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Defense Primer: Department of Defense Pre-Positioned Materiel

As part of its global posture, the U.S. military maintains war reserve materiel (WRM), which are stocks of essential items and munitions that, according to the Department of Defense (DOD), are sufficient to attain and sustain operational objectives in DOD plans. Some of this materiel, DOD states is designated *pre-positioned* WRM (or PWRM), which 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 (i.e., *ashore*) and dedicated ships (i.e., *afloat*).

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. 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 and sealift, PWRM is not constrained by lift capacity, but 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, in 1990-1991 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, according to the Congressional Budget Office. Similarly, in 2003 during Operation Iraqi Freedom, DOD made extensive use of stocks and materiel ashore and afloat in the Middle East and Europe, to provide deployed forces essential equipment and supplies.

PWRM may be used to signal U.S. intentions. Materiel stored overseas may demonstrate commitment to allies and partners or enhance the deterrence of potential adversaries.

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. Each military service (hereafter “service”) maintains and administers PWRM to satisfy such requirements and meet the needs of

CCDRs. The services rely upon the Defense Logistics Agency and contractor support to maintain PWRM.

Several sections of Title 10, United States Code (U.S.C.) govern PWRM, including the following:

- **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. § 2229 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.

Funding

Two defense appropriations titles primarily fund PWRM: Procurement and Operations and Maintenance (O&M). For example, the Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2021 (Division C of P.L. 116-260) provided \$324 million within the Operation and Maintenance, Army account for Army prepositioned stocks. For FY2022, DOD requested \$381 million for PWRM within the Operation and Maintenance, Army account. Funding amounts for the other services’ PWRM are typically included within the *Mobilization* budget activity within annual O&M appropriations. Additionally, PWRM resources for the Army, Marine Corps, and Air Force are included annually as part of the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI), an effort to reassure U.S. allies in Europe in the wake of Russia’s 2014 invasion of Ukraine’s Crimea region. Since FY2017, PWRM has been the single largest funding category within EDI, averaging \$2.3 billion over five years. For FY2022, DOD has requested \$1.2 billion for EDI PWRM.

Selected PWRM Programs

Army Pre-Positioned Stocks (APS)

The Army considers APS materiel “a cornerstone of the Army’s ability to rapidly project power.” 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 (See Figure 1). 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 Project Stocks (OPROJ)** contain equipment above normal allowances to provide strategic capabilities essential to the Army’s strategic deployment strategy.
- **Army War Reserve Sustainment Stocks** contain materiel (including vehicles and equipment) to sustain military operations by replacing combat losses and consumed supplies.

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 (MCCPP-N) to expedite the deployment of Marine Air-Ground Task Forces (MAGTFs). The Marines’ Blount Island Command, a subordinate of Marine Corps Logistics Command, maintains the MPF and MCCPP-N.

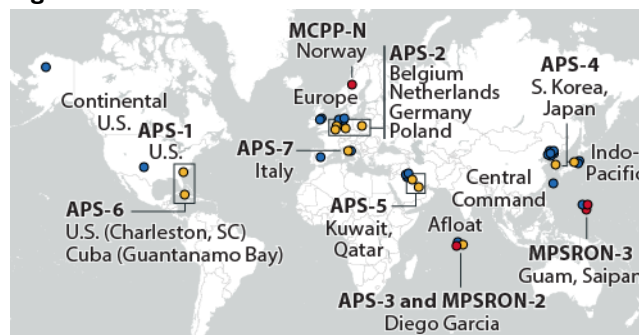
The MPF consists of two Maritime Prepositioning Ship Squadrons (MPSRONs), operated by the Navy’s Military Sealift Command (MSC). Each MPSRON carries unit equipment and 30 days of supply for one brigade-sized MAGTF when combined with an echelon of personnel, light equipment, and combat aircraft. Each squadron is capable of discharging its cargo pierside, ship-to-ship, ship-to-shore, or by air. MCCPP-N consists of ground equipment, munitions, and aviation support equipment to supply a Marine Expeditionary Brigade for 30 days.

Key U.S. Air Force PWRM

The Air Force’s PWRM is managed by Air Force Materiel Command. Across 23 worldwide locations, Air Force PWRM stocks consist of dispersed ashore assets and munitions necessary to initiate expeditionary operations. Some afloat munitions stocks are also stored aboard two MSC vessels that are under the tactical control of the relevant geographic CCDR. The Air Force also pre-positions consumable items such as food and fuel, and sets of equipment designed to provide expeditionary operational support, fuels support, damage recovery, force protection, and medical capabilities. Air Force PWRM consists of three major categories of materiel:

- **Common Support Equipment (CSE)** sets provide aerospace ground equipment, vehicles, and munitions support equipment to support initial combat operations.
- **Fuels Support Equipment (FSE)** sets provide ground and aircraft fuels support.
- **Basic Expeditionary Airfield Resources (BEAR)** sets provide personnel support, infrastructure, and flight line support at forward operating sites.

Figure 1. Selected PWRM Locations and Contents



- **U.S. Marine Corps Prepositioning Programs (3 locations)**
 MCCPP-N = Marine Corps Prepositioning Program-Norway
 MPSRON = Maritime Prepositioning Ship Squadron

- **Army Prepositioned Stocks (7 designations)**

DESIGNATION	Unit Sets	MATERIELS		
		OPROJ	Sustainment	
APS-1 Continental U.S.		✗	✗	✗
APS-2 Europe	✗	✗	✗	✗
APS-3 Afloat	✗	✗	✗	✗
APS-4 Indo-Pacific	✗	✗	✗	✗
APS-5 Southwest Asia	✗	✗	✗	✗
APS-6 U.S. Army South		✗		
APS-7 U.S. Army Africa		✗		✗

- **U.S. Air Force Prepositioned War Reserve Materiel (23 locations)**

USAF PWRM LOCATION	CSE	MATERIELS		
		FSE	BEAR	
Continental U.S.	✗	✗	✗	✗
Europe	✗	✗	✗	✗
Afloat	✗	✗	✗	✗
U.S. Indo-Pacific	✗	✗	✗	✗
Central Command	✗	✗	✗	✗

Source: Created by CRS. MCCPP-N and MPSRON information from Joint Publication 4-01, The Defense Transportation System (July 2017). APS and USAF PWRM information from U.S. Army G-4 and U.S. Air Force A-4 respectively.

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

Considerations for Congress

- **Improved Oversight of PWRM.** The Government Accountability Office (GAO) in 2019 found “DOD continues to provide incomplete information to Congress” and “has not fully implemented a joint oversight approach for managing prepositioned stock programs.” Congress may wish to review whether it receives sufficient information to assess DOD’s pre-positioned stocks.
- **Annual funding.** 10 U.S.C. § 2229a mandates an annual DOD report to Congress on PWRM. In considering the annual budget request, Congress may evaluate whether DOD has fully addressed statutory reporting requirements.

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