



DECEMBER 2017

# Building Allied Interoperability in the Indo-Pacific Region

DISCUSSION PAPER 1

## Command and Control

AUTHORS

Trent Scott

Andrew Shearer

CSIS

CENTER FOR STRATEGIC &  
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

A Report of the  
CSIS ALLIANCES AND AMERICAN  
LEADERSHIP PROJECT



DECEMBER 2017

# **Building Allied Interoperability in the Indo-Pacific Region**

## **Discussion Paper 1: Command and Control**

### AUTHORS

Trent Scott

Andrew Shearer

A Report of the

CSIS ALLIANCES AND AMERICAN LEADERSHIP PROJECT

## **About CSIS**

For over 50 years, the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) has worked to develop solutions to the world's greatest policy challenges. Today, CSIS scholars are providing strategic insights and bipartisan policy solutions to help decisionmakers chart a course toward a better world.

CSIS is a nonprofit organization headquartered in Washington, D.C. The Center's 220 full-time staff and large network of affiliated scholars conduct research and analysis and develop policy initiatives that look into the future and anticipate change.

Founded at the height of the Cold War by David M. Abshire and Admiral Arleigh Burke, CSIS was dedicated to finding ways to sustain American prominence and prosperity as a force for good in the world. Since 1962, CSIS has become one of the world's preeminent international institutions focused on defense and security; regional stability; and transnational challenges ranging from energy and climate to global health and economic integration.

Thomas J. Pritzker was named chairman of the CSIS Board of Trustees in November 2015. Former U.S. deputy secretary of defense John J. Hamre has served as the Center's president and chief executive officer since 2000.

CSIS does not take specific policy positions; accordingly, all views expressed herein should be understood to be solely those of the author(s).

## **Acknowledgments**

This report is made possible by the generous support of the governments of Australia and Japan.

© 2017 by the Center for Strategic and International Studies. All rights reserved.

Center for Strategic & International Studies  
1616 Rhode Island Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
202-887-0200 | [www.csis.org](http://www.csis.org)

# Contents

IV	Foreword
VI	Executive Summary
1	Introduction
3	CHAPTER 1   Command and Control: Moving beyond Reassurance
8	CHAPTER 2   Challenges in the Operating Environment
14	CHAPTER 3   Limitations and Risks Entailed in a Standing Combined Joint Headquarters in the Indo-Pacific Region
19	CHAPTER 4   A Staged Approach to Enhanced Allied Command and Control
25	CHAPTER 5   Conclusion
27	About the Authors

# Foreword

Throughout the Cold War, the United States avoided establishing joint and combined commands with allies in the Asia-Pacific region. The one exception was the Combined Forces Command (CFC) on the Korean peninsula, which reflected the requirement for U.S. and Korean forces to be ready to “fight tonight” in the event that North Korea broke the armistice and attacked the South. The heavily militarized DMZ left no room for vague command and control relationships, just as the Warsaw Pact’s forward-deployed armored formations required joint operational command under NATO in Europe. America’s maritime allies in the Pacific faced less immediate threats. Meanwhile, Japan feared entrapment in American-led Cold War conflicts, while the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff resisted commitments to far-away Australia. Japanese and Australian forces developed high levels of interoperability with U.S. forces in key areas such as antisubmarine warfare in the Western Pacific (Japan) and combined operations in the Middle East (Australia), but command relationships often remained ad hoc and never became joint and combined.

The operating environment for both ANZUS and the U.S.-Japan alliances has changed dramatically over the past decade. With North Korean missile and nuclear developments and China's expanding power projection capabilities, Japan has effectively been in the “front lines” for several years now and Australia may soon face a similarly challenging reality. The three countries all have similar long-term interests in stabilizing the maritime order in the region. The United States, Japan, and Australia also have operational advantages because their military systems, structures, experiences, and norms have been largely aligned throughout most of the postwar period. Additionally, the strategic geography of Japan and Australia—at the northern and southern ends of the “first island chain” respectively—remains vital to Indo-Pacific security and offers opportunities for strengthened trilateral defense cooperation with a focus on the maritime and air domains. At the same time, a range of nonstate, transnational security challenges are propelling cooperation among these three maritime democracies.

These geopolitical trends drove the United States, Japan, and Australia to establish the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD) in 2001 and then the parallel Security and Defense Cooperation Forum (SCDF). The next logical step would be an enhanced allied command and control architecture, which would better enable timely and effective responsive and/or preventative actions across the full spectrum of possible threats; deter potential adversaries; and enable allies and partners to shape the region in a manner that facilitates stability and prosperity. It is a vital step in building allied interoperability, and, ultimately, is essential for a more effective, networked regional defense.

This discussion paper proposes an evolutionary approach to building allied interoperability in command and control through three broad stages:

- Stage 1 is the development of a combined headquarters nucleus that develops competency through a relevant, trilateral joint exercise schedule.

- Stage 2 is the evolutionary development of the nucleus into a more robust and expansive combined joint headquarters, capable of commanding and controlling specified operations and activities, as well as joint exercises.
- Stage 3 is the maturation of the headquarters into a permanent, operationally competent, combined joint headquarters.

Pursuing a more robust command and control architecture capable of executing combined operations to counter the likely range of threats to stability in the region will require difficult decisions by governments, as well as challenging institutional, bureaucratic, and cultural norms. However, the default—doing more of the same, with less—offers the least prospect of effectively responding to emergent crises, positively shaping the region, and maintaining regional stability.

Napoleon famously said that he preferred fighting against allies because he could exploit the seams in their command and control relationships. Tightening those command and control relationships within the U.S.-Japan and U.S.-Australia alliances and trilaterally across the two treaties should be a high priority in the coming years.

*Michael J. Green*  
*Senior Vice President for Asia and Japan Chair*  
*CSIS*

# Executive Summary

The severity and complexity of the threats to the international order and to maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region, together with defense budget constraints that create additional challenges for America in meeting its global geopolitical objectives, demand deeper security collaboration between the United States and its most capable regional allies, Japan and Australia. This is becoming vital if the United States is to deter current and emergent threats, including from North Korea and China, but also to positively shape the regional environment. Integrating U.S., allied, and partner capabilities into networked security architectures predicated on aligned strategies, force postures, operating concepts, training, and logistics—delivered through shared defense capabilities, facilities, and other infrastructure, and jointly developed and acquired systems—is the most viable approach to shape the region and meet increasing threats to regional security and stability. This security collaboration is becoming increasingly urgent and now needs to move beyond broad statements of principle and intent.

The changing character of the operating environment in the Indo-Pacific region continues to compel the United States, Japan, and Australia to better coordinate their security policy planning and actively seek enhanced military interoperability and integration. At times, there will be scope to include other allies and partners, including South Korea, India, and in some instances China, in certain military exercises, activities, and operations. But Japan, Australia, and the United States must form the nucleus of a concerted effort to enhance allied interoperability if the positive effects of interoperability on the region are to be realized in a meaningful timeframe and an enduring manner.

This paper presents the case that an appropriate architecture for commanding and controlling U.S., Japanese, and Australian security forces in the Indo-Pacific in a combined manner is a vital step in building allied interoperability and, ultimately, is essential for a more effective, networked regional defense. Without an agreed, practiced, and robust command and control architecture, the United States and its allies are unlikely to establish a combined security presence that enables positive shaping of the region and *deters* potential threats to stability, rather than a presence that can conduct only less demanding missions such as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief and provides a false sense of reassurance.

A fit-for-purpose command and control architecture is required to enable the United States, Japan, and Australia to:

- better receive and integrate force contributions and then coordinate those assigned security forces, promote unity of purpose, and enable unity of effort;
- be better postured to manage, as a combined force, regional security challenges across the spectrum of likely threats, including more ambiguous “gray zone” threats through to possible high-intensity, multidimensional warfare; and
- maintain allied cohesion in the face of environmental and potential adversary threats.

The paper argues that the three countries must ensure their enhanced trilateral interoperability and command and control architecture fits logically within the larger picture of a more inclusive and flexible regional security order. Ideally, enhancing the trilateral relationship should not be perceived solely as applying pressure on a specific country, such as China, but rather seen as facilitating cooperation by providing public goods and enabling stability and prosperity throughout the region. However, given China's significant military build-up, harder-line diplomacy, and gray zone activities over recent years—not to mention President Xi Jinping's consolidation of power and forthright language about China's military at the 2017 Party Congress—an approach based on “more of the same” by the three countries has little prospect of shaping regional stability, deterring contemporary and future threats, and responding effectively to emergent crises. Better integrated and interoperable air and maritime security capabilities among the allies, based on the foundation of a robust combined command and control architecture, can be a significant instrument in ensuring China has realistic expectations about the extent to which other countries will tolerate changes to the regional order.

Given the character of the operating environment and the inherent challenges to combined command and control in the Indo-Pacific region, the primary objective of an effective allied command and control architecture in the Indo-Pacific should be: ***to achieve a philosophy of command and procedures for control of combined security forces capable of successfully coordinating joint, combined, interagency security operations across the spectrum of conflict (humanitarian assistance/disaster relief through “gray zone” conflict to high-intensity lethal operations) and across multiple domains, potentially against a modern and capable adversary in a contested environment.***

We recommend the three governments embark on a purposeful effort to develop enhanced combined command and control at the operational level among the United States, Australia, and Japan in three broad stages. The three stages provide a scalable suite of actions that allow for a graduated evolution of command and control depending on regional circumstances and political appetite. The duration of each stage, and the decision to transition between stages, will depend on mutually agreed measures of performance and effectiveness of the combined joint headquarters, as well as the exigencies of the operating environment and the extent of political agreement between the allies.

**Stage 1** of an evolutionary approach will leverage existing interoperability efforts, practices, and routines but will also focus on creating the nucleus of a combined joint headquarters that builds allied interoperability through the command and control of combined exercises (bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral exercises). The objective during **Stage 2** is to embed the nucleus of the combined joint headquarters into a select PACOM headquarters, to practice the headquarters consistently across the spectrum of conflict using the exercise schedule as the primary medium, but also to employ the headquarters frequently as the principal operational headquarters for Phase 0 / Phase 1 combined operations and patrols, and as the potential combined headquarters for other, higher-intensity operations. **Stage 3** is the maturation of a standing combined headquarters, capable of commanding and controlling combined operations across the spectrum of conflict. Stage 3 does, of course, entail the largest cost in terms of resources and political commitment but would be the most effective response to a serious deterioration in the Indo-Pacific security environment and would provide the greatest shaping and deterrence effects.

Developing a more robust command and control architecture capable of executing combined operations to counter the likely range of threats to stability in the region needs to become a priority. Pursuing it will require difficult decisions by governments as well as challenging institutional, bureaucratic, and cultural norms. However, doing more of the same, with less, holds out the least prospect of responding effectively to emergent crises and maintaining regional stability.

# Introduction

Without an agreed, practiced, and robust allied command and control architecture to ensure combined unity of effort and the effective implementation of relevant operational concepts, it will be difficult to establish a combined air, ground, and maritime security presence in the Indo-Pacific region that does more than superficially reassure its participants. Instead, an enhanced allied command and control architecture will better enable timely and effective responsive and/or preventative actions across the full spectrum of possible threats; deter potential adversaries; and enable allies and partners to shape the region in a manner that supports stability and prosperity.

Increased multilateral cooperation is necessary to respond effectively to the range of nonstate, transnational security threats and challenges that exist in the Indo-Pacific region. More specifically, however, deepening air and maritime security cooperation among the United States, Australia, and Japan will assist with positively shaping the Indo-Pacific region, deterring potential aggression, and reassuring allies and partners. This paper presents the case that an appropriate architecture for commanding and controlling U.S., Japanese, and Australian security forces in the Indo-Pacific in a combined manner is a vital step in building allied interoperability and, ultimately, is essential for a more effective, networked regional defense.<sup>1</sup>

The first section of the paper examines why a combined command and control architecture is the foundation for ensuring combined unity of effort and the effective implementation of relevant operational concepts among the three allies. Without an agreed, practiced, and robust command and control architecture, the United States and its allies are unlikely to establish a combined security presence that *deters* potential threats to stability, rather than a presence that can conduct only less demanding missions such as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief and provides a false sense of reassurance. The framework provided by the Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD) and the parallel Security and Defense Cooperation Forum (SCDF) provides an adequate policy framework for the three countries to take their trilateral interoperability to a new level.

The second section of the paper discusses the challenges inherent in the operating environment to realizing enhanced command and control interoperability. The third section of the paper details the more important strategic and operational constraints and risks associated with enhancing command and control as an operational objective to build allied interoperability. This is intended to assist policymakers to balance their desired outcomes against potential immediate, or second- and third-order negative effects of more integrated allied command and control arrangements. With

---

<sup>1</sup> See also CSIS, *Federated Defense Project: Overview* (Washington, DC: CSIS, December 16, 2013), <http://csis.org/program/federated-defense-project>; Michael J. Green, Kathleen Hicks, and Zack Cooper, *Federated Defense in Asia* (Washington, DC: CSIS, December 2014); Mark W. Lawrence, *Tailoring the Global Network for Real Burden Sharing at Sea* (Washington, DC: CSIS, August 2015); and Andrew Shearer, *Australia-Japan-U.S. Maritime Cooperation: Creating Federated Capabilities for the Asia Pacific* (Washington, DC: CSIS, April 2016).

these challenges in mind, the final section then proposes an evolutionary approach to building allied interoperability in command and control through three stages:

- Stage 1 is the development of a combined headquarters nucleus that develops competency through a relevant, trilateral joint exercise schedule.
- Stage 2 is the evolutionary development of the nucleus into a more robust and expansive combined joint headquarters, capable of commanding and controlling specified operations and activities, as well as joint exercises.
- Stage 3 is the maturation of the headquarters into a permanent, operationally competent, combined joint headquarters.

Developing a more robust command and control architecture capable of executing combined operations to counter the likely range of threats to stability in the region must become a priority for the three countries. Pursuing it will require difficult decisions by governments as well as challenging institutional, bureaucratic, and cultural norms. However, the default—doing more of the same, with less—offers the least prospect of effectively responding to emergent crises, positively shaping the region, and maintaining regional stability.

This discussion paper focuses on the conceptual and procedural aspects of command and control, as distinct from the technological aspects inherent in command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) systems. The technological and capability design requirements of a combined C4ISR system to enable the achievement of the desired command and control effects described in this paper will be the subject of a future paper.

# 1. Command and Control: Moving beyond Reassurance

The Indo-Pacific region presents an increasingly complex array of security challenges for the United States and its allies. North Korea's conventional forces and missile and nuclear programs pose an acute threat. Nonstate challenges to stability, such as terrorism, transnational crime (including narcotics and people smuggling), piracy, and natural disasters and other environmental threats to lives and property on a substantial scale remain prevalent in the region. China's continuing challenge to longstanding norms of regional and international behavior, such as freedom of navigation and the peaceful resolution of territorial disputes, and its consistent attempts to undermine U.S. alliances and partnerships in the region through coercion, economic incentives, and other means short of overt military force, further challenge the international rules-based order that has been underwritten by the United States since the end of the Cold War.

The severity and complexity of these threats to the accepted international order and maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region, together with defense budget constraints that create additional challenges for America in meeting its global geopolitical objectives, demand deeper security collaboration between the United States and its key allies, Japan and Australia, not just to respond to emergent challenges but also to positively shape the international environment. This security collaboration now needs to move beyond broad statements of principle and intent. Integrating U.S., allied, and partner capabilities into security architectures predicated on aligned strategies, force postures, operating concepts, training, and logistics—delivered through shared defense capabilities, facilities, and other infrastructure, and jointly developed and acquired systems—is the most viable approach to shape the region and meet increasing threats to regional security and stability.<sup>2</sup>

No three countries will always have identical interests and threat perceptions; however, the changing character of the operating environment in the Indo-Pacific region continues to compel the United States, Japan, and Australia to better coordinate their security policy planning and actively seek enhanced military interoperability and integration. At times, there will be scope to include other allies and partners, including China, in certain military exercises, activities, and operations. But, Japan, Australia, and the United States must form the nucleus of a concerted effort to enhance allied interoperability if the positive effects of interoperability on the region are to be realized in an enduring manner.

The three countries have similar long-term interests in stabilizing the maritime order in the region. Along with India, they formed the core of the international response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the 2011 earthquake in Japan, and the 2013 Typhoon Haiyan. The United States, Japan, and Australia also have operational advantages because their military systems, structures, experiences, and norms have been largely aligned throughout most of the postwar period.

---

<sup>2</sup> See Green, Hicks, and Cooper, *Federated Defense in Asia* and Shearer, *Australia-Japan-U.S. Maritime Cooperation*.

Additionally, the strategic geography of Japan and Australia—at the northern and southern ends of the “first island chain,” respectively—remains vital to Indo-Pacific security and offers opportunities for strengthened trilateral defense cooperation with a particular focus on the maritime and air domains. Importantly for Japan and Australia, better integration with the United States in meeting security challenges to the region will assist with legitimizing the continued U.S. forward presence in the Indo-Pacific and help to ensure the United States remains enmeshed in the region.

From a bilateral perspective, both Australia and Japan as allies have inherently strong relationships with the United States at the policy and operational levels. Australia, as a member of the Five Eyes intelligence community, and having contributed military forces to almost all U.S.-led military interventions since World War II, is well practiced in working in an integrated manner with U.S. forces in multi-domain environments, including cyber, information operations, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), maritime security, land and air offensive operations, counterterrorism, and counter proliferation. At the operational and tactical levels the United States and Australia are, by almost every measure, fully interoperable.<sup>3</sup> Cumulative years of operational experience gained through repeated deployments with NATO, the U.S. 5th Fleet Combined Maritime Forces, embedded officers throughout PACOM and its component forces as well as CENTCOM, a common language and shared access to Five Eyes intelligence, as well as a robust series of combined bilateral and multilateral training exercises, has enabled the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to achieve a high level of tactical and operational interoperability and integration with the U.S. military generally, and with PACOM and its component commands more specifically.<sup>4</sup>

Effective interoperability with the U.S. military in peacetime and at all levels of conflict (including “gray zone” conflict) is also a key desired outcome of Japan’s security and defense policy. In November 2015, the Japanese and U.S. governments established the Allied Coordination Mechanism (ACM) to provide a policy framework that better enables direct U.S. military support to the defense of Japan, including as a standing mechanism able to be used during peacetime security operations. The ACM aims to improve policy and operational coordination, including information and intelligence sharing, across government agencies, through coordinating mechanisms such as the Bilateral Operations Coordination Center and subordinate component coordination centers. It is underpinned by the Bilateral Planning Mechanism, a framework developed by the two countries to better synergize bilateral planning and responses to contingencies related to Japan’s security.<sup>5</sup>

The ACM, supported by the Bilateral Planning Mechanism, is primarily a framework for coordination of policy and effort at the strategic level. Although the ACM supports the coordination of ISR between the United States and Japan, as well as missile defense and joint training and exercises, moving beyond coordination to true interoperability and integration remains aspirational. That said, in some areas such as missile defense and antisubmarine warfare, the United States and

---

<sup>3</sup> As the United States progresses with its Third Offset Strategy, Australia may be challenged with maintaining similar levels of interoperability without its own commensurate advances in technology.

<sup>4</sup> Though the RAAF is well-practiced in participating in and coordinating advanced air operations with the USAF, particularly with those types of operations and procedures conducted in the CENTCOM area of responsibility (primarily Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria), it has less experience with the USN air component that dominates the day-to-day air operations in the PACOM area of responsibility.

<sup>5</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan: 2016*, Annual White Paper, Part II, 238–52, [http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w\\_paper/2016.html](http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/2016.html).

Japan are becoming steadily more integrated over time. Japanese deployments with U.S. forward deployed naval forces, combined U.S.-Japanese surface and sub-surface patrols, combined air patrols, and exercises in the East China Sea, also serve to enhance interoperability and should continue. However, the level of interoperability between the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) and the U.S. military generally remains behind that of the ADF and the United States.

Interoperability between the ADF and the JSDF is increasing, but from a low base and remains limited, despite the Australian Army providing security for the JSDF Iraq Reconstruction and Support Group in Samawah, Iraq from January 2004 through to July 2006, and ADF and JSDF maritime and air assets conducting coordinated patrols and combined joint exercises more frequently. This is a product of a combination of geography, culture, limited shared experience, and intelligence sharing permissions and protocols, rather than a reflection of potential competence or inadequate capabilities.

Both Japan and Australia have created the necessary political and policy environment for enhancing operational interoperability even further with the United States in matters of regional security beyond respective bilateral arrangements. Japan and Australia reinforced their own “special strategic relationship,” first announced in July 2014, by signing an updated Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement in January 2017, which now facilitates the mutual provision of ammunition as well as fuel and other nonlethal supplies. Agreements are also now in place between Japan and Australia for the transfer of defense equipment, technology, and sensitive information and intelligence. And similar bilateral agreements already exist between the United States and Japan, and the United States and Australia. Importantly, new Japanese security legislation passed in September 2015 makes it legal for the JSDF to participate in limited collective self-defense of U.S. forces, *and* the forces of other countries with which Japan has a close relationship, specifically including Australia.<sup>6</sup>

Reinforcing the minilateral relationship during the 2016 Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD), the respective foreign ministers and secretary of state “welcomed the growing positive impact of the strategic partnership between Japan, the United States and Australia, and reaffirmed the importance of TSD policy coordination and practical cooperation. They reiterated their commitment to further deepening their cooperation to ensure a peaceful, stable, and prosperous future for the Asia-Pacific region and the world.”<sup>7</sup> In June 2017, on the margins of the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, the three defense ministers again affirmed their shared intent to promote trilateral and multilateral security and defense cooperation with each other, regional allies, and partners. The ministers emphasized their shared strategic goals and commitment to trilateral defense cooperation to further peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region, and “directed their respective officials to continue to identify and pursue new opportunities for practical engagement, cooperation and increased interoperability, including in training, deeper and more sophisticated exercises, operations and capacity building.”<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Shearer, *Australia-Japan-US Maritime Cooperation*, 24.

<sup>7</sup> Julie Bishop, “Japan-United States-Australia Trilateral Security Dialogue Joint Statement,” July 25, 2016, [http://foreignminister.gov.au/releases/Pages/2016/jb\\_mr\\_160725.aspx?w=tb1CaGpkPX%2FISOK%2Bg9ZKEg%3D%3D](http://foreignminister.gov.au/releases/Pages/2016/jb_mr_160725.aspx?w=tb1CaGpkPX%2FISOK%2Bg9ZKEg%3D%3D).

<sup>8</sup> “Joint Statement: Australia-US-Japan Defence Ministers’ Meeting,”

But it is imperative the three countries move beyond positive statements of intent. Notably, PACOM conducts more than 1500 bilateral or multilateral training activities in the Indo-Pacific region each year. It has led the development and institutionalization of combined standard operating procedures (SOP) for humanitarian assistance and disaster response (HA/DR) in the region, and it continues to lead efforts to enhance interoperability with Japan and the ADF, and with other regional forces as well, including India. But many of these exercises and training activities are at the lower end of the spectrum of conflict, or are designed deliberately to develop and practice tactical-level actions and maneuvers, typically in a well-scripted manner. Although there are some trilateral exercises that focus on coordinating military responses within a high-intensity scenario, including antisubmarine warfare, maritime interdiction, and the Cope North annual air force exercise conducted out of Guam, these tend to be discrete in focus and limited in scale. Few exercises genuinely test combined operational-level concepts and command and control, short-notice crisis responses, or senior-level decisionmaking (including decisions regarding rules of engagement and targeting) within a highly contested operating environment of the type that exists currently in the East China Sea or South China Sea, for example. And few, if any, exercises test combined command and control mechanisms to failure.

Deeper engagement among the United States, Japan, and Australia in the form of advanced exercises, staff liaison and embedded officer exchanges, cooperative deployments, and combined operations will certainly result in more effective, coordinated responses to regional security challenges. Increased interoperability and integration between the three countries can also have the added benefit of accelerating complementary capability investments, benefiting national defense-related industries and contributing to technological advantage. But without a relevant and effective combined command and control architecture to coordinate, synchronize, and integrate multi-domain actions to achieve agreed objectives, U.S., Japanese, and Australian military actions are more likely to become uncoordinated, less complementary and therefore less effective and efficient, and less relevant especially when required under pressure and in more complex scenarios where allied actions may be contested and adversaries are likely to exploit command and control seams (including by employing sophisticated cyber and electronic warfare technologies).

U.S. doctrine defines command and control as “The exercise of authority and direction by a properly designated commander over assigned and attached forces in the accomplishment of the mission.” A Canadian study into command and control refines this by defining control as *those structures and processes devised by command to enable it and to manage risk*; and command as *the creative expression of human will necessary to accomplish the mission*. This means that the function of control is to enable the creative expression of will and to manage the mission to minimize the risk of not achieving a satisfactory solution. The function of command is to create solutions to problems, to provide conditions for starting, changing, and terminating control, and “to be the source of diligent purposefulness.”<sup>9</sup> Command exists to use military forces via means of control in achieving tactical, operational, or strategic objectives.

---

<https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/Australia-US-Japan-Defense-Ministers-Meeting-June-2017.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Ross Pigeau and Carol McCann, “Reconceptualizing Command and Control,” *Canadian Military Journal* (Spring 2002): 56.

At the heart of effective command are four essential factors. The first, *authority*, is the power to compel participants to act legitimately. The second factor is *communication*—the ability to convey information to and receive information from all relevant participants. Third is *situational awareness*, which is knowledge of the current facts of a situation to answer the question, “What is happening?” The final essential factor of command is *situational understanding*, a higher level of insight that enables decisionmakers to link current facts to the past, present, and future of the operational environment to answer the questions: “Why is it happening, and what should we do about it?”<sup>10</sup> Underpinning these four factors is the requirement for effective processes. These are especially important to accommodate national structures, policies, and politics that inherently frame and influence combined operations.

Command and control is practically realized through structures, processes, and philosophies generated and disseminated from a combined joint headquarters at either one, two, or all three levels of command: tactical, operational, and / or strategic. Effective command and control is relevant to deterrence, and an effective deterrent is one that continues to function even during a severe crisis, discouraging transition from peace (or even gray zone activities) to war. Historically, combined headquarters that are established, integrated, and practiced in executing their mission have been more successful than ad hoc headquarters that have been assembled rapidly in response to a specific problem.

With these factors in mind, a fit-for-purpose command and control architecture is required to enable the United States, Japan, and Australia to:

- better receive and integrate force contributions and then coordinate those assigned security forces, promote unity of purpose, and enable unity of effort;
- be better postured to manage, as a combined force, regional security challenges across the spectrum of likely threats, including more ambiguous “gray zone” threats through to possible high-intensity, multidimensional warfare; and
- maintain allied cohesion in the face of environmental and potential adversary threats.

Without an agreed, practiced, and robust command and control architecture to ensure combined unity of effort and the effective implementation of relevant operational concepts, it will be difficult to establish a partnered air and maritime security presence that, instead of superficially reassuring each of the participants, actually enables timely and effective responsive and/or preventative action across the full spectrum of possible threats, deters potential adversaries, and shapes the region in a manner that facilitates stability and prosperity.

---

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Hill and Heath Niemi, “The trouble with Mission Command: Flexive Command and the future of command and control,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* 86 (3rd Quarter, July 2017), <http://ndupress.ndu.edu/JFQ/Joint-Force-Quarterly-86/Article/1223929/the-trouble-with-mission-command-flexive-command-and-the-future-of-command-and/>.

## 2. Challenges in the Operating Environment

The tragedy of the MH370 disappearance and environmental disasters such as the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami, the 2013 earthquake in Japan, and the multitude of cyclones and typhoons that wreak havoc on the region annually, highlight the perennial demand for timely, coordinated, and preferably integrated military responses (within a whole of government and interagency framework) to save lives and support stability in the Indo-Pacific region. Often, these responses occur in environmentally extreme conditions, with demanding political oversight (or at least direction) and in the 24/7 media spotlight. And traditional challenges to security and stability, such as terrorism, transnational crime including narcotics and people smuggling, and piracy, have not gone away. However, transnational threats, environmental and humanitarian disasters aside, allied command and control is becoming increasingly complex and contested in the Indo-Pacific region as a matter of routine because of a combination of additional factors.

### Gray Zone Activities

Both North Korea and China continue to challenge the status quo. In the short and perhaps medium term, managing the North Korean problem presents varied challenges, but the nature and extent of the problem are understood (even if there is no immediate solution). North Korea's provocations and potential military threats to regional stability demand an integrated allied response, including the requirement for missile defense data exchange and the exchange of other sensitive intelligence in real time. Should military action involving the three allies be required against North Korea, or in response to North Korea's actions, it will need to be rapid, highly integrated, and multi-domain to be effective. And some of the necessary structures are already in place—for example, the United Nations Command and Combined Forces Command in Korea. However, for Japan, Australia, and the United States, the challenge of responding to the rise of China and its increasing assertiveness is more complex, more ambiguous, and presents additional significant challenges for commanding and controlling allied operations in the region over the longer term.

Despite the earlier hopes that underpinned Western policies of engagement, China is not satisfied with the status quo in what it considers to be its primary sphere of influence. Since 2012, China has aggressively pronounced expansive territorial claims in the East China Sea and South China Sea. Through subtle, gradualist means such as island building and militarization of disputed geographical features, China has transformed the maritime environment without risking a premature military clash with the United States or its allies. Beijing employs an at times sophisticated blend of political, economic, military, paramilitary, and informational means to influence its neighbors. It has challenged longstanding norms of regional and international behavior, such as freedom of navigation and the peaceful resolution of territorial disputes, and it continues to work over time to undermine U.S. alliances and partnerships in the region through coercion, economic incentives, and

other means.<sup>11</sup> Compounded by the U.S. withdrawal from the Trans Pacific Partnership trade agreement, the rising ambition of Chinese regional economic and financial initiatives, such as the “Belt and Road Initiative,” and Beijing’s pursuit of mercantilist trade policies, “has raised the prospect of a regional economic order that is less open and accessible to the U.S.” and its allies.<sup>12</sup>

China is undertaking concerted and deliberate “gray zone” operations to coerce regional countries into accepting Beijing’s vision of the future regional order. Gray zone activities by Chinese coastguard and maritime militia, often supported by People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) elements, along with island-building activities (including construction of military or dual-use facilities), serve to shape the regional maritime environment in China’s favor, complicate U.S. and allied decisionmaking, and slow the coordination of an effective response. These Chinese gray zone activities are designed to avoid triggering U.S. security commitments to allies by exploiting ambiguity, asymmetry, and incrementalism. Consequently, these actions by China present significant challenges for effective allied decisionmaking and command and control of security forces.

Typically, like-minded nations such as Japan, Australia, and the United States will have closely aligned (though not always identical) national interests when responding to environmental disasters or providing humanitarian assistance in the Indo-Pacific region. Coordinating combined effort in these circumstances therefore tends to be easier, not the least because there are tangible, finite goals to achieve. There is often friction at the tactical level; however, this can be overcome more easily when national interests are closely aligned. The same argument can be made, depending on the specific situation, in the case of high-intensity conventional war. Because of alliance commitments, if the three countries have committed support to each other against a belligerent in specific circumstances, it is more likely (though not guaranteed) that national interests will align, notwithstanding the strategic political-military friction inherent in any allied or coalition operation.

Aligning national interests in response to China’s gray zone activities is more challenging. Any formalized command and control architecture among the allies will need to determine ahead of time the broad parameters of what is permissible and what is not permissible by each participant nation when designing a suite of response options against such Chinese activity. This will require proactive political leadership by all three governments to ensure up-to-date guidance and authorities are provided to response elements and to embedded officers in any combined headquarters.<sup>13</sup> The political leadership of each country will need to become comfortable with providing ahead of time the boundaries of acceptable action and allow military commanders to act within those boundaries without having to seek prior approval each time. Governments will need to be apprised as quickly as possible whenever their forces are employed in response to a specific

---

<sup>11</sup> Hal Brands and Eric S. Edelman, *Why Is the World So Unsettled? The End of the Post-Cold War Era and the Crisis of Global Order* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2017), 12. See also Michael Green, Kathleen Hicks, Zack Cooper et al., *Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia: The Theory and Practice of Gray Zone Deterrence* (Washington, DC: CSIS, May 2017).

<sup>12</sup> Hal Brands, Peter Feaver, William Inboden, and Paul D. Miller, *Critical Assumptions and American Grand Strategy* (Washington, DC: CSBA, 2017), 32.

<sup>13</sup> We are indebted to Commodore Peter Leavy, Royal Australian Navy, for articulating this specific challenge to command and control.

situation, but there is likely not going to be sufficient time to seek specific approval for every instance. This becomes even more paramount the greater the intensity level of the conflict. If conflict does occur, there will be a need for high-speed, real-time transfer of data and intelligence for missile defense, targeting, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and electronic warfare (ISR/EW), and cyber operations. Respective governments will need to become comfortable with the political risks inherent in these requirements.

## Anti-Access/Area-Denial Conventional Forces

More than just its deliberate and concerted gray zone activities, China presents an excellent case study of the significant challenges to effective combined command and control created by the proliferation of enhanced anti-access/area-denial (A2AD) weapons systems. China's military buildup over the past two decades had as its main effort the development and introduction into service of capabilities designed to deny access into its "near seas"—the Yellow, East China, and South China Seas—by, principally, U.S. military forces. China's development of its A2/AD capabilities, including antiship ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, diesel-electric submarines, and advanced integrated air defense systems, enabled by sophisticated space, cyber, and electronic warfare (EW) capabilities, is designed to create doubt as to whether the United States can project decisive military power within the first island chain at an acceptable cost if contested. Additionally, Chinese ballistic missile capabilities present increasingly significant threats to U.S. facilities and forces in Okinawa and other Japanese bases, and Guam is increasingly threatened by intermediate range missiles.<sup>14</sup> Over time, facilities in northern Australia used by Australian and U.S. forces will also fall within the range of a growing number of Chinese conventional and nuclear capable ICBMs (as well as North Korean ICBMs) and submarine-launched intermediate range ballistic missiles.<sup>15</sup>

In its most simplistic and minimalist form, China's regional strategy can be stated as achieving parity with the United States in East Asia and the Western Pacific by building a Chinese sphere of influence up to the second island chain by means short of the use of force and by persuading the United States to accept power parity in the region with China.<sup>16</sup> To this end, China wants to deny and ultimately gain control of the maritime space up to the first island chain, and it wants to prevent the U.S. Navy and allied navies from controlling the seas between the first and second island chains. This means for China, "controlling the South China Sea, being the dominant force in the East China Sea, being the most influential external power compared to many of its neighbors, and having a clear strategic advantage over Japan."<sup>17</sup>

As China deploys surface-to-air missile systems with extended ranges, integrated with sophisticated radar and C5ISR/EW systems, the ability of U.S., Japanese, Australian, and other potential partner

---

<sup>14</sup> Brands, et al., *Critical Assumptions and American Grand Strategy*, 33. Brands, et al., go on to suggest that the consequence is that "the two primary military pillars of American policy in East Asia—forward presence and power projection—are in increasing danger, which is throwing the geopolitical arrangements that those pillars have long supported into greater doubt."

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Mahnken and Andrew Shearer, "Reassessing our defences in a more dangerous era," *The Australian*, August 4, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas J. Wright, *All Measures Short of War: The Contest for the Twenty-First Century and the Future of American Power* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017): 77.

<sup>17</sup> Wright, *All Measures Short of War*, 78.

force aircraft and surface vessels to operate forward in the region becomes increasingly limited. Aircraft carriers will also assume much greater risk given the range and quantity of Chinese antiship missiles and will be forced to operate further back until the missile threat is attrited. The cumulative effect is to significantly compound the challenge of establishing air superiority in such an environment. Chinese advances in counter-air and counter-space capabilities, supported by advanced EW and cyber capabilities, will potentially diminish U.S. strategic and operational ISR capabilities (both airborne and space-borne). The near impunity with which the United States and its allies have conducted ISR operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and the manner by which such ISR-assisted coalition decisionmaking at every level of command will likely not be replicated in such a congested and contested environment. Moreover, China has demonstrated improved ability and greater intent to disrupt U.S. military space networks and systems (and to steal sensitive technological information).<sup>18</sup> These developments will further stress combined command and control, especially at the tactical and operational levels of command and particularly in higher intensity scenarios.

To further complicate the operating environment, the Indo-Pacific is the most densely submarine populated maritime environment in the world, with more than 200 non-U.S. submarines dedicated to the region from more than 10 different countries. It is estimated that of those, 150 belong to China, Russia, and North Korea. Approximately 59 of these boats are assessed to be modern submarines, including up to 9 ballistic missile variants, 5 nuclear-powered attack or guided-missile submarines, and approximately 45 diesel-powered boats.<sup>19</sup> But there is more than just the quantitative challenge. The littoral characteristics of the operating environment present additional significant challenges for undersea warfare, especially to U.S. submarines. U.S. nuclear-powered submarines are designed to operate in deeper waters, with long endurance. Littoral operations are characterized by shallow depths and restricted maneuver, and present challenges for sensing technologies. This means that conventional submarines tend to have an advantage in the littoral regions because they can maneuver more effectively and better make use of the subsurface terrain to avoid detection.<sup>20</sup>

The large deep-water base located at Longpo on Yalong Bay on the southern coast of Hainan and abutting the northern edge of the South China Sea features extensive underground docking facilities and modern ship maintenance and repair facilities. The PLA Navy's Southern Fleet is located there and comprises, among other capabilities, 4 nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines, 2 nuclear-powered attack submarines, 16 diesel-electric powered attack submarines, 7 destroyers, 20 frigates, 40 patrol ships, 26 landing ships, and 9 mine counter-measure vessels. This force is larger than the naval forces of all of the other littoral states in the South China Sea combined. And its strength is compounded by significant numbers of coastguard and maritime militia vessels.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Michael Green, Kathleen Hicks and Mark Cancian, *Asia-Pacific Rebalance 2015: Capabilities, Presence and Partnerships* (Washington DC: CSIS, January 2016), 148.

<sup>19</sup> Green, Hicks, and Cancian, *Asia-Pacific Rebalance 2015*, 128.

<sup>20</sup> Green et al., *Asia-Pacific Rebalance 2015*, 128.

<sup>21</sup> Numbers of ships quoted in Ross Babbage, *Countering China's Adventurism in the South China Sea* (Washington DC: CSBA, 2016), 17. For details of China's maritime militia, see Conor M. Kennedy and Andrew S. Erickson, "China's Third Sea Force, The People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia: Tethered to the PLA," *China Maritime Report No.1* (Newport, RI: U.S. Naval War College, March 2017).

The sheer numbers of advanced surface ships, submarines, and aircraft China is able to field—now and particularly in the future—will stress U.S. and allied capacity. If tensions rise, more vulnerable, high-demand platforms such as tankers and command and control aircraft, as well as certain types of surveillance platforms, assume greater risk in such a contested operating environment. Aircraft carriers, the capability most associated with U.S. power projection, will also assume much greater risk given the range and quantity of Chinese antiship missiles and density of submarines. The challenge of establishing air superiority in such an environment is compounded significantly. Chinese advances in counter-air and counter-space capabilities, supported by advanced electronic warfare and cyber capabilities, also potentially diminish U.S. strategic and operational intelligence and surveillance capabilities, including space-based capabilities. Collectively, this creates an exceedingly complex and demanding operating environment in which to effectively command and control allied military forces, particularly when integrated action will depend on coordinating action across the three militaries in a timely manner, including at the political-military strategic level.

## Achieving Situational Understanding

A significant challenge to truly enhancing allied interoperability and integrating command and control in the region is the challenge associated with sharing information and intelligence, particularly with Japan. Australia, as a long-standing member of the Five Eyes intelligence community, has a strong intelligence management culture and well-established processes for the collection, analysis, dissemination, and storage of sensitive, classified intelligence, including effective independent oversight. U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) and the ADF Headquarters Joint Operations Command (HQJOC) already share a sophisticated common operating picture, and the two countries regularly share highly sensitive intelligence across (mostly) compatible command and control operating systems. This is not the case with Japan.

Although the United States and Japan share intelligence under extant bilateral agreements, the exchange is tightly controlled by the United States and significantly limited when compared with the volume and quality of intelligence sharing that occurs among the Five Eyes. Japan has not yet developed the same degree of experience and capacity in intelligence management that exists within the Five Eyes community; is less practiced in using that intelligence to enable operational outcomes; and lacks the level of government oversight and accountability that exists in the United States and Australia. The development of a robust intelligence management culture in Japan—with support from the United States and Australia—will take time; however, it is vital if the three countries want to move beyond unsophisticated coordination of security efforts in a benign operating environment.

Building a cost-effective and relevant common situational awareness tool for use among the three countries is not a technically insurmountable challenge. But it does require the necessary leadership and agreement by participants to install whichever system(s) is selected, and then ensure common and frequent use to build confidence in the integrity of the data within the system. Typically, the three countries do use common tools for situational awareness during exercises; however, each country tends to revert to national systems as soon as possible after the exercise. Employing common, interoperable information systems for situational awareness that can accommodate the full range of relevant and sensitive information required to enhance situational understanding and improve combined decisionmaking is not yet “business as usual.” In the interim, the United States

could consider a bespoke common command system (an Indo-Pacific CENTRIX-type network) to be deployed and practiced regularly regardless of how the three governments elect to develop combined command and control. This will at least assist in embedding habitual collaboration at the operational and tactical levels among the three countries. At a minimum, the United States and Australia (and the remaining Five Eyes countries) should agree to increase relevant intelligence products that are releasable to Japan (Rel J).

There are, of course, other challenges to realizing an effective networked defense in the region. These include ensuring interoperability of C5ISR/EW systems, integrating ballistic missile defenses, air defense systems, ISR systems, and operating concepts. But, without an ability to share relevant intelligence in real time, decisionmaking at any level of command will rarely be aligned, and responses will be uncoordinated because strategic and operational decisionmakers will not be able to keep up with tactical demands. The United States will need to continue to mentor and press Japan to develop an appropriate intelligence management culture and architecture that supports enhancing interoperability with the United States and other Five Eyes allies and partners; and Australia should continue to provide intelligence training and support to Japan to build the JSDF intelligence management culture.

### 3. Limitations and Risks Entailed in a Standing Combined Joint Headquarters in the Indo-Pacific Region

In its 2012 congressionally mandated independent review of U.S. defense strategy in the Asia-Pacific, CSIS recommended that a standing, operational-level, U.S.-led joint task force for the Western Pacific be established, subordinate to PACOM. The review argued the risks associated with major combat operations in the Asia-Pacific theater place a premium on preexisting command relationships. A standing joint task force could also confer operational advantages and deterrence and reassurance benefits by deploying within the first island chain; however, irrespective of its location, a standing joint task force, preferably manned by contributing allies, is a necessity for effective operational command of allied air and maritime security forces in future contingencies.<sup>22</sup>

Existing U.S.-led, standing combined joint headquarters owe their establishment to an agreed and readily identifiable threat that at the time of inception provided a compelling impetus for an integrated allied approach to deterrence, contingency, and response. NATO was created as a direct response to the threat posed by the Soviet Union (and other political and strategic motivations), and today has as its core tasks the collective defense of its members, crisis management, and cooperative security. It is now a heavily institutionalized alliance that tightly links political and military structures into multiple integrated commands at the strategic and operational levels of command.<sup>23</sup> The standing combined joint commands in Korea—Combined Forces Command and the United Nations Command—are also highly integrated, allied operational-level headquarters, designed to deter and respond to aggression from North Korea. The Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), commanded by commander U.S. Navy Central Command (NAVCENT) / U.S. 5th Fleet, comprises three tactical-level combined task forces with the respective missions of: Maritime Security Operations and Counter Terrorism (CTF150); Counter Piracy (CTF151); and Maritime Security Operations in the Arabian Gulf (CTF152). In the Indo-Pacific region there are, however, no agreed tangible threats to security of sufficient immediacy and magnitude that can act as a forcing function and provide compelling strategic logic to establish a standing combined joint headquarters to command and control assigned allied security forces. There are only potential threats.

Transitioning to a more permanent, operationally focused combined headquarters will present specific challenges for Japan and Australia. The political-military challenges and considerations at the strategic level, particularly with regard to the combined employment of forces, the authorities for the use of lethal force (rules of engagement and targeting), as well as boundaries and prescribed areas of operation, will be significant, especially for Japan and Australia. Up front, there will be a

---

<sup>22</sup> Michael Green, Kathleen Hicks, and Mark Cancian, *Asia-Pacific Rebalance 2015: Capabilities, Presence and Partnerships*, Abridged Report (Washington, DC: CSIS, January 2016), 12.

<sup>23</sup> Jeffrey W. Hornung, *Modeling a Stronger U.S.-Japan Alliance: Assessing U.S. Alliance Structures* (Washington, DC: CSIS, November 2015), 4.

requirement to understand and manage national constraints and restraints, and the combined headquarters will need to be well practiced in dealing with this inherent aspect of allied operations.

Both countries may be hesitant to press too quickly and too overtly to develop a more substantive command and control architecture in the region for concern of being overly provocative towards China. Certainly, a significant risk with moving straight to a permanent combined joint headquarters focused on combined operations in the region is that such an undertaking might be considered destabilizing and invoke an unnecessarily strong Chinese response. This makes a subtle approach to enhancing command and control interoperability more attractive because the perceived strategic risks associated with “upsetting” China would be more manageable.

There is a strong argument that all three countries must ensure their enhanced trilateral interoperability and command and control architecture fits logically within the larger picture of a more inclusive and flexible regional security order. Ideally, enhancing the trilateral relationship should not be perceived solely as applying pressure on a specific country, such as China, but rather seen as facilitating cooperation by providing public goods and enabling stability and prosperity throughout the region.<sup>24</sup>

In reality, the extent to which China becomes the explicit focal point of trilateral military interoperability will depend in large part on how China conducts its foreign policy in the coming years.<sup>25</sup> However, given China’s significant military build-up, harder-line diplomacy, and gray zone activities over recent years—not to mention President Xi Jinping’s consolidation of power and forthright language about China’s military at the 2017 Party Congress—an approach based on “more of the same” by the three countries has little prospect of shaping regional stability and effectively responding to emergent crises. Better integrated and interoperable air and maritime security capabilities among the allies, based on the foundation of a robust combined command and control architecture, can be a significant instrument in ensuring China has realistic expectations about the extent to which other countries will tolerate changes to the regional order. In this sense, actions to enhance interoperability between the three key allies can be used to clarify for Beijing the full potential costs of maintaining its current assertive course.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, an enhanced command and control architecture among the United States, Japan, and Australia will not preclude including China or other countries as a partner in addressing specific regional security issues. This is particularly the case if the command and control architecture is built with the goal of including additional like-minded countries for specific missions. Collectively, these benefits outweigh the risk of offending China.

For Australia, there is the related challenge of “entrapment”—overcoming the perception that a more enduring commitment in a combined joint headquarters will necessarily mean that Australia is committed to fight in conflicts that are not necessarily in its national interest or will require

---

<sup>24</sup> Ryo Sahashi, “Australia, Japan, and US Trilateral Cooperation in the Regional Security Architecture,” in Yuki Tatsumi (ed.), *US-Japan-Australia Security Cooperation: Prospects and Challenges* (Washington, DC: The Stimson Center, 2015), 96.

<sup>25</sup> James L. Schoff, “The Evolution of US-Japan-Australia Security Cooperation,” in Yuki Tatsumi (ed.), *US-Japan-Australia Security Cooperation: Prospects and Challenges* (Washington, DC: The Stimson Center, 2015), 46.

<sup>26</sup> Shearer, *Australia-Japan-US Maritime Cooperation*, 38.

sacrificing economic relations with China. Australian critics of efforts to enhance interoperability through more formal military-to-military arrangements in the Indo-Pacific frequently point to the prospect of Australia being drawn into a conflict between China and the United States over Taiwan, or one between Japan and China in the East China Sea over the Senkaku Islands, as an argument against more than ad hoc security arrangements in the region. There is a healthy debate in Australia presently over how the country can best balance its economic interests in China with its alliance with the United States.<sup>27</sup> The premise behind this paper is that Australian “entrapment” in any conflict involving either the United States or Japan in Northeast Asia is not inevitable, nor does participation in a combined joint headquarters under U.S. leadership mean a large force commitment by Australia for each and every conflict that occurs in the Indo-Pacific region. What is proposed is not a formal collective defense pact such as that created by Article V of NATO. Involvement in an enhanced Indo-Pacific C2 arrangement, if properly structured and managed, is entirely compatible with maintaining Australia’s sovereign decisionmaking. Moreover, improving interoperability among Japan, Australia, and the United States through enhanced command and control will actually contribute to maintaining a favorable balance of power and deterring potential adversaries, reducing the overall likelihood of conflict; and therefore will *reduce* the potential for entrapment in a conflict the Australia government may not wish to participate in.

For Japan too, implementing an enhanced combined command and control architecture will pose challenges. In the first instance, political rhetoric aside, constitutional, legal, fiscal, and political barriers exist against significantly expanding defense cooperation and interoperability, even with the United States. Prime Minister Abe has moved purposefully to upgrade Japan’s security policies and capabilities in recent years, and rising threats from North Korea and China are strengthening public support for this agenda. Nonetheless, it remains unclear whether the Japanese public is yet ready for a fundamental shift in Japan’s postwar military posture. Despite the reinterpretation of Japan’s constitution to allow for limited collective self-defense, the conditions for collective self-defense are still relatively restrictive and there remain institutional obstacles to full implementation in the near term. The most recent security legislation expands the JSDF rules of engagement to permit more proactive missions; however, direct participation in combat operations is still considered unconstitutional unless there is an existential threat.<sup>28</sup>

It is true the Japanese public has incrementally changed from a pacifist stance to being more accepting of the need for a more forward-leaning defense posture, but there remains a deep-seated reluctance among the public to shift away from the tenets of the peace constitution. It is unclear whether the Japanese people are ready for fundamental change, to include enduring participation in a combined joint, operational-level headquarters designed to control security operations across the spectrum of potential threats, including during routine Phase 0 / Phase 1 (Shaping / Detering) activities and operations. A key challenge for Japan (and with it for the United States and Australia) is to determine the practical applications of the possible expanded scope for JSDF operations enabled by the more recent legislation. Further constraint is the reality that, over the long term, Japan’s defense spending remains modest and will likely be limited by slow economic growth and

---

<sup>27</sup> For a good review of popular arguments surrounding entrapment, see John Blaxland, “Strategic Balancing Act: Australia’s Approach to Managing China, the USA and Regional Security Priorities,” *Security Challenges* 13, no. 1 (2017): 19–39.

<sup>28</sup> Emma Chantlett-Avery and Ian E. Rinehart, *The US-Japan Alliance* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, February 9, 2016): 1–5.

the overall fiscal environment, as well as public caution. Whether it is politically possible for the Abe government to increase defense spending significantly remains to be seen. Because of this, spending more on enhancing combined command and control will potentially be at the expense of other, more tangible capability expenditures that may be justified more easily.<sup>29</sup>

A second limitation for Japan is its relative lack of experience in joint operations, particularly at the operational level of command. Japan has recognized the central requirement for “jointness” in its most recent Defense White Paper, declaring the cornerstone of Japan’s peace and security is a “Dynamic Joint Defense Force.” Recognizing the increasingly severe security environment in its immediate neighborhood, and acknowledging that the U.S.-Japan alliance is the centerpiece of its national security policy, Japan is intent on “developing a highly effective joint defense force” to be employed “with a high level of flexibility and readiness based on joint operations.” This joint force is to be capable of managing the full spectrum of likely threats from humanitarian disaster response and “gray zone” activities in the maritime domain through to achieving air supremacy and maritime control in defense of the homeland.<sup>30</sup> But, as discussed earlier, the Allied Coordinating Mechanism and the Bilateral Planning Mechanism that have been created by the United States and Japan to coordinate the defense of the Japanese homeland, while a welcome step forward, lack the command and control elements necessary for a rapid *combined* and *joint* response to potential crises or conflicts. Nor does the JSDF have a central command and control headquarters for independent joint operations, one that separates operational command and control from chief of defense functions, which is critical for effective operational responses to a whole range of security challenges, including gray zone activities.

Another significant limitation confronting Japan, and one of the more significant practical challenges to enhancing interoperability and improving command and control in the region, is the challenge of trilateral information and intelligence sharing. As discussed, the United States and Australia have been sharing sensitive information for more than half a century under the Five Eyes partnership. It will take time for Japan to develop an appropriate intelligence management culture, but this is vital if the three countries want to move beyond basic coordination of security efforts in a benign operating environment. In the interim, a significant impediment to progress will be the tendency for relevant organizations within both the U.S. government and the Japanese government to use existing constraints on intelligence sharing as an excuse to “go slow” or to fixate on finding a complex technological fix. This approach will inhibit the more beneficial sharing of operating concepts, development of standard operating procedures, and enhancement of combined command philosophies that are essential ingredients of enhanced interoperability.

A less significant limitation for Japan, but one that shouldn’t be underestimated in terms of its short-term effects, is the capability of the JSDF to speak and understand English. Standard operating procedures, combined doctrine, terminology, and agreed operating concepts all go some way to establishing process and promoting clarity of intent. However, even English-speaking people from different countries—Australia and the United States, for example—misinterpret each other, particularly during moments of tension and high stress when decisionmaking is under pressure.

---

<sup>29</sup> Chantlett-Avery and Rinehart, *The US-Japan Alliance*, 5.

<sup>30</sup> Defense of Japan Annual White Paper: *Defense of Japan 2016*, 172, [http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w\\_paper/pdf/2016/DOJ2016\\_2-2-1\\_web.pdf](http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/pdf/2016/DOJ2016_2-2-1_web.pdf).

The JSDF will need to devote time and money to improving its English capabilities across the force to be more interoperable within a combined force led by the United States.

Finally, for both Japan and Australia, personnel capacity will be a real limitation that will affect the time required to stand up a permanent combined joint headquarters. In both countries, assignment of personnel to a combined headquarters will require senior-leader direction to reprioritize personnel postings. It will be easy for the United States to underestimate the challenge this will present to the JSDF and the ADF, particularly if the proposed permanent combined headquarters is a standalone headquarters that does not leverage the facilities and manpower of an existing U.S. headquarters.

## 4. A Staged Approach to Enhanced Allied Command and Control

We recommend the three governments embark on a purposeful effort to develop enhanced combined command and control at the operational level among the United States, Australia, and Japan in three broad stages. The three stages provide a scalable suite of actions that allow for a graduated evolution of command and control depending on regional circumstances and political appetite. The duration of each stage, and the decision to transition between stages, will depend on mutually agreed measures of performance and effectiveness of the combined joint headquarters, as well as the exigencies of the operating environment and the extent of political agreement among the allies.

Given the character of the operating environment and the inherent challenges to combined command and control in the Indo-Pacific region, the primary aspirational objective of an effective allied command and control architecture in the Indo-Pacific should be: ***to achieve a philosophy of command and procedures for control of combined security forces capable of successfully coordinating joint, combined, interagency security operations across the spectrum of conflict (HA/DR through “gray zone” conflict to high-intensity lethal operations) and across multiple domains, potentially against a modern and capable adversary in a contested environment.***

In designing an effective command and control architecture for combined operations among Japan, Australia, and the United States, we propose the following design principles:

- **Agreed control arrangements** via an integrated operational-level combined headquarters as the preferred objective to parallel control along national command lines.
- **Transparency** via a shared understanding of the environment (a common operating picture, recognizing there will inevitably be some restriction on the sharing of information and intelligence).
- **Predictability** via the regular practiced establishment of the agreed control arrangements and controlling mechanism (the headquarters), including for short-notice contingencies.
- **Complementarity** via compatible rules of engagement and declared caveats/restrictions of employment, as well as clear mutual understanding of national priorities.
- **Collaborative planning** at the operational level (aligned with respective national strategic direction), to include relevant contingency planning for potential operations across the likely spectrum of conflict.
- **Integrated execution**, including in the employment of ISR, target selection, and strike, cyber, and information operations.

- **Resilience** via appropriate defensive measures to protect systems and/or operate in a severely degraded information environment (including realistic exercises to test this ability).
- **Flexibility and adaptability** via a capacity (and willingness) to accept additional military forces from partner nations (South Korea and India, for example), as well as coast guard and law enforcement forces.

Stage 1 of an evolutionary approach will leverage existing interoperability efforts, practices, and routines but will also focus on creating the nucleus of a combined joint headquarters that builds allied interoperability through the command and control of combined exercises (bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral exercises). These exercises should, over an agreed period of time (annually, for example), cover the full range of potential threats and security challenges from HA/DR requirements through to high-intensity combined joint warfighting. The combined headquarters nucleus is not the training and exercise cell of one of PACOM's subordinate component or subcomponent headquarters; it does not plan or oversee the conduct of exercises. Instead, the combined joint headquarters participates in the exercise as the "Blue Force"-assigned combined joint headquarters so that it can develop the techniques and procedures necessary for it to evolve into an effective operational headquarters.

In Stage 2, depending on political appetite, the operational command of assigned forces may be restricted to coordinating and / or controlling combined forces only during a response to more benign "peacetime" threats such as environmental disasters or transnational threats such as terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, or piracy, while combined operational responses for more significant threats to regional stability may still be coordinated on an ad hoc and context-dependent basis. However, the overall objective during Stage 2 is to embed the nucleus of the combined joint headquarters into a select PACOM headquarters, to practice the headquarters consistently across the spectrum of conflict using the exercise schedule as the primary medium, but to also employ the headquarters frequently as the principal operational headquarters for Phase 0 / Phase 1 combined operations and patrols, and the potential combined headquarters for other, higher-intensity operations.

Stage 3 is the maturation of a standing combined headquarters, capable of commanding and controlling combined operations across the spectrum of conflict. Stage 3 entails the largest cost in terms of resources and political commitment but would be the most effective response to a serious deterioration in the Indo-Pacific security environment.

### **Stage 1: Build the nucleus.**

This stage would continue on the current trilateral track for enhancing air and maritime security interoperability. However, it would adopt a more aggressive pace to improve competencies in combined maritime and air security operations among Japan, Australia, and the United States through tailored combined trilateral exercises, patrols, liaison and embedded officer programs, capability development, and intelligence sharing. Command and control would be exercised primarily through parallel national command chains, or ad hoc integrated tactical and possibly operational headquarters such as existing PACOM joint task force headquarters (JTF519, for example), when circumstances permit. However, the overriding aim will be to generate the nucleus of a combined joint headquarters through developing a requisite "combined culture" that can evolve

into a more permanent, operational-level combined headquarters during Stage 2. In Stage 1, information and intelligence would be shared under existing permissions. Most targeting, ISR apportionment, and tactical tasking would be coordinated and mutually deconflicted, rather than controlled by a combined headquarters; however, respective strategic/political commands will need to exercise their own internal processes for working with the combined headquarters, in particular to develop mutual understanding of the parameters for the employment of assigned forces and respective authorizations of the use of force, so that the combined nucleus can evolve through Stage 1 and into Stage 2. New or improved capabilities would be developed in a combined manner where it is mutually beneficial.

In summary, the key characteristics of this stage are:

- C2 of operational deployments executed along parallel national command chains; more frequent and practiced command and control of combined exercise forces executed via a combined (U.S.-JSDF-ADF) joint headquarters nucleus collocated within an existing U.S. tactical- or operational-level headquarters, such as U.S. 7th Fleet, PACFLT, PACAF, or III MEF, depending on circumstances.
- Enhanced existing trilateral / multilateral training and exercise schedules, led by PACOM.
- Integrated / collaborative combined operational planning on a more frequent basis as part of combined joint exercises and patrols.
- Intelligence / information sharing as necessary for discrete tasks / activities.
- ISR: opportunities for complementary effects along national tasking lines and priorities, coordinated through PACOM or the nominated subordinate U.S. HQ.
- Enhanced efforts to develop a common operating picture.
- Joint / combined capability development (including industry) actively encouraged.
- Necessary authorities granted by respective national command chains for trilateral exercises / operations / capability development initiatives (including C4ISR) / lessons (as distinct from existing bilateral agreements).
- Opportunity for either Australia or Japan to practice assuming responsibility for a dedicated Joint Combined Area of Operations / Responsibility on the flanks of the U.S.-led main effort (during World War II, for example, the British agreed to assume responsibility for the Indian Ocean as an economy-of-force effort to protect the western flank of U.S.-led efforts in the South West Pacific Area, Central Pacific, and Northern Pacific Areas).

## **Stage 2: Enabled operational-level command and control.**

The second stage represents a much more purposeful line of effort among the three countries to develop a more enduring, expansive, and robust command and control architecture for regional maritime security. The objective during this phase is to enable an existing U.S. PACOM component

headquarters—PACFLT or PACAF, for example—or a subordinate headquarters—U.S. 7th Fleet HQ or III MEF—to become a combined headquarters charged with commanding and controlling Japanese, Australian, and U.S. assets in response to specific situations. The “base” combined headquarters hosting the nucleus from Stage 1 could be context dependent and could be based on an existing joint task force headquarters, such as JTF519; however, it would need to be exercised in this role regularly to ensure competency and create an element of predictability, particularly for the contributing countries. Competencies of this combined headquarters would be linked explicitly to a series of exercises covering the full spectrum of potential operations and involving the full suite of capabilities and tasks—both tactical and operational—in realistic scenarios, including short-notice contingencies. A necessary competency would include the relationship of this situational combined headquarters with the operational/strategic headquarters of each of the participants, including responsibility for developing and implementing relevant rules of engagement and targeting authorities.

This evolution would require agreed and practiced standard operating procedures, and would be enabled by an aggressive officer embed program by each of the three countries. This stage would be more effectively implemented were Japan to establish a single joint operational headquarters that could then function as the single national point of contact for operational matters, much in the way PACOM and HQJOC function (a subsequent paper will discuss possible models). PACOM would be required to lead a combined training needs analysis to determine how best to adapt the existing training and exercise regime to support the agreed outcomes, and a relevant combined lessons-learned process would need to be implemented.

This stage would likely require a review of current information and intelligence-sharing permissions to enable greater transparency among each of the participants, particularly for Japan. Clearly, this will require significant leadership and investment from PACOM, and commitment and similar investment from Japan and Australia, in both dollars and intellectual capital and personnel, to move beyond platitudes to ensure a robust command and control architecture that not only reassures allies but contributes to deterring potential adversaries. This stage should be designed with a view to transitioning to Stage 3 should circumstances dictate.

In summary, the key characteristics of this stage include:

- Command and control exercised via an existing U.S. PACOM component HQ or subordinate HQ that is enabled to act as a Combined Joint Task Force HQ (CJTFFHQ) for specified operations and activities (beyond just exercises) on a regular basis.
- A robust trilateral exercise and certification regime, agreed standard operating procedures, and regular activation of the combined headquarters.
- Integrated / collaborative operational-level planning is an essential function of the CJTFFHQ (this would need to be supported by enhanced strategic-level coordination, for example through an upgraded security and defense coordination forum).
- ISR: centralized planning and direction (with decentralized execution) by the CJTFFHQ. This depends on a willingness by the participating countries to allocate ISR assets to the CJTFFHQ for specified missions.

- Undersea warfare dimension accounted for in planning and execution by the designated CJTFHQ, with the long-term goal being integrated undersea warfare, not just deconfliction or coordinated actions. This will include water space management and cooperative deployments of unmanned underwater systems.
- Theater ASW competencies developed across the combined forces—theater ASW to be commanded and controlled via the designated CJTFHQ.
- A common operating picture is essential.
- To be most effective, this stage requires:
  - Relevant authorities / permissions to enable full integration along trilateral lines, to include more expansive permissions to share intelligence / information, particularly with the JSDF, and for combined capability development.
  - An integrated or, as a minimum, compatible C4ISR platform.
  - Agreed (complementary) national ROE.

### **Stage 3: Permanent combined operational headquarters.**

This is the costliest investment; however, it offers the most robust option for command and control, the greatest operational benefits and resilience, and the strongest deterrent effect. This stage would see the evolution to a standing combined operational level headquarters, led by the United States but staffed by all three countries on an agreed permanent basis. The standing combined joint headquarters need not be overly large on a full-time basis, though it will require capacity to surge and grow if necessary. The current Combined Maritime Forces within CENTCOM might serve as a useful model from which to build a standing combined joint headquarters in the Indo-Pacific, albeit with more concrete commitments from the three primary participants. Stage 2 might be developed further, such that the “context-dependent” headquarters evolves into a permanent combined operational headquarters (PACFLT, for example), with forward-deployed subordinate combined task force/task group headquarters established as required.

Clearly, this stage carries with it a more substantial personnel cost that, for both Japan and Australia, is a significant factor. For the ADF, establishing a continuous naval presence in the Western Pacific makes increasing strategic sense but would commit a significant proportion of its surface fleet to maintain an enduring presence, resulting in a commensurate reduction in capability available for long-standing operations in the Middle East. Contributing headquarter personnel during Stage 3 for the ADF would have similar implications for continuing contributions to Combined Maritime Forces in CENTCOM. The JSDF too will need to reprioritize personnel commitments to ensure the right skilled personnel are able to be assigned to the permanent combined headquarters.

In summary, the key characteristics of this stage include:

- C2 exercised via a permanent standing CJTFHQ. The permanent CJTFHQ would share existing infrastructure within an extant PACOM HQ (similar to the Combined Maritime Forces HQ in CENTCOM).
- The same characteristics and requirements as Stage 2, but with an enhanced personnel commitment to staff the HQ full time, and surge when required.

## 5. Conclusion

The international rules-based order that has been underwritten by the United States since the end of the Cold War is being severely challenged on multiple fronts. Recent geopolitical challenges to the international order have occurred concurrent with a period when many countries sympathetic to and invested in the current international order—including Japan, the United Kingdom, and key European allies of the United States—are confronting grave long-term economic, demographic, and internal political challenges that have placed increasing pressure on their political will and capacity to maintain a level of defense spending sufficient to meet their geopolitical objectives.<sup>31</sup>

Additionally, military threats to stability have become increasingly multi-domain, ranging across a very broad spectrum of lethality, complexity, and military involvement. Precision-guided munitions, able to travel at very high speeds with scalable lethality, are changing the implications of geography, and actions in space, cyber, and electronic warfare create an increasingly contested command and control environment.

Given the operating environment in the Indo-Pacific region, China's actions to influence and change the regional balance of power and international order, and constrained U.S. defense budgets measured against global operational commitments, deeper defense cooperation in the region is “no longer a policy choice; rather it is a reality and a necessity.” In practical terms, this means “a shift from broad statements of principle to a series of focused, targeted, and explicitly linked efforts with tangible promise.”<sup>32</sup> Integrated U.S.-Japan-Australia maritime and air cooperation can help to redress capability shortfalls, enhance coalition responses to emergent crises, and strengthen deterrence and reassurance in the Indo-Pacific.

A more integrated approach to security in the Indo-Pacific region will depend on U.S. leadership. Among other things, it will require a substantial U.S. cultural shift—both in Washington and at PACOM—from thinking reflexively about Indo-Pacific security in traditional “hub and spokes” bilateral terms. The alliance network that has underpinned security in the region for decades will remain vitally important. But the traditional model needs to be complemented by robust and relevant multilateral alliance networks. The potential for institutional and / or bureaucratic resistance to a more genuinely multilateral approach to regional security that offers more than just ad hoc reactions to crises is high, not least because identifying, analyzing, and responding to security challenges in the Indo-Pacific through the bilateral lens has become habitual. Only the United States can make the internal cultural changes necessary to transition away from defaulting

---

<sup>31</sup> In the specific case of the United States, a period of disinvestment in defense has left U.S. military resources far scarcer than before, resulting in a “creeping crisis of American military primacy, as Washington's margin of superiority is diminished, and the gap between U.S. commitments and capabilities grows.” The consequence is strategic insolvency: the power of the United States is becoming dangerously insufficient for the grand strategy and international order it supports. Hal Brands and Eric Edelman, “Toward Strategic Solvency: The Crisis of American Military Primacy and the Search for Strategic Solvency,” *Parameters*, 46(4), (Winter 2016/17): 27.

<sup>32</sup> Mark W. Lawrence, *Tailoring the Global Network for Real Burden Sharing at Sea* (Washington, DC: CSIS, August 2015): v, 8. See also Shearer, *Australia-Japan-U.S. Maritime Cooperation*, 5.

to the bilateral “hub and spoke” framework as the paradigm for analyzing and responding to security issues in the Indo-Pacific and institute a more multilateral approach that is sufficiently robust and effective.<sup>33</sup>

Underpinning enhanced allied interoperability in the Indo-Pacific region is the requirement for an enhanced command and control architecture that ensures greater integration of effort among the United States, Japan, and Australia. The rewards of a more robust and effective command and control architecture for combined maritime and air security are significant. Outcomes will include:

- More timely and relevant responses to crises including environmental disasters.
- Enhanced development, coordination, integration, and sustainment of capabilities so that the deployment of capabilities across all domains is much more effective.
- The capacity to grow and include other regional countries on a case-by-case basis.
- A greater deterrent effect against those actors who might wish to destabilize the region.

Developing a more robust command and control architecture capable of executing combined operations to counter the likely range of threats to stability in the region needs to become a priority. Pursuing it will require difficult decisions by governments as well as challenging institutional, bureaucratic, and cultural norms. However, doing more of the same, with less, is unlikely to generate effective responses to emergent crises or maintain regional stability.

---

<sup>33</sup> Victor Cha proposes such a transition will evolve into a “complex patchwork” of bilaterals, multilaterals, and other plurilateral configurations that, if implemented sensibly, may be a useful tool for muting regional security dilemmas. See Victor Cha, “Complex Patchworks: U.S. Alliances as Part of Asia’s Regional Architecture,” *Asia Policy*, no. 11 (January 2011), [http://www.nbr.org/publications/asia\\_policy/Preview/AP11\\_US\\_Alliance\\_preview.pdf](http://www.nbr.org/publications/asia_policy/Preview/AP11_US_Alliance_preview.pdf).

# About the Authors

Col. Trent Scott has served as an infantry officer in the Australian Army since 1991 and recently completed three years as director for operational plans at Australia's Headquarters Joint Operations Command. He has significant operational experience, including deployments to East Timor (twice); the Solomon Islands, as the J3 of the Regional Assistance Mission Solomon Islands; Iraq, as the deputy director of the Counterinsurgency Training Centre; and Afghanistan, as the deputy director of the Counterinsurgency Training Centre and as commanding officer 3 RAR Task Group. Colonel Scott is a distinguished graduate of the U.S. Marine Corps Command and Staff College and the U.S. Marine Corps School of Advanced Warfighting, both at Quantico, Virginia. He holds a bachelor of arts (honors) in politics from the University of New South Wales and master's degrees in military studies and operational studies from the Marine Corps University, in international relations from Deakin University, and in international public policy from the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS).

Andrew Shearer is a senior adviser on Asia-Pacific Security and director of the Alliances and American Leadership Project at CSIS. Mr. Shearer was previously national security adviser to Prime Ministers John Howard and Tony Abbott of Australia. In that capacity, he played a leading role in formulating and implementing Australian foreign, defense, and counter-terrorism policies. He provided high-level advice that shaped Australian government decisions on engagement with the Asia-Pacific region, defense capabilities, responses to international crises and terrorist incidents, and longer-term strategic challenges. Mr. Shearer has more than 25 years of experience in intelligence, national security, diplomacy, and alliance management.





---

COVER PHOTO U.S. ARMY/STAFF SGT. STEVEN SCHNEIDERAND



1616 Rhode Island Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20036  
202 887 0200 | [www.csis.org](http://www.csis.org)