

US Pacific Command, Climate Change and Collaborative Society アメリカ太平洋軍、気候変動、協調の安全保障

Andrew DeWit

While organizers mobilize across the globe for history's biggest climate march in New York on September 21,¹ strikingly large numbers of Americans - and an even bigger share of their political representatives - remain quiet, doubtful or even in denial about climate change.² But the US military, especially in the Pacific, is neither uncertain nor passive. The August 10 *Stars and Stripes* tells us that US Pacific Command (PACOM) is also "not waiting on politics" in responding to climate change. Brigadier General Mark McLeod, former head of PACOM's Logistics, Engineering and Security Cooperation directorate describes why. He points out that 70 percent of global storms are in the Pacific and that climate change's impacts are already having military consequences. He dismisses the denialism rampant in American politics and society with: "Call it climate change, call it the big blue rabbit, I don't give a hoot what you call it — the military has to respond to those kinds of things."³

The US military is already a leader on climate-change mitigation through renewable energy and energy efficiency. The military's adaptation efforts are also instructive for civil society and may help curb climate-related geopolitical instability. In the Pacific, centring on the vast region of Oceania, 12,000 kilometers east to west and 6000 kilometers north to south, PACOM is increasingly focused on building resilience against climate change and creative networks of cooperation on humanitarian assistance and disaster response, or HADR. The *Stars and Stripes* article points out that -

Washington's gridlock notwithstanding - the best evidence indicates that climate change's threat to human security is already dire and rapidly worsening and thus "U.S. Pacific Command is forging strategies with partner nations in the region to mitigate the security effects of global warming."



Loading US military disaster relief for Japan, March 12, 2011

PACOM's partner countries include many of Oceania's 22 island nations and territories in the subregions of Melanesia, Micronesia and Polynesia. Their human populations total 9 million over an area stretching far across the Western Pacific, and their biodiversity and species endemism are unparalleled on the planet.⁴ Among them is Kiribati, 4000 kilometers southeast of Hawaii and with a population of 103,000. It may be the world's first island nation to disappear beneath the rising sea. The 33 islands that compose Kiribati's total land area of 811 square

kilometers, spread out over 3.5 million square kilometers, are for the most part only a meter or two above sea level. And many are hardly wider than a city block. The islands are increasingly vulnerable to storm surges and their groundwater flows of fresh water are endangered by drought and the intrusion of salinity from the rising ocean. Kiribati president Anote Tong's request to PACOM for engineering support earlier this year has met with proposals that include an exchange of environmental engineers whose work seems likely to include desalinization, rainwater collection systems, bolstering natural wave barriers such as mangrove forests and coral reefs, and if necessary building seawalls.⁵



Map of Oceania and Oceanian Countries
Kiribati: A Nation Going Under

PACOM is also partnered on climate-change adaptation with larger regional players such as Australia, including a 6-month rotational deployment of Marines to the northern area of

Darwin since April 2012.⁶ Daniel Russel, the US State Department's senior official for the Asia-Pacific region, notes that "a significant component of the rationale and the mission for the rotational [US Marine] presence in Darwin ... is to increase the region's ability to respond to natural disasters."⁷



Marines loading into an Osprey at Darwin, September 3, 2013

This collaboration is a bit awkward of late, at the political level, because climate denialism is even more of a problem in Australian politics than in America. Though climate deniers can be found at all levels of American government, the Obama White House itself is unequivocal on the climate threat. Moreover, Secretary of State John Kerry put climate change at the centre of the pivot to Asia in his August 13 speech, at the East-West Center in Hawaii, on the "U.S. Vision for Asia-Pacific Engagement." Kerry described climate change as "the biggest challenge of all that we face right now." He did not stop there, and instead made a point of citing "unprecedented storms, unprecedented typhoons, unprecedented hurricanes, unprecedented droughts, unprecedented fires, major damage, billions and billions of dollars of damage being done that we're paying for instead of investing those billions of dollars in avoiding this in the first place."



Kerry speaks on the “U.S. Vision for Asia-Pacific Engagement

By contrast, Australia’s current federal government is led by Prime Minister Tony Abbott, a climate denialist who eliminated his country’s carbon tax in mid-July. Through his ideologically-driven action, Abbott became the first national leader ever to abolish a carbon price.⁸ Indeed, Tom Arup, the Environment editor of the Australian newspaper *The Age*, describes his country as being in a “climate coma” because the Abbott government has not only axed the carbon tax but is also attacking mechanisms to foster clean energy and efficiency.⁹ Reflecting this extremist antipathy to climate science and renewable energy, Abbott’s top business advisor, Maurice Newman, wrote a bizarre opinion piece in the August 14 *The Australian* warning that the real threat was global cooling due to declining solar activity.¹⁰ The Abbott government is also reluctant to put climate change on the very important G20 leaders summit in Brisbane (in November), despite increasing US, European and eminent Australians’ calls to for him to relent and be reasonable.¹¹



Abbott advisor Maurice Newman warns of imminent ice age

Tony Abbott and Environment Minister Greg Hunt after abolishing the carbon tax



Yet PACOM and Kerry have a staunch ally in the Australian military. The Australian Chief of Army (the top post), Lieutenant General David Morrison, has made it clear that he sees climate change as “the great challenge of our time.” Morrison points to the large number of low-lying islands in the region, and concludes the climate threat will entail “providing immediate assistance for humanitarian and disaster relief.”¹² And Morrison is not a lone voice. In January of 2013 (prior to Abbott’s taking office), the Australian National Security Strategy incorporated climate change. For many observers, this major development in Australian security policy shows “that the career military and national security establishments in the country have been taking climate change risks very seriously.”¹³

This approach is rapidly becoming common sense throughout the region’s militaries. On July 18, the Philippines appointed Lieutenant

General Gregorio Pio Catapang Jr., an officer expert on climate change and HADR, to be their new Chief of Staff Armed Forces of the Philippines. Echoing the leadership of America's Pacific Command, General Catapang argues that climate change – not armed conflict – is the greatest threat his country confronts.¹⁴

PACOM has many other allies on this issue, among militaries as well as in politics. One high-level illustration of this fact was seen at the Shangri-La Dialogue 2014,¹⁵ held over May 30 to June 1 of this year. It hosted a special session on “Climate change, HADR, and Security in the Asia-Pacific.” The speakers included the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence of Tonga, New Zealand's Minister of Defence, and the International Affairs Advisor to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh.¹⁶ Tonga's Prime Minister, Lord Tu'iavakanō, delivered an eloquent description of how climate change is the “number one threat to the security of our region, our survival, and our people” and “now not just an environmental issue, or an economic issue.” The New Zealand Minister of Defence, Jonathan Coleman, revealed that a 2010 white paper determined that “30% of our resources in New Zealand's defence force are actually committed to HADR work.” He also stressed the opportunity for expanding collaboration on climate-change related HADR training and deployment to include China. He used a concrete example: “last year for the first time ever we held a quadrilateral exercise in New Zealand involving China, New Zealand, Australia and the US – the first time PLA troops participated in an exercise in New Zealand, and that was a scenario that took lessons from the Christchurch earthquakes and sought to apply them in possible scenarios across the Asia-Pacific region.”

For his part, Gowher Rizvi, International Affairs Advisor to Bangladesh's Prime Minister, pointed out that 70% of the world's low-lying coastlines are in the Asia-Pacific, with one

estimate of USD 85 billion annual damage rising to USD 500 billion by 2030. He added that the multiplicity of effects from climate change makes it “the largest and the most significant global threat to peace and security,” with a particular intensity in the Asia-Pacific. He also lamented that climate change and security “remains peripheral to national, regional and international peace and security architecture and strategies.”



Just Politics?

There is a certain amount of cynicism that political actors are using HADR as a wedge “to pursue military engagement or soften military connections.”¹⁷ Yet given the growing threat of climate change, the military role in HADR surely needs to be expanded and more deeply and deliberately institutionalized in collaboration with NGOs and other organizations. This argument is receiving increased academic attention¹⁸ and is the focus of critical thinking and institutional initiatives within the military itself.¹⁹ Experts within the US military have begun to highlight means through which PACOM could facilitate a “community-centric approach” that goes beyond short-term HADR to build multifaceted resilience and thus reduce disaster risk.²⁰

Yet this argument for an expanded, collaborative military role is in contrast to HADR's reigning normative framework, the so-called Oslo guidelines of 1994 (updated in

2007). These guidelines relegate the military role in foreign-country HADR to a "last resort."²¹ And many of the multitudinous NGOs in the HADR field are in fact vociferously opposed to military involvement in relief operations.

It would of course be ideal to keep foreign military forces out of HADR. But non-military actors lack adequate means, especially to do large-scale HADR. There is at present no indication of willingness to substantially increase HADR funding for non-military civilian agencies or NGOs. One precondition for keeping the military out of HADR would be to slash 2012's global military spend of over USD 1.5 trillion and devote much of it to the present less than USD 20 billion funding for humanitarian assistance. That seems unlikely to happen, especially as nations throughout East Asia, the Middle East and other regions ramp up military spending.²² Moreover, our increasingly unstable geopolitics presents opportunities. As New Zealand's Defence Minister implied in his talk, the more our militaries collaborate on HADR, building bridges and bolstering human security, the less risk of yet more wars driven by climate, resource and other inter-related and escalating crises. This perspective has now begun to emerge publicly from within PACOM itself, in a recent analysis by PACOM regional analyst Jen Pearce. Pearce systematically outlines the benefits for both China and the US, as well as the larger region, from collaborating on HADR.²³ One of those benefits could be building a bridge between the Japanese and Chinese, through HADR, as some Japanese experts suggest.²⁴ One might add that the more our militaries devote resources to HADR and related activities, in collaboration with NGOs, the greater the prospect of civilizing the military rather than further militarizing society.



US-China HADR training, Hawaii, November 12-14, 2013

Recall the remarks of Gowher Rizvi, International Affairs Advisor to Bangladesh's Prime Minister. He expressed dismay that the link between climate change and security is marginal in most of the institutions that shape international relations. The inattention of every major country's public debate concerning what the militaries are doing on HADR, and why, is just as lamentable. Among other things, it leaves room for unscrupulous politicians like Tony Abbott to play games that will exacerbate the already costly consequences of climate change.

The highly regarded environmentalist George Marshall, formerly senior campaigner for Greenpeace US and the Rainforest Foundation, writes about this inattention in his new book *Don't Even Think About It: Why Our Brains Are Wired to Ignore Climate Change*.²⁵ Neuroscience and sociology reveal much about why even academe has yet to come to grips with the enormity of climate change. Marshall also tells us that climate change activism can come in a variety of forms that we might not recognize or feel comfortable about. One example he uses is emerging climate change activism among pro-life evangelicals on the basis of the rights of the unborn. In interviews, Marshall makes a convincing case that:

1) climate change is already too vast and fast to be compartmentalized as an environmental issue, and

2) that climate change activism is emerging among groups very different from progressive environmentalists and in discourses that the latter would never dream of.

Though Marshall himself does not, apparently, explore what the PACOM and partner militaries are doing, their mobilization on climate change as a national security threat is surely a profound example of precisely what he means. Perhaps the organizers of the September 21 People's Climate March in New York can harness the example and help broaden the link between climate change and national security into a more-encompassing paradigm of human security. As we saw in the above, many elements of the militaries and associated think tanks are clearly moving in that direction already.

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Notes

- ¹ The People's Climate March site is [here](#).
- ² For example, Ipsos MORI's first-ever Global Trends poll (2014) includes a section on the environment. In answer to the question "To what extent do you agree or disagree? The climate change we are currently seeing is largely the result of human activity," America was last among 20 major nations with only 54% in agreement. Fully 32% of Americans disagreed, the largest level of disagreement in the sample. The 14% share who opted for "Don't know" was also the largest in the sample. See [here](#).
- ³ See Wyatt Olson, ["PACOM not waiting on politics to plan for climate change challenges,"](#) Stars and Stripes, August 10, 2014.
- ⁴ See ["About Oceania,"](#) International Union for Conservation of Nature," nd.
- ⁵ See Wyatt Olson, ["PACOM not waiting on](#)

politics to plan for climate change challenges,” Stars and Stripes, August 10, 2014.

⁶ The initial deployment of 200 Marines is slated to be expanded to a 2500 member Marine Air-Ground Task Force during 2016-17. See Donna Miles, “Rotational Force in Australia Paves Way for Big Growth in 2014,” DoD News, September 4, 2013.

⁷ See the quote in Peter Hartcher and John Garnaut, “US administration and Tony Abbott have ‘meeting of minds’ on climate change,” Sydney Morning Herald, August 14, 2014.

⁸ Lisa Cox, “Carbon tax is gone: Repeal bills pass the Senate,” Sydney Morning Herald, July 17, 2014.

⁹ Tom Arup, “Tony Abbott battles the future by axing carbon tax,” Sydney Morning Herald, July 17, 2014.

¹⁰ Maurice Newman, “We’re ill-prepared if the iceman cometh,” The Australian, August 14, 2014.

¹¹ See John Conroy, “Bishop-Kerry talks covered climate change: US official,” Daily Telegraph, August 14, 2014. Among the prominent Australians calling for the inclusion of climate change on the G20 agenda are twelve leading medical scientists who wrote an open letter to Abbott. See “Put climate change on G20 agenda, medics tell Tony Abbott,” Responding to Climate Change, August 12, 2014.

¹² See the transcript of General Morrison’s interview with Karon Snowdon, “Australian army chief says climate change will impact military role,” ABC Radio Australia, February 20, 2014.

¹³ See “Climate Security on the Australia-United States Ministerial Consultation Table,” The Center for Climate and Security, August 14, 2014.

¹⁴ See Niko Dizon, “Climate change buff is new AFP chief of staff,” Philippine Daily Inquirer, July 17, 2014.

¹⁵ The Shangri-La Dialogue was initiated in 2002 as “a forum where the Asia-Pacific’s defence ministers could engage in dialogue aimed at building confidence and fostering practical security cooperation.” The Dialogue has since become “the most important regular gathering of defence professionals in the region,” and “a vital annual fixture in the diaries of Asia-Pacific defence ministers and their civilian and military chiefs of staff.” See [here](#).

¹⁶ A transcript of the session is available [here](#).

¹⁷ On this point, see the remarks of Anthony Bergin, Deputy Director of The Australian Strategic Policy Institute, in “Multilateral disaster relief efforts - not as easy as you might think,” The Strategist, March 11, 2014.

¹⁸ One example is Glen Penner “A Framework for NGO-Military Collaboration,” Small Wars Journal, July 9, 2014.

¹⁹ The US military itself has recognized that HADR expertise is repeatedly lost through personnel turnover and thus “efforts to institutionalize effective policies, tactics, techniques, and procedures (TTPs) that draw on lessons observed from recent responses and provide increased education and training opportunities related to disaster relief for individuals and units.” See Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance Director Pamela K. Milligan, “PACOM Disaster Response Lessons Trends 1991-2013,” Center for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance, March 12, 2014.

²⁰ See the highly informative article by Erik J Reaves, Michael Termini, and Frederick M Burkle, “Reshaping US Navy Pacific Response in Mitigating Disaster Risk in South Pacific

[Island Nations: Adopting Community-Based Disaster Cycle Management,](#)” Prehospital and Disaster Medicine Special Report, Vol 29, No 1, February 2014.

²¹ See [“Humanitarian Civil-Military Coordination and the Oslo Guidelines,”](#) UNOCHA.

²² For the numbers, see Yantoultra Ngui, [“As China flexes maritime muscle, SE Asia builds home-grown defence industry,”](#) Reuters, August 12, 2014.

²³ See the excellent analysis from PACOM regional analyst Jen Pearce, [“HADR and US-China Military Cooperation,”](#) The Diplomat, July 28, 2014.

²⁴ On this, see Hideshi Futari, [“Japan’s Disaster Relief Diplomacy: Fostering Military Cooperation in Asia,”](#) Asia Matter for America (East-West Center), May 21, 2013.

²⁵ A July 23 interview with George Marshall can be read and listened to at [“A World Burns in Silence,”](#) Radio Ecoshock, July 23: See [here](#).