

# Indo-Pacific Defense Debrief

September 30, 2024

This debrief covers the period from September 23 - 29, providing summaries of events and developments related to the Department of Defense's operations in the Indo-Pacific region.

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# Department of Defense

Austin met in London today with his AUKUS counterparts: British Defense Secretary John Healey and Australian Defense Minister Richard Marles, who also serves as his country's deputy prime minister. Progress has been made toward providing Australia with a conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarine, Austin said, noting that over the past year, the number of Australian sailors attending U.S. and U.K. nuclear reactor schools has increased and a U.S. nuclear-powered submarine visited an Australian port. The United States also remains committed to supporting Australia's efforts to recruit and train the skilled workforce needed to build, maintain, sustain and operate a nuclear-powered submarine, Austin said.<sup>1</sup>

As the US military seeks cost-effective ways to combat the threat of drones on land and at sea, the Defense Innovation Unit (DIU) and the Singaporean Ministry of Defence announced this week they are hosting a 12-week initiative to find "novel" unmanned aerial vehicle communications systems to help ships close to shore track and disrupt "unauthorized drones." This is the first official collaboration between the DIU and Singapore to come out of a Memorandum of Understanding for Defense Cooperation, according to the press release. The memorandum was signed at the end of May by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Singaporean Minister for Defence Ng Eng He based on the agreement that both nations would dedicate resources to shipboard counter-unmanned aircraft systems and electromagnetic interference resilience.<sup>2</sup>

Over the past month, the destroyer USS Sterett has been dispatched to the Alaskan coast in response to the Russian navy ships operating in the area, Army troops have landed on a remote Alaskan island, and fighter squadrons and other aircraft based in Alaska have been placed on heightened alert. The actions follow a series of Russian air operations that skirted Alaskan airspace and as Russian and Chinese warships conducted joint exercises across the Pacific near Japan.<sup>3</sup>

## Air Force

The Air Force is keeping the momentum going with its bomber deployments in Australia, with regional allies increasingly "welcoming" them as a strategic counterbalance to China's growing assertiveness. "We continue to build up the

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3918579/aucus-collaboration-advancing-capabilities-in-indo-pacific-region-austin-says/> *DoD News*

<sup>2</sup><https://breakingdefense.com/2024/09/singapore-us-defense-innovation-unit-collab-to-tackle-unauthorized-drones-in-indo-pacific/> *Breaking Defense*

<sup>3</sup><https://www.politico.com/news/2024/09/20/us-military-alaska-russia-00180276> *POLITICO*

infrastructure at [Royal Australian Air Force base] Tindal, I got to see that with my own eyes,” Gen. Kevin B. Schneider, commander of Pacific Air Forces, told reporters at AFA’s Air, Space & Cyber conference. He added that the command is closely working with the Air Force Global Strike Command to find “the right times” to bring out bomber deployment to the theater. <sup>4</sup>

## Army

Eighty-four military personnel who have been trained in the US to operate the M1A2T Abrams tanks are slated to return to Taiwan in November to become instructors in the training next year, the Ministry of National Defense (MND) said in its budget report to the Legislative Yuan. The 84 people were sent to the US for a 350-day training after Taiwan procured 108 M1A2T Abrams tanks, with the first batch of 38 tanks scheduled to arrive by the end of this year. <sup>5</sup>

American and Filipino security officials have agreed to keep a U.S. mid-range missile system in the northern Philippines indefinitely to boost deterrence despite China’s expressions of alarm, two Philippine officials said Wednesday. The U.S. Army transported the Typhon missile system, a land-based weapon that can fire the Standard Missile-6 and the Tomahawk Land Attack Missile, to the northern Philippines as part of combat exercises in April with Philippine troops and to test its deployability aboard a U.S. Air Force aircraft. <sup>6</sup>

Sen. Tuberville had blocked Lt. Gen. Ronald Clark’s nomination for months over concerns that the top military aide to Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, along with other staff, did not immediately notify President Joe Biden when Austin was hospitalized with complications from cancer treatment earlier this year. Clark, who Biden had nominated in July, was confirmed late Tuesday evening. Tuberville said Wednesday that he dropped his hold after meeting with Clark and talking to others in the Pentagon. <sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup><https://www.airandspaceforces.com/air-force-bombers-rotations-australia-china/> *Air & Space Forces*

<sup>5</sup>[www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2024/09/23/2003824205](http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2024/09/23/2003824205) *Taipei Times*

<sup>6</sup>[www.defensenews.com/global/asia-pacific/2024/09/25/us-missile-system-will-remain-in-philippines-despite-chinas-alarm/](http://www.defensenews.com/global/asia-pacific/2024/09/25/us-missile-system-will-remain-in-philippines-despite-chinas-alarm/) *Defense News*

<sup>7</sup><https://www.armytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2024/09/25/us-army-pacific-commander-confirmed-after-senator-drops-objections/> *Army Times*

## Navy

Having fallen far behind China in shipbuilding, the U.S. is turning to allies in South Korea and Japan for the turnaround strategy. Key to that effort is attracting companies such as Hyundai that go head-to-head with the Chinese and can do everything America lacks: making ships quickly at low costs with modern techniques. Both Hyundai and Hanwha recently received approval for the first time to do maintenance, repair and operations work for certain U.S. Navy vessels. On Sept. 2, the first such ship, the USNS Wally Schirra, a dry-cargo and ammunition vessel, arrived at Hanwha's shipyard for a three-month overhaul. Hyundai expects to field repair projects in the coming months. Hanwha, along with a sister company, said in June it plans to buy Philly Shipyard—a Philadelphia-based yard that supplies about half of the largest U.S. commercial vessels—for \$100 million. The South Korean company said it expects the deal to close around November.<sup>8</sup>

A U.S. fast-attack submarine, the USS Vermont, and its crew of around 130 sailors arrived at South Korea's largest port on Monday, the first stop in Busan by a U.S. sub that's been disclosed since December. The Vermont was docked in Busan to replenish its supplies and allow its crew to rest.<sup>9</sup>

## Marines

A joint venture between a California construction company and a Japanese developer acquired another contract for more facilities at Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz as the Guam installation inches closer to full operation. For \$113 million, Granite Construction Inc., of Watsonville, Calif., and Obayashi Corp., of Tokyo, will build an auto organization shop, an organic storage facility, an electrical and communications maintenance shop, a vehicle wash rack and a vehicle laydown area, according to a news release Tuesday from Granite.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup><https://www.wsj.com/world/asia/us-south-korea-shipyard-china-30aa2b11> *Wall Street Journal*

<sup>9</sup>[https://www.stripes.com/theaters/asia\\_pacific/2024-09-24/submarine-visit-busan-south-korea-15282986.html](https://www.stripes.com/theaters/asia_pacific/2024-09-24/submarine-visit-busan-south-korea-15282986.html) *Stars & Stripes*

<sup>10</sup>[https://www.stripes.com/theaters/asia\\_pacific/2024-09-26/camp-blaz-guam-construction-15306491.html](https://www.stripes.com/theaters/asia_pacific/2024-09-26/camp-blaz-guam-construction-15306491.html) *Stars & Stripes*

## Newly Released Reports

The China-Russia Entente in East Asia: Contending with Authoritarian Partnership in a Critical Region *Center for a New American Security*

How American Taxpayers and Universities Fund the CCP's Advanced Military and Technological Research *Select Committee on the CCP*