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Dutch Military Leader Urges Australia to Bolster Defence Capabilities

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The Netherlands' top military official has sounded the alarm, urging Australia to ramp up its defence capabilities in response to China's growing military might. General Onno Eichelsheim's warning, delivered during the Talisman Sabre exercises, underscores the need for Australia to prepare for regional threats. This article explores the call to action, the strategic context, and the implications for Australia's defence policy.

General Eichelsheim, Chief of Defence of the Netherlands, told ABC News that China's military buildup in the Indo-Pacific mirrors Russia's threat to Europe, emphasizing that Australia cannot afford complacency. "Those are not capabilities you only use for protecting yourself," he said of China's offensive arsenal, speaking at the Talisman Sabre exercises in Queensland, where Dutch forces joined 19 nations. He argued that relying solely on the United States (US) to counter China is unwise, pointing to strengthened partnerships with Japan, South Korea, and Australia. The Netherlands itself has boosted defence spending to 3.5% of gross domestic product (GDP), a benchmark the US has pressed Australia to meet, though the government has resisted, prioritizing specific capabilities over arbitrary targets.

Australia's defence landscape is shifting. The 2023 Defence Strategic Review (DSR), conducted by former defence chief Angus Houston and former minister Stephen Smith, warned that the Australian Defence Force (ADF) is not fit for today's threats, advocating for long-range strike capabilities and northern base upgrades. Admiral David Johnston, ADF Chief, echoed this at a 2025 Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) conference, stating Australia must prepare to launch operations from its own soil—a mindset not seen since World War II. Yet, the government's commitment to a \$19 billion defence boost over four years, including AUKUS submarines, has drawn criticism for delays and underfunding, with ASPI warning of a "brittle and hollow" force if spending doesn't rise.

As China's navy conducts exercises near Australia, the pressure is on. Eichelsheim's call aligns with US and allied urgings to counter Beijing's ambitions, particularly over Taiwan and the South China Sea. With the ADF stretched by recruitment challenges and ageing equipment,

Australia risks being outpaced. Will the nation heed this wake-up call, or continue to lag in a volatile region?