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**Reorientation of Australian Stance in AUKUS through Political
Cartoons: A Study of Global Times' Cartoons**



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Abstract

The research conducts a visual discourse analysis of the reappraisal of Australia's position in the context of the AUKUS partnership based on Heidi Scott's (2023) framework. With its rhetorical power to stage narratives, materialize facts, and make meanings, visual imagery excavates the time-truth power nexus central to socio-political conversations. Political cartoons use metaphors and symbolic representations to create a more nuanced critique of Australia's geopolitical alignment in the American power orbit. The cartoon depicts a bald eagle representing U.S. hegemony, casting a shadow over a kangaroo representing Australia, holding a weapon that embodies its role as an enforcer of U.S. interests. Exposing Australia's subservient status in the eyes of its security relationship with the US, the analysis unpicks the power dynamics and cultural ramifications of a myopic foreign policy process. The eagle's protective wing sweeping over the base represents the United States' strategic control, while the kangaroo's defensively folded posture raises questions about Australia's sovereignty within the alliance. Instrumental values such as loyalty and responsibility are balanced against terminal values of freedom and security, creating tensions between the need for national independence and the obligations to alliances. The cartoon ridicules the invented truths that uphold global power structures and draws attention to the implications of the skewed power relations between the United States and Australia. This visual dialogue highlights the wider socio-political consequences of Australia's alignment with U.S. doctrine, prompting critical thinking about the nation's involvement in global processes.

Key Terms: AUKUS, Political Cartoons, Global Times' Postings

Introduction

Australia's foreign policy pivoting in international relations, especially within the AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom, United States) security pact context, has attracted much debate and scrutiny. However, it receives limited coverage in mainstream media. This represents a shift for Australia away from the former position of a balanced foreign policy, aligning with the strategic interests of the United States and the United Kingdom (Morrison & Johnson). The shift has not escaped notice, particularly in China, where the state-controlled newspaper The Global Times has channelled that discontent into political cartoons to criticise Australia's new geopolitical posture. Far from being just a source of satire, these cartoons represent a

soft power tool, shaping citizen perceptions at home and abroad (Huh, 2024).

Announced in 2021, the AUKUS agreement encompasses sharing nuclear submarine technology and heightened military cooperation, signalling an increase in strategic deterrence against perceived threats in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly from China (Coung & Tai, 2023). This alignment has sparked tensions with Australia's largest trading partner, China, as economic interdependence collides with strategic rivalry. The Global Times cartoons frequently illustrate Australia as a puppet posing or subservient to American interests (Mažutaitytė, 2023), visually represented by a Mongolian octopus, a propagation of historical fears of being dominated by foreign powers, to criticise what it is seen as a loss of Australian sovereignty and autonomy in foreign policy making.

These visual narratives have a dual purpose: to critique Australia's strategic decisions and to sway opinion in China and around the globe. By framing Australia's involvement in AUKUS as a departure from an alternative path of regional cooperation towards a more confrontational posture vis-à-vis China, these cartoons support a narrative of betrayal and strategic miscalculation (Pelaudeix, 2023). This framing resonates with China's more expansive use of media to shift dialogue in the realm of international relations, whilst pointing to potential long-term adverse economic effects for Australia in light of their trade relationships (Sun, 2019).

The cartoons are the broader discourse on regional power dynamics, which raises questions as to whether Australia's choice to align strategically with AUKUS represents an embrace of strategic autonomy or rather the concession of its independent foreign policy to the interests of Western powers (Rees, 2025). According to the Global Times, Australia is now relatively isolated in the region due to its AUKUS commitments, leading to losing balance in the Asia-Pacific (Zaman & Yasmin, 2022).

Indicatively, these cartoons are their way of raising questions within Australia about its position in the Asia-Pacific. Moreover, they highlight questions of the long-term implications of such strategic realignments, for example, how they will impact Australia's positioning and reputation within regional societies, including organisations such as ASEAN, as well as Australia's diplomatic relations with other countries in Asia (Tan, 2020). Therefore, the most probable reason behind the humour of such cartoons is a reflection not just on Australia's current policy choices but also on wider geostrategic manoeuvring, where economic interdependence and (emphasis on) security alignment increasingly find

themselves at odds with each other.

As seen through the cartoons published by The Global Times, the repositioning of Australia's role within the context of AUKUS embodies a rich tapestry of economic interests, security priorities, and diplomatic manoeuvring (Phiddian & Stewart, 2024). Judging by how these cartoons reflect China's view of Australia's strategic options, they symbolise fears about sovereignty, regional stability and possible remapping of alliances in Asia-Pacific. Based on an analysis of the cartoons, this report provides valuable insight into the aesthetic visual media cultivated in international relations, resulting in a critique of ongoing policies and a mode of imagining future geopolitical relationships.

Statement of the Problem

AUKUS, a trilateral security pact with the U. S. and the UK, has triggered negotiations about Australia's Geopolitics and sovereignty and how it will affect ecology with inputs in the region. Political cartoons and visual media have framed the debates, often portraying Australia as subordinate in its alliances or conflicted in its decisions. These are rhetorical representations that help fashion public opinion and mould political discussion. However, little research exists on how these kinds of visual representations reflect or shape Australia's position within AUKUS and its broader goals for foreign policy. This study seeks to fill this gap by providing a critical discourse analysis of political cartoons to unveil their hidden discursive narratives, values, and power relations.

Objectives

- To understand the narrative of cartoons about Australia's position in AUKUS in a rhetorical/metaphorical sense
- To analyze the framing of Australia's geopolitical position in visual media
- To determine the values and power relationships presented in the representations
- To assess the influence of these visual narratives on public attitudes and policy discussions

Research Questions

1. How is Australia and its position in AUKUS framed in political cartoons?
2. What rhetorical, metaphorical elements do these visuals use to illustrate power dynamics and values?
3. How do these visual narratives mirror or shape Australia's foreign policy discourse and public opinion?

Significance of the Study

The study adds to the existing literature on visual discourse analysis and how political cartoons, in particular, influence socio-political narratives and public perceptions. The study examines Australia's visual framing in AUKUS to provide policymakers with insights into how alliances are perceived through a domestic and global lens. This research will contribute to building vital media literacy among the citizenry and, more importantly, policymakers, who will now learn how to decode visual rhetoric better. The research presented in this study provides an understanding of Australia's geopolitical landscape, demonstrating national challenges and opportunities that can inform strategies for maintaining balanced and sustainable foreign policy decisions. Cultural values embedded in political cartoons exploring national identity and sovereignty within international alliances offer more profound reflections of Australia's place in a complex global environment.

Literature Review

AUKUS and the Regional Politics

The emergence of the Australia, United Kingdom, and United States security pact has significantly reshaped the geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific region, sparking considerable debate and analysis regarding its implications for regional stability and the balance of power (Batudoka, 2023). This trilateral security agreement, known as AUKUS, entails a commitment to enhance military capabilities and foster technological cooperation among the three nations, most notably by providing nuclear-powered submarines to Australia (Markowaski et al., 2024). The core directive of the AUKUS security partnership is to convey balance to the Indo-Pacific region (Korwa & Wambrauw, 2023). This has led to many different responses from countries within the region, and countries outside of the area as well (Cheng, 2022). AUKUS can be seen as a defence diplomacy mechanism, where Australia has deepened ties with other countries (Baruah, 2022). Simultaneously, the United States has pursued a dual strategy to manage China's growing power by forging bilateral partnerships and establishing multilateral alliances within the region (Zhirui & Lin, 2023).

Australian foreign policy has been in a state of flux since it returned to the diplomatic field. AUKUS represents this change and also explains Chinese perceptions. Reading through cartoons in AUKUS-related topics, there is sadness and humour; thick descriptions give us special insight into how China views Australia. The Global Times' caricatures of AUKUS Australian-led internal Chinese criticisms are actually milder than those from other sources.

(Juras, 2024)

The influence of media on public perception of foreign policies is a subject which has long attracted attention. As noted in Robert and Wong (2022), the media plays an essential role in how foreign policies such as AUKUS are received both domestically and internationally. Political cartoons are a way of representing complex issues more simply but also critically. In Australia, Global Times has actively engaged with the AUKUS alliance through its editorial cartoons, offering Chinese perspectives on Australia's foreign policy reorientation. Roberts suggests that the political narrative in media can dramatically change public opinion, and these cartoons often serve commentary and critique altogether, questioning Australia's decisions from a geopolitical perspective (Clark, 2023).

Chinese media, including Global Times, sometimes use political cartoons to represent stances on foreign events. Mažutaitytė (2023) argues that the main role of Chinese cartoons is propaganda but also serves as a semi-lucid reflection on the decisions made by other countries regarding world affairs. These cartoons often employ humor or irony to comment on topics such as AUKUS, particularly focusing on Australia's relationship with the U.S. and U.K. Zhang points out that this is not only a form of humor but also a means of critiquing the perceived subservience of Australia to Western powers. From this viewpoint, Global Times cartoons reflect the broader struggle between China and Western powers; even within AUKUS, for instance, how Australia changes course (Mažutaitytė, 2023).

National identity significantly influences the shaping of foreign policy, and political cartoons serve as a major means of expressing this identity. He discusses how political cartoons reflect the changes in national identities as international relations evolve. Since Australia's entry into the AUKUS alliance, cartoons have depicted nations whose identities are increasingly aligning with those of Western powers. These cartoons often contrast Australia's historical identity as a regional power with its new role in global security networks, merging internal and external perspectives on the changing national identity in Australia. (Heritage 2024).

Politics serve as the backdrop for many political cartoons, mainly those depicting the international power balance. Toluwani & Shobukonla (2023) argue that cartoons can uncover the underlying tensions in geo-political relationships, particularly in the context of AUKUS. The cartoons from Global Times illustrate that Australia's participation in this alliance is driven by circumstances imposed upon it and acts of concession toward its allies. The balance

of power in the Indo-Pacific, as portrayed in these cartoons, shows Australia caught between its regional commitments and its ties to Western partners. Through Brown and Zhao's study, one can observe how cartoons depict the strategic positioning behind Australia's participation in AUKUS (Toluwani & Shobukonla, 2023).

Political cartoons often feature satire, which is particularly prominent in the *Global Times*, where the country's participation in AUKUS is frequently derided. Variants of this satirical viewpoint prevail among PRC observers, with cartoons that mock Australia's claims to regional power and sovereignty. One common device used in Chinese political cartoons is depicting Australian foreign policy as determined by others, rather than serving its own benefit. With obvious implications for AUKUS, Chen argues that these satirical images enable Chinese media to form opinions about the "rightness" (and legitimacy) of Australian choices in her dealings with the United States. They portray Australia as either just plain dumb or too compliant with Western power (Feldman, 2024). This treatment of Australia's position in the alliance and the questioning of Australia's international diplomatic stance, akin to how an economist analyzes statistics, is an important theme (Feldman, 2024).

In foreign policy discourse, political cartoons often serve as powerful weapons. Cartoons are not just for fun; rather, they function as pointed tools to shape or critique foreign policy narratives. AUKUS, the *Global Times* cartoons suggest, is occurring as a consequence of Australia's decision to align with its Western allies, rather than as any self-governing act on the part of the country itself. The narratives presented by He and Wang's research indicate how the cartoons differ from official Australian political spin, outflanking it.

Research Methodology

The present qualitative study incorporates the visual method of critical discourse analysis from Heidi Scott (2023), collected from the online source National Environmental Synthesis Center. Scott (2023) posited that the images possess rhetorical forces, enabling the reader to interpret them through:

- a) visuals for framing,
- b) facts that presuppose and suggest, and
- c) values that they signify.

The concepts of time, truth, and power within socio-environmental discourse are identified by employing the methodology of visual discourse analysis. This study emphasizes the humanities, utilizing these techniques to differentiate between objective facts and the

subjective forms of presentation that convey cultural values. Metaphors encompass verbal and visual forms, facilitating the communication of symbols and latent messages (Krippendorff, 1990).

Musolff (2016) observed that entailment is created in the resonance of metaphors through metaphorical scenarios that connect to source frames, thereby generating connotational meanings from literal words. As Heidi Scott indicated in 2023, the primary functions of these visuals are to construct facts and values. The reality asserts that factors represent the actual reception in the world, while values are dynamic in perception. Esteem encompasses the beliefs through which individuals comprehend the world in their unique manner. These values are scarce and operate within and across cultures (Boudon, 2017).

Values

Chris Drew (2019) elucidated various types of values:

Instrumental Values: These are desired end-values that render human life worthwhile (Rokeach, 1973). Examples include honesty, respectfulness, responsibility, cooperation, loyalty, and courage.

Terminal Values: These denote the ultimate outcomes of values and may also refer to the highest order values (Rokeach, 1973). Examples encompass happiness, knowledge, inner harmony, love, financial security, freedom, time, and subjective time versus objective time.

Time

Subjective time, also called private or particular time, should not be extended for emergence (Hornik, 1984). Objective time is public and unitary, frequently deriving from subjective time (Hornik, 1984).

Truth

A truth constitutes a knowledge claim and embodies the ultimate form of power (Focault, 2020). Truths are societal constructions that sustain power through systemic structures. Particularly for females, truths are formulated to perpetuate domination and uphold superior societal positions.

Power

Ronald Posner (2004) delineated three types of power in his cultural theory:

Power of Position, which pertains to the range of signs related to structural usage patterns within a given society (Institute); Power of Disposition, which encompasses the opportunities available to individuals of a particular culture to access and interpret texts and artifacts of

another culture, based on the breadth and inter-cultural significance of those texts and artifacts; and Power of Interpretation, which describes the opportunities available to the sign user to disseminate or share the perceptual facts of a specific culture, with interpretative power residing within the domain of mental culture.

Sample

The cartoons are selected as a convenient sample, with a sample size of six cartoons for analysis.

Data Analysis



Source: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202309/1298266.shtml>

Frames

- Australia as the kangaroo, its compact body protruding here from its thin, tall legs.
- It is positioned upside down, which symbolises its vulnerability or subjugation.
- Those are external forces, the US and United Kingdom being the hands that carry and throttle the kangaroo.

Perspective & Context

A comment on the economics or politics of power, perhaps, where Australia is being used or leveraged by more prosperous, more powerful Western allies in return for cash or, for that matter, with them in return for money. From the image, it can be infer an economic context in

which powerful nations “ shake down “ Australia for money or other benefits, implying an imbalance. It depicts an exploitative global power relationship where Western states in trade, military, or resource extraction could dominate Australia.

Instrumental Values

Responsibility and Respectfulness were absent in the case study example, and the two nations were considered interest-first individuals.

Courage: This possibly symbolizes Australia's call to withstand outside pressure.

Terminal Values

Stability: The image calls into question what exploitation does to Australia's economic security.

Freedom: This implies that Australia would be less free under the influence of the US and the UK.

The kangaroo being shaken is a symbol of exploitation. It is not clear what the cost will be to them, something that is directly falling out, directly imposed cost as a metaphor, indirectly imposed as financial sanctions that they are imposed with, or the loss of their sovereignty. The image tells a truth about power hierarchies, drawing attention to the idea that countries like Australia are economically exploited to sustain the power of stronger states. The image subverts dominant partnership narratives by characterizing the relationship as exploitative rather than collaborative.

Context criticism is likely not informed by the economic or political realities between the parties over the past few decades, especially concerning major international events- trade agreements, defence pacts, resource talks, etc.- that are currently happening or have recently occurred. The long-term perception of systemic exploitation or labour enslavement to a lucrative job is translated into this cartoon as a kind of response to some events in everyone's daily life, all taking place with a sympathetic object.



Source: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202211/1279932.shtml>

Frames

- Indicates nuclear weapons or nuclear technology.
- The chain and padlock bear the inscription “NPT,” for Non-Proliferation Treaty, which imposes limits on nuclear weapons and technology.
- The hand-marked “AUKUS” (a security pact between Australia, the UK, and the US) that breaks the chain indicates a deliberate breaking or circumvention of these restrictions.
- This visual casts AUKUS as the invisible hand rocking the boat of established global norms and treaties, thereby implying a critique of its role in nuclear proliferation.

Facts that Imply

Symbolising a direct challenge to the Non-Proliferation Treaty, which seeks to curtail the proliferation of nuclear weapons and foster disarmament, the breaking of the chain implicates the NPT. These visuals emphasise the concerns over whether AUKUS's transfer of nuclear-powered submarine technology to Australia could increase nuclear risks or lay the groundwork for undermining international treaties. The image implies that AUKUS is putting strategic or military goals ahead of international agreements.

Instrumental Values

Global Responsibility: AUKUS is critiqued for undermining worldwide responsibility and

the nuclear non-proliferation regime.

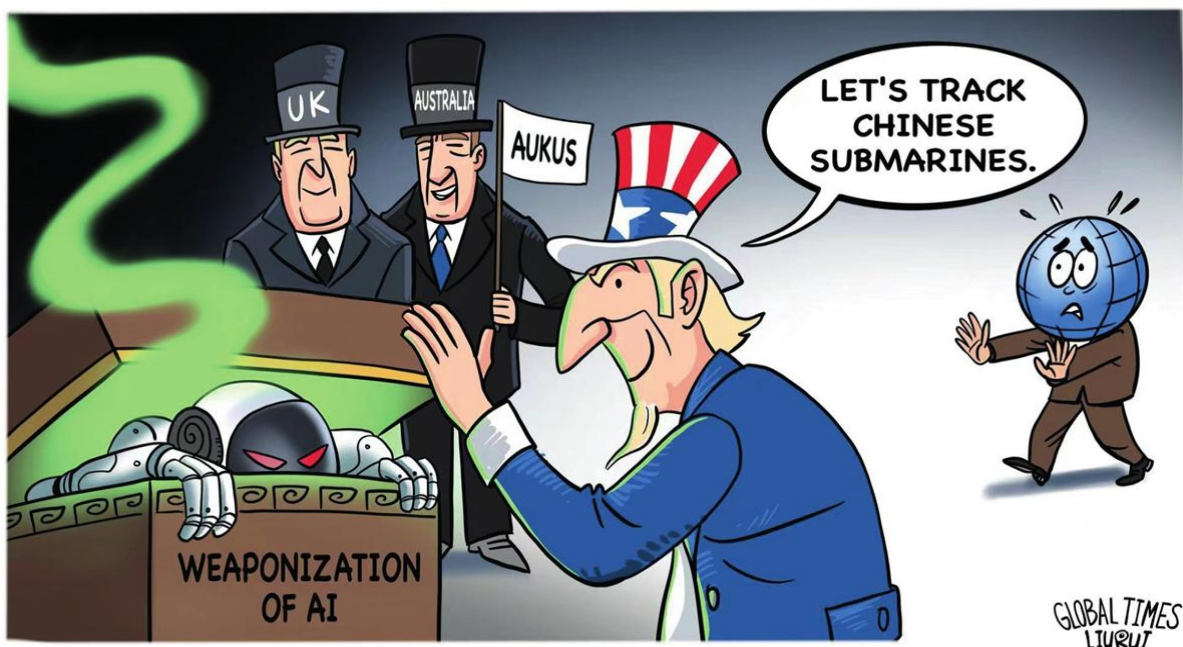
Cooperation: The chain also appears to have been broken regarding global treaties.

Terminal Values:

Global Security: The image asks whether AUKUS undermines long-term peace and stability by eroding the NPT framework.

Freedom vs. Regulation: The breaking of the chain involves tension between freedom (to pursue national security interests) and regulation of international norms imposed.

To cut the chain is to remove the safeguards maintaining nuclear stability. The nuclear missile symbolises latent danger, and the chain and lock represent attempts to contain this danger. This image frames a “truth” that AUKUS is behaving in a way that undermines international norms, which could lead to power imbalances and threats to world peace. The image specifies why AUKUS concerns international community more broadly. The cartoon reinterprets AUKUS as a destabilizing force rather than a peacekeeper. Objective Time is the critique comments on current geopolitical situations, especially the way AUKUS works in this international nuclear landscape. Subjective Time is the edit recalls long-term fears of nuclear proliferation and the decay of treaties made to stymie it.



Source: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202312/1302942.shtml>

Frames

- The “Weaponization of AI” box proposes applying artificial intelligence to military or

hostile ends.

- The red-eyed robot with billowing green smoke represents the threat of a rogue AI gone wild, a metaphor for the perils of AI militarisation.
- The involvement of the UK and Australia (leading participants in AUKUS) indicates complicity in this undertaking.
- The globe icon represents the world and symbolises the international community's wider concern about the consequences of militarising AI.

Facts that Imply

The emphasis on “tracking Chinese submarines” suggests it is geared explicitly toward countering China and signals a strategic, adversarial approach. The AUKUS cartoon critiques the AUKUS alliance not about peaceful applications of AI, which requires an international mechanism for mutual feedback and cooperation. Still, everything else is summarised as what is written as “Weaponization of AI”. The mention of Chinese submarines, in particular, emphasises the geopolitical nature of the allied countries' focus, painting the AUKUS countries as provocateurs rather than peacekeepers or stability promoters at home and abroad. The global response was alarmed, suggesting that the world views this as reckless militarisation that could threaten international security.

Instrumental Values

Crime: This cartoon asserts that AUKUS is deploying advanced technologies without considering the consequences.

Respectfulness: Pursuing militarised AI is being done in the implicit absence of mutual respect and global norms and on a commitment to multilateral cooperation.

Terminal Values:

Global Security: The image highlights a global risk of near-term militarisation of AI that could undermine broader peace and security over the long term.

The opening of the box represents the release of a potential threat (militarised AI). This metaphor references the idea of Pandora's box (releasing something uncontrollable that has undesirable effects). It points out a manufactured truth that AUKUS explains away its actions as defensive (submarines to track our enemies) but has faced criticism for enabling a potential arms race or technological escalation. In light of the AUKUS trilateral pact, the US, the UK, and Australia use their geopolitical power to pursue advanced militarised technologies. The cartoon recontextualises AUKUS's AI aspirations as negative instead of

positive, undermining their defence and security story. The analysis comes against the backdrop of the accelerating pursuit of AI across defence sectors and is in step with the growing rift between China and Western alliances such as AUKUS. This cartoon taps into fears about the immediate and longer-term consequences of such technologies, which could undermine trust and cooperation in international relations.



Source: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202402/1307326.shtml>

Frames

- The kangaroo is Australia's most iconic symbol, representing our role in this new regional alignment with AUKUS.
- The hand adorned US flag signifies American power and its position of “offering” or coercing Australia to accept nuclear-powered submarine technology.
- Australia is being forced over the cliff into the (imaginary) stinking danger zone.

Facts that Imply

The force behind the submarine being pushed into Australia's embrace suggests that the US is in the driver's seat, possibly placing Australia under any number of nuclear-related pressures. But the cliff's edge indicates that the choice could put Australia in perilous or unspecified territory, raising the risks of nuclear proliferation, strained relations with nearby countries, or

heightened tensions elsewhere in the region. The kangaroo's nervous look suggests Australia's potential discomfort or inexperience with the nuclear-powered submarine deal.

Instrumental Values

Responsibility: The image denounces the irresponsibility of twisting a country's arms to make such a high-stakes geopolitical choice.

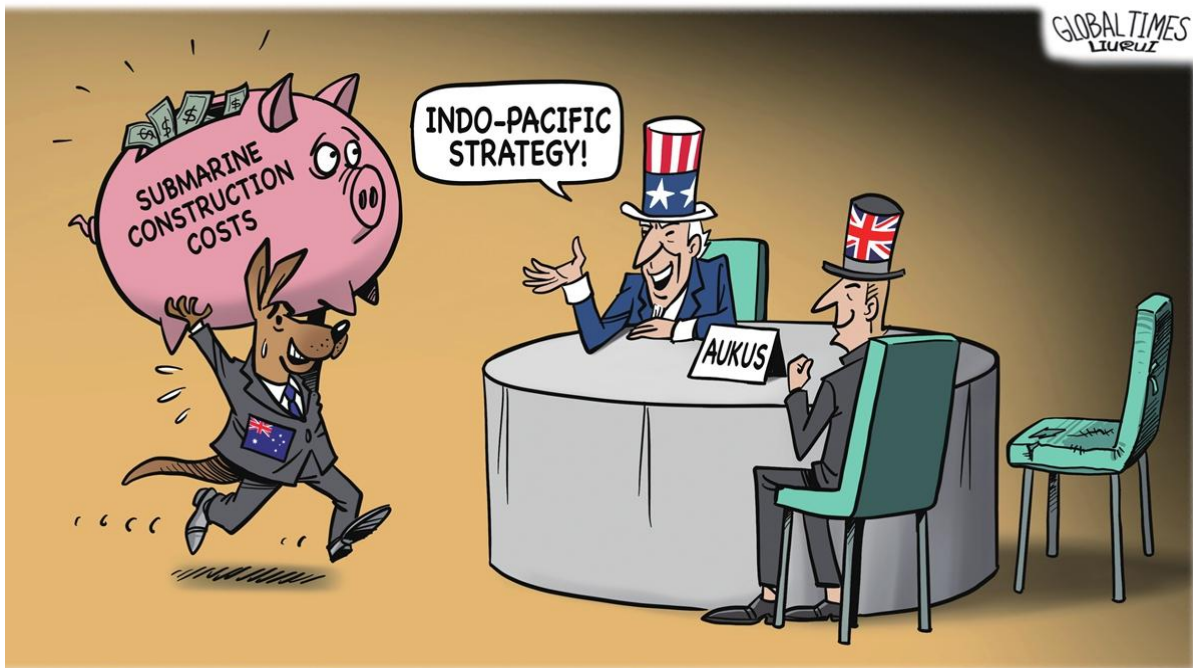
Disrespect: This implies that Australia cannot make such important decisions about its country.

Terminal Values

Safety and Security: The cartoon addresses fears about the safety of Australia and the jeopardization of regional peace.

Freedom: ranting that Australian decision-making may be constrained, or even manipulated, by its allies, especially the US.

To hand off the submarine is to transfer weight or responsibility. Pushing Estonia to the edge of the cliff adds to the metaphor of the edge of pushing an unavoidable decision. The AUKUS cartoon creates a narrative that “we” are being pressured into accepting a high-risk deal disguised as a partnership, revealing the power imbalances behind AUKUS. The US is a dominant global power that uses its military capability to align Australia's military strategy with its own. From the perspective of interpreting the challenge, reading this visual will call a shot over the US narrative of the AUKUS alliance ultimately benefiting Australia, showing hidden disaster ahead or raising concerns on coercive pressures. The work's aspects resonate with contemporary issues related to the AUKUS pact, nuclear technology, and geopolitical tensions in the Indo-Pacific. Subjective Time is lenses bearing fear and anxiety about the long-term scourges of nuclear proliferation and strategic dependency on great powers.



Source: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202303/1287329.shtml>

Frames

- The piggy bank represents the enormous financial cost of the nuclear-powered submarines that came with the AUKUS agreement.
- The kangaroo's visible labour and sweat express Australia's economic burden in meeting its obligations under the accord.

Facts that Imply

The cartoon points out that Australia is paying the bill for submarine construction costs, insinuating that it provides a high share of resources in the alliance. The broader geopolitical rationale behind the alliance is encapsulated in Uncle Sam's emphasis on the "Indo-Pacific Strategy." However, this also means that Australia's financial sacrifice pursues strategic objectives primarily defined by the US and the UK. The kangaroo's load is juxtaposed against the nonchalant posture of the US and UK representatives, suggesting that it presumes an asymmetry of who has to bear the costs and who benefits from AUKUS.

Instrumental Values

Responsibility Problems: Criticises a lack of shared responsibility in the alliance, with Australia carrying a disproportionate burden.

Respectfulness: This indicates that there are not getting an equal deal under AUKUS and that Australia has been treated as an inferior partner rather than an equal.

Terminal Values

Financial struggles (with caption): The cartoon raises questions about what these costs mean for the future of Australia's economy.

National Sovereignty: The kangaroo's burden suggests the loss of autonomy, as Australia's resources are requisitioned for the strategic priorities of its allies.

The piggy bank symbolises the financial commitments Australia will have to make. The kangaroo that's shouldering it represents the nation's struggle and the one-sided cost of the alliance. Instead of being top and bottom in AUKUS, he is not in AUKUS or has nothing to do with it. Australia has been placed as the technological follower of American strategic goals, even as the US and UK loom large over AUKUS. The visual turns AUKUS upside down and presents it as an expensive ticket for Australia to a club that may not be rewarding all its members. Objective Time is the ongoing fracas around the fiscal and strategic costs of the AUKUS deal, particularly concerning the price tag for building nuclear submarines. Subjective Time is absorbing Australia's increasing scepticism about the economic impact and whether these investments serve its national interests.



Source: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202209/1276076.shtml>

Frames

- The eagle's wing on top of the kangaroo represents dominance and control, symbolising

the U.S.'s influence over Australia.

- The kangaroo wielding the bat here seems to suggest that Australia is outfitted to get to work or go to war but is less keen or not entirely onboard.
- The eagle gazes aggressively, representing the dominant force, while the kangaroo sighs in resolve to comply with the eagle's power, an unequal relationship.

Facts that Imply

The eagle's great height and protective stance imply that the U.S. is the senior partner, providing direction (and perhaps pressure) on Australia to assume geopolitical or military roles. "In this precedent-setting situation many are likely to be in hot water, panicked and in danger for their lives," the caption reads, making a play on words with the word "hot" in that "hot water" implies the kangaroo's anxious message is that it is not a vital military or strategic asset, or even body at all, as it struggles to combat mythologised Daphne-esque trolls who dare attack its standing as a protected species or even a protected descriptor. The bat wielded by the kangaroo could represent Australia's involvement in U.S.-led initiatives, including countering threats in the Indo-Pacific region, including perhaps China.

Instrumental Values

Responsibility: Criticizes the U.S. for imposing on Australia a burden of responsibility that seems neither mutual nor beneficial.

Respectfulness: Implies a failure to respect Australia's agency in determining its strategic needs.

Terminal Values

National Sovereignty: Whether Washington's puppetry would subsume Australia's sovereignty is questionable.

Freedom: The kangaroo's tightly bound stance suggests the forfeiture of free will and agency to an expansively forged partner.

The eagle's wing represents U.S. protection but can also be read as overreach or coercion. The kangaroo with the bat suggests that Australia is armed or empowered but not fully willing. The image deconstructs the narrative of equal partnerships in alliances like AUKUS. It undermines the idea that the relationship is one of mutual benefit, instead hinting at the underlying "truth" of the arrangement as being one of dependency and strategic manipulation. The U.S. was described as having an incredibly dominant position in its alliance with Australia. The kangaroo's passive position indicates a disempowered agency in

establishing its posture within the partnership. The cartoon represents the concentrated power of interpretation, underlining the scope of manipulation: it decries the framing of U.S.-Australian relations and reveals their relationship's asymmetries. Subjective Time evokes Australian fears of being too deeply involved in American geopolitical agendas at the expense of the country's interests.



Source: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202311/1301371.shtml>

Frames

- Crossroads symbolises the dilemma between China and Australia's relationship
- The kangaroo's pensive posture implies Australia is weighing its options, an ongoing nuance in its relationship with China.

Facts that Imply

The cartoon implies a pivotal moment in Australia's longstanding relationship with China as the two countries weigh economic opportunities against geopolitical and national security challenges. Kangaroo's pondering testimony of a low-key China-Australian relationship. The solitary kangaroo at a junction with different directions represents Australia's independent agency in deciding the course of its relationship with China.

Instrumental Values

Responsibility: Implies Australia's duty to assess its way forward with China, weighing risks

with advantages.

Respectfulness: Signs of mutual respect that have been lacking through the political and economic context.

Terminal Values

Stability and Prosperity: Emphasizes the need for a balanced relationship that fosters long-term economic and political stability.

Autonomy: A measure of Australia's desire to preserve its sovereignty and independence in the face of competing pressures in its decision-making.

The crossroads is a metaphor for decision-making, the divergent paths that lie before Australia in its relationship with China, to closer ties, or greater distance. The image critiques the role of constructed stories in the China-Australian relationship and points to Australia's agency in controlling its narrative and future. The imagery suggests Australia is well-placed, with the choice to dictate the way forward with Beijing. The cartoon highlights Australia's strategic profile in regional and global power politics, particularly its relations with China. Objective Time represents a window into current geopolitical and economic trends shaping Australia's decisions, such as trade tensions, diplomatic headwinds, and the broader U.S.-China rivalry. Subjective Time captures Australia's backsliding self-examination and the strain of weighing short-term economic benefits against long-term strategic interests.



Source: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202309/1298888.shtml>

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Frames

- A speech by Uncle Sam about a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” is juxtaposed with a scene of the United States' militaristic dominance represented by a warship and fighter jets in a thought bubble.
- The worried looks on the individuals' faces indicate scepticism and/or fear of what U.S. forces may mean for the area.

Facts that Imply

The warships and jets represent military manoeuvres conducted by the U.S. and its allies in the Indo-Pacific that are couched as part of efforts to counter China but regarded by others as aggressive or destabilising. The faces of the two people are fearful because there is fear in the Indo-Pacific that they may get caught in the crossfire of great power competition, especially between the U.S. and China. The island in the thought bubble could represent disputed territories or the relative vulnerability of any smaller country in the region to the strategic ambitions of more extensive powers.

Instrumental Values

Responsibility: The cartoon criticises the U.S. for not adequately addressing the concerns of Indo-Pacific nations in its military and strategic moves.

Disrespect: This phrase suggests a disrespectful attitude toward the sovereignty and agency of smaller countries that may feel threatened by U.S. military bases.

Terminal Values

Peace and Security: Flags are concerned that greater militarisation may push the Indo-Pacific towards instability or conflict.

Freedom: Questions the idea of “freedom” in the context of military deployment, and says the interests of nations in the region lead it.

As the U.S. rethought its role and response in the world, it called up its military to force the enemy to surrender through overwhelming force, the imagery of which is the military equipment in the thought bubble of the cartoon, only, those who the U.S. tried to protect ended up feeling threatened by the promise of security offered by U.S. policies. In contrast, the image shows how the U.S. rhetoric fabricates a narrative of a “truth,” which upholds a paradigm of geo-logics power projection under the guise of freedom and openness. Asserting itself as a power and taking control in the Indo-Pacific as the U.S. under the pretext of promoting freedom. In operating under the assumption that the United States is benignly

hegemony and interpreting its policies, the cartoon signifies the divergent ways the larger country is seen versus smaller ones in the region. Time in Objective terms is practical ongoing geopolitical matters in the Indo-Pacific, such as U.S. military operations and U.S.-China antagonism. Subjective Time reflects the deep anxieties of Indo-Pacific nations about their futures during heightened militarisation and great power rivalry.

Conclusion

Overall, the visual level analysis of political cartoons reinforces the complex dynamics of Australia's realignment through the lens of Australia-U.S. relations and the AUKUS alliance. Through the lens of Heidi Scott's (2023) framework, the study illustrates how visual metaphors and symbolic representations are leveraged to critique Australia's so-called dependency and constrained sovereignty in its geopolitical posture. Laid underfoot the kangaroo struggles to place his stance under the control of the U.S. bald eagle from which the kangaroo may get some weak comfort (unlike the eagle, he won't scratch you) but what is ultimately made clear is that the balanced partnership that both countries historically boast of is in reality one person is in control and the other just a mere dance partner.

The cartoons capture the political frames around the constructed truths of global power, casting alliances such as AUKUS as essential for security when they could reduce the independence of smaller nations. Analysing the relationship between instrumental and terminal values in the pictorial texts, the visual discourse of values reveals a struggle between loyalty to alliances (instrumental values) on the one hand and national freedom and sovereignty (terminal values) on the other.

This analysis highlights, with a contrasting narrative, the need for security through domestic solutions rather than adversarial partnerships, where national-player alliances prevent from taking independent and sovereign decisions. When delving into the cultural and rhetorical aspects of these images, as done in this study, there can be arrive at a more nuanced understanding of the socio-political narratives surrounding Australia's place in a global perspective.

Findings

The political cartoons which are selected and analysed show Australia (represented as a kangaroo) as subordinate to the United States (represented as a bald eagle). The eagle's upside-down pose and covering wing emphasise the power imbalance of the AUKUS alliance, highlighting the U.S. as the overbearing force and Australia as the leech/little brother.

The cartoons characterise Australia's alignment within the AUKUS alliance as diminishing its independence. By capturing visual components of limited postures and eviscerating expressions of refusal, they pronounced Australia's limited agency in aligning strategic policies, painting it as merely an executor of U.S.-led policy.

The images critique the fictional narrative of security perpetuated by treaties like AUKUS. It questions the assumption that reliance on a superpower hub guarantees protection, revealing how it exposes dynamics that may reinforce inequalities in the geopolitics of this protectorate and erode most nations' autonomy.

The analysis indicates a struggle between these instrumental values (such as loyalty and collaboration between allies) and terminal values (for instance, freedom and self-reliance). Australia's alignment with the U.S. is depicted as sacrificing national autonomy for alliance loyalty.

The cartoons also reflect cultural values or perceptions of Australia's place in the world and challenge whether Australia's position in the AUKUS alliance meets its long-term national interests. It evokes public discourse about the costs and benefits of such strategic partnerships between nations.

Recommendations

- It is high time for Australians to take stock of the trade-offs between alliance commitments and national agencies. Australia should aim to maintain a balanced that avoids over reliance on any dominant regional power, whether United States, China or India.
- Australia should focus on developing closer relationships with its regional neighbours in the Indo-Pacific, promoting multilateralism and a commonality of interests to lessen the reliance on single alliances like AUKUS.
- Clear public information and engagement on the consequences of alliances such as © AUKUS are needed. This will open the strategic decision-making process to Australian society's broader values and aspirations.
- Educating policymakers and the general public on the dramatic power of visuals in shaping socio-political narratives can provide critical interpretation of such portrayals and sensitise audiences to those influences' effects on public perception.

Gaps for Future Research

There can be research on influence of visual narratives on public perception. There can be

research on Strategic Alliances and Cultural Perceptions. By studying individual nations, socially, ideologically, or even politically, across cultures in a comparative study, it is possible to discover how strongly or weakly nations perceive their identities within alliances and the overall global reception of the partnership. Future scholarship should examine the regional and geopolitical implications of Australia's alliances, such as AUKUS, on power dynamics with China and other members of the Indo-Pacific region. Longer-term studies are necessary to examine the socio-economic, military, and diplomatic implications of Australia's future commitment to AUKUS. Analyzing other types of visual media, such as digital memes or infographics, can yield a comprehensive interpretation of how visuals shape geopolitical narratives.

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