

Extracts from Testimony Given during Confirmation Hearing for Adm. John C. Aquilino, U.S. Navy, Nominated to Service as the Commander of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Unified Command

23 March 2021

Extract from prepared statement during confirmation testimony:

Admiral Aquilino: “The Indo-Pacific is the most consequential reason for America’s future and remains the priority theater for the United States. Residing here are four of the five security challenges identified in the Department of Defense—China, Russia, North Korea, and violent extremist organizations Of all the threats we face, Secretary Austin was very clear when he stated, “China is our pacing threat.” To meet this challenge, it will take all elements of national power, working together and with a sense of urgency. Together with our allies and partners, our professionally trained and lethal joint military force, postured forward will provide the deterrence required while enabling diplomacy from a position of strength to ensure peace, stability, and prosperity for all in the region [p. 13]

Extracts from question and answer period during confirmation testimony:

Senator Inhofe: ... As General McMaster told this committee “Taiwan may represent the most dangerous flash point for war.” He went on to say because of that very real threat, quote, “it is immensely important to keep forward-positioned capable forces in the Indo-Pacific.” So, Admiral, I have been

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

Admiral Aquilino: ... I agree with General McMaster’s discussion on the most dangerous concern is that of a military force against Taiwan. To combat that, the forward posture west of the International Date Line is how Admiral Davidson describes it, and I concur with that. Forces positioned to be able to respond quickly, and not just our forces, those forces combined with the international community, with our allies and partners, those nations with common values, those two things would position us very strongly for the deterrence required [pp. 22–23]

Senator Fischer: ... What do you believe are China’s goals ... ?

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



Adm. John C. Aquilino, U.S. Navy, testifies before the Senate Armed Services Committee 23 March 2021 in Washington, D.C. (Screenshot taken from a Department of Defense video)

ultimately to change those rules to the benefit of the PRC. Ultimately, it would change the view of the region from those who believe in a free and open Indo-Pacific to those that might want a more authoritarian might-equals-right closed Indo-Pacific. [p. 35–36]

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

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator, I would. It has certainly been evident to me that when we listen to the words that come from the PRC we have to look at not just words, and listen to words, we have to look at deeds. And your example of the islands in the South China Sea are probably the best examples. All of those

islands have been militarized, whether it be with missiles, jammers, but it is in exact opposition to what has been said. ... [p. 36]

... the allies and partners that we have are clearly an asymmetric advantage [over China], as the PRC has, I would argue, only one ally or partner, and that is North Korea. So we would continue to work towards increased multilateral operations, if I am concerned [sic] ... We do many things with the ASEAN nations. We do things with our Japanese counterparts and our Korean counterparts in the form of missile defense ...

Senator Cotton: Admiral ... I want to hear from you about why Taiwan is so critical from a military and strategic standpoint. Why would Beijing so desire to have Taiwan annexed to the mainland, and how would it complicate your military planning if Beijing did invade and annex Taiwan? ... From a military and strategic standpoint, why is it so important to Beijing that they annex Taiwan?



To view the full transcript of "To Consider the Nomination of Adm. John C. Aquilino, U.S. Navy, for Reappointment to the Grade of Admiral and to Be Commander, United States Indo-Pacific Command" from 23 March 2021, visit https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/21-14_03-23-2021.pdf.

Admiral Aquilino: ... they [China] view it as their number one priority. The rejuvenation of the Chinese Communist Party is at stake, very critical as they look at the problem. From a military standpoint, the strategic location of where it is, as it applies to the potential impact of two-thirds of the world's trade, certainly a critical concern. Additionally, the status of the United States as a partner with our allies and partners also is at stake, should we have a conflict in Taiwan. So those two reasons are really the strategic main concerns that I would see. [pp. 41–42]

Senator Cotton: What would it mean for the PLA's [People's Liberation Army] enhanced capabilities if they were able to turn Taiwan

essentially into a military base, if they were able to base aircraft and ships on the island if Taiwan, much like you discussed earlier with those islands they have got in the South China Sea. What advantage would that give to them?

Admiral Aquilino: ... it would extend their reach. It would extend the contested environment. It would threaten our allies and partners—think the Philippines. And it extends their reach initially away from their coast and to challenge the entire region, all allies and partners and friends. [p. 42]

Senator Cotton: You spoke earlier about continuing Freedom of Navigation Operations in the South China Sea, despite those militarized, man-made islands. If Taiwan were annexed to the mainland and the PLA navy were based there, would you be able to continue Freedom of Navigation Operations in the South China Sea, or is the fact that Taiwan sits right at the top of the South China Sea significantly impede those operations? [p. 42]

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

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

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, that was my second point. It certainly would impact the credibility of the United States as a partner in the region. [p. 43]

Senator Cotton: Thank you. Last week, Admiral Davidson testified that he thinks the

PLA may have the capability to effectively invade Taiwan in as soon as 6 years, maybe less. Do you agree with that view?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, there are many numbers out there. I know Admiral Davidson said 6 years. You have to ask him where he made that assessment. There are spans from today to 2045. My opinion is this problem is much closer to us than most think, and we have to take this on, put those deterrence capabilities like PDI in place, in the near term and with urgency. [p. 43]

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

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, sir, that is certainly a better time as it applies to sea state and environmental. [p. 44]

Senator Kaine: ... if we are thinking about our national security challenges in the INDOPACOM, how much of our thoughts should be about a whole-of-government approach rather than just an armed services approach? [p. 45]

Admiral Aquilino: Yes, Senator. We need to engage with every aspect of national power to be able to compete against the PLA. So whether it be diplomacy, whether it be scientific, whether it be informational, every aspect has an ability to generate deterrence, extend the cooperation with our allies and partners... and needs to expand across all elements of national power. [p. 45]

Senator Warren: ... Admiral Davidson also warned that China was on course to double their nuclear stockpile this decade, and he agreed with a claim by one of my colleagues that if China quadrupled their nuclear stockpile they could, quote, "have nuclear

overmatch against the United States." Now I want to look into the numbers on this. Last year's report on China's military power shows that their stockpile of operational nuclear warheads is only in the low 200s, far 16 fewer than the approximately 3,800 in the United States' active stockpile. So, Admiral, are you aware of any evidence that suggests that China intends to quadruple its nuclear stockpile in this decade?

Admiral Aquilino: ... I think what I would say is there are many opinions on what those numbers are. I think the numbers you quoted are accurate with regard to today. What I would say is we see China increasing at a rate that is faster than anyone previously believed, their nuclear stockpile. So while I cannot directly, at this point, understand their intent or what their end target is, they are increasing. If you were to look at what they have done with their conventional force, I would see no reason why I would expect anything other than to have them continue to increase their nuclear capabilities and aspirations. [pp. 59–60]

Senator Tillis: ... we got an update from NORTHCOM and SOUTHCOM on China's engagement, primarily in Latin and South America. Can you give me a quick rundown within your area, or your future area of responsibility in terms of China's relationships, say, today, as compared to 5 or 10 years ago, ostensibly economic or non-military engagement, but we all know there is a military dimension to almost everything that China does. So just a quick rundown of the areas of greatest concern. [p. 61]

Admiral Aquilino: ... I think the main point that comes out is China is a global problem. When you talk about their areas of influence and what does it mean globally, there are economic efforts that are underway by China across the globe. There are military efforts underway, and, you know, it furthers their reach. It would allow access, logistic support

in time of crisis. So all of those things are a bit concerning. And for allies and partners across the globe, they have to understand what that means. [p. 62]

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

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

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

Admiral Aquilino: I do not know how to answer that one, Senator, judging from intent. I think what I would articulate is we have seen aggressive actions earlier than we anticipated, whether it be on the Indian border or whether it be in Hong Kong or whether it be against the Uyghurs. We have seen things that I do not think we expected, and that is why I continue to talk about a sense of urgency. We ought to be prepared today. [pp. 68–69]

Senator Scott: What else do you think we need to do to make sure that Xi doesn't decide to

invade Taiwan? What should we be doing that we are not doing right now?

Admiral Aquilino: Senator, I think an increase in our forward deterrent posture, as identified by Admiral Davidson in the Pacific Deterrence Initiative is a great first start. But capable, lethal forces west of the Date Line, to be able to respond on extremely short notice, combined with synchronization with our allies and partners to ensure that all understand that that is not within the best interests of anyone in the theater. [pp. 69–70]

Senator Manchin: Okay. And speaking of Admiral Davidson, back in 2018, during his confirmation hearing, China was already capable of controlling the South China Sea and any scenario short of war with the U.S. Here we are 3 years later, and we have heard repeated testimony that China has increased its naval forces, its coast guard and other paramilitary forces. So what is stopping them right now from exercising their capability whenever they feel like it, of controlling the South China Sea?

Admiral Aquilino: The U.S. joint forces in the region, Senator, the partner nations? [p. 74]

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

Admiral Aquilino: No, Senator, he did not. [pp. 92–94] ■



Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster, U.S. Army, retired, testifies before the Senate Armed Services Committee 2 March 2021 in Washington, D.C. (Screenshot taken from a United States Senate video)

Extract from Statement of Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster, U.S. Army, Retired, before the Senate Armed Services Committee Hearing on Global Security Challenges

2 March 2021

For too long the United States clung to the assumption that China, having been welcomed into the international system based on our desire for cooperation and engagement, would play by the rules and, as China prospered, its leaders would

liberalize its economy and its form of governance. The 2017 National Security Strategy and the Indo-Pacific Strategy administered a corrective to that false assumption, recognized the need for transparent competition with the Chinese Communist Party's

aggressive policies, and effected what may be the most significant shift in U.S. foreign policy since the end of the Cold War. If any doubts lingered concerning the Chinese Communist Party's intention to extend and tighten its exclusive grip on power internally and achieve "national rejuvenation" at the expense of other nations externally, the CCP's actions in the midst of a global pandemic should have removed them. CCP leaders continued to speak the language of cooperation and global governance while repressing human freedom, exporting their authoritarian-mercantilist model and subverting international organizations. Chairman Xi speaks of "rule of law" while he interns millions of people in concentration camps and wages a campaign of cultural genocide against the Uighur population in Xinjiang. He vows carbon neutrality by 2060 while China continues to build scores of coal-fired plants globally per year. He gives speeches on free trade while engaging in economic aggression, forced labor, economic coercion, and unfair trade and economic practices. He suggests a "community of common destiny" while fostering servile relationships with countries vulnerable to his military or economic intimidation. The Chinese Communist Party's Orwellian reversal of the truth matters to Americans because the CCP is not only strengthening an internal system that stifles human freedom and extends its authoritarian control; it is also exporting that model and advocating for the development of new rules and a new international order that would make the world less free, less prosperous, and less safe. ■



To view the transcript of the "Statement of Lt. Gen. H. R. McMaster, U.S. Army, retired, Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution, Stanford University Before The Senate Armed Services Committee Hearing on Global Security Challenges," visit https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/McMaster--Statement%20for%20the%20Record_03-02-21.pdf.

Extract from Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III's Remarks at the 40th International Institute for Strategic Studies Fullerton Lecture (As Prepared)

27 July 2021

Beijing's claim to the vast majority of the South China Sea has no basis in international law. That assertion treads on the sovereignty

of states in the region. We continue to support the region's coastal states in upholding their rights under international law. And we remain committed to the



Adm. Philip S. Davidson, U.S. Navy, testifies before the Senate Armed Services Committee 9 March 2021 in Washington, D.C. (Screenshot taken from a Department of Defense video)

Extract from the Statement of Adm. Philip S. Davidson, U.S. Navy Commander, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, before the Senate Armed Services Committee on U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Posture

9 March 2021

Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss the Indo-Pacific Region. The Indo-Pacific is the most consequential region for America's future and remains the Department of Defense's priority theater. This region contains four of the five priority security challenges identified by the Department of Defense and includes

frequent natural and man-made disasters, the negative impacts of climate change, rapid population growth, and of course, disease and pandemics.

The Indo-Pacific accounts for 60 percent of the world's current Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and contributes more than two-thirds to the present global economic growth. Trade and investment in this dynamic region are vital to the security and prosperity of the United States

and reflective in more than \$1.9 trillion in two-way trade with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), serving as the number one destination for U.S. foreign direct investment (FDI). In 10 years, the region will host two-thirds of the world's population and two-thirds of the global economy.

Our Nation's vision for peace and prosperity in a Free and Open Indo-Pacific continues to resonate in the region and serves as an important reminder to all nations that the U.S. remains committed to free and fair trade, shared access to global markets, good governance, and human rights and civil liberties. The region's economic prosperity and security are inextricably linked and part of the competitive landscape.

The greatest danger for the United States in this competition is the erosion of conventional deterrence. A combat-credible, conventional deterrent posture is necessary to prevent conflict, protect U.S. interests, and to assure our allies and partners. Absent a convincing deterrent, the People's Republic of China (PRC) will be emboldened to take action to undermine the rules-based international order and the values represented in our vision for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. The combination of the PRC's military modernization program and willingness to intimidate its neighbors through the use, or threatened use of force, undermines peace, security, and prosperity in the region.

U.S. Indo-Pacific Command's approach for addressing Great Power Competition centers on advancing a Free and Open Indo-Pacific by focusing on four critical areas:

1. Increasing Joint Force Lethality
2. Enhancing Design and Posture
3. Strengthening Allies and Partners
4. Modernizing our Exercises, Experimentation, and Innovation Programs

In 2019, I reported to this Committee we had lost a quantitative advantage and our qualitative advantage was

shrinking across several domains as the People's Liberation Army (PLA) fields higher quality systems.

However, with this Committee's efforts to establish the Pacific Deterrence Initiative (PDI), along with resourcing our advanced undersea warfare capabilities and 5th generation fighters, I am optimistic you have created the opportunity to Regain the Advantage, but we must remain diligent. PDI provides the foundation for establishing a forward-deployed, defense-in-depth posture that defends our interests abroad, deters aggression, assures allies and partners, and provides flexible response options should deterrence fail. PDI also provides the requisite budget transparency and oversight to ensure resources are prioritized appropriately. Thank you for your continued support.

On top of PDI support, investing in our most critical and resilient resource – our people – is a national security imperative. USINDOPACOM is staunchly committed to promoting the health and well-being of our teammates. ...

For the future, combat credible deterrence depends on our ability to achieve four specific outcomes:

- 1) develop an agile and distributed

Joint Force designed to deter and deny our adversaries of their objectives in the first and second island chains; 2) regain positional advantage by evolving our posture and balancing key capabilities across South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Oceania resulting in a more dynamic and distributed presence; 3) establish a network of compatible and interoperable allies and partners who are willing and able to protect their sovereignty from coercion; and 4) reassure our allies and partners of our commitment by revealing the capacity to conduct complex operations and concealing capabilities that provide a decisive advantage. A strategy of deterrence supported by a command climate that places the dignity and respect of each individual as a vital aspect in how we train, maintain, and sustain the force is an imperative for the Joint Force's ability to deploy and perform assigned missions. ■



To view the complete transcript of the "Statement of Adm. Philip S. Davidson, U.S. Navy Commander, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, before the Senate Armed Services Committee on U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Posture," visit https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Davidson_03-09-21.pdf.