



US-Japan Alliance Digest

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Headlines:

- US & Japanese forces conduct “Iron Fist” exercise in western Pacific
- Japan, South Korea, US conduct trilateral exercises in East Sea
- US-Japan firms deepen rare-earths partnership, avoiding China
- US and Japan Coast Guard cross train in Kagoshima exercise
- Japanese electric giant to expand flow battery operations in US

Details:

- US and Japanese military forces began **joint exercise “Iron Fist” in Japan’s southwest islands** on February 16. The previously California-based exercise was held in the Western Pacific for the **first time** for more realistic training. The month-long exercise involves 1,700 **personnel** from the US Marines and Japan’s Ground and Maritime Self Defense Forces. The Japanese Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade will operate **with** the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit and Seventh Fleet between Kyushu and Okinawa to demonstrate capturing and defending remote islands using amphibious tactics and equipment. Separately, US and Japanese naval forces **concluded** exercise “Resilient Shield” 2023 on February 23 after a week of joint missile defense training to strengthen tactics, techniques and procedures. Also, Prime Minister Kishida **said** on February 27 that Japan is planning to buy up to 400 US Tomahawk cruise missiles.
- US, South Korean and Japanese naval forces conducted **trilateral ballistic missile defense exercises** in the Sea of Japan on February 22. The exercises followed North Korea’s **launching** of multiple intercontinental ballistic missiles on February 18 and 20. On the same day, commanders of the three national and regional fleets also **met** to discuss greater security cooperation. These Flag Talks involved Japan’s Commander in Chief Self Defense Fleet, Vice Admiral Saito, along with US 7th Fleet Vice Admiral Thomas and Korean Naval Operations Commander Vice Admiral Kim.
- US mine operator MP Materials said that it will now **sell its rare-earth materials directly to Sumitomo Corp** in Japan rather than refining facilities in China. This move comes as the US tries to **loosen** China’s grip on rare-earth supply chains. Until now, US raw material would first be processed in China as they have 85% of global refining **capacity**. MP Materials and Sumitomo said in a joint **statement** that the agreement will, “stabilize, diversify, and strengthen supply chain of critical importance to Japan’s manufacturing sector.”
- US Coast Guard Cutter Kimball left Kagoshima after completing a multi-day **joint exercise with the Japan Coast Guard** on February 16. The allies conducted search-and-rescue operations with sea and air units. The purpose was to **enhance** interoperability in safety and security exercises. The exercise follows the May 2022 **signing** of a memorandum of cooperation that adds capacity building and combined operations to the US-Japan Coast Guard partnership.
- **Sumitomo Electric will expand its US energy storage operations** in response to growing demand and against a backdrop of tighter North American content **rules** to qualify for special tax incentives in the US electric vehicle (EV) market. The Japanese firm will focus new US investments on developing its vanadium redox flow battery (VRFB) with local production and installment capabilities. Sumitomo Electric president Inoue **said** “It is our strategy to promote green transformation and contribute to the realization of a decarbonized society through the supply of our battery systems.” Separately, Toyota Motor will begin US **production** of EVs in Kentucky as early as 2025. Responding to increased **demand** for EVs and to meet the criteria for its products to qualify for US tax breaks, Toyota will increase production of its electric SUVs to 10,000 per month by the end of the same year.

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