

**OPENING STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR JACK REED
CHAIRMAN, SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**ROOM SD-G50
DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
Thursday, March 10, 2022**

*To receive testimony on the posture of United States Indo-Pacific Command and
United States Forces Korea
(As prepared for Delivery)*

REED: Good morning. The Committee meets today to receive testimony from Admiral John Aquilino, Commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, and General Paul LaCamera, Commander of U.S. Forces Korea. Gentlemen, thank you for your service to the nation, and please convey my thanks to the men and women serving under your commands at this critical time.

The Department of Defense has appropriately identified China as the “pacing threat” for the United States military. In the next decade, the Indo-Pacific region is projected to generate two-thirds of the global economy and be home to two-thirds of the global population, and we must calibrate our strategy accordingly.

For the past several decades, China has studied the United States' way of war and focused its efforts on offsetting our advantages. Beijing has made concerning progress in this regard, especially with respect to disruptive technologies and weapons like hypersonics, artificial intelligence, 5G, and biotechnology. China does not accept U.S. global leadership or the international norms that have helped keep the peace for the better part of a century. Maintaining our competitiveness in this region will take a concerted, whole-of-government effort, but the U.S. military, specifically INDOPACOM, will play a central role. As we speak, the importance of getting our approach right is on full display as another near-peer competitor, Russia, continues its brutal and illegal invasion of Ukraine.

Even as China has made progress, however, there is broad consensus that our comparative advantage over China is our network of allies and partners in the region and globally. Strengthening that network should be at the center of any strategy for the Indo-Pacific region, and the maturation of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or “Quad,” involving the United States, Japan, India, and Australia, presents an opportunity to establish a durable framework. It is my hope that the Quad, as well as Korea, will provide a platform for engaging other regional partners.

The most likely flashpoint that could turn our competition with China into a conflict is Taiwan. If China is the pacing threat for the Defense Department, Taiwan is the pacing scenario. Following the brutal repression of pro-democracy demonstrations in Hong Kong by China over the past two years and the unprecedented number of aggressive Chinese military incursions into Taiwan's airspace, the world has a right to be concerned.

There has been discussion in the last year regarding whether we should be more explicit about coming to Taiwan's aid militarily if they are attacked by China; the so-called "strategic ambiguity" versus "strategic clarity" debate. In my opinion, we should maintain the policy of strategic ambiguity that has helped to maintain the peace in the Taiwan Strait for decades. More than anything, changing our policy to strategic clarity could actually lead to escalation and the very conflict we are working so hard to prevent.

Admiral Aquilino, faced with these wide-ranging challenges, I would like to your assessment INDOPACOM's preparedness to carry out the United States' strategy in the region.

As we seek to more effectively compete with China, we must also manage the threat posed by North Korea. North Korea has vexed both Republican and Democratic administrations for decades. Maintaining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula must remain a priority for the Department of Defense, though solving the long-term challenges posed by North Korea will require all elements of national power.

Through various intelligence reports, we know that Kim Jong Un views nuclear weapons as "the ultimate deterrent against foreign intervention," and, over time, intends to gain "international acceptance and respect as a nuclear power." The ultimate goal of U.S. policy remains the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, but we are not taking an all-or-nothing approach. Instead, the Biden administration has pursued what it describes as "a calibrated, practical approach to diplomacy with the North with the goal of eliminating the threat to the United States."

This approach will require smart and firm engagement with the North Koreans, but – more importantly – it requires coordination with our allies and partners in the region, particularly South Korea and Japan. General LaCamera, I would ask for your views on the partnership between the U.S., Japan, South Korea, and other regional partners in addressing North Korea's destabilizing activity.

Similarly, General, the highest priority of any military commander is ensuring the readiness of the forces under their command to perform their mission. I hope you will share your views on how U.S. Forces-Korea can maintain readiness through

training and exercises with their South Korean counterparts while avoiding miscommunication or an unintentional escalation in tensions with the North.

Finally, Secretary Austin announced earlier this week that the Navy's Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility on the island of Oahu will be closed within the year following a series of major fuel spills. I believe that closing this facility was the right decision. I would like to know that steps are being taken to ensure the safety and health of the military families and civilians in the affected communities. More broadly, the closure of Red Hill is a significant change for our fueling and logistics approach in the Indo-Pacific, and we need to ensure that our combat capabilities remain unaffected. Admiral Aquilino, I am interested in your plans to mitigate the risk of Red Hill's closure and capitalize on the opportunities it provides to improve our distributed energy facilities across the region.

Thank you, again, to our witnesses. I look forward to your testimonies.

Senator Inhofe could not be here today, so I am submitting his opening statement for the record.

Admiral Aquilino.