Old Sea Dogs In New Battles With Fancy Labels

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by Peter Hayes

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This article is an expanded version of a blog post by Peter Hayes on the same theme.

Nautilus invites your contributions to this forum, including any responses to this article.

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I. Introduction

Peter Hayes writes that the role of the Hawaii based CINCPAC, the commander-in-chief of the Pacific Command, "originated in the competition between the Navy (Admiral Nimitz, central Pacific) and the Army (General MacArthur, western Pacific) in the prosecution of the war against Japan." While today CINCPAC's role has been greatly diminished, the newly formed AirSea Battle Office fills a similar function. Hayes concludes that "old sea dogs are sailing into new geostrategic and bureaucratic battles in the west Pacific with fancy labels on them--but nothing new in terms of a strategy that would engage China as an equal partner in a concert rather than a balance of powers."

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II. Article

In his 2009 book *Does the Constitution Follow the Flag? The Evolution of Territoriality in American Law*.[1] Kal Raustiala argues that the US military are leading international rule-makers. Out of sheer necessity, they make many *de facto* legal arrangements with allies and host nations, and set standards that are applied across US military operations in the far flung archipelago of US facilities.

Just how many military-military agreements exist between host nations and the US military is startling. The 1985 USCINCPAC Inventory of Unpublished International Agreements[2] published digitally on September 4, 2012 as part of Nautilus' FOIA archive, contains a cumulative listing of hundreds of agreement, ranging from the most commonplace matters of fuel supply pipeline specifications to the transfer of Nike-Hawk missile technology to Japan.

In 1974, Franz Schurmann noted the *de facto* diplomatic power of CINCPAC, the commander-i--chief of the entire Pacific Command.[3] Based in Hawaii, this (always) Admiral was a powerful proconsul. In fact, CINCPAC was so important that many heads of state stopped in Hawaii to meet CINCPAC to prepare for meetings at the White House or the State Department when they reached Washington.

Indeed, CINCPAC's Directorate for Plans and Policy developed an overarching political-military strategy outlined in its *Multinational Strategy (MNS*),[4] now available at the Nautilus FOIA archive. This guidance translated national strategy into local practice for local commanders serving in PACOM jurisdiction—in those days, stretching from tip of South Africa all the way to the South and North Pacific and the west coast of the America's—nearly half the planet.

CINCPAC's role originated in the competition between the Navy (Admiral Nimitz, central Pacific) and the Army (General MacArthur, western Pacific) in the prosecution of the war against Japan. CINCPAC was to ensure that the four services coordinated their operations and developed common war-plans during the Cold War. Thus, for much of its history,[5] Pacific Command strove to channel competition between commands for military missions and turf into integrated strategy, and to overcome the inherent dynamic whereby the services and sub-unified commands would go their own way, always seeking to preserve their own domains—the army in Korea, the air force in Japan, the Marines in the Kanto Plains and Okinawa, and the navy in the entire Pacific and Indian Ocean—but especially in the Taiwan Straits and in the coastal zones of China and the former Soviet Union.

Often decisions were led more by bureaucratic political interest of services rather than political-military logic in confronting the primary security imperatives of the day—insurgencies in Southeast Asia, and prosecuting the Cold War. This complicated political-bureaucratic tale is traced in two accounts released by Nautilus from its FOIA archives, viz, the US General Accounting Office's 1980 The Roles, Missions, and Relationships of Pacific Command Headquarters,[6] and John Buckley's 1983 An Analysis of the United States Army Command and Control Organization in the Pacific Theater: World War II to 1983**.[7]**

These days, airlines fly direct to DC, and CINCPAC's power has receded relative to that of American decision-makers in Washington DC. Moreover, the instantaneous oversight, sometimes supervision, sometimes direction of military operations from the White House and other regional command centers via networked command and control, computers, communications, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance systems known awkwardly as C4ISR often bypasses CINCPAC. CINPAC can listen in, but he can't run the show.

Today, the centrifugal operations of far-flung US service strain at the leash to deploy new military technologies and to run their own shows on a global basis. The Airsea Battle Office was created on November 9, 2011 by the Joint Chiefs precisely to develop joint strategy between the US air force and the navy—thereby, as noted by Bill Gertz,[8] further reducing CINCPAC's supervisory authority over the services in this region.

The resultant "pivot" strategy declared by the Obama Administration to overcome adversarial "anti-access, area-denial" capacity---above all by China along its eastern seaboard-- is justified as multiplying force gained from greater basing flexibility, maneuverability, and ability to be inter-operable across services and with allied forces.

In reality, much of this activity is driven by the ever-tightening budget screws that follow the bureaucrat's golden rule: "He who has the gold, rules." The increased deployment of US marines to Darwin in Australia, for example, actually moved these forces away from Chinese firepower as well as prospective sites of intervention but created a new political-symbolic US presence in the South Pacific—at least in the minds of Chinese and Southeast Asian leaderships.

Ironically, this move was also driven by the US marines desire to protect their units in the West Pacific from budget cuts by "embedding" them in a key alliance relationship—a smart bureaucratic maneuver dressed up as big picture strategy.

As former CINCPAC Admiral Denis Blair stated forthrightly, AirSea Battle “is nothing new, in typical American fashion we often pour the old wine into new bottles with fancy new labels.”

''But the navy and air force co-operating to be able to get to our allies that are within range of Chinese missiles is nothing new, and most Americans expect that to be their job.''[9]

In short, old sea dogs are sailing into new geostrategic and bureaucratic battles in the west Pacific with fancy labels on them--but nothing new in terms of a strategy that would engage China as an equal partner in a concert rather than a balance of powers.

III. References

[1] Kal Raustiala, *Does the Constitution Follow the Flag? The Evolution of Territoriality in American Law.* Oxford University Press, 2009.

[2] *USCINCPAC Inventory of Unpublished International Agreements (IACS)* USCINCPAC Staff Judge Advocate, July 8, 1985, FOIA document, Nautilus Peace and Security Special Report, September 4, 2012 [PDF, 5.1MB] at https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/uscincpac-inventor--of-unpublished-international-agreements-iacs/

[3] In his magisterial *The Logic of World Power, An inquiry into the origins,currents,and contradictions of world politics*, Pantheon, 1974.

[4] *The United States Pacific Command (USPACOM) Multinational Strategy (MNS),* Directorate for Plans and Policy, 1986, FOIA Document, Nautilus Peace and Security Special Report, **August 21, 2012** [PDF, **2.5**MB] **at:** http://nautilus.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/874-Directorate-for-Plans-and-Policy.pdf

[5] See CINCPAC Command Histories released under FOA to Nautilus Institute at: https://nautilus.org/projects/by-name/foia/command-histories/

[6] *The Roles, Missions, and Relationships of Pacific Command Headquarters*, US Comptroller General. US General Accounting Office, for Subcommittee on Defense, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives, August 18, 1980**,** FOIA Document, Nautilus Peace and Security Special Report, August 28, 2012 [PDF, 17.8MB] at:

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[7] *An Analysis of the United States Army Command and Control Organization in the Pacific Theater: World War II to 1983*, John Buckley, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, FOIA Document, Nautilus Peace and Security Special Report, August 14, 2012 [PDF, 2.8MB] at: https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/an-analysis-of-the--nited-states-army-command-and-control-organization-in-the-pacific-theater-world-war-ii-to-1983/

[8] B. Gertz, “Inside the Ring: Air Force Chief on air-sea battle, The Washington Times, July 25, 2012 at:
http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/jul/25/inside-the-ring-air-force-chief-on-air-sea-battle/?page=all

[9] Quoted in Dylan Welch, “US war strategy 'targets China,” *The Age*, **August 9, 2012, at:**
http://www.theage.com.au/opinion/political-news/us-war-strategy-targets-china-20120808-23uoc.html

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IV. Nautilus invites your responses

The Nautilus Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this report. Please leave a comment below or send your response to: napsnet@nautilus.org. Comments will only be posted if they include the author’s name and affiliation.

Go to Peter Hayes' blog on the same topic: Old Sea Dogs In New Battles With Fancy Labels

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