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Navigating the Tides
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Security: An In-Depth
Analysis of RIMPAC 2024 and
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Abstract

RIMPAC (Rim of the Pacific Exercise) is the world's largest multinational naval exercise, hosted biennially by the United States Navy's Pacific Fleet. Since its initiation in 1971, it has become a key platform for demonstrating naval strength, fostering cooperation, and promoting peace and security in the Pacific. The 2024 edition, themed "Partners: Integrated and Prepared," saw unprecedented participation, highlighting shifting global and regional strategic dynamics. This article provides an in-depth analysis of RIMPAC 2024, covering the diverse exercises, technological advancements, and strategic themes, including the growing focus on cyber warfare and unmanned systems. It also explores India's evolving role, the global reactions from key players like China and Russia, and the broader impact on international relations.

Keywords: RIMPAC 2024, Multinational Naval Exercise, Maritime security, Cyber warfare, International relations

Introduction

RIMPAC, or the Rim of Pacific Exercise, represents the most significant multinational naval drill globally. The United States Navy's Pacific Fleet hosts this event every two years (IPD Forum, 2024). Since its inception in 1971, RIMPAC has served as a platform for navies from across the globe to come together to demonstrate naval strength, cooperation, and a commitment to peace and security in the Pacific region.

This year's RIMPAC theme, "*Partners: Integrated and Prepared*," has drawn unprecedented participation, with more nations and naval assets involved than ever (PTI, 2024). RIMPAC 2024 captured the attention of global powers and regional actors alike, with its scope and scale influencing the shifting dynamics of international strategy.

As RIMPAC 2024 unfolded, it showcased various naval exercises, from amphibious operations to humanitarian assistance missions. The current iteration of the exercise was designed to enhance interoperability among the participating forces and prepare for multiple

potential scenarios (U.S. Pacific Fleet, 2024). The exercise also underscored the growing importance of emerging technologies and strategies in maritime warfare, including cyber warfare and unmanned systems, reflecting the evolving nature of naval operations.

This issue brief delves into the details of RIMPAC 2024, exploring the participating nations, the exercises conducted, and the underlying strategic themes that defined this year's event. It also examines India's evolving role in RIMPAC, its motivations for participation, the broader implications for its maritime strategy, and the global reactions to RIMPAC 2024 from China, Russia and the rest of the world. The potential impact of the exercise on international relations has also been examined. Finally, the outcomes of RIMPAC 2024 for future security initiatives have been assessed, providing a comprehensive and in-depth analysis.

Participants and Exercises in RIMPAC 2024

The 2024 RIMPAC event included participation from 29 countries, featuring more than 40 surface vessels, three submarines, 140 land-based military units, over 150 aircraft, and 25,000 service members, all operating within the Pacific region (U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, 2024). The participants in this year's event included long-standing allies of the United States, such as Japan, Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Additionally, other participants included Colombia, Brunei, Chile, Ecuador, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, the Philippines, South Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Tonga, Germany, Belgium, Brazil, Denmark, France, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, and Sri Lanka. This diverse roster reflects the exercise's global strategic focus (IPD Forum, 2024a).

RIMPAC 2024 featured various exercises designed to test the full spectrum of naval warfare capabilities. These included traditional exercises such as anti-submarine warfare (ASW), amphibious landings, maritime interdiction, and gunnery practice (ET Online, 2024). However, the 2024 edition significantly emphasised newer domains of warfare, particularly cyber and space, reflecting the changing nature of global conflicts (Letman, 2024).

One of the highlights of RIMPAC 2024 was the large-scale amphibious operation conducted off the coast of Hawaii. The exercise simulated a complex, multi-domain battle scenario, integrating land, sea, air, and cyber operations. The amphibious operation underscored the importance of joint force integration and the ability to conduct large-scale, coordinated actions across multiple domains—an essential capability in modern warfare (Villasenor, 2024).

Another significant aspect of RIMPAC 2024 was the focus on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations. Given the increasing frequency of natural disasters in the Indo-Pacific region, the capability to conduct effective HADR operations has become a critical component of naval capability. RIMPAC 2024 included a simulated disaster response scenario involving coordinated efforts from multiple nations to provide relief and support in the aftermath of a fictional typhoon. The exercise aimed to enhance participating forces' ability to conduct HADR operations and strengthen regional cooperation in times of crisis (Murkowski, 2024).

In addition to these traditional and emerging focus areas, RIMPAC 2024 also emphasised the role of unmanned systems in maritime operations. Various unmanned systems, including surface vehicles (USVs), underwater vehicles (UUVs), and aerial vehicles (UAVs), were showcased during the exercise. These systems were tested in various scenarios, including surveillance, mine countermeasures, and anti-submarine warfare, highlighting their growing importance in naval strategy (Dangwal, 2024).

Historical Context: Participation in Earlier RIMPACs

Since its inception, RIMPAC has seen the participation of a wide range of nations, reflecting the changing geopolitical landscape over the decades. The United States, Canada, and Australia have been consistent participants since the early years, with Japan and South Korea joining soon after. These core participants have been central to developing RIMPAC as a premier naval exercise.

In recent years, however, the exercise has seen the inclusion of new participants, reflecting the growing magnitude of the Indo-Pacific region in global security. For example, India first participated in RIMPAC in 2014, reflecting its increasing interest in the Pacific theatre. Similarly, China was part of the 2014 and 2016 editions, though it has been excluded from subsequent exercises due to rising tensions with the United States and its allies. In RIMPAC 2024, a member of the Chilean Navy, Commodore Alberto Guerrero, served as the Deputy Commander of the Combined Task Force (CTF) for the first time (Allison, 2024).

The expansion of RIMPAC participation over the years underscores the exercise's role in advancing international cooperation and addressing emerging security challenges. As more nations join the exercise, RIMPAC has continued to evolve, incorporating new perspectives and capabilities into its framework.

India's Role in RIMPAC

India first participated in RIMPAC in 2014, marking a substantial step in its engagement with the Pacific region. This participation is part of India's broader plan to enhance its maritime presence and bolster its naval strength in light of the increasing geopolitical significance of the Indo-Pacific. India's decision to join RIMPAC is driven by several factors, including the need to enhance its maritime security, increase its operational capabilities, and strengthen its relationships with key partners, particularly the United States.

In RIMPAC 2024, India has demonstrated its commitment to multilateral naval cooperation by deploying naval assets like the multi-stealth frigate, INS Shivalik (Siddiqui, 2024) and P-81 maritime patrol aircraft (ET Online, 2024). The INS Shivalik, built by the Indian Navy, was commissioned in 2010 and has an armament comprising Russian, Indian and Western weapon systems. The P-81, on the other hand, is produced by Boeing Defense, Space & Security and is used for maritime surveillance and patrol. At the RIMPAC 2024, these assets were involved in various exercises, including anti-submarine warfare, maritime interdiction, and amphibious operations.

India's objectives in RIMPAC 2024 have been multi-faceted. First, India has sought to enhance its interoperability with other participating nations, particularly the United States and its allies. This is crucial for India as it aims to build a more robust and capable naval force that could operate effectively in coalition environments.

Second, in the 2022 multi-agency Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) exercise 'Samanvay', the Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh stated that India has emerged as a regional player and net security provider in the Indo-Pacific as its ability to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief to its citizens and regional partners (PIB, 2022). By participating in exercises like RIMPAC, India aims to increase its credibility as a net security provider in the region, which signals its willingness to contribute to its security and stability.

Third, India seeks to gain valuable experience in new areas of naval warfare, particularly in cyber and unmanned systems. By participating in exercises focusing on these emerging areas, India can accelerate its learning curve and integrate these capabilities into its naval strategy.

Finally, India's participation in RIMPAC 2024 serves a broader diplomatic purpose. It reinforces India's strategic collaboration with the United States and its allies while sending a

message to China and other regional actors about India's commitment to maintaining a balance of power in the Indo-Pacific.

Global Reactions to RIMPAC 2024

The recently concluded RIMPAC 2024 has sparked several reactions. Experts see the rise of naval exercises as a clear sign of the Indo-Pacific heating up. As maritime exercises like RIMPAC grow, tensions are prone to rise (Beiping, 2024).

China's reaction to RIMPAC 2024 had been predictably cautious, reflecting its concerns about the growing military presence of the United States and its allies in the Indo-Pacific region. While China participated in RIMPAC 2014 and 2016, it had been excluded from subsequent exercises, a decision that had been a source of tension between Beijing and Washington (IPD Forum, 2024c). Beijing views the exclusion of China from RIMPAC 2024 as a deliberate attempt to contain its influence in the region.

During RIMPAC 2024, the USS Tarawa, a decommissioned amphibious assault ship, was sunk in the Pacific as part of the Sink Exercise (SINKEX), a component of RIMPAC. The main objectives of the SINKEX are to test weapon systems on unmanned target ships, train US Navy sailors on modern weapon systems, and collect data that will be put into practice in a multipolar and disputed world (Thomas, 2024).

China sees the sinking of the US amphibious assault ships as a demonstrated plan to counter China's development of large amphibious assault ships and aircraft carriers and their positioning around Taiwan. The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) has authorised three Type 035 amphibious assault ships. According to reports, the Chinese amphibious assault ships resemble the recently sunk USS Tarawa. In response, a spokesperson for China's Ministry of National Defense, Senior Colonel Wu Qian, has stated that the US can't frighten the Chinese by carrying out such military drills (Xuanzun, 2024).

Russia has been somewhat silent on the RIMPAC 2024. On the sidelines of RIMPAC 2024, Russia and China conducted a joint naval exercise called "Joint Sea 2024." The exercise occurred in the South China Sea, near the Chinese port of Zhanjiang. The port is vital because it serves as the headquarters for the PLAN South Sea Fleet (Cash, 2024). The combined naval force conducted various tactical drills during the exercise, involving joint live-fire air and missile defence drills. During the training, the two navies carried out a joint naval patrol that started from South Korea's Jeju Island, through the Osumi Strait to enter the Western Pacific

Ocean and then through the Philippine Sea, ending their patrol in the South China Sea (Mahadzir, 2024).

During the recently concluded Joint Sea 2024, an exercise similar to the sinking of USS Tarawa was carried out—naval crews from the two navies carried out anti-submarine warfare drills. The joint effort involved identifying and destroying a simulated “enemy” submarine using rocket bomb launches in the South China Sea. The navies fired artillery at assigned sea targets, establishing combat readiness and interoperability (Dangwal, 2024b). Despite the “unknown origin” of the enemy submarine in the simulation, it is meant to demonstrate a stated capability to the US.

RIMPAC 2024 has garnered responses from other corners of the world. Many people view RIMPAC as a trojan horse that, while claiming to be conducting humanitarian missions, actually serves to strengthen military collaboration between the US and its allies (Tricontinental, 2024). Additionally, RIMPAC is seen as a means of perpetuating the American empire at the expense of the lives of Hawaii's Indigenous people (Paterson, 2024). Some individuals have called for an end to military exercises (Lund, 2024) and the discontinuation of RIMPAC altogether (BIVN, 2024).

Conclusion

To conclude, RIMPAC 2024 is a powerful demonstration of the shifting dynamics in global maritime strategy. It highlights growing cooperation among Western-aligned nations and intensifying tensions with powers like China and Russia. With record participation and a clear focus on traditional naval warfare and emerging technologies, this year's exercise underscores the increasing importance of the Indo-Pacific region as a critical theatre of global security.

India's involvement further signals its expanding role in the region. It showcases its naval capabilities while strengthening partnerships with key players, particularly the United States. Meanwhile, China's exclusion, critical response, and joint exercises with Russia reflect the deepening rivalries that could shape future regional conflicts.

As RIMPAC evolves, it serves as a platform for nations to carry out various military scenarios, diplomatic signalling, and strategic positioning. While it promotes peace and security among participating allies, it also fuels a broader debate about the militarisation of the Indo-Pacific and the balance of power in this increasingly contested region.

RIMPAC will likely remain a focal point in the Indo-Pacific's geopolitical chessboard, where cooperation and rivalry go hand in hand. This will shape the course of international relations and maritime security for years to come.

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