

# *International Stability Operations Association – White Paper*

## **The Indo-Pacific Logistics Gap**

June 7, 2023

The Indo-Pacific Area of Operations (AOR) is the largest, most complex, most dynamic theater of operations on the planet. Sixty percent of the Earth's population, an estimated 4.5 billion people, reside in the region. Five of the seven military treaties between the United States and our allies—Japan, Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, and Thailand—are within the Indo-Pacific. Four of the five stated 2023 *National Defense Strategy (NDS)* challenges are also tied to the Indo-Pacific: including Russia, China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and violent extremism.

The Indo-Pacific stretches from the coast of California to the western shore of India and from the Arctic to Antarctica. The AOR is roughly 52 percent of the Earth's surface, or 100 million square miles, and it is mostly water. For reference, the continental United States is slightly more than 3 million square miles, and Europe covers approximately 21 million square miles. The region also experiences some of the world's worst natural disasters. Typhoons, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, and earthquakes are commonplace. The ability to overcome the spatial challenges of the region and provide relief when and where it is needed whether it be a natural disaster, or another complex crisis is a singular capability of the United States of America. This capability is respected by all, challenged by none, and often critical to developing and sustaining alliances and partnerships across the region.

Given the vastness of the region, the significant logistical challenges are obvious. Depending on the mode of transportation, it can take painstaking hours to multiple weeks to reach disparate locations, making pre-positioning, requirement anticipation, communication, domain awareness, and importantly logistics capability and capacity critical to any civil or military operation.

At the recent ISOA Indo-Pacific Conference, held in Honolulu, Hawaii, from April 25 to 27, 2023, the issue of logistics capacity and capability was central and the most compelling theme. Panelists and speakers noted continuously that there are not enough contracts or contract vehicles to rapidly support the Combatant Command or Lead Federal Agency in time of crisis. More troubling, government speakers said that they are often "one deep" in the AOR and would be incapable of identifying and executing sufficient contracted support when crises do occur.

The solution is not insurmountable. In order to provide the United States and the Department of Defense with the contracted support necessary to support this national security priority, additional capacity and capability is required on both the government and commercial side. Planning, table-top exercises, and communication capabilities inclusive of our defense industrial base partners are needed to ensure that commercial support is sufficiently exercised to achieve mission and Theater contingency objectives.

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Recommendations to the U.S. government:

1. Increase the number of IDIQ contracting vehicles to allow multiple companies to engage on this contract. This provides the government flexibility and timely execution in administering many different task orders for future contingency requirements.
2. Increase government contracting officials to draft new contracts to support COCOM and Lead Federal Agency requirements. This is critical in this era of existing and evolving threats across the region.
3. Improve the communications systems between the government agencies, operational forces, and contractors. This point was raised repeatedly by senior attendees at the ISOA Indo-Pacific Conference.
4. Planning and table top exercises that include contractors is needed to ensure that the commercial element of the total force is sufficiently practiced and prepared to operationalize when required.