

Japan joins US-Australian rehearsal for conflict with China

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For the first time, Japanese forces will participate in the biennial joint Australian and US “Talisman Sabre” exercise, now underway in military training areas in northern Australia. Along with the war games in Australia, the exercise involves key US naval and air force command centres in Guam, Hawaii and the US west coast.

A delegation of 40 Japanese military personnel has joined what amounts to a large-scale dress rehearsal for a military confrontation with China in the Asia-Pacific region.

The exercise was formally launched last Saturday, when Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott toured the Blue Ridge, the command ship of the US Navy’s Pacific Fleet, as it arrived in Sydney Harbour. The propaganda event was designed to promote the US-Australia military alliance and invoke a wartime atmosphere.

Attempting to imitate a US president’s “commander-in-chief” persona, Abbott landed aboard the ship on a military helicopter dressed in an Air Force flight jacket and headgear. A horde of media was on hand to record him, wearing his military garb, being welcomed by a US admiral and the American ambassador to Australia, John Berr.

Abbott hailed the US military as a “comforting presence” amid “significant challenges in many parts of the world.”

Under conditions in which the US, Australia and Japan are threatening to take action to assert “freedom of navigation” in the South China Sea near Chinese-held islands and reefs, Talisman Sabre involves a wide range of military assets training for potential combat situations. These extend from naval encounters and air attacks on ships, to long-range bombing and marine beach landings.

Last Sunday, “Open Days” were held at military bases in Darwin and Rockhampton in northern Australia, so the media could broadcast imagery of Australian and American military hardware and troops operating alongside each other.

Talisman Sabre will involve 21 ships, three submarines, over 200 aircraft and more than 33,000 personnel from the US and Australia, as well as 640 New Zealand personnel and the Japanese contingent.

The US Navy has sent the aircraft carrier George Washington and its support ships, which will train with Australian forces off northeastern Australia. A marine expeditionary unit aboard the amphibious assault ship Bonhomme Richard, supported by US and Australian submarines and ships, will exercise off the coast of Darwin—within striking distance of the strategic Sunda and Lombok Straits through Indonesia.

In the event of conflict with China, the US “AirSea Battle” concept envisages northern Australia being the base of operations for a naval blockade of these sea lanes, in order to starve the Chinese economy of oil and other natural resources and strangle its international trade. The key Malacca Straits, through which 80 percent of all Chinese sea-borne imports and exports pass, would also be blockaded in joint operations involving the US, Australia, Japan, Singapore and other allied forces.

A number of long-range B1 bombers currently based in Guam have been retooled over the past four years into ship-killers, armed with highly accurate missiles that can hit a vessel at sea from distances of up to 300 kilometres. Following statements in May by David Shear, the assistant secretary of defense for Asian and Pacific security affairs, that the US will “place” B1 bombers in Australia, close attention will be paid as to whether Talisman Sabre tests out such plans by sending

some of the aircraft for bombing training in northern Australia.

The US “pivot” to Asia, officially unveiled by the Obama administration in 2011, is aimed at concentrating 60 percent of the US Navy and Air Force in the region, and developing the network of military alliances and partnerships necessary to wage war against China.

The involvement of Japanese personnel in Talisman Sabre is highly significant. In a 2013 US strategic study, Japan and Australia were described as the “northern and southern anchors” of the pivot. Under the right-wing government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Japan is being steadily remilitarised. Abe has pushed through parliament a reinterpretation of the country’s pacifist constitution to permit “collective self-defence”—that is, the ability to deploy the Japanese military in wars wherever the US or another Japanese ally are allegedly under attack.

Last month, Japan participated in a provocative joint military exercise with the Philippines in the vicinity of the disputed territories in the South China Sea and initiated talks with Manila on basing ships and aircraft in the country. Japan has its own volatile territorial dispute with China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea. Close encounters regularly take place between Japanese and Chinese aircraft. If conflict breaks out, the Obama administration has guaranteed it will join Japan in a war against China.

Australia would be inevitably drawn in also, not only by virtue of its alliance with the US and the American satellite and communications bases in the country, but because of its growing military relations with Tokyo. While Australia and Japan do not have a formal defence alliance, Abbott and Abe have declared the countries have a “special relationship” and signed agreements on the exchange of military technology. Washington has actively encouraged the closer ties.

India is the other country that is central to US war planning in Asia. The US, Japan and Australia have each strengthened their military relations with New Delhi since 2011 and encouraged it to assert itself as a regional power. India, on the basis of assertions that it has “national interests” in the South China Sea, is making regular naval deployments into the area. In June, four Indian warships toured Singapore and Malaysia as part of an “operational” exercise.

Japanese and Indian ships will undertake joint training in October. Australia and India will conduct their first-ever bilateral naval exercise in the Indian Ocean in October-November, in the seas approaching the Malacca Straits. Japanese forces will then take part in a large-scale US and Indian “Malabar” exercise, brushing aside protests by China.

The increasing frequency and sizes of the exercises testifies to the tremendous dangers posed by the provocative US “pivot.” With reckless disregard for the dangers of a nuclear war, the US and its imperialist allies in Australia and Japan, supported by India, are determined to undermine Chinese economic and strategic influence in Asia.

In chilling comments on the discussion that occurred at a January conference in Melbourne, which involved top nuclear weapons policy and strategy experts from the US and its allies, Professor Joseph Siracusa from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology stated on June 17:

“They were discussing the inevitable war with China. This will happen. This is about power. The American Pentagon is on a collision course with China, so the South China Sea has become a flashpoint for war ... The trigger is there, it’s just waiting to happen.”



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