

US Observations Regarding Interoperability

US Combatant Commands

Background

- 1.1 The US organises operational control of its combat forces into nine regional Unified Combatant Commands. A Unified Combatant Command is composed of forces from two or more services, has a broad and continuing mission, and is normally organized on a geographical basis into regions known as Areas of Responsibility (AORs). The delegation visited two of these Commands to discuss both interoperability issues and to gain a first hand understanding of the strategic view held by the Commanders of these globally significant organisations.
- 1.2 US Pacific Command (USPACOM), located at Camp H.M. Smith in Honolulu Hawaii, was appropriately the first stop for the delegation as it entered the US. The USPACOMD AOR coincides with most of Australia's own area of interest and interaction between the Australian and US defence forces is most common in this theatre.

US Pacific Command

- 1.3 Commander U.S. Pacific Command is the senior commander of U.S. military forces in the Pacific and Indian Ocean areas. Its Commander, Admiral William J. Fallon, reports directly to the US Secretary of Defense, who in turn, reports to the President of the United States.
- 1.4 USPACOMD is responsible for more than 50 percent of earth's surface; approximately 169 million square km. The AOR extends from the west coast of the United States mainland to the east coast of Africa, from the

Arctic to Antarctic; including the state of Hawaii and forces in Alaska. It comprises the following:

- Nearly 60 percent of the world's population. 43 countries, 20 territories and possessions, and 10 U.S. territories.
- The world's six largest armed forces: (1) Peoples Republic of China, (2) United States, (3) Russia, (4) India, (5) North Korea, (6) South Korea.
- Five of the seven worldwide U.S. mutual defense treaties:
 - ⇒ ANZUS (Australia - New Zealand - U.S., 1952)
 - ⇒ U.S.-Republic of the Philippines (Mutual Defense Treaty, 1952)
 - ⇒ U.S.-Republic of Korea (Mutual Defense Treaty, 1954)
 - ⇒ South East Asia Collective Defense (U.S. - France - Australia - New Zealand - Thailand - Philippines, 1955)
 - ⇒ U.S.-Japan (Mutual Defense Treaty, 1960)
- 35 percent of U.S. trade is within the region, amounting to more than \$548 billion in 1998. In contrast, 19 percent of U.S. trade is with the European Union, 20 percent is with Canada, and 18 percent is with Latin America. Asia-Pacific nations, not including the U.S., account for about 34 percent of the Gross World Product (the U.S. accounts for 21 percent of GWP).¹

- 1.5 During the visit the delegation met with Vice Admiral Gary Roughead, Deputy Commander of USPACOMD and the Commander designate of the US Pacific Fleet. Admiral Roughead was assisted during the visit by Rear Admiral Mike Tracey the J5 or Joint Plans Officer for the Command.
- 1.6 Admirals Roughead and Tracey both spoke in glowing terms of the standards and performance of ADF, both during training exercises such as Exercise Talisman Sabre, and during operational activities such as the Tsunami Relief in December 04 / January 05. They described the very high levels of procedural interoperability achieved between the two defence forces in the Pacific Theatre, based on shared military and social cultures.
- 1.7 Admiral Roughead made particular mention of the shared leadership and decision making between USPACOMD and the ADF at the height of the Tsunami crisis. The long established relationships between the two organisations allowed the most effective distribution of aid to the region without overlap and waste, and with unprecedented speed. Admiral Roughead suggested Australia was the only alliance partner in the Pacific Theatre capable of achieving this immediate level of understanding and cooperation.

1 <http://www.pacom.mil/about/pacom.shtml>

- 1.8 Admiral Tracey also described the importance to the US of exercises such as Talisman Sabre, now regarded as the major exercise in Pacific Command for enhancing the core skills of US forces and for enhancing interoperability with Australian forces.
- 1.9 HQ Pacific Command also stressed the importance to the Command of the ongoing development of the shared Joint Combined Training Centre (JCTC) in Australia. The JCTC will form an important step in the PACOMD preparedness pathway, particularly in the development of core warfighting skills and for interoperability with Australian forces. The delegation was given the impression that HQ PACOMD would be happy to see development of the JCTC move as quickly as practical toward resolution.
- 1.10 Admirals Roughead and Tracey talked at length about the migration of US effort and interest to the Pacific. The success of the Global War on Terror in the Middle East had the potential to cause threat elements to look for new 'vacant' or 'un-governed' spaces. These terms described spaces where the rule of law was insufficient to detect and deter illegal actions by terror groups. HQ PACOMD planning is directed at keeping ahead of these threats by engaging with the countries in the region with territory susceptible to this type of infiltration. The delegation was briefed that HQ PACOMD and the US Government acknowledged Australia's significant contribution toward maintaining stability in Timor Leste and more recently in Solomon Islands as these were regarded as potential spaces denied to threat forces as bases of operation.
- 1.11 Members of the delegation questioned the USPACOMD leadership in some depth about their relationship and policy towards China and Taiwan. The response from the command responsible for any military involvement in a dispute between these governments was very moderate. USPACOMD reiterated the US policy supporting one China but opposed to any re-unification of China and Taiwan by force. USPACOMD stressed that they maintain capability based forces in the Pacific, rather than forces geared for any particular military threat.
- 1.12 Finally the delegation raised the issue of the USPACOMD relationship with Indonesia. The delegation described the importance of Australia's relationship with Indonesia and reminded USPACOMD that Indonesia was the world's third largest democracy but that it needed ongoing support from countries such as the US and Australia in developing its democratic structures. PACOMD acknowledged that the US absence from Indonesia had been exposed during efforts to provide support after the Boxing Day Tsunami. Where Australia clearly had relationships with the Indonesian military that facilitated rapid access to disaster effected areas, the US military no longer had these relationships. PACOMD is now an

advocate for the re-establishment of military to military relationships with Indonesia but is limited by US Congressional legislation from undertaking this interaction. The Australian delegation took this issue up in later discussions with both the US Department of Defence and with Congressional leaders in Washington.

US Central Command

- 1.13 The delegation visited the second Unified Combatant Command currently sharing interests with Australia, at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa Florida. US Central Command (USCENTCOM) is assigned operational control of U.S. combat forces in Central Asia and Africa and has under operational control Australian forces in Iraq and will soon have operational control over Australian Special Forces elements as they return to Afghanistan.
- 1.14 Organized as a headquarters element, USCENTCOM has no war fighting units permanently assigned to it. Instead, all four Armed Services provide USCENTCOM with component commands, which, along with a joint special operations component, make up USCENTCOM's primary war fighting and engagement organizations. This system of Joint Command has been adopted by Australia with VCDF exercising similar control over assigned joint forces through HQ Joint Operations Command in Sydney.
- 1.15 In its first year as a command, USCENTCOM conducted Operations EARLY CALL and ARID FARMER – both successful in quelling Libyan-sponsored insurgencies in Sudan and Chad respectively. In the 1990s, USCENTCOM became known for its success in the liberation of Kuwait (OPERATION DESERT STORM) under the leadership of Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf, and for humanitarian intervention in Somalia.

Figure 1.1 The Delegation arrives at US Central Command, Tampa Florida



- 1.16 USCENTCOM is commanded by General John Abizaid. General Abizaid met with the delegation for an extended period during their visit to his headquarters and was fully aware of Australia's contribution to the Global War on Terror and to the invasion and stabilisation of Iraq. General Abizaid described his father's involvement in the Pacific Campaign of the Second World War and expressed his admiration for the ability of the Australian Government to now establish strong ties with Japan to the extent that the Australian Army was now protecting Japanese troops in the Al Muthanna Province of Southern Iraq.
- 1.17 General Abizaid regarded the relationship between US and Australian service people as the closest he had experienced during his many years of service. He regarded this closeness as the key element in the level of interoperability achieved between the two militaries. General Abizaid was also very complimentary of the New Zealand contribution to operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan.
- 1.18 General Abizaid expanded extensively on his expectations of the course of operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan. He was grateful for Australia's return to Afghanistan, coming at the same time as an expected 'Spring Offensive' by Taliban forces and those forces determined to disrupt the impending elections. He stressed that the coalition must work hard to maintain the correct balance of forces between Iraq and Afghanistan.
- 1.19 The Commander summarised his current view of the situation regarding progress in Iraq as "cautiously optimistic". He regarded the majority of the resistance in Iraq as now being a combination of specific Sunni resistance and general Iraqi insurgency. The Al Qiada influence in Iraq is

assessed as being damaged by the excesses of the attacks directed at the Iraqi population. General Abizaid noted the importance of the surveillance operations being conducted by the Australian Airforce and Navy in the effort to prevent the movement of terrorists between the different parts of the CENTCOM AOR.

- 1.20 General Abizaid also discussed the manner in which threat forces were using the internet and news media to defeat the coalition in the “information war”. He described confidence amongst the Iraqi population about the eventual defeat of the insurgents as high, at 70% of the population in a recent survey. He described his own and the military confidence as high and yet he believed confidence among US legislators was low. These and other frank observations were appreciated by the delegation and added considerably to their understanding of the US view of the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- 1.21 The delegation was then given an extensive classified briefing by the CENTCOM staff. This briefing provided depth to General Abizaid’s personal observations. Among the themes was the understanding of the multi-generational nature of the war on terror. The brief stressed that coalitions are critical to the success of any extended conflict. The brief described the importance of resolving the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian people but stated that it would be wrong to assign too much value to this conflict, rather the war was now against an ideology which targets western values.
- 1.22 The delegation was particularly grateful for the frankness and depth of briefings at CENTCOM. The high regard with which Australian military forces were held was confirmed and the delegation departed confident that strategic and operational military planning was based on a depth of mutual understanding.

Interoperability

- 1.23 The delegation pursued a broad agenda seeking to understand military interoperability issues throughout the visit to the US. The Unified Combatant Commands are the place where this interoperability is actually tested and observations by these organisations were given significant weight by the delegation. However the observations in this section are drawn from a number of discussions throughout the delegation itinerary.
- 1.24 The ANZUS Treaty may be regarded by some as dated however it was observed by some agencies in the US that the codification of the alliance has allowed the development of formal structures for the interchange of

technical and procedural information. The achievement of these interoperability or standardisation agreements is not possible for all countries seeking to exchange information with the US.

- 1.25 One of the biggest interoperability successes described to the delegation has been at the highest or strategic level. The ADF has now created an understanding in the US Department of Defence that military planning must be carried out in parallel between the two countries whether or not the two Governments have completed their democratic decision making processes. Should Australia subsequently elect to participate in a particular military action then Australian interests will have been factored in at the outset of planning. Should the Government of Australia choose not to be involved in a particular action the US process continues without Australian involvement. This is a unique national position that has been earned over many years of sharing values and risks but more recently through the exchange of explicit liaison officers at the key Combatant Commands and in the Pentagon.
- 1.26 At the lower or tactical level of interoperability the US agencies understand that keeping pace with US technological advances is difficult and expensive for coalition partners, making interoperability a challenging process. The solution advised by RAND is to carefully target and test the technologies before selecting them for broad introduction. The delegation was briefed that this was the process effectively used during the lead up to the 2003 invasion of Iraq when Australian Special Forces had to be quickly added to the US 'Network' to avoid the risk of fratricide. The technologies added to and tested by Australian Special Forces will now enter the conventional Australian Army through the Abrams Tank project and other enhancements to the ground combat force.
- 1.27 The delegation challenged a range of US agencies to support better access for the ADF to 'source' technology such as programming code and in turn better access to the US market for the Australian Defence industry. This desire was clearly understood by the US agencies however the impediments are significant. Many are impediments from the US Legislature which are long standing. These include the Jones Act and its military equivalent, which prevent US agencies purchasing ships not built in the United States. Other restrictions may be within Australia's immediate ability to influence. Any arguments about increased access to US technology must be based on the maintenance of trust that the technology will not pass through Australia to other countries. It was suggested to the delegation that the practices used by Australian Defence industry to secure their facilities and their intellectual property are not at the same standard as those used in the US. The delegation experience of the approval process for access to US defence industry sites suggests that

measures in the US are significantly more stringent than those used in Australia.

- 1.28 Finally there was some discussion of areas where Australia was assessed as being able to offer potential advances to counterpart US organisations. These were described as military cultural rather than military technology advantages. The US Army has begun to recognise that a subtle cultural shift is necessary if it is to maximise its ability to win in the complex warfighting environment faced by western forces in the 21st Century. SSI suggested that the Australian Army may have made this subtle shift more readily than the much larger and less agile US Army. SSI described the Australian Army as one of only two or three Armies in the world completely trusted by the US to bring to a coalition these types of fully developed skills. Australian troops were described as being far more than merely a political contribution to a coalition in a place such as Iraq. They were regarded as sufficiently skilled to genuinely contribute in the most delicate of military situations.

Figure 1.2 Hon Graham Edwards, MP meets with Aust. exchange Warrant Officer prior to his deployment to Iraq with the US Marine Corps



- 1.29 The Chief of Staff of the US Army (CSA) was reported as seeing Australia as one of the places he can seek help achieving the cultural changes he believes are necessary to maximise the potential of US forces in complex environments. One of the areas the CSA sees Australia as being in advance of the US Army is through Australia's extensive use of exchange personnel. The delegation was briefed that CSA was envious of the Australian ability to learn the best lessons from the US and UK militaries

through its network of exchange personnel. Proportionally the US exchange program is significantly smaller than that run by Australia. The delegation noted with some concern that this successful Australian program is one of the areas identified for cuts to achieve Defence 'efficiency' savings.