



**SOUTH CHINA SEA STRATEGIC SITUATION  
PROBING INITIATIVE**

**An Incomplete Report on US Military Activities  
in the South China Sea in 2023**

**SCSPI**

**March 2024**

## About SCSPi

With a view to maintaining and promoting the peace, stability and prosperity of the South China Sea, we launched the South China Sea Strategic Situation Probing Initiative (SCSPi). The Initiative aims to integrate intellectual resources and open source information worldwide and keep track of important actions and major policy changes of key stakeholders and other parties involved. It provides professional data services and analysis reports to parties concerned, helping them keep competition under control, and with a view to seek partnerships.

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## Preface

In peacetime, conducting highly-intensified military activities in a coastal state's surrounding waters, such as thousands of close-in reconnaissance operations and hundreds of military exercises, is contrary to the spirit of “maintaining international peace and security” of the *UN Charter* and “the peaceful uses of the seas” of the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* (UNCLOS).

Since 2009, US military activities against China in the South China Sea have strengthened in frequency and intensity. Even against the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, US is still vigorously hyping up the “China threat” and accelerating the layout of Indo-Pacific Strategy. US military operations in the South China Sea continued unabated in 2023. Some operations are even unusually close to the coast of mainland China, and unmanned platforms have begun to be used on a large scale, significantly increasing the risk of maritime and air frictions and conflicts between China and the US.

In 2023, the politicization of military operations by the US military has been further enhanced, with increased exposure to the Taiwan Strait transit operations, deployments of carrier strike groups (CSGs), submarine activities, US-Philippine joint patrols, military exercises and drills. Meanwhile, the Pentagon and the US military have also repeatedly highlighted the so-called “dangerous interception” or “unprofessional” actions of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) at sea to put diplomatic, public and strategic pressure on China.

The US military presence and operations in the South China Sea are major factors affecting the situation in the South China Sea. Since 2019, the *South China Sea Strategic Situation Probing Initiative* (SCSPI) has

been releasing this annual report, *An Incomplete Report on US Military Activities in the South China Sea*. The report is intended to promote the transparency of South China Sea Situations and provide the perspective of a third-party think tank for reference to government departments, research institutions, media and the public of related parties.

Director of SCSPI Hu Bo

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hu Bo', written in a cursive style.

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# **An Incomplete Report on US Military Activities in the South China Sea in 2023**

## **SCSPI**

In 2023, the US military continued to strengthen its military deterrence against China, maintaining high-intensity activities including close-in reconnaissance operations, Taiwan Strait transits, forward presence, strategic cruising, military exercises and drills, and battlefield preparation in the South China Sea and its surrounding areas. Around 1,000 sorties of large reconnaissance aircraft conducted close-in reconnaissance, frequently approaching Chinese mainland airspace. Carrier strike groups (CSGs) and amphibious ready groups (ARGs) entered the South China Sea eight times, with increased duration, and training intensity. At least 11 nuclear attack submarines (SSNs) and two ballistic nuclear missile submarines (SSBNs) appeared in the region, signifying a clear intent for deterrence. Additionally, both joint operations with allies and partners and the use of unmanned systems were prominent among the US military activities in the South China Sea in 2023.

# I. Continuously Strengthened Strategic Platforms' Activities

## 1. CSGs

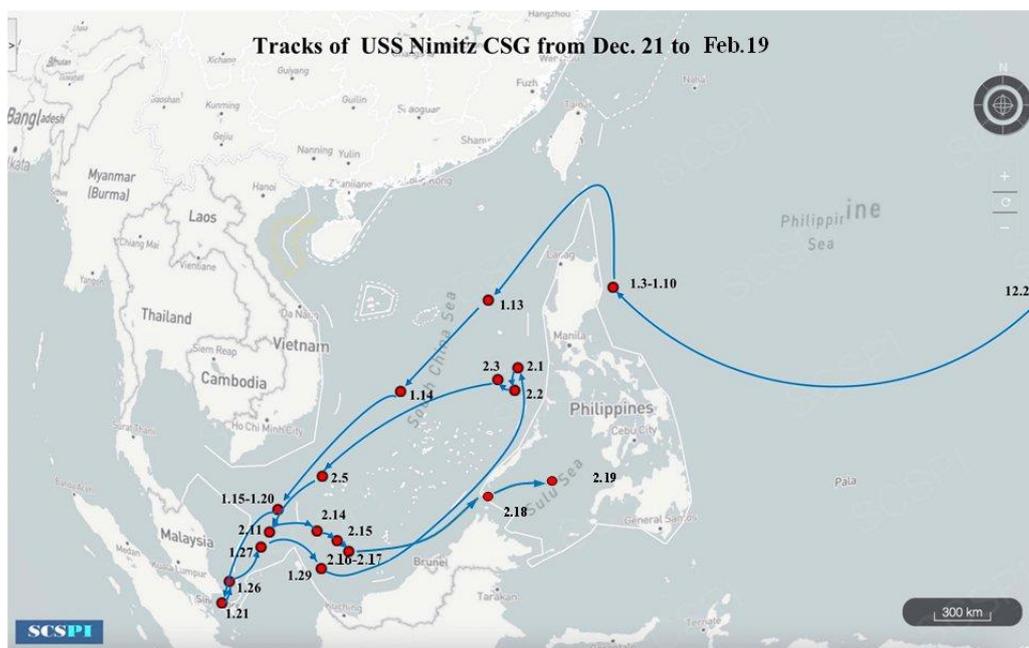
In 2023, the US deployed three CSGs, namely USS *Nimitz* (CVN-68), USS *Ronald Reagan* (CVN-76), and USS *Carl Vinson* (CVN-70), for a total of six activities accessing the South China Sea with the following features:

**Table 1: Activities of US CSGs in the South China Sea in 2023**

No.	Date	CSG	Access	Exit
1	Jan.12-Feb.18	USS <i>Nimitz</i>	Bashi Channel	Balabac Strait
2	Apr.16-May.3	USS <i>Nimitz</i>	Bashi Channel	Bashi Channel
3	Jun.14-Jul.10	USS <i>Ronald Reagan</i>	Bashi Channel	Karimata Strait
4	Oct.19-Oct.22	USS <i>Ronald Reagan</i>	Bashi Channel	Bashi Channel
5	Oct.26-Nov.3	USS <i>Ronald Reagan</i>	Bashi Channel	Bashi Channel
6	Dec.12-Jan.10(2024)	USS <i>Carl Vinson</i>	Balabac Strait	Bashi Channel

First, the duration of activities increased, with a preference for entering and exiting through the Bashi Channel. The frequency of USN CSG activities in the South China Sea remained the same as in 2022. Though the frequency decreased compared to 2021, the duration of activities increased significantly. USS *Nimitz* entered the waters on January 12 and left on February 18, conducting activities for 37 days. USS *Ronald Reagan* and USS *Carl Vinson* were also deployed for nearly 30 days each, from June 14 to July 10 and from December 12 to January 10 respectively. The duration of US CSG single deployments in the South China Sea in 2023 was markedly higher than in 2022 (10-20 days) and 2021 (4-5 days).

**Figure 1: Tracks of USS *Nimitz* CSG (Dec.21.2022-Feb.19.2023)**



In contrast to 2022, when CSGs often used the San Bernardino Strait, Mindoro Strait, Balabac Strait, Verde Island Passage and other straits in the Philippine Archipelago for 11 entry and exit to the South China Sea in 2023 included nine via the Bashi Channel and two the Balabac Strait. There was a noticeable increase in the use of the Bashi Channel. For large fleets like CSGs, the Bashi Channel was the primary preferred route, while the straits in the Philippine Archipelago served as secondary alternative routes. From 2020 to 2022, the frequent use of the straits in the Philippine Archipelago by USN CSGs was largely aimed at practicing aircraft maneuver or deployments in an Anti-Access/Area Denial(A2/AD) environment. Such a shift in 2023 may indicate their familiarity and usage of the straits in the Philippine Archipelago after years of training. Also, it suggests that the US is less anxious about the current situation in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea compared to previous years.

Second, the scale of the exercise and drills was expanded and the number of exercise subjects was increased. In 2023, the US CSG deployments focused on the Vanguard Basin, west of the Bashi Channel and north of the Indonesia-Malaysia border waters, and the east and west major sea lanes of the South China Sea. Targeted large-scale drills had been conducted in the region multiple times. From January 13 to 15, USS *Nimitz* sailed at a speed of 25 knots from near Scarborough Shoal, through the waters north of the Spratly Islands, to the west of Vanguard Bank. After departing from Singapore on the 26th, it returned to the waters west of Luzon through the eastern passage of the Spratly Islands (the Palawan Trough Passage). It then sailed back to the Vanguard Basin and stayed active in the two major sea lanes north of the Indonesia-Malaysia border waters until February 17. In addition to small-scale exercises such as maritime strike training, anti-submarine warfare, comprehensive multi-domain joint training between surface and air forces, and carrier-based aircraft flight training, the combined expeditionary strike force operations were also conducted with the US Marine Corps (USMC) and USS *Makin Island* amphibious ready group (ARG) in the waters near the Indonesia-Malaysia border. The US Air Force also sent two B-1B bombers to the drill. The large-scale drill centered on the major sea lanes and involved naval, air and marine corps forces. Meanwhile, the USNS *Victorious* (T-AGOS-19) ocean surveillance ship operated intensively at the northwest of the Spratly Islands. Carrying the new towed array and low-frequency active sonar systems, the ship might have provided intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) services for the drill. In April, during activities near Vanguard Bank in the South China Sea, the USS *Nimitz* conducted multi-domain joint exercises with USAF B-1B and B-52H bombers.

## 2. ARGs

In 2023, the US military successively dispatched two ARGs, USS *Makin Island* and USS *America*, for activities in the South China Sea.

USS *Makin Island* entered the South China Sea in December 2022, carrying the USMC 13th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) including Strike Fighter Attack Squadron 122 (VFA-122) equipped with 10 F-35B fighters. According to the US Naval Institute News service, the 13th MEU successfully completed a historically significant military deployment, spanning the Pacific and covering areas surrounding China.<sup>①</sup> During its journey in the South China Sea, the USS *Makin Island* participated in exercises and drills such as CARAT/MAREX Singapore, combined expeditionary strike force operations, Cobra Gold 2023 and Balikatan Exercise 2023. In Balikatan Exercise 2023, an F-35B fighter carried by USS *Makin Island* dropped a guided bomb, sinking target ships in the South China Sea. In recent years, the US military has been looking to develop the Lightning carrier concept to test the feasibility of integrating a 20-strong F-35B detachment onboard an LHA or LHD. Under the concept of the Lightning carrier, it can not only operate in synergy with CSGs but also serve as an alternative to an aircraft carrier in some occasions, enhancing the overall operational capability of the US military.

In 2023, USS *America* primarily operated in the East China Sea and the Philippine Sea. It entered the South China Sea in March and August, making brief stops in Manila. Notably, on March 16, USS *America*, USS *Makin Island* and the 13th MEU conducted integrated operations,

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<sup>①</sup> “13th MEU Pacific Deployment Expanded Marine F-35 Operations, Tested Contested Logistics, Says CO”, USNI News, August 1, 2023, <https://news.usni.org/2023/08/01/13th-meu-pacific-deployment-expanded-marine-f-35-operations-tested-contested-logistics-says-co#:~:text=The%2013th%20Marine%20Expeditionary%20Unit's,in%20the%20South%20China%20Sea.>

executing the Forward Arming and Refueling Ship (FARS) operations.<sup>①</sup>

While USS *America* was operating in the East China Sea, one F-35B fighter from VFA-122 landed on its flight deck and returned to USS *Makin Island* after being armed and refueled. This F-35B fighter belonged to the 13<sup>th</sup> MEU and was embarked on USS *Makin Island*, which was operating in the South China Sea (near the Gulf of Thailand).

Previously, the USMC extensively used Forward Arming and Refueling Points (FARP) in Iraq and Afghanistan. With the US military's focus shifting towards the Indo-Pacific, the FARS operations demonstrated the capability to implement operational concepts such as "Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations".

### 3. Submarines

According to open-source information, in 2023, the US Navy deployed at least 11 nuclear attack submarines, such as USS *Annapolis* (SSN-760), *Key West* (SSN-722), *Columbia* (SSN-771), *Illinois* (SSN-786), *Hampton* (SSN-767), *Springfield* (SSN-761), *Asheville* (SSN-758), *Missouri* (SSN-780), *Michigan* (SSGN-727), *Jefferson City* (SSN-759) and *Santa Fe* (SSN 763), plus two ballistic nuclear missile submarines, USS *Maine* (SSBN-741) and USS *Kentucky* (SSBN-737), for strategic cruise missions in the Western Pacific including the South China Sea. Concurrently, as a means of signalling and public relations, the US Navy has a growing motivation to disclose the operational status of its submarines and expose their locations. In May 2023, Commander of the Pacific Submarine Force, Jeffrey Jablon, stated that there were 18 US

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<sup>①</sup> "America, Makin Island and 13th MEU conduct integrated operations", U.S. Pacific Fleet, March 18, 2023, <https://www.cpf.navy.mil/Newsroom/News/Article/3336504/america-makin-island-and-13th-meu-conduct-integrated-operations/>.

submarines operating in the entire Pacific, with seven of them conducting missions west of the International Date Line.<sup>①</sup> 2023 has also witnessed US nuclear submarines' sharp increase in visiting South Korean (ROK) ports. USS *Springfield*, *Missouri*, *Michigan*, *Kentucky* and *Annapolis* visited Busan and Jeju ports respectively in March, June, and July. On April 26, the US jointly issued the Washington Declaration with the ROK, pledging to increase routine visits of US strategic weapon platforms and to deploy an Ohio-class SSBN in the latter. This declaration marked the first time in over 40 years that the US deployed an SSBN to the ROK.

#### 4. Bombers

The US military has been increasing the deployment of bombers to enhance its strategic deterrence capabilities in the Western Pacific and continuously exploring joint operational models with allies and partners. In 2023, the US Air Force conducted 30 B-52H or B-1B bomber sorties in the region in total, showing a significant increase compared to 20 sorties in 2022.

**Table 2: Activities of US Bombers in the South China Sea and Surrounding Areas in 2023**

No.	Date	Bomber	Sortie
1	Feb.28, 2023	B-52H	2
2	Mar.3, 2023	B-1B	2
3	Mar.4, 2023	B-1B	2
4	Apr.14, 2023	B-52H	2
5	Apr.24, 2023	B-52H	2
6	Jun.26, 2023	B-52H	2

<sup>①</sup> The Silent Service no more? Pacific submarine fleet a key part of Pacific deterrence, May 12, 2023, <https://breakingdefense.com/2023/05/the-silent-service-no-more-pacific-submarine-fleet-a-key-part-of-pacific-deterrence/>.

7	Jun.30, 2023	B-52H	2
8	Jul.10, 2023	B-52H	2
9	Jul.13, 2023	B-52H	2
10	Jul.21, 2023	B-52H	2
11	Aug.14, 2023	B-52H	3
12	Oct.6, 2023	B-52H	2
13	Oct.22, 2023	B-52H	1
14	Oct.24, 2023	B-52H	1
15	Nov.14, 2023	B-52H	2
16	Dec.20, 2023	B-1B	1

The deployment and operational exercises of bombers have become a crucial link for the US to strengthen military cooperation with Indo-Pacific countries. Bombers operating in the region are primarily deployed at Andersen Air Force Base in Guam, but in 2023, they also operated from multiple allied and partner countries' airports. In June, two B-52 bombers landed in Indonesia for the first time and participated in Cope West 2023. In July, two B-1B bombers arrived at Misawa Air Base. In October, one B-52 made its first landing at Seoul Airport in ROK and subsequently participated in the first trilateral aerial drill held by the US, Japan and the ROK.

Currently, the main deployed bombers by the US military in the Asia-Pacific region is B-52. The US Air Force is conducting the B-52 Radar Modernization Program (RMP), including replacing outdated parts and equipment, modifying internal systems, and equipping it with the active electronically scanned array system. Claimed as “the largest upgrade in history”, the program will comprehensively enhance the B-52’s navigation, targeting, and situational awareness capabilities. According to the US

military's deployment plans, the B-1B will be gradually replaced by the latest generation stealth bomber the B-21 and B-52, and prioritized for deployment in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>①</sup>

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<sup>①</sup> B-1B Lancer: The Air Force's Aging Bomb Truck, The National Interest, Nov. 9, 2023, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/b-1b-lancer-air-forces-aging-bomb-truck-2072092>.

## **II. Aggressively Rising of Close-in Marine and Aerial Reconnaissance**

In 2023, the US military continued to deploy reconnaissance aircraft and survey ships to conduct high-intensity reconnaissance operations in the South China Sea. In the air, similar to 2022, the US military flew approximately 1,000 sorties of large land-based reconnaissance aircraft. Among them, the MQ-4C Triton unmanned aircraft stood out as a rising star in close-in reconnaissance operations. At sea, US reconnaissance ships such as ocean surveillance ships and oceanographic survey ships proceeded with more targeted routine operations in the South China Sea and kept intensified reconnaissance in critical passages, accumulating a total of 314 ship-days.

### **1. Intensifying Aerial Close-in Reconnaissance**

In light of incomplete statistics, in 2023, the US military conducted around 1,000 sorties in various types of large reconnaissance aircraft from bases such as Kadena in Okinawa, Osan in South Korea, Andersen in Guam, and Clark in the Philippines for reconnaissance missions in the South China Sea throughout the year. Among them, about 100 sorties approached the airspace near the Chinese mainland and Hainan Island, most being within 30 nautical miles of the baseline of the territorial sea. Such reconnaissance was also corroborated by data from the US Department of Defense in October 2023. The Pentagon claimed that “since the fall of 2021, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) fighters have conducted over 180 risky intercepts of US aircraft.”<sup>①</sup> In fact, most of the intercepts occurred

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<sup>①</sup> Department of Defense Releases Declassified Images, Videos of Coercive and Risky PLA Operational Behavior, US Department of Defense, Oct. 17, 2023,

near the airspace of Chinese mainland and Hainan Island.

The main reconnaissance aircraft types operating in the South China Sea were the USN P-8A anti-submarine patrol, EP-3E electronic reconnaissance, MQ-4C unmanned reconnaissance, and the USAF RC-135 series electronic intelligence aircraft. Additionally, the US Air Force deployed E-8C Joint-STARS air-ground ISR, E-3B/G airborne early-warning, and U-2S high-altitude reconnaissance aircraft. It is worth noting that since September 2023, the MQ-4C has been deployed to Guam for the second time and has gradually become the mainstay of the US Navy's close-in reconnaissance operations against China.

**Figure 2: MQ-4C Triton Unmanned Aircraft**



Currently, the MQ-4C has achieved Initial Operational Capability (IOC) and is on its way to upgrading from the Integrated Functional Capability 3 (IFC 3) to IFC 4 standard. In terms of operational range, the MQ-4C has already replaced the EP-3E at least in the East China Sea, Taiwan Strait and South China Sea. Since October 2023, three MQ-4C aircraft (AE625B, AE625D, AE6257) have frequently operated in the

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<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3559903/department-of-defense-releases-declassified-images-videos-of-coercive-and-risky/>.

Taiwan Strait and South China Sea, often in late night and early morning hours. In December 2023 alone, at least 14 MQ-4C sorties were conducted in the region, with continuous missions from December 11 to 14.

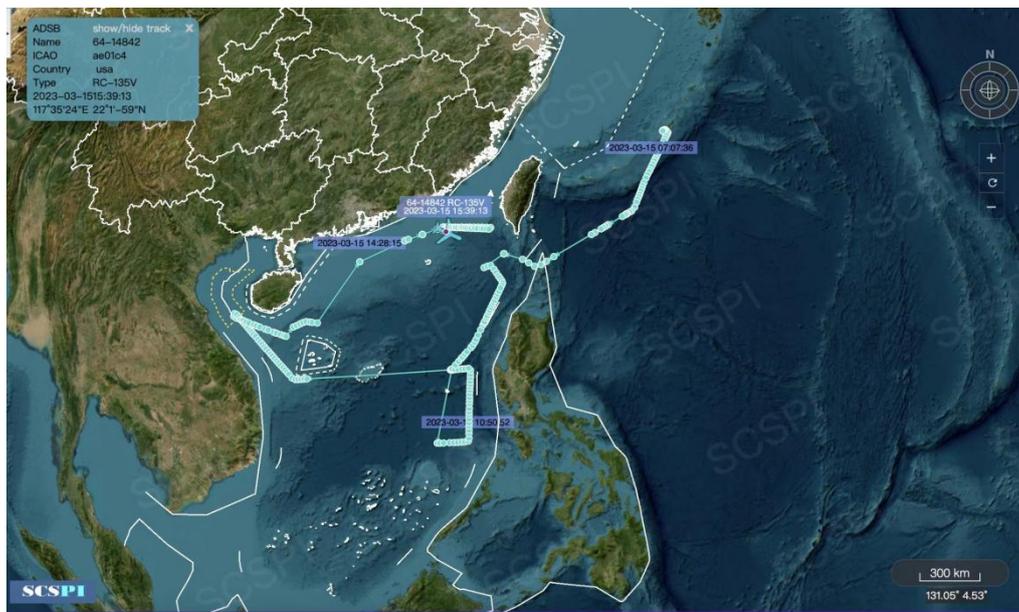
**Figure 3: USN MQ-4C Operated in the South of Taiwan Strait since Oct. 2023**



In recent years, the close-in reconnaissance activities of the US military against China in the South China Sea have intensified. First, they frequently approached the airspace of Chinese mainland and Hainan Island, continually pushing the boundaries of proximity to the Chinese coast. On March 15, a USAF RC-135V carried out intensive reconnaissance activities in the South China Sea, flying from north to south, east to west, and then turning north, conducting extensive and deep reconnaissance around the Paracel Islands and Hainan Island. In the early hours of November 15, a USN MQ-4C undertook a close-in reconnaissance sortie

in the Taiwan Strait along the eastern coast of Chinese mainland, with the closest distance to the baseline of China's territorial sea being approximately 31 nautical miles.

**Figure 4: USAF RC-135V Conducted Reconnaissance in the South China Sea (Mar.15.2023)**



Second, these activities frequently disrupted the normal exercises and drills of the PLA. During PLA exercises and drills, the US military often disregarded China's notices of no-entry zones, ignored safety distances, and entered relevant maritime and airspace, leading to close encounters with Chinese alert forces. For example, on May 26, a USAF RC-135V intruded into the training airspace of the Shandong aircraft carrier formation, prompting a PLA J-16 fighter on alert duty to conduct a close interception.

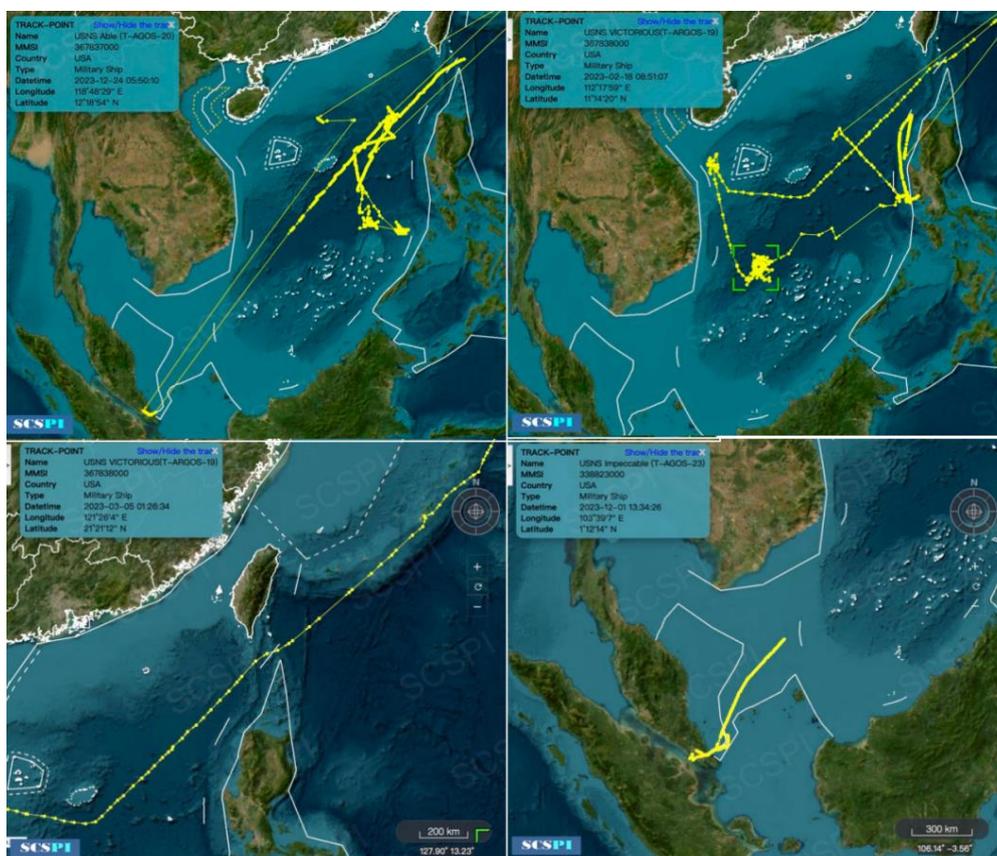
## 2. Increasingly Targeted Maritime Reconnaissance Activities

In 2023, the US military deployed four ocean surveillance ships, USNS *Victorious* (T-ARGOS 19), USNS *Able* (T-AGOS 20), USNS

*Effective* (T-AGOS 21), and USNS *Impeccable* (T-AGOS 23), as well as three oceanographic survey ships, USNS *Bowditch* (T-AGS 62), USNS *Henson* (T-AGS 63), and USNS *Mary Sears* (T-AGS 65), in the South China Sea for a total of 314 ship-days. USNS *Impeccable* was the most active, with 82 ship-days of activity.

The triangular area between the Paracel Islands, Spratly Islands, and the Bashi Channel, as well as the east and west lanes in the South China Sea are the focal point of US maritime reconnaissance activities.

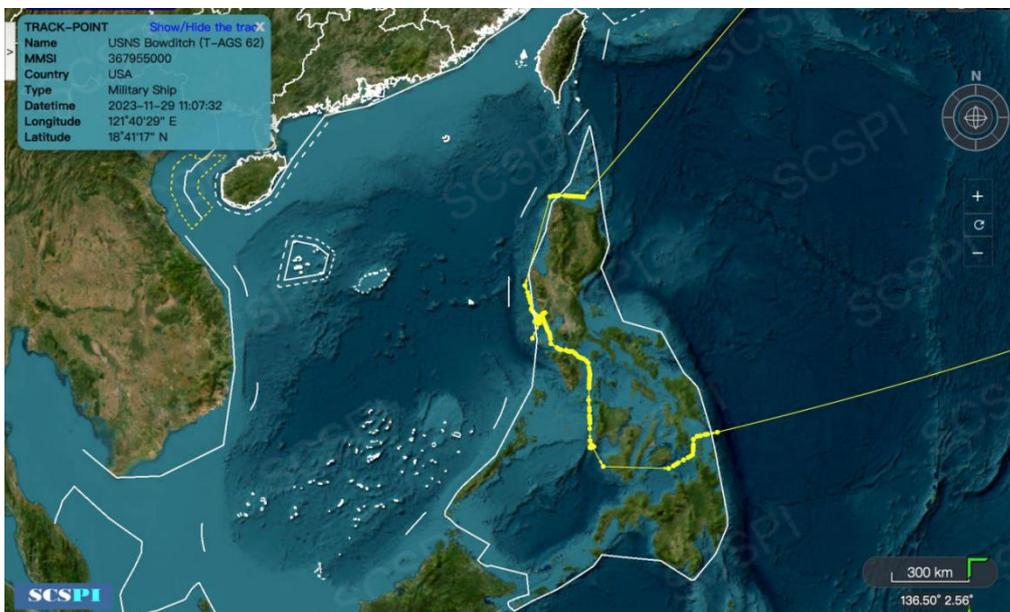
**Figure 5: Tracks of USNS Ocean Surveillance Ships in 2023**



The surveillance and survey ships also conducted high-intensity operations near the Philippine Archipelago, increasingly coordinating with other US military forces. In December 2023, USNS *Bowditch*'s movement covered Leyte Gulf and Sulu Sea while USS *Carl Vinson* operated in the

South China Sea through the Leyte Gulf-Sulu Sea-Balabac Strait route. Additionally, Babuyan Channel, Verde Island Passage and Mindoro Strait, as frequently used maritime passages by US CSGs in recent years, have also seen intensive reconnaissance operations by USNS *Bowditch*. Aiming mainly at conducting seabed terrain detection and hydrographic surveys, oceanographic survey ships could provide vital environmental information for naval operations.

**Figure 6: Tracks of USNS *Bowditch* (Nov.-Dec. 2023)**



### III. Multiple Declaratory Operations

#### 1. Island-intrusive FONOPs

In 2023, there has been an increased frequency of the US military’s island-intrusive FONOPs in the South China Sea, rising to six times from five in 2021 and four in 2022, but still lower than in 2020 (nine times).

**Table 3: US Warship’s Intrusions into the Territorial Waters of Parcel Islands and Adjacent Waters of China Stationed Features in the South China Sea in 2023**

No.	Date	Warship	Region
1	Mar.23, 2023	USS <i>Milius</i> (destroyer)	Territorial waters of the Parcel Islands
2	Mar.24, 2023	USS <i>Milius</i> (destroyer)	Territorial waters of the Parcel Islands
3	Apr.10, 2023	USS <i>Milius</i> (destroyer)	Mischief Reef, Spratly Islands
4	Nov.3, 2023	USS <i>Dewey</i> (destroyer)	Adjacent waters of Spratly Islands
5	Nov.25, 2023	USS <i>Hopper</i> (destroyer)	Territorial waters of the Parcel Islands
6	Dec.4, 2023	USS <i>Gabrielle Giffords</i> (littoral combat ship)	Second Thomas Shoal, Spratly Islands

Of note is the rare intrusion of a US warship into the waters adjacent to Second Thomas Shoal in the Spratly Islands on December 4. The last time was in February 2019, with USS *Spruance* and USS *Preble*. Considering the friction between China and the Philippines over Second Thomas Shoal in 2023, this intrusion served to both demonstrate its presence in the hotspot area and signal support for the Philippines. Implementing its statement in support of the Philippines’ claims in the South China Sea, “Second Thomas Shoal is within the Philippines’ exclusive economic zone and continental shelf”, the intrusion directly

challenged China’s operations or declarations claiming territorial waters and airspace around this feature.<sup>①</sup>

## 2. Taiwan Strait Transits

Throughout 2023, US warships transited the Taiwan Strait six times, suggesting a significant decrease compared to nine in 2022, 12 in 2021 and 15 in 2020. However, each operation was accompanied by an official announcement, and the level of participation from allies increased.

The diversification of naval forces transiting the strait was observed. On June 3, September 9 and November 1, the US and Canada dispatched a destroyer and a frigate respectively to transit the Taiwan Strait. Previously in 2021 and 2022, they only conducted one joint transit per year. On June 21, the USCG *Stratton* transited the Taiwan Strait. The operational capability of Coast Guard vessels is far weaker than naval warships and serves little deterrent effect. However, this transit occurred after Secretary of State Blinken’s visit to China, increasing its public profile and political significance.



<sup>①</sup> U.S. Support for our Philippine Allies in the Face of Repeated PRC Harassment in the South China Sea, US Department of State, Oct. 22, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-support-for-our-philippine-allies-in-the-face-of-repeated-prc-harassment-in-the-south-china-sea/>.

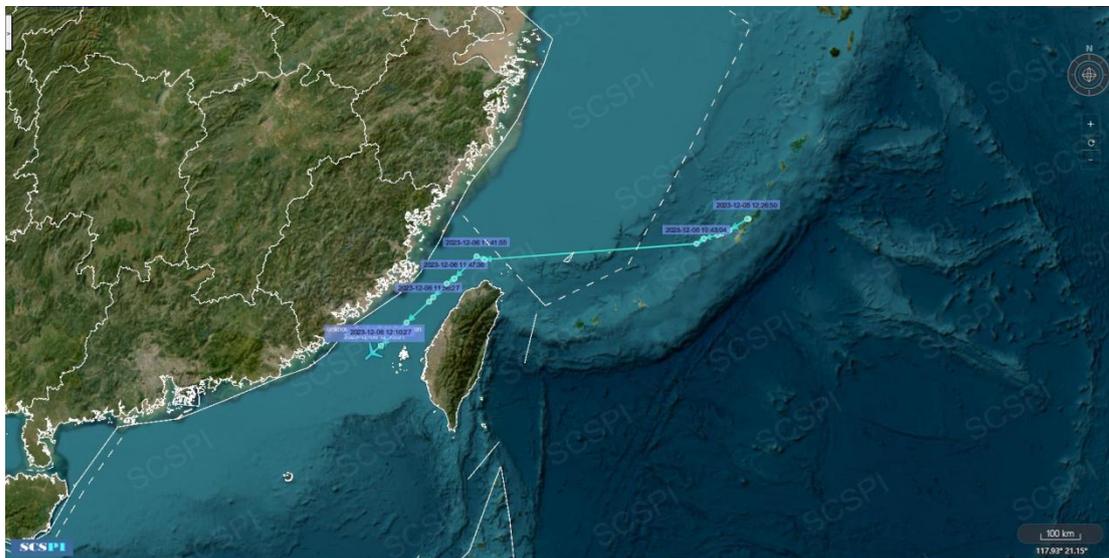
**Table 4: US Warships Transited the Taiwan Strait in 2023**

No.	Date	Warships
1	Jan.5	USS <i>Chung-Hoon</i> (destroyer)
2	Apr.16	USS <i>Milius</i> (destroyer)
3	Jun.3	USS <i>Chung-Hoon</i> (destroyer), HMCS <i>Montreal</i> (frigate)
4	Jun.21	USCG <i>Stratton</i> (patrol vessel)
5	Sep.9	USS <i>Ralph Johnson</i> (destroyer), HMCS <i>Ottawa</i> (frigate)
6	Nov.1	USS <i>Rafael Peralta</i> (destroyer), HMCS <i>Ottawa</i> (frigate)

The increase in reconnaissance aircraft transits was significant. While the frequency of warships transiting the Taiwan Strait decreased, there was a substantial increase in the frequency of the USN P-8A aircraft flying over the strait. Deployed to the Western Pacific in 2013, P-8A aircraft crossed the Taiwan Strait for the first time in 2021. On February 27, April 28, July 13, October 12, and December 6 2023, the US Navy had one P-8A aircraft cross the Taiwan Strait: these five flights marked a significant increase from the three flights in 2021 and 2022 respectively.

With the normalization of the US military's warships and aircraft transiting, the frequency of US official announcement has also gradually increased. All six warship transits and five military aircraft overflights in 2023 were accompanied by public hype. Apart from ISR purposes, the underlying purpose was deterring and exerting political pressure on China, as well as demonstrating the US military capabilities to allies.

**Figure 7: USN P-8A Anti-Submarine Patrol Aircraft Flew over the Taiwan Strait (Dec.6, 2023)**



## IV. Remarkably Boosted Joint Operations with Allies

### 1. EDCA and US-Philippine Military Cooperation

The US has emphasized its commitment to the US-Philippine military alliance repeatedly and advanced military cooperation with the Philippines through the *Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement* (EDCA).

On February 2, 2023, the US and the Philippines revived the EDCA. Based on promoting investment, construction and presence in the five existing bases, four new bases would also be established and operated in the Philippines. On April 3, the Philippines officially announced these new bases: Naval Base Camilo Osias in Santa Ana, Cagayan; Camp Melchor Dela Cruz in Gamu, Isabela; Balabac Island in Palawan and Lal-lo Airport in Cagayan.<sup>①</sup> Different from previous EDCA arrangement focused primarily on air force bases, the site selection of the additional ones prioritized the cooperation needs with the USN and USMC. Moreover, three new bases are located near Taiwan, revealing the US's intention to strengthen military deployments through the Philippines around the Taiwan Strait.

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<sup>①</sup> Philippines, U.S. Announce Locations of Four New EDCA Sites, US Department of Defense, Apr. 3, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3349257/philippines-us-announce-locations-of-four-new-edca-sites/>.

**Figure 8: EDCA Base Locations**



Although the Philippine Constitution prohibits the foreign troops’ presence and ownership of bases on its territory, the EDCA allows the US to rotate its “visiting” troops to extend their stay in the Philippines. The agreement also permits US troops and contractors to operate beyond the agreed locations, which are defined as “facilities and areas that are provided by the Government of the Philippines through the Armed Forces of the Philippines and that United States forces, United States contractors, and others as mutually agreed, shall have the right to access and use pursuant to this Agreement”.<sup>①</sup> The agreement transfers operational control of agreed locations to the US and allows US troops to preposition and store all defense materials, equipment, and supplies except for nuclear weapons.

EDCA claims its main purpose as enhancing the interoperability between the Philippine and US military and improving the capabilities in responding to climate change and natural disasters. However, if it were solely for counterterrorism, climate change, natural disasters and other

<sup>①</sup> U.S. Security Cooperation with the Philippines, US Department of State, Oct. 7, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-the-philippines/>.

relevant issues, the existing five bases would already suffice. Obviously, the new bases are designed to increase the US military presence in the Western Pacific and contain the growing military power of China in the region including the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea.<sup>①</sup>

In 2023, amidst increasing tensions in areas such as Second Thomas Shoal and Scarborough Shoal, the US issued official statements emphasizing its support for the Philippines. The US Department of State issued 7 statements asserting “US Support for the Philippines in the South China Sea.” During Philippine President Marcos’ visit to the US, President Biden stated that the US’s defense commitment to the Philippines was ironclad.<sup>②</sup> US Secretary of Defense Austin also related the US-Philippine *Mutual Defense Treaty* to the situation in the South China Sea in public statements.<sup>③</sup> During various confrontations and frictions between China and the Philippines, the US military deployed P-8A aircraft or various types of unmanned reconnaissance aircraft to provide real-time intelligence support to the latter and monitored the operations of both sides. However, it should be noted that in incidents such as Second Thomas Shoal confrontation, the US mainly provided diplomatic, public opinion, and intelligence support to the Philippines, with no indication of getting directly involved in assisting the Philippines with supplies. Although hoping to leverage the Philippines geographical location for its deployments of Indo-Pacific strategy and countering China, the US does not want to be unnecessarily drawn into armed conflicts with China due to

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<sup>①</sup> Analysts: Deal on Philippine bases gives US firmer foothold in Asia, Benarnews, Feb. 4, 2023, <https://www.benarnews.org/english/news/philippine/us-philippines-bases-02042023092804.html>.

<sup>②</sup> Remarks by President Biden and President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. of the Philippines Before Bilateral Meeting, the white House, May. 1, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/05/01/remarks-by-president-biden-and-president-ferdinand-marcos-jr-of-the-philippines-before/>.

<sup>③</sup> Readout of Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III's Call With Philippine Secretary of National Defense Gilberto Teodoro Jr., US Department of Defense, Dec. 13, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3616858/readout-of-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iiis-call-with-philippine-secret/>.

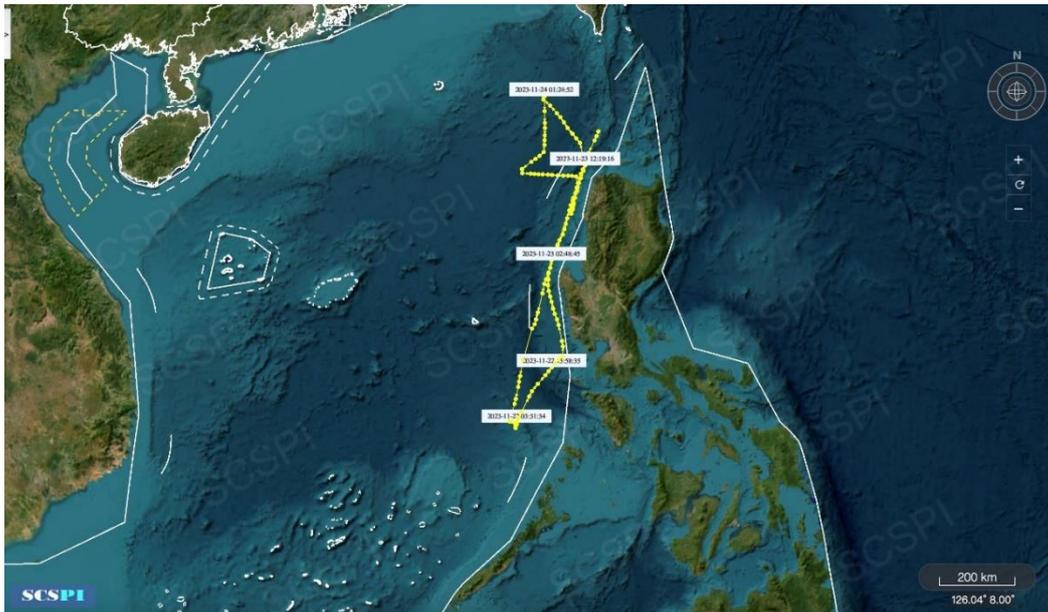
the Philippines agenda. It prefers ongoing Sino-Philippine friction in the South China Sea, which allows it to expand its strategic layout in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait while suppressing China. Thus, the US has not been prepared or determined to engage in a military confrontation with China in the South China Sea, nor does it want to be exploited for the Philippines' goals. Currently, small frictions are much favorable than major events in the South China Sea for the US. It is more of a deterrent and preventive diplomacy even if senior US officials often threaten to trigger the *Mutual Defense Treaty*. Overall, the US still strives to maintain the vagueness of relevant provisions and classifies acts such as water cannons and vessel collisions as non-armed attacks.<sup>①</sup>

From November 21 to 23, 2023, US and the Philippines conducted joint patrol in the South China Sea for the first time in seven years, based on the U.S.-Philippines *Mutual Defense Treaty*. The joint patrol was conducted in connection with the Maritime Cooperative Activity (MCA). USN USS *Gabrielle Giffords* (LCS-10), USNS *John Ericsson* (T-AO-194) and a P-8A aircraft, together with Philippine Navy warships BRP *Conrado Yap* (PS-39), BRP *Gregorio Del Pilar* (PS-15), BRP *Jose Rizal* (FF-150) and three fighter jets participated in this activity. According to the AIS data of USNS *John Ericsson*, the joint patrol was conducted in the waters west of Lubang Island to the west of Mavulis Island in the Philippines, far away from the Spratly Islands.

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<sup>①</sup> 胡波, “仁爱礁局势: 走向长期灰色地带对抗”, 2023年9月4日, <http://www.scspi.org/zh/dtfx/1693821895>.

**Figure 9: Tracks of US-Philippines Joint Patrol in the South China Sea  
(Nov.21-Nov.23, 2023)**



Meanwhile, the US-Philippine military cooperation and joint operations have been transitioning from bilateral to multilateral. After the meeting on May 1, Leaders of the US and the Philippines released a joint statement, agreeing to establish trilateral cooperation frameworks with Japan and Australia respectively. On June 16, US National Security Advisor Sullivan, Japan’s National Security Secretariat Secretary Takeo Akiba and Philippine National Security Advisor Arnold met together first in Tokyo, discussing defense and security, maritime order, humanitarian aid and disaster relief, and economic order and security. In 2023, Japan also participated many times in US-Philippine annual drills and joint naval and coast guard exercises. Compared to the trilateral security mechanism of the US, Japan and the Philippines, the cooperation between the US, Australia and the Philippines has been relatively slow. However, as the second country to commit to joint patrols with the Philippines in the South China Sea, the Australian bilateral relationship with the Philippines has developed rapidly. In the future, the US, the Philippines and Australia will be the core of the “US-Philippines+” multilateral security mechanism.

## 2. Joint Operations with Japan, Australia and Other Allies

Strengthening the alliance and partnership system is a significant pillar of the Biden administration's Indo-Pacific strategy. Against this backdrop, the interactions and joint operations between the US and staunch allies such as Japan and Australia have significantly increased.

First, there was a growth in joint exercises and training intensity with Japan and Australia. Under the trilateral framework of the US, Japan and Australia, according to incomplete statistics, Japan and Australia have participated in dozens of US-led multilateral drills in the Western Pacific region in 2023, such as Super Garuda Shield 2023 and Exercise SAMASAMA. In October, the US, Japan, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand conducted a multilateral drill, Noble Caribou, in the South China Sea, involving the destroyers USS *Rafael Peralta*, JS *Akebono*, HMAS *Brisbane*, and frigates HMCS *Ottawa*, and HMNZS *Te Mana*. The drill aimed to enhance tactical capabilities and strengthen cooperation with participating countries' navies. In December, the US and Japan conducted their joint training on Ishigaki Island (near Taiwan) for the first time.

Second, there was an emphasis on policy coordination and interoperability with Japan and Australia. On January 11, the US and Japan held a "2+2" ministerial meeting and released a joint statement. The US expressed strong support for Japan's updated national security policy, stating that the collective defense clause of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan applies to the Senkaku Islands. Furthermore, both countries confirmed their intention to enhance military cooperation, deepen bilateral coordination in ISR, flexible deterrent options (FODs), expand the collective defense clause to the space domain, and deploy a USMC Marine Littoral Regiment in Japan

to enhance defense capabilities in the southwestern islands of Japan.<sup>①</sup> In June, during the 2023 Shangri-La Dialogue, the US, Japan and Australia held a trilateral defense ministers' meeting and issued a joint statement, agreeing to develop the trilateral cooperation plan implemented in Australia over the next year. All parties committed to future trilateral F-35 joint strike fighter training in Australia, increased trilateral exercises and accelerated information-sharing cooperation.<sup>②</sup> In July, the US and Australia held the Australia-US Ministerial Consultations and announced a defense cooperation agreement, including the increased rotational presence of US forces at military bases in northern Australia, increased visits by US vessels, patrolling and surveillance aircraft, increased space cooperation and increased investment in Australian military infrastructure. The US also pledged to assist Australia in producing guided multiple launch rocket systems by 2025, further reinforcing and expanding the military alliance between the two countries.<sup>③</sup>

Third, there has been a significant increase in arms sales to Japan and Australia. According to the AUKUS (the Australia, UK, US trilateral security partnership) declaration in March 2023, the US would increase the frequency of submarine visits to Australia starting from 2023. By the end of 2027, the US plans to deploy nuclear-powered attack submarines in Australia on a rotational basis. Additionally, starting in the early 2030s, once approved by Congress, the US intends to sell three Virginia-class submarines to Australia with the possibility of selling two more if

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<sup>①</sup> “Joint Statement of the 2023 U.S.–Japan Security Consultative Committee (“2+2”)”, U.S. Department of Defense, January 11, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3265559/joint-statement-of-the-2023-usjapan-security-consultative-committee-22/>.

<sup>②</sup> “United States-Japan-Australia Trilateral Defense Ministers' Meeting (TDMM) 2023 Joint Statement”, U.S. Department of Defense, June 3, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3415881/united-states-japan-australia-trilateral-defense-ministers-meeting-tdmm-2023-jo/>.

<sup>③</sup> “Joint Statement on Australia-U.S. Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN) 2023”, U.S. Department of Defense, July 29, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3476104/joint-statement-on-australia-us-ministerial-consultations-ausmin-2023/>.

necessary.<sup>①</sup> In August, a USN nuclear-powered submarine visited Australia. During the same month, Australian Defense Minister Marles announced the purchase of over 200 Tomahawk cruise missiles from the US, which will be deployed on the Royal Australian Navy's Hobart-class destroyers. Furthermore, Australia plans to acquire over 60 AGM-88 HARM anti-radiation missiles, plus anti-tank missiles for its army.<sup>②</sup> The Pentagon announced also in August that the Department of State had approved the sale of the M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) to Australia.<sup>③</sup>

That month, multiple Japanese government officials revealed that Japan and the US had decided to jointly develop a new missile for intercepting hypersonic weapons.<sup>④</sup> In October, during a meeting between the defense ministers of the two countries, the ministers unanimously agreed to advance the timeline for Japan's introduction of the US-made Tomahawk cruise missiles to 2025. Reaffirming the support for Japan's strengthening of defense, they emphasized the shared commitment to enhancing the alliance.<sup>⑤</sup> In November, the US Department of State approved Japan's request to purchase 400 Tomahawk cruise missiles and related equipment.

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<sup>①</sup> "Joint Leaders Statement on AUKUS", The White House, March 13, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/03/13/joint-leaders-statement-on-aucus-2/>.

<sup>②</sup> "Australia invests in powerful new high-tech missiles", Australian Government Defense, August 21, 2023, <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/media-releases/2023-08-21/australia-invests-powerful-new-high-tech-missiles>.

<sup>③</sup> "AUSTRALIA – M142 HIGH MOBILITY ARTILLERY ROCKET SYSTEMS (HIMARS)", Defense Security Cooperation Agency, August 18, 2023, <https://www.dsca.mil/press-media/major-arms-sales/australia-m142-high-mobility-artillery-rocket-systems-himars>.

<sup>④</sup> "Japan, U.S. to jointly develop hypersonic missile interceptor", KYODO NEWS, August 14, 2023, <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2023/08/de07de66df7c-breaking-news-japan-us-to-jointly-develop-hypersonic-missile-interceptor.html>.

<sup>⑤</sup> "Japan brings forward Tomahawk acquisition by a year", NIKKEI Asia, October 5, 2023, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Defense/Japan-brings-forward-Tomahawk-acquisition-by-a-year>.

### 3. Strengthen Regional Maritime Domain Awareness

In February 2022, the Biden administration released its Indo-Pacific Strategy, which outlined the strategic objectives and implementation plans of the US in the region. Proposing two major cooperation initiatives, namely Pacific deterrence and maritime security, the administration focused on enhancing maritime situation awareness and establishing a networked system for maritime domain awareness. To that end, on the one hand, the US has developed its military armament, strengthened forward military deployments, and enhanced comprehensive maritime domain awareness in the region. On the other hand, it actively assisted regional allies and partners in advancing their maritime domain awareness capabilities, promoting the construction of a US-led Indo-Pacific maritime domain awareness network involving regional allies and partners.

First, strengthening the development of unmanned combat platforms and space-based reconnaissance networks was observable. Of particular note is the activities taken by the USMC. In June 2023, it released an updated version of “Force Design 2030”, which mentioned that in response to global crises, the USMC Marine Air-Ground Task Force needs to enhance its maritime situational awareness capabilities.<sup>①</sup> In August, the USMC Marine Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Squadron 3 (VMU-3) held a ceremony at Marine Corps Air Station Kaneohe Bay in Hawaii to showcase its newly equipped MQ-9A Reaper unmanned aircraft. VMU-3, part of 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, USMC III Marine Expeditionary Force, is the first VMU to be equipped with MQ-9A long-endurance unmanned aircraft and achieve the IOC of Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) Expeditionary/ Medium-Altitude, High-Endurance

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<sup>①</sup> “Force Design 2030 Annual Update”, June, 2023,  
[https://www.marines.mil/Portals/1/Docs/Force\\_Design\\_2030\\_Annual\\_Update\\_June\\_2023.pdf](https://www.marines.mil/Portals/1/Docs/Force_Design_2030_Annual_Update_June_2023.pdf).  
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(MUX/MALE) for the Marine Air-Ground Task Force.

The US Navy had made important progress in the deployment of carrier-based unmanned aircraft and large unmanned reconnaissance aircraft. In February 2023, the US Navy conducted the first maritime flight test of the Aerosonde unmanned aircraft on the USS *Miguel Keith*. In March, USS *Milius* launched and recovered an Aerosonde in the South China Sea. Aerosonde is a type of carrier-based small unmanned aircraft, developed by Textron Systems for the USN, providing destroyers with services such as maritime ISR when integrated into the naval destroyer combat system. In September, a detachment of USN MQ-4C Triton unmanned aircraft arrived at Andersen Air Force Base in Guam for their second deployment in the Pacific region, significantly enhancing their maritime ISR and targeting capabilities.

The US Space Force had accelerated the construction of its space-based satellite detection system. In April, SpaceX launched the first batch of 10 missile tracking and communication satellites of the Proliferated Warfighter Space Architecture. In September, the US Space Force launched Silent Barker military satellite to monitor potential threats. In December, SpaceX sent the US military's X-37B Orbital Test Vehicle into space, with highly classified mission objectives related to experiments of future space domain awareness technologies.<sup>①</sup>

Second, strengthening cooperation with allies to build a situational awareness network. In recent years, the US has been actively promoting minilateral mechanisms involving regional allies and partners such as the Quad (US, Japan, India, and Australia), AUKUS, and the US-Japan-ROK trilateral cooperation, establishing a maritime situational awareness system

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<sup>①</sup> “Department of the Air Force scheduled to launch seventh X-37B mission”, November 8, 2023, <https://www.spaceforce.mil/News/Article-Display/Article/3583347/departement-of-the-air-force-scheduled-to-launch-seventh-x-37b-mission/>.

through cooperation with allies and partners such as the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA). In April 2023, US Secretary of State Blinken, during his visit to Vietnam, expressed the US's willingness to help regional countries improve their maritime domain awareness capabilities to counter coercive actions against their fishing vessels.<sup>①</sup> In June, during the US-Japan-Philippines National Security Advisors Trilateral Meeting, the three countries' security agencies reaffirmed the importance of enhancing maritime domain awareness by utilizing Japan's new official security assistance and the IPMDA. In September, ASEAN and US leaders issued a statement on cooperation around ASEAN's Indo-Pacific outlook, which mentioned strengthening maritime cooperation through ASEAN-led mechanisms, promoting coordination among relevant agencies including maritime law enforcement ones and enhancing maritime situational awareness capabilities. In December, the US released the *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024*, which calls for the US government to promote its alliances with the Philippines and Thailand, as well as partnerships with other ASEAN countries, to improve maritime domain awareness in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>②</sup>

In May 2023, the Biden administration approved the sale of the Expeditionary Variant of the Surveillance Towed Array Sensor System to Australia, enhancing the buyer's capability to detect Chinese submarines. In the same month, the administration also signed a defense agreement with Papua New Guinea, allowing the country to utilize the US's satellite security system for maritime surveillance. In July, the US and Papua New

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<sup>①</sup> "Secretary Antony J. Blinken at a Press Availability", April 15, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-at-a-press-availability-33/#:~:text=And%20in%20our%20own%20relationship,seas%20that%20surround%20their%20countries%2C>.

<sup>②</sup> "National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024", December 15, 2023, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BILLS-118hr2670enr/pdf/BILLS-118hr2670enr.pdf>.

Guinea made a Shiprider Agreement to facilitate maritime situational awareness capabilities of the latter.

By providing military assistance, maritime support, and personnel training to regional countries, the US continued to strengthen the maritime capabilities and expand the maritime domain awareness of other South China Sea claimants, regional allies and partners. These efforts aimed to deter potential adversaries and maintain regional power advantage.

## V. Exercises and Drills for Enhancing Combat Readiness

### 1. Deepening Participation of Allied and Partner Countries

According to incomplete statistics, in 2023, the US military conducted a total of 107 large-scale exercises and drills (thousands of medium and small-scale ones) in the South China Sea and its surrounding areas (from the Philippines Sea in the east to Australia in the south), an increase in both quantity and scale compared to 2022. 9 out of 107 were unilateral and the other 98 were multilateral. The participating forces included the US Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Army and Coast Guard, etc. At the same time, the US continued to engage allies and partners in bilateral or multilateral drills. The joint drill partners in the South China Sea and its surrounding areas included ASEAN o, as well as extra-regional countries such as the UK, India, France, Canada and Germany. Japan ranked top in the times of participation with 80, followed by Australia with 16. The scale of several large-scale annual multilateral drills and the level of participation by allied and partner countries have both increased.

From February to March, the US and Thailand jointly hosted Cobra Gold 2023, which saw participation from over 7,000 personnel from 30 countries. The US side claimed it reached the highest level in the last 10 years. In April, the US-Philippines Balikatan Exercise 2023 took place on an unprecedented scale, with the participation of 17,600 military personnel, including approximately 12,000 US soldiers, over 5,000 Filipino soldiers and more than 100 soldiers from Australia. The participating forces were nearly twice the number of 2022, which stood at 8,900. From late July to early August, Talisman Sabre 2023 was held, which was the largest and most complex exercise conducted by the US and Australian forces to date.

## 2. Shifting of Multiple Exercise Locations to the Western Pacific

In terms of locations, in 2023, the US resumed high-density large-scale joint drills and exercises with countries in the Asia-Pacific, and several major exercise locations shifted or expanded from traditional exercise areas to strategically crucial areas in the Western Pacific.

From February to March, the US and Japan conducted Iron Fist 2023, with the location shifting from the US to Japan. The joint drill, which started in 2005 and previously took place in California, was held for the first time on Kyushu Island, Tokuno-shima Island and Kikai-jima Island in Japan. In May and July, the US and the Philippines revived Cope Thunder 23 after a 33-year hiatus. After first taking place in 1976 at Clark Air Base, the drill was moved to Alaska and renamed Red Flag Alaska after the USAF withdrew from Clark in 1991. The revived Cope Thunder 23 expanded its coverage from the vicinity of Clark Air Base to the Visayas Islands in the central Philippines and Mindanao Island in the south.

In July, the US Air Force conducted Mobile Guardian 23, expanding the exercise area beyond the continental US for the first time, with Guam as the forward hub and including airports in Hawaii, Japan and Australia. Also in the same month, the US Air Force held Northern Edge 2023-2 for the first time at the USMC base in Iwakuni, Yamaguchi Prefecture, Japan. Previously held in Alaska, the 2023 one took place in Japan, Guam, and Palau. In mid-October, the USMC and Japan Ground Self-Defense Force held Resolute Dragon 23. This field training exercise centered for the first time around the Self-Defense Forces and US military facilities in Kyushu and Okinawa, focusing on the recovery of captured islands. The previous two years saw mainland Japan and Hokkaido as the center respectively.

The shifting of multiple exercise locations to the Western Pacific region indicates a conscious effort by the US to strengthen its military

deployments and operational exercises near the first island chain, highlighting its strategic targeting.

### **3. Constantly Innovating Exercise Subjects**

In recent years, the US military has frequently conducted exercises in the Western Pacific region based on operational concepts such as Distributed Maritime Operations, Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations, and Agile Combat Employment. In 2023, with the introduction of unmanned combat concepts represented by the US Department of Defense's Replicator Initiative, there were several first-time exercise subjects. While continuing traditional exercise programs, the emphasis shifted towards enhancing maritime situational awareness and the use of unmanned combat platforms.

In the US-Philippines Balikatan Exercise 2023, the US Army's Multi-Domain Task Force and USMC Marine Littoral Regiment formed a joint force to conduct "using the land to control the sea" operations. The exercise expanded from amphibious operations to include remote seas and cyberspace, introducing maritime shooting exercises and the first network defense training. Additionally, the US military conducted the first-ever Patriot air defense missile shooting exercise in the Philippines. The US also deployed MQ-9 Reaper unmanned aircraft in the Philippines for the first time and utilized HIMARS for rapid deployment from amphibious landing craft. This exercise firstly conducted a ship sinking exercise, SINKEX in a region adjacent to the South China Sea. To facilitate the exercise, the US and the Philippines established the Combined Information and Effects Fusion Cell. Although the target ship was not successfully sunk, the exercise managed to enhance battlefield situational awareness by integrating command and control, intelligence information and multi-

domain firepower. To sum up, Balikatan Exercise 2023 was an opportunity for different branches of the US military to train their respective operational concepts and promote integration at the joint force level.

In Northern Edge 2023-2 in July, the US and allied countries deployed aircraft to conduct Agile Combat Employment exercise. MQ-9A unmanned aircraft served as a communication relay station for Distributed Aviation Operations, exploring tactics and strategies for manned and unmanned collaborative operations.

In September, the USN Unmanned Surface Vessels (USV) *Mariner* and *Ranger* were deployed to the Yokosuka Naval Base in Japan. They conducted joint training exercises with the littoral combat ship *USS Oakland* and frigate *JS Kumano* in Sagami Bay. This marked the first joint training between the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force and US unmanned surface vessels. *USV Ranger* had previously successfully test-fired the RIM-174 Standard Missile 6. According to the USN vision, the combination of unmanned surface vessels and Standard Missile 6 will serve as a distributed maritime weapon platform in the future, becoming a key component of operational concepts such as Distributed Maritime Operations and Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations.

In November, during the joint US-Philippines' KAMANDAG 7 exercise, USMC Marine Rotational Force - Southeast Asia deployed the Tactical Intelligence Targeting Access Node (TITAN) jointly with its maritime detect equipment for the first time. As the US Army's next-generation data processing ground station, TITAN uses artificial intelligence to accelerate the speed of multi-domain kill chains by processing ISR data. The exercise also utilized commercial-off-the-shelf sensors such as Simrad radars, enabling seamless interoperability in building maritime domain awareness picture.

## VI. Summary and Outlook

In 2023, the US National Security Council, Pentagon and US military extensively publicized the so-called “dangerous interceptions” and “unprofessional operations” by PLA against US warships and aircraft with a series of “dangerous” encounter cases. However, the US side never disclosed the specific locations of these encounters or explained why such encounters occurred. In reality, as mentioned earlier, most of these interceptions occurred near Chinese mainland airspace or within temporary no entry zones of the PLA’s exercise, while a few cases took place in the territorial water and airspace of Paracel Islands, as well as airspace and waters adjacent to the Spratly Islands where Chinese forces are stationed.

We believe that the US side has been highlighting these incidents out of its genuine concern about the potential loss of control in US-China maritime and aerial encounters. For another, such behavior is driven by political and diplomatic considerations, hoping to exert pressure or create publicity to gain a favorable position in the Sino-US strategic competition through public opinion and diplomacy.

However, the increasing military activities of the US in the South China Sea pose growing risks to Sino-US relations and the region as a whole. First, the US military’s escalating operations in the South China Sea and its surrounding areas against China will inevitably provoke strong countermeasures from the PLA. Second, the US Indo-Pacific Command is increasingly over-deployed and stressed, with a constant occurrence of major accidents. The declining professionalism of the US military does not facilitate constructive interactions between the Chinese and US militaries in the South China Sea. Also, the growing use of unmanned systems by the US military may increase the possibility of misjudgment.

In 2024, despite the ongoing impact of conflicts such as the Russia-

Ukraine conflict, the Israel-Palestine conflict and the situation in the Red Sea, the Indo-Pacific region will remain the focus of US military deployments in the maritime and aerial domains. The US military will continue to increase its presence and activities in the South China Sea and its surrounding areas. The upcoming US presidential election will bring new uncertainties to the region, and may see further intensifying of the US military's deployments and operations.

## Appendix

### Main U.S. Military Exercises in the South China Sea and Neighboring Areas in 2023

NO.	NAME	DATE	LOCATION	PARTICIPANT	FORCE	SUBJECT
1	Visit, board, search, and seizure exercise	1.7	South China Sea	America	America: USS Anchorage, USS Miguel Keith	Visit, board, search, and seizure exercise
2	CARAT/MAREX Singapore	1.9-13	Ashore at RSS Singapura - Changi Naval Base (CNB) and in the waters around Singapore	America, Singapore	America: USS Makin Island, USS John P. Murtha and 13th MEU Singapore: RSS Endurance	Shore phase: personnel conducted joint planning and subject matter expert exchanges in CNB. Sea phase: the ships conducting various exercise serials such as ship-to-shore training in waters off Pulau Sudong.
3	Bilateral Exercise	1.10	Okinawa	America, Japan	America: 2xB-1 Japan: 2xF-15	Tactical exercise
4	Bilateral Exercise	1.15-23	Philippine Sea	America, Japan	America: USS Antietam, USS Robert Smalls, USS Shiloh, USS Rafael Peralta, USNS Washington Chambers, USNS John Ericsson Japan: JS Ashigara	Anti-Air Warfare Exercise, Anti-Surface Warfare Exercise, Anti-Submarine Warfare Exercise, Replenishment at Sea, etc.
5	Fuji Viper 23.2	1.16-2.3	Japan	America	U.S. Marines with 3d Battalion, 4th Marines	Casualty evacuation training, Squad attacks, etc.

6	Bilateral Exercise	1.19	Okinawa	America, Japan	America: 10xF-15, 1xKC-135, 1xE-3, 2xHH-60, 1xP-8A Japan: 3xF-2, 12xF-15, 1xE-767	Tactical exercise
7	Bilateral Exercise	1.26	Okinawa	America, Japan	America: USS Antietam Japan: JS Oumi	Replenishment at Sea
8	Visit, board, search, and seizure exercise	1.29-30	Philippine Sea	America	America: USS Miguel Keith and 13th MEU	Visit, board, search, and seizure exercise
9	Bilateral Exercise	1.30-31	Okinawa	America, Japan	America: P-8A Japan: P-1, P-3C	Anti-Surface Warfare Exercise, Anti-submarine warfare exercise
10	Bilateral Exercise	2.1-10	Japan	America, Japan	America: EODT and UUVT Japan: 1LST, 2MSO, 7MSC, 3MCH-101	Anti-Mine Warfare Exercise
11	Bilateral Exercise	2.5	South China Sea	America, Japan	America: USS Charleston Japan: JS Makinami	Anti-Surface Warfare Exercise, etc.
12	Live-fire exercise	2.6	South China Sea	America	America: USS Nimitz	Phalanx Close-In Weapon System live-fire exercise
13	Cope North 2023	2.8-24	Guam, etc.	America, Australia, Japan, France	Approximately 1,000 U.S. Airmen, Marines, and Sailors, 1,000 combined Japan Air Self-Defense Force, Royal Australian Air Force, and French Air and Space Force service members	Trilateral planning and execution, extensive force coordination, and improving capabilities across dispersed locations, airlift, logistics, and search and rescue drills

<b>14</b>	Expeditionary Strike Force (ESF) Operations	2.11-17	South China Sea	America	America: USS Nimitz, USS Decatur, USS Chung-Hoon, USS Makin Island, 13th MEU and 2xB-1B	Integrated Expeditionary Strike Force (ESF) operations
<b>15</b>	Iron Fist 2023	2.16-3.12	Philippine Sea	America, Japan	America: USS America, USS Green Bay and USS Ashland and Marines Japan: JMSDF and JGSDF	Advanced marksmanship, amphibious reconnaissance, fire and maneuver assaults, logistics and medical support, and fire support operations, such as mortars, artillery and close-air support.
<b>16</b>	Bilateral Exercise	2.22	Guam	America, Japan	America: USS Nimitz Japan: JS Asagiri, JS Shimakaze	Tactical exercise
<b>17</b>	Resilient Shield 2023	2.23	Japan	America, Japan	America: U.S. Army, U.S. Air Force, and U.S. Marine Corps Japan: JMSDF, JASDF, JGSDF	Ballistic missile countermeasures and air defense
<b>18</b>	Bilateral Exercise	2.27-3.12	Philippine Sea	America, Japan	America: USS America, USS Ashland, USS Green Bay, LCAC, LCU and MH-60 Japan: JS Ohsumi, JS Hirashima, JS Yakushima, LCAC	Cross-Deck, Search and Rescue exercise, Boarding Exercise, etc.

19	Cobra Gold 2023	2.28-3.10	Thailand	America, Thailand, Singapore, Japan, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, etc	More than 7,000 service members from seven full participating nations	Live-fire drills and mock amphibious attacks as well as cyber defense and space operations to encompass all battlespace domains
20	Cope Angel	2.28-3.3	Philippine Sea	America, Japan	America: MC-130J, CV-22, HH-60 Japan: US-2	Search and Rescue exercise
21	Trilateral Exercise	3.6-8	Japan	America, Japan, Australia	America: RC-135 Japan: RC-2, EP-3, OP-3C Australia: P-8A	Information Exchange
22	Salaknib 2023	3.13	the Philippines	America, the Philippines	Around 3,000 troops from USARPAC's 25th Infantry Division and PA's 5th Infantry Division, 7th Infantry Division and 1st Brigade Combat Team	Various small-arms and maneuver live fire exercises (LFX), jungle training events, artillery, and mortar LFX events, etc.
23	Sea Dragon 2023	3.13-30	Guam	America, Japan, Canada, India, Korea	America: 2xP-8A Japan: P-1 Canada: CP-140 Aurora India: P-8I Korea: P-3	Anti-submarine warfare exercise
24	Bilateral Exercise	3.14	Okinawa	America, Japan	America: 2xF-22, 4xF-16, 1xKC-135 Japan: 4xF-15	Tactical exercise

25	Bilateral Exercise	3.23-26	Pacific Ocean to East China Sea	America, Japan	America: USS Nimitz, USS Decatur, USS Wayne E. Meyer Japan: JS Kirisame, JGSDF WESTERN ARMY	Anti-Submarine Warfare Exercise, Anti-Air Warfare Exercise, Anti-Surface Warfare Exercise, etc.
26	Bilateral Exercise	3.24-25	South China Sea	America, Japan	America: USS Chung-Hoon, USS Milius Japan: JS Kirisame	Anti-Surface Warfare Exercise, Link Exercise, etc.
27	Bilateral Exercise	3.25	South China Sea	America, Japan	America: USS Milius, USS Chung-Hoon Japan: JS Kirisame	Tactical exercise
28	Balikatan Exercise 2023	4.11-28	the Philippines, South China Sea	America, the Philippines, Australia, Japan	More than 17,600 American, Filipino and Australian sailors, Marines, soldiers and airmen	Maritime security, amphibious operations, live-fire training, urban and aviation operations, cyber defense, counterterrorism, and humanitarian assistance and disaster response.
29	Bilateral Exercise	4.13-14	South China Sea	America, Japan	America: USS Milius Japan: JS Kirisame	Tactical Maneuvering
30	Bilateral Exercise	4.19-20	Japan	America, Japan	America: P-8A Japan: P-3C	Link Exercise and Anti-submarine warfare exercise
31	Bilateral Exercise	4.21	Japan	America, Japan	America: UH-60L Japan: JS Murasame	Takeoff/Landing on deck exercise

<b>32</b>	FST-J Fleet Synthetic Training-Joint	4.21-28	Japan	America, Australia, Canada	USS America, the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Army, as well as units from the Royal Australian Air Force, Royal Australian Navy, and Royal Canadian Air Force.	Strike force-level proficiency, operations, joint interoperability and mission rehearsal for ships, aviation, and submarine simulators.
<b>33</b>	All-Domain Joint Exercise	4.22	South China Sea	America	America: USS Nimitz CSG, 1xB-1B, 1xB-52H	All-Domain Joint Exercise
<b>34</b>	Bilateral Exercise	4.24	East China Sea	America, Japan	America: 2xB-52, 6xF-35 and 1xKC-135 Japan: 4xF-2	Tactical exercise
<b>35</b>	Cope Thunder	5.1-12、7.2-21	the Philippines	America, the Philippines	Around 160 US Air Force service members and 400 PAF airmen	Defensive Counter Air and Offensive Counter Air Operation
<b>36</b>	Bilateral Exercise	5.8-10	Japan	America, Japan	America: EA-18G Japan: EP-3, OP-3C	Electromagnetic Maneuver Warfare

37	CARAT Thailand 2023	5.8-16	Thailand	America, Thailand	America: CARAT Thailand 2023, P-8A, MH-60R Thailand: HTMS Naresuan, HTMS Bangpakong and HTMS Kraburi	Knowledge exchanges highlighting communication, divisional tactics, replenishment-at-sea approaches, anti-submarine warfare, visit, board, search and seizure (VBSS), maritime domain awareness (MDA), air defense, deck landing qualifications, search and rescue, and mine countermeasures .
38	Field Carrier Landing Practice	5.9-19	Philippine Sea	America	America: USS Roland Reagan Carrier Air Wing Five (FA-18E, FA-18F, EA-8G, E-2D, C-2A)	Pre-aim calibration live-fire exercise, Field Carrier Landing Practice
39	Exercise Southern Beach	5.16-18	Japan	America, Japan	F-15E Strike Eagles assigned to the 336th and 391st Fighter Squadrons, 909th Air Refueling Squadron KC-135 Stratotankers, as well as JASDF and U.S. Navy E-2C Hawkeyes	Offensive and defensive counter-air operations and personnel rescue.
40	Bilateral Exercise	5.18-19	Pacific and East China Sea	America, Japan	America: USS Nimitz, USS Wayne E. Meyer Japan: JS Ariake	Link Exercise, etc.

41	Trilateral Exercise	6.1-7	the Philippines	America, Japan, the Philippines	America: USCGC Stratton Japan: JS Akitsushima the Philippines: BRP Melchora Aquino, BRP Gabriela Silang	Collaborative mission planning and joint search and rescue operations
42	NOBLE WOLF	6.3-5	East China Sea	America, Japan, Australia, Canada	America: USS Chung-Hoon Canada: HMCS Montreal Japan: JS Shiranui Australia: HMAS Anzac, MV Asterix	Surface surveillance, coordination and electronic warfare drills
43	Trilateral Exercise	6.3-15	Japan	America, Japan, Australia	America: P-8A Japan: P-3C and a submarine Australia: P-8A	Anti-submarine warfare exercise, etc.
44	Multi Big-Deck Event	6.7-10	From East of Okinawa to East China Sea	America, Japan, France	America: USS Nimitz, USS Roland Reagan, USS Antietam, USS Robert Smalls, USS Shiloh, USS Chung-Hoon, USS Wayne E. Meyer, USS Rafael Peralta Japan: JS Izumo, JS Samidare France: FS Lorraine	Anti-surface warfare exercise, Anti-air warfare exercise, Anti-submarine exercise, LINKEX, etc.
45	Shinka 23	6.10-7.1	Japan	America, Japan	U.S. Marines and JGSDF	Combat assault transport and aerial escort, aerial delivery operations, and simulated close air support

<b>46</b>	Noble Typhoon	6.10-14	Okinawa to South China Sea	America, Japan, France, Canada	America: USS Roland Reagan, USS Antietam, USS Robert Smalls, USS Rafael Peralta, USS Chung-Hoon, Japan: JS Izumo, JS Samidare France: FS Lorraine Canada: HMCS Montreal	Anti-surface warfare exercise, Anti-air warfare exercise, Anti-submarine warfare exercise, LINKEX, Replenishment at Sea, etc.
<b>47</b>	Noble Raven23	6.14-19	South China Sea	America, Japan, Canada	America: USS Rafael Peralta Japan: JS Izumo Canada: HMCS Montreal	Anti-Surface Warfare Exercise, Anti-submarine warfare exercise, Replenishment at Sea, etc.
<b>48</b>	Noble Buffalo	6.14-19	South China Sea	America, Japan, France	America: USS Roland Reagan, USS Robert Smalls Japan: JS Samidare	Anti-Surface Warfare Exercise, Anti-submarine warfare exercise, etc.
<b>49</b>	Bilateral Exercise	6.16-29	Guam	America, Singapore	America: USS Manchester, USS Shiloh	Tactical exercise
<b>50</b>	Cope West 2023	6.19-23	Indonesia	America, Indonesia	Approximately 100 U.S. service members and Indonesian Air Force personnel, six U.S. Air Force F-16s and 7 Indonesian Air Force aircraft	Bilateral tactical fighter exercise
<b>51</b>	Bilateral Exercise	6.28	Okinawa	America, Japan	America: 4xF-35, 2xB-52, 1xKC-135 Japan: 4xF-15	Tactical training
<b>52</b>	Bilateral Exercise	6.30	Okinawa	America, Japan	America: 2xB-52 Japan: 2xF-15	Tactical training

53	Pacific Vanguard 23	7.1-10	Guam	America, Japan, Australia, Korea	America: USS Howard , USNS Yukon, a submarine, P-8A, U.S. Marine Corps 5th Air Naval Gunfire Liaison Company (5th ANGLICO), III Marine Expeditionary Force Japan: JS Shiranui and a submarine Korea: ROKS Munmu the Great Royal Australian Navy	Anti-surface firing, anti-ground firing, anti-surface warfare, and anti-submarine warfare exercise, etc.
54	Northern Edge 2023-2	7.2-21	Japan, Guam, Palau, etc.	America, Japan, France	America: U.S. Air Force Airmen from the 388th and 419th Fighter Wing Japan: JASDF France: Air and Space Force	Agile Combat Employment (ACE)
55	Mobile Guardian 23	7.5-21	India-Pacific region	America, Australia, Canada, France, Japan, New Zealand, the United Kingdom	3,000 US and Allied Forces personnel	Airlift, aerial refueling, aeromedical evacuation, the Global Air Mobility Support System (GAMSS), command and control, and humanitarian and disaster assistance.

<b>56</b>	Marine Aviation Support Activity 23	7.6-21	the Philippines	America, the Philippines	2,711 personnel and 43 air assets	Live fire events, bilateral air assaults and airfield seizures, joint forward arming and refueling, and other aviation support operations.
<b>57</b>	Bilateral Exercise	7.11	South of Shikoku Island	America, Japan	America: USS Blue Ridge Japan: JS Suzutsuki	Tactical exercise
<b>58</b>	Hanuman Guardian 23	7.15-20	Thailand	America, Thailand	U.S. Army Soldiers and Royal Thai Army (RTA) soldiers	Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief capabilities
<b>59</b>	Bilateral Exercise	7.21	South China Sea	America, Japan	America: USS Blue Ridge Japan: JS Takanami	PASSEX
<b>60</b>	Talisman Sabre 2023	7.21-8.4	Australia	America, Japan, Korea, France, Germany, Australia, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Tonga, etc.	More than 30,000 military personnel from 13 nations	Field training exercises incorporating force preparation activities, amphibious landings, ground force maneuvers, and air combat and maritime operations.
<b>61</b>	Fuji Viper 23.3	8.7-9.8	Japan	America	America: 3d Battalion, 5th Marines	Combined arms live-fire training, etc.
<b>62</b>	Live-fire exercise	8.9	South China Sea	America	America: USS Ralph Johnson	Live-fire exercise

<b>63</b>	Exercise Malabar 2023	8.11-21	The east coast of Australia	America, Japan, India, Australia	America: USS Rafael Peralta, submarine, P-8A Japan: JS Shiranui India: INS Kolkata and INS Sahyadri Australia: HMAS Brisbane, HMAS Choules, submarine, P-8A, F-35A	Anti-submarine warfare exercise, Anti-Surface Warfare Exercise, Anti-Air Warfare Exercise, Replenishment at Sea, etc.
<b>64</b>	SEACAT Exercise	From 8.14	Singapore	America, Australia, Bangladesh, Brunei, Canada, France, Germany, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Maldives, New Zealand, Philippines, South Korea, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, United Kingdom, and Vietnam.	20 countries and 14 ships	Workshops on Vessel Board Search and Seizure (VBSS) and Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS), and a week-long sea phase
<b>65</b>	Noble CHINOOK	8.21-28	Philippine Sea	America, Japan, Canada	America: USS Benfold Japan: JS Hyuga Canada: HMCS Vancouver, HMCS Ottawa, MS Asterix	Anti-Surface Warfare Exercise, etc.
<b>66</b>	Bilateral Exercise	8.21-25	Okinawa to South of Kanto	America, Japan	America: USS Roland Reagan Japan: JS Maya	LINKEX, CROSS DECK, etc.
<b>67</b>	Multilateral Exercise	8.24	the Philippines	America, Japan, Australia, the Philippines	America: USS Mobile Japan: JS Izumo, JS Samidare Australia: HMAS Canberra, HMAS Anzac, F-35A the Philippines: BRP Davao del Sur	Replenishment at Sea

<b>68</b>	Bilateral Exercise	8.29-9.1	East China Sea	America, Japan	America: EP-3E Japan: EP-3, OP-3C	Information Exchange
<b>69</b>	Exercise Super Garuda Shield 2023	8.31-9.13	Indonesia	America, Indonesia, Japan, Australia, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and France	Approximately 2,100 U.S. and 1,900 Indonesian TNI service members	Expert academic exchanges and professional development workshops, a command and control simulation, an amphibious exercise, airborne operations, an airfield seizure exercise, and a combined joint field training that culminates with a live fire event.
<b>70</b>	Bilateral Exercise	9.1	South China Sea	America, Thailand	America: USCGC Munro Thailand: HTMS Klongyai and HTMS Pattani	At-sea engagement
<b>71</b>	Bilateral sail	9.4	South China Sea	America, the Philippines	America: USS Ralph Johnson the Philippines: BRP Jose Rizal	Bilateral sail
<b>72</b>	Noble Stingray	9.5-6	East China Sea	America, Japan, Canada	America: USS Ralph Johnson Canada: HMCS Ottawa Japan: JS Izumo, JS Samidare and a submarine	Anti-submarine warfare exercise, etc.

<b>73</b>	CARAT BRUNEI 2023	9.12	Brunei	America, Brunei	America: USCGC Munro Royal Brunei Armed Forces	Humanitarian assistance and disaster response scenarios, underwater medical tactics, and maritime security operations.
<b>74</b>	Exercise Noble Wolverine	9.14	South China Sea	America, Canada	America: USS Ralph Johnson Canada: HMCS Ottawa	Maneuvering drills, small boat operations and helicopter flight deck training, as well as routine bilateral surface operations.
<b>75</b>	Orient Shield 2023	9.14-23	Japan	America, Japan	About 2,300 Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) and 1,200 U.S. Army personnel	Infantry, army aviation and High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) live fires, as well as logistic movements by land, air and sea.
<b>76</b>	Bilateral Exercise	9.17	South China Sea	America, the United Kingdom	America: USCGC Munro the United Kingdom: HMCS Spey	Coordinated ship maneuvers
<b>77</b>	Bilateral Exercise	9.21	Japan	America, Japan	America: USS Robert Smalls Japan: JS Yuudachi	Tactical Maneuvering Exercise, PHOTOEX

<b>78</b>	Bilateral Exercise	9.25-10.3	Japan	America, Japan	America: LCAC Japan: JS Shimokita, JS Mikuma, JS Yakushima, JS Takashima, LCAC and MCH-101	Cross Deck (LCAC), Beaching Exercise, Search and Rescue Exercise, LCAC maintenance Exercise and PHOTOEX
<b>79</b>	Bilateral Exercise	9.27	Japan	America, Japan	America: USS Oakland, USV Ranger and USV Mariner Japan: JS Kumano	Tactical exercise
<b>80</b>	Bilateral Exercise	9.30-10.7	South of Kanto to East China Sea	America, Japan	America: USS Roland Reagan, USS Antietam, USS Robert Smalls, USS Shoup Japan: JS Yuudachi, JS Noshiro	LINKEX, etc.
<b>81</b>	Exercise SAMASAM A 2023	10.2-13	the Philippines	America, the Philippines	America: USS Dewey Japan: JS Akebono the Philippines: BRP San Antonio, C-90 Canada: HMCS Vancouver the United Kingdom: HMCS Spey	Training in medicine, legal concepts, engineering, logistics and public affairs while diving and explosive ordnance disposal teams, naval vessels and maritime surveillance aircraft conduct exercises focused on anti-submarine (ASW), surface (ASUW) and air (AAW) warfare, and maritime domain awareness.

82	Bilateral Exercise	10.4	Philippine Sea	America, Japan	America: USS Roland Reagan, USS Antietam Japan: JS Yuudachi, JS Noshiro	Tactical exercise
83	Bilateral Exercise (ILEX23-6)	10.6-8	Japan	America, Japan	America: MV Acadia Trader Japan: JS Oumi	Replenishment at Sea
84	Slient Shark Anti-Submarine Exercise	10.6-22	Guam	America, Korea	America: USS Topeka Korea: ROKS Jung Ji, 2xP-3	Anti-submarine warfare exercise
85	Exercise Resolute Dragon 23	10.14-31	Japan	America, Japan	Approximately 3,300 U.S. service members with various units across III MEF and the joint force and approximately 5,000 service members of the Japan Self-Defense Force (SDF)	bilateral command and control and combined arms live-fire training
86	Bilateral Exercise	10.16-18	South China Sea	America, Japan	America: USS Dewey, Japan: JS Akebono	Tactical Maneuvering, LINKEX, etc.
87	Bilateral Exercise	10.16-18	East China Sea	America, Japan	America: USS Roland Reagan, USS Antietam, USS Robert Smalls, USS Shoup Japan: JS Noshiro	LINKEX, etc.
88	Bilateral Exercise	10.17	Japan Sea to Okinawa	America, Japan	America: 2xB-52, 6xF-35, 1xKC-135 Japan: 12xF-15	Tactical training
89	Trilateral Exercise	10.22	Japan	America, Japan, Korea	America: 1xB-52, 3xF-16 Japan: 4xF-2 Korea: 2xF-15	Formation and Navigation training

<b>90</b>	Noble Caribou	10.23	South China Sea	America, Japan, Australia, Canada, New Zealand	America: USS Rafael Peralta Japan: JS Akebono Australia: HMAS Brisbane Canada: HMCS Ottawa New Zealand: HMNZS Te Mana	Tactical Maneuvering, etc.
<b>91</b>	Bilateral Exercise	10.23-27	Philippine Sea	America, Japan	America: MC-130J, HH-60G Japan: US-2, U-125A, UH-60J	Search and Rescue exercise
<b>92</b>	Bilateral Exercise	10.30-31	Japan	America, Japan	America: P-8A Japan: P-3C	LINKEX, Anti-submarine warfare exercise, etc.
<b>93</b>	Bilateral Exercise	10.30-31	Okinawa	America, Japan	America: P-8A Japan: P-3C	LINKEX, Anti-submarine warfare exercise, etc.
<b>94</b>	MTA Malaysia 2023	11.1-9	Malaysia	America, Malaysia	U.S. Marines with Marine Rotational Force-Southeast Asia, I Marine Expeditionary Force, U.S. Navy Sailors with Commander, Task Force-73, and Royal Malaysian Navy sailors	Expert exchanges on use-of-force and Maritime Domain Awareness, and a Women, Peace and Security Seminar.
<b>95</b>	Multi Big-Deck Event	11.4-7	the Philippines	America, Japan	America: USS Roland Reagan, USS Carl Vinson, USS Antietam, USS Robert Smalls, USS Princeton, USS Shoup, USS Hopper, USS Kidd, USS Sterett, USS William P. Lawrence Japan: JS Hyuga	LINKEX, CROSS DECK etc.

96	Bilateral Exercise	11.7	Okinawa	America, Japan	America: 2xB-52, 2xKC-135, 2xKC-46A, 4xF-35C, 12xF/A-18, 2xEA-18G, 4xF-35B Japan: 4xF-15	Tactical training
97	KAMANDAG 7	11.9-20	the Philippines	America, the Philippines, Japan, Korea, the United Kingdom	Nearly 3,000 members of elite forces from the Philippines, United States, Japan, South Korea and Britain	Humanitarian aid and disaster relief training to include chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear training operations, littoral search and rescue, coastal defense training and amphibious operations, conduct medical subject matter expert exchanges and participate in staff integration events along the eastern and northern coasts of the Philippines.

98	ANNUAL Exercise 2023	11.10-20	Japan	America, Japan, Australia, Canada, the Philippines	<p>America: USS Carl Vinson and about 10 other vessels, P-1 and other about 20 aircraft</p> <p>Japan: : JS Hyuga and about 15 other vessels, P-1 and other about 20 aircraft</p> <p>Australia: HMAS Brisbane and 1 vessel, P-8A</p> <p>Canada: HMAS Vancouver and 2 other vessels, CP-140</p>	Anti-submarine warfare exercise, Anti-Surface Warfare Exercise, Replenishment at Sea, etc.
99	Bilateral MCM/EOD Exercise	11.17-27	Japan	America, Japan	<p>America: Surface Units (MSO (2)), Aircrafts (MH-53E (2)), EODT, UUV operator</p> <p>Japan: Surface Units (FFM (1), MST (2), MSO (2), MSC (15)), Aircrafts (MCH-101 (2))</p>	Mine Warfare Exercise (Mine Laying, Mine Sweeping, Mine Hunting and EOD)
100	Bilateral Exercise	11.19-21	South of Shikoku to East China Sea	America, Japan	<p>America: USS Carl Vinson, USS Princeton, USS Hopper, USS Kidd, USS Sterett, USS William P. Lawrence</p> <p>Japan: JS Yuudachi</p>	LINKEX etc.

<b>101</b>	Keris MAREX 23	11.23- 12.11	Indonesia	America, Indonesia	The U.S. Marine Corps and Korps Marinir Republik Indonesia (KORMAR)	Patrolling, close-quarters battle and ambushing, unmanned aircraft systems employment, sensor to strike, tactical combat casualty care, and explosive ordnance disposal. Exchanges of various functional areas include joint planning, expeditionary advanced basing operations, joint planning operations, and small boat operations
<b>102</b>	Trilateral Exercise	11.26	East China Sea	America, Japan, Korea	America: USS Carl Vinson, USS Sterett, USS Kidd Japan: JS Kirisame Korea: ROKS Sejong the Great	Tactical exercise
<b>103</b>	Bilateral Exercise	11.26-30	East China Sea to Philippine Sea	America, Japan	America: USS Carl Vinson, USS Kidd, USS Sterett, USNS Charles Drew and USNS Yukon Japan: JS Kirisame	LINKEX, etc. and Replenishment at Sea
<b>104</b>	Bilateral Exercise	11.30	Japan	America, Japan	America: MH-60R Japan: SH-60K	Anti-submarine warfare exercise

<b>105</b>	Exercise Yama Sakura 85 (YS85)	12.4-13	Japan, Washington	America, Japan, Australia	Around 230 members of the Australian Army, 1500 US Army personnel and 5300 JGSDF	Large-scale Command Post Training Exercise
<b>106</b>	Bilateral Exercise	12.7	South China Sea	America, Japan	America: USS Gabrielle Giffords Japan: JS Ikazuchi	Tactical exercise
<b>107</b>	Bilateral Exercise	12.12-15	Okinawa	America, Japan	America: 6xF-35A, 6xEA-18G, 5xF-35B and 2xKC-130 Japan: 8xF-15	Tactical training