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BEFORE THE 117TH CONGRESS
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MARCH 9, 2022

Opening

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Rogers, distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to testify on the Department's efforts in the Indo-Pacific region. I am pleased to be here with the Commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, Admiral John Aquilino, and Commander of the United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command, and U.S. Forces Korea, General Paul LaCamera.

Challenges in the Indo-Pacific Region

The Indo-Pacific is the Department's priority theater. We are committed to maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific region, where all nations, large and small, are secure in their sovereignty, and can pursue economic opportunity, resolve disputes without coercion, and exercise the freedoms of navigation and overflight consistent with an open and stable international order.

The United States continues to uphold these principles of territorial integrity, sovereignty, and respect for the international rules-based order around the world. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a direct violation of these principles and we both recognize and appreciate that many of our Indo-Pacific Allies and partners, including Japan, Australia, and Taiwan, have condemned the invasion and offered assistance. This is in stark contrast to China's support for Russian aggression.

Today the Indo-Pacific region faces mounting challenges, particularly from the People's Republic of China (PRC), which has adopted a more assertive approach to advancing its interests in the region and beyond. Strategic competition with the PRC will be a defining feature of the 21st century and our collective efforts over the next decade will determine whether Beijing succeeds in undermining the rules and norms that have benefitted the Indo-Pacific region and the world for decades.

Over the last several years, the PRC has continued to escalate tensions with a number of its neighbors across the region. We've seen the PRC employ its military, maritime militias, and state-owned enterprises to intimidate regional states and assert unlawful maritime claims in the South China Sea. Further west, we're closely watching developments along the Line of Actual Control at the India-China border. All the while, the PRC continues to dial up pressure on Taiwan with People's Liberation Army (PLA) activities in and around Taiwan's air and maritime spaces, alongside other political and socioeconomic coercive tactics targeting the people on Taiwan.

The PRC is also projecting power further out from its periphery, positioning the PLA to command an increasingly global presence. The PLA is rapidly improving many of its capabilities, including strike, air, missile-defense, and anti-submarine warfare, as it focuses on integrating information, cyber, and space operations. The PLA has also been rapidly advancing its nuclear capabilities as documented in the Department's annual report to Congress on the Military and Security Developments Involving the PRC.

We are also concerned by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)'s recent ballistic missile launches, which are destabilizing and a clear violation of multiple United Nations Security Council resolutions. The DPRK's weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs constitute a serious threat to the United States and our allies and partners.

The security and stability of the Korean Peninsula is inextricably tied to regional security and stability. Our web of allies and partners in the region gives us a significant advantage, none more important than our Republic of Korea (ROK) and Japanese allies. To this end, we will continue to prioritize close trilateral and bilateral cooperation and information sharing as we address our shared threats. We will continue aiming to strengthen deterrence and readiness, while remaining committed to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Defending Peace and Security in the Indo-Pacific Region

Secretary Austin has described the PRC as the pacing challenge for the Department of Defense. Meeting this challenge requires a comprehensive response: the Department is committed to working more seamlessly *across* domains, theaters, the spectrum of conflict; *across* all instruments of national power; and most importantly, *across* our network of allies and partners to coordinate our policies, investments, and activities to maximum effect. This is what the Department of Defense has termed “integrated deterrence.”

Our approach aims to build a broader security architecture in the Indo-Pacific region that can sustain a free and open order and deter aggression. The Department is building enduring advantages through developing new operational concepts and making the investments in the future warfighting capabilities necessary to deter, and if necessary, prevail against PRC aggression. We are focused on strengthening our military position over the long-term through deepening cooperation with our allies and partners in terms of planning, operations, and greater collaboration on capability development.

Building a Combat-Credible Posture

The Department is prioritizing capabilities for the future Joint Force to ensure that it is lethal and able to strike adversary forces and systems at range; resilient and able to gain information advantage and maintain command and control through adversary disruptions; survivable and agile in the face of adversary attacks that seek to reduce combat power and mobilization speed; and can provide the logistics and sustainment needed for operations in a highly-contested environment.

The rapidly changing military competition with the PRC is also driving our efforts toward a more distributed and resilient U.S. posture in the region. The Department concluded the Global Posture Review (GPR) that President Biden directed shortly after taking office to better align our

force posture with our strategic priorities. The GPR reinforced the importance of diversifying our presence and capabilities across the region – from enhancing our infrastructure in Guam, Australia, and the Pacific Islands, to pursuing new areas of access, new ways of operating, and broadening the scope of cooperation with old and new partners, adding risk and new dilemmas for potential adversaries.

Looking forward, we will continue to build upon our ability to operate forward and more flexibly with allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region and we will adapt our approach as the strategic environment evolves, including through pursuing low-cost, short-duration rotational activities to enable future posture opportunities and create immediate operational advantages. Bottom line: we are optimizing our posture for denial, resilience, and collective cost imposition—key tenets of integrated deterrence.

Strengthening Alliances and Deepening Partnerships

As we realign our strategic priorities, we are also doubling down on one of our greatest strengths: our network of alliances and partnerships. The United States’ ability to pursue common security and economic goals with like-minded nations is a cornerstone of our success.

For the U.S. military, our defense relationships and our ability to bind them more tightly together into coalitions that operate together – including through information-sharing, exercises, and common platforms – can make clear to any potential adversaries the unacceptable costs of aggression.

We are deepening our interoperability and developing and deploying advanced warfighting capabilities with our allies as we support them in defending their sovereign interests. We also continue to reinvigorate and modernize partnerships that were built years ago.

Recognizing the United States-Japan Alliance’s critical role as the cornerstone of regional peace and stability, we are working in close partnership with Japan to modernize our alliance and strengthen integrated deterrence. As reaffirmed at the “2+2” Ministerial meeting earlier this year, we are deepening our defense cooperation with the Japan Self-Defense Forces; optimizing our alliance force posture, including by continuing to implement the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan; and integrating the alliance into a broader regional security network of like-minded nations.

We also continue to strengthen the U.S.-ROK alliance—the linchpin of peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in the Indo-Pacific region. Last December, we held the 53rd Republic of Korea – United States Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) where Secretary Austin and Minister Suh directed the Combined Forces Command to assess its force posture, capabilities, and plans to ensure the alliance remains postured to deter and defeat aggression now and into the future in light of advancing DPRK capability. We are continuing to focus on enhancing alliance readiness and are working together to address other shared security challenges in the region, including by seeking synergies between the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy and the ROK New Southern policy. Finally, our two sides reaffirmed a shared commitment to a conditions-based transition of wartime Operational Control (OPCON), which will enhance alliance capability to meet a range of regional challenges in a dynamic security environment.

Last September, we held the 31st Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN), where we announced several new initiatives to significantly advance U.S. – Australia force posture cooperation: to enhance air cooperation through the rotational deployment of U.S. aircraft of all types in Australia and appropriate aircraft training and exercises; to enhance maritime cooperation by increasing logistics and sustainment capabilities of U.S. surface and subsurface vessels in Australia; to enhance land cooperation by conducting more complex and more integrated exercises and greater combined engagement with allies and partners in the region; and to establish a combined logistics, sustainment, and maintenance enterprise to support combined military operations in the region.

We also announced last year the historic Australia – United Kingdom – United States (AUKUS) trilateral security partnership. Under this partnership, our three nations are working to identify the optimal pathway for Australia to establish a conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarine force, and deepen trilateral cooperation to develop other advanced capabilities that will be key to sustaining deterrence and stability in the region.

We continue to strengthen our treaty alliance with the Philippines, including through the reaffirmation of our bilateral Visiting Forces Agreement. Together with our Philippine allies, we developed a new alliance joint vision statement that lays out important advancements in our bilateral cooperation, including developing bilateral defense guidelines, a first for the alliance; concluding a bilateral maritime framework to coordinate and integrate maritime activities; and resuming infrastructure improvement projects at Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement agreed locations in the Philippines.

We are building security cooperation programs with our Thai allies and continue to focus on modernization and force professionalization efforts. We are also looking to emerging technical cooperation and other initiatives across the Thai military services.

We are also working with like-minded partners inside and outside the region to maintain peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, including by supporting Taiwan's self-defense capabilities, to ensure an environment in which Taiwan's future is determined peacefully consistent with the wishes of the people on Taiwan. With China as the pacing challenge, Taiwan is the pacing scenario, driven by a strategy of denial. Over the last year, we have made significant progress with Taiwan in aligning priorities for defense cooperation and our provision of defensive arms and services with our shared understanding of the threat. We continue to support Taiwan's ongoing defense reforms, including to reserves and mobilization, as critical to building a credible self-defense. Our approach remains consistent with our One China policy, the Taiwan Relations Act, the Three Joint Communiqués, and the Six Assurances.

We are also seeing accelerated progress in our Major Defense Partnership with India as we continue to work alongside our Indian counterparts to better integrate and operationalize our day-to-day defense cooperation and logistics, enhance information sharing, and grow our bilateral cooperation in emerging domains such as space and cyberspace. We are expanding the geographic scope of military cooperation with India to include greater coordination and cooperation in the Western Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia, where we share common goals and security interests. This progress is particularly evident in our expanding naval cooperation – bilaterally and with regional partners – to promote freedom of navigation and enhance maritime domain awareness across the region.

The Department is also taking steps to deepen our relationships with like-minded partners throughout the Indo-Pacific region. In Southeast Asia, we have been working to strengthen capabilities and improve our interoperability with our Thai and Philippine allies and partners such as Singapore, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Timor-Leste.

Finally, we are building overlapping and complementary coalitions to address the defining challenges of our time. We are working with interagency partners to elevate the Quad as a premier regional grouping that delivers on issues that matter to the Indo-Pacific region – from global health, critical emerging technologies, climate change, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, infrastructure, and in cyber and space. At the same time, we remain committed to ASEAN centrality and are working to improve coordination on shared challenges such as maritime security, during our tenure as co-chair of the ASEAN Defense Ministerial Meeting Plus Maritime Security Experts Working Group.

We will also actively seek to foster security ties among our allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region and those outside of the region, including by bringing together our Indo-Pacific and European partners in new ways, such as through the AUKUS partnership. This is a net positive for the region. From the Department’s standpoint, we see AUKUS as complementing our existing network of Indo-Pacific partnerships as well as other allies and partners around the world to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific, and build a future of peace and opportunity for all the people of the region.

Conclusion

I will conclude by noting that a powerful bipartisan consensus has emerged around the China challenge and the need for the United States to refocus its time, energy, and resources on the Indo-Pacific region. The reservoir of support for this approach is broad and deep, and we should continue working together to preserve this bipartisanship that is central to our ability to compete effectively in the region.

Thank you for your time and attention today, and I look forward to your questions and working together to meet our pacing challenge, ensure America remains an Indo-Pacific power, and uphold our vital national interests in the region.