

# Pacific Command: *Attacking the Nexus of Emerging Threats*

**by Jan Schwarzenberg**

With conflicts winding down in Southwest Asia and the accompanying retraction of U.S. forces overseas, the U.S. may once again direct its attention globally. While troops engaged in open combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, commitments elsewhere in the world did not lag or wane. In fact, nefarious elements may have taken advantage of the situation to advance their illegal activities or ideologies. However, with the President's declaration that the U.S. will once again "pivot" to concentrate on the Pacific, it is time to assess where and how the country will focus that attention in the Pacific arena, especially in an era of reduced resources.<sup>1</sup>

This article examines issues in the Pacific that have warranted long-standing U.S. attention and remain of concern today. In addition, it will explore emerging networks in Asia that threaten national security. Expenditures to counter this threat will require reducing funds for other programs. For example, for almost 25 years, the Joint Interagency Task Force-West (JIATF-W) has focused on just the illicit narcotics trade. The rising criminal syndicates in Asia have developed a sophisticated industry of networks to move illegal goods of all kinds, not just narcotics. Focusing attention on those networks, regardless of their political or criminal aim and irrespective of what items they illegally transfer across borders, will prove to be a more economical expenditure of public funds. Pursuing entire networks for elimination will be a greater return on investment than attempting to interdict just narcotics, weapons, false document providers, or warehouse-shippers.

The Asia Pacific Counter-IED (Improvised Explosive Device) Fusion Center (APCFC) is Pacific Command's (PACOM) executive agent for all matters related to the counter-IED fight (C-IED), including IED network analysis. Thus, expanding APCFC's capabilities will enable the Pacific Command to bring appropriate law enforcement authorities to bear on the full spectrum

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of network threats. In an era emphasizing joint operations to spread limited resources across the widest area, JIATF-W can no longer limit its mission to just the illicit narcotics trade.

## **PACOM Today**

PACOM is responsible for engaging 36 countries in Asia that encompass 51 percent of the earth's surface. PACOM's area of responsibility (AOR) stretches from the west coast of the U.S. to India. Whether rendering assistance in humanitarian crises such as typhoons, earthquakes, or volcanic eruptions or responding to a military contingency, PACOM forces face the "tyranny of distance." At normal speeds, it can take a ship almost a month to travel from San Diego to the mouth of the Hormuz Straits. Within this area are five of the seven nations with whom the U.S. has treaty alliances, three of the world's largest economies, the most populous nations of the world, and the world's largest Muslim-majority country. In addition, several of the world's largest militaries are resident in the Pacific arena. U.S. forces assigned to PACOM comprise approximately one-fifth of the total U.S. military establishment, including three-quarters of the Navy's ships and two-thirds of the Marine Corps.<sup>2</sup>

While PACOM is a military command committed to maintaining military superiority in all domains, it follows principles enumerated by the Secretary of Defense following the President's January 2012 guidance. Among these principles are international rules governing shared space (sea, air, and cyberspace) and resolution of disputes without force; strengthening alliances and partnerships; enhancing an enduring presence enabling engagement with partners; and contributing to U.S. whole-of-government resolutions for regional security.<sup>3</sup>

In pursuing these principles, PACOM clearly steps beyond pure military interests

and enters into foreign policy as it attempts to avoid initiating conflict by establishing and maintaining healthy relationships. In so doing, PACOM is committed to supporting regional international bodies such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). PACOM also entirely funds the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS), which brings foreign military and civilian officers to

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Hawaii to discuss and explore resolutions to regional security challenges through executive education and workshops. U.S. support of ASEAN and APCSS enhances relationships for future international cooperative efforts, such as pursuing and prosecuting transnational criminals and terrorists. Since 2011, the U.S. has served as the co-chair to the Indonesian-led ASEAN Defense Ministerial Plus sub-committee on counterterrorism.<sup>4</sup> This position has offered the U.S. a unique ability to assist partners in a multi-lateral rather than bi-lateral environment, reducing any accusation of U.S. hegemony in the area.

## **Pacific Threats**

Threats to U.S. national security in the Pacific are termed strategic, low-intensity, and emerging.<sup>5</sup>

Strategic threats can trigger state-on-state wide-area conflict and the possibility of the use of nuclear weapons, especially in regards to China's growing hegemony and ongoing disputes with Taiwan and support for North Korea.

Low-intensity threats are very local in nature, although violent and deadly. These

include piracy and smuggling, both of which can upset government economies. Smuggling of narcotics, weapons, terrorists, and terrorist tools all demand coordinated international law enforcement cooperation.

Emerging threats are a result of transnational terrorism based in Islamic extremist ideology. More disturbing than the national terrorism of

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the past, this form of Al-Qaeda-affiliated and sponsored terrorism spans national boundaries and attacks government institutions, not to gain concessions, but rather to destroy existing governments and replace them with Islamic extremist governments.

In addition to terrorism, a growing criminal services sector plies its trade. Indeed, the terrorists could not pursue their ideological goals without this criminal support. These criminal elements provide weapons, smuggle people, warehouse gear, lodge terrorists, expedite fund transfers, provide false documentation, and facilitate communications.

Dr. Sheldon W. Simon notes that terrorism and transnational crime feed off each other, with the proceeds of criminal activity funding terrorist activities. This relationship drives the need for law enforcement to embed with military counterterrorism forces. The most important asset that law enforcement can bring to the fight is sharing local intelligence across borders. Cooperation among regional intelligence agencies, law enforcement, and military forces

is essential to the effective apprehension of criminals and terrorists.<sup>6</sup>

Insofar as all nations suffer the scourge of crime, including the terrorism that it supports, law enforcement cooperation among countries is more politically palatable than military-to-military engagements. Military establishments, even when charged with internal security, are nonetheless limited in their authorities. Further, deploying armed troops into other territories always raises questions of sovereignty. Law enforcement officers are often perceived as being less threatening, as they seek mutual goals almost everywhere they go. Furthermore, it is most often law enforcement that has the jurisdiction to pursue, apprehend, and prosecute criminals and terrorists within its own territories.

For myriad historical reasons, many ASEAN member countries jealously guard their sovereignty. They are ready and, in some cases, eager to enter into bi-lateral agreements with the U.S. but draw back at the suggestion of multi-lateral agreements with neighbors. In working with such partners, PACOM officers must safeguard information shared in confidence and not inadvertently divulge facts from one country to another. As a body of resolution for regional challenges, ASEAN is a non-threatening forum in which issues such as transnational crime and terrorism can be openly discussed and joint international avenues can be explored without seeming to interfere in domestic affairs. In May of 2002, the ASEAN states agreed to enhance information sharing and coordinate legislation to eliminate safe-havens for criminals and terrorists. With Singapore in the lead, the U.S. was able to promote a declaration to combat transnational terrorism. This was followed the next year by Malaysia sponsoring, again with U.S. support, a program of intelligence sharing and mutual border control among Malaysia, Philippines, and Indonesia. That these three countries in particular should openly cooperate with each other directly, instead of through

a bi-lateral intermediary such as the U.S. or Australia, was an enormous break-through.<sup>7</sup>

Though painstakingly slow in its process—ASEAN policy to cooperate in counterterrorism came two full years after the 9/11 attacks—this cooperation eventually led to a permanent ASEAN sub-committee on terror and crimes such as piracy, money laundering, and arms smuggling.<sup>8</sup> Support and more importantly active participation in ASEAN by the U.S. arguably has led to greater advances in U.S. national interests than if the U.S. had acted independently. The collective energy of the ASEAN body and its open forum of discussion facilitate an easier path for achieving desired goals than attempting to shuttle an agreement between capitals individually.

### **Strategic Prioritization**

While the intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) have long been considered strategic weapons that can threaten U.S. interests in the area, debate is currently under way within the Department of Defense (DoD) as to whether terrorists' use of IEDs throughout the region is equally strategic.

Some argue that in the absence of any U.S. forces or interests being threatened by IEDs in the Pacific area, they are not a strategic weapon. This opinion ignores two essential elements. First, that there are approximately 100 IED incidents occurring each month in the Pacific arena.<sup>9</sup> Whereas missiles in silos are indeed a threat, they are exactly that, just a threat. IEDs are actually being deployed and killing innocents on a near daily basis. This realization leads to the second element. The Al-Qaeda-influenced bombing of a commuter train in Madrid in 2004 that killed 190 persons was accompanied by the demand for Spanish troops to be withdrawn from Iraq. This bombing and subsequent demand caused the defeat of the incumbent political party in national elections three days later. The opposing party was swept into office

riding a three-day old campaign promise to withdraw Spanish troops from Iraq.<sup>10</sup> This one IED incident most definitely strategically influenced the government of Spain and shaped its foreign policy through the plebiscite to accede to terrorist demands. Whereas political discourse with states such as China and North Korea always carries the threat of aggression, the very real threat surrounding the bombing in Madrid was a repetition of the attack should the Spanish state not comply with the demands of the terrorists. A report from the International Institute for Strategic Studies contends IEDs “can be strategic, not just tactical, weapons, by sowing fear, lowering troop morale, limiting freedom of movement, and undermining public support for combat operations.”<sup>11</sup>

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combats drug-related transnational crime in the Asia-Pacific region and focuses on the precursor chemicals used to produce methamphetamine. JIATF-West fights trafficking and organized crime in the Asia-Pacific region by sharing information with law enforcement agencies and partner nations.<sup>12</sup>

JIATF-W, a subordinate command of PACOM, is headed by a U.S. Coast Guard Rear Admiral and physically located within the PACOM compound. DoD is currently in a five year plan (2012–2017) with \$15 billion budgeted for counternarcotics efforts. This budget includes just over \$40 million for operations at JIATF-West and JIATF-South. (JIATF-South is

located in Key West, FL, with responsibility for Latin America and the Caribbean).<sup>13</sup>

After an initial trial period lasting several years, APCFC is in the Army's base budget for 2015. Although collocated with and supported by U.S. Army Pacific, APCFC reports to PACOM as the combatant command's executive agent for joint C-IED actions across all the services. As a result of the Global War on Terrorism, a component commander is imbued with the combatant commander's authority to manage a particular issue. To the point, the analytical tools developed by APCFC to discern and uncover illicit IED networks are easily applicable to any network. As its name implies, the APCFC was founded to fuse the three mission goals of defeating explosive devices, training forces, and, most importantly, attacking terrorist

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networks facilitating IEDs.<sup>14</sup> As time progresses, defeating devices will become a matter of greater concern for research laboratories such as the Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technical Division, and training troops in C-IED awareness will fall more to the services. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have created an incredible capability and specialty in network analysis with unique methodologies for uncovering linkages among seemingly disparate groups. These systems of network analyses can be applied outside the C-IED realm and just as easily define insurgent, criminal, smuggling,

and narcotics networks.

Analyzing networks, however, is highly dependent on information collection and assessment. This is particularly problematic when the networks to be identified are operating in foreign territory and subject to varying degrees of government oversight and interdiction. Success in this vein is highly dependent upon coordinated partnering with foreign nation military and law enforcement and understanding that the jurisdiction covering internal security in other countries alternates between military, para-military, ministerial police, customs-border police, and local law enforcement.

There is a fine line between cooperative assistance and over-bearing hegemony. Engaging partner nations for the mutual purpose of combating activities that are harmful to both the partner nation and the security of the U.S. can easily be misinterpreted as hegemonic colonialism if not approached delicately. PACOM espouses sensitivity to this distinction in its strategy statement: "We will modernize and strengthen...alliances by enhancing our ability to train and operate together, jointly developing high-tech capabilities, expanding information sharing..."<sup>15</sup> DoD's strategic guidance states: "For the foreseeable future, the United States will continue to take an active approach to countering these threats by monitoring the activities of non-state threats worldwide, working with allies and partners to establish control over ungoverned territories, and directly striking the most dangerous groups and individuals when necessary."<sup>16</sup>

Rather than attempting to establish bilateral cooperative agreements with each country in the Pacific, PACOM wisely gains a positive foothold via international bodies. To this end, PACOM's active support and participation in ASEAN portrays a regional partnership with simultaneous achievements across multiple countries. Applying itself in a regional forum

such as ASEAN encourages cooperation across the region and is much more productive in achieving such goals as information sharing.<sup>17</sup>

Thus membership and active contribution to ASEAN becomes a bridge by which PACOM can enlist other agencies of the U.S. government to move toward the same goal of attacking threat networks in foreign countries. Realizing that other federal departments besides Defense have far greater authorities and means by which to prosecute subversive threats, PACOM's participation in ASEAN opens the door to introduce U.S. federal law enforcement to other countries suffering the same scourge of destabilizing networks. In addition, introducing civilian law enforcement is much less offensive than the sight of foreign troops moving about the countryside.

PACOM's strategy is to "work as part of the U.S. interagency effort with regional partners to monitor and counter non-state threats and ensure that local governments and communities are inhospitable to violent extremism. . . enhance interoperability with allies and partners and develop the capacity of partners to cooperatively address regional challenges. . . work with regional forums such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and encourage multilateral relationships that build trust, prevent misperceptions that can lead to conflict, and reinforce international norms of conduct."<sup>18</sup>

PACOM's even greater underwriting of the Asia Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS) does much to support ASEAN's successes. The mid-grade officers selected to attend courses at APCSS will eventually rise within their own organizations, be they military or civilian. They frequently become the senior officers attending the ASEAN meetings where they help shape their countries' interests vis-à-vis neighboring countries' interests. These officers' backgrounds in interactive cooperation with neighbor countries as well

as the U.S., combined with their exposure to divergent cultural approaches, help to make the approaches to ferreting out criminal networks all the more effective.

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### **PACOM Future**

Dealing with the strategic threats of China and North Korea will remain a constant. While continuing to attempt to reach agreement and rapprochement, ignoring their potential aggression in the current environment would be folly. But the status quo is itself not a constant, as is evidenced by the evolving emergence of other violent actors. Consequently, those who would turn a blind eye to any discussion not involving Chinese or North Korean issues do the Nation a disservice. The only real constant in the international political chess game is that the political landscape is constantly changing.

In the same vein, the illegal narcotics industry has itself changed. What were once small and individual syndicates smuggling narcotics across borders have become international conglomerates with production facilities, warehouses, and delivery systems spanning several countries. In addition, rogue regimes conduct wholesale delivery and distribution of narcotics items, both finished products and precursor chemicals.

JIATF-W's goal of sharing counterdrug information among Pacific nations has served a purpose over the last twenty years. The skill set of peeling apart networks in combat zones

transfers to analyzing any network attempting to avoid scrutiny. Being able to employ the same analysts to simultaneously study terrorist and narcotics networks and the criminal networks supporting both puts all those enterprises on one map. Narcotics activity is intertwined with terrorist activity. One element cannot be investigated without delving into the other as well. Access to the required sources of information necessary to this analysis is derived from U.S. partnership with ASEAN countries. Seeing the benefit to rooting out these elements within their own borders, partner nations occasionally seek out U.S. experts to analyze this information. Additionally, APCSS graduates encourage their national leadership to join the community of nations that together can halt the plethora of real threats attacking their citizenry.

As resources dwindle, it is economically prudent to apply skill sets in an efficient manner as to derive the greatest benefit. Maintaining duplicative staffs that exploit the same information but narrowly focus on

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just one target set—narcotics, terrorists, or organized crime—is wasteful and indefensible. Differences between narcotics purveyors, terrorists, and transnational criminals are becoming exceedingly blurred.

JIATF-W should transfer its budget to expanding the network analysis tools and capabilities of APCFC while maintaining its information-sharing outlets with foreign nations. APCFC should utilize that funding to

expand its analytical team and authorities to include all criminal elements. By absorbing JIATF-W into APCFC, PACOM can use a portion of JIATF-W's funding to continue its support of APCSS. As APCSS strengthens its partnership with ASEAN to collectively attack threat networks of any kind, APCFC will become a hub to respond to any partner nation's request for assistance.

The most important and over-riding element to any investigation and prosecution of threat networks by PACOM and its subordinate commands is commitment. Confronting other networks, such as terrorism and organized crime, will be a generational effort. Eradicating the impetus for terrorist or criminal networks to emerge will command attention from many parts of government in terms of aid, assistance, and partnership. Here again, ASEAN is a doorway for U.S. law enforcement and humanitarian aid to enter partner nations in a less threatening manner.

Detractors will argue that such network analysis and concern for organized crime falls outside the Title X requirements to staff, train, and equip the services for military missions. Committing to investigating and prosecuting threat networks comes with the realization that such network analysis is both a result and contributor to joint operations, carrying the concept of joint throughout the agencies of the government.

The deeper pockets and personnel rosters of DoD can open network analysis conducted by APCFC to all the agencies of the U.S. government. Those agencies can also join in mutual prosecution of threats via the much broader authorities under their jurisdictions. APCFC's existence as an asymmetric force-multiplier can be further justified in the information services it provides to agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Department of Homeland Security, Treasury, and State. Rather than stepping in the way of

other government agencies, PACOM can use the APCFC to support furthering the goals of those agencies. Presenting a united governmental front to assist partners in all facets of their challenges, from border security, to customs tariffs, to enacting effective legislation by which to prosecute threats, will demonstrate that PACOM's participation in ASEAN goes far beyond military support.

## Conclusion

Where previously there had been only one prevailing threat network in the Pacific arena—narcotics trafficking—the expansion of Al Qaeda has spawned affiliate networks around the world. Some of these have found their way into PACOM countries, causing grievous mayhem with bombings and other attacks.

JIAF-W has been in operation for over twenty years with not much appreciable decline in the drug trade. In fact, if anything, drug traffickers have become more sophisticated, establishing inter-relational networks combined with criminal organizations to move their precursors and final product across national boundaries.

Pursuit of Al Qaeda networks in Iraq and Afghanistan created a sophisticated methodology to analyze and identify terrorists. Regardless of whether these individuals were importing IED components, moving funds, exporting narcotics, or establishing suicide cells, the network analysis successfully led to their neutralization. The APCFC was established at PACOM to bring these methodologies to bear upon PACOM-based terrorist networks.

The ASEAN organization provides a forum through which multiple agencies of the U.S. government can partner multilaterally with foreign nations for coordinated attacks upon transnational networks that span borders. Working through ASEAN saves the effort of establishing relationships with each individual country in turn while also obviating the need to negotiate agreements between two neighboring countries. ASEAN offers a neutral environment allowing such international agreements to blossom.

Consequently, folding JIAF-W's efforts and funding into an expanded APCFC will not only continue JIAF-W's charter but likely lead it to greater successes. The same APCFC network analysis methodology can be utilized to identify drug traffickers operating within larger criminal organizations that also derive income from servicing terrorist networks. Going beyond just that, APCFC will continue to identify terrorist cells as well as criminal organizations, thus closing the loop full circle. **IAJ**

## NOTES

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