

## SPEECH

# 'A Shared Vision for the Indo-Pacific': Remarks by Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III at the Shangri-La Dialogue (As Delivered)

June 2, 2023

Well, good morning, everyone.

It is indeed great to be back here for another Shangri-La Dialogue.

Let me thank John and everyone at IISS for their efforts to deepen our dialogue on the Indo-Pacific. You know, this is my third time speaking in Singapore at an IISS event. And so this is starting to be—it's becoming a habit there, John.

I also want to thank our national host, Singapore, for your tremendous hospitality.

And it's great to see Senior Minister Teo, and Minister Ng, and other distinguished guests from our host here today.

And I'm glad that we're joined by so many defense ministers and leaders from around the Indo-Pacific and around the world.

One minister of defense made a special effort to be here today: my good friend Oleksii Reznikov of Ukraine. Oleksii's seat is currently empty. I'm sure he's working the room somewhere around here, but Oleskii, if you can hear me, I'd remind you that, I'd just tell you

that your presence here reminds us that we can never take our peace and security for granted.

I'm also delighted to be here with Director Haines and many of our U.S. military leaders.

So thanks to everyone for being here today.

This dialogue is always a great opportunity to exchange views. And the only thing more wide-ranging than the conference agenda is the breakfast buffet.

[Laughter]

You know, this forum began two decades ago, in a very difficult geopolitical climate. And today, we're meeting at another moment of significant consequence.

More and more, the countries of the Indo-Pacific have come together around a compelling vision of the future. And they're advancing it in unprecedented ways.

It's a vision of a region in which all countries are free to thrive on their own terms—without coercion, or intimidation, or bullying.

It's a vision of a free, and open, and secure Indo-Pacific within a world of rules and rights.

And that vision is anchored in some key principles.

Respect for sovereignty.

Adherence to international law.

Transparency and openness.

The free flow of commerce and ideas.

Human rights and human dignity.

Equal rights for all states, large and small.

And resolving disputes through peaceful dialogue, and not coercion or conquest.

You know, since the last time that I was in Singapore, we have made some tremendous progress toward our shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

This is actually my seventh trip to the region as Secretary of Defense, and my fourth trip to Southeast Asia. And each time, I've had the privilege to listen to leaders expressing their hopes for their countries and their people.

And those conversations reinforce a simple truth. And that truth is that no one country can reach this future alone. As we all heard from Prime Minister Albanese last night, each country has a role to play. And the choices made by countries across the region reflect a deepening commitment to these shared principles.

Throughout the Biden administration, we've demonstrated what my first speech in Singapore called "the power of partnership."

We have forged new friendships and deepened old alliances. We have reinforced deterrence to prevent conflict. We have defended the rules and norms that protect us all. And we have moved closer to the bright future that the people of this region want—and the one that they deserve.

So today, I'd like to talk about the historic progress that we've made together over the past year.

I'll talk about what the countries of the region are doing to fulfill that vision, what the United States is doing, and—most importantly—what we're doing together.

Now clearly, we have much more to do. But our vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific is truly shared—and truly achievable.

You know, this vision isn't the vision of a single country, or the initiative of a single country. It is a common and compelling aspiration.

It's about building the basic conditions that let people live their lives without fear and pursue their dreams without limit.

And that matters to citizens across the region.

You know, some 60 percent of the world's young people live in this region, and they rightly demand the free flow of ideas.

Fishing communities in the Philippines, and Vietnam, and the Pacific Islands depend on open waterways for their livelihoods.

And innovators here in Singapore depend on the rule of law to keep propelling the global economy forward.

So these shared principles matter for men, women, and children all around this region.

And they can't be taken for granted.

And neither can this region's security or prosperity be taken for granted.

Just look at the crisis caused by Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine.

The Kremlin's indefensible war of choice stands as the bloodiest conflict in Europe since the end of World War II.

And Russia's shocking aggression has brought home to people everywhere how dangerous our world would become if big countries could just invade their neighbors with impunity.

Russia's invasion shows us all the dangers of disorder and the cost of chaos.

That's why so many countries represented here have supported Ukraine's brave defenders against Russia's war of imperial aggression.

And that's why the countries of the Indo-Pacific have cast their vote time and again for a future of peace, prosperity, and progress.

This year, as president of the G-7, Japan has focused on connectivity and on bridging the gap with developing countries. That includes pledging to invest \$75 billion in public and private funds for regional infrastructure that can weather the storms of climate change.

India took the helm of the G-20 and called on its members to work together to lift up the most vulnerable. And for the first time, India and ASEAN completed a new maritime exercise together.

Last year, the Republic of Korea's Indo-Pacific strategy declared that international norms and international order were keys to our shared security and prosperity.

Indonesia and Vietnam took bold steps toward resolving their maritime-boundary dispute. And this is after 12 hard years of negotiations.

And so around the region, countries are matching their words with their actions, insisting on resolving differences through dialogue, and calling for even closer cooperation.

And so are we.

As you may know, I had a brief, 41-year career in the U.S. Army.

[Laughter]

And I learned over and over again that alliances and partnerships make us all stronger.

The United States is working together with our friends more closely every day.

We're doubling down on our alliances and our partnerships.

And our National Defense Strategy calls for us to work more closely with our allies and partners at every stage of defense planning.

And so that spirit of partnership drove our work together to help the region recover from the worst days of the pandemic—including providing more than 360 million safe and effective vaccine doses.

And that same spirit will help us tackle other shared threats, from climate change to nuclear proliferation.

And so our shared goals are clear: to deter aggression and to deepen the rules and norms that promote prosperity and prevent conflict.

So we're stepping up planning, and coordination, and training with our friends from the East China Sea to the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean.

That includes staunch allies such as Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, and Thailand. And it includes as well such valued partners as India, Indonesia, Vietnam, and clearly our hosts here today in Singapore.

Consider the historic strides forward in the U.S.-Philippine alliance.

As you've heard, the United States and the Philippines recently designated four new locations under our Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement. And so this will let our forces work together to strengthen Philippine security, continue to modernize the Philippine military, and deliver humanitarian aid and disaster relief.

We also recently completed the largest and most complex Exercise Balikatan ever. More than 17,000 troops participated—and that's nearly twice as many as last year. And for the first time, the exercise featured cyber elements, HIMARS rocket systems, and Patriot surface-to-air missiles.

We're also standing with our Japanese allies as they make historic changes to their National Security Strategy. This will mean major new investments in Japan's defense, including moves to develop a counterstrike capability. And we're upgrading our joint exercises like Keen Sword and Resolute Dragon to include more complex and realistic scenarios.

We also salute the bold steps taken by Japan and the Republic of Korea to work more closely together. Strong ties between Tokyo and Seoul are good for both countries—and for the region. We've made tremendous progress in our own trilateral cooperation with Japan and the ROK, including more regular military exercises and greater information sharing.

As North Korea continues its nuclear threats, and missile tests, and other dangerous provocations, we're deepening our extended deterrence with our allies in the Republic of Korea. That includes increased deployments of our most advanced assets and the historic Washington Declaration issued by President Biden and President Yoon. And we're cooperating more deeply than ever with the ROK on joint planning exercises, and information-sharing, and more.

At the same time, we're working closely with our allies to upgrade our force posture in the region. We're making our presence more distributed, more agile, and more resilient. And that will bring greater stability and security to the region.

So we're committed to ensuring that every country can fly, sail, and operate wherever international law allows. And every country, large and small, must remain free to conduct lawful maritime activities.

So we're modernizing our presence so that we can all continue to exercise these rights each and every day.

We will forward-station our 12th Marine Littoral Regiment—which is the most advanced formation in the U.S. Marine Corps—in Japan by 2025 to deepen stability in the First Island Chain.

We have committed to increase the rotational presence of U.S. forces in Australia, including rotations of fighters and bomber task forces, as well as future rotations of ground and maritime capabilities.

We're also deeply committed to ensuring that our allies and partners have the capabilities that they need to deter aggression and to increase stability.

You see, more capable allies and partners magnify all of our security.

So we're making extraordinary investments in our capabilities, alongside our allies and partners, to reinforce peace and prosperity in this region.

President Biden's Fiscal Year 2024 budget request includes the largest procurement request in the history of the Department of Defense—and the largest investment ever in research and development. His budget also includes a 40 percent increase over last year's request for the Pacific Deterrence Initiative—and that's an all-time high of \$9.1 billion.

We're making bold investments in airpower, including an additional \$61 billion for our F-35s, F-22s, and uncrewed aircraft, and not to mention the B-21 Raider. And we're investing in an expanded fleet of subs, carriers, and destroyers—as well as in space, and cyberspace, and long-range fires, including hypersonics.

And at every point, we are committed to sharing the advances that we've made to help our partners.

For example, our Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology with India lets us explore new ways to co-develop key defense platforms.

With Japan, we're working closely together on uncrewed combat air systems, and counter-hypersonics, and air-defense and missile-defense technologies.

With the Philippines, we're negotiating a new security sector assistance roadmap that will bring our alliance into a new era.

And through the historic AUKUS partnership, we're cooperating with Australia and the U.K. on a range of path-breaking capabilities. And of course, earlier this year, we announced how AUKUS will deliver conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines to Australia, all with the purpose of upholding peace and security.

And just since 2020, we've invested nearly \$1.2 billion in security cooperation funding to ensure that Indo-Pacific countries can detect malign actors and deter coercion.

And so America's partnerships are bringing the region closer together to help keep it free, and open, and secure.



And you can see that in new forms of trilateral cooperation.

The United States, Australia, and Japan are operating together more closely than ever and finding new ways to enhance our science and technology cooperation.

The United States, Japan, and the ROK are strengthening our interoperability and exploring ways to better share information about missile threats from North Korea.

Later today, I'll talk with my Australian, Japanese, and Philippine counterparts about stronger cooperation, especially in the maritime domain.

We've also made some important strides forward with Australia, India, and Japan through the Quad. The Quad is strengthening its maritime cooperation and its work on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. And all four Quad partners will participate in Exercise Malabar, which will take place off the coast of Australia for the first time this summer.

Many of the region's other top exercises are expanding as more countries come together around our shared principles—our shared principles.

Last year, our annual Garuda Shield expanded from a bilateral exercise with Indonesia to include 14 countries with more than 4,000 troops. And this year, more than 19 flags will fly over Super Garuda Shield.

Next month, Exercise Talisman Saber with Australia will bring 14 countries together. It will be the largest iteration ever, with more than 30,000 people participating, including a significant contingent from Japan. And it is yet another way that European countries like France, and Germany, and the U.K. are standing up for our shared values in the Indo-Pacific.

And so building nimble coalitions to advance our shared vision makes the Indo-Pacific more stable and more resilient.

The United States is absolutely proud to expand our cooperation with ASEAN. We remain staunch supporters of ASEAN centrality and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific. And we stepped up our work through the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting-Plus, including new programs to support the next generation of Southeast Asian defense leaders.

We're also continuing to expand our marquee maritime initiative with the Quad. The Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness will help our partners across the region better monitor the waters near their shores. And that will help them combat illegal fishing and better respond to natural disasters.

And finally, we are building important new ties in the Pacific Islands.

We're working with our Pacific partners to combat illegal, and unregulated, and unreported fishing through more training and cooperation, such as the U.S. Coast Guard's Shiprider program. We're working together to strengthen maritime domain awareness and expand the capacity of our Pacific Island partners. And we recently signed a historic Defense Cooperation Agreement with Papua New Guinea. It will modernize our security cooperation and help us provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in the region.

And so ladies and gentlemen, our work together has made this region stronger and safer.

Now, we understand the headwinds that we face. But we won't let those headwinds blow us off course.

We'll continue to stand by our allies and partners as they uphold their rights. We will maintain our vigorous and responsible presence across the Indo-Pacific. And we'll continue to work to ensure that no one country can assert control over shared waterways.

In the South China Sea, we will continue to work with our allies and partners to uphold the freedom of navigation and overflight. And let me again underscore the importance of the 2016 ruling by the Arbitral Tribunal. It is legally binding, and it is final.

We won't be deterred by dangerous operational behavior at sea or in international airspace.

The People's Republic of China continues to conduct an alarming number of risky intercepts of U.S. and allied aircraft flying lawfully in international airspace. And we've all just seen another troubling case of aggressive and unprofessional flying by the PRC.

So we will support our allies and partners as they defend themselves against coercion and bullying.

To be clear, we do not seek conflict or confrontation. But we will not flinch in the face of bullying or coercion.

Now, all of this is especially important in the Taiwan Strait.

I'd also like to be clear about another point. The United States remains deeply committed to preserving the status quo in the strait, consistent with our longstanding one-China policy, and with fulfilling our well-established obligations under the Taiwan Relations Act.

Our policy is constant and firm. It has held true across U.S. administrations. And we will continue to categorically oppose unilateral changes to the status quo from either side.

I'd also highlight that conflict is neither imminent or inevitable. Deterrence is strong today—and it's our job to keep it that way.

You know, the whole world has a stake in maintaining peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait—the whole world. The security of commercial shipping lanes and global supply chains depends on it. And so does freedom of navigation world-wide.

But make no mistake: conflict in the Taiwan Strait would be devastating.

So we are determined to maintain peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait. And so are a number of other countries around the world—and that number continues to grow.

President Biden has been clear. The United States does not seek a new Cold War. And competition must not spill over into conflict. And the region should never be split into hostile blocs.

Instead, we're working to strengthen the guardrails against conflict, and to redouble our diplomacy, and to bolster peace, and security, and stability in the region.

The United States believes that open lines of communication with the People's Republic of China are essential—especially between our defense and military leaders.

For responsible defense leaders, the right time to talk is anytime.

The right time to talk is everytime.

And the right time to talk is now.

Dialogue is not a reward. It is a necessity.

And a cordial handshake over dinner is no substitute for a substantive engagement.

And the more that we talk, the more that we can avoid the misunderstandings and miscalculations that could lead to crisis or conflict.

You know, I am deeply concerned that the PRC has been unwilling to engage more seriously on better mechanisms for crisis management between our two militaries. But I hope that will change, and soon.

I've said it before, and I'll say it again: Great powers must be beacons of transparency and responsibility. And the United States is deeply committed to doing our part.

And we are determined to keep this region open, peaceful, and prosperous.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Indo-Pacific has become an extraordinary example of human progress and peaceful cooperation.

I'm proud to be here with you. And the United States is proud to be your partner.

As I said before, conflict and strife are not inevitable. But peace and security are not automatic.

The region's growing openness and prosperity show the importance of working together—and not allowing ourselves to be split apart.

The people of the Indo-Pacific have a wider view and a wider vision.

So together, we can deepen the region's security.

Together, we can expand the circle of opportunity.

And together, we can ensure that every citizen of this region has the chance to thrive.

So let's continue to draw on the power of partnership.

Let's continue to come together in common purpose.

And let's continue to build a region of prosperity, and openness, and freedom.

It's a real pleasure to stand in your ranks. Thank you very much. I look forward to your questions.

[Applause]

JOHN CHIPMAN: Mr. Secretary, thank you very much for that extremely compelling presentation and I think everyone will have marked down your note that the right time for talk is anytime. I was also struck by your phrase earlier in your remarks that the United States is seeking to modernize our presence so that we can exercise our rights, and it invited me to ask you if I can the first question we've seen in the conflict in Ukraine how quickly and automatically the forces of Ukraine have been able to incorporate a genuinely diverse range of technologies and systems. Including some that are very modern, can you say a few words about how you think emerging technologies, AI, quantum, cyber, uncrewed vehicles and the like have a particular role in the mission of deterrence in defense in this theater?

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE LLOYD J. AUSTIN III: Well thanks John. This is really important to us. You know, if you look at our National Defense Strategy we talk about the importance of leveraging capability and capacity in all of the warfighting domains, land, air, sea, space, cyberspace. And so our task is to go after those -- those capabilities that support our warfighting concepts that -- that enable us to be not only successful in the -- in the-- in deterring a conflict but also enable us to be dominant in any future contest. So as we go after those capabilities to support our warfighting concepts, we're looking to bring things together and synchronize them and network them in ways that we've not done before. So

we're going after capabilities like you mentioned quantum computing, edge computing, AI and -- and a number of other things. It's one thing to say that but I think you have to make an effort to invest in the right kinds of things and align your budget to -- to match what your strategy is. So we -- we through great pains to link our budget request to our strategy line by line almost and it's a -- it's probably the best I've ever seen.

I applaud my -- the staff, they really did a tremendous job there. So, it's one thing to even when you get the capabilities, you have to make sure that you've organized your organization to be able to manage those things, and then you have to drive yourself -- drive the organization to success. I made a change to our -- to our staff, I created a position that -- that oversees the -- the integration of our digital -- digital work and also AI, so I have a chief digital and AI officer that is really a phenomenal job of aligning the organization across -- across the board. So getting the capabilities are one thing, but then you've got to organize and you've got to drive to -- to create the capabilities that we're all looking for and then you have to work with industry and I know there's a number of industry leaders in this crowd and we make an effort.

I make an effort to talk to industry leadership to tell them where we want to go, what our needs are and, you know, how we intend to employ the capabilities that we're asking for and I would say that the United States, you know, our industrial base is really one of our strategic advantages. But, you know, unless we're communicating the right things to industry, we won't be where we need in the long term. So that remains a work in progress, but the kinds of things that you're talking about in terms of technology are the kinds of things that will help us maintain a competitive edge going forward. It is very important to us. It is fundamental to our -- our National Defense Strategy and again this is something we remain sighted on each and every day.

DR. CHIPMAN: Well thank you very much. I'll take with your permission about three or four from the floor. Don't worry about joining late. I don't necessarily respect an order of precedence so I'll call on four or five people first. First you mentioned SecDef the Philippines, so Jeffery Ordaniel from the Philippines first.

Q: Hi thank you. So according to the 2022 report to Congress released by your department Sir, if China continues the pace of its nuclear expansion. If you'll likely a stockpile about 1,500 warheads and that's significant given that the limit -- the legal limit of the U.S. operation deployed nuclear warheads under the New START agreement is about 1,500.

And so that means China will achieve nuclear parity with the United States in about 15 years, my question is are there any updates on U.S. efforts to push for some sort of an arms control with China and are your Asian allies involved in -- in that kind of discussion? Thank you.

SEC. AUSTIN: Let me begin this by saying we are serious about our commitment to extended deterrence and I have spoken with our allies and partners in the room a number of times on this particular issue. And you should know that the president of the United States and all of us are very serious about this commitment, but in terms of specific updates on engagements with -- with the PRC on arms control, I don't have any updates there. You have to talk to them first. So as soon as they answer the phone, maybe we'll -- we'll get some work done here.

DR. CHIPMAN: From the United States, Bonnie Glaser.

Q: Thank you, John. Secretary Austin, senior Chinese officials are communicating to their foreign counterparts that the United States is seeking to goad China into using force against Taiwan. This is reminiscent to the October surprise in 2020 when China seemed convinced that the United States was trying to participate a crisis in the South China Sea. So I agree, dialogue especially purposeful dialogue is essential. If you had the opportunity to meet with General Li, what would you tell him about U.S. objectives in the Taiwan Strait beyond the fact that the United States supports maintenance of the status quo and opposes use of force?

SEC. AUSTIN: Well thanks for the question. Let me say up front that I respectfully disagree with the premise of the question and that we're trying to goad China into a conflict. It's in fact just the opposite. We are doing everything in our power to make sure that we maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific, because as I said earlier in my remarks this is important to all of us in this region. In -- in terms of, you know, what I would say to -- to my counterpart, well, you know, I -- again with respect to Taiwan it's the same thing that I said to them the last time and that is our policy has not changed and we do not seek, do not desire to see a change, a unilateral change by any party. And so, you know, any kind of disagreements ought to be resolved through diplomacy and again it's important to maintain peace and stability in this region as I mentioned earlier. Conflict in the straits would affect the global economy in ways that we cannot imagine but thanks for the question

DR. CHIPMAN: Then from China, Chi Zhang.

Q: Thank you Dr. Chipman. Good morning Mr. Secretary. The theme of our plenary session here is U.S. leadership but how to play the role of leadership. On one hand you claim to support the centrality of ASEAN in the region, on the other hand the U.S. established multi-lateral institutions such as Quad and AUKUS. Is there any contradiction between U.S. led institutions and the centrality of ASEAN in the region? How to guarantee ASEAN centrality? Thank you.

SEC. AUSTIN: Don't think I got the entire jist of the question but it -- I think your question was centered on AUKUS and -- and whether or not that either-- that promotes security and stability in the region or -- or drives us to -- to conflict. It absolutely promotes greater stability and security. It provides a valued and highly capable ally with additional capability that I think will be a generational capability. And so I am confident that this will add greater stability and security for this region, I am proud of the work that we're doing with AUKUS and I know my good friends, my colleagues from Australia and the UK are here and I look forward to having additional discussions with them about AUKUS and updating our progress. But I think that this will add significantly to our efforts to maintain peace and stability in the region.

MR. CHIPMAN: And from Vietnam, Bich Tran.

Q: Thank you Dr. Chipman. Secretary, so you mentioned Vietnam is one of important partners of the United States in this region. So I wonder where does, you know, I think says a lot about the United States respects the different political system of Vietnam. So I wonder whether you agree that being a communist is not a problem but being a revisionist may be another issue? Thanks. So differtiate between a communist state and a revisionist state.

SEC. AUSTIN: I heard you say being a communist is not a problem, but being a revolutionary is an issue but, hey listen we are focused on what you heard me talk about earlier and that is making sure that we maintain peace, security and stability in this region, and we remain access to international airways and waterways. We don't -- in our partnerships and our alliances, we don't ask people to choose or countries to choose between us and another country. We don't ask country, impose our will on countries, you know, again we want to work on those things that are common interest to all of us, the both of us. So I'll leave it at that.



DR. CHIPMAN: From France, Francois Heisbourg.

Q: Thank you very much for your statements and for recalling the role with some of your European partners are playing in the region. You emphasized that you were in favor of the status quo on Taiwan and that conflict was neither imminent nor inevitable. Those are obviously very welcome statements, yet we have been hearing over the last couple of years a number of active duty, high ranking American officers actually talk about imminence 2025 and 2027 being the most frequently sighted dates. Are we going to continue to hear active duty, high ranking American officers take that line or will there be as we would put it in French, (in French), silence in the ranks?

SEC. AUSTIN: Well first of all I believe what they are pointing to in some cases is the fact that President Xi challenged his military to develop the capabilities to conduct military operations by 2027. It doesn't mean that he's made a decision to do that. In terms of whether or not our officers, what they will say in the future, they have the ability to say what they're thinking and, you know, we always welcome that. But my opinion is that a conflict is neither imminent or is it inevitable and so we're going to do everything we can to make sure that we're doing the right things to maintain the status quo. But, you know, the way that you deter any misguided decision is by having a combat credible military and we have one and we will continue to have one, and our officers are in charge of maintaining that combat credible force. I have to remain focused on making sure that they are ready to address any situation or circumstance. I know my INDOPACOM Commander is in the room somewhere and he'd be the first to stand up and tell you, boss you've charged me to do that and by golly I am going to be ready no matter what happens and that's what I want him to do. But again I don't think that a conflict is inevitable, nor do I think at this point that it's imminent.

DR. CHIPMAN: And from the Netherlands and the IISS, Verle Noouwens.

Q: Secretary of Defense, you made mention to the UK, Germany and France in the Indo-Pacific. I wanted to ask how important is it for the United States for European countries to be engaged militarily in the Indo-Pacific?

DR. CHIPMAN: How important is it for European militaries to be engaged militarily in the Indo-Pacific? How does it add value to the effort I think is the --

SEC. AUSTIN: Well, the first thing I'd tell you is we're not trying to create a NATO in the Indo-Pacific and we have a number of colleagues today from Europe and I'm really glad to see them here because they all have interest in this region. And those interests are not just military, they cover whole of government and so they would tell you that they have an interest in the region because all the great things that happened here. And Prime Minister Albanese talked about some of those things yesterday. The rate at which this region is growing, you know, the capability, the capacity that this region has. It is rightful that European countries would remain interested in making sure that we have good relationships with the countries here in the region and I'm confident that that's why they're here. But they'll probably tell you themselves because you'll see -- you'll interact with them later on in the day.

DR. CHIPMAN: Absolutely right. From Indonesia, Dewi Fortuna Anwar.

Q: Thank you John. I'd like to ask about the -- the relations between the Quad and ASEAN. As-- as the secretary, as you know, there's been a lot of initial skepticism and concerns that the Quad may undermine ASEAN's centrality. But I'm very happy to hear again, you know, you have stressed again the ASEAN centrality. And recently, President Widodo actually said that, you know, Quad and ASEAN are not competitors. They could be partners. Now I'd like to tease out more a Quad as an ASEAN corporation or is it the Quad and individual given the fact that all Quad countries are also a member of (inaudible). So what will be the format for such cooperation? Thank you.

DR. CHIPMAN: I think it's a question about the complex Rubik's Cube or the regional architecture in this region and how of these different mini-lateral and established multi-lateral arrangements interconnect?

SEC. AUSTIN: Well, I think we should take what we have in which is what we've done and what we've continue to do in terms of bilateral, trilateral and multilateral alliances and partnerships and build on those incrementally. Again, I don't think we should drive things to go in one direction or another. We're not trying to create a NATO in the Indo-Pacific. We value our relationships with our allies and partners and each of our allies and partners has a -- I mean they have their own self interests and we understand that and we want to make sure that we're helping them protect their self-interest. And that, when possible, are working with us and with other countries to provide for a free and open Indo-Pacific.

DR. CHIPMAN: Great. I'm going to take two questions in succession and let the Secretary answer those and we'll conclude the session with that. My first of this duet is Sharon Nanau.

Q: Yes sir, my question is on USA cooperation is pushing United States agenda into smaller island states. Example in the Solomon Islands, the U.S. was absent for over 20 plus years and only because of it's diplomatic switch to China. They've reopened the embassy last year. So to this corporation you've mentioned allies and partners but is it another form of pushing -- pushing USA agendas especially for smaller island states who don't have a leverage when coming to interacting with the developed bigger countries?

DR. CHIPMAN: Thank you very much. He's got that on small island states and their place in U.S. engagement in the region and from Ireland but also the Financial Times, Demetri Sevastopulo.

Q: Thank you, a very small island state. Secretary Austin, good morning. You've made a lot of progress creating a more joint security architecture in the Indo-Pacific, but one thing that's missing is joint operational war plans with allies, particularly to pattern Australia for Taiwan contingency. So my question is how urgent is the need for joint operational war plans and how hard is proving to develop them?

SEC. AUSTIN: On the issue of the importance of small island states, really they are important I think you know that for many of the small island states we've had relationships that go back for decades. We value and treasure those relationships and as you look at the number of people in some of those states that serve in the United States military, it really is impressive. So we want to make sure that we continue to build on those relationships and continue to account for your needs and your concerns. Most recently you saw that the President held a summit where he had Pacific Islander leadership into the White House and it was a great event. And this -- and I can tell you first hand that this is really important to him. On the issue of joint operational war plans, you probably know that I'm not going to discuss any kind of war plan in a forum like this and what we're doing and not doing. But what I will tell you is that it's important to work hard to increase our interoperability.

Now, it's, you know, it's important to have where possible compatible platforms. It's really important to make sure that you have, you know, policies and procedures that serve you well and that, you know, your allies or partners understand and are familiar with. But what happens when you work together as a joint or combined force is that you continue to build

trust among your forces and the forces that you're working with and at the end of the day, you can't surge trust. You know, it's got to be there up front. And so I'm proud of the work that we're doing to increase interoperability in the region, that interoperability will serve us well no matter what challenge presents itself.

We have come along way but we are by no means where any of us want be eventually. So we'll continue to work on that and for all of you that have, you provided the opportunities for my troops to work with your troops. Let me say thanks again. I cannot tell you how important that is. In terms of specific plans, again, we don't discuss plans in public forums but I will assure you that will continue to work with our allies to make sure that we think about and account for future contingencies. John, thanks so much for allowing me to be here and I guess we'll leave it at that.

[APPLAUSE]

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