

Research Briefing

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AUKUS pillar 2: Advanced military capabilities

Summary

- 1 What is AUKUS?
- 2 A closer look at pillar 2 capabilities
- 3 US export control regulations
- 4 Parliamentary analysis and response
- 5 Expanding AUKUS to other countries?
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Summary

AUKUS is a defence and security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States [announced in September 2021](#). The [Foreign Secretary has described it](#) as an “unprecedented partnership that is central to delivering security and prosperity for the UK and our partners in the Indo-Pacific and the Euro-Atlantic.”

As part of the agreement, the three countries are collaborating on exploring and developing a range of advanced military capabilities, in areas such as artificial intelligence, hypersonic missiles and quantum technologies. Collectively these are known as AUKUS pillar 2 activities.

Another major part of the agreement is to help Australia acquire their first conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarine fleet. This is known as pillar 1 of AUKUS and is examined in Commons Library briefing [AUKUS submarine \(SSN-A\) programme](#).

AUKUS leaders and defence ministers have [laid out the broad parameters of the advanced capabilities](#) they are jointly working on, although many activities are classified. In 2023 the UK hosted an AUKUS [artificial intelligence and autonomy trial](#) to test swarm technology, and participated in a [trial of robotic vehicles](#) in Australia. The three countries have also begun work on developing a deep space advanced radar.

An early concern about the AUKUS partnership was the extent to which [existing US export control laws and regulations](#) might hamper effective technological and industrial cooperation between AUKUS partners. Since AUKUS was first announced, the US has taken several regulatory and legislative measures to ease the export and transfer of technology and information between them, including passing the National Defence Authorisation Act in December 2023.

There is broad political support for AUKUS pillar 2 activities. The Shadow Defence Secretary, John Healey, has [explicitly said](#) “there will be no change in Britain’s commitment to AUKUS” if Labour wins the next UK general election.

The Foreign Affairs and Defence Select Committees have both suggested expanding AUKUS pillar 2 activities to other countries, notably Canada, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand. While Government Ministers said [they are open to future partnerships](#), the three AUKUS countries “collectively agree that we are not yet in a position to consider expanding to additional partners.”

1 What is AUKUS?

AUKUS is a defence and security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States announced in September 2021.¹

The UK Government has described it as a “landmark” agreement which will “help sustain peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.”² The agreement reflects the UK’s tilt to the Indo-Pacific, first articulated in the Government’s 2021 Integrated Review of defence, foreign and security policy and reaffirmed in the 2023 refresh of the review.³

A major part of the agreement is to trilaterally collaborate to help Australia acquire their first conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarine fleet. This is known as pillar 1 of AUKUS and is examined in Commons Library briefing [AUKUS submarine \(SSN-A\) programme](#).

A key part of the AUKUS agreement is the pledge contained in the initial leaders’ statement to deepen defence ties and enhance joint capabilities and interoperability between all three countries.⁴ This includes developing a range of advanced military capabilities that are collectively known as AUKUS pillar 2 activities and are the subject of this briefing. The Minister for Defence Procurement has said that “good progress is being made” across all of the pillar 2 workstreams.⁵

1.1 Identifying pillar 2 activities

AUKUS leaders initially identified four areas for collaboration: “cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, and additional undersea capabilities”.⁶ In April 2022 a further four areas for collaboration

¹ Prime Minister’s Office, [Joint leaders statement on AUKUS](#), 21 September 2021; Commons Library paper [the AUKUS agreement](#) examined the initial announcement and regional reaction in October 2021.

² Prime Minister’s Office, [Joint leaders statement on AUKUS](#), 21 September 2021

³ Cabinet Office, [Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy](#), 16 March 2021; [Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a more contested and volatile world](#), 13 March 2023

⁴ PMO, [Joint Leaders statement on AUKUS](#), 21 September 2021

⁵ [PQ188182 \[AUKUS\]](#), 7 June 2023

⁶ PMO, [Joint Leaders statement on AUKUS](#), 21 September 2021

were announced: hypersonic and counter-hypersonic capabilities, electronic warfare capabilities, innovation and information sharing.⁷

In an update in December 2023, Defence Ministers announced plans to develop a deep space advanced radar capability, to identify emerging threats in space, and more opportunities for industry to engage with AUKUS programmes.⁸ It is unclear if this is a new workstream. Grant Shapps, the Defence Secretary, said afterwards that the three countries are “significantly deepening cooperation on a range of security and defence capabilities.”⁹

Information on workstream progress

Information about each workstream is relatively limited. AUKUS Defence Ministers have said that “many AUKUS-related advanced capability activities remain classified.”¹⁰ As such, information on progress made under each workstream tends to be confined to joint statements:

- April 2021: [Joint Leaders Statement on AUKUS](#) announcement the partnership and the initial four areas for pillar 2
- April 2022: A [factsheet on implementation of the AUKUS partnership](#) following a meeting between the three leaders. This announced four additional areas under pillar 2.
- December 2023: an [AUKUS Defence Ministers meeting joint statement](#) provided an update on progress on the eight workstreams.

Additional information on individual workstreams has also been released in press releases and statements. The sections below outline each capability and information available so far.

Further reading

The Congressional Research Service has examined developments under each workstream from an American perspective in [AUKUS Pillar 2: Background and issues for Congress](#) (PDF).

A deeper look into some of these technologies, including cyber, artificial intelligence and autonomous systems, quantum technology and hypersonic weapons, in the context of their development for the UK armed forces, can be found in Commons Library briefing [emerging and disruptive defence technologies](#).

⁷ PMO, [Fact sheet: implementation of the Australia-UK-US partnership \(AUKUS\)](#), 5 April 2022; [HL2459 \[AUKUS\]](#), 24 October 2022

⁸ Australian Government, [AUKUS Defence Ministers Meeting Joint Statement](#), 2 December 2023

⁹ HCWS89 [[Update on the AUKUS Defence Partnership](#)], 4 December 2023

¹⁰ US Department of Defense, [AUKUS Defence Ministers meeting joint statement](#), 1 December 2023

2

A closer look at pillar 2 capabilities

The sections below examine each of the different workstreams. Each workstream is led by a trilateral working group. A joint steering group oversees the working groups, with a senior officials group providing overall direction.¹¹ The Minister responsible for AUKUS Pillar 2 activities in the UK is the Minister for Defence Procurement.¹²

2.1

Cyber capabilities

This workstream focuses on strengthening cyber capabilities, including protecting critical communications and operations systems.¹³ AUKUS leaders say this involves working on cyber security with critical suppliers to the naval supply chain, and working to strengthen cyber capabilities, including protecting critical communication and operations' systems.¹⁴

2.2

Artificial intelligence and autonomy

The Government says this workstream will provide “critical enablers for future force capabilities”.¹⁵ Early work is focused on “accelerating adoption, and improving the resilience of, autonomous and AI-enabled systems in contested environments.”¹⁶

Tests and trials

The UK hosted the first AUKUS AI and autonomy trial in April 2023.¹⁷ The trial tested a joint deployment of Australian, UK and US AI-enabled assets “in a collaborative swarm to detect and track military targets in a representative environment in real time.”¹⁸ The trial was organised by the Defence Science

¹¹ Altogether there are 17 trilateral working groups under AUKUS. As well as the eight for each of the advanced capabilities mentioned, there are 9 working groups for different aspects of pillar 1, the submarine project. PMO, [Fact sheet: implementation of the Australia-UK-US partnership \(AUKUS\)](#), 5 April 2022; [HL2459 \[AUKUS\]](#), 24 October 2022

¹² [HL10089 \[AUKUS\]](#), 26 September 2023

¹³ PMO, [Fact sheet: implementation of the Australia-UK-US partnership \(AUKUS\)](#), 5 April 2022

¹⁴ US Department of Defense, [AUKUS Defence Ministers Meeting Joint Statement](#), 1 December 2023

¹⁵ PMO, [Fact sheet: implementation of the Australia-UK-US partnership \(AUKUS\)](#), 5 April 2022

¹⁶ As above.

¹⁷ MOD, [World first as UK hosts inaugural AUKUS AI and autonomy trial](#), 26 May 2023

¹⁸ As above.

and Technology Laboratory (Dstl). The MOD said that by sharing AI and the underpinning data, the UK, US and Australian militaries can “access the best AI, reduce duplication of effort, and ensure interoperability.”¹⁹ Referencing that trial, James Cartlidge, the Minister for Defence Procurement, said the three partners are looking to “rapidly drive these technologies into responsible military use.”²⁰

A trial of robotic vehicles and sensors took place in late 2023 in Australia. The trial, known as TORVICE, was designed to test autonomous vehicle behaviour when under attack and involved all three countries.²¹

In the December 2023 update, the three countries said they are using artificial intelligence algorithms on “multiple systems” and gave an example of processing data from each nation’s sonobuoys on P-8A maritime patrol aircraft. They are also using artificial intelligence algorithms and machine learning to “enhance force protection, precision targeting, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance”, known as Resilient and Autonomous Artificial Intelligence Technologies (RAAIT).²²

Further reading

A dedicated Lords Select Committee, [AI in weapons systems](#), published a report on the use of AI in weapons systems in December 2023. The Committee noted: “the use of AI-enabled autonomous weapon systems (AWS) could revolutionise defence technology and is one of the most controversial uses of AI today.”²³ The Committee did not explicitly discuss the AUKUS agreement in its report.

2.3

Quantum technologies

The AUKUS Quantum Arrangement (AQuA) will “accelerate investments to deliver generation-after-next quantum capabilities.”²⁴ The initial focus will be on quantum technologies for positioning, navigation, and timing.

James Andrew Lewis, director of the strategic technologies program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, says quantum computing has the potential to solve problems that may be intractable for traditional

¹⁹ As above.

²⁰ PQ 200347 [\[AUKUS\]](#), 19 October 2023

²¹ US Department of Defense, [AUKUS defence scientists test robotic vehicles](#), 5 February 2024

²² US Department of Defense, [AUKUS Defence Ministers Meeting Joint Statement](#), 1 December 2023

²³ AI in weapons systems committee, [Proceed with caution: Artificial Intelligence in weapons systems, HL Paper 16 2023-24](#), 1 December 2023

²⁴ PMO, [Fact sheet: implementation of the Australia-UK-US partnership \(AUKUS\)](#), 5 April 2022

computers. He says that all three AUKUS countries have strong quantum sectors.²⁵

The UK Government has identified quantum technologies as one of its five “priority technologies of tomorrow”.²⁶ A national quantum strategy published in March 2023 set out a ten-year commitment to quantum technologies in the UK. This is being led by the new Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. The strategy briefly mentions the benefits of collaborative research and development opportunities “born out of defence pacts such as AUKUS”.²⁷ The Ministry of Defence has said it intends to be “amongst the first militaries to see, and harness, [quantum computing’s] potential in battlespace.”²⁸ The Ministry of Defence bought a quantum computer in 2022 to “develop future data processing capabilities.”²⁹

The UK has also established a collaborative programme between industry, academia and government to “secure UK advantage and opportunities in the globally competitive new quantum era”. This is known as the [UK National Quantum Technologies Programme](#).³⁰

At their December 2023 meeting, AUKUS Defence Ministers said they are “accelerating the development of quantum technologies for positioning, navigation, and timing in military capabilities.” These will “create resilience for our trilateral forces in Global Positioning System-degraded environments and enhance stealth in the undersea domain” and will also support the submarine programme.³¹

Further reading

A 2017 briefing by POST, the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, [explains what quantum technologies are](#).

2.4

Undersea capabilities

The AUKUS Undersea Robotics Autonomous Systems (AURAS) project focuses on autonomous underwater vehicles. The three countries expect these will be a “significant force multiplier for our maritime forces.”³²

²⁵ National Defense, [Special report: AUKUS Countries Team Up to Develop Key Quantum Capabilities](#), 17 February 2023

²⁶ Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, [National Quantum Strategy](#), 15 March 2023

²⁷ As above

²⁸ As above.

²⁹ MOD, [Defence’s response to a more contested and volatile world](#), CP 901, July 2023

³⁰ [National Quantum Technologies Programme](#), accessed 5 July 2023

³¹ US Department of Defense, [AUKUS Defence Ministers Meeting Joint Statement](#), 1 December 2023

³² PMO, [Fact sheet: implementation of the Australia-UK-US partnership \(AUKUS\)](#), 5 April 2022

The Royal Navy is separately [working with France to develop a maritime mine counter measures \(MMCM\) capability](#) which involves unmanned systems operating remotely.

The Royal Navy has also bought a new Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessel, RFA Proteus, to help protect undersea cables and infrastructure. For more on this see Commons Library insight [Seabed warfare: Protecting the UK's undersea infrastructure](#).

At their December 2023 meeting, AUKUS Defence Ministers shared plans to undertake a series of exercises to develop autonomous systems at sea:

The AUKUS partners will undertake a series of integrated trilateral experiments and exercises aimed at enhancing capability development, improving interoperability, and increasing the sophistication and scale of autonomous systems in the maritime domain.³³

Ministers said that current classes of submarines will be able to launch and recover undersea vehicles from torpedo tubes. These will be able to provide strike, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities.³⁴

James Cartlidge, the Minister for Defence Procurement, said AUKUS partners will “execute a series of integrated trilateral maritime experiments and exercises” to test their ability to jointly “operate uncrewed maritime systems, share and process maritime data trilaterally, and provide real-time maritime domain awareness to support decision-making.”³⁵

2.5

Hypersonic and counter-hypersonic capabilities

This workstream will focus on accelerating development of advanced hypersonic and counter-hypersonic capabilities.³⁶

Hypersonic missiles are missiles that travel within the Earth's atmosphere for sustained periods at speeds greater than five times the speed of sound. They fly at lower altitudes than ballistic missiles, which means they may be harder to track at long distances and may be more difficult to intercept with existing missile defence systems.³⁷

³³ US Department of Defense, [AUKUS Defence Ministers Meeting Joint Statement](#), 1 December 2023

³⁴ US Department of Defense, [AUKUS Defence Ministers Meeting Joint Statement](#), 1 December 2023

³⁵ PQ9170 [[Australian: Navy](#)], 16 January 2024

³⁶ Prime Minister's Office, [Fact sheet: implementation of the Australia-UK-US partnership \(AUKUS\)](#), 5 April 2022

³⁶ Prime Minister's Office, [Fact sheet: implementation of the Australia-UK-US partnership \(AUKUS\)](#), 5 April 2022

³⁷ POSTnote, [Hypersonic missiles](#), PN 0696, 27 June 2023

China and Russia have reportedly deployed hypersonic missiles that could deliver conventional or nuclear weapons. The US is testing multiple hypersonic technologies.³⁸

Further reading

A [POSTnote looks at hypersonic missile technologies](#), efforts to develop them, potential applications, and the possible challenges they may present for missile defence and global stability.³⁹

2.6

Electronic warfare capabilities

The Government says that in an increasingly contested electromagnetic spectrum, this workstream will share “understanding of tools, techniques, and technology to enable our forces to operate in contested and degraded environments.”⁴⁰

One area of interoperability is the [E-7 Wedgetail aircraft](#). Wedgetail is an airborne early warning and control system, commonly known as AWACs (or AEW&C). Easily recognisable by the large radar mounted on top, they are designed to track multiple targets at sea or in the air over a considerable area for long periods of time.

The RAF is expecting the first of three Wedgetail aircraft to be delivered in 2024, with initial operating capability expected three to six months after delivery.⁴¹ Wedgetail replaces the RAF’s previous early warning radar aircraft, Sentry, which retired in 2021.⁴² The MOD initially intended to buy five aircraft, but this was later reduced to three in the 2021 Defence Command Paper.⁴³ Commons Library Insight [RAF surveillance aircraft: The Wedgetail programme](#) (October 2020) discusses the replacement of the Sentry aircraft with Wedgetail.

Wedgetail is already in service with the [Royal Australian Air Force](#), and the US Air Force have selected the aircraft to replace its AWACs.⁴⁴

³⁸ National Defense, [Special report: AUKUS partners aim to catch China in Hypersonics race](#), 17 February 2023

³⁹ POSTnote, [Hypersonic missiles](#), PN 0696, 27 June 2023

⁴⁰ Prime Minister’s Office, [Fact sheet: implementation of the Australia-UK-US partnership \(AUKUS\)](#), 5 April 2022

⁴¹ [PQ 156935 \[AWACS: Procurement\]](#), 7 March 2023

⁴² RAF, [His Royal Highness the Earl of Wessex marks E-3D Sentry retirement after 30 years](#), 30 September 2021

⁴³ Ministry of Defence, [Defence in a competitive age](#), CP 411, 22 March 2021

⁴⁴ [USAF Selects Boeing’s E-7A Wedgetail as Successor to AWACS](#), Air and Space Forces magazine, 28 February 2023

2.7 Innovation

This element will look at ways to integrate commercial technologies faster and to learn from each other's defence innovation enterprises.⁴⁵

An Innovation Prize Challenge will be launched in early 2024 focusing on electronic warfare as part of a series of innovation challenges set for industry.⁴⁶

2.8 Information sharing

The three countries intend to expand and accelerate sharing of sensitive information.⁴⁷

2.9 Deep Space Advanced Radar Capability (DARC) programme

The December 2023 joint statement announced work on developing a deep space advanced radar capability, which will “provide 24-hour continuous, all-weather global coverage to detect, track, and identify objects in deep space and increase space domain awareness.” It is being developed by Northrop Grumman Corporation, which describes it as a “global network of three advanced ground-based sensors.”⁴⁸

It is unclear if this is a new workstream under pillar 2. The statement said AUKUS “played a critical role” in advancing collaboration on the deep space radar capability programme.⁴⁹

The first radar site in Western Australia will be operational in 2026, with two other radar sites in the US and UK “in service by the end of the decade.” The Defence Secretary has identified Cawdor Barracks in South-West Wales as the preferred host site in the UK, subject to planning permission.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Prime Minister's Office, [Fact sheet: implementation of the Australia-UK-US partnership \(AUKUS\)](#), 5 April 2022

⁴⁶ US Department of Defense, [AUKUS Defence Ministers Meeting Joint Statement](#), 1 December 2023

⁴⁷ Prime Minister's Office, [Fact sheet: implementation of the Australia-UK-US partnership \(AUKUS\)](#), 5 April 2022

⁴⁸ Northrop Grumman, [Global deep-space advanced radar capability extends AUKUS partnership](#), 11 January 2024

⁴⁹ US Department of Defense, [AUKUS Defence Ministers Meeting Joint Statement](#), 1 December 2023

⁵⁰ HCWS89 [[Update on the AUKUS Defence Partnership](#)], 4 December 2023

2.10 Industry engagement

Following the December 2023 meeting, the Defence Secretary also said there will be “significant opportunities for UK industry to engage”.⁵¹ The [December 2023 joint statement](#) mentioned an AUKUS advanced capabilities industry forum, to bring together government and industry representatives. There are also plans to increase private sector engagement with the creation of an AUKUS Defence Investors Network.⁵²

⁵¹ HCWS89 [[Update on the AUKUS Defence Partnership](#)], 4 December 2023

⁵² US Department of Defense, [AUKUS Defence Ministers Meeting Joint Statement](#), 1 December 2023

3

US export control regulations

An early concern about the AUKUS partnership was the extent to which existing US export control laws and regulations might hamper effective technological and industrial cooperation between AUKUS partners.⁵³

“ITAR is a barrier that is not helpful.”

Ben Wallace,
Defence Secretary,
November 2022

Of specific concern is the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR), a US regulatory regime which restricts the transfer of controlled defence articles and services. ITAR applies to direct commercial sales, which the Congressional Research Service (CRS) explains is a “US programme for registered US firms to sell defence articles directly to eligible foreign governments and international organisations.”⁵⁴ ITAR do not apply to foreign military sales, through which the US Government sells defence equipment directly to another Government.⁵⁵

The ITAR regime establishes rigorous restrictions on sensitive defence exports. The UK (and Australia) has some ITAR waivers, dating from the 2013 UK/USA Treaty concerning defence trade cooperation.⁵⁶ An [open general export licence](#) (OGEL) allows, subject to certain conditions, the export or transfer of military goods or technology under the US-UK Defence Trade Co-operation Treaty from the UK to the US.

However, the UK has long sought further exemptions. Lord Cameron, as Foreign Secretary, has described ITAR as a “troubling issue that British Governments have had to deal with for decades”.⁵⁷ Ben Wallace, then Defence Secretary, told the Defence Committee in November 2022 he spent “about half a billion a year complying with all the ITAR requirements”.⁵⁸

In July 2022 the US issued two open general licences to the UK, Canada and Australia allowing for retransfers and reexports between the four countries.⁵⁹ Mr Wallace described these as a “really significant change”, explaining that it means “among the four of us, we can buy in from the United States and export out to one of the other countries without the

⁵³ Congressional Research Service (CRS), [AUKUS Pillar 2: Background and issues for Congress](#) (PDF), R47599.; National Defense, [Will US export regulations derail AUKUS?](#), 10 March 2023

⁵⁴ CRS, [US Arms Transfer Restrictions and AUKUS Cooperation](#), 4 January 2024

⁵⁵ CRS, [US Arms Transfer Restrictions and AUKUS Cooperation](#), 4 January 2024

⁵⁶ The treaty was signed in 2007 and presented to Parliament in July 2013.

⁵⁷ [HL Deb 13 February 2024 c143](#)

⁵⁸ Defence Committee, [Oral evidence: The US, UK and NATO](#), (PDF) HC 184 2022-23, 2 November 2022, q243

⁵⁹ Federal Register, [International Traffic in Arms Regulations: Reissuance and Update of Open General Licenses 1 and 2](#), 1 June 2023. Analysis of what the licence means can be found on the international compliance blog of legal firm Steptoe: [New ITAR rules facilitate defense trade with the UK, Canada and Australia](#), 22 July 2022

controls that used to be around with ITAR.”⁶⁰ However, he also said more work needed to be done in Congress, describing ITAR as a “barrier that is not helpful”.⁶¹

One of the pledges contained in the Atlantic Declaration, agreed by the UK and the US in June 2023, is to ensure “flexible and coordinated export controls.”⁶²

In July 2023 the State Department announced what it described as an “interim measure” to speed up the process of AUKUS-related defence trade. The [AUKUS Trade Authorization Mechanism](#) would establish licence exemptions for certain exports to approved entities within AUKUS countries.⁶³

3.1 National Defense Authorisation Act 2024

In December 2023, the US Congress passed the [National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024 \(NDAA\)](#) (PDF) after several months of political disagreement over the broader contents of the bill.⁶⁴

The legislation establishes a national exemption for the UK and Australia from US defence export licensing criteria (Sections 1341- 1345) and adds both countries to the US Defense Production Act (Section 1080). The Australian Government said inclusion in the Act will “open new opportunities for Australian based industry to directly compete for business with the US Government.”⁶⁵

James Cartlidge, the Minister for Defence Procurement, said the Act’s reforms to ITAR and US export controls will enable “increased license-free trade and information-sharing between AUKUS nations.”⁶⁶

Australian defence economist George Henneke explains what the NDAA will do:

[The NDAA] authorises expedited processing of approvals for foreign military and direct commercial sales to Australia and the UK (while remaining vague on associated resourcing). An anticipatory release policy would set up pre-

⁶⁰ Defence Committee, [Oral evidence: The US, UK and NATO](#), (PDF) HC 184 2022-23, 2 November 2022, q243

⁶¹ Defence Committee, [Oral evidence: The US, UK and NATO](#), (PDF) HC 184 2022-23, 2 November 2022, q243

⁶² PMO, [The Atlantic Declaration](#), 8 June 2023

⁶³ Congressional Research Service, [US Arms Transfer Restrictions and AUKUS Cooperation](#), 4 January 2024

⁶⁴ In May 2023, the Pentagon presented [AUKUS-related legislative proposals](#) (PDF) to be included in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024 (NDAA).

⁶⁵ Australian Government, [Passage of priority AUKUS submarine and export control exemption legislation by the United States Congress](#), 15 December 2023

⁶⁶ PQ9332 [[AUKUS](#)], 17 January 2024

approval mechanisms for foreign military and direct commercial sales related to AUKUS Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 technologies.⁶⁷

However, Henneke warns “significant obstacles remain” in terms of implementation.⁶⁸ In February 2024 Lord Cameron, the Foreign Secretary, alluded to such concerns when he said “we are working with the State Department on the technical details to make sure that [licence-free trade] really happens.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ George Henneke, [US Congress fires the AUKUS starting gun](#), Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 15 December 2023

⁶⁸ George Henneke, [US Congress fires the AUKUS starting gun](#), Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 15 December 2023

⁶⁹ [HL Deb 13 February 2024 c143](#)

4

Parliamentary analysis and response

There is broad political support for AUKUS pillar 2 activities.

The Shadow Defence Secretary, John Healey, has explicitly said “there will be no change in Britain’s commitment to AUKUS” if Labour wins the next UK general election.⁷⁰ Mr Healey said that for Labour “AUKUS deepens our commitment to one of the UK’s closest allies and supports our ‘build in Britain’ mission” and the partnership “transcends party politics”. To help implement AUKUS, he said Ministers should create an “express route” for critical cross-government decisions over issues such as regulation, funding, and tech sharing.

In a report on the Indo-Pacific, the Foreign Affairs Committee welcomed the prominence given to AUKUS by the Government. The committee suggested the Government consider inviting Japan and South Korea to join pillar 2 activities.⁷¹ The UK is already collaborating with Japan on developing a new combat aircraft system and the two countries [signed a defence treaty](#) in early 2023. In 2022 the UK signed a bilateral framework for closer cooperation with South Korea which called for “closer interoperability between our respective Armed Forces and capabilities across all domains.”⁷²

The Defence Committee similarly welcomed AUKUS in its report on defence and the Indo-pacific, published in October 2023.⁷³ The committee said pillar 2 offers “an immediate avenue for developing the UK’s defence capabilities, and to access and share critical intelligence and technology.” The committee also suggested expanding pillar 2 workstreams to include supply chains for munitions and critical minerals. The committee heard that New Zealand, Japan and South Korea would be “ideal candidates” to cooperate on pillar 2 activities. The committee suggested the Government should consider “opportunities to involve other likeminded nations and allies (...) but only if this can be achieved without compromising the strong relationships developed between the three AUKUS partners.”⁷⁴

Members of the House of Lords [debated the AUKUS programme](#) on 29 February 2024.

⁷⁰ John Healey, Britain must feel the benefits of AUKUS pact, The Times, 2 February 2023

⁷¹ Foreign Affairs Committee, [Tilting horizons: the Integrated Review and the Indo-Pacific](#), HC 172 2022-23, 30 August 2023

⁷² FCDO, [UK-Republic of Korea bilateral framework for closer cooperation](#), 30 June 2022

⁷³ Defence Committee, [UK Defence and the Indo-Pacific](#), HC 183 2022-23, para 59

⁷⁴ Defence Committee, [UK Defence and the Indo-Pacific](#), HC 183 2022-23, para 59

5 Expanding AUKUS to other countries?

The Joint Statement issued by the UK, US and Australia on the second anniversary of the agreement notably said “we will seek opportunities to engage allies and close partners” as work progresses on pillar 2 activities.⁷⁵

As outlined in the previous section, the Defence and Foreign Affairs Select Committees both endorsed the potential inclusion of additional countries for pillar 2 activities. The Government said in response: “though we are making good progress on Pillar II, we collectively agree that we are not yet in a position to consider expanding to additional partners.”⁷⁶

Senior ministers have continued to suggest they are open to expanding AUKUS pillar 2 to other countries. Commenting in February 2024, Grant Shapps, the Defence Secretary, suggested pillar 2 work could be extended to others, including Canada and New Zealand.⁷⁷ Lord Cameron, the Foreign Secretary, has also suggested Japan as a potential future partner.⁷⁸

Canada and New Zealand are often mentioned because of their involvement in the Five Eyes security network with the UK, US and Australia.

In July 2023, during a visit to New Zealand, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the door was open for engagement with New Zealand and other partners.⁷⁹

Academics Stephanie Carvin and Thomas Juneau argue Canada risks being left out of important technological developments if it does not join at least some of the pillar 2 working groups, although they also say that Canada needs to be able to contribute to these groups and not just benefit.⁸⁰

Eunjung Lim, Associate Professor at the Division of International Studies, Kongju National University, says the Foreign Affairs Committee’s suggestion to include South Korea and Japan should be seriously considered by both

⁷⁵ Prime Minister’s Office, [Joint leader statement to mark the second anniversary of AUKUS](#), 15 September 2023

⁷⁶ Defence Committee, [UK Defence and the Indo-Pacific: Government response](#) [PDF], HC 465 2023-24, 11 January 2024

⁷⁷ [HC Deb 19 February 2024 c451](#)

⁷⁸ [HL Deb 13 February 2024 c114](#)

⁷⁹ [Blinken says door open for New Zealand to engage on AUKUS](#), Reuters, 27 July 2023

⁸⁰ Stephanie Carvin and Thomas Juneau, Why AUKUS and not CAUKUS? It’s a Potluck, not a Party. *International Journal*, 78(3), 359-374.

countries. Lim suggests it “makes sense to collaborate with countries that can trust each other and have complementary strengths and synergies.”⁸¹

Australia should also support Japan and South Korea’s inclusion to help maintain the “balance of power” between China and the US-led alliance, argues Corey Lee Bell, a researcher at the Australia-China Relations Institute at the University of Technology.⁸² He says Japan and South Korea would bring technical knowhow to the table, particularly in quantum computing and AI.

⁸¹ Lim Eunjung, [AUKUS strand B: opportunity for South Korea and Japan?](#), Asia Pacific Leadership Network, 20 September 2023

⁸² Corey Lee Bell, [Australia should support Japan and South Korea’s accession into AUKUS](#), The Diplomat, 19 October 2023

6 AUKUS in national defence strategies

6.1 United Kingdom

Integrated Review and Indo-Pacific tilt

In March 2021 the [Government set out its plan to “tilt” its foreign, defence and security policy towards the Indo-Pacific](#). The Government explained in its integrated review of security, defence, development and foreign policy that the region is “critical to our economy, our security and our global ambition to support open societies” and in the future will be “the crucible for many of the most pressing global challenges.” The Government said it intends to become the “European partner with the broadest and most integrated presence in the Indo-Pacific.”⁸³

In March 2023 the Government refreshed the integrated review to reflect Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and other developments. It reaffirmed the commitment to the Indo-Pacific, warning that tensions in the region are increasing and “conflict there could have global consequences greater than the conflict in Ukraine.” The Government said it plans to develop a new network of Atlantic-Pacific partnerships, of which AUKUS is one.⁸⁴ Further analysis is available in Commons Library paper [The Integrated Review Refresh 2023: What has changed since 2021?](#) CBP 9750.

2023 Defence Command Paper

In July 2023 the [Ministry of Defence published its refreshed defence command paper](#), reflecting the defence aspects of the integrated review update. The MOD articulates the need to shift from a platform-centric to technology-centric mindset. Harnessing new and emerging technologies is central to this shift, and the MOD identifies AUKUS pillar 2 projects as capabilities that will “help us to maintain our technological and military edge in an increasingly contested and unstable strategic environment.”⁸⁵

⁸³ Cabinet Office, [Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of security, defence, development and foreign policy](#), CP 403, 16 March 2021

⁸⁴ Cabinet Office, [Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a more contested and volatile world](#), CP 811, 13 March 2023

⁸⁵ MOD, [Defence’s response to a more contested and volatile world](#), CP 901, July 2023

Resilience is another theme of the paper, and AUKUS is explicitly identified as an example of how integrating supply chains will provide greater resilience to the UK defence sector.⁸⁶

Commons Library paper [Integrated Review 2021: emerging defence technologies](#) (CBP 9184) discusses some of the work underway to develop these new technologies.

Science and technology strategies

The [Science and Technology Framework](#), in which the Government sets out its ambition to create Britain as a “science and technology superpower” does not explicitly mention AUKUS.⁸⁷ It does, however, set out a vision of the UK enjoying “international partnerships which support critical technologies and the growth of our sectors.”⁸⁸

Strategies related to pillar 2 do explicitly mention AUKUS; the [Defence Artificial Intelligence Strategy](#), the [National Quantum Strategy](#) and the [UK’s International Technology Strategy](#) all mention the agreement as a means to deepen international research and development collaboration.

6.2

Australia

Australia [published a Defence Strategic Review and National Defence Statement](#) in April 2023 and plans on publishing a National Defence Strategy in 2024. It explicitly addresses Pillar 2 advanced capabilities, describing the success of AUKUS as “essential for Australia in acquiring asymmetric capability.”⁸⁹ The review outlines the advantages it will bring to the Australian defence and security industry:

AUKUS Pillar II Advanced Capabilities will contribute to strengthening the AUKUS partners’ industrial bases, eliminating barriers to information sharing, and technological cooperation. It will develop and deliver advanced capabilities in areas such as artificial intelligence, hypersonics and maritime domain awareness.

The ambition of the AUKUS partners is to support technological transfers as well as break down barriers for intellectual property transfer, domestic manufacturing, and domestic maintenance of key weapons, technology and capabilities. This requires dedicated senior-level focus.

⁸⁶ Ministry of Defence, [Defence’s response to a more contested and volatile world](#), CP 901, July 2023

⁸⁷ Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, [UK science and technology framework](#), 6 March 2023

⁸⁸ Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, [UK science and technology framework](#), 6 March 2023

⁸⁹ Australian Government, [National Defence: Defence Strategic Review 2023](#), 24 April 2023

6.3 United States

The US 2022 National Defense Strategy mentions AUKUS only once, in relation to building partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region.⁹⁰ A senior Defense Department official told members of Congress that the work AUKUS will do “will advance our own capabilities, as well as our partners’, and will enable us to address the challenges that we will collectively face.”⁹¹

Further analysis from a US perspective can be found in Congressional Research Service paper [AUKUS Pillar 2: Background and issues for Congress](#) (PDF) and [US Arms Transfer Restrictions and AUKUS Cooperation](#). The US Department of Defense has a [dedicated webpage](#) on AUKUS with statements, factsheets and press releases.

Separate to AUKUS, the US and Australia have a long-standing ministerial consultations framework known as AUSMIN through which they discuss common issues, including defence. For example, at the July 2023 meeting the US agreed to help Australia manufacture guided missiles and rockets for both countries within two years.⁹² The US and Royal Australian Air Force have also been collaborating on developing and testing hypersonic cruise missile prototypes under the [Southern Cross Integrated Flight Research Experiment](#) (SCIFiRE).

⁹⁰ US Department of Defense, [National Defense Strategy](#), 27 October 2022

⁹¹ US Department of Defense, [US partnership with UK, Australia enhances security](#), 25 May 2023

⁹² ABC News, [US pledges to help Australia manufacture guided missiles by 2025](#), 29 July 2023; US Department of Defense, [Joint Statement on Australia-U.S. Ministerial Consultations \(AUSMIN\) 2023](#), 29 July 2023

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