

REGIONAL SUSTAINMENT FRAMEWORK

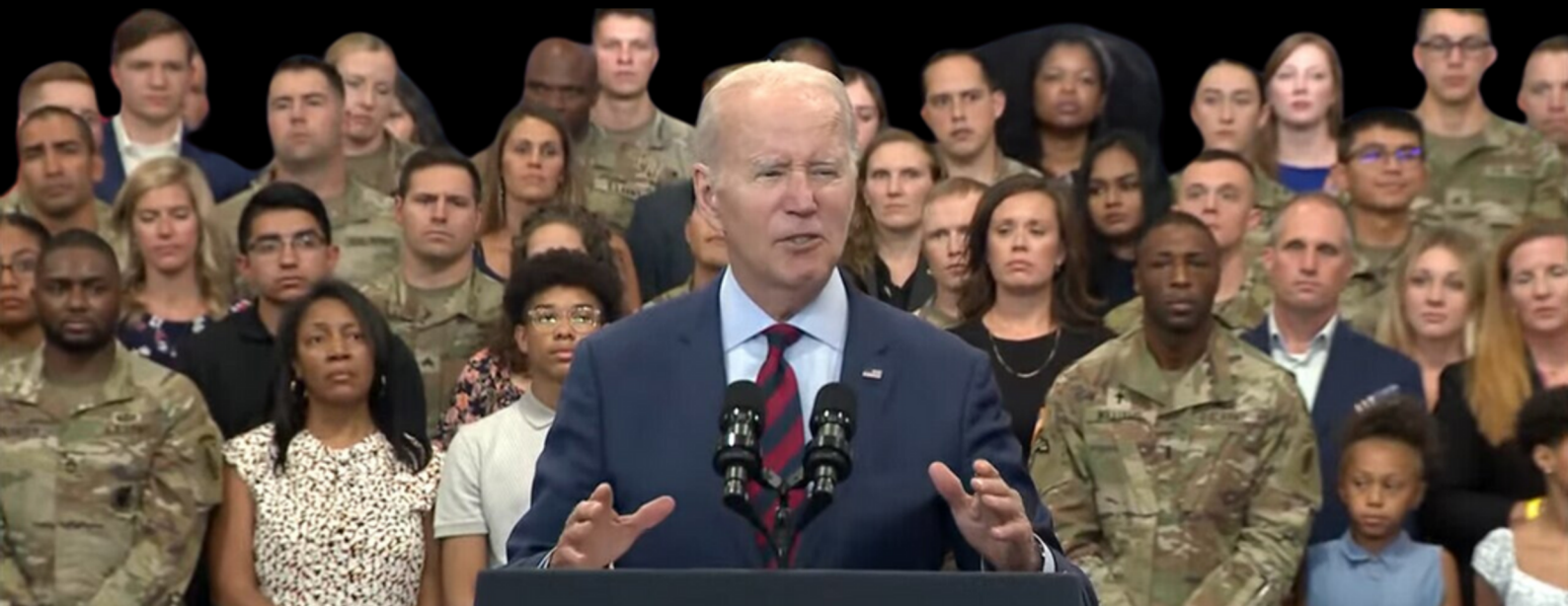
(RSF)



Executive Summary

The Regional Sustainment Framework (RSF) is a strategic initiative by the U.S. Department of Defense aimed at optimizing Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) capabilities through the establishment of regional repair hubs in key Indo-Pacific countries, including Japan, South Korea, Australia, Singapore, and the Philippines. This initiative seeks to reduce reliance on continental U.S. facilities, enhancing operational efficiency and readiness amid rising geopolitical challenges, particularly from China in the South China Sea.

Similar efforts have been extended to India through Master Ship Repair Agreements (MSRAs) with prominent shipyards, bolstering U.S.-India defense collaboration. The RSF promises both operational advantages and strengthened alliances but requires careful management of logistical, political, and security dynamics to achieve its full potential. With robust diplomatic engagement and integrated security measures, the RSF could significantly enhance regional stability and the U.S.'s strategic presence in the Indo-Pacific.



Background:



Geopolitical Context and current developments:

The Indo-Pacific region is of paramount importance to the United States due to its strategic significance as a global trade hub, with vital sea lanes such as the South China Sea facilitating trillions of dollars in commerce annually. This region plays a critical role in countering China's growing influence and ensuring a free, open, and rules-based order aligned with U.S. interests. Recognizing its significance, the U.S. has cultivated robust alliances with countries like Japan, India, and Australia, leveraging these partnerships to enhance its economic, diplomatic, and military presence in the region.

The Department of Defense (DoD) has identified the Indo-Pacific Command as a key focus area for 2024, followed by the U.S. European Command in 2025 and the U.S. Southern Command in 2026. In this context, the Regional Sustainment Framework (RSF) has been launched to strengthen the U.S.'s strategic engagements and sustainment capabilities across critical areas. This initiative reflects a broader commitment to maintaining regional stability and advancing shared security and economic objectives.



The Regional Sustainment Framework (RSF) is a strategic initiative by the U.S. Department of Defense aimed at optimizing regional Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) capabilities. As part of this initiative, the U.S. plans to establish military repair hubs in five key countries: Japan, South Korea, Australia, Singapore, and the Philippines.

By enabling repair and maintenance activities closer to the operational areas, the RSF seeks to reduce reliance on facilities in the continental U.S., thereby enhancing logistical efficiency and operational readiness. This approach ensures quicker turnaround times for deployed assets, strengthening the U.S. military's ability to respond rapidly to emerging challenges in the Indo-Pacific region.

The framework includes:

Regionalization and Prioritization: This involves aligning Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) efforts with strategic importance and operational requirements, recognizing emerging threats, and adapting to geopolitical shifts .

Strategic Partnership Alignment: Collaboration with allies and partner nations is emphasized to leverage shared defense systems and enhance overall defense posture .

Platforms and Systems Approach: Stakeholders are encouraged to tailor sustainment efforts for critical platforms and identify gaps in regional support solutions .

Industrial Base Integration: This component focuses on integrating regional capabilities and resources to create a more effective MRO strategy.

Hanwha Ocean, a prominent South Korean defense and shipbuilding firm, has secured two significant contracts in recent months, underscoring its growing role in regional defense collaboration. In August, the company was awarded a contract for maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) services for a 40,000-ton logistics support vessel. Most recently, in November, Hanwha Ocean signed a new agreement with the U.S. Navy to provide MRO services for the 31,000-ton replenishment vessel USNS Yukon (T-AO-202).

These deals align closely with the U.S. Regional Sustainment Framework, which emphasizes strengthening logistical and operational readiness across critical regions. South Korea's increasing involvement in such initiatives highlights its emergence as a pivotal partner in advancing the framework's objectives, reflecting the deepening defense and strategic ties between the two nations.

Similar collaborative efforts have been undertaken between Washington and New Delhi, reflecting a growing strategic partnership in the defense domain. The U.S. has signed Master Ship Repair Agreement (MSRA) deals with prominent Indian shipbuilding firms, including Larsen & Toubro, Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd, and Cochin Shipyard Ltd. Additionally, discussions are underway for a new MSRA at the Kolkata port.

These agreements aim to enhance maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) capabilities within India, enabling U.S. naval vessels to undergo repairs closer to their operational zones in the Indo-Pacific. This not only strengthens U.S. operational efficiency but also underscores India's rising role as a pivotal partner in regional security and logistical cooperation.

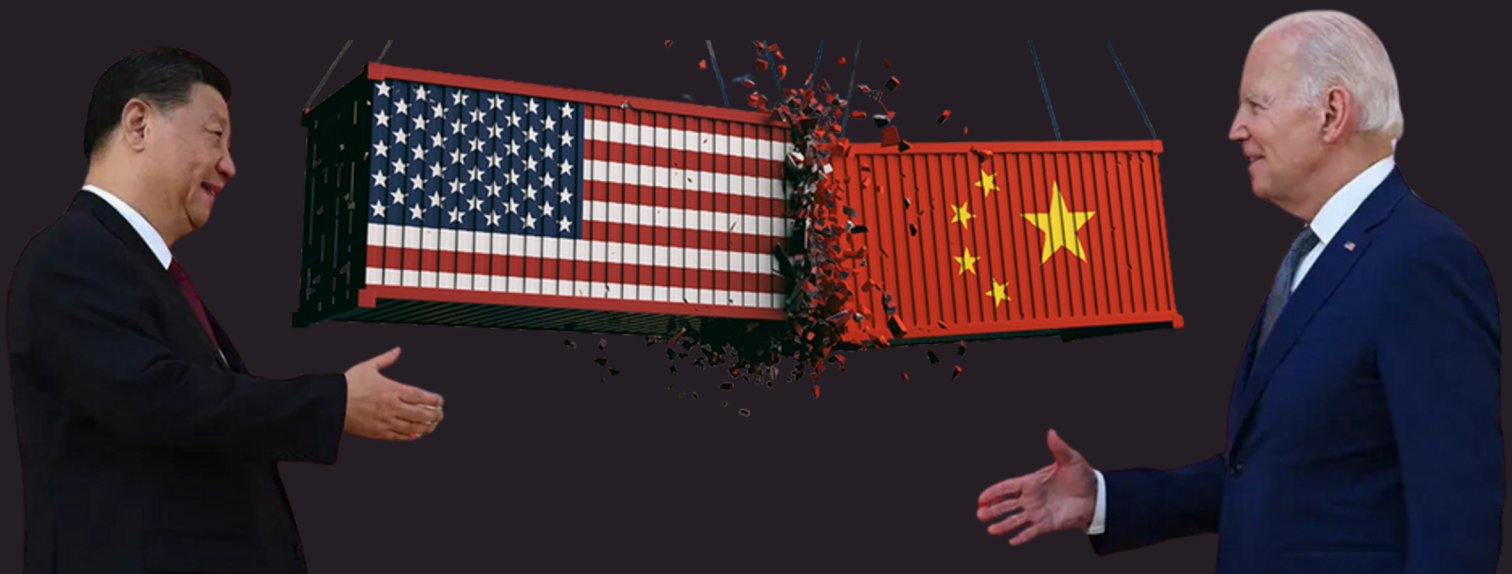
Strategic Analysis:

Geopolitical Implications:

The Regional Sustainment Framework (RSF) aims to address the strategic imbalance between the U.S. and China's shipbuilding and repair capabilities. By enabling repairs near the operational bases, it significantly reduces the time and cost associated with maintaining U.S. naval assets, thereby enhancing military readiness and efficiency in the Indo-Pacific. This is particularly critical in countering China's assertive behavior in the South China Sea. Furthermore, the RSF fosters stronger relationships between the U.S. and its regional allies by deepening defense collaboration and mutual reliance. It also reinforces the U.S.'s commitment to multilateral institutions in the region, strengthening collective security and economic ties, which are essential in maintaining a stable and rules-based order.

Social and Political Impact:

These collaborations may deepen trust and cultural exchange among partner nations, reinforcing regional stability and cooperation against shared challenges.



Strategic Analysis:

Best-Case Scenario:

The Regional Sustainment Framework (RSF) and related agreements, including MSRAs, achieve seamless operational efficiency, enabling rapid maintenance and repair of U.S. and allied naval assets in the Indo-Pacific. This leads to a robust counterbalance to China's assertiveness, strengthened regional security, and closer U.S. ties with allies like South Korea, India, and multilateral organizations, fostering long-term stability and collaboration.

Most Likely Scenario:

The RSF moderately enhances U.S. operational readiness and regional presence, but logistical challenges, political differences, and varying national priorities among allies could limit its full potential. While alliances are strengthened, the framework's effectiveness may vary across regions, requiring ongoing adjustments and negotiations to meet evolving geopolitical challenges.

Worst-Case Scenario:

Operational and logistical hurdles, coupled with political resistance or inadequate cooperation from partner nations, could undermine the RSF's objectives. This may leave U.S. forces vulnerable to delays and inefficiencies, weakening their strategic position and emboldening China's influence in the Indo-Pacific, potentially destabilizing the region.

Strategic Recommendations:

Diplomatic Recommendation:

Strengthen engagement with regional allies and partners through multilateral platforms like ASEAN and the Quad to align strategic objectives and foster shared ownership of the Regional Sustainment Framework (RSF), ensuring mutual benefits and long-term commitment.

Security Recommendation:

Establish joint training programs and integrated logistics systems with partner nations to enhance interoperability and streamline the coordination of Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) efforts, ensuring rapid response to regional threats and operational challenges.



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Conclusion:

The Regional Sustainment Framework represents a pivotal step in enhancing U.S. operational efficiency and strengthening alliances in the Indo-Pacific. By addressing logistical challenges and fostering strategic partnerships, it positions the U.S. to effectively counter emerging threats, particularly in the context of China's growing assertiveness. Successful implementation will require sustained diplomatic collaboration and security integration with regional partners to ensure long-term stability and readiness.

