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Air Force Refuels and Rearms at Remote Airfield in Talisman Sabre 2025

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The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) has successfully demonstrated its Forward Arming and Refuelling Point (FARP) capability during Exercise Talisman Sabre 2025, enhancing its operational agility and reinforcing Australia’s ability to project air power across contested and remote environments.

Between July 13 and August 4, a C-17A Globemaster III from No. 36 Squadron carried out a FARP operation at an austere airfield in Western Australia. The operation enabled the refuelling and rearming of air combat assets without relying on established infrastructure—a key advantage in potential high-threat or denied environments.

Squadron Leader Alex Moulds, lead planner from No. 88 Squadron, described the FARP as a critical enabler of expeditionary operations. “Using austere airfields gets our assets back into the fight quickly,” Moulds said in comments to *Defence News*, noting the importance of speed and adaptability in current strategic conditions.

Exercise Talisman Sabre 2025 involved approximately 35,000 personnel from 19 partner nations, testing combined force readiness across air, land, and sea domains. The RAAF’s FARP trial was supported by teams from the Air Warfare Centre, Combat Support Group, Air Combat Group, and Air Mobility Group, demonstrating inter-group coordination and high readiness levels.

The exercise took place amid continued strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific, where dispersed basing is increasingly viewed as a deterrent against threats to major military hubs. FARP capabilities enable rapid and flexible deployment options, allowing aircraft to operate from locations that may not have been prepared in advance.

The initiative aligns with the broader objectives of the Australia–United Kingdom–United States (AUKUS) security partnership, which aims to enhance deterrence and interoperability across the Indo-Pacific region. Allied contributions to Talisman Sabre, including missile training from

Japan and integrated operations with U.S. forces, underscore the importance of multilateral cooperation in regional security.

While the government has pointed to Talisman Sabre as evidence of Australia's growing operational capability, there is ongoing debate about whether current defence spending sufficiently supports the ADF's long-term preparedness. The 2025–26 defence budget, valued at \$50.3 billion, includes significant investment in procurement and capability development, but some opposition figures have questioned whether funding is adequately prioritised for emerging needs such as FARP expansion and dispersed logistics.

Opposition Leader Peter Dutton has called for greater urgency in equipping the ADF for modern warfare conditions, particularly as Australia works to meet its AUKUS Pillar I and II commitments. Critics have pointed to perceived delays in infrastructure upgrades and capability integration.

As with previous iterations of the exercise, foreign surveillance, including reported monitoring by Chinese vessels, has been observed near participating forces. Defence analysts note that austere airfield operations complicate adversarial intelligence gathering and offer a tactical advantage by reducing predictability in basing.

The RAAF's demonstration of FARP capability during Talisman Sabre 2025 marks a significant milestone in Australia's force posture and operational readiness. As regional dynamics continue to evolve, the ability to operate independently of major bases will be vital for ensuring response flexibility and maintaining strategic deterrence.

Continued investment in sustainment, training, and logistics infrastructure will be essential to retain this edge as Australia adapts to a more complex security environment.