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Australian Recon Soldiers Train Break-Contact Drills with Philippine Army at Camp Kibaritan

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Australian Army reconnaissance soldiers joined forces with their Philippine Army counterparts at From 19 May to 24 June 2025, over 80 Australian soldiers, mainly from the 1st Brigade, participated in joint training with approximately 140 personnel from the Philippine Army’s 4th and 10th Infantry Divisions at Camp Kibaritan in Bukidnon, Northern

Mindanao. The exercise, named *Kasangga* – meaning “ally” in Filipino – focused on enhancing interoperability through jungle and urban operations, including intense break-contact drills designed to teach troops how to disengage from enemy forces effectively.

Australian teams, such as reconnaissance squads from the 5th/7th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (RAR), emphasised low-profile, intelligence-gathering tactics. These small patrols of five to six soldiers operate stealthily from observation posts, with the intent to collect information rather than seek direct engagement. Corporal Scott-Mills noted that “We don’t normally go out seeking the enemy. We’re there to collect information,” reflecting Australia’s doctrinal preference for reconnaissance over direct confrontation.

In contrast, Philippine forces used larger platoon-sized “reconnaissance in force” methods suited to counterinsurgency operations, shaped by their ongoing experience combating internal armed groups. This difference in approach highlighted contrasting operational priorities between the two militaries.

The Joint Australian Training Team–Philippines (JATT-P) coordinated the exercise, which is one of more than 20 activities planned for 2025 between the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). Philippine Army spokesperson Colonel Louie Dema-ala described the drills – which also included breaching operations and tactical casualty care – as crucial to sharpening combat readiness.

However, the exercise’s focus on territorial defence prompted discussion about the suitability of Australia’s current military posture. Major Brendan Xenos, contingent commander, observed that *Kasangga* challenged the

Philippine Army's reliance on forward operating bases by encouraging more flexible tactics better suited to the evolving security environment of the Indo-Pacific.

Critics argue that the Australian Labor government's emphasis on regional alliances risks overstressing ADF resources without yielding proportional domestic security benefits. Nevertheless, the Philippines' strategic pivot towards territorial defence, motivated by tensions in the South China Sea, underscores the importance of such joint exercises. Kasangga 2025-1 represents a deepening of Australia–Philippines defence cooperation, but its long-term success depends on aligning tactics and fostering mutual resilience.