

We refuse to be enemies.

There is a peaceful alternative.

We can do better than AUKUS.

Introduction

AUKUS is a trilateral security understanding and associated set of proposed arms deals announced in 2021 between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Rather than bringing peace to Asia, AUKUS is part of an increasingly confrontational dynamic between the US and its allies with China, encouraging a dangerous nuclear arms race, and made more dangerous for everyone as trade and social connections decouple. A mirrored pattern whereby each side accuses the other of aggression and entitled domination in the region is then used to justify arms escalation, which in turns only fuels fears on the other side and generates their arms escalation. All four countries - Australia, United Kingdom, the United States, and China - appear to be choosing to fuel this confrontation.

Quakers in the three countries of the arms agreement have been discussing our response to this unfolding situation – AUKUS in the context of geopolitical competition. This short briefing paper outlines our initial response, but it can be summarised thus:

1. We refuse to be enemies
2. There is a peaceful alternative
3. Our governments can do better than AUKUS
4. Friends can be part of ways that are better than AUKUS.

What exactly is dangerous about AUKUS?

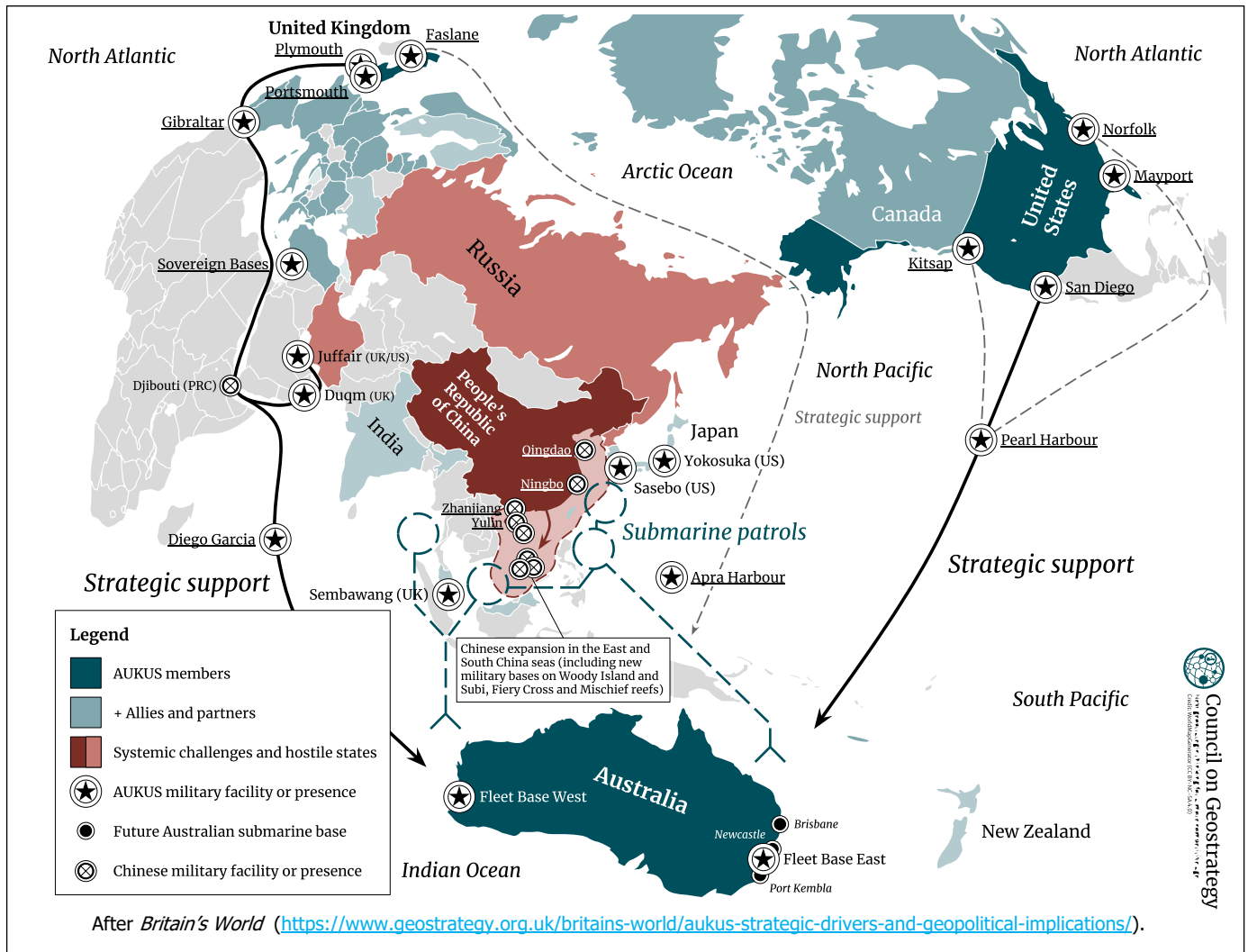
AUKUS involves several hundred billion dollars in military spending, focused on promoting the United States-led maritime control in the Indo-Pacific region, close to Chinese waters. It is part of the United States' declared pivot from wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan to an assertive presence in East Asia. AUKUS arrangements have triggered fierce criticism from China, and the Russian Federation, as well as dismayed responses from many Southeast Asian countries, who see nuclear submarines and hypersonic delivery missiles as escalatory, a challenge to the nuclear non-proliferation regime, and destabilising the region.

Key Components of AUKUS

1. **Nuclear-powered submarines:** Australia will acquire submarines powered by highly-enriched uranium (a key component of nuclear weapons). Australia will be supplied the reactors with fuel sealed inside. This is the first time ever that a non-nuclear weapon state will receive nuclear weapons-grade fissile material – the essential ingredient for a bomb – from nuclear weapon states. Prior to AUKUS, Australia had agreed to a multi-billion-dollar diesel submarine deal with France but cancelled it, in spite of France’s objections.

Australia’s acquisition of nuclear submarines is now contentious at many intergovernmental meetings on nuclear non-proliferation around the world. Apart from its destabilising effect which is undermining efforts to reduce conflict, Australia’s nuclear submarines will also raise concerns about their deployment being directed by the US military, and even being made nuclear-weapon capable at short notice. There are many questions about the details of the systems and arrangements when such sensitive materials will not be under international safeguards, and the precedent is obviously dangerous... opening the door to other states receiving weapons-grade material by also acquiring nuclear submarines and enabling them to move them out of safeguards. In addition, AUKUS has led to arrangements being made for nuclear fuel to be stored on Australian soil, near major population centres. The acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines is also being used by conservatives to argue for nuclear power in Australia, despite the bad economics and even worse environmental impacts of such a move.

2. **Hypersonic Weapons Research:** Nuclear and conventional weapons need delivery missiles. New kinds of hypersonic weapons can seriously reduce detection of nuclear attack, allowing no time for alternative responses to launch on warning. The existence of hypersonic weapons destabilises the “conversation” between nuclear powers when there is a heightened nuclear threat, and in trying to implement existing nuclear limitation agreements
3. **Transfers of cash:** Australia has given \$4b to the United States and \$4b to the UK government, to help the struggling military production facilities speed up. There is nothing required in turn – great for the arms trade, but a diversion of much-needed resources from environment, health, education, and money devoted to diplomacy.
4. **“Unfettered access” to Australian bases:** The new era of close military cooperation has led to a significant undertaking by the Australian government to give “unfettered access” to US operations – effectively turning many more Australian runways, ports, and surveillance facilities under direct US control. Australia’s sovereignty is slipping away. Past experience suggests that US command and control will supersede any attempts Australia tries to play to nuance or limit conflict. This is unsettling for many countries in the region. It may also draw Australia into a nuclear-weapons incremental target list, endangering civilian populations further.
5. **Other advanced military technology:** This includes technology sharing in areas such as cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence (AI), quantum technologies, and undersea capabilities. Much of this part of AUKUS has yet to be developed.



Perspectives from different places

1. Perspective from Australia:

From an Australian perspective the AUKUS confrontational (force) approach:

- makes a war (which could quickly escalate to nuclear war) more likely in the Pacific.* This is a very serious and alarming prospect.
- Undermines Australia's sovereignty.* The push for military “interoperability” with the US and “unfettered access” to Australian infrastructure are major issues because they could involve Australia in a war without its consent. Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles said America’s military was now “operating in Australia across land, sea, air, cyber and space”.
- Diverts public funds away from better programs:* The cost of AUKUS is estimated to be \$368 billion AUD (which like all military expansion programs is likely to at least double or triple or even quintuple). It diverts funds away from vital issues: health, education, poverty, wealth inequalities, climate, species loss, habitat destruction, building up our diplomatic corps around the region, and foreign aid. Action in these

peaceful areas is more likely to generate a return on investment economically, as well as socially.

- d. *Shifts us from defending Australia's borders to a provocative presence in the South China Seas:* In addition to nuclear-propelled submarines the agreement includes Australia's acquisition of Tomahawk Cruise Missiles, Extended Range Air-to-Surface Standoff Missiles, Long-Range Anti-Ship Missiles, a program for development of hypersonic missiles, precision strike guided missiles, and establishment of a sovereign guided missiles enterprise. This marks a change in defence strategy from defending Australia's mainland to one which projects long-range offensive power. There would be enhanced air cooperation through the rotational deployment of U.S. aircraft of all types in Australia (now including long-range B-52 nuclear-capable bombers) and appropriate aircraft training and exercises; enhanced maritime cooperation by increasing logistics and sustainment capabilities of U.S. surface and subsurface vessels in Australia; enhanced land cooperation by conducting more complex and more integrated exercises and greater combined engagement with Allies and Partners in the region; establish a combined logistics, sustainment, and maintenance enterprise to support high-end warfighting and combined military operations in the region.
- e. *Undermines our democratic processes* The lack of democratic processes in adopting such a long-range strategy with its many technical and practical problems not the least of which include nuclear waste and nuclear weapons proliferation violates basic Australian governance standards. The major parties have not permitted proper parliamentary supervision of AUKUS but have rubber stamped arrangements.
- f. *Toxifies the economy, schools and research centres with a military culture focus* The arms trade is a harmful contribution to Australia's GDP, because it creates economic dependency on creating materials that we are told benefits us economically and yet the wealth feeds into the arms trade which has a vested interest in selling more weapons, having them used in local wars to demonstrate their effects, and diverting brilliant minds into creating even more lethal weapons of destruction and mass destruction, when there are far more peaceful activities that they could be devoted to. Additionally, university campuses are being reconfigured to serve defence instead of the community, and there are even interventions in the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) curriculum to include competitions with prizes for young people in secondary and primary schools to support the nuclear submarines. Prospects for Peaceful purposes in STEM are not being supported by the government or industry.

Further references:

- Andrew Fowler, (August 2024) *Naked: The Submarine Fiasco that Sank Australia's Sovereignty*. Melbourne University Press. (Review by Mark Beeson: <https://theconversation.com/the-aukus-submarine-deal-has-been-exposed-as-a-monumental-fooly-is-it-time-to-abandon-ship-236873>).
- Independent and Peaceful Australia Network, (November 2022). *Charting Our Own Course: Questioning Australia's Involvement in US-led Wars and the Australia- United States alliance*. Available online as a pdf

2. Perspective from United Kingdom:

AUKUS is seen as a critical cash injection for a troubled submarine industry, beset with delays, spiralling costs and uncertain technical capability to overcome obstacles in the existing Dreadnought nuclear weapon submarine programme. The new Labour defence secretary John Healy has proclaimed the deal great for economic growth. Less public is the opportunity this deal brings for UK to deploy forces in the region.

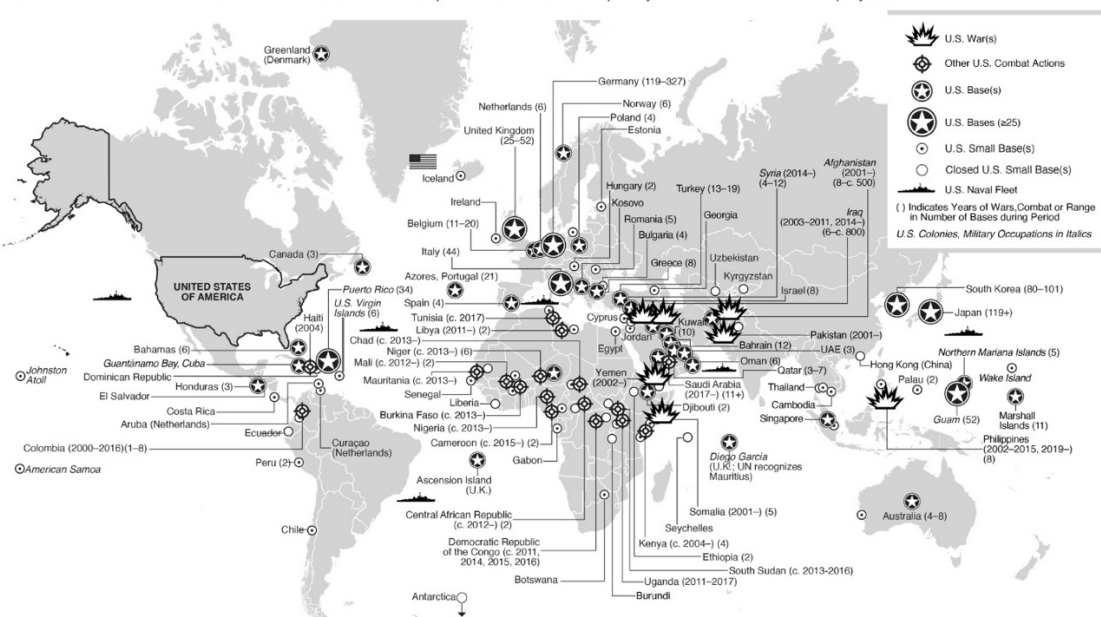
3. Perspective from United States:

AUKUS is a security grouping that raises significant concerns about implications for regional stability and non-proliferation efforts. The arrangement has been criticized for stretching the boundaries of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)—to which the US, UK, and Australia are signatories—by using the submarine “[loophole](#)” to provide submarines fueled with weapon-grade uranium to a non-nuclear state. This agreement sets a troubling precedent that could potentially inspire other nations to pursue similar deals, undermining the global non-proliferation regime.

Additionally, AUKUS furthers tensions with China and perpetuates a militaristic approach to international relations. Rather than fostering peace and stability, the US is further contributing to an arms race in the Indo-Pacific, increasing the likelihood of conflict. The vast resources allocated to AUKUS, including \$842 billion from the [U.S. defence budget](#) for 2024, are funds that could otherwise be used to invest in dialogue, peacebuilding, and alternatives to military responses to conflict.

U.S. Wars, Bases, and Expansion Abroad, 2001–2020

Significant combat, bases, and expansion outside U.S. states. Some bases occupied for only part of this period. Base numbers range provided for countries with significant change during the period. During U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, there were over 2,000 bases abroad. There were around 800 in 2020. For ease of comparison we use contemporary borders and a Mercator projection.



Map by Kelly Martin / kmartindesign.com for David Vine, *The United States of War: A Global History of America's Endless Conflicts, from Columbus to the Islamic State* (University of California Press, 2020).

There is a Peaceful Alternative* We Can Do Better than AUKUS

- **Better focus:** We sit at a moment of rising tension and danger, undermining global governance, just as we face major global challenges like climate change, rising pollutants and collapse of ecosystems, disruptive technologies, social revolution and financial uncertainties, which all come together in what is increasingly called a polycrisis. This is where our attention needs to be. We need to develop constructive and collaborative working relationships that cross political divides to tackle the many existential threats and catastrophic risks we face together.
- **Better peacebuilding:** We need a renewal in international relations that is co-created by diverse stakeholders rather than imposed by the most powerful, in which we acknowledge our own contributions to the collective crisis. This is sometimes known as a “**human security**” or “**shared security**” approach. Returning to multilateral approaches, which uphold international norms and the rule of law, can generate.
- **More humility and better willingness:** China contributes to human rights abuses and development of autocratic power, but our governments also perpetuate injustice and confrontation domestically and internationally. Our lack of humility about doing this – for example, our refusal to recognise the harm done by Australia, United Kingdom and the United States in two decades of “wars of choice” in the Middle East – can look like plain arrogance to the Global South. A diplomatic approach that shows humility about our own mistakes and harm caused to others, along with a willingness to encourage peaceful alternatives, can generate goodwill and interest in engagement.
- **Better Inclusion:** We need to build Human Security that meets the needs of all stakeholders, including the poor and marginalised, and includes personal, community, health, economic, political, food and environmental needs. It provides protection for all threats to the life and dignity of human beings.

What Quakers can do:

Show Peace is Possible * Build Relationships across the regions

- A. *Reach out to Friends internationally* and contacts in other states involved, e.g. FWCC Asia West Pacific, the Americas & Europe and Middle East Sections, Quaker United Nations Organisation, Australia Yearly Meeting Quaker Peace & Legislation Committee, American Friends Service Committee, Quaker Service Australia, Quaker Peace & Service Aotearoa/New Zealand, Quaker Peace & Social Witness, Quaker Council for European Affairs, Canadian Friends Service Committee, Friends Committee on National Legislation, Friends Peace Teams
- B. *Share information and conversation within your local meetings*
- C. *Seek out local allies* (peace groups, Indigenous organisations, ethnic community groups, trade unions, professional groups, e.g. law, health, social work, mental health, etc., universities, cultural organisations, political organisations) and those in other relevant states and join with them to resist our governments’ slide into confrontation with China.
- D. *Find local opportunities to engage with the public and representatives* (e.g. media, writing to MPs, etc).
- E. *Join international friendship societies and build people-to-people contacts across borders.*

Getting Started as Friends

Getting Started – Australia

1. *This campaign is built on relationships, not just about being right.* Encourage positive interactions with potential supporters and even those who don't!
2. *Engage with Politicians.* Write (ideally a letter, but if this is not possible, email) to your local House of Representatives MP and at least one state senator (especially cross-party lines) and express your concern about the undemocratic way AUKUS has been introduced and gone undebated, and its risk to our sovereignty.
 - a. Don't feel you need to get bogged down in the details. If the materials here make sense to you, then bring conversation back to three key themes:
 - i. *We refuse to be enemies*
 - ii. *There is a peaceful alternative*
 - iii. *We can do better than AUKUS*
 - b. Ask for money to be brought back to more positive human security methods – increasing foreign aid and the budget for diplomats abroad. Highlight cooperative actions between Australia and China on issues of common concern and interest – climate, culture, education, trade – as a way to build trust – and the need to refrain from policies that enable the arms trade to benefit from public funding.
 - c. If, and when, your member of parliament writes a reply, discuss it with the Quaker Peace & Legislative Committee, as your *second* letter to an MP or senator, in response, can often break through the standard answers, and start an ongoing conversation.
 - d. Consider visiting your local MP and at least one senator.
 - e. Become more informed by subscribing to Australia Yearly Meeting's QPLC newsletter (ask Harold Wilkinson to put you on the mailing list, cqplc@quakersaustralia.info)
 - f. Support the employment of a peacemaker for QPLC (currently Jessica Morrison) by making regular donations.
3. *Intersect with other campaigns*
 - a. The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons
 - b. Australian Religious Response to Climate Change
 - c. QUNO work on peace
4. *Be on the alert for, and encourage Quaker peacebuilding opportunities* for strengthening your own nonviolence and communications skills, offered from time - to-time, e.g.
 - a. Australia Yearly Meeting's Quaker Peace and Legislation Committee, as well as resources provided by the US Quaker advocacy group, Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL).
 - b. Alternatives to Violence, Friends Peace Teams, Friends teaching Nonviolent Communications
 - c. Hold peacebuilding sessions at your regional meeting that help you collectively consider the impact of European powers on Asia West Pacific

- e. Consider making regular contributions to the position of the Executive Secretary in FWCC Asia West Pacific (currently only one day a week).
 - f. Consider learning an Asian language, and helping others start that language learning journey, to give further depth to your connections with Asia.
 - g. Join in Friends activities across the region, e.g. “Peace selfie” in Chinese (in progress), FWCC Asia West Pacific Prospects for Peace series
10. *Learn more about the Pacific, especially the militarisation and nuclearization of islands*
- a. Watch “My fish is your fish”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDVND8mPaso>
11. *Connect with ecumenical and interfaith groups and peak councils and progress peacebuilding concerns.*

Getting Started – United Kingdom

- <https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/peace/peace-education>

Getting Started – United States

For Quakers in the United States, engaging with the issues surrounding AUKUS begins with education and advocacy. Here are some steps to consider:

- a. **Educate Yourself and Others:** Start by familiarizing yourself with the details of AUKUS and its implications. Share this knowledge within your Quaker community and with other groups concerned about peace and security. Connect with organizations such as the [American Friends Service Committee](#) (AFSC) or the [Friends Committee on National Legislation](#) (FCNL), which offer insights into U.S. military spending and its impact on global peace efforts.
- b. **Advocate for Change:** Write letters to your [elected representatives](#) expressing your concerns about AUKUS and its potential to escalate military tensions. Emphasize the need for greater investment in diplomacy and international cooperation, rather than in military expansion. Highlight the importance of [redirecting funds](#) from defence spending to critical peacebuilding and conflict mitigation programs.
- c. **Build Community:** Invite friends or members of your weekly meeting to participate in events by peace and justice organizations in your community. This could include working with groups that oppose nuclear proliferation, support disarmament, or advocate for shifts in national spending. By connecting with others, you can build sustainable connections and help create a broader movement for peace and security that challenges the militaristic status quo.

This QAUKUS briefing paper was prepared by global peace friends,
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Other Useful Links for Friends

Australia Yearly Meeting and Peace

<https://www.quakersaustralia.info/concerns/peace>

Quakers in Britain and Peace

<https://www.quaker.org.uk/our-work/peace>

American Friends Service Committee and Peace

<https://afsc.org/issue/global-peace>

Quaker United Nations Office Geneva and Peace

<https://quno.org/areas-of-work/peace-disarmament>

Quaker United Nations Office New York and Peace

<https://quno.org/areas-of-work/new-york>

Quakers Aotearoa New Zealand and Peace

<https://quakers.nz/engage-whakauru/quaker-peace-and-service-qpsanz>

Quakers in Scotland and Peace

<https://www.quakerscotland.org/our-work/peace>

FCNL and Peace (USA)

<https://www.fcnl.org/issues>

Friends Peace Teams (worldwide)

<https://friendspeaceteams.org/>

Quaker Council for European Affairs and Peace

<https://www.qcea.org/homepage/climate-justice-and-peace>