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**U.S. MILITARY POSTURE AND
NATIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES IN
THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION**

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U.S. MILITARY POSTURE AND NATIONAL SECURITY CHALLENGES IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC, Wednesday, March 20, 2024.

The committee met, pursuant to call, at 11:14 a.m., in room 2118, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Mike Rogers [chairman of the committee] presiding.

OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. MIKE ROGERS, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM ALABAMA, CHAIRMAN, COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

The CHAIRMAN. The meeting will come to order. Today, we will continue our posture hearings with INDOPACOM (United States Indo-Pacific Command) and U.S. Forces Korea.

I want to thank our witnesses for being here and their service to our Nation. Gentlemen, you can be seated.

The Indo-Pacific has some of our Nation's greatest threats. In North Korea, we have a madman who would rather build an illegal nuclear arsenal than feed his own starving people. Late last year, Kim Jong Un declared he was abandoning the longstanding policy of achieving unification with South Korea. He announced that South Korea is now "a hostile country" and that North Korea can legally annihilate them.

Alarming, he backed up this hyperbole by testing new nuclear-capable missile technology. The test included a strategic cruise missile, a submarine-launched cruise missile, and a solid fuel ballistic missile with maneuverable reentry vehicle. Each of these missiles were designed to disrupt our ability to detect them and to evade our missile defenses.

I'm very concerned that the advances in Kim's missile technology is the result of a strengthening alliance with Vladimir Putin. Since August, North Korea has shipped millions of artillery shells, rockets, and ballistic missiles to Russia, while Russia supplies energy back to North Korea.

Putin is testing missiles on the battlefield of Ukraine with deadly effect. And Kim is using this firsthand knowledge to improve his missile technology and tactics -- something he will rely on if war erupts on the Korean Peninsula.

But Kim is not the only Asian ally Putin has cultivated to support his illegal invasion of Ukraine. Shortly after the invasion, Putin and President Xi entered into a, quote, "no limits," close quote, partnership.

And while China has not yet provided weapons to Russia, Xi is providing Putin with critical economic and security assistance. This

includes dual-use materials and components for weapons. Xi can afford to do so because he continues to invest heavily on building a modern military.

Earlier this month, the PRC (People's Republic of China) announced it was raising its defense budget by 7.2 percent in 2024. It is the third year in a row in which China has increased defense spending by 7 percent or more. This unprecedented level of defense spending is paying off. The PLA (People's Liberation Army) is building modern military systems like hypersonic weapons and fifth generation fighters. They can project power well into the Pacific with a 340-ship navy that includes a new aircraft carrier and nuclear-powered ballistic missiles submarines.

They have improved their ability to conduct joint operations with more realistic exercises and new AI-driven technologies that will shorten the kill chain. And they are building a modern nuclear arsenal at a dizzying rate.

China's extraordinary military buildup is certainly concerning, but what is most alarming is the increasingly provocative actions Xi has taken in recent years, such as: pushing out China's borders with new defense agreements and military bases on foreign nations; threatening our allies in the region with reckless ship and aircraft intercepts, and attempting to coerce Taiwan with military exercises and near daily airspace incursions simulating an invasion of the island.

We have no choice but to take Xi's threats seriously, and we have to be resolute in our response. We need to accelerate our own military modernization. We need to enhance training and readiness in the region, and we need to better distribute logistics throughout the Pacific.

But we won't prevail in any conflict with the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) on our own. We need to expand and strengthen our partnerships in the region. We need to better arm our allies with agreements like AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom, and the United States), and we need to expedite the delivery of arms and training to Taiwan, so they can better defend their democracy.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses on their assessment of the threats and what support they will need from this committee to deter them.

And with that, I yield to the ranking member for any opening statement he may have.

STATEMENT OF HON. ADAM SMITH, A REPRESENTATIVE FROM WASHINGTON, RANKING MEMBER, COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

Mr. SMITH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity and I appreciate your opening statement.

I want to thank our witnesses, in particular, Admiral Aquilino. I believe this will be your last time before us in a posture hearing, as change of command is coming up soon. You have been a tremendous partner, great to work with, certainly, on the committee, and for those of us who have visited the region, we can see the incredible work you are doing to advance U.S. interests. We really appreciate that.

I understand it might also be General LaCamera's last appearance, depending on how the change of command goes. It could be a little unpredictable around here, as we have all learned in the last year. But really appreciate all of your service to our country.

And I want to really emphasize sort of one of the points of the chairman's statement. And that is, North Korea, China, Russia, and how our adversaries are beginning to more and more align.

The Indo-Pacific is an incredibly important region. We have had this ongoing debate about what is the No. 1 priority in the pivot to Asia, and a whole bunch of other debates. What I hope we all recognize is how interconnected it all is at this point.

Sadly -- and we can throw Iran and other terrorist organizations like Hamas into that equation -- they are beginning to coordinate to try to thwart our role in the world and advance their very, very troubling agenda for the world.

As we have seen what Russia has done in Ukraine; we have seen what Iran has done throughout the Middle East; we have seen the things that the chairman just mentioned about China and North Korea, it is all interconnected, but, certainly, the Indo-Pacific region is one of the central parts of this focus. And that focus is to deter our adversaries, and in that part of the world, that is China and North Korea.

I think we have made a lot of advancements just in the last year or two in working with partners in the region to be able to deter those adversaries. And I want to just start there and make a couple of comments about that before shifting, specifically, to the United States.

Those partnerships are crucial. We are not going to be able to deter that alliance that I just described on our own. We will need partners and allies in the world, and building up those partnerships is crucial.

Certainly, you know, helping build up the capability of Taiwan to directly deter China is crucial. Building up South Korea, but, also, so many other partners in the region. The work that has been done to bring Japan and South Korea closer together, working together, has been incredibly important in the last year; the role that Australia is playing; the AUKUS agreement that we reached with them; the Quad, working with Australia, Japan, India, along with us; the work that has been done just in the last year to improve so much our relations with the Philippines that have become part of that. Those partnerships and alliances are going to be crucial to deterring China.

And it is a very clear vision. We want a rules-based international order. It is not perfect. It is not always going to work out exactly right, but there is some structure to it.

China right now -- and I mean to add up the number of countries -- but it is somewhere between six and 12 countries in which China claims territory that is now the sovereign territory of other nations. It is not just Taiwan. Ironically, one of those countries is Russia. It will be interesting to see how they work that out in the future.

But China, basically, wants to bully their way across the globe without any respect for any rules. We need to work with all those countries in the world that understand what a threat that is -- not just to U.S. interests, but to global interests.

On our specific efforts, I know Admiral Aquilino has submitted an unfunded requirements list that has talked about some of the other capabilities he needs. But from our witnesses, I would be really interested to hear the capabilities that we most need to build up to make sure that the United States is playing its role, but, then, also, linking those capabilities to what our partners can potentially bring to that, to that deterrent capability as well.

So, the really interesting part of the world. I look forward to the testimony from the witnesses. Again, I thank them all for their service, and I thank the chairman for holding this hearing.

And I yield back. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. I thank the ranking member.

I would like to introduce our witnesses. First, we have the Honorable Ely Ratner, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs; Admiral John Aquilino, U.S. Commander, United States Indo-Pacific Command.

And it is going to be your last time testifying. Your service to our country has been admirable and we are going to miss you. I don't think you are going to miss us, but we are going to miss you.

[Laughter.]

The CHAIRMAN. General LaCamera is the Commander, United States -- or United Nations Command, Korea and U.S. Combined Forces Command, U.S. Forces Korea.

Also, you have done a great service to our Nation, and I appreciate you, and I hope this is not your last time before us.

But we will start with Dr. Ratner. You are recognized for five minutes.

STATEMENT OF DR. ELY S. RATNER, ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR INDO-PACIFIC SECURITY AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Mr. RATNER. Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today about how the Department of Defense is strengthening peace, stability, and deterrence across the Indo-Pacific region.

I'm pleased to be joined today by Admiral Aquilino and General LaCamera for what will likely mark our last time sharing a witness table together. And I want to thank both of my colleagues for their years of military service to the United States, including as we have worked together closely these past three years.

Mr. Chairman, in 2022, the National Defense Strategy identified the People's Republic of China as the Department's top pacing challenge. Since then, Russia's lawless war in Ukraine has continued into its third year; we have seen an outbreak of instability across the Middle East, and the DPRK continues to engage in destabilizing behavior.

At the same time, the Department's fundamental assessment of the PRC has not changed. The PRC continues to present the most comprehensive and serious challenge to our national security. That is because the PRC remains the only country with the will, and increasingly the capability, to dominate the Indo-Pacific region and displace the United States.

Today, the PRC is pursuing its revisionist goals with increasingly coercive activities in the Taiwan Strait, in the South and East China Seas, and along the line of actual control with India and beyond.

But, as I have said here before, conflict in the Indo-Pacific region is neither imminent nor inevitable. And the Department is doing more than ever to keep it that way with the help of U.S. allies and partners.

First, we are supporting our regional friends as they strengthen their own capabilities. In just the past year, for example, we have announced landmark bilateral agreements with Australia, India, and Japan to co-produce or acquire advanced capabilities that will strengthen deterrence across the region.

Second, we are building on historic momentum with our allies and partners toward a regional force posture that is more mobile, distributed, resilient, and lethal. In the past year, we have continued to implement major announcements with Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, and Australia, and we have concluded a new bilateral defense cooperation agreement with Papua New Guinea. Thanks to the leadership of members here, the United States will also extend the economic assistance at the heart of our Compacts of Free Association with three key Pacific Island partners into the 2040s.

Third, we are building new initiatives that deepen ties between our Indo-Pacific friends. For example, after President Biden's Camp David Summit with President Yoon of the ROK (Republic of Korea) and Prime Minister Kishida of Japan, our three countries delivered on a multiyear, trilateral exercise plan, and we fully activated a real-time DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) missile warning data-sharing mechanism.

With Australia, we are working together to integrate Japan into our force posture initiatives.

With Thailand and Indonesia, our MRKEE bilateral exercises have expanded to feature participation from across the region, and we are investing in the next generation of regional defense leadership with our friends in ASEAN.

Finally, we are delivering cutting-edge capabilities in the near term and investing in the capabilities our military will need to maintain deterrence in the long term. That is why the President's budget seeks major funding for our air power, sea and undersea power, nuclear triad modernization, space capabilities, cybersecurity, and more. We are also developing new operational concepts that will integrate these capabilities, enhance our war-fighting advantages, and ultimately, strengthen deterrence.

Mr. Chairman, with the support of Congress, the Department has delivered significant results in recent years to strengthen peace, stability, and deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. Even so, we remain clear-eyed about the substantial and growing challenges ahead, and we know that meeting them will require heightened urgency, attention, resources, and strong partnership with Capitol Hill.

Thank you for your time attention, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Ratner can be found in the Appendix on page 51.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Dr. Ratner.
Admiral Aquilino, you are recognized.

**STATEMENT OF ADMIRAL JOHN AQUILINO, COMMANDER, U.S.
INDO-PACIFIC COMMAND**

Admiral AQUILINO. Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and the distinguished members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to be here again this year.

This will be my last time, Chairman. I will miss all of you. We have had many great interactions, and I hope to be available if you need me in the future.

I do want to thank my family for their support during the most challenging tour that I have had in my time. And after 40 years of service, I can unequivocally state that the sacrifice our service members make is a family affair, and I couldn't have done this job without mine.

The CHAIRMAN. Will you suspend just a moment?

I would like somebody from the staff to stand outside this door and make sure we keep it closed and ask people who have ingress and egress to come to the anteroom.

I'm sorry, Admiral, go ahead.

Admiral AQUILINO. Thanks again, Chairman.

The last three years have been the honor of my lifetime commanding our soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, guardians, Coast Guard men, and the civilians who work tirelessly alongside our allies and partners to keep the Nation safe and to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific.

And I need to thank all of you. Our work together and your support, especially in establishing the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, the American people should know that your efforts to focus our country's resources on addressing the most pressing national security challenge our Nation has ever faced are making a difference. But we have much more to do and we have to go faster.

When I assumed command, we established the Seize the Initiative approach to implement the National Defense Strategy. In order to deter our adversaries, we challenged the Joint Force to think, act, and operate differently, and we all ought to do that.

While progress has been made, the risk is still high and it is trending in the wrong direction. Seize the Initiative has been challenged by the delayed delivery of construction, advanced capabilities, and in some cases resources, to persistently project and maintain forces west of the International Date Line.

While modernization of the force and the development of new concepts are essential to our ability to deter, we need to move at the speed of relevance and the pace required to address the rapidly evolving security environment.

As required by the NDAA (National Defense Authorization Act), I have provided my independent assessment of INDOPACOM's resourcing requirements to inform the Pacific Deterrence Initiative. And for three years, the requirements we have submitted have been transparent and consistent. That said, I acknowledge the requirements have grown, and that is due to a couple of things.

First, unfunded lists roll over and get included in the requirement. So, anything previously unfunded shows up.

Second, as we shift from planning and design funds to military construction, those costs increase.

Third, inflation that we are all dealing with.

And then, lastly, and most importantly, the threat has continued to grow and accelerate.

In last year's submission, we highlighted the fact that we expected the ask to increase. So, I will be ready to discuss that, if anybody would like to.

I continue to reiterate that the requirements outlined in the assessment have been consistent, 90-plus percent the same for three years.

As I have said many times, I agree with Secretary Ratner's assessment that the conflict is not imminent or inevitable, but our potential adversaries have become increasingly aggressive and emboldened.

The PRC's unprecedented military buildup and a campaign of coercive actions continue to destabilize the region, and they challenge the values and institutions that support a free and open Indo-Pacific.

We must continue to build upon the progress achieved in the last few years, and we need to accelerate fielding the key joint capabilities described in my assessment. These include the Guam Defense System, our Joint Fires Network, and decision superiority capabilities, as in AUKUS and the rest of our multilateral agreements with our partners.

And as I prepare to depart, again, I do want to thank the Congress for your focus, your challenges, and the many interactions that I have had with almost all of you during my three years here. My successor will need your support as well, and I know you will be prepared to give it to him.

Chairman and Ranking Member, thank you for the opportunity, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Admiral Aquilino can be found in the Appendix on page 61.]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Admiral.

General LaCamera, you are recognized.

**STATEMENT OF GENERAL PAUL LACAMERA, COMMANDER,
UNITED NATIONS COMMAND, ROK/U.S. COMBINED FORCES
COMMAND, AND U.S. FORCES KOREA**

General LACAMERA. Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and distinguished members of the committee, it remains my distinct honor to sit before you today, as the Commander of the United States Forces Korea, the Combined Forces Command, and the United Nations Command.

I want to express my sincere appreciation for your unwavering support to our service members, our civilians, our contractors, our interagency colleagues, and all of our families overseas and those who wait at home. We can never take our eye off the solemn responsibility to take care of those who have raised their right hand to defend our Constitution and our way of life, including our families who did not volunteer, but serve, nonetheless.

I am prepared to discuss those in the security environment on the Korean Peninsula. It was just over 70 years ago that a China-supported, Russian-spurned, and opportunistic communist North Korea decided to illegally invade the south -- plunging Korea into a very costly armed conflict that is ongoing today. Twenty-two United Nations states came to the aid of the Republic of Korea then, and 17 of them continue to support armistice enforcement today through the United Nations Command.

Defending forward this strategic location allows us to better protect our people, the Korean people, our homelands, and reinforce the United States' ironclad commitment to the Republic of Korea.

Situated on the Asian continent, the Korean Peninsula shares a northern border with both China and Russia. Although U.N. Council Resolutions have levied strict sanctions against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, they have found refuge in their alliance with the People's Republic of China and their revitalized partnership with Russia.

In the last year, DPRK has continued developing its military capabilities, including solid fuel ballistic missile technology, which violates sanctions. Some of the missile systems that North Korea has been testing threaten countries worldwide. North Korea has also been providing military material support to Russia, assisting in Russia's illegal and indefensible invasion of Ukraine.

These relationships have allowed the DPRK to circumvent sanctions, build their weapons program, illegally further missile technology, sustain their cyber-crime-derived economy, and threaten the international rules-based order.

During this same time, the U.S.-ROK alliance continued to adapt to meet the evolving challenges. In April of 2023, the Presidents of the two countries signed the Washington Declaration, reaffirming our commitment to mutual defense. They also announced the establishment of the Nuclear Consultative Group to strengthen extended deterrence, discuss nuclear strategic planning, and manage the DPRK threat. We have taken substantial and concrete steps to follow through on those commitments.

The Republic of Korea has organized its own strategic command, giving us another arrow in our quiver.

There have been multiple strategic asset deployments to the Korean Peninsula, including a nuclear ballistic missile submarine and the first B-52 landing in the last 40 years.

In August of 2023, the Presidents of the United States and the Republic of Korea and the Prime Minister of Japan met at Camp David for a trilateral summit. This historically significant meeting recognized the importance of advancing the security and prosperity of our people.

We have made significant progress and follow-through on the commitments made during the summit, including steps toward the sharing of real-time missile warning data; increased trilateral exercises on the sea, and introduction of trilateral air and cyber exercises.

Over the past three years, my thinking on operations, activities, and investments continued to evolve. However, what has not changed is my focus protecting our homelands, preparing for com-

bat, and taking care of people. Since readiness is perishable, I will never be satisfied with our level of training and preparedness.

As the Republic of Korea and the United States conduct regular military training activities on the peninsula, I am convinced that DPRK is not only reacting to our activities, but in many ways mirroring them. We must continue to build physical, mental, and spiritual readiness through operations and activities designed to compete in the gray zone with DPRK.

To defend the ROK, we must continue to invest in the 28,500 service members, including bi-, tri-, and multilateral exercises on and off the peninsula; multi-domain training integrating live, virtual, and constructive entities, and continue to experiment with next-generation capabilities in the exact environment where they will be employed.

To maintain the armistice agreement, our ironclad commitment, and maintain our combat readiness, we need your continued support and recognition of the threat to the homeland.

It is an honor to serve in these three commands. Once again, thank you for all your support, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of General LaCamera can be found in the Appendix on page 107.]

The CHAIRMAN. I thank all the witnesses for their opening statements.

I recognize myself for the first questions.

Admiral Aquilino, we have seen a growing security cooperation between China, and Russia, Iran, and North Korea, especially with respect to the war in Ukraine. What level of concern do you have about this building of a budding alliance? And particularly, if Russia were to be successful in Ukraine, what do you think that alliance could yield?

Admiral AQUILINO. Thank you, Chairman.

Again, I have described the security environment as the most dangerous I have seen in 40 years in uniform, and a big portion of that is the cooperation, No. 1, between the PRC and Russia. Again, in President Xi's words, "a relationship that has not been seen in 100 years." And we should listen to him when he speaks. They tell us what they are thinking about.

So, that cooperation from those two authoritarian nations puts us in a different security environment. So, I'm very concerned about that. It is amplified, as General LaCamera said, with regard to the DPRK supporting Russia in the form of ballistic missiles and other munitions and capabilities.

My sense is this is a way to combat the broadened United States' alliances/partnerships with our like-minded allies and partners around the region. This is their counter.

But I articulated that we are almost back to the Axis of Evil when you plug in Iran to this problem set. That set of cooperation is concerning and it should be concerning to the whole globe.

So, we ought to act accordingly. We ought to listen to what they say. We need to absolutely -- and we do every day -- watch what they do. But we do believe the strategy is right and our operations that we are executing are delivering the right message, which is

the United States Joint Force, combined with our allies and partners, is the strongest military power on the planet.

The CHAIRMAN. General, can you give us your assessment of North Korea's intentions? I know we have been seeing some actions from them recently. Given the provocative behavior we have seen from them lately, do you have any kind of vision into what you think their intentions are?

General LACAMERA. Yes, Chairman. I think its top end-state priority is regime survivability. And he is developing weapons of mass destruction for that. He is looking for sanctions relief. And he is preparing to defend his nation, as his top priorities.

The CHAIRMAN. So, you don't see, as far as your view of things, any anticipated aggression against the south?

General LACAMERA. The actions right now, as I stated in my opening statement, the gray zone activities, military strength, he has got a military. He is coming out of COVID, just like everybody else. He is in his winter training cycle right now and he is testing equipment, and he is also having Russia test some of his equipment by providing that for the fight in Ukraine.

The CHAIRMAN. Secretary Ratner, what do you think the biggest challenge is we are going to have in helping Taiwan develop its capabilities to defend itself?

Mr. RATNER. Congressman, we are working as absolutely rapidly as we can to fulfill our commitments under the Taiwan Relations Act. One thing that we have spoken about here before is the question of resources and providing Taiwan with the security assistance it needs. And I know that between the presidential budget for 2024, for 2025, and the national security supplemental, Congress is considering both enhanced foreign military financing and presidential drawdown authority backfill for Taiwan security assistance. And that would be one way that we could strengthen their resilience and strength and deterrence.

The CHAIRMAN. The chair yields to the ranking member for any questions he may have.

Mr. SMITH. Thank you.

Dr. Ratner and Admiral Aquilino, let's start with you on something we haven't talked that much about, and that is India and the role that they play in all of this. I see them as a crucial partner certainly, but also a little bit of a swing vote, in that they have a relationship, certainly, with Russia and they have relationships, you know, across the world with many of our adversaries. Getting them to work with us more going forward, I think is crucial to meeting our needs.

How would you describe our relationship with India, the way they look at the world, and what we need to be doing to enhance our relationship with India?

Mr. RATNER. Ranking Member Smith, I would describe the U.S.-India relationship as growing and stronger than it has ever been, and absolutely essential to our vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific. We have been strengthening a number of areas across the relationship, including in co-production, where we have made some major strides on jet engines; some new projects on armored vehicles to integrate our Defense Industrial Base, which is one important way to make those bonds all the stronger.

We have been working at the Department to strengthen the relationships between our private sectors, particularly in defense technologies. And we have some really important new initiatives to be doing that.

Admiral Aquilino has been leading a number of important exercises and operations with the Indians that are enhancing our operational coordination.

And our defense trade now is valued at over \$20 billion, and India recently announced their decision to acquire over 30 MQ-9Bs, and that is part of, again, a growing defense relationship between our countries that couldn't be more important.

Mr. SMITH. Sure.

Admiral?

Admiral AQUILINO. Yes, Congressman, thanks.

I was in India two and a half weeks ago to visit with my partners and to continue to work our mil-to-mil channels together.

So, No. 1, it is the largest democracy on the planet, and we have many overlapping values. We also have overlapping interests, although we don't have always the same interests.

Military to military, we have been executing much more increased operations and exercises together. They are working towards becoming more interoperable. They have bought our helicopters. They have C-130s, as we do. And we continue to expand, both bilaterally and multilaterally, our actions and exercises with them.

Mr. SMITH. And how do you see their calculation? Because the biggest alarm bell in all this is, you know, the BRICS countries, which, obviously, includes Russia and China. But India is a big part of that. And so, they are working in that relationship, which is challenging in and of itself. But when those BRICS countries decided to allow Iran to join them, what do you think India's calculation is in terms of that? I understand a little bit Russia and China, but why would India be part of empowering Iran in that way?

Mr. RATNER. Ranking Member Smith, part of India's strategic identity, as you know, is as a member of the Global South, they aspire toward an international system, based on a principle of multipolarity, and that is reflected in part of their foreign policy. But, on balance, they have been trending towards strategic convergence with the United States, and I think we do share a vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific. And we are going to do whatever we can to nurture and advance that part of their orientation.

Mr. SMITH. Yes, and don't misunderstand me. I see Iran as a valuable, crucial partner, and I agree with that. I just think we need to better understand some of their motivations, if we are going to move them in the right direction.

And then, just quickly, Admiral Aquilino, could you give us your current assessment of how China is looking at the Taiwan question? Where do you put the risk? How do you think they are deciding whether or not to launch a military attack?

Admiral AQUILINO. Thanks, Ranking Member Smith.

So, my view is that China would absolutely like to assimilate Taiwan without a war. And that is evident by their increasingly aggressive, coercive campaign against Taiwan -- increasingly deploying ships in the vicinity; crossing the centerline with their air as-

sets; entering their ADIZ with their aircraft; adjusting flight paths from China to get much more closer to Taiwan. They are taking all actions to attempt to get Taiwan to capitulate. Now I don't see that happening.

To back that up, their intent is to build military capability/capacity, should they need to take action. And as you know, coming out of the last two meetings, they have not over the past number of years denounced the use of force. They continue to keep it on the table. So, that is how I see it today.

Mr. SMITH. I apologize, I'm out of time. Thank you.

Mr. Wittman. [Presiding.] I thank the ranking member.

We will now go to Mr. Wilson.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank each of you for being here today.

And, Admiral Aquilino, it is good to be back with you. We appreciate your service so much.

I'm the only Member of Congress still serving who has had the opportunity, sadly, to visit Pyongyang, North Korea. I saw firsthand the oppression of the people of North Korea. It is just it is beyond comprehension, the subjugation of the people there. And when you compare it to South Korea, which is the exact opposite -- a country of opportunity for its citizens and the contrast per capita income is pretty clear. In North Korea, it is \$967; South Korea is \$44,000. You can't have a clearer example in the world of the difference between socialism and capitalism.

With that in mind, you have stated that North Korea is hoping to leverage their assistance, providing 155 artillery shells to War Criminal Putin to murder Ukrainians. And they want to, North Korea wants to receive nuclear and ballistic missile capability.

What evidence do we have of this exchange of information?

Admiral AQUILINO. We certainly have intelligence information that has shown the support from North Korea to Russia.

I will turn it over to General LaCamera in a second.

And that is pretty concerning. And as you have stated, Congressman, all of that technology and all of the funding that Russia might be putting into North Korea continues to go to their military buildup, and not their people and to feed them. So, that is a concern.

Let me turn it over to General LaCamera.

General LACAMERA. Thanks, Congressman, and it was good seeing you on the peninsula last month.

The evidence, I mean, we are still digging into exactly what is being provided back. But KJU has an opportunity with the Russians right now to have some of his technology tested on the battlefield -- and not just his missile technology, but his artillery and others.

Mr. WILSON. Well, to me, it is really concerning. Obviously, it is a direct threat to the people of South Korea, to Japan, but the ICBM (Intercontinental Ballistic Missile) capability to attack and threaten American families. And so, whatever you can do, we appreciate.

And, Dr. Ratner, I'm concerned that there are reports of the People's Liberation Army training at a former U.S. military base in Panama -- with the Chinese military personnel, possibly 20,000,

crossing the southern border into the United States. What information do you have about the training in Panama? And what is the training level? And is this a danger to American families?

Mr. RATNER. Congressman, I haven't seen that report. I'm not aware of a major PLA deployment to Latin America, but I will take that back and respond to you in an appropriate setting.

Mr. WILSON. Well, it is so critically important, and connecting the dots is really not that difficult. And that is that, if there is a training facility, if there are People's Liberation Army personnel being trained there, and then, persons of Chinese military age, unaccompanied, are coming into the United States due to Biden open borders, every American family is at risk, and this should be a priority of the Indo-Pacific, as to the deployment of troops from the Chinese Communist Party. It is that important.

Admiral Aquilino, as we see the attack of War Criminal Putin on the democracy of Ukraine, we are so concerned as to the efforts by War Criminal Putin and, also, allies of Iran and the Chinese Communist Party. What is your assessment of what the dictatorial governments are gaining by supporting War Criminal Putin's invasion of Ukraine?

Admiral AQUILINO. So, Congressman Wilson, thanks.

Again, this kind of goes back to Chairman Rogers' question in the linkage between Russia and the PRC. The PRC is certainly watching that conflict and they are gaining a lot of lessons learned on what gets done right and what gets done wrong.

The combination of the two supporting each other, whether it be in the information space or in the U.N., is concerning, right? You have a line-up behind the war criminal that you have identified by other nations, which legitimizes the actions. And we have to ensure that we don't support that assertion.

Mr. WILSON. Well, again, it is just so important. Connecting the dots, again, is so easy. War Criminal Putin was in Beijing prior to February 22nd, 2022, the invasion of Ukraine, to get a green light.

With that in mind, I yield.

But thank you for your service. It is more important than ever, as we are in a worldwide invasion of dictators into democracies. Thank you.

Mr. RATNER. Mr. Chairman, could I just respond to that question quickly for just a quick intervention?

Because there has been this dialog about the connection between the theaters, and I think it is really important to underscore the degree to which standing with Ukraine will help strengthen deterrents in the Indo-Pacific. It will demonstrate that there are costs and consequences for this kind of violence and that the free world will come together.

And I think, notably, if you look at what U.S. allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific are doing to support Ukraine, that says a lot. From the ROK to Japan, to Singapore, to Australia -- all of these countries are providing support in one way or another to Ukraine because they believe what happens there matters strategically for them in the Indo-Pacific.

Mr. WILSON. Hey, it is an unintended positive consequence, just like Sweden and Finland.

I yield back.

Mr. WITTMAN. Thank you, Mr. Wilson.
 We will now go to Mr. Courtney.
 Mr. Courtney. Thank you, Mr. Wittman.
 And thank you to all the witnesses.

And I want to join my colleagues in terms of expressing our respect and admiration for Admiral Aquilino's service and the fact that he has always, I think, understood that we are an independent, separate branch of government. And your testimony has always, you know, accordingly, treated us in that fashion.

Admiral Aquilino, yourself and your predecessors, Admiral Harris and Admiral Davidson, have repeatedly testified at these hearings over the years to stress the importance of our submarine programs in the Indo-Pacific.

And page 21 of your testimony talks about how the undersea domain is getting a little more crowded out there with Russia now with a Pacific fleet, the Severodvinsk and the upgraded Kilos that are out there.

Can you just express, again for the record, how critical is the mission of U.S. attack submarines in maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific?

Admiral AQUILINO. Certainly, Congressman. Thanks.

Again, the United States' asymmetric advantage of undersea capabilities, we are second to none and that is a domain that we need to maintain superiority. We need to maintain capacity and we need to maintain the industrial base that supports it.

So, again, I should say, as you work the supplemental, thank you very much for the \$3 billion identified towards supporting the industrial base, the Indo-Pacific, Taiwan. And as Dr. Ratner said, the linkage between the Ukraine support and the support for the Indo-Pacific can't be separated. But we need to maintain those investments in the undersea sets of capabilities because they allow us to be dominant.

Mr. COURTNEY. No, and I agree with you about the submarine industrial base funding, which, again, is spread between not just production, but also maintenance, which is a critical effort that we need to protect.

But, as Admiral Harris used to say over and over again, quantity is also quality in terms of our fleet. We have a budget that came over that will decommission three Virginia -- sorry -- three Los Angeles class submarines and cut procurement from two to one, the first time in 13 years.

And just again, in terms of just looking out at our commitments that we just made, which I enthusiastically support in terms of the AUKUS sales of three submarines in the 2030s, you know, can you just comment in terms of how you see that, how that budget fits in or doesn't fit it, in terms of the next few decades?

Admiral AQUILINO. Thanks, sir.

So again, with the capabilities that the PRC are producing, delivering, and continue to support, their numbers and their capability and capacity are increasing. That's a conscious decision by the CCP to support a 7.2 percent defense increase, despite an economy that is on the decline.

And I agree, we are at a point where the capability being produced does have a quality all of its own as it applies with capacity.

It is the world's largest navy right now. It is soon to be the world's largest air force, as they continue to produce.

So, across all Joint Force capabilities, you know, I don't support a reduction of capacity in the theater, so that we can continue to deliver the deterrent effects we need.

Mr. COURTNEY. Thank you.

I mean, this is not the budget hearing at this point, but, clearly, the top line for Virginia and shipbuilding in general is lower than 2024. And as I said, the net numbers really I think raise tremendous concerns amongst our colleagues.

Really quickly, you know, we have seen in recent news accounts about the fact that Philippine fishermen are getting rammed in the East China Sea area and South China Sea area. Can you comment about whether there is any, like, even version of a mil-to-mil communication to try and sort of reduce these types of episodes and incidents, either with the Philippines and the Chinese navy or the United States or INDOPACOM?

Admiral AQUILINO. So, there are procedures in place to avoid dangerous and unsafe accidents. We have been doing it for decades. COLREGs is that current environment or procedural set of guidance.

Additionally, with the PRC, we have, the United States has a code for unplanned encounters at sea. That should also separate and avoid those things.

The Philippines can use those. They have communicated with the PRC. Yet, the PRC continues to execute this belligerent, dangerous, and aggressive activity to prevent Filipino fishermen from executing their rights inside of their Exclusive Economic Zone at Scarborough Shoal.

And they have also prevented the resupply of the Philippine forces on Sierra Madre at Second Thomas Shoal. Those are not based in legality. The 2016 Tribunal has ruled that the PRC has no legal claim to the area of Second Thomas Shoal. Yet, they continue to drive a perception and they articulate that that is Chinese sovereign territory. It is not.

Mr. WITTMAN. I thank Mr. Courtney.

And we will now go to Mr. Lamborn.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you all for testifying.

Admiral, I would like to congratulate you on your upcoming retirement and for four decades of service to our country.

Admiral Aquilino, when you appeared before this committee last year, I said that accelerating the development of our offensive and defensive hypersonic capabilities was a top priority. My colleagues agreed and Congress mandated that we field a defensive capability by 2029.

Last year, the Director of the Missile Defense Agency, Vice Admiral Hill, testified that pushing the fielding of the Glide Phase Interceptor into the 2030s does not meet the threat. Do you agree with Admiral Hill, first of all, Admiral Aquilino?

Admiral AQUILINO. Thanks, Congressman Lamborn.

So, from the INDOPACOM position, right, I have articulated the requirement -- and it has been consistent for five years -- which is a 360-degree integrated air and missile defense capability for

Guam that would protect our citizens and protect the forces that we need. And that includes ballistic, hypersonic, and cruise missile threats. So, the requirement has remained consistent. The ask has been articulated in my last three reports and the two reports that Admiral Davidson submitted before me. This gets to my testimony, which is we must go faster. And I have articulated that needs to be in place by 2027.

Mr. LAMBORN. Okay. I like that, 2027. Because I'm concerned because not only did the Missile Defense Agency recommend ending the SM-3 Block 1B program -- we can talk about that in a minute -- but also delaying the Glide Phase Interceptor until 2035. That is eight years later than 2027. So, that is not responsive to the needs of INDOPACOM, is it?

Admiral AQUILINO. Again, sir, I'm the guy who articulates the requirements and I have set those. Those have been set very clearly and consistently. Again, this goes to the fact that we all need to go faster.

Mr. LAMBORN. Okay. And are you also concerned about the recommendation in the fiscal year 2025 budget request to terminate the primary sea-based missile defense interceptor in the fleet, the SM-3 Block 1B?

Admiral AQUILINO. For the requirements that I have set, Congressman, it doesn't matter to me what provides it. If there are capabilities that deliver to provide those defenses against cruise, ballistic, and hypersonic threats, I'm going to be okay. So, I will have to go back and look at that particular weapon and effector to see if it impacts what we need, based on the requirements. I haven't heard that there is a concern at this point.

Mr. LAMBORN. Well, if you could get back to us on that, that would be very helpful. We also know, for instance, from Dr. McCormick testifying in front of a Strategic Forces Subcommittee hearing, that China has the world's leading hypersonic arsenal; that we are falling behind China in that particular regard.

Can you explain the value of having a conventional offensive hypersonic capability that INDOPACOM could use?

Admiral AQUILINO. To execute the strategy and to deliver the deterrent effects we need, Congressman, it is combined through what we talk about as decision superiority. Again, the Chinese will continue to develop weapons that they believe have advantage and deliver vulnerabilities to the United States. We need to negate those vulnerabilities, and we need to take advantage of our capabilities that outmatch theirs.

So, the criteria that I have asked for, and the way we talk about decision superiority, is in the form of blind, see, and kill. I need to prevent the adversary from being able to close their kill chains against our forces. That is the blind piece. The "see" is persistent awareness and understanding of everything in the battle space at every second real time. And then, the kill are the networks and the effectors, our weapons that allow me to deliver effects, if tasked, such that we can act and deliver those effects at speed well in advance of our adversaries.

Mr. LAMBORN. Well, specifically, would INDOPACOM be able to use a conventional offensive hypersonic capability, and would hav-

ing that somehow be destabilizing, even though China has that as well today?

Admiral AQUILINO. Yes, we have certainly identified the need for that. There are some capabilities that exist. The Chinese have put production capability in their place, and we must get to that same place. I don't think it would be destabilizing.

Mr. LAMBORN. Thank you so much. I yield back.

Mr. WITTMAN. I thank Mr. Lamborn.

We will now go to Ms. Jacobs.

Ms. JACOBS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And thank you to our witnesses.

I wanted to, first, talk about Papua New Guinea. As you know, in April 2022, the Biden administration identified Papua New Guinea as a partner country to prevent conflict and promote stability, pursuant to the Global Fragility Act.

Last year, the administration released a 10-year strategy. As part of that strategy, the interagency has committed to improved justice systems and professionalized security forces. The GFA requires the interagency to align all activities in priority countries.

So, Assistant Secretary Ratner and Admiral Aquilino, can you both discuss the ways in which INDOPACOM is prioritizing its engagement in Papua New Guinea to professionalize security forces and promote justice and accountability, and how you are coordinating with the State Department and USAID on those activities?

Mr. RATNER. Maybe I will start, and then, turn it over to

Admiral AQUILINO.

Thank you for the question. And, in fact, last week, I had the opportunity to testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee alongside Assistant Secretary Krittenbrink from the State Department and Michael Schiffer from USAID(United States Agency for International Development) on the Pacific Islands, in particular, to talk about the whole-of-government approach. Because, as it relates to the Pacific islands, only three of them have militaries. We do security cooperation throughout the region, but this is very much an effort in which our development, finance, and diplomacy are front and center. So, we coordinate with them very closely.

As it relates to Papua New Guinea, in particular, as you know, last year, we signed a Defense Cooperation Agreement, a historic agreement, with Papua New Guinea. I had the opportunity to travel down there with Secretary Austin for the first visit ever by a Secretary of Defense to Papua New Guinea.

And we have managed to sign a new ship rider agreement that allows for Coast Guard cooperation. We can help them with maritime domain awareness.

And we are working, under the Defense Cooperation Agreement, to strengthen their own capability, as well as to explore possible access and infrastructure opportunities for the United States, both maritime and air. And I know INDOPACOM site survey teams have made one trip down there already late last year and are going to be executing a second one soon. So, we are moving out on that agreement.

Admiral AQUILINO. Congresswoman, I have been to Papua New Guinea twice, and I hosted the delegation that negotiated the DCA

at my house prior to the agreement. That is the amount of importance that I take as it applies to PNG.

Historically, if you go back to World War II, we operated from bases there, both airfields and seaports. And it is critical for the support that we would need.

Plus, the people there are wonderful and they have many of the same values that we do -- of freedoms and the desire to have a voice free of coercion.

What we have done to date, Dr. Ratner highlighted I have teams there in Lae that have identified what is it that it looks like to take the next step, which is to support construction of capabilities. And we are going to continue to work to build those out, assuming that the funding is authorized and appropriated. So, really important.

Ms. JACOBS. Thank you, and thank you for that. And we will continue monitoring, since the Global Fragility Act implementation is a big priority of mine.

I wanted to ask quickly to both of you again about the new BRAVO AI Battle Lab that INDOPACOM is creating. And if you could talk more about that and, in particular, how you are working to ensure warfighters have a clear process for reporting any new technologies in the AI space that aren't working or aren't functioning as reliably or responsibly as we had intended, once they are in use.

Admiral AQUILINO. Yes, I think that one is for me, Congresswoman. Thanks.

So, that battle lab is used to develop and build our Joint Fires Network. I talked about the kill, which is both the network and the weapons that allow me to close kill chains across great distances.

We have linked that with DARPA through the previous Assault Breaker II Program; support from Ms. Shyu in R&E, from ANS, from CDAO. And we are pulling that together in my headquarters through our Joint Mission Acceleration Directorate to deliver those capabilities you are talking about.

And we are trying to get to best of breed. So, we pulled all of the service programs in and we are trying to integrate those into a joint capability, whether it be Convergence, Overmatch, or ABMS, along with the data that is coming from NSA and our other exquisite sources. We need to pull that together fast and deliver a capability.

And we are going to demonstrate the first version of that, of JFN, in Valiant Shield in 2024. The team has worked incredibly hard and at a pace that I don't think anyone else could have matched.

Mr. WITTMAN. I would like to thank Ms. Jacobs.

I will now recognize myself for five minutes.

Gentlemen, thanks again for joining us.

Admiral Aquilino, earlier you spoke to the unfunded priorities list. We appreciate that, based upon 1302 requirements. We know you are very thoughtful about prioritizing and protecting the homeland.

One of the things you pointed out, too, was building capability and capacity quickly -- I would call it at the speed of relevance -- to increase the risk and uncertainty for the Chinese, to make sure that when Xi wakes up every morning, he says, "No, not today."

One of the aspects of where we can build that quickly is in relation to what we know is a vast domestic industrial complex in China that can do traditional military construction -- that is, exquisite system construction -- much, much faster than we can and in a much greater scale.

The one place that I think holds great promise is us being able to use our technology and innovation in the realm of expendable and attritable platforms. Can you give us your perspective about how we pursue that enterprise in the context of your 1302 requirements? And is there value in talking about, in the acquisition process, creating some guardrails there to say, listen, we ought to acquire systems within these price guardrails? So that we actually get maximum utility and we send the right demand signal to those innovators and creators out there, whether it is for attritable platforms or exquisite platforms.

Admiral AQUILINO. Thanks, Congressman. So, first, let me start by thanking Secretary Hicks for the initiation of the Replicator Program. It is exactly what you are talking about. That \$1.2 billion is in my 1302 report because it is critical to our concept and the ability to deliver multiple dilemmas and problem sets, should there be activity by our adversary.

So, it is important. There are capabilities, technologies that have been passed. I believe our industrial base and those companies who have those capabilities are aware. She has been through tranche one. We are getting ready to do tranche 2.

So, those capabilities that can deliver those effects, we are taking all comers to be able to vet; understand which ones are most effective against my problems, and then, deliver those. That said, they have to deliver them at scale and they have to deliver them cheaply. This is the asymmetric advantage.

Mr. WITTMAN. Yes.

Admiral AQUILINO. So, we are absolutely supportive, and they are included in my report.

Mr. WITTMAN. Fantastic. Thank you.

On your 1302 report, where you talk about the President's budget, and then, what your 1302 requirements are, we see there is a big delta there. And you talked to us earlier about prioritizing those and really going in order of the 42 items that you placed in that list.

As Congress makes those tough decisions about how do we place resources properly, give us your perspective on how we can make sure that we are coming up with the right formula. I want you to elaborate on maybe what you talked to us about earlier, about how do we look at that list and the things that we need to do.

Obviously, we are probably not going to have the resources to fulfill the list, and you have asked for that, which you should. But I want to get a little drilldown from you as to how we should look at doing all we can within the context of the list you provide us.

Admiral AQUILINO. Thank you, sir.

So again, I have provided that 1 to N list of priorities that you have asked for. I would categorize it this way: they focus around, No. 1, defense of the homeland, which is the Guam Defense System. That is certainly the top priority.

And then, below there, we get at the blind, see, kill aspect of this, which includes our Joint Fires Network; our INDOPACOM Mission Network, which allows us to communicate with all of our allies and partners. Right now, I have 16 networks to do that. I would prefer to have one.

Mr. WITTMAN. Right.

Admiral AQUILINO. I would prefer to fund one.

Mr. WITTMAN. Yes.

Admiral AQUILINO. I think you would, too.

Mr. WITTMAN. Yes.

Admiral AQUILINO. And then, that network tied to the weapons that can deliver those effects, that would be how I look at it in the top priorities listed. And so, we are always ready to work with your staff, should you have further questions on additional drilldowns.

Mr. WITTMAN. Absolutely. What would be your message to those that look at the list and say, "Well, we can't do that"?

Admiral AQUILINO. I guess what I would say is the process allows me to input my requirements into the overall PPB&E. Again, there's tough choices to be made, but I can tell you, this adversary, as Secretary Ratner said, there is no other adversary with the capability, capacity, means, and intent to displace the United States. That is why it is the top priority. So, you have got to make some tough choices, and I have articulated the resources I think I need to do that.

Mr. WITTMAN. Very good. So, you would say -- not to put words in your mouth -- but you would say that this is an all-hands-on-deck call moment for folks across the enterprise, both in the Pentagon, in the Service Branches, and in the industry?

Admiral AQUILINO. That is exactly what I would say, and by the way, with a sense of urgency, and in ways that can get past our slow and antiquated processes.

Mr. WITTMAN. Very good. Thank you, Admiral Aquilino.

We will now go to Mr. Deluzio.

Mr. DELUZIO. Thank you, Mr. Wittman. I appreciate it.

Mr. WITTMAN. Thank you.

Mr. DELUZIO. Good afternoon, gentlemen.

And, Admiral Aquilino, I want to echo many of the kind words passed on/said by my colleagues about your service. But, as a fellow Naval Academy grad, I would remiss to not mention that you are also the "Old Goat," the longest-serving grad in the fleet. So, we are very proud of that.

Admiral, I will start with you. In your testimony, you mentioned significant PLA, People's Liberation Army, buildup across all domains. I will quote part of it back to you. "In three years since I took command, the PLA has added over 400 fighter aircraft, more than 20 major warships, has more than doubled its inventory of ballistic and cruise missiles." End quote.

Last year, I asked you about Chinese shipbuilding investment compared to our own, and you made clear, then, that the Chinese are building ships at a pace that far exceeds ours. Has that trend changed at all since this time last year?

Admiral AQUILINO. No, Congressman. Matter of fact, it is one of the key reasons I'm concerned, is that, despite an economy that has taken a 30 percent hit, as a best estimate, right, they have

prioritized the delivery of military capability/capacity. It hasn't slowed down. Increased the budget by 7.2 percent.

Oh, by the way, that is what they advertise. Their budget process is not very transparent. My assessment is it is larger than that, and it is way cheaper to deliver stuff when you have a guaranteed workforce without all of the safeguards that we put into ours. So, that is why I say the trend is in the wrong direction.

Mr. DELUZIO. And to be clear, we are not talking just about the fleet for them? We are talking commercial shipbuilding as well in terms of their capacity and output?

Admiral AQUILINO. I'm talking about all capabilities in their joint force. So, shipbuilding, airplanes, missile systems, satellites -- across the board.

Mr. DELUZIO. Dr. Ratner, do you agree the Chinese industrial output capacity is, generally, far exceeding that of the United States?

Mr. RATNER. In some areas, Congressman, yes; in others, no.

Mr. DELUZIO. What are some key ones where it isn't?

Mr. RATNER. Where we are still maintaining the advantage, the undersea capability is one important area, and there are many others.

Mr. DELUZIO. So, I think we can debate the reasons why, the places we are disadvantaged, that we have gotten there. I think part of it is lousy industrial policy decisions across decades; I think a lack of investment in our own industrial base; anti-competitive behavior by China, and looking globally, others.

I will point to the recent Section 301 Shipbuilding Petition that I support that several unions -- including the Steelworkers, IBW, and Machinists -- have brought forward. And I will quote from that:

"Government interventions to accelerate the development of the Chinese shipbuilding industry include policy loans from state-owned banks, equity infusions and debt-for-equity swaps, the provision of steel plate from state-owned steel producers at below-market prices, tax preferences, grants, and lavish financing from China's state-owned export credit agencies." End quote.

Dr. Ratner, I will go to you. Do you agree that those types of unfair trade practices are counterproductive to our efforts in the region, and thus, hurting our national security?

Mr. RATNER. Yes, there is no doubt, and those are longstanding issues that we have had with their industrial policies.

Congressman, what I would say is that, look, the 2022 National Defense Strategy was the first ever that identified the PRC as the United States' top pacing challenge. And since that time, the administration has been moving to realign the budget toward the China challenge and toward the requirements that Admiral Aquilino has identified.

This year's budget would invest \$2.3 billion more in INDOPACOM than last year. That is a nearly 20 percent increase. The focus areas of the budget are on the areas that Admiral Aquilino has largely identified, including in critical munitions and in MILCON(military construction). And we are going to continue to work with them to close these gaps.

Mr. DELUZIO. Understood. And, look, my point, more broadly, is that our domestic supply chains and manufacturing prowess and power are relevant to our security interests across the globe, certainly in the Indo-Pacific. All the things we need to produce -- ships, submarines, aircraft, whether it is engines, pumps, valves, steel, you name it -- we should be doing things like we are doing with semiconductors.

And I will close with, you know, my particular concern around steel and the proposed sale of Pittsburgh-based U.S. Steel to a Japanese company. Of course, our Japanese friends are important regional partners of ours, but I oppose the deal, which I think will hurt folks in my part of Pennsylvania, but also undermine our security interests in manufacturing and industrial leadership.

I have been proud to see President Biden also oppose it. And my hope is we see more American icons, like U.S. Steel and others, rise and be there to deliver for our industrial base.

So, with that, Mr. Wittman, I will -- oh, Mr. Chairman, excuse me -- I will yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. [Presiding.] The gentleman yields back.

The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Tennessee, Dr. DesJarlais.

Dr. DESJARLAIS. Thank you, Chairman.

This is not an original question, but after seeing some of the unfunded mandates and your shortfall in funding, in an open setting, can you say, roughly, what you are needing to be ready to fight tonight?

Admiral AQUILINO. Yeah, thanks, Congressman. Again, I would categorize it around the defense of Guam system, to be able to protect those citizens and our military capabilities there. It is the assets that deliver the ability to blind, see, and kill our adversary in the form that I have described with regard to persistent battle space awareness and a real-time capability, with the networks and weapons that close the kill chain. There is capability -- and, again, in that report, from one to end, there is a variety of different sets of capabilities that deliver those three things broadly. So that is where I would start. And then there is, again, a number of other things. We will be ready to talk in detail.

Dr. DESJARLAIS. Is there a rough number in billions?

Admiral AQUILINO. The shortfall that I have identified is \$11 billion. Dr. DESJARLAIS. 11 billion?

Admiral AQUILINO. Yes, sir.

Dr. DESJARLAIS. I bring that up because right now on the Hill, the here and now, we know what is going on in Israel. We know what is going on in Ukraine. We know what is going on in the southern border. We see a supplemental emergency request for \$100 billion. I think 65 billion to go to Ukraine, 14 billion to Israel, a little bit of money for the border.

But, you know, this isn't maybe the time or place to have that in an emergency funding. But is it approaching that level? Compared to those other crises that we are facing as Congress and funding, where would you three fit this urgency in terms of funding? Because we are talking \$11 billion. There are 100 billion hanging out there waiting to be voted on. Where does this fit in that picture?

Admiral AQUILINO. So I would say this in addition. And this is the request for the '25 budget, Congressman. Again, I think the supplemental that you are debating, number one, we need it quickly. Number two, everything that is in there, again, there is a bunch of it that has been identified that supports the INDOPACOM needs. There is \$3 billion for infrastructure for the ship maintenance and other things. There is a billion dollars for INDOPACOM requirements. There is \$2 billion in support for Taiwan. Those are all critical needs for INDOPACOM.

But additionally, all that other money that is supporting the Ukraine problem set also provides a deterrent value for INDOPACOM, right? An inability for Russia to succeed is a deterrent for President Xi in INDOPACOM. So it is a large number. But it is all tied. And it is beneficial if you look at the global security environment.

Dr. DESJARLAIS. Yeah, I guess I would just like to see your shortfall included in there as part of that. And I get what you are saying that it is indirectly, but maybe directly considering the urgency of this threat, we ought to be looking at it in that light as well.

Admiral AQUILINO. Thanks, Congressman. I also would like to see it in there.

Dr. DESJARLAIS. Yes, sir. Secretary Ratner, last year China's Military Power Report the Department dedicated a significant amount of the attention to the PLA's growing nuclear capabilities. The report estimated that China had over 500 operational nuclear warheads today and will have over 1,000 by 2030. Is there a reason that you refrained from publishing this when it is beyond 2030. I believe there were previous iterations reported something like 1,500 estimated warheads by 2035. But such estimates tend to be, you know, either an underestimation based on the scale and speed in which Chinese nuclear build-up is occurring. Can you have -- or do you have an up-to-date estimate past 2030 that you can share with the committee today?

Mr. RATNER. Congressman, I don't have an open source estimate to share in this context. But, you are right, we do aim every year to provide the most up-to-date figure in our Annual Military Power Report to Congress. And we will aim to do that again this year.

Dr. DESJARLAIS. Okay. Are you seeing any signs of cooperation between either technical, strategic, or otherwise between the PRC and Russia in terms of their respective nuclear forces?

Mr. RATNER. Congressman, they are certainly engaging in dialogue on advanced military capabilities. I think that question would be better answered in a classified setting.

Dr. DESJARLAIS. Okay. Also, you're probably going to say the same thing here. We know there are 300 ICBM (Intercontinental Ballistic Missile) silos at this point. Do you believe they've loaded any of these or do you not know?

Mr. RATNER. Again, happy to provide information on that in a classified setting.

Dr. DESJARLAIS. All right.

Mr. RATNER. Thank you.

Dr. DESJARLAIS. Fair enough. I am about out of time so I will stop there. Thank you all for being here today. It means a lot.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. Carbajal.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today. Sometimes when talking to officials within the Department or even some members of the House, it sounds as if China invading Taiwan in the next few years is a foregone conclusion.

While I think it is critical that we be prepared for such a scenario, when Taiwan is taken by force, we should be pursuing every option to prevent a conflict in the region.

Admiral Aquilino, in your submitted testimony, you speak about the four lines of effort and the need to move faster on them to reduce the risk of conflict in the near and mid-term. Can you speak to your efforts to move faster on these lines of efforts? Do these lines of efforts also help us reduce the risk of conflict in the long-term?

Admiral AQUILINO. Thanks, Congressman. Yeah, absolutely. The PRC will be a competitor with the United States today, tomorrow and in the future. They are not going away. So the strategy articulates that. All of the actions and the approaches in the four pillars that we have set up, which are posture, our operations, capabilities, and allies and partners are designed to give us a sustained persistent advantage. And by moving faster, that reduces the risk in the near to mid-term and then continuing to modernize and deliver those capabilities and things we need in the long-term will maintain that advantage. All of it, the entire strategic approach by INDOPACOM is designed to prevent this conflict.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you. We have seen China rapidly accelerate in advancement of space capabilities, particularly with an increase in launch cadence. Mr. Ratner, does China's increase in space activity raise cause for concern? How do partnerships like Five Eyes help us and our allies maintain an advantage within the space domain in this AOR(Area of Responsibility)?

Mr. RATNER. Congressman, absolutely it is an area concern and it is an area where we do see China rapidly modernizing and investing. And it is an area in which we are working with our allies and partners including our Five Eyes partners to think about how we can manage that capability and the allies will be an essential part of our response, including our own investments here at home.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you. Mr. Ratner, actually Admiral Aquilino, can you speak to how maintaining superiority in the space domain is important to countering the threat of China in your AOR and do you feel you have the capabilities needed to maintain space superiority?

Admiral AQUILINO. Thanks, Congressman. So I guess I would answer it this way. The items -- the space capabilities identified in my 1302 report have been coordinated with both General Saltzman and the SPACECOM(United States Space Command) commander. Those are designed to meet my requirements as we talked about blind, see and kill. So our space base sensing layer and the other capabilities, we can provide some space are absolutely required. They also generate and support the survivability and protection of my force.

So they are absolutely critical. And I am aligned with both SPACECOM and Space Force as it applies to the asks that are in my 1302 report.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you. Mr. Ratner, islands in the Indo-Pacific are already feeling the effects of climate change and the field of burn more than most regions in the world. Can you speak to how climate change impacts our readiness in this region and what the Biden Administration is doing to counter this?

Mr. RATNER. Well, Thank you, Congressman. And it is a really important question. And as we have seeking to deepen our partnerships in the Pacific Islands, one of the principles upon which those partnerships is based is that we are meeting our partners where they are and working with them on what their top priorities are. And we hear again and again and again from our partners that they are quite concerned about the challenges of climate change. I had the opportunity just within the last couple of weeks to meet with the Deputy Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea who was here visiting Washington and have had the opportunity to engage other Pacific Island leaders who are concerned about this. And it affects our interest as well insofar as we have seen the effects of major storms, whether it Guam of other facilities affect our installations.

And so as it relates to the Department itself, our force posture initiatives and our infrastructure are focused on building climate resilient infrastructure in the region. And, of course, more broadly we are approaching a climate issue from a whole of government approach and the State Department and other members of the inner agency are vital to that.

Mr. CARBAJAL. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am out of time. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, gentlemen. Admiral, I want to follow-up briefly. He just made the inquiry about the space capabilities. I didn't notice any requirements or any unfunded requests on space. Were there?

Admiral AQUILINO. Yes, Chairman, and we can highlight it with your staff as well.

The CHAIRMAN. If you would, please. Thank you.

The chair recognizes the gentleman from Wisconsin, Mr. Gallagher.

Mr. GALLAGHER. Thank you. Admiral Aquilino, good to see you again. Is it correct that the President's budget includes barely half or 58 percent of the capabilities and priorities that you list as critical in your Seize the Initiative Report?

Admiral AQUILINO. Congressman Gallagher, so we have identified a requirement of 26.5 of which there is an \$11 billion shortfall.

Mr. GALLAGHER. So the total cost of where we are short is about \$11 billion?

Admiral AQUILINO. Yes, sir.

Mr. GALLAGHER. And can you explain to this committee and the American people the consequence of failing to find that funding, which includes money for things like defending Guam and the Joint Fires Network?

Admiral AQUILINO. Yeah, I think I would define it in the form of time, Congressman. So this intent from urgency and to move

faster, any delays in those fundings or reduced fundings, push everything out. And then those capabilities, we have asked for deliver not in a relevant time or in a time where they don't deliver the return effects.

Mr. GALLAGHER. So the \$11 billion is important to find. Do you know how much expiring funds, expired funding was cancelled from the Defense Department last year and returned to the Treasury where it sits in abeyance for five years and then evaporates? Do you know?

Admiral AQUILINO. I don't have that number, sir.

Mr. GALLAGHER. The answer is \$11 billion, which is the amount of money you need for your critical priorities list. Not only do we failed to take advantage of money that was appropriated that we could have rerouted for our priority theater, the Indo-Pacific to give you the resources you need to prevent World War III. The Department was actively working against a legislative effort to give DOD the flexibility to reroute that money. I would hope going forward we would find a way to take advantage of that money for our most critical priorities, particularly stockpiling critical munitions and surging it west of the international dateline before it is too late. By some estimates we have lost \$125 billion over the last decade, which is unacceptable. And I fear we are sleepwalking into a conflict that would be horrific.

Dr. Ratner, in recent years we have seen increasing attempts by the CCP to expand their political and economic relationships in the region. I think the Solomon Islands security deal caught a lot of people by surprise. It was doubly disheartening given just the history we have and the fact that a lot of marines paid with their lives for the Guadalcanal and I think the same geographic that made it important in World War II makes it important today. All of the islands have less than 24 percent of the world's land mass, but their EEZs are something like 14 percent of the worldwide total.

We narrowly have avoided failing to renew the compact and free association states agreements. I guess if you were to advise this committee to be paying attention to something that flies under the radar that isn't as sexy as say the defense of Taiwan or, you know, what we do with Japan and Guam itself, where would that be? Where in the region do we need to be spending more time and attention so we can avoid the CCP doing something like they did in the Solomon Islands?

Admiral AQUILINO. Well, thank you, Congressman and fully agree with you that the renewal of the COFA agreement was a really important bipartisan achievement for Congress. That is an area larger than the continental United States that will now be more free and more peaceful because of it.

Look, I think we have a clear understanding of the PRC's strategy in the Indo-Pacific and globally. We have articulated that in the China military power report. They are looking to gain influence and power. And they are looking to divide U.S. allies and partners.

There are the areas that are fundamentally important. And of the focus of this committee. And there are areas where they are pursuing new initiatives, including overseas basing initiative which might be one of those areas -- just to answer your question very specifically, the Military Power Report has articulated places where

we believe the PLA is pursuing basing opportunities in South Asia and Africa, potentially in the Western hemisphere. That may be an area of additional committee attention.

Mr. GALLAGHER. And then quickly, Admiral Aquilino, if we don't have access to Guam, Japan, and South Korea either because of enemy action or political constraints in the conflict what does that mean for your ability to replenish fuel and stores and do repairs in the midst of a conflict?

Admiral AQUILINO. Yeah, Congressman. And, again our strategy has been to diversity. And, again, if you look at the posture asks that we have had, they certainly are broad and expansive across the theater. That is designed to ensure that if there are any places that we are unable to use that we do have alternative places to use.

Some of those are land-based. Some of those might be sea-based. So, again, the approach that we have laid out I think takes into account resilient, redundant and flexible.

Mr. GALLAGHER. My time -- I will yield my four seconds back.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, you got a little extra because they didn't start the clock on you. So you've been very fortunate.

Mr. GALLAGHER. I appreciate it. I feel fortunate to serve under your command.

The CHAIRMAN. The chair now recognizes Ms. McClellan for five minutes.

Ms. MCCLELLAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for convening this hearing today and for our witnesses for being here. I want to follow-up -- well, echo concerns raised by Representative Courtney about the President's budget only including enough funding for procurement of one summary in a year instead of the standard two.

The Pacific Deterrence Initiative was established in the fiscal year 2021 NDAA to enhance U.S. defense posture in the Indo-Pacific region by modernizing and strengthening U.S. Armed Forces, improving logistics, and building our cooperative capabilities with allies.

In recent years, we have seen the percentage grow and the program slow year-over-year and this year the President's budget request calls for \$9.9 billion, an almost \$5 billion decrease in spending despite the committee's allocating more funding year-over-year. Can you, Secretary Ratner, and Admiral explain the decision to request a cut in funding here and does the PDI have everything that it needs to be as effective as possible?

Mr. RATNER. Well, thank you, Congresswoman. And I will just say on the first issue, as you know, the President's budget does request \$4 billion for the defense industrial base, sorry, for the submarine industrial base and combined with funding in the national security supplemental, we believe these investments would be a major step forward in terms of our defense industrial base as it relates to our submarine.

So we are very focused on that issue as well. And I would refer you to Navy Undersecretary Eric Raven's remarks just within the last week where he described his concerns about the near-term ability of the industrial base to produce that additional Virginia class submarine and why it is so important for the budget to make these investments in the submarine industrial base to get that ca-

capacity back on track so there is disagreement about the absolute importance and need for those submarines. And we are investing in the way that we believe is going to get us fastest there. So that is an important point on the submarine industrial base.

On the Pacific deterrence initiative, the President's budget seeks \$9.9 billion for PDI(Pacific Deterrence Initiative), which is consistent with the request last year. So I am not tracking from the administration a cut to PDI funding, and we are making major investments in military construction, and missile defense, exercising training, cyber capabilities and a number of other important areas with allies and partners. And we really thank Congress for its leadership in creating that initiative.

Ms. MCCLELLAN. So to be clear, you think the \$9.9 billion provides you everything you need for the PDI to be as effective as possible.

Mr. RATNER. Congresswoman, the PDI is simply an accounting mechanism based upon a rubric that Congress established. It by no means represents the totality of the administration's investments in the Indo-Pacific nor as it relates to major security challenges like the PRC and the DPRK.

Ms. MCCLELLAN. Thank you. That is a helpful clarification. My staff recently had the chance to travel to Japan and meet with our security partners there, who expressed concerns that ship building and repair capabilities are located almost exclusively in the United States. And then in times of war or during a conflict, this could severely constrain our combat capabilities if we had to send ships all the way back to Hawaii or San Diego for repairs.

Could you give a sense of your assessment of the risk here and what the Department and the administration are doing to ensure we have robust repair capabilities available in the Pacific if a conflict should break out?

Admiral AQUILINO. Well, thanks, Congresswoman. So if we get to crisis or conflict, I certainly don't want to send the ships all the way back to the United States to get fixed.

Those ships that are forward stationed in Japan are repaired in Japan. But having a more set of options for the maintenance and support and sustainability of the force, no matter where it comes from, so that it stays forward and can deliver the deterrent effects we are working towards certainly would be a positive way forward, I believe.

Ms. MCCLELLAN. Thank you. And this one you probably won't be able to answer, but I am going to ask it and if you could provide something for the record later.

If you could give some -- help us understand how operating under a CR (continuing resolution) for the past six months has impacted readiness and procurement for your operations in the Indo-Pacific that would be very helpful. And with that, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady's time has expired. I recognize the gentleman from Florida, Mr. Gaetz, for five minutes.

Mr. GAETZ. Admiral Aquilino, during the Revolutionary War, I think it was like 15 percent of Americans who fought for liberty. Does that sound about right, 15, 20 percent?

Admiral AQUILINO. I couldn't answer that now, Congressman, I would have to go back and look.

Mr. GAETZ. I guess I'm just kind of wondering in Taiwan what percent of the Taiwanese do we assess would actually fight in the event of kinetic conflict with China.

Admiral AQUILINO. Yeah, I also don't have that calculation. What I can tell you is when the Russians invaded Ukraine, that was a pretty good wakeup signal for a lot of people across the globe and especially for those people in Taiwan. And we continue to execute our responsibilities under the Taiwan Relations Act to ensure we support their ability to defend themselves.

Mr. GAETZ. And does that act require the development of a home guard in Taiwan?

Admiral AQUILINO. I would have to go back and look at the law. I don't specifically know if that --

Mr. GAETZ. I don't think it does. But maybe you could talk a little bit about what the home guard theory is in Taiwan, how that would enhance their capabilities.

Admiral AQUILINO. Well, what the people in Taiwan have done is they do have a reserve activation program. President Tsai just extended that to a one year commitment. So, again, when I talk about the people in Taiwan taking it seriously, they are. It includes that approach that you have just articulated.

Mr. GAETZ. And I almost think that is what it is going to take because I worry that the Taiwanese military may be infiltrated by the PLA. And that if there is really going to be a deterrent from a Chinese invasion, that might not come exclusively from the uniform military or even the reservists. So we may have to actually, you know, render capability to the hundreds of thousands of Taiwanese who don't want to be part of China, right?

Admiral AQUILINO. Yeah, your point is valid. And, again, I believe that approach is -- and actions are being taken there. What I would say is the example -- the best example that I think exists is when Israel was attacked by the violent extremists and Hamas, the next day 360,000 Israelis reported for duty. That's the type of response that I believe we will take.

Mr. GAETZ. Yeah, but I worry that we conflate the cultural features there, right? Because what I worry about in Taiwan is kind of a replay in Afghanistan where we look at some fake government, and we do the normal kind of DOD thing of large weapon systems and then we give them to that government and then the real governing power -- in Afghanistan's case the Taliban; in Taiwan's case perhaps China -- has the ability to then repurpose those assets against the United States. So it just seems to me that you are the guy, you are the person in charge of this theater. I think you need to know. You need to have some sort of assessment as to whether or not you're going to get that Israel level response from the Taiwanese. You know, what percentage of this group of people is going to stand up and fight. I am sure we are all continuously informed by events going on around the world. But in Taiwan specifically, like we have seen cases where the PLA is infiltrating their government, their military. And I don't offer that as some sort of criticism. Heck, I think they try to infiltrate our government and our military, too.

But I worry. I worry whether or not we are going to be able to rely on the uniformed service there. So is there a plan at DOD to kind of make these assessments about a home guard and to ensure that you have small arms in the hands of these people that might deter a Chinese invasion?

Admiral AQUILINO. Congressman, there absolutely is. And I would love to talk to you about it in a classified setting.

Mr. GAETZ. Great. No, it is good to know. And is that consistent with this porcupine theory that we think about often with Taiwan?

Admiral AQUILINO. I don't use the term porcupine theory. A lot of people do. What I -- Mr. GAETZ. Why don't you use it? I heard it a lot on this committee.

Admiral AQUILINO. Again I would articulate it in a way that is in alignment with the law, which is we are providing the people in Taiwan the ability, capability and training to be able to defend themselves in time of conflict. That by itself with regard to a strong Taiwan sets of capabilities is a strong deterrent.

Mr. GAETZ. Yeah. I just think this is a real important piece of the homework to emanate from this is to -- we have talked about this Taiwan Security Engagement Act. I get that. But I think you and I are both a little unclear as to the extent to which that authorizes the work with the home guard that we really need to convert Taiwan into an effective porcupine because I assess that this is all about time. China cannot endure an extended war with Taiwan. They can't endure the sanctions. They can't endure the other consequences. And so if we could demonstrate to them that that's going to be a longer period of time, I think that pushes out the inevitability of a kinetic conflict with Taiwan. So I appreciate the exchange, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Massachusetts, Mr. Keating.

Mr. KEATING. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I would like to thank our witnesses for their service.

As a person who is a ranking member on the House Foreign Affairs Committee on Europe and former chairman, I just have a question for Admiral, you know, Aquilino. There is a recent report that I find concerning that Hungary and China have an inked in agreement allowing Chinese police to patrol streets in Hungary alongside their local counterpart. They say it is to boost their security, you know, in well trafficked tourist areas.

But what I'm concerned about is China's penetrating and security services dealing with a NATO ally. You know, what, could you speak to the important no, no, just corporation but solidarity among our NATO allies in terms of dealing with Indo-Pacific and taking a united approach on these issues and concerns about China's activities in that regard and talk to the importance of that relationship as it affects our policy in the Indo-Pacific.

Admiral AQUILINO. Yeah, thanks, Congressman. So again, we are a globally integrated world like no one has ever seen before. The PRC's intent, as Dr. Ratner stated, is to, you know, achieve in an advantageous position, not just regionally but globally, with regard to some of their basing, their interaction and their intent to separate the United States from our relationships with allies and partners.

The police support is a way that they do that. And they just don't do it in Europe. They are doing that exact model in the Pacific Islands. So it is a foot in the door. It is a way to get power, influence, and the ability to take further actions and set the stage for what you described.

Now that said, I do talk to my other counterparts. You will hear from all the other combatant commanders the activities and actions that China is taking in their AOR, whether it be South America or Europe. And I spoke with General Cavoli last week. We stay close. The importance of the European nations and the U.K. understanding that what happens in the Pacific matters to them is a critical point, and General Cavoli and I synched on that. He is telling that story.

He visited Japan and Korea two weeks ago as he and I coordinate to ensure that we are combating these types of problems from a global perspective.

Mr. KEATING. I just want to thank you for your work in that regard because absent Hungary and some of Hungary's activities, I have never seen the cooperation with our European coalition towards the Indo-Pacific greater than it is today alongside the greater cooperation that you have built in that area to begin with. Dr. Ratner, do you just want to comment on that for a moment?

Mr. RATNER. Congressman, I fully agree with you. I think there is a huge opportunity here to work more with our European allies in the Indo-Pacific. They are operating there more. Some of them are resident powers, like France. And we are working with -- INDOPACOM is working with the U.K., other important Germany and others who are sending forces. Canada, not a European power, but part of the Atlantic community, and all of this contributes to peace and stability and deterrence. And all of these countries have their own relationships and partnerships too. And we can coordinate on security cooperation and together strengthen deterrence in the region.

Mr. KEATING. Also, Admiral, if I could, what gaps in our underwater autonomous vehicles are there and what can we do looking at next year's authorization and appropriations. Because I find that a particularly important area, and we don't want to have any gaps there at a time when it is more necessary than ever.

Admiral AQUILINO. Yeah, thanks Congressman. If you don't mind, I will save gaps discussion for a classified setting. What I would say is --

Mr. KEATING. If you could, just the importance of.

Admiral AQUILINO. Yeah, the importance is critical, right? So the ability to deliver swarming type unmanned attritable capabilities to deliver a problem set for the adversary that they won't be prepared for and would have a really difficult time countering, whether it is undersea, on the sea, or above the sea, all of those capabilities are needed and they are included in our ask as it applies to the 1302 part.

Mr. KEATING. Innovation is so critical in that regard. And that's more research. That's more development. So I would just like to close. You know, our whole posture towards the Indo-Pacific and China's threats really centers on deterrence right now. And I must

say I want to just thank you for bringing up Admiral and your remarks prior to this.

The importance of Ukraine, we are sitting here now talking about deterrence. To me I sit here March 20, we are sitting here not acting on the Ukraine assistance that is so vital, you know, as a deterrent. Because if we fail there, it is just going to send a signal that counteracts all the good work we talked about this morning that you are involved in.

So let's hope we get that done. Hope the speaker puts that on the floor for a vote. It would pass. And I would yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Nebraska, Mr. Bacon.

Mr. BACON. Thank you, Chairman, and thank you, gentleman, for being here. I have a couple questions for Admiral Aquilino and then one for General LaCamera.

First, I want to ask the question about electronic warfare in the Pacific theater. I am told that the PACOM requirement for EA-37s, the new compass call, to provide tremendous amounts of capability, that the requirement is 22. However, the Air Force is only funded for 10 of them thus far. And I don't see any funding plans in the near future.

Can you explain the need for 22 EA-37s and just unpack that for us a little bit?

Admiral AQUILINO. In an unclassified setting, Congressman, I think what I would say is the ability to deliver the capabilities that come from a compass call across the broad spectrum of this theater has the requirements that you have laid out. So it is critically important that we get to those numbers. It is critically -- and I guess what I would say is the only caveat would be those are the mechanism of delivery. If there are other ways to deliver --

Mr. BACON. Right.

Admiral AQUILINO. -- then we might be able to live with less. But we do need the capabilities that currently reside in that aircraft.

Mr. BACON. Thank you. On a similar note, I read where the Navy, because of the budget restrictions, they only do one new attack submarine in the upcoming plan. That concerns me because attack submarines are very important to your war plans. Are we headed the right direction with our attack submarine force size or do you see optimism or -- I see pessimism from where I am, but hopefully I am wrong.

Admiral AQUILINO. Again, I will go back to as the operational commander, the need to dominate and execute our undersea strategy and approach to be able to deliver a successful mission accomplishment, the undersea is critically important. Submarines are an aspect of that.

They are also very important for our office agreement with the U.K.-Australia as it applies to Pillar 1. So, again, I am very supportive of continuing or efforts in the undersea domains.

Mr. BACON. Do you have enough attack submarines now or do you see a plan to get there.

Admiral AQUILINO. I would say if you asked all of our combatant commanders, none of us have enough.

Mr. BACON. Right. On another similar note, I am concerned about the Air Force structure. For every new fighter we bring on,

the Air Force is eliminating two and a half fighters or two and a half aircraft. So we are getting smaller.

And I think in the fight that we could have with China -- hopefully, we don't -- we are going to need a bigger force size than we have now. Could you provide a little bit of your perspective on the Air Force?

Admiral AQUILINO. Yes, Congressman. Let me make it a little more broadly and then drill down.

Number one, it will take the entire joint force, as a matter of fact as you heard Dr. Ratner say, to deter this adversary, it will take all forms of national power, which is the design of integrated deterrence.

So as it applies to the joint force, you know, with the capability capacity that the adversary is building, we need to continue our capability advantages, and we need to get to the right capacity.

I don't support a smaller force in the Indo-Pacific. And specifically when you talk about half the globe, most of it is water. All of it is air. You know, we need the right capacity at the maritime and the air component to be able to deliver deterrent effects, and if deterrence fails, to be able to fight and win. So I don't advocate for getting smaller.

Mr. BACON. I appreciate your perspective. And Mr. Chairman, it seems like something we have to look at it. Our Air Force is getting smaller at a time when it needs to be getting bigger and that's a concern.

And General LaCamera, the North Koreans are one of the most impoverished, malnutrition people on the whole globe. How are we trying to reach them? Do we have an adequate voice of America or those kind of capabilities to communicate with the North Korean people because I see that as being perhaps a weak spot for the leader of North Korea.

General LACAMERA. We are not directly from my command. I have met with individuals from the State Department and the things that they are doing.

The Republic of Korea tries to reach them. They have non-government agencies. They are sending balloons across the border with messages and limited supplies. But we do not have a direct -- it is not part of my mission statement to communicate to them.

Mr. BACON. Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from California, Mr. Panetta.

Mr. PANETTA. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Gentleman, thanks all three of you for being here. There was a recent article in the Economist that talked about -- that title was, Does America's Army's Future Lie in Europe or Asia? Within that he had a couple of quotes from a couple generals, including James Rainey who says that basically now we are going to fight under constant observation, constant contact. There is no break. There is no sanctuary.

General Harrington goes on to say that China has optimized its forces to attack U.S. satellite ships and air bases, however, but not to find, fix, and finish land formations that are distributed, mobile, and networked.

And because of that, the article talked about how we developed these three experimental multi-domain task forces, two that are in

Asia and one that is in Europe. And they can do a wide range of things from gray zone and hybrid to kinetic and conventional warfare.

So I would ask if you can expand and elaborate on these MDTFs, one, too, though also last year's NDAA had mandated a permanent stationing of Green Berets on the Kinmen Island near China to train Taiwanese forces when prior SOF, Special Operation Forces, only made an ad hoc presence on and off the island.

I was wondering if you could elaborate on the current special operations force mission in Taiwan as well and if there is any coordination between the two.

Admiral AQUILINO. Yeah, Congressman, first let me just say the article is incorrect. There is no permanent stationing of U.S. forces there. We can talk in a classified setting for further evaluation but that is just inherently inaccurate.

Mr. PANETTA. On the Kinmen Island?

Admiral AQUILINO. Correct.

Mr. PANETTA. Great. Thank you.

Admiral AQUILINO. Now as it applies to the force that you described, I have a bit of a different view, which is the entire joint force is at risk of being tracked, targeted, and employed against. That is maritime, air, and land. There is no sanctuary for any of the joint force under the structure that the PRC has built, and our actions requirement movement, maneuver, protection, and all the things that we have to do. But there is no sanctuary on the land. So that I inherently disagree with.

Now that said, I do support the MDTF, and it is focused on delivering the capabilities that I need in the Indo-Pacific AOR. But what I would say is it needs all the capabilities that are designed to go with the MDTF(multi-domain task force). So the anti-air capability and the anti-ship capability are lagging. And they need to go to be in there and sooner, right? This is the urgency theme.

So I support the MDTF. It is absolutely the right design. But it has to be fully equipped with all the capabilities it is designed to deliver.

Mr. RATNER. Great. And Congressman, I would just add to that, in addition to the capabilities that Admiral Aquilino mentioned, of course we need the political agreements with our allies and partners to be able to put together the kind of force posture that you describe of being more distributed, more networked, more resilient, and more lethal in that scenario where over the last year, we have made absolute historic progress.

If you look at the agreements that we have made with Japan, with the Philippines, with Australia, with Papua New Guinea, major transformations. Now it will take time, and I agree with Admiral Aquilino that we need to move absolutely as fast as we can. But the political structures are in place to do exactly that thanks to the great work over the last year.

Mr. PANETTA. Got it. Secretary Ratner, obviously as you know, based on the elections recently in Taiwan, the Taiwanese Democratic Progressive Party won the recent presidential elections, is going to continue, we hope, President Tsai's growing relationship with the U.S. Meanwhile, the KMT(The Kuomintang Party) party

won a slight majority in Taiwan's legislature and is expected to favor more cooperation with China.

We might expect China to exploit this split in policy and can anticipate any influence campaigns from the Chinese to increase favorable policy coming from Taiwan's legislature. How are we preparing to approach these cross-state relations under a split Taiwanese government?

Mr. RATNER. Congressman, we look forward to working with all relevant parties in Taiwan. That includes the incoming administration.

And as you know, the DPP won that election again from a leadership perspective. We have had a bipartisan unofficial delegation go out around the time of the election to meet with Dr. Lai. The chairwoman of AIT(Advanced Individual Training), as our envoy, has met with Taiwanese officials. And everything that we have heard suggests that we are very encouraged by the message of continuity in terms of the new incoming government.

To your question about the legislative UM, look, we are committed to working with all parties to advance our critical reforms. And we would encourage members of Congress to do the same.

Mr. PANETTA. Thank you, gentleman. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Indiana, Mr. Banks.

Mr. BANKS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral, I saw in your unfunded priorities list that INDOPACOM believes it needs well over a billion dollars more in air and missile defenses.

So would you agree that it is an urgent priority for INDOPACOM to get more air and missile defenses to protect our forces from a potential Chinese missile and air attacks?

Admiral AQUILINO. Senator, or Congressman, if you are talking about the Guam shortfall, I think it is about \$430 million is we have identified for the ability to put the defense of Guam system in place. That includes both some of the integration capabilities and the military construction that is required.

I have to go back and look at the billion dollar number and where that is. But I do believe we will absolutely need to provide increased air and missile defense to support both the homeland in the form of Guam and wherever our forces are operating from, I am required to protect them. So we will need more integrated air and missile defense.

Mr. BANKS. Understood. So we agree it is an urgent priority. It is clear that we don't have enough air and missile defenses for a fight with China. And I think that is my takeaway from the billion dollar unfunded priorities list. Yet we have used well over 100 of these missiles in CENTCOM(Us Central Command) to shoot down Houthi drones. That cost 100 times less than our own missiles rather than saving them for a potential fight with China.

So, Admiral, has the high rate of missiles that we are using in CENTOM reduced the number of air and missile defense assets that your forces expect to receive next year?

Admiral AQUILINO. I don't know if I would view it that way, Congressman. I think what I would say is for those missiles coming off

the destroyers, those SM2s are resident in my theater on my destroyers, and we have those.

If you are talking about THAAD and Patriot, which again is going to be a pretty large portion of what we are going to need to defend Air Bases and those other places where our forces are, I don't think those have been employed at the large number that would impact me.

What I would say is, you know, I commend those sailors and the joint force and CENTCOM that are executing the protection mission against both our forces and those tankers. They are fighting with what they got. And we should never ask them to stop or conserve.

What we do have to do is move forward on our directed energy path to be able to get on the right side of this cost curve. So your point is completely valid, but bottom line, mission success there, I would never ask them to restrict what they need to do. But we do need to make sure that the capabilities that I have identified are delivered at a relevant time. And then we ought to accelerate the technologies that get us back in the right place.

Mr. BANKS. Yeah, I appreciate your candor on that and well put and well understand.

Dr. Ratner, has President Biden's failure to deter attacks on forces by Iranian proxies deprived our forces in INDOPACOM of vital assets that we might need for a potential fight with China based on what you just heard the Admiral say?

Mr. RATNER. Congressman, our position is that deterrence in the Indo-Pacific is real and strong, and we are doing everything we can to keep it that way.

Mr. BANKS. If we don't have enough air and missile defense assets for one region, how can we expect to be trying to fight in two different regions? I mean, it is an obvious tradeoff, right?

Mr. RATNER. Congressman, look, what I would say is reiterate what I said earlier, which is the 2022 National Defense Strategy identified the PRC as the top pacing challenge. And since then, the Department has produced the most strategy-driven budgets in its history, including investing \$2.3 billion more than last year on Indo-Pacific priorities upwards of a 20 percent increase year-on-year.

So we are doing everything we can to focus on the pacing challenge.

Mr. BANKS. Thank you. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. I want to foot stomp an agreement with what the Admiral said about we should be more aggressively pursuing directed energy capabilities to support our air defense systems in CENTCOM and bend that cost curve.

With that, I will recognize the gentleman from Minnesota, Mr. Finstad.

Mr. FINSTAD. Thank you, Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and to our witnesses for testifying today.

China remains the existential threat to America as an institution and to the American way of life. This is true on all issues, but especially so on critical issues like defense, supply chains, and agriculture.

China's 2024 National People's Congress, the Chinese Communist Party announced a 7.2 percent increase in annual defense spending. China also had a greater than 7 percent increase in defense spending in 2023.

Over a 10 years average, China has increased defense spending at approximately 7.5 percent per year. Considering the serious investment that China is making in its defense primarily to prepare to meet and defeat the United States in war, the budget recently published by the President is woefully inadequate in meeting our top obligation of keeping American citizens safe.

Specifically, the United States has made a strategic and proper choice to build the vast majority of its industrial base in the private sector. The small businesses and private sector companies are the hardworking Americans that rely on a healthy, proper, and sustained demand signal to keep making those investments in the pursuit of defense of America. A lot of these jobs and a lot of these companies are happening all over, rural America, specifically, in my district. And I am proud of them and what they do to our national defense.

As a Reagan Republican, I believe in peace through strength. Our ability to project strength originates from the industrial base. We must invest more in America.

So with that said, Admiral, great seeing you again. With the combination of the scarcity of resources and your growing needs and requirements, how badly do you feel the squeeze and vulnerabilities from the defense industrial base on your supply chain efforts?

Admiral AQUILINO. Thanks, Congressman. It is good to see you, too. Again, I have articulated over three years now the requirement and the need for the defense industrial base to ramp up and be prepared. And that is all across the defense industrial base. That is ship maintenance and sustainment. It is airplane depot maintenance. It is for the ground force maintenance of tanks and other military vehicles. It is weapons production. It is aircraft production. It is ship building.

So critically important for us to be able to have a footing that enables us to deliver a position of strength, right? This is not just in time supply and just in time delivery does not work in the security environment.

Mr. FINSTAD. Thank you for that. And I will just tell you having the honor to, you know, travel all over my district and talk to the folks that are working in the space, the signals that we here in this body that can send out to the countryside gives them the security to invest in those needed professions, whether it is the welders, the pipefitters, the plumbers, whatever it may be. But it also gives that signal to our job providers that there is work to be had, and it is a good long-term proposition for them to invest in.

I would just say I just left the Ag Committee, Mr. Chairman. And as a farmer myself, and I think about agriculture and food and food security as a national security piece, I will tell you China's investment in farmland in the U.S. and specifically near U.S. military installations is worrisome. It should be worrisome to each and every one of us.

China is also investing at record levels in farmland all over the place here. And this can and likely will lead to food insecurity issues while promoting espionage concerns and really our ability to project power can be compromised by this Community China investment in our farmland.

We must pay attention to this before it is too late. And, Mr. Chairman, I would just say in my closing here that food and farm security is national security. And I think that this committee can and needs to talk more about our farmland and the food security piece because it is a strong component in our national security.

So I appreciate all of you being here today. I appreciate the service and the work that you do for our men and women and for our country. So with that, Mr. Chairman, I would yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back.

Admiral AQUILINO. Could I make a --

The CHAIRMAN. Certainly, go ahead.

Admiral AQUILINO. So, Congressman, you are highlighting the Chinese approach, which is all forms of their national power to deliver an advantage for their objectives. So that is point one.

Point two, and I should have said this, the supplemental is so important because it does have in it those things that you described in the form of the industrial base, \$3 billion. And I thank the Chairman and the committee for supporting that. That is a great start to getting us back on track. And I thank you, Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. Sure. Before we go to the next member, I want to point out that we are going to be called for votes in about 20 minutes so we intend to adjourn this hearing at 1:30. So with that, the Chair now recognizes the gentlelady from Hawaii, Ms. Tokuda.

Ms. TOKUDA. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Admiral Aquilino, General LaCamera, since this is your last posturing hearing before this committee, I join my colleagues in thanking you both for your service and your leadership in your respective commands. Admiral, I hope you will continue to visit us in Hawaii and know that is always going to be home for you. And I especially appreciate the partnership and commitment to working with the people of our beloved state over the past few years and addressing our shared challenges that we have had.

You know, among those shared challenges has been the state of aging military infrastructure in Hawaii in across the issue, an issue I am very passionate about. And I know these issues generally fall on the service budget. But as a critical customer and user of this infrastructure, INDOPACOM has a significant stake here.

In Hawaii whether it is the barracks and electrical grid at Schofield, aging hangers at Kaneohe Bay in my own backyard, the failing waste water system at Pearl, the ramp at Hickam, the cumulative impact of these infrastructure issues affects not just our local communities, but also our readiness and the quality of life of our service members and our their families.

Admiral Aquilino, in your written testimony, you mentioned that many infrastructure projects across the AOR still need to be prioritized by the services with only 12 of over 200 required projects completed in the three years of your command and 47 high

priority MILCON projects still needing to be funded. I would also note the significant infrastructure gap of \$3.4 billion identified in your unfunded priorities list, which would suggest that the FY25 budget falls far short of the \$4.8 billion in infrastructure needs identified in your Section 1302 report. And that's not even getting to the infrastructure equities that fall to the services.

I know my friend and colleague Mr. Moylan would agree would agree with me on how important it is that we stop delaying, especially in remote places like Hawaii, Guam, and the Pacific where deferred maintenance and delayed investments lost us not only time but also resources given the cost increases as well.

Admiral Aquilino, how does the aging military infrastructure affect INDOPACOM's ability to project power out into the clusters you mentioned and effectively deter aggression? And what risks are we imposing on INDOPACOM because of these delayed investments in our infrastructure?

Admiral AQUILINO. Thanks, Congresswoman. It is good to see you. So about a year plus ago, again, in coordination with Congress, I commissioned a study by all the components to identify what infrastructure in Hawaii would potentially negatively impact my ability to generate the force and deploy it?

That was in the wake of, if you remember, we had a couple of water main breaks. And it gave us an indication that we need to look at this and ensure that we A, understand it, and then B, invest in it to fix it.

So that report was developed. I briefed it back to Congress. And the service components were tasked to go ahead and put that into their palms and maintain the ability to generate the force from Hawaii. So we continue to watch that.

I am concerned about power generation and brownouts and blackouts that we get sometimes. So we are watching it very closely. And we need to ensure that we reinvigorate the critical infrastructure required to support and generate the force in time of crisis.

Ms. TOKUDA. Thank you very much. I am going to come back. But I do want to ask another question, Admiral. What about overseas installations across the Indo-Pacific in places like Japan, Okinawa, and the Philippines, what is your assessment of military infrastructure and deferred maintenance impacts on readiness and quality of life that we have on those critical assets?

Admiral AQUILINO. Yeah, that report I mentioned, Congresswoman, was tasked for all of our forward station forces. So it was facilitated or at least was identified based on the water main on Hawaii. But I had tasked that same requirement not only for Hawaii, but for Japan and our other forward station bases.

We were a little better off there. Some of that stuff was newer. But we are monitoring it. Again, the services are required to keep that ready.

Ms. TOKUDA. Do you especially feel, and was this part of the report that given extreme weather conditions that we are seeing that a lot of it also has to do not just with the state of the current condition but also resiliency, Guam facing the most super typhoon. But these are more common instances that we are experiencing. So it was part of that reporting, extreme weather impacts, climate

change in terms of how that might factor into war gaming and planning?

Admiral AQUILINO. Thanks, Congresswoman. Again, so the national security impacts of climate change is what we focus on. And the severity of storms, sea level rise against our military capabilities, the ability to plan and then build our construction in a way where it is aligned and can sustain any of those problem sets, that is how we look at it. So it is important. We have done a look across all of the nations and our assets. And we are implementing those requirements to ensure what we build is able to adhere and stand for a long time.

Ms. TOKUDA. Thank you. I know my time is up. I might have more questions to add to the record. I appreciate the report. Now it is on us to make sure we urgently follow that in terms of the due diligence to make sure that it actually done and it is funded. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentlelady's time has expired. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Alabama, Mr. Strong.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you, Chairman Rogers. Thank you, Ranking Member Smith, and each of our panelists today.

Admiral Aquilino, first I want to thank you for your faithful service to our country. It has been a great career. And I appreciate you coming before us. As I shared with you last year, I am fully on board with providing Indo-Pacific command with the proper resources and funding to support the defense of Guam mission.

I know the Army is working to rollout a plan for integrated missile defense for Guam. However, as each of you know, well know, we can't just provide weapons systems. There are several other things needed to support this mission.

What is the defense of Guam 2030 architecture and how does it align in INDOPACOM budget requests and unfunded priorities?

Admiral AQUILINO. Congressman, it is my top priority. I think the shortfalls we identified across all aspects of what is needed, right, the purchasing of the capabilities, the integration of those assets, both the Aegis portion of it, the Army's portion of it with regard to integrating THAAD, Patriot, IFPC, LTAMDS.

That architecture that we have designed, again a shortfall we identified is about \$430 million. That also includes military construction.

So it is the top priority because it is the defense of the homeland and 170,000 U.S. citizens as well as my ability to surge and execute the force.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you. At present, does Guam's existing power infrastructure support the on-demand power needs of the emerging defense of Guam's architecture?

Admiral AQUILINO. Yeah. It is critically important. Again we have taken some steps in the past. I give you this example. So the Andersen Air Force Base power distribution mechanism is all underground. And during that storm, we had only small impacts there. In places where the power distribution was above ground, the super typhoon went through it pretty badly. We have to take those next set of steps.

The Air Force has identified \$7.2 billion to do that. The Navy has identified, I think it is \$22 something billion. That, I think, is a

combination of the critical infrastructure needed plus the additional capabilities on the sub-base. So we have to work through that. But the ability to sustain Guam, certainly from storms and ultimately from attack, is critically important to us.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you. Admiral and General, earlier this week we saw yet another reckless attempt by North Korea to destabilize the Indo-Pacific through three short-range ballistic missile launches off its Eastern Coast. We currently have THAAD batteries standing ready to defense against these type of actions in two locations in the Indo-Pacific, Guam and South Korea.

Last year, INDOPACOM released an operational needs statement that advanced THAAD's capabilities to defeat the full range of advanced ballistic and hypersonic missile threats. Can you speak to the needs in the upgrade to the THAAD that will be required to support integrated air and missile defense requirements?

Admiral AQUILINO. Certainly, Congressman, the integration of all of our ballistic -- well, let me start with the sensing aspect, right? One, we need to identify it, we need to track it, and then we need to shoot it.

I don't care what tracks it. I don't care what shoots it. We just got to hit it. So the integration of those capabilities, whether they be Aegis from the shore, Aegis from the sea, THAAD, Patriot, and the other systems I identified, they all have to come together to be able to execute at speed. And there is not a lot of time for decisions when you are talking about, you know, intercontinental ballistic or ballistic missiles.

So we are working to do that on Guam. And then the architecture and integration certainly exists across all those capabilities. Today, we got to get it synchronized, and we got to be able to operate at pace.

Mr. STRONG. Thank you. I will go ahead and mention another thing. I know today we have mentioned PAC-3, SM2, NGI, THAAD(Terminal High Altitude Area Defense), Patriot, directed energy. I want to thank those in the industrial base. Many of these are Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama. And I took a co-del there with many members. I am just telling you right now, it is unbelievable. We have got to be prepared. We have got to get the warfighter what they need to defend our country. I thank each of you for being here. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from Massachusetts, Mr. Moulton.

Mr. MOULTON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral Aquilino, generals and admirals win awards and immortal fame for winning wars, not preventing them. But for your work over the last three years, in my humble opinion, I think you are an American hero.

We are not where we need to be. We have a lot more work to do. But we are a lot closer to where we need to go because of your leadership.

You have also been someone who has been willing to engage in the debate, the debate with our committee that should be a hallmark of the relationship between the Department of Defense and our Congress.

You have even been willing to admit when you are wrong. You and I have had our fair share of debates. I have been willing to

admit that, too. And I think I have had to admit it more times than you.

But when we fail to participate in that humble and honest debate, we are ceding one of our supreme advantages over our authoritarian allies. So it is incredibly important. And you have set a great example by your leadership so thank you.

Admiral Aquilino, China has been getting steadily more aggressive in their actions against our allies in the Philippines, threatening their sovereign territory, their economy, their sailors, and their ships. How should we respond?

Admiral AQUILINO. Thanks, Congressman. And again I, too, appreciate the debates. I will say that I don't have to get it all right. I just got to get it less wrong than the other guy.

Let me start by saying I am not a hero, right? The heroes that exist out there are the 380,000 soldiers, sailors, marines, civilians, and their families. I will pass on your comments to them because I would have failed without them. They are incredible.

Mr. MOULTON. Thank you.

Admiral AQUILINO. As it applies to Philippines, you know, it is a really critical hotspot right now that could end up in a bad place. The continued belligerent and aggressive and dangerous activity by the PRC against our allies in the Philippines is concerning to me. The Chinese have no legal claim to the area that they have articulated as their sovereign territory and the fact that they are now fire hosing and ramming Philippine ships attempting to support Philippine sailors on the Sierra Madre.

So I am concerned where it could go. I would hope that the international community condemnation of those actions is enough to get the Chinese to back off. But if it doesn't, it could go in bad places.

The Philippines, if a sailor or soldier or one of their members were killed, could invoke Article 5 of the Mutual Defense Treaty. And that would put our policy decision-makers in a place that would require really tough choices.

It would be my requirement and responsibility to provide the Secretary with options if that were to happen.

Mr. MOULTON. Dr. Ratner, where do you assess that we have the strongest advantage over our potential adversaries in developing those allies and partnerships in the regions, some of which have really atrophied over the years, and how do you think about what we need to do from the administration perspective but also from the congressional perspective to strengthen those allied relationships and ensure that when Xi Jinping looks out at the Pacific, he sees a lot of allies and not just the United States of America?

Mr. RATNER. Thank you, Congressman. A really important question. And I think the fact of the matter is that today our most important alliance is in partnerships that are stronger than they have ever been. So if your question is where are our strong points? They are in the Republic of Korea, Japan, Philippines, Australia, India, and among other partners in ASEAN as it relates to the Indo-Pacific.

I think in terms of what can we do to make them stronger, we have bilateral agendas with all of these countries where we are working with them, strengthening their capabilities, advancing our

roles, missions, and capabilities, expanding our posture opportunities as we talked about earlier.

And one of the most important and innovative elements of our strategy in the region is the degree to which we are starting to knit these together. So we have seen unprecedented cooperation between the United States, the ROK, and Japan. We are seeing unprecedented cooperation between the United States, Japan, and Australia, where they have designed their own access agreements. And we have now seen F-35s from both countries visit each other.

We are working on the Quad. We are integrating the Philippines into these structures. So it is not just an individual hub and spoke model, but a set in a constellation of partnerships that really strengthens deterrence.

Mr. MOULTON. Well, I think where you can have recommendations for Congress about how we can better support that work, it is something that we would like to hear. So thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back. I would remind people that we are supposed to adjourn at 1:30, but we are going to try to get in two more members. Mr. Moylan of Guam and Mr. Davis of North Carolina. Mr. Moylan of Guam, you are recognized.

Mr. MOYLAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. As you know, my work on the Armed Services Committee has focused on two issues as the safety of the people of Guam and the need for resilient civilian infrastructure on Guam, which underpins military readiness.

I would like to thank the INDOPACOM for having prioritized the safety of the people of Guam and making missile defense their number one unfunded priority for FY25. I will also lead these efforts to ensure that this item is fully funded.

Admiral, on Guam, the military and civilian communities share one port, one power grid, one set of roadways, and all other major infrastructures. Yet Guam's infrastructure is being pushed to the point of failure.

I have put forward several legislation proposals addressing the problem. However, can you please speak to the military importance of this infrastructure and any national security risk posed by allowing this infrastructure to fail?

Admiral AQUILINO. Yeah, thanks, Congressman. With Guam as a critical aspect of our strategic approach and the ability to deter and generate forces both the capability to defense, the capability to deliver often affects and the ability to sustain the force through the airport and the seaport that exists there, Guam is obviously a strategic location and critical to our approach.

So that says everything has got to work to include the infrastructure. It has got to be flexible, it has got to be redundant, and we can't have breaks.

So we talked about the numbers of \$7.2 billion on the Air Force side, 22.4 I think for the Navy side. We have to be able to get this in a place where we do have sustained, consistent, flexible, and redundant power, water, and all of the capabilities needed to generate the force.

Mr. MOYLAN. Thank you. The next question, Admiral, is 40 percent of our cargo moving through the Port of Guam is military

cargo. The military is the largest consumer of electrical power on Guam. Yet the load shedding occurs and the Department of Defense is not affected. And the military is the only organization exempt in Guam, its local law, from weight restrictions for vehicles on public roads.

The people of Guam have come to a consensus that the federal government must contribute to the reconstruction of our infrastructure. I have responded to this consensus by proposing legislation such as Typhoon Mawar Reconstruction Act, which will allow FEMA(Federal Emergency Management Agency) to carry out necessary construction efforts. Would expanded federal involvement in Guam's infrastructure make your mission easier?

Admiral AQUILINO. From my seat, Congressman, again, it doesn't matter the mechanism that gets it as long as the capability can be delivered from Guam and we can support the military requirements as well as being a good part of the community because our footprint will increase there. We need to take that into account. But for me the mechanism doesn't matter as long as it is ready, in place, resilient, and sustainable.

Mr. MOYLAN. Okay. Thank you. And, Admiral, for my final question, a few weeks ago, I had the pleasure of meeting with Brigadier General Cruz, the Adjutant General of the Guam National Guard.

He relayed to me his sentiment of wanting his force to have closeness and presence amongst the force on the island. How does Guam guard being incorporated into this strategic plan of future operations on Guam?

Admiral AQUILINO. Congressman, for the operations and actions that we execute from my seat, the integrated joint force is what is needed. And what that means as it applies to the Guard and Reserve is that if I go to work, and I can't tell who is a guardsman and who is active duty, that is what right looks like.

Now that said on Guam, they are kind of leading the path here. So in the wake of the storm, they went to full activation and support directly alongside the Title 10 component that was supporting there. And that has to happen throughout the region, not just on Guam.

They currently support and protect the THAAD formation there. So I think it is probably a pretty good example of what right looks like for a total integrated force.

Mr. MOYLAN. I thank you, Admiral, and I just want to say I appreciate your service. You have been a good friend to the people of Guam, and you will be missed. But I am sure the next -- your replacement will have that good relationship as well so thank you very much, sir.

And on a final note, I would also like to reiterate that my colleagues and I are still awaiting a clear plan from DOD regarding Typhoon Mawar's recovery. And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back. The chair now recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina, Mr. Davis.

Mr. DAVIS. Thank you so much, Mr. Chair, and to the witnesses for being here today.

Since Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, we have seen President Putin and Xi develop an increasingly intimate relation-

ship. Mr. Ratner and General LaCamera, just last week Russia, China, Iran, completed the at-sea phase of the Sea Security Belt 2024 exercise near the Gulf of Oman.

What can we learn from the exercise about the growing Russia-China relationship?

General LACAMERA. Thanks, Congressman. I mean, we are watching the activities in Ukraine. We are watching the activities in the Middle East. We are watching the training that goes on and around the Peninsula with China, Russia, and DPRK and incorporating it into our exercises, making sure that we understand the capabilities that our adversaries are developing.

And, you know, as a reminder, the treaty does not name an adversary of what we have to do to protect the Republic of Korea.

Admiral AQUILINO. Yeah, Congressman, I am concerned about the increasing relationship between the PRC and Russia. Again, I articulated that the world is more global. It is more integrated. It is more connected. And the two authoritarian powers that are focused on delivering the same strategic objectives is concerning.

I continue to articulate that any win for Russia as it applies to the Ukraine is a win for China. And that is not in our best interest. So the continued support to Ukraine is critical. Again, that is also in the supplemental, but the critical capabilities that you have identified to go to INDOPACOM are also critical. So I thank the Congress for the support and hopefully we can get that passed very soon.

Mr. DAVIS. I want to thank you for your response and respect the time, Mr. Chair, we will be submitting any additional questions. Thank you so much. I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. The gentleman yields back. The Chairman now recognizes General Mr. Garamendi for a brief acknowledgment.

Mr. Garamendi. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Gentleman, thank you for your testimony today and your patience through all of this.

I want to specifically address Admiral Aquilino. I want to thank you for your extraordinary leadership. You are strong, intelligent, thoughtful, always informed, and I must say successful leadership.

It is quite remarkable what you were able to accomplish in your tenure as the INDOPACOM commander. You have focused the Department of Defense and the Congress on the most difficult of all of the regions in this world, and I thank you.

I thank you for the personal relationship we have been able to build and for what you have done for this nation. And with that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

The CHAIRMAN. Well said, and I completely concur. I thank all of you for your presence and your service to our nation. And, with that, we are adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:32 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

MARCH 20, 2024

PREPARED STATEMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

MARCH 20, 2024

STATEMENT BY
ELY S. RATNER
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
FOR INDO-PACIFIC SECURITY AFFAIRS
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

BEFORE THE 118th CONGRESS
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
MARCH 20, 2024

Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and Members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity today to discuss about how the Department of Defense is addressing the pacing challenge presented by the People's Republic of China (PRC) and working with our allies and partners to advance a shared vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

I am pleased to testify alongside Admiral Aquilino from U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and General LaCamera from U.S. Forces Korea, and I acknowledge that today's posture hearing likely marks the last time that the three of us will share a witness table together in our current roles. I thank both of my colleagues for their years of military service to the United States, including in the past three years as we have worked closely together to uphold peace, stability, and deterrence across the Indo-Pacific region.

In 2022, the *National Defense Strategy* (NDS) identified the PRC as the Department's pacing challenge. Since then, Russia's lawless war in Ukraine has continued into its third year, and we have seen an outbreak of violence and instability across the Middle East in the aftermath of Hamas' terrorist attacks on October 7, 2023. At the same time, the PRC remains the Department's pacing challenge given the rapid modernization of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and its growing use as a coercive instrument by the PRC. The PRC continues to present the most comprehensive and serious challenge to U.S. national security because it remains the only country with the will and, increasingly, the capability to dominate the Indo-Pacific region and displace the United States as a global power. In fact, the PLA's coercive and risky activities in the Taiwan Strait, the South and East China Seas, along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with India, and beyond have demonstrated the PRC's revisionist intentions more clearly than ever.

Meanwhile, the 2022 NDS also rightly identifies North Korea as a persistent threat due to North Korea's efforts to advance its illicit nuclear and missile capabilities and engage in destabilizing behavior.

Importantly, conflict in the Indo-Pacific region, as Secretary Austin and senior leaders across the Department have said many times, is neither imminent nor inevitable. This is because, whether on the Korean Peninsula, across the Taiwan Strait, or elsewhere in the region, the Department is doing more than ever to strengthen combat-credible deterrence and to prevail in conflict if necessary. We have also reiterated our openness to dialogue to reduce risks and avoid unintended escalation. Taken together, these efforts are making significant contributions to regional security. More than three years into the Biden-Harris Administration, the Department is supporting Indo-Pacific allies and partners as they strengthen their own capabilities; delivering a more forward regional force posture; connecting U.S. allies and partners in support of a shared regional vision; and making investments to ensure that the U.S. military remains the most capable fighting force in the world.

Supporting Stronger Indo-Pacific Allies and Partners

First, throughout the past year and beyond, the Department of Defense has supported U.S. allies and partners across the Indo-Pacific region as they invest in their own military strength and deterrent. More capable partners who share a free and open regional vision are a critical part of helping advance Indo-Pacific peace and stability.

With Australia, the Department has significantly developed defense industrial cooperation. At the 33rd Australia-U.S. Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN) in July 2023, our two countries decided to co-produce Guided Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (GMLRS) by 2025 as part of advancing our cooperation on Australia's Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordnance (GWEO) Enterprise. In March 2023, President Biden, Australian Prime Minister Albanese, and United Kingdom Prime Minister Sunak announced our plans to support Australia's acquisition of a conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarine capability through the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) enhanced security partnership. And in December 2023, the Defense Ministers of the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom announced new cooperation on advanced capabilities under AUKUS, including the announcement of the AUKUS Maritime Autonomy Experimentation and Exercise Series, an AUKUS Innovation Challenge, and other initiatives. The Unbreakable Alliance between the United States and Australia stands stronger today than ever before, and efforts like these will strengthen the ability of one of our closest Indo-Pacific allies to further contribute to regional peace, stability, and deterrence.

With India, the Department has helped bolster India's defense modernization plans, including by advancing the priorities outlined in the *Roadmap for U.S.-India Defense Industrial Cooperation* that Secretary Austin and his Indian counterpart established during Secretary Austin's June 2023 visit to India. During Prime Minister Modi's Official State Visit weeks later, the United States approved the unprecedented transfer of jet engine technology to India, setting up new co-production opportunities, and in November 2023 our two countries decided to co-produce ground mobility systems. Additionally, the United States and India have continued to drive defense technology innovation through the India-U.S. Defense Acceleration Ecosystem (INDUS-X), which facilitates partnerships among U.S. and Indian defense companies of all sizes, incubators and accelerators, investors, and universities with the support of our two governments. President Biden has described the U.S.-India relationship as "stronger, closer, and more dynamic than at any time in history," and efforts like what I have described will help our two countries' Major Defense Partnership to grow even stronger.

With Japan, the Department has supported Japan's decision to acquire new capabilities that strengthen regional deterrence, including indigenous and acquired counterstrike capabilities like the Tomahawk Land Attack Missile. We have also applauded Japan's decision to double its defense spending over the next five years and develop its research, testing, and industrial expertise to promote regional peace and stability. As Secretary Austin said in December 2022 when Japan released its updated National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and Defense Buildup Program, the U.S.-Japan alliance "remains the cornerstone of peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific, and the United States is committed to working with Japan in support of the goals enshrined in both countries' strategies."

The Department has also sustained activities to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability, consistent with the Taiwan Relations Act and in support of our efforts to maintain the status quo across the Taiwan Strait. We continue to leverage all tools at our disposal to provide Taiwan with materiel and non-material support necessary for its self-defense – including Foreign Military Sales (FMS), Foreign Military Financing (FMF), and Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA). The combination of these authorities has enabled us to sustain ongoing security cooperation with Taiwan, prioritizing capability development commensurate with the threats

Taiwan faces. The continued funding of these authorities for Taiwan in both the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 budget request and national security supplemental will enable the Department to sustain efforts.

With our Southeast Asian partners, we continue to prioritize enhancing their lawful jurisdictional control within their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). We are advancing this outcome through three lines of effort: sense, operate, and integrate. On sensing, we are enhancing partners' awareness of activities within their EEZs, through the Maritime Security Initiative (MSI) and the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA). With these tools, the Department and Quad partners have delivered more than \$475M in maritime domain awareness support to the region over the last eight years. We are assisting Southeast Asian allies and partners in operating differently by diversifying the maritime platforms and systems they have to respond to incidents within their EEZs. We are identifying and delivering new commercial off-the-shelf technologies, and emerging technologies, that can rapidly strengthen partners' ability to promote safety and security within their waters. Third and importantly, we are using training and exercises to assist partners with safely and effectively integrating maritime domain awareness data in their operational activities.

The 2022 *Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States* makes clear that the United States “will work with allies and partners to deepen our interoperability and develop and deploy advanced warfighting capabilities as we support them in defending their citizens and their sovereign interests.” By supporting the growing military capabilities of U.S. allies and partners, including through the efforts I have just described, the Department is equipping a range of likeminded states to further contribute to peace, stability, and deterrence in the region home to the majority of the world's people and economy.

Delivering a More Forward Indo-Pacific Force Posture

Second, we are delivering a U.S. force posture in the region that is more mobile, distributed, resilient, and lethal. The Department is fielding combat credible forces in the Indo-Pacific region that can rapidly respond to aggression and successfully deny a potential adversary's objectives. This means deploying U.S. forces forward, integrating alongside our allies and partners, being resilient, and capable of rapid, decisive action. Potential adversaries should know that aggression in the Indo-Pacific region would risk enormous costs and uncertain outcomes – and U.S. force posture remains critical for maintaining that deterrent.

For these reasons, the Department's momentum over the last 18 months toward fortifying our forward defense perimeter has marked a generational improvement in our ability to maintain regional peace, stability, and deterrence alongside U.S. allies and partners.

In December 2022, the United States and Australia announced a series of new force posture initiatives that include increased rotations of U.S. bombers and fighters through Australian bases, as well as future rotations of U.S. Navy and U.S. Army capabilities. These rotations will support training and bring more capable U.S. forces to the Indo-Pacific region, ready to quickly respond to any crisis. The United States is also deepening our logistics cooperation with Australia, which will strengthen our shared ability to move and sustain forces effectively, ensuring we can project

combat power throughout the Western Pacific. At the AUSMIN meeting in July 2023, our two countries built on these efforts, including by deciding to scope additional upgrades at new locations in Australia for rotational U.S. forces, enabling a regular rotation of U.S. Army Watercraft in Australia, and increasing our cooperation in space. Our trilateral plans under AUKUS to support Australia's acquisition of a conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarine capability committed to a phased approach that increases exchanges of our personnel and SSN port visits to Australia as we prepare to begin forward rotations of SSNs in Australia as early as 2027 in support of Australia's preparations to establish a sovereign SSN capability.

In early January 2023, the United States announced historic posture improvements with Japan that will deliver more capable, ready, and interoperable U.S. forces in the region. These include the first forward stationing of a U.S. Marine Littoral Regiment (MLR), bringing the Marine Corps' most advanced formation and cutting-edge anti-ship capabilities to Japan. In November 2023, the 12th Marine Regiment in Okinawa officially redesignated as the 12th Marine Littoral Regiment, marking a key milestone toward implementation. During the 2023 U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee meeting, our two countries also committed to enhanced bilateral exercises and training in Japan's Southwest Islands, which will increase interoperability across key terrain in the region. These improvements will be compounded by even greater capability; for example, the Department is modernizing its fighter aircraft presence in Japan to deliver more capable, advanced tactical aircraft capability to the Indo-Pacific theater.

Later in January 2023, the United States and the Philippines announced the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) would expand to four new sites. As a key pillar of alliance cooperation, EDCA supports combined training, exercises, and interoperability between U.S. and Philippine forces, including to respond more effectively to natural disasters and other crises. This announcement underscored how, in addition to strengthening our existing posture, the United States is also expanding where we invest and operate to new strategic locations. Then at the U.S.-Philippines 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue in April 2023, our two countries decided to accelerate discussions on the U.S.-Philippines Bilateral Defense Guidelines, which Secretary Austin and his Philippine counterpart concluded the very next month. These guidelines will continue to help strengthen our two countries' combined deterrence by deepening our interoperability and enhancing our bilateral planning and information-sharing.

In April 2023, President Biden hosted Republic of Korea (ROK) President Yoon and reaffirmed that the U.S. extended deterrence commitment to the ROK is enduring and ironclad. In support of this commitment, President Biden pledged to increase the visibility of strategic assets to the Korean Peninsula. Since then, the U.S. Department of Defense has deployed a number of strategic assets to the Korean Peninsula, including a nuclear ballistic missile submarine, a carrier strike group, fifth-generation fighters, and strategic bombers, to reinforce deterrence messaging and capabilities. The continued deployment of these U.S. assets, the expanded scope and scale of our combined exercises, and enhanced senior-level dialogues further improve the effectiveness of U.S. extended deterrence in the region and demonstrates our ironclad commitment to the alliance.

In May 2023, the United States and Papua New Guinea (PNG) concluded a Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA) that will deepen bilateral security cooperation, strengthen the close U.S.-PNG relationship, and increase regional stability and security. We have also successfully

concluded a shiprider agreement to improve PNG's capacity for maritime domain awareness, and both of these agreements build upon decades of meaningful defense cooperation between the United States and our partner in Port Moresby – where Secretary Austin made history in July 2023 as the first U.S. Secretary of Defense to ever visit the country.

Most recently, the Department was pleased to see Congress pass the *Compact of Free Association Amendments Act of 2024* with a strong bipartisan majority – and we thank the many Members of this Committee who played a pivotal role in advocating for this legislation until its final passage. The Compacts of Free Association (COFA) between the United States and the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Palau, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) ensure that the United States – and only the United States – can maintain a military presence in the Freely Associated States (FAS), and they allow FAS citizens to strengthen our All-Volunteer Force through dedicated military service in the U.S. Armed Forces. As part of these agreements, the U.S. military serves as the defense force for FSM, Palau, and RMI, which in return grant the United States assured access for our military operations, as well as sites for critical defense posture efforts in the region. That is why passing legislation to fund the U.S. economic assistance at the heart of the Compacts marked one of the 118th Congress' most significant achievements to advance U.S. strategic priorities in the Indo-Pacific region.

Each of these achievements could have been the highlight of the year for the United States' forward presence in the Indo-Pacific region. But through relentless work by President Biden, Secretary Austin, and our colleagues across the Administration, made possible by the support of Congress, the United States has advanced them all together, and in just the past 18 months. These changes help deter conflict by underscoring that the U.S. military stands ready—and forward—in the region, upholding stability and prosperity by defending ourselves, our interests, and our allies and partners.

Connecting Allies and Partners in Support of a Shared Indo-Pacific Vision

Third, the United States is deepening and connecting our alliances and partnerships across the Indo-Pacific region. Our regional alliances and partnerships are stronger today than they have ever been, and together we are advancing a shared regional vision for peace, stability, and prosperity.

With Japan and the ROK, for example, our three countries are cooperating more deeply than ever following President Biden's historic Camp David Summit in August 2023 with Prime Minister Kishida and President Yoon. Just months after the summit, we delivered on two key objectives identified by our leaders: a multi-year, trilateral exercise plan, and the full activation of a real-time North Korea missile warning data-sharing mechanism.

With Australia and Japan, we are strengthening cooperation through participating in bilateral and trilateral exercises, and the United States and Australia are working in lockstep to integrate Japan into our existing force posture initiatives. We are expanding our cooperation in intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; in unmanned aerial systems, and in science and technology. We are also working together in new groupings. For example, defense ministers from Australia, Japan, the Philippines, and the United States met together for the first time at the

2023 Shangri-La Dialogue to discuss expanding cooperation in the maritime domain. These new constellations of allies and partners bring together common interests and advanced capabilities in ways that harbor the potential to make powerful contributions to deterrence in the region.

With the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), we are also investing in programs to enhance regional cohesion and capacity to respond to shared challenges, including a new Emerging Defense Leaders' Program for young Southeast Asian leaders, which will convene its inaugural class in May. This is in addition to our robust engagement in the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus Expert Working Groups, where we support the exchange of knowledge and best practices across a range of functional topics, including maritime security, military medicine, counterterrorism, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

Finally, with partners across the region, we are also operating together like never before, with exercises growing in scale, scope, complexity, and participation. This year's Exercise BALIKATAN with the Philippines, for example, will include more than 17,600 service members from the Philippines, France, Australia, and the United States, and feature multi-domain littoral live fire exercises and cyber defense elements. Meanwhile, Exercise SUPER GARUDA SHIELD with Indonesia featured more than 4,000 service members from over ten countries. Australia hosted Exercise MALABAR with India, Japan, and the United States for the first time in 2023.

Speaking at the Reagan National Defense Forum in December 2023, Secretary Austin stated that "in this decisive decade, 2023 will be remembered as a decisive year for implementing U.S. defense strategy in Asia." The United States and our allies and partners achieved historic results together over the last year, and the Department remains committed to advancing our multilateral cooperation in the years ahead.

Investing in U.S. Military Capabilities to Strengthen Indo-Pacific Deterrence

Finally, with the support of Congress, the Department is delivering cutting-edge capabilities in the near term and investing in the capabilities our warfighters will need to maintain deterrence in the long term.

The Biden-Harris Administration's budget request for Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 will further strengthen these efforts. We know that having a combat-credible military, capable of gaining warfighting advantages and simultaneously exploiting adversary vulnerabilities in potential conflict, is the primary source of U.S. deterrence in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. For that reason, the Department is urgently modernizing U.S. military power with advanced capabilities and the right operational concepts to address the challenges posed by the PLA.

To achieve these ends, the Biden-Harris Administration's FY 2025 budget requests major investments in air power, including fifth generation aircraft; sea power, including undersea capabilities; modernization of the nuclear triad and nuclear command and control; resilient space capabilities; joint all domain command and control; and cybersecurity and cyber space operations, among others. More broadly, the budget request also seeks significant levels of funding for research and development and for procurement to support the deployment of near-term and long-term capabilities critical for deterrence in the decades ahead.

These capabilities will strengthen deterrence by ensuring the U.S. military could penetrate and operate inside an adversary's anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) defenses, conduct strikes against a range of potential targets, and ultimately prevail in conflict. The proposed investments in the FY 2025 budget request would improve our forces' survivability, ability to generate combat power in contested environments, information and decision advantages, and logistics.

This budget also includes significant investments under the Pacific Deterrence Initiative (PDI), totaling \$9.9 billion. Together with other investments in the Biden-Harris Administration's budget request, PDI expenditures support advanced capabilities and more resilient posture across the Indo-Pacific region.

The FY 2025 budget request also includes major funding requests for munitions, including precision long-range munitions that are vital to our warfighting requirements in the Indo-Pacific region. Combined with proposed funding for the munitions industrial base in the national security supplemental passed by the U.S. Senate in February 2024, this budget request would mark a truly generational investment in our country's future production capacity. The budget includes significant investments in anti-ship munitions, including the Standard Missile (SM-6), the Long-Range Anti-Ship Missile (LRASM), and the Maritime Strike Tomahawks (MST), as well as land-attack munitions such as the Precision Strike Missile (PrSM), Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile (JASSM), and upgrades to the Tomahawk Land Attack Missile. Combined with the multiyear procurement authority that Congress has already provided the Department, investments like these will strengthen the Department's ability to effectively steward taxpayer dollars and support the U.S. industrial base as we continue to stand with our allies and partners.

The FY 2025 budget also includes an unprecedented investment in the submarine industrial base to accelerate the production and maintenance of attack submarines, one of our most effective capabilities for maintaining deterrence. While this funding for our submarine industrial base is necessary to meet our national needs, these investments will also support U.S. commitments under AUKUS. The FY 2025 request includes \$11.4 billion in investments from FY 2025 to FY2029. Australia has also committed to making a significant and proportionate financial investment in the U.S. submarine industrial base to accelerate delivery of Virginia class submarines. The Administration's FY 2025 request is in addition to the \$3.3 billion for the submarine industrial base currently pending before Congress in the national security supplemental. Congress can support these efforts by delivering both final FY 2024 appropriations and the national security supplemental to provide funding to accelerate this critical capability.

As we seek investments in these critical capabilities, the Department is also bringing these capabilities together in new operational concepts like the Joint Warfighting Concept, which will enhance the U.S. military's ability to operate across all domains, draw upon all instruments of our national power, and perform effectively alongside our allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region.

For decades, the U.S. military's capability and credibility have formed the heart of deterrence in the Indo-Pacific region. The Department's major investments are designed to ensure that it continues to build the most capable and credible fighting force in the world.

Conclusion

Mr. Chairman, we remain clear-eyed about growing challenges to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region, as do our allies and partners. Even as we have delivered significant momentum in recent years against the backdrop of crises elsewhere in the world, meeting our pacing challenge will require heightened urgency, attention, and resources in the years ahead.

Just as the Department would not have been able to achieve the results I described today without robust support from Congress, our efforts will only continue to bear fruit with the bipartisan help of Congress.

Thank you for your time and attention, and I look forward to your questions.

DR. ELY S. RATNER

Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs



Dr. Ely Ratner serves as the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs. Prior to confirmation, he served as the Director, DoD China Task Force and as a Senior Advisor to China to the Secretary of Defense. Before arriving at the Department of Defense, Dr. Ratner was the Executive Vice President and Director of Studies at the Center for a New American Security (CNAS), where he was a member of the executive team and responsible for managing the Center's research agenda and staff.

Dr. Ratner served from 2015 to 2017 as the Deputy National Security advisor to Vice President Joe Biden, and from 2011 to 2012 in the office of Chinese and Mongolian affairs at the State Department. He also previously worked in the U.S. Senate as a Professional Staff Member on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and in the office of Senator Joe Biden. Outside of government, Dr. Ratner has worked as a Senior Fellow for China Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations, a Senior Fellow and Deputy Director of the Asia-Pacific Security Program at CNAS, and as an Associate Political Scientist at the RAND Corporation.

Dr. Ratner received his B.A. from Princeton University's School of Public and International Affairs, where he graduated Phi Beta Kappa. He earned his Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of California, Berkeley.

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**STATEMENT OF
ADMIRAL JOHN C. AQUILINO, U.S. NAVY
COMMANDER, U.S. INDO-PACIFIC COMMAND**

U.S. INDO-PACIFIC COMMAND POSTURE



20 MARCH 2024

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Introduction / Opening Statement

Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss the Indo-Pacific Region. This will be the last time I testify as the Commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM). I want to thank my wife, Laura, and the rest of our family for their support. After 40 years of service, I can say unequivocally that the sacrifice service members make for our nation is a family affair, and I could not have done it without mine. These last three years have been the honor of a lifetime. Our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Guardians, Coast Guardsmen, and civilian warriors work tirelessly alongside our allies and partners daily to keep our nation safe while ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific.

I also thank Congress for your support, especially in establishing the Pacific Deterrence Initiative (PDI). The American people should know that your efforts to focus our country's resources on addressing the most pressing national security challenge our nation has ever faced are making a difference, but we have much more to do. The U.S. cannot spend its way to a position of preeminence as our economic and technological advantages over the PRC continue to narrow. While modernization of the force and the development of new concepts are essential to our ability to deter, we need to move at the speed and pace required to address the rapidly evolving security environment.

The complexity of the threats we face requires the U.S. to mobilize the whole of government and use all elements of national power to counter revisionist powers and their proxies committed to overturning the rules-based order for the benefit of themselves and at the expense of everyone else. However, we must recognize that the most dangerous national security challenges are evolving faster than our current government processes allow us to address them. Each of our three major state threats in the USINDOPACOM area of responsibility (AOR) – the People's Republic of China (PRC), Russia, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) – are taking unprecedented actions that challenge international norms and advance authoritarianism. These adversarial regimes are increasingly interconnected, which is evident in Xi and Putin's declaration of a "no limits friendship" as well as Kim Jong Un's materiel deliveries to Putin in support of the illegal invasion of Ukraine. Nevertheless, *the PRC is the*

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only country that has the capability, capacity, and intent to upend the international order.

Even amidst slowing economic growth, the PRC continues its aggressive military buildup, modernization, and coercive gray-zone operations. All indications point to the PLA meeting President Xi Jinping's directive to be ready to invade Taiwan by 2027. Furthermore, the PLA's actions indicate their ability to meet Xi's preferred timeline to unify Taiwan with mainland China by force if directed.

When I became the Commander, I established *Seize the Initiative* as USINDOPACOM's approach to implement the National Defense Strategy (NDS) with a focus on deterring our adversaries by challenging the Joint Force to *think, act, and operate differently* and synchronizing four lines of effort in the near-, mid-, and long-term. While some progress has been made, the risk we assume is high and trending in the wrong direction, specifically due to delayed delivery of military construction, advanced capabilities, and resources to persistently project and maintain forces west of the International Date Line (IDL).

Pursuant to Section 1302 of the F.Y. 2024 NDAA, this Committee was provided USINDOPACOM's resourcing requirements needed to deter the PRC. The content of this posture statement and the 1302 Report has been provided to the Secretary and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. *More than ever, USINDOPACOM needs your support to deliver the sustainable solution outlined in my Independent Assessment.*

Without a credible deterrent, China, Russia, and other revisionist powers will be emboldened to take action to counter U.S. interests. This testimony focuses on how *Seize the Initiative* enables the U.S. to deter conflict while reassuring our allies and partners.

This testimony describes the four focus areas and highlights the critical investments required to strengthen deterrence, which is within our reach. We must establish a forward-deployed, defense-in-depth posture to defend the U.S. homeland and interests abroad, deter aggression, assure allies, and provide the President and Secretary of Defense flexible response options should deterrence fail. The four areas that will enable our warfighters to rapidly operate within the first island chain with the capabilities to blind, see, and kill are as follows:

- 1) **Distributed Force Posture**. A distributed force posture that is persistently forward-based, west of the IDL, makes U.S. forces more effective, responsive, and survivable.

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USINDOPACOM's Independent Assessment (1302 Report) provides a prioritized list of MILCON and access agreements and required capabilities for each desired force posture location. With the support of Congress and the Department of Defense, USINDOPACOM has worked diligently to accelerate construction and action of \$50M of advance planning. This includes Joint Area Development Plans, site surveys for the Guam Defense System (GDS), and employment of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Field Force Engineering Teams to the Philippines to rapidly develop projects at existing and new agreed Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) sites. *We have also worked with special authority via 2807 notifications to implement \$169M of design work to adequately program for \$2.75B in construction.* Once construction is appropriated, these projects will provide an operational airfield, port, and fuel storage projects needed to sustain the Joint Force west of the International Date Line.

- 2) **Campaign of Joint and Combined Operations.** A joint and combined campaign allows the combatant commander to conduct full spectrum military operations in combination with the exercise and experimentation program to enhance what is currently provided by the Services. Our campaign now includes persistent operations, synchronized across the Joint Force in all domains and with allies and partners, linked over space and time. Key highlights include ground forces operating in Northern Luzon of the Philippines and Japan's Southwest Islands and combined Taiwan Strait Transits with Canada. USINDOPACOM campaigning is combined with and built around an exercise program supported by experimentation and enhanced through scale, scope, timing, and location changes. We have brought high-end capabilities to exercises like BALIKITAN hosted by the Philippines and increased the number of multilateral exercises such as SUPER GARUDA SHIELD hosted by Indonesia, COBRA GOLD hosted by Thailand, KEEN EDGE hosted by Japan, and Talisman Sabre hosted by Australia. To better address campaigning requirements and improve our military positioning in the theater to respond to crisis and conflict, USINDOPACOM is evolving its command and control to be ready to fight tonight, thereby improving joint warfighting proficiency.
- 3) **Advanced Warfighting Capabilities.** Maintaining our joint warfighting advantage requires us to outpace our challengers and urgently deliver advanced capabilities. With homeland

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defense as our number one priority, the Guam Defense System (GDS) is a critical capability USINDOPACOM seeks to accelerate by fusing our most advanced missile defense capabilities from Army, Navy, and Air Force systems. Maintaining decision superiority to blind, see, and kill any threat provides a strong deterrent effect and enables us to be prepared to fight and win if tasked. The Joint Fires Network (JFN) is USINDOPACOM's mechanism to integrate, command, control, synchronize, and deliver effects across the battlespace. JFN has evolved expeditiously via an experimentation campaign starting in 2019, yielding initial capability in 2024. The USINDOPACOM Mission Network (IMN), formerly the Mission Partner Environment, is a secure, zero-trust data-centric environment that allows USINDOPACOM to rapidly share information and a common operating picture with allies and partners. Additionally, the Pacific Multidomain Training and Experimentation Capability (PMTEC) enhances U.S., allied, and partner training by enabling realistic, joint, and combined training ranges to improve our future operations and exercises using STORMBREAKER, an AI-based gaming and simulation capability. To further accelerate capability development and fielding, USINDOPACOM established the Joint Mission Accelerator Directorate (JMAD) in 2023 to identify emerging Department technology and commercial content able to mitigate capability gaps with near-term technical solutions.

- 4) **Enhanced Network of Allies and Partners.** Our robust network of allies and partners is our most significant asymmetrical advantage in long-term competition. Our alliances, multilateral arrangements, partnerships, friendships, and Five Eyes relationships are essential to this network and play an important role in enhancing regional security. Over the past three years, our network of strong, resilient, and mutually reinforcing relationships have strengthened cooperation in unprecedented ways. AUKUS was established, and the trilateral partners have since announced the Optimal Pathway for Australia's acquisition of conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines. A new phase in U.S.-Japan-Republic of Korea trilateral cooperation facilitated the activation of 24/7 real-time DPRK missile warning data sharing last year. The new Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) sites with the Philippines have reinvigorated the bilateral relationship with the Philippines, and provided the opportunity to make significant bilateral advancements, including in economic projects in the Philippines. We have also launched the India-U.S. Defense Acceleration

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Ecosystem (INDUS-X) and signed a defense cooperation agreement with Papua New Guinea.

While there has been progress in all four areas, *we MUST move faster to reduce the risk of conflict in the near and mid-term. Each line of effort is integral to deterrence in the USINDOPACOM area of responsibility.* USINDOPACOM requests increased support to make progress across these four lines of effort, allowing us to continue to *Seize the Initiative*.

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Key Adversarial Challenges

Since I took command in 2021, our potential adversaries have become increasingly aggressive in seeking to impose their will at the expense of all others. The PRC has coupled its massive military buildup with a campaign of coercive actions designed to force more vulnerable nations to bend to their will. Russia's illegal, illegitimate invasion of Ukraine exposed it as an irresponsible actor uninterested in upholding international commitments. DPRK continues to develop weapons it plainly articulates as threats to both the region and the U.S. homeland. Individually, each poses its challenges.

People's Republic of China (PRC)**Strategic Intent**

The PRC's strategic goals remain unchanged from those it held even before 2021. It remains the only competitor with the military strength, will, and intent to change the world order with authoritarian characteristics and displace the Free and Open Indo-Pacific. The PRC uses all elements of its "comprehensive national power" to attempt to elevate China to the world's "indispensable power" and to alter the international system to one that encourages repressive, authoritarian governance and protectionist economic practices that distort markets by avoiding openness and transparency.

The PRC's aggressive military buildup underpins its drive to supplant United States security leadership in the region, enabling the PRC to subjugate Taiwan, exert control over the South China Sea through its excessive maritime claims, and oppress those who believe in a free and open Indo-Pacific. While the PRC military focuses on regional issues, Beijing is setting the stage for a more significant global role through its global society, civilization, and development initiatives.

Military Modernization

The PRC continues to advance its comprehensive military modernization program to transform the PLA into an integrated, joint, high-tech, network-centric military force. Modernization has remained aggressive, and China remains committed to delivering the capabilities needed to achieve its objective by 2027.

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On a scale not seen since WWII, the PLA's buildup is occurring across land, sea, air, space, cyber, and information domains. Despite challenges presented by COVID-19 and an economic downturn, the PRC's official defense budget has risen over 16% from 192 billion USD to 223.5 billion USD. In the three years since I took command, the PLA has added over 400 fighter aircraft (almost all 4th and 5th generation variants), more than 20 major warships (guided missile cruisers, destroyers, frigates), and has more than doubled its inventory of ballistic and cruise missiles. Likewise, China has increased the number of satellites launched by over 50% during this period, yielding a five-fold increase since 2020. Perhaps most concerning has been the rapid pace at which the PRC has bolstered its nuclear arsenal, increasing its warhead inventory by well over 100% since 2020.

During my tenure, we have observed the PRC's growing focus on developing the capability and capacity to project power and challenge adversaries beyond the First Island Chain (FIC). The rapid expansion of the PLA Navy's (PLAN) guided missile cruiser and destroyer inventories and advances in ballistic missiles will enable the PLAN to contest adversaries increasingly farther outside the FIC. The subsurface fleet has also grown in volume and capability, notably with the launch of nuclear-powered guided missile submarines (the PLAN's first SSGNs).

PLA aviation has also undergone a significant transformation since 2021. Combined, the PLA Air Force (PLAAF) and PLAN Aviation constitute the largest aviation force in the Indo-Pacific. Over half of the PLA's operational fighter force is 4th and 5th generation, enabling longer-range A2/AD and counter-air operations across the western Pacific Ocean. The PLA is also developing a stealth bomber that can cover the Second Island Chain and the Western Pacific.

The PLA's investment in modern, long-range weapons, almost certainly focused on countering third-party intervention, is underscored by the rapid expansion of its ballistic missile inventories and technologies. During my tenure, the PLA increased its inventory of intermediate and medium-range ballistic missiles by over 60% while continuing to develop new longer-range capabilities, such as the DF-27 ballistic missile that will be able to reach targets well beyond the Second Island Chain.

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The continued development of supporting space and communications technologies is steadily increasing the lethality and precision of PLA systems. In addition to the sharp increase in space launches over the past three years, the PRC is steadily delivering capabilities that seek to deny the use of our space architecture. Despite statements opposing the weaponization of space, the PRC is developing a range of counter-space capabilities and related technologies, including kinetic-kill missiles, ground-based lasers, and orbiting space robots.

Like other domains, the PLA's nuclear force has proliferated in the last three years. Upon taking command, the number of nuclear warheads was in the low 200s, and its nuclear triad was nascent, with the air component operationally fielded only in 2020. Now we see a PLA nuclear force with 500+ warheads, missile systems employing multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles (MIRV), three new ICBM silo fields, and a nuclear-capable, air-to-air refuelable bomber. Unfortunately, this is not the end of the PRC's nuclear buildup; the PLA has plans for 1,000 warheads by 2030, accompanied by new air and sea-launch platforms.

Destabilizing Actions

Taiwan

Xi Jinping continues to view unification with Taiwan as a "historical inevitability" and "indispensable for the realization of China's great rejuvenation." As such, Beijing is employing all elements of national power to lead Taiwan and the international community to believe that unification is, in fact, inevitable. Although the PRC claims it prefers to achieve unification through peaceful means, Xi will not renounce the use of force.

China's pressure campaign, ongoing in earnest since 2016, spiked in 2022 when the PLA executed a large-scale military exercise following the U.S. House Speaker's visit to Taiwan. The well-documented, multidomain operation established a new, more dangerous status quo for PLA activity and posture around Taiwan, normalizing warship patrols around Taiwan and military flights crossing the Taiwan Strait centerline, routinely entering the PRC's self-declared Air Defense Identification Zone, and executing legal actions to validate their objectives.

Equally concerning, the PLA is systematically rehearsing critical tasks associated with military operations against Taiwan. In 2022 and 2023, the PLA rehearsed the encirclement of Taiwan, simulating a maritime and air blockade of the island while bracketing the island with

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ballistic missile launches. Subsequent exercises in 2023 focused on rehearsing counter-intervention and amphibious assault operations, the latter featuring extensive use of civilian Roll-On Roll-Off (RORO) ferries and vehicle carriers. This operational strategy leverages civilian capabilities to prepare its forces for seizing Taiwan.

Coercive and Risky Operational Behavior

Since 2021, the PLA has increasingly employed coercive tactics in response to activity the PRC deems provocative, significantly raising the risk of an incident or accident that could lead to loss of life or spark a wider, unintended conflict. The Department of Defense's 2023 China Military Power Report stated, "The PLA appears to have been engaged in a centralized, concerted campaign to perform risky behaviors to coerce a change in lawful U.S. operational activity and that of U.S. Allies and partners." These activities include reckless and dangerous maneuvers in the air and at sea in response to our activities that are well within international law.

Excessive Maritime Claims in the Region

The PRC is challenging the regional status quo through increasingly coercive tactics to pressure Taiwan and to force acceptance of Beijing's excessive maritime claims. The PRC accompanies its direct and clear claims with pointed warnings, most clearly, but not exclusively, in its Taiwan-focused rhetoric. In the ongoing dispute with the Philippines in the South China Sea (SCS), the PRC has significantly increased its aggression against the Philippines claiming "indisputable sovereignty" over Philippine waters. These actions are inconsistent with the conclusions of the 2016 Arbitral Tribunal convened pursuant to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

During my tenure, the PRC has become increasingly assertive in enforcing its illegitimate sovereignty claims in the SCS. The PRC continues to militarize its South China Sea outposts, enabling Beijing to threaten all nations operating nearby. It is quietly undertaking land reclamation at unoccupied features – a strikingly provocative act that clearly violates the spirit of the DOC. Over the last two years, the PRC utilized SCS-based CCG and maritime militia to water cannon, laser, and ram Philippine vessels that were, attempting to lawfully resupply the Philippine outpost at Second Thomas Shoal. The PRC's lawfare strategy is underpinned by

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increasingly assertive domestic laws, portrayed as being consistent with international law that they use to justify the enforcement of their excessive claims.

In the East China Sea, the PRC attempts to legitimize claims over the Japan-administered Senkaku Islands with a continuous presence of PRC fishing and Maritime Militia vessels, escorted by Chinese Coast Guard (CCG) ships, with PLAN ships nearby. CCG ships routinely enter territorial waters surrounding the Senkakus, frequently harassing Japanese fishing vessels. Other actions, such as its annual, unilateral summer fishing ban, threaten China's neighbors and clearly illustrate an attempt to change the existing international order in its favor. In 2021, amid its long-running border dispute with India, the PRC passed a land border law, asserting "which asserted that the "sovereignty and territorial integrity of the [PRC] are sacred and inviolable" sovereignty that and provided a legal framework for greater PLA involvement in border security.

PRC-Russia Cooperation

Since declaring a "no-limits" partnership in 2022, combined Russia-China military activities and PRC support for Russia's defense industrial base have become more concerning. Last summer's combined naval exercise in the Sea of Japan and follow-up on distant naval patrol highlight this growing military cooperation. The PRC has helped Russia rebuild and reconstitute its defense industrial base, with real world battlefield impacts in Ukraine. Beijing has become the largest consumer of Russian oil and natural gas, essentially keeping the Russian economy afloat as it suffers from the economic consequences of its illegal invasion of Ukraine.

The relationship is strengthened by the personal relationships between Xi and President Putin and their shared antipathy for the United States and our allies. While Xi has voiced support for Russia's justifications for its Ukraine war, the PRC has sought to avoid the appearance of direct support for Russia's military operations.

The Russian Federation

Strategic Intent

Russian President Vladimir Putin's blind ambition to reclaim the clout and influence of the Soviet Union has been fully displayed in my three years at USINDOPACOM. With

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disastrous results for all involved, Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine exposed weakness in the Russian economy and further damaged its international standing. The Russian economy has been exposed as one-dimensional and increasingly dependent on oil and natural gas exports. Internationally, Russia has become further isolated, only explicitly supported by authoritarian regimes like the PRC, the DPRK, and Iran.

Russia's inability to achieve its war aims continues to have disastrous consequences for its military, decimating large swaths of its ground forces and seriously depleting stores of ammunition and armaments. Even so, Russia remains a formidable potential adversary in the Indo-Pacific, intent on improving its ability to defend Russian territory in the Northern Pacific, strike U.S. and Allied targets, and sustain military engagement as a significant component of regional influence.

Military Modernization

Even with its immediate attention fixed on Ukraine, the Russian Naval Doctrine published in 2022 prioritizes the Pacific and Arctic regions above all others. Its main goal of "strategic stability" (a euphemism for mutual nuclear deterrence) delineates the Sea of Okhotsk and much of the Arctic as "areas of existential importance" alongside Russian territorial seas and its exclusive economic zone (EEZ). It is within this context that Russia has pursued the modernization of its strategic assets in the region, even as its conventional forces are engaged in Ukraine.

Since 2021, Russia's Pacific Fleet has added several modern surface ships and submarines to increase Moscow's combat capability. Russia fielded new nuclear-powered ballistic and cruise missile submarines and upgraded Kilo-class diesel submarines. Armed with dual nuclear and conventional capable Kalibr cruise missiles and the Tsirkon hypersonic cruise missile (still in testing), the Russian Pacific Fleet is increasing its ability to threaten U.S. and allied land and maritime targets.

Russia also continues to invest in modernizing its nuclear triad's land and air legs. This past January, Moscow identified the completion of the deployment of the Sarmat strategic missile system, which replaces legacy ICBMs with the new system capable of carrying multiple warheads. Russia also continues to upgrade its strategic bomber force in pursuit of Russia's aim

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to be able to effectively strike every U.S. installation in the Pacific, Alaska, and the U.S. West Coast.

Destabilizing Actions

Power Projection

Russia uses its Pacific-facing forces as a power projection tool, signaling that it has retained the capability and capacity to use military force in the region if it so chooses despite significant losses in Ukraine. In addition to strategic air patrols that skirt the coasts of Alaska, Hawaii, and Guam, the Russian military also uses exercises near U.S. and allied territory to reinforce perceptions of military might. The Russian exercise FINVAL 2023 reportedly involved 10,000 Russian Navy Pacific Fleet personnel, and numerous ships, submarines, aircraft, helicopters, and coastal missile systems. It deliberately messaged Moscow's intent to control its declared Northern Sea Route, including areas near Alaska.

Combined Exercises and Naval Diplomacy

The increasing frequency of combined activity is cause for concern. In addition to naval drills, Russia continues to partner with the PLA in strategic bomber patrols in the western Pacific near Guam. Russia is also increasingly collaborating with the PLA to execute combined air patrols that regularly cross into Japan and the Republic of Korea's Air Defense Identification Zones (ADIZ), further threatening our allies.

Arms Transfers from the DPRK

One of the many unfortunate outcomes of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine is a growing relationship between Moscow and Pyongyang. In addition to the ammunition the DPRK supplied last year, DPRK provided short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) that Russia is presently using in Ukraine. In return, Kim Jong Un probably seeks technical support for his growing strategic weapons program and Moscow's political support through its veto power at the United Nations Security Council.

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Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)Strategic Intent

The DPRK's primary strategic priority – regime security – has remained fixed for decades. What has become increasingly evident over the past three years is that Kim Jong Un is unwilling to slow the development of strategic weapons, even in the face of blistering sanctions, to possess a credible strategic deterrent. The DPRK's laser focus on developing technology and weapons that enable its strategic strike capability is evidenced both by the statements coming from Pyongyang and the well-publicized tests of systems intended to deliver nuclear strikes against the U.S. homeland and its regional neighbors.

Military Modernization

Over the past three years, the DPRK has primarily focused its military modernization efforts on strategic capabilities. At the DPRK's 8th Party Congress in 2021, Kim Jong Un articulated his intent to further develop strategic weapons and supporting technologies. Kim specifically highlighted preemptive and retaliatory precision nuclear strike capabilities, developing tactical nuclear weapons, solid-fuel ballistic missiles, and fielding a military reconnaissance satellite as priorities.

The DPRK has made significant progress toward its 8th Party Congress goals. In 2023, the DPRK unveiled what appear to be miniaturized warheads that can be employed on shorter-range missiles and conducted drills simulating tactical nuclear strikes and a nuclear counterattack. Since 2021, Pyongyang has also publicized multiple advancements in delivery platforms, now claiming the ability to launch weapons from subsurface, rail, and silo-based launchers.

Modernization of the DPRK's vast conventional force has been slower in comparison but progressing nonetheless. Ballistic missile submarines, associated SLBMs, and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) closely resembling U.S. systems highlight recent developments.

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Destabilizing Actions**Missile Launches**

Since 2021, the DPRK has launched over 100 ballistic and cruise missiles, including an IRBM that overflew Japan. In 2022, the DPRK restarted ICBM testing—paused since 2017—and tested a new solid-propellant ICBM in 2023. In 2024, DPRK launched a solid-propellant ballistic missile loaded with a hypersonic mobile control warhead. The advancements in solid-propellant rocket motors potentially enable DPRK to launch missiles with much less warning than their liquid-propellant counterparts.

Escalatory Behavior

The DPRK increasingly messages its aggressive behavior as a response to the actions of its adversaries. In an address to the U.N., the DPRK accused the U.S. of a "sinister intention to provoke a nuclear war" and attempting to create an "Asian NATO." These comments come in a year that saw Pyongyang's actions compel the Republic of Korea to suspend the 2018 Comprehensive Military Agreement, designed to lower military tensions and accidental military clashes between the two countries. Among other provocations, Pyongyang threatened to shoot down any U.S. reconnaissance aircraft breaching its claimed airspace, fired more than 200 artillery rounds near a disputed maritime border with the ROK, launched an intercontinental ballistic missile into waters near Japan, and simulated a missile strike on the ROK in protest of military drills conducted by ROK with the United States.

Satellite Launch

The DPRK also took significant steps to advance its space and satellite reconnaissance capabilities to meet the goals identified in the 8th Party Congress. In 2023, DPRK successfully used its ballistic missile technology to launch its first reconnaissance satellite following two high-profile failures. The successful launch occurred only months after a Kim-Putin summit in Russia. Putin reportedly promised to help DPRK build satellites, almost certainly in return for support for Russia's war effort.

Support to Russia

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In addition to ballistic missiles, the DPRK has probably provided over one million artillery shells and scores of missiles to Russia. Pyongyang almost certainly hopes to leverage Russian technological expertise to bolster its nuclear and ballistic missile programs. These benefits are in addition to the diplomatic cover Moscow provides DPRK, using its U.N. Security Council vote to frustrate efforts to increase sanctions against Pyongyang.

Sanctions Evasion

DPRK's efforts to evade U.N. imposed sanctions intended to curtail funding for its nuclear and other WMD programs are nothing new. In 2023, a U.N. Panel of Experts found that the DPRK continues to employ various evasion measures to import refined petroleum products. The report states that, after a record-breaking level of cyber thefts in 2022, estimated at \$1.7 billion, the DPRK continued to successfully target cyber cryptocurrency and other financial exchanges globally to support its sanctioned development programs. Even as DPRK takes more aggressive steps in these programs and tests more weapons in contravention of Security Council resolutions, Russia and China continue to resist efforts to strengthen sanctions.

Violent Extremist Organizations (VEOs)

Transnational and ethno-nationalist violent extremist organizations remain active across the Indo-Pacific region. The December 2023 bombing of a Catholic Mass in the southern Philippines that killed four is only the most recent reminder. While VEO strength as a whole in the region is far from its pinnacle, and security forces throughout the region have thinned VEO ranks, we must remain vigilant in our efforts to prevent violent extremists from planning and executing attacks.

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Implementing *Seize the Initiative*

USINDOPACOM developed the *Seize the Initiative* approach to transform the needed force posture, operational campaign, advanced capabilities, and partnerships to defend the nation and deter our adversaries. Essential to this approach is the imperative to *think, act, and operate differently*. With the support of Congress, USINDOPACOM has made progress in the last three years in preparing and planning for a distributed force posture, implementing an integrated, operational campaign of joint operations, activities, and investments (OAI) with advanced capabilities specifically designed to enhance deterrence, and strengthening relationships with our allies and partners.

Distributed Force Posture

Deterrence depends on the ability of the Joint Force to act quickly and decisively, which requires an increasingly flexible and distributed force posture and logistics network. Central to *Seizing the Initiative* is shifting from the “As Is” posture of 2021 to a near future “To Be” force posture of forward-based and rotational joint forces. By creating a distributed force posture west of the IDL, U.S. forces are more responsive, survivable, and interoperable with our allies and partners. This effort also provides the Secretary and the President with increased options to respond to a crisis.

A distributed force posture also requires new approaches to sustainment and logistics, as well as definitive access, basing, and overflight (ABO) agreements with allies and partners. USINDOPACOM’s Joint Posture Management Office (JPMO), established in 2023, synchronized theater posture planning, design, and construction to streamline and coordinate priorities. Across the Indo-Pacific, USINDOPACOM has been pursuing distributed force posture aligned across four posture “clusters.” Specific site information and planning efforts are described in detail in the classified 1302 Report.

Congressional funding and support have allowed USINDOPACOM to progress with design and planning. However, many of these projects still need to be prioritized by the Services. We have only completed 12 of over 200 required infrastructure projects in my three years in command. Forty-seven (47) high-priority MILCON projects still need to be funded. However,

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we can now create gains with the support from the additional authorities and funding provided by Congress. We seek the programming and budgeting necessary to implement significant construction efforts as early as FY25.

The Guam Cluster

The Guam cluster – comprised of the forward-most U.S. territories of Guam and the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) – as well as the Freely Associated States (FAS), which include the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), the Republic of Palau and the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) – is the cornerstone of the U.S. security architecture west of the International Date Line. In a crisis, bases and infrastructure in these territories and states will be crucial to sustain the Joint Force. USINDOPACOM has worked diligently to build local political support across the region over the last three years. The national and territorial governments have welcomed the increased transparent communications and our willingness to incorporate local concerns into our plans.

USINDOPACOM continues to work towards rapid implementation of priority posture projects in the region, an enabling component of the “To Be” posture. The Defense Policy Review Initiative (DPRI) is on plan. It continues to develop infrastructure on Guam and CNMI, including Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz, where Marines will begin movement from Okinawa by the end of the year. USINDOPACOM and Congress have successfully identified ways to accelerate posture processes to meet the Guam cluster's emerging operational infrastructure development requirements. The funding Congress enacted for USINDOPACOM in FY22 and FY23 funded the necessary planning and development for critical Joint Force-enabling projects not prioritized by the Services. Leveraging these targeted investments and authorities, USINDOPACOM was able to advance infrastructure needs in FSM, Palau, and CNMI on a faster timeline than traditional MILCON and better position projects for funding within the budget cycle. USINDOPACOM and the FAS continue discuss potential ways to negotiate on additional defense sites for use by all Services. These sites will significantly enhance our logistical lines of communication and add to our aviation dispersal and other combat capabilities, while providing attendant economic benefits to the local governments.

Our increasing military capabilities strain local infrastructure and sustainment networks in the U.S. territories and the FAS. The remote nature of many of the posture project locations in

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this region results in a massive demand for limited materials, contracting, and housing resources. In Guam and CNMI, the totality of military construction projects is too large to be supported solely by local labor. Congress has provided much-needed relief from the H-2B temporary work requirement extending through 2029 for projects directly connected to military realignment. Additional relief is necessary to enable prolonged extensions of H-2B visas and direct relief for typhoon recovery and resilience projects in Guam and the CNMI. Absent additional relief before FY27, the loss of an assured workforce will result in cost and schedule impacts to both military relocation and typhoon resilience projects; impacts will increase until the workforce collapses in FY30.

Under the Compacts of Free Association (COFA) agreements with the Freely Associated States (FAS), the U.S. has full authority and responsibility for security and defense matters in and related to the FAS, including extensive access to operations in their territories. In May 2023, the U.S. signed agreements with FSM and Palau to extend economic assistance for twenty years, and in October 2023, the U.S. signed a similar agreement with the RMI. I want to thank Congress for recently approving legislation to implement and bring agreements under COFA into force. The President signed these 20-year assistance agreements into law this month, reaffirming the perception of the United States as a reliable partner for all Pacific Island nations.

The Japan Cluster

USINDOPACOM has worked closely with the Government of Japan to optimize Alliance force posture based on improved operational concepts and enhanced capabilities to address increasing security challenges in the region, including for the defense of Japan's Southwest Islands. In October 2022, the United States completed a deployment of MQ-9s to Japan's Kanoya Air Base, followed by movement to Kadena Air Base in November 2023. In April 2023, USINDOPACOM established the Composite Watercraft Company at Yokohama North Dock to strengthen Alliance maritime mobility. In addition, as part of our commitment to strengthening Japan's defense, the U.S. began the first deployment of a TPS-80 radar system to the Sakishima Islands in October 2023.

We continue to work with the Government of Japan to position more resilient and mobile forces with increased intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), anti-ship, and

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transportation capabilities. To strengthen deterrence and response capabilities, we are optimizing the posture of U.S. forces in Japan, alongside enhanced Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF) capabilities and posture in areas including the Southwest Islands. Further, we are continuing close consultation with Japan to expand joint use of U.S. and Japanese facilities and enhance bilateral exercises and training focusing on Japan's Sakishima Islands.

The Philippines Cluster

In 2023, to allow both countries to address shared challenges in the Indo-Pacific region, the United States and the Philippines designated four additional EDCA in addition to the five existing EDCA sites. The four new announced EDCA sites will expand U.S. rotational access across the Philippines, strategically strengthening the interoperability of U.S. and Philippine armed forces and facilitating the rapid provision of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in the Philippines.

The U.S. has allocated over \$109 million towards infrastructure improvements at the five existing EDCA locations and two new EDCA locations. This investment, and forthcoming additional allotment, will complete twenty-three projects, enabling the U.S. and the Philippines to continue to build lasting security infrastructure to fill short-term capability gaps, promote long-term modernization, establish a credible mutual defense posture, maintain humanitarian assistance and disaster relief capabilities, and enhance the strength of the alliance. We anticipate making significant progress in the Philippines this year. Once appropriations are received, we have several projects ready for rapid execution. We will streamline construction at the EDCA locations using a design-build acquisition approach that employs new and recently provided authorities for smaller projects (up to \$9M) using Unspecified Minor Military Construction.

The Australia Cluster

To ensure an Indo-Pacific region that is free, open, stable, peaceful, prosperous, and respectful of sovereignty, the United States has completed twelve construction projects in the Indo-Pacific region worth \$146M; three of these projects support our bilateral alliance with Australia. These efforts have been carried out in close partnership with the Australian Department of Defense's U.S. Force Posture Initiatives (USFPI) program, which focuses on

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Marine Rotational Force – Darwin, enhanced air cooperation, enhanced land cooperation, enhanced maritime cooperation, combined logistics sustainment, and maintenance enterprise, and enhanced space cooperation. There are three large MILCON projects in Australia to improve the early phases of Darwin/Tindal airfield improvements and ammunition and fuel storage. USINDOPACOM is working to identify alternatives which might enable accelerated execution of other posture initiatives.

Over the past few years, the United States and Australia have expanded posture coordination beyond Australia. The United States has recently added several initiatives to our posture planning efforts to support AUKUS and mutual operational requirements. Australia has been a valuable partner in coordinating posture initiatives and other cooperation activities across the Pacific Island region, including with the government of Papua New Guinea. In May 2023, the United States and Papua New Guinea signed a bilateral defense cooperation agreement (DCA) enabling the modernization and strengthening of this important security partnership in the region. The DC will enhance security cooperation, further strengthen our bilateral relationship, improve the capability of the PNG Defence Force, and increase stability and security in the region.

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Deterrence Campaign of Joint and Combined Operations

Through a persistent campaign in the Indo-Pacific, USINDOPACOM deters adversaries by demonstrating U.S. capabilities, responsiveness, and commitment to the region. USINDOPACOM's deterrence campaign normalizes U.S. operations in the AOR, builds warfighting advantage through rehearsal of concepts, and strengthens interoperability with allies and partners. Since 2021, USINDOPACOM has actively worked to expand its campaign of joint and combined operations, including phased surges that increase our positions of relative advantage by concentrating OAs in time and tempo to maximize effects. Improvements to OAs include expansion of operational complexity across all domains and enhanced coordination of global activities with other combatant commands. Additionally, to strengthen O A.I.s with allies and partners, USINDOPACOM is conducting new flexible response options and multilateral operations to increase the complexity of our activities, create new dilemmas for adversaries, and reassure like-minded countries within the theater.

The key to our deterrence campaign is maintaining our forward stationed and rotational forces to maintain our military strength to respond quickly to any contingency. The removal of capability or capacity of the Joint Force sends the wrong message to our potential adversaries, allies, and partners. Additionally, the Navy, Army, and Marine Corps still need to procure the types and quantities of the munitions required to defeat threats in the Indo-Pacific region. These Service decisions continue to increase the risk to USINDOPACOM and its men and women while reducing our forces' overall deterrent effect in theater.

To meld Service capabilities into an integrated Joint Force, USINDOPACOM is evolving its operational command and control to be prepared to "fight tonight," thereby improving joint warfighting proficiency and effectiveness. As the updated command structure executes operations, activities, and investments throughout the region, we will capture lessons learned and identify known shortfalls in personnel, facilities, and equipment. These lessons and shortfalls will inform future USINDOPACOM resource requirements.

The first step in this process was forming a joint force headquarters on Guam, Joint Task Force-Micronesia (JTF-M). JTF-M integrates joint, all-domain command and control effects and mission command and control in Guam. As of January 2024, an initial staff for the JTF is on

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Guam and setting the conditions to establish an enduring headquarters. USINDOPACOM will identify additional resources and staffing requirements as planning efforts and joint exercises refine operational concepts.

Exercise, Experimentation, and Training

USINDOPACOM's Joint Exercise Program has been integrated into our deterrence campaign plan and is critical to a trained and ready joint force. Major joint exercises put aggregated combat formations with advanced capabilities in a position to conduct all-domain operations and activities. With allies and partners, these exercises demonstrate interoperability and warfighting proficiency, contributing to combat credibility and bolstering deterrence.

Since 2021, USINDOPACOM has evolved the exercise program to increase multilateral participation, facilitate experimentation with advanced concepts and technologies, and demonstrate the ability to execute high-end all-domain warfighting in the theater. In 2023, USINDOPACOM oversaw an annual exercise program consisting of nineteen joint and more than ninety Service exercises involving participants from the United States and allies and partners across the globe.

Bilateral exercises such as KEEN EDGE with Japan and BALIKATAN with the Philippines have expanded to multilateral events and have increased in complexity, interoperability, and scope. Additionally, USINDOPACOM expanded previously unilateral exercises such as NORTHERN EDGE and VALIANT SHIELD to integrate other combatant commands and allies such as Australia and the United Kingdom. Continued and additional investment in USINDOPACOM's Joint Training Exercise and Evaluation Program (JTEEP) will further advance the Command's ability to exercise large-scale, all-domain joint and combined exercises in contested environments, improving joint force training, readiness, and interoperability.

USINDOPACOM developed the Pacific Multidomain Training and Experimentation Capability (PMTEC) to enhance U.S., allied, and partner training. PMTEC enables realistic joint, combined all-domain training across a live-virtual-constructive environment via networked ranges, simulation centers, and mobile training support systems. PMTEC resourcing in FY23 delivered substantial contributions to transition the Joint Exercise Program into operationalized

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training, experimentation, and rehearsal events through the BALIKATAN, NORTHERN EDGE, and TALISMAN SABRE exercises, among others. Through PMTEC, these previously geographically focused exercises enjoyed greater theater-wide participation due to linking capabilities across the theater and adding more Combined Joint All Domain Operations (CJADO) in the events. CJADO activities were supported by CONUS-based constructive and virtual support to provide more realistic common operational pictures, including increased emulation of space, cyber, and electronic warfare effects. PMTEC reached Initial Operational Capability for exercise enhancement through these initiatives in September 2023.

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Advanced Warfighting Capabilities

Over the past three years, the PRC has continued the most extensive and rapid buildup since World War II. With the Department focused on the PRC as the pacing threat, delivering capabilities enables us to sustain credible deterrence. *This budget cycle is a critical opportunity to focus concertedly on providing the right capabilities in the suitable capacity on the proper timelines to strengthen deterrence.*

Guam Defense System (GDS)

As the most forward U.S. territory in the Western Pacific, Guam is a strategic outpost critical to projecting power, maintaining deterrence and stability, and responding to regional crises or conflicts. Establishing the GDS – a 360-degree, persistent, layered, and integrated air and missile defense on Guam – remains the top homeland defense priority for USINDOPACOM to protect more than 170,000 U.S. citizens on the island. The U.S. has programmed billions of dollars in defense capability on Guam to advance these capabilities, including offensive capabilities, command and control, and sustainment.

In June 2023, the Deputy Secretary of Defense designated the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment (USD A&S) as the senior DoD official responsible for the Integrated Air and Missile Defense of Guam, the Army as the Service Acquisition Executive (SAE), and GDS as an Acquisition Category (ACAT) 1D program. USINDOPACOM joined multiple war games and exercises in the past three years that have refined and optimized the GDS defensive capabilities. Although field-testing of the initial elements of GDS will begin in 2024, USINDOPACOM continues to advocate for and work with the larger defense enterprise to accelerate the fielding of the entire GDS ahead of the current delivery timelines. *As of today, USINDOPACOM believes the completion and integration of the GDS will be late to need* and continues to advocate for prioritizing and accelerating the necessary operations, activities, and investments (OAs) to complete the initiative this decade.

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DECISION SUPERIORITY

Decision superiority requires us to operate in contested space safely, sustain target quality, real-time battlespace awareness, and deliver multidomain joint fires. A Persistent Targeting-Quality Common Operating Picture (PT-COP) – the visualization of fires command and control drawing from a common data layer and pairing the best weapons against adversary targets – is necessary to enable *BLIND – SEE – KILL* effects. JFN provides decision superiority by fusing sensors across all domains and platforms with intelligence and other information to provide target guidance simultaneously to commanders across the battlefield.

Combined warfighting also requires rapidly sharing information and a common operating picture with allies and partners in a secure and resilient data-centric environment. IMN is an agile environment that modernizes command, control, communication, computer, and information technology (C4IT) systems by shifting USINDOPACOM from thirteen separate coalition systems into one system to deliver combined C2 in a contested environment. IMN increases coalition access to data, improves mission assurance west of the IDL, and enables campaigning and coalition operations by getting the correct information to the right partner at the right time. Without full resourcing, the modernization and fielding of this more resilient and effective mission partner communication in the theater will be delayed.

BLIND: Operate in Contested Space and Domains

Detering conflict requires the U.S. to demonstrate the ability to operate in all contested spaces and dominate all domains, especially in space and cyberspace. Our competitors recognize the importance of space and cyberspace and have invested heavily to advance their capabilities in these domains. Over the last three years, the U.S. has made the investments necessary to maintain its advantage in space and cyberspace, and we must continue to focus resources and talent in these domains to stay ahead. USINDOPACOM's mission depends on U.S. dominance in space and cyberspace through resilient and flexible capabilities integrated and exercised with our allies and partners.

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SEE: Battlespace Awareness Across the Joint Force

Since 2021, USINDOPACOM has advocated for resources to fund critical future space-based intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) systems explicitly designed to support warfighting requirements and improvements in signals intelligence collection capability. These capabilities combine to enable a complete understanding of the battlespace throughout the Joint Force and share that understanding with key allies and partners.

KILL: Synchronizing Joint Fires

USINDOPACOM's Joint Fires Network (JFN) initiative seeks to integrate Joint Force capabilities into a coherent architecture to provide a Persistent Targeting Common Operating Picture (PT-COP), a Common Data Layer (CDL), a standard set of integrated Battle Management and Command and Control Applications (BMC2), and a resilient, secure transport-agnostic communications infrastructure. JFN is USINDOPACOM's mechanism to integrate, synchronize, and deliver effects across the battlespace.

Since USINDOPACOM established the JFN initiative in 2022, we have made tremendous strides thanks to our close partnership with OSD Acquisition and Sustainment (OSD A&S); Research and Engineering (OSD R&E); the Chief Digital and Artificial Intelligence Office (CDAO); the Defense Innovation Unit (DIU); the Services; the Intelligence Community; and industry. We developed and deployed fifteen JFN experimentation kits in 2023 in eight months. With these kits, we conducted experimentation in three joint exercise and experimentation venues in CY23, successfully scaling up from eight nodes in NORTHERN EDGE 23-1 to twenty nodes in NORTHERN EDGE 23-2. To further accelerate our progress, we successfully integrated with the OSD-led Global Information Dominance Exercise in December 2023 (GIDE 8). Further integration in exercises, including a JFN live fire demonstration during VALIANT SHIELD 2024, will deliver an initial JFN combat credible capability to the Joint Force in CY24.

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Joint Mission Accelerator Directorate (JMAD)

To identify and accelerate solutions that enhance the interdependencies between required strategic capabilities, USINDOPACOM established the JMAD in October 2023. JMAD is driving the acceleration, integration, and interoperability of the most critical and strategic needs across the Department and the Joint Force. JMAD has already initiated the integration of JFN and IMN architectures. JMAD also oversees STORMBREAKER, USINDOPACOM's program to develop a Joint Operational Planning Toolkit (JOPT) enabled by advanced technology that will include advanced data optimization capabilities, machine learning, and artificial intelligence to support planning, war gaming, mission analysis, and execution of all-domain, operational-level course of action development. STORMBREAKER is optimizing alignment with operational and wartime planning requirements and objectives.

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Enhanced Network of Allies and Partners

Over the last three years, USINDOPACOM has trained, operated, exercised, experimented with, and engaged allies and partners from across the region and the globe to enhance the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific. The relationships we have developed are built upon respect, trust, and shared values that are not just enduring but transformative. Our network of allies and partners is an unmatched asymmetric advantage, and our work together is critical to delivering integrated deterrence.

Multilateral Cooperation, Coordination, and Integration

Strengthening our bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral defense relations is one of USINDOPACOM's highest priorities, whether through capacity building, security cooperation, increasingly complex exercises, or advanced capability development. Developing stronger multilateral relationships in the region has been one of our greatest successes in the last three years, resulting in increased multilateral deterrence effects and the creation of relationships and activities among U.S. allies and partners to pursue a more stable order in the region.

AUKUS

AUKUS embodies a generational opportunity to modernize the longstanding relationships among the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom (U.K.), guided by a shared commitment to global security. The trilateral AUKUS partnership consists of two pillars: Submarine Consultation (Pillar I) and Advanced Capabilities (Pillar II).

On Pillar I, we are working to deliver a conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarine capability to Australia as soon as possible, upholding while setting the highest nuclear non-proliferation standards. We have already made significant progress in operator and industry training for Australia, and we look forward to having Australian sailors commence duty in Guam this year to build their maintenance skills. We are also increasing the number of visits of nuclear-powered attack submarines to Australia, including the visit by the USS North Carolina in 2023 and the visit going on right now by the USS Annapolis.

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We are working to accelerate and deepen cooperation on advanced defense capabilities through Pillar II. The Chiefs of Defense from Australia, the U.K., and I have made specific recommendations to the respective ministers and the Secretary of Defense on the priority areas that can deliver advanced capability in the near term while we also pursue maritime autonomous systems, anti-submarine warfare: undersea vehicles; positioning, navigation, and timing (PNT); artificial intelligence (A.I.); space capabilities; and integrated air and missile defense (IAMD). *We appreciate the NDAA's establishment of national exemptions for Australia and the United Kingdom from U.S. defense export control licensing and adding these two allies to the U.S. Defense Production Act. These provisions are crucial to enable accelerated delivery of advanced capabilities.*

U.S.-Japan-ROK

Trilateral cooperation between the United States, Japan, and the ROK is a priority for the United States and crucial for security in northeast Asia. The relationship between our three nations is the strongest it has ever been. As the DPRK continues its provocations, we are committed to enhancing our deterrence by responding in concert with our allies through improved intelligence and missile defense information sharing, combined operations in response to DPRK actions, and strengthening our interoperability across all three nations. In the last three years, we advanced a new era of trilateral cooperation by activating a 24/7 real-time DPRK missile warning data-sharing mechanism. The efforts improve our shared ability to ensure the safety of our people by trilaterally detecting and assessing DPRK missiles. We expanded our trilateral exercise program's scope and scale in recent years through successful trilateral ballistic missile defense, anti-submarine warfare, air exercises, and exercises with our Canadian and Australian partners. In 2023, we negotiated a multi-year trilateral exercise program, which formalized our trilateral cooperation in exercises for the next two years.

The Quad

The Quad nations, represented by Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S., is a diplomatic network supporting a prosperous, Free, and Open Indo-Pacific. The Quad is not a military alliance, but rather a diplomatic network committed to a peaceful, secure region, free from

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intimidation and committed to the rule of law. The Quad nations collaborate on matters such as maritime awareness, disaster response, and counterterrorism to enhance stability in the Indo-Pacific region. Including all Quad nations in India's Exercise MALABAR demonstrates commitment of Quad nations to a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. The chiefs of defense of Australia, India, Japan and I now meet annually for the Indo-Pacific Security Dialogue to discuss common security challenges.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

ASEAN advances critical works to uphold the rules-based order, advance respect for international law, and peacefully resolve disputes through consultation, diplomacy, and consensus-based decision-making. At the 2022 U.S.-ASEAN Summit, President Biden announced the launch of the U.S.-ASEAN Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. USINDOPACOM is committed to supporting maritime security cooperation with ASEAN, including significant support via the U.S. Pacific Fleet to a second ASEAN Maritime Exercise in 2025. USINDOPACOM is also co-chairing a Medical Expert Working Group with Indonesia and is developing concepts to support Laos' initiatives in environmental resilience; women, peace, and security; and cyber efforts.

Blue Pacific Cooperative

The Blue Pacific Cooperative (BPC) is a USINDOPACOM-led initiative to support the 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent and, the Pacific regional framework laid out by the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), and ultimately address critical issues for Blue Pacific nations, such as combating illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing and building climate resilience. The BPC provides the 17 partner nations with enhanced maritime domain awareness and seamless information sharing and supports the Forum Fisheries Agency based in the Solomon Islands and the Fiji Maritime Surveillance Rescue Coordination Center. Additionally, as a member of the Pacific Quad with Australia, France, and New Zealand, we work to build the capacity of Blue Pacific nations' maritime security forces, assist in the protection of central and western Pacific fisheries, and provide access to maritime domain awareness technology and best practices to counter IUU fishing assets. U.S. cooperation with Blue Pacific nations without

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militaries focuses on improving relations through engineering projects, combating transnational crime, and enhancing coordination and collaboration. In July 2023, Samoa joined the State Partnership Program with the Nevada National Guard.

Northeast Asia

Our relationships with allies and partners in Northeast Asia are crucial to deterring aggressive action by the DPRK, Russia, and the PRC, as well as securing the support needed to transition to conflict if necessary. Increasing bilateral interoperability and growing multilateral relationships and operations have significantly improved our strategic position and deterrence within the First Island Chain.

Alliances with Japan and the ROK are the cornerstone of regional peace and security. Beyond trilateral cooperation, bilateral relations with each country are consistently being modernized to prevail in the new era of strategic competition and underpin a shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

The U.S. and Japan made significant progress in modernizing the alliance in the last three years, including expanding bilateral planning efforts for contingencies and exploring more effective alliance command and control relationships to enhance interoperability. We are rapidly expanding our multilateral cooperation efforts by including partners such as Canada, the Philippines, the ROK, and the U.K. in Exercise KEEN SWORD 23 and Australia in KEEN EDGE 24. The U.S. and Japan continue to optimize force posture, including for the defense of the Southwest Islands, by forward-deploying more resilient and mobile capabilities. Japan continues demonstrating its resolve to take a more active role in maintaining regional peace and stability. Japan has committed to doubling its defense budget from 1% to 2% by 2027, resulting in unprecedented defense spending. This spending includes counter-strike, integrated air and missile defense, multidomain, sustainment, and other capabilities.

The U.S.-ROK military-to-military relationship is one of the world's most robust and interoperable alliances. Exercise ULCHI FREEDOM SHIELD continues to significantly improve our bilateral crisis management and war execution capabilities. As part of our commitment to extended deterrence, USINDOPACOM facilitated the first U.S. SSBN port

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visit to ROK in 40 years, the port visit of the USS Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group; the first 5th Gen aircraft deployment to Korea, and the first B-52 landing in Korea in decades. The U.S. and the ROK are committed to modernizing our capabilities to strengthen our combined defense; at nearly \$43 billion, the 2023 ROK Defense budget is its most significant defense budget ever – a 4.4% increase over 2022, which was previously a record-high year. USINDOPACOM continues to work towards transitioning wartime Operational Control (OPCON) to the ROK through the Conditions-based OPCON Transition Plan (COTP).

The U.S. is proud to be Mongolia's strategic "Third Neighbor" and partner. Continued military-to-military relationship with Mongolia is one of the most active aspects of our Strategic Partnership and a contributor to regional security. USINDOPACOM and Mongolia cooperate on improving HA/DR response, defense modernization, developing professional military education (PME) programs, expanding Special Operations Forces capability, and enhancing air operations. We also continue to support Mongolian participation and leadership in U.N. Peacekeeping operation (UN PKO) missions, including expanding the scope and depth of Exercise KHAAN QUEST to include participation by Japan and the Republic of Korea.

U.S. policy on Taiwan is consistent and unchanged. We will continue to support Taiwan's self-defense capabilities, consistent with the Taiwan Relations Act. This aligns with our one China policy, which is guided by the Taiwan Relations Act, the three Joint Communiqués, and the Six Assurances. The United States is committed to cross-strait peace and stability and the peaceful resolution of differences, free from coercion and pressure.

Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia continues to be a region that sees significant coercive action from the PRC. These actions include the increasing militarization of their South China Sea outposts and further coercive gray zone actions against the Philippines in their Exclusive Economic Zone, including around Second Thomas Shoal, and other attempts to enforce domestic laws in international spaces, including using Chinese law enforcement entities to harass nations operating legally within their exclusive economic zones. Increased aggressive behavior by the PRC has led nations in this area to rethink and adjust their relationships with China, the U.S., and

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each other.

The Philippines and Thailand, as allies of the U.S., continue to grow closer bilaterally, as well as increase multilateral activity to ensure the defense of their nations against external armed attack in the Pacific. For the Philippines, the four new sites were announced for proposed inclusion under Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) sites, with the U.S. allocating over \$109M in infrastructure projects to improve bilateral military modernization and expand training opportunities, as well as position for response to HA/DR events. Exercise BALIKATAN increased in scope to include plan-based command posts and combined joint field training exercise events, including live fire maritime strikes, integrated air-missile defense activities, and the Australian Defence Force as a part of the exercise. In support of the Philippines' sovereign rights and its maritime security, USINDOPACOM conducted a bilateral sail and air patrol campaign in the Philippine Exclusive Economic Zone and Northern Luzon Strait, with five bilateral sails executed as of March 2024 and nearly 500 bilateral activities planned for the rest of the calendar year.

In Thailand, USINDOPACOM is committed to building an interoperable ally and supporting its military modernization efforts, including welcoming the first permanent Thai Liaison Officer in April 2024. Exercise COBRA GOLD continues to grow in scope and scale, featuring a staff exercise, a field training exercise, humanitarian civic assistance programs, and cyber operations, and includes forces from Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, the ROK, and Singapore.

Other nations in Southeast Asia remain essential to ensure regional stability. Singapore provides substantial support to the U.S. military, including offering U.S. forces the use of facilities near the Strait of Malacca. The U.S.-Singapore defense relationship has advanced over the last three years, with the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) USINDOPACOM and USCYBERCOM signing an MOU in August 2021 to advance cybersecurity information sharing, exchange of threat indicators, combined cyber training and exercises, and other cyber cooperation. In February 2023, Singapore hosted a rotational deployment of U.S. unmanned aerial systems, and we are exploring options to deploy U.S. maritime vessels based out of Singapore. SAF uses four CONUS locations, including three flying training programs and an annual live fire training with High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) launchers. By 2026, Singapore's F-16 training facility at Luke AFB will relocate before their F-35B deliveries

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in October 2026. Singapore hosts the multinational maritime Information Fusion Center (IFC), which coordinates efforts to support regional maritime security, and the Counterterrorism Information Facility (CTIF), which uses network analysis and multilayer analytics to identify trends, aberrations, and terrorist threats.

The U.S. and Brunei made significant strides in strengthening our military relationship, signing a new Acquisition Cross Servicing Agreement (ACSA) in April 2023 to enable greater military interoperability and a 505 Agreement in December 2023 that provides a conduit for defense articles and training grants. Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) is the largest U.S.-Brunei annual exercise, marking its 30th iteration in 2024. Brunei also participates in Southeast Asia Cooperation and Training (SEACAT) and the biennial Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) Exercise. In September 2022, in the first multilateral training in Brunei, the U.K. Special Boat Service (SBS) joined U.S. Navy SEALs and the Brunei Special Forces Regiment in Exercise NEPTUNE WARRIOR. In March 2023, His Royal Highness Prince Mateen visited the United States and engaged with Naval Special Warfare and others, strengthening military-to-military ties.

Indonesia's location stretching between the Indian and Pacific Oceans and the southern edge of the South China Sea means it occupies a critical strategic position regionally and globally. The U.S. has worked closely with Indonesia over the last three years to advance our strong defense cooperation. In November 2023, Presidents Biden and Widodo elevated our relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership. This effort resulted in a mutual commitment to advance space cooperation, cyber capacity building, maritime security, exercises, and other areas. SUPER GARUDA SHIELD grew from an Army service exercise to one of the most extensive joint and multinational exercises in the Indo-Pacific, featuring a joint bilateral CPX and FTX conducted with the Indonesian military and multinational participants from Australia, Singapore, the United Kingdom, and France.

The U.S.-Laos military relationship continues to advance as lingering mistrust from the legacy of war issues subsides. Laos and the United States resumed a Bilateral Defense Dialogue (BDD) in 2023 to advance cooperation efforts, resulting in the delivery, supported by the U.S. Department of Defense, of 619 various-sized cold-chain freezers capable of storing Pfizer COVID vaccines, distributed throughout the provinces in January 2024. USINDOPACOM has

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supported Laos via the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS) in their traditional advisory role, as well as through the provision of computer equipment. INDOPACOM continues to support ASEAN's central role in the region and Laos' ascension to the chairmanship of ASEAN for 2024.

Bilateral security cooperation tripled in scope and scale after the U.S.-Malaysia relationship was elevated to a Comprehensive Partnership in 2014 and revalidated in 2017. USINDOPACOM and the Malaysian Armed Forces will hold the first-ever execution of KERIS STRIKE in Sabah (East Malaysia) in FY24 and are developing BERSAMA WARRIOR (BW) into a multilateral exercise through a Five-Year Plan. To augment Malaysia's intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capability, the U.S. delivered 18 UAS ScanEagles by November 2022 for maritime domain awareness and counterterrorism (C.T.) missions. Since 2017, the U.S. has invested approximately \$220M in Maritime Security Initiative/Building Partner Capacity (MSI/BPC) programs.

In February 2023, Timor-Leste, the Rhode Island National Guard (RING), and Timor-Leste Defense Force signed a State Partnership Program agreement, resulting in RING's participation in several exercises and exchanges with Timor-Leste in 2023. The Baucau MOU signed in June 2021 was a milestone in U.S.-Timor-Leste bilateral relations, paving the way for more significant security cooperation and expanded access. The \$23M airfield rehabilitation and maritime security program will allow Timor-Leste to monitor its EEZ and conduct maritime security operations.

Vietnam is a leading regional voice supporting freedom of navigation and adherence to international law and the rules-based international order. The U.S. and Vietnam upgraded our relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership during President Biden's visit in September 2023, resulting in progress in maritime security and opportunities to expand cooperation in HA/DR, PKO, aviation, cyber, and personnel accounting (POW/MIA). This year, we will host a Vietnam delegation to conduct the US-VNM bilateral defense dialogue.

Cambodia's new government, appointed in August 2023, has expressed a desire for an improved bilateral relationship with the United States, to include the possible restoration of security cooperation. In January 2017, Cambodia imposed a moratorium on all military exercises with the U.S., followed by the State Partnership Program (SPP) termination in 2020. Currently,

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the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) mission continues, allowing for the continued search and recovery of 48 U.S. personnel still declared missing in Cambodia. We are seriously concerned about the PRC's military presence and construction of facilities at Ream Naval Base.

Relations with Burma remain strained. We condemn the military coup in 2021 against the democratically elected government in Burma and the subsequent widespread violence perpetrated by the Burma military regime against the people of Burma. USINDOPACOM does not engage with Burma's military but monitors the information space to support and assist the State Department in the protection of U.S. facilities and American personnel in Burma.

In January 2017, Cambodia imposed a moratorium on all military exercises with the U.S., followed by the State Partnership Program (SPP) termination in 2020. Currently, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) mission continues, allowing for the continued search and recovery of 48 U.S. personnel still declared missing in Cambodia. While USINDOPACOM desires military engagement with Cambodia where policy allows, we remain seriously concerned about the PRC's military presence and construction of facilities at Ream Naval Base.

Oceania

The many nations of the Oceania region include staunch allies and strong partners but are continuously under threat from diplomatic, economic, and security coercion by the PRC. Consequently, many of our relationships in this area have expanded and strengthened to address pernicious Chinese behavior and coercive pressure.

The U.S. and Australia have worked to enhance all-domain cooperation, integrate ranges, improve posture, and expand multilateral exercises across the theater, including hosting Marine Rotational Force-Darwin (MRF-D). The alliance continues to demonstrate combined operational capability executed in two Bomber Task Forces, submarine and U.S. Army watercraft rotations to Australia, and the deployment of U.S. Navy Maritime Patrol and Reconnaissance Aircraft (MPRA) from Australia to strengthen maritime domain awareness. Australia and the U.S. continue to expand the scope and scale of our robust exercise program, including PACIFIC SENTRY 23, featuring combined U.S.-Australia planning and combat operations against an all-domain, near-peer adversary, and TALISMAN SABRE 23 emphasizing interoperability and

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expeditionary logistics from eleven additional partners from across the globe. Increased trilateral opportunities with Australia and Japan allowed for increased complexity of our operations while improving partner interoperability throughout the region at the joint level. Australia's importance as an anchor of U.S. security in the Indo-Pacific remains unequivocal.

The Freely Associated States (FAS)—the Republic of Marshall Islands (RMI), the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), and Palau—occupy a strategic location linking the U.S. to the rest of the Indo-Pacific region, and they have the highest military service per capita in the U.S. military. We greatly appreciate that Congress recently passed the legislation that will allow the new COFA-related assistance agreements to be brought into force.

In addition to the COFA-related agreements, the United States must fully fund the Economic Assistance Agreement associated with the South Pacific Tuna Treaty. The treaty provides the United States access to tuna fisheries across Oceania and provides a mechanism for the United States to support economic development in the region. Failure to fund the Economic Assistance Agreement undermines U.S. credibility and opens the door for other countries to gain influence over these strategically important partners.

New Zealand is an essential leader in Oceania, with a mature network of mentors, instructors, and technical advisors supporting a pan-regional security cooperation program. New Zealand is part of DPRK U.N. Security Council Resolution enforcement efforts, part of the Headquarters Integrated Area Defense System under the Five Powers Defense Arrangements, and contributes to the Counter Terrorism Information Facility in Singapore. Exercise TEMPEST EXPRESS 23 featured a joint multilateral exercise conducted in New Zealand with 20 participating nations where planners examined New Zealand's earthquake response plan and HA/DR operations planning. In addition, New Zealand routinely engages in a broad range of U.S.-led exercises across the Indo-Pacific, including Rim of the Pacific, PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP, MOBILITY GUARDIAN, and CARTWHEEL.

Fiji, Papua New Guinea (PNG), and Tonga are essential partners in the region to ensure continued defense relationships, access, and lines of communication into the First Island Chain. Through Fiji's Blackrock training center, the Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) regularly deploys personnel supporting U.N. peacekeeping operations across the globe. Nevada National Guard's State Partnership Program and Exercise CARTWHEEL, Exercise TAQOMACA, the

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U.S.-Fiji Bilateral Defense Dialogue (BDD), the U.S. Shiprider Program, and the Oceania Maritime Security Initiative improve bilateral coordination of maritime domain awareness in support of Fijian sovereignty.

In May 2023, the U.S. and PNG entered into a bilateral Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA). This foundational agreement enhances access and security cooperation and further strengthens our bilateral relationship, improves the capacity of the PNG Defence Force, and increases stability and security in the region. Capacity building and training are advancing through the SPP's Wisconsin National Guard, and a ship rider program is set to expand U.S. Coast Guard elements into a maritime security line of effort.

The U.S. opened a new U.S. Embassy in Nuku'alofa, Tonga, in May 2023. It conducted a U.S.-Tonga Bilateral Defense Dialogue (BDD) that examined non-commissioned officer (NCO) developmental training opportunities and improvements to State Partnership Program initiatives between Tongan forces and the Nevada National Guard.

South Asia

South Asia is at the nexus of global trade and commerce, with nearly half of the world's 90,000 commercial vessels and two-thirds of global oil trade traveling through the Indian Ocean. The region boasts some of the fastest-growing economies on Earth and is home to a quarter of the world's population. While the region offers unprecedented opportunity, it also confronts many security challenges, including a growing Chinese presence, static or declining defense budgets, terrorism, and climate change effects. To combat these challenges, the U.S. seeks opportunities to broaden and strengthen partnerships with India, Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka.

A strong U.S.-India Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership is essential to a free and open Indo-Pacific. In 2023, the U.S. and India launched INDUS-X and completed a Roadmap for U.S.-India Defense Industrial Cooperation to enhance bilateral defense industrial cooperation and innovation. The proposed deal between G.E. Aerospace and Hindustan Aeronautics for domestic Indian production of F-414 jet engines exemplifies this approach. The U.S. and India are seeking unprecedented levels of interoperability by expanding cooperation in the air domain through the participation of U.S. B-1B Bombers in India's biennial air show AERO INDIA and bilateral air

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exercise COPE INDIA. Additionally, in the land domain, we conducted the largest-ever bilateral joint amphibious exercise with India, TIGER TRIUMPH, improving our cooperation on maritime domain awareness and strengthening service-to-service ties. USINDOPACOM seeks to deepen cooperation under the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) to enable more regular and flexible engagements in the Indian Ocean Region, including U.S. ship repair in Indian shipyards. Two new Master Ship Repair Agreements were signed in 2023, and three U.S. Navy vessels have recently received maintenance and repair in Indian shipyards.

USINDOPACOM conducted the 10th Bilateral Defence Dialogue with the Bangladesh AFD in August 2023 to strengthen military-to-military ties further and explore opportunities for collaboration on training, exercises, and equipment exchanges. USINDOPACOM seeks a General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) with Bangladesh to improve cooperation between our countries on defense matters.

The U.S. is committed to our longstanding defense relationship and supporting Maldivian sovereignty, safety, and security. USINDOPACOM continues seeking opportunities to enhance our relationship with the Maldives, including building maritime security and counterterrorism capacity. In 2021, the Maldives signed an arrangement with the Montana National Guard to join the State Partnership Program. As the Maldives looks towards establishing a maritime fusion center in the future, USINDOPACOM stands ready to leverage capabilities through our Joint Interagency Task Force – West (JIATF-W) and the U.S. Coast Guard to support those efforts.

USINDOPACOM supports Nepal in becoming a premier contributor to global PKO through Global Peace Operations Initiative (GPOI) funds and exercises. In February of this year, the United States and Nepal co-hosted the largest-ever military exercise in Nepal, the Multinational Peacekeeping Exercise SHANTI PRAYAS IV, which included over 1,000 participants from 20 countries. Beyond PKO, USINDOPACOM partners closely with Nepal on HA/DR, border security, and special operations cooperation.

USINDOPACOM continues to support Sri Lankan defense reform and equipment divestiture efforts within the bounds of current legal constraints, as well as opportunities for institutional capacity building, maritime security, HA/DR, and U.N. PKO. In the past three years, U.S.-Sri Lankan defense relations built upon a successful CARAT exercise, the transfer of the 3rd USCG cutter, and Sri Lanka's hosting of the 2023 USINDOPACOM Environmental Security

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Forum. We welcome Sri Lanka's decision to participate in Operation Prosperity Guardian utilizing a Coast Guard cutter previously transferred through the EDA program. It is a valuable reminder that our security assistance programs advance U.S. and global security. We will continue strengthening our relationship with the upcoming King Air Maritime Patrol Aircraft delivery in 2024.

Other Indo-Pacific Nations

Many other Indo-Pacific nations have continued to increase their activities unilaterally and bilaterally with regional governments and multilaterally to strengthen the rules-based international order. Key among these nations are Canada, France, and the United Kingdom (U.K.). Canada continues to deploy competent forces to the region to support freedom of navigation and sovereignty, including through several combined Taiwan Strait Transits with the United States in the last three years. French armed forces maintain commands in French Polynesia (FAPF), New Caledonia (FANC), and South Indian Ocean Zone (FAZOI), as well as keeping an active role in regional security, protecting fisheries, and countering transnational crimes. The U.K. sustains a regional defense posture, including the Brunei Garrison and two permanently deployed Royal Navy Offshore Patrol Vessels. A broad program of bilateral and multilateral operations and activities complement their posture, including exercises and training contributions from the British Army and Royal Air Force. The U.K. invests in the Five Power Defence Arrangement (FPDA) with Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, and Singapore; continues a Global Combat Air Programme with Japan and Italy to develop 6th generation fighter aircraft; and supports defense programs through the Hiroshima Accord with Japan, the Downing Street Accord with the Republic of Korea; a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with India; and the Partnership Roadmap with Indonesia, and Strategic Partnership with Singapore. USINDOPACOM continues to benefit from basing and access to the British Indian Ocean Territory at Diego Garcia and from the British Defence Singapore Support Unit.

Other Areas of Cooperation

Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Program

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USINDOPACOM executes a robust WPS program as part of the Department of Defense's (DOD) implementation of the U.S. Women, Peace, and Security Act 2017. This is done by mainstreaming a gender perspective into theater plans, programs, and policies to enable USINDOPACOM to develop inclusive security strategies that advance a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. WPS-themed security cooperation engagements with partner nations are an innovative approach for strategic competition that is non-escalatory, less costly than conflict, enables values-based choices, and helps the United States maintain an asymmetric advantage. WPS builds resilience capacity and self-reliance, demonstrating a commitment to investing in our partners, not extracting from them.

In 2023, USINDOPACOM designed and delivered a tailored gender focal point training to the Papua New Guinea Defence Force (PNGDF) at the request of the recently established PNGDF Gender Committee. This work with the PNGDF Gender Committee is currently the only DOD initiative in the Indo-Pacific Region supporting the U.S. Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote stability (also known as the Global Fragility Act). USINDOPACOM also supported a U.S.-Malaysia Trafficking in Persons workshop with WPS-related programming. Finally, USINDOPACOM developed and held the inaugural Indo-Pacific Regional Military Gender Advisor Course, part of a five-year initiative to create a fully trained network of certified military Gender Advisors within the region. Course participants included representatives from Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Fiji, Japan, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, and Thailand.

Climate Change

The national security impacts of climate change are a priority concern to many allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region. These impacts may exacerbate existing challenges, including growing geostrategic competition and maritime boundary disputes. Our partners and allies in

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Oceania, Southeast Asia, and South Asia are increasingly vulnerable to extreme weather and the food and water security challenges that result.

Climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resilience considerations are essential to long-term planning for U.S. operating locations, critical facilities, and capabilities in the Indo-Pacific region. USINDOPACOM is committed to increasing the resilience of its infrastructure, facilities, and forces and assisting allies and partners in resiliency efforts. The military's role in disaster preparedness and response will be increasingly needed as climate change impacts become more frequent and severe. Enhancing disaster preparedness and response is an opportunity for the USINDOPACOM to play a significant role in supporting efforts to build resilience.

Red Hill

Secretary Austin tasked USINDOPACOM to establish Joint Task Force-Red Hill (JTF-RH) in recognition of the need to safely and expeditiously defuel the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility and to rebuild trust with the State of Hawaii and the local community on Oahu. Through collaboration and transparency with the Environmental Protection Agency and the Hawaii Department of Health, JTF-RH accelerated the defueling schedule by six months. On 16 December 2023, JTF-RH completed gravity defueling of over 104 million gallons of fuel, fulfilling the Department's commitment to remove the threat to one of Oahu's primary aquifers as quickly and safely as possible. JTF-RH is presently removing residual fuel from the facility, simultaneously conducting a methodical turnover with a newly established Navy Closure Task Force as the Department transitions the main effort from defueling to closure and long-term environmental remediation. As DOD notified Congress in September of 2023, defueling the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility will not adversely impact the Department's ability to support military operations in the Indo-Pacific theater. The Defense Logistics Agency repositions fuel across the Indo-Pacific to better support USINDOPACOM requirements.

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Conclusion

Conflict is not imminent or inevitable, but our potential adversaries have become increasingly aggressive and seek to impose their will at the expense of like-minded nations that embrace a rules-based order. The PRC's actions, which include a massive military buildup accompanied by a campaign of coercive actions, destabilize the region and challenge the ideals that support a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Through *Seize the Initiative* and in concert with the Department of Defense and the U.S. Congress, USINDOPACOM has delivered a comprehensive plan that provides a more distributed force posture, a synchronized campaign of joint/combined operations across all domains, the capabilities needed to fight and win, and the relationships with allies and partners needed to maintain a free and open INDOPACIFIC.

However, ***my successor will need your support to continue making progress across all of these efforts with a sense of urgency.*** We must build upon the progress achieved in the last few years to accelerate the fielding of the initiatives described in the Section 1302 Independent Assessment. These initiatives include the defense of Guam, decision superiority capabilities, our security cooperation actions, AUKUS, and bilateral international agreements such as [those related to] the Compacts of Free Association (COFA) to ensure the United States remains the security partner of choice in the Indo-Pacific.

Lastly, I want to thank Congress for your continued focus on our challenges in the Indo-Pacific region and your commitment over the last three years. ***Your focus and leadership have never been more important.*** Congress must pass timely appropriations. Continuing resolutions result in cumulative and detrimental effects on our buying power, delay the fielding of much-needed capability and capacity, and increase the level of operational risk that I am forced to assume. If we are not vigilant in aligning our resources to address the most critical national security priorities, our ability to ensure the safe and prosperous future of the U.S. and our children and grandchildren will be in jeopardy.

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ADMIRAL
JOHN C. AQUILINO
Commander, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command



Admiral John Aquilino is the 26th Commander of the United States Indo-Pacific Command, the nation's oldest and largest combatant command. USINDOPACOM includes 380,000 Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen, Guardians, Coast Guardsmen and Department of Defense civilians and is responsible for all U.S. military activities in the Indo-Pacific, covering 36 nations, 14 time zones, and more than 50 percent of the world's population.

A native of Huntington, NY, he graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1984, earning a Bachelor of Science in physics. He subsequently entered flight training and earned his wings in August

1986.

Operationally, he served in numerous fighter squadrons flying the F-14 A/B Tomcat and the F-18 C/E/F Hornet. His fleet assignments included the Ghostriders (VF-142) and Black Aces (VF-41). He commanded the famous Red Rippers (VF-11) and Carrier Air Wing 2. His extended deployments were in support of Operations Deny Flight, Deliberate Force, Southern Watch, Noble Eagle, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom.

Ashore, Aquilino's assignments included duties as an adversary instructor pilot flying the A-4, F-5, and F-16N aircraft for the Challengers (VF-43); operations officer for the Strike Weapons and Tactics School, Atlantic; flag aide to the vice chief of naval operations; special assistant for weapons systems and advanced development in the office of legislative affairs for the U.S. secretary of defense; director of air wing readiness and training for the commander, Naval Air Forces, U.S. Atlantic Fleet; and executive assistant to the commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command.

His flag assignments included director of strategy and policy, U.S. Joint Forces Command; deputy

director, joint force coordinator, the Joint Staff; commander, Carrier Strike Group 2 aboard USS GEORGE H.W. BUSH (CVN-77); director of maritime operations, U.S. Pacific Fleet; deputy chief of naval operations for operations, plans and strategy; and commander, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command/U.S. Fifth Fleet/Combined Maritime Forces. Prior to his assignment to U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, Aquilino served as the 36th commander of U.S. Pacific Fleet.

Aquilino graduated from Navy Fighter Weapons School (TOPGUN) and the Joint Forces Staff College. He completed Harvard Kennedy School's executive education program in national and international security.

He is entitled to wear the Distinguished Service Medal, Defense Superior Service Medal, Legion of Merit, Bronze Star Medal, Air Medal as well as several other personal unit and campaign awards. He accumulated more than 5,100 mishap free flight hours and over 1,150 carrier-arrested landings.

STATEMENT OF

GENERAL PAUL J. LaCAMERA
COMMANDER, UNITED NATIONS COMMAND;
COMMANDER, UNITED STATES-REPUBLIC OF KOREA COMBINED FORCES COMMAND;
COMMANDER, UNITED STATES FORCES KOREA

BEFORE THE 118th CONGRESS
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

20 MARCH 2024



INTRODUCTION

Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and Distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide a written statement on the security environment in the Republic of Korea (ROK) and Northeast Asia. I appreciate your unwavering support to the Servicemembers, Civilians, Contractors, and their families who work with our Korean allies and United Nations Command Member States to maintain security on the Korean Peninsula. The U.S.-ROK Alliance serves as a linchpin for peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific. Our two nations share common values and democratic norms, value human rights, and abide by the rules-based international order. We also share significant economic and cultural ties that benefit both nations. The ROK sits at the heart of Northeast Asia, a region of significant security and economic interest for the United States. The presence of U.S. forces in the ROK and Japan demonstrates our ironclad commitment to the people of Korea and protects our strategic interests in Northeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific region.

This past year has seen significant strides in U.S.-ROK relations. President Biden hosted President Yoon for a State Visit in April 2023, leading to the issuance of the *Washington Declaration*, in which the two nations expressed our bilateral commitment to develop an ever-stronger mutual defense relationship and reaffirmed commitment to the Mutual Defense Treaty. As a result, the *Washington Declaration* also established the Nuclear Consultative Group as an enduring, bilateral consultative body focused on strengthening extended deterrence, discussing nuclear and strategic planning, and managing the threat posed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). President Yoon noted the importance of the United Nations Command (UNC) in his August 15, 2023, National Day Address, stating that UNC is a great example of international solidarity that has played a key role in firmly safeguarding the ROK's freedom. In November 2023, in commemoration of the 70 years of the Alliance and in recognition of the changing security environment both on the Korean Peninsula and the broader region, Secretary Austin and Minister Shin issued a "Defense Vision of the U.S.-ROK Alliance" outlining a transformational way forward for the

security and defense of the two countries, while also contributing to the security of the region and the world. Our Alliance with the ROK and their growing cooperation and coordination with Japan is bolstering regional security in Northeast Asia. Additionally, moving beyond the bilateral framework, President Biden and President Yoon met with Japanese Prime Minister Kishida during the Camp David Summit, the first-ever summit of the leaders from the U.S., ROK, and Japan, yielding broad trilateral military and diplomatic progress.

As the U.S.-ROK Alliance strengthens, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has responded with continued destabilizing activities. The mission of the UNC is to enforce the terms of the Armistice Agreement and to restore peace and security on the Korean Peninsula. The mission of the United States-Republic of Korea Combined Forces Command (CFC) is to deter aggression and if necessary, defend the ROK to maintain stability in Northeast Asia. The mission of the United States Forces Korea (USFK) is to deter aggression and protect the ROK against any adversary or threat, ultimately maintaining stability in Northeast Asia.

My priorities and focus as the Commander for these three commands are the same. My lines of operations are: Defend the Homeland(s), Strengthen the Alliance, Prepare for Combat, and Build Coalitions in order to ensure we achieve our strategic, operational, and tactical end states. My lines of effort, which are interwoven and connect my lines of operations are: taking care of the Servicemembers, Civilians, Families, and Contractors who support the Forces on the Korean Peninsula, and working to gain and maintain our Information Advantage which is critical in Armistice and vital in Conflict.

DEFEND THE HOMELAND(S)

Northeast Asia, which includes the Korean Peninsula, is vital to global peace and stability. It is home to four of the world's most powerful and largest economies: the U.S., ROK, Japan, and the People's Republic of China (PRC). The United States has also had an enduring economic presence in the region for decades. It is also important to acknowledge Russia's growing presence in Northeast Asia.

Due to geographic proximity, there is significant potential for third party intervention and influence on the Korean Peninsula, should a crisis occur specifically from the PRC (Korea lies within the PRC's Anti-Access / Area Denial defensive layers) and Russia. Both are mindful that there is a premier Joint Force of 28,500+ American Servicemembers forward deployed to the ROK. These geographic realities, combined with powerful economic interests, make the ROK the linchpin of security in Northeast Asia and a treaty ally we must defend.

It is imperative for us to remember that the Korean War has not ended; the Korean Peninsula is in armistice and the DPRK continues to develop capabilities that threaten not only the region but nations around the world. These capabilities include nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, orbital launch capabilities, cyber threats, and chemical and biological weapons. The persistent DPRK threat looms far beyond the Korean Peninsula, Northeast Asia, and into multiple domains including cyber and space. Furthermore, recent DPRK collaboration with Russia is also an indicator of growing bilateral relations between the two nations which is manifested in the DPRK's continued supply of artillery and ballistic missiles for use in Ukraine. It has delivered more than 10,000 shipping containers—the equivalent of 260,000 metric tons—of munitions or munitions-related materials to Russia since September 2023, which undermines regional security beyond Northeast Asia. In confronting the DPRK's actions, the U.S. and the ROK will continue to stand together to maintain peace and security on the Korean Peninsula and stability throughout Northeast Asia. This commitment is vital to stability in the region and is an example to other like-minded nations.

We must maintain our ironclad commitment to the Alliance which has endured since the Korean War and never take it for granted. Pursuing our goal of the complete and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, deterring the DPRK from using nuclear weapons, and defending our homelands requires all three Commands in Korea: United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command, and U.S. Forces Korea.

STRENGTHEN THE ALLIANCE

We have shared a Mutual Defense Treaty with the ROK since 1953, but we should never take our Alliance for granted. The *Washington Declaration* and the Camp David Summit have helped to expand our cooperation and reinforce our extended deterrence commitments.

President Yoon articulated his vision for the ROK to become a “global pivotal state” and the ROK government released its own Indo-Pacific strategy. The strategy is a comprehensive vision for the entire region and is not limited to just Northeast Asia or economics. It is reflective of a rules-based international order founded in cooperation rather than coercion. As the ROK aims to “increase engagement and cooperation with the Indo-Pacific” (*Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region, 2022*), protected under the security umbrella of the U.S. military and interagency, I expect Northeast Asia will remain vital to global stability and security.

Of these powerful economies, the ROK is, by Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the 13th largest economy in the world and 4th largest in Asia. It is a leading producer of semi-conductors, vehicles, and many other consumer electronics. It is also the 6th largest defense exporter in the world and President Yoon has set a goal for the ROK to become the 4th largest during his tenure. The advances within the Korean defense sector have yielded exports in aircraft, warships, and ground combat vehicles and weapons; the presence of Korean weaponry within the international community has trended higher since 2000 (*Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*).

The ROK is also the 6th largest U.S. trading partner (U.S. is now the ROK’s largest trading partner), and the 6th largest U.S. agricultural export market. Between 2019-2022, the ROK directly invested \$74 billion, and ROK firms have announced \$98 billion of new planned investments in the United States, concentrated in semiconductors, electric vehicles, and battery technology.

The ROK's success is due to our shared values, democratic ideals, and market-based economies within the rules-based international order. Maintaining peace and stability on the Korean peninsula is important to global stability and to the global economy, including the United States.

PREPARE FOR COMBAT

While we remain focused on a diplomatic resolution, the military missions of UNC, CFC, and USFK are to be prepared for combat so our governments can negotiate from a position of strength. Each of the three commands has separate sets of authorities, separate chains of command, and each continues to adapt to meet emerging security challenges. Our goal is to prevent an outbreak of hostilities, but we remain prepared to react and respond to any form of aggression across all domains.

Combined Forces Command has been the heart of the U.S.-ROK Alliance for over 45 years and is a unique, bilateral warfighting command charged with the dual missions of deterrence and defense. Combined Forces Command receives its direction and guidance from both U.S. and ROK national leaders, through ministerial and general officer level forums. During Armistice, I, as the Commander of CFC, have Combined Delegated Authority of designated ROK forces to maintain deterrence and to prepare forces to execute combined missions and plans. This starts and ends with tough, realistic training - executed in combined and joint environments alongside our interagency partners across all domains using live, virtual, and constructive environments. In addition to our strategic asset deployments to Korea, including carrier strike groups, strategic bombers, and nuclear submarines, our routine, defensive training events, such as ULCHI FREEDOM SHIELD and FREEDOM SHIELD are critical to our ability to maintain readiness and provide extended deterrence in Northeast Asia. Finally, bilateral, trilateral, and multinational operations, activities, and investments on and off the Korean Peninsula allow us to Fight Tonight.

United States Forces Korea remains the premier Joint Force, capable of operating in all domains with our allies and partners and committed to defending the security of the ROK. It is a critical part of the

United States' approach to providing extended deterrence in Northeast Asia. As U.S. Indo-Pacific Command's (USINDOPACOM) sub-unified Joint Force on the Korean Peninsula, USFK is primarily responsible for the Reception, Staging, Onward Movement, and Integration of combat forces to the peninsula, as well as the sustainment of those forces. As the USFK Commander, I support UNC and CFC by coordinating and planning among U.S. component commands in the ROK, exercising operational control of U.S. forces as directed by USINDOPACOM, and coordinating U.S. military assistance to the ROK.

United States Forces Korea continues to demonstrate new and innovative capabilities that provide our forces advantages across multiple domains. Everything the Department of Defense (DOD) is doing to modernize is occurring on the Korean Peninsula—in a combined, joint, interagency environment in multiple domains. We are pursuing opportunities in artificial intelligence and machine learning. We are also working with all U.S. military services on improving our aging network and cybersecurity posture for our Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Cyber, Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance, and Targeting (C5ISRT). Additionally, the Northeast Asia Regional Fusion Cell is USFK's mechanism and environment through which we will aggregate understanding of DPRK's nuclear and weapons of mass destruction kill web. Our Fusion Cell capability ensures unity of efforts with the U.S. Intelligence Community and identifies effects-based options to deter aggression.

Our ability to provide forward deterrence is dependent upon conducting regular, robust, and challenging training in addition to proper manning. Readiness for combat—at the unit and operational levels—must be built and continuously maintained; USFK has a high turnover rate and many of our servicemembers serve two years or less in Korea. Additionally, due to geographical space constraints, current ranges and availability for collective live-fire training requirements are limited. Components must train outside of Korea throughout the year to maintain unit readiness. These constraints impact our ability to execute fixed and rotary wing live fire exercises. Training off peninsula, while costly, is critical to

maintaining our combined and joint force operational readiness. These are the steps we must take to ensure a Fight Tonight posture on the Korea Peninsula; we cannot afford to wait to train.

While assignment lengths of permanent party pose challenges to reactivity and unit readiness, our rotational units and units that train in the vicinity of the Korean Peninsula build readiness. The Services provide trained and ready forces, but we build their operational readiness to fight in the Korean Peninsula environment. We are not a readiness consumer.

BUILD COALITIONS

Our network of allies and partners on the Korean Peninsula represents our greatest asymmetric advantage in supporting regional stability. These coalitions are bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral. In support of our efforts to build coalitions, UNC continues to represent the mechanism for collective security on the Peninsula. Our collective action ensures we are strategically predictable to our allies and partners, while being tactically and operationally unpredictable to adversaries and competitors. Managing and responding to crisis is the most consequential thing we do as an Alliance.

Since 1950, UN Member States under the UNC have collectively supported the ROK's security and sovereignty alongside U.S. forward deterrence. UNC provides three enduring functions.

First, UNC enforces the Armistice Agreement by executing the functions necessary to maintain and enforce the terms of the Armistice through close coordination between the United States, the ROK, UN member states, as well as coordination with the Korean People's Army (KPA). Furthermore, UNC informs the DPRK prior to the start of U.S.-ROK Alliance large-scale training exercises, such as the defensive FREEDOM SHIELD and ULCHI FREEDOM SHIELD exercises, to ensure training events are not misinterpreted as aggressive actions.

Second, UNC coordinates the multinational contributions for securing the Korean Peninsula. Today, 17 countries contribute to UNC's mission. These UN Member States come from every corner of the globe, offering a visible reminder of the international community's resolve to defend the ROK and the global

nature of the DPRK threat. I am thankful for each countries' contributions, and it is an honor to serve with their countrymen and women.

Finally, UNC executes functions as assigned by U.S. National Authorities through the Joint Chiefs of Staff. United Nations Command is a one-of-a-kind, multinational military command under U.S. leadership. The UNC is not a United Nations peacekeeping organization.

United Nations Command is critical to our mission and provides international legitimacy through multinational contributions; it is a "ready-made" combined joint task force that adds value across the Korean Peninsula. We continue to welcome Member States to join our coalition and increase participation through exercises and liaison officer programs to our headquarters in the ROK.

TAKING CARE OF PEOPLE

Servicemembers, Civilians, Families, and Contractors who support the Force are our most precious resource; taking care of our people is a no-fail task.

Those who volunteer to bring their families to the Korean Peninsula normally spend at least two years there defending the ROK and deterring the DPRK. Ensuring those personnel and their families the best quality of life possible while they are away from the U.S. homeland is of great importance and something I stress with leaders at every echelon. For those serving in Korea accompanied with their families, we are recommending tour length normalizations to three years that will enhance family stability while keeping unaccompanied tours at one year. We continue to look for ways to build our community to ensure the ROK remains an assignment of choice for our personnel and their families.

Our families also include the dependents of UN Member States who live on our installations. Currently, the school aged children of the UN Member State personnel are not guaranteed spaces at the on base schools, which creates an often-stressful planning challenge for the families who are headed to Korea to share in the mission. We are working with relevant organizations and agencies to mitigate these challenges, and ensure we do all we can to take advantage of these multinational and multigenerational

relationship building opportunities.

The wellbeing of our Servicemembers is also dependent on addressing systemic issues such as sexual assault and harassment in our ranks. I have a zero-tolerance policy for any action that destroys unit cohesion. Our senior leaders continue to impress the importance of these initiatives upon their subordinates. This is not just about combat readiness; it is simply doing right by our people.

And finally, our people live and work across the entire ROK, from Panmunjom near the Demilitarized Zone to the southern port of Busan. Being a responsible ally means being a good steward of the places where we operate. United States Forces Korea continues to conduct bilateral engagements with the ROK to appropriately posture our presence while also returning valuable land for use by the Korean people. We could not do this without military construction support from Congress.

INFORMATION ADVANTAGE

Our newest line of effort, “Gain and Maintain Information Advantage” is critical. The UNC/CFC/USFK must protect operations security-related critical information while leveraging information to achieve our missions during Armistice and conflict. Our ability to integrate and synchronize UNC/CFC/USFK strategic communication and Operations, Activities, and Investments (OAI)s across the information environment is contested by adversaries. Competition in the information environment increases the risks associated with strategic miscalculation; our ability to affect adversary perceptions in support of deterrence and protection of UNC/CFC/USFK forces and domestic populations is vital.

Today’s information environment requires fewer resources to contest than other aspects of the operational environment. Our competition in the information environment encompasses activities across the informational, cognitive, and cyber dimensions to gain military advantages. This enhances efforts to deter by synchronizing our communication, actions, images, and intentions to send clear and credible signals to our adversaries. During conflict, leveraging information is critical to maintaining global support and legitimacy among the international community.

Each component of the UNC/CFC/USFK provides a different function and capability needed to exploit opportunities in the information environment in support of deterrence. While we can operate across all domains, I am concerned about our ability to compete in the information environment in Northeast Asia in light of PRC, Russia, and DPRK's aggressive investments in information warfare technology and operational practices. As the largest U.S. force on the Asian continent, USFK is uniquely positioned to counter many of the disinformation, misinformation, and mal-information efforts of our competitors and adversaries, and defeat enemies during conflict.

CONCLUSION

United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command, and United States Forces Korea, will deter and, if necessary, defeat our adversaries. Our collective actions will advance a free and open Indo-Pacific that is more connected, prosperous, and secure. The men and women working towards that goal are motivated, capable, and postured to do so while forward deployed in Korea alongside our ROK Allies and UN Member State Servicemembers. Our presence within Korea is advantageous; it is better to be prepared from within Korea rather than to fight our way in. We train to fight in a combined, joint, interagency, and multi-domain environment simultaneously. In doing so, we will preserve peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, Northeast Asia, and the Indo-Pacific. I am grateful for this Committee's continued support, and I am honored to lead this dedicated multinational, combined, and Joint Force deployed to the Asian mainland.

Thank you to the United States Congress, Armed Service Components, USINDOPACOM, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Under One Flag! We Go Together! Fight Tonight!

Commander UNC/CFC/USFK

Gen. Paul LaCamera

[Download the Hangul Version](#)

General Paul LaCamera assumed command of United Nations Command, ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command, and United States Forces Korea (UNC/CFC/USFK) on July 2, 2021.

A native of Westwood, MA, General LaCamera commissioned as an Infantry Officer from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1985. His education includes a Bachelor of Science from the U.S. Military Academy and a Master of Arts degree from the U.S. Naval War College.



General LaCamera most recently served as the Commanding General of the United States Army's largest Service Component Command, U.S. Army Pacific (USARPAC), headquartered at Fort Shafter, Hawaii, with portions of the command forward-deployed and based throughout the Indo-Pacific.

During his 38 years of service, General LaCamera had the honor to lead and serve with members of all military branches, inter-agency colleagues, and coalition partners from platoon through corps, and a combined joint task force.

General LaCamera's past assignments include: the 82d Airborne Division, XVIII Airborne Corps, U.S. Army Special Operations Command, and Joint Special Operations Command at Fort Bragg, North Carolina; 1st Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment, Hunter Army Airfield, Georgia; 4th Ranger Training Battalion, 3d Ranger Battalion and the 75th Ranger Regiment at Fort Benning, Georgia; 2d Ranger Battalion, Fort Lewis, Washington; 2d Infantry Division, Eighth United States Army,

Republic of Korea; 10th Mountain Division (Light), Fort Drum, New York; 4th Infantry Division, Fort Carson, Colorado; Office of Security Cooperation, Baghdad, Iraq; 25th Infantry Division, and U.S. Army Pacific, Hawaii.

General LaCamera participated in numerous contingency operations including: Operation JUST CAUSE in Panama; Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY in Haiti; Operation ANACONDA in Afghanistan; and multiple deployments in support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in Afghanistan, Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, Operation NEW DAWN, and Operation INHERENT RESOLVE in Iraq and Syria.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS POST HEARING

MARCH 20, 2024

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. WILSON

Mr. WILSON. Admiral Aquilino, in your testimony, you state that North Korea hopes to leverage their assistance to Russia to obtain technology for their nuclear and ballistic missile programs. Is North Korea receiving military weapon systems or technology from Russia in exchange?

Admiral AQUILINO. It's not clear what, if anything, North Korea has received thus far. We know North Korea has sent a large amount of conventional artillery ammunition and rockets to Russia, as well as a modest number of ballistic missiles. We also know Russia has used them against Ukraine because the Ukrainians have recovered and analyzed the debris.

Kim Jong Un likely expects something in return. Putin promised Russian assistance to Kim's nascent space program when he met with Kim last September. That assistance could also directly benefit the DPRK's long-range offensive missile programs, as there are many technologies common to both space and missile programs. Kim also visited a military aircraft factory when he was in Russia, strongly suggesting acquisition of new, more advanced aircraft is a DPRK priority.

Mr. WILSON. General LaCamera, in your testimony you state how critical training is to maintain readiness and deter our adversaries in the region. You also state some of the challenges you face in this area such as the high turnover rate of service members within U.S. Forces Korea and geographical space constraints.

When taking into consideration the critical role Air and Missile Defense units add to the Joint-Bilateral fight in the region, are current policies inhibiting commanders' ability to maintain an adequate level of readiness to meet the rising threats?

General LACAMERA. Shorter tour lengths result in higher personnel turnover rate, causing more frequent breaks of trained, ready, and certified Air Defense crews and, thus, overall readiness. Changing accompanied tours to 36-month tour lengths in the Republic of Korea would reduce strain on Air and Missile Defense crew readiness, training, and operational tempo, as well as provide greater stability for both the units and individual personnel. Additionally, continuing to provide volunteers of unaccompanied tour extensions from 1-year to 2-years would also provide desired benefits to both the crews and the volunteering individual.

Mr. WILSON. Dr. Ratner, over the past few years we've witnessed China extend their influence throughout the Indo-Pacific region with their projection of military force (including an unprecedented modernization of their military). In stride, the U.S. has established and continues to strengthen relationships w/ our multilateral partners in the region.

Can you characterize the positive impact these relationships, and the potential impact new partner relationships, have on countering China's influence in the region?

Follow-Up: Are there any actions Congress or the U.S. Government can take to establish new relationships to further our efforts?

Mr. RATNER. [No answer was available at time of publication.]

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. GARAMENDI

Mr. GARAMENDI. As INDOPACOM looks to build relations with partners and allies, the Coast Guard can and does play a critical role in supporting those relationships. Despite the Coast Guard's outsized impact, there are significant budget disparities compared to other branches of the military. For example, this year's budget request for the entire Coast Guard (\$12.3 billion) is only slightly larger than that request for the Pacific Deterrence Initiative alone (\$9.9 billion) and far less than the DoD's \$850 billion. What strategies is INDOPACOM implementing to allocate resources more effectively for burden sharing? How is DoD supporting the resources that USCG needs to operate? Are payments keeping pace with operational demands?

Admiral AQUILINO. The United States Coast Guard budget falls under the Department of Homeland Security. We strive to maintain a close relationship with the Coast Guard to synchronize requirements and investment strategies. We advocate for resources allocated to centrally managed funds for operations and activities, es-

pecially those involving security cooperation and countering transnational organized crime, two areas where capabilities owned by the Coast Guard are highly relevant. We fully support the Coast Guard's investment in presence in the Indo-Pacific Region and appreciate the FY2025 Coast Guard budget including \$200 million to expand the program of record for two fast response cutters in support of the Indo-Pacific Strategy and \$63 million to support training, partnership, and engagement in the theater.

Mr. GARAMENDI. Under the Navy's FY2025 budget submission, the Navy is proposing to defer procurement of the second TAGOS-25 class ship from FY2025 to FY2026. The Navy's proposed FY2025 shipbuilding budget requests no procurement funding for the TAGOS-25 program. Given the expense and limitations of T-AGS, have you evaluated alternative approaches to ocean floor mapping, such as lower cost unmanned maritime vehicles, which could also enable existing TAGOS ships to focus other critical intelligence missions?

Admiral AQUILINO. The Navy's five current Auxiliary General Ocean Surveillance, the T-AGOS-19 and -23 class ships, are used primarily for gathering acoustic intelligence using the Surveillance Towed Array Sensor System, commonly called SURTASS. These will be replaced by the T-AGOS-25 at a rate of one per year, excluding FY2025. As a mitigation measure, the Navy has procured expeditionary SURTASS, or SURTASS-E, which can be deployed globally using roll-on/roll-off equipment on a vessel of opportunity.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. SCOTT

Mr. SCOTT. During the wars in the Middle East, the men and women of Special Operations were largely seen as a counter-terrorism force with little attention given to the impact that SOF has "left of war." What is the role of SOF in your AOR today?

Admiral AQUILINO. In the Indo-Pacific, special operations forces, or SOF, continue longstanding efforts to enhance partner capacity by building generational relationships grounded in trust. SOF remain focused on honing the core maritime capabilities of the Naval Special Warfare and Marine Raider formations to preserve and strengthen U.S. warfighting advantage. Multiple SOF elements, including Air Force Special Operations units, leverage large-scale joint exercises to experiment with emerging technologies and creative options to extend the operational reach of the Joint Force in USINDOPACOM.

SOF are a major component of the "To Be" posture within the first island chain, where SOF are establishing critical C2 architectures enabling interoperability and synchronized operations, activities, and investments with allies and partners in the first island chain and periphery of the PRC. These operations, activities, and investments highlight and exploit PRC aggression against our allies in the South China Sea and East China Seas to garner increased support for a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Mr. SCOTT. Terrorist groups obtain financing through many different methods. What actions are INDOPACOM taking to combat the financing of terrorists? Are there areas in which increased collaboration with interagency partners, allies, or partner nations would lead to cutting terrorist financing to prevent them from buying weapons and conducting attacks?

Admiral AQUILINO. In the Indo-Pacific Region, terrorist organizations primarily self-fund using sources such as donations and member contributions. Fundraising activity is generally opportunistic and self-directed, and these organizations typically lack an organized financial network. The situation offers few options for formal financial institutions and local partner law enforcement to intervene in the financing of terrorist organizations. However, cumulative years of intense security pressure by local allies and partners continues to significantly degrade the abilities of regional terrorist groups to plan and conduct attacks.

Mr. SCOTT. India has finally begun decreasing imports of Russian oil and subsequently increasing U.S. imports. Although INDOPACOM has taken steps to bolster defense cooperation between the U.S. and India, what can the interagency to encourage the Indian government to severely reduce their dependence on Russian oil?

Admiral AQUILINO. The U.S.-India Major Defense Partnership has never been stronger, enabled by increased strategic alignment, improved military interoperability, and enduring support to India's defense modernization efforts. I support any efforts that the interagency can take to further strengthen this partnership and reduce Indian reliance on Russian oil, and I would refer you to Department of State and the Department of the Treasury for additional detail on these efforts.

Mr. SCOTT. How many more State Partnership Program (SPP) Projects could occur in your AOR if SPP had multiyear funding?

Admiral AQUILINO. Multi-year SPP funding will improve engagement predictability, increase the quality and quantity of engagements, and leverage long-term planning to provide the best qualified subject matter experts to participate in engagements. It will allow events to be conducted throughout the year, as opposed to the compressed third- and fourth-quarter limitations presented with the current funding model and its lack of predictability. A five-year funding cycle will also allow for the introduction of innovative new ideas that require phased implementation. Multi-year funding will result in a 20 to 50 percent increase in SPP projects in USINDOPACOM.

Mr. SCOTT. Admiral James A. Winnefeld Jr., U.S. Navy (Retired) wrote an article in the December 2023 issue of Proceedings entitled, "Mine Warfare Could Be Key." According to Admiral Winnefeld, "Offensive mine warfare-in both its current and potential instantiations-offers an opportunity to present new dilemmas to those who would threaten U.S. vital interests, but only if we quickly recapitalize this disruptive, historically proven capability before it is too late." Do you agree with Admiral Winnefeld's assessment?

Admiral AQUILINO. Offensive maritime mining is one tool that may be used to deter or defeat an adversary, as it adds uncertainty to the adversary's road-to-war calculations. Offensive mining restricts an adversary's maneuver space, both spatially and temporally. Mining is relatively cheap and expeditious. Mine clearing operations, on the other hand, are expensive, dangerous, and time consuming. Remote-controlled mining technology offers new ways to present dilemmas to an adversary, and offers a wide range of options to influence the outcome of high-end conflicts while minimizing the risk of civilian harm.

Mr. SCOTT. CDR. Justin Cobb, USN, wrote an article in the March 2024 issue of Proceedings entitled, "The Navy Is Not Prepared for the Joint Fight in IndoPaCom." According to CDR. Cobb, "What joint all-domain operations (JADO) and Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2) are missing is a new all-domain "Current Tactical Orders and Doctrine, U.S. Pacific Fleet," otherwise known as "PAC 10" and originally issued in 1943 to address continued deficiencies in operational and tactical execution. Does USINDOPACOM need to re-issue a new all-domain "Current Tactical Orders and Doctrine, U.S. Pacific Fleet," otherwise known as "PAC 10?"

Admiral AQUILINO. USINDOPACOM executes joint all-domain operations, activities, and investments to achieve intermediate objectives as defined in the Theater Campaign Plan and establishes the baseline for an assessment process. Within this guidance is the requirement for persistent synchronized operations across the joint force in all domains, to include allies and partners, coordinated across time and space. Improvements within the USINDOPACOM Campaign Plan include expansion of complexity in operations and enhanced global coordination to create new dilemmas for adversaries while increasing opportunities of engagement with like-minded countries. This Campaign Plan represents a modern equivalent of the historic "PAC 10."

Mr. SCOTT. Lieutenant Commander Alex Crosby, U.S. Navy, wrote an article in the September 2023 issue of Proceedings entitled, "The Joint Force Needs a Counter-SOF Strategy." According to Crosby, Strategic conflict will include the threat of adversary SOF, which demands forethought-i.e., developing a joint strategy for countering adversary SOF efforts with conventional forces. Integrating joint force capabilities and Special Operations Command expertise to build such a strategy is possible and should be prioritized, to provide operational commanders guidance before conflict erupts." Do you agree with Crosby's assessment? Is the U.S. joint force prepared to counter adversary special operations forces (SOF) threatening U.S. national interests in your area of responsibility?

Admiral AQUILINO. The joint force is prepared to counter adversary SOF threatening U.S. national interests in the Indo-Pacific. More importantly, we are working with our allies and partners to strengthen their resilience through the doctrinal application of foreign internal defense and through training, which will be decisive in countering adversarial SOF.

Mr. SCOTT. Rear Admiral Patrick Piercey, U.S. Navy (Retired), wrote an article in the September 2023 issue of Proceedings entitled, "Planning for the Next War Must Be a Mixture of Art & Science." According to Piercey, "Commander's intent, mission command, all-domain fires, and the ability to maneuver in the decision space must be resilient enough to keep going. Creating that resiliency means the joint force must rebalance toward critical thinking, creativity, and imagination-otherwise known as the art of war." Do you agree with Piercey's assessment? Does the forces under your command have the critical thinking, creativity, and imagination to be resilient enough to absorb the first punch and keep fighting?

Admiral AQUILINO. The USINDOPACOM Seize the Initiative approach to implementing the National Defense Strategy challenges the joint force to think, act, and operate differently, which includes planning through operational design to increase the complexity of our activities, create new dilemmas for adversaries, and reassure like-minded countries. Through persistent operations, synchronized across all domains with allies and partners, the combined and joint force improves its warfighting proficiency. When enabled by a flexible, distributed force posture, the joint force has the resiliency to respond to regional crises or conflicts and, if deterrence fails, “fight tonight.”

Mr. SCOTT. How confident are you that USINDOPACOM will be able to rely on foreign commercial vessel contracts to transport battle damaged ships in the event of a conflict? What is the minimum number of organic heavy-lift ships needed by USINDOPACOM?

Admiral AQUILINO. It depends on which carriers would be willing to participate in naval salvage or recovery operations, and which would be pre-positioned in the region at the time of need. Float on/float off vessels would likely be required for these operations, though the Department of Defense does not own or operate any. The entire requirement would need to be contracted.

There are only four organic heavy-lift ships available to USINDOPACOM, but they are not large enough to support U.S. naval combat loading. Additional assessments between USINDOPACOM and our partners at USTRANSCOM are required to better refine the minimum requirement.

Mr. SCOTT. Dr. Jerry Hendrix, Senior Fellow at the Sagamore Institute, wrote a March 26, 2024, article in Asia Times entitled, “China’s Maritime Power Cause for Action and Alarm.” According to Dr. Hendrix, “The United States should also seek to pursue repair capacity in the group of Freely Associated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands and Palau, with which it just recently signed a new Compact of Free Association. These islands, some of which lie just outside of the Chinese threat perimeter, possess some superb harbors and airfields but require investment to modernize their repair capacity.” How much would it cost to modernize the repair capacity of the Freely Associated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands and Palau?

Admiral AQUILINO. The Freely Associated States and their infrastructure are vital to INDOPACOM’s “To Be” Posture. While INDOPACOM does not have plans for depot-level repair capabilities in these states, we do have plans to rely on them for expeditionary repair, rearm, refuel and resupply activities. For the past few years INDOPACOM has utilized advance planning and MILCON Planning & Design funding provided by Congress to study, plan, and design infrastructure projects to modernize airfields, seaports, and storage facilities in the Freely Associated States. The funded activities include topographic surveys, geotechnical surveys, environmental baseline surveys, joint area development plans and designs of infrastructure projects. The current cost estimates for the various airfield and seaport investments are \$1.89 billion for Palau, \$2.98 billion for the Federated States of Micronesia, and \$750 million for the Marshall Islands.

Mr. SCOTT. According to Dr. Hendrix, the United States “should also seek to better leverage the repair capacity of foreign yards, perhaps by providing advanced surface-to-air defensive missile systems to protect those sites.” Do you agree or disagree with Dr. Hendrix’s assessment?

Admiral AQUILINO. There is a global demand for integrated air and missile defense, or IAMD, a low-density class of assets with high demand. USINDOPACOM is working closely with allies and partners that have IAMD capabilities to supplement the defense of critical assets in theater. The command, along with stakeholders, has a methodology to identify critical assets, to inform air and missile defense priorities and determine how to distribute IAMD assets across the theater.

Mr. SCOTT. Tim Sheehy wrote an article in the March 2024 issue of Proceedings entitled, “The Navy Must Reconsider Using Seaplanes.” According to Sheehy, “seaplanes rescued thousands of downed airmen and sailors, resupplied remote operating bases, supported spy and insurgent networks, and acted as the eyes and ears for fleet commanders at sea across the Pacific and Atlantic theaters.” Since there are no seaplanes in the U.S. inventory today, how do you plan to replicate the tasks mentioned above that were performed by seaplanes in World War II?

Admiral AQUILINO. The USINDOPACOM approach to the recovery of distressed personnel at sea is via a multifaceted construct relying on multiple mechanisms, capabilities, and allied or partner capacities. It does not rely on any one particular technical or technological application for these mission sets. Having said that, USINDOPACOM would certainly welcome additional capabilities for long-range and persistent airborne logistic, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance platforms.

Mr. SCOTT. China operates the AG600 Sea Dragon. Russia flies the Be-200 while Japan operates a fleet of US-1As and ShinMaywa US-2s. What do Japan, China, and Russia know about the capabilities of seaplanes in the USINDOPACOM AOR that we don't know? Should seaplanes be added to future Unfunded PRiority Lists? Should the U.S. Air National Guard be considered as a potential home for U.S. seaplanes if the Navy doesn't want them?

Admiral AQUILINO. China, Russia, and Japan currently all operate seaplanes in support of civil activities, such as firefighting, maritime search and rescue, or to transport supplies or personnel to remote locations. Certainly, in a crisis those seaplanes could be used to support military operations, and there is no lack of knowledge about the employment of seaplanes within USINDOPACOM where we have included the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force US-2 seaplane in large U.S. and Japanese fleet training exercises. There is currently no USINDOPACOM requirement for seaplanes specifically, but we do support the continuous development of new and innovative solutions to logistical challenges being pursued by the services.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. BERGMAN

Mr. BERGMAN. Admiral Aquilino, how can INDOPACOM make most efficient use of pre-existing commercial cellular infrastructure to provide improved availability, security, and resilience for communications across the AOR?

Admiral AQUILINO. USINDOPACOM utilizes commercial cellular as a transport option for its approved mobility solution. Leveraging additional cellular capabilities beyond these approved access solutions is often limited due to foreign cellular infrastructure vulnerabilities.

Mr. BERGMAN. What kind of investments is INDOPACOM making to develop that concept, especially in advance of potential operations in 2027 or in light of feelings of isolation that servicemembers have reported while deployed?

Admiral AQUILINO. USINDOPACOM will continue to leverage and build upon approved mobility solutions and emerging capabilities in support of future operations. Communicating with friends and family is essential to the positive morale and well-being of those who are deployed.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. WALTZ

Mr. WALTZ. The U.S. naval fleet is getting widely outpaced by China. With over 370 Chinese naval vessels vs 280 U.S. naval vessels. How are patrols and operational tempo affected in the INDOPACOM AOR with current vessel numbers and the potential pull to CENTCOM to address the Houthi problem?

Admiral AQUILINO. This situation underscores a critically important difference between the U.S. and PRC navies - we are a global force and they are not. On a typical day, both navies might have about 75 ships at sea for operations, exercises or training. For the U.S., those 75 ships will be present in every ocean and every region to advance and protect the maritime commons for the benefit of all. The portion available in the western Pacific will be a small percentage of the total ships underway. By contrast, nearly all of the PLA Navy's 75 ships will be in the western Pacific, as the PLAN only maintains one out-of-area commitment, a three-ship counter-piracy force in the Gulf of Aden. This gives the PLAN a consistent numerical advantage of between 5 and 7 to 1.

Taking INDOPACOM assigned or operating forces and committing them elsewhere will exacerbate this numerical overmatch. The PRC has shown no inclination to deploy any assets to assist the international response, including no actions by the counter-piracy task force already in the region.

Mr. WALTZ. Admiral Paparo recently stated "Just in the last three years, step-level changes in the [Chinese military] force levels, the jointness of those force levels, the rehearsals that are apparent to the joint force and raising the threshold of warning to the point where soon we'll be at a point where a force sufficient to execute a profound military operation is in the field and operating under a fig leaf of exercise." If this is the case, how are your forces postured to respond to an exercise that could in turn be a PLA offensive?

Admiral AQUILINO. I completely agree with ADM Paparo's comments about diminished warning. The PLA's steady-state posture and operations could give them the ability to posture for hostilities under the guise of an exercise, similar to what we saw Russia try to do prior to invading Ukraine. PLA rehearsals almost certainly are intended - in part - to desensitize Taiwan and the region to this increased PLA presence. This is especially concerning when considering "smaller" military courses of action, such as China seizing one or more of Taiwan's offshore islands. This concern

is driving a broad effort to reimagine how we do warning, incorporating more and different indicators. We continuously monitor PLA activity and adjust our force posture, training, and our requirements to maintain a credible deterrence and options should deterrence fail.

Mr. WALTZ. Publicly, China disclosed their defense budget as only \$230 billion. European think tanks have estimated that real Chinese defense spending is at least 30-40 percent higher than the official budget. Numerous analyses have concluded the Chinese government excludes significant sums from the official figures to hide the extent of its military buildup.

With this obvious Chinese military buildup, is INDOPACOM matching the requirement to deter and compete with China with advanced technology to achieve joint all domain command and control (JADC2)? What do you need from Congress? How are our allies and partners in the region responding to meet this growing concern?

Last month, Australia announced a plan to increase its fleet of warships and boost its defense spending to 2.4% of its GDP, above the 2% target for our NATO allies. Given our level of engagement through AUKUS, can you describe any increase in interest or engagement from other nations to engage us for greater naval security cooperation?

Admiral AQUILINO. The Joint Fires Network (JFN) is INDOPACOM's initiative to provide an operational Joint All Domain Command and Control (JADC2) capability in the Indo-Pacific by 2027. We are aggressively pursuing JFN in partnership with the services, OSD, Joint Staff, and allies. We are making progress, but we need to move faster. I ask for Congress's continued support in resourcing our investments identified in USINDOPACOM's Independent Assessment report through the FY2025 appropriation and the FY2024 supplemental. I appreciate the additional \$50 million Congress appropriated in FY24 for JFN. This funding will allow us to begin fielding the network. I would also highlight that JFN is the number two priority on my unfunded priorities list for FY25, and I have requested an additional \$122.7 million that is necessary to ensure the network is ready by 2027.

Allies and partners in the region are all taking steps to buttress their security in light of the PRC military buildup. Japan, Australia, the Republic of Korea, and the Philippines have been closely monitoring the actions of the PRC and have taken several steps to respond to challenges posed by China's assertive behavior. These include a combination of diplomatic, economic, and military measures to respond to China's actions while also seeking to maintain stability and promote cooperation in the region.

Yes, several nations in the Pacific have expressed interest in and engaged with the United States for greater naval security cooperation, largely as a result of aggressive actions by the PRC to assert unlawful maritime territorial claims. Japan, Philippines, India, Vietnam, and Taiwan have sought increased maritime security ties with the United States and our allies. The United States has longstanding alliances and partnerships in the region, and its naval presence plays a crucial role in maintaining security and stability.

Mr. WALTZ. INDOPACOM recently submitted a required independent assessment that contained multiple infrastructure related needs. What MILCON projects were not included in the FY25 budget request or on the Future Years Defense Program list and why?

Admiral AQUILINO. A number of MILCON projects were not included in the FY2025 budget request including Army major construction for three Guam Defense System projects on Guam; Air Force and Navy major construction for airfield and runway improvements at Yap; Navy major construction for harbor improvements at Palau; Navy major construction for joint communications upgrades, a consolidated joint communication center, and a satellite communications center on Guam; and Navy major construction for an aircraft refueling pit and high explosive magazines in Hawaii.

The majority of these were not funded because they had not satisfied the OSD requirement that projects should be at the thirty-five percent design level at the time of the program budget review. The planning and design funds that Congress has provided in recent years have enabled us to move most of these beyond the thirty-five percent design level since the time of the program budget review.

Mr. WALTZ. Following the defueling of Hawaii's Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility, the criticality of Guam as an Indo-Pacific logistics hub is highly elevated. However, Guam is reliant upon only two major piers for fuel imports - one of which was permanently damaged by Typhoon Mawar in 2023. As a result, suppliers are forced to limit bulk fuel delivery to the island, thus further compounding Guam's limited bulk fuel storage capabilities. Failure to invest in upgrades and innovation of fuel distribution systems creates supply chain risk, maintains higher than necessary

operational costs, and restricts both agility and readiness at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels.

What action is the Department taking to modernize distribution of fuel and energy assets to Guam and/or promote industry partnerships to help Guam? Further, how does the Department plan to test the performance of its operational energy assets in a contested environment within the Indo-Pacific?

Admiral AQUILINO. USINDOPACOM continues to advocate for an interconnected fuel posture with various sites throughout the region that provides the redundancy, resiliency, and flexibility required for the contested environment. Increasing fuel capacity in Australia, Guam and other Pacific islands provides survivability to the fuel network. Continued investment in fuel infrastructure postured west of the International Date Line and east of potential weapon engagement zones affords the Department the ability to maneuver from safe distances.

USINDOPACOM participates in Defense Logistics Agency Energy's annual Installation Planning Review Board, where we submit and advocate for the prioritization of USINDOPACOM service component military construction projects across the theater, including Guam. Additionally, we, along with our fuel mission partners including USTRANSCOM and Defense Logistics Agency Energy, coordinate closely to grow and develop relationships with commercial industry and continue to pursue commercial contracting opportunities with the U.S. petroleum industry to strengthen integrated deterrence options on Guam and across the theater.

USINDOPACOM and its service components have tested and will continue to test operational energy assets during field exercises such as Talisman Saber in Australia, Balikatan in the Philippines, and Valiant Shield throughout the Indo-Pacific.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. GIMENEZ

Mr. GIMENEZ. You have said that integrated air missile defense for Guam is your number one priority. Why is it your top priority? Despite it being your top priority, in your independent assessment, there remains a substantial shortfall in funding. Given the past five years that this requirement has been requested, it does not appear we are making much progress. What is the problem, how have you tried to address it, and what can we do to advance integrated air missile defense for Guam?

Admiral AQUILINO. Defense of the homeland is USINDOPACOM's number one priority. As the most forward U.S. territory and a strategic outpost in the Western Pacific, Guam is critical to projecting power, maintaining deterrence and stability, and responding to crisis or conflict in the region. The United States has programmed billions of dollars in defense capability on Guam to advance those capabilities including offensive capabilities, command and control, and sustainment. Establishing the Guam Defense System, a 360-degree, persistent, layered, and integrated air and missile defense on Guam, remains the top homeland defense priority for USINDOPACOM and underscores the seriousness of this responsibility and approach taken to protect more than 170,000 U.S. citizens on the island.

USINDOPACOM has consistently advocated with OSD for full funding of the Guam Defense System. As you know, the command provides input to the budget process, but all decisions are made by the services and OSD. There are several challenges to fielding an integrated air and missile defense architecture on Guam including funding levels, environmental impacts and mitigation, MILCON capacity and prioritization, and local opposition groups. We must ensure that the funding for the Guam Defense System is fulfilled, and that work is prioritized. To enable this, all stakeholders must conduct comprehensive and holistic analysis on the requirements and the associated costs to accurately inform funding and development.

Mr. GIMENEZ. You said Under Secretary Shyu has been incredibly supportive of your efforts in INDOPACOM. I had the chance to speak with her on her efforts on rapid acceleration of autonomous systems to deter China. What has she provided you that has been most effective and most realistic to be fielded at scale by 2027?

Admiral AQUILINO. Under Secretary Shyu's organization has been actively engaged with the Defense Innovation Unit led Replicator effort. Replicator-1 is focusing on all domain attributable autonomous systems to be available in the March 2025 to August 2025 timeframe. Four autonomous systems were selected for Replicator-1 Tranche-1 for rapid development. We have worked with other stakeholders to develop concepts of operations for these four systems. The Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Research and Engineering and many other organizations are now coordinating experimentation plans for development of tactics, techniques, and procedures for these systems in parallel with efforts in policy, acquisition, strategic engagement, and other lines of effort directed by the Defense Innovation Unit.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. LALOTA

Mr. LALOTA. As our concerns rise with countering peer / near peer aggression in INDOPACOM and the other COCOMs, we're modernizing our services with network-enabled capabilities such as real-time common operating picture with mission command, robotics, AI, the use of sensors, and the effects of integrated fires. How do you feel C-JADC2 is progressing, and are your networks and modernization pathways suitable for supporting such capabilities while integrating your operations with partner forces?

Admiral AQUILINO. We are making progress toward partner integration in line with the C-JADC2 Campaign Plan 2030 FVEY Addendum. The INDOPACOM Mission Network (IMN) proved successful during KEEN EDGE 24 by integrating two partners enabling trilateral operations.

Mr. LALOTA. Can you discuss the importance of merging unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs) and artificial intelligence (AI) systems with our existing manned submarine fleet in the Indo-Pacific, and how that could enhance our operations and capabilities?

Admiral AQUILINO. UUVs will deliver effects, increase forward operational persistence, and enable clandestine surveillance and combat reach. UUVs will operate independently from or in cooperation with crewed vehicles as mission needs dictate; will operate in areas that are inaccessible to manned submarines and ships; and will address capability gaps of crewed systems. The integration of AI and machine learning technologies with unmanned and remotely operated undersea vehicles is critical to enabling UUVs to operate independently and autonomously.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MR. MILLS

Mr. MILLS. The PRC's use of corruption is heavily destabilizing the politics and economics of the Pacific Islands, weakening their democratic institutions and opening the door for Chinese influence operations designed to pull them into Beijing's orbit. This political warfare is leading directly to military advantage for Beijing, as we saw with the Solomon Islands. How can the Department of Defense assist the U.S. Freely Associated States fight PRC-linked criminal activity? If the countries request support, can Joint Interagency Task Force-West (JIATF-West), JAGs, and others from the Department of Defense work with their governments to give them the necessary tools to defend themselves from these attacks?

Admiral AQUILINO. The response to pervasive malign Chinese behavior must incorporate all available instruments of U.S. national power. DOD can and will play a role, through information sharing and exposing what the PRC is doing, but the most effective counters are almost certain to come in the form of economic engagement, assistance with tracking and countering illegal PRC activities, exposing mis- and disinformation, and robust and consistent operations in the information domain.

Mr. MILLS. There is a lot of talk in the Federated States and Marshall Islands about U.S. initiatives to support National Security Council development in their countries, as required under the CONVENT Act. However, there are conflicting reports about what parts of the U.S. government are proposing this and what it would look like. Can you clarify what is being proposed? What government departments and agencies are involved? What support is going to the existing National Security Coordination office in Palau?

Admiral AQUILINO. The Department of Defense and our interagency partners have persistently called for the establishment of national security councils in the Federated States and Marshall Islands. The Marshall Islands recently established their National Security Office and has been working with the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies, the State Department's Global Defense Reform Program, and with Lawyers without Borders to begin drafting a national security policy.

USINDOPACOM has been engaged in providing training and security cooperation assistance, where requested, to Palau's established National Security Coordination office, and maintains a liaison position in at the embassy to support these activities.

Mr. MILLS. Much of the focus in INDOPACOM and around the PRC has focused on the threat posed by an invasion of Taiwan by China. However, we have also seen China apply pressure throughout the region. On March 5th, Chinese Coast Guard ships aggressively approached and sideswiped a Philippine patrol vessel. China's actions injured a Filipino admiral and four sailors. This is just one example of the increased pressure China is applying across the region, not just around Taiwan. Is it possible that China decides to take military or asymmetric actions elsewhere in the INDOPACOM region in order to set the conditions for a future invasion of Taiwan? Are we focusing too many resources on a Taiwan fight and not enough on the

broader competition throughout the region and conflict in other locations? Where do you believe we are most likely to see conflicts arise outside of the Taiwan AOR?

Admiral AQUILINO. By necessity, we dedicate a significant amount of attention and effort to the most dangerous potential action, a possible PRC invasion of Taiwan, but we also balance our presence and activities against all those other situations. Our campaign approach accounts for gray zone activity, supports our allies and partners in their efforts to resist PRC pressure, and postures forces for a wide range of activities. We are prepared and postured to counter PRC actions not only against Taiwan, but throughout the entire region. Additionally, we maintain awareness and capabilities to counter the other significant threats in our region, the DPRK and Russia.

Mr. MILLS. China is investing heavily in modernizing its military, including new armored vehicles which they clearly see value in. Do our ground forces in the region have the capabilities and resources to effectively counter concentrated armored forces? The Marines lack any armor capabilities in their current force structure. Armored forces have proven vital in past Pacific conflicts and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Do you see a world in which the Army is expected to cover down any gaps in the Marine's armor capabilities?

Admiral AQUILINO. The joint force is postured to fight as a team, leveraging the strengths of each service against the appropriate threat. The distribution of armor among ground forces to support mission objectives is no exception - it is essential. The Marine Corps' Force Design 2030 is an example of the bold changes we'd like to see across the Department to re-orient against the PRC threat.

Mr. MILLS. Recently, Gen. Paul Nakasone testified before the China Select Committee that Chinese cyber actors have persistently used malware to hold our critical U.S. infrastructure at risk - including those that provide water, electricity, and fuel to Americans. These efforts are meant to give the Chinese government options during a potential conflict. What are we doing to ensure all domains are woven into a comprehensive strategy to counter China?

Admiral AQUILINO. We work very closely with the USCYBERCOM team to integrate campaigning activities to bolster our own resilience and strengthen that of our allies and partners. Similarly, we integrate space into all our operations to ensure we have a comprehensive all-domain approach to executing integrated deterrence.

Mr. MILLS. There has been some question surrounding the continued presence of US forces in Okinawa at their current manning presence. If those troops were redeployed to other parts of the AOR - for example: Guam (along China's Second Island Chain line) - how would that impact our ability to defend our national interests?

Admiral AQUILINO. The redeployment of US Forces from Okinawa beyond agreed upon levels will increase the need for more forward ready forces to deter and assure, while being persistently postured for contingency and crisis. Presence in the first island chain is critical to deterrence and any decrement to capability or force structure there will be very harmful to that deterrent effect.

Mr. MILLS. China is working diligently to shift the military balance in their favor (amassing ships, missiles, etc.), making Beijing perilously optimistic. If a conflict with China were to begin in the next year and the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East were still ongoing, how do we balance our current level of military aid to partner nations while also ensuring US forces are fully equipped?

Admiral AQUILINO. USINDOPACOM works with the Department to ensure we are assigned the forces required to deter, fight, and win, and we deploy many of these forces forward for maximum effectiveness. In advance of a conflict with the PRC, USINDOPACOM will request additional forces and equipment needed from OSD and the Joint Staff. Regarding our allies and partners, we believe assistance provided now will allow them to become force multipliers in a crisis - they provide us an asymmetric advantage not enjoyed by the PRC.

QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY DR. MCCORMICK

Dr. MCCORMICK. Admiral Aquilino, several combatant commanders have suggested that the increasingly prevalent UAS threat is a wicked problem. Additionally, a January 8th Military.Com article titled, "Marine Units Rotating to Indo-Pacific Don't Have Their Own Counter-Drone Capabilities, Commanders Say," stated commanders in the field concede "units do not have capabilities 'to counter UAS at this time'". They acknowledged that they have limited tools and resources and in fact stated do not any have organic US made counter-drone capabilities and must rely on partnered forces to combat the unmanned aircraft. 1. Do drones and drone swarms pose an increasing threat to US forces deployed throughout INDOPACOM? 2. Most counter drone and drone Swarm systems employed today are kinetic - they

require a munition, often an expensive missile. Given the long resupply lines in the theater, and the inefficiency of these systems to take out swarms, how are you working with the services to rapidly field new, cost-effective, counter-swarm technology into theater? Have you evaluated the effectiveness of low-logistical needs systems like High Powered Microwave, which rely less on resupply of munitions? 3. What additional resources do you require to counter the increasing UAS threat utilizing US made capabilities.

Admiral AQUILINO. The recent attacks in the Red Sea, Syria, and Ukraine demonstrate the increased UAS threat against maritime and land-based forces. All of our regional threats are investing in a wide range of UAS systems and we must be prepared to counter this threat.

The Joint Staff and the Services have been conducting studies and experimentations to address this concern. USINDOPACOM supports these efforts by ensuring our priorities and specific geographical concerns are being addressed. One of these concerns is the long resupply lines as you mentioned. Our science and technology team is conducting several experimental tests and are currently assessing one low-logistical system, the palletized high-powered laser, within the theater.

Industry must continue to be innovative in developing counter UAS solutions to get ahead of this problem set. Working with industry to drive down costs is essential to our success as our adversaries maneuver to gain an asymmetric advantage. Increased options and an increase in production rates of the current C-sUAS systems can help us meet the growing need to equip our formations.

Dr. McCORMICK. How would the use of unmanned surface vessels assist our military's ability to project force while having a dispersed force structure?

Admiral AQUILINO. Modern surface combatants are capital warships that can project tremendous warfighting force. Smaller unmanned surface vessels can accomplish less complex or lower-end missions, which allows for more flexible force projection options that preserve capital fighting power for those engagements that only a large surface combatant can fulfill.

Dr. McCORMICK. Admiral Aquilino, I am glad to see that you are working with the Defense Innovation Unit (DIU) to set up a new directorate called "Joint Mission Accelerator" to deliver the technology you require on time and at scale. 1. How are you ensuring that requirements from the Combatant Commands are being fulfilled while the Program Managers may have different priorities? 2. Would flexible spending authorities, like those at Special Operations Command, be beneficial to you?

Admiral AQUILINO. USINDOPACOM does not have acquisition authority and is reliant on the services to field and sustain capabilities to their forces. We actively participate in the rapid acquisition process through the Joint Staff, services, and OSD. This participation includes employing a joint innovation and experimentation program to integrate and validate DoD emerging capabilities for joint warfighting. However, if properly resourced in terms of manpower and budget, and if granted the commensurate authorities, USINDOPACOM could more rapidly develop, deploy, and employ critical joint capabilities not directly pursued by the services.