IMPACTS OF THE “PACIFIC PIVOT” ON MARINE ECOSYSTEMS

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Hawaii is the home of Pacific Command, or PACOM, ground zero for the militarization of the Asia-Pacific region. It’s where all decisions are made to carry out Obama’s “Pacific Pivot.” These are decisions that directly impact the big watery region that includes the Arctic Ocean to the north, the west coast of the Americas to the east, the Indian Ocean to the west, all the way south to Antarctica.

Decisions by PACOM are wreaking havoc on the health of the ocean. When the ocean is healthy, it supplies the planet’s atmosphere with 50-85% of its oxygen. But militarization is killing the ocean. And a dead ocean means a dead planet.

The two activities most destructive to ocean health are: basebuilding and military exercises. Wherever there is a base, soldiers are always practicing for war-- even if there is no war. This means practice of amphibious attacks and bombing, torpedoes, underwater mines and other detonations from the air, from the sea, and from the ground. For the dolphins, whales, coral, turtles, seaweed and all the other living things in the sea, all of this military practice is not really “practice.” It is real war, all the time. This is why we are seeing mass beachings of whales and other marine life death at record numbers.

BASEBUILDING

There are already over 400 official U.S. bases throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Meanwhile, client-states, such as Japan and South Korea, have been enlisted to build their own installations in addition to the
U.S. bases. And now, India is getting in the game. These bases may officially belong to nations other than the U.S., but they all serve the U.S. agenda – to contain China. The South Korean navy base on Jeju Island was recently completed, and new Japanese missile bases are also slated for the Ryukyu island chain that encircles China, and India just signed the LEMOA, or the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement, which will allow any U.S. ship into any Indian base. This is a great way for the U.S. to have all the services of a base, without the inconvenience of U.S. environmental regulation or the expense of operations, and with less “colonialism” controversy than what would result from opening a U.S. base on Indian soil.

The environmental impacts of basebuilding are huge. One of the most tragic examples of how basebuilding destroys an ancient culture, a reef, a rare coastline, clean water and fertile farmland is the recently completed Korean navy base on Jeju Island.

Gangjeong village on Jeju Island has been nearly destroyed in order to build a state-of-the-art Korean navy base that will serve U.S. interests. The South Korean government has dredged what was recently the world’s largest and most perfectly intact temperate soft-coral habitat in the world – a 15-acre undersea garden. It contained at least 60 species of coral. It was part of a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve and a Korean Natural Monument. The South Jeju Sea was also home to the world’s most northerly pod of Indo-Pacific bottle-nosed dolphins, the only pod of dolphins in Korea. The culturally significant haenyo tradition of woman sea divers have lost their diving grounds at Gangjeong. The rocky coastline that was once home to 86 species of seaweed and over 500 species of shellfish has been covered with concrete and base buildings. Now the military wants to swallow up more of the village and tangerine orchards to provide military housing.
Gangjeong once boasted some of the cleanest drinking water in the world. But the freshwater springs were covered with concrete and the military base. Wherever there are bases, toxic substances such as trichloroethylene that are used to clean ships and other military vessels perpetually leach into soil and groundwater. Now that is happening to the groundwater of Gangjeong.

And now Russia is building bases in disputed islands north of Japan, while China has finished building bases in disputed reefs in South China Sea. The environmental devastation is rampant.

MILITARY EXERCISES

It is important to understand how military exercises interfere with whale and dolphin survival. Sonar is one of the central components of military exercises. Unbearably loud sound waves are shot through the ocean to detect the presence of submarines. To give you an idea of the great distances that sound travels in water, if there is a sound made in the Indian ocean, it can be heard all the way to the northwest coast of the U.S. Whales and dolphins also send out sounds to find their way, to find food, to mate, to follow their mothers. If the ocean is filled with loud noises such as military noise, they cannot function. Worse, still, the noise is painful and they will swim away to escape. But they cannot escape. So they beach themselves on land and kill themselves. There have been hundreds, if not thousands, of whale beachings due to military sonar testing. The whales swim so quickly from very deep water to shallow water to escape, which creates a loss of pressure that is so rapid that it causes their brains to explode. That is why you can see blood coming out of the ears of beached whales. Sonar testing, along with amphibious warfare, are two of the most destructive military exercises.

The U.S. has permanently claimed for itself two huge swaths of ocean where it conducts military testing
and exercises. One of these is called the Hawaii Range Complex, which is 9 million square kilometers or roughly the size of China, and the other is the Mariana Islands Range Complex, which has been 1.7 square kilometers, but now, as part of the Pacific Pivot, the military is in the process of doubling its size to 3.3 million square kilometers, which is the size of India. That would be a combined area of over 12 million square kilometers! And this does not even count the range complexes off the coast of Alaska and California.

The destruction to the oceans by these range complexes is astonishing. For example, the U.S. military itself projects that over the next five years, the number of marine mammals to be killed and injured by sonar testing in just the Hawaii Range Complex alone will be 9.6 million whales and dolphins.

As I mentioned, the Pentagon is actively expanding the range complex of the Mariana islands. Part of the expansion includes seizing the islands of Pagan and Tinian, which are both inhabited, and using them for perpetual full-spectrum assaults from air, land and at sea, including reef-crushing amphibious landings and countless detonations. The U.S. already uses one of the Mariana islands for bombing practice. That island is called Farallon de Medinilla, or “FDM.” The U.S. currently drops 2000 bombs per year on this island and now, as part of the Pacific Pivot, is tripling the number of bombs dropped to 6,000 per year.

Bombs dropped on FDM are ejected from the belly of a B-52 Stratocruiser, with eight jet engines. It guzzles 50 gallons of gas per minute. The U.S. military is the largest single consumer of energy in the world.
This is home to the Mariana Trench, 11 kilometers deep, the deepest spot in the ocean. It is home to amazing biodiversity and countless species still undiscovered. These plans will destroy these species well before we learn about them.

Just to give you an idea of how military exercises are proliferating at an unprecedented rate in Asian waters, here is an incomplete list of military exercises that took place in 2015 and 2016. Most of those listed were brand new, set up during Ashton Carter’s 2015 visits to various Asian countries. As you can see below, it is all-war, all the time, for the oceans.

**2015**

*April-May*  India and France

*May*  India and Singapore

*May-June*  Japan and the Philippines

*May and June*  India and France in the Bay of Bengal

*June*  India, Japan and Australia had a trilateral meeting to discuss joint training.

*June*  U.S. and the Philippines for two weeks on beautiful Palawan Island. This year, the number of troops **doubled** from last year, to 12,000.

*July*  U.S. and Singapore. Destroyers and other warships, attack submarines, jet fighters, helicopters, drones and troops came together for eleven days for practice.

*July – November*  U.S. with Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Timor Leste and Vietnam.

*July*  One of the largest military exercises this year was held for the first time in 2015, on the beautiful north coast of Australia. It is called “Talisman Sabre” and took place for ten days in July. Over 33,000 soldiers, 21 ships, Osprey and Cobra helicopters, jet fighters, three submarines, amphibious assault ships,
and over 200 aircraft and 640 officers from New Zealand and Japan. Talisman Sabre is scheduled to take place every two years. Part of Talisman Sabre is to stage a naval blockade of a sea lane that would choke off oil from reaching China.

- **August** U.S. and Indonesia in the Java Sea.
- **August** Malaysia and the Philippines held military exercises in the southern part of the Philippines.
- **September** India and Australia
- **September** Russia and China. 500 Marines, 22 warships and support vessels, 15 aircraft and 2 drones in Russia’s Far Eastern Primorsky Territory.
- **October** U.S. and India and Japan in the Bay of Bengal
- **October** India and Australia
- **October and November** India and Japan
- **October** Japan, U.S. and India in Bay of Bengal
- **October** Sri Lanka and India off coast of Trincomalee
- **December** India and Russia in Bay of Bengal
- (date unavailable) India and Singapore

2016

- (U.S. and India have at least 50 joint naval exercises per year)
- **January** U.S. and the Philippines with 80 “seals”
- **January** China and Pakistan in East China Sea using anti-submarine testing (sonar)
- **January** China Indonesia – Java Sea
- **February** 1800 personnel from U.S., Australia, Japan, NZ, PI, South Korea for “Cope North” in Guam
- **March, April, May** Operation “Foal Eagle” between U.S. and South Korea involving 50 ships, submarines, and aircraft. 315,000 troops, double the number of troops from last year
April thousands of U.S. and PI troops with Australia in SCS

June meeting of leaders of Indonesia, Malaysia and PI discussing more joint exercises

June U.S. and South Korea, for annual military war games in August;

July and July Chinese launched missiles near Xisha/Paracel islands

July – November U.S. with Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Timor Leste and Vietnam.

August China staged live-fire drills in Tonkin Gulf

August Chinese planes and ships in Sea of Japan

August-September China, U.S. and Australia

September China and Russia. A total of 18 ships and supply vessels, 21 aircraft and over 250 personnel for one week in the South China Sea.

September China and Australia, near Sydney

October U.S. and the Philippines conducted amphibious landing exercises and live-fire training in Luzon, Philippines.

(date unavailable) China and Thailand

(date unavailable) India and Mauritius

(date unavailable) Philippines and Cambodia

(date unavailable) U.S., Japan and India in North Philippine Sea

RIMPAC

In the world of military exercises, there is an event that is considered the “World Cup” of war games. It is called RIMPAC, which stands for “Rim of the Pacific.” It takes place in Hawaiian waters every two years. The last one was last summer in 2016, and was comprised of 26 nations, 45 ships, five submarines,
more than 200 aircraft and 25,000 personnel. The first RIMPAC was in 1971.

Participants practice sea control and disaster relief, but mostly complex war fighting. One of the drills involves shooting at old warships with missiles and torpedoes until they sink. A lawsuit was filed against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for failing to prevent this exercise from polluting the sea with toxic materials.

During RIMPAC 2004, 200 melon-head whales stranded themselves on the island of Kauai.

Through the years, RIMPAC has changed into more of a marketing event than anything. For example, Norway entered RIMPAC for the first time several years ago because it was hoping to sell a newly developed missile to one of the Asian countries. RIMPAC must certainly be the most destructive trade show in history.

Now, the U.S. Navy wants to create another kind of RIMPAC. In May 2015, military leaders from 23 countries met to talk about this new event that would also take place in Hawaii. It would be for amphibious assault vehicles only. These are the most dangerous kinds of vehicles for the ocean health, because they are built to create maximum traction on delicate reefs.

The decision to promote amphibious assault vehicles is a calculated one. The global war industry has noted that 70 percent of the planet is covered by water, that 80 percent of the world’s population lives on or near a coast, and that 90 percent of international commerce travels by sea. Currently, ships, jets, and helicopters are jostling for supremacy in Asian waters. Whoever wields the most powerful amphibious vehicles will dominate. This is a perfect time to make astronomical sums of money selling amphibious
assault vehicles. Like RIMPAC, the multinational amphibious vehicle event would be another giant trade show, created to sell machines that will be used in war practice, crushing and destroying countless reefs and coastlines.