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Australia Assures U.S. on AUKUS Submarine Pact Amid Defense Review

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Australia has reaffirmed its commitment to the AUKUS (Australia-United Kingdom-United States) submarine agreement, as its ambassador to Washington expressed confidence that any concerns raised by the U.S. Department of Defense would be addressed. The remarks come amid a Pentagon-led review of the trilateral security pact, which aims to bolster Western naval presence in the Indo-Pacific to counter Chinese influence.

Speaking at the Aspen Security Forum, Australian Ambassador Kevin Rudd emphasized a strong working relationship with the U.S. Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Elbridge Colby initiated the internal review. Rudd underscored the deep military and political ties between the two nations, referencing decades of bipartisan cooperation. “We’re confident

we'll work through every issue raised," Rudd said, pointing to the maturity of the alliance and longstanding personal connections.

The AUKUS initiative, unveiled in 2023, is designed to provide Australia with nuclear-powered attack submarines beginning in the early 2030s. It is the largest defense undertaking in Australia's history and reflects a growing concern over the Chinese Communist Party's military assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific region. The project also represents a significant commitment from the U.S. and the United Kingdom, both in terms of technology sharing and strategic alignment.

In June, the U.S. Department of Defense announced it was reevaluating AUKUS to ensure the agreement aligns with the administration's "America First" defense strategy. This includes concerns about whether the U.S. can meet its own naval needs while still supporting Australia's ambitious submarine program. Questions have also arisen over how Australia would respond in the event of a conflict involving Taiwan.

Australia's Defence Industry Minister, Pat Conroy, responded cautiously to those concerns, stating that Canberra would not pre-commit to any military involvement in future conflicts, particularly one between the U.S. and China. His comments reflect a hesitancy within Australia's current government to be seen as unconditionally tied to U.S. foreign policy decisions.

Furthermore, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has declined U.S. calls to raise Australia's defense spending from 2% to 3.5% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Instead, his administration insists it will fund defense based on national priorities, not external pressure—an approach that has raised questions in Washington about Australia's long-term strategic reliability.

Despite these political hesitations, Ambassador Rudd remains optimistic. He described the AUKUS deal as a reflection of "enduring trust" and a signal of the depth of the U.S.-Australia relationship. However, with growing scrutiny from the Pentagon and a reserved stance from Canberra's leadership, the future of the AUKUS pact may depend as much on political will as it does on military planning.

As the United States balances domestic priorities with international obligations, allies like Australia will face increased pressure to step up and share the load, especially as threats in the Indo-Pacific become more complex and immediate.

