

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

July 20, 2022

The Honorable Lloyd Austin
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Austin:

For years, while the United States abided by the terms of arms control agreements from a bygone era, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which is not bound by these agreements, significantly increased its arsenal of nuclear-capable ballistic missiles. According to the 2020 China Military Power Reports produced by your department, the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the CCP's armed wing, possesses "more than 1,250 ground-launched ballistic missiles (GLBMs) and ground-launched cruise missiles (GLCMs) with ranges between 500 and 5,500 kilometers." Left unchallenged, the CCP can use its growing missile arsenal to coerce American allies and threaten American interests in the region.

The U.S. withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in 2019 provides an opportunity for us to adequately protect our allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific from future CCP attempts at nuclear aggression. U.S. alliances and partnerships are essential not only for the defense of the U.S. homeland, but also to our efforts to build and sustain a rules-based international order. In order to keep this balance, the U.S. must prioritize the development and deployment of GLBMs and GLCMs in the Indo-Pacific. The permanent, forward deployment of these weapons would demonstrate a strong commitment to our allies and partners that the U.S. is indeed committed to upholding a free and open Indo-Pacific.

The U.S. Department of Defense's (DoD) Fiscal Year 2023 budget specifically cites more than 100 new intercontinental ballistic missile siloes recently built by China and highlights CCP's growing military power as "the most serious potential threat to the U.S. and its allies."¹ According to a 2020 assessment submitted by U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) to Congress, INDOPACOM made clear that GLBMs and GLCMS will be critical in breaking through the PLA's defense systems. According to the report, INDOPACOM needs "highly survivable, precision-strike networks along the first island chain, featuring increased quantities of ground-based weapons." These capabilities would allow INDOPACOM, in the event of an attack, to ensure that the U.S. and allies maintain freedom of movement in the region by denying an adversary's efforts to restrict operations in a contested environment.

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https://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/FY2023/FY2023_Budget_Request_Overview_Book.pdf

Despite the opportunity afforded by the withdrawal from the INF Treaty, the stated need of INDOPACOM, and the PLA's growing arsenal of weapons, there has yet to be a serious effort to work with our allies to develop and deploy ground-based ballistic missiles in the Indo-Pacific. Given this glaring lack of action by your department, we request the answers to the following questions:

1. Has DoD initiated a dialogue with the militaries of treaty allies and other partners in the Indo-Pacific region to discuss co-developing ground-launched ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and other weapons to counter the PLA's growing arsenal?
2. What efforts is the DoD taking with regards to deploying these weapons in U.S. facilities located in allied and partner states in the Indo-Pacific?
3. Some allies and partners are concerned that the deployment of these weapons in their territories will provoke a harsh response from the CCP, as was directed recently against Lithuania and Korea. Have you discussed with the Department of the State the need to work with allies and partners in the region to develop an economic and diplomatic strategy to reassure allies that the U.S. will support them should the CCP attempt an economic coercion campaign?
4. How does positioning these weapons in the Indo-Pacific factor into the 2022 National Defense Strategy and the DoD's overall strategy towards the Indo-Pacific?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator



Tom Cotton
U.S. Senator



Josh Hawley
U.S. Senator



Joni K. Ernst
U.S. Senator



Bill Hagerty
U.S. Senator



Ted Cruz
U.S. Senator