



Consortium of Indo-Pacific

Researchers

Indo-Pacific Weekly Mail July 20-July 26, 2026

Greetings Colleagues,

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

Rubio Says, "US Stands with ASEAN" at Manila Conference



Figure 1: Sec. Rubio & ASEAN Foreign Ministers, Meeting in Pasay, Metro Manila, Philippines /IMAGE/ asean.org/

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio reassured Indo-Pacific allies that the United States' strategic interests are inextricably bound to regional partnership as he participated in the ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Manila. He engaged substantively with his ASEAN counterparts and spoke at considerable length about the United States' strategic investment of \$2.5 billion in Southeast Asia —to reinforce Washington's enduring commitment to the region and to underscore that the prosperity and development of ASEAN is inseparable from the national interest of the United States.

Rubio announced that the US Development Finance Corporation had approved \$1.5 billion in new strategic investments advancing aviation infrastructure, energy security, and secure supply chains across the region — a concrete and consequential financial commitment designed to structurally deepen US-ASEAN economic interdependence. Furthermore, he commented on Washington's expansive investment agenda in the US-ASEAN partnership, spanning digital infrastructure, artificial intelligence, maritime security, and regional stability. He underscored advancing regional stability, characterizing Southeast Asia as an "engine of economic growth in the 21st century" and declaring with conviction that "the story of the 21st century will be written in this region."

On the persistent question of American strategic diversion from the region, Rubio categorically reiterated that the United States remains "ASEAN 100 percent" and is not abandoning the region. However, ASEAN countries

remain skeptical of Washington's reliability as a long-term regional anchor — skepticism rooted in the current administration's disruptive tariff policies and the cascading economic consequences of the expanding US-Iran war, which has imposed a severe and widening economic toll on the entire Indo-Pacific countries. These nations have been confronting acute energy crises precipitated by dangerous disruptions to free navigation in the Strait of Hormuz — a chokepoint whose closure threatens the energy security architecture of every economy in the region.

Rubio's address placed deliberate emphasis on Freedom of Navigation, citing the Strait of Hormuz as the defining illustration of the principle at stake. He stated unequivocally that the Hormuz is controlled by Iran, and that it sets a deeply troubling and unacceptable precedent — for the region and for elsewhere in the world— that international waters should be controlled by a single country or subjected to tolls for passage. He was rallying ASEAN partners to coalesce in collective and principled support for a free and unimpeded Strait of Hormuz — framing the chokepoint not merely as a maritime passage but as a litmus test for the rules-based international order itself.

On the diplomatic margins of the ASEAN Foreign Ministers gathering, Rubio also held consequential bilateral engagements with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov — encounters

that underscored the Manila meeting's significance as a convergence point for great powers with stakes in the Indo-Pacific's strategic trajectory.

In a subsequent and significant development for the solidarity of Indo-Pacific alliance and partnership, the Quad Foreign Ministers also convened on the sidelines of the ASEAN conference — a parallel gathering that demonstrated the complementary and reinforcing relationship between ASEAN-centered multilateralism and the Quad's security-focused grouping in sustaining regional order.

Rubio reaffirmed unequivocally that the United States remains "ASEAN 100 percent." His Manila visit delivered a resolute message to Indo-Pacific allies: that America's enduring interests in the region are fundamentally and irrevocably dependent on the vitality of its alliances and partnerships — and that Washington regards the Indo-Pacific not as a peripheral theater but as the “priority” theatre in which American power, purpose, and credibility will be defined for the centuries ahead. [Read More](#)

India's Youth Movement Force Exam Reforms

Within two months, India's youth protest — led by the "Cockroach Janta Party" (emphatically not a formal opposition party) — compelled India's Modi government to accept the resignation of its education minister and constitute an urgent task force mandated to comprehensively reform the nation's

chronically dysfunctional examination system. India's youth were consumed by profound frustration and righteous anger over the recurring pattern of paper leaks in the country's most prestigious national and regional competitive examinations — a failure that pushed some students into the abyss of acute depression and drove others, devastatingly, to take their own lives.

The fury intensified when the first catastrophic national examination leak erupted in 2024 — a scandal of staggering proportions in which the perpetrators escaped meaningful accountability, and the government demonstrated neither the urgency nor the institutional will to institute credible preventive measures against a recurrence.

India is home to the world's largest population with more than 734 million people under the age of 35 years. [Read More](#)

US, Saudi Arabia Sign Civil Nuclear Deal

US and Saudi Arabia signed a peaceful nuclear cooperation agreement, commonly known as a 123 agreement. The nuclear agreement, along with the legal safeguard agreement, aims to advance a multi-billion-dollar partnership with shared economic and strategic objectives, including non-proliferation. According to the US Energy Department, this agreement provides significant access for American companies in the Saudi nuclear energy program,

benefiting American industry, workers, and supply chains while helping to meet Saudi energy needs. However, concern rises over nuclear proliferation in the Middle East and in the Gulf region. With the agreement, it is not clear that Saudi Arabia can enrich Uranium domestically that can be used in making a nuclear bomb. Riyadh has concerns about its enemy, Iran, having a nuclear bomb and would demand one if the hostility with Iran escalates. [Read More](#)

US and Allies Conduct Maritime Cooperative Activity

The Armed Forces of the Philippines, Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, and U.S. Navy conducted a Multilateral Maritime Cooperative Activity (MMCA) within the Philippine Exclusive Economic Zone. The maritime exercise demonstrates collective commitment and strength for Free & Open Indo-Pacific. This MMCA iteration enhanced maritime capabilities by incorporating anti-submarine warfare training and exercising standard operating procedures and tactics. The five-day MMCA also focused on tactical interoperability, featuring replenishment-at-sea, vertical replenishment, maritime domain awareness operations, and division tactics. [Read More](#)

Indo-Pacific Quiz

Who is the newly appointed US Ambassador to ASEAN?

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|
| a. Yeouk Kevin Kim | c. David Perdue |
| b. Yohannes Abraham | d. Joy M. Sakurai |

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

- | | |
|------------|---------------|
| a. Nairobi | c. Mombasa |
| b. Nakuru | d. Madagascar |

Consortium Highlights

- ❖ [Webinar Recording](#): Deterrence to Dealmaking: Assessing America's China Strategy, July 6, 9:00 AM EST / 10:00 PM Tokyo Time
 - ❖ CIPR announces the availability of Fall Internship 2026
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Indo-Pacific Quiz Key

Here are the **Answers** for July 12, 2026, Newsletter Quiz

Q. In which Ocean China tested long-range ballistic missile on July 6, 2026?

- b. South Pacific

Q. In which year the treaty of friendship was signed between China and North Korea?

- a. 1961
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