

Hawk's World

By Richard Halloran

A lot has changed in PACAF over the last 10 years. A lot more will change over the next 10.



When Gen. Herbert J. Carlisle assumed command of Pacific Air Forces in August 2012, he made his priorities clear: Bolster military-to-military engagements in the Asia-Pacific region; integrate air and missile defenses to confront expanding threats from China and North Korea; combat the tyranny of distance in the region by projecting American airpower and reach; and take care of airmen.

In less than a year, “we’ve made some great progress,” said Carlisle in an interview at JB Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii.

As the US retrenches its forces following more than a decade of war in Iraq and Afghanistan, it must rely more on allies and friends for the common defense. Carlisle said he wants to “broaden our robust ties with key allies and joint partners by establishing a multilateral training construct.” The goal is to “train like we intend to fight,” he added.

That will require cultivating an agile apparatus for command and control,

which Carlisle said “provides the backbone of our success.” He has called for command relationships that provide clear lines of communications tailored to the mission plus systems that ensure continued operations in contested environments.

Completing this list of priorities is the vital task of nurturing resilient airmen. Carlisle emphasized: “Airmen are the critical enabler.” The general, known to most by his call sign “Hawk,” seeks an increased awareness of the Asia-Pacific strategy and plans to reward bold leadership at all levels.

Even with these operating instructions, Carlisle asserted, the \$1.3 trillion budget shortfall facing the armed forces over the next 10 years “will fundamentally change what we do and how we do it.” Pacific Air Forces has taken its fair share of hits in operation and maintenance funding as the Air Force attempts to navigate recent budgetary turmoil, but unlike other major commands, its flying hours have largely been protected because of increasing threats from North

Korea and the planned strategy shift to the Asia-Pacific, said Carlisle.

“There is never enough money, manpower, or time. One of those three is always falling out of place,” he said.

Air Force leadership has said the service will need to chop 200,000 flying hours from the force for the remainder of Fiscal 2013, yet PACAF’s flying hours remain mostly intact.

Air Combat Command, on the other hand, has already started standing down more than a third of its fighter and bomber units. In addition, Red Flag, and many other major exercises throughout the Department of Defense, have been canceled.

Of the 17 USAF squadrons grounded by budget issues, only one from PACAF has stopped flying: the 18th Aggressor Squadron at Eielson AFB, Alaska. Grounding that squadron, which flies F-16s in Red Flag-Alaska exercises as enemy aviators, saves the Air Force the immediate fuel and maintenance costs of flying 18 F-16s plus three backup fighters. It also helps cut the costs of

An F-16 in aggressor markings flies an air-to-air combat mission during Cope North near Andersen AFB, Guam, in February, before sequestration forced USAF to cancel some other major exercises.



USAF photo by SrA. Matthew Bruch



A pilot with the 25th Fighter Squadron prepares to take off in an A-10 from Osan AB, South Korea. PACAF's flying hours have largely been protected because of increasing threats from North Korea.

moving other squadrons and support units from their home bases to Alaska to participate in a Red Flag drill.

Terminating the exercise has some clear costs, however. For example, many Air Force fighter units in South Korea rely on a trip to Red Flag-Alaska to keep their skills sharp, as there are limited opportunities for realistic combat training on the Korean peninsula.

The suspension also means USAF, Navy, and Marine Corps aviators are denied vital training. Equally important, in the eyes of PACAF planners, is the fact that airmen from allied and friendly nations have been turned away, a move that has weakened PACAF's engagement with other air forces, directly counteracting one of Carlisle's initial priorities.

British and Canadian forces were scheduled to participate in the two-week Red Flag-Alaska exercise before it was canceled.

The 18th Aggressor Squadron also is caught up in another issue with wide implications: the consolidation of units to cut costs. These proposed moves have aroused fierce opposition from lawmakers and the surrounding communities, due to the potential loss of jobs and income.

PACAF has proposed moving the aggressor squadron from Eielson, near Fairbanks, to Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage. The proposed relocation would mean removing 623 military personnel from Eielson, transferring 542 positions to Elmendorf, and eliminating 81 positions altogether. The Air Force has also proposed cutting an additional 749 military and 179 civilian positions at Eielson, saying they are no longer needed for operations there.

The planned reductions came in response to mandates from Congress; however, they drew immediate and vocal opposition from the Alaska delegation on Capitol Hill, led by Democratic Sen. Mark Begich, and from the Alaskan state government, led by Gov. Sean Parnell (R).

AirSea Battle

Another consolidation has also proved more difficult than expected: Folding 13th Air Force into PACAF's headquarters. Realigning the numbered air force has turned out to be a significant challenge. In 2011, USAF ordered 13th AF to be stitched into Pacific Air Forces to reduce duplication and to turn PACAF into a warfighting command.

Officials have met some resistance as they seek to meld 13th AF's operational

staff into PACAF's command staff, which is charged with organizing, training, and equipping forces for US Pacific Command operations.

Under the new organization, Lt. Gen. Stanley T. Kresge, the former 13th AF commander, has become the PACAF vice commander.

As PACAF looks ahead to 2023, it is entering a new era in its area of responsibility. In Washington, President Barack Obama's second term promises to be substantially different from the first term in policy toward Asia. It will be fashioned by newly appointed Cabinet officers—Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, Secretary of State John F. Kerry, and Director of Central Intelligence John O. Brennan. Even so, Carlisle contended, "I don't think there is anybody in the United States who doesn't recognize the importance of the Asia-Pacific region." Therefore, he said of the "pivot" or "rebalance" toward Asia, "I do think it will endure."

The general also said efforts to develop AirSea Battle (ASB), which is intended in part to counter China's extensive air defenses, would "endure."

An early version of ASB came out of a PACAF wargame seven years ago. Carlisle, who served as the commander of 3rd Wing at Elmendorf and as Air Force's A-3 from 2011 to 2012, pushed the concept along in Washington.

During a trip in April to Japan, South Korea, and China, Kerry sought to reassure Asian allies and friends that the US remained committed to the security of Asia. "Some people might be skeptical of America's commitment to this region," he said in a speech in Tokyo. "Well, let me be clear: President Obama made a smart



A1C Stephen Zbinovec (center) helps marshal a Japanese F-15J Eagle on the flight line at Andersen Air Force Base during the exercise Cope North.



SSgt. Jennifer Koontz checks the oil of a “jammer” at Osan AB, South Korea. Secretary of State John Kerry insists the US remains committed to the region’s security.

and a strategic commitment to rebalance our interests and investments in Asia. My commitment to you is that as a Pacific nation that takes our Pacific partnership seriously, we will continue to build on our active and enduring presence.”

Similarly, Deputy Secretary of Defense Ashton B. Carter has sought to reaffirm US commitments in Asia. In an address at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank, Carter said he had recently gone to Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Indonesia “to make sure that our forces, our allies, and our partners in the region understand that we are serious about our defense commitments there—that we are going to walk the walk, not just talk the talk.” He added, “It’s important to point

out how much time, energy, and intellectual capital, as well as resources, we are investing in our rebalance to Asia.”

China Seeking Sphere of Influence

Skeptics, however, abound.

They point out that two of the architects of the Obama “pivot” to Asia, previous Secretary of State Hillary R. Clinton and Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt M. Campbell have left office. The President’s national security advisor, Thomas E. Donilon, who led White House staff efforts on the pivot, has resigned.

In this uncertain era unfolding in Asia, new governments have taken over in China and North Korea, both potential adversaries. If precedent holds, both na-

tions’ governments will still be around 10 years from now, making long-range planning somewhat easier.

Carlisle was quick to assert that military-to-military and particularly air force-to-air force relations with Japan, Thailand, and India were in good shape despite often-troubled political relations. When the earthquake and resulting tsunami struck Japan in March 2011, for instance, US Pacific Command and PACAF personnel and aircraft began working with the Japan Self-Defense Forces within hours. Carlisle and other senior US officers credited the mission’s success to the enduring US-Japan military collaboration.

During Cope Tiger 13, USAF pilots from the 44th Fighter Squadron at Kadena AB, Japan, and the 25th Fighter Squadron at Osan AB, South Korea, trained with aviators from Thailand and Singapore at Korat Royal Thai Air Base in central Thailand. Last year, USAF pilots flew with and against Indian Air Force pilots flying Su-30 and other Russian-built aircraft in the Cope India exercise. Leaked reports suggested that the Americans were surprised by some of the capabilities of the Russian aircraft and impressed with the skill of the Indian pilots.

On competition between the US and China for influence in Asia, Carlisle said every Asian nation has some sort of political relations with both. But he contended that the US seeks an open international system while China seeks to forge a sphere of influence. He agreed with US political leaders, diplomats, and military officers who contend that the US should not ask Asians to choose between America and China. And he applauded the Southeast Asian diplomat who asserted that, as a general rule, Asian nations want the US “to be on tap, but not on top.”

However, Carlisle looked back a tad wistfully, saying: “We can’t do today what we could do in 2003” because of budget constraints and numerous deployments supporting US Central Command operations that took place in the ensuing years.

Then he brightened and quoted from Winston Churchill, Britain’s famous prime minister: “Gentlemen, we have run out of money. Now we have to think.” ■

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Gen. Herbert Carlisle (in window) and Maj. David Morales tour a train that delivers coal to the central heating and power plant at Eielson AFB, Alaska. Red Flag-Alaska, a multilateral exercise held at the base annually, has been canceled.