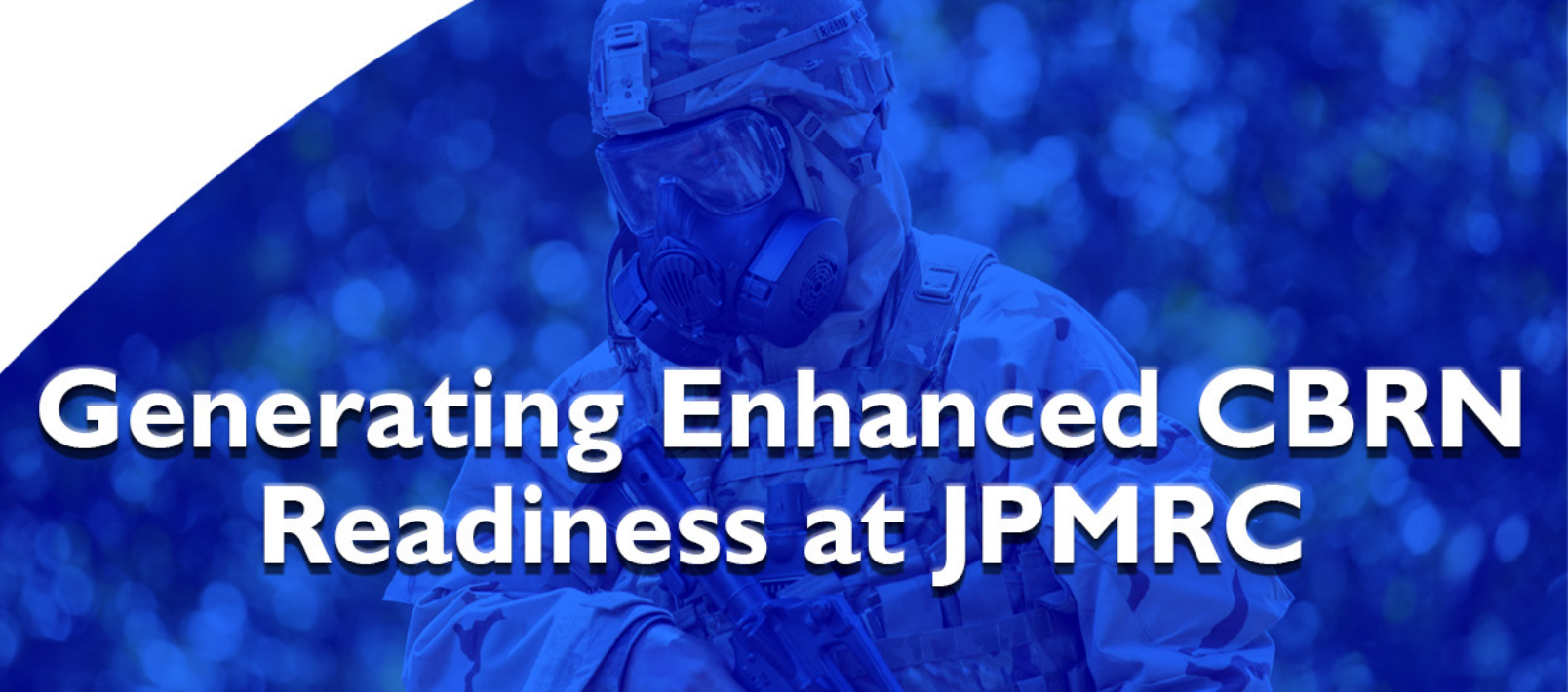

Generating Enhanced CBRN Readiness at JPMRC

By Captain Christopher C. Piasecki

In today's complex national security environment, the threat of near-peer adversaries possessing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) continues to increase. Future conflict in the Indo-Pacific theater will likely involve the use of chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) WMD.[1] However, while U.S. adversaries are substantially fortifying their WMD development and posture, U.S. Army readiness to conduct operations in a CBRN-contaminated environment has severely atrophied. At all echelons, the U.S. Army deficiency in CBRN-focused training has caused a deterioration of basic CBRN capabilities, proficiency, and readiness.[2] By remastering CBRN fundamentals, revitalizing CBRN equipment sets, and conducting training for large-scale combat operations (LSCO) in simulated CBRN environments, the U.S. Army of 2030 will be better prepared to fight and win the Nation's wars.

"By remastering CBRN fundamentals, revitalizing CBRN equipment sets, and conducting training for large-scale combat operations (LSCO) in simulated CBRN environments, the U.S. Army of 2030 will be better prepared to fight and win the Nation's wars."

The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) area of operations (AOR) is the world's largest and most consequential theater of operations, with pacing threats posed by the People's Republic of China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and Russia. These adversaries are well known to possess ever-growing arsenals of CBRN agents and WMD.[3] Under the steadfast leadership of General Charles A. Flynn, the U.S. Army Pacific (USARPAC) has dedicated significant effort and resources to the expansion and development of the Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center (JPMRC) as a top priority to retain combat power and generate readiness within the USINDOPACOM AOR. The JPMRC is the first Army regional combat training center (CTC) to be located within the Indo-Pacific theater of operations. It will play a significant role in preparing the Army of 2030 for LSCO in CBRN-contaminated environments.[4]

The JPMRC is an innovative CTC that allows the retention of trained forces in the Indo-Pacific theater so that they are continuously available to the combatant commander. The unique capabilities of the JPMRC allow for joint and combined partner operations to be executed with allies at locations throughout the USINDOPACOM AOR. The JPMRC conducts three training rotations each year—one in the Hawaiian Islands, one in Alaska, and one in an allied or partner nation. The diversity of locale and the resultant versatility provide incredible opportunities for U.S. military forces to train in the same physical environments in which they will be expected to fight. A complex doctrinal simulation provides the foundation for each exercise and allows for honest feedback, with virtual and constructive effects throughout the battlefield and across multiple echelons.

Since the height of the Cold War, the U.S. Army has dedicated the time and resources needed to adequately prepare ground forces for CBRN employment[5]—and the JPMRC is no exception. Another innovative capability fostered at JPMRC is the integration of enhanced CBRN training scenarios and rigorous assessments by CBRN subject matter experts that increase the value of training and evaluation at this newest Army CTC. By ensuring that CBRN threats and conditions are prevalent throughout the JPMRC training scenario, units will prioritize CBRN readiness at home station before assessments of CBRN readiness are conducted at the CTC.

Army force readiness is transient. Readiness naturally dissipates due to personnel turnover and the need to maintain institutional and organizational memory. Therefore, readiness

must be continuously generated through dynamic training. The best way to verify that Army units at the echelon are trained and ready to complete their distinct mission sets in a CBRN-contaminated environment is the employment of CBRN readiness.[6] Unfortunately, Army readiness for conducting LSCO in a CBRN-contaminated environment is nearly depleted. The execution of more dynamic and vigorous CBRN training and the employment of more agile combat employment in theater can improve the U.S. Army force posture against near-peer adversaries in the Indo-Pacific region. The term "applied readiness" can be used to describe this paradigm. CBRN training focused forward in the Indo-Pacific theater requires expeditionary advanced basing operations and facilitates the execution of maneuver operations in the environment. Forces that achieve recurrent forward presence in theater continuously generate and renew applied readiness, which is easily demonstrated and assessed by the combatant commander.

The mechanism for generating applied readiness in the USINDOPACOM AOR is the Operation Pathways series of exercises. Operation Pathways provides the U.S. Army Pacific with multinational and joint training opportunities. It generates readiness, develops interoperability with allies and partners, and contributes to integrated deterrence of regional adversaries. By incorporating enhanced CBRN training into the follow-on rotation of units through Operation Pathways, the USARPAC commander successfully generates and employs applied readiness throughout the theater. This, in turn, leads to enhanced integrated deterrence, which is the culmination of forward positioning and the forward presence of military units in-theater.[7] Maintaining and exercising ground forces in-theater signals to U.S. adversaries in the region that the United States is dedicated to maintaining more persistent capabilities than can be provided by the potentially transient presence of air and naval forces in the region.

The Army of 2030 will be better trained and equipped to conduct LSCO in a CBRN-contaminated environment due to the innovative and enhanced CBRN training available at CTCs like JPMRC. However, enhanced CBRN training may be a misnomer. Much of this training involves remastering the fundamentals of CBRN detection, decontamination, and avoidance.[8, 9, 10] This is the same training that U.S. Army units tend to dismiss or deprioritize due to competing and ever-changing requirements. Enhanced CBRN training is, at its core, the reprioritization of CBRN fundamentals so that they are at the forefront of all training exercises and events. By including CBRN-related training events and challenges for commanders at all echelons, the U.S. Army can better train and prepare for real-world WMD contingencies.

The reprioritization of CBRN training and evaluation at CTCs like JPMRC is a much-needed course correction for the Army. However, much more must be done to ensure that our forces can fight and win during LSCO in CBRN-contaminated environments.[11] As the current situation in Ukraine has demonstrated, the threat of CBRN WMD posed by our adversaries is persistent.[12] U.S. Army CBRN Soldiers must be trained, equipped, and recognized for the unique challenges inherently posed by their military occupational specialty (MOS). Commanders at all echelons regularly fail by assigning these specialty Soldiers additional duties and borrowing them for military manpower taskings, such as gate guard duty or headcount duty at the dining facility, rather than utilizing them to train their formations in the complex science of CBRN warfare.[13] The success of the Army of 2030 will depend on the ability of commanders to understand and appreciate the importance of operating within a CBRN environment to generate applied readiness for combatant commanders.[14] The enhanced CBRN training at JPMRC and other Army CTCs is the first step on a much longer journey toward U.S. Army proficiency with LSCO in CBRN-contaminated environments.

Endnotes:

[1]Richard A. Bitzinger, "The Security Environment in the Asia-Pacific: The Context for Arming," *Defense & Security Analysis*, 2022, pp. 247–257, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2022.2084816>, accessed on 9 February 2023.

[2]Andrew A. Kick et al., "Army Officer Corps Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Foundation Gaps Place Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction (CWMD) Operations at Risk—Part 2," *Countering WMD Journal*, June 2022, <https://digitalcommons.usmalibrary.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1786&context=usma_research_papers>, accessed on 10 February 2023.

[3]Bitzinger.

[4]*Army of 2030*, U.S. Army, 5 October 2022, <https://www.army.mil/article/260799/army_of_2030>, accessed on 10 February 2023.

[5]Bitzinger.

[6]Joint Publication (JP) 3-40, *Joint Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction*, 27 November 2019.

[7]Bitzinger.

[8]JP 3-40.

[9]JP 3-11, *Operations in Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Environments*, 29 October 2018.

[10]JP 3-41, *Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Response*, 9 September 2016.

[11]Kick et al.

[12]Manprett Sethi, "Nuclear Overtones in the Russia-Ukraine War," *Arms Control Today*, June 2022, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2022-06/features/nuclear-overtones-russia-ukraine-war>, accessed on 6 February 2023.

[13]Kick et al.

[14]*Army of 2030*.

Captain Piasecki is a CBRN officer and the chief of the Maneuver Support Observer Coach/Trainer Team at JPMRC. He holds bachelor's degrees in physiology and psychology from Michigan State University, East Lansing, and is pursuing a master's degree in emergency disaster management from the American Public Military University System.