

US Announces Intention to Expand the AUKUS Alliance

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The United States is open to allowing more countries to participate in the technology arm of the monumental Australia-UK-US alliance, known as the AUKUS, but they would have to show they can contribute in meaningful ways, a US official said on June 26.

"We are in conversation with a variety of countries who are interested. And frankly, it goes far beyond just those countries, and we're grateful for that. The fact that countries are interested in it is a positive, and we will explore those appropriately," Kurt Campbell, the deputy assistant to the president and coordinator for the Indo-Pacific, said during the Center for Strategic and International Studies event.

"I think all three countries have made clear that under the appropriate circumstances we would be prepared to work collaboratively with other partners who bring capacity to the challenge," he added.

According to the official, the perspectives of potential partners in terms of interacting with AUKUS will depend on the benefits they can bring to the association in a specific field. The representative of the US National Security Council did not name the countries with which cooperation negotiations are being carried out but said that there are many interested States.

The Australian broadcaster ABC [believes](#) that Canada and New Zealand – which with the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, form the Five Eyes intelligence sharing network – have previously expressed interest in joining the AUKUS at a new stage of partnership development.

For its part, the US Congressional Research Service released a report on June 20 saying that, in addition to Canada and New Zealand, Congress may consider giving the Department of

Defense and the Department of State a mandate to expand the AUKUS to include Japan, as recommended by several analysts.

The US, for its part, hopes to create, based on AUKUS, an analogue of the NATO bloc to deter China in the Asia-Pacific region. In China, the creation of AUKUS was repeatedly criticised. Beijing noted that transferring nuclear submarine technology to Canberra would only fuel the arms race and undermine regional stability.

But Washington defiantly rejected that position. In March 2023, US President Joe Biden said he did not care if China saw aggression in the AUKUS alliance.

At the same time Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov warned that AUKUS was being created as an instrument of NATO influence in the Asia-Pacific region. In addition, Lavrov pointed out that the US is “energy pushing” Japan, New Zealand and Australia towards activities that involve the expansion of NATO military infrastructure in Asia-Pacific with the formation of appropriate logistical chains.

It must be remembered that the subsequent expansion of AUKUS, through the involvement of external partners, was built into the bloc’s format from the beginning. As Ukraine does in Europe, several countries will be offered cooperation and partnership options with AUKUS but will not grant equal rights.

In September 2021, Canberra, London, and Washington formed the AUKUS pact to deliver nuclear-powered submarines to Australia by 2040. The alliance is focused on sharing military capability, including cyberintelligence, artificial intelligence and quantum technologies, but also hypersonic weapons and the nuclear-powered submarines in question. Although AUKUS claims not to focus on any specific adversary, it is clear, by its structure and comments from its member nations, that it is intended to deter China in the Indo-Pacific region and, by extension, Russia.

The deal caused worldwide controversy because Australia is a nuclear-free state, not even having a national nuclear energy program, meaning all technology must be imported and adapted from the US. Virginia-class submarines, which Australia will acquire, use military uranium as fuel, which raises fears of nuclear proliferation.

According to a Congressional Research Service [report](#), the AUKUS agreement comprises two pillars: to provide Australia with nuclear-powered attack submarines and cooperation in key technologies such as hypersonics, underwater drones, and artificial intelligence. The Center for Strategic and International Studies Australia chair Charles Edel said New Zealand, South Korea, and France had expressed interest in the second pillar.

The latest discussion of AUKUS expansion comes after US Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s recently visited China, which was considered a success by American government officials in the context of current tensions. However, on June 20, US President Joe Biden remarked at a fundraiser in California about the spy balloon controversy in February and described Chinese President Xi Jinping as a “dictator.”

China’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning hit back, saying,

“[President Biden’s remarks] go totally against facts, seriously violate diplomatic protocol, and severely infringe on China’s political dignity ... It is a blatant political provocation.”

Rather than try and calm tensions, Blinken backed Biden by saying:

“The President always speaks candidly, he speaks directly. He speaks clearly, and he speaks for all of us.”

This demonstrates that Washington has no real actual intentions of de-escalating with China, despite some diplomatic niceties by Blinken. Instead, the US is working towards expanding AUKUS to challenge and contain China in the Asia-Pacific region, as well as Russia.

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