

Two Chinese-Russian Naval Task Forces Enter South China Sea for Drills



Sovershenny as seen from a PLA Navy warship (Courtesy PLA)

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Russia and China have picked the contested waters of the South China Sea to conduct their annual joint naval drills, and the exercises are now getting under way.

On Sunday, a flotilla of Russian Pacific Fleet and PLA Navy warships left Zhanjiang, China, headed for the South China Sea. Participants include the Russian frigates *Gromkiy* and *Rezkij* and the PLA Navy vessels *Nanning*, *Xianning* and *Dali*. They will conduct live-fire exercises, joint air defense drills and practice search and rescue - along with a drill to "destroy" a simulated enemy submarine.

Separately, the Russian corvette *Sovershenny* and the PLA Navy warships *Yinchuan* and *Hengshui* departed the East China Sea, transited the Osumi

Strait, sailed south to the Luzon Strait and entered the South China Sea via the Balintang Channel.

Counting other PLA Navy vessels, the arrival of these two joint task forces means that there are about 10 Chinese and Russian naval vessels operating in the South China Sea this week, according to state outlet Global Times. The PLA has also dispatched its biggest hospital ship - the *Silk Road Ark*, making its maiden voyage - to "better serve operational demand and battle readiness" in the same region. The Chinese carrier *Shandong* has also been spotted conducting launch and recovery exercises in the Philippine Sea, on the other side of Luzon.

Global Times emphasized that it would be "totally baseless" to connect the joint Chinese-Russian operation with China's recent disagreement with NATO; the Western defense alliance recently identified China as a "decisive enabler" of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, drawing Beijing's ire.