

# Medium-range GBAD

## to prove decisive

ONE OF THE most consequential announcements contained within the 2026 *National Defence Strategy* (NDS) was not a new submarine, warship or combat aircraft. It was the decision to pursue a medium-range ground based air defence (MRGBAD) capability for Australia.

For decades, Australia has enjoyed the luxury of geography. Distance provided warning time, strategic depth and a degree of protection from conventional attack. Those assumptions are now eroding. Long-range missiles, autonomous systems, hypersonic weapons and increasingly sophisticated air power mean that Australia's critical infrastructure, military bases, ports and population centres are more vulnerable than at any time since World War Two.

Recent conflicts have reinforced this reality. Ukraine has demonstrated the decisive importance of integrated air and missile defence against persistent drone and missile attacks. The conflict between Israel and Iran has highlighted the scale and sophistication of modern strike campaigns. Across the Indo-Pacific, regional militaries are rapidly expanding their inventories of ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and unmanned systems. Australia can no longer assume that its northern bases, fuel infrastructure or command and control (C2) networks will remain beyond reach.

The acquisition of a MRGBAD capability, therefore, addresses a critical gap in Australia's force structure. While the Australian Army is introducing a short-range GBAD capability in the National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System (NASAMS), there remains no credible system capable of defending key military and civilian infrastructure against more



sophisticated threats at greater ranges. This leaves a dangerous seam in Australia's integrated air and missile defence architecture. The challenge will be speed. Developing a bespoke solution is unlikely to be viable given the deteriorating strategic environment. Instead, Defence will need to look towards proven systems already in production. The attraction of an off-the-shelf acquisition is obvious. These systems are combat-proven, supported by established supply chains and can be integrated relatively quickly into allied networks. The downside is equally clear: they are expensive.

Air and missile defence is one of the most costly capability areas in modern warfare. Acquisition costs are only the beginning. Missile inventories, training systems, sustainment arrangements, radar networks and C2 integration generate substantial long-term expenditure. A credible national capability could cost many billions of dollars over its life-cycle.

This raises difficult questions for Defence planners. Every dollar invested in MRGBAD is a dollar unavailable for other priorities, whether autonomous

**ABOVE: An ADF MRGBAD system would provide a middle-layer, area air defence capability to defeat air and missile threats outside the range of Army's NASAMS-based SRGBAD system.**

*Image: Aust DoD*

systems, long-range strike, naval construction or the AUKUS submarine program. The 2026 NDS has already significantly expanded Defence's ambitions and funding every priority simultaneously will become increasingly difficult.

Yet the strategic logic remains compelling. A military that cannot protect its bases, ports, fuel facilities and command networks is vulnerable before a conflict even begins. Deterrence is not simply about having the ability to strike an adversary, it is also about denying them the ability to achieve their objectives. **DTR**



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