

AUKUS and the world Diplomacy

Intercontinental alliances are nothing new in the world. They can be military, like NATO, and represent a collective system of mutual security, and act jointly in attacks, like the Afghanistan War. They can also be non-interference agreements, like the BRICS, which are not automatic military and economic pacts. And they are usually formed in times of conflict. NATO, for example, was born in 1949, after World War II and the beginning of the Cold War.

Last Wednesday (09/15), the birth of AUKUS was announced, an intercontinental alliance formed by Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The negotiations for this agreement have been going on in secret for many months. No wonder: it is the largest military agreement between them since the end of World War II. Furthermore, it is the first time since 1958 that the United States will share its technology for developing nuclear-powered submarines. It comes out of the tensions that have been going on in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. In the press conference that Scott Morris, Boris Johnson, and Joe Biden gave, everything was focused on "security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific," and they insisted that the pact "is not directed against any country." But those who follow international politics know that this is not quite the case.

Although China has not been mentioned once, it is a fact that the military alliance is only born to stand up to the country's naval-military power. The main "cold conflict" in the region is the disputes over the North China Sea, an area that creates access between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Whether the intention is to increase or decrease conflicts is still open. A third of all goods in the world pass through there, amounting to a little over 3 trillion dollars a year, which is twice the GDP of Brazil, for example. Several countries claim parts of that sea, and China is the country

that has made most progress in its conquest, with the construction of artificial islands in the region, with air and naval bases. But AUKUS totally changes the balance of power in the region.

The military agreement will give Australia the ability to build its first nuclear-powered submarines through technology transfer. And it establishes technology sharing between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States in the areas of artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and quantum computing. But it focuses on increasing the military capacity of the countries, especially Australia. China has, between submarines and military ships, between 350 and 400. The United States has 300, the United Kingdom has 80. If they unite and give Australia the technology to produce its own, they will have the greatest naval-military power in the region. Australia had a policy of "automatic non-alignment" with the United States, and the pact ends that. They have chosen a side. Of course, China remains much more armed than Australia, but the response it would receive to an eventual attack has totally changed.

For Australia, it was a deal that could not be refused. China, which used to be one of its main trading partners in mineral sales, responded strongly to pressure from Canberra for an international investigation into the origins of the new coronavirus. When Scott Morrison sent a letter to the G20 requesting international support in the investigation, Beijing responded with significant increases in export tariffs. Barley, meat, cotton, coal and wine were the main products that experienced significant changes in tariffs. China is the destination for 39% of Australia's exports, and this change has caused an obvious mismatch in its trade balance. Researcher Mathias Alencastro wrote for Folha that the agreement "paves the way for technological modernization and positions Australia at the forefront of opposition to Chinese expansionism. It is worth adding that the transfer of nuclear

technology for submarines proposed by the Americans could never be covered by France.¹

China reacted, of course. The government spokesman said that AUKUS is the “Cold War mentality being born,” said it will cause problems in the peace of the region, and called the countries irresponsible. But it’s not quite “peace” that the region has seen. In 2020, a fishing vessel from Vietnam was sunk by the Chinese coast guard. And a Malaysian oil tanker was also intercepted in the region, both in the South China Sea. Although these actions may seem small, they represent serious violations of international treaties on the dominance of those waters, which also belong to Taiwan, Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia, two of those attacked by China in their own seas. In practice, Australia’s new naval-military capability will give the country the ability to respond to a possible conflict in a way that other countries in the region do not have.

China is not the only country facing AUKUS as a diplomatic conflict. France also finds itself under extreme attack. In 2016 Australia bought 12 submarines from France, for an amount that annually represented 4% of the country’s GDP. Mathias Alencastro also wrote that this deal “would ensure thousands of jobs in Normandy, one of the French regions hardest hit by deindustrialization, the international competitiveness of European military technology in the post-Brexit era, and France’s political projection in its last global frontier, the Indo-Pacific, where it still controls New Caledonia, Reunion Island, and the archipelago of Mayotte.”

With AUKUS, the trade agreement was broken and France learned about it through the media, along with the rest of the world. French Prime Minister Emmanuel Macron had already given interviews saying that he did not intend to form military alliances with the European Union, that he was aiming for “alliances outside of Europe,” which is why the deal with

Australia was so important. Even if the loss in GDP is important, the biggest problem is the breaking of the political partnership, done in an undiplomatic way.

The French Foreign Minister was not ashamed to expose his complete dissatisfaction to the world media. He accused Biden of acting like Trump, said he was stabbed in the back, and cancelled Gala events of the US Embassy in Paris (one of them was of the commemoration of the US War of Independence, which drew a lot of attention). He even called a meeting with the US and Australian ambassadors with Prime Minister Macron, which in international politics is a serious representation of dissatisfaction.

The United States and the United Kingdom are moving to soften the situation. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said on Sunday (9/19) that he is "very proud of the UK's relationship with France," but that was not enough for Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian. In an interview with local newspaper Paris 2, the Minister said that "There was a lie, there was duplicity, there was a big breach of trust, there was contempt. So all is not well between us, it's not well at all. It means there is a crisis." President Joe Biden has requested a call with the French president, but the phone has yet to ring in Washington, DC.

Some political commentators assume that Macron's immoderate reaction is his attempt to captivate popular opinion in his favor. The reality is that the situation puts him in a position of humiliation and easily disposable, this with seven months to go before the French presidential primaries, where he is technically tied with far-right representative Marine Le Pen. The media recalls his great efforts to preserve the United States in the Doha agreements on troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the response weeks later is his easy dismissal.

NATO also comes out weak, as the partnership between the

thirty countries no longer seems sufficient to deal with international military problems. Already, buzz is emerging that France could leave NATO. Macron has already called it “brain dead,” and it would not be atypical of France, which left NATO in 1966 under De Gaulle and returned in 2009 under Sarkozy. And Macron is recognized to be a Gaullist. But the exit would also leave France in an even greater position of political isolationism, unable to position itself as the military power it wants to be recognized as.

AUKUS means more the change of position of Australia and the UK in an eventual conflict than a major increase in war power. The bloc, united, certainly means the world’s greatest naval-military power. But its objective significance is Australia’s automatic anti-China alignment in any conflict that might take place in the region.

Some point out that the birth of AUKUS is the birth of the first “New Cold War” bloc, with China replacing Russia. British MP Jeremy Corbyn accuses the Johnson government of “encouraging a new cold war,” and some journalists agree with his view. Its exact meaning is still open. Australian submarines are expected to take several years to be ready for action, and are theoretically forbidden to carry weapons. The upcoming NATO summit has gained even more importance, as has the COP 26 in the first week of November in Glasgow.

[1^ohttps://www1.folha.uol.com.br/colunas/mathias-alencastro/2021/09/acordo-militar-com-a-australia-fragiliza-promessa-de-biden-de-unir-ocidente.shtml](https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/colunas/mathias-alencastro/2021/09/acordo-militar-com-a-australia-fragiliza-promessa-de-biden-de-unir-ocidente.shtml)