

# An Interview with Ambassador Ravic Huso

**JFQ:** Tell us about your position as the foreign policy advisor [FPA] to the U.S. Pacific commander, and how you interact with the commander, his staff, and Washington policy circles.

**Ambassador Huso:** The foreign policy advisor is by no means a new construct. There is a long tradition of pairing military commanders with diplomatic advisors. Within U.S. Pacific Command [PACOM], Department of State career diplomats have advised the commander for the past 50 years. During that period, the position has become well established and, by most accounts, is a successful model for similar positions elsewhere. I would offer a few observations from the past 3 years on why the relationship seems to work well at PACOM.

First, the FPA works directly for the commander. While it would seem obvious, it is an important distinction. As staffs get larger and actions get more complex, the FPA has to stay above the fray in order to advise the commander on the most critical decisions affecting foreign policy in the region. Certainly, close coordination with the rest of the leadership and staff directors, particularly the

J5, is absolutely essential. But the FPA answers directly to the commander—it can work no other way. I feel privileged to have worked with three superb commanders: Admirals [Thomas] Fargo, [William] Fallon, and now [Timothy] Keating. All three appreciated the perspective that a career diplomat could bring to their deliberations on policy issues and were more than willing to include me in all of their senior meetings within PACOM and during their regional travels. It has certainly kept me busy for 3 years, but it is the only way for the FPA to be an effective asset for the commander.

Second, the FPA has to stay plugged in very closely with the regional bureaus at State. Technically, the Bureau for Political-Military Affairs “owns” the FPA positions at the geographical combatant commands, under the POLAD [political advisor] program. However, as FPA, the policy issues I have dealt with have usually been more closely aligned with the regional bureaus’ interests, particularly the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs and the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs. These two bureaus recognize the value of having one of their own as a close advisor to the PACOM commander and have

been extremely supportive in terms of keeping me involved in key policy developments. Maintaining those links is key to the FPA’s utility to the commander.

Third, the command’s relationship with the Ambassadors in the region is critically important, and the FPA plays an important role in cultivating and managing that relationship. The commander and Ambassadors must have a common understanding of the security challenges, and potential policy solutions, in a given country. Certainly, there are other voices in Washington that have a great deal of influence over policy matters, but having the PACOM commander and Ambassador on the same sheet of music goes a long way toward policy coordination and implementation. Ambassadors make a point of stopping at PACOM as part of their orientation and periodically during their tours. And when the PACOM commander travels to a given country, his first stop is almost always with the Ambassador and key Embassy staff.

In all of this, it is important to note that the FPA link is not, and never should be, a shortcut for the established process of interagency policy coordination that occurs back in Washington. PACOM’s voice in the interagency process runs through the Joint Staff and OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense]. The FPA has to respect that process.

**JFQ:** How does the foreign policy advisor interact with the Joint Interagency Coordination Group [JIACG]?

**Ambassador Huso:** This has been a work in progress, as the JIACGs have evolved from their original focus on counterterrorism to more broadly cover interagency coordination. But we have a good model in operation here at PACOM. In very general terms, the FPA is focused on strategic policy coordination and implementation, while the JIACG is more focused on the operational and tactical coordination and execution of specific programs and policies. I know that is a broad characterization, and in practice, there is quite



U.S. Navy (Jimmie Crockett)

Ambassador Ravic Huso is the Department of State Foreign Policy Advisor to the Commander, U.S. Pacific Command.

often overlap. But good coordination has thus far helped avoid conflicts and redundancies. The JIACG here is part of the J5 and has a midgrade Department of State officer on staff. Daily discussions with him, the JIACG director, and the J5 are key to making this work. Of note, PACOM also has a Department of State public diplomacy advisor on staff in order to inform PACOM officers of notable public diplomacy issues for the Embassies in the region, support foreign public outreach efforts, and coordinate with PACOM officers on their strategic communications planning.

**JFQ:** *What would you highlight as some of the major successes in the region that you have observed in the past year, from the standpoint of interagency cooperation?*

**Ambassador Huso:** The biggest success, in my view, was the coordinated interagency response to the tsunami that affected Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka in late December of 2004. Much has been written on the tsunami from the standpoint of building goodwill with the Indonesian people and government, but it really was a significant event in terms of interagency cooperation, too. Most of that was in the coordination and execution of the provision of aid—and took place on the ground in the affected areas—with the local U.S. commanders working in concert with the Ambassadors and their staffs and coordinating with NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] and our partners from other nations.

Another important example of interagency success has been occurring in the Philippines, as the U.S. military and civilian aid agencies have partnered with the Philippines government to execute a coordinated strategy to eliminate terrorist safe havens in the south. From the U.S. standpoint, coordination of military and civilian assistance programs has been a key to our ability to help the Philippines government provide needed services and promote economic development in the south. This would not have been possible without the efforts of Ambassador [Kristie] Kenney and her staff, working closely with the commander of Joint Special Operations Task Force–Philippines, to make this happen.

Perhaps a lesser known example of interagency success has been the development and execution of security assistance programs under Section 1206 of the National Defense Authorization Act. This was an authorization established in FY2006 [fiscal year 2006] for



Fleet Combat Camera Group, Pacific (Troy Latham)

Kristie A. Kenney, U.S. Ambassador to Philippines, and Philippines chief of staff talk with press after Rewards for Justice Program ceremony

the Department of Defense to use up to \$200 million of its funds in grant assistance to build capacity relevant for counterterrorism and stability operations in partner nations. To develop the specific proposals, Pacific Command partnered with Embassies, in coordination with relevant offices in OSD Policy, Joint Staff J5, and Department of State, to develop a single, combined Department of Defense–Department of State proposal for projects in the region. The combined proposals arrived in Washington with the joint endorsement of the PACOM commander and the respective Ambassadors. As a consequence, \$48 million in proposals from the Pacific Command area of responsibility were granted in FY2006, focusing on building maritime security capacity in South and Southeast Asia. The collaborative planning process developed in this theater was held up as a model of interagency cooperation.

Lastly, my office has continually pushed to get more Department of State involvement in PACOM exercises, planning conferences, and events—not just from Embassies, but from the regional and functional bureaus at the Department of State. Typically, the Department of State has not had a training culture, but more senior leaders, particularly in the East Asian and Pacific Bureau, are recognizing the value in sending key officers out with the military to participate in major training events. I think this has contributed greatly to the excellent relationship this command has enjoyed with State.

**JFQ:** *Thank you.*



Tsunami devastation near Banda Aceh, Indonesia, brought over 18,000 Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Coastguardsmen to aid survivors

U.S. Air Force (Aaron D. Alimony)