

Australia, U.S., U.K. Sign Landmark Nuclear Transfer Deal for AUKUS Submarines

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- AUKUS partnership

Why in News?

Australia has signed a deal with the United States and Britain to exchange nuclear secrets and materials, advancing its plan to equip its navy with nuclear-powered submarines as part of the 2021 AUKUS security accord.

This agreement binds the three countries to secure arrangements for transferring sensitive nuclear material and know-how.

AUKUS partnership

- **About**

- Signed in September 2021, the new enhanced trilateral security partnership between **Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States** is named as **“AUKUS”**.
- This is a trilateral defence deal for Indo-Pacific.
 - The **first major initiative** of AUKUS would be to deliver a nuclear-powered submarine fleet for Australia.
 - These countries, however, made it clear that their **aim is not to arm the new submarines with nuclear weapons**.
 - This is because Australia is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) which bans it from acquiring or deploying nuclear weapons.
- **Key highlights of the deal**
 - Under the deal, the United States intends to sell Australia three US Virginia class nuclear-powered submarines, in the early 2030s, with an option for Australia to buy two more if needed.
 - The multi-stage project would culminate with British and Australian production and operation of a **new submarine class - SSN-AUKUS**.
- SSN-AUKUS will be a trilaterally developed vessel based on Britain’s next-generation design.
- It would be built in Britain and Australia and include cutting edge U.S. technologies.
 - Britain would take delivery of its first SSN-AUKUS submarine in the late 2030s, and Australia would receive its first in the early 2040s.
- **Significance of this deal**
 - **For US**
 - US has only shared nuclear submarine technology once before in 1958 with Great Britain.
 - **For Indo-Pacific Region**
 - Under this partnership, technology, scientists, industries and defence forces of these three countries will work together to deliver a safer and more secure region.
 - Some analysts feel that this partnership will lead to intensified arms race in the region.
 - **For Australia**
 - Australia has never had nuclear-powered submarines.
 - Hence, this step will give Australia naval heft in the Pacific, where China has been particularly aggressive.
 - Critics, on the other hand, claim that this **deal would antagonise Beijing** which will not be good for Australia.
 - Australia is now set to join **an elite group of only six countries** – India, US, UK, France, Russia and China – that operate nuclear-powered submarines.
 - It will also be the only country to have such submarines without having a civilian nuclear power industry.
 - **For India**
 - The new pact will add to the global efforts to balance China in the region.
 - It should be noted that Australia and India are close strategic partners in the Indo-Pacific region.
 - Australia is also a member of **QUAD group**. A stronger Australia would lead to further strengthening of QUAD.
 - **For France**

- France is not happy with the deal and has termed this deal a “stab in the back”.
- Australia had signed a contract to buy 12 Attack-class submarines from France in 2016. The first submarine was expected to be operational around 2034.
- As a result of the current deal, Australia ditched the contract.

- **How China views this agreement?**

- China denounced a new Indo-Pacific security alliance saying such partnerships should not target third countries.
 - It claims that the current cooperation would gravely undermine regional peace and stability, aggravate arms race and hurt the international non-proliferation efforts.
 - China claimed that western powers are using **nuclear exports for geopolitical gaming tools**.
 - Under this deal, highly-sensitive nuclear powered submarine technology will be exported to Australia.
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Q.1. What is QUAD group?

The QUAD group, or Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, is a strategic forum comprising the United States, Japan, India, and Australia. It focuses on enhancing regional security, economic cooperation, and democratic values in the Indo-Pacific region. The group aims to address common challenges and promote a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific.

Q.2. What is a submarine?

A submarine is a watercraft designed to operate underwater. It is equipped with propulsion systems, navigation tools, and weapons for various missions, including defense, research, and reconnaissance. Submarines can submerge to avoid detection and surface to perform tasks, making them versatile in naval operations.

Source: [Australia, U.S., U.K. sign nuclear transfer deal for AUKUS submarines](#) | [India Today](#) | [Times of India](#)

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