

# Fortifying Operational Readiness in the Pacific

## A Strategic Blueprint

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The Battle for Manila in February and March 1945 was one of the most harrowing and significant conflicts of World War II, marking a pivotal moment in the Pacific theater. Following the liberation of the Philippines from Japanese occupation, American forces, alongside Filipino guerrillas, faced fierce resistance as they fought to recapture Manila. The monthlong battle devolved into intense street-to-street fighting characterized by widespread destruction and civilian casualties. Using similar guerrilla tactics employed by Hamas against the Israel Defense Forces in Gaza today, the Japanese defenders, entrenched in fortified buildings linked by tunnels, were fighting amongst the local population and inflicted heavy losses on the advancing Allied forces.<sup>1</sup> Despite the challenges, American troops eventually prevailed but at a staggering cost of both military and civilian lives. The Battle for Manila highlighted the complexities of operations in the Indo-Pacific and the challenges of readiness for operations.

The U.S. Army gleaned crucial lessons on operational readiness from the Battle for Manila. The need for meticulous planning and coordination became paramount, as the chaotic nature of urban environments demanded precise intelligence, communication, and maneuverability. It underscored the

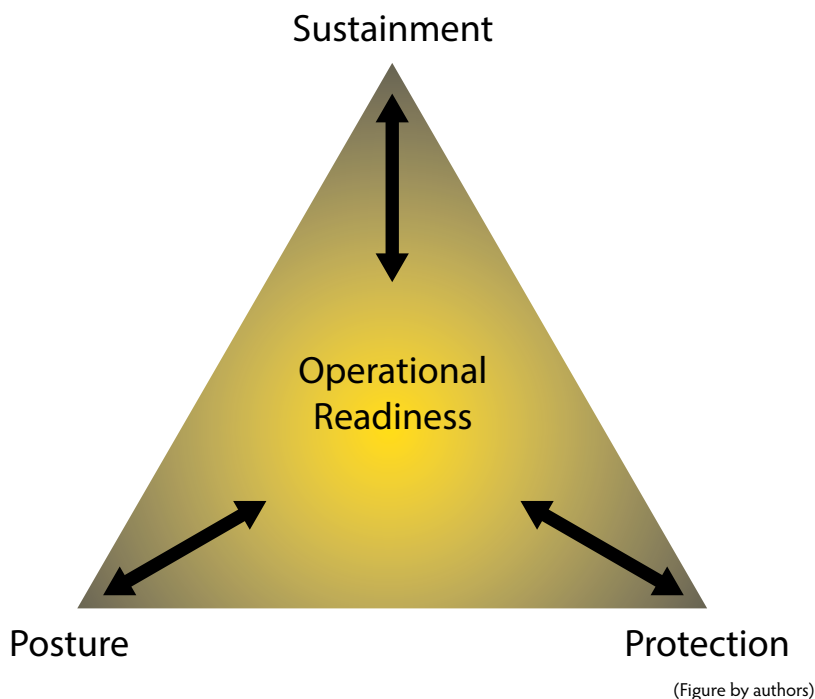
importance of integrating infantry with armor and artillery support, as well as utilizing air and naval assets effectively to neutralize fortified positions and minimize collateral damage. The experience also emphasized the necessity of capturing key political and critical infrastructure locations that were essential for the population to survive.<sup>2</sup> The battle highlighted the imperative of humanitarian considerations in military operations, creating an impetus for strategies that prioritize civilian safety and minimize the impact of conflict on noncombatants. These lessons ultimately contributed to three key considerations when planning the liberation of Manila: protecting friendly troops and civilians, posturing thirty-five thousand army troops to land and fight, and sustaining operations.<sup>3</sup> Protecting friendly forces and civilians required limiting heavy bombing, employing newly developed aerial delivery, and improving artillery and infantry coordination. Posturing a large quantity of ground troops required prioritizing the capture of seaports, and sustaining operations for long periods required creative employment of newly developed vehicle platforms. Ultimately, the Battle for Manila became a pivotal case study for future military planning, shaping doctrines and practices that continue to influence warfare strategies to this day.



Medics assigned to the 37th Infantry Division give plasma to a soldier wounded during a battle inside the walled city of Intramuros, a sixteenth-century Spanish fort, on 25 February 1945 in Manila, Philippines. (Photo courtesy of the Ohio Army National Guard Historical Collections)

The Indo-Pacific region, America's First Corps' main operations area, has long been a focal point for global geopolitics, presenting both opportunities and challenges for the U.S. Army.<sup>4</sup> Drawing on historical lessons, contemporary strategies, and future outlooks, fortifying operational readiness in the Pacific necessitates a comprehensive approach. "Winning the First fight is critical."<sup>5</sup> As U.S. Army Gen. Andrew Poppas stated, "This comes down to foundational readiness."<sup>6</sup> Tactical readiness is routinely built both within the United States and through Pathways operations; however, qualifying and quantifying operational readiness is more complex.<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of this article, operational readiness is defined as the ability of Army forces to efficiently execute operations and conduct campaigns in collaboration with combined joint forces.<sup>8</sup>

The challenge of achieving operational readiness in the Indo-Pacific can be managed through the framework defined in Gen. Xavier Brunson's "Three Kings of the Pacific": protection, posture, and sustainment.<sup>9</sup> Each of these pillars makes an important contribution to any military's operational readiness. Each of them is closely nested in U.S. Army doctrine, and each of them face unique challenges in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, establishing the right balance among these three pillars is at the heart of the problem—noting that the "right balance" may indeed be a deliberate imbalance in one or more pillars. Moreover, given the noncontiguous archipelagic operational environment, each pillar can often be in competition for resources and prioritization. This tension is the challenge of operational readiness, one that requires consistent



**Figure. The Operational Readiness Triad**

assessment and management and is the heart of managing I Corps' operations.

## The Tension of Operational Readiness

The three pillars both contribute to and detract from operational readiness. The amount to which they do so is always changing based on the environment—a large portion of which remains outside of the U.S. Army's control but within its ability to influence. Importantly, the three pillars are often in competition with one another as improving one can often degrade another. For example, an aggressive posture for command and control in the First Island Chain, protected across all domains from adversaries, could extend the lines of communication and create a sustainment vulnerability in a contested logistics environment.<sup>11</sup> Conversely, addressing this challenge by focusing on protecting the lines of communication that sustainment is reliant upon could weaken the protection of forward nodes because it dilutes the efforts of the joint force's finite protection resources.<sup>12</sup> Lastly, prioritizing protection and sustainment by staying in the third island chain (Hawaii and Alaska) or at the home station operations center could seriously alter I Corps' contribution to deterrence.

Each of these options may be suitable, dependent on the operational environment (OE).

To truly understand I Corps' operational readiness requires a constant assessment of where I Corps sits within what the authors define as the operational readiness triad (see the figure). Taken a step further, such an assessment must be compared to a broader I Corps' OE assessment to enable effective adaptation and decision-making. Yet this cannot be achieved without first appreciating the pillars of operational readiness in both isolation and as they relate to one another, and the means to measure them.

## Protection

Protection is the “related tasks and systems that preserve the force so the commander can apply maximum combat power to accomplish the mission.”<sup>13</sup> Protection is achieved through technology as well as the employment of forces, which makes it a multidomain (and even multiagency) problem. Therefore, while only part of the equation, investment in modernization and innovative technologies is paramount for protection. Prioritizing the development and deployment of advanced systems such as long-range precision fires, next-generation combat vehicles, and resilient communication networks fortifies the Army's ability to deter aggression and defend against evolving threats. Beyond investing in and developing antiaccess/area denial capabilities and advanced missile defense systems, and given the significance of cyber threats, enhancing cyber capabilities and information security measures is crucial. The U.S. Army must continuously fortify its cyber defenses, conduct regular assessments, and invest in training to counter cyberattacks that could compromise operational readiness and information integrity. Cyber defense measures must be bolstered to safeguard critical infrastructure and networks from sophisticated threats. Developing such multidomain protection capabilities not only improves the obvious protection of the U.S. force but also the interests of critical partners and allies across the OE.





The distributed nature of the fight in the Indo-Pacific region significantly influences protection strategies through several key aspects and demands innovative approaches to protection that leverage geography, advanced technology, and tactical deception. Military assets are spread across multiple islands and maritime zones, reducing vulnerability to concentrated strikes. This dispersion complicates an adversary's targeting efforts and increases the survivability of forces by enhancing the ability to evade detection and engage from unexpected positions. The region's varied geography, ranging from dense jungles to remote islands, offers natural concealment that makes it harder for adversaries to locate and target these assets.

To minimize detection, U.S. Army forces must utilize low-visibility communication methods and minimize emissions from radar and electronic systems to avoid electronic warfare tactics employed by adversaries. This should be reinforced by emitting false signals or deploying decoys to mislead enemy sensors, making it challenging to distinguish between real and fake targets. Since it is increasingly used for reconnaissance, protecting against space-based observation is also critical. This includes employing tactics to obscure

Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) member Lt. Col. Koishi Hiroshi (center) briefs U.S. Army soldiers and JGSDF members about supply routes and resources during a bilateral sustainment brief on 10 December 2023 during Yama Sakura at Camp Sendai, Japan. As a part of U.S. Army Pacific's Operation Pathways, the Yama Sakura exercise is the first U.S. Army, JGSDF, and Australian army command-post exercise based in Japan. For over forty years, this exercise has demonstrated a continued commitment by both the United States and Japan to work together as dedicated allies in support of the U.S.-Japan security treaty and for continued peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. (Photo by Spc. Nolan Brewer, U.S. Army)

thermal and radar signatures. Developing capabilities to counteract or degrade adversarial satellite surveillance (e.g., antisatellite weapons, electronic warfare) is essential to maintaining operational security and ensuring the effectiveness of dispersed forces.

In the Indo-Pacific region, I Corps is likely to operate over numerous islands separated by hundreds of kilometers that may be sovereign territory to one or more other nations. This renders the protection of I Corps and the management of rear areas a complex endeavor that requires deliberate integration into operational planning and the employment of forces. While I Corps is expected to receive additional

enabling units such as maneuver enhancement brigades under direct command, it must also leverage the theater-level capabilities provided by flanking formations in the joint operational area. Further, multinational cooperation in such an environment is near essential for protection, which poses possibly both the biggest challenge and benefit for I Corps.

As briefly described, technology and force employment have key roles to play in protection and operational readiness. Both occur over a relatively long term, compared to how swiftly changes in the OE can occur, and their effects can be somewhat intangible. As such, measuring their impacts is often a complex endeavor, and the impacts of changes are never certain. Despite this constraint, the following areas are a valuable means to build and assess I Corps' protection as it relates to operational readiness.

To overcome the absence of a NATO-like alliance in the region, I Corps must develop and expand the network of allies and partners created at the strategic level. Participation in multinational forums and conferences such as the Land Forces Pacific and the Indo-Pacific Armies Chiefs Conference enhances operational readiness in the Indo-Pacific region by promoting information sharing, standardization of practices, joint training exercises, and strategic partnerships. These engagements contribute to a more cohesive and capable multinational force prepared to address diverse security challenges across the vast expanse of the Indo-Pacific region. These forums facilitate extensive information sharing among participating nations where insights on regional security challenges, emerging threats, and best practices in defense strategies are shared. This collective knowledge helps nations in the Indo-Pacific region to better understand each other's capabilities and intentions, fostering trust and collaboration.

Another way to indicate progress for better regional protection is the identification of capability gaps that exist in partner nations. Discrepancies or deficiencies in capabilities can be identified early on, enabling collaborative efforts to address these gaps through training programs, equipment upgrades, or shared resources. Military planners can better coordinate joint operations by allocating responsibilities based on capabilities, conducting joint exercises that target specific training objectives, and refining operational procedures to optimize combined efforts. For this reason, I Corps keeps

an extensive record of its partners' training objectives during Operation Pathways exercises.

Lastly, and linked to the identified capability gaps, is the development and deployment of advanced technologies, including satellite communication systems, unmanned aerial vehicles, and cyber defense capabilities contributing to a safer region. By integrating these technologies into exercises, forces can test and refine the employment of innovative equipment and systems, ensuring they are prepared to leverage technological advantages in operational scenarios. Further, the lessons learned from multinational exercises go on to inform future training priorities and operational concepts, thereby creating a positive cycle of improvement. This iterative process enables military forces to remain agile and responsive; as well as capable of adjusting tactics, techniques, and procedures based on real-world experiences and feedback from partner nations. As shall be seen, such multinational cooperation in the pursuit of protection also positively contributes to force posture.

## Posture

Establishing an effective posture in the Indo-Pacific begins with strategic alignment. Nations in the region need to define clear objectives and priorities that are considered within the OE, particularly against emerging and evolving threats, regional dynamics, and geopolitical complexities. A strong posture involves proactively approaching regional actors by acknowledging the diverse nature of challenges, from territorial disputes to emerging technologies, within the Indo-Pacific. It also involves maintaining a visible and persistent presence. Rotational deployments of troops to key locations in the region such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, and Guam reinforce deterrence and readiness. This presence not only demonstrates dedication but also facilitates a prompt reaction to emerging threats and fosters operational preparedness in advance, all the while establishing and fortifying strategic footholds and promoting compatibility with regional partners. Strengthening expeditionary capabilities enables rapid response and agility to address emerging threats. According to Adm. Samuel Paparo, commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, the forward bases and rotational joint force provide persistent, combat-credible presence throughout the western

Pacific. “This is the most effective way the military can demonstrate our commitment and resolve to competitors, deter aggression, and assure allies and partners.”<sup>14</sup>

Developed by U.S. Army Pacific, Operation Pathways stitches together a series of over forty army-to-army joint exercises into what is described by retired Gen. Charles Flynn as a campaign for good.<sup>15</sup> I Corps participates in most of these exercises, which have evolved from bilateral to multilateral and have grown in scope, scale, and realism, enhancing technical, procedural, and human interoperability.<sup>16</sup> These events are significantly increasing concepts of credible deterrence based on a highly trained, properly equipped, quick-response force.

Organizing a tailored force structure is crucial. It involves deploying assets strategically to address specific threats and maintain a credible deterrence. The creation of the Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center allows the brigades of I Corps to generate tactical readiness while training with allies and partners in the environment that also enhances operational readiness. These forces can then be projected on various Pathways exercises where the readiness generated can be applied. This contributes to deterring adversaries through threat-driven cooperation using a mix of air, naval, and ground capabilities augmented by cyber and space forces, which are orchestrated to respond swiftly and effectively. The exportable nature of the Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center enables allies and partners to benefit from world-class technical and tactical expertise during specific exercises

designed to meet their needs and conducted in their home countries.

Deterrence, through the activities highlighted above, also contributes to protection. However, the significant number of exercises within Operation Pathways also strains the testing and deployment of protection technologies given such technology’s finite nature. Further, deploying and testing protection technologies with partners and allies through Operation Pathways can be a difficult sustainment task due to the near constant movement of personnel and equipment across the Indo-Pacific to support the training objectives. Additionally, while widespread deployment of personnel enhances posture, it is difficult to achieve task-organized protection for multiple task forces that are tailored to the specific nature of a multinational exercise and not necessarily the current OE. These simple examples serve to highlight the importance of building and assessing posture both of itself, but also how it relates to protection and sustainment. Therefore, senior leaders need a thoughtful approach to building metrics to gauge the U.S. Army’s posture in the region.

The international exercises comprised in Operation Pathways build operational readiness by applying tactical readiness generated in the continental United States. They provide opportunities for diverse participation in realistic training scenarios. These exercises incentivize military forces to be well-prepared, adaptable, and interoperable, ready to respond effectively to the

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complex security challenges of the region and beyond. Therefore, increased desire for international participation in Operation Pathways exercises is a sign of success. Diverse participation allows for interoperability testing and fosters relationships between allied and partner nations. As more countries join these exercises, the opportunity for joint operations and collective defense strategies grows, improving operational readiness.

Any enhancement in the complexity and the realism of these exercises is a measure of progress. By incorporating scenarios that mirror operational environments and threats, military units can practice decision-making under pressure, coordination with allies, and adaptability to evolving situations. This realism incentivizes forces to better prepare themselves to handle complex and dynamic scenarios in real-world situations. While the clear demonstration of operational results remains difficult, the aggregation of multiple tactical successes can be a good indicator of improvement in the OE.

While it is cheaper, simpler, and less resource intensive to train in the continental United States, the Indo-Pacific region offers diverse geographic and environmental conditions ranging from tropical islands to open ocean expanses. International exercises in

Army mariners discharge vehicles on the beach via the causeway ferry as part of a joint logistics over the shore (JLOTS) operation during Talisman Sabre 2023 in Bowen, Australia, 31 July 2023. JLOTS demonstrates the critical capability of bringing vehicles and equipment to the shore in austere environments or when port facilities are unavailable. Talisman Sabre is hosted by Australia and the United States with multinational participation, advancing a free and open Indo-Pacific by strengthening relationships and interoperability among key allies and enhancing their collective capabilities to respond to a wide array of potential security concerns. (Photo by Maj. Jonathon Daniell, 8th Theater Sustainment Command)

this region allow forces to train in varied conditions including littoral environments, coastal waters, and deep-sea operations. This diversity prepares military units to operate effectively in different climates and terrains, enhancing readiness for a wide range of potential mission scenarios. Since I Corps typically deploys forces west of the International Date Line nine months of every year, troops are likely to be well postured when the security situation deteriorates from competition to conflict. However, such posture—and protection—places a burden on sustainment, something particularly acute for the Indo-Pacific given the vast geographic region and maritime zone it encompasses.

## Sustainment

Sustainment is “the related tasks and systems that provide support and services to ensure freedom of action, extended operational reach, and prolonged endurance,” and it forms the backbone of operational readiness.<sup>17</sup> Investment in resilient infrastructure and logistics is paramount. Robust bases, ports, airfields, and supply chains, which enable rapid response and sustained operations, are lacking in many countries of the region, further hindering self-sustainment and our ability to self-deploy inside the theater of operations. Emphasis on modernizing and expanding these facilities promotes the mobility and resilience of forces, enabling seamless coordination and support during operations. Coordinating reception, staging, onward movement, and integration for large formations requires sophisticated logistics management, and the need to integrate forces from different branches and allied nations adds layers of complexity. Differences in protocols, equipment, and command structures can slow the process and create friction. For this reason, I Corps is exploring several options to posture expandable command-and-control nodes and logistical hubs to enable a timely and efficient response during crises. I Corps is also rehearsing drawing and employing the Army pre-positioned stocks to gain efficiencies and accelerate timelines. This approach will reduce reliance on vulnerable supply lines to enhance the Army’s ability to sustain operations for extended durations.

Moreover, the need for continual movement to avoid detection and to respond to evolving threats necessitates a high level of readiness and logistical support. This perpetual movement strains supply lines and requires flexible resupply operations. Maintaining supply lines across vast distances, especially in contested environments, is risky. Disruption to these lines can severely impact the sustainment of forces, making it crucial to establish redundant routes and methods. For example, infantry support vehicles must be able to navigate various terrains, from urban areas to rugged landscapes. However, many vehicles are optimized for specific environments, limiting their operational flexibility in diverse settings and the logistics of transporting and sustaining these vehicles can become cumbersome, particularly when rapid mobility is required.

Sustained readiness requires continuous technological advancements. Investment in research and

development for innovative technologies, such as AI, unmanned systems, and advanced cyber capabilities, is crucial. These innovations enhance operational effectiveness, providing a competitive edge in the dynamic Indo-Pacific theater. As stated by Lt. Gen. Jered Helwig, former commander 8th Theater Sustainment Command, the sustainment warfighting function has been positioned to rehearse those key theater opening capabilities that will be required in time of crisis.<sup>18</sup> The experiments carried out during Exercise Talisman Sabre 23 have revealed the considerable efficiency gains that can be achieved through the utilization of new capabilities like joint logistics over the shore and joint petroleum over the shore. These findings are not specific to the Indo-Pacific region since they have direct relevance to the ongoing mission in Gaza.<sup>19</sup>

Adequate resourcing and long-term planning are vital for sustainment. Consistent budget allocation, prioritizing future capabilities, and prudent resource management enable the Army to maintain its readiness posture while investing in future technologies and capabilities that align with evolving threats in the Pacific. Building resilience and adaptability within joint inter- or lines is essential. Flexibility in operational planning and readiness to swiftly adapt to evolving threats or unforeseen challenges is crucial in a contested logistics environment. Resilience is cultivated through diversification of supply chains, reducing dependencies, and developing redundancies to mitigate potential disruptions.

One of the best ways to assess how sustainment has evolved in the region is to notice the drastic changes to standardization and interoperability. As stated earlier, multinational forums promote discussions on standardization of procedures, equipment interoperability, and joint operational planning. By aligning standards and practices, participating nations can enhance their ability to conduct combined military operations effectively. This interoperability is crucial for responding swiftly and cohesively to regional crises or threats. Since the U.S. Army will never operate alone in the region, better interoperability is directly linked to sustainment. The ability to share parts, fuel, or ammunition creates unequivocal efficiencies. By monitoring and evaluating the performance of partner nations on sustainment operations, military commanders can assess the level of interoperability achieved. Therefore, the ability to



build strategic partnerships also has a great impact on sustainment. By fostering closer ties and mutual understanding, the foundation for deeper security cooperation, diplomatic engagements, and shared responsibilities in maintaining regional stability and security can be implanted. Through demonstrating transparency in tracking and sharing training accomplishments, nations foster a collaborative spirit and strengthen bilateral and multilateral relationships.

Interoperability can also be noticed through shared use of infrastructure. Breakthroughs are accomplished when national command posts move from separate locations to a common base, to a common building, to a common operations room and eventually become true multinational headquarters. Trust and confidence in each other's capabilities are crucial for effective coalition operations, crisis response, and shared security responsibilities in the region. Participating nations practice coordination and crisis response mechanisms through Pathways exercises. This includes communication protocols, joint planning processes, and mutual support arrangements during humanitarian assistance, disaster relief operations, or other crisis situations. By regularly exercising these aspects, countries can streamline their response capabilities and improve their ability to work together seamlessly in times of need.

## Way Forward

Making a deliberate choice about where I Corps balances its posture, protection, and sustainment against the environment is critical. The perfect solution is not achievable in the short term—if ever—and necessitates careful and ongoing assessment and management of operational risk through the perspectives of protection, posture, and sustainment. Doing so includes deliberate decisions on how and where to commit the finite resources the U.S. Army has to the Indo-Pacific theater to maintain operational readiness. I Corps' operational assessments process, which ultimately manages the corps' campaign plan, is the means to both deploy and manage resources and capability and critically seek to understand the operating environment. Building readiness necessitates multilateral collaboration.

To ensure its protection, I Corps continues to grapple with managing a noncontiguous rear area and continues to iterate solutions. The latest iteration

includes experimenting with the creation of a deputy commanding general for protection through its road to Warfighter Exercise 2025, a computer-based, force-on-force training exercise. The main role of this general officer was to synchronize and coordinate the rear area operations across all domains and demonstrate an example of how adaptable task organization is a way of overcoming the complexity of rear area management.

Strengthening alliances and partnerships among regional and global stakeholders fosters collective security. However, I Corps must make a deliberate effort to facilitate sharing the decision-grade information it produces. This is accomplished by stopping the overclassification of intelligence and improving access to our command-and-control systems. I Corps will continue to forge and fortify partnerships with regional allies and stakeholders to bolster collective security and interoperability. Regular joint exercises such as Talisman Saber, Yama Sakura, Salaknib, Cobra Gold, and Freedom Shield serve as vital mechanisms to improve coordination and readiness among our treaty allies. Conducting these joint exercises, sharing intelligence, and capacity-building initiatives as part of Operation Pathways enhances the ability to operate seamlessly in the region.

Other theater events, such as the Indo-Pacific Motorized Forum, one of I Corps' newer initiatives, also brings together partners and allies every year to share lessons learned and best practices in employing mechanized forces across the region. The first two iterations have been held at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, and I Corps held 2025's event in Thailand. Active participation in multilateral forums and bilateral dialogues enables the U.S. Army to uphold international norms, promote stability, and counter common threats and adversaries. Adequate resourcing and prudent budget allocation are imperative for sustained readiness. Long-term investment in defense capabilities, maintenance, and personnel training increases preparedness against evolving threats. Efficient resource management and procurement processes optimize spending while maintaining operational effectiveness. Unlike other indicators that are less tangible, the funds allocated from the Department of Defense toward our operational readiness in the region are easy to understand. But we must be mindful of the importance of evaluating outcomes



rather than solely focusing on inputs. Therefore, an exhaustive analysis of the indicators outlined above will provide the subjective metrics required to evaluate operational readiness.

Operational empathy for the U.S. Army in the Pacific refers to the approach to understanding and incorporating cultural awareness, social sensitivity, political insight, and humanitarian considerations. This concept recognizes the importance of empathy in building relationships, fostering trust, and achieving mission success in diverse and complex environments. Overall, operational empathy enhances the U.S. Army's effectiveness by fostering positive interactions with local populations, building partnerships, and promoting stability in the Pacific region. It goes beyond traditional military objectives to encompass broader goals of diplomacy, cooperation, and sustainable development. For example, when senior leaders of I Corps oversee multinational exercises, they need to spend more time developing relationships with upcoming senior leaders of partner nations than time observing company live-fire exercises. As a graduate

A Philippine Army Special Forces operator assigned to the 28th Infantry Battalion searches for opposing forces during a Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center-Exportable (JPMRC-X) exercise at Fort Magsaysay, Philippines, on 7 June 2024. This iteration of JPMRC-X marked its first deployment to the Philippines. JPMRC-X will enable and assist the Philippine Army and the Armed Forces of the Philippines in building combat training center locations within the Philippines. JPMRC-X is a Department of the Army initiative consisting of a deployable package of personnel and equipment designed to support training exercises across the Pacific. (Photo by Spc. Carleeann Smiddy, U.S. Army National Guard)

of the U.S. Army War College, Brig. Gen. Eric Landry has developed a wide network of international Fellows who have all been identified with high potential within their own militaries. He intends to use that network for his engagements across the Indo-Pacific region to build trust. I Corps could also augment the demand signal on the local country teams to build a clearer common operational picture. As the regimental sergeant major of the Regular Australian Army, Warrant Officer Kim Felmingham said, "In times of crisis, you can surge personnel, equipment and funds,

but you can't surge trust."<sup>20</sup> Therefore, leaders at all levels are responsible for applying operational empathy and building trust with allies and partners now to be ready when a crisis occurs.

## Conclusion

The U.S. Army's and America's First Corps' focus on building operational readiness in the Pacific demands a tailored strategy to address regional challenges and maintain a credible deterrence. As we celebrated the eightieth anniversary of D-Day this past year, the Army must dedicate the proper amount of training and resources toward the Pacific theater despite competing demands. The United States and its allies were surprised in the Pacific during World War II because the attention was on Europe. We cannot make that mistake again. Operational readiness in the Pacific mandates a forward-looking and

adaptive approach rooted in historical insights. By prioritizing protection, bolstering posture, and ensuring sustainment while cultivating partnerships and engaging strategically, the U.S. Army can effectively fortify its operational readiness in this pivotal theater. Adequately measuring our level of operational readiness will inform our actions. Adherence to these multifaceted strategies not only safeguards American interests but also contributes to regional stability, prosperity, and partnerships. The Pacific region is currently facing an unprecedented level of uncertainty and threat. We cannot afford to "waste" the current crisis and seize the opportunity to build on the current momentum to increase our operational readiness. Just as historical campaigns shaped the Pacific's significance, a proactive and resilient Army remains paramount in navigating contemporary challenges and future uncertainties in this crucial region. ■

## Notes

1. Peter R. Mansoor, "A Not-So-Distant Mirror: What the Battle of Manila During World War II Suggests About Urban Combat, War Crimes, and the Battle for Gaza," Hoover Institution, 21 December 2023, <https://www.hoover.org/research/not-so-distant-mirror-what-battle-manila-during-world-war-ii-suggests-about-urban-combat>.

2. Benjamin Phocas, "Fighting for the Pearl of the Orient: Lessons from the Battle of Manila," Modern War Institute, 1 August 2023, <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/fighting-for-the-pearl-of-the-orient-lessons-from-the-battle-of-manila/>.

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4. America's First Corps is the U.S. Army's operational headquarters for the Indo-Pacific. Based at Joint Base Lewis McChord, Washington, it is responsible for the employment of Army forces throughout the Indo-Pacific Region. Major subordinate commands include 7th Infantry Division in Washington, 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii, and 11th Airborne Division in Alaska.

5. Michelle Tan, "New Horizons: Forces Command Leader Readies for Today and Tomorrow," Association of the United States Army, 25 June 2024, <https://www.ausa.org/articles/new-horizons-forces-command-leader-readies-today-and-tomorrow>.

6. Ibid.

7. "Campaigning," U.S. Army Pacific, accessed 29 January 2025, <https://www.usarpac.army.mil/Our-Approach/Campaigning/>.

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Joint Publication 3-0, *Joint Campaigns and Operations* (U.S. Government Publishing Office [GPO], 18 June 2022 [CAC required]), I-11, [https://jdeis.js.mil/jdeis/new\\_pubs/jp3\\_0.pdf](https://jdeis.js.mil/jdeis/new_pubs/jp3_0.pdf).

9. Stephanie Crider, host, CLSC Dialogues, podcast, episode 1, "New Technologies and Emerging Trends in the Indo-Pacific," China Landpower Studies Center, 27 March 2024, <https://media.defense.gov/2024/Apr/09/2003434468/-1/-1/0/CLSC-1-BRUNSON-PODCAST-TRANSCRIPT.PDF>.

10. Field Manual 3-0, *Operations* (U.S. GPO, October 2022), 7-3–7-18, [https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR\\_pubs/DR\\_a/ARN36290-FM\\_3-0-000-WEB-2.pdf](https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN36290-FM_3-0-000-WEB-2.pdf).

11. The first island chain is defined as the terrain that "encloses the East Asian coastline. It arcs southward from the Japanese home islands through the Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, and the Philippine archipelago." James R. Holmes, "Defend the First Island Chain," *Proceedings* 140, no. 4 (April 2014), <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2014/april/defend-first-island-chain>.

12. "Nodes" refers to I Corps distributed command-and-control nodes concept. A node is a command post, purpose built for each mission, comprised of a crossfunctional team with representation from the appropriate warfighting function based on the node tasking/function statement

13. Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-0, *Operations* (U.S. GPO, July 2019), 5-6, [https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR\\_pubs/DR\\_a/ARN18010-ADP\\_3-0-000-WEB-2.pdf](https://armypubs.army.mil/epubs/DR_pubs/DR_a/ARN18010-ADP_3-0-000-WEB-2.pdf).

14. Samuel J. Paparo, "Advance Policy Questions for Admiral Samuel J. Paparo, USN, Nominee for Commander, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command" (U.S. Senate Committee on Armed Services, 1 February 2024), 5, [https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/paparo\\_apq\\_responses.pdf](https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/paparo_apq_responses.pdf).

15. Charles Flynn, quoted in Jennifer Hlad, "Sophisticated Army Training Goes Mobile to Knit a Farflung Pacific Coalition," Defense One, 10 June 2024, <https://www.defenseone.com/>



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16. Xavier Brunson, *Greater Than the Sum of Our Parts: Integration of All Domains for the Coalition and Joint Campaign* (Land Forces Conference of the Pacific, 14 May 2024), posted 25 May 2024 by USARPAC PAO, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qUDkEKGzxvg>.

17. ADP 3-0, *Operations*, 5-5.

18. Nathan Hoskins, "8th TSC Leaders on Campaigning, Sustaining, Protecting Joint Force in Indo-Pacific Theater," U.S. Army Pacific, 16 May 2024, <https://www.usarpac.army.mil/Our-Story/Our-News/Article-Display/Article/3777749/8th-tsc-leaders-on-campaigning-sustaining-protecting-joint-force-in-indo-pacific/>.

19. Ibid.

20. Kim Felmingham, *The Evolving Role of the NCO in the Landpower Domain in the Indo-Pacific Region* (Land Forces Conference of the Pacific, 14 May 2024), posted 15 May 2024 by USARPAC PAO, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eO9z3krqWEw>.

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