



Consortium of Indo-Pacific

Researchers

## **Indo-Pacific Weekly Mail April 20-26, 2026**

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Greetings Colleagues,

The Consortium is pleased to share its latest newsletter for the Indo-Pacific. Press the reply button for your feedback and comments.

### **US and Philippines Forces Participate in Balikatan 2026**



Figure 1: U.S. Airmen assigned to the 317th Airlift Wing and 7th Bomb Wing transit to a C-130J Super Hercules aircraft equipped with external fuel tanks before continuing with a Maximum Endurance Operation en route to Exercise Balikatan 2026 at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, April 16, 2026. (U.S. Air Force photo)

US and Philippines forces commence annual military exercise Balikatan 2026 with allies Japan, Australia, and New Zealand in Philippines. This year's iteration is the longstanding annual exercise coincides with the 75th anniversary of the U.S.-Philippine Mutual Defense Treaty. Designed to strengthen the ironclad alliance and improve combined capabilities, the [exercise features more than 17,000 personnel](#) from the Philippines, United States, Australia, Japan, Canada, France, and New Zealand. U.S. Marines have deployed Navy-Marine Corps Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System (NMESIS) anti-ship missile launchers.

Balikatan 2026 is actively operating in Luzon, with a heavy focus on the northern region and the Luzon Strait. For the first time, maritime strike drills are scheduled for the northernmost part of the Philippines, situated only 155 km from Taiwan. According to a report from this Northern Luzon airfield, unmanned launchers equipped with dual missiles are capable of striking targets up to 200 kilometers into the waters separating the Philippines and Taiwan. This region serves as one of the principal passages for ingress and egress within the first island chain.

It is important to highlight that China and the Philippines have long continued a territorial spat over Paracel and Spratly Islands in the South China Sea. In 2016, the arbitral tribunal adjudicating the Philippines' case against China in the South China Sea ruled overwhelmingly in favor of the Philippines, determining that major elements of China's claim—including its nine-dash line,

recent land reclamation activities, and other activities in Philippine waters—were unlawful. Contrary to this, China denied the ruling, maintaining it was “null and void.”

Philippines, a key United States ally in the Southeast Asia, is bound by the Mutual Defense Treaty of 1951. To further strengthen defense and security cooperation, both countries signed the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) in 1998 and the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) in 2014. Furthermore, the Philippines is undergoing a 15-year military modernization program set to run until 2027.

While the US National Security Strategy (NSS) 2026 and National Defense Strategy (NDS) 2026 focus on “peace through strength” and highlight a robust deterrence in competition with China in the Indo-Pacific. Both US strategic documents support to “erect a strong denial defense along the First Island Chain (FIC).”

China has criticized the expansion of Balikatan 2026 and warned the Philippines and its allies of exacerbating the regional tensions. [Read More](#)

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## **Japan’s Shift from Pacifism to Preparedness**

In a cabinet meeting on April 21, Japan has significantly overhauled its “Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology,” officially allowing the [export of lethal weapons](#) to nations with signed transfer

agreements. has. The decision came at a time when Japan is facing excessive [hostile security environment in its neighborhood](#) by China and North Korea. Simultaneously, it is under stress regarding US security guarantees and demand for increased defense spending.

Additionally, US has been using its resources in the Iran war and has presented a major force posture in the Western Hemisphere, the Japanese export will boost domestic defense production and deterrence capabilities of allies in deteriorating security situation.

Furthermore, Sane Takaichi stated in Nov. 2025 that China's attack on Taiwan would be a survival threat to Japan. China has banned exports of critical minerals to 20 Japanese entities, including Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, in Feb. 2026 alleging these firms supports Japan's military.

Japan has made major defense overhauls such as 2014 redefinition of the collective self-defense legislation, that allows Japan to act in defense of allies and eased constraints in participating foreign military exercises. Further, In December 2022, Japan released three key security documents, including an updated National Security Strategy, shifted its posture, procuring long range missiles to establish counterstrike capability. Japan has also achieved 2% defense spending in 2025, that was expected by 2027.

With lifting the restrictions on overseas arms sales, Japan is now enabling the export of lethal weapons like warships, fighter jets, and missiles to 17 eligible countries, including the UK, Australia, and the Philippines. Japan's

enhanced defense also partnering with Britain, Italy, and Germany to Global Combat Air Program (GCAP) to develop a next-generation fighter jet. Adding to, Japan has signed a [deal of approx. \\$10 billion to export 11 Mogami Frigate](#) warships to Australia. [Read More](#)

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## **China's Wang Yi meets Myanmar's Top leader**

China's Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, held discussions with Myanmar President Min Aung Hlaing, the former military general who has ruled Myanmar since seizing power in a 2021 coup. Following the national election in early April, Hlaing was sworn in as President; however, critics contend that the elections lacked fairness and were used as a means to consolidate power.

It is important to note that China has geopolitical and economic interests and is Myanmar's largest trading partner. Beijing has heavily invested in the Myanmar-China Economic Corridor and is a major arms supplier along with Russia. Earlier, China had also mediated a truce between the ethnic rebel groups and the Myanmar Junta. [Read More](#)

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## **India and South Korea Deepen Cooperation in Trade and defense**

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung visited New Delhi South Korean President Lee Jae Myung visited New Delhi on a state visit, hosted by the

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Both leaders outlined plans for a "futuristic partnership" covering trade, commerce, energy, and defense. In a joint statement, both countries set ambitions to achieve a \$50 billion trade target by 2030. India and South Korea signed the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) that came into effect in 2010. The trade between the two countries has risen from \$10 billion to \$27 billion. However, India seeks to address the [\\$15 billion trade deficit](#) and upgrade the CEPA.

Additionally, 25 MoUs are signed across the domains of trade, steel, shipping and maritime cooperation, environment, science and technology, climate change, financial cooperation, education, culture, and creative industries.

The two countries have planned for the third phase of defense cooperation expansion of K9 Vajra-T, a Korean-designed anti-aircraft system, with a focus on technology transfer and co-development of a new generation of military systems. South Korea has also joined the Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI), which may lead to increased cooperation on freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific region. [Read More](#)

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## **Indo-Pacific Quiz**

What does Article 9 of Japan's constitution pertain to?

- a. Immigration
- c. Foreign Relations

b. Renounce of war

d. US-Japan alliance

In which year did Australian and New Zealand troops land, as commemorated by ANZAC Day?

a. April 25, 1914

c. April 25, 1915

b. April 25, 1916

d. April 25, 1916

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## Consortium Highlights

- ❖ Upcoming Book-Talk **Japan's Grand Strategy: Liminal Power in an Uncertain World**, May 4, 2026, 9:00 AM EST
- ❖ Upcoming podcast on **Meiji Japan and what it teaches about rising Asian powers**, May 11, 9:00 AM EST

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## Indo-Pacific Quiz Key

Here are the **Answers** for April 19, 2026, Newsletter Quiz

Q. In which City of Pakistan, US and Iran Peace Talks are held?

a. Islamabad

Q. From which nation did Indonesia gain its independence?

c. Netherland

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