



Consortium of Indo-Pacific

Researchers

Indo-Pacific Weekly Mail March 17-23, 2025

Greetings Colleagues,

The Consortium is pleased to share its latest newsletter for the Indo-Pacific.

Press the reply button for your feedback and comments.

U.S. Seeks Re-establish Deterrence in the Indo-Pacific



Figure 1: U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth meet with Philippine President Ferdinand Maco Jr. in Manila March 28, 2025. IMAGE / [defense.gov](https://www.defense.gov)

On his maiden trip to the Indo-Pacific, US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth visited the United States's crucial allies, the Philippines and Japan, this week. DEFSEC reiterated the US commitment to strengthen the Alliance and establish deterrence in the region. He also emphasized advancing military cooperation and capabilities to deter any aggression in the region. Earlier speaking at Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, Hegseth said, "Alliance and partnership in the Indo-Pacific matters a great deal to the United States because Indo-Pacific is the region of consequences."

In Manila, Hegseth met with Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and his counterpart, Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro Jr. The leaders discussed "[Accelerating the U.S.-Philippines alliance](#)" as after last year's Typhoon missile deployment, the US will provide the Navy-Marine Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System (NMESIS) to the Philippines, which is intended to be a part of the Balikatan exercise 2025 starting later this month. In addition to the NMESIS, Hegseth said the US would also provide highly capable unmanned surface vehicles for Balikatan. He stated, "These systems will enable U.S. forces and the Armed Forces of the Philippines to train together on using advanced capabilities to defend the Philippines' sovereignty."

It is worth mentioning that China strongly criticized the deployment of the Typhon missile in April 2024 and warned of countermeasures.

Further, both countries continue to work on enhancing deterrence as the leader reaffirmed bilateral [defense-industrial cooperation](#), and the US will provide USD 500 million to modernize the Philippines military.

On his next stop in Tokyo, Hegseth emphasized [strengthening the U.S.-Japan alliance capability and deterrence](#) to respond to maintain a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific," viewing the severe security situation in the region, especially regarding China's aggression in the region. Hegseth met with the Japanese Prime Minister Ishiba and his counterpart Nakatani.

Hegseth confirmed the continued work on upgrading the respective command and control framework and further effective bilateral cooperation. He also announced the start of phase one, upgrading U.S. Forces Japan to a joint force headquarters to bring more warfighting and operational responsibilities, as earlier limited to the administrative command. Hegseth stresses that it shows "more urgency" and "more cooperation in real-time." He further said, "Japan would be on the front lines of any contingency we might face in the Western Pacific, and we stand together in support of each other."

Hegseth rallied allies and partners to "advocate for peace through strength" during his visit to the Indo-Pacific region and criticized China's aggressive actions in the South China Sea and the East China Sea. He assured allies of the U.S. support to defend them and enhance deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. However, on the economic front, it is yet to be seen how the U.S. allies

and partners can find a way to avoid or compensate for the reciprocal tariffs starting from April 2.

India and China Explore Cooperation Amid Border Barriers

After the visit of India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri to Beijing on 26-27 January, there have been several statements by top leaders from both sides to anticipate the normalization between rivals India and China. Last month, the Indian prime minister positively set a tone for cooperation between India and China and called for collaboration. Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Mao Ning welcomed Modi's remarks and stated, "The two countries should be partners that contribute to each other's success."

It is important to highlight that in the last couple of months, India and China resumed border patrol and direct flights and sought a thaw in their strategic relationship. Further, both countries share the multilateral platforms BRICS and SCO. And Indian Prime Minister Modi met with Chinese Premier Xi Jinping at the BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia, in October 2024. It was the first meeting between two leaders after the bloody Galwan face-off at the Himalayan border. India and China can resume talks and further economic relations by viewing U.S. President Trump's reciprocal tariff policy. However, both countries have a long way to go in resolving the border disputes. In addition, China's assertiveness in the Indian Ocean and ownership of the Hambantota, Sri Lanka, port in India's backyard are security concerns. It is

important to highlight that India's Defense Minister, [Mr. Rajnath Singh](#), [tweeted](#) in response to the question of opposition leader Rahul Gandhi on February 24, 2025, "With respect to territorial issues, it is well documented that 38,000 sq. km of Indian territory in Aksai Chin has been under Chinese control since the 1962 conflict. Furthermore, 5,180 sq. km of territory was ceded by Pakistan to China in 1963. These historical facts remain an integral part of India's territorial discourse."

Viewing the historical rivalry between both countries, it becomes evident that India faces a challenging situation in maintaining a cordial relationship with China. This is complicated by China's infrastructure and port development initiatives under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in South Asia and its support for Pakistan regarding the Kashmir issue. [Read More](#)

Bangladesh Bolsters Ties with China

Muhammad Yunus, the Chief advisor of Bangladesh's Interim Government visited China this week and seek stronger bilateral ties. Yunus participated in the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2025 in Hainan and then met Xi Jinping in Beijing. As per the joint conference China will support Bangladesh in enhancing infrastructure and industrialization. It encourages Chinese companies to invest in sectors such as textiles, clean energy, the digital economy, agriculture, and manufacturing. Bangladesh invites Chinese participation in the Mongla Port modernization project and seeks collaboration

to develop the Chinese Economic and Industrial Zone (CEIZ) in Chattogram.

[Read More](#)

U.S. Demands to Open the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR)

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio urged China to access the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) for U.S. diplomats, journalists, and other international observers. Further, the State Department “imposes visa restrictions on Chinese officials determined to be substantially involved in the formulation or execution of policies related to access for foreigners to Tibetan Areas, pursuant to the Reciprocal Access to Tibet Act of 2018.” [Read More](#)

Indo-Pacific Quiz

Where is Palawan Island located?

- | | |
|----------------|--------------|
| a. Japan | c. Indonesia |
| b. Philippines | d. Thailand |

What is ‘Pituffik’ refer to?

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| a. Space Fore Base | c. Contested Island |
| b. Missile System | d. Naval Base |
-

Consortium Highlights

- ❖ Podcast on **U.S.-Latin America Relations and Implication for the Indo-Pacific** March 20th, 2025, 6:00 PM EST. [Listen Here](#)
 - ❖ Upcoming Podcast: South China Sea and Importance of International Arbitration in Territorial Disputes
-

Indo-Pacific Quiz Key

Here are the **Answers** for the March 23rd Newsletter Quiz

Q. Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines was recently arrested by the International Criminal Court (ICC). What position did he hold?

a. President

Q. Which country does the U.S. designate “sensitive country” status?

a. South Korea

Contributions: Indu Saxena