

China Landpower Studies Center



# CLSC

## DIALOGUES

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

### GEN Charles A. Flynn and COL Rich Butler

## The Role and Impact of US Army Pacific in the Indo-Pacific Region

In this episode of CLSC Dialogues: Landpower in the Indo-Pacific, General Charles A. Flynn, commander of US Army Pacific and Colonel Rich Butler, director of the China Landpower Studies Center, discuss the role and impact of the US Army in the Indo-Pacific.

**Keywords: China, Indo-Pacific, Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center, Operation Pathways, Joint interior lines**

#### Stephanie Crider (Host)

You are listening to CLSC Dialogues: Landpower in the Indo-Pacific, a China Landpower Studies Center production. The views and opinions expressed in this podcast are those of the guests and are not necessarily those of the Department of the Army, the US Army War College, or any other agency of the US government.

I'm in the studio today with Colonel Richard Butler, the director of the China Landpower Studies Center at the US Army War College. Joining us virtually from Hawaii is General Charles A. Flynn, commander of US Army Pacific.

Over to you, Colonel Butler.

#### COL Rich Butler

General Flynn, it's great to have you on the net. It's been an honor and privilege to serve with you [a] couple times out in the Indo-Pacific at various times and locations.

As the US comes out of two long wars in the [Middle East], why should Americans today start caring about the rise of China? And we talk an awful lot about it, but I think you have a unique perspective from your vantage as the senior Army leader in the Pacific.

#### GEN Charles A. Flynn

Well, Rich, thanks, first of all, for doing this podcast and inviting me.

I guess I'd just start by saying, as our national leaders have said, China is the only country that has the capability, capacity, and intent to upend the international order, and they've also communicated that very directly in written form and in spoken word by President Xi [Jinping] and other senior officials in China—and that has been consistent for some time.

I guess I'd say more broadly that the Indo-Pacific is really the epicenter of the twenty-first century. That is true geopolitically, economically, [and] diplomatically. And the fact that the United States has [been] and remains a Pacific nation. Stability in this region matters. It matters because it's so consequential to world events. It's consequential to all of the diplomatic, economic, and, certainly, geopolitical aspects. But maybe most concerning, at least in my

\*\*\*\*\*

<https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/clsc-pod>

## GEN Charles A. Flynn and COL Rich Butler The Role and Impact of US Army Pacific in the Indo-Pacific Region

particular role, is the military instrument that the Chinese have developed (and continue to develop) for the better part of at least 20 years.

The consequential nature of security in this region matters. It matters to mankind. It matters to the globe. And, I guess, with the limited regional war going on in Europe right now, and another limited regional war going on in the Middle East, the world [and] the United States can ill afford to have another war happen out here. So, our ability to actually be forward, be present, reassure and deter, and prevent a war from happening is vitally important right now.

### Butler

Thanks for that, sir. I completely agree. You mentioned deterrence and obviously, you have to assure your allies and partners and work together, but when you think about a potential conflict and the character of that conflict in the Indo-Pacific, how does strategic Landpower play in that? And how is it integral to Jointness, and even, if you could, in air quotes, “combinedness,” working with allies and partners? How does that character of a potential conflict shape what you’re doing as the Army leader in the Indo-Pacific?

### Flynn

Well, if history is a guide, there’s been an awful lot of fighting on land in this theater going back at least a century and beyond. I would just tell you that’s why I make the point that key terrain matters out here. It matters for the people of the region. It matters for the governments within the region. It largely expresses where their wealth is concentrated and where decisions are made by the people and the governments in each one of these nations.

So, this is the importance of what I refer to as the Landpower network because the size of the armies out here matter. Japan’s army—65 percent; Philippines—70 percent; India—80 percent. I could go on and on. The fact of the matter is the Landpower network that exists in the Indo-Pacific is actually the instrument that does protect their borders. It does protect their national sovereignty and their territorial integrity. Often, because people look at the map, they see it as an air and maritime theater; it’s actually a Joint theater. It’s got Joint and combined and multinational challenges, and it’s only going to be solved by Joint, combined, and multinational capabilities.

The last thing I’d point out about the strategic Landpower network is the fact that the Jointness—or “combinedness,” as you mentioned—it’s really the interdependencies that matter between these forces. Because of the size of the Landpower force that exists in this region, to include the United States Army of the Pacific—because the United States Army of the Pacific, little known fact: on any given day, we’re about 60 to 65 percent of the total US Marine Corps. This is two times larger than the next theater Army in the US Army in Europe. So, this position that we have as US Army in the Pacific as the [Theater Joint Force Land Component Command, or] TJFLCC and as a component of INDOPACOM—we can actually be an epoxy or a glue that brings this Landpower network together. And that Landpower network, in my view, is the great counterweight that brings trust in the region together as a counterweight to some of the insidious and irresponsible behavior of the Chinese.

All five of our allies, just another point, are led by Army generals. This is the influence that armies have in this region. And I could go beyond that because beyond just the five allies that we have in the region, there are a number of other generals that are in charge of their militaries. Again, these armies represent an incredibly important institution in each

\*\*\*\*\*

## GEN Charles A. Flynn and COL Rich Butler The Role and Impact of US Army Pacific in the Indo-Pacific Region

one of the nations, and their leaders that are in charge of them normally move to positions of great influence inside their militaries and even inside their governments.

### Butler

In your time in the Pacific—and you may have more time in the Pacific than any living general in the Army at this point, being a division commanding general for the 25th [Infantry Division], the US Army Pacific deputy commanding general, and now the commanding general of US Army Pacific—can you comment a little bit on some of the major efforts that USARPAC has undertaken that both deter and assure and a little bit about how they've evolved over the years as you've been working the problem set?

### Flynn

There's really three ways that we're going about our concept of operations out here in support of the Indo-Pacific Theater campaign and in support of the—I would just refer to them as the pillars of national defense strategy. The three ways are the Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center—so, this is the Army's newest combat training center. We stood it up a couple of years ago. We've always had one in Europe. We've had two in the continental United States. We never built one, but we have one now, and I credit the Army for making the investment in what was a lesser-than capability when I was out here as a two star. But now it is a Joint nationally certified training center by the Joint staff. It's got a Hawaii campus. Hawaii is a eight-island archipelago, tropic jungle surrounded by Joint forces. Multinational partners enjoy coming here and training because it looks a lot like Southeast Asia.

Jump up to the Alaska campus in Alaska with the Yukon and Donnelly training area and the airspace around that high altitude, mountainous, extreme cold weather surrounded by Joint assets (mostly in the air and land domain but [also] special operations, some Navy and some other Marine Corps and Coast Guard forces). But the fact of the matter is, these two campuses in Alaska and Hawaii under [Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center, or] JPMRC look just like the region.

There's a third like the JPMRC, which is the exportable version. We brought this exportable training center into Indonesia in '21 and '22 for Garuda Shield. We brought it into Talisman Sabre in Australia in '23, and we're bringing it into Balikatan and Salaknib in the Philippines in '24, in fact, just next month. So, JPMRC is the first way. What we do with this Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center is that we're generating readiness in the region, and then after we generate that readiness as a Joint force and with our allies and partners and the combined and multinational contributions, we then apply it in the region through the second way, which is Operation Pathways.

Operation Pathways, previously known as Pacific Pathways, which was three countries in three months, this is now the annual tying together of our operations, activities, and investments to really do three things: to create interoperability with our allies and partners and increased confidence in our relationship. The second aim of this is to increase Joint readiness because we're training forward as a Joint force. And then the third aim would be to deny key terrain to our adversaries. That's both human and physical terrain, so we can dominate the area and enhance and assure our allies and partners in the work that we're doing together to improve their positioning and improve their readiness.

\*\*\*\*\*

## GEN Charles A. Flynn and COL Rich Butler The Role and Impact of US Army Pacific in the Indo-Pacific Region

The second way, after generating readiness at home station in the combat training center of JPMRC, [is] we apply it in the region. And I believe that Operation Pathways, the second way, meets the very definition of campaigning, which is the logical and sequential arrangement of those [operations, activities, or investments, or] OAs in time and space to meet US national security objectives and those of our allies and partners; that is the very definition of what we aim to do with Operation Pathways as our campaigning effort forward in region.

And then that campaigning effort culminates in what we call the third way, [which] would be the Joint interior lines. And Joint interior lines are really creating positional advantage forward, building operational endurance in command and control, logistics, protection, [and] collection. And then [we engage] our ability to have staying power with our allies and partners to take time and space away from adversaries and to deter by denial, being in key positions—again, back to key terrain—to be able to prevent the adversary from threatening either people or land or borders, by ensuring and deterring, [and] working with our allies and partners in the region. So, a lot of gains have been made in all of these areas. I would add that this is a whole-of-government effort. No military posture is going to occur in region without the invitation and consent of our allies and partners in the region and without the great work of our Diplomatic Corps at the State Department, [which is] working with the host nations for each one of these countries to understand why that position matters and how we can enable our friends, allies, and partners in the region by those different positions.

So, those three ways—the Joint Pacific Multinational Readiness Center, Operation Pathways, and Joint interior lines—are really how we’re trying to achieve our operational approach here in the Indo-Pacific in support of the Combatant Commands Theater Campaign Plan and the *National Defense Strategy*.

### Butler

Sir, thanks. I think from a traditional Army perspective, we don’t think about the theater Army as the theater Army. We think of it in Army lanes more as the Army Service Component Command. But you’re describing an actual operational force in motion, campaigning each and every day. If you expand that to the Joint world, with the theater Joint Force Land Component Command concept, the idea that Army and Marines and [special operations forces, or] SOF on the ground are supposed to be working together to achieve those campaigning objectives, where do you think we are in that type of strategic use of Landpower, as well as are you seeing any reflections back from the [People’s Liberation Army, or] PLA or the [People’s Republic of China, or] PRC on the utility of strategic Landpower that we’re doing things in a campaigning way?

### Flynn

I have, probably best in another venue to go over, sort of reflections. I guess what I would say is this: The region, it actually speaks through its behavior, and what I have been seeing, particularly the last two years, is there’s an increased expression that each of the countries are offering, and that expression is their desire to participate in more multilateral, multinational training, exercises, and rehearsals that we’ve been doing here. Garuda Shield in Indonesia is a great example. One year it’s [the] US Army in Indonesia, the next year it’s 14 countries.

Talisman Sabre is another great example. Again, about a decade ago that was a US-Australian exercise. Now it’s got 15 nations, [including] the work going on between the US, Australia, Japan, Republic of Korea, and the

\*\*\*\*\*

## GEN Charles A. Flynn and COL Rich Butler The Role and Impact of US Army Pacific in the Indo-Pacific Region

Philippines in [command post exercises, or] CPXs like Yama Sakura—and I could go on and on. The fact of the matter is the region is actually speaking with their behaviors by increasing their desire to remain part of that network through these exercises. And why? Because they're concerned about the infringement upon their sovereignty. Those actions by the Chinese out here are actually creating conditions where the security partner of choice remains with the US, and this is an area that I think is really important for us to continue to mature, develop, and stay with each one of the nations. And of course, my contribution, or our contribution, through that is with their land forces. And their land forces [are] often not just the Army; it's the Army, it's the special operations forces, and even Marines, in some of these nations.

I guess the last point I'd make on this as another great example is the JPMRC—that exportable version. We didn't bring that exportable training center into Indonesia or Australia or the Philippines. Of course, Thailand wants this to come into their country, maybe in Cobra Gold next year. The Japanese and Koreans already had one, and we've linked up with them, but I think they turn to the US Army because they know we have these combat training centers and they've been crown jewels for us over half a century. And they've all attended either a school or they've gone to these training centers and, therefore, they see the value of it, and they are asking the US Army of the Pacific to help them design, develop, and create these combat training centers. I think those are really good examples, in very concrete ways, of how the region is speaking to US Army Pacific and, really, Indo-Pacific command.

### Butler

Just a quick follow up: Are you seeing the same sort of bounce in the foreign military sales and the use of US military equipment?

### Flynn

Yes, I would say that because of what's happened in Europe—I don't know if it's a lesson, but it's certainly an insight—is that the weapon systems that are being employed (and I'll just speak for the Army ones), the Army systems that are being used, work. And for the better part of a half century, one of the primary arms dealers out here in Asia has been Russia. I think they're beginning to realize, 1.) Their supply chains are gonna be interrupted by what the Russians are having to provide their own forces; and secondly, I think some of the performance of the weapons systems that the Russians have produced is lacking or wanting. And so, I think that that's beginning, and the region has taken notice of that. As a result, there is greater interest, and there are, in fact—and I won't go country by country—a number of countries that are investing in weapons systems that the United States produces.

And if I can, on this same point—so, there are three types of interoperability, there's human interoperability, there's technical interoperability, and there's procedural interoperability. And oftentimes, if those systems are there, this makes it much easier with technical and procedural interoperability when we share a common platform. And what I think the armies do a really good job of doing is advancing the human interoperability, the trust factor, so that when a system is shared, or when another country purchases a system that is like ours, then that just accelerates our ability to have all three of those types of interoperability increase the human, technical, and procedural aspects.

\*\*\*\*\*

## GEN Charles A. Flynn and COL Rich Butler The Role and Impact of US Army Pacific in the Indo-Pacific Region

### Butler

Sir, you've mentioned Russia a couple times—both the Ukrainian conflict and things going on here in the theater. How has your vision changed over the last couple years of how you see the [Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or] DPRK and the Russian threats layered in on top of the PRC threat we're talking about?

### Flynn

First of all, I take them for their word when they say, "No limits." I think it's imperative that we listen to what they're saying. I think the collaboration that is ongoing, and is now public, is concerning and it bears watching. But as I said earlier, I'm also encouraged by the increased cooperation amongst our allies and partners in the region. Of course, we can't take our eye off DPRK. We had a challenge in the '16-'17 timeframe, and that has not tapered off at all in the '21 through '24 time frame. I think that the concern is the rate by which Russia is and is attempting to regenerate. I think the exchange of materials between North Korea and Russia is concerning. But make no doubt about it, the pace and the speed and the advances that the PRC and the Chinese have made is exactly the one we need to be paying attention to, and it is the pacing threat as outlined in our national security documents. We need to be paying attention to that because their ability to do that—in fact, I think it's a 7.2 percent increase in their defense budget this year. And that's just what we know. That's what's publicly stated. I believe it's probably more than that. They're struggling a bit economically, yet they're putting [a] 7.2 percent increase in their defense budget, and their ability to produce at speed and at scale is really—it bears watching. And I won't go into numbers here, but when they're producing in one year what they produced in three years, that kind of generation of capability is why I say those three things that they have with interior lines, mass, and magazine depth is something that we have to do everything to slow down and disrupt.

### Butler

Yes, sir. Just one final question, and I think you partly got into it, was we're supposed to maintain a long-term focus on the pacing threat of the PLA and the Chinese Communist Party's army. With your strategic acumen, you've been focused on the Pacific, but you've also been the Army G-3/5/7, looking at global strategy planning and operations. How do we keep the focus right? And where do you see the risk in the problems that we see globally between Europe and the Horn of Africa and maintaining the Northeast Asia alliance system against the robust series of threats? How do you see that in terms of the risk calculus and an ends-ways-means balanced strategic application? Are we still learning what we need to do?

### Flynn

Having spent the last nearly a decade here and then my time in Washington, DC, I would just say that we have to recognize that we're in the middle of an infinite game here, and it's gonna require us to focus each and every day and make some hard choices. I think that continuity out here matters—continuity of leadership, continuity of concepts [and] a focused effort on the long game and being able to slow the clock down, maintain the balance and the peace, [and] create unified action across the region. I always express that the collective commitment and unity out here in the region against insidious, incremental, and irresponsible behavior of adversaries—and there

## GEN Charles A. Flynn and COL Rich Butler The Role and Impact of US Army Pacific in the Indo-Pacific Region

are a number of them, China being the one we have to pace off of—is why we have to do the work that we’re doing every day.

I’m actually encouraged by the consistency between multiple administrations about the focus in the Indo-Pacific and the focus on Asia because of the leadership role that the United States plays. So, I’m actually encouraged by what we have been doing, but I will also tell you that we have to maintain the long game here and focus, and, as you know, that can be challenging sometimes because of the global commitments that the United States has.

Look what’s happening in Europe. Look what’s happening in the Middle East. We’ve got, obviously, a challenge now in the Caribbean, in Haiti. There’s all these things that come with great responsibilities of the United States, and balancing all that will be a challenge. But I would say down at my level, at the Army level—US Army in the Pacific—I’m very encouraged by the things that we’ve been doing out here. Army Futures Command just did their Project Convergence, which was focused on the Pacific. Army Materiel Command is standing up a contested logistics cross-functional team. [Training and Doctrine Command, or] TRADOC has basically changed their [professional military education, or] PME, they’re changing the training centers, they’re changing the education platforms, they’re creating the [opposing force, or] OPFOR, they’re creating, basically, a threat study of the PLA. And then [Forces Command, or] FORSCOM is committed to doing more emergency deployment readiness exercises in the region—we just did one last year to Korea.

And then you look at like even the [Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore, or] JLOTS rehearsal that we did during Talisman Sabre with that asset, which is actually a combination of assets that we had in the Pacific and over on the East Coast. Now that asset is being mobilized and going to be deployed into support operations in Gaza. I don’t want to take credit for it, but I’ll give ourselves credit for having at least done a rehearsal on another continent called Australia. And now they’re gonna generate that capability to go support operations in the Middle East.

So again, these are really important parts of the story where the United States Army is really weighting their efforts into the Indo-Pacific. And as I said, the US Army of the Pacific plays a central role in binding together the foundational capabilities that only the Army provides through its Army support to other services and executive agency requirements, which are greater in the Army alone than all the other services and [Defense Logistics Agency, or] DLA put together. So, when there is a challenge with command and control, protection, sustainment, collection, and support to other services—and for that matter, support to other allies and partners where the services and the Joint force have to come together—the Army is going to be the backbone or the linchpin of that work that has to happen. So, this is an important role that we play out here, and our ability to do that, [and] at the same time be able to provide fires and maneuver to do sea control [and] sea denial from the land, and be able to sea sense, make sense and understand for the Joint force from the land into the air and maritime littorals, I think that’s a vitally important role for us to be playing out here.

### **Butler**

Sir, thank you very much for your time, the energy you put into the Indo-Pacific and the Army writ large, and also the energy you pumped into the stand up of the China Landpower Studies Center. We’re underway and making way, if I can borrow a Navy term.

\*\*\*\*\*

## GEN Charles A. Flynn and COL Rich Butler The Role and Impact of US Army Pacific in the Indo-Pacific Region

Sir, I'll give final word to you.

### Flynn

I'll use an Army term: You've crossed the line of departure/line of contact, and now you're making contact in the environment with the China Landpower Studies Center. So, thanks very much for what you and the team there are doing. This is another example of the contributions that the Army is making to focus not just our physical efforts but also our intellectual capital on this problem because it's a very, very complex part of the world, and it's a complex problem for us to have to solve. But we absolutely have to solve it as a nation, and we're gonna need to be together with the region to do that. So, thanks very much.

### Host

Thank you both so much for making time to record this podcast today.

For more Army War College podcasts on similar topics, check out [Decisive Point](#), [SSI Live](#), and [A Better Peace](#).

Listeners, you can find more CLSC content at [ssi.armywarcollege.edu/CLSC](https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/CLSC).

### Download this episode:

<https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/SSI-Media/Podcasts-Lectures-and-Panels/mod/66554/player/610/audio/80099>

\*\*\*\*\*

<https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/clsc-pod>



SSI Website



This Episode



CLSC Website