

Pentagon: U.S. Military Footprint Staying Right Where It Is

The long-awaited Global Force Posture review shows that status quo is the key refrain as the China song remains the same.

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An unclassified [summary](#) of the Defense Department’s Global Posture review was released Monday and in the words of the indomitable Jimmy Page and Robert Plant, the song of American military primacy worldwide pretty much “remains the same.”

Of course the summary of the GPR, which has been long anticipated, doesn’t offer much detail, but the bottom line is this: China remains a key “pacing threat” and it will be met. There seems to be no plan, however, for reshuffling U.S. military forces from other theaters to grow the foot print in East Asia. Instead, Washington aims to build upon its strategic partnerships in the region. Where there is actual growth in the footprint, mentioned below, much of that had already been announced previously:

(The GPR) directs additional cooperation with allies and partners to advance initiatives that contribute to regional stability and deter potential Chinese military aggression and threats from North Korea. These initiatives include seeking greater regional access for military partnership activities; enhancing infrastructure in Australia and the Pacific Islands; and planning rotational aircraft deployments in Australia, as announced in September. The GPR also informed Secretary Austin’s approval of the permanent stationing of a previously-rotational attack helicopter squadron and artillery division headquarters in the Republic of Korea, announced earlier this year.

Most of the [hullabaloo](#) over the Australia-UK-U.S. (AUKUS) agreement in September had been over the transfer of nuclear submarine technology to Australia. But as David Vine pointed out in [this RS article](#), AUKUS is also allowing the U.S. to station more assets and personnel Down Under, including, “combined logistics, sustainment, and capability for maintenance to support our enhanced activities, including...for our submarines and surface combatants” and “rotational deployments of all types of U.S. military aircraft to Australia.”

As the Wall Street Journal noted Monday in its [summary of the summary](#), the Biden administration’s goal of meeting “China’s military buildup and more assertive use of power” doesn’t seem to be coming at the expense of U.S. force posture in other parts of the world. Those forces are largely staying put.

According to the DoD summary, in Europe, the GPR “strengthens the U.S. combat-credible deterrent against Russian aggression and enables NATO forces to operate more effectively.” This includes leaving the 25,000 troops President Trump wanted to take out of Germany right where they are in the region (which we already knew about). There is no further detail on how Washington plans to “strengthen the deterrent” against Russia, though we know there have been plenty of efforts on Capitol Hill to send [more troops to Europe](#).

Those hoping to see the Biden administration begin to extricate from the Middle East won’t find much solace in this summary either. Without committing either way, the DoD says “the GPR assessed the department’s approach toward Iran and the evolving counterterrorism requirements following the end of DoD operations in Afghanistan. In Iraq and Syria, DoD posture will continue to support the Defeat-ISIS campaign and building the capacity of partner forces. Looking ahead, the review directs DoD to conduct additional analysis on enduring posture requirements in the Middle East.”

The big news here is that Washington is not even considering leaving Iraq and Syria, which many [smart analysts](#) deem essential not only for American interests, but for the security of the region. On the greater question of whether there will be a major shift toward reducing the U.S.-led security obligations in the Middle East, the summary, at least, seems to punt. On Africa and the Americas, as indicated by the release yesterday, no discernible change in posture.

This shouldn’t come as any surprise, as the signs of status quo are all around us — just read the RS piece by Nick Turse on U.S. commando presence in [Africa](#), and then in [Europe](#). Just before the Thanksgiving holiday, National Guard units from Virginia and Kentucky [sent 1,000 troops to Africa](#) for “Task Force Red Dragon.” As Page/Plant [wrote](#), “everything that’s small has got to grow,” and this footprint isn’t going anywhere, at least not yet.

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Featured image: President Joe Biden greets members of the military at a FEMA COVID-19 vaccination site Friday, Feb. 26, 2021, at NRG Stadium in Houston. (Official White House Photo by Adam Schultz)

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