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AUKUS AS AN EFFECTIVE RESPONSE TO THE PROSPECTIVE LIMITATION OF AMERICAN DOMINATION IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

ABSTRACT

The establishment of the AUKUS system by the USA, Great Britain and Australia is a tangible proof of the change in the American maritime strategy and the rivalry with China for influence in the Indo-Pacific. Including Australia in the efforts to curb Chinese regional expansion is an undoubted success of Washington, which has skilfully used both the weaknesses of the QUAD agreement and the Australia-India-Indonesia trilateral cooperation to persuade Canberra to redefine its policy towards China and the region itself. As a result, Australia is becoming not only the second most important ally of the USA after Great Britain, but also the most important maritime player in the Indian Ocean. This status also poses a threat to the US, as it will weaken the community of interests with India and – to a lesser extent – with Saudi Arabia. Moreover, American politicians must accept the fact that they will be co-makers of policies in the Indo-Pacific region and that sometimes – in their own interest – they will be forced to remain passive in the face of actions taken by Canberra. The aim of the article is to analyze the political significance of the AUKUS agreement for American politics and to assess the possibility of its potential transformation into a political alliance or a regional maritime security complex. This assessment will be made based on the analysis of strategic documents of the signatories of the agreement and political and economic conditions in the Indo-Pacific region. The issue of approval by the American political establishment for recognizing Australia as an independent political player in this region was considered a major threat to the implementation of this political concept.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The conclusion of the trilateral AUKUS agreement (USA, Great Britain, Australia) on co-operation aimed at developing the potential of the Australian submarine fleet – despite initial fears (O'Connor et al., 2023) – is perceived rather as the establishment of a political and military coalition, and in the future – its transformation into a political and military alliance (Vaughn, 2021). Such a political assessment of this agreement caused an almost hysterical reaction from France (the country with the status of the US's oldest ally) and a decidedly negative reaction from China (Shoebridge, 2021; Marlow, 2021; Huisken, 2022). Undoubtedly, this fact also surprised the international community. In fact, this agreement should be viewed as the support that Australia is giving to the United States and the United Kingdom in order to effectively control the maritime activity of other state players in the Indo-Pacific and the Southern Oceans (Mickiewicz, 2021). It should also be emphasized that the presence of Great Britain among its signatories is not – as some media reports – only an American gesture towards this country or a consequence of signing (10 June 2021) the so-called New Card. It results from political calculations and the assessment of military potential in the areas covered by tripartite cooperation (Brooke-Holland and others, 2021). It is also a result of the recognition by American analysts that it is impossible to achieve the assumed strategic goals (limiting China's presence in the Indo-Pacific region) through actions under the QUAD system reactivated in 2017 (India, South Korea, Japan, Australia). This agreement should also be seen as the last stage in the process of changing the US policy in the basins of the four oceans (the Pacific, the Indian, the Arctic and the Southern), taking into account the fact that the American hegemony in these waters is not so obvious. In the third decade of the 21st century, it was noticed that sanctioning the thesis that *The Ocean is God, T. A Mahan its prophet and the US Navy its sword* is in practice abandoning the concept of a reactive policy in relation to actions taken by other maritime players. It was recognized that it was necessary to create an international order, and not to react to its transformations.

Pointing to the delays in the assessment of the strategic situation in sea areas, it should be emphasized that there is continuity in the process of creating American policy. It also occurs despite the existence of fundamental differences between the views of successive presidents of this country in the last decade. It is pointless to discuss whether the State and Defense departments have such autonomy, or whether the US economic policy must be subordinated to the security policy (achieving interests). The fact is that in 2018–2021, in the course of the policy of breaking regional agreements in the Indo-Pacific catchment area, the forces of the Indo-Pacific Command were significantly transformed (*National Security*, p. 45, *Summary*, p. 11), cooperation in the QUAD system was reactivated and dynamized, and finally the AUKUS system was signed. The chronology of events and the actions taken indicate that American politicians (strategists) understood that they were losing a strategic advantage to China, and that national goals could not be achieved by controlling navigable straits and using the potential of aircraft carrier teams. It is necessary to carry out comprehensive projects in the face of China's political and economic expansion, and not in reactive activities. On the other hand, regional conditions mean that the role of the “gendarme” in the southern part of

the Indo-Pacific and the South Ocean was assigned to Australia, for which the limitation of Chinese political and military activity in the area from Oceania through Antarctica to South Africa is one of the factors increasing the level of state security (Wilkinson, 2022). Formally, this coalition aims to improve the possibilities of supervising compliance with regulations on the exploitation of sea basins, but in practice (due to the way in which China and, to a lesser extent, Japan and South Korea conduct maritime activity) it is aimed at maritime players violating the interests of both countries in the region, and the signatories of the AUKUS agreement. Their specificity makes it impossible to extend the QUAD system to Great Britain, and practical contacts with countries that recognize themselves as regional powers (India and Indonesia) made American politicians realize that increasing American maritime activity is also perceived by them as a threat to their interests and region destabilizing factor. The specific “replacement” of these partners by Great Britain not only does not weaken the potential that this coalition has in the Indo-Pacific in relation to alternative solutions, but increases both the potential of Australia’s naval forces and – more importantly – its political cohesion and the community of interests of the signatories of this agreement in the long term. Both Australia and Great Britain are interested in maintaining the control of shipping and its freedom, which in the Indian Ocean is counteracted by attempts by China to obtain such a possibility. In addition, the spectrum of activities for sea control includes the issue of compliance with the imposed fishing quotas in the Southern Ocean, which is important for Australia. On the other hand, the inclusion of Great Britain in the process of building submarines for this country is an important element expanding and improving the financial efficiency of the long-term investment plan, undertaken after Brexit, in the field of expanding the naval forces, especially the submarine fleet. It also increases its status as an independent political player and strengthens its strategic alliance with the US, which is also an important strategic goal of this country after leaving the EU. Pointing to the above conditions, it is justified to emphasize that the cooperation undertaken is aimed at limiting the attempts to obtain the possibility of military maritime activity by the Chinese navy in the Indian Ocean. However, due to the likely reaction of this country, it will not be transformed into a formal alliance of an institutional nature. Nevertheless, it is a convenient instrument for the United States, as it is accepted by regional powers, to counteract Chinese economic and political expansion in the Indo-Pacific catchment area.

2. THEORETICAL APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The specificity of the legal regime of sea basins and the principle of ensuring freedom of navigation in the open sea and safety of navigation, which dominates in the policy of coastal states, determined the research approach. In the process of preparing this study, the realistic paradigm was adopted as the paradigm of basic research, which allows for the description and interpretation of the policy pursued by coastal states as the main maritime players. The specific nature of the state’s powers on sea waters in the context of ensuring freedom and safety of navigation makes it possible to use the concept of the Copenhagen School and Barry Buzan’s theory in the field of the principles of creating regional security complexes (RSC). It has been assumed that one of the main factors contributing to their emergence is security interdependence (Buzan, 1991), however, in this case it refers to non-regional state players whose interests are located in the Indo-Pacific region. This feature makes it necessary to include the

theory of alliances in the course of research. Taking into account its main theses regarding the advisability of building alliances (Liska, 1962; Wright et al., 1978; Morgenthau, 1985) and the theory of “balance of threat” and “balance-of-power” (Walt, 1987; Waltz, 1979) the leading thesis was recognized by R. Rothstein that political alliances are also created to influence another international player, especially to stop him from taking undesirable actions (Rothstein, 1968).

Based on these assumptions, it was assumed that regional maritime security complexes may function in the formula of coalition activities aimed at enforcing the provisions of the law of the sea. This solution can be used in a situation where the formal institutionalization of an alliance/coalition is unjustified or its creation may be a stage in the process of building an alliance (Stefanowicz, 2001). It was assumed that the creation of an alliance/coalition results from the convergence of interests of the state striving to play the role of a leader in it and the states to which the proposal is addressed. Their duration and the ability to influence them are determined by the durability of the interests that led to their creation, the level of their convergence and the possibilities of implementation by individual members. Re-determinants can be defined as “attractiveness” for their participants in the process of achieving subsequent strategic goals defined by them. Based on the above theories, it was assumed that:

1. In maritime areas, with the consent of the countries of the region, the role of the so-called dominant entity may be a sea power from outside this area, provided that a sense of interdependence of the countries of the region is skillfully created in the field of maritime security.
2. The cooperation of the countries of the region with the supra-regional player is formally based on a community of interests relating to the general observance of the legal regime in these waters and the need to enforce both the law of the sea (UNCLOS) and international agreements regarding the forms of exploitation of naval resources and activities (the principle of peaceful from the sea);
3. The political and economic processes occurring in the Indo-Pacific region create a kind of interdependence between the countries of the region and supra-regional players in shaping security in maritime areas (security inter-dependency);
4. The formula for the use of sea basins by shipping, the adopted concept of shipping control and the political and economic expansion of supra-regional powers in the catchment area of the West Indian Ocean create the factors that generate the need to create regional security complexes.

The adopted research assumptions allow for the formulation of a working hypothesis in the form of a statement that the establishment of AUKUS is the result of the existing community of interests of three countries (USA, Great Britain and Australia). It is a consequence of attempts to take control of shipping in the Indo-Pacific region by other maritime players and the occurrence of factors destabilizing the region. China's economic and military expansion in the West Indian Ocean region was recognized as such. On the other hand, the informal nature of this alliance is the result of the assessment that the regional maritime security complex should be built on the basis of the RSC concept with the participation of the countries of the region approving the participation of other state players. This factor means that the AUKUS agreement at this stage functions as a political alliance according to Rothstein's concept, which allows it to become an agreement aimed at ensuring maritime security, especially the functioning of the supply chain. Ultimately, however, it will be successively trans-

formed into a regional maritime security complex created by the states of the region with the active participation of maritime powers. Its base has become the Quad Plus agreement. These activities will focus on expanding the ability to control the sea by selected countries in the region. Thus, AUKUS should transform into a classic alliance according to Morgenthau's concept, and the regional maritime security complex created on its basis will become a separate entity of the regional international order. The article is a case study of the process of building a political alliance with the characteristics of a regional security complex in a specific formal and legal space, which is the legal status of sea basins. The main research methods used in the research process are theoretical methods in the form of a case study, analysis of documents and scientific literature, system analysis and an empirical method in the form of data analysis (selected elements of the maritime potential of countries). It primarily takes into account the maritime interests of the main maritime players and their concentration in the Indo-Pacific region. This made it possible to define the "fields of competition" and to indicate the role of Australia as a regional maritime player and political and economic partner.

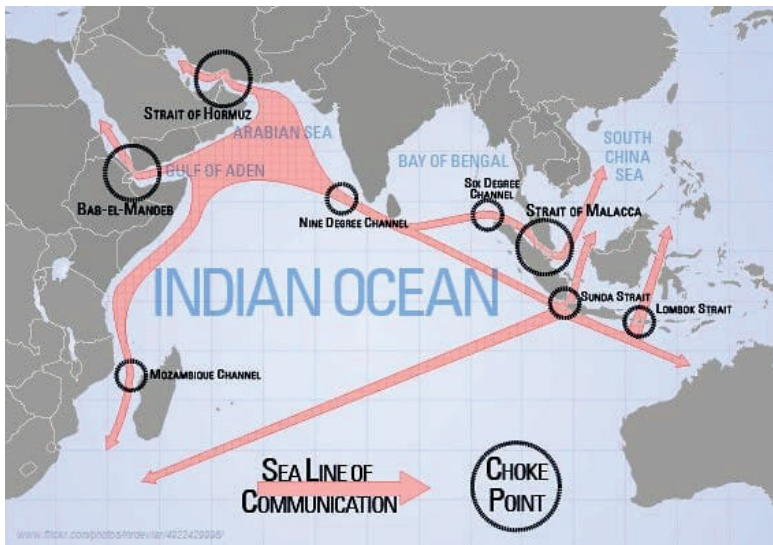
3. CHINESE ACTIVITY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC AS A DETERMINANT OF THE EMERGENCE OF AUKUS

The axis of the Chinese-American rivalry that has been fought since the beginning of the 20th century is Beijing's desire to expand its economic influence in selected regions of the globe and the control of shipping routes (Jacob, 2018). An important role in the concept of shipping control is played by the Indo-Pacific hub points of the maritime communication system (Brewster, 2014). The Bab al-Mandab, Ormuz, Malacca and Singapore Straits are commonly considered to be such. However, the routes leading from Australia to China, Japan and South Korea, as well as India play an equally important role in the regional transport system. They can be controlled in the Indonesian Sunda, Lombok and Makassar straits (Becker, 2020).

The ability of the Chinese navy to gain control of these shipping routes has been downplayed by American experts for two decades. They pointed to the failure of the concept of achieving the third line of defense, i.e., leaving the Bay of Bengal, ignoring the fact that it took place in 2010. The operational and political significance of China's policy of building a *chain of pearls* in the form of a homing system in the northern and western part of the Indian Ocean and the penetration of shipping opportunities through the straits belonging to Indonesia (Huang An-Hao, 2009). A consequence of this policy is the possibility – currently limited to 18 ships – of the permanent presence of Chinese surface ship teams in the Indian Ocean (Kondapalli, 2018). Apart from the limited number of units in the water, the weakness that has not been eliminated is the limited possibility of providing protection against air attacks and the use of submarines (Becker, 2020). However, a realistic assessment of the potential of the Chinese navy, the ability to base it and the defense potential of the countries in the region allows us to conclude that China has gained the ability to have a continuous presence of naval forces in the Indian Ocean. The surface ship team will, however, focus on protecting their own communication lines, sanctioning maritime presence and obtaining the possibility of introducing a sea blockade in selected sea areas. On the other hand, the forces conducting maritime activity in order to apply a possible blockade of the water area will be submarines. This is due to the assessment of the specificity of Beijing's maritime activity and

Map 1

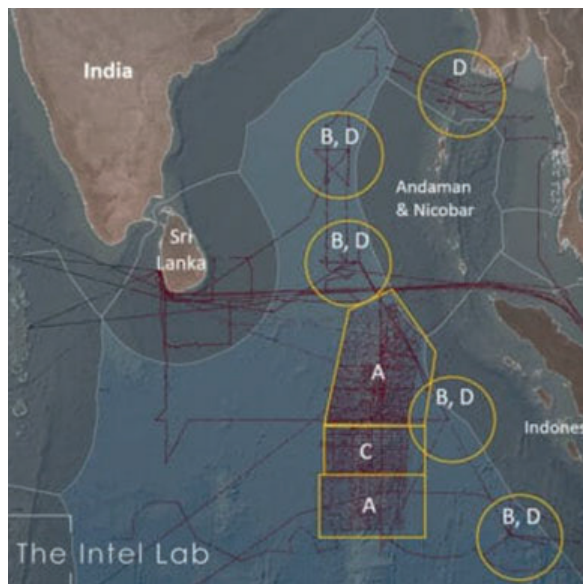
Shipping routes in the Indo-Pacific



Note: Adopted from <https://www.futuredirections.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Indian-Ocean-Choke-Points.jpg>

Map 2

Area of concentration of Chinese hydrological research in 2019–2021



Note: Adopted from *Chinese Ships Seen Mapping Strategic Seabed In Indian*, by H. I. Sutton, Navalnews, 22 January 2021, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2021/01/how-china-is-mapping-the-seabed-of-the-indian-ocean/>

the hydrographic research conducted, covering a total body of water with an area of approximately 500,000 km². They are concentrated on routes leading to the Malacca and Sunda Straits, the main Indo-Pacific shipping lanes. The way they are conducted (the use of guided underwater vehicles steered from hydrographic units) indicates that their purpose is both to conduct hydrographic research aimed at the preparation of maps for submarines and the reconnaissance, especially of the Indian system of monitoring their movement.

An equally serious limitation of American domination is China's involvement in the so-called West Indian Ocean. This reservoir is not only the area through which the routes of energy carriers from the Persian Gulf and East Africa run, or the trade of goods conducted by these countries (directed to the area of Eurasia and conducted in the system of Australia and Oceania and continental Asia and Europe). Potentially, it is also an area controlled by three BRICS countries (China, South Africa, Brazil), which is successively used to expand the scale of trade between them and the countries of East Africa and South America.

The policy of expanding forms of economic activity along the coast of Africa and Asia Minor in Chinese politics also includes the development of transshipment possibilities in sea and land logistics centres (Fulton). Cooperation with the countries of the region, and even the offer or the possibility of including their ports in the Chinese transport system, create specific political and economic alliances. Their feature is also the undertaking of bilateral political and military cooperation, sometimes going beyond the current alliances (the strategic Alliance of Oman and Saudi Arabia with the USA did not prevent their authorities from starting economic cooperation with China and the Russian Federation, which are participating in the process of transforming the economic structure of these countries. An example of such investments are ports located in the Persian Gulf, which are created in the form of industrial complexes (e.g., Industrial Park in al-Duqm in Oman or King Abdullah Economic City – KAEC in Saudi Arabia) or combine the functions of an urban agglomeration with a seaport (Yanbu). Port complexes have fuel terminals, but significant investments include the construction of container terminals and the creation of free zones. A special feature of investments in the Persian Gulf basin is the convergence of the goals adopted for their development with the One Belt One Road initiative. The most important of them is the Kuwaiti Mubarak al-Kabeer Port, which is by definition an element of the Chinese Silk Sea Road. The planned transshipment capacity is 3.6 million TEU, but an equally important role is played by its location as an element of the Asian multimodal transport system using the constructed network of motorways and railways. Its strategic role for China is evidenced by the fact that already during its construction an agreement was signed to establish a permanent connection with the port of Gwadar (used by China) and the involvement of both Chinese capital and production capacity.

Another negative, from the point of view of American policy, consequence of Chinese involvement in the West Indian Ocean region is the attempt by the former US allies to pursue an independent policy. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates made an attempt to take control of the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb strait. The political goal of this cooperation is to control the shipping system (officially – building a shipping safety belt) from the Red Sea through the Gulf of Aden, the Arabian Sea to the Persian Gulf. The process of achieving this goal is currently Saudi control of the Yemeni ports of Midi and Nishtun in the Red Sea and the takeover of supervision by the United Arab Emirates (through the Dubai World port authorities) in strategic ports in Somalia (Berbera in Somaliland, Bosasso in the Puntland prov-

ince, Barawe in the Republic of Somalia and Kismayo in Jubaland). Both countries also conduct joint military operations, but as a result they also gained control over the Yemeni ports of Al-Mokha, Aden, Balhaf, Bir'Ali and Mukalla and the island of Socotra. As a consequence of this policy, they gained the opportunity to expand trade cooperation with China, India, South Korea and European countries (Spain, Greece and Cyprus). Its scope includes, among others, cooperation in the field of port complex management and naval equipment (purchase of ships and training of maritime personnel). This significantly limits the scale of their dependence on the US, both as a guarantor of their political position and as a creator of processes ensuring the safety of navigation in strategic sea areas, including the Strait of Hormuz.

4. THE EVOLUTION OF AMERICAN INDO-PACIFIC POLITICS AFTER 2019

Chinese evaluations of Chinese policies, especially those pursued after 2017, and their political and economic impact of the countries of the region, led to a change in the American vision of the Indo-Pacific (*National Security 2017*, pp. 45–47; *Summary of the National*, p. 11). It was assumed that the majority of these projects will be carried out within the QUAD system and by countries defined as partners (New Zealand, Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia). They were also supposed to focus on the economic and military spheres. The first part assumes the development of economic relations with the countries of the region in a way that eliminates the possibility of their economic and political binding by China (Kolmaš & Kolmašová, 2020). An important element of these activities was the increase in mutual trade, which indirectly forced the involvement in activities for the safety of navigation and the freedom of navigation (Eichensehr, 2022). As a consequence, these countries, with the support of the US maritime forces (and Australia and New Zealand), take measures to combat the phenomenon of maritime piracy and respond to natural disasters, which limits the legitimacy of the presence of extra-regional maritime forces in these waters. The military dimension consists of classic actions in the form of the presentation of force (military deterrence) in the form of expanding the potential of anti-missile defense systems deployed in Japan and South Korea, and the construction of an anti-Chinese agreement with a political and military dimension. India (the main partner in the region) and the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore were offered to participate in this specific regional system. It should be emphasized, however, that the offer addressed to these countries mainly related to ensuring the safety of navigation (control of shipping routes and combating maritime piracy) as well as combating terrorism and conducting intelligence activities. This policy was supplemented by capacity building (increasing the combat potential of the Indo-Pacific Command component) and the proposal to conduct joint patrol and training missions. Unfortunately, this potential was not able (it is not intended for this) to counter China's Antarctic policy, which assumes gaining the ability to control not only sea basins, but the air space from Oceania through South Africa to South America, and to use the assets of Antarctica. Especially with regard to expanding the capabilities of the BeiDou system (with intelligence functions, reconnaissance, missile guidance), conducting research on the physics of the upper atmosphere, remote detection (to search for deposits and living resources, mapping and analysis of submarine noise) and geomagnetism, ionosphere and auroras (the ability to detect a metal object and the ability to disrupt the satellite signal). Awareness of these limitations resulted in abandoning the policy of expanding the scope of economic cooperation with countries as-

sociated in APEC and ASEAN. Among the factors that led to the change of this strategy, the main determinants should be considered:

- Expanding the capabilities of China's naval forces in the Indian Ocean, especially through the expansion of the underwater fleet and effective hydrographic research around Indonesian waters, which can be used to develop underwater maps of the Indian Ocean and the Indonesian straits;
- The successive independence of American partners from the Persian Gulf region and their skilful elimination of the threat created by Iran, also thanks to cooperation with China in the development of Asian transport systems;
- How China, Japan and South Korea conduct maritime and land activity in Antarctica. The process of exploitation of living resources in the South Ocean limits the scope of cooperation between the USA-Japan and the USA-South Korea in the southern Indo-Pacific, also due to Australia's response.
- The scale and scope of investment in China's Antarctic research infrastructure, which has the characteristics of military satellite installations and space penetration;
- Progressive non-confrontational expansion of the scope of political and economic cooperation between China, South Africa and Brazil in the southern and central belt of Africa and South America (to the Caribbean zone).

The assessment of these conditions made it necessary for the United States to create a supranational system that could counteract these forms of Chinese activity more effectively than the QUAD agreement (London). The main limitation of this concept were and are the differences of interests, especially those located in the southern part of the Indian Ocean and the Southern Ocean. As a consequence, the cooperation of states takes the form of bilateral and tripartite actions and is limited to contacts at the political level and military exercises of a limited nature. These limitations were not eliminated by the Quad Plus concept and the attempt to expand bilateral contacts. The assessment of these conditions meant that the United States had to decide to create a new agreement, from which countries were excluded whose interests could limit the effectiveness of the activities carried out. This is especially true of India, which pursues a two-pronged policy, partial acceptance of American activity in the region, while at the same time expanding multilateral control of shipping in the Indian Ocean. Creating cooperation in this area with regional players (Indonesia, Thailand, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Vietnam in the Indian Ocean and Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman in the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal itself), as well as with countries traditionally present in these waters (Japan, France, Great Britain, West Germany) limits the American domination in the field of shipping control. Its internationalization also encourages the countries of the region to try to control it on their own (Saudi Arabia and UAE in the Red Sea). An equally negative feature of Indian maritime activity from the American point of view is the policy of strategic partnership in the control of Indo-Pacific shipping with Indonesia and the approach proposed by New Delhi to the presence of the Chinese navy in this area. It was assumed that they would only react to the activity of Chinese submarines and the fact of conducting hydrological research that could be used to expand the scope of their operational capabilities in the Indian Ocean. However, they do not intend to react to the presence of surface ships in this area, recognizing that China has the right to secure its sea transport (Singh, 2021).

5. AUSTRALIA'S REGIONAL STATUS AS A DETERMINANT OF AUKUS

The limited potential of both countries meant that they considered it necessary to base their vision of controlling the waters of the central and southern Indian Ocean on cooperation with Australia (Strating, 2020; Novita, 2022). In practice, this cooperation boiled down to the recognition of the dominant role of this state in the control system of these reservoirs, but it is also necessary to demonstrate the differences in the approach to it in the policies of both countries. While both countries approved its scope, they perceived the durability of this agreement differently and the possibility of extending the scope of cooperation. The analysis of the Indian Navy's development plans allows for a thesis that it will be respected by New Delhi until it is possible to independently control the activities of submarines of third countries in the waters surrounding the Andaman and Nicobar archipelagos, around Djibouti and – together with air reconnaissance units – to monitor the central part of the Indian Ocean from the Lombok Strait to Madagascar. In Indonesian politics, on the other hand, the goal is to shift the burden of cooperation to the spheres of counteracting terrorism, migration and hostile actions undertaken in the ICT space, rather than controlling shipping. Especially since it is connected with the necessity to combat the phenomenon of maritime piracy in the waters surrounding this country. For this reason, the Indonesian Coast Guard (BAKAMLA) is more involved in tripartite cooperation in the Indian Ocean than the Navy.

Canberra also owes its status as a regional player with the potential to effectively oppose the form of Chinese maritime activity to the assessment of its policy towards China (Kizaková, 2021). In recent years, it has been defined on the basis of the assumptions contained in the *White Book on Foreign Policy* of 2017 (in practice, it maintained the goals set out in the *White Book Australia in the "Asia Age"* of 2012). A feature of this political concept was that it did not involve any forms of rivalry between the PRC and the US, while at the same time preventing excessive militarization of the region and acting as – as it was defined – China's guide to Antarctica (Australian Government, 2017). However, the way the country conducts Antarctic policy forced Canberra to abandon its policy of treating both global players equally. It has become a political necessity to expand the area of marine interest and activity from the waters along the northern part of the state (from the Arafura and Coral seas to the East China Sea) and shipping routes around Malaysia and Papua New Guinea to the Northern part of the Southern Ocean and the central Indian Ocean. The area of interest has become the waters of the East China, South China and the Gulf of Thailand (India) and around the Indonesian Lombok and Sunda straits and the Timor, Banda and Arafura seas (Australian Government, 2017). The partnership with India and Indonesia as well as the potential of the navy turned out to be insufficient to carry out this task. This should be recognized as a fundamental factor determining the change in Australia's policy of equal treatment of the main political (US) and economic partner (China). These conditions were skilfully used by the United States, for which the condition for maintaining a dominant position in the Indo-Pacific was to build a coalition of states with the ability to influence selected areas and with specific technical and military potential. In practice, these were to be countries for which active control of the sea, as well as air and cyber space is a task for which their armed forces are prepared. It is obvious that the countries associated in the Five Eyes Alliance (intelligence data exchange network focused on monitoring China's political, military and economic activity), i.e., Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The assessment of their ability to conduct sea-basin reconnaissance and localization of interests made the involvement of Canada and New Zealand

neither possible nor necessary. On the other hand, the British presence is a guarantee of involvement in the West Indian Ocean region, especially the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, as well as intelligence and technological potential in the field of underwater observation and the construction of submarines (especially in the context of the post-Brexit program to develop these capabilities). Australia, as a state in the region, can naturally undertake activities in these waters, also as part of bilateral or multilateral cooperation (Indonesia, India). Also those in which American participation would be a political burden. The development of the country's potential to control the Indian and Southern Oceans and discrete support for these activities is currently the only American instrument allowing for a non-crisis reduction of Chinese maritime and economic activity in this region.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The role of Australia indicated by the Americans as a country stabilizing the situation in the Indo-Pacific region fits perfectly into the strategic goals of this country. As an exporter of primary production, it is interested in maintaining the safe navigation of the body of water and the sustainable exploitation of living resources. This approach to regional policy is also influenced by the legal status of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean, as well as the specificity of China's maritime and Antarctic activity. It is forcing Australia to abandon the policy described as "Beijing's Antarctic Guide." Beijing's attempt to sanction its military presence in the Indo-Pacific and Antarctica in connection with the country's activity in the Southern Ocean is perceived as a threat to destabilize the regional situation. It forces the military reaction of India and Indonesia, i.e., countries remaining in political disputes (activity in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea) and territorial with China (over the territorial division of the Natuna Sea). This may lead not only to interruptions in the continuity of shipping, but also a potential escalation of political tensions. Australia's assuming the role of a stabilizer of the regional situation and obtaining a military potential adequate to that used in the region by China is accepted by the countries of the region. It also fits in with the assumptions of the regional policy of this state. This is also in line with the assumptions of the regional policy of this country. In American policy, however, AUKUS is an instrument that allows for expanding the ability to control the sea in the basin covering the South Pacific and a large part of the Southern Ocean. The condition for the success of his plan is, however, to resist attempts by the United States to become excessively involved in the region. This seemingly small nuance will determine the role, effectiveness and durability of the AUKUS coalition as well as the policy of limiting Chinese political, economic and military activity in the catchment area of the West Indian Ocean and Antarctica. In practice, it is about the effectiveness of the American policy of containing Beijing's expansion. An open question is the ability of the American political establishment to accept the fact that it is not the United States that will implement this policy in the Indian and Southern oceans, and that this state can sometimes only be a passive observer of the actions taken. This is possible because a feature of American maritime activity is the construction of a regional community of maritime interests and a system for their protection (Mickiewicz, 2022). In addition, the foreign policy of the Joe Biden administration assumes conducting cooperative activities in the sphere of creating regional and international order. Trilateral cooperation with Great Britain and Australia also allows for the creation of a kind of "strategic arc" covering the waters surrounding Eurasia. It enables full

control of the North Atlantic and Indo-Pacific, but the condition is the integration of the forms of military naval activity conducted by these three countries. As a consequence, it is possible to transform these reservoirs into a uniform strategic area. Another factor indicating the possibility of transforming the AUKUS agreement into a political alliance is its attractiveness to other regional players and the possibility of expanding cooperation with them by using Australia's bilateral relations. Japan and South Korea should be considered as countries that may express interest in such cooperation. France could play a special role in the process of transforming AUKUS into a political alliance. Its military potential deployed in the Indo-Pacific region and the skilful construction of regional development processes based on its own Dependent Territories (DOM-TOM) allow it to play the role of an important player in the region of Oceania, the south-western part of the Indian Ocean and the central Pacific. The inclusion of a potential political alliance may fundamentally change the strategic situation, but such a process could take place in the longer term and after significant political gestures by the current signatories of the agreement. Currently, such a situation can only be regarded as a desirable but unlikely scenario from the US point of view.

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