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**THESIS**

**HOW HAS THE “AMERICA FIRST” POLICY  
AFFECTED THE BALANCE OF POWER IN EAST ASIA?**

by

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June 2020

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**HOW HAS THE “AMERICA FIRST” POLICY AFFECTED THE BALANCE OF  
POWER IN EAST ASIA?**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines the implications of President Trump's "America First" foreign policy (AFP) on the balance of power as it relates to America's hub and spoke alliance system in East Asia. Before the AFP, President Trump often questioned the relevancy of America's alliances with South Korea and Japan, accusing each of not paying their fair share for American extended deterrence. The president pressured both allies to increase their burden sharing and enhance their capabilities to defend themselves. Since the AFP, South Korea has doubled down on its goal to reduce dependency on the U.S. alliance by expediting the transfer of wartime operational control of its forces from the United States. Additionally, the policy demands that South Korea shoulders the full cost to maintain the alliance. The AFP calls on Japan to take a more assertive leadership role in regional security, pushing on an open door that allows Japan to expand its interpretation of collective defense. Taiwan has benefited greatly from the AFP, but it also received pressure similar to America's treaty allies. The strategically ambiguous partner has now tied its defense spending to keep pace with its growing economy. This allowed Taiwan to purchase an advanced fighter from the United States that will increase parity with Chinese threats while allowing for enhanced interoperability with the U.S. military in the event of a crisis.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>PREFACE .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>C.</b>	<b>SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>D.</b>	<b>LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>E.</b>	<b>THE AMERICA FIRST POLICY.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>F.</b>	<b>THE AMERICA FIRST POLICY EFFECTS ON BILATERAL SECURITY IN EAST ASIA .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.</b>	<b>Japan.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>South Korea .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Taiwan.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>G.</b>	<b>POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>H.</b>	<b>RESEARCH DESIGN.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>JAPAN.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>SECURITY ASSESSMENT .....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>C.</b>	<b>INTERNAL BALANCING.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>D.</b>	<b>EXTERNAL BALANCING.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>E.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>SOUTH KOREA.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>SECURITY ASSESSMENT .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>C.</b>	<b>INTERNAL BALANCING .....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>D.</b>	<b>EXTERNAL BALANCING.....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>E.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>TAIWAN.....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>BACKGROUND .....</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>SECURITY ASSESSMENT .....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>C.</b>	<b>INTERNAL BALANCING .....</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>D.</b>	<b>EXTERNAL BALANCING.....</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>E.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>V.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>71</b>

<b>LIST OF REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST .....</b>	<b>89</b>

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	Author-derived timeline of Japan’s NDPGs along with their key driving events.....	16
Figure 2.	SIPRI data depicting Japanese defense expenditures as a share of GDP.....	22
Figure 3.	Kei Koga’s use of SIPRI data to compare military expenditures as a share of GDP.....	23
Figure 4.	Japanese MOD data depicting defense-related expenditures for the past 15 years.....	24
Figure 5.	Number of bilateral defense consultations at the ministerial level. Data from Japanese fiscal years 2010–2014.....	27
Figure 6.	Data from Japanese fiscal years enumerating the number of U.S.–Japan bilateral exercises. ....	27
Figure 7.	Military strengths of the four major powers surrounding the Korean peninsula.....	37
Figure 8.	History of North Korean missile launches and nuclear tests.....	40
Figure 9.	Republic of Korea Defense Budget projection differences between President Park and Moon’s administrations. ....	47
Figure 10.	Republic of Korea burden sharing to maintain U.S. forces on the Korean peninsula.....	49
Figure 11.	ROK defense burden sharing breakdown as of 2016.....	50
Figure 12.	Taiwanese perspective of U.S.—PRC “co-petition” for influence in the Indo-Pacific. ....	59
Figure 13.	Adapted from data depicting U.S. Navy Freedom of Navigation Operations in the Taiwan Strait through May 22, 2020.....	64
Figure 14.	Foreign Military Sales to Taiwan since 1990.....	66
Figure 15.	Matrix depicting this thesis’s findings. ....	72

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFP	America First Policy
A2AD	Anti-Access / Area Denial
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CPX	Command Post Exercise
DOD	Department of Defense
DPJ	Democratic Party of Japan
EDD	Extended Deterrence Dialogue
FMS	Foreign Military Sales
FOC	Full Operational Capable
FOIP	Free and Open Indo-Pacific
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GPC	Great Power Competition
INF	Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty
IOC	Initial Operational Capable
JMSDF	Japan Maritime Self Defense Force
JSDF	Japan Self Defense Force
KADIZ	Korean Air Identification Zone
KAMID	Korea Air and Missile Defense
KIDA	Korea Institute for Defense Analysis
KMT	Kuomintang
LDP	Liberal Democratic Party
MND	Ministry of National Defense (Republic of Korea)
MOD	Ministry of Defense
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDPG	National Defense Program Guidelines
NIDS	National Institute for Defense Studies
NPR	Nuclear Posture Review
NSS	National Security Strategy
OPCON	Operational Control

PRC	People's Republic of China
ROC	Republic of China
ROK	Republic of Korea
SACO	Special Action Committee on Okinawa
SCM	Security Consultative Meeting
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SMA	Special Measures Agreement
THAAD	Terminal High Altitude Area Defense
TLAM/N	Tomahawk land attack missile - Nuclear
TRA	Taiwan Relations Act
TTA	Taiwan Travel Act
USFK	United States Forces Korea

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# I. INTRODUCTION

## A. PREFACE

There is a growing sense that a power transition is taking place around the world stemming from the rise of great powers who are challenging the American-led international order. These challenges range from the construction of parallel economic institutions, such as China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), to military actions by revisionist authoritarian states such as Russia invading American partner states, such as Ukraine. Over the past several decades, America has supported an institutionalized network of alliances and partnerships to balance its power in such a way that effectively counters such challenges along the periphery.

As if external challenges to American power were not enough, internal fault lines amongst America's allies and partners are appearing which have the potential to disrupt the balance of power against America's favor. International media reporting indicates that these fault lines are becoming more pronounced, especially within the US's largest combatant command.

Tremors in the Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) exemplify these divisions. From India's crisis in Kashmir, to the economic and military tensions between South Korea and Japan, the region is currently experiencing acute sources of friction that, if left unchecked, can devolve into an array of bad situations that threaten the integrity of America's alliances to the benefit of a rejuvenating People's Republic of China (PRC) and rejuvenating Russia.

Many are calling for America's leadership to calm the growing storms. However, the president is being increasingly perceived as taking a "hands-off approach" by not intervening in alliance management as a result of the "America First" policy (AFP). These perceptions are seen by some as yet another indicator of America's declining power in the region.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Wong, "Waning of American Power? Trump Struggles With an Asia in Crisis," *The New York Times*, August 13, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/13/world/asia/trump-asia.html>.

The language used in President Trump's AFP leaves no doubt that alliances strengthen America's position around the world. The already uncertain promise of international cooperation is further weakened though when senior administration officials publicly question the value of American alliances in general, especially with key allies in East Asia.<sup>2</sup> Is the AFP designed as a wakeup call for East Asian allies to play a more active role in their security in a self-help system? How has it affected the balance of power in East Asia?

## **B. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION**

This thesis will analyze the degree to which the AFP has changed the way traditional American allies in East Asia, namely Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, are choosing to distribute their national power in an emerging multipolar system that is increasing Great Power competition.

This thesis will first theoretically frame the phenomenon that is occurring where America's allies are more economically tied to its strategic rival while remaining fundamentally bound to the United States for their security. I will then briefly compare the Trump administration's approach to Asia under the AFP with the previous administration's "pivot" or rebalance to Asia. with an emphasis on each of the three countries in order to serve as an analytic baseline.

Once the baseline is complete, I will then examine how the AFP is affecting each of the three aforementioned countries using the case study method to determine if each one is balancing, bandwagoning, or hedging vis-à-vis a rejuvenating PRC. Finally, I will conclude with a summary of each country's results along with my assessment of their impact on U.S. military theater security cooperation in the future.

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<sup>2</sup> Linda Sieg and Daniel Leussink, "Trump Renews Criticism of Japan-US Alliance before G20 Summit," *Reuters*, June 26, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-g20-summit-trump-japan/trump-renews-criticism-of-japan-us-alliance-before-g20-summit-idUSKCN1TS057>.

### C. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

This thesis is relevant for military planners in the INDOPACOM combatant command in general, and specifically for those within the Marine Corps' component. There is no shortage of literature that focuses on China's rise or the revisionist Russian state. It is important to remember that great power conflict can result from the Great Power competition. A clear gap exists that assesses how America's allies in East Asia are observing, orienting, and deciding to distribute their national capabilities in response to a multipolar environment.

The past two decades have shown that U.S. allied forces are a critical component to joint military operational success in a conflict. When speaking on the significance of American allies, former Secretary of Defense and retired Marine Lieutenant General James Mattis was recently quoted as saying "when you are going to a gunfight, bring all of your friends with guns."<sup>3</sup>

This thesis is significant since it is designed to expand the analytic aperture since it has potential nuclear implications. The AFP raises questions amongst American treaty allies and partners concerning American extended deterrence. Japan and South Korea are clearly under the U.S. nuclear umbrella, while the United States still remains "strategically ambiguous" concerning America's commitment to defend Taiwan in general.<sup>4</sup> However, America First connotes that the U.S. may not be as willing as before to trade San Francisco for Seoul or Tokyo, and these allies are now increasingly showing their willingness to take security matters into their own hands.

The goal of this analysis is to help inform the way that INDOPACOM strategic planners regard how regional allies will likely continue to evolve their capabilities to serve their state's interests. Given that tensions are increasing between two states that host significant numbers of U.S. forces, this analysis has immediate implications. Since the U.S.

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<sup>3</sup> Gerald F. Seib, "U.S. News: Mattis Says the U.S. Needs Allies," *Wall Street Journal*, August 29, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Terence Roehrig, *Japan, South Korea, and the United States Nuclear Umbrella: Deterrence After the Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 13.

is the common security guarantor to defend its allies in East Asia, how would wartime plans and exercise scenarios account for U.S. support to the defense of Japan if the aggressor was South Korea?

The scope of published literature on this subject is usually solely focused on the decline of American power as defined within International Relations (IR) theory. The typical examples include the U.S. withdrawal from institutions such as the Transpacific Partnership (TPP), and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Force (INF) treaty. Although these institutional examples provide context, taken alone they cannot depict the balance of power in a way that is relevant to the typical U.S. military planner supporting INDOPACOM. Each IR theory is a lens through which portray the puzzle unfolding in East Asia.

#### **D. LITERATURE REVIEW**

A survey of the literature shows that an overwhelming number of authors agree with the idea that the AFP marks a shifting power balance taking place around the world. Much of the analytic attention has been devoted to the policy's impact on either the NATO alliance or bilateral security arrangements. However, this myopic approach ignores a critical power shift in East Asia that does not explain if America's allies are balancing, bandwagoning, or hedging. This literature review will first contextualize the policy within a theoretical framework before illustrating its impacts on a regional security institution. Then, I will survey different types of balancing behavior exhibited by Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan as a result of the AFP.

#### **E. THE AMERICA FIRST POLICY**

Over the past two years the policy has been manifested in many ways. These manifestations include traditional means such as the official National Security Strategy (NSS) senior U.S. officials' statements and visits abroad, to non-traditional forms of communication such as Twitter. Regardless of how the policy is communicated, all agree that the "principled realist" approach means that the U.S. sees the world in a fundamentally different way than it has since the Cold War. The principles of this policy are really nothing new from prior U.S. presidential administrations. They are a way to show continued

support for universal values including human rights. What is different this time is that the policy's new world view places a greater emphasis on the realist outlook.

The policy reintroduces realism to contemporary international politics in a way that would not be unfamiliar to Cold War-era experts' theories. Writing during the peak of the bipolar era, Stephen Walt claimed that the way in which America deals with its alliances is dependent upon how it views its own security in response to a given threat along with a reliability assessment of its allies.<sup>5</sup> According to Walt, balancing behavior is more likely to occur by allies provided that the United States is in a position of strength, and appears to be less intimidating than the threat.<sup>6</sup> Under those conditions, Walt would expect American allies to contribute more for their own security, and thus balance the threat in accordance with America's shared interests.<sup>7</sup> The policy's proponents would agree with Walt, and they go as far to acknowledge the value of America's alliances, but cry foul that America has benevolently footed the bill for its allies' security and will not tolerate "free-riding" in response to Great Power Competition (GPC).

#### **F. THE AMERICA FIRST POLICY EFFECTS ON BILATERAL SECURITY IN EAST ASIA**

The president along with the AFP's proponents have made clear why the AFP is needed: to prevent American allies such as those in East Asia from free-riding on American taxpayer-funded security guarantees. Many have analyzed what the policy's economic results have been, including the U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-pacific Partnership (TPP).<sup>8</sup> In the military realm, while some question whether the U.S. seeks to be a regional hegemon, they assume that the underlying U.S. presence in East Asia is to maintain

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<sup>5</sup> Stephen Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," *International Security* 9, no. 4 (1985): 3, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538540>.

<sup>6</sup> Walt, 39.

<sup>7</sup> Walt, 40.

<sup>8</sup> Brian Harding, "The Trump Administration's Free and Open Indo-Pacific Approach," *Southeast Asian Affairs*; Singapore, 2019, 65.

readiness that will “preserve military superiority over potential adversaries” and to “sustain its Asian alliances.”<sup>9</sup>

However, the U.S. has threatened to withdraw U.S. troops from forward bases in South Korea and Japan, so readiness cannot be the *raison true* purpose.<sup>10</sup> The gap in the literature exposes the other assumption for the U.S. presence—the sustainment of the alliances. This next section will demonstrate that there is balancing taking place amongst U.S. allies in East Asia. The immediate effects appear to be in America’s favor. But when this behavior is synthesized with their own state’s self-interests, it becomes clear that each leader is expending political capital within their democracies to become less reliant on the U.S. in a self-help environment. The ultimate outcome may not necessarily strengthen the American position in GPC against the PRC or Russia.

Since President Trump has taken office, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan have strengthened their bilateral ties to the U.S. For example, Japan has agreed to purchase the U.S. Navy’s ground-based Aegis system. South Korea has continued to host the controversial Terminal High Altitude Air Defense (THAAD) system. Taiwan continues to purchase equipment through the Foreign Military Sales program. But these quantitative adjustments have much continuity with the past.

New qualitative developments are overshadowing status quo adjustments of power. America’s allies are undergoing innovative developments that are emblematic of how each government perceives its country’s role in an increasingly multipolar system. Unlike the NATO example, there is no regional security institution. This means U.S. allies and partners in East Asia have varied security relationships with the U.S., each founded upon different concentric circles of bilateral interests. However, they each share one common feature. Each case is the result of a democratically elected president making the decision to place a higher priority on state interests above international considerations.

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<sup>9</sup> Van Jackson, “American Military Superiority and the Pacific-Primacy Myth,” *Survival* 60, no. 2 (March 4, 2018): 108, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2018.1448578>.

<sup>10</sup> Roehrig, , 8.

## 1. Japan

There is a growing sense in Japan that it must take a more active role in its own defense. Many argue that this opinion began to gain traction during President Trump's campaign when he introduced his AFP intentions. Japanese apprehension of the policy grew when he questioned the value of U.S. alliances in general, but especially when he threatened to withdraw U.S. troops from Japan and South Korea once in office.<sup>11</sup>

Apprehension grew to uncertainty when President Trump withdrew the U.S. from the Transpacific Partnership (TPP), making many question whether Japan would actually be protected under the U.S. nuclear umbrella.<sup>12</sup> This uncertainty has had a galvanizing effect on Japanese politics, with both liberals and conservatives agreeing to pursue an "independent defense policy" in light of America's decline.<sup>13</sup>

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has skillfully used the new policy to Japan's advantage. A unified government gives Abe the political capital to carry out reforms that allow a more aggressive security policy, including his plan to revise Article 9 to allow Japan to have an offensive military capability. In 2018 Abe ignored restrictions to keep defense spending at 1% of GNP,<sup>14</sup> making way for a defense authorization that accounts for 5% of the entire government budget, which has not been seen since World War II. Abe was also able to convince President Trump that it was in America's interests to allow Japan and India to enter into a civil nuclear agreement, which would not have likely been supported under previous American administrations.<sup>15</sup> Some make the argument that since Japan was the most affected country by the post-World War II American-led international order, its quest for security independence is the most prominent signal of America's declining power.

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<sup>11</sup> Roehrig, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Roehrig, 123.

<sup>13</sup> Richard Samuels and Corey Wallace, "Introduction: Japan's Pivot in Asia," *International Affairs* 94, no. 4 (2018): 703, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iyy034>.

<sup>14</sup> Kenneth B. Pyle, "Japan's Return to Great Power Politics: Abe's Restoration," *Asia Policy; Seattle* 13, no. 2 (April 2018): 82.

<sup>15</sup> Pyle, 85.

## 2. South Korea

For South Korea, the AFP adds a new level of uncertainty to an already chaotic environment. The threat to withdraw U.S. troops<sup>16</sup> and leave the South Korean military alone to face a nuclear-armed threat to the North has resulted in polls that show 60% of South Koreans supporting their own nuclear weapons program.<sup>17</sup> The poll results should not come as a surprise when one considers that South is constantly threatened by a rogue nuclear state with whom they technically remain at war. The surprise comes in the form of how conservative President Moon has spent that political capital to use this uncertainty to South Korea's advantage.

Moon gained “conceptual approval” from President Trump to reincarnate a nuclear-powered submarine program under the auspices that the South would be doing more for its own security under the AFP.<sup>18</sup> Moon's original plan for South Korea to obtain nuclear propulsion was canceled in 2004 after the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) became aware of violations to use the program as a cover for potentially offensive capabilities.<sup>19</sup> Twenty four years later Moon has interpreted Trump's conceptual approval under the AFP “as the green light for the development of nuclear-powered submarines.”<sup>20</sup> This will not happen quickly, but some estimate that this is a sign that South Korea intends to increase its ability to protect itself by decreasing dependence on the US.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Roehrig, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Lami Kim, “South Korea's Nuclear Hedging?,” *The Washington Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2018): 122, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2018.1445910>.

<sup>18</sup> Kim, 127.

<sup>19</sup> Kim, 125.

<sup>20</sup> Kim, 127.

<sup>21</sup> Sebastien Roblin, “Are South Korean Submarines About to Go Nuclear?,” Text, *The National Interest*, March 9, 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/are-south-korean-submarines-about-go-nuclear-46582>.

### 3. Taiwan

Taiwan's situation is unique for many reasons but suffice it to say that Taiwan has feared U.S. abandonment since President Nixon normalized relations with the PRC in 1972. Many assess that the fear has risen as a result of the policy, particularly if the U.S. follows through with ideas to use Taiwan as a bargaining chip with the PRC.<sup>22</sup> Although Taiwan is not technically an ally of the U.S., it is still bound by law for its defense. In that vein, the AFP demands that Taiwan do more for its own defense.

Admittedly, this demand is not unique to the Trump administration. For example, during President Obama's administration senior U.S. officials accused Taiwan of "free-riding."<sup>23</sup> At the time, Taiwan only spent about 2% of its GDP each year on defense.<sup>24</sup> Despite the free-rider accusations, President Obama approved nearly \$14 billion in foreign military sales to Taiwan.<sup>25</sup> Prominent scholars on the subject have put those figures in context, stating that President Obama "sold more arms [to Taiwan] than all other U.S. presidents combined."<sup>26</sup> After President Trump took office, the U.S. repeated its request that President Tsai Ing-wen increase military spending to 3%.<sup>27</sup> This request was met with positive results.

Tsai demonstrated her resolve to continue receiving U.S. support in the face of the PRC threat by increasing defense spending by 8.3%, the highest since 2001.<sup>28</sup> Shortly

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<sup>22</sup> Shelley Rigger, Dennis Hickey, and Peter Chow, "U.S.-Taiwan Relations: Prospects for Security and Economic Ties | Wilson Center," <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/us-taiwan-relations-prospects-for-security-and-economic-ties>, May 22, 2017, 5, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/us-taiwan-relations-prospects-for-security-and-economic-ties>.

<sup>23</sup> Rigger, et al., 11.

<sup>24</sup> Rigger, et al., 10.

<sup>25</sup> Rigger, et. al., 11.

<sup>26</sup> Rigger, et. al., 11.

<sup>27</sup> Rigger, et. al., 11.

<sup>28</sup> "Taiwan Sharply Boosts Defense Budget amid China Tension," *Reuters*, August 15, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-china-defence-idUSKCN1V50TZ>.

afterward, the U.S. provided an \$8 billion arms sale to Taiwan.<sup>29</sup> Many predict that the U.S. will take a transactional approach towards Taiwan, using the AFP to continue arms sales to promote American businesses.<sup>30</sup> Regardless of the rationale, it is notable that Taiwan is attempting to maximize its security as a result of the AFP.

## **G. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES**

There are many structural forces that can explain why America's allies and partners in East Asia are increasing their national capabilities at this time. My hypothesis is that the leaders of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan have demonstrated their desire to increase their country's military capabilities in the past, but were unable to do so as a result of a combination of exogenous and endogenous factors.

In Japan, Shinzo Abe has been the longest-serving prime minister since the end of World War II. During previous Prime Ministerial terms, Abe consistently declared his intent to revise Article 9 in order to allow Japan to have an offensive military capability. Outside of his Liberal Democratic Party, Abe was unable to muster the appropriate level of domestic support needed to make the country's first constitutional amendment.

Three external factors are combining that may help him achieve that domestic support as early as next year. One factor is the nuclear-capable rogue state of North Korea, whose nuclear-capable missile tests have raised the stakes to threaten Japanese security. The second factor is Japan's desire to reduce dependency on the U.S. to seize territory in the event that either the PRC, Russia, or South Korea occupy any of its disputed territories. The third factor comes from the U.S. in the form of a welcomed expectation that it will both do more for its security as well as take on a regional leadership role.

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<sup>29</sup> "Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States (TECRO) – F-16C/D Block 70 Aircraft and Related Equipment and Support, The Official Home of the Defense Security Cooperation Agency," accessed September 11, 2019, <https://dscs.mil/major-arms-sales/taipei-economic-and-cultural-representative-office-united-states-tecro-f-16cd-block>.

<sup>30</sup> Weixing Hu, "Trump's China Policy and Its Implications for the 'Cold Peace' across the Taiwan Strait," *China Review* 18, no. 3 (2018): 84.

South Korea represents a case where the current President Moon Jae-in has side-stepped international prohibitions to maintain nuclear capabilities on the peninsula by reincarnating a nuclear submarine project that he failed to champion over ten years ago while serving as a previous presidential advisor. Although South Korean progressives are usually associated with being soft on security, Moon capitalized on the opportunity to take a harder stance on North Korea since he took office amid heightened tensions with the North and after the impeachment of his predecessor.

Moon demonstrated his political agility by appointing the appropriate personnel to achieve this nuclear submarine project while simultaneously engaging with President Trump to gain his support during their first meeting. Additionally, Moon and Trump both agreed to exercise the OPCON transfer of combined ROK and U.S. forces during a wartime scenario. This marks the first time that this has happened in the history of the alliance.

Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen has taken a middle stance from previous pro-independence party members of the DPP. She has neither refuted nor publicly supported Taiwan's ability to declare its independence from the PRC. However, Tsai's congratulatory phone call from one democratically elected president to another following Trump's inauguration sent a signal to Beijing that the independence issue remains looming across the Taiwan Strait. The U.S. has insured that the issue is further bolstered by at least \$8 billion in F-16Vs and surface-to-air missiles.

The AFP has now provided each leader with an opportunity to align their state's security interests with that of the U.S. The result is that each ally is strengthening themselves militarily, which is in line with the AFP, but unless the U.S. keeps its allies' focused on Great Power competition the region will simply be more militarized and not be able to effectively balance against the PRC and Russia.

## **H. RESEARCH DESIGN**

The nature of this thesis warrants a multidisciplinary approach to assess how the AFP has served as an independent variable that has affected the balance of power amongst America's allies in East Asia. I intend to incorporate material such as scholarly journals which will be judiciously complemented by a survey of journalistic sources. These

materials will be queried to focus on English language articles, but not necessarily limited only to American perspectives.

Outside perspectives on the AFP and its effects are essential to add the required emphasis needed to conduct a proper case study. Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan will be examined using the case study method. I intend to analyze each case using the same basic analytic framework and will ensure that I inform the reader of any deviations.

This framework will include a survey of U.S. officials' bilateral engagements or policy initiatives to carry out the AFP juxtaposed by each country's defense expenditures, major arms sales and level of integration with the U.S. during Theater Security Cooperation (TSC) exercises. Such indicators will be categorized as part of internal and external balancing, or hedging. I currently intend to analyze the country's defense expenditures using the metric of Gross Domestic Product per capita, since it is effective to demonstrate a given country's standard of living for each of its citizens.

## II. JAPAN

### A. BACKGROUND

Between 1960 and the mid-2000s Japan's security policy was defined more by how it perceived American security guarantees than by its own military capabilities relative to regional threats. However, the last decade has been characterized by what some scholars such as Lionel P. Fatton call the "entrapment-abandonment dilemma" created by a combination of the America First foreign policy, and the new era of Great Power Competition (GPC).<sup>31</sup>

Two factors make Japan an anomalous case study when analyzing it as an actor within the GPC arena, specifically as it relates to shifting perceptions of the balance of power in East Asia. First, Japan's pacifist constitution does not allow for a traditional military that can conduct offensive operations. Instead, Japan relies on U.S. security guarantees, which include the nuclear umbrella. The Japanese Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) are manned, trained, and equipped with conventional weapons to defend the island nation and its claimed territories from external air, naval, and ground threats. Much of the JSDF's equipment is purchased from the U.S. and can be characterized as dual-use for both offensive and defensive purposes. According to Clausewitz's trinity, a normal state would use its military to achieve its government's policy goals so long as it aligned the will of the people, government, and the military; however, Japan must also consider the credibility of American security guarantees for its defense.<sup>32</sup>

Second, despite the lack of legal authority to conduct offensive operations, certain Japanese political parties have argued that Japan may need to develop its own offensive nuclear capabilities for its defense. At the height of the Cold War, the Japanese government, ruled by the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), sponsored several studies to determine whether it retained the sovereign ability to develop its own nuclear

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<sup>31</sup> Lionel P. Fatton, "A New Spear in Asia: Why Is Japan Moving toward Autonomous Defense?," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 19, no. 2 (2019): 303, <https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcy006>.

<sup>32</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On war* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 89.

weapons program.<sup>33</sup> The studies concluded that Japan could legally develop a nuclear weapons capability for its defense under two conditions: first, that American security guarantees were no longer credible, and second that the security environment changed significantly.<sup>34</sup> The studies' findings have remained valid at the time of this writing.<sup>35</sup> These two anomalies combine with the AFP to form the backdrop for a peculiar security metamorphosis now taking place in Northeast Asia.

This chapter examines the AFP's effects on Japan in three sections. The first section traces the evolution of Japanese perceptions of its security environment since the 1960s, demonstrating that Japanese security perceptions have historically been influenced more by the dynamics of the U.S.–Japanese alliance than by the relative military capabilities of its neighbors. The second section focuses on Japanese internal balancing efforts since the AFP went into effect. The final section examines Japan through the lens of external balancing actions. The purpose is to determine whether Japan's recent actions to diversify regional security alliances are the result of long-standing interests or a perceived change in relative power. This chapter concludes by reaggregating the three sections' findings to form a synthesized assessment of Japan's behavior as it relates to the AFP.

## **B. SECURITY ASSESSMENT**

The U.S.–Japanese alliance has evolved since its inception in 1960 to become one of the strongest alliances in the world, but Stephen Walt's analysis is a reminder that even the strongest alliances are made up by states that perceive threats to their interests differently.<sup>36</sup> For example, the U.S. government saw the Japanese alliance as a way to balance against the Soviet Union<sup>37</sup> and its proxies by positioning conventional and even

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<sup>33</sup> Terence Roehrig, *Japan, South Korea, and the United States Nuclear Umbrella: Deterrence After the Cold War*, 123.

<sup>34</sup> Terence Roehrig, 123.

<sup>35</sup> Terence Roehrig, 123.

<sup>36</sup> Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," 8.

<sup>37</sup> Emma Chanlett-Avery, "The U.S. - Japan Alliance \*," *Current Politics and Economics of Northern and Western Asia*; *Hauppauge* 20, no. 4 (2011): 593.

nuclear forces on Okinawa.<sup>38</sup> Conversely, Douglas Mendel Jr. cited a 1960 Japanese public opinion poll revealing that the Japanese government agreed to sign the alliance despite a lack of public support, since there appeared to be no immediate threat to Japanese security.<sup>39</sup> Mendel observed that the Japanese public feared the treaty would divert resources away from Japan's economic growth, especially from lucrative trade with communist countries such as the People's Republic of China (PRC), towards defense spending and, thus, increase the likelihood of war.<sup>40</sup> Whereas the United States saw the alliance with Japan in strategic terms, the Japanese were primarily concerned with expanding trade with China beyond Taiwan.

After 1964 Japanese public opinion became more favorable towards the alliance with the United States when they perceived an existential threat to Japan's security. Mendel's analysis indicates that Japanese public threat perceptions became more aligned with those of the government with the emergence of the PRC as a nuclear state in 1964 and territorial disputes with the nuclear-capable Soviet Union.<sup>41</sup> It appears that in the 1960s Japan was not concerned with Cold War politics and related threat assessments; rather, Japan was more concerned with nuclear-armed countries that posed an existential threat. Using Mendel's research and Walt's theory on the balance of power, Japan exhibited bandwagoning behavior during this time since it was a militarily weak state that sustained its alliance with the U.S. to balance against regional nuclear powers.

However, by the mid-1970s Japan began to perceive American security guarantees differently, causing it to reevaluate its security environment along conventional lines and take more proactive steps to ensure its own security in an increasing self-help system. In 1980, Gerald L. Curtis wrote an article in *Foreign Affairs* that analyzed a Japanese government report that was presented to then Prime Minister Ohira to determine the future

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<sup>38</sup> Douglas H. Mendel, "Japan Reviews Her American Alliance," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (1966): 11.

<sup>39</sup> Mendel, 7.

<sup>40</sup> Mendel, 6.

<sup>41</sup> Mendel, 3.

of Japan’s security. The report’s commission was likely spurred by the negative perception of the American military’s failure to defend South Vietnam; it declared that “the most fundamental change in the international situation which emerged in the 1970s was the end of American superiority both militarily and economically.”<sup>42</sup> The effect was that in 1976 Japan began developing its National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG). This document is akin to the U.S. NSS and has since been published each time Japan perceived a fundamental shift in its security environment. It is designed to provide a synchronized approach for the JSDF to appropriately man, train, and equip its forces to defend Japan against a given threat since it could no longer solely rely on its alliance with the United States. A common theme among the NDPGs between 1976 and 2013 was that Japan emphasized the importance of international cooperation and institutions to address the security environment. Figure 1 portrays the increased frequency in which Japan has perceived a fundamental shift in its security environment.

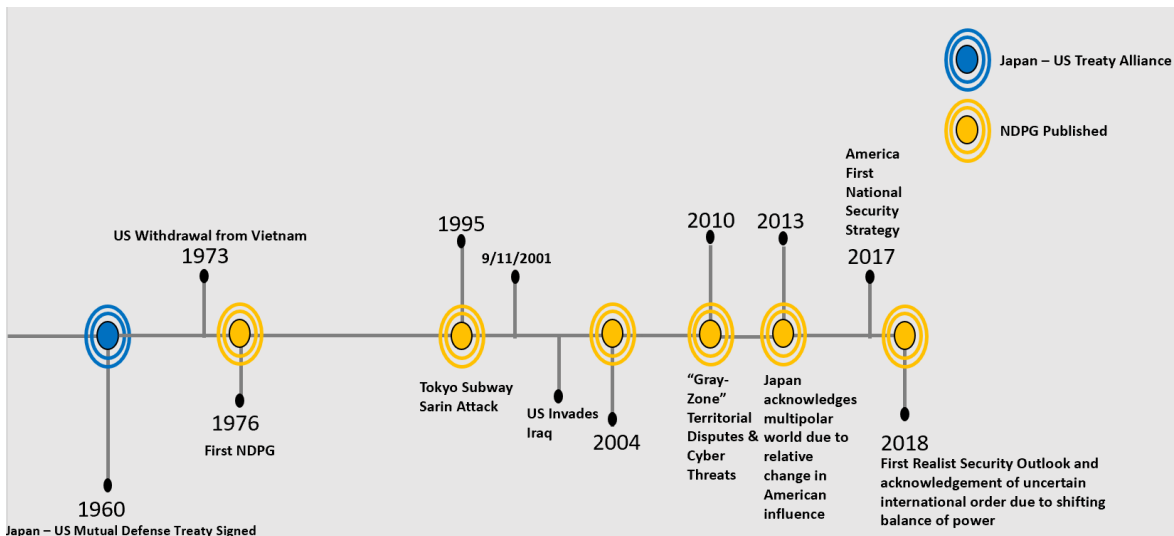


Figure 1. Author-derived timeline of Japan’s NDPGs along with their key driving events.

<sup>42</sup> Gerald L. Curtis, “Japanese Security Policies and the United States,” *Foreign Affairs* 59 (1981): 852.

Each subsequent NDPG that followed the initial 1976 publication had an additive effect and followed a predictable format identifying increasingly specific threats to Japan's security. For example, the 1976 NDPG only identified one broad threat to Japanese security. The document required the JSDF's to be prepared for "preventing & dealing with a limited, small-scale invasion independently."<sup>43</sup> This NDPG threat assessment remained in effect through the end of the Cold War until 1995, when it notably added the requirement to deal with terrorist acts.<sup>44</sup> This was likely added in response to the sarin gas attack that occurred in Tokyo that same year.<sup>45</sup> The 2004 NDPG was largely influenced by the 9/11 terrorist attacks as well as the U.S. invasion of Iraq but it also added new threats from "ballistic missiles...invasion of islands...armed spy ships, etc."<sup>46</sup> The new additions reflected emerging trends that stemmed from a combination of state actors including North Korean nuclear ballistic missile tests, along with an increased Chinese presence within disputed areas such as the Senkaku islands. In 2010 the NDPG introduced the "gray zone" territorial disputes posed by China as well as asymmetric threats posed by cyber-attacks from regional actors.<sup>47</sup>

In 2013 Japan recognized that the regional threats it faced were part of the shifting international order. As the U.S. was pivoting its focus to the Pacific, Japan published an NDPG openly acknowledging that the security environment had changed as a result of a shift in the global balance of power.<sup>48</sup> In that document Japan declared that the world had become multipolar due to the "relative change of influence" that tipped power away from

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<sup>43</sup> Government of Japan Ministry of Defense, "National Defense Program Guidelines - 2018," December 18, 2018, 108, [http://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryou/pdf/2019boueikeikaku\\_e.pdf](http://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryou/pdf/2019boueikeikaku_e.pdf).

<sup>44</sup> Government of Japan Ministry of Defense, 108.

<sup>45</sup> *The Japan Times*. "A Chronology of Doomsday Cult and Its Founder," July 26, 2018, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/07/26/national/crime-legal/key-events-related-aum-shinrikyo-cult/>.

<sup>46</sup> Government of Japan Ministry of Defense, "National Defense Program Guidelines - 2018," 108.

<sup>47</sup> Government of Japan Ministry of Defense, 108.

<sup>48</sup> Government of Japan Ministry of Defense, "National Defense Program Guidelines - 2013," December 10, 2004, 1, [https://www.mod.go.jp/e/d\\_act/d\\_policy/pdf/national\\_guidelines.pdf](https://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/d_policy/pdf/national_guidelines.pdf).

the U.S. in favor of rising powers such as India and China.<sup>49</sup> Japan also cautioned that the international institutions and interdependence that was once the hallmark of its previous NDPGs was now seen as a liability that could threaten security around the world.<sup>50</sup>

The AFP altered the theoretical lens through which Japan characterized the security environment. In 2018 the Japanese government published an NDPG that fundamentally diverged from its predecessors since it applied realist principles for the first time since WWII.<sup>51</sup> First, whereas previous NDPGs maintained that Japan was responsible for a certain degree of its own defense while relying on the promise of international institutions to increase international security, the 2018 NDPG language mirrored the realist lexicon that emerged in the 2017 AFP.<sup>52</sup> For example, this NDPG marked the first reference to the Government of Japan's responsibility to ensure state survival above all else.<sup>53</sup> This was a significant break from its preceding guidance that the government's primary role was to "ensure the peace and safety of Japan and stability of the international community."<sup>54</sup> Second, the document also described an increasingly anarchical environment due to countries like China changing the balance of power "to shape global and regional order to their advantage as well as to increase their influence."<sup>55</sup> Japan's shift to realist principles is what many scholars including David Envall are increasingly calling the "Abe

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<sup>49</sup> "National Defense Program Guidelines and the Mid-Term Defense Program Japan Ministry of Defense - 2013," 1, accessed January 26, 2020, [https://www.mod.go.jp/e/d\\_act/d\\_policy/national.html](https://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/d_policy/national.html).

<sup>50</sup> "National Defense Program Guidelines and the Mid-Term Defense Program Japan Ministry of Defense - 2013," 1.

<sup>51</sup> Government of Japan Ministry of Defense, "National Defense Program Guidelines - 2018," 1.

<sup>52</sup> President Donald Trump, "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America" (The White House, December 2017), 1, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

<sup>53</sup> Government of Japan Ministry of Defense, "National Defense Program Guidelines - 2018," 1.

<sup>54</sup> Government of Japan Ministry of Defense, "National Defense Program Guidelines - 2004," December 10, 2004, 1, [https://www.mod.go.jp/e/d\\_act/d\\_policy/pdf/national\\_guidelines.pdf](https://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/d_policy/pdf/national_guidelines.pdf).

<sup>55</sup> Government of Japan Ministry of Defense, "National Defense Program Guidelines - 2018," 3.

Doctrine”<sup>56</sup> In sum, this realist doctrine was born from Japan’s recent threat perceptions and fears of alliance abandonment.

After the AFP, Japan’s defense publications attribute Japan’s increasingly precarious security situation to a shift in the balance of power.<sup>57</sup> Last year the Japanese National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS) analyzed the AFP and assessed that it “stems from the U.S. awareness of the relative decline in the arena of international politics” and that it “symbolizes an erosion of the U.S. will and capacity to lead the global security framework.”<sup>58</sup> To that end the Japanese government accepted that it is now in the state’s vital interests to do more for its own security than ever before. This was best exemplified by the 2018 NDPG when the Japanese government asserted its requirement to “fundamentally strengthen its national defense architecture...by exerting efforts on its own accord and initiative.”<sup>59</sup> Some prominent Japanese academics such as Yuichi Hosoya of Keio University are capitalizing on Japan’s new security situation by characterizing Japan as a Great Power that is determined to uphold western-style liberal norms and values until the U.S. “can come back to the original position” in a post-Trump administration.<sup>60</sup> The next section will examine what steps the Japanese government has taken to fundamentally increase its own security since the AFP has been implemented.

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<sup>56</sup> H. D. P. Envall, “The ‘Abe Doctrine’: Japan’s New Regional Realism,” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 20, no. 1 (2020): 31, <https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcy014>.

<sup>57</sup> Sugio Takahashi, “Chapter 6. The United States. The Trump Administration’s Second Year: Aiming to Restore a ‘Strong America,’” *Japan National Institute for Defense Studies East Asian Strategic Review 2019*, 23, 2019, 181, [http://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/east-asian/pdf/2019/east-asian\\_e2019\\_06.pdf](http://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/east-asian/pdf/2019/east-asian_e2019_06.pdf).

<sup>58</sup> Tomohiko Satake and Yuji Maeda, “Chapter 7. Japan. New National Defense Program Guidelines,” *Japan National Institute for Defense Studies East Asian Strategic Review 2019*, 23, 2019, 219, [http://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/east-asian/pdf/2019/east-asian\\_e2019\\_07.pdf](http://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/east-asian/pdf/2019/east-asian_e2019_07.pdf).

<sup>59</sup> Government of Japan Ministry of Defense, “National Defense Program Guidelines - 2018,” 2.

<sup>60</sup> Yuichi Hosoya, “Exploring Abe’s Role on the Chessboard with Professor Yuichi Hosoya” (Center for International and Strategic Studies, Washington, D.C., February 6, 2020), <https://www.csis.org/analysis/exploring-abes-role-chessboard-professor-yuichi-hosoya>.

### C. INTERNAL BALANCING

According to Mearsheimer, a threatened state will usually buck-pass its security rather than balance against the threat.<sup>61</sup> President Trump's AFP appears to have used this theory as a cautionary tale and explains the idea that America will support the allies that demonstrate that they can support themselves. As a result, the administration has placed American allies around the world on notice: increase their country's defense spending to help themselves, or else do without support from the U.S. military.

Japan's fear of abandonment is acute since it relies on the U.S. for extended nuclear deterrence. Academics such as Shogo Suzuki and Corey Wallace observed that the President's "America First" rhetoric and criticism of Asian allies for free-riding on America's security guarantees provoked fears in Japan about the possibility of the United States abandoning the alliance.<sup>62</sup> Based on extensive analysis of a wide variety of polls and a close reading of Japanese security elites' written assessments, they argue this fear persists since "Trump might carelessly start a war with North Korea" by placing American interests above those of Japan and other regional allies resulting in Japan's "abandonment and entrapment."<sup>63</sup> However, senior White House officials have added that if Great Power Competition becomes Great Power conflict, "America First" does not mean that America intends to go to war alone.<sup>64</sup> They base their position on the AFP's "principled realism," meaning that America's allies should devote an adequate amount of their GDP to their own defense in line with Mearsheimer's view of internal balancing.

Since the Japanese defense budget is essentially pegged to 1% of its GDP, it can spend more to procure military hardware as the nation becomes richer. Japanese defense spending since the U.S. implemented the AFP reveals that Japan is hedging by increasing

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<sup>61</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Updated edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014), 139.

<sup>62</sup> Shogo Suzuki and Corey Wallace, "Explaining Japan's Response to Geopolitical Vulnerability," *International Affairs* 94, no. 4 (2018): 718, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iyy033>.

<sup>63</sup> Suzuki and Wallace, 718.

<sup>64</sup> H. R. McMaster and Gary D. Cohn, "America First Doesn't Mean America Alone," *Wall Street Journal, Europe; Brussels*, June 1, 2017.

its interoperability within its U.S. alliance, but also bolstering its ability to conduct unilateral actions without American support. The former Japanese Minister of Defense Takeshi Iwaya's remarks reveal a sense of pride in the monumental spending while emphasizing that Japan's internal balancing is a way to strengthen America's position. This was exemplified when he stated that Japan will soon purchase 105 operational F-35 stealth fighters from the United States, 42 of which will be F-35Bs capable of short takeoff and vertical landing (STOVL) that could be used on Izumi-class light carriers.<sup>65</sup> He went on to emphasize that the number of F-35s that Japan will possess symbolizes how important it is to maintain U.S. interoperability in the event of a conflict.

It is important to note that the post-World War II Japanese government reluctantly developed the ability to internally balance only at the behest of U.S. influence. In fact, shortly after North Korea invaded the South in 1950, General MacArthur began a rearmament program in Japan by ordering its government to create a national police force.<sup>66</sup> This is the organization that ultimately became the JSDF. Three years later, senior U.S. officials publicly admitted to a Tokyo audience that it made a mistake by inserting a "disarmament clause" in Japan's pacifist constitution.<sup>67</sup> Mendel quoted a contemporary Japanese author who observed "how puzzled our people are by this switch in American policy...America can change its policy quicker than we can change our deep antipathy of our own people toward rearmament."<sup>68</sup> Japan's government was caught in the middle where on one side it conceded to U.S. pressure to develop the JSDF, and on the other its democratic structure meant it had to account for societal factors as well. Figure 2 illustrates that after it signed an alliance with the U.S. in 1960, Japan's democratically elected government abided by the will of its people and kept defense spending below 1%.

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<sup>65</sup> Takeshi Iwaya, "Japan's National Defense Strategy" (Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., January 16, 2019), <https://www.csis.org/events/japans-national-defense-strategy>.

<sup>66</sup> Mendel, "Japan Reviews Her American Alliance," 9.

<sup>67</sup> Mendel, 9.

<sup>68</sup> Mendel, 9.

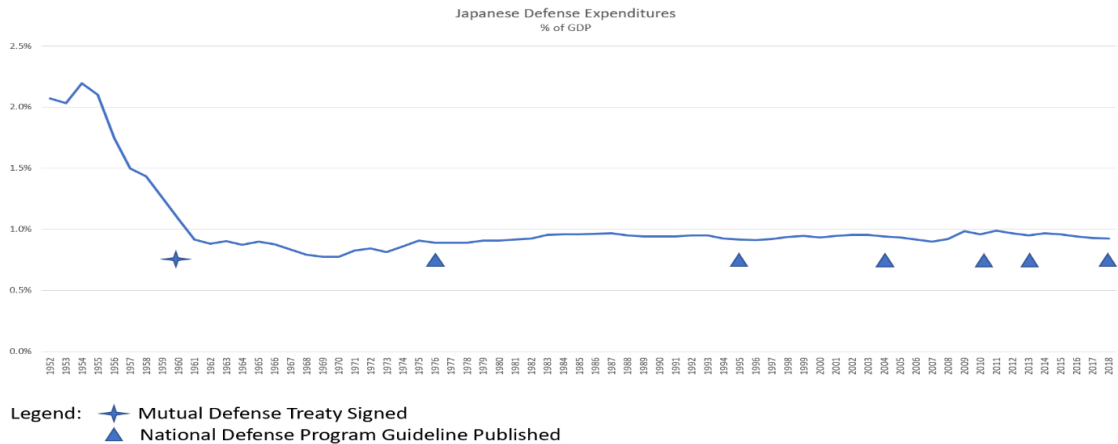


Figure 2. SIPRI data depicting Japanese defense expenditures as a share of GDP.<sup>69</sup>

Historically, Japanese defense spending in the context of its alliance with the U.S. appears to be a classic case of “buck-passing.”<sup>70</sup> For example, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) data in Figure 2, the last time that Japan spent more than 1% of its GDP on defense was 1960.<sup>71</sup> Contrary to popular belief, low defense spending is the result of self-imposed political restraint due to its reliance on the U.S. alliance, and not part of its pacifist constitution. It is important to consider that geography might also help explain Japan’s buck-passing behavior. Christopher Twomey observed that Japan has historically maintained its security against conventional threats as a result of its advantageous “strategic geography.”<sup>72</sup>

Japan’s buck-passing is not consistent with the security dilemma looming in Northeast Asia. Japanese defense spending remained relatively flat at a time when military spending was on the rise around the world, but especially in Asia. In 2018, SIPRI research

<sup>69</sup> Adapted from “Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Military Expenditure Database,” accessed January 28, 2020, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>.

<sup>70</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 139.

<sup>71</sup> “Military Expenditure (% of GDP) Data,” accessed January 9, 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS>.

<sup>72</sup> Christopher Twomey, “An Alliance for Engagement: Building Cooperation in Security Relations with China,” ed. Benjamin Self and Jeffrey Thompson, *Stimson Center*, September 11, 2002, 16–19.

showed that Asia accounted for 28% of global defense expenditures, compared with 1988 when the region only accounted for 9%.<sup>73</sup> Figure 3 illustrates how Japan’s relatively low defense spending compares to both the U.S. and PRC. This data also depicts how PRC defense spending overtook that of Japan after 2006.

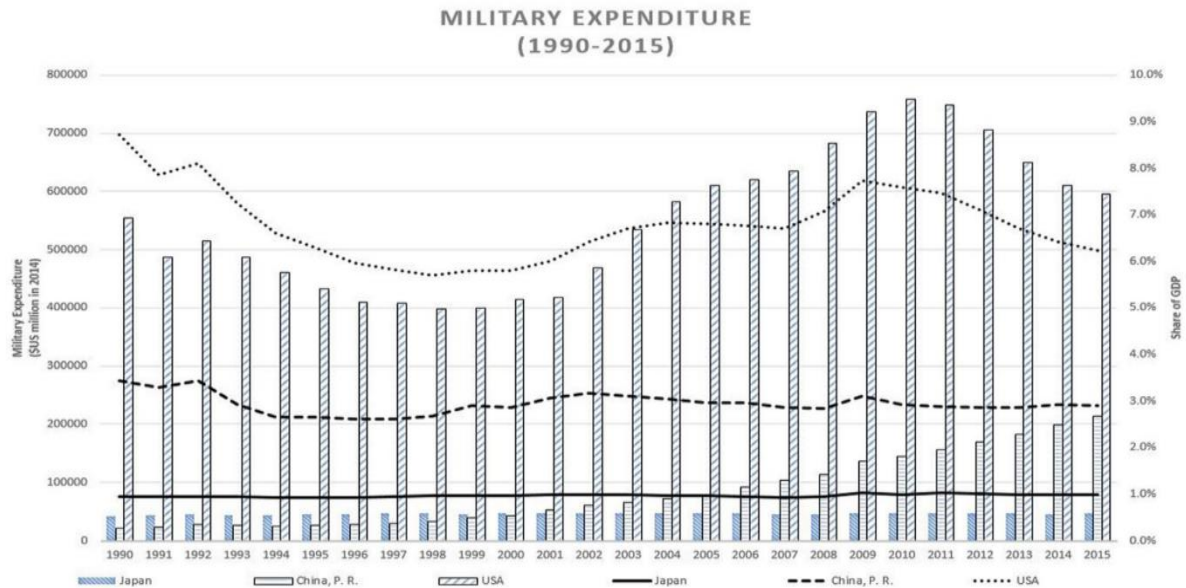


Figure 3. Kei Koga’s use of SIPRI data to compare military expenditures as a share of GDP.<sup>74</sup>

While Japan’s defense spending appears constant compared to Great Powers in the region, internal politics have driven it to unprecedented levels. Figure 4 depicts that toward the end of the Democratic Party of Japan’s (DPJ) term in government in 2012 significantly reduced Japan’s defense contributions intended to support the U.S. alliance after President Obama’s “Pivot to the Pacific” policy. However, this trend was reversed when the LDP returned to power in 2012.

<sup>73</sup> “World Military Expenditure Grows to \$1.8 Trillion in 2018 SIPRI,” accessed February 11, 2020, <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2019/world-military-expenditure-grows-18-trillion-2018>.

<sup>74</sup> Source: Kei Koga, “The Concept of ‘Hedging’ Revisited: The Case of Japan’s Foreign Policy Strategy in East Asia’s Power Shift,” *International Studies Review* 20, no. 4 (December 1, 2018): 645, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/vix059>.

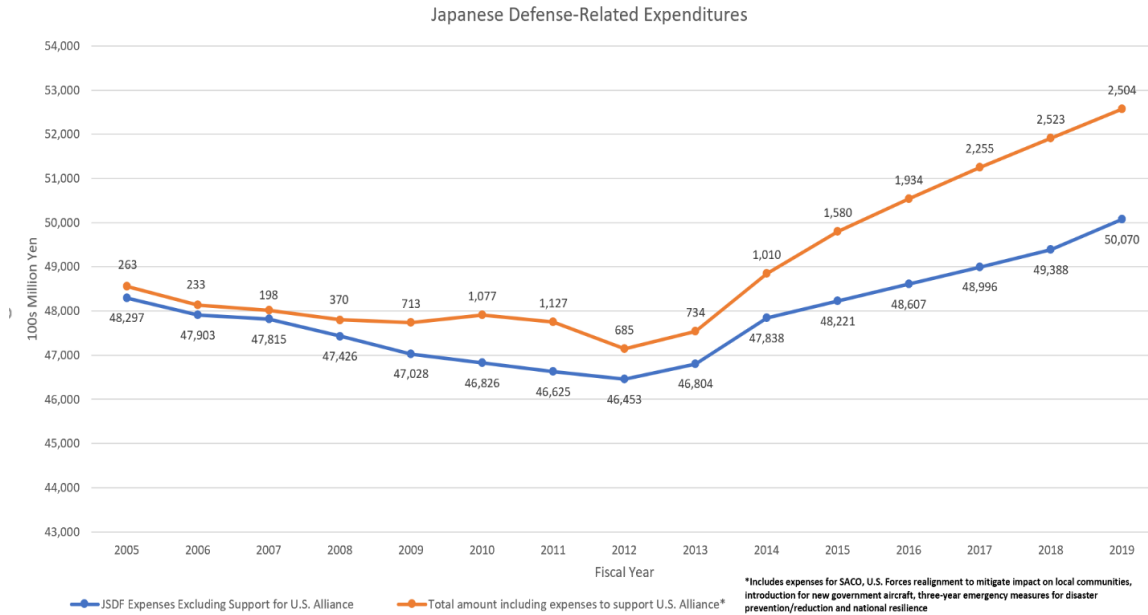


Figure 4. Japanese MOD data depicting defense-related expenditures for the past 15 years.<sup>75</sup>

Since Abe’s return as prime minister in 2012, Japanese defense spending has been increased by 15%.<sup>76</sup> Figure 4 illustrates how Abe increased defense spending after the 2013 NDPG’s dismal security outlook which was heavily influenced by a combination of China’s increased military capabilities and America’s perceived decline. Figure 4’s blue trendline depicts Japanese defense spending on JSDF’s capabilities, excluding funds that are designed to strengthen the U.S. alliance. The orange line depicted in Figure 4 is not included in the blue line. The MOD reports that these funds are dedicated for the Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) which are designed to enhance the U.S. military’s ability to defend Japan by building and improving facilities on Okinawa, the JSDF’s acquisition of new aircraft, and funds to improve the JSDF’s ability to conduct disaster

<sup>75</sup> Adapted from Taro Kono and Takeshi Iwaya, “Defense of Japan 2019. Japan Ministry of Defense,” 28, accessed April 21, 2020, [https://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w\\_paper/2019.html](https://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/2019.html).

<sup>76</sup> Scott Foster, “On Trump’s Demand That Japan Pay More for Security Article,” *Asia Times*, accessed February 11, 2020, <https://www.asiatimes.com/2020/02/article/trumps-demand-that-japan-pay-up-for-cooperation/>.

relief operations.<sup>77</sup> Based on further analysis of the “Defense of Japan 2019” document, this separate category appears to enhance the JSDF’s interoperability with the U.S. military across the range of military operations.

In terms of national power, Japan’s declining population cannot overcome any gains made by increased defense spending. In 1994 the former age limit captured “about 17.4 million people,” but in 2018 that population had dwindled to “about 11.05 million people.”<sup>78</sup> To remedy this, Japan has increased its internal balancing since the AFP has been implemented by increasing the total number of Japanese citizens eligible to serve in the JSDF. In 2018 Japan increased the “upper age limit” for eligible JSDF candidates to enlist from “under 27” to “under 33.”<sup>79</sup>

On one hand, Japan’s defense expenditures and increased military enlistment age demonstrate the country’s willingness to distribute its own organic resources in a way that Mearsheimer would classify as internal balancing, or the “purest” form of self-help.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, Japan has invested in these capabilities with the intent to have increased interoperability within the U.S.–Japan security alliance.

#### **D. EXTERNAL BALANCING**

Stephen Walt theorized many factors that facilitate an alliance’s formation, but he omitted critical details of how countries maintain an alliance. The U.S.–Japan alliance turns 60 years old this year, and it has evolved to become one of America’s strongest alliances. Both Japan’s emerging security role and its ability to strengthen the Japan–U.S. alliance can be attributed to Japan’s keen diplomatic work. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was not only the first foreign leader to meet the newly elected President Trump but has

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<sup>77</sup> “MOFA: The Japan-U.S. Special Action Committee (SACO) Interim Report,” accessed February 21, 2020, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/seco.html>.

<sup>78</sup> Kono and Iwaya, “Defense of Japan 2019 | Japan Ministry of Defense,” 37.

<sup>79</sup> Kono and Iwaya, 37.

<sup>80</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 157.

also spent more time with Trump than any other foreign leader.<sup>81</sup> Additionally, when Japanese Emperor Akihito made history by being the first emperor to abdicate his ceremonial position, Abe invited President Trump to be the first foreign leader to visit Japan and meet his successor, Naruhito.<sup>82</sup> However, close diplomatic ties alone are not enough to maintain an alliance.

In order for an alliance to effectively counter a threat at the onset of combat operations, the two countries must first invest in exercising their militaries before the conflict begins. At the strategic level, such interoperability begins when each country's defense ministers meet and discuss key areas of coordination and improvement. Figure 5 depicts the number of bilateral MOD and U.S. Secretary of Defense-level meetings. Note that the highest number of meetings occurred in 2013, the same year that Japan began perceiving an increasingly uncertain security environment. The data was derived from the MOD's "Defense of Japan" documents published in 2014, 2016, and 2019. Before the AFP was implemented these meetings revolved around either the agreeing that the alliance was important in general, the relocation of U.S. military installations on Okinawa to Guam, as well as "exchanging views on MV-22 Ospreys."<sup>83</sup> After the AFP was implemented the meeting agendas continued to convey the alliance's significance, but also expanded the bilateral security aperture. This included space and cyberspace operations, the faster procurement of American equipment such as the Aegis-ashore and F-35 as well as the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" strategy.<sup>84</sup> After one such meeting where the U.S. and Japan defense ministers agreed to include a cyberattack on Japan under the Mutual Defense Treaty, Defense Minister Iwaya said this was "significant from the perspective of deterrence." In conventional military terms, Figure 6 illustrates the number of bilateral military exercises between the U.S. and Japan.

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<sup>81</sup> Tomohiko Taniguchi, "Japan: A Stabilizer for the U.S.-Led System in a New Era," *Asia Policy; Seattle* 14, no. 1 (January 2019): 173.

<sup>82</sup> Weston S. Konishi, "Trump and Abe: The Odd Couple," *The Japan Times*, May 23, 2019, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2019/05/23/commentary/japan-commentary/trump-abe-odd-couple/>.

<sup>83</sup> Itsunori Onodera, "Defense of Japan 2014 Japan Ministry of Defense," 416, accessed April 28, 2020, [https://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w\\_paper/2014.html](https://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/2014.html).

<sup>84</sup> Kono and Iwaya, 501.



Figure 5. Number of bilateral defense consultations at the ministerial level. Data from Japanese fiscal years 2010–2014.<sup>85</sup>

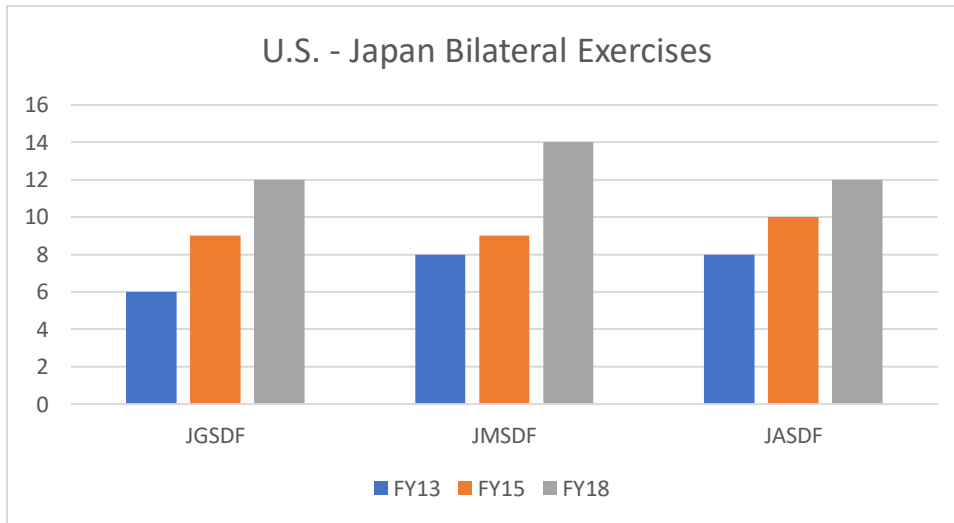


Figure 6. Data from Japanese fiscal years enumerating the number of U.S.–Japan bilateral exercises.<sup>86</sup>

The sharp rise in the JMSDF’s bilateral exercises coincides with its new prominent role in the FOIP strategy. Aside from its bilateral activities with the United States, Japan’s

<sup>85</sup> Source: Itsunori Onodera, “Defense of Japan 2014 Japan Ministry of Defense,” 416. Note that data from Japanese fiscal years 2010 – 2015 were derived from the Defense of Japan 2016 (p. 428); data from fiscal years 2016-2019 were derived from Defense of Japan 2019 (p. 499)

<sup>86</sup> Adapted from Japanese fiscal years 2013, Itsunori Onodera, 421; Data from fiscal year 2015, Gen Nakatani, 430; Data from fiscal year 2018, Kono and Iwaya, 503.

external balancing has been headlined as the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP) strategy. Japan’s FOIP is centered on the JMSDF and designed to piggy-back Japan’s security cooperation activities on existing American security ties with countries that comprise the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as well as with India and Australia. This strategy includes “capacity building assistance, [JMSDF] port visits, defense exchanges, bilateral training and exercises.”<sup>87</sup> It is clear that the American alliance remains the “cornerstone” of Japan’s security given how Japan has nested its primary regional security framework on relationships built by the United States.<sup>88</sup>

According to Stephen M. Walt’s hypothesis on balancing behavior, Japan’s alliance with the U.S. signals that it continues to trust American benevolence for its security.<sup>89</sup> At the heart of this trust is Japan’s reliance on U.S. extended nuclear deterrence, also known as the nuclear umbrella. Terence Roehrig characterized Japanese bureaucrats’ description of their almost “magical belief” that the nuclear umbrella will shield them from a nuclear attack.<sup>90</sup> Before North Korea developed a credible nuclear weapons program, Japan blindly placed its faith in U.S. extended deterrence. However, Roehrig observed that the Japanese government began to question the American nuclear deterrent’s credibility after North Korea detonated its first nuclear weapon in 2006.<sup>91</sup> He goes on to say that the credibility of America’s nuclear deterrent became a topic of concern during President George W. Bush’s administration. Roehrig noted that conservative Japanese politicians resumed discussions that lent credence to findings from government studies outlining options to ensure Japan’s survival, including potentially developing its own nuclear weapons program.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Kono and Iwaya, 34.

<sup>88</sup> Kono and Iwaya, 304.

<sup>89</sup> Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987), 18.

<sup>90</sup> Roehrig, 107.

<sup>91</sup> Roehrig, 107.

<sup>92</sup> Roehrig, 107.

In 2008 new American leadership intervened to maintain the balance of power and assuage its treaty ally. Shortly after taking office, President Obama established bilateral nuclear discussion groups with its treaty allies in Northeast Asia. The Extended Deterrence Dialogue (EDD) was the institution pertinent to Japan.<sup>93</sup> Although the EDD is done on a bilateral basis and Japan does not house any U.S. nuclear weapons, the significance is not lost on Japan since the dialogue elevates the nuclear umbrella's importance in Japan in a similar way that to the Nuclear Planning Group with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).<sup>94</sup>

While on one hand Obama's EDD represented an American institution designed to reassure its East Asian allies under the nuclear umbrella, the other hand revealed systemic changes in the nuclear nonproliferation realm that were defanging America's nuclear deterrent. This was particularly concerning from Japan's perspective, since President Obama decided to remove nuclear-capable Tomahawk Land Attack Cruise Missiles (TLAM/N). Japan exercised considerable diplomatic and direct lobbying to the U.S. Congress during Obama's administration to oppose the decision, but to no avail.

Japan welcomed President Trump's Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) with open arms despite the administration's transactional "America First" rhetoric. One statement released by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) praised the NPR since it "clearly articulates the U.S. resolve to ensure the effectiveness of its deterrence and its commitment to providing extended deterrence to its allies including Japan" in response to China and North Korea's nuclear and missile programs.<sup>95</sup> For Japan, the assurance comes from the NPR's assertion to "respond decisively to Chinese non0nuclear or nuclear aggression."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Roehrig, 107.

<sup>94</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "Nuclear Planning Group (NPG)," NATO, accessed April 2, 2020, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_50069.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50069.htm).

<sup>95</sup> "The Release of the U.S. Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) (Statement by Foreign Minister Taro Kono)," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, accessed April 3, 2020, [https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e\\_001893.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_001893.html).

<sup>96</sup> Ken Jimbo, "Wanted: A U.S. Nuclear Strategy Tailored to Asia," *The Japan Times*, January 31, 2018, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2018/01/31/commentary/japan-commentary/wanted-u-s-nuclear-strategy-tailored-asia/>.

Additionally, Japanese analysts such as Masashi Murano argue that America's withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) is in the best interests of Japan since Japan would likely host the forward deployment of American ground-based missile systems to counter threats from China and North Korea.<sup>97</sup> However, nuclear deterrence is costly, and the "America First" rhetoric has recently been exemplified by President Trump's demands that Japan pay more for its continued inclusion under the U.S. "nuclear umbrella."<sup>98</sup> If it were to pay more for its protections under the "nuclear umbrella," some argue that this aspect of the AFP might give Japan unprecedented leverage to request detailed information regarding the American nuclear weapons arsenal or else develop their own sovereign nuclear capability.<sup>99</sup> Ultimately, it appears that Japan sees through the AFP's rhetoric, since the most recent NPR is a strong reassuring signal for Japan under the nuclear umbrella.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

This chapter examined the AFP's effects on Japan. The evidence shows that Japan's government perceived fundamental changes in the global balance of power prior to President Trump's election and the AFP. This is evidenced by the two NDPGs that Japan published during President Obama's second term alone, and each acknowledged fundamental changes in Japan's security environment as a result of America's perceived decline in the region.

Some may argue that correlation is not causation, and that Japan would have made the same policy decisions whether President Trump or Secretary of State Hillary Clinton won the presidential election in 2016. Based on the evidence put forth in this Chapter I do not believe that Abe would have had the political capital to take a more assertive regional role under Clinton than under Trump. However, after Trump was elected there was a

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<sup>97</sup> Masashi Murano, "Ensuring Indo-Pacific Security Post INF - by Masashi Murano," accessed May 3, 2020, <http://www.hudson.org/research/15213-ensuring-indo-pacific-security-post-inf>.

<sup>98</sup> Hiroyuki Akita, "Trump Demands Japan and South Korea Pay for Nuclear Umbrella," *Nikkei Asian Review*, accessed April 24, 2020, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Comment/Trump-demands-Japan-and-South-Korea-pay-for-nuclear-umbrella>.

<sup>99</sup> Hiroyuki Akita.

growing sense that Japan is becoming a great power that will fill the institutional void until the United States returns to its preeminent position. This suggests that Japan is now operating under the framework of “offensive realism,” since Japan is internally balancing to maximize its security due to the anarchic structure of the international environment. Additionally, after the AFP Japan published a realist NDPG for the first time. It indicated that Japan’s government now places its highest priority on state survival in an increasingly self-help international order that is no longer dominated by the U.S. This is evidenced by the second section’s findings that Japan has increased its internal balancing efforts which include increased defense spending as well as expanding the eligible age for its citizens to enlist in the JSDF. In terms of external balancing Japan is buck-passing by continuing to rely on the United States to deal with regional nuclear threats from China and North Korea.<sup>100</sup> On the other hand, Japan is externally balancing along conventional lines by strengthening its interoperability with the U.S. for its own defense, as well as taking a more active security role under its FOIP strategy.

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<sup>100</sup> Mike M. Mochizuki, “Japan’s Shifting Strategy toward the Rise of China,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 30, no. 4–5 (2007): 746, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390701431832>.

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### III. SOUTH KOREA

#### A. BACKGROUND

Unlike Japan, the Republic of Korea's (ROK) security does not benefit from the geographic advantage that Mearsheimer phrased as "the stopping power of water."<sup>101</sup> That is because security concerns for the ROK are dominated by the North Korean threat looming across the most heavily mined land border in the world. In fact, the ROK government has been focused on security concerns emanating from North Korea since 1950. Even though the two Koreas remain at war under the terms of an armistice signed in 1953, the ROK government did not publicly establish an official threat assessment in the form of a Defense White Paper until 1988.<sup>102</sup> The fact that the ROK's security assessment openly named North Korea as a threat was obvious. However, such government transparency only came about in that year as a result of South Korean society's victory to end a decades-long military dictatorship and establish a democratically elected civilian government.<sup>103</sup>

To understand how South Korea affects the regional balance of power, one must understand that its policy goals are heavily influenced by its style of democracy. In the relatively short timeframe since it democratized, the metronome of South Korean politics has been generally characterized by rhythmic swings from the political left and right that have resulted in two policy archetypes. Typically, left-leaning or progressive South Korean presidents have adopted dovish policies towards North Korea. In contrast, South Korea's conservative presidents have generally espoused more hawkish policies towards North Korea. From a geopolitical standpoint, the democratic styles between the ROK and its treaty ally the U.S. have generated political rhythms that are rarely synchronized along the

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<sup>101</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 44.

<sup>102</sup> Tai Young Kwon and Young Sun Song, "The First ROK Defense White Paper: Its Significance and Important Contents," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 1, no. 1 (June 1, 1989): 193, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10163278909464199>.

<sup>103</sup> Kwon and Song, 193.

political spectrum, but recent evidence shows that even relatively short harmonious periods between the two can alter the balance of power in Northeast Asia.

While on the campaign trail, President Trump ran on an “America First” agenda that openly questioned the value of America’s alliances around the world, including the U.S.–ROK alliance.<sup>104</sup> The agenda also included support for nuclear proliferation to allow a South Korean nuclear weapons program to reduce America’s costly alliance burden-sharing expenses associated with the nuclear umbrella.<sup>105</sup> Such remarks did not engender a strong sense of American commitment towards the ROK and stoked ROK nationalist fears for more independence in the security realm. Members of ROK President Park Geun Hye’s ruling Saenuri (new world) party said that “we cannot borrow an umbrella from a neighbor whenever it rains...we must be prepared and wear our own raincoat.”<sup>106</sup> Throughout the U.S. presidential campaign ROK fears of U.S. abandonment peaked, and the day after Trump was elected, Park held an emergency National Security Council meeting to discuss the implications on the alliance. However, two days after his election victory President-elect Trump called Park to reassure her that the U.S. remained committed to its alliance responsibilities.<sup>107</sup> This set the stage for a short honeymoon period for the security relationship between the two allies.<sup>108</sup>

During the short ideologically harmonious period before she was impeached, Park Geun Hye supported a controversial plan that was hotly contested within South Korea but altered balance of power on the Korean peninsula. The two allies agreed to deploy the

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<sup>104</sup> Ben Jacobs Martin Pengelly in New York, “Donald Trump on North Korea Going to War: ‘Good Luck, Enjoy Yourself Folks,’” *The Guardian*, April 7, 2016, sec. U.S. news, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/apr/02/donald-trump-north-korea-war-nuclear-weapons>.

<sup>105</sup> “Full Rush Transcript Donald Trump CNN Milwaukee Presidential Town Hall,” accessed April 17, 2020, <http://cnnpressroom.blogs.cnn.com/2016/03/29/full-rush-transcript-donald-trump-cnn-milwaukee-republican-presidential-town-hall/>.

<sup>106</sup> Myo-Ja Ser, “Saenuri’s Floor Leader Calls for a Nuclear South,” *Korea JoongAng Daily*, accessed April 17, 2020, <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=3015115>.

<sup>107</sup> Williams, Jennifer, “Trump Just Completely Reversed His Policy on South Korea — Only 2 Days after Being Elected,” *Vox*, November 10, 2016, <https://www.vox.com/world/2016/11/10/13585524/donald-trump-phone-call-south-korea-park-geun-hye>.

<sup>108</sup> Williams.

Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system to South Korea in order to strengthen America's ability to defend its interests in the region.<sup>109</sup> The deployment Park's impeachment in early 2017 opened the door for the election of the left-leaning President Moon Jae-In.

President Moon has taken a pragmatic approach to balance the ROK's security interests since the AFP has been implemented. When it comes to the nuclear realm, Moon would support a deal between the U.S. and North Korea that reduces nuclear tensions on the peninsula. Conventionally speaking, Moon desires increased military autonomy during a conflict with the North in the form of operational control (OPCON).<sup>110</sup> Pressure from the People's Republic of China influenced Moon's "three no's" policy: "no additional THAAD deployment, no participation in the US's missile defense network and no establishment of a trilateral military alliance with the U.S. and Japan."<sup>111</sup>

This chapter will examine the effects of the AFP on the ROK-U.S. alliance in three sections. First, it will explore the differences between how the ROK perceived its security environment before and after the AFP. Second, it will examine the policies that govern how it distributes its own resources to internally balance. This section will analyze the ROK's ends, ways and means to increase its own sovereignty and autonomy away from the U.S. alliance through the transfer of wartime Operational Control (OPCON) from the U.S. to the ROK. The last section will analyze how the AFP's characteristics have influenced the ROK in terms of external balancing. Since the combined ROK-U.S. exercises have been drastically reduced as a result of negotiations between President Trump and Kim Jong Un, this analysis will instead examine the ROK's support to maintain the U.S. alliance in terms of burden sharing. and how much the U.S. is demanding as part

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<sup>109</sup> Kim Rahn, "THAAD Arrives at Sensitive Time," *Korea Times*, July 3, 2017, sec. National, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2020/04/205\\_225236.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2020/04/205_225236.html).

<sup>110</sup> Bryan Port, "Defense Readiness and the U.S.-ROK Alliance - Korea Net Assessment 2020: Politicized Security and Unchanging Strategic Realities," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/03/18/defense-readiness-and-u.s.-rok-alliance-pub-81234>.

<sup>111</sup> Byong-Su Park, "South Korea's 'Three No's' Announcement Key to Restoring Relations with China," accessed April 14, 2020, [http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_international/817213.html](http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/817213.html).

of the AFP. It is important to note here that this section would typically examine any qualitative and quantitative changes in bilateral ROK - U.S. exercises since the AFP. Instead, this section will briefly examine how these exercises were drastically reduced or scaled back after the U.S. put prioritized engaging directly with the North Korea after the regime developed the capability and intent to threaten the American homeland with nuclear weapons.

## **B. SECURITY ASSESSMENT**

Where you stand depends on where you sit.<sup>112</sup>  
—Miles Law

In 1989 the ROK government first began openly publishing the country's perceptions of its security environment within a biennial defense white paper. Tai Young Kwon and Young Sun Song summarized the ROK's first threat assessment. They observed that the ROK perceived its security through a realist lens where the Soviet-allied and equipped North Korean Army (NKA) held a quantitative and qualitatively advantage over the ROK.<sup>113</sup> Additionally, they analyzed that the ROK held a deep-rooted fear that the U.S. would defect from its treaty alliance obligations with the ROK leaving it to defend itself during an existential crisis.<sup>114</sup> The legacy of South Koreans' fear of abandonment amidst an existential threat remained intact after the end of the Cold War, but President Trump's "America First Policy" (AFP) likely resonated with these historic concerns.<sup>115</sup>

In 2016 the ROK government characterized the global security environment as one defined by conflicting strategies between America's "Asia-Pacific rebalance" and the

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<sup>112</sup> Rufus E. Miles, "The Origin and Meaning of Miles' Law," *Public Administration Review* 38, no. 5 (1978): 399, <https://doi.org/10.2307/975497>.

<sup>113</sup> Kwon and Song, "The First ROK Defense White Paper," 196.

<sup>114</sup> Kwon and Song, 196.

<sup>115</sup> Kim Ji-Yoon, Lee John J., and Kang Chungku, "Trump Time: Koreans' View of ROK-US Relations," accessed May 12, 2020, <http://en.asaninst.org/contents/trump-time-koreans-view-of-rok-us-relations/>.

PRC’s “new type of major power relations.”<sup>116</sup> Additionally, the global assessment included language that referenced the PRC’s illegal activities to build artificial features in the South China Sea. The 2016 ROK assessment observed that Northeast Asia was still dominated by the American military, but that China, Japan and the PRC’s growing militaries were “spurring an arms race especially in naval and air forces.”<sup>117</sup>

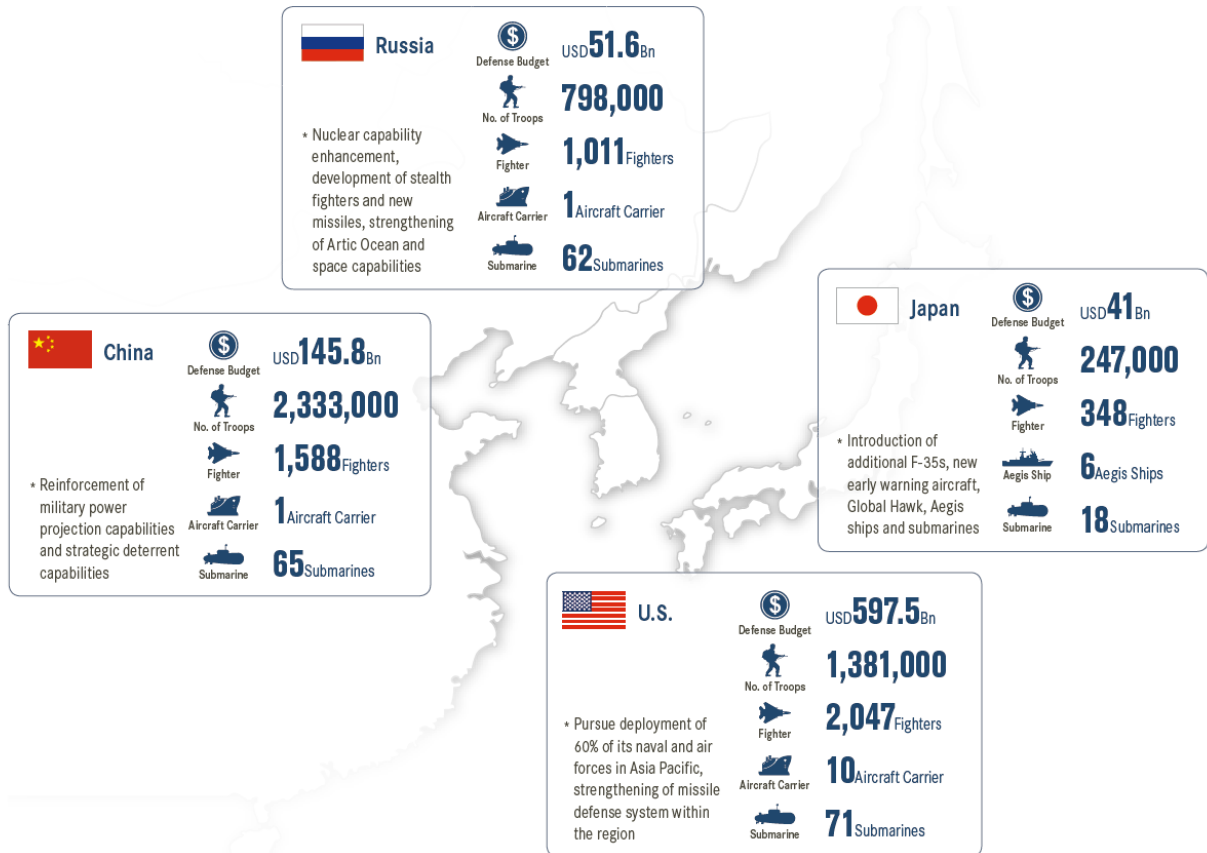


Figure 7. Military strengths of the four major powers surrounding the Korean peninsula.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>116</sup> Han Min-Koo, “2016 ROK Defense White Papers,” Republic of Korea Ministry of National Defense, December 31, 2016, 8, [http://www.mnd.go.kr/cop/pblicitn/selectPublicationUser.do?siteId=mndEN&componentId=51&categoryId=0&publicationSeq=777&pageIdx=1&id=mndEN\\_031300000000](http://www.mnd.go.kr/cop/pblicitn/selectPublicationUser.do?siteId=mndEN&componentId=51&categoryId=0&publicationSeq=777&pageIdx=1&id=mndEN_031300000000).

<sup>117</sup> Han Min-Koo, 14.

<sup>118</sup> Source: Han Min-Koo, 15.

In 2016 the ROK portrayed the PRC as a rising regional power with benign intentions. The ROK observed that the PRC's intentions were to create a "moderately prosperous society" with a long term goal of "becoming a prosperous, democratic, harmonious and strong socialist country by 2049."<sup>119</sup> It then summarized a theme from the PRC's 2015 Defense White Paper that "China's dream is that of a strong nation, and the military's dream is that of a strong military" that will take the lead in a region where Asians are at the forefront of regional security.<sup>120</sup>

The ROK's muted threat perception of China's rise in 2016 extended beyond the government's assessments. Analysts at the Korea Institute of Defense Analysis (KIDA) such as Kim Jangho and Kim Saeme characterized the PRC's actions in the South China Sea (SCS) as "alarming," but from South Korea's "middle power" perspective they only served as a "constant reminder that there is a potential hegemon in the region."<sup>121</sup> This contrasted with American policy at the time which focused on rebalancing U.S. forces and resources to the Pacific to counter China's rising influence. The two analysts then added that China's peaceful rise juxtaposed with America's relative decline served the ROK's narrow interests, since "closer ties" with the PRC gave the middle power "room to maneuver."<sup>122</sup> The ROK's closer ties to China in 2016 were a signal that South Korean interests were no longer as congruent with the United States as they once were. The analysts posited that South Korea perceived that its interests "namely stability and economic growth" were no longer being served by the American alliance.<sup>123</sup> The ROK's hedging strategy to "straddle between the United States and China" was seen as a "survival strategy" to deal with the existential threat posed by North Korea.<sup>124</sup> Thus, even while U.S.

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<sup>119</sup> Han Min-Koo, 18.

<sup>120</sup> Han Min-Koo, 18.

<sup>121</sup> Kim Jangho and Kim Saeme, "South Korea's Middle Power Diplomacy: Toward an Agenda-Partner Based Leadership," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis (KIDA) Archive* 28, no. 2 (n.d.): 318.

<sup>122</sup> Kim Jangho and Kim Saeme, 318.

<sup>123</sup> Kim Jangho and Kim Saeme, 318.

<sup>124</sup> Kim Jangho and Kim Saeme, 318.

policy was heading towards emphasis on AFP, ROK policy itself was shifting for internal reasons.

The 2016 ROK government faced an unprecedented threat from North Korea. According to Figure 8, North Korea conducted more missile launches and nuclear tests while Park was in office than all its similar provocations combined. Park's government used these provocations as an indicator to describe North Korea as a regime that is trying to maintain its ironclad grip on a restless society domestically, while provoking the South Korean government and the international community.<sup>125</sup> The ROK assessed that Kim Jong-un himself was the regime's center of gravity, and that the North Korean people were suffering as a result. The ROK described the effects of Kim's regime included an increasingly invasive form of authoritarian government that "stepped up the ideological education and surveillance by public security forces" in an effort to "stymie the wave of defection."<sup>126</sup> From the perspective of the 2016 ROK government such a complex threat could only be deterred with the help from the alliance.

In 2016 the ROK took an institutional response to the North Korean threat. Park's government emphasized the importance of cooperation and its alliance with the United States as its bid for success to effectively deter North Korean threats. The government relied upon a strong "ROK-U.S. combined readiness posture" as the principle form of deterrence.<sup>127</sup> Additionally, reports published by think tanks such as KIDA discussed how North Korea played unifying role that create a limited security cooperation framework between the U.S., Japan and South Korea in the form of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA).<sup>128</sup> During this period even when South Korean analysts hypothesized about alternative strategies for its military to deter the North, the

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<sup>125</sup> Han Min-Koo, "2016 ROK Defense White Papers," 22.

<sup>126</sup> Han Min-Koo, 22.

<sup>127</sup> Han Min-Koo, 39.

<sup>128</sup> Ryo Hinata-Yamaguchi, "Completing the U.S.-Japan-Korea Alliance Triangle: Prospects and Issues in Japan-Korea Security Cooperation," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis (KIDA)* 28, no. 3 (September 2016): 386.

most feasible solutions chosen were based on “a joint strategy” such as the “Tailored Deterrence Strategy” that relied on the U.S. alliance.<sup>129</sup>



Figure 8. History of North Korean missile launches and nuclear tests.<sup>130</sup>

President Moon’s 2018 Defense White Paper described a security environment where America promoted new multilateral initiatives as it decreased its direct involvement in Asia. From a global perspective, the ROK acknowledged that in the 2017 AFP “the United States set its core strategic goals as protecting the homeland, promoting national prosperity, preserving peace through strength, and advancing American influence.”<sup>131</sup> Even though the U.S. was putting its interests first, the ROK noted that the American “Indo-

<sup>129</sup> In-Taek Hyun, “An Enduring Dilemma on the Korean Peninsula: The North Korean Nuclear Conundrum and South Korea’s Strategic Choices,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis (KIDA) Archive* 28, no. 2 (June 2016): 176.

<sup>130</sup> Source: “North Korean Missile Launches & Nuclear Tests: 1984-Present,” *Missile Threat*, April 20, 2017, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/north-korea-missile-launches-1984-present/>.

<sup>131</sup> Jeong Kyeong-doo, “2018 ROK Defense White Papers,” ROK Ministry of National Defense, December 31, 2018, 14, [http://www.mnd.go.kr/cop/pblicitn/selectPublicationUser.do?siteId=mndEN&componentId=51&categoryId=0&publicationSeq=846&pageIndex=1&id=mndEN\\_031300000000](http://www.mnd.go.kr/cop/pblicitn/selectPublicationUser.do?siteId=mndEN&componentId=51&categoryId=0&publicationSeq=846&pageIndex=1&id=mndEN_031300000000).

Pacific Strategy” was a direct response to the PRC’s Belt and Road Initiative.<sup>132</sup> The ROK noted that the American “Indo-Pacific Strategy” was the overarching policy that reinforces its influence in Asia.<sup>133</sup> However, its language suggests that the ROK perceived it was a junior partner of the American regional strategy since they describe it as being “centered on cooperation with Japan, Australia, and India.”<sup>134</sup> The ROK ultimately became part of this new American strategy, but analysts at the Korea Economic Institute of America (KEIA) assessed that the ROK’s hesitation was indicative of its goal to diversify itself from being a country that was fixated on balance of power politics, to one willing to “pursue an autonomous foreign policy.”<sup>135</sup> Additionally, the ROK’s hesitation to join is a signal of strained ties with its ally.

The new American strategy coincided with an increasingly fractured ROK–U.S. alliance. In the year that led up to the release of the ROK’s white paper, President Trump matched rhetoric to reduce troop levels in Korea with action. For example, in July of that year he directed the Pentagon to prepare a list of options that would drastically reduce the number of U.S. troops in the ROK due to high costs with little benefit to America.<sup>136</sup> Still, the ROK’s white paper addressed uncertainty surrounding fears of abandonment by emphasizing that the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act “limits the drastic reduction of the United States Forces Korea (USFK) by requiring the U.S. Secretary of Defense to certify to Congress the reason for reduction when he intends to cut the number below 22,000 [troops].”<sup>137</sup> Furthermore, it paraphrased Secretary of Defense James Mattis’ assurance to his ROK counterpart that USFK’s size “will remain unchanged and that the United States will maintain its commitment to defend the ROK using all ranges of

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<sup>132</sup> Jeong, 8.

<sup>133</sup> Jeong, 14.

<sup>134</sup> Jeong, 8.

<sup>135</sup> Dr Jagannath P Panda, “Framing an Indo-Pacific Narrative in India-South Korea Ties,” n.d., 1.

<sup>136</sup> Mark Landler, “Trump Orders Pentagon to Consider Reducing U.S. Forces in South Korea,” *The New York Times*, May 3, 2018, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/03/world/asia/trump-troops-south-korea.html>.

<sup>137</sup> Jeong, 16.

diplomatic and military capabilities.”<sup>138</sup> Despite these senior level reassurances, the AFP increased the likelihood of American stepping back from the alliance.

In 2018 South Korean analysts began to perceive the AFP as a sign of America’s decline, and associated it with historical examples of alliance abandonment. Taesuh Cha and Jungkun Seo wrote that “America First” signifies “the eclipse of U.S. power” and compared the policy to Nixon’s Vietnam-era policies.<sup>139</sup> The two authors observed that the AFP is reminiscent of Nixon’s policy on alliances which stated that the U.S. would be more judicious when approaching international security issues since “others have the ability and responsibility to deal with local disputes which once might have required our intervention.”<sup>140</sup> Cha and Seo warned that just as Nixon “used the USSR and PRC to avoid the Vietnam trap” Trump might use the PRC to make a “great power ‘deal’ to solve tricky foreign policy issues” such as North Korea.<sup>141</sup> This comparison changes the South Korean perception of the PRC’s intentions towards the Korean peninsula.

Moon’s government omitted his predecessor’s hedging characterization of China’s benign rise. The 2018 White Paper noted that the PRC’s military goal was to “build a globally competitive military by the mid-21st century.”<sup>142</sup> It observed that the PRC was “transforming its regional defensive concept to a full-spectrum combat concept to meet the strategic requirements of maneuvering...and multidimensional attack and defense.”<sup>143</sup> The ROK then acknowledged that PRC military aircraft have been increasing tensions on the

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<sup>138</sup> Jeong, 16.

<sup>139</sup> Taesuh Cha and Jungkun Seo, “Trump by Nixon: Maverick Presidents in the Years of U.S. Relative Decline,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis (KIDA)* 30, no. 1 (March 2018): 87.

<sup>140</sup> Richard M. Nixon, “Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Volume I, Foundations of Foreign Policy, 1969–1972 - Office of the Historian,” Office of the Historian: U.S. State Department, February 18, 1970, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v01/d60>.

<sup>141</sup> Taesuh Cha and Jungkun Seo, “Trump by Nixon: Maverick Presidents in the Years of U.S. Relative Decline,” 86.

<sup>142</sup> Jeong, 17.

<sup>143</sup> Jeong, 17.

Korean peninsula as a result of their illegal incursions into the Korean Air Defense Identification Zone (KADIZ).<sup>144</sup>

In sum, the AFP arrived on the scene at a unique time in terms of how the ROK perceived an uncertain security environment wedged between great powers. Uncertainty for the alliance is not new. As the Cold War neared the end, the ROK began to fear U.S. abandonment since its alliance was built within the paradigm of that bipolar structure. Instead, the alliance evolved and remained intact when the Soviet Union collapsed. The ROK then perceived that the American-led unipolar order benefitted both its security and economic interests until 2016. While President Obama's administration rebalanced U.S. forces to the Pacific to counter China's rise, the ROK downplayed the China threat, since the two economies were intricately aligned. In 2018 the ROK perceived the worst-case effects of the AFP to be increased risk of U.S. abandonment at worst or decreased American commitment to its security at best. Alliance uncertainty added to concerns of a more assertive Chinese foreign policy in an international arena dominated again by great powers, along with a nuclear-capable North Korea. The next section affixes these security concerns as the backdrop to analyze the ROK's pursuit to alter its internal balancing in such a way that gives it more autonomy away from the U.S. during a crisis.

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<sup>144</sup> Jeong, 18.

## C. INTERNAL BALANCING

Our defense is our responsibility<sup>145</sup>

—2018 ROK Defense White Paper

According to Mearsheimer, “in international politics, God helps those who help themselves.”<sup>146</sup> Since the AFP’s implementation, South Korean internal balancing has been focused on aligning *ends, ways, and means* to achieve more self-sufficiency from its American ally under a policy known as “Defense Reform 2.0.”<sup>147</sup> The ROK’s *ends* is to expedite the transfer of Operational Control (OPCON) of its own armed forces during a wartime scenario from the United States to the ROK military. Its *ways* come in the form of military exercises designed for the ROK military to certify its ability to perform the functions necessary to maintain OPCON. Defense spending provides the *means* that realize this goal.

For the ROK, the wartime OPCON of its own armed forces is more than just a military end state, it is an issue of sovereignty. This transfer has been consistently delayed since the mid-1990s due to uncertainty caused by North Korean nuclear provocations.<sup>148</sup> However, in 2017 many factors combined that created an opportunity for the newly elected President Moon to rejuvenate the ROK’s goal to obtain wartime OPCON from the United States. First was the political aftermath of an impeachment scandal that mobilized South Korean civil society. Second was the destabilizing effect brought on by North Korean nuclear and missile provocations that threatened the United States directly. Third was President Trump’s rhetoric that portrayed the ROK–U.S. alliance as an unnecessary burden

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<sup>145</sup> Jeong, 40.

<sup>146</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 33.

<sup>147</sup> “Joint Communique of 50th U.S.-ROK Security Consultative Meeting,” United States Forces Korea, accessed May 1, 2020, <http://www.usfk.mil/Media/News/tabid/12660/Article/1679753/joint-communicue-of-50th-us-rok-security-consultative-meeting.aspx>.

<sup>148</sup> Jina Kim, “Military Considerations for OPCON Transfer on the Korean Peninsula,” Council on Foreign Relations, accessed April 23, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/military-considerations-opcon-transfer-korean-peninsula>.

that did not place America's interests first and labeled the ROK as a "free rider" on the U.S. alliance.<sup>149</sup> In 2017 Presidents Trump and Moon agreed to expedite OPCON transfer since it was a win-win for both allies, but the *ways* had to be exercised for the ROK to increase its internal balancing capability by certifying its ability to be less dependent on the US.<sup>150</sup>

In August 2019, the ROK took the first step achieve OPCON of its forces during a wartime scenario when one of its generals led a combined ROK-U.S. exercise.<sup>151</sup> Initially, the exercise was announced to be called "19-2 Dong Maeng" which means "alliance" in Korean, but it was ultimately exercised without a name after North Korea rebuffed the name since it symbolized a combined ROK-U.S. effort that threatened the regime.<sup>152</sup> The exercise formerly known as 19-2 Dong Maeng was a command post exercise (CPX) using computer simulations to test the ROK Army's ability to command and control forces under its OPCON.<sup>153</sup> The exercise was a success, and in the 51st Joint Communique of the ROK-U.S. Security Consultative Meeting the ROK was certified as Initial Operational Capable (IOC) with the goal to become Full Operational Capable (FOC) during the next iteration of the CPX in 2020.<sup>154</sup>

Since the AFP, the progressive ROK government has planned to increase defense spending to unprecedented levels. The decision to increase defense spending to these levels was made as a means to expedite the transfer of OPCON and become more self-sufficient

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<sup>149</sup> Park Min-hee, "S. Korea Rejects Paying for U.S. Troops Stationed Outside Korea : International : News : The Hankyoreh," accessed May 1, 2020, [http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_international/921604.html](http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/921604.html).

<sup>150</sup> Jina Kim, "Military Considerations for OPCON Transfer on the Korean Peninsula."

<sup>151</sup> Lee Min-Hyung, "Seoul, Washington to Carry out Drill Led by ROK Forces," *koreatimes*, May 28, 2019, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2020/05/205\\_269636.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2020/05/205_269636.html).

<sup>152</sup> Oh Sok-Min, "Allies to Conduct Summertime Military Exercise in Earnest next Week," *Yonhap News Agency*, August 10, 2019, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20190810000900325>.

<sup>153</sup> Oh Sok-Min.

<sup>154</sup> "Joint Communiqué of the 51st ROK-U.S. Security Consultative Meeting," U.S. DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE, accessed May 4, 2020, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2018651/joint-communicu-of-the-51st-rok-us-security-consultative-meeting/>.

before Moon's single five year term ends 2022.<sup>155</sup> Moon's liberal government is projected to increase spending sharply compared to his predecessor. Figure 9 is a table depicting the official government figures that Park's administration projected to spend on defense before she was impeached, with actual amounts from those of Moon's administration. This shows the high priority that Moon's administration has placed on defense reforms intended for increased military autonomy. Moon has said the country's defense budget increases are needed for "critical military capabilities necessary to lead combined defense" and speed up OPCON transfer

Mearsheimer is quoted as saying that "in international politics, God helps those who help themselves."<sup>156</sup> Since the AFP has been the progressive ROK government has planned to increase defense spending to unprecedented levels. The decision to increase defense spending to these levels was made as a means to expedite the transfer of OPCON and become more self-sufficient before Moon's single five-year term ends 2022.<sup>157</sup> According to Figure 9 in 2020 Moon's government authorized defense spending to surpass 50 trillion Korean won (KRW) well before Moon has said the country's defense budget increases are needed for "critical military capabilities necessary to lead combined defense" and speed up OPCON transfer timeline. Such critical military capabilities include technologically advanced weapons systems such as the F-35A, the Korea Air and Missile Defense (KAMD) and the preemptive targeting system known as "Kill Chain."<sup>158</sup>

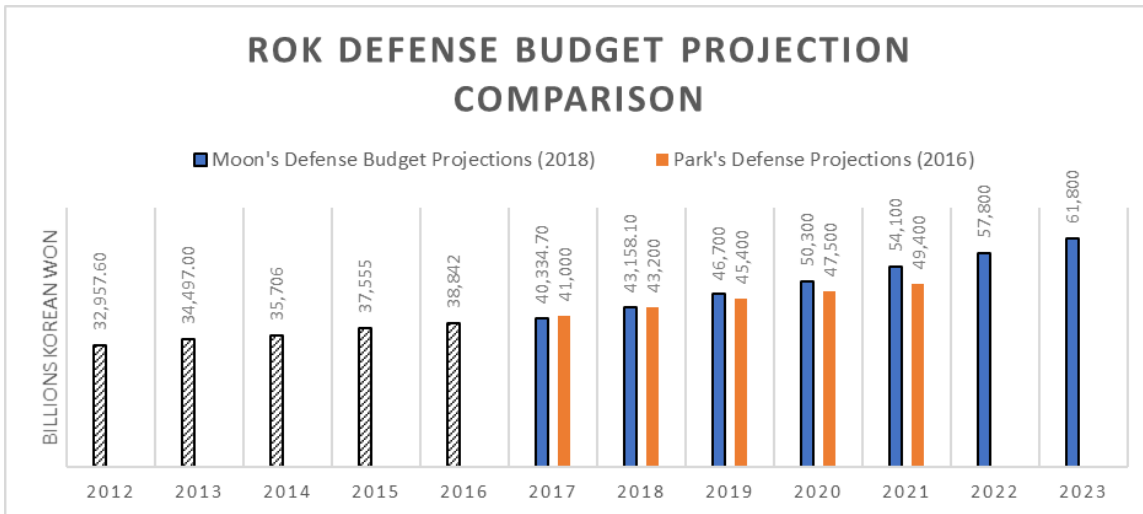
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<sup>155</sup> Kim So-hyun, "Korean General to Lead Joint Drills to Test Seoul's Readiness for Wartime OPCON Transfer," *The Korea Herald*, May 28, 2019, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20190528000466>. Moon Jae-in, "Opening Remarks by President Moon Jae-in at Annual Briefings by Ministry of National Defense and Ministry of Patriots and Veterans Affairs," Office of the President, Speeches and Remarks, January 21, 2020, <https://english1.president.go.kr/BriefingSpeeches/Others/746>

<sup>156</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 33.

<sup>157</sup> Kim So-hyun, "Korean General to Lead Joint Drills to Test Seoul's Readiness for Wartime OPCON Transfer."

<sup>158</sup> Yeo Jun-suk, "[News Focus] Will OPCON Transfer Take Place Earlier than Expected?," July 3, 2017, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20170703000985>.



ROK prior years' budget executions are shown in gray for comparison purposes.

Figure 9. Republic of Korea Defense Budget projection differences between President Park and Moon's administrations.<sup>159</sup>

#### D. EXTERNAL BALANCING

The ROK's most prominent manifestation of external balancing comes in the form of its alliance with the United States. South Korean support for the alliance has been popular in recent years in the face of increased North Korean aggression. According to a 2019 poll conducted by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 92% of South Koreans support the ROK–U.S. alliance.<sup>160</sup> However, there have been increased tensions between the ROK and U.S. over burden sharing to maintain the alliance. As part of putting America's interests first, President Trump demanded that the ROK pay the full \$5 billion burden for U.S. conventional and nuclear extended deterrence.<sup>161</sup> However, the ROK

<sup>159</sup> Source: Jeong Kyeong-doo, "2018 ROK Defense White Papers," 331.

<sup>160</sup> Sarah Kim, "Survey Shows 92% Support Korea and U.S. Alliance," accessed May 19, 2020, <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2019/12/16/socialAffairs/Survey-shows-92037-support-Korea-and-US-alliance/3071551.html>.

<sup>161</sup> Song Sang-ho, "(LEAD) S. Korea, U.S. Reaffirm Efforts for 'fair, Mutually Acceptable' Defense Cost-Sharing Deal," Yonhap News Agency, April 22, 2020, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20200422005751325>.

refuses to pay the U.S. more than \$870 million U.S. dollars.<sup>162</sup> President Moon is facing public pressure to keep ROK contributions lower than U.S. demands. South Korean public opinion may soon shift, since the failed negotiations have forced 4,000 ROK nationals who normally work for USFK to be furloughed.<sup>163</sup>

Defense burden sharing is a concept based on Article 5 of the alliance's Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and pertains to the amount of funds that the ROK expends to compensate the U.S. for stationing its forces on the Korean peninsula.<sup>164</sup> The document that operationalizes the concept is the Special Measures Agreement (SMA) and is delineated into three categories: labor costs, military construction, and logistics costs.<sup>165</sup> Figure 10 overlays how different ROK presidential administrations have allocated funding to maintain the U.S. alliance since the SMA went into effect in 1991. The figure shows that under Park's administration, the ROK consistently exhibited the slowest rate of increase to support the alliance. This data point supports one explanation why President Trump has consistently deemed the ROK as a free rider.

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<sup>162</sup> Yi He-ah, "U.S. Wants S. Korea to Shoulder Larger Share of Defense Burden: Pentagon Nominee," Yonhap News Agency, May 7, 2020, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20200507011300325>.

<sup>163</sup> Troy Stangarone, "The U.S. and South Korea Need a Stopgap SMA," accessed May 3, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/04/the-us-and-south-korea-need-a-stopgap-sma/>.

<sup>164</sup> Han Min-Koo, "2016 ROK Defense White Papers," 152.

<sup>165</sup> Jeong, 178.

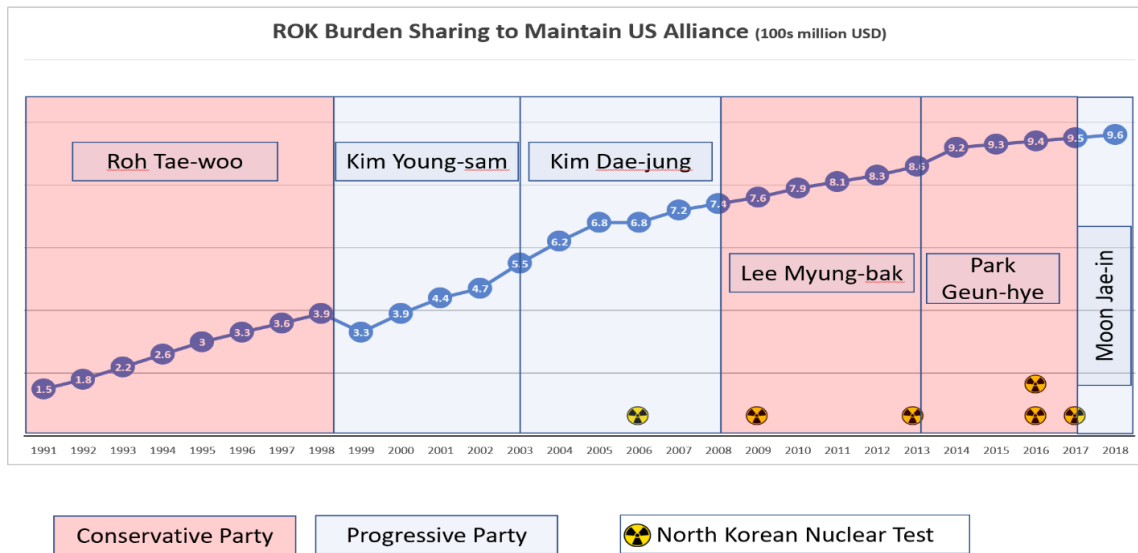


Figure 10. Republic of Korea burden sharing to maintain U.S. forces on the Korean peninsula.<sup>166</sup>

Before 2017, North Korean military capabilities only posed an existential threat to the ROK, and not to its ally the U.S. Therefore, the alliance could be categorized under Walt’s alliance theory of “asymmetrical dependence” since the ROK faced an existential threat by North Korea but the U.S. did not.<sup>167</sup> Under this theory, the U.S. should have had more leverage to exert its influence over the ROK, however the evidence shows that in 2016 the ROK did not increase its support for the alliance in spite of nuclear provocations from North Korea.

Figure 11 shows that in 2016 the ROK paid for nearly 17% of logistics support for both garrison and exercise support in the form of goods. The many garrisons that comprise USFK are largely supported by local Korean nationals. According to Figure 11, the ROK paid for 38.4% of the local Korean nationals’ salaries in cash. Additionally, the ROK supported for 44.7% of the USFK’s military construction projects which included new

<sup>166</sup> Source: Jeong Kyeong-doo, 179. The author juxtaposed this data with North Korean nuclear tests for analysis purposes.

<sup>167</sup> Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 43.

barracks for U.S. troops.<sup>168</sup> These amounts represented a budgetary ceiling that was agreed to by both allies two years prior and codified in the 2014 SMA.<sup>169</sup> However, given the increased number of North Korean provocations combined with the topic of free riding alliances during the U.S. presidential campaign, one would expect that the ROK would increase its burden sharing significantly to strengthen the ROK–U.S. alliance, however the evidence reveals that this did not occur.

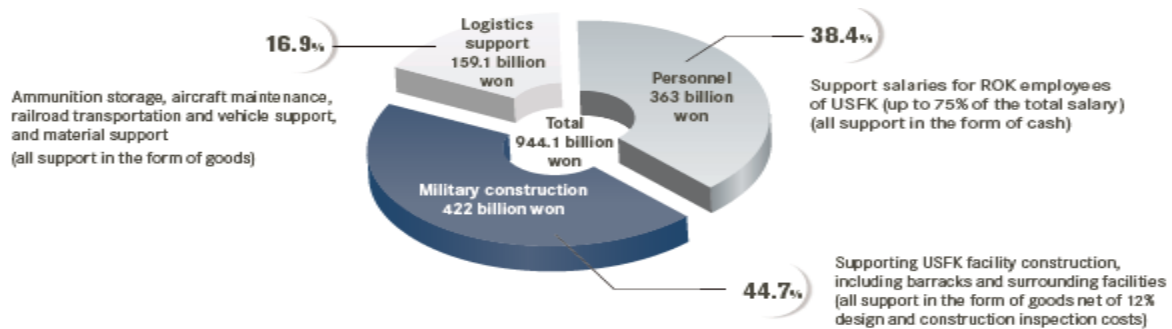


Figure 11. ROK defense burden sharing breakdown as of 2016.<sup>170</sup>

As North Korean nuclear and missile technologies became capable of threatening the United States, the ROK continued to exhibit free-riding tendencies. According to Walt’s theory of asymmetric dependence, now that both allies are mutually dependent on the alliance, both countries should have focused their efforts to “adapt to their partner’s interests.”<sup>171</sup> However, according to Figure 10, the rate at which the ROK’s burden sharing grew from 2016 to 2018 was less than what previous administrations would spend after just one year. Figure 10 shows that the ROK’s burden sharing amount grew to 9.6 hundred million dollars under Moon’s administration. The ROK’s stagnant level of support to maintain the alliance is not likely to rise in the near term given that the current round of

<sup>168</sup> Han, 153.

<sup>169</sup> Han, 152.

<sup>170</sup> Source: Han Min-Koo, 153.

<sup>171</sup> Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 43.

SMA negotiations are currently at a stalemate due to burden sharing disagreements between Presidents Trump and Moon. Analysts at the Korea Institute for Defense Analysis (KIDA) assess the failed negotiations will negatively impact the alliance due to decreased combat readiness as well decrease the alliance's legitimacy among South Korean citizens.<sup>172</sup>

Before the AFP, the alliance's combat readiness was exercised annually to deter the North Korean threat. Each year the alliance's solidarity was demonstrated through a combination of major bilateral exercises such as *Key Resolve* and *Ulchi Freedom Guardian*.<sup>173</sup> In addition to these two major exercises, smaller scale exercises such as *Vigilant Ace* and the *Korean Marine Exchange Program (KMEP)* continued throughout the year as a persistent reminder of the alliance's solidarity.<sup>174</sup> U.S.-ROK military interoperability was baked into how these major exercises were designed, planned, and executed, complete with each ally exchanging liaison officers to enhance cooperation during the exercise. This pattern repeated over the years, creating an institutional inertia intended to increase the alliance's lethality if combat operations resumed on the peninsula.

The frequency and scale of bilateral exercises has been impacted by the AFP in service of broader U.S. goals. The institutional knowledge developed over the years through persistent bilateral exercises may atrophy because of the reduction of exercises in terms of both size and scale. The decision to reduce the two ally's military exercises were made bilaterally between President Trump and Kim Jong-un, although he ROK claims to have assisted with facilitating the negotiations.<sup>175</sup> The AFP revealed that once North Korea

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<sup>172</sup> Kim Ki-Joo, "The Korea-U.S. Alliance and SMA," accessed May 4, 2020, <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2020/05/04/columns/alliance-korea-korean-employees/20200503193500195.html>.

<sup>173</sup> "CFC Announces Start of Key Resolve and Foal Eagle 2016," United States Forces Korea, accessed May 20, 2020, <http://www.usfk.mil/Media/PressReleases/tabid/12661/Article/686836/cfc-announces-start-of-key-resolve-and-foal-eagle-2016.aspx>.

<sup>174</sup> "Vigilant Ace 16: New Kind of Exercise," U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, accessed May 20, 2020, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/630993/vigilant-ace-16-new-kind-of-exercise/>.

<sup>175</sup> Jung Da-Min, "President Moon's Mediator Role Being Threatened," *The Korea Times*, August 12, 2019, [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2020/05/103\\_273824.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2020/05/103_273824.html).

obtained the ability to threaten the American homeland with a nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), the American President would engage bilaterally with the North Korean leader for the first time, leaving the ROK to serve in a backseat role.

The transactional nature of the AFP changed the alliance from positive to zero sum. The ROK–U.S. Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) is part of “2+2” security dialogue where the U.S. Secretary of Defense meets with the ROK Minister of National Defense to discuss the health of the alliance. In fact, “the SCM has grown into the symbol of the ROK–U.S. alliance.”<sup>176</sup> Before the AFP, these dialogues were geared toward America’s commitment to defend the ROK as part of the alliance by using language that “reaffirmed its commitment to extended deterrence that is credible, capable and enduring.”<sup>177</sup> The U.S. focus on the alliance was mainly one-sided since the U.S. was not threatened directly by the North Korean threat. After the AFP and as North Korean provocations threatened the American homeland more the alliance’s dialogue took on a different tone. The two allies continued to acknowledge the alliance’s importance and strength, however there was more emphasis on what the ROK could provide to the U.S. in the realm of mutual security.<sup>178</sup> The ROK reassured the U.S. that its Defense Reform 2.0 was the policy that would “support the acquisition and development of advanced military assets by the ROK military” to enhance the ROK’s support to U.S. security interests.<sup>179</sup>

After the AFP, the U.S. began to remind the ROK that the alliance was a temporary institution with an expedited time horizon. For example, at an SCM in October 2018 Secretary Mattis and ROK Minister of National Defense Jeong Kyong-doo were discussing details to expedite the OPCON transfer from the U.S. to the ROK. Secretary Mattis took the opportunity to remind the ROK that the U.S. was committed “to continue to provide bridging capabilities until the ROK fully acquires an independent defense capability.”<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Jeong, 378.

<sup>177</sup> Han, 293.

<sup>178</sup> Jeong, 372.

<sup>179</sup> Jeong, 373.

<sup>180</sup> Jeong, 373.

This signified that the alliance's time horizon depended on the ROK obtaining the equipment it needed to become certified as FOC and assume wartime OPCON of its forces. This theme persisted in future SCMs. In November 2019 Minister Jeong reemphasized to his new counterpart, Secretary Mark Esper that the ROK "pledged to acquire these capabilities expeditiously" through the Defense Reform 2.0 policy.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion the transactional nature of the AFP has weakened the ROK–U.S. alliance. This has been manifested by the way that the ROK perceives its security environment, conducts its internal and external balancing. Before the AFP, the ROK prioritized a US-led institutional approach to its security where the alliance's combined hard power was relied upon to deter the North Korean threat. After the AFP the ROK signaled that it leaned more towards China along economic lines along with pursuing a peaceful solution to denuclearize North Korea. In terms of internal balancing, since the AFP's implementation the ROK focuses on the Defense Reform 2.0 policy to align its ends, ways and means to decrease its security dependence on the U.S. alliance. The transactional nature of the AFP has affected the ROK's external balancing as well by transforming the ROK–U.S. alliance from a positive to zero-sum relationship. Before the AFP, the U.S. focused its reassurances to defend the ROK, but afterwards the U.S. emphasized that the ROK needed to develop capabilities that ensured the mutual security of both allies. Both allies see the others' request to pay their fair share as completely unreasonable, and the failed negotiations are weakening the allies' combat readiness as a result.

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## IV. TAIWAN

### A. BACKGROUND

The Republic of China (ROC), also known as Taiwan, is considered a rogue province by the People's Republic of China (PRC). When the United States (US) terminated diplomatic relations with Taiwan in 1979, it also severed the mutual defense treaty that guaranteed American military protection against an attack. Officially, this left Taiwan without many allies. The PRC has carried out a campaign to whittle down the number of countries with which Taiwan maintains diplomatic ties to 15, only four of which are in the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) area of responsibility.<sup>181</sup> Those four are the Marshall Islands, Palau, Republic of Nauru, and Tuvalu.<sup>182</sup>

However, the U.S. maintained unofficial diplomatic ties with Taiwan and has adopted a security policy known as “strategic ambiguity” towards the former ally.<sup>183</sup> Before President Trump was elected this policy meant in part that the U.S. president did not make direct contact with the Taiwanese head of state, nor did the U.S. send an Ambassador to or even have a de jure embassy in Taipei. In a surprising move shortly after he was elected in 2016, President-elect Trump made news when he became the first American President to speak directly over the phone with a Taiwanese President.<sup>184</sup> Many perceived this break from the norm as a signal that President Trump might use Taiwan as a bargaining chip to improve relations with the PRC as part of the “America First Policy”

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<sup>181</sup> “Diplomatic Allies,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of China (Taiwan) May 5, 2020, <https://www.mofa.gov.tw/AlliesIndex.aspx?fn=3dDF6F8F246049F8D6%26sms%3dA76B7230ADF29736>.

<sup>182</sup> “Diplomatic Allies.”

<sup>183</sup> Susan V. Lawrence and Wayne M. Morrison, “Taiwan: Issues for Congress,” *Congressional Research Service Report*, October 30, 2017, 10.

<sup>184</sup> Jean Yoon and J. R. Wu, “Exclusive: Taiwan President Says Phone Call with Trump Can Take Place Again,” *Reuters*, April 27, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-taiwan-president-idUSKBN17T0W3>.

(AFP).<sup>185</sup> This chapter argues that Taiwan’s relative power has been strengthened by the AFP, separate from the improvement from the emphasis on GPC in the military, economic and information domains.

This condensed chapter examines the military, economic and information effects of the AFP on Taiwan. This chapter will conduct this examination in three sections. First, it explains how the Taiwanese security environment has changed since the AFP. During President George W. Bush’s term, Taiwan did not accurately gauge the severity of its security dilemma and assumed that the U.S. would intervene if the PRC attacked.<sup>186</sup> Towards the end of President Obama’s term, Taiwan annual defense report concluded that the unipolar system dominated by the U.S. “hyperpower” was facing “many superpowers” and becoming multipolar.<sup>187</sup> After 2017 Taiwan observed that the Trump administration’s emphasis on GPC meant that the PRC “has apparently become the most concerning security challenge to the US.”<sup>188</sup> The second section illustrates how the AFP has positively affected Taiwan’s internal balancing abilities. Only after immense political pressure by President Trump did Tsai codify that Taiwan’s defense spending would now be pegged to its rising Gross Domestic Product (GDP).<sup>189</sup> The last section uses U.S. Foreign Military Sales (FMS) to exemplify the AFP’s positive impact on Taiwan’s external balancing.

## **B. SECURITY ASSESSMENT**

It is unsurprising that the PRC presents itself as the major security threat for Taiwan. This is because the PRC perceives Taiwan as a core national interest, meaning it

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<sup>185</sup> Weixing Hu, “Trump’s China Policy and Its Implications for the ‘Cold Peace’ across the Taiwan Strait,” *China Review* 18, no. 3 (2018): 83.

<sup>186</sup> Jonathan D. Pollack, “Short-Range Ballistic Missile Capabilities,” in *If China Attacks Taiwan : Military Strategy, Politics and Economics* (Routledge, 2010), 49, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203087411>.

<sup>187</sup> Kao Kuang-Chi, “Taiwan Ministry of National Defense (MND) Report 2015,” Taiwan Defense & National Security, November 2015, 27, <https://www.ustaiwandefense.com/taiwan-ministry-of-national-defense-reports/>.

<sup>188</sup> Yen Teh-fa, “Taiwan Ministry of National Defense (MND) Report 2019,” Taiwan Defense & National Security, September 2019, 14, <https://www.ustaiwandefense.com/taiwan-ministry-of-national-defense-reports/>.

<sup>189</sup> Yen, 131.

may require the use of military force if Taiwan declares independence.<sup>190</sup> Whether analyzed from an academic perspective or from the Taiwanese government, Taiwanese threat assessments have historically centered on a PRC invasion scenario.<sup>191</sup>

A 2006 academic assessment evaluated a Taiwan invasion scenario at length and identified how the PRC would phase its forces accordingly. Bernard Cole and Valerie Niquet summarized that based on the PRC's military capabilities at that time combined with Taiwan's geography, the PRC would not be able to conduct an amphibious assault with more than a Division-sized force unless it was supplemented with civilian shipping assets.<sup>192</sup> Kenneth Allen and Jeffrey Allen added that in order for the PRC to establish such a foothold in Taiwan, the PRC would first need to establish air superiority over Taiwan's 1990s-era air defenses.<sup>193</sup> During this assessment, Jonathan Pollack judged that the PRC's short-range ballistic missile capabilities posed the "most consequential" threat to Taiwan's security since they could be used as a deterrent, or a rapid means of overwhelming Taiwanese defenses.<sup>194</sup> The assessments of this era described how the PRC would conduct an attack, but were not congruent with the PRC order of battle across the Strait. That is because at that time, the PRC maintained a large, but relatively static military force posture across the Taiwan Strait.<sup>195</sup>

According to Taiwan's government in 2015 the PRC was talking softly but carrying a big stick. For example, Taipei remarked that "cross-Strait relations have eased as a result

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<sup>190</sup> Hu, 83.

<sup>191</sup> Jennifer Liu, "Anticipating Invasion: Military Training in Taiwan's High Schools, 1953–1960," *Twentieth-Century China* 37, no. 3 (2012): 204, <https://doi.org/10.1179/1521538512Z.00000000007>.

<sup>192</sup> Valerie Niquet Bernard D. Cole, "Amphibious Capabilities," in *If China Attacks Taiwan: Military Strategy, Politics and Economics* (Routledge, 2010), 126, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203087411>.

<sup>193</sup> Kenneth W. Allen and Jeffrey M. Allen, "Controlling the Airspace Over the Taiwan Strait," in *If China Attacks Taiwan: Military Strategy, Politics and Economics* (Routledge, 2010), 87, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203087411>.

<sup>194</sup> Jonathan D. Pollack, "Short-Range Ballistic Missile Capabilities," 47.

<sup>195</sup> Ji You and Yufan Hao, "The Political and Military Nexus of Beijing-Washington-Taipai: Military Interactions in the Taiwan Strait \*," *China Review; Hong Kong* 18, no. 3 (August 2018): 99.

of increasing economic, cultural, and educational exchange.”<sup>196</sup> That was the result of the Kuomintang’s (KMT) efforts to strengthen cross-Strait relations along economic lines.<sup>197</sup> However, while diplomatic and economic relations between the PRC and Taiwan improved, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) was refining the doctrine, tactics, and structure to increase its power projection capabilities in a Taiwan scenario.<sup>198</sup> The PLA was increasing its military capabilities against the backdrop of was an increasingly complex geostrategic environment with increased “coopetition” resulting from the PRC and Russia placing the U.S.-led international order in a “stranglehold.”<sup>199</sup> Taipei described the nexus between these contradictions was to create conditions “beneficial to the interests of the PRC and generate advantageous environments for future military invasions.”<sup>200</sup>

President Tsai’s election and her refusal to sign the 1992 Consensus reversed Taiwan’s benign characterization of cross-Strait relations.<sup>201</sup> In 2019, the Taiwanese government perceived that the regional strategic security environment changed from a unipolar system to one that is now dominated by competition between the U.S. and the PRC.<sup>202</sup> The Taiwanese government continued to describe the interaction between the two great powers using the term “co-petition.”<sup>203</sup> Figure 12 illustrates how Taiwan perceives itself to be in the middle of a series of zero sum, tit for tat actions between the competing great powers.

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<sup>196</sup> Kao Kuang-Chi, “Taiwan Ministry of National Defense (MND) Report 2015,” 51.

<sup>197</sup> Hu, “Trump’s China Policy and Its Implications for the ‘Cold Peace’ across the Taiwan Strait,” 2018, 75.

<sup>198</sup> Kao, 42.

<sup>199</sup> Kao, 43.

<sup>200</sup> Kao, 51.

<sup>201</sup> Hu, 75.

<sup>202</sup> Yen Teh-fa, “Taiwan Ministry of National Defense (MND) Report 2019,” 8.

<sup>203</sup> Yen, 14.

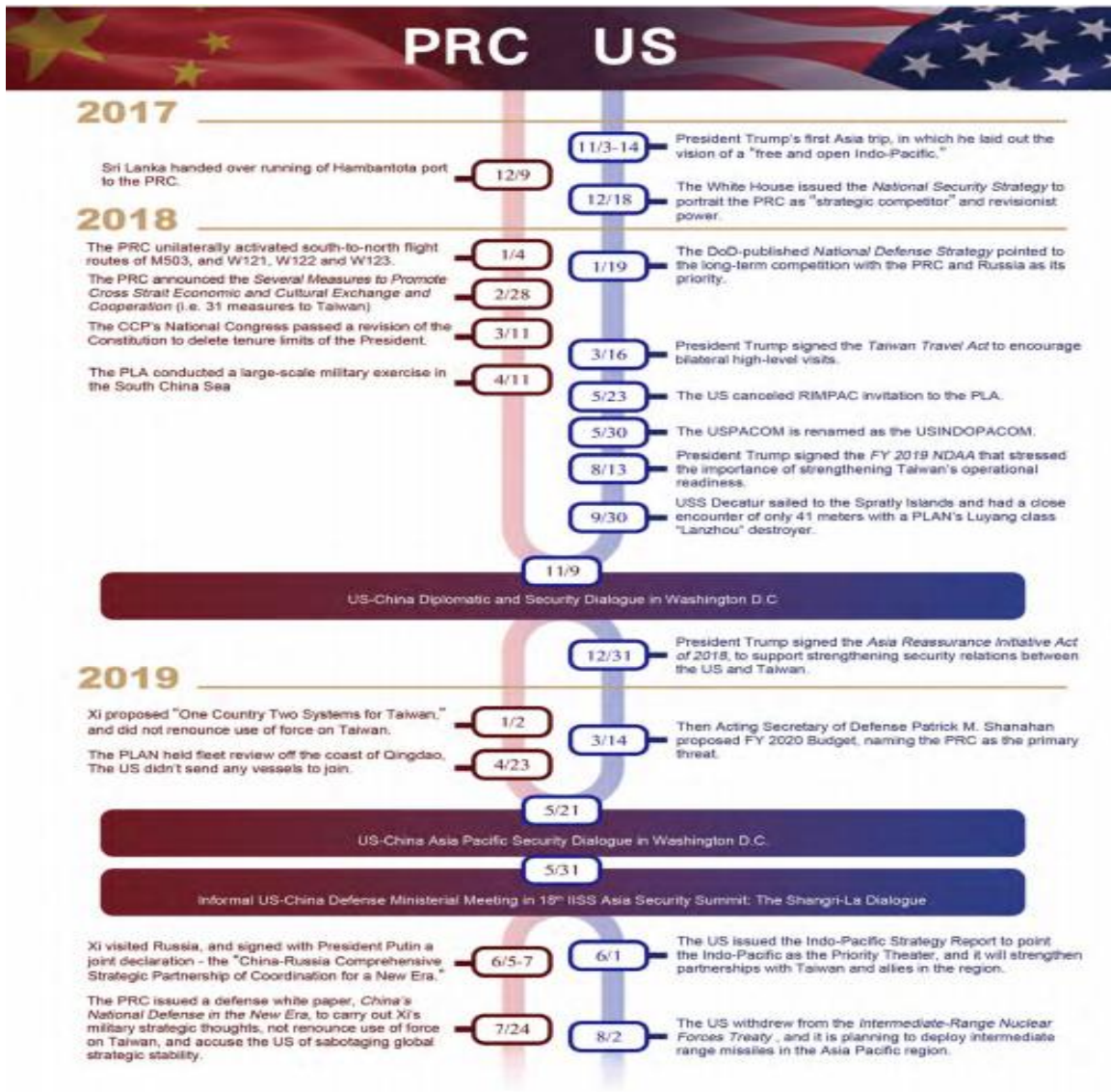


Figure 12. Taiwanese perspective of U.S.—PRC “co-petition” for influence in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>204</sup>

<sup>204</sup> Yen, 17.

Since Tsai's election the PRC increased its military's activities across the Strait to hover just below the threshold of a combat deployment.<sup>205</sup> For example, the PRC has signaled its enhanced power projection capabilities by deploying its first aircraft carrier, CV-16 or *Liaoning* through the Taiwan Strait.<sup>206</sup> In addition to the PRC's kinetic capabilities, Taiwan is threatened by the full spectrum of the PRC's non-kinetic capabilities, including in the space, cyberspace, information operations, along with the PRC's expanding "military-civilian fusion."<sup>207</sup> Beyond the Taiwan Strait the island nation is concerned about the PRC's military modernization in general, as well as streamlined theater commands capable of commanding and controlling power projection capabilities within "the Second Island Chain."<sup>208</sup> Taiwan's security situation is not getting better with time. That is because the PRC's "relative military capabilities vis-à-vis Taipei has continued to rise, while the people in Taiwan have increasingly identified themselves as Taiwanese rather than Chinese."<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> You and Hao, "The Political and Military Nexus of Beijing-Washington-Taipei," 101.

<sup>206</sup> You and Hao, 105.

<sup>207</sup> Kent Feng, "Taiwan Ministry of National Defense (MND) Quadrennial Defense Review 2017," Taiwan Defense & National Security, February 21, 2020, 24, <https://www.ustaiwandefense.com/taiwan-ministry-of-national-defense-reports/>.

<sup>208</sup> Feng, 9.

<sup>209</sup> Hu, 79.

### C. INTERNAL BALANCING

Peace relies on defense, and our determination to realize a self-reliant defense remains unchanged.<sup>210</sup>

—ROC President Tsai Ing-wen

Taiwan faces a paradox in terms of its ability to internally balance against the PRC threat. Before 2017 many analysts commented that Taiwan's ability to defend itself was hindered by a limited defense budget despite having a robust economy.<sup>211</sup> However, the evidence shows that Taiwan's defense spending during this time had become increasingly divorced from its growth in GDP.<sup>212</sup> For example, in 1994 Taiwan's defense spending accounted for nearly 4% of GDP, but this has decreased to less than 2% in 2017.<sup>213</sup> To put this negative trend in context, in 1994 Taiwan's GDP was reported at roughly \$226 billion, and in 2017 its GDP grew to slightly more than \$600 billion.<sup>214</sup> This trend suggests that Taiwan's defense spending limitation was not based on the government's lack of resources, but rather the effect of domestic political decisions.

President Tsai reversed the negative trend and vowed to strengthen Taiwan's defenses, but only after the U.S. increased pressure to do so. One week before President Trump visited Asia Tsai announced her pledge to increase defense spending by 2%. After the AFP and considering President Trump's pressure that American allies and partners need to increase spending, Tsai's government was the first to permanently peg defense

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<sup>210</sup> Yen, 64.

<sup>211</sup> Derek Grossman, Michael S. Chase, and Logan Ma, "Taiwan's 2017 Quadrennial Defense Review in Context," June 14, 2017, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2017/06/taiwans-2017-quadrennial-defense-review-in-context.html>.

<sup>212</sup> Grossman, Chase, and Ma.

<sup>213</sup> J.R. Wu, "As Trump Riles China, Taiwan Tallies Defense Costs," *Reuters*, December 16, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-taiwan-analysis-idUSKBN1450JE>.

<sup>214</sup> "National Statistics, Republic of China (Taiwan)," accessed May 8, 2020, <https://eng.stat.gov.tw/point.asp?index=1>.

spending to keep pace with its GDP.<sup>215</sup> Additionally, the Chairman of the American Institute in Taiwan James Moriarty pressured Tsai to increase defense spending, since Taiwan was spending “significantly less on defense as a percentage of GDP than others that face similarly sophisticated threats, such as Israel, South Korea, and Ukraine.”<sup>216</sup> Tsai’s emphasis that Taiwan do more for its own security is indicative of the AFP tenets, and Tsai has since characterized the U.S. – Taiwanese relationship under Trump as “unprecedentedly friendly.”<sup>217</sup> The reason why the U.S. has so much leverage over how much Taiwan spends on defense has to do how politically isolated it is on the world stage.

Taiwan’s unique geo-political position determines how it must tailor its defense industry to internally balance. For example, even if it dedicated a higher percentage of its GDP on defense, it faces great difficulties to purchase arms on the open international market since it is only recognized by 15 countries, none of which are known for exporting advanced military equipment. This means that it must either depend on its own defense industry for advanced military technologies, or else rely on the benefits of its unofficial partnership through arms sales from the United States. As a result, Taiwan has taken a hybrid approach to blend its own defense industry’s equipment with arms sales from the U.S. Arms sales from the U.S. have the most explanatory power when it comes to understanding how Taiwan conducts its unofficial external balancing.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> Yen, 131.

<sup>216</sup> Lawrence and Morrison, “Taiwan: Issues for Congress,” 64.

<sup>217</sup> Reuters, “Taiwan to Boost Defense Spending as U.S. Expresses Concern over Possible Military Imbalance with China,” *The Japan Times*, October 30, 2017, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/10/30/asia-pacific/politics-diplomacy-asia-pacific/taiwan-boost-defense-spending-u-s-expresses-concern-possible-military-imbalance-china/>.

<sup>218</sup> Corey Lee Bell. “Is Taiwan Really Buying the ‘Wrong’ Weapons?,” accessed May 6, 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/03/is-taiwan-really-buying-the-wrong-weapons/>.

## D. EXTERNAL BALANCING

Protecting Taiwan is in the national interests of the United States<sup>219</sup>

—ROC Minister of National Defense Yen Teh-fa

Although Taiwan is not officially recognized as a state by any notable countries, its external balancing is heavily dependent on creative diplomatic agreements. The U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Susan Thornton summarized these agreements in 2015. She said that “the United States remains committed to our one-China policy, based on the Three Joint Communiques and the Taiwan Relations Act, a policy that has remained consistent over several decades and many administrations.”<sup>220</sup> However, one of the tenets of the AFP has been that America’s alliances and partnerships will not be supported unconditionally. In Taiwan’s case, the U.S. commitment to the island’s defense, and its adherence to the one-China policy is based upon whether the Taiwan remains an effective tool to gain leverage over the PRC.

Although Taiwan is not an official ally of the U.S., it remains an important partner with U.S. military backing. Since the 1950s the U.S. has an established pattern of military actions to prevent PRC interference with Taiwan.<sup>221</sup> One of the most prominent examples of U.S. military support to Taiwan occurred during Taiwan’s pivotal democratic transition in the 1995–1996 Taiwan Strait Crisis.<sup>222</sup> These actions were not just a deterrent for the PRC, but also indicative of the United States’ commitment to Taiwan’s security.

The U.S. military maintains a routine presence in the Taiwan Strait by conducting freedom of navigation operations (FONOPS) to both deter the PRC and reassure Taiwan of American support. Figure 1 shows that during the last years of George W. Bush’s term

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<sup>219</sup> Yiu Kai-hsiang and Evelyn Kao, “Protecting Taiwan benefits the U.S.: defense minister - Focus Taiwan,” October 3, 2018, <https://focustaiwan.tw/politics/201810030022>.

<sup>220</sup> Susan Thornton, “Taiwan: A Vital Partner in East Asia,” U.S. Department of State, May 21, 2015, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2015/05/242705.htm>.

<sup>221</sup> You and Hao, 106.

<sup>222</sup> Hu, 77.

the U.S. signaled its steady support for Taiwan by conducting a predictable number of FONOPS. During President Obama’s term, the U.S. strengthened its reassurance to Taiwan by increasing the number of FONOPS. However, after the AFP the U.S. decreased the number of FONOPS in the Taiwan Strait.

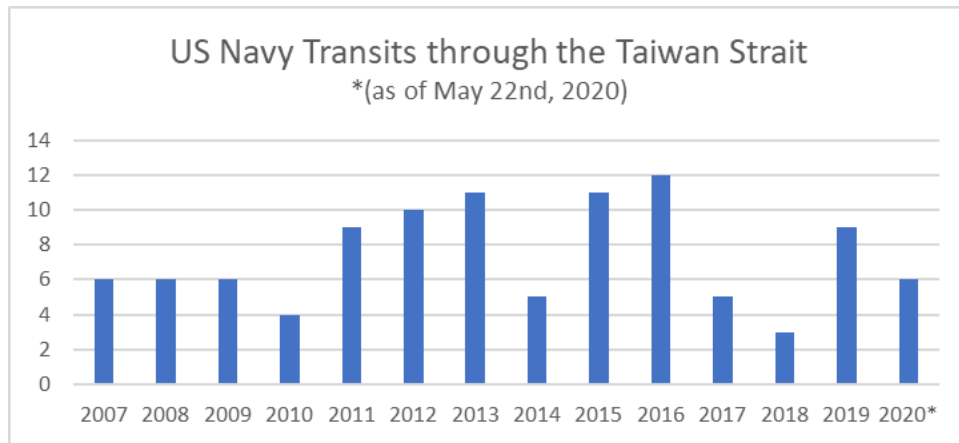


Figure 13. Adapted from data depicting U.S. Navy Freedom of Navigation Operations in the Taiwan Strait through May 22, 2020.<sup>223</sup>

Taiwan sees the AFP as a unique opportunity to leverage its role in the American-led regional security architecture. In 2019, Taiwan claimed that it should “maximize its geostrategic advantages and early warning to construct a threat-based security and cooperation mechanism with like-minded countries...to ensure the regional security and stability.”<sup>224</sup> This theme was echoed outside of the government as well. David An of the Global Taiwan Institute reminded his American audience how General Douglas MacArthur referred to Taiwan as an “unsinkable aircraft carrier” and added that Taiwan’s strategic

<sup>223</sup> Source: Data from 2007-2018 transits, “China Bristles at Western Naval Transits through the Taiwan Strait,” *The Economist*, accessed May 22, 2020, <https://www.economist.com/china/2019/05/09/china-bristles-at-western-naval-transits-through-the-taiwan-strait>; data from 2019-2020 derived from Sophia Yang, “US Navy Reveals Another Warship Sailed through Taiwan Strait,” Taiwan News, accessed May 22, 2020, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3933686>

<sup>224</sup> Yen, 14.

geography combines the benefits of “both security and trade” for the US.<sup>225</sup> David An went on to say that Taiwan could be a force multiplier to advance American interests in INDOPACOM by supplementing U.S. FONOPS in the South China Sea (SCS) as well as conduct counter-terrorism actions against regional elements of the Islamic State.<sup>226</sup> He concluded by reemphasizing that Taiwan and the U.S. should “boost military-to-military cooperation” since the majority of Taiwanese equipment was purchased from the US.<sup>227</sup> One way that Taiwan can accomplish this level of cooperation is by increasing its interoperability with American military systems. Since the U.S. does not maintain any military bases in Taiwan unlike in Japan and South Korea, the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program is the most prominent example of military cooperation.

The U.S. conducts FMS cases to Taiwan to maintain the balance of power across the Taiwan Strait and promote the U.S. defense industry. The U.S. has packaged its FMS to Taiwan under the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA). Figure 14 depicts historic FMS cases under the TRA to Taiwan from 1990 to 2019. Historically, U.S. FMS cases to Taiwan were designed to enable the island nation’s military to maintain an even balance with the current PRC threat. In terms of U.S. FMS to Taiwan, F-16s have become one of the most symbolic indicators that reveal the strength of the U.S. – Taiwan partnership. It took over a decade of persistent requests before the U.S. agreed to sell the 1970s era F-16A/B variants to Taiwan in 1992.<sup>228</sup> The U.S. only agreed to sell the aircraft after the PRC received 24 Sukhoi-27 (Su-27) FLANKERS fighters from Russia.<sup>229</sup> Then, during George W. Bush’s administration Taiwan began requesting the American government to simultaneously

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<sup>225</sup> David An, “Enhancing Taiwan’s Role in Asia under the Trump Administration,” *Global Taiwan Institute*, September 2017, 14.

<sup>226</sup> An, 14.

<sup>227</sup> An, 14–15.

<sup>228</sup> Daniel Southerl, “Ban on F-16 Sales to Taiwan May End,” *Washington Post*, September 2, 1992, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1992/09/02/ban-on-f-16-sales-to-taiwan-may-end/c1a832cf-b74a-4035-8b3f-b15a07e8e821/>.

<sup>229</sup> Eliot A. Cohen, Bates Gill, and Taeho Kim, “China’s Arms Acquisitions from Abroad: A Quest for ‘Superb and Secret Weapons,’” *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 2 (1997): 58, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20047971>.

upgrade its F-16A/Bs and purchase the more modern F-16C/Ds.<sup>230</sup> However, even when the U.S. was willing to sell the newer platforms to Taiwan, the island nation did not devote enough towards defense spending to afford the advanced aircraft so instead it chose to upgrade the older platforms.<sup>231</sup> Taiwan’s quest to upgrade its F-16s continued but when it had the financial capital to acquire them, it lacked the political capital to execute the deal.

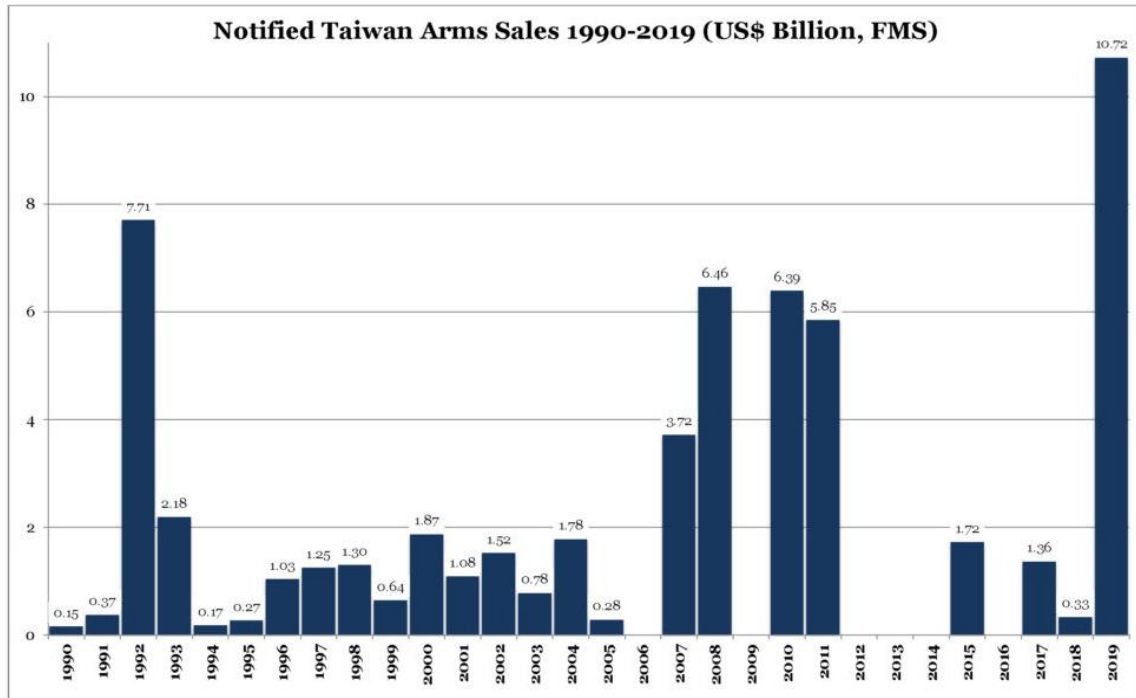


Figure 14. Foreign Military Sales to Taiwan since 1990.<sup>232</sup>

Taiwanese presidents from both ends of the political spectrum have supported acquiring the F-16C/D from the U.S., albeit for different purposes. For example, when the PRC-leaning Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou of the Kuomintang (KMT) party visited the U.S. in 2011 he stated that Taiwan needed to upgrade its fighters to the F-16C/Ds to

<sup>230</sup> Shirley Kan, “Taiwan: Major United States Arms Sales Since 1990 \*,” *Current Politics and Economics of South, Southeastern, and Central Asia* 20, no. 3 (2011): 512.

<sup>231</sup> Kan, 516.

<sup>232</sup> “US Foreign Military Sales to Taiwan 1990 - 2019,” Taiwan Defense & National Security, accessed May 6, 2020, <https://www.ustaiwandefense.com/tags/fms/>.

increase Taiwan's negotiating leverage with the PRC, and not to maintain the balance of power.<sup>233</sup> Ultimately, Ma was unable to secure these fighters from the U.S. There is evidence that suggests that President Obama's administration chose to disapprove Taiwan's request as a way to alleviate political pressure from the PRC.<sup>234</sup> In contrast to Ma, President Tsai Ing-wen also supported purchasing the newer F-16 variants but did so to "enhance our air defense capability."<sup>235</sup> In this case President Trump saw this as a way to put American interests first, since the \$8 billion deal would support American jobs.<sup>236</sup> As for Tsai's rationale for the purchase, President Trump said he believed that Taiwan would use the fighters "very responsibly."<sup>237</sup> In both cases Taiwan's presidents were appealing to the U.S. using a variation of external balancing in order to increase their military's capabilities. In Tsai's case, her request to increase Taiwan's ability to defend itself coincided with a U.S. president whose AFP calls for American allies and partners to do more for themselves in a way to increase the American bargaining position in Great Power Competition (GPC). It also helps if those American allies and partners buy American-made equipment to that end.

External balancing is more than hard power alone. The economic and information domains are levers of power as well. The AFP impacted these two levers of power by influencing the 2018 Taiwan Travel Act (TTA). From an information standpoint, the TTA signals a closer relationship between the U.S. and Taiwan "across all levels" by allowing senior government officials "including Cabinet-level national security officials, general officers, and other executive branch officials" to meet either in the United States or in

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<sup>233</sup> Kan, "Taiwan," 516.

<sup>234</sup> Andrew Jacobs, "China Warns U.S. Against Selling F-16s to Taiwan," *The New York Times*, February 25, 2010, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/26/world/asia/26china.html>.

<sup>235</sup> Aaron Tu and Sherry Hsiao, "Tsai Wants U.S. to Make F-16 Decision - Taipei Times," August 16, 2019, <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2019/08/16/2003720562>.

<sup>236</sup> Aaron Mehta Gould Joe, "Taiwan F-16 Sale Officially Cleared by Trump Administration," *Defense News*, August 21, 2019, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/asia-pacific/2019/08/20/taiwan-f-16-sale-officially-cleared-by-trump-administration/>.

<sup>237</sup> Keoni Everington, "Trump OK's F-16V Fighter Deal to Taiwan," *Taiwan News*, accessed May 7, 2020, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/en/news/3764903>.

Taiwan.<sup>238</sup> The TTA would then allow the Taiwanese Minister of National Defense to officially visit the U.S., which is “an indicator of the breadth and depth of the ties between the United States and such country.”<sup>239</sup> Economically, the TTA puts American interests first since it also promotes representatives from Taiwan’s public and private sectors to conduct business “in the United States, including activities which involve participation by Members of Congress, officials of Federal, State, or local governments.”<sup>240</sup> This expands the number of economic touchpoints between the U.S. and Taiwan across all sectors and from the highest levels down to local governments. This policy gives Taiwanese businesses an alternative to the PRC market, but ultimately puts American interests first.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the AFP, separate from the administration’s emphasis on GPC, has had a positive effect to enhance Taiwan’s relative power as well as increase the United States’ negotiating leverage vis-à-vis the PRC. This benefits Taiwan since it perceives itself as caught between two great powers competing in zero sum terms. The AFP has given Taiwan greater incentives to internally balance. Only after President Trump’s pressure that allies and partners do more for their security did Tsai’s government peg defense spending to keep pace with its GDP. Increased defense spending complements Taiwan’s ability to externally balance with its unofficial ally the U.S. since Taiwan will now have more to spend to procure advanced American military equipment. Taiwan is also in a unique position when compared with Japan and South Korea for two reasons. First, it does not permanently host U.S. forces there. A lack of U.S. bases in Taiwan eliminates the issue of burden sharing to maintain the alliance. Beyond that, the absence of bases hosting U.S. forces removes a major source of tension in the aligned relationship. AFP in the other two cases, found points of friction over the ally supporting costs of forward deployed U.S. forces. In this case, that is simply absent, amplifying the overall positive effect of AFP to

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<sup>238</sup> Steve Chabot, “Text - H.R.535 - 115th Congress (2017-2018): Taiwan Travel Act,” webpage, March 16, 2018, 132, 2017/2018, <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/535/text>.

<sup>239</sup> Chabot, 132.

<sup>240</sup> Chabot, 132.

the ties. Second, Taiwan is not officially covered by the U.S. nuclear umbrella. Taiwan is not being asked to increase its cost for strategic ambiguity. In the end, “America First” has been a tremendous bolster for Taiwan.

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## V. CONCLUSION

To focus on great powers is not to lost sight on lesser ones. Concern with the latter's fate requires paying most attention to the former.<sup>241</sup>

—Kenneth Waltz

This thesis was inspired by countless news articles and academic papers which incessantly discussed the power transition taking place in the international arena caused by declining American power against the backdrop of China's rise. Moreover, such power transition discussions were exhibited by the U.S. government. In the "America First" policy (AFP) the U.S. characterized a multipolar international security environment in "principled realist" terms where great powers including China and Russia were competing to challenge the American-led liberal international order.<sup>242</sup>

Important elements of the threats that these great powers pose are to the liberal international order in economic terms. However, this thesis instead focusses on America's military alliances that have underpinned this order in East Asia. Over the past several decades, the United States has created and nurtured an institutionalized network of alliances and partnerships to balance against threats. Today's multipolar world means that the United States will count on its allies even more when great power competition (GPC) becomes great power conflict. However, the dilemma that America's allies in East Asia face is a particularly important puzzle, specifically as it relates to Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. In each of these cases, China is the country's number one trading partner, but each government's security relies heavily on U.S. security guarantees.

This thesis took a reductionist approach to assess changes on the balance of power amongst America's allies and partners in East Asia. The case studies did not compare the relative power of Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan with their most likely or most dangerous threat scenarios. Instead, the cases were designed to analyze how each state's leaders altered their country's internal and external behaviors because of the new American foreign policy. Figure 14 depicts a summary of this thesis' findings.

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<sup>241</sup> Kenneth Neal Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Long Grove, Ill: Waveland, 2010), 73.

<sup>242</sup> Donald Trump, "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America," 1.

Japan		
	Pre - AFP	Post - AFP
Perception of Security Environment	Institutional	Realist
Baseline Internal Balancing Spending	Low	Low
Host Nation Support for U.S. forces	Yes	Yes
U.S. Foreign Military Sales	Medium - 11 Cases from 2010 - 2016	High - 12 Cases
Benefit from GPC	Yes	Yes
Alliance Strength Assessment	Strong, relied on U.S. regional leadership	Strong, preparing to assume regional leadership role
Taiwan		
	Pre - AFP	Post - AFP
Perception of Security Environment	Institutional	Realist
Baseline Internal Balancing Spending	Low	Medium
Host Nation Support for U.S. forces	No	No
U.S. Foreign Military Sales	Medium - \$13.96B from 2010 - 2016	High - \$12.41B
Benefit from GPC	No	Yes
Alignment Strength Assessment	N/A	N/A* Increased Interoperability with U.S. systems
South Korea		
	Pre - AFP	Post - AFP
Perception of Security Environment	Realist	Institutional
Baseline Internal Balancing Spending	High	High
Host Nation Support for U.S. forces	Yes	Yes
U.S. Foreign Military Sales	High - 13 Cases from 2012 to 2016	Low - 5 Cases
Benefit from GPC	Yes - U.S. historically met ROK's Economic and Security interests	No - Economic/Security Conflict of Interest between PRC / US
Alliance Strength Assessment	Strong, relied on U.S. Wartime OPCON of its forces	Challenged, pursuing transfer of Wartime OPCON of its forces, reduced number / scale of Combined Exercises

Figure 15. Matrix depicting this thesis's findings.

Additional structural forces are likely at play for each case. However, the approach chosen here I chose examined the interactions between statesmen and how those interactions became translated into domestic and international policies. This was based on the essence of Waltz's observation that structure and international systems have the power to influence a given state's behavior, but "agents act" and "systems as a whole do not."<sup>243</sup> Furthermore, Waltz said that if one is concerned with how power is distributed across the international system, then "the internal dispositions" of states within that system are also important to study.<sup>244</sup>

In Japan's case, the government perceived fundamental changes in the global structure prior to President Trump's election and the AFP. This was evidenced when Japan published an unprecedented number of NDPGs during a single American president's term. Each of Japan's NDPGs acknowledged fundamental changes in Japan's security environment as a result of America's perceived decline in the region. Despite the perceived change in structure, Japan's internal balancing remained low. Additionally, from 2010 to 2016 Japan was involved in only 11 FMS cases with the U.S. These were designed to develop limited offensive military capabilities that could enable it to retake contested territories on a small scale, but overall Japan mainly relied on the promise of American extended deterrence for its security and regional leadership.

However, after the AFP Japan donned a realist outlook to characterize the international order in a way not seen since WWII. Domestic politics led by Shinzo Abe's LDP have capitalized on the AFP to advance their conservative aims to make Japan great again. After the AFP, the Japanese government declared that the role of the state was survival and that it existed in an international hierarchical order where unipolarity was being conceded by the United States.

The AFP encouraged Japan to take on a more active leadership role in the East Asia. Japan intends to lead through institutions that promote the western liberal values traditionally upheld by the United States. In fact, it now sees itself as the vanguard to

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<sup>243</sup> Waltz, 74.

<sup>244</sup> Waltz, 74.

uphold these values “until the U.S. can come back to the original position” through the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy.<sup>245</sup> While some may argue that this will be difficult since Japan’s internal defense spending has remained low, the equipment it has purchased supported the AFP and the FOIP. Within President Trump’s administration alone the U.S. has implemented 12 FMS cases with Japan. One of the key symbols that will signify Japan’s new power projection capabilities in the region will be complete when it converts its *Izumo* class helicopter carriers to support its newest acquisition, the F-35B short takeoff and vertical landing (STOVL) variant of the Joint Strike Fighter.<sup>246</sup>

In contrast to Japan, this thesis has shown that the AFP has weakened the ROK–U.S. alliance. In the years leading up to the AFP the alliance was maintained most visibly through persistent bilateral exercises, creating an institutional knowledge between the two allied forces. This knowledge may now atrophy because of the reduction of exercises in terms of both size and scale. The AFP coincided with North Korea’s development of the ability to threaten the American homeland with a nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM). The American emphasis on unprecedented bilateral negotiations with the North Korean leader had implications for the US-ROK alliance (reduced combined exercises). While the ROK claims to have assisted with facilitating the negotiations that led to the reductions, the decisions to decouple the two ally’s military exercises were made bilaterally between President Trump and Kim Jong-un.<sup>247</sup> The few remaining large force exercises are increasingly focused on certifying the ROK to be Full Operations Capable (FOC) with the transfer of wartime Operational Control (OPCON) from the U.S.

Since the AFP, the ROK’s new defense endstate envisions its forces under its own sovereign wartime OPCON using new indigenously produced military equipment. It has shifted the focus of its continually high defense spending on the Defense Reform 2.0 policy to align its ends, ways and means to decrease its security dependence on the U.S. alliance.

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<sup>245</sup> Hosoya, “Exploring Abe’s Role on the Chessboard with Professor Yuichi Hosoya.”

<sup>246</sup> “Japan Decides to Procure F-35B Fighters from U.S.,” nippon.com, August 17, 2019, <https://www.nippon.com/en/news/yjj2019081700045/japan-decides-to-procure-f-35b-fighters-from-u-s.html>.

<sup>247</sup> Jung Da-Min, “President Moon’s Mediator Role Being Threatened.”

From 2012 to 2016 the ROK was involved in 13 U.S. FMS cases. Since the AFP, the number of FMS cases has dropped precipitously to 5. Instead, the ROK intends to develop its own advanced military technology such as the Korea Air and Missile Defense (KAMD) and Kill Chain systems.

The transactional nature of the AFP has affected the way in which the ROK–U.S. approaches burden sharing. Domestic politics constrain the ROK’s ability to match the U.S. demands to share the full burden of the alliance. Both allies see the others’ request to pay their fair share as completely unreasonable, and the failed negotiations are weakening the allies’ combat readiness as a result.

Some analysts have observed that ROK–U.S. alliance tension caused by the AFP is reminiscent of the precursors that resulted in the American withdrawal from the Philippines in the 1990s.<sup>248</sup> For example, Clint Work and senior ROK officials noted that Manila and Washington both saw a reduced threat perception that warranted permanent American troops in the Philippines.<sup>249</sup> Additionally, the “smaller ally” was prone to “impulsive or assertive nationalism” and there was a “belief in Washington that the ally...was ungrateful and uncooperative.”<sup>250</sup> Philippine domestic politics played a part as well. Work noted that “a slim majority of Filipino senators voted to force the expulsion of U.S. forces” despite popular support against the ruling.<sup>251</sup> The AFP is not threatening to dissolve the alliance, but the U.S. should not discount the power of ROK domestic politics.

For Taiwan, the AFP and the parallel emphasis on GPC has had a positive effect to enhance Taiwan’s relative power as well as increase the United States’ negotiating leverage vis-à-vis the PRC. As in the Japan and South Korean cases, the AFP was the catalyst for Taiwan to dedicate more towards its internal balancing. Tsai’s government finally codified

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<sup>248</sup> Clint Work, “Alternative Futures for the US-ROK Alliance: Will Things Fall Apart? 38 North: Informed Analysis of North Korea,” 38 North, May 7, 2020, 2, <https://www.38north.org/2020/05/cwork050720/>.

<sup>249</sup> Work, 2.

<sup>250</sup> Work, 2.

<sup>251</sup> Work, 2.

that defense spending was to keep pace with its growing GDP, but only after President Trump's pressure that allies and partners do more for their security. Increased defense spending fuels Taiwan's ability to externally balance with its unofficial ally the U.S. on an unprecedented scale. Now that Taiwan has more to spend on procuring advanced American military equipment it has gone from spending \$13.96B on U.S. FMS cases during Obama's two terms, compared to \$12.41B since President Trump's AFP was implemented.

Simply buying more American military equipment is not the only reason to explain how Taiwan has benefitted from the AFP. That is because Taiwan is in a unique position when compared with Japan and South Korea for two reasons. First, it does not permanently host U.S. forces there. A lack of U.S. bases in Taiwan eliminates the issue of burden sharing to maintain the alliance. Second, Taiwan is not officially covered by the U.S. nuclear umbrella. Therefore, Taiwan is not being asked to increase its cost for strategic ambiguity. In the end, "America First" has been a tremendous bolster for Taiwan.

Beyond the scale of the East Asian cases studies, the AFP has effectively increased the relative power of American-aligned allies and partners' hard power if GPC becomes Great Power Conflict. The policy has been a signal for each to meaningfully contribute their share of the security burden. This increases American National Security because in many cases those same allies and partners will be engaged in a conflict for a certain period of time based on the anti-access and area denial (A2AD) capabilities of great power rivals. The AFP diverged from the institutional policies espoused by previous administrations, but it has the potential to enable the United States military to focus its efforts more efficiently by empowering its allies and partners to do more for themselves.

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