

International Relations

Taking It to the Next Level: A Necessary Evolution in Combined Multinational Exercises

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Keywords: interoperability, combined military exercises, command post exercises, table-top exercises, live fire exercises, field training exercises

<https://doi.org/10.58930/bp55098253>

Vol. 4, Issue 1, 2026

This paper considers optimal ways to expand the conduct of combined military exercises with partner nations and achieve the objectives of developing relationships, interoperability, networking and collective resolve. It considers different reasons for conducting combined military exercises, the Australian Government's renewed support for combined military exercises, the global context of combined exercises increasing in frequency, and successful examples of combined military exercises in the region. It considers how different ways of conducting combined military exercises apply to the goals articulated in Australia's 2024 National Defence Strategy. Ultimately, it suggests Command Post Exercises should be progressed with partner nations, and that existing regional security architecture offers a useful means through which to establish them. This paper is written for defence strategists, international engagement planners, defence exercise planners and potential exercise participants.

1. Introduction

Australia's 2024 National Defence Strategy (NDS) directs the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to pursue combined military exercises with partners and allies (Department of Defence, 2024). The NDS calls on Australia to use defence exercises with Southeast Asian nations to 'strengthen our relationships, build robust and interlocking networks of partners, increase interoperability and demonstrate collective resolve' (Department of Defence, 2024). The NDS emphasises harnessing all arms of national power to deter adversary actions that would lead to conflict, coercion or direct action against Australia's interests. To be prepared and resilient enough to achieve this objective means reinforcing international partnerships. Beyond Australia's allies, the strategy calls for development of practical interoperability with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) partners and notes increased work with partners can 'build depth and trust, support collective deterrence and demonstrate our value as a partner' (Department of Defence, 2024).

By partner nations, this paper refers to nations with whom Australia collaborates on some security initiatives and shares some strategic interests. Unlike Australia's alliances with the United States (US) and New Zealand, there is not necessarily a formal security treaty with a partner. Partner nations are distinct from allies. Australia's partners would include ASEAN and Southwest Pacific nations with whom Australia does not have a security treaty, and some external to the Indo-Pacific region who hold similar strategic outlooks. Many nations with whom Australia conducts exercises like Pitch Black or Talisman Sabre would fall into the category of partner nations.

Military exercises are the predominant means of conducting 'collective training' for military forces. Collective training is one of the fundamental inputs to capability (FIC), and refers to training ranging from that done by small teams to multinational task force exercises that enable Defence capability to be optimised to deliver government outputs (Australian Defence Force, 2021). ADF doctrine says exercises involve the simultaneous and sequential performance of related tasks to produce group outputs and outcomes. An exercise is fundamentally a military manoeuvre or simulated warfare operation involving planning, preparation and execution (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 2013). Here, a variety of possible types of exercise will be explored. An exercise can be conducted at the component level (which includes maritime, land, air and special operations forces), jointly between components, or as a combined exercise between nations. ADF doctrine has stated that regular and realistic exercises are the most effective way of generating, demonstrating and evaluating the ADF's preparedness for operations (Australian Defence Force, 2018). Preparedness is the measurable capacity of Defence to generate sustainable military power to achieve government-directed objectives over time. It describes the combined outcome of readiness and sustainability (Australian Defence Force, 2024).

While making these fundamental contributions, exercises also have a secondary role that the NDS seeks to promote. As Bernhardt (2020) explains, exercises can be a vehicle to advance national security policy and strategy. Nations can use the mechanism of exercises to show solidarity and present a deterrent to potential aggressors. The NDS directs Australia to do as such. While Australia currently invests predominantly in exercises that focus on tac-

tical interoperability with partner nations, these investments do not meet the expectations of the NDS. Australia would need to pivot its exercise program to do so.

There can be many reasons why militaries from two or more countries conduct combined exercises. Drivers for combined military exercises arguably fit into one of two broad groupings, readiness assurance and international strategy. Readiness assurance encompasses the drivers of capability assurances and interoperability. On the other hand, international strategy encompasses the drivers of relationship building, strategic alignment, deterrence and the collective ability to resolve strategic problems. Laksmna et al (2024) assert exercises can be seen as a 'defensive' signal of reassurance between allies and partners, as 'offensive' demonstrating coercive pressure against a third party in preparation for aggression, or both. Likewise, Bernhardt (2020) also suggests drivers for participating in combined military exercises include the need for partnerships and that this need is felt both by major and smaller power nations. Bernhardt goes on to suggest that the gains of combined military exercises include a stabilising effect and an economic benefit in that they deliver 'a decrease in the likelihood of engaging in a militarized interstate dispute and an increase in the value of arms traded between states'. Broadly, nations may conduct combined military exercises for a variety of possible strategic reasons encompassing intent to coerce, signal, stabilise or increase trade. Australia's NDS direction acknowledges the importance of interoperability but emphasises the international strategy drivers when it calls for exercises to demonstrate collective resolve.

The drivers outlined above can motivate Australia's partners too. Yaacob and Sato (2024) list two key reasons why member states of ASEAN have participated in multilateral or bilateral combined exercises. The first is to enhance interoperability against a common security concern, often underpinned by a security treaty. For example, the US-Philippines Balikatan series of exercises is bound by the Mutual Defense Treaty between Washington and Manila. The second reason is to build trust between states, especially if they have competing interests, the Aman Youyi combined exercise between China and some ASEAN states is such an example (Yaacob & Sato, 2024). The engagement with Australia's regional partners opens and sustains avenues for Australia to conduct combined military exercises. However, on the negative side, this means that competition for opportunities exists, and the relative strategic significance with a potential partner must be measured against the significance of the other exercises that the partner participates in. Hence, to maximise the meaning and importance of the combined exercises with partners, Australia must therefore carefully calibrate the design and implementation of those exercises.

Here, I argue that strategic and operational level problem solving is an area Australia should develop in its exercise regime with partner nations. I will consider optimal ways of meeting the NDS guidance to conduct military exercises with partner nations. Notably, the NDS does not elaborate on what kinds of military exercises should be conducted, which appropriately leaves the ADF to deter-

mine which types of exercises will best achieve the objectives stated in the NDS. To achieve the NDS objectives and demonstrate 'collective resolve', combined exercises must practise the ability to act together with partners to confront realistic mutual challenges. Exercise design must target NDS objectives. As such, I argue that an exercise participated in by a command post or headquarters offers the best way to achieve NDS objectives. However, at present, Australia primarily conducts tactical exercises with partner nations. While field exercises establish tactical interoperability and build trust amongst participants, exercises participated in by a command post could provide strategic and operational complexity for senior decision makers and therefore create pathways for collective problem solving. As the ADF leans into the NDS guidance, choosing the right type of exercise will ensure a genuine combined capacity to resolve strategic problems shared with partners. When partners select the optimal exercise type, they can calibrate the design to achieve the strategic effects the NDS demands.

2. Types of exercises

Several varieties of exercise exist for planners to draw from, with a number of options to achieve different objectives. The NDS strategic objectives should drive the type of exercise Australia chooses to conduct with partners. US exercise doctrine says 'as a general rule, collective joint training does not require fielded forces supporting the training event in order to meet the Training Objectives for the joint training audience' (US Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2019). The same point can apply to Australia's combined military exercises with partner nations. Possible types of combined military exercises include:

- Table-Top Exercises (TTX), where participants might play a structured strategy game to determined different outcomes to a specific scenario.
- Command Post Exercises (CPX), where a simulated or constructive strategic problem stimulates decision-making at a command post or headquarters level under realistic circumstances but no actual tactical actions take place.
- Live Fire Exercises (LFX), where weapons are released in firing ranges.
- Field Training Exercises (FTX), where tactical forces conduct real manoeuvres.

Any of these exercise types can practise a scenario at any point on the spectrum of conflict. The framework of any exercise could range from component level activity; for example, exercising an airborne maritime patrol role to a joint activity practising integration of several components. The degree of partner involvement could range from bilateral, mini-lateral to multilateral. Given the different possible frameworks for exercise design, it stands to reason that some exercise frameworks will be more suited to achieving NDS goals than others. Tactical field training and LFX are essential for confirming the ability to achieve tactical actions, while TTX could stimulate creative thinking and problem identification. To an observer, FTX are

highly visible and impactful. However, they largely occur at the tactical level and therefore do not necessarily explore how to integrate decision-making when confronting a mutual strategic challenge. Arguably, FTX promote tactical excellence and the development of military skills. However, demonstrating collective resolve demands more, such as how to act collectively with partners for a specific outcome. However, the operational and strategic levels of the command post must be practised to respond to realistic challenges as warfighting hierarchies if they are going to succeed with collective action in a domain of combined operations. Shared and sovereign interests exist in a state of tension and a command post exercise at the operational and strategic level is a vehicle through which to discover how to resolve this tension.

There are synergies associated with different exercise types in each of the NDS objectives of relationships, networks, interoperability and demonstrating collective resolve.

Relationships. These include the interpersonal but also the systemic, for example, processes for communication and decision-making, which exist at different levels of command. It is the systemic relationships at the operational and strategic levels that enable strategic consultation, decision-making and combined action. Relationships at the tactical level support seamless execution of tactical action. All relationships are important but the ability to consult about a strategic issue of mutual significance and then decide on a mutually satisfactory approach is an essential precondition of combined tactical action. Successful strategic and operational relationships call for combined intelligence analysis, integrated planning and integrated decision-making. TTX and CPX pave the way for these outcomes. They are not outcomes achieved through efforts to increase excellence in tactical integration. At the operational and strategic level, TTX and CPX facilitate the ability to conduct combined appreciation and planning. They can also build appreciation of constraints of the partners' military, political and legal systems. Effective relationships build trust. Trust enables partners to build strategic alignment and tactical interoperability where feasible. Building strategic and operational relationships through CPX would enable partners to resolve strategic challenges together.

Networks. The concept of a network can imply various levels of formality, but a good network in the military sense infers a hierarchical structure with interconnected communications systems. The beauty of a CPX is that it tests decision-making and communication between operational hierarchies. Realistic, effective networks from national through strategic and operational to tactical levels of command are the backbone of the CPX. The conduct of a CPX is an excellent way to develop and test networks between participating entities.

Interoperability. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a strategic grouping that depends highly on interoperability, defines the concept as the ability of forces, units and systems to operate together effectively (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2023). It involves sharing common doctrine, procedures, infrastructure and bases. Interoperability can increase capabilities, shape the strategic environment and reduce resource demands. This is honed at the tactical level, but the operational and strategic levels of command need to be cohesive to achieve successful combined interoperability. Tensions with interoperability can include differing perspectives on matters of international law, the limits of national policy and differing planning processes to name a few. Partners who mutually design and execute a CPX at the strategic and operational level will build a shared understanding of what may get in the way of interoperability. Understanding these factors will improve the likelihood of successful combined operations occurring.

Progress in the domain of interoperability can be gained by developing and rehearsing common procedures and systems, for example, the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES)¹, common Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), common command, control, communications, cyber and intelligence (C4I) systems, and logistic requisition systems. Where these do not exist, a CPX provides the opportunity to identify whether they should.

Collective resolve. Of the outcomes the NDS encourages, this is the most difficult to develop through the conduct of any type of military exercise. Participants may communicate strategic policy positions externally but how these are intended to be understood by the international community may not always be clear. An FTX sends a visible public message and keeps the door ajar for collective resolve to be negotiated. Arguably, the facts of the contribution to an exercise are a more important message about what the exercise represents than a finely crafted statement. But a CPX, collectively designed against a common problem, has a chance of uncovering the collective resolve which actually exists under specified strategically challenging circumstances, and where the obstacles to alignment will present. A collectively designed exercise can infer collective resolve. An FTX gives an outward display of collective resolve while a CPX can explore the limits of what collective resolve really exists.

3. Mutual design of exercises

Given the range of possible alternatives for combined military exercises, participants should give careful consideration to exercise design. Doing this together would imply mutual respect and recognise that all partners are seeking different objectives from the same activity. What is certain is that other nations would not go into a combined exercise to satisfy Australian NDS objectives. Combined exercise de-

¹ The Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES) is a non-binding multilateral agreement that standardises safety protocols, basic communications and basic manoeuvring at sea for ships and aircraft. In 2014, more than 20 countries adopted the code at the Western Pacific Naval Symposium in Qing Dao, China (Western Pacific Naval Symposium, 2014).

sign capturing all participant goals would be essential to achieving authentic integration. Mutual design of exercises could build the depth and trust the NDS seeks and contribute to interoperability and collective resolve. It would result in an exercise framed to explore the objectives of multiple participants.

Mutual design starts with agreeing on a problem set which partners confront. The type of problem over which an exercise could coalesce could include any regional security scenario emergent in the 'global commons' which impinges on the sovereignty of one or more partner nations. Such scenarios are well suited to combined exercises. They can reveal the advantages of collaborative effort over unilateral effort, be threat agnostic, be highly visible and affect the prosperity of all. Sub-surface, surface, air, space and cyber threats to transportation, fishing, resource harvesting, tourism and other industries in the maritime domain would provide a canvas for a mutually beneficial scenario to be developed.

The NDS points to increasing strategic great power competition and a military build-up in Australia's region as key themes of concern. Australia's Foreign Minister Senator the Hon Penny Wong (2024a, 2024b) specifically mentions Australia's imperatives of working with ASEAN to increase mutual resilience and ensure waterways that serve us all remain open and accessible. As such, possible scenarios of mutual interest to partner nations are wide ranging. After agreeing to a scenario the hard work of building a combined exercise would then start.

NATO has a relevant model for designing combined military exercises. The Joint Warfare Centre facilitates incident development and scripting workshops which collaboratively build a script that is fit for purpose (Joint Warfare Centre, 2025). More than 200 participants are brought together to design an exercise, comprising Training Audiences representatives from NATO Centres of Excellence, non-governmental and international organisations, subject matter experts, exercise planners and scenario developers.

A well-run CPX demands hundreds of inputs and many response cells to deliver dynamic inputs to the participants in order to create the realism needed to test headquarters and staff. To be able to deliver them in a coherent and synchronised way, Australia and its partners would need a coherent design process. There are also substantial practical aspects to be determined, like how to link communications systems, locations, schedules, etc. Starting small might be a good idea. The gradual evolution of a CPX might begin with a Table-Top exercise between HQ representatives, building to a small-scale bilateral CPX and onto a multilateral CPX. There would be a cost in time, effort and resources associated with designing and delivering any combined CPX.

Using existing regional security architecture as a backbone for mutual design and exercise scheduling offers some practical benefits and could enable the establishment of the coherent processes needed to sustain an exercise series.

4. Opportunities provided from regional security architecture

In 2024, the Australian Minister for Defence Industry, the Hon Pat Conroy, stated in his Defence Partnership for the Future Statement that 'ASEAN and its sectoral bodies play a critical role in supporting an inclusive and rules-based approach to maintaining regional security and stability' (Conroy, 2024). He called for Australia's international engagement activities, including with ASEAN, to focus on 'achieving outcomes that contribute to regional security and stability and strengthen deterrence against the threat of military coercion or a major conflict'. The Minister announced that the Australian Government is enthusiastic to leverage the ASEAN security apparatus to expand military exercise partnerships. The Government pledged to commit \$64 million over the next four years to enhance Australia's Southeast Asia Maritime Partnerships (Wong, 2024a). The stated Government enthusiasm for multilateral exercises reinforces the NDS direction.

Developing collective security through an existing multilateral organisation can more substantively contribute to Australia's NDS aims like 'building interlocking networks of partners' because doing so uses mechanisms partners are already committed to. The lessons drawn from exercises conducted within existing arrangements would have greater potential to endure. Arguably, exercises outside of existing security frameworks might infer less mutual resolve to collaborate when real strategic pressure is applied. Integrating within existing strategic constructs would be a superior way of achieving NDS aims than, for example, an invitation to partners to participate in an Australian-designed exercise in Australia's back yard.

Within ASEAN, there is already some internal momentum towards combined military exercises. The ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) forum in 2024 declared the intent to deepen defence and security cooperation and engagement between ASEAN and Plus Countries (ADMM+) (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2024). This objective aligns with Australia's NDS objectives. Australia has access to the ASEAN security apparatus as an ASEAN dialogue partner and member of the ADMM+ grouping. The seven Expert Working Groups (EWGs) of the ADMM+ are existing mechanisms for establishing combined exercises. These working groups have designed and conducted TTX and FTX. The Maritime Security EWG may be the most pertinent of the working groups to the NDS objectives. ASEAN has made progress on combined military exercises under its banner. The Maritime Security EWG has facilitated security seminars, conferences, FTX and TTX since the ADMM+ inception in 2011 (The ASEAN Secretariat, 2025). Given the momentum of the Maritime Security EWG, maritime challenges present as a scenario around which Australia could pursue a multilateral CPX with ASEAN partners.

The ASEAN exercises that Australia has thus far participated in, could be a stepping stone to higher end collaboration, but presently fall short of the scope of current Australia-led partner nation exercises. They have focussed on niche activities like medical responses and have not

yet broached high-end combined joint-force warfighting. ASEAN is a valid vehicle for this ambition because, as a credible architecture for security cooperation, it offers a backbone on which to build the robust and interlocking networks to which the NDS aspires. Australia's seat at the table of the ADMM+ Maritime Security EWG provides an opportunity to engage as equals with ASEAN states who, like Australia, wish to use the existing security architecture to discover ways of confronting and solving contemporary maritime security problems collectively.

While ADMM+ exercises are in a nascent state, exercises between Southeast Asian nations outside of the ASEAN apparatus have larger scope and are growing in frequency. Laksmana et al (2024) suggest combined exercises are one of the core pillars of the Asia-Pacific security order and are part of a wider framework of defence diplomacy. Furthermore, ASEAN proper has embarked on combined exercises, including a multilateral maritime field training exercise, the ASEAN Solidarity Exercise, in 2023. This exercise demonstrated collective ASEAN intent to confront mutual security challenges. All 10 ASEAN members participated, with Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore deploying warships (Yaacob, 2023). This momentum should encourage Australia to pursue its NDS goals through the ASEAN apparatus.

The narrower strategic organisation of the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) has also advanced combined exercising in our region. The FPDA has a goal of defending Malaysia and Singapore during military crises. A joint communique from 1971 commits the participants to consult and decide on measures in the event of an attack on or threat to Malaysia or Singapore. The FPDA has infrastructure in terms of combined doctrine, exercise and planning documents which can enable collaboration on exercises (Sleeman, 2025, p. 59).

The FPDA has a mature and robust exercise regime and a cycle of FTX and CPX has been running for over 20 years. This legacy will have streamlined the ability of partners to operate together in defence of Singapore and Malaysia. FTX Bersama Shield and Bersama Lima practise combined and joint tactical level air, land and maritime integration (Five Power Defence Arrangements, n.d.). They include integration at the operational headquarters level. The Suman Warrior and Suman Protector CPX form a series that tests the partners' ability to collaborate to resolve a mutual strategic challenge. Suman Warrior is an annual land-based CPX. Suman Protector occurs every five years and is the culminating activity in the FPDA exercise program. It is an operational level CPX designed to exercise an FPDA Combined and Joint Task Force headquarters to plan for and execute a military operation for the defence of Malaysia and Singapore against a conventional threat (Five Power Defence Arrangements, n.d.). The FPDA exercise series is a mature collaborative series that can be a model for Australia to build its contemporary exercise aspirations on with a wider series of partner nations.

The Cobra Gold exercise series offers another robust regional example. Having run for 43 iterations and now with 30 partners, it is the longest-running international exer-

cise. Senior US leader Lt. Gen. Xavier Brunson, commanding general of I Corps notes 'Cobra Gold provides a platform to refine our strategies, test our readiness, and cultivate the friendships that are the foundation of effective multinational cooperation' (Vincent, 2024). As an established exercise, it offers a model worth considering. In 2024, it comprised a CPX and several FTX events. Building interoperability and collective resolve in a creative and innovative way it also comprised a component of humanitarian and civic assistance projects showing genuine collaboration between nations in the real world and not just the hypothetical. Post-exercise reporting in 2024 indicated the multinational CPX component simulated a large-scale combat operation which challenged international leaders and staff to coordinate effectively in a complex, multilingual and procedurally diverse environment (Bocanegra, 2024). A Joint Task Force (JTF) is composed of assigned or attached elements of two or more Services and/or groups established for carrying out a specific task or mission. Incorporating a JTF in a CPX is a prime example of nations meeting the objectives to which the NDS aspires – demonstrating interoperable networks and collective resolve in a practical way.

Benefits of including a JTF in combined military exercises include strategic-to-operational interoperability, civil-military interplay, a focus on operational authorities, senior leadership decision-making and working with international boundaries. In short, a JTF construct develops partners' ability to work together through operational complexity and uncertainty. Australia must aspire to replicate the level of integration exemplified in the region in order to satisfy the NDS goals for combined exercises with partners.

5. Global trend towards multinational exercises

As the existence of the Cobra Gold series indicates, the extent of military integration already occurring between Australia's partners places constraints on how Australia might achieve NDS goals. Since the end of the Cold War, the number of combined military exercises held each year has been steadily increasing globally as has the number of countries participating in exercises together. While all the elements of increasing globalisation have probably contributed to this, so too has the increasing extent to which the security of any one country is tied to that of many others. The more than 300 different combined military exercises held in 2016 was a six-fold increase from the number held in 1990 (Bernhardt, 2020). Bernhardt also observes that the number of pairings of countries to have conducted at least one military exercise together has increased from around 1% during the last decade of the Cold War to close to 20% of all possible pairings in 2016. The US participated in at least one military exercise with around 80% of countries in 2016. China, Russia and India conducted at least one joint military exercise with around 30% of countries in the period. From 2021 to 2023, Southeast Asian nations participated in 525 joint military exercises at the bilateral or multilateral level. The US, Australia and Japan participated in more than 60% of these (Yaacob & Sato, 2024). Australia is clearly not the only nation with a national strategy demanding participation in combined military ex-

ercises. With so many combined military exercises occurring, the significance of any one exercise is vulnerable in comparison to others. This places additional pressure on Australia's goals of conducting combined military exercises with partners.

Another key trend beyond the raw increase in combined military exercises is that the growing number of combined exercises far outstrips any increase in formal military alliances (Bernhardt, 2020). This suggests that participant nations view combined military exercises as an opportunity to make strategic gains without necessarily carrying the strategic risk that an alliance commitment might. Combined exercises (in the absence of an alliance treaty) can imply a level of partnership that is somehow short of an actual commitment. They might infer a peacetime partnership but not one that assures a coalition during times of strategic risk. They may not infer 'collective resolve'. Reporting on combined military exercises in 2005, the Australian Parliament noted:

Ad hoc coalitions are fragile and demand constant attention if they are to survive. Coalitions based on extant alliances have the durability to nurture a range of capabilities that can be developed over time, for example 'through sustained cooperation on military exercises and training, the networking of information flows and of forces, and shared experience in joint operations' (Parliament of Australia, 2006, para. 4.3).

However, 20 years later, Australia finds itself in a strategic environment where ad hoc military exercise groupings outnumber alliances. As their incidence increases, the strategic significance of any one combined military exercise arguably decreases. The current 'global economy' of combined military exercising makes it particularly important that whatever combined exercises a nation conducts are calibrated effectively to achieve the right strategic effect.

5.1. Current Australian combined military exercises

Australia hosts several multilateral tactical combined military exercises at the component and joint levels. Pitch Black, an air combat exercise, is such an example. Other such exercises occur in the land and maritime domains. Australia's premier joint force combined military exercise, Exercise Talisman Sabre, is a distinctly multilateral military exercise that has been rapidly expanding in size. Talisman Sabre has increased from a bilateral exercise with the US to a multilateral exercise with an increasing number of partner nations over its past three biennial iterations. The Talisman Sabre series enhances Australia's capacity to cope with an inflow of partners and achieve tactical integration but has some inherent shortfalls. First, an all-encompassing exercise like Talisman Sabre risks trying to dilute Australia's cooperation across too many partners at the same time. The further participation in an exercise extends, the weaker is the ability to infer collective resolve. Second, a tactical exercise cannot infer 'collective resolve' at the strategic level. It does not reflect an ability to collaborate to solve a realistic strategic challenge. To develop the ro-

bust interoperable network of partners that is demanded by the NDS, exercises should offer partners greater operational and strategic integration opportunities.

5.2. Future combined exercises

To meet NDS objectives, Australia should exercise with its partners in ways it used to do with its allies. The 2005 parliamentary report evaluating Australia's combined military exercises with the US explained the benefits of training at the operational level of command when it stated:

operational level planning may be conducted using a Command Post Exercise or Map Exercise. This level of exercise play is increasingly enabled by sophisticated computer based simulations. Commonality of 'architecture' for such simulations will allow future interactions to occur without forces leaving their home bases, even if these are on different continents. Where 'real' exercise play is involved it is often the large scale deployment, operational manoeuvre and logistic support that create the most significant training advantage at this level of command (Parliament of Australia, 2006, para. 4.8).

At present, Australia focusses on the fielded force aspects of exercises with partner nations and ignores the others. Bolstering combined CPX opportunities as part of a comprehensive suite of exercises with partner nations will get Australia closer to achieving NDS objectives.

A mutually designed CPX between like-minded nations who are looking to explore the possibilities of interoperability and collective action presents a valuable opportunity to build relationships, networks and interoperability and develop collective resolve. CPX can more precisely target Australian and partner nation decision makers at the operational and strategic levels of command to explore aspects of integration that an FTX does not. CPX are also advantageous because they may require a smaller resource impost compared to an FTX. CPX have a smaller personnel and equipment commitment and use of fewer training areas with lower financial burden.

6. Conclusion

Australia's NDS calls on the ADF to increase its exercises with partner nations in order to enhance relationships, interoperability, networks and collective resolve. The Government's recent promises of financial and policy support to combined military integration suggests a window of opportunity exists for enhancing exercise programs with partner nations. To achieve the best outcomes in these endeavours the ADF must evaluate which types of exercises are best suited to developing integration with partners. There are many exercise types to choose from and each offers different advantages to participants.

The CPX can pose realistic challenges for the command elements of different nations to confront together. In doing so, participants will come to understand what obstacles hinder preferred outcomes in a given scenario. They will grow to understand the political, strategic and operational decision-making processes of the other participants, and

the limits national policy places on the scope of their operations. They will grapple with the challenge of communicating operational information and orders between national command elements. Over several iterations, participants in a series of CPX stand to learn how to devise collaborative responses to shared strategic problems and how to implement these solutions together.

As combined tactical exercises increase in frequency, it is less clear that ‘collective resolve’ can be implied from the fact of nations conducting tactical training together. Building on Australia’s firm foundation of tactical level FTX, operational level CPX would offer an opportunity to pursue the more robust integration with partner nations that the NDS desires. There are several mature regional and global examples that Australia and its partners could use as mod-

els for how they might embark on CPX together. Building combined exercises into existing security architecture would increase the likelihood of achieving enduring outcomes. A decision to confront a mutually agreed strategic problem in an operational level CPX builds a pathway towards strategic cooperation and success in combined operations. The ADF should therefore look to establish simulated strategic and operational problem solving through the mechanism of a CPX with its partner nations to satisfy NDS goals.

Submitted: May 27, 2025 AEDT. Accepted: August 14, 2025 AEDT. Published: February 17, 2026 AEDT.



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