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Australia, NZ Bolster Military Ties After Chinese Drills

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Australia and New Zealand vowed to deepen military cooperation in response to a Chinese live-fire naval exercise in the Tasman Sea, signaling heightened regional security concerns.

On August 9, 2025, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon met in Queenstown for the annual Australia-New Zealand Leaders' Meeting, focusing on strengthening military ties amid growing regional tensions. The summit followed a Chinese naval live-fire exercise in February 2025 in the Tasman Sea, which separates the two nations. The exercise, involving the Chinese warships Hengyang, Zunyi, and Weishanhu, disrupted commercial flights and was seen as a bold

demonstration of China's expanding military reach, according to the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Luxon, describing Australia as New Zealand's "only ally," emphasized the need for closer military integration. "A key priority is interoperability with Australia to form a cohesive Anzac force in our region," he told reporters, referencing the Australian New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC), a historic military partnership from World War I, as reported by The Nightly. The leaders endorsed the Joint Statement on Closer Defence Relations (CDR), signed in December 2024, to enhance joint capabilities and deterrence in the Indo-Pacific.

The Chinese exercise, which prompted flight diversions, drew criticism for its lack of prior notification. Albanese raised concerns with Chinese President Xi Jinping during a Beijing visit, noting the disruption to civilian aviation, per Military.com. Xi countered by referencing Australia's freedom of navigation exercises in the South China Sea. Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles called the incident "disconcerting," highlighting that Australia typically provides 12 to 24 hours' notice for such exercises.

The leaders' joint statement acknowledged the volatile strategic environment, driven by great-power competition, without directly naming China. They reaffirmed the Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty (ANZUS) as a cornerstone of regional stability. Luxon noted both nations adopt a similar approach to engaging China, their largest trading partner, balancing cooperation with candid discussions on differing values, according to 9News.

The summit also addressed economic ties, with Albanese meeting business leaders from the Australia New Zealand Leadership Forum (ANZLF) to advance the Single Economic Market (SEM). The leaders' commitment to a unified defence posture reflects a pragmatic response to regional challenges, prioritizing national security and alliance strength.