

STATEMENT BY  
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PERFORMING THE DUTIES OF  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
FOR INDO-PACIFIC SECURITY AFFAIRS  
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
BEFORE THE 119<sup>th</sup> CONGRESS HOUSE  
ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
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Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity today to discuss how the Department of Defense is reestablishing deterrence in the Indo-Pacific and meeting President Trump's directive to achieve Peace through Strength. I am pleased to testify alongside Admiral Paparo from U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and General Brunson from U.S. Forces Korea.

The United States faces one of the most dangerous security environments in our nation's history. China has deployed all aspects of its national power in an attempt to dominate the Indo-Pacific—a prelude to their broader objective of displacing the United States as the world's most powerful nation. If China were to gain hegemony over the Indo-Pacific, it would be well positioned to project military power around the world. China is undertaking an unprecedented military buildup through massive investments in the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The PLA is developing a large and advanced arsenal of nuclear, conventional, cyber, and space capabilities that directly threaten the United States. It is well known that Xi Jinping has ordered the PLA to be ready to invade Taiwan by 2027. The severity of the threat posed by China, driven by its ambitions, is growing rapidly.

President Trump has stated that China will not attack Taiwan on his watch. Thus, we must, with urgency and focus, prioritize efforts to strengthen deterrence against Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific.

The Department of Defense is focused on reviving the warrior ethos, rebuilding our military, and reestablishing deterrence. In the Indo-Pacific, we will deter China by prioritizing combat credible military forces postured to deter by denial.

To reestablish deterrence in the Indo-Pacific, the Department is focused on strengthening our force posture across the region, empowering our allies and partners and increasing burden sharing to address all threats, and advancing President Trump's vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific.

### **Strengthening Force Posture Across the Indo-Pacific**

Consistent with the President's direction to achieve Peace through Strength and the Secretary's direction to reestablish deterrence, our focus on strengthening our force posture in the Indo-Pacific is a priority.

In Japan, the Department is taking steps to enhance U.S. and Alliance force posture and readiness to meet dynamic regional threats, to meet the growing challenge of China. As the Secretary announced in his recent visit to Tokyo, we are implementing the first phase to modernize U.S. command-and-control in Japan through upgrades to U.S. Forces Japan (USFJ), forward deploying some of our newest and most capable platforms and formations, and improving our exercises to make them more realistic, including in Japan's Southwest Islands. Each of these initiatives increases Joint Force lethality, directly benefitting our treaty obligations with Japan and in support of deterrence requirements throughout the Indo-Pacific theater. On command and control, transforming USFJ into a warfighting headquarters will help improve the command's ability to operate with Japan's Joint Operations Command (JJOC).

We are continuing to deploy more forces and advanced capabilities to the Philippines. Just two

weeks ago, Secretary Hegseth and Philippine Secretary of National Defense Teodoro announced new key initiatives to improve U.S. posture, including the deployment of the Navy-Marine Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System (NMESIS), an anti-ship missile system used by the Marine Littoral Regiment. This builds upon the deployment of the Typhon missile system to the Philippines and supports our efforts to rebuild deterrence through strength. The United States and the Philippines will also continue to work closely to improve alliance cooperation through U.S. access to Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) locations in the Philippines.

The Department of Defense is increasing expeditionary submarine visits, rotations of U.S. air assets, including bombers, fighters, and advanced air capabilities, U.S. Army watercraft, and building in greater complexity to the U.S. Marine Rotational Force-Darwin's annual six-month rotation to Australia. The Department is committed to accelerating our work with Australia to upgrade critical air bases across northern Australia, while executing key upgrades to ports to support expeditionary submarine visits and execution of AUKUS Pillar I at His Majesty's Australian Ship (HMAS) Stirling. Because Australia serves as a key logistics hub, the Department is continuing to expand storage locations across Australia to position key equipment and munitions.

The Department has worked with the Republic of Korea (ROK) to modernize its force structure, including developing advanced missile technologies as well as capabilities to enable the transfer of wartime operational control for the defense of the ROK. We continue to strengthen our posture through combined, joint, all-domain exercises. The deployment of U.S. assets, the expanded scope and scale of our combined exercises, and enhanced senior-level dialogues help deter aggression on the Korean Peninsula.

Across the Oceania region, our defense posture in the Pacific Islands remains critical for U.S. military logistics, sustainment, and power projection. We are focused on projects planned for the Freely Associated States (FAS), particularly in Palau and the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). The Compacts of Free Association (COFAs) between the United States and the three FASs – Palau, FSM, 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 FAS. 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. We thank the Members of this Committee who played a pivotal role in advocating for the passage of the Compact of Free Association Amendments Act of 2024.

### **Empowering Our Allies and Partners and Increasing Burden Sharing**

America First does not mean America only or America alone. The Department will stand with its allies and partners to deter China's aggression. Reestablishing deterrence, however, will require more than U.S. effort. It will require our allies and partners to step up, increase defense spending, and share the burden of restoring and sustaining deterrence. Through security cooperation, defense industrial collaboration, and exercises, the Department will empower our allies and partners to strengthen and do more to defend themselves.

Taiwan has committed to increase its defense budget to exceed 3% of its GDP. But it must do significantly more, through spending, acquisition of asymmetric capabilities, and reforms. The Department has sustained activities to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability.

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). I would take this opportunity to thank Congress for the new Taiwan Security Cooperation Initiative, which we view as critical to enabling our support to Taiwan. 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 Philippines is increasing its spending on defense modernization to improve its territorial defense capabilities in response to China’s aggression in the South China Sea. We are working closely with the Philippines to align this spending to strategic bilateral objectives that address shared security challenges. The framework guiding this effort is the bilateral Philippines Security Sector Assistance Roadmap (P-SSAR), which DoD and the State Department developed in partnership with the Philippines Department of National Defense and Department of Foreign Affairs to prioritize capabilities for investment. We greatly appreciate Congressional support for Title 10 International Security Cooperation Program funds, as well as State’s Foreign Military Financing allocations for this region, which enable this progress. There is still much work to be done to modernize the Philippines’ defense capabilities, so we support continued resourcing for the Philippines.

We are also encouraging greater burden sharing with like-minded partners and allies to support the Philippines, particularly Australia and Japan, to contribute to these shared policy and security objectives. For example, in the maritime domain, the United States, Australia, and Japan are continuing to work together to expand cooperation and to collaborate on security-related infrastructure investments in the Philippines. These frameworks for defense and security cooperation bring together common interests and advanced capabilities.

With Australia, our two countries have commenced arrangements to co-produce 155 mm ammunition and to co-assemble Guided Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (GMLRS) this year as part of our cooperation on Australia’s Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordnance (GWEO) Enterprise. We are also pursuing a production, sustainment, and follow-on development arrangement on the Precision Strike Missile. These arrangements anchor our work to conclude a two-year, multi-service roadmap for cooperation under GWEO to guide our work. Additionally, we have committed to developing a roadmap for cooperation in the critical area of integrated air and missile defense through co-development, co-production, and co-sustainment activities – which can ensure that major Presidential initiatives such as Golden Dome for America have our closest allies and best-in-class technology to bring into this national priority.

The United States has also backed Australia’s acquisition of a conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarine capability through the AUKUS security partnership, provided the United States can fulfill our own submarine requirements. In addition, the U.S. Navy has executed significant submarine tender maintenance periods and rotational deployments of submarines to Australia over the last year.

The Department is promoting defense equipment and technology cooperation with Japan. This includes co-production, co-development, and co-sustainment efforts under the Forum on Defense Industrial Cooperation, Acquisition, and Sustainment (DICAS) that bolster allied supply chains and

strengthen U.S. and Japanese defense industrial capacity. DICAS has served as a forum to explore opportunities in ship repair, aircraft repair, missile co-production, and supply chain resilience.

The United States and ROK have deepened industrial base and science and technology (S&T) cooperation, including the establishment of a new structure within the Alliance to identify and prioritize S&T cooperation. The United States has also relied on ROK contributions for regional sustainment, including pilot projects for the use of ROK companies for maintenance, repair, and overhaul of U.S. aircraft and naval support ships in Korea.

With India, the Department has helped bolster India's defense modernization plans while elevating military cooperation across all domains, strengthening India's ability to contribute to regional deterrence both on land and in the Indian Ocean Region. The next ten-year Framework for the U.S. Major Defense Partnership, which we expect to conclude this year, will reflect the accelerating ambition of our defense cooperation. The Department continues to advance defense sales and co-production with India to strengthen interoperability and defense industrial cooperation. We are also expanding the scale and complexity of our military exercises with India, including through incorporation of autonomous technologies. These efforts will help our two countries' defense partnership grow even stronger.

Across the Indo-Pacific, we continue to prioritize enhancing ally and partner capacity to control their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) through the Maritime Security Initiative (MSI) and the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA), a flagship Quad Initiative with Australia, India, and Japan that promotes burden-sharing. In addition, we are moving forward with demonstrating the promise and opportunity of shared airlift and logistics, with a reach and capacity only possible through the Quad partners, in order to support civilian response to natural disasters more rapidly and efficiently.

We have also accelerated work to identify and deliver innovative commercial sensors and unmanned systems from U.S. industry, to rapidly strengthen partners' capacity to promote safety and security within their EEZs. Through training and exercises, we are assisting our partners with effectively integrating maritime domain awareness data into common operating pictures, improving partner capacity to understand and respond to threats.

Exercises and training with multiple countries are and will continue to be a priority. These are among the most visible and effective ways to demonstrate our shared commitment and enhance the capabilities of allies and partners. With our Southeast Asian partners, we have expanded our key exercises in scale, scope, complexity, and participation, including COBRA GOLD in Thailand, BALIKATAN in the Philippines, and SUPER GARUDA SHIELD in Indonesia, to work with a wider range of partners on more advanced capabilities, including in the cyber and space domains. This year's Exercise BALIKATAN with the Philippines, for example, will include more than 10,000 service members from the United States, with additional participation from Australia and Japan and will feature multi-domain littoral simulated fire exercises and advanced sensing capabilities. We have also initiated regular maritime cooperative activities with the Philippines and other international partners, including Australia, Japan, and New Zealand.

## **Conclusion**

The Department will execute the President's clear mission of achieving Peace through Strength. We will move with urgency to reestablish deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. We will do so by strengthening our posture, empowering our allies and partners, and increasing burden sharing. Much remains to be done to deter China's aggression. But I am confident that with the support of Congress, we will meet this challenge.

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