



U.S. Presence and the Incidence of Conflict

Angela O'Mahony, Miranda Priebe, Bryan Frederick, Jennifer Kavanagh, Matthew Lane, Trevor Johnston, Thomas S. Szayna, Jakub P. Hlávka, Stephen Watts, Matthew Povlock

www.rand.org/t/RR1906

There is an ongoing debate about whether U.S. military presence brings stability or an increased likelihood of conflict to a region. The authors of this report analyze historical data to assess how U.S. military presence—in particular, U.S. troop presence and military assistance—is associated with the interstate and intrastate conflict behavior of states and nonstate actors.



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What is U.S. military presence, and how can it be measured?
- How have U.S. forces been deployed around the globe since the end of World War II? To what countries has the United States provided military assistance since the end of World War II?
- How might U.S. military presence affect the conflict behavior of states and nonstate actors?
- What does statistical analysis reveal about how U.S. military presence affects the likelihood of interstate or intrastate conflict in a region?
- What are the implications for contemporary debates about U.S. forward presence?



KEY FINDINGS

The Effects of U.S. Troop Presence on Interstate Conflict

- On average, nearby U.S. troop presence is associated with a lower likelihood of interstate war.
- Nearby U.S. troop presence is associated with allies initiating fewer militarized disputes.
- These benefits appear to come with tradeoffs. Nearby U.S. troop presence is associated with a higher likelihood of low-intensity militarized disputes (e.g., displays of military force and threats to use military force).
- In addition, a large in-country U.S. troop presence is associated with potential U.S. adversaries initiating even higher-intensity militarized disputes, though still short of war.

continued on back

- U.S. troop presence is associated with a higher likelihood of the United States initiating militarized disputes. This may reflect the strategic deployment of U.S. forces near states with which the United States expects to engage in military conflict.

The Effects of U.S. Military Presence on Intrastate Conflict

- The authors found no consistent or robust association between U.S. forward troop presence and intrastate conflict.
- However, overall U.S. military assistance is positively associated with an increased risk of anti-regime activities and greater levels of state repression by incumbent governments.

The Effects of U.S. Military Assistance on Conflict

- The authors found no consistent or robust association between U.S. military assistance and interstate content.
- However, provision of U.S. military assistance may be associated with increased state repression and incidence of civil war.

Implications for Forward Presence Decisions

- A large U.S. regional troop presence can be an effective tool in deterring interstate war, but it may also provoke more militarized activities short of war.
- With regard to Russia and China, substantial increases in U.S. troop presence nearby those countries may help to deter interstate war but increase the likelihood of disputes and provocations short of war.
- In the Middle East, U.S. military assistance may increase the likelihood of repression and domestic instability in the recipient states.

