

GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-270](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Both DOD and the Department of State (State) report that cooperation between the U.S. and its allies Japan and South Korea is essential for confronting regional and global challenges. The decades-long forward presence of the U.S. military in those countries has undergirded these security alliances. DOD has about 55,000 troops in Japan, its largest forward-deployed force in the world. DOD has about 28,500 troops in South Korea. It spends billions of dollars annually and maintains dozens of facilities in both countries, ranging from tens of thousands of acres for training sites to single antenna outposts, in support of this presence.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 included a provision for GAO to report on the security benefits derived from the forward presence of the U.S. military in Japan and South Korea and the costs associated with it for calendar years 2016 through 2019. This report describes (1) the identified benefits to U.S. national and regional security derived from the U.S. military presence in Japan and South Korea, (2) the funds obligated by the U.S. military for its presence in Japan and South Korea for 2016 through 2019, and (3) the direct and indirect burden sharing contributions made by Japan and South Korea for 2016 through 2019. To address these objectives, GAO interviewed DOD and State officials and nine non-governmental experts; reviewed various strategy documents and expert studies; and analyzed relevant cost data obtained from DOD.

View [GAO-21-270](#). For more information, contact Diana Maurer at (202) 512-9627 or maurerd@gao.gov and Jason Bair at (202) 512-6881 or bairj@gao.gov.

March 2021

BURDEN SHARING

Benefits and Costs Associated with the U.S. Military Presence in Japan and South Korea

What GAO Found

GAO identified six benefits to U.S. national and regional security derived from the U.S. military presence in Japan and South Korea (see fig. 1). U.S. officials and strategy documents cited them, and non-governmental experts generally agreed.

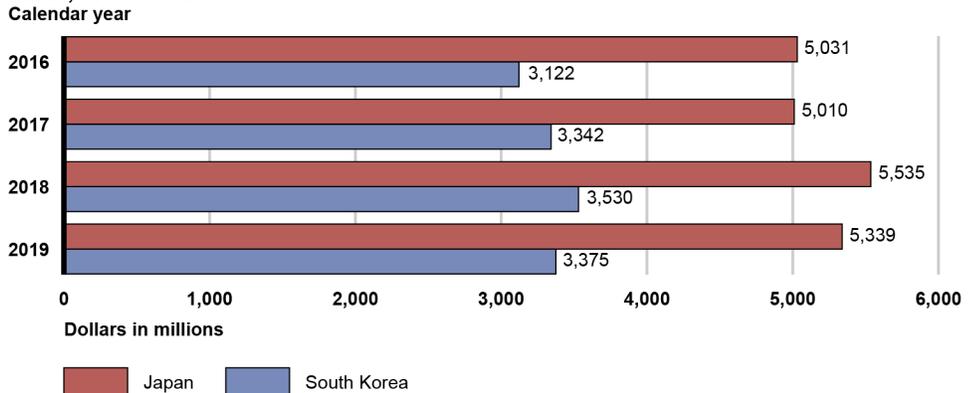
Identified Benefits to U.S. National Security Derived by the American Military Presence in Japan and South Korea

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Regional Stability and Security
 Helps maintain regional stability and security by deterring aggression and ensuring a favorable balance of power.
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Defense Capability and Interoperability
 Enhances Japan's and South Korea's defense capabilities and their interoperability with U.S. forces and weapon systems.
- 
Contingency Response
 Enables prompt response to military and non-military contingencies (e.g., natural disasters) throughout the region.
- 
Denuclearization and Nonproliferation
 Supports efforts to achieve North Korean denuclearization and more generally promote nonproliferation.
- 
Strong Alliances
 Strengthens the U.S. bilateral relationships with Japan and South Korea.
- 
Free and Open Indo-Pacific
 Promotes a free and open Indo-Pacific, a broad strategic vision that includes good governance and economic prosperity.

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. and host nation strategy documents, expert studies, and interviews with Department of Defense and State officials and nine non-governmental experts. | GAO-21-270

The Department of Defense (DOD) obligated \$20.9 billion for its presence in Japan and \$13.4 billion for its presence in South Korea from 2016 through 2019 from funds available to the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps (see fig. 2). The military services obligated these funds from five categories, in order of size: military personnel, operation and maintenance, family housing operation and maintenance, family housing construction, and military construction.

Department of Defense Obligations to Support the Military Presence in Japan and South Korea, 2016—2019



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense data. | GAO-21-270

According to data obtained from DOD, Japan provided \$12.6 billion and South Korea provided \$5.8 billion from 2016 through 2019 in cash payments and in-kind financial support. This direct financial support paid for certain costs, such as labor, construction, and utilities. In addition to direct financial support, Japan and South Korea provided indirect support, such as forgone rents on land and facilities used by U.S. forces, as well as waived taxes, according to DOD officials.