



Pacific Pathways:

Maintaining Freedom of Maneuver Through Reception, Staging, and Onward Movement

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Soldiers from 325th Brigade Support Battalion, 25th Infantry Division, load an 8th Theater Sustainment Command logistics support vessel on Aug. 10, 2016, at Ford Island, Hawaii, in preparation for its Pacific Pathways voyage to Nagoya, Japan, for exercise Orient Shield 16. (Photo by Spc. Jaime Ruiz)



“U.S. Army Pacific (USARPAC) and its logisticians are involved in solving some of the most complex challenges in arguably the most dynamic environment in the world. These complex challenges include setting the theater (forces, footprints, and agreements), infrastructure improvement and alignment, petroleum distribution, and ammunition management across 36 nations and through dramatically varying climates.

One of the most critical functions in any potential military operation is the reception, staging, and onward movement of personnel, equipment, and supplies. Since 2014, the 8th Theater Sustainment Command along with its enterprise partners have been refining these critical operations through USARPAC’s Pacific Pathways.”

—Maj. Gen. Susan A. Davidson, 8th Theater Sustainment Command

Pacific Pathways is not a single event but, rather, a sequenced execution of multiple exercises at the Joint Chiefs of Staff, geographic combatant command, and Army service component command levels. The exercises are carried out through three expeditionary deployments. Each deployment links several exercises, resulting in unit deployments that are five to seven months long.

These exercises provide regional familiarization and continuous multinational engagement with allies and partner nations. They also provide the U.S. Pacific Command with a persistent land force presence west of the international dateline, without additional basing requirements.

Pacific Pathways contributes to the joint force by encouraging interoperability in reception, staging, and onward movement (RSO) operations and requiring planners to communicate, synchronize, leverage, and pool resources for efficiency.

A Challenging Region

The 8th Theater Sustainment Command (TSC) is tasked to synchronize and integrate U.S. regional

and multinational sustainment operations in the Pacific. Pacific Pathways deployments provide the TSC with opportunities to conduct challenging RSO operations in 36 nations.

The Pacific region presents logisticians with a complex and unique operational environment. Logisticians must work through 16 time zones, limited infrastructure, reduced access, cross-border security, extended lines of communication, low-capacity transportation networks, and language and interoperability challenges, all while operating in the most natural-disaster-prone area of the world.

In the dynamic geopolitical environment of USARPAC’s area of responsibility, the strategic complexities of executing RSO cannot be understated. Relationships in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region are varied and fluid, sometimes turning from warm to cold seemingly overnight.

For example, during a 2017 Pacific Pathways deployment, the 8th TSC was days away from uploading unit equipment destined for exercise Angkor Sentinel, an exercise the United States co-hosts with the Kingdom of Cambodia, when an announcement was made that Cambodia was postponing all combined military exercises

for 2017 and 2018.

Around the same time, the Republic of the Philippines announced a significant reduction in scope of Balikatan, its annual military exercises with the United States. Details of the reduction were not finalized until the U.S. Army had completed a large portion of the planned exercises of Pacific Pathways 17-1, including Cobra Gold in the Kingdom of Thailand and Foal Eagle in the Republic of Korea.

Each separate exercise of Pacific Pathways is planned with its own unique joint exercise life cycle. The 8th TSC uses the life cycle to coordinate the concept of support with participating units. Executing combined joint RSO for multiple exercises in multiple countries requires the 8th TSC to synchronize the exercise linkages that create the “pathway” across the region and to ensure unity of the sustainment efforts.

No two Pacific Pathways deployments are alike. Each requires a tailored mix of strategic lift, Army watercraft systems (AWSs), and strategic and operational concepts of sustainment. Pacific Pathways is an excellent way to practice expeditionary operations and to test the Department of Defense’s global infrastructure in lo-



A logistics support vessel from the 8th Theater Sustainment Command returns to Joint Base Pearl Harbor–Hickam, Hawaii, on Oct. 8, 2016, after a deployment in support of Pacific Pathways. (Photo by Staff Sgt. Michael Behlin)



Personnel from the Ocean Terminal Division, Fleet Logistics Center Pearl Harbor, Navy Supply Systems Command, load Army equipment and cargo onto Ocean Jazz, a commercial vessel, to support Pacific Pathways. (Photo by Shannon Haney)

cations that challenge both strategic planners and tactical operators.

Movements

There is nothing routine about RSO in the Pacific; U.S. Army forces cannot cross any land borders within the USARPAC area of responsibility, making every intratheater movement strategic. Pacific Pathways enables RSO planning and training at a level not frequently seen outside of a contingency operation.

The 8th TSC relies heavily on joint and contracted support to maintain visibility of sustainment requirements and infrastructure gaps in multiple countries during RSO operations. Several years of Pacific Pathways have exposed significant intratheater and intertheater move-

ment challenges that come from relying on airlift and sealift capabilities.

The theaterwide multinational engagements of Pacific Pathways highlight unique country operational requirements and the joint competition for scarce contracted resources.

A dedicated vessel provides a central point to build a Pacific Pathways movement. This strategy economizes the force structure needed to execute a rotation and eliminates duplicate port operations and transoceanic voyages throughout the deployment.

The strategy also provides the Army with the flexibility to reconfigure the deploying force for each successive engagement. The crew discharges only the equipment needed for each exercise, and unused gear remains onboard and ready for contingencies.

Using AWSs improves RSO planning and execution and benefits deploying forces. Logistics support vessel and landing craft utility (LCU) watercraft are essential components of RSO operations in Pacific Pathways. These watercraft facilitate the movement of tailored equipment packages among separate, overlapping, or simultaneous exercises that would otherwise require two or more strategic sealift assets.

Japan-based LCUs act as munitions supply ships for Pacific Pathways. They allow exercise ammunition to be drawn from the Republic of Korea or Japan. This strategy eases the burden on deploying units to draw, pack, and ship training ammunition from home station and accelerates RSO and redeployment for each exercise.

Strategic sealift no longer requires a separate ammunition port call.

Relationships

Intratheater and intertheater movements require a complex mix of strategic and tactical traffic management that balances host-nation processes with the multinational movement control functions of an allied force.

The success of an exercise in any country often depends on the relationships formed and experiences gained during previous deployments. Planning teams succeed or fail because of the last impression left with the host-nation military and the U.S. Embassy security cooperation teams.

Many key planning considerations, including the allocation and staging of vehicles and equipment, the location of convoy support centers, and convoy highway clearances require coordination and official approval from the host nation's movement control equivalent and civil and military authorities. Each successive annual Pacific Pathways deployment reaps the benefits of positive multinational engagements and lessons learned by the previous year's participants. These interactions strengthen regional familiarization and readiness.

These relationships are important for expediting the customs and immigration processes. For example, traveling to and from Australia requires the RSO process to begin at home station. Months before loading the vessel for deployment, units must prepare for strict agricultural inspections that ensure compliance with seaport of embarkation standards during upload.

Conducting a stateside preclearance promotes an accelerated clearance process upon arrival in Australia and keeps RSO and exercise timelines on track. Frustrated cargo can cause key equipment to never clear the port of debarkation, which affects readiness and training.

Pacific Tensions and Variables

The U.S. Pacific Command operates in a complex region with a polit-

ical environment as varied, dynamic, and challenging as its terrain. The region is home to four billion people, 24 of the world's 36 megacities, seven of the world's 10 largest armies, and

dynamic security environment.

RSO inherent to Pacific Pathways increases expeditionary proficiency, ensures readiness, and improves access. These operations foster and

The U.S. military sustainment community must respond quickly to overcome challenges and find rapid solutions when the political situation in a country changes and the RSO plan is disrupted.

five of seven mutual defense treaties that often require logistics solutions that are multinational and multi-lateral. U.S. forces are charged with helping to balance and stabilize the relationships that allies maintain with other regional powers.

Sudden changes to U.S. exercise plans and timelines can occur as a result of nations seeking to demonstrate their sovereign powers, national elections, mourning periods after the death of a national leader, or changes in foreign policy. The U.S. military sustainment community must respond quickly to overcome challenges and find rapid solutions when the political situation in a country changes and the RSO plan is disrupted.

If countries deny U.S. aircraft and vessel diplomatic clearances during Pacific Pathways deployments, the 8th TSC must find ways to move people and equipment into and out of the host country for the exercise.

The tyranny of distance is alive and well for the U.S. Army in the Pacific, where the operational environment stretches over 9,000 miles and land border crossings are not available for U.S. forces. The combined and joint RSO process applied throughout Pacific Pathways provides exposure and experience for the Army to train and test expeditionary logistics during operations in an increasingly complex, resource-competitive, and dy-

build the multinational relationships that enhance freedom of maneuver for USARPAC.

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