

**The foreign policy vector of Australia in the context of U.S.-China standoff in the Indo-Pacific region**

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Today, Australia plays more significant role in the foreign affairs than ever before. First of all, it is related to a geopolitical and geostrategic location of Australia in the Indo-Pacific region (IPR). Considering US-China standoff, it is necessary to mention the formation of a new alliance in the region. On September 15, 2021, Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States created a new format of trilateral cooperation in the field of security - AUKUS. The leaders of the member states declared about the need of strengthening security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region (IPR), joint response to security challenges, increasing Australia's defense potential [1]. More than that, at the 76th session of the UN General Assembly Joe Biden claimed that Australia was the closest and most reliable ally [2].

Along with that, China is concerned about Australian involvement in arms race. Therefore, the Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi claimed that the acquisition of nuclear submarines by Australia destroyed the strategic balance in the region and violated the Nuclear-Free Zone Treaty in the South Pacific. Moreover, such steps taken by Australia will provoke a new round of the arms race [5]. China wants all countries to pay attention to the militarization of the region and focus on inappropriate American actions towards undermining stability in the Indo-Pacific.

According to the 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper Australia highlights five objectives of fundamental importance for Australian security and prosperity: the promotion of open, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific region in which the rights of all states are respected, giving more opportunities for businesses globally and stand against protectionism, the promotion and protection of the international rules, support for a more resilient Pacific and Timor-Leste, ensuring Australians remain safe, secure and free in the face of threats such as terrorism. Besides, it is stated about central role of alliance with the United States for Australia's security, sits at the core of strategic, and defence planning. China is also vital for Australia both to pursue extensive bilateral interests and because of China's growing influence on the regional and global issues of greatest consequence to our security and prosperity [4, p. 3]. In addition, Australia prefers sitting on the fence and trying to maintain relations with all sides of the US-China standoff. Such Australia's strategy contributes to ensure its national security and protect national interests. Furthermore, the growing Australian involvement opens great opportunities to get benefit from such tense relations between the United States and China in favor of the Australian Union in the military, economic and other fields.

Another factor aggravating the situation is a speech of the prime minister of Australia Scott Morrison who represented the 2020 Defence Strategic Update and the 2024 Force Structure Plan in which Australia must be prepared to post pandemic world. For that, the Australian leadership has provided its Ministry of Defense with A\$575 billion (US\$397.4 billion) for the next 10 years to modernize the armed forces and the military-industrial complex. According to the Australian Prime Minister, the country should be better prepared for the prospect of a

"high-intensity conflict"[3]. Relying on such facts, Australia can become a great foothold for the United States in case of a possible full-scale war with China.

In conclusion, Australia is likely to be a new regional power in the Indo-Pacific. The Western support in the framework of AUKUS to Australia in military, political and economic spheres only strengthens the Australian positions in the region and irritates the Chinese guidance trying to keep its firm positions in so-called historical waters. In addition, the nuclear technologies sharing with Australia, necessary equipment and facility construction will definitely contribute a destructive role to nuclear security and US-China standoff as well.

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