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DEFENCE WHITE PAPER SETS POSITIVE TONE ON REGIONAL RELATIONS

MELBOURNE, 3 May 2013 - The Defence White Paper corrects a previously provocative stance towards China and will help maintain Australia's prestige and independence in the region, Professor Tony Milner said.

Professor Milner is International Director of Asialink and co-chair of The Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific.

"It is much more positive about China and that meshes well with the Prime Minister's very useful recent visit to China," Professor Milner said.

"It is a helpful contrast to the last Defence White Paper, which was unnecessarily provocative regarding China.

"It gives a special role to the East Asia Summit in terms of the regional security architecture, which seems highly sensible.

"It promises a return to 2 per cent of GDP expenditure on Defence. Such a level is probably necessary to maintain Australia's prestige in the region and to assist a more independent Australian role in regional relations."

The White Paper referred often to the "Indo Pacific", Professor Milner noted.

"We are likely to hear much more of that phrase," he said.

"Given Australia's geographic location, 'Indo Pacific' – with its stress on India as well as China and the US – makes good sense for Australia as a concept. Whether it has such a potent meaning in the Asian region is another matter.

"One advantage of the Asian Century White Paper is that it acknowledged the potency of the word 'Asia' and promised an Australian determination to engage effectively with that Asia.

"The new Defence White Paper's reference to the Indo Pacific is a very broad focus.

"It does talk about the importance of Australia's immediate region and ASEAN, but I think we need to give greater attention to Australia's strategic future with ASEAN and less to speculating on the more distant and larger US-China issues."

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