
Australia and the United States Ministerial Consultations Joint Communiqué

**Media Note From the Office of the Spokesman,
Washington, D.C., December 12, 2006**

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England, Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs Alexander Downer and Australian Minister for Defence Brendan Nelson met in Washington D.C. on December 12, 2006 to discuss global and regional security and the state of the alliance between Australia and the United States. The talks marked the 21st anniversary of the Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN) and fifty-five years of the alliance.

Future of the Alliance

The United States and Australia agreed that the alliance between the two countries has never been stronger. They agreed that the stalwart and immediate response of the alliance to the emerging threats of the twenty-first century has proven the fundamental resilience of these ties. They noted that, especially since September 11, 2001, the alliance has moved from strength to strength and amply demonstrated its critical importance to both countries.

Working Together for a Safer World

The two countries reaffirmed their commitment to work together on a wide range of global security issues to meet common security challenges. They emphasized their shared goal of helping the people of Iraq create a free, democratic and peaceful country and maintaining security assistance to Iraq as long as it is needed. They called on the international community, and in particular Iraq's neighbors, to provide further assistance to Iraq.

The United States and Australia discussed their continued efforts to promote stability in a newly-democratic Afghanistan and to provide continued assistance to the Afghan government and people. The United States welcomed Australia's successful cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in operations in Afghanistan.

Countering Proliferation

The United States and Australia noted that the world had condemned North Korea's nuclear test on October 9, 2006. They discussed their shared strategy in responding to the threat of a nuclear-armed North Korea and reaffirmed the need for all United Nations (U.N.) Member States to fully implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 1718. Additionally, the two countries agreed that Iran's failure to comply with international obligations on nuclear activities remains a grave concern. They agreed to continue their work with allies, other partners and key international organizations, including the United Nations, to ensure that Iran complies with its international obligations and provides full transparency regarding its nuclear activities. While acknowledging Iran's right to civil nuclear energy, they noted that without full transparency and cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Commission (IAEA), the international community is unable to verify that Iran's nuclear program is solely for peaceful purposes.

Recognizing the potentially devastating consequences of allowing nuclear weapons and materials to fall into the hands of terrorists, the two countries emphasized their commitment to the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism and agreed to continue efforts to build international support for this initiative through outreach activities. The United States welcomed Australia's commitment to outreach in Southeast Asia. They also agreed to promote the goals of the Proliferation Security

Initiative (PSI) and to further strengthen their cooperation to interdict the flow of illicit weapons of mass destruction (WMD) materials. The two countries agreed that man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS) in the hands of criminals or terrorists pose a serious potential threat to commercial aviation and military aircraft around the world. The United States and Australia will continue to take concrete steps to counter the emerging MANPADS threat to the international community, such as through Australia's multilateral leadership on the issue as chair of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and its role in the Wassenaar Group and the United States' stockpile security and destruction programs.

Regional Cooperation

The United States and Australia discussed the importance of continued progress on security and stability in Southeast Asia. They agreed to continue their efforts to build partnership capacity in key security areas such as maritime security, counterterrorism and intelligence sharing, disaster relief and emergency response, and counter-insurgency and governance capabilities. They also agreed to continue to work under the Global Peace Operations Initiative to help build capacity in the Asia-Pacific.

The United States and Australia welcomed Indonesia's growing regional role and both countries noted their increasing engagement with Indonesia. In particular, the United States welcomed the Australia-Indonesia Agreement on the Framework for Security Cooperation as a contribution to security in the Asia-Pacific region. They discussed coordination of their assistance to regional countries, including Indonesia and the Philippines, in those countries' efforts to fight terrorism and meet broader security challenges. They also discussed the importance of stability, free and fair elections, and accountability in East Timor. The United States welcomed Australia's contribution to the stabilization and development of East Timor. Both countries called for an early return to democracy in Thailand.

The two countries pledged to continue to work closely with Japan through the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue on a wide range of issues and noted their agreement to hold a ministerial meeting in the first quarter of 2007. The United States welcomed the efforts of Australia and Japan to develop a closer bilateral security relationship reflecting Japan's growing role in international security. They also undertook to explore with Japan areas for possible trilateral defense cooperation as an early priority.

The United States and Australia expressed their wish to see China play a growing role as a responsible stakeholder in global and regional affairs. They welcomed China's enhanced international engagement, including on the North Korean nuclear issue.

The United States and Australia reaffirmed their commitment to APEC as the preeminent forum in the Asia-Pacific region, and pledged to work closely together during Australia's hosting of APEC in 2007 and beyond in order to strengthen trans-Pacific regional cooperation and institutions. They agreed to consult closely on the evolution of regional cooperation in East Asia.

Australia welcomed the United States' continuing efforts to develop an enhanced partnership with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The two countries expressed concern about continued instability in the South Pacific, noting the recent civil unrest in Tonga and continuing concerns about the Solomon Islands. The United States and Australia strongly condemned the Fiji military's unconstitutional removal of Prime Minister Qarase. The two countries called on the military to return the country immediately to the elected civilian government and to withdraw completely from politics. They agreed to continue to work together to help Pacific Island countries build stability, democratic governance and economic reforms for the benefit of their people. They agreed to encourage other countries in the region and elsewhere to support the same objectives.

Defense Cooperation

The United States and Australia reaffirmed the critical importance of strong bilateral defense relations in advancing their shared strategic objectives. Their joint experience in Iraq and Afghanistan has reinforced the vital importance of interoperability between U.S. and Australian forces. They agreed to continue to strengthen this interoperability, including through information sharing, training and exercises, capability development, involving cooperation in research and development as well as acquisition and support of materiel. They agreed that this extended to strengthening bilateral defense industry linkages, including through improved access.

The two countries noted that North Korean and Iranian missile tests in 2006 and the widening proliferation of ballistic missiles has reinforced the importance of Missile Defense. They agreed to intensify cooperation under the bilateral Memorandum of Understanding on Missile Defense, and committed to further collaboration in coming years. They welcomed ongoing bilateral work on exploring options for cooperation in this area.

The two countries welcomed the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on Production, Sustainment and Follow-on Development of the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF), noting that an enhanced Australian air combat capability will benefit the continued effectiveness of the alliance. The MoU also serves as the framework for future JSF cooperation between Australia, the United States, and seven other partner nations. They noted the importance of the Joint Combined Training Capability as an important element for training and building on Australian and United States interoperability in the future. They also agreed to intensify cooperation in intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, including in the context of acquisitions.