

U.S. MILITARY “DETERRENCE” STRATEGY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

Lieutenant Colonel Ioseb Turashvili¹

<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-2891-7547>

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the United States’ military “deterrence” strategy in the Indo-Pacific region and its underlying geopolitical dynamics. The study highlights the 21st-century geopolitical context in which the region has become the primary arena of great-power competition between the United States and China. It emphasizes Washington’s strategic objectives: containing China’s expanding influence, maintaining military and air superiority, strengthening partnership alliances (ASEAN – Association of Southeast Asian Nations; AUKUS – Australia–United Kingdom–United States security partnership; QUAD – Quadrilateral Security Dialogue), and upholding the international order under the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) strategy.

Special attention is given to the significance of AUKUS, which provides Australia with nuclear-powered submarines, cyber capabilities, hypersonic systems, and advanced AI technologies—constituting a direct response to China’s military activities in the South China Sea and the broader region. The study also outlines the importance of economic engagement, support for innovation, and strengthening democratic governance as critical components of the U.S. global strategy, all of which reinforce the traditional military dimension of deterrence.

The research employs a qualitative social-science methodology. This approach enables a comprehensive and multidimensional analysis of the problem rather than focusing solely on isolated manifestations. The key advantage of the qualitative method lies in its capacity for in-depth, holistic examination of complex issues.

The paper discusses the role of U.S. geopolitical interests in shaping the global order of the 21st century. Strategically, Washington focuses on regions that directly or indirectly affect U.S. national security, economic power, and global leadership—with the Indo-Pacific being among the most vital. U.S. military policy for safeguarding these interests is grounded in three core principles: **Threat prevention and deterrence** through a robust military presence in strategic regions; **Strengthening global partnerships** via NATO, AUKUS, QUAD, and other regional blocs; **Integration of innovative technologies**, particularly in cybersecurity and artificial intelligence.

Geopolitically, the Indo-Pacific constitutes a crucial economic and strategic space in which the United States seeks to maintain vigilance and rapid response capabilities—militarily and economically. At the same time, regional partners such as India, Australia, Japan, and others form integral pillars of America’s deterrence architecture, contributing to a strengthened regional coalition and an increasingly multipolar security structure. The strategy’s effectiveness relies on mobile and flexible military forces, innovative technologies, and the active use of the information domain, all of which enhance the United States’ capacity to respond to regional challenges.

Keywords: deterrence strategy, Indo-Pacific, AUCUS, regional security, global hegemony

¹ Head of the Baccalaureate Program in Management at LEPL - David Aghmashenebeli National Defence Academy of Georgia

INTRODUCTION

In the geopolitical landscape of the 21st century, the Indo-Pacific has emerged as the primary arena of great-power rivalry. The strategic objective of the United States is to contain the expansion of China's influence and ensure the preservation of its own military and economic superiority in the region. To achieve this, Washington employs a strategy of **strategic deterrence**, which integrates military basing, security alliances, trade mechanisms, and technological dominance.

The Indo-Pacific encompasses the central sphere of competition between the world's two largest economies—the United States and China. China's *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI), its assertive claims in the South China Sea, and the Taiwan issue—considered a potential flashpoint for military conflict—are identified in the **2022 U.S. National Security Strategy** as core strategic challenges. Within this framework, the U.S. deterrence strategy is designed to limit China's growing military and economic influence through a global network of military bases and strengthened alliances, including **AUKUS** (Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States), **QUAD** (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue—United States, Japan, India, Australia), and **ASEAN** (Association of Southeast Asian Nations). These partnerships promote economic stability, maritime security, and cooperation on climate-related challenges.

Regarding U.S. military basing and force posture in the region, key installations are located in **Okinawa (Japan), Guam, Diego Garcia, South Korea, and Australia**. In addition, the United States maintains a **rotational presence** in Australia (Darwin), the Philippines, and Japan as part of the **Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)** doctrine, ensuring sustained military access to critical strategic locations. Significant military assets oriented toward the region include new naval and air capabilities, such as **Ford-class aircraft carriers** and the **B-21 Raider** strategic bomber.²

² U.S. Department of Defense. Fact Sheet: Department of Defense Marks Two-Year Anniversary of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy. February 2024. <https://surl.lt/fobwkw>. (Accessed 28. 11.2025.)

MAIN PART

The United States' Indo-Pacific strategy is officially defined in the **2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy** document. Its core components reflect Washington's long-term geopolitical vision for ensuring regional stability, maintaining a favorable balance of power, and countering China's expanding influence.

A central pillar of this framework is the **Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)** doctrine—a geostrategic concept in U.S. foreign policy aimed at promoting stability, security, respect for sovereignty, and economic openness across the Indo-Pacific region. FOIP is built upon four foundational principles:

1. **Freedom of Navigation and Overflight** – All states in the region must be able to move freely by sea and air in accordance with international law.
2. **Respect for Sovereignty** – No state should be coerced into accepting policies contrary to its national interests.
3. **Market-Based Economics and Inclusive Development** – Regional development should be based on open markets, transparency, infrastructure integrity, and the absence of corruption.
4. **A Predictable, Rules-Based Order** – Stability should rest on international norms and legal regimes, particularly the **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)**.

The FOIP doctrine emerged as a direct response to China's growing military, economic, and technological influence throughout the region, especially in the South China Sea. The United States places particular emphasis on a **deterrence-based strategy** to prevent unilateral Chinese dominance, strengthening both traditional and emerging multilateral security arrangements.

Among these, **AUKUS** and **QUAD** represent critical instruments of coordinated action. They enhance interoperability, increase joint military preparedness, and reinforce collective security commitments. Moreover, the United States continues to advance alternative infrastructure and investment initiatives—such as the **Blue Dot Network** and

Build Back Better World (B3W)—which serve as counterweights to China’s expansive *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI). These initiatives seek to provide transparent, sustainable, and rules-based infrastructure development as strategic alternatives to Chinese state-backed projects.

Through these combined approaches—military deterrence, alliance strengthening, technological cooperation, and geoeconomic counterbalancing—the United States aims to maintain regional stability while limiting China’s ability to reshape the Indo-Pacific order in ways that challenge U.S. national interests and the wider rules-based international system.

“Strengthening the Partnership Network” - China’s pressure on neighboring states in the South China Sea, its economic expansionism, and the construction of military bases have prompted an active U.S. response and deeper partnership engagement. The strengthening of the partnership network represents the United States’ geostrategic response to China’s assertive policies. This approach relies not only on military deterrence but also on long-term economic, technological, and political cooperation. Situational analysis demonstrates that the U.S. strategy is more inclusive and multilayered than the traditional, narrowly defined concept of “containment.”

“Regional Security and Deterrence” - The region holds immense geoeconomic and geopolitical significance, as it hosts 60 percent of global trade flows and some of the most critical energy routes. For the United States, the Indo-Pacific is strategically essential for maintaining global hegemony and balancing China’s growing military and political influence. U.S. military strategy in the Indo-Pacific is based on the principle of deterrence, which includes strengthening military capabilities in the region, supporting strategic allies, expanding the partnership network, and upholding a rules-based international order. This strategy aims to restrain China’s military expansion in the South China Sea, around the Taiwan Strait, and throughout East Asia.³

³ U.S. Department of Defense. Fact Sheet: Department of Defense Marks Two-Year Anniversary of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy. February 2024. <https://surl.li/mnohuz>, (Accessed 28. 11.2025.)

“Economic Engagement and Innovation” - The U.S. strategy in the Indo-Pacific is oriented not only toward military deterrence but also toward stabilizing the economic environment, developing digital infrastructure, and promoting innovation. Through this approach, the United States seeks to establish a partnership-based, rules-driven system that counters authoritarian economic models and ensures long-term stability in the region. Washington is launching multibillion-dollar infrastructure initiatives with its partners—for example, the G7-announced Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII)—which aims to provide an alternative to China’s Belt and Road Initiative. Priority areas include digital infrastructure, clean energy, and the health sector. Furthermore, the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF), launched in 2022, brought together 14 countries (including Japan, South Korea, India, Australia, and Vietnam) to develop common standards in trade policy, supply-chain resilience, energy, and anti-corruption measures.⁴ The United States also supports the development of startup ecosystems in the region, including assistance for digital enterprises, the empowerment of women in the technology sector, and the funding of regional innovation hubs.⁵ In addition, Washington is advancing scientific cooperation with partners such as South Korea and Australia in areas related to the hydrogen economy, battery technologies, and green innovation—initiatives that also contribute to broader climate security objectives.⁶

“Support for Democratic Governance” - The United States promotes the development of democratic institutions, the strengthening of the rule of law, and the protection of human rights in the region. It supports non-governmental organizations, media freedom, and the empowerment of civil society. The U.S. considers democratic values to be directly linked to long-term security and stability.⁷

⁴ White House. “Fact Sheet: In Asia, President Biden and a Dozen Indo-Pacific Partners Launch the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework.” 2022. <https://surl.li/kelazn>. (Accessed 28. 11.2025.)

⁵ U.S. Department of State. “U.S.-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET).” 2023. <https://surl.li/brylfy>. (Accessed 28. 11.2025.)

⁶ U.S. Department of Energy. “DOE Launches Clean Energy Partnerships in the Indo-Pacific.” 2022. <https://surl.li/zffhga>. (Accessed 28. 11.2025.)

⁷ U.S. Department of State. *The United States’ Enduring Commitment to the Indo-Pacific*, February 2024. <https://surl.li/irykrz>. (Accessed 28. 11.2025.)

The U.S. military deterrence strategy in the Indo-Pacific represents a comprehensive response to the evolving global balance of power. Partnership networks, economic engagement, the geographical distribution of military bases, and value-based principles together form a solid platform for maintaining U.S. global hegemony.

The AUKUS military-political bloc (Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) plays a crucial role in Washington's Indo-Pacific deterrence strategy, especially in countering China, and is widely regarded as a de facto NATO equivalent in the region. Analyzing this bloc and its objectives provides deeper insight into U.S. geopolitical interests in the Indo-Pacific. The U.S. National Security Strategy (2022) underscores the importance of AUKUS as a tool for strengthening the alliance network. The strategy aims to advance systems based on nuclear technologies, advanced weaponry, and cybersecurity.

The article “AUKUS: A Generational Opportunity,” published by the U.S. Department of State in 2023, is a key document that examines the goals, significance, and prospects of the newly established AUKUS military-political alliance among Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The alliance represents a major indicator of shifting geopolitical dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region.⁸

The establishment of AUKUS was announced in 2021 as a trilateral partnership aimed at strengthening security in the Indo-Pacific region. AUKUS brings together three powerful democratic states that share common values and strategic interests. The formation of the alliance reinforces the unity of democratic forces in the region and reduces China's influence. Its creation was primarily driven by China's growing military capabilities and expanding regional influence, both of which pose challenges to the United States, its partners, and its allies. The objectives of AUKUS include: Development of Submarine Capabilities - The partnership envisions providing Australia with nuclear-powered submarines, which will enhance the maritime balance in the region. Under AUKUS, Australia will receive nuclear-powered submarines for the first time, enabling extended

⁸ U.S. Department of State. “AUKUS: A Generational Opportunity.” United States Department of State, April 5, 2023. <https://surl.li/lnwans>, (Accessed 28. 11.2025.)

operational range and greater strategic flexibility. As part of the agreement, Australia will acquire at least three nuclear-powered submarines from the United States, significantly boosting its naval capabilities. This step is viewed as a means of strengthening deterrence and stability in the Indo-Pacific, although China perceives it as a threat and a factor contributing to regional destabilization.

This move substantially enhances Australia's maritime capabilities, serving as a direct instrument for countering China's military activities in the region. Nuclear-powered submarines possess the ability to operate undetected for long periods, making them ideal assets for maintaining the regional balance of power. The program contributes to the strengthening of U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific and ultimately supports the overall security architecture of the region.⁹

Cybersecurity and Advanced Technologies: This includes partnership aimed at strengthening cybersecurity and developing cyber-defense strategies. One of the core priorities of AUKUS is the enhancement of cybersecurity, which is an integral part of modern military and economic strategies. This involves the development of innovative systems that ensure the protection of partners' critical infrastructure.

Regarding the research and development of artificial intelligence, hypersonic weapons, and counter-hypersonic systems, it encompasses the use of AI in military operations, which reduces human error and increases operational precision. Within the framework of the alliance, there is also close cooperation in the field of hypersonic technologies, which includes the development of both hypersonic weapons and anti-hypersonic defense systems, thereby strengthening defensive capabilities.

Strategic Integration: This refers to military and technological coordination that ensures the effectiveness of joint operations. Joint military exercises and technological experiments among AUKUS partners are aimed at improving operational coordination. This includes: *Integration of naval and air operations* – joint exercises that enable partners to operate as a

⁹ U.S. Space Forces Japan Celebrates First Year of Activation, <https://surl.li/jkacfk>, (Accessed 28. 11.2025.)

unified force; Autonomous systems – the use of advanced technologies that increase efficiency and reduce the need for human involvement.¹⁰

AUKUS is clearly focused on containing China's growing military capabilities. The deployment of nuclear-powered submarines and the development of hypersonic weapons are a direct response to China's military expansion in the South China Sea and beyond.

China perceives AUKUS as a threat to its regional and global influence. As a result, China has strengthened its own military programs and is actively seeking diplomatic support in the region. It is also attempting to deepen its partnerships with Russia and other regional states.

AUKUS may also affect China's economic relations with partner countries, potentially slowing its economic growth rate. Additionally, the advanced technologies developed within the AUKUS framework may pose a direct challenge to China's military programs, such as:

Hypersonic weapons: China is actively working in this area, but AUKUS's technological progress threatens its military advantage;

Cybersecurity capabilities: the partnership creates a strong barrier against China's cyberattacks.

Despite AUKUS's strength, its implementation faces several challenges, including: *Regional reactions*: several regional countries (e.g., Indonesia and Malaysia) have expressed concern about AUKUS, which may complicate regional diplomacy; *Formation of new military alliances*: other states may begin forming new military blocs to balance AUKUS's influence; *Destabilization of the international order*: AUKUS may disrupt the global order and intensify great-power rivalry; *Chinese propaganda*: China actively uses criticism of AUKUS to advance its interests, strengthening anti-American sentiment; *Economic costs*: the expenses associated with nuclear submarine development and large-scale technological

¹⁰ U.S. Department of State. "AUKUS: A Generational Opportunity." United States Department of State, April 5, 2023. <https://surl.li/dfqgrw>, (Accessed 28. 11.2025.)

programs will be significant, which may lead to domestic criticism within partner countries.¹¹

On January 10, 2025, U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks spoke at an event hosted by the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University and participated in a subsequent discussion, addressing issues related to strategic competition with China. Her remarks focused on the U.S. defense strategy aimed at containing China's growing influence and ensuring stability in the region. Hicks emphasized that China represents the U.S.'s primary strategic competitor, seeking to reshape the existing international order to its advantage.

In this context, the U.S. Department of Defense is making efforts to maintain military superiority and ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific region. Hicks highlighted that the AUKUS partnership, which brings together Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, represents a key initiative to strengthen security in the region. This partnership includes the provision of nuclear-powered submarines to Australia, as well as collaboration in cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, and other advanced technologies.

The Deputy Secretary of Defense stressed that technological innovations, such as artificial intelligence and hypersonic weapons, are critical for maintaining strategic advantage. She noted that AUKUS partners are actively working on the development and integration of these technologies, which will enhance the effectiveness of joint operations. Hicks also addressed the importance of cybersecurity, emphasizing that the AUKUS partnership facilitates information sharing and strengthens cyber defense. This cooperation aims to protect the critical infrastructure of partner countries and prevent cyberattacks.¹²

Kathleen Hicks' remarks and discussion underline the priorities of the U.S. defense strategy in the context of strategic competition with China. The AUKUS partnership and technological innovation are key components of this strategy, aimed at ensuring regional stability and security.

¹¹ Ibid. U.S. Space Forces Japan Celebrates First Year of Activation

¹²Hicks Delivers Speech and Fireside Chat: "Outpacing the PRC: Lessons Learned for Strategic Competition", <https://surl.lu/jrzxlj>, (Accessed 28. 11.2025.)

AUKUS is a significant geopolitical development with a major impact on the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region. The full consequences of the alliance are not yet fully known, and its influence will depend on multiple factors, including China's policies, the responses of other regional powers, and the broader international environment. At this stage, however, AUKUS is an important part of the U.S. strategy of deterrence in the Indo-Pacific region against China. Its success depends not only on the development of military technologies but also on close cooperation among partners and the support of regional countries.

Despite existing challenges, the long-term impact of AUKUS will be decisive in maintaining regional security and stability. Preserving the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific remains a central goal of U.S. geopolitical strategy, and AUKUS remains an integral part of this strategy.

CONCLUSION

In the 21st century, U.S. geopolitical interests and military policy are reflected in its efforts to ensure global security and stability. Despite challenges such as economic costs, geopolitical competitors, and domestic political polarization, the United States continues to act as a global leader. Its military and strategic decisions have a significant impact on the world order and international security. The U.S. military component plays a decisive role in shaping and implementing its geopolitical interests. From supporting allies in Europe amid the Russia-Ukraine war to countering China's rise in the Indo-Pacific through initiatives such as AUKUS and strategic force deployments, the U.S. continues to adapt to address new global challenges. The military remains a key instrument for realizing U.S. geopolitical objectives, integrating strategic and operational approaches to safeguard security, stability, and economic interests. However, in the face of emerging challenges such as technological progress and a multipolar world, the U.S. will need to develop more flexible and innovative strategies.

Using the situational analysis method, it is evident that the U.S. "deterrence" military strategy in the Indo-Pacific region is a key component for maintaining global hegemony.

This strategy relies on a multifaceted approach that includes military presence, strategic partnerships, and economic diplomacy.

Primarily, the U.S. aims to contain China's growing influence in the region, which is directly linked to geopolitical tensions and new security challenges. By leveraging the size of its military forces and technological superiority, the United States strengthens stability, secures free maritime routes, and upholds the sovereignty of its allied countries in the region.

Ultimately, the U.S. "deterrence" military strategy in the Indo-Pacific is part of a broad and integrated policy. It not only demonstrates military power but also establishes partnership structures in a complex geopolitical environment and preserves the global order. Through this approach, the U.S. seeks to maintain prestige and influence in the region while remaining prepared to respond promptly and effectively to new geopolitical challenges.

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