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# Special Online Briefing With Mark Lambert, Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs; Anthony Wier, Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation; Douglas Jones, Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs; and Abraham Denmark, Senior Advisor to the Secretary of Defense for AUKUS

## SPECIAL BRIEFING

BUREAU OF INTERNATIONAL SECURITY AND NONPROLIFERATION

BUREAU OF EAST ASIAN AND PACIFIC AFFAIRS

BUREAU OF EUROPEAN AND EURASIAN AFFAIRS

BRUSSELS INTERNATIONAL MEDIA HUB

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**MODERATOR:** Good afternoon from the State Department's Brussels Media Hub. I would like to welcome everyone joining us for today's virtual press briefing. Today we're very honored to be joined by Mark Lambert, Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs; Anthony Wier, Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation; Douglas Jones,

Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs; and Abraham Denmark, Senior Advisor to the Secretary of Defense for AUKUS.

Finally, a reminder that today's briefing is on the record. And with that, let's get started. Thank you so much to our four speakers for joining us today. I'll turn it over to Deputy Assistant Secretary Lambert for opening remarks.

**MR LAMBERT:** Well, thank you so much, and good day, everyone. It's a pleasure to talk with you all.

Yesterday in San Diego, President Biden, alongside UK Prime Minister Sunak and Australian Prime Minister Albanese, announced the optimal pathway for Australia's acquisition of conventionally armed nuclear-powered submarines under the Australia, United Kingdom, and United States partnership, which we call AUKUS. Yesterday's announcement outlined how we will do this under AUKUS. As AUKUS partners build the new SSN-AUKUS submarine, we will leverage the best technology and ingenuity from the United States, Australia, and the UK to design a new class of submarine for Australia and the United Kingdom to use. We are coming together to assist Australia in modernizing its submarine fleet to use the same technology that the United Kingdom and the United States have safely used for decades.

As we do so, we are bolstering the economic opportunity of all three of our nations. We are deepening our longstanding, robust defense cooperation to bring our sailors, mariners, and engineers together to make this a reality and to build Australia's stewardship of this powerful technology.

AUKUS is an integral part of the United States strategy towards the Indo-Pacific and a concrete commitment to the Indo-Pacific region by the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom to ensure continued stability and prosperity in the region and across the globe. As you all know, the United States is an Indo-Pacific nation. We have a deep history in the region. The economies, people, and national security of all Indo-Pacific nations are inextricably linked. We are committed to realizing the full potential and prosperity the region can achieve in the decades ahead, advancing our Indo-Pacific Strategy together with allies, partners, and friends as we continue to face unprecedented challenges – including Russia's brutal war against Ukraine; the DPRK's unlawful weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile development in violation of multiple United Nations Security Council resolutions; the climate crisis and its effect on global stability; and supply chain vulnerability.

AUKUS is a modernization of our alliances and partnerships to face the challenges of the future, and is one of multiple partnerships we are fostering in the region to build a stronger multilateral architecture to advance our shared goals of promoting a free and open, secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific.

Guided by a shared commitment to global security and stability, AUKUS deepens our diplomatic, security, and defense cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region in line with President Biden's vision of working with our partners and allies to solve global challenges. AUKUS is binding our partners in Europe and Asia together, recognizing that our world is increasingly interconnected and the fates of all the world's regions are intertwined. The AUKUS partnership reflects the critical role that both our European and Indo-Pacific partners play in supporting our shared vision for increased peace and security throughout the world.

We are excited to deliver AUKUS as one piece of the United States' broader Indo-Pacific Strategy. Our intentions in the Indo-Pacific are clear: to advance a free and open, connected, prosperous, secure, and resilient region. Like our other partners in Southeast Asia, East Asia, and the Pacific, AUKUS partners understand the critical role the region plays in global trade and global prosperity. Global economic growth and prosperity require security, stability, and predictability. AUKUS partners understand this reality, value it, and are working together to enhance our security and defense capabilities to help ensure this. AUKUS is a contribution to continued stability.

In conclusion, I want to underscore one aspect of AUKUS that we will continue to make – that will continue to make it unique: transparency. AUKUS partners have made our intentions clear, including our commitment to regional peace and stability. We have committed ourselves to the highest safety and nonproliferation standards, and we look forward to continuing engagement with our friends, partners, and allies in the region.

Thank you again for taking your time to be with us today, and I look forward to your questions.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you very much. We'll now turn to the question-and-answer portion of today's briefing.

So our first question comes from Giulia Pompili from *Il Foglio* in Italy. "Do you expect more engagement in the Indo-Pacific region by the EU partners?" And —

**MR JONES:** This is Doug Jones; I can start on that question. We cooperate very closely with our European allies and with our partners on the Indo-Pacific, among other global challenges. There is a broader trend of European countries playing an important role in the Indo-Pacific, which we welcome and look forward to continuing that close cooperation. With the EU specifically, we have regular dialogue on the Indo-Pacific and meet regularly to coordinate our policies on the Indo-Pacific and expect that cooperation to continue and expand.

On the specifics of partnership engagement, European partners and allies' engagement, I might ask Mark Lambert to say a bit more about that.

**MR LAMBERT:** Thank you, Doug. This is Mark Lambert. Just fleshing out a little bit, over recent years we've been very grateful for the increasing links we have with the EU, both individual member states and the EU as an institution. Let me point out a few examples of this.

In the past year, we have worked with the EU to set up a structure of countries focused on the development challenges facing the Pacific Island countries. We call this the Partners of the Blue Pacific. Germany and the UK are both charter members of Partners of the Blue Pacific, but France and the EU have attended numerous of our activities.

For years now, we have partnered with EU member states and the EU as an institution in talking about challenges facing the ASEAN countries of Southeast Asia and we regularly share information with the EU about provocations caused by the DPRK. I know the UK is no longer an EU member state, but I think this can also be said for the UK's growing work in East Asia. It dovetails quite closely with London's tilt towards the Indo-Pacific. So this is something where I think you will see more and more American diplomats, American experts working on East Asia, traveling to Brussels, and traveling to European capitals to talk about issues of mutual concern.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you very much. We'll now go to our next question, which comes from Giselle Nath from *De Standaard* in Brussels, who asks: "Are there any diplomatic channels or deliverables open to the U.S. with China regarding free and open traffic in the Indo-Pacific?"

**MR LAMBERT:** This is Mark Lambert again. Let me take a stab at this. It's no secret that our relationship with China is not as close as it was in the past. I would like to point out, though, that we did brief the Chinese about this AUKUS announcement in the hopes of promoting transparency. We need to be in regular communication with our partners in Beijing and we intend to continue to do so at all levels.

**MODERATOR:** Do any of our other speakers want to speak to that question as well?

(No response.)

Okay. Just making sure that we've got everybody. I'd like to also remind our journalists that if you'd like to ask a question, you can put it in the chat or raise your hand to ask your question live.

Our next question comes from Paul Shinkman at *U.S. News & World Report*, and Paul asks: "I'd like to ask you about the news last week that China brokered a diplomatic breakthrough between Saudi Arabia and Iran. I've heard growing concerns that Beijing appears to be trying to increase its clout as a diplomatic power to garner support for its other international initiatives, perhaps its supposed peace plan for Ukraine or even its own land grabs. What do you believe China was trying to achieve, and how concerned are you about the effect of that particular deal it brokered? And also, is there any comment on the parties' refusal to use English in their negotiations?"

**MR LAMBERT:** Paul, this is Mark Lambert. I must confess I am not an expert on the Middle East, so my understanding of the arrangement is pretty shallow. To answer one of your questions, though, are we concerned about it – I wouldn't say we are concerned. We would like to know more about the arrangement. And again, if the Chinese would like to talk to us about this arrangement, I think that would be welcomed.

**MODERATOR:** Okay. And now our next question comes from Jennifer Hansler at CNN. Jennifer, you can open your line and ask your question.

I think, Jennifer, you just need to unmute yourself.

**QUESTION:** Hi, can you hear me now?

**MODERATOR:** Yes, we can.

**QUESTION:** Thank you. Thanks so much for doing this. I just want to follow up on the briefing of the Chinese on the AUKUS deal. Could you describe to us a little more at what level that briefing occurred and what the reaction was from the Chinese to this deal? Thank you.

**MR LAMBERT:** Jennifer, this is Mark again. I think the Chinese response has been public of their reaction to the AUKUS announcement. They were briefed both in Beijing and here in Washington, and I don't have the details at what level.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you very much. And our next question, then, comes from Alex Raufoglu from Turan News Agency. Alex, you can go ahead and ask your question.

**QUESTION:** Hi, you might be able to hear me now.

**MODERATOR:** Yes, we can.

**QUESTION:** Andrea, thank you so much for doing this. Russia today expressed its – basically, (inaudible), let's say, on the AUKUS project. Lavrov said – he slammed today the AUKUS, saying that it basically invites a serious bid for confrontation. We heard similar comments from China as well. I'm just wondering if you're – first of all, let me get your reaction to that, and also if you see this Russian reaction and also Chinese reaction as a potential excuse or pretext to consolidate in the region. Thanks so much.

**MR LAMBERT:** This is Mark Lambert again. I'll welcome my other colleagues to join in here. I think there's several things that were interesting in both the Chinese reaction and the Russian reaction, talking about concerns about an arms race. And as I think a German admiral pointed out recently, there has been concerns about growing naval activity. I think if you look at the PLA Navy over the course of the last recent years, they've grown at a pace of every four years adding the equivalent of the French navy.

So there has been a growth in naval activity in the region. You've seen the joint naval exercises that both the PRC and the Russians are doing around Korea and Japan as a further example of this.

What AUKUS is, is simply modernizing the alliance between the United States and Australia that has been in existence for 70 years. It is taking older technology and replacing it with new technology, and it's been trying to – and it's being done in response to the growing challenges in the region. You've seen growing ballistic missile activity from the DPRK. You've seen this uptick in naval activity, combined forces of Russia and China. And you've seen the growth of naval activity by the PRC.

**MODERATOR:** And can I turn the floor over to one of our other speakers? Does anybody else want to weigh in to answer that question?

(No response.)

Okay. And we don't currently have a question in the queue. We'll wait for our journalists to add them in, but I wonder if you could speak – if somebody could speak a little bit more about some of the additional capabilities that this agreement will bring. I know a lot of people talk about submarines, but what is – what – could you speak a little bit more about the additional enhanced cooperation or kind of the joint capabilities that will be developed as a result of this.

**MR DENMARK:** Hi, this is Abe Denmark. I can speak to that a bit if you like, Andrea.

**MODERATOR:** Yes, please.

**MR DENMARK:** So AUKUS, ever since it was announced, is divided into two groups – we call them pillar one and pillar two. Pillar one is the submarine piece that was announced by the President and two prime ministers yesterday. Pillar two has also been moving forward. We have announced work in six different capability areas that I'll list off in a moment, and it's work in advanced capabilities between the three AUKUS partners in the following six areas: in AI, in antisubmarine warfare, in cyber capabilities, in electronic warfare, in hypersonics, and in quantum technologies.

And so we are working together – we've established working groups in all of those pieces to try to develop advanced capabilities in all those capability areas. We are also working together broadly to bring together our innovation environments, our innovation communities, as well as improving information sharing between the three nations. And so taken as a whole, those capability areas plus the submarine piece of pillar one is what constitutes the AUKUS trilateral cooperation partnership at this point.

**MODERATOR:** Excellent. Okay. And I think – I don't see any additional questions, but I would like to just pose another question to the entire group. What – now that we've had this announcement yesterday, what are the next steps? How do you see it moving forward?

**MR DENMARK:** Well, I can take a stab at that if – I'm sure there's a lot of diplomatic moves that my colleagues will want to talk about as well.

So as was announced by the President and the two prime ministers yesterday on the pillar one side, on the submarine side, the United States is going to begin to have regular port visits of our submarines to Australia. We'll also begin to start co-crewing our submarines with Australian submariners. There are already Australian sailors in our submarine schools, in our nuclear power schools. And we will also begin to bring Australian workers into our shipyards, all of which is designed to start building the skills that will be necessary for Australia to be able to eventually operate, maintain their own sovereign conventionally armed nuclear-powered submarine.

We're also expecting to continue work to advance our cooperation in the advanced capability areas that I just mentioned and expect there to be a regular drumbeat of achievements in that area as well.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you very much. We have a hand raised from Paul Shinkman from *U.S. News and World Report*. Paul, you can unmute yourself and go ahead and ask your question.

**QUESTION:** Can you hear me okay?

**MODERATOR:** Yes, we can.

**QUESTION:** I'd like to ask if there's sort of any follow-up to the balloon fracas last month. Is that something that you still hear anything about from the Chinese side? Have they raised any sort of persistent or new concerns about the U.S. decision to shoot it down? Have you seen any changes in their behavior since either the U.S. shot it down or that program has become sort of more public? Thank you.

**MR LAMBERT:** Paul, this is Mark Lambert. I'm unaware of anything since that initial flurry of reaction.

**QUESTION:** Thank you.

**MODERATOR:** Okay. Thank you very much. And I am – we have one additional question from Jennifer Hansler from CNN. Jennifer asks: "Are there any updates on the U.S. assessment of China sending lethal aid to Russia?"

**MR LAMBERT:** Jennifer, this is Mark Lambert again. I don't have anything for you on that. I'm unaware if the State Department has anything that's come out here recently. But we can certainly check on that for you.

**MR JONES:** This is DAS Jones. We continue to see no information that China has provided direct military assistance to Russia, though it continues to provide political and diplomatic support. And we've been quite clear in our messaging to China that it should not cross that line into providing that direct military support. But so far, we've seen no evidence yet. Though we have indications that they are considering it, they have not taken that step.

**MODERATOR:** Okay. Thank you very much. I think that's actually all the questions that we have for today. Thank you to all the journalists for your questions, and thank you to our speakers for joining us. But before we close the call, I'd like to see if Deputy Assistant Secretary Lambert or any of our speakers have any final remarks for the group.

**MR LAMBERT:** Well, I have nothing more to add other than thank you very much for giving us this opportunity to field your questions. We are sincerely trying to be transparent in what is happening. And this will be a multiyear effort, and I think there'll be plenty of opportunities for us to clarify any misunderstandings or answer any questions that any journalist might have about this.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you very much. Any final remarks from any of our other speakers today?



(No response.)

Okay. Thank you, everyone, for joining. Shortly we'll send the audio recording of the briefing to all participating journalists and provide a transcript as soon as it's available. We'd also love to hear your feedback, and you can contact us at [TheBrusselsHub@state.gov](mailto:TheBrusselsHub@state.gov). Thank you, again, for your participation, and we hope you can join us for another press briefing soon. This ends today's briefing.

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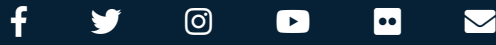
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