



December 9, 2020

Defense Primer: Department of Defense Pre-Positioned Materiel

As part of its global posture, the U.S. military maintains war reserve materiel (WRM), stocks of “mission-essential secondary items, principal and end items, and munitions,” to “attain and sustain operational objectives in scenarios” authorized by the Department of Defense (DOD). Some of this materiel, designated *pre-positioned* WRM, or PWRM, is “strategically located to facilitate a timely response ... during the initial phase of an operation.” PWRM is stored worldwide at or near points of planned use in specialized facilities and dedicated ships.

Why does DOD pre-position materiel?

The primary purpose of PWRM is to reduce military response times and ensure timely support of operations in their initial phases until follow-on capabilities are available and supply chains are established. PWRM, airlift, and sealift comprise the three legs of the strategic mobility triad that enables military power projection. Each leg of the triad has its own inherent strengths and weaknesses in speed, capacity, cost, and infrastructure requirements. Pre-positioning materiel reduces the demands for strategic airlift and sealift assets by locating heavy and bulky materiel closer to the theater of operations. Unlike airlift, PWRM is not constrained by the limited capacity of transport aircraft, but it comes with increased infrastructure costs associated with storing and maintaining stocks. Typically, personnel and a limited amount of equipment are transported into a theater, where they draw and prepare PWRM to rapidly resource deploying forces.

For example, according to the Congressional Budget Office, during Operation Desert Shield PWRM enabled the delivery of Marine Corps armored units to the Persian Gulf one month before the arrival of other armored units shipped from the United States. Similarly, during Operation Iraqi Freedom, DOD made extensive use of afloat stocks and materiel positioned ashore in the Middle East and Europe to provide deployed forces essential equipment and supplies.

PWRM can also be used as a signal of U.S. intentions. Materiel stored overseas can demonstrate commitment to allies and partners or enhance the deterrence of potential adversaries. Additionally, units deploying to a theater for training and exercises may utilize pre-positioned equipment, which allows these forces to practice withdrawing and preparing PWRM for operations.

Responsibilities and Management

The Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Sustainment establishes and maintains a DOD-wide strategic policy for WRM and PWRM. The military departments, combatant commands, defense agencies, and other DOD components are also responsible for issuing component-specific guidance. Combatant Commanders

(CCDRs) determine PWRM operational requirements in accordance with strategic guidance; the Joint Staff then reviews and validates these requirements. The military services maintain and administer PWRM to satisfy validated requirements and meet the needs of CCDRs. The services routinely rely upon the Defense Logistics Agency and contractor support to maintain PWRM.

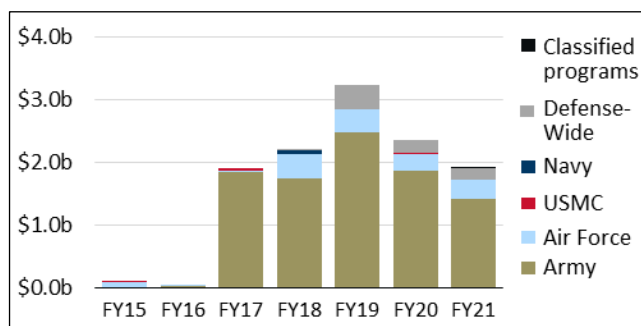
Several sections within Title 10, United States Code (U.S.C.) govern PWRM.

- **10 U.S.C. §2229.** Requires the Secretary of Defense to maintain a strategic policy on pre-positioned materiel and to certify annually that current PWRM “meet all operations plans, in both fill and readiness.” The FY2014 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA, P.L. 113-66) amended §2229 to require a one-time submission of DOD’s plan to implement its strategic policy.
- **10 U.S.C. §2229a.** Mandates an annual report to Congress, submitted prior to the submission of the President’s budget request, on the status of pre-positioned stocks at the end of the last fiscal year.
- **10 U.S.C. §229 note.** Charges the Secretary of Defense with ensuring that service secretaries have funds to reconstitute pre-positioned stocks in accordance with the requirements under the strategy outlined in §2229.

Sample Funding for PWRM

Two appropriations accounts primarily fund PWRM: Procurement, and Operations and Maintenance (O&M).

Figure 1 displays requested annual funding levels for pre-positioning in the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) from FY2015 to FY2021. Since FY2017, PWRM has been the largest category of EDI spending. The FY2021 NDAA would authorize the requested \$282.1 million to support logistics and prepositioning of equipment as part of the Pacific Deterrence Initiative.

Figure 1. EDI Pre-Positioning Funding Requests, FY2015-FY2021

Source: CRS analysis based on Under Secretary of Defense Comptroller information, available at <https://comptroller.defense.gov/Budget-Materials/>.

Selected PWRM Programs

Army Pre-Positioned Stocks (APS)

The Army considers APS materiel “a cornerstone of the Army’s ability to rapidly project power.” It is located around the world in seven stocks. Army Materiel Command (AMC) manages APS, while Army Sustainment Command and other AMC subordinate commands maintain the stocks through regional Army Field Support Brigades and Battalions. APS contain several categories of materiel:

- **Unit Equipment Sets** contain combat equipment and supplies to support the Army’s force projection strategy. Unit sets mirror Army force structure unit equipment (i.e., brigade combat team or sustainment brigade equipment sets).
- **Operational Projects (OPROJ)** contain equipment to provide strategic capabilities specific to CCDR requirements, such as engineering or petroleum distribution equipment.
- **Army War Reserve Sustainment Stocks** contain materiel (including vehicles and equipment) to sustain the fight by replacing combat losses and supplies consumed during operations.

APS also includes War Reserve Stocks for Allies, which are stocks owned and funded by the United States, to be released to supported allied forces under the Foreign Assistance Act (22 U.S.C. §2331h). These stocks are excluded from the DOD-wide definition of PWRM.

U.S. Navy and Marine Corps Pre-Positioning

The Navy and Marine Corps rely on the afloat Maritime Prepositioning Force (MPF) and the ashore Marine Corps Prepositioning Program-Norway (MCPN) to expedite the deployment of Marine Air-Ground Task Forces (MAGTFs). The Marines’ Blount Island Command, a subordinate of Marine Corps Logistics Command, maintains MPF and MCPN.

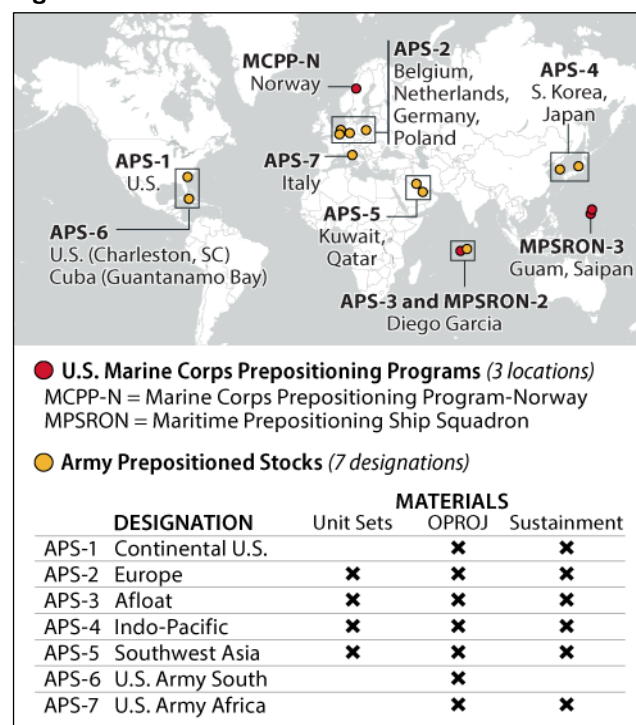
The MPF consists of two Maritime Prepositioning Ship Squadrons (MPSRONS), operated by the Navy’s Military Sealift Command (MSC). Each MPSRON carries unit equipment and 30 days of supply for one brigade-sized MAGTF when combined with an echelon of personnel, light equipment, and combat aircraft. MPSRONS also contain additional capabilities such as an expeditionary medical facility, Naval support element, Naval construction element, and bridging, aviation support, and expeditionary

airfield equipment. Each squadron is capable of discharging its cargo pier-side, ship-to-ship, ship-to-shore, or by air. As displayed in **Figure 2**, MPSRON-2 is based in Diego Garcia, while MPSRON-3 is based in Guam and Saipan.

MCPN consists of ground equipment, munitions, and aviation support equipment stored inside various cave facilities near Trondheim, Norway. MCPN stocks are sufficient to supply a Marine Expeditionary Brigade with munitions for 30 days and equip an infantry battalion task force, combat logistics battalion, and aviation squadron.

Air Force PWRM

The Air Staff’s Director of Logistics is responsible for Air Force PWRM policy and planning, while Air Force Materiel Command manages stocks. The Air Force utilizes munitions stocks positioned at bases around the world and additional materiel located aboard two munitions vessels. These vessels belong to MSC and are sometimes under the tactical control of the MPSRONS. The Air Force also pre-positions consumables and *force generation sets* designed to provide expeditionary airfield, fuel support, damage recovery, and medical capabilities.

Figure 2. Selected PWRM Locations and Contents

Source: Created by CRS. MCPN-N and MPSRON information from Joint Publication 4-01, The Defense Transportation System (July 2017). APS information from U.S. Army G-4.

Notes: APS-1 is designated for U.S. Army North Homeland Defense missions or for use by overseas Army forces.

Considerations for Congress

- **Alignment with the National Defense Strategy.** A potential oversight issue for Congress is whether DOD’s pre-positioned stocks properly align with the National Defense Strategy. Congress may wish to review whether it receives sufficient information to adequately assess this alignment. A January 2019 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report found that “DOD continues to provide incomplete information to

- Congress on the department’s prepositioned stock programs,” and “DOD has not fully implemented a joint oversight approach for managing prepositioned stock programs...” (GAO, *Prepositioned Stocks: DOD Needs Joint Oversight of the Military Services’ Programs*, GAO-19-244, January 2019).
- **Annual funding.** Another potential oversight issue for Congress is whether to approve, reject, or modify

DOD’s annual funding requests for PWRM. Congress faces the competition for funding among pre-positioned stocks and other mobility capabilities and resourcing programs.

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