

Stenographic Transcript
Before the

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.

ALDERSON COURT REPORTING
1111 14TH STREET NW
SUITE 1050
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005
(202) 289-2260
www.aldersonreporting.com

1 TO CONSIDER THE NOMINATION OF ADMIRAL JOHN C. AQUILINO, USN,
2 FOR REAPPOINTMENT TO THE GRADE OF ADMIRAL AND TO BE
3 COMMANDER, UNITED STATES INDO-PACIFIC COMMAND
4

5 Tuesday, March 23, 2021
6

7 U.S. Senate

8 Committee on Armed Services

9 Washington, D.C.
10

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

14 Committee Members Present: Senators Reed [presiding],
15 Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Hirono, Kaine, King,
16 Warren, Peters, Manchin, Duckworth, Rosen, Kelly, Inhofe,
17 Wicker, Fischer, Cotton, Rounds, Ernst, Tillis, Sullivan,
18 Cramer, Scott, Blackburn, Hawley, and Tuberville.
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

1 OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JACK REED, U.S. SENATOR FROM
2 RHODE ISLAND

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

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

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

22 Secretary Austin has appropriately labeled China as the
23 "pacing threat" for the U.S. military. I agree with experts
24 who have stated that China is a long-term challenge that
25 must be "managed" rather than "solved." Part of managing

1 our strategic competition with China and ensuring a free and
2 open Indo-Pacific is the need to maintain a strong presence
3 in the region and a credible conventional deterrent to
4 military aggression.

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

18 China and the U.S. have a shared goal of avoiding
19 unnecessary and costly armed conflict. Last week's U.S.-
20 China diplomatic meeting in Alaska was not without its
21 challenges, but provided an important opportunity for us to
22 engage China, express our concern with China's conduct in
23 the region and around the world, and reiterate our
24 commitment to the region. We should look to build upon last
25 week's meeting by establishing more robust means of

1 military-to-military communication, particularly to avoid
2 miscalculation in a crisis. We should also seek greater
3 cooperation with China when it is in our interest, including
4 in areas like climate change, the proliferation of weapons
5 of mass destruction, and counterterrorism.

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

19 Perhaps our most immediate security challenge in the
20 region is North Korea. We must approach this challenge
21 clear-eyed and in cooperation with our regional allies and
22 partners, most notably Japan and South Korea, who are most
23 directly threatened by Kim Jong Un's belligerent behavior.
24 While we maintain significant sanctions pressure on North
25 Korea, we must also pursue diplomacy with the goal of

1 achieving a formal moratorium on nuclear and missile testing
2 in the near-term. Admiral Aquilino, I would appreciate your
3 views on the regional threat posed by North Korea and the
4 prospects for greater trilateral cooperation between the
5 United States, Japan, and South Korea on missile defense and
6 other issues.

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

10 And now let me recognize the Ranking Member, Senator
11 Inhofe.

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1 STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES INHOFE, U.S. SENATOR FROM
2 OKLAHOMA

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

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

20 The top line of the defense budget and the amount of
21 funding for the Pacific Deterrence Initiative will be the
22 Biden administration's first and most important message to
23 China. What we do and do not do to deter China in the
24 military domain will override and determine the success or
25 failure of diplomatic, economic, and information efforts as

1 well. Simply put, if you fail to invest in defense, and as
2 a result fail to deter China's use of military force in the
3 Indo-Pacific, nothing you do in those areas will really
4 matter. Admiral Aquilino, if confirmed as commander of
5 INDOPACOM you would be on the front lines of the military
6 competition with China. There must never come a day when
7 the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party decide today is
8 the day they can achieve their goal by using military force.

9 At the beginning of March, General McMaster told us
10 that since the 1900s China has undertaken the largest
11 peacetime military buildup in history. This ramp-up in the
12 past decade, when China increased real purchasing power in
13 the defense sector by \$200 billion. Meanwhile, primarily
14 during the Obama administration, America cut some \$400
15 billion of purchasing power from our defense spending. As
16 China was quietly increasing investments in defense, many
17 U.S. leaders naively assumed when China joined the WTO in
18 2001, that it was integrated in the global economy, somehow
19 this would make the Chinese Communist Party friendlier and
20 more open to the West. And I predicted it would not, and I
21 was right. The result of that bad assumption is American
22 military advantage and the credibility of our deterrence has
23 eroded, and comes to erosion.

24 So we have got a problem out there, and you are going
25 to be right in the middle of that, and we are anxious to

1 make some really good things happen. As General McMaster
2 told us, Taiwan may represent the most dangerous flash point
3 for war, and when Admiral Davidson was asked what the most
4 likely target of the Chinese military action would be in the
5 next 5 to 10 years, he said, "I would say Taiwan is the
6 first." So we know where our problems are, we appreciate
7 your service, and look forward to this hearing.

8 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

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

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

20 At a time when we are confronting an increasingly
21 aggressive China and looking to deepen our defense ties with
22 allies in the Indo-Pacific, it is imperative we have an
23 experienced leader at Indo-Pacific Command capable of
24 meeting the urgency and sensitivity of the moment. With
25 this in mind, I would like to introduce and enthusiastically

1 endorse today's nominee, and, of course, welcome his family,
2 Admiral John C. Aquilino, to serve as the next Commander of
3 the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command.

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

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

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

1 imperative for a well-trained and postured force.

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

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

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

24 If you speak to those who serve in his command, you
25 will find Admiral Aquilino has deep and abiding care for his

1 sailors, civilians, and their families, by working to
2 instill an environment of dignity and purpose. This skill
3 was evident in Admiral Aquilino's actions after a gunman
4 took the lives of Roldan Agustin and Vincent Kapoi Jr., and
5 seriously injured another man during the horrific shooting
6 at Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard on December 4, 2019. Admiral
7 Aquilino paid special care to the families of the victims
8 and the shipyard community during this intense time of
9 grief. A few months ago, he organized a memorial service
10 marking the 1-year anniversary of the tragic event, and
11 installed a permanent memorial plaque to honor the lives and
12 service of Mr. Augustin and Mr. Kapoi Jr.

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

16 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

17 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Hirono.

18 Admiral, you are recognized for your opening statement.
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

1 STATEMENT OF ADMIRAL JOHN C. AQUILINO, USN, FOR
2 REAPPOINTMENT TO THE GRADE OF ADMIRAL AND TO BE COMMANDER,
3 UNITED STATES INDO-PACIFIC COMMAND

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

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

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

20 I would not be here today without the love and support
21 of my family. My wife, Laura, and my oldest daughter,
22 Jessica are here with me today, and my daughter, Lisa, was
23 unable to attend from Los Angeles. Like every military
24 family, they have endured many sacrifices and they
25 tirelessly advocate for military members and their families.

1 They set a tremendous example of service to our nation, and
2 I am proud of each of them.

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

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

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

22 Of all the threats we face, Secretary Austin was very
23 clear when he stated, "China is our pacing threat." To meet
24 this challenge, it will take all elements of national power,
25 working together and with a sense of urgency. Together with

1 our allies and partners, our professionally trained and
2 lethal joint military force, postured forward will provide
3 the deterrence required while enabling diplomacy from a
4 position of strength to ensure peace, stability, and
5 prosperity for all in the region.

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

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

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

21 [The prepared statement of Admiral Aquilino follows:]
22
23
24
25

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

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

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

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

24 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. Thanks. So there are
25 two initiatives. Admiral Davidson, along with the Joint

1 Staff, is working on a joint warfighting concept. Those
2 focus areas are designed to specifically ensure that the
3 joint force is integrated, that command and control that is
4 required exists, and on top of that, from the Indo-Pacific
5 position, it has the ability to also expand to our allies
6 and partners. It is extremely important, and if confirmed,
7 Senator, I will continue those efforts. They are that
8 important.

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

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

25 Additionally, there is ISR capabilities needed. There

1 are long-range joint integrated fires capabilities that are
2 needed. And underpinning all of that is the need to be able
3 to execute logistics across that great distance.

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

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

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

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

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

24 Admiral Aquilino: Senator, there are many areas where
25 we certainly cooperate across a whole-of-government approach

1 -- economic, diplomatic, informational, legal, as well as
2 military. All of those efforts will be required to do the
3 deterrence needed, and if confirmed I am certainly
4 interested in working across the interagency to achieve that
5 goal.

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

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

22 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Admiral. Before I
23 turn it over to Senator Inhofe I am required to ask
24 questions of the nominee, and I have been reminded by my
25 staff to do so. Just like the master chief, I do what I am

1 told.

2 Have you adhered to applicable laws and regulations
3 governing conflicts of interest?

4 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, sir.

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

8 Admiral Aquilino: No, sir.

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

16 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, sir.

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

20 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, sir.

21 Chairman Reed: Do you agree to provide records,
22 documents, and electronic communications in a timely manner
23 when requested by this committee, its subcommittees, or
24 other appropriate committees of Congress and to consult with
25 the requestor regarding the basis or any good-faith delay or

1 denial in providing such records?

2 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, sir.

3 Chairman Reed: Will you ensure that your staff
4 complies with deadlines established by this committee for
5 the production of reports, records, and other information,
6 including timely responding to hearing questions for the
7 record?

8 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, sir.

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

12 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, sir.

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

15 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, sir.

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

18 Senator Inhofe: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
19 Let me draw on your experiences as a fighter pilot. It has
20 been concerning to me for quite some time the criticism of
21 our F-35 that we hear, from a lot of people. I will not
22 even mention the sources, but it is something that really
23 bothers me, when you stop and think about what we do not
24 have in terms of fifth-generation fighters. Admiral
25 Davidson's testimony, and this is way back in March, to the

1 House Armed Services Committee, he said that our adversaries
2 are already developing or fielding fifth-generation
3 fighters, that we know from our own gaming and emulations
4 that fifth-generation fighters are a game-changer.

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

18 Admiral Aquilino: Thank you, Senator. As you know,
19 the Chinese Communist Party has generated some capabilities
20 in the region that are designed to keep us out. Some refer
21 to those as A2/AD, and when we talk about them we talk about
22 operating in contested space. Fifth-generation airplanes,
23 and beyond, are required to be able to generate a lethal
24 force and posture it in a place where it is needed to
25 generate the deterrence that I mentioned.

1 Senator Inhofe: Are your concerns like mine in terms
2 of the attacks on the F-35 and what our capacity would be if
3 we became weak in that area?

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

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

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

20 Admiral Aquilino: Thanks, Senator. I agree with
21 General McMaster's discussion on the most dangerous concern
22 is that of a military force against Taiwan. To combat that,
23 the forward posture west of the International Date Line is
24 how Admiral Davidson describes it, and I concur with that.
25 Forces positioned to be able to respond quickly, and not

1 just our forces, those forces combined with the
2 international community, with our allies and partners, those
3 nations with common values, those two things would position
4 us very strongly for the deterrence required.

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

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

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

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

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

25 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. Thanks. Again, this

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

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

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

21 Senator Shaheen: Thanks very much. Much of the
22 discussion today, and in this committee, when we are talking
23 about INDOPACOM, has focused on China. But, in fact, Russia
24 continues to also engage in malign activities in the region.
25 And we saw General Austin, when he was in India last week,

1 talking about India's planned purchase of Russia's S-400
2 defense system, which is a concern for us because of the
3 insights that it gives Russia into our technology.

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

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

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

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

1 national power and see where that goes.

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

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

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

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

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

1 Chairman.

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

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

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

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

22 So I would like to thank CNO Gilday for his efforts in
23 identifying the 30-year shipbuilding plan that identifies
24 the need for a larger, more lethal, networked and ready
25 force to be able to compete today, as you have highlighted.

1 Senator Wicker: Do you support that plan, advanced by
2 Gilday?

3 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator.

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

6 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator.

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

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

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

24 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, sir. I think currently that
25 the size of that force is correct, unless additional

1 challenges show themselves.

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

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

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

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

23 Senator Wicker: And lastly, I joined Senator Inhofe in
24 stressing the United States' friendship and support for
25 Taiwan. Would you like to see greater official coordination

1 between our military and that of Taiwan, and if so, what
2 measures do you think could be taken in the near future to
3 strengthen this critical partnership?

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

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

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

18 Senator Wicker: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

21 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral,
22 I want to discuss further INDOPACOM's utility with
23 addressing some of the human rights and humanitarian
24 challenges in the region. As we all know here, our
25 competition with China will also include a competition of

1 values, and I believe this is a great opportunity to connect
2 with our allies in showcasing our values, to support human
3 rights and human security.

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

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

24 And there are many examples in history of those things
25 that we have done. I think back to the tsunami in Banda

1 Aceh, Indonesia in 2004, when the USS Lincoln showed up on
2 the scene to rescue and administer support to thousands of
3 Indonesians. And we are prepared to do that every day. As
4 you know, the region hosts the Ring of Fire, and is
5 prevalent to those events. Continued engagement with those
6 allies and partners, and as soon as they need help we are
7 prepared to respond. And, if confirmed, I will continue to
8 ensure that we are ready to do that with our allies and
9 partners.

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

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

23 Admiral Aquilino: Senator, we rely on our commanders
24 every day to ensure that they take care of their personnel.
25 The sanctity of the chain of command is critical to ensure

1 that military operations can be executed. It is also
2 critical to ensure that the unit is prepared and ready.
3 There is certainly no place in our military for sexual
4 harassment, discrimination, or any other form that makes us
5 ineffective.

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

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

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

24 Senator Gillibrand: Well, just for clarity, convening
25 authority for general courts martial is for O6's and above,

1 and obviously you have lower-ranking commanders more junior
2 to 06's and above, and they have to maintain good order and
3 discipline within their unit, for each level of command,
4 before you get to a colonel and above. Do you agree with
5 that?

6 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator.

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

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

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

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

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

22 Admiral Aquilino: Thank you, Senator. The work with
23 India, the Quad, as well as all the allies and partners in
24 the region continues to be the strength, and it highlights
25 our ability to ensure that the entire force, the entire

1 region understands the cooperation and the alignment with
2 international norms, standards, rules, and laws.

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

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

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

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

24 Ultimately, it would change the view of the region from
25 those who believe in a free and open Indo-Pacific to those

1 that might want a more authoritarian might-equals-right
2 closed Indo-Pacific.

3 Senator Fischer: If I could ask you more about the
4 islands in the South China Sea. The President of China, in
5 2015, stated, quote, "Relevant construction activity that
6 China is undertaking does not target or impact any country,
7 and there is no intention to militarize," end quote. Would
8 you agree that this is a false statement, that it has been
9 proven false?

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

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

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

25 Senator Fischer: Do you think the United States should

1 continue the Freedom of Navigation missions in and around
2 these disputed territories that they have?

3 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator.

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

6 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator.

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

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

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

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

17 Admiral Aquilino: No, Senator.

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

20 Admiral Aquilino: No, Senator.

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

23 President Biden and Secretaries Lincoln and Austin have
24 taken several steps in recent weeks to engage with our
25 partners and allies in the Indo-Pacific. In particular, I

1 want to highlight the President's call with our Quad allies
2 -- Australia, Japan, and India. If confirmed, what steps
3 will you take in your new role to strengthen our
4 partnerships with the Quad nations?

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

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

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

24 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. Certainly one of five
25 treaty allies in the region. Our relationship with South

1 Korea, they are a linchpin as part of the alliance. Their
2 capabilities, the equipment that they have, we are extremely
3 interoperable. There is currently an exercise that is going
4 on right now, that we continue to train and build readiness
5 with the South Koreans. As it applies to the Quad, that
6 would have to be discussions with the other three members to
7 determine if they would like to pull those in. If not,
8 there are many other opportunities to generate additional
9 multilateral events with the South Koreans.

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

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

25 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. As I have looked at

1 PDI, Admiral Davidson's strategic, very thoughtful approach,
2 aligned with this committee, has identified the foundational
3 capabilities needed to do deterrence, and it would have to
4 be sustained to ensure that we can execute this on a longer
5 term.

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

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

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

25 Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

1 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Hirono. Senator
2 Cotton, please.

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

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

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

1 certainly a critical concern.

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

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

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

18 Senator Cotton: You spoke earlier about continuing
19 Freedom of Navigation Operations in the South China Sea,
20 despite those militarized, manmade islands. If Taiwan were
21 annexed to the mainland and the PLA navy were based there,
22 would you be able to continue Freedom of Navigation
23 Operations in the South China Sea, or is the fact that
24 Taiwan sits right at the top of the South China Sea
25 significantly impede those operations?

1 Admiral Aquilino: Senator, we would still execute
2 those operations. It certainly would be at greater risk.

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

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

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

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

25 Senator Cotton: I share that view. It is not a 2045,

1 it is not a 2030 problem. I suspect it may not even be a
2 2026 problem.

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

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

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

11 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, sir.

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

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

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

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

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

24 Senator Hirono was asking you questions about the Quad,
25 and I have been very interested in this since we started to

1 hear about it at this committee a number of years ago. I
2 was intrigued that the first-ever head of nation meeting of
3 the Quad was about vaccines, and even though most of the
4 discussion about the Quad has been in the armed services
5 hearing, this first big initiative with the heads of states
6 was about funding vaccine development in India, that could
7 be used to vaccinate the Indian population but also could be
8 used to produce vaccines that could be used throughout the
9 region. And that made me want to get your perspective on,
10 if we are thinking about our national security challenges in
11 the INDOPACOM, how much of our thoughts should be about a
12 whole-of-government approach rather than just an armed
13 services approach?

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

25 Senator Kaine: I have always said to witnesses here

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

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

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

23 Senator Kaine: Thank you for that. The Navy is in the
24 early stages of replacing the F-18 Super Hornet with a
25 program called Next Generation Air Defense, which I guess

1 goes by two acronyms, NGAD or F/A-XX. Where do you see gaps
2 emerging in our current fleet structure of F-18s and F-35s
3 that have to be addressed by a new platform like the NGAD?

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

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

19 Admiral Aquilino: Senator, I do not have a sense of
20 that exact date. I think they are looking at IOC in 2030 or
21 2031.

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

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

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

1 first of all let me just say thank you very much for your
2 service and your family's service to our country. I
3 appreciated the discussion that we had last week and believe
4 that you are the right person at this time, in this critical
5 position.

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

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

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

1 citizens is critical.

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

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

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

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

24 Can you discuss how you view this threat from the
25 perspective of the INDOPACOM, and how you would approach it

1 through the lenses of strategy, operations, and exercises?
2 What exercises are you doing, and how do you fill this in?
3 I mean, when we talk about the issues of cyber it is the
4 least expensive part of defense, and yet it impacts all of
5 the other domains -- air, land, sea, and space.

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

18 Senator Rounds: Thank you. One last item that I just
19 wanted to bring up that I think, when we talk about fifth-
20 generation aircraft and the need for more of them, and
21 particularly right now we are talking about those that could
22 be used within the carrier-based fleet that we have got.
23 But we have also got the B-21 coming online and will
24 probably be operational well before the next-gen fighter
25 systems will be available. The B-21, which would be based

1 in safe bases, South Dakota and Texas, is the knock-down-
2 the-door type of a system which basically will slow down our
3 adversaries who think that they may very well be safe from a
4 carrier-based operation because of their land-based defense
5 systems that they have in place, specifically China.

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

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

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

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

20 Senator King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to
21 follow up on Senator Rounds' questions, Admiral. I can
22 guarantee you that at this very moment, hundreds, if not
23 thousands of very smart software engineers and hackers are
24 in China, attempting to figure out how to compromise our
25 command and control systems, our IRS systems, our force

1 projection software. I cannot stress more to you the
2 urgency of being prepared for this. All of our
3 preparations, all of our money, all of our systems are
4 useless if we cannot communicate with them or, on the other
5 hand, if they are rendered inert by a cyberattack.

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

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

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

1 on a Freedom of Navigation mission?

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

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

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

19 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator, I do.

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

25 Admiral Aquilino: Senator, there are really two main

1 reasons. Number one, as the group gets together it would be
2 certainly beneficial if we had a seat at the table when
3 there were discussions occurring as it applied to potential
4 adjustments and the interpretations of those international
5 laws. The second reason, it puts us in an increased
6 position of credibility. We adhere to the UNCLOS treaty in
7 our operations, and it would make our position much stronger
8 if we were signators.

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

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

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

23 Senator King: Thank you, Admiral. I appreciate your
24 answers and look forward to voting for your confirmation.
25 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

1 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator King. Senator
2 Ernst, please.

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

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

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

24 Admiral Aquilino: Thanks, Senator. Certainly
25 contributions in the form of energy support that exceed the

1 UN Security Council resolutions is concerning. Again,
2 providing capability that we would be concerned about in the
3 form of technology transfer, whether it be missile
4 technologies, nuclear capabilities. All those would
5 negatively impact the region and negatively impact all of
6 the allies and partners.

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

9 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, ma'am.

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

20 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator, and again, the
21 capabilities are across the spectrum. It is critical that
22 we have allies and partners to support, whether it be
23 logistics, whether it be access, whether it be combined
24 interoperability in the form of operations. Every aspect of
25 it is important. I do not think there is one piece that you

1 can leave out and be effective and be able to generate the
2 deterrence needed.

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

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

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

25 Admiral Aquilino: Senator, the SOF team plays an

1 important role across all aspects in the entire spectrum.
2 Currently, their leading role is in the information space,
3 as a part of Joint Task Force Indo-Pacific, currently
4 located in Singapore. So while they touch every aspect of
5 the spectrum, they are leading a role in a couple of
6 different places.

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

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

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

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

23 Earlier this month, Admiral Philip Davidson, the
24 current Commander of INDOPACOM, testified that the greatest
25 danger to the United States is the erosion of conventional

1 deterrence against China. He warned that without credible,
2 conventional deterrence, China may be emboldened to take
3 action and supplant U.S. interests in the region.

4 Do you agree with Admiral Davidson that the erosion of
5 conventional deterrence is the greatest danger to the United
6 States in the region?

7 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator.

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

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

21 Admiral Aquilino: Senator, I think what I would say is
22 there are many opinions on what those numbers are. I think
23 the numbers you quoted are accurate with regard to today.
24 What I would say is we see China increasing at a rate that
25 is faster than anyone previously believed, their nuclear

1 stockpile. So while I cannot directly, at this point,
2 understand their intent or what their end target is, they
3 are increasing. If you were to look at what they have done
4 with their conventional force, I would see no reason why I
5 would expect anything other than to have them continue to
6 increase their nuclear capabilities and aspirations.

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

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

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

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

23 Senator Warren: Okay. Thank you, Admiral. I
24 appreciate your comments on this. China presents the
25 greatest geopolitical challenge to the United States since

1 the end of World War II, and it is critical that we face
2 this challenge with clear eyes. And distorting the threat
3 to justify building more nuclear weapons at home is not a
4 recipe for success here.

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

9 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

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

25 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. I spoke to Admiral

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

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

19 Admiral Aquilino: Thanks, Senator. I think General
20 Berger, in his former position as the Commander of Marine
21 Forces Pacific, he got a front-line view of the main concern
22 for the next generation, if you will. And I appreciate his
23 efforts to restructure, to take on adjusted mission sets,
24 and to ensure that his forces are contributing to
25 deterrence.

1 I would like to highlight that all of the service
2 chiefs are on board with the same set of concerns. So I
3 appreciate and admire the work done by CNO Gilday, by Chief
4 C.Q. Brown, by General McConville, and by General Clarke.

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

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

20 What I believe is there is a need in the near term to
21 defend against all of those threats, from a 360-degree
22 standpoint, and if that answer is Aegis, I am absolutely
23 supportive. If there is a better answer that can be
24 delivered in the near term, I would be ready to listen to
25 that, if confirmed. But that is how I see it.

1 Senator Tillis: One other question on the F-35
2 program. Several of our allies are participating in that
3 program. We understand the military significance of it.
4 But to what extent has that engagement been helpful, from a
5 diplomatic perspective?

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

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

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

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

22 Admiral, the Marine Corps has been implementing its
23 Force Design 2030 plan to support operations as a lighter,
24 much more maneuverable force, as you are well aware. For
25 example, they have talked about divestment of tanks in favor

1 of joint light tactical vehicle equipped with some long-
2 range precision munitions. Have you been monitoring the
3 Marine Corps' progress, and if so, what are your thoughts
4 about this approach?

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

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

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

25 So my question is, to what extent do you believe our

1 security assistance should include cybersecurity assistance
2 or measures to enhance resiliency against information
3 warfare?

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

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

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

24 Admiral, do you support the use of these capabilities
25 to more quickly and cost-effectively address this challenge?

1 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. You highlighted the
2 extreme build-up in the space domain, and that is certainly
3 concerning. Any ability to increase capability, capacity,
4 resiliency in the space domain would be of benefit, and if
5 confirmed, I would support that.

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

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

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

24 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Peters. Let me
25 recognize Senator Scott, please.

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

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

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

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

22 Admiral Aquilino: I do not know how to answer that
23 one, Senator, judging from intent. I think what I would
24 articulate is we have seen aggressive actions earlier than
25 we anticipated, whether it be on the Indian border or

1 whether it be in Hong Kong or whether it be against the
2 Uyghurs. We have seen things that I do not think we
3 expected, and that is why I continue to talk about a sense
4 of urgency. We ought to be prepared today.

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

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

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

24 Senator Scott: What else do you think we need to do to
25 make sure that Xi doesn't decide to invade Taiwan? What

1 should we be doing that we are not doing right now?

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

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

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

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

22 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. Japan is the
23 cornerstone of the alliance in the region. I think they
24 have watched all of the events you and I talked about a few
25 minutes ago, and they understand what does that translate as

1 it applies to them. If you were to think of the Senkaku
2 Islands, I believe that they are concerned. I am extremely
3 happy with the interoperability, coordination, and
4 relationship we have with the Japanese. I think it is a
5 strong, as I said, cornerstone to the foundation in
6 executing deterrence in the region.

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

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

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

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

21 Admiral Aquilino: Senator, absolutely. The mission
22 partner environment generates synchronization, the ability
23 to command and control beyond just the cyber domain. So
24 think ISR, think coordination operations of planning, all
25 the way to execution. It is absolutely critical.

1 Senator Manchin: Have you had to coordinate with Cyber
2 Command in your past? Have you worked with them in the
3 past?

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

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

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

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

21 Senator Manchin: Sure. I think mostly with Japan
22 pulling back because of public support, pulling out of the
23 Aegis. Where do you see -- that troubled me, being the
24 great ally that they have been, all of a sudden public
25 opinion, and they pull out of the defense that I think is

1 needed for their own country.

2 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. Again, I think what
3 they have done is they decided to relook at whether Aegis
4 Ashore is the right answer. They certainly are partnered
5 with us in the form of their Aegis destroyers. I think we
6 have a shared responsibility and requirement to protect
7 forces in Japan, and I look forward, if confirmed, to work
8 with the Japanese to try to get to the right answer for
9 them.

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

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

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

1 paramilitary forces.

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

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

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

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

20 Senator Manchin: I did not mean that in a detrimental
21 way. I meant that in saying that they have taken small
22 outcrops and continually enlarge those into a military
23 confine, if you will. We, or no one else, seem to be able
24 to stop that or prevent that or took any actions before they
25 got to the size they are now and to the operability they

1 are.

2 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. We certainly have not
3 changed their desire nor intent nor ability to execute the
4 largest military build-up we have seen in a while.

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

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

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

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

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

21 I want to talk with you just a little bit about China
22 and our Chinese counterparts. You know that some deterrence
23 and the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, these are things that
24 are important to me, and our diplomats had a contentious
25 encounter last week in Alaska. Beijing's Foreign Affairs

1 Chief, Director Yang, this was his statement: "The U.S.
2 does not have the qualification to say that it wants to
3 speak to China from a position of strength." And if
4 Congress fully funds the Pacific Deterrence Initiative at
5 the levels proposed in Admiral Davidson's assessment, and
6 listening to you this morning it sounds as if you are in
7 complete agreement with that, talk to us about how we
8 communicate that we believe we hold that position of
9 strength in communicating with Beijing.

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

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

24 Let me ask you this. Okay, when you look at PDI,
25 combined command, control networks, and the mission partner

1 environment, in relation to interoperability and the needs
2 of our regional security partners, and we look at this
3 through the lens of cyber, through the lens of technology,
4 tell me what concerns you about China's aggressiveness in
5 this great power competition when it comes to technology, to
6 hardware, to setting standards, to infrastructure, to their
7 cyber capabilities.

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

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

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

24 Senator Blackburn: Thank you. Just a quick yes or no
25 from you. Should we be increasing our bilateral

1 participation in exercises with Taiwan?

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

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

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

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

17 In addition to agreeing that our logistics enterprise
18 is absolutely foundational for having a combat-credible
19 deterrent, I feel that we were very much on the same page
20 about the need to strengthen our partners with the various
21 nations in the region. You and I have both heard our
22 regional partners say that they want a greater U.S. presence
23 in the Indo-Pacific so that they have alternatives to the
24 Communist PRC when it comes to trading and security
25 partners. But the tragic murders of eight people in Atlanta

1 last week, six of them of East Asian descent, highlighted a
2 disturbing trend of an increasing violence and hate towards
3 Asians and Asian Americans in this country, particularly
4 those of East Asian descent.

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

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

25 Let me be clear. There is a difference between

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

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

19 Admiral Aquilino: Thank you, Senator. To your first
20 point, and you and I have had this conversation,
21 professionals talk logistics, so all of our efforts in the
22 region are underpinned, and the relationships with our
23 partners and allies will certainly be required to help us
24 set up this enabling network and support our logistics
25 issues. So thanks for that.

1 To your second point, what I owe, and what we all owe
2 our incredibly brave servicemembers is a safe, comfortable
3 place where they can work and execute the oath that they
4 have taken. So there is no place in our ranks for any type
5 of discrimination. Whether it be against Asians, whether it
6 be race, creed, color, you name it, it is just completely
7 unacceptable, it degrades from our readiness, and, if
8 confirmed, I can tell you it will not be tolerated.

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

20 Admiral Aquilino: Senator, our relations in the region
21 are critical. I have and will continue to say that. As a
22 diverse military, we continue to ensure that our values are
23 understood. I believe our allies and partners understand
24 that when they talk with us that we speak from a position of
25 shared values. And as I said, if confirmed, I will do

1 everything possible to ensure none of that discrimination is
2 a part of how the Indo-Pacific operates.

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

9 I yield back, Mr. Chairman.

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

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

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

21 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator.

22 Senator Hawley: Do you think the Department should
23 also prioritize preparations for a Taiwan scenario so that
24 we will be able to deter China from attacking Taiwan, should
25 they attempt to do so?

1 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. That credible
2 deterrence forward is absolutely required with the correct
3 forces, the right magnitude of forces, and the readiness of
4 those forces.

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

12 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator.

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

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

25 Senator Hawley: You also said earlier today that the

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

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

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

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

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

22 Admiral Aquilino: Senator, as we discussed a bit, the
23 resources they have require them to be spent in the correct
24 manner to have the most effectiveness against the possible
25 threat. I am encouraged by some of those capabilities that

1 they have purchased, and I am encouraged by the capabilities
2 that they are investing in, in an indigenous fashion, for
3 their defense. The example I would give you is the harpoon
4 system. I thought it was very thoughtful and the right
5 capability, for one example.

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

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

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

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

1 strategic location is critical to be able to provide forces
2 quickly in the area we need them.

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

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

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

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

18 Oh, excuse me. Senator Rosen via Webex. Excuse me.
19 Senator Rosen, please.

20 Senator Rosen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate
21 it. And I thank you, Ranking Member. And I want to thank
22 you, Admiral, for your service, for your willingness to
23 continue to serve and step up and take on this extremely
24 important role in our national defense. I really appreciate
25 that.

1 And I would like to talk a little bit about maintaining
2 our technological edge, because at the heart of China's
3 military modernization efforts of course there is Beijing's
4 investment in next-generation military capabilities. I know
5 we have talked about that earlier in the hearing, when I was
6 in the room. And we want to close that technological gap.
7 China is making advances in critical areas like artificial
8 intelligence, cyber, robotics, hypersonics, and they are, at
9 the same time, rapidly procuring commercial technologies
10 that can be used for military purposes.

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

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

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

23 Senator Rosen: And so if you are confirmed, how would
24 you incorporate this increasingly technological nature of
25 warfare into our domains of warfare, into joint coalition

1 exercises, like we do, of course, many of them in the Nevada
2 and, of course, around the world.

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

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

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

19 Admiral Aquilino: Thanks, Senator. So the services
20 have that responsibility as a part of their Title 10
21 taskings. If I were confirmed I would highlight to the
22 service chiefs certainly what is needed in an increased
23 technological footprint, and if you look from a Navy
24 perspective, currently the CNO does a great job at
25 recruiting and retaining the best. It is getting extremely

1 competitive across the workforce to recruit and retain, and
2 all of the services are doing a really good job at
3 maintaining that capability and advancement.

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

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

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

21 Admiral Aquilino: Thanks, Senator. It is extremely
22 important. You know, I have had a chance to work with Ken
23 Hara, the head of National Guard in Hawaii, and it continues
24 to pay dividends. As it applies to foreign partners, it is
25 just as helpful, and if confirmed, I would continue to

1 execute those ten partner linkups and look for additional
2 opportunities, because I think there are some there.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 of what is in Alaska.

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

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

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

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

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

24 Senator Inhofe identified the capabilities needed in
25 fifth-generation to be able to enter that contested space,

1 to fight and win. So I agree with all those comments that
2 you made.

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

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

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

18 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. Alaska is closer.

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

25 Your recommendations are going to be important. This,

1 I believe, is going to certainly be viewed now, going
2 forward, as the most important combatant command that we
3 have anywhere around the world.

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

9 Admiral Aquilino: No, Senator, he did not.

10 Senator Sullivan: He did not. Not even close. What I
11 refer to as "promise fatigue," right. The Chinese make
12 promises over decades. They rarely keep those promises.
13 Promise fatigue -- we are sick of it.

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

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

24 Senator Sullivan: Assume that happened, because it
25 did. Was that a good idea, from Secretary Kerry?

1 Admiral Aquilino: What I would say is we have
2 continued FON operations.

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

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

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

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

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

22 Admiral Aquilino: I think we --

23 Senator Sullivan: You are going to be asked.

24 Admiral Aquilino: -- I think we should continue
25 FONOPS, Senator.

1 Senator Sullivan: In the South China Sea and the
2 Taiwan Strait.

3 Admiral Aquilino: Yes, sir.

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

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

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

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

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

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

22 You know, I have heard all the questions about Taiwan
23 and China and all the things that go on. You forgot one,
24 and we know about it, and we are going to be trusting you
25 for that. It is important that we fight through the climate

1 change and the diversity and all the things going on. I
2 believe in that. You know, I was a football coach. I mean,
3 you have to plug all that in.

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

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

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

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

1 believe is the right way forward.

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

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

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

25 Senator Tuberville: You know, as Marines are operating

1 in smaller units in the Pacific, how do you plan to float
2 medical support? You know, the Mercy and the Comfort, they
3 are large, you know, and they are slow to deploy. Would a
4 smaller, Ford-based hospital ship capable of quicker and
5 faster engagement, do you think that would be better served
6 for what you all do in the Pacific?

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

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

19 Senator Tuberville: Yeah, I think it is important,
20 because we are in a different part of the world, and we look
21 at -- of course, I am from Alabama, and we have Huntsville.
22 We build all the missiles and the rockets and have 800
23 defense contractors. We build ships and boats down in
24 Mobile, that hopefully you have seen some. I think the LCS
25 or whatever, made out of aluminum, a little different.

1 But, you know, I am a common-sense guy, and I just want
2 us prepared, you know. And I see you are going to be hit
3 from all different directions and I just hope when you are
4 confirmed that you are ready, you are willing. I just hope
5 you are able to get what you need to protect this country
6 and protect our kids and our grandkids from future attacks,
7 because they are coming, and you are going to be the first
8 line of defense.

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

12 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

13 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Tuberville.

14 Senator Sullivan would like to ask one question.

15 Senator Sullivan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It might
16 be a series of one questions. No, I am just kidding. It is
17 going to go back to the PDI. Admiral, I am sure you saw
18 that when Admiral Davidson was here, just 2 weeks ago, he
19 talked about the full funding, \$4.6 billion of the PDI was
20 something that would be critical in halting the erosion of
21 our nation's conventional deterrence in the INDOPACOM
22 region. He actually said, quote, "PDI is the foundational
23 approach to advancing capabilities and capacity while
24 strengthening our allies and partnership for an integrated
25 joint force west of the International Date Line." I already

1 talked about how the International Date Line is in some ways
2 an artificial construct that does not really fully reflect
3 the force posture, particularly as you go north.

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

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

22 Senator Sullivan: And just again I ask two questions.

23 Alternatively, if that is not funded, that \$4.6 billion,
24 which is what the Admiral has requested, and you, I believe,
25 support, and this committee supports, by the way, in a

1 bipartisan way, what kind of message would that send if we
2 do not do it, we, the Federal Government, we, the Biden
3 administration, to be frank, if we do not do it, despite the
4 fact that the PACOM commander has said we need to do it?
5 What kind of message would that send?

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

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

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

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

20 Admiral Aquilino: Thank you, Senator.

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

22

23

24

25