

# Amid Ukraine crisis, US Navy stages war games in South China Sea

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Even as the US and its European allies are beating the war drums against Russia over the Ukraine, the US Navy is engaged in provocative war games in the South China Sea aimed at threatening China. These naval exercises are a clear indication that the Pentagon's war planners recognise that any conflict with Russia could very quickly widen to embroil China.

Two nuclear aircraft carriers—the USS Carl Vinson and the USS Abraham Lincoln—and their strike groups began joint military drills on Sunday. There was no pretence that the exercises had any benign intent. They aimed, stated a media release, “to strengthen maritime integrated-at-sea operations and combat readiness.”

The Pentagon's AirSea Battle strategy for war with China is premised on the US control of waters adjacent to the Chinese mainland, particularly Hainan Island, which is adjacent to the South China Sea and houses key submarine bases. AirSea Battle envisages a massive air and missile assault on Chinese military bases and infrastructure from US bases, warships and submarines.

That is exactly what the US Navy is preparing for. According to the press release, the two aircraft carrier strike groups are engaged “in joint operations to include enhanced maritime communication operations, anti-submarine warfare operations, air warfare operations, replenishments-at-sea, cross-deck flight operations and maritime interdiction operations.”

An article in the *South China Morning Post* last week noted that US carrier strike groups had entered the South China Sea 10 times in 2021, compared with six times in 2020 and five in 2019. Even before the current exercises, the USS Carl Vinson had carried out a five-day joint drill around the disputed Spratly Islands in the South China Sea with the Essex Amphibious Ready Group, which is specifically tasked with

amphibious assaults.

Last week the USS Carl Vinson and the Essex amphibious group joined USS Abraham Lincoln and the America Expeditionary Strike Group, which is also designated for amphibious assaults, for war games in the Philippine Sea—to the east of Taiwan. The massive US naval presence was further bolstered by two Japanese warships—the helicopter carrier JS *Hyuga* and the destroyer JS *Myoko*.

The inclusion of US amphibious naval units is particularly menacing, not only to the Chinese mainland but to Chinese-controlled islets in the South China Sea, which would be prime targets in any US war with China.

The *South China Morning Post* article noted that US naval operations in the South China Sea had increased in both number and complexity. Citing a former Taiwanese naval military instructor, it suggested that the entry routes of US warships into the South China Sea had changed to evade over-the-horizon radar systems on China's Mischief, Subi and Fiery Cross reefs.

The American media has all but ignored the US naval war games, focussing instead on the Chinese response—the dispatch of warplanes into Taiwan's Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ), which are invariably described as “intrusions” and “threats” and cited as evidence of Beijing's intentions to invade Taiwan. According to Taiwanese authorities, 39 Chinese military aircraft entered its ADIZ on Sunday, followed by another 13 on Monday.

This anti-China propaganda involves yet another hypocritical double standard. When the US navy carries out war games thousands of kilometres from the nearest American territory, it is operating in “international waters” to ensure “a free and open Indo-Pacific.” Yet

when Chinese warplanes fly into international airspace close to the Chinese mainland, that is branded as Chinese aggression. ADIZs in general have no standing in international law. Moreover, the Taiwanese ADIZ provocatively includes areas over mainland China.

As with its moves against Russia over the Ukraine, Washington is engaged in a similar modus operandi in relation to China over Taiwan. Russian military operations on Russian territory are cited as “proof” of an imminent invasion of the Ukraine. This is the pretext for threats against Moscow and a huge US military build-up in Eastern Europe, like the amassing of what Rear Admiral Dan Martin, commander of the USS Carl Vinson strike group, described as “overwhelming maritime force” against China.

In an interview with the Australian media while in Sydney last week, British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss warned, without providing a shred of evidence, that China could exploit the Ukraine crisis to invade Taiwan. “Russia is working more closely with China than it ever has. Aggressors are working in concert and I think it’s incumbent on countries like ours to work together,” she said.

In a similar vein, *Financial Times* commentator Gideon Rachman published a lengthy article last weekend entitled “New world order: Russia and China’s plans take shape.” He inadvertently pointed to the underlying motives, not so much of Russian and Chinese geo-politics, but of the aggressive moves by US imperialism in Eastern Europe and East Asia.

Rachman declared: “Two features of the current world order that the Russians and the Chinese frequently object to are ‘unipolarity’ and ‘universality.’ Put more simply, they believe that the current arrangements give America too much power—and they are determined to change that.”

In reality, the boot is on the other foot: In its historic decline, US imperialism is determined to shore up the global dominance that it established in the wake of World War II through every means, including military. Its triumphalism following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 has vanished and it is now targeting what it regards as the chief threats to the post-war imperialism order, in which it was top dog.

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly intensified geo-political tensions and accelerated the war planning in the Pentagon. Confronted with an immense social,

economic and political crisis at home that is leading to a rising class conflict, the Biden administration is seeking to project these social tensions outward against an external enemy, greatly heightening the danger of war.

While the immediate target is Russia, the US Navy’s drills in waters off the Chinese mainland are a warning that wherever a conflict might start, it has the potential to rapidly evolve into a disastrous global war involving nuclear-armed powers.



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