



STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE AUSTRALIA–PAPUA NEW GUINEA DEFENCE TREATY FOR INDONESIA

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Abstract

The Australia–Papua New Guinea Joint Defence Treaty signed on October 6, 2025, reflects a shift in the security architecture of the Pacific Islands, showing a tendency toward formal alliance patterns. This treaty strengthens the military integration of both countries through joint response mechanisms, capacity building, and the use of Papua New Guinea's defence facilities and support by the Australian armed forces. This paper outlines the provisions of the treaty that warrant attention and explains its implications bilaterally and regionally. Although it does not pose a direct threat to Indonesia, the treaty's implementation requires vigilance regarding the transparency of Australian military operations in Papua New Guinea and their potential implications for the stability of the Pacific Islands amid intensifying Australia–China strategic rivalry. Commission I of the DPR RI should urge the government to closely monitor the treaty's implementation and enhance defence diplomacy with both countries to maintain and build mutual trust among the three parties.

Introduction

Australia and Papua New Guinea (PNG), two of Indonesia's neighboring countries, recently signed a mutual defence treaty in Canberra, Australia, on Monday, October 6, 2025 (Dziedzic, 2025). The bilateral agreement, known as the Pukpuk Treaty, contains various provisions for strengthening the defence capabilities and interoperability of both nations. One notable clause recognizes that an armed attack on one party constitutes a threat to both, thereby allowing joint measures to address shared threats. The treaty is currently awaiting ratification from both sides.

This paper further elaborates on the key provisions of the agreement and maps the strategic implications that Indonesia needs to consider at both bilateral and regional levels across the Pacific Islands. It is expected that this paper will serve as a reference for Commission I of the DPR RI to support its oversight functions over foreign and defence policies concerning neighboring countries and regions bordering Indonesia.

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Historical Context and Provisions of the Agreement

Australia and Papua New Guinea share a long history of evolving defence co-operation. This relationship began on January 26, 1977, with the Agreement between Australia and Papua New Guinea Regarding the Status of Forces of Each State in the Territory of the Other State, followed by the Defence Cooperation Arrangement, which entered into force on May 10, 2013, and was renewed on April 22, 2015, through the Arrangement Concerning the Provision of Mutual Logistic Support. The two countries further deepened their cooperation with the Agreement on a Framework for Closer Security Relations, effective December 12, 2024. During the 50th anniversary of its independence on September 16, 2025, Papua New Guinea proposed elevating relations with Australia into a formal alliance. This proposal was embodied in the Joint Communiqué signed on September 17, 2025, which included an agreement to prepare a mutual defence treaty based on five key principles of cooperation. These principles were later adopted into the text of the Pukpuk Treaty, though the term “Alliance” was omitted from the final document.

The mutual defence commitment between Australia and Papua New Guinea is primarily outlined in Articles 4 through 7 of the Pukpuk Treaty. Article 4 establishes the mechanism for responding to security threats to both nations. Paragraph 2 obliges both parties to consult in the event of developments that could threaten the sovereignty, peace, or stability of either party to consider possible responses. Paragraph 3 reinforces the commitment to act jointly in the face of military threats, declaring that an armed attack on either party in the Pacific region shall be regarded as a threat to both. The two countries agree to respond jointly in accordance with their respective constitutional mechanisms.

Defence cooperation between the two countries is detailed in Article 5. This includes the exchange and deployment of personnel, bilateral and multilateral joint exercises, interoperability enhancement, and joint operations during crises or conflicts. The cooperation covers multiple domains (land, sea, air, cyber, space), capability development, intelligence sharing, synchronization of logistics and defence industries, construction of military infrastructure, and even recruitment of nationals into the other party’s defence forces. Article 6 governs the status, jurisdiction, and legal responsibilities of military personnel present in each other’s territories. Article 7 regulates access to and use of facilities and territories in Papua New Guinea by the Australian armed forces, including facility security, contractor use, and management of military equipment. These provisions demonstrate a high degree of strategic trust and closeness between Australia and Papua New Guinea, providing a legal basis for troop deployment, infrastructure use, and logistics integration within a framework of ongoing bilateral cooperation.

In its press release, the Australian Prime Minister stated that in the initial implementation phase of the treaty, Papua New Guinean citizens residing and permanently living in Australia would be allowed to enlist in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2025). Australia

will also upgrade facilities at the Goldie River Training Depot in Port Moresby, provide Australian-made assault rifles, and conduct training for PNG Air Force personnel (minister.defence.gov.au, 2025).

Strategic Implications for Indonesia and the Region

The Pukpuk Treaty grants Australia access to PNG's military facilities and personnel in exchange for economic and capacity-building benefits (Sasingian, 2025) through comprehensive integration across defence sectors with Australia. Considering PNG shares an 840-km land border with Indonesia, the treaty could bring Australian military presence closer to Indonesia's border (Keary & Hughes, 2025). PNG Prime Minister James Marape acknowledged that the Indonesia-PNG border is a sensitive issue under the Pukpuk Treaty (Zarriga, 2025). The Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' statement to ABC News, emphasized that it continues to monitor the treaty's developments and expects both Australia and PNG to uphold sovereignty and independence, ensuring that their cooperation contributes to regional peace and stability and prevents heightened geopolitical competition (Souisa & Renaldi, 2025).

Australia has also communicated this strategic policy to Indonesia. On June 5, 2025, Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles conveyed the treaty plan to Defence Minister Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin in Jakarta (Aditya & Damarjati, 2025). The ADF Commander, Admiral David Johnston, after his meeting with Minister Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin on October 17, 2025, reaffirmed their strong commitment to respect Indonesia's sovereignty as outlined in the Lombok Treaty, noting that the Pukpuk Treaty would open opportunities for closer cooperation with Indonesia (Riswan, 2025).

The Pukpuk Treaty emerged amid the strengthening of Indonesia's bilateral defence ties with both Australia and PNG. Indonesia and Australia signed a Defence Cooperation Agreement on August 29, 2025. On July 7, 2025, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea discussed accelerating the implementation of their Defence Cooperation Agreement, which has already been ratified by both parties (antaranews.com, 2025).

Another strategic implication worth noting is the potential escalation of geopolitical rivalry between Australia and China in the Pacific Islands. The treaty arose amid Australia's growing concerns over China's expanding influence in Pacific Island nations. Australia's orientation to counter China's influence is undeniable, especially since 2018 when it began perceiving China's presence in the Pacific as a threat (Wallis et al., 2022, p. 522). The treaty ensures that China will not gain the same access to PNG's defence facilities as it has achieved in other Pacific Island countries, explaining why China reacted negatively to the agreement (Faa, 2025).

Conclusion

The Australia–Papua New Guinea Joint Defence Treaty reflects an evolving security architecture in the Pacific Islands that reinforces the trend toward formal alliance structures. Two aspects warrant Indonesia’s close attention: the deployment and military operations of Australia within PNG, especially those near the Indonesia–PNG border, and the collateral effects of potential geopolitical competition intensifying in the region.

Through its oversight function, Commission I of the DPR RI can recommend that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs monitor the treaty’s implementation, including promoting intensive communication with the treaty parties. Commission I may also recommend that the Ministry of Defence strengthen defence diplomacy with both countries amid the implementation of the Defence Cooperation Agreement.

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