperation in various areas, including economy, trade, and investment, technology, and climate change mitigation.

The complex attitudes of Australia

1. Cautious attitudes

Australia has not yet fully embraced the shift in global strategic thinking symbolized by its commitment to AUKUS and still retains a traditional strategic mindset of regional division. This model limits its openness to the expansion of AUKUS membership, and its role and position in the global strategic arrangement have been profoundly influenced by its history and geopolitical environment. Australia’s strategic thinking is more based on its role as a regional power, with strategic planning focusing more on exerting influence in the Asia-Pacific region rather than expanding globally (White, 2011). This role positioning limits its openness to the expansion of AUKUS membership, as introducing new members would require coordination and planning in a broader geopolitical context. Traditional regional division: Australia’s strategic thinking has long been influenced by regional divisions, especially regarding the South China Sea and East China Sea areas. In traditional thinking, Australia focuses more on its neighboring regions rather than the more distant Northeast Asia (He and Hundt, 2024).

Geographical proximity significantly influences Australia’s strategic decisions. As a country far from Europe and America, Australia pays more attention to the dynamics and cooperation opportunities of its Asia-Pacific neighbors. For example, Southeast Asian countries are relatively close to Australia, making Australia more willing to engage in deep economic and security cooperation with these countries. Although Japan is an

important economic partner, its relative geographical distance affects its priority position in Australia's strategic planning.

Japan has not yet reached the trust threshold for intelligence sharing, especially with significant risks in confidentiality protection. Unlike potential members such as New Zealand, Japan has not met the strict standards for intelligence sharing and confidentiality mechanisms. This means that in highly sensitive technological fields, information could be at risk of leakage (Meng, 2022). The core of the AUKUS alliance lies in the sharing of highly sensitive technology and intelligence, with trust and confidentiality capabilities among member countries being a crucial foundation for maintaining this alliance. Japan has long hoped to join the Five Eyes alliance's intelligence sharing mechanism, which is one of the world's most tightly integrated intelligence sharing systems characterized by high trust among member countries and mature confidentiality mechanisms. However, Japan's intelligence system lags behind the institutional development of Five Eyes member countries. Domestic pacifist norms and historical memories constrain Japan's government's intelligence system development (Wang, 2021). The lack of systematic organization in intelligence agencies leads Japan to frequently face cyber security attacks; thus, Japan's efforts to join the Five Eyes alliance have stalled. In this context, sharing highly sensitive AUKUS technology and intelligence with Japan could pose potential risks of leaks.

In Australia, political forces and interest groups hold differing opinions regarding the expansion of AUKUS. On one hand, some political forces and military experts support expanding AUKUS membership, believing that it would enhance the alliance's overall strength and influence. On the other hand, other political forces and interest groups are concerned that inviting new members could increase Australia's security burden and complexity. Some political parties and think tanks may argue that Japan's accession could further delay the AUKUS process, potentially requiring Australia to shoulder additional military obligations and responsibilities. This situation could potentially have negative implications for Australia's national security and economic interests (White, 2024). Public opinion significantly influences government decision-making. In Australia, there is division among the populace regarding AUKUS. Some support strengthening defense cooperation with allied nations, while others fear such cooperation could draw the country into more international conflicts and confrontations. Furthermore, public perceptions of Japan's historical issues and bilateral relations also affect their stance on Japan joining AUKUS. These divergent public opinions necessitate cautious government decision-making to avoid triggering domestic discontent and opposition.

2. Japan-Australia security cooperation

In January 2022, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison signed the Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA), aimed at facilitating bilateral defense and security cooperation between the two countries. According to the agreement, Japan and Australia simplified the entry and customs procedures required for each other's military personnel, equipment, and activities, relying on each other's military facilities to enter their respective territories. Recently, the defense technology departments of Japan and Australia signed a technical cooperation agreement aiming at enhancing their capabilities in underwater robots and autonomous systems development. This marks the first specific project following the bilateral agreement signed in June 2023 for military research, development, testing, and evaluation. It also signified another significant step in strengthening the 'quasi-alliance' military cooperation relationship between Japan and Australia.

Technology Security Cooperation Based on the Quad Alliance. The Biden administration launched the 'Critical and Emerging Technologies Working Group' under the framework of the Quad Alliance, emphasizing mutual cooperation on topics such as artificial intelligence and next-generation communication technologies. In response to the US request, the Australian government designed the 'Quad Tech Network' (QTN), aiming at promoting consensus through Track 1 and Track 2 cooperation, joint research, and dialogue on critical technology and cyber issues. This initiative strengthens influence with the United States, Japan, and India in the Indo-Pacific region. Meanwhile, efforts are also underway to strengthen the implementation and institutionalization of the 'Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence' (GPAI). In January 2023, leaders of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) convened in New Delhi to advance cybersecurity-related agendas. During this meeting, the Quad outlined future directions and visions for cyber security policy. First, they emphasized enhancing cyber security cooperation from a technological standpoint, specifically leveraging machine learning and other advanced technologies to bolster cyber security. Second, they proposed to establish crisis management mechanisms and institutions to enhance information sharing among the four countries. A direct initiative included setting up Computer Emergency Response Teams (CERTs) and creating secure channels for sharing threat information with private enterprises. Finally, they underscored the broad impact of cyber security on supply chain security and the digital economy, aiming to safeguard information and communication technologies in critical sectors.

China's attitude toward Japan's accession

Incorporating an examination of China's response to AUKUS, particularly concerning the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Pillar I, is crucial for understanding the broader implications of this trilateral security partnership. China's reaction has been multifaceted, reflecting its strategic interests and concerns about regional stability and nuclear proliferation.

China has expressed strong opposition to the AUKUS agreement, asserting that it undermines the objectives of the NPT and poses significant risks of nuclear proliferation. The AUKUS pact, which facilitates Australia's acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines, has been criticized by Chinese officials as a move that could trigger an arms race in the Asia-Pacific region. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has articulated that the Pacific should not become a battleground for major power competition, emphasizing that the introduction of nuclear submarine capabilities in the region contradicts the principles of nuclear non-proliferation and regional peace.

The Pillar I of AUKUS, which involves the transfer of nuclear submarine technology from the U.S. and the United Kingdom to Australia, has raised particular alarm in Beijing. China argues that this arrangement could lead to the proliferation of nuclear weapons technology, as it allows a non-nuclear weapon state to access advanced nuclear capabilities. This concern is compounded by the fact that Australia is a signatory to the NPT, which obligates it to refrain from developing nuclear weapons. In this context, China has called for strict adherence to the NPT and has urged AUKUS members to ensure that any nuclear technology transferred is used solely for peaceful purposes.

Moreover, China's apprehensions are not solely focused on the direct implications of AUKUS but also on the broader geopolitical landscape it creates. The AUKUS alliance is perceived as a strategic counterbalance to China's growing military influence in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the South China Sea. As China continues to expand its military capabilities, it views AUKUS as an attempt by the U.S. and its allies to encircle and contain its influence. This has led to a heightened sense of insecurity in Beijing, prompting calls for increased military readiness and strategic partnerships with other nations in the region.

In response to AUKUS, China has sought to strengthen its diplomatic ties with Southeast Asian nations, many of which have expressed concerns about the potential for nuclear proliferation and regional instability. Countries like Indonesia and Malaysia have voiced skepticism about AUKUS, emphasizing the need for transparency and adherence to the NPT. China has positioned itself as a supporter of regional stability, advocating for

multilateral dialogue and cooperation to address security challenges without resorting to military alliances that could exacerbate tensions.

The impact of Japan joining AUKUS

Influence regional security structure

Under the AUKUS framework's the Pillar I, cooperation mainly focuses on the research, development, and sharing of advanced military technologies, including nuclear submarine technology, artificial intelligence, and cyber security. Japan's technological advantages in areas such as anti-submarine warfare, sonar, and artificial intelligence will bring new momentum to AUKUS, enhancing the alliance's overall defense capabilities (Shi, 2021). For example, Japan's technology can be integrated with the military forces of the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia to create stronger capabilities in maritime operations and anti-submarine warfare. This integration of technologies will significantly enhance AUKUS's military presence and deterrence capabilities in the Asia-Pacific region. Japan's participation will prompt the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia to deploy more military forces in Northeast Asia, particularly in strategic locations such as southwest Japan and Okinawa. These deployments also provide a broader support network for the United States' strategic positioning in the Asia-Pacific region.

Japan, as the 'Northern anchor' for the United States in the Asia-Pacific region, its inclusion in AUKUS will extend the strategic depth of the United States further into the South China Sea and Southeast Asia. This adjustment will make the U.S. strategic layout in the Indo-Pacific region more comprehensive and three-dimensional. The joint efforts of the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and Japan will form a complete strategic line from Northeast Asia to Southeast Asia, effectively countering China's influence in this region. With Japan's participation, the influence of AUKUS will extend beyond the traditional trio of the UK, the U.S., and Australia to encompass the entire Asia-Pacific region. Military cooperation between Japan and Southeast Asian countries like the Philippines and Vietnam may also strengthen as a result. These nations may seek collaboration with AUKUS to enhance their own defense capabilities and strategic positions. This regional linkage will further consolidate the U.S. alliance system in the Asia-Pacific, creating a tighter network of defense cooperation.

Influence on the Southeast countries

Japan's accession to AUKUS will have complex and profound implications for ASEAN countries. Firstly, it will likely deepen divisions within ASEAN regarding their

security strategies, differing levels of demand for the U.S. security protection and cooperation, and varying perceptions of China's security threats (Xing, 2022). These factors directly contribute to divergent psychological responses and reactions among ASEAN member states towards the AUKUS alliance. Indonesia, Malaysia, and Cambodia have clearly opposed Japan's entry into AUKUS, expressing concerns that this move could destabilize the region and trigger an arms race. On the other hand, the Philippines has voiced support, believing it can help balance regional power dynamics and maintain freedom of navigation. Japan's participation may indeed fuel arms competition in Southeast Asia and exacerbate tensions in the South China Sea, prompting countries like Indonesia and Malaysia to increase military spending to counter perceived threats. Moreover, the expansion of AUKUS could challenge ASEAN's central position and potentially marginalize existing security cooperation mechanisms within ASEAN, weakening its influence and leadership in regional affairs (Zhou, 2022). ASEAN countries also face pressure to choose sides between the United States and China, impacting their stance on neutrality and strategic balance. To address these challenges, ASEAN nations may enhance cooperation with China and other major powers, innovate multilateral cooperation mechanisms, and seek to maintain regional peace and stability while balancing the impact of AUKUS.

Reinforcing technology alliance to contain China

In the 'National Cybersecurity Strategy' released on March 2, 2023, the Biden administration emphasized ensuring the openness, freedom, global nature, interoperability, reliability, and security of the internet. It set a goal to build a 'defensible and resilient digital ecosystem.' The strategy prioritizes cooperation with allies and adherence to international rules while expanding cyber deterrence capabilities. Particularly, the cyber security policies targeting China are more explicit and direct. This strategy aims to establish a multi-layered, broad-spectrum, and comprehensive cyber security alliance to collectively constrain China's influence in global cyberspace. Japan's inclusion in the Pillar II of AUKUS consolidates the United States' intertwined multilateral technology alliance system, complementing alliances such as the U.S.-Japan-South Korea, IPEF (Indo-Pacific Economic Framework), U.S.-Japan-Philippines, and the Quad. Through these multilateral mechanisms, the U.S. strengthens cooperation with countries in the Asia-Pacific region to ensure leadership in global cyber governance. This not only enhances the U.S. and its allies' cyber security defenses but also places significant pressure on China's influence in global cyberspace.

Conclusion

Japan's decision to join the AUKUS alliance marks a significant shift in the regional security dynamics of the Indo-Pacific. This move is driven by Japan's strategic objectives to enhance its defense capabilities, deepen its alliance with the United States, and shape the regional order in the face of China's growing assertiveness. The U.S., United Kingdom, and Australia have welcomed Japan's inclusion, recognizing the potential benefits it brings in terms of technological cooperation and regional stability.

The AUKUS alliance, established in 2021, has faced several challenges in its development, particularly in the Pillar I involving Australia's acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines. Funding issues, international pressure, and regional tensions have slowed progress in this area. However, the Pillar II focusing on advanced technology cooperation has gained momentum, providing an opportunity for Japan to contribute its expertise and resources.

Japan's motivations for joining AUKUS are multifaceted. As it strengthens its self-defense capabilities to cope with evolving security threats, Japan seeks to enhance its alliance with the U.S. and expand its deterrence capabilities. By aligning with the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy and actively engaging in regional issues, Japan aims to solidify its strategic position and shape the regional order based on the principles of rule of law and freedom of navigation. Moreover, Japan's participation in AUKUS is driven by the desire to address bottlenecks in its high-tech development, particularly in areas such as semiconductors and new energy technologies.

The attitudes of major countries towards Japan's accession to AUKUS vary. The U.S. welcomes Japan's inclusion, believing it will enhance the technological and military capabilities of the alliance, address China's geopolitical and technological challenges, and promote innovation. Great Britain sees Japan's participation as an opportunity to strengthen its 'Global Britain' strategy and deepen security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. However, Australia has shown a more cautious attitude, citing concerns over strategic considerations, institutional mechanisms, and domestic disagreements.

China has strongly opposed Japan's accession to AUKUS, arguing that it undermines the objectives of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and could trigger an arms race in the region. Beijing perceives AUKUS as a strategic counterbalance to its growing influence and has sought to strengthen its diplomatic ties with Southeast Asian nations who share similar concerns about regional stability.

The impact of Japan joining AUKUS is expected to be significant. It will influence the regional security structure by enhancing the alliance's military presence and deterrence capabilities, particularly in Northeast Asia and the South China Sea. Japan's

participation may also deepen divisions within ASEAN and challenge its central position in regional affairs. Furthermore, the U.S. and its allies will likely use AUKUS to reinforce their technology alliance and collectively constrain China's influence in the global cyberspace. In conclusion, Japan's decision to join AUKUS represents a bold move in its security strategy, reflecting its desire to adapt to the evolving regional dynamics and shape the future of the Indo-Pacific.

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