US-Japan Alliance Digest

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Image Source: Pacific Fleet

Headlines:

- Deterrence focus at US, Japan, S. Korea sub fleet leaders' historic meet
- Japan's Astellas Pharma to buy US biotech group Iveric Bio for $5.9bn
- Japanese Diet Members visit Washington for Golden Week dialogues
- NATO exploring establishment of a liaison office in Tokyo
- COVID 19 travel restrictions end as pandemic officially downgraded

Details:

- US Pacific Fleet on May 4 announced that senior commanders of the US, Japan, and South Korea submarine fleets embarked for the first time on a US ballistic missile submarine together last month. The historic tour occurred on the Bangor-based USS Maine, operating off Guam. During their time at sea, the senior leaders toured the sub, including demonstrations of the unit's capabilities. The embarkation coincides with other US efforts to reassure its allies about the reliability of the US nuclear umbrella, such as the US-South Korea presidents' Washington Declaration on April 26 that includes a new bilateral Nuclear Consultative Group, as well as with trilateral consideration of real-time missile defense data sharing to enhance early warning against North Korea's improved missile technologies. Pacific Fleet also announced April 28 that Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS George Washington will return to the 7th Fleet in Yokosuka Japan, replacing USS Ronald Reagan as the forward-deployed Naval Forces-Japan aircraft carrier in 2024.
- Astellas Pharma, Japan's third largest pharmaceutical company by revenue, said May 1 it will acquire New Jersey-based Iveric Bio for $5.9 billion. The purchase improves Astellas' position in the growing field of age-related eye diseases. Iveric is awaiting FDA approval for a drug that reduces the rate of irreversible loss of vision in elderly patients. Astella's largest acquisition is a reflection of its search for growth abroad as the home market shrinks. CEO Naoki Okamura said US-China tensions and a weaker yen would not hinder his strategy to strengthen the company.
- Japanese Diet Members and officials engaged in meetings across Washington during the week of May 1. Secretary-General of the LDP Motegi met with Secretary of State Blinken, National Security Advisor Sullivan, and others to discuss a range of topics including strengthening ties with the Global South. Hon. Akira Amari, Hon. Takayuki Kobayashi, and other lawmakers took more than a dozen meetings on economic security and related issues with Members of Congress, government officials, and private sector representatives as part of the Integrated Security Dialogue, an annual event organized by Sasakawa USA. Amari gave a speech on "The G7 Summit and a New Era of Japanese Leadership" at Hudson Institute. Also, former Minister of Defense and current House of Representatives Member Onodera spoke at CSIS on strengthening deterrence and Japan's new defense budget.
- Japan's US Ambassador Tomita confirmed talks with NATO to open a consultation office in Tokyo, during a news conference in Washington on May 10. Prime Minister Kishida was the first Japanese Prime Minister to attend a NATO summit in June last year. NATO spokesperson Oana Lungescu said "cooperation includes a wide range of areas, including cyber defense, maritime security, humanitarian assistance, non-proliferation," among others. The liaison office would be NATO's first in Asia and would facilitate consultations with other Asia security partners as well.
- Japan officially downgraded COVID-19 May 8 to a status on par with seasonal flu and did away with various coronavirus measures including border control/proof-of-vaccination limitations. The WHO and US made similar moves this month.

"US-Japan Alliance Digest" is a bi-weekly summary of bilateral and related developments compiled by Sasakawa USA's "US-Japan NEXT Alliance Initiative." To receive "Alliance Digest" via email, contact egulum@spfusa.org