The.Requirement.for.Air.Combat.Mass.and.Depth.in.the.Indo_Pacific

1 October 2026, National Gallery of Australia

Context

The April 2026 seminar explored the ways and means of exploiting Australia's advantage in the context of 'fight tonight' readiness across Defence and industry. It examined global air power trends and observations from operations in Ukraine and the Middle East as they applied to the Indo-Pacific and ongoing concerns about the sophistication and scale of regional threats.

In the same month the Government released National Defence Strategy 2026, which highlighted among others:

> Increasing efforts to develop greater self-reliance over the longer term so Defence can more ably and independently deter force projection against Australia.
>
> Prioritising capability acquisition and sustainment plans to deliver the strategy of denial, drawing on lessons learned from the war in Ukraine and conflicts in the Middle East.
>
> Strengthening the resilience of Australia's sovereign defence industrial base and building stronger, more diverse international industrial partnerships.
>
> Improving national civil preparedness and national resilience as part of national defence to help protect Australia against regional or global disruption.
>
> Increasing coordination with regional partners to collectively deter actions against to Australia's interests and shape a region governed by rights and rules, not fear or force.

From an air and space power perspective, the accompanying Integrated Investment Program highlighted investment in:

> An Air Force that can provide air support for integrated operations by conducting surveillance, air defence, strike and air transport.
>
> Enhanced space capabilities to provide space-based situational awareness and communication capabilities.

While the NDS and IIP provided continuity from NDS 24, there is now the need for a greater emphasis on the future force structure into the 2035 planning horizon, and a more nuanced understanding of the purpose and importance of Air Force in the projection of military power and assuring ongoing access at speed into an increasingly contested and operationally hazardous Indo-Pacific. This steps substantially beyond the provision of 'air support for integrated operations' and demands a fundamental re-set in the way air and space power is articulated in terms of operational and strategic outcomes, rather than inputs and tactical application.

Aim

The aim of the 1 October 2026 seminar is to introduce a series of topics that explore the strategic, operational and tactical requirements of the high-end fight in the Indo-Pacific, and to

initiate a broader conversation around concepts, planning assumptions, dependencies, opportunities, and potential vulnerabilities.

The first topic will focus on air combat mass, depth, and reach, and the need to generate increasingly self-reliant, scalable capability that can provide deterrence by denial in a national defence construct where access, basing, and overflight considerations are becoming more consequential and complex.

Background

Australia's air power capabilities must evolve to provide the Integrated Force with increased self-reliance, survivability, and depth, not least through air superiority and survivable, extended range strike missions at the lowest political risk. To remain operationally credible with the US, this drives the need for the long-term continuous investment in Australian air and space power to sustain Tier One Air Force capability and be able to contribute to the 'high-end fight', as well as the fight tonight.

A growing surface combatant fleet, and a land force equipped with landing craft, tactical joint fires, and a combined-arms land system configured for littoral operations in our northern approaches substantially increases the demand for air combat capability - specifically, localised air superiority - and survivable air launched offensive strike. On the supply side, this will require increased availability of both crewed and uncrewed systems to achieve and maintain control of the air over vast geographic distances, 24/7/365, and in all weather. And a strike capability able to be launched from sovereign bases, with operationally relevant payloads, integrated targeting systems, and all while maintaining political imperatives and the element of surprise.

The survivability of the Integrated Force must also be considered in the context of national defence and the protection of Critical National Infrastructure which will also compete for scare air combat resources to counter more lethal and complex threats from and through the air. As recent operations in the Middle East have demonstrated, conducting and sustaining both offensive and defensive counter air operations is resource intensive, technically challenging, and highly dependent on persistent air and space-enabled ISR and targeting systems.

Agenda

The Sir Richard Willaims Foundation has invited speakers from across military, strategy, academia, and industry organisations both locally and internationally with the intent to examine the topics across policy, process, technology, basing / infrastructure, and workforce considerations including, but not limited to:

- Natural strategic advantages, such as airspace and continental geography.
- Operational Risk Management: Balancing Lethality and Survivability
- Workforce: Management, Automation, and Development
- Training System Effectiveness & Mission Rehearsal
- Future Technologies and Collaborative Combat Systems
- Accelerating Capability Development
- Preparedness, Replenishment, Basing, Logistics & Supply Chains

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Program

(updated 26 September 2026)

0800-0830	Registration Light breakfast, tea and coffee on arrival
0835-0840	Welcoming Remarks ACM Mark Binskin AC (Retd), Chair, Sir Richard Williams Foundation
0840-0845	MC Introduction WGCDR Sally Knox, Commanding Officer 6SQN
0845-0910	Geostrategic perspective: securing Australia in a fractured world Prof Rory Medcalf AM, Head, National Security College, ANU
0910-1000	Conversation: Collaborative Combat Aircraft in Context - CCA's and Defence Industry John Conway, Williams Foundation Fellow WGCDR Chris McInnes, Air and Space Power Centre Jeremy Feldhahn, CCA Strategy Lead, MQ-28 Boeing Defence Australia
1000-1015	Delivering Combat Depth: Multi-Mission Force Multiplication Phil Gordon AM, Director, International Strategy & Business Development Rotary & Mission Systems, Lockheed Martin Australia
1015-1100	Morning Tea
1100-1125	Australia's Defence Dilemma: Deterring Whom? Mike Pezzullo, Former Secretary Department of Home Affairs
1125-1210	Conversation -Contemporary Air Power and Space Lessons for the Indo-Pacific AVM Steven Roberton DSC, AM (Retd), Director, Williams Foundation Gen. Mark D. Kelly, USAF (Ret.), Former Commander, Air Combat Command, United States Air Force
1210-1225	Building Mass with Industry Robert Denney AM, Country Executive, Northrop Grumman Australia
1225-1330	Lunch
1330-1400	Preparing for the Storm: Developing and Delivering a Sixth-Generation Royal Air Force Air Mshl Sir Paul Lloyd, KBE, FREng, RAF, Deputy Chief of the Air Staff, Royal Air Force
1400-1500	Conversation: Air Combat Mass and Depth: Gaps Risks and Opportunities AIRMSHL Geoff Brown AO (Retd), Deputy Chair, Williams Foundation Lt Gen David A. "Dave" Deptula, USAF (Ret.), Dean, Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies
1500-1520	Air Force in the National Defence Strategy AIRCDRE Jarrod Pendlebury CSC PhD., Director-General – Strategy and Planning, Royal Australian Air Force WGCDR Chris McInnes, Air and Space Power Centre
1520-1535	Closing Remarks ACM Mark Binskin AC (Retd), Chair, Sir Richard Williams Foundation