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U.S. Major Combat Operations in the Indo-Pacific

Partner and Ally Views
The study described in this report sought to assess the degree to which partner air component capabilities could be helpful to the United States in future high-end warfare. Those air assets feature capabilities beyond combat aircraft, such as transport and search and rescue aircraft. But we did not conduct a wider assessment of ally and partner decisions on U.S. access or general logistical support. The study assessed their likely geopolitical willingness to support the United States in several major Indo-Pacific scenarios. We found that this willingness is likely to be very strictly constrained for all regional partners with the partial exception of Japan and Australia.

This analysis therefore does not support a program of general efforts to build interdependence and partner capability on the theory that it will be available in case of war. If the United States Air Force is interested in how partners and allies are likely to help in the event of major war, the right approach is a very narrowly focused set of efforts—likely prioritizing Australia and Japan—to enhance the ability to operate together. The study’s findings highlight the higher value of working with partners to improve their own self-defense. They also point to the value of improving partner capability and ability to operate with the United States more broadly—but only in very narrow air systems (typically not combat aircraft) and with the goal of joint activities only in such scenarios as stability operations or humanitarian assistance and disaster response.

The research reported here was commissioned and sponsored by Headquarters U.S. Air Force, A-3 (AF/A3). This research should be of value to the U.S. Air Force and the broader U.S. national security community, as it provides insights into the type of policies and investments that may be required to build and sustain effective warfighting capabilities in the Indo-Pacific.

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense or the U.S. Government. This research was completed in 2019, and the report was significantly updated in September 2021—before the February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. It has not been subsequently revised.

RAND Project AIR FORCE

RAND Project AIR FORCE (PAF), a division of the RAND Corporation, is the Department of the Air Force’s (DAF’s) federally funded research and development center for studies and analyses, supporting both the United States Air Force and the United States Space Force. PAF provides the DAF with independent analyses of policy alternatives affecting the development, employment, combat readiness, and support of current and future air, space, and cyber forces. Research is conducted in four programs: Strategy and Doctrine; Force Modernization and
Employment; Resource Management; and Workforce, Development, and Health. The research reported here was prepared under contract FA7014-16-D-1000.

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Acknowledgments

The authors would like to acknowledge the sponsor’s office, particularly Steven Ruehl, for assistance in gathering information and developing contacts with key U.S. sources of data. We are grateful for the assistance of the PAF Strategy and Doctrine Program director, Raphael S. Cohen.
Summary

Issue

The study described in this report examined the likely willingness of key U.S. partners and allies in the Indo-Pacific to contribute combat air assets in support of U.S. operations in four illustrative scenarios.

Approach

To assess likely partner behavior, we gathered evidence from four sources of evidence for each focus country in the study:

- the country’s laws, regulations, constitution, official national security strategies and documents, and other public statements by government officials (including an examination of the interests at stake in various scenarios)
- scholars and experts within these countries, who discussed likely reactions to different scenarios
- past behavior by the focus country
- U.S. defense staff at embassies in the respective countries to ensure that we were up to date on the latest discussions on these issues.

We then applied several specific criteria to assess factors that could influence partner willingness to provide air combat support to U.S. operations in each of four scenarios:

- a conflict over Taiwan
- a second Korean war
- a maritime conflict in the South China Sea (Scarborough clash)
- a major stability operation on the Korean Peninsula following a North Korean collapse.

We considered such factors as national interests, fear of retaliation, domestic politics, strategic posture, and public statements by senior officials. We also relied on the judgment of regional subject-matter experts.

Primary Findings

Our analysis produced findings specific to each ally or partner. The following were among the high-level takeaways from the geopolitical analysis:

- Australia and Japan have significant security interests at stake in major Asian contingencies. But both will face political (and, in the case of Japan, legal and constitutional) hurdles to participating in wars that do not directly engage them at first.
South Korea values the U.S. alliance but has little interest in being a cobelligerent off the Korean Peninsula.

We found little evidence that, unless directly attacked itself, Thailand is willing to endanger its security by offering military aid to the United States.

Several other regional countries—notably India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam—have very strong traditions of nonalignment and display no evidence of being willing to volunteer to join a war that does not directly involve them.

New Zealand and the Philippines have few air assets to devote to a major fight and strong incentives to remain aloof from distant wars.

Various factors will affect final choices of these partners, such as the degree of Chinese belligerence between now and the crisis, degree of U.S. commitment, and political changes in other countries in the region.

The baseline findings are depicted in Table S.1.

### Table S.1. Summary of Analysis: Likelihood of Partner Contributions to Scenarios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conflict over Taiwan</th>
<th>Korean War</th>
<th>Scarborough Clash</th>
<th>Stability Operation in Korea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Limited support</td>
<td>Operations support</td>
<td>Limited support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Limited support</td>
<td>Limited support</td>
<td>Limited support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Support assumed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>Limited support</td>
<td>Limited support</td>
<td>Limited support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Support assumed</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>Support assumed</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Red means that the country will likely decline to provide air assets to the scenario; green means it is likely to support U.S. operations with the full range of its capabilities; and yellow means that there is some chance the country would contribute and/or that it might offer limited assets. In cases in which the specific scenario chosen refers to the country itself (for example, Taiwan contributing to a Taiwan scenario), the assumption is that all countries will fight to defend themselves.

**Implications for the U.S. Air Force**

Our analysis does not support a program of general efforts to build interdependence and partner capability on the theory that it will be available in case of war. The Air Force would likely make the most progress by focusing on efforts designed to enhance

- deeper interoperability across the board with Australia and Japan
- local self-defense capabilities (as opposed to distant power projection capacity) of partners and allies
• partner capability and ability to operate with the United States more broadly—but only in very narrow air systems (typically not combat aircraft) and with the goal of joint activities only in such scenarios as stability operations or humanitarian assistance and disaster response.
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Chapter 1. Introduction

The study described in this report assessed the potential for the United States to receive support in air component capabilities from partners and allies in the event of a major combat contingency in the Indo-Pacific. This report represents one of two volumes stemming from the study.\(^1\) The companion report focuses on technical and operational considerations associated with partner and allied support—whether they have the capability and capacity to support U.S. air operations in a major conflict. In this report, we focus on the geopolitical side of the equation: whether partners and allies have the willingness to support U.S. operations. Capabilities alone do not equal warfighting outcomes; the partners and allies must be willing to join the United States in the conflict.

In cooperation with the sponsor, we identified 12 countries for the focus of the analysis, representing a mix of U.S. treaty allies, significant regional players, and countries with specific air component assets potentially important to a contingency. These countries are Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam.\(^2\) We then defined four potential scenarios for high-end conflict against which we would assess these countries’ possible contribution.\(^3\) Those scenarios are:

- a conflict over Taiwan
- a second Korean war
- a maritime conflict in the South China Sea (SCS) (Scarborough Clash)
- a major stability operation on the Korean Peninsula following a collapse of North Korea.

This last scenario does not represent a true high-end, combined-arms conflict, but we chose it because (1) it would be very demanding of U.S. military assets and (2) it is a scenario in which some U.S. allies and partners might be more willing to offer direct military contributions than they might in major war.

We then sought to assess the political likelihood of partner contributions across the full range of air component missions in these scenarios. The question of likely partner behavior is

\(^1\) The other volume is David T. Orletsky, Shawn Cochran, Kevin J. Connolly, Beth Grill, Devon Hill, Katherine Pfrommer, Ashley L. Rhoades, and James Williams, *(U) Potential Contribution of Partner Nations to Support Air Operations in Major Combat Operations in the Indo-Pacific*, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, forthcoming, Not available to the general public.

\(^2\) Our analysis did not rely on this set of countries as a representative group of countries whose behavior is representative of world politics. The methodological burden on the selection of countries was therefore low. This set of nations was largely a function of sponsor interest—the focus of the U.S. Air Force (USAF) on the nations of most potential interest and value as possible partners in conflict.

\(^3\) These scenarios are described in detail in the companion volume.
obviously somewhat speculative. To assess it as objectively as possible, we gathered evidence from four sources of evidence for each focus country in the study:

- the country’s laws, regulations, constitution, official national security strategies and documents, and other public statements by government officials (including an examination of the interests at stake in various scenarios)
- scholars and experts within these countries, who discussed likely reactions to different scenarios
- past behavior by the focus country
- U.S. defense staff at embassies in the respective countries to ensure that we were up to date on the latest discussions on these issues.

We then applied several specific criteria to assess factors that could influence partner willingness. These factors would be likely to determine or help anticipate the degree of willingness to support U.S. combat operations:

- self-interest, including interests at stake in the specific scenario
- legitimacy of the U.S. request for contingency support
- fear of retaliation or vulnerability to punishment
- domestic politics
- relationship with the United States
- strategic posture (existence of strong nonalignment policy)
- existence of formal alliance with the United States
- legal or treaty basis (constitutional or legal constraints, access agreements in place)
- public statements by senior officials
- evidence of private assurances or agreements
- senior leaders in a position to exercise decisive influence
- domestic political constraints.

We considered each of those factors for each country. Because the relevance of these factors is so different among countries and the availability of data for each factor in each country was so variable, the chapters of this report are not organized according to these criteria, but we considered each factor to the extent that the evidence allowed. Not every chapter mentions every factor, but we do discuss every factor that is relevant for the analysis of the country in question. In many cases, we also relied on the judgment of regional subject-matter experts who have deep personal experience with these countries and who have been conducting analyses of partner strategic perceptions and potential for combined operations for several years. Subject-matter expert input was especially relevant for our findings having to do with Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Taiwan, and Vietnam.

In some cases, the focus countries have constitutional or legal restrictions or long-standing national strategic postures that create objective barriers to participating in certain activities. In others, national leaders or governments have given strong clues about how their country might react, at least in the short term. But for most scenarios—and certainly when considering the mission level—our findings unavoidably reflect significant degrees of expert judgment. This was
based on the categories of evidence gathered, including detailed discussions with U.S. defense officials in the relevant embassies.

The focus of this study was narrow, which shaped our research on partner willingness. We sought to assess the degree to which partner air component capabilities could be helpful to the United States in future high-end warfare. Those air assets include capabilities beyond combat aircraft, such as transport and search and rescue (SAR) aircraft. But we did not conduct a wider assessment of ally and partner decisions on U.S. access or general logistical support. The question for this piece of the analysis was very specific: What is the probability that our focus set of nations would directly commit some air assets to a future fight in each of our four scenario types? Some that may be unwilling to commit forces might still be willing to grant the United States air or maritime access during a conflict or to allow the United States to transit supplies through their ports or airfields. But that analysis was beyond the scope of this study.

The result is still a forecast, and comes with all the limitations of forward-looking, speculative analysis. In most cases, however—most of the potential relationships between specific countries and individual scenarios—we found that the evidence leaned strongly in one direction: Very few of these countries are likely to commit to any of the scenarios involving major war unless they are directly attacked. Willingness is likely to be very strictly constrained for all regional partners with the partial exception of Japan and Australia.

Chapters 2 through 13 assess these questions for each of the focus countries in terms of the four scenarios outlined. Each chapter provides the same basic information: a brief survey of the country’s strategic objectives and orientation, evidence from public statements and other sources of perspectives on its view of regional conflict, and likely willingness to participate in U.S.-led operations. Longer chapters also have conclusions.

We have addressed the countries in alphabetical order for consistency, but the depth of the analyses, by design, is not equivalent. Using the sponsor’s request, five countries were identified as priorities for analysis: Australia, India, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea. These treatments are somewhat more extensive than the others because of this priority emphasis. Of those, our analysis quickly identified Australia and Japan as the two critical actors; therefore, those chapters are significantly more detailed than the others.

We considered contingent events or developments that could affect these countries’ judgments. The study’s time frame was 2021–2030; although we did not anticipate radical changes in world politics in that time, the perspectives of critical countries could change, driven by a variety of possible developments. We could not identify and consider every possible factor that might shift the willingness of countries to contribute military assets in support of U.S. operations in a major conflict. Using the evidence gathered for each country, we identified a set of factors most likely to govern shifts in partner willingness to support U.S. operations over time compared with the present-day baseline assessment. Chapter 14 describes these factors and summarizes some of our overall findings.
Chapter 2. Australia

Australia sits at the very top of the list of reliable and capable allies of the United States, particularly in the Indo-Pacific. Australia has fought alongside the United States in every major military conflict since World War I. The Australia–New Zealand–United States (ANZUS) Security Treaty, formalized since 1951, serves as the foundation of the security relationship. The mutual defense clause of the ANZUS Treaty was invoked only once, in solidarity with the United States after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

In recent years, Australia has shown a willingness to invest more heavily in the defense of the homeland and to support future regional operations in the Indo-Pacific. According to Prime Minister Scott Morrison, “If we are to be a better and more effective ally, we must be prepared to invest in our own security.” The Australian Government’s new Defence Strategic Update (DSU), unveiled in July 2020, essentially replaces the 2016 Defence White Paper and details new investments plans, including new defense capabilities. Morrison plans to invest $140–$240 billion in Australian dollars (AUD) in Defence over the next five years—totaling AUD $270 billion over ten years, a 40-percent increase from the AUD $195 billion promised in the 2016 White Paper. Priority capability investments are longer-range strike weapons (land and maritime), cyber capabilities, hypersonics, highly integrated sensors, and area-denial systems.

Australia’s Strategic Concepts and National Interests

The DSU is about as close to a Grand Strategy as Australia has come in recent history. The document promises to pivot Australia’s strategic posture from a largely defensive force primed for coalition operations to a conventional deterrence role with an elevated focus on lethality and Australian-led military operations within the country’s immediate environment. At the same time, there is a growing realization among Australian officials and analysts that Australia needs to be more independent in protecting its national interests, specifically concerning consumables (such as fuel and parts), weapon inventories, and surveillance systems. Moreover, there has been

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4 September 2021 marks the 70th anniversary of the ANZUS Treaty.
5 Australia is often referred to as the southern flank of U.S. Operational Plans.
a shift toward greater independence for national security, built on the fact that the United States is unlikely to be able to fully meet Australia’s security, logistics, and consumption needs in a time of conflict.

Outwardly, Australia is doubling down on an emphasis on its own sovereignty; strategic and operational decisions must be deemed in Australia’s national interest before alliance considerations are made. As Prime Minister Morrison explained the emphasis, “It’s as if Australia does not have its own unique interests or views as an independent sovereign state. This is false and needlessly deteriorates relationships.” He added, “Like other sovereign nations in the Indo-Pacific, our preference is not to be forced into binary choices.”

These two main themes—a historic and persistent desire to remain close to the United States and a growing urge to set its own course—have produced an emerging duality in Australia’s strategic policy that consists of both expanding regional leadership and strengthening the alliance with the United States. Within the DSU, there has been a shift in focus from a global to a local or regional emphasis, with the outright acknowledgement of China as the primary threat, something the 2016 Defence White Paper failed to do. Circumstances with China have spurred Australian leaders to be willing to take greater risks in the direct acknowledgement of a threat from China as they now recognize they are at more risk of attack.

Australian policymakers now see ample evidence of China’s intentions to establish a military presence in the Southwest Pacific islands, which both the United States and Australia find deeply concerning. There have been repeated rumors about China’s plans to establish a major naval base in Fiji or the Solomon Islands. Moreover, in Papua New Guinea (PNG), the U.S. chiefs of the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard have issued a major warning for the Indo-Pacific region, encouraging such key U.S. allies as Australia to counter Beijing’s regional presence and power projection ambitions in the region. This warning comes shortly after information about a Beijing-backed AUD $200 million “fishing complex” in Daru, PNG, which is a little over 200 km from mainland Australia. ADM Philip S. Davidson expanded on these points, while stressing that “Australia has [the] right to be very concerned about the Chinese potentially building a base in the island chain. I believe Australia has made quite clear [that] its national interest—is to prevent such bases from happening”.

Australia’s overall strategy has some notable trademarks, such as the following:

- doubling-down emphasis of Australian sovereignty

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9 Harris and Galloway, 2020.
11 Former senior Defence official, interview with authors, January 2021.
• a clearer desire to focus more on Australia’s region of influence (the Northeast Indian Ocean, maritime and mainland Southeast Asia to Papua New Guinea and the Southwest Pacific Islands; see Figure 2.1) and less on out-of-area coalition operations in the Middle East and elsewhere
• strong support for increased training with the United States and other allies, especially in Australia, taking advantage of the “archipelago”
• an increased appetite for additional (limited) U.S. forces, capabilities, and equipment to be stationed on Australian soil
• a strong desire for the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to be fully integrated (beyond interoperable) with U.S. forces when deployed together.

Figure 2.1. Australia’s Regional Perspective

These trademarks will be discussed in greater detail in the context of brief discussions of strategy and support, then a longer discussion of Australia’s willingness to train and operate with and host additional U.S. forces. The discussion will also address what ADF support the United States can expect relative to our four operational scenarios. This chapter is supported with interviews from more than 20 current and former senior U.S. and Australian defense officials. We provide analysis of opportunities that exist for the United States and Australia to train and operate together, along with some Australia-specific caveats and a few cautions for U.S. policymakers.

Our analysis suggests that Australia will continue to support U.S.-led operations that are deemed to be in Australia’s interests—but the judgment of what falls into that category is difficult to predict and might not include some of the most important scenarios for the United States. It is important for U.S. policymakers to understand that Australia is certainly open to discussing U.S. military requests, but circumstances require the Australian government to focus on its own region of influence as the highest strategic priority. Australia is an influential regional leader with innovative, niche capabilities that can and do complement U.S. capabilities.
The 2020 Defence Strategic Update

The 2020 DSU marks the first time that China is publicly acknowledged as the primary threat to Australian security. The DSU is essentially a reassessment of the planning assumptions in the 2016 Defence White Paper, specifically acknowledging that a ten-year warning time for planning against possible Chinese aggression is no longer valid. Australia’s geographical advantage accorded by its maritime buffer has historically provided its government with some breathing space to respond to threats, but this is no longer the case because of the speed at which China is modernizing its defense forces and acting more aggressively, particularly in the SCS.

As mentioned earlier, Australia’s Department of Defence essentially has regional and alliance strategies running in parallel. Although the alliance is still the highest priority, there is a growing realization that the United States cannot be militarily engaged everywhere but that Australia still needs U.S. capability support for a credible response function. The DSU represents a pivot from a defensive force primed for coalition operations in support of the United States to one that can play a more conventional deterrence role (by denial and punishment) and is prepared for the possibility of high-intensity operations with the United States. The DSU also explains that Australia prioritizes international engagement and the ADF’s ability to deploy force in support of shared interests in security and stability in the immediate region. Australia is both expected and willing to take the lead in military operations in its immediate region.

There has been a strategic shift in Australia’s national defense policy to invest in “respond” options along with capabilities and policies that can deliver “shape” and “deter” functions. The Australian government has set these new strategic objectives to guide all Department of Defence planning, notably force structure, force generation, international engagement, and operations. The ADF is required to shape Australia’s strategic environment; deter actions against Australia’s interests; and respond with credible military force when required.

It is becoming clear in the discourse that Australia is intending to do more in terms of regional and alliance commitments. The DSU makes clear that Australia is less willing to participate in coalitions beyond its immediate region (for example, in Iraq, Afghanistan, or Syria), but, according to several officials, the ADF would likely do so in limited ways, particularly if doing so helps to advance ADF shape and deter functions.

In late 2020, the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) launched the Air Force Strategy (AFSTRAT). Although light on actual strategy, the AFSTRAT outlines five lines of effort and the subsequent directions associated with integrated air and space power for the joint force. The five lines of effort are as follows:

1. delivering air and space power as part of the joint force

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14 Australian Government, Department of Defence, 2020a.
15 Australian Defence officials, interview with authors, February 2021.
2. developing an intelligent and skilled workforce
3. deepening relationships, strengthening engagement
4. evolving air force culture
5. exercising agile and coherent governance.\textsuperscript{16}

The AFSTRAT reads more like an organizational concept, but it does give some insights to the Chief of the Air Force’s thinking. According to one official, one of the tensions felt is that of balancing the preparedness for high-end warfare with the need to be responsive for other tasks. Interestingly, senior RAAF officials also acknowledge tension regarding the need to integrate with the USAF as opposed to with the rest of the ADF—these efforts are not necessarily congruent given the speed at which the United States is modernizing.

For the first time in recent years, strategists are openly contemplating the proposition that Australia may not be able to rely on the protection of the United States over the longer term. The follow-on effect of this thinking is realization of a need for greater self-reliance and a strategy, as well as capabilities, to optimize the defense of Australia rather than joining coalitions farther afield. The extent to which this view is supported across Australia’s Department of Defence is not clear, but Australia is planning to take more responsibility for its own security and the security of its immediate region, per the DSU.

Professor Hugh White’s book, \textit{How to Defend Australia},\textsuperscript{17} is worth noting because White is probably the most prominent leader in this camp. He sets out four strategic objectives for Australian forces: defending the continent, securing the neighborhood, supporting maritime Southeast Asia, and preserving the wider Asian balance. In his book, White kills many sacred cows: He significantly downplays the alliance with the United States, and (at the extreme) factors the United States out of Australia’s strategic objectives. White argues that Australia should focus on engagement with its immediate region and that it has been making the wrong (and too expensive) investments for self-reliance.

White’s views are countered by many others, including Michael Shoebridge, who argues that cobbling together regional coalitions with “partners of convenience” is not a basis for improving Australia’s security. White points to the small numbers of highly expensive new capabilities, such as autonomous systems that the ADF will soon acquire, and argues that they may not be worth the investment in the end (and many commentators do not disagree). Shoebridge’s view is that White’s front-end assessment is incorrect, and that Australia need not live in an Asia without U.S. military power.\textsuperscript{18}

The DSU discusses plans to enhance ADF capabilities in longer-range strike weapons (land and maritime), cyber capabilities, and area denial systems. Australia also will invest in more


\textsuperscript{17} Hugh White, \textit{How to Defend Australia}, Melbourne, Australia: La Trobe University Press, 2019.

\textsuperscript{18} Michael Shoebridge, “Hugh White’s Plan For Defending Australia Simply Isn’t Viable,” \textit{The Strategist}, Australian Strategic Policy Institute blog, July 2019.
highly integrated and automated sensors and weapons, such as hypersonic weapons systems (HIFIRE/SKYFIRE). Plans involve an AUD $15 billion investment in cyber and information warfare capabilities; an AUD $7 billion investment in space capabilities over the coming decade, including the new Australian Space Agency (based in Adelaide); and a decision to expand the Jindalee Over-the-horizon Radar Network (JORN) to provide wide-area surveillance to the east, complementing the surveillance of the north and west. Finally, there will be new investments in logistics systems that will improve the ADF’s ability to deploy globally and support its allies when doing so is in Australia’s interests. All of these investments are intended to improve Australia’s ability to respond more directly to credible threats posed by its adversaries in the Indo-Pacific region. There is strong support from the United States for the investments.

Growing U.S.-Australian Defense Cooperation

The Australian government does not acknowledge an existence of U.S. bases on Australian territory. From an Australian perspective, these facilities in the Northern Territory (NT) are shared (Figure 2.2), and they exist for the benefit of Australia and its alliance with the United States. This is a subtle but extremely important nuance that gets to the heart of Australian sovereignty and its strong desire to be an equal partner. That said, the U.S.-Australia Force Posture Initiatives (FPI) (which we also refer to as the Initiatives) announced in 2011 are being implemented under the 2014 Force Posture Agreement (FPA). The Initiatives are an extension of Australia’s defense alliance with the United States. Four broad objectives are associated with the initiatives:

- improve interoperability
- provide opportunities to engage with partners in the Indo-Pacific
- promote regional stability
- better posture both countries to respond to contingencies, particularly stabilization and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) operations.

The Initiatives are a key component of the alliance and include the Marine Rotational Force–Darwin (MRF-D) and Enhanced Air Cooperation (EAC).

The MRF-D is a contingent of 2,500 U.S. Marines who, with their equipment, rotate through the NT during the dry season (May to October). This deployment provides an excellent opportunity to undertake a variety of training activities and combined exercises with the ADF and, increasingly, with regional partners. The MRF-D has grown in size and complexity since the first rotation of 200 U.S. Marines through Darwin in 2012, reaching the milestone of 2,500

19 Australian Government, Department of Defence, 2020a.
21 Australian Government, Department of Defence, undated-c.
22 Australian Government, Department of Defence, undated-c.
Marines in 2019. This rotation works to address all four FPI objectives, although training with the United States to promote interoperability is at the top of the agenda.

Together, the U.S. Marines and the USAF are deepening ties with ADF counterparts. Both MRF-D and EAC are expanding following the 2020 DSU and subsequent Australian-U.S. ministerial meetings of 2020; these expansions reflect significant new investments in the NT (which we will discuss later) and an endorsement to station U.S. bombers and tankers in the NT. The Australian government is unlikely to make broad public statements about hosting U.S. forces to maintain sovereignty, but Defence officials say that there is a growing conversation around expanding the U.S. presence in Australia, though any expansion will need to be clearly seen to benefit Australia to gain the support of the government and population. The NT population is largely supportive of a U.S. military presence given the vast resources that accompany this presence.

Australia and the United States are sharing the significant costs to modernize and right-size bases and training centers in the NT to better prepare for future contingencies. Former Australian Minister for Defence Linda Reynolds stated that Australia and the United States will jointly invest around AUD $2 billion in a variety of FPI projects over the life of the initiative.

![Figure 2.2. Northern Territory Bases and Training Areas](source)

The multimillion-dollar construction contract is part of the FPI, which feature a variety of initiatives in the NT over the next decade. At RAAF Darwin, U.S.-funded FPI projects include an extended parking apron for 4 KC-10 tankers (KC-30A passenger), an aircraft maintenance

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24 EAC background papers provided to the authors by the Australian Department of Defence.
25 During the Australia-U.S. Ministerial Consultations in 2020, the United States (surprisingly) mentioned hosting intermediate-range missiles.
26 Australian Department of Defence officials, interview with authors, March 2021.
27 Linda Reynolds, speech at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, July 2, 2020.
support facility, two bulk fuel storage tanks, a new operations facility, and a second parking apron. At RAAF Tindal, which is 15 km outside the town of Katherine (320 km by road southeast of Darwin), U.S.-funded FPI planned projects feature new jet fuel storage tanks, two earth-covered magazines (ECMs), an aircraft maintenance support facility, a new bomber apron for six B-52s, and a squadron operations facility. The United States is expected to spend $1.6 billion at RAAF Base Tindal alone. Australian-funded projects feature significant airfield upgrades, base support improvements (accommodation, mess facilities, and gymnasiums), and upgrades to training areas and ranges. The main outcome of all of this investment will be opportunities to train together, according to U.S. and Australian defense officials.

In addition to the necessary upgrades at RAAF Tindal and RAAF Darwin air bases, wider logistics and supply chains exist in the NT that, according to Australian Department of Defence analysts, will need to be addressed in the short to medium term. According to one senior Australian Department of Defence analyst, and there is a need to build resilience and redundancy in the NT and protect critical supply chains. In this regard, it is useful to think of the NT as an ecosystem. The two main air bases are part of a chain of airfields stretching across northern Australia from Learmonth in western Australia to Townsville in northern Queensland, spanning over 4,500 kilometers (2,800 miles, about the distance from Washington, D.C., to San Francisco). Improvements are needed to some roads, bridges (especially the Katherine River crossing during the wet season), and other critical infrastructure between the two main bases. A second port to supplement the Port of Darwin may be needed to build in some redundancy. As far as fuels, Australia has only two refineries, both of which may soon close; 100 percent of jet fuels are imported. Keeping the refineries open and producing jet fuel will be expensive, and the Australian government will likely need to step in for the financing. These supply chain issues in the NT will need to be addressed at the national level rather than the Defence level.

ADF officials like to talk about promoting full integration with U.S. forces, which extends beyond interoperability. This area is where training with the latest technologies becomes extremely important. According to one senior Australian Department of Defence official, there is a hard boundary emerging about ADF limitations concerning the Chinese Peoples’ Liberation Army (PLA). Integration with the United States becomes critical because Australia cannot accept the risk of not being fully integrated. Integration may help to shift Australia’s willingness to participate in a variety of scenarios.

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28 The U.S. Navy’s Naval Facilities Engineering Command Pacific recently awarded a USD $10 million contract to a Perth company for the ECMs.
29 Australian Government, Department of Defence, undated-d.
31 ADF official, interview with authors, February 2021.
The permanent rotational U.S. force presence and infrastructure investments in the NT, as well as the NT’s vast, open, largely unrestricted territory offer tremendous opportunities for increasing the scope and complexity of combined training with the United States. Opportunities also exist for combined training and multilateral training with other countries in the region, such as Singapore. The ADF has been promoting the idea of Australia as an archipelago for training purposes, given the vast, largely barren territory in the middle with some key locations around the rims. Exercises can be designed around this construct to mimic the vast territory of Southeast Asia. Discussions with Australian Department of Defence officials reveal a desire for live virtual and constructive training alongside the in-person major exercises, such as Talisman Sabre. In short, the NT is becoming a major power projection; according to one Australian Department of Defence official, that comes with an obligation from the United States for the provision of funding.

Australia’s Willingness to Participate in U.S.-Led Operations

To this point, this chapter has mostly described Australia’s strategic priorities and constraints, as well as new opportunities accorded by the DSU and the 2020 Australian-U.S. ministerial meetings. In this section, we turn to an analysis of Australia’s willingness to support four specific U.S.-led scenarios. Much of the information comes directly from interviews with senior U.S. and Australian defense officials. Much of this information is supplemented by expert opinion commentary coming mostly out of Australia, as well as corroborating discussions with U.S. officials working closely with the Australian Department of Defence.

As a reminder, our study considered four scenarios:

- a conflict over Taiwan (maritime invasion)
- a second Korean war (land invasion)
- a maritime conflict in the SCS (Scarborough Clash)
- stability operations (Korean Peninsula following a collapse of North Korea).

Australia has limited capacity; this being the case (and per the DSU), priority is given to its territorial integrity and its immediate region. The Australian government prioritizes the following operations (not in any order):

- **stabilization**: The government is finding it harder to join coalitions outside its region (for example, in the Middle East), in which the ADF is in a “use of force” role. Therefore, new Iraq- or Afghanistan-type commitment is less likely, but missions like one in the southern Philippines against Islamic extremists are more likely.

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32 The ADF and the Singapore armed forces are already training together quite extensively through the Australia-Singapore Military Training Initiative, where roughly 14,000 Singapore Armed Forces members train with Australia in the Shoalwater Bay Training Areas in central Queensland for roughly 18 weeks of the year (Australian Government, Department of Defence, “Australia-Singapore Military Training Initiative,” webpage, undated-a).
• **HADR operations:** The ADF has become increasingly involved in taking the lead on HADR operations closer to home, both within Australia and in the Southwest Pacific and Southeast Asia.

• **SAR operations:** Australia has the second largest SAR region in the world and the Australian Department of Defence will prioritize SAR within its immediate region. A strong ADF contribution to SAR further afield (except within the context of another deployment) is highly unlikely.

• **Peace operations:** The ADF will contribute to peace operations, but mostly at the individual level.

• **Cyber and gray-zone covert operations:** This sort of collaboration with the United States is routine, particularly between national-level agencies, and will continue.

As one Australian Department of Defence official explained, it is useful to consider Australia’s support to U.S.-led missions in two buckets—competition and conflict—because the two environments may drive different responses.

In the current competition-driven environment, the ADF is primarily focused on its immediate region, including the Southwest Pacific and a growing interest in Antarctica. There is momentum for further collaboration with the United States on the generation of intelligence mission data and the associated intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) requirements. The key characteristic of this environment is the provision of ADF enhanced regional engagement (ERE), which provides defense-related assistance to Southwest Pacific countries, much like U.S. Department of Defense security cooperation. In ERE, Australia is doubling down on the countries with which it is already aligned rather than competing with China’s Belt and Road Initiative in other countries in the region. Australian Department of Defence officials often note that U.S. resource support to the ERE could significantly increase Australia-U.S. combined leverage.\(^\text{33}\)

In a conflict-driven environment, the ADF would be focused first on the defense of Australia, including maritime and air defense approaches in Australia’s inner arc, then on force projection into Southeast Asia. Three mission areas of specific interest to the ADF are multidomain strike, integrated air and missile defense, and full spectrum undersea warfare. Collaboration with the United States in these missions is a priority, with greater reliance on a unilateral response the closer to the Australian continent that operations are conducted.\(^\text{34}\)

As Australia is a key U.S. ally, the alliance considerations are huge. We must keep in mind that the ANZUS alliance has no provision similar to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s Article 5: There is simply an agreement to consult one another. Traditionally, however, that consultation has resulted in an active ADF contribution whenever the issue has been serious (for

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\(^{33}\) Senior ADF officials, interviews with authors, March 2021; Michael S. Chase and Jennifer D. P. Moroney, Regional Responses to U.S.-China Competition in the Indo-Pacific: Australia and New Zealand, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-4412/1-AF, 2020.

\(^{34}\) Senior ADF officials, interviews with authors, March 2021.
example, conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Philippines; SCS freedom-of-navigation operations; and Persian Gulf and Iran Hormuz patrols). The main public comments around these missions revolve around stabilization operations, specifically the need to ensure stability in Australia’s region of influence. This topic is discussed extensively in the DSU. Public opinion polls show that Australian citizens want to maintain the stability of the region, but there is little appetite for Australia being “dragged into U.S.-led wars” against China.35 The broader the sanctioned international support, the stronger the public opinion for taking military action.

It is important at this point to zoom out a bit to understand some of the connections between U.S. forces stationed in Australia at joint facilities and launching operations in the region. Australia would not allow the United States to launch an operational mission from Australian soil (not even for presence or reassurance purposes) without Australia’s full knowledge and concurrence.36 This requirement relates to Australia exercising its sovereignty and its desire to avoid being seen as a subservient player to the United States. According to several Australian officials, Australia is usually a willing participant, and, as one official put it, “we just do not want to be taken for granted.”37 As far as making requests to the Australian government for support to specific missions, one official remarked (and several corroborated) that “everything needs to be discussed” for specific missions. According to a U.S. official, airfield assessments, particularly at RAAF Bases Darwin and Tindal, will be necessary for use in future operations, and the ADF is on board with conducting these assessments.38

Coming back to the discussion of willingness, the United States should expect that, assuming the mission is deemed in Australia’s national interest, Australia will be a willing supporter when asked. The ADF would need to have excess capacity that does not risk undermining the defense of the homeland. If the United States is seen as responding to a provocation, then a level of active and overt Australian military support can be expected in all four scenarios. It is important to understand that the United States should not expect these military offers of support well in advance of any provocation. According to one Australian official, the ambiguity of Australia’s likely response is a highly prized asset. This is partly because Australia’s fear of abandonment is complemented by a fear of entrapment (in a U.S.-led campaign); therefore, the United States should anticipate that the Australian government would need time to allow for public and private debates.39

35 See Lowy Institute, “China,” webpage, undated.
36 One U.S. official remarked that the new bomber ramp in the NT is completely useless because of this agreement, but that is probably an overreaction. It would be an odd situation for a U.S. ally to allow U.S. forces on its territory with no operational restrictions.
37 Senior Australian Department of Defence official, interview with authors, March 2021.
38 Senior U.S. Department of Defense official, interview with authors, February 2021.
39 Senior Australian Department of Defence officials, interview with authors, March 2021.
Conclusions

The opportunities for Australia and the United States to train and operate together have never been better, and the stakes have never been higher. It would be useful for Australia to focus on missions in which the ADF can make a decisive operational contribution. Should it join the fight directly with F35s? Growlers? Or with supporting capabilities, such as P3s, ISR (E-7 Wedgetail), or lift and refueling in the background? Or should the ADF stay out of the conflict and take up the slack somewhere else? These are difficult questions, some of them highly politically charged; nonetheless, they should be at the top of the agenda for high-level ministerial meetings all the way down to the operational wargames and key biannual exercises. To these ends, the new Australia–United Kingdom–United States enhanced defense partnership announced in September 2021 (following the completion of research for this study) will provide opportunities for broader technological collaboration among the three partners, which will hopefully serve to break down barriers to information-sharing among these key allies.

In terms of caveats, as a middle power that has limited capacity compared with the United States, Australia is attempting to shift focus to its inner region and take a much-needed leadership role in shaping, deterring, and responding to contingencies in Southeast Asia and the Southwest Pacific while modernizing its force structure to prepare for the future. Australia is a willing supporter of the United States, but there are limits to its projectable capabilities. Australia also needs to be given political space when making military decisions that prioritize the defense of Australia and its key regional interests.

As far as cautions, the United States will need to continue to respect Australia’s sovereignty, and one way to do this is to recognize U.S. posture beddowns in the NT not as U.S. bases but as joint facilities and capabilities shared with the ADF. Australia has shown a strong willingness to support the United States when asked for the past 100 or so years of “mateship,” but some barriers remain, even between the closest of allies. Australia does not have access to U.S. operational plans even though the expectation is that Australia will be the southern flank, and that’s a rub in the relationship (even though workarounds have been created through information-sharing mechanisms). Moreover, Australia does not have access to information about many of the critical U.S. capabilities being developed, particularly at the concept development level (that is, before a capability becomes a record). Several senior and former

41 Senior ADF operational officials, interview with authors, February 2021.
42 The U.S. Advanced Battle Management System is a good example.
Australian Department of Defence officials also reported that the United States does not always approach Australia in the most-effective ways with its requests for capabilities.43

The 2020 DSU offers a much more sobering assessment of Australia’s defense priorities against a rising China than has been seen in recent history. As one Australian Department of Defence official remarked, “there is a real awareness starting to grow around ADF limitations. There is also an acknowledgement that Uncle Sam can’t protect us in the way we always assumed.”44 This thinking is most certainly influencing Australia’s strategic and regional priorities along with DSU-driven investments in the Australian Department of Defence. Overall, the ANZUS alliance is as strong and vibrant as it has ever been, but there remains a continuing need both for a frank dialogue regarding capabilities, investments, limitations, and opportunities for military interdependence and for the fostering of seamless information-sharing practices (see Table 2.1).

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43 As one official put it, “Australia wants to know specifically what the United States wants. U.S. replies with, ‘What do you have? We want you to do your thing.’” Senior Australia Department of Defence official, interview with authors, March 2021.

44 ADF official, interview with authors, March 2021.
### Table 2.1. Assessment of Australia's Support for U.S.-Led Scenarios by Mission Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenarios</th>
<th>Missions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>OCA/DCA</strong></td>
<td><strong>SEAD</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maritime invasion (e.g., attack on Taiwan, the Philippines)</td>
<td>Possibly, but contribution would be minimal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Australian interest if contained</td>
<td>Possibly, but contribution would be minimal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land invasion (e.g., North Korea provocation)</td>
<td>Yes, there is an historical obligation to South Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Australian interest if contained</td>
<td>Yes, but contribution would be minimal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maritime conflict (e.g., SCS provocation)</td>
<td>Yes, but contribution would be minimal; highest country priorities are Indonesia and Malaysia; investing in this now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Australian interest, especially if spillover to southwest Pacific</td>
<td>Yes, but contribution would be minimal; highest country priorities are Indonesia and Malaysia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability operations (e.g., RFF to region, collapse of North Korea)</td>
<td>Yes, but contribution would be minimal; the Philippines would be higher priority; investing in this now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Australian interest, especially if spillover to southwest Pacific</td>
<td>Yes, but contribution would be minimal; the Philippines would be higher priority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C2ISR</strong></td>
<td>Yes, E-7 Wedgetail is unique capability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CSAR/PR</strong></td>
<td>No, no response option (historically reliant upon the United States)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Airlift</strong></td>
<td>Yes, but limited capacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tankers</strong></td>
<td>Yes, but limited capacity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** OCA = offensive counter-air missions; DCA = defensive counter-air missions; SEAD = suppression of enemy air defenses; C2ISR = command, control, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; CSAR/PR = combat search and rescue and personnel recovery; RFF = recognition friend or foe.
Chapter 3. India

This chapter examines India’s potential support to U.S. military operations across the range of contingencies and scenarios discussed in this study. As a major and growing U.S. security partner that is increasingly aligned with the United States against China, India might naturally be expected to assist U.S. military operations in any China-related contingency. However, this is unlikely. New Delhi’s support is only guaranteed if India itself becomes the target of Chinese aggression during a land invasion scenario. Beyond that, New Delhi’s traditionally nonaligned foreign and security policy strongly suggest that India would remain cautious and perhaps covert in its assistance to the U.S. military—if it assists at all—during any other China contingency. Distant scenarios that do not involve significant Indian interests, such as stabilization operations on the Korean Peninsula, are unlikely to produce significant Indian participation. (Other potential stabilization scenarios, such as ones involving Islamic extremist groups, might generate a bigger Indian role—particularly under Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Hindu nationalist government, which seeks to eliminate Islamic terrorist threats within India and along its periphery. If these terrorist groups are supported by movements outside South Asia, then India would likely take a keen interest in combating them as well.)

To assess the potential for India to support U.S. combat operations, we considered the categories of potential data outlined in Chapter 1. We also looked for the indicators specific to this case that appear to be especially decisive in determining the answer. In this case, the main factor included interests at stake in the specific scenario, fear of retaliation from the aggressor state involved, domestic politics and lack of a formal alliance with the United States, and public statements by senior officials.

India’s Strategic Concepts and National Interests

Since the founding of the modern Indian state by Jawaharlal Nehru in 1947, New Delhi has predominantly steered clear of forging security alliances with other nations and has instead pursued a nonaligned foreign and security policy. However, the utility of maintaining strict adherence to nonaligned policy has routinely been questioned, particularly during tumultuous

45 For more on the origins of India’s nonaligned foreign policy, see Lorne J. Kavic, India’s Quest for Security: Defence Policies 1947–1965, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Berkeley Press, 1967. For more on the evolution of Nehruvian nonaligned foreign policy, see Sumit Ganguly and Manjeet S. Pardesi, “Explaining Sixty Years of Indian Foreign Policy,” India Review, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2009. In the past several decades, Indian experts have argued that India’s foreign policy has been shifting away from Nehru’s nonalignment stance, even if it remains the lodestar. For example, see C. Raja Mahan, Crossing the Rubicon: The Shaping of India’s New Foreign Policy, London: Palgrave, 2004. For an argument against Nehruvian policy, see Ramesh Thakur, “India After Nonalignment,” Foreign Affairs, Vol. 71, No. 2, Spring 1992.
periods in recent Indian history. Most notably, India’s loss of a Himalayan border war against China in 1962 fueled concerns that New Delhi lacked adequate external support to balance Beijing’s superior military power. And as India and Pakistan were at war in 1971, the U.S. decision to officially recognize China and support Pakistan with arms prompted India to break nonalignment by signing the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation.46 In recent years, China’s growing assertiveness throughout the Indo-Pacific region—including against India at Doklam in 2017 and again along the disputed Line of Actual Control in the Himalayas in May–June 2020—has fueled Prime Minister Modi’s plan to shift India away from Nehruvian nonalignment and toward a stronger U.S.-India security partnership.47 Nevertheless, India has tried to maintain cordial and productive ties to China. For example, in 2018 and 2019, Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping met for informal summits at Wuhan and Chennai to hash out their differences. Their personal relationship, however, is yet to translate into tangible policy solutions. Most significantly, the Chinese and Indian militaries regularly continue to meet and negotiate on their disputed land border while both sides continue to dig in. Meanwhile, India’s relationship with Russia has persisted since the end of the Cold War, even though it would appear that the engagements offer New Delhi diminishing returns. Russian President Vladimir Putin visited India in December 2021, and the key deliverable was Russian-built S-400 missile defense system to India. Because the Indian military is overwhelmingly of Soviet or Russian origin, we expect this arms procurement relationship to continue for the foreseeable future. However, from a geostrategic standpoint, New Delhi decreasingly trusts Moscow because of the latter’s burgeoning relationship with Beijing. This is all the more reason to strengthen security ties to the United States.

Today, the U.S.-India security relationship is increasingly robust—featuring, for example, annual “2+2” meetings, as well as “foundational” military communications and logistics agreements (known as the Communications, Compatibility, and Security Agreement and the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement [LEMOA], respectively).48 As we have discussed in previous RAND Corporation research, New Delhi in recent years has also become an important recipient of U.S. security cooperation. Beyond the United States, RAND has assessed how India, among other countries, has further bolstered security ties to additional

46 Although not a formal military alliance, the treaty signaled unprecedented cooperation between India and the Soviet Union against the United States, China, and Pakistan during the Cold War.

47 For more on Modi’s intentions, which appear to be mostly driven by ideological rather than realist or pragmatic considerations, see Ian Hall, Modi and the Reinvention of Indian Foreign Policy, Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2019.

partners that can help New Delhi achieve its broad foreign policy and defense goals, including countering China.49

Modi’s push to deepen security ties with the United States and other key partners, along with a new term—multi-alignment—that has cropped up in the Indian foreign policy lexicon starting in September 2020, strongly suggest that New Delhi’s conception of nonalignment is changing. Multi-alignment advocates strengthening Indian partnerships with all countries that can reasonably support Indian national security interests.50 Still—and as RAND has observed as recently as April 2021—nonalignment has been and remains the center of gravity of Indian foreign and security policy. Even if New Delhi now prioritizes bolstering security ties with key partners, it will nevertheless continue to avoid any type of formal alignment with them.

India’s Willingness to Participate in U.S.-Led Operations

Maritime Aggression

In a maritime aggression or invasion scenario, potential Indian willingness to assist will depend largely on whether New Delhi itself is affected (see Table 3.1). For example, a Chinese attack against Indian territory, whether against mainland India or Indian military facilities on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, would almost certainly prompt New Delhi to respond. However, India’s willingness to request U.S. assistance is likely to be limited by New Delhi’s concerns of the appearance that it cannot handle its own affairs and nationalistic pride in self-reliance. This was the case during the May–June 2020 clashes against China along the disputed Line of Actual Control—when the Trump administration floated a proposal to mediate the conflict, New Delhi promptly rejected it.51 However, India did accept intelligence-sharing from the USAF during this episode. India’s willingness to engage the U.S. military is likely to grow commensurately with the severity of the crisis. Alternatively, if the United States is at war with China in another region apart from India to prevent maritime aggression or invasion, then New Delhi’s response is likely to be relatively restrained because of nonalignment. Nevertheless, it is possible that India would offer access to its military facilities through LEMOA and other agreements. For example, in September 2020 and for the first time ever, New Delhi granted a U.S. military aircraft (P-8 Poseidon) refueling access to India’s Andaman and Nicobar Islands under LEMOA.52 India is

now an active participant in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (or Quad), along with the United States, Australia, and Japan. The four countries are working together, in part, to deal with China. Hence, it would not be wholly surprising if India provided some level of access and support to the U.S. military—such as CSAR/PR and C2ISR for the purposes of our criteria—in a conflict against China beyond Indian shores.

Although the United States has no formal alliance with India, New Delhi continues to affirm the need to keep the Indo-Pacific region “free and open” from coercion, strongly suggesting that it plans to work closely with Washington to prevent Beijing from taking military action against Taiwan or against maritime counterclaimants in the South or East China Seas. However, there are no specific comments from Indian leaders that point to how New Delhi might decide whether it would assist the U.S. military in a maritime aggression or invasion contingency—and, if India were to do so, at what level of access and support. There are no specific senior leaders in a position to exercise a veto effect over Modi and his government. The domestic population is unlikely to support Indian involvement in a maritime aggression or invasion scenario if it is not against Indian territory. Coordinated action among partners, most notably within the Quad, might have a positive impact on Indian decisionmaking because such coordination would legitimize support to the U.S. military.

### Table 3.1. Assessment of India’s Support for U.S.-Led Scenario—Maritime Aggression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maritime aggression or Taiwan contingency</td>
<td>Does the country have vital interests at stake?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is there a formal U.S. alliance?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have officials made direct comments indicating possible or likely support</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for the United States in this scenario?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Have assurances or comments been made at the official level that suggest</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>willingness to support the United States in this scenario?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are key senior leaders who have potential veto power supportive of</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>partner engagement in this scenario?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the host government enjoy potential domestic support for helping the</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>United States in this scenario?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is the country’s support unconstrained by formal nonalignment policies or</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>traditions?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is the country’s support in this scenario independent of constraints</td>
<td>Depends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>imposed by interaction effects with other allies and partners?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Land Invasion

Regarding the second scenario analyzed in our study, a land invasion, the default scenario assessed was potential aggression by North Korea. Our assessment of India’s potential to

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contribute to U.S. operations assumes that scenario and concludes that it is unlikely India would participate directly (Table 3.2). Even if China were to launch a ground attack against India itself, New Delhi is prepared to defend itself without U.S. involvement. As noted, the Trump administration attempted to mediate the Line of Actual Control incident in May–June 2020, and New Delhi promptly rebuffed Washington’s overtures.

Beyond the scenario examined for this study, other possible land aggression contingencies could call for Indian involvement. For example, a Chinese land invasion against one of the smaller South Asian countries surrounding India—such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, or Nepal—would have enormous geostrategic consequences, meaning New Delhi is likely to intervene and perhaps look to the United States for support. This is not such a far-fetched scenario. As mentioned earlier, Chinese and Indian armies engaged in a months-long standoff at Doklam in 2017 over disputed Chinese road construction. China and Bhutan also have unresolved borders, and, at the time of this writing, the two countries are negotiating toward a resolution.54

Furthermore, there are growing concerns in India about China’s outreach and potential support to the president of Nepal, who hails from the Communist Party of Nepal.55 Although Beijing has traditionally looked down on them, communist Maoist-Naxalites in Nepal could be leveraged against the Nepalese government and India, provoking a future land war.56 It is also possible that China would support its close strategic partner Pakistan in a future border conflict against India along the Line of Actual Control through Kashmir.

Any such land invasion within India’s immediate neighborhood would probably result at least in Indian willingness to assist the U.S. military in the areas of CSAR/PR and C2IS and perhaps in other categories as well (OCA/DCA, SEAD, airlift, and tankers). Apart from invasions in South Asia, however, it is difficult to envision much Indian cooperation with the U.S. military given New Delhi’s nonalignment policy and lack of vital interests at risk. For example, India would likely play no role in assisting the U.S. military on the Korean Peninsula if North Korea invaded South Korea.

As with a maritime invasion, there are no specific comments from Indian leaders that point to how New Delhi might decide on whether it would assist the U.S. military in a land invasion contingency, and if India were to do so, at what level of access and support. Additionally, there are no specific senior leaders in a position to exercise a veto effect over Modi and his government, nor are there any significant domestic constraints for an attack on India or within India’s immediate neighborhood. Outside South Asia, however, gaining Indian support is likely to be difficult. Coordinated action among partners, most notably within the Quad, might have a

54 Sarah Zheng, “India’s Shadow Looms Large over Revived China-Bhutan Border Talks,” South China Morning Post, April 17, 2021.
positive impact on Indian decisionmaking because such coordination would legitimize support to the U.S. military.

Table 3.2. Assessment of India’s Support for U.S.-Led Scenario—Land Invasion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Land invasion or Korea contingency</td>
<td>Does the country have vital interests at stake?</td>
<td>Depends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is there a formal U.S. alliance?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have officials made direct comments indicating possible or likely support for the United States in this scenario?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have assurances or comments been made at the official level that suggest willingness to support the United States in this scenario?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are key senior leaders who have potential veto power supportive of partner engagement in this scenario?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the host government enjoy potential domestic support for helping the United States in this scenario?</td>
<td>Depends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is the country’s support unconstrained by formal nonalignment policies or traditions?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is the country’s support in this scenario independent of constraints imposed by interaction effects with other allies and partners?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Maritime Conflict**

Similar to the maritime aggression or invasion and land invasion scenarios at a remove from India that we have already detailed, New Delhi is also likely to refrain from becoming too involved in a maritime conflict in the SCS, East China Sea, or elsewhere in the Indo-Pacific. New Delhi’s core policy of nonalignment would certainly play a significant role in this decision. A competing factor would be deficiencies in India’s “Act East” (formerly “Look East”) policy. Act East calls on New Delhi to play an increasingly active role in East and Southeast Asian affairs insofar as developments there affect Indian national security.\(^5^7\)

Beijing’s increasingly coercive behavior against maritime counterclaimants in the SCS—a key commercial shipping route for global trade—is a good example. India has noticeably strengthened security ties to Vietnam to counter China in recent years. For instance, the two nations conducted combined naval exercises in the SCS in 2018.\(^5^8\) India is reportedly selling the Philippines the BrahMos antiship cruise missile, which could seriously complicate China’s plan to control the entirety of the SCS within its “Nine-Dashed Line.”\(^5^9\) Despite New Delhi’s activities in the region, it generally lacks the resources to outcompete China, and thus the United


\(^5^9\) Alan Robles and Raissa Robles, “Will Buying India’s BrahMos Missiles Give the Philippines an Edge in South China Sea Dispute with Beijing?” *South China Morning Post*, March 5, 2021.
States should not expect India to be in a position to leverage its minimal influence much beyond South Asia. Either way, and as is the case in other scenarios, New Delhi’s nonalignment policy is likely to circumscribe any assistance given to the U.S. military in a maritime conflict. It is possible, however, that India might offer low visibility and low-cost support to the U.S. military, such as CSAR/PR and C2ISR.

There are no specific comments from Indian leaders that point to how New Delhi might decide on whether it would assist the U.S. military in a maritime conflict contingency, and if India were to do so, at what level of access and support. Additionally, there are no specific senior leaders in a position to exercise a veto effect over Modi and his government. It is unclear whether the domestic population would support Indian involvement in a maritime conflict scenario. Coordinated action among partners, most notably within the Quad, might have a positive impact on Indian decisionmaking because such coordination would legitimize support to the U.S. military (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3. Assessment of India’s Support for U.S.-Led Scenario—Maritime Conflict

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maritime conflict</td>
<td>Does the country have vital interests at stake?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is there a formal U.S. alliance?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have officials made direct comments indicating possible or likely support for the United States in this scenario?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have assurances or comments been made at the official level that suggest willingness to support the United States in this scenario?</td>
<td>Depends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are key senior leaders who have potential veto power supportive of partner engagement in this scenario?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the host government enjoy potential domestic support for helping the United States in this scenario?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is the country’s support unconstrained by formal nonalignment policies or traditions?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is the country’s support in this scenario independent of constraints imposed by interaction effects with other allies and partners?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stabilization Operations

Finally, the fourth scenario examined in this report—stabilization operations—could see India provide support to the U.S. military, depending on the specific target (Table 3.4). If the U.S. military is conducting stabilization operations against North Korea, for example (as in the default scenario considered for this analysis), India is almost certain to remain on the sidelines because of its nonalignment policy. However, other potential scenarios—such as U.S. stabilization operations against Islamic terrorists, whether in South Asia or beyond—are more likely to elicit some Indian assistance. This is because New Delhi has a Hindu nationalist-led government under Prime Minister Modi that is highly suspicious of Islamic extremists operating
within and around India. The Modi government has sought partnerships with like-minded nations—such as Israel, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates—to root out Islamic extremism. Although India is primarily worried about threats emanating from archrival and neighbor Pakistan, New Delhi is concerned about the wider regional and global nexus that funds and otherwise enables terrorist attacks in India. Moreover, with the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, New Delhi is likely to become increasingly concerned that Pakistani support to the Taliban, Haqqani Network, and other Islamic terrorist groups that are not only anti-U.S. but also anti-India might fill the security vacuum there. India has consistently and adamantly rejected the notion that it would ever send troops to Afghanistan. In January 2021, for example, Indian Army Chief Manoj Mukund Naravane stated that “as far as Afghanistan is concerned, there are no plans whatsoever to commit boots on the ground and neither do we envisage such a scenario developing in the near future.” But if the situation there dramatically worsens and Washington decides to return temporarily, then New Delhi may feel compelled to provide some assistance to quell the chaos that might affect India. For the purposes of supporting a U.S. stabilization operation against Islamic extremists, India could be expected to provide CSAR/PR and C2ISR assistance. India might offer additional assistance if the target warrants it, though for the purposes of our study, U.S. operations against nonstate actor groups are unlikely to require Indian OCA/DCA, SEAD, airlift, or tanker support.

There are no specific comments from Indian leaders that point to how New Delhi might decide whether it would assist the U.S. military in a stabilization contingency, and if India were to do so, at what level of access and support. Additionally, there are no specific senior leaders in a position to exercise a veto effect over Modi and his government. If a stabilization operation is against Islamic terrorist targets, then the domestic population is likely to be supportive. Coordinated action among partners, most notably within the Quad, might have a positive impact on Indian decisionmaking because such coordination would legitimize support to the U.S. military.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stabilization operations</td>
<td>Does the country have vital interests at stake?</td>
<td>Depends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is there a formal U.S. alliance?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have officials made direct comments indicating possible or likely support for the United States in this scenario?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have assurances or comments been made at the official level that suggest willingness to support the United States in this scenario?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are key senior leaders who have potential veto power supportive of partner engagement in this scenario?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the host government enjoy potential domestic support for helping the United States in this scenario?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is the country’s support unconstrained by formal nonalignment policies or traditions?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is the country’s support in this scenario independent of constraints imposed by interaction effects with other allies and partners?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ultimately, New Delhi is likely to determine whether it will support U.S. military operations in the scenarios detailed in this report according to the extent to which Indian national security interests are at stake (Table 3.5). However, and counterintuitively, if India itself is in jeopardy, then the likelihood of it requesting U.S. military assistance is low because of nationalistic pride and a desire to demonstrate competence to the domestic population. Working with the United States on addressing threats immediately beyond India’s borders, however, is likely to elicit better results, including not only CSAR/PR and C2ISR but also higher-end assistance (such as OCA/DCA, SEAD, airlift, and tankers). India is far less likely to support U.S. military operations farther afield, such as in the SCS. Regardless, New Delhi may be willing to provide CSAR/PR and C2ISR assistance for any U.S. military operations not directly involving the defense of India.
Table 3.5. Assessment of India’s Support for U.S.-Led Scenarios by Mission Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Missions</th>
<th>OCA/DCA</th>
<th>SEAD</th>
<th>C2ISR</th>
<th>CSAR/PR</th>
<th>Airlift</th>
<th>Tankers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maritime</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aggression</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Possible</td>
<td>Possible</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land</td>
<td>Possible; depends on</td>
<td>Possible; depends on</td>
<td>Possible; depends on</td>
<td>Possible; depends on</td>
<td>Possible; depends on</td>
<td>Possible; depends on</td>
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<tr>
<td>Invasion</td>
<td>whether Chinese</td>
<td>whether Chinese</td>
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<td>aggression is aimed</td>
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<td>at India or its</td>
<td>at India or its</td>
<td>at India or its</td>
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<td>at India or its</td>
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<td></td>
<td>neighborhood</td>
<td>neighborhood</td>
<td>neighborhood</td>
<td>neighborhood</td>
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<td>neighborhood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maritime</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Depends on India’s</td>
<td>Depends on India’s</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>conflict</td>
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<td>threat perception from China</td>
<td>threat perception from China</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>Depends on whether</td>
<td>Depends on whether</td>
<td>Depends on whether</td>
<td>Depends on whether</td>
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<tr>
<td>operations</td>
<td>China is involved;</td>
<td>China is involved;</td>
<td>China is involved;</td>
<td>China is involved;</td>
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<td>terrorists</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>Depends on whether</td>
<td>Depends on whether</td>
<td>Depends on whether</td>
<td>Depends on whether</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>operations</td>
<td>China is involved;</td>
<td>China is involved;</td>
<td>China is involved;</td>
<td>China is involved;</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 4. Indonesia

Indonesian foreign policy is deeply committed to the ideas of nonalignment and the avoidance of blocs.⁶⁴ These commitments, which stem from a long history as a colony and an abiding suspicion regarding the intentions of foreign powers, create a hard limit to the extent of cooperation with the United States, even in the event of many types of crises. Requests that are perceived as forcing the country into a de facto alliance or firmly into the U.S. camp will not be well received. The country has thus far seen a fair degree of military cooperation with the United States, but Indonesia has security relationships with many other regional powers and a deep relationship with China in the economic realm. Indonesia’s constitution forbids the joining of military blocs of alliances, so this is not only an ideological commitment but a legal one, which adds a layer of difficulty to any effort to station forces on Indonesian territory or request further cooperation in all but the most-severe crises that endanger Indonesian territory directly.⁶⁵ Continued midlevel and noninvasive cooperation should be expected within the framework of the policy of nonalignment.

Our assessment of Indonesia’s likelihood to support U.S.-led operations in any of the scenarios considered in our study was derived from Indonesian government sources, previous RAND research, scholarly work on Indonesian foreign policy, and some coverage of contemporary events in Indonesian actions and statements in the foreign policy realm. Altogether, these sources indicate what Indonesia considers to be its core national interests and overall strategic concepts, given its position in the international system. Our analysis looked at current and ongoing cooperation that Indonesia has with the United States, along with the trends in the U.S. military’s relationship with Indonesia over time, among other factors that help determine Indonesia’s likely alignment in a crisis. Furthermore, we considered the domestic politics of the country, the constraints that exist within the domestic sphere in legal terms and de facto constraints that arise from public opinion. These sources and issues of focus combine to support the determination described in this report—that Indonesia is likely to continue to work moderately with the United States but within its traditional nonaligned status, even in the event of any of the crisis scenarios presented here.


Indonesia’s Strategic Concepts and National Interests

Indonesia’s foreign policy has been “independent and active” since the country’s split from its colonial power (the Dutch Empire) following World War II. In practical terms, this means that the country has “a million friends and zero enemies.” Indonesian strategy is defined by three main objectives that define its national interests: first, to support continued national development, with an emphasis on economic development; second, to preserve internal and regional stability to support national development; and third, to protect the territorial integrity of the country and protect the people. Leadership will continue these policies by avoiding decisions that are perceived as picking sides (such as declaring the extent of military cooperation with any particular country) because such decisions could imperil both regional stability and continued economic development. This leads to security relationships with nearly all major powers in the Indo-Pacific, including China. However, this balance of security relationships largely enmeshes the country in a network of associations that links the country with more U.S. allies than it does with U.S. competitors. On top of this dense network of connections, China is seen by the leadership of Indonesia as the only realistic near-term foe, because of tensions in the SCS.

Although this network of relationships nests the country’s foreign policy in a relatively favorable framework, there are just as robust a set of obstacles to higher levels of engagement between Washington and Jakarta. First, there is little appetite for confrontation with Beijing because of the economic leverage that the Chinese economy has over Indonesia and the heavy imbalance in capabilities between the PLA and the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI, for Tentara Nasional Indonesia). Although Jakarta would love a resolution to the SCS issues, there is little belief that China actually intends to engage in full-scale conflict with Indonesia or sponsor insurgencies within Indonesia itself. This leaves some tensions between China and Indonesia but certainly not a state of open animosity, which reduces the incentives for the leadership in Jakarta to abandon its long history of nonalignment. Indonesia’s relationship with China will continue to be less than fully positive, and Indonesia will continue to see China as a means to further economic development, especially as the Chinese leadership has engaged the administration of President Joko Widodo (“Jokowi”) further on his goals of focusing on internal socioeconomic challenges.

Much of Indonesia’s foreign policy can be said to resemble that of its neighbor, Malaysia, though the two differ on how much they emphasize working through the Association of

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68 Blank, 2021.
69 Blank, 2021.
70 Emmers, 2019.
Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Although the official foreign policy line from the Indonesian government remains that ASEAN will continue to be a pillar of the country’s efforts, there has been increasing resistance from other ASEAN members, particularly to the country’s focus on democracy and human rights.\(^{71}\) Although other countries see ASEAN as a way of amplifying their power in negotiations with larger powers, Indonesia is a larger country than most in ASEAN and sometimes has slightly different priorities. Since these priorities of human rights and democracy are often not shared by “least common denominator” states, such as Myanmar and Laos, Indonesia has come to see acting independently as increasingly necessary.\(^{72}\) Although Indonesia will continue to act through ASEAN as part of its pattern of having “a million friends and zero enemies,” its priorities are beginning to take shape independent of the organization, even though much of its foreign policy remains in alignment with ASEAN efforts to keep the region out of great power conflicts.

These perspectives have led Indonesia to pursue growing security ties with the United States, though within strict limits. Indonesia annually hosts the bilateral Garuda Shield exercises on its territory, which is part of U.S. Army Pacific’s Pacific Pathways program of exercises throughout the Indo-Pacific. The exercises are sponsored by U.S. Army Pacific and generally feature a Staff Exercise and a Field Training Exercise; these include aviation components, such as medical evacuation.\(^{73}\) Although these exercises are helpful in building out capabilities, exercising them, and developing some mutual understandings between the forces, a consistent theme in coverage of them is the importance that needs to be placed on shows of respect toward Indonesia and the TNI.\(^{74}\) U.S. forces often focus on “checking off a list” of things accomplished in an exercise, but far more important to Indonesia are relationships, respect, ceremony, ritual, and elements of formality. Demonstrations of respect and patience are key to the ability to work with the TNI and to the country’s willingness to continue working with the U.S. military.

As mentioned earlier, there is a limit to the willingness to work with U.S. forces, regardless of the signs of respect that are demonstrated. Jokowi rejected a recent proposal to host ISR forces on the country’s territory because doing so was perceived to violate the country’s constitutional provision against joining military blocs or alliances.\(^{75}\) Although such a move could be considered a relatively noninvasive one with a light footprint and without heavy connotations of military alliance, it veered too close to sensitivities around the policy of nonalignment. This decision indicates the general level of willingness to work with U.S. forces in any politically sensitive ways. Two other factors compound this outlook: The country does not have a positive view of

\(^{71}\) Nur Yasmin, “Indonesia’s Foreign Policy Priorities for the Next 5 Years,” *Jakarta Globe*, October 29, 2019.
\(^{72}\) Emmers, 2019.
\(^{74}\) Blank, 2021.
\(^{75}\) Suoneto, 2020.
foreigners, and only 42 percent have a positive view of the United States, as of 2018.\textsuperscript{76} This level of public support, which is moderate at best, provides very little by way of incentivizing the leadership to work more extensively with the United States. That being the case, there is a low ceiling to Indonesian willingness to host U.S. forces beyond things like HADR trainings or the yearly Garuda Shield exercises.

**Indonesia’s Willingness to Participate in U.S.-Led Operations**

Although Indonesia’s security interests (such as the preservation of sovereignty and guarding against encroachment from revisionist powers) are in close harmony with those of the United States, Indonesia’s commitment to nonalignment is profound.\textsuperscript{77} There are significant obstacles to increased cooperation with Indonesia that go beyond the constitutional prohibition against alignment, such as low funding for the military, slow and ad hoc decisionmaking within the Indonesian military bureaucracy, and a political structure outside the military that is much more susceptible to foreign pressures and incentives than much of the military establishment. Indonesia’s political system has individuals within it who remember a previous era in which the country relied heavily on the United States, and some hold the perception that this reliance came back to bite Indonesia during the economic sanctions imposed in the 1990s. That experience has predisposed the country’s overarching decisionmakers to follow the “thousand friends and zero enemies” strategy going forward, even if the actual result is that the country is left with a thousand enemies and zero friends.

In terms of the scenarios laid out in this report, the likeliest ones for Indonesia to provide support would be the two maritime scenarios. Although Indonesia would, of course, object to direct aggression against its territories in the SCS, its trade and economic interests in the region are more expansive than its direct territory. Given its geography, Indonesia is highly reliant on trade and trade routes through the SCS, so aggressive action in this region that imperils Indonesia’s economic prospects presents a “real threat” to the country.\textsuperscript{78} In recent years, Indonesia has more assertively guarded its sovereignty and interests in the maritime domain, including sending its F-16s to patrol its SCS territories and firing warning shots at Chinese vessels encroaching on its territorial waters.\textsuperscript{79}

As with many countries in Southeast Asia, the likelihood of support for the United States in the case of maritime conflict depends on the circumstances of the conflict itself. Support from


\textsuperscript{77} Blank, 2021.

\textsuperscript{78} “South China Sea Conflict a Real Threat to Indonesia,” *Jakarta Post*, September 20, 2014.

Indonesia will depend on the nature of the conflict’s onset, whether there is an overt aggressor, and whether Indonesian officials believe that the conflict precludes a continuation of its policy of positive relations with all parties involved in some way. Indonesia would likely have to see its trade, economic interests in the SCS, or direct territory imperiled; it would also have to be able to attribute these threats directly to China’s behavior. These elements would disaffect neutral parties within the political class that see continued benefits from maintaining positive relations with China and allow the country’s officials to argue to the general public that it is in their interest to defend Indonesian sovereignty against an encroaching threat (most of the population does not see China that way). If officials find these arguments are lacking or believe that a restoration of normal relations with China is possible after a conflict, they are likely to continue the country’s policy of nonalignment in order to bear short-term pain in exchange for the continuation of long-term economic gains from China in the aftermath. The economic relationship with Beijing would be easier to restore if Indonesia did not support opposition to China in the conflict. Therefore, Indonesia’s support for the United States in a maritime conflict is possible, but it would have to meet an extremely narrow set of conditions for it to be realized.

Indonesian support during a land invasion is even less likely, given Indonesia’s geography. Few Indonesian core interests would be at stake under such a circumstance, and it is unlikely that officials would see a land invasion as necessarily a threat to the country itself. Again, however, it would depend on where the invasion occurs, who the target is, and under what circumstances the invasion arose. If it is a blatant aggressive move on behalf of China against a fellow ASEAN state, and there is a uniform negative response to such an action from the whole of ASEAN, Indonesia would be more likely to provide support. In the event of a North Korean land invasion scenario, Indonesia is similarly unlikely to support U.S. operations. Indonesia does not see itself as having any national interests at stake regarding the Korean Peninsula, and it has little trade with South Korea that would be imperiled. Without a crucial national interest at stake, such as the disruption of trade or a threat to Indonesia’s own territory, it is unlikely that Indonesian support would be forthcoming.

For a stability operations scenario, it again depends on the location and nature of the issue. Indonesia would be more likely to support nearby stability operations against insurgencies that either directly or indirectly threaten Indonesia itself. Indonesia has consistently stated that domestic security and antiseparatism are key goals in its foreign policy, with primary objectives focusing on maintaining both internal and regional stability in order to provide a conducive environment for national development. However, consistent with Indonesia’s policy of guarding its sovereignty, the country would likely insist on being at the forefront of operations rather than supporting the efforts of the United States or others. In this scenario, Indonesian support depends on the degree of ASEAN’s commitment to the issue, with greater ASEAN buy-

in likely producing more support from Indonesia. Indonesian support is also contingent on the degree of China’s disinterest in the issue, as Jakarta has thus far been unwilling to take many actions that would be objectionable to Beijing. Therefore, this scenario is unlikely to generate Indonesian support unless the country’s direct national interest is engaged against a nearby threat, ASEAN is on board, and China does not have a vested interest. Secondarily, support from Indonesia would be much more likely to come in operations consisting largely of HADR, a field in which Indonesia has a great deal of recent experience and looks to be a supporter of its neighbors in such instances.

Overall, Indonesian foreign policy is defined by its nonalignment, and this is unlikely to change in any of the scenarios considered in our study. However, in the event of a very specific course of events that puts Indonesia or its critical interests under threat or precludes the continuation of relationships or the restoration of normal relationships after a conflict, there is a greater possibility that Indonesia would provide support in various forms. For the most part, these scenarios are limited to direct attacks on Indonesian territory, and ASEAN would likely have to be highly unified in favor of support, which is difficult to envision in multiple scenarios given the alignment of several members with China.

Indonesia has thus far proved to be highly unwilling to provide its territory as the base of operations for U.S. forces and it consistently objects to the use of its airspace by U.S. forces. These are indications of Indonesia’s overall foreign policy leaning and how likely it is to support U.S.-led operations in any of these scenarios. Indonesia has a vested interest in the continuation of its hedging strategy (to maintain the benefits that it receives from security cooperation with multiple partners and the gains from trade with China); thus, overcoming its desire to proceed along these lines, even in the event of conflict, is a high hurdle. Indonesian forces are also unlikely to provide significant support to the United States in the event of conflict, except in extreme situations; this stems from both a lack of capability and a likely lack of political desire to engage in picking sides.

Our look into Indonesian politics thus produces the expectations for Indonesian involvement in the scenarios outlined in Table 4.1.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenarios</th>
<th>OCA/DCA</th>
<th>SEAD</th>
<th>C2ISR</th>
<th>CSAR/PR</th>
<th>Airlift</th>
<th>Tankers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maritime invasion (for example, attack on Taiwan, the Philippines)</td>
<td>DCA, only if directly threatened, but dependent on nature of war onset</td>
<td>Unlikely to support nondefensive missions; little capability</td>
<td>If directly threatened; dependent on nature of war onset</td>
<td>If directly threatened, but dependent on nature of war onset—only for defensive or HADR</td>
<td>If directly threatened, but dependent on nature of war onset—only for defensive or HADR</td>
<td>If directly threatened, but dependent on nature of war onset—only for defensive or HADR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land invasion (for example, North Korean provocation)</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maritime conflict (for example, SCS provocation)</td>
<td>DCA, if directly threatened</td>
<td>Unlikely to support nondefensive missions; little capability</td>
<td>If directly threatened or trade is imperiled, but dependent on nature of war onset</td>
<td>If directly threatened or trade is imperiled, but dependent on nature of war onset—only for defensive or HADR</td>
<td>If directly threatened or trade is imperiled, but dependent on nature of war onset—only for defensive or HADR</td>
<td>If directly threatened or trade is imperiled, but dependent on nature of war onset—only for defensive or HADR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability operations (for example, collapse of North Korea)</td>
<td>If there is a direct threat near Indonesia or little Chinese interest</td>
<td>If there is a direct threat near Indonesia or little Chinese interest</td>
<td>If there is a direct threat near Indonesia or little Chinese interest</td>
<td>If there is a direct threat near Indonesia or little Chinese interest</td>
<td>If there is a direct threat near Indonesia or little Chinese interest</td>
<td>If there is a direct threat near Indonesia or little Chinese interest</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: The term *if directly threatened* implies a direct attack on Indonesian territory or assets.
Chapter 5. Japan

Japan is one of America’s most reliable allies in the Indo-Pacific. Its armed forces, called the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), is composed of three services: the Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF), Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF), and Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF). The GSDF is the largest, at roughly 140,000 personnel; the MSDF and ASDF are roughly equivalent in size with approximately 42,000 personnel. Despite its size, the ASDF has procured some of the world’s most advanced air platforms: F-35A and B fighters, E-2D airborne early warning and control aircraft, C-2 transport, RQ-4B Global Hawk unmanned ISR, and the KC-46A refueler and transport aircraft. Additionally, the ASDF conducts annual exercises with the USAF, such as Cope North or Keen Edge, helping ensure interoperability between the forces.

This chapter seeks to examine what Japan may be willing to have its ASDF do in the four scenarios of our study. After explaining what Japanese law permits in specific situations, we describe each scenario and consider possible support in the following categories: OCA/DCA, SEAD, C2ISR, CSAR/PR, airlift, and aerial refueling tankers. We conclude that, aside from C2ISR, Japan’s willingness to support U.S. operations will be a function of how political leadership defines a situation, with broad operational support possible under only limited situations.

Japan’s Strategic Concepts and National Interests

Japan’s guiding strategic concept is called the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy. Since it was first revealed in August 2016, it has morphed into simply being referred to as the FOIP concept. In its initial rendering, FOIP focused on “fostering the confluence of the Pacific and Indian Oceans and of Asia and Africa into a place that values freedom, the rule of law, and the market economy, free from force or coercion, and making it prosperous.” Today, FOIP focuses on promoting the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and free trade; pursuing economic prosperity; and maintaining a commitment to peace and stability. The objective is enhancing connectivity of Asia, Africa, and everything in between, with the promotion of infrastructure investment and development as one of the most visible pillars. Although FOIP aims to enhance stability and uphold the international order, it actively counters Chinese activities, albeit subtly.

82 Abe Shinzo, “Address at the Opening Session of the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI),” speech, Nairobi, Kenya, August 27, 2016.
It does so by calling for protection of the global commons from unlawful behavior, by providing Japanese assistance as an alternative to Chinese assistance, and by escalating the focus on normative values, such as rule of law, as guiding values for the region. Seen this way, FOIP is inherently a counter-China strategy, although Japanese officials do not characterize it as such.

Given the attractiveness of an approach that works as a regional engagement strategy while subtly countering Chinese influence, FOIP has expanded the number of stakeholders with which Japan can partner. Furthermore, variants of FOIP have been adopted by other countries. India has an Act East policy as well as what some call a free, open, inclusive Indo-Pacific strategy. Australia focuses on attaining a stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific. France and Germany both released Indo-Pacific–focused strategic documents. ASEAN published an ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific meant to help the Southeast Asian grouping to “face challenges and seize opportunities arising from the current and future regional and global environments.” The most blatant copying of FOIP was by the United States which released a Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy in 2019, and the Biden administration continues to promote FOIP. Although these strategies do have some differences, their common theme drawn from Japan’s FOIP concept is that disputes in the Indo-Pacific region should be resolved peacefully in accordance with international law, that economic markets need to be open and freedom of navigation needs to be secured, and that states should not have to live in fear of the threat or use of military coercion.

Japan’s strategy is motivated by an interest in protecting the stability and prosperity of the international order. However, in its 2013 National Security Strategy (its only security strategy at the time of writing), Tokyo states only its willingness to strengthen the deterrence necessary for maintaining its own survival and for deterring and defeating threats against Japan, not the broader region. Among Tokyo’s stated interests, the primary ones are independence and sovereignty, territorial integrity, safety of Japanese nationals, and survival. This sentiment is reinforced in the most current (at the time of writing) National Defense Program Guidelines

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which state that Japan’s defense objectives are to deter threats from reaching Japan or to counter threats that do reach Japan.\footnote{Ministry of Defense of Japan, \textit{National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2019 and Beyond}, Tokyo, December 18, 2018, p. 8.}

Japan’s willingness to use force, therefore, revolves primarily around self-defense. Tokyo states that it is willing to deploy all forces at its disposal to counter and defeat any threat against Japan. For example, government documents say that the SDF will, among other things, block access and landing of invading forces while ensuring maritime and air superiority, retake any Japanese territory “by employing all necessary measures” should any part be occupied, and implement cross-domain operations to block and eliminate attacks.\footnote{Ministry of Defense of Japan, \textit{Defense of Japan 2020 [令和2年版防衛白書]}, Tokyo, 2020a, p. 252.} In contrast, despite its interest in maintaining the international order, Japan does not publicly indicate any interest in supporting regional conflicts that are not related to Japan’s own defense. Instead, Japanese statements and public documents focus attention on the general threat posed by China or North Korea and Japan’s interest in peaceful resolution of these challenges. Even when Japan explicitly mentions the “critical” importance of maintaining open sea lanes in places like the SCS because of Japanese dependence on natural energy resources from the Middle East, the government only says its interests lie in enhancing law enforcement capabilities of coastal states or strengthening cooperation with partners.\footnote{Government of Japan, 2013, p. 17.} Despite the lack of explicit acknowledgement of Japan’s willingness to act in areas outside Japan’s defense, there are hints related to each of the three geographic situations highlighted in this report.

Tokyo regularly highlights the security challenge that China poses to Japan and the region, but it has historically not usually spoken about Chinese activities vis-à-vis Taiwan. Japan does, however, consider Taiwan “an extremely crucial partner and an important friend, with which it shares fundamental values such as freedom, democracy, basic human rights, and the rule of law, and enjoys close economic relations and people-to-people exchanges.”\footnote{Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, \textit{Diplomatic Bluebook 2020}, Tokyo, 2020, p. 58.} Although this does not indicate whether Japan is willing to help defend Taiwan, it demonstrates closeness. More-recent statements, however, indicate Japan’s \textit{possible} willingness to support operations regarding Taiwan. For example, much attention was given to then–State Minister for Defense Nakayama Yasuhide referring in English to Taiwan as a “red line” in a December 2020 online event.\footnote{Ju-min Park, “Japan Official, Calling Taiwan ‘Red Line,’ Urges Biden to ‘Be Strong,’” Reuters, December 25, 2020.} In March 2021, U.S. and Japanese officials referred to the “importance of peace and stability” in the Taiwan Strait, notable because it marked the first reference to the Taiwan Strait in a joint statement between foreign affairs and defense officials since 2005; a summit statement between Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide and President Joe Biden the next month included the first such
reference in a leaders’ statement since 1969. Following the summit, Defense Minister Kishi Nobuo told reporters that the stability of Taiwan is important for the security of Japan. In July 2021, then–Deputy Prime Minister Aso Tarō told an audience at a private fundraising event that “[i]f a major problem occurred on Taiwan, it is not too much to say that it would unmistakably relate to a situation threatening [Japan’s] survival. Japan and the United States must defend Taiwan together.” For many, these statements reinforced the notion that Japanese officials have taken a more forward-leaning position on Taiwan, hinting at potential willingness to directly involve Japan in a Taiwan scenario. However, as Indiana University scholar Adam Liff has noted, these developments do not indicate any major change in Japan’s commitment or official posture toward the Taiwan Strait issue—and Japan remains ambiguous about its role in the event of Chinese aggression against Taiwan.

With regard to the Korean Peninsula, Japan considers the “peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula . . . an extremely important challenge not only to Japan but to the entire region of East Asia.” Moreover, North Korea remains one of Japan’s main policy priorities. Like its numerous statements delineating the threat posed by Beijing, Tokyo only indicates in broad terms the security challenges posed by North Korea, such as its development and acquisition of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles, enhancement of its operation capabilities, and continued improvements in its cyber units and special operation forces as posing “grave and imminent threats to Japan’s security and significantly undermine the peace and security of the region and the international community.” Tokyo says these trends “pose grave and imminent threats to Japan’s security.” Although Tokyo does not publicly speak about how it would react to North Korean provocation against South Korea, it has said that North Korea’s “possession of nuclear weapons cannot be tolerated,” suggesting that it would support (politically, in the very least) efforts to disarm North Korea of these weapons. Moreover, given Tokyo’s objective of the “dismantlement of all weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles of all ranges in a complete, verifiable, and irreversible manner, in accordance with a series of relevant UN [United

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99 “Possibility of Taiwan Emergency ‘Survival Crisis Situation;’ Deputy Prime Minister Aso” [“台湾有事「存立危機事態」にあたる可能性” 麻生副総理], NHK Seiji Magazine [NHK 政治マガジン], July 6, 2021.
100 Adam P. Liff, “Has Japan’s Policy Toward the Taiwan Strait Changed?” Brookings Institution, August 23, 2021.
102 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2020, p. 17.

Nations] Security Council (UNSC) resolutions,” there is reason to believe that Japan would be interested in the activities on the Peninsula in a post-conflict scenario.\textsuperscript{106}

Finally, Japan has expressed an interest in the SCS, calling it “a legitimate concern of the international community that is directly related to the peace and stability of the region.”\textsuperscript{107} Although it does not call the SCS a vital interest, Japan recognizes Southeast Asia as occupying “a strategic position for traffic, linking the Pacific and the Indian Oceans” and thus important because Japan relies on maritime transport for its economy and the livelihoods of Japanese.\textsuperscript{108} The “safety of [this] maritime and air traffic,” in turn, is “fundamental to its peace and prosperity.”\textsuperscript{109} It can be inferred that anything negatively affecting this traffic would therefore be of interest to Japan, necessitating a response of some sort.

**Japan’s Willingness to Participate in U.S.-Led Operations**

Although these statements demonstrate that Japan has an interest in what occurs in the region, they lack specificity on whether Japan would be willing to militarily support operations concerning them. In this section, we seek to address that. We begin by explaining what Japanese law would permit in the four scenarios of our study: (1) maritime aggression by China against Taiwan; (2) land invasion of South Korea by North Korea; (3) maritime conflict involving China in the SCS; and (4) stabilization operations on the Korean Peninsula following a collapse of North Korea. Each of these discussions features insight into what Tokyo may be willing to do.

Japan’s constitution, and the laws and legal interpretations derived from it, place constraints on what Japan can do with its SDF. Japan’s constitution renounces war and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes.\textsuperscript{110} And although the constitution prohibits the maintenance of war potential, governments have interpreted the constitution as renouncing aggressive war, not defensive, thus making the SDF constitutional as a defensive force. Therefore, Japanese governments have followed a principle of exclusive defense-orientation (専守防衛), which effectively places limits on the SDF and how Japan can use force. Effectively, it means Japan limits itself to using the “minimum necessary level” for the self-defense of Japan.\textsuperscript{111}

Despite the United States and Japan being treaty allies, there is nothing stipulated in the security treaty that obligates Japan to support U.S. military operations or come to the defense of

\textsuperscript{106} Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2020, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{109} Ministry of Defense of Japan, 2018, p. 7.
the United States if it or its territories are attacked. Instead, the basis for understanding Japan’s willingness to participate in the aforementioned scenarios is rooted in Japanese law. Over the past decade, Japan has reinterpreted domestic laws in ways that have expanded the scope of activities the SDF is legally permitted to perform and the geographical areas in which it can operate. Japanese involvement relies purely on a political decision by the prime minister. With the exception of ISR, which is generally considered to be a guaranteed area of support under the Ministry of Defense Establishment Law, the key to understanding possible Japanese participation in these scenarios is rooted in two broad legal interpretations.\footnote{Government of Japan, Ministry of Defense Establishment Law [防衛省設置法], Law No. 164, 1954a, (Revised: 2020, Law No. 19), Article 4 [第四条十八], Section 18.}

The first pertains to a situation characterized as having an “important influence” on Japan’s peace and security (重要影響事態). This situation is one that, if not addressed, will affect Japan’s peace and security and potentially lead to a direct armed attack against Japan.\footnote{Government of Japan, Law Concerning Measures to Ensure Peace and Security of Japan in Situations That Will have an Important Influence on Japan’s Peace and Security [重要影響事態に際して我が国の平和及び安全を確保するための措置に関する法律], Law No. 60, 1999 (Revised: 2015, Law No. 76), Article 1 [第一条].} According to legislation detailing authorized SDF activities in this situation, SDF involvement is limited to noncombat, rear-area support, and SAR activities in areas where combat is not taking place.\footnote{Government of Japan, 1999, Article 2 [第二条], Sections 1, 2, and 3.} There is no geographical limitation on where this activity can take place, although if it is conducted in or above foreign territory, that government will need to approve the SDF operating there.\footnote{Government of Japan, 1999, Article 2 [第二条], Section 4.} According to Article 4, the measures that the government is able to take in this situation are limited to rear-area support, SAR, ship inspections, and other necessary measures.\footnote{Government of Japan, 1999, Article 4 [第四条].} That said, these activities cannot be regarded as violating a prohibition on integration with the use of force with another military (武力行使との一体化).\footnote{Hiroshi Sasamoto and Naoki Kuwayama, “Diet Debate Regarding Logistics Support Legislation: Revision of the Law Concerning Measures for Peace and Security in Situations in Areas Surrounding Japan and the International Peace Support Bill” [“後方支援法制に関する国会論議: 周辺事態安全確保法 改正案、国際平和支援法案”], Legislation and Research [立法と調査], No. 372, December 2015; Ministry of Defense of Japan, “Response to an Important Influence Situation” [“重要影響事態への対応”], 2020 Defense White Paper [令和2年版防衛白書], Tokyo, 2020c, p. 233.}

In practice, Japan would be legally authorized to perform airlift and tanker support (as rear-area support activities) and C2ISR within Japanese airspace, waters and territory. Japan can legally conduct these activities in international airspace, but that is contingent on the activity taking place where no combat is occurring. There is some legal uncertainty about Japan’s ability to perform DCA missions if Japan is not attacked because those missions involve the use of force that SDF forces are not legally authorized to perform in this situation. However, the action could
be legally possible, considering that Japan is authorized to take “other measures necessary to respond” in “important influence” situations if the government issues additional directives (such as a Maritime Security Operation [海上警備行動]). Finally, in addition to being legally prohibited from performing OCA and SEAD in this situation, Japan is legally limited from performing CSAR/PR because the combat aspect would entail sending the SDF into an area where combat is taking place and might require ASDF fighters to escort SDF helicopters and conduct sweeps to intercept—and shoot—incoming enemy aircraft, both of which the ASDF is not authorized to do in this situation. SAR and PR would be authorized, however, assuming it takes place where combat is not occurring.

For the SDF to move beyond rear-area, noncombat support to using force, Japan’s prime minister would have to characterize a situation as an “armed attack” on Japan or, if Japan is not attacked, as a circumstance that threatens Japan’s survival (存立危機事態). In either situation, a prime minister can authorize the SDF to move beyond rear-area support. Following legal changes made in 2015, the prime minister must determine whether three conditions are fulfilled to authorize the use of force; the legislation describes them as follows:

- When an armed attack against Japan has occurred, or when an armed attack against a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Japan occurs and as a result threatens Japan’s survival and poses a clear danger to fundamentally overturn people’s right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness;
- When there is no other appropriate means available to repel the attack and ensure Japan’s survival and protect its people; and
- The use of force will be limited to the minimum extent necessary.

Assuming these three conditions are fulfilled, the government can issue a Defense Operation (防衛出動) order to authorize use of force. Importantly, under this order, Japan can use force not just for its own self-defense but to assist another country through the exercise of collective self-defense. SDF activities are no longer limited to noncombat areas nor to the geographic boundaries of Japanese territory, territorial waters, and airspace.

Taken together, it is possible to draw two general conclusions about Japan’s willingness to participate in the four scenarios. The first is that, should Tokyo declare a situation as having an

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118 An *Armed Attack situation* refers to situations in which an external armed attack against Japan occurs or a situation where one is expected because it appears there is an imminent and clear danger of such an attack. Ministry of Defense of Japan, “Framework Regarding SDF Activities, Etc.,” [“第1節 自衛隊の行動などに関する枠組み”], 2020 Defense White Paper [令和2年版防衛白書], Tokyo, 2020b, p. 231, Footnote 2.


“important influence” on Japan, the SDF will be limited to noncombat missions, meaning that it legally can go no further than absorbing such rear-area support missions as C2ISR, transport, or aerial refueling. The second conclusion is that, should Japan be attacked or Tokyo declare a situation as being a threat to Japan’s survival, the legal aperture of possible support operations broadens. In this situation, Japan will be able to legally perform missions that involve the use of force, such as OCA/DCA strike missions, SEAD, and CSAR/PR. What is legal, however, may not reflect Japan’s willingness to perform such missions. The specific details of Japan’s willingness in our four specific scenarios are detailed next.

**Response to Maritime Aggression: U.S. Support for a State Attacked by Sea**

For Japan, there are two cases of maritime aggression for which it would be likely to respond. One is a Chinese attack on the Senkaku Islands; the other is an attack on Taiwan. Because the former involves a set of islands over which the Japanese government maintains administrative control (and which the United States has declared falls under Article 5 of the U.S.-Japan security treaty), there is no question that Japan would be willing to support operations to defend or retake these islands. Tokyo would consider this an attack on Japan and would support any U.S. activity meant to defend them and turn back Chinese aggression.

If the maritime aggression situation involves Taiwan, Japan’s willingness to support any U.S. operation will depend on how the government defines the situation. If it appears limited or Japan is not attacked, Tokyo will likely declare any Chinese aggression against Taiwan as an “important influence” situation. As noted, Japanese forces would be legally limited to noncombat, rear-area support operations of U.S. forces in areas where combat is not occurring. Despite recent comments by Japanese officials that have been interpreted as Japan being willing to provide such support, this willingness to support U.S. operations remains uncertain. What Japan is willing to do will depend on the scale of the Chinese attack, how the attack started, and how the public perceives the invasion.\(^{122}\) Even without a direct attack on Japan, if the government perceives an unprovoked assault by China against Taiwan as clear and the threat or risk to Japan is evident, the government will be more willing to support the United States with activities beyond C2ISR, such as airlift and refueling. With all these activities—even with C2ISR (which is the most likely)—Japan will be willing to conduct them but “only to the extent that [the] SDF is not regarded as directly supporting U.S. combat activities”\(^{123}\). If support activities are framed as violating this prohibition, then the government will likely be less willing to conduct these actions. Additionally, if a contingency is induced by Taiwan’s behavior (such as declaring

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\(^{122}\) SDF officer, interview with authors, February 3, 2021; Ministry of Defense of Japan official, interview with authors, February 6, 2021.

\(^{123}\) Ministry of Defense of Japan official, email correspondence with authors, April 8, 2021.
independence), this would “sap” government willingness to support U.S.-led efforts.\textsuperscript{124} Although Tokyo would not be willing to conduct CSAR/PR if the government limits its definition of the situation as having only an “important influence” on Japan, it would be willing to conduct SAR/PR, but only in areas where combat is not taking place,\textsuperscript{125} including both Japanese waters and international waters.

If the situation were to change and Japan were directly attacked (including attacks on U.S. bases in Japan) or if political leadership felt the survival of Japan’s territory or nationals were threatened (even short of an attack), then Tokyo could declare the situation as a threat to Japan’s survival. In this situation, the government would issue a Defense Operation (防衛出動) order, under which the SDF is authorized to use force as long as the aforementioned three conditions are met.\textsuperscript{126} Under this order, there is no regulation limiting the type of measures the SDF can perform or the area where they are performed, except if the aim of the SDF is to use force in the airspace, waters, or territory of another country.\textsuperscript{127} This means the full menu of activities legally opens to the SDF, including use of force, in both Japanese airspace and international airspace, thereby broadening the aperture of possible support options. As noted, Japan would be able to legally conduct CSAR/PR, OCA/DCA, and SEAD, in Japanese and international airspace and waters.

Japan’s willingness to conduct what is legal, however, will depend on a variety of factors. In addition to the issue of how a Taiwan conflict starts, Japan’s willingness will depend on whether Japan itself was attacked. If Japan or U.S. bases in Japan were directly attacked, the government would be more willing to conduct activities that use force because it would become a defense-of-Japan situation.\textsuperscript{128} If Japan were not attacked, however, willingness to get involved would be partly tied to capabilities. The paucity of capabilities to conduct some types of operations may make the government “not be so willing” to conduct what is nevertheless legal.\textsuperscript{129} For example, Japan would likely be unwilling to conduct OCA or SEAD because it lacks robust capabilities to do so. DCA would be different because these activities would be tied directly to Japan’s defense

\textsuperscript{124} Ministry of Defense of Japan official, interview with authors, February 6, 2021.

\textsuperscript{125} This does not, however, mean that Japan cannot use its weapons in this activity. If SAR operations have commenced, SDF units can continue SAR activities until the safety of the units in distress is ensured.

\textsuperscript{126} Ministry of Defense of Japan, 2020b, p. 232.

\textsuperscript{127} According to the Ministry of Defense of Japan: “The use of the minimum necessary force to defend Japan under the right of self-defense is not necessarily confined to the geographic boundaries of Japanese territory, territorial waters, and airspace. However, it is difficult to give a general definition of the actual extent to which it may be used, as this would vary with the situation. Nevertheless, the Government interprets that, as a general rule, the Constitution does not permit armed troops to be dispatched to the land, sea, or airspace of other countries with the aim of using force; such overseas deployment of troops would exceed the definition of the minimum necessary level of self-defense. Ministry of Defense of Japan, 2020a, p. 201.

\textsuperscript{128} SDF officer, email correspondence with authors, January 29, 2021; SDF officer, email correspondence with authors, February 3, 2021.

\textsuperscript{129} Ministry of Defense of Japan official, email correspondence with authors, February 1, 2021.
or survival and the ASDF’s capabilities and posture are primed for this mission. Similarly, although Japan has a robust helicopter fleet to perform CSAR/PR, these are “very vulnerable to air activity” which would mean that Japan is only willing to conduct this activity close to Japan or in Japan’s Air Defense Identification Zone where these assets would be at less risk.\(^\text{130}\) There are calculations on how supporting the U.S. missions could indirectly harm Japan’s security. For example, political leadership could decide against assisting a particular U.S. mission if it judged the possibility that losing assets in combat—such as jets to support U.S. OCA or SEAD missions—would hurt Japan’s ability to defend itself in DCA missions, which would likely be prioritized as part of defense of Japan operations.

**Land Invasion: U.S. Support for a State Suffering a Land Invasion**

In the case of a land invasion, such as North Korea invading South Korea, the same legal hurdles for SDF participation would need to be cleared to move away from rear-area support to the use of force, but there are unique political limitations that were not present in the maritime cases.

Should a Japanese prime minister declare a North Korean invasion as having an “important influence” on Japan, the SDF would be legally limited to rear-area support of U.S. operations. Like the Taiwan scenario, this would mean C2ISR, airlift, aerial refueling, and SAR/PR in Japanese waters, airspace, and territory and in noncombat areas in international airspace. As long as the situation remains an “important influence,” CSAR/PR, SEAD, and OCA/DCA would not be areas that Japan would be legally able to support.

What Tokyo would be willing to do, however, once again might be very different from what is legal. Apart from C2ISR, Japan might be hesitant to support U.S. operations in and around the Korean Peninsula because it may be harder to argue that the risk to Japan is clear and evident (the way it would be in a Taiwan scenario). Like the Taiwan case, legal issues may restrict Tokyo’s willingness. For example, if a fight with North Korea is not seen as directly affecting Japan’s security, Japan might be willing to transport U.S. troops and supplies from one base to another inside Japan, but political opposition could argue it is a violation on the prohibition against the integration with the use of force if those troops and supplies are then moved outside Japan to be used against North Korea. Depending on the political leadership, fears of getting embroiled in legalities may therefore prevent the government from providing this option. The same is true of refueling. Japan could refuel U.S. planes, but if those planes then directly go and perform sorties or bomber missions against North Korea, this too could be painted as violating the same prohibition, thereby making Tokyo unwilling. Because Japan “can’t afford to have the ROK [Republic of Korea, or South Korea] overrun,” Tokyo will likely be willing to provide some level of rear-area assistance to U.S. forces.\(^\text{131}\) As long as that support could be painted as

\(^{130}\) SDF officer, interview with authors, March 31, 2021.

\(^{131}\) Ministry of Defense of Japan official, interview with authors, February 6, 2021.
violating the integration with the use of force prohibition, however, Tokyo’s willingness will likely remain restrained.

If Tokyo declares the situation as a threat to Japan’s survival, or if North Korea attacks Japan, Tokyo’s willingness to assist U.S. operations will increase dramatically because such support “ensures the U.S. and ROK forces are not overrun.” This situation would therefore open the possibilities of operational support options. That said, like the Taiwan case, beyond rear area support and C2ISR, Japan is likely to remain restrained in what it is willing to support. For example, the ASDF’s capabilities are not built for OCA and SEAD. Because these are not the ASDF’s “strong points,” Tokyo would be unwilling to “run a political risk for a role it is not good at.” Combined with the fact that the United States has a very capable ally in South Korea, this means that Japan would likely rely on the United States rather than perform these types of operations. Similarly, given the risk that performing CSAR/PR in an active battlespace in the Sea of Japan could pose to the ASDF, Tokyo would likely be willing to perform this only closer to Japanese shores or within Japan’s air defense identification zone.

Different from a Taiwan contingency, Japan’s willingness to support U.S. efforts will be affected by the political state of bilateral Japanese–South Korean ties. Because Japanese officials widely believe that South Korea will not allow the SDF to operate in or above Korean territory, even during a contingency, there will likely be less willingness to assist operations not directly related to Japan’s defense or rescuing Japanese nationals. The issue stems from lingering memories of Japan’s actions on the Korean Peninsula during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, which remain a major part of South Korean collective memory and domestic politics. Enduring resentment over Japan’s colonization of the Peninsula and treatment of Koreans continue to serve as politically divisive wedges to closer relations. These historical issues have had repercussions over South Korea’s willingness to cooperate with Japan in security issues that could play out in a contingency.

Critically, this means that South Korea could be hesitant to allow the SDF to operate on or over its territory, a fact which Tokyo is already aware of. During the 2014 Sewol ferry disaster, media reported that South Korea refused Japan’s offers of assistance by both the SDF and Japan Coast Guard. South Korea has opposed the idea of Japan conducting noncombatant evacuation operation (NEOs) on Korean territory in an emergency. In addition to

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133 Ministry of Defense of Japan official, email correspondence with authors, March 10, 2021.
South Korean officials telling Japan they would not provide the SDF with information about Korean ports, roads, or infrastructure during a NEO, Seoul has told Tokyo that it would not approve the dispatch of SDF elements for a NEO. South Korea has even opposed SDF assets from entering its waters for goodwill shows if they display the *kyokujitsuki*, or Rising Sun flag. Although the flag was used by Imperial Japanese forces, it remains the naval ensign for the MSDF. In October 2018, when South Korea was to host an international fleet review, the South Korean Navy requested that the MSDF not display the *kyokujitsuki*. Japan objected, not only because MSDF vessels flying the flag had participated in South Korean–hosted ship reviews in 1998 and 2008 but also because using the *kyokujitsuki* is mandatory under Japanese law and related international law requiring countries to show external markings to identify military vessels. For Japanese officials, these examples indicate that the SDF likely will not be welcome to operate in South Korean airspace, waters, or territory, potentially making Tokyo less willing to try to send the SDF for South Korea’s defense.

An often underappreciated role that Japan would play in a Korean contingency is providing a staging area and rear-area bases for U.S. and UN forces. In addition to hosting U.S. forces, Japan has a UN-Japan Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) that allows its signatories—as UN Sending States—to use seven UN-designated bases in Japan and send their forces through Japan for a Korean contingency. The UN Command–Rear, headquartered in Yokota, maintains this SOFA in peacetime but transitions during hostilities to support UNC operations in Japan and facilitate the movement of UNC Sending States from Japan to the Peninsula. This means Japan would play a role in force protection in Japan and support any reception, staging, onward movement, and integration of forces flowing into Japan for onward movement to the Korean Peninsula. It is also possible that Japan would transition very quickly to defining any Peninsula contingency as one that threatens Japan’s survival.

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137 Besides Japan and the United States (which has its own SOFA with Japan), the ten other SOFA signatories are: Australia, Canada, France, Italy, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. The seven UN-designated bases are: Yokota Air Base (Air Force), Camp Zama (Army), and Sasebo and Yokusuka (Navy) on mainland Japan; Kadena Air Base (Air Force), Futenma Air Station (Marine Corps), and White Beach (Navy) in Okinawa. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “Relations Between the United Nations Forces of Korea and Japan” [“朝鮮国連軍と我が国の関係について”], webpage, July 23, 2019.
Unlike a contingency on Taiwan or the Korean Peninsula that could spill over into Japan, a maritime conflict in a critical maritime area far from Japan, such as the SCS, will likely not spill over into Japan. That is not to say it will not affect Japan: As many experts have noted, Japan has economic and energy interests connected to freedom of navigation in the SCS that a conflict would endanger. Diplomatically, Japan has openly challenged China’s excessive SCS claims in the UN by rejecting China’s baseline claims and denouncing its efforts to limit the freedom of navigation and overflight. Japan has deployed its assets to the SCS for transits to demonstrate its right to freedom of navigation, for port visits at regional states, and for exercises to boost tactical capabilities.

It is unlikely, however, that Tokyo would view an SCS contingency as a threat to its survival. Despite an interest in the region, the SCS is not one of Japan’s highest security priorities, like North Korea, the Senkaku Islands, or China’s behavior in the East China Sea. Japanese container ships and energy supplies can take alternative routes through the Lombok and Makassar Straits. This means that, at most, Japan would likely declare any maritime conflict in the SCS as an “important influence” situation. In turn, this would limit Japan’s legal options to C2ISR, airlift, aerial refueling, and SAR/PR—meaning that other missions, like OCA/DCA, SEAD, and CSAR/PR, would not be options that the government would consider.

Again, what is legal may not be possible, as Japan’s willingness to perform C2ISR, airlift, aerial refueling, and SAR/PR is open for debate. The distance between the SCS and Japan plays a role. From a capabilities perspective, as the location of where rear-area support would be needed moves farther from Japan, it becomes more difficult to operate Japan’s assets. This, in turn, would make it difficult for political leadership to approve such support. Take SAR/PR, for example. Because Japan does not have bases in the area and it is too far to fly helicopters from

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141 Koga, 2018, pp. 22–23.

142 Koga, 2018, p. 23.

143 Ministry of Defense of Japan official, email correspondence with authors, April 8, 2021.
Japan to the SCS, it is unlikely that Tokyo would dispatch SAR assets. If this were to happen, Tokyo would have to send helicopters on MSDF helicopter destroyers to an active combat zone and base its operations from the sea, leaving Japan vulnerable to attack. This would make it unlikely for Tokyo to approve SAR/PR.\textsuperscript{144} The same is true of aerial refueling, airlift, and C2ISR; the distance would require regional forward bases from which to operate, something Japan does not have.

There are also operational uncertainties that would make it unlikely for Tokyo to support even rear-area operations. Depending on the nature of the conflict, Japan could be hesitant to send C2ISR assets if there are no noncombat areas in which to perform this mission, particularly because these assets would require fighter escorts or otherwise remain vulnerable. Similarly, although airlift and tanker support in the SCS area is legally possible as long as Japanese forces remain outside areas where combat is taking place, it is possible that the government would assess the situation as “too risky or unpredictable,” leading Tokyo to not conduct these missions in the SCS.\textsuperscript{145} It is more likely that Japan will be willing to assist the United States with airlift and tanker support within Japan so as to free up U.S. assets to perform operations in the SCS, assuming Japan can perform this activity without violating the prohibition against integration with the use of force.

\textit{Stabilization Operations}

Japan has more legal flexibility—and arguably a greater willingness—to participate in post-conflict stabilization operations that do not involve the use of force. The most likely to evoke Japanese willingness to participate would be stabilization operations following a collapse of North Korea.

As a member of the Northeast Asia community that views itself as having a stake in what occurs on the Korean Peninsula, Tokyo would feel the need to be actively involved in stabilization activities. In the past, Japan has expressed its interest in participating in efforts related to any long-term framework meant to replace the Armistice and generate peace on the Peninsula. In 2018, then-Foreign Minister Kōno Tarō said that Japan has a strong interest in “building peace in Northeast Asia.”\textsuperscript{146} Nonetheless, similar to the restrictions of allowing the SDF to operate on or in Korean territory, Japanese decisionmakers assume that Japan would not be allowed to deploy SDF onto the Peninsula even if it were willing to do so and despite its interest in quickly restoring order on the Peninsula.

\textsuperscript{144} Retired SDF officer, interview with authors, March 11, 2021; SDF officer, interview with authors, March 31, 2021.

\textsuperscript{145} Retired SDF officer, interview with authors, March 11, 2021.

\textsuperscript{146} Kōno Tarō, remarks before the House of Councilors Foreign Affairs-Defense Committee [国会参議院外交防衛委員会], National Diet Library Online Archives, May 15, 2018.
Even in a stabilization operation, however, Japan’s willingness to act is a function of how the government defines the situation. Should nuclear weapons remain unaccounted for or remnants of the North Korean regime launch missiles at Japan, Tokyo is likely to characterize the situation as a threat to Japan’s survival so as to retain the legal authority to conduct defensive operations if required. This, however, would likely be focused solely on Japan’s defense, therefore making SDF support for the United States in the form of OCA, SEAD, or CSAR/PR missions unlikely. Once active combat decreases, or ceases altogether, even if the U.S. and South Korean forces are hunting down remnants of the old regime, Tokyo would likely define the new postconflict conditions as an “important influence” situation. Therefore, the types of operations Tokyo would be willing to perform in Japan or over international waters would be limited to C2ISR, airlift, refueling, and SAR/PR. Assuming that active combat has ceased, there would be no fears of violating Japan’s integration with the use of force, and Japan would be willing to conduct these missions, focusing on humanitarian assistance for Koreans and Japanese nationals on the Peninsula.

Past examples suggest what this could look like. During the 1995–1996 famine in North Korea, Japan donated more than 500,000 tons of food to North Korea. Following Japan’s relaxation of a freeze put in place on its Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) funding following North Korea’s August 1998 launch of a missile that overflew Japan, Tokyo resumed food aid and intimated that it would be willing to offer North Korea an economic assistance package similar to the one it gave South Korea in 1965 to normalize relations. Although Japan would be willing to authorize the SDF to fly these humanitarian supplies, as mentioned already, Tokyo realizes Seoul may oppose this initiative.

Japan has provided financial support to help North Korea pivot away from its nuclear program. For example, despite not being a signatory to the 1994 Agreed Framework, Tokyo agreed to help finance the KEDO, to provide North Korea with 500,000 metric tons of heavy fuel oil while two light-water reactors were constructed. Japan welcomed the establishment of the Six-Party Talks in August 2003 and promised that should they resolve North Korea’s nuclear and missile issues (as well as abduction issues), Tokyo would provide a large-scale economic aid

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147 Retired SDF officer, interview with authors, March 11, 2021.
148 Retired SDF officer, interview with authors, March 11, 2021.
151 Japan funded around 20 percent of KEDO’s costs (about $500 million), which is less than South Korea’s contributions of $1.5 billion but more than Washington’s $400 million and the European Atomic Energy Commission’s $120 million. Much smaller amounts were contributed by 27 other countries. Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization, “Total Financial Support by Country,” 2005 Annual Report, 2005, p. 13.
package—on the order of $5 billion to $10 billion. Although Japan has technical expertise with civilian nuclear issues, it does not have nuclear weapons and thus has no expertise in securing nuclear weapons that may be found. This being the case, Japan would likely look to the United States.

Because Tokyo assumes that South Korea would not welcome the SDF onto Korean territory, and because it lacks the required intelligence of North Korean territory, Japan would not be willing to participate in operations meant to restore order on the Peninsula, such as combating pockets of resistance from remnants of the North Korean military or tracking down and arresting top-level North Korean leadership. Tokyo would instead defer those types of activities to the South Korean or U.S. militaries.

What this suggests is that the main thrust of post-conflict Japanese assistance would likely be providing food and medical supplies for the Korean people, including refugees and internally displaced persons. Although Japan might be willing to airlift these materials to the Peninsula, it may be prevented from doing so should Seoul refuse.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we examined what Japan may be willing to have its ASDF do in our four scenarios (Table 5.1). In addition to legal restrictions that limit specific ASDF missions in particular situations, Japanese leadership is likely to be quite selective in what it is willing to do regardless of legalities. We argue that Japan’s willingness to support U.S. operations will be limited. This means that such categories as OCA, SEAD, and CSAR/PR are highly unlikely but that DCA, airlift, aerial refueling, and SAR/PR are more possible, depending on the situation. C2ISR is the only response that Japan is most likely to perform without any difficulty if it is directly tied to Japan’s defense both because it has the capability and because the mission does not require any special authorization under domestic laws or specific situations.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenarios</th>
<th>Missions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OCA/DCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maritime aggression</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Invasion</td>
<td>Unlikely in this scenario given political considerations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maritime conflict</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability operations</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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Chapter 6. Malaysia

Malaysia sees itself as shaped by three key factors: its strategic location, its status as a nation dependent on trade, and its unique demography.\(^{153}\) These three factors drive Malaysia’s incentives and decisions, which the country then seeks to pursue with “credibility together with consistency and coherency.” These dynamics lead to a pragmatic foreign policy focused on stability and a recognition that the country is highly vulnerable. Such vulnerability in relation to its neighbors and great powers leads to a commitment to multilateralism and a staunch adherence to a nonaligned status.\(^{154}\) The result is a country that has a foreign policy defined by continuity with few expectations of seismic change from its traditional approach, which is one of independence, nonalignment, and a focus on sovereignty. There should be little expectation that Malaysia’s military cooperation will significantly diverge from current trends in the absence of the most severe kind of crisis.

We made this determination through an investigation of Malaysian government documents, previous RAND research, scholarly work on the topic of Malaysian foreign policy, and an analysis of recent events involving Malaysia. These sources combine to give a sense of Malaysia’s core national interests, its tendencies when working with the United States, the relationship that it has with China, the domestic politics that will likely inhibit additional cooperation with U.S. military forces in the event of a crisis, and a series of other factors outlined earlier that are likely to determine alignment in our four scenarios. Overall, these sources and issues for analysis support our assessment that Malaysia will likely continue apace on its largely nonaligned path with low-intensity levels of cooperation in the event of one of these crisis scenarios.

Malaysia’s Strategic Concepts and National Interests

Nonalignment is one of the key pillars of Malaysia’s defense strategy and general foreign policy.\(^{155}\) This means that Malaysia is focused on building self-sufficiency in its defense forces, maintaining positive relationships with its more powerful neighbors, balancing its relationships to maintain its independence, and charting a middle course in its relationship with the great powers. These values lead Malaysia to the conclusion that it must deal pragmatically with both the United States and China and not throw its lot fully into the camp of either power. On the one hand, China has more to offer Malaysia in the economic realm, but relations are strained because

\(^{153}\) Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Malaysia’s Foreign Policy,” webpage, undated.

\(^{154}\) Elena Noor, *Foreign and Security Policy in the New Malaysia*, Sydney, Australia: Lowy Institute, November 7, 2019.

of tensions in the SCS. On the other hand, the United States offers a significant amount in the security realm, but the country’s foreign policy figures foresee a consistent decline of the West going forward.\textsuperscript{156} The Prime Minister summarized the calculation as “I’d side with rich China over fickle U.S.,” as the U.S. political system continued to create uncertainty for partners.\textsuperscript{157}

This middle course that maintains independence and maintains good but hands-off relationships with the great powers is often charted through ASEAN, which insulates Malaysia from direct bilateral relationships in which its power disadvantage is more acute and diffuses its relational dynamics more widely to avoid being perceived as siding too far in any direction. Furthermore, this ASEAN approach is a way to ensure that Malaysia, as a medium-sized country, has a voice in the conversation about how the wider region will look in the future. ASEAN amplifies Malaysia’s voice in significant and varied ways, along with ensuring that the country is consistently committed to its nonaligned strategy by working through a multilateral organization rather than directly with great powers in a way that might cause consternation in Washington or Beijing.\textsuperscript{158}

In terms of the security relationship with the United States, security cooperation includes such areas as counterterrorism, maritime security, HADR, cyber, capability building, and consultations between defense industries. Malaysia consistently takes part in the Pacific Pathways exercises that occur throughout the Indo-Pacific, and it annually participates in the Keris Strike exercises with the U.S. Army. However, because of Malaysia’s overall foreign policy and defense strategies, there is a hard limit on the degree of cooperation. Operations specifically targeting China (beyond generic “maritime security” work) are avoided because they may trigger a response from Beijing that would inhibit Malaysia’s goals for economic growth and would violate its strict adherence to nonalignment. Thus, like many other countries in the region, Malaysia’s willingness to host U.S. forces is defined by its larger policy of hewing a middle ground between the great powers.\textsuperscript{159}

But limits on cooperation are not exactly out of affinity for China. Although polling from 2022 indicates that some 60 percent of Malaysians have a positive view of China, there are serious issues in the relationship that keep the government committed to nonalignment.\textsuperscript{160}

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Because Malaysia is a predominantly Muslim country, one of the key tenets of its foreign policy is solidarity with the wider Ummah.\(^{161}\) China’s treatment of Muslim Uighurs in Xinjiang is a significant complication in the relationship, given Malaysia’s consistent and public commitments in this area. Furthermore, maritime disputes with China in the SCS and China’s ongoing assertiveness in the area create continuing tensions between the two. Although these issues may look from the outside like an invitation for much larger deployments of U.S. forces (and perhaps permanent basing), this is not necessarily the case. The Malaysian public’s view of China is much more positive than its view of the United States, which in the same Pew poll stood at 54 percent. Given the complexities involved in both relationships, Malaysia’s willingness to host U.S. forces is defined by its pragmatism—attempting to build the country’s military capabilities and solve specific problems like terrorism or HADR—rather than any particular affinity for one power over the other or a similar view of the threat posed by China.

**Malaysia’s Willingness to Participate in U.S.-Led Operations**

Malaysia’s commitment to nonalignment for pragmatic purposes puts it in much the same position as Indonesia: It is unlikely to participate in most scenarios unless directly threatened. Most Malaysians do not see China as a threat; to change that, there would likely need to be an outright aggressive move by Beijing toward a Malaysian core interest. If Malaysia’s maritime interests, trade, or Exclusive Economic Zone are under threat, there would likely be a greater degree of willingness on the part of the Malaysian people and government to diverge from its nonaligned foreign policy. These threats are more likely to manifest in either of the maritime scenarios but are unlikely even there given Beijing’s probable interest in keeping regional states on the fence. Short of outright aggression that puts Malaysia under threat, an action on the part of China that makes a resumption of normal relationships untenable, or unanimous opposition to China within ASEAN (which is unlikely, given the alignment of some states within it), Malaysia is likely to be a hedging state for the foreseeable future.

In a scenario involving Taiwan, for example, Malaysia has no national interests in the scenario that would support its involvement. Malaysia would face significant Chinese retaliation both economically and (partly because of its proximity) potentially militarily. Nothing in Malaysia’s national security policy indicates a willingness to be drawn into such a conflict. The same can be said for the North Korea invasion scenario. Malaysia has no core interest involved on the Korean Peninsula and only a small percentage of Malaysian trade is tied to South Korea.\(^{162}\) There is little recognition of the Korean dispute as being central to Malaysian security interests, either at the elite or mass levels. Although defense cooperation with South Korea has

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\(^{161}\) Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, undated. *Ummah* here refers to the concept of the “whole Muslim world” or the community of believers that transcends national, racial, and class divisions to unite all Muslims.

\(^{162}\) We searched for Malaysian trade by country. United Nations, UN COMTRADE database, undated.
increased in recent years, this relationship has not moved to the stage where Malaysian support would likely be forthcoming, especially with only 13 percent of Malaysian respondents listing flashpoints such as the SCS, Taiwan Strait, or Korean Peninsula as a top-three challenge facing Southeast Asia.\(^{163}\) Malaysia would similarly be unlikely to provide support in a Korea instability scenario because Malaysia’s foreign policy is almost entirely dedicated to continued development, which is the primary concern of the public.\(^{164}\) Participating in operations to promote stability in a country thousands of miles away when stability in Malaysia itself is still the primary concern is unlikely.

Even less likely is Malaysian support for a land scenario, given the country’s geography. Any land invasion in Southeast Asia is unlikely to put the country under threat, and its core interests lie largely outside the areas that may be engaged. Contrarily, stability operations, especially those that may occur in Malaysia itself or its neighbors, may see more support from the Malaysian government. Much of the security cooperation with the United States already lies in this realm, and Malaysia has long been more interested in issues of terrorism and HADR than large-scale conventional conflict either on land or at sea. Particularly when it comes to HADR operations, Malaysia would be likely to provide airlift and tanker support in the area, in keeping with its strategy to build friendly relationships with as many regional partners as possible. Even when it comes to HADR or stability operations, much depends on the level of interest in the issue from Beijing, as Malaysia is unlikely to join operations that Beijing heavily objects to unless Malaysia sees it as a core national interest.

Overall, Malaysia is in a very similar position to that of Indonesia. Both countries are heavily reliant on maritime trade with modest capabilities, and both are deeply committed to a policy of nonalignment and a diversification of its relationships across the region, including China. Although Malaysia does not have the constitutional prohibition against joining alliances, it recognizes its vulnerability and sees its long-term interests as being best suited to maintaining positive relationships with all parties, especially great powers. As with much of the rest of Southeast Asia, in any scenario, much will depend on the exact nature of the conflict, its onset, reactions from other states, and the degree to which it threatens core national interests, but the most likely outcome is that Malaysia takes a hands-off approach, watches from the sidelines, and looks to maintain its flow of trade and its free hand in relationships going forward.

Table 6.1 summarizes the likely outcomes in each of our four scenarios, along with the type of missions within them.

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\(^{164}\) Seah et al., 2021; Malaysian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021.
Table 6.1. Assessment of Malaysia’s Support for U.S.-Led Scenarios

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<tr>
<th>Scenarios</th>
<th>Missions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>OCA/DCA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maritime invasion (for example, attack on Taiwan, the Philippines)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land invasion (for example, North Korea provocation)</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maritime conflict (for example, SCS provocation)</td>
<td>DCA, if attacks against Malaysian territory or assets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability operations (for example, RFF to region, collapse of North Korea)</td>
<td>If there is a direct threat near Malaysia or little Chinese interest. Little capability.</td>
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</table>
A recent RAND study found that New Zealand is strongly in favor of military cooperation with the United States, supportive of U.S.-led security efforts in the Indo-Pacific theater, and disposed to working with the United States to counter the shared Chinese threat.\textsuperscript{165} Nonetheless, New Zealand’s willingness to contribute to U.S.-led military operations in the event of a U.S.-China conflict or other regional military contingency remains highly conditional despite this strategic alignment and pro-U.S. stance.

To assess the potential for New Zealand to support a U.S.-led military coalition in the Indo-Pacific, we systematically weighed the relevance of the 12 factors outlined in Chapter 1, using a diverse set of primary and secondary sources. We looked at these factors relative to New Zealand in a general sense and within the specific contexts of our four sample scenarios.

New Zealand views China as a growing threat to the region and to New Zealand’s vital national interests, particularly the interest of preserving a rules-based, liberal international order. At the same time, New Zealand’s economy has become increasingly dependent on trade with China, raising the potential for Chinese economic coercion if New Zealand challenges China in the security realm. The resultant tension has pushed New Zealand to adopt a hedging strategy that is purposefully ambiguous and flexible in its approach to China and to U.S.-Chinese competition.\textsuperscript{166} The aim of this approach, as then–Foreign Minister Winston Peters explained to the New Zealand Parliament in 2018, is to “jump into troubled waters without making a splash.”\textsuperscript{167}

Apart from this broader strategic framework and any specific defense-related issues at stake, we identified and evaluated four specific factors that will affect New Zealand’s propensity to contribute to U.S.-led operations in a given scenario. First, New Zealand maintains a uniquely close security relationship with Australia and will likely follow Australia’s lead. If Australia elects to contribute to a military coalition, New Zealand is likely to join as well. Second, New Zealand values multilateralism and working through international institutions. The broader the military coalition, and the stronger the endorsement from the international community, the more apt New Zealand will be to contribute. Third, New Zealand is more likely to take part in operations centered in the South Pacific than in operations in the SCS or Northeast Asia. Finally,

\textsuperscript{165} Lin et al., 2020.
\textsuperscript{167} Quoted in Anne-Marie Brady, “New Zealand’s Quiet China Shift,” \textit{The Diplomat}, July 1, 2020.
New Zealand is more likely to contribute if constrained to a combat support role. This stems from the hedging dynamic mentioned earlier and the status of New Zealand’s current and anticipated military forces. Looking specifically at air assets, New Zealand is well postured to provide SAR, theater airlift, and maritime patrol capabilities in support of a coalition, albeit on a relatively limited scale.

**New Zealand’s Strategic Concepts and National Interests**

Beyond maintaining its territorial integrity, New Zealand considers the protection of external lines of communication and the preservation of the rules-based, liberal international order to be its most vital national interests.\(^\text{168}\) This is not surprising; New Zealand has a highly developed free market economy that is dependent on international trade. Furthermore, as a relatively small island nation with a population of 5 million that generally spends less than 1.5 percent of GDP on defense, New Zealand has a marginal ability to defend its own territory, let alone secure overseas economic access. As then–Minister of Foreign Affairs Phil Goff noted in 2005, “Our economic and physical security depends on a properly functioning system of collective security, the international rule of law and dispute settlement.”\(^\text{169}\)

In its latest tranche of defense policy documents, New Zealand identifies several threats to the international order, from violent extremism to climate change. However, it is clear that New Zealand assesses China’s increasingly aggressive behavior and apparent quest for regional hegemony to be among the most serious threats—perhaps the most serious one. Although not necessarily perceiving its territorial integrity to be at risk, New Zealand fears that an increasingly powerful and emboldened China will use its military and economic weight to coerce and usurp the sovereignty of states in the region or impinge on freedom of the seas.

This negative perception of China has grown over the past decade, as has the willingness of New Zealand’s government to publicly address China as a security threat and disavow Chinese behavior. New Zealand’s 2010 *Defence White Paper*, a 90-page document, mentions China seven times, and most of this discussion focuses on China’s economic growth. The only hint of China as a threat is the suggestion that although “China both benefits from and contributes to regional stability and prosperity . . . there will be a natural tendency for it to define and pursue its interests in a more forthright way on the back of growing wealth and power” along with a note that the pace of China’s military modernization program “may test the relationships of the major

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In contrast, New Zealand’s 2018 Strategic Defence Policy Statement, a 40-page document, mentions China 32 times. This more recent work specifically names China as a threat to the international order, elaborating on China’s efforts to expand its territorial claims, its aggressive push for greater regional influence, its construction of artificial islands that threaten international shipping, and its divergent views on international norms.\footnote{New Zealand Ministry of Defence, 2018, p. 17.}

Despite New Zealand’s growing perception of China as a security threat over the past decade, economic relations between the two countries have continued to strengthen. In 2008, after three years of negotiations, New Zealand became the first developed nation to sign a free trade agreement with China. The value of trade between the two countries soon increased by more than 300 percent; by 2017, China had surpassed Australia as New Zealand’s top trading partner with New Zealand holding a $3.6 billion trade surplus over China in the exchange.\footnote{New Zealand Ministerial of Foreign Affairs and Trade, “New Zealand-China Free Trade Agreement Upgrade,” February 25, 2019.} Seeking to solidify the relationship and bolster trade even further, New Zealand and China agreed to an upgrade of the 2008 Free Trade Agreement in 2019.\footnote{New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, “New Zealand-China Free Trade Agreement Upgrade,” February 25, 2019.}

Although extensive trade with China has benefited New Zealand’s economy, multiple analysts have warned of the dangers of unbalanced dependence. China is New Zealand’s largest trading partner, but New Zealand does not even make China’s top 20 list: This at least raises the potential for economic coercion if New Zealand sides with the United States in a U.S.-China military confrontation.

The severing of trade is certainly a risk that weighs on New Zealand’s strategic calculus, but it is important to recognize that any such move against New Zealand could be very costly to China. China is highly dependent on foreign products to feed its growing population; as of 2019, China was the world’s largest importer of food. New Zealand may not be one of China’s largest trading partners overall, but it is China’s top external provider of food and it dominates key food markets in China, particularly the market for imported dairy products. According to a recent Westpac economic analysis, China is “very dependent” on New Zealand dairy: Approximately 30 percent of New Zealand dairy exports go to China, but more than one-half of Chinese dairy imports come from New Zealand, and “China has very few other options available to fill its dairy production deficit.” Accordingly, New Zealand’s risk exposure in the dairy sector, its most important export market, remains low.\footnote{Westpac, “China Exposure,” October 2020.} More generally, given the “complementary nature” of the New Zealand–China trade relationship across the board, “New Zealand’s risk exposure is less

\footnote{Westpac, “China Exposure,” October 2020.}
than the outright level of exports would suggest.”

Relatedly, multiple analyses suggest that New Zealand’s economy, although vulnerable, would be more resilient than other economies in the region if China elected to impose punitive measures.

In sum, New Zealand’s trade relationship with China is one of codependence, and this has a significant impact on New Zealand’s strategic approach. New Zealand strives to maintain stable and harmonious diplomatic ties with China and is generally more conciliatory in its dealings with China than the United States might prefer. But New Zealand’s fear of Chinese economic retaliation remains muted, and the trade relationship has not stopped New Zealand from openly critiquing Chinese behavior in the region and periodically challenging China on both economic and defense issues, especially since 2018. Relations with China also have not stopped New Zealand from building increasingly close security ties with the United States following the 2010 Wellington and 2012 Washington Declarations.

New Zealand’s Willingness to Participate in U.S.-Led Military Operations

Given New Zealand’s strategic environment and consequent hedging strategy, the willingness to contribute to U.S.-led military operations in the region remains highly contingent. As noted, there are four additional factors beyond fear of Chinese economic retaliation that will frame New Zealand’s strategic calculus: (1) the role of Australia, (2) the breadth and legitimacy of the military coalition, (3) the geographic focus of operations, and (4) the types of military capabilities and mission sets requested.

Role of Australia

New Zealand and Australia do not see eye to eye on China. In general, Australia has taken a harder stance toward China over the past few years and is more in line with U.S. efforts to contain and balance against China in the region. That said, New Zealand and Australia maintain a uniquely close security relationship that has deep historical and cultural roots. This relationship is at the core of New Zealand’s defense policy, and the level of military cooperation between the

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two states is unparalleled in the region.\(^\text{179}\) Apart from peacetime humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, when it comes to regional military operations, New Zealand is likely to follow Australia’s lead. In considering the question of New Zealand’s willingness to participate in a U.S. military-led operation, particularly against China, one must account for Australia’s role. There is no guarantee New Zealand will follow Australia, but Australian participation would significantly increase the likelihood of New Zealand also becoming involved. Conversely, without Australian participation, that is almost no chance of New Zealand joining an operation unless a very narrow set of criteria are met.

**Breadth and Legitimacy of the Military Coalition**

Beyond following Australia, New Zealand is more likely to join a U.S.-led military operation as a member of a broad-based coalition of regional partners sanctioned by the international community. New Zealand is a champion of the rules-based, liberal international order and a firm believer in the importance of international institutions; multilateralism is a cornerstone of New Zealand’s foreign policy. From the vantage point of a small state, there is certainly a utilitarian rationale behind such a perspective—international institutions serve to constrain great powers, at least in theory. But New Zealand’s preferences for multilateralism and working through institutions seem to reside at a deeper, normative level, ingrained within New Zealand’s national values.\(^\text{180}\) The result, per the Ministry of Defence, is that “New Zealand’s involvement in international security operations will almost always be as a partner in a coalition, mandated or endorsed by the UN or by a regional organization.”\(^\text{181}\) Apart from its own self-defense or the defense of Australia, New Zealand is likely to balk at any U.S.-led military action that does not align with these preferences.

**Geographic Focus**

As a small state, New Zealand does not necessarily think in terms of a sphere of influence, but it does think of Oceania, or the South Pacific, as its backyard and maintains a strong desire to prevent Chinese inroads.\(^\text{182}\) In 2018, New Zealand announced a “Pacific Reset” policy,

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\(^{181}\) New Zealand Ministry of Defence, 2010, p. 32.

\(^{182}\) Notably, New Zealand has special relationships with and obligations to Niue and Cook Islands, which are self-governing states in free association with New Zealand; New Zealand has a similar situation with Tokelau, which is a territory of New Zealand.
“reenergizing” New Zealand’s strategic focus in Oceania with the aim of mitigating great power competition and influence in the region.\textsuperscript{183} Within this framework, New Zealand has publicly declared its aim of taking a leadership role in South Pacific regional security.\textsuperscript{184} At the 2019 Shangri-La Dialogue, New Zealand’s Minister of Defense explained, “As you all know, New Zealand is a Pacific country . . . . In many ways the Pacific region is where New Zealand matters most and can have a more positive impact. It is our neighbourhood, and where we most certainly act locally.”\textsuperscript{185} With this in mind, New Zealand’s ongoing military modernization efforts are specifically aimed at developing capability to project and sustain operations throughout the Pacific region, with these operations given equal priority to those in New Zealand’s own territory.\textsuperscript{186} Also of note, New Zealand has expressed a desire for more U.S. involvement and more U.S.–New Zealand cooperation in the Pacific (perhaps seeking to mitigate Chinese influence).\textsuperscript{187}

Given this emphasis, New Zealand will be more apt to participate in a U.S.-led military operation if the operation is focused on protecting the Pacific Island region. Any military confrontation between the United States and China will more likely be centered in the SCS or Northeast Asia—but even in these cases, a scenario in which New Zealand participates is still possible, albeit in a role limited primarily to the Pacific in some type of rearguard or indirect action.

\textit{Types of Military Capabilities and Mission Sets}

Regardless of the geographic focus, New Zealand is more likely to participate in a U.S.-led military operation if limited to a combat support role. This is based on both New Zealand’s broader hedging strategy and the status of New Zealand’s current and forecast military forces. In 2000, New Zealand’s government went against the advice of military leaders and made the controversial move of canceling a deal with the United States to purchase 28 F-16 fighter aircraft as replacement for New Zealand’s aging A-4 fleet.\textsuperscript{188} As result, New Zealand does not operate any fighter, strike, or attack-type aircraft, and there is no plan in place to acquire such aircraft.

\textsuperscript{185} Ron Mark, Ensuring a Resilient and Stable Region,” speech delivered to the 18th Shangri-La Dialogue, Singapore, June 2, 2019.
\textsuperscript{186} New Zealand Defence Force, 2019.
Except for limited antiship and antisubmarine capabilities, New Zealand’s military aviation is largely constrained to combat support roles.

That said, New Zealand’s Air Force is on the front end of the most extensive (and expensive) modernization program in decades. The focus of this modernization on combat support constrains New Zealand to a variety of mission types; it also provides a window into how New Zealand envisions its contribution to regional security efforts. To start, New Zealand recently completed the acquisition of NH90 and SH-2G(I) helicopters, with the latter shared by the Air Force and Navy. Both are designated for SAR as a secondary mission and are highly capable in this role. In 2018 New Zealand agreed to buy four P-8A maritime patrol/ISR aircraft, comparable to those employed by the U.S. Navy, with initial delivery planned in 2023. New Zealand considers these aircraft to be of particular value for various surveillance missions across the South Pacific. New Zealand’s P-8s will be equipped with a special SAR kit that allows the aircraft to precisely deploy survival equipment to personnel stranded at sea. Of note, New Zealand views the P-8 as its primary contribution to future coalition military operations, particularly alongside the United States and Australia in the event of a high-end conflict. New Zealand citizens protesting the acquisition to the government have accordingly argued that “the P-8 purchase can only be interpreted as siding militarily with America against China.” Finally, in 2020, New Zealand completed a deal to purchase five C-130J transport aircraft to be delivered in 2024, replacing its older fleet of C-130s acquired in the 1960s. This purchase will significantly increase New Zealand’s ability to conduct theater airlift in a variety of conditions and environments.

New Zealand’s Willingness to Participate in Regional Scenarios

Any scenario of maritime aggression or land invasion outside Oceania or the South Pacific would limit the extent of New Zealand’s interest. We looked particularly at Chinese maritime aggression versus Taiwan and a North Korean invasion of South Korea in our scenarios. Still, New Zealand may be willing to join an internationally sanctioned military

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191 Senior U.S. defense officials, interview with authors, February 2021.

192 World Beyond War Aotearoa New Zealand, “To House of Representatives: Reconsider the Purchase of P-8s,” online petition, undated.

coalition for these scenarios in a support role. The most likely contribution would consist of P-8 aircraft for maritime patrol, ISR, and SAR to the extent these missions are required.

A similar argument can be made for New Zealand’s willingness to contribute during a conflict for control of critical maritime areas, but New Zealand’s willingness would likely be significantly greater if this were centered in the South Pacific rather than the SCS. Of note, New Zealand has already contributed air assets to combined operations with the United States aimed at stopping illegal fishing in support of the Pacific Islands Forum Fisheries Agency. Furthermore, if China took aggressive military action in the South Pacific, New Zealand would be more likely to use its P-8s for antisubmarine and antisurface missions in addition to reconnaissance and SAR.

An additional factor that could affect New Zealand’s willingness to engage militarily in the SCS is its membership in the Five Power Defence Arrangements alongside Australia, the United Kingdom, Malaysia, and Singapore. Established in 1971, the Arrangements lack any binding alliance commitment but provides a significant basis for defense cooperation and consultation, specifically related to the security of Malaysia and Singapore. This long-standing link could provide New Zealand with unique justification and motivation to contribute to military operations if these partners were at risk.\(^\text{194}\)

Finally, New Zealand has demonstrated both the capability and willingness to deploy forces in support of stabilization and humanitarian operations, both within and outside the region, including deployments by New Zealand’s C-130 and P-3 aircraft in support of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. Furthermore, New Zealand’s strategic documents highlight its role in regional HADR and stability operations. This suggests that New Zealand might be willing to support regional stabilization efforts unless involvement in a specific scenario unnecessarily risks antagonizing China.\(^\text{195}\)

Table 7.1. summarizes our analysis of New Zealand’s willingness to contribute to U.S.-led military operations across the four scenarios.

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195 Senior U.S. defense officials, interview with authors, February 2021.
Table 7.1. New Zealand’s Willingness to Contribute by Scenario

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Maritime Invasion (Taiwan)</th>
<th>Land Invasion (Korea)</th>
<th>Maritime Conflict (SCS)</th>
<th>Stability Ops (Korea)</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vital interests at stake?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Would change to “Y” if located in the South Pacific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal alliances of defense agreements?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Five Power Defence Arrangements (nonbinding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior leader support?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Would change to “Y” if located in the South Pacific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official assurances?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Would change to “Y” if located in the South Pacific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic backing?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>In general, there is domestic support for NZ role in stability ops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unconstrained by nonalignment policy?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>New Zealand is not formally nonaligned despite limits to U.S. security relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent of regional partners?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Influenced by Australia’s role and nature of international coalition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall likelihood of NZ military contribution</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low–Med</td>
<td>Low–Med</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most probable type of contribution</td>
<td>C2ISR</td>
<td>CSAR</td>
<td>C2ISR</td>
<td>C2ISR</td>
<td>Does not have OCA/DCA, SEAD, or air refueling capability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CSAR</td>
<td>Airlift</td>
<td>CSAR</td>
<td>Airlift</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

Given its strategic environment and its status as a small nation dependent on international trade, New Zealand will continue to pursue a hedging strategy vis-à-vis the United States and China. Although New Zealand’s economic relationship with China affects its broader strategic calculus and drives conciliatory policies, New Zealand remains highly independent and has shown itself willing to challenge China, although it is wary of—but by no means paralyzed by—the risk of Chinese economic retaliation. New Zealand has worked to improve its security ties with the United States over the past few years and is disposed to working with the United States to counter increasingly aggressive Chinese behavior that threatens the rules-based, liberal international order. Nonetheless, the United States would be mistaken to assume New Zealand’s cooperation in the event of a U.S.-Chinese military conflict. New Zealand will be more likely to join a U.S.-led military operation if Australia is on board, the United States builds a broad-based military coalition endorsed by international institutions, the operation (or at least New Zealand’s participation) is focused on the South Pacific, and New Zealand’s role is limited to combat support. By 2024, New Zealand will be well postured to contribute SAR, theater airlift, and maritime patrol/ISR capabilities to a military coalition.
Chapter 8. The Philippines

Although the Philippines has limited military capabilities to support the scenarios that we examined, the United States has not typically relied on the Philippines for military support; instead, the primary strategic value of the Philippines to the United States is the access it can offer for basing and power projection purposes in the region. This being the case, the Philippines’ limited capacity is not a major issue, and the nation remains crucial to U.S. operations because of its strategically important location. In conducting our analysis of the Philippines’ willingness to support specific missions, however, it became clear that even in instances in which the Philippines is capable of providing substantive military support, it is largely unwilling to do so unless its territorial integrity, maritime security, or other vital national interests are directly threatened. This unwillingness primarily stems from the Philippines’ sensitive geostrategic position between the United States and China and persistent concerns over preserving autonomy vis-à-vis the United States. In the rest of this chapter, we provide an overview of the Philippines’ strategic objectives and orientation, then assess the nation’s willingness to support U.S. contingencies in light of geopolitical considerations.

The Philippines’ Strategic Concepts and National Interests

Although the Philippines and the United States have been close allies for decades, this relationship began as an occupation, with the Philippines being a U.S. protectorate until July 4, 1946. A few years later, the Philippines and the United States became party to the U.S.-Philippines Mutual Defense Treaty in 1951. Its colonial past has colored the Philippines’ view of its relationship with the United States; on one hand, it views the United States as one of its staunchest allies, both militarily and in terms of shared values; on the other, it is wary of falling too much under U.S. control again. In the clearest example of this wariness, the Philippine Senate voted in 1991 to reject an extension of the Military Bases Agreement of 1947, which had granted the United States a 99-year lease on several military bases throughout the Philippines. As a result, all major U.S. bases in the Philippines have since been closed. The United States still maintains a rotational force presence in the Philippines, however, under the auspices of the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) and its supplemental Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA), signed in 2014. The VFA, which has been in place since 1998, “grants legal status to U.S. forces who are in the Philippines temporarily for exercises, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and other contingencies” and “enables a predictable, dependable, and cooperative relationship between the Philippines and the United States, and also allows for the


The Philippines’ first National Defense Strategy was published in August 2019 and remains in effect through the end of the administration of President Rodrigo Duterte in 2022. The document builds on two prior defense documents, the National Security Policy of 2017 and the National Security Strategy of 2018. The Strategy identifies the Philippines’ key national security objectives, including to “1) safeguard and preserve national sovereignty and territorial integrity; 2) ensure maritime and airspace security; and 3) strengthen international relations”; it also identifies the Philippines’ primary external defense missions, which are “1) Maritime and Air Defense Mission (MarAD); 2) Cyber Security Mission (CS); and 3) Security Cooperation and Engagement Mission (SCE).”

On the foreign policy front, President Duterte sought to set himself apart from his predecessors by pursuing an “independent foreign policy” rather than a “U.S.-centric foreign policy.” To this end, Duterte claimed in public statements that the Philippines is neutral in the ongoing U.S.-China competition, though it recognizes the importance of having U.S. troops in country to deter China. In a February 2021 speech, he said, “[The United States] is free to advance their troops in our land . . . . We do not like it because we want to remain neutral . . . . But the exigency of the moment requires their presence here, I am okay with that.” He further remarked, “We do not want to quarrel with anybody . . . . The game here is geopolitics.”

Though Duterte left office in June 2022 and his predecessors have varied in their affinity for the United States and China, the Philippines’ geostrategic location and historic relationships have put the nation in a delicate position between the United States and China. Like several of its neighbors, the Philippine government is loath to antagonize China, as it has repeatedly noted that it cannot hope to match China militarily. At the same time, Manila has frequently discounted Washington’s help or assurances in this arena, suggesting that there is more at play than just fear of being overrun by Beijing. Economics may play a big role: Duterte was seemingly swayed by China’s deep pockets, as China is the Philippines’ largest trading partner. In 2018, China was the largest foreign investor in the Philippines, though the United States eclipsed China in 2019 to become the top investor. Duterte’s successor may have diverging views on China’s involvement

199 Galang, 2019.
200 “Philippines’ Duterte Tells U.S. ‘You Have to Pay’ If It Wants to Keep Troop Deal,” Reuters, February 12, 2021.
in the Philippines, but China’s economic interests and investments in the Philippines will likely endure, keeping Manila in a precarious political position.

Despite Manila’s attempts to position itself as a neutral party in U.S.-China competition, the United States has publicly stated—amid recent tensions between the Philippines and China—that it views the Mutual Defense Treaty as obligating the United States to defend the Philippines against “armed attacks against the Philippine armed forces, public vessels, or aircraft in the Pacific, which includes the South China Sea.” The United States can ill afford to lose the Philippines as an ally: Access to the Philippines gives the United States the strategically important ability to easily access the SCS and counter Chinese activity in the first island chain, a group of islands that includes Japan and Taiwan.

The Philippines’ Willingness to Participate in U.S.-Led Operations

Using our analysis of open-source documents—and augmented by an interview with a U.S. government expert on the Philippines’ capabilities and strategic outlook—we concluded that the Philippines is unwilling to support the United States in any contingencies beyond those that directly affect the Philippines’ territorial integrity, maritime security, or encroach on key interests. This means that out of the four scenarios we examined, the Philippines would only be willing to provide limited support to the United States in three of them: a maritime invasion by China of Philippine territories, a maritime conflict in which China infringes on or threatens Philippine territory or interests, and stability operations (assuming there are implications for the Philippines, such as large refugee flows or threats to economic interests or territorial integrity). In all three scenarios, we assume the Philippines would defend itself as needed, but it is highly unlikely to provide access to U.S. forces or contribute to missions in the region that do not directly affect the Philippines. This unwillingness stems from several interrelated factors, including the following:

- Manila’s need to balance its relationships with the United States and China
- a reluctance to challenge China for fear of military or economic retribution
- limited military capabilities
- a desire for geopolitical autonomy.

The results of our analysis are summarized in Table 8.1. In the subsequent sections of this chapter, we analyze how a specific geopolitical factor has affected the Philippines’ willingness to provide access to U.S. forces or contribute capabilities to U.S. or coalition missions.

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203 Air Force official with expertise on the Philippines, interview with authors, April 15, 2021; defense official with expertise on the Philippines, interview with authors, April 19, 2021.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenarios</th>
<th>OCA/DCA</th>
<th>SEAD</th>
<th>C2ISR</th>
<th>CSAR/PR</th>
<th>Airlift</th>
<th>Tankers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maritime invasion (for example, attack on Taiwan, the Philippines)</td>
<td>No for Taiwan scenario; only if direct attack on the Philippines</td>
<td>No for Taiwan scenario; only if direct attack on the Philippines</td>
<td>No for Taiwan scenario; only if direct attack on the Philippines</td>
<td>No for Taiwan scenario; only if direct attack on the Philippines</td>
<td>No for Taiwan scenario; only if direct attack on the Philippines</td>
<td>No capability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land invasion (for example, North Korea provocation)</td>
<td>Unlikely, and the Philippine Air Force has limited capabilities</td>
<td>Unlikely, and the Philippine Air Force has limited capabilities</td>
<td>Unlikely unless Philippine interests are directly affected</td>
<td>Unlikely unless Philippine interests are directly affected</td>
<td>Unlikely unless Philippine interests are directly affected</td>
<td>No capability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maritime conflict (for example, SCS provocation)</td>
<td>Only if directly attacked, and the Philippine Air Force has limited air defense and air combat capabilities</td>
<td>Only if directly attacked, and the Philippine Air Force has limited air defense or other SEAD capabilities</td>
<td>Only if directly attacked</td>
<td>Only if directly attacked</td>
<td>Only if directly attacked</td>
<td>No capability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability operations (for example, RFF to region, collapse of North Korea)</td>
<td>Unlikely, and the Philippine Air Force has limited capabilities</td>
<td>Unlikely, and the Philippine Air Force has limited capabilities</td>
<td>Unlikely unless Philippine interests are directly affected</td>
<td>Unlikely unless Philippine interests are directly affected</td>
<td>Unlikely unless Philippine interests are directly affected</td>
<td>No capability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Manila’s Balancing Act Between the United States and China

China has persistently courted the Philippines through Belt and Road Initiative investments, COVID-19–related assistance, and other overtures, such as attempts to spin U.S. offers to defend the Philippines as malicious efforts to stoke war in the region. China’s approach proved very persuasive to Duterte, who was enamored of China throughout his time in office. On the other hand, he adopted a frosty posture toward the United States largely because of U.S. allegations (levied against him under both the Obama and Trump administrations) of human rights abuses as part of his violent war on drugs. As a result, Duterte was resistant to any U.S. agenda that would push democracy and human rights reform in the Philippines.

The fraying state of the U.S.-Philippine relationship under President Duterte jeopardized U.S. basing access. There are two major developments that signal potential issues for U.S. access to the Philippines for training, exercises, security cooperation, and large visits. The first is that implementation of the EDCA stalled under Duterte, with virtually no progress occurring during his time in office. The second is that the VFA is fairly fragile; it can be abrogated six months after either party to the agreement announces intent to terminate. The VFA appeared at risk following a February 11, 2020, declaration by Duterte indicating his intent to terminate the VFA. At the time, this declaration was “hailed by Beijing as evidence the United States was losing the great power competition with China in the Indo-Pacific.” However, the Biden administration prioritized renewing the VFA, emphasizing the importance of allowing U.S. access to the Philippines “given China’s increasing dominance in the South China Sea,” and the VFA was fully restored in July 2021. Although the VFA appears set for now, the ease with which it could be revoked means that the United States must actively seek to maintain it.

Given Manila’s hesitancy to fully embrace the United States, a willingness to support U.S. operations throughout the region will largely depend on the scale of Chinese attacks and the degree of Philippine interests implicated. Developments under the Duterte administration illustrate that the Philippine response to China vacillates depending on the severity of the scenario at hand. Amid China’s growing displays of aggression in the SCS, for instance, Duterte’s rhetoric shifted from being largely anti-U.S. to anti-China. In March 2021, hundreds of Chinese maritime militia vessels—which China claimed to be fishing vessels—began gathering at Whitsun Reef in the Spratly Islands, violating the Philippines’ exclusive economic zone. China’s goal was purportedly to “reinforce its [artificial islands and South China Sea claims] by

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204 Derek Grossman, “China Has Lost the Philippines Despite Duterte's Best Efforts,” Foreign Policy, May 6, 2021a.
swarming the disputed waters with vessels, effectively defying the other countries to expel them.\(^{208}\) This prompted Duterte to attempt to negotiate with China to cease its incursions and Philippine Secretary of Foreign Affairs Teodoro Locsin, Jr., to follow up with public statements firmly (and colorfully) decrying China’s actions.\(^{209}\)

The Philippines responded to the presence of Chinese ships in its waters by sending navy warships, coast guard boats, and fighter aircraft to surveil and patrol the Chinese ships. The Philippine coast guard conducted drills near Thitu Island, Scarborough Shoal, and the Batanes islands.\(^{210}\) Commenting on this incident, Philippine defense secretary Delfin Lorenzana stated that “the Philippines is ready to defend our national sovereignty and protect the marine resources of the Philippines.”\(^{211}\) Duterte similarly asserted, “I’ll tell China, we do not want trouble, we do not want war. But if you tell us to leave—no. . . . There are things which are not really subject to a compromise, such as us pulling back. It’s difficult. I hope [China] understand[s], but I have the interest of my country also to protect.”\(^{212}\)

This turn of events suggests that disputes over ownership of the Scarborough Shoal and the Spratly Islands in the SCS or other contested territory or waters could elicit stronger reactions from the Philippines; even if Duterte initially adopted an air of nonchalance about Chinese activity in the SCS, domestic pressures would likely spur a response by Manila—particularly if the United States were on board—to Chinese aggression that directly affects Philippine interests.\(^{213}\) Moreover, if a full-scale invasion of Taiwan occurs, the Philippines could be inclined to at least lend support in the form of increased U.S. access to its bases, as there are over 100,000 Filipino citizens residing in Taiwan.

\textbf{Fear of Antagonizing China}

Manila’s fear of Beijing hinges on the potential economic and military retribution that China could enact against the Philippines in the case of a dispute. Duterte, for instance, was often conciliatory toward China throughout his term, even opting not to implement a Hague ruling that deemed the West Philippine Sea—part of the SCS—to belong legally to the Philippines in exchange for Chinese loans and grants.\(^{214}\) He regularly framed his reluctance to challenge China as being in the best interests of the Philippines, claiming that he was avoiding confrontation because the Philippines would be destroyed in a war with China.

\textsuperscript{208} Sam Cohen and Alex Vivona, “Water Wars: Philippines ‘No Fool’ about Chinese Maritime Militia, While China Keeps Pressure on Taiwan,” \textit{Lawfare} blog, April 6, 2021.

\textsuperscript{209} Grossman, 2021a.

\textsuperscript{210} “Philippines’ Duterte Refuses to Stop South China Sea Patrols,” \textit{France24}, April 29, 2021.

\textsuperscript{211} Cohen and Vivona, 2021.

\textsuperscript{212} “Philippines’ Duterte Refuses . . . ,” 2021.


However, Duterte’s reluctance to engage China in defense of Philippine territory and waters may eventually crumble in response to domestic pressures. A 2019 poll conducted by the Social Weather Stations discovered that “93% of [a sample of 1,200] Filipino adults think ‘it is important that the Philippines regain control of the islands occupied by China in the West Philippine Sea.’”[^215] Previous polls in 2018 had yielded an 89-percent and 87-percent positive response rate, suggesting an increasing trend in the number of people supporting action against China to reclaim the occupied islands.[^216] The survey asked Filipinos about their opinions on strengthening the Philippines’ military capability (particularly the Navy) and forming alliances to aid in defensive operations in the West Philippine Sea, both of which were met with resounding affirmative responses (92 percent and 84 percent respectively).

This difference between public opinion and that of leadership suggests that there may be more appetite for engaging China to protect Philippine waters and territory under the next administration, especially should China’s aggressive behavior continue. Duterte did not represent the viewpoint of the whole Philippine government or the public throughout his time in office. There appear to be both pro-China and pro–United States factions within the Philippine government, with the pro-United States group slowly gaining momentum given China’s increasingly aggressive actions in the West Philippine Sea. For instance, the Philippine Department of Foreign Affairs has gradually adopted a stronger position on China; in response to a new Chinese law giving its “maritime authorities permission to fire on foreign vessels,” Philippine foreign secretary Locsin commented that, “While enacting law is a sovereign prerogative, this one—given the area involved or for that matter the open South China Sea—is a verbal threat of war to any country that defies the law; which, if unchallenged, is submission to it.”[^217] Philippine defense secretary Lorenzana similarly asserted that China “must abide by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas.”[^218] Moreover, a January 2020 survey showed that the Philippine defense establishment is concerned about China’s behavior.[^219] In late 2021, Manila took several steps that suggest a shift away from China and attempts to rebuild closer relations with the United States—these steps include “a series of high-level visits; the restoration of wide-ranging defense agreements; Manila’s full endorsement of the Australia–United Kingdom–United States security pact joining Australia, Britain, and the United States; the reestablishment of the Philippines–United States Bilateral Strategic Dialogue; and expanded joint military exercises [scheduled for 2022].”[^220]

[^216]: Esmaquel, 2019.
[^217]: Feng, 2021.
[^219]: Seah et al., 2021.
Despite this progress, Duterte’s influence may persist beyond his term. Some analysts have suggested that the Philippines’ pro-China leanings may continue beyond Duterte’s administration because of the magnitude of the threat that China poses along with the economic benefits that China provides to the Philippines.\(^{221}\)

**Limited Military Capabilities**

The level of support that the Philippines could offer to U.S. operations in the region is constrained both by low political will and limited military capabilities. Limited military prowess has in part contributed particularly to reluctance to become involved in a U.S.-China conflict; the Philippines’ defense apparatus has regularly expressed reluctance to bear the brunt of such a conflict—doing so would be highly damaging to the Philippines, which lacks the resources to effectively defend itself. The Philippine military’s strongest and best-resourced branch is by far its Army despite its greatest threats coming from the maritime domain.\(^{222}\) The Philippines does have a modernization program in place to bolster its air force and navy; notably, March 2021 reports suggest that the Philippines is seeking to procure the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile, which would provide a deterrent capability against China.\(^{223}\) Pending the fielding of this system, however, the Philippines would have little to contribute to any U.S. operations against China, even if it were willing to do so.

**Desire for Geopolitical Autonomy**

As previously discussed, Duterte sought strategic independence for the Philippines while acknowledging its difficult position in the U.S.-China competition. In one recent statement, Duterte declared that “I’m walking on a tightrope”—presumably referring to the Philippines’ position between the United States and China—and that “I’m not allied with anybody . . . . I will just offer my life and offer it to the Philippines. Nobody else.”\(^{224}\) Beyond Duterte’s statements, some analyses have suggested that the Philippines’ relationship with China is primarily economic in nature and that there is little danger of the Philippines abandoning the United States in favor of China. But others have noted that persistent inequities in the U.S.-Philippine alliance have stoked resentment and need to be rectified if the alliance is to thrive again.\(^{225}\) In short, the Philippines, like many U.S. allies in the region, has found itself


\(^{224}\) Cepeda, 2021.

having to balance its relationships with the United States and China and is seeking to maximize its security and prosperity by declining to place itself firmly in either camp.

Conclusion

The U.S.-Philippine alliance faces several issues, as illustrated by the near abrogation of the VFA, slow progress on implementation of the EDCA, and fraught U.S.-Philippine relations under Duterte. Although the next administration may be more pro-U.S. and take a harder line against China, the Philippines’ need to balance its relationships with the United States (its biggest security provider) and China (its biggest threat and a key trading partner) will continue to color its strategic decisions. These tensions, together with the Philippines’ limited military capability, have constrained the nation’s willingness to contribute to U.S. operations in the region, particularly operations against China. However, other RAND experts have argued that the U.S.-Philippine alliance remains resilient, and that “Manila continues to prioritize Washington over Beijing.”

Even Duterte, despite his anti-American rhetoric, seemed to be primarily motivated by pragmatic considerations about the overall geostrategic position of the Philippines. The Philippines has already demonstrated a certain degree of willingness to engage China in defense of its territorial waters, suggesting a possible willingness to support U.S. operations against China should its own interests be implicated.

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South Korea is among the most militarily capable U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific region—and in the world. It has the ability to support U.S. operations across all our scenarios. Its willingness to do so, however, is constrained by a variety of geopolitical factors, such as an eagerness to avoid any actions that may antagonize China in light of South Korea’s economic dependence on China; disagreements over key policy issues that are complicating the historically strong U.S.-South Korean alliance; perceptions of Japan as a potential threat rather than partner, leading to difficulties in effecting U.S.–South Korean–Japanese cooperation; the desire of the Moon administration to improve relations with North Korea; and political divisions between South Korea’s liberal and conservative constituencies regarding how to approach relationships with all of these actors (the United States, China, Japan, and North Korea). In this chapter, we first provide an overview of South Korea’s strategic objectives and orientation; we then assess South Korea’s willingness to support U.S. contingencies in light of these geopolitical constraints.

The Republic of Korea’s Strategic Concepts and National Interests

South Korea’s overall strategic objectives and orientation are heavily influenced by its relationships with and geographic proximity to other regional powers, particularly its vulnerable position sharing a peninsula with North Korea.

South Korea has been a U.S. ally since the two countries entered into a Mutual Defense Treaty in October 1953, which “obligates both parties to ‘act to meet the common danger’ in the event of an ‘armed attack in the Pacific area on either of the Parties.’” The South Korean/U.S. Combined Forces Command was subsequently established on November 7, 1978, with the mission to “deter, or defeat if necessary, outside aggression against the ROK.” The United States maintains a large force presence in South Korea; U.S. Forces Korea consists of roughly 28,500 troops headquartered at Camp Humphreys in Pyeongtaek and stationed at additional bases at Army Garrison Yongsan, Camp Walker, and air bases at Osan and Gunsan. The United States engages in high levels of security cooperation—such as joint military exercises and training—with South Korea through the auspices of the alliance.

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230 Chun et al., 2020, p. 18.
Despite its close alliance with the United States, South Korea has made clear that it feels caught between the United States and China and the growing competition between the two powers, relying as it does on the United States for security and China for economic prosperity. As the speaker of South Korea’s legislature, Moon Hee-sang, quipped in an interview with *The Atlantic*, ‘Asking whether South Korea will ‘choose either China or the United States’ is like ‘asking a child whether you like your dad or your mom’ . . . ‘We cannot abandon economy for the sake of security, and we cannot abandon security for the sake of economy.’” Given these dynamics, South Korea has sought to strike a delicate balance in its relations with the United States and China and shied away from being used as a pawn or middleman in U.S.-China strategic competition. Although the United States tends to view South Korean ties to China as a threat and damaging to U.S. interests, South Korea views this hedging strategy as essential for its national security. Given that North Korea’s only real ally, both economically and militarily, is China, South Korea must balance its relationship with both actors so as not to jeopardize its security. As one analyst explains South Korea’s strategic calculus in navigating these relationships:

South Korea’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Chung Eui-yong insisted that South Korea cannot afford a lopsided strategy, because the Korean economy depends upon trade with China, so that strategic ambiguity is inevitable. He argued that it is counterproductive to allow Sino-U.S. competition to overshadow Korean issues. Chung wants a more nuanced approach so that Seoul can make better progress with North Korea, pointing out that South Korea is the only intermediary available to connect the DPRK [Democratic Republic of Korea, or North Korea] and the U.S. without the involvement of China.

In another example of preserving this strategic ambiguity, South Korea has declined to join the Quad—consisting of the United States, Australia, Japan, and India—given its view that the Quad is directed at deterring and potentially fighting against China. Another factor influencing South Korea’s strategic orientation is its complicated relationship with Japan. South Korean–Japanese ties worsened in 2021 because of ongoing disputes over ownership of the Dokdo islets as well as historical issues that resurfaced over the treatment of South Korean women by Japanese occupiers. As a result, South Korea has increasingly shied away from deepened cooperation with Japan, even in efforts led or facilitated by the United States. U.S. efforts to foster a functional military alliance between South Korea and Japan have

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reportedly irked some South Korean liberal officials, who “view these efforts as forcing the two countries to get along for the sake of U.S.-China strategic competition.”

South Korea’s Ministry of National Defense routinely publishes defense white papers, which serve as the country’s primary national security strategy documents and reflect South Korea’s efforts to navigate its complicated geopolitical relationships. Although an English translation of South Korea’s Defense 2020 White Paper has yet to be released as of November 2021, South Korean news outlets have reported that the new white paper introduces the following key changes from the previous strategy:

- discussion of joint U.S.-South Korean “customized deterrence strategies” to deter North Korea as “Pyongyang reinforces its asymmetric power, including nuclear arms, weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and various ballistic missiles”
- acknowledgement that South Korea’s military is developing its own deterrent capabilities by “establishing strategically guided munitions and a domestically developed missile defense system for independent deterrence”
- reiteration of South Korea’s “2018 stance that the military considers forces that threaten or violate South Korea’s sovereignty, territory, people and property as an enemy,” though still stopping short of explicitly naming North Korea as an enemy
- downgrading Japan from a “partner,” as it was referred to in past white papers, to a “neighboring country” given ongoing disputes between the two countries over resurfacing historical issues and trade issues.

South Korea’s position at the difficult geopolitical intersection of the United States, China, North Korea, and Japan has strongly influenced its level of willingness to participate in various military contingencies. In the subsequent section, we analyze the specific geopolitical constraints and their effect on South Korea’s willingness to participate in U.S. operations.

The Republic of Korea’s Willingness to Participate in U.S.-Led Operations

Using our analysis of open-source information and interviews with experts on South Korea’s capabilities and strategic outlook, we determined that South Korea is unwilling to support the United States in most contingencies beyond the Korean Peninsula itself. More specifically, out of the four scenarios examined in this report, South Korea would be willing to provide support to the United States in only two of the scenarios, both of which directly involve South Korea. The

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240 Air Force official with expertise on South Korea, interview with authors, April 15, 2021; Defense official with expertise on Republic of Korea, interview with authors, April 19, 2021.
first scenario concerns a land invasion of South Korea by North Korea, and the second posits stability operations in the event of North Korea’s collapse. In both scenarios, we assume that South Korea would bring all of its assets to bear to defend itself as needed. However, our analysis suggests that South Korea is highly unlikely to contribute to missions in the region that do not directly affect South Korea’s territorial integrity or key interests. The one exception is the potential for South Korea to provide very limited support to stability operations—likely in the form of CSAR/PR support—if there is a non–North Korea scenario that generates instability near the Korean Peninsula. This unwillingness to provide access to U.S. forces or support U.S. missions vis-à-vis China has traditionally stemmed from tensions in the U.S.-South Korean relationship, fears of antagonizing China (and, relatedly, North Korea), and the political preferences of some South Korean presidential administrations.

Generally, South Korea is more willing to engage in noncombat missions, such as HA/DR and stability operations, because these run less risk of antagonizing China. However, the appetite even for this sort of engagement has reportedly been low in recent years. When it comes to contingencies on the Korean Peninsula—whether they are stability operations related to the collapse of North Korea or a land invasion scenario of South Korea itself—South Korea would presumably bring all of its capabilities to bear. The results of our analysis are summarized in Table 9.1. Each of the subsequent sections analyzes how a specific geopolitical factor has affected South Korea’s willingness to contribute capabilities to U.S. or coalition missions.

241 Air Force official with expertise on South Korea, interview with authors, April 15, 2021; Defense official with expertise on Republic of Korea, interview with authors, April 19, 2021.
242 Air Force official with expertise on South Korea, interview with authors, April 15, 2021.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenarios</th>
<th>OCA/DCA</th>
<th>SEAD</th>
<th>C2ISR</th>
<th>CSAR/PR</th>
<th>Airlift</th>
<th>Tankers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maritime invasion (for example, attack on Taiwan, the Philippines)</td>
<td>Highly unlikely, unless South Korea is directly threatened by or otherwise implicated in scenario</td>
<td>Highly unlikely, unless South Korea is directly threatened by or otherwise implicated in scenario</td>
<td>Highly unlikely, unless South Korea is directly threatened by or otherwise implicated in scenario</td>
<td>Unlikely, unless South Korea is directly threatened by or otherwise implicated in scenario</td>
<td>Highly unlikely, unless South Korea is directly threatened by or otherwise implicated in scenario</td>
<td>Highly unlikely, unless South Korea is directly threatened by or otherwise implicated in scenario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land invasion (for example, North Korea provocation)</td>
<td>Yes, but only if North Korean or Chinese aggression is aimed at South Korea</td>
<td>Yes, but only if North Korean or Chinese aggression is aimed at South Korea</td>
<td>Yes, but only if North Korean or Chinese aggression is aimed at South Korea</td>
<td>Yes, but only if North Korean or Chinese aggression is aimed at South Korea</td>
<td>Yes, but only if North Korean or Chinese aggression is aimed at South Korea</td>
<td>Yes, but only if North Korean or Chinese aggression is aimed at South Korea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maritime conflict (for example, SCS provocation)</td>
<td>Highly unlikely, unless South Korea is directly threatened by or otherwise implicated in scenario</td>
<td>Highly unlikely, unless South Korea is directly threatened by or otherwise implicated in scenario</td>
<td>Highly unlikely, unless South Korea is directly threatened by or otherwise implicated in scenario</td>
<td>Unlikely unless South Korea is directly threatened by or otherwise implicated in scenario</td>
<td>Highly unlikely, unless South Korea is directly threatened by or otherwise implicated in scenario</td>
<td>Highly unlikely, unless South Korea is directly threatened by or otherwise implicated in scenario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability operations (for example, RFF to region, collapse of North Korea)</td>
<td>Yes, if the scenario involved collapse of North Korea or instability on the Korean Peninsula</td>
<td>Yes, if the scenario involved collapse of North Korea or instability on the Korean Peninsula</td>
<td>Yes, if the scenario involved collapse of North Korea or instability on the Korean Peninsula</td>
<td>Yes, if the scenario involved collapse of North Korea or instability on the Korean Peninsula; potential support to non–Korean Peninsula operations if there is some South Korean interest implicated</td>
<td>Yes, if the scenario involved collapse of North Korea or instability on the Korean Peninsula</td>
<td>Yes, if the scenario involved collapse of North Korea or instability on the Korean Peninsula</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dependence on and Fear of Antagonizing China

China is South Korea’s largest trading partner but also its greatest threat (beyond North Korea) given China’s large arsenal of ballistic missiles capable of striking South Korean targets—which is about four times as many as can strike Japan. As such, although President Moon Jae-in demonstrated higher willingness than his predecessors to support U.S. operations beyond the immediate Korean Peninsula, he expressed concerns about being drawn into conflicts between the United States and China. South Korea’s geopolitical position makes it highly unlikely to participate in any operations against China itself—assuming South Korea’s national interests are not directly implicated in the scenario—or even to “buy in to any explicit condemnation of China.” More broadly, South Korea’s wariness of provoking China has engendered deep reluctance in Seoul to participate in any contingencies beyond South Korea’s immediate borders or situations in which its interests are directly affected. In one example of this reluctance to provoke China by straying into contingencies beyond its borders, South Korea rejected U.S. proposals in 2019 to revise the joint crisis management manual to expand the concept of a crisis to require a joint U.S.-Korean response to contingencies in the SCS and beyond. Wariness of antagonizing China has created sensitivities surrounding the use of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile system. The sensitives around THAAD stem from China’s coercion of South Korea following the 2017 deployment of this missile system in South Korea, which was aimed at strengthening South Korean missile defense capabilities vis-à-vis North Korea. Claiming that the deployment of THAAD threatened China’s “legitimate national security interests,” China imposed stringent (yet unofficial) sanctions on several South Korean sectors, resulting $7.5 billion in damage to South Korea’s economy in 2017. Bending to Chinese economic pressure, then newly elected South Korean President Moon “agreed to China’s ‘Three Nos’: No additional THAAD deployment, no participation in U.S. missile defense, and no trilateral military alliance with the U.S. and Japan” in exchange for the normalization of economic relations. Experts note, however, that this agreement largely codified South Korea’s status quo and that its conditions do not appear to have had any lasting impact.

244 Fuch and Lee, 2020.
Fissures in the U.S.–South Korean Relationship

U.S.–South Korean relations have been strained in recent years because of differing stances on China, Japan, and North Korea; significant U.S. fluctuations in policy under the Trump administration; and disputes over burden-sharing. Importantly, the United States and South Korea have differing goals for their alliance. From South Korea’s perspective, its alliance with the United States is primarily useful for fostering deterrence against and potential détente with North Korea; the United States, for its part, continues to push for a broader agenda, viewing South Korea as “an essential bulwark in maintaining the security of Northeast Asia and in protecting democracy and human rights.” These diverging interests have resulted in disagreements over preferred approaches to the region.

In one prominent example of disagreements over burden-sharing, when the Special Measures Agreement—which specifies South Korea’s financial contributions to sustaining U.S. Forces Korea—expired in 2018, the Trump administration requested a 150-percent increase, to $1.2 billion annually. The Moon administration countered with an 8.2-percent increase and offered to renegotiate the terms of the agreement annually, an offer the Trump administration accepted. When the Special Measures Agreement expired again in 2019, however, the Trump administration requested a 500-percent increase in South Korea’s annual contributions, sparking months of deadlocked negotiations during which thousands of U.S. Forces Korea personnel were put on unpaid leave. This call for such a large increase in South Korea’s contributions generated some consternation on the part of the Moon administration because South Korea has shouldered a good deal of the cost for the U.S. military presence in country, including financing 90 percent of the $11 billion it cost to build the large U.S. base of Camp Humphreys.

Following these extracting demands in discussions over burden-sharing, public opinion of the United States reportedly fell “to an almost historic low of 45 percent,” though “92 percent of the South Korean public remains supportive of the alliance.” Moreover, only 4 percent of the public supported increases of the order that the Trump administration had requested.

There has been considerable debate over how large of a U.S. force presence and how much joint activity is required in South Korea to maintain effective deterrence against North Korea and contribute to U.S. deterrent efforts against China across the Indo-Pacific Command. Most U.S. officials tend to believe that U.S. force levels (approximately 28,500 as of November 2021) should be maintained to signal resolve and bolster deterrence, but Seoul is reportedly amenable to reducing both the U.S. force presence and participation in joint exercises, believing it will help

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ease tensions and improve relations with North Korea.\textsuperscript{253} In 2019, for example, the United States struck a deal to scale back U.S. exercises with South Korea in exchange for suspension of North Korean nuclear and missile tests. Although many analysts decried this decision as the United States abandoning its South Korean ally, some U.S. officials have suggested that South Korea actually requested this action to deescalate tensions with North Korea.\textsuperscript{254} Whatever the motives for this move, South Korea denied U.S. calls in 2020 to increase its financial contributions to support U.S. rotational deployments.

Despite these tensions and disagreements between the United States and South Korea, the alliance remains strong, in large part because Seoul requires U.S. backing to achieve several of its foreign policy and security objectives, including its overtures to North Korea with the aim of improving inter-Korea relations because “North Korea wants sanctions relief and security guarantees—concessions that Seoul cannot provide without U.S. support.”\textsuperscript{255} In renewing the latest Special Measures Agreement in March 2021, Washington and Seoul agreed that South Korea would pay “1,183 trillion won ($1 billion) in 2021 toward the costs of U.S. Forces Korea, a 13.9 percent increase from 2019, and . . . payments [would be raised] over the next four years at a rate that tracks the increase in Seoul’s own defense spending.”\textsuperscript{256} Out of these talks emerged the possibility that Seoul would buy more “weapons and equipment from U.S. companies to operate the new ROK carrier.”\textsuperscript{257} South Korea’s desire for the United States to transfer wartime operation control (OPCON) to South Korea did not materialize, however. U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin “made clear that both militaries need more time to complete procedures for full operational control in the event of a condition-based OPCON transfer.”\textsuperscript{258}

An additional factor affecting the U.S.–South Korean alliance is the frostiness of the South Korean–Japanese relationship as of 2021. South Korea’s ongoing feud with Japan has complicated the security relationship between the two countries and—by extension—undermined U.S. security objectives in the region. In 2019, for example, South Korea declared it was not going to renew the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSSOMIA), a bilateral military intelligence-sharing agreement with Japan that “provide[s] both countries with a direct line of communication for the exchange of classified military information regarding both North Korea’s ballistic missile launches and conventional military operations.”\textsuperscript{259} Though Seoul ended up changing its mind at the last minute and did not go through with the termination, it has

\textsuperscript{253} Fuch and Lee, 2020; and Shin and Lee, 2021.
\textsuperscript{254} Interview with Air Force Official with expertise on Republic of Korea, April 15, 2021.
\textsuperscript{255} Fuch and Lee, 2020.
\textsuperscript{256} Yoon, 2021.
\textsuperscript{257} Yoon, 2021.
\textsuperscript{258} Yoon, 2021.
since threatened to end the agreement again and appears to be using this as a bargaining chip in its disputes with Japan. On a strategic level, the two countries are split in their stances toward the United States, as “Japan is happy to toe the U.S. line, whatever that may be, but to U.S. eyes South Korea is altogether too well-disposed toward China and North Korea.” In sum, South Korea’s geopolitical constraints are greater than those of Japan when it comes to its willingness to support U.S. operations, and the lack of will for two of the United States’ closest allies in the region to work together poses significant obstacles for future U.S. operations vis-à-vis China in particular.

**Political Preferences and Objectives of South Korean Leadership**

Within South Korea, the level of willingness to engage in U.S.-led contingencies is highly dependent on which political party is in power. Conservatives tend to be more pro-United States and more hawkish on North Korea while progressives prefer to be less dependent on the United States and more conciliatory toward North Korea. South Korean liberals are “willing to actively pursue steps such as joint economic projects and humanitarian assistance as confidence-building measures [with North Korea], while simultaneously addressing threat reduction and denuclearization.” As one analysis in the aftermath of a March 2021 meeting between U.S. and South Korean foreign and defense officials (dubbed the “2+2 talks”) explained:

Korean reactions to the 2+2 talks were predictably mixed. Liberals were disappointed with the outcome. They view the future of the ROK-U.S. alliance in terms of the changing geopolitical environment, declining U.S. influence, and China’s rise. They seek a more autonomous security framework, and saw this meeting as an opportunity promote a pan-Korean approach to a peace settlement and denuclearization. They also want to expedite . . . OPCON transfer. Conservatives criticized the Moon administration for naively believing in Chinese and North Korean statements on denuclearization. They fear that half-hearted cooperation with the United States will erode the security alliance, leading ultimately to the withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea.

President Moon Jae-in’s administration ended in 2022, however, and it is difficult to determine with certainty how policy will unfold in the future.

**Conclusion**

South Korea is among the most militarily capable U.S. allies in the region. However, it is unlikely to engage militarily to support the United States in any contingencies beyond the Korean Peninsula given the dynamics and developments discussed in this chapter, notably its

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262 Yoon, 2021.
complicated relationship with China and issues in the U.S.–South Korean relationship. South Korea’s continued reliance on the United States as a security provider and lever of influence over North Korea despite bilateral issues—coupled with the large U.S. force presence in South Korea—could contribute to greater willingness on the part of South Korea to support U.S. access or operations beyond the Korean Peninsula in future, but for now this remains an open question.
Chapter 10. Singapore

Singapore is the most favorable environment for the U.S. military in Southeast Asia because it views its relations and partnership with the United States as essential to its security policy. However, this does not mean that the U.S. military will receive effusive support in the case of a crisis. Due to Singapore’s size and position, its strategy is to balance all of its partners and create a dense network of relationships. The United States has the most capabilities of all of Singapore’s partners, which offers the most opportunities for cooperation, but Singapore limits that cooperation out of this desire for balance. So, although Singapore is a long-standing and trustworthy partner in security cooperation, it will continue to cooperate with other regional actors—Japan, India, Australia, and even China on occasion—out of its desire for balance. This means there will likely always be a cap to the degree of cooperation that emerges from the relationship with Singapore as it seeks to maintain good relations with all regional partners.

This assessment was reached after an analysis of documents from the government of Singapore, previous RAND research, scholarly work, and recent events involving Singapore. Our team used these documents to determine core Singaporean national self-interests, the domestic politics of Singapore, its strategic posture, and the state of cooperation with the United States, along with trends within that cooperation and a variety of other factors, such as fear of retaliation. Overall, these elements support the diagnosis that Singapore is unlikely to dramatically escalate its level of cooperation with the United States in the event of any crisis that forces a zero-sum decision between China and the United States. However, for other types of issues, especially when it comes to stabilization operations, Singapore may be a reliable partner if Beijing does not significantly object.

Singapore’s Strategic Concepts and National Interests

Singapore’s overall strategy is one of a diversified series of relationships throughout the region, including with China, but with an overall tilt toward the United States. The historical relationship with the United States, the heft of U.S. foreign direct investment in Singapore, and the numerous opportunities for defense cooperation with U.S. forces drives this tilt, along with similar visions for a region that is not dominated by China. Singapore’s defense cooperation with the United States is only growing over time, as it purchases F-35s, which will continue to enmesh Singaporean forces into the U.S. defense network in the region.

However, there are significant cross-cutting forces that are leading Singapore to a closer relationship with China over time as China’s power in the region increases. Singapore seeks to reduce friction in that relationship and expand relations with China to the extent that Singapore’s security interests or freedom of action are not threatened. Singapore has assisted in financing Belt and Road Initiative projects, which it sees as offering financial gains. Trade with China is increasing, with almost 30 percent of Singapore’s trade now tied to either China or Hong Kong. However, there is growing concern in Singapore that China’s growing influence and power is leading to a more assertive pursuit of Chinese interests, which could imperil Singapore. Despite these concerns, along with some views that China has already sealed control of the SCS, Singapore has sought to improve relations with Beijing in order to buoy its economy. Even so, there are large and potentially unresolvable issues in Singapore’s relationship with China, such as Singapore’s military cooperation with the United States, its military training on Taiwan, and its support for the tribunal verdict on the SCS that sided with the Philippines. These and other items limit the closeness of any relationship with Beijing.

To insulate itself from great power politics, Singapore tends to act through ASEAN to both amplify its power and further balance its portfolio of relationships. On a public opinion level, 83 percent of a surveyed group of Singaporean elites said they were worried about ASEAN becoming an arena for great power competition, rather than its preferred path of ASEAN as an independent base of power separate from more-powerful states in the region. However, the use of ASEAN is more of a buffer against China than the United States for Singapore, as none of the respondents in that same survey group reported that they considered China as a benevolent power and 92 percent worried about China’s growing influence. Overall, despite improvements in its relationship with Beijing, Singapore will likely continue in its strategy of having a diversified series of relationships with regional states and acting through ASEAN to prevent itself from being dominated and to maintain its freedom of action.

As a result of these perspectives, there are a host of opportunities for the U.S. military to work with Singapore, particularly on such things as HADR. Further kinds of high-tech, nonintrusive forms of cooperation are abundantly available as well, such as collaboration on space and cyber operations; electronic warfare; command and control; and communications,

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265 We used the search string “Singapore Trade by Country.” United Nations, undated.
intelligence, and surveillance. These types of cooperation are mutually beneficial: They assist the United States in building its network of partnerships in the region and provide it with enhanced capabilities; they also provide Singapore with the same. Singapore’s overall view of the region is largely in alignment with the United States, and it supports the U.S. vision for the region over the long term. That vision features stability and prosperity for all states in a region that is not dominated by an assertive China.

Singapore has much better diplomatic and political ties to the United States than it does to China, and the United States is still the leading source of foreign direct investment into Singapore. Its military is deeply intertwined with the United States, with Singaporean F-16C/Ds and Apaches hosted in Arizona, along with F-15SGs in Idaho. Ties will continue to strengthen as Singapore purchases F-35s and enhances its interoperability with U.S. forces, along with F-35 contingents from both Japan and Australia. The United States routinely sends P-8 reconnaissance flights out of Singapore, along with other USAF aircraft; Singapore sees roughly 100 U.S. Navy visits per month and hosts a Navy information fusion center. On top of these areas of cooperation, public opinion of the United States in Singapore is quite high, though the public is concerned about its reliability and predictability.

Overall, in the event of a crisis, the nature of the situation will largely dictate the degree of cooperation from Singapore, though any additional willingness would come on top of a high level of support. Singapore recognizes that it lies at both a critical and a vulnerable strategic position and that it cannot defend itself from more powerful neighbors on its own. Its pursuit of balance is largely in the interests of protecting itself by playing more-powerful actors off each other. However, during previous crises, Singapore did allow operations to continue from its territory, such as P-8 flights into the SCS where there were brewing tensions with forces from China. This will likely continue to be a template for expectations of cooperation in future crises. As long as the United States and other allied states do not force Singapore into zero-sum decisions that imperil its long-term relationship with China, significant support will likely continue in the event of a crisis.

Singapore’s Willingness to Participate in U.S.-Led Operations

Although Singapore tilts further in the direction of the United States than its neighbors Malaysia and Indonesia do, Singapore is still focused on hedging between the United States and China. Singapore’s defense cooperation with the United States began the period of China’s rise at an already high level and thus constituted the status quo. Although it is unlikely that Singapore’s cooperation with the U.S. military will be reduced, it will take China’s response

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269 Cooper and Chase, 2020.
seriously when considering any moves for additional layers of cooperation. Though Singapore’s view of the ideal structure of the international order largely comports with that of the United States, the economic realities of Southeast Asia mandate the avoidance of needlessly poking China.

When it comes to the specific conflict scenarios detailed in this report, the likelihood of Singapore’s support is mostly consistent with its neighbors.\textsuperscript{272} Singapore would likely be on the side of the United States and its allies, but much depends on the nature of the conflict, who started it and how, and whether it is sanctioned by an official body (such as the UN). UN sanctions are particularly unlikely in any scenario involving conflict with China because of China’s veto power within the Security Council. However, instability in Southeast Asia or involving North Korea could see Chinese support within the United Nations, in which case Singapore’s support would likely be forthcoming.\textsuperscript{273} Given Singapore’s history with stability operations, it could provide backing for stabilization even if China objects moderately—in a way that would not severely imperil Singapore’s increasing reliance on Chinese trade.

In other scenarios, current levels of support and cooperation would likely continue, but that limits activities to nonkinetic ones focused on HADR and ISR. Such activities as supporting OCA operations are unlikely; they have a high risk of spurring retaliation and thus run afoul of Singapore’s consistent interest in maintaining positive relations with all nations. This likely future is consistent with levels of support that Singapore already provides, and these levels do not allow, for example, the docking of ships immediately before or after operations targeting China (such as freedom-of-navigation operations). Such restrictions on docking give an indication of the delicate balance that Singapore seeks to maintain between the United States and China.

Therefore, for both maritime scenarios and the potential land invasion scenario, much depends on the nature of the conflict, how it began, and larger responses within ASEAN. Singapore relies on ASEAN as a power amplifier when working with larger partners, and the organization insulates Singapore from more-direct consequences if a larger neighbor opposes its actions. However, a unified response from ASEAN to any of these scenarios is unlikely, given the alignment of some ASEAN members with China. Thus, Singapore’s explicit support in these scenarios is contingent on elements similar to those in Malaysia and Indonesia’s calculus: Is China the undisputed aggressor, is Singapore directly under threat, and is it unlikely that trade relationships prior to the conflict are unlikely to be restored in full in the aftermath?

In the event that the answer to any of those questions is “yes,” Singapore’s support for the United States in a conflict is more likely. These questions are particularly critical in a Taiwan scenario, which may be seen as a tipping point for the regional balance of power. Furthermore, if

\textsuperscript{272} Bonny Lin, \textit{U.S. Allied and Partner Support for Taiwan: Responses to a Chinese Attack on Taiwan and Potential U.S. Taiwan Policy Changes}, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, CT-A1194-1, 2021.

\textsuperscript{273} U.S. defense officials, interview with authors, 2021.
a Taiwan crisis is initiated by China, Singapore is likely to see this as a violation of its commitment to regional stability and ability to balance powers within the country’s alliance portfolio. If the regional order is overturned with a successful Chinese move on Taiwan, it would open Singapore, as a small and vulnerable nation, to being dominated by a hegemonic China in the absence of the ability to balance between regional powers. Undisputed aggression by China would similarly be seen as a violation of Singapore’s commitment to regional stability and raise the likelihood of its support for U.S. operations.

The two areas in which Singapore’s support is more likely are those of stability operations and HADR. Singapore has taken a leading role in the region providing humanitarian assistance during crises as part of its strategy of being a “friend to all, enemy to none.” Singapore offered assistance to both Myanmar and Bangladesh during the Rohingya crisis (only Bangladesh accepted); and Singapore has brought its ability to rapidly deploy supplies in numerous other natural disasters in the region. Furthermore, it has offered assistance to the Philippines against Islamic extremist fighters, although that offer was declined because of a status-of-forces legal issue. This latter example is a demonstration of Singapore’s primary security interest, which is concerns over the return of fighters from the Middle East to Southeast Asia. Operations aimed at combating terrorism or potential insurgencies could see support from Singapore, especially in the case of general Chinese lack of interest in the issue.274

This analysis then produces likely outcomes in each scenario, along with the type of missions within them (Table 10.1).

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274 U.S. defense officials, interview with authors, 2021.
Table 10.1. Assessment of Singapore’s Support for U.S.-Led Scenarios

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenarios</th>
<th>OCA/DCA</th>
<th>SEAD</th>
<th>C2ISR</th>
<th>CSAR/PR</th>
<th>Airlift</th>
<th>Tankers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maritime invasion (for example, attack on Taiwan, the Philippines)</td>
<td>Possibly DCA, only if directly threatened, trade imperiled, or situation precludes return to normal.</td>
<td>Unlikely to support nondefensive missions. Little capability.</td>
<td>Not unless directly attacked</td>
<td>Not unless directly attacked</td>
<td>Not unless directly attacked</td>
<td>Not unless directly attacked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land invasion (for example, North Korea provocation)</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>Possible depending on origins of conflict and position of China</td>
<td>Possible depending on origins of conflict and position of China</td>
<td>Possible depending on origins of conflict and position of China</td>
<td>Possible depending on origins of conflict and position of China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maritime conflict (for example, SCS provocation)</td>
<td>Possibly DCA, only if directly threatened, trade imperiled, or situation precludes return to normal.</td>
<td>Unlikely to support nondefensive missions. Little capability.</td>
<td>Only if directly attacked</td>
<td>Only if directly attacked</td>
<td>Only if directly attacked</td>
<td>Only if directly attacked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability operations (for example, RFF to region, collapse of North Korea)</td>
<td>Not applicable for the main scenario of a Korean stability operation</td>
<td>Not applicable for the main scenario of a Korean stability operation</td>
<td>Unlikely to be relevant to a Korean scenario; likely to offer help in some counterterrorism cases</td>
<td>Unlikely to be relevant to a Korean scenario; likely to offer help in some counterterrorism cases</td>
<td>Unlikely to be relevant to a Korean scenario; likely to offer help in some counterterrorism cases</td>
<td>Unlikely to be relevant to a Korean scenario; likely to offer help in some counterterrorism cases</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 11. Taiwan

This chapter analyzes the extent to which Taiwan might support the U.S. military in conducting specific operations across the range of contingencies and scenarios presented in this report. Although it is a near certainty that Taiwan would provide all manner of support to the U.S. military if the island itself came under attack from China, Taiwanese support under every other China-related scenario examined in this report is ambiguous at best and unlikely at worst. Taipei is very likely to assess that any assistance to Washington’s wartime efforts against China elsewhere in the Indo-Pacific would result in serious repercussions for Taiwan, unnecessarily jeopardizing its security. There might, however, be the possibility of covert Taiwanese assistance to the United States, especially in areas such as C2ISR and CSAR/PR. Nevertheless, Taipei would proceed in an exceedingly cautious manner that might limit the value of such support. If the contingency is against another state (such as North Korea) or nonstate actor, then the potential for Taiwanese assistance probably improves significantly across all operational missions.

To assess the potential for Taiwan to support U.S. combat operations, we considered the categories of potential data outlined in Chapter 1. We looked for the indicators specific to this case that appear to be especially decisive in determining the answer. In this case, those factors were self-interest, including interests at stake in the specific scenario; fear of retaliation and vulnerability to punishment; domestic politics; lack of a formal alliance with the United States; and public statements by senior officials.

Taiwan’s Strategic Concepts and National Interests

Since the landslide election of Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen in 2016, and her landslide reelection in 2020, Taiwan has faced an increasingly hostile China that is pressuring the island on virtually every front: diplomatic, economic, and military. Although Tsai is an exceptionally pragmatic leader who seeks to maintain the peaceful status quo in the Taiwan Strait, Beijing continues to be suspicious of her motives as she hails from the independence-leaning Democratic Progressive Party.²⁷⁵ Tsai has attempted to appease Beijing by recognizing that the “1992 Consensus”—an alleged agreement between China and Taiwan’s Kuomintang on the existence of only one China—was “an historical fact.”²⁷⁶ However, she has refused to explicitly recognize

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²⁷⁶ “Full Text of President Tsai’s Inaugural Address,” Focus Taiwan, May 20, 2016.
“One China,” prompting Chinese President Xi Jinping in January 2019 to double down on the need to reunite (from the uniquely Chinese perspective) Taiwan with mainland China. In response, Taiwan has sought to strengthen its unofficial partnership with the United States. Under the Trump administration, the U.S.-Taiwan partnership reached new heights. For example, U.S. arms sales to Taiwan during the Trump years occurred more frequently and robustly than was the case during the Obama administration. In addition, Congress passed more pro-Taiwan (and anti-China) legislation, signed by President Trump into law, than perhaps at any time since Washington switched diplomatic recognition in 1979 from Taipei to Beijing. Notable examples of this recent activity are the Taiwan Travel Act (2018) and the Taiwan Allies and International Protection Enhancement Initiative (TAIPEI) Act (2020). The Taiwan Travel Act encourages senior-level official engagements, and the TAIPEI Act seeks to protect Taiwan’s 15 remaining diplomatic partners from being poached by Beijing. In the waning days of the Trump administration, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced that the United States would end self-imposed contact guidelines with Taiwan, paving the way for regularized diplomatic interactions at all levels. The early days of the Biden administration indicated a plan to keep the Trump administration’s forward-leaning Taiwan policy.

Taiwan has welcomed and probably encouraged every U.S. initiative to help balance against China’s growing economic and military power. Taipei has seized the initiative on its own to better position itself in cross-Strait relations. On the diplomatic front, in addition to prioritizing relations with the United States, Taiwan has sought to enhance its unofficial partnerships with like-minded democratic nations, such as Japan, Australia, and India. Additionally, Tsai in 2016 announced her New Southbound Policy aimed at diversifying the Taiwanese economy away from overdependence on China. In the military domain, Tsai has welcomed U.S. arms sales and endorsed the Overall Defense Concept—a new asymmetric warfighting plan designed to complicate a Chinese amphibious landing invasion against the island. It is important to note,

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278 “The Trump administration notified Congress of 20 proposed major Foreign Military Sales cases for Taiwan, with a combined value of over $18 billion. By comparison, over eight years in office, the Obama administration notified Congress of 16 cases with a combined value of $14 billion.” (Susan V. Lawrence, “Taiwan: Political and Security Issues,” Congressional Research Service, January 4, 2021, p. 2)
however, that Taiwan’s Ministry of National Defense over the past few years has been resistant to fully implementing the Overall Defense Concept—or, at least, it has avoided vocalizing its support for the concept. Either way, the concept is the official Taiwan defense strategy, and we expect to see Taipei plan accordingly. In sum, Taiwan’s security strategy is aimed at blunting Chinese advantages within a cross-Strait context. It is multifaceted and largely dependent on sustained U.S. support.

Taiwan’s Willingness to Participate in U.S.-Led Operations

Taipei’s near exclusive focus on Chinese threats against Taiwan means it is virtually inconceivable that Taipei would not assist the U.S. military across all proposed operational missions for the first scenario (maritime aggression or invasion). Taiwan certainly has vital interests at stake—specifically, the very survival of its democratic governance and status as a de facto independent country in the face of Chinese annexation through force. President Tsai and most other Taiwanese leaders have consistently highlighted the need to protect Taiwan’s democracy from China and to do whatever necessary to secure the island’s sovereignty in the future.\(^{283}\) This is particularly true following Beijing’s implementation of its new national security law in Hong Kong and its crackdown on dissent in the territory.\(^{284}\) Additionally, although there is no formal security alliance between the United States and Taiwan, Taipei has routinely supported a stronger relationship with Washington as key to balancing against Beijing. For example, in an interview held in September 2020, Taiwanese Foreign Minister Joseph Wu stated that, “We are not seeking full diplomatic relations with the United States at this moment . . . but, certainly, there is a lot of room for us to explore how to strengthen the relations between Taiwan and the United States, and we have been advocating that Taiwan and the United States should further strengthen the economic relations, trade relations, political relations, even security relations.”\(^{285}\)

Given the sensitivity of Taiwan’s position vis-à-vis China, it is unsurprising that Taipei has not offered any public commitments on assisting the U.S. military across the operational missions explored in this report. However, there are occasional indications that Taipei plans to be fully engaged with the United States in the event of a maritime aggression or invasion contingency against Taiwan. For instance, 1st Army Green Berets were reportedly welcomed to Taiwan in June 2020 for joint training, and Marine Raiders were deployed in November 2020 for


\(^{284}\) “Keep Faith in Democracy, Taiwan President Tells Hong Kongers in New Year Message,” Reuters, February 10, 2021.

a separate joint exercise there. Regarding the latter engagement, Taiwan’s Naval Command issued a rare statement, noting, “In order to maintain regional peace and stability, the military and security cooperation and exchanges between Taiwan and the United States are proceeding normally.” The fact that Taiwan felt comfortable enough not only to host U.S. Special Forces but to publicly confirm their presence in the country is quite a positive indication for wartime cooperation. Taiwan’s willingness to train with the U.S. military on special forces missions suggests that such operations as CSAR/PR would be easily within the range of potential cooperation. Furthermore, Taiwan’s possession of 207 F-16s—including its purchase in August 2019 of an additional 66 F-16 Vipers—can be leveraged to complement USAF’s OCA/DCA missions in a future fight against China (though one has to wonder whether Taiwan’s Air Force would even be operable following China’s near-certain bombardment of its air fields and air installations at the outset of conflict). Following the deal, President Tsai said that Washington, with this sale, demonstrated its “long-standing commitment to helping maintain peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait.” Similarly, Washington’s sale to Taipei in October 2020 of stand-off land attack missile/extended range (SLAM-ER) air-to-ground missiles and drones will provide Taiwan with additional equipment to support the U.S. military’s SEAD and C2ISR missions. In response, Taiwan’s defense minister, Yen Teh-fa, said that the sale “shows the importance attached by the United States to security in the Indo-Pacific and the Taiwan Strait. We will continue to consolidate our security partnership with the United States.” Although no public statements were found specific to potential Taiwanese assistance in U.S. airlift operations, it is reasonable to presume that Taiwan, if under attack from China, would offer some of its limited airlift capabilities—18 C-130Hs and 13 commercial aircraft—in support of U.S. military operations to help defend the island. Finally, Taiwan does not possess any tankers, and thus would not be relevant to the analysis in this study of potential tanker support to U.S. military operations.

289 Taijing Wu, “Taiwan’s Tsai Expresses Thanks over Approval of F-16V Sale,” Associated Press, August 20, 2019.
Taiwan does not have any specific leaders in place that would attempt to exercise a veto over assistance to the U.S. military during a maritime aggression or invasion scenario. Nor would it be likely that Taiwan would face significant domestic constraints, particularly when already at war with China. Taipei does not have a policy of nonalignment; it is fully aligned with the United States and other like-minded democratic partners (such as Australia, India, and Japan). If Taiwan is the target of an attack, then decisions made by external countries would not play into Taipei’s decisionmaking calculus; it would be preoccupied with the need to defend itself. See Table 11.1 for more on this.

Regarding the second scenario analyzed in this study, a land invasion, Taiwan is far less likely to support U.S. military objectives in many possible scenarios. Taipei would not seek to unnecessarily antagonize Beijing during a Chinese land invasion of India in the Himalayas, for example. It is less clear, however, whether Taiwan would support U.S. military operations in the default land invasion scenario employed for the purposes of this analysis—a Korean Peninsula contingency. Given that it is virtually inconceivable for China not to be involved in such a conflict, or at least to not have national interests in the outcome, it is thus unlikely Taiwan would feel comfortable assisting Washington there because of a risk of retribution from Beijing. Either way, there are no public statements directly against Taiwanese support for U.S. military action in a land invasion scenario, nor are there any in support of it. This is not to say, however, that Taiwan is afraid to publicly choose sides.

Table 11.1. Assessment of Taiwan’s Support for U.S.-Led Scenarios—Maritime Aggression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 Maritime aggression or invasion or Taiwan scenario</td>
<td>Does the country have vital interests at stake?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is there a formal U.S. alliance?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Any public comments for or against supporting the United States?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assurances or comments at the official level that suggest willingness or lack of it?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specific senior leaders in a position to exercise a veto effect?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confront significant domestic constraints?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the country have a strong policy of nonalignment?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Any interaction or coalition effects among allies or partners?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For example, during China-India land border tensions, both President Tsai and Foreign Minister Wu expressed support for New Delhi against Beijing. In October 2020, Tsai said, “From

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292 According to a recent poll, 77 percent of Taiwanese planned to fight for their country if attacked by China. See Wu Su-wei, “More Than 77 Percent Willing to Fight in the Event of an Invasion by China: Poll,” Taipei Times, October 25, 2020. Other polls are less encouraging, but still show a rising Taiwanese willingness to fight. For example, see George Liao, “Nearly Half of Taiwanese Unwilling to Fight to Defend Nation,” Taiwan News, July 20, 2020.
sovereignty disputes in the South and East China Seas and the China-India border conflict, to developments in the Taiwan Strait, as well as the ‘Hong Kong version of the National Security Law’ that has garnered international concern, it is clear that democracy, peace, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific are currently facing serious challenges.” That same month, Foreign Minister Wu added that, “We need to build more friendships with other countries, and India is a country we want to be friends with.” Likewise, Taiwan has expressed support for and closely coordinated with the United States on North Korea. ‘Taipei has remained in compliance with UN Security Council sanctions even though Taiwan itself is barred by China from being a member of the United Nations. Although both of these Taiwanese positions are encouraging for achieving U.S. objectives in a Korean Peninsula land scenario, they are relatively vague and do not provide any further indication of Taipei’s intentions (see Table 11.2 for more).

Table 11.2. Assessment of Taiwan’s Support for U.S.-Led Scenarios—Land Invasion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#2 Land invasion</td>
<td>Does the country have vital interests at stake?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is there a formal U.S. alliance?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Any public comments for or against supporting the United States?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assurances or comments at the official level that suggest willingness or lack of it?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specific senior leaders in a position to exercise a veto effect?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confront significant domestic constraints?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the country have a strong policy of nonalignment?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Any interaction or coalition effects among allies or partners?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whatever Taiwan decides in a land invasion scenario, it is unlikely to confront leadership that can exercise a veto. The Taiwanese population, however, might take umbrage with potentially “picking a fight” unnecessarily with China in an area of the world outside the Strait or SCS where Taipei has territories (the Pratas/Dongsha Islands). Regardless, Taiwan policy will remain pro-U.S. and probably would not be significantly influenced by alliance or partner decisions.

Taiwan’s response to the third scenario examined in this report, maritime conflict, would once again heavily depend on whether Taiwan’s territories in the SCS, the Pratas/Dongsha Islands, are affected and whether China is the aggressor (Table 11.3). If the answer to both questions is yes, then Taiwan would almost certainly support the U.S. military across all

293 Lauly Li and Cheng Ting-Fang, “Taiwan’s Tsai Paints China as Aggressor in India, South China Sea,” Nikkei Asia, October 10, 2020.
operational missions in the same way as it would under the maritime aggression contingency. Although Tsai has been more reticent than previous leaders (especially Kuomintang leaders) to reaffirm Taiwanese (Republic of China, or ROC) sovereignty over its SCS possessions, she nevertheless did so in July 2016. Taiwan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs in July 2020 reiterated Tsai’s position, which is that “the South China Sea Islands are part of the territory of the Republic of China (Taiwan) [and that] the ROC is entitled to all rights over the South China Sea Islands and their relevant waters in accordance with international law and the law of the sea is beyond dispute.” This reaffirmation strongly suggests that Taiwan would be fully engaged in any potential Chinese attack against the Pratas/Dongsha Islands.

If, however, the maritime conflict scenario features China against another maritime counterclaimant, such as the Philippines or Vietnam, then the likelihood of Taiwanese support to U.S. military operations significantly decreases, and may only consist of such military assistance as C2ISR and CSAR/PR. Any other form of military cooperation would likely be curbed to avoid unnecessarily antagonizing Beijing. Taiwan certainly supports maritime counterclaimants against China. For example, in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ reaffirmation of Tsai’s SCS policy, part of the statement read, “disputes in the South China Sea should be settled peacefully in accordance with international law and the law of the sea, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).” This statement, however, offers no indication as to whether Taiwan might support U.S. military operations on behalf of the maritime counterclaimants.

A China-related contingency against Taiwanese-held territories in the SCS would almost certainly not feature any leadership or popular opposition within the Taiwanese government, but a contingency involving China (or not) beyond Taiwanese claims would be more questionable. Taiwan policy will remain pro-U.S. and probably would not be significantly influenced by alliance or partner decisions.

Table 11.3. Assessment of Taiwan’s Support for U.S.-Led Scenarios—Maritime Conflict

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#3 Maritime conflict</td>
<td>Does the country have vital interests at stake?</td>
<td>Depends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is there a formal U.S. alliance?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Any public comments for or against supporting the United States?</td>
<td>Depends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assurances or comments at the official level that suggest willingness or lack of it?</td>
<td>Depends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specific senior leaders in a position to exercise a veto effect?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confront significant domestic constraints?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the country have a strong policy of nonalignment?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Any interaction or coalition effects among allies or partners?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, the fourth scenario examined in this report—stabilization operations in North Korea—might see Taiwan provide the U.S. military with a moderate level of support, especially if China is not involved in the contingency (Table 11.4). However, it is hard to envision a North Korea scenario in which China would not play a role or at least not have a keen interest in the outcome, meaning that Taiwanese assistance to the United States might be rather limited. In other stabilization contingencies, such as an Islamic terrorist stabilization scenario, Taiwan might be more willing to assist U.S. military operations because Chinese sensitivities would not be a factor. Regardless, Taiwan would not have vital national interests at stake. Taiwanese leaders have given no indication publicly whether they would support such operations. Rather, and as previously cited, Taipei has given only a broad indication of a willingness to align with U.S. initiatives on North Korea. In this scenario, Taiwan is likely willing to commit to at least assisting the U.S. military in CSAR/PR and C2ISR and perhaps additional contributions as well. There have been no observable Taiwanese statements on Islamic terrorism. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to assess that Taiwan would provide at least minimal support to U.S. military operations in CSAR/PR and C2ISR and probably more, considering that China would not have direct involvement and might even support such assistance in the name of counterterrorism (as Beijing perceives Islamic militancy challenges in its Xinjiang province).

It is hard to envision any Taiwanese leader having a veto ability over the decision to support the U.S. military in a stabilization scenario. Furthermore, Taipei is unlikely to face significant domestic constraints unless Beijing is deeply involved in a North Korea contingency. Finally, potential U.S. ally and partner involvement in stabilization operations might offer needed cover to Taiwan to support U.S. military operations. If China is uninvolved, such cover might not be deemed necessary.
Table 11.4. Assessment of Taiwan’s Support for U.S.-Led Scenarios—Stabilization Operations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#4 Stabilization operations</td>
<td>Does the country have vital interests at stake?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is there a formal U.S. alliance?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Any public comments for or against supporting the United States?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assurances or comments at the official level that suggest willingness or lack of it?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Specific senior leaders in a position to exercise a veto effect?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Confront significant domestic constraints?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the country have a strong policy of nonalignment?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Any interaction or coalition effects among allies or partners?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

Taiwan is likely to be willing to support U.S. military operations across all missions examined in this report for a maritime aggression scenario against the island itself. However, many more questions arise in other contingencies. For example, in a land invasion scenario, Taiwan probably would not have the national interest to support U.S. military operations against China, though certain less provocative activities—such as CSAR/PR and C2ISR—may still be feasible. Non-China land invasion scenarios would probably significantly elevate the chances of Taiwanese support. Taipei would probably be reluctant to support Washington during a maritime conflict scenario outside the Strait, though if conflict involves Taiwanese-held features in the SCS, the response is likely to be entirely different and beyond assisting in just CSAR/PR and C2ISR operations. Finally, regarding the stabilization scenario, Taipei would likely feel less inhibited in assisting U.S. military operations against Islamic terrorists than it would in a North Korea contingency because the latter almost certainly would involve Chinese interests.
Chapter 12. Thailand

Thailand’s grand strategy is based on maintaining beneficial relations with both the United States and China. Although the country is a treaty ally of the United States and the two have a strong security cooperation relationship, Thailand has increasingly cooperated with the PLA, from training to access to weapons purchases. This grand strategy makes it unlikely that Thailand will support operations aimed at China in all but the most extreme scenarios. This determination was reached after analyzing RAND research, Thai government documents, secondary sources from scholars and policy experts, and recent events involving Thailand. We used these sources to ascertain trends in Thai decisionmaking when it comes to security cooperation activity with both the United States and China, the role of the Thai-U.S. alliance, the state of domestic politics in Thailand, and the positions of leadership within Thailand.

Thailand’s Strategic Concepts and National Interests

A 2008 RAND report may have said it best when stating that Thailand has a long tradition of “bending with the wind.” Although written more than a decade ago, the same holds true today. Thai leaders still worry about having to choose sides between the United States and China, and their grand strategy and positioning are designed to avoid such a choice. Thai government seeks to obtain maximum advantage from both China and the United States without triggering opposition from one side or the other. Although Thai military officers are more sympathetic toward the United States, it appears that the general population is slightly more predisposed to China, and government officials see the economic benefits of closer relations with China. Threat perception of China among all segments of society is very low, indicating that any expectation from the United States that Thailand will be willing to participate in efforts aimed at China are likely to be misguided.

Thailand’s desire to “bend with the wind” was clear in 2008, and it has become even clearer over time. Particularly after the 2014 coup, in which the military took over the caretaker

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303 Cooper and Chase, 2020.

government, repealed the constitution, and established a military junta, the country has had a tentative relationship with democracy. As a result of the coup, the United States suspended military aid to Thailand, and China happily stepped into the void. The trend since that time has been toward increased cooperation between Thailand and China across all dimensions, including the military one. Thailand’s view of China as a benign hegemon and economic partner means that cooperating with China, providing increased access to the PLA, and increasing exercises with the PLA do not come with any sense of threat.\footnote{Abuza, 2020.}

This military cooperation has proceeded in numerous ways, indicating a deepening relationship between the Thai military and the PLA. Thailand has purchased a Chinese submarine and granted the PLA Navy access to Sattahip naval base, where China is building new submarine facilities. The two countries have increased joint exercises and training and educational exchanges (including the first air exercises and tank purchases), and discussions have taken place about creating cooperative production facilities for Thailand to produce Chinese weapons.\footnote{Abuza, 2020.} All of these factors indicate that Thailand has increasingly tilted toward China since the 2014 coup.\footnote{Sek Sophal, \textit{The US-Thailand Security Alliance: Growing Strategic Mistrust}, Australian Institute of International Affairs, October 2, 2020.} These observations are bolstered by analyses indicating that Thai military elites in 2017 perceived that the United States could actually pose a greater threat to Thailand than China.\footnote{John Blaxland and Greg Raymond, “Tipping the Balance in Southeast Asia? Thailand, the United States and China,” Australia National University and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Centre of Gravity Series, November 2017.}

These military avenues of cooperation are not isolated from the views of the rest of the Thai population. The population of Thailand is perhaps the most bullish throughout the entire region on the future of Chinese power; most see it as a beneficial development.\footnote{Michael Green, Amy Searight, and Patrick Gerard Buchan, \textit{Powers, Norms, and Institutions: The Future of the Indo-Pacific from a Southeast Asia Perspective}, Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 2020.} These developments are not confined to a single study—others have shown that the vast majority of Thai respondents see China as the most influential economic and political power, with similar majorities expecting the relationship to continue improving into the future.\footnote{Mun et al., 2020.} Similarly, in terms of threats perceived by the country’s population, security threats from China (including in the SCS and Taiwan) do not crack the top three. Those spots are occupied by internal threats, climate change, and economic downturns. Overall, when put directly as a choice between the United States and China, a bare majority chose China over the United States.

How does this compare with developments in the relationship between Thailand and the United States? There are extensive historical ties between the two countries, which have enjoyed

\footnote{Abuza, 2020.}
\footnote{Abuza, 2020.}
\footnote{Sek Sophal, \textit{The US-Thailand Security Alliance: Growing Strategic Mistrust}, Australian Institute of International Affairs, October 2, 2020.}
\footnote{John Blaxland and Greg Raymond, “Tipping the Balance in Southeast Asia? Thailand, the United States and China,” Australia National University and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Centre of Gravity Series, November 2017.}
\footnote{Mun et al., 2020.}
an alliance that is nearly 70 years old. The United States maintains access to U-Tapao air base, which is one of the largest airfields in Southeast Asia and was heavily used to fly missions in support of operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Sattahip naval base is a longtime port of call for the U.S. Navy, which is expected to continue despite the use of the installation by the PLA Navy. These access considerations give a sense of the overall relationship that Thailand has with supporting operations by the U.S. military, and they appear to be ebbing.

Despite the disruption of the reduced U.S. participation in 2015 in response to the military coup, the Cobra Gold exercises remain one of the most important multinational land exercises in the entirety of the Indo-Pacific. However, as a sign of the changing situation in Thailand and the balancing act that the Thai government is pursuing, China was invited to participate starting in 2015, at the same time the United States scaled down its involvement. Nonetheless, as of 2018, despite the growth in Chinese participation and exercises with the Thai military, the United States still held a significant advantage when it came to levels of military cooperation.

Although the United States retains an advantage in this area, it would be too much to say that this position can be used for significant increases in the presence of U.S. forces—particularly any presence aimed at China—or that Thailand would otherwise provide support for operations aimed at China. Thailand is even less likely than Malaysia or Indonesia to participate in such activities, given its lack of any perceived threat from China. Thailand has no claims to the SCS, it has no territorial disputes with China, and it shares no border with China. The Thai military still prioritizes security cooperation with the United States, but it does so for the purposes of nontraditional threats and internal security, not external threats emanating from China. Roughly 30 percent of Thai elites polled in 2020 saw increased military tensions over such issues as the SCS, Taiwan, or North Korea as one of the top three security threats; this contrasts with the 80 percent who responded that economic downturns, domestic political instability, and natural disasters constituted threats to Southeast Asia. All of this adds up to a situation in which Thai authorities are quite unlikely to respond favorably to requested support for operations aimed at China. This stands in striking difference to the situation in Australia, which geographically stands in a similar position. However, the Thai government does not have the same traditional commitment to democracy that is seen in Australia and the domestic population of Thailand does not see Chinese activity as a direct threat to the country. This dynamic is unlike the population in Australia, which has dramatically turned against China in

313 Cooper and Chase, 2020.
316 Mun et al., 2020.
recent years, particularly after the Dastyari affair of Chinese involvement in Australia’s domestic politics.\textsuperscript{317}

These preferences are clearly illustrated by several recent dynamics. First, there are extreme sensitivities to the idea of setting up new U.S. facilities on Thai territory; political controversy has arisen even from rumors of a new U.S. installation.\textsuperscript{318} Such rumors were met with swift denials from the government that the U.S. or Thai government had any such plans.\textsuperscript{319} If even peacetime access has raised significant political controversy, the likelihood of Thailand fully supporting U.S. operations in a crisis is quite low. In addition, part of the rationale behind purchasing Chinese equipment is to reduce the country’s reliance on U.S. supplies, which is in keeping with its overall strategy of hewing a middle ground between the two powers. Overall, these developments do not signal a state that is ready—among governmental organizations or among the citizenry—to engage in a process of hosting U.S. forces, particularly those aimed at China. The actions of the Thai government are consistent with the strategy of avoiding provocations toward either the United States or China, but movement is toward cooperation with the Chinese.

Such developments should not be considered as confined to peacetime alone. This strategy of avoiding provocation toward either power and “bending with the wind” is deeply engrained in Thai thinking. Although the country has been a treaty ally of the United States for almost the entirety of the post–World War II period, that should not be taken as a green light to treat the country in the same way as other treaty allies, such as Japan or Australia. Thailand fiercely guards its independence in foreign affairs, as can be seen in historical episodes like the removal of U.S. forces following the violation of Thai restrictions on the use of its territory in the SS \textit{Mayaguez} incident.\textsuperscript{320} Thailand receives many advantages from charting this middle course while remaining a treaty ally. A good summary of Thailand’s willingness to host U.S. forces was offered by Zachary Abuza, who said that “any U.S. Indo-Pacific Command or Pentagon plan that assumes that Thailand will offer the United States certain advantages—such as overflight, port access, or other facilities—in a conflict with China is circumspect. Thailand is no longer a key partner for advancing U.S. interests in the region, especially vis-à-vis China.”\textsuperscript{321} Any regional strategy must keep this in mind and be realistic about the low likelihood of Thai willingness to provide support to either a peacetime or conflictual context outside the most extreme scenarios.

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize
317 Lowy Institute, undated.
\end{flushright}
Thailand’s Willingness to Participate in U.S.-Led Operations

In terms of the scenarios developed here, Thailand is highly unlikely to provide any support in most of them (Table 12.1). In the two scenarios that take place in the maritime domain, Thailand has no claims to the SCS and does not have a vested national interest in the outcome of the claims there. Even if China is an outright aggressor, there is very little incentive for Thailand to get involved in such a conflict; its security and prosperity are not contingent on the outcome of a maritime conflict in the SCS as is the case for other states in Southeast Asia. In addition, although Thailand has a formal alliance with the United States, as discussed already, Thailand generally follows a path of “bending with the wind” and hewing a path between the two great powers. Especially for a maritime conflict outside the area of Thai national interest, it is highly unlikely that the country will go out on a limb in favor of the United States by supporting operations. Unlike other states (such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia), Thailand’s involvement largely would not depend on how the conflict arises. Thailand simply has little invested in the issue. The same considerations likely hold for a Taiwan conflict scenario: Thailand has little national interest at stake in the issue, the likelihood of retaliation would be high, and there would be very little domestic support for such a move.

Given that Thailand has no land border and no territorial disputes with China, Thai support is also unlikely in a land invasion scenario. In most cases, any land invasion that can be traced back to long-standing territorial disputes will be seen by Thailand as unthreatening to its own sovereignty because China would have to cross additional countries in order to reach Thailand. Even then, forces would have to cross significant territory to reach Bangkok, traversing difficult terrain. Thai officials would likely calculate that such a move by China would be highly unlikely, especially without any precipitating cause. If Thai territory were directly threatened, however, the calculation would change and likely see Thailand diverge from its hedging strategy and increase support for the United States. Similarly, a North Korean invasion scenario does not involve any core national interests of Thailand, either in terms of sovereignty or economic activity.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenarios</th>
<th>OCA/DCA</th>
<th>SEAD</th>
<th>C2ISR</th>
<th>CSAR/PR</th>
<th>Airlift</th>
<th>Tankers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maritime invasion (for example, attack on Taiwan, the Philippines)</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>No—no capability</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>No—no capability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land invasion (for example, North Korea provocation)</td>
<td>Unlikely unless seen as a direct threat.</td>
<td>No—no capability</td>
<td>Unlikely unless seen as a direct threat.</td>
<td>Unlikely unless seen as a direct threat.</td>
<td>Unlikely unless seen as a direct threat.</td>
<td>No—no capability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maritime conflict (for example, SCS provocation)</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>No—no capability</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
<td>No—no capability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability operations (for example, RFF to region, collapse of North Korea)</td>
<td>If there is a direct threat near Thailand or little Chinese interest.</td>
<td>No—no capability</td>
<td>If there is a direct threat near Thailand or little Chinese interest.</td>
<td>If there is a direct threat near Thailand or little Chinese interest.</td>
<td>If there is a direct threat near Thailand or little Chinese interest.</td>
<td>No—no capability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The one scenario that stands out is the commencement of stability operations. Thai elites are highly attuned to the possibility of domestic instability and insurgency. Much of the ongoing security cooperation between the United States and Thailand is focused on preparing for counterinsurgency, and support in such a future scenario is likely to be more forthcoming, especially if Thailand is directly under threat either internally or along its borders. Although Thailand would likely be largely irrelevant to a North Korean instability scenario, any instability in Southeast Asia may see Thai support, especially if China is disinterested in the issue.

Overall, despite the alliance ties with the United States, Thai policy adheres to a hedging strategy between the United States and China. This has particularly been the case since the 2014 coup, when U.S. cooperation took a step back and China stepped in to fill the gap. Although cooperation with Beijing has increased, the United States still has the advantage in this arena, though this does not mean that support will be forthcoming in the event of the maritime or land invasion scenarios examined in this report. Thailand stands as one of the least likely to support in these situations, given its specific geography and its policy of hedging.
Chapter 13. Vietnam

Over the past decade, Vietnam has been one of the most outspoken opponents of China’s aggressive behavior in the Indo-Pacific region, although demonstrating a growing proclivity to work with the United States and regional partners to counter Chinese activity. As regional analyst Joshua Kurlantzick notes, “Vietnam has shown the fewest illusions about the implications of China’s rise, and the greatest willingness to employ tough, sophisticated strategies to prevent Chinese dominance of the SCS and the region more generally.”

Although there is little question that Vietnam will stand up to China in defense of its own territory, Vietnam is unlikely to side with the United States against China in a broader conflict, at least not under current conditions. Hanoi maintains close political and economic ties with Beijing. And since the late 1990s, Vietnam’s defense policy has been firmly centered on three core tenets of nonalignment: no joining military alliances, no foreign military operations from Vietnamese territory, and no siding militarily with one country against another. Nonetheless, there are multiple trends that suggest potential for greater willingness to cooperate with a U.S.-led military coalition down the road, particularly in response to Chinese aggression against another ASEAN member in the SCS.

To assess the potential for Vietnam to support a U.S.-led military coalition in the Indo-Pacific region, we systematically weighed the relevance of the 12 factors outlined in Chapter 1, using a diverse set of primary and secondary sources. We looked at these factors relative to Vietnam both in a general sense and within the specific contexts of our four sample scenarios. In particular, we determined that Vietnam’s deep-seated fear of the Chinese threat to Vietnamese territorial integrity and economic interests in the SCS, unique political affiliation with China and the Chinese Communist Party, a national security strategy firmly grounded in a policy of military nonalignment, and emergence as a regional leader within ASEAN all to be significant for Vietnam’s approach to U.S.-Chinese competition and Vietnam’s potential to contribute to a U.S.-led military coalition.


\[324\] This brief synopsis draws heavily on recent and more in-depth RAND work on Vietnam. See Derek Grossman, Regional Responses to US-China Competition in the Indo-Pacific: Vietnam, Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, RR-4412/6-AF, 2020a; Harold et al., 2019.
Vietnam’s Strategic Concepts and National Interests

There is little question that Hanoi’s most pressing security challenge is an increasingly powerful and aggressive China and the threat that China poses to Vietnam’s territorial integrity and economic interests in the SCS. Vietnam’s tenuous relationship with China has deep historical roots, going back well before the 1974 Battle of the Paracel Islands. But the past decade or so has been particularly marked by dangerous flare-ups. In 2011, Sino-Vietnamese disputes over rights in the SCS began to escalate, culminating in a 2014 naval standoff over Chinese oil rig operations that prompted the Council on Foreign Relations to warn of a serious military confrontation in the next 12 to 18 months. In 2017, Beijing threatened an attack on Vietnamese bases in the Spratly Islands if Vietnam continued gas drilling operations in the area, effectively coercing Hanoi to end the drilling. In 2019, there was a tense, months-long standoff following incursion by a Chinese survey ship in Vietnam’s exclusive economic zone near the Vanguard Bank. And throughout 2020, the Chinese attacked and sank multiple Vietnamese fishing boats near the Paracel Islands. Reflective of broader sentiments, a senior Vietnamese military official recently opined, “China never abandons its cruel intention to capture our territory in the East Sea; the point is when and how it will act.”

Despite this history, Vietnam has little choice but to compartmentalize the ongoing territorial disputes and maintain cooperative ties with China in other areas. Vietnam, which shares an 800-mile land border with China, is little match for China militarily and thus remains wary of provoking more-severe Chinese responses. Furthermore, like many countries in the region, Vietnam has strong economic ties to China and is vulnerable to Chinese economic pressure. Unique to the Sino-Vietnamese relationship is the natural affinity between the Chinese Communist Party and the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP), with the continued viability of the VCP depending in part on its link to the Chinese party.

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Vietnam’s Willingness to Participate in U.S.-Led Military Operations

Although seeking to bolster its economic and political ties with China, Vietnam has been one of the most stalwart opponents of China’s aggressive behavior in the Indo-Pacific region, implementing a multiprong strategy to balance against China. Of note, this strategy has featured a variety of cooperative security engagements with the United States. But such activity by no means implies that Vietnam is ready to join the United States in a fight against China. Apart from Hanoi’s close rapport with Beijing, Vietnam remains firmly committed to nonalignment.

Under current conditions, there is little chance that Vietnam would contribute to a military coalition versus China; however, there are multiple trends that suggest potential for greater willingness down the road. Vietnam has had one of the world’s fastest-growing economies over recent years and has emerged as a regional economic powerhouse. This vector will likely continue. Some forecasts suggest Vietnam’s economy will quintuple by 2035 to become the 19th largest in the world. China remains Vietnam’s largest trading partner, and Hanoi will remain wary about disrupting this relationship. Vietnam is also bolstering economic ties with other regional and global actors, partly as a diversification strategy. As an economic power in its own right, with an economic growth rate that has surpassed that of China, Vietnam will likely become more confident in standing up to China and less susceptible to Chinese economic pressure.

Second, the narrative of solidarity fostered by two communist governments is largely a façade. The VCP’s affinity for China is not reflected in the Vietnamese population, where anti-Chinese sentiment runs deep—to a level unmatched across the region. Always simmering in the background, this sentiment has boiled over periodically in response to Chinese actions and perceived failure of the VCP to take a hardline stance against China. The resultant mass


protests have shaken VCP leadership. Vietnamese public opinion, bordering on xenophobic nationalism, already constrains the VCP’s interactions with China. The long-term impact is difficult to forecast, but this type of nationalism can be a powerful force; given the right circumstances, it could force the VCP’s hand and drive a fundamental shift in the country’s approach to China.\textsuperscript{334}

Next, Vietnam appears to have at least softened its nonalignment stance in the most recent \textit{Defense White Paper}, opening the door to greater military collaboration with the United States. Specifically, following reiteration of Vietnam’s traditional nonalignment tenets, the 2019 document adds, “Depending on circumstances and specific conditions, Viet Nam will consider developing necessary, appropriate defence and military relations with other countries on the basis of respecting each other’s independence, sovereignty, territorial unity and integrity.”\textsuperscript{335} The document further articulates the virtue of a proactive defense strategy. Although such concepts can take on many meanings, together they could provide underpinning rationale for conducting more-distant but still defensive military activity elsewhere in the region through military relations with other countries.

Furthermore, Vietnam has exhibited an ability and desire to take on a greater leadership role within the region. In 2020, Vietnam served as chair of ASEAN and as a nonpermanent member of the UN security council, garnering widespread recognition for strong and active leadership.\textsuperscript{336} Apart from these formal roles, Vietnam has emerged as an informal leader and “senior diplomatic force” for the region.\textsuperscript{337} Vietnam has leveraged these positions to push the agenda of a more robust role for ASEAN in regional security matters, particularly as a hedge against Chinese aggression in the SCS.\textsuperscript{338} Accordingly, if ASEAN endorsed a military operation in response to Chinese aggression against another ASEAN member, Vietnam could face significant reputational costs if it declined to contribute in some way.

\textsuperscript{335} Vietnam Ministry of National Defence, 2019, p. 24; also see Derek Grossman and Dung Huynh, “Vietnam’s Defense Policy of ‘No’ Quietly Saves Room for ‘Yes,’” \textit{The Diplomat}, January 19, 2019. According to a Vietnamese defense official, the ‘Three No’s’ policy was initially formulated created to appease Beijing, the implication being that if Hanoi comes to view appeasement as a failed approach, the underlying rationale for the ‘Three No’s’ policy will be weakened. See Grossman, 2020a, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{337} David Hutt, “Will Vietnam Be ASEAN Chair for Another Year?” \textit{The Diplomat}, May 1, 2020. Also see Try Wicaksono, “Vietnam: ASEAN’s New De Facto Leader?” \textit{ASEAN Post}, April 16, 2021.
Finally, tensions with China over the SCS continue to escalate with no clear limit in sight. Although it is difficult to predetermine a breaking point, many observers propose that another war between Vietnam and China could be inevitable, going so far as to suggest that China seeks war with Vietnam as a warmup fight in preparation for conflict with the United States.\(^{339}\) If key decisionmakers in Hanoi come to view war with China as inevitable, this could fundamentally change Vietnam’s strategic calculus, opening the door to actions that were previously off the table.\(^{340}\)

The most probable scenario for Vietnam’s participation in a military coalition against China, apart from its own territorial defense, would be in response to Chinese aggression against one of Vietnam’s neighbors in the SCS, particularly efforts by China to seize disputed islands in the Spratly chain. Such a scenario would likely involve other ASEAN members (such as Malaysia or the Philippines); as noted, Vietnam has emerged as a leader within ASEAN and has been a strong proponent of ASEAN taking on a greater security role in the SCS. Vietnam could plausibly frame its involvement as an extended form of self-defense, or defending the Homeland from afar, with Chinese attacks against Vietnam’s neighbors viewed as precursors to similar attacks against Vietnamese-claimed and occupied islands in the area.

If Vietnam joined a military coalition against China in the SCS, its contribution would likely consist primarily of naval assets. Vietnam’s defense budget has grown along with its economy, more than quadrupling over the past 15 years. A significant portion of this spending has gone toward weapon procurement; Vietnam has emerged as one of the top ten largest arms importers in the world.\(^{341}\) Further, the focus of Vietnam’s military modernization has been on developing maritime capabilities, highlighted by the purchase of six state-of-the-art Kilo-class submarines equipped with advanced antiship cruise missiles, in preparation for a “people’s war at sea.”\(^{342}\)

The Vietnamese air force, in contrast, has received less attention and remains relatively antiquated, excepting a fleet of 36 Su-30 fighters acquired between 2004 and 2012.\(^{343}\) Shortly after the United States lifted its arms embargo in 2016, Vietnam explored the possibility of purchasing F-16 fighters and P-C maritime patrol aircraft from the United States through the excess defense article program. However, any movement toward such advanced acquisitions has


\(^{343}\) Senior defense officials, interview with RAND authors, Hanoi, February 2021. Of note, these multirole fighters have been modified to primarily fill a maritime strike function.
stalled, with the United States looking primarily to help the Vietnamese Air Force bolster its pilot training program. Accordingly, Vietnam does not operate any U.S.-designed or -built fighter aircraft, which in turn would limit interoperability with a U.S.-led military coalition. Apart from perhaps contributing SU-30s in a DCA role, Vietnam has a very small fleet of CASA C-295 and C-212 aircraft for tactical airlift. Vietnam’s most valuable airpower contribution to a U.S. coalition could be its fleet of U.S.-supplied ScanEagle unmanned aerial vehicles for ISR.\textsuperscript{344}

Beyond maritime conflict in response to Chinese conflict in the SCS, we weigh the potential for regional partners to contribute to a U.S.-led coalition in three additional scenarios: maritime invasion (Chinese attack versus Taiwan), land invasion (North Korean attack against South Korea), and stability operations (collapse of North Korea). Again, the maritime conflict in the SCS represents the most plausible, albeit still unlikely, scenario for Vietnamese participation. There is little chance, even with the trends discussed earlier, that Vietnam would contribute militarily to a U.S.-led coalition in the other three scenarios given both a lack of interests and capabilities.

If the stability operations shifted to Vietnam’s more immediate region, though, this would likely change Hanoi’s calculus. Over the past few years, Hanoi has expressed significant interest in taking on a greater role in peacetime operations, such as HADR or CSAR—particularly within the context of ASEAN. This stems in part from Vietnam’s emergence as a regional leader and reflects its growing military capabilities. Hanoi views these types of operations as opportunities bolster ASEAN security cooperation in the SCS without being overly provocative.\textsuperscript{345}

Table 13.1 summarizes our analysis of Vietnam’s willingness to contribute to U.S.-led military operations across the four scenarios. The table reflects seven general criteria that could influence support or link Vietnam to a specific scenario:

- Does Vietnam have vital interests at stake?
- Is Vietnam obligated to support by formal alliance or defense pact?
- Have Vietnamese leaders expressed willingness to support?
- Does Vietnamese policy provide official assurances of support?
- Does the Vietnamese government have domestic backing for contributing militarily?
- Is Vietnam unconstrained by formal nonalignment policy or tradition?
- Does Vietnam have ties with other regional actors that could draw Vietnam into the conflict?

\textsuperscript{344} Senior defense officials, interview with RAND authors, Hanoi, February 2021.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenarios</th>
<th>Missions</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maritime invasion (for example, attack on Taiwan, the Philippines)</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unlikely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No—no capability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land invasion (for example, North Korea provocation)</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maritime conflict (for example, SCS provocation)</td>
<td>Limited capability that would only be brought to bear if Vietnam is directly attacked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited capability that would only be brought to bear if Vietnam is directly attacked</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Limited capability that would only be brought to bear if Vietnam is directly attacked</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Limited capability that would only be brought to bear if Vietnam is directly attacked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No—no capability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stability operations (for example, RFF to region, collapse of North Korea)</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No for default Korea scenario; some other regional stabilization operations could involve a limited Vietnamese contribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No for default Korea scenario</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No for default Korea scenario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No—no capability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

Vietnam’s nonalignment policy, specifically the commitment to not side militarily with one country against another, remains intact. But this policy, along with Hanoi’s more general strategic approach of compartmentalizing security matters and appeasing China, was born at a time when Vietnam was much weaker—diplomatically, economically, and militarily—than it is today. The likelihood of Vietnam joining a military coalition against China remains low. But there are multiple trends to suggest that Vietnam might be more willing in the future, particularly in response to Chinese aggression versus another member of ASEAN in the SCS. China remains an important economic and political partner, but for Vietnam, preventing Chinese domination of the SCS is a vital national security interest, perhaps even a matter of national survival. It is unclear how far China can go with its aggressive and provocative behaviors before triggering a fundamental shift in Hanoi’s strategic approach. But as Vietnam continues to develop as an economic power, acquire advanced military capabilities, promote ASEAN as a regional security actor, and articulate the concept of defending the Homeland from afar, the line will likely extend beyond Vietnam’s strict territorial boundaries.
Chapter 14. Findings and Conclusions

Taken together, the country-specific assessments of the component of our study described in this report highlight several leading findings. Some of the high-level takeaways from the geopolitical analysis are as follows:

- Australia and Japan are both intent on deepening security ties with the United States and improving interoperability. Both have significant security interests at stake in major Asian contingencies and the most significant region-wide alliance relationships with the United States. Yet both will still face political—and, in the case of Japan, legal and constitutional—hurdles to participating in wars that do not directly engage them at first.
- South Korea values the U.S. alliance but has little interest in being a cobelligerent off the Korean Peninsula. This is partly because of its persistent security concerns about North Korea, but Seoul has been determined to avoid drastic military actions, even in peacetime, that would rupture its relations with China.
- Thailand’s geopolitical perceptions are affected by post-coup U.S. sanctions and strong Chinese advances. We found little evidence that it is willing to endanger its security by offering military aid to the United States unless Thailand itself is directly attacked.
- Several other regional countries—notably India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Vietnam—have very strong traditions of nonalignment and display no evidence of being willing to volunteer to join a war that does not directly involve them.
- New Zealand and the Philippines have few air assets to devote to a major fight and strong incentives to remain aloof from distant wars. Both might support the United States in some stability operation scenarios with limited assets they could bring to bear.

The baseline findings of our analysis are depicted in Table 14.1. Red means that the country will likely decline to provide air assets to the scenario; yellow means that there is some chance the country would contribute and/or that it might offer limited assets; green means it is likely to support U.S. operations with the full range of its capabilities. Cases in which the specific scenario chosen refers to the country itself (for example, Taiwan contributing to a Taiwan scenario) we have listed as “support assumed”; the assumption is that all countries will fight to defend themselves.346

In sum, if the United States becomes involved in major military contingencies in the Indo-Pacific, it is likely that the United States will be fighting alongside whatever partner or ally is being directly threatened or attacked with little if any other allied or partner support. There are too many constitutional, strategic, legal, economic, and political barriers to expect significant participation, and the relevant allies and partners generally have too few national interests at

346 Our analysis suggests that none of these countries are likely to contribute air assets to contingencies in the same general type or category as self-defense if they involve third parties. Taiwan, for example, will not contribute air assets to a U.S.-led operation to defeat a maritime invasion of a third country.
The possible exceptions to this are Australia and Japan; even in those cases, participation in such scenarios as a Taiwan or Korea conflict is not guaranteed. The baseline findings of our analysis are depicted Table 14.1.

**Table 14.1. Summary of Analysis: Likelihood of Partner Contributions to Scenarios**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>War over Taiwan</th>
<th>Korean Conflict</th>
<th>Scarborough Clash</th>
<th>Stability Operation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Limited support</td>
<td>Full support</td>
<td>Limited support</td>
<td>Full support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Limited support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Limited support</td>
<td>Limited support</td>
<td>Limited support</td>
<td>Limited support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Limited support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Support assumed</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>Limited support</td>
<td>Limited support</td>
<td>Limited support</td>
<td>Full support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Support assumed</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Full support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>Support assumed</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Limited support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Limited support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
<td>Decline support</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Our analysis suggests that none of these countries are likely to contribute air assets to contingencies in the same general type or category as self-defense if they involve third parties. Taiwan, for example, will not contribute air assets to a U.S.-led operation to defeat a maritime invasion of a third country.

In addition to this baseline analysis, we considered possible contingent developments that could shift these countries’ willingness to participate in U.S.-led combat operations over the next decade. Considering alternative shaping factors is a challenging task: An endless set of trends, events, decisions, and developments will affect the final decisions of key countries on these issues. Political outcomes in the countries will play an especially important role: The election of especially pro-China or anti-China leaders could make all the difference.

We could not, therefore, undertake a comprehensive identification of every contingent future—how every factor would intersect with every other factor under every possible set of circumstances. Instead, we sought to use the basic data gathered for each country to identify a small set of factors with broad applicability—variables that are especially likely to affect countries’ perceptions over time. These were:

- a dramatic increase in Chinese belligerence over time, either across the region or with regard to the specific country
- a strong degree of international consensus on and endorsement of the U.S. response, perhaps generated by Chinese aggression of a type and scale that provokes a global diplomatic response involving a large coalition
• direct Chinese attack on multiple countries at the same time, signaling a generalized militaristic agenda that demands a response (such as a series of military attacks on several other territorial claimants throughout the SCS)
• the rise to power of extreme anti-China hawks in partner countries.

The degree of perceived U.S. commitment and perceptions of U.S. power relative to China will play a role in determining partner responses. If the United States significantly expands its regional footprint and the character of its security commitments over the next decade, if its public and political actors are strongly behind a commitment, and if other countries perceive that it has staying power in these commitments, these factors might make it more likely that others become involved. Moreover, the calculus could change once a shooting war begins and the United States is suffering casualties and urging others to contribute.

This factor may not be decisive in most cases, however. Our analysis suggests that it is the basic national strategic posture, national interests, stakes in a conflict, risk of Chinese retaliation, and other foundational variables that are most likely to govern partner willingness. Such underlying and structural factors are likely to be more important than individual contingent developments in governing partner willingness. National interests, economic dependence on China and fear of military response remain the overriding considerations limiting partner willingness and are unlikely to change fundamentally. The massive Chinese aggression envisioned in some of these variables remains highly unlikely. Moreover, the places where some variables look most likely to shift partner willingness—such as Australia—are already those toward the top of the list of plausible U.S. partners. Self-defense remains the dominant circumstance under which partners would be willing to join in a U.S.-led operation.

Table 14.2 captures some of our analysis about the potential shift in partner willingness if some of the conditions we have mentioned are met. Specifically, which ratings in Table 14.1 would change in the case of (1) an extended period of growing Chinese belligerence that convinces regional countries it is on the road to forcible hegemony, (2) direct attacks on multiple countries or other actions that signal an emerging Chinese regional militarized revisionism, and (3) strong political backing in the United States for a full-scale response? Which countries would be more likely to provide direct air asset support to a coalition operation? The judgments here are subjective to some degree but grounded in all the same criteria as our overall assessment of likely national willingness to participate. (Again, one critical baseline assumption is that all states will fight to defend themselves—these are judgments relating to their willingness to fight for others alongside the United States.)
Table 14.2. Ally and Partner Willingness: Alternative Scenario

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>War over Taiwan</th>
<th>Korean Conflict</th>
<th>Scarborough Clash</th>
<th>Stability Operation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Some increase</td>
<td></td>
<td>Significant increase</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Some increase</td>
<td></td>
<td>Some increase</td>
<td>Willingness not affected by changed circumstances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td></td>
<td>Some increase</td>
<td>Significant increase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>Significant increase</td>
<td></td>
<td>Significant increase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>Some increase</td>
<td>Some increase</td>
<td>Some increase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some increase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>Some increase</td>
<td>Some increase</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Some increase</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14.2 carries several messages. First, even these changed circumstances would not necessarily transform the perspectives of all regional actors. The cases in which growing Chinese aggressiveness and U.S. commitment shift our judgment relate to about one-third of the total. Second, in most cases, these changes would make it more likely for a state to contribute something or to support U.S. logistics and sustainment (the “Some increase” category) but not necessarily agree to commit its entire air force to the conflict. Third, these judgments again reinforce the centrality of Australia and Japan as the most likely to have their strategic perspective and wartime participation shaped by Chinese actions.

Drawing from these considerations, Table 14.3 lays out three categories of partner nations according to their assessed willingness, even under the variable conditions noted, to participate in large-scale combat operations.
Table 14.3. Tiers of Partner Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tier</th>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Focus of U.S. Engagement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:</td>
<td><strong>Most likely to offer support:</strong> Offer support and intelligence functions, combat elements given very stringent preconditions</td>
<td>Australia, Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Offer support and intelligence functions, combat elements given very stringent preconditions</strong></td>
<td>Comprehensive interoperability, especially C4ISR; combined regional support planning; combat operations training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:</td>
<td><strong>Conditional support providers:</strong> Provide support functions if coalition or regional conflict, unwilling to join campaign but may be willing to backfill some USAF roles and missions</td>
<td>New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Provide support functions if coalition or regional conflict, unwilling to join campaign but may be willing to backfill some USAF roles and missions</strong></td>
<td>Focus on support, intelligence, backfilling functions, ISR, mobility, support functions, access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:</td>
<td><strong>Most constrained:</strong> Despite possible enhanced conditions, still likely to send air assets to fight only if directly attacked</td>
<td>India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Taiwan, Vietnam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Despite possible enhanced conditions, still likely to send air assets to fight only if directly attacked</strong></td>
<td>Focus on training, capacity for partner self-defense; interoperability allows United States to come to defense quickly and efficiently</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most importantly, the existence of highly contingent variables that can have some effect on partner willingness does not change the basic findings and recommendations of this analysis. Although some contingent factors could change these judgments in very specific and unlikely circumstances, larger structural and foundational variables are more likely to govern partner behavior in wartime. Even given the contingent possibilities, the basic approach outlined in Tables 14.3 and 14.4 still makes sense for the United States and the USAF. A focus on enhancing self-defense capabilities of all countries in the region, combined with selective engagement to improve interoperability and partner capabilities on a sliding scale relative to likely partner willingness, stands the highest chance of fostering investment in military capabilities most likely to be committed by allies and partners.

Conclusions and Implications of Partner Willingness

This analysis therefore does not support a program of general efforts to build interdependence and partner capability on the theory that it will be available in case of war. This analysis instead suggests that the USAF would gain better medium-term return on investment for more-targeted investments in ally and partner cooperation.

Table 14.4 summarizes some of the major implications of this finding, in terms of the primary opportunities and gaps present in U.S. partner and allied air component support for contingency operations. This study points to three useful goals of USAF engagement efforts with partners and allies.
### Table 14.4. U.S. Policy Toward Partners and Allies: Leading Opportunities and Gaps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leading Opportunities</th>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Leading Gaps and Constraints</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Airlift and tanker synchronization especially for non-major war scenarios</td>
<td>• Australia, Japan, Singapore, South Korea</td>
<td>• Absent direct attack on partner and ally, no country willing to provoke large-scale Chinese retaliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Potential CSAR to relieve U.S. burden in some scenarios, but highly conditional</td>
<td>• Australia, Japan, New Zealand for many scenarios; also Singapore, South Korea</td>
<td>• Extremely limited prospect for direct combat mission support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Stability operations and HADR scenarios: Multilateral plans, exercises</td>
<td>• All, depending on scenario</td>
<td>• Focus on partner and ally self-defense capabilities rather than support to other contingencies: systems, exercises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Focus on enhancing self-defense of countries facing direct aggression vs. third-party fights</td>
<td>• India, Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam</td>
<td>• C2ISR systems not integrated; U.S. joint all-domain command and control may drive the USAF further from its partners (but this may not matter given limits on warfighting ties)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Australia may be most likely to support but has limited capability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Focus on enhancing self-defense of selected partners and close coordination on narrow set of missions in limited scenarios</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first would be a narrowly focused set of efforts prioritizing Australia and Japan to enhance the ability to operate together. Of all the countries in the region, these two are by far the most likely—very probably the only—countries that might become directly engaged in a conflict that did not involve a direct attack on them. Improved interoperability would lay the groundwork for more-effective collaboration in the event of conflict.

A second promising direction is engagement focused on the goal of working with partners to improve their own self-defense. Any conflict in the region to which the United States responds almost by definition must involve an attack on some nation. All these partners are increasingly concerned with self-defense. And even in that arena, some nations (such as India and Vietnam) impose strict limits on what they are willing to do with outside partners like the United States. A program of engagement and assistance focused on boosting self-defense in a bilateral manner, rather than enhancing partners’ ability to project power into distant contingencies to help the United States, would be a more feasible way of enhancing deterrence.

Third and finally, this analysis points to the value of improving partner capability and ability to operate with the United States more broadly—but only in very narrow air systems (typically not combat aircraft) and with the goal of joint activities only in such scenarios as stability operations or humanitarian assistance and disaster response.
### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADF</td>
<td>Australian Defence Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFSTRAT</td>
<td>Air Force Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANZUS</td>
<td>Australia–New Zealand–United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASDF</td>
<td>Air Self-Defense Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUD</td>
<td>Australian dollars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2ISR</td>
<td>command, control, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSAR/PR</td>
<td>combat search and rescue and personnel recovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCA</td>
<td>defensive counter-air missions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DSU</td>
<td>Defence Strategic Update</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAC</td>
<td>Enhanced Air Cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECM</td>
<td>earth-covered magazine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EDCA</td>
<td>Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERE</td>
<td>enhanced regional engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOIP</td>
<td>Free and Open Indo-Pacific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPA</td>
<td>Force Posture Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPI</td>
<td>Force Posture Initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSDF</td>
<td>Ground Self-Defense Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HADR</td>
<td>humanitarian assistance and disaster relief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISR</td>
<td>intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEMOA</td>
<td>Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MRF-D</td>
<td>Marine Rotational Force–Darwin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSDF</td>
<td>Maritime Self-Defense Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NT</td>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCA</td>
<td>offensive counter-air missions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPCON</td>
<td>operation control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLA</td>
<td>Peoples’ Liberation Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PNG</td>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quad</td>
<td>Quadrilateral Security Dialogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAAF</td>
<td>Royal Australian Air Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RFF</td>
<td>recognition friend or foe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROK</td>
<td>Republic of Korea (South Korea)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAR</td>
<td>search and rescue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAR/PR</td>
<td>search and rescue and personnel recovery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCS</td>
<td>South China Sea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDF</td>
<td>Self-Defense Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEAD</td>
<td>suppression of enemy air defenses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOFA</td>
<td>Status of Forces Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAIPEI</td>
<td>Taiwan Allies and International Protection Enhancement Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THAAD</td>
<td>Terminal High Altitude Area Defense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TNI</td>
<td>Indonesian Armed Forces (<em>Tentara Nasional Indonesia</em>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAF</td>
<td>U.S. Air Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCP</td>
<td>Vietnamese Communist Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VFA</td>
<td>Visiting Forces Agreement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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ASEAN—See Association of Southeast Asian Nations.


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The study described in this report assessed the potential for the United States to receive support in air component capabilities from partners and allies in the event of a major combat contingency in the Indo-Pacific. A companion report focuses on technical and operational considerations associated with partner and allied support: whether they have the capability and capacity to support U.S. air operations in a major conflict. This report focuses on the geopolitical side of the equation: whether partners and allies have the willingness to support U.S. operations. Capabilities alone do not equal warfighting outcomes; the partners and allies must be willing to join the United States in the conflict.

The authors identified 12 countries for the focus of the analysis, representing a mix of U.S. treaty allies, significant regional players, and countries with specific air component assets potentially important to a contingency. These countries are Australia, India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and Vietnam. The authors then defined four potential scenarios for high-end conflict against which they assessed as these countries’ possible contribution: a conflict over Taiwan, a second Korean war, a maritime conflict in the South China Sea, and a major stability operation on the Korean Peninsula following a collapse of North Korea.