

# Adapting Sustainment to Meet Geographical Challenges



■ *By Lt. Gen. Christopher O. Mohan*

In a February 2023 talk at the American Enterprise Institute on the Army's role in the Indo-Pacific region, Gen. Charles A. Flynn, commander of U.S. Army Pacific, described the Indo-Pacific as “not only an air and maritime theater, this is a joint theater ... [with] joint challenges and joint problems, and it requires joint

solutions,” and called the Army the “linchpin force” that enables and sustains our joint and allied partners.

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has provided several critical observations into modern warfare in a contested environment, chief among them is the importance of predictive logistics and precision sustainment on the battlefield. The effects we are observing on the battlefield today in Europe are helping to inform Army senior leader decisions as we modernize and prepare the future force for large-scale combat operations in a contested, multidomain environment. Nowhere is that preparation more important than in the Indo-Pacific, a theater with great economic and strategic importance.

As a region with extensive joint interior lines and complex geopolitical dynamics, the Indo-Pacific houses more than half of the world's population, seven of the

world's largest militaries, 65% of the world's oceans, and 25% of its land. This tyranny of distance presents significant logistics challenges for the sustainment enterprise, and we must think and act differently when preparing and setting the theater. We must stay ahead of the need.

We must start with training as we fight and ensuring sustainment objectives are incorporated into overall exercise objectives. Tough, realistic training at the Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center and through Operation Pathways builds critical readiness within the sustainment warfighting function and forges relationships and interoperability with the strategic land-power network. This is especially important when we talk about campaigning and preparing the theater in competition to better transition to conflict. Last year's Talisman Sabre 23 (TS23) demonstrated and rehearsed the Army's ability to get troops and

equipment to the fight rapidly and efficiently, from its installations to the tactical edge, in a realistic multinational training scenario.

Continuous transformation of sustainment capabilities includes seeing and sensing more, further and persistently. We evaluated and demonstrated these capabilities alongside joint and multinational partner decision-makers at the strategic and operational levels, not only at TS23 but also during Project Convergence Capstone 4. We did this by using various platforms, technologies, and data designed to move and resupply troops. This included testing the Army's watercraft. Our integration with Army Futures Command's Contested Logistics Cross-Functional Team aims to refine the watercraft strategy and give our service a mix of capabilities for next-generation sustainment systems.

While we can draw on valuable sustainment lessons and best practices from the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, we know sustainment in the Indo-Pacific requires constant practice, rehearsing, and deep coordination within the strategic land-power network. This includes positioning supplies, equipment, and munitions with redundancy near potential areas of operation, with a deepened emphasis on Army pre-positioned stocks (APS) and on using joint theater distribution centers. But the equipment is only as good as its upkeep. Effective execution of maintenance and repairs of equipment at APS sites, as well as

our expanded remote maintenance and fix-forward capabilities, ensure that systems are quickly returned to optimal conditions.

The Indo-Pacific region requires semi-independent maneuver elements with decentralized sustainment capabilities. While remote maintenance is not a new model, the use of an assortment of tactics during the fight to keep equipment operating where it is needed, rather than having to be shipped back to the depot and repaired, is one more solution to challenges we envision.

The sustainment enterprise continues transforming to deliver logistics at speed and scale in a contested environment while positioning equipment preemptively and adapting modernized capabilities to ensure readiness ahead of need. Land power provides positional advantage, and nowhere is this more important than in the Indo-Pacific. This is how we will remain the best trained, equipped, and sustained fighting force in the world.

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