



COMBA THROUGH SUS

Combat readiness in large-scale combat operations (LSCO) is not defined solely by the maneuver capabilities of forward formations. It is forged in the docks, rail yards, and logistical nodes that power the fight. The tempo of operations hinges on our ability to scale throughput,

secure infrastructure, and synchronize sustainment across borders. As recent conflicts and exercises have revealed, victory is often shaped long before the first shot is fired. Robust infrastructure, such as roads, rails, ports, and effective sustainment partnerships, is foundational for projecting and sustaining combat power in the Indo-Pacific.



AT READINESS SUSTAINMENT PARTNERSHIPS

Leveraging Contracting in the Indo-Pacific

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Allied Infrastructure as a Readiness Enabler

U.S. Army Pacific Command conducts a wide array of annual exercises that stress-test our sustainment posture and contracting capacity. Exercises such as Cobra Gold, Pacific Pathways, and Lightning Strike mirror the logistical focus of the European Deterrence

Initiative, developed to increase U.S. presence and readiness in Europe after Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea. These events validate maneuver readiness and logistics readiness. They leverage prepositioned stocks, enhanced port facilities, acquisition and cross-servicing agreements (ACSAs), and multinational

coordination mechanisms to ensure contracted support is operationalized, throughput is optimized, and sustainment remains responsive in contested environments.

These exercises underscore a key point: infrastructure is a combat enabler, not just terrain. The ability to integrate host-nation capabilities, manage contract logistics support, and conduct port operations at scale must be as rehearsed and refined as much as the maneuver plan itself. Partnered infrastructure must be treated as part of the operational framework, not an afterthought.

The Sustainment Challenge in LSCO

Modern infrastructure is highly vulnerable and exploitable. Russia's strikes on Ukrainian ports and logistics hubs in late May 2025 demonstrate how rapidly supply chains can be disrupted. Even absent a kinetic threat, bottlenecks can emerge from bureaucratic friction, incompatible rail systems, commercial delays, and cyber vulnerabilities. In LSCO, the complexity of multinational sustainment exceeds what the Army can generate organically.

To close this gap, we must train to contract effectively, integrate with allied logistics networks, and overcome the legal and procedural hurdles that delay delivery. Our logistics enterprise must be interoperable, forward leaning, and resilient, built to operate under duress, not just in peacetime conditions.

Contracting and ACSAs as Combat Multipliers

Contracting is not a contingency tool. It is a combat multiplier. Prearranged contracts for fuel distribution, inland haul, security, and maintenance represent the connective tissue between strategy and execution. Contracting officers (KOs) must be embedded in operational planning from the outset, ideally at the mission analysis phase, to ensure that their market knowledge, legal expertise, and vendor insight shape courses of action and mitigate sustainment risk.

In tandem, ACSAs offer a framework for sharing resources, capabilities, and logistics services across coalition partners without the need for lengthy contracting processes. These agreements are especially critical in early-entry or austere environments where speed and interoperability are paramount. From

tables and chairs to mobile command platforms, ACSAs have served as a practical and diplomatic mechanism to bridge sustainment gaps, showcasing how pre-coordinated logistics agreements can generate operational flexibility and cost efficiency during multinational exercises and real-world operations.

A case in point is Cobra Gold 2025, where contracting and ACSAs jointly enabled the sustainment backbone of the exercise. Contracting facilitated essential life support, such as power generation, water supply, shelter, and sanitation, while ACSAs provided access to allied capabilities that would have otherwise required

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shipment from the U.S., including tactical equipment, power converters, and translator support. The synergy between U.S. contracts and ACSA-enabled host-nation support streamlined operations and reduced logistical strain, proving essential to enabling rapid, coalition-based maneuver in Thailand's complex operating environment.

Transporting sustainment supplies the continental U.S. (CONUS) to Indo-Pacific forward locations imposes significant costs on the joint force. Strategic lift, whether by sea or air, consumes time, fuel, personnel, and opportunity, and is also vulnerable to disruption or delay. In contrast, leveraging regional contracting and ACSAs offers a far more economical and operationally flexible alternative. Procuring material, services, and equipment in-theater through vetted vendors or partner militaries reduces transportation costs, lead times, and administrative complexity. During Cobra Gold 25, using local vendors and ACSAs eliminated the need to ship bulk construction and life support supplies from CONUS, resulting in significant savings of money and critical movement assets for higher priority cargo. These cost-saving measures enable the force to reallocate resources toward lethality and readiness while enhancing theater responsiveness.

Joint and Multinational Integration

Sustainment success in LSCO begins during the earliest stages of exercise and operational planning. Incorporating KOs, contracting officer representatives, and ACSA managers during the initial planning conference and initial site survey phases is essential to building realistic, cost-effective logistics plans. Early collaboration enables planners to identify sourcing options, compare in-theater procurement with CONUS-based shipment costs, and initiate long-lead contracting actions before the window of opportunity narrows. By bringing these stakeholders into the planning cycle from the beginning, units develop more agile and economical support concepts, reduce reliance on last-minute contracting, and mitigate risks associated with shipping delays or infrastructure shortfalls.

During exercises like Cobra Gold 2025, this proactive integration has allowed planners to leverage regional vendors, access host-nation support through ACSAs, and avoid unnecessary expenditures associated with overseas bulk shipments. The result is a leaner, faster, and more interoperable sustainment posture that maximizes combat readiness and fiscal responsibility.

Multinational sustainment interoperability must be treated as a mission-essential task, not a supporting activity. Exercises must not only validate maneuver concepts but also confirm our ability to deliver contracted and ACSA-supported sustainment across jurisdictions, currencies, and regulatory systems. In the Indo-Pacific, where distance, diversity, and diplomatic nuance create immense complexity, coalition sustainment capabilities must be as decisive and integrated as any fires capability.

Combat readiness begins long before deployment. It begins with the contracts, agreements, and infrastructure that set the theater. Building sustainment depth requires investing in allied infrastructure, developing regional vendor networks, leveraging ACSAs, and embedding contracting into the joint fight. Recent examples, such as successful maintenance operations in Korea and coalition sustainment during Cobra Gold 25, demonstrate that these tools are not supplementary but are essential elements of expeditionary readiness.

As we shift focus toward competition and conflict in the Indo-Pacific, we must ensure that the foundation of our sustainment enterprise, ports, contractors, coalition networks, and ACSAs is ready to support the fight and win tonight.

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