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Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and distinguished Members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity to testify today on what the Department of Defense is doing to safeguard the interests of the American people, our allies, and our partners in the Indo-Pacific region.

I am pleased to testify today alongside Admiral John Aquilino of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) and General Paul LaCamera of the United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command, and U.S. Forces Korea (USFK). And before I continue, I would like to highlight the tireless work of those who serve the United States in uniform across the Indo-Pacific region, as well as those who serve in the civilian workforce across the Department. In his *Message to the Force* last month, Secretary Austin said that “our people are the bedrock of a strong national defense,” and that is something that I am reminded of every day when I see our entire team hard at work together.

A Vision for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific Region

The very first words of the Biden-Harris Administration’s Indo-Pacific Strategy plainly state that “the United States is an Indo-Pacific power.” And Secretary Austin has been clear about our commitment to seeking transparency; openness and accountability; freedom of the seas, skies, and space; and the peaceful resolution of disputes in the region.

That vision – and that commitment – continues today. Alongside our partners across the U.S. government, the Department seeks to uphold a rules-based order where commerce and ideas flow and flourish without the threat of coercion, aggression, or contempt for human dignity. I look forward to speaking with you today about many of those efforts and the results we are seeing as part of the Administration’s “invest, align, compete” strategy.

Challenges to the Vision

The Department of Defense does not take this vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific order for granted. In particular, we have seen the People’s Republic of China (PRC) increasingly look to the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) as a tool for coercion in support of its global aims, and we have in turn seen the PLA conduct more dangerous and aggressive activities in the region.

In just the past twelve months, PLA aircraft and maritime vessels have continued to conduct inherently risky intercepts against U.S, ally, and partner assets in the air and at sea, increasing the unacceptable danger of an accident. The PLA continues to conduct coercive military activities in the Taiwan Strait, the South and East China Seas, and beyond. With our allies and partners across the region, the United States has called out such behavior; in recent examples, we have condemned the PRC’s use of military-grade lasers in separate incidents against an Australian aircraft and a Philippine vessel, both operating lawfully in their respective Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ). Additionally, we have seen continued coercive PLA behavior along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with India. For the sake of preserving peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific, we must never accept military activities intended to undermine the rules-based international order through coercion and aggression.

The PRC high-altitude balloon (HAB) that violated U.S. airspace earlier this year – itself part of a PRC fleet of surveillance balloons that have crossed over many other countries – exemplified the PRC’s disregard for the basic principle of sovereignty at the heart of peace, order, and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. And the PRC’s public comments about this program, which include no plausible explanation for violating the sovereignty of the United States and dozens of other countries, underscore the ongoing challenges posed by PRC dis- and mis-information.

As this Committee is aware, the PRC is engaged in a significant and fast-paced expansion, modernization, and diversification of its nuclear forces. While the end state of the PRC’s nuclear force expansion remains uncertain, the trajectory of these efforts points to a large, diverse nuclear arsenal with a high degree of survivability, reliability, and effectiveness, encased in an opaque posture. This could provide the PRC with new options before and during a crisis or conflict to leverage nuclear weapons for coercive purposes, including military provocations against U.S. allies and partners in the region.

The PRC is also embracing rapid technological change to accomplish military goals. Of particular concern is PRC interest in biotechnology and other areas that may have peaceful purposes but that also enable weapons development, including advanced biological and chemical weapons.

On a related note, we have also seen the PRC demonstrate a concerning lack of interest in the important lines of communication that underpin a stable defense relationship between our countries. The Department of Defense believes strongly in maintaining open lines of communication between Washington and Beijing to ensure competition does not veer into conflict. Immediately after downing the PRC high-altitude balloon in February, the Department submitted a request for a call between Secretary Austin and the PRC Minister of National Defense because we wanted to ensure there was no misunderstanding or miscalculation in Beijing about our actions. Unfortunately, the PRC declined our request. This was not far from the first time that the PRC has declined invitations to communicate from the Secretary, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, or other Department officials. But this will not diminish the Department’s commitment to seeking open lines of communication with the PRC military at multiple levels, and to responsibly managing the relationship.

It is for reasons like these that the 2022 *National Defense Strategy* (NDS) identifies the PRC as the Department’s “pacing challenge” while the Administration’s *Indo-Pacific Strategy* warns that the PRC is “combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological might as it pursues a sphere of influence in the Indo-Pacific and seeks to become the world’s most influential power.” And while the PLA plays a central role in these aims, as other leaders from the Department have said before, I must note that the PRC’s coercive behavior also extends to the realms of trade, technology, diplomacy and multilateral institutions, and more.

Importantly, while the Administration’s 2022 *National Security Strategy* warns that the PRC “harbors the intention and, increasingly, the capacity to reshape the international order,” we also know that the PRC is not the only driver of challenges to a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region. North Korea continues to engage in provocative and destabilizing behavior,

including an unprecedented pace of ballistic missile testing in violation of UN Security Council resolutions. The effects of climate change will continue to place downward pressure on peace, stability, and prosperity across the region. Finally, violent extremism will continue to require cooperation between the United States and our partners on counterterrorism efforts.

Setting the Pace

Faced with these challenges to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly the challenges posed by the PRC, the Department of Defense is doing more – more than ever – to strengthen deterrence, and to, if necessary, ensure we can prevail in conflict. We are doing so by, in the words of Secretary Austin, “using every tool at the Department’s disposal, in close collaboration with our counterparts across the U.S. Government and with Allies and partners, to ensure that potential foes understand the folly of aggression.” This is integrated deterrence in action. And simply put, our approach is delivering a military that is growing in capability, deploying in more-forward locations, and connecting more deeply with our allies and partners – reflecting the Department’s imperative to deliver the credible capabilities that underpin deterrence against the pacing challenge in the near-, mid-, and long-term.

Strengthening U.S., Ally, and Partner Capability

When it comes to strengthening U.S. capabilities in the region, the Department is deploying cutting-edge capabilities right now. We are making major investments in the capabilities we will need in the future, and our budget request shows it.

The President’s Budget Request for Fiscal Year 2024 (FY 2024) requests more than \$60 billion for air power, including next-generation aircraft; nearly \$50 billion for sea power, including undersea capabilities; more than \$33 billion for resilient space capabilities; more than \$37 billion for modernization of the nuclear triad and nuclear command and control; and more. The Department’s budget also includes an unprecedented level of funding for research and development – \$145 billion, and for procurement – \$170 billion. In fact, these investments would constitute the Department’s largest commitment ever in these areas.

Efforts like the Rapid Defense Experimentation Reserve (RDER) underscore how we are working to quickly deliver promising prototypes to warfighters. And the B-21 Raider, which Secretary Austin unveiled last December, is yet another example of a cutting-edge capability – with groundbreaking advances in range, survivability, and stealth – coming online in the immediate term.

The NDS also makes clear that, even as we continue to address terrorist threats against the homeland, “the PRC and Russia now pose more dangerous challenges to safety and security at home.” The Department’s budget request for FY 2024 prioritizes defending the homeland as called for by the NDS, and my colleague Assistant Secretary Melissa Dalton testified about these crucial efforts before this Committee just last month.

Here is the bottom line: Deterrence in the Indo-Pacific region is real and strong today for two reasons. First, the U.S. military remains the most capable and credible fighting force in the world. The major investments in the President's Budget Request will help keep it that way.

Second, the United States is not the only Indo-Pacific power seeking to uphold peace and stability in the region by investing in greater capability and connection. The Alliance and partner network both in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond is our greatest asymmetric advantage, and it is gaining even greater strength.

There are numerous examples of important initiatives underway.

For example, we have strongly supported Japan's decision to increase substantially its defense budget over the next five years and to introduce new capabilities, including counterstrike, that will strengthen regional deterrence at a time of important strategic alignment between our two countries. We will continue to deepen cooperation on space capabilities and to bolster technology cooperation and joint investments in emerging technologies, such as autonomous systems and counter-hypersonics.

With the Republic of Korea (ROK), we are taking clear, meaningful steps to modernize and strengthen our alliance, including by expanding the scope and scale of our combined exercises and deploying some of our most capable platforms to the Korean Peninsula at a faster tempo. We are also reinvigorating our dialogues on extended deterrence, ensuring strategic alignment through a whole-of-government approach. Additionally, we are working with the ROK to facilitate greater security cooperation outside of the Korean Peninsula and throughout the broader region.

We have made increased investments to support the Philippines' their modernization goals, and we are working together to accelerate allied capabilities in the air and maritime domain.

With India, we are making major investments in our defense ties to uphold the regional balance of power. In yet another example of these increasingly promising efforts, the United States and India launched our initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) that includes in-depth conversations about opportunities for co-producing important defense platforms.

The AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom, United States) security pact exemplifies our collaboration with highly capable allies and partners to strengthen our combined capabilities and capacity in support of deterrence. The recently announced AUKUS Optimal Pathway, also known as Pillar I, will see Australia acquire conventionally-armed, nuclear-powered submarines, further enhancing their force projection capability.

Finally, we continue to fulfill our commitments under the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA). The TRA has formed the bedrock of peace, stability, and deterrence in the Taiwan Strait over the last four decades, and it is sustained by strong bipartisan support for providing Taiwan with self-defense capabilities, as well as for maintaining the U.S. capacity to resist any use of force that jeopardizes the security of the people on Taiwan.

Delivering a More Mobile, Distributed, Lethal, and Resilient Regional Force Posture

When it comes to modernizing our force posture in the Indo-Pacific to be even more mobile, distributed, lethal, and resilient, the Department of Defense is delivering historic achievements.

I will highlight several examples from just the past six months.

In December, Secretary Austin, Secretary Blinken, and their Australian counterparts held the 2022 Australia-U.S. Ministerial Consultations and announced a series of new force posture initiatives, including increased rotations of U.S. bombers and fighters at Australian bases, alongside expanded maritime and ground forces cooperation. These rotations, in addition to helping make our forces more ready, will bring our most capable U.S. forces to the Indo-Pacific region. We are also deepening our logistics cooperation with Australia to improve our shared ability to effectively move and sustain our forces. This will, in turn, strengthen our ability to project combat power from the U.S. homeland into the region. Finally, we are increasingly inviting Japan to integrate into our force posture work in Australia, leveraging Australian geography to increase training opportunities to exercise our forces.

Then in January, the United States and Japan announced a series of historic force posture improvements, including the first forward deployment of a U.S. Marine Littoral Regiment (MLR) to Japan. The MLR is the Marine Corps' most advanced formation, with cutting-edge anti-ship capabilities, and will significantly enhance combat-credible deterrence. We also announced that our military and the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) are increasing the complexity of our joint and combined training and exercises, including in Japan's Southwest Islands.

Later that month, Secretary Austin visited the Philippines, and the U.S. and Philippine governments announced that U.S. forces will have access to Philippine military bases in four new strategic locations under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA). This expanded access will help our forces respond more effectively to natural disasters and other crises, including in the South China Sea. EDCA has proven a key pillar of defense cooperation in the U.S.-Philippine alliance, and these improvements will ensure even greater combined training, exercises, and interoperability between our forces.

Each of these announcements represents a major achievement. And together, they are a historic improvement of our regional force posture – the result of relentless defense diplomacy.

Deepening and Connecting Our Alliances and Partnerships

As the Department bolsters our network of U.S. alliances and partnerships across the region, we are also supporting efforts by our allies and partners to deepen their own ties with each other.

We are operating together like never before, with our bilateral and multilateral exercises in the region growing in scale, scope, and complexity. This summer's Exercise TALISMAN SABRE in Australia will be the biggest bilaterally planned U.S.-Australia exercise to date, bringing

together likeminded partners from across the region and around the world, including Japan, the Republic of Korea, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United Kingdom. This year's Exercise BALIKITAN with the Philippines included participation from Australia and also saw the inaugural deployment of the Third Marine Littoral Regiment (MLR). Additionally, this year's Exercise COBRA GOLD, co-sponsored with our treaty ally Thailand, featured not only a return to pre-pandemic levels of participation by dozens of countries – but also the largest U.S. contingent in a decade. And Exercise GARUDA SHIELD, once a bilateral training event with Indonesia, has now become one of the largest multilateral exercises in the region, featuring thousands of forces from over a dozen participating nations. These combined operations enhance interoperability and boost deterrence through demonstrations of our mutual resolve against regional coercive behavior.

We are also bringing together our closest regional allies and partners in ways that strengthen peace, stability, and deterrence across the region. Over the past twelve months, we have deepened our trilateral security efforts with Japan and Australia, with Japan and the Republic of Korea, with Japan and the Philippines, and beyond. And of course, we have made groundbreaking progress in the AUKUS partnership, which I mentioned earlier.

Additionally, we have broadened our engagement and initiatives with multilateral partners in the Indo-Pacific region to deliver real results for peace and security, especially with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Quad. Last year, we launched the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) to provide space-based maritime domain awareness to states across the region. This will support greater transparency in the region and enhance neighbors' abilities to monitor and police their waters.

We are also listening to the needs of allies and partners who say that the effects of a changing climate pose a serious threat to their security, and we are furthering our efforts together on this important issue. In December, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command's Center for Excellence in Disaster Management held a wargame on this topic to identify risks to infrastructure and how to build the climate resilience of allies and partners in the region. The resilience of not only our own installations but also those of regional allies and partners is particularly important in an increasingly complicated logistics environment.

Faced with a changing security landscape, states across the Indo-Pacific region are investing in their own capabilities, connections with regional partners, and their relationships with the United States. For example, over the past decade, our five regional treaty allies have increased their military expenditures by double-digit rates. We look forward to supporting our regional allies and partners as they conduct vital operations, activities, and investments in support of our shared vision of a free and secure Indo-Pacific region in a rules-based international order.

Conclusion

In the past several years, we have witnessed the growth of a strong bipartisan consensus around the scale and scope of the China challenge.

We are working toward the transformation of that consensus into a coalition built around solutions.

The Department of Defense is taking action to deploy the capabilities, drive forward the force posture, and deepen the alliances and partnerships we need to meet our pacing challenge.

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