



Center for a  
New American  
Security

## *Alliance Requirements Roadmap Series*

# **Security Cooperation:**

The Key to Access and Influence in the Asia-Pacific

May 2016

Colonel Desmond Walton, USA (Ret.)

*Bold. Innovative. Bipartisan.*

1152 15th Street NW  
Suite 950  
Washington, DC 20005

CNAS.ORG / @CNASDC  
T: 202.457.9400  
F: 202.457.9401

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Colonel Desmond Walton, USA (Ret.) is a Senior Director at BowerGroupAsia and Senior Advisor to the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

The views expressed in this report are personal and the author's alone. They are solely responsible for any errors in fact, analysis, or omission.

## ABOUT THE SERIES

To build a foundation of subject matter expertise for our study, "Dynamic Balance: An Alliance Requirements Roadmap for the Asia-Pacific Region," CNAS commissioned this Alliance Requirements Roadmap essay series from experts in third offset strategic thinking, Asian-Pacific maritime security issues, and on partner countries in Asia. These essays were the focus of a December 2015 experts' workshop, where CNAS investigators and leaders in the field discussed in depth the tools the United States, Japan, and its regional partners would need to best shape the future security environment of the Asia-Pacific. These conference papers were crucial to our analysis and have done much to shape the study's findings.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project is made possible due to the generous support of the Government of Japan.

## ABOUT THE ASIA-PACIFIC SECURITY PROGRAM

The Asia-Pacific Security program seeks to inform the exercise of U.S. leadership in Asia by analyzing how the United States can rebalance its priorities; shape a rules-based regional order; modernize traditional alliances; build the capacity of new partners; and strengthen multilateral institutions. From exploring rising maritime tensions in the region to crafting ways to renew key alliances and partnerships to articulating strategies to extend and enhance America's influence, the program leverages the diverse experience and background of its team, deep relationships in the region and in Washington, and CNAS' convening power to shape and elevate the conversation on U.S. policy across a changing Asia.

In the coming decade, the Chinese and American struggle for preeminence in the Asia-Pacific will continue to unfold over multiple fronts including economic, political, and security. In the security realm, both nations will continue to develop and deploy advanced weapons and mobility platforms; sensor, logistical, and communication systems; and new operational designs aimed at achieving military dominance in the event of armed conflict.

One emerging element of Sino-American competition in the security realm will be the contest for expanded military access and increased influence over security decisionmaking that both sides seek with regional partners. Success or failure in these competing Sino-American regional security cooperation efforts will have profound strategic consequences. For the United States, successfully expanding the portfolio of regional partners willing to provide access and operational support to U.S. forces is key to achieving the operational and strategic agility essential to countering China's anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) strategy. Conversely, China must complement its current A2/AD strategy, largely based on the ability to pose a kinetic threat to U.S. forces deployed in the region, with its own security cooperation campaign aimed at thwarting the unchecked expansion of U.S. access and influence.

## SECURITY COOPERATION DEFINED

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) defines security cooperation as “all DoD interactions with foreign defense establishments to build defense relationships that promote specific U.S. security interests, develop allied and friendly military capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations, and provide U.S. forces with peacetime and contingency access to a host nation.”<sup>1</sup> On a practical level, these “DoD interactions” consist of training programs, exercises, defense equipment sales, and a host of engagements often referred to as “defense diplomacy.” The latter category encompasses senior leader meetings and visits, formal consultations with foreign defense establishments (oftentimes called “strategic dialogues”), seminars, conferences, and more. Taken together, the various aspects of U.S. security cooperation are an essential tool to maintain alliances and partnerships and to advance U.S. security interests in the Asia-Pacific.

## THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Over the next decade, China and the United States will increase efforts to strengthen their respective networks of regional military partnerships by using the standard tools of security cooperation: transfers of military equipment, offers of training and scholarships, bilateral and multilateral exercises, and multiple forms of defense diplomacy. Of course, these efforts to bolster security relationships will be nested within, and supportive of, broader diplomatic strategies aimed at enhancing trade, political, and soft-power ties.

What drives this emerging competition in the security cooperation realm? The answer is simple. For the United States, a robust network of capable military partners willing to provide access to ports, airfields, and training facilities is critically important to establishing favorable strategic conditions in the Asia-Pacific – both for maintaining the status quo and, if necessary, prevailing in a regional

---

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, Joint Publication 1-02 (November 8, 2010) 212, [www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new\\_pubs/jp1\\_02.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp1_02.pdf).

conflict. Meanwhile, China has long been confounded by America's web of regional alliances and partnerships – a formidable bulwark anchored in northeast Asia and arching southwestward to Australia. Strategists on both sides recognize that the U.S. ability to disperse force deployments and logistical support through regional access arrangements is a significant offset to the PRC's ability to mass firepower against consolidated U.S. bases in Japan, South Korea, Guam, and Hawaii. China must find a way to undermine the veritable U.S. monopoly on security partnerships in the Asia-Pacific in order to offset what is, at present, a notable strategic advantage for the United States. Increased Chinese efforts in the security cooperation realm are in many ways normal great-power behavior. But, one also must recognize that an enhanced program of regional Chinese security cooperation will impact – indeed target – America's strategic center of gravity in the region.

The United States has a decades-long head start in building a resilient network of deep security ties within the Asia-Pacific region and should make every effort to sustain and enhance this enormous strategic advantage. The nature of U.S. security ties within the Asia-Pacific is, of course, driven by the self-interested strategic calculus of a diverse group of nations characterized by wide variances in political structure, economic development, and military capability. This strategic calculus is, in turn, influenced by the cumulative effect of innumerable U.S.-led security cooperation activities over decades that have helped to favorably incline various partners towards U.S. strategic interests. Just as in corporate accounting, reservoirs of goodwill, trust, and brand loyalty are important assets on the strategic balance sheet.

However, this is not the time for complacency. China's growing power and assertiveness; persistent regional maritime security, counterterrorism, and disaster relief challenges; and the urgent need to increase regional burden-sharing in order to alleviate pressure on an over-taxed U.S. military make it absolutely necessary that the United States remains unequivocally committed to sustaining robust regional security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific over the decades to come.

## THE SECURITY COOPERATION VALUE PROPOSITION

Viewed through a regional lens, there is a wide range of benefits inherent in American offers to strengthen security cooperation, ranging from the practical to the strategic. The practical benefits that accrue to the Asia-Pacific nations with a security cooperation relationship with the United States are obvious: access to world-class military education, training, and equipment. The strategic benefits are also abundantly clear: the ability to access top U.S. military leadership, insurance against gross coercion, and buy-in to the regional status quo that facilitates unimpeded commerce and mitigates the potential for interstate conflict.

From a U.S. perspective, what is the value derived from all of this security cooperation effort? Security cooperation helps underwrite the status quo and provides opportunities for U.S. military forces to access regional ports, airfields and training facilities. It provides some level of influence so that regional militaries and political leaders will take U.S. preferences into account when facing security decisions. And finally, it helps develop a range of desired military capabilities in U.S. allies and partners that can be leveraged in the future.

At the low end of this capability range, the United States expects allies and partners to share the burden in confronting regional security challenges like disaster response and peacekeeping. Farther



up the scale, the United States desires allies and partners to make meaningful contributions to regional maritime security. At the top tier, the United States wants capable allies and partners that can contribute militarily in the event of an outbreak of war.

It must be said that, within the region, there has been occasional hesitancy to embrace the United States as a security partner, despite the benefits previously outlined. This stems in part from concerns over U.S. reliability (the risk of arms embargo or suspended training programs, for example), and the fact that U.S. security policy is deeply imbued with American values of democracy, human rights, and the subordination of military authority to civilian rule. Within the region, it is known that security cooperation with the United States entails exposure to liberal, Western values and the accompanying U.S. expectation that regional civil-military relations will reflect the standards and practices of advanced democracies. The majority of nations within the region have accepted this conditionality, albeit sometimes begrudgingly. At the same time, it must be recognized that Chinese pressure influences the strategic calculus of regional decisionmakers. In some cases, efforts to deepen security cooperation with the United States risk antagonizing China, a point that Chinese diplomats and military officials no doubt make clear to their regional counterparts. Evidence of this can be seen, for example, in Vietnam's cautious reaction to U.S. overtures aimed at strengthening security cooperation.

## THE ACCESS EQUATION

Access is a central objective of U.S. security cooperation efforts aimed at offsetting the risk of China's A2/AD strategy, but what does this objective actually entail? Four of five treaty allies in the Asia-Pacific host permanent or rotational U.S. forces. Clearly, access as it pertains to Japan and South Korea means stationing significant U.S. forces in those nations. One step below this is rotational access, which is somewhat easier to achieve because it avoids the thorny political and legal issues associated with permanent basing agreements. The Philippines recently granted rotational access to U.S. forces through the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement. Australia also hosts U.S. rotational forces based on a 2011 agreement. Singapore agreed to grant rotational access to four U.S. Navy littoral combat ships (LCS) and one P-8 surveillance aircraft.

Apart from permanent basing and rotational presence, the most basic form of access is the near-continuous presence of U.S. forces that deploy for training and exercises with regional partners. U.S. Pacific Command manages a near-constant schedule of deployments across the region, ranging from ship visits and small, special operations exercises to large exercises involving thousands of personnel and dozens of aircraft. Thus, the overall access equation consists of three tiers: permanent basing, rotational presence, and routine security cooperation deployments.

The United States clearly intends to use routine security cooperation activities to reinforce and incrementally expand access to critical military facilities in the Asia-Pacific. This, by definition, is a long game calling for sustained effort and patience. What U.S. planners covet most – ensured wartime access for the positioning of U.S. forces – will surely not materialize without sustained efforts to exercise periodically access through security cooperation activities. Through persistent engagement over years, perhaps decades, the United States will be well positioned to expand its access, whether permanent or rotational, and thereby achieve the necessary operational agility to counter an adversary's A2/AD strategy.

## WHY IS U.S. RECOMMITMENT TO SECURITY COOPERATION IMPORTANT?

After 15 years of intense U.S. effort to build partner capacity in the Middle East, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and elsewhere, some sense “security cooperation fatigue” emerging in Congress, administration policymakers, and senior military commanders. Among these key decisionmakers, declining confidence in security cooperation as an effective security policy tool would likely result in diminished resources and strategic emphasis directed to global security cooperation efforts.

This would have a deleterious impact on U.S. security strategy in the Asia-Pacific. Even a temporary U.S. pullback would prompt allies and partners to reevaluate the validity of the region’s central strategic assumption: that the United States will sustain its military presence and engagement over the long term. Furthermore, China would almost certainly move quickly to exploit any opportunity to enhance its own security ties in the region at U.S. expense. At risk are hard-won gains in access, influence, interoperability, and the nascent regional capability to act multilaterally in response to security challenges. With the 2016 election fast approaching, it is critical that a new administration be prepared to recognize the strategic importance of security cooperation programs and to commit fully to resource adequately these efforts.

Security cooperation communicates U.S. strategic intent. Anyone serving as a defense attaché overseas or in a regional policy office at Pacific Command or the Pentagon can attest to how closely U.S. partners scrutinize levels of security-cooperation funding. Funding for International Military Education and Training (IMET), Foreign Military Financing (FMF), and other programs are almost always among the top discussion points during ministerial-level meetings. The implication is clear: U.S. funding for security cooperation conveys U.S. intent much more powerfully than does rhetoric alone.

Computing an accurate total of U.S. resources invested annually in security cooperation activities in the Asia-Pacific is a difficult undertaking due to the vast range of programs and the “sunk costs” inherent in exercises involving deployed ships, aircraft, and personnel. Of the 31 U.S. security cooperation funding authorities identified in Dr. Dafna H. Rand and Dr. Stephen Tankel’s CNAS publication, “Security Cooperation & Assistance: Rethinking the Return on Investment,” at least 20 are actively employed in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>2</sup> Funding data for marquee security cooperation programs like the Department of State’s FMF and IMET is easily obtainable and provides an indication of resource trends.

Between Fiscal Year 2012–2015, the State Department’s foreign operations budget included FMF and IMET requests (in thousands of dollars) depicted in the chart below.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, this data set

---

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Dafna H. Rand and Dr. Stephen Tankel “Security Cooperation & Assistance: Rethinking the Return on Investment” (Center for a New American Security, August 4, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Foreign Military Finance Account Summary,” <http://www.state.gov/t/pm/ppa/sat/c14560.htm>. “International Military Education and Training Account Summary,” <http://www.state.gov/t/pm/ppa/sat/c14562.htm>.

would need to be greatly expanded and analyzed relative to the other geographic regions in order to fully assess all relevant implications.

East Asia and Pacific	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15
FMF	48,302	53,316	78,488	67,400
IMET	9,015	8,522	9,290	12,500

The first key takeaway from this brief snapshot is that FMF by itself is inadequate to address regional capability shortfalls. The DoD's ambitious objectives of building regional maritime security capacity outlined in the 2015 Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy<sup>4</sup> would require far more than \$67 million, given the scope of regional shortfalls and the high cost of air, surface, and sensor platforms. It should be noted that annual FMF allocations also fund efforts to build counterterrorism capacity and other competing, regional U.S. priorities. Second, the 34 percent increase in IMET from FY14 to FY15 is welcome, but still represents the smallest total amount requested for any geographic region. This is indicative of the challenge of aligning U.S. security assistance resources with national strategy, which clearly outlines the importance and priority of the Asia-Pacific region. To date, the resource allocations do not match well with the underlying strategy.

Annual DoD contributions to security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific are more difficult to calculate, but it is safe to say that they will exceed State's in 2016 as the Maritime Security Initiative (MSI) for Southeast Asia gets underway.

### THE MSI CASE STUDY

This initiative, announced in May 2015 by Secretary of Defense Ashton B. Carter, proposes allocating up to \$425 million to regional maritime security capacity-building programs focusing on Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam over the next four years. As described by the White House, the program is intended to boost "the maritime security capacity of our allies and partners, to respond to threats in waters off their coasts and to provide maritime security more broadly across the region. We are not only focused on boosting capabilities, but also helping our partners develop the necessary infrastructure and logistical support, strengthen institutions, and enhance practical skills to develop sustainable and capable maritime forces."<sup>5</sup> The assistance may include provision of equipment, supplies, training, and small-scale military construction, as well as training to ministry, agency, and headquarters-level organizations for maritime forces.

MSI is notable for two reasons. First, apart from being designed to provide real increases in capabilities over several years, it is a powerful strategic communications signal, effectively conveying long-term U.S. resolve to remain decisively engaged in the Asia-Pacific. Second, by virtue of being

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, "Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy," RefID: F-79748EF (July 27, 2015), [http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/NDAA%20A-P\\_Maritime\\_Security\\_Strategy-08142015-1300-FINALFORMAT.PDF](http://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/NDAA%20A-P_Maritime_Security_Strategy-08142015-1300-FINALFORMAT.PDF)

<sup>5</sup> "Fact Sheet: U.S. Building Maritime Security Capacity in Southeast Asia," The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, press release, November 17, 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/11/17/fact-sheet-us-building-maritime-capacity-southeast-asia>.

conceived and designed within the interagency process, it will be poised to optimally leverage other related security cooperation programs and thus have a far greater chance of yielding tangible results.

Maritime security capacity-building efforts are simply less effective if they aim solely to send allied naval officers to the U.S. Naval Staff College or to provide a refurbished coastal patrol vessel to an under-equipped partner. Likewise, holding a single annual exercise or hosting a one-off seminar for officials from partner ministries of defense, foreign affairs, and fisheries is likely to produce negligible results.

The most powerful effects of U.S. security cooperation are achieved when all of these elements can be blended together in a synchronized fashion. This is precisely the intent of MSI. Comprehensive technical and staff training, with emphasis on supporting functions such as maintenance and intelligence integration, will accompany any new equipment provided. Once the equipment is fielded and the personnel are trained, the new capability will be integrated into realistic exercises – initially bilateral but evolving multilaterally as soon as conditions permit. Ministerial-level policy discussions will address challenges of long-term sustainment and regional integration of new maritime security capabilities.

This virtuous cycle of train-equip-exercise is the pathway to achieving enduring increases in partner capability. It is a cycle that might as well be patented by the United States, as no other nation actively practicing security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific, apart from perhaps Australia on a small scale, even attempts to do it. Regrettably, achieving the full impact of security cooperation efforts through the train-equip-exercise model remains the exception rather than the rule. Synchronization is hard work. The structural impediments, competing priorities, and funding challenges that hinder the optimum performance of the U.S. security-cooperation enterprise are well documented.<sup>6</sup>

Still, MSI stands a good chance of success; it is among the United States' top strategic initiatives in the Asia-Pacific. By announcing the plan publicly at last year's Shangri-La Dialogue, Secretary Carter staked U.S. credibility on the success of this program. That type of top-level emphasis should enable the managers of the MSI program to overcome bureaucratic obstacles.

## MULTILATERAL OPPORTUNITIES TO ENHANCE SECURITY COOPERATION

In the coming decade, the United States must expand efforts to incorporate Japan, South Korea, and Australia into a coordinated, regional security-cooperation strategy. Nascent steps have already occurred, but much more could be achieved if this team of relatively like-minded nations acted in concert to address regional shortfalls in maritime security, counterterrorism, and disaster response. This reservoir of latent allied capability must be tapped.

Apart from alleviating some budget pressure on the United States, increased allied involvement in regional security cooperation would provide a relatively benign environment for Japan, South Korea,

---

<sup>6</sup> Rand and Tankel, "Security Cooperation & Assistance: Rethinking the Return on Investment."



and Australia to work on enhanced interoperability and to increase trust. Finding opportunities to incorporate these three nations into MSI would be a good starting point.

## CONCLUSIONS

The United States has enduring security interests in the Asia-Pacific including: maintaining the peaceful status quo, deterring aggression, addressing emerging threats to stability, and facilitating unimpeded commerce. Maintaining a robust network of mutually beneficial security-cooperation relationships throughout the region greatly improves the ability of the United States to protect these interests. These relationships enhance the operational agility of U.S. forces by expanding access to regional airfields, ports, and training facilities. They increase, however immeasurably, U.S. influence over the security decisionmaking process of governments and militaries in the region. And finally, they are the proven pathway to developing allied and partner military capabilities that can contribute meaningfully to regional security and stability.

It is essential that the incoming administration recognizes and adequately resources the contributions of security cooperation to American security interests in the Asia-Pacific. These efforts represent a cost-effective way to convey U.S. resolve while enabling the region to make strategic choices favorable to U.S. interests in the face of growing Chinese power and assertiveness.