

The Pacific



At AFA's Pacific Air & Space Symposium, top USAF officials touted the increasing need for engagement across the Asia-Pacific region.

THE Pentagon is adjusting to the reality that the budget sequester mandated by the 2011 Budget Control Act—with perhaps some minor changes—will roll right on into 2014 and quite possibly continue for the remainder of the 10-year law.

Given all the rapidly evolving parts of US military strategy, the timing couldn't be worse.

The military services are grappling with how to shift away from counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan to a renewed focus on the Asia-Pacific region. That shift demands close cooperation with allies, but funds for joint exercises and partnership activities are evaporating. Longtime US military strengths are being challenged or denied by emerging and re-emerging powers in the region, and the potential is rising that a number of long-simmering territorial or political disputes there could boil over into armed conflict.

These warnings, issued by Air Force officials at the vanguard of the “rebalance,” as well as senior space and cyber officials and industry representatives, resonated throughout the Air Force As-

sociation's Pacific Air & Space Symposium in Los Angeles, held in November.

Speakers at the symposium noted that the US shift to the Pacific, toward fulfilling the 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance, parallels rising tensions between some Asian countries. China's increasing military capabilities worry American allies and potential partners, as the People's Liberation Army openly challenges key US advantages in air, space, and cyberspace.

New and Creative Models Needed

Missile technology is proliferating across the region, sparking heightened US interest in integrated air and missile defenses in the theater. China and others are pursuing counterspace capabilities, such as jammers and even anti-satellite programs, and many state-sanctioned hackers are aggressively probing US networks daily, senior space officials said.

“Some of the most active of [cyberspace actors], frankly, are in the Pacific,” said Gen. William L. Shelton, commander of Air Force Space Command.

USAF is adopting a “defense-in-depth” strategy, consolidating its network and adopting more safeguards

and process improvement tools, but in cyberspace, the target is always moving.

“The price of admission in the cyber domain is so low; it's a laptop, an Internet connection, and you are a rifleman,” Shelton said. “We are good in the cyber domain. But so are others.”

In the aviation arena, senior leaders stressed staying power and presence—especially regarding the rotation of US forces in and out of the region.

Pacific Air Forces officials insisted no more major garrisons will be established to support US forces in Asia for the foreseeable future. Continuing fiscal pressure on force structure demands that new and creative models for military presence must be explored with allies both old and new.

PACAF speakers drew a dour distinction between physical engagement and presence versus “virtual presence,” arguing that real-life coalition exercises of everything from high-intensity air combat to humanitarian relief operations pave the way for future success.

Eric Fanning, then acting Secretary of the Air Force, said USAF is facing extraordinary circumstances in the next few fiscal years as it adjusts its posture, but

Abhors a Vacuum

By Marc V. Schanz, Senior Editor

An F-22 from JB Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, flies off the wing of a KC-135 from Kadena AB, Japan, during Red Flag-Alaska in August.

USAF photo by SrA. Zachary Perras

doesn't yet know how much it will have to spend, or on what, or when such authorization might come.

"We won't be able to finalize that until we have a number," Fanning said. USAF and the other services have assembled budget building blocks ranging from the low option of a sequester budget and a high option based on President Barack Obama's submitted Fiscal 2014 budget. While Fanning doesn't think either extreme will end up as the agreed solution, the budget drills necessary to accommodate them have produced ugly choices. The Air Force is facing the possibility of cutting its ranks by an additional 25,000 airmen and divesting another 500 aircraft from its fleet.

Despite the near-paralysis of operating in what Fanning called a "quarterly execution loop" rather than an orderly appropriations process, he said discussions between the Office of the Secretary of Defense and USAF for the next five-year plan do offer some heartening trends. After the Air Force offered issue papers on the budget and the programs, a

number of core positions on key capabilities survived the review process between OSD, the other services, and the combatant commanders.

"I take it as a signal as to how strong we are" in the process, Fanning said. As the bills for unmet aviation needs stack up from across the COCOMs, he said it is clear the larger military recognizes how important airpower is.

Given the anti-access, area-denial issues in the Pacific and challenges that are "different from the conflicts we are in now, and the massive geographic spread of that region," Fanning said, "it's clear that our ability to see what's going on, through space, through cyber and [intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance], and our ability to move

quickly and great distances is very valuable in this rebalance."

Recent events clearly demonstrated the importance of airpower for the US and its allies. The US quickly responded to the catastrophic Typhoon Haiyan with disaster relief to the Philippines, chiefly by air. It also seemingly quelled North Korea's mounting bellicosity of early 2013 with the long-range flight of B-2



USAF photo by TSgt. Kristine Dreyer

bombers from Whiteman AFB, Mo., to South Korea. Both high-visibility events demonstrated USAF's ability to move quickly and influence events beyond kinetic operations, showing how frequently USAF is called to act in crisis—and to avert escalation.

According to speakers, the US Pacific Command chief, Adm. Samuel J. Locklear III, is pushing his component commanders toward a more operational footing, to prepare for operations ranging from nonconflict scenarios to continuous coalition action from the Korean Peninsula to a potential crisis in the Taiwan Strait.

Lt. Col. David A. Williamson, a B-2 and F-15C pilot and branch chief for operations force management on PACAF's staff, told attendees the command is taking a holistic approach to power projection in the theater, examining Phase Zero operations—those that shape the situation, or preconflict activities—and tracking how airpower is used to achieve PACOM's objectives and the effects it produces.

"Power projection is about intentionally influencing the theater," he said, noting that as he spoke, USAF C-130s and C-17s were ferrying relief supplies to the Philippines and transporting evacuees from the Leyte region.

Last summer, USAF tankers supporting South Korean and Japanese aircraft making their way to Alaska for Red Flag exercises combined several PACAF activities at once. "It is sometimes difficult to see where one

line of operation begins and another ends," Williamson observed, as the Red Flag example showed how theater security cooperation and power projection activities folded into one another.

Collaboration and innovation are common threads tying US and allied power projection capabilities in the coming years, several speakers said.

"Even the Navy guys will tell you, you can't do anything in a naval campaign without Air Force airpower," said PACAF chief Gen. Herbert J. "Hawk" Carlisle, calling out the examples of air refueling, long-range ISR support, and anti-submarine scenarios.

"It really is a team; you have to have both," he said.

Above: Airmen offload an MC-130H in November at Ormoc Arpt., Philippines. They were deployed there on a humanitarian mission in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan. Below: A USAF F-15C from Kadena AB, Japan, conducts tactical flight operations near Korat RTAB, Thailand, during Cope Tiger, a military-to-military exercise with Thailand and Singapore. Right: Technicians prepare USAF's third Advanced Extremely High Frequency satellite for launch in September. China and others are pursuing counterspace capabilities.





Lockheed Martin photo



USAF photo by Capt. Joshua Gunderson

the Air Force more than \$1.5 million a year.

Carlisle highlighted USAF Reservist Lt. Col. Kevin Sutterfield, who thought up the concept that became PACAF's "Rapid Raptor" expeditionary F-22 package: a four-ship of Raptors paired with a C-17, a forward air refueling point (FARP) kit, some munitions, and crew. The result is a tailored, flexible, and responsive fighter package that can move quickly across the theater, can land, rearm, and get back in the air in less than an hour.

"Think of an adversary out there thinking, 'Oh, they're at Andersen; oh, now they're at Kadana; oh, now they're at Chitose [AB, Japan]," Carlisle said. The demonstrated capability gives the PACOM commander another arrow in his quiver—useful for complicating a potential enemy's targeting and decision-making cycle.

The continuous bomber presence on Guam, one of PACOM's core power projection deployments, is approaching its 10th anniversary, Williamson said. (Within days of his comment, B-52s assigned to the mission carried out a training sortie in China's newly declared air defense identification zone—ADIZ—over international waters in the Pacific).

PACAF also provides the bulk of air-breathing ISR equipment rotating through the theater. These include Cobra Ball, Combat Sent, and Rivet Joint RC-135s, RQ-4 Global Hawks, U-2s, E-8 JSTARS, and other assets involved in a variety of exercises and engagements, he said. PACAF focuses these ISR rotations to be collaborative with its treaty allies in the Pacific—specifically, Australia, Japan, and South Korea—that are aiming to make better use of ISR in their own operations.

PACAF released a new strategic plan last summer, Carlisle said. It outlined three core objectives in the theater: expand engagement, increase combat capability, and improve combat fighter integration. To execute these tasks, PACAF is focused on refining roadmaps and plans in five key "lines of operations": theater security cooperation, integrated air and missile defense activity, power projection, "agile and flexible" command and control, and resilient airmen.

Chinese power projection and influence—and reactions to it—are creating sensitive problems for PACOM, from the South China Sea to the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea. These scenarios demand more command and control, especially after years of operating in an environment where

Carlisle praised the new US Pacific Fleet commander, Adm. Harry B. Harris Jr., for looking at new ways to meld allied militaries, USAF, and naval power across the theater.

"We're looking from subs to [Japanese F-2 fighters] to space-based capabilities," Carlisle said. "We are evolving AirSea Battle, putting it into operational use. . . . It's a collaboration that really works."

Rotating Through the Theater

Small innovations at the unit level are paying off. TSgt. Matthew Woodward, a maintainer at Andersen AFB, Guam, came up with a new approach to managing equipment for B-52 bomber rotations. His innovations helped shrink the footprint of the support deployment package from four C-17s to one, saving



USAF photo by A1C Ashley J. Thum

access and connectivity were deemed less important.

PACAF officials said they have a lot of work to do on flexible command and control—one of the reasons why it’s a central feature of the command’s new strategic plan.

“How do we solve the problem of an adversary actively attacking C2?” Carlisle asked.

“We want to be able to execute the commander’s intent, even if it is in a degraded environment for comms,” said Col. Douglas James, PACAF’s deputy assistant director of operations. Success in a coalition—in scenarios where integrated air and missile defense could come into play—means C2 processes must be exercised. Next month, PACAF will host a theaterwide conference in Hawaii to discuss some of the hard questions surrounding command and execution, James added.

Potential flashpoints in the Asia-Pacific region demand that USAF think hard about survivability, resiliency, and attrition, even on orbit, Shelton said. The US is heavily dependent on space navigation, early warning, and other core capabilities, and no viable replacement will be available any time soon. Rather than give up and build “terrestrial options” based on land, Shelton said USAF should apply the same thinking to space challenges as it did to integrated air defenses.

To address that challenge, “what we did was build stealth, develop [electronic warfare],” Shelton said. “We looked at the problem from all sorts of different angles. ... We need that kind of thinking—what I would call fifth generation thinking—in the space business” and need to add “resiliency” to the mix.

America’s allies in the Asia-Pacific are watching China’s actions closely and adjusting their own security posture

accordingly. PACAF officials noted that cooperation with Japan—ranging from air defense coordination to renewed discussions of missile defense—has grown sharply in the last two years.

“I think they are better able to engage today, and be more assertive about engaging with other countries,” Brig. Gen. Jeffrey R. McDaniels, PACAF’s director of operations, said of increasing US-Japan cooperation.

Col. Daniel Wolf, chief of PACAF’s Advanced and Warfighter Integration Division, said PACAF’s cooperation with Japan has increased “significantly” in the last year, as the longtime US treaty ally adapts its defense and security activities to a more regional focus and seeks better day-to-day interoperability with US forces.

Expanding Bilateral Collaborations

Australia is also expanding its welcome of US rotational force visits to its facilities and is improving its infrastructure to accommodate them. In space, Shelton said AFSPC would move C-band radar from Antigua to Australia, to help upgrade Asia-Pacific monitoring capability and increase partnership opportunities with Australia. There are other opportunities to partner in space situational awareness activity, he added, and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency will soon move a telescope from New Mexico to Australia to help improve monitoring of geosynchronous orbit, where many of USAF’s most valuable assets operate.

Brian Woo, a former State Department foreign service officer now serving as Carlisle’s foreign policy advisor, said when he first joined PACAF’s command staff in 2007, he heard from officials across Asia that the US was “too interested in what was going on” in the region.

“We got the impression we were told to chill out and relax,” Woo said. “But in the last six years, the changes have been dramatic.”

PACAF officials said they’ve worked hard to expand traditional bilateral collaborations into more nuanced multilateral efforts (as with Guam’s Cope North), with special attention to improving communications and quick reaction military forces. KC-135s from Kadena AB, Japan, dragged Japan’s F-15Js and South Korea’s F-15Ks to Alaska for Exercise Red Flag 13-3, the first time South Korean and Japanese air forces trained together.

In addition to the historic fighter collaboration, Carlisle noted the exercise hosted three airborne command and control platforms simultaneously: Australia’s E-7 Wedgetail, USAF’s E-3 AWACS, and Japan’s E-767. The event emphasized the importance of coalition C2 operations.

“We had only done that once before,” he pointed out. “But practicing command and control in a battle environment like



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Left: A security forces airman spots simulated approaching opposition forces during a readiness exercise at Osan AB, South Korea. Below: US paratroopers and their Bangladeshi counterparts jump together from a USAF C-130 during the bilateral exercise Cope South in November. Bottom l-r: Lt. Col. Jeff Menasco, USMC Col. Brian Cavanaugh, Brig. Gen. James Hecker, and CMSgt. Baird Stiefel visit Clark AB, Philippines, to thank airmen and marines for providing humanitarian relief to the populace in the wake of a super-typhoon that devastated the country in November.

that is critical.” To successfully “put three C2 assets in the air, build the same battle picture, and have an effective fight, you have to practice it.”

Officials said theater security cooperation underpins US strategy in the Pacific. Relationships among allies and emerging partners aren’t simply diplomatic pleasantries; they are critical to asserting the interests of the US and its allies in such a massive theater, speakers said. If the US leaves a void in this regard, others will capitalize.

Carlisle frequently includes Russia’s military power in his briefings because there is a “significant amount” of Russian

contributions to Operation Damayan and Joint Task Force 505, providing humanitarian relief in conjunction with the Philippine armed forces and the US Agency for International Development.

Col. Marc Caudill, PACAF’s chief of exercises and readiness, said there are 19 PACOM-level exercise engagements that USAF forces in the Pacific support every year, one of them Exercise Balikatan in the Philippines.

“We do that every year, [and] it has really helped us propel to success” in Operation Damayan. “Without it, we would have been starting at ... zero,” he asserted.



USAF photo by Capt. Raymond Geoffroy



USAF photo

influence in the Pacific, from long-range strategic bomber operations around Japan’s northern islands to building ties with other Asian militaries. While some may observe a bipolar competition emerging between the US and China, Carlisle said Russia is putting much more emphasis on political and military relationships in Asia as well. The topic of Russian influence in the Pacific, and “how we will deal with it,” is a frequent topic of conversation between Carlisle, US Air Forces in Europe’s Gen. Frank Gorenc, and Supreme Allied Commander Europe Gen. Philip M. Breedlove, Carlisle said.

The importance of presence and regular training with allies was highlighted repeatedly during the symposium by multiple speakers who mentioned PACAF’s

Carlisle said the US relief effort was quick—participation wound down in late November.

The ability to live in the Pacific, to go forward to train from Japan to Indonesia, and then execute promptly when called on will make the difference in the coming years, just as it did in the Philippines, Carlisle insisted.

In the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan, the US response demonstrated American involvement and staying power in the region to other potential partners that may be worried about US commitment there.

“Our rebalance is working, but it’s an uphill battle,” Carlisle said. “It will work if we figure out a way to take care of these airmen and give them the tools to do the job we’ve given them.” ■