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AUSTRALIA IN AUKUS: A RAGING BULL IN CHINA'S SHOP?

By
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WHY AUKUS?

AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom, United States) was cobbled together in great hurry to counter China's growing naval clout in the Asia Pacific. This new trilateral, essentially military alliance, is formed as their geopolitical interests have completely converged. AUKUS is conceived in the wake of America's global strategic competition with China stretching in earnest across the entire competitive spectrum in economics, military, technology, etc. AUKUS has found its strong admirers. No less a publication of stature like *The Economist* lauded the immediate strategic impact of AUKUS. Likening it to shifting tectonic plates so profound to geopolitics that its strategic importance is equated alongside those of Suez in 1956, Nixon going to China in 1972, and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. In other words, AUKUS has truly far-reaching implications for the future security balance in Asia. Really? No, it does not. Underlining this outpouring of superlatives is speculation that AUKUS would, with time, morph into the Asian equivalent of NATO eventually drawing in the likes of Canada, New Zealand, and even India and Vietnam. Some have suggested that the overlapping membership of QUAD and AUKUS suggests the possibility of their merger in the future, even though present objectives are distinctly different. The rationale of AUKUS is, however, much more modest and down to earth, nothing quite earth shattering. In truth, it is more about a well thought out plan to allow Australia acquire

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critically sensitive naval nuclear technology without legislative opposition. Congressional approval is mandatory in an America that is acutely sensitive to nuclear proliferation, particularly in the light of on-going nuclear spats with Iran and North Korea. Support in Congress is better assured with an AUKUS drawing together 3 like-minded Anglophone countries packaged with an openly anti-China mission, which would help override residual nuclear proliferation concerns.

AUKUS allows Australia to acquire (at least?) 8 nuclear propelled submarines but not nuclear weapons, locking Australia into a multi-decade long construction programme. In Australia's AUKUS submarines, the critical issue is about the transfer of naval nuclear propulsion technology currently deployed in the most advanced nuclear attack submarines (SSN) operated by both the USN and RN. Nuclear propulsion is a very closely guarded US military secret. Australia, we are reminded, would be only the second country entrusted with possession of this highly sensitive technology. Only once before did the US share this secret and that was with the UK, in 1958, which bore testimony to their Special Relationship in the wake of an increasingly belligerent Soviet Union. The US-UK agreement was, by and large, a quid pro quo whereby the British agreed to limit their nuclear weapons programme in exchange for obtaining US nuclear technology and weaponry. So sensitive is the US to nuclear proliferation that Congressional approval is mandated. Australia's proposed receipt of naval nuclear technology is thus not yet a done deal and would be subject to intense Congressional scrutiny. Especially so as Australia would be the first non-nuclear country to acquire maritime nuclear propulsion. The starting point going through this legislative process, though, is the strength and durability of relationships. The UK and US had weathered through 2 world wars and a series of US induced conflicts since, with unqualified UK support. Undoubtedly, as Anglophones, they are the closest of allies. Australia's claim to now more than "a hundred years of mate-ship" has substance too. Australian forces fought alongside the Americans in Gallipoli, and throughout the 2nd World War, in Korea, Vietnam, in Iraq, Afghanistan, and diplomatic support for the US in just about every vote in the UN. Indeed, America acknowledges Australia as its closest ally in Asia. Together with the UK, as traditional Anglophone allies, they have shared defence related commitments in the 5 Eyes, NATO, ANZUS, FPDA. The leaders of all 3 countries acknowledge that AUKUS is a further investment in yet another Anglophone alliance which provides them their biggest source of strength. Beyond submarines, AUKUS also provides for co-operation in other defence related areas including cyber, AI, quantum and undersea technologies. USAF B2 strategic bombers and USN SSN are permitted to use Australian bases in times of crisis. But current defence arrangements, ie, ANZUS, can open possibilities for these as well. AUKUS thus is designed like a water tight Anglophone capsule to clear the legislative hurdle for the transfer of nuclear propulsion technology to Australia. And ring fence this transfer to the exclusion of others, such as India and Brazil. Approval for Australia would be sought from Congress as another one-off, after Britain's one-off more than 60 years earlier.

DEFIANT AUSTRALIA CONFRONTS A RISING CHINA

Australia does not face the dilemma of choice - to either choose the US to safeguard its national security or settle with China so as to continue having more than the 30 years of economic prosperity. An enforced choice like this is blatantly false smacking more of leverage to keep an enduring US presence in the Asia Pacific rather than one genuinely rooted in a Sino-US dilemma. In Australia's case, that choice was perhaps influenced early - as early as the Immigration Restriction Act, 1901, a critical piece of legislation borne of prejudices against Chinese following the spate of gold rushes to Australia in the late 19th century. That, in turn, gave rise to the White Australia Policy and the consequential deep-rooted fear of the yellow peril spiralling down from the high north. This is the sort of unfounded fear involving a massive East Asian invasion (once Japan, now China) which stays deeply entrenched in the Australian national psyche. Such is understandable, when it is an outcome conditioned in a European-centric country perched uncomfortably on the periphery of Asia. This level of perceived national security vulnerability is assuaged by way of treaties and alliances involving like-minded Anglo powers. Britain was the initial protector of choice throughout the first half of the 20th century, but upon the collapse of the British Empire in Asia in the aftermath of WW2, Australia sought refuge elsewhere. With Britain gone, the US became the natural successor. The ANZUS Treaty (alongside New Zealand) was accordingly set up in 1951, which forms the bedrock of the Australia-US security relationship. The Australia of today is filled with dread of yet another abandonment in the absence of a worthy successor to America. There is no other country that fits Australia's geopolitical bill - rich, powerful, willing and white. As such, the recourse open for Australia is the one of enticing the US stay committed in the Asia Pacific for as long as is possible, seemingly at any cost. Now that America has declared China a strategic competitor, grovelling Australia has signed up to this upbeat US cause in earnest. It has chosen to enter the fray with obligatory attacks on China like the covid pandemic, Uyghurs, Hong Kong, Huawei, etc. The cost of antagonizing China is steep. China is Australia's largest trading partner, and one that has conferred the latter more than 30 years of continued economic prosperity. Good times are starting to be imperilled, but Australia appears determined to withstand the economic onslaught come what may. Rather than wind down hostility, Australia is winding it up instead to levels expected to align with America's increasingly hostile positions taken to contain China. Stepping up its US service accordingly, Australia is preparing for a kinetic conflict in the First Island Chain in what is China's maritime backyard just as the Pacific islands are Australia's. Supporting this endeavour, Australia purchased 72 F-35 for its air force, but when determined that the aircraft lacked the requisite range to hit Chinese forces, long range missiles from the US were acquired to make up for the range deficit. This is Australia's determined forward defence posture, one very closely aligned to US interests.

Before turning to AUKUS and submarines, it is imperative to address 2 sets of red herring issues long perpetrated by Australia:

(i) The fear of invasion is constantly harped upon both in government and by the media, an outrageous lie no doubt. What use would the Continent be to a foreign power? What could they possibly plunder: iron ore, coal, wine? Which foreign leader in his/her right mind would attempt to invade a far-away continent which nature has endowed the world's best natural ocean defences. If that alone is not sufficient deterrent, then the small population of 24 million scattered largely across 5 urban conurbations with each separated by vast distances and massive deserts would present one horrendous obstacle for any expeditionary force to overcome. It is suicidal, the mark of someone mad acting beyond insanity. China has better ways to commit resources, BRI being one. Why would China even contemplate action? The impending invasion of Taiwan is enough trouble for China. And Taiwan is no more than 200 km from the China mainland and 218 times smaller than Australia! Above all else, the recovery of Taiwan is sacrosanct to China. Nothing remotely so to justify China mounting an Australian invasion.

(ii) Australia says it strongly believes in, and enthusiastically supports, the rules based international order. Though merited, in the context of the Asia Pacific it is simply a means to prop up American primacy in the light of its weakening position in the region as power shifts unmistakably towards China. Australia does its utmost to shore up the weakened US position especially in the South China Sea. So, Australia, strongly advocates, under the false pretexts of safeguarding the "rules-based order" and of freedom of navigation, moves the odd naval vessel through that body of water to test and to irritate China. In truth, most of Australia's non-China trade does not need to get through the South China Sea. Australia too has labelled China's territorial claims there illegal. Why then? In America, Australia finds a useful friend to help define its place in the world. As an Anglo power, Australia wants and is used to punching its weight well above its global standing as a middling power. Maritime SE Asia is where it now envisages for itself a substantial role in the diplomatic and military spheres. SE Asia happens also to be a coveted region for the US and it is here that their strategic interests meet and it is where Deputy Oz puts in his fair share of duty to the Sheriff. One cannot but sense the odour of Australia's hypocrisy.

Australia's mood against China remains defiant and uncompromising. Canberra does not only see the China-US competition in the Pacific Asia only in terms of primacy, but also as an ideological showdown between liberal democracy and authoritarianism. The proposed acquisition of 8 nuclear powered submarines under the umbrella of AUKUS is just reward for Australia's unswerving devotion to America.

WHAT'S IN IT FOR AUKUS MEMBER STATES

The nuclear attack submarine (SSN) club has long been limited to just 6 members, viz, US, UK, Russia, China, India, and France. Australia is the likely seventh. SSNs are much sought after as they submerge longer, carries more missiles/torpedoes, travels much faster and are harder to detect than conventionally powered electrical/diesel submarines (SSK).

One. AUSTRALIA Australia's 6 Collins-class SSK is way due for replacement. Successive Australian governments are fickle regarding its replacement. Tony Abbot saw in the Japanese Soryu-class SSK an adequate replacement to the Collins only for the Turnbull government to pull the rug. In a sense, the Soryu-class purchase would have laid the foundation of strengthened Australia-Japan security ties which, perhaps, was what drove Abbot towards the Japanese SSK in the first place. Turnbull's administration dismissed the Soryu-class on account of its lack of operational range and that the sub was deemed to contain insufficient room to accommodate the better build Australians. Turnbull then turned inexplicably towards the French Shortfin Barracuda instead, an arduous and expensive process to have a nuclear propelled submarine (SSN) convert into a conventional one (SSK). Like the Soryu its longer range was a plus point for the French SSK, though it is just as likely that Turnbull was influenced by the prospect of closer military ties with France whose military presence in Polynesia would have helped Australia check China's rise in the Western Pacific. And with another change of government there was to be yet another submarine choice. Morrison's decision caused shock. His government favoured a nuclear-powered one for its endurance and range and stealth, although this simple decision could have been made at least 6 years earlier. The French were livid at Australia's ungentlemanly conduct tearing up a contract, albeit a very troubled one (cost over-run, delays, design changes), without prior knowledge. That it was done in stealth, and in connivance with France's traditional allies, made a bad decision much worse. The end result caused grievous hurt. But something else compelled Morrison's team to go for the jugular. It seems likely that the Chinese were to be squarely blamed. They took upon themselves to repeatedly kick the macho and tough talking Australians in the teeth. To be on the receiving end from a people they had once shoved around with impunity is seemingly unbearable for the Australians! The anti-China hawks are elated, others are wary. Debates are ignited within over whether AUKUS is the right strategic decision for Australia. Whether it is now too closely aligned to the US rather than spend capital investing in greater self-reliance and building stronger relationships with its neighbours. Or whether it is better opting for more conventional submarines (SSK) rather than the 8 AUKUS SSN.

Two. UNITED STATES AUKUS has confirmed that the standoff with China is indisputably the number one foreign policy priority for Joe Biden's administration. As was repeatedly stressed, the US is sharing its nuclear submarine technology for only the second time, with Australia 50 years after Britain. Australia would become the seventh country to operate SSN. In return, there are US expectations that Australia would now be obligated to buy American SSN which would provide a financial windfall for US naval export sales. More importantly, Australia would be tied closely to US Indo-Pacific military strategies. Nowhere is this quid pro quo more pronounced than in an impending Taiwan conflict which Australia is incumbent to militarily support. Under ANZUS, however, Australia's support remained ambiguous. Taiwan has far-reaching consequences for US influence and alliances, indeed an existential threat to US hegemony over the entire Asia-Pacific. The US is increasingly resigned to the fact that it would be decisively beaten by China

in a war within the First Island Chain. In 18 of the last 18 Pentagon war games involving China in the Taiwan Straits, the US lost every single one of the 18. China enjoys overwhelming theatre level military superiority in its own backyard. It is getting increasingly difficult for the US to single-handedly take on China in the naval arena in the First Island Chain, so it has no other choice but to lean on its most trusted (Anglo) partners. Hoping to overturn their near-peer status against the Chinese, the Pentagon has embarked on rethinking new strategies to counter China. The most compelling of which is to keep its much-vaunted aircraft carrier battle groups out of harm's way, steering these out of effective range of Chinese ballistic and cruise missiles. The entire surface fleet is similarly threatened. The air force's F22 and F35 are short on range and rely too heavily on multiple air-to-air refuelling. The Chinese are getting their sights firmly on destroying the lumbering air refuelling planes. So, the air force too suffers a technical knockout. Which leaves the undersea elements of the USN and the USAF strategic bombers (B2/B21) the only serious assets operable against the Chinese. But the strategic bombers would need to operate from continental US, it is a given that US forward bases like in Guam and Diego Garcia would be disabled. Here is where the usefulness of Australia's 8 nuclear powered submarines come in.

Three. UNITED KINGDOM What's in it for the UK in AUSUK? A delusional global Britain, post Brexit, has proclaimed itself once again as a military power with a global reach. AUKUS plays fittingly well into Global Britain's charade, giving it a sense of global importance to engage in the region's security dynamics. It is difficult, though, to envisage a pompous UK that would contribute to its share of firepower when the shooting starts. Boris Johnson's clowning glory was set when the HMS Queen Elizabeth and her escorts, the QE carrier strike group (CSG), made her audacious maiden voyage "East of Suez" showing off Britain's renewed determination to wield its maritime power and influence. CSG supposedly gives expression to Britain's tilt to Asia. But it is most difficult to add meat to this bare bone narrative. To critics, Global Britain's tilt to the Asia Pacific and sending a CSG is mostly "theatrical exercise", "imperial grandeur", etc, and the purpose seems nothing more than to solicit media headlines. Embarrassingly, Global Britain could hardly scrape together a full CSG, and had to rely on the US for an added destroyer and a frigate from the Netherlands. So poor are the Royal Navy destroyers for warm water operations that HMS Defender predictably broke down in the Mediterranean and was towed to an Italian port for repairs. This was the same ship that was harassed by the Russians in the Black Sea, a mission to show off Global Britain's naval prowess in Russia's backyard that spectacularly backfired. On board QE were more USN F-35B than those from the RAF. A series of deep budget cuts have kept the Royal Navy so short of ships that it is hardly able to keep pace with the present level of Euro-Atlantic commitments. The service struggles with its current fleet of 19 major surface vessels (destroyers and frigates), mostly all aging, and half of which is tied dockside undergoing maintenance or repair. The balance of about 10 are already assigned to the defence of the British Isles, the North Atlantic, the Arctic, Falklands, and the Persian Gulf. There is no more to spare for Asia-Pacific service, now or in the future. The boast of keeping

one of two aircraft carriers in the Asia Pacific will not come to pass, but Global Britain has indeed kept its word by sending 2 River-class patrol vessels on long term assignments. Patrol vessels of this class are more appropriate for constabulary duties, like keeping French fishing boats off British waters. In the Far East, Chinese Coast Guard ships would be their perfect match! Global Britain would be nothing more than a bit player in AUKUS. The UK is on course to win some defence-industrial contracts on future submarine work that may generate hundreds of much needed jobs, which is about it. Britain, a European power, ought to stay European. Russia, not China, is its real strategic adversary and that must command Britain's undivided attention. Global Britain, however, remains in thrall of America and is prepared to serve the US' interests anywhere on earth in pursuit of much closer trans-Atlantic ties whilst keeping a keen eye on that coveted trade deal.

CHOICE OF SSN AND NUCLEAR FUEL

The alliance partners have given themselves 18 months to come out with a plan. The first decision must be with regard to submarine choice, along with workforce, shipyard and training needs. That would limit the choice to 2 designs; either the Virginia-class (American) of 7,400 tonnes with a crew of 130 plus or the Astute-class (British) weighing in at 7,400 tonnes with a crew of 98. Both continue to be in production and either is fit for Australia's purpose. Astute is cheaper and requires less crew, an advantage given Australia's current difficulties in manning the Collins. The option to go for a completely new design is probably out of question for reasons of costs and timely delivery. Politically, Australia would insist that all 8 submarines be constructed in Adelaide, though it is still possible for the first, perhaps second, to be constructed abroad. The Virginia-class is likely the favoured choice as the US is the lead alliance partner and the nuclear reactors are of American design and boats and weapon systems on board would ensure inter-operability with the USN. The proposed Australian SSN delivery dates are measured in decades, 2040s? And the yet to be determined costs are already speculated to be in excess of A\$100 billion. In the meantime, the Collins-class SSK would need massive upgrades to keep them operational at least until the first of their new replacements arrive. Sweden's SAAB would likely be involved in inserting new technologies into the Swedish designed Collins. As a stop-gap measure, however, Australia might consider leasing SSN from US (Los Angeles-class) or UK (Trafalgar-class) to help plug critical gaps.

Beyond submarine choice, other key questions surrounding the deal swirls around nuclear power. Morrison has publicly affirmed that Australia would neither acquire nuclear weapons nor establish a civil nuclear industry. Which, indeed, provides clarity that Australian SSN would be equipped with an existing nuclear reactor, likely similar to the ones installed in the Virginia-class. And the nuclear fuel required would likely also be American after Australia has ruled out producing its own fissile material. Australia is inclined towards the high enriched (weapons grade) uranium which affords

the boats fuel for its entire life-time, ie, over the boat's 30-35 years of operational life. Morrison has publicly said as much - no domestic production of fissile material but opting instead for the US/UK life-time fuel used in both the Astute and Virginia classes. The US would probably accede to this request and is prepared to accept the small risk of proliferation of nuclear weapons if ever the Australians decide to arm themselves accordingly. The Americans, though, would pointedly prohibit nuclear proliferation and Congress would be expected to raise the level of its scrutiny regarding this issue. Alternatively, but most unlikely, the Australian boats could be fuelled by low enriched uranium but this would require fuel top-up in just a matter of 15 years, and here Australia would have to build the nuclear infrastructure to support the AUKUS boats which they strongly oppose. Presently, only the Chinese and French SSN operate with low enriched uranium. The Australians would not want to source from the French for fear of being held hostage mid-stream due to supply hesitancy. One other major concern is with the safe storage of the resultant nuclear wastes. Given that Australia would likely obtain fuel from another country, the wastes could be repatriated to source or secured in a proposed facility in South Australia. The less obvious concerns, pointedly the most-sticky as it relates to costs and delivery schedules, are the modifications the Australians would want made on their chosen design to suit operational requirements. If Australia decides to tinker with design, that would add on to delivery time. 18 months (likely extended) for the AUKUS partners to sort out all these issues!

REACTIONS FROM CHINA AND OTHER NEIGHBOURS IN ASIA

One. CHINA Chinese reaction is surprisingly mild. Sure, it has lashed out at the US for its "cold war mentality" and strongly argued that it would spark an arms race in the Asia-Pacific region, and ominously warning AUKUS against attempting to contain China's rise. All typical wolf-warrior talk, but the response appears to lack serious bite. China recognizes in AUKUS the troubling future presence of SSN but it is a development which would neither alter the military balance against Beijing nor the strategic balance in Asia. With the submarine delivery dates measured in decades (delivery scheduled in the 2040s and 2050s) and costs which might break the bank, Beijing takes comfort that they would arrive in a drastically geo-politically altered Asia Pacific. Taiwan would cease to be an issue having been re-unified with China in the late 2020s. The US sits out the Taiwan conflict and its prestige and presence takes a severe beating. America's primacy in the region consequently unravels and the US security agreements with Japan and South Korea are abrogated. The US is pressured at home, packs its bags and returns stateside. In which event, AUKUS would be a non-entity. By 2049, China plans to develop into a leading world military power. It's military advancements over the last 10 years is nothing short of staggering, and this trajectory is due to continue unabated. The anti-submarine warfare (ASW) technologies would by then be considerably advanced - seabed mounted sensors, unmanned underwater vehicles, shipboard ASW helicopters, and land based fixed wing ASW aircraft - all would lead China towards world class ASW capabilities which would hold (AUKUS) submarines at huge risks. Within the immediate future, however,

China is expected to pile more economic misery on Australia with the aim of crippling its economy. Iron ore exports, inbound tourism, and students at higher education institutions, are all fair targets. By shaving off tens of billions from the usual Australian annual surpluses, China could conceivably kill off the submarine project or, at the very least, ensure that the “at least 8 submarines” would turn out to be a lot less in number.

Two ASEAN. Like China, AUKUS has not generated a lot of anxiety to individual ASEAN countries and the reactions are mixed. The Philippines, a US treaty ally, has thrown its open support behind the project but that might have more to do with the impending Presidential elections there. Singapore, the closeted US ally, has quietly given its support. Indonesia and Malaysia, however, have expressed apprehensions because of long term risks to regional stability involving arms races and power projection. Reactions from other ASEAN members are muted. Around mid-century, a growing Indonesia sitting near to Australia’s doorsteps would understandably seek to strengthen its national defences and match Australia’s. Indonesia is expected to grow into the world’s fifth largest economy by 2050. With economic success, Indonesia’s maritime policy would lead to the construction of a powerful naval force that would take care of its maritime interests across the archipelago which might bring it into contention with Australia. Ironically, Indonesia might be the country most threatened by the AUKUS boats.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

AUKUS has made Australia honest in its relationship with China. Australia is now openly hostile and the veil of pretence of having to choose between the US and China is finally lifted. The anti-China hawks are jubilant, wallowing at the prospect of hitting China hard, now that the AUKUS submarines are to be provided tomahawk and other cruise missiles and torpedoes to hurl at China and Chinese naval assets in future years. There is considerable pride that the Australian submarines could in future aid the US help find and sink PLA Navy submarines near their home bases and surface ships, or attack Chinese missile and radar systems on Chinese territory, some many hundreds of miles inland. Australia, in this moment of euphoria, have not yet given weight to the inevitability of Chinese retribution and the extent of destruction that would follow Chinese retaliation. Either of the said missions carry alarming prospects of escalation, none more dangerous than an attack on military installations on Chinese soil. In fact, attacking Chinese A2/AD systems in China was intrinsic to the obscure US concept of Air-Sea Battle (since quietly abandoned) for fear of triggering a Chinese nuclear response. An Australia “all the way with the USA” would bear the full brunt of China’s wrath, perhaps more so than the US, and taught a lesson it would never again forget. Middle powers should not punch above their weight when it comes to confrontation with a great power. Militarily, in the early stages of an attack on continental Australia, the Chinese would aim to destroy high value targets, none more so than the 2 Australian-US spy stations in NT and WA, followed by another attack on HMAS Sydney and HMAS Stirling in WA, the latter

is where the RAN and USN SSN would be based. RAAF Tindal, NT, where USAF strategic bombers are to be hosted is yet another choice target. China's large missile inventory allows it to expand the list of targets where necessary. Australia, however, would sign its own death warrant if insanity takes hold and it stupidly attacks the Yulin Naval Base on Hainan Island upon US directive. Yulin is where China bases all its nuclear ballistic missile submarines (SSBN) as are most of its nuclear attack submarines (SSN). The concentration of all China's SSBN in one location makes an enemy attack tempting but China's SSBN forms one of (by then) three parts of China's nuclear delivery systems - the other 2 are nuclear ballistic missiles delivered by air and land-based systems. No nuclear armed country would ever tolerate an attack on its nuclear weapons facilities without delivering a swift nuclear retaliation, China would be no different. In the madness that ensues, Australia would be nuked and parts of the continent laid bare. It seems inconceivable that Australia is prepared to take such enormous, including existential, risks to please the US by acting as its obedient US dog of war. Australia has everything to lose by misjudging China's strategic intentions and military strength. China would develop into the world's leading military power by 2050, round about the time the RAN submarines are expected to see service. Australia's present fears of an attack by an aggressive China has in AUKUS the basis of self-fulfilment.

Australia has made a key strategic decision. It is firmly locked in the geopolitical contest with China putting itself in the forefront with the US in resisting and confronting the Asian super-power. Australia, sadly, has not got over its security demon of a war mongering China. As a country on Asia's periphery, it has not learnt to be more Asian and accept the fact that it has to live with China forever. China cannot be simply wished away. Placing strategic bets on the US is a huge gamble, the US being a transient power in Asia would be gone in time. As AUKUS shows, Australia has found it profoundly difficult to put aside its misgivings of race. Running roughshod over China is definitely not in Australia's best interests putting in jeopardy its economic future and national security. On the contrary, as AUKUS demonstrates, Australia is now wholly ingratiated with the west and is fully committed to an Anglo-American future. Putting all eggs and trust in one single strategic relationship, however, is fraught with dangers especially as American hegemony in the Asia Pacific is under increasing stress with an end point in sight. Australia would be left in a lurch of its own doing in the inevitable event of a US regional withdrawal. Tensions between Beijing and Washington simmers close to boiling point, an invasion of Taiwan is imminent and the reunification of China is probable before the end of this decade. America's inevitable departure would be consequently hastened. AUKUS would be redundant without the submarines or American primacy in the Asia-Pacific.

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