

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-126](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

In accordance with the shift in U.S. strategy and rebalance of military forces to the Asia-Pacific, USARPAC has turned its focus toward rebuilding its expeditionary readiness. To this end, USARPAC launched the Pacific Pathways initiative in 2014, in which it deploys a battalion-sized task force for approximately 90 days to conduct a series of exercises in the Asia-Pacific for the purpose of enhancing readiness and strengthening relationships with allies, among other things. As of September 2016, USARPAC had completed six Pathway operations.

House Report 114-102 accompanying a bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2016 included a provision for GAO to review the Pacific Pathways initiative. This report examines the extent to which the Army has (1) assessed the costs and benefits of Pacific Pathways; and (2) synchronized plans and incorporated training objectives of supporting units to maximize the training value for all participating Army forces. GAO reviewed documents and data and interviewed relevant officials involved in Pacific Pathways.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that USARPAC conduct a comprehensive analysis of Pathways' benefits in light of its costs, better synchronize planning, and integrate supporting units' training objectives. DOD partially concurred with the first recommendation and concurred with the other two. DOD said that USARPAC understands the strategic benefits and a comprehensive analysis is not needed. GAO believes that this recommendation is still valid, as discussed in this report.

View [GAO-17-126](#). For more information, contact Cary Russell at (202) 512- 5431 or russellc@gao.gov.

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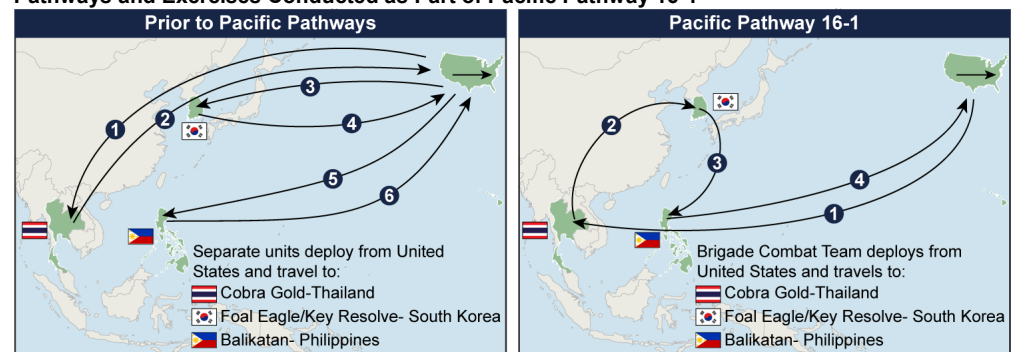
ARMY PACIFIC PATHWAYS

Comprehensive Assessment and Planning Needed to Capture Benefits Relative to Costs and Enhance Value for Participating Units

What GAO Found

U.S. Army Pacific (USARPAC), the Army's component command in the Asia-Pacific region, has identified Pacific Pathways costs and taken steps to assess some associated benefits, but it has not conducted an analysis that fully assesses the initiative's benefits relative to costs. Pacific Pathways is an initiative that combines three to four exercises with partner nations—exercises that were previously conducted as stand-alone events—into an integrated operation to strengthen relationships with allies and build readiness by rehearsing deployment tasks (see figure below). For fiscal year 2015, the three Pathway operations cost a total of \$34.5 million—about twice as much as the combined costs of those same named exercises prior to Pathways. However, the forces and equipment provided under Pathways were more than double in many categories. USARPAC officials stated that Pathways builds readiness at multiple command echelons; increases exercise complexity for partners, such as by providing more equipment to exercises; supports the rebalance of forces to the Pacific with a persistent forward presence; and allows the Army to experiment with capabilities. Units that have participated in Pacific Pathways have assessed some of these benefits, but USARPAC has not conducted a comprehensive analysis that demonstrates the initiative's value, which could better inform Department of Defense decision-makers as they consider budgetary trade-offs.

Comparison between the Concepts of Operation for Stand-Alone Exercises Prior to Pacific Pathways and Exercises Conducted as Part of Pacific Pathway 16-1



Source: GAO analysis of Army information. | GAO-17-126

The Army has taken steps to plan for Pacific Pathways as a cohesive operation, but challenges remain in synchronizing planning efforts and incorporating training objectives of supporting units, such as units that provide transportation support to the operations. USARPAC has developed some Pathways-specific planning guidance, among other things, but it continues to experience challenges in synchronizing planning across participating organizations and in ensuring that decisions made for individual exercises are aligned with the broader objectives of the Pathway operation. Also, USARPAC has not established an approach to seek out and integrate supporting units' training objectives in the design of Pacific Pathway operations. Without taking action on these issues, USARPAC may continue to experience challenges executing the Pathway operations as cohesive operations and could miss opportunities to enhance the value of Pacific Pathways as a venue for real-world training across the region.