

China's rage at AUKUS subs

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THE Chinese government has launched an extraordinary attack on the global nuclear watchdog, warning it will be breaching its own rules if it refuses to block Australia's nuclear submarine fleet.

China has vehemently opposed Australia's acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines through the AUKUS defence pact, which was unveiled a year ago with the US and Britain.

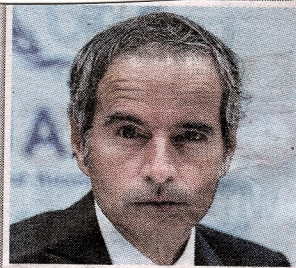
In a fiery letter to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) ahead of its September board meeting, the Chinese government ramped up the pressure by blasting the "seven cardinal sins" of the AUKUS deal and pushing the agency to intervene.

IAEA director-general Rafael Grossi on Monday welcomed the engagement of Australia, the US and Britain on AUKUS, saying he expected they would "deliver on their stated commitment to ensuring that the highest non-proliferation and safeguards standards are met".

But the Chinese government said his latest report on AUKUS – which has not been publicly released – was "patently absurd" and made the agency a "political tool" of the three countries.

"The relevant report selectively quotes agency's documents, lacks proper legal basis, and at the same time overstepped its responsibility and competence to make misleading conclusions," it said.

The letter said the director-general could not "override or overrule" the agency's member states, including China, warning that an endorsement of Australia's submarine plan would be a "direct violation" of the global nuclear non-pro-



Rafael Grossi.

liferation treaty. The Chinese government demanded an immediate halt to the AUKUS program, accusing Australia and its partners of "sinister and illegal moves", "brazen political manoeuvring" and a "serious violation" of its global nuclear responsibilities.

The Australian government has assured the IAEA that its submarine fleet would not breach non-proliferation rules because the nuclear reactors would be sealed overseas and never reopened once they were in use.

But China argued this was an "obvious cover-up effort by the three countries to conceal the true nature of their trilateral nuclear submarine co-operation, which is nothing but an act of nuclear proliferation".

It said Australia and its allies were trying to use the agency as a "Trojan Horse" to "whitewash their nuclear proliferation acts" and the "illegal transfer of nuclear weapons materials".

"The three countries have deliberately confused legitimate military activities within a country's sovereignty with acts of nuclear proliferation," the Chinese government said.

"It is ... not an issue which can be settled bilaterally between the three countries and the agency to the exclusion of other member states of the agency."