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RAN Sailors Train with US Coast Guard in Darwin Harbour for Talisman Sabre 25

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Royal Australian Navy (RAN) sailors sharpened their maritime security skills alongside US Coast Guard personnel in Darwin Harbour during Exercise Talisman Sabre 2025. Using a transportable port security boat, the joint operation highlighted the strategic and economic importance of allied interoperability while raising questions about Australia's reliance on foreign partnerships.

On 20 July 2025, RAN personnel conducted vessel boarding drills employing a US Coast Guard Port Security Unit 307 transportable boat. This training formed part of Talisman

Sabre, Australia's largest military exercise, involving 35,000 personnel from 19 nations. The exercise focused on protecting critical infrastructure such as the Port of Darwin. Lieutenant Nicholas Haas from the US Coast Guard noted that working alongside Australian forces enhances both countries' port defence capabilities. The operation simulated layered security measures, combining small boat patrols with shore-based teams securing key locations—essential for safeguarding maritime trade routes that underpin Australia's \$2.2 trillion economy.

The economic significance of maritime security was underscored by the fact that the Port of Darwin handles approximately \$40 billion in annual trade, including liquefied natural gas exports. Talisman Sabre also featured live-fire and amphibious exercises involving RAN units working with the UK's HMS Prince of Wales and the US Navy's USS George Washington. These drills test joint operational readiness across large distances, ensuring that supply chains remain uninterrupted. However, opposition voices have criticised the Labor government's focus on multinational exercises, arguing it detracts from necessary investments in domestic naval projects such as the delayed Hunter-class frigate program, which is key to supporting Australian shipbuilding and employment.

Critics also question the government's strategic priorities, pointing to the 2015 leasing of the Port of Darwin to a Chinese-owned company as an unresolved national security concern. Shadow Defence Minister Andrew Hastie urged that Australian sovereignty should take precedence over foreign dependencies. While Exercise Talisman Sabre strengthens alliances, the RAN's use of US Coast Guard assets during the drills highlights the ongoing need to develop robust Australian capabilities to protect economic interests and maintain stability in the region.