



# **BALANCING POWER**

## **Establishing the Indo-Pacific Treaty Organization as a Political and Nuclear Alliance**

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A historical black and white photograph of the Wright Flyer biplane in flight over a rural landscape. The plane is a two-winged aircraft with a propeller at the front and a tail. The background shows a field, a small building, and a line of trees under a clear sky.

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***Establishing the Indo-Pacific Treaty Organization  
as a Political and Nuclear Alliance***

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## Foreword

The Wright Brothers remind us that transformative military capability begins with bold ideas, disciplined experimentation, and the courage to rethink what is possible. The Wright Flyer series continues that tradition of intellectual innovation. From the Air Corps Tactical School's pioneering concepts on strategic airpower to the Manhattan Project's fusion of science with a warfighting strategy, airpower history demonstrates that rigorous research is not academic luxury—it is a warfighting imperative. Breakthroughs occur when professionals challenge assumptions and interrogate complex problems, pushing past traditional limiting boundaries. When we invest in deliberate inquiry, we expand the range of strategic and operational options available to commanders and national leaders.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Benjamin B. Hatch". The signature is stylized and written in a cursive-like font.

BENJAMIN B. HATCH  
Colonel, USAF  
Commandant

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## **Abstract**

The shifting balance of power in the Indo-Pacific has renewed debates over regional security and the need for a multilateral alliance to counter emerging geopolitical challenges. This paper examines the establishment of the Indo-Pacific Treaty Organization (IPTO) as a political and nuclear alliance aimed at deterring revisionist threats, particularly from China. While previous attempts to create multilateral security structures in the region were hindered by political disagreements and strategic divergences, recent shifts among key players indicate increasing alignment and renewed momentum for such an initiative.

This study traces the historical evolution of regional security frameworks and the need for a NATO-like alliance in the Indo-Pacific. It evaluates past multilateral defense initiatives, explores ways to adapt NATO's model to the Indo-Pacific, and assesses political willingness, defense commitments, and nuclear burden-sharing among its proposed core members—Japan, South Korea, Australia, and the United States. Additionally, it outlines implementation strategies and key challenges, arguing that the IPTO is essential for strengthening deterrence, ensuring regional stability, and countering growing security threats.

As the limitations of the US “hub-and-spoke” alliance system become more apparent, the creation of the IPTO marks a necessary evolution in Indo-Pacific security at a pivotal moment for the United States and its regional allies.

## **Introduction**

The 2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy of the United States emphasizes the region's critical role in shaping the future global order, describing the Indo-Pacific as pivotal to the security, prosperity, and democratic values of the United States and its allies.<sup>1</sup> The region—spanning from the west coast of India to the western shores of the United States—is home to over half the world's population and nearly two-thirds of the global economy.<sup>2</sup> It is home to seven of the largest state militaries, five US allies, and three nations under the US nuclear umbrella.<sup>3</sup> Its regional boundaries encompass multiple ongoing, high-profile conflicts with major global geopolitical implications and serves as the primary arena for great power competition between the United States and the People's Republic of China (PRC).<sup>4</sup> Given its strategic importance, the future security and prosperity of the United States, along with the integrity of the rules-based international system, depends on maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific.<sup>5</sup>

Beginning around 2013, stability in the Indo-Pacific began a relative decline. Under President Xi Jinping's leadership, the PRC adopted a more assertive regional foreign policy.<sup>6</sup> Using military and economic coercion, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) sought to intimidate its neighbors, advance unlawful maritime claims, threaten vital shipping lanes, and destabilize territories along its periphery.<sup>7</sup> These shifts in the PRC's international behavior were accompanied by a renewed emphasis on strengthening the People's Liberation Army (PLA).<sup>8</sup> In 2019, it became evident that its military buildup included the rapid expansion and modernization of its nuclear weapons capabilities, which continue to grow at an exponential rate.<sup>9</sup> Subsequently, the PLA surpassed the United States in possessing the world's largest navy and established itself as the dominant military power in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>10</sup> These military efforts have been described as “the largest and most ambitious of any country since the end of the Second World War.”<sup>11</sup>

As the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific has shifted in the PRC's favor, so too has its use of coercion to advance its national interests.<sup>12</sup> According to the PRC's national strategy, the CCP aims to completely reshape the existing international order by 2049, promoting a regional governance and political system that prioritizes its national interests over those of its neighbors.<sup>13</sup> It has demonstrated an ability to integrate diplomatic influence, economic leverage, and hybrid warfare tactics to pressure and isolate individual states, advance its strategic objectives, and evade meaningful penalties for its actions.<sup>14</sup> Given these dynamics, it is increasingly clear that no single nation or bilateral alliance in the region possesses the capability or capacity to effectively counter the PRC's growing influence. If left unchecked, these efforts will subjugate the

regional economic and security interests of the US and its Indo-Pacific allies and partners to those of Beijing.<sup>15</sup>

Adding to the complexities of this geopolitical landscape is the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), whose persistent threats and bellicose rhetoric continue to destabilize East Asia.<sup>16</sup> Following the failed February 2019 Hanoi summit between US president Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jung-un, the DPRK abandoned its long-standing goal of normalizing relations with the United States and pursuing peaceful unification with the Republic of Korea (ROK).<sup>17</sup> Despite its diplomatic and economic isolation, the DPRK has strengthened its alliance with the Russian Federation, emboldening the hermit kingdom to further harass and coerce its perceived adversaries.<sup>18</sup> Like the PRC, North Korea aims to “reshape the regional security environment in [its] favor.”<sup>19</sup> Lacking the geopolitical influence and power to achieve this directly, it continues to expand its nuclear and missile programs with the long-term objectives of asserting dominance over the Korean Peninsula, extracting policy concessions from South Korea and the United States, decoupling the ROK-US alliance, and establishing itself as a regional great power.<sup>20</sup> Recent intelligence assessments indicate that through 2030, the DPRK will increasingly wield its nuclear arsenal as a tool of coercion to advance its domestic and foreign policy goals.<sup>21</sup>

The US “hub-and-spoke” alliance model in the Indo-Pacific serves to counterbalance the destabilizing activities of these nations.<sup>22</sup> Under this framework, the United States operates as a central security hub, projecting its power through multiple strategic spokes.<sup>23</sup> The modern version of this system is built on bilateral agreements with key allies—Australia, Japan, the ROK, the Philippines, and Thailand—alongside regional partnerships with India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Singapore, Taiwan, Vietnam, and the Pacific Islands.<sup>24</sup> More recently, it has evolved to incorporate multilateral regional partnerships including the revitalized Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)—comprising Australia, India, Japan, and the United States—and the trilateral AUKUS security partnership between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.<sup>25</sup> Under the previous US administration, major emphasis was made on accelerating efforts to enhance cooperation among the spokes, fostering a more interconnected regional security network.<sup>26</sup> This included a key policy objective of improving cooperation between Japan and South Korea, two countries with a complex and historically strained relationship.<sup>27</sup>

Despite recent progress in promoting regional cooperation, the current framework remains insufficient for addressing the rapidly evolving threats in the Indo-Pacific. The model continues to struggle with limited coordination among allies, fragmented responses to shared challenges, and concerns about

the credibility of US extended deterrence, particularly in the nuclear domain.<sup>28</sup> As recently noted in a recent RAND Corporation report, different interpretations of bilateral agreements related to basing and access are likely to complicate—or even obstruct—the United States’ ability to operate effectively in potential future conflicts in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>29</sup> Absent a cohesive multilateral alliance among key regional allies, the prevailing hub-and-spoke model will continue to expose weaknesses in intraregional dynamics that could disrupt cooperation and weaken security support when it is most needed. If left unaddressed, these challenges will amplify existing vulnerabilities, threaten strategic cohesion, undermine regional stability, and increasingly jeopardize the established international system in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>30</sup>

Given the high stakes involved, the United States must reassess how it applies national power to secure a long-term position of continuing advantage. Effectively containing China’s revisionist ambitions will require Washington to augment its current approach, employing “every lever of statecraft” and leveraging allies and partners in new ways to limit the PRC’s reach beyond the first island chain.<sup>31</sup> Crucially, this effort comes at a time when US allies are increasingly concerned about the future of the existing regional architecture.<sup>32</sup> To that end, this analysis proposes the establishment of the Indo-Pacific Treaty Organization (IPTO)—a multilateral alliance designed to promote political unity, military coordination, and nuclear burden-sharing. By institutionalizing these pillars, the IPTO would serve as a strategic counterweight to growing security threats posed by the PRC and DPRK, strengthen regional stability, and reinforce the collective security interests of the United States and its allies throughout the Indo-Pacific.

This study explores the creation of the IPTO in five parts. Its first section offers a comprehensive literature review, beginning with an analysis of the origins and historical evolution of discussions surrounding the need for a NATO-like security framework in the region. It then explores contemporary debates on the subject, highlighting the recent resurgence of interest and the geopolitical factors driving renewed discussions on collective security. Subsequently, it situates these discussions within the context of current threats posed by the PRC and DPRK across diplomatic, military, informational, and economic domains. The section concludes by assessing the political challenges inherent in the existing hub-and-spoke model, arguing that effectively addressing these security threats requires a new framework, one that expands opportunities to leverage the instruments of national power and establishes a more stable and enduring security architecture in the Indo-Pacific.

The second section examines lessons from historical alliances, beginning with an analysis of the enduring success of NATO. It explores NATO’s struc-

ture and strategies—including its political components, integrated command structure, and nuclear burden-sharing—that enabled it to deter the Soviet Union, promote democratic values, uphold regional stability, and evolve to meet new challenges and threats. Additionally, it assesses the shortcomings of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). It identifies their failures in achieving political unity, defining clear objectives, incorporating nuclear strategies into their frameworks, and the geopolitical contexts that led to their dissolution.

Section three draws lessons from NATO, SEATO, and CENTO to envision how a similar multilateral framework might be established in the Indo-Pacific. It begins by examining the strategic objectives and potential entry points for forming such an alliance, identifying its core purposes and the countries best suited to participate. The analysis then turns to the prospective contributions of key potential members—namely the United States, Japan, Australia, and South Korea—assessing whether their regional perceptions and partnerships are sufficiently aligned to support the alliance’s creation. Building on this foundation, the section then explores contemporary shifts in regional security dynamics, highlighting recent political trends that enhance the feasibility of forming the IPTO. Next, it outlines the essential elements required for a modern multilateral security alliance in the region and considers the capacity of each prospective member to meet these criteria. The section concludes with a proposed draft of the Indo-Pacific Treaty, outlining the foundational charter from which IPTO would emerge, aiming to embed collective defense and integrated security into the region.

Section four conceptualizes the IPTO alliance, outlining its foundational structures—modeled after NATO but adapted to the Indo-Pacific’s distinct political and geographic landscape. It then transitions to an analysis of potential locations for the alliance’s political and military headquarters, drawing on NATO’s formative experiences to inform decisions about where to establish the alliance’s strategic center of gravity. The section examines the IPTO’s nuclear forces, with particular emphasis on integrating theater nuclear capabilities and sustaining a more robust long-range bomber presence in the region. It also outlines the proposed basing and force layout for the alliance, illustrating how these assets would be distributed across the region to support deterrence and operational readiness. The section concludes by exploring potential regional partnerships and integration pathways aimed at strengthening collective security and reinforcing the rules-based international system.

The final section outlines an implementation strategy for establishing the IPTO, centered on four potential founding models for its charter: (1) Japan-United States-South Korea, (2) Japan-United States-Australia,

(3) United States-South Korea-Australia, and (4) Japan-United States-South Korea-Australia. Each model is evaluated against a standardized set of criteria to identify its respective strengths and weaknesses. These assessments are then compared with historical alliance frameworks such as NATO, SEATO, and CENTO, offering valuable context for understanding each model's viability in launching a multilateral nuclear alliance. The section also addresses the financial requirements for establishing the IPTO and concludes with an analysis of the legal and policy barriers that prospective members may encounter in the process of joining.

The establishment of the IPTO as a nuclear alliance marks a necessary evolution in the Indo-Pacific security framework. While the hub-and-spoke model effectively served its purpose for decades, it is now insufficient to address the evolving threats posed by the PRC and DPRK. Japan, South Korea, and Australia have evolved significantly since the beginning of the Cold War, when this model was first conceived and implemented. Today, they are vibrant democracies with strong economies, advancing military capabilities, and distinct national identities. These developments make them well-suited for a multilateral collective security structure similar to NATO in Europe. While transitioning from bilateral to multilateral security cooperation will be challenging, it is essential to counter rising regional instability. Contrary to President Xi Jinping's claim that time and momentum favor China, the US and its Indo-Pacific allies must act decisively to establish a multilateral nuclear alliance and defend their shared interests against an aspiring regional hegemon.<sup>33</sup> With the PRC's goal of "national rejuvenation" by 2049 fast approaching, strengthening regional deterrence has never been more urgent.<sup>34</sup>

## Literature Review

### **Origins and Historical Evolution**

Discussions on establishing a multilateral security structure in the Indo-Pacific date back to the spring of 1949, during the early Cold War years.<sup>35</sup> Following NATO's creation in April of that year, leaders from the Philippines, Taiwan, and South Korea began advocating for a "Pacific Pact" modeled after the Atlantic Pact.<sup>36</sup> Diplomatic efforts originating in the Philippines spurred a series of summits, dialogues, and meetings aimed at securing US support for a Pacific Alliance Treaty Organization (PATO).<sup>37</sup> However, the initiative failed to gain traction within the Truman administration. Congressional backing was similarly limited, with a legislative proposal introduced in August 1949 failing to attract broad sup-

port.<sup>38</sup> At the time, Washington's strategic focus remained concentrated on rebuilding Western Europe through the Marshall Plan and containing Soviet influence, leaving Asia on the periphery of US foreign policy priorities.<sup>39</sup>

By 1951, Washington's perspective on a multilateral security organization in the Pacific had evolved. The Korean War prompted renewed interest in a Pacific Ocean Pact, envisioned to include the US, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Indonesia—maritime nations regarded as sharing “distinctive community of interest.”<sup>40</sup> The pact's primary objective was to secure the island chain leading to Japan while facilitating Japan's rearmament in a manner that reassured regional neighbors, mirroring West Germany's reintegration into Europe.<sup>41</sup> However, the pact ultimately failed to materialize. Internal disagreements, particularly over Japan's inclusion, led to the adoption of an alternative security framework—the hub-and-spoke model—as the institutional design for Asia.<sup>42</sup> Accordingly, the US pursued a series of bilateral defense treaties, including agreements with Japan and the Philippines, as well as a tripartite pact with Australia and New Zealand, known as the ANZUS alliance.<sup>43</sup> By 1953, this network expanded to include a formal alliance with the ROK.<sup>44</sup> Notably, these agreements eventually brought Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and South Korea under the US nuclear umbrella.<sup>45</sup>

In 1954, the Eisenhower administration intensified its efforts to reinforce the US and allied military posture in Asia. Confronted with the mounting threat from Communist China, a comprehensive review of US policy reaffirmed the “long-range goal” of establishing a regional security pact.<sup>46</sup> In September, the United States, France, Britain, New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Pakistan formed the SEATO to contain the spread of communism in the region.<sup>47</sup> However, SEATO lacked the binding defense commitments and institutional depth of NATO, and for the Eisenhower administration, it remained largely symbolic.<sup>48</sup> That December, the administration approved policy supporting the creation of a Western Pacific collective defense arrangement that would include the Philippines, Japan, the Republic of China, and the ROK, with the eventual goal of linking this arrangement to SEATO and ANZUS.<sup>49</sup> Yet once again, internal divisions obstructed progress. The failure of Japan and the ROK to normalize relations—essential for advancing the security arrangement—ultimately prevented the security pact from taking shape.<sup>50</sup>

Beyond these earlier efforts, calls for a multilateral security structure in the Indo-Pacific periodically emerged in national discourse but struggled to gain political traction. In early 1955, US and South Korean leaders explored the idea of a tripartite treaty with Japan.<sup>51</sup> In 1959, interest in a comprehensive security pact again surfaced; however, disagreements among Asia-Pacific and

European allies once again proved to be an obstacle to prevent its formation.<sup>52</sup> In the late 1960s and early 1970s, some regional actors proposed transforming the Vietnam War allies' conference and the Asian-Pacific Council into a "PATO-like" security alliance.<sup>53</sup> In 1977, SEATO was disbanded due to internal friction among its members, particularly over issues related to the Vietnam War.<sup>54</sup> Influenced by SEATO's collapse, a strong consensus took shape in the 1980s among both government and academic circles that multilateral security cooperation in the Asia-Pacific was either undesirable or unfeasible.<sup>55</sup> Yet in the mid-1990s, perspectives had shifted significantly, with growing support for new multilateral initiatives and efforts to put them into practice.<sup>56</sup> This momentum carried into the 2000s and has continued since, with an expanding body of scholarship exploring regional security frameworks and debating the feasibility of a new multilateral security structure for the Indo-Pacific.<sup>57</sup>

### **Contemporary Debate**

In recent years, discussions on multilateral security arrangements in the Indo-Pacific have occasionally surfaced within the realm of state diplomacy. As part of the Obama administration's strategic pivot to Asia, reports from 2012 suggest that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton explored the creation of a "Pacific-Atlantic Treaty Organization" (PATO).<sup>58</sup> Although this proposal never materialized, it signaled a renewed US commitment to the region and to strengthening multilateral security cooperation. This emphasis was reinforced under the first Trump administration and carried into the Biden era through initiatives such as the 2017 revival of the Quad and the 2021 signing of the AUKUS partnership.<sup>59</sup> While neither arrangement constitutes a formal alliance, both represent significant steps toward enhancing multilateral security cooperation in response to China's coercive actions and activities.<sup>60</sup>

Later in the Biden administration, efforts to modernize the traditional hub-and-spoke model in the Indo-Pacific focused on fostering a more integrated and interconnected network of partnerships.<sup>61</sup> A key component of this initiative was strengthening trilateral cooperation among regional allies, exemplified by a historic summit in August 2023 between the leaders from the United States, Japan, and the ROK.<sup>62</sup> This milestone signaled a shift toward deeper trilateral engagement, enhancing high-level consultation and collaboration across critical areas including security.<sup>63</sup> In 2024, these efforts were further reinforced with the establishment of a Trilateral Secretariat to coordinate and implement a shared agenda among these three nations.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, the administration also explored ways to institutionalize the grouping of

South Korea, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand—the four Indo-Pacific partners of NATO—referred to as the Indo-Pacific 4 (IP4).<sup>65</sup>

By late 2024, discussions on a multilateral security framework for the Indo-Pacific intensified following an article coordinated with Japan's soon-to-be Prime Minister, Shigeru Ishiba. In the commentary, Ishiba called for the establishment of an “Asian NATO” to create a more structured regional security arrangement.<sup>66</sup> His proposal fueled momentum for enhanced security cooperation, reigniting debates on the future of multilateral defense coordination in the region. However, US officials remained cautious, with Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Kritenbrink emphasizing that it was “too early” to discuss formal collective security institutions.<sup>67</sup> Instead, he reaffirmed the Biden administration's approach of strengthening existing alliances and partnerships through a flexible “lattice-work” of formal and informal relationships, suggesting that future developments would evolve organically.<sup>68</sup>

In February and April 2025, calls for an Asian counterpart to NATO gained further traction when former South Korean lawmaker Chung Mong-joon, a seven-term conservative politician and honorary chairman of the Seoul-based Asian Institute for Policy Studies, advocated for the creation of an IPTO.<sup>69</sup> Citing growing security challenges from North Korea's nuclear missile threats and the military expansionism of Russia and China, Chung emphasized the need for stronger regional security cooperation.<sup>70</sup> He proposed that the US and its treaty allies—such as South Korea, Japan, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand—enhance minilateral security coordination while also engaging key regional partners like New Zealand, India, and Indonesia.<sup>71</sup> Stressing that such an initiative was not aimed at PRC containment or regime change, Chung framed the proposal as a means to safeguard the sovereignty of Indo-Pacific nations and ensure they could live free from coercion.<sup>72</sup>

Such calls notwithstanding, early actions taken during the second Trump administration suggest that the prospects for a multilateral security arrangement in the Indo-Pacific remain limited in the near term. The administration's broad skepticism on multilateral alliances—particularly its stance toward NATO—suggests a general reluctance to pursue a formalized collective security framework for the region.<sup>73</sup> Given President Trump's past criticisms of the transatlantic alliance as an outdated and burdensome alliance for the United States, similar hesitation may extend to the establishment of an Indo-Pacific equivalent.<sup>74</sup> Instead, the administration appears more inclined toward bilateral or loosely coordinated security partnerships rather than binding multilateral commitments.<sup>75</sup> As such, efforts to establish a NATO-style alliance in the Indo-Pacific are likely to encounter substantial political and strategic headwinds for the time being.

## Threats in the Indo-Pacific Region

The need for a NATO-style alliance in the Indo-Pacific arises from the PRC's increasingly assertive foreign policy, which disregards international laws and norms across multiple domains. As outlined in the 2022 US *National Security Strategy* (NSS), the PRC is “the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it.”<sup>76</sup> Beijing's ambitions center on expanding its sphere of influence in the Indo-Pacific and positioning itself as the world's leading power.<sup>77</sup> If realized, these objectives threaten the stability and prosperity that have underpinned the post-World War II international system.<sup>78</sup> For US allies in the region, such an outcome would be destabilizing, undermining their national sovereignty and leaving them vulnerable to coercion and aggression.<sup>79</sup>

Diplomatically, the PRC continues to align with other authoritarian powers, such as Russia, to shape international institutions in ways that serve their shared interests.<sup>80</sup> Beijing seeks to promote its governance model on the global stage and push for a multipolar system that weakens existing liberal-democratic institutions in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>81</sup> Compounding these challenges, North Korea's deepening ties with Russia have further complicated the regional security landscape, adding new layers of uncertainty.<sup>82</sup> These developments have generated widespread concern, prompting many countries in the Indo-Pacific to push back against Chinese influence. Beijing's persistent border disputes with India, sweeping claims in the South China Sea, and coercive actions toward Taiwan have driven many regional actors to align more closely with the United States and like-minded nations to counter China's attempts to reshape international norms.<sup>83</sup>

In the information domain, the PRC employs a broad range of deceptive and coercive tactics to manipulate the global information environment.<sup>84</sup> It spends billions of dollars annually on propaganda, censorship, and disinformation campaigns designed to influence foreign media narratives and suppress dissenting views.<sup>85</sup> Within international organizations and bilateral partnerships, China has effectively created confusion and, in some cases, division.<sup>86</sup> More significantly, it has established an incentive structure that pressures regional actors to accept its preferred narratives while discouraging criticism of its actions.<sup>87</sup> If not addressed, these efforts could reshape the global information landscape, creating biases and information gaps that ultimately lead nations to prioritize Beijing's interests over their own economic and security concerns.<sup>88</sup>

Militarily, the PLA is rapidly expanding its capabilities to project power beyond the first island chain, with a stated goal to “fight and win wars” against

a “strong enemy (强敌)” — a likely reference to the United States.<sup>89</sup> More concerning still, the PLA is fast approaching conventional military advantage over US forces in the Indo-Pacific, particularly when factoring in China’s significant advantages in defense industrial capacity, which are positioning it to dominate its near seas and surrounding maritime domains.<sup>90</sup> In the nuclear realm, the Department of Defense (DOD) assesses that China is actively modernizing, diversifying, and expanding its nuclear forces, with projections indicating it could field 1,000 operational warheads by 2030.<sup>91</sup> Meanwhile, North Korea is also expanding its nuclear arsenal, diversifying its delivery platforms, and increasing its stockpile of fissile material, with estimates suggesting it could possess between 130 and 166 nuclear weapons by the same year.<sup>92</sup> For US allies in the region, the PLA’s growing military capabilities, persistent threats from North Korea, and the relative erosion of US military dominance have raised concerns about Washington’s security commitments and the reliability of its extended deterrence guarantees.<sup>93</sup>

Economically, the PRC remains the primary trade partner for many US allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific, giving Beijing significant leverage over regional economies.<sup>94</sup> Under President Xi Jinping, China has consistently employed economic statecraft to advance its foreign policy, coercing other nations into alignment with its strategic goals.<sup>95</sup> By capitalizing on its extensive market access, investment capabilities, and critical role in regional supply chains, Beijing has cultivated asymmetric dependencies that limit the ability of smaller nations to resist economic pressures.<sup>96</sup> This dynamic is exemplified by China’s Belt and Road Initiative, which employs infrastructure investments and targeted incentives to deepen economic dependencies.<sup>97</sup> These vulnerabilities constrain the foreign policy options of nations reliant on China, amplifying Beijing’s ability to wield economic influence for geopolitical advantage.<sup>98</sup>

### **Limitations of the Hub-and-Spoke Model**

Thus far, the existing hub-and-spoke model has proven slow to adapt to the rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape in the Indo-Pacific, particularly in the diplomatic domain. Unlike NATO, which operates under a unified framework with clear collective defense commitments, the current model relies on a network of bilateral agreements that often differ in scope and strategic interests.<sup>99</sup> This lack of integration complicates efforts to coordinate responses to shared security challenges. Furthermore, intraregional disputes among US allies—particularly between South Korea and Japan—exacerbate diplomatic fragmentation, making it difficult to present a cohesive front.<sup>100</sup> Without a formal multilateral structure to align decision-making and enhance cooperation, the

existing framework remains vulnerable to geopolitical frictions that weaken its ability to respond effectively in times of crisis.

In the information domain, this model impedes multilateral coordination among US allies, hindering effective responses to complex global information challenges. The current structure, dependent on outdated bilateral information-sharing mechanisms, lacks the agility and resilience required to navigate today's rapidly evolving security and economic environment.<sup>101</sup> Although the US and its Indo-Pacific allies acknowledge the importance of this issue, they have yet to develop an integrated framework reflecting the full scope of their expanding regional partnerships. Current efforts still position the United States centrally in information sharing, offering limited incentives for direct ally-to-ally communication.<sup>102</sup> Without a more cohesive information strategy, persistent gaps in coordination, messaging, and cybersecurity leave the US and its allies vulnerable to miscommunication, misinformation, and data breaches, weakening their collective ability to counter regional threats and maintain strategic cohesion.

Militarily, the hub-and-spoke model presents several operational challenges that are frequently overlooked or inadequately addressed in US military planning.<sup>103</sup> The model's reliance on separate bilateral agreements leads to varied interpretations regarding basing rights, access, and host-country consent, creating mismatched expectations about permissible capabilities and force deployments.<sup>104</sup> Additionally, the absence of a multilateral planning framework for military exercises in the region generates inefficiencies, strains resources, and exposes gaps in personnel and equipment.<sup>105</sup> Similarly, limited coordination among US Indo-Pacific allies regarding force posture and defense procurement results in redundant efforts, hindering a cohesive and optimized regional security strategy.<sup>106</sup> Without a robust multilateral command structure, the US and its regional allies face significant obstacles in synchronizing their responses to emerging threats and reacting rapidly during crises, complicating combined planning and undermining force interoperability.

While the economic dimension of US engagement in the Indo-Pacific is not directly influenced by the existing hub-and-spoke model, it nonetheless exposes gaps in regional economic resilience. Current initiatives, such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF), have yet to achieve the deeper coordination and collective advocacy necessary to effectively address economic vulnerabilities.<sup>107</sup> Additionally, the absence of a dedicated multilateral institution specifically focused on coordinating defense-industrial strategies and procurement across the region restricts opportunities for optimized cooperation. Without a coordinated multilateral approach, allies face difficulties in collectively addressing supply chain disruptions, enhancing re-

silience, implementing effective early-warning mechanisms, and strategically stockpiling critical resources.<sup>108</sup> Consequently, the existing fragmented economic landscape undermines the capacity of the US and its allies to effectively respond to economic vulnerabilities and emerging security threats.

With strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific intensifying, the United States must reassess how it projects power and advances its national interests. The creation of an IPTO presents a compelling solution to existing alliance shortfalls by promoting multilateral coordination and formalizing shared responsibilities, particularly in the nuclear domain. Through burden-sharing and enhanced collective decision-making, the IPTO would overcome the structural limitations of the current hub-and-spoke model, enabling a more cohesive and credible response to the PRC's regional ambitions while reinforcing confidence in US extended deterrence. NATO's long-standing success in Europe offers a valuable blueprint: over its 76-year history, it halted the spread of communism, supported democratic governance, and maintained peace and stability across its continent.<sup>109</sup> Most notably, NATO is credited with preventing major interstate conflict in Europe—underscoring the strategic efficacy of multilateral security frameworks.<sup>110</sup> A similar approach in the Indo-Pacific would strengthen deterrence, reinforce regional stability, and counter Beijing's efforts to reshape the international system to its advantage.

## **Lessons from Historical Alliances**

### **NATO's Enduring Success**

NATO was established in 1949 with 12 original members and has since expanded to 32 member states.<sup>111</sup> Its lasting significance and longevity arise from fundamental principles that have remained consistently relevant over time. Chief among these is the doctrine of collective defense, enshrined in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. This principle—summarized as “an attack against one is an attack against all”—has solidified as a lasting security commitment among member states while serving as a powerful deterrent against aggression.<sup>112</sup> Reaffirmed in the 2022 Strategic Concept, collective defense remains the alliance's “key purpose and greatest responsibility,” sustaining its credibility as a nuclear alliance amid evolving global threats.<sup>113</sup>

Equally important, though often less emphasized, is NATO's concept of resilience.<sup>114</sup> Embedded in Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty, resilience provides the foundation for credible deterrence and defense by ensuring that allies can protect their societies, populations, and shared values.<sup>115</sup> Article 3

provides NATO with the means to fulfill its core tasks by making resilience “both a national responsibility and a collective commitment.”<sup>116</sup> To meet this standard, each ally must be sufficiently prepared and adaptable to confront the full spectrum of crises the alliance may face.<sup>117</sup> Defense begins at home, and only through a strong national defense can nations build the capacity needed to support the collective defense of others.<sup>118</sup>

Another critical pillar in NATO’s longevity has been its capacity to adapt to changing geopolitical realities, a flexibility embedded in its founding treaty. Originally focused on deterring Soviet expansion and stabilizing postwar Europe, the alliance has evolved over decades to meet emerging security challenges.<sup>119</sup> In the 1950s, NATO functioned purely as a defensive organization, while in the 1960s, it became a political instrument for détente.<sup>120</sup> Following the Cold War, it played a crucial role in stabilizing Eastern Europe and Central Asia by integrating new partners and allies.<sup>121</sup> In the twenty-first century, NATO expanded its mission beyond traditional defense, addressing threats such as terrorism, ethnic conflict, weapons of mass destruction proliferation, cyber warfare, and hybrid warfare.<sup>122</sup> This adaptability was evident in its post-9/11 strategic shift, which extended operations beyond Europe, and remains critical today as NATO counters cyberattacks, hybrid threats, and strategic competition from Russia and China.<sup>123</sup>

NATO’s strength is further reinforced by its integrated military command structure and sustained financial and military commitments. Established in 1951, its command system significantly enhances coordination among member states, ensuring the seamless execution of military exercises, joint operations, and rapid crisis response.<sup>124</sup> Complementing this framework is NATO’s principle of common funding, enabling member states to collectively finance programs and capabilities essential for its operational readiness.<sup>125</sup> In recent years, NATO’s financial commitments have expanded to include the defense investment pledge, which requires member states to allocate at least 2 percent of their gross domestic product (GDP) to defense and 20 percent of annual defense expenditures to major new equipment—a commitment reaffirmed at recent summits to enhance burden-sharing and collective deterrence.<sup>126</sup>

Finally, underpinning NATO’s success is its political cohesion, a dynamic reinforced by its nuclear burden-sharing arrangements. This cohesion is primarily upheld through consensus-based decision-making within the North Atlantic Council, NATO’s principal governing body, which ensures unified responses to global security challenges.<sup>127</sup> Supporting this decision-making structure is an extensive network of committees, including the Military Committee and Nuclear Planning Group, which facilitate coordinated action and strategic alignment across the alliance.<sup>128</sup> Notably, NATO’s nuclear

burden-sharing arrangements play a pivotal role in strengthening this cohesion.<sup>129</sup> Beyond their direct military value, these arrangements hold profound symbolic importance, visibly demonstrating the US commitment to transatlantic security and reinforcing the critical linkage between NATO's deployed posture and its strategic nuclear forces.<sup>130</sup> Together, these elements not only bolster the alliance's deterrence credibility but also sustain transatlantic unity in an increasingly complex and challenging security landscape.

### **From Formation to Disbandment: The Story of SEATO**

SEATO was founded in 1954 by the United States, France, Great Britain, New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Pakistan to counter the spread of communism and defend against subversion in Southeast Asia.<sup>131</sup> However, from its inception, the alliance faced considerable political challenges. With only three Asian members, SEATO was often seen as a Western-dominated initiative with colonialist undertones.<sup>132</sup> Internally, diplomatic fragmentation weakened its association, as differing priorities among its members led to instability. While the US viewed communism as an existential threat that required military intervention, other member states sought political leverage and economic benefits over security cooperation, creating tensions that hindered the organization's effectiveness.<sup>133</sup> These divisions deepened during the Vietnam War as the US utilized SEATO's charter to justify its intervention in the conflict, straining relations with members who were either reluctant to support the war or outright opposed it.<sup>134</sup>

SEATO's charter was also undermined by weak institutional structures and the lack of a unified military command.<sup>135</sup> Unlike NATO, the alliance had no automatic collective response mechanism to threats, relying instead on loosely defined consultations among members.<sup>136</sup> Article IV of the treaty stated that in the event of aggression, each member would consider an attack as endangering "its own peace and safety" but would only act in accordance with its constitutional processes, making coordinated military action uncertain.<sup>137</sup> Likewise, the alliance lacked standing forces, independent intelligence capabilities, and force-deployment mechanisms, further limiting its ability to respond collectively.<sup>138</sup> Although SEATO conducted annual joint military exercises, these efforts lacked a cohesive strategy, as each member committed forces independently without a unified operational plan.<sup>139</sup> Consequently, SEATO functioned as a loose coalition of relatively weak regional forces, heavily reliant on British and US military power to sustain its credibility.<sup>140</sup>

Regarding SEATO's access to nuclear forces, the alliance remained entirely dependent on US capabilities rather than a coordinated strategy among its

members, creating uncertainties and weakening internal confidence.<sup>141</sup> The alliance lacked an integrated approach, with its nuclear doctrine vaguely centered on retaliatory scenarios against China or North Vietnam but lacking concrete collaborative planning.<sup>142</sup> Moreover, SEATO members largely believed that Communist adversaries would prioritize insurgency and guerrilla warfare over direct nuclear confrontation, further diminishing the perceived necessity of a nuclear deterrent within the alliance.<sup>143</sup> The absence of transparent coordination on nuclear strategy and shared capabilities among member states weakened SEATO's credibility, rendering its nuclear umbrella more of a symbolic reassurance than a practical collective defense mechanism.<sup>144</sup>

Ultimately, SEATO's inability to adapt to shifting geopolitical realities led to its downfall. Unlike NATO, which adjusted to new strategic challenges, SEATO remained rigid, failing to redefine its objectives beyond anticommunist containment.<sup>145</sup> The alliance proved ineffective in addressing the rise of nationalist movements, regional conflicts, and changing superpower dynamics, particularly as US-Soviet détente and China's evolving foreign policy reshaped global politics in the 1970s.<sup>146</sup> As the alliance's relevance declined, member states began to distance themselves and question its utility. In 1973, Pakistan formally withdrew after failing to secure SEATO's support during its conflict with India.<sup>147</sup> Lacking a clear and evolving mission, SEATO's remaining members took action to disband the alliance, leading to its formal dissolution in 1977.<sup>148</sup>

### **The CENTO Alliance: Ambitions, Setbacks, and Collapse**

CENTO was formed in 1959 as a military alliance to counter Soviet influence in the Middle East and South Asia, evolving from the Baghdad Pact of 1955.<sup>149</sup> Its core members included Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and the United Kingdom, with the United States participating as an observer and active committee associate.<sup>150</sup> Much like SEATO, CENTO faced persistent internal challenges that undermined its effectiveness. Competing national priorities and political divisions created alliance instability, with some members prioritizing regional conflicts over broader strategic cooperation, while others remained more committed to external alliances, relegating CENTO as a secondary concern.<sup>151</sup> Additionally, domestic political volatility and fears of internal subversion among its regional members further hindered unified action toward the alliance's core objectives.<sup>152</sup> As a result, CENTO struggled to fulfill its intended purpose and realize its full potential as a unified regional defense pact.<sup>153</sup>

Structurally, CENTO was also challenged by weak institutions that prevented it from functioning as a cohesive military alliance. Like SEATO, it lacked a binding collective security agreement, meaning members were un-

der no obligation to provide military assistance during times of crisis.<sup>154</sup> Although the organization engaged in military planning, coordination, and training, it lacked a permanent military command structure and suffered from limited intelligence sharing, both of which undermined its operational cohesion.<sup>155</sup> CENTO also did not maintain assigned forces from its regional members, instead relying on voluntary contributions.<sup>156</sup> In practice, this led to a significant imbalance in military support, with the United Kingdom bearing the primary defense burden while other members contributed minimally.<sup>157</sup> With its military relevance downgraded, CENTO gradually shifted its focus to economic and technical cooperation, signaling its diminished role as a regional security organization.<sup>158</sup>

As an alliance, CENTO failed to establish an integrated nuclear strategy. The United Kingdom was the only member to contribute nuclear-capable forces, rotationally stationing Royal Air Force nuclear-armed bombers to Cyprus in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>159</sup> Notably, these deployments were made independent of the alliance, rather than as part of a cohesive military strategy.<sup>160</sup> CENTO never established a joint nuclear doctrine or coordinated planning with NATO, even though their strategic interests overlapped.<sup>161</sup> The lack of coordination meant that nuclear targeting remained primarily a UK and US responsibility, with other CENTO members excluded from meaningful participation in strategic decision-making.<sup>162</sup> By the early 1970s, British economic constraints and defense cuts led to discussions on scaling back nuclear forces stationed in Cyprus, culminating in the withdrawal of its bombers in 1975.<sup>163</sup> Without a dedicated nuclear deterrent, CENTO's strategic posture further weakened, limiting its ability to serve as a credible counterweight to Soviet influence in its later years.<sup>164</sup>

By the late 1970s, CENTO's decline became inevitable. The easing of Cold War tensions through *détente* had reduced the perceived Soviet threat, undermining the alliance's cohesion and strategic relevance.<sup>165</sup> In 1979, Iran withdrew from CENTO following the rise of a new revolutionary government, removing one of the alliance's key regional players.<sup>166</sup> Pakistan quickly followed, concluding that CENTO no longer served its security interests.<sup>167</sup> Without Iran and Pakistan, the remaining members—Turkey and the United Kingdom—had little reason to maintain the alliance, leading to CENTO's formal dissolution in March 1979.<sup>168</sup> Its fundamental weaknesses—political fragmentation, the absence of a unified military command, and a lack of meaningful strategic commitments—ensured its failure. Ultimately, it remained a Cold War experiment in regional security that never evolved into a functional alliance.

During the Cold War, regional security alliances were utilized to promote political integration, deter aggression, and limit the spread of communism.<sup>169</sup> Among these, NATO stands out due to its strong political cohesion, integrated military command structure, clear collective defense commitments, adaptability to geopolitical changes, and sustained financial and military resources. Moreover, its nuclear-sharing arrangements significantly contributed to mutual trust and deepened alliance cohesion, setting NATO apart from other Cold War alliances. In contrast, SEATO and CENTO disbanded due to institutional weaknesses, vague security guarantees, and conflicting interests among member states, resulting in their diminished historical relevance. Recognizing both the strengths of NATO and the shortcomings of SEATO and CENTO provides essential lessons for contemporary policymakers aiming to create a resilient, strategically adaptable, financially sound, and politically sustainable Indo-Pacific security framework.

## **From Past Lessons to Future Strategies in the Indo-Pacific**

### **Aims and Entry Points**

Lessons from NATO's successes and the failures of SEATO and CENTO provide a shared framework for identifying the core elements necessary to launch the IPTO. Each of these historical alliances was established with a clear purpose and defined objectives. For an Indo-Pacific alliance, it is therefore essential to first understand why its charter is necessary. Building on the "Threats in the Indo-Pacific Region" analysis presented in the literature review of this study, three primary objectives emerge: (1) constraining the PRC's revisionist ambitions, (2) deterring PRC and DPRK coercive behavior toward neighboring states, and (3) fostering deeper political and military integration among the Indo-Pacific's democratic nations. These overarching goals form the critical foundation for all further discussions regarding the alliance's potential membership, structure, operational framework, and strategic direction.

Considering potential membership, forty-one nations—including the United States—form the pool of prospective members for inclusion in the IPTO.<sup>170</sup> Among them, the United States maintains active relationships with fourteen countries.<sup>171</sup> These are grouped into three categories: US regional partners, US allies without extended nuclear deterrence guarantees, and US allies with such guarantees.<sup>172</sup> The first group (India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Singapore, Taiwan, Vietnam, and the Pacific Islands) presents a range of divergent political, diplomatic, economic, and military

policies and capabilities. These differences currently complicate their immediate inclusion in the IPTO. In the second group (the Philippines and Thailand), these challenges are less significant but still present. The Philippines, in particular, has moved closer to the United States in diplomatic and security terms.<sup>173</sup> However, cultural sensitivities and political factors—including the lack of an extended nuclear deterrence guarantee from Washington—suggest it may be better suited as a future member of the IPTO, rather than a founding one.<sup>174</sup> The final group (Australia, Japan, and South Korea) presents the fewest obstacles to entry and the strongest set of candidates for a multilateral Indo-Pacific alliance. All three nations are closely aligned with US security and foreign policy objectives and fall under the US nuclear umbrella, making their inclusion into a nuclear-aligned IPTO the most politically and strategically viable option.<sup>175</sup>

### **The Core Four**

The United States is an indispensable partner in the formation of the IPTO. As a global economic and military power, it exercises unmatched influence across diplomatic, informational, military, and economic domains.<sup>176</sup> It is also the only prospective member formally recognized as a nuclear weapon state (NWS), offering strategic capabilities that none of the other potential members currently possess.<sup>177</sup> Notably, the United States is unique in maintaining formal defense and security treaties with each of its other prospective members. These agreements include the 1951 Security Treaty Between the United States, Australia, and New Zealand (ANZUS); the 1953 Mutual Defense Treaty with the Republic of Korea; and the 1960 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security with Japan.<sup>178</sup> Given its position, the United States is well-placed to craft agreements with allied partners interested in hosting US nuclear assets in the Indo-Pacific, laying the groundwork for the IPTO to evolve into a true nuclear alliance.

Japan boasts the third largest economy in the Indo-Pacific—behind the US and China—and ranks fifth in conventional military strength within the region.<sup>179</sup> It serves as the United States' most strategically important regional ally, maintaining a record 120 active military bases within its territory and hosting the largest deployed US military presence in the world.<sup>180</sup> This positions Japan as a critical logistical hub and forward staging area for US power projection across the Indo-Pacific.<sup>181</sup> Like the United States, Japan views the PRC as the region's principal security challenge and a key threat to regional peace and stability while also identifying the DPRK's military activities as a direct threat to its national security.<sup>182</sup> In response to these challenges, Japan has taken an

active role in fostering regional cooperation across the Indo-Pacific. Alongside its alliance with the United States, Japan has cultivated a robust and growing bilateral relationship with Australia, rooted in shared economic interests and converging strategic priorities. Building on the 1976 Basic Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation Between Australia and Japan, the two nations deepened their defense ties in 2022 with the Agreement Between Japan and Australia Concerning the Facilitation of Reciprocal Access and Cooperation Between the Self-Defense Forces of Japan and the Australian Defence Force—Japan’s first defense treaty with a partner other than the United States since 1960 and its first reciprocal agreement governing the status of foreign forces on Japanese territory.<sup>183</sup> Japan’s relationship with South Korea, meanwhile, remains anchored in the 1965 Treaty on Basic Relations Between Japan and the Republic of Korea.<sup>184</sup> More recently, the convergence of rising regional security threats has helped foster a growing rapprochement between the two nations, particularly in the area of security cooperation.

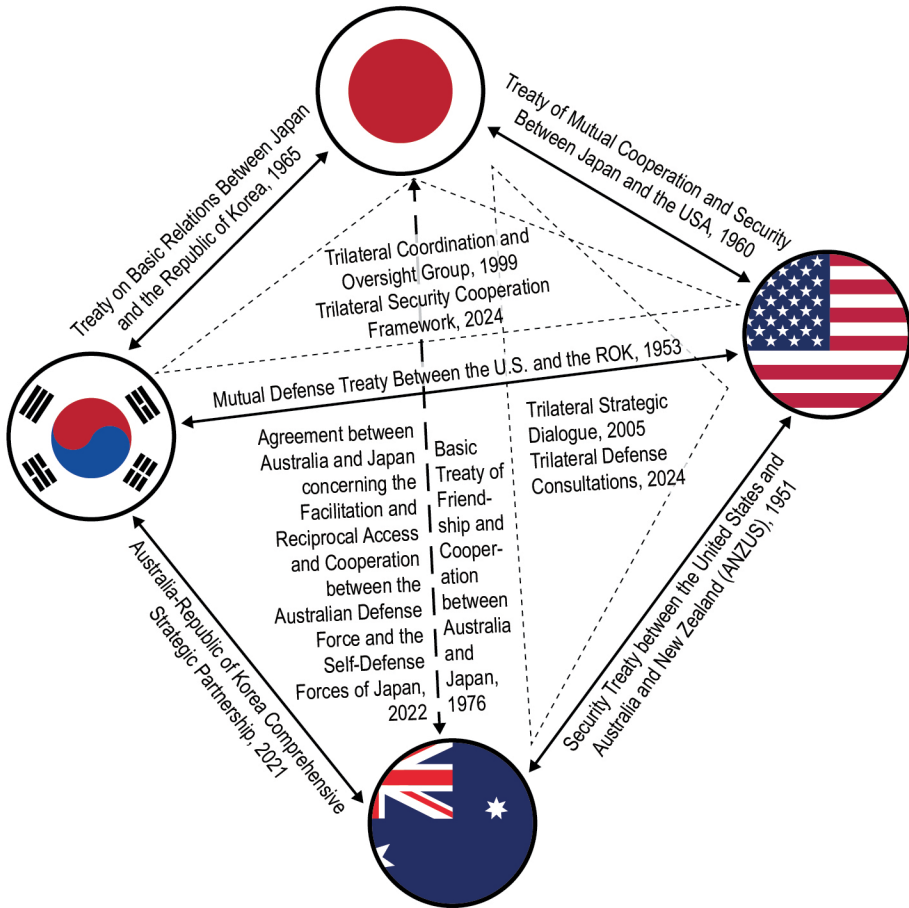
Australia is the fifth largest economy in the Indo-Pacific and ranks seventh in conventional military strength.<sup>185</sup> Its economy is highly developed, diversified, and integrated within regional and global markets.<sup>186</sup> Australia possesses substantial rare earth resources, including the world’s largest uranium reserves, ranking fourth in global rare earth production in 2024.<sup>187</sup> As a key trade and investment partner for the United States, Australia has emerged as a pivotal player in defense and industrial cooperation.<sup>188</sup> Joint investments aimed at enhancing long-range strike capabilities for both Australian and US Air Forces, along with collaboration on nuclear submarine development through the AUKUS partnership, have reinforced Australia’s position as a vital ally and strategic partner in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>189</sup> Like the United States and Japan, Australia views the People’s Republic of China’s actions in the Indo-Pacific as a direct threat to its national security and to regional stability.<sup>190</sup> At the same time, it recognizes the destabilizing behaviors of the DPRK, which undermine Indo-Pacific security and prosperity, and emphasizes its role as an active shaper of the Indo-Pacific strategic environment.<sup>191</sup> Here too, Australia has been a proactive contributor to strengthening regional security collaboration across the Indo-Pacific. Beyond its close ties with the United States and Japan, Australia has also moved to deepen its relationship with the ROK. A key development in this regard was the signing of the 2021 Australia-Republic of Korea Comprehensive Strategic Partnership—a landmark agreement advancing bilateral cooperation in strategy, security, technology, innovation, economics, and cross-cultural engagement.<sup>192</sup>

South Korea holds the sixth largest economy in the Indo-Pacific and ranks fourth in conventional military strength within the region.<sup>193</sup> Its economy is

strongly export-driven and technology-focused, with advanced capabilities in sectors such as semiconductor manufacturing and quantum technology.<sup>194</sup> It also supports a growing defense industrial base, positioning it as an emerging supplier in the global arms market.<sup>195</sup> South Korea hosts the second-largest forward-deployed US military presence in the world, supported by its own robust armed forces and coalition troops operating under the United Nations Command, making it a critical frontline defense against aggression and coercion on the Korean Peninsula and within Northeast Asia.<sup>196</sup> Unlike the United States, Japan, and Australia, South Korea views the DPRK as its primary security threat, while considering the strategic risks posed by the PRC to be of secondary importance.<sup>197</sup> Nevertheless, these differing threat perceptions have not hindered Seoul's efforts to strengthen its regional relationships. The previously mentioned Australia-Republic of Korea Comprehensive Strategic Partnership marked South Korea's first such agreement outside its alliance with the United States.<sup>198</sup> Additionally, its relations with Japan have seen renewed momentum in recent years—highlighted by the 2023 Camp David Summit, where the United States, ROK, and Japan reaffirmed their commitment to deepening mutual cooperation.<sup>199</sup> For South Korea and Japan, this has translated into closer bilateral coordination on a number of issues, including their shared security concerns over North Korea.<sup>200</sup>

Alongside deepening bilateral relations, the United States, Australia, Japan, and South Korea have also seen a growing convergence in their foreign policy positions through the expansion of minilateral groupings. This trend is reflected in the strengthening and expansion of the US-Japan-South Korea and US-Japan-Australia trilaterals.<sup>201</sup> The former includes long-standing mechanisms like the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) and the newly established Trilateral Security Cooperation Framework.<sup>202</sup> The latter features the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue and the recently launched Trilateral Defense Consultations.<sup>203</sup> Although formal minilateral frameworks have yet to emerge between Australia-Japan-South Korea and US-South Korea-Australia, early signs of cooperation are beginning to surface. Interest in an Australia-Japan-South Korea trilateral is gaining traction.<sup>204</sup> While such a grouping may place less emphasis on China, its formation would nonetheless contribute to strengthening quadrilateral coordination and laying the groundwork for an eventual IPTO.<sup>205</sup> Similarly, ongoing and prospective research and policy initiatives are exploring avenues to deepen US-South Korea-Australia coordination.<sup>206</sup> These efforts, along with an expanding network of Track 1.5 and Track 2 dialogues among all four countries, point toward a credible path for establishing them as the founding members of the

IPTO. Figure 1, below, offers a visual overview of the bilateral and minilateral relationships outlined in this section.



**Figure 1. US-Japan-Australia-ROK security relationships. (author's analysis)**

### Changing Dynamics in Regional Security

Further strengthening the case for a new multilateral security framework among the United States, Japan, Australia, and South Korea are evolving policy dynamics and shifting public attitudes that are reshaping regional perspectives and commitments amid a period of heightened change and uncertainty in the Indo-Pacific. One key development fueling this shift is growing dissatisfaction with the long-standing bilateral agreements between the United States and each of these allies—treaties now more than sixty-five years old. Across these

relationships, questions have emerged about the adequacy and relevance of existing bilateral arrangements to address today's complex regional threats.<sup>207</sup> Importantly, this discontent is not limited to US allies; the current US administration has also voiced concerns about the structure and balance of some of its regional defense commitments.<sup>208</sup>

Another significant trend is the rising calls for nuclear sharing arrangements in the Indo-Pacific. In South Korea, public opinion polls and leading political figures increasingly support the return of US tactical nuclear weapons or the development of an indigenous nuclear deterrent.<sup>209</sup> In Japan, a country long defined by its nonnuclear stance, both former and current senior officials have called for discussions on nuclear sharing with the United States, marking a profound shift in national policy discourse.<sup>210</sup> While such proposals were previously dismissed by US administrations, the evolving security environment in the Indo-Pacific has made these conversations more urgent and difficult to ignore. Without meaningful engagement from Washington, there is a growing risk that allied concerns could lead to independent nuclear pursuits, potentially triggering a broader proliferation dynamic in the region.<sup>211</sup> As such, addressing these discussions is now critical to preserving alliance cohesion and regional stability.

A third key development is the marked improvement in diplomatic relations between South Korea and Japan—a bilateral relationship long seen as the missing link in building a cohesive, multilateral security framework in the Indo-Pacific. Both governments have made concerted efforts to move beyond long-standing historical grievances, resulting in enhanced diplomatic and defense cooperation in recent years, as well as a noticeable improvement in public perceptions of each other.<sup>212</sup> In early 2025, the two countries marked the sixtieth anniversary of normalized diplomatic ties, highlighting a shared commitment to ushering in a new era of friendship and collaboration.<sup>213</sup> Renewed pledges to deepen high-level engagement, share intelligence, and strengthen defense coordination reflect a narrowing of the historical divide and growing convergence on regional security priorities.<sup>214</sup> These positive trends create new opportunities for broader multilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific moving forward.

These trends, while perhaps insignificant in isolation, collectively suggest that the potential for a reformation of US and allied security structures in the Indo-Pacific could soon gain traction. Growing dissatisfaction with aging bilateral security agreements, rising calls for nuclear sharing arrangements, and the steady normalization of Japan-South Korea relations all point to a region undergoing strategic realignment. As Indo-Pacific allies reassess the adequacy of legacy frameworks in the face of evolving threats from China and North

Korea, momentum is building toward more integrated, adaptable, and multi-lateral approaches to regional security.

### **Foundations of Collective Security**

Should some or all of the aforementioned nations choose to establish a multilateral defense arrangement in line with the objectives listed above, they would also need to forge agreement on the specific terms and responsibilities associated with joining the IPTO's charter. Drawing from the experiences of NATO, SEATO, and CENTO, as detailed in the Lessons Learned from Historical Alliances section, the following essential elements emerge:

1. Strong political cohesion—anchored in shared purpose, common threat perceptions, institutionalized structures, and consensus-based decision-making—is key for fostering unity and coordinated strategic direction.

2. A unified military command framework is necessary for sustaining a combined defense strategy, ensuring operational coherence, and enabling effective collective responses to common threats.

3. A clear collective defense commitment is imperative for maintaining alliance strength. Loosely defined or non-binding pledges diminish resolve and compromise the solidarity required for decisive combined action.

4. Nuclear burden-sharing arrangements and dedicated nuclear forces reinforce alliance credibility. These enhance deterrence while symbolizing extended commitments to allied defense and linking forward-deployed assets with strategic nuclear capabilities.

5. The capacity to adjust to changing geopolitical conditions is critical to preserving a multilateral alliance's relevance, agility, and strategic effectiveness over time.

6. Ongoing financial support to defense forms the backbone of an alliance's deterrence and readiness. Shared responsibility strengthens internal cohesion and supports long-term sustainability.

With these considerations in mind, we can begin to envision the structure of the IPTO's founding charter. A comparison of the foundational texts of NATO, SEATO, and CENTO demonstrates how the inclusion of certain core elements shaped specific articles and agreements, offering clear guidance for what must be negotiated in forming a new regional security treaty. Notably absent across these earlier documents, however, are provisions addressing the alliance's military command structure, its nuclear dimension, and need for

sustained financial support to defense. While each of these features was eventually integrated into NATO's architecture, none were present in its original 1949 charter. NATO activated its integrated military command structure in 1951 and received its first deployment of US atomic weapons in 1954, and only in 2014 did members states formally commit to allocate 2 percent of their GDP to defense spending.<sup>215</sup> As such, careful consideration must be given to how these critical elements will be incorporated into the IPTO's framework from the outset. The following is a comparison of the NATO, SEATO, and CENTO treaties.

## **The North Atlantic Treaty (1949)**

### **Article 1**

The Parties agree to settle international disputes peacefully and to refrain from threats or use of force inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.

### **Article 2**

The Parties will contribute toward developing peaceful and friendly international relations by strengthening their free institutions, by bringing about a better understanding of the principles upon which these institutions are founded, and by promoting conditions of stability and well-being. They will seek to eliminate conflict in their international economic policies and will encourage economic collaboration between any or all of them.

### **Article 3**

To fulfill the Treaty's goals, the Parties, will strengthen their ability to resist armed attack through ongoing self-help and mutual aid, both individually and collectively.

### **Article 4**

The Parties will consult together whenever any of them believes a threat exists to their territorial integrity, political independence or security.

### **Article 5**

The Parties agree that an armed attack against is considered an attack on all, prompting collective defense actions—including the use of force if necessary—until the UN Security Council restores peace and security.

## **Article 6**

For Article 5, an armed attack includes those against Parties' territories in Europe or North America, the Algerian Departments of France, on the territory of Turkey, or other agreed areas of the North Atlantic north of the Tropic of Cancer. This includes their forces, vessels, or aircraft located in these regions or in the Mediterranean as of the treaty's entry into force.

## **Article 7**

The Treaty does not alter United Nations (UN) members' obligations under the UN Charter or the Security Council's primary role in maintaining international peace and security.

## **Article 8**

Each Party affirms its existing agreements do not conflict with the Treaty and pledges to avoid any future conflicting commitments.

## **Article 9**

The Parties will establish a Council, with representation from each, to oversee the Treaty's implementation, able to meet at any time and create necessary bodies—including a defense committee to recommend actions under Articles 3 and 5.

## **Article 10**

The Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite other European states that support the Treaty's principles and regional security to join, with membership formalized by depositing an accession Instrument with US government, which will notify all Parties.

## **Article 11**

This Treaty must be ratified by each Party according to its constitutional process, with ratifications deposited with the US government, which will notify the others. It enters into force once a majority—including specifically named countries—have ratified and takes effect for others upon their ratification.

## **Article 12**

Ten years after the Treaty enters into force—and anytime thereafter—the Parties will consult, upon request, to review the Treaty in light of evolving peace and security conditions, including developments under the UN Charter.

## **Article 13**

After twenty years, any Party may withdraw from the Treaty one year after notifying the US government, which will inform the other Parties.

## **Article 14**

This Treaty, equally authentic in English and French, shall be archived by the US government, which will provide certified copies to other signatories.

# **Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty (1954)**

## **Article 1**

The Parties agree to settle international disputes peacefully and to refrain from threats or use of force inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.

## **Article 2**

To fulfill the Treaty's goals, the Parties will strengthen their ability to resist armed attack through ongoing self-help and mutual aid, both individually and collectively, and to prevent and counter subversive activities directed against their territorial integrity and political stability.

## **Article 3**

The Parties commit to strengthening their free institutions and cooperating on economic and technical initiatives to promote progress and social well-being, both individually and collectively.

## **Article 4**

1. Each Party recognizes that an armed attack within the treaty area—whether against a Party or a unanimously designated state or territory—would endanger its own peace and safety and agrees to act to meet the com-

mon danger according to its constitutional procedures. Such actions must be reported immediately to the UN Security Council.

2. If any Party, believes that the inviolability, territorial integrity, sovereignty, or political independence of a Party or designated area is threatened by means other than armed attack, or by a situation endangering regional peace, the Parties will consult immediately to determine appropriate measures for the common defense.

3. No action may be taken in or on any unanimously designated state or territory without the invitation or consent of the government concerned.

#### **Article 5**

The Parties will establish a Council, with representation from each, to oversee the Treaty's implantation, able to meet at any time, and provide consultation on military and other planning as needed.

#### **Article 6**

This Treaty does not alter United Nations (UN) member's obligations under the UN Charter or its responsibility for maintaining peace and security. Each Party affirms its existing agreements do not conflict with the Treaty and pledges to avoid any future conflicting commitments.

#### **Article 7**

The Parties my, by unanimous agreement, invite other states that further the Treaty's objectives and regional security to join, with membership formalized by depositing an accession instrument with the Philippine government, which will notify all Parties.

#### **Article 8**

The "treaty area" covers Southeast Asia, the full territories of the Asian Parties, and the Southwest Pacific—excluding areas north of 21° 30' north latitude. The Parties may unanimously agree to amend this definition.

#### **Article 9**

1. This Treaty shall be archived by the Philippine Government, which will provide certified copies to other signatories.

2. The Treaty must be ratified by each Party according to its constitutional process, with ratifications deposited with the Philippine government, which will notify the others.

3. The Treaty shall enter into force between the States which have ratified it as soon as the ratifications of the majority of the signatories have been deposited and shall come into effect with respect to the other States on the date of the deposit of their ratifications.

#### **Article 10**

The Treaty shall remain in force indefinitely, but any Party may withdraw one year after notifying the Philippine government, which will inform the other Parties.

#### **Article 11**

The English text of the treaty is binding, and the French text becomes equally authentic once all Parties agree to it and notify the Philippine government.

#### **Understanding of the United States of America**

The United States affirms that its commitments under Article 4, paragraph 1, apply only to communist aggression, but it will consult under Article 4, paragraph 2 in response to other forms of aggression or attack.

### **The Baghdad Pact (1955)**

#### **Article 1**

The Parties agree to cooperate on security and defense in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter. Any actions they choose to take together can be outlined in special agreements between them.

#### **Article 2**

To implement the cooperation in Article 1, the relevant authorities from each Party will decide on necessary measures once the Pact takes effect. These measures will be enacted after government approval.

### **Article 3**

The Parties agree not to interfere in each other's internal affairs and to resolve any disputes peacefully, following the UN Charter.

### **Article 4**

Each Party affirms its existing agreements do not conflict with the Pact and pledges to avoid any future conflicting commitments.

### **Article 5**

The Pact is open to any Arab League member of other state recognized by the original Parties and concerned in regional peace and security. Membership will be formalized by depositing and accession instrument with the Iraqi government. New members may form special agreements under Article 1 and take measures under Article 2, which become effective once approved by the governments of the concerned Parties.

### **Article 6**

The Parties will establish a Permanent Council when at least four countries join the Pact. The Council will create its own rules of procedure.

### **Article 7**

The Pact is valid for five years and can be renewed for additional five-year terms. Any Party may withdraw by giving six months' written notice before a renewal date, and the Pact will continue to apply to the remaining Parties.

### **Article 8**

The Pact shall be ratified by each Party and enter into force once ratifications are exchanged in Ankara. It is signed in Arabic, Turkish, and English, with all texts equally valid, but the English version will prevail in case of any disagreement.

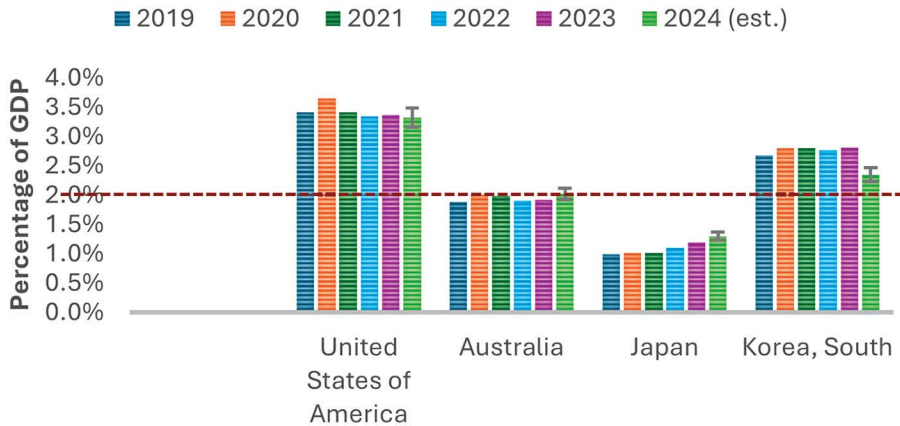
While the "Conceptualizing the IPTO" section will provide a more detailed examination of the alliance's military command structure and nuclear component, it is important—within the context of the IPTO's founding charter—to briefly outline the core operational structures that will underpin its political and military functions. Doing so ensures that prospective members are committed to supporting these institutions and upholding the principles necessary to sustain the IPTO as a credible and effective alliance.

Drawing on NATO's working structures as a model, the IPTO would establish an Indo-Pacific Council (IPC), a Nuclear Policy and Consultative Group (NPCG), and a Military Committee (MC).<sup>216</sup> It would also feature an integrated military command structure, an international staff, and a principal secretary to serve as the alliance's chief international civil servant.<sup>217</sup> Proven over decades to be essential to NATO's success, these institutions and roles are therefore considered vital for the IPTO and have been included in the text of the alliance treaty.

With regard to defensive spending, NATO's use of common funding and its 2 percent of GDP pledge offer a useful framework and benchmark for ensuring sustained financial support within the IPTO alliance. Although there have been recent calls to raise the 2 percent threshold, this standard remains a reasonable guide—and a minimum requirement—for membership into the IPTO, particularly given the growing security challenges in the Indo-Pacific. That said, the signing of the treaty's text presents a valuable opportunity to incentivize contributions that go beyond this baseline. Accordingly, prospective members should negotiate mechanisms to encourage higher levels of defensive spending. One such approach could involve linking economic incentives within the alliance to increased defense expenditures above the 2 percent threshold. These incentives might include commitments to tax breaks, subsidies, favorable trade agreements, technology transfers, or investment guarantees offered at various spending benchmarks above the minimum.

Regarding the ability of the United States, Japan, Australia, and South Korea to meet or exceed this minimum defense spending threshold, figure 2 presents military expenditure for each of these four nations from 2019 to 2024, using NATO's definition of qualifying defense contributions. As shown, the United States, Australia, and South Korea currently meet or exceed the 2 percent benchmark. In Japan's case, the government has committed to reaching the 2 percent of GDP target by 2027—an important and symbolic step that reflects Tokyo's resolve to address rising security challenges in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.<sup>218</sup> Regarding the IPTO's other prospective members, each are projected to exceed the 2 percent minimum threshold in the years ahead.<sup>219</sup>

# COUNTRY MILITARY EXPENDITURE



**Figure 2. US-Australia-Japan-ROK military expenditure as a percentage of GDP. (Author’s analysis, data from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Military Expenditure Database)**

## The IPTO’s Founding Charter

Building on the analysis above and drawing from the founding treaties of NATO, SEATO, and CENTO as foundational references, the proposed text of the Indo-Pacific Treaty is presented below. Comprising 16 articles, the treaty outlines the essential elements and mechanisms required to formally establish the IPTO upon ratification. Articles 1 and 2 define the treaty’s overarching purpose: to maintain peace, security, and stability in the Indo-Pacific Region through collective defense and cooperative engagement. Articles 3 and 4 describe how the IPTO will carry out its core functions, particularly in the areas of deterrence and defense, and include provisions on defense spending as well as mechanisms to incentivize contributions beyond a defined baseline. Article 5 outlines procedures for consultation among members in response to emerging threats and decision-making on joint actions. Articles 6 and 7 detail the collective defense clause and define what constitutes an armed attack. Articles 8 and 9 clarify the treaty’s legal hierarchy, establishing the primacy of IPTO obligations over other national agreements, while affirming that these do not

override the responsibilities of member states under the United Nations Charter. Article 10 lays out the institutional framework of the alliance, including key structures and leadership roles. Article 11 articulates the alliance’s “open door policy,” setting criteria for the admission of states that support the treaty’s principles and enhance Indo-Pacific security. Article 12 defines the “treaty area,” adopting the current US interpretation of the Indo-Pacific, which includes the United States as an Indo-Pacific nation. Article 13 addresses the process for ratification and implementation by member states. Articles 14 and 15 establish periodic review requirements and procedures for withdrawal. The final article, Article 16, designates English, Japanese, and Korean as the official treaty languages and identifies the location of the treaty’s official archive.

Once signed and ratified by a sufficient number of prospective members, the treaty would formally establish the IPTO and initiate a new era of collective defense and integrated security in the Indo-Pacific. This milestone would mark a decisive shift away from the long-standing hub-and-spoke model, which, while effective for much of the postwar period, is now inadequate for addressing the complex and evolving threats posed by the PRC and DPRK. It would open new pathways for diplomatic, informational, military, and economic cooperation while addressing the structural vulnerabilities that currently expose the United States and its Indo-Pacific allies to increasing strategic risk. More broadly, it would serve to constrain the PRC’s revisionist ambitions, deter coercion by the PRC and DPRK, and promote deeper political and military integration among the region’s democratic nations, thereby strengthening regional stability and preserving the existing rules-based international system. A proposed text of the Indo-Pacific Treaty, derived using the texts of the North Atlantic Treaty, Southeast Asia Collective Treaty, and the Baghdad Pact, follows.

## **The Indo-Pacific Treaty**

*The Parties to this Treaty reaffirm their faith in the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and their desire to live in peace with all peoples and all governments.*

*They are determined to safeguard the freedom, common heritage, and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law. They seek to promote stability and well-being in the Indo-Pacific area.*

*They are resolved to unite their efforts for collective defense and for the preservation of peace and security. They therefore agree to this Indo-Pacific Treaty:*

## **Article 1**

The Parties undertake, as set forth in the Charter of the United Nations, to settle any international dispute in which they may be involved by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security and justice are not endangered and to refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force in any manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.

## **Article 2**

The Parties will contribute toward the further development of peaceful and friendly international relations by strengthening their free institutions, by bringing about a better understanding of the principles upon which these institutions are founded, and by promoting conditions of stability and well-being. They will seek to eliminate conflict in their international economic policies and will encourage economic collaboration between any or all of them.

## **Article 3**

In order more effectively to achieve the objectives of this Treaty, the Parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack.

## **Article 4**

To fulfil their obligations in Article 3, the Parties agree to allocate a minimum of 2 percent of the national Gross Domestic Product to defense spending. Additionally, the Parties shall establish economic incentives to encourage defense expenditures exceeding this 2 percent threshold.

## **Article 5**

The Parties will consult together whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence, or security of any of the Parties is threatened.

## **Article 6**

The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in the Indo-Pacific or the United States shall be considered an attack against them all, and consequently each Party recognizes that an armed attack upon any one of them in the Indo-Pacific or the United States would be dangerous to its

own peace and safety and declares that it will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the Indo-Pacific area. Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.

#### **Article 7**

For the purposes of Article 3 and Article 6, an armed attack on one or more of the Parties is deemed to include an armed attack on the territory of any of the Parties in the Indo-Pacific or the United States, on the Australian Antarctic Territory, or on the islands under the jurisdiction of any of the Parties in the Indo-Pacific area.

#### **Article 8**

This Treaty does not affect and shall not be interpreted as affecting in any way the rights and obligations under the Charter of the Parties which are members of the United Nations or the primary responsibility of the Security Council for the maintenance of international peace and security.

#### **Article 9**

The Parties declare that none of the international engagements now in force between it and any other of the Parties or any third State is in conflict with the provisions of this Treaty and undertake not to enter into any international engagement in conflict with this Treaty.

#### **Article 10**

The Parties hereby establish an Indo-Pacific Council, on which each of them shall be represented, to consider matters concerning the implementation of this Treaty. The Council shall be so organized as to be able to meet promptly at any time. The Council shall set up a Nuclear Policy and Command Group, with the same authority as the Indo-Pacific Council with regard to nuclear policy issues. The Council will set up such subsidiary bodies as may be necessary; in particular it shall establish immediately a Military Committee and an integrated military command structure which shall recommend measures for the implementation of Articles 3 and 5. Furthermore, it will establish immediately the position of Prin-

cial Secretary and create an international staff to facilitate consensus-building, decision-making, and policy implementation.

#### **Article 11**

The Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other Indo-Pacific State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the Indo-Pacific area to accede to this Treaty. Any State so invited may become a party to the Treaty by depositing its instrument of accession with the Government of the United States of America. The Government of the United States of America will inform each of the Parties of the deposit of each such instrument of accession.

#### **Article 12**

The “treaty area” covers the full territories of its Parties that lie within the geographic region that stretches from the west coast of India to the western shores of the United States. The Parties may unanimously agree to extend this definition.

#### **Article 13**

This treaty shall be ratified and its provisions carried out by the Parties in accordance with their respective constitutional processes. The instruments of ratification shall be deposited as soon as possible with the Government of the United States of America, which will notify all the other signatories of each deposit. The Treaty shall enter into force between the States that have ratified it as soon as the ratifications of at least three signatories, between Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the United States, have been deposited and shall come into effect with respect to other States on the date of the deposit of their ratifications.

#### **Article 14**

After the Treaty has been in force for ten 10 years, or at any time thereafter, the Parties shall, if any of them so requests, consult together for the purpose of reviewing the Treaty, having regard for the factors then affecting peace and security in the Indo-Pacific area, including the development of universal as well as regional arrangements under the Charter of the United Nations for the maintenance of international peace and security.

## **Article 15**

After the Treaty has been in force for twenty 20 years, any Party may cease to be a Party one year after its notice of denunciation has been given to the Government of the United States of America, which will inform the Governments of the other Parties of the deposit of each notice of denunciation.

## **Article 16**

This Treaty, equally authentic in English, Japanese, and Korean, shall be deposited in the archives of the Government of the United States of America. Duly certified copies will be transmitted by that Government to the Governments of other signatories.

## **Summary**

This section advanced the discussion on Indo-Pacific multilateralism by defining the purpose of the IPTO, assessing its prospective membership, analyzing the region's shifting security dynamics, and outlining the foundational elements for the defensive alliance, culminating in a detailed examination of the IPTO's proposed founding charter. While this analysis extends beyond existing literature, it is only a starting point. Establishing the IPTO requires not only applying lessons from past alliances but also envisioning its political and military architecture, defining its engagement with other Indo-Pacific nations, integrating its nuclear component, and articulating a clear approach for the alliance to achieve its objectives in a rapidly evolving security environment. Only through a clearly defined, strategically grounded force architecture can the rationale for the IPTO be fully understood, effectively communicated, and ultimately realized.

## **Conceptualizing the IPTO**

### **Key Structures**

The proposed structure of the IPTO is inspired by NATO, whose flexibly designed institutions have allowed it to remain effective through decades of shifting geopolitical conditions and evolving security threats.<sup>220</sup> NATO's organizational architecture—including its consensus-based political mechanisms and military components—provides a valuable starting point for conceiving the IPTO's institutional framework.<sup>221</sup> However, a direct replication of NATO's model would be insufficient. The Indo-Pacific's unique geography and cultural

and legal dynamics demand a structure that is both regionally attuned and politically agile. For the IPTO to be operationally viable, it must combine the credibility of a proven collective defense framework with the flexibility to respect the political sensitivities and strategic autonomy of its more diverse member states.

At the core of the IPTO is the IPC, a permanent political body composed of senior civilian representatives appointed by each member nation.<sup>222</sup> These representatives would ensure continuity, strategic coherence, and sustained diplomatic engagement across the alliance's priorities.<sup>223</sup> The IPC would be chaired by a principal secretary—the alliance's top international civil servant—who is responsible for steering the process of consultation, consensus-building, and strategic decision-making within the alliance.<sup>224</sup> The principal secretary would also ensure that IPC directives are clearly articulated, effectively coordinated, and fully implemented across IPTO's political and military institutions.<sup>225</sup> To maintain active and effective dialogue, the IPC would meet regularly to address pressing matters and alliance-wide concerns.<sup>226</sup> Beyond shaping policy, the IPC would be tasked with establishing subordinate committees, agencies, and commands to execute strategic directives, manage policy implementation, and advance the alliance's overarching mission and objectives.<sup>227</sup>

Complementing the IPC would be a civilian-led NPCG, the alliance's senior deliberative body on nuclear matters.<sup>228</sup> Holding equal authority to the IPC, the NPCG would serve as the principal consultative forum for shaping nuclear policy and making decisions concerning its nuclear forces.<sup>229</sup> It would include representatives from all alliance members who choose to participate, helping to ensure ongoing strategic alignment across the alliance. The NPCG would be responsible for maintaining the alliance's nuclear posture, encompassing deployments, doctrine, operational concepts, and strategic communication.<sup>230</sup> Recognizing the dynamic nature of strategic security in the Indo-Pacific Region, the alliance's nuclear policies would remain under constant review, with the NPCG continuously assessing developments, recommending policy modifications, and adapting frameworks as necessary to address evolving security challenges and enhance alliance deterrence credibility.<sup>231</sup>

The alliance's military dimension would be overseen by the MC, the primary source of consensus-based advice to the IPC and the NPCG on military policy and strategy.<sup>232</sup> Composed of senior military representatives from the IPC's member nations, the MC would be tasked with translating political guidance into military direction, advising measures necessary for the alliance's defense, and implementing military decisions.<sup>233</sup> The committee would be led by a chair, who serves as the principal military advisor to the principal secretary and consults closely with the national military representatives to the IPC.<sup>234</sup> The commit-

tee would also provide guidance to the Unified Allied Commander Indo-Pacific, the head of the IPC's integrated military command structure and individual responsible for directing its military operations.<sup>235</sup> If approved by the IPC, this position should be a direct report to the council and be dual-hatted by the commander of US Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM).

Subordinate to the MC would be the IPC's integrated military command structure, charged with planning and executing the alliance's military operations.<sup>236</sup> Additionally, it would conduct regular assessments of the IPC's military structure and capabilities to ensure that allied forces remain effective, adaptable, and credible in a rapidly changing security environment.<sup>237</sup> Through its ongoing activities, the IPC's military commands would play a vital role in advancing allied defense and security by safeguarding the integrity of alliance territory, ensuring the freedom of maritime navigation and critical economic routes, and maintaining or restoring the security of its member states.<sup>238</sup> Notably, the IPC itself would not be expected to maintain a large standing force; instead, support for its military activities will require member states to voluntarily contribute forces, who would be returned to their respective countries upon completion of the assigned mission or task.<sup>239</sup>

Supporting these key structures would be international staffs made up of civilian and military personnel contributed by IPC member nations.<sup>240</sup> These staff members would provide advice, guidance, and administrative support to the principal secretary, national representatives, and delegations, as well as to the alliance's military bodies across its headquarters.<sup>241</sup> They would also play a vital role in implementing policies and decisions adopted at various committee levels, helping to foster consensus, support effective decision-making, and ensure the efficient day-to-day functioning of the IPTO.<sup>242</sup> Lastly, they would facilitate cooperation and information sharing across the alliance, reinforcing cohesion and unity of purpose throughout the alliance's structures.<sup>243</sup>

### **Nuclear Command Authority**

Regarding the authorities of the IPC and NPCG, this study proposes a nuclear employment model distinct from the alliance framework used in Europe. Specifically, it recommends that the National Command Authority (NCA)—the ultimate source of lawful military orders for nuclear weapons use—remain solely with the president of the United States (POTUS) for any US nuclear forces deployed on the territory of IPTO member states. This approach is essential for maintaining the integrity of the US chain of command over nuclear-capable forces in the Indo-Pacific, consistent with the theater nuclear posture recommended in this study. Although the IPC and the NPCG would not retain veto

authority for a unilateral US-only nuclear employment decision, the POTUS would instead be required to consult with and notify allied leaders before any nuclear use. Importantly, this limitation would apply only to the employment of nuclear weapons; the IPC and NPCG would maintain full authority over the day-to-day posture, readiness, and related operational matters concerning any nuclear assets stationed on the territory of non-US IPTO member states that have agreed to host US theater nuclear weapons.

This streamlined model would enhance the alliance's credibility and responsiveness in the face of fast-evolving threats, particularly from the PRC and DPRK. Unlike NATO's consensus-based system, which can slow decision-making and dilute strategic clarity, a centralized approach enables timely, decisive action while preserving alliance unity through mandated consultation. The result is a nuclear posture that balances political coordination with military effectiveness, strengthening deterrence by minimizing ambiguity and signaling clear resolve. Moreover, this structure would align with the IPTO's core goals of: (1) constraining the PRC's revisionist ambitions, (2) deterring PRC and DPRK coercive behavior toward neighboring states, and (3) fostering deeper political and military integration among the Indo-Pacific's democratic nations.

### **Political and Military Headquarters**

A critical decision for the IPTO alliance would be the selection of a location for its political and military headquarters. Drawing lessons from NATO's experience, three key considerations guide this decision. First is the availability and cost of suitable real estate, which plays a central role in determining feasibility and long-term sustainability. NATO's decision to establish its headquarters in Brussels was influenced in part by the Belgian government's provision of land at no cost and the availability of infrastructure in the Brussels region, which significantly reduced expenses and accelerated setup timelines.<sup>244</sup> Second, colocating the political and military headquarters enhances coordination and civil-military integration. NATO's arrangement—where its political headquarters in Brussels and military headquarters in Mons operate in close proximity—has proven effective in facilitating regular interaction, improving communication, and streamlining strategic and operational alignment.<sup>245</sup> Third, a central location within the alliance's geographic area strengthens cohesion and accessibility. Just as NATO's placement in Brussels served as a geographically and politically central point in Europe, the IPTO's headquarters should be positioned to provide equitable access across the Indo-Pacific, reinforce collective identity, and enable agile regional engagement.<sup>246</sup>

Among the potential sites that meet these criteria, Canberra, Australia, emerges as a leading candidate to host the IPTO alliance headquarters. As Australia's national capital, Canberra is both highly accessible and uniquely equipped with available real estate to construct dual, co-located headquarters, an attribute not shared by the capital cities of other prospective IPTO members. Its location in the southern hemisphere places it at a safe distance from regional flashpoints like the Taiwan Strait and the Korean Peninsula, reducing vulnerabilities to immediate threats while maintaining overlapping time zones with the IPTO's other prospective member states, thereby enhancing alliance coordination and operational responsiveness. Politically, hosting the IPTO's headquarters in Australia is fully consistent with its obligations under the Treaty of Rarotonga, which prohibits the stationing of nuclear weapons on its territory but does not preclude its participation within a nuclear alliance. Canberra's selection would symbolize Australia's commitment to the alliance, just as Japan and South Korea could signal their own commitment by hosting US nonstrategic nuclear weapons, a topic discussed more below. Finally, selecting Canberra would reinforce a balanced and multilateral image for the alliance, offering a neutral location that helps avoid potential regional rivalries and mitigates perceptions of US dominance.

### **Theater Nuclear Forces**

To bolster regional deterrence and signal collective resolve, the IPTO would actively pursue options to formalize its status as a nuclear alliance, incorporating US theater nuclear weapons within its operational authority. In the near term, this would likely involve the forward deployment of B61-12 gravity bombs—the same weapon currently fielded by the United States in support of NATO—to South Korea and Japan.<sup>247</sup> Notably, the US nuclear arsenal appears to have sufficient inventory of these weapons to support such an initiative. The recently completed B61-12 Life Extension Program reportedly produced 400 units.<sup>248</sup> Of these, approximately 100 are deployed in Europe, while the remaining 300 are believed to be held in a ready reserve status within the United States.<sup>249</sup> These reserve bombs are intended for use with strategic platforms such as the B-2 Spirit and the forthcoming B-21 Raider bombers, as well as US dual-capable fighter aircraft.<sup>250</sup> A portion of this reserve is believed to be specifically allocated for “backup and potential use . . . in support of allies outside Europe, including Northeast Asia.”<sup>251</sup>

Exploring the possible locations to host US B61-12 weapons, Kunsan Air Base in South Korea's Jeonbuk Province and Kadena Air Base on Japan's Okinawa Island emerge as strong potential candidates for redeployment. Both

locations are Cold War-era nuclear weapon sites selected for their strategic value, and today they continue to offer critical advantages in terms of geography, infrastructure, and alliance integration.<sup>252</sup> These bases benefit from robust existing facilities, established security protocols, and a long history of operational coordination with US forces.<sup>253</sup> Their proximity to regional flash-points enhances their utility as forward-operating locations capable of supporting rapid response options in a crisis.<sup>254</sup> Recent assessments also suggest that, with modest modifications, these installations could readily support the reintroduction of nuclear weapons, making their selection both practical and cost effective within the broader IPTO deterrence posture.<sup>255</sup>

The most suitable delivery platform supporting the reintroduction of the B61-12 in the Indo-Pacific theater is the fifth-generation F-35A Lightning II. Outfitted with advanced stealth technologies, next-generation sensors, and exceptional survivability in contested environments, the F-35A offers a flexible and capable nuclear delivery option.<sup>256</sup> In October 2023, the US Air Force confirmed that the F-35A had achieved operational certification to carry the B61-12, officially designating it as a dual-capable aircraft (DCA).<sup>257</sup> Select aircraft have already received the necessary modifications, and all US F-35As are scheduled to be upgraded to a nuclear-certified configuration in the future.<sup>258</sup> Notably, both Kunsan and Kadena Air Bases are expected to receive the F-35A in the coming years, further enabling the operational integration of dual-capable systems across the region.<sup>259</sup>

Demonstrating the strategic value of such deployments, figure 3 illustrates the notional combat radius of the F-35A from Kunsan and Kadena—the maximum range these aircraft can travel with a standard payload to conduct a mission and return without refueling.<sup>260</sup> This radius encompasses all of North Korea and much of China's eastern seaboard, including key military and industrial targets.<sup>261</sup> The ability to hold such targets at risk with forward-deployed, nuclear assets would significantly complicate adversary planning and provide the IPTO with rapid, survivable, and flexible response options in the event of a limited nuclear attack (LNA) on member states.<sup>262</sup> Crucially, the likelihood of such a scenario is assessed to be rising in the event of a major conflict in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>263</sup> Fielding this capability therefore presents a compelling opportunity to close a growing deterrence gap and counter the expanding theater nuclear arsenals of both the PRC and DPRK.



**Figure 3. Combat radius of the F-35A stationed at Kunsan and Kadena air bases. (author’s analysis)**

In the medium to long term, additional theater-class nuclear forces will likely be necessary to contain the PRC’s revisionist ambitions and to deter coercion against the IPTO’s member states.<sup>264</sup> As such, the United States, in coordination with its IPTO allies, should consider a range of additional deployment options for theater nuclear weapons in the Indo-Pacific. Beyond the fielding of nuclear-armed, sea-launched cruise missiles (SLCM-N) on attack submarines, projected to enter service in the mid-to-late 2030s, the alliance should also explore the development of other nuclear capabilities, such as a “stand-off, air delivered nuclear capability” for use with DCA and nuclear variants to ground-launched cruise or ballistic missile systems (GLCM-N/GLBM-N).<sup>265</sup> Each offers distinct advantages for enhancing de-

terrence, enabling flexible response, and signaling resolve in scenarios where conventional superiority is in doubt or a LNA occurs.<sup>266</sup>

### **Deterrence in Depth**

In addition to developing theater nuclear forces, the alliance should pursue a range of complementary measures to establish layered, in-depth deterrence that reinforces its current, ongoing ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) patrols. One such step would be for the United States to reinstitute a continuous bomber presence in the Indo-Pacific, a mission the US Air Force ended in 2020.<sup>267</sup> While current limitations in the long-range bomber fleet constrain this capability, the introduction of the B-21 Raider—expected to add up to 145 next-generation stealth bombers—would provide the force structure necessary to reestablish a rapid and persistent projection of strategic airpower across the Indo-Pacific.<sup>268</sup> This effort is reinforced by recent infrastructure improvements and the deployment of advanced air defense systems on Guam as well as the revitalization of nearby Tinian Island, both of which enhance the US capacity to host and protect a persistent bomber presence in the western Pacific.<sup>269</sup> Furthermore, the US should prioritize the maintenance and modernization of its munitions storage infrastructure on Guam, encompassing both conventional and nuclear weapons, to ensure a responsive and resilient logistical capability for supporting future contingencies across the Indo-Pacific.

Complementing and enhancing the US bomber and submarine presence in the Indo-Pacific are a range of significant military contributions and infrastructure investments by Australia. Ongoing upgrades at Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) bases in Darwin, Tindal, and Amberley are enabling support for US conventional bomber operations, offering additional staging points for long-range strike missions in the region.<sup>270</sup> At sea, parallel improvements are underway at Her Majesty's Australian Ship (HMAS) Stirling naval facility to accommodate the future "Submarine Rotational Force-West," which will host US nuclear-powered submarines (SSN) on a rotational basis under the AUKUS partnership.<sup>271</sup> Looking further ahead, Australia's own submarine forces—initially composed of US-transferred SSNs—will significantly bolster the IPTO's undersea deterrence posture.<sup>272</sup> Beyond these efforts, Australia and the United States should explore additional avenues to deepen burden sharing and enhance collective deterrence within the alliance's air component. These could include the eventual transfer of B-2 stealth bombers to the RAAF as well as the construction of new Weapon Generation Facilities (WGF) at key Australian air bases for potential use during crisis, subject to authorization by the Australian government.<sup>273</sup>

Finally, the strategic nuclear forces of the United States based across the continental United States and deployed in international waters would serve as a cornerstone of the IPTO's deterrence posture. These forces, including intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), SSBNs, and long-range bomber aircraft, would represent the "supreme guarantee" of the alliance's security.<sup>274</sup> Importantly, these assets are already committed to the defense of Japan, Australia, and South Korea under the existing US nuclear umbrella.<sup>275</sup> Their incorporation into the IPTO's framework would not impose additional burdens on the United States, particularly as these forces are already undergoing a comprehensive modernization effort that spans nearly every aspect of the US strategic arsenal.<sup>276</sup>

### **Alliance Basing and Force Layout**

In addition to the domestic military forces contributed by each IPTO member state, there are several strategically significant sites not yet discussed that warrant individual recognition for their potential role in supporting the IPTO alliance. Wake Island, Midway Island, and the Hawaiian Islands have long served as key enablers of US military operations in the Indo-Pacific, primarily due to their geographic positioning and capacity to support long-range missions. Hawaii, in particular, hosts Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, a critical hub for both bomber and submarine operations, and serves as the headquarters of INDOPACOM, which would be central to coordinating alliance activities and integrating US contributions within the IPTO framework.<sup>277</sup> Midway's airfield offers a proven platform for bomber deployments, while Wake Island holds valuable potential as a forward refueling and maintenance location.<sup>278</sup> Together, these sites could enhance the endurance, flexibility, responsiveness, and survivability of US military capabilities, reinforcing the alliance's ability to project power and sustain operations across the region.

In Japan, US installations such as Misawa Air Base, Yokosuka Naval Base, and Yokota Air Base would serve as critical hubs for allied air, naval, and command and control operations across Northeast Asia. Yokota Air Base is home to the headquarters of US Forces Japan (USFJ), a subunified command under INDOPACOM overseeing all US military activities conducted from Japanese territory; USFJ plays a central role in coordinating joint activities with the Japan Self-Defense Forces.<sup>279</sup> Notably, it would likely assume responsibility for the safety, security, and reliability of US theater nuclear forces stationed in Okinawa, should such a deployment be approved by both the Japanese and US governments. Collectively, these installations provide vital logistical sup-

port and forward staging capabilities, reinforcing the alliance's ability to project power and respond across the Indo-Pacific.

In South Korea, the US installations of Osan Air Base and Camp Humphreys, along with the ROK Busan Naval Base, serve as key locations for allied air, ground, and maritime operations on the Korean Peninsula. Camp Humphreys, the US's largest overseas military installation, hosts the headquarters of United States Forces Korea (USFK), a second subunified command under USINDOPACOM that is responsible for coordinating all US military operations in South Korea and works closely with the ROK Armed Forces through the Combined Forces Command.<sup>280</sup> As part of a broader effort to enhance alliance integration, USFK is already playing a growing role in nuclear consultation and coordination mechanisms under an expanding deterrence framework between the US and ROK.<sup>281</sup> Should the deployment of US theater nuclear forces be approved by both Seoul and Washington, USFK would likely oversee their operational safety, security, and readiness.

Finally, Joint Base Lewis-McChord—home to the US Air Force's 62nd Airlift Wing—holds a unique role as the primary unit responsible for the airborne transport of nuclear weapons and materials.<sup>282</sup> Its capabilities would be critical to the IPTO, enabling the secure and timely airlift of theater nuclear weapons potentially stationed in South Korea and Japan as well as the forward movement of other nuclear assets to designated storage sites across the Indo-Pacific, should such actions be required during a crisis or conflict. Its integration into the IPTO operations would enhance strategic mobility, deterrence responsiveness, and alliance-wide preparedness for rapid escalation scenarios.

Figure 4 provides a visual overview of the proposed strategic military locations and capabilities of the IPTO alliance, emphasizing the distribution of burden-sharing among member states. These sites offer critical geographic dispersion, operational depth, and logistical support, reinforcing the alliance's regional deterrent posture and enhancing its capacity to project power and respond to threats. Not depicted are the vast majority of the alliance's conventional military assets that would provide the foundation of the alliance's military strength and overall effectiveness. These forces, maintained by each member state, would play an essential role in deterring aggression, managing crises, and responding to regional contingencies.



**Figure 4. Proposed strategic military locations and capabilities of the IPTO Alliance. (author’s analysis)**

### **IPTO Partnerships and Integration Across the Indo-Pacific**

Equally important to defining the IPTO’s political and military structures is determining how the alliance would engage with other nations and regional organizations across the Indo-Pacific and beyond.<sup>283</sup> The IPTO’s approach should be inclusive rather than exclusive, fostering strategic relationships that both strengthen the alliance and incentivize external partners to meet established criteria for future membership. To that end, the IPTO could actively pursue partnerships with key nonmember states such as the Philippines, Thailand, India, New Zealand, Vietnam, and Singapore. By leveraging existing bilateral ties and expanding cooperation through joint exercises, strategic dialogues, and cooperative security initiatives, the alliance could promote deeper engagement and alignment with its goals. Additionally, the IPTO should collaborate closely with regional organizations and frameworks—including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Quad, and the AUKUS partnership—to enhance diplomatic influence, synchronize security policies, and build consensus around shared strategic priorities. Through sustained engagement, interoperability initiatives, and targeted outreach, the IPTO could create clear pathways for partner

nations to understand the requirements of formal association, recognize the benefits of closer integration, and progressively align with alliance standards, ultimately contributing to strengthened regional security and reinforcing the rules-based international system.

This section outlined the foundational elements of the IPTO, examining its core organizational structures and the design of its nuclear command authority, and recommended a location for its political and military headquarters. It also proposed a framework for integrating theater nuclear forces, offered guidance for strengthening the alliance's overall deterrence posture, and addressed key considerations for basing and force structure. Additionally, it presented an approach for engaging with external partners beyond the core membership to broaden regional cooperation. Together, these components form a cohesive vision for how the IPTO can fulfill its core missions and achieve its strategic goals. The next and final step is to assess the implementation strategy needed to transition from current geopolitical conditions to a fully operational IPTO alliance.

## **Implementation Approach**

### **IPTO Founding Model Analysis**

Establishing the IPTO is likely to proceed through one of four core founding models: (1) Japan-United States-South Korea, (2) Japan-United States-Australia, (3) United States-South Korea-Australia, and (4) Japan-United States-South Korea-Australia. The first three models implicitly assume that the IPTO can be launched with as few as three members, leaving the door open for a fourth to join when politically feasible, an option enabled by Article 11 of the proposed treaty text previously discussed. Importantly, each of these founding configurations includes both the United States and at least two additional anchor states. As the only nuclear weapons state among the prospective members, the United States is considered indispensable, not only for its military capabilities but also for its nuclear deterrent, which would formally establish the IPTO as a nuclear alliance.

To compare and evaluate these models, the following criteria were applied. Of note, each criterion was assigned a weight ranging from 1 to 3, with 1 indicating the least impact and 3 representing the most significant impact for influencing a state's decision to join a multilateral security framework in the Indo-Pacific.

1. Shared Threat Perception (weight=2): A common perception of the threat is crucial for creating cohesive strategies and aligning national inter-

ests. Evaluating models on this basis helps determine which alliance members have the greatest potential for unified and sustained action in the Indo-Pacific.

2. Entrapment Fear (weight–3): Strategic partnerships must balance commitments with autonomy. Resulting for overdependence pathologies, high entrapment fears can discourage multilateral cooperation or constrain joint military planning. Assessing this helps evaluate the perceived risks among potential member states to join with one another into a multilateral framework.

3. Abandonment Fear (weight–2): Rising security challenges in the Indo-Pacific have led some states to reassess their current security partnerships and, in some cases, their commitment to a nonnuclear posture. Assessing each model’s capacity to ease pressures driving strategic realignment or potential proliferation, especially considering which members are included or excluded, offers insight into whether the model reinforces or exacerbates undercommitment dynamics.

4. Military Power (weight–2): Military strength underpins deterrence and strategic influence. Comparing military capabilities helps identify which models can realistically contribute to shaping regional outcomes and deterring aggression in the Indo-Pacific.

5. Economic Strength (weight–1): Economic power can be leveraged for influence, resilience, and developing partnerships across the region. It is also a key factor in strategic competition and offers insight into an alliance’s ability to distribute responsibilities through burden sharing. Models with strong economic underpinnings may be better positioned to offer attractive alternatives to China’s influence.

6. Political Acceptability (weight–3): Even strategically sound models can falter without political will or domestic public support. This criterion helps gauge the feasibility of multiple countries joining a robust multilateral security framework in the Indo-Pacific.

Analyzing Model 1 against the evaluation criteria reveals several notable strengths. It benefits from a generally high level of shared threat perception between its members—Japan, the United States, and South Korea—despite some variation in how members prioritize threats. These differences are less significant in practice, however, as recent analysis suggests that potential conflicts involving the PRC or DPRK are increasingly viewed as strategically linked.<sup>284</sup> Closely related is the model’s low level of entrapment fear, mitigated by growing minilateral security cooperation and coordination among its members. Abandonment fear is assessed to be very low, supported by long-

standing US treaty commitments to both Japan and South Korea. Of note, the absence of Australia from this model is not expected to affect its strategic alignment or nonnuclear posture, given both geographic and political considerations. The model also benefits from substantial military power, with Japan's advanced Self-Defense Forces, South Korea's modernized military, and the US regional posture in Northeast Asia forming a credible deterrent. Economically, the trilateral boasts significant strength, uniting some of the world's largest and most technologically advanced economies. However, political acceptability is more complex; persistent historical tensions between Japan and South Korea may continue to challenge deeper integration, despite recent progress in trilateral diplomacy.

Model 2 demonstrates significant strengths across most evaluation criteria. In terms of shared threat perception, all three member states—Japan, the United States, and Australia—identify the PRC as the primary threat to regional stability and their national strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific. Entrapment fears are low, as growing strategic alignment and institutionalized defense consultation, facilitated by minilateral mechanisms, make it unlikely that any member would unilaterally draw the others into conflicts unrelated to the core alliance focus. Although the US maintains long-standing treaty commitments to both Japan and Australia and Australian-Japanese defense cooperation has notably deepened, abandonment fear is still assessed as moderate. The exclusion of South Korea from this model increases the perceived risk that Seoul may feel compelled to hedge between Washington and Beijing or even reconsider its nonnuclear stance, particularly in the absence of an initial role within the IPTO alliance. On military power, the model is formidable: Japan and Australia maintain growing interoperability with US forces, supported by frequent joint exercises and enhanced cooperation under the AUKUS framework. The model also exhibits substantial economic strength, grounded in deep trade linkages and the advanced technological capabilities of all three nations. Political acceptability is very high, sustained by long-standing bilateral alliances and relatively smooth trilateral relations, making this configuration a politically viable and publicly acceptable foundation for launching the IPTO.

Model 3 demonstrates alignment with a number of the evaluation criteria. As a trilateral alliance comprising the United States, South Korea, and Australia, it reflects a moderate level of shared threat perception. While all three countries regard China as a strategic concern, their threat prioritization differs: South Korea remains more focused on North Korea, whereas Australia, given its geographic distance from the Korean Peninsula, places greater emphasis on the PRC and broader Indo-Pacific dynamics. Entrapment fears are more pronounced in this model. Australia may be cautious about being drawn into a Korea-centric

conflict, while South Korea could be wary of becoming entangled in US-China tensions not directly related to the peninsula. In contrast, abandonment fear is assessed as low, supported by firm US treaty commitments to both Australia and South Korea and further reinforced by the recent Australia-Republic of Korea Strategic Partnership. Although Japan is excluded from this configuration, its absence from the alliance is unlikely to impact its strategic alignment or nuclear posture. The model maintains credible military power, with each member fielding professional, well-equipped forces supported by growing defense cooperation and interoperability through joint exercises and bilateral agreements. Economic strength is considerable, underpinned by advanced industrial capacity, robust trade relationships, and technological innovation across all three economies. Finally, political acceptability may face substantial hurdles, due to less developed trilateral coordination mechanisms and a lack of broad public visibility or support for this specific arrangement.

Model 4 performs strongly against the evaluation criteria. This four-party configuration presents a high common threat perception, uniting all key US allies in Northeast and Southeast Asia who share concerns over China's regional ambitions and North Korea's destabilizing behavior. While entrapment fears persist—particularly for Australia and South Korea—they may be mitigated through joint planning mechanisms and regular diplomatic consultation. Abandonment fear is assessed to be very low, underpinned by long-standing US treaty commitments, a growing strategic convergence of regional security priorities, and the inclusion of all Indo-Pacific nations under the US nuclear umbrella. It also brings together the most formidable military power, leveraging each country's advanced capabilities and deepening interoperability through joint exercises and technology sharing. The group's combined economic strength is unparalleled in the region, creating a potential hub for strategic coordination across security and economic domains. Political acceptability is strained, as this model requires a greater number of politically diverse and geographically dispersed nations to enter into a multilateral alliance with one another.

### **IPTO Founding Model Comparison**

Turning to model comparison, each was rated on a scale from 1 to 5, with half-point increments permitted. For criteria marked as positive (+), higher scores denote better alignment. Conversely, for criteria marked as negative (-), lower scores are preferable; to account for this in scoring, the inverse of each negative criterion score is shown in brackets and was used in the weighted calculation. Each base score was then multiplied by the criterion's assigned

weight (as noted above), and the resulting weighted scores were summed to produce a total composite score for each model.

**Table 1. IPTO founding model comparison**

EVALUATION CRITERION	WEIGHT (wgt.)	MODEL 1		MODEL 2		MODEL 3		MODEL 4	
		Score	wgts. Score	Score	wgts. Score	Score	wgts. Score	Score	wgts. Score
n/a	n/a	Score	wgts. Score	Score	wgts. Score	Score	wgts. Score	Score	wgts. Score
Shared Threat Perception (+)	2	4	8	5	10	3.5	7	4.5	9
Entrapment Fear (-)	3	2(4)	12	1(5)	15	4(2)	6	3(3)	9
Abandonment Fear (-)	2	1(5)	10	3(3)	6	1.5 (4.5)	9	1(5)	10
Military Power (+)	2	4	8	4	8	4	8	5	10
Economic Strength (+)	1	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	5
Political Acceptability (+)	3	2.5	7.5	3	9	2	6	2	6
Total	n/a	49.5		52		40		49	

Source: Author's analysis

Table 1 presents the results of the IPTO Founding Model Comparison, with a maximum of sixty-five weighted basis points available across all evaluation criteria. Model 2, which envisions a tripartite alliance among Japan, the United States, and Australia, ranked highest with a composite score of fifty-two. It scored best overall in entrapment fear, shared threat perception, and political acceptability, making it the most well-rounded and strategically viable option. Model 1, involving Japan, the United States, and South Korea, followed closely with a composite score of forty-nine and one-half, performing strongly in entrapment fear, abandonment fear, shared threat perception, and military power. It notably tied for first in abandonment fear and ranked second in entrapment fear. Model 4, incorporating all four countries—Japan, the United States, South Korea, and Australia—placed third with a composite score of forty-nine, performing well in abandonment fear, military power, shared threat perception, and entrapment fear. It also scored highest in both military power and economic strength and tied for first in abandonment fear. Model 3, consisting of the United States, South Korea, and Australia, ranked fourth with a composite score of forty, with its strongest areas being abandonment fear, military power, and shared threat perception, though it

trailed the other models in overall alignment with the evaluation criteria. Notably, all models performed comparably in military power and economic strength, with only a two-point spread separating the highest and lowest scores in those categories. Lastly, it is worth emphasizing that Models 1, 2, and 4 from table 2 scored within just five basis points of one another, indicating a relatively tight performance band and suggesting that multiple configurations may be viable starting points for the IPTO's incorporation.

To provide context for these scores, the same evaluation criteria were next applied and adapted for a comparative analysis of NATO, SEATO, and CENTO alliances in the lead-up to their respective formations in 1949, 1954, and 1959. Drawing from the analysis conducted in support of “Lessons from Historical Alliances” section of this report, the following results were observed.

**Table 2. NATO, SEATO, and CENTO founding model comparison (author's analysis)**

EVALUATION CRITERION	WEIGHT (wgt.)	NATO (1949)		SEATO (1954)		CENTO (1959)*	
		Score	wgts. Score	Score	Weighted Score	Score	wgts. Score
n/a	n/a	Score	wgts. Score	Score	Weighted Score	Score	wgts. Score
Shared Threat Perception (+)	2	5	10	3	6	2.5	5
Entrapment Fear (-)	3	1(5)	15	3.5 (2.5)	7.5	3.5 (2.5)	7.5
Abandonment Fear (-)	2	1(5)	10	1(5)	10	2(4)	8
Military Power (+)		2.5	5	3.5	7	2	4
Economic Strength (+)	1	3.5	3.5	2.5	2.5	2	2
Political Acceptability (+)	3	4.5	13.5	4	12	3.5	10.5
Total	n/a	n/a	57	n/a	45	n/a	37

For the CENTO alliance, the evaluation criteria were considered in the lead-up to the signing of the Baghdad Pact in 1955. n/a =not applicable

Table 2 presents the results of the comparative analysis of NATO, SEATO, and CENTO in the lead up to their formation. Using the same evaluation criteria and a maximum of sixty-five weighted basis points, the analysis reveals that NATO scored the highest, with a composite score of fifty-seven. It performed strongest in entrapment fear, political acceptability, shared threat perception, and abandonment fear and also received the top score for eco-

conomic strength. SEATO followed with a composite score of forty-five, with its strengths in political acceptability, abandonment fear, and entrapment fear. It also scored highest in military power and tied for first in abandonment fear. CENTO ranked lowest, with thirty-seven points, though like SEATO, its strongest areas were in political acceptability, abandonment fear, and entrapment fear. Across all three alliances, scores in abandonment fear and economic strength remained relatively consistent, with only a two-point spread between the highest and lowest performers in those categories.

With regard to the scores presented in table 2, it is important to recognize that the defensive commitments embedded in each alliance were not equal, as detailed in the “Lessons from Historical Alliances” section and analyzed in “From Past Lessons to Future Strategies in the Indo-Pacific” in this paper. These factors can directly influence outcomes in entrapment fear, abandonment fear, and political acceptability. The North Atlantic Treaty obligations were the most robust, explicitly incorporating collective defense obligations. In contrast, the Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty featured more ambiguously defined commitments, while the Baghdad Pact had the weakest overall framework. This stands in contrast to the models evaluated in table 1, which apply a consistent treaty structure—based on the proposed Indo-Pacific Treaty found previously in “From Past Lessons to Future Strategies in the Indo-Pacific”—but which vary in membership composition. These foundational differences are essential to keep in mind when interpreting the results that follow, as they provide critical context for understanding how variations in alliance design—particularly the strength and clarity of formal commitments—shape performance across these three evaluation criteria.

When cross-referencing the results from tables 1 and 2, we find that the composite scores of all four proposed IPTO founding models fall within the overall range of the NATO, SEATO, and CENTO alliances at the time of their creation. Notably, all four IPTO configurations outperformed CENTO, and three surpassed SEATO. However, none matched NATO’s founding composite score. Statistically significant differences emerged between the IPTO founding models and the historical alliances in military power, economic strength, and political acceptability. While the IPTO has not yet been established, its prospective models scored higher in both military power and economic strength than any of the three legacy alliances at the time of their formation. This suggests that while strong capabilities are beneficial, they are not in themselves decisive for achieving formal alliance incorporation.

Conversely, political acceptability appears to be a critical factor. This aligns with intuitive expectations: The formation of a multilateral alliance hinges on the willingness of multiple governments to reach a shared political consensus. It

also underscores a key inhibiting factor across all four IPTO models: Each scored noticeably lower in political acceptability compared to NATO, SEATO, and CENTO. Even the highest-performing IPTO model in this category, Model 2, trailed CENTO—the weakest of the historical alliances—by 1.5 points. This gap is not trivial, especially given the observed positive correlation between higher political acceptability scores and more defined alliance frameworks. In practical terms, this suggests that alliances with broader domestic and multilateral support tend to form stronger, more enduring structures. Given that the formation of a robust multilateral alliance, particularly one with collective defense obligations, likely requires a political acceptability score of 4.5 or higher, it appears that the current geopolitical conditions are not yet conducive to the successful incorporation of the IPTO as described in this study.

Looking ahead, a shift in the US position toward greater multilateral engagement will likely be necessary for improving the IPTO's prospects. Should that shift occur, any of the founding models presented in table 1 could serve as a viable foundation for the alliance's formation. While Model 2 currently stands out as the most advantageous starting point, the other configurations remain strategically sound and should not be discounted. To maintain flexibility and relevance across scenarios, the analysis that follows will center on Model 4, the most comprehensive configuration, incorporating all four potential member states. This approach ensures that the study's key findings remain adaptable, regardless of which model may ultimately be pursued.

### **Funding the IPTO**

Table 3 presents a rough order of magnitude (ROM) estimate for the costs necessary to establish the IPTO and its components. It is important to note that these estimates do not include assets and capabilities already available—such as F-35A aircraft and B61-12 weapons—or those already funded by their respective governments, such as US integrated air and missile defense for the Indo-Pacific, the SLCM-N, the B-21 Raider, and Australia's SSN program. Additionally, it does not include potential future alliance capabilities that could be deployed over the medium-to-long term. These excluded costs substantially reduce the marginal financial burden of implementing an Indo-Pacific nuclear posture, allowing the financial estimate to focus solely on the core capabilities, infrastructure, sustainment, and support requirements necessary for the IPTO in the near-term.

Concerning the alliances' theater nuclear forces, the initial cost estimate to establish forces at Kunsan Air Base and Kadena Air Base is estimated between \$1.25 billion to \$1.85 billion with annual recurring costs estimated between

\$125 to \$150 million thereafter.<sup>285</sup> This first figure encompasses the construction of new facilities and supporting infrastructure necessary to provide a safe, secure, reliable, and credible nuclear weapons capability.<sup>286</sup> The latter covers the administration, maintenance, upkeep, logistics, future requirements, and salaries of additional US military personnel to sustain and operate a nuclear mission at these locations.<sup>287</sup>

For its support of long-range bomber operations in Australia, two new WGFs—selected among RAAF Amberley, Tindal, and Darwin—are estimated between \$0.5 billion to \$1 billion in upfront costs with \$4 million to \$6 million in annual costs recurring thereafter.<sup>288</sup> The first cost figure covers the construction of these new facilities while the latter covers their maintenance and upkeep. Regarding US long-range bomber support for the territories of Guam, Tinian, Wake Island, and Midway Island, these programs are estimated between \$0.75 billion to \$1.5 billion in upfront costs with \$2 million to \$3 million in annual costs recurring thereafter. This first cost figure covers the construction of a new WGF in Guam while the latter covers various facility and capability renovations, sustainment and logistical infrastructure upgrades, and maintenance and upkeep costs. Of note, domestic US policy changes would be required to remilitarize Midway Island and return it to the US DOD.<sup>289</sup> The costs for doing so were considered beyond the scope of this ROM estimate and are not reflected within our estimates.

Lastly, establishing alliance facilities, such as the IPTO's political and military headquarters in Canberra, is expected to cost between \$3 billion to \$3.5 billion initially.<sup>290</sup> The estimated total IPTO annual operating cost of \$5 billion is comparable to the costs for NATO operations.<sup>291</sup> This parallel is not coincidental; the same core functions of planning, coordination, political-military integration, and command infrastructure must be replicated in the Indo-Pacific context. In total, the financial commitments mirror those of operating NATO, reaffirming that strategic deterrence, allied cohesion, and regional stability in this theater require an equally robust institutional framework and investment.

The total upfront cost of establishing the IPTO as a political and nuclear alliance is estimated to range between \$9.45 billion and \$13.5 billion. The majority of these expenses are attributed to the construction and development of alliance facilities, followed by the establishment of theater nuclear forces and the enhancement of long-range bomber operations in the Indo-Pacific. Annual recurring costs are projected between \$5.13 billion and \$5.16 billion, with most of these funds dedicated to sustaining alliance operations. Crucially, all costs would be fairly and equitably distributed among IPTO member states through cost-sharing agreements, reinforcing both the alliance's financial sustainability and its political cohesion over the long term.

**Table 3. Estimated financial costs of the IPTO\* (author’s analysis)**

<b>Assets and Capabilities</b>	<b>Location(s)</b>	<b>Estimated Cost</b>
Theater Nuclear Forces B61-12 nuclear gravity bombs, F-35A aircraft, facilities, supporting personnel, operations and sustainment	Kunsan Air Base, ROK Kadena Air base, Japan	\$1.25–1.85 billion (initial) \$125–150 million (recurring)
Australian Long-Range Bomber Support** WGFs (to include facility upkeep and maintenance)	RAAF Amberley RAAF Tindal RAAF Darwin	\$0.5–1 billion (initial) \$4–6 million (recurring)
US Long-Range Bomber Support Weapon generation facility (to include facility upkeep and maintenance), other facility and capability renovations, sustainment and logistical infrastructure upgrades	Guam Tinian Wake Island Midway Island	\$0.75–1.5 billion (initial) \$2–3 million (recurring)
Alliance Facilities and Operations Political and military headquarters, operations of the organization and its military commands, command and control upgrades across IPTO member states	Canberra, Australia	\$3–3.5 billion (initial) \$5 billion (recurring)
Total Financial Obligations***	Initial Costs: \$9.45–13.5 billion Recurring Costs: \$5.13–5.16 billion	

\* Estimated financial costs do not include those assets and capabilities already funded by the governments of the United States, Japan, Australia, or South Korea

\* Estimated financial costs are for two WGFs, selected among the three locations presented

\*\* Presented in FY2025 dollars

### **Toward Strategic Convergence: The Politics of Alliance Formation**

Establishing the IPTO will require overcoming a range of legal and policy barriers, some of which are deeply rooted in national legislation, historical agreements, and alliance commitments. Table 4 contains a preliminary analysis of specific treaties, laws, and policies that must be addressed. Notably, the IPTO framework remains fully compliant with the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT); however, individual member states may face unique challenges that will determine the pace and structure of their participation.<sup>292</sup>

The United States currently faces no domestic legal barriers to deploying nuclear weapons or coordinating with allies under existing laws. Although the 2023 US-ROK Washington Declaration affirmed the goal of “denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula” and would have restricted nuclear redeployment to South Korea, it appears the current Trump administration may have quietly withdrawn from the agreement.<sup>293</sup> In its place, both the US and ROK now support the narrower objective of “denuclearization of North Korea,” potentially

paving the way for the redeployment of US nuclear weapons to South Korea, provided both sides reach a mutual agreement.<sup>294</sup> If South Korea or Japan were to host US nonstrategic nuclear weapons (NSNW), a formal governance structure would need to be established. Drawing on the model used between the US and NATO allies in Europe—while adapting it to the Indo-Pacific context—this framework would likely include an Atomic Cooperation Agreement for the bilateral exchange of nuclear information and an Atomic Stockpile Agreement covering the introduction, storage, custody, security, safety, and possible release of US nuclear weapons by the host nation.<sup>295</sup>

South Korea's participation in the IPTO as a host nation for US theater nuclear forces faces two restrictive measures. Specifically, the 2015 US-ROK Agreement for Peaceful Nuclear Cooperation and 2024 US-ROK Guidelines for Nuclear Deterrence impose restrictive policy frameworks that limit how South Korea can participate in nuclear-related operations without significant legal reinterpretation or formal withdrawal.<sup>296</sup> Specifically, the former limits the military use of nuclear technology while the latter may require alteration to permit NSNW redeployment.<sup>297</sup> Regarding the 1992 Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, this too was likely rescinded based on recent policy statements made by the ROK government.<sup>298</sup> Of final importance, there is no explicit constitutional prohibition against nuclear weapons in South Korea, suggesting that legal reform is possible with sufficient political will and alliance consensus.

Japan presents the most formidable domestic legal and normative barriers to IPTO participation as a host nation for US theater nuclear forces. Both the 1947 Constitution (Article 9) and the 1967 Three Nonnuclear Principles function as prohibitive barriers, strictly limiting Japan's involvement in nuclear operations.<sup>299</sup> These are reinforced by the 1968 Four Pillars of Nuclear Policy, which further institutionalize nonnuclear norms as part of Japan's postwar security identity.<sup>300</sup> Amending Article 9 would require a two-thirds majority in both houses of the Diet and a national referendum which can be a high threshold given Japan's pacifist political culture. Without major constitutional and policy shifts, Japan's role in the IPTO may remain limited to nonnuclear support and political coordination unless it undertakes significant legal reforms.

Australia faces relatively minimal domestic legal barriers, provided that nuclear weapons are not permanently stationed within its territory. The 1986 Treaty of Rarotonga, which established the South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone (SPNFZ), serves as a restrictive constraint by prohibiting the stationing of nuclear weapons.<sup>301</sup> However, it does not explicitly ban the transit or rotational presence of nuclear-capable platforms. This legal nuance gives Australia the flexibility to support enabling functions, such as hosting bomber support infrastructure and WGFs housing stand-off

weapons without contravening treaty obligations. Australia is thus well-positioned to play a key supporting role within IPTO without requiring legislative changes.

Overcoming these barriers will require a combination of domestic legal reform, bilateral diplomatic engagement, and regional strategic recalibration. While the NPT remains fully compatible with the IPTO vision, other agreements, such as Japan’s pacifist legal architecture, pose significant hurdles. Moving forward, the IPTO initiative will need to focus on building political consensus, establishing phased implementation pathways, and creating tailored roles for each member state that reflect both legal constraints and strategic needs. US extended deterrence remains a critical enabler in this equation, mitigating the need for nuclear proliferation while anchoring a stable and balanced regional security framework.

**Table 4. Restrictive and prohibitive barriers to IPTO participation\* (author’s analysis)**

Country	Domestic Change Required?	Restrictive (R) or Prohibitive (P) Accords, Agreements, and Policy	Notes
United States	No	No restrictive or prohibitive accords, agreements, or policy	Existing US laws permit nuclear deployment and allied coordination. The 2023 US-ROK Washington Declaration may have been rescinded by the Trump Administration. Current US policy is committed to denuclearization of North Korea
Republic of Korea	Yes	2015 US-ROK Agreement for Peaceful Nuclear Cooperation (R) 2024 US-ROK Guidelines for Nuclear Deterrence and Nuclear Operations on the Korean Peninsula (R)	There is no ROK constitutional objection to nuclear weapons. 1992 Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula was likely rescinded by the South Korean government.
Japan	Yes	1947 Constitution of Japan—Article 9 (P) 1967 Three Nonnuclear Principles (P) 1968 Four Pillars of Nuclear Policy (R)	2/3 majority needed to amend the constitution. The three nonnuclear principles are embedded in the four pillars of Nuclear Policy.
Australia	No (if no nuclear weapons are permanently stationed in country)	1986 Treaty of Rarotonga (R)	The SPNFZ treaty prohibits “stationing” of nuclear weapons, but not explicitly having them rotationally or for transit
Note: The NPT remains fully compatible with the proposed IPTO framework. US extended deterrence guarantees to diminish the need for a nuclear hedging strategy and protects the nuclear nonproliferation regime.			

\*Assessments are preliminary and require further validation with each nation’s respective government

This section examined four potential founding models for the IPTO, evaluating each against a set of criteria relevant to the formation of a multilateral alliance to identify their respective strengths and weaknesses. It then compared these models both with one another and against historical alliances such as NATO, SEATO, and CENTO to provide contextual insight into each model's viability. Among the options considered, the trilateral model involving the United States, Japan, and Australia emerged as the most promising framework for IPTO incorporation at this stage. Building on this analysis, the section turned to a review of the financial requirements for establishing the alliance, followed by an assessment of the legal and policy barriers that prospective member states might face. With these components addressed, the analysis of the IPTO alliance is now complete. The remainder of this study offers concluding reflections and highlights reasons for optimism about the alliance's future charter and viability.

## Conclusion

### **Balancing Power: International Relations (IR) Theory and the Changing Indo-Pacific Order**

In a private address to the Council on Foreign Relations in October 1951, US Ambassador John Foster Dulles, architect of the United States' Indo-Pacific alliance system, observed that while the region was not yet ready for a NATO-style security arrangement, the development of a multilateral framework might become feasible over time.<sup>302</sup> The reasons for this assessment were several. From a realist IR standpoint—emphasizing threats, geography, hegemonic power, and cost-benefit calculations—there were no pressing military contingencies in Asia that the United States could not manage alone, making a multilateral security structure unnecessary.<sup>303</sup> From a liberalist perspective—focused on economic development, regime types, and the pursuit of absolute gains—Asia's relatively low levels of economic development, diverse forms of governance, and limited enthusiasm for collective security suggested that bilateralism was a more practical approach.<sup>304</sup> Lastly, from a constructivist viewpoint—centered on identity and norms—lingering historical animosities toward Japan and prevailing racial biases against Indo-Pacific nations diminished the United States' motivation to pursue multilateral alignment with regional partners at the time.<sup>305</sup>

What is most striking about these historical arguments is that each of them is now reversed. Today, the military threat in Asia is the greatest since the end of the Cold War, with growing concerns over China's regional assertiveness, North Korea's advancing nuclear capabilities, and increasing tensions across

the Taiwan Strait—creating scenarios that the United States is unlikely to manage effectively on its own. Economically, the Indo-Pacific has become the engine of global growth, with relatively higher levels of development, greater interdependence, and a rising number of democratic states, all of which enhance the feasibility and appeal of multilateral cooperation. Furthermore, evolving regional identities, the normalization of Japan’s security role, and the erosion of racial and historical barriers have contributed to a more cohesive regional political environment. These shifts suggest that the very conditions that once justified a hub-and-spokes alliance model now support renewed consideration of a multilateral security architecture in the Indo-Pacific.

### **The Indo-Pacific at a Crossroads**

Today, the Indo-Pacific stands at a strategic inflection point. The escalating assertiveness of authoritarian powers, chief among them China, poses a growing threat not only to regional stability but also to the broader rules-based international system. What makes this moment particularly consequential is the increasing alignment and coordination among revisionist regimes, including China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran, which signals a shift from isolated challenges to a more integrated geopolitical front.<sup>306</sup> As Chinese President Xi Jinping remarked to Vladimir Putin in 2023, “Right now there are changes—the likes of which we haven’t seen for 100 years—and we are the ones driving these changes together.”<sup>307</sup> This statement encapsulates the ambition of authoritarian states to reshape global norms and institutions in ways that challenge Western leadership and liberal-democratic values.

In response, the United States and its regional allies must rethink how they project and sustain power in an environment defined by intensified strategic competition and growing multipolarity. The long-standing hub-and-spokes model, once sufficient to manage fragmented threats through bilateral ties, now appears increasingly inadequate in the face of coordinated adversaries and complex, transnational challenges. What is needed is a more coherent, integrated, and multilateral approach that combines military, political, and technological capabilities across allied states to build collective resilience and deterrence.<sup>308</sup> This study argues that such a transformation is both strategically necessary and increasingly feasible.

To that end, it introduced the IPTO, a proposed multilateral alliance structure modeled in part on the legacy of NATO but tailored to the unique dynamics of the Indo-Pacific. The IPTO framework envisions a unified posture anchored in political cohesion, military interoperability, and nuclear burden-sharing, capable of reinforcing regional defense and counterbalancing au-

thoritarian influence. It aims not only to deter aggression but to safeguard sovereignty, uphold democratic values, and ensure long-term strategic advantage for the United States and its allies.

Importantly, this study went beyond conceptual advocacy. Through rigorous analysis, historical case studies, and comparative institutional review, it presents a viable blueprint for how such an alliance could be structured, operationalized, and sustained. Yet, like any strategic proposal, it raises key questions that require further exploration. How would regional actors—especially China, North Korea, ASEAN, and India—react to the IPTO’s formation? Would a crisis such as a Chinese invasion of Taiwan catalyze its creation, and would it be wise to wait for such a moment? What levels of political will, legal feasibility, and strategic interest exist among potential core members like Japan, Australia, and South Korea? Additional research is needed to examine domestic public opinion, legal and constitutional barriers, the economics of alliance-building, and potential pathways for integrating nonnuclear states. Predictive modeling on the relative viability of the IPTO’s four founding structures would further clarify its optimal form. Addressing these questions is essential for translating strategic vision into durable policy and for ensuring that the Indo-Pacific remains free, open, and secure in the face of mounting global challenges.

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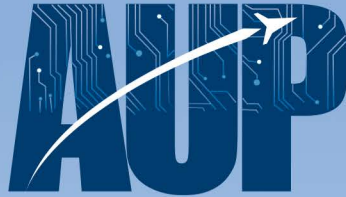
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## Abbreviations

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CENTO	Central Treaty Organization
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
DCA	dual-capable aircraft
DOD	Department of Defense
DPRK	Democratic People's Republic of Korea
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HMAS	Her Majesty's Australian Ship
IAMD	integrated air and missile defense
INDOPACOM	Indo-Pacific Command
IPC	Indo-Pacific Council
IPTO	Indo-Pacific Treaty Organization
IR	international relations
JSDF	Japan Self-Defense Forces
LEP	life extension program
LNA	limited nuclear attack
MC	Military Committee
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCG	Nuclear Consultative Group
NPCG	Nuclear Policy and Consultative Group
NSS	National Security Strategy
NWS	nuclear weapon state
PATO	Pacific Alliance Treaty Organization
PLA	People's Liberation Army
POTUS	President of the United States
PRC	People's Republic of China
RAAF	Royal Australian Air Force
ROK	Republic of Korea
ROM	rough order of magnitude
SANDS	School of Advanced Nuclear Deterrence Studies
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organization
SPNFZ	South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone
TCOG	Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group
TSD	Trilateral Strategic Dialogue

UACIP  
WGF  
WMD

unified allied commander Indo-Pacific  
weapon generation facilities  
weapons of mass destruction



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