THE AUKUS PACT AS THE MAIN ELEMENT OF THE AMERICAN-LED ORDER IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

SUMMARY

The aim of the article is to determine the meaning of the AUKUS pact. The long-term effect of the conclusion of the AUKUS, having its geopolitical dimension, will be a change in the balance of power on a global scale. In the Indo-Pacific, the main axis of the competition concerns two opposing international orders: Chinese-led and American-led. The main research problem is included in the question what is the function and importance of the AUKUS pact for maintaining the American-led order in the Indo-Pacific region? The hypothesis assumes that the AUKUS is to be of key importance in maintaining the American-led order in the region. In cooperation with allies, the US has a chance to maintain primacy in the region, due to the possibility of joint development of cutting-edge military technologies offered by AUKUS pact.

KEYWORDS: AUKUS, Indo-Pacific, multi-order world, USA, China, Australia.

INTRODUCTION

We have been witnessing in the 21st century a gradual collapse of the rules-based global order and the crisis of the liberal international order. In this regard, many concepts have emerged regarding the future of the global international system. The concept of multi-order world by Trine Flockhart deserves special attention. The two basic assumptions of this concept are:

- Relations between various international orders, and not between sovereign states, are of fundamental importance in the contemporary world.
- International order is a group of states gathered around the leading state on a voluntary basis or under the influence of force.

According to T. Flockhart and Elena Korosteleva the multi-order world has been partly formed. It applies to the US-led "liberal international order", the Chinese-led "Belt and Road order" and the Russian-led "Eurasian order". In the future, other international orders may develop, including African, Latin American, and Islamic.

The ideal type of the international community created by Flockhart is defined by the following components:

- "The identity component" - derived from self-understanding, core values, vision, norms and social practice.
- "The primary institution component" - comprising durable and recognized patterns and practices followed by a group of countries.
- "The secondary institution component" – constituting a formal institutional architecture.
- "The power component" - covering hard power and soft power, mainly of the leading country.

The authors adopted Flockhart's multi-order world concept as the basis for the analysis of the US-led order in the Indo-Pacific region. The aim of the paper is to solve the main research problems related to the AUKUS pact.

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3 T. Flockhart, op. cit., pp. 15-16.
problem:
- What is the function and importance of the AUKUS pact for maintaining the American-led order in the Indo-Pacific region?

This leads to further research questions:
- What results from the current shape of the pact and what determines its effectiveness?
- Why is AUKUS so important in terms of power projection in the Indo-Pacific?
- What are AUKUS' prospects for the future?

The main hypothesis of the article is the assumption that:
- The AUKUS pact is a consequence of the US foreign policy to contain China's growing expansionism in the Indo-Pacific. Its creation is to be of key importance in maintaining the American-led order in the region.

The following hypotheses are the initial answer to the detailed research questions:
- The AUKUS pact was created on the basis of identity factors and positive experiences of cooperation in the area of defense that will determine its effectiveness.
- The direct goal of the AUKUS pact is the construction of Australian nuclear-powered submarines and technological cooperation between countries in the field of various types of modern armaments. This might determine the future advantage of the US-led bloc's navies in the Indo-Pacific over the Chinese navy.
- Despite the barriers related to nuclear technologies, the extension of the AUKUS to countries with similar demo-liberal institutions and cultural and ethnic identity: Canada and New Zealand is possible. It is also possible to join for states with similar demo-liberal institutions but different cultural and ethnic identity: Japan and South Korea.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ESTABLISHING THE AUKUS PACT

According to "the Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States" of 2022, in order to strengthen its position in the Indo-Pacific, the United States primarily intends to: "modernize our long-standing alliances, strengthen emerging partnerships, and invest in regional organizations. Among the multilateral alliances, partnerships and organizations in the field of security that work to maintain the US-led order in the Indo-Pacific, there are primarily: ANZUS (Pacific Security Treaty) - a defense treaty between Australia and New Zealand as well as Australia and the USA; AUSCANNZUKUS - an agreement determining the principles of cooperation between navies in the field of Command, Control, Communications and Computers (C4) of Australia, NZ, Canada, the United Kingdom and the USA; FVEY (The Five Eyes) - an agreement of the intelligence services of Australia, Canada, NZ, the UK and the USA; Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) - a strategic security dialogue between Australia, India, Japan and the USA. They are supplemented by bilateral alliances (mainly between the USA and Japan, and the USA and the Republic of Korea), and various multilateral economic organizations.

Established on 15 September 2021 AUKUS is to play a key role for the US position in the Indo-Pacific region. This stems from the fact that AUKUS is the most significant security arrangement between the US, the UK, and Australia since World War II and has real chances for further development. This alliance is to be the main barrier to Chinese expansionism in the Indo-Pacific. This organization does not have a clearly narrowed path of development, which gives it flexibility in the forms of cooperation and may be conducive to joining other countries. AUKUS gives the USA the opportunity to maintain a hegemonic position in the Indo-Pacific and effectively balance the Chinese naval forces increasingly present in regional waters.

In 2019 Defense White Paper China declaree to fully transform the People’s Liberation

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Army (PLA) into world-class forces by the mid-21st century. Much attention was paid to the Chinese Navy, which was to develop rapidly and adapt to the evolution of China’s naval strategy. The PLA Navy (PLAN): “is speeding up the transition of its tasks from defense on the near seas to protection missions on the far seas, and improving its capabilities for strategic deterrence and counterattack, maritime maneuver operations, maritime joint operations, comprehensive defense, and integrated support, so as to build a strong and modernized naval force.” Americans are watching with concern the impressive development of the Chinese army, especially its navy. According the Department of Defense (DoD) annual report to Congress on "Military and security developments involving the People's Republic of China 2020": "China has already achieved parity with - or even exceeded - the United States in several military modernization areas, including shipbuilding, land-based conventional ballistic and cruise missiles, and integrated air defense systems." The DoD report from 2021 stated that: "the PRC is the top ship-producing nation in the world by tonnage and has the capability to produce naval gas turbine and diesel engines as well as shipboard weapons and electronic systems, which makes it nearly self-sufficient for all ship building needs."  

In 2021, the PLA had 355 front-line ships (ships and submarines) and the U.S. Navy had just 305. American ships, however, could take on board twice as many offensive missiles as Chinese. However, these proportions are changing in favor of China, therefore AUKUS is to be the main forum for US international cooperation to balance the dynamic development of the Chinese fleet.

The main direct aim of AUKUS is building Australia’s nuclear-powered submarine capability. However, cooperation within AUKUS is to be much broader, and assumes cooperation to gain an advantage in various domains of future armed conflicts. The cooperation will include: undersea capabilities; quantum technologies; artificial intelligence and autonomy; advanced cybersecurity; hypersonic and counter-hypersonic capabilities; and electronic warfare. Countries also pledged to share sensitive information and innovation. During the ceremony of announcing the establishment of AUKUS President Biden said: "Today, we’re taking another historic step to deepen and formalize cooperation among all three of our nations because we all recognize the imperative of ensuring peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific over the long term." Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on that day: "the UK, Australia, and the U.S. will be joined even more closely together, reflecting the measure of trust between us, the depth of our friendship, and the enduring strength of our shared values of freedom and democracy." In a joint statement, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Minister for Defence Peter Dutton said: "This is an historic opportunity for the three nations, with like-minded allies and partners, to protect shared values and promote security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.

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13 Ibidem.
region. The creation of the AUKUS pact confirms the diagnosis of John Mearsheimer, who stated that if a potential hegemon emerges, the United States will engage militarily to counterbalance it. Thanks to the transfer of modern military technology to its close allies under the AUKUS framework, the United States can significantly increase the US-led order’s military capabilities in the Indo-Pacific region.

**THE IDENTITY COMPONENT OF AUKUS**

As Flockhart wrote:

"The identity component is derived from the order's self-understanding, core values and vision expressed through shared norms and social practice. The identity may be rooted in religion, culture, ethnicity or ideology or other strong identity signifiers. The identity is also likely to be reflected in the internal domestic governance arrangements."

AUKUS members see themselves as representatives of Western civilization, and within it, the Anglo-Saxon area. They are connected by a historical identity, rooted in the period of colonialism. Although these are countries with a complex ethnic and religious mosaic, they are dominated by people with European roots, and the majority religion is Christianity. These countries have adopted liberal ideology and for centuries developed and strengthened the demo-liberal institutions. They cultivate the systemic solutions and values derived from political and social liberalism, including: democratic political system; free elections between multiple distinct political parties; the rule of law; separation and balance of power; respect for human rights, civic liberties and political freedoms; open society; respect for diversity; prohibition of discrimination; private property; capitalist free market economy and many others.

In American, British and Australian societies there is deeply rooted individualism, characteristic of consolidated liberal democracy. This distinguishes them from collective societies, which are typical for authoritarian states, in particular Asian autocrats such as China. There is also a short distance between societies and governments, which is typical in democratic political systems, and does not occur in authoritarian systems.

In the Joint Statement on AUKUS, the leaders of the US, UK and Australia stated that they were guided by: "enduring ideals and shared commitment to the international rules-based order". They also referred to: "common tradition as maritime democracies".

**THE PRIMARY INSTITUTION COMPONENT OF AUKUS**

The importance of AUKUS as a key component of the American-led order in the Indo-Pacific region results mainly from the basic institution which is a permanent and recognized model of military cooperation between Anglo-Saxon states. In the declaration on AUKUS, the leaders of the founding states referred to long-term cooperation to defend common values:

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19 The White House, *Joint Leaders..., op. cit.*
"For more than 70 years, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, have worked together, along with other important allies and partners, to protect our shared values and promote security and prosperity. Today, with the formation of AUKUS, we recommit ourselves to this vision."

The USA, the UK, and Australia have been close partners or allies for over a century, and AUKUS formalises and deepens the defense cooperation between them. The United States was founded as an independent state in 1783 as a result of the War of Independence against the United Kingdom. Another armed conflict between the two countries took place in 1812. However, since 1904, Britain's defense plans have ceased to take into account the possibility of war with the USA. From the beginning of the 20th century, states began to be bound by special allied relations, the maintenance of which required overcoming many difficulties and disputes including in the Indo-Pacific region. The alliance between the states especially manifested itself in the close military cooperation during World War I, World War II, the Korean War, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The participation of Australians in the wars waged by the United States and the United Kingdom was an important component of the mythology creating Australian national identity. Close military cooperation with the metropolis took place both before and after the adoption in 1900 by the British parliament of the constitutional law allowing the unification of six Australian colonies in the Commonwealth of Australia. In 1942, apart from the close relationship with the UK, an alliance with the USA was made due to the threat posed by Japan. Australia's military cooperation, first with the UK and then with the USA, has a very rich tradition:

- 16,000 Australians took part in the Boer wars at the turn of the 20th century.
- 331,781 Australian troops took part in World War I, with a country's population of 4.5 million.
- During World War II, the Australian army served almost a million soldiers who, in alliance with the UK, fought against Germany and Italy in Europe and North Africa, and in alliance with the USA against Japan in Asia-Pacific.
- 17,000 Australian troops took part in the Korean War and 60,000 in the Vietnam War.
- About 1,400 Australian soldiers served in Iraq and 26,000 in Afghanistan.

It is also worth noting that one of the first decisions of the administration of President Barack Obama under "the Pivot to Asia" concept was to rotate up to 2,500 US Marines to Darwin for training for six months each year. At the same time, the states concluded agreements on other forms of strengthening military cooperation and within the framework of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance cooperation.

**THE SECONDARY INSTITUTION COMPONENT OF AUKUS**

AUKUS was created as a result of the actions of the executive authorities in the member states without the involvement of the legislative authorities. In a communication published by the White House (2021c) we read that the purpose of AUKUS is "to deepen diplomatic, security, and defense cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, including by working with partners, to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century". As mentioned above, first of all, AUKUS signatories commit to support the Royal Australian Navy in acquiring nuclear-powered submarines but also to collaborate in acquiring other modern military systems.

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There is no mention in the AUKUS documents of who the pacts is against or any declarations of mutual military support. Still, no one doubts that it is directed against China, and in the event of a war, the US, the UK and Australia will act together. The same is true of ANZUS, the more than 70-year-old treaty on the security of the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, which does not formally oblige these countries to provide each other with military assistance in the event of an armed conflict. However, should such a situation arise, their joint military action is not in doubt because of the primary institution component. Such beliefs also exist regarding the defense of New Zealand by the USA, although from the US perspective, NZ's membership in the pact is partially suspended due to its declaration as a nuclear-free zone in 1987.

The rise of AUKUS confirms Flockhart's observation that "The level of constitutionalism in the current international order is a relative recent addition and specific to the American-led order." From the US point of view, the creation of the AUKUS pact results from two basic premises:

- The USA could not offer Australia assistance in the construction of SSN ships as part of the ANZUS defense system, because NZ used to refuse to allow the presence of nuclear-powered ships in its ports.
- The USA could not conclude an agreement only with Australia because it would give the impression of its vassalisation and this, in turn, could threaten to block the project by the political opposition with the support of a large part of Australian public opinion.

The creation of the multinational AUKUS with the participation of one more contractor, the UK, allowed the Americans to avoid these problems.

AUKUS' role goes well beyond the agreement on ships and their propulsion. For Australia, this pact means an end to the policy of balancing between China and the US and unequivocally siding on one side. Over the past decade, both Australian political and business elites and the public had assumed that the policy of equal distance towards its most important trading partner, China, and its most important strategic partner, the USA, was optimal. Thanks to this attitude, Australia avoided the effects of the global crisis in 2008, having an unlimited market in China for its raw materials. The change in Australian strategy and the acceptance of the American offer despite Chinese pressure is due to the following premises:

- China pursue an aggressive policy in the South China Sea manifested, inter alia, by creating artificial islands that could serve as military bases.
- China strengthens cooperation and build port infrastructure in the Oceania countries.
- China has attempted to corrupt representatives of Australia's political and business elite.
- China has been spying on selected individuals and entities in Australia.
- China has used blackmail by banning the import of certain Australian products.
- China is violating human rights, especially against the Uyghurs.

Chinese pressure on Australia was counterproductive as the government in Canberra blocked a number of Chinese investments and banned many companies (such as Huawei) from operating there. In turn, the conclusion of the AUKUS pact triggered a lively discussion, the critical assessment in Australia focused mainly on:

- The project is very expensive (50 billion Australian dollars and 90 billion after adjusting for inflation).
- The Australian arms industry has too little stake in this project.
- Many small and medium-sized Australian arms companies have gone bankrupt due to a broken contract with a French contractor.
- Nuclear-powered submarines will enter service in 2036 at the earliest.
- Australian Navy requires the training of about 2,000 sailors.
- Australia does not have a nuclear industry.
- The implementation of the project is a huge challenge for the Australian defense industry.

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However, due to China’s controversial policy, the close alliance with the US, despite a number of critical voices, gained the support of not only the Australian government camp and opposition parties, but also the majority of the public.

The United Kingdom plays a secondary role in AUKUS and its accession results from the following premises:
- The United Kingdom tries to conduct global politics in response to Brexit.\(^{28}\)
- The United Kingdom wants to maintain and deepen its special relationship with the USA.
- The United Kingdom’s global strategy is based on a military presence in the Indo-Pacific region.\(^{29}\)
- The United Kingdom participates in the transfer of modern military technology to Australia.
- Prime Minister Boris Johnson wanted to be considered a politician of the world class.

**THE POWER COMPONENT OF AUKUS**

The power component of AUKUS results not only from the potential of the USA but it is also a function primary and secondary institution component. According the Economist\(^ {30}\):

> "Just occasionally, you can see the tectonic plates of geopolitics shifting in front of your eyes. Suez in 1956, Nixon going to China in 1972 and the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 are among the examples in living memory. The unveiling last week of a trilateral defence pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States (introducing the awkward acronym of aukus) is providing another of those rare occasions."

There is no exaggeration in these words, the conclusion of the AUKUS pact is indeed a turning point due to its geopolitical consequences.

The plans provide for the construction of eight SSN - nuclear-powered attack submarines in Adelaide, Australia, where a shipyard is to be built for this purpose. The technology and basic elements of nuclear propulsion are to be provided by the Americans. In this way, Australia will become the seventh country in the world to have such units (only China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States and India have them). In official documents, there is no mention of equipping Australian SSNs with nuclear weapons, although such an option is almost certain in the event of an armed conflict. As part of AUKUS, Australia will also purchase the American RGM-109 Tomahawk maneuvering missiles for the new Hobart missile destroyers and tactical air maneuvering missiles with reduced detect ability for aviation AGM-158B JASSM-ER (Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile-Extended Range). The Australian Defence Force is also to receive a long-range ballistic missile PrSM (Precision Strike Missile) and aviation hypersonic missile SCIFiRE (Southern Cross Integrated Flight Research Experiment).

The effects of AUKUS implementation can be divided into short-term and long-term. The first one is undoubtedly the sharp reaction of France to the breaking of the contract concluded in 2016 by Australia with the French company Naval Group for the construction of 16 conventionally powered submarines. The French blame the USA for the economic losses

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associated with this. The reaction of the French economic and political elites to the annulment of the "contract of the century" is very nervous and may cause economic retaliation against Australia, however, one should not count on France breaking off strategic ties with the USA and the UK.

A long-term geopolitical effect will be a change in the global balance of power when Australian nuclear-powered ships enter service. Due to their range, units of this type can patrol the entire Indo-Pacific region for an unlimited period of time, are difficult to detect and can be armed with nuclear warheads, which will practically prevent the free operation of the Chinese fleet. The mere announcement of the construction of SSN-class ships in Australia may provoke China to intensify the arms race at seas and oceans. According the International Institute for Strategic Studies in 2020, the Chinese navy commissioned the sixth nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine. However, it is unlikely that China will have technically comparable units to SSN in the foreseeable future.31

It should also be remembered that as part of the Pivot to Asia the U.S. Navy is positioning 60 percent of its fleet in the Pacific Ocean compared to a current 50:50 split between the Pacific and Atlantic.32 Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Mike Gilday assumes that in 2040 the U.S. Navy will be a hybrid, consisting of: "more than 350 manned ships, about 150 large unmanned surface and subsurface platforms, and approximately 3,000 aircraft".33 The modernization and expansion of the U.S. Navy and the navies of its allies is to be a response to the dynamic growth of the potential of the Chinese Navy.

PERSPECTIVES OF THE AUKUS AS A PILLAR OF THE AMERICAN-LED LIBERAL ORDER IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

The further escalation of the conflict between the American-led order and the Sino-led order in the Indo-Pacific region may have a number of consequences:
- Extension of AUKUS to other Anglo-Saxon countries: New Zealand and Canada.
- Extension of AUKUS to Asian countries: Japan and South Korea.
- Conclusion of a US military agreement with India combined with the provision of modern military technology.

The escalation of the US-Chinese conflict is likely to lead to a further tightening of US cooperation with Anglo-Saxon countries. The AUKUS Pact, based on the common cultural model of the USA, the UK and Australia, is a pattern that can be replicated in the case of Canada and New Zealand. As in the case of Australia, the cooperation of New Zealand and Canada with the USA and the UK will result from the primary institution component which is a permanent and recognized model of military cooperation of Anglo-Saxon states. Currently, Canada, despite close economic ties with the US, is trying to maintain sovereignty over the international policy of its neighbor. Both countries, despite the common cultural model, partly differ in the political organization of the state and the mentality of the society. However, there is serious reason to change Canada's policy on nuclear submarines. In their report, Timothy Choi and Chris Spedding state that joining AUKUS is essential for Canada because it solves two issues: replacing its obsolete submarine fleet and defending the Arctic.34 The main problem for Canada's defense is not China, but Russia, which has nuclear-powered ships in the Arctic. Canada can defend its Arctic borders only with nuclear-powered units of a similar class. Decisions in this matter will be supported by anti-Russian sentiments in Canada due to the strong pro-Ukrainian lobby in this

32 R. A. Bitzinger, China's military buildup: regional repercussions, [in:] China's power and Asian security, M. Li, K. M. Kemuri (Eds.), New York 2015, p. 54.
country and many voters of Ukrainian origin. Currently, there is a discussion in Canada on the need to replace the obsolete Victoria-class submarines that form the backbone of the Canadian fleet. The declarations of the Canadian government on the implementation of the program of replacing Victoria-class ships with more modern diesel-powered units will probably not be implemented due to a number of scandals and numerous controversies related to government orders.

Canada did not join the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) of 2017. Moreover, the leader of the Official Opposition Erin O’Toole, whose Conservative Party went neck to neck with the victorious Liberal Party in the September 2021 federal election, strongly advocated Canada’s entry into the AUKUS. A similar position was presented by the leader of the New Democratic Party - Jagmeet Singh. Concerns about not entering AUKUS also emerged among the Canadian Admiralty. Vice-Admiral Bob Auchterlonie, the commander of the Canadian Joint Operations Command, saw joining AUKUS as an opportunity for Canada to acquire cutting-edge technology together with its closest allies and strengthen its position in the Indo-Pacific region.

Unlike Canada, New Zealand joined the 2017 TPNW treaty. However, the states that established AUKUS clearly emphasized that the organization does not address the issue of the development of nuclear weapons. In the case of New Zealand, the main obstacle to the development of military cooperation with the US is the signed on Roratonga Island in 1986 South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty. Because the policy of the US Navy assumes that it does not officially confirm or deny if its ships have nuclear capabilities, it stopped visiting New Zealand. NZ’s withdrawal from the treaty in the near future is unlikely. Much more likely, however, is a less restrictive approach to the issue of the nuclear-free zone, which would allow access by SNN ships. This is becoming more and more likely, as tensions in the Pacific increase the need to tighten the alliance with the US. For Washington, the issue of the US Navy’s lack of access to NZ bases has been a major barrier. Confirmation of the softening of the interpretation of the issue of the nuclear-free zone was the visit in 2016 of the USS Sampson, which was the first visit of a US warship to NZ in 33 years. At the end of 2021, that is, after the establishment of AUKUS, the port of Wellington was visited by the USS Howard. Although these are not nuclear-powered ships, it is undoubtedly a breakthrough.

What is important, New Zealand could join AUKUS even if it maintains its restrictive approach to the nuclear-free zone. During a visit to NZ in August 2022, US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said that there could be “scope for others to join” when “other emerging technologies” were considered, adding that when the time comes Washington will hold talks with Wellington on the matter. This was a reference to the debate in NZ regarding the possibility of joining AUKUS for cooperation in the acquisition of other military technologies. Annette King, New Zealand’s high commissioner to Australia, said in November 2021 that NZ could potentially join AUKUS to cooperate on cybersecurity technologies. NZ Defense Minister Peeni Henare endorsed this approach by pointing out “technology gains” that AUKUS would generate and expressing a willingness to “leverage off that particular opportunity.”

In mid-2022, the US and the NZ signed the Framework Agreement in the field of space cooperation, which shows the need for New Zealand to develop modern technologies in various domains.

For NZ, Pacific island nations are of particular importance, and the US treats it as a critical partner in the blue Pacific. Therefore in June 2022 NZ together with the USA, the UK, Australia, and Japan established the Partners in the Blue Pacific (PBP). The increase in China’s interference in Oceania will favor the inclusion of New Zealand in "hard" security organizations, such as AUKUS or QUAD. It is worth mentioning that China’s signing of a security agreement

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38 G. Miller, op. cit.
with Solomon Islands in early 2022 prompted New Zealand to conclude a security agreement with Japan, which was also very concerned about that.

Despite some dissenting voices within the ruling Labor Party, it is generally skeptical of New Zealand joining AUKUS. This attitude was criticized by opposition National Party defense spokesperson Gerry Brownlee, who stated that: "The government needs to explain why it looks as though New Zealand has been left out of the loop. ... Were we consulted or at the table to discuss with a group of countries that we've considered likeminded for quite some time?" (Guardian 2021). The National Party has a good chance of winning in the next parliamentary elections (in the previous elections it won 26.8% of votes and 35 seats) due to the decline in support for the Labor Party's government due to rising inflation, crime and an increase in taxes. On 19 January 2023, the former Prime Minister of NZ Jacinda Ardern announced her resignation. Should the National Party win, the issue of New Zealand's accession to AUKUS may again become a topic of national discussion. The key role of AUKUS in defending the freedom of the Indo-Pacific from China was confirmed by Winston Peters, the leader of New Zealand First and a former Deputy Prime Minister, but there is no certainty as to the presence of his party in the next parliament, let alone in the government.

Joanne Wallis and Anna Powles presented on the one hand the four points of convergence between New Zealand and Australia: “a shared commitment to preserving and promoting the international rules based order; a shared commitment to crisis management; a shared commitment to Pacific regionalism; and a shared commitment to regional trade liberalization”. On the other hand four points of divergence in the Pacific Islands: “differing approaches to regional diplomacy; New Zealand’s Pacific identity as a domestic driver of foreign policy; and differing priorities on climate change and nuclear disarmament”39. New Zealand, which is against the militarization of the Pacific, is concerned about China’s deal with the Solomon Islands and the announcement of the creation of a Chinese base in Vanuatu, i.e. in the area covered by the Rarotonga treaty. According to Reuben Steff, to counterbalance the growing Chinese influence, New Zealand will have to cooperate more closely with Australia.40 In this situation, the convergence protocol between the two countries presented by J. Wallis and A. Powles may prevail over the divergence protocol. The most important difference between NZ and Australia, the attitude towards nuclear energy and nuclear weapons, may recede into the background due to repeated more or less veiled threats of the use of nuclear weapons by Russia and North Korea. In practice, this could mean translate into the New Zealand’s public consent to join AUKUS.

In the longer term, this is also very likely that the AUKUS will be expanded to include countries with similar demo-liberal institutions but different cultural and ethnic identity: Japan and South Korea. In this case, traditional factors such as geographical location and common perception of threat will be crucial. Possession of advanced civil nuclear technologies and extremely modern armies and defense industries make these countries very important potential AUKUS members. South Korea had previously wanted to purchase SSN ships, but so far it did not come to fruition due to the US's reluctance to proliferation of nuclear technology for military purposes. Japan and RoK are located in the immediate vicinity of China and increasingly feel the threat resulting from their dynamic development and assertive policy in the region. In addition, these countries share with the United States a developed primary institution component resulting from the tradition of military cooperation. Last year, these countries have been tightening military cooperation with current and potential members of the AUKUS. For example, in August 2022, the cyclical biennial multinational air and missile defense drills of the USA, Japan and North Korea. The most important difference between NZ and Australia, the attitude towards nuclear energy and nuclear weapons, may recede into the background due to repeated more or less veiled threats of the use of nuclear weapons by Russia and North Korea. In practice, this could mean translate into the New Zealand’s public consent to join AUKUS.

ministers of the US, Japan and Australia agreed to strengthen cooperation in the field of security. This was due to growing concern about China's increasingly expansive naval strategy, including increasing military pressure on Taiwan. Japan is also concerned about the unresolved dispute over the Senkaku Islands, and China's growing influence among the island states of the Pacific Ocean, including the mentioned earlier Solomon Islands. The ministers of the three countries agreed to expand the scope of joint military exercises to strengthen the interoperability of armed forces, including navies, and to deepen military cooperation, including in the field of military equipment, technology and intelligence gathering. Military cooperation is fostered by a sharp increase in Japanese defense spending and dropping most restrictions on joint weapons development41. South Korea has similar concerns to Japan. These countries are also afraid of China's cooperation with North Korea and Russia. That is why RoK and Japan are implementing closer military cooperation with the US and other countries of the liberal order in the Indo-Pacific.

The likely expansion of US military cooperation with India will be of a different nature. This state is in conflict with China, which both sides are trying not to escalate, and which is of varying intensity. Its main causes are:
- Fight for the status of a regional hegemon.
- Rivalry for naval supremacy in the Indian Ocean
- Competition for access to resources.
- The border conflict that led to armed clashes in 1962.

Despite the conflict with China, India continues its policy of "strategic autonomy" initiated during the Cold War, which in practice means good relations with Russia and distance from the US international policy. The basis of Hindu foreign policy is the "Nehru doctrine", according to which India is the only hegemon in the Indian Ocean42. The increase in Chinese potential in this region may lead to a complete reevaluation of Hindu foreign policy, entering into a close military alliance with the USA, combined with the transfer of modern military technology. The Indian Navy wants to acquire nuclear-powered attack submarines under Project 75 Alpha of an estimated value of USD 15-20 billion. Russia, France and the USA are all competing for this contract. The war in Ukraine may encourage India to change its main arms supplier from Russia to the US. The war reveals the disproportion in the effectiveness of the armaments produced by these countries, as well as limits the production capacity of the Russian defense industry, including for export.

CONCLUSIONS

The future of the AUKUS pact is not yet determined as it is in status nascendi. The construction of nuclear-powered submarines for the Australian Navy, the development of hypersonic weapons, ballistic missiles of various types, and stealth drones alone can make AUKUS crucial to maintaining the US-led liberal order in the Indo-Pacific region. The broad formula of cooperation potentially creates an opportunity for the development of various types of military technologies and cooperation in other security areas. In order not to lag behind in terms of cutting-edge technology, other countries might decide to join the agreement. The chance for this will increase along with China's increasing assertiveness in the region and the growing threat from China. AUKUS was founded on the basis of identity factors and positive experiences of cooperation, which is why it is most likely that other countries that care about maintaining a liberal order in the Indo-Pacific will join it.

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