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[UK Parliament](#) > [Hansard](#) > [Commons: 14 March 2023](#) > [Commons Chamber](#) > [AUKUS Defence Partnership](#)

AUKUS Defence Partnership

Volume 729: debated on Tuesday 14 March 2023

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🕒 3.09pm

The Minister for Defence Procurement >

(Alex Chalk)

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With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to make a statement about the AUKUS defence partnership. Yesterday, the Prime Minister, standing alongside the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Australia, announced that our three nations would be jointly developing a conventionally armed—I stress that—nuclear-powered submarine, the SSN-AUKUS, which will come into service in the late 2030s.

Before I provide the House with more details about this landmark announcement, it might be beneficial for colleagues if I provide a brief summary of how we got here. For more than 60 years, the UK and the US have successfully collaborated on the development of nuclear submarines. This unprecedented co-operation goes to the very core of our special relationship. Currently, with the support of the United States, we have a fleet of five Astute-class submarines, with a further two boats to be built. These world-class vessels are an essential component of our defence and security apparatus in a more contested world.

More recently, Australia has also recognised the need for a stealthier and more enduring underwater capability to deter threats to the peace and stability of the Indo-Pacific. That is why back in September 2021, my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), while Prime Minister, announced to the House a pivotal new defence partnership involving the United States, Australia and the UK, otherwise known as AUKUS. The partnership involves two pillars: first, the joint development of a nuclear-powered, conventionally armed submarine capability for Australia; and secondly, the creation of a suite of complementary technologies, among them hypersonics and cyber. It is the first of those pillars that I wish to focus on today.

For the past 18 months, we have been working closely with our trilateral counterparts to understand Australia's requirements, to make a detailed technical assessment and to set out the optimal pathway for delivering this unique platform. As the Prime Minister said last night, this scoping period has now concluded and a solution has been identified.

The SSN-AUKUS will be based on the design for the UK's Astute-class submarine replacement, SSN(R), which has been under development for several years. SSN-AUKUS will build on these firm foundations by incorporating cutting-edge US submarine technology, including the propulsion plant, combat systems and conventional weapons, but this boat will not just be of benefit to the Royal Australian Navy. It is now clear to us that the SSN-AUKUS, which is an evolution of SSN(R), should now become the UK's future platform as well, providing the future attack submarine requirement for the Royal Navy as well as the Royal Australian Navy.

As yesterday's refreshed integrated review underlines, we are having to contend with an increasingly volatile and complex environment, with multiple adversaries seeking to undermine our rules-based international order. In response, the deepening of our defence partnership offers three distinct advantages. First, it bolsters our undersea capability. It will give us the ability to deter future threats in the underwater battlespace, to protect our nuclear deterrent and our vital sea lines of communication and to fulfil a range of military tasks, including anti-surface and anti-submarine warfare, land attack and intelligence gathering.

Secondly, AUKUS will bring a truly global and interoperable capability for our nations that is not just capable of operating in the Indo-Pacific, but strengthens our contribution to NATO in Europe. It will enable us to operate in the high north, where the impact of climate change is opening new military and commercial shipping access to the north Atlantic, and it will ensure that three like-minded

nations with shared interests on the global stage can work together even more closely.

Thirdly, and finally, AUKUS helps us share the burden of research and development costs, not just giving us access to some of the most advanced technology on the planet, but allowing us to integrate our supply chains and provide greater resilience at a time of growing resource costs and inflationary pressures. It will also open up further opportunities for technology sharing and interoperability across the defence context.

The first SSN-AUKUS for the Royal Navy will be built in the United Kingdom and delivered in the late 2030s, taking full advantage of our many decades of experience in building nuclear-powered submarines. To support SSN-AUKUS, Australia has committed to making a proportionate financial investment in our submarine industrial base. SSN-AUKUS will support thousands of new jobs at Barrow-in-Furness and Derby and throughout the national supply chain. These are truly centres of excellence, and I am proud to say that they stand ready to support Australia in this endeavour. It is particularly good news that Rolls-Royce UK will be building the nuclear reactors for all of Australia's submarines.

We intend for the first SSN-AUKUS to come into service with the Royal Australian Navy in the 2040s, and Australia will receive substantial support to develop and operate these nuclear-powered submarines. Submariners from the Royal Australian Navy have already begun to train with the Royal Navy to gain the relevant experience and, alongside the US, the Royal Navy intends to increase the number of submarine deployments to Australia from 2026, building on the successful visit to Australia by HMS Astute in 2021. The United States has also signalled her intention to provide Virginia-class attack submarines to the Royal Australian Navy, with Australia planning to acquire three. Taken together, this plan is consistent with Australian sovereignty and international obligations. It systematically and carefully builds Australia's ability to safely and securely operate, maintain and sustain SSNs.

It goes without saying that compliance with non-proliferation requirements is paramount, and I reassure the House that throughout this process we will remain fully committed to setting the highest non-proliferation standards. We are undertaking every step in a way that reflects our long-standing leadership in global non-proliferation and our steadfast support for the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. We have been clear that we will pursue this endeavour in a way that sets a strong precedent for states seeking to develop a naval nuclear propulsion capability. We have consulted, and we will continue to consult regularly and transparently with the International Atomic Energy Agency with respect to the development of a suitable nuclear safeguards approach. The IAEA director general has expressed his satisfaction with our engagement.

This is a momentous journey for us all. For maritime nations such as the UK, as well as Australia and the US, maintaining a capability advantage over potential adversaries is essential. For the UK, AUKUS represents an historic opportunity for a deep, enduring and mutually beneficial partnership with two of our closest allies—a partnership that will strengthen the resilience of our nuclear submarine enterprise and will bring with it investment and high-skilled, high-wage jobs, as well as an even stronger and more capable Royal Navy submarine force. The United Kingdom will now begin embarking on delivering SSN-AUKUS, along with our allies. I look forward to keeping the House updated on how it progresses. I commend this statement to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker >

(Dame Rosie Winterton)

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I call the shadow Secretary of State.

🕒 3.16pm

John Healey >

(Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab)

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I thank the Minister for the advance copy of his statement. This AUKUS defence partnership has our fullest Labour support. The multi-decade agreement deepens security and opportunity between our three countries. It strengthens strategic security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific. It promises not just jobs now, but jobs in the next generation and the one after that. It fulfils all our obligations under the non-proliferation treaty. I want to see Britain playing the biggest role possible in building these new submarines, with the first AUKUS boat launched as early as possible in Barrow.

Yesterday's 2023 integrated review states

“£3 billion will be invested across the defence nuclear enterprise”.

How much of that total is going to Barrow and to Derby? The current funding of £85 million each for developing the new SSN(R) submarine runs out at the end of this month. As the Minister has mentioned, the AUKUS pathway report published by the Australian Government last night confirms that

“Australia will also make a proportionate financial investment in the UK and US industrial bases.”

When will this investment in Barrow and Derby begin? How will the combined UK-Australian investment in the SSN-AUKUS programme be managed?

This AUKUS agreement is profound. It is not about any nation buying weapons systems off one another, or the Government contracting with major companies for a new platform; it is about building the industrial capability of all three countries. It is a national enterprise for the UK on skills and workforce, on technology, on security of essential supply chains and components, on sharing highly secret technologies and on decommissioning and recycling out-of-service subs, so who will lead this drive? How will the necessary co-ordination and integration be done? We know, as the Minister said, that Australian personnel have begun serving with the Royal Navy, and that the UK will increase SSN visits to Australia ahead of what is called the submarine rotational force west being created in 2027. How often and for how long will a UK Astute be rotated to Australia?

The UK’s former National Security Adviser, Sir Stephen Lovegrove, has described the AUKUS pact as

“perhaps the most significant capability collaboration anywhere in the world in the past six decades”,

because it is about more than just subs. Pillar 2 of the AUKUS partnership, which the Minister mentioned, promises potential co-operation on hypersonics, cyber, artificial intelligence and quantum computing. Those are essential capabilities that can be delivered before the new AUKUS subs enter service.

Yesterday’s integrated review said little about pillar 2, so can the Minister overcome his reluctance and provide an update on it? What are its strategic objectives? What are its timelines? Which of the technologies has the highest priority? As the broad coalition of countries imposing sanctions on Russia has shown, some of our strongest and most reliable allies are in the Indo-Pacific. Could any other countries, beyond the three AUKUS nations, become involved in pillar 2 collaborations?

Finally, AUKUS is a national enterprise for the UK and a trilateral endeavour with our closest security allies. Will the Minister commit today to report regularly on progress with AUKUS to Parliament and to the public?

Alex Chalk >

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I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his remarks. He is absolutely right that this is an announcement of such moment that it will require cross-party and generational support. It is important to note precisely the scale of what is being proposed. As he rightly indicated, this is about not simply the sale of a weapons system, but the growth of a capability across continents and across generations. With scale comes opportunity: having that trilateral approach builds the resilience of the supply chain and of the industrial capability, which benefits Australia, of course, and the United Kingdom.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about investment. I am pleased to note that, in the last financial year, £2 billion was invested into Barrow-in-Furness and Raynesway, as he will have seen, because I think he has had the opportunity to visit both recently. There will be further investment to come, partly as a result of what has been announced recently, and in the years to come, which echoes my point about it having to be sustained and continued. He is right, of course, to reference the fact that, in the document that accompanies the announcement, a copy of which I am sure he has seen, the Australians have indicated their agreement to make a proportionate investment in UK infrastructure.

The right hon. Gentleman is correct to ask about co-ordination, because this has to be co-ordinated. The way that happens is, first and foremost, to ensure that the Australian experts who need to develop that expertise, as they have candidly acknowledged, spend time in the UK—in Barrow and Raynesway. Indeed, this Thursday, I am looking forward to going to Barrow with the Premier of South Australia—South Australia being the place where the first SSN-AUKUS for the Royal Australian Navy will be built.

The right hon. Gentleman raised the issue of AUKUS pillar 2. I have had the opportunity to speak to my opposite number here in the UK to discuss precisely that. There are a number of aspects to it, as he indicated, such as hypersonics, AI and underwater technologies, and further detail will be explored in due course. To his point about other countries, I can say that, unlike pillar 1, which

is not open for engagement beyond the three nations, we will of course consider the interest that other nations have expressed in pillar 2.

As is well expressed in the fact sheet that accompanies the announcement, AUKUS—whether pillar 1 or pillar 2—is designed to show:

“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.”

That is what our nations stand for, and that is what AUKUS will deliver.

Madam Deputy Speaker >

(Dame Rosie Winterton)

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I call the Chair of the Defence Committee.

Mr Tobias Ellwood >

(Bournemouth East) (Con)

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As somebody who is passionate about UK security and Britain’s place in the world, I could not hide my deep disappointment yesterday when the new integrated review spelled out a deteriorating global threat picture, but offered no new investment in our conventional forces. We are back here today, however, and I welcome this landmark announcement of ever greater collaboration between three trusted allies. Our political relationship with Washington experienced a bumpy patch post Brexit—I say that as a US-UK dual national—so it is good to see it back where it should be. Indeed, landing AUKUS, the Paris agreement and the Windsor framework shows that statecraft has returned to No. 10.

The procurement programme is for the long term and the first subs will not arrive for another couple of decades, yet the threat picture is deteriorating rapidly. If we are to commit to the Indo-Pacific tilt, does the Minister recognise the urgent need to increase the surface fleet, so that we can meet our responsibilities there?

Alex Chalk >

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I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who is assiduous in his attention to the issue of the deterrent and the nuclear submarine capability in general. His point about the surface fleet is absolutely right. As a relatively new Minister coming into the Department, it has been encouraging to see the approach taken on Type 31—in other words, the choice of a platform that is deliverable, affordable and configurable to a mission. We have to move beyond a situation where exquisite and highly expensive capabilities are not necessarily operating on a particular mission to their full specification, so Type 31s can be reconfigured for anti-piracy missions, war-fighting missions or humanitarian missions. The British people want to see British warships and frigates acting in the national interest abroad in a sustainable and affordable way, and that is the approach we are taking.

Dave Doogan >

(Angus) (SNP)

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I am not a huge advocate of nuclear submarines, but I recognise their dynamic advantages over air-independent propulsion, in terms of range, speed and duration. Moreover, as the SNP’s lead on defence, I spend my time engaged on the defence posture and resources that an independent Scotland will require to defend our national interests and those of our allies collectively, in a way that is consistent with Scotland’s defence and security priorities, so I will not lecture Australia or the United Kingdom on what is right for them. I encourage the Defence Procurement Minister to acknowledge the outstanding engineering prowess that supports attack submarines at Thales in Glasgow and MacTaggart Scott in Loanhead. Nevertheless, I wish everybody in Barrow-in-Furness every success with the work and I hope it generates great prosperity there.

I note the challenges in delivering Astute-class SSN in the UK, with boats one to three being delivered five years late and 53% over budget. What assurances has the UK given to the Australians that that contagion will not affect SSN-AUKUS? What about refit—will the UK be helping Australia with technology transfer and how to refit the boats? Presumably not, given that, due to the Ministry of Defence's dithering and short-termism, HMS Vanguard required seven years to overhaul and refuel, rather than the planned two, with an attendant cost explosion.

Of the 21 submarines languishing at end of life—seven at Rosyth and a further 14 at Devonport in England—only seven have been defuelled. This scandal sees the previous HMS Vanguard, which went out of service in 1980 and has a 62-year-old hull, still sitting there waiting for the Government to put the money in to safely dispose of it. We have the industrial expertise in the United Kingdom to do that work, so why are the Government not funding their responsibilities? Has the UK cautioned the Australians that it is not enough simply to fund the build, commission and operation of these nuclear submarines, because states must also allocate the budget for disposal? Has the MOD had that conversation, and if so, how did it manage the hypocrisy of it all?

Alex Chalk >

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I thank the hon. Gentleman for his sunny observations, which were hugely appreciated. If I can begin at the end, I was disappointed to hear him asking questions about whether the Australians have been reminded about decommissioning, because it is in the very document that I would have thought he had read. This document, at page 41, talks about radioactive waste management and Australia's plans to do precisely that, so I am pleased to have been able to deal with that.

On the issue the hon. Gentleman raised about the expertise in Scotland, let me join him, in the spirit of unity across the House, in commending the excellence in Scotland. I am delighted that it is the Ministry of Defence in a British Government that has ensured that those brilliant experts in Scotland have got the ships to work on. That simply would not happen in the event of independence, and he needs to be straight with the Scottish people about that.

On the second issue about refitting, let me say that one advantage of co-operating across the three nations is that we have not only the broader industrial capability to build these boats in the first place, but the capability to develop them over time. One thing he will well understand, as others in the House also recognise, is that it is not enough to think about the capability of the platform on day one; we have to consider how it will develop through the years. Our ability to do that and to ensure that it remains at the cutting edge is immeasurably enhanced by the fact that we are operating across the three nations.

On the hon. Gentleman's point about dismantling, I hope I can reassure him. Swiftsure, one of the boats he referred to, is being dismantled as the demonstrator—that will be completed by 2026—and low-level radioactive waste has been removed already from Swiftsure, Resolution and Revenge. The matters are in hand, and they will continue at pace.

Simon Fell >

(Barrow and Furness) (Con)

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May I put on record my thanks to my hon. and learned Friend, the Defence Secretary and the Prime Minister, and to their teams, for getting this bold and visionary deal over the line? AUKUS will provide resilience for our submarine programme, and capacity and capability between our three nations, and it will secure our allies in uncertain times, and deliver jobs and investment in Barrow. It will be a true win-win. Further, does my hon. and learned Friend agree that it is testament to the remarkable skills of the ship makers in Barrow that Australia chose a submarine designed by Barrovians for its future fleet? Will he join me in thanking and paying tribute to the hard work they do day in and day out, at the shipyard and in the wider submarine programme, to keep us and our allies safe?

Alex Chalk >

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I thank my hon. Friend for his heartfelt and powerful tribute to the people he represents, and he is absolutely right. This decision is a vote of confidence—not just a British Government vote of confidence, but an international vote of confidence—in the good and skilled people he represents. Let us be clear that this is a British design that will be enhanced principally by US but also by some Australian technology. It is an excellent example of where international scale allied with British know-how and British hard work can produce something genuinely world beating not just for this generation, but to ensure that future generations—our children and grandchildren—can enjoy the safety we have enjoyed.

Mr Kevan Jones >

(North Durham) (Lab)

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I welcome this announcement. Last year, I visited Australia, and one thing that impressed me was that, for Australia, this is a national endeavour. With meetings at federal level and obviously with the state premier of South Australia, this is a joined-up national endeavour, including looking at skills not just for today, but for the future.

I noticed that, in the new refresh of the integrated review yesterday, it says:

“We have also: announced...Great British Nuclear, to progress a resilient pipeline of new nuclear projects”.

The fear I have is that we are not matching the endeavour of the Australians. Could the Minister explain how we will get that concentration on skills—not just today, but in future—especially with the Business Department shilly-shallying around the investment for Rolls-Royce in the small modular nuclear reactors?

Alex Chalk >[Share](#)

May I welcome the right hon. Member's approval, which is appreciated? He is right that it is a joined-up endeavour in Australia. It has to be, and the Australians well understand the enormous scale of what they are taking on. As he indicated, I look forward to welcoming the premier of South Australia in Barrow this Thursday. His point about skills is well made. We are clear, as are those at Raynesway in Derby, and in Barrow and Furness, that we need to grow the skills pipeline, but that has already begun. If we consider the £2 billion invested last year, yes, some of it went to new buildings and equipment, but it also went to ensuring that the capacity and college facilities to bring on those apprentices are in place. Someone who goes to Derby can be briefed now about precisely what is taking place. The excitement, enthusiasm and drive that is going into ensuring sufficient suitably qualified and expert personnel is reassuring and encouraging. The right hon. Gentleman is making the right point, and I am pleased to reassure him that that matter is not lost on those involved.

John Redwood >

(Wokingham) (Con)

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I warmly welcome the announcement and the work that has gone into it. Can the Minister give the House any indication of the first phase of roll-out, and of how many submarines of the new type will be built? How many of those could be for the Royal Navy?

Alex Chalk >[Share](#)

We know, come what may, that the first of these submarines will be built in Barrow, and we have already begun the procurement of long-lead items for that initial batch. Precise numbers will emerge in due course, and that will depend on all sorts of things, including how quickly the Australian industrial base matures and so on. I reassure my right hon. Friend that the first boat will be built here in the UK, and work is being done to ensure that the necessary components for future builds are already being procured.

John Spellar >

(Warley) (Lab)

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I welcome this development, as well as the announcement from the Prime Minister, an American Democrat President and an Australian Labour Prime Minister, showing unity between parties and across countries on this vital endeavour. However, I think the Minister is unreasonably complacent. It is not clear who is in charge, and lack of clarity leads to delay and disruption. If we look at the Polaris agreement—it was signed at Nassau in 1962, and HMS Resolution was laid down in 1964, launched in 1996, and commissioned in 1967. Who will be doing that? On the nuclear aspect, as my right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) said, the report states that we will be looking to

“align delivery of the civil and defence nuclear enterprises”

and goes on to mention the development of

“small modular reactors in the UK through Rolls-Royce SMR;”.

Yet the Treasury is sabotaging that project. It is demanding endless inquiries and evaluations, and is now talking about having a competition with international competitors to try to undermine Rolls-Royce. We do not have that link-up between the civil and military enterprise, so when will somebody get a grip?

Alex Chalk >

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I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his remarks, but I do not recognise the points he is making. As far as Rolls-Royce is concerned, the Government are absolutely behind that fantastic facility—

John Spellar >

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indicated dissent.

Alex Chalk >

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I have been there recently, and I am pleased to say that they are. Rolls-Royce recognises the importance of this programme. One thing that is clear about building nuclear powered submarines is that unless we keep the drum beat of “always-on” manufacture, it is easy for those skills to erode. I am delighted that this programme ensures that we will be building reactors now and in the future for generations to come. That means we will keep those expert personnel, ensure a pipeline of staff, and we will be experts for many years to come.

Alec Shelbrooke >

(Elmet and Rothwell) (Con)

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I congratulate my hon. and learned Friend on the work he has done with his Department, his team, and the Ministry of Defence as a whole. The changing geopolitical landscape, and the 360-degree view of NATO, make it vital that there is a silent capability in the Pacific, especially when we look at changes to the geopolitical energy demands coming from western South America. On pillar 2, and the development of weapons, if we are to expand to other nations to help with the development of highly complex weapons, on which I think the west would admit it is way behind the curve, has the Minister given any consideration as to how the UK and AUKUS members can work with PESCO nations which, as he will understand, are a closed shop and have made it difficult for a relationship to form? Will he give that issue some attention regarding how that relationship can be built moving forward?

Alex Chalk >

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I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend. I am also grateful to him for the part he played in progressing this matter when he was in the Department. He comes to this subject with enormous knowledge of the NATO context. I want to pick up on his first point, on capability, because we have not spoken a vast amount about it. The ability to be stealthy and undetected is not a capability enjoyed by conventionally powered submarines, and that is one reason why the United States and the United Kingdom no longer operate them. It is vital that submarines have the range, the lack of detectability, and the ability to be more stealthy and detect more in terms of intelligence and so on, so I take that point. On his second point about pillar 2, he is absolutely right and I will certainly undertake to consider the matter he raises. We had very warm and positive discussions with the Australians here in the UK about pillar 2. I think there is a shared recognition among the United States, the UK and Australia that we need to move quickly. There is no time to lose.

Richard Foord >

(Tiverton and Honiton) (LD)

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On behalf of my party, the Liberal Democrats, I welcome the AUKUS defence partnership announcement. I endorse what the right hon. Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke) said about the stealth it will bring to our partnership. Like the Minister, the US President was at pains yesterday to stress that SSN-AUKUS will be nuclear powered but not nuclear armed. The Minister went further today and talked a little about compliance with international law on proliferation. The International Atomic Energy Agency is satisfied that Australia does not intend to pursue uranium enrichment. Given that since the announcement China alleges that AUKUS undermines the international non-proliferation system, will the Minister provide a little more assurance to the House and the British public that the initiative does indeed comply with the non-proliferation treaty?

Alex Chalk >[Share](#)

I am happy to do so. The hon. Gentleman is right to say, of course, that this has nothing to do with nuclear weapons. I have made that crystal clear. The NPT is about the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, not nuclear propulsion systems. I am pleased to be able to indicate that the director general of the IAEA reported to IAEA member states that he believes the AUKUS partners are committed to ensuring the highest non-proliferation and that safeguard standards are met. He noted his satisfaction with the engagement and transparency shown by the three countries thus far. Australia, in joining the UK and the US, has joined not just the strongest possible culture of safety, but the strongest possible culture of adherence to the rule of law. Indeed, these systems are the very tools that we bring to the table to defend the rules-based order.

Mark Fletcher >

(Bolsover) (Con)

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This is a very welcome agreement that helps to make the world just a little bit safer. I recently had the pleasure of visiting Faslane with the armed forces parliamentary scheme. I met some of our submariners, went aboard one of our nuclear submarines and saw a reactor built by Rolls-Royce in Derby, which will have been made by some of my constituents. The announcement is incredibly welcome news for Derby and Derbyshire. What assessment has the Department made of the economic boost it will bring to the east midlands?

Alex Chalk >[Share](#)

I thank my hon. Friend for his excellent question. He is a great supporter of his constituents who produce these brilliant reactors. I am so pleased he went to Rosyth and met the submariners, because I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to them. It is a tough job, candidly. They do on our behalf, out of sight and sometimes out of mind, an enormously important job and I know the whole House will join me in paying tribute to them for what they deliver for the security of our nation. The additional investment—let us be clear that the nuclear reactors will supply all the Australian SSN-AUKUS submarines—will mean thousands more high-skilled, high-paid jobs here in the UK. To the point made just a few moments ago, they will be welded shut nuclear reactors. I am happy to be able to make that point. They will not need to be opened or tampered with in any way during the lifetime of the submarine.

Derek Twigg >

(Halton) (Lab)

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I was deeply disappointed with the funding announcement yesterday, which was woefully inadequate for our defence needs, but I fully support and welcome today's announcement and the AUKUS partnership. May I ask the Minister a specific question? Page 56 of the "Integrated Review Refresh" rightly refers to supply chain risks, particularly in terms of the five priority technologies. To ensure that we, along with our partners, produce and develop the best possible assets that can outmatch our adversaries, at what point will we hear—we still have not heard—when we will publish a strategy on semiconductors and quantum technologies?

Alex Chalk >[Share](#)

The hon. Gentleman is right that semiconductors and quantum technologies are significant. I am happy to write to him on that point.

Sammy Wilson >

(East Antrim) (DUP)

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I welcome today's announcement as further evidence that we and our allies are taking seriously the threat of Chinese aggression in the Pacific, and taking action to deal with it. Apart from the strategic security advantages, the announcement offers economic benefit to the United Kingdom. The Minister has indicated that the defence supply chain should benefit, and it is reported that Barrow shipyard, Rolls-Royce, Thales and more will be in line to benefit. Is the Minister in a position to indicate whether this announcement will lead to extra high-value jobs in engineering and defence in Northern Ireland?

Alex Chalk >[Share](#)

It is overwhelmingly likely that this announcement will have a positive impact across the United Kingdom, including in Northern Ireland. Inevitably, precisely how it shakes down will become clear in the fullness of time, because we will need to see the extent to which the supply chains are met in the UK, the United States and Australia. There is the rub—the point of all this is that all three countries bring that element of resilience. Already, Australia has certain capabilities in pressure hull steel, valves, pumps and batteries; we have capabilities in nuclear reactions and so on; and the United States brings weapons systems and various other technologies to bear. That resilience in the supply chain is important to ensure not just that the current submarines can be fitted out and produced, but, vitally, that there is a pipeline in future, because it sends the strongest possible demand signal not just now but for generations to come.

Gareth Davies >

(Grantham and Stamford) (Con)

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My hon. and learned Friend will have noticed that China has been quick to condemn our historic AUKUS agreement as a “path of error”. It also still refuses to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Does he agree that that illustrates both the difficulty that we face in determining our relationship with Beijing and why AUKUS is so important for our security?

Alex Chalk >[Share](#)

It is important to note that we are looking to have an interoperable presence with our allies in the Indo-Pacific as a whole. Although my hon. Friend is right and proper in identifying China, which the Prime Minister said presented an “epoch-defining systemic challenge”, it is also correct to say that the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States want to ensure that all of the Indo-Pacific remains free for those who believe in the international rules-based order and the rule of law. My hon. Friend is absolutely right that when it comes to China, we have grave concerns about human rights violations and other aggressive actions. That is why we want to ensure the capability to allow our values and what we stand for to be properly represented and upheld in that vital part of the world.

Jeremy Corbyn >

(Islington North) (Ind)

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Many in the world are concerned that this agreement undermines, if not breaches, the non-proliferation treaty. Will the Minister assure us that it will be constantly under review and will be reported to the NPT review conference when it comes along? Will he also explain the longer-term implications of this in stoking up a cold war with China? That is likely to increase defence expenditure by the

UK, the US, Australia and China in future, leading to greater danger in the South China sea. What is his aspiration for a more peaceful relationship in the long term that will not cost such vast amounts of money for all the countries concerned?

Alex Chalk >

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May I reject in the strongest possible terms what the right hon. Gentleman says? I do find it troubling that he is so ready to take the side of any country that stands potentially in opposition to the United Kingdom.

Jeremy Corbyn >

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indicated dissent.

Alex Chalk >

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The right hon. Gentleman is the self-same man, I am sorry to say, who in 2014 blamed NATO for Russian aggression. Now, again, he wants to take the side of others. This is the country, together with its allies, that believes in what he should believe in: the international rules-based order and the assertion of those rights in a contested world. We will continue to do that, and we will not be knocked off course by those who try to do our country down.

Mr Deputy Speaker >

(Mr Nigel Evans)

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I call Jonathan Edwards.

Jonathan Edwards >

(Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (Ind)

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Diolch, Mr Deputy Speaker. Is it not the case that major defence announcements such as this one should not be considered in isolation? By far the biggest foreign policy challenge that we face is the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Western strategies are largely dependent on economic sanctions against Russia, but those sanctions have been blunted by the fact that Russia has been able to find other markets with which to trade. What assessment has the Minister made of whether the AUKUS security pact will help or hinder our strategies to bring Russia's war to an end?

Alex Chalk >

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The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: we have to ensure that our defence nuclear programme progresses in the way that I have indicated, but not to the exclusion of what we are properly doing on the continent of Europe. I am proud, and I think this whole House can be proud, that after the United States there is no nation on the planet that has done more than ours to provide military equipment to the Ukrainians: more than 100,000 artillery shells, 200 armoured fighting vehicles, night vision goggles, more than 10,000 anti-tank weapons, winter clothing and so on. We do all this and more because we believe that we need to send a message from this country that might is not always right and that our country can be counted on to stand up to bullies.

Mr Deputy Speaker >

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I thank the Minister for his statement and for responding to questions for almost three quarters of an hour.

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