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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

Pacific Pathways: A Value Added Approach to US Strategic Objectives in the Pacific

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Executive Summary

Title: Pacific Pathways: A Value Added Approach to US Strategic Objectives in the Pacific

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Thesis: This paper examines the roles and responsibilities of Pacific Pathways to illustrate the complementary nature that this concept achieves in accomplishing the nation’s security cooperation goals and objectives, as well as providing US Pacific Command an additional capability in crisis response.

Discussion: In 2013, General Vincent Brooks, Commander, US Army Pacific unveiled his initiative for utilizing regional aligned forces to accomplish the nation’s strategic objectives in the “Rebalance to the Pacific.” Pacific Pathways utilizes a Brigade Combat Team “Mission Command” with an infantry battalion, logistics enablers, and often aviation assets to conduct engagements with foreign militaries in accordance with the Theater Campaign Plan. US Pacific Command (PACOM) is responsible for the largest area of any Geographical Combatant Command with thirty-six countries that speaks 3,000 different languages, which includes the largest communist nation, the most repressive nation, the largest democracy, the largest Muslim nation, seven of the top ten largest militaries, five of the nine declared nuclear countries, and four of the top ten largest economies. In this context, the security cooperation efforts of US Pacific Command ensures that US interests are maintained, and that the nation remains the Pacific power. Pacific Pathways is a means to ensure that PACOM can achieve these objectives. The role of Pacific Pathways is “to strengthen relationships with allies and partners while building a broader set of readiness outcomes for all participating forces and providing crisis response options to the combatant commander.” In achieving this role, Pacific Pathways could not rely on forward basing as a means. Therefore, personnel and equipment are placed on Military Sealift Command vessels and transported from engagement to engagement. During the three-month operational deployment, Pacific Pathway will conduct engagements with up to four allies or key partners in an effort to maintain access, build relationship, and increase capabilities and capacity of these nations. This paper makes four recommendations to benefit the already successful Pathway Pacific operations: 1) build on the joint force capabilities, 2) increase the operational deployment from three to six months, 3) utilize existing forces on the Korean Peninsula to demonstrate US resolve to the region and deter US adversaries, and 4) increase engagement with India.

Conclusion: Pacific Pathways is a value added capability to achieve the US objectives and provides the US Pacific Command an additional capability to utilize in crisis response.

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Introduction

In 2014 MajGen Richard Simcock, USMC, stated “Pacific Pathways may not be the best fit for the US Army, but it may be what is required for the United States right now and throughout the Pacific region.”¹ Simcock was referring to the US Army’s initiative to deploy a Brigade Combat Team to conduct theater security cooperation and provide an additional crisis response option to US Pacific Command (PACOM). The purpose of this research is to evaluate the Pacific Pathways initiative. This paper will examine the importance of the Asia Pacific region, the roles and responsibilities of Pacific Pathways, how this initiative links security cooperation and national policy, and the way ahead for future Pacific Pathways operations. The paper will conclude by offering recommendations to enhance Pacific Pathways. The research will show that Pacific Pathways is a complementary asset to achieve the nation’s security cooperation goals and objectives, as well as provide PACOM an additional capability in crisis response. The intent of this paper is not to compare and contrast the capacity and capabilities of one service against another, but show that Pacific Pathways is a value added capability in this important region of the world.

In 2011, with reductions in forces in Afghanistan and Iraq, the US Government shifted focus to the Asia Pacific region. Hillary Clinton (then Secretary of State) defined the shift of focus as, “continuing to dispatch the full range of our diplomatic assets — including our highest-ranking officials, our development experts, our interagency teams, and our permanent assets — to every country and corner of the Asia-Pacific region.”² In response, the 2012 National Defense Strategy (NDS) stated, “while the US military will continue to contribute to security globally, we will of necessity rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific region” while also providing key objectives for the military.³ The objectives described in the NDS were:

1) Build relationships with Asian allies and key partners to ensure future stability and growth in the region.

2) Expand networks of cooperation with emerging partners throughout the Asia-Pacific to ensure collective capability and capacity for securing common interests.

3) Invest in a long-term strategic partnership with India as an emerging regional economic anchor and provider of security in the broader Indian Ocean region.

4) Maintain peace on the Korean Peninsula by conducting security cooperation with allies and regional states to deter and defend against provocation by North Korea.⁴

These key themes were reiterated and emphasized two years later in the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR).⁵

Of the eleven enduring armed services missions identified in the QDR, US Army Pacific (USARPAC) fulfills six key roles in the Asia Pacific Region: 1) provide for military defense of the homeland, 2) provide a global stabilizing presence, 3) respond to crisis and conduct limited contingency operations, 4) conduct military engagement and security cooperation, 5) Conduct stability and counterinsurgency operations, and 6) conduct humanitarian assistance and disaster response.⁶ The QDR places a constraint on achieving these enduring missions to rebalance capacity and capability within a period of increasing fiscal constraints. Specifically, the QDR states, “the active Army will reduce from its war-time high force of 570,000 to 440,000-450,000 Soldiers.”⁷ With these objectives in mind, the USARPAC developed Pacific Pathways to meet these requirements as well as reduce manpower and gains efficiencies.

Asia-Pacific Region Overview

The Asia Pacific region is home to over fifty percent of the world's population and comprises thirty-six nations, which speaks 3,000 different languages. According to PACOM, "the region includes the most populous nation in the world, the largest democracy, and the largest Muslim-majority nation."⁸ The Asia Pacific region also includes the largest communist state and the most oppressive dictatorship. This region has seven of the top ten largest militaries, five of the nine declared nuclear countries,⁹ and four of the top ten largest economies.¹⁰

In terms of the economic impact of the region, over half of all container ships and about two-thirds of all oil and petroleum shipping transit this area, primarily through the Straits of Malacca. This equates to about 50,000 merchant ships per year and about 15 million barrels per day of crude oil. According to the Congressional Research Service, "Asia is the largest source of imports and second-largest export market."¹¹ According to the US National Security Strategy, "over the next 5 years, nearly half of all growth outside the United States is expected to come from Asia."¹² Further, the US has the potential to realize \$78 billion per year with the Trans-Pacific Partnership.¹³ However, in addition to strategic concerns in relation to economics, another key component is the five mutual defense treaties in the region.

Of the seven collective defense arrangements that the US is party to, five involve countries within the Asia-Pacific region. These defense alliances benefit the US as much as they do our allies. First, these alliances provide for collective security, an attack on one is an attack on the other, and the partner nation will come to the aid of the one under attack. Also, by enabling forward basing, these agreements allow for access to logistical support and infrastructure that reduces the US's cost to maintain a forward presence (in some case the host pays for our forward presence). For example, host nation support from Japan and South Korea equaled \$2.37 billion

and \$765 million in 2012, respectively.¹⁴ To maintain creditable relationships with its allies the US must ensure access and dominance in the region.

Regional stability, prosperity, and strategic influence in the Asia-Pacific region will require forward presence by US forces that can maintain access and freedom of navigation in the region. Currently, the PACOM force posture in the region is about 325,000 US military and civilian personnel, which includes 40,000 in Japan; 28,500 in the Republic of Korea (ROK); 5,000 in Guam, with smaller detachments throughout the region, though the vast majority are based within the continental US. The US forces assigned to Japan conduct security cooperation events, such as bilateral training and exercises, and capacity building, as well as a host of other functions, with its allies and partner nations within the region. The US forces assigned to Korea, known as USFK, are employed solely in the defense of the ROK.”¹⁵ However, with emerging force posture requirements USFK, with diplomatic support from the US Ambassador, this position should be reevaluated to allow for increased flexibility and enhanced partner capacity across the region.

National Policy

The evolving security environment, as described in the 2015 National Security Strategy and DoD Strategic Guidance, requires that US forces conduct a variety of missions across the Asia Pacific region. In Southeast Asia, US forces will focus on security cooperation missions to build relationships, maintain access, and instill confidence in US allies and partners, while deterring potential aggressors and showing US resolve as the dominant leader in the region. These operations consist of planning for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, conducting bilateral training events, and developing partner nation capability and capacity. In Northeast

Asia, US forces must focus on building credibility against potential aggressors. With the primary focus being on operational planning and contingency operations with US allies.¹⁶

Security Cooperation

Security cooperation is a continuous exchange with allies and partners to maintain, shape, and influence policy and doctrine. The Defense Security Cooperation Agency defines Security cooperation as, “all activities undertaken by the Department of Defense (DoD) to encourage and enable international partners to work with the United States to achieve strategic objectives.”¹⁷ Therefore, security cooperation impacts all phases of operations (see Figure 1). With regards to PACOM area of responsibility, the combatant commander must ensure a commitment to collective security through key leader engagements within the region. The US maintains these commitments with friendly nations by building partnerships, maintaining access to aerial and sea ports of debarkation, and developing partner capabilities and capacity.

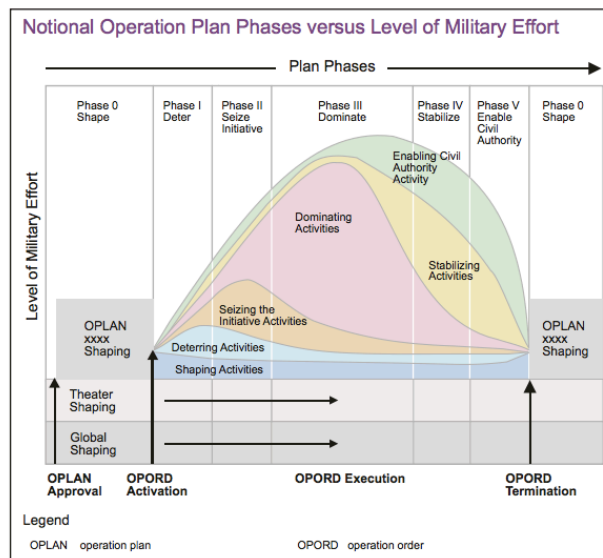


Figure 1: Illustrates the phases of operations versus level of military effort with theater shaping being maintained across the operational phases.

Linking Security Cooperation to US Commitments

To meet the requirements of national-level strategy, forward-deployed forces must persistently engage and partner with nations through PACOM's theater campaign plan. These engagements allow for information and intelligence sharing; building relationships; developing combined tactics, technics, and procedures; and establishing combined doctrine to ensure interoperability and support for mutual defense treaties, partnerships, and agreements.

The US-Japanese alliance is critical for both nations. According to a Center for Strategic and International Studies assessment, "Japan is the lynchpin for US access in the Asia-Pacific region."¹⁸ For Japan, the US-Japanese alliance is critical to the security of the nation and to deter Chinese expansion in the East China Sea particularly in defense of the Senkaku Islands. With major elements of the US military stationed on mainland Japan, such as the 7th Air Force and 7th Fleet, and III Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) in Okinawa, the US military is positioned to respond to any contingency in Northeast Asia. As a combined force, the US-Japanese forces conduct joint/bilateral Command Post Exercises KEEN EDGE/KEEN SWORD to improve interoperability of US forces and the Japanese Self-Defense Force (JSDF).¹⁹ Recently, Japan has begun to build mutual relationships with nations such as India, the Republic of Korea (ROK), and Australia. These relationships also promote US interests in the region. This network of vital partners share US values and economic interests, and seeks to deter aggression within the region.

The ROK is a political and militarily strategic partner with the US. Politically, the ROK is a democratic government and shares the US's views on human rights and rule of law.²⁰ The US-ROK alliance is critical to US efforts in deterring North Korea's nuclear proliferation. Militarily, US Forces Korea (USFK) and the ROK conduct numerous biannual training events

focused on building partner capability and capacity, but most importantly, the training focuses on responding to North Korean provocations. These security cooperation events incorporate not only a US-ROK military response, which includes United Nations Command (UNC), as well as Combined Forces Command (CFC), both of which are commanded by a US Army four-star general, but also the ROK civilian leadership. These training events are facilitated by combined joint computer assisted exercises (CAX) and command post exercises (CPX), which fuses the CFC with the ROK Government. These exercises provide the US-ROK military forces with enhanced training to develop shared knowledge and build enduring relationships. Further, these exercises provide the US forces with an understanding of on-the-ground infrastructure requirements. In addition to the biannual exercises, the US Army and its ROK counterparts conduct local training on an on-going basis, as does III MEF and the ROK Marine Corps. Pacific Pathways brings an element of realism outside the computer simulation that US-based forces will be integrated into support operations in the Korean joint area of operation. Pacific Pathways enables understanding of how US forces will be incorporated into the fight on the peninsula.

Pacific Pathways

The purpose of Pacific Pathways operations “is to strengthen relationships with allies and partners while building a broader set of readiness outcomes for all participating forces and providing crisis response options to the combatant commander.”²¹ During the Pacific Pathways iterations in 2014, USARPAC consolidated multiple theater security cooperation events into one operational deployment to demonstrate US commitment to security and stability in the Asia Pacific region and build relationships at the collective and individual troop levels. GEN Vincent Brooks, Commander, USARPAC, describes the Pacific Pathways model as an improvement for strengthening relationships with partner nations, stating “this model is more relationship focused

than the exercises.”²² With Pacific Pathways, the exercises are merely a means to improve upon current military-to-military relationships at the professional and personal level. These enduring relationships support the continued success of security assistance operations such as the foreign military sales and International Military Education and Training.²³ By building and maintaining strong partnerships through presence in the region, the US can build a reputation for commitment to its partners.

The 2015 National Military Strategy states:

“In case of aggression, denying adversaries their goals will be an immediate objective. This places special emphasis on maintaining highly-ready forces forward, as well as training and equipping surge forces at home, resilient logistics and transportation infrastructures, networked intelligence, strong communications links, and interoperability with allies and partners.”²⁴

In 2014, Brooks published his concept for Pacific Pathways operations, some claimed that the Army was “committing copyright infringement”²⁵ on the Marine Corps mission and providing a “solution in search of a problem.”²⁶ With the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan coming to a close and resulting in reduced budgets and manpower, Pacific Pathways is a means for Brooks to utilize regional aligned forces while following the strategic direction in the National Military Strategy and National Security Strategy to “continue to support the advance of security.”²⁷ Brooks’s concept of Pacific Pathways provides a value-added capability to meet national policy objectives and support security cooperation in the region.

Since the George W. Bush Administration, a key challenge for the US is the means and method of rebalancing and strengthening US presence in the Asia Pacific Region while minimizing basing requirements. The Marine Corps has done this through assigning Special

Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Forces, and like the Marine Corps, Pacific Pathways enables a broad distribution of forces that does not require permanent basing. Rather than deploying and redeploying a force for one exercise, Pacific Pathways now merges several exercises into a continuous deployment over several exercises. The exercise consolidation enables USARPAC to introduce a larger force package in the aggregate of three or four exercises than for a single exercise. This concept creates a forward presence, supports the PACOM theater security cooperation plan, and increases combat effectiveness.

During the Cold War Era, the term “forward presence” meant mitigating a security threat to a country or region. Even as recently as 2006, the QDR stated the purpose of forward presence is to 1) interact with allies, 2) build partner capability, 3) conduct long-duration counterinsurgency operations, and 4) to deter aggressors.²⁸ The thinking at the time was that forward presence required a permanent presence via basing. This form of forward presence is costly in terms of political resources. One needs to look no further than Okinawa, Japan to understand the political implications of permanent basing. In 2010, Admiral James Stavridis articulated that forward presence, in addition to reassuring allies and deterring potential aggressors, is required for “logistics—‘the ability to move rapidly globally,’ and training—a tool for building partner capacity and maintaining interoperability, and leadership.”²⁹ However, the forward presence paradigm continues to shift to balance readiness and presence. The capability Pacific Pathways operations provide to US strategic planners is a smaller footprint to build relationships and interoperable partners. Through the planning and execution of Pacific Pathways training events, these soldiers (both US and their foreign counterparts) are gaining critical insight to assess their capacity and capability to fight side-by-side these partners in the future.

Pacific Pathways is a three-month operational deployment consisting of an O-6 mission command capability augmented often with aviation, sustainment, and other enablers to facilitate port operations, foreign flight operations, and operational contract support. The planners from USARPAC, I Corps, 25th Infantry Division and BCT planners conduct coordination and planning with the US embassies and intergovernmental organizations approximately six months prior to and throughout the deployment. Following the initial thirty-day training, the unit conducts the deployment consisting of joint, combined, and bilateral pre-existing exercises, as well as other events in support of the PACOM theater campaign plan. In 2014, these exercises consisted of Exercises GARUDA SHIELD (Indonesia), KERIS STRIKE (Malaysia), and ORIENT SHIELD (Japan).³⁰ In 2015, Pacific Pathways conducted three iterations. The first took place from January to April with exercises conducted in Thailand, South Korea, and the Philippines. The second and third iterations overlapped taking place between Jun and October. Pacific Pathways 15-2 took place between July-September and consisted of bilateral training with Australian, Indonesian, and Malaysian armies. Pacific Pathways 15-3 consisted of unit level training in Mongolia, Japan, and Korea between June and October.³¹

A key aspect of Pacific Pathways and security cooperation in general is reconnaissance--to gain understanding of the area of operations. General Brooks stated, “by just coming here we get a better understanding of the terrain.”³² Pacific Pathways stresses port reception and inland transportation capabilities, which enables familiarity with the local business and personal customs, language, and geography. The knowledge gained to develop procedures to operate with the host nation ports, transportation agencies, customs and immigration officials, and local contractors cannot be replicated during home station training events. Reconnaissance is required to close the force and transition ashore to conduct the reception, staging, onward movement and

integration (RSO&I). The follow on operations relies on RSO&I and all levels of command requires training to understand this critical component. Another aspect of RSO&I, is the interagency, intergovernmental, and host nation coordination that must take place to offload equipment at the port, contracting of all classes of supply (food, fuel, and security for ammunition) in which Pacific Pathways gains training value in conducting this coordination.³³ This acquired knowledge through experience and consequently, “reassuring our allies by backing our security commitments and increasing responsiveness” benefits the US national interests in the Asia-Pacific Region.³⁴

Although the Marine Corps mission is to “seize and defend advance naval bases,” the US Army also requires the ability to deploy across the Pacific and establish logistics nodes required for long-term sustainment. Pacific Pathways utilizes this capability to establish regional partnerships and develop situational understanding throughout the region. Over the course of the three-month deployment, it will conduct no less than six RSO&I events of personnel and assets, and establish command and control three times. Realistic training, such as the joint logistical training conducted before and during Pacific Pathways iterations, is paramount to understanding the operational requirements from port to port.

Recommendations

Pacific Pathways has operationalized the capability to move troops and cargo with Military Sealift Command (MSC) vessels according to the demands of civilian leaders. While some have argued that Pacific Pathways operations are a redundant capability to one that the Marine Corps has already perfected,³⁵ III MEF cannot be everywhere, and nor do they even make that claim. LtGen Wissler, Commanding General, III MEF stated, “I’ve never been on a crowded battlefield.”³⁶ The battlefield that Wissler is speaking of is the PACOM AOR, which is

perhaps the most important region in the world. Pacific Pathways operations are a means of getting more US engagement with its strategic allies and partner nations. Placing Army equipment and personnel on a MSC vessel does not make Pacific Pathways a redundant capability. The fact remains that Pacific Pathways does not have an amphibious capability. Although they do deploy with helicopters, they are shipped as cargo on the vessel. As a concept, Pacific Pathways is value added. After all, security cooperation is about what is best for the nation, not any one service.

Although Pacific Pathways is an evolving Army concept, there are several recommendations to enhance this capability. While the Army has conducted Pacific Pathways successfully primarily as a single-service endeavor, by making it into a joint program, the Department of Defense can capitalize and expand on the opportunities Pacific Pathways has created. There is knowledge sharing that can take place across all the services, and the Pacific region is an ideal location to share these experiences, while also achieving the objectives of PACOM's theater security cooperation plan. Second, work toward extending Pacific Pathways iterations from three to six months can streamline events and decrease manpower and resource requirements. Third, consider utilizing USFK forces to conduct off-peninsula engagements. Lastly, increase engagements with India.

Joint exercises such as Exercise BALIKATAN and Exercise COBRA GOLD, provide unique opportunities for the military services to use Pacific Pathways to work together to gain perspective on each other's tactics and techniques. These exercises, where the Marine Corps is the Joint Force Commander provide understanding of Marine Corps higher headquarters structure. There is precedence for this concept. During Exercises BALIKATAN and COBRA GOLD 2014 and 2015, 25th Infantry Division, the Mission Command element of Pacific

Pathways served as the US Army Forces for both exercises under the oversight of Marine Corps Forces Pacific.³⁷ Inviting all services and certain government agencies to participate in Pacific Pathways joint combined Pacific Pathways CPXs will minimize friction the next time there is a crisis requiring a joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational (JIIM) capability. Pacific Pathways 15-01 exercised the full JIIM capability following the grounding of the US Navy Ship KOCOK off the coast of Japan, which contained Pacific Pathways and III MEF equipment destined for Exercise COBRA GOLD.³⁸ Further, joint combined exercises provide US allies and partners with an understanding of the distinction between the two land-based services in the event one is assigned as a subordinate command under either service. In addition, these types of combined exercises utilizing Asia Pacific based forces will reassure our partners and allies of the US's resolve in the region.

A common concern with America's partners in the Asia Pacific region, is the lack of trust in the staying power based on a historical inconsistency to commitment and presence. Most of the smaller nations (e.g. the countries constituting the Association of Southeast Asian Nations) will resist becoming entangling in the power struggle between the US and China. A key component of Pacific Pathways operations is the capabilities to build enduring relationships to demonstrate US resolve and commitment to partners; however, after the exercise concludes, the participating US Army units return to their dispersed, distant home stations.³⁹ Having a mix of US forces based in the Asia Pacific region coalesced within the overall exercise provides a measure of reassurance to partner nations.

Pacific Pathways should consider conducting the exercise under the umbrella of or in coordination with a unit assigned to the Asia Pacific Region, one that has a reduced response time. As mentioned previously, Exercises BALIKATAN and COBRA GOLD are excellent

examples. If USARPAC wants to maintain service exclusivity, a solution is to utilize I Corps (Fwd) in Japan as officer conducting the exercise. For the Navy and Marine Corps, particularly III MEF, this is not new, with over eighty annual exercises across the Asia Pacific region.⁴⁰ The US Navy's 7th Fleet utilizes San Diego based ships to conduct maritime security cooperation events while transiting between 5th Fleet and 3rd Fleet.

The second recommendation to enhance Pacific Pathways is to increase the deployment time from three to six months. When Brooks unveiled his concept for Pacific Pathways the intention was to “gain efficiency in preparation and recovery, transportation, and consolidating missions.”⁴¹ The US Army recently inserted \$39 million in the fiscal year 2018-2022 budget to fund three Pacific Pathways iterations per year.⁴² By extending the iterations from three to six months, the US Army could potentially reduce cost and manpower requirements of each iteration. Not only would this extended deployment reduce cost, it would further achieve Brooks's goal of streamlining of building habitual relationship and cultural understanding among partner nations.⁴³ The benefit is the extended engagement with the host nation and increased partner building that could take place.

This recommendation does have two challenges, funding and synchronizing the joint exercise life cycle (JELC). Pacific Pathways requires units to deploy, sustain, and execute as a single, continuous physical line of operation. However, funding remains separate and distinct by exercise, which creates serious funding gaps. The Army financial accounting system requires that Pacific Pathways units establish several lines of accounting for each leg of travel during the iteration, which creates an administrative burden upon redeployment. USARPAC Resource Managers must create a process to fund Pacific Pathways as one continuous operation.⁴⁴

Extending the iterations from three to six months will encounter challenges with synchronizing the JELC. The USARPAC staff noted that aligning the JELC conferences with US participating units was the greatest challenge.⁴⁵ However, there is an additional challenge of planners aligning host nation political-military interests, goals, and objectives with Pacific Pathways capabilities. As Pacific Pathways gains regional attention, partner nations will adapt their schedule to align to the Pacific Pathways iterations.

The third recommendation links the first and second recommendation for Pacific Pathways to utilize USFK forces to support expeditionary missions to enhance the regional linkage and reduce costs. Although it is not articulated in the US-Korea Defense Treaty, “the ROK expectation is that US military personnel deployed on the peninsula will not be used for PACOM mission elsewhere in the [PACOM] [area of responsibility].”⁴⁶ However, with the conditions based transfer of operational control of the US-ROK Combined Forces Command from a US Army four-star general to ROK military leadership, the US Army should consider a diplomatic solution with the ROK to utilize US forces for off peninsula exercises. These forces are already assigned west of the international date line could augment Pacific Pathways. The effect would be a reduce cost and provide an element of reassurance to regional partners. Utilizing exercise funding data provided by III MEF for Exercises BALIKATAN (Philippines), TALISMAN SABER (Australia), and COBRA GOLD (Thailand), which includes transportation of personnel/things (TOP/TOT) and exercise cost was \$10.6 million, \$10.3 million, and \$27.8 million for 2013-2015, respectively.⁴⁷ Whereas, the Pacific Pathways cost per iteration is budgeted for \$39 million. This data is shown not to compare services, but to illustrate the cost savings to utilize forces already assigned to the region. Further, setting aside the cost and assurance to regional partners, this would demonstrate USFK capabilities to, not only defend the

Peninsula, they can also deploy assets to defend US allies and key partners, which is a measure of deterrence for US adversaries.

The last recommendation to enhance the capabilities of Pacific Pathways operations is to engage with India. With the US pivot to the Pacific, the US must foster the strategic partnership with India, the largest democracy in the region to promote the ability to share information across all domains. India, who recently instituted a policy of “Look East,” shares US values on human rights, rule of law, and democracy. Militarily, the US and Indian naval forces conduct multiple annual bilateral and multinational maritime exercises, and other bilateral security cooperation events. However, the Indian Ministry of Defense (MOD) and Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) strictly limit US-Indian Armed Forces engagements to one per year per service, which restricts PACOM’s access to the nation.⁴⁸ Due to the Indian Armed Forces lack of a Marine Corps, Pacific Command could leverage Pacific Pathways to gain access through Army channels and utilize Marine Corps expertise in amphibious operations to train with the 91st Brigade of the Indian Army, which is designated as the amphibious brigade. Amphibious operations are a critical component for joint operations in the region.

India’s strategic location, which links the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean, is of vital importance to US interests in terms of maritime security and free flow of trade. India’s growing interest in security cooperation with Japan, Australia, and ASEAN promotes US interests. However, located between Pakistan and Myanmar, India’s geography makes it an area of instability. Further, India’s internal conflict with the Maoist-Nexalite insurgency is another potential area of concern. Pacific Pathways land based capabilities could support additional security cooperation in the nation to minimize the potential for escalating conflict.

PACOM should continuously conduct an effects based evaluation of all the security cooperation events in the region. There is no doubt that the AOR is large enough to accommodate multiple units conducting the security cooperation objectives. However, the US could quickly exceed the absorptive capacity of the partner nation(s). The US maritime services (Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard) have the maritime security cooperation planning process that aligns the efforts of all participants. This type of formalized process to synchronize all the services objectives would minimize duplication of training with US partners and allies and ensure continued process of capability and capacity building.

The Way Ahead

Over the last two years of conducting Pacific Pathways operations, the US Army has seen a significant impact in the US Pacific Command's area of responsibility.⁴⁹ The US Army is requesting funding for three iterations per year. Unlike Pacific Pathways iterations in 2014 and 2015, where units from Alaska, Hawaii, and Washington were projected into PACOM's AOR, the 2016 iterations will conduct two iterations in the Pacific and one state-side. The State-side iteration will assist in projecting three regional partners onto a US location, linking up with US forces, and conducting a US based exercise then deploying a force to Japan. The current concept for Pacific Pathways 16-1 is to conduct theater security cooperation in Thailand, the Republic of Korea, and the Philippines from February – April. Pacific Pathways 16-2 will conduct a hub and spoke mission command with the headquarters deploying to the Philippines and conducting distributive operations with other elements conducting security cooperation events in Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia. The headquarters element in the Philippines will exercise command and control over the other two deployed units.⁵⁰

The projected Pacific Pathways 2017 deployments will include three iterations into the region to conduct theater security cooperation events. A Stryker Brigade Combat Team conducting deployment to Thailand, Korea, Cambodia, and the Philippines will conduct Pacific Pathways 17-1. For Pacific Pathways 17-2, an Infantry Brigade Combat Team will conduct a deployment to Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Cambodia. The third and final iteration of FY17, will be conducted by an Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne) to Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, and Japan.

Conclusion

Pacific Pathways is one of many assets that contribute to the US strategic objectives in national policy. The largest contributions that Pacific Pathways makes are through its engagements with allied and partner nations; power projection west of the international date line; and a commitment to the Asia Pacific Region. Although all of the services conduct theater security cooperation in the region, this provides for the opportunity to distribute forces throughout the region. Pacific Pathways is not meant to, nor does it, replicate the Marine Corps's capabilities. This Brigade-sized element does not have amphibious shipping, and their helicopters do not have the ability to be stowed and launched from MSC vessels. Pacific Pathways is not redundant; it is a value added capability that the US needs to promote its interests. The benefit is combat effectiveness gained through these operational deployments and providing PACOM with an additional JTF-capable headquarters in the region. Pacific Pathways is engaging at the professional and personal level with US partners and allies, and the participants are gaining the benefit of reconnaissance (understanding of the cultural, terrain, and infrastructure) and rehearsal (means and methods of operating with the host nation). USARPAC

cannot replicate this training at home station. Furthermore, Pacific Pathways provides effective strategy for PACOM to show that the US is committed to the region.

Demonstrating a willingness to foster the greater good in the Pacific AOR can enhance this commitment. Joint operations, increasing the deployment time line to achieve maximum benefit of relationships, utilizing regional forces, and increased engagement with India will demonstrate the US resolve as the Pacific power, deter US adversaries, and enhance US relationships in the region.

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