

Australia hosts major war games simulating aerial combat

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War games are underway in northern Australia, with the US and many of its regional allies simulating aerial conflict with the most advanced fighter jets.

Named Exercise Pitch Black, the biennial games are the largest in their history and occur under conditions of an active US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and a continuous ratcheting up of Washington's confrontation with China in Asia. The drills began on August 19 and will conclude on September 8.

The exercises again underscore Australia's central role in the region-wide US build-up against China, as well as the militarisation of the country's north. The war games are making use of the Northern Territory air force bases Darwin and Tindal, as well as Amberley in southeast Queensland, while defence force publications have noted that they are occurring over an area comparable in size to a European country.

The participation and format of the exercises underscore the accelerating US-led war drive over the past several years. Due to COVID, the last Exercise Pitch Black was held in 2018. In that year 12 countries participated. In 2022, the list has grown to 17.

They include the US, Britain, Canada and New Zealand, which together with Australia comprise Five Eyes intelligence-sharing and military network. Minor US regional allies from elsewhere in the world are taking part, including the United Arab Emirates.

Several South East Asian countries have been invited, as the US and Australia seek to deepen military ties with them and combat their economic and trade dependence on China. They include Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Notably, India is participating, while Japan is taking part for the first time. That means that all members of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a de facto alliance

of the largest militaries in the region directed against China, are involved in the exercises. The US and Australia are the other two Quad members.

South Korea is also joining, having never participated before. Along with Japan, it is a key north-east Asian ally of Washington, hosting substantial US military bases. Both countries would automatically be involved in any US-led conflict with China. South Korea is simultaneously conducting major military exercises with the US on the Korean peninsula.

France, which has a long history of neo-colonialism in the Pacific, is integrated into the exercises, while Germany is participating for the first time. This reflects Berlin's own project of German remilitarisation, accelerated by the proxy war in Ukraine. It has also sparked warnings from some Chinese analysts that the US is attempting to expand the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) alliance into the Asia-Pacific.

Australia, New Zealand and other regional allies took part in a NATO summit in Madrid last July, which explicitly denounced China and Russia and called for member-states to prepare themselves for conflict with nuclear-armed powers.

Promotional material for the exercises boasts that they are the first iteration of Exercise Pitch Black that will involve Australia's F-35A Lightning II, new fifth generation fighter jets. They are described by the air force as a "highly advanced multi-role, supersonic, stealth fighter which will meet Australia's requirements to defeat current and emerging threats."

Overall, more than 2,500 personnel and 100 aircraft are involved. The US-based *Stars and Stripes* website published an article entitled: "Stealth fighters prepare to dogfight over Australian Outback during Pitch Black drills." It noted that in addition to the F-35A's, other advanced fighter jets would be present, including the

“US Air Force F-15C Eagles, French Rafales, German and British Typhoons, South Korean, Singaporean and Indonesian F-16 Fighting Falcons, Japanese F-2s and Indian Sukhoi SU-30MKI Flankers.”

In comments to the US publication, Royal Australian Air Force Group Captain Matt McCormack, the exercise director, explained: “During the dogfights, about 50 friendly aircraft will line up against 30 planes roleplaying as adversaries. The enemy aircraft will be able to regenerate from kills so that they simulate a force of 60-70 fighters.”

McCormack added: “India’s multirole Flankers were designed by Russia to defeat US F-15s and should be effective when employed as a simulated adversary during the exercise.”

That underscores the global significance of the exercises, which are part of the US-led war efforts against Russia. China is also clearly a target of the games. Aerial combat, moreover, is central to the US preparations for conflict with China, which would also centrally involve maritime warfare.

The exercises are being held as the US continues to ratchet up tensions with China over Taiwan. Over the weekend, US warships transited the narrow Taiwan Strait, separating the island from the Chinese mainland, in a provocation that could have led to a military clash. That followed US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s visit to Taiwan, which even senior US political figures warned had threatened an outbreak of military hostilities with China.

Over recent months, moreover, information has emerged showing that the US and its allies, including Australia, are conducting continuous naval operations in the East and South China Seas, with some of the activities resulting in “near misses” with the Chinese military.

The Australian Labor government, which is hosting Exercise Pitch Black, is also presiding over a further expansion of the military, having already committed, along with the Liberal-National opposition, to defence spending of \$600 billion this decade.

Labor has commissioned an “urgent review” into Australia’s military capabilities. Initial findings are to be presented to Defence Minister Richard Marles in November, with a final report next March, which analysts have described as record speed for such a review.

In an *Sydney Morning Herald* interview last week, Marles declared: “We need to make sure that our Defence Force is potent, that it is capable. We need to make Australia a difficult proposition for any adversary. In that context, we need to be a porcupine.” As the Nine Media publications noted, the phrase “porcupine” is frequently used to describe Taiwan’s own military build-up.

Contrary to Marles’ claims, there is nothing defensive about the Australian military expansion. Instead, its aim is to ready the country to play a frontline role in an aggressive, US-led war against Beijing, aimed at ensuring the hegemony of American imperialism in the region and internationally.

This was underscored by press reports, revealing that one of the focuses of the review is on Australian preparedness for a war with China over Taiwan.

The Labor government is fully committed to AUKUS, the militarist pact established with Britain and the US last September, openly based on plans for conflict in the Indo-Pacific. Under AUKUS, Australia is to acquire hypersonic missiles, as well as nuclear-powered submarines.

Marles has stated that Australia will purchase such submarines off the shelf, either from Britain or the US. Marles is currently touring France, Germany and Britain, to deepen military ties. In the UK, he is visiting naval shipyards in line with the plans for a submarine purchase.

Labor is accelerating Australia’s crucial role in the US military build-up and war preparations, in line with its own character as a pro-war party of the banks and corporations. The militarist program, however, is widely opposed by working people, raising the need to transform latent anti-war sentiment into a mass movement of the working class to prevent a catastrophic conflict.



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