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Q20

The newly tri-nation partnership AUKUS is aimed at countering China's ambitions in the Indo-Pacific region. Is it going to supersede the existing partnerships in the region? Discuss the strength and impact of AUKUS in the present scenario.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2021 · GS II · 15 marks · India and its Neighbourhood

India and its neighborhood - relations.

Core demand of the question

- The newly tri-nation partnership AUKUS is aimed at countering China's ambitions in the Indo-Pacific region. Is it going to supersede the existing partnerships in the region? Discuss the strength and impact of AUKUS in the present scenario
- Honour the official stem. Compare AUKUS with **Quad** and **Malabar**; do not collapse them
- Keep the explanation within a 15-mark length

Revision summary

AUKUS (2021) is a tri-nation pact for Australian nuclear-powered submarines and advanced military technology, aimed at China's Indo-Pacific rise.

Its strength is hard undersea power and Anglosphere interoperability, not regional political inclusion.

- **It will not supersede the Quad or Malabar:** those include India and do diplomacy and exercises AUKUS does not.

Impact includes PLA planning, a France-Australia rift over the Barracuda contract, and ASEAN nuclear-sensitivity.

India should treat AUKUS as a parallel layer, keep **Quad-Malabar** as its own China-balancing tools, and stay out of the nuclear-propulsion club.

Introduction

AUKUS, announced in 2021 by Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, is a hard-security pact whose first pillar is nuclear-powered attack submarines for Australia, with a second pillar in advanced technology. It is aimed at China's military-maritime rise. It will not supersede the **Quad**, **Malabar**, ASEAN-centred diplomacy, or Five Eyes; it adds a sharper Anglosphere blade beside those partnerships.

Body**What AUKUS is, and what it is not**

- AUKUS is a tri-nation defence-industrial partnership, not a pan-Indo-Pacific political forum. India, Japan, ASEAN and France are outside the nuclear-submarine core.
- Pillar I (submarines) transfers naval nuclear propulsion to Australia, a first among non-nuclear-weapon NPT states in this form, which is a proliferation-sensitive strength and a

diplomatic cost.

- Pillar II (undersea, AI, quantum, hypersonics, cyber) is the longer technology glue, potentially more transferable than hulls.

Strength in the present scenario

- It gives Australia a quieter, longer-range undersea capability that complicates PLA Navy planning in the South China Sea and approaches to Taiwan - a military fact the Quad's statements do not create by themselves.
- It binds UK industry and nuclear know-how to a Pacific theatre, thickening the American alliance system after years of European distraction.
- Interoperability among three English-speaking militaries with Five Eyes intelligence habits is a real combat strength, not a communiqué.
- The shock to France (cancellation of the conventional Barracuda-class deal) showed AUKUS can reorder alliance politics overnight - impact as well as strength.

Impact, including on China and on partners

- Beijing reads AUKUS as containment with nuclear overtones, which may accelerate PLA naval and nuclear modernisation rather than freeze it.
- **ASEAN centrality is rattled:** nuclear propulsion in regional waters raises residual NPT and environmental politics even if Australia stays a non-nuclear-weapon state.
- France-Australia and EU Indo-Pacific trust took a hit, then a slow repair; minilateralism now has a reputation for surprise.
- **For India, AUKUS is not an invitation and not a threat to strategic autonomy:** New Delhi wants a balance on China without a nuclear-submarine club that would collide with its non-proliferation story.

Will it supersede existing partnerships?

- The Quad (India, Japan, Australia, U.S.) is a diplomatic and public-goods minilateral - vaccines, maritime domain awareness, infrastructure talk - not a NATO. AUKUS does not replace that political table; Australia simply sits in both.
- **Malabar** is a naval exercise grouping (U.S., India, Japan, later Australia) that builds operational habit among four navies, including India's. AUKUS does not absorb **Malabar** or give India nuclear propulsion.
- **ANZUS, Five Eyes, U.S.-Japan and U.S.-Korea alliances, and ASEAN Regional Forum remain:** AUKUS layers on the U.S.-Australia-UK node; it does not merge the lattice.
- Supercession talk confuses a specialised defence pact with the region's whole security architecture. Different tools, overlapping members, no single heir.
- **Recommendation for India:** deepen Quad and Malabar, keep AUKUS at arm's length on nuclear propulsion, and cooperate case-by-case on undersea domain awareness that does not require club membership.

Flow diagram

AUKUS AUKUS AU UK US UK US -> Nuclear submarines Pillar I

AUKUS AU UK US -> Pillar II advanced tech

Nuclear submarines Pillar I -> Harder PLA maritime calculus

Quad -> Diplomatic public goods

Malabar -> Four-navy exercises

AUKUS AU UK US -> Layer not successor

Quad -> Layer not successor

Malabar -> Layer not successor

Conclusion

AUKUS is a strong, China-focused Anglosphere defence-industrial pact whose submarine and technology pillars will matter in the Western Pacific. It will not supersede the **Quad**, **Malabar**, or ASEAN-centred partnerships, because those do different political and operational jobs and include India and others whom AUKUS excludes. Impact is real - on the PLA's planning, on France, on ASEAN nerves - as an added layer, not as a successor regime.

Facts & figures

AUKUS, 2021

Australia-United Kingdom-United States partnership; Pillar I submarines, Pillar II critical technologies.

Quad

India-Japan-Australia-United States minilateral for Indo-Pacific diplomacy and public goods, not a defence treaty.

Malabar

Naval exercise framework whose later Australian inclusion overlaps AUKUS membership only in part.

French Barracuda / Attack-class cancellation

Immediate diplomatic cost of AUKUS; showed the pact's power to reorder alliances.

NPT / nuclear propulsion

Australia remains a non-nuclear-weapon state; naval reactors still raise regional non-proliferation politics.