

Strengthening Allies and Partners:

The Optimal Strategy for Prepositioned War Reserve Materiel in the Indo-Pacific

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14. ABSTRACT To accomplish the operational requirements associated with the USINDOPACOM's theater strategy, leaders must leverage prepositioned war reserve material (PWRM) stock during the initial phases. Currently, the USINDOPACOM does not possess the PWRM framework to support potential joint warfighting requirements across the region. According to a recent study by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, the region's vast size and lack of host nation agreements (HNAs) are the primary challenges specific to PWRM stock. Although USINDOPACOM maintains two of the military's largest PWRM warehouses in Japan and South Korea, both locations are within China's long-range strike capability. These warehouses may potentially serve as critical vulnerabilities for China to target and exploit during military conflict. To address these challenges, USINDOPACOM must enhance partnerships with other nations in the region to expand basing options and develop HNAs to support the improvement of its PWRM framework. A diverse basing footprint with multiple partners will maximize combat power projection against the theater's adversarial threats. Moreover, the development of added HNAs offers a more efficient means to maintain, store, and transport PWRM throughout the region. With a stronger PWRM framework, the USINDOPACOM is better prepared for military conflict against the region's most notable adversaries.					
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Abstract

To accomplish the operational requirements associated with the USINDOPACOM's theater strategy, leaders must leverage prepositioned war reserve material (PWRM) stock during the initial phases. Currently, the USINDOPACOM does not possess the PWRM framework to support potential joint warfighting requirements across the region. According to a recent study by the U.S. Government Accountability Office, the region's vast size and lack of host nation agreements (HNAs) are the primary challenges specific to PWRM stock. Although USINDOPACOM maintains two of the military's largest PWRM warehouses in Japan and South Korea, both locations are within China's long-range strike capability. These warehouses may potentially serve as critical vulnerabilities for China to target and exploit during military conflict. To address these challenges, USINDOPACOM must enhance partnerships with other nations in the region to expand basing options and develop HNAs to support the improvement of its PWRM framework. A diverse basing footprint with multiple partners will maximize combat power projection against the theater's adversarial threats. Moreover, the development of added HNAs offers a more efficient means to maintain, store, and transport PWRM throughout the region. With a stronger PWRM framework, the USINDOPACOM is better prepared for military conflict against the region's most notable adversaries.

Keywords: Prepositioned War Reserve Materiel; Host Nation Agreements;
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Prepositioning Challenges in the Indo-Pacific

The military balance in the Indo-Pacific is becoming unfavorable to the U.S. The USINDOPACOM strategy seeks to counter and deter the military aggressions of great powers such as China, Russia, and North Korea in the region. Admiral Philip S. Davidson, the USINDOPACOM Commander's Posture Statement, called for joint force precision-strike networks in conjunction with postured air and missile defense systems across the First and Second Island Chains. The overall objective of this strategy is to bolster deterrence and seize initiative during theater contingency operations. In support of these tasks, UNINDOPACOM emphasizes a heavy focus on three of its four critical areas of attention: increasing joint force lethality, enhancing force design and posture; and modernizing its exercises and innovation programs¹. The 2022 Pacific Deterrence Initiative (PDI) presents a budget of over \$5 billion to support the focus areas outlined in the USINDOPACOM Posture Statement. The PDI strongly prioritizes the first three areas of focus as it allocates funds of over \$4.95 billion in correlation with developing, exercising, and testing new capabilities². Although this approach is vital for deterrence, it lacks adequate consideration for the logistical framework required to achieve victory. Projecting the most lethal and current combat power on the First and Second Island Chains will require swift expansion and realignment towards the region's preposition war reserve material (PWRM) stock.

¹ ADM Phillip S. Davidson, *Indo-Pacific Command Posture Statement*, 2021.

² *PACIFIC DETERRENCE INITIATIVE Department of Defense Budget*, 2021.

PWRM stock reduces military response times and ensures timely support to theater contingency operations. This logistical function provides the military equipment needed to meet operational requirements in the initial phases until follow-on capabilities are available via established supply chains. The USINDOPACOM maintains PWRM locations in South Korea, Japan, Guam, Saipan, and Diego Garcia. The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) conducted a Warfighter Support Study to gain insight into military prepositioning programs across the DOD. This research revealed several shortfalls across all Combatant Commands, including lack of storage locations, insufficient storage space, and materiel degradation. The GAO also highlighted two prepositioning challenges specific to the Indo-Pacific: the region's vast size and the lack of host nation agreements with other countries in the region³.

The most efficient manner to address these challenges would be the final critical area of approach expressed in the USINDOPACOM Posture Statement, strengthening allies and partners. As of now, the Combatant Command is falling short of supporting this approach. The PDI indicates a clear funding priority toward the focus areas directly associated with enhancing the offensive and defensive capability to remain competitive with the region's great powers. However, the mere \$500K allocated towards strengthening allies and partners in the region may prevent U.S. Armed Forces from winning during theater contingency operations. Leaders should consider alternate prepositioning options outside China's long-range strike capability; assistance from partnering countries can shape these realignment efforts. Developing a concept of support for projecting combat power along the First and Second Island Chains will require equitable support from neighboring countries in the region. Therefore, USINDOPACOM must enhance

³ Alissa H. Czyz et al., *Warfighter Support: DOD Needs a Complete Picture of the Military Services' Prepositioning Programs*, 21st ed., vol. GAO (Washington, DC: GAO @ 100 A Century of Non-Partisan Fact-Based Work, 2021).

relationships with partners to revitalize its PWRM stock by expanding basing options and Host Nation Agreements (HNAs) across the region.

Basing Solves Storage Locations and Limitations

The USINDOPACOM should seek to expand joint-use basing options with partners for better PWRM coverage across the vast region. One of the biggest challenges with the PWRM framework across the Indo-Pacific is the lack of storage locations and sufficient space to facilitate initial requirements for combat operations, support to allies, disaster response, and humanitarian assistance. The massive size of the Indo-Pacific region presents a challenge to each of the services' ability to meet operational objectives due to the distances between available supply centers and points of employment. Air Force officials noted that limited surface movement capacities further intensify this challenge, as prepositioned assets are limited to either airlift or sealift for dispersion across large bodies of water⁴.

Storage space is insufficient because of many limitations on the size or quality of facilities. Army, Navy, and Air Force officials assume risk with recurring shortfalls specific to prepositioned assets in the Indo-Pacific region due to lack of storage space. For example, the Army reported shortfalls in construction equipment from 2015 through 2019; the Navy reported a lack of functioning CBRN-E assets from 2017 through 2019; and the Air Force had shortfalls in basic expeditionary airfield resources, fuel support equipment, and munitions in 2018 and 2019⁵. Additionally, many storage locations lack the funding to recapitalize existing

⁴ Alissa H. Czyz et al., *Warfighter Support: DOD Needs a Complete Picture of the Military Services' Prepositioning Programs*, 21st ed., vol. GAO (Washington, DC: GAO @ 100 A Century of Non-Partisan Fact-Based Work, 2021).

⁵ Ibid.

warehousing locations to fulfill the requirements for proper storage. Leaders across all services may unknowingly accept the risk of materiel degradation or accelerated deterioration of perishable assets, such as medical supplies, due to limitations of climate-controlled storage. Due to insufficient storage facilities abroad, Air Force and Navy officials reported they chose to store some prepositioned medical assets in the continental United States to mitigate the degradation risk. This method contributes to a longer response time to receive medical assets in theater and is counterproductive to sustaining joint-force lethality in the region.

USINDOPACOM should consider alternate storage locations in the region. Although we maintain strong basing agreements with Japan and South Korea, China's missile strike capability can exploit those PWRM locations as critical vulnerabilities during a time of conflict due to proximity. Moreover, China increased its threat ring by expanding its basing and maritime presence throughout the region. Currently, the U.S. naval and air bases in Guam are the strategic locations outside of China's threat ring. An article titled "Indo-Pacific Deterrence and the Quad" by Lt Col Justin Diehl expressed that the U.S. and its partners should work to reduce the critical vulnerabilities at strategic chokepoints within their basing footprint⁶. They should explore long-range basing options that outrange China's conventional missile strike capability to limit opportunities for exploitation of initial combat power.

Diehl highlighted the importance of leveraging partner relationships to expand basing in India, Papua New Guinea (PNG), and Australia. India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands offer established military presence with two naval bases and four air bases⁷. These islands are perfect for establishing a PWRM location as it would allow the U.S. and its partners to transport materiel

⁶ Lt Col Justin L. Diehl, "Indo-Pacific Deterrence and the Quad in 2030," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* (2021): 17-19.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17

requirements through the Malacca Strait into Southeast Asia. Manas Island, PNG, presents a prime location for strategic basing as its more than 4,000 km away from China. In March 2019, Australia and PNG signed the Lombrum Joint Initiative, which increased funding for infrastructure development on Manas Island⁸. The U.S. should leverage Australia's support in this agreement to establish PWRM stock on the island. Adding a U.S. presence in this agreement would enable the U.S. and its partners to maintain Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) of the South of the Philippine Sea, which allows for a permissive flow of equipment into the First and Second Island Chains. Another basing option is in Northern Australia near Tindal or Darwin. Northern Australian air bases provide the infrastructure to base long-range aircraft and fighters⁹. A PWRM warehouse at this location would allow the UNINDOPACOM the best opportunity to project long-range fires into China's homeland while positioned outside of their conventional threat rings. This location may also serve as a critical hub for PWRM stock to support partners and allies as its centrally located between India and Japan.

Increased basing locations will provide service commanders with multiple options to establish Bases of Operations (BOOs) and Intermediate Staging Bases (ISBs) for maneuvering their forces across the massive ocean. The 2021 PDI allocated 26% of its budget to prepositioning and logistics. However, there must be a strong consideration for the proper locations and necessary storage requirements to balance joint-force lethality and the defense posture. While advocating for Congress, Admiral Davidson stated, "it is not strategically prudent, nor operationally viable to physically concentrate on large, close-in bases that are highly vulnerable to a potential adversary's strike capability. Forward-based, rotational joint forces are

⁸ Ibid., p. 19

⁹ Justin L. Diehl, "Indo-Pacific Deterrence and the Quad in 2030," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* (2021): 17-19.

the most credible way to demonstrate U.S. commitment and resolve to potential adversaries while simultaneously assuring allies and partners¹⁰." Maintaining PWRM stock at locations under the control of partner nations allows us the best opportunity to leverage their forces for the protection of our assets while supporting them with additional war materiel reserves. This trade-off will meet Admiral Davidson's intent to reduce the logistical footprint inside China's conventional threat capability and allow us to adequately reinforce ourselves and our partners as potential conflict may arise.

Leveraging Host Nation Agreements

Using HNAs with different partners and allies will enable more expedient employment for PWRM stock across the Indo-Pacific. The best HNAs provide monetary solutions for labor and procurement costs associated with PWRM stock. Presently, the USINDOPACOM maintains the strongest agreements with South Korea and Japan. South Korea's financial support for logistics totaled \$507.5 million from 2016 through 2019. Through contracts with South Korean firms, this HNA provided various equipment, supplies, and services to support the U.S. forward posture, including the storage, transportation, and maintenance of ammunition; distribution and storage of fuels; and facility sustainment services¹¹. The U.S. and South Korea funded a 350,000 square foot warehouse facility along with a \$9.4 million maintenance facility to support PWRM stock on the peninsula; both are the largest of their kind from an OCONUS standpoint¹². From 2016 to 2019, Japan has funded over \$710.7 million towards the Facilities Improvement Program. Upgrades to facilities such as the infrastructure at the container yards and controlled-

¹⁰ ADM Phillip S. Davidson, *Indo-Pacific Command Posture Statement*, 2021.

¹¹ Jodie Sandel et al., *BURDEN SHARING: Benefits and Costs Associated with the U.S. Military Presence in Japan and South Korea*, 21st ed. (Washington, DC: GAO @ 100: A Century of Non-Partisan Fact-Based Work, 2021).

¹² "Army Prepositioned Stocks: Indispensable to America's Global Force-Projection Capability," *Association of the United States Army, Voice of the Army-Support for the Soldier* (December 2008).

humidity functions in the Sagami General Depot and watercraft support equipment at Yokohama North Dock will modernize PWRM capability in Japan. Over the past several years, the U.S. Armed Forces have benefitted greatly from these HNAs. However, China continues to exert its influence throughout the region. To remain competitive and properly postured to respond to contingency operations, the USINDOPACOM should develop similar HNAs with additional, prominent nations in the region, such as India and Australia.

USINDOPACOM can efficiently distribute its PWRM assets by establishing host nation agreements with additional countries. Although USEUCOM has a smaller Area of Responsibility (AOR), it provided a great illustration of how strong alliances and partnerships can best support PWSM requirements to reduce deployment times and provide initial combat power. In September 2021, the 21st Theater Sustainment Command demonstrated multination cooperation and interoperability while tasked to move nearly 700 pieces of equipment across multiple countries within a 48-hour timeframe. The 21st TSC's Transportation Movement Center (TMC) reached out to the Movement Coordination Center Europe (MCCE). With no organic movement assets in theater and a short timeline to push PWRM equipment, the TMC leveraged its relationship with the MCCE to engage a partner nation's military. In this case, the Netherlands Ministry of Defense and Denmark's MOD's Joint Movement and Transportation Organization provided offers of support via host nation contracts. Utilizing HNAs, the two Ally nations' militaries were able to contract with commercial vendors to move the equipment on behalf of the U.S. Army¹³. The MCCE and HNAs allowed the U.S. to bypass the regulatory chokepoints associated with hazardous materials, weapons, escorts, and other restrictions that often cause

¹³ Eleanor Prohaska, "21st TSC Scores Bullseye with Allies Moving Prepositioned Stock through Europe," *DVIDS*, last modified December 20, 2021, <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/411540/21st-tsc-scores-bullseye-with-allies-moving-prepositioned-stock-through-europe>.

transportation delays. USINDOPACOM must strengthen its alliances and partners to build HNAs that mirror those in Europe.

The best way for the USINDOPACOM to build diverse HNAs with additional partners is by continuing to train together during exercises such as Operation Pacific Pathways (formerly known as Defender Pacific) and Yudh Abhyas. These exercises extend from mobilization and deployment into the theater and the redeployment to a place of origin. The primary training objective of all the participating countries is exercising combined/joint interoperability with one another. This goal requires many Mutual Logistics Support Agreements (MLSAs) that allow different countries to share the burden of maintenance, storage, and transportation. One of the best MLSAs in the region is the one Japan and Australia signed in June 2020. This agreement offers greater cooperation of defense forces between the two nations. The geographic location of both countries relative to each other enables effective Maritime Domain Awareness over a large portion of the Indo-Pacific. It would be advantageous for the USINDOPACOM to continue its participation in exercises with both countries to compound HNAs in hopes of maturing similar relationships. Materiel stored overseas can demonstrate commitment to allies and partners or enhance the deterrence of potential adversaries. Additionally, units deploying to a theater for training and exercises may utilize prepositioned equipment, which allows these forces to practice drawing and preparing PWRM for operations¹⁴. Continuous resourcing for these exercises every year will potentially breed enough PWRM stock to support a Combined Joint Task Force. This opportunity can only mature through detailed HNAs that codify funding and responsibility, such as Acquisition Cross Service Agreements (ACSAs). Therefore, the more military exercises

¹⁴ “Defense Primer: Department of Defense Pre-Positioned Materiel,” *Congressional Research Service* (IN FOCUS, December 9, 2020), <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11699/2>.

USINDOPACOM participates in, the more MLSAs and ACSAs they can tap into for additional PWRM stock.

This method of acquiring PWRM would assist with validating operational requirements for combat-configured sets, unit sets, and war reserve sets for allies as it serves as a byproduct of multinational joint exercises. However, capturing the PWRM demands across all service branches would be a challenge. Although the J4 is responsible for strategic and operational logistics, the theater-level sustainment units across each service component command are originally responsible for coordinating the maintenance, material handling, and transportation of their PWRM stock; regardless of any HNAs. The USINDOPACOM J4 could focus efforts on developing simple HNAs that only execute similar PWRM stock requirements for all branches of services in the region. These efforts may potentially reduce duplicate funding requirements and allow the HNAs to serve as the umbrella to facilitate the proper employment of PWRM in the future.

In Contrast: Enhanced Force Design Posture

An alternative strategy to address the challenges associated with the current PWRM framework would be focusing on a force design posture that protects our current footprint and facilitates better distribution. The USINDOPACOM Posture Statement issued guidance to establish a joint force laydown west of the IDL to defend in-depth and decisively respond to contingencies across the region¹⁵. This concept allows for more dispersed combat power along the island chains, emphasizing air and missile defense systems and securing SLOCs to increase survivability, reduce risk, and ensure the ability to "fight and win" in the Indo-Pacific.

¹⁵ADM Phillip S. Davidson, *Indo-Pacific Command Posture Statement*, 2021.

The primary means of protection for our current PWRM locations is an integrated air and missile defense system along the Second Island Chain to counter long-range fires from China or North Korea. Admiral Davidson expressed that a 360-degree, persistent air and missile defense capability on Guam, known as the Guam Defense System (GDS), is the most critical for defending the American Homeland and operating locations in the western Pacific. The plan for the GDS consists of a robust architecture to engage emerging threats, including hypersonics and the ability to integrate existing weapon control systems. In January 2021, the MDA was directed by the Office of the Secretary of Defense to reprogram up to \$29M in FY21 RDT&E funding to begin the architecture design for the GDS¹⁶. In the future, this newly implemented air-defense capability can provide protection for primary PWRM warehouse locations in South Korea, Japan, and Guam. Furthermore, this additional air and missile defense component will alleviate the pressure to reposition PWRM stock from current locations to outside of enemy strike capabilities.

Additionally, the negotiation process for HNAs is a complex and timely process that involves other U.S. government agencies such as the U.S. Department of State. Recently, a heavy reliance on HNAs has been the status quo to execute intratheater transportation requirements. The primary reason was a reduction in the risk to U.S. forces during an operation's reception and staging phases. During the most recent GAO study, Army and Air Force officials cited challenges with host nation agreements. For example, the Special Measures Agreement with South Korea expired in December 2019 and went unrenewed until April 2021¹⁷. Under this agreement, the South Korean government-funded labor costs to store and maintain some PWRM

¹⁶ ADM Phillip S. Davidson, *Indo-Pacific Command Posture Statement*, 2021.

¹⁷ Alissa H. Czyz et al., *Warfighter Support: DOD Needs a Complete Picture of the Military Services' Prepositioning Programs*, 21st ed., vol. GAO (Washington, DC: GAO @ 100 A Century of Non-Partisan Fact-Based Work, 2021).

assets specifically for the Air Force. According to Air Force officials, the 17-month negotiation process hindered operational planning as this forced them to seek alternative avenues to fund these unanticipated fiscal requirements and employ PWRM stock¹⁸. The use of HNAs will continue to be a means to maintain, store, and transport PWRM stock. However, too much reliance may handicap USINDOPACOM's ability to respond to the crisis brought upon China, Russia, or DPRK. Admiral Davidson's guidance on a persistent presence through forward-based and rotational joint forces will reduce the amount of dependency on HNAs for future contingency operations.

Accordingly, a forward-based footprint with secure SLOCs throughout the island chains can yield an operational strategy that supports intratheater air and sea lifts to distribute PWRM stock from its warehouse locations closer to the point of need. USINDOPACOM is prioritizing the use of expeditionary airfields and ports along with the First and Second Island Chains as part of a distributed force posture. Section 1251 of the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) outlines specific investments to build dispersed power projection airfields across U.S. territories in the region, Oceania and the Pacific Island Countries, and Southeast Asia¹⁹. These investments will increase the region's tactical airlift and sealift capability, enabling local air and maritime superiority to establish SLOCs. Additionally, this strategy would maximize the employment of sustainment units such as the 7th Transportation Brigade (Expeditionary), Military Sealift Command, Air Mobility Command to execute operational-level tasks such as Joint Logistics Over the Shore (JLOTS) in support of the onward movement for PWRM stock. Focusing on an enhanced force design posture in the Indo-Pacific will prepare USINDOPACOM

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ ADM Phillip S. Davidson, *Indo-Pacific Command Posture Statement*, 2021.

to defend the airspace and secure SLOCs. This focus will intend to mitigate risks to the region's current PWRM framework, thus, minimizing the demand for additional basing options and HNAs with partner nations. Though this is a logical course of action, it is insufficient to solve the problem.

Conclusion:

Admittedly, concentrating efforts to enable intratheater distribution of PWRM stock is critical in integrating combat power with the warfighters. USINDOPACOM's efforts to enhance the force design offer better protection and maneuverability of our current PWRM framework. Nonetheless, this focus area does not adequately address the challenge of having limited storage capacity to support the combatant command's PWRM requirements for individual military services. Moreover, the idea of defending the airspace and securing SLOCs across the vast distances of the Indo-Pacific's waters is easier said than done. It is important to remember China's influence throughout the region and its initiatives to project military power at great distances. Despite USINDOPACOM's priority to develop, exercise, and test new capabilities, the probability of prevailing in a large-scale conflict against China is much slimmer without strong relationships with partners and allies.

Ultimately, the optimal strategy to revitalize USINDOPACOM's PWRM framework would be to build a stronger relationship with partners across the region to expand basing options and develop HNAs. This strategy will diversify the combatant command's distribution network and build more resilient logistical trains to support the staging, onward movement, and integration of its PWRM stock. By leveraging basing options with partner nations, USINDOPACOM can preposition more combat power throughout the region with dispersed locations outside of China's threat rings to reduce risks of exploitation. The development of

additional HNAs can offer a more efficient means to maintain, store, and transport PWRM stock. These agreements will strengthen over time as combined/joint large-scale exercises stress their importance. With this revitalization strategy for PWRM stock, conditions for success favor USINDOPACOM during any conflict against the region's most notable adversaries.

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