

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

Event

“AUKUS at Five: Progress, Challenges, and the Way Forward”

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FEATURING

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UK Prime Minister’s Special Representative on AUKUS

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Charles Edel: Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening, depending on which of the AUKUS countries you're tuning in from right now. I'm Charles Edel, senior advisor and Australia Chair here at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Thank you all for joining us online for a virtual discussion with some of the original architects of AUKUS to examine where the agreement is as we mark its five-year anniversary.

AUKUS, the Australia, United Kingdom, and United States security partnership, first announced on September 15, 2021, was intended to enhance deterrence by bolstering the three nations' submarine capabilities and increasing their cooperation on cutting-edge defense technologies. For all three countries, the pact represents a significant shift in strategic thinking, multilateral security cooperation, and defense integration. Five years on, AUKUS has made meaningful progress toward each of those ends, but it has also had to deal with unforeseen challenges and new developments. So, five years on, it's worth taking stock. What was the original rationale behind the pact? How much progress has been achieved to date? What unexpected obstacles has it faced over the past half decade? And critically, what are the next steps required if it is to sustain momentum?

To answer those questions, I'm thrilled to be joined today by three of the original architects of AUKUS: Ambassador Greg Moriarty, Sir Stephen Lovegrove, and Kurt Campbell. Ambassador Moriarty has served as Australia's ambassador to the U.S. since May of 2026. Prior to that, he served as the secretary of Australia's Department of Defence since 2017. Sir Stephen Lovegrove serves as the UK prime minister's special representative on AUKUS. Previously, he was the UK government's national security advisor, with oversight of the UK's security, defense, and intelligence capabilities. Kurt Campbell is the chairman and co-founder of The Asia Group. Previously, he served as the United States deputy secretary of state and Indo-Pacific coordinator at the National Security Council and deputy assistant to the president at the White House from 2021 to 2024.

Okay, on to the matter at hand: AUKUS, five years on. Between these three luminaries, we'll have some conversation, we'll have some discussion, and who knows, maybe even some debate. And we'll make sure to reserve some time at the end of our discussion for questions from the audience. For those of you who are watching right now, if you do have questions, please complete the form on the event webpage, and we'll do our best to get to as many of those questions in just a bit.

But first, let's start at the beginning. Ambassador Moriarty, you were the Australian defense secretary in Canberra at the time this idea was originally hatched. I'd like to get at the origin story. Can you tell us a bit more about the thinking, about the logic, and really the intent behind AUKUS at the time?

Greg Moriarty: Well, thank you, Charlie. It's great to have this opportunity this morning, and very, very good to see Kurt and Stephen again. It's a lot of work that we've done together over the years, and it's great to have this opportunity to share with you.

So, Charlie, in the period leading up to the AUKUS announcement, Prime Minister Morrison of Australia came to the view—I'm sure it was his own, but based on advice—that Australia's strategic circumstances were deteriorating, that the challenges we faced in the Indo-Pacific region were becoming more substantial, and that the risks to Australia were rising, in particular in relation to the maritime capabilities and submarine capabilities. Prime Minister Morrison started asking questions about whether the capability path that we were on was the right one, given the challenging threat environment. And again, we were at that stage, we were working with the French on a conventional submarine design, which would have replaced the Collins-class conventional submarines. Prime Minister Morrison asked us to do some work, and the work suggested that the threat environment was changing very significantly and that a conventional submarine was increasingly going to be at risk of detection in the areas where Australia had traditionally operated submarines for decades previously.

So Prime Minister Morrison asked us to explore the options for moving away from a conventional submarine capability to a nuclear-powered submarine capability and he, and the department as well, was of the view that the United States and the UK, because of their very significant technological advantage in nuclear submarines and in the subsea environment, were the best partners, potential partners, for us to pursue that capability. And so he asked us to think, think about how we might do that, and then eventually to reach out to the UK and the U.S. to see whether it might be possible to work with them to acquire that capability.

So that that was the origin was in a particular point in time when Prime Minister Morrison had big decisions to make about whether the path that we were on with a conventional submarine was going to cut it for us in the in the decades to come, or whether we needed to move down a different path. And so he was the, he was the political driver behind us doing the strategic and intelligence work that led to the the genesis for AUKUS.

Mr. Edel: Great. Sir Stephen, take us not to Canberra but to London at that time in 2021. You were the prime minister's national security advisor. Obviously, the story looks different there than in Australia, as the UK has had nuclear-powered submarines since 1963, enabled by the 1958 U.S.-UK Mutual Defense Agreement. What was the conversation at 10 Downing? What would AUKUS do for the UK?

Stephen
Lovegrove:

Well, it was by a quirk of timing, actually. Australian colleagues came in to talk to me about this on pretty much my last day as the permanent secretary of the Ministry of Defence. So we had this fascinating conversation, effectively laying out the strategic considerations that Greg has just talked about from the Australian side. And, there were about three people in the British system who were aware of that conversation, and I crossed the road in Whitehall, scratched my head for a couple of days, and then went to see my new boss, Boris Johnson, and asked him what he wanted to do about this. And I should say that, that was, to his immense credit, I think he got, he got the strategic rationale of this within a heartbeat. And he formed an extremely close, he already had an extremely close relationship with Prime Minister Morrison, and they took it forward together very, very effectively, with, of course, President Biden as well.

In terms of the strategic rationale for the Brits specifically, it was obviously a little bit different from that which Greg has just outlined. We were at the time talking about the Indo-Pacific tilt. That was really a recognition of the fact that our prosperity was very much reliant on freedom of navigation and trade routes, which were in the Indo-Pacific, and we wanted to make sure—without reversing east of Suez or anything—we wanted to make sure that we were playing our part in making sure that that bit of the world continued to be safe and this is a very obvious expression of that.

But probably more tangibly, if I'm absolutely honest, it was the moment at which we could crystallize a whole bunch of things that we wanted to do with the British submarine industrial base. Speaking very candidly, and Kurt may well have some observations about the American position, since 1990 we had underinvested in the submarine industrial base in the UK, with the result that we weren't making boats quickly enough, we weren't maintaining them quickly enough, and our availability was dropping and there were many, many problems there. And this offered a colossal shot in the arm, really, for the submarine industrial base in a whole host of different ways which meant that there was going to be a bigger class size. We were going to go from not seven boats but to about twelve boats. The Australians ultimately have committed to five of those boats, so that enables and catalyzes investment, which is desperately needed in a submarine industrial base, and which would then have a beneficial cycle. You'd have more boats, it would be easier to produce them on time, you could move to a different drumbeat, it would justify investment up in Barrow, and and and. So that that was important.

We really liked the idea of having a more resilient supply chain. Rather than just having a slightly creaky supply chain in the UK, the idea that there was

going to be a sister yard in Australia making similar boats—well, the same boats, actually, to the ones that we make in Barrow—was great. The fact that there was going to be an Australian supply chain which could start delivering components to us as well, rather than just relying on single points of failure, which we'd always been suffering from, was was was terrific as well. And that, by the way, is already beginning to come to fruition.

Two other quick things. It is often characterized as predominantly an Indo-Pacific endeavor, AUKUS, and of course, it is very, very relevant for the Indo-Pacific, and that was the original motivation from the Australians coming to talk to both us and the U.S. But for the UK, although our boats do go down there occasionally, and indeed there was a visit the other day from HMS Anson down into Perth, the reality is that most of our boats are going to be in the North Atlantic, the Mediterranean, and the High North— I mean 99 percent of the time, probably. And that is really important, because the threats in those areas are increasing all the time, and the Indo-Pacific and the North Atlantic are, it is artificial to pretend they are completely divorced theaters. We are very conscious of wanting to be able to play a more full and effective role with more boats, better boats, in those areas, because the threat from the Russians in that in those waters is very, very acute, and we need to make sure that we maintain our edge.

I suppose the last thing I would just say is that the opportunity to do an alliance of this scale, but at the same time, a slightly more nimble framework for it for just the three countries doing something as important as this, really provided a new model for us of minilateral alliances, which is, I think, increasingly the way that the world is going to go, and probably needs to go. And the opportunity to do it with pretty much our two closest allies for decades, if not longer than that, was pretty irresistible. So it it all made sense very, very quickly. Huge commitments, no question about that, but the strategic logic was was pretty clear for us.

Mr. Edel: Kurt, we've got the Australian, we've got the British perspective on what AUKUS might do for their countries and why they thought it was a good idea. You were in the White House, serving as Indo-Pacific coordinator, when this idea was first floated. In the past, historically, the U.S. has pretty steadfastly shot down requests for sharing its nuclear propulsion technology with other countries. Can I ask you, why was the answer different this time around? What was the logic that drove AUKUS for the U.S.?

Kurt Campbell: So, first, Charles, just let me thank you so much for bringing us all together, have an opportunity at this juncture, five years later, to look back and see

where we are. When I realized that we were having this, I myself was thinking back to the days before the announcement, what it was like when we went public, and some of the dynamics. This is really a wonderful opportunity to reflect, and I think you see from the Ambassador and Sir Stephen the quality of thinking that went into it on both sides.

Ambassador Moriarty was part of the inner circle around the prime minister in Australia. And I think they had had some initial conversations with the U.S. government, probably through more military channels, and I think they did receive the what we call, in the United States, the Heisman initially. And as you indicate, quite a few countries in the past have come to the United States, and the answer has always been no, for you know decades. Very carefully, the ambassador decided, excuse me the prime minister in Australia decided to send an emissary up to Washington for a careful set of discussions. Our good friend Andrew Shearer, who is currently serving as the Australia's ambassador High Commissioner in Japan, was the chosen person. We've all known each other for a long time. We were able to have deep strategic conversations with him over several days in Washington, in which he was able to lay out the thinking on the part of Australia, and then we almost immediately went into trilateral conversations. Jake Sullivan played an absolutely key role in the U.S. government, I think understood the strategic proposition.

I will say, what we've already heard Charles, I would just build on, you know there is an undeniable operational dimension to this that is absolutely critical. But at the time, one of the things that we were most interested in was seeking greater engagement and cooperation sort of across theaters. I think there had been a perception of a stark contrast between the European dynamics and the Indo-Pacific. What Sir Stephen has described is more a blending of some of the strategic logic, and so this was an operational dimension for something that was already well underway under Sir Stephen's leadership, and you've already heard his description. I'm not sure this is as well understood, but at the time, the driving intellectual force to how to how to think about this proposition was Sir Stephen, and we saw that play out in our trilateral conversations, when we were initially trying to figure out the way forward. But at the same time that we were doing this, we were also launched on, in many respects, an unprecedented set of conversations between the United States and Great Britain about the Indo-Pacific, to discuss what were the manifestations of the so-called tilt.

I thought that the way the Australians made the case was was very powerful. I think there was no question but that all the criteria that would be necessary, only a few countries on the planet could reach those particular

criteria and Australia easily cleared that mark. And and frankly, I think the biggest challenge we initially had, as you recall, Sir Stephen and Ambassador, was that we were in the middle of COVID, so we were trying to do technical Zoom calls and have meetings on the side, but also conduct those initial discussions in an environment where you know we had to have a high confidence that we could have conversations that were open and strategic, but constantly worrying that, gosh, if this got out, it would have major consequences.

So one of the things that is not as well understood before that announcement, Charles, in September, five years ago, literally hundreds of technical, political, and other operational folks had been meeting for months, and it is remarkable that we were able to achieve a degree of coordination and a kind of strategic surprise. I don't think anyone really expected the announcement when it came. In fact in some ways, the fact that we weren't able to build toward it in public meant we had to spend a lot of time explaining the proposition behind it.

I would simply say that what you heard from Ambassador Moriarty is absolutely clear: the Pacific Ocean is vast, huge operational challenges, and I think the truth is that the capability before AUKUS limited Australia to you know a kind of perimeter that I didn't believe, and I don't think any of us believed, matched some of the strategic challenges of the twenty-first century. So, to be honest, it was a model of coordination and dialogue. It, I think, revealed a pretty strong and profound amount of historical trust and confidence among the three. And we'll get into it, Charles, there are enormous challenges ahead, but I would ask you, each of our colleagues here that there isn't a day or week that goes by that I don't have a sense of pride in what we have accomplished and in the ability to work together on such a challenging, mammoth project in such constructive ways.

Mr. Edel:

Thanks, Kurt. Actually, let's get into that now. Sir Stephen, I want to swing back to you, because you're still working the account now as the UK prime minister's special representative on AUKUS. Before you took that position, you were commissioned by then Prime Minister Starmer to review AUKUS. That review, you told the House of Commons Defence Committee, was undertaken—these are your words—not because they felt AUKUS's basic tenets needed to be questioned in any way, but merely because they wanted to make sure that an enterprise of this magnitude was on track. It is colossal, the biggest defense and security capability collaboration in the last nearly seventy years. That review has not been made public, but can you give all of us an overview of whether that enterprise was or whether it is on track? What's the progress that you look to when you talk about what it has accomplished to date?

Sir Stephen:

Thank you, yes. I think it's probably worth noting, actually, that all three countries did a review. Mine happened to be the first out of the blocks, but Dennis Richardson did one in Australia, and of course Elbridge Colby and his team did one in the States as well. Well actually, I'm really glad that all those three did happen, because I think they all had trenchant remarks to make about the way in which the the endeavor was was progressing. I'm not going to go into an enormous amount of detail about what I said then. If the prime minister doesn't want to publish the report, it's his report, not mine. But in general—so this was, what, two and a half years ago?—in general, I thought that we had made a terrific start, but that we needed to re-energize and reinvigorate the work that had been set in train.

From the British perspective, we had done quite a lot of investment, we had developed our plans well, but I didn't think that we were spending money fast enough, candidly. Time is not on our side at the moment in today's world, and building nuclear submarines is a very slow business, far too slow, in fact actually. I think we need to get back to a sense of enterprise that they used to have in the '60s and '70s, actually, but anyway, pull that to one side. And I wanted to make sure that we had properly sentenced plans with proper sums of money, which were being aggressively pursued and prosecuted in our in our country. Part of that, obviously, was going to be about speaking to the Australians in particular, because the investments that we needed to make in our boatbuilding they needed to match or sort of, they needed to dovetail anyways, so there was a long series of conversations about that.

And I have to say that in the last couple of years—it's not merely because of my report, by any stretch of the imagination—I think all the leaders, the leaders in all three countries have very very publicly recommitted to AUKUS. I think it is important that that happens at the leader level. It is an endeavor of that scale. It is very difficult to get the right kind of national effort going unless it is leader level endorsed. In the last couple of years, there has been a great deal of work done in all three countries. I'm obviously most familiar with the UK, but there has been a lot of money promised, and indeed it is on order now in the UK. Raynesway, which is where we make our cores, has practically doubled their footprint there. There are big plans up in Barrow as well. Our design is likely to be finished, frozen, and approved by not only us but obviously by the Australians and the Americans next year. So we are sort of moving with much more determination. We are now on on the submarines, I think we are really into the execution phase; the time of policy questioning, the time of doing reviews, is all kind of over. We'll leave that where it needs to be, maybe for another five years.

We will probably come back to Pillar 2 at some point in more detail. I did think, when I did my review, that Pillar 2 was not making anything like the progress that we needed it to make. And the reason for that was there was a lack of broadly it was a it was a mile wide and inch deep. There were too many projects, and there was too little clarity of thought about the few things that we should be doing which are actually suitable for this kind of arrangement. That has also come a long way. I think around Easter time, we announced the first of the signature projects, which is, interestingly, and actually not surprisingly, adjacent to the main submarine project as well, because it is in the extra-extra-large uncrewed underwater vessels. We've decided that we're going to have compatible payloads and make sure that we are properly lashed up on that particular front. I think that area, that whole area of maritime dominance, the autonomous maritime edge, is likely to be a very fruitful one for Pillar 2 in the future.

So I think, I think there's been a hell of a lot of progress in the last five years. I think the pace is really picking up at the moment. And as I was saying to the guys just before we came on air, if you'd told me five years ago that we would be today in the position that we are in, I would have bitten your hand off to take that position. I think I think there's been a lot of progress. There is a hell of a lot to do, as Kurt has pointed out. These are huge, huge projects. Any single component of them is a huge, huge project, and no doubt there will be lots of bumps in the road, but that's fine. We can overcome them. We've overcome them in the past.

Mr. Edel: Terrific. Okay, no biting of hands, but let me now sling this over to Ambassador Moriarty. And Australia, obviously, at the outset of this, is the only AUKUS country not to have nuclear-powered submarines, which means that Australia probably, or definitely, had the most ground to cover here. I was hoping you might give us a sense—kind of a similar question, but from an Australian perspective—of what work Australia has done to get ready and, perhaps just as important, what are some of the challenges were that appeared that you didn't anticipate at the outset of this?

Ambassador Moriarty: Thanks, Charlie. Well, in addition to that very significant point deeply important that we haven't operated nuclear-powered submarines, Australia also does not have a civil nuclear industry. So, again, workforce right from even before the announcement, I was very deeply focused on how quickly we had to develop a workforce. And still, in Australia, with the size of our population, I think I think workforce challenges will will continue to be a significant obstacle that we need to overcome. But in terms of the thinking that's gone on, we realized that we would have to acquire skills by collaborating with the UK and the U.S. A so a lot of work has been done to grow that skill set by supporting the maintenance of of U.S. and UK boats and by responding to the very generous offers of the UK and the U.S. to allow us to integrate into their workforce, into their naval forces, to acquire the skills.

I'm very in particular pleased with the amount of the maintenance that we are doing already on UK and U.S. boats in in Australia, at HMAS Stirling in Western Australia. We've had six U.S. SSNs visiting since the announcement of the optimal pathway. We supported the first submarine-tended maintenance period in August 2024, and we've done additional workforce packages since then. The UK's HMS Anson visited earlier this year, too, the first British SSN to undertake maintenance activities in Australia ever. And the fact that our maintenance crews and our naval personnel have met the maintenance standards that we have been required to meet I think is very pleasing to me. We want to meet those demanding standards for nuclear stewardship, for safety, for security, for the quality of work. We, this is such a technically demanding area, but also we understand that the safety, security, and stewardship requirements for operating safely nuclear submarines are a different level of commitment, and we are very committed to meeting those standards. We are working with the U.S. and the UK to make sure that our people, both our civilian maintainers and our naval personnel, can meet those can meet those standards.

We've done a lot of infrastructure work, in particular at Stirling, which where we will host the first U.S. deployed, rotating submarine from sometime next year, and we're well on track to meeting those requirements at Stirling. We've committed more than \$30 billion to build to build that capability, including over \$8 billion at HMAS Stirling and an initial \$12 billion for the broader maritime precinct at Henderson. We've also committed \$3 billion to support the uplift of the U.S. submarine industrial base, and already over \$2 billion has been transferred to the United States to help with the uplift of that submarine capability.

So the numbers of people, we have over 100 Royal Australian Navy personnel training in the United States at the moment, at this current point in time, and over 140 have already graduated and are working, are serving on U.S. submarines, learning on the job. We've had 230 personnel from the Australian Submarine Corporation training at Pearl Harbor, with many now returning to Western Australia to be able to do the maintenance work when Submarine Rotational Force-West gets underway. And we're we're investing over \$200 million to help Australian companies grow the skills to be able to participate in the supply chains. And so I think that is a really an important point made before is that Australian companies can help relieve some of those supply chain choke points in both the UK and the and the U.S. But our companies need to be qualified so that our U.S. and UK partners can be very assured that the quality of the work that we're doing and the products that we're producing will meet their very demanding standards for their own submarine programs. So we're qualifying companies and and having some success in order to be able to contribute to those supply chains.

So again, people say, oh, you're maintaining nuclear submarines, is that a big deal? That is a huge deal. That is a huge deal, because if we can't, if we can't maintain those boats, if we can't grow our skill sets to support SRF-West and to be able to support work on UK boats, because there a lot of the design will be very similar. This this provides the foundational skills for us to then be able to go on and build build SSN-AUKUS in the years ahead. So I'm again, I'm like others, I'd say there are enormous challenges ahead. There are always heartaches and headaches. But again, when I think back five years ago, I'm I'm I'm really pleasantly surprised at how much we've achieved.

Mr. Edel: Thanks. It's really interesting to hear kind of not only the bureaucratic skills and the businesses that are feeding in, but and actually about the shovel-ready work out in Perth. For those of you who are watching, I've been out to Perth about once a year over the last two or three years. It's actually fascinating to watch the progress, if you watch it progress, new buildings, new facilities, roads getting widened, so you can actually physically see the changes.

But I want to take it out of that realm for a second and swing it back to Kurt. When we are talking about one of the challenges that we faced, is or seemingly faced, was political durability. Between the three governments, there have actually been four national elections and nine different administrations in place, and those administrations have often been of decidedly different outlooks and perspectives. What do you think accounts though for the political durability of AUKUS across our three countries during this time, despite the wildly different outlooks of different administrations?

Mr. Campbell: Yeah, Charlie, I think you put your finger on it. It's it's really quite remarkable, the sense of commitment to this partnership that we've seen from a range of prime ministers and political leaders in the United States. And after intensive review—and I'm with Sir Stephen, I think these reviews are both necessary, they're useful; they require you to test and retest assumptions—I think that has been very healthy, and it has allowed us to recommit each time to this process and to this program. I also think, as Sir Stephen indicated, and also the Ambassador, we do have a long history of mateship, of collaboration, and we've been able to call on that, and I think that confidence, that history, has helped us through some of the challenging moments.

I like the way each of of our guests with me have been able to describe dimensions of the challenge. I do want to just also say, Charles, that there are the obvious things that we've talked about, which are training, money, programs. I, too, would like to see some of these things speed up a bit more. But in truth, the other bureaucratic elements, for instance just creating the

appropriate framework so that the United States could share absolutely essential technology with Australia. None of those provisions were in place. And in fact, there had to be an enormous amount of work done to allow the necessary kind of technology sharing. The right mental image is almost like hacking your way with a machete through the densest jungle of bureaucratic inhibitors. And tremendous credit to the Australians and the British for pushing us to look carefully at our own system, at some of you know the procedures and protocols in place that actually inhibited the very cooperation and progress that we were always pressing for. And so I think some of these strategic reviews, Charlie, have allowed us to do a degree of self-examination that has propelled the the plan forward.

The other thing I would also say, which has been referred to a little bit—at least for me, as someone who'd served in the Pentagon and been in the Navy—is that I had always assumed and believed that our submarine capabilities, our submarine force was our jewel in our national security realm. One of the most important consequences of AUKUS is that it has forced us to look deeply at our submarine capacity and infrastructure and to realize that, in many respects, it was profoundly lacking in the ability to get subs under repair, back out at sea, and to be able to turn out new submarines. I think I think this process forced us to look hard at our internal capacities. And so at the same time, that we are now working much more collaboratively, much more seamlessly, and again, there are more challenges to do, but if you look back at what has been accomplished, I completely align myself with what we've heard to date. I wasn't sure we could get to where we are. But the fact that we've gone so far gives me that extra confidence that we will be able to surmount what lies ahead. What what has happened, Charles, is that it has not been an either-or. We have both focused on AUKUS, but we have also turned our attention more internally to our national sovereign submarine capabilities, and and we are much more serious about that at a national level than we were just four or five years ago.

Mr. Edel:

Yeah, thanks, Kurt. You know the point that you raised, too, about all the bureaucratic thickets, legal thickets—it's been fascinating to note that laws have changed in all three countries in order to enable this. That is nothing particularly easy to do. But even if this has had a ton of political support, Ambassador Moriarty, it's not been without its challenges, and as Sir Stephen said, there are hard yards ahead of us. So now that you are in Washington representing Australia, what's at the top of the agenda now for AUKUS as you push ahead? What are the next steps required to sustain momentum for the project? What are you focused on right now?

Ambassador
Moriarty:

Charlie, there there we will all need to work to sustain momentum. I think Sir Stephen before made the point before about driving the UK program, his review. Dennis Richardson, a very distinguished former ambassador here but also secretary of the Department of Defence in Australia—in his review, he talked about and again, it was a report for the prime minister—talked about the need to drive this as a national endeavor. I think that is a critical thing. So I'm I'm I'm working here to make sure that we in Australia are working as closely as we can, in particular in Washington, with our U.S. partners, to make sure that we are learning from them, that we are meeting the milestones that are required, and that we are meeting our own obligations to upgrade our skills.

There's work to be done. The Trump administration has driven enormous investment in the in the submarine industrial base. It has taken a number of steps to accelerate shipbuilding capability, and the appropriations that have gone through. I know Admiral Gaucher, who has taken over overall responsibility for the submarine enterprise, he has been given some authorities which have cut through some of those bureaucratic challenges. Working with Admiral Gaucher, with Admiral Houston at Naval Reactors, and also with the policy shop at the Pentagon, all saying that we need to move at pace. The Congress has been really helpful in terms of identifying and working to reduce some of the regulatory hurdles. We've got the Unlock AUKUS legislation in the Congress, again reducing the excluded technologies list and making some of that information sharing easier to do. I'm I'm doing a lot of work with the Congress, and they've been incredibly positive to work with on how we remove or put the legislative pieces in place and remove the blockages so that we can achieve the the optimal pathway. So there is a lot of work to be done in Washington, even though the strategic direction is set. But there will always be these additional steps that need to be that need to be taken.

I think the Australian support for the U.S. industrial base uplift is a really tangible expression of how Australia understands that that uplift in the U.S., but also in the UK, is critical to the overall success of AUKUS. So I've been a powerful advocate for making sure that our our our support for that U.S. industrial uplift is well targeted and seeks to achieve our our common objectives.

Mr. Edel:

Thanks. I want to circle back to a point that you raised that Kurt raised previously and that all of you have talked about this. About the fact that one of the things that AUKUS has revealed to us—for those of you who had your hand on the wheel as you were doing the homework, but actually as we've

watched how it's developed—is it's put a torchlight on our submarine industrial bases and showed us, as Kurt was just saying, that they're not where we need them to be, because we have significant advantages in the undersea realm and we need to have more. That's how you create deterrence.

So one of the conversations that keeps coming up is that the U.S. has multiple demands on its submarine fleet. And Kurt, I guess I'd ask you: when the U.S. already faces significant pressure to expand its fleet, how do we ensure that AUKUS strengthens deterrence rather than simply adding another long-term commitment to an already demanding global presence?

Mr. Campbell: So, look, Charles, I mean at the core of this is a proposition, a proposition that I stand by, and I would assume the Ambassador and Sir Stephen would join me in this. I believe, given the multiplicity of challenges that the United States faces on the global stage, both traditional and nontraditional kind, the most important thing the United States can do is to work constructively, deeply, and with purpose with allies and partners. And I think this is a unique example of this kind of you know more flexible, smaller grouping, but the idea that American security is somehow enhanced by operating uniquely and alone is completely wrong, completely misguided. And if you look at polling in the United States across, Charles, the political aisle, you will find that most Americans take comfort in the idea that we will work together on common problems with partners. I think some of that is occasionally lost. I believe that this enduring quality of American diplomacy will see a brighter day again. But I would simply say that the idea that we will enhance our security security by withdrawing from allies and partners is deeply, profoundly misguided. We have many historical examples of moments of American retrenchment, and in almost every case that has led to degrees of global calamity. And so I'm all for opportunities to work constructively with allies and partners.

But if I can say this, Charles, just very quickly: that does not mean just continuation of business as usual. Part of what AUKUS reveals, for instance—we talked a little bit about the bureaucratic layers and all the different you know strictures that made certain kinds of technical and operational cooperation much more difficult—if you look at many of these partnerships they are strong and durable, but they come, frankly, from a tradition of a degree of paternalism. And an frankly, one of the things that's going to be absolutely essential on the part of the United States is is that we've got to clear out some of those hurdles that make cooperation with the United States that much more difficult. It means approaching some of these partnerships with a much higher degree of humility. It means listening to the security perceptions and unique perspectives of allies and partners and to take those into effect. I feel very strongly that any national security strategy, any

approach to the world, requires the United States to work more directly and fundamentally with allies and partners.

And I also believe that in that effort, breaking down the sort of regional silos is really critical, one of the most important things. Again, Sir Stephen led the way in Britain, but others across the continent in Europe—what's what's taken place in the last ten years is remarkable. It used to be that talking about the Indo-Pacific was kind of a distant fifth on the agenda. That is no longer the case. Indo-Pacific questions and opportunities are now basically at the center of strategic thinking across Europe, and frankly, AUKUS both was a result of that and has driven that as well. Charles.

Sir Stephen: Charles, can I just make a couple of really quick points on—

Mr. Edel: Hold on, hold on, Sir Stephen, because we have so many questions coming in. I've got a question that I actually want to tee you up on, and then you can make whatever points you want to. So, final question for you, Sir Stephen is in your own words, AUKUS is a colossal undertaking. Let's also note that it's faced colossal scrutiny and criticism. Some of that scrutiny is fair and has been warranted, as I think you all said. Other parts of the conversation, probably less so. I guess the final question I have is that I'd like to ask you first, Sir Stephen: what's the right way to measure whether AUKUS is delivering? What's the right way to judge AUKUS, and what should we be paying closest attention to?

Sir Stephen: So that does actually go to one of the things I was going to say. The the the reason that AUKUS is so important is because of, outside of strategic nuclear weapons, the most important platform that anybody fields is the conventionally armed nuclear-powered submarine. And various people have described them, but for me the best description is that it is absolutely the apex predator of the seas, and indeed has a colossal effect on the calculations that people make about land campaigns as well. And anybody who can make these things wants to make more of them. So the simple truth of the matter is that you know one measure of whether or not we're doing well is how quickly we are getting more of them. At that is at a very reductive level, AUKUS is about getting more of these boats into the water, fielded and driven around by nations where the trust is at the absolute pitch, the absolute maximum pitch.

That is what it is all about. AUKUS is effectively allowing a boat class of seven in the UK to be a boat class of twelve, and for an additional five AUKUS boats, as well as the three Virginia boats, to be put into the water and driven around by the Australians, so that is an uplift from seven to seventeen, and that is a big deal. It also means that there is a greater focus on investment and a much greater focus on compatibility, commonality between the boat

classes, so all of the boats, the new Virginias and the AUKUS boats, are all going to be better than the boats that they would have been before AUKUS was was imagined. That is an important part as well.

And critically—we haven't talked about this yet—we know that the American submarine industrial base is not producing Virginias at the speed that it would like to. The ability to have another maintenance base in Western Australia is going to mean that that America can keep more of its boats out without necessarily having to increase the rate of production. That is absolutely critical as well. So I mean all of that, in a very simple way, I would say, how many of these boats are there out there, and how much is AUKUS contributing to that? That is critical.

The other thing I would say—and this is obviously not open to everybody to judge from public sources, by any stretch of the imagination—our adversaries hate AUKUS. They really hate it. In a sense, the way in which you can judge whether or not it is doing the things that you want it to do is how much people who don't necessarily share our value systems and our objectives are objecting to it. Sometimes that's publicly, sometimes that's less publicly, but it's certainly something to watch watch out for. So those are a couple of things I would think about, but the main thing here is: how many more boats have we got in the water, keeping us safe?

Mr. Edel:

Thank you. I'd like to swing this now and roll in a couple of questions before we kind of conclude here. Ambassador Moriarty, you can keep that question on the table—what is the appropriate metric to judge AUKUS by?—but I would also throw out this question that we've just got in from Ellen Nakashima of The Washington Post. And she asked actually building directly on what Sir Stephen just laid out, how has China's stance on and response to AUKUS evolved in the past five years? And so I'd love to throw this to you, Ambassador, about your read and of the adversary's read of AUKUS, and maybe what is the appropriate metric that we should be evaluating AUKUS on? Ambassador.

Ambassador
Moriarty:

Charlie, I think that the optimal pathway has set out a very demanding set of points at which Australia, and all three partners, needed to meet. I think at the moment we are on track. We are meeting the optimal pathway requirements and the dates. So we are on time, on schedule, on the optimal pathway that was designed following the announcement. I get a lot of comfort from that. There will be rocky moments in the years ahead, I'm absolutely certain of that.

But I think it is how Australia, the Collins-class submarines are reaching the end of their life. We're we're looking at how we can keep those very potent,

but still conventional, submarines, how we can keep them in our fleet for as long as possible. So getting this capability, getting the hulls in the water, as Stephen said, is really important for us. And it's not just the number of hulls, it's also the capability. The SSN-AUKUS will be a much more capable platform than what we would have had if we'd pursued another conventional capability. It's the range, the speed, the onboard capabilities, but also I draw particular attention to the vertical launch capability, which we will now be able to acquire. That changes the strategic calculation in profound ways. It gives Australia the ability to have a missile launch capability from a submerged, covert platform. It really does add a potent capability to Australia's maritime arsenal in the years ahead, and you know that's a very significant benefit for Australia in terms of being able to contribute to real deterrence and real balance in the Indo-Pacific.

And I think China has made clear it's very unhappy with AUKUS. It believes, or it said that it is destabilizing the region; I'm not sure if it believes that it is destabilizing the region. But when you look at the way in which China is putting additional nuclear-powered submarines and additional nuclear-armed submarines into the water, it's building its submarine capability and its nuclear missile capability at such a pace. These Australian boats are not destabilizing the region. We are seeking to balance in the region. And the growth of PLA capabilities, the growth of PLA nuclear-powered submarine capabilities, is very profound, and it is changing the strategic balance in the Indo-Pacific. I think our really significant but nonetheless when you scale things, its overall contribution to balance. I just can't understand that there's any credibility in a Chinese claim that that a relatively small fleet of Australian SSNs is destabilizing the region. I think we need to examine those claims very closely.

Mr. Edel: Yes, especially when China has put more than a dozen into the water themselves over the last decade-plus, which is a fact that I think bears repeating, I think. Kurt, finally, over to you. So same question as the last two, about what is the appropriate metric to judge AUKUS by, what should we be looking at. But let me, again, throw out to our audience Hiroki Nakanishi's question—he's from Japan's LDP—and he asks a perennial favorite: how can AUKUS be transformed into JAUKUS? So we've heard that one before, but why don't I give that to you, in addition to the appropriate metric that you think we should be looking at. Thanks, Kurt.

Mr. Campbell: Thank you, Charlie. Well, look, I don't really have much more to add to what the Ambassador and Sir Stephen have said. I think the guideposts are fairly clear in front of us. There are going to be some hurdles ahead, and

there will be challenges, but at the same time, I would just simply say myself remember facing challenges in this process, thinking we'd never get over them, that it was just too hard: too much bureaucratic you know sticking points, not enough money, not enough political will. Each time, we have mounted them.

I will say Charlie, one of the things that I'm struck by—we talked a little bit about this before we started—there is a small group of people who focus on the comings and goings of AUKUS and sort of report on them, and many of these stories are quite negative. They tend to focus on some of the challenges and not on what has been accomplished. I hope this podcast and other five-year memorials give us, you know frankly, a little bit more balanced perspective about what's been achieved and the road ahead. And I think what's been achieved should give us confidence that we will be able to meet the guidelines before us. I also want to suggest that small and short slippages of time is the order of the day in almost all big programmatic things. So I think we need to be calm if we have certain you know kind of mandates or criteria that appear to be you know less immediate. It will take time to accomplish a number of things that are ongoing now.

Look, and this is a complex, intense effort. There are lots of proposals for how other countries can join in. I will say I've been very grateful for the work that's been done recently—we didn't get to it, Charles—on Pillar 2, and I think Japan's interest in engaging in that element of AUKUS is an important and critical first step. I would I would like us to get a little further down the trajectory of the trilateral engagement before we start talking about more partnerships. I think that would just complicate what is already one of the most you know dynamic, challenging multilateral industrial capacities of modern times.

Mr. Edel:

Great. Well, I'm not going to double our session and go for another hour and get to Pillar 2, but stay tuned, because I'm sure we'll have that conversation as well. Look, as we wrap here, let me just thank the three of you enormously, not only for taking the time to have this conversation, but also for the enormous amount of effort that has gone into what is, as everyone likes to say, a multidecadal proposition of working to inject more stability into our largest challenges that we have in front of us.

A long time ago, I think someone wrote that because this is one of the most enormous undertakings that our nations have decided to undergo, it also requires enormous undertakings of explaining what it is we're doing, explaining to our publics why this is worth it. And I think the three of you

have really done an outstanding job in helping us to have that conversation, which in democratic nations is never going to go away, and we're going to continue having that conversation. So again, I'd like to thank the three of you very much. For all of those of you who are watching, at CSIS, the Australia Chair continues to track this. We have new analysis out regularly. Please tune in for more of our efforts at [CSIS.org](https://www.csis.org), and thank you all so much for tuning in today.

(END.)