

The Key Role of Exercises and Training Ranges

The recent search for the missing Malaysian airliner reminds us of the challenges of operating in the vast region of the Pacific Ocean. This area covers so much of the earth's surface, and with its thousands of islands, presents a tapestry of operational complexity. **This is no place for amateurs!**

When U.S. Admiral Nimitz, a character in *Neptune's Inferno: The U.S. Navy at Guadalcanal* by James D. Hornfischer (2011), confronted last century challenges, he identified a core lesson for this century's Pacific warriors. "Having confronted the Imperial Japanese Navy's skill, energy, persistence, and courage, Nimitz identified the key to victory: 'training, TRAINING and M-O-R-E T-R-A-I-N-I-N-G'" wrote Hornfischer.

The U.S. and its core allies are shaping new capabilities to deal with the various threats and challenges in the Pacific in the time of the Asian century. Flexibility in operations, and agility in inserting force with a proper calibration of effect will be enhanced as new systems come on line in the years ahead. But these systems will have the proper effect only in the hands of skilled warriors. And in this century, this will mean not only the U.S. training effectively but doing so from the ground up with its core allies and partners. The U.S. Marine Corps, for instance, is in the process of shaping a distributed laydown strategy. Such an approach is a key element of shaping the deterrence in depth strategy in the Pacific, and a fundamental element in building out an effective partnership strategy and capability in the region.

The distributed laydown began as a real estate move from Okinawa to Guam, but under the press of events and with the emergence of partnering opportunities, it has become something quite different. It is now about re-shaping and re-configuring the USMC presence within an overall joint force strategy, and with a focus on enabling coalition capabilities.



PHOTO: MCPL MARC-ANDRÉ GAUDREAU, CAF COMBAT CAMERA

The distributed laydown fits the geography of the Pacific and the evolving partnership dynamics in the region. The Pacific is vast, with many nations and many islands. The expeditionary quality of the

USMC – which is clearly evolving under the impact of new aviation and amphibious capabilities – is an excellent fit for the island component of the region.

What the Marines are doing is also congruent with what the USAF is doing in the Pacific. Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) is shaping its own approach to distributed operations, and is charged with working integrated air and missile defense whereby various Army, Navy, USAF and allied systems are integrated to provide enhanced capabilities to operate in a deterrence mode to deal with China and North Korea.

Other aspects of the U.S. approach follow similar trend lines, and it is through exercises and training that a 21st century force is emerging. General Carlisle, the PACAF Commander and the next Air Combat Command Commander, coined the term "places not bases" as his command's way of discussing working with partners and allies throughout the region, providing logistical support and coordinated capabilities that allow the U.S. and allied partners to work together in a variety of contingencies.

The wide-ranging exercise regime is clearly part of this effort, as exercises provide the opportunity to test and enhance logistical and support approaches as well as to shape convergent con-ops where appropriate.

Equally important are the modernizations being pursued by key allies in the region. Australia, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore are all expanding the reach and integration of those forces. For instance, air tanker modernization, being pursued by all four powers, is an expression of enhanced reach, range, and sustainability of their forces. Aegis ships are being added, new submarines, new amphibious ships and capabilities, new frigates, enhanced air and sealift capabilities are all being added with the clear strategic objective to have a more effective national force that can reach further out to protect national interests.



U.S. NAVY PHOTO: MC3 RYAN J. MAYES

Nature abhors a vacuum, and if you are not present you are absent. Building out core working relationships fills a significant power void, which could otherwise be

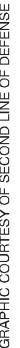


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But the approach is changing. One senior member of the PACAF staff put it this way during an interview: “We are going beyond a hub and spoke, bilateral exercise approach to a multilateral approach. The purpose is not just to meet

There is another aspect to the centrality of exercises in shaping 21st century capabilities: core allies are adding new systems and capabilities. How will these work together in the period ahead? Will multiple sum force gains be achieved?



RIMPAC 2012 – Coalition members of the Combined Forces Maritime Component at the Pacific Warfighting Center, Ford Island, Pearl Harbor.

The answer, in part, is to leverage an exercise regime to add in the force re-shaping process. For example, the Cope North exercise held in Guam began as a US-Japanese exercise. Now the Australians are core participants, and other countries are being invited to the Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HA/DR) parts of the exercise as well. And it should be noted that the PRC is being invited to exercises like RIMPAC to engage in HA/DR training for the goal is to promote compliance with international norms and laws, not simply preparing for high end military missions. As one participant from the PACAF staff noted:

“At this year’s Cope North the South Koreans came with their CN-235s to participate as well as the Kiwis from New Zealand and Filipinos as observers. Such participation provides a solid basis for expanding their roles as appropriate.”

Another aspect has been illustrated by the evolution of Red Flag. According to a PACAF staff member: “Our role as a facilitator is growing in broadening the engagement opportunities for allies to work together. A good image of the change is that an Aussie Wedgetail was doing Command and Control for US, Japanese and South Korean jets at the recent Red Flag exercise. And, for the first time, South Korean jets crossed through Japanese air space to come to fly with the participants in Red Flag.”

The process of preparing for an exercise regime is part of the outcome as well. The USAF sits down with counterparts and sorts out a 3-5 year plan for specific national exercise participation. Through that process the partner nation can sort out

its way ahead with regard to the operations of its forces and the USAF understands better where that partner is headed as well.

In other words, exercises fit the nature of the region well, in that the U.S. is the core bilateral partner to many states in the region. Exercises allow other partners to join in without hosting permanent U.S. bases. As one participant put it: “We don’t want to be parked throughout the region; and our partners do not necessarily want us to be either.” In a world where “places not bases” is a key focus, bilateral and multilateral exercises become a means to an end: shaping real deterrent capabilities with enhanced crisis response readiness.

Notably, the U.S. is expanding training ranges on Guam and in the Mariana Islands. This expansion of capabilities will allow the Pacific allies to come and work with the U.S. as well to shape convergent capabilities in a setting where domestic sensitivities back home can be respected.

A key aspect of the change in the decade ahead is the coming of the F-35

Pacific fleet. All three US power projection forces, plus Australia, Japan, South Korea and Singapore – all F-35 partners – will work through ways to take a common fleet and make it a core foundational element for the next surge in national, joint and coalition capabilities.

“It will be significant,” replied General Carlisle when asked about the impact of a fleet of allied and U.S. F-35s for a Commander of PACAF a decade out. “Instead of thinking of an AOC, I can begin to think of an American and allied CAOC (Combined Air Operations Center). By sharing a common operating picture, we can become more effective tactically and strategically throughout the area of operations.”

Exercises are already a key part of enhanced the system of systems approach to missile defense whereby Patriots, Thaad and Aegis are forged into a convergent capability. This evolving sensor / shooter relationship being forged in missile and air defense will provide a useful template for enhancing the impact of the



July 2012 – U.S. Landing Craft Air Cushion 32, assigned to Assault Craft Unit 5, departs for amphibious assault ship USS Essex during the RIMPAC 2012 exercise.

May 2014
U.S. Pacific Air Force
F-16 Demonstration Team
at Misawa Air Base, Japan.



U.S. AIR FORCE PHOTO: STAFF SGT. MARIE BROWN

F-35 Pacific fleet as a distributed force of flying combat systems as well.

In other words, shaping an integrated enterprise via the integration of Patriots, Aegis and THAAD is already underway. For example, a recent U.S.-Japanese joint exercise worked directly on the integration piece for air and missile defense. With significant Japanese investments in such systems, this is an obvious step forward. South Korea is an obvious player as well, with their Patriot and Aegis systems, and with the Australians buying Aegis and F-35's, they will be players as well in the future.

General Carlisle sees the approach getting better over time as new systems come

to the Pacific, including a fleet of allied and American F-35s. "We need to get better at attack operations to take out the shooter. How do we do that better? It is clear that an F-35 fleet coupled with the new long range strike systems will play a key role in that function. We also need to shape game changers in terms of the missiles used to intercept missiles."

It is clearly understood by the US and allied forces in Pacific that collaborative efforts and effective joint forces do not happen by chance; you train to gain your tactical and strategic advantages. And this training will occur on the Pacific ranges going from the Arctic to Australia.

Lieutenant General "Guts" Robling, the MARFORPAC Commander, summed it up well: "The enhanced capabilities our partners are building through both training and hardware procurement will enable each of them to address individual security challenges while also providing us opportunities for partnerships that will naturally create a deterrence that covers large expanses of this large region. The focus is not just on separate ground, naval and air forces but convergent capabilities to serve our national and coalition needs." **FL**

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