August 2024 US, Australia & UK remain close.

Back in September 2021, the US, UK, and Australia announced to great fanfare that they were entering into a new security pact: the AUKUS agreement. The aim of this partnership is to improve defence cooperation between the three countries in essence to counter what is perceived as China's increasingly ambitious geopolitical agenda. Of course, the US, the UK, and Australia have been closely sharing intelligence since 1956 through the Five Eyes alliance.

The AUKUS pact is split into two facets (called Pillars I and II). Pillar I ensures that Australia will have its own fleet of nuclear submarines within the next ten years, aided by both the US and UK. Pillar II has a wider context and is a framework to make the three countries work together to constantly enhance their military capabilities in terms of AI, cybersecurity, quantum technologies, and undersea capabilities.

Moving the clock forward to the current day, progress has been made on both fronts of the agreement, albeit in a modest fashion. All three countries have agreed to relax major restrictions on defence trade among them, making it considerably easier to quickly approve sensitive technologies, such as nuclear submarine technologies.

The view appears to be that, although the US is some way ahead of China technologically, it remains concerned that its aircraft carriers and nuclear submarines may become more vulnerable as China develops new defence technologies, adding to its naval power. As it stands, only six countries (US, UK, France, Russia, China, and India) have nuclear submarines. Thus, by inviting Australia to this club, the US wants to counterbalance China's strengths and ensure that no single power is allowed to dominate the Indo-Pacific. The geopolitical mantra is keep the region "free and open", with Pillar II of the AUKUS alliance (AI, cybersecurity, quantum technologies, and undersea capabilities) continuing to be a fundamental part of this equation.

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