

THE CENTRE OF GRAVITY SERIES

ALLIANCES UNDER AUSTERITY: WHAT DOES AMERICA WANT?

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ABOUT THE SERIES

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Western military spending has stabilised and in some cases declined after a period of rapid growth over the past decade, but this is not only a function of austerity.
- An expanding and diffuse set of security challenges are facing the United States (US) and its allies in Asia.
- The US will seek to build on its security framework to more effectively integrate economic, diplomatic, and cultural engagement.
- The US will ask its allies to take more responsibility for security, especially in their immediate neighbourhoods, but to do so while avoiding provocations.
- The US will want help from its allies to both assure and deter China.
- The current period of austerity will end and US fundamental economic strength remains.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Work with US partners to define and build a more expansive and comprehensive mutual security framework at both political and working levels, to encompass greater engagement across the spectrum of the relationship: on trade and investment; greener energy solutions; diplomatic initiatives; people-to-people exchanges; education, innovation and science programs; and defence and security cooperation.
- Continue to engage and encourage active US participation in and commitment to effective, problem-oriented multilateral mechanisms in the region, both formal and informal, including multilateral collaborations, consultations, and joint activities amongst Australia, the US, and other allies and security partners.
- Give particular attention to collaboration and consultation with the US in and related to Southeast Asia.
- Generate new opportunities for bilateral security engagement in Australia and in Australia's nearby region, including facilities sharing and access, prepositioning of US equipment, weapons and other defence technology trade and development, and joint deployments and training.
- Explore and where possible expand possibilities to strengthen Australian deployments to bilateral and multilateral operations alongside American forces.
- Take initiative to strengthen Australian bilateral security relationships with other non-US allies and partners.
- Deepen military-to-military and other security-related engagement with China and encourage greater trilateral security cooperation amongst Australia, China and the United States.

I. Introduction

What does America want from its allies during austere times? Or, to put it another way, what do reduced defence budgets mean for the US's alliance relationships and for the alliance partners themselves? These are critically important and likewise complex questions with policy responses still at a relatively early stage. Nonetheless—while recognizing it verges on the hubristic to suggest one can know in detail “what America wants”—it is possible to sketch the outlines of the geostrategic environment and see what a more austere situation already means and likely will mean for US and allied interests and action.

This paper will first consider two of the fundamental factors shaping the current strategic environment, defence resources on the one hand and the key security trends on the other. From there, as discussed in the next section, the parameters of “what America wants” becomes more clear as does what makes sense for overall allied interests—including those of Australia—going forward. Some concluding words offer a longer-term assessment as a counterpoint to much of the current conventional wisdom about the future regional strategic environment.

FIGURE 1

Spending figures are in US\$, at current prices and exchange rates. Countries are ranked according to military spending calculated using market exchange rates (MER).

Rank 2012 (2011)	Country	Spending (\$ b., MER)	Change, 2003–12 (%)	Share of GDP (%) ^a		World share (%)	Spending (\$ b., PPP) ^b
				2012	2003		
1 (1)	USA	682	32	4.4	3.7	39	682
2 (2)	China	[166]	175	[2.0]	[2.1]	[9.5]	[249]
3 (3)	Russia	[90.7]	113	[4.4]	[4.3]	[5.2]	[116]
4 (5)	UK	60.8	4.9	2.5	2.5	3.5	57.5
5 (6)	Japan	59.3	-3.6	1.0	1.0	3.4	46.0
Subtotal top 5		1 059				60	
6 (5)	France	58.9	-3.3	2.3	2.6	3.4	50.7
7 (8)	Saudi Arabia	56.7	111	8.9	8.7	3.2	63.9
8 (7)	India	46.1	65	2.5	2.8	2.6	119
9 (9)	Germany	[45.8]	-1.5	[1.4]	1.4	[2.6]	[42.8]
10 (11)	Italy	[34.0]	-19	1.7	2.0	1.9	31.0
Subtotal top 10		1 301				74	
11 (10)	Brazil	33.1	56	[1.5]	1.5	[1.9]	[34.4]
12 (12)	South Korea	31.7	44	2.7	2.5	1.8	44.2
13 (13)	Australia	26.2	29	1.7	1.9	1.5	16.3
14 (14)	Canada	[22.5]	36	[1.3]	1.1	[1.3]	[18.3]
15 (15)	Turkey ^c	[18.2]	-2.1	2.3	3.4	[1.0]	[25.9]
Subtotal top 15		1 432				82	
World		1 753	35	2.5	2.4	100	

[] = estimated figure; GDP = gross domestic product; PPP = purchasing power parity.

^a The figures for national military expenditure as a share of GDP are based on estimates for 2012 GDP from the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) World Economic Outlook database, Oct. 2012.

^b The figures for military expenditure at PPP exchange rates are estimates based on the projected implied PPP conversion rates for each country from the IMF World Economic Outlook database, Oct. 2012.

^c It is possible that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) would be in 15th position in place of Turkey, but data is not available for the UAE in 2012. In 2011, the UAE's military spending (in current prices) was estimated by SIPRI to be \$19.2 billion.

Sources: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, <<http://www.sipri.org/databases/milex/>>; and IMF, World Economic Outlook database, Oct. 2012, <<http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2011/02/weodata/index.aspx>>.

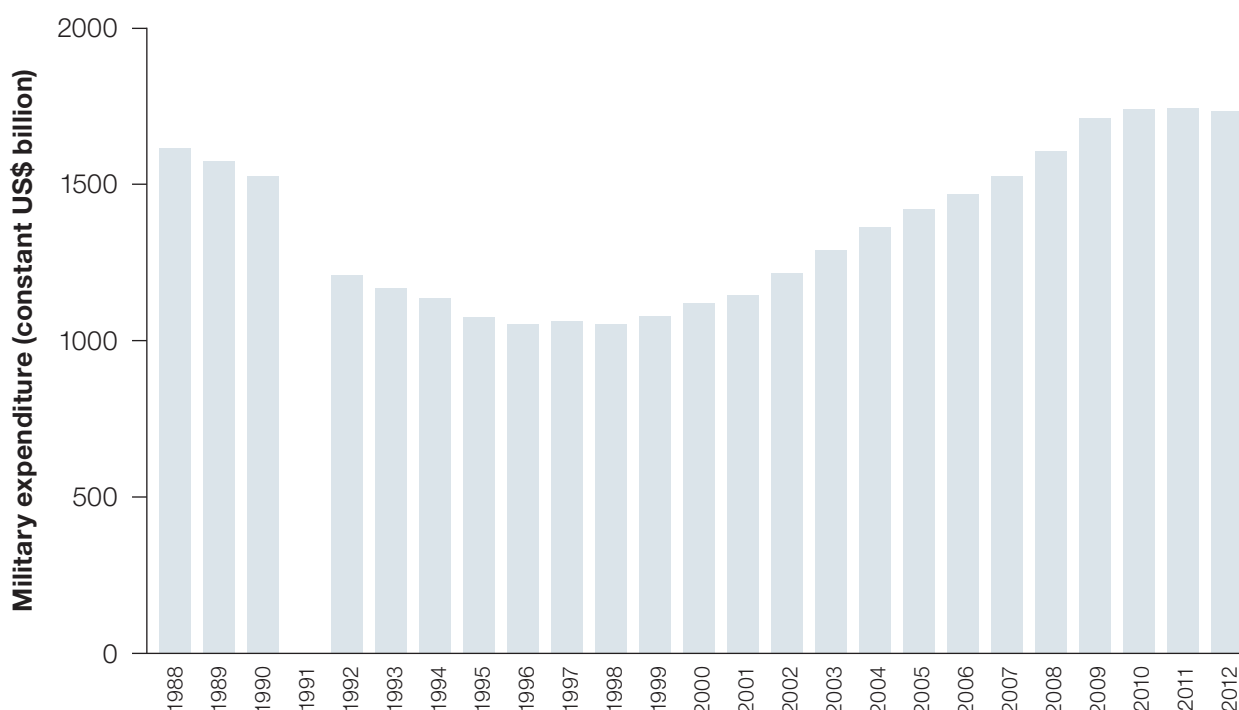
II. Defence spending and the security environment

Trends in defence spending seem quite clear. US and allied defence spending is leveling out and in some cases declining, while the defence spending of other major countries—such as China, India, and Russia—is increasing (see Figure 1).

Among the top 15 military spenders, which together accounted for 82 percent of the global total of military spending in 2012, declines from 2011 to 2012 were seen primarily among the Western allies. More telling, however, are the longer-term declines for some of the Western allies. For example, when gauged over the 10 years from 2003 to 2012, military spending in Western allied states declined in Japan, France, Germany, Italy and Turkey between 1.5 and 19 percent. Meanwhile, countries not formally allied with the United States have seen a rapid increase in their military spending over the past decade, 2003 to 2012.

But there is more here than meets the eye. To begin, it is true that total global military spending *actually declined* between 2011 and 2012 (the first time that figure has decreased since 1998), largely a reflection of declines among Western allies. But in spite of these more austere figures, global military spending was still at *historical highs in 2012*, higher in real terms than it was even at its peak at the end of the Cold War, as shown in Figure 2. Moreover, many of the major Western allies amongst the top 15 spenders saw their military expenditures *increase* when measured over the course of the decade 2003-2012: United States up by 32 percent, and the United Kingdom, South Korea, Australia, and Canada up by 4.9, 44, 29, and 36 percent respectively (see Figure 1). Moreover, US military spending was still nearly *70 percent higher* in 2012 than it was in 2001 and in 2012 accounted for nearly 40 percent of the global military expenditure, amounting to more than the next 10 countries combined. Taken together, the 10 Western allies among the top 15 military spenders accounted for 60 percent of total global military spending in 2012 despite some leveling off in defence expenditure.

FIGURE 2 WORLD MILITARY EXPENDITURE, 1988–2012



SIPRI Military Expenditure Database

And, to focus on Australia, while current military spending is down from its peak in 2010, the figure for 2012 represents a 29 percent increase over spending a decade earlier in 2003 and a 36 percent increase over the figure for 2001, prior to the start of the global war on terror (see Figure 3).

FIGURE 3 AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE SPENDING, 2000-2012

In constant US million dollars

2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
17994	18711	19512	19868	20687	21414	22562	23947	24820	26676	27006	26610	25555

Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database 2012

In sum, looking at allied defence spending, it is true that growth in US and overall Western allied military spending is flattening and, in some individual cases, declining over the past several years. However, that said, the US and nine allied countries among the top 15 military spenders increased their defence expenditures by an average of 11.64 percent for the period 2003 to 2012. Moreover, in several key cases, US and Western allied military spending has seen significant increases—South Korea, Australia, Canada particularly—over this period.

In this situation—where defence spending among US allies is generally slowing though remains at significant levels—what is the security environment in the Asia-Pacific to which these resources will need to be targeted? Several key aspects stand out. These are not unfamiliar and have been a part of an increasingly complex security environment for more than a decade.

The single most important development for US and allied security interests is the rise of China and particularly its increased capability in terms of comprehensive national power to shape security outcomes in the region. At the same time, China has also become an increasingly important economic partner to countries around the world and is the number one trading partner for all American treaty alliance partners in the Asia-Pacific region.

But at the same time, an expanding and more diffuse set of challenges, many arising not from states per se, but from non-state actors, is coming to the fore and demanding greater attention from national militaries, border control agencies, police forces, and intelligence services. A part of the more diffuse environment is an increasing diversity and at times divergence of interests and policy directions across US allies and security partners.

“ defence spending among US allies is generally slowing though remains at significant levels ”

In addition, the region is seeing a growing engagement by all key players in a range of multilateral institutions intended to address regional security challenges—both inclusive and exclusive in nature—presenting alternatives to the traditional, bilateral “hub and spoke” system of US alliances. Even at their best, these mechanisms struggle to address regional security challenges effectively and in a sustained way. But despite this weakness, these mechanisms make sense for the region as incubators of dialogue, platforms for nascent forms of multilateral security cooperation and confidence-building, and forums for expression of strategic concerns.

Lastly, the Asia-Pacific security environment is also shaped in recent years by the American “rebalance” to the region. This approach sets forth a clear strategic commitment—encompassing economic, diplomatic, and military components—to engage the dynamic Asia-Pacific region more purposefully for the long-term. It has been spelled out most authoritatively by Thomas Donilon, the US National Security Advisor in March 2013 where he emphasized the US President’s commitment to the strategy and outlined its five principal components: (1) strengthened alliances; (2) engaging emerging powers (such as India and Indonesia); (3) building a constructive relationship with China; (4) strengthening regional institutions; and (5) strengthening regional economic architecture.¹

III. What does America want?

Given flattening and even declining resources for defence among Western allies on the one hand, and the increasingly complex nature of the region's security environment on the other, what does America look for from its allies in the Asia-Pacific?

Answers to this question will not be applicable in the same way across all the alliance partnerships. But it is possible to consider some broad themes which have already emerged and are likely to remain in place for the short-to-medium-term. In basic terms, America looks to its allies to cooperate in implementing **a strategy which employs a more flexible, expanded, multifaceted, and integrated framework for security, encouraging more action and responsibility amongst allies, both individually and collaboratively, to address and mitigate security challenges at national, regional and even global levels.**

It is important to note from the outset that some partners will be more capable and interested than others to work with the United States in implementing such a strategy. And it is worth highlighting that this approach is not simply driven by budgetary cutbacks. Elements of this approach have been in place for many years, predating the current period of austerity—just as the “pivot” or “rebalancing” strategy well-predates 2011 and the seminal statements in that year of President Obama in Australia and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in *Foreign Policy*.²

What are the apparent elements of this approach and where do we see it in action?

First, America will want to work with its allies to broaden the framework for security and more effectively integrate economic, diplomatic, even cultural engagement alongside and complementary to traditional defence and military aspects of security. This is a more balanced effort to demonstrate that “forward-deployed diplomacy” and particularly economic ties, along with defence engagement, are mutually reinforcing pathways to deepen US and allied commitment to and cooperation with one another. There are a number of undertakings already in this direction, and more should be expected as this strategy continues to unfold. For example, in the economic realm, the United States has sought strong bilateral and multilateral trade agreements with many of its closest allies, such as through the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement (FTA) which came in to force in January 2005 and the Republic of Korea-US FTA (March 2012). The current negotiations to conclude the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade agreement—involving Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand Peru, Singapore, the US, and Vietnam—is another example of American efforts to economically engage allies and other partners in the region in addition to strengthening defence and security ties.

The establishment of “2 + 2” dialogues—bringing together foreign and defence policy leaders at the ministerial level—is another way Washington seeks to broaden the framework for security relations. The Australia-US Ministerial Consultation (AUSMIN), a 2+2 process held regularly since the 1980s, has become a model for the US to follow with other allies.

The US and Japan's Security Consultative Committee is a 2 + 2 process going on for more than a decade. The US and Republic of Korea have held 2+2 meetings since 2010, and the US and the Philippines held their first in April 2012. Allies can expect these to be intensified with more in the way of deliverables and deepening of relationships.

Beyond 2 + 2, we should also expect the US to expand collaboration with its allies on new security challenges which fall outside of the realm of traditional security and intersect with economic, resource and society related concerns: cybersecurity, domestic terrorism and insurgencies, energy security, refugee and other population flows, organized crime, climate-related problems, and others.

“AUSMIN has become a model for the US to follow with other allies”

Second, the United States will look to its allies to take on more responsibility for their security in their immediate periphery, as well as in their nearby region, but doing so in a way to avoid provocative overreach.

This will include American expectations and action to encourage and enable allies and other security partners to cooperate with the United States more effectively to meet commonly-held security challenges of the region. This will mean, for example, seeking partnerships with allies and other security partners to help disperse, pre-position, and upgrade American and allied military assets, deepening military-to-military ties and exchanges, increasing allied responsiveness and capabilities, and improving joint military training and interoperability. This also includes partnering to help with the development of a country's own defence capabilities through arms sales, defence technology agreements, and co-development and co-production arrangements. This will obviously entail much defence and military-to-military cooperation, but not exclusively so, and should be coordinated with economic and diplomatic undertakings.

Third, the United States will look to strengthen both formal and informal multilateralism, including, importantly, networks amongst American allies and other security partners. This will mark a continuing effort to blend the traditional "hub and spokes" system with various forms of multilateral engagement amongst American allies and other security partners.

This will include encouraging greater ongoing coordination multilaterally across allied relationships—such as through the US-Japan-ROK Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group, the Australia-Japan-US Trilateral Strategic Dialogue, and the more recent the Australia-Japan-United States Defense Leaders Trilateral Meeting. But this effort will also seek to encourage new groupings to include other security partners in the region such as India, Indonesia, Singapore, and Vietnam, or to involve new participants into ongoing multilateral mechanisms. An interesting recent example of this latter approach comes with China's acceptance of the Pentagon's invitation to participate in the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) naval exercises in 2014.

The United States will also expect its allies and other security partners to cooperate in strengthening other existing multilateral organisations in the region—such as ASEAN, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asia Summit (EAS), and their ability to address regional security challenges through diplomatic exchanges, policy reform, and concerted action to prevent and/or react to security threats in the region.

Not all allies and partners are going to be comfortable with this approach as not all allies and partners see the benefits in the same ways and have varying reservations about such multilateralism. For example, even between allies—such as Japan and South Korea—lingering historical distrust or other obstacles often hinder deeper cooperation. Allies and security partners may also wish to avoid the appearance they are "ganging up" on China. Or, in an interesting finding by Carl Baker and Brad Glosserman in their January 2013 study, there is little appetite among US allies in the region to formulate a consistent "alliance caucus" position within the larger multilateral organizations in the region such as the ARF or EAS.³ Washington is aware of these and other potential sensitivities, but will nonetheless seek to strengthen a variety of multilateral networks amongst its allies and security partners in the region.

Fourth, Washington will look to its allies and security partners to engage China in ways that both assure and deter. This is a difficult and delicate balance to achieve for America itself, one which recognizes and encourages a growing constructive role for China in the region, but also hedges against a growing potential for confrontation with a rising China. It is a balance all the more difficult to achieve in partnership with regional allies given the range of different interests, concerns, and national strategies the regional allies (and other security partners in the region) have vis-à-vis a rising China.

The Obama-Xi "shirtsleeve summit" in June this year is particularly important in this context as it helped set a positive tone for the US-China relationship early in the administration of the new Chinese leader. The key point for allies and other security partners to understand is that the United States does not seek a confrontation with China and sees value in engagement while also assuring a continued delivery of a deterrent message for China and for US allies. The engagement side of this balance remains the most important, most preferred and most likely to be sustained, and the US will look to its allies to strike this formulation as well.

IV. And for Australia?

Looking more specifically at US expectations for its alliance with Australia, all signs point to the growing importance of this special partnership. As with other partners, the US will seek to strengthen a range of cooperative activities with Australia, including through multilateral institutions regionally and globally, partnerships with other allies, and engagement of China.

In Australia itself, this will include some expectation to expand the sharing of facilities, such as the relocation and establishment of a C-band space surveillance radar and the transfer of an advanced space surveillance telescope, both to Western Australia. The continued increase in US Marine training rotations at Darwin's Robertson Barracks is another example of how the US and Australia can increase joint activities on Australian soil. Looking ahead, the two countries will likely continue to explore ways to preposition US equipment in Australia and take steps to slowly increase US access to Australian facilities such as airfields in the Northern Territory and to naval bases such as HMAS Stirling in Western Australia. Washington will continue to appreciate and look to expand sharing of facilities and expertise in other areas, such as in intelligence cooperation, conducting joint planning and exercises, and strategic consultations.

Within the broader region, the United States will look to Australia to maintain and expand its capability to provide for Australia's defence but also to contribute to security operations in Australia's near-abroad and further afield where possible through improved interoperability and joint operations with the US and other allied forces. The US will look to the Australian navy to continue its important contributions to three combined task forces (CTF-150, CTF-151, and CTF-152) of the Combined Maritime Forces in the Gulf of Aden, Red Sea, Indian Ocean, Gulf of Oman, and Persian Gulf, conducting counter-piracy, counter-terrorism, and other maritime security operations. Similarly, Australia's preparedness to embed with other US and allied operations—for example, the deployment in 2013 of the guided missile frigate *HMAS Sydney* with the US Seventh Fleet in Northeast Asia—is viewed very positively and as a model for future cooperation. The United States will also look to Australia to expand its activities in cooperation with other US allies and partners, such as the ongoing training for Philippine armed forces and the establishment of the Australia-Indonesia "2 + 2" (March 2012) and the Australia-Republic of Korea "2 + 2" (July 2013).

Beyond military-to-military activities, Washington would welcome cooperation with Australia to strengthen regional multilateral institutions in the region, such as the EAS, the ARF, the TPP, and other multilateral bodies which can help strengthen stability and prosperity in the region. Conclusion of the TPP will be a particularly high priority for Washington in the coming months. More broadly, the US will continue to see great value in its partnership with Australia at a global level as well, working through the United Nations Security Council and in other bodies to address challenges facing the international community—such as climate change, proliferation, cybersecurity, and illicit trafficking and other transnational crime—where the two countries can seek common approaches and outcomes.

“ Washington will likely look to explore forms of trilateral and other multilateral defence cooperation with Australia and China ”

The United States will also welcome a continued strong and constructive relationship between Australia and China. This includes support for the establishment and growth of the Australia-China strategic partnership, and ongoing defence and military-to-military ties between Australia and China such as the annual Defence Strategic Dialogue and cooperation and joint humanitarian and disaster relief exercises. Looking ahead, Washington will likely look to explore forms of trilateral and other multilateral defence cooperation with Australia and China.

While working in these and other areas to realise an even more effective partnership with Australia, Washington will continue to seek what may be the most valued Australian asset: straightforward, well-informed strategic advice on how the United States and Australia can achieve their common interests nationally, regionally, and globally.

V. Future prospects: brighter than many think

Concerns about austerity and its impact are warranted. But at the same time we should not overlook the prospects for the United States and other allies and partners in the coming decades and how they compare with other countries, such as China. A more-than-plausible case can be made that the current downturn in US fiscal fortunes is temporary and indeed comes at a time of relative stability when no major rival akin to Wilhemine or Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan, or the Soviet Union, threatens to overturn the international order or presents an existential challenge to the United States or its allies.

The United States enjoys a range of fundamental and intrinsic attributes which bode well for the country over the medium-to-long-term: an advantageous geostrategic position, natural endowments of land and other resources, favourable demographics, openness to immigration, competition, and innovation, and a comparatively cohesive and predictable sociopolitical and legal order.

By comparison, other countries in the region and beyond, face enormous long-term problems, not least China. China will be dealing with a range of difficult and in some cases immutable challenges, including a negative demographic picture, environmental degradation, resource scarcity (not least water and land, but also energy), and geostrategic vulnerability, as well as a brittle and too-often corrupted political system. Not only will these and other challenges constrain and perhaps thwart Chinese ambitions, these very challenges make it more likely that China will not fundamentally challenge the current international and regional system from which it gains the benefits it desperately needs if it hopes to mitigate and overcome those challenges.

In conclusion, it is important to recognise that the current period of austerity will not always be thus and the prospects for America and American alliances and other partnerships in the region—including with China—hold more promise than many seem to believe.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Work with US partners to define and build a more expansive and comprehensive mutual security framework at both political and working levels, to encompass greater engagement across the spectrum of the relationship: on trade and investment; greener energy solutions; diplomatic initiatives; people-to-people exchanges; education, innovation and science programs; and defence and security cooperation.
- Continue to engage and encourage active US participation in and commitment to effective, problem-oriented multilateral mechanisms in the region, both formal and informal, including multilateral collaborations, consultations, and joint activities amongst Australia, the US, and other allies and security partners.
- Give particular attention to collaboration and consultation with the US in and related to Southeast Asia.
- Generate new opportunities for bilateral security engagement in Australia and in Australia's nearby region, including facilities sharing and access, prepositioning of US equipment, weapons and other defence technology trade and development, and joint deployments and training.
- Explore and where possible expand possibilities to strengthen Australian deployments to bilateral and multilateral operations alongside American forces.
- Take initiative to strengthen Australian bilateral security relationships with other non-US allies and partners.
- Deepen military-to-military and other security-related engagement with China and encourage greater trilateral security cooperation amongst Australia, China and the United States.

Endnotes

- 1 See "Complete transcript: Thomas Donilon at Asia Society New York", March 11, 2013, accessed at: <http://asiasociety.org/new-york/complete-transcript-thomas-donilon-asia-society-new-york>.
- 2 *Remarks by President Obama to the Australian Parliament*, Parliament House, Canberra, Australia, November 17, 2011, accessed at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/11/17/remarks-president-obama-australian-parliament>; Hillary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century", *Foreign Policy*, November 2011, accessed at: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas_pacific_century.
- 3 Carl Baker and Brad Glosserman, eds, *Doing More and Expecting Less: The Future of US Alliances in the Asia-Pacific*, Issues & Insights, vol. 13, no. 1 (Honolulu: Pacific Forum CSIS, January 2013).

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