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Subject: RELEASE OF AUSTRALIAN STRATEGIC POLICY INSTITUTE
REPORT: "RELIABLE PARTNERS—STRENGTHENING AUSTRALIA-
TIMOR LESTE RELATIONS"

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HOT ISSUE BRIEF

ISSUE: RELEASE OF AUSTRALIAN STRATEGIC POLICY INSTITUTE REPORT: "RELIABLE PARTNERS— STRENGTHENING AUSTRALIA-TIMOR LESTE RELATIONS"

SENSITIVITY: The release of this Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) report will likely garner some media interest, given both the report's high-profile launch and recent domestic media attention to Australia's defence engagement in East Timor.

KEY ISSUES:

- On 8 April 2011, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) will launch a report entitled "Reliable Partners: Strengthening Australia-Timor Leste Relations".
- While the report's findings and comments are largely benign, in places it inaccurately reports on the aims and past achievements of Australia's defence engagement with East Timor, and often over-emphasises the role of China.
- Defence provided comments and corrections during the preparation of the report. While some were incorporated, the final copy of the report does not reflect all the information we provided. As a result, the

report still retains some factual inaccuracies, and includes recommendations that have either already been achieved or are not feasible.

- The report will be officially launched during a workshop in East Timor, attended by senior East Timorese Government officials (likely including President Horta, Prime Minister Gusmao, and Chief of Defence Major General Taur Matan Ruak).

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BACKGROUND: ASPI REPORT ON AUSTRALIA-EAST TIMOR RELATIONS

On 8 April 2011, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) will release the report 'Reliable Partners: Strengthening Australia—Timor-Leste relations'. Chapters One and Five focus respectively on the Australia-East Timor security relationship and East Timor's maritime security.

The report's findings and recommendations are largely benign; however it does misreport some of the aims of Australia's defence engagement, and over-emphasises the role of China in East Timor's international defence cooperation policy. Defence was consulted during the drafting of this report, and provided—in writing and in person—comments and corrections where necessary. While some comments were incorporated, the final report still contains factual inaccuracies, and some of the recommendations are either already being addressed, or are not feasible or unreasonable.

For example, on maritime security cooperation, the report emphasises the need for Australia to do more on training and

capacity building (echoing comments made in the 27 March 2011 SBS Dateline story on foreign engagement in East Timor). In fact, Defence already provides East Timor with a range of maritime security training opportunities, and conducts a number of bilateral maritime capacity building activities. Additional offers of maritime security assistance for East Timor have also been made (and largely not taken up), such as the package offered by the then-Minister for Defence in 2008. This package—which was reiterated in 2010— included sea riding opportunities, training programs, hydrographic assistance, and contracted maritime surveillance support. Information on these offers, as well as our extant program of maritime security cooperation, was provided to the report's authors during the preparation of the report.

The report also notes that while Australia should not seek to compete with external powers in East Timor (specifically, China), we should remind East Timor 'in more beguiling ways' of its 'true and more reliable friendships'. We remain of the view that East Timor can and should be in charge of its own bilateral relationships, and will continue to work with East Timor, the UN, and other donors to ensure our cooperation remains complementary.

Finally, the report recommends Australia maintain a 'proportionately appropriate' scaled group of military trainers into the medium term, which could 'quickly evolve' into an active unit should another crisis emerge. We do not agree with this recommendation, and believe it fails to reflect the work undertaken by our extant Defence Cooperation Program (DCP) personnel. The DCP's continuing presence forms the basis of a normalised bilateral defence relationship, which a 'scalable group of military trainers' would undermine. The DCP presence instead remains appropriately focused and sized according to the wishes of East Timor.

More broadly, the report offers a realistic picture of East Timor's future challenges. While it claims that East Timor has developed a great deal in the past decade, it also emphasises that the capacity of the East Timorese Defence Forces (F-FDTL) and police forces (PNTL) remains uncertain. It cites continuing institutional weakness in both organisations, and questions the appropriateness of the operational tasks selected for both the F-FDTL and PNTL. Despite

these challenges, the report does note there are reasons for optimism, especially East Timor's relative resource wealth and the commitment of many international donors.

East Timor will likely respond positively to the report. The report will be officially launched by East Timor's Secretary of State for Defence, Dr Julio Pinto. The launch will occur at an ASPI-run workshop in East Timor, officially hosted by the East Timorese Government. Aside from Secretary Pinto, the workshop will be attended by a range of other senior East Timorese representatives, likely including President Gusmao, Prime Minister Horta, and Chief of Defence Major General Taur Matan Ruak.

Other relevant Australian Government Departments are aware of the report, and are preparing their own responses where appropriate.

CONTINGENCY MINISTERIAL TALKING POINTS

- I welcome the release of the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) report into the Australia-East Timor relationship.
- The report is timely; this year marks the ten year anniversary of our defence engagement, which continues to grow and mature.
- Australia is at the forefront of international efforts to help East Timor become a peaceful and more prosperous nation. We are committed to East Timor's long-term development.

If asked: International Stabilisation Force withdrawal from East Timor / Post 2012-presence

- The Australian Defence Force contribution to the International Stabilisation Force—currently around 380

personnel—remains in East Timor at the invitation of the Government of East Timor, and in support of the United Nations Mission in East Timor.

- While Australia has always planned for an eventual drawdown of our contribution to the International Stabilisation Force, this is not tied to any specific date.
- Any future force reductions will be based on the security situation and occur in close consultation with the Government of East Timor, the United Nations and New Zealand (our International Stabilisation Force partner).
- And Australia remains committed to future cooperation with East Timor. Our Defence Cooperation Program (DCP) will remain in East Timor into the long-term.
 - At \$10.721 million over financial year 2010-11, our program with East Timor represents one of Australia's largest DCP relationships.
 - We currently maintain 25 DCP personnel, both civilian and members of the Australian Defence Force, in East Timor.
 - These help the DCP build capacity within the East Timorese Defence Force and the Secretariat of Defence. Current areas of cooperation include engineering, maritime security, nation-building, communications, logistics, and financial management assistance.

- We discuss the focus and scale of our DCP with East Timor regularly, and develop mutually agreed areas of focus that meet East Timor's needs.
- Important to note that members of the DCP are provided with specific language and cultural training prior to deployment.

If asked: Australian maritime assistance to East Timor

- Australia recognises that developing a maritime security capability remains a priority for the East Timorese Armed Forces (F-FDTL).
- We remain committed to assisting the F-FDTL develop a maritime capability to secure its maritime environment both now and over the long term.
- Contrary to the reports claims, Australia has offered a number of maritime security initiatives to East Timor in recent years
 - These include hydrographic assistance; support to establish the National Maritime Authority; sea-riding opportunities on Australian patrol boats; and assistance with developing a master plan for Port Hera.
- We remain ready to implement offers of assistance at East Timor's request, including the maritime assistance package offered by the former Minister for Defence in 2008 and
 - re-offered to East Timor in 2010.
 - This package included offers of contracted surveillance flights and data compilation;

command control and coordination training; training and personnel attachments to assist with the development of mariner skills; and two in-country advisers.

- As the report notes, in 2009 East Timor accepted our offer of maritime advisers, both of whom are now in place.

If asked: China's defence engagement in East Timor

- Australia enjoys strong and mutually beneficial Defence relationships with both East Timor and China.
- As a sovereign nation, East Timor can and should be in charge of its own bilateral relationships.
- We continue to work closely with the Government of East Timor, the UN and other donors and to ensure our security sector assistance in East Timor, including in maritime security, is beneficial and complementary.
- In January to March 2009, Australia was pleased to provide English language training to 36 F-FDTL personnel to prepare them for patrol boat training in China.

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