



Executive Summary

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THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN LANDPOWER: DOES FORWARD PRESENCE STILL MATTER? THE CASE OF THE ARMY IN THE PACIFIC

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The time has come for a reappraisal of the U.S. Army's forward presence in East Asia, given the significantly changed strategic context and the extraordinarily high, recurring costs of deploying U.S. Army forces from the 50 states for increasingly important security cooperation activities across the Indo-Asia-Pacific theater. For economic, political, diplomatic, and military reasons, the Indo-Asia-Pacific theater continues to grow in importance to the United States. As part of a broad, interagency, multifaceted approach, the U.S. military plays a critical role in the rebalancing effort now underway. The U.S. Army in particular has a special role to play in bolstering the defense of allies and the deterrence of aggression, promoting regional security and stability, and ameliorating the growing U.S.-China security dilemma.

In particular, military security cooperation programs are becoming increasingly important for achieving U.S. security goals. These military-to-military programs and activities are designed to shape the security environment; prevent conflict through deterrence, assurance, and transparency; and build operational and tactical interoperability. As wartime requirements decrease in the coming year following the end of extensive American involvement in Afghanistan and as the U.S. military undergoes a dramatic yet historically typical post-war drawdown, security cooperation activities will comprise the primary way in which a leaner U.S. military contributes to broad American national security objectives in the next decade.

However, the U.S. Army today remains hamstrung in its efforts to contribute to those broader security goals in the Indo-Asia-Pacific theater. A dated basing paradigm limits the utility to be gained from the roughly 22,000 U.S. Army Soldiers based in East Asia, and the extraordinarily high transportation costs associated with sending other, U.S.-based Army forces to conduct security cooperation activities across the vast Indo-Asia-Pacific region limits what the Army can accomplish. If reconfigured, the forward-based Army presence in East Asia could help achieve U.S. objectives more effectively and more efficiently. Effectiveness would be increased through more regular, longer duration engagement with critical allies and partners, including Australia, India, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam, while still maintaining deterrence through punishment on the Korean Peninsula. Efficiency would grow by reducing the recurring transportation costs associated with today's practice of sending U.S.-based units to conduct most exercises and training events across the Indo-Asia-Pacific region.

Changing the U.S. Army's forward posture in East Asia involves overcoming several hurdles. These include the challenge of reassuring South Korea and Japan of the U.S. commitment to their security even as the number of U.S. Soldiers based in those countries decreases; the difficulty of negotiating status of forces agreements and/or cost mitigation arrangements with potential new host nations like Australia or the Philippines; budgetary challenges in terms of funding any necessary initial infrastructure investments; and

the need to allay Chinese fears of containment and encirclement. However, these challenges are not necessarily insurmountable. For instance, countries across the Indo-Asia-Pacific theater, including some that have long viewed the United States with suspicion, are coming to increasingly value the offshore balancing role Washington can play vis-à-vis China. Additionally, the one-time infrastructure investment costs associated with any new U.S. forward presence in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region are likely to be offset over a matter of years by savings gained from reduced transportation costs. Finally, Washington can work to explain to Beijing how a transparently reconfigured U.S. presence in East Asia actually benefits China by acting as a pacifier for the more aggressive impulses of American allies and partners in the region, and by reassuring leaders in those same countries that as China rises, the United States will remain a steadfast partner. There are no guarantees that the United States will succeed in overcoming all of the potential difficulties associated with a reconfigured Army presence in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region, but to avoid trying would severely limit the effectiveness and the efficiency of the Army's contribution to broader U.S. national security goals.

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