

British prime minister urges France to get a grip and move on from AUKUS row

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Johnson's remarks came after France last week recalled its ambassadors from the United States and Australia over the AUKUS agreement [File: Ben Stansall/Pool Photo via AP]

London, September 22 (RHC)-- British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has urged France to “get a grip” after Paris spent days reacting furiously to being sidelined by a new security pact brokered between the

United Kingdom, United States and Australia.

Johnson on Wednesday praised the trio's agreement, which led to Australia scrapping a multibillion-dollar deal with France to build conventional submarines, as a "fundamentally great step forward for global security."

Australia will instead acquire at least eight nuclear-powered submarines with US and British technology as part of the new trilateral security deal for the Indo-Pacific region, dubbed AUKUS. "It's three very like-minded allies standing shoulder to shoulder creating a new partnership for the sharing of technology," Johnson told reporters in Washington, DC.

"I just think it's time for some of our dearest friends around the world to prenez un grip about this and donnez moi un break," he added, using the French expression for "get a grip" and a mixture of French and English to mean "give me a break".

Johnson said the pact was "not exclusive" and dismissed suggestions it was an attempt to counter the growing influence wielded by China. "I find it very hard to see in this agreement anything not to like," he said.

Johnson's remarks came after France recalled its ambassadors from the US and Australia last week, saying it was blindsided by Canberra's move to develop submarines with the US and UK rather than stick with its 2016 contract for French diesel vessels.

No such step was followed for London, with France's Europe minister, Clement Beaune, suggesting that was because the UK was a "junior partner" to the deal and subordinate to Washington on foreign policy issues post-Brexit.

French defence minister Florence Parly did however pull out of scheduled talks with her British counterpart, Defence Secretary Ben Wallace, which had been set to take place in London this week.

US, UK and Australian officials have attempted to ease France's anger by reassuring Paris that it remains a vital ally. U.S. President Joe Biden and French counterpart Emmanuel Macron were expected to speak by telephone on Wednesday for the first time since the spat began. Biden and Johnson held talks at the White House on Tuesday.

Macron will expect "concrete measures" from Washington to restore lost trust, his office said. The French president wants Biden to recognise that consultations with allies should have been held before the decision was made. Macron also hopes the U.S. will acknowledge a need for European sovereignty.

On Tuesday, Germany joined France in berating the U.S. for negotiating the trilateral security pact in secret, while the European Union's top official said such behaviour was unacceptable

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