



The Clock is Running

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Abstract

A problem-framing discussion on opportunities to build, codify, and deploy an agreed upon and well-rehearsed Command and Control (C2) structure that contributes to Multi-Domain integrated deterrence for the US-Japan Alliance.

Introduction

Through nearly four decades of service in the US Marine Corps and throughout multiple assignments in Japan, my assessment had always been that Japan, while a treaty ally for more than six decades, was a nation we would one day possibly have to fight from. I personally never envisioned a scenario whereby Japan would one day become a military ally we would potentially fight with.

Understanding the far-reaching and deeply significant impacts of the December 2022 release of Japan's new National Defense Strategy, this creates both great challenges and opportunities to explore, develop, and identify mutually beneficial Command and Control (C2) relationships

between our two nations. I have never met a combat veteran who wants to return to war. I, like many fellow veterans and our active-duty counterparts, believe that the best way to prevent conflict is to be absolutely and overwhelmingly prepared for it. Creating a massive dilemma for potential adversaries who must then think carefully about the wisdom of entering into a conflict with a highly ready and capable foe.

Combat readiness of course includes having a highly trained, motivated, multi-domain capable force at a high state of readiness. It is also dependent upon the force being superbly equipped, supplied and battle-drilled and rehearsed to stand ready for a wide variety of potential political and military scenarios. This must include having state-of-the-art weapons and ample logistics resources available to prosecute the campaign. Most importantly, success in this arena will be dependent on having leaders with vision, who have well prepared, anticipated, and coordinated with allies and partners in any region where tensions are heightened. True integrated multi-domain deterrence must include close cooperation and collaboration between allied and like-minded nations, less the term “integrated deterrence” ring hollow. I believe in the old adage that has been used for decades on the Korean peninsula that “We must be ready to fight tonight” but I always add the important corollary “but we will not fight alone.” Today, the “fight tonight” mentality has expanded well beyond the peninsula and has taken root in the joint force of the region, but my sense is we are still behind on our ability to fully develop a mature Command and Control structure that fully incorporates the capabilities and positive contributions of allies and partners.

Jointness

Joint Warfare is not a naturally occurring reality. Service culture, history, rivalry for funding, and even doctrine get in the way of closer collaboration. In the United States it took congressional intervention and the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 to even start the process of true service integration on an operational scale. Even then, continued congressional oversight was required along the way to drive greater cooperation, collaboration and adherence to the concept. Still today, our Joint Force is a work in progress, and without continued congressional oversight and direction, the armed services naturally focus inward. For many years US service Headquarters would comply with joint manning directions by sending less than first-tier officers to these joint staffs. The best and brightest were retained at home in the most important staff and command positions. Once

again, it took a congressional mandate that no officer could be promoted to the ranks of General or Flag Officer without first having successfully served in a joint assignment to be eligible for selection. That congressional mandate was required before we saw the influx of our best and brightest officers serving on joint assignments. Today, Joint Combatant Commands and other joint organizations offer numerous opportunities for officers to earn their Joint credentials in a variety of assignments at home and across the globe. Today, Joint education is valued, and students from all services can be found at each other's staff and command colleges.

Japan is still in the very early stages of designing a true joint force structure capable of not only fighting together as a joint force, but also being able to fight as part of a bi-lateral or combined multinational organization. I believe that to be an effective partner in a combined force, you must first be viable as a joint force. Excellent strides are being made and the decision to stand up a Permanent Standing Operationally Focused Joint Force HQ by Japan is a noteworthy first step.

The Challenge: Caveats, Stovepipes, Trust, and Policy

If Joint warfare is challenging, combined warfare is even more so. First amongst the challenging issues is the vexing issue of the sharing of information and intelligence to create a Common Operating Picture (COP). The United States is part of the Five-Eyes network that includes the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. This legacy from WWII unites these five nations with a common language and culture, and has been a highly successful program since its inception, but is wholly inadequate when examining the threat scenarios that we face today. There is little chance that Japan will any time soon become a member of this Five-Eyes group. However, this does not mean we are incapable of finding a solution to this challenge. We must explore, design and employ in a bi-lateral or even multi-lateral arrangement, an avenue to achieve a Five-Eyes-like arrangement allowing for the sharing of intelligence and COP.

There is not one nation in the Five-Eyes organization more likely to be engaged in the close tactical fight with the United States than Japan. We have heard from our leaders that a future fight in the region, against a peer adversary would be the ultimate away game. It will not be an away game for the citizens of Japan. Accordingly, we are behind and must immediately work to develop procedures and practices allowing for deeper and greater cooperation and coordination between our two nations. True Combined warfare starts and ends with one word, TRUST. Collectively we

must work with Japan to develop and gain absolute confidence in their ability to secure and safeguard classified information. We must have confidence that their networks are secure, and that adequate and appropriate fire walls are established and protecting shared information. We must ensure that those who have access to and use this information are vetted carefully and understand their responsibilities to safeguard this information. Unless we can guarantee these requirements and build that trust, true combined operations are impossible, greatly diminishing the opportunities for collective integrated defense fighting as a truly Joint and Combined force. I believe this is achievable; reaching Five-Eyes or near Five-eyes level of sharing of COP and information. There are things we can do in a bilateral way that will facilitate and allow for this much needed change in our existing Command and Control (C2) relationship.

Today the Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF) has garrisons of soldiers scattered up and down the Southwest Islands of the Ryukyu or Nansei Shoto island chain, stretching south from the main island of Kyushu down to the Senkaku islands located a scant 75 miles from Taiwan. These JGSDF forces have with them sophisticated world class anti-air and anti-ship weaponry. If we are unable to provide them COP of both friendly and enemy aircraft and vessels in their area, then either the effective impact of these weapons will be lost and not be used against the enemy for lack of positive identification, or even worse, friendly forces could be engaged mistakenly for lack of finding a method that allows us the ability to share a COP with our allies. I see this first as a policy issue that our governments must engage to solve, and then a military one, where like-minded senior leaders from the US and Japan must closely engage to develop a way ahead to develop these critical information sharing protocols.

The Solution, A Possible Way Ahead

A few ideas on how we can move the process forward, understanding that time is not our ally in this situation. This is based upon the reality that should we move from Competition (which we have been in for several years) to Crisis (see China's recent isolation/effective blockade of Taiwan following US House Speaker engagements with Taiwan's president), to possible Conflict, that we will not have sufficient time to secure these arrangements and develop an effective C2 process benefitting the war-fighting capability of both nations.

1. INDO-PACOM must take the lead on this issue and press the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), NSA/CYBERCOM and the National Command Authority (NCA) writ large for greater authorities for sharing of information and intelligence with Japan.
2. We should have bilateral talks with Japan on this issue allowing for confidence building measures to be explored and developed at the first opportunity.
3. Both the US and Japan should have Flag/General Officer level representation at their respective partner joint HQ representing their nations, not just Liaison Officers. These officers should be key advisors to the Commanders and maintain open and persistent comms with their sending HQ, while facilitating the sharing of information, intelligence and COP.
4. Japan must quickly develop and bring online the recently announced Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ), that is able to synch up with and connect to not just INDO-PACOM in Hawaii, but with whatever Joint Task Force that the INDO-PACOM Commander assigns to command forces in theater. This in theater US HQ will be the principal partner and interlocutor for the Japanese Permanent Joint HQ.
5. We should immediately begin conducting table-top exercises, assigning only our best and brightest young officers that can work together on a multitude of scenarios that would be presented to the senior leaders of both nations during war-gaming exercises.
6. We need to ensure the newly formed Japanese Amphibious Ready Deployable Brigade (ARDB) forces are closely training with US Marines in challenging and dynamic ways, that will best prepare them for the most likely potential tactical scenarios.
7. We MUST integrate the US only bases on Okinawa to reflect the alliance basing concept we see on the mainland. We must relocate the 15th Brigade from Naha city to our outer camps of Camp Hansen and Camp Schwab. Working together, building personal and professional relationships for the future whilst sharing best practices, tactics, techniques and procedures today, will provide great dividends for the future.

8. We should today work with Japan to build and rehearse what a JTF-SW Islands organization should look like. Define and agree upon the organizational construct, the assigned forces, the leadership, and rehearse and exercise the force. It can be built, rehearsed and exercised but not permanently stood up, although that would be an option. Better to formulate the concept of this organization today even if not a permanent standing JTF, then to attempt to put this together in crisis or conflict.
9. We must achieve in both Japan and the US a greater sense of urgency that time is definitely not on our side. If the achievement of all-domain integrated deterrence and combat readiness is the goal, and that high level of deterrence and readiness is the reason a potential adversary defers, then we are not yet where we need to be.
10. We must not squander the historic opportunities that were presented in the December 2022 National Security/Defense Strategy of Japan. We have a small but closing window of opportunity to set the conditions to create an effective and combat ready combined force between our two nations.
11. We need to stop having large scale bilateral exercises in the theater. We need to have multi-lateral exercises, bringing in all potential allies and partners who might be participants in a future fight.
12. We need to understand that the Japanese homeland is at the greatest risk should a conflict arise. We need to work more closely with Japan on supporting its defense of the homeland. Getting Command and Control right between our two nations is not a “nice to have,” it will be critical to the success of our courses and the defense of all the nations in the region.
13. A final point for consideration.....Explore options for the role of US FORCES JAPAN during crisis and conflict. Today, they are an invaluable coordinating HQ focused on issues relevant to the Alliance Coordinating Mechanism (ACM), but perhaps a larger role is possible.

Strongly consider the viability of a standing US-Japan integrated bilateral Combined Command and Control structure, that could be expanded to accommodate more nations.

This is not currently on the horizon, but if the PJHQ is plugging into both INDO-PACOM and whatever US JTF HQ is assigned to operate inside the Weapons Engagement Zone (WEZ), then they will be stretched quite thin. So where will the high-level strategic dialogue be occurring. Perhaps at some level with INDO-PACOM, but perhaps using US FORCES JAPAN (USFJ) (Re-enforced for the mission) could be a way to have senior US and Japanese leaders more working closely together.

Lt. Gen. Lawrence Nicholson wrote in his own personal capacity. The views and interpretations expressed by the author are solely his own.

*The **US-Japan NEXT Alliance Initiative** is a forum for bilateral dialogue, networking, and the development of joint recommendations involving a wide range of policy and technical specialists (in and out of government) to stimulate new alliance connections across foreign, security, and technology policy areas. Established by Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA with support from the Nippon Foundation, the goal is to help improve the alliance and how it serves shared interests, preparing it for emerging challenges within an increasingly complex and dynamic geostrategic environment. Launched in 2021, the Initiative includes two overlapping lines of effort: 1) Foreign & Security Policy, and 2) Technology & Innovation Connections. The Initiative is led by Sr. Director Jim Schoff.*
