

Asia

Ever since the founding of the American Republic, Asia has been a key U.S. area of interest 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 allowing any single nation to dominate Asia would be inimical to American interests. Asia constitutes too important a market and is 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. In 2018, almost 40 percent of U.S. trade in goods was with Asia,¹ which hosts nine of the world's 10 busiest seaports and 60 percent of global maritime traffic.² As the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) 2019 *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report* notes, "America's annual two-way trade with the region is \$2.3 trillion, with U.S. foreign direct investment of \$1.3 trillion in the region – more than China's, Japan's, and South Korea's combined."³

Asia is a key source of vital natural resources and a crucial part of the global value chain in areas like electronic components. As of October 2017, it was reported to be America's second-largest trading partner in services.⁴ Disruption in Asia can affect 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. Seven of the world's 10 largest standing armies are in Asia, including those of China, India, North and South Korea, Pakistan, Russia, and Vietnam.⁵ The United States also maintains a network of treaty alliances and security partnerships, as well as a significant military presence, in Asia, and five Asian states (China, North Korea, India, Pakistan, and Russia) possess nuclear weapons. According to the DOD *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report*:

USINDOPACOM currently has more than 2,000 aircraft; 200 ships and submarines; and more than 370,000 Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, Airmen, DoD civilians, and contractors assigned within its area of responsibility. The largest concentration of forces in the region are [*sic*] in Japan and the ROK. A sizable contingent of forces (more than 5,000 on a day-to-day basis) are also based in the U.S. territory of Guam....⁶

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) are 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 uses different names when referring to the disputed areas. 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 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 many 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 Defense 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 (ARF) and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus) have been far weaker. There also 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 involving all four countries.

Nor is there much of an economic 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 25 rounds of negotiations. When fully implemented, these agreements will help to remedy the lack of regional economic integration.

Important Alliances and Bilateral Relations in Asia

The keys to America's position in the Western Pacific are its alliances with Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK), the Philippines, Thailand, and Australia, supplemented by very close security relationships with New Zealand and Singapore and evolving relationships with other nations 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 gained 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; they also field F-15 and F-16 combat aircraft and employ LINK-16 data links. Australia, Japan, and South Korea are partners in 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 soon.

Consequently, in the event of conflict, the region's 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 of 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, both between the two allies and with other countries in the region.

Since the end of World War II, Japan's defense policy has been distinguished by Article 9 of the Japanese constitution, 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.”⁷ In effect, this article 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 against “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. Until then, for a variety of economic and political reasons, Tokyo had chosen 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.⁸ 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 (the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which ended World War II in the Pacific) 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 DOD civilian employees in Japan under the rubric of U.S. Forces Japan (USFJ).⁹ 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 include joint amphibious exercises.

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 "pays roughly \$2 billion per year to defray the cost of stationing U.S. military personnel in Japan."¹⁰ 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 has sought to expand Japanese participation in international security affairs. Japan's political system, grounded in Japan's constitution, legal decisions, and popular attitudes, has generally resisted this effort. Similarly, attempts to expand Japan's range of defense activities, especially away from the home islands, have 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, a controversial memorial to Japan's war dead that includes some who are deemed war criminals for their conduct in World War II. 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 serious enough to torpedo efforts to improve defense cooperation between Seoul and Tokyo. In 2012, for example, South Korea decided at the last minute not to sign an agreement to share sensitive military data, including details about the North Korean threat to both countries.¹¹ 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. In August 2019, South Korea announced it would not extend the General Security of Military Information Agreement, an intelligence-sharing agreement.

South Korean–Japanese relations took another downturn in 2018 when the South Korean Supreme Court ruled that Japanese companies could be forced to pay occupation reparations. In December 2018, an incident between a South Korean naval ship and a Japanese air force plane further exacerbated tensions.

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.

The U.S. is committed to maintaining 28,500 troops on the Korean Peninsula. 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 to transfer 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,¹² and there is little indication that this will change in the foreseeable future.

The domestic political constraints under which South Korea's military operates are less stringent than those that govern the operations of the Japanese military. South Korea rotated several divisions, for example, to fight alongside Americans in Vietnam. In the first

Gulf War, the Iraq War, and Afghanistan, however, South Korea limited its contributions to noncombatant forces and monetary aid.

South Korean defense planning remains focused 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 there are now few Americans deployed on the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).

Traditionally, U.S. military forces have regularly engaged in major exercises with their ROK counterparts, including the Key Resolve and Foal Eagle series, both of which involved the actual deployment of a substantial number of forces and were partly intended to deter Pyongyang, as well as to give U.S. and ROK forces a chance to practice operating together. However, after the 2018 U.S.–North Korean Summit, President Donald Trump unilaterally announced that he was cancelling major bilateral military exercises. This decision was made without consulting the Department of Defense, U.S. Forces Korea, or allies South Korea and Japan. As of mid-2019, the U.S. and South Korea have cancelled 11 exercises and imposed constraints on additional exercises. General Robert Abrams, Commander, U.S. Forces Korea, testified in February that he had reduced the “size, scope, volume, and timing” of allied military exercises in Korea.¹³ Despite this, “We have observed no significant changes to size, scope, or timing of [North Korea’s] ongoing exercises.”¹⁴ He added that Pyongyang’s annual Winter Training Cycle involved one million troops.¹⁵

The ROK government provides substantial resources to defray the costs of U.S. Forces Korea. “In February 2019, U.S. and ROK negotiators announced a preliminary one-year ‘Special Measures Agreement’ (SMA) for dividing the cost of hosting U.S. troops in South Korea that increased South Korea’s contribution by approximately 8%, to \$924 million.” In addition, “The U.S. military is relocating its forces farther south from bases near the border with North Korea, with South Korea paying \$9.7 billion for construction of new large-scale military facilities.”¹⁶ The 2019 bilateral Special Measures Agreement negotiations were particularly contentious. The U.S. had demanded an increase of 50 percent–100 percent in South Korea’s contribution. Washington eventually agreed to an 8 percent increase in return for renegotiating the agreement every year rather than every five years.

The Philippines. America’s oldest defense relationship in Asia is with the Philippines. The United States seized the Philippines from the Spanish more than 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 received 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. After a lengthy debate, the Philippines rejected the treaty, compelling American withdrawal from Philippine bases. Given 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, it was not felt that closure of the bases would fundamentally damage 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 supported Philippine efforts to counter 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), ended 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 (OPE–P). The presence of 200–300 American advisers proved very valuable to the Philippines in its 2017 battle against Islamist insurgents in Marawi,¹⁷ and these advisers remain there as part of a continuing advise-and-assist mission. Other continuing support over the past year has included the presence of 12 aircraft, eight unmanned ISR platforms, three medium-lift helicopters, and one medium-lift airplane.¹⁸

The Philippines continues to have 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 were planned for 2018, “slowly expanding parameters of military-to-military cooperation.”¹⁹ In 2019, in addition to American and Philippine forces, Balikatan involved more than 60 Australian Defence Force personnel and the deployment of American F-35Bs embarked on an amphibious assault ship.²⁰ In all, activities with the Philippines were scheduled to increase in 2019 from 261 military engagements to 281.

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.²¹ The U.S.–Philippine Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) does not settle this question, but tensions in the South China Sea, most recently around the most developed island claimed by the Philippines, Pag-asa,²² have highlighted Manila's need for support from Washington. Moreover, the U.S. government has long made it clear 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.”²³ In March 2019, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo

reiterated this position and reaffirmed that the South China Sea is part of the Pacific for purposes of the treaty's application.²⁴

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.–Philippine alliance have raised questions about both 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 have continued to work together with some adjustment in the size and purpose of their cooperation.²⁵

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.²⁶ These were supplemented by the 2012 Joint Vision Statement for the Thai–U.S. Defense Alliance.²⁷ In 2003, Thailand was designated a “major, non-NATO ally,” a status that gave 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, American aircraft based in Thailand ranged 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 2019, it involved roughly 10,000 troops from nine countries, including 4,500 from the US.²⁸

U.S.–Thai relations have been strained since 2006. Domestic unrest and two coups in Thailand limited the extent of U.S.–Thai military cooperation, as U.S. law prohibits 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 managed to cooperate in joint military exercises and counterterrorism operations, and elections held in Thailand in March 2019 should allow full restoration of the two countries' military-to-military relations.

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. As of 2016, China was the second-largest destination for Thailand's exports and the leading source of its imports.²⁹ Relations are also expanding because of the aforementioned complications in U.S.–Thai relations arising from coups in Thailand.

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 2015.³⁰ The Thais have been buying Chinese military equipment for many years. Purchases in recent years have included significant buys of battle tanks and armored personnel carriers.³¹

In 2017, Thailand made the first of three planned submarine purchases in one of the most expensive arms deals in its history.³² Submarines could be particularly critical to Sino–Thai relations because the attendant training and maintenance will require a greater Chinese military presence at Thai military facilities. There has been discussion of a possible China–Thai arms factory in Thailand, as well as Chinese repair and maintenance facilities to service Chinese-made equipment.³³

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, and 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 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.³⁴ Eventually expected to total some 2,500 by 2020, a record number of approximately 1,700 marines are set to deploy in 2019 as part of the eighth rotation through Darwin.³⁵ Reports indicate that, building on improvements in the 2018 rotation, this one will be the most capable to date. It will include 10 Osprey tiltrotor aircraft, four Viper attack helicopters, and three Venom utility helicopters.³⁶

The U.S. and Australia have also worked to upgrade air force and naval facilities in the area to "accommodate stealth warplanes and long-range maritime patrol drones" and to provide refueling for visiting warships.³⁷ The Air Force has deployed F-22 fighter aircraft and bombers to northern Australia for joint training exercises.³⁸ 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 space information data to be shared among the U.S., Australia, the U.K., and Canada.³⁹

The two nations' chief defense and foreign policy officials meet annually (most recently in July 2018) 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.⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹

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.⁴²

Singapore. Although Singapore is not a security treaty ally of the United States, it is a key security partner in the region. The close U.S.–Singapore 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.⁴³ The 2015 DCA established "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."⁴⁴

In October 2017, it was announced that "Singapore trains approximately 1,000 military personnel in the United States each year" on American-produced equipment like F-15SG and F-16C/D fighter aircraft and CH-47 Chinook and AH-64 Apache helicopters.⁴⁵ Singapore has also announced an intention to buy the F-35, which would make it the fourth in the region to do so, next to three American treaty allies.⁴⁶

New Zealand. For much of the Cold War, U.S. defense ties with New Zealand were similar to those between America and Australia. In 1986, 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.⁴⁷ As part of this warming of relations, New Zealand rejoined the multinational U.S.-led RIMPAC (Rim of the Pacific Exercises) naval exercises in 2012 and has participated in each iteration since then.

In 2013, U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel and New Zealand Defense Minister Jonathan Coleman announced the resumption of military-to-military cooperation,⁴⁸ 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.⁴⁹ At the time of the visit in November 2016, both sides claimed to have satisfied their respective legal requirements.⁵⁰ 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. Since then, there have been several other ship visits by the U.S. Coast Guard,⁵¹ and in 2017, New Zealand lent the services of one its naval frigates to the U.S. Seventh Fleet following a deadly collision between the destroyer USS *Fitzgerald* and a Philippine container ship that killed seven American sailors.⁵²

New Zealand is a member of the elite “five eyes” intelligence alliance with the U.S., Canada, Australia, and the U.K.

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 (PRC, the mainland), it also 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 and was terminated by President Jimmy Carter following the shift in recognition to the PRC, all other treaties and international agreements made between the Republic of China and the United States remain in force.

Under the TRA, it is the policy of the United States “to provide Taiwan with arms of a defensive character.”⁵³ 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.”⁵⁴ 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.”⁵⁵ To this end:

The President is directed to inform the 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. The President and the Congress shall determine, in accordance with constitutional processes, appropriate action by the United States in response to any such danger.⁵⁶

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.*⁵⁷

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 DOD 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 America’s 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. This requirement remains in effect.

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. The MOU 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,”⁵⁸ and is scheduled for implementation under a three-year “2018–2020 Plan of Action for United States–Viet Nam Defense Cooperation” agreed upon in 2017.⁵⁹

The most significant development with respect to 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 ended the embargo on arms sales completely in 2016. The 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 that are likely to be sold.

Transfers to date have been to the Vietnamese Coast Guard. These include the provision under the Excess Defense Articles (EDA) program of a decommissioned *Hamilton*-class cutter and 18 Metal Shark patrol boats, as well as infrastructure support.⁶⁰ Vietnam is also considering purchasing American UAVs for its Coast Guard.⁶¹ Discussions of bigger-ticket items like P-3 maritime patrol aircraft, although conducted since the relaxation of the embargo, have yet to be concluded. In his 2019 force posture statement, INDOPACOM Commander Admiral Philip Davidson cited as a priority “enhancing Vietnam’s maritime capacity, which will be bolstered by Vietnam’s acquisition of Scan Eagle UAVs, T-6 trainer aircraft, and a second U.S. Coast Guard cutter.”⁶²

The Cooperative Humanitarian and Medical Storage Initiative (CHAMSI) is designed to enhance cooperation on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief by, among other things, prepositioning related American equipment in Da Nang, Vietnam.⁶³ During Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc’s visit to Washington in 2017, the U.S. and Vietnam reaffirmed their commitment to this initiative, which is being implemented. In 2018, Vietnam participated in RIMPAC for the first time. The military-to-military relationship, however, suffered a setback in 2018 when Vietnam abruptly cancelled 15 defense activities with the U.S. that were slated for 2019.⁶⁴

There has been an increase in cooperation between the two nations’ coast guards. In March 2018, the U.S. Embassy and Consulate in Hanoi announced an official transfer 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.”⁶⁵ Beginning in 2017 and through the spring of 2019, the U.S. delivered to Vietnam 18 of these patrol boats.⁶⁶ In early 2018, the USS *Carl Vinson* visited Da Nang with its escort ships in the first port call

by a U.S. aircraft carrier since the Vietnam War.

Nevertheless, significant limits on the U.S.–Vietnam security relationship persist, 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 Vietnamese foreign policy that seeks to balance relationships with all major powers. The U.S., like others among Vietnam’s security partners, remains officially restricted to one port call a year, with an additional one to two calls on Vietnamese bases being negotiable.

The U.S. and Malaysia, despite occasional political differences, “have maintained steady defense cooperation since the 1990s.” Examples include Malaysian assistance in the reconstruction of Afghanistan and involvement in counter-piracy operations “near the Malacca Strait and...off the Horn of Africa.” Each year, the U.S. and Malaysia participate jointly in dozens of bilateral and multilateral exercises to promote effective cooperation across a range of missions.⁶⁷ The U.S. has occasionally flown P-3 and/or P-8 patrol aircraft out of Malaysian bases in Borneo.

The U.S. relationship with Malaysia was strengthened under President Barack Obama and has continued on a positive trajectory under the Trump Administration. 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 cooperation 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.”⁶⁸ To this end, in 2018, Malaysia for the first time sent a warship to participate in U.S.-led RIMPAC exercises.⁶⁹ The new government in Malaysia is not likely to reverse these gains. Close U.S.–Malaysia defense ties can be expected to continue, albeit quietly.

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 EDA program in 2018 and is talking with Indonesian officials about recapitalizing their aging and largely Russian-origin air force with new F-16s.⁷⁰ In 2018, the U.S. also completed delivery of eight Apache helicopters. The Navy characterized the August 2018 CARAT (Cooperation, Afloat Readiness and Training) exercise with Indonesia as “build[ing] upon more than 200 military exercises between the two partner nations.”⁷¹

The U.S. is working across the board at modest levels of investment to help build Southeast Asia’s maritime security capacity. Most notable in this regard is the Maritime Security Initiative (MSI) announced by Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter in 2015, which pledged \$425 million in equipment and training for Southeast Asia over a five-year period and was authorized by Congress in 2016 for a five-year term from 2016–2020. The 2019 National Defense Authorization Act reauthorized the program through 2025, rebranding it the Indo-Pacific Maritime Security Initiative and making Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and India eligible for funds.⁷² In August 2018, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced the commitment of another \$290.5 million in Foreign Military Financing to strengthen maritime security, High Availability/Disaster Recovery (HA/DR), and peacekeeping capabilities in Southeast Asia.⁷³

Afghanistan. On October 7, 2001, U.S. forces invaded Afghanistan in response to the September 11, 2001, terrorist 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 (FATA), 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). In 2011, at the height of the war, 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).⁷⁴ 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 2019, slightly more than 17,000 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.⁷⁵

In August 2017, while declining to announce specific troop levels, President Trump recommitted America to the effort in Afghanistan and announced that “[c]onditions on the ground—not arbitrary timetables—will guide our strategy from now on.”⁷⁶ According to the most recent available public information, the U.S. currently has around 14,000 troops in Afghanistan split between the NATO-led Resolute Support training mission and the U.S.-led Operation Freedom’s Sentinel counterterrorism mission.

Since 2018, U.S. Special Envoy Zalmay Khalilzad has been leading talks with the Taliban in an attempt to find a political solution to the fighting, but there has been little progress. The Afghan government has not participated in the talks because the Taliban refuse to meet with them, and this has caused tension

between the U.S. and Afghan governments. Whether the U.S. will be able to bring all parties to the table and succeed in achieving a politically acceptable conclusion to the war remains an open question.

Pakistan. During the early stages of the war in Afghanistan, the U.S. and NATO relied heavily on logistical supply lines running through Pakistan to resupply anti-Taliban coalition forces. 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. For roughly the first decade of the war, about 80 percent of U.S. and NATO supplies traveled through Pakistani territory. This amount has decreased progressively as the U.S. and allied troop presence has shrunk.

U.S.–Pakistan relations have grown more acrimonious since 2011, when U.S. special forces conducted a raid on Osama bin Laden’s hideout in Abbottabad not far from facilities run by the Pakistani military. In addition, President Donald Trump has suspended U.S. military assistance to Pakistan and increased pressure on Islamabad for its continued support of the Taliban.

Since 2001, Pakistan has received roughly \$30 billion in 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, though its operations have tended to target anti-Pakistan militant groups like the Pakistani Taliban rather than those attacking 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.

According to the Congressional Research Service (CRS), 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, \$1.20 billion in 2016, \$590 million in 2017, and \$108 million in 2018. This is mostly the product of a major drop in reimbursements from CSF, which once accounted for roughly half of all U.S. aid to Pakistan. This fell from \$1.20 billion in 2014 to \$700 million in 2015, \$550 million in 2016, and zero dollars in 2017, 2018, and 2019. Since 2015, U.S. Administrations have refused to certify that Pakistan has met requirements to crack down on the Haqqani Network, an Afghan terrorist group that resides in northern Pakistan. As the CRS notes, “The NDAA for FY2019 revamped the CSF program, authorizing \$350 million to support security enhancement activities along Pakistan’s western border, subject to certification requirements that have not been met to date.”⁷⁷

As frustration with Pakistan has mounted on Capitol Hill, the Trump Administration has signaled a series of measures designed to hold Pakistan to account for its “double game.”⁷⁸ In 2018, the U.S. military suspended all \$800 million in Coalition Support Funds “due to a lack of Pakistani decisive actions in support of the [U.S.] South Asia Strategy.”⁷⁹ The Administration has also 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. supplied India with arms and ammunition. The rapprochement was short-lived, however, and the U.S. suspended aid to India following the Second Indo-Pakistan War of 1965. The Indo–U.S. relationship was again characterized by suspicion and mistrust, especially during the 1970s under the Nixon Administration. The principal source of tension was India’s robust relationship with Moscow, with which it signed a major defense treaty in 1971, and the U.S. provision of military

aid to Pakistan. 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. has contracted to supply between \$15 billion and \$20 billion worth of U.S. military equipment to India, including C-130J and C-17 transport aircraft, P-8 maritime surveillance aircraft, Chinook airlift helicopters, Apache attack helicopters, anti-submarine warfare helicopters, artillery batteries, and AN-TPQ-37 firefinder radar. The two countries also have several information-sharing and intelligence-sharing agreements in place, including one that covers "white" or commercial shipping in the Indian Ocean.

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), marked a major 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 facilitate its access to American defense technology. Since then, Indian and U.S. warships have begun to offer each other refueling and resupply services at sea.

The Trump Administration subsequently reaffirmed this status⁸⁰ and has taken several

additional steps to advance the defense relationship. A Communications and Information Security Memorandum of Agreement (CIS-MOA), successfully negotiated in 2018, allows for the exchange of encrypted communications and communications equipment, and negotiations on the last "foundational" military cooperation agreement, the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), which would facilitate the exchange of geospatial intelligence and navigation services, are ongoing. Also in 2018, the Trump Administration granted India Strategic Trade Authorization-1 (STA-1), which eases export control regulations on arms sales to India, among other things. India is only the third Asian country after Japan and South Korea to be granted STA-1 status. The same year, India established a permanent naval attaché representative to U.S. Central Command in Bahrain, fulfilling a long-standing request from New Delhi.

New Delhi and Washington regularly hold joint annual military exercises across all services, including the Yudh Abhyas army exercises, Red Flag air force exercises, and Malabar naval exercise, which added Japan as a regular participant in 2012. The Indian government and the Trump Administration are currently negotiating several prospective arms sales and military cooperation agreements, including the sale of armed MQ-9 Guardian/Predator-B unmanned drones to India.

Quality of Key Allied or Partner 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, most Asian militaries have limited combat experience, particularly in high-intensity air or naval combat. Some, like

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 40 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 wartime realities.

Based on examinations of equipment, however, we assess 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, and their military forces field 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 (667, 49, and 547, respectively) than their British counterparts field (227, 20, and 250, respectively).⁸¹ Similarly, South Korea fields a larger military of tanks, principal surface combatants, and combat-capable aircraft (more than 2,514, 26, and 590, respectively) than their German counterparts field (236, 14, and 217, respectively).⁸²

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.⁸³

Australia also has very capable armed forces. They are smaller than NATO militaries but have major operational experience, having deployed to both Iraq and Afghanistan as well as to help the Philippines with its Southern insurgency. Australia's military is today involved in 13 different operations from the Middle East to the South China Sea.⁸⁴

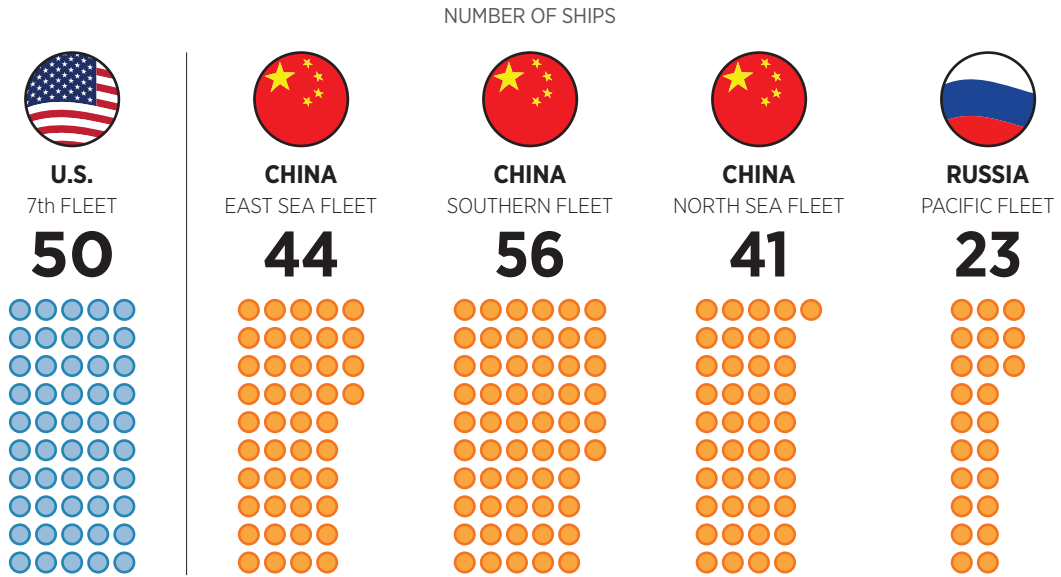
Singapore's small population and physical borders limit the size of its military, but in terms of equipment and training, it has Southeast Asia's largest defense budget⁸⁵ and fields some of the region's highest-quality forces. For example, Singapore's ground forces can deploy third-generation Leopard II main battle tanks, and its fleet includes four conventional submarines (with four new, more capable submarines on their way from Germany to replace them⁸⁶), 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.⁸⁷

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 Philippines, like Thailand, spends only 1.4 percent of GDP on its military.⁸⁸ In absolute numbers, its defense budget in 2019 is \$3.24 billion.⁸⁹ 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 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.⁹⁰

FIGURE 1

U.S. Faces Daunting Force in Pacific

The Eastern Hemisphere is home to the two most formidable naval threats to the U.S., China and Russia, and the bulk of this area is the responsibility of the U.S. Navy's 7th Fleet. The 7th Fleet must contend with all three of China's fleets in addition to Russia's Pacific Fleet.



NOTES: Figures are estimates. Figures exclude patrol boats and other vessels smaller than a frigate.

SOURCES: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2019* (New York: Routledge, 2019), and Heritage Foundation research and analysis.

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The armed forces of American allies from outside the region, particularly those of France and the United Kingdom, should also be mentioned. France has overseas bases in New Caledonia and the South Pacific, locally based assets, and 2,900 personnel in the region.⁹¹ It also conducts multiple naval deployments a year out of Metropolitan France. The U.K. is also very active in the region, and given its unparalleled integration with U.S. forces, can employ its capability directly in pursuit of shared objectives. It has a naval logistics facility in

Singapore and Royal Gurkhas stationed in Brunei and has been an integral part of a U.S.-led mission to monitor seaborne evasions.

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.⁹²

USINDOPACOM’s area of responsibility (AOR) includes not only the expanses of the Pacific, but also Alaska and portions of the Arctic, South Asia, and the Indian Ocean. Its 36 nations represent more than 50 percent of the world’s population and include 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 Indo–Pacific is also the world’s most militarized region, with seven of its 10 largest standing militaries and six of its nuclear nations.⁹³

Under INDOPACOM are a number of component commands, including:

- **U.S. Army Pacific.** USARPAC is the Army’s component command in the Pacific. With 80,000 soldiers, it 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.⁹⁴
- **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.⁹⁵ 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 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 made it easier for the Third Fleet’s five carrier strike groups to operate 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

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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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).⁹⁶

- **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 and has a primary focus on counterterrorism operations.⁹⁷
- **Five Train, Advise, Assist Commands** in Afghanistan, each of which is a multinational force tasked with improving local capabilities to conduct operations.⁹⁸

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.⁹⁹

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 it was 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. It was seized by Japan in World War II, 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 to operate from Andersen Air Force Base in 2005.¹⁰⁰ 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.

Today, maintaining maritime domain awareness or space situational awareness would be extraordinarily difficult 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. The eruption of Mount Pinatubo had already forced the closure of Clark Air Base; the costs of repairing the facility were deemed too high to be worthwhile. In 2014, however, spurred by China's growing 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.¹⁰¹ In 2018, construction was completed on a humanitarian assistance and disaster relief warehouse located at Basa Air Base in Pampanga, central Luzon, the main Philippine island.¹⁰² In 2019, American F-16s based in South Korea deployed there for a 12-day exercise with Philippine fighter jets.¹⁰³

It remains unclear precisely which additional 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.–Philippine defense ties begun under the Aquino government and continued under President Duterte with some adjustments.

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. 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.”¹⁰⁴ In keeping with Australian sensitivities about permanent American bases on Australian soil, the Marines do not constitute a permanent presence in Australia.¹⁰⁵ 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.¹⁰⁶

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 located 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 recognize 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.¹⁰⁷

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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