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Security Nexus Perspective

BEYOND THE TWO PERCENT: A PRACTITIONER FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSING BURDEN SHARING IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

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Summary

Security cooperation officers and installation strategists across the Indo-Pacific are routinely asked to assess, improve, and report on burden sharing with allies and partners. While robust tools exist for other regions, many practitioners lack a tailored framework for these specific assessments. The dominant metric, defense spending as a percentage of GDP, was designed for a different alliance in a different theater and often requires adaptation to accurately reflect Indo-Pacific realities. This paper introduces the Burden and Responsibility Index for Security Contributions (BRISC), a tiered, weighted, practitioner-ready instrument grounded in the federal government's own multi-dimensional burden-sharing framework. BRISC organizes partner contributions across five tiers including a dedicated intelligence-sharing sub-element, applies context-variable weights that shift as scenarios harden from peacetime to contingency, and incorporates an access, basing, and overflight conditionality modifier that down-weights partners whose access commitments are hedged or unreliable under pressure. Three case studies drawn from publicly available data, Australia, the Philippines, and Palau, demonstrate how the instrument produces assessments that broaden practitioner assumptions anchored to NATO-derived metrics and reveal the strategic value of contributions that conventional frameworks may inadvertently overlook.

Contextualizing the Baseline Metric

When the question of burden sharing and security cooperation comes up in bilateral security dialogues or country team discussions, the conversation frequently centers on a single number representing defense spending as a percentage of GDP. The logic is straightforward: NATO established two percent of GDP as its collective defense spending target at the 2014 Wales Summit[1,2]. In recent years, the United States has pressed allies and partners globally to meet or exceed that benchmark with Congress mandating an annual report on allied contributions to the common defense. The metric is visible, comparable, and politically legible.[3,4]

It is also an incomplete metric for the Indo-Pacific, as security cooperation officers and installation strategists operating in the region recognize. A security officer at an embassy in Manila, Suva, or Ngerulmud is working a different burden-sharing conversation than a counterpart in Warsaw or Tallinn. The partner governments they engage do not have NATO membership, comparable economic structures, integrated military commands, or identical threat perceptions. Most Indo-Pacific countries are low to mid-income countries, which face distinct structural challenges to achieve meaningful joint military capabilities on par with NATO countries. The income gap between NATO and Indo-Pacific partners is notable at the aggregate level: the overwhelming majority of NATO member states are classified as high-income economies under World Bank GNI per capita criteria, while most Indo-Pacific partner nations fall into lower-middle or upper-middle income categories, meaning that identical GDP percentage targets represent different fiscal burdens and produce different capability outputs.[6] Nevertheless, Indo-Pacific countries still contribute to regional security in other ways that remain strategically consequential, operationally irreplaceable, but not always fully captured when focusing primarily on a GDP percentage calculation.

The gap between U.S. expectations and partner defense spending is often not one of commitment. It is a matter of framework. When a partner government asks what a meaningful contribution looks like, the most comprehensive answer cannot be limited to a NATO spending target. When a security cooperation officer needs to assess a partner's burden-sharing posture for a planning document or a country team brief, they need an instrument that captures the full range of what partners do and weigh it against what the strategic environment demands.

The Burden and Responsibility Index for Security Contributions (BRISC) instrument provides that capability. It is grounded in the federal government's own multi-dimensional framework for assessing allied contributions, reoriented for Indo-Pacific realities, and built for practitioners working from open-source data and bilateral agreement knowledge. Rather than requiring specialized modeling expertise or classified reporting, it relies on the structured judgment security cooperation professionals and installation strategists already exercise.

The Existing Multi-Dimensional Framework

The United States government already formally assesses burden sharing through a broader lens. The Department of War (DoW), the State Department, and Congress-mandated annual reporting on allied contributions treat burden sharing as a multi-dimensional spectrum covering financial inputs, operational outputs, in-kind support, and what official documents call strategic equivalences. The public conversation often gravitates to GDP percentage because it is simple to communicate, but the analytical framework beneath that conversation is considerably more sophisticated.

The framework organizes contributions across five tiers, running from standardized financial inputs at the base to flexible strategic equivalences at the top. Table 1 presents the full structure as applied to the Indo-Pacific context.[5,7]

Table 1. The Five-Tier Burden-Sharing Framework: Indo-Pacific Application

Tier	Definition	Indo-Pacific Example
Tier 1 **Core Defense Spending**	Direct military expenditures measured as a percentage of GDP. The primary benchmark in existing US and NATO frameworks.	Japan's FY2025 budget reaching 2% of GDP for the first time; Australia at 2.02% with trajectory to 2.4% by 2033.[10]
Tier 2 **Expanded Security Investment**	Defense and security-related spending outside strict military definitions: cybersecurity and cyber resilience, civil preparedness infrastructure, defense industrial base investment, dual-use infrastructure with military application, supply chain resilience programs, and defense co-production or technology transfer agreements.	Australia's AUKUS Pillar II investments in cyber, AI, and autonomous systems; Philippines' $613M cyber systems acquisition.
Tier 3A **Access, Basing, Overflight and Host-Nation Support**	Physical access granted to US and coalition forces: basing rights, overflight permissions, pre-positioning agreements, logistics and sustainment facilities, and financial offsets to US presence costs. Includes an ABO conditionality modifier.	Palau's COFA granting exclusive US military access to land, waters, and airspace; Philippines' nine EDCA sites; Australia's HMAS Stirling hosting US submarine rotation.
Tier 3B **Intelligence Sharing**	Depth, classification level, and reciprocity of intelligence sharing, and degree of architectural integration with US and coalition frameworks.	Australia's Pine Gap joint facility integrating CIA, NSA, NRO, and ASD; Five Eyes architecture; Philippines bilateral defense intelligence sharing agreements.
Tier 4 **Operational and Capability Outputs**	Deployable forces, coalition interoperability, specialized capability contributions, readiness levels, and defense industry outputs available to coalition operations.	Fiji's UN peacekeeping contributions and Exercise Cartwheel participation; Japan's long-range strike development and JMSDF maritime domain awareness.
Tier 5 **Indirect and Non-Military Strategic**	Actions advancing shared security goals outside direct military spending: diplomatic alignment and coalition signaling, development assistance tied to security outcomes, strategic denial (refusal to host or enable adversary infrastructure), export controls on dual-use technologies, investment screening aligned with partner security priorities, and active resistance to coercive inducements from strategic competitors.	Australia's Pacific Policing Initiative; Palau's active resistance to Chinese inducements to shift Taiwan recognition; Philippines' public alignment on South China Sea lawfare.

Source: Synthesized from DoW annual reports on allied contributions, NATO burden-sharing documentation, and RAND Burden sharing Index methodology, reoriented for Indo-Pacific application. The five-tier structure parallels the multi-dimensional framework used in congressional burden-sharing reporting, which organizes allied contributions across financial inputs, operational outputs, in-kind support, and strategic equivalences. The framework presented here is not

identical to any single congressional or DoW document; it synthesizes and reorients those existing analytic categories for Indo-Pacific application, adding the Tier 3B intelligence-sharing sub-element and the ABO conditionality modifier as features absent from standard reporting formats. See: Office of the Secretary of Defense, Report on Allied Contributions to the Common Defense (annual); NATO, Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries 2014–2024 (2024); Thaler, D. et al., Assessing the Value of Burden Sharing (RAND Corporation, 2022); Cha, V., Shared Threats: Indo-Pacific Alliances and Burden Sharing in Today's Geopolitical Environment (CSIS, March 2025).

Two features matter before turning to the critique. First, Tier 3A is not an addition to the federal framework. It is already present in the Department of War's (DoW) treatment of host-nation support. What practitioners consistently underweight is that ABO contributions in the current environment carry operational significance that conventional discussion does not reflect. Second, the higher tiers formalize what official documents call equivalences: contributions that count toward shared burden even when they fall outside traditional defense budgets. That is the legislative basis for treating a Pacific Island state's unconditional access grant as genuine burden sharing, not diplomatic courtesy.[3]

Tier 5 captures what is strategically significant precisely because it is not military. Strategic denial, such as refusing to host, enable, or legitimize adversary infrastructure, imposes real costs on a competitor and protects the operating environment. Export controls on dual-use technologies and investment screening are concrete and measurable. For Pacific Island states and ASEAN members constrained by non-interference norms, Tier 5 is often the primary contribution avenue.

Contextualizing the NATO Metric for the Indo-Pacific

The two percent benchmark was designed for NATO: a treaty alliance with integrated command, standardized requirements, a single geographic adversary, and economies large enough for percentage-of-GDP calculations to scale effectively. Those conditions do not hold uniformly in the Indo-Pacific. Applying this metric without regional calibration reveals four primary limitations.

The first challenge is structural. Many of the most strategically significant US partners in the region are not treaty allies and have no obligation to meet a collective spending target. Pacific Island economies are of a scale where even a doubling or tripling of defense spending would not significantly alter the regional security balance. Some partner nations operate without standing armed forces. Overemphasizing a NATO benchmark when engaging these partners may overlook their specific regional constraints and risks sub-optimal engagement, rather than the intended progress.

The second limitation is geographic.[5,8] The Indo-Pacific presents a fundamentally different operational theater. Collective defense here relies heavily on maritime domain awareness, power projection across vast distances, distributed basing, and the ability to sustain forward presence under contested conditions. A runway on Palau, a submarine rotation at HMAS Stirling, or pre-positioned logistics stocks in the Philippines are not only financial investments. They are the access infrastructure that determines whether a credible deterrence posture is possible at all, and no standard financial metric adequately captures the sovereignty a partner exercises to host them.

The third consideration is temporal. The GDP metric measures steady-state investment and does not dynamically adjust with scenarios. A partner at 1.5 percent of GDP looks identical in this metric whether its access is unconditional or hedged, its forces deployable or garrison-bound, and its intelligence sharing deep or nominal. The metric cannot distinguish a partner that provides assured access in a crisis from one that does not. In a period of active contingency planning for Taiwan and South China Sea scenarios, differentiating between baseline spending and crisis responsiveness is a critical requirement.

The fourth factor is operational. The NATO metric generates a conversation primarily about financial inputs and potential shortfalls. Reframing around the full contribution spectrum, weighted for this theater and adjusted for scenario context, shifts that conversation to strategic calibration. Practitioners need a basis for engagement that neither disadvantages partners who cannot hit a standardized spending threshold nor overvalues partners whose financial contributions might mask hesitancy under pressure.

The BRISC: Instrument Design and Scoring Logic

The BRISC operationalizes the five-tier framework as a practitioner-ready scoring instrument. A security cooperation officer working from open-source and classified data, bilateral agreement knowledge, and country team reporting can complete it. No econometric modeling or specialized training is required beyond familiarity with the relationship being assessed.

Scoring Structure

Each indicator scores on a 1-to-5 scale with anchored descriptions to hold consistency across assessors: 1 is absent or refused; 5 is full, unconditional, or exceeding expectation.

Tier 3A incorporates an ABO conditionality modifier applied after the base score is calculated. A partner with broad access on paper that has demonstrated hedging or denial under pressure is operationally unreliable in ways the base score cannot capture. The modifier applies a graduated adjustment to the Tier 3A subtotal based on three factors: recency of the behavior, severity of its operational impact, and whether it has been reversed or remains active. A partner whose access is mildly hedged or subject to domestic political conditions receives a 10% reduction. A partner with documented scenario restrictions or public statements signaling conditional cooperation receives a 20% reduction. A partner with a documented history of crisis denial, unilateral access reversal, or active withdrawal of pre-positioned rights receives a 40% reduction. Hedging indicators include public statements distancing a government from alliance commitments under pressure, delays in implementing agreed pre-positioning, domestic legislation constraining foreign military presence, and signaling to adversaries about access limits. Crisis denial indicators include formal notice of agreement termination, refusal of access during active contingency planning, and documented reversal of basing arrangements. The modifier is bidirectional. A partner that has demonstrated positive reliability through rapid agreement activation, crisis-period access support, or voluntary expansion of pre-positioning rights receives a 10% bonus applied to the Tier 3A subtotal, capped at the maximum score of 5. This positive modifier incentivizes demonstrated reliability rather than only penalizing unreliability, making the instrument more useful as a planning and engagement tool.

Tier 3B carries a separate intelligence-sharing sub-element because INDOPACOM bilateral arrangements, and signals intelligence reciprocity constitute a discrete, high-value category that behaves more like structural access than operational output and warrants separate treatment.

Context-Variable Weighting

Weights shift across three scenario bands: peacetime, elevated tension, and contingency. These reflect the changing strategic value of each contribution type. Tier 3A climbs from 20% in peacetime to 40% at contingency because access is the binding operational constraint. No defense budget substitutes for a runway at the right latitude when the alternative is an extra thousand nautical miles of logistics tail. Tier 1 and Tier 5 compress because financial inputs and diplomatic contributions, however important, are displaced by operational demands at the high end of the spectrum. Table 2 presents the full weighting scheme.

The key pattern in the weighting scheme is the transfer of weight from Tier 1 toward Tier 3A as scenarios harden: at peacetime, financial inputs carry 20% and access carries 20%; at contingency, that relationship

inverts, with access at 40% and financial inputs at 10%. Tier 4 remains flat at 30% across all contexts because deployable capability is the second binding constraint regardless of scenario. This shift encodes a simple operational logic: money matters in peacetime, but in a Taiwan or South China Sea contingency, the question is whether US and coalition forces can get to the fight, not whether the partner's defense budget meets an arbitrary benchmark.

Table 2. BRISC Context-Variable Tier Weights

Tier	Peacetime	Elevated Tension	Contingency	Weighting Rationale
T1 Core Defense Spending	20%	15%	10%	Financial inputs matter less as operational demands increase. Access and capability outputs become the binding constraints in crisis planning.
T2 Expanded Security Investment	15%	10%	5%	Cyber and resilience investments are background conditions, not operational inputs in a crisis. Weight compresses as scenario demands shift to access and outputs.
T3A ABO / Host-Nation Support	20%	30%	40%	Access is the binding constraint in Indo-Pacific contingencies. No amount of spending substitutes for a runway at the right latitude.
T3B Intelligence Sharing	5%	5%	5%	Intelligence sharing value is consistent across scenario contexts. Flat weight reflects that depth of sharing matters equally whether the region is at peace or in crisis.
T4 Operational Outputs	30%	30%	30%	Deployable capability is consistently the second most important dimension regardless of scenario context. Flat weight reflects that operational depth matters equally across the spectrum.
T5 Non-Military Strategic	10%	10%	10%	Diplomatic and economic contributions matter consistently but are never the dominant operational variable. Flat weight preserves their relevance without overstating it.
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	

How to Read the Scores

T1. Core Defense Spending

- 1 = Defense spending below 0.5% GDP with no growth trajectory;
- 2 = Spending between 0.5–1.0% GDP or nominal increases only;
- 3 = Spending between 1.0–1.5% GDP with stated commitment to growth;
- 4 = Spending at 1.5–2.0% GDP with demonstrated upward trajectory and capability investment;

- 5 = Spending at or above 2% GDP with active modernization, defense industrial development, and interoperability investment.

T2. Expanded Security Investment

- 1 = No investment in cyber, resilience, or dual-use infrastructure beyond core military budget;
- 2 = Token programs without integration into joint planning or coalition architecture;
- 3 = Active investment in one or two sub-categories (e.g., cybersecurity or civil resilience) but not systematically linked to coalition requirements;
- 4 = Investment across multiple sub-categories including dual-use infrastructure or defense co-production, integrated with partner planning;
- 5 = Comprehensive investment across cyber, resilience, supply chain, and defense industrial base; actively contributes to coalition capability development

T3A. Access, Basing, and Overflight

- 1 = No access granted; requests refused or actively opposed;
- 2 = Limited access only (e.g., transit rights, no basing or pre-positioning);
- 3 = Access granted for exercises and rotational presence but no pre-positioning or permanent basing rights; subject to case-by-case approval;
- 4 = Broad access including pre-positioning, established basing rotations, and overflight rights; some political conditions apply;
- 5 = Unconditional, legally structured access covering land, waters, and airspace; includes pre-positioned equipment, permanent infrastructure investment, and host-nation cost-sharing.

T3B. Intelligence Sharing

- 1 = No bilateral intelligence relationship; sharing refused or purely transactional;
- 2 = Ad hoc sharing at low classification levels; no architectural integration;
- 3 = Regular bilateral sharing at moderate classification with established channels; not integrated into coalition architecture;
- 4 = Deep bilateral sharing including signals intelligence; partial integration with coalition frameworks (e.g., INDOPACOM bilateral agreements);
- 5 = Full architectural integration with Five Eyes or equivalent coalition frameworks; reciprocal sharing at the highest classification levels with joint facilities.

T4. Operational and Capability Outputs

- 1 = No deployable forces, no interoperability, no defense industry output for coalition use;
- 2 = Minimal deployable capacity; forces not interoperable with US or coalition systems; limited participation in exercises;
- 3 = Some deployable forces with partial interoperability; regular exercise participation; limited specialized capability contributions;
- 4 = Substantial deployable forces, high interoperability, consistent coalition exercise participation, and some specialized capability (e.g., maritime domain awareness, ISR);
- 5 = Full deployable force package with demonstrated coalition command integration, advanced specialized capabilities, and defense industry outputs available for coalition operations.

T5. Indirect and Non-Military Strategic

- 1 = No alignment with US strategic positions; active accommodation of strategic competitor demands;
- 2 = Nominal diplomatic alignment; no active strategic denial or economic statecraft;

- 3 = Diplomatic alignment on most issues with occasional hedging; some development assistance with security relevance;
- 4 = Consistent diplomatic alignment, active strategic denial, and investment screening; development assistance tied to security outcomes;
- 5 = Full diplomatic alignment, active resistance to coercive inducements, export controls on dual-use technology, investment screening aligned with partner security priorities, and documented strategic denial.

Scores are assigned from the best available open-source data, classified input, bilateral agreement knowledge, and country team reporting. Where data is ambiguous, take the lower score. The instrument runs on structured judgment, not false precision.

Within each tier, indicator scores average to a tier score. Tier 3A scores are adjusted by the ABO conditionality modifier before the composite is calculated. The composite burden score (CBS) is calculated by multiplying each tier score (1–5) by its scenario weight, summing the six weighted tier scores, dividing by 5 (the maximum score per tier), and multiplying by 20 to produce a 0–100 scale. Expressed as a formula: CBS = (sum of weighted tier scores / 5) x 20. The denominator of 5 reflects the maximum raw score on any tier; the multiplier of 20 normalizes the result to a 100-point scale. The CBS maps to five bands, shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Composite Burden Score (CBS) Bands and Engagement Implications

CBS Score	Band	Descriptor
0–20	Non-Contributor	No meaningful burden-sharing relationship. Foundational engagement required before contributions are realistic.
21–40	Limited	Isolated tier contributions. Unreliable across the full spectrum. Engagement focused on expanding contribution breadth.
41–60	Partial Contributor	Meaningful contributions in one or more tiers but significant scope or reliability gaps remain. Engagement focused on protecting existing contributions and targeting gaps.
61–80	Active Contributor	Substantive multi-tier burden sharing with demonstrated reliability. Engagement focused on closing specific gaps and deepening integration.
81–100	Strategic Partner	High-intensity contributions across all tiers with deeply integrated relationship. Engagement focused on sustainment and strategic expansion.

The CBS should always be read against the tier distribution. A partner scoring 65 concentrated in T3A is delivering access without operational depth. A partner scoring 65 distributed across T3A, T3B, T4, and T5 is a qualitatively different relationship. The composite opens the conversation; the distribution guides it.

Limitations

Several limitations bear mention. First, higher tiers, such as Tier 5, involve more assessor judgment than lower tiers, and practitioners working from different information sets will produce different scores. This is inherent to any instrument assessing strategic behavior rather than financial inputs and is addressed by the convention of assigning the lower score when data is ambiguous.

Second, very small states like Palau have structural ceilings that the instrument reflects honestly, but practitioners should resist treating a low CBS as evidence of unwillingness rather than incapacity.

Third, the context-variable weights reflect current strategic priorities; as the space and cyber domains become operationally binding constraints in Indo-Pacific contingencies, the weights assigned to Tier 2 and Tier 3B may warrant upward revision. Practitioners should treat the weighting scheme as a calibrated starting point, not a permanent formula, and recalibrate periodically against evolving threat assessments and operational requirements.

Fourth, if the BRISC is a transparent instrument, sophisticated partner governments that understand its scoring logic could in theory optimize visible indicators without delivering genuine operational reliability. Assessors would have to weigh recent behavior and pattern consistency over formal agreement texts.

Three Cases: What the BRISC Reveals

Three cases drawn from publicly available data show how the BRISC surfaces findings that NATO-anchored metrics cannot. Australia, the Philippines, and Palau represent fundamentally different contribution profiles and span the full range of burden-sharing arrangements in the Indo-Pacific. The scores are illustrative as they are constructed from open-source data to demonstrate the instrument's logic rather than constitute definitive assessments.

Australia: The Deep Contributor

Tier raw scores:

- T1: Core Defense Spending 4
- T2: Expanded Security Investment 5
- T3A: ABO / Host-Nation Support 5
- T3B: Intelligence Sharing 5
- T4: Operational Outputs 4
- T5: Non-Military Strategic 5

Australia CBS scores are 90/100 in Peacetime , 91/100 in Elevated Tension, and 92/100 in Contingency scenarios classifying it firmly as a *Strategic Partner*, barely moving as scenarios harden. That stability is the finding: the relationship is already fully loaded across every tier. AUKUS Pillar II investments anchor Tier 2. Joint Defence Facility Pine Gap, US submarine rotation at HMAS Stirling, and unconditional access commitments anchor Tier 3A. Full Five Eyes architecture integration anchors Tier 3B. ADF interoperability and long-range strike development anchor Tier 4. Pacific development leadership and consistent diplomatic alignment anchor Tier 5.[9]

The Philippines: The Conditionality Case

Tier raw scores:

- T1: Core Defense Spending 2
- T2: Expanded Security Investment 2
- T3A: ABO / Host-Nation Support 5 (adjusted to 4.0)
- T3B: Intelligence Sharing 3
- T4: Operational Outputs 3
- T5: Non-Military Strategic 3

The Philippines CBS scores are 57/100 at peacetime, 61/100 at elevated tension, and 65/100 at contingency, moving from *Partial Contributor* toward the lower boundary of *Active Contributor* as scenarios harden.[5]

The Philippines Tier 3A score reflects the ABO conditionality modifier (-20%) applied to a base score of 5, producing an adjusted score of 4.0 across all scenario contexts. CBS scores are normalized to 100. All scores are based on open-source data current as of early 2026.

The ABO conditionality modifier is the instrument's most consequential output in this case. The Philippines' base Tier 3A score is 5, reflecting the scope and strategic value of current access arrangements. The modifier reduces it to 4.0, reflecting the 2020 unilateral suspension of the Visiting Forces Agreement, which was subsequently reversed but demonstrated that access commitments can be withdrawn at domestic political cost to the requesting power.[13,14] Without the modifier, the Philippines scores 70 at elevated tension, in the Active Contributor band. With it, the score is 61, at the lower boundary of Active Contributor. That nine-point difference is analytically defensible and operationally significant. It reflects the difference between access that can be relied upon and access that must be continually maintained through diplomatic investment.

The practical implication for security cooperation officers is direct. The Philippines conversation is not primarily about spending. It is about deepening the structural foundations of access reliability, investing in the relationship architecture that makes contingency commitments durable, and ensuring that EDCA site development proceeds at a pace that creates the same kind of sunk costs and operational integration that make exit increasingly costly for both parties.

Palau: The Small-State Surprise

Tier raw scores:

- T1: Core Defense Spending 1
- T2: Expanded Security Investment 1
- T3A: ABO / Host-Nation Support 5
- T3B: Intelligence Sharing 2
- T4: Operational Outputs 1
- T5: Non-Military Strategic 4

Palau CBS scores are 43/100 at peacetime, 51/100 at elevated tension, and 59/100 at contingency, remaining *Partial Contributor* throughout. Even at maximum contingency weight, with T3A carrying 40%, it cannot cross into Active Contributor. The instrument works as expected. Unconditional access in the second island chain is genuine burden sharing, but access alone cannot sustain a score above 60 without operational depth across Tiers 2, 3B, 4, and 5. A nation of 18,000 with no military and no defense industry has a structural ceiling, and the BRISC reflects it accurately. What it also reflects, and what GDP metrics cannot, is that Palau's ceiling is far higher than any percentage calculation suggests.

Palau's 2024 Compact of Free Association renewal grants the United States exclusive military access to Palauan land, waters, and airspace, including active construction of a high-frequency radar system with completion expected in 2026.[11,12] That access is unconditional, documented, and legally structured. It applies a zero-conditionality modifier. At contingency weights, Tier 3A carries 40% of the composite score, and Palau's score of 5 on that tier reflects the full strategic value of what the COFA provides. Palau's Tier 5 score of 4 reflects its documented and active resistance to Chinese inducements to shift Taiwan recognition, including public statements by President Whipps warning US officials about Beijing's pressure campaign.[15]

For security cooperation professionals, Palau reframes the conversation entirely. The question is not what this partner cannot contribute. It is how to protect, deepen, and operationalize what it already contributes, which the dominant metric makes invisible. A practitioner working from Palau's BRISC profile will prioritize the COFA relationship, the radar installation, and the access architecture in ways a GDP-percentage conversation never generates.

Implications for Practitioners

Four operational implications follow directly from the instrument and the cases.

1. First, use the BRISC as the structured basis for annual partner assessments. A complete tier profile takes less than a day from open-source data and produces something far more actionable than a GDP percentage: a map of where contributions are strong, where gaps exist, and which tiers are most amenable to near-term improvement given the partner's constraints. That profile can drive security cooperation planning, Foreign Military Financing (FMF) priorities, and bilateral dialogue agendas.
2. Second, apply the ABO conditionality modifier explicitly and document the basis. Security cooperation professionals, desk officers, and the J5s routinely hold understanding of access reliability that does not appear in formal agreement texts. The modifier gives that judgment a structured channel. A documented modifier rationale becomes an analytic record usable in senior leader briefings and INDOPACOM and OSD Policy reporting.
3. Third, run both a peacetime and a contingency assessment for the same partner. They are different products serving different purposes. Peacetime informs routine security cooperation programming; contingency informs force posture planning, Special Measures Agreement negotiations, and coalition access planning. The gap between the two scores identifies which partners are most sensitive to scenario context, which is operationally significant.

The cases here are illustrative. They were built to demonstrate the instrument's logic, not to constitute definitive assessments. *Practitioners with classified reporting and direct partner engagement will score differently and more precisely*.

Comparing Partners: CBS Band Placement and Engagement Strategy

The CBS band structure provides the foundation for comparing partners. Each band carries a label anchored to observable contribution behavior, and placing partners within that structure produces a vocabulary that is analytically grounded and operationally communicable. The three cases span three distinct bands at contingency: Australia at 92 sits firmly in the Strategic Partner band (81-100); the Philippines at 65 sits in the Active Contributor band (61-80), at its lower boundary; and Palau at 59 sits in the Partial Contributor band (41-60), near its upper boundary.

The band placement is not merely descriptive. It drives engagement strategy. Australia's Strategic Partner classification means the planning conversation is about sustainment and deepening, not development. The Philippines' position at the lower boundary of Active Contributor, depressed by the conditionality modifier, signals that the relationship has the structural foundations of a higher-band partnership but reliability gaps that diplomatic investment can close. Palau's Partial Contributor classification reflects genuine structural limits, not absence of commitment, and the appropriate practitioner response is protection and operationalization of existing contributions rather than pressure for contributions the partner cannot provide.

When applied across a full regional partner set, the gap between a partner's peacetime and contingency band placement is itself an analytic output. A partner whose band rises sharply as scenarios harden is access-heavy and scenario-dependent. A partner whose band holds stable is deeply integrated and represents a more durable planning foundation.

Conclusion

Relying primarily on a NATO-derived metric in the Indo-Pacific context may limit the scope of regional security dialogue. Security cooperation professionals, desk officers, and planners require an instrument calibrated to this theater: one that reflects the full range of partner contributions, weighs them against strategic requirements, and adjusts dynamically as scenarios move from routine cooperation toward crisis.

The BRISC framework addresses this requirement. Grounded in the federal government's own multi-dimensional burden-sharing framework and reoriented for Indo-Pacific realities, it offers insights that a single financial metric may not fully capture. Contributions that might otherwise remain unquantified become analytically discernable, operationally communicable, and strategically actionable. This approach provides the comprehensive perspective necessary for effective, results-oriented engagement in the Indo-Pacific.

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