

# Asia

Since the founding of the American republic, Asia has been a key area of interest for the United States for both economic and security reasons. One of the first ships to sail under an American flag was the aptly named *Empress of China*, which inaugurated America's participation in the lucrative China trade in 1784. In the more than 200 years since then, the United States has worked under the strategic assumption that it was inimical to American interests to allow any single nation to dominate Asia. Asia constituted too important a market and was too great a source of key resources for the United States to be denied access. Thus, beginning with U.S. Secretary of State John Hay's "Open Door" policy toward China in the 19th century, the United States has worked to prevent the rise of a regional hegemon in Asia, whether it was imperial Japan or the Soviet Union.

In the 21st century, Asia's importance to the United States will continue to grow. Already, approximately 40 percent of U.S. trade in goods is in Asian markets.<sup>1</sup> Asia is a key source of vital natural resources and a crucial part of the global value chain in areas like electronic components. It is America's second largest trading partner in services.<sup>2</sup> Disruption in Asia, as occurred with the March 2011 earthquake in Japan, affects the production of things like cars, aircraft, and computers around the world, as well as the global financial system.

Asia is of more than just economic concern, however. Several of the world's largest militaries are in Asia, including those of China, India, North and South Korea, Pakistan, Russia, and Vietnam. The United States also maintains a network of treaty alliances and security

partnerships, as well as a significant military presence, in Asia. Five Asian states (China, North Korea, India, Pakistan, and Russia) possess nuclear weapons.

The region is a focus of American security concerns both because of the presence of substantial military forces and because of its legacy of conflict. Both of the two major "hot" wars fought by the United States during the Cold War (Korea and Vietnam) were fought in Asia. Moreover, the Asian security environment is unstable. For one thing, the Cold War has not ended in Asia. Of the four states divided between Communism and democracy by the Cold War, three (China, Korea, and Vietnam) were in Asia. Neither the Korean situation nor the China-Taiwan situation was resolved despite the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The Cold War itself was an ideological conflict layered atop long-standing—and still lingering—historical animosities. Asia is home to several major territorial disputes, among them:

- Northern Territories/Southern Kuriles (Japan and Russia);
- Senkakus/Diaoyutai/Diaoyu Dao (Japan, China, and Taiwan);
- Dok-do/Takeshima (Korea and Japan);
- Paracels/Xisha Islands (Vietnam, China, and Taiwan);
- Spratlys/Nansha Islands (China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia, and the Philippines);

- Kashmir (India and Pakistan); and
- Aksai Chin and parts of the Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh (India and China).

Even the various names applied to the disputed territories reflect the fundamental differences in point of view, as each state refers to the disputed areas under a different name. Similarly, different names are applied to the various major bodies of water: for example, “East Sea” or “Sea of Japan” and “Yellow Sea” or “West Sea.” China and India do not even agree on the length of their disputed border, with Chinese estimates as low as 2,000 kilometers and Indian estimates generally in the mid-3,000s.

These disputes over names also reflect the broader tensions rooted in historical animosities that still scar the region. Most notably, Japan’s actions leading up to and during World War II remain a major source of controversy, particularly in China and South Korea, where debates over issues such as what is incorporated in textbooks and governmental statements prevent old wounds from completely healing. Similarly, a Chinese claim that much of the Korean Peninsula was once Chinese territory aroused reactions in both Koreas. The end of the Cold War did little to resolve any of these underlying disagreements.

It is in this light and in light of the regional states’ reluctance to align with great powers that one should consider the lack of a political-security architecture. There is no equivalent of NATO in Asia, despite an ultimately failed mid-20th century effort to forge a parallel multilateral security architecture through the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). Regional security entities like the Five Power Defence Arrangement (involving the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia, and Singapore in an “arrangement” rather than an alliance) or discussion forums like the ASEAN Regional Forum and the ASEAN Defense Ministers-Plus Meeting have been far weaker. In addition, there is no Asian equivalent of the Warsaw Pact. Instead, Asian security has been marked by a combination of bilateral alliances,

mostly centered on the United States, and individual nations’ efforts to maintain their own security. In recent years, these core aspects of the regional security architecture have been supplemented by “mini-lateral” consultations like the U.S.–Japan–Australia and India–Japan–Australia trilaterals and the quadrilateral security dialogue.

Nor is there much of an architecture undergirding East Asia. Despite substantial trade and expanding value chains among the various Asian states, as well as with the rest of the world, formal economic integration is limited. There is no counterpart to the European Union or even to the European Economic Community, just as there is no parallel with the European Coal and Steel Community, the precursor to European economic integration.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a far looser agglomeration of disparate states, although they have succeeded in expanding economic linkages among themselves over the past 50 years through a range of economic agreements like the ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA). Less important to regional stability has been the South Asia Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which includes Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. The SAARC is largely ineffective, both because of the lack of regional economic integration and because of the historical rivalry between India and Pakistan.

With regard to Asia-wide free trade agreements, the 11 countries remaining in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) after U.S. withdrawal subsequently modified and signed it. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership—the ASEAN-centric agreement that includes China, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia, and New Zealand—has gone through 22 rounds of negotiations. When implemented, these agreements will help to remedy the lack of regional integration.

### **Important Alliances and Bilateral Relations in Asia**

For the United States, the keys to its position in the Western Pacific are its alliances

with Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK), the Philippines, Thailand, and Australia. These five alliances are supplemented by very close security relationships with New Zealand and Singapore and evolving relationships with other nations with interests in the region like India, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The U.S. also has a robust unofficial relationship with Taiwan. In South Asia, American relationships with Afghanistan and Pakistan are critical to establishing peace and security.

The United States also benefits from the interoperability that results from sharing common weapons and systems with many of its allies. Many nations, for example, have equipped their ground forces with M-16/M-4-based infantry weapons (and share the 5.56mm caliber ammunition); field F-15 and F-16 combat aircraft; and employ LINK-16 data links. Australia, Japan, and South Korea are partners in the production of the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter; Australia and Japan have already taken delivery of aircraft, and South Korea is due to take delivery next year. Consequently, in the event of conflict, the various air, naval, and even land forces will be able to share information in such key areas as air defense and maritime domain awareness. This advantage is further expanded by the constant ongoing range of both bilateral and multilateral exercises, which acclimate various forces to operating together and familiarize both American and local commanders with each other's standard operating procedures (SOPs), as well as training, tactics, and (in some cases) war plans.

**Japan.** The U.S.–Japan defense relationship is the linchpin in the American network of relations in the Western Pacific. The U.S.–Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, signed in 1960, provided for a deep alliance between two of the world's largest economies and most sophisticated military establishments, and changes in Japanese defense policies are now enabling an even greater level of cooperation on security issues between the two allies and others in the region.

Since the end of World War II, Japan's defense policy has been distinguished by Article

9 of the Japanese constitution. This article, which states in part that “the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes,”<sup>3</sup> in effect prohibits the use of force by Japan's governments as an instrument of national policy. It also has led to several other associated policies.

One such policy is a prohibition on “collective self-defense.” Japan recognized that nations have a right to employ their armed forces to help other states defend themselves (i.e., to engage in collective defensive operations) but rejected that policy for itself: Japan would employ its forces only in defense of Japan. This changed, however, in 2015. The U.S. and Japan revised their defense cooperation guidelines, and the Japanese passed legislation to enable their military to exercise limited collective self-defense in certain cases involving threats to both the U.S. and Japan, as well as in multilateral peacekeeping operations.

A similar policy decision was made in 2014 regarding Japanese arms exports. For a variety of economic and political reasons, Tokyo had chosen until then to rely on domestic or licensed production to meet most of its military requirements while essentially banning defense-related exports. The relaxation of these export rules in 2014 enabled Japan, among other things, to pursue (ultimately unsuccessfully) an opportunity to build new state-of-the-art submarines in Australia for the Australians and a seemingly successful effort to sell amphibious search and rescue aircraft to the Indian navy.<sup>4</sup> Japan has also supplied multiple patrol vessels to the Philippine and Vietnamese Coast Guards and is exploring various joint development opportunities with the U.S. and a few other nations.

Tokyo relies heavily on the United States for its security. In particular, it depends on the United States to deter both conventional and nuclear attacks on the home islands. The combination of the pacifist constitution and Japan's past (i.e., the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki) has forestalled much

public interest in obtaining an independent nuclear deterrent. Similarly, throughout the Cold War, Japan relied on the American conventional and nuclear commitment to deter Soviet and Chinese aggression.

As part of its relationship with Japan, the United States maintains some 54,000 military personnel and another 8,000 Department of Defense civilian employees in Japan under the rubric of U.S. Forces Japan (USFJ).<sup>5</sup> These forces include, among other things, a forward-deployed carrier battle group centered on the USS *Ronald Reagan*; an amphibious assault ship at Sasebo; and the bulk of the Third Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF) on Okinawa. U.S. forces exercise regularly with their Japanese counterparts, and this collaboration has expanded in recent years from air and naval exercises to practicing amphibious operations together.

The American presence is supported by a substantial American defense infrastructure throughout Japan, including Okinawa. The array of major bases provides key logistical and communications support for U.S. operations throughout the Western Pacific, cutting travel time substantially compared with deployments from Hawaii or the West Coast of the United States. They also provide key listening posts to monitor Russian, Chinese, and North Korean military operations. This is supplemented by Japan's growing array of space systems, including new reconnaissance satellites.

The Japanese government provides "nearly \$2 billion per year to offset the cost of stationing U.S. forces in Japan."<sup>6</sup> These funds cover a variety of expenses, including utility and labor costs at U.S. bases, improvements to U.S. facilities in Japan, and the cost of relocating training exercises away from populated areas in Japan. Japan is also covering nearly all of the expenses related to relocation of the Futenma Marine Corps Air Station from its crowded urban location to a less densely populated part of the island and facilities in Guam to accommodate some Marines being moved off the island.

At least since the 1990 Gulf War, the United States had sought to expand Japanese

participation in international security affairs. Japan's political system, grounded in Japan's constitution, legal decisions, and popular attitudes, generally resisted this effort. Attempts to expand Japan's range of defense activities, especially away from the home islands, have also often been vehemently opposed by Japan's neighbors, especially China and South Korea, because of unresolved differences on issues ranging from territorial claims and boundaries to historical grievances, including visits by Japanese leaders to the Yasukuni Shrine. Even with the incremental changes allowing for broader Japanese defense contributions, these issues will doubtless continue to constrain Japan's contributions to the alliance.

These historical issues have been sufficient to torpedo efforts to improve defense cooperation between Seoul and Tokyo, a fact highlighted in 2012 by South Korea's last-minute decision not to sign an agreement to share sensitive military data, including details about the North Korean threat to both countries.<sup>7</sup> In December 2014, the U.S., South Korea, and Japan signed a military data-sharing agreement limited to information on the North Korean military threat and requiring both allies to pass information through the United States military. This was supplemented in 2016 by a Japan–ROK bilateral agreement on sharing military intelligence. Similar controversies, rooted in history as well as in contemporary politics, have also affected Sino–Japanese relations and, to a lesser extent, Japanese ties to some Southeast Asian states.

**Republic of Korea.** The United States and the Republic of Korea signed their Mutual Defense Treaty in 1953. That treaty codified the relationship that had grown from the Korean War, when the United States dispatched troops to help South Korea defend itself against invasion by Communist North Korea. Since then, the two states have forged an enduring alliance supplemented by a substantial trade and economic relationship that includes a free trade agreement.

As of March 2018, the United States had some 24,915 troops in Korea,<sup>8</sup> the largest concentration of American forces on the Asian



mainland. This presence is centered mainly on the U.S. 2nd Infantry Division, rotating brigade combat teams, and a significant number of combat aircraft.

The U.S.–ROK defense relationship involves one of the more integrated and complex command-and-control structures. A United Nations Command (UNC) established in 1950 was the basis for the American intervention and remained in place after the armistice was signed in 1953. UNC has access to a number of bases in Japan in order to support U.N. forces in Korea. In concrete terms, however, it only oversaw South Korean and American forces as other nations' contributions were gradually withdrawn or reduced to token elements.

In 1978, operational control of frontline South Korean and American military forces passed from UNC to Combined Forces Command (CFC). Headed by the American Commander of U.S. Forces Korea, who is also Commander, U.N. Command, CFC reflects an unparalleled degree of U.S.–South Korean military integration. Similarly, the system of Korean Augmentees to the United States Army (KATUSA), which places South Korean soldiers into American units assigned to Korea, allows for an atypical degree of tactical-level integration and cooperation.

Current command arrangements for the U.S. and ROK militaries are for CFC to exercise operational control (OPCON) of all forces on the peninsula in time of war; peacetime control rests with respective national authorities, although the U.S. exercises peacetime OPCON over non-U.S., non-ROK forces located on the peninsula. In 2003, South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun, as agreed with the U.S., began the process of transferring wartime operational control from CFC to South Korean commanders, thereby establishing the ROK military as fully independent of the United States. This decision engendered significant opposition within South Korea and raised serious military questions about the transfer's impact on unity of command. Faced with various North Korean provocations, including a spate of missile tests as well as attacks on South

Korean military forces and territory in 2010, Washington and Seoul agreed in late 2014 to postpone wartime OPCON transfer.<sup>9</sup>

The domestic political constraints under which South Korea's military operates are less stringent than those that govern the operations of the Japanese military. Thus, South Korea rotated several divisions to fight alongside Americans in Vietnam. In the first Gulf War, the Iraq War, and Afghanistan, South Korea limited its contributions to noncombatant forces and monetary aid. The focus of South Korean defense planning remains on North Korea, especially as Pyongyang has deployed its forces in ways that optimize a southward advance and has carried out several penetrations of ROK territory over the years by ship, submarine, commandos, and drones. The sinking of the South Korean frigate *Cheonan* and shelling of Yongpyeong-do in 2010, which together killed 48 military personnel, wounded 16, and killed two civilians, have only heightened concerns about North Korea.

Over the past several decades, the American presence on the peninsula has slowly declined. In the early 1970s, President Richard Nixon withdrew the 7th Infantry Division, leaving only the 2nd Infantry Division on the peninsula. Those forces have been positioned farther back so that few Americans are now deployed on the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).

Washington is officially committed to maintaining 28,500 American troops in the ROK. These forces regularly engage in major exercises with their ROK counterparts, including the Key Resolve and Foal Eagle series, both of which involve the actual deployment of a substantial number of forces and are partly intended to deter Pyongyang, as well as to give U.S. and ROK forces a chance to practice operating together. The ROK government also provides substantial resources to defray the costs of U.S. Forces–Korea. It pays approximately half of all non-personnel costs for U.S. forces stationed in South Korea, amounting to \$821 million in 2016, and “is paying \$9.74 billion for the relocation of several U.S. bases within the country and construction of new military facilities.”<sup>10</sup>

With new governments in place in both the U.S. and South Korea, the health of the alliance at the political level will need to be monitored closely for impact on the operational levels. The two could diverge on issues such as North Korea sanctions policy, the timing of engagement with North Korea, deployment of the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system, and ROK–Japan relations.

**The Philippines.** America’s oldest defense relationship in Asia is with the Philippines. The United States seized the Philippines from the Spanish over a century ago as a result of the Spanish–American War and a subsequent conflict with Philippine indigenous forces. Unlike other colonial states, however, the U.S. also put in place a mechanism for the Philippines to gain its independence, transitioning through a period as a commonwealth until the archipelago was granted full independence in 1946. Just as important, substantial numbers of Filipinos fought alongside the United States against Japan in World War II, establishing a bond between the two peoples. Following World War II and after assisting the newly independent Filipino government against the Communist Hukbalahap movement in the 1940s, the United States and the Philippines signed a mutual security treaty.

For much of the period between 1898 and the end of the Cold War, the largest American bases in the Pacific were in the Philippines, centered on the U.S. Navy base in Subic Bay and the complex of airfields that developed around Clark Field (later Clark Air Base). While the Philippines have never had the ability to provide substantial financial support for the American presence, the unparalleled base infrastructure provided replenishment and repair facilities and substantially extended deployment periods throughout the East Asian littoral.

These bases, being reminders of the colonial era, were often centers of controversy. In 1991, a successor to the Military Bases Agreement between the U.S. and the Philippines was submitted to the Philippine Senate for ratification. The Philippines, after a lengthy debate,

rejected the treaty, compelling American withdrawal from Philippine bases. Coupled with the effects of the 1991 eruption of Mount Pinatubo, which devastated Clark Air Base and damaged many Subic Bay facilities, and the end of the Cold War, closure of the bases was not seen as fundamentally damaging to America’s posture in the region.

Moreover, despite the closing of the American bases and consequent slashing of American military assistance, U.S.–Philippine military relations remained close, and assistance began to increase again after 9/11 as U.S. forces assisted the Philippines in countering Islamic terrorist groups, including the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), in the south of the archipelago. From 2002–2015, the U.S. rotated 500–600 special operations forces regularly through the Philippines to assist in counterterrorism operations. That operation, Joint Special Operations Task Force–Philippines (JSOTF–P), closed during the first part of 2015. The U.S. presence in Mindanao continued at a reduced level until the Trump Administration, alarmed by the terrorist threat there, began Operation Pacific Eagle–Philippines. The presence of these 200–300 American advisers proved very valuable to the Philippines in its 2017 battle against Islamist insurgents in Marawi.<sup>11</sup>

The Philippines continues to have serious problems with Islamist insurgencies and terrorists in its South. This affects the government’s priorities and, potentially, its stability. Although not a direct threat to the American homeland, it also bears on the U.S. military footprint in the Philippines and the type of cooperation that the two militaries undertake. In addition to the current threat from ISIS-affiliated groups like the ASG, trained ISIS fighters returning to the Philippines could pose a threat similar to that of the “mujahedeen” who returned from Afghanistan after the Soviet war there in the 1980s.

Thousands of U.S. troops participate in combined exercises with Philippine troops, most notably as a part of the annual Balikatan exercises. In all, 261 activities with the Philippines are planned for 2018, “slowly

expanding parameters of military-to-military cooperation.”<sup>12</sup>

In 2014, the United States and the Philippines announced a new Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) that allows for an expanded American presence in the archipelago,<sup>13</sup> and in early 2016, they agreed on five specific bases that are subject to the agreement. Under the EDCA, U.S. forces will rotate through these locations on an expanded basis, allowing for a more regular presence (but not new, permanent bases) in the islands and more joint training with the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP). The agreement also facilitates the provision of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. The United States also agreed to improve the facilities it uses and to transfer and sell more military equipment to the AFP to help it modernize. In 2018, construction began on facilities at one of the bases covered, Basa Air Base in Pampanga, central Luzon, the main Philippine island.<sup>14</sup>

One long-standing difference between the U.S. and the Philippines involves the application of the U.S.–Philippine Mutual Defense Treaty to disputed islands in the South China Sea. The U.S. has long maintained that the treaty does not extend American obligations to disputed areas and territories, but Filipino officials occasionally have held otherwise.<sup>15</sup> The EDCA does not settle this question, but tensions in the South China Sea, including in recent years at Scarborough Shoal, have highlighted Manila’s need for greater support from and cooperation with Washington. Moreover, the U.S. government has long been explicit that any attack on Philippine government ships or aircraft, or on the Philippine armed forces, would be covered under the treaty, “thus separating the issue of territorial sovereignty from attack on Philippine military and public vessels.”<sup>16</sup>

In 2016, the Philippines elected a very unconventional President, Rodrigo Duterte, to a six-year term. His rhetorical challenges to current priorities in the U.S.–Philippines alliance have raised questions about the trajectory of the alliance and initiatives that are

important to it. With the support of the Philippine government at various levels, however, the two militaries continue to work together with some adjustment in the size and purpose of their cooperation.<sup>17</sup>

**Thailand.** The U.S.–Thai security relationship is built on the 1954 Manila Pact, which established the now-defunct SEATO, and the 1962 Thanat–Rusk agreement. These were supplemented by the 2012 Joint Vision Statement for the Thai–U.S. Defense Alliance.<sup>18</sup> In 2003, Thailand was designated a “major, non-NATO ally,” giving it improved access to American arms sales.

Thailand’s central location has made it an important component of the network of U.S. alliances in Asia. During the Vietnam War, a variety of American aircraft were based in Thailand, ranging from fighter-bombers and B-52s to reconnaissance aircraft. In the first Gulf War and again in the Iraq War, some of those same air bases were essential for the rapid deployment of American forces to the Persian Gulf. Access to these bases remains critical to U.S. global operations.

U.S. and Thai forces exercise together regularly, most notably in the annual Cobra Gold exercises, first begun in 1982. This builds on a partnership that began with the dispatch of Thai forces to the Korean War, where over 1,200 Thai troops died out of some 6,000 deployed. The Cobra Gold exercises are among the world’s largest multilateral military exercises. In 2018, after a brief period of reduced U.S. commitment due to objections over Thailand’s 2014 coup, the U.S. doubled the size of its troop deployment.

U.S.–Thai relations have been strained in recent years as a result of domestic unrest and two coups in Thailand. This strife has limited the extent of U.S.–Thai military cooperation, as U.S. law prohibits U.S. funding for many kinds of assistance to a foreign country in which a military coup deposes a duly elected head of government. Nonetheless, the two states continue to cooperate, including in joint military exercises and counterterrorism. The Counter Terrorism Information Center (CTIC)

continues to allow the two states to share vital information about terrorist activities in Asia. Among other things, the CTIC reportedly played a key role in the capture of Jemaah Islamiyah leader Hambali (Riduan Isamuddin) in 2003.<sup>19</sup>

Thailand has also been drawing closer to the People's Republic of China (PRC). This process, underway since the end of the Vietnam War, is accelerating partly because of expanding economic relations between the two states. Today, China is Thailand's leading trading partner.<sup>20</sup> Relations are also expanding because of complications in U.S.–Thai relations arising from the Thai coups in 2014 and 2016.

Relations between the Thai and Chinese militaries also have improved over the years. Intelligence officers began formal meetings in 1988. Thai and Chinese military forces have engaged in joint naval exercises since 2005, joint counterterrorism exercises since 2007, and joint marine exercises since 2010 and conducted their first joint air force exercises in 2015.<sup>21</sup> The Thais have been buying Chinese military equipment for many years. Recent purchases include two significant buys of battle tanks as well as armored personnel carriers.<sup>22</sup>

In 2017, Thailand made the first of three planned submarine purchases in one of the most expensive arms deals in its history.<sup>23</sup> Submarines could be particularly critical to Sino–Thai relations because the training and maintenance required will entail greater Chinese military presence at Thai military facilities. For a number of years, there has been discussion of a joint arms factory in Thailand and Chinese repair and maintenance facilities needed to service Chinese-made equipment.<sup>24</sup>

**Australia.** Australia is one of America's most important allies in the Asia–Pacific. U.S.–Australia security ties date back to World War I, when U.S. forces fought under Australian command on the Western Front in Europe. These ties deepened during World War II when, after Japan commenced hostilities in the Western Pacific (and despite British promises), Australian forces committed to the North Africa campaign were not returned to defend the

continent. As Japanese forces attacked the East Indies and secured Singapore, Australia turned to the United States to bolster its defenses, and American and Australian forces subsequently cooperated closely in the Pacific War. Those ties and America's role as the main external supporter for Australian security were codified in the Australia–New Zealand–U.S. (ANZUS) pact of 1951.

A key part of the Obama Administration's "Asia pivot" was to rotate additional United States Air Force units and Marines through northern Australia.<sup>25</sup> Eventually expected to total some 2,500 troops by 2020, a record number of more than 1,500, along with Osprey aircraft and howitzers, have been deployed in 2018. During the six months they are in Australia, "the rotation will include additional equipment and assets such as AH-1W Super Cobra helicopters, UH-1Y Venom helicopters, F/A-18 Hornet aircraft and MC-130 Hercules aircraft."<sup>26</sup>

The U.S. and Australia are also working to upgrade air force and naval facilities in the area to "accommodate stealth warplanes and long-range maritime patrol drones" as well as provide refueling for visiting warships.<sup>27</sup> The Air Force has deployed F-22 fighter aircraft to northern Australia for joint training exercises, and there have been discussions about rotational deployments of other assets to that part of the country as well.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, the two nations engage in a variety of security cooperation efforts, including joint space surveillance activities. These were codified in 2014 with an agreement that allows the sharing of space information data among the U.S., Australia, the U.K., and Canada.<sup>29</sup>

The two nations' chief defense and foreign policy officials meet annually in the Australia–United States Ministerial (AUSMIN) process to address such issues of mutual concern as security developments in the Asia–Pacific region, global security and development, and bilateral security cooperation.<sup>30</sup> Australia has also granted the United States access to a number of joint facilities, including space surveillance facilities at Pine Gap and naval



communications facilities on the North West Cape of Australia.<sup>31</sup>

Australia and the United Kingdom are two of America's closest partners in the defense industrial sector. In 2010, the United States approved Defense Trade Cooperation Treaties with Australia and the U.K. that allow for the expedited and simplified export or transfer of certain defense services and items between the U.S. and its two key partners without the need for export licenses or other approvals under the International Traffic in Arms Regulations. This also allows for much greater integration among the American, Australian, and British defense industrial establishments.<sup>32</sup>

**Singapore.** Although Singapore is not a security treaty ally of the United States, it is a key security partner in the region. Their close defense relationship was formalized in 2005 with the Strategic Framework Agreement (SFA) and expanded in 2015 with the U.S.–Singapore Defense Cooperation Agreement (DCA).

The 2005 SFA was the first agreement of its kind since the end of the Cold War. It built on the 1990 Memorandum of Understanding Regarding United States Use of Facilities in Singapore, as amended, which allows for U.S. access to Singaporean military facilities.<sup>33</sup> The 2015 DCA establishes “high-level dialogues between the countries’ defense establishments” and a “broad framework for defense cooperation in five key areas, namely in the military, policy, strategic and technology spheres, as well as cooperation against non-conventional security challenges, such as piracy and transnational terrorism.”<sup>34</sup> Singapore trains 1,000 service personnel a year on American-produced equipment like F-15SG and F-16C/D fighter aircraft and CH-47 Chinook and AH-64 Apache helicopters.<sup>35</sup>

**New Zealand.** For much of the Cold War, U.S. defense ties with New Zealand were similar to those between America and Australia. As a result of controversies over U.S. Navy employment of nuclear power and the possible deployment of U.S. naval vessels with nuclear weapons, the U.S. suspended its obligations to New Zealand under the 1951 ANZUS Treaty.

Defense relations improved, however, in the early 21st century as New Zealand committed forces to Afghanistan and dispatched an engineering detachment to Iraq. The 2010 Wellington Declaration and 2012 Washington Declaration, while not restoring full security ties, allowed the two nations to resume high-level defense dialogues.<sup>36</sup>

In 2013, U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel and New Zealand Defense Minister Jonathan Coleman announced the resumption of military-to-military cooperation,<sup>37</sup> and in July 2016, the U.S. accepted an invitation from New Zealand to make a single port call, reportedly with no change in U.S. policy to confirm or deny the presence of nuclear weapons on the ship.<sup>38</sup> At the time of the visit in November 2016, both sides claimed to have satisfied their respective legal requirements.<sup>39</sup> The Prime Minister expressed confidence that the vessel was not nuclear-powered and did not possess nuclear armaments, and the U.S. neither confirmed nor denied this. The visit occurred in a unique context, including an international naval review and relief response to the Kaikoura earthquake, but the arrangement may portend a longer-term solution to the nuclear impasse between the two nations.

**Taiwan.** When the United States shifted its recognition of the government of China from the Republic of China (on Taiwan) to the People's Republic of China (the mainland), it declared certain commitments concerning the security of Taiwan. These commitments are embodied in the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) and the subsequent “Six Assurances.”

The TRA is an American law and not a treaty. Under the TRA, the United States maintains programs, transactions, and other relations with Taiwan through the American Institute in Taiwan (AIT). Except for the Sino–U.S. Mutual Defense Treaty, which had governed U.S. security relations with Taiwan, all other treaties and international agreements made between the Republic of China and the United States remain in force. (President Jimmy Carter terminated the Sino–U.S. Mutual Defense Treaty following the shift in recognition to the PRC.)

Under the TRA, it is the policy of the United States “to provide Taiwan with arms of a defensive character.” The TRA also states that the U.S. will “make available to Taiwan such defense articles and services in such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability.” The U.S. has implemented these provisions of the TRA through sales of weapons to Taiwan.

The TRA states that it is U.S. policy to “consider any effort to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means, including by boycotts or embargoes, a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific area and of grave concern to the United States.” It also states that it is U.S. policy to “maintain the capacity of the United States to resist any resort to force or other forms of coercion that would jeopardize the security, or the social or economic system, of the people on Taiwan.”<sup>40</sup>

The TRA requires the President to inform Congress promptly of “any threat to the security or the social or economic system of the people on Taiwan and any danger to the interests of the United States arising therefrom.” It then states: “The President and the Congress shall determine, in accordance with constitutional processes, appropriate action by the United States in response to any such danger.”

Supplementing the TRA are the “Six Assurances” issued by President Ronald Reagan in a secret July 1982 memo, later publicly released and the subject of a Senate hearing. These assurances were intended to moderate the third Sino–American communiqué, itself generally seen as one of the “Three Communiqués” that form the foundation of U.S.–PRC relations. These assurances of July 14, 1982, were that:

In negotiating the third Joint Communiqué with the PRC, the United States:

1. *has not agreed to set a date for ending arms sales to Taiwan;*
2. *has not agreed to hold prior consultations with the PRC on arms sales to Taiwan;*
3. *will not play any mediation role between Taipei and Beijing;*

4. *has not agreed to revise the Taiwan Relations Act;*
5. *has not altered its position regarding sovereignty over Taiwan;*
6. *will not exert pressure on Taiwan to negotiate with the PRC.*<sup>41</sup>

Although the United States sells Taiwan a variety of military equipment and sends observers to its major annual exercises, it does not engage in joint exercises with the Taiwan armed forces. Some Taiwan military officers, however, attend professional military education institutions in the United States. There also are regular high-level meetings between senior U.S. and Taiwan defense officials, both uniformed and civilian.

The United States does not maintain any bases in Taiwan. In 2017, however, the U.S. Congress authorized the U.S. Department of Defense to consider ship visits to Taiwan as part of the FY 2018 National Defense Authorization Act. Coupled with the Taiwan Travel Act passed in 2018, this could lead to a significant increase in the number and/or grade of American military officers visiting Taiwan in the coming years.

**Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia.** The U.S. has security relationships with several key Southeast Asian countries. None of these relationships is as extensive and formal as its relationship with Singapore and its treaty allies, but all are of growing significance. The U.S. “rebalance” to the Pacific incorporated a policy of “rebalance within the rebalance” that included efforts to expand relations with this second tier of America’s security partners and diversify the geographical spread of forward-deployed U.S. forces.

Since shortly after the normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries in 1995, the U.S. and Vietnam also have gradually normalized their defense relationship. The relationship was codified in 2011 with a Memorandum of Understanding “advancing bilateral defense cooperation” that covers five areas of operations, including maritime security, and was updated with the 2015 Joint Vision

Statement on Defense Cooperation, which includes a reference to “cooperation in the production of new technologies and equipment.”<sup>42</sup>

The most significant development in security ties over the past several years has been the relaxation of the ban on sales of arms to Vietnam. The U.S. lifted the embargo on maritime security-related equipment in the fall of 2014 and then lifted the ban completely when President Barack Obama visited Hanoi in 2016. This full embargo had long served as a psychological obstacle to Vietnamese cooperation on security issues, but lifting it does not necessarily change the nature of the articles likely to be sold. The only transfer to have been announced is the provision under the Foreign Assistance Act of a decommissioned *Hamilton*-class Coast Guard cutter.<sup>43</sup> Others, including P-3 maritime patrol aircraft, discussed since the relaxation of the embargo three years ago have yet to be concluded. However, lifting the embargo does expand the potential of the relationship and better positions the U.S. to compete with Chinese and Russian positions in Vietnam.

The Joint Statement from President Obama’s visit also memorialized a number of other improvements in the U.S.–Vietnam relationship, including the Cooperative Humanitarian and Medical Storage Initiative (CHAMSI), which will advance cooperation on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief by, among other things, prepositioning related American equipment in Danang, Vietnam.<sup>44</sup> During Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc’s visit to Washington in 2017, the U.S. and Vietnam recommitted to this initiative, and it is being implemented.

There has been an increase in cooperation between the two nations’ coast guards as well. In March 2018, the U.S. Embassy and Consulate in Hanoi announced an “official transfer at Region 4 Station on Phu Quoc Island” that “comprises 20 million dollars’ worth of infrastructure and equipment including a training center, a maintenance facility, a boat lift, vehicles, a navigation simulator, and six brand-new fast-response Metal Shark boats—capable of reaching up to 50 knots.”<sup>45</sup> In early 2018, the

USS *Carl Vinson* visited Da Nang with its escort ships, marking the first port call by a U.S. aircraft carrier since the Vietnam War.

There remain significant limits on the U.S.–Vietnam security relationship, including a Vietnamese defense establishment that is very cautious in its selection of defense partners, party-to-party ties between the Communist Parties of Vietnam and China, and a foreign policy that seeks to balance relationships with all major powers. The U.S., like others among Vietnam’s security partners, remains officially limited to one port call a year, with an additional one to two calls on Vietnamese bases being negotiable.

The U.S. and Malaysia “have maintained steady defense cooperation since the 1990s” despite occasional political differences. Each year, they participate jointly in dozens of bilateral and multilateral exercises to promote effective cooperation across a range of missions.<sup>46</sup> The U.S. occasionally flies P-3 and/or P-8 patrol aircraft out of Malaysian bases in Borneo. During former Prime Minister Najib Razak’s 2017 visit to Washington, he and President Trump committed to strengthening their two countries’ bilateral defense ties, including in the areas of “maritime security, counterterrorism, and information sharing between our defense and security forces.” They also “committed to pursu[ing] additional opportunities for joint exercises and training.”<sup>47</sup> To this end, in 2018, Malaysia for the first time sent a warship to participate in U.S.-led RIMPAC exercises.<sup>48</sup> Close U.S.–Malaysia defense ties can be expected to continue quietly under Malaysia’s new government.

The U.S.–Indonesia defense relationship was revived in 2005 following a period of estrangement caused by American concerns about human rights. It now includes regular joint exercises, port calls, and sales of weaponry. Because of their impact on the operating environment in and around Indonesia, as well as the setting of priorities in the U.S.–Indonesia relationship, the U.S. is also working closely with Indonesia’s defense establishment to institute reforms in Indonesia’s strategic defense planning processes.

The United States carried through on the transfer of 24 refurbished F-16s to Indonesia under its Excess Defense Articles program in 2018 and is talking with Indonesian officials about recapitalizing its aging and largely Russian-origin air force with new F-16s.<sup>49</sup> Indonesia has also begun to take delivery of eight Apache helicopters bought in 2012. The U.S. plans more than 200 cooperative military activities with Indonesia in 2018 and is looking for a way to resume its training of Indonesia's special forces (KOPASSUS).<sup>50</sup>

The U.S. is working across the board at modest levels of investment to help build Southeast Asia's maritime security capacity.<sup>51</sup> Most notable in this regard is the Maritime Security Initiative (MSI) announced by Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter in 2015.<sup>52</sup>

**Afghanistan.** On October 7, 2001, U.S. forces invaded Afghanistan in response to the September 11, 2001, attacks on the United States. This marked the beginning of Operation Enduring Freedom to combat al-Qaeda and its Taliban supporters. The U.S., in alliance with the U.K. and the anti-Taliban Afghan Northern Alliance forces, ousted the Taliban from power in December 2001. Most Taliban and al-Qaeda leaders fled across the border into Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, where they regrouped and started an insurgency in Afghanistan in 2003.

In August 2003, NATO joined the war in Afghanistan and assumed control of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). At the height of the war in 2011, there were 50 troop-contributing nations and nearly 150,000 NATO and U.S. forces on the ground in Afghanistan.

On December 28, 2014, NATO formally ended combat operations and relinquished responsibility to the Afghan security forces, which numbered around 352,000 (including army and police).<sup>53</sup> After Afghan President Ashraf Ghani signed a bilateral security agreement with the U.S. and a Status of Forces Agreement with NATO, the international coalition launched Operation Resolute Support to train and support Afghan security forces. As

of May 2018, more than 15,600 U.S. and NATO forces were stationed in Afghanistan. Most U.S. and NATO forces are stationed at bases in Kabul, with tactical advise-and-assist teams located there and in Mazar-i-Sharif, Herat, Kandahar, and Laghman.<sup>54</sup>

In August 2017, while declining to announce specific troop levels, President Trump recommitting America to the effort in Afghanistan and announced that “[c]onditions on the ground—not arbitrary timetables—will guide our strategy from now on.”<sup>55</sup> According to the most recent available public information, the U.S. currently has almost 8,500 troops in Afghanistan,<sup>56</sup> roughly the same level left in place by President Obama

**Pakistan.** During the war in Afghanistan, the U.S. and NATO relied heavily on logistical supply lines running through Pakistan to resupply coalition forces in Afghanistan. Supplies and fuel were carried on transportation routes from the port at Karachi to Afghan-Pakistani border crossing points at Torkham in the Khyber Pass and Chaman in Baluchistan province. During the initial years of the Afghan war, about 80 percent of U.S. and NATO supplies traveled through Pakistani territory. This amount decreased to around 50 percent–60 percent as the U.S. shifted to northern routes and when U.S.–Pakistan relations deteriorated significantly because of U.S. drone strikes, continued Pakistani support to Taliban militants, and the fallout surrounding the U.S. raid on Osama bin Laden's hideout in Abbottabad on May 2, 2011.

From October 2001 until December 2011, the U.S. leased Pakistan's Shamsi Airfield southwest of Quetta in Baluchistan province and used it as a base from which to conduct surveillance and drone operations against terrorist targets in Pakistan's tribal border areas. Pakistan ordered the U.S. to vacate the base shortly after NATO forces attacked Pakistani positions along the Afghanistan border, killing 24 Pakistani soldiers, on November 26, 2011.

Since 2001, Pakistan has received over \$30 billion in military aid and “reimbursements” from the U.S. in the form of coalition support



funds (CSF) for its military deployments and operations along the border with Afghanistan. Pakistan has periodically staged offensives into the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), though its operations have tended to target anti-Pakistan militant groups like the Pakistani Taliban rather than those targeting Afghanistan and U.S.-led coalition forces operating there. In recent years, frustration with Pakistan's inaction toward such groups has led the U.S. to withhold ever-larger sums of reimbursement and support funds. In 2016, reflecting a trend of growing congressional resistance to military assistance for Pakistan, Congress blocked funds for the provision of eight F-16s to Pakistan.

Meanwhile, U.S. aid appropriations and military reimbursements have fallen continuously since 2013, from \$2.60 billion that year to \$2.18 billion in 2014, \$1.60 billion in 2015, \$1.19 billion in 2016, an estimated \$0.53 billion in 2017, and \$0.35 billion requested for 2018.<sup>57</sup> As frustration with Pakistan has coalesced on Capitol Hill, the Trump Administration has signaled a series of measures designed to hold Pakistan to account for its "double game."<sup>58</sup> "We can no longer be silent about Pakistan's safe havens for terrorist organizations," President Trump declared in August 2017. "We have been paying Pakistan billions and billions of dollars at the same time they are housing the very terrorists that we are fighting. But that will have to change and that will change immediately."<sup>59</sup> Aside from withholding additional support funds, the Administration has supported both Pakistan's addition to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) "grey list" for failing to fulfil obligations to prevent the financing of terrorism and its designation on a special watch list for violations of religious freedom.

**India.** During the Cold War, U.S.-Indian military cooperation was minimal, except for a brief period during the Sino-Indian border war in 1962 when the U.S. sided with India and supplied it with arms and ammunition. The rapprochement was short-lived, however, and mutual suspicion continued to mark the Indo-U.S. relationship because of India's robust

relationship with Russia and the U.S. provision of military aid to Pakistan, especially during the 1970s under the Nixon Administration. America's ties with India hit a nadir during the 1971 Indo-Pakistani war when the U.S. deployed the aircraft carrier *USS Enterprise* toward the Bay of Bengal in a show of support for Pakistani forces.

Military ties between the U.S. and India have improved significantly over the past decade as the two sides have moved toward establishment of a strategic partnership based on their mutual concern about rising Chinese military and economic influence and converging interests in countering regional terrorism. The U.S. and India have completed contracts worth approximately \$14 billion for the supply of U.S. military equipment to India, including C-130J and C-17 transport aircraft and P-8 maritime surveillance aircraft.

Defense ties between the two countries are poised to expand further as India moves forward with an ambitious military modernization program. In 2015, the U.S. and India agreed to renew and upgrade their 10-year Defense Framework Agreement. During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the U.S. in June 2016, the two governments finalized the text of a logistics and information-sharing agreement that would allow each country to access the other's military supplies and refueling capabilities through ports and military bases. The signing of the agreement, formally called the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), marks a milestone in the Indo-U.S. defense partnership. During that visit, the U.S. also designated India a "major defense partner," a designation unique to India that is intended to ease its access to American defense technology. The Trump Administration subsequently reaffirmed this status.<sup>60</sup>

New Delhi and Washington regularly hold joint military exercises across all services, including the annual Malabar naval exercise that added Japan as a regular participant in 2012. The Indian government and Trump Administration are currently negotiating several prospective arms sales and military cooperation

agreements, including the sale of armed drones to India and the completion of two outstanding “foundational agreements,” the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) and Communications and Information Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISOMA).

### **Quality of Allied Armed Forces in Asia**

Because of the lack of an integrated, regional security architecture along the lines of NATO, the United States partners with most of the nations in the region on a bilateral basis. This means that there is no single standard to which all of the local militaries aspire; instead, there is a wide range of capabilities that are influenced by local threat perceptions, institutional interests, physical conditions, historical factors, and budgetary considerations.

Moreover, the lack of recent major conflicts in the region makes assessing the quality of Asian armed forces difficult. Most Asian militaries have limited combat experience, particularly in high-intensity air or naval combat. Some (e.g., Malaysia) have never fought an external war since gaining independence in the mid-20th century. The Indochina wars, the most recent high-intensity conflicts, are now 30 years in the past. It is therefore unclear how well Asian militaries have trained for future warfare and whether their doctrine will meet the exigencies of war-time realities.

Based on examinations of equipment, however, it is assessed that several Asian allies and friends have substantial potential military capabilities supported by robust defense industries and significant defense spending. Japan’s, South Korea’s, and Australia’s defense budgets are estimated to be among the world’s 15 largest. Each of their military forces fields some of the world’s most advanced weapons, including F-15s in the Japan Air Self Defense Force and ROK Air Force; airborne early warning (AEW) platforms; Aegis-capable surface combatants and modern diesel-electric submarines; and third-generation main battle tanks. As noted, all three nations are involved in the production and purchase of F-35 fighters.

At this point, both the Japanese and Korean militaries are arguably more capable than most European militaries, at least in terms of conventional forces. Japan’s Self Defense Forces, for example, field more tanks, principal surface combatants, and combat-capable aircraft (690, 47, and 542, respectively) than their British opposite numbers (227, 19, and 258, respectively).<sup>61</sup> Similarly, South Korea fields a larger military of tanks, principal surface combatants, and combat-capable aircraft (more than 2,514, 25, and 587, respectively) than their German counterparts (236, 14, and 211, respectively).<sup>62</sup>

Both the ROK and Japan are also increasingly interested in developing missile defense capabilities, including joint development and coproduction in the case of Japan. After much negotiation and indecision, South Korea deployed America’s THAAD missile defense system on the peninsula in 2017. It is also pursuing an indigenous missile defense capability. As for Japan, its Aegis-class destroyers are equipped with SM-3 missiles, and it decided in 2017 to install the Aegis ashore missile defense system to supplement its Patriot missile batteries.<sup>63</sup>

Singapore’s small population and physical borders limit the size of its military, but in terms of equipment and training, it has the largest defense budget among Southeast Asia’s countries<sup>64</sup> and fields some of the region’s highest-quality forces. For example, Singapore’s ground forces can deploy third-generation Leopard II main battle tanks, and its fleet includes four conventional submarines, including one with air-independent propulsion systems, as well as six frigates and six missile-armed corvettes. Its air force not only has F-15E Strike Eagles and F-16s, but also has one of Southeast Asia’s largest fleets of airborne early warning and control aircraft (G550-AEW aircraft) and a squadron of KC-130 tankers that can help to extend range or time on station.<sup>65</sup>

At the other extreme, the Armed Forces of the Philippines are among the region’s weakest military forces. Having long focused on waging counterinsurgency campaigns while relying on the United States for its external security, the AFP has one of the lowest budgets in the

region—and one of the most extensive coastlines to defend. With a defense budget of only \$2.8 billion<sup>66</sup> and forced to deal with a number of insurgencies, including the Islamist Abu Sayyaf and New People's Army, Philippine defense resources have long been stretched thin. The most modern ships in the Philippine navy are three former U.S. *Hamilton*-class Coast Guard cutters. In 2017, however, South Korea completed delivery of 12 TA light attack fighter aircraft to the Philippines. The Philippine air force had possessed no jet fighter aircraft since 2005, when the last of its F-5s were decommissioned. The Duterte government has expressed interest in supplementing its current fleet with a follow-on purchase of 12 more.<sup>67</sup>

### Current U.S. Presence in Asia

**U.S. Indo-Pacific Command.** Established in 1947 as U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM), USINDOPACOM is the oldest and largest of America's unified commands. According to its Web site:

USINDOPACOM protects and defends, in concert with other U.S. Government agencies, the territory of the United States, its people, and its interests. With allies and partners, USINDOPACOM is committed to enhancing stability in the Asia-Pacific region by promoting security cooperation, encouraging peaceful development, responding to contingencies, deterring aggression, and, when necessary, fighting to win. This approach is based on partnership, presence, and military readiness.<sup>68</sup>

USINDOPACOM's area of responsibility (AOR) includes the expanses of the Pacific, but also Alaska and portions of the Arctic, South Asia, and the Indian Ocean. It includes 36 nations holding more than 50 percent of the world's population, two of the three largest economies, and nine of the 10 smallest; the most populous nation (China); the largest democracy (India); the largest Muslim-majority nation (Indonesia); and the world's smallest republic

(Nauru). The region is a vital driver of the global economy and includes the world's busiest international sea-lanes and nine of its 10 largest ports. By any meaningful measure, the Asia-Pacific is also the most militarized region in the world, with seven of its 10 largest standing militaries and five of its declared nuclear nations.<sup>69</sup>

Under INDOPACOM are a number of component commands, including:

- **U.S. Army Pacific.** USARPAC is the Army's component command in the Pacific. It is comprised of 80,000 soldiers and supplies Army forces as necessary for various global contingencies. It administers (among others) the 25th Infantry Division headquartered in Hawaii, U.S. Army Japan, and U.S. Army Alaska.<sup>70</sup>
- **U.S. Pacific Air Force.** PACAF is responsible for planning and conducting defensive and offensive air operations in the Asia-Pacific region. It has three numbered air forces under its command: 5th Air Force in Japan; 7th Air Force in Korea; and 11th Air Force, headquartered in Alaska. These air forces field two squadrons of F-15s, two squadrons of F-22s, five squadrons of F-16s, and a single squadron of A-10 ground attack aircraft, as well as two squadrons of E-3 early-warning aircraft, tankers, and transports.<sup>71</sup> Other forces that regularly come under PACAF command include B-52, B-1, and B-2 bombers.
- **U.S. Pacific Fleet.** PACFLT normally controls all U.S. naval forces committed to the Pacific, which usually represents 60 percent of the Navy's fleet. It is organized into Seventh Fleet, headquartered in Japan, and Third Fleet, headquartered in California. Seventh Fleet comprises the forward-deployed element of PACFLT and includes the only American carrier strike group (CTF-70) and amphibious group (CTF-76) home-ported abroad, ported at Yokosuka and Sasebo, Japan, respectively. The Third Fleet's AOR spans

## The Tyranny of Distance

Steam times are in parentheses.



**SOURCE:** Heritage Foundation estimates based on data from Shirley A. Kan, “Guam: U.S. Defense Deployments,” Congressional Research Service, April 29, 2014, Table 1, <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=752725> (accessed January 13, 2015).

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the West Coast of the United States to the International Date Line and includes the Alaskan coastline and parts of the Arctic. In recent years, this boundary between the two fleets’ areas of operation has been blurred under a concept called “Third Fleet Forward.” This has eased the involvement of the Third Fleet’s five carrier strike groups in the Western Pacific.

Beginning in 2015, the conduct of Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPS) that challenge excessive maritime claims, a part of the Navy’s mission since 1979, has assumed a higher profile as a result of several well-publicized operations in the South China Sea. Under the Trump Administration, the frequency of these operations has increased significantly.



- U.S. Marine Forces Pacific.** With its headquarters in Hawaii, MARFORPAC controls elements of the U.S. Marine Corps operating in the Asia–Pacific region. Because of its extensive responsibilities and physical span, MARFORPAC controls two-thirds of Marine Corps forces: the I Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF), centered on the 1st Marine Division, 3rd Marine Air Wing, and 1st Marine Logistics Group, and the III Marine Expeditionary Force, centered on the 3rd Marine Division, 1st Marine Air Wing, and 3rd Marine Logistics Group. The I MEF is headquartered at Camp Pendleton, California, and the III MEF is headquartered on Okinawa, although each has various subordinate elements deployed at any time throughout the Pacific on exercises, maintaining presence, or engaged in other activities. MARFORPAC is responsible for supporting three different commands: It is the U.S. Marine Corps component of USINDOPACOM, provides the Fleet Marine Forces to PACFLT, and provides Marine forces for U.S. Forces Korea (USFK).<sup>72</sup>
- U.S. Special Operations Command Pacific.** SOCPAC has operational control of various special operations forces, including Navy SEALs; Naval Special Warfare units; Army Special Forces (Green Berets); and Special Operations Aviation units in the Pacific region, including elements in Japan and South Korea. It supports the Pacific Command's Theater Security Cooperation Program as well as other plans and contingency responses. SOCPAC forces support various operations in the region other than warfighting, such as counterdrug operations, counterterrorism training, humanitarian assistance, and demining activities.
- U.S. Forces Korea and U.S. Eighth Army.** Because of the unique situation on the Korean Peninsula, two subcomponents of USINDOPACOM, U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) and U.S. Eighth Army, are based in Korea. USFK, a joint headquarters led by a four-star U.S. general, is in charge of the various U.S. military elements on the peninsula. U.S. Eighth Army operates in conjunction with USFK as well as with the United Nations presence in the form of United Nations Command.
- Other forces, including space capabilities, cyber capabilities, air and sealift assets, and additional combat forces, may be made available to USINDOPACOM depending on requirements and availability.
- U.S. Central Command—Afghanistan.** Unlike the U.S. forces deployed in Japan and South Korea, there is no permanent force structure committed to Afghanistan; instead, forces rotate through the theater under the direction of USINDOPACOM's counterpart in that region of the world, U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM). As of January 2017, these forces included:
  - Resolute Support Mission,** including U.S. Forces Afghanistan.
  - Special Operations Joint Task Force—Afghanistan.** This includes a Special Forces battalion, based out of Bagram Airfield, and additional allied special operations forces at Kabul.
  - 9th Air and Space Expeditionary Task Force.** This includes the 155th Air Expeditionary Wing, providing air support from Bagram Airfield; the 451st Air Expeditionary Group and 455th Expeditionary Operations Group, operating from Kandahar and Bagram Airfields, respectively, providing air support and surveillance operations over various parts of Afghanistan; and the 421st Expeditionary Fighter Squadron, providing close air support from Bagram Airfield.
  - Combined Joint Task Force for Operation Freedom's Sentinel,** centered

on Bagram Airfield. This is the main U.S. national support element. It includes seven battalions of infantry, air defense artillery for counter-artillery missions, and explosive ordnance disposal across Afghanistan. It also includes three Army aviation battalions, a combat aviation brigade headquarters, and two additional joint task forces to provide nationwide surveillance support.<sup>73</sup>

- **Five Train, Advise, Assist Commands** in Afghanistan, each of which is a multinational force tasked with improving local capabilities to conduct operations.<sup>74</sup>

### **Key Infrastructure That Enables Expeditionary Warfighting Capabilities**

Any planning for operations in the Pacific will be dominated by the “tyranny of distance.” Because of the extensive distances that must be traversed in order to deploy forces, even Air Force units will take one or more days to deploy, and ships measure steaming time in weeks. For instance, a ship sailing at 20 knots requires nearly five days to get from San Diego to Hawaii. From there, it takes a further seven days to get to Guam, seven days to Yokosuka, Japan; and eight days to Okinawa—if ships encounter no interference along the journey.<sup>75</sup>

China’s growing anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities, ranging from an expanding fleet of modern submarines to anti-ship ballistic and cruise missiles, increase the operational risk for deployment of U.S. forces in the event of conflict. China’s capabilities not only jeopardize American combat forces that would flow into the theater for initial combat, but also would continue to threaten the logistical support needed to sustain American combat power for the subsequent days, weeks, and months.

American basing structure in the Indo-Pacific region, including access to key allied facilities, is therefore both necessary and increasingly at risk.

### **American Facilities**

Much as in the 20th century, Hawaii remains the linchpin of America’s ability to support its position in the Western Pacific. If the United States cannot preserve its facilities in Hawaii, both combat power and sustainability become moot. The United States maintains air and naval bases, communications infrastructure, and logistical support on Oahu and elsewhere in the Hawaiian Islands. Hawaii is also a key site for undersea cables that carry much of the world’s communications and data, as well as satellite ground stations.

The American territory of Guam is located 4,600 miles farther west. Obtained from Spain as a result of the Spanish–American War, Guam became a key coaling station for U.S. Navy ships. Seized by Japan in World War II, it was liberated by U.S. forces in 1944 and after the war became an unincorporated, organized territory of the United States. Key U.S. military facilities on Guam include U.S. Naval Base Guam, which houses several attack submarines and possibly a new aircraft carrier berth, and Andersen Air Force Base, one of a handful of facilities that can house B-2 bombers. U.S. task forces can stage out of Apra Harbor, drawing weapons from the Ordnance Annex in the island’s South Central Highlands. There is also a communications and data relay facility on the island.

Guam’s facilities have improved steadily over the past 20 years. B-2 bombers, for example, began operating from Andersen Air Force Base in 2005.<sup>76</sup> These improvements have been accelerated and expanded even as China’s A2/AD capabilities have raised doubts about the ability of the U.S. to sustain operations in the Asian littoral. The concentration of air and naval assets as well as logistical infrastructure, however, makes the island an attractive potential target in the event of conflict. The increasing reach of Chinese and North Korean ballistic missiles reflects this growing vulnerability.

The U.S. military has noncombatant maritime prepositioning ships (MPS), which contain large amounts of military equipment and supplies, in strategic locations from which they

can reach areas of conflict relatively quickly as associated U.S. Army or Marine Corps units located elsewhere arrive in the areas. U.S. Navy units on Guam and in Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, support prepositioning ships that can supply Army or Marine Corps units deployed for contingency operations in Asia.

### Allied and Friendly Facilities

For the United States, access to bases in Asia has long been a vital part of its ability to support military operations in the region. Even with the extensive aerial refueling and replenishment skills of the U.S. Air Force and U.S. Navy, it is still essential for the United States to retain access to resupply and replenishment facilities, at least in peacetime. The ability of those facilities to survive and function will directly influence the course of any conflict in the Western Pacific region. Moreover, a variety of support functions, including communications, intelligence, and space support, cannot be accomplished without facilities in the region.

At the present time, it would be extraordinarily difficult to maintain maritime domain awareness or space situational awareness without access to facilities in the Asia-Pacific region. The American alliance network is therefore a matter both of political partnership and of access to key facilities on allied soil.

**Japan.** In Japan, the United States has access to over 100 different facilities, including communications stations, military and dependent housing, fuel and ammunition depots, and weapons and training ranges, in addition to major bases such as air bases at Misawa, Yokota, and Kadena and naval facilities at Yokosuka, Atsugi, and Sasebo. The naval facilities support the USS *Ronald Reagan* carrier strike group (CSG), which is home-ported in Yokosuka, and a Marine Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) centered on the USS *Wasp*, home-ported at Sasebo. Additionally, the skilled workforce at places like Yokosuka is needed to maintain American forces and repair equipment in time of conflict. Replacing them would take years, if not decades.

This combination of facilities and workforce, in addition to physical location and political support, makes Japan an essential part of any American military response to contingencies in the Western Pacific. Japanese financial support for the American presence also makes these facilities some of the most cost-effective in the world.

The status of one critical U.S. base has been a matter of public debate in Japan for many years. The U.S. Marine Corps' Third Marine Expeditionary Force, based on Okinawa, is the U.S. rapid reaction force in the Pacific. The Marine Air-Ground Task Force, comprised of air, ground, and logistics elements, enables quick and effective response to crises or humanitarian disasters. To improve the political sustainability of U.S. forces by reducing the impact on the local population in that densely populated area, the Marines are relocating some units to Guam and less-populated areas of Okinawa. The latter includes moving a helicopter unit from Futenma to a new facility in a more remote location in northeastern Okinawa. Because of local resistance, construction of the Futenma Replacement Facility at Camp Schwab will not be complete until 2025, but the U.S. and Japanese governments have affirmed their support for the project.

**South Korea.** The United States also maintains an array of facilities in South Korea, with a larger Army footprint than in Japan, as the United States and South Korea remain focused on deterring North Korean aggression and preparing for any possible North Korean contingencies. The Army maintains four major facilities (which in turn control a number of smaller sites) at Daegu, Yongsan in Seoul, and Camps Red Cloud/Casey and Humphreys. These facilities support the U.S. 2nd Infantry Division, which is based in South Korea. Other key facilities include air bases at Osan and Kunsan and a naval facility at Chinhae near Pusan.

**The Philippines.** In 1992, The United States ended nearly a century-long presence in the Philippines when it withdrew from its base in Subic Bay as its lease there ended. Clark Air Base had been closed earlier due to the

eruption of Mount Pinatubo; the costs of repairing the facility were deemed too high to be worthwhile. In 2014, however, with the growing Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea, including against Philippine claims such as Mischief Reef (seized in 1995) and Scarborough Shoal (2012), the U.S. and the Philippines negotiated the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, which will allow for the rotation of American forces through Philippine military bases.

In 2016, the two sides agreed on an initial list of five bases in the Philippines that will be involved. Geographically distributed across the country, they are Antonio Bautista Air Base in Palawan, closest to the Spratlys; Basa Air Base on the main island of Luzon and closest to the hotly contested Scarborough Shoal; Fort Magsaysay, also on Luzon and the only facility on the list that is not an air base; Lumbia Air Base in Mindanao, where Manila remains in low-intensity combat with Islamist insurgents; and Mactan-Benito Ebuen Air Base in the central Philippines.<sup>77</sup> Work at Basa Air Base is progressing.

It remains unclear precisely which forces would be rotated through the Philippines as a part of this agreement, which in turn affects the kinds of facilities that would be most needed. The base upgrades and deployments pursuant to the EDCA are part of a broader expansion of U.S.–Philippines defense ties, which most recently included the U.S. leaving behind men and matériel at Clark Air Base following annual exercises,<sup>78</sup> as well as joint naval patrols and increased levels of assistance under the Maritime Security Initiative (MSI). Since July 2016, the Duterte government has shed doubt on the future of U.S.–Philippines military cooperation, but it continues to be robust at the operational level.

**Singapore.** The United States does not have bases in Singapore, but it is allowed access to several key facilities that are essential for supporting American forward presence. Since the closure of its facilities at Subic Bay, the United States has been allowed to operate the principal logistics command for the

Seventh Fleet out of the Port of Singapore Authority’s Sembawang Terminal. The U.S. Navy also has access to Changi Naval Base, one of the few docks in the world that can handle a 100,000-ton American aircraft carrier. In addition, a small U.S. Air Force contingent operates out of Paya Lebar Air Base to support U.S. Air Force combat units visiting Singapore and Southeast Asia, and Singapore hosts Littoral Combat Ships (LCS) and a rotating squadron of F-16 fighter aircraft.

**Australia.** A much-discussed element of the “Asia pivot” has been the 2011 agreement to deploy U.S. Marines to Darwin in northern Australia. While planned to amount to 2,500 Marines, the rotations fluctuate and have not yet reached that number. “In its mature state,” according to the Australian Department of Defence, “the Marine Rotational Force–Darwin (MRF–D) will be a Marine Air–Ground Task Force...with a variety of aircraft, vehicles and equipment.”<sup>79</sup> The Marines do not constitute a permanent presence in Australia, in keeping with Australian sensitivities about permanent American bases on Australian soil.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, the United States jointly staffs the Joint Defence Facility Pine Gap and the Joint Geological and Geophysical Research Station at Alice Springs and has access to the Harold E. Holt Naval Communication Station in western Australia, including the space surveillance radar system there.<sup>81</sup>

Finally, the United States is granted access to a number of facilities in Asian states on a contingency or crisis basis. Thus, U.S. Air Force units transited Thailand’s U-Tapao Air Base and Sattahip Naval Base during the first Gulf War and during the Iraq War, but they do not maintain a permanent presence there. Additionally, the U.S. Navy conducts hundreds of port calls throughout the region.

**Diego Garcia.** The American facilities on the British territory of Diego Garcia are vital to U.S. operations in the Indian Ocean and Afghanistan and provide essential support for operations in the Middle East and East Asia. The island is home to the 12 ships of Maritime Prepositioning Squadron-2 (MPS-2), which can support a Marine brigade and associated



Navy elements for 30 days. Several elements of the U.S. global space surveillance and communications infrastructure, as well as basing facilities for the B-2 bomber, are also on the island.

## Conclusion

The Asian strategic environment is extremely expansive, as it includes half the globe and is characterized by a variety of political relationships among states that have wildly varying capabilities. The region includes long-standing American allies with relationships dating back to the beginning of the Cold War as well as recently established states and some long-standing adversaries such as North Korea.

American conceptions of the region must therefore start from the physical limitations imposed by the tyranny of distance. Moving forces within the region (never mind to it) will take time and require extensive strategic lift assets as well as sufficient infrastructure, such as sea and aerial ports of debarkation that can handle American strategic lift assets, and political support. At the same time, the complicated nature of intra-Asian relations, especially unresolved historical and territorial issues, means that the United States, unlike Europe, cannot necessarily count on support from all of its regional allies in responding to any given contingency.

## Scoring the Asia Operating Environment

As with the operating environments of Europe and the Middle East, we assessed the characteristics of Asia as they would pertain to supporting U.S. military operations. Various aspects of the region facilitate or inhibit America's ability to conduct military operations to defend its vital national interests against threats. Our assessment of the operating environment utilized a five-point scale, ranging from "very poor" to "excellent" conditions and covering four regional characteristics of greatest relevance to the conduct of military operations:

1. **Very Poor.** Significant hurdles exist for military operations. Physical infrastructure is insufficient or nonexistent, and the region is politically unstable. The U.S. military is poorly placed or absent, and alliances are nonexistent or diffuse.
2. **Unfavorable.** A challenging operating environment for military operations is marked by inadequate infrastructure, weak alliances, and recurring political instability. The U.S. military is inadequately placed in the region.

3. **Moderate.** A neutral to moderately favorable operating environment is characterized by adequate infrastructure, a moderate alliance structure, and acceptable levels of regional political stability. The U.S. military is adequately placed in the region.
4. **Favorable.** A favorable operating environment includes good infrastructure, strong alliances, and a stable political environment. The U.S. military is well placed in the region for future operations.
5. **Excellent.** An extremely favorable operating environment includes well-established and well-maintained infrastructure, strong and capable allies, and a stable political environment. The U.S. military is exceptionally well placed to defend U.S. interests.

The key regional characteristics consisted of:

- a. **Alliances.** Alliances are important for interoperability and collective defense, as allies would be more likely to lend support to U.S. military operations.

Various indicators provide insight into the strength or health of an alliance. These include whether the U.S. trains regularly with countries in the region, has good interoperability with the forces of an ally, and shares intelligence with nations in the region.

**b. Political Stability.** Political stability brings predictability for military planners when considering such things as transit, basing, and overflight rights for U.S. military operations. The overall degree of political stability indicates whether U.S. military actions would be hindered or enabled and considers, for example, whether transfers of power in the region are generally peaceful and whether there have been any recent instances of political instability in the region.

**c. U.S. Military Positioning.** Having military forces based or equipment and supplies staged in a region greatly facilitates the ability of the United States to respond to crises and, presumably, achieve successes in critical “first battles” more quickly. Being routinely present in a region also assists in maintaining familiarity with its characteristics and the various actors that might act to assist or thwart U.S. actions. With this in mind, we

assessed whether or not the U.S. military was well positioned in the region. Again, indicators included bases, troop presence, prepositioned equipment, and recent examples of military operations (including training and humanitarian) launched from the region.

**d. Infrastructure.** Modern, reliable, and suitable infrastructure is essential to military operations. Airfields, ports, rail lines, canals, and paved roads enable the U.S. to stage, launch operations from, and logistically sustain combat operations. We combined expert knowledge of regions with publicly available information on critical infrastructure to arrive at our overall assessment of this metric.<sup>82</sup>

For Asia, we arrived at these average scores:

- Alliances: **4—Favorable**
- Political Stability: **4—Favorable**
- U.S. Military Positioning: **4—Favorable**
- Infrastructure: **4—Favorable**

Aggregating to a regional score of:  
**Favorable**

Operating Environment: Asia

	VERY POOR	UNFAVORABLE	MODERATE	FAVORABLE	EXCELLENT
Alliances				✓	
Political Stability				✓	
U.S. Military Posture				✓	
Infrastructure				✓	
OVERALL				✓	

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