



INNOVATIVE: Journal Of Social Science Research

Volume 3 Nomor 3 Tahun 2023 Page 8629-8640

E-ISSN 2807-4238 and P-ISSN 2807-4246

Website: <https://j-innovative.org/index.php/Innovative>

Indonesia's Responding The Escalation Of Aukus In The Indo-Pacific

Irene^{1✉}, Anak Agung Banyu Perwita², Jonni Mahroza³

Defense Diplomacy, Indonesia Defense University

Email : dokter.irene@gmail.com^{1✉}

Abstrak

Peran strategis Indonesia di kawasan ini diperebutkan oleh munculnya kemampuan China untuk meningkatkan kemampuan materialnya dan munculnya AUKUS. Langkah Amerika Serikat untuk mempertahankan status hegemoniknya ditantang oleh kemampuan China yang terus berkembang yang akan terus berkembang dan mencapai tujuannya dalam mewujudkan Impian China. Pergeseran struktur sistem internasional dan menurunnya kecenderungan ASEAN dalam mencapai konsensus menyebabkan munculnya AUKUS dan ketidakstabilan di kawasan. Indonesia, sebagai pemimpin ASEAN harus menerapkan langkah-langkah strategis untuk menyesuaikan dengan munculnya aliansi keamanan ini. Menggalakkan forum dialog konstruktif melalui ASEAN tampaknya menjadi solusi yang paling tepat dalam menghadapi kondisi saat ini. Namun pada saat yang sama, upaya peningkatan kapasitas nasional diperlukan untuk menjaga keutuhan wilayah, khususnya untuk mencegah keterlibatan Australia lebih lanjut dalam urusan dalam negeri seperti perlindungan hak asasi manusia dan pemberontakan di Papua.

Kata kunci: *AUKUS; Indonesia; China; ASEAN; Kontestasi Militer; Perimbangan Kekuatan; Indo-Pasifik;*

Dilema Keamanan; Integritas Kebangsaan Indonesia; Papua

Abstract

Indonesia's strategic role in the region is contested by the emergence of China's ability to enhance its material capabilities and the emergence of the AUKUS. United States measure to maintain its hegemonic status were challenged by China's growing capabilities that will continue to grow and achieve its objective in fulfilling the Chinese Dream. The shifting structure of the international system and declining trend of ASEAN in reaching a consensus led to emergence of AUKUS and instability in the region. Indonesia, as the ASEAN leaders should implement strategic measures to adjust with the emergence of this security alliances. Promoting a constructive dialogue forum through ASEAN seems as the most suitable solution in dealing with the current condition. But at the same time, effort in enhancing national capacity is needed to maintain territorial integrity, specifically to prevent Australia further involvement in domestic matters such as human rights protection and insurgency in Papua.

Keywords: *AUKUS; Indonesia; China; ASEAN; Military Contestation; Balance of Power; Indo-Pacific; Security Dilemma; Indonesia National Integrity; Papua*

INTRODUCTION

To protect its national integrity and sovereignty, Indonesia's response to the emergence of AUKUS remains significant. Indonesia's leadership in ASEAN has become a primary factor to maintain the unity of ASEAN member states and create a neutral environment in facing a contested interest of great powers in the region. The formation of regional security cooperation will undoubtedly be influenced by how each state addresses potential threats to its own interests. AUKUS is an acronym for Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, which announced their extensive collaboration on September 15, 2021 (Li, 2022). Those states share traits as democratic powers confronted by the Chinese expansionist movement. The AUKUS strategic alliance is dedicated to enhancing cooperation and collaborative collaboration in the Indo-Pacific region. The scope of the collaboration comprises military, technological, and improved nuclear-powered submarines. Even though the decision contradicted Western countries' pledge to respect the nuclear proliferation measure, other states' reactions have been diverse.

The deal to transfer technology and knowledge from Western powers to Australia to advance their submarine capabilities is considered as a move to strengthen Australia's major pion in the region. To counter China's rising momentum, the US needs to work with critical allies to reduce the threat posed by the PRC's aggressive military efforts, particularly in the South China Sea. China will undoubtedly feel intimidated by these military activities and will undoubtedly prepare countermeasures. In September 2021, China expressed significant opposition to the AUKUS collaboration, interpreting it as an attempt to establish an Asian NATO. It is a confrontational approach aimed at undermining the collective effort to create

regional stability and pushing for more security dilemma situations. China saw these alliances as an exceedingly irresponsible step that might exacerbate the region's continuing tensions and arms race, especially given that the use of nuclear technologies could jeopardize nuclear non-proliferation efforts.

There are a few crucial aspects that underscore China's reservations about this collaboration. The Communist leadership is concerned about sovereignty; the US's transfer of nuclear submarine technology to Australia is a direct challenge to China's territorial claims and tries to limit its regional activity. Such a move has the potential to exacerbate geopolitical tensions and create unstable conditions in the region's power balance. This collaboration also appears to be an attempt to form a security network alliance aimed directly at limiting China's expanding strength. The further development of AUKUS may also provide a security problem for other states seeking to strengthen their military capabilities to ensure their survival in the international system and to maintain peace and stability if tensions rise further. Excluding other regional states from its decision-making process and commencing the use of nuclear weapons may deteriorate geopolitical tensions (Li, 2022).

While the West maintains that this alliance is the result of escalating geopolitical tensions, it represents like-minded nations or democratic powers working together to form a strong security alliance in the Indo-Pacific area. China's growing influence, as well as its aggressive military engagement in the South China Sea and other maritime territorial areas, represent unethical behavior that violates international law. These security treaties seek to help the region's development by upholding the application of a rules-based international order. This plan is also consistent with the United States' proposal for a free and open Indo-Pacific as an inclusive framework to promote more active cooperation among the states included in the vision. The balance of power and deterrence effects of these alliances resulted in a specific security arrangement that will encourage security partnership and collaboration. As a result of this collaboration, a new and flexible strategic realignment in the region can be established, and the landscape of geostrategic conditions can become even more competitive.

METHOD

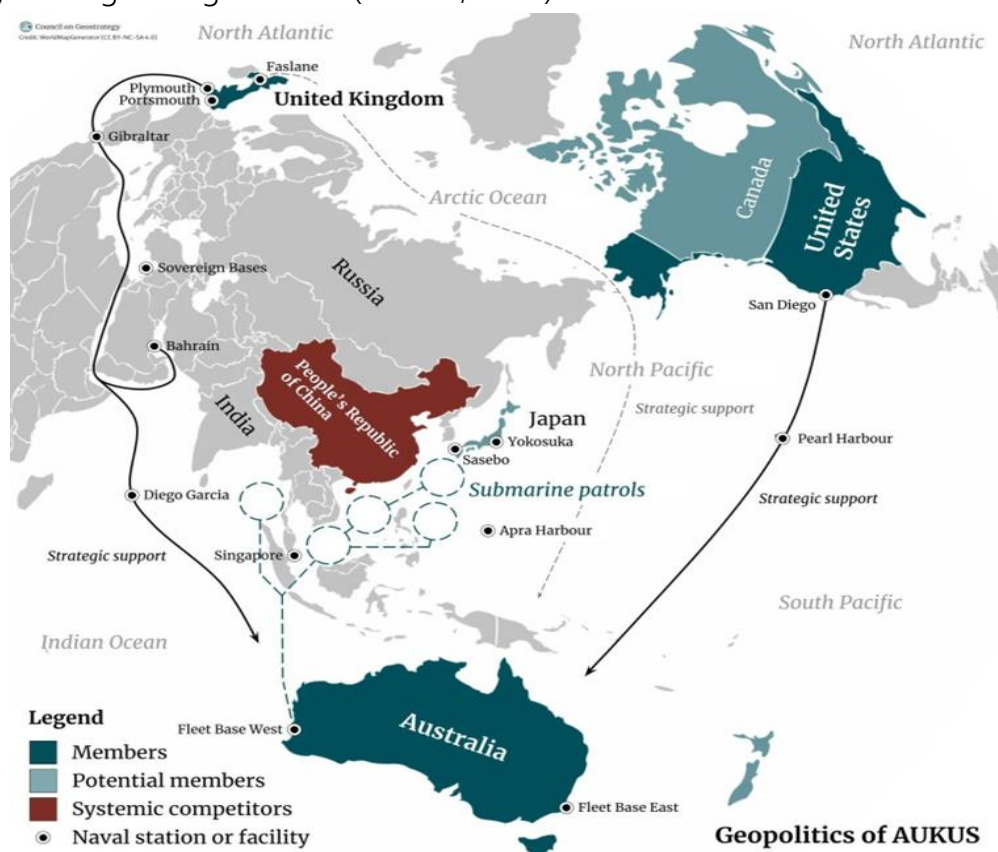
This research's procedure of establishing solid findings should be based on appropriate and suitable research methods. The methodology will determine the methods, research technique, and data collecting that will be employed in this research (Creswell, 2017). As a result, descriptive qualitative approaches will be employed to collect secondary data from previously used literature on the topic of this research. The data will be examined using

descriptive approaches, including arranging and grouping the literature used based on the classification of the literature review, to continuously create a thorough grasp of the topic chosen.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Balancing Measure by the United States

The United States and its allies are responding to China's dominance in the maritime regions by attempting to institutionalize a security and military cooperation pact through AUKUS and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. The security quandary caused by China's assertive behavior in the SCS prompts the US and its allies to offset this action through defense diplomacy and security cooperation aimed at maintaining regional stability. The goal of this security cooperation is to push for the implementation of regional orders and norms, as well as the priorities of each state's commitment to respect international law and freedom of navigation, and to maximize regional forums for resolving disputes peacefully through constructive dialogue and reaching a mutually agreed consensus. Building a strategic connectivity with Americans allies in a more concrete way to collaborate is the objective of US policy making through AUKUS (Febrica, 2023).



Picture 1. Geopolitics of AUKUS

Source: (Council on Geostrategy, 2023)

The development of this trilateral security alliance addresses a critical counterweight act by Western powers against China's ascent. Previously, the United States and its partners used the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, which is committed to implementing international law, freedom of navigation, democratic standards, and peaceful conflict resolution. AUKUS pursues the same goal, but with a more assertive military role in developing strategic measures. The AUKUS approach is more defensive in nature, with the goal of enforcing a rules-based international order (Mohan, 2022). One of the AUKUS measures to improve their military capabilities in the region is the use of defense diplomacy to advance a nuclear submarine. China has criticized this action, describing it as an act against nuclear proliferation (Murphy, 2022).

The region's defense diplomacy interaction will undoubtedly benefit from ongoing efforts to advance this security accord. The Sino-US competition to retain its emergent phenomena or hegemonic standing in the world system would undoubtedly have a substantial influence. The United States and its allies responded to China's assertive move in militaries on an artificial island in the SCS region by formulating a security intervention in the region through QUAD, utilizing its soft approach to maintaining democratic value implementation and bolstering Indo-Pacific integration. AUKUS' more daring approach to developing strategic military measures is undoubtedly intended to oppose China's efforts to advance its military capabilities in the region.

The latest ASEAN meeting that took place in Labuan Bajo last May shows no indications that the organization shows an official stance on the AUKUS activity. Development of military technology through nuclear power in Australia's submarine can operate in the Southeast Asian maritime territory and it may harm the nuclear non-proliferation measures in the region. Joko Widodo argued that ASEAN should see both AUKUS and QUAD as partners not competitors. Each member of the AUKUS also has already become an active dialogue partner of ASEAN. But there's no formal mechanism within ASEAN to respond to the emergence of AUKUS. Cooperation should be improved and works on aspect and inclusive pillars that can lead to a further regional development (Shofa, 2023).

Establishment of AUKUS

Indonesia is faced with the current regional situation, where each state aims to achieve its national interest in global interaction. The struggle for domination between the great powers in the region also pushed other states to adapt and find a common interest and aspect of collaboration. To avoid future conflict escalation, regional states should respond to the

development of AUKUS in a more strategic manner. Other states in the region have various concerns and considerations. The first is the immediate implication of AUKUS action, which has the potential to lead to power contestation and arm races. The AUKUS also disallowed the use of existing regional architecture, such as ASEAN, which could lead to competing national interests among states. Meanwhile, the great power struggle cannot be avoided, and other stakeholders who feel endangered may respond by using all of their efforts to retain their legitimacy and autonomy.

Though bilateral interaction through improved diplomatic ties and dialogue with the AUKUS remain important means of addressing each state's concerns, interests, and expectations in the situation. Struggle for Indo-Pacific Dominance, addressing more assertive Chinese influences, and struggle for resources are geopolitical scenarios constructed from the current conditions. Threat in the region or traditional approaches to resolving this dilemma described in terms of politics and international relations.

AUKUS is a trilateral security and military cooperation arrangement formed by Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom. It can be seen as a symbol of mutual interest by western countries in responding to the current high level of security and political tension in the region, particularly in the Indian and Pacific oceans, where China has demonstrated an assertive orientation in expanding its dominance, particularly in maritime territorial waters. The formation of AUKUS is motivated by a complex factor, as mentioned above. It is an effort that demonstrates the struggle for Western power dominance in the Indo-Pacific, as well as its integrated cooperation in containing China's growing influence, with the main objectives being to secure the potential rich resources under the South China Sea maritime domain and secure the vital sea lanes of communication through this maritime territory.

In June 2021, China and the AUKUS countries clashed at the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna over the advancement of a nuclear submarine program. The objective is for Australia's military to improve by obtaining at least eight nuclear submarines. China objects, claiming that it is a proliferation effort. The AUKUS security partnership encouraged the Cold War mentality and reflected an unclear political agenda. The AUKUS security deal entails the transfer of nuclear weapon technology to Australia, which provokes China, who calls it an act of nuclear proliferation. The goal of using nuclear power is solely for fuel, and China provoked this plan because there is a possibility for the transfer of nuclear material to Australia, and China claims the intergovernmental institutions under the IAEA are overstepping their jurisdiction. AUKUS's transparency in demonstrating their use of nuclear power is critical. The evolution of these nuclear submarines is further hampered by the lack of inspectors who can oversee the use of this nuclear material (Murphy, 2022).

Meanwhile, a potential in developing more advanced military capabilities through deeper cooperation and integration in aspects such as science, technology, and industrial bases, and military supply chains able to push further military alliances. The U.S. naval capabilities can provide lethal assistance for its allies in the region. United States commitment to advance its engagement approach in the region implemented through pursuing this kind of alliance in security. This activity surely shows an exclusive military alliance and being able to form a certain block in a contested regional architecture, hence it may trigger other regional powers to act and adapt. (Townshend & Crabtree, 2022).



Picture 2. China's view of Regional Security

Source: (The Economist, 2021)

Based on traditional approaches, the ongoing activity of AUKUS to develop the use of nuclear power in military capabilities can result in a more complicated dynamics and crisis in the region. The western power's decision to enhance military capacity tends to trigger other powers to do the same. It is accordingly with the traditional perspective that observed a destructive nature of conflict within the organization and practically AUKUS controversial

decision is avoidable to maintain and create stability in the region (Mix & Vaughn, 2022). The only way to avoid conflict escalation is to achieve a firm and solid consensus on how to handle the region's competing interests.

The rise of China undoubtedly prompted Western powers to respond as a balancing measure. Its overseas action reveals a desire to dominate, endangering the implementation of good democratic government and very certainly triggering the growth of authoritarian regimes. A sensible decision by the Indonesian government as the traditional leader of ASEAN should be made to end the power struggle and develop more constructive relationships through cooperation.

How should Indonesia respond to AUKUS alliances?

The two main driving elements in Indonesia's attitude toward developing an official posture towards the AUKUS are to handle the region's security quandary and to maintain ASEAN centrality. Indonesia's role as ASEAN leaders in 2023 faces numerous obstacles from both inside the member nations and foreign geopolitical tensions. Though Indonesia had not yet issued an official reaction to the AUKUS alliance, it remained committed to the primary premise of foreign policy formulation, which is to be free and active in managing regional dynamics. Critics from other ASEAN member states respond in a mixed manner that is consistent with their national interests. Indonesia and Malaysia express their concern about the use of nuclear power and the arms race that has resulted from the establishment of AUKUS in the region. Other countries' responses include Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Brunei, and Myanmar, who have chosen to remain silent and keep a low profile. While, as expected, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Singapore express their full support for the Western powers' initiative to sustain their participation in the region. The South China Sea scenario can be construed to shape this claimant state's orientation on AUKUS (Li, 2022).

There is numerous approaches Indonesia should take in response to AUKUS, to maintain stability, ASEAN unity, and to handle the great power contestation. A constructive and forward-thinking regional forum in ASEAN can help all the players responsible for the region's security communicate and negotiate a solution that is acceptable to all parties. It is hoped that through maintaining these diplomatic channels, all the players concerned will be able to resolve their problems. ASEAN can play a strategic role as the major actor in facilitating other stakeholders through regional security multilateralism through active dialogue and progressive communication in various institutions such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ASEAN Ministerial Meeting with dialogue partners, the East Asia Summit, and the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+), all of which have a strong commitment to

maintaining ASEAN centrality in the region as the main foundation of integration (Li, 2022).

Promoting non-alignment and inclusion in the region is undoubtedly a critical component in promoting the dialogue channel and cooperation among vital stakeholders. Indonesia's approach to AUKUS demonstrates a sense of impartiality, concern, and a commitment to smart and prudent policymaking. To integrate with other governments in the region, smaller countries must be engaged to understand their requirements and points of view. ASEAN, as a regional organization, is the major platform in the region for facilitating all the region's key participants. Indonesia's responsibility to unify ASEAN member nations is critical in reacting to the AUKUS security pact's formation. To establish a specific policy adjustment, ASEAN member states must reach an agreement on how to confront any traditional and non-traditional concerns resulting from the presence of AUKUS coalitions in the region.

Furthermore, when constructing a more comprehensive cooperation between the U.S. and Australia, both represent certain challenges for the implementation of the ASEAN Outlook of the Indo-Pacific. This activity contradicted AOIP objectives in putting ASEAN at the center of regional architecture processes that emphasize inclusivity (Febrica, 2023). Indonesia needs to step up in the regional stage and maximize its ASEAN presidency in facilitating great power conflict interests to achieve common goods to create peace and stability in the region.

Due to its strategic location between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, as well as its location in the heart of the emerging and developing global market, Indonesia is confronted with a plethora of possible interstate concerns with resource shortages and territorial borders with neighboring countries. The conflicting nature of traditional perspectives that claim that a conflict should be avoided due to its destructive nature on an organization's continuity and modern perspectives that assume the existence of conflict is required and supports the mechanism of a more integrated organization resulted in multiple interpretations of the presence of conflict. The comparison is between a pragmatic or pessimistic view of regional interaction dynamics and a more optimistic perspective, and it all depends on whatever country's direction, interest, and policymaking decision to interpret this global phenomenon. Interaction between states in the region should emphasize the notion of neutrality and balance in maintaining a strategic relationship between AUKUS and the emergence of China. The Australian officials argued that the development of submarines in the region aims to create stability in the region through cooperation and strategic engagement with the states within the region (Liang, 2023).

The tension in the South China Sea is the most recent potential interstate conflict that could develop because of territorial and boundary disputes. Chinese policymakers believe that

a large military and economic force can keep China's strategic position as a long-term economic power in the global interaction. China's effort to claim practically all the maritime land in the South China Sea through a historical claim has heightened tensions between Southeast Asian claimant states and other regional and major powers in the region.

The confluence of the 9-dash line claim and the Natuna Sea's exclusive economic zone was of particular concern to Indonesia. The concrete occurrences may be traced back to 2019, when the Chinese navy escorted its fishing vessels into Indonesia's EEZ (Chang, 2020). The buildup of military capabilities in China's artificial island in the South China Sea has created a security quandary for the region's neighbors. Joko Widodo, the Indonesian President, has pledged to increase military capacity construction along the border, particularly Natuna Island, as a preventive measure in response to the possibility for war escalation in the region (Scott, 2019).

Other ASEAN governments' territorial disputes in the land and sea domains are examples of inter-state conflict. The effort to accelerate the demarcation process through international law principles has been one of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia's priorities in identifying the land and marine border. The archipelagic structure of Indonesia's 17,000 islands overcame decades of conflict. As a result, the MOFA's effort to address these issues included 17 rounds of consultations last year with the Philippines, Malaysia, Palau, and Vietnam. This year, the focus will be on the maritime border with Malaysia in the Sulawesi Sea and the Malacca Strait, finishing the delimitation of the continental shelf and exclusive economic zone with the Philippines, resuming negotiations with Vietnam on the EEZ in the South China Sea, and reaching a partial agreement on the EEZ with Palau (Yuniar, 2022). In the framework of the marine domain, neighboring countries such as Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines, and China continue to engage in illegal fishing in Indonesia's maritime area. The goal of exploring other natural resources in states' EEZs is bound to aggravate bilateral ties between countries.

Australia Military Development Impact on Papua

Historical tension between Indonesia and Australia has been constructed and its always Papua that become the sensitive issues that influence the bilateral relations between both states. The complexity of these issues is crucial for both governments to build open and constructive dialogue to address these concerns. Indonesia's concerns grow from Australia 's achievement in advancing its military capabilities. Hence various diplomatic channels through bilateral and regional forums needed to build a transparent cooperation.

In viewing the emergence of AUKUS, practically Indonesia should anticipate the growing

capabilities of the Australian military. There has been a long dynamic of bilateral interactions regarding Papua and the human rights issues. Possibility for a further intervention from Australia to confront Indonesian domestic dispute is surely going to push Indonesia to enhance the same orientation in creating a more advanced military power. The nuclear submarines that operate in the regional waters become a major threat of nuclear proliferation, it also may enter the conflicted South China Sea and Indonesia authority would not let the activities related to war or non-peaceful activities to occur (Darmawan, 2023).

Keeping the neutrality notion of Indonesian strategic approach is the most suitable method to keep the stability and peaceful cooperation in the region. Hence complying with international law should be maintained along with enhancing domestic capabilities. Though the utilization of nuclear power has many advantages, it could potentially trigger the balance of power act and provoke actions from other states (Ningsih, 2022).

While becoming a danger to the region's security, Indonesia must make a more concerted effort to maintain strategic autonomy. It is necessary to protect its sovereignty and have a strategic decision-making competence in drafting military and security policies. Without precluding other options for cooperation, Indonesia's foreign policy has always prioritized economic interests. Exploring economic interests to strengthen national capacity is also required. To ensure economic growth and stability, regional actors must pursue a progressive partnership and construct an open dialogue, transparency, and commitment to keep the regional stability.

CONCLUSION

The trilateral security alliances focused on the Indo-Pacific maritime region and collaborate to improve capacity on defenses, technology, and nuclear-powered submarines. While in doing so, maintaining the balance of power in handling the emergence of AUKUS and China is important in creating stability in the region. Indonesia needs to maximize its effort to enhance a more capable military power to protect national integrity and sovereignty, implement a strategic diplomacy engagement in dealing with the emergence of Australia military capability to possibly harm Indonesian domestic issues, specifically Papua if the Australia government continued to interfere with this dispute.

REFERENCES

Aukus and the Indo-Pacific. Jatin Verma's IAS Academy. (2021, November 8). <https://www.jatinverma.org/aukus-and-the-indo-pacific>

- Creswell, John. W. (2017). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Darmawan, A. R. (2023). *Beyond Arms Race Concern: Indonesia and Submarine Passage in Archipelagic Waters*. RSIS.
- Febrica, S. (2023). Indonesia and the United States: Improving and Increasing Cooperation. In *Indonesia and the Indo-Pacific* (pp. 100–101). essay, Routledge.
- Li, M. (2022). ASEAN's responses to AUKUS: Implications for strategic realignments in the Indo-Pacific. *China International Strategy Review*, 4(2), 268–287. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42533-022-00121-2>
- Liang, L. Y. (2023, June 4). *Aukus and quad do not seek to displace ASEAN: Australian DPM*. The Straits Times. <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/aukus-and-quad-do-not-seek-to-displace-asean-australian-dpm>
- Mix, D.E., & Vaughn, B. (2022). AUKUS and Indo-Pacific Security. *Congressional Research Service*.
- Mohan, V. (2022, March 26). *Interpretation of quad and Aukus in the Indo-Pacific region*. The Geopolitics. Retrieved November 4, 2022, from <https://thegeopolitics.com/interpretation-of-quad-and-aukus-in-the-indo-pacific-region/>
- Murphy, F. (2022, September 16). *China, AUKUS countries clash at IAEA over nuclear submarine plan*. Reuters. Retrieved October 28, 2022, from <https://www.reuters.com/world/china-aukus-countries-clash-iaea-over-nuclear-submarine-plan-2022-09-16/>
- Ningsih, T. G. (2022). Nuclear powered warship, does Indonesia need it? *Jurnal Strategi Pertahanan Laut*, 8(1), 16. <https://doi.org/10.33172/spl.v8i1.1039>
- Shofa, J. N. (2023, May 16). *No formal dialogue between ASEAN and Aukus or quad: Envoy*. Jakarta Globe. <https://jakartaglobe.id/news/no-formal-dialogue-between-asean-and-aukus-or-quad-envoy>
- The Economist Newspaper. (n.d.). *Aukus reshapes the strategic landscape of the Indo-Pacific*. The Economist. Retrieved November 4, 2022, from <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2021/09/25/aukus-reshapes-the-strategic-landscape-of-the-indo-pacific>
- The geopolitics of AUKUS*. Council on Geostrategy. (2023, May 15). <https://www.geostrategy.org.uk/research/the-geopolitics-of-aukus/>
- Townshend, A., & Crabtree, J. (2022). U.S. Indo - Pacific Strategy, Alliances, and Security Partnerships. In *Asia-Pacific Regional Security Assessment 2022* (pp. 28–31). essay, IISS.