

RECORD VERSION

STATEMENT BY

**HONORABLE JOHN NOH ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF WAR FOR
INDO-PACIFIC SECURITY AFFAIRS**

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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 War is preserving a favorable balance of power in the Indo-Pacific and implementing President Trump's common-sense peace through strength agenda in this vital region. I am pleased to testify alongside Admiral Paparo from U.S. Indo-Pacific Command and General Brunson from U.S. Forces Korea.

The 2026 National Defense Strategy directs the Department of War to deter China through strength, not confrontation. It seeks to focus the U.S. military's effort on ensuring the preservation of a favorable balance of power in the Indo-Pacific, in which no country, including China, can become a regional hegemon. This is to defend our nation's scoped and reasonable vital interests in the Indo-Pacific: to ensure that neither China nor anyone else can dominate the region or our allies. We are clear-eyed about the People's Liberation Army's rapid and sustained buildup, which has strengthened its ability to project military power. Recognizing this, it is our essential responsibility at the Department of War to ensure that President Trump is always able to negotiate from a position of unquestionable military strength to sustain peace in the Indo-Pacific.

The Department is therefore moving with the utmost urgency and focus to erect a strong denial defense in the Indo-Pacific, with a focus on the First Island Chain, while simultaneously defending the U.S. Homeland. This requires strengthening U.S. force posture across the theater, including through resilient basing and logistics networks, and accelerating the fielding and production of the capabilities required to deny aggression and, if necessary, prevail. This also requires expanding the contributions of U.S. allies and partners through greater burden sharing. We will enable and incentivize our allies and partners to do more for our collective defense, including by bolstering their readiness, increasing operational cooperation, and revitalizing our defense industrial bases. These efforts are central to maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific and to achieving the President's objective of peace through strength.

Building, Posturing, and Sustaining a Strong Denial Defense Along the First Island Chain

Consistent with the Secretary's direction to reestablish deterrence in the Indo-Pacific, the Department is focused on strengthening its force posture across the theater to increase the Joint Force's lethality and optionality to deny aggression along the First Island Chain.

Strengthening our presence and posture in Japan is a top priority for the Department. As the Secretary announced during his visit to Tokyo in October 2025, we are making significant progress modernizing U.S. command-and-control in Japan. We have started Phase II of the upgrade of U.S. Forces Japan into a joint force headquarters, growing its ability to respond to regional contingencies and work closely with Japan's Joint Operations Command (JJOC). We also continue to forward deploy to Japan our most capable platforms and formations, such as the F-35s arriving at Misawa Air Base as part of the Department's tactical aircraft modernization plan for Japan. Additionally, we are improving our training and exercise programs with Japan, including at new and operationally relevant locations, such as in Japan's Southwest Islands.

The Department of War is rapidly expanding force posture in Australia. This includes increasing rotational deployments of U.S. bombers, fighters, and advanced air capabilities. We are also advancing important infrastructure projects at Australian airbases to support these rotations, with plans to expand infrastructure enhancements at additional locations. The Department is building on

longstanding initiatives, such as Marine Rotational Force-Darwin, by further developing infrastructure and logistics capacity, as well as prepositioning U.S. Marine Corps MV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft in Australia. As directed by President Trump, the Department is also moving “full steam ahead” to implement AUKUS – the trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. AUKUS enhances our combat-credible forward posture by increasing submarine interoperability, expanding access and sustainment infrastructure, and ensuring that U.S. and Australian forces can operate seamlessly together in crisis. In December 2025, Secretary Hegseth and Secretary Rubio, alongside their Australian counterparts, reaffirmed the plan under AUKUS to establish Submarine Rotational Force-West as early as 2027, which will mark an important expansion of our maintenance options and sustainment infrastructure to support a strong denial defense along the First Island Chain.

We continue to deploy more forces and advanced capabilities across the Philippines for longer, including High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), the Navy-Marine Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System (NMESIS) – an anti-ship missile system used by the Marine Littoral Regiment – and the Typhon missile system. We are also investing in resilient infrastructure and storage facilities at contingency-relevant locations to preposition key equipment and munitions, while improving alliance cooperation through streamlined U.S. access to Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) locations. With the allocation of an additional \$144M for Fiscal Year 2026, the Department of War has committed over \$300M in infrastructure investments at EDCA locations to date. Across Southeast Asia, we are engaging our partners to expand and streamline U.S. access, basing, and overflight permissions so that we are prepared to deny aggression and respond if necessary.

Our posture across the Pacific Islands also remains critical for U.S. military logistics, sustainment, and homeland defense. We continue to enhance infrastructure in 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 Palau, FSM, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands grant the United States assured military access, in addition to permissions to execute important posture projects, as part of the United States’ exclusive responsibility for the COFAs’ national defense. In FSM’s Yap State, we are making considerable progress on construction projects at the airport and seaport, which enhances the resiliency of our military infrastructure in the Second Island Chain. In Palau, we are continuing construction on the Tactical Multi-Mission Over-the-Horizon (TACMOR) capability to improve the Joint Force’s domain awareness across the Indo-Pacific. Also in Palau, our work to establish a defense site in Peleliu will provide additional logistics support to the Joint Force.

Increasing Burden Sharing with Allies and Partners

The 2026 National Defense Strategy recognizes that the U.S. military cannot and should not sustain a favorable balance of power in the Indo-Pacific alone. The Department has called upon wealthy and capable allies and partners to share the burden of restoring and sustaining deterrence by increasing defense spending, meeting the new global standard of spending 3.5% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on core defense, and taking greater responsibility for their conventional defense.

This is particularly critical for Taiwan. President Lai has publicly committed to reach 5% of GDP in core defense spending by 2030. This includes an unprecedented special defense budget that

addresses many of Taiwan's most critical defense gaps. The Department worked closely with Taiwan's Ministry of National Defense in the development of its historic defense special budget and is encouraging Taiwan's political parties to work together to fund these requirements. Still, Taiwan must do more, and faster, to build on this positive momentum and ensure it has the self-defense capability to meet the scale of the threat it faces.

Following his visit to the Republic of Korea (ROK) in October 2025, President Trump and President Lee announced the ROK's plan to increase its defense spending to 3.5% of GDP as soon as possible and the ROK's commitment to spend \$25 billion on U.S. military equipment purchases by 2030. Supported by high defense spending and its powerful military, the ROK has committed to take primary responsibility for deterring North Korea with critical but more limited support from U.S. forces and is developing capabilities to support this goal. By shifting the balance of responsibility with the ROK and enhancing U.S. conventional deterrence posture on the peninsula against all threats, we are modernizing the U.S.-ROK Alliance to better align with the Department's priorities. We are working closely with the ROK as it acquires the requisite capabilities for its conventional defense.

We are optimistic about Prime Minister Takaichi's commitment to increase Japan's defense capabilities, especially following her party's landslide victory in Japan's election in February 2026. As the Fact Sheet from her official visit to the White House last month states, Japan is committed to rapidly strengthen its own defense capabilities and increase its defense budget. Japan also affirmed the importance of credible deterrence and denial capabilities and of deploying advanced capabilities in Japan, building on the successful U.S. deployment of the Typhon missile system to mainland Japan last year. These commitments and monetary investments are important steps, but there is still more work to do.

As part of AUKUS, Australia has contributed \$2 billion to the U.S. submarine industrial base over the last year, which will support U.S. efforts to uplift submarine production. Although Australia is making significant investments in AUKUS-related submarines and infrastructure, it must continue to invest in key capabilities, including integrated air and missile defense, long-range strike, and logistics. We appreciate Australia's release of its updated National Defense Strategy and Integrated Investment Plan last week. It is vital that Australia work to increase its defense spending commensurate with its critical capability requirements.

Developing the Capability and Capacity of Allies and Partners to Contribute to Collective Defense

Through security cooperation, defense industrial collaboration, and enhanced military operations and exercises, the Department will empower U.S. allies and partners to leverage their latent military potential – creating a formidable network of highly capable armed forces that would convince any adversary that peace and restraint are the better course.

We are continuing to work closely with Japan to increase U.S.-Japan Alliance readiness, build military capabilities, and address defense industrial base issues to increase production for the United States and our allies. We are working diligently to expand realistic training and exercises in Japan, including in the Southwest Islands, which directly improve alliance readiness. Fires are a key focus area. Last year, we deployed the NMESIS system to Okinawa, conducted a live fire

exercise of HIMARS at Camp Fuji, and temporarily deployed the Typhon missile system to Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni. We are also working closely with Japan to address industrial base issues through the Defense Industrial Cooperation, Acquisition, and Sustainment (DICAS) initiative. This work includes efforts to dramatically expand production of air defense missiles, including the Standard Missile-3 Block IIA, and partnering on AIM-120 Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missile (AMRAAM) co-production.

In line with the changing security environment, we are strengthening readiness and interoperability with the ROK through combined, joint, all-domain exercises. This includes annual bilateral, combined exercises like FREEDOM SHIELD and ULCHI FREEDOM SHIELD that strengthen alliance readiness against a range of threats. We are also deepening defense industrial cooperation with the ROK by expanding co-sustainment efforts to repair critical U.S. military assets in theater, reducing cost, duration, and operational impacts to the Joint Force. In November 2025, Secretary Hegseth announced that the U.S. Navy will repair a warship in the ROK for the first time – a clear demonstration of the ROK’s advanced maintenance capability. We are also adding to the list of projects under the Regional Sustainment Framework, including partnering with Korean industry to repair U.S. Air Force fixed wing platforms and U.S. Army watercraft and helicopters. We are beginning to explore opportunities for co-production of critical platforms with the ROK to leverage Korean manufacturing capacity and fortify global supply chains.

The Department continues to increase operational cooperation with Australia, including through Exercise TALISMAN SABRE—the largest bilateral combined training activity between our two countries. This last iteration demonstrated enhanced interoperability and employment of exquisite weapons systems, including the first ever live-fire of the Typhon missile system in the Indo-Pacific and the use of the Precision Strike Missile. The Department is also continuing to increase defense industrial base collaboration with Australia through initiatives like the Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordnance (GWEO) Enterprise. In December 2025, Secretaries Hegseth and Rubio, together with their Australian counterparts, endorsed a two-year pathway for GWEO that will support Australian co-production of the Hypersonic Attack Cruise Missile, sustainment of critical munitions such as AMRAAMs, and cooperation on maritime strike and interceptor capabilities.

We continue to expand our exercises and training with key allies and partners across Southeast Asia. This year’s Exercise BALIKATAN, currently underway with the Philippines, is our largest and most complex ever, testing multi-domain warfighting concepts in strategic locations like the Batanes Islands and Northern Luzon. We recently concluded Exercise COBRA GOLD with Thailand, where we demonstrated new multidomain fires and incorporated unmanned systems for the first time. With Singapore, we have increasing opportunities to expand our interoperability following Singapore’s recent announcement of its intent to purchase P-8 aircraft in addition to its fleet of F-16s, F-15s, and F-35s. We are also supporting the modernization of the Armed Forces of the Philippines through the Philippines Security Sector Assistance Roadmap (P-SSAR), which prioritizes combat-credible capabilities like long-range fires, integrated air and missile defense, and cyber systems, to ensure that our joint investments contribute to our collective defense.

Finally, we are expanding our defense cooperation with India. In October, Secretary Hegseth and Defense Minister Singh signed the Framework for the U.S.-India Major Defense Partnership, which charts a course for increasing operational coordination, information sharing, and growing our defense industrial, science, and technology cooperation. Our defense industrial collaboration

has expanded significantly, with commitments to co-produce and co-develop advanced technologies, increase U.S. Navy ship repair in India under the Master Shipyard Repair Agreements, and pursue the maintenance, repair, and overhaul of commonly operated platforms such as C-130s, P-8s, and C-17s.

Conclusion

The Department will move with focus and determination to execute the 2026 National Defense Strategy's clear direction to preserve a favorable balance of power in the Indo-Pacific, with an emphasis on erecting a strong denial defense along the First Island Chain while simultaneously defending the U.S. Homeland. We will do so by strengthening our force posture across the region, increasing burden sharing among highly capable allies and partners, and enabling them to increase their self-defense capability and capacity. Much work remains to be done to sustain lasting peace in the Indo-Pacific. 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.