



By: TA | AP Brief

Australia-Vanuatu pact blocks China from building a military base



Australia and Vanuatu signed a long-awaited bilateral **security and economic treaty** Monday that prevents China creating a military base on the South Pacific island nation.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese signed the so-called Nakamal Agreement with his Vanuatu counterpart Jotham Napat in the Australian capital nine months after the Vanuatuan government rejected an earlier draft. Vanuatu had feared the deal would limit its ability to attract infrastructure investment.

“Our agreement reflects and confirms Australia’s role as Vanuatu’s largest and most comprehensive economic, security and development partner, a responsibility that we take seriously,” Albanese told reporters.

Napat said the pact “reaffirms our shared commitment to continuing and strengthening the comprehensive partnership between our two countries, founded on mutual respect, trust and our common vision for a peaceful, stable and prosperous Pacific.”

Under the agreement, Vanuatu will not allow any foreign military base or infrastructure in its territory and will keep its critical infrastructure free from militarization, foreign interference or unauthorized access, a government statement said.

The agreement is **one of several** Australia struck or was negotiating with regional neighbors to prevent China from gaining security influence in the region.

Vanuatu will consult with Australia when it considers third-party engagement in its critical infrastructure, but there is no power of veto as originally proposed.

Vanuatu committed to prioritize policing cooperation with Pacific Islands Forum members, a collection of 18 countries and territories that includes Australia.

But the agreement does not exclude Chinese police. China does not have a permanent police presence in Vanuatu, but Chinese police personnel often visit the nation of 350,000

people.

Agreement with China

Vanuatu also agrees to come to Australia, New Zealand and France first in response to major natural disasters.

Australia had proposed to provide Vanuatu with 500 million Australian dollars (\$344 million) over a decade under the terms of the agreement as originally drafted.

Albanese said the cost of the latest agreement would be made public by December.

Vanuatu has received large loans and aid from China for buildings, wharves and other infrastructure

Napat said a bilateral agreement Vanuatu was negotiating with China would be made public once the pact had “clearance from Beijing.”

Napat has previously described the so-called Namele Agreement with China as a “comprehensive development cooperation” deal. He said it was not a security pact.

Vanuatu has received large loans and aid from China for buildings, wharves and other infrastructure.

“Currently, it’s not yet signed. We will share the (Namele) agreement. There is nothing to hide. Our government is transparent and I am so grateful that the Prime Minister (Albanese) has also given me the clearance to share with them (China) the Nakamal Agreement,” Napat said.

In September last year, **Albanese** was notified that a previous draft of the pact had been rejected hours before he was to fly to Vanuatu for the signing.