

# Talisman Sabre military exercise in Australia: A dress rehearsal for war against China

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Massive war games began across Australia last week involving almost 40,000 troops, missiles and other advanced weaponry. This year's iteration of the biannual Talisman Sabre exercise is the largest yet, involving not only the chief participants, the US and Australia, but 17 other countries including Washington's allies throughout the region and internationally.

Talisman Sabre is largely subject to a media blackout in Australia. The population is being kept in the dark, because what is being carried out would provoke widespread fear and opposition.

In its geographical scope, the number of participants and the aggressive character of the military operations being trialled, Talisman Sabre is a dress rehearsal for a US-led war against China. In addition to the tens of thousands of troops, some of the most potent weaponry in the world is being deployed to Australia, including the U.S. Navy's George Washington Carrier Strike Group, F-35 fighter jets and long-range missiles.

The target of the exercises has been explicitly stated. In a feature article, the *Wall Street Journal* declared: "The biennial exercise, called Talisman Sabre, is meant to send a message to China: The U.S. and its partners are ready to respond together to aggression from Beijing, which has been increasingly asserting itself in what it regards as its sphere of influence in the Asia-Pacific region."

Lt. Gen. Matthew McFarlane, who commands the U.S. Army's I Corps, told the *Journal*: "Everyone is seeing the aggressive activities that China is doing. That's why they're more interested in what they need to do to protect their sovereign interests."

The depiction of China as the aggressor and the US as the protector of sovereignty and international law turns reality on its head. The fascist Trump administration is trampling on the US Constitution domestically, while dispensing with all pretenses of legal norms in international relations, from the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza to a tariff regime that has the character of an economic war on the world.

In reality, the Trump regime is escalating a more than

decade long US military build-up in the Indo-Pacific, directed against China, because it is viewed as the chief threat to the economic dominance of American imperialism.

The line was set by Trump's Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth, who delivered a bellicose tirade against China at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore in late May. Hegseth declared that Beijing posed a "threat" that "could be imminent." Top US military commanders have predicted a war against China over control of Taiwan within the next several years.

Hegseth demanded that US allies in Asia immediately boost their defence spending to 3.5 percent of gross domestic product. Then, last week, on the eve of Talisman Sabre, the Trump administration leaked to the media its demands that Australia and Japan commit their military assets to participation in the war with China that is being prepared.

Talisman Sabre underscores that these are not simply words, but that advanced, on-the-ground planning is underway for how such a war would be waged. The participants in the exercise include all of Washington's allies which would be involved in a conflict.

The UK is taking part, meaning that together with the US and Australia, all participants in the AUKUS military pact directed against China are involved. AUKUS includes the sale of US nuclear-powered submarines to Australia and a broader build-up, including plans for hypersonic missiles and other advanced weaponry.

India, whose authoritarian government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has played an increasingly prominent role in the anti-China campaign is a participant. So too is Japan, which, with US encouragement has effectively jettisoned its post-World War II pacifist constitution, while embarking on its largest military expansion since that catastrophic conflict.

That means that Talisman Sabre also encompasses the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. The QUAD, which is a de facto alliance of the largest militaries in the region, the US, Japan, India and Australia directed against China, has provoked continuous opposition from Beijing.

Other regional US allies, including South Korea, New Zealand and the Philippines, are taking part. Several South East Asian nations, including Indonesia, have also sent contingents, under conditions where Washington is demanding that these countries end their balancing acts between the US and China.

The global scope of Talisman Sabre is underscored by the involvement of the major European powers, including France and Germany. Both have embarked upon enormous military expansions and are centrally involved, alongside the US, in the proxy war with Russia in Ukraine. That conflict is widely viewed in Washington as a stepping stone to war with China.

Talisman Sabre's exercises include a number of "firsts." Missiles from the Typhon system, which have never been fired west of the international date line, will be launched. Given their range of 1,200 miles, they could fire deep into the Indo-Pacific, or if stationed in a South East or North East Asian ally of Washington, could reach into mainland China.

The *Wall Street Journal* declared that the system would be "crucial if Washington wants to control important sea lanes around Taiwan in a conflict."

The High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, or HIMARS, are also being fired for the first time on Australian soil. HIMARS, provided to Ukraine by Washington, have played a key role in the war with Russia. The truck-launched system is highly mobile. Again, the *Journal* noted approvingly that the "US and its allies could use the system to hit Chinese targets from islands."

Drones are being deployed more in this iteration of Talisman Sabre than ever before, with the *Journal* and national security commentators drawing a direct relationship of their centrality to the Ukraine war.

In an exercise last week, 335 US paratroopers dropped into Charters Towers, in a night-time raid where they mock seized control of the small outback Queensland town. The paratroopers had flown some 10,000 kilometres from Alaska.

That showed "we own the night," US Colonel Brian Weightman told local media. "Our ability to fly halfway around the world, communicate in real time and drop combat-ready troops and equipment into an area should serve as a reminder to any potential adversary."

In another operation, US, Australian, South Korean, Japanese and French naval forces descended on Cowley Beach in North Queensland, staging an amphibious landing.

The Australian Defence Department declared this showed the ability of the US allies to use a "diverse range of landing craft" to get to "shore, where they can secure a beach landing site and allow forces to push forward." The "force" had "built a comprehensive battle plan, integrating doctrine

and processes from the group of partners, to successfully deliver a battle group assault."

All of these activities are a trial run for what would be an offensive war against China in the Indo-Pacific. Already, the Australian military, as well as other regional US allies, are overhauling to prepare for a conflict that would be centred on the control of waters and islands off the Chinese mainland.

Significantly, Talisman Sabre includes exercises in Papua New Guinea (PNG) for the first time. The largest state in the South West Pacific, and the only one with major port facilities that could service a military in time of war, PNG has been pressured to align ever more closely with the anti-China build up, by both Washington and Canberra.

The beginning of Talisman Sabre coincided with a six-day visit by Australian Labor Prime Minister Anthony Albanese to China.

Albanese's government has completed Australia's transformation into a launching pad for a US war in the Indo-Pacific, through a vast expansion of US basing, especially in the north and west of the continent where Talisman Sabre's most potent exercises are being held. But his government and the ruling elite are clearly fearful of the implications of a full-scale conflict with China, which remains Australia's largest trading partner.

A similar dilemma confronts a host of states throughout the region. But the clear message from the US is that the time for such balancing acts is over.

Talisman Sabre underscores the reality that what is already developing is a war that has an increasingly global dimension. For the strategists of imperialism, the war against Russia in Ukraine, the genocide in Gaza and associated attacks, including against Iran, and the build-up against China are fronts in a single worldwide conflict.

As in the 1930s, the major powers, led by the US, are responding to the breakdown of global capitalism, with a turn to militarism threatening a nuclear catastrophe.

The working class must respond with its own international strategy, based on uniting its struggles globally in a common fight to overturn the profit system and establish a peaceful socialist society on a world scale.



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