

Is 'Fortress Australia' inherently insecure?

Benjamin Herscovitch

Research Fellow, Australian National University

Australia is undertaking a massive expansion of its defence budget and military capabilities. Among other platforms, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) will acquire nine anti-submarine warships and 72 F-35A fighter jets, while the new Government has pledged to keep Australia's defence spending above 2% of GDP. At the leading edge of this drive towards more capability is AUKUS — the trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States — which is designed to furnish the ADF with at least eight nuclear-powered and long-range submarines.

The suitability of these submarines for protecting Australia and its near-region is up for debate. But this platform will undoubtedly enhance the ADF's capacity to contribute to collective deterrence far from home. AUKUS will help Australia shift the military balance against China and in favour of the United States and its allies and partners in the Western Pacific.

Accordingly, Tokyo and Taipei have endorsed AUKUS as a way of safeguarding peace and stability in the face of Beijing's assertiveness and fast-expanding military budget.

But while AUKUS submarines will make some like-minded in North Asia feel more secure, this new capability will continue to foster fears in Beijing and concerns in some regional capitals, including Jakarta. Meanwhile, the cancellation of the conventional submarine deal with Paris — AUKUS' predecessor — has undermined trilateral cooperation with India on maritime security and Franco-Australian bilateral diplomatic initiatives. So far, Australia's sharpening defence posture under the Morrison and Albanese governments has produced a mixed bag of outcomes and the net effect on Australian security remains uncertain.

Ben is the person in the room with empathy for all sides of a policy challenge and the sharp wits to help navigate a way through. At the Lab, we're fans of Ben's newsletter, [Beijing to Canberra and Back](#), and enjoy Ben challenging us with his China,

security and geoeconomics expertise. He's a class act, a scholar to watch and a delight to work with.