

THE AUKUS DEAL THROUGH A NEOCLASSICAL REALIST LENS: OFFSHORE BALANCING AND ELITE PERCEPTIONS

NEOKLASİK REALİST BAKIŞLA AUKUS ANTLAŞMASI: AÇIK DENİZ DENGELMESİ VE ELİT ALGILAMALARI

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ÖZ

ABD, İngiltere ve Avustralya tarafından imzalanmış olan AUKUS antlaşması Hint-Pasifik jeopolitiği içerisinde yeni bir ittifak dinamiğini harekete geçirmiştir. Sürprizle karşılanan ve bölgeyle ilgili olan pek çok aktörün tepkisini çeken antlaşma yapısı itibarıyla bilinen ittifak antlaşmalarından ayrılmaktadır. Antlaşma Avustralya'ya herhangi bir güvenlik garantisi vermekten ziyade ülke donanmasına Amerikan üretimi nükleer güç ile çalışan deniz altların verilmesini garanti etmektedir. Bu yönüyle söz konusu antlaşmanın ABD ve İngiltere'nin bölgesel politikasını destekleyecek bir açık deniz dengeleme stratejisi olduğu anlaşılmaktadır.

Avustralya donanmasının bu kazanımı bir yandan bölgesel güç dengesi dinamiklerini etkilerken Canberra'nın Fransa ile yapmış olduğu silah satış antlaşmasının da iptaline yol açmıştır. Hiçbir imzacı devletin Çin'e karşı bir ifade kullanmamasına rağmen antlaşma Çin tarafından da tepkiyle karşılanmıştır. Dolayısıyla kazanımları olduğu kadar maliyetleri de olabilecek bir antlaşma olarak imzalanan AUKUS'un ortaya çıkmasındaki yönetici elitlerin mevcut uluslararası sistemdeki kırılganlık ve fırsatlar ile bölgesel tehdit ortamına ilişkin algılamaları önem kazanmaktadır. Bu çalışmada AUKUS ittifakı neoklasik realizmin analitik yöntemleri etrafında değerlendirilmiş ve imzacı ülkeleri AUKUS antlaşmasına taraf olmaya iten gerekçeler yönetici elitlerin algıları çerçevesinde incelenmiştir.

ABSTRACT

The AUKUS deal, signed by the USA, the UK and Australia has revealed a new alliance dynamic within the Indo-Pacific geopolitics. The deal, which was met with surprise and attracted the reaction of many actors concerning the region, differs from the known alliance treaties in terms of its structure. Rather than giving any security guarantees to Australia, the treaty provides the delivery of American-made nuclear-powered submarines to Australian navy. In this respect, it is understood that the agreement in question is an offshore balancing strategy which will be expected to support the regional policies of the USA and the UK.

This acquisition of the Australian navy, while affecting the regional balance of power, also led to the cancellation of the arms trade agreement between Canberra and France. Although none of the signatory states used a statement against China, the treaty was also met with a reaction by China. Therefore, the AUKUS may have costs besides its gains and it is thus important to understand the perceptions of the ruling elites regarding the constraints and opportunities in the current international system and the regional threat environment. In this paper, the AUKUS deal was evaluated through the analytical methods of neoclassical realism which allows analyzing the perceptions of the ruling elites.

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Introduction

Announced by Australia, the USA, and the United Kingdom on 15 September 2021, the AUKUS deal has revealed a new partnership layout which defines the emerging balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region. The deal made a tremendous impact on all around the world as it provides Australia nuclear-powered submarines with American technology. It would obviously strengthen Australian Navy against the growing influence of P.R. China in the region. This will help restore the balance of power and counterbalance China, which is the untold propose of the agreement. The deal brought three like-minded, democratic states with a long alliance background. But it also surprised and even deteriorated the relations with some other European actors. The AUKUS infuriated the French, who made an historical arms sale agreement with the Canberra in 2016 for the construction of diesel-electric powered submarines, as Canberra terminated the contract following the new agreement with the US and the UK. The AUKUS deal is also widely criticized on the acquisition of nuclear technology by Australia as a non-nuclear power and the possibility of a possible nuclear armament in the future. The US president Biden and Australian government declared this submarine acquisition is not an intention to obtain nuclear weapons and all three signatory states are “deeply committed to leadership on global non-proliferation” (Media Statement, 2021). It is reminded that the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) permits countries to run nuclear-powered submarine without nuclear weapons. Beyond that, one of the actors most disturbed by the deal was undoubtedly China. The Beijing government accused the US of acting with a Cold War mentality. Actually, stated by realist thinkers like John Mearsheimer, a new Cold War is emerging between China and the USA, and this Cold War is more likely to turn into a hot conflict than the former one (Mearsheimer, 2021).

Neoclassical realism differs from common structural theories in the way it analyses systemic constraints along with states' internal factors. The imposed constraints and possibilities of the international system are refined through unit level variables and turn out to foreign and security policies (Rahman, 2021: 26). The internal factors vary from national makeup to political and economic sentiment of a state; from political regimes to strategic culture (Rose, 1998: 147-148). Furthermore, as the foreign policy decisions made by, mostly, a small group of people, elite and leader perception of the threats and opportunities is crucial for policy outcomes. Sometimes imperatives of the international system may not be perceived correctly by the leaders or the leaders cannot respond to the systemic constraints in a certain rationale (Rispman, 2011). As Wohlforth (1993: 2-3) pointed out, it is necessary to focus on the main factor, the perceptions of people, those who rule states and decides the foreign policy behaviors. Thus, with the recent, AUKUS, agreement, a new generation arms sale or a new alliance layout in the Indo-Pacific region is emerged as a result of perceptions of various leaders and decision makers. The regional imperatives and systemic stimuli shape the conditions for the agreement. In the light of above-mentioned considerations, the purpose of this paper is to understand the systemic and regional conditions within a framework of elite perceptions of Australia, the USA and the United Kingdom which lead to AUKUS deal.

Stephen Walt (2018) asserts that the US foreign policy understanding, which is shaped by experts, divides the world between virtuous allies, mostly democracies, that Washington can cooperate with and hostiles, mostly dictatorial regimes, that must be fought fiercely. So, the world is not absolute insecure as there are allies to fight for virtuous aims. This very American worldview considers alliances as natural elements of US grand strategy. While the Trump era can be considered as an exception, the above-mentioned statement can be confirmed by political history of the USA. Even though Trump administration aimed to limit China, it was a game without the consent of many US allies in the region. The Trump presidency was rude, inconsistent and oppressive towards its allies despite the need. Because of this, Walt (2018) points out that this period was a time without any rational or strategic approach. However, when Joe Biden took the office in January 2021 as the 46th US president, this was very welcomed by most American allies. The first step of Biden's policy on the field, which supports the alliances with a discursive slogan he put forward as “America is back”, was the AUKUS agreement signed with Australia and the United Kingdom.

Randall Schweller (2018: 26) pointed out that China, with an increased economy and military power, will definitely seek hegemony in its region, like other examples in history, and that the USA should follow a strategy known as “offshore balancing” based on strengthening its allies. Announced in September 2021, AUKUS can

be considered as an obvious example of offshore balancing. It is thus possible to assume the AUKUS as a very rational and strategically-traditional foreign policy move for the USA, as Schweller, Walt and Mearsheimer put forward. The deal is obviously a power play that Washington has been accustomed to for many years. And it is easier to understand the inner motivation, the elite perceptions to build this act, respectively. On the other hand, the UK, along with the USA, is an actual off shore balancer (Mearsheimer, 2001). However, the motivation and elite perceptions for a signature in the AUKUS deal can be found in different background. In this paper, it is claimed that the will to lead a foreign policy differs from continental Europe in the post-Brexit period has been the main drive for the AUKUS.

For the Australian case, the elite perceptions of threat, mostly caused by the aggressive foreign policy of Beijing, seem to be the driving force behind the AUKUS deal. However, it is widely known that Australia has long been a loyal ally of the USA and has significant political and historical bonds with the UK. On the other hand, Australia has long been in a neutral position between China and the USA, while she enjoys economic leverage of China. It is thus important to understand the elite and leader perceptions to take side with the USA, which is a balancing act rather than a bandwagon with China. While the systemic stimuli shaping the US strategy are perceived almost in the same way by the British and Australian decision makers, there are different motivations that bring actors together for a controversial nuclear submarine sale deal.

This paper thus attempts to understand the reasons that push London and Canberra to join the US in its geopolitical rivalry against China from neoclassical realist perspective, through a discussion on elite perceptions and systemic constraints. Paper analyses the AUKUS deal, the independent variable of the study, through intervening variables, those are elite perceptions of rise of China and security threats in the region, which form the independent variables at the system level.

This paper is structured as follows. In the first part, the systemic rivalry between the USA and China is discussed along with the term *offshore balancing*, which is also reviewed and detailed within the first part of the study. The regional dynamics are becoming the main determinant of the international relations in the Indo-Pacific. To clarify this, the second part of the paper, particularly focusing on the rise of China, emphasizes the emerging geopolitical and geo-economical dynamics that shaped by global pandemic and the increasing importance of trade routes and supply chain networks in the Indo-Pacific. In the third part, the process building AUKUS deal is assessed through the elite perceptions of signatory states, the outcome of those above-mentioned systemic power competition and regional dynamics. So, the case aims to illustrate how systemic imperatives affect the perceptions of the ruling elites and have an impact on the foreign policy behavior.

Systemic Competition, Alliances and Offshore Balancing as a Part of the U.S. Great Power Politics

Alliances, crucial for the United States both historically and politically, formed among some friendly, like-minded countries for security purposes (Bayazit, 2021: 95). Historically, the Americans signed a treaty of alliance with France on February 6, 1778, albeit diplomatically at first, during the American Revolution. Thus, the Americans, who were still in the establishment phase and were fighting for independence, entered into military solidarity with a European power for the first time. The French made enormous military contributions to the United States during its founding (Office of the Historian, 2021). However, after becoming independent, the decision makers in Washington decided that the USA should stay away from the constant wars of the states, especially in Europe. The Washington Doctrine, shaped by the phrases “it is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world” used by George Washington (1796: 27) in his farewell speech, shaped American foreign policy for a long time. Throughout the 19th century, the primary purpose of the USA was to establish hegemony in the Western hemisphere (Mearsheimer, 2001: 236). By achieving this, the Americans gained a geopolitical advantage that can be considered unique in the world and created an extremely secure region away from the possible threats of other great powers. On the other hand, the crises of the 20th century proved that the USA can only be safe, despite its geopolitical advantages, when the balance of power maintained in the Atlantic and Pacific regions. The United States has indeed enjoyed the advantages of a stable balance of power in Asia and Europe for several hundred years.

According to Walt (2021), the USA is the world’s greatest power not because of its innovative and big economy nor mighty army, although it is extremely important. It is not even a wide network of allies that makes it the world’s greatest power. It is the regional hegemony, which is achieved and maintained only by the United States in modern political history (Walt, 2021). As the only regional hegemony in the world, the foreign and security policy of the USA thus has been to prevent emergence of any regional hegemons in Europe and East Asia as

well as keeping the balance of power unchanged in favor of any actor (Ross, 2013: 20). Throughout history, such mentality of security prompted the US to enter into active international politics. Whenever the balance of power is lost and a rising power began to dominate any of those regions, the USA, somehow, intervened in either by blood and iron or backing the countries of the region to restore the balance of power. Twice in the 20th century, regional actors could not maintain the regional balance of power in Europe and Asia until Washington intervenes in. In other words, by joining in both world wars, the USA itself prevented the overtake of regional hegemony by any dominant actor. When the Second World War ended and the Soviet Union emerged as a rival superpower, this time the US did not leave it to regional powers to maintain the balance of power. Throughout the Cold War, American powers stationed in Europe and Asia as a part of complex network of alliances and the US took the responsibility of regional peace. So, in this way, the US won three world wars and prevented the rise of four regional hegemony in history (Mearsheimer, 2021; Zakaria, 1992: 21). Those are the Imperial Germany in the First World War; Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany in the Second World War; and the Soviet Union in the Cold War.

In the post-Cold War period, the main challenges to the world order as well as the US security has multiplied. From globalization to global terrorism threat; from regional conflicts to civil wars and increasing ethnic clashes; from economic and social problems to environmental and global health crises, the world seems to keep suffering (Tao, 2016). Yet the main security issue for the USA recently, after several military campaigns and invasions in the Middle East, is widely accepted as the rising China (Allison, 2017; Brands, 2021; Mearsheimer, 2001; 2021). China has one-fifth of the world total and a population of more than four times that of the United States, and is on track to become the world's largest economy economically (The World Bank, 2022). In particular, the economic growth has led to a more aggressive and expansionist China. China is thus seen as a challenge to US traditional foreign policy to avoid any hegemonic power in any other part of the world and an ideological threat to US values. President Biden organized Summit for Democracy and pointed out the battle between autocracies and democracies will repeat in the 21st century (The White House, 2021). The emphasis on democracy versus autocracy give a clue on the elite perceptions of threat in the US capital. Indeed, geopolitics in Asia after the Cold War have affected the US foreign policy regarding its global position. Thus, along with several issues like Taiwan, trade and technology, China and the USA now turned into rival powers of the region. And this has the potential to be a real source of regional and global instability that can displace the regional balance of power (Zhu, 2006: 90).

In this paper, thus, the rise of China is claimed as the most important challenge to foreign and security policy of the USA within the elites' perception after the Cold War. At the beginning of the 21st century, the general opinion among American foreign policy experts was the possible consequences of Chinese economic development, was focusing on Beijing's satisfaction with the system. The question aroused commonly was if China would rise peacefully or would be more integrated with the world economy. If so, the USA would not expect to have a problem with this country. However, John Mearsheimer (2001: 4) stated that China, let alone integrating into the world economy, cannot escape the consequences of a great power competition, even if it turns into a democracy. This has repeated several times throughout history. Democracies, also, prioritize their security not less than autocracies. And in an insecure world where there is no supreme authority, no state can be sure of the intentions of the other. At this point, states continue to rely on their armed forces. This argument based on Mearsheimer's historical analyzes seems to correspond to the situation after China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. Because Beijing's integration into the global economy accelerated its growth and it reduced the competitiveness of western powers such as the USA. In 2008 the economic crisis in western economies sparked a great recession. China, despite export-dependent economy, was one of the least hurt major economies (Womack, 2017: 391). This heated up US-China rivalry in terms of economy. Graham Allison (2017) thus pointed out that the USA and China cannot escape the trap of Thucydides, which is a historical phenomenon, and that it is inevitable for those to be systematically rivals that pushes them to a war.

By contrast, Mahbubani (2020), Overholt (2007) and some other pro-China researchers think differently about the future role of China in the global system and China-US relations. Overholt (2007: 229) pointed out that contrary to realist views of Allison (2017) and Mearsheimer (2001; 2021), the USA has produced a pragmatic policy against China since the presidency of Richard Nixon. This pragmatism has deterrent politics and some tensions correspondingly, like the Taiwan crisis in 1996, on one hand. On the other hand, it encourages China to play an active role in the international system both economically and politically. Although this strategy had

different orientations, it was implemented along the Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush, Clinton and George W. Bush administrations. However, the USA has kept its military assets, stationed and deployed its troops throughout the region against possible security problems, despite the policy of mutual dependence and bilateral relations with China. Additionally, the USA has alliance agreements in effect since the end of the Second World War. In addition, Washington managed to maintain its relations with the allies even though there were problems occasionally. In this respect, the US policy towards China and Asia-Pacific on a large scale has a tradition of pragmatic balancing that is also followed by US presidents like Obama, Trump and Biden in the post-Cold War era.

Hillary Clinton, former Secretary of the State, highlighted that the USA should get away from the turmoil in Iraq and Afghanistan as soon as possible, and seek its interests in Asia-Pacific region, in a 2011 article she wrote for Foreign Policy magazine. Clinton stated that the USA has an inevitable place in the architecture of Asia-Pacific, which is determined by security and economic parameters (Clinton, 2011). The economic opening and reform process initiated by China in the late 1970s under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping has enabled China to become an increasingly powerful military-political actor as well as being a developing economy. Since 2009, China has become a more aggressive actor, giving unprecedented diplomatic reactions. Beijing, for instance, canceled the China-US security dialogue for the first time in 2009. Moreover, China imposed sanctions on American companies that sell weapons to Taiwan, and on Norway, after a Chinese activist awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. And also, Beijing had disputes on maritime regions with Japan and harshly criticized South Korea's naval drill with the USA in the Yellow Sea (Ross, 2012: 70). Therefore, the Obama administration announced a new regional strategy focusing more on Asia-Pacific, namely "Asia Pivot", in 2012.

Obama's foreign policy didn't satisfy many people (Kolmas & Kolmasova, 2019: 61-62). Donald Trump, before he took the office as Obama's successor, was one of those dissatisfied people. Trump's mentality was to overturn the economic supremacy of China and Japan which he perceived as a main threat to US interests. Moreover, Trump considered American military assets and bases in Japan and South Korea as an economic burden for the US economy (Nakamura, 2016). This was just the contrary of Obama's policy of strong relation with the allies. However, Joe Biden's inauguration, the political perspective of Obama administration revived in Asia-Pacific. When Biden took the office, China has already taken more attraction than ten years ago. The US foreign policy turned to China more than before as Beijing has become more aggressive since 2013 under Xi Jinping's leadership. The COVID-19 pandemic was also considered by the Trump administration as a problem related to Chinese rule. So, the US foreign and security policy recently has and will have an inevitable Chinese dimension. And one can expect this policy would emerge as a part of long tradition.

The foreign and security policy of the USA has been affected by a kind of great power competition that is analyzed at the systemic level. In the last systemic competition against the Soviet Union, the USA strategically built alliance networks and supported the allies with unmatched American power. However, the US alliances after Soviet dissolution are thought to be in decline, as the common threat of communist expansionism is disappeared and threats to national securities vary (Casey, 2011: 2). But, in contrast, the alliances didn't dissolve as expected and Washington still trusts its strong alliance networks all around the world. As stated above, historically, the US foreign and security policy is based on its regional hegemony and prevent any other regional hegemon to emerge (Mearsheimer, 2001: 236; Ross, 2013: 20). The balance of power in Asia-Pacific and Europe thus helped US to stay safe from 1776 to 21st century. After the Second World War the US, itself, engaged in world politics actively to prevent any geopolitical rival to dominate its region (Layne, 1997: 89). And alliances played a vital role in both regions supporting American engagement and balance of power.

Balance of power, through many International Relation (IR) theories, compel states to follow two types of balancing act. States, especially the ones under threat, first tend to increase the own military firepower to deter the others to attack. This is called internal balancing. If this doesn't satisfy the state, then building alliances is the second option to increase the national power. This is strategy generally accepted as external balancing. As John Mearsheimer (2001: 156) pointed out, recruiting allies increases the quantity of firepower, thus increases the usefulness of deterrence. The alliances are formed to restore the balance of power, or as a result balance of threat or balance of interests (Waltz, 1979; Walt, 1985; Schweller, 1994). Within the traditional policy of the USA, each has its own justification in various cases. However, the balancing model, one of the dominant strategies in the post-Cold War period, which was built on the basis of the US strategy to strengthen the allied states, is defined as *offshore balancing* (Layne, 1997).

Offshore balancing, as a concept, is part of the realist theory of international relations. This strategy is supported by balance of power approaches and highlights the geographical advantages it has for the USA. Layne (1997) stated that the USA can support the dynamics in the current alliance relations with an offshore balancing strategy. Since power transitions in various parts of the world continue to constitute a vital security concern for the USA, offshore balancing has a wide range of advantages by supporting the alliance networks in ensuring the power balance. Realists like Mearsheimer and Layne consider this strategy to be part of the traditional foreign policy of the United Kingdom and the USA. This strategy based on supporting the allies distantly by providing them arms or other resources instead of backing them with ones' own army. Both the British and the Americans tend to have relatively fewer military forces in areas where potential hegemon are located (Mearsheimer, 2001: 141).

Offshore balancing, for instance, was used by the USA against USSR in its competition regarding the Asian geopolitics. Particularly in the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the USA preferred to support pro-Afghan powers. Besides local fighters, Washington supported neighboring countries like Pakistan. Thus, until Soviets leave Afghanistan in 1989, offshore balancing was the distinctive feature of US-Pakistan relations (Rudolph and Rudolph, 2006: 705-707). This was an effective and cheaper way for the U.S. as well as keeping the American forces away from conflict zones. Considering the expenses of the primary goal of the U.S. foreign policy both for economic and human resources, preventing emergence of regional hegemon in different corners of the world, the offshore balancing is one of the most useful. It helps keeping the balance of power without engaging directly. Besides, supporting allies has many things in return. That's why the balancing offshore alliances is seen a very American, and suitable for American interests. Layne (1997: 87) stated that such a strategy has two purposes: The first is to keep the U.S. forces distant from a dispute, which may have nuclear threats. And the second is to increase the relative power of the USA in the international system. This strategy, the offshore balancing, help USA to achieve its ultimate foreign policy goal just as John Mearsheimer (2001: 42) pointed out, the USA played the primary role to prevent rise of any hegemon four times in a century. This balancing act can thus be very optimal choice for the U.S. in its policies against Chinese domination in the Indo-Pacific region.

Layne (1997: 93) stated that followers of offensive realism believe the necessity of American hegemony for global stability. Nevertheless, decrease in U.S. power and hegemony has become more likely in a multipolar international system. Offshore balancing can thus be seen as a more appropriate strategy for the new multipolar world order (Layne, 1997: 112). Layne's anticipation was that the United States would avoid costs, reduce the number of soldiers and support allied countries in the Asia-Pacific, such as Japan and South Korea, those played crucial roles during the Cold War. However, the USA largely preserved its forces in these countries despite the costs and discussions about the high costs in American domestic politics. At this point, it can be understood that it is not easy for the U.S. to leave the region and it is sensible to preservation of the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific. On the other hand, the AUKUS agreement is likely to support current U.S. forces and allies by, besides controlling the balance of power, supporting Australian Navy with U.S. made nuclear-powered submarines. In this case, the offshore balancing strategy plays an assistive role for USA's overall Indo-Pacific strategy.

According to Walt (2020: 71), the USA maintained its relations with the allies, albeit the end of Cold War and they were the victorious side. This was a part of the worldview of liberal hegemony adopted by the American leaders. According to this approach, the spread of liberal values by the USA constitutes one of the basic elements of national security. This provides a convenient basis for the implementation of American foreign policy, and also makes it easy to convince American public and politicians in the domestic policy. It is more likely to get public support in this way. However, the liberal hegemony pursuit of the USA is not enough to solve the problems in the world, and it is not enough for American interests in terms of costs and consequences (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2016: 70-71). Within the framework of the Bush doctrine, it can be well seen that the USA attempted to promote democracy all over the world, but it has been successful neither in Iraq nor in Afghanistan in its consequences. For American leaders, the ideal of liberal hegemony constitutes an important portion of the American perception of security. Because the USA has not hesitated to implement its world view based on this for over 60 years and therefore built its foreign policy around liberal hegemony (Walt, 2020: 71-73). However, it is believed that offshore balancing, which has also a traditional position among the grand strategies of the USA, has features far superior to the liberal hegemony approach (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2016). Because this strategy can be considered as a cheaper, less risky and more efficient approach.

By definition, offshore balancing is a proactive strategy in terms of supporting the balance of power, not isolationism that suggests stepping aside and watching developments. It makes relations with America's allies and regional partners possible, both economically and diplomatically. Rather, it ensures the safety of the United States without the loss of its soldiers and big financial loss. In addition, it stops U.S. allies being free-riders who make unlimited use of the American security umbrella, making them the actor that takes the initiative in regional security problems (Walt, 2020: 79). As a result, it is obvious that the offshore balancing approach is seen as a great strategy that paves the way for the USA to take advantage of its unique position in the world. At this point, by signing AUKUS deal, it is seen that the USA aimed to strengthen its military presence in Northeast Asian countries such as Japan and South Korea with a second assistive offshore balancing strategy in the Indo-Pacific region.

In American politics, the increasing tendency to prevent China to establish a regional hegemony emerged during the Obama administration. The first step was moving the U.S. forces away from the endless conflicts in the Middle East and turning towards Asia. The U.S. thus implemented QUAD with India and Japan, and then to declare AUKUS with its allies like Australia and Britain after leaving Iraq and Afghanistan largely (Alagoz, 2021: 499; Khan, 2021). The plan to deliver American high-tech nuclear-powered submarines to Australia through the AUKUS treaty particularly demonstrates that Washington has adopted an offshore balancing approach, by which the U.S. administration support and strengthen the allied state rather than directly deploying American military assets.

Structural Strains of the Indo-Pacific Region: Assertive China as a Rising Power and the U.S. Strategy to Balance

With the economic reforms it put into practice about 40 years ago, China has become industrial center of the world. Its economic development and economic opening policy has enabled China to grow by an average of ten percent each year, reaching the status of an upper middle-income country and lifting 800 million people out of poverty each year (The World Bank in China, 2021). China's growing economy has become a strategic tool after the election of Xi Jinping as Chinese president in 2013. China's efforts to build multinational and China-centered global economic system, with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and the estimates that its increasing economic capacity will surpass the USA which make them the world's largest economy in a short time have required special attention of American politicians and IR researchers.

The economic development of China has turned the Asia-Pacific into a global trade zone, thus creating an extremely important geo-economic area. Besides China, the region also includes Japan, the world's third largest economy, and India, the sixth (The World Bank, 2022). According to estimates, these actors, which are the engines of economic growth in Asia, will host 90 percent of the 2.4 billion new middle-class people by 2030 (Yendamuri & Englishian, 2019). However, with its economic development, China started to pursue an offensive policy towards its neighbors and this jeopardize its relations with major U.S. allies in the region such as Australia, India and Japan. In addition, the increase in military expenditures and disputed territorial claims in the South China Sea strengthen the sense that China is increasingly pursuing a regional hegemony. Many scholars thus resemble 21st century China to 20th century Germany, the rise of which resulted in a great war.

In this respect, China is perceived as a systemic rival and threat to American interest as the balance of power is shifting to China. This completely contradicts the in the USA's understanding of foreign policy that the balance of power in different regions does not deteriorate in favor of a certain actor has caused the American politicians and security experts to perceive China as a systemic rival and threat. As a result, it is possible to associate the current Indo-Pacific strategy of the USA with the increasing influence of China and the increasing economic importance of the region. Therefore, American policy regarding this region has geo-strategic and geo-economic dimensions.

Indo-Pacific term conceptually defines the commercial and strategic international relations in the region, which includes the Indian Ocean, outstretches from east of the African coasts to the western coasts of the Pacific Ocean (Roy-Chaudhury & Estrada, 2018: 181). Here, the main factor that distinguishes the concept from Asia-Pacific is its focus on the South and Southeast Asia, and the importance of regional security, which is basically the security of maritime zones at its center (Alagoz, 2021: 794). The Indo-Pacific also is perceived differently by different countries. For example, for India, the Indo-Pacific stretches from eastern Africa to the western coast of the Americas. French perception of the region is limited to the extent of French-speaking communities in

the region; on the other hand, Japan champions the idea of *Open and Free Indo-Pacific* based on their offshore perspective (Pascal, 2021: 6-7). For the Netherlands, which announced its Indo-Pacific strategy in November 2020, the region stretches from Pakistan to the Pacific islands (Okano-Heijmans, 2021). For the United States, besides being a new geopolitical competition area, Indo-Pacific can be limited geographically within American Indo-Pacific Command's (USINDOPACOM) area of operation. But beyond that, for the United States, the Indo-Pacific seems to be perceived as a region to prevent the influence of China and its like-minded countries. In this region, the perception that China poses a threat to both the USA and its democratic allies is increasing day by day. In this respect, it can be understood that the USA urges to strengthen its solidarity with its allies in order to prevent China from being the dominant power in the Indo-Pacific. The tensions between the USA and China build the regional political background and thus create systemic constraints in the international relations within the region.

Therefore, recently, strategic transformation in the Indo-Pacific region has been the centerpiece of modern international politics. In particular, China's economic and military expansion and the USA's focus on approaches that emphasize hard power methods show the two ends of the strategic tension in the region. The perception of threat to current position of the USA in terms of the international system and the values it represents by the rise of China and the reality that it offers an alternative form of governance may unfold events between these two actors. China's filling and arming of disputed islands and reefs in the South China Sea, moreover, is an important security concern that creates pressure on the neighboring states. In addition, China established a military base in 2015 in Djibouti, a former French colony located at the important transit point of Africa, overlooking the Bab-el Mandeb Strait and the Red Sea. This is in an important strategic position between the Middle East and Indian Ocean (Cabestan, 2020: 731). China has also territorial disputes with India, and maritime disputes with South Korea and Japan. Apart from that, China has a major disagreement on Taiwan's international status. Beyond, China gives impression as an expansionist state to protect its national interests. As in the example of Djibouti, it is thought that China sees some places as commercially and strategically important for the projects like BRI (Pascal, 2021: 3).

It is possible to trace the increasing attention of the USA in this region to Obama's *rebalance* strategy, aka Asia Pivot (Davidson, 2014; The White House, 2015). The 2000s started with the military intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq and occupation of those countries by the USA. Barrack Obama, taking the office in 2008, laid the groundwork for a U.S. withdrawal from the Middle East, and for America's security and economic interests, focused more on China-centered politics in the Indo-Pacific. Although the USA could not always maintain favorable relations with its allies during the Donald Trump era, the USA focused too much on China. In 2021, Joe Biden, the vice president of Obama administration replaced Trump. With the inauguration of Biden, it has been seen that the USA has adopted the approaches reminiscent of Obama's, as the importance given to bilateral relations with the allies increased and the USA demonstrated that it would be show more presence in the Indo-Pacific.

Roy-Chaudhury and Sullivan (2018: 182) stated that although it is claimed that Washington's policy is not directly against China, it may be well understood that many American attempts in the Indo-Pacific aim to restrict Beijing's infrastructure and investment-oriented moves in the region. To achieve this purpose, the USA picks its regional partners from those with democratic identity and care about Western-style society and economy management. The solidarity of these democratic nations against China's alternative social rule can be understood as an effort of justification. This makes it very meaningful that why USA works with states like Australia, India, Japan and South Korea. Tow and Stuart (2014) pointed out that there's no way for the USA to achieve its goals without any support of allied states. Thus, the current U.S. strategy of Indo-Pacific form an internal part of its traditional foreign policy based on historical facts, those are which the American power economically corresponding to the growing power of Asia, the security of democratic nations in the region, and the key importance of democracy for the liberal order.

The Motivation of the U.S. for an Indo-Pacific Approach

The relationship between the economy and security has been central to international relations in East Asia and the Asia-Pacific after the Cold War. Economy plays a crucial role is United States' foreign policy as well. This provides the maintenance of economic prosperity and encourages the spread of the liberal economic order, and helps the creation of a democratic peace order through the globalization of democratic government forms. Duc Cuong (2018) stated that the strategic approach of the USA here is based on two basic elements, one is internal

and the other is external. Accordingly, this article focuses more on the internal factors of the U.S. foreign policy regarding the Indo-Pacific region. These internal elements can be listed as follows: The policy of maintaining its global leadership position; maintaining commercial superiority based on the freedom and security of the oceans, and thus maintaining its profits in the markets; strengthening the American-style notion of democracy, democratic institutions and culture, and human rights understanding; supporting the stability of the region through balance of power (Hasan, 2021). On the other hand, the external motivation is the increasing threat perception of the rise of China among American elites.

Returning to the internal motivations, the motto echoing the U.S. political approach towards this region has been “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” since Obama administration. This short phrase, obviously, means a lot to the USA. While the emphasis on freedom and openness evokes democracy, it also describes the basis of liberal economy. Therefore, with this statement, both the economic and political expectations of the USA in the region are revealed. Rapp-Hooper (2018: 7) stated that the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” approach put forward during the Trump era is actually not much different from Obama’s policy of Asia Pivot, alias Rebalance. Essentially, Obama’s policy was based on three key elements. These were an active military, which was built on economic and political pillars, to be more visible in the region; to strengthen the integration between the countries of the region and the USA by the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), and to strengthen the democratic ties with the allies in the region. Secretary of the State Hillary Clinton (2011) noted the importance of the security and economic architecture of the region at an early stage, emphasizing that America’s future cannot be separated from the future of the region. When Trump took office, he declared Obama’s strategy dead and pulled Washington out of the TPP. On the other hand, the motto “Free and Open Indo-Pacific”, which was used for the first time by Rex Tillerson in 2017, was again stressed in the important strategy documents of the USA such as the National Security Strategy (NSS, 2017) and positioned China at the very center of national security understanding. According to the American security documents, while the interests of the USA in the region extend back to its foundation years, China represents the evil side in a struggle between the free and oppressive world order understandings in the region (NSS, 2017: 45-46). Although the importance of alliances in any America’s strategy in the Indo-Pacific region was emphasized during the Trump era, there were problems in practice. On the other hand, it is possible to say that Biden has turned to the strategy of cooperation with the allies. Secretary of the State Anthony Blinken (2021) repeated the slogan “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” in his speech in Indonesia on 14 December 2021. According to Blinken, while freedom is an important key to the future, openness is in the natural process of freedom (Blinken, 2021). In his speech, Blinken stated what this motto of the American strategy means at three levels: First of all, at the individual level, the individuals living here should be free in their daily lives; at the state level, it describes the existence of countries that can pursue their own path, and at the regional level, a system where problems can be resolved openly, rules are transparent and fairly applied, and ideas, products and goods can move freely between countries.

As pointed out by realist thinkers, understanding of America’s role in the Middle East, Europe and the Indo-Pacific for the maintenance of American primary in the world is also expressed in the American Security Strategy document (NSS, 2017: 45). At this point, both the Democratic political wing, represented under the presidency of Obama and Biden and the Republican political wing, represented under the presidency of Donald Trump have consensus on America’s leading position an economic, military and political power. Hence, it can be claimed that that the perceptions of the elite, as put forward by this study, have a common-sense despite being in different political spectrums.

Therefore, it can be claimed that the Indo-Pacific approach of the USA is based on the spread of the American worldview, with principles like freedom and liberty, both in the economic and political context, and stopping the rival ideology and its precursor China, and furthermore, strengthening the relations with the American allies in the region. The main reason for this is the threat perception which is based on the prevention of any regional hegemony to emerge in other parts of the world. In this respect, if it wasn’t for the China’s economic development, the American Indo-Pacific policy would most likely have focused on completely different factors. It makes thus sense, as a part of the traditional foreign policy, the USA tends to take a position against the possible challenge by China. Strengthening the relationship with democratic allies and partners in the region, which is one of the main elements of the U.S. approach in this region, is also meaningful in this respect. In other words, the AUKUS deal is an expected maneuver while it is rational in terms of traditional foreign policy and

offshore balancing acts of the United States. Nevertheless, the elite perceptions of the other signing parties have different motives which is discussed in the next part of the article.

Great Britain's Tilt to Indo-Pacific: Brexit's First Blossom Forth

It may be very assertive to say that Great Britain has put forward a totally new foreign policy agenda with the AUKUS agreement, but a significant number of people believe it that way (Major & von Ondarza, 2021). However, the AUKUS functions as an offshore balancing act for the British just like the Americans. Britain and the USA, which Mearsheimer (2001) considered as offshore balancers traditionally, have once again revealed their identities. Because the primary aim of AUKUS is to ensure Australia a powerful navy in the region. For this purpose, the deal promises the delivery of cutting-edge US-made nuclear-powered submarines. In this respect, AUKUS is not an alliance agreement in terms of its widely accepted meaning (Perot, 2021: 2). Nevertheless, this treaty brings the western democracies significant military power together and increases their influence in the region, while shifting the balance of power to Australia. Canberra, London and Washington, which have been allies for a long time, thus have increased the deterrence and succeed in placing nuclear submarines that can serve with long-term and durable structures in the Indo-Pacific region with the help of Australia. Thus, it helps to keep the USA and Britain away from threats caused by a sudden shift in the balance of power in Asia. This proves that the issue is also an offshore balancing issue for the British.

The commercial, economic, military and security interests of the British, as well as of many nations in recent times, lie in this vast Indo-Pacific region. One of the factors that pushed the British to pursue an active policy here is, undoubtedly, the history of the region which the British played an important role (Pant & Milford, 2021: 12). As several independent countries today, like India, one of the biggest actors in the region and supported by the West against the expansion of China as an important partner, remained under the British colony for a long time. However, British left the region gradually and London lost its effect on the regions' politics. The most important step in Britain's return to the region recently is brought to public by the British government with a document titled as "Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defense, Development and Foreign Policy" (Brooke-Holland, 2021).

The future plannings with an ambitious slogan like *Global Britain* can be seen as the first important step in the post-Brexit foreign policy of the UK. This hadn't been possible so far for Britain as a part of the European Union (EU). But soon after Brexit, it is thus possible for the British to plan a policy, which is not a part of collective security of Europe nor NATO, and on a region miles away from their borders. It is clear that British elites widely expressed their opinions in this point of view. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, for instance, has openly declared in the introduction pages of this document that the quit from the EU is a new historical start and that the UK has now gained its freedom to deal with political and economic issues differently and better than before (Cabinet Office, 2021: 3). In this respect, it is seen that the British attach importance to the Indo-Pacific and AUKUS as a post-EU foreign policy step. At this point, it can be said that the British want to separate themselves from the EU member countries and to position its security policies at a more global level. Despite the increasing Russian threat perceptions of the EU member states, especially through the Ukraine crisis, the British focused their security emphasis on the Indo-Pacific region rather than continental Europe. It is clearly seen in the "Global Britain" document as Elhefnawy (2021: 2) found that the term Indo-Pacific was used in at least 22 of the total 69-page of the document. This points the outlines of the future security and foreign policy of the British. Even this trend reveals that the UK wants to play a more global role in the post-Brexit era.

Indeed, the UK was not restricted by the EU. But the areas of interest of the British are somewhat different from the common EU policies (Pant & Milford, 2021: 18). Therefore, the main factor pushing the British to be a part of AUKUS is the will of to become an economic and military actor on a global scale in the post-Brexit process. While doing this, the British aimed to strengthen transatlantic ties with the USA. At this point, it can be stated that London put forward a free will to further strengthen its unity with the Anglo-Saxon world (Major and von Ondarza, 2021).

In terms of elite perceptions and government policies, it is seen that the British wanted to display their position along with Washington to support democratic international order, and prove the UK can play more globally in contrast to the EU member states. Just like American politicians, the British also emphasized the principle of openness and freedom of the international order and announced that liberal democracies had an obligation to prove this (Cabinet Office, 2021: 11-12). At this point, it is more courageous than the EU member states in

supporting the anti-Chinese policies of the USA. Making a strategic difference with Brussels, London had previously supported the U.S. sanctions on Huawei and did not hesitate to criticize the EU-China Comprehensive Investment Agreement (Major & von Ondarza, 2021). The sudden announcement of AUKUS to everyone's surprise, moreover, overshadowed the EU's own Indo-Pacific strategy, which was declared the same day with the AUKUS. With an emphasis on Global Britain, it is possible to say that the British, in a way, reflects their desire to return to the pre-EU period. Indeed, Elhefnawy (2021: 6) pointed out that the aims of the document are quite ambiguous. But as an impression it has a milder resemblance to the 1960s British stance. As a result, it is seen that the UK wants to solve its security problems at a more global level along with the USA, despite the increasing political problems in Europe and the aggressive attitudes of foreign actors such as Russia. It is understood that the reason for this is the desire for a more global Britain regarding the post-Brexit world, which is reflected in the policies and discourses of British decision makers.

Australia as a Balancer Against China

In the post-Cold War period, intra- and extra-regional trade, investment and other economic developments in Asia expanded rapidly. In addition, the Asia-Pacific region has been away from important wars and intra-regional conflicts for a long time. The conditions described as "Pax Asiatica" in the region, where a period of almost 70 years of peace was followed, started to be questioned more and more as a result of the recent tensions between China and the USA (Solingen, 2021: 1). On the other hand, China's growing economy has become an important springboard in achieving foreign policy goals (Jain, 2019: 28). In the region where Australia is located, China has gradually increased its influence economically and militarily. In addition, regional tensions have deepened as the conflicts between South Korea and Japan have increased and North Korea has become an increasingly aggressive actor. Furthermore, China's activities in the South China Sea and the problems regarding the maritime zones have created military tensions despite the growing and developing economic infrastructure in the region (Solingen, 2021: 2).

In fact, there were tensions between the USA and China in the Taiwan Strait in the mid-90s, as well. However, the USA had a significant military advantage, especially with its aircraft carrier technologies (Sullivan, 2015). This pushed Beijing to seek supremacy in the sea. With the allocation of its increasing economic capacity to military resources, by the year 2000, China's submarine power has become an important concern of security for the American surface fleet, especially for the aircraft carriers (Ross, 2013: 25). At this point, factors such as increasing Chinese naval power and the capture and arming of disputed areas in the South China Sea have raised the issue of openness of maritime routes, which provides the flow of international trade. Therefore, these security problems that emerged in the geo-economic area, where the world economy is highly dependent and global supply chains form an important network, attracted not only the countries of the region but also other important actors of the world to the region (Solingen, 2021: 1). These new regional dynamics thus plays an inevitable role in Australia's foreign policy.

China's increasing share in world trade and its increasing influence in maritime power have affected the national security and threat perceptions of Canberra governments and the Australian political elites. In particular, China's plans to have a new generation nuclear submarine fleet of Type 095 (09-V) has aroused concern in Canberra while, then, China would become an under-balanced actor in the Pacific Ocean (Wieslander, 2021: 36). Indeed, it is generally accepted by the realist IR theory, that states have two main strategic options such as balancing and bandwagoning in case of a shift in the balance of power or a threat emerged to their national securities (Walt, 1985: 4). Apart from this, some Asian states (such as South Korea), which have adopted the economic benefits of China but are also America's ally, follow a third way, the hedging strategy. In this respect, it was expected that Australia would follow a policy by avoiding a choice between the USA and China, and it was claimed that a policy in this direction would serve Canberra's economic and national interests more (Chan, 2019). However, many incidents, especially since 2009, have led to deterioration in Canberra-Beijing relations (Bisley, 2013: 413). Therefore, it is understood that the perception of rising China by the Australian political elites is closer to a threat perception due to the increasing pressures of Beijing and the foreign policy it follows. In this case, it is more likely to expect Canberra to balance or bandwagon (Schweller, 1994). Hence, Australia is impelled to follow a balancing strategy.

Chinese attempts to increase its naval power with new generation submarines prompted Canberra, at first, primarily to a strategy known as internal balancing. In this regard, Canberra made an arms-sale agreement with France in 2016 for the purchase of submarines that run on conventional energy but with new generation

features. In accordance with this agreement, that worth 55 billion USD and is seen as the contract of the century by France, Paris would produce diesel-electric Barracuda class submarines for Australia (Fathi, 2021). This agreement, which had many economic and geopolitical advantages for France, also responded to the search for a balance of power in the face of increasing pressure from China. However, with the election of Joe Biden as president, the US policy of forming a strong anti-China bloc became more concrete. With their long-standing alliance relations, such as the Five Eyes Intelligence agreement and ANZUS, Washington considered it should be the primary actor for Australia's security, rather than France. At this point, the United States stepped in and the understanding of "you are either with us or against us" introduced by the Bush doctrine was revived. Biden administration provided more attractive and special offers than France and somehow draw Canberra to choose a more prominent place in an anti-Chinese bloc rather than pursuing a policy in an ambiguous position between the USA and China (Fathi, 2021).

As a state with deep-rooted democracy in the Asia-Pacific, Australia is also an important Western partner due to especially its historical and political ties to the monarchy of the Great Britain. The role it played among the Western powers in both world wars is well-known (Bisley, 2013). In this respect, the elites in Canberra have chosen to sit at the table with their Western partners and to be on the balancing side, in terms of their long-term relations with the West and being like-minded, against the rising China. At this point, it is obvious that the AUKUS is seen as a win-win process for the Australian elite. Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison stated that with the AUKUS, Canberra has now access to a very important technology as Australia will be able to purchase eight American nuclear-powered submarines in accordance with the treaty (Nicholson, 2021). However, this situation would enable Australia to become an important actor in the Indo-Pacific axis, with access to an extremely superior technology not only in terms of purchasing American technology, but also in production and use. In this respect, Canberra's main elite perception in signing AUKUS can be listed as follows: First, China's increasing pressure and its perception of a threat for Australian national security. Secondly, the influence of the Anglo-Saxon state traditions and mentality as well as the long history of alliance with democratic like-minded states. And lastly, the chance of ending up profitable in U.S.-China tensions by gaining technological qualities and thus deterrence against possible future threats.

Conclusion

One of the most recent concerns in international politics is the future of the relations between the USA and China. The AUKUS agreement, which was announced unexpectedly, was met with a sense of surprise and some criticism in the Europe as well as in Asia. Of course, it has a clear purpose within the geopolitical lines that are already becoming increasingly evident in the Indo-Pacific region. This paper thus aims to help understanding the regional dynamics and the motives of states against this, through perceptions of the elite, as neoclassical realism proposes an analytical perspective taking unit-level factors into account along with constrains and opportunities in the international system. The way leaders perceive threats and opportunities is one of those analytical elements. Hence, this study evaluated the process of the emergence of the AUKUS agreement by taking advantage of neoclassical realism, focusing on the perceptions of the elite in Washington, London and Canberra.

AUKUS, which can be considered as a part of offshore balancing strategy of the USA, is an example of traditional American and British policies to ensure national security. In this respect, it's been clear that both London and Washington follow a well-known strategy regarding the Indo-Pacific region. After Joe Biden's take the office, the U.S. foreign policy on Asia and China turned the way it was in Obama administration. Biden withdraw the American forces in Afghanistan and right after that declared the AUKUS with Britain and Australia. This was one of the main policy agendas of the Obama presidency. For the British, AUKUS means more than it does for Washington. The need for the UK to put forward an ambitious project in its foreign policy and economic policies after Brexit, which has important crises in itself, came into being with the AUKUS deal. The ambitious Global Britain document prepared by the British government shows British priorities until 2030. This document contains an important message about where the British see their place in world politics. It can be seen that this document focuses more on the Indo-Pacific region and the British are trying to leave the EU countries behind with its ability to pursue a global and flexible foreign policy agenda. At a time when Europe was more local and reserved in security issues, the British tried to show that they would follow an ambitious and global policy. At this point, the AUKUS seems to be a reflection of elite perceptions of the UK's self-confidence with a new foreign policy agenda in the post-Brexit period.

For the Canberra administration, choosing a side in the China-U.S. tension has become a necessity as a result of the geopolitical constraints. China's naval capacity has become a threat to Australia over time. At this point, Canberra management first made an important submarine agreement with the French defense industry in 2016. However, the increasing influence of the USA in the region after Biden's inauguration caused Canberra to abandon its agreement with Paris. This was in favor of a more profitable one proposed by the Americans. Australia can enjoy both the technological gains of the AUKUS deal as well as a significant deterrent against China by purchasing Washington's high-tech nuclear submarines. It is seen that the past experiences and the idea of forming a strong democratic bloc in the region constitute the common ground that affects the elite perceptions of the three states.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Amaç ve Kapsam

15 Eylül 2021'de Avustralya, ABD ve Birleşik Krallık tarafından açıklanan AUKUS anlaşması, Hint-Pasifik bölgesinde ortaya çıkan güç dengesini tanımlayan yeni bir ortaklık düzeni ortaya koymuştur. Anlaşma, Avustralya'ya Amerikan nükleer denizaltı teknolojisini sağladığı için tüm dünyada muazzam bir etki yaratmıştır. Anlaşma, Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti'nin bölgedeki artan etkisine karşı Avustralya donanmasını güçlendirmeyi ve açıkça dile getirilmemiş olmasına rağmen bölgedeki Çin lehine değişmekte olan güç dengesinin yeniden tesis edilmesine yardımcı olmayı amaçlamaktadır. Anlaşma, uzun bir ittifak geçmişine ve benzer yönetim biçimine sahip üç demokratik devleti bir araya getirmiştir. Ancak anlaşmanın gizli yapılmış olması ve beklenmedik bir anda duyurulması bu üç ülkenin bazı Avrupalı aktörlerle olan ilişkileri de olumsuz etkilemiştir. Canberra'nın ABD ve İngiltere ile yaptığı yeni anlaşmanın ardından 2016 yılında Fransa ile yaptığı dizel ve elektrikle çalışan denizaltıların inşasına yönelik tarihi silah satış anlaşmasını iptal etmesi Fransızları oldukça kızdırmıştır. Diğer bir yandan AUKUS anlaşması, Avustralya'nın nükleer olmayan bir güç olarak nükleer bir savunma teknolojisini edinmesi ve gelecekte nükleer bir silah edinmeye yol açabileceği gibi unsurlar üzerinden de eleştirilmektedir. Buna karşın ABD başkanı Joe Biden ve Avustralya hükümeti, bu denizaltı satışında nükleer bir silah elde etme niyeti olmadığını ve üç imzacı devletin de "küresel nükleer silahların yayılmasını önleme konusunda yürüttükleri liderliğe derinden bağlı olduğunu" dile getirmiştir (Media statement, 16 Eylül 2021). Ancak anlaşmanın yol açtığı nükleer tartışmalar ve silah antlaşmasının iptalinin yol açtığından çok daha fazla rahatsızlık kuşkusuz Çin yönetimi tarafından duyulmuştur. Zira anlaşmanın duyurulmasının hemen ardından Pekin hükümeti ABD'yi Soğuk Savaş zihniyetiyle hareket etmekle suçlamıştır. Bu noktada Soğuk Savaş ifadesi dikkat çekici durmaktadır. Aslında John Mearsheimer gibi realist düşünürlerin de ifade ettiği gibi, Çin ile ABD arasında yeni bir Soğuk Savaş yaşandığından bahsetmek mümkün görünmektedir ve bu Soğuk Savaş'ın bir öncekinden daha fazla sıcak bir çatışmaya dönüşme olasılığı bulunmaktadır (Mearsheimer, 2021).

Stephen Walt (2018) Amerikalı dış politika uzmanlarının dünya görüşlerine göre ABD'nin dış politikasına şekil veren anlayışın dünyayı mutlak güvensizliğin olduğu bir yer olmaktan ziyade, iş birliği yapılabilecek çoğunlukla demokrasilerden oluşan erdemli müttefikler ile savaşılması gereken çoğunlukla diktatoryal rejimlerden oluşan kötü düşmanlar arasında böldüğünü ifade etmektedir. Dolayısıyla, onlara göre erdemli amaçlar için savaşacak müttefikler olduğu müddetçe dünya mutlak güvensiz bir yer değildir. Bu Amerikan dünya görüşü, ittifakları ABD'nin büyük stratejisinin doğal unsurları olarak görmektedir. Bu durum belki Trump dönemi için bir istisna olarak kabul edilebilir. Ancak tarihsel bakımdan ele alındığında ittifakların ABD'nin siyasi tarihi önemi anlaşılmaktadır. Her ne kadar Trump yönetimi de Çin'i sınırlamayı amaçlayan pek çok politika izlemiş olsa da bu bölgedeki birçok ABD müttefikinin rızası olmadan oynanan bir oyunun parçası olmuştur. Ayrıca Trump başkanlığı sürecince müttefiklere ihtiyaç duymasına rağmen zaman zaman kaba, tutarsız ve baskıcı bir tutum sergilemiştir. Bu nedenle Walt (2018), bu dönemin herhangi bir rasyonel veya stratejik yaklaşımın olmadığı bir zaman olarak ele alınması gerektiğini dile getirmiştir. Gerçekten de Joe Biden'ın Ocak 2021'de ABD başkanı olarak göreve gelmesi pek çok Amerikan müttefikleri tarafından memnuniyetle karşılanmıştır. Biden'ın "Amerika geri döndü" şeklinde öne sürdüğü söylemsel bir sloganla ittifakları destekleyen yaklaşımının sahadaki ilk adımını ise Avustralya ve İngiltere ile imzalanan AUKUS anlaşması oluşturmuştur.

Bu yönüyle AUKUS anlaşması hem Amerikan büyük stratejisi içerisinde bir süreklilik, hem de ABD'nin Çin'e karşı yürütmekte olduğu büyük güç stratejisi içerisinde müttefik devletlerle iş birliğine dayalı bir dengeleme yaklaşımı oluşturmaktadır. Offshore dengeleme ya da tam olarak açık deniz dengeleme stratejisi, bir kavram olarak, realist uluslararası ilişkiler teorisinin bir parçasıdır. Bu strateji, güçler dengesi yaklaşımlarıyla desteklenmekte ve ABD için sahip olduğu coğrafi avantajları vurgulamaktadır. Layne (1997), ABD'nin mevcut ittifak ilişkilerindeki dinamikleri bir offshore dengeleme stratejisi ile destekleyebileceğini belirtmiştir. Dünyanın çeşitli yerlerindeki güç geçişleri ABD için hayati bir güvenlik endişesi oluşturmaya devam ettiğinden, offshore dengeleme, güç dengesinin sağlanmasında ittifak ağlarını destekleyerek çok çeşitli avantajlara sahiptir. Mearsheimer ve Layne gibi realistler, bu stratejiyi Birleşik Krallık ve ABD'nin geleneksel dış politikasının bir parçası olarak görmektedirler. Bu strateji temel olarak, müttefikleri kendi ordusuyla desteklemek yerine onlara silah veya başka kaynaklar sağlayarak uzaktan desteklemeye dayanmaktadır. Hem İngilizler hem de Amerikalılar, potansiyel hegemonların bulunduğu bölgelerde nispeten daha az askeri güce sahip olma eğilimindedir (Mearsheimer, 2001: 141). Bu bakımdan bu devletlerin geleneksel güvenlik politikaları açısından tarihsel yeri olan bir stratejik yaklaşımdır.

Offshore dengeleme daha önce ABD tarafından Asya jeopolitiğine ilişkin rekabetinde SSCB'ye karşı kullanılmıştır. Özellikle 1979'da Sovyetlerin Afganistan'ı işgalinde ABD, Afgan yanlısı güçleri desteklemeyi tercih etmiştir. Washington, yerel savaşçıların yanı sıra Pakistan gibi komşu ülkeleri de desteklemiştir. Böylece, Sovyetler 1989'da Afganistan'dan ayrılana kadar, ABD-Pakistan ilişkilerinin ayırt edici özelliği açık deniz dengelemesi olmuştur (Rudolph & Rudolph, 2006: 705-707). Bu, ABD için hem etkili hem de daha ucuz bir yol olmuş hem de Amerikan güçlerini çatışma bölgelerinden uzak tutarak olası kayıpların ve beklenmedik savaşların önüne geçmiştir. ABD dış politikasının birincil hedefinin hem ekonomik hem de insan kaynaklarına yönelik maliyetleri göz önüne alındığında, dünyanın farklı köşelerinde bölgesel hegemonların ortaya çıkmasının önlenmesi, offshore dengelemenin en faydalı olanlarından biri olarak görülmektedir. Doğrudan devreye girmeden güç dengesini korumaya yardımcı olmaktadır. Ayrıca müttefikleri desteklemenin karşılığında çok şey mevcuttur. Bu nedenle dengeleyici offshore ittifakları oldukça Amerikan ve Amerikan çıkarlarına uygun bir strateji olarak görülmektedir. Layne (1997: 87), böyle bir stratejinin iki amacı olduğunu belirtmiştir: Birincisi, ABD güçlerini nükleer tehditler içerebilecek bir anlaşmazlıktan uzak tutmaktır. İkincisi ise ABD'nin uluslararası sistemdeki göreceli gücünü artırmaktır. Bu strateji, yani offshore dengeleme, ABD'nin nihai dış politika hedefine ulaşmasına yardımcı olmaktadır. John Mearsheimer'ın (2001: 42) belirttiği gibi, ABD bir yüzyılda dört kez herhangi bir hegemonyanın yükselmesini önlemede öncelikli bir rol oynamıştır. Dolayısıyla bu dengeleme eylemi, ABD için Hint-Pasifik bölgesindeki Çin egemenliğine karşı politikalarında çok optimal bir seçim olarak görülebilmektedir.

Bu makalede offshore dengeleme kavramsal olarak AUKUS antlaşmasını tanımlayıcı bir özellikte kabul edilmiştir. Ancak AUKUS antlaşmasının ortaya çıkmasını sağlayan etmenlerin farklı ülkelerde nasıl algılandığı asıl araştırma konusunu oluşturmaktadır. Bu bakımdan ABD için geleneksel büyük güç siyasetinin bir parçası olan bölgesel hegemonların ortaya çıkmasını önleme yaklaşımı mevcut ABD-Çin gerilimi içerisinde kendisine yer bulmuştur. Dolayısıyla ABD için Çin'e komşu bir müttefikin güçlendirilmesi Çin'e karşı hem bir offshore dengeleme oluşturmada hem de yıllardır izlediği büyük güç stratejisini desteklemektedir. Bu noktada Amerikalı yöneticilerin algılarını bu ikisi oluşturmuştur. Öte yandan İngilizlerin elit algılamaları Brexit sonrası İngiltere'nin iddialı bir dış politika arayışı ile ilgili olmuştur. Avusturyalı elitleri ABD-Çin arasında seçim yapmaya zorlayan koşulların oluşması sonrası caydırıcılık arayışı ile yüksek teknoloji elde edecek olmanın getirdiği kazanç duygusu olmuştur. Yukarıda belirtilen değerlendirmeler ışığında bu makalenin amacı Avustralya, ABD ve Birleşik Krallık hükümetlerindeki lider ve elitlerin AUKUS antlaşmasına zemin hazırlayan algıları çerçevesinde sistemsal ve bölgesel koşulları anlamaktır.

Yöntem

Neoklasik realizm diğer sistemsal analiz yapan teorilerden sistem düzeyindeki baskıların devletlerin içsel faktörleriyle bir arada değerlendirmesi yönüyle ayrılmaktadır. Uluslararası sistemin dayattığı kısıtlamalar ve olanaklar, birim düzeyindeki değişkenler aracılığıyla rafine edilmekte ve dış ve güvenlik politikalarına dönüşmektedir (Rahman, 2021: 26). Bu iç etmenler, bir devletin ulusal yapısından siyasi ve ekonomik duyarlılığına; siyasal rejimin yapısından stratejik kültürüne kadar farklılıklar göstermektedir (Rose, 1998: 147-148). Ayrıca, dış politika kararları çoğunlukla küçük bir grup insan tarafından verildiğinden, elit ve liderin tehdit ve fırsatları algılaması politika sonuçları için çok önemlidir. Zira uluslararası sistemin zorunlulukları kimi zaman liderler tarafından doğru algılanamayabilmekte veya liderler sistemsal kısıtlamalara belirli bir mantıksal işleyiş içerisinde cevap veremeyebilmektedir (Rispmann, 2011). Bu noktada William Wohlforth'un (1993: 2-3) belirttiği gibi, devletleri yönetenlerin temel özellikleri olan insani yapılarına ve dolayısıyla dış politika davranışlarını belirleyenlerin algılarına odaklanmak gerekmektedir. Bu çalışmada ele alınmakta olan AUKUS antlaşmasıyla, Hint-Pasifik bölgesinde yeni nesil bir silah satışı veya yeni bir ittifak düzeni ortaya koymaktadır. Dolayısıyla, bu süreci ortaya çıkaran rasyonalitenin çeşitli liderlerin ve karar vericilerin algılarının bir sonucu olduğu gerçeğinden hareketle bu algılamaların dikkate alınması gerekliliği ortaya konulmaktadır.

Sonuç

Bu makalede offshore dengeleme kavramsal olarak AUKUS antlaşmasını tanımlayıcı bir özellikte kabul edilmiştir. Ancak AUKUS antlaşmasının ortaya çıkmasını sağlayan etmenlerin farklı ülkelerde nasıl algılandığı asıl araştırma konusunu oluşturmaktadır. Bu bakımdan ABD için geleneksel büyük güç siyasetinin bir parçası olan bölgesel hegemonların ortaya çıkmasını önleme yaklaşımı mevcut ABD-Çin gerilimi içerisinde kendisine yer bulmuştur. Dolayısıyla ABD için Çin'e komşu bir müttefikin güçlendirilmesi Çin'e karşı hem bir offshore dengeleme oluşturmada hem de yıllardır izlediği büyük güç stratejisini desteklemektedir. Bu noktada Amerikalı

yöneticilerin algılarını bu ikisi oluşturmuştur. Öte yandan İngilizlerin elit algılamaları Brexit sonrası İngilteresinin iddialı bir dış politika arayışı ile ilgili olmuştur. Avusturyalı elitleri ABD-Çin arasında seçim yapmaya zorlayan koşulların oluşması sonrası caydırıcılık arayışı ile yüksek teknoloji elde edecek olmanın getirdiği kazanç duygusu olmuştur. Yukarıda belirtilen değerlendirmeler ışığında bu çalışmada Avustralya, ABD ve Birleşik Krallık hükümetlerindeki lider ve elitlerin AUKUS anlaşmasına zemin hazırlayan algıları çerçevesinde sistemsal ve bölgesel koşulları irdelenmiştir.