

Russia, Southeast Asian States Kick Off First Naval Drills Off Indonesia

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The exercises take place amid the Southeast Asian states' tensions with China around its claim of the entire South China Sea. mil.ru

Russia and Southeast Asian states have kicked off military exercises in Indonesia as part of a “new page” in the countries’ strategic partnership, Moscow [said](#) Wednesday.

The Dec. 1-3 drills along the Strait of Malacca on the northeastern coast of Sumatra involve all 10 members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Russia dispatched the large anti-submarine ship Admiral Panteleev for the marine phase of the two-part virtual and marine exercises.

Agence France Presse reported that these were the first ever joint Russian-ASEAN naval exercises.

According to the state-run TASS news agency, Rear Adm. Abdul Rasyid, the Indonesian Navy’s commander of the first fleet, said the maneuvers will “strengthen friendship” and “interaction and mutual understanding” between Russia and ASEAN.

“These exercises are about peace, stability and prosperity in the region,” said Russia’s ambassador to ASEAN Alexander Ivanov.

“We’re opening a new page in our strategic partnership,” added Ivanov, who attended the opening ceremony with Russia’s Ambassador to Indonesia Lyudmila Vorobyova.

The Russian-ASEAN exercises are taking place against the backdrop of the Southeast Asian states’ growing tensions with China around its claim of the entire South China Sea.

Russia has been forging closer ties with China since its relations with Western nations soured after it annexed Ukraine’s Crimea peninsula and is being accused of backing pro-Moscow rebels in the country’s southeast.

In addition to Indonesia, the bloc comprises Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, Malaysia, Myanmar and Brunei.

The countries provided warships or aircraft, AFP reported, while the Philippines took part as a virtual observer.

AFP reported that ASEAN has previously held drills alongside the U.S. and Chinese navies. Indonesia and the United States held their biggest ever annual military exercise — the Garuda Shield — in August.

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