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Australia's Military Shortfalls: Defence Experts Sound Alarm

July 27, 2025

– Categories: Defence & Security



Australia's military faces significant challenges in preparing for high-intensity conflict, with defence experts warning of critical gaps in readiness amid increasing Indo-Pacific tensions. Despite large-scale exercises demonstrating capability, concerns remain about the Australian Defence Force's (ADF) ability to respond effectively to emerging threats.

The 2025 Talisman Sabre exercises, Australia's largest war games, involved warships, aircraft, and thousands of personnel, showcasing interoperability with allies. However, defence analysts, including former Army Chief Lieutenant General Peter Leahy, highlight

shortages in key areas such as long-range precision weapons, armoured vehicles, live-fire training opportunities, personnel numbers, and ammunition supplies. Infrastructure deficits and supply-chain vulnerabilities further complicate operational readiness. These experts caution that current capabilities fall short of the obligations Australia has committed to under the AUKUS partnership.

The 2023 Defence Strategic Review assessed the ADF as “not fully fit for purpose,” abandoning the previous assumption of a decade’s warning before major conflict. China’s rapid military expansion and assertive stance on Taiwan increase the immediacy of potential threats. The 2024 National Defence Strategy focuses on deterrence and upgrading northern bases but delays procurement of critical missile defence systems until 2026 despite available technologies. Some strategists argue that Australia’s defence posture is more oriented towards supporting allied operations in the region rather than independently defending the nation.

The Albanese Government’s commitment to acquiring nuclear-powered submarines under AUKUS, with an estimated cost of up to \$360 billion, risks diverting funds from other essential defence capabilities. Defence spending remains around 2 percent of gross domestic product, and recruitment challenges persist, with active personnel numbers below 60,000 as of 2023. Comparisons to regional military capabilities underscore the need for a stronger, more self-reliant defence force.

Given the evolving security environment, Australia requires a robust, combat-ready ADF. Clearer transparency regarding defence expenditures and a strategic plan to close current capability gaps are essential to ensure national security as regional tensions continue to rise.