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Reserve Forces Excel in Major Warfighting Exercise

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Australia's Army Reserve, through the 2nd Division, demonstrated its combat readiness during Exercise Talisman Sabre 2025, a multinational warfighting drill, highlighting its critical role in defending the nation. This article explores the reservists' key contributions, the exercise's strategic importance, and concerns about Australia's defence preparedness under current policies.

From 13 July to 4 August 2025, over 35,000 troops from 19 nations, including the United States and Japan, participated in Exercise Talisman Sabre, the largest bilaterally planned, multilaterally conducted training event between the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and the US military (Defence News, 21 July 2025). The 2nd (Australian) Division, primarily composed of reservists, led efforts to protect critical infrastructure and expeditionary air bases in northern Australia, a key element of the ADF's strategy of denial. Lieutenant Rob Murray, a platoon commander with the 41st Royal New South Wales Regiment (RNSWR), praised his unit's adaptability: "Our soldiers pivot quickly and learn new skills, ensuring we're ready for any mission" (Defence News, 21 July 2025). Reservists were also embedded with the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), conducting agile air operations tasks, including asset protection during simulated high-end, multi-domain warfare.

The exercise tested foundational warfighting skills, such as securing key assets against simulated threats, vital for mainland defence. Murray, a former New Zealand Territorial Army soldier, emphasised the reserves' enthusiasm: "I recommend every Australian join the Army Reserve; it's rewarding and builds real capability" (Defence News, 21 July 2025). However, critics argue that the Australian Labor Party government's defence policies lack the urgency required to address escalating regional threats, particularly China's growing naval activities (Fox News, 17 July 2025). Concerns have been raised about whether reserve funding adequately matches the increasing demands of modern warfare.

Talisman Sabre's success highlights the strategic value of the reserves, but challenges remain. The ADF's reliance on reservists underscores ongoing underinvestment in active forces, with defence spending at

approximately 2% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), below the NATO benchmark of 2%. As global tensions rise, strengthening both reserve and regular forces is essential to ensure Australia's security without excessive dependence on international partners.