# Australia dismisses Russia’s denial of military cooperation claims with Indonesia as propaganda



Australia has firmly rejected claims from Moscow denying any involvement in regional military cooperation with Indonesia, dismissing the Russian assertions as “propaganda.” The controversy centres on reports that Russia had sought access to a military airbase on Biak Island in Indonesia’s Papua province, a location approximately 1,300 kilometres north of Darwin, Australia.

In a letter published by The Jakarta Post, Russia's ambassador to Indonesia, Sergei Tolchenov, responded to Australian concerns by rejecting any interference. He wrote that Canberra's “national interests cannot extend to the territory of neighbouring sovereign states that pursue active and independent policies." Tolchenov also criticised Australian politicians for allegedly exploiting the issue amid the federal election campaign, accusing both major parties of "playing the so-called ‘Russian card’." Furthermore, he questioned why Australians would be concerned about military activities so far from their borders and pointed to Australia's own security arrangements—with the United States, including the Aukus pact and the presence of US submarines and missiles—as presenting a greater regional threat.

The issue was initially sparked by a report from defence publication Janes, which stated that Russia had formally requested to base military aircraft at Biak. Indonesian officials have publicly denied any permission has been granted for a foreign military base but have not confirmed whether Russia made such a request. Russia itself has not clarified if it submitted an official proposal.

Australian prime minister Anthony Albanese condemned the Russian response as authoritarian propaganda during a press conference on Monday. He said, “I’m anti-Russia. Russia wants propaganda to be promoted by Australians. Of course, they want propaganda, and Russia engages in that.” When asked whether his government had intelligence on a Russian approach to Indonesia, Albanese declined to confirm, saying he did not want to help spread Russian messaging, which he suggested was not in Australia's national interest.

The handling of the situation has drawn criticism from opposition leader Peter Dutton, who accused Prime Minister Albanese of evading transparency. “The prime minister again has ducked and weaved on this issue today,” Dutton said, urging for more openness. The opposition party has demanded a national security briefing amid what they describe as inconsistent and evasive ministerial responses. Coalition frontbencher David Coleman added that the Labor government was attempting to “avoid scrutiny” and was unwilling to disclose the full extent of their knowledge on the matter.

Adding to the complexity, Labor senator Murray Watt stated on Sunday there was “no proposal from Russia to have a base anywhere in Indonesia,” likening opposition demands for a briefing to inquiries about the “Loch Ness monster.” However, when pressed on Monday to reaffirm this statement, Watt did not repeat his denial.

Indonesian officials have also moved to distance their government from the allegations. Defence minister Prabowo Subianto told Australian defence minister Richard Marles that reports of Russian aircraft operating from Indonesian territory were “simply not true,” as reported by 9 News. Frega Wenas, a spokesperson for the Indonesian defence ministry, echoed this position to Reuters, stating the reports were incorrect.

Despite the controversy, Australian defence minister Richard Marles expressed confidence in the strong bilateral security relationship between Australia and Indonesia, which is governed by the Lombok Treaty and the Defence Cooperation Agreement. Marles highlighted that the two countries conduct approximately 20 joint military exercises annually. Prime Minister Albanese reiterated the strength of this relationship, saying, “Indonesia is a sovereign nation. So we continue to put our argument about our own case and our own relationship with Indonesia. Indonesia and Russia have historically had relations that are different from Australia’s.”

The unfolding situation underscores ongoing tensions over military influence in Southeast Asia amid Russia’s global activities and Australia’s regional security concerns. The issue remains under close political and diplomatic scrutiny in both Canberra and Jakarta.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/australasia/australia-russia-indo-pacific-security-b2736568.html> - Details Australia's diplomatic response to Russia's dismissive remarks and the election context of the dispute.
* <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/australia-engaging-with-indonesia-as-russia-requests-access-to-island-military-base/nhnwh8zz5> - Confirms Indonesia's denial of allowing Russian aircraft operations and quotes Defence Minister Richard Marles' statement.
* <https://armyrecognition.com/focus-analysis-conflicts/army/analysis-defense-and-security-industry/why-a-russian-military-base-in-indonesia-could-shift-the-indo-pacific-balance-against-the-us-and-australia> - Analyzes the strategic implications of Russia's request for Biak Island access and mentions past Russian bomber landings at Manuhua.
* <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/commentary/russia-military-base-indonesia-papua-base-australia-5071841> - Explores the plausibility of Russia's interest in Biak Island and references Indonesia's 2017 hosting of Russian bombers.
* <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2541287/australian-pm-albanese-dismisses-russian-you-have-no-cards-warning-as-propaganda> - Reports Prime Minister Albanese's direct rejection of Russian claims as propaganda and election-related rhetoric.