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BEFORE THE 118th CONGRESS
SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 9, 2023

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, and distinguished Members of the Committee: thank you for the opportunity to testify on U.S. policy toward the People's Republic of China (PRC).

The 2022 National Defense Strategy (NDS) rightly identifies the PRC as the Department's "pacing challenge." This is because, as articulated in the Administration's Indo-Pacific Strategy, 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." China's military is central to these aims. In fact, in recent years, the PRC has increasingly turned to the PLA as an instrument of coercive statecraft in support of its global ambitions, including by conducting more dangerous, coercive, and aggressive actions in the Indo-Pacific region.

In contrast to these revisionist goals, today I would like to provide an update on the steps we are taking alongside Department of State colleagues with our allies and partners to advance an alternative vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific region; a vision that is widely shared throughout the region and the world. This is the "align" pillar of the Administration's "invest, align, compete" China strategy. In particular, I would like to highlight the steps we are taking: First, to strengthen our alliance capabilities; second, to develop a more distributed, resilient, and lethal force posture; and third, to build stronger networks of likeminded allies and partners. Let me underscore the Defense Department's view that today our deterrent is strong, and that these efforts will play an essential role in sustaining and further strengthening deterrence in the years and decades ahead.

Strengthening Ally and Partner Capability

I'll say at the outset that 2023 has already been a groundbreaking year for U.S. alliances and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region.

With Japan, we have expressed our support for Tokyo's decision to acquire new capabilities that will strengthen regional deterrence, especially counterstrike capabilities.

Under AUKUS, we remain encouraged by the significant progress we've made on developing the optimal pathway for Australia to acquire a conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarine capability. And we thank the Members of this Committee for their continued support of this initiative, which will reinforce deterrence and advance our shared vision for a free, open, and secure region.

With the Republic of Korea, DoD and the Department of State joined in September in the Under Secretary-level Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group, a forum for comprehensive discussions on strategy and policy issues to strengthen Alliance deterrence on the Korean Peninsula and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

Additionally, we are making significant investments in our defense ties with India to uphold a favorable balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region. Earlier this month, the U.S. Government launched our inaugural technology initiative (iCET) with India, including in-depth discussions about opportunities for co-production of major defense platforms.

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

Developing a Distributed, Resilient, and Lethal Force Posture

DoD has also announced major upgrades throughout the region that will make our forward posture more distributed, resilient, and lethal. In just the past several months, we have seen that hard work come to fruition in several important ways.

First, in December, Secretary Austin and Secretary Blinken joined their Australian counterparts for the 2022 Australia-U.S. Ministerial Consultations, where they announced several new force posture initiatives to increase the rotational presence of our capabilities across a range of domains in Australia, including U.S. Bomber Task Force rotations, fighter rotations, and future rotations of U.S. Navy and U.S. Army capabilities.

Weeks later in early January, Secretary Austin co-chaired the Japan 2+2 ministerial meeting with Secretary Blinken, where the United States and Japan announced the first U.S. forward deployment of a Marine Littoral Regiment (MLR) to Japan. The MLR is the Marine Corps' most advanced formation, and it exemplifies how DoD is working with one of our closest regional allies to bolster deterrence and enhance our ability to respond rapidly to regional contingencies.

Finally, just days ago, Secretary Austin was in Manila, where the United States and the Philippines announced four new Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) Annex sites at strategic locations across the country. This achievement will not only bolster U.S. rotational presence – it will also strengthen our combined ability to address a range of shared challenges across the Indo-Pacific region.

Networking Likeminded Allies and Partners

Meanwhile, despite PRC efforts to divide the United States from our allies and partners, DoD is developing a constellation of coalitions to address emerging threats.

Trilateral cooperation between the United States, Japan, and Australia represents one of our most advanced network of alliances. We invited Japan to participate in force posture initiatives in Australia, we held our first trilateral asset protection exercise, and we are expanding collaboration on research and development.

With Japan and the Republic of Korea, we are continuing to enhance trilateral security cooperation and address common security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region.

Finally, in addition to ongoing efforts with ASEAN, we are also working with a range of partners to bring greater transparency to the region, including through the Indo-Pacific Partnership

for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA). This initiative aims to provide space-based maritime domain awareness to countries across the region—including in Southeast Asia, in the Indian Ocean, and the Pacific Islands.

Seeking Open Lines of Communication

Before I close, I would like to offer a brief word on DoD's belief in the importance of maintaining open and constructive lines of communication between the United States and the PRC in order to responsibly manage our relationship. On Saturday, February 4, immediately after taking action to down the PRC high-altitude surveillance balloon, the Department of Defense submitted a request for a call between Secretary Austin and PRC Minister of National Defense Wei Fenghe. Lines between our militaries are particularly important in moments like this. Unfortunately, the PRC has declined our request. Our commitment to open lines of communication and to responsibly managing the relationship will continue.

Conclusion

As I have done before, I'll conclude today by noting the powerful bipartisan consensus that has emerged around the China challenge and the commensurate need for the U.S. government to refocus its time, energy, and resources on the Indo-Pacific region. It is my enduring belief that we should be vigilant in preserving and advancing a bipartisan approach, which will remain fundamental to our ability to compete effectively against the PRC.

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