

To consider the nomination of:
Admiral Samuel J. Paparo, Jr., USN
for reappointment to the grade of
admiral and to be Commander, United
States Indo-Pacific Command
Senate Committee on Armed Services

February 1, 2024

SPEAKERS:

SEN. JACK REED [D-RI],
CHAIRMAN
SEN. JEANNE SHAHEEN [D-NH]
SEN. MAZIE HIRONO [D-HI]
SEN. TIM KAINE [D-VA]
SEN. ANGUS KING
SEN. ELIZABETH WARREN
SEN. JOE MANCHIN [D-WV]
SEN. TAMMY DUCKWORTH
[D-IL]

SEN. JACKY ROSEN [D-NV]
SEN. MARK KELLY [D-AZ]
SEN. ROGER WICKER [R-MS]
SEN. DEB FISCHER [R-NE]
SEN. TOM COTTON [R-AR]
SEN. RICK SCOTT [R-FL]
SEN. DAN SULLIVAN [R-AK]
SEN. TOMMY TUBERVILLE
[R-AL]
SEN. TED BUDD [R-NC]
SEN. ERIC SCHMITT [R-MO]

WITNESSES:

Admiral SAMUEL J. PAPARO, JR. USN - Review Paparo's answers to the
Advance Policy Questions

JACK REED: The committee meets today to consider the nomination of
Admiral Samuel Paparo to be the next commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific
Command or INDOPACOM.

Admiral, congratulations on your nomination and thank you for stepping forward
to lead at this critical time. We'd also like to recognize your family, particularly
your daughter, Regina, who was scheduled to be here. And in a few moments,
Senator Hirono will formally introduce you.

And let me thank your family for all of the years they've dedicated to the service of this nation and the Navy. We'd also like to thank the Korean INDOPACOM commander, Admiral John Aquilino, who will retire later this spring. Admiral Aquilino has served the nation with skill and honor for nearly four decades, and we congratulate him on his retirement.

Admiral Paparo, you are well qualified to lead INDOPACOM. As the current commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, you have led our maritime forces in the region during a momentous time. You bring a record of successful leadership around the globe and command experience at all levels of our military. If confirmed, you will lead America's military forces in the most consequential theater in the world, the Indo-Pacific. There is a common understanding that the future of our national security is tied to our competition with **China**. This competition is occurring right now across every field of national power – military, economic, political, technological, and more.

Maintaining America's advantage will require a whole-of-government effort, but INDOPACOM will continue to hold the leading edge of our strategy. As INDOPACOM commander, you will need to understand **China's** competitive tactics, develop new competitive tools of our own, and integrate our activities with those of our allies and partners. For several decades, the **People's Liberation Army** has studied America's way of war and focused their efforts on countering our advantages. **China** has invested in offsetting technologies like anti-access and aerial denial systems, artificial intelligence, unmanned vehicles, hypersonics, and of course, nuclear weapons. Further, **Beijing** has leveraged a combination of military and civil power against its neighbors, including statecraft, economic pressure, coercion, and deception. **China** has sought ways to achieve its national objectives while avoiding a direct confrontation with the United States military.

As the Defense Department's new Joint Concept for Competing states, **China** seeks to win without fighting. The strategy warns that if we do not adapt our approach to compete more effectively, the United States risks ceding strategic influence, advantage, and leverage while preparing for a war that never occurs. Indeed, the document warns that the U.S. could lose without fighting. Just as **Chinese** leaders have studied America's way of war, we need to study theirs.

With that in mind, Admiral, I would ask for your assessment of how **China** is evolving its competitive strategies and objectives. I would also appreciate your views on what military and non-military factors are most likely to impact **Chinese** decision-making with respect to potential action against Taiwan and our regional partners.

Indeed, our network of allies and partners will be the decisive factor in this competition. We have seen the power of this approach through the coalition

effort to support Ukraine, and this strategy should continue to be pursued in the Indo-Pacific as well, particularly as we strive to deter **Chinese** aggression against Taiwan. We are making good progress through networks like AUKUS and the Quad, which is made up of the United States, Australia, India, and Japan.

Each of these partnerships provide valuable group lengths for the future. There has also been momentum in a number of other relationships, including our new basing agreement with the Philippines, a remarkable transformation in Japan's defense strategy, and historic cooperation announcements between South Korea and Japan. Admiral, I would ask for your views on how we can build upon these multilateral efforts and pursue more opportunities to engage our partners in the Indo-Pacific.

Admiral Paparo, if confirmed, you will lead INDOPACOM at a critical time. I am grateful for your willingness to step forward to meet this challenge. Thank you, and I look forward to your testimony.

When Senator Wicker arrives, I will ask for his testimony if he wants to deliver it or to submit it for the record. At this point, I would like to call upon Senator Hirono to introduce you for your opening statement, Admiral Paparo.

MAZIE HIRONO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and welcome, Admiral, and to you and your family, congratulations on your nomination.

I'm here today to introduce Admiral Samuel Paparo, President Biden's nomination for the next commander of U.S. INDOPACOM, and as the Chairman noted, this area of responsibility is one of the most critical to our national defense.

As Commander of INDOPACOM, Admiral Paparo would be responsible for all military operations in the Pacific, a priority theater with great and growing strategic importance for the U.S. and our partners and allies.

If confirmed, Admiral Paparo will be responsible for operations in the Pacific and integrating multiple components, including U.S. forces in Korea and Japan, U.S. Special Operations Command Pacific, the U.S. Pacific Fleet, U.S. Marine Forces Pacific, U.S. Pacific Air Forces, and U.S. Army Pacific. He will continue protecting 65 percent of the world's oceans.

This is why the Indo-Pacific area of responsibility is so important because it is geographically the largest combatant command. So in addition to 65 percent of the world's oceans that you have to oversee, you will be overseeing 66 significant defense sites, which are home to 375,000 U.S. military and civilian personnel serving in the region.

In this role, Admiral Paparo would also be in charge of overseeing the military's

presence in Hawaii, which is home to all branches of the military with 14 key military installations and more than 55,000 active duty service members and their families.

Hawaii's Central Pacific location has been a significant military location since Pearl Harbor was established in 1899 and continues to be invaluable for strategic defense in the Pacific.

As a senior military officer on island, I will look to Admiral Paparo to lead on all issues in Hawaii, including the successful permanent closure of the Red Hill bulk fuel storage facility on Oahu and transparent open communications with the community.

While we have made great progress in safely defueling Red Hill, just this week new reports have emerged regarding tap water and air quality issues from Navy water system users near Red Hill, leading to testing of the water.

I continue to hear from families impacted by Red Hill and the continuing impacts they face, underscoring the need for an INDOPACOM commander familiar with this issue and the work that lies ahead to permanently, safely close Red Hill and remediate the area while protecting our communities. I have shared these concerns with Admiral Paparo and my expectations for him if he is confirmed.

INDOPACOM is a critical role, especially as we work to counter threats across the region from Russia, **China**, North Korea and others. And that's why it is important we have a commander who understands the region, the threats we face and the communities in which our troops serve.

Mr. Chairman, Admiral Paparo has dedicated his adult life to serving our nation with more than 37 years of service in the Navy. And as U.S. Pacific fleet commander based in Hawaii, he currently oversees all neighbor operations in the Pacific. Before becoming pack fleet commander, Admiral Paparo served on numerous operational and staff tours around the world and was also a top gun fighter pilot. I know he will speak more about his background and his remarks, but suffice to say, his experience is extensive. That experience informs his leadership mentality to quote him, never ready enough, end quote, which I appreciate as chair of the readiness subcommittee of SASC. That mentality will serve him well if confirmed. As the next INDOPACOM commander, he will have his work cut out for him.

In addition to ensuring the readiness and operational capabilities of troops in our priority theater, the next INDOPACOM commander will face many issues with wide impacts on the state of Hawaii. In addition to Red Hills closure, Admiral Paparo will also play an important role in the renegotiation of land leases between the department and the state of Hawaii for several critical training areas, including Pahakalua training area on the Big Island.

These negotiations will significantly impact the way that training is conducted in the state and could put at risk the continued training of land forces in Hawaii if not successfully and mutually concluded. An understanding of and appreciation for Hawaii's unique culture and history are vital to any INDOPACOM commander's success.

Having lived and worked in Hawaii for several years, Admiral Paparo has shared with me his interest in developing Hawaii's defense industrial workforce and collaborating more closely with Hawaii's universities and institutions. I have appreciated having strong working relationships with Admiral Aquilino and his predecessors at INDOPACOM.

And if confirmed, I look forward to working with Admiral Paparo to support our troops, our communities, and our national security.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

JACK REED: Thank you, Senator Hirono.

Admiral Paparo, Senator Wicker has arrived. I will recognize the member's statement, then I will recognize you for your statement.

Senator Wicker, please.

ROGER WICKER: What he's saying is you're eventually going to get to talk, Admiral. Let me first of all say, though, that this is a special day in the life of one of our committee members.

Senator Sullivan will be retiring from the Marine Corps this afternoon. He's certainly not retiring from the Senate or from this committee. But I want to mention that to our fellow members of the committee and to congratulate Senator Sullivan on his service to the United States.

And Admiral, I want to welcome you and thank you for your service. You're clearly carrying on a proud tradition. Your grandfather served as an enlisted sailor during World War II. Your father served as an enlisted Marine. I speak for everyone when I say I'm grateful for the legacy of service. I'm confident that you are exceptionally qualified to lead our forces in the Pacific.

We need another great leader to take the baton from Admiral Aquilino for this important command. Senior defense leaders have stated before this committee that the United States is facing the most dangerous national security environment since World War II. Nowhere is that fact more evident than in the INDOPACOM theater. **Beijing** has conducted the largest and most rapid military buildup in modern history, surpassing our own military in many categories.

The Pentagon's most pressing task remains deterring conflict in the Indo-Pacific.

Failure to prevent aggression there would have enormous consequences. Trillions of dollars would be wiped away. The loss of lives would be enormous.

Admiral, if confirmed, you would take command at a time of great challenge. And you would be a crucial part of our ability to overcome these difficulties. You'll be part of history, sir. In the South China Sea, **Beijing** wants total control. **China** continues to undermine the Philippines' legitimate maritime claims at Second Thomas Shoal, firing water cannons and lasers at Filipino vessels. **China** is also intent on destabilizing the Korean peninsula. By refusing to enforce sanctions or apply any pressure to the Kim regime, **China** is actively encouraging an arms race between North and South Korea.

The United States must be prepared to meet that challenge through resolute support for our allies, South Korea and Japan. This will require our uniformed leaders to provide honest and realistic assessments of the relevant threats and enemy capabilities. Congress has required the commander of INDOPACOM to provide an independent assessment of the resources necessary to meet the challenge.

If confirmed, I trust you would continue to be open and direct about what you need. There is much more that we can and should do. The Pacific Deterrence Initiative has failed to transition into a real tool of budgetary change at the Pentagon. We've made minimal progress in bolstering deterrence in the Western Pacific.

The United States must also improve our munitions procurement and production. Deterring conflict will require the Defense Industrial Base and the Pentagon to build the right systems in sufficient quantity at the speed of relevance. We need an operational joint task force. But so far that wish, that directive in fact, remains unfulfilled. The enabling infrastructure is not expanding fast enough to support distributed military operations in the near future. We have barely begun building contested logistics plans. This will include taking a hard-nosed look at what we need in order to maximize our operational capacity on strategically vital Guam, and on other islands in the first and second island chains that would be essential in a contested logistics scenario.

The United States alliance structure needs further modernization, and we should include command and control and joint planning operations. We cannot wait for conflict to begin to make these updates. Congress can help deter war in the Pacific. But our window to do so is rapidly closing, we need to build on last year's work with this year's NDAA.

Admiral Paparo, I think you're exceptionally qualified and I look forward to working with you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

JACK REED: Thank you, Senator Wicker.

Admiral Paparo, ergo statement, please.

ADMIRAL PAPARO Good morning to all.

Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Wicker, distinguished members of the committee. Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear. Senator Hirono, thank you for the kind introduction. Senator Sullivan, Ura Marine, congratulations, sir. I thank the President and the Secretary of Defense for the trust and confidence in this nomination. I have great admiration and gratitude for my friend and mentor, Admiral John C. and Laura Aquilino, as they transition from 40 years of dedicated service to the nation.

I'm grateful to the committee and to Congress for your continued support of the members of the armed services, their families, and DOD civilians. They are our nation's very best and your support enables their success.

I serve as commander of U.S. Pacific Fleet. I'm a sailor, a naval officer, and a fighter pilot. But foremost, I'm a husband to Maureen Connolly Paparo and father to our six children. Regina, her husband Christopher, Samuel, his soon-to-be wife Katie, Elizabeth, John, Joseph, and Michael.

Together, we've served at 15 duty stations around the world and each of our children has attended more than five schools. Most of our children have attended three high schools. I'm so very grateful for their wisdom.

In the case of mentors, my greatest mentor is Maureen, whose wisdom and serenity have been my greatest influence throughout my life. Our family is from Delaware County, Pennsylvania, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. My single mother, Suzanne Paparo, as a young mother, gave up her dreams to raise my brother and my sister and I working in a barbershop in South Philly and a makeup counter. My dear father, a former enlisted Marine and a shipyard worker, also had tremendous influence in my service. I'd like to also acknowledge Maureen's late parents, her father, an Army veteran, the late Jim and Regina Connolly, and our sisters and brothers, all of whom are located in that southeastern Pennsylvania area.

We have a very close-knit and rooted family that give us strength and keep us rooted through the many moves around the world. I'd like to acknowledge my mentors in all services, above the chain of command and maybe most assuredly, below the chain of command. My commanding officers, but also leaders from the hardest working, most dedicated, young enlisted, to the senior most admirals and generals who guided and mentored me.

Most of all, I'd like to thank the senior non-commissioned leaders, the chief petty

officers, the sergeants major, the gunnies, and the first shirts who've guided me. The senior NCO corps is the strength of the joint force and is the asymmetric advantage of the American joint force. As commander, United States Pacific Fleet, for the last three years, I have led INDOPACOM's maritime component and integrated operations of the joint force for deterrence in the Indo-Pacific.

Other operational tours include United States Central Command Director of Operations, Director of the Air and Space Operations Center and Al Udeib Cutter. I've served with the U.S. Air Force, flying the mighty F-15C Eagle. I've also served with the U.S. Army as a provincial reconstruction team commander in the eastern zone of Afghanistan in the Nuristan province and have had operational tours including operational command in Japan and having deployed, fly, flown, and served throughout the Pacific and the Indian Ocean region.

As stated by the chairman, ranking member, and Senator Hirono, it has never been more critical for the joint force, along critically with our allies and partners, to operate confidently, professionally, and responsibly. Together, we strive to maintain regional stability in this consequential theater and safeguard the sovereign rights of nations through posture and dynamic operations and exercise.

Our joint and combined operations are increasingly frequent, complex, multilateral, interoperable, and interchangeable. But as Senator Hirono stated, we must never consider ourselves ready enough. We must always be improving our position.

If confirmed, I pledge to work with this committee to ensure that we meet the top defense priorities in the National Defense Strategy, and most especially, deterring conflict as the **PRC**, our pacing challenge, continues to escalate its aggressive behavior.

The **PRC** is our only competitor with the will and with the capability to reshape the international order to suit its autocratic preferences. We'll work closely with our interagency teammates and our allies and partners as we also face the challenge of Russia, of North Korea, and violent extremist groups.

If confirmed, I will ensure that we maintain the overmatch that preserves stability today, tomorrow, next week, and for the decades to come. Thank you, Chairman Reed and ranking member.

JACK REED: Thank you very much, Admiral.

I have a series of standard questions that nominees must respond to. Please respond appropriately. Have you adhered to applicable laws and regulations governing conflicts of interest?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Yes, Senator.

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

ADMIRAL PAPARO: No, sir.

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

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Yes, sir.

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

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Yes, Senator.

JACK REED: Do you agree to provide records, documents, and electronic communications in a timely manner when requested by this committee, its subcommittees, or other appropriate committees of Congress, and to consult with the requester regarding the basis for any good faith delay or denial in providing such records?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Yes, sir.

JACK REED: Will you ensure that your staff complies with deadlines established by this committee for the production of reports, records, and other information, including timely responding to hearing questions for the record?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Yes, Senator.

JACK REED: Will you cooperate in providing witnesses and briefers in response to congressional requests?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Yes, sir.

JACK REED: Will these witnesses and briefers be protected from reprisal for their testimony or briefings?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Yes, Senator.

JACK REED: Thank you very much, Admiral Paparo.

We are in the moment, a historic moment, conflict in Ukraine, conflict in the Middle East, tensions in the Indo-Pacific. One of the issues revolving on Ukraine is I think **China** is looking very closely at what we're doing, and our current

difficulty in providing resources to Ukraine is not going unnoticed in **China**.

As the CIA Director Burns pointed out, no one is watching U.S. support for Ukraine more closely than **Chinese** leaders. One of the surest ways to rekindle **Chinese** perceptions of American fecklessness and stoke **Chinese** aggressiveness would be to abandon support for Ukraine. Do you concur in that observation?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Sir, I do concur. Russian failure to achieve its aggressive actions directly aid deterrence in the Western Pacific and directly reassure partners our key strategic competitive advantage.

JACK REED: And so the most decisive thing we can do in the moment and absolutely necessary is to pass the supplemental in your view?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Sir, I do agree.

JACK REED: Thank you. What are the lessons you believe that **China** is taking from the battle in Ukraine?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: The first is, the first lesson is instead of seeing the Ukraine conflict and decide this is too hard, their intention on the other hand is to take note of the actions of Russia in order to effect a short, sharp, fait accompli conflict that presents a fait accompli to all of the world. And so rather than take the strategic lesson of the futility of aggression, instead it is doubling down on their ability to shrink strategic, operational and tactical warning and act quickly.

JACK REED: Now, another aspect of the supplemental is the direct support to our military, two billion dollars in military financing for the Indo-Pacific, which I presume is absolutely critical.

I also want to commend Senator Whitaker because he has worked very hard to get additional money for industrial base and submarine industrial base. This is necessary, I presume in fact, critical. Is that your view?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Absolutely critical, yes sir.

JACK REED: And in the Indo-Pacific that will help you dramatically help Taiwan to take the lessons of Ukraine themselves and turn them on the **Chinese**?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Yes sir, Taiwan itself is taking the lessons of Ukraine and they are acting with dispatch and I have great admiration for that. And it will directly aid deterrence in the Pacific with tremendous leverage.

JACK REED: Thank you sir. One of the perennial questions with respect to United States relations with Taiwan is the issue of strategic ambiguity.

You are operating under the Taiwan Relations Act, which is ambiguous at best. This question came up repeatedly when Avril Haines was here, the Director of National Intelligence, he said if adopting an explicit commitment would be deeply destabilizing, would solidify **Chinese** perceptions that the U.S. has been on constraining **China's** rise, including through military force, and would probably cause **Beijing** to aggressively undermine U.S. interests worldwide, in fact accelerate their interest.

What's your perception of this issue?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: My view Senator is that the Taiwan Relations Act, the three communiques and the six assurances have served the nation well for the last 45 years and there is no ambiguity for the joint force, there is just the mission clarity contained within the Taiwan Relations Act that the department will aid Taiwan's ability to defend itself from having matters that resolve the Taiwan Strait issue with force or the logic of force and that the department will be ready to come to Taiwan's aid.

JACK REED: So in a sense at the diplomatic presidential level there is this ambiguity but in your command you are preparing for every potential which includes active combat.

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Yes sir, clarity and mission focus.

JACK REED: Senator Wicker raised an interesting, in fact very important question about the joint all-domain command and control. I presume he is going to raise that again so I will defer and at this point again Avril thank you for your service and your family service and I will respond, I will refrain from many comments on the football game.

Senator Wicker.

ROGER WICKER: Thank you Mr. Chairman and I hope it's clear that I would have asked the very same questions the chair has asked. We are really totally united on the issues that he brought forward. Let me just make this, see if I can understand clearly and if those listening outside the hearing room understand this clearly.

We can do what we are doing to help our Ukrainian friends and still not miss a beat in managing risk in the Indo-Pacific, is that correct?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Yes sir, in two years for the force capabilities that are relevant to deterring and the force capabilities that are relevant to prevailing in major combat or operations in the Pacific.

I have not seen a single force element that has been, where in the Indo-Pacific for

any other theater that has contributed to deterrence in any of the other theaters.

ROGER WICKER: And can we manage risk in the Middle East without harming in any way your job in the Indo-Pacific?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: I believe we can Senator, however the expenditures of some capabilities against a global inventory will increase some of the demand for particularly precision weapons.

ROGER WICKER: And so we need to give attention immediately to that inventory, do we not?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Yes sir, we do.

ROGER WICKER: Alright, now let me then get to the Joint Task Force structure. I don't know what more we need to do on our authorization act annually to make it clear that we'd like for the department to carry out the creation of a standing permanent Joint Task Force structure with three-star general or three-star admiral under the INDOPACOM commander to focus on command and control war fighting.

Now, you as Pacific Fleet commander, you were dual-headed as the Joint Task Force commander within INDOPACOM, that's correct?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: I continually qualify the Pacific Fleet headquarters as a JTF headquarters as I utter these words, we're executing a command post exercise along with the Australia and Japan Joint Operations Command.

I have not operated as the Joint Task Force commander but under a different command arrangement as a supported commander, a term in doctrine and have integrated the operations and the activities of the Joint Force for deterrence.

ROGER WICKER: Are you familiar with what we believe we've mandated in the NDAA?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Yes sir.

ROGER WICKER: And do you have any dedicated staff to carry out the Joint Task Force responsibilities?

The chair and I, and I think the members of this committee overwhelmingly, are united that we need a three-star billet and staff are actually in the hundreds to carry this out.

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Yes sir, I augment the staff, we augment the staff with reservists and with embeds from the other services when we execute as a JTF staff and for the U.S. Pacific Fleet in order to achieve at scale and in time would

require the augmentation of several hundred permanent staff across all services.

ROGER WICKER: It seems to me we're really not ready unless we do that, is that correct?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: We'll be readier when we do sir.

ROGER WICKER: Okay, so what more do you need from the Congress, what more do you need from the members of this committee in this regard?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Sir, I have clear guidance from the Congress, from the NDAA and if confirmed, I pledge to work with this committee and the Department with dispatch.

ROGER WICKER: Mr. Chairman, I think we have a very explicit statement from the witness.

JACK REED: I concur.

ROGER WICKER: Thank you, thank you.

JACK REED: Thank you Senator Wicker, Senator Shaheen please.

JEANNE SHAHEEN: Thank you and congratulations Admiral on your nomination, thank you to you and your family for all of your years of service and thank you for taking time to meet with me yesterday.

I appreciated both Senators Reid and Wicker's questions about Ukraine and as I understood Senator Wicker asked if we can do what we need to do in the Indo-Pacific and still help Ukraine.

I actually understood you to say that not only can we still do what we need to do in the Indo-Pacific but it actually helps us with deterrence from **China** if we support Ukraine in their efforts against Putin.

Is that an accurate assessment of what you said?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: I am sure it has a direct and positive impact on deterrence in the Indo-Pacific.

JEANNE SHAHEEN: Thank you.

One of the things I appreciated in our conversation yesterday was our discussion about the importance of our diplomats in countries throughout the Indo-Pacific. Can you talk about why that is helpful to you as somebody who is trying to help maintain stability?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Both Chairman Reid and Ranking Member Wicker

among all noted that the asymmetric advantage among the allies and partners is our alliances and partners.

Accordingly, the Chiefs of Mission are the prime movers in effecting those alliances and partnerships and not just the Chief of Mission but all of the heroic Foreign Service Officers and all of the people that work there at the Embassy.

I have close relationships and tremendous admiration for the Diplomatic Corps and they are our first mover in our key asymmetric advantage.

JEANNE SHAHEEN: Thank you. I agree with that. And it does send a message to those countries if we go for long periods of time without ambassadors in place, does it not?

It raises concerns in the countries about how important we think they are to the United States.

ADMIRAL PAPARO: It certainly doesn't demonstrate commitment.

JEANNE SHAHEEN: Thank you. Our public shipyards such as the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard are expanding and modernizing facilities for U.S. domestic and AUKUS efforts.

It's one of the areas where we still have a competitive advantage with our undersea warfare. And I wonder if you could talk about how important AUKUS is going to be. You mentioned the importance of our allies and partners.

And how is that going to be helpful as we're thinking about deterrence and what do we need to do to ensure that that continues to move along in an expeditious way?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: AUKUS is a generational partnership that combines all of the talent of the United Kingdom, of Australia, the United States against a key asymmetric advantage in our undersea dominance.

It's absolutely critical for deterrence in the 21st century. And we must effect the improvements in the shipyard integrated optimization program to bring our public shipyards with this world class workforce up to 21st century industrial standards so we can meet the threat at scale.

JEANNE SHAHEEN: Well, thank you. I know Senator King and I both agree with that.

Last night and this morning FBI Director Wray was all over the news talking about the irregular and cyber intrusions that **China** is prepared to make in our infrastructure in the United States and the advantage that it would give them.

One of those other areas is around the information sphere and information warfare. Can you talk about how important you think it is for us to engage in being able to respond to disinformation?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: It is absolutely critical. We as an open society with freedom of speech have an inherent vulnerability to this. The PRC sees that vulnerability to information operations that is a societal strength is freedom of speech and our values.

And we have to work very hard. And Director Wray also talked about the penetration of much of our critical infrastructure throughout the country, also critical that we close those gaps and we're ready to counter.

JEANNE SHAHEEN: Well, thank you very much. My time has expired, but I also want to again commend you and everyone at INDOPACOM for all of your efforts on women, peace and security and recognizing how important that is to stability.

JACK REED: Thank you, Senator Shaheen. Senator Fischer, please.

DEB FISCHER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome, Admiral, and thank you for your service to this country and that of your family.

The 24 National Defense Authorization Act extended the Pacific Deterrence Initiative, as well as the requirement for the Commander of INDOPACOM to provide an independent assessment on resources for the Indo-Pacific.

If confirmed, how would you use those tools to work to effectively communicate, not just with Congress, but also to the American people on what investments are needed in the Indo-Pacific and why they are needed?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Senator, as the Pacific Deterrent Initiative is different in its makeup than the European Deterrence Initiative, and accordingly, the expression of those priorities goes through the prism of the integrated priorities list of each of the components.

A tight connection between U.S. INDOPACOM and to ensure the coherency of the service expressions of those elements within the Pacific Deterrent Initiative is important.

I submit a specific Indo-Pacific integrated priority list to the Chief of Naval Operations that is focused on the Pacific. For those elements that are not within that, in accordance with Title 10 U.S. Code Section 222 Alpha, I am required, if confirmed, to submit a 12XX report. This year, it will be 1202 that explicates those unfilled requirements that do not go through the components in a tight lashup.

And so, following my oath and the letter I signed and the pledge I made to Chairman Reed, I will do so with a strict focus on our military capabilities and submit that same report to the Department as required.

DEB FISCHER: Without presupposing the outcome of our fiscal year 25 budgetary decisions, are there capabilities, and you have alluded to the priorities that are out there, but are you looking at things like munitions, specific other weapons systems that you would prioritize based on your experience that you've had with PAC Fleet?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Yes, Senator, and if confirmed, I will meet my obligations to share those. Many are at a classified level, and I will make myself available to the members.

DEB FISCHER: Thank you. When we look at what's going on in North Korea, last month they announced that they would no longer strive for peaceful reunification with South Korea, and it continues to advance its nuclear weapon program and develop their strike capabilities.

With recent developments in mind, can you comment on how important our extended nuclear deterrence commitment is to the United States and the South Korea alliance?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Senator, absolutely critical. The Republic of Korea is the linchpin of peace stability security in the Pacific. We seek a denuclearized Korean peninsula.

Whatever the public statements, as a military commander, I must look at the capability development and to be able to pace that, to deter that. Extended deterrence, particularly with U.S. strategic forces, is absolutely essential.

DEB FISCHER: Do you assess that the security dynamic on the peninsula is changing in any way, and if so, can you tell us a little bit about what you see?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: I can't speak fully to it because I'm still the Pacific fleet commander, and in my current role, I would support general camera in a, you know, in a general camera, United States forces Korea.

But the changing dynamic is continued saber rattling, continued proliferation, a greater volume of testing and weapons demonstrations on the part of the North, and in response, South Korea has increased its intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance activities in the vicinity of the North.

And so, despite the public statements, it continues to be tense.

DEB FISCHER: What's your assessment on the deepening security assistance ties between Russia and North Korea?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: It is concerning deeply. It is symbiotic. It closes gaps, each for the other, providing conventional weapons to Russia from North Korean industry, providing sanctions-evading materials and high-end, potentially high-end technology to North Korea.

In all cases, it runs counter to the principles of peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific and globally.

DEB FISCHER: Thank you, sir.

JACK REED: Thank you, Senator Fischer. Senator Hirono, please.

MAZIE HIRONO: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

To ensure the fitness of nominees to serve, I ask the following two initial questions of all nominees who appear before any of the committees on which I sit.

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

ADMIRAL PAPARO: No, Senator.

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

ADMIRAL PAPARO: No, Senator.

MAZIE HIRONO: Admiral, you noted the importance of our allies and partners as a very critical aspect of our asymmetric advantage, and this includes our Compact Nations partnerships.

So I'd like you to acknowledge the importance of congressional action in support of our negotiated compacts with Palau, Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands.

ADMIRAL PAPARO: The Compact of Freedom Association is absolutely critical for multiple reasons.

The first is the **People's Republic of China** is attempting to drive a wedge through traditional partnerships and through traditional people-to-people ties across the Pacific. They employ corruption and elite capture to do so.

The COFA states, on top of a moral duty as a result of years and years of partnership with the COFA states, are historical ties, our people-to-people ties. In fact, a little-known point is that young people from the COFA states enlist in the U.S. Armed Services at higher rates than U.S. citizens do. And I've had the honor of serving with Yap Islanders, Truck Islanders, and Pompeii Islanders

throughout the course of my career.

And then finally, in accordance with the sovereign wishes of the COFA states, they offer tremendous potential for a theater posture that will aid the joint force and the allied force in achieving the principles of expanded maneuver in conflict in the Western Pacific.

MAZIE HIRONO: Thank you for acknowledging the importance, and we have this year, we have the important duty to approve these compacts, and let's get it done. I know that you are aware of my focus on infrastructure. I've had discussions with you, and of course I mentioned what happened at Red Hill. And so over the last few years in Hawaii alone, there have been water main breaks, power outages, and spills, including, of course, the catastrophic events at Red Hill, as well as unnecessary dry dock replacement.

Although you will not be directly responsible for improving infrastructure in Hawaii, yours will be an important voice on the issue, especially as it impacts readiness. If confirmed, how do you intend to approach the infrastructure challenges in the region, including in Hawaii?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Senator, if confirmed, the first is a critical eye with worst case thinking. And that's a critical eye to look at the critical infrastructure and have a risk management standpoint that looks instead of saying, I hope it's going to be okay, the approach to say, how can this go wrong?

You mentioned the water main. When we unearthed that water main, we found that it was 75 years old. Red Hill itself was 80 years old at the time. This focus on critical infrastructure is going to require critical thinking. It's going to require integration among the components and leaders holding each other to account and holding the services to account to ensure that the foundation of the joint forces, the bases, the piers, the airfields, the refueling points are going to support combat operations and by doing so, support deterrence.

MAZIE HIRONO: You mentioned that your father was a shipyard worker, so I know that you have an appreciation of the importance of the four public shipyards, including Pearl Harbor.

And one of the biggest issues that we're going to face is the dry dock replacement to enable us to repair and maintain our ships. So that is an infrastructure that I would like you to pay particular attention to as we go forward.

I mentioned Red Hill as symptomatic of the importance of public engagement and I'd like your commitment that you will continue to focus on how important it is to basically repair the breakdown in trust and questions that arose as a result of the handling of the Red Hill situation.

So I would like your public commitment that you will continue to focus on restoring trust between the people of Hawaii and our military in Hawaii.

ADMIRAL PAPARO: If confirmed, I commit myself to it, Senator.

MAZIE HIRONO: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

JACK REED: Thank you very much, Senator Bruno. Colonel Sullivan?

DAN SULLIVAN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral, great to see you. Thank you and your family for your exceptional service. I think you're extremely well qualified.

I certainly plan to provide my strong support for your confirmation. I also appreciate what the Chairman said about Admiral Aquilino and his wife, Laura. They have also undertaken exceptional service to our country. I hope when your change of command comes that Admiral Aquilino's service to America is not over. I highly doubt it will be over.

Let me focus on an issue I know you're focused on now in your current billet. The **PRC's** focused and rapid naval buildup has highlighted our own shipbuilding deficiencies.

Numerically, they now have a larger Navy, roughly 370 ships to our 291 ships. Last year, they added 30 ships to their fleet. 15 were large surface combatants, including cruisers, destroyers, and another aircraft carrier. We added two. At the same time, the current Biden budget shrinks the Navy. It's going to be shrinking our Navy for some time. If deterrence fails and we go to war in the near term with **China**, we have to fight with the fleet we have today. You're very aware of that fleet's capabilities.

Can you describe the impact of the **PRC's** naval buildup and how we need to equip the joint force to deter and defeat the **PLA Navy** today should conflict occur?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: The **PLA Navy** has been on a historic trajectory these last 25 years. While I am confident that we would prevail in combat, it is a concerning trajectory.

DAN SULLIVAN: Are we overmatched in the Indo-Pacific?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: We are not overmatched, but I don't like the pace of the trajectory. And in answering the question on the other capabilities that could be brought to bear is we're a joint force that thinks in a multi-domain mindset. And that is the kind of formations in maritime terrain. Those are forces on land that can affect events at the maritime that can shoot, move, communicate, and impose costs against the naval force to augment the Navy force at sea.

And then further, the 21st century capabilities, unmanned capabilities from the seabed to the heavens that can also affect –

DAN SULLIVAN: Let me, Admiral, sorry to interrupt. I got a few more questions. I want to talk about some of those forces. While testifying in front of the Congress in 1935, General Billy Mitchell, often referred to as the father of the U.S. Air Force, said this, I believe that in the future, whoever controls, and then he said a piece of strategic territory, this territory, this land, controls the world. It is the most strategic place on the planet.

Do you know what piece of terrain Billy Mitchell was talking about?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Alaska.

DAN SULLIVAN: Correct. Now, with regard to Alaska, you will own the forces in Alaska. That includes over a hundred fifth-generation fighters, the 11th Airborne Division of the U.S. Army. Those will be under your command.

I'd like to do just a quick geography test because sometimes even our four-star admirals and generals miss this. Which forces are closer to Japan, the joint force in Alaska or joint force in Hawaii?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Alaska.

DAN SULLIVAN: How about which forces are closer to Korea? Forces in Hawaii or Alaska?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Alaska, Senator.

DAN SULLIVAN: And one more, Taiwan Strait. Which forces are closer to the Taiwan Strait?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Alaska, Senator.

DAN SULLIVAN: Thank you, Admiral. You'd be amazed how many four-star admirals and generals don't pass that simple geography test.

So, very quickly, two summers ago we had a joint Russia-**China** naval task force, seven ships, that was off the coast of Alaska. We sent 150-foot coast guard cutter to intercept it. Was that appropriate? Was that a show of American deterrence?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: It was a risk that the joint force took in putting force elsewhere and it's a risk we'd rather not take.

DAN SULLIVAN: So, this summer we had an 11-ship joint Russia-**China** task force, naval task force, off the coast of Alaska. We sent four destroyers and P-8s.

I think that's a better answer. Could you commit to, if we do that again and they'll do it again next summer with a bigger joint task force, hit them with an appropriate size response?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: I will intend to do so and will do so across the joint force, Senator.

DAN SULLIVAN: Thank you. Final question, Admiral. I know you're very well read, very, very smart. Have you happened to read this book, This Kind of War, by T. R. Fehrenbach, the classic Korean War history?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Yes, sir. My dear son gave it to me for Christmas when he was at the Naval Academy. I have it on my shelf.

DAN SULLIVAN: Well, he beat me to it because I was going to give it to you. But every one of your Marine Corps and Army senior officers will have read it.

The lesson is very simple in it. It's a great book. I highly recommend it. I give it to everybody who's up for senior positions, particularly civilians who don't know a lot about readiness in this administration.

But the lesson is this. In 1945, we had the most fearsome, lethal military probably in the history of the world. Five years later in 1950, our military couldn't stop a third world peasant army as it invaded South Korea, literally, and thousands of young Americans died in the summer of 1950 because we had weak civilian and weak uniformed military leadership.

So I would just commend you to read this, compliments to your son for getting it to you before I did, but it's a really important book. And I worry as we're shrinking the Army, shrinking the Navy, shrinking the Marine Corps at one of the most dangerous periods we've seen since World War II.

Not enough members of the Pentagon know what's in this, have read history. We can't repeat history. We can't have another Task Force Smith. And I appreciate you taking a look at this book.

ADMIRAL PAPARO: I'll reread. And he stole it back, so I'll accept it if you give it to me.

DAN SULLIVAN: I will give it to you. Thank you.

JACK REED: Now that we've settled that, Senator Rosen, please.

JACKY ROSEN: Well, thank you, Chairman Reed, for holding this hearing. And Admiral, I want to thank you for your service to our nation. Congratulations on your nomination. We had such a great visit last week talking about computing and cybersecurity, my civilian cyber reserve pilot program. I look

forward to working with you on all of that.

But I really want to focus now for a moment on space and cyber resilience. So in our meeting last week, you said the first battle in future conflict is likely to be fought in the cyber and space domains.

And so could you elaborate on what steps you would take, if confirmed, to further prepare our forces for the challenges in these domains and how you would ensure that our capabilities are not just current, but also adaptable to the rapidly evolving nature of cyber and space warfare?

And I don't know how I follow up. I don't have a book to give you.

Computer program, perhaps [laughing].

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Senator, in saying that the first battle will be space and cyber, it's because in the 21st century, the next advantage is who can see, decide, and act faster.

And increasingly, we're dependent on our cyber networks and in our constellations to be able to see, understand, make sense of, and to act. And accordingly, we must build the resiliency of our constellation of sensors on orbit, as well as our constellation of sensors from the seabed to the Karman line.

It must be resilient. It must be redundant. It must include the elements of graceful degradation so that when one thing is out, it's just a small loss in capability, but it still provides enough.

And we've got to work tirelessly to close those gaps. Thank you.

JACKY ROSEN: Well, and I want to build on that resiliency, particularly in Taiwan. So this last year's NDAA includes the Taiwan Cybersecurity Resiliency Act, bipartisan legislation that I introduced alongside with Senator Rounds to expand military cybersecurity with Taiwan to help them counter these cyber attacks from **China**, building in that resiliency, redundancy, all of those things.

So if confirmed, what other allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region would you prioritize for our cyber collaboration?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia, of course, and there's already tight partnerships among them all, but we can never be satisfied.

I work really with every state that is an ally and partner, and that's a deep list. Now, that's the key advantage. But all allies and partners that are willing to work with us are our, you know, key focus of that effort.

JACKY ROSEN: Creating this broad net of cyber resiliency, really important.

And again, you work with everyone. So you're a coalition builder, and this is really important, not just in this region, but every region.

And of course, the Houthis' recent attacks on commercial shipping in the Red Sea. It highlights how less sophisticated adversaries can disrupt international commerce and challenge the freedom of our navigation.

And I'm increasingly concerned about the capabilities, of course, as you are and everyone's been talking about, sophisticated adversaries, **China**, for example, to take similar aggressive actions like they're doing in the Red Sea, in the Indo-Pacific.

So how does INDOPACOM, how would you plan to collaborate with allies and partners in the region to share the responsibilities and resources so there is freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific? We see the challenges we have now.

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Coalition building. And one of the key efforts within this is currently under Admiral Aquilino is the INDOPACOM mission network that is going to create secure layers of intel sharing, where it's just not U.S. sharing with allies and partners, but it is all of the allies and partners sharing to build a common picture of malign activity at sea, which will give all of the allies and partners the ability to act quickly and to counter the threats.

JACKY ROSEN: Like you said, intelligence, cybersecurity, this is key for our maritime defense.

So could you talk a little bit in my last few seconds about how increased joint training programs could really benefit our mutual defense capabilities and this interoperability and collaboration that it supports?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Our joint training programs, and I'd like to especially acknowledge our state partnership programs in being absolutely critical in raising the capability, in bringing skill sets to each other and learning from each other, as well as building the people-to-people ties that will help speed the coalition along when we reach that unforgiving hour when we need it.

JACKY ROSEN: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. I yield back.

JACK REED: Thank you, Senator Rosen. Senator Scott, please.

RICK SCOTT: Thank you, Chairman. Admiral, thanks for being here. Thank you for your service. Thank you for your commitment.

We had a great conversation the other day. So the world's pretty dangerous. We weren't able to deter Russia in Ukraine. We walked out of Afghanistan. Now we've got the Houthis shooting at us.

We've lost two SEALs, three servicemen and women. We watched what Hamas did. We watched how much money Iran has. We look at what Senator Sullivan said, the size of the **Chinese** military versus what we're doing, the trajectory.

So if you're **Xi Jinping**, what are you thinking?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Well, first, Senator, I'll share with you to acknowledge the service and sacrifice of our five fallen heroes along with their family.

I think, you know, I can't directly express **Xi Jinping's** attitude, but I do see the actions of the **People's Liberation Army**. And I see an undaunted effort to extend its aggression as a revanchist, revisionist and expansionist state to reset the borders based on the logic of their military power. And I think we are in a global environment that has increasingly disordered, increasingly chaotic.

The logic of rules is being replaced with the logic of power. And we must, as a nation, counter that logic with comprehensive national power across all levers of statecraft.

RICK SCOTT: So we have a lot of servicemen and women stationed in the Indo-Pacific. We spend a lot of money in the Indo-Pacific.

So if you're talking to just an average American that's writing the check, what would you tell them? Why?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: First, 60 percent of the world population, 60 percent of the world's economy and seven of the world's 10 largest militaries is in the Indo-Pacific. And if that disorder extends to aggression in the Indo-Pacific, we risk greater conflict, we risk proliferation that makes the world a more dangerous place. And so success in aggression anywhere in the Western Pacific has a direct effect on the security of the United States.

The integration of the economies, particularly in semiconductors, according to many think tanks, could result in up to a double-digit contraction in GDP, greatly affecting people's lives and their well-being.

And then finally, democracy and our values, which is the ties that connect. For all of those reasons, it is in America's direct physical interest to deter conflict by being ready to fight and to win.

RICK SCOTT: How important is Taiwan?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Critical for the reasons that I spoke to earlier, even more so in the case of the economy.

RICK SCOTT: So if **China** continues to build their economy and eventually they have about three times the number of people, if they continue to build their

economy and they build an economy bigger than ours, is that a threat to the United States?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: One would hope not.

I don't think we're competing on who has the bigger economy. We're competing on values. And for me, what I'm looking at is I'm looking at the military instrument. And in many ways, the military instrument is directly related to the economy. And what I see is generational and concerning in terms of the activity and the buildup of the **PRC**.

RICK SCOTT: We talked about this a little bit last week, the recapitalization of the C-130s. I think the Air Force has done about 50 percent, National Guard has done about 35 percent, Marines are 100. But the Navy's at zero. Does that concern you?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Yes, sir. Our logistics enterprise is built on the principles of efficiency over a time when we were focused on regional conflicts. Now, under the contestation that we see from actors, we've got to build a logistics enterprise that's based on the principles of effectiveness under fire.

RICK SCOTT: Can you tell me the importance of having a defense alliance with the Philippines?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: It is one of our oldest alliances. It's based on close people-to-people ties. It is key geography within the Western Pacific.

And our continued commitment to our defense alliance with the Philippines has the same effect as our alliances and our security guarantees throughout the Western Pacific. But the people-to-people ties are very important to us. The values ties are important to us and the geography.

RICK SCOTT: Thank you, Admiral.

JACK REED: Thank you, Senator Scott. Senator Kaine, please.

TIM KAINE: Thank you, Mr. Chair, Admiral Paparo. Congratulations. I enjoyed our visit the other day. The chairman's opening comments referred to a CCP strategy drawn from **Chinese** military tradition of to win without fighting. And he referred to the danger of losing without fighting. I'm also worried about the danger of losing while fighting. I think our fighting force is second to none. And yet you can lose while fighting if you fight the wrong war and if you allow wrong wars to direct resources and attention away from the most critical.

I'm very, very concerned about the escalation of the Middle East right now. I think we need to provide support for allies, certainly. I think alliances are strong. But the U.S. being involved in an escalating war without a congressional dialogue

before the American public about whether that would be wise is really troubling me.

The U.S. is protecting global shipping through the Red Sea. Only the U.K. is joining with the U.S. on our military efforts against the Houthis. The transit of ships through the Red Sea is global. There aren't a lot of U.S. flag ships that go through the Red Sea. And so protecting U.S. ships, U.S. flag ships, U.S. military assets, of course, is something we should do.

But when we take on the global burden of protecting others and they are not participating in it, that's the kind of thing that diverts attention and resources away from what I believe our most significant challenges should be, that should be directing our efforts going forward.

Let me move now to some questions. Your next position involves commanding personnel from multiple services to maintain the free and open Indo-Pacific.

You've just commanded the naval component of INDOPACOM. So brag about the service members, DOD civilians and their families and the value that they bring to the Indo-Pacific region.

ADMIRAL PAPARO: For all members of the committee, I would welcome you to join us on a ship visit and to see what you can see in the young people's eyes that stare back at you and the commitment.

And at Fleet and Family Service Centers and Child Development Centers, just to see the dedication of our service members and the dedication of their families and what they do within their families in order to bring their licensure to places and to find meaningful employment for working families.

But for all the discussions about the joint force, your brain chemistry is instantly transformed when you see the intellect, the dedication, the esprit de corps, the cohesiveness of the joint force.

And so it's just great to get out there and to visit with the Fleet to hear their concerns. And always their concerns are not, can I have this or can I have that? But it is, how can we do our job better? It's absolutely inspiring.

TIM KAINE: Thank you, Admiral. Senator Sheehan asked you questions about AUKUS. I'm very focused on that as well.

A lot of the work on Pillar 1 with respect to submarines will happen in Virginia. And she already asked you a little bit about that. Let me ask about Pillar 2. A lot of the discussion has been about prepping for the Pillar 1 submarine industrial base and working with Australia on first Virginia class subs, but then their development of their own industrial capacity to produce nuclear submarines. Talk

about the kind of more open ended but equally exciting Pillar 2 capabilities in this AUKUS framework.

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Very exciting. Cyber, unmanned, seabed warfare among them, unmanned capabilities, AI. All of these have important, important key leverage making effects on the ability of the joint and the allied force to fight. Just in November, I was in Sydney Harbor where U.S. Pacific Fleet conducted Integrated Battle Problem 23.1, where sailors, marines, airmen, soldiers from the United Kingdom, from Australia, and from INDOPACOM all assembled to begin the real work of sharing technology, of sharing information, of combining the talent to achieve those key 21st century advantages that will augment the asymmetric advantage of our submarine forces. Exciting, every bit as critical as Pillar 1.

TIM KAINE: Let me ask one last question. You've talked about alliances, AUKUS, the Quad, Senator Scott asked you about the improving U.S.-Philippines mil-to-mil relationship.

What's the reaction in the Indo-Pacific region to the U.S.-Japan Republic of Korea summit that was held in 2023 at Camp David?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: First, I applaud the courage of the leaders in the Pacific who came to that accord and we have implemented it directly now in advance of North Korean threats, frequently being postured in position to be ready to defend if instead of a test, it's an attack.

We're seeing the fruits of it at the operational level already every day. It's historic and it's inspiring.

TIM KAINE: Thank you very much. I yield back.

JACK REED: Thank you, Senator Kaine. I will recognize Senator Tuberville, but I will also ask Senator Kaine to preside as I go to the Banking Committee. Thank you, Admiral. Senator Tuberville, please.

TOMMY TUBERVILLE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Admiral, for being here. Congratulations. Good visit yesterday. 375,000 military and civilian personnel. That's a huge, huge undertaking. We're glad you're willing to take that on.

We talked about the KC-46. We have, I think, about 10 or 12 135s in my state of Birmingham. I'm looking forward to the KC-46. Given with the issues and delays with delivering the 46, what concerns do you have about the availability and the quality of these aircraft?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: No concerns about the quality. I'm not yet in the duty

position, but for the airmen who maintain them, I have perfect faith that no aircraft is going to fly until it's ready to fly.

I do. I do have concerns, if confirmed, about the ability of the Joint Force to refuel what will be a dynamic force operating in the air from bases on land and at sea. And we've got to have a consistent critical eye. And if confirmed, I'll work with you and with the members of the committee to be clear about the requirements are and we can close those gaps.

TOMMY TUBERVILLE: Do you think the 46 has the range that we're going to need in the Indo-Pacific?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: With all refueling aircraft, tankers can bucket brigade themselves. I'm not savvy on the precise range and it's always a choice between how much gas it takes to get to the point where you're refueling and how much give there is at that point. But I am concerned about the Joint Force's ability to refuel a dynamic force operating in the air.

TOMMY TUBERVILLE: We'll switch gears a little bit. We talked a little bit about the Philippines. What's your biggest concerns at the moment there? What do we need to do more or less for the Philippines?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Philippines are under intense pressure with aggression against their lawful sovereign rights in their EEZ.

And because the Philippines are a sovereign partner, our charge is to be ready to come to their aid as they desire, as they navigate that problem along with us for them to know that we have their back at all times and we've got capability that is ready to assist them in their defense of their lawful claims. And they're not claims, they're rights and they are settled in law.

TOMMY TUBERVILLE: How does the U.S.-Vietnam Security Corporation, regarding what's happened in the South China Sea, how has that changed in your eyes?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: We applaud the essential double elevation to strategic comprehensive partnership with Vietnam.

The main areas for our cooperation presently right now are in the manner of medical and unexploded ordinance removal and medical training. We stand ready to partner with them more deeply as they, and we're ready to partner with Vietnam as deeply as they want.

TOMMY TUBERVILLE: I remember asking Admiral Aquilino when he took over, getting ready to take over, what his number one want and need was for the Indo-Pacific. And he said an EEZ system at Guam. Do you have any thoughts?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: A multilayered, effective, capable, integrated air and missile defense system from the surface of the sea to the heavens to defend the 170,000 Americans in Guam, the American homeland, it would be my number one priority if confirmed.

TOMMY TUBERVILLE: Being the PAC commander, what was your thoughts and when did you first find out about the balloon that came from **China**, I guess about a year ago?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Represents aggression. It was brazen. It was collecting information to give the **PRC** an advantage. It violated the sovereignty of the United States. It was deeply concerning.

TOMMY TUBERVILLE: When did you first find out about, where was it at? Where was it located when they, when you got the call? Hey, we've got a balloon flying over.

ADMIRAL PAPARO: I was the Pacific fleet commander and accordingly was not in the air defense business and it was over the continental United States when it came to light and that was a different area of responsibility –

TOMMY TUBERVILLE: So it was over the United States when you found out, not in the Pacific.

ADMIRAL PAPARO: I did not have a close view of the balloon's trajectory.

TOMMY TUBERVILLE: Thank you, Admiral.

TIM KAINE: On behalf of the chairman, Senator Kelly.

MARK KELLY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Admiral, good to see you again. My brother Scott and your training command classmates since his regards.

Admiral, being the only US Merchant Marine Academy graduate in the Congress, I pay close attention to our maritime strength.

China is the world's largest ship builder and controls most of the merchant ships in the world with over 5,500 vessels. In the United States, flying under the American flag, we have about 80 ocean-going merchant ships. And I'm concerned about the size and the capacity of our US merchant fleet and how this is a risk to our national security. Admiral, as you know, an insufficient commercial maritime capacity impacts peacetime trade and supply chains.

But the more important part of this is it will hamper our ability to supply our own troops in a conflict. And this isn't a capability that we can just turn on overnight with a switch. I mean, we need investments now to be ready for tomorrow.

So Admiral, how do you assess the challenge of **China's** numerical advantage in a conflict in the Indo-Pacific?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Senator, I believe that the current size and scope of the US merchant fleet is a vulnerability. As discussed earlier, I believe that we have a force that's sized for efficiency but has not been examined from the standpoint of effectiveness under fire.

MARK KELLY: And does that affect how you plan for operations today and how you project power across the Pacific Ocean?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: It does, in fact, and it is a limitation for how forward we could put combat capability and sustain combat capability that was in maritime terrain.

MARK KELLY: And as the future INDOPACOM commander, how do you plan to address this maritime capacity issue?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: In close partnership with my fellow COCOM, if confirmed, US Transportation Command, identify those shortfalls along with my – through the integrated priority list of our components, not just sea lift and air lift. And then, as necessary, communicate as required by law.

MARK KELLY: So in recent years, Congress has focused on rebuilding domestic industries like critical minerals, microelectronics, manufacturing of semiconductor chips. It's been a big focus of the Congress and we've made some great progress there. We've got more to do. And this certainly supports our national security needs but also our domestic economic security.

Would you agree that there could be national security benefits to a similar kind of focus on the maritime industry?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: I would strongly agree.

MARK KELLY: Thank you, Admiral. And, Admiral, as you know, logistics will be – you know, it's going to be critical to, you know, any future conflict.

And what else besides, you know, a focus like we're doing with microelectronics, what else do you think we could do to be addressing this strategic vulnerability now with the force we currently have today?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: I think there are a number of initiatives such as the Department of Defense's Replicator Initiative that seeks to gain scale with innovative practices and by closing on design and invoking small business and increasing the defense industrial base.

I think another key point is to understand the opacity of the financial community

and the extent to which investments in the **PRC** through their civil military fusion directly could confer to weapons building that could affect and could harm Americans on the battlefield.

MARK KELLY: Well, Admiral, thank you. And I look forward to working with you on trying to solve this problem. It'll – you know, clearly if we can make some progress here, it'll be in furtherance of, you know, stronger, you know, operations in the Pacific and the ability to sustain if we ever do, you know, wind up in a conflict. Thank you.

TIM KAINE: On behalf of the chairman, Senator Cotton.

TOM COTTON: Admiral, congratulations on your nomination and thanks for your service. There was a report in Bloomberg last month leaked from Intelligence Assessment saying that **Xi Jinping** had purged numerous of his military commanders, especially in his rocket forces for corruption.

It further said that American officials had concluded that Xi was so doubtful about the capabilities of the **PLA** to execute an operation against Taiwan, given this corruption, that now that operation was less likely to happen.

Without commenting on the veracity of the intelligence report that was leaked, can you say does that corruption, which I think everyone would accept happens in the **PLA** and in **China** writ large, influence your thinking about what you need to deter **Chinese** aggression towards Taiwan?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: It does not, sir, and it must not.

TOM COTTON: Thank you.

ADMIRAL PAPARO: I've got to adjust to the capability that we see. I see more activity, further afield, greater force assembling in objective areas, a shrinking of strategic and operational warnings, and I must be focused on capability instead of intentions, if confirmed.

TOM COTTON: I think that's very important. I think part of our role when we read intelligence reports, whether we read them in the intelligence reports or in the media, is to always express some healthy skepticism.

As Churchill said about civil-military relations, it is always right to probe. I think that's especially true whenever the conclusions in intelligence reports are comforting or reassuring of what we would like to believe, and maybe most true when those comforting, reassuring conclusions are then leaked to the media.

You mentioned capabilities. We've spoken in the past about the very challenging strategic and tactical situation you would encounter in a fight in the Pacific, ranging from logistics to intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance.

What U.S. capabilities gaps currently exist in your theater, and what capabilities will you prioritize most highly?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: The raise in posture that I spoke of with the PRC increasingly requires persistent stare. ISR is inherently, due to the ephemera of the capability, blinking. The closer we can come to a persistent stare from the seabed to the surface of the sea, distributed throughout geography, in the air and in the constellation, all of it, you must sum to a persistent stare of PRC forces in response to this shrinking strategic operational tactical warning.

TOM COTTON: And how about countering their ability to do so?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: It is counter what's called C5ISR, command, control, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and targeting. Behind homeland defense is the number one priority for U.S. INDOPACOM. It has been the number one priority that I've communicated to the chief of naval operations in my integrated priority list, and if confirmed, it is the enabling capability to counter that that will bring victory to the allies.

TOM COTTON: Thank you, Admiral.

TIM KAINE: On behalf of the chairman, Senator Warren, sorry.

ELIZABETH WARREN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and congratulations, Admiral Paparo, on your nomination. So, if confirmed, you will oversee one of the most dangerous national security threats, North Korea. Reports indicate that North Korea has shifted to a more aggressive posture against American troops and allies in the region. And in just the last few months, the country has fired off hundreds of missiles as it has increased its military capabilities. North Korea is one of the most heavily sanctioned countries in the world. So, one question is, where the heck are they getting the money to test these new weapons? You know, this is not free.

And one answer is cryptocurrency. North Korea uses cryptocurrency both to evade sanctions and raise revenues. From cyber hacks against banks to strikes on crypto exchanges to ransomware attacks against American businesses and hospitals, North Korea has been using crypto to generate revenue. Over the past five years, it has stolen at least \$3.3 billion worth of crypto, and those dollars matter.

Experts estimate that half its missile program is paid for through crypto crime. So, Admiral Paparo, is North Korea's reliance on cryptocurrency to evade sanctions and fund its illegal nuclear and missile programs a threat to our national security and the security of our allies in the Indo-Pacific?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Yes, Senator, most certainly.

ELIZABETH WARREN: Alrighty, you are not the only one to recognize this threat. Your predecessors have been ringing the alarm for years. Former INDOPACOM commander Admiral Davidson, who was appointed by President Trump, warned this committee in 2021 that North Korea's crypto crime allows it to "...raise illicit revenue to support its weapons development program."

To underscore the sheer scale of North Korea's reliance on crypto, consider that nearly a third of all crypto stolen last year was stolen by North Korea, and that its hacks are, on average, ten times more lucrative than those linked to other actors. You know, no one needs crypto more than Kim Jong-un.

North Korea's success in evading sanctions and funding its weapons program with crypto also undermines our security elsewhere. North Korea is selling missiles and ammunition to Russia, helping Russia evade sanctions so that it can continue its war against Ukraine.

So let me ask you, Admiral Paparo, would cutting off North Korea's access to crypto and making it harder for other countries to evade sanctions strengthen our global security?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Yes, Senator, directly.

ELIZABETH WARREN: Would you like to say more about that?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Cryptocurrency, inherently with its opaqueness, is a key enabler worldwide for proliferation, for terror, for illicit trafficking, including illicit trafficking in drugs, while blockchain methodologies have promise for assurance of financial transactions. This particular usage of crypto, which is backed by nothing but emotion, directly aids illicit trafficking, terror, crime, human trafficking, and proliferation of weapons, and makes the world less secure.

ELIZABETH WARREN: Well, that's pretty definitive. Admiral, can I just ask you, what is it that you think makes crypto so attractive to countries like North Korea and illicit arms dealers?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: People can make money outside the eyes of law, and it provides a moral hazard whereby people can do bad things without fear of punishment because it's opaque.

ELIZABETH WARREN: All right, so you hit it right on the head, outside the eyes of the law. In November, Treasury asked Congress to give it more tools to crack down on crypto crime and money laundering. Twenty senators, Democrats and Republicans, have put together a bill that delivers exactly what Treasury called for.

You know, it's not about who should regulate crypto to protect investors. It's

about dealing with the most urgent crypto problem in front of us, ensuring that countries like North Korea and terrorists, drug traffickers, and other criminals can't use crypto to undermine America's security. I'm looking forward to working on that bill with my colleagues and looking forward to working with you, Admiral. Thank you.

JACK REED: Thank you very much, Senator Warren. Senator King, please.

ANGUS KING: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Admiral, your testimony today has been extremely important, informative and important. And one of the aspects that was so important were your initial answers to the questions from the chair and the vice chair in terms of the undermining of our deterrence in terms of the **People's Republic of China** by unilaterally abandoning Ukraine. Just to confirm, you view our leaving Ukraine to be a significant diminution of the deterrent that we're presenting to **China**. Is that correct?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Yes, sir.

ANGUS KING: I think that is very important. Now, one other aspect of that is the effect of this of leaving Ukraine unilaterally on our allies. How would Japan and South Korea react to that action?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: All of our allies and partners are under pressure. They're under coercion from other actors, from actors such as the **People's Republic of China**. And frequently, it's not just coercion in the military sphere, but across all levers of statecraft.

And they're staying with the alliance. They're enjoining their national power to the United States is directly related to their confidence in U.S. partnership when it is so committed. And accordingly, our U.S. security partnerships worldwide have a direct impact on the cohesion of our alliances and partnerships.

And any effect on that imposes costs on the quality of deterrence as our allies and partnerships have our greatest leverage in deterrence.

ANGUS KING: The important deterrence has probably been used. I've been counting. I think we're up to about 25 times in this hearing. Deterrence is based upon two things, capacity and will. We can usually be talking about weapons, but Ukraine is all about will.

We can supply the capacity. The question is will. And as you point out, it would undermine the deterrence not only of the actions of **China**, perhaps toward Taiwan. It would certainly change Xi's calculus. Will the Americans actually be there, which would be an important part of his consideration, but also undermine, as you say, the confidence of our allies.

Short question. We've talked about the South China Sea. We've talked about disputes with **China**. Would it be in the national interest for this body to ratify the law of the sea treaty?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Yes, sir.

ANGUS KING: You're about the 20th flag officer who has answered that question in exactly that way. I hope the Senate will start to listen to our people that are on the front lines that understand how important that would be.

One of the things that concerns me most urgently about the relationship with **China** and the South China Sea is the danger of miscalculation, the danger of mistake, the danger of some misunderstanding that would lead to an escalating conflict. Do you feel that we have sufficient military to military communications with the **People's Republic of China** in order to de-conflict a potential situation that should not be escalated but could be?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Senator, as yet, I've had no contact, mill to mill, as the U.S. Pacific Fleet Commander, and my boss and my mentor, Admiral Aquilino, has had limited and seeks more for the very reasons you talked about.

ANGUS KING: Do you agree that that's a danger, to not have those kinds of communication links?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: We're left with their activity, with the guidance that we give the force and their public statement, and accordingly, we must divine their intentions and act accordingly. With better information, we have lower risk of miscalculation.

ANGUS KING: I would rather have us understand directly from communication their intentions rather than trying to read the tea leaves or divine it, as you suggest.

Finally, the nature of war, and the nature of war is changing fundamentally. Hypersonics, directed energy, cyber, clearly the next conflict will begin with cyber. Are you satisfied that the Navy and the joint force in the Pacific is at a place where it needs to be in order to fight the next war rather than based upon strategies and tactics from the last war?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Senator, I'm never satisfied with our readiness.

ANGUS KING: Good.

ADMIRAL PAPARO: I'm confident, but I'm paranoid, and we're working constantly, and if and when additional resources are required to be more resilient in that first battlefield, you'll know it from me.

ANGUS KING: I hope you'll really press on that, because all of the aircraft carriers in the world aren't going to work if GPS is gone, if there's no way to navigate, if they're targeted by hypersonics. So this is, I think, one of the most important areas, is to press the entire military establishment on electronic warfare, hypersonics, directed energy, and I appreciate your answers. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

JACK REED: Thank you, Senator King. Senator Schmitt, please.

ERIC SCHMITT: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good to see you, Admiral, and really appreciate our time in my office. We had a chance to visit.

As I mentioned in the office, as we consider your nomination, the threat posed by Communist **China** grows every single day, in my view. I think you shared that assessment.

This and other challenges around the world put the Navy at an inflection point, and the tone set by the next commander of the U.S. INDOPACOM will prove critical in strengthening our relationships with important partners in the region, so we can collectively deter the rise of **China**. Your potential future actions as commander of INDOPACOM will be watched and judged by the world, as you know. We trust you understand the weight of the task that you're taking on, and if confirmed, must demonstrate the United States' resolve in the region by ensuring peace through strength.

I have three questions, so, you know, limited time we have here, but the first is, just a few short years ago, Admiral Davidson was in front of Congress and made an alarming assessment that **China** would have the necessary capabilities to invade Taiwan by 2027. Do you share that assessment?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: I know that in public statements, the **PRC** intends to be ready by 2027, but that's related to nothing other than the 100th anniversary of the **People's Liberation Army**. In fact, I think they're working to be ready every day, and they could go, and we've got to be constantly vigilant. There's no holiday between now and when they may go, and we must be ready now, next week, next month, and in the decades to come.

ERIC SCHMITT: What more do you need to effectively deter that?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: If confirmed, I'll work with the committee across the joint force and with the department to ensure that I'm clear in what those requirements are in accordance with my oath.

ERIC SCHMITT: Thank you. In addition to this invasion scenario, one of my concerns is where the CCP starts ratcheting up tensions through a blockade of Taiwan. The island nation imports 98% of its energy and is heavily reliant on

food imports to feed its population.

If the **PLA Navy** was able to successfully implement a blockade, it would not only be a problem, I think, for that island, but creates a ripple effect around the world. How would you, as INDOPACOM commander, make sure that **China** knows that the costs of imposing a blockade like that or other acts of war against **China** would be deterred, or how dire it would be?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Senator, you're bringing up a great point, which is that if we're just planning for an invasion, we're leaving a wide range of military options unplanned for. And so planning for deterrence and planning on response across the range of military operations, and plans are nothing, planning is everything, as Dwight D. Eisenhower said, is critically important.

And the Taiwan Relations Act provides the department no limits on what we should plan to. We should plan across that range of military operations, if so ordered by the commander in chief.

ERIC SCHMITT: And then lastly, one question I wanted to touch on, I think we talked about it in the office a little bit, but we've seen recently increased activity, I think, in this sort of gray zone aggression by the PL Navy in the South China Sea, and particularly directed against the Philippines, a key ally of ours in my view, in areas like the second Thomas Shoal. How do you see that gray zone harassment, aggression evolving over the next few years?

And do you see it growing in complexity and frequency? What's your assessment of that?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: I do see these gray zone operations, which is malign activity that does not necessarily risk full-blown acknowledged combat. This is done in the form of lawfare, declare a law, wait a minute, wait until people think that it's symbolic, then push maritime militia into the space under the fig leaf of fisher folk or something like that, then push law enforcement into the space under the fig leaf of protecting the maritime militia, and then comes the uniformed military as it tries to wrap with its tentacles through its expansionist desires.

And we must close every asymmetry with symmetry. U.S. Coast Guard partnerships are absolutely critical and indispensable to our success, and then strengthening our allies and partners in intel sharing for what those activities are to meet lawfare with lawfare, gray zone with gray zone, and it must be across all agencies within the Department of Defense and all of the levers of statecraft for the United States of America and our allies and our partners.

ERIC SCHMITT: Thank you, Admiral. Thank you for your service.

JACK REED: Thank you, Senator Schmidt. Senator Manchin, please.

JOE MANCHIN: Thank you very much. Admiral Paparo, thank you very much. I enjoyed the visit also, and thank you for your service to our great country. First of all, I want to reaffirm what I think Senator Hirono about the COFA. You and I spoke about how important that is, and you laid out to me about how important it is, and also the service of the people from those areas have given to our country. I appreciate all that, and we really need to double down to make sure they understand that we're behind them.

I'd like to talk to them a little bit about technology, and that's going to be Project Pele. It's basically small modular reactors. We're talking about microreactors now. And really, I haven't seen DOD kick in the way they should have kicked in, because it tremendously helps, I think, especially in the Indo-Pacific, where your supply chains can be a little bit challenging at times.

This reactor can be housed in a 20-foot shipping container. It provides five megawatts of power continuously for three years. In comparison, you need six diesel, large diesel generators, and nine million gallons of fuel to do the same job.

So I'm hoping that you can bring that to the attention of the urgency, especially in the Indo-Pacific, what it would do, because technology is almost there, and we've been running the entire military fleet almost on these microreactors for many times on our ships, submarines, and all that. So I don't know how high that's on your priority list. I don't know if that's been brought to your attention.

ADMIRAL PAPARO: It is compelling, and of course, as a naval officer, I've got deep connection with naval reactors. And if confirmed, you can count on inquiry and as-able support for feasible solutions.

JOE MANCHIN: Private sectors try, Admiral, as much as they can, to advance this technology as quickly as possible. But in the military, the way you all would have it and the amount of need you would have, showing it in the most harsh and adverse conditions would be tremendously important for our country to be able to have that opportunity, but also showing that it works in the savings. I think in burn pits and everything else we've been going through and the PAY Act we've had to do and all the different things, this is a tremendous opportunity for us to cure a lot of our ills.

The other thing I'm concerned about is efforts such as Force Design 2030 for the Marine Corps. They demonstrate modernization in a deliberate manner, but also **China** continues to outpace us in building of ships and munition output and things of this sort. What's your concerns on that?

Are we going to be able to meet that challenge, or do you think that this is the proper way to go?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Well, first, Force Design 2030 does not relieve the joint

force of its crisis response capabilities, nor to my awareness has the Marine Corps in any way walked away from the crisis response mission. And particularly the Marine Corps in close partnership within the Navy Marine Corps team, crisis response isn't a Marine Corps mission, it's a Navy Marine Corps mission, and it's also a joint force mission.

So I think conceptually we should be always challenging our assumptions about our force designs when we're looking off into the future. We should be planning to worst-case scenarios and closing gaps, and if confirmed, I'll work continuously –

JOE MANCHIN: Let me ask you this question. As far as, you know, you're going into the hottest area I think we have as far as direct engagement, if you will, in the Indo-Pacific right now. What's the greatest challenge, I mean, we hear about, and I know they've asked you questions concerning the timing on Taiwan, maybe coming to whatever that outcome is going to be and what time period, but also what they've been building up as far as **China** and shutting down the shipping lanes, making it almost impossible for the Philippines to be able to.

What is the greatest challenge we have that you're going to be able to be faced with and think you have to meet, the highest priority?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: The trajectory and the aggression, the trajectory of the **PLA**, the **People's Liberation Army**, across all of its services and its activity and its aggression, that itself is the greatest challenge, and to be able to day-to-day deter conflict by the dynamic demonstration of allied and joint operations to show the ability to impose costs.

And if and when conflict comes, it is that C5ISR in space and cyber that shall be the first battle and will be either the enabling capability for the joint force or the Achilles heel for the **PLA** if that day comes.

JOE MANCHIN: One real quick, if I can. I get mixed signals on basically, we have said that we're going to defend Taiwan if they're attacked, but yet we don't acknowledge them.

We still acknowledge a one **China** policy. People back home ask me, so why do we have a one **China** policy, but yet we don't recognize them, and yet we say we're going to fight for them. Is that confusing?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Not to the joint force, Senator, because the joint force, our mandate is the Taiwan Relations Act, which is the Department shall support Taiwan with defensive systems and the Defense Department shall be prepared to thwart an invasion of Taiwan and that mission clarity –

JOE MANCHIN: That's clear. That's very clear, right?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: For the joint force, yes, sir –

JOE MANCHIN: We're behind Taiwan?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: The joint force is ready to defend Taiwan and must be critical thinking and continuing to make itself in the face of a concerning **PRC**.

JOE MANCHIN: Thank you, Admiral. I appreciate it. Thank you very much. Sorry, Mr. Chairman.

JACK REED: Thanks, Senator Manchin. Senator Budd, please.

TED BUDD: Thank you, Chairman. Admiral, good to see you again. Enjoyed the conversation in my office and even more in your office out in the Indo-Pacific. You're a wonderful host. It was very insightful. You know, some seem to think that if **China** successfully seizes Taiwan, then the **China** problem that we have is it's over and that the United States won't have to worry about **China** anymore. You know, in these people's view, Taiwan is really all that **Beijing** wants. So do you agree with this line of thinking or do you worry that **Beijing's** ambitions go beyond Taiwan?

And if **China** seizes control of Taiwan, do you think it will consolidate its gains and then seek to use force to expand its control in other areas?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: I do not agree, by which I mean I do not agree that all the problems are over if and if the Taiwan matter would be settled by force. And that is evident in there in the **PRC's** behavior, in the kind of force that they're building is a force that lends itself to power projection –

TED BUDD: Beyond just Taiwan?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Yes, sir. In the Senkakus, in the South China Sea, and then even in the maps that they publish in open source is an ever-expanding zone.

TED BUDD: Admiral, would it be harder for the U.S. and its allied forces, the joint force, to deter or defeat **Chinese** aggression if **Beijing** is able to seize control of Taiwan and station forces on Taiwan?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: It would be a challenge geographically and it would also be a challenge in terms of the cohesion of our alliances and partnerships who would have seen the potential failure of an American security agreement.

TED BUDD: How would the **Chinese** threat to U.S. territories in the Western Pacific like Guam and the Northern Marianas change if **China** is able to seize Taiwan and position forces there?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Northern Marianas and Guam are America and it would

be under greater and direct threat.

TED BUDD: Thank you. Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs General Milley testified that strengthening Taiwan's asymmetric defenses is vital not only to bolster deterrence against **China** but also to reduce operational risk to U.S. forces who may be called to help defend Taiwan. Do you agree with the former chairman's testimony?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: I do, sir.

TED BUDD: Would you elaborate on that?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Actions that Taiwan takes to strengthen its own defenses have a three-to-one leverage against aggression. This is military doctrine on assault ratios.

And accordingly, to the extent that Taiwan can make itself a porcupine with sea denial capabilities, with the ability to defeat an invader at sea, undersea, in the air, to the invasion beaches, has three-to-one leverage in the investment in its ability to defend itself and ensure that the tension in the straits are resolved peacefully and not by coercion.

TED BUDD: Thank you. So is it fair to say that the United States should be doing everything possible to get Taiwan the asymmetric defense capabilities and associated training and other support required to defend itself against the **Chinese** invasion?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: The scale of the support is a decision of the commander-in-chief and of the Congress. I support any effort that makes Taiwan stronger.

TED BUDD: Is it fair to say that Taipei also needs to be doing everything possible to strengthen Taiwan's defenses, including by increasing Taiwanese defense spending and making necessary defense reforms, for instance, to Taiwan's reserve forces and conscription program?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Yes, sir, I agree. And if confirmed, I will stress that.

TED BUDD: Thank you, Admiral. Appreciate your time today. Chairman?

JACK REED: Thank you very much, Senator Budd. I'm informed that Senator Duckworth is on her way here. As a result, I will take the opportunity to ask an additional question. We've talked a lot about equipment, funding, et cetera, but one of the essential factors is the will of the people to resist and to fight.

Can you evaluate the situation on Taiwan in terms of their commitment and their capabilities?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: In my discussions with the Taiwan forces, I have seen a greater focus on the kinds of operational capabilities that would make Taiwan more able to defend itself. I see those investments as well. And so I am seeing it conceptually. I'm seeing shifts in the culture of Taiwan's military doctrine becoming more joint, of seeing the problem clearly with defensive capabilities and in a will to mobilize their young people.

You know, they've recently increased the levels of their, the time of their conscription. And so at the levels for my interlocutors, I am seeing that manifest itself.

JACK REED: Let me further ask, you've mentioned this before, and I think you're exactly right. The key factor in our military competence is the skilled professionalism of non-commissioned officers. We owe them a lot. To what extent are we focusing on developing that skill and expertise in Taiwanese forces?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: I am seeing that, Senator. And if confirmed, I think we should redouble it, particularly with our command sergeant's major, our fleet master chiefs at that level. And the relationships that we have at senior levels, we must mimic, if not redouble our efforts among the professional NCO corps.

JACK REED: It strikes me one of the reasons that the Ukrainian forces resisted so well and had so much flexibility and initiative at the company level and below is that they've been trained by U.S. Special Forces since 2014. And that, I think, showed itself.

One of the greatest issues, and it's been mentioned several times here, is contested logistics. That has been wholly, instead, an army who was on its stomach. A navy swims on its stomach, I guess is the analogy. But this could be the real choke point in terms of operations in the Pacific. Can you tell us what your plans would be, what your emphasis would be in terms of logistics so we avoid that?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Senator, we're gaming, modeling, and simulating at every level to identify those gaps. And it's almost a misnomer. We talk about contested logistics as if it never were contested. Logistics are always contested. And executing the joint function of sustainment comes under all of the same pressures and all of the same fog and friction that maneuver, that fires, that all of the joint functions come at.

At the service level, we're seeing invaluable games and simulations that are informing our ability to sustain the force in conflict. And if confirmed, I'll continue to work with this committee to identify what those gaps are for rapid closure.

JACK REED: I would assume your experience commanding a provincial

reconstruction team reinforced the nature of logistics and the fact that they all are contested. Is that an experience you're drawing?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Indeed. It was kind of essential to my formation as a joint officer.

JACK REED: I think that's an excellent experience to have when you're assuming joint command. We've also talked about the developing relationship between the Japanese and the Koreans. I've traveled over there several times, and there wasn't until very recently lingering distrust because of the history of those two countries over this century and the previous century.

You're seeing, though, I presume, a real cooperative spirit and a new generation of leaders that understand the threat is not from either of those countries but from **China**. Is that correct?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: I do see it firsthand, Senator, at the senior level. There's no faking the chemistry between the senior leaders that I see. And more directly and probably more tellingly, the Pacific Fleet headquarters is a deeply partnered environment with not liaison officers but embeds, officers from other countries with enhanced clearances who do U.S. jobs for a U.S. command Pacific Fleet.

And to see the chemistry between the multiple JMSD, the Japanese officers that are in the headquarters, and the Korean officers, and although it is a complicated and difficult history, I see a bright future.

JACK REED: Wonderful. Thank you. With that, let me recognize Senator Duckworth for her question.

TAMMY DUCKWORTH: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for waiting on me. Admiral Paparo, so good to see you again. Good morning. Welcome to you and your family, and congratulations on your nomination. And thank you for our wide-ranging discussion on Tuesday.

Should you be confirmed, I look forward to working with you to deepen relationships and integration between the Indo-Pacific Command and Transportation Command. We had a good discussion on that.

Transportation Command plays an important role in providing unique logistical capabilities to geographic combatant commanders like Indo-Pacific Command. Any conflict in the Indo-Pacific region would pose significant logistical and maneuver challenges for the joint force, further complicating TRANSCOM's already difficult mission. I will always be this committee's fiercest advocate for resourcing Transportation Command and ensuring that the command's hardworking men and women are able to do mission in any circumstance.

Admiral, if confirmed, how will you work with Transportation Command to ensure the two combatant command's warfighting requirements and planning factors are integrated and supported by rigorous exercises and experimentation?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Senator, absolutely indispensable, this relationship, and the intellect, the energy, the drive, the expertise at U.S. Transportation Command at Scott Air Force Base. Those relationships are absolutely critical. They must be honest relationships where we hold each other to account in the best and most team-oriented way.

But in deterrence, in competition, in crisis, in conflict, it is very likely the most important COCOM to COCOM relationship we have.

TAMMY DUCKWORTH: Can you expand on that with how you would ensure a unified and coherent plan to address the logistical challenges that forces operating in INDOPACOM's AO would face in a contested environment specifically?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: As Eisenhower said, plans are nothing, planning is everything. Continued planning within the two commands is what builds the habits of mind and habits of action that not only allows the force to plan for every contingency, but to also execute against every contingency when every plan fails at first contact with the enemy.

And so it's that habitual planning relationship, the critical thinking, the combining on a common vision of the operational environment, that consistent planning is that that's going to deliver not just resilient plans for conflict across the spectrum, but also effective execution and teamwork when the unforgiving hour comes.

TAMMY DUCKWORTH: Thank you. And part of the teamwork that works in the Indo-Pacific region is the state partnership for peace program. It's really important to maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific.

And I think it's a great opportunity that is existing that will enhance interoperability and strengthen our allies and partners in mil-to-mil engagement. Can you chat with us a little bit about how you would plan to use the National Guard's SPP program to strengthen both our relationships with our allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific, but also to just greater engagement and exercises as well?

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Senator, across the Pacific, across the Indian Ocean, these state partnership programs have got tremendous leverage to build those partnerships, to build partner capacity for us to learn from each other.

And one of the unappreciated benefits of the National Guard is that in addition

to excellence in the military occupation specialty of each of the Guard service members, they also frequently bring to bear other civilian skill sets that just add value to the program. So in the Indian Ocean region, in Bangladesh, in Sri Lanka, across the Southeast Asia, across the South Pacific, it pays dividends every single day, has huge impact on the ability of the theater to operate.

And this, I say, just at the appreciation level as the pack fleet commander, if confirmed, I'll learn even more and go even deeper into the state partnership program. But as Chairman Reed said, you know, I've got a lot of experience with the National Guard, so kind of as a function of my time in Nuristan, so already a kind of a deep appreciation for what the Guard brings to the fight.

TAMMY DUCKWORTH: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, would you indulge me with one last question on aero medical evacuations? Thank you.

Admiral, I would love to talk about a medical evacuation of wounded during a kinetic conflict. I would love to hear about your ideas to leverage our allies and partners in the region to address INDOPACOM's medical care capacity constraint, if there were a conflict in the region.

Because we talked at length about the tyranny of distance, and there's no golden hour because you're going to have to fight your way in to get the wounded, you have to fight your way out, and even Guam or Tripler is still hours and hours away.

ADMIRAL PAPARO: Senator, through wide travel throughout the theater, you know, over 37 years, just haven't had the honor of visiting so many places. And then among countries that actually have licensure here in the United States, we should be creative about how we're going to think about delivering care, particularly in environments with mass casualty among allies and partners.

And so, in addition to looking after our capability at our naval and our military hospitals, we should also be constantly gaming on our medevac capability, our cas-evac capability, our CSAR capability, our getting patients to role one, role two, role three care, and being creative in the ways that we partner across the theater.

And you mentioned in our office call the opportunities that could be gained from a partnership standpoint to train more deeply across that. And if confirmed, I pledge to work with you to bring that kind of creativity to bear against this, really our first duty as commanders is to look after our people.

TAMMY DUCKWORTH: Thank you, Admiral. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

JACK REED: Thank you, Senator Duckworth. Admiral, thank you for your testimony today. Thank you, particularly you and your families for your

distinguished service to the Navy and the nation. We will move aggressively on this nomination. With that, the hearing is concluded.