THE “PACIFIC PIVOT”: WAR AGAINST THE OCEANS

by Koohan Paik, Hawaii

Project Director, International Forum on Globalization, San Francisco

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The year 2015 marked a year of “firsts” for the Asia-Pacific region. For the first time ever, China began to build bases outside its own national boundaries. For the first time since WWII, Japan began manufacturing and exporting large war machines. And for the first time, the Pentagon created an entire department devoted solely to launching India's war economy and managing it on a long-term basis. The year 2015 also marked the beginning of a “base-building race” between China and the U.S., rampant naval exercises, and unprecedented levels of arms sales in the Asia-Pacific region. We are witnessing the world's most militarized era in history.

While the economic, political and colonial implications of the “Pacific Pivot” are routinely discussed, it is rare that environmental impacts to the ocean are analyzed. Given that the Pacific Ocean, when healthy, provides roughly half of the world's oxygen supply, it is vitally important to give attention to this issue. This paper focuses on how current hyper-militarization impacts ocean health of the Asia-Pacific region.

Background

The huge military buildup actually began in the 1990s. That was when the U.S. recognized that the Asia-Pacific would soon be the planet’s most resource-rich and economically dynamic region. According to the Asian Development Bank, within thirty-
five years, the region will account for half of the world’s economic output and include four of the world’s ten largest economies, those of China, India, Indonesia and Japan. The U.S. determined, back in the 1990s, that if it wanted to continue to dominate the Asian economies, it would need to dramatically increase its military presence in the region. That was when it began a campaign to encircle China with missile bases – either its own bases or those built by allies such as Japan and South Korea.

It hasn't been easy for the U.S. to proceed with this plan. For example, in 1995, after three U.S. servicemen kidnaped and raped a 12-year-old Okinawan girl, Okinawans were furious and wanted all 32 U.S. bases and 54,000 service personnel off their island completely. The U.S. responded by announcing its “Roadmap to Realignment.” This was a proposal to close Futenma Air Base with the pretext of lessening the military burden on Okinawa. But it was a sham; part of the Roadmap was to build yet another base on Okinawa, on pristine Henoko Bay. For over two decades, this project has been stalled by protestors in the hundreds of thousands. They are aware that the real purpose of the Roadmap to Realignment is to reorganize U.S. troops into a configuration that would actually increase U.S. control of the region, not lessen it.

In 2011, Barack Obama formally named the grandiose scheme to rule the hemisphere: the “Pacific Pivot.” It is comprised of 1) a shift of 60% of all navy and air forces from Europe and the Middle East to the Asia-Pacific region and 2) the promotion of the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement. The ultimate goal is to isolate – and weaken – China, and, thus, to maintain U.S. preeminence.
**An epidemic of base-building and military exercises**

The Pacific Pivot has already brought unprecedented levels of environmentally deleterious militarism to the Asia-Pacific. The worst destruction has been wrought by the perpetual activities of base-building and military exercises.

1) **Base-building**

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 that would encircle China with missiles. Wherever there are bases, there is perpetual leaching of trichloroethylene and other toxic substances into soil and groundwater.

Once a base is built, it doesn’t end there. The base is then ready to be filled up with bombs, warships, jets, helicopters, submarines, amphibious vehicles, aircraft carriers and more. And each of these war vehicles is part of an entire system. For example, one nuclear-powered aircraft carrier doesn’t stand alone; it is part of a bigger system. That system includes eighty-five fighter jets and over 5,000 troops. One warship is part of a bigger system that might include missile technology that is interoperable with many other systems. Militarism is like a metastasizing cancer.

2) **Military exercises**
Wherever there is a base, soldiers are always practicing for war-- even if there is no war. Military exercises are the other highly destructive activity of the Pacific Pivot, along with base-building. 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, whale, 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. Sonar testing and practice is so unbearable for whales that they must kill themselves to escape the noise.

Here’s a snapshot of how the destruction of base-building and military exercises has played out in only the past five years:

1) Gangjeong village on Jeju Island was destroyed in order to build a huge navy base that will serve U.S. interests. The South Korean government 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 Korean Natural Monument 442. 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.

2) The U.S. has begun its annual military practice in the Gulf of Alaska. The year 2015 was the first time for this event. Six thousand sailors, soldiers, airmen, Marines and Coast Guard members along with three Navy Destroyers, 200 aircrafts, much weaponry, and a submarine converged for eleven days of war games in June. Tens of thousands of pounds of toxic bombs were detonated. Active sonar which kills whales and dolphins was used. Species affected were nine species of whales, including the highly endangered North Pacific right whale (of which there are only approximately 30 left), as well as dolphins and sea lions. The Navy estimates that there will be more than 182,000 marine mammal deaths during eleven days of war games each year, for the next five years.

3) The U.S. has begun rotating troops out of Darwin, Australia, and regularly conducts joint military practice there with the Australian military. One of the most colossal practice events in the region is “Talisman Sabre.” Every two years, in July, it pollutes and desecrates one of the most remote, cherished and pristine areas in Australia. Over 33,000 soldiers convene with 21 ships, Osprey and Cobra helicopters, jet fighters, three submarines, amphibious assault ships, and over 200 aircraft. Part of Talisman Sabre is to stage a naval blockade of a sea lane that would choke off oil from reaching China.
The U.S. is also looking to expand to nearby Cocos islands as a drone base.

4) The U.S. has ported four warships in Singapore.

5) Japan has built four bases on the most remote islands of the Ryukyu archipelago. Three of the four bases are to point missiles at China.

6) On Guam, the most southerly Mariana island, the military is planning to dredge over 70 acres of one of the world's healthiest and most vibrant coral reefs, to make way for a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier. Scientists say that if the project is allowed to move forward, the reef will be destroyed before many of its endemic species can even be discovered, let alone saved.

7) The U.S. has claimed one million square miles as a “protected” nature area. The four nature areas are called the Marianas Trench Marine National Monument, the Papahanaumokuakea Marine National Monument, the Pacific Remote Island Marine national Monument and the Rose Atoll Marine National Monument. Actually, this is not about protecting nature. It is about controlling large areas of sea. The combined areas of the four “marine monuments” equals the area of India. Three of these so-called “protected” areas are used for destructive military practice.
8) The U.S. has proposed using approximately one million square miles of open ocean and several islands in and around the Mariana Islands as a “range complex.” Year-round, “full spectrum” military practice would take place over a swath of ocean larger in area that the country of Mexico. “Full spectrum” means weapons and bombs are detonated from every conceivable military perspective: missiles are launched from destroyer ships and drones, bombs are dropped from fighter jets, torpedoes and drones are shot from submarines, squadrons of tanks lumber onto fragile coral reefs crushing everything beneath them – and so many other inconceivable practices. There would be underwater-mine detonations and brain-crushing sonar. Thousands of fish and invertebrate species, and at least 26 marine mammal species will be severely impacted. As part of this plan, one of the world’s most beautiful islands, Pagan, is proposed to be used for live-fire military practice target from air, sea and land. Pagan is so untouched that none of the many bird species there are introduced. They are all endemic. Such a pure place is unheard of in the modern world. And yet the U.S. is proposing to kill everything on this beautiful island. Shockingly, this new range complex would include about half of the supposedly "protected" Marianas Trench Marine National Monument. So, obviously, these “environmental protected areas” don’t protect anything.

9) Meanwhile, military training is devastating marine life in the Hawaii Islands Range Complex. The range complex is 3.4 million square miles in area -- larger than all 50 states. A Navy report has projected that 9.6 million cetaceans will
be killed or injured here by sonar testing and other war games over the next five years. Ironically, this war-games area overlaps President Obama’s newly expanded, supposedly “protected” Papahanaumokuakea Marine Monument.

10) The U.S. is proposing to build another military base on Okinawa, at Henoko, on beautiful Oura Bay, which would destroy the last coral reef ecosystem in Japan.

The list of military maneuverings listed above are geared to a single goal: to prevent China from assuming regional dominance. China has claimed that it owns 80 percent of the South China Sea. But the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan also claim parts of these waters. These conflicts have provided a perfect opportunity for U.S. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter to travel to Asia and offer deals to a host of nations seeking military muscle against China. Carter has made several trips to old U.S. allies, such as Japan and Korea, and has also visited countries that are having territorial conflict with China – Philippines, Vietnam and India. The U.S. is trying to use their vulnerable position to solidify a bloc of allies opposed to China.

But not all nations have been compliant. In September 2016, newly elected Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte announced that the October 2016 war games would be the “last” between the two allies. “You are scheduled to hold war games again, which China does not want,” explained Duterte. “I would serve notice to you now that his will be the last military exercise. Jointly, Philippines-U.S., the last one.”
Meanwhile, the U.S. has encouraged a development in Japan, a stalwart ally, that shocked that nation and led to protests that lasted months outside the Diet legislature building in Tokyo. In late 2015, Japan passed legislation to dismantle its beloved “peace constitution” implemented at the end of WWII by General Douglas MacArthur. No longer does Japan's highest legislation mandate that the nation remain a pacifist country. For the first time since the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan is building an arms industry. It has begun to manufacture and export large war machines, such as Mitsubishi’s amphibious tanks. Those are tanks that operate on land, water and reef.

There is a reason why Mitsubishi chose to design and develop amphibious tanks. As a capitalist entity, it is interested in making maximum profit. Therefore, it wanted to create a machine for which there would be highest demand. They recognize that the biggest conflict will take place in the island-filled South China Sea. The most effective vehicle for fighting wars in this environment is the amphibious tank. So, the decision to mass produce these vehicles was made purely with a vision toward anticipated markets and maximum profits. By these standards of measurement, it appears that Mitsubishi will profit hugely. In fact, U.S. military generals have said that the Mitsubishi tank is better than any tank manufactured by the U.S. because of its superior speed and traction. Unfortunately, these tanks crush and kill reefs and everything on them.

But Japan is not the only Asian country turning against peace. One of the most war-entrenching deals that was made by Carter was with India. India and the U.S. signed a ten-year agreement for India to build aircraft carriers and jet fighter engines, and to
expand and strengthen India’s defense industry to turn India into a “regional security provider.” This would intractably root India's economy with war, thus pushing the dream of world peace farther into a distant future.

The U.S.-India strategic partnership is just one of a score of strategic agreements forged in the last couple of years. Ashton Carter has encouraged all the ally countries to militarize and create partnerships with the U.S. and with each other. The partnerships are expressed through rampant military exercises, or “war games,” throughout Asia-Pacific waters.

Here is only a partial schedule of war games that took place in the region during 2015 and 2016:

**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 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 takes place every two years.

• 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

• 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

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• (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 in 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 disaster relief, sea control and 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.

**Trade**

When Defense Secretary Ashton Carter said in April, “The TPP is as important to me as an aircraft carrier,” he revealed the inextricable connection between the Trans-Pacific Partnership and militarism. Until that statement, the TPP had been treated as nothing other than the most formidable free trade agreement to come along since NAFTA, CAFTA, TTIP and the rest. However, unlike the TPP, none of these other global trade deals were implemented to thwart a rival world power. President Obama summed things up last spring when he said of the TPP, “If we don’t write the rules, China will write the rules in that region.” So, TPP provides the rules; the Pentagon enforces them.
A look at the map clarifies how forces at play in the Asia-Pacific give a geopolitik context to the TPP. Off the southeast coast of China lies the South China Sea, through which over $5 trillion worth of trade passes annually, after squeezing through the Strait of Malacca. This is also the gateway through which all oil from the middle-east passes before it reaches China, Japan, and South Korea. Whoever controls the Strait of Malacca and South China Sea controls Asia’s economy, which, in turn, drives the world economy. In order for the U.S. to maintain authority over these far-flung hotspots, it must project military might – the most resented and costly form of power. That’s why Ashton Carter needs the TPP so bad: to justify mega-militarizing Pacific trade routes. Now we see the reason that Obama has been pushing so hard for the TPP, which is projected to result in only a measly 0.4% increase in GNP over fifteen years! To put it bluntly, the TPP is not merely a set of rules; it locks in and justifies a defense empire to counter China.

Is it any coincidence that all the Asia-Pacific TPP signatories, with the exception of Japan, Australia and New Zealand, can be found surrounding the South China Sea? Those nations are Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and Vietnam. For years, they, along with the Philippines and Taiwan, have been in heated disagreement with China over territory that includes critical sea lanes. China is claiming most of the sea for itself, a move which would castrate the TPP. (What good is a trade agreement without access to trade routes?) The stakes are so high that China went so far as to build seven artificial islands, totaling 2,000 acres, in the middle of the disputed Spratly Islands. China claims sovereignty over the new islands, as well as the surrounding sea within twelve nautical miles. Now, China is following the lead of the U.S., by enlisting its allies for joint military exercises and building bases. The Asia-Pacific is witnessing the world’s first “base race.”
In such unpredictable circumstances, solid alliances with the China-vulnerable countries are indispensable to the Pentagon. Their membership in the TPP exacts deference to U.S. hegemony. In exchange, they get the American muscle they need to stake out their own territorial claims, such as the warship that Carter sent directly into the contentious waters surrounding the artificial islands. This military excess is shaping 21st-century Asia, warping indigenous cultures, destroying countless ecosystems, and costing billions of dollars.

**China's response**

China is responding to the Pacific Pivot with its own series of military exercises, with Russia and other allies, involving hundreds of troops, dozens of aircraft, warship and armor vehicles. It has also built the seven artificial-island bases in the middle of the Spratly Islands, also claimed by the Philippines. The artificial islands are built from dredged and crushed coral, upon some of the world’s most once-vibrant reefs, now certainly dead.

Most harmful to world peace as well as ecological health, China is now building bases outside its own borders. It has broken its anti-imperialist policy to never build bases on foreign soil, by constructing a naval base in Djibouti and another one in the Seychelle Islands. These are the first of the “string of pearls,” a sequence of Chinese installations planned for Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Bangladesh in the northern Indian Ocean; Oman, Yemen, Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique in the western Indian Ocean; Madagascar in the central South Indian Ocean; and Namibia in the South Atlantic. The goal is to encircle India with bases, just as the U.S. encircled China.
China is also building Pakistan's Gwadar naval base on the Indian Ocean, where missiles can be launched to attack U.S.-owned targets in the Middle East and in Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. And China has also sold eight submarines to Pakistan, to encircle India.

For its part, India is expanding its bases at the Andaman and Nicobar archipelagos and has reached an agreement with Vietnam to build an Indian base at Haiphong. This is part of its deal with the U.S. to be the “regional security provider.”

**Lasting peace can come only from peace**

Militarism profoundly ruins people’s lives, destroys the environment, and transforms a home village into a first-strike target. Anyone who has visited the construction site of the Jeju Naval Base in Gangjeong village, can attest to this. We are told by the world powers that the destruction is a necessary sacrifice to ensure “regional security.” But, as former mayor of Gangjeong village, Kang Dong-kyun, has said, “Lasting peace doesn’t come from violence. Lasting peace can come only from peace.”