



AS DELIVERED

**MODERATOR:** Greetings from the U.S. Department of State's Asia Pacific Media Hub. I would like to welcome journalists to today's on-the-record briefing with General Jacqueline D. Van Ovost, Commander of U.S. Transportation Command. General Van Ovost will discuss her travel to meet with senior leaders in Papua New Guinea, Australia, and Japan, and address USTRANSCOM's efforts to grow logistics partnerships and security throughout the Indo-Pacific.

And with that, let's get started. General Van Ovost, thank you for joining us and I'll turn it over to you for your opening remarks.

**GENERAL VAN OVOST:** Thanks, Katie. Before we begin, let me say thank you for taking the time to dial in, and thanks to the Department of State for hosting this call. Now I'll be honest, you've got to look far and wide to find a bigger supporter of State than I am. Before I travel overseas, I devour your excellent analytical products and I speak with your colleagues in Washington, and when I'm on the road, I appreciate and admire the substantive expertise that you provide. I know it only happens because of all your support, to include the locally employed staff. And then when I'm on my way back home, I'm reminded that you and your families are making profound commitments that help us all advance U.S. interests around the globe. So thank you for the many things, both seen and unseen, that you do.

Now I have the honor of leading U.S. Transportation Command, a team that enables our nation to respond quickly to crises and sustain humanitarian and military operations worldwide. And because of that team and our strong relationships with our allies and partners, we've gained a reputation for unparalleled logistics and transportation excellence. As you mentioned, over this past week I visited senior government officials and multinational service members in Papua New Guinea, Australia, and Japan to discuss regional security and how we can continue to work together to promote stable economies, increase our interoperability, deter aggression, and be ready to respond to any crises in this vital region.

And just as importantly, through the Women, Peace, and Security initiative, I had the pleasure of speaking to military women in each country who are driving culture change in their respective services and institutions. They are the trailblazers dedicated to making their militaries stronger through diversity in both terms of gender and in thought. Their continued drive, dedication, and collective voices will ultimately lead to greater stability for their nations and for the Indo-Pacific.

But one thing is more evident now than ever. Our relationships matters. The complexity of this region requires multidimensional, multipartner solutions, and I saw an incredible example during our visit to Papua New Guinea. Their embrace of diversity in what they call a Land of a Thousand Tribes make them a stronger democracy and a gateway to the Pacific. Their example reinforced once again that we are unequivocally stronger together. We must continue to deepen our relationships and our capabilities with our key allies and partners, and embrace a diversity of our views that unite all of us in a common vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific.

In the past year we've seen how crucial close partnerships have been in enabling the broader international community and the United States to provide rapid disaster relief efforts, and in sustaining operational support to countries who have been unjustifiably invaded. Maintaining and growing our relationships in the Indo-Pacific is critical as we work together to ensure expeditious response to future humanitarian aid and disaster relief efforts while countering threats to international peace and security, whether from state actors or violent extremist organizations.

So I'm encouraged by new regional defense agreements which modernize our partnerships to enhance multilateral constructs. This past week, my counterparts and I discussed ways to expand cooperation through these agreements and how we can strengthen the ties between our shared interests and values. It's clear we must forge ties that enable our partnerships to operate through an environment of multidomain threats, requiring robust infrastructure, information sharing, and a resilient shared logistics enterprise. And I'm confident that our partnerships provide the necessary framework through which we can find solutions to enhance peace and security for the people of the Indo-Pacific. And I assure you that we will retain the ability to respond whenever and wherever our allies and partners need us.

Again, thanks for joining us today, and I look forward to taking your questions.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you so much. We will now turn to the question-and-answer portion of today's briefing.

Our first question today goes to Gorethy Kenneth of the Post Courier in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, who asks: "What role does the USTRANSCOM play in supporting military operations and logistical efforts in Papua New Guinea, particularly in relation to the country's remote and diverse geographical landscape? How has the partnership between the USTRANSCOM and Papua New Guinea's military contributed to enhancing regional security and stability, and what specific initiatives are currently underway? And in what ways does the USTRANSCOM collaborate with Papua New Guinea's government and nongovernmental organizations to improve humanitarian assistance and disaster relief capabilities in the country?" Over.

**GENERAL VAN OVOST:** Yeah, thanks, Mr. Kenneth. So that's a mouthful, but let me say I was really excited about my trip to Papua New Guinea and meeting the officials there. And Papua New Guinea continues to prove themselves as a steadfast partner who understand the importance of readiness and resiliency. They find themselves in a unique position to play a critical role in responding to natural disasters or other contingencies and crises, and we are continuing to work closely with them to modernize their infrastructure. We're increasing their resiliency and their ability to respond quickly.

And I also want to refer back to what I said during the opening statement about their very active participation in the Women, Peace, and Security initiative. Their continued focus on diversity and inclusion is to be commended. I'm extremely proud of the work that they and their gender focal points have done. That work is going to lead to increased stability for both PNG and the Indo-Pacific.

Now, I would say we are working on actioning the significant Defense Cooperation Agreement that they just modernized to assist them in fulfilling their desired role as this regional leader for HADR, Humanitarian Assistance Disaster Response. And we're working with USAID, which is part of the

U.S. Department of State, INDOPACOM, and their state partnership lead unit, which is the Wisconsin National Guard, to assist with their training, with their force development, and increased exercises so they can improve their capabilities to respond in the region against disasters.

**MODERATOR:** All right, our next question comes into us via the Q&A tab, and it comes from Seong Hyeon Choi with South China Morning Post based in Hong Kong. And the question is: “There has recently been increasing tensions in the South China Sea with Chinese and Philippine coast guards clashing around Second Thomas Shoal for several months, including last week’s collision. What are you USTRANSCOM’s response to these tensions in its operation near the South China Sea and the efforts to mitigate the chance of armed conflict in the region?” Over.

**GENERAL VAN OVOST:** Yeah, thanks. Let me just say that as USTRANSCOM, we project and sustain the joint force at a time and place of our choosing. And I really believe that our ability to do that deters aggression and it assures our allies and partners that we’re going to be there. So when I think about efforts within the South China Sea, I think about international law and ability for not just the U.S. but for all of the nations to be able to operate in accordance with international law and freedom of navigation, which has been well established in the area. And as we continue to ensure that allies and partners can freely operate without coercion around the globe, that is what brings them more stability and assures them that will be there in case they have concerns.

**MODERATOR:** Our next question comes in via the Q&A tab from Gordon Arthur at the Asian Military Review based in Christchurch, New Zealand. Gordon asks: “Transporting equipment and troops to Talisman Sabre earlier this year was an important test for your command. If there were ever a war in the Indo-Pacific region, can you describe some of the challenges the U.S. would face in moving forces across the Pacific? What measures are being taken to improve that logistics capability?” Over.

**GENERAL VAN OVOST:** Well, thanks for that question. Talisman Sabre was a significant exercise for the U.S. and multiple allies and partners that we work together with as we work to build interoperability in our operations. And for me, I think specifically about our logistics and

transportation. So this gave us an opportunity to work in this coalition setting to understand what the demands might be of these different exercises or humanitarian assistance, and how we work together to ensure the resilience of our networks so that we can support our various allies and partners.

It definitely showed the depth of our interoperability, and frankly also shows in areas that we need to work together even further and deeper. And we look forward to additional exercises with these allies and partners so that we can exercise different ports, different lines of communication or logistical lines, and share in maintenance, repair, and overhaul between us so that we can be more resilient and more ready for anything that comes our way.

**MODERATOR:** Okay. Our next question came in advance from Dane Anwar at Kompas in Jakarta, Indonesia, who asks: “Indonesia is wary with regional security since U.S. can access military bases in Papua New Guinea. How will you guarantee that it will not shake territorial and regional balances?” Over.

**GENERAL VAN OVOST:** Thanks, Dane. Look, our agreements and continued partnership with Papua New Guinea shouldn’t concern anyone. Our work with Papua New Guinea is focused on modernizing the infrastructure through our defense agreements. These should be viewed as positive developments for the region, as the work being done to increase the ability to respond to humanitarian assistance, disaster responses – you may know they’re all situated, as is Indonesia, on the Ring of Fire. So just improving their capability and capacity will allow a faster response following any kind of natural disaster or contingency. In fact, we share this vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific, where all can prosper and benefit from stability, and we absolutely think that PNG can help bring that stability to the area.

**MODERATOR:** Okay. Our next question goes to Nhu Nguyen from OEC in Dan Ang, Vietnam. Nhu asks: “In terms of working with U.S. allies in the Indo-Pacific area to collaborate on air and marine transportation, what plans have you made in case the PLA invades Taiwan over the Taiwan Strait?” Over.

**GENERAL VAN OVOST:** Yeah, thanks. Look, the work we do with our allies and partners will ensure that the Indo-Pacific remains free and open. We exercise and train with that collective in order to increase our interoperability and therefore our capability and capacity in order, again, to be ready to respond to a wide range of natural and man-made contingencies.

**MODERATOR:** Okay. Our next question came in from Christopher Woody of Business Insider in Washington, D.C. Mr. Woody asks: “What were the most interesting takeaways and insights you gained from the Mobility Guardian exercise in July? How are you applying them to Transportation Command’s air, land, and sea operations as you prepare for an environment where you expect your operations to be contested?” Over.

**GENERAL VAN OVOST:** Yeah, thanks for asking. It was quite a exercise. And so this summer, we used Exercise Mobility Guardian to explore a variety of experiments, and we discovered potential ways to close some command and control gaps through integrating some new technology on our legacy platforms, and we worked very close with our allies and partners and tested our ability to move forces throughout what we call a simulated contested logistics environment.

So we conducted dispersed operations, decentralized command and control, empowering decisions at the lowest level, and we conducted integrated operations that consisted of combined flights, refueling, air drop that was led by our partners, so various – air refueling, airlift, air medical evacuation operations so that we can increase and thicken this interoperability.

And so we’ve learned a few things with respect to our interoperability and how we can even deepen the relationships with – especially with respect to maintenance, repair, and overhaul, sharing the ability to service different aircraft; how to manage distributed operations going to many places and turning airplanes very quickly on the ground; the importance of fuel throughout the theater and how do we support distributed operations around the globe; and the concepts of maneuver for our services, these – for one – for the Air Force called Agile Combat Employment is this ability to be able to disperse and then collect up again, so disaggregate to survive, aggregate to create an effect, and how we could do that more effectively across the vast region of the Indo-Pacific.

And finally, we had a number – we had seven allies and partners that were with us, and again, we all got to exercise our ability for – to agile, rapid global mobility operations, and really took away how deep our partnerships are and how we are stronger together and areas that we can build on to strengthen each other. So thanks for that question. It was a great exercise.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you, and just a reminder, to ask a question, you can click the “raise hand” button or type in the question-and-answer tab. Our next question goes to Kosuke Moriwaki from Kyodo News, Japan, based in Tokyo, who asks, “Regarding the Defense Cooperation Agreement with Papua New Guinea, what is the concrete plan of the Transportation Command to contribute to the regional security?” Over.

**GENERAL VAN OVOST:** Yeah, thanks. As I said, my job is to project and sustain the joint force around the globe, to deter adversaries, to assure our allies and partners, and ensure that our credible combat forces can achieve effects around the globe in support of our national objectives and the shared objectives of our allies and partners.

Just want to remind folks that 85 percent of our force elements for the United States are actually in the continental United States, and so these exercises allow me to demonstrate that I can deploy at a moment’s notice, whether it’s providing hope through humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, or to be that credible deterrent, or, if necessary, to be able to prevail in conflict.

And so we do this all over the world, mostly in a supporting role to various national security requirements, and we use our component commands – air, land, and sea component commands – to execute this movement of cargo and troops around the globe. So again, I think the absolute – I think logistics absolutely supports regional peace and security. It supports economy, and I think that we’re definitely in the nexus between the economy and security out there. So I do believe that logistics makes a difference for each nation and for our militaries.

**MODERATOR:** Okay. Next we have a question from Kirsty Needham based in Sydney, Australia with Reuters. Ms. Needham asks, “In PNG did you discuss how ports and airports would need to be

upgraded for U.S. military use under the Defense Cooperation Agreement? Can you share any timeframes?" Over.

**GENERAL VAN OVOST:** Yeah, thanks. Again, I applauded them for this modernization of the Defense Cooperation Agreement, which gives us more opportunities to not just deepen the relationships with us, but their ability to achieve their national security requirements. So we discussed how we work together to modernize the existing infrastructure over the next several years. So they're committed, as I said, to expanding their humanitarian assistance disaster relief capability and to developing that resilient infrastructure we talked about so that they could have a fast response either for their own people or for others in their region. They want to be a leader in doing this.

So again, they understand, given their position and the fact that they're sitting on the Ring of Fire, that they have to be prepared, and so they're very anxious and willing to help build that resiliency through their infrastructure. We've had an opportunity to assess some of the infrastructure and we had discussions on how we would be able to support that development out fully of that infrastructure so that they can achieve their goals for the region.

**MODERATOR:** Okay. Our last question, unless we have any last-minute raised hands, goes to Josef Dollinger of ORF Austrian Broadcasting who's based in Beijing, China. Josef asks, "Do the U.S. have enough capabilities to supply Taiwan, if China seals off the island or in case of war or invasion by Chinese military?" Over.

**GENERAL VAN OVOST:** Yeah. Thanks, Josef. Look, my – again, my responsibility is to protect and sustain the force around the globe. And the sustainment you have seen around the globe, whether it's in the European theater, the Central Command theater, or right out here in the Indo-Pacific, we're going to support our allies and partners. And so it is because of our deep relationships with our allies and partners that we have the access, basing, and overflight to support them and to get what they need. And I do that not just for military capability, but with our commercial partners.



And I think that our logistics networks that are not just the United States logistics networks but also our allies and partners, their contacts and contracts, overlaid provide a resilient web of capability that we can support our allies and partners to achieve their national security objectives.

**MODERATOR:** All right. Well, thank you very much General Van Ovost. If you have any closing remarks, I'll turn it back over to you now.

**GENERAL VAN OVOST:** Yeah, thanks. Look, in closing, I'm confident that we as allies and partners continue working together and sustain a focus on people, partner, and innovations, we're going to enable peace and security in the region.

And lastly, thanks again, Katie, to you and your team for putting this together and for each of you who joined us tonight. You have an important job in ensuring true and accurate information is communicated to the public. And as demanding as the job can be, it's an extremely important one. And so in USTRANSCOM parlance, together we deliver.

**MODERATOR:** Well, that brings us to the end of our time today. Thank you so much for your questions, and many thanks to General Van Ovost for joining us today during a busy trip. We will provide a transcript of this briefing to participating journalists as soon as it is available. And we'd also love to hear your feedback. You can contact us at any time at [asiapacmedia@state.gov](mailto:asiapacmedia@state.gov). Thanks again for your participation, and we hope you can join us for another briefing soon.