

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

Partner and Ally Views

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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, the authors 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 the authors were up to date on the latest discussions on these issues.

The authors 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.

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



FINDINGS

The 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.
- The authors 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 the table.



IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES AIR FORCE

The 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.

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS: LIKELIHOOD OF PARTNER CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCENARIOS

	Conflict over Taiwan	Korean War	Scarborough Clash	Stability Operation in Korea
Australia	Limited support	Operations support	Limited support	Operations support
India	Decline support	Decline support	Decline support	Limited support
Indonesia	Decline support	Decline support	Decline support	Decline support
Japan	Limited support	Limited support	Limited support	Limited support
Malaysia	Decline support	Decline support	Decline support	Limited support
New Zealand	Decline support	Decline support	Decline support	Operations support
Philippines	Decline support	Decline support	Support assumed	Decline support
Singapore	Limited support	Limited support	Limited support	Operations support
South Korea	Decline support	Support assumed	Decline support	Operations support
Taiwan	Support assumed	Decline support	Decline support	Limited support
Thailand	Decline support	Decline support	Decline support	Limited support
Vietnam	Decline support	Decline support	Decline support	Decline support

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.



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