



CONTESTED WATERS AND STRATEGIC STRAITS: NAVAL ARMAMENT, AUKUS AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF MARITIME SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

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ABSTRACT

Maritime security has re-emerged as one of the central theatres of twenty-first-century geopolitics. The oceans are no longer viewed simply as commercial highways or neutral global commons; they are increasingly becoming contested spaces where naval armament, chokepoint politics, undersea deterrence, supply-chain vulnerability and great-power rivalry converge. This article examines the changing architecture of maritime security through three interconnected developments: the weaponisation of critical maritime straits, the strategic implications of AUKUS and nuclear-powered submarine proliferation in the Indo-Pacific, and the militarisation of the Arctic as melting ice opens new routes and resource frontiers. The article argues that maritime security is being reconfigured from a relatively open order based on freedom of navigation and commercial interdependence into a more securitised, militarised and fragmented order shaped by naval competition and strategic denial. Chokepoints such as Malacca, Bab el-Mandeb, Hormuz and the Suez-linked Red Sea corridor reveal how narrow waterways can be transformed into instruments of coercion against global supply chains. AUKUS demonstrates how undersea warfare and nuclear-powered submarines are becoming central to Indo-Pacific deterrence, but it also raises concerns about arms racing, alliance politics and nuclear-propulsion diffusion. Arctic militarisation shows how climate change is creating new geopolitical theatres by exposing routes, resources and strategic approaches previously constrained by ice. The article concludes that the future of maritime security will depend not only on naval power, but also on resilient supply chains, cooperative governance, undersea surveillance, crisis-management mechanisms and the ability of states to prevent strategic straits and polar frontiers from becoming permanent arenas of militarised rivalry.

KEYWORDS: Maritime security, chokepoints, AUKUS, nuclear-powered submarines, Bab el-Mandeb, Strait of Malacca, Indo-Pacific, Arctic militarisation, sea power, supply-chain security.

INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century has brought the ocean back to the centre of strategic politics. For much of the post-Cold War period, maritime space was often discussed through the language of globalisation, trade connectivity, port development and freedom of navigation. Yet recent crises have demonstrated that the sea remains a deeply political and military domain. Supply chains depend on narrow maritime corridors, energy flows pass through vulnerable straits, naval forces compete for access and denial, undersea cables carry the data of global economies, and submarine operations increasingly shape strategic deterrence. Maritime security is therefore no longer a secondary dimension of national security; it is one of its foundations.¹

The title “contested waters and strategic straits” captures two related transformations. First, waters once treated as shared commercial spaces are becoming more contested because great powers increasingly deploy naval, coast guard, militia, cyber and surveillance capabilities to shape access and influence. Second, strategic straits are no longer merely geographical passages; they have become geopolitical instruments. A narrow waterway can be used to delay shipping, raise insurance costs, divert trade, pressure energy markets and signal military intent without declaring war.²

This article argues that the contemporary maritime security architecture is being reconfigured through three major processes. The first is chokepoint militarisation, where critical

straits and sea lanes become vulnerable to naval coercion, missile threats, piracy, insurgent attacks and grey-zone disruption. The second is undersea strategic competition, where AUKUS and nuclear-powered submarines reflect the growing value of stealth, endurance, long-range deterrence and maritime denial in the Indo-Pacific. The third is Arctic militarisation, where climate change is opening new routes and resource possibilities while intensifying competition among Arctic and extra-regional powers.³

The global economy is especially vulnerable to maritime disruption because shipping remains the backbone of international trade. More than four-fifths of world merchandise trade by volume moves by sea, and a large portion of energy trade flows through a limited number of chokepoints. When a single chokepoint is disrupted, the consequences can spread through freight rates, insurance premiums, energy prices, port congestion and manufacturing schedules. UNCTAD reported that Red Sea and Panama Canal disruptions in 2023–24 generated major pressure on shipping routes and freight markets, with Suez-related traffic falling sharply while Cape of Good Hope rerouting increased.⁴

The Indo-Pacific has become the centre of maritime strategic competition because it contains several of the world’s most important sea lanes and chokepoints. The Strait of Malacca links the Indian Ocean and Pacific Ocean, while the South China Sea connects East Asian production networks with global trade routes. The U.S. Energy Information



Administration identifies Malacca as a key Asian oil transit chokepoint, with a very high share of petroleum flows consisting of crude oil.⁵ These routes are not simply commercial passages; they are strategic arteries for China, Japan, South Korea, India, ASEAN states and the wider global economy.

At the same time, the undersea domain has become increasingly important. AUKUS, announced in 2021 by Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, is intended to provide Australia with conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines and to deepen cooperation in advanced defence technologies.⁶ The agreement illustrates a broader shift from surface-visible naval presence to stealthy undersea deterrence. Nuclear-powered submarines are valued because they can operate at long range, remain submerged for extended periods and complicate adversary planning. However, their spread also creates questions about proliferation norms, regional threat perceptions and alliance dependency.

The Arctic represents a third maritime frontier. Melting ice is creating possibilities for longer navigation seasons, resource extraction and military access. Russia has invested heavily in Arctic military infrastructure, while NATO states have increased attention to the northern flank following Finland's and Sweden's accession to NATO. Recent reporting notes that NATO allies are trying to strengthen Arctic defence amid concerns over Russia's military presence, China's growing interest and the need for surveillance, ice-capable vessels and undersea security.⁷ The Arctic is thus shifting from a relatively insulated region of scientific cooperation into a strategic theatre of great-power competition.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The first objective of this article is to analyse how critical maritime chokepoints are being weaponised through naval armament, missile threats, insurgent activity, piracy, grey-zone tactics and strategic denial. The second objective is to examine the impact of chokepoint disruption on global supply-chain security, energy flows, freight markets and maritime insurance. The third objective is to assess the strategic implications of AUKUS and nuclear-powered submarine proliferation for the Indo-Pacific maritime order. The fourth objective is to evaluate how Arctic climate change is producing new military, commercial and geopolitical dynamics. The fifth objective is to develop an integrated understanding of maritime security that connects chokepoints, undersea warfare, polar militarisation and supply-chain resilience.

METHODOLOGY

This article follows a qualitative, analytical and doctrinal research methodology. It uses books on sea power, naval strategy and geopolitics; journal articles on maritime security and deterrence; official statements on AUKUS; international organization reports on maritime trade; energy-data sources on chokepoints; and recent policy analysis on Arctic and Indo-Pacific security. The study does not examine classified naval deployments or operational submarine details. Instead, it focuses on publicly available strategic, geopolitical and economic evidence.

The analytical framework combines three perspectives. The first is sea-power theory, which explains how control, denial and access at sea shape national power. The second is

supply-chain security, which explains how maritime disruption affects trade, energy and industrial resilience. The third is strategic geography, which explains why narrow straits, island chains, polar routes and undersea spaces carry disproportionate geopolitical importance. Together, these perspectives show that maritime security is not merely a naval issue; it is an economic, technological and geopolitical problem.

Sea Power, Strategic Geography and Maritime Order

Sea power has historically been associated with the ability to use the sea for commerce, mobility, coercion and war. Alfred Thayer Mahan argued that maritime strength depends on geography, commerce, naval capability, bases and national policy. Although Mahan wrote in a different technological age, his core insight remains relevant: states that can protect sea communications and project power across oceans gain strategic influence beyond their land borders.⁸

Modern sea power, however, is no longer limited to battleships, ports and surface fleets. It now includes submarines, satellites, cyber systems, drones, anti-ship missiles, undersea sensors, maritime domain awareness, logistics networks, coast guards, maritime militias and control over maritime infrastructure. A state may not need to command the entire ocean to exercise maritime power. It may only need to disrupt a chokepoint, threaten a shipping lane, disable port systems, or deny access to a contested littoral region.

Strategic geography gives some maritime spaces far greater importance than others. Chokepoints such as Malacca, Hormuz, Bab el-Mandeb, the Suez Canal, the Panama Canal and the Turkish Straits are narrow corridors through which large volumes of trade and energy must pass. Their importance is created not only by geography but also by economic concentration. If alternative routes are long, costly or limited, then chokepoints become strategic pressure points.⁹

The contemporary maritime order was built on the assumption that sea lanes should remain open for lawful commerce. Freedom of navigation, port access, maritime insurance, naval escort, international law and commercial shipping norms have supported this order. Yet the order is now under stress because states and non-state actors have discovered that disruption can produce strategic effects without requiring full-scale naval war. This is the essence of maritime grey-zone competition.

Naval Armament and Chokepoint Politics

Chokepoint politics refers to the strategic use, control or disruption of narrow maritime passages for political, military or economic advantage. These spaces are vulnerable because traffic density is high and manoeuvrability is limited. They can be threatened by naval mines, submarines, anti-ship missiles, drones, piracy, maritime militias, coastal artillery, missile boats, cyberattacks on port systems and attacks on commercial vessels. Even rumours of danger can raise insurance costs and alter shipping behaviour.

The weaponisation of chokepoints is not always direct closure. A state or non-state actor may not need to block a strait physically. It may only need to create enough risk to make shipping companies reroute voluntarily. Modern shipping is highly sensitive to insurance rates, crew safety, legal liability



and schedule reliability. Therefore, intermittent attacks can produce effects similar to partial blockade.

Bab el-Mandeb is one of the clearest contemporary examples. It connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden and forms part of the route linking the Indian Ocean with the Suez Canal and Mediterranean Sea. Houthi attacks on commercial vessels after late 2023 demonstrated how a non-state actor could disrupt one of the world's most important trade corridors. The U.S. Maritime Administration's 2025 advisory noted continuing risk in the Southern Red Sea, Bab el-Mandeb Strait and Gulf of Aden, including attacks on commercial vessels.¹⁰

The Red Sea crisis showed how chokepoint insecurity affects supply chains. Many shipping companies rerouted around the Cape of Good Hope, increasing travel distance, fuel consumption, transit time and freight costs. UNCTAD reported that by mid-2024 ship capacity crossing the Gulf of Aden had fallen sharply, Suez Canal tonnage had been cut substantially and Cape of Good Hope arrivals had surged.¹¹ This means that maritime insecurity can function as a tax on global trade.

The Strait of Malacca represents a different kind of chokepoint vulnerability. It is less associated with current insurgent attack than with structural dependence. It is the primary maritime passage between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean and is vital for energy flows to East Asia. The EIA has described Malacca as a key oil trade chokepoint linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans, with most petroleum flows through it consisting of crude oil.¹² Any major disruption in Malacca would affect China, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Indonesia, India and global shipping markets.

Chokepoint politics also affects military strategy. Naval powers seek the ability to protect, monitor or deny access through critical straits. Littoral states seek sovereignty and control. External powers seek freedom of navigation. Non-state actors seek leverage through disruption. The result is a layered security environment in which commercial shipping, naval competition and political coercion overlap.

Chokepoints and Global Supply-Chain Security

Global supply chains are maritime systems before they are factory systems. A manufacturing hub may be located inland, but its inputs and exports often depend on ports, container shipping, maritime insurance, fuel availability and predictable shipping schedules. When chokepoints are disrupted, the effects are transmitted through logistics networks. Delays can create shortages, raise inventory costs, disrupt just-in-time manufacturing and increase consumer prices.

Supply-chain vulnerability is especially severe where alternative routes are limited. Rerouting around the Cape of Good Hope can reduce exposure to Red Sea attacks, but it increases distance and transit time between Asia and Europe. A disruption in Malacca would be even more difficult because alternative passages through Indonesia are narrower, longer or less efficient. A closure of Hormuz would directly affect global energy markets because of the volume of oil and liquefied natural gas moving through the Gulf.

The supply-chain lesson is that maritime security cannot be separated from economic security. A navy may secure national waters, but if global chokepoints remain unstable, national industries still suffer. Similarly, commercial shipping

firms may adapt through rerouting, but such adaptation transfers costs to consumers, manufacturers and insurers. Maritime disruption therefore creates a shared security problem for governments and markets.

Chokepoint disruption is also cumulative. One disruption may be manageable. Simultaneous stress across multiple chokepoints can create systemic risk. The 2023-24 period showed this problem when Red Sea insecurity overlapped with Panama Canal constraints linked to drought and water levels. UNCTAD's maritime transport review noted that disruptions in the Red Sea, Suez Canal and Panama Canal made container shipping rates more volatile and raised pressure on global logistics.¹³

For developing economies and small island states, chokepoint disruption can be especially damaging. Their trade dependence is high, their port options are limited and their ability to absorb higher freight costs is weaker. Maritime security is therefore not only a great-power issue. It is also a development issue, a food security issue and an energy security issue.

AUKUS and the Reconfiguration of Undersea Deterrence

AUKUS represents one of the most consequential maritime security initiatives in the Indo-Pacific. Announced in September 2021 by Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, it is a trilateral security partnership designed to strengthen deterrence and technological cooperation. Its first pillar focuses on enabling Australia to acquire conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines, while its second pillar focuses on advanced capabilities such as undersea systems, artificial intelligence, autonomy, quantum technologies, cyber, electronic warfare and hypersonics.¹⁴

The significance of AUKUS lies not only in submarine acquisition but in the strategic logic behind it. Nuclear-powered submarines offer speed, endurance, stealth and long-range operational reach. Unlike diesel-electric submarines, they do not need frequent surfacing or snorkelling for battery recharge. This makes them especially useful in the vast distances of the Indo-Pacific. For Australia, nuclear-powered submarines are intended to extend maritime reach, strengthen deterrence and deepen integration with U.S. and British undersea capabilities.

AUKUS also reflects a shift in alliance strategy. Rather than relying only on forward bases and surface fleets, the partnership emphasizes distributed, survivable and stealthy capabilities. Undersea deterrence complicates an adversary's planning because submarines are difficult to detect and can operate near contested areas without visible escalation. This is particularly relevant in the Indo-Pacific, where potential conflict scenarios may involve Taiwan, the South China Sea, the East China Sea, the Indian Ocean and sea-lane security.

However, AUKUS also raises complex questions. The first concerns regional security perceptions. China has criticized AUKUS as destabilising and as evidence of bloc politics. Whether or not one accepts that interpretation, AUKUS clearly contributes to a security dilemma in which one side's deterrence measure is viewed by another side as encirclement or escalation. This may accelerate naval modernization, anti-submarine warfare investment and missile development across the region.



The second concern is proliferation sensitivity. AUKUS submarines are planned to be conventionally armed, not nuclear-armed, but they use nuclear propulsion. This raises questions about nuclear naval technology, safeguards, highly enriched uranium, and the precedent set for other states seeking nuclear-powered submarines. The challenge is to ensure that naval nuclear propulsion cooperation does not weaken the broader non-proliferation regime.

The third concern is industrial feasibility. Nuclear-powered submarines require advanced shipbuilding, nuclear stewardship, skilled labour, maintenance facilities, regulatory capacity and long-term funding. The AUKUS pathway requires deep industrial coordination among three states. Delays in U.S. submarine production, workforce constraints or shipyard limitations could affect delivery timelines and strategic credibility.

The fourth concern is alliance dependency. AUKUS strengthens Australia's integration with U.S. and British defence systems, but it also increases reliance on allied technology, training, maintenance and operational concepts. This may enhance deterrence, but it also raises questions about autonomy in crisis decision-making. Strategic integration can produce both capability and dependency.

Nuclear-Powered Submarine Proliferation in the Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific is becoming an undersea competition zone. China has expanded its submarine force and anti-access capabilities. The United States continues to rely on nuclear-powered attack submarines as a core component of regional deterrence. India operates nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines for deterrence and has pursued nuclear-powered attack submarine ambitions. Australia's AUKUS pathway adds another layer to this undersea environment.

The spread of nuclear-powered submarines does not automatically mean nuclear weapons proliferation. Nuclear propulsion and nuclear armament are distinct. However, the strategic effect of nuclear-powered submarines is still significant because they increase endurance, range and survivability. They can support intelligence gathering, sea denial, special operations, anti-submarine warfare and long-range strike missions. In a crisis, they may operate invisibly, creating uncertainty for adversaries.

Undersea warfare also increases the importance of anti-submarine warfare. States will invest in seabed sensors, maritime patrol aircraft, unmanned underwater vehicles, sonar networks, satellites, acoustic analysis and oceanographic data. The ocean may appear open, but the undersea domain is becoming increasingly monitored. This creates a new technological competition between stealth and detection.

The risk is that undersea competition may reduce crisis stability. Submarines are valuable partly because they are hidden. But hidden platforms can also create uncertainty. If states fear that their submarines are being tracked, they may act more aggressively. If anti-submarine warfare operations occur near sensitive waters, escalation risks may rise. Undersea incidents are difficult to observe publicly, which complicates crisis management.

AUKUS must therefore be assessed as both a deterrent and a driver of strategic adaptation. It may strengthen allied

deterrence by complicating Chinese naval planning, but it may also encourage China and others to accelerate undersea surveillance, long-range strike and counter-submarine capabilities. Maritime security architecture is therefore being reconfigured through a cycle of action, reaction and technological adaptation.

Naval Armament and the Indo-Pacific Security Dilemma

Naval armament in the Indo-Pacific is not limited to submarines. It includes aircraft carriers, destroyers, frigates, maritime patrol aircraft, anti-ship missiles, drones, amphibious capabilities, coast guard expansion, maritime militia activity, cyber systems and space-based surveillance. The region's maritime security environment is shaped by overlapping disputes in the South China Sea, East China Sea, Taiwan Strait, Indian Ocean and Pacific island spaces.

The security dilemma arises because naval capabilities are often dual-use in strategic meaning. A submarine may be described as defensive deterrence by one state and offensive threat by another. A port investment may be described as commercial infrastructure by one actor and potential military access by another. Coast guard vessels may be presented as law-enforcement assets but used for coercive grey-zone operations. This ambiguity makes maritime armament politically sensitive.

For middle powers, maritime competition creates both risk and opportunity. States such as India, Japan, Australia, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines and South Korea seek to protect maritime sovereignty and supply-chain access while avoiding uncontrolled escalation. They may welcome balancing coalitions, but they may also fear being trapped in great-power confrontation. The maritime order is therefore becoming more networked but also more fragmented.

India's role in this architecture is important. India sits astride the Indian Ocean, close to the western approaches of Malacca and the energy routes from the Gulf. Its island territories, naval modernization, partnerships with the United States, Japan, Australia and France, and interest in maritime domain awareness make it a central actor in the Indo-Pacific. Yet India also seeks strategic autonomy, meaning it may cooperate with AUKUS partners without becoming formally part of AUKUS.

Arctic Militarisation and the Opening of a New Maritime Front

The Arctic is undergoing a strategic transformation because climate change is reducing sea ice and increasing access to routes, resources and military operating areas. The Arctic was once treated primarily as an extreme environment, a scientific frontier and a region of controlled Cold War military presence. It is now becoming a theatre of renewed geopolitical attention. Melting ice does not eliminate operational difficulty, but it expands the strategic imagination of states.

Several factors explain Arctic militarisation. The first is geography. The Arctic connects North America, Europe and Russia across the polar region. It contains approaches to the North Atlantic, the Barents Sea, the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom gap and the Russian Northern Fleet. The second is resources. The Arctic contains energy, minerals and fisheries, though extraction remains costly and environmentally sensitive. The third is shipping. Routes such as the Northern Sea Route may become more navigable over time, although



commercial viability remains uncertain. The fourth is strategic signalling. Military presence in the Arctic demonstrates sovereignty, deterrence and readiness.

Russia is the dominant Arctic military actor by geography and infrastructure. It has invested in bases, airfields, radar systems, air defence, submarines, icebreakers and Northern Fleet capabilities. The Kola Peninsula remains central to Russian nuclear deterrence because it hosts strategic submarine forces. NATO's enlargement to include Finland and Sweden has altered the strategic balance in Northern Europe and increased alliance attention to the Arctic and High North.

NATO's Arctic focus has intensified in recent years. Reporting in 2026 described NATO allies as trying to strengthen Arctic defence through initiatives involving surveillance, submarines, ice-capable vessels and northern flank preparedness.⁷ The Arctic is therefore no longer peripheral to Euro-Atlantic security. It is becoming a connecting space between North Atlantic defence, Russian deterrence, North American homeland security and Indo-Pacific interest from China.

China's role adds another layer. Although China is not an Arctic coastal state, it has described itself as a "near-Arctic state" and has invested in polar research, shipping interests and energy projects. Its Arctic presence is not equivalent to Russia's military position, but it signals that Arctic governance is no longer confined to the original Arctic states. This raises questions about whether the region will remain governed through cooperation or shift toward competitive bloc politics.

Arctic Governance and the Limits of Cooperation

The Arctic Council was created as a cooperative forum for Arctic governance, environmental protection, sustainable development and Indigenous participation. It deliberately excluded military security from its mandate. This model worked during periods of relative cooperation, but it has become harder to sustain after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the deterioration of relations between Russia and Western Arctic states.

The problem is that Arctic governance and Arctic security cannot be fully separated. Scientific cooperation, search and rescue, environmental protection and Indigenous rights require communication with Russia because Russia controls a large portion of the Arctic coastline. At the same time, military tensions make cooperation politically difficult. The Arctic is therefore caught between functional interdependence and strategic mistrust.

Climate change deepens the governance challenge. Melting ice may open more routes and resource opportunities, but it also increases environmental risk. Oil spills, accidents, search-and-rescue needs, illegal fishing and infrastructure stress may rise. Militarisation may further complicate emergency cooperation. The Arctic is therefore a test of whether states can manage strategic competition while preserving essential regional governance.

The risk is that the Arctic becomes another arena of permanent militarised rivalry. If states treat every port, research station, satellite facility or icebreaker as a strategic threat, cooperation will narrow. Yet ignoring the military dimension would also be unrealistic. The challenge is to develop

confidence-building measures, communication channels and incident-prevention mechanisms suited to polar conditions.

Reconfiguration of Maritime Security Architecture

The three cases examined in this article-chokepoints, AUKUS and the Arctic-show that maritime security architecture is being reconfigured in four ways. First, maritime security is becoming more militarised. Naval forces, submarines, missiles, drones, surveillance systems and military partnerships are increasingly central to managing commercial routes and geopolitical competition.

Second, maritime security is becoming more networked. A crisis in Bab el-Mandeb affects European supply chains, Asian exporters, African ports, global freight rates and naval deployments. AUKUS affects not only Australia but also the wider Indo-Pacific balance, non-proliferation debates and allied industrial capacity. Arctic militarisation affects NATO, Russia, China, energy markets, Indigenous communities and climate governance.

Third, maritime security is becoming more technologically complex. Undersea warfare, autonomous systems, cyberattacks on ports, satellite surveillance, electronic warfare and AI-enabled maritime domain awareness are changing how states detect, deter and disrupt one another. Control of the sea is no longer only about fleets; it is about information, sensors, logistics and data.

Fourth, maritime security is becoming more economically sensitive. Chokepoint disruption translates quickly into freight rates, insurance costs and supply-chain delays. Naval deterrence affects investor confidence. Arctic routes influence long-term shipping expectations. Maritime security is therefore part of economic statecraft and global political economy.

Policy Recommendations

First, states should treat maritime chokepoints as shared security infrastructure. Naval escort missions, maritime domain awareness, anti-piracy cooperation, intelligence sharing and port resilience should be strengthened around critical straits. The objective should be to deter attacks without transforming chokepoints into permanent zones of militarised confrontation. Second, supply-chain planning must incorporate chokepoint risk. Governments and firms should map exposure to Malacca, Bab el-Mandeb, Suez, Hormuz and Panama, and develop contingency plans for rerouting, strategic inventories, alternative ports and insurance shocks. Maritime resilience should become part of national economic security strategy. Third, AUKUS should be accompanied by transparency and non-proliferation safeguards. The partners must demonstrate that nuclear propulsion cooperation remains consistent with non-proliferation obligations and that submarines will be conventionally armed. This is necessary to reduce regional mistrust and prevent harmful precedents. Fourth, undersea crisis-management mechanisms should be strengthened. As more states invest in submarines and anti-submarine warfare, the risk of undersea incidents will rise. Communication channels, incident-at-sea agreements and operational restraint around sensitive waters should be developed. Fifth, Arctic states should preserve functional cooperation even during strategic rivalry. Search and rescue, environmental protection,



scientific data and Indigenous participation should not be sacrificed entirely to military competition. The Arctic requires both deterrence and governance. Sixth, maritime security policy should integrate military, commercial, environmental and technological dimensions. Navies alone cannot secure the maritime order. Port authorities, shipping companies, insurers, energy firms, satellite providers, cyber agencies and diplomatic institutions must be part of the architecture.

FINDINGS

The first finding of this article is that maritime chokepoints are no longer passive geographical constraints; they are active instruments of coercion and strategic leverage. The second finding is that naval armament around straits can protect commerce but may also intensify security dilemmas. The third finding is that AUKUS represents a major reconfiguration of Indo-Pacific undersea deterrence, but it raises concerns about proliferation sensitivity, industrial feasibility and regional threat perceptions. The fourth finding is that nuclear-powered submarines are becoming central to maritime strategy because they combine stealth, endurance and long-range access. The fifth finding is that the Arctic is shifting from a cooperative scientific frontier toward a militarised geopolitical theatre. The sixth finding is that maritime security architecture is being transformed by the interaction of trade vulnerability, naval technology, climate change and great-power competition.

CONCLUSION

Maritime security is being redefined by contested waters and strategic straits. The oceans remain essential to global trade, but they are increasingly shaped by military rivalry, chokepoint coercion, undersea deterrence and polar competition. The assumption that maritime globalisation would produce stable interdependence has been weakened by the reality that interdependence also creates vulnerability. Chokepoints such as Malacca and Bab el-Mandeb reveal the strategic power of geography. Their disruption can affect supply chains, energy flows, freight markets and military planning. The Red Sea crisis demonstrated that even non-state actors can impose global costs by threatening a narrow corridor. Malacca shows that structural dependence can be as important as active conflict.

AUKUS reveals the growing significance of undersea warfare in the Indo-Pacific. Nuclear-powered submarines provide endurance, stealth and deterrent value, but they also intensify strategic competition and raise questions about proliferation norms and alliance dependency. The undersea domain is becoming one of the most important arenas of twenty-first-century maritime power. The Arctic shows how climate change is reshaping geopolitics. Melting ice is not simply an environmental phenomenon; it is a strategic event. It opens routes, exposes resources, expands military access and increases competition among Arctic and extra-regional powers. The Arctic's future will depend on whether states can balance deterrence with cooperation.

The reconfiguration of maritime security architecture therefore requires a wider understanding of sea power. Security at sea is no longer only about naval battles. It is about supply-chain resilience, undersea infrastructure, polar governance, maritime law, port security, insurance markets, energy flows,

alliance strategy and technological competition. In this emerging order, the states that succeed will be those that can protect the openness of the seas without turning every maritime corridor into a permanent battlefield.

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