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Fighter Controllers Hone Skills Aboard HMAS Sydney

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Four fighter controllers from the Royal Navy (RN), Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), and Royal Australian Navy (RAN) have joined forces aboard HMAS Sydney, integrating advanced air defence tactics during a multinational deployment. This article explores their collaboration, the strategic importance of the exercise, and its implications for Australia's naval readiness amid rising regional tensions.

In late June 2025, HMAS Sydney, a Hobart-class destroyer, sailed from Singapore with the United Kingdom's Carrier Strike Group (CSG) under Operation Highmast, led by HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Dauntless. The fighter controllers, operating in the ship's Combat Information Centre (CIC), supported air operations using the Aegis Combat System and SPY radar, managing assets such as F-35s and F/A-18s. Royal Navy Lieutenant Paul Rogers, on his first foreign warship assignment, praised the experience: "It's crucial for integrating HMAS Sydney into the CSG and understanding the Aegis system's capabilities" (Defence News, 21 July 2025). The exchange, part of Exercise Talisman Sabre, underscores the importance of interoperability among allied forces in the Indo-Pacific.

The collaboration enhances Australia's defence capabilities, particularly in air and missile defence, as the RAN's destroyers are equipped to counter threats at ranges exceeding 150 kilometres. RAAF Flying Officer Frank Headley emphasised the value of cross-navy operations: "Working with both navies advances our integrated air and missile defence mission" (Mirage News, 21 July 2025). HMAS Sydney's crew, accustomed to coordinating with its MH-60R Seahawk helicopter, adapted to managing fixed-wing aircraft, a skill vital for joint operations. Commander Ben Weller, Sydney's Commanding Officer, called the integration a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity" to enhance skills with allies (Defence News, 21 July 2025).

While such exercises are valuable, some critics argue they highlight Australia's reliance on foreign alliances, potentially at the expense of developing independent capabilities. However, with China's naval activities intensifying, as noted in Japan's 2025 defence report, these collaborations remain critical for regional stability (Fox News, 17 July

2025). The fighter controllers' success aboard Sydney signals Australia's commitment to maintaining a robust and allied defence posture.