

SOUTHEAST ASIA'S GEOPOLITICAL DYNAMICS IN RESPONDING TO THE EMERGENCE OF AUKUS

Muhammad Badry Muntasyir¹, Made Panji Teguh Santoso²

¹²University of Singaperbangsa Karawang

Email:

2010631260033@student.unsika.ac.id
made.santoso@staff.unsika.ac.id

Abstract: The Trilateral Security Partnership or AUKUS is a defense pact formed on 15 September 2021 which aims to maintain security stability in the region by making the manufacture of nuclear-powered submarines for Australia the main agenda. The emergence of AUKUS with its efforts to balance the power of China's hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region has sparked debate between countries in the region. This qualitative research with data collection methods through literature studies and secondary data aims to analyze the differences in the responses of countries in Southeast Asia to the emergence of AUKUS based on their national interests, as well as how ASEAN's attitude as a regional organization in Southeast Asia is. The results of the study prove that differences in national interests make ASEAN countries split into two camps that are for and against AUKUS. ASEAN, whose centrality is threatened by the presence of AUKUS, is urged to immediately take a firm stance that is able to represent the interests of its members and is also encouraged to initiate various diplomatic negotiations with related countries.

Keywords: ASEAN Responses, AUKUS, Balance of Power

Abstrak: *Trilateral Defence Partnership Australia-UK-US* adalah sebuah pakta pertahanan yang dibentuk pada 15 September 2021 yang bertujuan untuk menjaga stabilitas keamanan di kawasan dengan menjadikan pembuatan kapal selam bertenaga nuklir bagi Australia sebagai agenda utamanya. Kemunculan AUKUS dengan upayanya untuk mengimbangi kekuatan (*balance of power*) hegemoni China di kawasan Indo-Pasifik telah memicu perdebatan antara negara-negara di kawasan tersebut. Penelitian yang bersifat kualitatif dengan metode pengumpulan data melalui studi literatur dan data sekunder ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis perbedaan respons negara-negara di Asia Tenggara terhadap kemunculan AUKUS berdasarkan kepentingan nasionalnya, juga bagaimana sikap ASEAN sebagai organisasi regional di Asia Tenggara. Hasil penelitian membuktikan bahwa perbedaan kepentingan nasional membuat negara-negara ASEAN terpecah menjadi dua kubu yang pro dan kontra AUKUS. ASEAN yang sentralitasnya terancam oleh kehadiran AUKUS didesak untuk segera mengambil sikap tegas yang mampu merepresentasikan kepentingan para anggotanya, juga didorong untuk menginisiasi berbagai perundingan diplomatis bersama negara-negara terkait.

Kata Kunci: AUKUS, Keseimbangan Kekuatan, Respon ASEAN

INTRODUCTION

On September 15, 2021, the world was startled by three old allies specifically Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States who announced the formation of an Australia-UK-US Trilateral Security Partnership or AUKUS Trilateral Security Partnership. Even though it aims to maintain the stability of the Indo-Pacific regional security, AUKUS seems to have forgotten—or perhaps deliberately—to ask for the willingness of countries in the region to form a defense pact. The formation of AUKUS, which lacks transparency and coordination, has led experts to consider that AUKUS has a hidden agenda that is getting clearer, namely as an effort to dispel China's dominance in the Indo-Pacific region (Delanova, 2021). This defense pact, which consists of three major countries, brings the nuclear issue as one of its main agendas. AUKUS agreed to transfer technology by the United States and the United Kingdom to Australia for the manufacture of nuclear-powered submarines. For the Australian navy, AUKUS is the answer to increasing military power to keep up with China's strength, as nuclear-powered submarines will allow Australia to dive into the South China Sea area without being detected (Tsuruoka, 2021).

According to Delanova (2021), the sudden appearance of AUKUS has also triggered different responses from countries in Southeast Asia. As one of the regions in the Indo-Pacific, Southeast Asia is inhabited by countries that have tendencies based on different national interests in responding to the emergence of AUKUS. The contradictory voices between countries in the region make ASEAN's centrality as a regional organization fade and questioned. Many parties, especially those who stand against AUKUS, have urged ASEAN to immediately take a firm stance in responding to the emergence of AUKUS (Singarimbun, 2021).

This article aims to analyze the dynamics of geopolitics and defense, as

well as security in the Southeast Asian region by answering a big question mark "How is the response of ASEAN and its member countries to AUKUS based on their respective national interests?". Eventually, this article offers a solution that can be taken by ASEAN with the full support of its members, namely by bringing this issue to the High-Level Conference so that ASEAN has a representative stance that can represent its common interests. Adding to the previous point, ASEAN also needs to demonstrate its relevance and credibility by being able to become the initiator of diplomatic negotiations with AUKUS members, China, and other countries in the Asia Pacific region. (Djalal, 2021).

LITERATURE REVIEW

In writing this article, the author refers to several previous studies that are relevant to the substance of the research conducted. Basically, there is no research that is used as a reference that specifically discusses the dynamics of geopolitics and security in Southeast Asia after the emergence of AUKUS based on the national interests of the ASEAN countries. At the same time, these previous studies will be a comparison that strengthens the arguments and theoretical basis used by the author.

The first study entitled "The Impact of the AUKUS Trilateral Defense Pact on the Indo-Pacific Regional Condition" by Mariane Olivia Delanova states that the concern of some Southeast Asian countries towards the emergence of AUKUS stems from the pessimism on AUKUS' commitment to maintaining regional stability. It is not surprising that ASEAN members have different responses in responding to AUKUS since the Indo-Pacific region is inhabited by multicultural countries and often causes fragile solidity between countries. However, Australia's intention to initiate the

formation of AUKUS is also seen as a step to evenly balance the power in the region which has only been held by China. With the AUKUS defense pact, there will be many parties gaining advantages by reason of AUKUS will become a new force against China's arbitrariness in its maritime activities (Delanova, 2021).

The second reference is entitled "AUKUS, Japan and the Indo-Pacific Strategic Rationales and Challenges" by Michito Tsuruoka. He said that although it shocked the world, the formation of AUKUS had rational intentions when viewed from a strategic lens. AUKUS is the initial stage of a long-term defense cooperation agreement between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States where success is not guaranteed in this agreement. This is because it can take decades for new submarines to finally be able to dive into the Indo-Pacific region, including the South China Sea (Tsuruoka, 2021).

RESEARCH METHODS

This article was prepared using qualitative research methods. As explained by Creswell (2017), qualitative research is research conducted by collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data without conducting field observations. Sampling was carried out by researchers to be interpreted personally. The method of data collection is carried out by studying literature, specifically by searching, collecting, and processing documents from various literature sources and scientific writings of previous researchers (Melfianora, 2019). The data used by the author is secondary data that originates from numerous books, scientific articles, and literature on credible online media.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The demeanor of the founding countries of AUKUS can be elaborated by using the neorealism theory which states that it is a natural law that every country must develop a strong military in order to maintain its survival in anarchical international politics. Otherwise, the

country will have to accept the consequences of being conquered in war and enslaved by other countries (Hadiwinata, 2017). The condition of anarchy—the absence of a central authority that can enforce laws and maintain the system—will result in countries competing with each other in increasing their power, especially in the military field. In this situation, greater military power will enable a certain country to dominate and influence other countries (Ambarwati & Wijatmadja, 2016). Through the theory of Neorealism, we can understand the reason why Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States formed a defense pact, namely to strengthen the military—especially the Australian military—by planning to construct nuclear-powered submarines.

Balance of Power refers to the efforts of a country to balance the military power of other countries that are considered to threaten security stability (Mearsheimer, 2001). According to the views of realist and neorealist experts, international relations are always colored by competition between countries in increasing their military power to maintain hegemony in a region. Furthermore, Ashari (2020) explained that balance of power is a concept of between-countries-relation balance, both at regional and global levels. This balance is indicated by the loss of the dominance of a country in a certain area due to the division of political and military power. In his masterpiece entitled "*Kamus Hubungan Internasional dan Diplomasi*" (International Relations and Diplomacy Dictionary), Ashari also explains that the concept of balance of power comes from two main opinions. The first is the historical realist group with the view that balance can be achieved through diplomacy between countries. The second is the structural realist group with the assumption that naturally, the system of relations between countries

can lead to a balance of power. Putting aside the existing differences of opinion, experts still believe that peace and stability can be achieved by a balance of power as it can reduce or eliminate the domination of superpower countries. If we take a look at the relevance of Mearsheimer's and Ashari's explanation of the emergence of AUKUS, we can understand that AUKUS is a response and an effort to counterbalance China's growing and aggressive power in the Indo-Pacific region. With the formation of the AUKUS Defense Pact, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States will play a role in collective security which aims to reduce China's hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region.

Security Dilemma refers to a situation where the behavior of a country that strengthens military power will make other countries feel threatened and respond by increasing their military strength. This dilemmatic situation will eventually lead to an arms race in the region (Hadiwinata, 2017). The security dilemma is among the factors in the formation of AUKUS by Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, which feel threatened by the aggressiveness of China's military power in the Indo-Pacific region, especially in the South China Sea. The conditions experienced by AUKUS countries are relevant to the neorealism explanation which states that countries will suffer a dilemmatic experience between strengthening or not strengthening their military capability. This difficult situation occurs because if a country strengthens its military, this will be considered a threat by other countries which will eventually do the same. Meanwhile, if a country does not strengthen its military, then that country will be easily controlled by other countries since a weak military will lead to a vulnerable position (Ashari, 2020).

Stepping to the end of 2021, the world was shocked by the formation of a new defense pact called AUKUS. As quoted from the Australian Prime Minister's website (2021), Scott Morrison

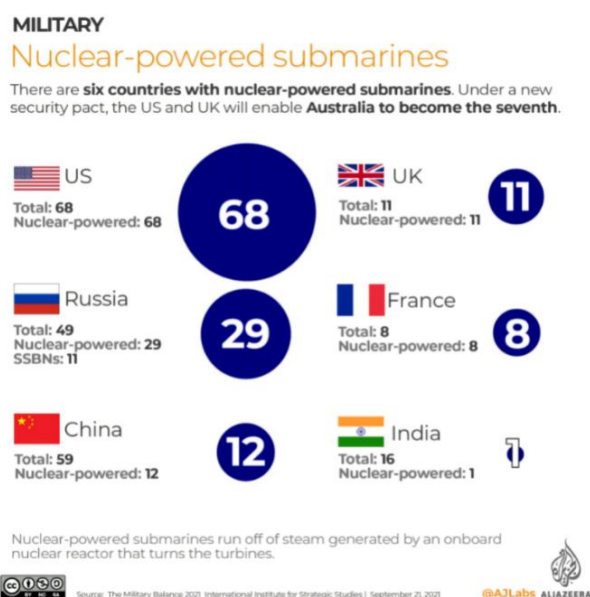
stated that AUKUS is a strategic partnership initiated by three major countries, specifically Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Having the name identified as the Australia-UK-US Trilateral Security Partnership, this new "gang" in the Indo-Pacific region places the military development of the three countries as the main agenda and priority aimed at maintaining regional stability and security.

AUKUS focuses on the development of military industry and technology, in particular, the procurement of nuclear-powered submarines to support mutual defense interests. As reported by Asia Today (2021), the formation of the AUKUS Trilateral Defense Alliance was officially announced by high-ranking officials from the three countries, namely Joe Biden as President of the United States, along with Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison, and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on September 15, 2021 (Dikarma & Christiyaningsih, 2021). The emergence of AUKUS is startling and has triggered numerous responses from the world, especially from countries in the Indo-Pacific region due to the lack of coordination (Delanova, 2021).

AUKUS was established with the aim of carrying out the function of collective defense and security, with one of the points of the agreement is to transfer technology in the manufacture of nuclear-powered submarines to Australia for the sake of its navy development (Cindyara, 2021). The AUKUS had a deal to assist Australia to create at least eight nuclear-powered submarines using US technology and expertise. According to many experts, ownership of nuclear-powered submarines will enable Australia to patrol longer in maintaining the security of the Indo-Pacific region which is often disrupted by the existence of the Chinese military (Delanova, 2021).

As reported on the website of the Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia (2021), not only will the AUKUS make Australia the seventh country in the world to have nuclear-powered submarines after the United States, China, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, and India, but the agreement will also focus on the cooperation of the three-member countries in technology and military fields, such as in terms of enhancing underwater security, quantum, cyber security, artificial intelligence, underwater warfare capabilities, and remote attack capabilities in the Asia-Pacific region which opens the door for various potential collaborations (Permatasari, 2021).

Figure 1.
Countries with Nuclear Submarines
Source: (Haddad, 2021).



The shock caused by AUKUS was not only by reason of its hasty formation, but also because the main agenda of the defense pact was the nuclear issue. An Asia-Pacific observer from the East-West Center, Satu Limaye, tried to clear up the misunderstanding. He said that AUKUS was not cooperation in the procurement of nuclear-weapon submarines, but nuclear-powered submarines. This cooperation is based on the assumption that nuclear-powered submarines are greater in strength and last longer than conventional

submarines (VOA, 2021). The sudden formation of AUKUS and lack of coordination have given rise to a lot of speculation and assumptions from the global community. Although officials from each of the AUKUS countries have repeatedly stressed that this cooperation is not aimed at any country, many analysts speculate that China is the actual reason behind the formation of AUKUS. As stated by an Indonesian political observer from the Australian National University, Greg Fealy, China is a country with massive naval power and is continuously showing aggressive behavior in the Indo-Pacific region. According to Global Fire Power, China, which has two aircraft carriers and 79 submarines, is a country with the largest naval power in the world. Meanwhile, Australia has absolutely no aircraft carrier and only has six submarines up to the present day. That is why AUKUS feels the need to deter China from acting high-handedly (VOA, 2021).

Greg Fealy's assumption is in line with what a number of defense and security experts say that AUKUS is a form of resistance to China's dominance in the Indo-Pacific region, mainly in the South China Sea conflict where China has expanded its territory through one-sided claims with nine-dash lines. China's aggressiveness in the Southeast Asian region has not only led to long-drawn-out conflicts with Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei Darussalam, and Indonesia, but also with the United States, which has numerous strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region. The existence of the AUKUS Defense Pact will be a power balancer against China's dominance in the region that can prevent China from acting arbitrarily (Putro, 2021).

In the Southeast Asian region, the emergence of AUKUS is a thing that disunites the ASEAN countries. Being under the same organization does not

guarantee that its members will always sing the same song, on account of each country has its own preferences, tendencies, and national interests in international relations. Some ASEAN countries consider AUKUS a threat to regional stability and increase the arms race. Meanwhile, some others are very supportive on the pretext that AUKUS can balance power against China.

For Indonesia, the emergence of AUKUS is something that is worrying and threatens regional stability. Having a free and active foreign policy tenet does not make Indonesia stand any nonsense in the middle position without a tendency toward certain parties. The principle adopted by Indonesia cannot be interpreted as total neutrality without a clear and firm stance. Through its Foreign Minister, Indonesia vocally expressed concern over the formation of AUKUS which is suspected to escalate tension, power projection, and arms race in the region. The Director-General of the Asia Pacific and Africa at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, Abdul Kadir Jailani, said that AUKUS did not heed the commitments of countries related to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (CNN, 2021). Countries that signed this treaty are committed to limiting the possession of nuclear weapons through nuclear disarmament, nuclear non-proliferation, and the use of nuclear materials for peaceful purposes (Putro, 2021). At the ASEAN-Australia Summit on 27 October 2021, the President of Indonesia, Joko Widodo, expressed concern over the presence of AUKUS. He does not want the stability of the Southeast Asian region to be disrupted because it becomes an amphitheater for arms race and power projection. Indonesia emphasized the importance of maintaining peace and nurturing trust between countries in the region. Trying to convince ASEAN, Australia stated that Canberra respects the non-proliferation agreement and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (Bimo, 2021).

Nevertheless, there is an interesting fact that Indonesia interweaves with AUKUS member countries in military relations. Indonesia's proximity to AUKUS can be interpreted as a political stance with an orientation towards national interests in the military and defense sectors. Moreover, the fact that Indonesia is in a dispute with China over the South China Sea—or what Indonesia names the North Natuna Sea—further sheds light on the fact that Indonesia will have a tendency toward AUKUS rather than China. Not long before the AUKUS agreement, on September 9, 2021, Indonesia and Australia agreed on several points of cooperation in the military sector, specifically the signing of the MoU on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism, the MoU on Cyber Cooperation and Emerging Cyber Technology, and an agreement to conduct joint exercises between the Armed Forces. Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) with the Australian Defense Force (ADF). Furthermore, Australia also donated 15 Armored Personnel Carrier (APC) tactical vehicles for the TNI. This agreement was agreed upon in Jakarta through a bilateral meeting between Indonesia represented by its Minister of Defense and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prabowo Subianto, and Retno Marsudi, with Peter Dutton as Australia's Minister of Defense and Marise Payne as Australia's Minister of Foreign Affairs (Putro, 2021). Adding to the previous points, Putro explained that not only was a good relationship established between the Indonesian military with Australia, but also with other AUKUS countries, specifically the United Kingdom. On September 16, 2021 (a day after the AUKUS Trilateral Defense Pact was agreed), the Indonesian Minister of Defense, Prabowo Subianto, attended Defense and Security Equipment International, a defense industry exhibition held in London, England. After attending the

exhibition, Prabowo Subianto then held a bilateral meeting with the Secretary of State for Defense, Ben Wallace. During the bilateral meeting, Prabowo Subianto and Ben Wallace agreed on a license to manufacture British battleships in Indonesia, namely the Arrowhead 140 frigate, which PT PAL plans to produce as many as two ships in Surabaya and is targeted for completion in 2026.

Being one voice with Indonesia, Malaysia is one of the countries that are 'disgusted' by the presence of AUKUS. Prime Minister of Malaysia, Ismail Sabri Yaakob, assessed that AUKUS could provoke other countries to act more aggressively (CNN, 2021). Malaysia firmly encourages ASEAN countries to shout one solid voice and reinforce solidity in responding to AUKUS to make Southeast Asia a region free from rivalry between the US and China (Kurniawan, 2021). In Malaysia's perspective, Southeast Asian countries must act quickly to configurate a consensus on the security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States in the Indo-Pacific region because of the great potential to create an arms race in the region (Dikarma & Christiyaningsih, 2021). Seeing Malaysia's contra stance towards AUKUS, of course, it is quite baffling if we examine it from the point of view of Malaysia's national security. Malaysia is one of the countries in dispute with China over the South China Sea conflict, so there is a high chance that AUKUS will benefit from trying to diminish China's dominance in the Indo-Pacific region. However, a regional analyst, Oh Ei Sun, said that Malaysia is more concerned with its strategic working relations with China, despite China's aggressiveness which often intrudes on Malaysian territorial waters (Gunawan, 2021).

Without the support of Indonesia and Malaysia, AUKUS can breathe a sigh of relief knowing the fact that Singapore, one of the most influential countries in ASEAN, is its supporter. Singapore, which is a long-standing US partner, has openly welcomed the presence of AUKUS.

Singapore's Ambassador to Indonesia, Anil Kumar Nayar, welcomed AUKUS which he said could maintain stability and security in the Asia-Pacific. Lee Hsien Loong as Prime Minister of Singapore hopes that AUKUS will be able to contribute to regional peace. Loong optimistically thinks that AUKUS is not a threat to ASEAN centrality, and will not contravene the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (CNN, 2021). Singapore's positive response to AUKUS cannot be separated from the Little Red Dot's close relationship with one of the founders of AUKUS: the United States. Singapore and the United States have guaranteed military cooperation in The Strategic Framework Agreement for a Closer Cooperation Partnership in Defense and Security. The agreement signed in 2005 in Washington by President Bush and Prime Minister Lee was motivated by the alignment of interests between the two countries in the military and defense fields. In terms of national interests, Singapore prioritizes trade and military cooperation with the international community. In the military field, Singapore has always prioritized its hard power with a large allocation of funds in the defense sector, has a mandatory military policy, and a total defense policy that unites the economic, civil, military, social, and psychological aspects of the country. For Singapore, military capability coupled with economic sector progress and social cohesion are the key to the country's stability. Not surprisingly, Singapore was then armed by the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF), which is a world-class military unit. The Singapore military, which has a pragmatic ideology, intends to step up its military capabilities and hard power in order to fight terrorism, maintain regional stability, and advance defense technology. For the United States, this cooperation is also an effort to balance

the power and hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region (Prakoso, 2014).

Another support for AUKUS also comes from a country that has close ties to the United States in the military field. The Philippines strongly supports and publicly states that AUKUS cooperation is important for enhancing regional security and stability. This support is not surprising because the Philippines is a longtime ally of the United States. In fact, the Philippines had become a 'second home' for the US fighter fleet that had anchored at Subic and Clark Bases from 1947 to 1991 (Zulfikar, 2021). Moreover, historical facts prove that the Philippine territory is one of the most widely claimed by China in the South China Sea disputes, especially in the Spratly islands. The dispute with China that never ends has prompted the Philippines to seek support from great powers to counterbalance China's strength. In this case, the United States is the best answer for the Philippines. This archipelagic nation in northern Indonesia asked the United States for assistance in the South China Sea conflict by bringing this dispute to the International Court of Arbitration in January 2013. The United States, which has many interests in the Asia Pacific region, responded favorably by establishing military cooperation and providing financial support to the Philippines for the purchase of modern defense equipment to strengthen the Philippines' military capabilities. The two countries are also intensely conducting joint military exercises around the South China Sea (Wu & Zou, 2016). The Philippines' invitation to the United States to intervene in the security dynamics in the Southeast Asian region explicitly indicates that the Philippines is dependent on the United States which is considered capable of being a balance of power against China. Although it has often been stated that the United States is neutral in the South China Sea conflict, in fact, US financial assistance to the Philippine military continues and is predicted to

increase every year (Chalid, Heryadi, Nuraeni, & Sudirman, 2016).

An ambiguous stance was shown by Vietnam which neutralized itself from regional dynamics after the formation of AUKUS. To the Hanoi Times, Le Thi Thu as a spokesman for Vietnam said that Vietnam always monitors the geopolitical dynamics of the region. Even so, Vietnam has a preference and tendency towards AUKUS by stating that nuclear energy needs to be developed and used for peace and socio-economic development, of course, by always paying attention to human and environmental safety (Anh, 2021). It will be difficult for Vietnam to take side with China in responding to the emergence of AUKUS. The dispute between China and Vietnam over the Spratly Islands and the Paracel Islands has been dragging on for a long time and has sparked heated relations between the two countries. Both Vietnam and China continue to seek support from ASEAN countries regarding their claims to the two islands (Maksum, 2017).

ASEAN's joint attitude and multilateralism in responding to tensions between AUKUS and China are difficult to realize because ASEAN countries actually have their own national preferences and interests. The intervention of great powers in regional security dynamics triggers intra-ASEAN divisions which weaken ASEAN's position and relevance as an independent regional organization. ASEAN is now accepting challenges from the United States and China which make ASEAN an amphitheater for power struggles and hegemony (Chalid, Heryadi, Nuraeni, & Sudirman, 2016). Then, the absence of superpower countries forced Southeast Asian countries to take shelter in strong countries. As a result, countries in the region will be disintegrated into two major power strongholds, namely the AUKUS side—especially the US—and

the Chinese side. This has great potential to cause intra-ASEAN conflict (Permatasari, 2021). This difference in voice raises a big question: *Is AUKUS a threat to ASEAN's stability and centrality or the other way around?* AUKUS initiators have repeatedly emphasized that ASEAN's centrality in maintaining regional security and stability will not be weakened by AUKUS. However, in fact, ASEAN is a region that will potentially be a submarine-crossing path constructed by AUKUS, resulting in the ASEAN centrality in building regional security seems to be subtly ignored by AUKUS (Singarimbun, 2021).

According to a Southeast Asian affairs analyst, Richard Heydarian, the AUKUS pact has exposed discordance in ASEAN. AUKUS has shown that ASEAN does not have the same position, but only the position of each country based on their respective national interests. In this case, each country is able to show a firm stance both pro and contra, and can show ambiguity by pretending to be neutral or secretly welcoming the emergence of AUKUS (Gunawan, 2021). For countries that are against AUKUS, this defense pact will violate the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (SEANWFZ), an agreement that has been agreed upon by ASEAN countries as an effort to bring a Southeast Asian region free of nuclear and weapons of mass destruction into reality. The treaty agreed on December 15, 1955, is a mission of international peace and security that will be threatened by AUKUS with the agenda of procuring submarines supported by nuclear power (Putro, 2021). Meanwhile, pro AUKUS countries are optimistic that the AUKUS defense pact will be a balance of power that can decrease China's hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region. As explained earlier, China is acting aggressively and arbitrarily on and on by making unilateral claims to other countries' territories by echoing the nine-dash line.

Figure 2.
Map of the nine-dash line in the South China Sea (green)
Source: (Tsirbas, 2016).



The different responses shown by countries in Southeast Asia show that ASEAN is not cohesive in determining its position: pro or contra. ASEAN countries that are not being one voice have made the relevance of ASEAN as a regional organization questionable. Although the ASEAN region is closer to Australia, which is one of the members of the AUKUS “gang”, there is no denial that the United States has much greater influence in this regional dynamic. The pro and contra stances taken by countries are also influenced by the proximity of these countries to the United States, or to China as its rival. To put it more succinctly, ASEAN countries are disunited into two sides, Pro AUKUS leaning on the US, and Contra AUKUS leaning on China (Singarimbun, 2021).

Many works of literature optimistically say that ASEAN is able to have a role as a balance of power in the region's dynamics of security.

Unfortunately, ASEAN has in fact not been able to dampen the power of America and China, which have myriad interests and high-value assets in Southeast Asia. For ASEAN, the security dynamics in the region are a legacy of the cold war that still remains (Chalid, Heryadi, Nuraeni, & Sudirman, 2016). ASEAN faces doubts from the global community because it is considered disintegrated and unable to take real action even just to provide a response that represents all its members. Here, ASEAN's centrality in outbuilding a peaceful region seems to be fading. AUKUS is solid proof that the United States is no longer focused on ASEAN to facilitate its interests in the region, especially in balancing power with China (Syahrianto, 2021). At the same time, here ASEAN appears to have lost its dignity as a relevant regional organization. According to Cindyara (2021), ASEAN does need to prepare itself to face the dynamics of the new geopolitical climate after the emergence of AUKUS. Even though there is no one voice, ASEAN cannot automatically be considered disunited and is no longer relevant as it is often depicted in many speculative media reports. Retno Marsudi as Indonesian Foreign Minister is optimistic that ASEAN can survive more than half a century while still contributing to stability, peace, and prosperity since this group believes in the power of cooperation. In addition, ASEAN also believes in the power of dialogue to overcome differences (AsiaToday, 2021). Reported by Antara (2021), ASEAN only took different steps and strategies in responding to new dynamics after the emergence of AUKUS.

The various responses given by ASEAN countries demanded the regional organization which is now under the leadership of Brunei Darussalam to immediately take a joint stance. According to the Director-General of Asia-Pacific and Africa at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, Abdul Kadir Jailani, ASEAN must take firm action against this defense pact based on the ASEAN Outlook in the Indo-Pacific

(Cindyara, 2021). ASEAN's concrete actions in responding to AUKUS and maintaining solidity can be started by taking a stand through an ASEAN joint statement which is carried out collectively. As a regional organization in Southeast Asia, ASEAN must be able to initiate the formation of mutual trust between ASEAN member countries, AUKUS, and China through the multilateral negotiating table. This multilateral dialogue can be initiated by holding the ASEAN Regional Forum or East Asia Forum. By taking the diplomatic route, ASEAN is expected to reduce tensions in the region (Singarimbun, 2021).

A brilliant idea was also put forward by the former Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Marty Natalegawa. The idea, titled the Indo-Pacific Treaty, will apply the same norms and values as the ASEAN's Treaty of Amity of Cooperation. Natalegawa said that so far ASEAN's diplomatic stance is still weak and not vocal. ASEAN needs to re-echo its interests louder to maintain its relevance on the regional geostrategic chessboard. ASEAN also requires a strategic design arrangement in order to compete at the international level. Although it sounds difficult because of the absence of a superpower country in ASEAN, this is not impossible considering that ASEAN has ten members who will have great power when synergizing with each other. (Djalal, 2021).

CONCLUSION

AUKUS is a defense pact whose appearance has startled the world. The defense pact that was established with the mission of maintaining regional stability has actually clouded the dynamics of the Indo-Pacific regional security. Basically, AUKUS was formed as an effort to quell China's increasingly strong and aggressive hegemony. Playing the role of balance of power, AUKUS can have a positive impact and

benefit many parties, especially countries in dispute with China. The dynamics that occur are caused by the lack of confidence in the Indo-Pacific countries towards the good intentions of AUKUS. In addition, the role of balance of power played by AUKUS will also trigger an arms race in the region. As a country with great economic and military power, China certainly will not remain silent and desperately give up on AUKUS.

In responding to AUKUS, ASEAN countries have various stances that are motivated by the national interests of each country. This is not surprising because Southeast Asian countries are oriented toward two great powers both in the economic and military fields. Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia rely heavily on China for their economic development. Meanwhile, the Philippines and Singapore rely on US military assistance in dealing with tensions in the South China Sea. Indonesia and Malaysia are on the counter side and are worried that AUKUS will escalate the arms race, the military, and threaten regional stability and peace. Meanwhile, Vietnam appears to be taking cautious steps and a 'wait and see' approach by stating that it will continue to monitor developments in security dynamics in the region. Contradictory, the Philippines and Singapore actually welcome AUKUS because they are considered to be able to balance China's power and dominance in the region (Syahrianto, 2021).

As a regional organization in Southeast Asia, ASEAN has a centrality to be reckoned with. Unfortunately, the solidity of the ASEAN member countries that are disunited in responding to AUKUS has made the relevance of ASEAN questioned by many parties. Experts say that ASEAN does not take a position that represents its members, because there is only the position of each ASEAN country based on its national interests. To answer the doubts of the global community, ASEAN needs to take decisive steps in responding to the emergence of AUKUS. Some of the policies that ASEAN can take

are to initiate multilateral dialogue by holding the ASEAN Regional Forum or East Asia Forum, and form the Indo-Pacific Treaty by applying the same norms and values as the ASEAN Cooperation Friendly Treaty or ASEAN's Amity Treaty of Cooperation.

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