

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

Event

**“The Future of AUKUS with Admiral Harry Harris Jr.,  
USN (Ret.)”**

DATE

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FEATURING

**Vice Admiral Peter H. Daly, USN (Ret.)**

*Chief Executive Officer and Publisher, United States Naval Institute*

**Admiral Harry Harris Jr., USN (Ret.)**

*Former Commander, U.S. Pacific Command*

CSIS EXPERTS

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Vice Admiral Peter H. Daly:

Well, good afternoon. I'm Pete Daly, CEO and publisher at the U.S. Naval Institute. And on behalf of the Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Naval Institute, we welcome you. We're proud to bring this continuation of our Maritime Security Dialogue series. This series is made possible by the generous contribution of HII.

Today's guest is Admiral Harry Harris, and today's topic is "The Future of AUKUS." Admiral Harris served as commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet from 2013 to 2015, and then as commander at U.S. Pacific Command before it became INDOPACOM until his retirement from the Navy in 2018. He subsequently was appointed the U.S. ambassador to the Republic of Korea and served in that position until January of '21.

A 1978 graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, Admiral Harris was designated a Naval Flight Officer, NFO, in 1979. Previously he commanded Patrol Squadron 46, Patrol and Reconnaissance Wing 1. He commanded the Joint Task Force at Guantanamo, commanded the U.S. Sixth Fleet, Striking and Support Forces NATO.

Staff assignments include three tours on the Navy OPNAV staff, including Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Communications Networks. He also served as Assistant to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs from 2011 to 2013. And in that capacity, he traveled globally as the chairman's personal representative to the secretary of state.

He holds a master's in public administration from Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government and a master's in National Security Studies from Georgetown University.

Today we'll have a short scene setter from the CSIS Australia Chair, Dr. Charlie Edel, who will give a brief introduction. And then Dr. Seth Jones will engage Admiral Harris up on stage in a moderated discussion that will include Q&A.

Dr. Jones is the Senior Vice President, Harold Brown Chair, Director of International Security Program and Director of the Transnational Threats Project here at CSIS.

So first over to Dr. Edel and then to our dialogue between Seth and Admiral Harris. Thank you.

Charles Edel:

Good afternoon. Thanks very much, Pete.

I'm very glad to be here with all of you, talking about AUKUS and the way forward, now that we actually know the way forward for AUKUS, now that it's finally been announced, and we can move on to, as the Aussies say, the hard yards of actually ensuring that we can pull it off. And that's true for all three of our nations' governments, our respective legislatures, and our industry partners.

Now, I realize that I am just the warm-up act here, so what I thought what I might do is give you a bit of a scene-setter before Seth and Admiral Harris get into what I'm sure will be a very interesting conversation.

In San Diego, on Monday, March 13th, President Biden, along with his Australian and his British counterparts, announced the "Optimal Pathway" forward for Australia's acquisition of a nuclear-powered submarine program. This announcement was the result of an intensive 18-month effort by all three governments to figure out how they were going to get after this challenge. It was almost entirely the announcement focused on pillar one; that is the acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines.

There was a lot that came in the statement but, to my mind, three things at least should really jump out at us. The first is the speed with which this enterprise will commence; second, that there are multiple moving parts to what is happening; and the third one, which was quite surprising, is that the U.S. intends to sell three to five Virginia-class attack submarines to the Australians.

Now, when AUKUS was first announced back in September of 2021, we didn't have all of this figured out, but now we have a pathway forward. And one of the things that I thought was most striking from this announcement, one of the surprises that came out, is that the scale and the ambition of AUKUS have actually grown over the past 18 months. Not only do we now see that we're looking to – we're looking to have all three partners invest in their own but also in allied industrial capability. This should be a real linking of European with Asian security partnerships, and the integration of industrial capacities – and I do underscore the plural nature of this – is really key. Now, those ambitions have grown, I believe, commensurate with the scale of the challenges that all of us face. AUKUS was undertaken against a backdrop of deteriorating security environment in the Indo-Pacific region and

specifically revolving around the exponential growth of China's military power coupled with its more assertive use over the past decade and a half. Those two trends have highlighted security concerns in the region and motivated AUKUS members to align their strategies and respond to the challenges that are being posed by Beijing.

Now, in a narrow sense, AUKUS is a trilateral partnership between these three nations; it's meant to enhance the defense capabilities of each one of those partners. But if we think of AUKUS as only a submarine program, I think we're missing what this actually represents. The broader significance of this is the intentionality to drive technological integration, industrial capacity, and deepen strategic coordination between all three partners, which is to say that AUKUS is being undertaken to help the U.S.'s most trusted partners become stronger and more capable of pushing back against Beijing. When you look at AUKUS, just remember that it has more than one objective behind it. It's meant to transform the industrial shipbuilding capacity of all three nations, it's meant as a technological accelerator, it's meant to change the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region, and I think it's meant to transform how the United States works with and empowers its most trusted allies.

Good. I can now exit because that all sounds great, but with all that greatness and with that complexity come a fair amount of challenges in front of us as well. So let me just tee up a couple of them that I see looming in front of us for the two of you to address. The first is political attention, support, and resourcing from all three nations over the decades with which this program will play out. The second challenge that we face is an ability to scale up and scale up quickly, particularly in shipbuilding. That's true in the United States. We know that we are not meeting our requirements of how many submarines we're supposed to produce. Depending on how you calculate, we're not at two SSNs per year; somewhere between 1.2 and 1.4. It's also a challenge for the Australians, where there have been estimates that they need to find employment and find the bodies who are going to be those workers of as many as 20,000 jobs that will be related to this enterprise, and that's equally true in Britain.

A third challenge is the complexity of the multiple parts of pillar one. We're going to get into shortly that there are multiple moving parts to this starting this very year but then phasing all the way to the early 2040s. This means that the Australians will have to have

crews at some points on three different types of submarine platforms.

A fourth one is timing and deterrence because, obviously, we have a deterrence problem now and not in 2040 so the question becomes how quickly can some of these assets be brought online.

And the final challenge that I would just point to is one of export controls. The United States rightly guards our sensitive technology and U.S. companies' IP. However, without changes to the current rules governing export controls the United States will not be able to move forward with the true technological integration required in order to move AUKUS forward.

Whether there will be sufficient movement in Congress to change the U.S. export control system or if this can be accomplished through regulatory administrative changes remains to be seen.

Now, I will exit stage right or, I guess, stage left and allow Seth and Admiral Harris to dive into the future of AUKUS and figure out some of the answers to those challenges. Thank you.

Seth G. Jones:

Thanks, Charlie, and appreciate the work you've done, including with senior levels of the Australian government, the White House, and others as the U.S. has proceeded forward with its partners in the U.K. and in Australia.

Thank you, Admiral Harris, for joining us here today and thank you to those both in person and online. Thanks to HII for supporting this and thanks for the partnership with USNI and Admiral Daly that has been so strong over several years.

So let me, first, ask you for those less familiar with the specifics of AUKUS, Admiral Harris, to just outline the key pillars and, in part, also your main takeaways from what came out of the March 2023 San Diego meeting.

Admiral Harry Harris Jr.:

Yeah. So thanks, Seth, for that, and I'll echo Seth's appreciation to CSIS, to the Naval Institute, HII, and for all of your interest, whether you are here in the room or out in TV land.

This is an important discussion and it's – because it's an important relationship that we have, the United States has, with the U.K. and with Australia.

So AUKUS, this deal, if you will, has three main pillars. The first pillar where it's already underway is the training of Australian sailors in our nuclear power program. So that's already underway. We will also, us, being the U.S. and the U.K., will also immediately begin ramping up increasing the number of port visits of our submarines to Australian ports and that will eventually get to the point where we will begin to stage submarines out of Australian ports under rotation, probably in the late 2020s, and we're going to call our part of that the Submarine Rotational Force West. So all of that is under the first pillar and that pillar is already underway now.

The second pillar is, I think, the most interesting pillar because the second pillar is the U.S. commitment to sell to Australia three Virginia-class submarines with an option for Australia to buy two more, and this is really remarkable when you think about it because we are going to share our crown jewel – our nuclear submarine program – with Australia and that will happen in pillar two.

And then pillar three, which will happen probably in the late 2030s or early 2040s. Australia by then will have the industrial base, the capability, the capacity, and the expertise in their workforce to build their own nuclear submarine. And this is where the U.K. comes in, in force. It'll be a modified U.K. SSN, a modified Astute-class, perhaps. But that's where we're going to go in the late 2030s to the early 2040s.

And so the key to this – there are a number of keys. I won't go into all of them. I'll hope you ask them to me and then I can take some time to answer them. But the key to this is that, in my opinion, is the second pillar, right? It's the selling of Virginia-class submarines to Australia to fly under sovereign Australian colors for the bulk of the 2030s until Australia has the capability and the capacity to build their own nuclear submarines. I'll stop there, and then just respond.

Dr. Jones:

Great questions. So the way we'll do this is I will start off with a few questions, and then we encourage those in the audience both in person and virtually to ask. For those online, there is an easy way for you to write those in. For those in person, just scan the QR code and I have an iPad right here that I will read the questions out. So if you have any questions about how to do that, there are some folks around here that can help those less technologically sophisticated, probably like me, including Christine, who's in the

back corner. And thanks to you and the rest of the crew for setting this up.

Let me talk a little bit about one of the key pillars of AUKUS as you started to get in. There has been a focus, and will continue to be a focus, on advanced capabilities, critical technologies. There are a number that could be in the mix – live virtual constructive training, artificial intelligence, big data processing, common operational pictures, quantum computing, unmanned or uncrewed systems. What do you take to be some of the more interesting options for advanced capabilities as you look down the road.

Adm. Harris: You mean advanced capabilities for training or advanced –

Dr. Jones: No, I'm talking about for sharing, yeah.

Adm. Harris: Yeah. Well, the things that you mentioned in this first pillar are critical, in my opinion. And that's the synthetic learning. In order to increase Australia's capability to not only man and operate nuclear submarines, which we'll do through our normal Nuclear Power School training exchanges on our submarines, exchanges on the U.K. submarines, and all that. But the key – one of the main issues is training the industrial base to build and operate nuclear submarines to go from zero to warp speed in a decade or so. So that's going to be the key. And we have to be able to share that technology and share the learning with our Australian counterparts.

Now, Australia already knows how to build submarines. They have built a very capable submarine, the diesel Collins-class submarines. But they're coming to the end of their operational life. They'll have to be extended mostly likely a little while to bridge the gap between the end of their operational use and the beginning of the new nuclear submarines. But they know how to – the Australians know how to build submarines. And they know how to build good submarines. But the nuclear part of that is completely new. And so that's going to require a lot of effort on our part, on the U.K.'s part, and especially on Australia's part.

You know, I used to think that while there are some people that would say that in order to pull this off in its entirety in the ultimate vision, you know, there have to be three impossibles, right? You have to have sustained political support in three countries for three decades, at least. You have to have to have sustained resourcing by those same three countries for three

decades. And you have to be maximally flexible across three decades. Some people would say that those are three impossibles that have to come together to pull this off.

I don't agree with that. I think it is entirely possible because, as Charlie indicated earlier, the criticality of the need for Australia to have this capability against the threats that we all face, in a region as vitally important as the Indo-Pacific, demands something big, bold, and creative. In my opinion, Australia is a great nation making great contributions to the global good, and Australia has great ambitions. And I believe that this program, this nuclear-submarine program, will help Australia achieve those ambitions, and not just in the defense space. This is about industry. It's about capacity. It's about relevance. And it's really about the free and open Indo-Pacific that we all ascribe to, hope for, and I believe are committed to ensuring remains the norm for a long time to come.

Dr. Jones:

One issue that has come up in the discussions, I know, as we've talked to senior White House officials and senior officials from the Department of Defense, as well as from Australian and U.K. counterparts, including those that we've hosted here privately or publicly, one issue that has come up repeatedly is this issue of export control.

And so, you know, there is hope among a number of countries, including the Australians, that AUKUS becomes much bigger than just about nuclear-powered submarines, that it allows for opportunities to share critical and sensitive technologies, even outside of the scope of submarines. But U.S. policies related to ITAR or foreign military sales have been challenging. The Australians are a Five Eyes country.

So what is your thought – and you've noted recently in House Armed Services Committee testimony, you talked about how the U.S. has to get its export-control policies right for this.

Adm. Harris:

Yeah. So ITAR – that's the International Trade Traffic in Arms Regulations that the United States has in place, which limits or certainly requires processes to share technologies with different countries, including our friends, partners, and especially our allies.

So I testified before the House Armed Services Committee last month, at the beginning of February, that we have to get ITAR right with regard to AUKUS or AUKUS will fail.



So if I go back to those three pillars, where AUKUS – I’m sorry – where ITAR comes into play is building to the third pillar. So we have to share our nuclear technology, our crown jewels that I spoke about before, with Australia in order to help them and their industrial base rise to the capacity to build a nuclear submarine, a nuclear-power submarine. And that requires, in my opinion, either a change to ITAR for Australia or a carveout for Australia within the existing ITAR regime. That means, you know, ITAR exists. We’re going to exclude those restrictions, those regulations, for Australia for their nuclear-submarine program.

And ITAR reaches across those other components of the AUKUS deal as well. You know, AUKUS is – you know, we think of AUKUS as – it’s about the submarine. It is about the submarine, but it’s also about other things. It’s about hypersonics. It’s about weaponizing. It’s about machine learning and all those things which are governed or potentially governed by ITAR. So we have to get through ITAR or we’ll never get to the pillar three of AUKUS. So I think it’s critical. I made that pitch to the House Armed Services Committee last month; don’t know how that’s going to go in the long run. But it’s out there anyway.

Dr. Jones: Well, also that pitch needs to continue also with the foreign-affairs side, because it’s a State Department function primarily with a Department of Defense component to it. So maybe we’ll get you in front of the House Foreign Affairs Committee next so you can broaden the discussion.

Adm. Harris: Happy to do it.

Dr. Jones: (Laughs.) Let me talk a little bit about the issue of shipbuilding. You were the commander of what is now U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. The most recent AUKUS announcement calls for Australia to buy three Virginia-class submarines, potentially two more. A lot of questions about – I mean, there certainly are constraints right now within the shipbuilding industry in the U.S., including the workforce. What is your sense about how – what are some of the main challenges? And how do we get this done in a reasonable fashion?

Adm. Harris: Yeah. So are we committed to AUKUS or not? Is Australia committed to AUKUS or not? Is the U.K. committed or not? So that goes back to those things that I was talking about earlier about resourcing, about commitment over the long haul, at least three decades’ worth.

And if we're committed to it, we can do it, right? Look, I mean, we put a man on the Moon in eight years. We developed a COVID vaccine in one year. We can do AUKUS.

Shipbuilding-wise, you know, as Charlie said – I think he said; if he didn't say it, he should have said it – (laughter) – we have – you know, we have a requirement for two new submarines a year and we're building something less than that in our industrial base. But we have 53 SSNs today, and so we're talking about 2 percent when we sell one to the Australians, 4 percent if we sell two, and 6 percent if we sell three. So Australia has zero, so they're going to go from zero to a hundred percent. So single-digit numbers mean a lot. Single-digit numbers can be ameliorated by the denominator, the denominator in our case being 53.

The other issue is it's not a zero-sum game. We're not going to sell a submarine to Australia and then – and then have – and then have some deficit in the – in the global submarine force. Australia is a key American ally. We've been allies with Australia since we put U.S. troops under the command of Australian Lieutenant General Monash back on World War I, so we have been closely aligned and allied with Australia for well over a century. So an Australian Virginia-class submarine under Australian – sovereign Australian colors is a good thing. It's good for the free and open Indo-Pacific. It's good for the reach that Australia will have globally with a submarine of that capacity.

And it's not about – although some would have you believe it, it's not about Australia giving up its sovereignty. Australia will own that submarine, the crews that are on it. It'll fly under Australian colors. And that's just transition to phase – pillar three, the third pillar, when Australia builds its own submarines.

So I don't buy the argument that by selling three Virginia-class submarines to Australia we're somehow hurting our own defensive capabilities. We're adding to it, in my opinion, not decrementing from it.

Dr. Jones:

One component of this – and I think that's important to look at it – is it's certainly important to look at the next steps for AUKUS and the needs and the implications for technology sharing and shipbuilding. What would be helpful, too, is if you could highlight the need for AUKUS based on what you're seeing with the Chinese right now. When you look at the Chinese, you called – you've called them repeatedly, including in testimony, an adversary, more than

a competitor. There are arguments that they're eclipsing the U.S. on shipbuilding. According to the 2022 U.N. Conference on Trade and Development Statistics handbook, China built 44 percent of the world's merchant fleet last year, followed by South Korea and Japan. But more broadly, we're seeing them build fifth-generation aircraft, blue-water navy including some submarines, space, cyber. So how do you put AUKUS into a broader strategic context?

Adm. Harris:

Yeah. So all those things that you mention, Seth, are the reasons that we need AUKUS to work. It's because, in my opinion – though the governments will say it's not about China, in my opinion it is certainly Chinese ambition and current bad behavior with no letup in sight that would – that makes me think that this capability resident in the power in, actually, of AUKUS is so important. So I think that this will serve, certainly, as a deterrent in the mindset of the Chinese military when they consider things like acting against their neighbors, acting on a global stage in negative and nefarious ways.

So I gave an interview not too long ago to breaking news – Breaking Defense, I guess. And since then, I've had a chance to think about the questions I was asked then. And I now agree completely with Sidharth Kaushal who's with the U.K.'s RUSI, the Royal United Services institute, when he said that this will make China's potential aggression against Taiwan a lot less appealing. That's his words, "a lot less appealing." I agree with him. Though this is – again, it is not about China, per se, according to the governments. But certainly, it is about a free and open Indo-Pacific. It is about maintaining the global order. And it is about Australia's place on the global stage as a great power.

Dr. Jones:

And how do you respond to some who have argued that AUKUS results or could potentially result in escalation with China, an arms race in the Indo-Pacific, or it could increase the potential for miscalculation, escalation. What's your response to that?

Adm. Harris:

Yeah. If I agreed with them, then they and I would both be wrong, all right? I mean, this is – you can argue both sides. And I've read both arguments. Each country has to act in its own enlightened self-interest. I think Adam Smith said that a few years ago. And Australia has acted in its sovereign self-interest by deciding that it needs a nuclear submarine force. The U.K. and the United States have acted in our enlightened self-interest by agreeing to provide assistance to Australia, in terms of technology primarily, and

sharing our crown jewels on how to get to that end state. So I don't think it's destabilizing.

I think it's more stabilizing to have countries like Australia, the United States, the U.K., Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, our other friends, allies, and partners in the – our other friends and partners in the region to do things that increase stability, not decrease stability. The most dangerous point, in my view, is when you have – when stability totters on the balance. And when that happens, that's when things are most apt to go in a bad way. But if you have strong powers out there that are able to defend their interest, their own sovereign national interests, I think that's an increase to stability and not a decrease.

Dr. Jones:

One issue, speaking of China, that has come up – and I think it's reflected in some of the most recent acts, including the CHIPS Act and the Inflation Reduction Act, are trying to change the landscape in which China operates. They dominate the advanced battery supply chain across the globe. Lithium hydroxide cells, electrolytes, anodes, cathodes, and a number of other areas, rare earth metals. There have been broader concerns with the supply chain, whether it's for shipbuilding or in other areas, including aircraft.

AUKUS is interesting because you're going to have the continuing production of Virginia-class and providing to the Australians. There will be the AUKUS version, SSN AUKUS, that's produced. How do you think about supply chains there? And the U.S. is also going to be working on its next-generation submarine. So how does the U.S., the Australians, in that environment with potentially multiple submarines, think about efficiency on supply chains?

Adm. Harris:

Yeah. So out of – out of danger comes opportunity. And I think that what we're seeing in supply chain challenges today – today being primarily an outgrowth of the COVID epidemic – we have a better understanding today. We, the United States, our industrial base, has a better understanding of where supply chain bottlenecks occur. And globally – I mean, because, you know, we source globally. And we are better now than we have been probably ever in understanding the dynamics of small changes resulting in big issues.

So, you know, I think that we're stronger now because of what we have gone through and what we have learned. And we know that we're stronger when we act in concert with friends, allies, and

partners. That's one of the strengths of the current administration's national security strategy, is the recognition that friends, allies, and partners matter, and the realization that friends, allies, and partners make us stronger. You know, when you compare our network of alliances and partnerships with that of China, it becomes more stark than ever how strong we are, how strong the United States is compared to China, because China can rely on whom? Afghanistan, I guess; North Korea, yeah, sure –

Dr. Jones: Apparently the Russians now, too.

Adm. Harris: Apparently the Russians, who are getting their asses handed to them. I'm sorry, I can't say that in public. (Laughter.) I apologize.

Dr. Jones: No, you can say that.

Adm. Harris: Who are getting their behinds crushed in Ukraine. So those are – that's a pretty interesting smattering of allies, in my view.

Dr. Jones: Yeah. Before going to some audience questions in a moment, I wonder if you could reflect on some of the challenges you see going ahead. We talked about the upsides and the opportunities that AUKUS provides, both in warfighting and deterrence, certainly to the defense industrial bases, both within the United States, Australia, and even the U.K., for that matter. So there are also some advantages, as we started off with, in advancing critical technologies. But what are some of the issues, whether they're time, whether – we've talked about export controls, but what is some of the other issues that you identify as potential challenges that are probably most significant that need to be worked through over the next few years, as implementation of the various pillars occurs?

Adm. Harris: Yeah, so probably the greatest challenge is expectations. You know, we have to manage expectations. This program, the three pillars are going to run well into the 2040s by the time, you know, the full realization of Australia's own nuclear-power industry and submarine force is fully realized. So I think expectation management is one of the keys. Certainly ITAR is a key. Security classifications – you know, we have a class, a security classification called NOFORN, not for foreign dissemination. We have to understand the impact that that could have on not only the training of Australia's submariners but also their industrial base. So we have to understand that as well, even as we try to go after ITAR, which is governed by laws and regulations; we have to go

after NOFORN caveats, which are governed by policy, not by law or regulation. So, you know, those are some of the barriers to fully realizing AUKUS in its entirety. But I am optimistic that at least we've identified those barriers. And then if we have broadminded, forward-thinking, creative, innovative leaders that we can get through each of these barriers and meet the timeline.

Dr. Jones:

The timing of your response was interesting because one of the – the first question I was going to read came from Peter Pennington, British Officer Club, saying, will the dreaded “U.S. eyes only” – he means NOFORN, I think in part – be eased? And that's coming from the British part of this as well.

Let me turn to – there are a couple of questions; this one is Michael Werbowksi from the Warsaw Institute, but there's also Rod Azama from the Japanese American Veterans Association, that are asking very similar questions. So I'll read Rod's question, and then it's – again, it's reflected in several others.

I recognize the importance of the Australia-U.S.-U.K. partnership in the Pacific. What other allies play a key role in the region – Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Singapore? When – what mechanisms exist for them and the – Michael's question right after that is: Is there a possibility of growing AUKUS at some point to include other allies and partners in the Pacific?

Adm. Harris:

Yeah. So it's a great question. There are other groupings in the Pacific – Indo-Pacific that some of the countries that he mentioned could be a part of. May not be a part of today but could be a part of. Of one of those is the Quad and that's the Quadrilateral Dialogue between Australia, Japan, India, and us.

There's also the Five Eyes grouping, which includes our allies that you mentioned plus New Zealand, which is a partner nation, and we have a great relationship with Singapore, which hosts a lot of our ships, submarines, transiting strike groups, and personnel. So there are all these different groupings.

I'm not qualified to answer the question of will AUKUS be extended to South Korea or to Japan or to other countries. That's a different question.

I think what we need to do is focus on AUKUS. Let's get AUKUS right. Let's get this submarine deal done. Let's get a nuclear

submarine indigenously produced in Australia flying Australian colors and then look at potential expansion.

We have great allies, the United States. We have great allies in the Pacific. I've named them already. I'll name them again. In Northeast Asia it's Japan and South Korea. You know, it's hard to imagine any important issue, whether it's defense, whether it's economics, or whatever being resolved in Northeast Asia without Tokyo, Seoul, and Washington's combined efforts. Key critical allies.

Our allies in the central part of the region are the – in Southeast Asia are the Philippines and Thailand and, of course, Australia is the bulwark for our structures there and we're demonstrating that in real time in real ways with this AUKUS agreement.

Dr. Jones:

Interesting. I didn't mention them before but we have two questions. You've already answered them, in a sense, but I think this highlights the interest in AUKUS coming from U.S. partners and allies. Two questions, one from INR Davidson, who's a USNI member from Canada, the other is Rick Lewis, both asking about AUKUS and Canada.

I mean, I say that in part just because there, clearly, is value identified from our closest allies and partners about AUKUS and interest at some point in joining, even if you say at this point, I can't answer that question – let's focus on AUKUS.

Adm. Harris:

Yeah. So to my Canadian friends up there, let's focus on AUKUS. But I will underscore how important Canada is.

You cannot defend the United States homeland without Canada, without NORAD – the North American Air Defense Command – which existed long before NORTHCOM did, and that is an important component of North American air defense, Canadian and the United States' ability to defend our airspace together.

Dr. Jones:

As someone who is married to a Canadian, I strongly support that. (Laughter.)

Let me turn to Admiral Verma from the Indian Navy, who's currently at the U.S. Naval War College, and the admiral asks or he notes a number of articles published recently state that AUKUS sets up a precedent of more nations that are signatories to the NPT developing nuclear capabilities for their subs, and then he goes on

to say there are some concerns that the IAEA does not have an inspection regime in place for monitoring nuclear fuel used by these types of submarines.

Do you have any comment? I should note, actually, before you answer that question in this room within the last two weeks we had the IAEA director here, who was very complimentary about the way AUKUS was set up and how confident he feels about AUKUS. But I leave the question to you.

Adm. Harris:

Thanks. As has been said earlier, the IAEA director was here and he was very complimentary of AUKUS and so, therefore, I think he's far more qualified than me to answer that question.

I will note that India not only has nuclear weapons, but also has nuclear submarines. So I believe that India would welcome Australian nuclear submarines as another force for stability and good in the Indian Ocean and beyond.

Dr. Jones:

Sounds good. Let me turn to Vice Admiral Crowder, retired U.S. Navy. As part of the increased U.S. submarine visits to Australia, is there a plan, or at least thinking, about a U.S. sub tender there as well, at least rotating?

Adm. Harris:

Doug, I don't have the answer to that question, but thanks for asking it. Hopefully at some point we'll get to the point that our nuclear submarines can be worked on, replenished by Australia, under maybe pillar two for sure. But there is clearly a plan under pillar one to increase the training of Australian officers and men and women.

And in our own schoolhouse efforts, there is a plan under pillar one to improve or increase or develop, really, the Australians' indigenous shipbuilding capability, especially in the nuclear realm, to build their submarines. And for sure we're going to see a lot of port visits by U.K. and American submarines in Australia and exchanges on those submarines with Australian crew members.

But as far as putting a tender there, I don't know what the Navy's capacity for tenders is these days. And I will defer to OPNAV for that.

Dr. Jones:

Thanks.



Dr. Parrish Staples from Navarro Research: What actions, to the degree you're aware, are each of the three nations taking to develop the future workforce, including submarine? But also technical staff are difficult to find now for existing programs. How do they propose to entice the future staff into these programs that will enable AUKUS objectives to be successful into the 2040s?

Adm. Harris:

A very important question. But I will defer to Australia on how they're going to recruit and retain their industrial workforce to get at the issues that you asked.

As far as the troops, the sailors that'll operate the submarines, us and the U.K. are involved in training already Australian submariners in that effort. But as far as the aegis of the technical workforce, I have no visibility in that.

Dr. Jones:

Got a lot of questions. This is from the CSIS Coast Guard fellow, Ginny Nadolny, who I think is sitting in the audience here. With the expected timeline to establish the three key pillars AUKUS is prioritizing, what risks do you still see in the near term? And what role will AUKUS have in addressing those threats?

Adm. Harris:

Yeah. So in the near term, the near term involves really training and having a lot more submarines, U.K. and American nuclear submarines, pay visits in Australia. But primarily, again, it's about training Australian submariners and beginning to train the Australian industrial-capacity workers to do the work of building a nuclear submarine a decade hence.

So I don't see hardly any challenges to the first pillar. But the first pillar then rolls into the second pillar, where the sale of Virginia-class submarines come into play. That's a big resourcing issue; and primarily that, because by then the engineers that'll operate the nuclear power plant should be well on their way after pillar one.

And again, because Australia has a very capable and professional submarine force, which tends, I think, to get lost in the discussion, Australia knows how to operate submarines. They've been doing it really since 1914, since their first submarine. And so the idea of operating a submarine, they're expert at that. The difference is in a nuclear power plant, the nuclear propulsion part of the submarine. So we have a while to help them in that regard, with the help of the U.K. And I'm convinced – I know that they'll get there.

Dr. Jones: We have a couple of other questions that get into – you know, we’ve talked a little bit about export controls. Jerry McGinn from George Mason University, formerly with the Department of Defense, says: Foreign disclosure and technology transfer policies are just as critical as export controls. And these policies, unlike export controls, are governed by the Department of Defense. What efforts are being undertaken, or potentially should be undertaken, on that front to address AUKUS’s capabilities under pillars one and two?

Adm. Harris: Yeah. So, again, another important question. And certainly, a hurdle to the full realization of AUKUS if we don’t get this right. So I don’t know specifically what steps are being taken to overcome these two issues that are under the purview of DOD, but I’ll just foot-stomp the idea that if we don’t overcome these issues then AUKUS is at risk.

Dr. Jones: So I want to back up and ask a question from Rick Lewis here, which gets – it’s more of a strategic-level question for you. Which is, given that America has obligations other than the Western Pacific, so a major war with China would involve various components of the U.S. Navy. China is building major combatants in some cases faster than the U.S. How will AUKUS help keep China from expanding their activities, potentially aggression, to include invading Taiwan and permanently taking islands in the South China Sea? So how do you see AUKUS in a broader strategic sphere?

Adm. Harris: Yeah. So I mentioned already that I believe that this submarine, the AUKUS, will make an attack by China on Taiwan less appealing, to use Kaushal’s phrase from RUSI. And I think that will play out across the years ahead. Our relationship with Australia and the U.K. and our other allies in the Pacific stands on its own merits. I believe that those relationships will strengthen stability and not weaken stability. It’s not destabilizing to be strong. It’s destabilizing when you’re weak, and which then encourages stronger entities, nations or whatever, other stronger entities to try to defeat you. But when you’re strong, I think that the risks are actually less than if you’re weak. And AUKUS certainly makes it stronger, for sure.

Dr. Jones: Yeah. I think there's no question that's the case. When it comes to posture, it's an interesting question from Christopher Woody of Insider, which is: How will the future basing of U.S. and British submarines near Perth as part of, I guess, what's going to be called Submarine Rotational Force-West, benefit the posture of U.S. and allied forces in the region?

Adm. Harris: Well, for sure, we don't have to go there, right? I mean, to go from San Diego to Perth, or from Norfolk to Perth, or whatever, that is obviated if you're staging from there. I don't know if we're going to actually base submarines there. I know that under Submarine Rotational Force-West we're going to position submarines there, but for how long, whether it's like an FDNF, forward deployed naval force, structure like we have in Spain or in Japan – I don't know if that's the vision. I think we're not quite there yet. But we do have a commitment with Submarine Rotational Force-West. And so I think that's a positive. And it certainly increases our day-to-day presence and numbers in the Indian Ocean, certainly in the Western Pacific. So I think it matters.

Dr. Jones: I wonder if you could just ask – or, just talk briefly about any thoughts you have on how to mitigate some of the concerns we're seeing in Australia about the U.S. You talked a little bit about this, but just a review of the Sydney Morning Herald over the last few days, there are a lot of opinion pieces coming out of Australia about the possibility or fear that AUKUS will impact negatively Australian sovereignty over time. So how do you – how do you respond to that? How do you assure the Australians that that's not what's happening?

Adm. Harris: Yeah. So let me talk about two advantages right off the top that AUKUS provides Australia, then let me get right into the – then the sovereignty issue.

So this is an opportunity, in my view, for Australia to develop its technical skills and its already technical but could be – but will be far more technically competent workforce in terms of nuclear power. So this is an opportunity for Australia. It also strengthens the U.S.-Australia-U.K. alliance in ways well beyond where we were even a year ago, two years ago, before AUKUS. So it's going to strengthen the alliance. It's going to provide opportunities to improve in the nuclear realm, and all the things that go with that, the Australian workforce. So I view those as positives.

And on the sovereignty question, for sure while it's undeniable that Australia will have to depend on the U.K. and the United States for its nuclear submarine capability in the near term, once we get to the point of selling Virginia-class submarines to Australia and certainly when we get to the point of Australia building its own indigenous nuclear submarines, by those points – pillars two and three – those submarines will be flying under Australian colors. They are sovereign Australian assets. I can't say that strongly enough. I could say it louder, but that would not be helpful. But I can't say is strongly enough that pillars two and three, those submarines will be Australian submarines under Australian colors under Australian sovereignty. To get to – to get to that point, for sure, I mean, there's – again, Australia will be dependent on the – on the United States and the United Kingdom to help Australia develop its submarine force. But once it's there, those are sovereign, independent Australian assets.

Dr. Jones:

One last question before asking you to summarize your thoughts on AUKUS. This comes from Tom Minear from News Corporation Australia. And he says: There's some concern in Australia about how AUKUS will endure as administrations change in the United States. So if you look at future U.S. presidents, are you concerned at all that future U.S. presidents might be willing to stick with a plan to sell Virginia-class submarines to Australia and to participate?

Adm. Harris:

For sure. I mean – I mean, that's one of the issues I talked about at the beginning of this session, where I talked about what some people view as three impossibilities have to come together all at once. And one of those is a long-term political commitment by three countries over three decades. Is that subject to possibly being affected by changing political environments in each of those three countries? For sure. But we have to remain – we have to, I think, commit to this deal. Each country has to commit to it, one administration at a time, whether that administration is in London, in Canberra, or in Washington. And if we get well into pillar one and well into pillar two and Australia remains committed on its behalf to get to pillar three and resource the purchase of Virginia-class submarines from the United States in pillar two, you know, it will build – every success will build on itself.

And that's why I've talked so much about ITAR and security classifications and all of that, because that's at the front end. And if

we don't get that right at the front end, then it could – it could cause the whole thing to tumble down, if you will.

But I believe that if the three countries remain committed to it in terms of the political will and in terms of resourcing this, then I think we'll get there. But again, there are those naysayers that are suggesting otherwise. And I think that we have to have successes that build on successes for 30 years.

Dr. Jones: So, just briefly, Admiral Harris, if you could just sort of wrap this up with your kind of key elevator pitch on the value of AUKUS to U.S. deterrence and warfighting in the Indo-Pacific, to the industrial base, to the development of advanced capabilities, and alliances and partnerships. What's your elevator pitch on the value of AUKUS?

Adm. Harris: AUKUS matters. AUKUS matters not only to Australia, but also to the United States and the United Kingdom. And AUKUS is relevant – materially relevant to a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Dr. Jones: Well, that was succinct. That was very clear. And if you could all join me in thanking Admiral Harris for a really interesting discussion. He has to leave shortly, but really happy that he came to visit us. Thanks, again, for the partnership with USNI, that I know you work with as well. But please join me in thanking Admiral Harris for his time. (Applause.)

(END)