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感知计划

**Report on the Military Activities of
Non-US Extra-Regional Countries
in the Western Pacific in 2025**

South China Sea Strategic Situation Probing Initiative

May 2026

About SCSPI

With a view to maintaining and promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the South China Sea, we launched the South China Sea Strategic Situation Probing Initiative (SCSPI) in April of 2019. The Initiative aims to integrate intellectual resources and open-source information worldwide and track important actions and major policy changes of key stakeholders and other parties involved. It provides professional data services and analytical reports to parties concerned, helping them manage competition and seek partnerships.

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Preface

In recent years, European countries like the UK, France, and Germany, along with US allies such as Australia and Canada, have notably increased their military presence in the Western Pacific region, including the South China Sea, East China Sea, Sea of Japan, and the Philippine Sea. Among various underlying motives, the most prominent view is that, against the backdrop of intensified US-China strategic competition, their deployments and activities in the region are meant to align with the US Indo-Pacific strategy and its competition with China.

On a broader scale, the Western Pacific is experiencing increasing prosperity alongside a rise in frequent geopolitical hotspots. As the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait become “trendy spots”, for Western countries that are either unsatisfied with exerting influence solely within their own regions or have imperial and colonial traditions, strengthening their presence in the Western Pacific is a significant measure to project global influence and uphold the “rules-based international order”. Beyond symbolic gains, there are tangible benefits: the substantial enhancement of political, economic, and military ties with Asia-Pacific countries through military activities and presence. Specifically, the considerations of each extra-regional country vary greatly.

However, compared to the US military, the military activities of these countries in the Western Pacific share certain commonalities: they have yet to establish regular deployments, lack robust operational capabilities,

and are primarily strategic and diplomatic in nature. As they do not pose significant military threats to regional countries, it is crucial not to overstate their impact on the security dynamics in the region. However, on a tactical and operational level, some extra-regional countries like Australia and Canada have conducted military activities that are sometimes very aggressive and unprofessional, resulting in frequent unsafe maritime and aerial encounters with regional military forces. Consequently, the impact of these countries' military presence and activities on regional security dynamics cannot be overlooked, and oversimplifying this would be imprudent.

In light of relevant insights, we have compiled and released this annual report to systematically review and comprehensively analyze the military activities of non-US extra-regional countries in the Western Pacific. The goal is to furnish the audience with a more complete and objective understanding of these activities and their implications for regional security dynamics.

Director of SCSPH Hu Bo

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hu Bo', is positioned below the printed name. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first and last names clearly distinguishable.

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Report on the Military Activities of Non-US Extra-Regional Countries in the Western Pacific in 2025

SCSPI

In 2025, non-US extra-regional countries continued to expand their military presence in the Western Pacific, undertaking activities such as reconnaissance patrols, Taiwan Strait transits, forward deployments, drills and exercises, as well as port calls. The UK and France deployed carrier strike groups (CSGs) to the region, and conducted joint drills with allies like the US and Japan. Australia performed multiple declaratory operations in the name of defending “freedom of navigation” in the South China Sea and participated in multilateral maritime cooperation activities led by the Philippines. Additionally, countries such as Canada, New Zealand, and India actively took part in multinational patrols and exercises.

I. Overview

1. Warship Activities

In 2025, according to incomplete statistics, approximately 200 warships from 18 extra-regional countries operated in the Western Pacific, totaling nearly 10,000 ship-days of naval presence. The US Navy accounted for 109 ships and 9,088 ship-days, while other countries, primarily from Europe, Oceania, and Canada, contributed 48 ships and 610 ship-days, averaging about 2 ships per day.

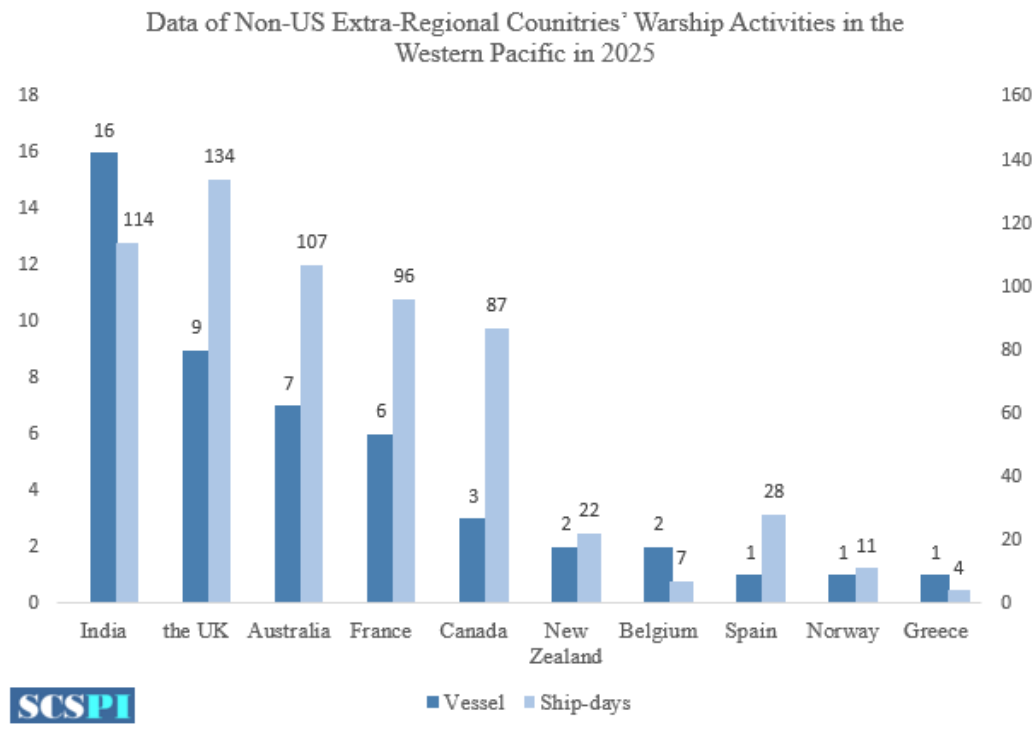


Figure 1: Overview of Non-US Extra-Regional Countries' Warship Activities in the Western Pacific in 2025

The warships primarily operated in the waters around the South China Sea, Philippine Sea, and Japan, concentrating in key waterways. The Singapore Strait, Bashi Channel, Miyako Strait, and Taiwan Strait became crucial areas for repeated passage. Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Japan, and South Korea were the major targets for port calls and supply operations.

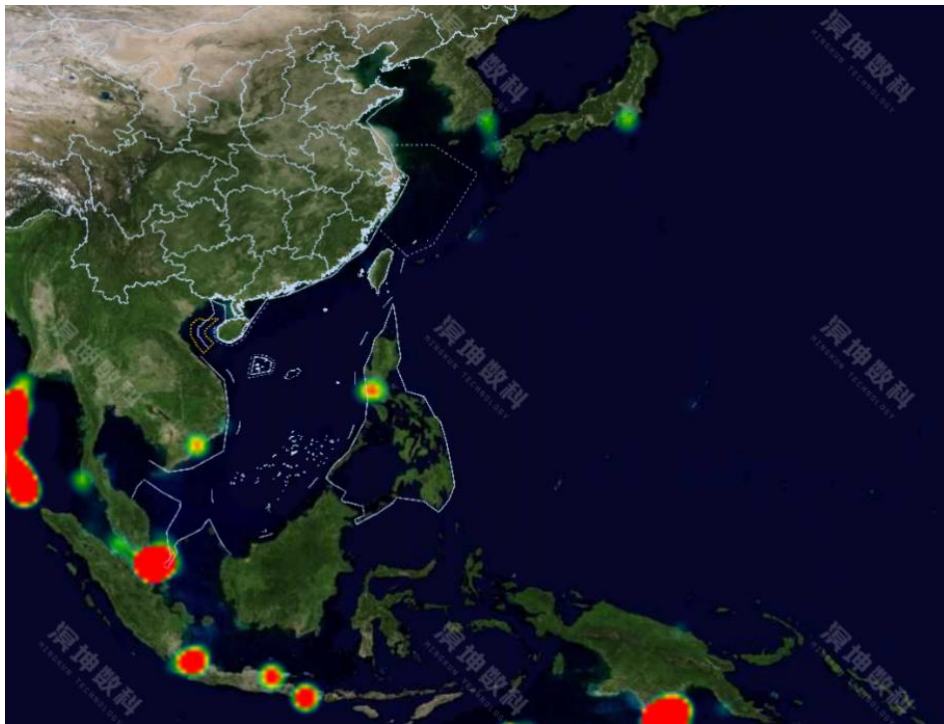


Figure 2: Heat Map of Non-US Extra-Regional Countries' Warship Activities in the Western Pacific in 2025

2. Aircraft Activities

In 2025, according to incomplete statistics, there were over 20,000 sorties of aircraft sent by extra-regional countries in the Western Pacific, including fighters, helicopters, transport aircraft, reconnaissance aircraft, tankers, and bombers. Most were US sorties, while other extra-regional

countries, such as Australia, Canada, and India, combined approximately 1,500 sorties.

Non-US sorties were mostly transport aircraft, helicopters, reconnaissance aircraft, airborne early warning aircraft, and refueling aircraft, among which transport ones ranked top with nearly 900 flights (over 50% of the total).

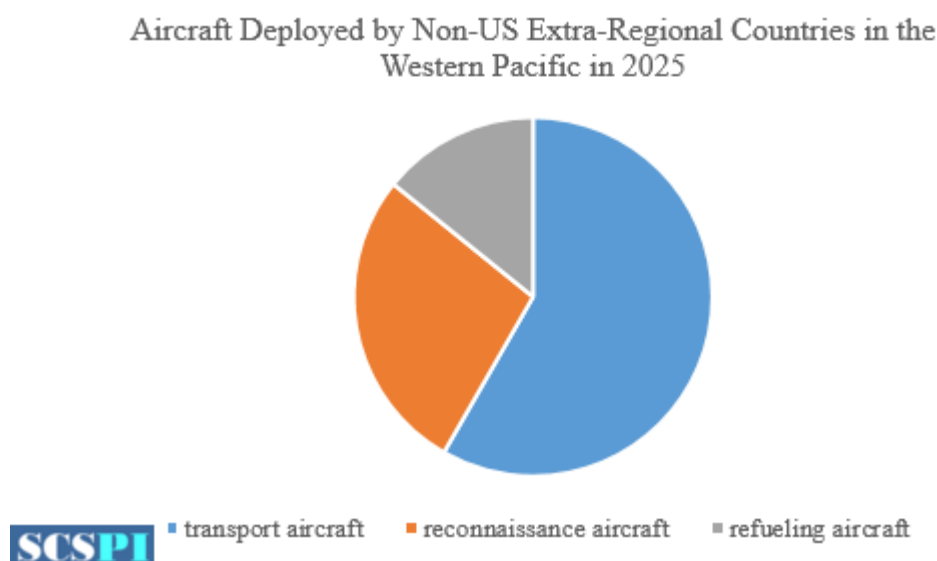


Figure 3: Aircraft Deployed by Non-US Extra-Regional Countries in the Western Pacific in 2025

Activities were centered in the airspace near Osan Air Base, South Korea, Misawa Air Base, Japan and Kadena Air Base, Okinawa in the Pacific Ocean, as well as in the vicinity of the South China Sea covering the Philippines and the Strait of Malacca. Due to the use of false identification codes or inactive transponders during missions, the actual number and scope of operations were likely larger.



Figure 4: Heat Map of Non-US Extra-Regional Countries' Aircraft Activities in the Western Pacific in 2025

3. Special Deployments

In 2025, the military activities of these extra-regional countries in the Western Pacific were mostly temporary deployments, participation in drills, or transit and overflight operations, with year-round rotational regular deployments primarily limited to Australia. Due to military resources and strategic priorities, countries like Canada and India deployed limited forces to this region through specific actions annually, while the UK and France opted for temporary large-scale or permanent small-scale surveillance vessel deployments with limited scale and frequency.

Over recent years, the Australian Defence Force has carried out annual regular rotational deployments via “Regional Presence Deployments (RPDs)” in the Asia-Pacific region, engaging in routine transits, freedom of navigation activities, aerial patrols, joint exercises and drills with partner countries, and port calls in the Western Pacific sea and airspace. In 2025, the Royal Australian Navy conducted 4 RPDs deployments in the region, each lasting several weeks, to maintain a “near permanent presence”¹

Table 1: Overview of Australian RPDs in 2025

No.	Warship	Time
1	HMAS <i>Hobart</i> (DDG 39)	January-February 2025
2	HMAS <i>Sydney</i> (DDG 42)	March-July 2025
3	HMAS <i>Brisbane</i> (DDG 41)	August-December 2025
4	HMAS <i>Ballarat</i> (FFH 155)	September-December 2025

Additionally, since 1980, Australia has conducted maritime surveillance patrols in Southeast Asia under the codename Operation Gateway. Based at Malaysia’s RMAF Butterworth, this operation involves the rotational deployment of P-8A anti-submarine patrol aircraft throughout the year for regular maritime surveillance patrols and freedom of navigation/overflight activities in the North Indian Ocean and South China Sea. In 2025, the Royal Australian Air Force dispatched 2 P-8As for

¹ HMAS Brisbane transits South China Sea during regional presence deployment, Defence Connect, November 24, 2025, <https://www.defenceconnect.com.au/naval/17257-hmas-brisbane-transit-south-china-sea-during-regional-presence-deployment>

a 3-week deployment from May to June, and 3 P-8As for a 2-week deployment from November to December.



Figure 5: Track of Australian P-8A Aircrafts in the Western Pacific in 2025

Canada implemented forward deployments in the Asia-Pacific region through Operation Horizon and Operation NEON. In 2025, Canada’s main deployments in the Western Pacific include:

Table 2: Overview of Canadian Warships and Aircraft Deployments in the Western Pacific in 2025

No.	Warship/Aircraft	Time
1	HMCS <i>Ottawa</i> (FFH 341)	December 2024-February 2025
2	CP-140 <i>Aurora</i>	April-May 2025
3	HMCS <i>Ville de Québec</i> (FFH 332)	April-November 2025
4	CP-140 <i>Aurora</i>	September-October 2025
5	HMCS <i>Max Bernays</i> (AOPV 432)	September-November 2025

Unlike Australia’s year-round rotational regular deployment in the region, India adopted periodic deployments, usually at least once a year, lasting several months and involving port calls, bilateral/multilateral exercises, and other presence operations. The French Navy maintained

permanent deployments of small-scale surveillance vessels in the Pacific, such as FS *Prairial* (F731) stationed around Guam and FS *Vendémiaire* (F734) at New Caledonia, patrolling the Western Pacific, including the South China Sea. These were light, non-capital combat ships rather than regular large-scale forces.

The Royal Navy maintained long-term deployments of HMS *Spey* (P234) and HMS *Tamar* (P233) in the Asia-Pacific region. Without a fixed base, these 2 ships have been rotating for maintenance and supply in partner countries' ports since permanently forward deployed to this region in 2021.

II. Main Characteristics

In 2025, under the pretext of deepening Indo-Pacific strategies and engaging with hotspots, extra-regional countries such as the UK, France, Canada, and Australia attempted to strengthen multilateral mechanisms, enhance interoperability with East Asian allies/partners, and exhibit collective presence through military activities. The political signaling of such actions outweighed their actual military impact.

1. Strengthened Deployment of Large Platforms

Highlighting military presence through deployments of large platforms or task groups has become the main tactic for traditional maritime powers like the UK and France to increase visibility in the Western Pacific.

In 2025, France and the UK successively deployed their respective CSGs, FS *Charles de Gaulle* (R91) and HMS *Prince of Wales* (R09), to operate in the Western Pacific region.

In November 2024, FS *Charles de Gaulle* set sail from the southern French port of Toulon for a more than 5-month deployment known as Clemenceau 25 in the Western Pacific region. The CSG consisted of FS *Charles de Gaulle*, FS *Forbin* (D620), FS *Alsace* (D656), FS *Provence*

(D652), FS *Jacques Chevalier* (A725), an attack nuclear submarine, 2 E-2C early warning aircraft, 24 Rafale fighters, and 4 helicopters.

The CSG transited the Mediterranean Sea, Red Sea, and Indian Ocean before arriving in the Western Pacific region in late January 2025. Following a port call in Indonesia, the French CSG conducted Pacific Steller 2025 with the US Navy's USS *Carl Vinson* (CVN-70) and the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force's JS *Kaga* (DDH-184) in the Sulawesi Sea and the Philippine Sea from February 8 to 18. Subsequently, the CSG performed joint exercises with the Philippine Armed Forces on February 21 and visited the port of Manila. In early March, the French CSG visited Vietnam and Singapore, concluding its deployment in the Western Pacific before heading to the Indian Ocean through the Strait of Malacca. Rear Admiral Guillaume Pinget of the French Navy stated that this deployment marked the first time in over 40 years that France had deployed a CSG to the wider Pacific region.¹

¹ With rare Asia carrier deployment, France seeks greater interoperability, the Japan Times, December 17, 2024, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2024/12/17/asia-pacific/france-navy-indo-pacific/>

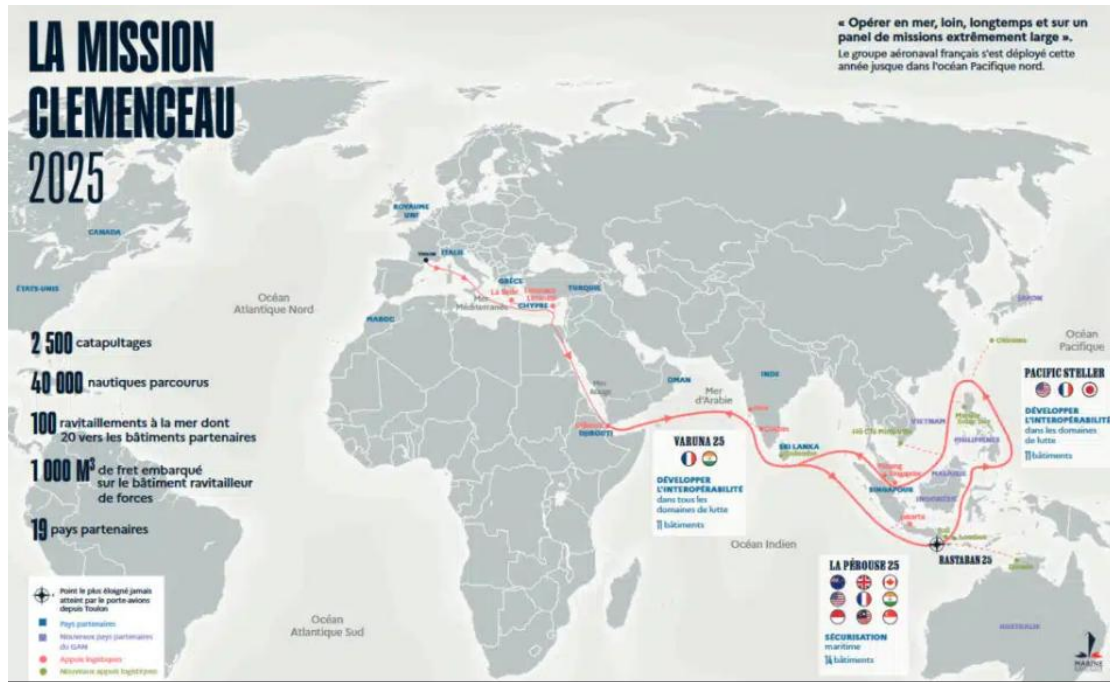


Figure 6: Track of Clemenceau 25 (Source: Naval News)

In late April 2025, the Royal Navy’s CSG, led by HMS *Prince of Wales*, left Portsmouth in southeastern England for the Indo-Pacific region to undertake the 8-month Operation Highmast. The CSG consisted of HMS *Prince of Wales*, HMS *Dauntless* (D33), HMS *Richmond* (F239), and RFA *Tidespring* (A136). Additionally, escort vessels from partner countries such as Canada, Norway, and Spain joined in at various stages of the deployment. The CSG arrived in the Western Pacific region via the Strait of Malacca in late June and departed through the South China Sea in late September. During the deployment, it participated in Exercise Talisman Sabre 2025 led by Australia and the US, implementing dual-carrier operations with USS *George Washington* (CVN-73), Multi-Large Deck Event (MLDE) in the Philippine Sea with the US Marine Corps’ F-35 fighters, and F-35B fighter

landings on the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force's *JS Kaga*. Individual vessels of the CSG also made separate port calls to Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Japan, and South Korea. The operation marked not only the first deployment of HMS *Prince of Wales* to the Pacific region since its commissioning but also the return of a British CSG to the Indo-Pacific region after the global deployment of HMS *Queen Elizabeth* (R08) in 2021.

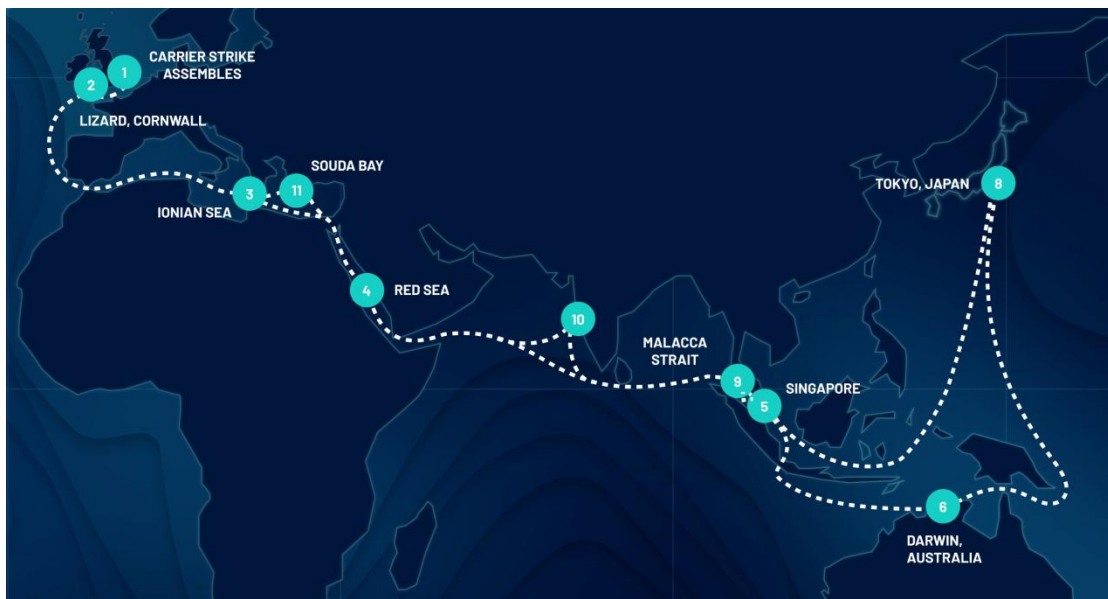


Figure 7: Track of HMS Prince of Wales in the Western Pacific in 2025
(Source: Royal Navy)

2. Normalized Declaratory Activities

Countries like the UK, France, Canada, and Australia do not have the concept or practice of FONOPs. Nevertheless, in recent years, these countries have frequently undertaken similar declaratory activities in the Western Pacific, citing tensions in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea as justification. In 2025, amid ongoing tensions in the Taiwan Strait,

extra-regional navies from Australia, Canada, and the UK intensified their activities in the Western Pacific in the name of upholding navigation rights in international waters as per the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), showcasing military presence by transiting the Taiwan Strait or carrying out “freedom of navigation” activities in the South China Sea.

Statistics show that in 2025, apart from the US, 4 countries including Australia, Canada, the UK, and New Zealand deployed 6 warships to transit the Taiwan Strait 5 times, all accompanied by official public reports. Previously, such transits were mainly led by the US, with limited participation from other extra-regional countries. Since 2024, there has been a notable rise in transits by non-US extra-regional countries, with a shift towards increased involvement from European and Oceanic countries in comparison to the original dominance of the US and Canada. Non-US extra-regional countries have gradually accomplished regular transits with consistent frequency.

Table 3: Overview of Non-US Extra-Regional Warships Transiting the Taiwan Strait in 2025

No.	Date	Warships
1	February 16	HMCS <i>Ottawa</i>
2	June 18	HMS <i>Spey</i>
3	September 6	HMCS <i>Ville de Québec</i> , HMAS <i>Brisbane</i>
4	September 12	USS <i>Higgins</i> (DDG-76), HMS <i>Richmond</i>
5	November 5	HMNZS <i>Aotearoa</i> (A11)

In 2025, the UK and Australia conducted 2 activities defending the so-called “freedom of navigation” in the Spratly Islands. On June 24, the UK Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ) announced on social media that the Royal Navy’s HMS *Spey* and the Royal Australian Navy’s HMAS *Sydney* performed a joint “freedom of navigation” activity around the Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, claiming the operation to be in accordance with the freedom of navigation granted by UNCLOS. It was the first public announcement of joint “freedom of navigation” activities in the South China Sea by the UK and Australia. On the same day, British Foreign Secretary Lammy stated in Parliament that the Royal Navy would conduct more activities defending “freedom of navigation” in the Taiwan Strait and South China Sea regions in the future.¹ On October 30, the UK declared that RFA *Tidespring* implemented an activity to uphold “freedom of navigation” in the Spratly Islands.

Among them, Australia has been the most aggressive, sending military aircraft to intrude into the airspace of the Paracel Islands every year. On February 13, 2025, the Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson commented on the “deliberate intrusion of Australian military aircraft into China’s airspace over the Paracel Islands.” The Australian Department of Defense also issued a statement on the same day, steering clear of the intrusion while accusing a Chinese J-16 fighter of intercepting an

¹ UK navy unveils plans near Taiwan, Taipei Times, June 26, 2025, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2025/06/26/2003839260>

Australian P-8A in the South China Sea.¹ On October 19, an Australian P-8A once again illegally entered the same airspace; the day also witnessed the overnight return of the P-8A to Australia via Darwin to RAAF Base Edinburgh. The Australian side stated that its P-8A encountered flares from Chinese aircraft in the South China Sea.²

On October 6, a Canadian CP-140 entered the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone and was intercepted by a Chinese J-16 fighter as it approached China’s airspace and platforms. According to the Canadian side, the target of this operation was to “track North Korean ships that violate sanctions”.³

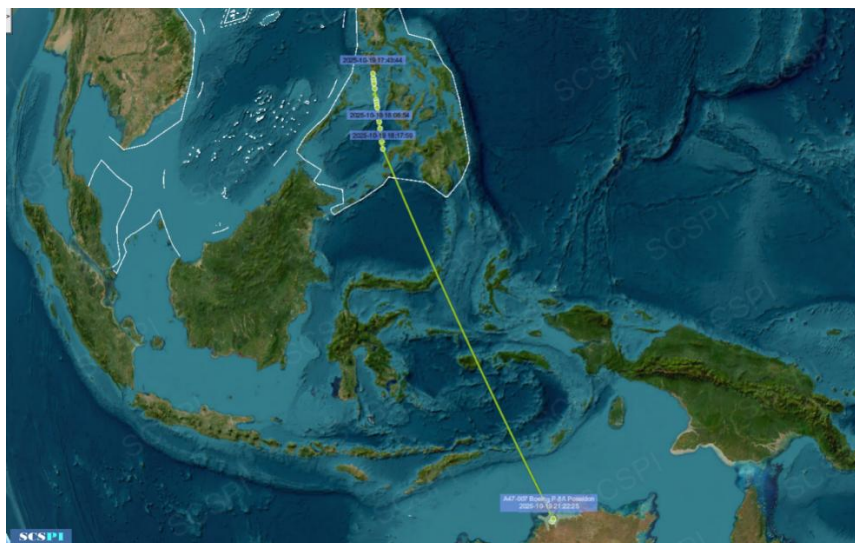


Figure 8: Track of the Australian P-8A on October 19, 2025

¹ Statement on unsafe and unprofessional interaction with People’s Liberation Army–Air Force, Australian Government Defence, February 13, 2025, <https://www.defence.gov.au/news-events/releases/2025-02-13/statement-unsafe-unprofessional-interaction-peoples-liberation-army-air-force>

² Statement on unsafe and unprofessional interaction with People’s Liberation Army–Air Force, Australian Government Defence, October 20, 2025, <https://www.defence.gov.au/news-events/releases/2025-10-20/statement-unsafe-unprofessional-interaction-peoples-liberation-army-air-force>

³ Chinese Jets Intercept Canadian Plane Tracking North Korea Ships, Newsweek, October 7, 2025, <https://www.newsweek.com/chinese-jets-intercept-canadian-plane-tracking-north-korea-ships-10838285>

3. Increased Participation in Exercises and Drills

Compared to previous years, extra-regional countries escalated their involvement in large-scale military drills notably in the Western Pacific in 2025. Particularly, some European countries promoted interoperability and collective deterrence through dominating or participating in multilateral drills with larger scale and wider participation via CSG deployments.

From February 8 to 18, 2025, the French-led MLDE Pacific Steller 2025 was held in the Philippine Sea, gathering FS *Charles de Gaulle*, USS *Carl Vinson*, and JS *Kaga*. The 3 CSGs engaged in high-intensity anti-submarine, anti-surface, and anti-air warfare training. In contrast to sporadic European participation in past Western Pacific exercises and drills, the drill marked the first instance of high-level integration between European CSGs and regional partners, significantly enhancing interoperability.

From November 10 to 18, Malabar 2025 led by the US, Australia, India, and Japan under the QUAD framework took place in the waters around Guam. JS *Kaga*, HMAS *Ballarat*, and the Indian Navy's INS *Sahyadri* (F49) cooperated on anti-submarine warfare, maritime replenishment, and advanced tactics. Exercise Malabar has traditionally been held in the Indian Ocean and around Australia. But in 2025, the emphasis shifted towards projecting into the Western Pacific,

strengthening operational coordination between extra-regional and regional partners.

In 2025, France (February), India (August), and New Zealand (October) participated for the first time in the Multilateral Maritime Cooperation Activity (MMCA) with the Philippines. In September, the first non-US-led MMCA involving the Philippines, Australia, and Canada occurred, signaling the enhanced independent coordination capabilities between extra-regional countries and regional partners in the Western Pacific region.

III. Objectives

The military activities of extra-regional countries such as the UK, France, Canada, and Australia in the Western Pacific differ fundamentally from those of the US military. Most of them have neither substantive geopolitical conflicts with China, nor capabilities to mount a significant military challenge in the region.

Apart from coordinating with US operations, their primary objectives are to serve diplomatic ends and to uphold the “rules-based international order.”¹ The motives and objectives of their military activities (including non-US allies like India) can be broadly categorized into 4 types, with specific priorities varying by country:

1. Capitalizing on Hotspots and Asserting Presence

Currently, the Western Pacific is the world’s most economically developed region and a focal point of great power competition. It is also home to hotspots such as the Korean Peninsula, the Taiwan Strait, and the South China Sea. Consequently, major global powers are actively displaying their presence, including military presence, in the region. This is particularly evident among US allies; regardless of their actual capabilities, most exhibit a paternalistic mindset and historical hubris,

¹ 胡波：《如何看待英法等美国区域外盟友加强在西太平洋地区的军事存在？》，《现代舰船》，2025年第9期。

viewing themselves as duty-bound to uphold the “rules-based international order.” For instance, France positions itself as a resident Indo-Pacific power by virtue of its overseas territories, viewing its military engagement as a manifestation of strategic autonomy. Likewise, the UK continues to advance its “Global Britain” initiative, with the aim of maintaining its influence in the Indo-Pacific region. Therefore, whether driven by geopolitical calculation or public opinion, asserting a military presence in the region is an attractive policy choice. Furthermore, these extra-regional countries incorporate the security of distant waters into their own economic security agendas, citing the maintenance of open maritime lanes as a primary justification.

In September, 2025, more than 35 countries, including the US, Australia, the UK, Greece, the Netherlands, Japan and the Philippines, held a ministerial-level conference with the theme of “the realization of a secure and stable maritime domain upheld by consistent cooperation” to boost the freedom and openness of the South China Sea, and reinforce the freedom of navigation and overflight globally as well as unimpeded trade through international coordination.¹ Among countries involved, Australia serves as a prime example. Viewing the Western Pacific as an extension of its strategic periphery, Canberra not only emphasizes the necessity of “assured”

¹ Reinforcing Cooperation to Achieve a Secure and Stable Maritime Domain, U.S. Department of State, September 25, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2025/09/reinforcing-cooperation-to-achieve-a-secure-and-stable-maritime-domain>

air and maritime access but also actively seeks to advance its security, political, and economic interests in these waters.¹ In November 2025, the Australian Defence Minister explicitly designated the security of shipping lanes in the South and East China Seas as a core national interest, declaring that the Australian Defence Force would respond to the challenge of China as “biggest military build-up in the world today” to safeguard these vital trade routes.² Similarly, the EU has repeatedly stressed the need for an open, rules-based security architecture. By focusing on capacity building and an enhanced naval footprint, the EU aims to strengthen maritime security governance and secure sea lines of communication.³ Germany, despite limited investment in long-range power projection, undertakes highly symbolic actions at critical junctures—a delicate balancing act between its economic ties with China, domestic political pressures, and international security obligations. For example, *Germany’s Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific (2020)* prominently noted that as a major exporting country, Germany has a high degree of sensitivity regarding the openness of maritime routes.⁴

¹ 许少民：《国家利益、威胁认知与澳大利亚对华政策的重置》，《外交评论》，2020年第5期，第72-76页。

² Kirsty Needham, “China’s military build-up demands response, Australia defence minister says,” November 4, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/chinas-military-build-up-demands-response-australia-defence-minister-says-2025-11-03/>.

³ European Commission, “The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” September, 2021, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_2021_24_1_en.pdf.

⁴ the Federal Government, “Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific,” August, 2020, <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/resource/blob/2380514/f9784f7e3b3fa1bd7c5446d274a4169e/200901-indo-pazifik-leitlinien--1--data.pdf>.

20 [Report on the Military Activities of Non-US Extra-Regional Countries in the Western Pacific in 2025|www.scspi.org](https://www.scspi.org)

2. Strengthening Relations with Regional Countries

Diplomacy is one of the three main duties of a navy (alongside combat and law enforcement), and warships serve as mobile “sovereign territory” and natural diplomatic platforms. The UK’s *Integrated Review Refresh 2023* continued and refined its “Indo-Pacific Tilt”, proposing that the tilt be achieved primarily through non-military tools such as diplomacy, trade, and technology, accompanied by a modest increase in defense presence, with partnerships like AUKUS serving as key mechanisms.¹ Countries like the UK, France, and the Netherlands have long colonial histories in the region and maintain close military, political, and diplomatic ties with many regional countries. The growing prosperity of the region has witnessed the strengthened economic and political presence of these countries, which naturally leads to deeper military ties. In recent years, European countries seldom involved in Asian security issues, such as Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Norway, and Spain, started to show increasing interest in deploying military assets in the Western Pacific.

This shift is marked by high-profile operations such as participating in joint military drills, transiting the Taiwan Strait and conducting port calls. All these approaches serve to moderately bolster the military presence of relevant countries in a bid to further project their diplomatic and political

¹ UK Cabinet Office. *Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World*, May 16 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-review-refresh-2023-responding-to-a-more-contested-and-volatile-world>.

influence while deepening relations with regional countries. In reality, the military forces deployed by these countries generally lack the capability for high-intensity sustained operations; their primary mission is to pursue diplomatic engagement and partnership network building, with approximately 80% of their actual activities consisting of port calls and symbolic joint exercises.

3. Upholding the “Rules-Based International Order”

The military activities of these extra-regional countries, particularly US allies, in China’s peripheral waters and the broader Western Pacific are closely centered around the discourse of “upholding the rules-based international order”. For example, when the UK and Canada explain their warship’ transits through the Taiwan Strait or activities near disputed islands in the South China Sea, they frequently cite UNCLOS provisions regarding “international waters” and “freedom of the high seas”. These countries have reframed their distant-water deployments from “military intervention” into the political language of “providing international public goods”. When the UK’s HMS *Prince of Wales* transited the South China Sea, London explicitly stated that the deployment aimed to uphold “freedom of navigation”. Canada’s Indo-Pacific Strategy similarly emphasizes promoting regional security and maintaining the rules-based order by expanding military presence, intelligence, and cyber capabilities.

France's 2025 Indo-Pacific Strategy document integrates overseas territories, regional cooperation mechanisms, sovereign partnerships, and maritime security projects into a unified framework, emphasizing the enhancement of regional security and governance capabilities through cooperation and project-based tools.¹

4. Supporting US Strategy and Operations

From the “Pivot to Asia” and “Rebalance to the Asia-Pacific” to the current “Indo-Pacific Strategy”, the aforementioned extra-regional countries have responded actively to US strategies. To this end, the strengthening of military deployments in the region and enhancing interactions with US forces have become an inherent part of this alignment. To support the US's deterrent strategy against China, these countries have not only conducted military operations, but also occasionally made provocative statements. For instance, on 27 July 2025, UK Secretary of State for Defence John Healey declared in Australia that should conflicts erupt in the Taiwan Strait, Britain would be ready to fight in the Pacific region.² When releasing its Indo-Pacific Strategy, Canada explicitly proposed investing resources to strengthen its naval presence and increase military participation in regional exercises to promote long-term security

¹ French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. France's Indo-Pacific Strategy 2025, https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/france_s_indo-pacific_strategy_2025_cle04bb17.pdf.

² Britain 'ready to fight' over Taiwan, Defence Secretary suggests, the Telegraph, July 7, 2025, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2025/07/27/britain-ready-to-fight-over-taiwan-china-john-healey/>

and prosperity. At the implementation level, Canada's strategic documents and subsequent assessments emphasize improving annual deployments and participation in multilateral exercises through mechanisms like Operation HORIZON, advancing both 'presence' and 'interoperability'.¹ A December 2025 statement by the UK Ministry of Defence noted that AUKUS had entered the "delivery phase" following the US completion of internal reviews. The statement reiterated Britain's investment and resolve regarding nuclear submarine infrastructure and advanced technology cooperation, underscoring their significance for Indo-Pacific deterrence and partner interoperability.²

However, even for the UK, its operational role in support of the US military is relatively limited; it serves more to "show participation" and boost morale, yielding greater diplomatic and strategic impact. Considering diplomatic and strategic effects, especially given the "quantity anxiety" regarding US military platforms, the US certainly welcomes the military presence of allies like the UK in the Western Pacific to help compensate for its own presence gaps. While allied activities help fill gaps in peacetime presence, their military utility and capabilities would be far more constrained in a scenario of high-end competition or actual conflict.

¹ Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada. Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy at Three, September 29 2025, <https://www.asiapacific.ca/publication/canadas-indo-pacific-strategy-at-three>.

² UK Ministry of Defence. UK 'All In' on AUKUS Submarine and Tech Delivery, December 12 2025, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-all-in-on-aukus-submarine-and-tech-delivery-as-partnership-powers-full-steam-ahead>.

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IV. Trends

Currently, considering the Russia-Ukraine War and disputes over Greenland, the Trans-Atlantic partnership is undergoing a profound realignment. With military resources severely stretched by geopolitical crises in the Middle East and other regions, extra-regional countries including the UK, France, Canada, and Australia are focusing on reevaluating and reestablishing their ties with China. However, it remains to be seen whether these factors could make them pragmatic and low-profile in consideration of their military presence and activities. Looking ahead, past policy inertia and emerging trends will likely intertwine to shape future choices:

First, the trend towards multilateralization and institutionalization is poised to deepen further. In recent years, with Japan and the Philippines serving as pivots, extra-regional countries have established diverse multilateral mechanisms regarding security cooperation, exemplified by frameworks such as the Quad (US-Japan-Australia-India) and the US-Japan-Australia-Philippines grouping. It is believed that the institutionalization of defence cooperation between NATO and countries like Japan, one of the US's allies in the Asia-Pacific, will continue. Meanwhile, military relationships between the Philippines and countries like the UK, France, Canada and Australia have also been

strengthened significantly. Furthermore, an increasing number of countries have started to participate in the MMCA, an initiative aimed at countering China spearheaded by the Philippines. On November 2, 2025, the Philippines signed a Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) with Canada, while negotiations for similar agreements with the UK, France and Germany have also reached various stages. Once concluded, these agreements will provide a legal basis for the military presence of relevant extra-regional countries in the Philippines, allowing them to secure a strategic hub for military activities in the Western Pacific. Looking ahead, these countries are expected to continue leveraging Japan and the Philippines as primary pivots to expand the scope and capabilities of their intelligence, operations, and interoperability within the region.

Second, declaratory actions are likely to be intensified. Against the backdrop of US strategic adjustments and its downplaying of ideological and regulatory discrepancies, countries such as the UK, France, Canada, and Australia, which view themselves as standard-bearers of multilateralism and the rules-based international order, may deliberately highlight their specific roles and missions in the region. For instance, the extent of provocations by Australian and Canadian forces near the Paracels and the Chinese mainland airspace has even surpassed that of the US in recent years, with Canadian warships emerging as the main non-US force transiting the Taiwan Strait. Even if Washington downplay its interest in

such operations, alongside the significant recovery of bilateral relations between China and the aforementioned countries, these operations are unlikely to cease. Instead, driven by policy inertia and an obsession with their self-perceived role as ‘guardian’ of the rules, such operations may well be intensified in the future.

Third, the frequency, intensity and scale of military activities will undergo appropriate adjustments. Australia increasingly emphasized that the waters surrounding China are vital to its core national interests, while France believes that military operations conducted in the Indo-Pacific region, including the South China Sea, should be considered an embodiment of strategic autonomy. Consequently, spurred by the US, both are expected to sustain combat-oriented military operations and deepen institutionalized cooperations with countries within and outside the region. Nevertheless, a great number of countries may choose to reduce their military presence in the region or adopt a more low-profile approach. In December 2025, the UK Ministry of Defence confirmed that a major restructuring of military training will begin from 2026 onwards, with the Royal Navy also set to scale back its operations near China.¹ Given their limited strategic interests and fiscal constraints, such countries will likely reduce their military activities in China’s periphery, while sustaining their

¹ George Allison, “UK to scale back military training exercises outside Europe,” UKDJ, Dec. 9, 2025, <https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/uk-to-scale-back-military-training-exercises-outside-europe/>.

investment in diplomatic resources. European countries such as the UK, France, and Germany, along with Canada and other US allies, have suffered significantly under the Trump administration's so-called "Donroe Doctrine". As the logic of continuing to align with and support the US in the Western Pacific becomes increasingly untenable, these countries may appropriately scale back their military activities in the East and South China Seas and the Taiwan Strait. For instance, the visit by Canadian PM Mark Carney to Beijing in early 2026, aimed at mending and bolstering Sino-Canadian relations and navigating the "new world order" in concert with China, signals a potential shift.¹ In this context, the intensity of provocation in their regional military operations may well subside.

¹ Alisha Rahaman Sarkar, "Canada's Mark Carney refers to 'new world order' during historic visit to China," 16 January 2026, <https://www.independent.co.uk/asia/china/china-canada-mark-carney-xi-jinping-trade-talks-b2901628.html>.

V. Conclusion

As the global maritime structure and international maritime order are facing “profound changes unseen in centuries”, the Western Pacific remains a region of contradiction for outsiders like the UK, France, Canada, and Australia, seemingly so close, yet physically distant. Undoubtedly, apart from reasonable pursuit of interests, including passage security and other political and economic interests, within the region, these countries also possess historical sentiment. However, whether measured by distance or capability, the geopolitical hotspots in this region lie far beyond the capacity that these countries possess, despite Australia’s view that it is not an extra-regional country.

No matter how nuanced the rhetoric employed by these countries regarding their military operations in the Western Pacific, China is undoubtedly their primary target. Although there are indeed divergences in terms of maritime rules between China and these countries, these issues should be resolved through dialogue, discussion and coordination, rather than by military means. More regrettably, such divergences have been politicized and even demonized. Their policies are predicated on the so-called claims that “China seeks to control the South China Sea”, or “endanger maritime passage”, among other exaggerated speculations. Therefore, it is unwise and irrational for these countries, driven by

groundless and imaginary threats, to project military power from afar to the Western Pacific at the risk of conflicts with China.

Consequently, extra-regional powers such as the UK, France, Canada, and Australia are expected to recalibrate their military engagement in the Western Pacific in a more rational and pragmatic manner. Regarding regional hotspots, they should place their trust in the collective will and wisdom of regional actors to manage crises and disputes peacefully, avoiding overreaction and unnecessary anxiety.

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