

AUKUS Partners Focus on Indo-Pacific Security in Shaping Joint Capabilities

April 10, 2024 | By Joseph Clark, DOD News

Maintaining peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific serves as the key factor driving the selection of advanced capabilities to pursue as part of the AUKUS security partnership between the U.S., U.K. and Australia, senior officials said yesterday.

Justin McFarlin, deputy assistant secretary of defense for international and industry engagement, detailed the top criteria for decision makers as the three countries begin to partner with industry in shaping the path forward for enhancing joint capabilities and interoperability under the partnership.

"It's really about maintaining peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific," McFarlin said in underscoring the overarching intent behind the security partnership during a panel discussion at Sea-Air-Space 2024, an exposition hosted by the Navy League at National Harbor, Maryland.



The partnership was agreed to in September 2021, kicking off a multiphased approach to fostering technology exchanges among the three countries and building Australia's nuclear-powered submarine force.

Under the plan's first pillar, Australia will purchase three Virginia-class, conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines in time to replace its current fleet of diesel electric subs in the 2030s.



The three countries will also develop a state-of-the-art platform designed to combine and leverage their shared submarine technology. The "SSN-AUKUS," as the future platform is known, is slated to be fielded by the U.K. in the 2030s and by Australia in the 2040s.

Spotlight: AUKUS: The Trilateral Security Partnership Between Australia, U.K. and U.S.

The second pillar of the agreement is focused on developing joint capabilities to further enhance interoperability among the participating nations with a focus on cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies and additional undersea capabilities.

McFarlin said that as the U.S., U.K. and Australia further define their technology requirements under the second pillar, they remain laser focused on selecting technology that is relevant to all three nations while maintaining a focus on the Indo-Pacific.

"Our focus is maintaining the peace and stability in that region," he said.

Additionally, McFarlin said the technology selected must add mutual value to all participating nations.

"As we look at new opportunities, we're very focused on what is [the] AUKUS difference that's going to cause this to be better trilaterally, rather than if it's just bilateral or one country doing it," he said.

Shimon Fhima, the director of strategic programs for the U.K. Ministry of Defense, also described his focus on selecting technology that will pay dividends across all three countries with a focus on maintaining regional security.

"In thinking about the capabilities that we invest in, it has to be something that will maintain the strategic balance of security in the Indo-Pacific," he said.

Fhima echoed McFarlin in describing his criteria for capabilities that add value to warfighters across the partnership.

"It's really important that we've got to be better together," he said. "Therefore, the sum of our parts must be far greater than us working it individually."

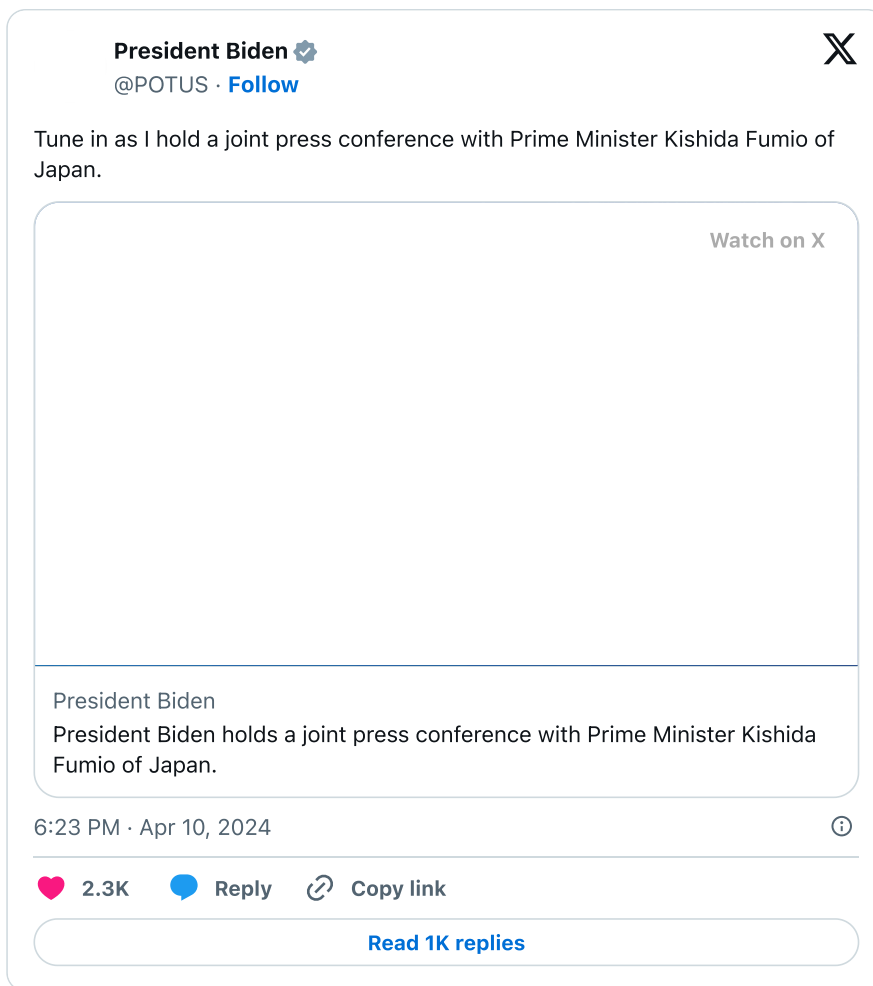


McFarlin and Fhima were joined during the panel by Michael Vaccaro, the U.S. State Department's deputy assistant secretary for defense trade controls, and Stephen Moore, the first assistant secretary for AUKUS advanced capabilities for the Australian Department of Defense.

The officials spoke one day after the three nations' defense ministers announced that they are considering cooperation with Japan in pursuing advanced capabilities specifically under the second pillar of AUKUS.

In a joint statement on Monday, the defense ministers cited Japan's "strengths and its close bilateral defense partnerships with all three countries" as factors in the decision.

In a joint press conference with Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio at the White House today, President Joe Biden said the potential inclusion of Japan in the pursuit of advanced capabilities under AUKUS adds to significant steps in strengthening defense cooperation.



In addition to exploring Japan's potential cooperation in the AUKUS partnership, Biden announced that the U.S., Japan and Australia will partner in creating a networked air defense architecture. The U.S. and U.K. will also be standing up trilateral military exercises with Japan.

"All told, that represents a new benchmark for our military cooperation across a range of capabilities," Biden said.

During Tuesday's panel, the officials noted that expanding AUKUS Pillar 2, to include additional partners has been a consideration from the start and that the three countries looked forward to further discussions with Japan on how they might cooperate on particular projects.

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