



**Australian Government**  

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**Defence**

**Joint Standing Committee on  
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade**

**Inquiry into the role of Australia's international  
development program in preventing conflict**

**Department of Defence  
Submission**

**February 2026**

1. The Department of Defence acknowledges the valuable work of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in elevating conflict prevention in Australia's foreign policy. Conflict-prevention diplomacy complements deterrence, which the 2024 National Defence Strategy (NDS) termed as Australia's primary strategic defence objective.
2. Deterrence is defined in the 2024 NDS as "the use of the military and other elements of national power to discourage or restrain a potential adversary from taking unwanted actions". Through the 2024 NDS, Australia has adopted a 'Strategy of Denial' that aims to deter any conflict before it begins, prevent any potential adversary from succeeding in coercing Australia through force, support regional security and prosperity, and uphold a favourable regional strategic balance.
3. As set out in the 2024 NDS, Defence's international engagement activities are focused on achieving outcomes that contribute to regional security and stability, and to deterring military coercion or major conflict. Defence's activities and investments in the region, while not part of Australia's official development assistance program, complement DFAT's work to shape a region that is peaceful, stable and prosperous. Defence's programs contribute to preventing conflict by supporting a favourable regional strategic balance, and an environment in which no one country will conclude that the benefit of military action outweighs the risks.
4. Defence's international engagement is focused on the security of the Indo-Pacific region, referred to as Australia's primary area of military interest from the Northeast Indian Ocean region, through maritime Southeast Asia in to the Pacific. Through bilateral, minilateral and multilateral engagement, Defence aims to contribute to a region in which all countries, regardless of size, can exercise their sovereignty free of coercion. Defence's international engagement is a key tool of the integrated statecraft required to support the concept of National Defence.
5. The Defence Cooperation Program (DCP) is a key mechanism for Australia's practical defence engagement in the Indo-Pacific. It contributes to Australia's security by funding programs and activities that foster enduring links with partners and support their resilience and capacity, including to work effectively with the Australian Defence Force in response to common security challenges such as terrorism, maritime security and natural disasters. More professional and capable security forces in the region also have a deterrent effect and contribute to reducing the risk of state conflict.
6. The DCP has supported Australia's defence relations in the region since the 1960s. The Department's 2025-26 Portfolio Budget Statement reports an allocation of \$401.3 million for the DCP, an increase of over \$70 million on the 2024-25 Portfolio Additional Estimate Statement Budget.
7. Under the DCP, Defence conducts a broad range of activities and investments with around 30 countries, including:
  - a. individual education and training (including scholarships);
  - b. capacity and confidence building (including for maritime security, capability development, infrastructure, counter terrorism, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and military professionalism);
  - c. personnel exchanges (including seconded officers and exchanges);
  - d. visits in both directions (including strategic and other dialogues), and
  - e. collective training (including exercises and operations that promote interoperability and familiarity with our partners).

8. Defence is committed to being flexible and responsive to the needs of our international partners. The global strategic environment is dynamic and can result in shifting demands from partners requiring changes and re-allocation of funds. To remain flexible and responsive to emerging and long-term needs of our partners, the DCP budget is allocated at the regional level.
9. The bulk of DCP funding supports programs in the Pacific (approximately 80 per cent). The remainder funds programs in Southeast Asia (approximately 10 per cent), South Asia, the Middle East and Africa. The program also funds the Defence International Training Centre in Australia.
10. In the Pacific, a key element of the DCP, and the centrepiece of Australia's defence engagement, is the Pacific Maritime Security Program (PMSP). Through this program Australia is providing 23 Guardian-class Patrol Boats (GPBs) and three landing craft to the region. The GPBs replace the previously-delivered Pacific Patrol Boats with a newer, more advanced capability. As of 6 January 2026, Australia has delivered 22 GPBs to 11 Pacific partner nations with a 23rd expected to be delivered to the Republic of Marshall Islands on 29 January 2026. A 24th GPB will be delivered to the Republic of Maldives later in 2026 outside the auspices of the PMSP. Alongside the provision of vessels, the PMSP also includes support for in-country advisers, maintenance, aerial surveillance, crew training, infrastructure to enable safe and secure berthing and greater regional coordination. The totality of this support amounts to a commitment of \$5.9 billion over 30 years which strengthens Pacific partner nations' ability to effectively manage maritime security threats.
11. Under the Indo-Pacific Infrastructure Program, Defence has supported security related infrastructure projects in the region to increase capability and interoperability and to allow Pacific-led responses to Pacific security challenges. The Program includes 43 active projects and activities across the Indo-Pacific within six different sub-programs: major works, minor works, maritime infrastructure, policing infrastructure, Defence's regional estate, and maintenance and sustainment. Key projects include the redevelopment of Lombrum Naval Base in Papua New Guinea, upgrades to the Cook Barrack site for the Vanuatu Police Force in Port Vila, and the delivery of a maritime essential services centre in Suva, Fiji.
12. The Australian Civil-Military Centre supports Pacific partners to better prepare for, and respond to, crises and contingencies in our region. Through training, exercising and research, the Australian Civil-Military Centre supports military, police and civilian agencies to share good practices and address common challenges. This includes improving coordination and collaboration in disaster management; developing and promoting good practice approaches to crisis and conflict, including protection of civilians and international humanitarian law; and strengthening regional resilience.
13. The NDS also recognises the value of Australia working with its partners to support the global rules-based order. Defence has a strong record of contributing to peace operations in the Indo-Pacific, including leading operations in Cambodia and Timor-Leste, and continues making targeted contributions to peace and stability operations in the Middle East. Defence is also working closely with Indo-Pacific partners to support their contributions to global peace and security, including through the provision of training, materiel, and strategic airlift.