

GEELONG TREATY – INTERNATIONAL RELATION

Australia, UK Sign 50-Year Geelong Treaty Under AUKUS Amid US Review of Alliance. The UK and Australia have signed the Geelong Treaty under the AUKUS security pact to equip Australia with nuclear-powered submarines. This move aims to counter China's influence in the Indo-Pacific, presenting both strategic opportunities and concerns for India.

The Geelong Treaty: A Landmark Australia-UK Defence Pact

Comprehensive Overview – The Geelong Treaty is a legally binding, bilateral agreement focused on the Partnership and Collaboration for Nuclear-Powered Submarines. Signed between Australia and the United Kingdom, it operates under the framework of AUKUS Pillar I. This treaty formalizes the joint endeavor to equip Australia with its first fleet of nuclear-powered submarines.

Duration and Strategic Commitment – The treaty establishes a 50-year period of deep strategic defence cooperation, underscoring the long-term commitment and trust between the two nations. This extended timeframe is necessary to manage the multi-generational complexity of designing, building, and operating advanced submarine fleets.

Core Focus on SSN-AUKUS – The central objective of the treaty is to facilitate every stage of the lifecycle for the next-generation SSN-AUKUS submarines. These submarines will be nuclear-powered but armed with conventional weapons. The treaty covers the entire spectrum of activities, including:

Design and Construction – Jointly developing and building the submarines.

Operation and Sustainment – Cooperating on training crews, maintenance, and logistical support.

Disposal – Collaborating on the safe and secure decommissioning of the submarines at the end of their service life.

Foundational Support Mechanisms – Beyond the submarines themselves, the treaty supports the creation of the entire ecosystem required for this capability. This includes the joint development of:

Personnel and Workforce – Training a highly skilled workforce of engineers, technicians, and submariners in both countries.

Infrastructure – Building and upgrading the necessary shipyards, maintenance facilities, and naval bases.

Regulatory Systems – Establishing robust safety and security protocols for handling naval nuclear technology.

Operational Presence – The treaty facilitates port visits and a rotational presence of a UK *Astute-class* submarine at the HMAS Stirling naval base in Western Australia, allowing for early integration and training.

Unprecedented Significance – This treaty is regarded as the most detailed and long-term defence manufacturing and technology-sharing agreement ever signed between Australia and the UK. It represents a new level of integration in their defence industries and strategic planning.

Upholding Non-Proliferation – A critical aspect of the treaty is its strict adherence to international non-proliferation standards, ensuring that the transfer of nuclear technology is solely for propulsion and does not contribute to the spread of nuclear weapons. Key commitments include alignment with:

Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) – Adhering to the global framework to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons.

South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty – Respecting the regional agreement that bans nuclear explosive devices.

IAEA Safeguards – Complying with the International Atomic Energy Agency's verification and monitoring protocols.

AUKUS Naval Nuclear Propulsion Agreement (ANNPA) – Following the specific AUKUS framework for the safe handling of nuclear materials.

About the AUKUS Partnership

Genesis and Formation: AUKUS is a **trilateral security and defence partnership** formally established in **2021** between **Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States**. Its legal foundation for technology sharing was established through the **Exchange of Naval Nuclear Propulsion Information Agreement (ENNPIA)**, a binding pact that permits the sharing of sensitive naval nuclear propulsion technology among the three partners.

Overarching Aim: The primary goal of AUKUS is to significantly **strengthen the collective defence capabilities** of its members. It aims to achieve this by **accelerating technological integration** and expanding their shared industrial capacity, with the ultimate objective of promoting peace and stability in the strategically vital **Indo-Pacific region**.

Structured Around Two Pillars: AUKUS is organized into two distinct but complementary pillars of cooperation:

Pillar I – Submarine Cooperation: This pillar is exclusively focused on supporting Australia in acquiring its first-ever fleet of **conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines (SSNs)**. This represents a monumental leap in Australia's naval capabilities, providing it with submarines that have greater range, speed, and endurance.

Pillar II – Advanced Capabilities: This pillar is a broader effort to accelerate trilateral cooperation across a range of critical and emerging defence technologies. The key areas of focus include:

1. **Cyber Capabilities:** Enhancing joint defensive and offensive cyber operations.
2. **Artificial Intelligence (AI):** Integrating AI into military systems for improved decision-making and autonomy.
3. **Quantum Technologies:** Exploring quantum computing, sensing, and communication for military applications.
4. **Undersea Technologies:** Developing advanced unmanned underwater vehicles and other deep-sea capabilities.
5. **Electronic Warfare:** Collaborating on systems to control the electromagnetic spectrum.
6. **Innovation:** Fostering joint research and development in other cutting-edge defence technologies.

The Strategic Importance of the Indo-Pacific Region

Defining the Region: The "Indo-Pacific" is a geopolitical concept that recognizes the strategic fusion of the **Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean** into a single, interconnected theater. Geographically, it spans from the **east coast of Africa to the west coast of the United States**, encompassing Southeast Asia.

Global Maritime and Economic Hub: The region's importance is immense:

Trade Volume: Over **60% of global maritime trade** traverses the Indo-Pacific.

Energy Flows: The majority of the world's oil and gas supplies pass through its sea lanes.

Critical Strategic Chokepoints: The Indo-Pacific contains several narrow maritime passages that are vital for global trade and energy security. These include the **Straits of Hormuz, Malacca, Lombok, and Sunda**. Any disruption in these chokepoints could have severe global economic consequences.

Analyzing the Impact of AUKUS on India

Strategic Significance for India (Benefits)

Balancing China's Influence: AUKUS serves as a powerful military deterrent to Beijing's growing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific. India benefits indirectly from this power balance, as it helps contain China without requiring India to enter a direct military alliance.

Complementing the Quad: The partnership enhances Australia's military capabilities, particularly in undersea warfare. This adds significant "hard power" weight to the strategic role of the Quad, addressing naval capability gaps that previously existed in the Indian Ocean.

Strengthening European Partnerships: While France was initially angered by the cancellation of its submarine deal with Australia, the situation created an opportunity for India to **deepen its strategic ties**

with Paris. As a trusted defence partner, France can collaborate more closely with India on defence technology and maritime security.

Providing Strategic Maneuvering Room: AUKUS gives India greater flexibility in its foreign policy. Without being a member, India can maintain its strategic autonomy while leveraging the security benefits provided by AUKUS, Quad, NATO, and other European partners to advance its own independent Indo-Pacific strategy.

Concerns for India

Shifts in Regional Naval Influence: The introduction of advanced nuclear-powered submarines into the Eastern Indian Ocean could diminish India's relative naval dominance and strategic weight in its primary area of maritime interest.

Limitations on Technology Access: The United States has explicitly stated that the nuclear-propulsion technology deal with Australia is a unique, "one-of-a-kind" arrangement. This clarification dampens India's own long-term aspirations of acquiring similar advanced technology from the US for its submarine program.

Diplomatic Fallout with France: The abrupt announcement of AUKUS led to France temporarily withdrawing from trilateral engagements involving India and Australia, such as joint naval exercises. Rebuilding the trust and momentum in these important mini-lateral forums will require significant diplomatic effort.

Comparative Analysis: QUAD vs. AUKUS

Feature	QUAD	AUKUS
Members	United States, Japan, India, Australia	United States, Australia, United Kingdom
Nature	Informal strategic dialogue and minilateral cooperation forum.	Formal security and defence partnership with legally binding agreements.
Core Objective	Promote a "free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific" through broad cooperation on security, economics, and health.	Enhance "hard military capabilities," specifically undersea deterrence against potential adversaries like China.
India's Role	Central member. India's strategic location and naval power are crucial to the Quad's vision for the Indian Ocean.	Not a member. India is an indirect beneficiary as AUKUS complements the Quad's security objectives.

Key Similarities Between QUAD and AUKUS

- China-Focused Orientation:** Both frameworks were created primarily as a response to China's growing military power, naval expansion, and coercive diplomatic tactics in the Indo-Pacific.
- Enhanced Security Cooperation:** Both groupings aim to deepen defence collaboration among their members through joint military exercises, strategic dialogues, and technology sharing.
- Shared Goal of Indo-Pacific Stability:** The ultimate collective aim of both QUAD and AUKUS is to ensure peace, stability, and the freedom of navigation through the vital sea lanes of the Indo-Pacific.

Understanding Submarine Designations: SSN vs. SSBN

Feature	SSN – Nuclear-Powered Attack Submarine	SSBN – Nuclear-Powered Ballistic Missile Submarine
Armament	Armed with conventional weapons like torpedoes and cruise missiles.	Armed with Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs), which typically carry nuclear warheads.
Primary Mission	Tactical roles: hunting enemy ships and submarines, intelligence gathering, surveillance, and special operations.	Strategic role: Serves as a nuclear deterrent by providing a nation with a "second-strike" capability.

Propulsion	Nuclear-powered, providing virtually unlimited range and endurance underwater.	Nuclear-powered, allowing it to remain hidden at sea for extended periods to ensure its survival.
Nuclear Weapons	Does not carry nuclear ballistic missiles.	Its primary purpose is to carry and be ready to launch nuclear ballistic missiles.

Source: <https://www.newsonair.gov.in/australia-uk-sign-50-year-geelong-treaty-under-aukus-amid-us-review-of-alliance/>

