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PETE HEGSETH

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE, US

As Delivered

Pete Hegseth, Secretary of Defense, US
Good morning. It is great to be in Singapore. Bastian, thank you very much for the warm welcome. The Shangri-La Dialogue is an important forum to bring together defence leaders from across the Indo-Pacific and the world. I want to thank IISS for hosting us this morning.

As was mentioned, I am certainly proud to be back in the Indo-Pacific for the second time as the Secretary of Defense. I am going to keep coming back and back and back again. You are stuck with me. However, it is not just me. America is proud to be back in the Indo-Pacific, and we are here to stay.

The United States is an Indo-Pacific nation. We have been since the earliest days of our Republic. We will continue to be an Indo-Pacific nation, with Indo-Pacific interests, for generations to come.

Under President Trump's leadership, the US is committed to achieving peace through strength. That starts with deterring aggression around the world and here in the Indo-Pacific, here in our priority theatre, here with you, our allies and our partners. The US stands ready to work with any country that is willing to step up and preserve the global and regional peace that we all hold dear.

Your presence here today sends a strong message about our shared purpose, our shared commitment to peace, our shared dedication to a free and open Indo-Pacific.

This morning, I would like to share the US Defense Department's vision for the Indo-Pacific. You see, my job is to create and maintain decision space for President Trump, not to purport to make decisions on his behalf. In doing that, I am joined today by two great military leaders from the United States' military. Our Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Dan Razin Caine, is here with me, a great partner who understands how to take a global look, globally integrate American interests and American power regionally and internationally. Of course, we are joined by our Indo-Pacific Commander, Admiral Sam Paparo, America's fighting general in the Pacific. Admiral, thanks for being here.

It is our job, the three of us and the entire Defense Department, to keep our military strong and create options. President Trump was elected to apply America First on the world stage. Getting a chance to watch him first-hand in the Oval Office and around the world, the world is incredibly fortunate to have an American president with the combination of being a peace seeker and a strong leader. President Trump has the unique ability to make possible things that seem impossible, moving the Overton window. He is the ultimate dealmaker.

To that end, from day one, President Trump gave me a clear mission at the Defense Department: achieve peace through strength. To accomplish this mission, our overriding objectives have been equally clear: restore the warrior ethos, rebuild our military and re-establish deterrence. It starts with a warrior ethos. All of us in this profession of arms understand that humans are far more important than hardware. We are focused on lethality, meritocracy, accountability, standards, readiness and war fighting. We respect human nature, hard training and the lessons of history.

Our combat formations will be trained and skilled. Our standards will be high and unwavering. If you can do the job, you will be in our formation. If you cannot, you are not. Colour blind, gender neutral, merit based. It is as simple as that. That is restoring the warrior ethos, and our troops in America are responding to it. Morale, recruiting, retention, readiness, training, capabilities – all rapidly increasing thanks to President Trump's back-to-basics approach.

Our second priority is rebuilding the military. We are equipping American war fighters with the most advanced capabilities so that we remain the strongest and most lethal fighting force in the world. For

the first time ever, President Trump is spending over $1 trillion next year to do this, a 13% increase in American defence spending.

The Golden Dome for America, our new sixth-generation fighter, the F-47, our new stealth bomber, the B-21, new submarines, destroyers, hypersonics, drones – you name it, it is all part of it. The best military equipment in the world. We are reviving our defence-industrial base and investing in our shipyards. We are rapidly fuelling emerging technologies that will help us remain the world leader for generations to come. We are stronger, yet more agile than ever before.

When our opponents know that our military is armed with the most capable weapons systems, wielded by skilled warriors with the will to prevail, they are less likely to challenge us on the battlefield, which is the point.

This leads to the third objective, which is re-establishing deterrence. Across four years of deferred maintenance under the Biden administration, the world saw, unfortunately, a feckless and weak America. An invasion of 21 million illegals on our southern border; Russian aggression in Ukraine after what had happened under the previous Democrat administration in 2014 in Crimea; Islamist terror on 7 October in Israel; a humiliating and deadly retreat in Afghanistan; an enriched and emboldened Iran; a Chinese spy balloon flying over our country; and a secretary of defense that was AWOL for a week.

That ends now; not anymore. We are re-establishing deterrence around the world, but credible deterrence starts at home, like our historic Golden Dome for America. It starts at our borders. Border security, for us and for all of you, is national security. We have surged troops to our southern border, and we will have 100% operational control of there soon enough. We spent two decades patrolling other borders. It is time to prioritise the defence of our own.

We are also increasing security in the Western Hemisphere and taking back the Panama Canal from malign Chinese influence. It is key terrain, after all. China did not build that canal. We did. And we will not allow China to weaponise it or control it. Deterrence starts in our own backyard.

Beyond our borders and beyond our neighbourhood, we are reorienting toward deterring aggression by communist China. We will talk a little bit more about that in a minute.

Elsewhere and around the world, we are engaging with, enabling and empowering our allies, sometimes with tough love, but love nonetheless. We are pushing our allies in Europe to own more of their own security, to invest in their defence, things that are long overdue. We still believe the 'N' in NATO stands for North Atlantic and that our European allies should maximise their comparative advantage on the continent. Thanks to President Trump, they are stepping up.

An alliance cannot be ironclad if, in reality or perception, it is seen as one-sided. That is changing, and that is very important. As our allies share the burden, we can increase our focus on the Indo-Pacific, our priority theatre.

You see, here in the Indo-Pacific, our futures are bound together. The prosperity and security of the American people are linked to those of your people. We share your vision of peace and stability, of prosperity and security. We are here to stay. As a matter of fact, we are here this morning, and somebody else is not.

However, for a generation, the US ignored this region. We became distracted by open-ended wars, regime change and nation-building. I had a front-row seat as a soldier in Iraq, in Afghanistan. These

costly diversions lacked clearly defined goals and were not tied to vital and core American interests. President Trump is changing that.

We are not making the same mistakes, not this generation and not now. We are done with that approach. We are focused on delivering for the American people, on safeguarding their security, on protecting their economic interests and on using common sense to preserve peace in the Indo-Pacific.

Standing here in Singapore, I think this approach aligns quite well with the pragmatic style of Singapore's legendary Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew. Across three decades, he built this country into one of the world's most important hubs of finance and innovation.

Like the late prime minister, President Trump's approach is grounded in common sense and national interests, built on a willingness to work with others while respecting mutual self-interest, and informed by an understanding of military strength, but shaped by a preference for engaging on the basis of commerce and sovereignty, not war.

These two historic men share a willingness to challenge old ways of doing things that no longer make sense. We refuse to accept any paradigm that makes conflict inevitable. As President Trump said in Riyadh, a historic speech in Saudi Arabia, America does not have or seek permanent enemies.

Under President Trump's leadership, we are applying this common-sense approach to defence here in the Indo-Pacific and throughout the world, and we believe the results speak for themselves. President Trump is leading European allies to step up in their own defence, as I mentioned. He is striking new, fairer trade deals that protect Americans while providing a lasting and secure basis for commerce, not to mention resilient, anti-fragile and reliable supply chains for our – and your – defence needs.

He is also rebalancing security and defence arrangements with key allies in the region. This enables all of us to benefit from the peace and stability that comes with a lasting and strong American presence here in the Indo-Pacific. These benefits, they only multiply when our allies and partners are also strong.

As President Trump also said in Riyadh, the US is not interested in the moralistic and preachy approach to foreign policy of the past. We are not here to pressure other countries to embrace or adopt policies or ideologies. We are not here to preach to you about climate change or cultural issues. We are not here to impose our will on you. We are all sovereign nations. We should be able to choose the future we want to build. We respect you, your traditions and your militaries, and we want to work with you where our shared interests align for peace and prosperity.

On this sure foundation of mutual interest and common sense, we will build and strengthen our defence partnerships to preserve peace and increase prosperity.

However, a threat gathers. As we all know, strength and security underpin peace and enable prosperity. And our common-sense approach to achieving peace through strength requires seeing things crystal clearly. It requires confronting obvious truth about the threats that we face in the Indo-Pacific, and it requires meeting those threats with a very real sense of urgency.

Before we get to those hard truths, and to make sure, for our friends in the press, our words are not misconstrued, as they so often are, let me begin by saying we do not seek conflict with communist China. We will not instigate, nor seek to subjugate or humiliate. President Trump and the American people have an immense respect for the Chinese people and their civilisation, but we will not be pushed out of this critical region. We will not let our allies and partners be subordinated and intimidated.

China seeks to become a hegemonic power in Asia, no doubt. It hopes to dominate and control too many parts of this vibrant and vital region. Through its massive military build-up and growing willingness to use military force to achieve its goals, including grey-zone tactics and hybrid warfare, China has demonstrated that it wants to fundamentally alter the region's status quo. We cannot look away and we cannot ignore it. China's behaviour toward its neighbours and the world is a wake-up call, and an urgent one.

China uses its vast and sophisticated cyber capabilities to steal technology and attack critical infrastructure in your countries and in the US as well. These actions not only compromise our countries but endanger the lives of our citizens. In the South China Sea, China harasses its neighbours, many of which are here in the room today. China seeks to intimidate you in your own waters.

We have all seen the videos and pictures of water cannons and ship-to-ship collisions and illegal boardings at sea. We are also seeing the illegal seizing and militarising of lands in the South China Sea. These actions reveal a lack of respect for neighbours, and they challenge sovereignty, freedom of navigation and overflight. We are watching, very closely, China's destabilising actions.

Any unilateral attempt to change the status quo in the South China Sea and the first island chain by force or coercion is unacceptable. Every day, you see it, China's military harasses Taiwan. These activities have been paired with China's rapid military modernisation and build-up, including huge investments in nuclear weapons, hypersonics and amphibious-assault capabilities. It has to be clear to all that Beijing is credibly preparing to potentially use military force to alter the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific.

We know – it is public – that Xi has ordered his military to be capable of invading Taiwan by 2027. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is building the military needed to do it, training for it every day, and rehearsing for the real deal. Admiral Paparo has spoken very clearly about this on multiple occasions.

Again, to be clear, any attempt by communist China to conquer Taiwan by force would result in devastating consequences for the Indo-Pacific and the world. There is no reason to sugarcoat it. The threat China poses is real, and it could be imminent. We hope not, but it certainly could be. Facing these threats, we know that many countries are tempted by the idea of seeking both economic cooperation with China and defence cooperation with the United States.

Now, that is a geographic necessity for many. However, beware the leverage that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) seeks with that entanglement. Economic dependence on China only deepens their malign influence and complicates our defence decision space during times of tension. Nobody knows what China will ultimately do, but they are preparing, and therefore we must be ready as well.

Urgency and vigilance is our only option at the Department of Defense with our allies because the US, especially under President Trump, does not seek war. We do not seek to dominate or strangle China, to encircle or provoke. We do not seek regime change, nor will we instigate, or disrespect a proud and historic culture. We will be ready, but we will not be reckless.

Instead, we seek peace. However, we must ensure that China cannot dominate us or our allies and partners. Maintaining the status quo requires strength. That is just a rational, common-sense goal that we should all be able to live with.

President Trump has also said that communist China will not invade Taiwan on his watch. Our goal is to prevent war, to make the cost too high and peace the only option. We will do this with a strong shield of deterrence forged together with you, America's great allies and defence partners. Together, we will

show what it means to execute peace through strength in many ways, seen and unseen, overt and covert.

However, if deterrence fails, and if called upon by my Commander-in-Chief, we are prepared to do what the Department of Defense does best: to fight and win decisively.

As I have said many times before, and it is important for this room to hear today and all the world, America First certainly does not mean America alone, especially alongside so many of our model allies like Poland, Israel and the Gulf states, the Baltic states. And it does not mean ignoring the world. As you have all seen, President Trump is committed to a lasting and durable peace in Ukraine. With an unwavering commitment to ensure Iran never has nuclear weapons, he seeks a strong and verifiable negotiated deal. The other option is regional war, or worse.

As we shift our focus to this region, and as Europe steps up and takes greater ownership for its own security, President Trump and I will be counting on you, on this room, our allies and partners, to be force multipliers for peace alongside the US. We ask, and indeed we insist, that our allies and partners do their part on defence. Sometimes that means having uncomfortable and tough conversations. Partners owe it to each other to be honest and to be realistic, as many of you have been with me in the past few days, and I with you. This is the essence of a pragmatic, common-sense defence policy.

However, you will also see that we are and will remain loyal to our allies and partners. The military-to-military relationship between many of our countries goes back decades, and in some cases centuries. In fact, the only way to ensure lasting alliances and partnerships is to make sure that each side does its part and sees the benefit. We will stand with you and work alongside you to deter Chinese aggression. Each day, together, creating more and more dilemmas and complications, should China want to act, should they decide to overturn the status quo. More dilemmas, more complications, more questions, more concerns, more variables, more reasons to say it is not worth it.

No one should doubt America's commitment to our Indo-Pacific allies and partners. We will continue to wrap our arms around our friends and find new ways to work together, not only our treaty allies here, but also our key defence partners in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and across the Indo-Pacific. For example, look no further than to our growing defence relationship with India, where we pass new milestones by the day, from shared ventures of our defence industries to the increased operational coordination and inter-operability between our two militaries.

I urge all of our allies and partners to seize this moment with us. Our defence spending must reflect the dangers and threats that we face today, because deterrence does not come on the cheap. Just ask the American taxpayer. Time is of the essence. We must step up and move out with urgency.

It is hard to believe, a little bit, after some trips to Europe, that I am saying this, but thanks to President Trump, Asian allies should look to countries in Europe as a new-found example. NATO members are pledging to spend 5% of their GDP on defence, even Germany. It does not make sense for countries in Europe to do that while key allies in Asia spend less on defence in the face of an even more formidable threat, not to mention North Korea.

Ultimately, a strong, resolute and capable network of allies and partners is our key strategic advantage. China envies what we have together, and it sees what we can collectively bring to bear on defence. However, it is up to all of us to ensure that we live up to that potential by investing. US allies in the Indo-Pacific can and should quickly upgrade their own defences. President Trump said it himself last month in Riyadh and will never hesitate to wield American power swiftly and decisively, if necessary. That is re-establishing deterrence.

We are doing this here in the Indo-Pacific in three distinct ways, and forgive me as I go into a little bit of detail. First, by improving our forward force posture. Second, by helping allies and partners strengthen their defence capabilities. And third, by rebuilding defence-industrial bases.

First, the Defense Department is prioritising forward-postured, combat-credible forces in the Western Pacific to deter by denial along the first and second island chains. In my first trip to the Indo-Pacific in March, I travelled to the Philippines to meet with President Marcos and Secretary of National Defense Teodoro. While there, we announced our commitment to deploy more advanced US military capabilities to the Philippines. We announced the inaugural overseas deployment of NMESIS (Navy-Marine Expeditionary Ship Interdiction System), a US Marine Corps mobile anti-ship missile system, to the Philippines. The 3rd Marine Littoral Regiment, one of the US military's most capable and lethal formations, exercised NMESIS along with our Philippine allies.

Together, we deployed the system to the Batanes Islands on the Luzon Strait, between the Philippines and Taiwan. This enhanced our inter-operability and improved our readiness on cutting-edge platforms, where we need them and when we need them.

We also announced that the US special-operations forces and Philippine marines are training together on complex landing scenarios in the Batanes Islands. This demonstrates that our forces can conduct high-end operations in the most challenging of environments.

I also had a chance to visit Tokyo and meet with Prime Minister Ishiba and Defense Minister Nakatani. We announced that we are upgrading US Forces Japan (USFJ) headquarters. This is about war fighting and deterrence as well as common sense. Upgrading USFJ demonstrates the significant work of the US–Japan alliance as it evolves to emerging threats. It also reflects the progress the alliance has made toward improving inter-operability and strengthening Japan's capabilities.

This summer, the US Army has plans to conduct its first-ever live-fire test of its mid-range capability system in Australia. This will be the first time that system is fired west of the International Date Line, the first time it has been tested on foreign soil. Deployments like this represent a commitment to the region, and there are many more planned.

On the home front, the Golden Dome for America will protect the US homeland against a catastrophic missile attack by adversaries. We will strengthen missile defences for the US homeland as we look for ways to improve regional missile defences right here in the Indo-Pacific.

We are also using regional integrated air and missile defence, and we are deploying several key missile-defence technologies and data-sharing partnerships with Japan and Australia, leveraging America's best-in-class technologies to strengthen regional air- and missile-defence architectures.

Second, we are supporting allies and partners as they strengthen their own defence capabilities and capacity. We want to empower you as partners, not dependents, to work more capably with the US. We are working to rapidly deliver the kinds of off-the-shelf, innovative, autonomous systems for which the American defence industry is renowned.

It is why the department partnered with US industry to launch the Maritime Security (MARSEC) Consortium. This consortium will build and sustain maritime-domain awareness to deliver real operational effects by employing unmanned aircraft and vessels. These capabilities, delivered quickly and at a lower cost, give a cutting-edge advantage to the hands of war fighters and our defence partners in Southeast Asia.

A critical part of working with our partners is increasing inter-operability – learning how to sail, fly and fight as one. This year's *Balikatan* exercise in the Philippines was the largest ever. In the South China Sea, we continue to conduct regular maritime activities alongside Australia, Japan and the Philippines. We are also expanding our security partnership with India through robust military exercises like *Tiger Triumph*. We are also amplifying cooperation within the Quad and other multilateral frameworks.

Within the Quad, we are also leading an initiative called the Indo-Pacific Logistics Network (IPLN), enabling Quad partners to leverage shared logistics capabilities in the Indo-Pacific. They say rookies talk strategy, pros talk logistics.

We are grateful for the opportunity to train with all our allies in the region in other exercises like *Talisman Sabre* with Australia and *Cobra Gold* in Thailand. These exercises enhance our lethality while improving our readiness to respond at a moment's notice. That was certainly put into practice last March with the Thai military in response to the earthquake there. Flying and sailing and operating together in peacetime ensures we are prepared for the unexpected.

Third, we are revitalising our defence-industrial bases and reallocating resources toward the most lethal and effective capabilities. We are doing this because success of the war fighters requires it. It is one thing for an adversary to see multinational forces operating together in exercises. It is another thing entirely for that same country to see an integrated defence-industrial base supporting those forces and standing ready to keep them in the fight. That is why we are pleased to endorse the Partnership for Indo-Pacific Industrial Resilience, also known as PIPIR, a US-initiated multilateral forum of 14 allies and partners working with industry, capital providers and key non-governmental stakeholders to strengthen industrial resilience, expand our capacity and accelerate deliveries.

Today, I am proud to announce the first PIPIR projects. The first project plans to establish repair capability and capacity for P-8 radar systems in Australia. It will also enable Indo-Pacific allies and partners operating the aircraft, including New Zealand and the Republic of Korea, to repair aircraft within the region rather than relying on single repair sources in the continental United States.

The second is a project that will develop standards for small unmanned aerial systems across the Indo-Pacific, identifying secure sources of production for their critical components and increasing global supply-chain resilience for these essential systems.

Similarly, we are working through our regional sustainment framework to do things like expand existing contracts for US Army watercraft repair. The goal of this initiative is to bring in more providers and expand existing repair capability more broadly across the Indo-Pacific.

We will also use our allies' world-class ship-repair capabilities to enhance the US Navy's operational effectiveness to save taxpayers money. These moves will strengthen regional resiliency by increasing access to repair capabilities in theatre and reducing dependency on faraway supply chains.

We are deepening our cooperation with Australia's Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordnance Enterprise (GWEO) with historic momentum and purpose. This work secures our technological edge and makes our munitions supply chains resilient. In the last two months, we have reached an agreement for Australia to produce 155-millimetre ammunition and to assemble Guided Multiple Launch Rocket Systems, or GMLRS. These steps enhance our readiness and facilitate upgrades to our collective defence-industrial base.

We are working with India to co-produce equipment needed to deter aggression. This includes negotiating an agreement to bring our industrial bases ever closer. Last month, we held our first-ever US–India industry–government experts exchange to produce and field state-of-the-art autonomous systems as part of the US–India Autonomous Systems Industry Alliance (ASIA).

Across the board, the US, our allies and our partners have made great progress in these and many other areas towards achieving peace through strength, but we have to move quickly and we have no time to waste.

As I conclude, it is with sage leadership and strategic vision, and a sense of urgency, that Lee Kuan Yew turned Singapore into one of the world's great success stories. Many call it the Singapore Miracle. That is what common-sense policies can achieve.

That is precisely what President Trump's vision is all about. President Trump is a leader of peace, a man of peace, a force for peace. Together, we will achieve that peace through strength, re-establishing deterrence, sharing our burdens, multiplying our strengths, reinforcing our great alliances, respecting our cultures, not starting wars but preventing them, and building a better future for our nations for our mutual benefit.

During my last visit to the Indo-Pacific, I watched oil seep out from the wreckage of the USS *Arizona* at Pearl Harbor. I saw the rows of crosses marking the graves of over 17,000 American soldiers at the Manila American Cemetery in the Philippines and had a chance to walk the black sandy beaches of Iwo Jima. In these hallowed places, you cannot help but immediately feel connected to the past, to the warriors who went before us. They gave their all for me, for men and women they never knew, for freedom and for peace.

As we mark 80 years since the end of the Second World War, we owe it to today's warriors, to our citizens – as we put our citizens first and you put your citizens first – we owe it to them, to our children and our grandchildren, to preserve this peace.

The motto of my first platoon, the first one I led, was: 'Those who long for peace must prepare for war.' And that is exactly what we are doing. We are preparing for war in order to deter war, to achieve peace through strength. We look out in this room and we look to you, to our allies and to our partners, who join us in this important work. Our time is now. The threats we face will not wait, and nor can we.

Thank you, and Godspeed.