

MARCH 13, 2023

## FACT SHEET: Trilateral Australia-UK-US Partnership on Nuclear-Powered Submarines

On March 13, 2023, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese of Australia, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak of the United Kingdom, and President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. of the United States announced an arrangement for Australia to acquire a conventionally-armed, nuclear-powered submarine (SSN) capability through the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) enhanced security partnership.

On September 15, 2021, our three nations embarked on an 18-month consultation period to identify the optimal pathway for Australia to acquire this capability, while setting the highest nuclear non-proliferation standard. The plan announced today will deliver on that commitment. Further, this plan will lift all three nations' submarine industrial bases and undersea capabilities, enhancing deterrence and promoting stability in the Indo-Pacific.

Australia's future SSN – which we are calling “SSN-AUKUS” – will be a state-of-the-art platform designed to leverage the best of submarine technology from all three nations. SSN-AUKUS will be based upon the United Kingdom's next-generation SSN design while incorporating cutting edge U.S. submarine technologies, and will be built and deployed by both Australia and the United Kingdom.

AUKUS demonstrates our shared commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific and an international system that respects the rule of law, sovereignty, human rights, and the peaceful resolution of disputes free from coercion. AUKUS partners operating highly capable conventionally-armed, nuclear-powered submarines will provide an assured undersea capability that contributes to stability, peace, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific and around the world.

## **A Phased Approach to Build Stewardship and Sustain Australia's Undersea Capability**

Our nations have outlined an ambitious approach that will provide Australia with a conventionally-armed, nuclear powered submarine capability at the earliest possible date while ensuring Australia's capacity to safely operate, maintain and regulate this technology, and setting the highest standards for nuclear non-proliferation. Our phased approach includes the following elements, each underwritten by the mutual commitments of each nation:

- **Embedded Personnel and Port Visits.** Beginning in 2023, Australian military and civilian personnel will embed with the United States Navy, the United Kingdom Royal Navy and, subject to any necessary arrangements, within the United States and United Kingdom submarine industrial bases. This will accelerate the training and development of Australian personnel to ensure our ability to work together and for Australians to take on the responsibilities associated with these programs. The United States plans to increase SSN port visits to Australia beginning in 2023, with Australian sailors joining U.S. crews for training and development; the United Kingdom will increase visits to Australia beginning in 2026.
- **Submarine Rotational Forces.** As early as 2027, the United Kingdom and the United States plan to establish a rotational presence of one UK Astute class submarine and up to four U.S. Virginia class submarines at HMAS *Stirling* near Perth, Western Australia – this initiative will be known as ‘Submarine Rotational Force-West’ (SRF-West). This rotational presence will comply fully with Australia's longstanding position of no foreign bases on its territory. It will put our nations shoulder to shoulder as Australia builds the necessary operational capabilities and skills to steward and operate its own fleet of nuclear-powered submarines. Australia is launching an ambitious national effort to grow its defense and industrial workforce to support this plan.
- **Sale of U.S. Virginia Class Submarines.** Beginning in the early 2030s, pending approval from the U.S. Congress, the United States intends to sell Australia three Virginia class submarines, with the potential to sell up to two more if needed. This action is critical to continue growing Australia's ability to own and operate a fleet of SSNs, and to provide

Australia with a sovereign capability at the earliest possible date. It also ensures Australia sustains its undersea capabilities until SSN-AUKUS is ready, given the planned retirement of Australia's current fleet of submarines.

- **SSN-AUKUS.** The combination of United Kingdom submarine design and advanced United States technology is intended to deliver a best-in-class submarine that meets Australia's long-term defense needs while bolstering trilateral industrial cooperation. SSN-AUKUS will be the future attack submarine for both Australia and the United Kingdom. Australia and the United Kingdom intend to start building SSN-AUKUS in their domestic shipyards before the end of this decade. The United Kingdom intends to deliver its first SSN-AUKUS to the UK Royal Navy in the late 2030s. Australia plans to deliver the first Australian-built SSN-AUKUS to the Royal Australian Navy in the early 2040s.

The implementation of this approach will be consistent with the trilateral partners' respective international obligations and domestic law and underpinned by future legal and enabling arrangements for sharing sensitive information, equipment and technology.

### **Responsible Stewardship of Naval Nuclear Propulsion Technology**

All three nations appreciate the enormity of this endeavor and are committed to the principles that have upheld the United Kingdom and United States naval nuclear propulsion programs' unmatched safety records. For over 60 years, the United Kingdom and United States have operated more than 500 naval nuclear reactors that have collectively travelled more than 150 million miles – the equivalent of over 300 trips to the moon and back – without incident or adverse effect on human health or the quality of the environment. Australia is committed to upholding these same standards to safely steward naval nuclear propulsion technology.

As part of this commitment to nuclear stewardship, Australia has committed to managing all radioactive waste generated through its nuclear-powered submarine program, including spent nuclear fuel, in Australia. The United Kingdom and the United States will assist Australia in developing this capability, leveraging Australia's decades of safely and securely managing

radioactive waste domestically. Australia will manage these materials in accordance with its nuclear non-proliferation and other international obligations and commitments.

### **Strengthening the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Regime**

When the AUKUS leaders announced this initiative in September 2021, they committed to meeting our countries' respective nuclear non-proliferation obligations, setting the highest non-proliferation standard, and strengthening the non-proliferation regime while protecting classified and controlled information.

Our nations have made clear commitments to meet these objectives, including that:

- As a non-nuclear-weapon state, Australia does not – and will not – seek to acquire nuclear weapons;
- Australia will not enrich uranium or reprocess spent fuel as part of this program;
- Australia will not produce its own nuclear fuel for its SSNs;
- The United Kingdom and United States intend to provide Australia with nuclear material in complete, welded power units that will not require refueling during their lifetime;
- The nuclear fuel that Australia receives cannot be used in nuclear weapons without further chemical processing, which would require facilities that Australia does not have and will not seek; and
- This initiative will occur within the framework of Australia's Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement (CSA) and Additional Protocol (AP) with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Our nations have consulted regularly with the IAEA over the past year, in support of the IAEA's mandate to uphold the integrity of the global nuclear safeguards regime. The Director General of the IAEA has reported to IAEA Member States that he believes the AUKUS partners “are committed to ensuring the highest non-proliferation and safeguards standards are met,”

and noted his “satisfaction with the engagement and transparency shown by the three countries thus far.” The international community can be confident that our nations will continue to work transparently with the IAEA towards an approach that will strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime and set the strongest non-proliferation precedent.

### **Upgrading Infrastructure and Industrial Capacity**

AUKUS submarine cooperation will result in significant benefits to infrastructure and industrial capacity in all three nations.

- **Australia:** The pathway to Australia acquiring SSN-AUKUS will be a whole-of-nation undertaking. HMAS *Stirling* in Western Australia will be expanded to support the scale of infrastructure required for nuclear-powered submarines – both for visiting and rotational submarines and for Australia’s own nuclear-powered submarines. Australia’s SSN-AUKUS submarines will be built at Australia’s future Submarine Construction Yard in Adelaide, South Australia – employing thousands of workers onsite at peak. Overall, this enterprise will almost double the previously forecasted demand for personnel in Australia’s submarine shipyard, and will be supported by significant investment in Australia’s domestic industrial capacity and infrastructure. Australia will establish additional training, skilling and educational programs to achieve this growth for Australia’s local submarine and shipbuilding industry.
- **United Kingdom:** The United Kingdom intends to build on the recent investment it has been making in its submarine delivery, such as the £2.0 billion in BAE Systems, Barrow and Rolls Royce, Derby announced last year. This will deliver thousands of jobs in the United Kingdom, including in the supply chain. Australia has committed to a proportionate financial investment in the United Kingdom submarine industrial base to accelerate production of SSN-AUKUS.
- **United States:** The United States is investing an additional U.S. \$2.4 billion over fiscal years 2023-2027 in the submarine industrial base to increase construction capacity – above and beyond its annual investment in undersea platforms – to meet U.S. national needs. The United States also added \$2.2 billion to its submarine maintenance budget over fiscal years 2024-2028 to improve Virginia class SSN maintenance. The U.S. is

examining what additional investments are required to accelerate submarine production and maintenance to support both U.S. and AUKUS needs. These investments will support thousands of high-skill jobs in the United States. Australia has committed to a proportionate financial investment in the U.S. submarine industrial base to accelerate delivery of Virginia class submarines.

### **Increasingly Integrated Submarine Forces**

Incorporating proven, advanced U.S. technologies into SSN-AUKUS will optimize the capability, commonality and interoperability of all three nations' SSN platforms. Trilaterally sharing sophisticated submarine technology is emblematic of the broader integration of our submarine enterprises. For example:

- **Australian submariner training in United States and United Kingdom schools:** In 2022, the United States accepted its first Royal Australian Navy personnel into nuclear propulsion training programs, with additional personnel slated to join upcoming cohorts. The United States Congress, as part of the Fiscal Year 2023 National Defense Authorization Act, passed a bipartisan provision that establishes the ability for Royal Australian submarine officers to train at the Naval Nuclear Power Training Command and eventually serve on operational U.S. submarines. The United Kingdom has also welcomed Australian submariners into the Royal Navy's nuclear courses.
- **Australian personnel on board United States and United Kingdom submarines.** Australian submariners already train aboard U.S. and UK submarines. We will increase their numbers and levels of seniority over time as we grow Australia's capacity to operate, maintain and regulate its own sovereign nuclear-powered submarines.
- **Training Australia's industrial and technical workforce.** Australia intends to send hundreds of workers to United States and United Kingdom shipyards, and scientists and engineers to United States and United Kingdom technical facilities, for specialized skills training and to gain the experience required to build and sustain nuclear-powered submarines.

- **Interoperable Infrastructure.** As Australia upgrades its infrastructure to support the arrival of SSNs, it will build maintenance and repair capabilities that United States and United Kingdom submarines may also use, increasing our capacity to enhance our forces in peacetime and meet operational needs in times of crisis.

## **Conclusion**

The optimal pathway announced today will enhance the capabilities of AUKUS partners to contribute to security and stability in the Indo-Pacific. It will:

- Increase the number of partner-nation SSNs in the Indo-Pacific, increasing our combined capacity in the undersea domain;
- Create additional production capacity, enabling AUKUS partners to grow the size of our combined submarine forces;
- Strengthen and make more resilient trilateral supply chains, enhancing the industrial bases in all three nations; and
- Enhance the ability of our three nations to deter aggression and contribute to stability in the Indo-Pacific, and globally.

We are committed to open and transparent engagement with partners within and beyond the region as we implement this plan. The initiatives announced today will strengthen deterrence and bolster stability in the Indo-Pacific and beyond for decades to come.

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