

# ROYAL NAVY TO EXPAND SUB FORCE

IS THIS AMBITIOUS PLAN A CASE OF TOO LITTLE AND TOO LATE?

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Artist concept of the new AUKUS-class submarine.



There is no doubt that the military forces of the United Kingdom have suffered a distinct drop in quantity and quality over the past several decades. Britain's prime minister has now announced a plan to build up

to a dozen new attack submarines as part of the AUKUS program. AUKUS stands for Australia, United Kingdom, and United States and is a trilateral security partnership aimed at promoting a free and open Indo-Pacific. The new

submarine will replace the *Astute*-class currently under construction. AUKUS focuses on strengthening defense and security interests through information and technology sharing, and integrating security-related science, technology, and supply chains. A key aspect for the United Kingdom as Keir Starmer has stated is that the Royal Navy's conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarine fleet will be significantly expanded under the nation's new Strategic Defense Review (SDR). But will it?

The SDR proposes to build one new sub every 18 months. However, the United Kingdom has only one shipyard capable of this work and that is the BAE Systems facility Barrow-in-Furness. Some critics state that the infrastructure and people required to build the subs just doesn't exist. Also, recruitment and retention are problematic for the Royal Navy but even more so for its submarine crews.

The Ministry of Defense has stated

that AUKUS would support 30,000 jobs into the 2030s as well as 30,000 apprenticeships and 14,000 graduate roles across the next decade. AUKUS will incorporate American technology such as propulsion plant systems and components, a common vertical launch system and weapons and will have a high degree of commonality with the US Navy's *Virginia*-class, including sharing elements of the propulsion plant, combat system and weapons, thus enhancing interoperability and Australia's transition to AUKUS.

The review also states that the British government needs to start considering a replacement for the *Dreadnought*-class of submarines. It also outlined a commitment of \$18 billion in the UK's sovereign nuclear warheads as well as investment in cutting-edge warships and support ships, including new autonomous vessels to patrol the North Atlantic. Since the retirement of the last Royal Air Force WE.177 nuclear bomb back in 1998, Britain's nuclear arsenal

has been wholly submarine-based.

The *Dreadnought*-class is intended to replace the *Vanguard*-class and construction started in late 2016 with the first in class expected to enter service in the early 2030s and four of the class are

currently under construction but certain delays may have impact on the *Astute*-class (of which seven are contracted) since there is only the one manufacturing facility and this could lead to a snowballing effect. **SC**



HMS Ambush of the *Astute*-class nuclear attack submarines.



The BAE Systems Barrow-in-Furness submarine construction hall with an *Astute*-class submarine.