

A new wargame tells airmen what it will take to hold the line in the Far East.



PACAF's "Vision"

USAF photo by MSgt. Kevin J. Gruenwald

Thing

By Richard Halloran

Pacific Air Forces has begun to forge a doctrine of AirSea Battle with the intent of deterring any Chinese, North Korean, or Russian military aggression in Asia and the Pacific. The doctrine is in its early stages of development, and initial findings are being drawn from a two-phase wargame called Pacific Vision, held in October.

Pacific Vision's first phase looked out to 2016, and was centered on Air Force operations. This wargame focused on the weapons, bases, and combat forces that PACAF already had on hand.

The second phase looked out to 2028 and included naval aviators and submariners from the US Navy as well as a contingent from Australia's armed forces. In this phase, officers taking part in the exercise brainstormed a series of alternate

futures. Of particular interest was one scenario that the planners called "Dr. Strangelove's World."

Gen. Carrol H. Chandler, who commands PACAF from its headquarters at Hickam AFB, Hawaii, said, "Pacific Vision provided ... a foundational assessment of where we are and what we need in the Pacific."

Col. Martin Neubauer, the command's director of intelligence, added, "The easiest way to guarantee an undesirable future is to refuse to think about it." Neubauer ran the game.

In the first phase of the wargame in early October, the airmen concluded that US airpower would be sufficient to defeat a "near-peer competitor" in the Asia-Pacific region over the next seven years—provided the United States adopted a strategy of dispersal and made certain critical force investments.

For the "near-peer competitor" in Pacific Vision, read "China"—but Air Force officers cautioned that the main adversary in the Far East could be a resurgent Russia. In any case, the wargame was intended

not only to test strategic plans but to help prevent any miscalculation of US power and intentions, a priority for American commanders in the region.

Chandler said in an interview that he asked his staff "to look at what we think we need to carry out our mission, particularly when we have finite resources."

The Air Force's internal results didn't mesh with the media's first take on this issue. In contrast to PACAF's assessment that it could realistically expect to defeat a serious foe through 2016, a contemporaneous RAND study, widely cited in the press, claimed that US airpower in the Pacific would be inadequate to thwart a Chinese attack on Taiwan in 2020.

Virtually all analysts believe a battle over Taiwan, the island claimed by China but informally allied with the US, is the most likely cause of hostilities between the US and China. RAND analysts took part in the Pacific Vision wargame, but PACAF officers said that the wargame and the RAND study were actually not connected. RAND's analysis also included



Left: A B-52 deployed to Andersen AFB, Guam. Above: (l-r): Gen. Carrol Chandler, PACAF commander, Gen. Arthur Lichte, AMC commander, and Gen. Bruce Carlson, then AFMC commander, review notes before a meeting.

future capabilities and a somewhat longer time horizon.

In Pacific Vision's first phase, a Red Team played the near-peer competitor and was instructed to "play dirty." This meant that these adversaries were to employ Chinese weapons, communications, and tactics to the fullest, with little consideration to training, maintenance capabilities, and political constraints.

Two Blue Teams, reflecting PACAF as it exists today and will be by 2016, were engaged. After two days, they were "reset" to run the game again with what they had learned. (In effect, that gave evaluators four sets of conclusions.)

PACAF's officers immediately determined that Washington should disperse its fighter, bomber, and tanker forces well before the start of hostilities. These assets, they said, should be redeployed on an

arc ranging from Alaska in the north to Australia in the south, with intermediate bases in Japan, South Korea, Guam, and Southeast Asia. This, they said, would complicate and frustrate any adversary's targeting.

Force Projection Needs

That, in turn, underscored the need for ready American access to bases for forward deployment, and for intensification of efforts to cultivate good political relationships with the nations along that arc.

Chandler said Pacific Vision "clearly drove home the importance of ensuring access to airfields around the Pacific Rim. You cannot 'surge' engagement, and we must ensure our ability to project airpower from forward bases in the region."

That means, among other things, strengthening relations with treaty allies in Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, and Australia—each of which could impose political constraints to curtail US freedom to operate.

The same would be true of friendly nations, such as Singapore, with which the US lacks a defense treaty. Still other nations, like India and Indonesia, are already being cultivated by the US but are not yet ready to "sign on" as friends or military partners.

Vietnam presents an intriguing case. The nation was, of course, engaged in military hostilities with the US, in one form or another, from 1954 through 1975. Still, it harbors long-standing animosities toward China.

Toucheiest of all is the case of Taiwan, situated just 100 miles off the coast of China. It is already the target of more than 1,000 Chinese missiles and is vulnerable to bomber attack, so relying on Taiwan as a potential base of operations does not make much strategic sense.

The Navy's aircraft carriers and submarines armed with cruise missiles would need to be dispersed like the land-based aircraft, but more needs to be done to integrate these vessels into war plans, said PACAF officers.

Pacific Vision emphasized the need to harden hangars, command posts, electrical plants, ammunition depots, and supply warehouses to withstand attack. This is particularly true on Guam, which is being built up as a critical forward base.

Below: The carrier USS Ronald Reagan and two ships of its battle group cruise on a mission in the South Pacific.





USAF photo by A1C Jonathan Steffen

An F-22 Raptor assigned to Elmendorf AFB, Alaska, takes on fuel from a KC-135 Stratotanker from the Alaskan Air National Guard's 168th Air Refueling Wing. Alaska-based forces are crucial to US power in the Pacific.

Moreover, said PACAF planners, crews equipped and trained to repair damaged bases should be positioned to move quickly to wherever they are needed. Runways, for instance, would need to be repaired within hours. Because of long distances in the Pacific, more tankers are required to support combat operations than were needed in Europe to deter the Soviet Union.

The wargame also validated the advantages of the stealth technology that permits B-2 bombers and F-22 fighters to evade radar detection. "We are sure that we can shoot them before they can see us," said one officer.

Even so, the game also underscored the vulnerability of unprotected commercial communications channels on which the Air Force relies. China demonstrated its anti-satellite capability by knocking out an inactive satellite with a missile in 2007. Few expect China to hold back in the event of a shooting war.

Pacific Vision confirmed the need for greater numbers of Global Hawks, the large unmanned reconnaissance airplanes that can survey 40,000 square miles a day in all weather. The first of three Global Hawks to be based on Guam will arrive on the scene next year.

Officers also discovered that the US has lagged in cyber warfare, from jamming enemy radar to attacking computer

networks, as well as protecting US radars and computers.

The 13th Air Force's air operations center at Hickam, which would coordinate an air war in Asia, has been up and running for two years but needs to improve controls over PACAF's dispersed forces.

In the second phase of Pacific Vision, the wargame's organizers asked the players to imagine the role of the US in the world 20 years hence. Scenarios included everything from the existence of a "Pax Americana" in which the United States dominated the political scene, to a return to the isolation of the 19th century with no alliances.

The future that got the most attention—the so-called Dr. Strangelove's World—was the least comfortable and perhaps most dangerous of the alternatives. It conjured up an America that was tired of war, having fought more or less continuously around the world since 1941 (World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Grenada, Lebanon, Panama, Persian Gulf, Somalia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, and Afghanistan). Its armed forces had long since been stretched to the breaking point, and the American people have

been fatigued by repeated economic crises, political divisions, and the continuing War on Terror.

"That's not where we want to be," said Neubauer. He emphasized the need to have plans to cope with war fatigue. "It's a bit like thinking about retirement," he said. "All the surprises will be bad if you don't have a plan."

This second phase, in which about 80 people took part, included the participation of some 25 naval officers, a handful of marines, and a few special operations forces. Some Australians were assigned to a Green Team alongside the two Blue Teams. The Australians, who work hard to maintain their alliance with the US, "forced the Americans to articulate what most of us had taken for granted," Neubauer said. Americans had assumed that open ocean surveillance by aircraft would be a naval mission. The Australians didn't see that as obvious, and pointed out that this is a Royal Australian Air Force mission for them.

That drove a discussion on "who does what and where" that forced everyone participating in the wargame to discuss the best ways to divide responsibilities in a joint operation.

When it was over, the PACAF staff set about drawing up its conclusions and fashioning a framework for AirSea Battle. When the final findings from Pacific Vision have been sorted out, Chandler will take recommendations to Adm. Timothy J. Keating, who heads US Pacific Command at nearby Camp Smith in Honolulu.

If proposed force structure, basing, or policy changes pass muster there, they will go to the Air Force Chief of Staff, Gen. Norton A. Schwartz, and the Chief of Naval Operations, Adm. Gary Roughead, for approval before eventually being submitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Parallel to that, PACAF plans to submit its proposals to Andrew Marshall, the influential director of the Office of Net Assessment who advises the Defense Secretary directly. The ONA shop helped to finance Pacific Vision, and sent officers to Hawaii to take part.

"Maintaining security and stability in the Pacific requires constant preparation for potential threats and crises," Chandler concluded. "That's what Pacific Vision was about." ■

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