



AUKUS: A STRATEGY FOR CREDIBLE DETERRENCE THAT CANADA MUST EMBRACE

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Exercise Solo Flight

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THAT CANADA MUST EMBRACE**

Lieutenant-Commander Leslie M. Gunderson

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AUKUS: A Strategy For Credible Deterrence That Canada Must Embrace

Canada shares a common history with the United States and Australia as former dependencies of Great Britain. All four countries continue to have very close ties, being strong democracies with similar values and which are allied economically, politically, and militarily in numerous ways. Throughout the 20th century, Canada was considered the closest ally of the United States as shared custodians of a continent with the world's longest undefended border, unequalled economic cooperation, and militaries that were almost completely interoperable.

In the 21st Century, China has emerged as a new superpower. They have demonstrated a willingness to challenge US hegemony in the Indo-Pacific region through aggressive military expansion coupled with coordinated utilization of all instruments of their national power in numerous activities short of armed conflict. In response, the Canadian government recently formalized an Indo-Pacific Strategy which affirms Canada's dedication to protect the Rules-Based International Order and a free and open Indo-Pacific region, very clearly labelling China as a disruptive power.¹ That is why it came as a surprise that a major defensive cooperation pact focused on the Indo-Pacific includes the US, The UK, and Australia, with Canada noticeably absent. This paper will show that rather than just another defence procurement agreement between friendly states, AUKUS is an acknowledgement of a rapidly changing security landscape in which we face an urgent deterrence problem with respect to China and that Canada must join AUKUS to play a meaningful part in influencing the geopolitical landscape commensurate with the aims in the Indo-Pacific Strategy. Failing to do so will diminish Canada's ability to advance these aims, maintain close ties with our traditional allies, or to contribute in a meaningful way to credible deterrence against growing Chinese aggression. This paper will explain what credible deterrence entails with respect to China and the Indo-Pacific region and why there is urgent need to strengthen it. AUKUS will be explained, including how it is a large part of a major shift in United States naval doctrine and how it demonstrates the urgency of the Chinese deterrence problem. Canada's historical contribution to credible deterrence will be described, why it is important that Canada join AUKUS and what failure to join our allies in this endeavour will cost with respect to national defence and stated foreign policy aspirations.

DETERRENCE IN THE INDO-PACIFIC CONTEXT

Patrick Morgan defined two types of deterrence: immediate and general. Immediate deterrence is more intuitive in that it involves the threat to thwart an imminent attack from happening or punish one once it has occurred. This contrasts with general deterrence which involves the regularly maintained military capabilities two opponents possess as a means of regulating their relationship, even in the absence of either side considering an imminent attack on the other.² Lawrence Freedman elaborates on the relationship between immediate and general deterrence by noting that effective general

¹ Global Affairs Canada, *Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy*, (Ottawa: Global Affairs, 2022) 5-7
<https://www.international.gc.ca/transparency-transparence/assets/pdfs/indo-pacific-indo-pacifique/indo-pacific-indo-pacifique-en.pdf>

² Patrick Morgan, *Deterrence: A Conceptual Analysis* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1977), 28

deterrence creates a stable situation if both sides perceive that despite continuing antagonism, one must respect the other side's interests. He notes that over time, the policy problem for a state is to maintain this perception in one's adversary by keeping available the capabilities required for effective immediate deterrence, even throughout many years of seemingly stable general deterrence.³ There is undoubtedly a relationship between these two types of deterrence. Both can happen concurrently, both require legitimate known capabilities, and both require a belief in one's opponent that you have the resolve to use those capabilities if pushed beyond clear "red lines" that protect your vital interests. It is these demonstrated capabilities coupled with the perception of your resolve to use them that ultimately garners the amount of credibility ascribed to the deterrence.⁴ Both types of deterrence also involve the coordinated effort of all the elements of national power: diplomacy, information, military, economics (DIME). Although immediate deterrence relies more heavily on the military element, it must involve a whole-of-government effort to be most credible.

The overall goal of maintaining credible deterrence is to limit your adversary's strategic options so that they choose courses of action that align with your own vital and important interests. It is important to describe how interests that are considered vital and those that are considered important differ in how they affect the credibility of one's deterrence strategy. According to Daryl Press, when measuring interests, it is intuitive that safeguarding fundamental aspects of a state's survival, like national sovereignty, integrity of borders, and safety of citizens, are easily identifiable vital interests which are most likely to be aggressively defended.⁵ A deterrence therefore serving to protect these aspects would naturally carry the most credibility. What government would fail to defend its own borders and citizens? Press, however, defines important interests as a much broader category of material concerns that are not necessary for survival of the state, but which countries value greatly and are willing to pay high prices to protect and defend.⁶ When a country extends its deterrence to protect friendly states, it is usually because important interests rather than vital ones are at stake. This means it more difficult to achieve a credible deterrence when extending it to a third party or another region of the globe. How far would a country go to defend a far away land? Expensive government expenditures which defend against threats to other countries can be difficult to explain for politicians and difficult to understand for voters. There may be more urgent concerns closer to home. Press further defines a second type of vital interest as the assurance that no other country possesses control of the world's major economic regions: Europe, North America, and East Asia.⁷ This would imply that today's globalized economy, which was created by the United States after the end of the Second World War and has been defended by them ever since, is a vital interest for the United States, and by extension their democratic western allies. I believe however, that it falls in between the categories

³ Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 42

⁴ Robert Ross, "Navigating the Taiwan Strait: Deterrence, Escalation Dominance, and U.S.-China Relations," *International Security* 27 no. 2, (2002): 51-52 [https://direct-mit-edu.cfc.idm.oclc.org/isec/article/27/2/48/11742/Navigating-the-Taiwan-Strait-Deterrence-Escalation](https://direct.mit.edu.cfc.idm.oclc.org/isec/article/27/2/48/11742/Navigating-the-Taiwan-Strait-Deterrence-Escalation)

⁵ Daryl Press, *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 26

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

of vital and important interests, especially in how it is perceived by policy makers, and there are criticisms of this definition along these lines.⁸

For many years, US Policy in the Indo-Pacific assumed that allowing China into the global economy as a major trading partner would have numerous tangible benefits, including democratization of the Chinese state and greater cooperation.⁹ It is this key assumption that led Western countries to minimize the perceived threat to the status quo in the Indo-Pacific for many years. The lack of appreciation for the dangers of the rise of Chinese power played greatly in diminishing the credibility of Western deterrence of Chinese aggression. The United States and its allies focused instead on suppressing and eliminating global terrorism. After 9/11 and with no other global superpower to threaten US hegemony, the war on terror was easily targeted as the most vital interest. The assumption was that great power conflict was unlikely and future conflicts would involve weaker failed states and non-state actors.

China, meanwhile, appreciated that their maritime approaches constituted a key vulnerability which impacted its options to advance the policy of becoming the clear regional hegemon. In 2013, Chinese military strategists stated their Navy's strategic mission: "...opposing an enemy invasion from the sea is the foundational strategic idea behind the establishment of our Party's navy; it is the fundamental, long-term strategic mission of the People's Liberation Army Navy."¹⁰ This lesson had been learned in 1996 when aggressive Chinese posturing towards Taiwan resulted in the United States deployment of two aircraft carrier battlegroups and intensified arms sales to Taiwan. Chinese analysts correctly concluded that the US response was a strong signal that greatly limited their options in the Taiwan dispute.¹¹ Since that time the Chinese have vastly strengthened their position in their maritime approaches. They have pursued advanced technologies and weaponry to defeat US carrier battle groups and have expanded away from the mainland into the South and East China Seas (SCS and ECS) through island building at Fiery Cross Reef, Gaven Reef, Hughes Reef, Johnson Reef, Mischief Reef, and Subi Reef. These new land masses have been heavily militarized with runways, hangars, aircraft, ship harbours, and missile systems, despite Chinese assertions that this is not the case. China has continued this process despite rulings against it from the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). In 2018, US Admiral Philip Davidson, the future US Navy Commander of Pacific Command, summarized Chinese intent as follows:

⁸ Yves-Heng Lim, "The fragility of general deterrence: The United States and China in maritime East Asia." *Comparative Strategy* 41 no. 2 (2022) 140-141 <https://www-tandfonline-com.cfc.idm.oclc.org/doi/full/10.1080/01495933.2022.2039006>

⁹ Dean Chen, "The End of Liberal Engagement with China and the New US-Taiwan Focus." *Pacific Focus* 35 no. 3 (December 2020) 400-401 <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.cfc.idm.oclc.org/doi/full/10.1111/pafo.12176>

¹⁰ Academy of Military Science Military Strategy Dept., *The Science of Military Strategy*, (Beijing, Military Science Press, 2013) 209 <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Portals/10/CASI/documents/Translations/2021-02-08%20Chinese%20Military%20Thoughts-%20In%20their%20own%20words%20Science%20of%20Military%20Strategy%202013.pdf>

¹¹ Ross, "Navigating the Taiwan Strait" ..., 68-69

China seeks to displace the U.S. as the security partner of choice for countries in the Indo-Pacific. Specific to the military instrument of power, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is using its rapidly increasing defense budget to fund the most ambitious military modernization in the world. The PLA is heavily focused on advanced platforms and long-range strike weapons, including anti-ship ballistic missiles, intermediate range ballistic missiles capable of targeting U.S. and allied bases, advanced space and cyber capabilities, and hypersonic glide weapons. These counter-intervention weapon systems are designed to push U.S. forces out beyond the First Island Chain, isolate China's neighbors, and prevent the United States from intervening in any regional conflict on China's periphery.¹²

Admiral Davidson went on to assert that as of 2018 “China is now capable of controlling the SCS in all scenarios short of war with the United States.”¹³ The problem faced by the US military is three-fold. They have lost their quantitative gap over the Chinese military, the qualitative gap is closing as the Chinese bring much more capable systems online, and China has shown a willingness to aggressively use its military to threaten its neighbors. The realization that the United States faces an aggressive peer competitor who possesses the ability and intent to seriously threaten an important if not vital US interest has caused a massive shift in focus for US policy makers. The US military has pivoted away from the Middle East and counter insurgency operations towards an urgent military and technological arms race with China. It is a race in which the US is seeking strong allies who are willing to participate in creating a credible deterrence against Chinese aggression.

THE AUSTRALIA – UNITED KINGDOM – UNITED STATES AGREEMENT

On the 16th of September 2021 the Heads of State of Australia, The United Kingdom, and the United States held a joint press conference in which they announced the creation of “an enhanced trilateral security partnership called AUKUS.”¹⁴ The announcement stated goals of deeply strengthening cooperation and integration on a range of defence initiatives, including advanced technologies and capabilities, industrial bases, and supply chains. These details were largely overshadowed by the revelation of the first initiative of AUKUS, which is to provide Australia with a nuclear submarine capability.

¹² United States Senate Committee on Armed Services. *Advance Policy Questions for Admiral Philip Davidson, USN Expected Nominee for Commander, U.S. Pacific Command*, (Washington D.C. 2018) 15 https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Davidson_APQs_04-17-18.pdf

¹³ *Ibid.*, 18

¹⁴ The White House. “Joint Leaders Statement on AUKUS,” last modified 15 September 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/15/joint-leaders-statement-on-aukus/>

This announcement acknowledges the credible deterrence gap in three ways. First, the announcement occurred without any specific details regarding the new capabilities, numbers of new platforms, and procurement timelines, that typically accompany other large-scale procurement agreements between nations. In fact, the only detail regarding the submarine initiative was that there would be an 18-month period to “seek optimal pathways to deliver this capability”.¹⁵ Second, AUKUS marks just the second time that the US has agreed to share its highly classified nuclear submarine technology with an allied nation, and the first since they did so with the UK in the 1950s. This demonstrates the importance the US places on strengthening allies in the region and that they are fully committed. Finally, the AUKUS announcement means Australia is backing out of a prior agreement with France to procure diesel-electric submarines and are willing to spend up to ten times more for nuclear submarines instead. The early announcement signals that the AUKUS nations are serious about defence and security in the Indo-Pacific, as did the sharing of US nuclear secrets and Australia’s abrupt move away from their agreement with France. It speaks to the rapidly changing security situation in the region in which a well-armed and aggressive China poses a serious threat now and not just in the future. Furthermore, the announcement which followed the 18-month consultation period stated that in addition to the long-term development of Australia’s future nuclear submarine, dubbed SSN-AUKUS and which will be based on a UK design, the US will sell three to five Virginia Class SSNs to Australia in the near-term as well as begin stationing US nuclear submarines there as early as 2027.¹⁶ Again, the capability is needed as soon as possible, not just many years from now.

The announcement regarding nuclear submarines overshadows the second pillar of AUKUS, Advanced Capabilities. This pillar was described in 2022 to include the AUKUS Undersea Robotics Autonomous Systems project (AURAS), the AUKUS Quantum Arrangement project (AQuA) which seeks to advance quantum computing technology, and collaborative research in a host of other areas including advanced artificial intelligence, cyber, hypersonic and counter-hypersonic technology, defence innovation enterprises, and classified information sharing.¹⁷ The Australia Chair for the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Charles Edel, recently described nuclear submarines as merely the beginning when it comes to the strategic significance of AUKUS and that the “three nations plan to deepen their technological collaboration, grow the industrial capacity in and of all three countries, and increasingly coordinate their strategic planning.”¹⁸ In these ways AUKUS more closely resembles the NATO alliance than other cooperative defence procurement agreements. It also reflects the increasingly

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ The White House. “Fact Sheet: Trilateral Australia-UK-US Partnership on Nuclear-Powered Submarines,” last modified 13 March 2023. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/03/13/fact-sheet-trilateral-australia-uk-us-partnership-on-nuclear-powered-submarines/>

¹⁷ The White House. “Fact Sheet: Implementation of the Australia-United Kingdom-United States Partnership (AUKUS),” last modified 5 April 2022. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/04/05/fact-sheet-implementation-of-the-australia-united-kingdom-united-states-partnership-aukus/>

¹⁸ The Center for Strategic and International Studies. “The United States, Britain, and Australia Announce the Path Forward for AUKUS,” last modified 16 March 2023. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/united-states-britain-and-australia-announce-path-forward-aukus>

complex nature of the security environment. The 2018 United States National Defense Strategy attributes this complexity to rapid technological change, the challenges from peer adversaries across all operating domains, and the need to overcome strategic atrophy caused by the longest period of continuous armed conflict in US history.¹⁹ To overcome this atrophy and respond to the pacing threat of China, the strategy lays out US priorities to build a more lethal force. These include prioritizing preparedness for war and modernizing key capabilities in the space domain, cyber domain, nuclear forces, C4ISR, joint lethality in contested environments, and forward force maneuver and posture resilience.²⁰ These priorities are perfectly reflected in the AUKUS agreement, with nuclear submarines being just one aspect of the grander strategic aims.

THE NEW DOCTRINE OF DISTRIBUTED MARITIME OPERATIONS

Drilling down further into the operational realm, the US military has begun a process of reinvention since the release of the National Defense Strategy. The US Marine Corps has decided to completely divest themselves from heavy armor and heavy lift helicopters and reducing the amount of infantry battalions and associated supporting organizations. The USMC Force Design 2030 states that they will transform the force to meet the threat of China and do so in full partnership with the US Navy.²¹ In essence, they are moving away from being a second land army to a more agile force of numerous small amphibious fleets that will be supported by advanced precision strike weapons and autonomous ships and aircraft. The aim of this force is to make it very difficult for China to achieve their major objectives by starting a conflict in the region and to be capable of seizing Chinese bases in the South China Sea if necessary and push the Chinese military back to the mainland.

Concurrently, the United States Navy is in the process of redefining their core doctrine with the concept of Distributed Maritime Operations (DMO). What DMO acknowledges is that their traditional large naval task groups are vulnerable to Chinese attack. Though extremely resilient and highly lethal, the number of threat vectors posed by a modernized Chinese force is likely to overwhelm a large, consolidated fleet operating in the western Pacific. Deterring Chinese aggression through the presence of a large carrier battle group, as has been done in the past, is no longer a viable option. To counter the Chinese threat, US Vice Admiral Phil Sawyer, former Deputy Chief of naval Operations, stated that the navy envisions large numbers of “geographically distributed naval forces integrated to synchronize operations across all domains.”²² He went further to explain its not just the number of forces, but the right mix of crewed and uncrewed platforms to maximize ISR capabilities above, on, and below the sea, in a kill web in

¹⁹ Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2018), 1 <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1045785.pdf>

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 5-6

²¹ United States Marine Corps, *Force Design 2030*, (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Navy, 2020) 2-3 <https://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/142/Docs/CMC38%20Force%20Design%202030%20Report%20Phase%20I%20and%20II.pdf?ver=2020-03-26-121328-460>

²² Sea Power “DMO is Navy’s Operational Approach to Winning the High-End Fight at Sea,” last modified 2 February 2021. <https://seapowermagazine.org/dmo-is-navys-operational-approach-to-winning-the-high-end-fight-at-sea/>

which “the connective tissue between sensors, platforms, and weapons...[is] central to our DMO operating concept.”²³

DMO represents a fundamental shift in US Navy doctrine. It is based on deploying more numerous, smaller, and difficult to detect forces, both crewed and uncrewed, combined with inorganic ISR assets on land in allied nations, all networked into a resilient kill-web. By massing the effects of numerous weapon systems without the need to mass the platforms that fire them, a distributed force is designed to be both more lethal and more difficult to find and strike,²⁴ which drastically increases the costs for an adversary in weapons, assets, and lives, in a conflict. The USMC is invested in the principles of DMO through its Force Design 2030 concept and are coordinating with the US Navy to achieve it. AUKUS represents the extension of this transformation to key US allies. The intended rate of the conversion of forces combined with the associated technological hurdles make it an ambitious undertaking. Allied nations who do not keep up with these changes may find their forces incompatible with the advanced kill-web network that is envisioned, and thus unable to effectively project power in the Indo-Pacific region.

CANADA AND DETERRENCE

The CAF played an important role in deterring Soviet aggression during the Cold War. Since the end of the Second World War, the make-up of our military was based entirely on preventing the outbreak of hostilities between our North Atlantic allies and the Soviet Union, and to defend North America and Europe in the event of war. Distinguished Canadian Defence analyst, Dr. George. R. Lindsey, writing in 1980 at the height of Soviet military power, described Canadian deterrence priorities as heavily influenced by our unique geographical location. The country was situated along the most direct polar routes for Soviet bomber and missile strikes on North America, and along the great circle route of the sea lines of communication to Europe. Dr. Lindsey concluded that defending the approaches to major North American strategic weapon sites as well as the sea links across the Atlantic were the obvious choices to prioritize CAF capabilities towards strategic deterrence of Soviet aggression.²⁵ To support these priorities, The CAF has maintained several generations of advanced radar surveillance systems in the North and fleets of fighter-interceptor aircraft to defend North American airspace. Our Naval fleets have been designed to fight alongside our allies in the contested open ocean battlespace along the sea lines of communication in the North Atlantic in major fleet engagements. The RCN mastered naval fleet operations and anti-submarine warfare. The RCAF are highly proficient submarine hunters with their long-range patrol aircraft and shipborne ASW helicopters. Dr. Lindsay highlighted the importance of maintenance and continued upgrading of land and air-based radar monitoring of the arctic, and of specific

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Center for International Maritime Security “Fighting DMO, Part 3: Assembling Massed Fires and Modern Fleet Tactics,” last updated 6 March 2023. <https://cimsec.org/fighting-dmo-pt-3-assembling-massed-fires-and-modern-fleet-tactics/>

²⁵ George. R. Lindsey, “The Realities of Strategic Deterrence and Their Implications for Canada”, in *The Selected Works of George R. Lindsey* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 187-190

procurement initiatives like the CP-140 Aurora long range maritime patrol aircraft, the Canadian patrol Frigate, and the CF-18 Hornet fighter.²⁶

The new platforms noted by Dr. Lindsey form the backbone of the RCN and RCAF to this day and are nearing the end of their operational lives. There are ongoing procurement initiatives underway to replace these legacy platforms by new systems that will essentially fulfill the same roles. The CF-18 is to be replaced by the F-35A Lightning and the Canadian Patrol Frigate is to with the Canadian Surface Combatant, based on the British Type-26 frigate design. The Canadian government has recently expressed interest in replacing the CP-140 Aurora with the P-8 Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft²⁷, and the CH-124 Sea King ASW helicopter was recently retired after the procurement of the CH-148 Cyclone ASW helicopter. The RCN recently stated the requirement to replace the Victoria Class submarine with a modern diesel-electric submarine yet to be chosen.²⁸ These are essentially like-for-like upgrades of our traditional capabilities based on the cold-war model of deterrence against a Soviet threat. Furthermore, due to the complex and lengthy nature of Canadian military procurement cycles, the processes that led to approval of these procurement initiatives began well before the acknowledgment of the return of major power competition with China, and the increased likelihood of major military conflict in the Indo-Pacific. They also began well before the USN and USMC decided to undertake major redesign of their forces or the announcement of the AUKUS agreement.

That is not to say that these procurement projects should all be cancelled. However, it suggests that Canada is suffering from the lack of a coherent strategy that is relevant to the state of the world as it is today with China as an urgent threat to national security to our stated aspirations on the world stage. The Indo-Pacific Strategy contains perhaps some of the strongest language the government of Canada has directed towards a rival power in many years. It states that China frequently disregards international rules and norms in attempting to establish economic, diplomatic, and military dominance in the region and that Canada must challenge them as required to protect our economic interest in open trade with Indo-Pacific nations. It is unequivocal in stating Canada's commitment to uphold the rules-based international order which supports the globalized economy.²⁹ The strategy suggests Canada considers its Indo-Pacific trade relationships and the international rules and norms that enables them as vital interests of the state. As discussed previously, vital interests are those in greatest need of defending through the maintenance of credible deterrence. The Indo-Pacific strategy also aligns our foreign policy very closely to that of the United States³⁰ and comes at a time when China has been more

²⁶ Ibid., 188-189

²⁷ Ottawa Citizen "Canada Requests Boeing P-8 Surveillance Aircraft from U.S. Government," last updated 27 March 2023 <https://ottawacitizen.com/news/national/defence-watch/canada-requests-boeing-p-8-surveillance-aircraft-from-u-s-government>

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²⁹ Global Affairs Canada, *Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy...*, 22

³⁰ National Post "New Indo-Pacific Strategy Seen Putting Canada in Lockstep with US on China," last updated 28 November 2022 <https://nationalpost.com/news/politics/new-indo-pacific-strategy-seen-putting-canada-in-lockstep-with-u-s-on-china>

openly dismissive and threatening towards Canadian leadership, indicating that they do not see Canada as a serious player in the region at this time.³¹

The fact that Canada lacks the ability to influence Chinese actions despite having vital interests in the region and foreign policy goals that align with the United States indicates that we are suffering the same deterrence deficit that led to the creation of AUKUS. Detractors can look at the nuclear submarine aspect of AUKUS as a reason for Canada not to get involved, and it was the federal government itself that initially explained our absence from AUKUS as due to nuclear submarines not being a current Canadian priority.³² However, it is the second pillar of AUKUS, advanced technology, that is vital for Canada to be a part of. To remain operationally relevant, we must be in lock step with our allies with respect to the new technologies that will support future military capabilities. The Commander of the Canadian Joint Operations Command (CJOC), Vice Admiral Bob Auchterlonie, recently stated publicly that it is Canada's absence from the advanced technology pillar of AUKUS that is of significant concern.³³

In contrast, Australia is fully committed to both AUKUS and the shifting US Naval doctrine of DMO. In conjunction with ambitiously undertaking AUKUS initiatives, Australia recently developed an amphibious warfare capability equivalent to a USMC Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU). This unit is trained to USMC standards and is completely interoperable with them.³⁴ Furthermore, Australia are leaders in developing the Loyal Wingman program which will very soon introduce autonomous aerial systems carrying advanced sensors and weapons and are survivable in contested environments.³⁵ These aircraft will operate with Australian and US F-35s, and many technologies to improve this capability will be developed through AUKUS. Canada will soon have its own fleet of F-35s and would seem to be a good fit to participate in this program. Developing a domestic amphibious capability would also not be an unrealistic goal for Canada and would permit the Canadian Army to play a major role in the Indo-Pacific. In its current state with no Sealift capability whatsoever it is unclear how the largest component of Canada's military can add value to credible deterrence in Asia. Such vessels are also extremely useful for conducting humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) missions, due to their large aircraft, vehicle, and storage capacity. HADR

³¹ CBC News "Why Xi Jinping publicly rebuked Justin Trudeau, and what it means for Canada's relations with China," last updated 17 November 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/china-justin-trudeau-xi-1.6653939>

³² Global News "Canada not part of AUKUS because nuclear submarines are not a priority: Anand," last updated 21 March 2023 <https://globalnews.ca/video/9567039/canada-not-part-of-aukus-because-nuclear-submarines-marine-capabilities-not-priorities-anand>

³³ CTV News "Military Concerned by Canada's absence from American-British-Australian Security Pact," last updated 15 January 2023 <https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/military-concerned-by-canada-s-absence-from-american-british-australian-security-pact-1.6231547>

³⁴ USNI News "Australia's Amphibious Force Nearing Full Operational Capability," last updated 5 October 2017. <https://news.usni.org/2017/10/05/australias-amphibious-force-nearing-full-operational-capability>

³⁵ Airforce Technology "Uncrewed ambitions of the Loyal Wingman," last updated 1 November 2022. <https://www.airforce-technology.com/features/uncrewed-ambitions-of-the-loyal-wingman/>

is also a stated priority within Canada's Defence Policy³⁶ and the Indo-Pacific Strategy.³⁷ Setting long term goals like Australia is doing and formally joining our allies in developing these capabilities is something Canada must therefore strongly consider.

Furthermore, the reality is that Canada has a small military, long excluded from the ability to field massive platforms like US super carriers and ballistic missile submarines. With DMO, the pivot to smaller, more nimble, more versatile platforms that carry an array of crewed and autonomous craft above, on, and below the water would seem to be a perfect fit for the small but highly professional and skilled Canadian military. In this way, being at the forefront of AUKUS technological development would allow Canada to maximize the return on investment in our defence budget.

The Canadian Government must be made to understand that AUKUS is not only about nuclear submarines. It is the setting of clear goals and striving towards a cohesive technologically advanced doctrine in line with our allies that is what makes it extremely valuable for Canada. Cohesive strategy is something that is lacking in a Canadian military context today. As mentioned, we are maintaining similar military capabilities to what we have had throughout the Cold War. Contemporary capital procurement projects were conceived independent of one another and without a larger look at the strategic context.

Australia on the other hand, is pursuing a multi-domain procurement strategy, with AUKUS initiatives targeted at all three branches of their military holistically. Just last month, Australia released a Defence Strategic Review which stated the goal of moving from a Joint Force to a Fully Integrated Force across all domains, optimized to operate together in the maritime and littoral theatres.³⁸ As part of this review, they are pausing their planned acquisition of new Hunter-Class ASW frigates, which is to be based on the same Type-26 design as the Canadian Surface Combatant, until an independent analysis of their surface fleet capabilities is completed. This review seeks to reprioritize ASW operations to their future nuclear submarine force and factor in a major shift to a strategy of a larger number of smaller surface and subsurface vessels with advanced new technologies.³⁹ It is alarming that Australia is reconsidering their own acquisition of the only major surface combatant that is planned for the future RCN fleet, and it demonstrates Australian commitment to develop the right capabilities that mesh together to fit their needs.

³⁶ Dept. of National Defence, *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy*. (Ottawa, National Defence, 2017) 11 <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/dnd-mdn/documents/reports/2018/strong-secure-engaged/canada-defence-policy-report.pdf>

³⁷ Global Affairs Canada, *Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy*...,20

³⁸ Department of Defence, *Defence Strategic Review*, (Canberra: Department of Defence, 2023) 54-61 <https://www.defence.gov.au/about/reviews-inquiries/defence-strategic-review>

³⁹ Naval News "Australia's DSR: Navy Signals Shift Towards Smaller Ships," last updated 2 May 2023. <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2023/05/australias-dsr-navy-signals-shift-towards-smaller-ships/>

CONCLUSION

Our allies have “pivoted to Asia”⁴⁰ and have decided that in the military context this requires adopting the new doctrine of Distributed Maritime Operations to respond to an urgent deterrence shortfall. They are working closely through the AUKUS partnership to develop this new doctrine together.

Canada has published an assertive strategic policy document with respect to China with its Indo-Pacific Strategy. The policy designates free and open access to trade with the region as a vital interest to the nation. But Canada risks lacking the military capabilities to defend this vital interest and could therefore be unable to achieve its diplomatic and economic aspirations. Responding to the deterrence gap should therefore be a top priority for the Canadian Government.

Canada needs not participate fully in every aspect of AUKUS to benefit greatly from it. Finding our own niche in the larger allied strategy is something we have traditionally excelled at, but to continue to be a reliable partner we must be a formal participant. We must be at the forefront of the technological and doctrinal changes that can only be achieved through collaboration with our allies in multinational defence partnerships.

Maintaining an unwavering commitment to the defence of North America, while supporting our closest allies in responding to the Chinese threat should be Canada’s top two priorities for deterrence, and a detailed military strategy must be developed to enable it in the near and long terms. If we fail to follow the lead of our closest allies, Canada is unlikely to possess the advanced capabilities needed to contribute in a meaningful way to credible deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. Without these capabilities, Canada lacks the ability to signal its resolve to defend our vital and important interests in the region, and the stated goals of the Indo-Pacific Strategy are likely to remain wishful thinking. When it comes to effective deterrence, actions speak much louder than words, and seeing is believing.

⁴⁰ Brookings “The American Pivot to Asia,” last updated 21 December 2011.
<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-american-pivot-to-asia/>

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