Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 1, 2022

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

Dear Secretary Austin:

We write with concern over recent reporting that the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) will retire its entire fleet of F-15 fighter jets currently based in Okinawa, Japan, without replacing them with a permanent presence anywhere in Japan.

According to public reporting, the U.S. Air Force (USAF) plans to retire two squadrons of F-15 Eagles that were permanently based in Okinawa. This decision would involve half of the roughly 100 USAF fighters in Japan. While we agree with the need to modernize the Air Force's fleet in order to counter the rising threat of the People's Liberation Army, we are concerned with reporting that indicates that there will be no permanent presence to replace the Okinawa F-15s. Instead, USAF plans to send F-22 fighters from Alaska to Okinawa on only a rotational basis.

As you know, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is expanding its aggression in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. In his 20th Party Congress report, CCP General Secretary of Xi Jinping stated, "[w]e have shown a fighting spirit and a firm determination to never yield to coercive power" and "the wheels of history are rolling on toward China's reunification… Complete reunification of our country must be realized, and it can, without doubt, be realized!" [1] It is abundantly clear that General Secretary Xi intends to take over Taiwan and establish the CCP as the hegemon in the Indo-Pacific, which would have catastrophic strategic, geopolitical, military, and economic consequences for U.S. interests.

In this context, we believe that DoD's plans to replace permanently-based fighters with rotational forces will lead to a tangible reduction in American forward combat power in the Indo-Pacific, lowering the bar for aggression and demonstrating a continuing mismatch between the Biden Administration's talking points on the Indo-Pacific and America's actual commitments in the region.

This decision is especially puzzling in light of the 2022 National Defense Strategy, which explicitly prioritizes deterring aggression and makes clear that "[e]arly and continuous consideration, engagement, and where possible, collaboration with Allies and partners in

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[1] *Nikkei Asia*, "Transcript: President Xi Jinping's Report to China's 2022 Party Congress." October 18, 2022.
https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/China-s-party-congress/Transcript-President-Xi-Jinping-s-report-to-China-s-2022-party-congress

planning is essential for advancing our shared interests."[2] We are concerned that DoD's decision sends the wrong signal, not only to the CCP, but also to our allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific. We therefore request a Congressional briefing on DoD's actions articulating specific steps to replace the deterrent value and combat capability of any assets removed from the Indo-Pacific region, as well as the administration's plan to establish a force posture in the Indo-Pacific that would be resilient to a CCP attack and capable of deterring an invasion of Taiwan.

We look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator

Mike Gallagher
Member of Congress

Bill Hagerty
U.S. Senator

Michael T. McCaul
Member of Congress

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[2] United States Department of Defense, "2022 National Defense Strategy of The United States of America." October 27, 2022. https://media.defense.gov/2022/Oct/27/2003103845/-1/-1/1/2022-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY-NPR-MDR.PDF