

# Australia, Canada, and U.S. conduct multilateral operations in South China Sea



A Royal Canadian Air Force Super Puma assigned to Royal Canadian Navy Halifax-class frigate HMCS Charlottetown (FFH 339) prepares to land on the flight deck of U.S. Navy Whidbey Island-class dock landing ship USS Ashland (LSD 48) during a multilateral exercise with the Royal Australian Navy and Royal Canadian Armed Forces in the South China Sea, April 18, 2026. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Maliq J. Martin)

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**SOUTH CHINA SEA** – Ships from the Royal Australian Navy, Royal Canadian Armed Forces, and U.S. Navy conducted multilateral operations in support of a free and open Indo-

Pacific in the South China Sea, April 12-18.

Participants included Royal Australian Navy Anzac-class frigate HMAS Toowoomba (FFH 156), Royal Canadian Air Force Super Puma helicopter, Royal Canadian Navy Halifax-class frigate HMCS Charlottetown (FFH 339), and U.S. Navy Whidbey Island-class amphibious dock landing ship USS Ashland (LSD 48) with embarked Marines from Task Force Ashland.

During the exercise, ships conducted tactical maneuvers, helicopter cross-decks, and personnel exchange during the combined transit through the South China Sea.

“We embrace any chance to engage with our allies and friends in the region to learn from each other and build upon our strong relationships,” said Cmdr. Adam Peebles, commanding officer of Ashland. “These exercises provide an opportunity to increase interoperability, information-sharing, and access with our allies and partners across the globe. The Sailors and Marines of Task Force Ashland are dedicated to supporting regional security and committed to ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific.”

This operation builds on numerous other engagements, such as Exercise Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2024, where the three U.S. allies were part of 29 nations training to foster and sustain cooperative relationships among participants critical to ensuring the safety of sea lanes and security on the world’s oceans.

Multilateral operations such as this provide valuable opportunities to improve combined readiness and promote peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific. The U.S. Navy regularly operates alongside our allies in the Indo-Pacific region as a demonstration of our shared long-term commitment to the region.

Ashland and embarked Marines from Task Force Ashland are a flexible crisis response force, purpose-built to integrate with allies and partners in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific. Their forward deployment to U.S. 7th Fleet demonstrates the unwavering U.S. commitment to regional security and stability.

U.S. 7th Fleet, the U.S. Navy's largest forward-deployed numbered fleet, routinely interacts and operates with allies and partners in preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific.