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COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

TO CONSIDER THE NOMINATION OF ADMIRAL JOHN C. AQUILINO, USN, FOR REAPPOINTMENT TO THE GRADE OF ADMIRAL AND TO BE COMMANDER, UNITED STATES INDO-PACIFIC COMMAND

Tuesday, March 23, 2021

Washington, D.C.

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U.S. Senate
Committee on Armed Services
Washington, D.C.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:31 a.m. in
Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Jack Reed,
chairman of the committee, presiding.

Committee Members Present: Senators Reed [presiding],
Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Hirono, Kaine, King,
Warren, Peters, Manchin, Duckworth, Rosen, Kelly, Inhofe,
Wicker, Fischer, Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan,
Cramer, Scott, Blackburn, Hawley, and Tuberville.
OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JACK REED, U.S. SENATOR FROM RHODE ISLAND

Chairman Reed: Let me call the hearing to order, and this morning the committee meets to consider the nomination of Admiral John Aquilino to be the next Commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, or INDOPACOM. Admiral, we thank you and your family for your willingness to serve in this important position. We welcome your wife, Laura, and your daughter, Jessica, along with your colleagues from the Pacific Fleet. Thank you very much.

You have most recently served as the Commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, an experience that will serve you well.

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as the Department of Defense's priority theater. As Admiral Davidson highlighted at his posture hearing earlier this month, the region will be home to two-thirds of the world's population and generate two-thirds of the global economy in the next 10 years. Maintaining U.S. leadership in this consequential region will take a concerted, whole-of-government effort, but the U.S. military, specifically INDOPACOM, will play a central role.

Secretary Austin has appropriately labeled China as the "pacing threat" for the U.S. military. I agree with experts who have stated that China is a long-term challenge that must be "managed" rather than "solved." Part of managing
our strategic competition with China and ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific is the need to maintain a strong presence in the region and a credible conventional deterrent to military aggression.

For this reason, in last year's National Defense Authorization Act, the committee created the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, or PDI. The PDI is intended to better focus Defense Department resources on key military capabilities, reassure U.S. allies and partners, and send a strong signal to the Chinese Communist Party that we are committed to defending U.S. interests in the Indo-Pacific. Maintaining momentum behind the PDI will be a key focus of this committee as we begin work on this year's National Defense Authorization Act. Admiral Aquilino, we look forward to hearing your views on how the PDI can be used to bolster U.S. military presence and conventional deterrence in the region.

China and the U.S. have a shared goal of avoiding unnecessary and costly armed conflict. Last week's U.S.-China diplomatic meeting in Alaska was not without its challenges, but provided an important opportunity for us to engage China, express our concern with China's conduct in the region and around the world, and reiterate our commitment to the region. We should look to build upon last week's meeting by establishing more robust means of
military-to-military communication, particularly to avoid miscalculation in a crisis. We should also seek greater cooperation with China when it is in our interest, including in areas like climate change, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and counterterrorism.

Effectively managing our competition with China also requires that we continually invest in our relationship with allies and partners. The last few weeks have demonstrated just how central these relationships are to the Biden administration's approach to the region. On March 12, President Biden participated in the first-ever leader-level meeting with other members of the Quad -- Japan, Australia, and India. Just last week, Secretary of Defense Austin and Secretary of State Blinked held in-person meetings with their counterparts in Japan and South Korea. Admiral Aquilino, we look forward to your views on how these alliances and partnerships can be strengthened and how we can attract new partners across the region.

Perhaps our most immediate security challenge in the region is North Korea. We must approach this challenge clear-eyed and in cooperation with our regional allies and partners, most notably Japan and South Korea, who are most directly threatened by Kim Jong Un's belligerent behavior. While we maintain significant sanctions pressure on North Korea, we must also pursue diplomacy with the goal of
achieving a formal moratorium on nuclear and missile testing in the near-term. Admiral Aquilino, I would appreciate your views on the regional threat posed by North Korea and the prospects for greater trilateral cooperation between the United States, Japan, and South Korea on missile defense and other issues.

Admiral, if confirmed, you will lead INDOPACOM at an incredibly consequential time, and we thank you again for your willingness to serve.

And now let me recognize the Ranking Member, Senator Inhofe.
STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES INHOFE, U.S. SENATOR FROM OKLAHOMA

Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral Aquilino, we are real pleased to have you, and moving into a position where you are certainly the person most qualified for that position. With over 1,150 carrier arrested landings and 5,000 hours of flying time, I think that you have spent a lot of time on the sea but also a lot of time in the air. And I have to say that I may have twice the hours you have, but you have twice the miles I had.

Secretary Austin and Deputy Secretary Hicks said China is the pacing threat for our military, and General Milley said the Pacific is the number one regional priority. We all understand this. This administration is saying the right things about pushing back on Chinese aggression, but the key indicator of whether or not we are serious about this competition with China will be what we do with the defense budget top line, the great growth. The words do not have real meaning.

The top line of the defense budget and the amount of funding for the Pacific Deterrence Initiative will be the Biden administration's first and most important message to China. What we do and do not do to deter China in the military domain will underride and determine the success or failure of diplomatic, economic, and information efforts as
well. Simply put, if you fail to invest in defense, and as a result fail to deter China's use of military force in the Indo-Pacific, nothing you do in those areas will really matter. Admiral Aquilino, if confirmed as commander of INDOPACOM you would be on the front lines of the military competition with China. There must never come a day when the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party decide today is the day they can achieve their goal by using military force.

At the beginning of March, General McMaster told us that since the 1900s China has undertaken the largest peacetime military buildup in history. This ramp-up in the past decade, when China increased real purchasing power in the defense sector by $200 billion. Meanwhile, primarily during the Obama administration, America cut some $400 billion of purchasing power from our defense spending. As China was quietly increasing investments in defense, many U.S. leaders naively assumed when China joined the WTO in 2001, that it was integrated in the global economy, somehow this would make the Chinese Communist Party friendlier and more open to the West. And I predicted it would not, and I was right. The result of that bad assumption is American military advantage and the credibility of our deterrence has eroded, and comes to erosion.

So we have got a problem out there, and you are going to be right in the middle of that, and we are anxious to
make some really good things happen. As General McMaster told us, Taiwan may represent the most dangerous flash point for war, and when Admiral Davidson was asked what the most likely target of the Chinese military action would be in the next 5 to 10 years, he said, "I would say Taiwan is the first." So we know where our problems are, we appreciate your service, and look forward to this hearing.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Inhofe. Now let me recognize Senator Hirono to introduce the admiral.

Senator Hirono: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and I very much appreciate your remarks and Ranking Member Inhofe's remarks in recognizing the importance of the Indo-Pacific region.

Our country faces an array of challenges and opportunities in the Indo-Pacific region, and AORs stretching from the west coast of the United States to the western border of India, and from the North Pole to Antarctica, covering about half of the Earth's surface.

At a time when we are confronting an increasingly aggressive China and looking to deepen our defense ties with allies in the Indo-Pacific, it is imperative we have an experienced leader at Indo-Pacific Command capable of meeting the urgency and sensitivity of the moment. With this in mind, I would like to introduce and enthusiastically
endorse today's nominee, and, of course, welcome his family, Admiral John C. Aquilino, to serve as the next Commander of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command.

Admiral Aquilino's 37 years of Navy service, highlighted by command of the U.S. Pacific Fleet and the U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, make him well suited for this new role. Since assuming command of the Navy's Pacific Fleet in 2018, I have seen how the admiral and his leadership team at PACFLEET have worked to ensure the readiness of the fleet to protect the security of our nation. From his headquarters at Pearl Harbor, "Lung" Aquilino, as he is affectionately known to those under his command, has guided the 140,000 sailors and civilians of the Pacific Fleet to meet challenges and opportunities presented.

I have to admit, Lung is such an unusual nickname, and I had to ask how he got it. It was coined years ago by his fighter pilot buddies who thought his last name sounded like Aqualung, and with that the name Lung was born.

Lung's message of, quote, "deter, assure, compete, and win," end quote, is the right message for INDOPACOM today. I have gotten to work with Admiral Aquilino during his time in Hawaii and know first-hand he believes in the power of working together to find whole-of-government solutions, the importance of our alliances and partnerships, and the
imperative for a well-trained and postured force.

I have appreciated the interactions Admiral Aquilino and I have had on issues of importance to Hawaii and the Pacific region, including the strategically vital Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility. In operating the Red Hill Facility, the Navy has a critical responsibility to protect Oahu's drinking water and keep the community updated. The admiral knows the importance of transparent and open community engagement.

Admiral Aquilino also has a personal appreciation of the significance of Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard to our community. The shipyard is our largest industrial employer, with thousands of military and civilian workers who support our forces and broader in the Pacific region to advance our strategic interest. Admiral Aquilino participated in shipyard visits with Senator Kaine, former Senator Perdue, and me over the past 2 years.

As evidenced throughout his years of service, Admiral Aquilino has demonstrated a deep understanding of Hawaii's strategic importance to our national security, and he advocates for capabilities and nurtures relationships to help Hawaii fully realize its role in America's continued access and influence in the Indo-Pacific.

If you speak to those who serve in his command, you will find Admiral Aquilino has deep and abiding care for his
sailors, civilians, and their families, by working to
instill an environment of dignity and purpose. This skill
was evident in Admiral Aquilino's actions after a gunman
took the lives of Roldan Agustin and Vincent Kapoi Jr., and
seriously injured another man during the horrific shooting
at Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard on December 4, 2019. Admiral
Aquilino paid special care to the families of the victims
and the shipyard community during this intense time of
grief. A few months ago, he organized a memorial service
marking the 1-year anniversary of the tragic event, and
installed a permanent memorial plaque to honor the lives and
service of Mr. Augustin and Mr. Kapoi Jr.

I am confident that after today's hearing my colleagues
will join me in supporting Admiral Aquilino's nomination to
lead INDOPACOM.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Hirono.

Admiral, you are recognized for your opening statement.
STATEMENT OF ADMIRAL JOHN C. AQUILINO, USN, FOR
REAPPOINTMENT TO THE GRADE OF ADMIRAL AND TO BE COMMANDER,
UNITED STATES INDO-PACIFIC COMMAND

Admiral Aquilino: Thank you very much, Senator Hirono, for that kind introduction. Congratulations on your selection as the chair of the Seapower Subcommittee. It has been my pleasure to work with you these past 3 years, and from all the sailors in the Pacific theater and their families I would like to thank you for your constant support. Thank you very much, ma'am.

Thank you, Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and committee members for this opportunity to appear before you today. I am both honored and humbled to be here as the nominee to lead U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. It is a great responsibility. I am honored to President Biden's nominee for this important position.

I would also like to thank Secretary Austin, General Milley, Acting Secretary Harker, and Admiral Gilday for their support and confidence.

I would not be here today without the love and support of my family. My wife, Laura, and my oldest daughter, Jessica are here with me today, and my daughter, Lisa, was unable to attend from Los Angeles. Like every military family, they have endured many sacrifices and they tirelessly advocate for military members and their families.
They set a tremendous example of service to our nation, and I am proud of each of them.

Also with me here today are members of my Navy family, and they are led by Fleet Master Chief Jim Honea. He is my right-hand man and he personally cares for over 140,000 Navy sailors and their families in the Pacific Fleet every day.

I would be remiss if I did not highlight my constant admiration and respect for the men, women, civilians, and families of our joint force, who faithfully serve, many deployed as we speak to defend our nation and protect our way of life. It has been my greatest privilege to have served alongside them for 37 years.

The Indo-Pacific is the most consequential reason for America's future and remains the priority theater for the United States. Residing here are four of the five security challenges identified in the Department of Defense -- China, Russia, North Korea, and violent extremist organizations. The Indo-Pacific region also experiences frequent natural and man-made disasters, the negative impacts of climate change, rapid population growth, drugs and human trafficking, and, of course, disease and pandemics.

Of all the threats we face, Secretary Austin was very clear when he stated, "China is our pacing threat." To meet this challenge, it will take all elements of national power, working together and with a sense of urgency. Together with
our allies and partners, our professionally trained and lethal joint military force, postured forward will provide the deterrence required while enabling diplomacy from a position of strength to ensure peace, stability, and prosperity for all in the region.

The Pacific Deterrence Initiative is a strong example of the effort required to compete and win. I thank the committee for your leadership and your vision in establishing PDI. These efforts are foundational to ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific.

As the Interim National Security Strategic Guidance points out, America's fate is intertwined with events beyond our shores. Global peace and prosperity depend on our presence in the Indo-Pacific. If confirmed for this great responsibility I look forward to working with this committee as we advance our shared national security objectives while continuing to serve alongside Indo-Pacific's men and women to accomplish this important mission before us.

Thanks, Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and to the committee. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Admiral Aquilino follows:]
Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, sir. Let me point out, for the benefit of my colleagues, that if we get a quorum I will interrupt. We have thousands of military nominations we would like to pass out of committee. And also since this is a hybrid hearing, we will not be following the early bird rule. Instead, we will handle the order of questions by seniority, alternating back and forth. This message is getting a little old but let me reiterate it.

We will do the standard five-minute rounds. I ask my colleagues on the computers, and at their desk, to observe the five minutes. And then, for everyone to be heard, please mute your microphones if you are not speaking.

Thank you very much, Admiral, for your testimony, for your distinguished service, and the service of your family.

One of the most important aspects in any theater is joint warfighting operations. We fight as a team, not as individual platforms or individual services. And I know the Joint Staff and INDOPACOM have been working on joint operations, joint techniques and models. COVID has interrupted that a bit. Can you give us kind of a status, from your perspective, of how we are doing in integrating our forces?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. Thanks. So there are two initiatives. Admiral Davidson, along with the Joint
Staff, is working on a joint warfighting concept. Those focus areas are designed to specifically ensure that the joint force is integrated, that command and control that is required exists, and on top of that, from the Indo-Pacific position, it has the ability to also expand to our allies and partners. It is extremely important, and if confirmed, Senator, I will continue those efforts. They are that important.

Chairman Reed: Can you briefly prioritize what are the key elements? My notion would be if you cannot communicate effectively then you cannot do much. But your sense of what the priorities are, and are they budgeted in that order, or do we have to do some work collectively?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, the Pacific Defense Initiative I think is kind of the poster child for what the capabilities and things look like in prioritized order, and again, I thank the committee for that support. Those capabilities, as I see them, are force protection, there is the ability to command, control, and communicate in the mission partner environment, then there is the ability needed to train both with the joint force and our allies and partners, and that linkage between the ranges, from Guam to Hawaii to Alaska to the west coast of the United States, PMTEC, is absolutely required.

Additionally, there is ISR capabilities needed. There
are long-range joint integrated fires capabilities that are needed. And underpinning all of that is the need to be able to execute logistics across that great distance.

Chairman Reed: So we have a ways to go, frankly, to get to the point where you are satisfied. Is that fair?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, again, I think PDI is foundational, but it will take a longer-term sustained investment to be able to generate the deterrence required.

Chairman Reed: And a final point on this issue. First of all, integrating Army, Navy, and Air Force is tough. I would assume integrating our allies is even more challenging because of obvious differences in language and other equipment, et cetera. Is that fair?

Admiral Aquilino: That is absolutely fair, sir, but it is also extremely important. We operate with our allies and partners each and every day, so it is certainly not a hurdle we cannot get over, and it is critically important.

Chairman Reed: Thank you. You mentioned this has to be a whole-of-government effort, not just a military effort. And within our partners, particularly the Quad, are there issues that we can rally around, issues like climate change and other issues like that? Is that something that your State Department and colleagues are talking about?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, there are many areas where we certainly cooperate across a whole-of-government approach
-- economic, diplomatic, informational, legal, as well as military. All of those efforts will be required to do the deterrence needed, and if confirmed I am certainly interested in working across the interagency to achieve that goal.

Chairman Reed: Thank you very much. Just a final question here. I think we have come to realize that we were overly optimistic about China's role in the world for several decades, when we saw it as simply an economic power that would come into the world stage with a benign, not malign, attitude, and that has changed. The danger today might be overestimating China, of not seeing some of their vulnerabilities. Can you comment upon some of the shortcomings you see or some of the weaknesses that might not be explored?

Admiral Aquilino: Thanks, Senator. Certainly we have seen the largest military buildup by China. That does bring with it certain vulnerabilities, whether it be training, command and control and operations across a broader scale. And again, if confirmed, I will look through that lens to see where we can really have some effect to deter.

Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Admiral. Before I turn it over to Senator Inhofe I am required to ask questions of the nominee, and I have been reminded by my staff to do so. Just like the master chief, I do what I am
Have you adhered to applicable laws and regulations governing conflicts of interest?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, sir.

Chairman Reed: Have you assumed any duties or taken any actions that would appear to presume the outcome of the confirmation process?

Admiral Aquilino: No, sir.

Chairman Reed: Exercising our legislative and oversight responsibility makes it important that this committee, its subcommittees, and other appropriate committees of Congress receives testimony, briefings, reports, records, and other information from the Executive branch on a timely basis. Do you agree, if confirmed, to appear and testify before this committee when requested?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, sir.

Chairman Reed: Do you agree, when asked before this committee, to give your personal views, even if your views differ from the administration?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, sir.

Chairman Reed: Do you agree to provide records, documents, and electronic communications in a timely manner when requested by this committee, its subcommittees, or other appropriate committees of Congress and to consult with the requestor regarding the basis or any good-faith delay or
Chairman Reed: Will you ensure that your staff complies with deadlines established by this committee for the production of reports, records, and other information, including timely responding to hearing questions for the record?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, sir.

Chairman Reed: Will you cooperate in providing witnesses and briefers in response to congressional requests?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, sir.

Chairman Reed: Will those witnesses and briefers be protected from reprisals for their testimony at briefings?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, sir.

Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Admiral. Senator Inhofe, please.

Senator Inhofe: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let me draw on your experiences as a fighter pilot. It has been concerning to me for quite some time the criticism of our F-35 that we hear, from a lot of people. I will not even mention the sources, but it is something that really bothers me, when you stop and think about what we do not have in terms of fifth-generation fighters. Admiral Davidson's testimony, and this is way back in March, to the
House Armed Services Committee, he said that our adversaries are already developing or fielding fifth-generation fighters, that we know from our own gaming and emulations that fifth-generation fighters are a game-changer.

Now as a fighter pilot, kind of explain why the F-35, as a fifth-generation fighter, is so critical to deterring, and, if necessary, defeating China's uses of military force, and in your opinion, why it is important to the ability to fight and win inside the first and second island chains. I can remember when we had the F-22, and we talked about the fact that it was a fifth-generation fighter. We started out we were going to have 700 of them. We ended up getting 200. I remember that very well and the criticism that I had at that time, and we have had the same problems now. And yet now we know it is a different game now, because our competition has fifth-generation fighters. What are your thoughts on that?

Admiral Aquilino: Thank you, Senator. As you know, the Chinese Communist Party has generated some capabilities in the region that are designed to keep us out. Some refer to those as A2/AD, and when we talk about them we talk about operating in contested space. Fifth-generation airplanes, and beyond, are required to be able to generate a lethal force and posture it in a place where it is needed to generate the deterrence that I mentioned.
Senator Inhofe: Are your concerns like mine in terms of the attacks on the F-35 and what our capacity would be if we became weak in that area?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator, I would be concerned if we lessened our capacity of fifth-generation airplanes. I think they are needed to win.

Senator Inhofe: Mm-hmm. Okay. As General McMaster told this committee, and this is a quote, "Taiwan may represent the most dangerous flash point for war." He went on to say because of that very real threat, quote, "it is immensely important to keep forward-positioned capable forces in the Indo-Pacific."

So, Admiral, I have been co-chairman of the Taiwan Caucus for quite a while and I have been concerned that a Chinese invasion of Taiwan would represent the hardest test from U.S. military response time. Can you talk about why the U.S. forward-positioning forces are so important, and what do you mean by forward-positioning, and where do the forces need to be?

Admiral Aquilino: Thanks, Senator. I agree with General McMaster's discussion on the most dangerous concern is that of a military force against Taiwan. To combat that, the forward posture west of the International Date Line is how Admiral Davidson describes it, and I concur with that. Forces positioned to be able to respond quickly, and not
just our forces, those forces combined with the international community, with our allies and partners, those nations with common values, those two things would position us very strongly for the deterrence required.

Senator Inhofe: Okay, good. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Inhofe. Now let me recognize Senator Shaheen.

Senator Shaheen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Admiral Aquilino, congratulations on your nomination and thank you very much for your service to this country.

I am a big supporter of the legislation that was signed into law in 2017, the Women, Peace, and Security Act. It was legislation that I sponsored, and I think having a government-wide strategy to include women in all aspects of our security decisions is very important.

Implementation at DoD is underway, and, in fact, USINDOPACOM has played a really important role implementing the legislation, hosting the first gender insecurity cooperation course in January of 2020. USINCOPACOM also hosted two operational gender advisor courses to train personnel to serve as advisors. Can you talk about why you think it is important to have this kind of legislation and how you would continue the work that Admiral Davidson has begun?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. Thanks. Again, this
is one of our asymmetric advantages, the Women, Peace, and Security Initiative. Admiral Davidson took it extremely seriously and he implemented his own program aligned with the larger program, that really stepped out in the form of the example you mentioned. And those have events are even more broad than that. And if I am confirmed, ma'am, I would continue those efforts and work to expand them. It helps for other nations to understand and align with the values that we believe in, human rights, and it is a great initiative. If confirmed, I would certainly continue that.

Senator Shaheen: Well, thank you. When you talk about the asymmetric advantage that it gives us, can you describe that a little better?

Admiral Aquilino: I would say it is a focus. When we think of a member of the military sitting in front of you, that the entire focus is military, but it is not. There are cultural aspects. There is sharing of values. There is education, training, schooling. All those things are resident in the military lines of effort. So that is why I view them as asymmetric.

Senator Shaheen: Thanks very much. Much of the discussion today, and in this committee, when we are talking about INDOPACOM, has focused on China. But, in fact, Russia continues to also engage in malign activities in the region. And we saw General Austin, when he was in India last week,
talking about India's planned purchase of Russia's S-400
defense system, which is a concern for us because of the
insights that it gives Russia into our technology.

Can you talk about how we balance still getting along
with our allies and the efforts that Russia has underway,
and in particular, do you have any thoughts about India and
the S-400 and what we can do there to address that?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. As Senator Hirono
identified, half the globe encompassed in the Indo-Pacific.
Seventeen hundred miles of Russian coastline in that region.
So we watch and we will continue to compete with Russia in
the Pacific.

That said, India is really a terrific partner, and as
we have seen from the recent Quad discussions, I think the
importance of India and the rest of the nations in the Quad
will increase.

We are at a balance, however. India has had a long-
standing relationship with the Russians for security
cooperation and for military equipment. So we will have to
work through this, and one of the ways we can do that,
again, if confirmed, I would work to continue to encourage
India to look at and consider U.S. equipment. Number one,
it is the best. Number two, it generates interoperability
and makes it easier to work together, and I think we should
encourage India to do that through all the elements of
national power and see where that goes.

Senator Shaheen: And should we sanction India if they acquire the S-400?

Admiral Aquilino: Ma'am, I think I would leave that to the policymakers to determine if that is a path. I think we certainly should understand where we are with India, and I think potentially the encouragement angle in providing alternatives might be a better approach.

Senator Shaheen: Thank you. And I am almost out of time, but I just wanted to raise one other issue with you, and that is the mysterious brain injuries that have come to be known as the Havana Syndrome, which have affected our diplomats and other personnel, not just in Cuba but also in China. Are you aware of the challenges around these injuries, and can I just urge you to take the attacks seriously and respond if you have any personnel that you come in contact with who say that they have been harmed by these kinds of attacks?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. I am aware. I will certainly treat it seriously, if confirmed, and the care and welfare of our servicemembers, their families, to include the diplomatic corps, is certainly of interest, and I will keep an eye on that, if confirmed, and make recommendations as we see what the causes might be.

Senator Shaheen: Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr.
Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Shaheen. Senator Wicker, please.

Senator Wicker: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral, let's talk about the size of our fleet and the capability. And I want to quote Admiral Davidson earlier this month, before this committee, when asked about the gap between the Chinese and U.S. naval forces. He said, quote, "If we don't make changes in our posture forward, the Chinese will have greater capacity than us."

Given what you know about China's rapid naval buildup and projected growth, do you believe our naval forces still present a credible deterrent to Chinese aggression in the region today, and what do you say to that projected 5 years from now, sir?

Admiral Aquilino: Thank you, Senator. From my current seat I would to highlight that the United States Navy is the most powerful, greatest navy on the planet, still, despite numbers. That said, as you have highlighted, the Chinese are increasing their capability and capacity and closing that gap.

So I would like to thank CNO Gilday for his efforts in identifying the 30-year shipbuilding plan that identifies the need for a larger, more lethal, networked and ready force to be able to compete today, as you have highlighted.
Senator Wicker: Do you support that plan, advanced by Gilday?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator.

Senator Wicker: And do you agree with the statement by Admiral Davidson a few days ago?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator.

Senator Wicker: Let's ask then about carriers specifically. What kind of carrier presence is needed in the Western Pacific, and does the Navy have enough carriers to support those needs?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, currently the Navy is in alignment with the law of the land of 11 carriers. And as you know, today's carrier strike groups are a tremendous form of deterrence, and that is globally against all competitors. You see that by the continued requests for additional carrier deployments, and I believe we need to have persistent presence by all of the joint forces, to include carrier strike groups west of the International Date Line.

Senator Wicker: Well, okay. We have complied with the law of the land at 11, but is that enough, though? Just tell us. We need to know. We can change the law of the land if we get up enough votes.

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, sir. I think currently that the size of that force is correct, unless additional
challenges show themselves.

Senator Wicker: And so tell us about the Ford. There have certainly been some hiccups and slips. But where is that program now, and what do you think about that vessel going forward?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, I am supportive of the Ford. We took a lot of great, new technologies. We have put them into that carrier. It is the first of the class, and if you go back through history you will find we have challenges when we go first of a class. I am confident that the Navy will overcome all of those challenges, and I know my counterpart of the East Coast is working to get Ford deployed as soon as possible.

Senator Wicker: Have they pretty much already overcome most of those challenges or are there still -- you say "will." I might have expected you to say that we have overcome those challenges.

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. I would argue almost all of those have been completed. All but two of the weapons elevators are repaired, as I understand it, and we are certainly through all those technological challenges. The next thing you should see will be Ford deployed.

Senator Wicker: And lastly, I joined Senator Inhofe in stressing the United States' friendship and support for Taiwan. Would you like to see greater official coordination
between our military and that of Taiwan, and if so, what measures do you think could be taken in the near future to strengthen this critical partnership?

Admiral Aquilino: Thanks, Senator. I think our operations and efforts through all of those training exercises are currently in accordance with the Taiwan Relations Act, the three communiques and the six assurances, which is the current policies. Should we choose to change those policies we could have a conversation on what might be expanded as it applies today.

Senator Wicker: But you are declining to give your opinion as to whether you would like to see greater cooperation between our military and Taiwan.

Admiral Aquilino: Sir, we do many things with Taiwan, again, under those current policy guidelines. We do exercises. For the Navy it is called Blue Sea. And we do have interactions that contribute to the defense of Taiwan.

Senator Wicker: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Wicker. Now via Webex, Senator Gillibrand.

Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral, I want to discuss further INDOPACOM's utility with addressing some of the human rights and humanitarian challenges in the region. As we all know here, our competition with China will also include a competition of
values, and I believe this is a great opportunity to connect with our allies in showcasing our values, to support human rights and human security.

What changes do you foresee making to INDOPACOM's humanitarian role while also ensuring our work coalesces with that being done by Australia, New Zealand, and others? And while we have a number of key allies in the region, some more reluctant in this space than others. How will you use INDOPACOM's influence in the region to improve coordination with reluctant allies? And last, in the case of countries like Myanmar where a democratic backsliding is clearly occurring and where there are complex security dynamics, how would you work with our allies to approach this issue, as INDOPACOM's commander?

Admiral Aquilino: Thanks, Senator. I think you highlighted, again, the key advantage that the United States has in the region, and that is our relationships with our allies and partners, all of those based on our values. Like-minded nations continue to work together, and as you described, humanitarian assistance and then response to natural disasters is something that we monitor, track, maintain every day, whether they be earthquakes, eruptions, tsunamis.

And there are many examples in history of those things that we have done. I think back to the tsunami in Banda
Aceh, Indonesia in 2004, when the USS Lincoln showed up on the scene to rescue and administer support to thousands of Indonesians. And we are prepared to do that every day. As you know, the region hosts the Ring of Fire, and is prevalent to those events. Continued engagement with those allies and partners, and as soon as they need help we are prepared to respond. And, if confirmed, I will continue to ensure that we are ready to do that with our allies and partners.

Senator Gillibrand: Thank you. Admiral, as you mentioned in your statement prior to the hearing, it is the commander's responsibility to set a culture that prevents sexual harassment and sexual assault, and you referenced the array of tools in the commander's toolkit to carry out this duty.

Wouldn't you agree that a skillful commander should be able to accomplish this mission without convening authority? After all, a very small percentage, approximately 3 percent of commanders ever need to invoke convening authority or have the responsibility to invoke convening authority and are still required to create a culture that is inhospitable to harassment and assault.

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, we rely on our commanders every day to ensure that they take care of their personnel. The sanctity of the chain of command is critical to ensure
that military operations can be executed. It is also critical to ensure that the unit is prepared and ready. There is certainly no place in our military for sexual harassment, discrimination, or any other form that makes us ineffective.

I know the Secretary of Defense is executing an independent study. If confirmed, I would certainly like to see the results of that study. But I am open to any options that it identifies that would make us more effective in this role.

Senator Gillibrand: Well, obviously that 90-day commission will provide some guidance on this issue. But with regard to your view, given that 97 percent of commanders do not have convening authority for general court martials, do you agree it is not necessary to maintain good order and discipline?

Admiral Aquilino: Ma'am -- Senator, I would have to look at that a little more deeply and understand the percentages that you identified. The convening authority still runs through the chain of command, as I am aware, but like I said, I would be certainly open to anything that does more and is more effective at taking care of our servicemembers and their families.

Senator Gillibrand: Well, just for clarity, convening authority for general courts martial is for 06's and above,
and obviously you have lower-ranking commanders more junior to 06's and above, and they have to maintain good order and discipline within their unit, for each level of command, before you get to a colonel and above. Do you agree with that?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator.

Senator Gillibrand: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Gillibrand. And now via Webex, Senator Fischer.

Senator Fischer: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Admiral. It is good to see you again today.

One of the issues that you and I spoke about when we met last week was the evolving dynamic between India and China. The deadly skirmishes between Indian and Chinese troops underscored the high level of tension along the border, and China has made no secret of its ambition to encircle India with military and economic influence.

As INDOPACOM commander, how would you approach this dynamic, and what do you see as the future of the U.S.-India military cooperation?

Admiral Aquilino: Thank you, Senator. The work with India, the Quad, as well as all the allies and partners in the region continues to be the strength, and it highlights our ability to ensure that the entire force, the entire
region understands the cooperation and the alignment with international norms, standards, rules, and laws.

The work, or the effort that India has taken on to protect their northern border I think is noteworthy. The fact that the PRC has decided to instigate that skirmish on the northern border is noteworthy to all of us. So the strength of multilateral operations within India and with all allies and partners is certainly a mechanism to add to our deterrence in the region.

Senator Fischer: You know, you spoke about the [inaudible] of international laws by China along the border with that skirmish. We also see their island-building campaign in the South China Sea and their use of the debt trap diplomacy that they have elsewhere.

What do you believe are China's goals with regard to this border region in India?

Admiral Aquilino: Thank you, Senator. I think the goals are to supplant U.S. security leadership in the region, overall, whether they be in the South China Sea or on the northern border of India and generate a change to the international rules beyond what the nations all agree to, under the 1982 UNCLOS treaty, and ultimately to change those rules to the benefit of the PRC.

Ultimately, it would change the view of the region from those who believe in a free and open Indo-Pacific to those
that might want a more authoritarian might-equals-right
closed Indo-Pacific.

Senator Fischer: If I could ask you more about the
islands in the South China Sea. The President of China, in
2015, stated, quote, "Relevant construction activity that
China is undertaking does not target or impact any country,
and there is no intention to militarize," end quote. Would
you agree that this is a false statement, that it has been
proven false?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator, I would. It has
certainly been evident to me that when we listen to the
words that come from the PRC we have to look at not just
words, and listen to words, we have to look at deeds. And
your example of the islands in the South China Sea are
probably the best examples. All of those islands have been
militarized, whether it be with missiles, jammers, but it is
in exact opposition to what has been said.

Senator Fischer: What capabilities and projections of
power has China gained from those facilities that they have
constructed?

Admiral Aquilino: It certainly expands the footprint,
and we talked before about contested space. It makes it
easier for the PRC to be able to operate further from their
cost --

Senator Fischer: Do you think the United States should
continue the Freedom of Navigation missions in and around these disputed territories that they have?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator.

Senator Fischer: I am sorry. Did you say yes, you would support that?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator.

Senator Fischer: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Fischer. Now via Webex, Senator Hirono.

Senator Hirono: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral, I ask the following two initial questions of all nominees who come before any of the committees on which I serve, so here are the questions.

Since you became a legal adult, have you ever made unwanted requests for sexual favors or committed any verbal or physical harassment or assault of a sexual nature?

Admiral Aquilino: No, Senator.

Senator Hirono: Have you ever faced discipline or entered into a settlement related to this kind of conduct?

Admiral Aquilino: No, Senator.

Senator Hirono: Admiral, it was a pleasure and a privilege to introduce you today to the committee.

President Biden and Secretaries Lincoln and Austin have taken several steps in recent weeks to engage with our partners and allies in the Indo-Pacific. In particular, I
want to highlight the President's call with our Quad allies -- Australia, Japan, and India. If confirmed, what steps will you take in your new role to strengthen our partnerships with the Quad nations?

Admiral Aquilino: Thank you, Senator, and thanks very much for the kind introduction again.

As you heard me state many times, the allies and partners that we have are clearly an asymmetric advantage, as the PRC has, I would argue, only one ally or partner, and that is North Korea. So we would continue to work towards increased multilateral operations, if I am concerned. Again, the Quad we talked about would be an example of only one of those. We do many things with the ASEAN nations. We do things with our Japanese counterparts and our Korean counterparts in the form of missile defense, and I think, again, if confirmed, we would continue to expand those efforts and operations to work together on a broader scale.

Senator Hirono: Admiral, I know that we have a very important partnership with South Korea, but they are not part of the Quad. I am a little bit curious and concerned that they are not, but can you assure me that they are definitely in the mix of the relationships that you consider very important in that part of the world?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. Certainly one of five treaty allies in the region. Our relationship with South
Korea, they are a linchpin as part of the alliance. Their capabilities, the equipment that they have, we are extremely interoperable. There is currently an exercise that is going on right now, that we continue to train and build readiness with the South Koreans. As it applies to the Quad, that would have to be discussions with the other three members to determine if they would like to pull those in. If not, there are many other opportunities to generate additional multilateral events with the South Koreans.

Senator Hirono: I know that you are aware that many of us are very concerned about the issue of sexual assault and harassment in the military, and I just want to note that we will continue to focus on this, and we are, of course, aware of the DoD Sexual Assault Commission, and I would certainly hope that you will pay much attention to the recommendations made by the commission, because the issue of sexual harassment and assault continues to plague our military. And I know that Senator Gillibrand also questioned you about that.

Regarding the PDI, Admiral Davidson's new PDI report called for significant increases in spending across all lines of the PDI effort. Do you believe the increase in spending proposed in Admiral Davidson's PDI is sufficient to deter our adversaries in the region?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. As I have looked at
PDI, Admiral Davidson's strategic, very thoughtful approach, aligned with this committee, has identified the foundational capabilities needed to do deterrence, and it would have to be sustained to ensure that we can execute this on a longer term.

Senator Hirono: Admiral Davidson listed the Aegis Guam Defense System, GDS, as his top priority in the PDI, but similar Aegis Ashore facilities in Romania and Japan have had delays and been over budget. With that, do you believe the cost and time estimates for deploying of GDS are accurate, and will GDS also be your number one priority in this region?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, it certainly would be a top priority -- 170,000 U.S. citizens on Guam, over 20,000 servicemembers that force protection is absolutely required for. I am not aware of the different cost comparisons of the overrun, but if confirmed I will certainly look into that, ma'am, and determine. It is not the first one we have put in, so I would hope there would be some learning, and the ability to stay on cost and schedule would be easier.

Senator Hirono: Thank you, and I realize I think I am running out of time, but I am very concerned about our missile defense structure. So I will continue to work with you, should you be confirmed, of course.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.
Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Hirono. Senator Cotton, please.

Senator Cotton: Admiral, thanks for your appearance, thanks for your service, and congratulations on your nomination. I want to talk a little bit more about Taiwan, and I want to very much get your professional military advice. Taiwan is a very vibrant democracy -- a very vibrant democracy -- and we respect our democratic partners like Taiwan.

But I want to hear from you about why Taiwan is so critical from a military and strategic standpoint. Why would Beijing so desire to have Taiwan annexed to the mainland, and how would it complicate your military planning if Beijing did invade and annex Taiwan? Strictly from a military and strategic standpoint. I do not want to talk about protecting Taiwanese democracy. I am clear on that and I know you are as well. From a military and strategic standpoint, why is it so important to Beijing that they annex Taiwan?

Admiral Aquilino: Thanks, Senator. As you know, they view it as their number one priority. The rejuvenation of the Chinese Communist Party is at stake, very critical as they look at the problem. From a military standpoint, the strategic location of where it is, as it applies to the potential impact of two-thirds of the world's trade,
certainly a critical concern.

Additionally, the status of the United States as a partner with our allies and partners also is at stake, should we have a conflict in Taiwan. So those two reasons are really the strategic main concerns that I would see.

Senator Cotton: What would it mean for the PLA's enhanced capabilities if they were able to turn Taiwan essentially into a military base, if they were able to base aircraft and ships on the island if Taiwan, much like you discussed earlier with those islands they have got in the South China Sea. What advantage would that give to them?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, certainly it would extend their reach. It would extend the contested environment. It would threaten our allies and partners -- think the Philippines. And it extends their reach initially away from their coast and to challenge the entire region, all allies and partners and friends.

Senator Cotton: You spoke earlier about continuing Freedom of Navigation Operations in the South China Sea, despite those militarized, manmade islands. If Taiwan were annexed to the mainland and the PLA navy were based there, would you be able to continue Freedom of Navigation Operations in the South China Sea, or is the fact that Taiwan sits right at the top of the South China Sea significantly impede those operations?
Admiral Aquilino: Senator, we would still execute those operations. It certainly would be at greater risk.

Senator Cotton: And then speaking about the point you made about our allies, if you were sitting in a treaty partners capital, conducting military planning, say Tokyo or Seoul, or for that matter sitting in any Southern Asian capital and thinking the United States might support you in the face of Chinese aggression, if we stood idly by while China invaded Taiwan and annexed it to the mainland, how would you feel?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, that was my second point. It certainly would impact the credibility of the United States as a partner in the region.

Senator Cotton: Thank you. Last week, Admiral Davidson testified that he thinks the PLA may have the capability to effectively invade Taiwan in as soon as 6 years, maybe less. Do you agree with that view?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, there are many numbers out there. I know Admiral Davidson said 6 years. You have to ask him where he made that assessment. There are spans from today to 2045. My opinion is this problem is much closer to us than most think, and we have to take this on, put those deterrence capabilities like PDI in place, in the near term and with urgency.

Senator Cotton: I share that view. It is not a 2045,
it is not a 2030 problem. I suspect it may not even be a 2026 problem.

From a military planning point of view, what is the best time of year, given light, weather, and sea conditions, for the PLA to launch an invasion of Taiwan? Is it the middle part of the spring?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, sir, that is certainly a better time as it applies to sea state and environmentals.

Senator Cotton: Do you recall when the Sochi Winter Olympics ended in 2014?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, sir.

Senator Cotton: February 23rd. Do you recall when Russia invaded Crimea?

Admiral Aquilino: I do not have the date, Senator. I apologize.

Senator Cotton: February 27th, 4 days later. The Beijing Winter Olympics end February 23rd of next year.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Cotton. Senator Kaine, please.

Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and Admiral Aquilino, congratulations on the nomination. I enjoyed our conversation. I enjoyed visiting you in Hawaii last year with Senator Hirono.

Senator Hirono was asking you questions about the Quad, and I have been very interested in this since we started to
hear about it at this committee a number of years ago. I was intrigued that the first-ever head of nation meeting of the Quad was about vaccines, and even though most of the discussion about the Quad has been in the armed services hearing, this first big initiative with the heads of states was about funding vaccine development in India, that could be used to vaccinate the Indian population but also could be used to produce vaccines that could be used throughout the region. And that made me want to get your perspective on, if we are thinking about our national security challenges in the INDOPACOM, how much of our thoughts should be about a whole-of-government approach rather than just an armed services approach?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. We need to engage with every aspect of national power to be able to compete against the PLA. So whether it be diplomacy, whether it be scientific, whether it be informational, every aspect has an ability to generate deterrence, extend the cooperation with our allies and partners, and that is one example. From the military perspective this last year, the Quad, or in the form of India, Japan, the United States, and Australia, executed Exercise Malabar. So the cooperation of those nations currently has and needs to expand across all elements of national power.

Senator Kaine: I have always said to witnesses here
about the Quad is that if the Big 12 can have ten teams, and the Big 10 and A 10 can have 14 teams each, there is no reason a Quad cannot have more than four nations. And so I would encourage us to always broaden our reach in that way.

Missile attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq over the past year have shown a level of precision that our forces have not experienced during much of the early years of the global war on terror, and so the attacks display both accurate and devastation but also the vulnerabilities of our systems to defend against them. Any conflict in PACOM is guaranteed to see a widespread use, in my view, of precision guided missiles against both bases and ships. Do you think there is adequate attention paid in current budgeting for medium- and long-range air defense weapons?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, I think the Pacific Deterrence Initiative has identified a need that you just articulated, to ensure that we can protect our force. It is combined with not just missiles but the ability to integrate and the ability to command and control them, as well as tie those with our allies and partners. It would give us a broad ability to protect and defend all of our citizens, and sailors, soldiers, airmen, Coast Guardsman, and Marines.

Senator Kaine: Thank you for that. The Navy is in the early stages of replacing the F-18 Super Hornet with a program called Next Generation Air Defense, which I guess
goes by two acronyms, NGAD or F/A-XX. Where do you see gaps
emerging in our current fleet structure of F-18s and F-35s
that have to be addressed by a new platform like the NGAD?

Admiral Aquilino: Thank you, Senator. The
capabilities that are needed against this competitor need to
be more technologically advanced. To Senator Inhofe's
questions, the need for fifth-generation aircraft has been
identified and is needed to enter and operate in those
contested spaces. And NGAD or F/A-XX I think is our next
step to advance the technology and provide even more
capability to be able to operate in those contested spaces.
It is very important, and the Navy is currently working on
the development of the air wing of the future. So think of
those carrier strike groups we talked about before being
even more lethal, being able to enter and operated in those
contested spaces. It is critical to the deterrence needed.

Senator Kaine: Do you have a sense of the timeline for
when NGAD may come online in the INDOPACOM?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, I do not have a sense of
that exact date. I think they are looking at IOC in 2030 or
2031.

Senator Kaine: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Kaine. Now let me
recognize, via Webex, Senator Rounds.

Senator Rounds: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral,
first of all let me just say thank you very much for your
service and your family's service to our country. I
appreciated the discussion that we had last week and believe
that you are the right person at this time, in this critical
position.

A couple of thoughts. Number one, I want to go back
and visit just a second an issue that Senator Hirono brought
up, and that is Guam. We did not really get into it, but
would you talk with us a little bit about just how critical
Guam is in terms of any of our strategies with regard to
this AOR. Right now, part of the discussion has been how do
you defend Guam, what are the options available? I know
that Admiral Davidson had recommended, and Congress did not
agree last year, with the funding for the GDS, the Guam
Defense System.

But I would like your thoughts on it as well, because
it seems to me that without that in place we leave, as you
indicated, literally thousands of our own military men and
women at risk.

Admiral Aquilino: Thank you, Senator. Guam, as we all
can agree, I think, is an incredibly strategic location in
the Indo-Pacific. It is west of the International Date
Line, the ability to host over 20,000 of our U.S. forces to
be able to respond if needed, and the force protection for
those servicemembers, families, as well as the 170,000 U.S.
citizens is critical.

Admiral Davidson highlighted the need for 360-degree coverage. He also highlighted the need for those systems to be in place by 2025. It goes back to our point of near term and with a sense of urgency.

So I certainly believe we need that capability, and if confirmed I look forward to working with you to ensure we can get it in place.

Senator Rounds: Thank you. I agree, and I think as Senator Cotton indicated in his remarks most certainly time is of the essence, and we cannot simply sit back and just say this is just something that we can put off for another day.

An area that I think is going to continue to be an item of discussion I think in your AOR, just like in any other place in the world, the DoD's cyber strategy, which was published in December of 2018, charges DoD to defend forward, shape the day-to-day competition, and prepare for war. We have experienced highly sophisticated attacks within the cyber domain from the lines of both Russia and China in the past, and most recently we have seen some other capabilities, with the most recent attacks on business and some of our governmental entities as well.

Can you discuss how you view this threat from the perspective of the INDOPACOM, and how you would approach it
through the lenses of strategy, operations, and exercises?

What exercises are you doing, and how do you fill this in?

I mean, when we talk about the issues of cyber it is the
least expensive part of defense, and yet it impacts all of
the other domains -- air, land, sea, and space.

Admiral Aquilino: Thanks, Senator. As we have seen,
many of our competitors are operating at the level short of
war through the cyberspace domain that you identified. It
is critically important. In many cases it is an indicator
of follow-on events that we might see. And, if confirmed, I
think our focus needs to be on, number one, the strongest
defense possible to ensure that those competitors are unable
to take advantage of that space, and combined with that it
is important that we have those same conversations with our
allies and partners so that they are just as defended and we
do not provide an alternative path for anyone to enter in
our cyber domain.

Senator Rounds: Thank you. One last item that I just
wanted to bring up that I think, when we talk about fifth-
generation aircraft and the need for more of them, and
particularly right now we are talking about those that could
be used within the carrier-based fleet that we have got.
But we have also got the B-21 coming online and will
probably be operational well before the next-gen fighter
systems will be available. The B-21, which would be based
in safe bases, South Dakota and Texas, is the knock-down-the-door type of a system which basically will slow down our adversaries who think that they may very well be safe from a carrier-based operation because of their land-based defense systems that they have in place, specifically China.

Could you talk a little bit about the integrated need and capabilities that the B-21 would bring in the Indo-Pacific region?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. I just want to highlight before it was a specific Navy question that I answered, but that said it will obviously take the entire joint force to be able to compete. Again, as it applies to where might be the best place I would love to see the results of the Secretary's posture review, that global posture review, and if confirmed, to see what does that mean and how does it impact the Indo-Pacific.

Senator Rounds: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Rounds. Let me recognize, via Webex, Senator King.

Senator King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to follow up on Senator Rounds' questions, Admiral. I can guarantee you that at this very moment, hundreds, if not thousands of very smart software engineers and hackers are in China, attempting to figure out how to compromise our command and control systems, our IRS systems, our force
projection software. I cannot stress more to you the urgency of being prepared for this. All of our preparations, all of our money, all of our systems are useless if we cannot communicate with them or, on the other hand, if they are rendered inert by a cyberattack.

So I hope that you will see this as an extremely high priority. You should be having people trying to hack your own systems to determine how safe they really are.

Admiral Aquilino: Thanks, Senator. It truly is important, and the word "urgency" I use frequently as it applies to all aspects of the missions assigned, additionally in cyberspace. And we actually have cyber aggressor teams that execute the role that you just described, and I believe it is worthwhile to ensure we expand those tests, if you will, into all of our operations and exercises. Sir, and if confirmed, I will continue to do that.

Senator King: Thank you. One of the things that worries me are the continuing friction, if you will, in the South China Sea and the potential for an accident, for an accidental conflict. Do we have mil-to-mil communications established with the Chinese, a kind of red phone, where you and your counterpart in China can have direct communication if there is, for example, a Chinese fighter jet flies too close or actually clips a destroyer in the South China Sea.
on a Freedom of Navigation mission?

Admiral Aquilino: Thank you, Senator. I do not have a direct communication with my counterpart. I know Admiral Davidson has advocated for that ability at his level, and I know the chairman does have a connection that he can utilize. If confirmed, I would continue to advocate for that connection to ensure there is an ability to de-escalate if there were an event, and the ability to not let it go out of control. I think that communication mechanism could be effective if that connection was with someone who had decision-making authority.

Senator King: I appreciate your interest in pursuing that. I think it could be critically important.

Law of the Sea, you mentioned what the Chinese are doing in the South China Sea in terms of planes. The Russians are doing similar things in the Arctic. Do you believe it is in the national interest for this country to enter into the Law of the Sea treaty?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator, I do.

Senator King: And I have asked every flag officer that has appeared before this committee that question, just pretty much regularly for the last 8 years, and I have never gotten a negative answer. Why do you think it is important that we be part of this treaty structure?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, there are really two main
reasons. Number one, as the group gets together it would be
certainly beneficial if we had a seat at the table when
there were discussions occurring as it applied to potential
adjustments and the interpretations of those international
laws. The second reason, it puts us in an increased
position of credibility. We adhere to the UNCLOS treaty in
our operations, and it would make our position much stronger
if we were signators.

Senator King: I appreciate that, Admiral, and hope to
persuade my colleagues of those arguments, indeed.

I mentioned the urgency of the cyber threat. I think
another urgent concern is vulnerability to hypersonics. Do
you see that as an issue that we really need to be
accelerating our defensive, not only our hypersonic capacity
but our ability to defend against hypersonic attacks,
particularly since forward-deployed carrier strike groups,
for example, are part of the essence of our deterrence.

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator, absolutely. It is the
next step. It is capabilities that our competitors are
pursuing, and I see we need to pursue both offensive
capability in the form of hypersonics and defensive
capabilities.

Senator King: Thank you, Admiral. I appreciate your
answers and look forward to voting for your confirmation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator King. Senator Ernst, please.

Senator Ernst: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and Admiral, thank you very much for being here today and for your willingness to continue to serve our great country. To your wife, as well, Laura, welcome. It is good to have you here, Jessica, as well, and to your Fleet Master Chief. You always need a battle buddy when you come to Capitol Hill. So thank you all for what you do for the men and women that serve within your fleet, and to those that will be serving upon confirmation in the Indo-Pacific Command as well.

So we have talked a number of issues today, and my colleagues have highlighted a lot of issues. All of these are nesting together quite well. I am going to dive in a little bit more, just a bit on China. But last week we did discuss some of the major influencers in the region, of course China, but then we also see the Russian influence, we see the Iranian influence, and North Korea as well.

So what are your thoughts on the Iranian influence first, within INDOPACOM? We are seeing them work alongside North Korea in logistical areas such as munitions. Is this alarming to you, and what other threats or concerns might you have with the Iranians engaging in the INDOPACOM AOR?

Admiral Aquilino: Thanks, Senator. Certainly contributions in the form of energy support that exceed the
UN Security Council resolutions is concerning. Again, providing capability that we would be concerned about in the form of technology transfer, whether it be missile technologies, nuclear capabilities. All those would negatively impact the region and negatively impact all of the allies and partners.

Senator Ernst: So it is definitely something that we need to keep an eye on. Correct?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, ma'am.

Senator Ernst: Thank you, Admiral. And as well, we have talked about China and why it is important then that we have interoperability capabilities with our regional partners and our allies. Some of the things we have mentioned today, Senator Kaine brought up missile defense. Others have talked about humanitarian assistance. Are there other capabilities, whether it is hard infrastructure or munitions, things of that nature, or other soft capabilities that we can work on as well with our partners that would enhance our partnership in that region?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator, and again, the capabilities are across the spectrum. It is critical that we have allies and partners to support, whether it be logistics, whether it be access, whether it be combined interoperability in the form of operations. Every aspect of it is important. I do not think there is one piece that you
can leave out and be effective and be able to generate the
deterrence needed.

Senator Ernst: One of the soft capabilities that China
does tend to offer, or benefits that China offers to a
number of those countries in that region is training
capabilities. They offer that assistance to many of our
partners. Can you stress to us how important the IMET
program is?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. Again, it is one of
those additional areas beyond operations and exercises that
allow us to connect and get to that access, training, and
improvement of our allies and partners. General Rudd
supports all of the components currently, and in many cases
he is the lead effort as it applies to being able to get
access and get in and train our allies and partners. So it
is extremely important. We have got to continue IMET, and
if confirmed, I will continue to stress that.

Senator Ernst: Fantastic. And as part of those
training opportunities as well and other types of
capabilities operating in the gray zone are our special
operations forces. And can you describe what role you would
see our SOF playing in the INDOPACOM command area of
authority, and what role that they might have in pushing
back against China?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, the SOF team plays an
important role across all aspects in the entire spectrum. Currently, their leading role is in the information space, as a part of Joint Task Force Indo-Pacific, currently located in Singapore. So while they touch every aspect of the spectrum, they are leading a role in a couple of different places.

Senator Ernst: Thank you. My time is expiring so I will stop there, but Admiral, thanks once again for stepping up to this nomination, and I look forward to confirming you. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Ernst. Let me recognize, via Webex, Senator Warren.

Senator Warren: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And Admiral Aquilino, thank you for being here today. Congratulations on your nomination.

So the Indo-Pacific represents the most consequential and challenging region of the world for the United States and our national security, and as Commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command you will be responsible for overseeing U.S. forces in the region. One of your top priorities will be contending with China and its growing influence, both regionally and globally.

Earlier this month, Admiral Philip Davidson, the current Commander if INDOPACOM, testified that the greatest danger to the United States is the erosion of conventional
deterrence against China. He warned that without credible, conventional deterrence, China may be emboldened to take action and supplant U.S. interests in the region. Do you agree with Admiral Davidson that the erosion of conventional deterrence is the greatest danger to the United States in the region?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator.

Senator Warren: So Admiral Davidson also warned that China was on course to double their nuclear stockpile this decade, and he agreed with a claim by one of my colleagues that if China quadrupled their nuclear stockpile they could, quote, "have nuclear overmatch against the United States." Now I want to look into the numbers on this. Last year's report on China's military power shows that their stockpile of operational nuclear warheads is only in the low 200s, far fewer than the approximately 3,800 in the United States' active stockpile.

So, Admiral, are you aware of any evidence that suggests that China intends to quadruple its nuclear stockpile in this decade?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, I think what I would say is there are many opinions on what those numbers are. I think the numbers you quoted are accurate with regard to today. What I would say is we see China increasing at a rate that is faster than anyone previously believed, their nuclear
stockpile. So while I cannot directly, at this point, understand their intent or what their end target is, they are increasing. If you were to look at what they have done with their conventional force, I would see no reason why I would expect anything other than to have them continue to increase their nuclear capabilities and aspirations.

Senator Warren: So let me just ask that from maybe a different point of view. I understand what you are saying, and I appreciate it, but even if they did quadruple their stockpile, China would still have fewer warheads than the U.S. has currently deployed. Is that right?

Admiral Aquilino: If it were to quadruple today, that would be accurate. Yes, ma'am.

Senator Warren: Okay. So from your perspective, as the Commander of Pacific Fleet and the incoming INDOPACOM Commander, would you agree that credible, conventional deterrents are still the best way of protecting U.S. interests in the Indo-Pacific region and avoiding a conflict with China?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. That conventional deterrents to avoid crisis or conflict is certainly the main effort, as I would see it, if confirmed.

Senator Warren: Okay. Thank you, Admiral. I appreciate your comments on this. China presents the greatest geopolitical challenge to the United States since
the end of World War II, and it is critical that we face
this challenge with clear eyes. And distorting the threat
to justify building more nuclear weapons at home is not a
recipe for success here.

So I look forward to your confirmation and I look
forward to working with you to advance areas of shared
interest. Thank you very much. Thank you for being with us
today.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Warren. Let me
recognize Senator Tillis, please.

Senator Tillis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Admiral,
congratulations to you and to your family and your team for
your nomination. I would like to start just by asking a
general question. About a week ago, maybe a week and a half
ago we got an update from NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM on China's
engagement, primarily in Latin and South America. Can you
give me a quick rundown within your area, or your future
area of responsibility in terms of China's relationships,
say, today, as compared to 5 or 10 years ago, ostensibly
economic or non-military engagement, but we all know there
is a military dimension to almost everything that China
does. So just a quick rundown of the areas of greatest
concern.

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. I spoke to Admiral
Faller last week, after he testified. I think the main point that comes out is China is a global problem. When you talk about their areas of influence and what does it mean globally, there are economic efforts that are underway by China across the globe. There are military efforts underway, and, you know, it furthers their reach. It would allow access, logistic support in time of crisis. So all of those things are a bit concerning. And for allies and partners across the globe, they have to understand what that means.

Senator Tillis: Thank you. A number of my colleagues have covered the fifth-generation F-22, F-35, the importance of those programs. The one question I had, I think with General Berger, there is some thought in the future of the Marine Corps force design of reducing squadrons from 16 to 10 aircraft, I think. What is the rationale behind that, and what impact could that possibly have in your area of operation?

Admiral Aquilino: Thanks, Senator. I think General Berger, in his former position as the Commander of Marine Forces Pacific, he got a front-line view of the main concern for the next generation, if you will. And I appreciate his efforts to restructure, to take on adjusted mission sets, and to ensure that his forces are contributing to deterrence.
I would like to highlight that all of the service chiefs are on board with the same set of concerns. So I appreciate and admire the work done by CNO Gilday, by Chief C.Q. Brown, by General McConville, and by General Clarke.

Senator Tillis: And actually I may have time for two questions. The 360 missile defense system in Guam has been raised, as the top unfunded priority. Do we have our priorities in order? Do we just simply have the resources to do it? In your opinion, why is it that we have this unfunded priority, and what should we do about it?

Admiral Aquilino: Thanks, Senator. I think Admiral Davidson and I highlighted the right priority order as needed to foundationally begin to identify and show that credible deterrence that is needed inside, or west of the International Date Line. There are a variety of opinions that there may be a better system, that there is an integrated air missile defense problem vice just a ballistic missile defense problem. So I think those are the different competition voices.

What I believe is there is a need in the near term to defend against all of those threats, from a 360-degree standpoint, and if that answer is Aegis, I am absolutely supportive. If there is a better answer that can be delivered in the near term, I would be ready to listen to that, if confirmed. But that is how I see it.
Senator Tillis: One other question on the F-35 program. Several of our allies are participating in that program. We understand the military significance of it. But to what extent has that engagement been helpful, from a diplomatic perspective?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, it is always helpful when our allies and partners are operating with the same stuff we are. It absolutely makes us more interoperable. It opens up opportunities for logistic sites, supply cooperation, and other events like that, that just continue to expand our relationship and make us more effective in operations.

Senator Tillis: Thank you, Admiral. Mr. Chair, if I had more time I would ask the admiral if the Aqualung nickname was inspired by the breathing apparatus or the Jethro Tull album, but I will leave that for the record. Thank you.

Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Tillis. Let me now recognize Senator Peters.

Senator Peters: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral, thank you for your service. Good to see you here with us today.

Admiral, the Marine Corps has been implementing its Force Design 2030 plan to support operations as a lighter, much more maneuverable force, as you are well aware. For example, they have talked about divestment of tanks in favor
of joint light tactical vehicle equipped with some long-
range precision munitions. Have you been monitoring the
Marine Corps' progress, and if so, what are your thoughts
about this approach?

Admiral Aquilino: Thanks, Senator. Commandant Berger
is extremely thoughtful, as the former head of the Marine
Corps in the Pacific, he has seen first-hand. I think his
structure and approach is correct. It will really help to
generate deterrence that we continue to talk about today, in
the form of whether it be surface-to-air capability, anti-
ship capability, and the ability to expand the competitive
space from a land domain into a mostly maritime domain.

So his site picture is correct, and hopefully he can
keep that plan on track. It would be better, under the
sense of urgency needed to deliver sooner rather than later.

Senator Peters: Very good, Admiral. Thank you. When
Admiral Davidson appeared here 2 weeks ago, I questioned him
on a strategy focused heavily on conventional deterrence
would fare against China's three-pronged strategy of
unrestricted warfare, given that its efforts are undertaken
below the threshold of armed conflict. And I think this
also applies to our partnerships. The type and caliber of
security systems we are providing should certainly reflect
our mutual threats that we all have.

So my question is, to what extent do you believe our
security assistance should include cybersecurity assistance
or measures to enhance resiliency against information
warfare?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, it should absolutely
include it. First, a strong defense against the cyber
problems that exist. Without a doubt, resiliency -- and I
would go one step further, the potential for reconstitution.

Senator Peters: Admiral, on March 4th, Admiral
Davidson introduced his investment plan of needed
capabilities for INDOPACOM, and this plan includes over $2
billion for space-based radars. And as you know, the
Chinese are rapidly launching ISR satellites to better
monitor the INDOPACOM, and last week they launched another
trip of Yaogan-31 satellites. I think this is the third
launch since January 29th of this year.

It is clear that we must improve our capability and
capacity to monitor the region from space, and there are
certainly a number of innovative commercial companies out
there, such as Orbital Effects, of Ann Arbor, Michigan,
which is quickly launching radar satellites with the
necessary capabilities, and quite frankly, they are doing it
at a fraction of the cost of traditional government efforts
to address national security threats.

Admiral, do you support the use of these capabilities
to more quickly and cost-effectively address this challenge?
Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. You highlighted the extreme build-up in the space domain, and that is certainly concerning. Any ability to increase capability, capacity, resiliency in the space domain would be of benefit, and if confirmed, I would support that.

Senator Peters: Right. Admiral, the Department of Defense is currently developing a training program to enable servicemembers and civilian employees to better understand and better identify foreign malign influence campaigns and cyber exploitation, generally, as it is targeting members and their families. So my question to you, sir, is to what extent have you contended with these issues at the Pacific Fleet, and how will you inform your approach to INDOPACOM personnel related to this issue?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, my team reviews my profile in the cyber domain, and over the past 6 months they have removed over 250 false sites that are claiming to be me. I think that gets to the indication that this is a persistent threat, as was mentioned before, low cost, and we have to be on our game. We have to understand what it means and continue to defend against it.

Senator Peters: Thank you, Admiral. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Peters. Let me recognize Senator Scott, please.
Senator Scott: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Admiral, for your service. I had the opportunity to serve in the Navy and it was a great experience. They did not pay me much, though. Of course, I was 18 and I had no experience too. They shouldn't have.

Do you believe that it is clear that we have got to prevent Communist China from controlling Taiwan, that it would be a strategic necessity for the United States to make sure Taiwan remains not controlled by Communist China, and the loss of Taiwan would devastate our ability to counter the aggressive actions of Communist China?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. Again, the policy identifies that through the Taiwan Relations Act we support the defense of Taiwan. Three communiques and six assurances. It would negatively impact our standing in the region if that were to happen, and it would challenge the rest of our allies and partners in the U.S., negatively impacting our ability to operate freely in that area.

Senator Scott: When you look at what Communist China has done with Hong Kong, why haven't they been even more aggressive with Taiwan, do you think?

Admiral Aquilino: I do not know how to answer that one, Senator, judging from intent. I think what I would articulate is we have seen aggressive actions earlier than we anticipated, whether it be on the Indian border or
whether it be in Hong Kong or whether it be against the
Uyghurs. We have seen things that I do not think we
expected, and that is why I continue to talk about a sense
of urgency. We ought to be prepared today.

Senator Scott: I introduced the Taiwan Invasion
Prevention Act to end the U.S. strategic ambiguity about
Taiwan. I believe it is time for the U.S. to say clearly
that we will not, absolutely not allow Communist China to
invade and subdue Taiwan, and that both Taiwan and the
United States need to invest in the resources, weapons,
training, and strategic dialogue to ensure that Xi
understands that he has nothing to gain from using force
against Taiwan.

It is not calling for their independence, only that we
need to meet the threat that Xi has announced through his
aggressive actions. What are your thoughts on this?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, the current policies have
been able to keep the status quo in place now for a number
of years. I would be open to, and hope to be, if confirmed,
included in any conversations should we decide to change or
adjust that policy. We would have to ensure we understand
the risk and be extremely thoughtful if we were to go down
that path.

Senator Scott: What else do you think we need to do to
make sure that Xi doesn't decide to invade Taiwan? What
should we be doing that we are not doing right now?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, I think an increase in our forward deterrent posture, as identified by Admiral Davidson in the Pacific Deterrence Initiative is a great first start. But capable, lethal forces west of the Date Line, to be able to respond on extremely short notice, combined with synchronization with our allies and partners to ensure that all understand that that is not within the best interests of anyone in the theater.

Senator Scott: Do you think we have the right resources so Taiwan will not get overwhelmed by the coercive acts of Communist China?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, I am really encouraged by the actions of Taiwan in accordance with the Taiwan Defense Act with regard to the capabilities that they are purchasing, with regard to the indigenous capabilities that they are pursuing, all for the defense of where they live, and that has to continue.

Senator Scott: Do you think Japan is doing enough to get prepared for the aggressive actions that Communist China clearly is threatening for the region, to the region?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. Japan is the cornerstone of the alliance in the region. I think they have watched all of the events you and I talked about a few minutes ago, and they understand what does that translate as
it applies to them. If you were to think of the Senkaku Islands, I believe that they are concerned. I am extremely happy with the interoperability, coordination, and relationship we have with the Japanese. I think it is a strong, as I said, cornerstone to the foundation in executing deterrence in the region.

Senator Scott: Thanks for your service. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Scott. Senator Manchin, please.

Senator Manchin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Admiral, and first of all, thank you for your service, and I want to thank your family for supporting your service. I know it is a family event and an affair.

Sir, one of Admiral Davidson's top priorities is a mission partner environment that would serve as a common platform for our partners in the Pacific to work collaboratively in a cyber domain. Do you share the urgency of promoting greater interoperability of the cyber operations with our allies and partners in the Pacific?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, absolutely. The mission partner environment generates synchronization, the ability to command and control beyond just the cyber domain. So think ISR, think coordination operations of planning, all the way to execution. It is absolutely critical.
Senator Manchin: Have you had to coordinate with Cyber Command in your past? Have you worked with them in the past?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, at the Pac Fleet level I have a support organization in cyber, but I do not personally coordinate directly with Cyber Command. That is Admiral Davidson's role. If confirmed, I certainly would.

Senator Manchin: Our current major ballistic missile defense assets in the INDOPACOM include Thaad in South Korean and Guam, Aegis systems in service with U.S. naval assets in the Pacific and the Japanese navy, and Patriot missile capability in South Korea and Japan. With Japan's uncertainty on Aegis Ashore construction, we are at an even greater disadvantage to sustaining a credible military deterrence against our competitors.

So where do you assess the greater vulnerability exists when it comes to missile defense in the Pacific, and how do you plan to fix these?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, the missile defense concern is throughout the theater.

Senator Manchin: Sure. I think mostly with Japan pulling back because of public support, pulling out of the Aegis. Where do you see -- that troubled me, being the great ally that they have been, all of a sudden public opinion, and they pull out of the defense that I think is
Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. Again, I think what they have done is they decided to relook at whether Aegis Ashore is the right answer. They certainly are partnered with us in the form of their Aegis destroyers. I think we have a shared responsibility and requirement to protect forces in Japan, and I look forward, if confirmed, to work with the Japanese to try to get to the right answer for them.

Senator Manchin: Are you aware of any assistance being offered by INDOPACOM to provide community engagement in Japan to help relieve or ease the public concerns, at this point in time? If not, it might be a good position for you to take on that one.

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. I am unaware in my current seat. If confirmed, I would look to work with the Missile Defense Agency to ensure -- and I would be surprised if Admiral Davidson was not having those conversations with his counterparts.

Senator Manchin: Okay. And speaking of Admiral Davidson, back in 2018, during his confirmation hearing, China was already capable of controlling the South China Sea and any scenario short of war with the U.S. Here we are 3 years later, and we have heard repeated testimony that China has increased its naval forces, its coast guard and other
paramilitary forces.

So what is stopping them right now from exercising their capability whenever they feel like it, of controlling the South China Sea?

Admiral Aquilino: The U.S. joint forces in the region, Senator, the partner nations?

Senator Manchin: We are strong there. We have not done anything to deter it. They have taken these little outcrops and made them into major military bases.

Admiral Aquilino: Yeah, I would somewhat disagree with that we have not taken any action. I think if you looked at the events we have executed over the past couple of years -- and I will speak from my role as the Pacific Fleet Commander, multiple dual-carrier strike group operations in the South China Sea, the most FONs and Taiwan Strait transits that have been executed in recent years, multiple bilateral and multilateral operations with our partners and allies, all in the South China Sea I think would highlight that we can and will continue to operate there.

Senator Manchin: I did not mean that in a detrimental way. I meant that in saying that they have taken small outcrops and continually enlarge those into a military confine, if you will. We, or no one else, seem to be able to stop that or prevent that or took any actions before they got to the size they are now and to the operability they
Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. We certainly have not changed their desire nor intent nor ability to execute the largest military build-up we have seen in a while.

Senator Manchin: So is it safe to say that basically unless we are going to have a major presence, as you just outlined, in the South China Sea, then they will have total control of that?

Admiral Aquilino: I think that credible forward presence, again, not just the United States but with allies and partners, is the best deterrent option to ensure that we can keep that space free and open.

Senator Manchin: Thank you, sir, and I look forward to your confirmation and look forward to voting for you.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Manchin. Now let me recognize, via Webex, Senator Blackburn.

Senator Blackburn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you so much for allowing [audio malfunction] for being generous with your time. We appreciate that and appreciate your service to our country.

I want to talk with you just a little bit about China and our Chinese counterparts. You know that some deterrence and the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, these are things that are important to me, and our diplomats had a contentious encounter last week in Alaska. Beijing's Foreign Affairs
Chief, Director Yang, this was his statement: "The U.S. does not have the qualification to say that it wants to speak to China from a position of strength." And if Congress fully funds the Pacific Deterrence Initiative at the levels proposed in Admiral Davidson's assessment, and listening to you this morning it sounds as if you are in complete agreement with that, talk to us about how we communicate that we believe we hold that position of strength in communicating with Beijing.

Admiral Aquilino: Thank you, Senator. I think what you described is what competition looks like in the future. Actions that we would take to ensure credible deterrence, the desire to not have conflict by the actions and operations that we execute and understanding that there are things that we will do that our competitor will not find very good for them. So I think we have to be ready and have to understand what does that competition space look like and continue to execute those things that will allow us to keep the status quo.

Senator Blackburn: Well, and I think probably, too, that you would agree that keeping these budgetary top lines that are going to give you what you need should be a priority as we look at our INDO PACOM initiatives.

Let me ask you this. Okay, when you look at PDI, combined command, control networks, and the mission partner
environment, in relation to interoperability and the needs of our regional security partners, and we look at this through the lens of cyber, through the lens of technology, tell me what concerns you about China's aggressiveness in this great power competition when it comes to technology, to hardware, to setting standards, to infrastructure, to their cyber capabilities.

Admiral Aquilino: Thanks, Senator. So the key with the mission partner environment is that it absolutely must be cyber secure. We would not benefit from allowing the PLA to be able to infiltrate that network. So all the benefits that it provides, for interoperability, for command and control, for resilience and reassurance, the concern would be the cybersecurity of that environment, and it would have to be top on the list of priorities as it were developed.

Senator Blackburn: Well, in that regard what about the vulnerabilities that are associated with cloud computing and integrated systems?

Admiral Aquilino: Thanks, Senator. So those technological advances, I think while they identify vulnerabilities also have opportunities. So as we shift and take advantage of those things, again, we have to make sure that they are cybersecurity and unable to be infiltrated.

Senator Blackburn: Thank you. Just a quick yes or no from you. Should we be increasing our bilateral
participation in exercises with Taiwan?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, we should continue to execute those things that we do with Taiwan, and should there be a policy shift, again, if confirmed, I hope to be in those conversations, we do exercise with Taiwan, we have visits with Taiwan, we have consultations. All of those are contributing to Taiwan's defense.

Senator Blackburn: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator. Let me now recognize Senator Duckworth via Webex.

Senator Duckworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral Aquilino, I appreciate our call last week and I am glad we were able to discuss some of the biggest challenges that you face if you are confirmed, including improving our logistics capabilities and capacity in the INDOPACOM region.

In addition to agreeing that our logistics enterprise is absolutely foundational for having a combat-credible deterrent, I feel that we were very much on the same page about the need to strengthen our partners with the various nations in the region. You and I have both heard our regional partners say that they want a greater U.S. presence in the Indo-Pacific so that they have alternatives to the Communist PRC when it comes to trading and security partners. But the tragic murders of eight people in Atlanta
last week, six of them of East Asian descent, highlighted a
disturbing trend of an increasing violence and hate towards
Asians and Asian Americans in this country, particularly
those of East Asian descent.

Regardless of the stated motive for last week's
shooting, there is no arguing that cities across the country
are reporting a drastic increase in violent crimes and
discrimination targeting members of the AAPI community. It
is also not hard to see a correlation between the stark rise
an anti-Asian bigotry and our former commander in chief,
Donald Trump, blatantly using hateful and racist language,
such as calling the coronavirus the "Kung Flu" or the
"Chinese virus," long after such terminology has been deemed
inappropriate and harmful.

Shockingly, Trump spread such bigotry despite the FBI
producing a report, as early as March 2020, that included a
clear and chilling assessment. And I quote, "Hate crime
incidents against Asian Americans likely will surge across
the United States due to the spread of coronavirus disease,
endangering Asian American communities." And just last
week, Gallup released a poll that found, over the past year,
the percentage of Americans who consider China to be the
United States' greatest enemy today rose from 22 percent in
February 2020 and 45 percent when measured last month.

Let me be clear. There is a difference between
expressing opposition to the Communist Chinese government's aggressive economic and military practices, which I absolutely support opposing them, and ignorantly blaming Asian people, especially those of East Asian descent, for the coronavirus pandemic. Blaming the AAPI community for a public health crisis is racist and wrong, and I am increasingly concerned that it will hurt our relationship with our partners in the Indo-Pacific region.

Admiral Aquilino, when American leaders make racist statements about Asians, and American citizens participated in anti-Asian hate, how does it harm the United States' credibility and reputation in the Indo-Pacific region? And please make sure to address how such bigotry and racist violence undermines our relationships with our allies and partners who may already be facing challenges in defending our presence in their respective nation states as views and attitudes towards the U.S. evolve with the younger generation.

Admiral Aquilino: Thank you, Senator. To your first point, and you and I have had this conversation, professionals talk logistics, so all of our efforts in the region are underpinned, and the relationships with our partners and allies will certainly be required to help us set up this enabling network and support our logistics issues. So thanks for that.
To your second point, what I owe, and what we all owe our incredibly brave servicemembers is a safe, comfortable place where they can work and execute the oath that they have taken. So there is no place in our ranks for any type of discrimination. Whether it be against Asians, whether it be race, creed, color, you name it, it is just completely unacceptable, it degrades from our readiness, and, if confirmed, I can tell you it will not be tolerated.

Senator Duckworth: So how does the rise in hate crimes against Asian Americans and hateful rhetoric at the top ranks of government, and the absolute lack of representation at the very top ranks of the Biden administration of AAPIs in secretarial positions or higher levels, affect our relationships in the INDOPACOM region? I mean, you are going to be going in there trying to make alliances with folks in the INDOPACOM region, and yet we have Asians being shot down, and we have even Members of Congress targeting Asian Americans with hate rhetoric. How does that affect your job, trying to develop relationships in the region?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, our relations in the region are critical. I have and will continue to say that. As a diverse military, we continue to ensure that our values are understood. I believe our allies and partners understand that when they talk with us that we speak from a position of shared values. And as I said, if confirmed, I will do
everything possible to ensure none of that discrimination is a part of how the Indo-Pacific operates.

Senator Duckworth: Thank you. I have every confidence in your commitment to diversity, Admiral, and you have shown that in your service and you have shown that in your conversations with me, and I thank you for continuing to be a leader, both in the military but also when it comes to diversity in that military that we both love. Thank you.

I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Duckworth. Senator Hawley, please.

Senator Hawley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral, good to see you. I appreciated our conversations, and congratulations on your nomination.

I want to start by revisiting something that you and I talked about at some length when we visited, which is the situation in Taiwan. Both Deputy Secretary Hicks and Admiral Davidson have testified that the U.S. should maintain the ability to defeat a fait accompli scenario in Taiwan. Do you agree with that?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator.

Senator Hawley: Do you think the Department should also prioritize preparations for a Taiwan scenario so that we will be able to deter China from attacking Taiwan, should they attempt to do so?
Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. That credible deterrence forward is absolutely required with the correct forces, the right magnitude of forces, and the readiness of those forces.

Senator Hawley: Very good. The Deputy Secretary and Admiral Davidson have also testified that a strategy of denial is essential for deterring Chinese aggression. Secretary Austin said the same thing to me in response to a question that I had for him for the record. Do you agree with that, that a strategy of denial is essential for deterring China?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator.

Senator Hawley: Let me ask you about a question that you were posed earlier by one of my colleagues. You were asked about the importance of conventional deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. But I just want to get clear on your views here. The necessary of conventional deterrence, which I think we agree on, does not mean that nuclear deterrence has any less of a role, doesn't it? I mean, wouldn't you agree that our nuclear deterrent provides a critical backstop to our conventional deterrent, and that both are necessary to be able to effectively deter China?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator, absolutely. If I gave that impression then I apologize.

Senator Hawley: You also said earlier today that the
threat of a Chinese invasion in Taiwan is much closer to us than most think. You and I talked about this at some length. Is it fair to say that this threat, what you said earlier, "much closer to us than most think," is it fair to say that this threat could materialize well before 2035, or some of those very later dates that folks have put out there?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator, I believe it could.

Senator Hawley: And is it fair to say that we need to act now if we are going to prevent this threat from materializing in the future?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator, absolutely. A strong posture forward, linked with our allies and partners I believe is the leading path for prevention.

Senator Hawley: Very good. Reports have indicated that Taiwan's upcoming Quadrennial Defense Review is going to emphasize the need for Taiwan to adopt an asymmetrical defense posture. This, again, is something you and I visited about. Can you just give us a sense, why is it so important for Taiwan to invest in asymmetrical capabilities, especially those that are low cost, high impact?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, as we discussed a bit, the resources they have require them to be spent in the correct manner to have the most effectiveness against the possible threat. I am encouraged by some of those capabilities that
they have purchased, and I am encouraged by the capabilities 
that they are investing in, in an indigenous fashion, for 
their defense. The example I would give you is the harpoon 
system. I thought it was very thoughtful and the right 
capability, for one example.

Senator Hawley: What can the United States do to help 
encourage Taiwan to adopt a more asymmetric defense posture 
as quickly as possible?

Admiral Aquilino: I think it is a part of the Taiwan 
Relation Act. Offering the right capabilities with the 
right support is the best way to ensure that they certainly 
understand all of their options, they get to make their own 
choices, but by providing credible, realistic options with 
recommendations would be helpful.

Senator Hawley: Let me ask you about something else we 
discussed on the phone. The Guam Defense Act has been 
INDOPACOM's top unfunded priority for the last 3 years. 
Just generally speaking, give us a sense of why Guam is so 
important, from a military operational standpoint.

Admiral Aquilino: It is certainly in a strategic 
location, west of the International Date Line, distant 
enough to be able to protect our forces, muster our forces, 
and as you know, there are over 20,000 servicemembers on 
Guam. So combined with the 170,000 American citizens, we 
certainly are responsible to protect those people. But the
strategic location is critical to be able to provide forces quickly in the area we need them.

Senator Hawley: Let me just ask you, finally, the Quad appears to be forming the basis for a regional coalition to stand up to Chinese aggression. How do you see the Quad contributing to deterrence in the Indo-Pacific, now and in the future?

Admiral Aquilino: I think it is extremely important when you look at India as the world's largest democracy, combined with three other nations of shared values and beliefs. When an organization of that magnitude comes together it would generate concern for anyone with an opposite opinion.

Senator Hawley: Very good. Thank you, Admiral. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Hawley. Senator Sullivan, please.


Senator Rosen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it. And I thank you, Ranking Member. And I want to thank you, Admiral, for your service, for your willingness to continue to serve and step up and take on this extremely important role in our national defense. I really appreciate that.
And I would like to talk a little bit about maintaining our technological edge, because at the heart of China's military modernization efforts of course there is Beijing's investment in next-generation military capabilities. I know we have talked about that earlier in the hearing, when I was in the room. And we want to close that technological gap. China is making advances in critical areas like artificial intelligence, cyber, robotics, hypersonics, and they are, at the same time, rapidly procuring commercial technologies that can be used for military purposes.

So do you believe that China has achieved technological parity with the U.S. in its operational systems, and are there any areas that you are concerned about that they have outpaced us?

Admiral Aquilino: Thanks, Senator. I do not believe they have achieved parity. I think they have a desire in the technological world to increase and ultimately to gain an overmatch. I think it is extremely important that we do not let that happen.

So one of our competitive advantages is our ability to do S&T research and keep that technological edge, and we have to continue to do that.

Senator Rosen: And so if you are confirmed, how would you incorporate this increasingly technological nature of warfare into our domains of warfare, into joint coalition
exercises, like we do, of course, many of them in the Nevada
and, of course, around the world.

Admiral Aquilino: Thanks, Senator. So if confirmed I
think there is a lot of opportunity to be able to do that,
as you highlighted, the efforts that are executed at both
the Nellis ranges and the Fallon ranges are places where we
certainly experiment and try to work to get to those
improved technological advantages. I think that it is
applicable across the entire region to ensure we can develop
tests and ultimately implement those advanced capabilities.

Senator Rosen: Well, I could not agree with you more.
I am proud of all the training that we do in Nevada. But I
know that this training requires improved skill sets --
retraining, improving training, and, of course, new training
for young men and women who are joining our military.

And so how are you planning to recruit and retain,
build up that workforce that we are going to need within
INDOPACOM, particularly in these areas of technology?

Admiral Aquilino: Thanks, Senator. So the services
have that responsibility as a part of their Title 10
taskings. If I were confirmed I would highlight to the
service chiefs certainly what is needed in an increased
technological footprint, and if you look from a Navy
perspective, currently the CNO does a great job at
recruiting and retaining the best. It is getting extremely
competitive across the workforce to recruit and retain, and all of the services are doing a really good job at maintaining that capability and advancement.

Senator Rosen: I am pleased to hear that. I have instituted a bill that was in the NDAA last year, about adding a cyber track to our Junior ROTC program, and hopefully that will build up our force.

But I would like to, in the last remaining minute or so, talk a little bit about the state partnership program. Of course, this initiative links our states' National Guards with the armed forces. We cooperate, it is a mutually beneficial relationship, and I know that INDOPACOM maintains ten of these SPP relationships. So in Nevada, our Nevada National Guard, we have existing partnerships with Fiji and Tonga to support INDOPACOM's mission in the South Pacific.

Can you talk about how you are going to work with National Guards and these partnerships, of course, to be sure that they know what you are planning, going forward, so they can prepare and plan to complete their mission sets by improving the skill sets of our National Guard as well?

Admiral Aquilino: Thanks, Senator. It is extremely important. You know, I have had a chance to work with Ken Hara, the head of National Guard in Hawaii, and it continues to pay dividends. As it applies to foreign partners, it is just as helpful, and if confirmed, I would continue to
execute those ten partner linkups and look for additional opportunities, because I think there are some there.

Senator Rosen: Thank you very much. I yield back.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator. Now let me recognize Senator Sullivan, please.

Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral, good to see you again. I appreciated the opportunity to have another discussion, and I look forward to more discussion going forward. Congratulations on your nomination.

I want to just talk a little bit about Alaska and the Pacific. Have you been to the great state of Alaska?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, I have not yet been, but I will come and visit Alaska at first opportunity.

Senator Sullivan: Good. We need to get on that, and I am going to talk a little bit of the reason why.

I was just home. I just got back. You know, there was a lot of fireworks with this U.S.-China meeting in Anchorage. I had the opportunity to meet with Secretary Blinked, National Security Advisor Sullivan, and Kurt Campbell, who is also doing a really good at the NSC, right after the meeting. I was glad to see our Alaska-based military on Thursday. When the Chinese were approaching we were doing some exercises with F-22 Raptors there, right around the hotel, give the Chinese delegation a little view
of what is in Alaska.

As you know, we are going to have over 100 fifth-generation fighters, F-22s, F-35s, by the end of this year, and then on Friday, when the Chinese are still in Alaska, the Air Force announced four new tankers, KC-135s, going to Alaska.

The previous Secretary of Defense called this combination tankers, 100 fifth-gen fighters, giving our country extreme strategic reach. These fighters could be in the Taiwan Strait, if they are supersonic, within 5 hours.

These forces are actually OPCOM to PACOM, as you know, in Alaska. What do you see as the role of these combat-credible forces from Alaska play within the Indo-Pacific, given that you will be in command of them?

Admiral Aquilino: Thanks, Senator. I have to correct a previous statement. I said I would visit Alaska. I have to say, if confirmed I would visit Alaska at first opportunity, so Senator Reed, I apologize.

The forces in Alaska are critical for both the defense of the homeland, Senator, as you know. They support the different ACL levels in the event of either Russian bomber flights and would be critically needed as a surge force in time of either crisis or conflict, as you clearly identify.

Senator Inhofe identified the capabilities needed in fifth-generation to be able to enter that contested space,
to fight and win. So I agree with all those comments that you made.

Senator Sullivan: Let me, real quick -- and sorry to interrupt, but I have got a couple more questions. There is oftentimes, and you have mentioned it already, this kind of delineation west of the International Date Line as the delineation for PACOM. But as you know, Admiral, the further north you get, the International Date Line in some ways does not matter, just so I am kind of aware of your geography, your recognition of geography. We have a lot of forces in Alaska, a lot of forces in Hawaii, a lot of forces in Australia. Which of these are closer to Korea and Japan -- our forces in Hawaii or our forces in Alaska?

Admiral Aquilino: Well certainly Alaska would be closer to Korea and Japan.

Senator Sullivan: That is correct. Yeah. And how about Australia versus Alaska, closer to Korea and Japan?

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. Alaska is closer.

Senator Sullivan: Yeah. A lot of people do not know that, believe it or not. So it is not just International Date Line, it is how north you are and how close you are. So keep that in mind. You are going to be in charge of these, and you are going to get confirmed, and I am going to strongly support it.

Your recommendations are going to be important. This,
I believe, is going to certainly be viewed now, going forward, as the most important combatant command that we have anywhere around the world.

In 2015, President Obama and President Xi Jinping stood in the Rose Garden, and President Xi Jinping promised the President of the United States and the American people not to militarize the South China Sea. Did President Xi Jinping keep that promise?

Admiral Aquilino: No, Senator, he did not.


Promise fatigue -- we are sick of it.

It was widely reported, and this committee followed it closely, that because of this we said let's do Freedom of Navigation Operations. As a matter of fact, your predecessor said we need to do it. John Kerry, then the Secretary of State, said, "No, we have a good climate deal in Paris, with the Chinese no-FONOPS." Was that a good idea to exchange FONOPS for a vague promise on the Paris climate accords?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, just so you know, I am unaware of that agreement.

Senator Sullivan: Assume that happened, because it did. Was that a good idea, from Secretary Kerry?
Admiral Aquilino: What I would say is we have continued FON operations.

Senator Sullivan: No, no, no. We did not then. Trust me. This committee was pressing for it. We would not do them. Was that a good idea -- vague promises and the Paris climate accords from John Kerry and the Chinese for no FONOPS in the South China Sea for at least 2 years?

Admiral Aquilino: Well, Senator, I think FONOPS are important. They identify our link to the need for international order through normal rules and standards.

Senator Sullivan: Was that a good idea? Assume that happened. Assume that could happen one more time. Let's say John Kerry has got another role, and says, "I have got a good commitment from the Chinese. They just want us to not do FONOPS through the Taiwan Strait." Would that be a good idea?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, I think FONOPS have served us well over the past 3 years since I have been at the Pacific Fleet.

Senator Sullivan: So you would not agree with that idea if Kerry put it forward again.

Admiral Aquilino: I think we --

Senator Sullivan: You are going to be asked.

Admiral Aquilino: -- I think we should continue FONOPS, Senator.
Senator Sullivan: In the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait.

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, sir.

Senator Sullivan: Regardless of commitments from China on vague climate change commitments that they might get from John Kerry.

Admiral Aquilino: I think that we should continue those operations to assure our allies and partners and ensure we can operate anywhere international law allows.

Senator Sullivan: Good. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Sullivan. Senator Tuberville, please.

Senator Tuberville: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Best for last. Put a football coach last.

I have been impressed. I have been in all these meetings for the last 2 months and I am impressed. Thank you for your service and your family being here. They are very important. And what a job you have got in front of you, just sitting and listening to all the things going on in our world. Huge job.

You know, I have heard all the questions about Taiwan and China and all the things that go on. You forgot one, and we know about it, and we are going to be trusting you for that. It is important that we fight through the climate
change and the diversity and all the things going on. I believe in that. You know, I was a football coach. I mean, you have to plug all that in.

But we need to build a team. You need to build a team, because we are getting ready to go in waters unknown over the next few years, with the money that the CCP is putting in, and the things that we are going to have to prepare for.

One thing I want to know, and I am going to vote for you. I believe, you know, you are ready to go, to turn it over to you and protect our world, not just our country. I just want to know, are you going to be able to stand up and fight, you know, this administration for more money? We do not need to be cutting. We need to be adding. And are you willing to say to us today that you are willing to fight, you know, for what you believe in, in terms of adding on to Guam, for instance.

You know, we have not added anything, hardly, in the last 10 years. We need to recapitalize. Will you promise that you will fight for that money that we need for our military?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, thanks. So if confirmed I will provide my best military advice and recommendations to request those things that are needed, to do the mission that I would have been assigned. And if that is the case, I will give it absolute straight, with conviction, on what I
believe is the right way forward.

Senator Tuberville: Well, to me our freedom and our liberty and our families and our kids and grandkids depend on it, that we make sure that we defend not just this country but our allies and the world, because these people over there that we are getting ready to deal with, that you know, that you have seen, you know, they do not play fair. They steal everything that we have got. You know, we develop it and they steal it, and it does not cost them near as much.

Do you think that is fair? We just saw what we went through with the pandemic. You know, we shipped everything over to China. They make everything that we do. And now we are scrambling to try to figure out how to handle the next pandemic. Hopefully it does not come along. Are we the same way in the military? Have you seen that? Do we have the capabilities to build what we need in this country right now?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, I think we do. I think what we have learned over the past 10 years is we do have to protect those advantages, technological trade secrets, and advantages that we have. So we should be aware that competitors will intend to try to take it, and we have to be able to secure it and defend it.

Senator Tuberville: You know, as Marines are operating
in smaller units in the Pacific, how do you plan to float medical support? You know, the Mercy and the Comfort, they are large, you know, and they are slow to deploy. Would a smaller, Ford-based hospital ship capable of quicker and faster engagement, do you think that would be better served for what you all do in the Pacific?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, we have done a lot over the last 3 years on generating a concept of operations, how to ensure we can provide medical support to our forces in time of crisis and conflict. And it looks a lot different when you look at an area that covers half the globe and most of it has water on it.

We are looking at all options to be able to quickly pick up, care for, and return our forces, joint forces, that may have been wounded. One of those things that is being looked at is a different form of hospital ship than we are used to, and if confirmed, will continue to look at those other options and what might be the best way.

Senator Tuberville: Yeah, I think it is important, because we are in a different part of the world, and we look at -- of course, I am from Alabama, and we have Huntsville. We build all the missiles and the rockets and have 800 defense contractors. We build ships and boats down in Mobile, that hopefully you have seen some. I think the LCS or whatever, made out of aluminum, a little different.
But, you know, I am a common-sense guy, and I just want us prepared, you know. And I see you are going to be hit from all different directions and I just hope when you are confirmed that you are ready, you are willing. I just hope you are able to get what you need to protect this country and protect our kids and our grandkids from future attacks, because they are coming, and you are going to be the first line of defense.

So again, thank you for your service and thank you for everything that you have done, and the things that you are going to do for us in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Tuberville.

Senator Sullivan would like to ask one question.

Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It might be a series of one questions. No, I am just kidding. It is going to go back to the PDI. Admiral, I am sure you saw that when Admiral Davidson was here, just 2 weeks ago, he talked about the full funding, $4.6 billion of the PDI was something that would be critical in halting the erosion of our nation's conventional deterrence in the INDOPACOM region. He actually said, quote, "PDI is the foundational approach to advancing capabilities and capacity while strengthening our allies and partnership for an integrated joint force west of the International Date Line." I already
talked about how the International Date Line is in some ways an artificial construct that does not really fully reflect the force posture, particularly as you go north.

But the question is, given that he has been public about it, given that you have been public about it, given that this committee actually passed, in a very strong bipartisan way, the initiative of the PDI last year, in the NDAA, what message does it send to China if we have a robust, top-line defense budget that fully funds the PDI as you and Admiral Davidson have requested? And alternatively, what message does a declining defense budget and not funding the PDI send to China?

Admiral Aquilino: Thanks, Senator. I do believe it sends a strong message that the entirety of government and the United States is focused on the challenge that we have identified as it applies to the Western Pacific. I do agree that the initial funding last year -- and I thank the committee for all of their work, $2.2 billion to start. I think "foundational" is the right word. This is not a one-trick pony. It is going to take some sustainment to ensure we can generate that credible deterrence and keep it going.

Senator Sullivan: And just again I ask two questions. Alternatively, if that is not funded, that $4.6 billion, which is what the Admiral has requested, and you, I believe, support, and this committee supports, by the way, in a
bipartisan way, what kind of message would that send if we do not do it, we, the Federal Government, we, the Biden administration, to be frank, if we do not do it, despite the fact that the PACOM commander has said we need to do it? What kind of message would that send?

Admiral Aquilino: I think it is the wrong signal, Senator, a lack of commitment and a lack of ability to follow through on what we believe is needed.

Senator Sullivan: Great. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Sullivan. Admiral, thank you for your devoted service to the nation and the Navy, and the profound support of your family and your colleagues from the fleet. Please convey to all of the men and women of your command our deepest and profound appreciation for their work. We look forward to moving forward with this nomination.

With that, the hearing is adjourned, and I will remind my colleagues that a vote is pending right now. Thank you very much, Admiral.

Admiral Aquilino: Thank you, Senator.

[Whereupon, at 11:59 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]