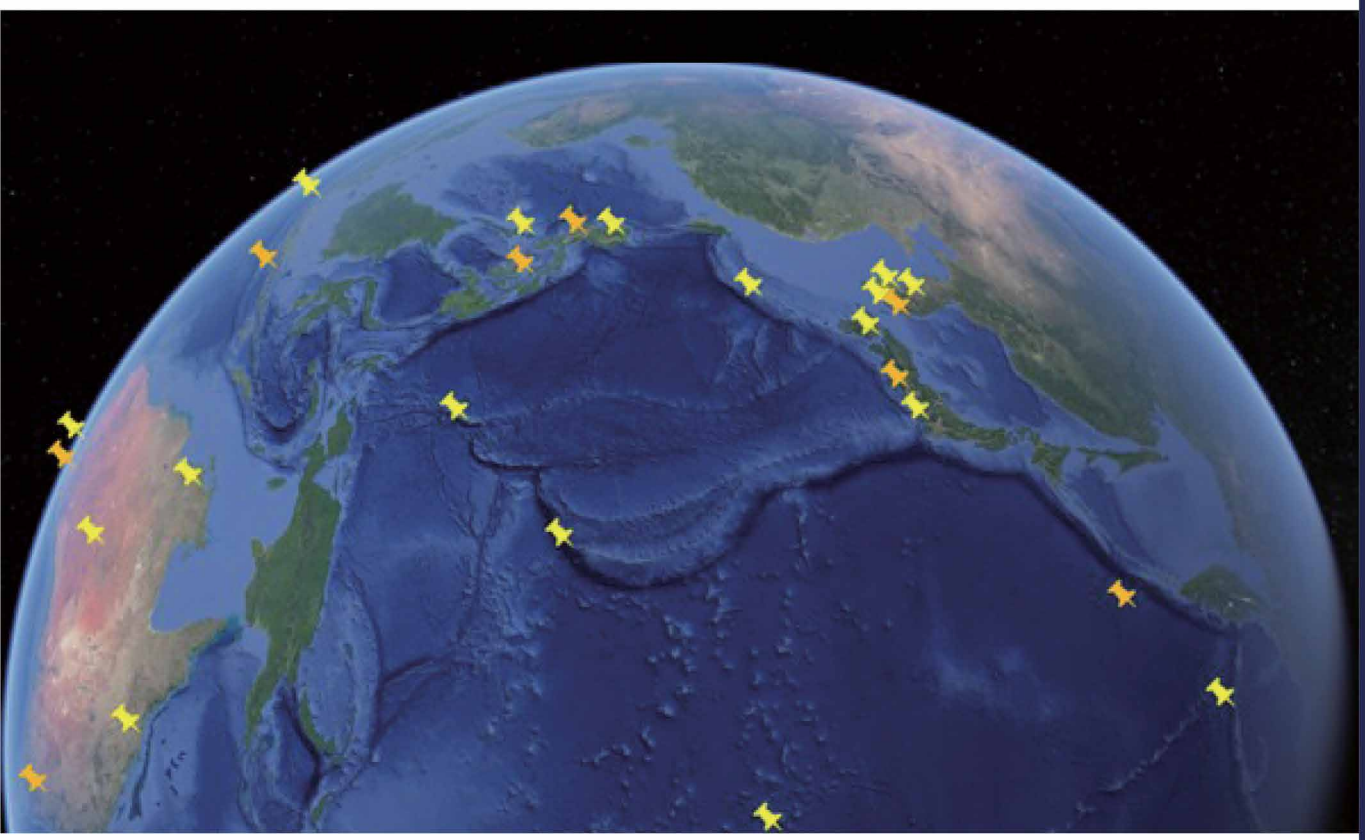
ASAN
REPORT

# A Pointillist Coalition

## Redefining Allied Force Posture in the Indo-Pacific

PETER K. LEE, ESTHER DUNAY

JANUARY 2026



THE ASAN INSTITUTE for POLICY STUDIES

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The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

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# Executive Summary

What is the optimal posture of U.S. and allied military forces throughout the Indo-Pacific to deter Chinese military adventurism and, if necessary, win a regional war? The United States has begun to rethink its military footprint in the region in response to China's increasing strike capabilities. At the same time, U.S. allies whose support is crucial for U.S. force posture—the Republic of Korea, Japan, the Philippines, and Australia—are upgrading security cooperation with each other in ways that have effects similar to force posture initiatives.

This *Asan Report* examines how this evolving patchwork of U.S. and allied force posture initiatives can become more integrated, resilient, and sustainable. The report argues that the debate about allied force posture in the Indo-Pacific should be expanded beyond just deployments of uniformed military forces in each other's territories. Chapter one discusses how the United States is rethinking its military presence in the Indo-Pacific to be more flexible and distributed, yet why it has struggled to make significant changes to its force posture.

Chapter two examines the different responses by allies to possible changes in U.S. force posture. Despite hosting different U.S. forces in terms of size, composition, and permanence, none of them appear willing to see the U.S. military posture radically changed in either their own situation or that of other allies, especially if that means trading places with another ally.

Chapter three shows how allies and partners are pursuing their own, more eclectic, types of force posture arrangements throughout the region with each other, including new security treaties, rotational forward deployments, reciprocal access agreements, cross-national defense industrial facilities, and land leasing arrangements. These are designed to be flexible, rotational, and have a light military footprint on local communities. It finds that the ROK has been notably absent from these quasi-force posture initiatives.

Chapter four presents new force posture models that play to the strengths of allies, with a focus on preserving a social license to operate foreign military and defense industrial access. The first model is what it calls the "coalition lily pad" strategy of using access arrangements to lay the foundations for coalition operations with a light military

footprint. The second model is what it calls the "military-industrial force nexus" of leveraging overseas defense industrial presence as a form of hybrid force posture. Both of these strategies would be more politically feasible to encourage allies, especially the ROK, to expand their military and defense-related footprint in the region.

Chapter five offers policy recommendations to improve U.S. and allied force posture in a coalition framework.

1. U.S. posture decisions with one ally can have significant implications for other allies, so the United States should establish collective forums for consultations to gather allied perspectives.
2. The ROK should initiate reciprocal access agreement negotiations with other U.S. allies to avoid being excluded from the emerging coalition network.
3. The ROK should consider limited regional force deployments focused on capacity-building as part of the growing regional role of the ROK-U.S. alliance.
4. The ROK should explore the posture implications of its defense industrial partnerships and facilities and how they can support coalition deterrence.
5. Allies and partners should coordinate their local community engagement around potential wartime access points by investing in appropriate social license contributions.
6. Other partners—such as those from Europe—should initiate consultations on how their territories in the Indo-Pacific could facilitate coalition lily pads or the military-industrial force nexus.

# 국문 요약본

인도-태평양 지역에서의 미국과 동맹국 최적의 '전력태세(force posture)'는 무엇일까? 중국의 군사적 모험주의를 억제하고, 필요 시 지역전에서 승리하기 위해 동맹 간 전력태세를 어떻게 구성해야 할까? 미국은 중국의 타격 능력 강화에 대응해 역내 군사적 존재(military footprint)를 재검토하기 시작했다. 동시에 한국, 일본, 필리핀, 호주 등 미군의 전력태세에 핵심적인 역할을 하는 동맹국들도 상호 간 군사 협력을 강화하고 있으며, 이는 사실상 연합 전력태세 구상(coalition force posture initiatives)에 준하는 효과를 발생시킨다.

본 아산 보고서는 미국과 동맹국이 추진 중인 다층적 전력태세 구상이 어떻게 보다 통합되고, 회복력 있으며, 지속가능한 방향으로 발전할 수 있는지 분석한다. 본 보고서는 인도-태평양에서 동맹군 전력태세 논의가 단순히 서로의 영토에 병력을 주둔시키는 문제를 넘어서는 방향으로 확장될 필요가 있다고 주장한다. 제1장은 미국이 인도-태평양에서 보다 유연하고 분산된 전력태세를 구축하기 위해 기존의 배치를 재고하고 있으나, 실질적인 변화를 도출하는 데 어려움을 겪는 이유를 설명한다.

제2장은 미군의 전력태세 변화 가능성과 이에 대한 동맹국들의 상이한 반응을 분석한다. 각국이 수용하고 있는 미군의 규모·구성·주둔 방식에는 차이가 있지만, 어느 국가도 자국 또는 다른 동맹국 내에서 미군 태세가 급격히 변화하는 것을 원치 않는 것으로 보인다. 이는 특히 그러한 변화가 미군 주둔의 규모·구성·주둔 방식이 다른 동맹국처럼 바뀐다는 것을 의미한다면 더욱 그렇다.

제3장은 미 동맹국과 파트너국이 서로 간에 더욱 다양한 형태의 병력 태세 협정을 추진하고 있음을 보여준다. 여기에는 새로운 안보 조약, 순환·전진배치, 상호 접근 협정(Reciprocal Access Agreement, RAA), 국가 간 방위산업 시설 공동 구축, 부지 임대 협정 등이 포함된다. 이러한 조치들은 유연성과 순환배치에 초점을 맞추며, 지역사회에 최소한의 군사적 부담만을 주도록 설계됐다. 한국은 이러한 동맹국 간 준(準)전력태세(quasi-force posture) 구상 협력에서 참여가 미흡하다는 점을 지적한다.

제4장은 동맹국의 장점을 극대화하면서도 외국군과 방산체의 접근에 필요한 '사회적 면허(social license)' 확보에 중점을 둔 두 가지의 전력태세 유형을 제시한다. 첫 번째는 접근 협정을 활용하고 소규모 군사 배치를 통해 연합작전의 기반을 마련하는 '유연한 다각적 연합전력 운영(coalition lily pad)'이다. 두 번째는 해외 방산시설을 활용하는 '군산(軍産) 넥서스(military-industrial force nexus) 구축'이다. 두 전략 모두 미 동맹국, 특히 한국이 군사 및 방산 존재감을 확대하는 데 정치적으로 실현 가능성이 높은 방식이 될 수 있다.

제5장은 미국과 동맹국이 연합 차원에서 전력태세를 강화하기 위한 정책을 제언한다.

1. 미국은 특정 동맹국과의 전력태세 조정이 다른 동맹국에게도 중대한 영향을 미칠 수 있다는 점을 고려해, 동맹국들의 의견을 수렴할 수 있는 공동 협의체를 마련해야 한다.
2. 한국은 새롭게 형성되고 있는 협력 네트워크에서 배제되지 않으려면 타 미 동맹국들과 RAA 협상을 개시할 필요가 있다.
3. 한국은 한미동맹의 지역역할 확대 차원에서 역량제고(capacity-building)에 초점을 둔 제한적인 역내 전진배치를 고려해야 한다.
4. 한국은 방산 협력과 해외의 방산 시설들이 전력태세와 연대의 억제력(coalition deterrence)에 미칠 수 있는 영향을 적극 검토해야 한다.
5. 동맹국과 파트너국은 사회적 면허 확보를 위해 기여하고, 지역사회와 잠재적 전시 접근 거점을 둘러싼 지역사회 협력을 조정해야 한다.
6. 유럽 등의 파트너국은 자국의 인도-태평양 내 영토가 '유연한 다각적 연합전력 운영'이나 '군산 넥서스 구축' 전략을 지원하는 데 어떤 역할을 수행할 수 있는지에 대한 협의를 시작해야 한다.

# Introduction

What is the optimal posture of U.S. and allied military forces throughout the Indo-Pacific to deter Chinese military adventurism and, if necessary, win a regional war? To date, most analysis has focused on "right-sizing" the large U.S. military presence stationed outside the continental United States and its overseas territories.[1] In the Indo-Pacific region, which covers most of the area of responsibility of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM), U.S. military force posture focuses on large bases in the Republic of Korea (hereinafter ROK or South Korea) and Japan, as well as smaller rotational deployments to Australia, the Philippines, and smaller states such as Singapore and Pacific Island countries.

At the same time, these same allies are pursuing force posture initiatives of their own with each other. In recent years, an increasing number of Australian military aircraft have been flying surveillance missions out of the Philippines.[2] Singaporean troops regularly visit northern Australia to train on leased military training facilities.[3] Japanese Marines will soon join U.S. Marines in Australia on rotational deployments.[4] Australia has maintained a small but ongoing military presence in the ROK through United Nations Command inspections, investigations, and observer missions, as well

1. U.S. Department of Defense, "Work: DoD Transforms Global Posture for Future Needs" (September 30, 2014), https://www.war.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/603350/work-dod-transforms-global-posture-for-future-needs/.; Pete Hegseth, "Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth Holds a Press Engagement at the NATO Defense Ministerial Meeting in Brussels, Belgium" (June 5, 2025), https://www.war.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript/Article/4208718/secretary-of-defense-pete-hegseth-holds-a-press-engagement-at-the-nato-defense/.
2. Andrew Greene, "Chinese military video appears to show 'dangerous' intercept of Australian aircraft over South China Sea," *ABC News* (September 18, 2024), https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-09-18/video-shows-chinese-military-intercept-of-australian-aircraft/104362682.
3. Natasha Ganesan, "An inside look at a new camp used by Singapore Armed Forces troops training in Australia," *Channel NewsAsia* (November 15, 2024), https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/shoalwater-bay-training-area-saf-new-camp-tilpal-4747106.
4. Andrew Greene, "Japanese forces to join US Marines for military exercises in Australia next year," *ABC News* (November 17, 2024), https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-11-17/japanese-forces-to-join-us-marines-in-australia/104610378.

as participation in the ROK's regular military exercises.[5]

This *Asan Report* examines how U.S. and allied military force posture initiatives in the Indo-Pacific region can become more integrated, resilient, and sustainable. The types of force posture initiatives being pursued by allied countries are quantitatively and qualitatively different from what the United States is doing. They are designed to be flexible, rotational, and have a light military footprint on local communities. As such, the report argues that a different conceptual framework is needed to optimize the two different lines of effort.

This should begin with an assessment of the strategic objectives that allied countries are seeking to achieve through these posture initiatives, which are often not the same as U.S. military objectives focused on U.S.-China war planning. It should also incorporate and leverage the unique strategic assets that these allies possess, such as geographic proximity, industrial linkages, and favorable trust toward each other. These assets can provide a valuable foundation for new models of U.S.-allied combined force posture initiatives. Going beyond conventional top-down thinking can help uphold a favorable balance of power in the Indo-Pacific, and especially the Western Pacific, in the years to come.

This *Asan Report* proceeds as follows. First, it introduces the regional context in which U.S. force posture is changing. Second, it reviews how key U.S. allies are reacting and responding to these U.S. signals as they affect their bilateral alliances and hosting roles. Third, it explains the diverse range of de facto force posture initiatives that allies are pursuing with each other. Fourth, the report proposes that the United States and its allies should consider two hybrid force posture models that resemble "coalition lily pads" or a "military-industrial force nexus" of defense industrial linkages. Fifth, it offers policy recommendations relevant to the United States, the ROK, and other allies to optimize their collective force posture settings to serve their shared objective of deterring conflict and safeguarding prosperity.

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5. "ADF members deploy to Korea as part of Exercise Ulchi Freedom Shield," *Defence Connect* (August 22, 2023), https://www.defenceconnect.com.au/geopolitics-and-policy/12631-adf-members-deploy-to-korea-as-part-of-ex-ulchi-freedom-shield.

# I. U.S. Force Posture in the Indo-Pacific

For most of its history, the United States shunned having a large military footprint in the Indo-Pacific region. Instead, it preferred to pursue what the historian Daniel Immerwahr has described as a "pointillist empire" in which it could protect its interests through control of critical points in the world without the burdens of imperial overstretch and colonial occupation.[6] This was why, for instance, it chose not to acquire all of Micronesia, which had been colonized by Spain, following its victory in the Spanish-American War in 1898, even as it took possession of the Philippines and Guam in Asia. But the Second World War forced the United States to expand its troop presence in the Pacific Theater, encompassing the Pacific Ocean Areas, South West Pacific Area, and Southeast Pacific Area. These areas would eventually form the Pacific Command (PACOM), which oversaw all U.S. force posture deployments under its jurisdiction. In 2018, PACOM was renamed the Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) to reflect the rising importance of the Indian Ocean theater to U.S. strategic interests.[7]

From the Second World War to the end of the Cold War, the United States stationed on average almost 300,000 personnel in the PACOM area of operations. The vast bulk of these U.S. forces were stationed in the ROK and Japan, with the remainder in the Philippines. Other treaty allies such as Australia, Thailand, formerly New Zealand, and the Freely Associated States in the Pacific Islands have only intermittently or rarely hosted large numbers of U.S. forces. The remainder of the U.S. military presence has been on U.S. territories in the region, including the states of Hawaii and Alaska and the overseas territory of Guam.

U.S. military force posture—defined as "the location and primary operational orientation of the nation's military personnel and the military facilities that its troops

6. Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A Short History of the Greater United States* (Random House, 2019).
7. U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, "U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Holds Change of Command Ceremony" (May 30, 2018), https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/1535776/us-indo-pacific-command-holds-change-of-command-ceremony/.

have access to"[8]—has evolved significantly since the end of the Cold War. In a review of the evolution of U.S. global force posture, Stacie Pettyjohn explained that, during this period, the United States adopted "expeditionary defense in depth" by refocusing from the formerly global Soviet threat to regionally specific threats and from forward defense to forward presence. This involved "reducing the U.S. permanent overseas presence but also bolstering it with occasional rotational deployments of U.S. troops abroad to demonstrate U.S. resolve and capability to defend its overseas interests."[9] Today, the United States is rethinking its military presence in the Indo-Pacific to be more flexible and distributed as it seeks to update its Cold War-era force posture for a new era of strategic competition with China.[10]

**Figure 1. U.S. Military Forces in the Pacific: 1947-1989**


*Source: United States General Accounting Office, "Report to Congressional Requesters, Military Presence: U.S. Personnel in the Pacific Theater," GAO/NSIAD-91 (August 1991), https://www.gao.gov/assets/nsiad-91-192.pdf, p. 3.*

8. Stacey L. Pettyjohn, *U.S. Global Defense Posture, 1783–2011* (RAND Corporation, 2012), p. xi.
9. Ibid, p. 84.
10. Andrew Yeo and Isaac Kardon, eds. *Great Power Competition and Overseas Bases: Chinese, Russian, and American Force Posture in the Twenty-first Century* (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2024).

The experience of the 2003 Iraq War—in which the U.S. military faced logistical challenges moving its forward-deployed forces due to host nation opposition in many European countries—reinforced the need to shift to flexible force posture settings. During this period, the George W. Bush administration made significant changes to the U.S. posture in South Korea, Japan, Germany, and other major host nations. Regular, rotational deployments have been articulated within broader posture concepts such as Dynamic Force Employment (DFE) and Agile Combat Employment (ACE), arguing that dispersion and access agreements can mitigate China's anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) risks and reduce peacetime access vulnerability.[11]

**Figure 2. U.S. Force Posture Commitments in the Western Pacific**


*Source: Illustration adapted based on map from the Australian National University, "East Asia to West Pacific," https://hdl.handle.net/1885/733715868.*

11. Michael J. Lostumbo, Michael J. McNerney, Eric Peltz, Derek Eaton, David R. Frelinger, Victoria A. Greenfield, John Halliday, Patrick Mills, Bruce R. Nardulli, Stacie L. Pettyjohn, et al., *Overseas Basing of U.S. Military Forces: An assessment of relative costs and strategic benefits* (RAND Corporation, 2013).

In 2011, the United States under the Barack Obama administration pledged to "Pivot" to the Asia-Pacific from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq to focus on managing the rise of China. The Obama administration took the first steps toward making U.S. force posture more flexible. In 2011, it announced an annual, rotational deployment of U.S. Marines to northern Australia. With the Philippines, it signed the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA)—legally enabling rotational U.S. access rather than new permanent bases—which was expanded from five to nine EDCA sites in 2023.[12] With Singapore, the Obama administration signed an agreement in 2015 to enable periodic U.S. Navy P-8A Poseidon aircraft and Littoral Combat Ship deployments.[13] It also renegotiated and renewed Compacts of Free Association (COFA) with the three Freely Associated States of the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and Palau to ensure access. Finally, with South Korea, the U.S. Army replaced a permanently-stationed heavy brigade with nine-month armored brigade rotations in 2015.[14] Although these measures improved flexibility, they did not fundamentally mitigate China's A2/AD missile threat, as U.S. forces largely remain within range of Chinese missiles and strike systems. Moreover, the posture remained Pacific-centric, limiting integration with the Indian Ocean despite its strategic importance in countering China's increasingly expansive military footprint and capabilities.

## 1. The Trump Administration and Force Posture Burdens

The burdens of U.S. overseas military posture were a key theme of President Donald Trump's 2016 election campaign.[15] For example, in an interview with *The New York*

12. Renato Cruz De Castro, "The Philippines-U.S. Alliance and 21st Century U.S. Grand Strategy in the Indo-Pacific Region: from the Obama Administration to the Biden Administration," *Defence Studies* 22, no.3 (April 29, 2022), pp. 414-432, https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2022.2073224.
13. Ministry of Defence of Singapore, "Singapore, US Step Up Defence Cooperation," Press release (December 8, 2015), https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/MINDEF_20151208001.pdf.
14. Michelle Tan, "2-star outlines new Korea unit rotations," *Army Times* (April 23, 2015), https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2015/04/22/2-star-outlines-new-korea-unit-rotations/.
15. Elise Hu, "Japan And South Korea Rattled By Trump's Talk Of Closing U.S. Bases," *NPR* (November 10, 2016), https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2016/11/10/501531166/japan-and-south-korea-rattled-by-trumps-talk-of-closing-u-s-bases.

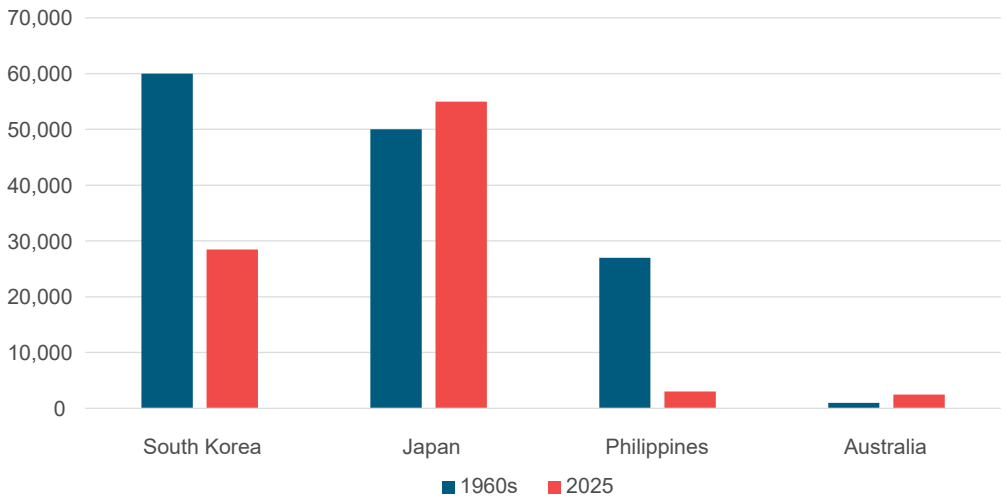
*Times*, he was asked, "Would you be willing to withdraw U.S. forces from places like Japan and South Korea if they don't increase their contribution significantly?" to which he replied: "Yes, I would. I would not do so happily, but I would be willing to do it. Not happily. […] We cannot afford to be losing vast amounts of billions of dollars on all of this. We just can't do it anymore."[16] It was also contemplated during his first term, as many of President Trump's senior officials, such as Jim Mattis, Mark Esper, and John Bolton, wrote in their memoirs.[17] The first Trump administration's 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS) meanwhile explicitly reoriented U.S. defense planning toward great-power competition with China, a shift that has driven an urgent search for new access points to distribute American military presence across the Indo-Pacific. Yet U.S. access, basing, and overflight (ABO) faced continued demand for retrenchment.

As former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs Randall Schriver put it in Senate testimony in 2025, the United States is "a Pacific power" but "mostly resident in the Eastern Pacific," and thus "largely removed from many of the key areas of the Western Pacific that significantly impact America's vital interests."[18] Victor Cha likewise warned that the United States will increasingly operate in "a contested basing environment," where internal resource constraints, A2/AD strategies, and host-nation politics complicate posture.[19] Reflecting these imperatives, the U.S. Congress has also buttressed the political-economic foundations of access, approving $889 million in economic support for Palau under the 20-year renewal of the COFA,

16. "Transcript: Donald Trump Expounds on His Foreign Policy Views," *The New York Times* (March 26, 2016), https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/27/us/politics/donald-trump-transcript.html?_r=0.
17. Upon taking office in 2018, President Trump reportedly ordered plans for troop drawdowns. See: Mark Landler, "Trump Orders Pentagon to Consider Reducing U.S. Forces in South Korea," *The New York Times* (May 3, 2018), https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/03/world/asia/trump-troops-south-korea.html.
18. Randall Schriver, "Testimony to the Committee Hearing: Shared Threats: Indo-Pacific Alliances and Burden Sharing in Today's Geopolitical Environment," U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (March 26, 2025), https://www.foreign.senate.gov/hearings/shared-threats-indo-pacific-alliances-and-burden-sharing-in-todays-geopolitical-environment.
19. Victor Cha, "Testimony to the Committee Hearing: Shared Threats: Indo-Pacific Alliances and Burden Sharing in Today's Geopolitical Environment," Senate Foreign Relations Committee (March 26, 2025), https://www.foreign.senate.gov/hearings/shared-threats-indo-pacific-allian ces-and-burden-sharing-in-todays-geopolitical-environment.

which grants Washington exclusive military operating rights in Palauan territory. The second Trump administration also pledged to spend $2 billion in infrastructure assistance to the FSM to upgrade access.

**Figure 3. U.S. Military Presence by Indo-Pacific Ally: 1960s vs. 2025**[20]




*Source: Data adapted and redesigned from Tim Kane, "Global U.S. Troop Deployment, 1950-2003," The Heritage Foundation (October 27, 2004), https://www.heritage.org/defense/report/global-us-troop-deployment-1950-2003; Defense Manpower Data Center, "DoD Personnel, Workforce Reports & Publications" (2010–2025), https://dwp.dmdc.osd.mil/dwp/app/dod-data-reports/workforce-reports; Office of the Historian, "203. Backchannel Message From the Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (Green) to the Ambassador to the Philippines (Byroade)" (December 31, 1969), https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v20/d203; Jennifer Kavanagh and Dan Caldwell, "Aligning global military posture with U.S. interests," Defense Priorities (July 9, 2025), https://www.defensepriorities.org/explainers/aligning-global-military-posture-with-us-interests/.*

However, the United States struggled to make significant changes to its force posture. The Australian analyst Ashley Townshend has succinctly concluded that, "For more than a decade, the United States has struggled to prioritise the Indo-Pacific, improve its military posture in the region and modernise its network of alliances and

20. U.S. military presence in its overseas territories in the Indo-Pacific is as follows: Hawaii (75,486), Guam (11,070), American Samoa (36), Wake Islands (4). Defense Manpower Data Center, "DoD Personnel, Workforce Reports & Publications" (2025), https://dwp.dmdc.osd.mil/dwp/app/dod-data-reports/workforce-reports.

partnerships to advance a collective approach to regional defence strategy."[21] This has stemmed from a lack of sustained funding for posture initiatives and distraction, and redeploying U.S. forces to other theaters such as the Middle East and Europe. While the People's Liberation Army (PLA) is primarily structured for contingencies in the Indo-Pacific, U.S. forces remain globally dispersed in support of a multi-regional grand strategy. In addition, Washington's preoccupation with conflicts in the Middle East has undermined military readiness, skewed force-structure priorities, and left the joint force ill-prepared for high-intensity competition with a peer adversary. Years of fiscal austerity, unpredictable defense budgets, and the slow arms procurement process have worsened these challenges, while America's extensive global commitments have diverted successive administrations from making the sustained investments necessary to counterbalance China's growing power.

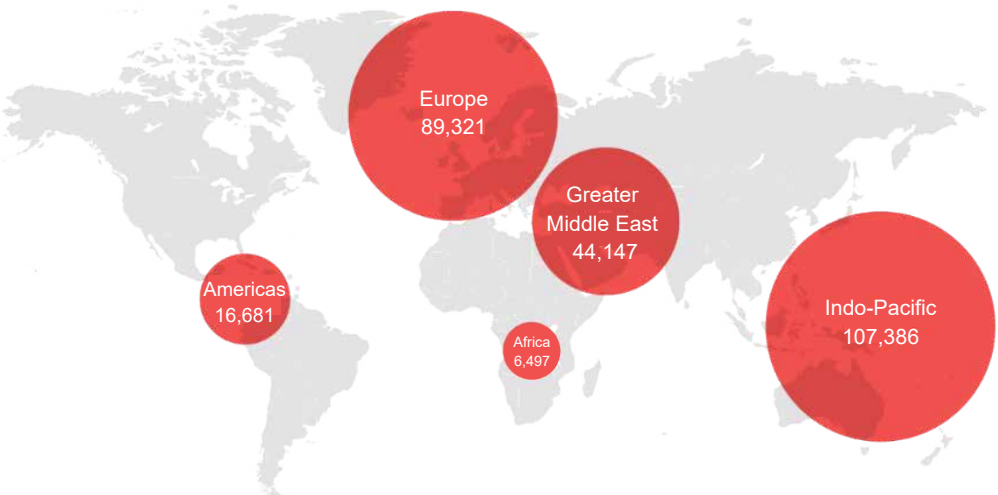
In his study of American grand strategy toward Asia, Michael Green concluded by comparing the future of U.S.-China competition to three-dimensional chess. On the top board, the United States "must seek to reinforce a rules-based regional order underpinned by U.S. leadership and backed by strong alliances, partnerships, trade agreements, and multilateral engagement."[22] On the middle board, the United States "will have to work towards a stable and productive relationship with China." And on the bottom board, the United States "will have to continue ensuring that it has the military capabilities and posture necessary to defeat any attempts to overturn the current regional order through force." Over time, China would improve its position on the three chessboards as its growing national power was converted into more military capabilities—in effect, putting more pieces on the boards—and it leveraged its geostrategic position to put the U.S. military posture at a disadvantage on the bottom board.

The U.S. Global Posture Review (GPR) undertaken by most U.S. administrations seeks to recalibrate the U.S. military's basing with strategic objectives. Republicans under Trump have emphasized industrial rearmament, mobility, and distribution with sharper burden-sharing, while recent Democratic approaches have paired forward presence

21. Ashley Townshend and James Crabtree, "US Indo-Pacific Strategy, Alliances and Security Partnerships," in *Asia-Pacific Regional Security Assessment 2022* (Routledge, 2022), pp. 14-16.
22. Michael Green, *By More Than Providence: Grand Strategy and American Power in the Asia Pacific Since 1783* (Columbia University Press, 2017), p. 543.

with alliance networking and capacity-building. The second Trump administration's 2025 National Security Strategy sets out a fundamental rethinking of the regional priorities and commitments of the United States, shifting its attention to the Western Hemisphere and the Indo-Pacific while downgrading the importance of Europe and the Middle East to U.S. interests. In Asia, it outlined a focus on deterring a Chinese attack against Taiwan by leveraging the geostrategic value of its allies, noting that "We will build a military capable of denying aggression anywhere in the First Island Chain. But the American military cannot, and should not have to, do this alone. […] America's diplomatic efforts should focus on pressing our First Island Chain allies and partners to allow the U.S. military greater access to their ports and other facilities, to spend more on their own defense, and most importantly to invest in capabilities aimed at deterring aggression."[23]

**Figure 4. U.S. Global Force Posture in 2021**




*Source: Gil Barndollar, "Global Posture Review 2021: An Opportunity for Realism and Realignment," Defense Priorities (July 12, 2021), https://www.defensepriorities.org/explainers/global-posture-review-2021-an-opportunity-for-realism-and-realignment/.*

23. The White House, "National Security Strategy of the United States of America" (November 2025), https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf, p. 24.

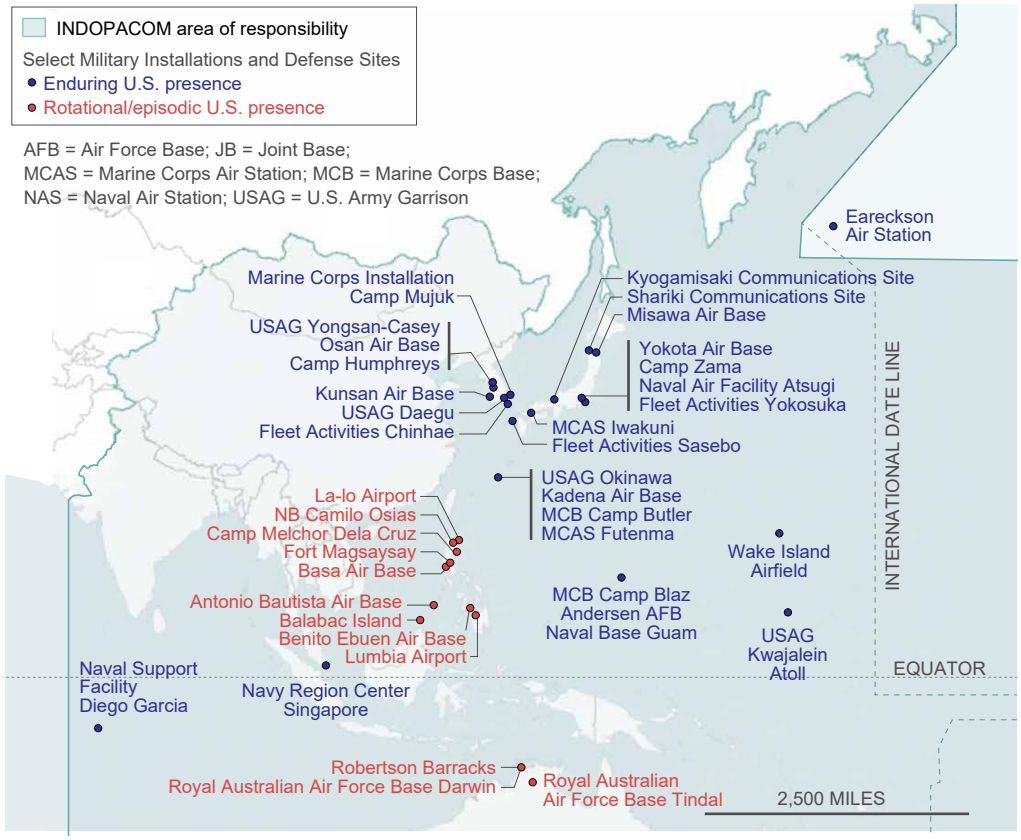
These announcements and their force posture implications had previously been foreshadowed by American experts. For example, Jennifer Kavanagh and Dan Caldwell have proposed "burden shifting" to allies while shrinking the U.S. global footprint. Given the Pentagon's "flat budgets"[24] and limited resources, the United States cannot afford to maintain an expanded force posture worldwide, particularly in regions that pose less immediate threats to its security. The authors therefore argue that the United States should set priorities and realistic goals, and propose measures such as "increasingly [concentrating] its military investments in the region on combat support and enabling capabilities that can operate from standoff distances, leaving partners to put their own forces on the front line in any conflict."[25] These arguments carry significant strategic implications for the Indo-Pacific, the main theater of U.S.-China great power competition, and thus a region carrying high stakes. If implemented, recommendations would see an overall reduction of roughly 77,000 of 200,000 personnel overseas, including 30,000 from Europe, 25,000 from the Middle East, and 22,000 from South Korea.[26] This highlights how, although the Indo-Pacific requires a sustained U.S. military presence, resource constraints make maintaining or increasing U.S. force deployments operationally difficult.

24. Jennifer Kavanagh and Dan Caldwell, "Aligning global military posture with U.S. interests," Defense Priorities (July 9, 2025), https://www.defensepriorities.org/explainers/aligning-global-military-posture-with-us-interests/, p. 4.
25. Ibid., p. 17.
26. Ibid.

# II. Allied Reactions to Changing U.S. Force Posture

The U.S. military currently has 28,500 personnel in South Korea, 55,000 in Japan, around 3,000 on rotational presence in the Philippines, and 2,500 rotational personnel in Australia, with smaller numbers of military personnel on deployments throughout the INDOPACOM's area of operations—including in Singapore, Taiwan, the Pacific Island countries, and elsewhere. It maintains 24 "persistent bases" in the region and access to roughly twenty additional sites. How have U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific reacted to these potential changes in U.S. force posture and the implications for their national security and alliance?

**Figure 5. U.S. Defense Sites in the Western Pacific**




*Source: Luke A. Nicastro, "U.S. Defense Infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific: Background and Issues for Congress," Congressional Research Service (June 6, 2023), https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R47589.*

## 1. South Korea: Fears of "Strategic Flexibility"

South Korea has been the most resistant to any reductions in the U.S. military presence. Fears of abandonment have long overshadowed the U.S. military presence on the Korean Peninsula. Since the end of the Cold War, there have been periodic calls for the United States Forces Korea (USFK) to be reduced or withdrawn.[27] A significant drawdown occurred in the mid-2000s during the U.S.-led War on Terror, in which 3,600 troops of the 2nd Brigade of the 2nd Infantry Division of USFK were sent to Iraq before being transferred back to the continental United States.[28]

In May 2025, as the second Trump administration began reviewing its overseas force posture, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that the United States Department of Defense (DOD) was considering whether to "pull out roughly 4,500 troops" of the 28,500 it has deployed in the Republic of Korea.[29] What the *Journal* article also noted, however, was that rather than the retrenchment of the U.S. troops back to bases in the continental United States, the Pentagon was, in fact, weighing options to "move them to other locations in the Indo-Pacific region." These rumors align with the so-called "restraint" school of thought in U.S. foreign policy debates, as seen in proposals to reduce U.S. troops in South Korea by defense experts close to Secretary Pete Hegseth. For example,

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27. Doug Bandow, "Ending the Anachronistic Korean Commitment," *Parameters* Vol. 33, no. 2 (Summer 2003), https://doi:10.55540/0031-1723.2142. See also: Richard V. Allen, "Seoul's Choice: The U.S. or the North," *The New York Times* (January 16, 2003), p. A31; Donald Lambro, "Shultz Weighs Impact of the Deployment," *Washington Times* (January 16, 2003), p. A17; Murray Hiebert, "Yankee Go Home," *Far Eastern Economic Review* (January 23, 2003), p. 17; Robert Novak, "Perhaps It's Time South Korea Tried Its Wings," *The Washington Post* (January 6, 2003), p. A15; William Safire, "N. Korea: China's Child," *The New York Times* (December 26, 2002); "South Korea's Schroeder," *The Wall Street Journal* (December 20, 2002), p. A14; NR Editors, "Limited Options," *National Review Online* (January 10, 2003); Jack Kelly, "Crisis Management," *Washington Times* (January 12, 2003), p. B1; Victor Davis Hanson, "Korea Is Not Quite Iraq," *National Review Online* (January 10, 2003).
28. Choi Ho-Won, "USFK to Complete Transport to Iraq by Following Week," *The Donga-A Ilbo* (August 4, 2004), https://www.donga.com/en/article/all/20040804/236463/1.
29. Nancy A. Youssef, Alexander Ward, and Timothy W. Martin, "U.S. Considers Withdrawing Thousands of Troops From South Korea," *The Wall Street Journal* (May 23, 2025), https://www.wsj.com/world/asia/u-s-considers-withdrawing-thousands-of-troops-from-south-korea-725a6514.

Dan Caldwell, Secretary Hegseth's former senior advisor, advocated "[reducing] the total U.S. military presence in South Korea by more than 50 percent, leaving about 10,000 personnel along with two fighter squadrons"[30] from the current 28,500.

Partly to pre-empt any such unilateral moves, the U.S. Congress has in recent years tied funding to appropriate consultation before any such move can be made under the *Fiscal Year 2026 National Defense Authorization Act* (NDAA) § 1233, titled "Oversight of United States Military Posture on the Korean Peninsula." This section states that NDAA funds may not—unless certified by the U.S. DOD following consultation across the inter-agency and with key allies—"be obligated or expended to reduce the total number of members of the Armed Forces permanently stationed in or deployed to the Republic of Korea below 28,500."[31]

In contrast to U.S. troop withdrawals or drawdowns from the ROK, there has emerged a parallel debate over how USFK should be postured for threats beyond the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (hereinafter DPRK or North Korea). Over the past decade, fears of a U.S.-China conflict over Taiwan have gradually expanded to include U.S. forces stationed in Japan and the ROK. In the ROK case, this possible shift has fallen under the concept of "strategic flexibility" of USFK.[32] For example, a strong proponent of this argument has been Elbridge Colby, Under Secretary of Defense for Policy at the U.S. DOD, who has advocated "an overhaul to make [the USFK] 'more relevant'" in a potential conflict with China.[33] This concept has drawn attention as the United States narrows down the focus to China, its "sole pacing threat," and the Taiwan contingency,

30. Jennifer Kavanagh and Dan Caldwell, "Aligning global military posture with U.S. interests," Defense Priorities (July 9, 2025), https://www.defensepriorities.org/explainers/aligning-global-military-posture-with-us-interests/.
31. National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2026, S.2296, 119th Congress (2025), https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/2296. pp. 671-677.
32. Jo Bee Yun, "Strategic Flexibility of USFK and the Future of the ROK-US Alliance," *Sejong Policy Brief* 2025-19 (July 22, 2025), https://sejong.org/web/boad/22/egoread.php?bd=24&seq=12333; Song Sang-ho, "U.S. looks to 'calibrate' USFK posture to deter China: senior official," *Yonhap News Agency* (May 29, 2025), https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20250529011051315.
33. Song Sang-ho, "Ex-Pentagon official stresses need for war plan rethink, swift OPCON transfer, USFK overhaul," *Yonhap News Agency* (May 8, 2024), https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20240508000300315.

its "sole pacing scenario."[34] Most recently, Daniel Driscoll, Secretary of the Army, argued that North Korea and China are both "basic threats" that the USFK should address,[35] comments that reinforced public concerns.

**Figure 6. Key U.S. Posture Sites in the ROK**


*Source: Illustration adapted based on map from the Australian National University, "Korean Peninsula base," https://hdl.handle.net/1885/733715544.*

34. Alex Horton and Hannah Natanson, "Secret Pentagon memo on China, homeland has Heritage fingerprints," *The Washington Post* (March 29, 2025), https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2025/03/29/secret-pentagon-memo-hegseth-heritage-foundation-china/.
35. Lee Minji, "U.S. Army secretary calls N. Korea, China both 'basic threats' in region," *Yonhap News Agency* (October 2, 2025), https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20251002004100315.

Senior USFK officials, including current and former commanders, have slowly alluded to the dual or multiple missions that they could be ordered to perform beyond just deterring a conventional DPRK military attack. For example, former USFK Commander General Paul La Camera said, "Given the global role of the U.S. military and, increasingly, the international reach of the South Korean military, opportunities are emerging for alliance cooperation beyond the Korean Peninsula. United States Forces Korea forces are uniquely positioned to provide the Commander of [U.S. INDOPACOM] a range of capabilities that create options for supporting out-of-area contingencies and responses to regional threats."[36] Current USFK Commander General Xavier Brunson has also observed that the Korean Peninsula's strategic value extends beyond concerns just about the DPRK, noting: "What immediately stood out to me as I looked at the map was the position of the Korean Peninsula and the fact that it's on the Asian continent, has a sizable U.S. force posture, is inside the first island chain, and is the closest allied presence to Beijing […] At night, from a satellite image, [South Korea] looks like an island or like a fixed aircraft carrier floating in the water between Japan and mainland China."[37] To illustrate the strategic importance of forces based in South Korea and the necessity of "strategic flexibility" to fully use them as necessary, General Brunson rotated the conventional north-up map to an east-up map. By doing so, he offered a new perspective on the Indo-Pacific and highlighted how operating USFK alongside forces in Japan and the Philippines may enhance operational efficiency. He even went as far as to argue that forces positioned in South Korea may be used against Russia as well. He wrote, "Rather than viewing these deployments as vulnerable forward positions requiring reinforcement, planners might consider them as advantageously positioned assets already inside the defensive perimeter, capable of immediate cost-imposition against multiple adversaries."[38]

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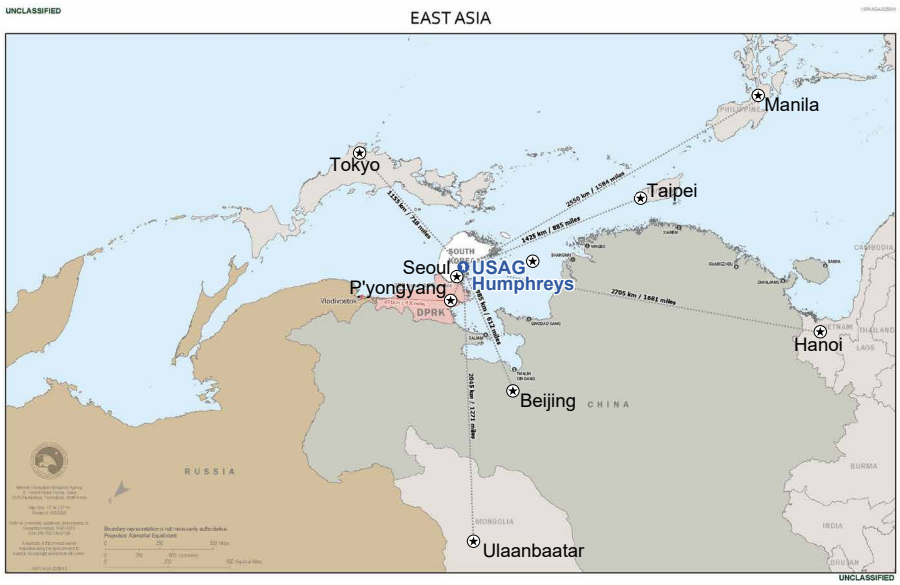
36. Gil Yun-hyung, "USFK commander nominee: S. Korea-US alliance can cooperate beyond Korean Peninsula," *Hankyoreh* (May 20, 2021), https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/996001.html.
37. David Choi, "US Forces Korea leader says his troops deter China, guard 'freedom's front yard'," *Stars and Stripes* (May 16, 2025), https://www.stripes.com/branches/army/2025-05-16/brunson-south-korea-china-lanpac-17807125.html.
38. General Xavier Brunson, "The East-Up Map: Revealing Hidden Strategic Advantages in the Indo-Pacific," Press release (November 16, 2025), https://www.usfk.mil/Media/Press-Products/Press-Releases/Article/4332674/commanders-article-the-east-up-map-revealing-hidden-strategic-advantages-in-the/.

**Figure 7. The East-Up Map: Strategic Importance of USFK Forces**




*Source: General Xavier Brunson, "The East-Up Map: Revealing Hidden Strategic Advantages in the Indo-Pacific" Press release (November 16, 2025), https://www.usfk.mil/Media/Press-Products/Press-Releases/Article/4332674/commanders-article-the-east-up-map-revealing-hidden-strategic-advantages-in-the/.*

Within South Korea, elite and public sentiment has generally favored keeping USFK near current levels for deterrence. For example, the Asan Institute for Policy Studies has conducted annual public opinion surveys to gauge public sentiment, which found that support for the U.S. military presence in 2025 was 80.1 percent and has stayed steady between 72 percent and 82.1 percent since 2014. Moreover, it has found that over 60 percent of the South Korean public agrees that the USFK will be needed even after unification, continuing an incremental rise over the past decade from 36.1 percent in 2014.[39] From a ROK perspective, a USFK commitment to any Taiwan Strait combat operations is no different from a drawdown of USFK. That is, both scenarios produce a security vacuum on the Korean Peninsula, and it is not yet clear whether the ROK can fill it alone.

39. The Asan Institute for Policy Studies, "South Koreans and Their Neighbors 2025," The Asan Institute for Policy Studies (April 28, 2025), https://asaninst.org/data/file/s1_6_1_eng/f15af67c43af11afd7a990dc4f32fd2b_ot3OTnEP_aff1732105bf8cfcdf301afc6625e14a19f463b3.pdf.

To Korean ears, this concept of "strategic flexibility" resonates as a potential signal of U.S. abandonment. "Strategic flexibility" has also heightened South Korean fears of a forced engagement in the Taiwan contingency. South Korea is intrinsically linked to the Taiwan contingency, not because of its commitment to protecting the island, but because of its alliance with the United States. While South Korea is unlikely to commit its ROK forces to Taiwan's defense, it could be entangled in a possible conflict due to the presence of the 28,500 U.S. troops and its strategic location offering "key transit routes for incoming U.S. forces."[40] Explicitly allowing the USFK to prioritize deterrence against China would therefore increase the risk of South Korea being dragged into an unwanted war. In sum, South Korean administrations have resisted any changes to U.S. force posture on the Korean Peninsula, whether in terms of total size or operational focus. This is due to the ongoing North Korean military and nuclear threat, fears of a potential entanglement in any Taiwan Strait conflict, and longstanding fears of alliance abandonment.

## 2. Australia: Consolidating Its Role as a "Pivotal Strategic Node"

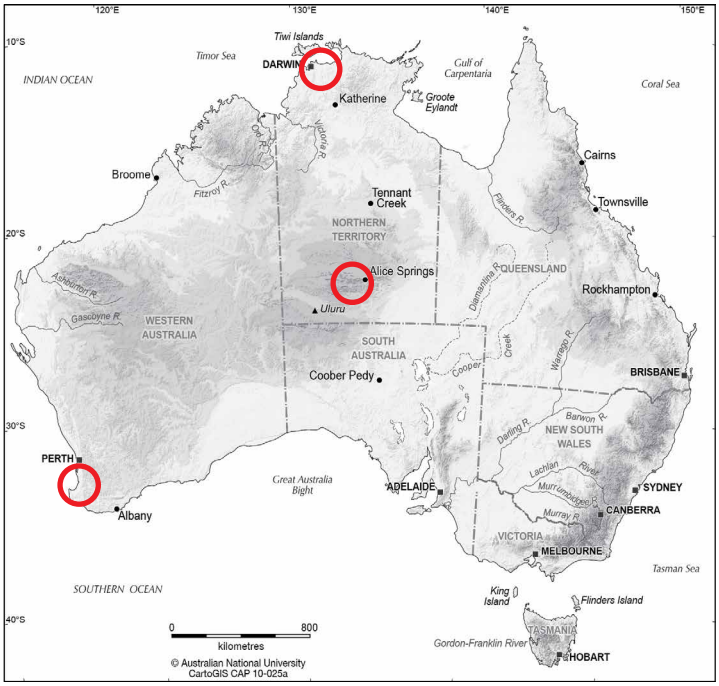
Australia has been actively involved in hosting a new suite of U.S. force posture initiatives, while noting that any sudden reductions in U.S. forces in North Asia could destabilize ROK and Japanese trust in the United States. Since the end of the War on Terror, the U.S.-led occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the campaign to defeat ISIS, Australia has quietly encouraged the United States to see through its "Pivot" to Asia and shift its global force posture to the Indo-Pacific. Yet, Australia itself has been cautious not to be seen as becoming a host to large U.S. military bases on its own soil. Australian governments have maintained a "long-standing policy that there are no foreign military bases on Australian soil," as affirmed by the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties' review of the 2014 Force Posture Agreement that gave legal authority to the U.S. force posture initiatives (USFPI).[41] The core principle for the hosting of foreign

40. Peter K. Lee, "South Korean Entanglement in a Taiwan Contingency," *Asia Policy* Vol. 19, no. 2 (2024).

41. Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, "Report 145: Treaties tabled on 26 August and 2 September 2014" (November, 2014), https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/publications/tabledpapers/35477ab6-1e85-498d-88c2-b76cddc9b8e1/upload_pdf/Ttreaties%20Final%20Report%20-%20145.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf#search=%22publications/tabledpapers/35477ab6-1e85-498d-88c2-b76cddc9b8e1%22.

military personnel—including from the United States—has been the Australian policy of "full knowledge and concurrence."[42] Australia has for decades hosted Australia-U.S. joint intelligence facilities at Pine Gap in the Northern Territory and North West Cape in Western Australia,[43] the Australian Defence Satellite Communications Station in Western Australia, and the Learmonth Solar Observatory.[44]

**Figure 8. Key U.S. Posture Sites in Australia**




*Source: Illustration adapted based on map from the Australian National University, "Australia," https://hdl.handle.net/1885/733715223.*

42. Richard Marles, "Securing Australia's Sovereignty," Speech to the Parliament of Australia (February 29, 2023), https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/statements/2023-02-09/securing-australias-sovereignty.
43. Desmond Ball, *A Suitable Piece of Real Estate: American Installations in Australia* (Hale & Iremonger, 1980).
44. Christopher Pyne, "Australia-United States Joint Facilities," Speech to the Parliament of Australia (February 20, 2019), https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22chamber%2Fhansardr%2Fe0e7b3e2-2c86-47b4-8de2-de9e8f0f224b%2F0026%22;src1=sm1.

Australia has incrementally expanded its capacity to host a larger U.S. military force posture on its territory over the past decade. In November 2011, U.S. President Barack Obama and Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard announced the establishment of a U.S. Marine Rotational Force–Darwin (MRF-D) in Darwin, Australia, as part of a broader U.S. force posture initiative in the Indo-Pacific. As of 2025, the rotations continue on a six-month basis, symbolizing the deepening alliance and the U.S. commitment to a sustained forward presence in the Indo-Pacific. Similarly, the first phase of the AUKUS partnership—known as Submarine Rotational Force-West (SRF-West)—will begin in 2027 and bring up to four U.S. *Virginia*-class nuclear attack submarines to Perth, Western Australia, for extended visits. As the Australian analyst Ashley Townshend has observed, "much more, however, is on the way. With new initiatives quickly progressing between the U.S. Air Force, Marine Corps, Navy, Army, and Space Force and their ADF [Australian Defence Force] counterparts, Australia is transforming into a pivotal strategic node within the United States' regional alliance network."[45]

Even within the same national context, a gap can exist between the general public opinion and the local hosting population, as was the case in Australia.[46] Thus far, force posture initiatives have proceeded at the expected pace and scale, without particular controversy or high-profile incidents. This is largely explained by the remote location of U.S. deployments and the benefits—namely, government infrastructure investment or economic factors such as employment opportunities—that align with the interests of

45. Ashley Townshend, "How to Manage the Risks and Requirements of U.S.-Australia Force Posture Cooperation," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (October 20, 2023), https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2023/10/how-to-manage-the-risks-and-requirements-of-us-australia-force-posture-cooperation?lang=en.
46. Peter K. Lee, "Renewing the social license for US forces in Australia," United States Studies Centre (November 24, 2022), https://www.ussc.edu.au/renewing-the-social-license-for-us-forces-in-australia.; Susan Thomson, "The future of US facilities in northern Australia," *ASPI The Strategist* (July 16, 2025), https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/the-future-of-us-facilities-in-northern-australia/; Peter K. Lee, "Re-negotiating the Australia-US Alliance for sovereign control," *Kwentuhan* (University of Canterbury Institute for Indo-Pacific Affairs) (December 19, 2023), https://www.indopac.nz/post/re-negotiating-the-australia-us-alliance-for-sovereign-control.

the local population.[47] According to a 2022 Lowy Institute poll, 89 percent of Northern Territory respondents were "strongly" or "somewhat in favour" of allowing the United States to base military forces in Australia, up from 76 percent in 2011. Interestingly, local community support was significantly higher than that of Australians overall, as support was only 55 percent in 2011 and 63 percent in 2022; 21 and 36 percentage points lower, respectively.[48]

Differences in perceptions of U.S. military deployment also emerged along political lines, according to a survey conducted in October 2022 by the United States Studies Centre. When asked about the rotation of 2,500 U.S. Marines in Darwin, roughly half of Australian respondents were in favor of maintaining the current troop level. The proportion of Labor voters preferring the status quo (48 percent) was similar to that of Coalition voters (44 percent). Interestingly, a sharp divide appeared regarding a hypothetical increase in troop numbers: while only 18 percent of Labor voters supported an increase, 40 percent of Coalition voters responded that Australia should increase U.S. troops. Conversely, Labor voters were more than twice as likely to favor decreasing or removing the U.S. military presence from Australia, at 21 percent compared to 9 percent of Coalition voters.[49] In general, Australian public opinion strongly supports the United States and partnerships like AUKUS. However, less than a third of the Australian public advocates for the increase of the U.S. military presence in Australia.[50]

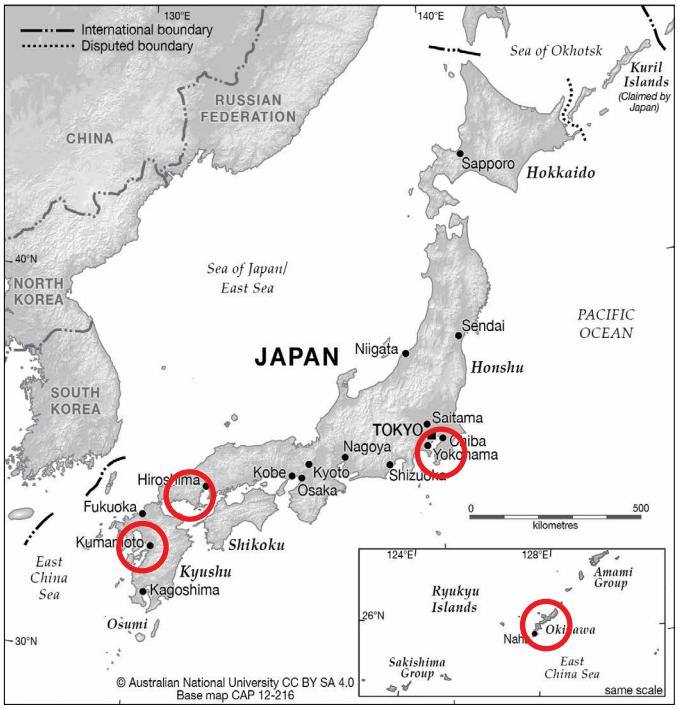
## 3. Japan: Embracing Entanglement

Japan has been ambivalent about any changes to the U.S. military presence of 55,000 military personnel, even as it has supported a refocus of their roles and missions to focus on China. While the general public acknowledges the United States as essential to

47. Peter K. Lee, "Renewing the social license for US forces in Australia," United States Studies Centre (November 24, 2022), https://www.ussc.edu.au/renewing-the-social-license-for-us-forces-in-australia.
48. Lowy Institute, "Foreign military based in Australia," in Lowy Institute Poll 2023, Lowy Institute (2023), https://poll.lowyinstitute.org/charts/foreign-military-based-in-australia/.
49. Jared Mondschein and Victoria Cooper, "US midterms 2022: The stakes for Australia and the alliance," United States Studies Centre (October 26, 2022), https://www.ussc.edu.au/us-midterms-2022-the-stakes-for-australia-and-the-alliance.
50. Ibid.

Japan's national security, the local hosting population has been more resistant. Okinawa, which comprises only 0.6 percent of the Japanese territory, carries a disproportionate burden of hosting over 70 percent of U.S. military facilities, including Kadena Air Base and Marine Corps Air Station Futenma. A survey conducted by Meisei University in Tokyo and the University of the Ryukyus in Okinawa in 2022 found that 70 percent of Okinawans believe "it is unfair that U.S. military bases are concentrated in Okinawa," and 83 percent fear "military bases in Okinawa Prefecture would be targets of an attack in an emergency."[51] In addition, historical accidents and crimes involving U.S. troops led to major protests and local opposition to the American presence.

**Figure 9. Key U.S. Posture Sites in Japan**




*Source: Illustration adapted based on map from the Australian National University, "Japan base," https://hdl.handle.net/1885/733715505.*

51. Hiroshi Higa, "70% of Okinawans say US base concentration 'unfair' as more youths lose hope," *The Mainichi* (June 7, 2023), https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20230606/p2a/00m/0na/019000c.

Motivated primarily by local community concerns rather than operational planning against China, the United States and Japan signed the Roadmap for Realignment Implementation in May 2006, which confirmed the relocation of 8,000 U.S. Marines from Okinawa to Guam by 2014. However, the plan underwent multiple revisions both in terms of timeline and troop numbers. In 2012, the two sides finally agreed to move 9,000 U.S. Marines by 2031.[52] Disagreements between the central Japanese and local Okinawan governments, as well as the significant cost of $8.5 billion burdened governments and slowed down progress. In 2021, only about 30 percent of the project was complete,[53] and the first 100 Marines began relocating only in December 2024.[54] The Okinawa-Guam relocation case illustrates how adjusting U.S. force posture overseas is a complex and protracted process, influenced by political views and costs. It is in this context that the United States is increasingly interested in strengthening its posture in Japan's southwestern islands near Taiwan, as part of its strategy to prepare for a potential conflict with China.[55] In a joint statement released in February 2025, President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Ishiba Shigeru agreed to increase bilateral presence in the southwest islands.[56] Japan has also moved to increase its military presence in its southwestern islands.[57]

## 4. Philippines: Horizontal Escalation

The Philippines has slowly reversed course in its opposition to hosting U.S. military

52. Ashley Townshend and James Crabtree, "US Indo-Pacific Strategy, Alliances and Security Partnerships," in *Asia-Pacific Regional Security Assessment 2022* (Routledge, 2022).
53. Ibid.
54. Nobuhiko Tajima, Mizuki Sato and Kazuyuki Ito, "Marines moving from Okinawa to Guam but at a very slow pace," *The Asahi Shimbun* (December 15, 2024), https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/15551132.
55. Michito Tsuruoka, "Preparing for a Taiwan Contingency: Lessons for Japan from the War in Ukraine," *Asia Policy* Vol. 19, no. 2 (April, 2024), https://doi.org/10.1353/asp.2024.a927083.
56. The White House, "United States-Japan Joint Leaders' Statement" (February 7, 2025), https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2025/02/united-states-japan-joint-leaders-statement/.
57. Mari Yamaguchi, "Japan starts deploying Osprey fleet at a new base with an eye on China," *AP News* (July 9, 2025), https://apnews.com/article/japan-army-defense-osprey-b119139cfc0948b1718ba939aff3992a.

forces since their departure in 1992. Over the past decade, it has opened rotational access to key military installations to support its efforts to push back against Chinese maritime coercion in the West Philippine Sea. These tensions have been building almost immediately after the departure of U.S. forces. In 1992, China enacted the Law of Territorial Waters and Contiguous Land Claims, claiming sovereignty over most of the South China Sea, and in 1995, the PLA Navy (PLAN) and the Philippine Navy clashed over the disputed Mischief Reef before the U.S. Navy intervened.[58] Despite its strong opposition to American occupation, the Philippines relied on the United States for external security, as the capacities of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) were limited to defend the country from external threats.[59]

It was in this context that the Philippines reaccepted an American military presence. In 1999, the two countries signed a Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA), allowing the temporary rotational presence of the U.S. forces, later reinforced by the 2003 Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA). More importantly, the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) granted the United States operational control of five Philippine bases, and set the conditions of its presence, for example, confirming that the bases remain under the sovereignty of the Philippines, that U.S. deployment would not be permanent, and that access would be provided "without rental or similar costs."[60] While the Duterte administration repeatedly threatened to terminate the EDCA, the Marcos administration resumed the negotiations and eventually added four new sites to the original five established under the 2014 accord.[61] Three of the new sites are

58. Shawn D. Harding, "There and Back and There Again: U.S. Military Bases in the Philippines," *Proceedings* 150, no.5 (May 2024), https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2024/may/there-and-back-and-there-again-us-military-bases-philippines.

59. Roland G. Simbulan, "The Historic Senate Vote of 16 September 1991: Looking Back and Looking Forward Twenty-Five Years After," *Philippine Studies: Historical & Ethnographic Viewpoints* Vol. 66, no. 1 (March 2018), pp. 3-18, http://www.jstor.org/stable/45171901.

60. Agreement Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of the Philippines on Enhanced Defense Cooperation, (April 28, 2014), https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/14-625-Philippines-Defense-Cooperation.pdf.

61. Rosalie Arcala-Hall, "Philippine-US Military Relations under Marcos 2.0: Re-coupling and Re-entangling with a Local Twist," *Kwentuhan* (University of Canterbury Institute for Indo-Pacific Affairs) (October 4, 2023), https://www.indopac.nz/post/philippine-us-military-relations-under-marcos-2-0-re-coupling-and-re-entangling-with-a-local-twist.

located in northern Luzon—likely positioned with potential Taiwan contingencies in mind—while the fourth provides access to a key maritime corridor connecting the South China Sea and the Sulu Sea.

**Figure 10. Key U.S. Posture Sites in the Philippines**


*Source: Illustration adapted based on map from the Australian National University, "Philippines base," https://hdl.handle.net/1885/733715680.*

While tensions in the West Philippine Sea were the initial driver of U.S.-Philippines cooperation, the Taiwan issue has become an increasingly important factor. In 2023, the U.S.-Philippines Bilateral Defense Guidelines reaffirmed the Mutual Defense Treaty

and clarified that "an armed attack in the Pacific, including anywhere in the South China Sea, […] would invoke mutual defense commitments."[62] Moreover, President Marcos acknowledged that the Philippines would inevitably be involved in a potential conflict because of its proximity to Taiwan, though he was cautious not to commit explicitly: "When it comes to the military response, well, that will really depend on how it has gotten to that point."[63]

Reflecting such developments, the Philippines has also been strengthening its posture regarding a Taiwan contingency. For example, the Naval Forward Operating Base Mahato was constructed in Batanes, the country's northernmost and closest islands to Taiwan; Tomahawk missiles were deployed in Luzon; and discussions are happening on a possible establishment of a weapons production and storage facility at Subic Bay with the United States.[64] This case shows that as China's assertiveness expands, U.S. cooperation with regional partners and efforts to counterbalance China also intensify, risking further escalation. It also gives an example of how the United States can legally expand its military posture without building permanent bases, though such arrangements can raise questions about sovereignty.

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62. U.S. Department of Defense, "U.S.-Philippines Bilateral Defense Guidelines," Press release, (May 3, 2023), https://www.war.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3383607/fact-sheet-us-philippines-bilateral-defense-guidelines/.
63. "Transcript: Philippine President Marcos speaks with Nikkei Asia," *Nikkei Asia* (February 13, 2023), https://asia.nikkei.com/editor-s-picks/interview/transcript-philippine-president-marcos-speaks-with-nikkei-asia.
64. Karen Lema, David Lague and Lisa Marie David, "A narrow Pacific waterway is at the heart of U.S. plans to choke China's vast navy," *Reuters* (October 31, 2025) https://www.reuters.com/investigations/narrow-pacific-waterway-is-heart-us-plans-choke-chinas-vast-navy-2025-10-31/; Gerry Doyle and Karen Lema, "Exclusive: US deploys Typhon missile launchers to new location in Philippines," *Reuters* (January 23, 2025), https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/us-deploys-typhon-missile-launchers-new-location-philippines-2025-01-23/; Won Sun-woo, "The United States to Build the World's Largest 'Weapons Factory' in the Philippines Right on China's Doorstep," *Chosun Ilbo* (September 9, 2025), ttps://www.chosun.com/international/international_general/2025/09/09/2SCPHAXQ2NAAVK4P63UF3R7ZQY/.

## 5. Conclusion

In summary, U.S. allies who host either a large, permanent military presence—such as South Korea and Japan—or those who host small, rotational but ongoing military deployments—such as Australia and the Philippines—have different perspectives on the changing U.S. regional force posture. It is noteworthy that academic research into how U.S. allies view the U.S. treatment of other allies has found that they are often willing to support alliance abandonment or troop reductions if such actions benefit them.[65] This contrasts with the conventional wisdom that allies would like the United States to honor its treaty commitments and troop deployments to others, and that any abandonment would make them doubt U.S. credibility. While these findings might apply in cross-regional cases of abandonment—such as the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, as well as historical cases such as Taiwan in the 1950s—the growing literature on U.S. preparations to defend Taiwan in the 2020s suggests that there is also a need for further research into how potential U.S. entrapment and entanglement of other allies are viewed. Since the end of the Cold War, these four U.S. allies reached a mutually acceptable posture arrangement with the United States.

**Table 1. Comparison of Allied Views of U.S. Posture**

| | | View of Possible U.S. Force Posture Changes | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | *Oppose* | *Support* |
| **Hosting Arrangement** | *Small* | None | **Philippines, Australia**: Welcome increased presence but only non-permanent |
| | *Large* | **South Korea**: Oppose sudden changes to USFK missions or size | **Japan**: Conditionally support USFJ reductions, but only out of Okinawa |

65. Iain D. Henry, "What Allies Want: Reconsidering Loyalty, Reliability, and Alliance Inter dependence," *International Security* Vol. 44, no. 4 (Spring 2020), https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00375; D.G. Kim, Joshua Byun and Jiyoung Ko, "Remember Kabul? Reputation, strategic contexts, and American credibility after the Afghanistan withdrawal," *Contemporary Security Policy* Vol. 45, no. 2 (September 5, 2025), pp. 265-297, https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2023.2253406.

Today, despite hosting different U.S. forces in terms of size, composition, and permanence, none of them appear willing to see the U.S. military posture radically changed in either their own situation or that of other allies, especially if that means trading places with another ally. Australia and the Philippines do not want to carry the burden of hosting tens of thousands of U.S. military personnel in large military bases. Conversely, neither the ROK nor Japan wants to experience the turmoil of a sudden U.S. military drawdown and become host to a rotational deployment of U.S. forces.

# III. Quasi-Force Posture Initiatives by Allies

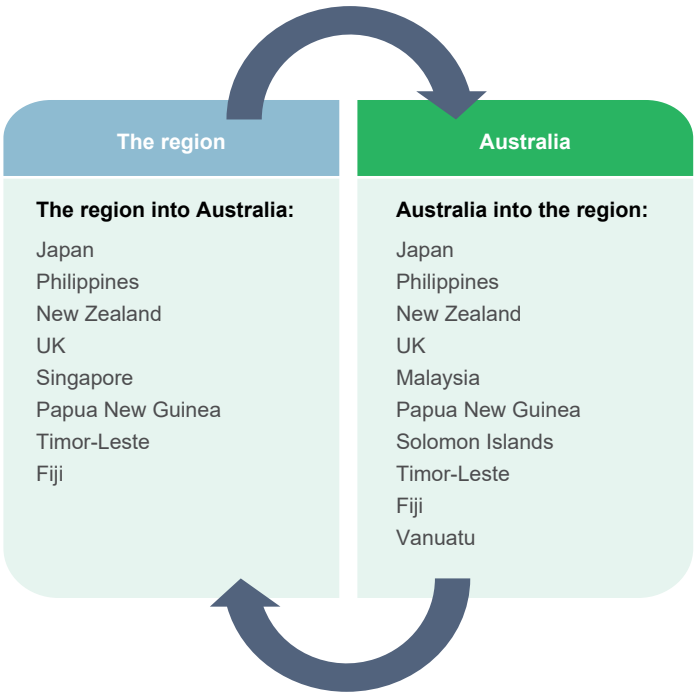
This *Asan Report* has so far discussed the evolving nature of U.S. force posture in the Indo-Pacific and the reactions of key allies—including South Korea, Japan, Australia, and the Philippines. However, U.S. allies and partners are pursuing their own, more eclectic, types of force posture arrangements throughout the region *with each other*, including new security treaties, rotational forward deployments, reciprocal access agreements, cross-national defense industrial facilities, and land leasing arrangements. Many of these activities are producing a patchwork of strategic effects akin to force posture agreements. This chapter first introduces some of the most significant initiatives by U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific and how they might improve escalation dynamics, satisfy U.S. burden-sharing demands, and meet allied security needs. This section therefore takes a bottom-up approach to the important strategic question of whether and how the United States and its key allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific are reorienting their military forces. This chapter finds that the ROK has been notably absent from these quasi-force posture initiatives and is falling behind other U.S. allies when it comes to deepening and expanding force posture initiatives in the Indo-Pacific region. The U.S. model of force posture cooperation is not the only, or even the most applicable, model that the ROK should consider. This chapter introduces a range of possible options and configurations that are relevant to a middle power.

## 1. Australia: Defending Northern Approaches

Australia has been active in using its vast territory as an asset in engaging with other U.S. allies to invite them to train, exercise, and deepen interoperability. Australia is also engaging in a trilateral force posture cooperation with Japan and the United States, with the objective of increasing interoperability. Aside from treaty allies, New Zealand is highly integrated into the ADF. At the command level, New Zealand officers are embedded in Australian headquarters. At the 2024 Australia-New Zealand ministerial meeting, the two countries pledged that at "the heart of this endeavour will be an increasingly integrated 'Anzac' [Australia and New Zealand Army Corps] force. This means we will be more prepared, exercised and ready to combine our military forces in defence of our shared interests, our common values, and our territory." This includes integrating a New Zealand Motorised Infantry Battle Group in an Australian-led Brigade, as well as a New Zealand Special Operations Taskgroup alongside an

Australian Special Operations Taskforce.[66]

**Figure 11. Australian Force Posture Initiatives**




Singapore also maintains a large, regular military presence in Australia. Since the 1990s, Australia has hosted Singaporean troops annually for training and field exercises through a 25-year lease agreement in Queensland. The Australia-Singapore Military Training Initiative (ASMTI) was announced in 2015 and ratified in 2020. It allows the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) to conduct extensive military training on Australian soil, significantly expanding the scope and scale of Singapore's training opportunities while also enhancing the bilateral defense relationship between the two countries. In 2024, there were 6,600 Singaporean troops visiting Australia for 9 weeks of training. Once fully operational, the ASMTI will allow up to 14,000 SAF personnel to conduct

66. Australian Department of Defence, "Australia - New Zealand Joint Statement on Closer Defence Relations" (December 6, 2024), https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/statements/2024-12-06/australia-new-zealand-joint-statement-closer-defence-relations.

unilateral training for up to 18 weeks annually for 25 years.[67]

Australia has been among the most active U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific in expanding its own force posture cooperation efforts with regional partners as well as hosting partner military forces. In addition to the Australia-U.S. alliance, Australia maintains a formal alliance with New Zealand under the Australia, New Zealand and United States (ANZUS) Treaty, and recently signed a new mutual defense treaty with neighboring Papua New Guinea in October 2025. Australia currently has Status of Forces Agreements (SOFA) or SOFA-like arrangements with numerous countries, including five Pacific Island countries: Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Fiji, and Vanuatu. Australia signed Bilateral Security Treaties with Solomon Islands in 2017[68] and Vanuatu in 2022,[69] allowing Australian forces to be deployed to the islands as necessary. In 2022, Australia and Timor-Leste signed a reciprocal Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA).[70] Australia also signed a 2022 SOFA with Fiji,[71] building on the 2019 Fiji-Australia Vuvale Partnership ("vuvale" means family in Fijian) which was a comprehensive security agreement.

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67. Australian Department of Defence, "Australia – Singapore Military Training Initiative" (n.d.), https://www.defence.gov.au/defence-activities/programs-initiatives/australia-singapore-military-training-initiative.
68. Agreement between the Government of Australia and the Government of Solomon Islands Concerning the Basis for Deployment of Police, Armed Forces, and other Personnel to Solomon Islands, (August 14, 2017), https://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdoc/au/other/dfat/treaties/ATS/2018/14.html.
69. Agreement between the Government of Australia and the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu concerning Closer Security Relations, (December 13, 2022), https://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/viewdoc/au/other/dfat/treaties/ATNIF/2023/2.html.
70. Agreement between the Government of Australia and the Government of the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste on Cooperation in the Field of Defence and the Status of Visiting Forces, (2022), https://www.aph.gov.au/-/media/02_Parliamentary_Business/24_Committees/244_Joint_Committees/JSCT/2023/Timor-Leste_SOFA/Treaty_Text_-_Aus-Timor-Les_SOFA.pdf?la=en&hash=62AC452E175EC79AFE9F66F7C258745ED6B3B60D.
71. Australian Department of Defence, "Status of Forces Agreement between Fiji and Australia" (October 20, 2022), https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/statements/2022-10-20/statusforces-agreement-between-fiji-australia.

## 2. Japan: Conditional Reciprocal Access

For most of its post-war history, Japan has been reluctant to expand its regional security footprint. Japan has hosted the United Nations Command-Rear (UNC-Rear), which is a multinational unit posted to Japanese bases, managing the force flow of Sending State forces through Japan in the event of a contingency on the Korean Peninsula.[72] But since the mid-2010s, under the conservative Shinzo Abe administration, Japan has taken modest steps to enable more regular and rotational access to key partner countries. Japan has been expanding its regional footprint via reciprocal access agreements (RAAs) with other U.S. allies. An RAA represents a more ambitious type of security cooperation among non-treaty allies than a visiting forces agreement. Tony McCormack, commander of UNC-Rear during the 2011 Japan triple disaster, explained its purpose as follows: "Australia was the only nation aside from the US that made a direct contribution of military forces, and the RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] integrated seamlessly with its US and Japanese counterparts."[73] In 2014, it began negotiations with Australia. Japan's 2022 National Security Strategy described Australia as Japan's second most important security partner.[74] But the experience also demonstrated the limits of existing legal and border entry/exit measures for military cooperation. As another Australian scholar has explained, "[There was the] Fukushima disaster in Japan where Australian C17 [aircraft] flew in equipment but struggled to get it off boarded because of administrative procedures that had not been agreed upon beforehand."[75] The objective of an RAA was to fix operational obstacles to smoother and more efficient exchanges.

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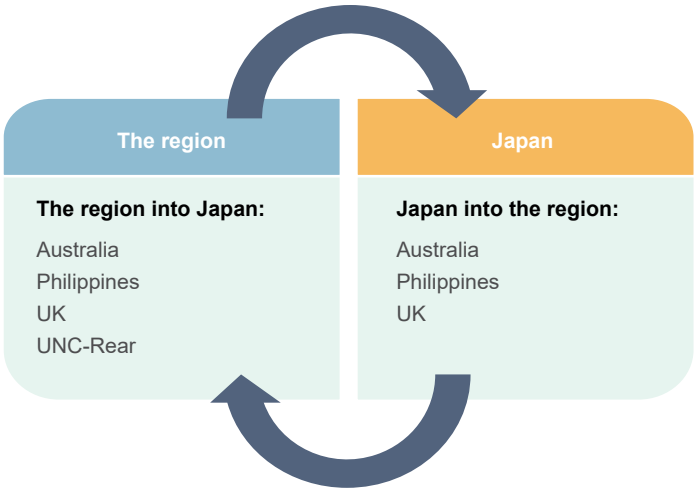
72. United Nations Command, "United Nations Command-Rear Fact Sheet" (September 22, 2020), https://www.yokota.af.mil/Portals/44/09_21_UNCFactSheet_v6.pdf.
73. Tony McCormack, "RAAF response to 2011 earthquake and tsunami led to closer Australia–Japan ties," *ASPI The Strategist* (March 10, 2021), https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/raaf-response-to-2011-earthquake-and-tsunami-led-to-closer-australia-japan-ties/.
74. Ministry of Defense of Japan, "National Defense Strategy" (December 16, 2022), https://www.mod.go.jp/j/policy/agenda/guideline/strategy/pdf/strategy_en.pdf.
75. Jake Sturmer, "Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison heads to Japan as a rising China squeezes the two middle powers together," *ABC News* (November 17, 2020), https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-11-17/scott-morrison-in-japan-for-first-trip-since-pandemic-began/12877938.

**Figure 12. Japanese Force Posture Initiatives**




According to Don Rothwell, a leading legal expert on RAAs, a central feature of these agreements concerns the legal frameworks governing how the sending state's laws apply to its deployed personnel abroad, and how those laws interact with the domestic legal system of the host country.[76] The default principle is that visiting forces are primarily subject to the jurisdiction of their own state while operating in the host country.[77] The major sticking point between Japan and Australia was the death penalty, which Australia outlawed in 1985. In negotiating the RAA, the two sides included a Record of Discussion relating to Article XXI, which stated that Australia may withhold cooperation with Japanese authorities if there is a "sufficient likelihood" that the individual could be exposed to the death penalty.[78]

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76. Don Rothwell, "Legal Hurdles Remain in the Australia–Japan Reciprocal Access Agreement," *East Asia Forum* (November 30, 2020), https://eastasiaforum.org/2020/12/01/legal-hurdles-remain-in-the-australia-japan-reciprocal-access-agreement/.
77. International Policy Division, Department of Defence, "National Interest Analysis [2022] ATNIA 2" (January 2022), https://www.aph.gov.au/-/media/02_Parliamentary_Business/24_Committees/244_Joint_Committees/JSCT/2024/OCCAR/NIA_OCCAR.pdf
78. Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "Australia-Japan Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation" (October 22, 2022), https://www.dfat.gov.au/countries/japan/australia-japan-joint-declaration-security-cooperation.

Following the successful agreement with Australia, Japan quickly moved to sign RAAs with the United Kingdom (UK) and the Philippines. In January 2023, Japanese Prime Minister Kishida and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak of the United Kingdom signed the Japan-UK RAA. The agreement has been supported by the two governments despite leadership changes. The RAA was reinforced through the Hiroshima Accord of May 2023, then first applied for a bilateral field training exercise in Japan in October 2023,[79] and once again endorsed in August 2025.[80] This RAA allows a European power to access facilities in the region and contribute to deterrence against China alongside other U.S. allies. This expands the scope of security cooperation in the region, signaling the internationalization of deterrence against China and Japan's leading role in diversifying partnerships. Japan also continued to broaden cooperation in the region by signing an RAA with the Philippines in July 2024. The agreement was first applied during a bilateral exercise between the Japan Air Self-Defense Force and the Philippines Air Force in the Philippines in October 2025.[81] This case again shows Japan's continued commitment to leading cooperation among U.S. allies and deterrence against China.

## 3. Philippines: Welcoming Capacity Builders

The Philippines has welcomed all allies of the United States to support its ability to resist Chinese coercion. Australia has been the most active U.S. ally present in the Philippines. Australia built a robust defense relationship with the Philippines during the Cold War. For example, RAAF aircraft regularly participated in U.S.-Philippines Air Force exercise Cope Thunder in the late 1980s and early 1990s, operating out of Clark Air Base in the Philippines. More recent Australian defense cooperation with the Philippines has focused on two areas.[82]

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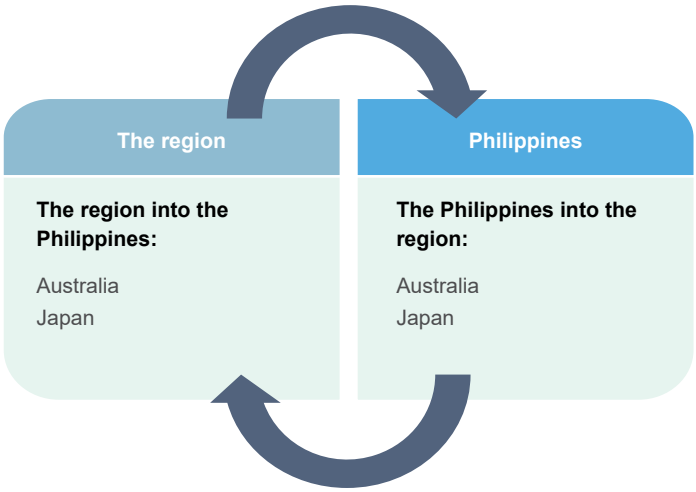
79. Embassy of Japan in the UK, "First application of Japan-UK Reciprocal Access Agreement," Press release (October 24, 2023), https://www.uk.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/231025.html.
80. United Kingdom Ministry of Defence, "UK-Japan Defence Ministerial Meeting 2025: Joint Statement" (August 28, 2025), https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-japan-defence-ministerial-meeting-2025-joint-statement/uk-japan-defence-ministerial-meeting-2025-joint-statement.
81. Embassy of Japan in the Philippines, "Japan and the Philippines Strengthen Cooperation through DOSHIN BAYANIHAN Bilateral Training following RAA Implementation" (October 10, 2025), https://www.ph.emb-japan.go.jp/itpr_en/11_000001_020481.html.

**Figure 13. Philippine Force Posture Initiatives**




The first area is Australia's participation in activities that support Philippine maritime sovereignty. Most notably, Australia has conducted maritime surveillance patrols in the South China Sea. In recent years, Australian P-8 maritime surveillance aircraft have operated over the South China Sea from Clark Air Base in response to a rise in maritime incidents between the Philippines and China in the disputed area.[83] In 2023, Australia and the Philippines conducted joint patrols in the South China Sea, with Australia deploying its Toowoomba frigate and P-8A maritime surveillance aircraft.[84] Australia has also contributed to capacity building of the Philippines through initiatives such as Exercise Alon 25, during which Australia's Joint Task Force 661 was deployed

82. Euan Graham, "Allies entwined: Australia's strategic convergence with the Philippines," Report, Australian Strategic Policy Institute (November 3, 2025), https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australias-strategic-convergence-with-the-philippines/.
83. Peter K. Lee, Ristian Atriandi Supriyanto, Renato Cruz De Castro, and Collin Koh, "Many hands: Australia-US contributions to Southeast Asian maritime security resilience," United States Studies Centre (November 28, 2022), https://www.ussc.edu.au/australia-us-contributions-to-southeast-asian-maritime-security-resilience.
84. "Philippines, Australia start sea, air patrols in South China Sea," *Reuters* (November 25, 2023), https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-australia-start-sea-air-patrols-south-china-sea-2023-11-25/.

to Antonio Bautista Air Base in Palawan for integration and training activities.[85]

The second area is defense infrastructure development. At the second Philippines-Australia Defense Ministers' Meeting in August 2025, the two sides agreed to "progress arrangements for Australia's construction, use, upgrade and maintenance of defense infrastructure in the Philippines." It also clarified that while Australia leads infrastructure projects, the Philippines would maintain sovereignty over its bases.[86] According to Australian Minister for Defence Richard Marles, Australia will undertake "eight different infrastructure projects across five different locations" in the Philippines,[87] and enhance Australia's access to bases there.

## 4. European Partners: Territories and Forward Presence

Although often overlooked, another set of U.S. allies in the region, the European powers, is seeking to strengthen its force posture and expand cooperation and reciprocal access with others.[88] In recent years, five European countries have announced Indo-Pacific strategies, including France, the Netherlands, Germany, the Czech Republic, and Lithuania. In addition, several countries conduct annual or biennial "Indo-Pacific Deployments" bringing their naval and air assets to the region to conduct combined training exercises with like-minded partners.[89] In principle, cooperation with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) could be a means of integrating European

85. Australian Department of Defence, "Alon" (n.d.), https://www.defence.gov.au/defence-activities/exercises/alon.
86. Australian Department of Defence, "Joint Statement for the 2nd Philippines-Australia Defense Ministers' Meeting" (August 22, 2025), https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/statements/2025-08-22/joint-statement-2nd-philippines-australia-defense-ministers-meeting.
87. John Eric Mendoza, "PH, Australia inch closer to defense agreement, military infra projects," *Inquirer* (August 22, 2025), https://globalnation.inquirer.net/288933/ph-australia-inch-closer-to-defense-agreement-military-infra-projects.
88. See, for example, Kim Saeme, "Europe as a Strategic Partner: The Case for a Sharper South Korea–Europe Policy," *Asan Issue Brief* 2025-08 (September 22, 2025), https://asaninst.org/bbs/board.php?bo_table=s1_1_eng&wr_id=257.
89. Francesca Frassineti, "From Like-Minded to Like-Acting: The EU-ROK Strategic Partnership in Times of Crisis," *The Asan Forum* (July 9, 2024), https://theasanforum.org/from-like-minded-to-like-acting-the-eu-rok-strategic-partnership-in-times-of-crisis/.

partners into regional force posture initiatives. However, institutional and political constraints limit the feasibility of a NATO forward presence in the Indo-Pacific. NATO has shown interest in establishing a permanent liaison office in Tokyo, but faced opposition from French President Emmanuel Macron, who feared escalation, and the idea was not strongly supported by the Biden administration either.[90] This case shows that European engagement in the Indo-Pacific is more realistic at the national level than through NATO.

The United Kingdom and France have been particularly active in integrating force posture initiatives with U.S. Indo-Pacific allies. The UK maintains three sites in Brunei, a U.S.-UK joint base in Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, and a naval logistical base in Singapore. In 2021, the UK released its *Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, dedicating a whole section on "the Indo-Pacific tilt."[91] It emphasized the region's economic and strategic importance and called for a more integrated presence by strengthening multilateral cooperation and reinforcing its military bases in the region. It then put this commitment into action by signing an RAA with Japan in January 2023. Nonetheless, as the United Kingdom updated its *Integrated Review* a couple of months later,[92] it referred instead to its 'Atlantic-Pacific' partnerships, particularly AUKUS, and accorded less importance to the region compared to the Euro-Atlantic and the war in Ukraine. The UK's posture reflects relationships that have been shaped by ongoing colonial legacies—with regional states such as Singapore, Brunei, Australia, and New Zealand—rather than a need to defend territory and population. This is particularly pronounced now that it has ceded sovereignty of Chagos, which was one of its two remaining dependencies in the Indo-Pacific.

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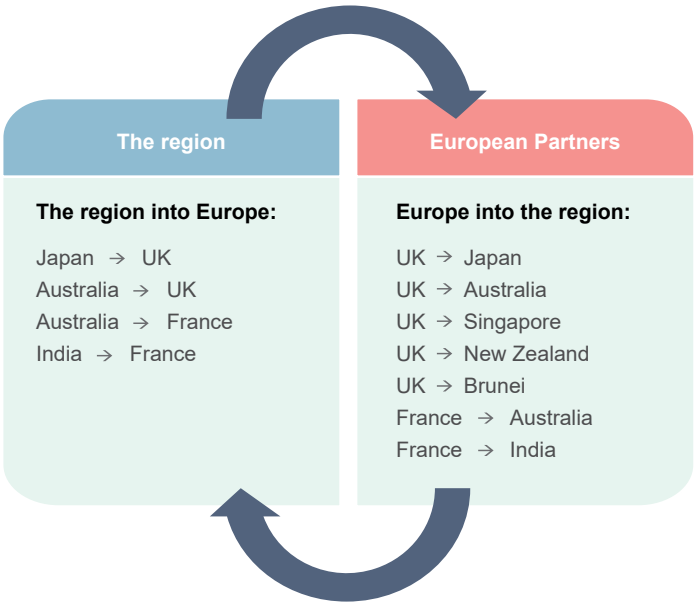
90. Jack Detsch and Robble Gramer, "NATO Wants to Plant Its Flag in Asia," *Foreign Policy* (July 9, 2024), https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/07/09/nato-asia-tokyo-office-indo-pacific-china/.
91. United Kingdom Cabinet Office, "Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy" (March 16, 2021), https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-britain-in-a-competitive-age-the-integrated-review-of-security-defence-development-and-foreign-policy.
92. United Kingdom Cabinet Office, "Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a more contested and volatile world" (March 13, 2023), https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-review-refresh-2023-responding-to-a-more-contested-and-volatile-world.

**Figure 14. European Force Posture Initiatives**




France, as the only "European and Indo-Pacific nation,"[93] leverages its territories in the Indo-Pacific and reinforces its military presence through bases in New Caledonia, French Polynesia, and Réunion. France has taken a more ambitious approach than most European countries. It has published four Indo-Pacific Strategies, the most recent in 2025, which recognizes China's military, diplomatic, and economic assertiveness. The strategy advances France's non-aligned approach in defending its national and shared interests in the region by building on its permanent military posture and reinforcing partnerships. France has established multiple logistical and access agreements with key partners. In 2018, France and India signed the Reciprocal Logistics Support Agreement, granting mutual access to ports and military bases, including in overseas territories.[94]

93. French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, "France's Indo-Pacific Strategy" (July 15, 2025), https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/france_s_indo-pacific_strategy_2025_cle04bb17.pdf.
94. Embassy of France in India, "Political relations and strategic partnership" (December 20, 2024), https://in.ambafrance.org/Relations-politiques-et-partenariat-strategique; Stephanie Pezard, "Expanding Army Cooperation Between the United States and France in the Indo-Pacific," RAND Corporation (January 25, 2023), https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RRA1600/RRA1633-1/RAND_RRA1633-1.pdf.

France has had meaningful agreements and discussions with Australia as well. The two concluded a Mutual Logistics Support Agreement (MLSA) in 2018, enabling mutual "base operations support (and minor works incident thereto), storage services, [and] temporary use of facilities,"[95] and set a roadmap to deepen cooperation in 2023, in which they sought to reinforce "reciprocal access to military facilities leveraging existing legal frameworks, [enhance] French access to Australian defence facilities, [and enhance] Australian access to French defence facilities in the Pacific and Indian Oceans."[96] Furthermore, France sought to diversify partnerships and access to bases through ongoing talks with the Philippines on a Status of Visiting Forces Agreement (SVFA)[97] and through discussions with Japan on a possible RAA.[98] Moreover, France has allocated €13 billion to improve the capabilities of its forces in overseas territories, including improving infrastructure and deploying additional assets to these bases.[99] These efforts can enable French and British forces, two powerful U.S. allies, to contribute to regional deterrence and enhance flexibility for Asian allies in countering China.

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95. Agreement between the Government of Australia and the Government of the French Republic Regarding the Provision of Mutual Logistics Support Between the Australian Defence Force and the French Armed Froces, (2018), https://www.aph.gov.au/-/media/02_Parliamentary_Business/24_Committees/244_Joint_Committees/JSCT/2018/Defence_Support_-_France/Treaty_text_-_Australia_France_MLSA.pdf.
96. Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, "Australia-France Roadmap – A New Agenda for Bilateral Cooperation" (December 4, 2023), https://www.dfat.gov.au/countries/france/australia-france-roadmap-new-agenda-bilateral-cooperation.
97. Embassy of France in the Philippines and in Micronesia, "Visit of the Commander of the French Armed Forces in French Polynesia (18-19 septembre 2025)," Press release (September 26, 2025), https://ph.ambafrance.org/Visit-of-the-Commander-of-the-French-Armed-Forces-in-French-Polynesia-18-19.
98. Gabriel Dominguez, "France-Japan military pact expected by year-end, envoy to Tokyo says," *The Japan Times* (September 18, 2024), https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2024/09/18/japan/politics/france-ambassador-japan-interview/.
99. French Ministry of the Armed Forces, "Presentation Booklet for the 2024–2030 Military Programming Law" (April 6, 2023), http://www.defense.gouv.fr/sites/default/files/cde_1/Livret%20de%20pr%C3%A9sentation%20de%20la%20Loi%20de%20programmation%20militaire%202024-2030%20%286%20avril%202023%29.pdf, p. 7.

In the Pacific and Indian Oceans, France's relatively significant naval posture largely reflects its sovereign and maritime territories in these areas. Whether France would actually allow allied forces to use its bases still remains uncertain, given its emphasis on pursuing a "third way"[100] and framing its role as a "balancing power."[101] It is equally uncertain whether the U.S. would support the French and British initiatives to engage with its Indo-Pacific allies.[102] In his speech at the 2025 Munich Security Conference, U.S. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth noted that the priorities of the United States are defending the homeland and deterring Communist China, and argued that meanwhile, European allies should assume greater responsibility for security in Europe. He said, "As the United States prioritizes its attention to these threats, European allies must lead from the front. Together, we can establish a division of labor that maximizes our comparative advantages in Europe and Pacific respectively,"[103] implying that European countries should stay in their region. Yet, as China presents a threat to European interests,[104] both France and the UK have incentives to engage, even if not directly, for instance by offering to be rear bases in

100. Emmanuel Macron, "Keynote Address at the 22nd Asia Security Summit (The Shangri-La Dialogue)" (May 30, 2025), https://www.iiss.org/globalassets/media-library---content--migration/files/shangri-la-dialogue/2025/transcripts-final/keynote/n/keynote-address_president-macron_as-delivered.pdf, p. 5.

101. The General Secretariat for Defence and National Security of France, "National strategic review 2022," https://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/files/files/rns-uk-20221202.pdf.

102. Demetri Sevastopulo and Lucy Fisher, "US wants UK military to focus more on Europe and away from Asia," *Financial Times* (May 8, 2025), https://www.ft.com/content/21dffaa9-e73b-44f0-be3b-acb6d0d35ced.

103. Pete Hegseth, "Opening Remarks," Speech to the Ukraine Defense Contact Group (February 12, 2025), https://www.war.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/4064113/opening-remarks-by-secretary-of-defense-pete-hegseth-at-ukraine-defense-contact/.

104. French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, "France's Indo-Pacific Strategy" (July 15, 2025), https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/france_s_indo-pacific_strategy_2025_cle04bb17.pdf, p.17; United Kingdom Cabinet Office, "Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy" (March 16, 2021), https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-britain-in-a-competitive-age-the-integrated-review-of-security-defence-development-and-foreign-policy; United Kingdom Cabinet Office, "Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a more contested and volatile world" (March 13, 2023), https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/integrated-review-refresh-2023-responding-to-a-more-contested-and-volatile-world, p. 7.

case of a war in East Asia.[105] The U.S. also has incentives to accept the Indo-Pacific shift of European force postures, as this would alleviate the burden it carries in the region. It is nonetheless necessary to acknowledge some potential constraints.[106] Some raise concerns that European states have limited resources and that increased military engagement in the Indo-Pacific will make no difference to the regional balance of power. However, French and British efforts are not irrelevant, particularly regarding reciprocal access to bases with other U.S. allies and like-minded partners in the region.

## 5. South Korea: In Search of a Rationale?

South Korea has been notably absent from these quasi-force posture initiatives. The main exception aside from the USFK has been the presence of small numbers of foreign military personnel under the auspices of the United Nations Command (UNC). For instance, a small team of three military personnel—each from Australia, the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Denmark—conducts six-month deployments to the ROK as part of Operation Linesmen, which patrols within the Demilitarized Zone to uphold the inter-Korean Armistice Agreement.[107] There are also substantial constraints on the overseas deployment of ROK military personnel abroad due to the clear and present dangers posed by the North Korean military threat, domestic political and diplomatic sensitivities about potentially antagonizing China, lingering historical tensions with Japan that preclude any possibility of visiting forces arrangements, budgetary constraints for large overseas deployments, and an ongoing manpower crisis in the ROK Armed Forces. With the exceptional cases of military operations in support of the United States, in conflicts such as the Vietnam War and the occupations of Iraq

105. Jérémy Bachelier and Céline Pajon, "France in the Indo-Pacific: The Need for a Pragmatic Strategic Posture," Institut français des relations internationales (October 10, 2023), https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/migrated_files/documents/atoms/files/ifri_bachelier-pajon_france_in_the_indo-pacific_oct2023.pdf, p. 77.

106. Sebastian Biba and Rebecca Strating, "Symbolism or substance? Europe's naval engagement in the Indo-Pacific," *Contemporary Security Policy* 46, no.4, https://doi.org/10.1080/13523260.2025.2518950, p. 21.

107. Australian Department of Defence, "Operation Linesmen" (n.d.), https://www.defence.gov.au/defence-activities/operations/indo-pacific-operations/linesmen; Australian Department of Defence, "Keeping the peace during Op Linesmen," Press release (October 24, 2025), https://www.defence.gov.au/news-events/news/2025-10-24/keeping-peace-during-op-linesmen.

and Afghanistan, the ROK has avoided any substantive force posture deployments aside from United Nations-authorized peacekeeping and monitoring missions.

But this is not the full picture. While South Korea has not been forward deployed in the Indo-Pacific, there are nonetheless precedents that suggest South Korea could also adopt a more active military posture. The most notable case is the rotational deployment of ROK Special Forces as part of the Akh Unit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE). First begun in 2011, the elite soldiers were dispatched as part of a comprehensive security package that the ROK signed with the UAE under the nuclear energy construction partnership in 2009. By the end of 2022, a total of 2,399 troops from the ROK Special Forces have been deployed to train Emirati troops, conduct combined exercises with foreign military forces, and protect critical infrastructure.[108]

**Figure 15. Cheonghae Unit Operating Abroad in Waters Near the Somali Coast**

*Source: Yonhap News Agency.*

108. Republic of Korea Ministry of National Defense, "2022 Defense White Paper" (2023), https://www.mnd.go.kr/user/mndEN/upload/pblictn/PBLICTNEBOOK_202307280406019810.pdf, pp. 309-318.

A second example is the long-term rotational deployment of ROK Naval units as part of the anti-piracy mission, the Cheonghae Unit, to the Gulf of Aden near Somalia since 2009. As Korea's first naval deployment task force, the Unit's mission is to secure maritime routes and protect both Korean and foreign citizens in the region as necessary. As of December 2022, 12,218 soldiers have participated in the deployment.[109] These two cases suggest that, under the right conditions, South Korea could also become involved in regular, rotational military deployments on the territories of like-minded partners in the Indo-Pacific.

## 6. Conclusion

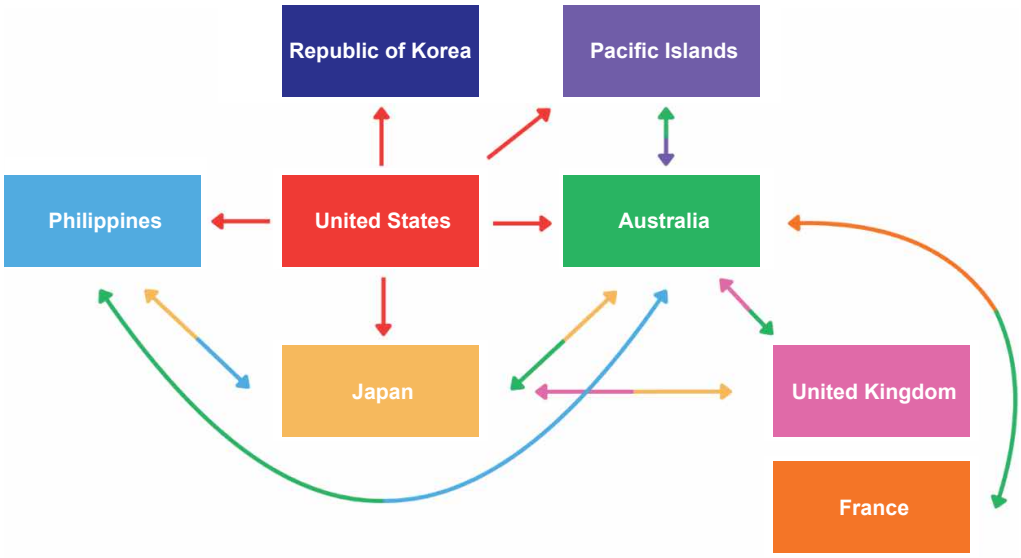
Rather than being the product of a grand strategy coordinated between the United States and its allies, the current patchwork of unilateral, bilateral, and minilateral force posture initiatives has only partially emerged in response to current or emerging military deterrence needs. Many of the linkages among allies are the products of historical peculiarities, bilateral diplomatic incrementalism, as well as economic and commercial incentives. While not involving large military bases like those operated by the United States, these de facto force posture initiatives—such as RAAs, joint defense industrial manufacturing facilities, and long-term rotational training and exercise deployments—are producing a more dynamic strategic landscape.

109. Ibid.

# IV. New Models of Allied Force Posture

The preceding chapters have discussed how U.S. force posture is being revamped in the Indo-Pacific, how U.S. allies have responded to these proposed changes, and quasi-force posture initiatives by allies themselves. Expanding and integrating U.S. and allied force posture initiatives must begin with a clear-eyed understanding of how to preserve and maintain public support. This chapter begins with a brief discussion of how to maintain the social license to operate in the host communities that would be asked to host the next generation of force posture initiatives. This chapter then lays out two force posture models that play to the strengths of U.S. allies, with a focus on preserving a social license to operate foreign military and defense industrial access. The first model is what it calls the "coalition lily pad" strategy of using access arrangements to lay the foundations for coalition operations with a light military footprint. The second model is what it calls the "military-industrial force nexus" of leveraging overseas defense industrial presence as a form of hybrid force posture. Both of these strategies would be more politically feasible to encourage U.S. allies, especially the ROK, to expand their military and defense-related footprint in the region.

**Figure 16. Schematic of Force Posture Initiatives Between Allies in the Indo-Pacific**




*Source: Esther Dunay.*

## 1. Social License for Force Posture

U.S. President Abraham Lincoln once proclaimed, "Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it, nothing can succeed." The move away from permanent military garrisons also occurred due to the growing importance of domestic politics in host nations since the end of the Cold War and the democratic transitions that took place in many U.S. allies.[110] Anti-base civil society movements have grown in prominence since the 1990s, putting political pressure on host nations in conjunction with changing security conditions and elite threat perceptions.[111] Today, any U.S. military presence can trigger opposition from local communities and civil society groups, especially when subject to misinformation or foreign disinformation. Civil society activists and opposition lawmakers are likely to mobilize transnational coalitions of their own to oppose any unwanted foreign military presence. To mitigate opposition and ensure continued support, countries should develop consistent approaches given the growing transnational and coalition dynamics in force posture initiatives.

One recent case of strong opposition—that of the U.S. deployment of a missile defense system, including roughly 100 military personnel to operate it, to a new location in the ROK—is illustrative. In response to escalating DPRK nuclear threats, in 2016 the ROK and U.S. governments agreed to deploy a U.S. missile defense system known as the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system in Seongju, in North Gyeongsang Province, just west of the southern city of Daegu.[112] However, its implementation was delayed due to strong domestic and external opposition against an unpopular conservative administration. Large protests were held nationwide over the lack of public consultations leading up to the announcement, including health, environmental, and economic assessments.[113] The residents of Seongju feared exposure

110. Alexander Cooley, *Base politics: Democratic change and the US military overseas* (Cornell University Press, 2012); Calder, Kent E. *Embattled garrisons: Comparative base politics and American globalism* (Princeton University Press, 2010).

111. Andrew Yeo. *Activists, alliances, and anti-US base protests* (Cambridge University Press, 2011); Gavan McCormack and Satoko Oka Norimatsu, *Resistant Islands: Okinawa Confronts Japan and the United States* (Bloomsbury Publishing PLC, 2018).

112. United States Forces Korea, "ROK & U.S. Joint Statement: ROK-U.S. Alliance agrees to deploy THAAD" (July 8, 2016), https://www.usfk.mil/Media/Newsroom/News/Article/831175/rok-us-joint-statement-rok-us-alliance-agrees-to-deploy-thaad/.

to potential electromagnetic radiation from the THAAD system, as well as its potential impact on health, agriculture, and the local economy.[114] For example, these fears triggered a 30 percent drop in agricultural product prices from the county in the months following the announcement.[115] During the height of protests, the U.S. 35th Air Defense Artillery Brigade struggled to deliver fuel to operate the THAAD battery because protesters blocked the access road, forcing the military to use helicopters at significant cost.[116] Similarly, the ROK Ministry of National Defense (MND) noted at the time that "they have been blocking the transport of construction materials and equipment into the THAAD site [...] for months. [...] It is urgent to improve the living conditions of hundreds of American and South Korean troops there with no adequate amenities."[117]

At the same time, domestic opposition intensified because of external opposition, particularly from China which retaliated through both diplomatic and economic means. For instance, China suspended its high-level defense dialogue with South Korea and Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi directly warned that the deployment "will create negative impact on the Korean Peninsula situation, regional stability, and China-ROK relations."[118] China boycotted and imposed strict import rules on South Korean goods,

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113. Brian Padden, "THAAD Radiation Fears Spark South Korean Protests," *VOA News* (July 15, 2016), https://www.voanews.com/a/thaad-radition-fears-spark-south-korean-protests/3419467.html.
114. Ibid.
115. Ha Jina, "People Power Party: 'Chamoe prices in Seongju have fallen by 30 percent… Who will bear the resulting losses to the local economy?'," *E-Daily* (July 31, 2016), https://www.edaily.co.kr/News/Read?newsId=01656406612720096&mediaCodeNo=257.
116. Yang Seung-sik, "U.S. Hints at Deploying More THAAD Launchers in Korea," *The Chosun Daily* (February 14, 2020), https://www.chosun.com/english/national-en/2020/02/14/PSAG3ZFLAWMFQVFSZJOUJPWTFI/.
117. Lee Chi Dong, "Military losing patience with protest against THAAD base," *Yonhap News Agency* (April 19, 2018), https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20180419007200315.
118. Michael D. Swaine, "Chinese Views on South Korea's Deployment of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD)," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (February 2, 2017), https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2017/02/chinese-views-on-south-koreas-deployment-of-terminal-high-altitude-area-defense-thaad?lang=en&utm; Ministry of Foreign Affairs People's Republic of China, "Wang Yi Meets with Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se of the ROK," Press release (July 25, 2016), https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/gjhdq_665435/2675_665437/2767_663538/2769_663542/202406/t20240607_11413014.html.

namely cosmetics and batteries, and banned entertainers from performing in China.[119] The Lotte Group, which provided the land for the THAAD site, was forced to shut down its supermarkets in China.[120] Additionally, Beijing banned group visits to South Korea, causing a $15.6 billion loss to the Korean economy.[121] The fallout from the Chinese retaliatory sanctions would persist for almost a decade, with the last measures only lifted during President Xi Jinping's visit to the ROK for the 2025 APEC Summit.

However, foreign military presence can also be supported by local communities under certain conditions, and the population might protest *against* the departure of these forces, as seen in the case of the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Subic Bay in the Philippines in the early 1990s. Subic Bay was home to U.S. Naval Base Subic Bay, the largest American base in Southeast Asia during the Cold War. Yet, in 1991, as the Military Bases Agreement granting the United States access to bases in the Philippines was set to expire, both parties entered negotiations for a new base agreement. The general public held protests calling for the departure of the American forces. By contrast, then-president Corazon Aquino worried that the U.S. departure would harm local businesses and industries,[122] a concern shared by Richard Gordon—Mayor of the nearby city of Olongapo—who remarked that "People here live because of the bases."[123] Indeed, the base contributed about $500 million a year to the national economy, roughly 1.5 percent of national income,[124] and employed 20,000 Filipino workers. The base also

119. Park Boram, "China takes 43 retaliatory actions over S. Korea's THAAD deployment plan," *Yonhap News Agency* (February 3, 2017), https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20170203010100315.
120. Joyce Lee and Adam Jourdan, "South Korea's Lotte reports store closures in China amid political stand-off," *Reuters* (March 6, 2017), https://www.reuters.com/article/business/south-koreas-lotte-reports-store-closures-in-china-amid-political-stand-off-idUSKBN16D03U/.
121. Jun Hae-young, "Estimate of losses to the domestic tourism industry resulting from the prolonged THAAD-related dispute," Hyundai Research Institute (September 14, 2017), https://hri.co.kr/kor/report/report-view.html?mode=2&uid=29951&find_ordby=PubDATE__desc&find_field=total&searchdate=PubDATE&find_word=%EC%82%AC%EB%93%9C&page=1.
122. "Philippine girls want U.S. military men to stay," *UPI* (September 29, 1991), https://www.upi.com/Archives/1991/09/29/Philippine-girls-want-US-military-men-to-stay/3513686116800/.
123. Anna Mariano, "Filipinos rally for U.S. bases," *UPI* (January 20, 1989), https://www.upi.com/Archives/1989/01/20/Filipinos-rally-for-US-bases/4618601275600/.
124. Central Intelligence Agency, "The Philippines: Exploring Views on the US Military Bases" (August 24, 1987), https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90T00114R000200970003-8.pdf, p. 4.

sustained local service sectors such as bars, shops, and other businesses.[125] As such, the local population strongly favored a continued American presence and protested to keep it, with an estimated 50,000 to 200,000 protesters. Concerns deepened at the time, since the island of Luzon was struggling to recover from natural disasters, including the 1990 earthquake and the 1991 eruption of Mountain Pinatubo. Eventually, the Philippines Senate rejected the proposed base agreement renewal, effectively ending the U.S. military presence in the country.

This Philippines case illustrates that local communities can come to support hosting a foreign military presence, especially if it creates economic prosperity. This dynamic has also recently been observed in the case of U.S. Marine Rotational Force-Darwin (MRF-D) which has conducted six-month rotational deployments in the northern Australian city of Darwin to train with Australian military personnel. Polls of Darwin residents have found strong support for the U.S. military presence, which has stayed above 70 percent and sometimes almost reached 90 percent,[126] due to economic investments by both the U.S. and Australian governments, including upgrading public infrastructure, as well as the spending that visiting forces provide to the local economy.[127] Meanwhile, the ROK case of THAAD deployment shows that even a relatively small 100-personnel deployment of troops to operate a missile battery can face enormous obstacles in the absence of local and general public support. This support is crucial to weather any external pressure and disinformation that almost invariably accompanies a new force posture announcement. In summary, increasing the size, scale, and disposition of U.S. and allied military forces throughout the Indo-Pacific region will face obstacles without the right conditions in place.

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125. David E. Sanger, "Philippines Orders U.S. to Leave Strategic Navy Base at Subic Bay," *The New York Times* (December 28, 1991), https://www.nytimes.com/1991/12/28/world/philippines-orders-us-to-leave-strategic-navy-base-at-subic-bay.html.
126. Lowy Institute, "Foreign military based in Australia," in Lowy Institute Poll 2023, Lowy Institute (2023), https://poll.lowyinstitute.org/charts/foreign-military-based-in-australia/.
127. Melissa Mackay, "Marking 10 years in Darwin, top US diplomat signals bigger US marine deployments in Top End," *ABC News* (October 10, 2021), https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-10-10/ten-years-us-marines-top-end/100523120.

## 2. The Coalition Lily Pad Strategy

None of the initiatives discussed in chapter three involve more than a few hundred military personnel at any given time. To borrow an art analogy, rather than approaching coalition military deployments like the surreal cubism of Pablo Picasso's paintings, it should be more like a pointillist painting—such as Georges Seurat's *Island of La Grande Jatte* or the dot paintings of Australia's First Nations peoples—in which individual dots of paint collectively produce a single coherent picture. This emerging trend echoes the concept of security "lily pads." In 2004, during the U.S.-led War on Terror, the U.S. Department of Defense's GPR proposed reducing its overseas basing posture from 850 to 550 installations and bringing home 70,000 Army personnel, including from the Republic of Korea.[128] The Review also recommended adopting a three-tiered basing structure: Main Operating Bases (MOBs), Forward Operating Sites (FOSs), and Cooperative Security Locations (CSLs). The latter, which would become referred to as "lily pads," were small, temporary facilities maintained with host-nation consent and minimal permanent U.S. presence.[129]

During the U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, there was a similar further shift from large military garrisons to establishing small, temporary bases as regional hubs from which U.S. and coalition forces could operate.[130] The U.S. military established more CSLs throughout Africa, including Djibouti. As one U.S. study described them: "Lily pads are not intended to be like the sprawling bases found in many foreign countries […] Lily pads allow for quick movement of forces into hostile and destabilizing areas, not for a prolonged continuous, permanent base."[131] For example, during the war against

128. Robert D. Critchlow, "U.S. Military Overseas Basing: New Developments and Oversight Issues for Congress," Congressional Research Service (October 31, 2005), https://sgp.fas.org/crs/natsec/RL33148.pdf.
129. Andrew F. Krepinevich and Robert O. Work, "A New Global Defense Posture for the Second Transoceanic Era," Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (2007), https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/2007.04.20-New-Global-Defense-Posture.pdf.
130. Andrew F. Krepinvevich, Jr., "How to Win in Iraq," *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2005), https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/iraq/2005-09-01/how-win-iraq.
131. CW3 Brandon LaMothe, "Deterrence, Lily Pads, and Regionally Aligned Forces: Keys to the Successful Application of Strategic Landpower" (M.A. Thesis), U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (2016), https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1022080.pdf, p. 20.

the Islamic State in 2015, U.S. Army General Martin E. Dempsey described small training bases where U.S. and Iraqi forces could operate from as "a lily pad in a pond, with the base at the center and the lily pad being the range of security extending out."[132]

More recently, U.S. strategists have invoked the lily pad concept to describe possible U.S. posture options in the Western Pacific to mitigate China's A2/AD threats. The U.S. Air Force's ACE model plans to disperse aircraft and small, multi-capable teams across temporary or austere airfields, making them harder to target.[133] The U.S. Marine Corps' Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO) concept applies similar principles to littoral warfare by positioning units on small naval expeditionary forces to support sea denial and control.[134] Even the Navy's use of expeditionary sea bases and amphibious ships as mobile logistical nodes reflects an afloat version of lily pads.[135]

The patchwork of quasi-force posture initiatives discussed in this report could be upgraded to produce a coalition lily pad strategy in the Indo-Pacific. Many of these initiatives are already concentrated in several hubs that include one or more other partners having a presence. For example, key sites and locales include the South Korean cities of Pyeongtaek, Kunsan, and Changwon; Australia's northern bases and Shoalwater Bay training area in Queensland; Japan's southwest islands and especially Okinawa Island; the Philippines' northern Luzon EDCA sites, Subic Bay and Cebu Island; and potentially French Pacific territories and British bases in Singapore, Brunei, and the Indian Ocean.

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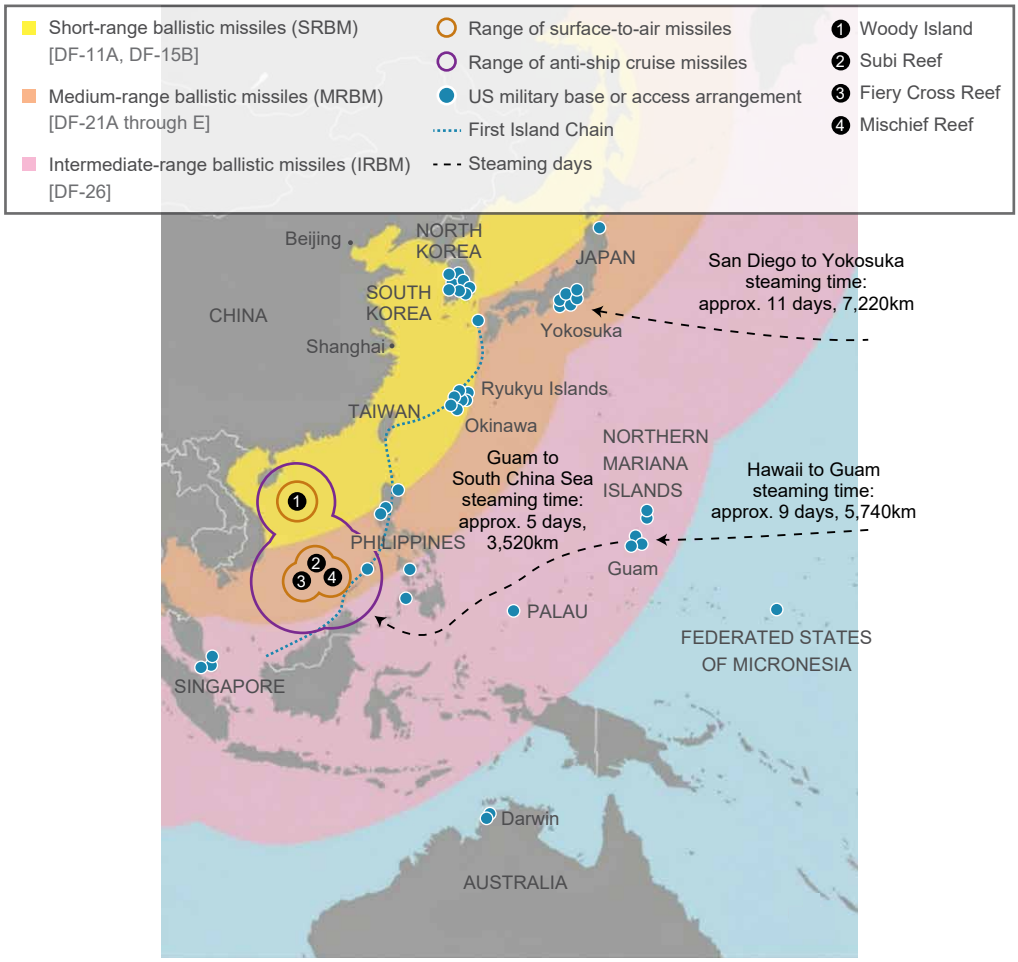
132. Jim Garamone, "New Base Opens Possibilities for Iraqi Forces, Dempsey Says," *DoD News* (June 11, 2015), https://www.dvidshub.net/news/503797/new-base-opens-possibilities-iraqi-forces-dempsey-says; Mark Thompson, "U.S. Adapts 'Lily Pad' Strategy to Defeat ISIS in Iraq," *Time Magazine* (June 11, 2015), https://time.com/3918318/iraq-isis-lilypad/.
133. U.S. Air Force, "Air Force Doctrine Note 1-21: Agile Combat Employment" (August 23, 2022), https://www.doctrine.af.mil/Portals/61/documents/AFDN_1-21/AFDN%201-21%20ACE.pdf.
134. U.S. Marine Corps, "Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations (EABO)" (August 2, 2021), https://www.marines.mil/News/News-Display/Article/2708120/expeditionary-advanced-base-operations-eabo/.
135. Megan Eckstein, "Navy Integrating Littoral Combat Ships, Expeditionary Sea Base into New Operating Concepts," *U.S. Naval Institute News* (January 18, 2021), https://news.usni.org/2021/01/18/navy-integrating-littoral-combat-ships-expeditionary-sea-base-into-new-operating-concepts.

**Figure 17. Current U.S. Deployment and China's Missile Threats**




*Source: Ashley Townshend, Brendan Thomas-Noone, and Matilda Steward, "Averting Crisis: American strategy, military spending and collective defence in the Indo-Pacific," United States Studies Centre (August 19, 2019), https://www.ussc.edu.au/averting-crisis-american-strategy-military-spending-and-collective-defence-in-the-indo-pacific.*

These sites are likely to soon host forces from more than one country and, in the long term, become large modern-day multinational bases, even if they are rotational and non-permanent in nature. Approaching these initiatives with a lily pad strategy in mind could help manage the process to emphasize light footprints, operational flexibility, pre-positioning logistics, and standard operating procedures for entry and exit. The lily pad network may enable rapid response and survivability, but it depends

heavily on diplomatic access, regional infrastructure, and the willingness of partners to host temporary U.S. forces in times of crisis. Beyond a warfighting concept, thinking of coalition military force posture as ideally comprising a numerically small, temporally temporary, and host-government and local-community-supported activity offers a framework for assessing the disparate patchwork of force posture initiatives that the United States and its allies are currently pursuing throughout the region.

Central to this strategy is the establishment of a common regime of VFAs and RAAs as explained in chapter three. As discussed, U.S. allies—including Australia, Japan, and the Philippines—have already begun concluding RAAs with each other to facilitate easier access and provide more posture options. It is time for the ROK to participate. A revised coalition lily pad strategy that incorporates both U.S. and allied military forces throughout the Indo-Pacific, with light footprints on host countries, survivable and prepared capabilities, and networkable and portable supply chains is the purpose of this report. In short, just as the United States is moving away from legacy garrisons toward flexible force posture settings, U.S. allies are also moving toward flexible force posture settings of their own.

## 3. The Military-Industrial Force Nexus

The deployment of uniformed combat troops is not the only means to strengthen security linkages for joint military operations. This is because, in the event that U.S.-China strategic competition were to transition into direct hostilities, there would very quickly be incentives to expand targeting beyond just military bases to also include military-industrial infrastructure. For example, during the Second World War, it was volunteer civilian contractors such as the famous Seabees who built and defended military infrastructure in the Pacific.[136] It was the U.S. Merchant Navy and its civilian sailors who transported cargo and troops across the oceans. It was civilian factories, shipbuilders, and even automakers who faced Allied and Axis attacks throughout the war. By taking a more holistic view of the types of assets, or conversely targets, that

136. Arthur Herman, *Freedom's Forge: How American Business Produced Victory in World War II* (Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2013); Tyler Hacker, "Arsenal of Democracy: Myth or Model? Lessons for 21st-Century Industrial Mobilization Planning," Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (2025), https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/CSBA8404_(Arsenal_of_Democracy_Report)_Final_web.pdf.

would be involved in a period of hostilities in the Indo-Pacific, a very different picture of allied posture comes into play. In this context, it would not only be uniformed military personnel at clearly identified host bases, but also military infrastructure, military-industrial facilities, energy storage and transport infrastructure, and more that would be at risk.

This lesson underpins the second allied force posture model that this report proposes for consideration: the military-industrial force nexus. As the earlier discussion of the ROK's limited experience with overseas force posture demonstrates, the political risk appetite in most allied capitals for deploying large numbers of troops will remain limited. However, the case of the ROK also shows that commercial interests in the defense industrial sector can generate powerful military-industrial partnerships that bind countries together.

On one level, defense industry linkages are primarily commercial activities between private sector companies and host governments and are therefore distinct from military-to-military cooperation between governments. For example, there is more than one defense contractor involved in the ROK's defense industry exports, and they regularly compete against each other and Japanese companies for regional export contracts such as warships. Furthermore, there are many cases where defense firms engage in projects that do not generate subsequent bilateral effects, such as Sweden's Saab Kockums or Germany's Howaldtswerke-Deutsche Werft (HDW), which helped Australia and South Korea build their earlier generations of submarines, but did not end up creating deep strategic ties with these countries.

It is possible to therefore view the current wave of trans-national defense industrial infrastructure and multinational workforces within the Indo-Pacific as ultimately a commercial activity with limited strategic effect. However, this report proposes that even though these companies are often competing with each other, and the ROK government tends to play a supporting rather than directing role in pursuing export contracts, the current pattern of military-industrial cooperation is different from earlier cases such as defense industry exchanges of the 1990s. First, the defense procurement agencies in these countries have adopted an acquisition framework that is not solely based on price and capability needs, but are also factoring in the nationality of the bidding companies and the strength of the bilateral relationship. Second, bidding companies are increasingly coordinating with their national governments to present a

whole-of-government proposal, such as with Japan's bid for Australia's frigate program.

Of the four U.S. allies covered in this report, arguably, South Korea has the greatest defense industry potential to alter the collective military balance of power of other allies and partners. One of the biggest contributions that South Korea could make to collective security capacity in the region is, rather than deploying its troops abroad, actually sending its defense industrial experts abroad to help arm these countries. In recent years, a wave of South Korean companies has expanded their overseas defense manufacturing and sustainment operations as part of defense industrial exports. Initially, South Korea began by exporting completed defense capabilities to U.S. allies and partners in the region. Yet in 2022, the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy set an objective to move beyond the sale of complete defense products toward exporting full-cycle systems, including technology transfer, localization, and maintenance services. This shift aimed at expanding the role of Korean firms in foreign supply chains.[137] Since the late 2010s, South Korea's defense export model has evolved from direct exports to localized production and co-manufacturing with other allied countries. This approach involved investments, technology transfer, integrated operation, and the dispatch of Korean experts to importing countries, establishing a sustained Korean presence in allied defense industries.

Starting in 2014, the Philippines has been a significant buyer, acquiring FA-50 combat jets, HDF-3000 and HDC-3100 frigates, and other equipment, with at least 10 vessels being acquired from South Korea.[138] In shipbuilding, building on its experience managing HD Hyundai Vietnam Shipbuilding (HVS), Southeast Asia's largest shipbuilder, HD Korea Shipbuilding & Offshore Engineering (HDKSOE) has expanded its activities in the Philippines at the Subic Yard in partnership with American investors. The Korean shipbuilder established a logistics support center providing Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) services in 2022, and plans to manufacture oil tankers and offshore

137. Republic of Korea Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy, "President-led '2022 Defense Export Strategy Meeting' Held and On-site Visit to Defense Companies," Press release, (November 24, 2022), https://www.korea.kr/briefing/pressReleaseView.do?newsId=156538533.

138. Max Broad and Evan A. Laksmana, "South Korea's defence relations in Southeast Asia," The International Institute for Strategic Studies (September 29, 2023), https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2023/09/south-koreas-defence-relations-in-southeast-asia/.

wind power structures, investing $550 million over the next ten years.[139] As of August 2025, 3,500 workers have been hired, and training has begun, with Koreans expected to have been sent to train the local workforce.[140] In the coming months, there will be a growing number of Navy and Coast Guard personnel being exchanged between the two countries to train on these vessels. Meanwhile, the Australian shipbuilder Austal employs 300 workers at its Philippines shipyard on the island of Cebu while Japanese shipbuilder Tsuneishi employs 950 workers also on Cebu.

South Korea's military-industrial footprint has also expanded with Indonesia, a U.S. partner, which acquired three submarines from the now-defunct Daewoo Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering (DSME). Moreover, Korea Aerospace Industries (KAI) has also deepened cooperation with Indonesia to jointly develop the KF-21 *Boramae* fighter jet. As Indonesian Deputy Defense Minister Donny Ermawan Tafuanto points out by emphasizing that "the cooperation between Indonesia and South Korea is not limited to buying and selling but also increasing capacity and capability in the aviation industry," this collaboration means more than simple arms sales, as technology like aircraft design, flight testing, or maintenance will be fully transferred.[141] To support this, KAI is also providing training for Indonesian workers through partnerships with Indonesian firms Prima Duta Sejati and Dirgantara Indonesia.[142]

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139. HD Hyundai, "HD Korea Shipbuilding & Offshore Engineering Expands Global Shipbuilding Success in the Philippines," Press release (September 2, 2025), https://www.hd.com/en/newsroom/media-hub/press/view?detailsKey=3645; https://esg.hd.com/en/news/867; Office of the President of the Philippines, "Cerberus-Hyundai partnership to restore glory days of shipbuilding in PH — PBBM," Press release (May 14, 2024), https://pco.gov.ph/news_releases/cerberus-hyundai-partnership-to-restore-glory-days-of-shipbuilding-in-ph-pbbm/.
140. Genivi Verdejo, "HD Hyundai to restore shipbuilding in Subic," *The Manila Times* (August 13, 2025), https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/08/13/business/maritime/hd-hyundai-to-restore-shipbuilding-in-subic/2166326.
141. Gusty Da Costa, "Indonesia, South Korea reaffirm defense industry ties with focus on aerospace development," *Indo-Pacific Defense Forum* (April 30, 2025), https://ipdefenseforum.com/2025/04/indonesia-south-korea-reaffirm-defense-industry-ties-with-focus-on-aerospace-development/.
142. Andrea Arshirena Hosana, "Korea Aerospace Industries to Train and Recruit Indonesian Workers," *Jakarta Globe* (February 28, 2025), https://jakartaglobe.id/business/korea-aerospace-industries-to-train-and-recruit-indonesian-workers.

New Zealand, a U.S. partner and Australian ally, purchased HMNZS Aotearoa, a 26,000-ton auxiliary ship from Hyundai Heavy Industries (HHI) in 2016, building on a legacy that dates back to its first acquisition from HHI of an auxiliary ship in 1987.[143] In Australia, South Korean defense firm Hanwha Aerospace has established Hanwha Defence Australia and the Hanwha Armoured Vehicle Centre of Excellence (H-ACE) in Geelong. The site consists of 11 facilities, including assembly plants or driving test sites, and will produce equipment and expertise for the ADF.[144] Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (MHI)—which won the recent Royal Australian Navy SEA3000 contract to build a fleet of 11 general-purpose frigates, partly in Australia—is also expected to expand its workforce presence in Australia and host Australian workers in Japan.

As such, this new wave of defense industrial cooperation is linking together U.S. allies and partners with each other in new configurations and levels of risk exposure. South Korea, for its part, has quietly increased its commercial but also military advisory presence in these countries. Dispatching Korean personnel and establishing significant infrastructure enable Korea's strategic presence and integration, that creates a rationale to become involved in potential conflict scenarios—in order to protect its investments, infrastructure, and personnel stationed in other U.S. allied countries, but also to contribute to allied security and defense as necessary. In practice, South Korea is already contributing to a quasi-allied defense industry network, which could serve as a stepping stone for expanding formal military cooperation, personnel exchanges, and deeper integration with allied forces. In short, South Korea's industrial cooperation can be translated into a strategic presence and serve as a platform for deeper allied engagement. The same trends will apply to the many other defense industrial partnerships that U.S. allies are currently forging with each other, most prominently the AUKUS partnership for nuclear-powered submarines.

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143. HD Hyundai Heavy Industries, "Hyundai Heavy Industries delivers New Zealand's largest naval vessel," Press release (June 10, 2020), https://www.hhi.co.kr/kr/media-hub/press-release-view?idx=3774&searchKey=all&searchValue=%EB%89%B4%EC%A7%88%EB%9E%9C%EB%93%9C&limitPage=9&currentPage=1.
144. Hanwha, "Hanwha Aerospace completes armored vehicle factory in Australia," Press release (August 27, 2024), https://www.hanwha.com/newsroom/news/press-releases/hanwha-aerospace-completes-armored-vehicle-factory-in-australia.do; Hanwha Defence Australia, "Hanwha in Australia: Our History" (n.d.), https://www.hanwha-defence.com.au/heretostay.

# V. Policy Recommendations

The report concludes by offering a number of policy recommendations that will provide the foundations for whichever coalition model that future governments decide to choose.

## 1. For the United States

- **Recommendation 1: Collective consultations on the U.S. GPR**

Decisions about U.S. force posture are the sovereign prerogative of the United States government. Yet, even small adjustments can have outsized impacts on the countries that host U.S. forces. While previous U.S. GPRs noted in their releases that they involved extensive consultations with key allies, the classified and bilateral nature of these meetings means that even under U.S. administrations that proclaim to champion allied interests, the final GPR will usually catch many experts and commentators by surprise. At present, Washington is most likely to discuss its posture changes bilaterally, as there is no multilateral platform where all allies can be consulted about such amendments together. However, in a highly interconnected system, U.S. posture decisions with one ally can have significant implications for other allies. For example, the U.S.-Japan upgrade of their combined headquarters to a four-star level could have implications for the ROK-U.S. Combined Forces Command's (CFC) resource allocation and command structure. Similarly, the deployment of B-52 bombers and refueling infrastructure at Australia's RAAF Tindal can influence how the United States would use its other facilities across the Indo-Pacific. The United States thus needs to move beyond bilateral frameworks and should establish collective forums for consultations to gather allied perspectives. This could take the form of high-level consultative meetings on the next GPR. Topics to be addressed could include the implications of U.S. presence or troop reduction, the possibility of amendments affecting escalation and targeting, and areas where allied forces can supplement or backfill U.S. capabilities—for example, through air-to-air refueling, the use of P-8 Poseidon patrol aircraft now operated by Australia, the ROK, New Zealand, Singapore, and others.

## 2. For the ROK

- **Recommendation 2: Initiate RAA negotiations with other partners**

The ROK should initiate RAA negotiations with other U.S. allies—namely, Australia, the Philippines, New Zealand, Singapore, and Micronesian states such as Palau—to avoid being excluded from the emerging coalition network. The ROK has already fallen behind other U.S. allies in the growing web of RAAs and multinational cooperation. It should not only rely on the United States or expect the United States to safeguard regional security. The recent ROK-U.S. Joint Statement fact sheet noted that, "The two leaders committed to peace, security, and prosperity both on the Korean Peninsula and in the Indo-Pacific region," including "uphold freedoms of navigation and overflight and other lawful uses of the sea."[145] The ROK has a clear interest in expanding its promising defense industrial partnerships with key countries like Australia and the Philippines. Signing an RAA would make it easier for the ROK Armed Forces to visit and train with these countries without onerous entry and exit processes as well as one-time legal protections.

- **Recommendation 3: Consider limited ROK regional force deployments focused on capacity-building**

South Korea should consider limited forms of forward military deployments and frame any efforts as part of the evolving regional role of the ROK-U.S. alliance. South Korea will have to take into consideration the risks of regional escalation and its limited resources, which remain focused on deterring North Korea. For this reason, any forward deployment should be selective, rotational, and framed as capacity-building rather than war-fighting. To avoid risks of escalation and entanglement, South Korea's deployments should prioritize training partner forces, providing logistical support, and participating in maritime security activities. The ROK could build on its own prior experience with the Akh and Cheonghae Units and closely observe how other U.S. allies engage regionally. For example, South Korea could draw on the Akh Unit's experience and follow Australia's model of training-oriented engagement in the Philippines, such as

145. The White House, "Joint Fact Sheet on President Donald J. Trump's Meeting with President Lee Jae Myung" (November 13, 2025), https://www.whitehouse.gov/fact-sheets/2025/11/joint-fact-sheet-on-president-donald-j-trumps-meeting-with-president-lee-jae-myung/.

Exercise Alon 25, to support capacity-building among like-minded partners. Similarly, the ROK could build on the Cheonghae Unit's role in anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden to expand surveillance activities and contribute to maritime security in the Indo-Pacific. This could eventually lead to South Korea's participation in multilateral maritime patrols, such as taking part in so-called "Squad" U.S.-Australia-Japan-Philippines joint patrols in the South China Sea. Such engagement would allow South Korea to develop and test its capabilities and serve as a foundation for further expansion of the alliance's regional role, without undermining South Korea's efforts to keep peace on the Korean Peninsula.

- **Recommendation 4: Broaden consultations on military-industrial posture**

The 'restraint' school of thought in the United States makes a powerful argument about superpower overstretch and the atrophied industrial base in the United States that is unable to meet the challenges of great power competition. The United States has therefore encouraged closer industrial cooperation among its allies where it is seen as contributing to the larger allied industrial base. The Joe Biden and Trump administrations have encouraged allies to take the lead in investing and securing supply chains and critical infrastructure in Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands rather than trying to do it all by itself. For instance, the Partnership for Indo-Pacific Industrial Resilience set up by the Biden administration and continued under the second Trump administration involves creating a P-8 sustainment hub in Australia that other U.S. allies can also access.[146] Similarly, the Trump administration endorsed a private sector acquisition of the Subic Bay shipyard complex in the Philippines to prevent a Chinese takeover, but then had no objections to a South Korean company, HD Hyundai, from becoming a partner in the facility's operations rather than trying to push a U.S. shipbuilder to take up the role. Therefore, these activities do not necessarily require the participation of the United States, as its most important contribution would be its symbolic presence, helping reduce political sensitivities and lower barriers, creating the momentum for cooperation.

Going forward, the recent $150 billion ROK-U.S. Make American Shipbuilding

146. U.S. Department of Defense, "Partnership for Indo-Pacific Industrial Resilience (PIPIR)" (June 1, 2025), https://media.defense.gov/2025/Jun/02/2003730341/-1/-1/1/FACT-SHEET-PARTNERSHIP-FOR-INDO-PACIFIC-INDUSTRIAL-RESILIENCE.PDF.

Great Again (MASGA) deal could be a platform for future multinational industrial ventures throughout the Indo-Pacific to acquire and hold critical infrastructure, such as shipyards, ports, and airfields to which a coalition workforce would be deployed.[147] The ROK should explore the posture implications of its defense industrial partnerships and facilities, and how they can support coalition deterrence. South Korea should begin to package its defense industrial co-production offer and joint management operations as part of a wider security cooperation effort in which it accepts both the risks and responsibilities of arming de facto allies with the profits that come from such contracts. In addition, the stakes it has in terms of owning defense facilities and deploying and hosting large defense workforces should also be highlighted.

## 3. For Allies and Partners

- **Recommendation 5: Caucus together to secure bulk social license concessions**

The eventual emergence of a multi-national force posture case is most likely just a matter of time. Whether that initiative involves a small or large number of allies depends on what the value of contributing is, not only for the sending governments and militaries but also for the host government and communities. Some of the most successful cases of U.S. and allied force posture initiatives discussed in this report share key commonalities. For instance, they are framed as being initiated at the request of the host community, with an expectation of fulfilling a needed service, such as infrastructure or security provision, and contributing to the local economy by offering job opportunities. They are also framed as non-permanent, time-bound, and non-intrusive on the local community and environment. The most strategically valuable function of some of these initiatives will be as prepositioned sites for potential activation. For example, allied control of key ports and shipyards is generally not necessary until wartime. Allies and partners should coordinate their local community engagement around potential wartime access points by investing in appropriate social license contributions.

In the coming years, the U.S. INDOPACOM and its key allies should jointly identify potential sites that would be needed in wartime, especially as large hubs, as well as lily

147. Peter K. Lee, "MAASGA: Making American and Allied Shipbuilding Great Again," *Asan Issue Brief* 2025-07, (August 29, 2025), https://www.asaninst.org/bbs/board.php?bo_table=s1_1&wr_id=547.

pad sites, and then explore which are located in areas where there is the most support for hosting, depending on the right incentives. These communities could, for example, be open to hosting military infrastructure upgrades such as hardened air shelters for fighter jets, long-range strike capabilities and missile defense systems, and sustainment facilities for uncrewed vehicles and vessels. In return, economic investment, job opportunities, and labor migration schemes could all be explored as proper exchanges. For example, France has run the Adapted Military Service program since 1961, offering professional training to 6,000 young, unemployed, and marginalized volunteers in overseas territories every year. The program provides military training, first aid training, citizenship and basic education, and vocational training, thereby preparing participants for future employment. According to the French Ministry of the Overseas, 82 percent of participants have either been employed or chose to pursue further education after completing the program.[148] These personnel can not only be used to support armed forces but also civil responses to natural disasters or diseases, thus benefiting local communities as well. As such, benefits should be given to host populations to strengthen support and increase the resilience of military presence overseas.

- **Recommendation 6: European niche posture contributions**

European partners present in the region cannot afford to retreat into marginalization or isolation, despite the so-called "tyranny of distance" and weak perceptions of imminent threats. This is particularly relevant at a time of significant developments, such as the emergence of the China-Russia-India-North Korea (CRINK) grouping, which is gaining strategic prominence and increasing the risk of possible conflicts on multiple fronts, as well as the ongoing evolution of U.S. global leadership. European governments should assess and understand the implications of a potential crisis in the Indo-Pacific. While Europe will understandably prioritize the Russian and American problems, it should understand that a major conflict in the Indo-Pacific can directly affect European interests, including the safety of their territories and citizens, as well as the stability of maritime flows critical to European commerce.[149] Although China remains an important economic partner, economic concerns cannot undermine European policymakers' security responsibilities in the region. They should prioritize the

148. French Ministry of the Overseas, "Adapted Military Service" (December 8, 2021), https://www.outre-mer.gouv.fr/ministere/le-sma-service-militaire-adapte.

protection of citizens, assets, and territories in the region, and strengthen partnerships through joint exercises, intelligence sharing and logistical cooperation with Indo-Pacific U.S. allies. Given these circumstances, European partners, especially the UK and France, as key U.S. allies, should actively engage in the regional security order led by U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific. European partners should initiate consultations on how their territories in the Indo-Pacific could facilitate coalition lily pads or the military-industrial force nexus. Such engagements would reinforce Europe's Indo-Pacific presence and collective regional security.

149. Jérémy Bachelier and Céline Pajon, "France in the Indo-Pacific: The Need for a Pragmatic Strategic Posture," Institut français des relations internationales (October 10, 2023), https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/migrated_files/documents/atoms/files/ifri_bachelier-pajon_france_in_the_indo-pacific_oct2023.pdf, p. 55.

# Conclusion

Over the long term, the regularized presence of military forces, defense-industrial investments, and associated personnel from key strategic partners in each other's territories is almost certain to continue. In practical terms, a military attack against a host country could raise the prospect of a collective response, even if the visiting forces themselves are not directly attacked. To effectively navigate this evolving environment, discussions on allied force posture in the Indo-Pacific must expand beyond the narrow focus on uniformed military forces in allied territories. This *Asan Report* thus proposes a new conceptual framework to better understand the various ongoing efforts. On one hand, allies may adopt a "coalition lily pad" strategy, using access arrangements to establish lightweight operational sites that leave minimal military footprint, resembling a pointillist network of locations. On the other hand, allies and host countries could leverage their defense industrial presence overseas through a "military-industrial force nexus" model. This type of hybrid force posture deepens integration and compels investing countries to remain engaged to protect their personnel and assets. The United States, the ROK, and other U.S. allies must first and foremost be more open and continue discussions to develop these ideas. Both the lily pad and military-industrial force nexus models facilitate high levels of integration among allies and can strengthen deterrence, reduce the possibility of conflict, or improve capacities in a potential conflict.

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# A Pointillist Coalition

## Redefining Allied Force Posture in the Indo-Pacific

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