

Australia, Philippines Conduct Massive South China Sea Drills

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Australia and the Philippines have commenced their largest-ever joint military exercises, signaling a firm commitment to regional security and deterrence in the face of Beijing's growing assertiveness in the South China Sea. The drills, named **Exercise Alon**, meaning "wave" in Filipino, involve over 3,600 troops conducting live-fire drills, amphibious assaults, and coordinated battlefield maneuvers along a Philippine coastal town directly facing the disputed waters.

The exercises showcase Australia's military capabilities, with assets including an advanced guided-missile navy destroyer, F/A-18 supersonic jets, C-130 transport aircraft, Javelin anti-tank systems, and special forces sniper units. Observers from allied nations, including the United States, Canada, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, and Indonesia, are also participating, emphasizing the growing international concern over China's unilateral claims and provocative actions in the region.

Vice Admiral Justin Jones of the Royal Australian Navy highlighted the strategic importance of the drills, stating they ensure that nations can exercise sovereignty and adhere to

international law free from coercion. “This exercise demonstrates our ability to project power, collaborate with regional partners, and respond decisively to security challenges,” he said.

The drills continue until August 29 and form part of Australia’s broader strategy to reinforce alliances in the Indo-Pacific. Australia is now the second country, after the U.S., to hold a visiting forces agreement with the Philippines, enabling large-scale troop deployments and joint operations. The Philippines is also finalizing similar agreements with Japan and negotiating with France, Canada, and other regional powers.

The exercises come amid rising tensions with China, which has criticized multinational drills near the South China Sea as attempts to “gang up” on Beijing. Recent incidents, including a Chinese navy ship colliding with its coast guard while confronting Philippine forces near Scarborough Shoal, underscore the need for a strong deterrent. Australia’s Embassy in Manila condemned China’s “dangerous and unprofessional” conduct, calling for restraint and respect for international law.

In addition to the Philippines, U.S. freedom of navigation operations, including the deployment of two warships near Scarborough Shoal, further reinforce the region’s collective commitment to a rules-based maritime order. Australian defense officials have also noted previous Chinese provocations, such as a J-16 fighter jet dangerously close to an Australian P-8 Poseidon surveillance aircraft in international airspace.

Exercise Alon sends a clear message: Australia and its allies are ready to defend regional stability, protect sovereign nations, and counter aggressive actions that threaten the Indo-Pacific order. It reflects a pragmatic, strategic approach to deterrence, ensuring that Beijing understands the consequences of continued expansionist behavior in international waters.