



ESTABLISHING AN OPERATIONAL SUPPORT HUB IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION AS A STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL IMPERATIVE

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JCSP 50

Service Paper

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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE - COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES

JCSP 50 - PCEMI n° 50
2023 - 2024

Service Paper – Étude militaire

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AIM

1. Escalating great power competition, particularly regarding Taiwan necessitates addressing the glaring operational weaknesses present in the Canadian Armed Forces' (CAF) Strategic Lines of Communication (SLOC) within the Indo-Pacific (IP) region. This paper argues that to meet the evolving strategic challenges, the Canadian Joint Operations Command (CJOC) must act immediately in order to establish an Operational Support Hub (OSH) in the IP region to enhance operational capabilities, develop deeper strategic relations with host nation (HN), and establish Canada as a logistical and operational contributor among allies. The OSH will serve as the backbone to enable a more robust and effective regional conflict response.

INTRODUCTION

2. The rivalry between China and the US has increased rapidly in recent years with a potential for two countries escalate into a full-scale hostility is probably at its highest level since the end of the Cold War. The clash between the US and China has scholars to predict that a full conflict with China, will likely occur in the maritime and air domains.¹ In supporting the US, it is expected that Canada will play significant role in supporting the US in this endeavor.²

3. Despite the threat, the CAF has yet to undertake any preparation for a potential conflict in the region. A conflict of this scale will surely lead to a competition for resources even among allies and partners. It is likely that berthing, airfield, and warehousing capacity will become premium and potentially even overwhelmed. Canada, with no own SLOC in the region, could yet again become dependent on allies and partners for support. Canada yet again may face a risk of becoming a burden rather than a meaningful contributor to the allies during the conflict.

4. This paper will be divided into three sections. The first section will discuss how establishing an OSH will be the critical enabler to support operations in the region. The second section will highlight how it will deepen the strategic relationship with the Host Nation, increasing the likelihood of support for the force flow, and use of berthing and airfields. Lastly, this paper will posit that an OSH in the region will establish Canada as a net contributor in the event of a potential conflict.

DISCUSSION

Support to Operations

5. Logistical and sustainment operations in a near-peer and contested environment are extremely challenging, perhaps the most challenging the CAF has endeavored since the 2nd World War. If hostilities or crisis were to arise in regards to Taiwan, the CAF would be expected

¹ Rahman, 'Defending Taiwan, and Why It Matters'; 'Gompert et al. - 2007 - Coping with the Dragon Essays on PLA Transformati.Pdf', 59–70.

² *Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy*; Nagy, 'CANADA IN THE INDO-PACIFIC?'; Kucharski, 'Energy, Trade and Geopolitics in Asia: The Implications for Canada'.

to assume roles such as Non-Combatant Evacuation Order operations and Anti-Submarine Warfare in support of the US Navy's 7th Fleet (C7F) for a prolonged period.³ Therefore, it is anticipated that the CAF commitment in the IP area will resemble its current commitments for Ops NEON and HORIZON, which include the deployment of multiple frigates and CP-140 Auroras.

6. The need for regular rotation of personnel and resupply of of munitions including torpedoes, Surface to Surface Missiles and Surface to Air Missiles are evident in the deployment of military assets in a theatre. The complexity of customs and handling procedures of Dangerous Goods and explosive munitions eliminates at-sea or ad-hoc location resupply options, requiring a centralised onshore hub for warehousing and distribution. In addition, strategic pre-positioning of critical spares for both ships and aircraft is crucial to sustain operations. An OSH can meet these various logistical demands, although ammunition storage will require coordination with HN or allied depots. By ensuring there is CAF oversight of munitions receipt and distribution for rearming, the OSH has a fundamental role in achieving CAF operational readiness in the IP theatre and enables a robust logistical architecture to be in place for a deployed military commitment.

7. Activation of SLOCs is emphasized in the Canadian Forces Joint Publication 4-0 (CFJP 4-0) as the first critical action post an issuance of a Chief of Defense Staff (CDS) Directive/Operations Order.⁴ Yet, Canada does not have established SLOC in the IP region, and likely implies that CAF assumes peacetime SLOC in the region from allies and partners will be readily available in the event of a crisis over Taiwan. This assumption is quite bold, and departure from an established CAF support doctrine, highlighting a significant strategic oversight.⁵

8. The need for foresight is one of the key support principal as highlighted in CFJP 4-0. The doctrine defines foresight as “the ability to accurately predict and overcome support constraints that could limit a force commander’s freedom of action...”⁶ This is accomplished through an analysis of future operations, and the anticipation of personnel, materiel, equipment and services requirements.⁷ Given the clear threat identified in both Canada’s Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) and Pan-domain Force Employment Concept (PFEC), the stark absence of a reliable CAF SLOC within the IP region is a glaring support constraint.⁸

9. Creating an OSH in the aftermath of a crisis is a daunting task. There is potential for allies and partners to compete for the same scarce resources, as each member of the coalition attempts to establish similar logistical footprint. This stands in contrast to extant multinational logistics doctrine, which underlines the importance of collaboration, coordination, and shared resource management among allied forces.⁹ Thus, pre-crisis planning is critical to establish robust logistic and support structures capable of navigating through crisis without undue

³ Gompert et al., ‘Coping with the Dragon’, 59–70.

⁴ Canadian Joint Operations Command, ‘Canadian Forces Joint Publication 4-0 Support’, 6–2.

⁵ Canadian Joint Operations Command, 1–3.

⁶ Canadian Joint Operations Command, 1–2.

⁷ Canadian Joint Operations Command, 1–2.

⁸ *Canada’s Indo-Pacific Strategy*; ‘Pan-Domain Force Employment Concept’.

⁹ NATO, ‘AJP-4 ALLIED JOINT DOCTRINE FOR LOGISTICS Ed B Ver 1’, 1–5.

dependence on allies and partners for continuous support. This strategic foresight is an imperative to sustain operations and effectiveness of the CAF in a contested environment and would correspond to the broader objectives of Canada's IPS and PFEC.¹⁰

Host Nation Support

10. Canada has established OSHs in most of the “hot spots” in the world except in IP region.¹¹ Each OSH has been critical to CAF operations and have provided a useful diplomatic tool in enhancing relationships between the HN and Canada. In fact, without the relationships that have been built and matured over the years, Canada would have faced serious challenges in projecting and supporting operations in those regions. The OSH in Kuwait has played a pivotal role in supporting a wide range of CAF operations within the region. Its significance was particularly evident in the execution of NEO operations where speed, agility, and Host Nation Support (HNS) are critical. Operations (Ops) SAVANNAH and AEGIS, which demand rapid deployment and logistical precision, would have encountered substantial difficulties without the infrastructure and support provided by the established OSH in Kuwait.¹² This hub has not only facilitated the effective management and movement of troops and material, but it has also ensured that operations could be conducted with the necessary speed and flexibility. Furthermore, OSH Kuwait's instrumental support of the enduring Operation (Op) IMPACT, since 2014, is clear evidence of its strategic utility. More importantly, it is the relationship building efforts between Kuwait and Canada over the years, facilitated by the OSH, that led to customs clearance flexibilities, diplomatic clearances, visa waivers and among other benefits – ensuring successful completion of these mission.¹³ The continued success of these Ops attests to both the strategic value of OSHs in the enhancement of the operational capabilities of the CAF, as well as the importance of these hubs in support of CAF's complex military operations abroad.

11. In case of a crisis in the IP region, aforementioned competition for resources and strategic sites such as berthing, airfield, and warehousing spaces will increase. This competition will include the private sector and broaden among allies and partners, with the area ultimately becoming a nexus for military asset. Currently, much of the logistical requirement of the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) and Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) currently relies on facilities provided by allies, including the US bases in Japan and South Korea, and US, UK, Australia, New Zealand facilities in Singapore under the Five Power Defence Arrangements.¹⁴

12. However, the availability of these facilities will be tested in times of conflict. With China's Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2AD) strategy in play, allies will naturally prioritize their own requirement, doing so will complicate Canada's sustainment activities.¹⁵ The US, for

¹⁰ *Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy*.

¹¹ Ghanmi, 'Canadian Forces Global Reach Support Hubs: Facility Location and Aircraft Routing Models'; Government of Canada, 'Operational Support Hubs'.

¹² 22 Jan 2024, Based on Brigadier-General Arsenault's lecture at CFC to JCSP students. He stated that achieving success during SAVANNAH and AEGIS would have been challenging without the already established relationship with Kuwait.

¹³ Government of Canada, 'Canada-Kuwait Relations'.

¹⁴ Abdul Rahman Yaacob, 'Keeping the Five Power Defence Arrangement Relevant at 50'.

¹⁵ Ashish Dangwal, 'Canada Looks To “Break Shackles” From Monopolistic US Defense Firms As It Explores Submarines For Its Navy'.

instance, will likely activate its Operational Plan for Taiwan, deploying forces based on already established Time Phased Force Deployment Data leaving limited support for CAF participation.¹⁶ Australia, New Zealand, and the UK, will also focus on their military assets most likely leveraging their foot print in Singapore, again forcing Canada to look to IP nations for its essential services during conflict. Doing so however will be challenging with the regional balancing act between the US and China, unless Canada has already established a robust presence and deepened relationships with these nations.

13. The establishment of robust Host Nation Support (HNS) arrangements is vital in operational planning; as outlined in Allied Joint Publication 4.5.¹⁷ While the conflict in IP will not result in a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) operation, the doctrine applies equally to any allied/coalition operation. Since the Taiwan conflict is expected to be predominantly in the maritime and air domains, the HN will not be Taiwan itself but rather a third location that will serve as the Advanced Forward Logistics Site (AFLS). Should an OSH already be established, it is likely that the AFLS will be co-located to leverage existing logistics and support infrastructure and HNS to enhance operational effectiveness and sustainment in a conflict scenario, underscoring the strategic importance of pre-established support arrangements and infrastructure in ensuring rapid and efficient military response.

Canada as a Net Contributor to Security

14. Canada's reputation as a credible security partner and ally has been under scrutiny lately. With defense spending consistently well short of the 2% mandated by NATO coupled with a convoluted procurement process, it is perceived that Canada has limited ability to sustain prolonged operations, is ripe with capability gaps, and lacks interoperability with allies, ultimately being viewed as a security 'freeloader.'¹⁸

15. AJP 4.9 on Modes of Multinational Logistic doctrine states that "each nation bears ultimate responsibility for ensuring the provision of logistic support for its forces allocated to NATO during peace, crisis, and conflict."¹⁹ Canada has fallen short of this obligation on a number of occasions. The Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) had to operate without a tanker for three years, resulting in reliance on a Chilean tanker for support to force generation activities.²⁰ In Afghanistan, Canada lacked troop lift capability, relying heavily on allies, a glaring shortfall for a G7 nation.²¹

¹⁶ Spahn, 'Force Projection, at the Right Time and Place, Is a Critical Component to Operational Art; Consequently, TPFDDs Remain Relevant, Now and in the Foreseeable Future'.

¹⁷ 'AJP-4.5 ALLIED JOINT DOCTRINE FOR HOST NATION SUPPORT'.

¹⁸ Steve Scherer, 'Canada Pressured by Allies to up Military Spending'; Lanoszka and Hunzeker, 'Evaluating the Enhanced Forward Presence After Five Years'; John Ivison, 'Our NATO Allies Have Little Patience Left for Trudeau's Freeloading'; Lanoszka and Hunzeker, 'Evaluating the Enhanced Forward Presence After Five Years', 94; Steve Scherer, 'Canada Pressured by Allies to up Military Spending'.

¹⁹ NATO, 'AJP-4.9 Allied Joint Doctrine for Modes of Multinational Logistics Doctrine', 1-4.

²⁰ Ellie Aminaie, 'RCN Sailors Train for the Future with Chilean Navy'.

²¹ David Ljunggren, 'Canada Moves to Solve Afghan Helicopter Shortage'.

16. It is perceived that Canada's exclusion from the AUKUS discussion sidelines Canada as no longer being a reliable security partner by its closest allies.²² Nonetheless, Canada has an opportunity to bolster its strategic relevance through establishing an OSH in the IP region. This would demonstrate Canada's further commitment in the region on top of Canada's contribution to the Freedom of Navigation Operations through Ops NEON and HORIZON. The establishment of an OSH would not only bolster Canada's commitment in the region but also demonstrate Canada's resolve to contribute in the event of a conflict in the region.

17. Standup of an OSH would represent an additional strategic avenue for allies and partners to promote burden-sharing to counter-act Chinese aggression. This move would see Canada transition from relying on allies for logistical support to being a net-contributor in the IP region in both competition and conflict phase. An already established OSH in crisis would only enhance the CAF's capabilities and those of allies to quickly deploy forces and materiel to critical areas. Such an initiative would elevate Canada as a significant contributor in global power dynamics and highlighting its dedication to global security and the rules based international order. As such, Canada needs to be agile in exploiting such niche opportunities to its advantage, thereby underlining its status as a vital part of international defense and security endeavours.

CONCLUSION

This paper has demonstrated critical vulnerabilities in the CAF's SLOC within the IP region in the context of potential conflict between US and China over Taiwan. In order to enhance the CAF's operational capabilities, foster strategic relationship with HN and to to be a net contributor during the conflict to allies, CJOC must develop an OSH within the IP region. To ensure the operational readiness and effectiveness of the CAF, an OSH in the IP region is required due to the complexities associated with logistics and sustainment operations in a 'near-peer' adversarial environment. The importance of HNS and the strategic advantage of establishing logistics and support infrastructures prior to a crisis were also discussed, with such a strategy being in line with the broad objectives of IPS and PFEC. The paper posits that without such foresight and preparation, Canada's credibility as a security partner in the eyes of the allies would suffer. Moreover, Canada would not be able to make a meaningful contribution in a time of crisis. The establishment of an OSH within the IP region is not just a logistical necessity, it is a strategic move which underlines Canada's vision for global security and the rules based international order.

RECOMMENDATION

19. It is recommended that the CJOC prioritize the establishment of an OSH in the IP region as a matter of strategic urgency. As per the PFEC, Canada has the unique opportunity to adopt a Whole of Government (WoG) approach in enhancing its SLOC in the IP region.²³ Canada's current plan to procure twelve off-the-shelf submarines²⁴ (e.g., South Korean KSS III or Japanese Taigei Class), Canada's procurement efforts can be leveraged to negotiate the

²² Carvin and Juneau, 'Why AUKUS and Not CAUKUS? It's a Potluck, Not a Party'.

²³ 'Pan-Domain Force Employment Concept'.

²⁴ Ashish Dangwal, 'Canada Looks To "Break Shackles" From Monopolistic US Defense Firms As It Explores Submarines For Its Navy'.

establishment of OSH with enduring berthing and airfield access. Instead of focusing only on the best value for money, Canada could also factor in the strategic value of gaining a footprint in the IP region. A coordination between Government Affairs Canada, Public Services Procurement Canada and Department of National Defence, to achieve such a procurement would not only be a procurement feat but also a diplomatic success showcasing a WoG approach.

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