New Uncrewed Undersea Capabilities Strengthen AUKUS Partnership



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The UK, US and Australia have strengthened their maritime forces, introducing new uncrewed undersea vessels to extend the range and lethality of their warfare capabilities.

As part of the AUKUS partnership, the nations have taken part in a joint exercise off the east coast of Australia to test new equipment that will increase the protection of critical underwater infrastructure. During the exercise, Australia's new Undersea Support Vessel, Australian Defence Vessel (ADV) Guidance, hosted a range of undersea capabilities while they were tested at sea.

A recent addition to the Australian fleet, the ADV Guidance's primary role is to support undersea and surveillance systems trials and includes the ability to host a small team of sailors as well as on-board and off-board systems, with both crewed and uncrewed capability. Earlier this month, Lieutenant General Rob Magowan, the UK's Deputy Chief of Defence Staff for Military Capability, joined international representatives to witness the showcase of a range of advanced undersea capabilities deployed from ADV Guidance.

The UK's Offshore Patrol Vessel HMS Tamar, which is on a 5-year deployment to the Indo-Pacific, also played a key role in the exercise. HMS Tamar used a combination of divers and autonomous underwater vehicles to conduct mine countermeasure operations, and monitor critical infrastructure, including pipelines and communication cables.

Last week, First Sea Lord Admiral Sir Ben Key visited Australia to address the Australian Sea Power Conference, discussing the UK's commitment to the collective security of the region.

Key said:

"The recent AUKUS trials and exercise demonstrate the advances being made possible by our tri-lateral collaboration under the partnership. It is hugely exciting to see the strength of our three nations, coming together through the AUKUS partnership to successfully develop and demonstrate a range of underwater capabilities that are crucial to ensuring safety and security in the region and more broadly.

AUKUS is a landmark security and defence partnership between Australia, the UK, and the US to support a free and open Indo-Pacific by strengthening regional global security. This exercise is a significant step forward for delivery of the undersea warfare capabilities work stream under the second pillar of AUKUS.

AUKUS Pillar 2 seeks to strengthen trilateral capabilities in cutting-edge military technologies, increase interoperability, and drive knowledge-sharing and innovation. AUKUS partners are developing a suite of advanced capabilities including autonomous systems, artificial intelligence, and other key technologies for the three AUKUS nations. Pillar 2 complements trilateral efforts under AUKUS Pillar 1 to deliver a conventionally-armed nuclear-powered submarine capability to Australia."

Chief of Navy, Vice Admiral Mark Hammond AO, Royal Australian Navy, said:

"Submarines are critical to the defence of Australia. Our submarines, and other military assets, will increasingly work with autonomous systems below and on the surface of the ocean to extend range and lethality.

AUKUS Pillar Two is about delivering advanced capabilities, including through technologies that extend reach and range.

As we have seen in the Ukraine conflict, scalable autonomous and semi-autonomous systems have the capacity to transform warfighting. The Defence Strategic Review (DSR) identified asymmetric capabilities like these as critical in the defence and protection of the nation.

These technologies originate from a range of industries, like the off-shore oil and gas and communications industries. They have been modified to carry a military payload to become force multipliers, working in concert with our ships, submarines and aircraft, and to serve as a key deterrent.

What we get by working with industry in this way is speed, what we get by doing it together under the AUKUS partnership is scale, where the sum of the whole is greater than its parts."

Admiral Samuel Paparo, U.S. Navy, the Commander of U.S.

Pacific Fleet, said:

“These exercises accelerate our combined development of advanced military capabilities. In a dynamic strategic environment and the escalation of competitors’ coercive activities, AUKUS is not just about the exchange of submarines and capabilities, it is an expansion of our continued trust in and commitment to our allies.

We are prioritizing capabilities that improve our warfighter’s ability to see, understand, decide and act – then work together to bolster integrated deterrence.

Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States are developing and fielding joint advanced military capabilities to promote security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. The strategic alignment of our national defense strategies anchored by shared values is driving unprecedented collaboration in advanced technologies.

Our trilateral exercises develop and deliver interoperable, threat-informed capabilities key to the warfighter, and contribute to sustained defense industrial-based collaboration. Meanwhile, the AUKUS partners are investing in trilateral projects that are enhancing our scientific and technological capacity to build enduring advantages for the future.”

Earlier this month, the Australian Deputy Prime Minister joined the UK Defence Secretary Grant Shapps on a visit to Rolls Royce in Derby – the location where the nuclear reactors will be built for the SSN-AUKUS submarines under the AUKUS collaboration.