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Australia Praised for Defence Spending, More Urged

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A senior United States senator has praised Australia's current defence spending levels while suggesting there is scope for additional investment as international security challenges grow.

Senator Chris Coons, a member of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was part of a bipartisan congressional delegation visiting Sydney on Friday. The group met Prime Minister Anthony Albanese after attending the Australia-US Leadership Dialogue in Adelaide earlier in the week.

In an interview with the ABC, Senator Coons said that when Australia's shipbuilding program and other military infrastructure are included, the nation's defence budget is higher than often recognised.

"The way our NATO allies count their percentage of GDP would give Australia credit for north of 2.7 or 2.8 per cent," he explained. "I do think an increased investment in defence would be justified. Of course, that's a decision for the Australian government, the Australian people."

Australia currently spends just over 2 per cent of GDP on defence, a figure set to rise to 2.3 per cent by 2033–34 under existing projections. Coons highlighted that accounting differences mean Australia is already contributing at a level comparable to many NATO members, though calls for higher budgets are increasing as the alliance pushes toward 3.5 per cent.

The visit from the US delegation comes amid continuing discussions around the AUKUS security partnership, which has faced scrutiny in Washington during an ongoing strategic review. Former US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Elbridge Colby has been leading calls for allies in the Asia–Pacific region to raise their contributions.

Coons stressed that bipartisan support in Congress for AUKUS remains strong and warned that any significant changes to the agreement would face resistance from both Democrats and Republicans. “There is deep commitment in the Senate to this partnership,” he said.

Prime Minister Albanese has maintained that Australia’s defence budget will be set according to national requirements rather than external pressure, despite some calls in the US for spending to reach \$100 billion annually. Canberra has repeatedly emphasised that its focus is on ensuring capability and readiness rather than meeting arbitrary percentage targets.

The discussions in Sydney also come ahead of a possible meeting between Albanese and former US president Donald Trump at the United Nations General Assembly in New York next month. While the meeting has not been confirmed, officials are preparing for the prospect as part of broader diplomatic engagement.

Australia’s ongoing investments in defence, including shipbuilding, infrastructure, and advanced capability projects under AUKUS, continue to draw attention from allies. The US delegation’s remarks highlight Canberra’s growing role in regional security and the expectation that it will maintain strong commitments in the years ahead.