

## Barometer for Pacific Success

With numerous competing budget priorities, is the Pacific Partnership a good investment for the US military?

By **Eddie Walsh**  
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*In the last of a series of dispatches from Washington on the US military's role in the Pacific Partnership, ASEAN Beat writer Eddie Walsh looks at the how the programme evaluates mission success.*



Image Credit: US Navy

The Pacific Partnership 2011 is taking place just as a major beltway budget battle brews half a world away. With two ongoing wars to account for in addition to the **proposed \$530 billion defence budget**, the US Navy is no doubt aware of the need to demonstrate return on investment for every mission.

Prior to departure, US Navy Capt. Jesse A. Wilson Jr., who serves as mission commander of Pacific Partnership 2011, says his staff prepared a list of three key performance indicators (KPIs) for measuring success, namely whether the US Navy managed to:

- 1) Cooperate with host nations in addressing regional issues and strengthen US alliances and ability to work together.
- 2) Enhance military-non-governmental organization interoperability and capacity to provide humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR) by monitoring success or failure of mission execution and applying lessons learned to future missions.
- 3) Promote awareness of US, host nations and partner nations' commitment to security and stability in the region by conducting media analysis throughout the mission.

But while these KPIs provide a useful benchmark for Washington, Wilson acknowledges that they only reveal half the story. 'You can't place a price on developing trust and confidence and building the enhanced interoperability required to more effectively mitigate pain and suffering during a natural disaster when one occurs,' he says.

The Tohoku earthquake and tsunami in Japan in March underscore this point. According to the US Navy, the Pacific Partnership mission's emphasis on readiness and training, coupled with interoperability experience gained through real world exercises, enabled US military personnel who came to Japan's aid 'to execute HA/DR in times such as these to

mitigate pain and suffering to the greatest extent possible.' In addition, many civilians and military personnel from previous Pacific Partnership programmes responded to the Haiti and Japan disasters, including all the Japan Maritime Defence Service personnel on the JDS Kunisaki, which participated in last year's Partnership programme in Vietnam and Cambodia.

It's clear, then, that the true measure of PP11's success lies not in today's accomplishments, but rather in tomorrow's possibilities, making it hard to really judge the return on investment for the US taxpayer. Still, while the US military may maintain a preference for long-term performance monitoring for military humanitarian aid missions, the political realities of defines spending require 'narratable' wins during the mission's time at sea.

With this in mind, the US Navy is keen to point to accomplishments in the first few port calls:

- 1) The mission represents the first naval exercise between the United States and New Zealand since New Zealand declared itself nuclear free in 1985;
- 2) The mission demonstrated for the first time that a New Zealand Landing Craft Medium could dock inside a US Amphibious Transport Dock ship and transfer stores and personnel to support an HA/DR mission;
- 3) The US ambassador has been secured and will be directly involved in 4/5 mission countries; linking the mission with larger diplomatic objectives such as promotion of rule of law and good governance.

Wilson believes that the mission's true value to taxpayers will grow as time goes on. In the meantime, these mission wins will have to suffice in sustaining continued support for the Pacific Partnership.