



Consortium of Indo-Pacific

Researchers

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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.

China Holds Military Drills in the South China Sea; Beijing-Manila Dispute Deepens



Figure 1: Map of the South China Sea depicting disputed territories including Scarborough Shoal/[IMAGE/britannica.com/](https://www.britannica.com/)

China's People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) carried out [joint naval and air combat patrols](#) around the disputed Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea, describing the exercises as a test of combat readiness and a defense of what Beijing characterizes as its national sovereignty and maritime rights.

Scarborough Shoal, known in the Philippines as Bajo de Masinloc, lies approximately 140 miles west of the Philippine island of Luzon and occupies an important strategic position in the northeastern South China Sea, near productive fishing grounds used by Filipino fishermen for generations.

The South China Sea carries roughly one-third of global maritime trade each year, making freedom of navigation through the region a matter of international economic and security importance.

In 2016, an international arbitration tribunal established under UNCLOS ruled overwhelmingly in favor of the Philippines, concluding that China's expansive maritime claims lacked legal basis under international law — a ruling Beijing rejected as "null and void."

Additionally, Taiwan government has reaffirmed its sovereignty over islands in the South China Sea after the Philippines submitted its official nautical chart to the UN regarding an atoll claimed by Manila, Taipei, and Beijing. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) stated that disputes in the area "should be resolved peacefully in accordance with international law."

The United States has strengthened defense cooperation with the Philippines through expanded military exercises, increased rotational deployments, and additional access to Philippine military facilities under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, and has repeatedly stated that its Mutual Defense Treaty with Manila applies to armed attacks on Philippine public vessels, aircraft, or armed forces operating in the South China Sea. [Read More](#)

Japan Conducts First Live-Fire Test in the Pacific Ocean

Japan's Maritime Self- Defense Force (MSDF) conducted a live-test fire of a U.S.-made Tomahawk cruise missile on Chokai, an Aegis-equipped destroyer, in the Pacific Ocean. The Tomahawk has a range of more than 1,600 kilometers and serves as a pillar of counterattack capabilities to strike enemy missile launch sites and other targets.

It was the first time for an MSDF vessel to conduct a live-fire test of a Tomahawk. The ministry plans to acquire up to 400 Tomahawk missiles and proceed with modifications.

According to reports, Japan initially planned to acquire Tomahawks in Fiscal Year 2026 but moved the timeline up by one year due to the “increasingly severe security environment around Japan.” [Read More](#)

Robots, Rights, and the Limits of Détente: US-China Friction Deepens

The US Federal Communications Commission has banned imports of new foreign-made humanoid robots, citing national security risks, in a move that targets China. Beijing accused the US of protectionism and economic containment.

The decision arrives at a diplomatically delicate juncture and is likely to inject significant turbulence into the bilateral relationship ahead of a planned visit by Chinese leader Xi Jinping to the United States in September. China dominates the global market for humanoid robots with an estimated market share of roughly 85%.

Additionally, the US Department of Homeland Security delivered a parallel and compounding blow, [blacklisting 43 Chinese](#) entities from importing their products into the United States — leveling accusations of systematic and unconscionable unethical labor practices against them. China’s Xinjiang province, where Uyghur Muslim minorities have been reportedly under illegal

labor by the Chinese Communist Party, and Washington have been keeping it front and center for their right under the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA).

The two superpowers demonstrate a mutual desire to preserve open lines of communication and pursue a constructive and calibrated management of their consequential relationship. However, the deepening and structural friction across trade, technology, and artificial intelligence is starkly evident.

[Read more](#)

Myanmar's Military Ruler Turned President Criticizes ASEAN

The President of Myanmar, Min Aung Hlaing, who is a former military ruler, gave a speech on Friday to mark his first 100 days in office. He defended his government's work so far and laid out a five-year plan for the years ahead. However, Myanmar continues to face a civil war at home.

Speaking before his lawmakers, officials, and military representatives at Parliament in the capital Naypyidaw, Min Aung Hlaing said his government had made important progress since taking power. He pointed to two main goals — bringing peace and stability to the country and advancing national development.

Min Aung Hlaing also hit back at Southeast Asian leaders over the Five-Point Consensus, a plan agreed in 2021 to stop the violence in Myanmar. He

said the plan was unfair because not all member countries had agreed to it and accused the regional bloc of treating Myanmar differently from other members. ASEAN had called on Myanmar to stop the fighting immediately and hold talks with all sides involved in the conflict. [Read More](#)

Indo-Pacific Quiz

China fought a war in 1962 and occupied approx. 38,000 sq. km. from which country?

- | | |
|----------|-------------|
| a. Nepal | c. Bhutan |
| b. India | d. Pakistan |

Which Pacific Island country reclaim traditional name “Naoero?”

- | | |
|------------|----------|
| a. Vanuatu | c. Nauru |
| b. Samoa | d. Niue |
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Consortium Highlights

- ❖ New Read: Japan’s Strategic Shift: From Pacifist to Provider
- ❖ CIPR announces the availability of Fall Internship 2026

Indo-Pacific Quiz Key

Here are the **Answers** for July 26, 2026, Newsletter Quiz

Q. Who is the newly appointed US Ambassador to ASEAN?

a. Yeouk Kevin Kim

Q. What is Kenya's largest city on the Indian Ocean?

c. Mombasa

Contributions: Indu Saxena