

# International Stability Operations Association

## White Paper

### Pre-Positioning Equals Deterrence

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Pre-positioning serves as a necessary factor for the United States (U.S.) to be able to display and project power and influence. As a strategic resource, sea and land-based pre-positioned equipment may be leveraged as a component of deterrence in providing a show of force reducing the need to deploy large numbers of personnel to a theater of operations.

The primary purposes of pre-positioning are to reduce the initial amount of strategic lift required to support a predominately CONUS-based force projection capability, and to sustain the U.S. and allied forces until sea lines of communication are established. Pre-positioned equipment should be configured to support extensive combat operations for the maximum extent possible to minimize draw times and enable rapid build-up of combat power by a supported command. Pre-positioned stores are those items that sustain the force, such as fuel and food. Additionally, while pre-positioning equipment and stores are the most often highlighted, increasingly, pre-positioning can include the ability to stage and support personnel and the sustainment capacity required for equipment sets and commodities.

As the U.S. Indo Pacific Strategy increasingly emphasizes a distributed and disbursed footprint, additional pre-positioned capacity is increasingly important. In the vast Indo Pacific, transportation timelines are staggering. Travel from the west coast of the U.S. to Japan can take 12 to 20 days by ship. Shipping to Singapore requires a month of transit, and to Australia, with its growing American troop presence, even longer. Additionally, there is the cost of shipping. Currently, shipping containers and fuel costs are historically low. However, in a crisis, costs would skyrocket. For example, today the cost of shipping a 40-foot container from America's west coast to China is approximately \$1400, down 93% from its peak of \$20,600 in September 2021 during the pandemic. An actual conflict scenario would result in an even greater spike in prices for shipping and fuel costs. Additionally, unlike the 1990 Persian Gulf War buildup, which took six months, such a timeline is unlikely in an Indo-Pacific conflict or crisis. Maintaining additional pre-positioned assets and capabilities at distributed and disbursed locations eliminates the timelines and costs associated with shipping in the vast Indo Pacific region in a time of crisis.

U.S. strategy in the region is also adapting to China's anti-access/anti-denial "A2/AD" concept. China's term for A2/AD is "counter-intervention" and the goal is to keep the U.S. out of the region to prevent a U.S. engagement and resupplying of deployed forces. As the U.S. increasingly relies on allies and partners to conduct military operations, a holistic logistics and sustainment network that all parties is critical. In a

crisis or conflict, transporting weapons or stock to the region that could be accessed by one or all will be essential to supporting the entire allied effort.

Increasingly creative approaches are required. The United States maintains an existing program called the War Reserve Stocks program, which is a “dual key” approach to pre prepositioning, allowing a host nation and/or U.S. forces to access stockpiles. A multi-key concept, that allows multiple nations to access stocks would best leverage these strategic resources and help optimize the deployment and operational flexibility of all allied forces. Additionally, augmented reality has radically transformed the maintenance paradigm by allowing expert over the shoulder maintenance mentorship from remote locations. As war stocks in multiple locations would require translating various languages, augmented reality, with instantaneous maintenance protocols and translated language capability eliminates communications barriers that previously made working across multiple nationalities cumbersome and challenging.

To address the logistics and sustainment gap in the Indo Pacific the following approaches should be pursued:

- Increase the total number of pre-positioned stockpile locations.
- Reproduce the War Reserve Stockpiles program for additional partners in the region.
- Create innovative, scalable war reserve stockpiles programs that are multi-lateral, allowing multiple allies to leverage the equipment and stores in various locations.
- Move Preposition Maintenance Repair Overhaul (MRO) capability forward to increase operational availability, build partner capacity in theater, and enable flexibility of sustainment in theater.
- Utilize creative “hide-in-plain sight” approaches to supporting and sustaining logistics and sustainment teams.
- Expand the use of augmented reality maintenance to minimize travel requirements, maximize maintenance protocols and expertise and leverage language translation capabilities embedded in the programs.
- Intra-theater logistics are crucial. With the diminishment of the Army Watercraft fleet, new, innovative, agile and cost-effective solutions are essential.

The era of “contested logistics” has arrived. The ability of the U.S. military to react, respond, and resupply in the vastness of the Indo Pacific will be challenging. Knowing China will likely do everything it can to keep U.S. and allied forces from being able to maneuver close enough to the battlefield complicates how logistics will be undertaken. Spending time now to leverage existing authorities on the books, listen and engage partners, and develop plans and processes to embark on a major peacetime pre-positioning effort may well be the key to whether the U.S. wins or loses in a future Indo Pacific engagement.