

The US Navy just sent Russia and China powerful messages with aircraft-carrier shows of force

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US Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Brian M. Brooks Aircraft from the Freedom Fighters of Carrier Air Wing 7 flying in formation above the Nimitz-class aircraft carriers USS Abraham Lincoln and USS Harry S. Truman.

- **The US Navy carried out two high-profile aircraft-carrier training events in key waters that send messages to China and Russia.**
- **The US has identified China and Russia as its great rivals and has said it intends to build military capacity to thwart their military ambitions.**
- **The US Navy hadn't been taking an active role in checking these two countries, but recently it made big statements.**
- **Exercises including strong US allies and F-35C stealth jet fighters no doubt raised eyebrows in Moscow and Beijing.**

The US Navy carried out two high-profile aircraft-carrier training events in key waters that send messages to China and Russia, the US's two main competitors and the only countries close to matching the US's military might.

The US Navy's Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group joined Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force's Escort Flotilla 4 Battle Group to conduct joint military exercises in the hotly contested South China Sea on Friday, [the Navy said](#).

Japan sent the Kaga, a small aircraft carrier technically classified as a destroyer, along with guided-missile destroyers to train with the US's only forward-deployed aircraft carrier, the Reagan.

The training advanced the US and Japan's vision of a "[free and open Indo-Pacific](#)," a [key part of US strategy](#) to prevent Beijing from tightening its grip on the region by further militarizing the South China Sea.

But beyond just teaching US and Japanese carriers how to fight together, Washington sent Beijing a message that it won't be pushed out of the South China Sea and that if a fight comes, it won't stand alone.

China, which illegally annexed about 90% of the South China Sea and has sought to unilaterally dictate who can use the resource-rich waterway that sees trillions of dollars in annual trade, has struggled to make allies in the region. The US has moved to counter China's attempts at hegemony by deepening ties with Australia, Japan, and India.

On top of that, the US just showed for the first time ever that it can update its supercarriers with a stealth aircraft perfect for taking out island fortresses like Beijing's South China Sea holdings: [the F-35C](#).

[Russia checked by the 2nd Fleet](#)



Lockheed Martin/Andrew McMurtrieAn F-35C conducting a catapult takeoff from the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Half a world away, the USS Abraham Lincoln and USS Harry S. Truman carriers did joint training including the F-35C for the first time. But the exercise most likely had an additional audience in mind: Russia.

The [US recently decided to bring back the Second Fleet](#), a Navy command that countered the threat from the Soviet Union and was stood down in 2011 when it seemed as if the Russia threat had waned.

As Russia's navy increasingly menaces the US and looks to assert itself as a powerful navy in the Mediterranean and elsewhere, the US has again found the need to defend its home waters of the near Atlantic.

Russia, which [has only one inactive, shoddy aircraft carrier](#), cannot hope to compete with the US's multiple carriers and advanced aircraft.

The US has [recently reshuffled its schedule of aircraft-carrier deployments](#) to have more ships present to keep the pressure on Russia and China. New US national defense and strategy documents from President Donald Trump's administration outline a decided shift in US focus from a post-Cold War mentality - when the US's enemies were small, lightly armed cells of terrorists hidden in hills - to [a full-on competition among world powers, as it was in the world wars](#).

Russia and China have taken notice, with [Russian ships exercising in the Mediterranean](#) - waters they wouldn't have normally reached before Russia's incursion into Syria in 2015 - and Chinese ships [challenging the right of US ships and planes](#) to pass through international spaces.

Also in 2015, the US suspended "freedom of navigation" patrols, its main way of checking Chinese ambition in the South China Sea.

But now the Navy is taking those challenges seriously.

"We are the best Navy in the world, and given the complex and competitive environment we are in, we can't take anything for granted or settle for the status quo," Rear Adm. John Wade, the commander of the Abraham Lincoln Strike Group, [said in a Navy press release](#).

With a renewed mission and the world's first carrier-launched stealth aircraft, the US has sent a clear signal to its main military rivals that US Navy power is back and on the move.

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