

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0908

April 23, 2020

The Honorable Mark Esper
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20591

Dear Secretary Esper:

We write to express concern about the recent People's Republic of China (PRC) military exercises and maritime militia confrontations intended to threaten and intimidate our allies and partners in the Asia-Pacific. These activities highlight the potential for Chairman Xi Jinping to exploit the opportunity presented by the COVID-19 health crisis to press its territorial claims, especially along the PRC's maritime periphery. As the U.S. military and your department play a key role in providing security in Asia, we urge you to continue to take the necessary steps to maintain the readiness of U.S. forces under Indo-Pacific Command.

Since Taiwan's presidential election on January 11, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has increased the frequency of incursions into Taiwan's air and maritime space. Such pressure is being mirrored elsewhere, including in the East China Sea with Japan and in the South China Sea with Vietnam. As you are undoubtedly aware, the following incidents describe just a small sampling of the PRC's recent provocative actions in the Western Pacific:

- On April 18, the PRC asserts the establishment of two new South China Sea administrative districts in the Parcels and the Spratly Islands, violating international law.
- On April 12, a Chinese carrier strike group moves through the straits of Taiwan without forewarning to the Taiwanese Military.
- On April 2, a Chinese maritime surveillance vessel rams and sinks a Vietnamese fishing boat in the South China Sea near the Paracel Islands.
- On March 31, two PLA Air Force J-11s violated the center line in the Taiwan Strait.
- On March 30, Japanese destroyer collides with Chinese fishing boat.
- On March 16, KJ-500 early warning aircraft and J-11 fighters flew over waters southwest of Taiwan to conduct anti-ship exercises.

We are concerned that the PLA's recent activities amid a global health crisis are intended to probe the readiness of the U.S. military as well as the readiness of our allies and partners. The PLA's activities, and those of the maritime militia, serve as a stark reminder of the need to strengthen the U.S. military's capabilities in the contact and blunt layers of the National Defense Strategy as well as to encourage our regional allies to focus on enhancing their own capabilities

in these areas. We appreciate your substantial and effective efforts to ensure the readiness of U.S. forces in the Pacific and that the United States can fulfill its defense commitments. We remain confident in, and assured by, your leadership and that of Admiral Davidson.

Thank you for your continued work to deter PRC aggression. We have read Admiral Davidson's report to Congress required by Section 1253 of the Fiscal Year 2020 National Defense Authorization Act and understand the necessity of more defense investment in the Indo-Pacific to support broader U.S. commitments and interests. We look forward to working with you to ensure the U.S. ability to provide security in the Indo-Pacific.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Marco Rubio in black ink.

Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator

Handwritten signature of Jeanne Shaheen in blue ink.

Jeanne Shaheen
U.S. Senator