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Australia Reaffirms Military Independence Amid Growing U.S.-China Tensions

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Australia will not pre-commit troops to any future conflict in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the event of a war over Taiwan, according to recent statements by Australian Defence Industry Minister Pat Conroy. As the United States steps up its pressure on regional allies to clarify their roles in potential military scenarios, Canberra has made clear that any such decision remains sovereign and situational.

Speaking on the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* (ABC) over the weekend, Conroy emphasized that Australia does not speculate on hypothetical conflicts and will not pledge

forces in advance. “The decision to commit Australian troops to a conflict will be made by the government of the day,” Conroy said, reinforcing Canberra’s longstanding policy of maintaining independent control over military decisions.

The remarks come after a report by the *Financial Times* indicated that the U.S. Department of Defense has been actively engaging with allies, including Australia and Japan, regarding their positions on a potential conflict involving China and Taiwan. Elbridge Colby, former U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy and now a prominent voice in Washington foreign policy circles, noted on social media platform X (formerly Twitter) that the Pentagon is advancing former President Donald Trump’s “America First” doctrine. This includes urging allies to increase defense investment and take greater responsibility for collective deterrence.

Taiwan, a self-governed democratic island, is claimed by China as part of its territory. While Beijing has not ruled out using military force to assert control, Taiwan’s President Lai Ching-te has maintained that the island’s future should be determined by its people. The Australian government, led by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, continues to support the status quo, opposing any unilateral change to Taiwan’s position.

Conroy also voiced concern over China’s growing military capabilities, both nuclear and conventional, and warned against any single power seeking dominance in the Indo-Pacific. “A balanced region is in Australia’s interest. The idea of China establishing a military base in the Pacific is not something we support,” he added.

Despite tensions, multinational military cooperation continues. The latest iteration of **Talisman Sabre**, Australia’s largest joint military exercise with the United States, kicked off in Sydney on Sunday. The drill involves over 40,000 troops from 19 nations, including allies such as Japan, India, the United Kingdom, France, South Korea, and Canada. The scope of the exercise spans from Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean to the Coral Sea, simulating a coordinated military response across sea, air, land, and space.

Vice Admiral Justin Jones, Chief of Joint Operations for the Australian Defence Force (ADF), described the event as a key demonstration of allied unity. “This is about our ability to move and operate across northern Australia and send a message of readiness,” he said. When asked about China’s likely monitoring of the event, Jones remained pointed: “I’ll let China interpret what it means when 19 partners come together. To us, it means peace and a shared commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific.”

U.S. Army Lieutenant General Joel Vowell, also present at the exercise, emphasized deterrence as a core objective. “Our ultimate goal is no war,” Vowell said, adding that these exercises help nations build the capacity to act together amid growing instability in the region.

While Australia has ruled out hosting permanent foreign military bases, its partnership with the United States continues to deepen. U.S. rotational deployments and infrastructure investments are increasing across Australian military sites. By 2027, U.S. **Virginia-class** nuclear-powered submarines are expected to begin port visits in Western Australia as part of broader support under the AUKUS agreement, a trilateral defense pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

These submarines would play a pivotal role in any regional contingency, including a Taiwan conflict, defense analysts have noted. Still, Canberra maintains that it will act based on its national interest, not foreign expectations.

Australia’s stance underlines a careful balance: supporting its long-standing alliance with the United States, while asserting control over its own defense decisions. As strategic uncertainty grows in the Indo-Pacific, Canberra appears determined not to be drawn into conflict without cause or consultation.