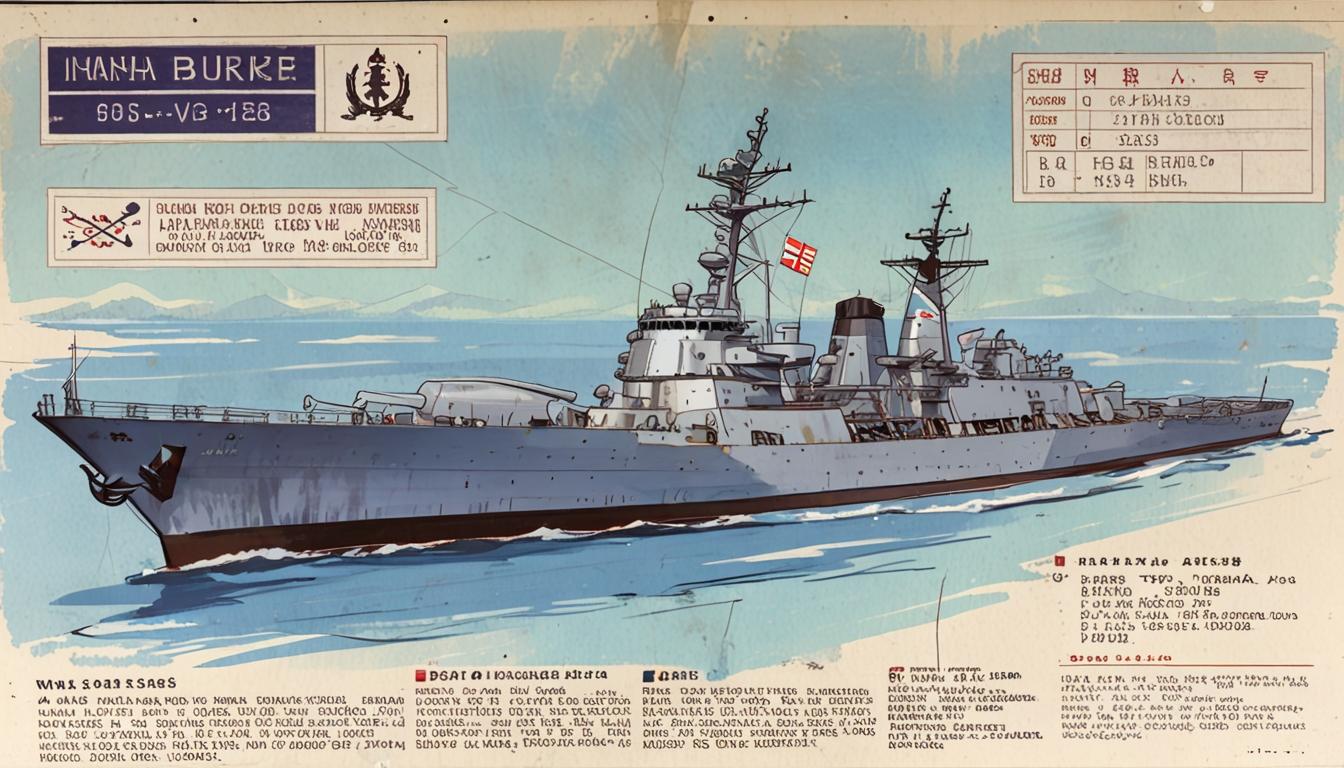
# China labels US and Japanese destroyers as enemy vessels amid rising Indo-Pacific tensions



China has intensified its rhetoric amid ongoing regional tensions by explicitly identifying American and Japanese destroyers as "enemy vessels" during an unusual public display at one of its naval bases. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) took the unprecedented step during an open day event by featuring an information board aboard the Nanjing Type 052D guided-missile destroyer, which operates under the PLA Navy's Eastern Theatre Command.

The sign on the Chinese warship stated that it was capable of targeting "large and medium-sized enemy surface vessels such as the US Arleigh Burke-class and Japan's Atago-class destroyers." Further description highlighted the vessel's ability to launch missiles following "supersonic trajectories, possessing a high penetration probability and accuracy," thereby enhancing the PLA Navy’s maritime dominance. According to the South China Morning Post, this marked the first occasion that any US and Japanese vessels were explicitly labelled as adversaries in peacetime naval displays; prior exhibits had only listed generic missile specifications without naming specific foreign ships.

This announcement coincided with the passage of the USS William P. Lawrence, an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, through the strategically sensitive Taiwan Strait. This area has been a focal point of military posturing, reflecting the increasing strain in Sino-US relations over Taiwan.

In parallel, the Royal Navy’s new £3.5 billion flagship, HMS Prince of Wales, departed Portsmouth on an extensive eight-month deployment to the Far East. HMS Prince of Wales leads a coalition maritime strike group that includes British, Norwegian, and Canadian warships. The group is scheduled to conduct operations in various regions, including the Mediterranean, Middle East, Southeast Asia, Japan, and Australia. Although the UK government has not officially disclosed the precise route for this mission, known as Operation Highmast, naval officials have not ruled out transiting the Taiwan Strait, a move that carries significant strategic implications given the ongoing tensions between China and Taiwan.

Thousands of people gathered at Portsmouth harbour to witness the departure of HMS Prince of Wales. The 65,000-tonne aircraft carrier, the largest ever built for the Royal Navy, was accompanied by the Type 45 destroyer HMS Dauntless. A public spokesman noted the aircraft carrier’s ensign flag was flown at half-mast on its flight deck as a mark of respect following the death of Pope Francis. The strike group will be augmented by two Norwegian ships, the tanker HNoMS Maud and the frigate HNoMS Roald Amundsen, alongside the UK frigate HMS Richmond and the Canadian frigate HMCS Ville de Quebec, which recently sailed from Plymouth. The Royal Fleet Auxiliary tanker RFA Tidespring will also join the group.

The carrier will be supported by a fleet of 18 F-35B jets from the UK, with plans to increase this number to 24 throughout the deployment. Additionally, Merlin Mk2 anti-submarine helicopters, Merlin Mk4 Commando, Wildcat helicopters, and an undisclosed number of T-150 Malloy and Puma drones from Royal Navy Air Stations Culdrose and Yeovilton will be part of the air contingent.

Commodore James Blackmore, who commands the UK Carrier Strike Group, emphasised the readiness and capability of his forces ahead of the deployment. Speaking to The Telegraph, he said, "I will deliver whatever mission I am ordered to go and do – that's my role." He added, "My part of the bargain is being ready for all eventualities from a combat capability, from a defence engagement capability, from a partners and allies capability, so I'm ready to exercise whatever the Government or the Ministry of Defence asks me to do."

The timing of these naval movements and public statements from both Chinese and Western military officials underscores the heightened strategic contest in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly concerning Taiwan's status. Meanwhile, the UK’s deployment represents one of its most significant attempts to assert military presence in this part of the world, signalling its intent to maintain and project influence amid evolving global dynamics.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

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* <https://www.andrewerickson.com/2024/04/pla-military-diplomacy-during-2023/> - Discusses PLA Navy's Gulf of Aden escort missions and joint exercises, but does not directly address named adversary designations.
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