

## Australia and the Philippines Launch Largest Joint Military Drills Near the South China Sea

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Australia and the Philippines have commenced their largest-ever joint military exercises, dubbed “Alon,” involving more than 3,600 military personnel. The drills, conducted near the disputed South China Sea, aim to strengthen regional security and demonstrate the nations’ readiness to address emerging threats.

The “Alon” exercises feature a comprehensive array of operations, including live-fire drills, beach assaults, and coordinated maneuvers with advanced military hardware. Participating units are utilizing guided-missile destroyers, F/A-18 fighter jets, C-130 aircraft, and specialized infantry equipment. The presence of U.S., Canadian, Japanese, South Korean, New Zealand, and Indonesian military observers underscores the international interest in maintaining security and stability in the region.

Officials have described the drills as a signal of commitment to upholding international law, particularly in the context of ongoing territorial disputes in the South China Sea. The exercises come in response to recent confrontations, including a collision involving Chinese vessels and a Philippine patrol ship near Scarborough Shoal. Such incidents have heightened regional tensions, prompting coordinated military and diplomatic responses.

The United States has reinforced freedom-of-navigation operations in the area, while Australia has publicly condemned aggressive maneuvers by Chinese forces in previous encounters. These steps reflect a shared concern among regional and global partners about maintaining open sea lanes and deterring unilateral actions that could destabilize the maritime region.

For the Philippines, the “Alon” exercises represent a continuation of strengthened defense cooperation with key allies. The country has signed similar defense agreements with the United States and Japan and continues negotiations with nations including France and Canada. Through such collaborations, Manila seeks to enhance military readiness, interoperability, and strategic partnerships capable of addressing diverse security challenges.

Ministerial and military officials from both Australia and the Philippines have emphasized that these exercises are not solely for tactical preparation but also serve as a demonstration of resilience and coordination in the face of regional threats. The drills allow personnel to practice integrated operations, refine command structures, and test logistical capabilities across joint scenarios.

International observers participating in the exercises will monitor performance, provide feedback, and exchange expertise. Their involvement highlights the broader commitment of allied and partner nations to support rule-of-law principles and regional stability. Observers also help ensure transparency, reinforcing that the exercises are defensive and coordinated rather than provocative.

Analysts note that the timing and scale of “Alon” reflect a strategic calculation by both nations to assert their capabilities and readiness while avoiding escalation. The drills strengthen Australia-Philippines relations, improve operational interoperability, and provide a platform for multilateral engagement in response to emerging threats.

As the exercises continue, officials maintain that the primary objectives remain the protection of maritime security, the enhancement of bilateral military coordination, and the deterrence of actions that threaten peace and stability in the South China Sea. The success of “Alon” is expected to reinforce the strategic partnership between Australia and the Philippines and set a model for cooperative regional defense initiatives in the years ahead.