

**The 17th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM +)
Experts' Working Group (EWG) On Maritime Security (MARSEC)**

**Importance of ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific
23 August 2022**

Introductory Remarks

- First, my thanks to Rear Admiral (Ret) Pete Gumataotao and his team at APCSS for hosting such an important event over the coming days and allowing me to speak to you all today. It is an honor to be here.
- Special thanks to Deputy Assistant Secretary Lindsey Ford and Vice Admiral Supapat, for their work in Co-Chairing this team.
- I also appreciate the efforts each of you have made to join together as leaders from across the ADMM Plus and participate this Experts' Working Group on Maritime Security.
- Since its inception, the ADMM Plus Experts' Working Group on Maritime Security has been a beneficial mechanism for the ten ASEAN and eight Dialogue Partners to address their mutual maritime security interests. A consistent feature of this Working Group has been an emphasis on practical cooperation, which has allowed us to overcome barriers to effective collaboration and communication.
- I am certain that we have the right people in this Working Group to engage in a candid discussion on shared challenges in Maritime Security and to drive towards cooperative solutions.
- Today I want to highlight the significance of ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific region, and how the rules-based international order has benefited all nations, large and small for the last 75 years.
- The two important points I would like to leave with you are:
 - First: The Indo-Pacific region is vital to global stability and prosperity;
 - And second: We must uphold ASEAN centrality and the rules-based international order, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), as it benefits us all.

ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific

- The current Maritime Security environment in our region is extremely complex.
- The Indo-Pacific is an immense marine region rich in natural resources. It is the crossroads of global cultures and commerce where ships, people, and data converge from all compass points.
- The volume of trade and information that crosses the region will continue to increase with advancements in information and transportation. Regional growth will increase the standard of living for more people, driving up personal consumption.
- Bilateral and multilateral trade agreements are becoming more common as new markets open in an increasingly competitive environment that will continue to rely on safe and secure seafair, data, and information exchange.
- In just the past two decades, the world's military and economic center of gravity has shifted to the Indo-Pacific region.
- The region holds the four most populous nations, the three largest democracies, and the three largest economies. The Indo-Pacific is responsible for 60% of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and two-thirds of the global economic growth.
- Militarily, seven of the largest armies, five of the world's declared nuclear nations, and some of the most sophisticated navies reside in the Indo-Pacific, which underscores the need for open communication.
- Additionally, the Indo-Pacific holds the nine largest ports. Every day, half the global container cargo and 70% of ship-borne energy supply flows through this area.
- ASEAN's efforts have created an environment in which nations can prosper. By adhering to international norms such as mutually respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states, and peacefully resolving disputes, ASEAN has created greater stability and greater prosperity.

UNCLASSIFIED

- For example, according to the World Bank, GDP in Singapore has nearly quadrupled since 2001.
- And Indonesia has reduced poverty levels by 50% in the last 20 years.
- This dramatic growth and development was facilitated by the rules-based international order.
- The rules-based international order has benefitted not only the Indo-Pacific region, but the entire world, cultivating greater stability, prosperity, and peace. Secretary Blinken best defined the rules based international order as, “the system of laws, agreements, principles, and institutions that the world came together to build after two world wars to manage relations between states, to prevent conflict, to uphold the rights of all people. Its founding documents include the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which enshrined concepts like self-determination, sovereignty, the peaceful settlement of disputes. These are not Western constructs. They are reflections of the world’s shared aspirations.”
- USINDOPACOM’s strategy is focused on maintaining the rules-based international order, as it benefits us all. INDOPACOM does that in two ways. One, US Navy, US Air Force, and US Marine Corps assets regularly conduct freedom of navigation exercises and activities in line with all standing international agreements, including transits of the Taiwan Strait. Two, the US empowers Allies and partners in the region to protect their own sovereignty and resources within their EEZs through the use of the Maritime Security Initiative (MSI). MSI provides Allies and partners with the software and hardware required to detect illegal activity in their EEZ, notify that such activity is taking place, and enable them to conduct interdiction if required on those infringing in their territorial waters.
- Highly intertwined with the rules-based international order, the late Shinzo Abe announced his vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific in 2016, and since then, the vast majority of countries throughout the region have rallied around this uniting concept.
- ASEAN is the geographic and normative lynchpin of the Indo-Pacific. As President Biden said when he hosted ASEAN leaders at

the White House in May: “ASEAN centrality is the very heart of my administration’s strategy in pursuing the future we all want to see.”

- ASEAN and this Working Group are central to ensuring a free, open, peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific.
- This Working Group has an important role in tackling numerous issues including:
 - peaceful resolution of conflicts
 - environmental protection in maritime security
 - expanding information sharing
 - safety of navigation
 - countering violent extremism
 - illicit drug trafficking and trafficking in persons
 - sustainable and equitable maritime development
 - the impact of climate change on maritime security
 - and confronting IUU fishing.
- Tackling just one of these issues is a major challenge. But finding solutions to all of them will be necessary for the future security and prosperity of not only the region, but the world. The work the Maritime Security Experts’ Working Group is doing is invaluable, and well worth the focused commitment of all its members.
- What happens in the Indo-Pacific impacts the entire globe – climate impact on fisheries, IUU, piracy, transnational crime, and EEZ encroachment are key examples.
- This is why cooperation between ASEAN and Dialogue Partner nations is required to preserve the rules-based international order and ensure free and open access to the global commons.
- ASEAN’s leadership and the commitment to common values shared broadly among nations have fostered prosperity and impressive successes in the Indo-Pacific.
- The ADMM Plus works together to support our common values. The Working Groups facilitate increased capability, improved interoperability, and strengthened trust between nations to ensure the air, maritime, cyber, and space domains remain open to all.

- Assured access to the global commons is vital for all nations, as is the opportunity to pursue greater prosperity. But we must work together to achieve this.
- Since the end of World War II, the United States and our Allies and partners in the Pacific have worked together to build and strengthen the rules-based international order that has maintained peace and security not only in the Indo-Pacific, but the entire world.
- This year marks 45 years of ASEAN-U.S. relations. The U.S. is committed to ASEAN and ASEAN centrality, and we are determined to deepen and strengthen our partnership. We support the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific and share the values on which it is based: openness, inclusivity, good governance, rule of law, and respect for international law.

Closing Remarks

- The Indo-Pacific spans half the globe and is also the wealthiest, most populated region on Earth. The future of the global geopolitical order is tied to this region.
- As President Biden has said, “the future of each of our nations – and indeed the world – depends on a free and open Indo-Pacific enduring and flourishing in the decades ahead.”
- In an ever-changing strategic landscape, the United States’ enduring commitment to the Indo-Pacific and to ASEAN is essential to advancing our shared interests. We are currently laying foundations for a comprehensive strategic partnership to expand our cooperation more deeply into maritime security, and into other areas such as public health and cybersecurity.
- Together through ADMM Plus, we must make concerted efforts to increase resilience and strengthen capabilities to address challenges that impact the entire world.
- ADMM Plus must work closely together to facilitate open communication, tackle shared maritime security challenges, and maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific.

UNCLASSIFIED

- This Working Group is an incredibly valuable event for the Indo-Pacific region because discussions that bring together leaders and subject matter experts like all of you are absolutely critical to producing shared solutions.
- Your perspectives help further our understanding and shape our collective approach to promoting a peaceful, secure, and inclusive Indo-Pacific.
- I have confidence that you will make significant progress in advancing the goals of the MARSEC Working Group in meetings this week and look forward to hearing about your success.
- I appreciate and thank you for your attendance today and for what you do every day.
- It has been an honor to speak with you this morning and I look forward to the work you will continue today and into the future.