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U.S. war games in Pacific seek global participation in imperialist maneuvers

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Every two years, the Indo-Pacific Command Center of the United States convenes the largest maritime war exercises on the planet. With over 35,000 troops participating, 29 nations, 46 naval surface ships, 4 nuclear submarines, and a multitude of air and ground forces, the Rim of the Pacific military exercises, or RIMPAC, is one of the most destructive training events globally.

Through these exercises, the U.S. consolidates its control of the Pacific. RIMPAC began as an annual training exercise in 1971 and became bi-annual in 1974. Since it began, some of the historically worst human rights abusers, like the U.S., Australia, Canada, and Israel, have participated in the exercise. The U.S. has a long history of using the Hawaiian islands for target practice. In 1965, the U.S. Navy [detonated a](#)

[bomb on the Kaho'olawe](#), the equivalent of 500 tons of dynamite, breaking the island's water table and carpeting the island with unexploded ordinances.

Hawai'i was illegally seized by American sugar planters in 1893 who were supported by the U.S. military and sought the Hawaiian harbor of Pu'uloa (Pearl Harbor) for a coaling station. In 1898, the U.S. Congress, which had actually lost the treaty of annexation, illegally took Hawai'i by joint resolution. Hawai'i has remained under illegal occupation by the U.S. and its military since then.

U.S. militarism destroys our land through RIMPAC

RIMPAC, as a symptom of the U.S. empire, has immense environmental and cultural ramifications. Geopolitically, the exercises are used to control trade routes, train genocidal regimes, and posture against China. Since Obama's "Pivot to Asia" strategy, the U.S. has shifted from cold war tactics of diplomacy and arms procurement to hot war tactics of aggressive invasion and unchecked military build-up. RIMPAC is used to test weapons and military technology for weapons manufacturers.

Between San Diego to Hawai'i, havoc is wrought upon both our land and sea through the U.S. military and their war games. They sink ships, carry out mock marine invasions of urban and jungle warfare, and engage in live fire training in conservation zones that cause fires across thousands of acres and threaten endangered species. All of these "routine" exercises take place in areas that are cultural and ancestral sites of deep value.

The U.S. military's largest base in our islands is Pōhakuloa, a sacred region of Hawai'i Island, thousands of acres utilized as a firing range to train militaries in the tactics of warfare, suppression, and invasion. Mākua Valley was a former civilian town turned into a firing range between World War II and 2004, which filled the valley with unexploded ordinances, white phosphorus, and other [forever chemicals](#).

The U.S. Marine base at Mōkapu is built upon one of the most ancient villages in Hawai'i where residents were expelled to make room for the base. In addition to the massive pollution and raw sewage spills the base puts out into the surrounding ocean, it is also a sacred burial site where many iwi kūpuna (ancestral bones) are buried near the coast.

RIMPAC also threatens vulnerable and delicate ecosystems and our vast oceanic nature reserves which are restricted conservation zones except for the military. The U.S. Navy has faced multiple lawsuits for the death of whales from [mass beachings to escape naval sonar](#), multiple helicopters and planes have [crashed onto our beaches and ocean](#), and sea turtles [lose access to their traditional nesting grounds](#) due to the practice of amphibious assaults on our beaches. The U.S. military is the largest driver of the climate crisis and RIMPAC's environmental impact only adds to this catastrophe by risking the livelihood of ocean nations through repeated missiles, explosions, and heavy metal waste being driven into the Pacific as a result of these exercises. Therefore, RIMPAC is in direct violation of its own Marine Species Awareness Training (MSAT) and its own Protective Measures and Assessment Protocols (PMAP) which require that the Navy be in compliance with the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species and ensure mitigation to prevent any injury, behavioral change, or death. Each year RIMPAC is planned, the U.S. Navy Indo-Pacific Command requests exemption to these laws from NOAA and the Department of Defense, with extraordinary requests to allow incidental "takes" (deaths) of marine mammals in the millions. There is also no limit to the number of marine birds it can take during the exercises. RIMPAC threatens no less than 12 endangered species.

RIMPAC: Exporting violence

Besides its obscene show of environmental destruction, RIMPAC supports the repression of Indigenous cultures throughout the world by actively training regimes

that are currently inflicting genocide or other human rights violations on its Indigenous peoples. RIMPAC plays out various “future scenarios of potential terrorists.” In 2022, RIMPAC enacted a [pretend invasion of North Korea](#), going house to house executing a regime change operation with houses decorated with pictures of Kim Jong Un. Prior to that, in 2016, RIMPAC used the Hawaiian Islands to play out a scenario of imaginary so-called “enemy states” seeking to [expand power](#) that played counter to Western influences. And of course, there is the constant saber-rattling and escalation against China which is used as a scapegoat by the new U.S. Cold War.

RIMPAC also brings with it a significant increase in gender-based violence. Studies have shown a significant [leap in human trafficking and sexual exploitation](#), especially of young Native Hawaiian girls every year. In 2022, a former U.S. Naval petty officer was [sentenced to 20 years in prison](#) for the [sex trafficking of Native Hawaiian girls](#). The influx of more than 25,000 international military personnel into Hawai‘i ensures a constant market for the exploitation of women and gender non-conforming people.

RIMPAC exposes enduring U.S. military dominance

This year’s exercises are notable given the current geopolitical context. RIMPAC is taking place amid the ninth month of Israel’s genocidal war in Gaza. This war has isolated the U.S. and its junior partner Israel and united much of the world in the demand for a ceasefire and in opposition to the West’s murderous violence against Palestinians and oppressed people across the world.

However, some of the voices that have been strongest on the world stage in condemning Israel and the U.S. today have sent their Armed Forces to participate alongside the U.S. and Israel in RIMPAC. Countries such as Colombia, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, and Indonesia are participating and have either closed their Israeli embassies or publicly renounced Israel for its ongoing genocide of the Palestinian

people. While the mood in the Global South is one of challenging Western dominance and hypocrisy, challenging [U.S. military supremacy as its bloc leads spending at 74.3%](#) proves to be harder.

Yet, these war games are not mere pastimes and excursions; they are a declaration of national values and a statement of political intention. The strategies and tactics, weapons, and technologies practiced and mastered at RIMPAC are utilized by participant nations for weaponization at home. Be it for the worst form of atrocities such as genocide or repression of any form of resistance to the state or to control “free trade” routes to ensure capital continues to move for the benefit of the international capitalist elite. In other words, RIMPAC trains governments that have a long history of developing repressive techniques to control their colonies and are now deploying those same techniques on its citizens. As with all imperialist activities, it is up to the social and people’s movements of the respective impacted nations to take a stand and reject this continuous arming and military expansion of our collective oppressors.

The Hawaiian people stand arm in arm with the peoples of the world to demand an end to these war games and to sharpen our fight against U.S. imperialism and colonialism, which today is the biggest threat to the survival of our planet—especially those of us from island nations in the “strategic” Pacific. It is people’s movements who will mobilize to remind the governments of those participating nations that they must withdraw from this exercise, end their collaboration with the Israeli Occupation Forces, and stand firm upon their declarations at the United Nations and other various forums. Together, we can build a better world.

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