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Statement before the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations on "Shared Threats: Indo-Pacific Alliances and Burden Sharing in Today's Geopolitical Environment"

Burden Sharing in the Indo-Pacific:
Recommendations for U.S. Defense Policy

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Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Shaheen, and esteemed members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to present my views on how to best approach alliance burden sharing in the Indo-Pacific to ensure the United States is best position to protect its interests there. In this testimony, I will present what types of allied support would be the most strategically consequential for U.S. ability to deter Chinese aggression and how the United States can best encourage greater support from its allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific.

Introduction

The Trump administration has recently called for a reassessment of alliance burden sharing, ostensibly to reduce the price tag of U.S. defense commitments.[1] Currently, the United States spends around 3.4 percent of its GDP on defense, which is around $916 billion (around $850 billion was requested for FY2025), with about $9.1 billion allocated to the Indo-Pacific through the Pacific Deterrence Initiative (around $9.9 billion requested for FY2025 PDI).[2] U.S. allies and partners spend less: below is a chart on spending as a percent of GDP from 2018-2024.

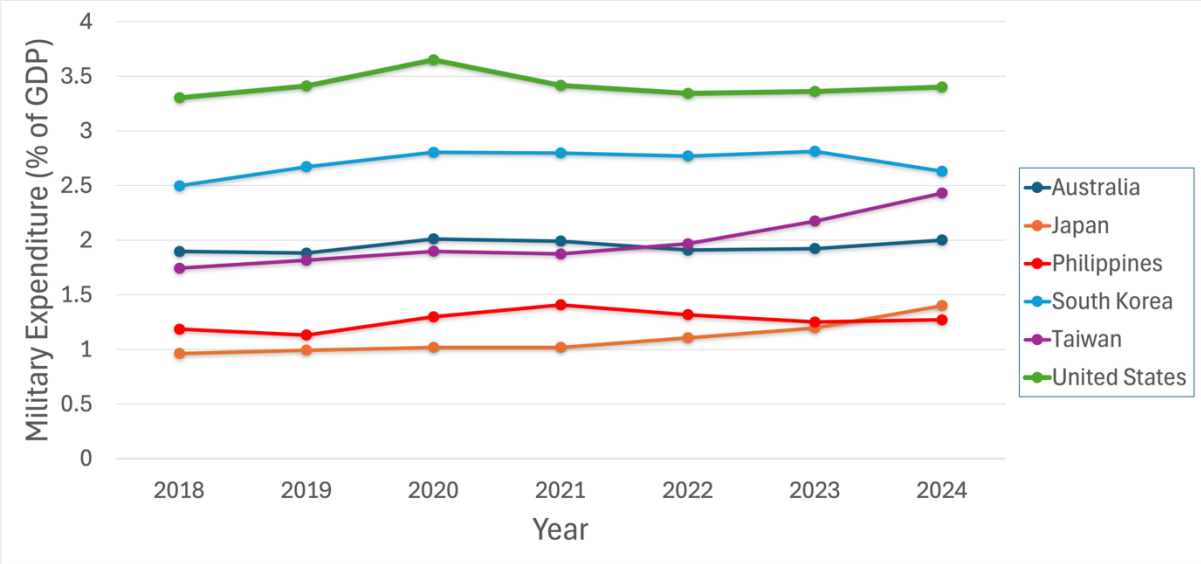

Fig 1: Military spending as a share of GDP, 2018 to 2024, Author's creation[3]

In this testimony, I will argue that the changing strategic environment does require U.S. allies and partners to take on a greater portion of the burden of defense and deterrence, but that increasing their domestic expenditure is not the most impactful way. Moreover, there needs to be a recognition that the U.S. military presence in Asia is not for the defense of allies alone, or even mainly, but for the protection of U.S. interests and security. Given that the United States needs to convince allies to expand access, basing and overflight (ABO) for U.S. military forces in their countries, Washington needs to provide positive inducements, not threats, to convince countries to play a greater role in maintaining stability in the Indo-Pacific.

Benefits of the alliances

The U.S. alliance network is considered by most to be "one of the most enduring and successful elements of U.S. foreign policy since World War II."[4] The benefits of alliances are not limited to military affairs; allies vote with the United States in international institutions, coordinate development assistance, and help each other become more prosperous through trade and

investment.[5] The alliance relationships create significant economic benefits for the United States. A 2016 RAND report estimates that an 80 percent reduction in U.S. security commitments could save the U.S. defense budget $126 billion per year but it would reduce U.S. trade in goods and services by $577 billion per year.[6] Security commitments also provide the U.S. with leverage in trade negotiations, as it has in the past with Korea and Australia.[7]

This system has allowed the U.S. military to maintain a global presence at a far cheaper cost than past great powers' strategies, such as the British colonial empire or the Soviet Union's repeatedly contested occupation of neighboring countries.[8] These alliances are necessary for the global projection of military power, which is key to protection of U.S. interests abroad. Global power projection is arguably the central mission of the U.S. armed forces (after homeland defense). The National Defense Strategy and its precursor, the Quadrennial Defense Review, have addressed global power projection and protection in every published volume since the first in 1997.[9] Operationally, this global focus is integrated into the distinctive missions of the different service branches.[10] For example, of the five core missions of the U.S. Air Force—air superiority; global strike; rapid global mobility; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR); and command and control—two are explicitly global while the remaining three are global in practice.[11]

Let me be clear. No entity will protect U.S. interests better than the United States itself. U.S. interests and security are not something to outsource to another nation, let alone an adversarial one like China. I want to start this testimony therefore with an important premise: if our goal is peace through strength, we must recognize that allied support for U.S. military operations, activities and investments (OAI) are a critical source of that strength.

U.S. forces are in Asia to operate and respond to contingencies and crises important to the United States. The proximity of U.S. forces in Japan and South Korea shortens logistical supply lines, enabling quicker reactions to evolving security threats. Longer military response times would catastrophically increase strategic risks. The U.S. military presence also prevents nuclear proliferation by providing security assurances to Japan, Australia, and South Korea. Without U.S. forces deployed in Asia, these other countries will have incentives to develop independent nuclear programs, raising the risk of destabilizing arms races, conflict, and entrapment.

There is no doubt that if the United States alienates allies, the real winner will be Beijing.[12] The fact that Chinese discourse, behavior and capabilities are designed to undermine the U.S. alliance system in Asia alone tells us a lot about its benefits for the United States. Beijing has framed U.S. security ties with Japan, the Philippines, and other ASEAN countries as direct provocations or efforts to "contain" China, and seeks to dissuade these nations from aligning too closely with Washington.[13] Xi Jinping has called for the end of the system multiple times as Beijing actively criticizes the U.S.-led alliance system as an outdated, "zero-sum," "exclusive" security model.[14] The Chinese are leveraging the current Trump administration approach of "no money, no protection," to argue that U.S. commitments have gradually become little more than hollow political rhetoric.[15] In parallel, Beijing advocates for an alternative vision for Asian security with its Belt and Road Initiative, which it argues is a "Key Pillar of the Global Community of Shared Future."[16]

In sum, alliances with Indo-Pacific countries benefit the United States. In the next section, I discuss the ways allies can contribute more that would be most beneficial for the United States. Please note that Taiwan is a unique case and will be discussed in a separate follow-on section.

Alliance Burden-Sharing

Burden-sharing in alliances is often framed in financial terms, but a broader perspective reveals that contributions can take many forms beyond defense spending. I argue instead that the United States should focus on getting 1) more expansive, flexible and permanent access, basing and overflight (ABO) in allied and partnered countries in the Indo-Pacific; and 2) greater influence in what allies invest in, to include greater support for U.S. military construction (milcon) and the development of certain niche military capabilities that complement, rather than duplicate, U.S. forces.

More flexible, extensive ABO. First, as I have written extensively elsewhere, to deter China from using force, especially over Taiwan, the United States needs to implement a denial strategy – that is, as Elbridge Colby has argued, the ability to deny China from achieving its goals through force. This means the United States must be able to bring mass into the theater of conflict quickly, without any advanced warning. The United States needs more forces forward, but also certain types of capabilities that are politically sensitive like strategic bombers, submarines, and anti-ship missiles. The United States also needs more flexibility in what it can do with those forces once there. For example, the U.S. policy should prioritize getting submarine tenders in Japan and the Philippines, permanent bomber bases in Australia and the Philippines, and anti-ship missile capabilities in the southwestern (SW) islands of Japan in addition to in the Philippines.

With respect to Japan, the United States also needs greater access to its southwestern island chain, and a political guarantee or clearer assurances on U.S. base access in a Taiwan contingency. Joint U.S.-Japan planning reportedly envisions deploying U.S. missile units and Marine littoral forces along the Nansei (southwest) Islands in the event of a Taiwan Strait crisis.[17] However, under current alliance arrangements, the use of U.S. bases in Japan for operations not directly tied to Japan's defense is subject to Tokyo's consent as a 1960 exchange of notes requires "prior consultation" before U.S. forces in Japan conduct combat operations abroad, which means access during a Taiwan emergency is not automatically guaranteed.[18] The United States also needs to renegotiate the relocation of Marines from Okinawa to Futenma, an agreement signed 30 years ago which did not take into account the rise of China and the consequent changed security environment.[19] A significant reconsideration of this agreement is necessary, as Okinawa hosts over half of the approximately 50,000 U.S. troops in Japan and its bases are viewed as a key forward 'bulwark' against China's expanding military presence in the region.[20]

With respect to South Korea, Seoul needs to finally agree to strategic flexibility - the notion that the United States would be allowed to use its forces on the peninsula for off-peninsula contingencies (i.e. against China). South Korea is geographically closer to mainland China and almost as close to Taiwan as Japan and hosts fifteen U.S. military bases and about 28,500 U.S. personnel. Using U.S. bases and South Korean military infrastructure, such as Camp Humphreys (the largest overseas American military base), the U.S. can improve the operational flexibility of its forces during a Taiwan crisis.

Lastly, the United States needs permanent basing in the Philippines, especially for naval and air forces. The current system of rotational forces is more expensive than basing troops permanently.[21] Moreover, the United States is reluctant to invest in the military construction of bases without some political reliability of its ability to use them in the time of conflict, thereby

rendering the current arraignments far less strategically useful. By mid-2024, total U.S. commitments reached around $210 million for EDCA (including a fresh $128 million package covering projects at 7 of the 9 sites).[22] However, it remains a challenge to translate paper funding into concrete facilities on the ground. Both sides acknowledge that progress was "minimal" for six years and only recently accelerated.[23]

Smart defense investments. It is more important for the United States to convince allies and partners to spend on the right things than to just spend more. U.S. could encourage two types of spending in particular. First, to contribute more to costs of U.S. military construction. From 2016 through 2019, the Department of Defense spent roughly $20.9 billion in Japan and $13.4 billion in South Korea to pay military salaries, construct facilities, and perform maintenance. The governments of Japan and South Korea also provided $12.6 billion and $5.8 billion, respectively, to support the U.S. presence during the same period.[24] South Korea should contribute more to these costs. The Philippine government is more cash-strapped compared to the U.S. or other allies, and given U.S. need for a more permanent presence, requesting greater financial contributions toward the U.S. presence is not advisable. Under EDCA, the Philippines already does not charge the U.S. rent for use of its bases, and in fact it shoulders some operating costs. Australia already shares the costs of the U.S. military rotation based in Australia's Northern Territory (exact cost split is not publicly disclosed) but Australia could allow greater U.S. access to existing Australian bases and contribute to upgrades needed to accommodate greater U.S. presence.[25]

Allied defense investment decisions could also be geared to better support U.S. defense industry. There has been progress in this area. In early 2023, the U.S. and Japan signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation Projects (RDT&E) and a Security of Supply Arrangement (SOSA).[26] This collaboration was further solidified by an announcement of a cooperative development program for the Glide-Phase Interceptor (GPI) in August 2023, building on past cooperative successes in missile defense, including the joint development of a hypersonic missile defense system, that emphasizes balanced workshare and industry collaboration.[27] Additionally, in December 2023, Japan strengthened these efforts by relaxing its defense export regulations to allow the export of Patriot missiles to the U.S., which are manufactured under a U.S. license in Japan. In June 2024, the U.S.-Japan Defense Industrial Cooperation, Acquisition, and Sustainment (DICAS) Forum was organized to leverage their respective industrial bases to address the demand for critical capabilities and maintaining long-term readiness and initial activities have focused on forming working groups to address procurement and support issues critical to regional security operations such as ship and aircraft repair, supply chain support, and the coproduction of advanced missiles.[28] Moreover, the Collaborative Combat Aircraft (CCA) program discussed with Japan aims to develop uncrewed air systems, incorporate AI technology, and engage in international symposiums.[29]

A prime example of expanded defense cooperation can be found in AUKUS, in which Australia will purchase up to 3 U.S. Virginia-class attack submarines in the 2030s and later build a new "SSN-AUKUS" submarine with British design and American technology.[30] In addition, AUKUS Pillar II centers on collaborative development of advanced technologies among the three countries and has the potential to significantly accelerate innovation. As part of it, Australia is making a significant investment in the U.S. submarine industrial base, with a $500 million installment made in the first week of February 2025, toward its pledged $3 billion contribution, ahead of Deputy Prime Minister Marles' meeting with Secretary Hegseth.[31] It is also fostering collaboration on AI, hypersonic missiles, quantum tech, and undersea drones.

Japan and Australia have also signed a Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) (entered into force in 2023) to facilitate greater military deployments and exercises between those two nations.[32] Similar agreements must be explored between other regional U.S. allies, such as the Philippines for more effective cooperation.

The Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordnance (GWEO) enterprise is another opportunity for Australia and the United States to deepen their defense industrial partnership and reinforce deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. As both countries face an urgent need to expand their stocks of maritime strike and air defense missiles, collaborating through GWEO can boost joint operational effectiveness, foster long-term sustainment partnerships, and improve overall interoperability. Instead of duplicating complex weapons development efforts, Australia would benefit more by co-investing in and acquiring proven long-range munitions from the United States and Australian firms can also play a valuable role in relieving pressure on U.S. supply chains by producing key components that are currently in short supply, such as solid rocket motors.[33]

Moreover, allies could prioritize the research, development and production of critical capabilities like anti-ship intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBMs). There might be no more important capability for the United States to develop and deploy into the theater than intermediate range anti-ship ballistic missiles. This should be the #1 priority of the U.S. defense industry, and finding locations in the AOR to deploy them a close second. This is key to deny China's taking of Taiwan by force; a fact recognized in Beijing. Indeed, Wang Yi in March 2025 noted that China would "firmly oppose" any such plans, but also that countries in the region would not welcome it.[34]

The United States should also try to encourage allies to invest in capabilities that complement instead of duplicate U.S. capabilities. The Japanese government has approved three new security documents which increase the development of standoff capabilities, integrated missile and air defenses, and unmanned vehicles to assist in intelligence gathering and combat support roles.[35] AUKUS Pillar II is another instance that seeks to leverage the distinct innovation strengths of the AUKUS nations to expand market opportunities for U.S. and allied defense industries while minimizing redundancy in research and development.[36] Similarly, South Korea can be a valuable critical technology partner to the United States, offering significant contributions in advanced tech development that would bring mutual benefits to both countries.[37] As a global leader in fields such as semiconductors, shipbuilding, and consumer electronics, South Korea is well-positioned to complement U.S. strengths and help strengthen shared supply chain resilience, innovation capacity, and strategic competitiveness. South Korea's advanced defense and shipbuilding industries offer the U.S. a strategic opportunity to strengthen its industrial base and reduce reliance on Chinese commercial ships and components, with expanded cooperation—from sourcing parts to full coproduction—helping address both economic and security needs amid ongoing delays in U.S. shipbuilding.[38]

Our allies will make sovereign decisions for their sovereign defense. In some case that might duplicate U.S. military capabilities inefficiently, leading to fragmented and misaligned defense strategies. But we should make every effort – through strategic consultations, sharing intelligence assessments, and coordinated contingency planning – to work towards a rational collective effort to build complementary capabilities wherever possible.

Mission burden sharing. Lastly, the allies and partners need to invest in the appropriate capabilities to take over certain deterrence and defense requirements during times of crisis or

conflict to free U.S. resources to fight and win a war with China if that proves necessary. Specifically, South Korea needs to be better positioned to take on greater responsibilities and resources to counter North Korea's hostility during potential conflicts involving Taiwan.[39] Additionally, by enhancing its self-defense capabilities particularly through expediting the transfer of wartime operational control (OPCON) from the U.S. to South Korea, the ROK military can gain greater independence and responsibility for national defense, which would further free up U.S. resources for potential redeployment to Taiwan. Japan needs to be prepared to deter conflict in the East China Sea. Both countries, though especially Japan, need to be appropriately integrated with U.S. forces so as to offer logistical support to U.S. forces engaged in any Taiwan-related operations. Australia would need to take on a greater burden of exercising military dominance over key Southeast Asian chokepoints. Effective burden-sharing should also involve cooperation, joint threat assessments, intelligence-sharing, and industrial collaboration—all elements that strengthen deterrence and defense without imposing rigid financial ceilings.

Recognizing that the United States cannot do it all, we should also welcome efforts by our allies to cooperate among themselves, without U.S. involvement. For instance, Japan and Australia could increase their defense engagement with Southeast Asia through joint military training, capacity-building exercises, and defense equipment cooperation with regional allies. Allies also need to be open to greater alliance integration, as it strengthens coordination among partners. By establishing joint military bases and promoting peacetime military coordination and troop interoperability programs, allies can make way for more seamless joint operations in potential future conflicts. Such integration not only boosts the likelihood of alliance members fulfilling their commitments during conflicts but they could also signal their shared interests to potential adversaries.[40] They could also benefit from joint trainings during peacetime, improved interoperability, and sometimes the adoption of standardized equipment, which streamlines logistics.[41] For instance, the U.S. handles its alliances with Tokyo and Seoul separately, and the three have only recently signed the "Memorandum of Cooperation on the Trilateral Security Cooperation Framework," which while a good initiative, is not legally binding.[42] While ad-hoc negotiations remain an option, they could be costly, making coalition-building in a crisis more challenging and time-consuming for the United States.[43]

Best Way to Encourage "Burden Sharing"

So far, I have suggested in this testimony that there are more strategically impactful ways to burden share beyond increases in GDP. The second main point I would like to highlight is that there are better ways to achieve those goals than to publicly criticize allies and demand it.

Making U.S. commitments to allies conditional on paying more for defense both reduces the benefits that other states expect to glean from the relationship and raises their fears of abandonment by the United States. Moreover, to achieve the types of burden sharing I lay out in the beginning of my testimony, the United States needs to offer more than security protections – development assistance, political support, technological cooperation, economic benefits, humanitarian aid and disaster relief – are often more impactful. While threatening abandonment of NATO allies might be effective in encouraging greater burden sharing there, it will not be the case with most partners in the Indo-Pacific. This is because the threat from China or North Korea is not so direct for many, and the benefits of a positive relationship with Beijing are large. Specifically, the expected cost in terms of defense is not as large as it was to ally with Europe during the Cold War, as China has no intention of occupying any of these countries (Except for Taiwan). The U.S. has explicit treaty commitments to South Korea,

Japan, the Philippines, Australia, and Thailand and an implicit one to Taiwan. China threatens all these actors, but for most, the threat is indirect – that China will either strike them if they support US military operations, or that China will seize small uninhabited islands like the Senkakus, that China will exert influence from afar, by threatening their maritime approaches or exclusive economic zones. Only Taiwan faces the threat of territorial conquest. This means that the benefits for many allies of U.S. security guarantees are limited–and the costs potentially high enough to outweigh the risks. That is especially the case for countries in Southeast Asia like Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia or in the second island chain like Palau or the Federated States of Micronesia. Moreover, these countries benefit significantly from their economic relationships with Beijing.

Since 2013, China has consistently been Singapore's largest trading partner for 11 years, and among the ASEAN countries, Singapore ranks as China's fifth-largest trading partner. In 2023, bilateral trade between China and Singapore reached a value of US$108.39 billion, whereas, total trade value between the United States and Singapore in 2023 was $76.1 billion.[44] Similarly, the total trade between China and Malaysia in 2023 was approximately $145.3 billion more than double the US$63.8 billion in Malaysia-U.S. trade.[45] With Indonesia, the pattern was the same, China's trade volume reached US$133.4 billion in 2023, while trade with the United States totaled just US$38.9 billion.[46] More globally, approximately 70 percent of global economies engage in more trade with China than with the United States, with over half of these economies trading twice as much with China as they do with the U.S.[47]

Between 2015 and 2021, China's development aid to Southeast Asian countries averaged about $5.5 billion annually.[48] In a broader context, from 2013 to 2018, China provided a total foreign aid of 270.2 billion RMB, equivalent to around $42 billion based on average exchange rates during that period. Due to the lack of transparency in China's reporting of its foreign aid and its historical preference for providing development finance primarily as loans rather than grants, it will be unclear exactly how much China will leverage its aid and grants following a reduction in U.S. contributions. However, China most definitely will intensify its existing engagement strategies such as enhancing the public-private "Health Silk Road" initiative, expanding aid-like training for civilian government and security officials, and taking a more prominent role in South-South cooperation, especially in areas involving emergencies and conflicts.[49]

If the United States is too forceful with the allies and partners, it could backfire. For some countries, like Singapore or the Philippines, if you force them to pick a side, you might not like which side they pick. A professor at the PLA Rocket Force Command College points out tensions between the U.S. and its allies, highlighting that the U.S. is not in an easy position: "Decades of history have shown that when faced with disagreements with its allies, the U.S., aside from issuing criticism and pushing forward its own policies, often has few effective solutions. Although the U.S. possesses overwhelming power compared to its allies, this power does not always translate into influence."[50] Again, the United States needs ABO in the region to protect U.S. security and interests – if we lose that, our security, political and economic interests will be at the whim of Beijing. The United States would lose all means of deterring Chinese aggression in the region as well as against the U.S. homeland, and we would have to follow rules of economic engagement that are favorable to Chinese companies over others.

Second, a strategy of forced burden sharing could cause allies to seek greater strategic autonomy (a trend already visible in Europe), reducing U.S. influence over the strategic decisions there. The fact that allies are reliant on the United States also enhances U.S. power

and influence in the region. Experts agree that this presence not only deters adversaries but also prevents allies from taking rash actions. For example, it influenced South Korea's measured response to North Korea's 2010 attack on a South Korean naval vessel.[51]

Third, the public nature of U.S. demands makes it harder for U.S. allies —all democracies—to concede to the United States. These countries need public support for any defense policies, from increased spending to closer defense coordination with U.S. forces. For instance, American statements usually refer to "EDCA sites," but Manila calls them "Agreed Locations" on Philippine bases, to try and assure the public and the option that no bases are being given over to the U.S.[52] This semantic distinction is important domestically for Marcos to argue he is not violating the constitution or sovereignty. For permanent basing in the Philippines, like the United States enjoyed in the 1990s at Naval Base Subic Bay and Clark Air Base, there needs to be an agreement approved by the Philippine parliament. Allowing some ambiguity about which country provides the support could be helpful. This might be when the Philippines military spokesperson said that the U.S. spent almost $82 million on 21 projects on those five bases, while the U.S. INDOPACOM spokesperson, stated that the U.S. spent only $56.8 million on 14 projects in five EDCA sites in the Philippines from 2014 to 2023.[53] To date there has been domestic pushback in the Philippines: former President Duterte and others opposed to U.S. military presence have criticized EDCA's expansion.[54] So far, Marcos Jr. has overcome these voices, with strong public support for the U.S. alliance. But to smooth things, Washington should increase economic investments around EDCA locations and emphasize humanitarian and disaster relief uses of the sites.

Similarly, the Australian government avoids the term "base" and instead refers to U.S. military presence as "rotational forces," which reflects a bipartisan policy of no foreign bases on Australian soil. Allowing this largely semantic difference likely creates the situation in which the majority of Australians (57 percent) appear comfortable with U.S. basing. Moreover, in Japan's case, the Okinawa prefectural government led by current Governor Denny Tamaki staunchly opposes constructing the new Henoko base and demand a reduction of U.S. troop presence. In 2019, a local referendum saw over 70 percent of Okinawan voters reject the Henoko relocation plan.[55] Governor Tamaki, elected and re-elected on anti-base platforms, has used every administrative tool to impede construction at Henoko, including refusing permits for landfill work, rescinding previous approvals, and filing numerous lawsuits against Tokyo's decisions but the Japanese central government, supported by court rulings, has overridden Okinawa's objections.[56]

In sum, to achieve greater alliance burden sharing, the U.S. should focus on offering incentives coupled with privately communicating that greater support of the United States is also needed for domestic and strategic reasons.

Taiwan

So far, I have argued that the United States should encourage greater alliance burden sharing, but in a way and of a type different than publicly demanding greater defense spending. The situation with Taiwan, however, is strategically different from the other allies and partners and therefore burden sharing should take on a different form.

While the United States should still try to make any discussions of burden sharing with Taiwan private, it is the case that the United States must demand more from Taiwan. This is an entity

that faces the real and acute threat of invasion by the PRC. If Taiwan expects the U.S. to help in a conflict, thereby risking major war with China, Taiwan does need to contribute more to deterring the war, and prevailing if that proves necessary.

First, on defense spending. While U.S. military power has deterred China to date from using force, the U.S. conventional deterrent has eroded. Specifically, the fait accompli scenario in which China takes Taiwan in 3-4 weeks before U.S. forces can come to Taiwan's aid is becoming increasingly tempting for Beijing. China has spent decades modernizing its military, with the final steps of honing command and control and logistics currently underway. Once those issues are finalized, likely in the next 3-4 years, the PLA will communicate to Xi Jinping that it's ready to take Taiwan by force.

While I have argued for significant U.S. force posture changes to convince Beijing such a quick move is unlikely to succeed, the truth is most of those efforts, especially in force development, take years if not decades. The best near-term solution is that Taiwan develops the capability to hold off a Chinese landing for 30 days. Note, given the serious imbalance of power between Taiwan and mainland China, Taipei will never be able to defend itself completely without U.S. assistance. There is no scenario in which Taiwan wins a war against China without direct U.S. military intervention. However, Taipei's ability to hold off long enough for U.S. forces to arrive in mass in theater is the heart of deterrence against China.

In other words, Taiwan must not only procure the right weapons, but enough of them, to forestall a Chinese landing. This takes more than the approximately 2.45 percent of its GDP to defense in 2025. The Taiwan economy might not be able to sustain 10 percent (and given that Taiwan's total government spending accounts for only 13.70 percent of GDP that is even harder) but Taiwan needs to do more.[57] And more to increase its overall government spending. Israel is often cited as a model for Taiwan, but its government spending consistently ranged from 36 percent to 44 percent of GDP between 2018 and 2024, significantly higher than Taiwan's 13.70 percent. This disparity underscores Taiwan's fiscal limitations in adopting a similar defense strategy.

But at the very least, as a symbolic gesture, Taiwan should spend at least the same amount as the United States on defense—currently 3.4 percent of GDP. The U.S. is reported to provide $571.3 million in direct defense support to Taiwan and that the potential sale to the island would be of worth $265 million in military equipment, which is only a fraction of America's total military budget.[58] Moreover, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 (NDAA) stipulates that grant assistance to Taiwan can be up to $2 billion, and military finance loans cannot exceed $2 billion from 2023 to 2027.[59] If we take 2023 as an example and assume the maximum yearly allotment is spent in 2023, then $2 billion in grants to Taiwan would constitute 0.007 percent of the total U.S. GDP or seven one-thousandths.[60]

Apart from increasing their defense spending, Taiwan also needs to buy the right weapons from the United States. Taiwan has recognized the necessity of acquiring appropriate defense systems to deter potential threats from China, and in recent years, it has shifted its focus towards asymmetric warfare capabilities, such as coastal defense cruise missiles and HIMARS rockets, moving away from more traditional, high-cost platforms like submarines.[61] Taiwan is also planning to propose a special defense budget that prioritizes precision ammunition, air-defense upgrades, command and control systems, equipment for the reserve forces, and anti-drone technology.[62] However, there have been delays in the delivery of previously ordered weapons packages from 2019, which included 250 Stinger missiles and are not expected to be

fully delivered until at least 2026.[63] Moreover, while splurging on high-profile items like the F-35 may offer a visually impressive spectacle, these jets could become costly losses in a real conflict.[64] Instead, Taiwan should persist in acquiring large quantities of anti-air, anti-armor, and anti-ship missiles, weapons that provide more value in Taiwan's defense scenario, and the U.S. should prioritize the speedy and reliable delivery of these crucial weapon systems.

Therefore, increases in Taiwan defense spending are less about fiscal burden sharing, and more about the unique role of Taiwan in creating a deterrent against Chinese use of force and the political need for Taipei to show seriousness about its defense if American lives are going to be sacrificed for its defense.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in this testimony, I have argued that while greater alliance burden sharing is necessary given the strategic threat environment in the Indo-Pacific, increasing allied defense spending alone is neither the most impactful nor the most strategic path forward. Instead, Washington should prioritize obtaining broader, more flexible access, basing, and overflight rights across the region, and encourage targeted investments in capabilities that directly support U.S. operational goals, such as missile infrastructure, submarine capabilities and components, and complementary defense production. It is also equally important to pursue strategies that can deeper mission integration and political alignment among allies, especially in preparing for contingencies like a conflict over Taiwan. In such a scenario, joint planning, logistical support, and shared responsibilities with allies and partners could prove decisive.

The United States should offer positive incentives in the economic, strategic, and diplomatic areas rather than threats or public demands, which risk alienating partners and reducing cooperation. I have also highlighted the unique role of Taiwan. Unlike other allies, it faces a real and imminent threat of invasion, and thus has a responsibility to invest more in its own defense. This investment is necessary not only to enhance deterrence but also to politically justify the immense risks the United States would undertake on its behalf should it be invaded by force.

The U.S. military also needs consistency in budgeting and planning to execute its Indo-Pacific military strategy. The frequent use of Continuing Resolutions (CRs) and last-minute funding deals in Congress has direct, negative impacts on Indo-Pacific posture planning and military construction, as senior defense leaders have repeatedly warned. A CR essentially hits "pause" on new defense initiatives and for the Indo-Pacific, that means new construction of bases, airfields, radars, and other infrastructure cannot begin under it.[65]

Also to create the more effective U.S. force posture in the Indo-Pacific, INDOPACOM cannot rely on the services to invest in the more useful capabilities. INDOPACOM needs leverage and authorities and appropriations to force the issue—something Congress has provided but needs to provide that continued support. Congress has enacted measures such as the Indo-Pacific Security Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2024, which allocates $8.12 billion to enhance deterrence against regional threats, including a specific provision of $3.3 billion dedicated to developing submarine infrastructure. Sustained legislative support is more than important now to empower INDOPACOM with the leverage required to effectively implement these initiatives.[66] One model to consider is giving the INDOPACOM Commander more direct control over a pool of resources dedicated to regional needs. For example, expanding the PDI into a truly flexible fund (similar to how the European Deterrence Initiative allowed EUCOM

to rapidly enhance posture after 2014).[67]

Lastly, it goes without saying that convincing countries to support the United States requires the full use of all aspects of national power. The recent dissolution of key agencies such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. Agency for Global Media (USAGM), which oversees Voice of America (VOA)—important and relatively inexpensive tools of U.S. power and influence—make the job of projecting the United States' power much harder. This move not only reduces U.S. influence but also provides strategic opportunities for competitors like China to expand their presence and influence unopposed. China, for instance, has been actively expanding its global media footprint, intensifying its influence efforts in various countries through state-sponsored outlets like CGTN and Xinhua, content-sharing agreements, and strategic media partnerships.[68] The absence of robust U.S. counterparts risks ceding influence to authoritarian narratives and undermining American credibility abroad. I hope, pending appropriate reviews into governmental waste, fraud, and abuse, that support and funding for these tools resume in the future.

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