

China Sentry

Weekly Debrief: March 4, 2024

This debrief covers the period from February 26 - March 3, providing summaries of events and developments related to the Department of Defense's operations in the Indo-Pacific region.

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Congress

On February 28th, Senators confirmed Adm. Samuel Paparo as the next leader of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. Paparo's confirmation was advanced by a voice vote without any objections late Wednesday evening, alongside 25 other senior military promotions. See our Paparo nomination. Paparo will replace Adm. John Aquilino, who has served in the INDOPACOM role since April 2021.¹ [transcript hearing](#).

Department of Defense

Guam's Governor is advocating for federal funds to replace aging cranes at Guam's port, highlighting the island's critical role in Indo-Pacific defense. This push aligns with the Biden Administration's initiative to enhance port cybersecurity and infrastructure, specifically targeting the replacement of Chinese-made cranes due to security concerns. The Port of Guam, vital for both commercial and military operations amid the U.S. military buildup, faces operational risks with its outdated cranes, emphasizing the need for modernization to support the Department of Defense's requirements.²

Army

The U.S. Army has unveiled a [whitepaper](#) detailing how the service plans to shrink the force in some places and grow it in other areas. The Army plans to bring up troops levels by fiscal 2029 from the current 445,000 soldiers to 470,000. As part of the force structure change, the Army already has three theater-level multidomain task forces (MDTF) - two in the Indo-Pacific theater and one in the European theater - and plans to set up another dedicated to the Pacific region, and yet another that is "service-retained" to likely focus on U.S. Central Command's area of operation. The MDTFs will consist of a headquarters and headquarters battalion, a multidomain effects

¹<https://www.federaltimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2024/02/29/senate-confirms-paparo-as-new-indo-pacom-commander> *Federal Times*

²https://www.stripes.com/theaters/asia_pacific/2024-02-29/guam-port-cranes-military-security-13166297.html *Stars and Stripes*

battalion, a long-range fires battalion, an Indirect Fire Protection Capability battalion, and a brigade support battalion.³

8,000 soldiers concluded a large-scale Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center training exercise from Feb 8 -22 in Alaska. A Mongolian Armed Forces infantry company and 600 Canadian troops, 350 from the 3rd Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, 165 from the Royal Canadian Air Force and 100 from various support forces, participated alongside U.S. forces. The 1st Brigade, 11th Airborne Division, served as the "blue force" fighting over the two weeks against two battalions of the 2nd Brigade, 11th Airborne Division, which served as the enemy force. The 2nd Brigade was given about five times the number of rockets, artillery and ammunition to battle 1st Brigade. The "enemy" brigade also had air defense, communication jamming and electronic warfare tools. That extra firepower meant that blue force fire units had to pick their targets wisely, shoot quickly and move rapidly to avoid enemy counterfires.⁴ Lessons from the exercise will help inform the Army's first Arctic-focused doctrine in more than 50 years, which is expected to be issued in mid-2024. The exercise also provided insights into the tactics, techniques, and procedures to operate various pieces of equipment.⁵

The 3rd Cavalry Regiment from Fort Cavazos, Texas, has assumed the role of the rotational force for the 2nd Infantry Division in South Korea, near the Demilitarized Zone. This transition from the 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team marks the regiment's first deployment to South Korea, highlighting the continued U.S. commitment to maintaining capabilities on the Korean Peninsula in response to potential aggressions.⁶

Air Force

Northrop Grumman is now adapting the next two RQ-4 Global Hawk drones into aircraft that can monitor hypersonic system tests and expects to start integration testing on the pair later this summer.

³<https://www.defensenews.com/land/2024/02/27/here-are-the-winners-and-losers-in-us-armys-force-structure-change/> *Defense News*

⁴<https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2024/02/26/8000-soldiers-tested-in-large-scale-combat-in-the-arctic/> *Army Times*

⁵<https://www.defensedaily.com/army-exercises-with-first-catvs-in-alaska-tests-other-equipment-in-recent-exercise/army/> *Defense Daily*

⁶<https://www.stripes.com/branches/army/2024-02-29/south-korea-rotational-force-3rd-cavalry-13156565.html> *Stars and Stripes*

Navy

Del Toro will visit the Indo-Pacific to meet with allies and partners to further maritime cooperation, explore opportunities to collaborate with the Republic of Korea (ROK)⁷ and Japan on commercial and Naval shipbuilding, and engage with Sailors, Marines, and Department of the Navy civilians forward deployed to the region. He will also travel to Palau for a series of strategic engagements on the expanding relationship with that critically important Compact of Free Association (COFA) state.⁸

While in South Korea, Del Toro encouraged major Korean shipbuilders Hanwha Ocean and HD Hyundai Heavy Industries to consider opening subsidiaries and investing in shipyards within the United States. This effort is part of a broader initiative to strengthen the U.S. defense industrial base by attracting allied countries' shipbuilders to establish dual-use (commercial and military) shipbuilding facilities stateside, leveraging existing but underutilized U.S. shipyards for redevelopment.⁹

Marines

The offshore supply vessel *Resolution*, contracted by the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory, commenced a series of experiments at Camp Pendleton to inform the design and operational concepts for the Navy's Landing Ship Medium (LSM). Serving as a prototype for the future LSM, *Resolution* conducted trials involving Marines, drones, and tactical resupply systems to assess its capacity, mobility, and adaptability in littoral environments, with a focus on logistics challenges in the Indo-Pacific. These experiments aim to refine Force Design concepts and tactics, techniques, and procedures for Marine Littoral Regiments, highlighting the vessel's potential role in supporting island-hopping campaigns against peer adversaries like China.¹⁰

⁷<https://m.koreatimes.co.kr/pages/article.amp.asp?newsIdx=369498> *Korea Times*

⁸<https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/Press-Releases/display-pressreleases/Article/3686156/secnav-del-toro-travels-to-the-indo-pacific-to-further-maritime-cooperation-exp/> *US Navy*

⁹<https://breakingdefense.com/2024/02/in-south-korea-del-toro-courts-major-shipbuilders-to-set-up-shop-in-us/> *Breaking Defense*

¹⁰<https://news.usni.org/2024/02/26/marine-corps-begins-water-testing-for-future-landing-ship-concept> *USNI News*

Exercises & Activities

Japan - U.S. Marines and sailors and Japanese troops have begun three weeks of amphibious training for Iron Fist 24 that focuses on island defense. Iron Fist, in its 18th year, involves 600 Japanese soldiers, 200 Japanese sailors, 700 U.S. Marines and 600 U.S. sailors and is taking place on Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four main islands, on Okinawa and at sea. The key training event is a bilateral amphibious operation March 12 on Okinawa.¹¹

A West Coast-based U.S. Naval Special Warfare unit integrated with a Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) Special Boat Unit (SBU) to conduct joint training on navigation, communications, radar, and more from Feb. 15-17, 2024 at Naval Base White Beach in Okinawa, Japan. The training, which included classroom instruction and practical application, focused heavily on small-unit skills such as mission planning, navigation and communications. The event culminated with an on-the-water exchange of tactics among the partner forces.¹²

The forward-deployed amphibious assault carrier, USS America (LHA 6) with embarked Marines assigned to the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) arrived in Osaka, Japan, Feb. 27. The purpose of the visit is to strengthen the relationship between Japan and the United States, provide the crew an opportunity for some rest and relaxation, and to make logistic preparations for participation in the 18th iteration of Exercise Iron Fist.¹³

South Korea - On Wednesday, the South Korea and U.S. militaries jointly announced that the allies will conduct Freedom Shield exercise, a computer-simulated command post training, and a variety of separate field training, from March 4-14. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff stated the allies are to carry out 48 field exercises this spring, twice the number conducted last year, and that this year's drills would involve air assault, live-firing and bombing training.¹⁴

Newly Released Reports

- [Tracing the Roots of China's AI Regulations](#) *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*
- [Chinese Academy of Sciences 2023 Budget](#) *Center for Security and Emerging*

¹¹https://www.stripes.com/theaters/asia_pacific/2024-02-27/marines-japan-island-recapture-drills-13132036.html *Stars and Stripes*

¹²<https://www.nsw.navy.mil/PRESS-ROOM/News/Article-View/Article/3688798/japanese-special-boat-unit-us-naval-special-warfare-unit-conduct-joint-training/> *NSW*

¹³<https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3688840/america-arrives-in-osaka/> *INDOPACOM*

¹⁴<https://apnews.com/article/south-korea-us-military-drills-north-korea-d633b0e37134c12bba7b4f79650510aa> *AP News*

Technology

- *Balancing the Ledger: Export Controls on U.S. Chip Technology to China . . . U.S.-China Collaboration on HIV/AIDS* *Center for Strategic and International Studies*
- *A Complex Systems Engineering Undertaking: The Qian Xuesen School of Systems Engineering . . . Coercive Space Activities: The View From PRC Sources* *China Aerospace Studies Institute*
- *Iran's Petroleum Exports to China and U.S. Sanctions* *Congressional Research Service*
- *Tightening the Belt or End of the Road? China's BRI at 10* *Foundation for Defense of Democracies*
- *South Korea Must Counter Chinese Influence Operations—and the U.S. Should Provide Support* *Heritage Foundation*
- *The Increasing Challenge of Obtaining Information From Xi's China* *Mercator Institute for China Studies*
- *Transatlantic China Policy: In Search of an Endgame* *Royal United Services Institute*
- *Censorship Practices of the People's Republic of China* *U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission*