
International Exercises Highlight Division's Unique Capabilities

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Although 11th Airborne Division Soldiers and Paratroopers proudly wear the Arctic Tab, they remain ready to operate in any environment. The division both demonstrates and builds this readiness by participating in a wide range of international exercises across the globe. Some exercises, such as Arctic Shock, hone the Arctic Angels' expertise in frigid, high-latitude environments. Arctic Shock is a U.S.-Norwegian exercise where 11th Airborne Paratroopers executed an over-the-pole strategic airborne insertion to Europe's High North. Most exercises, however, force the division out of its cold-weather comfort zone to locales such as Chile's Atacama Desert — the world's driest desert — or the humid jungles of the Indo-Pacific. By training worldwide alongside joint, allied, and partner forces, the 11th Airborne Division promotes regional stability by demonstrating to friend and foe alike its ability to fight and win on any battlefield.



Pacific annually, Operation Pathways strengthens U.S. lines of communication and multinational relationships as well as ensures U.S. forces maintain a persistent presence forward in theater. The tactical training objectives of each exercise — ranging from executing joint forcible entry (JFE) via airborne insertion to establishing tactical communications with allies — thus produce the strategic result of regional stability through assurance and deterrence.

Operation Pathways consists of more than 40 joint and multinational exercises, and the Spartan Brigade participates in over a dozen of these exercises annually. During the summer of 2025, one infantry battalion in 2/11, the 3rd Battalion, 509th Infantry Battalion (Airborne) will participate in three Operation Pathways exercises: Talisman Sabre, Super Garuda Shield, and Ksatria Warrior. Talisman Sabre is a multilateral combined joint exercise located in Australia that incorporates more than 19 partner nations. This year's exercise promises to be the largest ever, involving more than 35,000 military personnel with forces conducting airborne, amphibious, ground, air, and maritime operations. Similarly, Super Garuda Shield is expanding, growing from a bilateral U.S.-Indonesian exercise a few years ago into this summer's iteration which will include 11 nations conducting operations across the archipelago nation. During both Talisman Sabre and Super Garuda Shield, 3-509 IN (ABN) will conduct battalion-level airborne operations and integrate allied and partner forces into the battalion. Ksatria Warrior, a smaller bilateral exercise between the U.S. and Indonesia, will include one rifle company, Baker Company, 3-509 IN (ABN), and focus on tactical skills exchanges and offensive operations.

Nowhere is promoting stability more critical than the Indo-Pacific. The 2022 National Defense Strategy explicitly identifies the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the U.S.'s primary geopolitical competitor and military pacing challenge. By expanding its military influence, undermining freedom of navigation, and employing economic coercion, the PRC is actively working to undermine stability in the Indo-Pacific area of responsibility (AOR). In response, the U.S. places the highest priority on security and deterrence operations in the theater. The U.S. strategy for the Indo-Pacific emphasizes strengthening regional alliances and partnerships and posturing combat-credible forces forward in theater. As the only airborne brigade in the Indo-Pacific, the 11th's 2nd Brigade Combat Team brings a unique capability to project power into the region, deterring the PRC and assuring U.S. partners by consistently demonstrating its singular ability to rapidly respond across the AOR.

Pathways planning is a yearlong endeavor. Talisman Sabre 2025's Initial Planning Conference occurred in August 2024 for a July 2025 execution. Throughout the year, division, brigade, and battalion planners attended three weeklong planning conferences across eastern Australia (initial, mid, and final) as well as each conference's corresponding site survey to assess various training areas, logistical nodes, and infrastructure for the exercise. Additionally, planners attended multiple joint air planning conferences to coordinate multiple battalion-echelon airborne JFE operations with the U.S. and partner air forces. With a total of eight conferences or site surveys throughout the year, it is common for an executing battalion to dedicate at least one planner for a week each month to intensive exercise preparation.

Because power projection from Alaska provides an alternative strategic avenue of approach into the nation's priority theater, the bulk of the Spartan Brigade's international efforts support the U.S. Army Pacific Command's (USARPAC's) Operation Pathways. Designed to enhance operational readiness and demonstrate U.S. military capability and commitment to the region, Operation Pathways is a key strategic initiative that positions combat-credible forces forward in theater to fully integrate with allies and partners, enhancing and demonstrating U.S. rapid response abilities. By rotating tens of thousands of service members through the Indo-

Building relationships across the joint and combined force,



Arctic Angels conduct operations with Indian Army soldiers during Operations Pathways on 4 April 2025. (Photo courtesy of the Indian Army)

coupled with creating continuity and shared understanding between planning events, is fundamental to a successful operation. Planning events provide fantastic opportunities for planners from across the joint force and world's militaries to work closely together to solve problems and achieve shared training objectives. During Talisman Sabre's final planning conference in April, for example, members of the 11th Airborne Division; German, French and Australian armies; and U.S., Canadian, Australian, and Norwegian air forces arranged an impromptu breakout group to create and coordinate key exercise events. These planners will then continue to communicate weekly until many of them meet up face-to-face again on the drop zones or airfields of Australia.

Talisman Sabre 2025 promises to be an extraordinary training opportunity for 3-509 IN (ABN). The battalion will build readiness through multiple iterations of mission-essential task training in unfamiliar terrain and build partnerships with joint and international forces, all while accomplishing the strategic objectives of assurance and deterrence. Throughout the exercise, 3-509 IN (ABN) will be woven into the larger exercise design, sharing battlespace with joint and combined partners to provide inputs to facilitate higher echelon training objectives. First, the battalion will demonstrate the 11th Airborne Division's unique strategic infiltration capability when it conducts an airborne operation directly from Alaska.

The combined JFE operation (CJFEO) will also include a platoon of French paratroopers. The 3-509 IN (ABN) will then maneuver its organic companies, a German company, and the French platoon against an Australian armored opposing force to seize an airfield to enable further assets to arrive in theater. The battalion will then "island hop" via a second airborne CJFEO, this time alongside both German and French paratroopers several hundred miles south to seize another airfield and airland its organic equipment. After approximately two weeks of training, 3-509 IN (ABN) will return to Alaska a more capable fighting force and joint, multinational partner.

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U.S. and Indian Army Soldiers conduct mortar training during Exercise Yudh Abhyas 2024 on 19 September 2024. (Photo by 1LT Byron Nesbitt)



An 11th Airborne Division Soldier provides security during a reconnaissance mission as part of Orient Shield at Aibano Training Area, Japan, on 21 July 2024. (Photo by SPC Nicholas Bushey)



Paratroopers from 1st Battalion, 40th Cavalry Regiment conduct weapon retention drills with members of the Indian Army's 9th Assam Regiment during Yudh Abhyas 22. (Photo by Benjamin Wilson)