

Member Day Testimony on FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)
House Committee on Armed Services
Congressman Ed Case (HI-01)
April 3, 2019

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Thornberry, distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on this year's NDAA.

The National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy affirmed the reemergence of long-term strategic competition with other great powers as the central challenge to our national security. No country poses as significant a long-term threat to us as China does. Thus, the NDAA, as our annual blueprint for the Department of Defense and our military, should reflect the strategic interests the U.S. has in the Indo-Pacific region.

Our goal, as summarized by this Administration's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" strategy, is to peacefully manage China's rise and bring it into the existing regional architecture of free and open navigation, interconnected trade and development, security cooperation and international institutions. The purpose of a strong military posture in the Indo-Pacific is not to seek conflict or escalate competition with China, but to raise the costs of Chinese aggression and reassure allies and partners of American engagement in this critical region.

Enhancing U.S. Military Posture

United States Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) is charged with addressing our military challenges in the Indo-Pacific. It is the largest combatant command in terms of area of responsibility and assets, but it requires additional resources. Reports of forces in the region being overworked from high demand and struggling with readiness from deferred maintenance are unacceptable.

This year's NDAA should continue a long-term strategy for INDOPACOM to reach its goals in deployed forces and readiness, especially in air and naval assets. We need to continue supporting improvements in doctrine, assets and technology to counter China's aggressive military buildup. I urge the Committee to continue investing in research and development of critical technologies to address these risks.

Hawai'i is of particular importance to our Indo-Pacific strategy. Hawai'i offers a forward position in the Pacific, is home to INDOPACOM headquarters and commands for every service and maintains a large military presence. We need increased investment in our military construction needs there, including the Hawai'i Infrastructure Readiness Initiative, our shipyard and training ranges to improve our readiness in the Indo-Pacific.

Strengthening Alliances and Partnerships

Even with increased investment in improving our military posture in the Indo-Pacific, the U.S. cannot go it alone in the region. Peacefully integrating China into the existing rules-based regional order requires the active cooperation of partner countries. The vast geographic space that needs to be covered in the Indo-Pacific demands reliance on our allies and partners there.

Strengthening these alliances and partnerships in the interconnected space of the Indo-Pacific will require a whole-of-government approach that combines multiple dimensions of power and security, including military, political, diplomatic, economic, social, technological and more. We need to reassure our traditional treaty allies of Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines and Thailand, while building relationships with partners like India, Taiwan, New Zealand, Vietnam, Singapore, Indonesia and more. I especially support language that reaffirms our commitment to Taiwan's self-defense and that prevents the withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Korea, as featured in last year's NDAA.

I also want to ask that special attention be paid to the Pacific island countries, such as Vanuatu, the Federated States of Micronesia and Palau to name only a few. They are strategically important to our position in the Indo-Pacific, as demonstrated by the increasing interest and investment from China. We must include these Pacific island countries in our strategic thinking in the Indo-Pacific and invest more heavily in their security and development.

However, we must also be sure not to force countries to choose between the U.S. and China but focus our efforts instead at reinforcing the advantages of our vision for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, namely a respect for sovereignty, open trade and development, security and stability, a respect for human rights and a rules-based system. The attractiveness of our values has always been critical to the success of our foreign policy, and the Indo-Pacific will be no exception.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I urge this Committee to ensure this year's NDAA reflects the strategic importance of Hawai'i and the Indo-Pacific. We must enhance our military posture there and continue building alliances and partnerships in the region. Thank you for your consideration and your hard work in advancing our country's national security.