

# US conducts massive RIMPAC joint naval drills

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Throughout this month, the US and 29 other nations are taking part in the biennial Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) naval exercise in and around Hawaii. The largest joint maritime drills in the world, RIMPAC 2026 takes place as part of Washington's longstanding preparations for war against China.

The RIMPAC exercise began on June 24 and will last through July 31. According to the US Pacific Fleet website, the forces deployed to Hawaii include 32 surface ships, five submarines, 206 aircraft, and more than 30,000 personnel. Land forces from 15 nations are also taking part.

The aircraft carrier, USS Theodore Roosevelt, is leading the exercise alongside a contingent of other US warships, including destroyers, cruisers, submarines, and an amphibious assault ship, among others. This includes the USS Charlotte, the attack submarine that in March carried out a war crime by sinking an unarmed Iranian frigate, killing 84 of its personnel.

US allies in the Asia-Pacific are also playing leading roles, which includes Japan as the war games vice commander and South Korea as the maritime component commander. Canada is commanding the air component of the exercise.

Other key US allies in the war preparations against China taking part include Australia, the Philippines, and New Zealand. Israel, which is carrying out the genocide in Gaza, devastating Lebanon, and taking part in the US war against Iran, is also participating.

China is not taking part, though Beijing had previously been invited to join the exercise in 2014 and 2016. It was disinvited in 2018 over rising territorial disputes in the South China Sea that had been stoked by Washington and its allies.

The theme of RIMPAC 26 has been "Partners: Integrated and Prepared." The drills are meant to

improve the "interoperability" of those taking part. What this means is that the US alliances with other countries work as "force multipliers," in the language of the US military, amplifying their mutual strength. Washington has built a system of alliances throughout the Indo-Pacific, deepening military cooperation with countries while also encouraging collaboration between countries like Japan, South Korea, Australia and the Philippines.

RIMPAC takes place without Washington directly mentioning China, and claims the world's largest maritime drills are not aimed at China. Instead, RIMPAC "provides a unique training opportunity for allies and partners to strengthen their collective capabilities and promote a free and open Indo-Pacific region."

In reality, the phrase "free and open Indo-Pacific" is regularly trotted out to justify the ramping up of tensions with Beijing. Numerous longstanding territorial disputes exist in the East and South China Seas. However, in the past 15 years, the US has deliberately stoked tensions, encouraging countries like the Philippines to belligerently confront China, while accusing Beijing of "aggression" as the pretext for its own military build-up throughout the region.

At a virtual press conference on July 6, Rear Admiral Suzanne Bailey, the commander of the RIMPAC Combined Exercise Control Group, stated more bluntly that "here at RIMPAC, *we're ensuring we can control the seas as a fundamental mission of the Navy*, and a critical part of that is being able to decisively engage and defeat surface threats." (Emphasis added.)

Rather than the "free and open Indo-Pacific," Washington's goal is the control of oceans, sea lanes, and choke points throughout the region. This has become all the more critical following the debacle in

the US war on Iran, where the Trump administration has failed to achieve the objectives of US imperialism and Iran successfully closed the Strait of Hormuz.

Drills taking place during RIMPAC including amphibious operations, which means assaults on beaches and islands; anti-submarine warfare drills; missile exercises; and mine countermeasures. Submarine drills include firing long-range UGM-84 Harpoon anti-ship cruise missiles that enable attacks from a stand-off distance. Another component includes military medicine in preparation for mass casualties.

Beijing is well aware that RIMPAC is preparation for war against China. China Military Online, the official English-language news site of China's military, stated in a July 6 article, "This year's exercise is not only unprecedented in scale, but also features a stronger emphasis on major-country competition in both its strategic orientation and tactical arrangements, warranting close attention and vigilance."

RIMPAC is far from the only US-led exercise taking place. Two additional exercises took place just as RIMPAC was beginning, Resolute Dragon 2026 and Valiant Shield 2026.

Resolute Dragon is an annual bilateral exercise with Japan, this year running from June 20 to June 30. The drill took place in Okinawa and Kyushu in the East China Sea involving 9,000 troops. The biennial Valiant Shield drill involving 10,000 troops began June 22 and ended on July 1, taking place in the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and Japan. Tokyo was closely integrated in the planning and execution of Valiant Shield for only the second time.

Japan is playing a key role in the war preparations against China. Under far-right Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, Tokyo has threatened war with China over Taiwan, ramped up military spending to 2 percent of GDP, and lifted a ban on the export of lethal military weaponry. Tokyo is also expanding intelligence gathering operations.

Takaichi's threat of war over Taiwan is significant, as the island is a major red line for Beijing, which considers it a rogue province and part of China. Conscious that Taiwan could be used by the US as a military staging ground against the Chinese mainland, Beijing has stated it will use force to reunify the island if Taipei declares independence. For this very reason, Washington and Tokyo, in conjunction with the

administration of Lai Ching-te in Taipei, have stoked tensions over the island, attempting to goad Beijing into firing the first shot.

That Taiwan's own war games are taking place at this time is not a coincidence. In recent weeks, Taiwan held its Immediate Combat Readiness Exercise from June 22 to 26, which involved 100,000 troops. It is also holding the Joint Defense Exercise beginning on July 13 and Han Kuang, the largest annual exercise for the Taiwanese military, beginning on August 5.

When asked recently during a legislative hearing if any US personnel were taking part in these military exercises, Hsieh Jih-sheng, the deputy chief of the general staff for intelligence, refused to comment. However, he added that the US-led exercises throughout the region were evidence that Taiwan is "definitely not alone." American troops have been stationed in Taiwan for several years, supposedly in a training capacity.



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