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Australia, Philippines Launch Largest Joint Military Exercises

August 18, 2025

— Categories: Defence & Security



Australia has commenced its largest-ever military exercises in collaboration with the Philippines, involving more than 3,600 troops. The drills, named “Alon”, meaning “wave” in Tagalog, include live-fire exercises, beach assaults, and coordinated maneuvers near the contested South China Sea and will run until August 29.

The exercises showcase Australian military capabilities amid rising regional tensions with China. Participating forces include a guided-missile destroyer, F/A-18 supersonic fighter jets, C-130 transport aircraft, and Javelin anti-tank weapons, supported by specialised units

such as snipers. Observers from the United States, Canada, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, and Indonesia are also taking part, highlighting the multinational dimension of the operations.

Vice Admiral Justin Jones of the Royal Australian Navy emphasised that the exercises underline Australia's commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific. "This exercise reflects Australia's commitment to working with partners to ensure we maintain a region where state sovereignty is protected, international law is followed, and nations can make decisions free from coercion," he stated. The drills also provide an opportunity to strengthen cooperation and prepare for shared security challenges, while demonstrating the ability to project military power across long distances.

The joint exercises are part of a broader regional security strategy. Australia has become the second country, after the United States, to establish a Visiting Forces Agreement with the Philippines, enabling large-scale troop deployments for joint drills. The Philippines is finalising a similar agreement with Japan and exploring arrangements with France and Canada to further reinforce defence partnerships.

China has expressed strong opposition to the multinational exercises, accusing the U.S. and its allies of militarising the South China Sea. The waterway is a key international trade route claimed almost entirely by China, though several other nations, including the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, and Taiwan, also assert territorial claims.

The exercises follow recent regional incidents, including a collision between a Chinese navy ship and a Chinese coast guard vessel while attempting to impede a Philippine patrol near the Scarborough Shoal. The Australian Embassy in Manila condemned the collision as "dangerous and unprofessional," urging de-escalation and respect for international law.

In response to ongoing tensions, the United States deployed two warships to the Scarborough Shoal as part of a freedom of navigation operation. Earlier this year, a Chinese J-16 fighter jet released flares near an Australian P-8 Poseidon surveillance aircraft in international airspace, prompting official protests from Canberra.

The "Alon" exercises mark a significant effort by Australia and its regional partners to enhance collective security, improve operational coordination, and reinforce commitments to international norms in a strategically sensitive region.