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## Asia-Pacific U.S. Military Overview

### Admiral Timothy Keating, Commander, U.S. Pacific Command

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**MODERATOR:** Hello, and welcome to the Washington Foreign Press Center. Please turn off your cell phones and any electronic devices at this time.

Today, we have for you Admiral Tim Keating, who is the U.S. Pacific Command Commander, who is going to deliver an Asia-Pacific U.S. military overview briefing.

Without further ado, here is the admiral.

**ADM. KEATING:** Thank you, Andy. And good morning to all of you. As Andy mentioned, I'm Admiral Tim Keating, Commander of the United States Pacific Command. I've been there for about two years. I am, as you can tell, an officer in the United States Navy. I've been in uniform for almost 40 years now.

This is an exciting time for us all. I'd take a few minutes here in the beginning to go over a couple of broad points, and then very much look forward to sharing your questions.

In the United States Pacific Command, we have a strategy that has, as its absolute centerpiece, three important points: partnership, presence, and military readiness. I mentioned that this was an interesting time for us as we go through administration transition. I would point out the obvious, that having been in uniform for 40 years, this is not our first transition of administrations, and we have begun a process of working with President-elect Obama's transition teams and have found those discussions to be very interesting and engaging.

Our aforementioned strategy -- we attempt to accomplish a couple of things by publishing our strategy and emphasizing it. We want everybody in our area of responsibility, AOR, to know that we're committed to security, stability and prosperity all throughout our region, which covers over half of the surface of the earth.

We're going to remain present and engaged throughout the area of responsibility, and we want to emphasize to our friends and allies that we will be there in the years ahead, as we have been there for decades in the past, and we want them to be confident and comfortable in our ability to respond across the entire spectrum of operations, should the opportunities arise.

We are emphasizing additionally that our strategy is inextricably linked to U.S. government policy and strategic guidance. We want to sustain this remarkable level of stability and continuity throughout the region while responding to significant regional pressures and addressing the enduring challenges that each country faces throughout our area of responsibility.

The global supply chains rely on freedom of access to the maritime and air domains, and we concentrate on sustaining and maintaining that freedom of access. We emphasize also, to a much greater degree than perhaps in years past, the fact that this will be an interagency, intergovernmental process and not just military-to-military. We rely increasingly on nongovernmental organizations and private industry partners to help us sustain the stability and enhance the security, improving the prosperity all throughout the region.

Thanks very much. I'll be happy to take your questions.

**MODERATOR:** Please wait for the microphone, which may be coming from either side, and state your name and publication.

**Q** Thank you, Admiral. My name is Vincent Chen with the *United Daily News*, Taiwan.

**ADM. KEATING:** Good morning.

**Q** Good morning. Given the current situation in the Taiwan Strait, does PACOM, or do you still regard Taiwan Strait as one of the flash points in the East Asia and Pacific region? And is there any sign showing that, you know, China has changed or rearranged its posture, military posture, against Taiwan?

**ADM. KEATING:** Let me take them in reverse order, Vincent.

We watch very carefully the militaries of all of our friends, partners, allies and other countries in our region. We have seen some changes in China's military posture, but I don't think I would characterize them as significant.

That said, we are pleased with the progress being made by China and Taiwan in reducing the tension across the Strait in the issues where we see progress can be in

some ways not great strategic shifting of tectonic movement, necessarily -- China sending pandas to Taiwan; increased capability to send mail across the Strait; the improvement in cross-Strait transportation capabilities and access; the sociological changes that are going on where young men and women on various sides are falling in love with one another, and it's increasingly easy to do so.

All of these recommend to us a decrease in tension across the Strait, and we are gratified by that decrease. That said, we still pay close attention to the Strait, as we do many other regions in our area.

**Q** Thank you very much, Admiral. My name is Shogo Kawakita with Kyodo News, Japanese Newswire Service.

**ADM. KEATING:** Good morning.

**Q** Good morning. I have two questions, if I may. One is on China-U.S. relations. As we know, the Chinese authorities have notified U.S. authority, [in the] Pentagon, to postpone or cancel the military- to-military exchanges by the end of November. And now we are passing the end of October (*sic*). And do you have any update on that? And that's first.

And related to this, it's my understanding Ambassador Edelman also told the Chinese authorities to postpone the defense dialogue of this year until the Obama administration would be ready to take stock. And you could also say something about this, some updates on this.

And second question is you once mentioned in New York that deployment of 8,000 troops in Japan to Guam would be delayed beyond scheduled time period. But after your comment, Pentagon official immediately denied your comment. Would you respond to that? Thank you very much.

**ADM. KEATING:** It is a fact that the Chinese suspended mil-to-mil dialogue with Department of Defense in general and U.S. Pacific Command as the agency perhaps most frequently involved in that dialogue. We are hopeful, cautiously optimistic, that the Chinese will resume all the mil-to-mil dialogue and personnel exchanges and visits that had been suspended, and we have hopes that this suspension will be rescinded in the very near future.

The movement of forces off of Guam -- our administration's policy is clear. The Defense Policy Review Initiative, as agreed to by the United States and Japan, remains in effect. That calls for the movement of 8,000, as you know; 8,000 Marines and a number of dependents and thousands out of Okinawa to Guam. And the policy is still in effect.

My comments were based on the likelihood of the potential -- not likelihood -- the potential for a minor delay. I don't know that that potential is any greater or less today than it was when I made my comments in New York City. But the administration's policy is clear that we will adhere to the Defense Policy Review Initiative.

**Q** John Zang with *CTI TV*, Taiwan.

**ADM. KEATING:** Hi, John.

**Q** Admiral, this question may have been asked; I'm a little bit late. The former vice defense minister of Taiwan, Mr. Lin Chong-pin, said that, given the relaxation of tensions across the Taiwan Strait and given the fact that the three major links have started, the risk of a military conflict across the Taiwan Strait has been reduced to close to zero.

Do you share his optimism? And are you sleeping better now? (Laughter.) Thank you, sir.

**ADM. KEATING:** Yeah. Thank you, John.

I slept well last night, but I sleep well most every night. (Scattered laughter.) I'm fortunate in that regard. And we talked in my earlier remarks about the peace and stability and prosperity that are prevalent throughout our region. That's not to say we take any of those for granted, and I'm sure the same holds true for Taiwan as it does in China and all of the countries in our area of responsibility. So I sleep well at night because of the great work done by thousands, hundreds of thousands, of men and women all throughout our area of responsibility.

I think it unmistakable that tensions have decreased across the Strait in the last couple of months. That said, I wouldn't put -- you know, I think you characterize it as near zero. I'd rather not put a number against it. I would just say we are grateful for the effort being put forth by the Chinese and the Taiwans to continue dialogue in seeking some sort of resolution to the cross-Strait challenge. And we're grateful for those efforts.

**Q** Jay Park with *Radio Free Asia*.

**ADM. KEATING:** Good morning.

**Q** Admiral, thank you for your decades of service for the regional security.

**ADM. KEATING:** Thank you. It's a privilege.

**Q** Can you tell us Pacific Command's estimation of the North Korean leader Kim Jong-il's health, the current condition? And concerning that, can you tell us about current status of contingency plan discussion among U.S. and other allies? Especially did you start discussion on contingency plan with China about this issue yet?

**ADM. KEATING:** It's our opinion that Kim Jong-il is alive. As to the particular details attendant to his medical condition, I don't know any more than you in the media provide us. I think he's alive. I think he's relatively in control of his faculties. I'm hardly a doctor and I wouldn't know how to characterize it medically. He's alive, and he remains in control of the North Korean government.

I can't comment on the status of operational plans anywhere in the theater other than to say they exist. We exercise them frequently, and we continue to report on our readiness to execute those plans to the Secretary of Defense and the President frequently.

**Q** Good morning, Admiral. Daphne Benoit with *Agence France Presse (AFP)*. I have two questions.

**ADM. KEATING:** Bonjour.

**Q** Bonjour. I have two questions for you. First of all, what's your view on China being ready to send some ships off the coast of Somalia? Is it a positive development -- do you see this as a positive development? And second question: Over the few last years, the counter-piracy efforts in the Strait of Malacca seem to have results. Can we -- is there anything to be learned from what has been applied in this region that could help in Somalia?

**ADM. KEATING:** Thank you, Daphne. I think those are two great questions.

The first, we are in dialogue with various agencies and commands in an attempt to provide information to the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), should their country decide to deploy ships to the Central Command area of responsibility. That is, of course, outside our AOR. But we're also talking to our good friends in the Central Command AOR. I'll meet with General Petraeus within a couple of days -- shorter than that, actually -- to discuss this, amongst other issues.

So we are working with the Chinese to ensure they are aware of the lines of communication that are available to them and to avail them of certain parts of information that we have from our friends in Central Command, should they desire to send ships to the piracy -- the area of piracy most prevalent, which is, of course, the Gulf of Aden and off the coast of Somalia. I hope the Chinese do, and we'll work closely with them. And I think this augurs well for increased cooperation and collaboration between the Chinese military forces and U.S. Pacific Command forces.

To go back to one of our first questions, I think this could be a springboard for resumption of dialogue between PLA forces and U.S. Pacific Command forces in particular. So I'm cautiously optimistic and hopeful.

You cite a very good example for the power of increased cooperation and collaboration between right-minded countries who want to decrease piracy, whether it is a criminal or terrorist nature in basis. Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and now Thailand are cooperating across a wider spectrum of operations, and the efficacy of their results is dramatic. Incidents of piracy of two or three years ago were numbered in the several dozens, three or four dozen per year. Those are down in this past year to seven incidents of piracy in the Strait of Malacca.

So by sharing information, by cooperating on an operational basis, by training extensively with each other, not just with the United States but on a bilateral-multilateral basis, those countries are decreasing incidents of piracy across the Strait of Malacca. And we think those lessons learned are, some of them, transferable to the Gulf of Aden. And we're sharing those lessons with our friends at Central Command.

Yes, ma'am.

**Q** Just to follow up on that, isn't the situation quite different --

**ADM. KEATING:** Yes.

**Q** -- as far as the countries that you're mentioning are, you know, somewhat more stable than --

**ADM. KEATING:** And you have hit on the absolute core element that is different in Somalia and the Gulf of Aden in particular.

The pirates have to understand they don't enjoy safe haven when they go back to -- they get a sack of cash from the owners of the vessel. They have to go somewhere to spend the money. Well, if they know they can't get safe haven in, let's say Somalia, that makes it dramatically more difficult for them to operate in the coast off of Somalia.

So you're absolutely right. The fact that there are standing governments who have rigid adherence to the rule of law in Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines makes it much more difficult for the pirates to operate. You're exactly right.

**Q** Byungsu Kim, *Yonhap News Agency, South Korea.*

**ADM. KEATING:** Good morning.

**Q** Good morning.

Yeah. Do you -- good morning. Do you think North Korea's developed a nuclear warhead which is small enough to be loaded on a long-range missile?

Also, do you think North Korea has a long-range missile which can reach the United States?

**ADM. KEATING:** The possession by North Korea of nuclear warheads, the -- I'm not going to give you a yes or no answer as to whether I think they do.

**I would answer your question this way:** We are prepared to deal with that eventuality should it -- that situation present itself. By ballistic -- by increased capabilities in ballistic missile defense, we in the United States Pacific Command are more prepared to address that issue should it develop.

North Korea, I think, does have intercontinental ballistic missiles that can reach the United States. Remember, that would include Hawaii and territories of the United States in our area of responsibility in the Pacific. So yes, I think they do have that capability.

**Q** Thank you, Admiral.

I'm Satoshi Ogawa with Yomiuri Shimbun, and I'd like to ask [whether] Futenma Marine Corps Air Base in Okinawa and Futenma's relocation to Camp Schwab plan is behind schedule.

And my question is, are you confident in that relocation? And if Japan will not meet the agreement again, would you consider to quit the Marine Corps relocation to Guam?

**ADM. KEATING:** It won't be my decision to advocate any part of the Defense Policy Review Initiative. That will be made by our National Command Authority here in Washington, D.C.

I am aware that the progress of work on the Futenma replacement facility is behind schedule. And that is what leads me to say I understand DPRI. It is our country's policy, it is Japan's policy.

I wouldn't be surprised if delays that are already occurring don't result in a slide a little bit to the right in execution of DPRI, as it's very much a matter of national policy between the United States and Japan as to long -- execution of DPRI writ large.

**Q** (Off mike.) As far as, I believe, that you emphasized trilateral cooperation among America and Japan and South Korea. How will you apply that to the strategy towards North Korea?

**ADM. KEATING:** We just came from a conversation at the State Department, which centered upon progress in the Six-Party Talks. Of course, instrumental to that progress has been the cooperation and collaboration of all of those parties. To slightly varying degrees, perhaps somewhat less cooperation by the North Koreans themselves, but we are very much encouraged by the process and the progress.

The fact that these countries -- the participants in the Six-Party Talks -- sit down, have rational, reasonable discussions and agree on a way ahead is very encouraging to us. And that, of course, includes South Korea and Japan.

We just saw participation by those two countries' navies and the United States Navy in a search and rescue exercise off the coast of Hawaii, which was an inaugural event for those three nations to have navies participate in a multilateral exercise.

The exercise went very well. It has led to staff talks, including the United States, Japan and Korea, which were successful and recently concluded. So I am encouraged by the progress being made on a trilateral basis.

**Q** Hi Admiral, Nadia Chow with *The Liberty Times*.

**ADM. KEATING:** Good morning.

**Q** Yeah, good morning.

We heard -- actually, it's not a rumor anymore, that China is building a carrier. And we see some, actually, solid progress. We heard their generals or admirals have commented on it.

I don't know if PACOM is monitoring the latest developments and have an assessment, you know, what the impact would be. Thanks.

**ADM. KEATING:** This is a topic that gets a modest amount of conversation. When I meet with our good friends in the media, the People's Republic of China's plans to develop an aircraft carrier in particular, and that capability writ large.

I go back to a conversation I had on my first visit to China over a year ago when a Chinese admiral said to me, when we build our carrier, how about we make a deal: You stay east of Hawaii, we'll stay west of Hawaii and we can save you the time and the expense of coming all the way to the western Pacific. You tell us what happens where you are, we'll tell you what happens where we are and everything will be hunky-dory. I declined his offer.

I don't know how serious he was in terms of expressing a division of the Pacific. I do believe the Chinese are serious in considering development of aircraft carrier capabilities. As I told our Chinese host that morning, it's not as easy as it looks. We've been at this for decades and decades. I have a little bit of experience flying on and off carriers and employing carrier battle tactics. It's complex, it's complicated, it's an intensely demanding regime and it's a dangerous regime and it's a very expensive undertaking.

If the Chinese choose to pursue aircraft carrier technology, we will -- as we are now -- monitor very carefully that development. We would ask that they be increasingly transparent with us -- more transparent with us -- so we can understand their intention.

When I proposed to the Chinese an increased statement of intention, they come back and say, well, we only want to protect those things that are ours, which is fair enough. So too do we, so too do all of the countries who have access to the maritime domain.

I followed with saying there's lots of room in the Pacific, there's lots of room in the Indian Ocean. We want to work with you to enhance maritime security. Your development of aircraft carriers, done in a certain way, could be seen as a threat by some. I don't regard it as a threat today. We are going to watch very carefully to make sure that it doesn't become a threat.

**Q** (Off mike.)

**ADM. KEATING:** Good morning.

**Q** My name is Yoshinari Kurose from the Japanese newspaper *Yomiuri Shimbun*.

**ADM. KEATING:** Good morning.

**Q** I have a question. It is that -- it is about the Littoral Combat Ship which the United States Navy is now developing.

Could you explain the role of this particular type of ship in the context of the maritime security of the Asian region? Thank you -- Asian Pacific Region. Thank you.

**ADM. KEATING:** Throughout our region, as I mentioned in my early statements, we will have -- we will emphasize partnership and presence. And there's a saying amongst the junior officers in all of our services. It goes something like, you know, "virtual presence equals actual absence." You've got to be there to be present. It sounds almost trite, but it's absolutely true.

As I move around our region, folks tell me in varying types of statements that they regard the United States as an essential partner. And so we want to demonstrate that partnership by being present. And to be present, you need ships, airplanes, soldiers, Marines, sailors, airmen.

The development of follow-on naval platforms by our United States Navy is encouraging to us. We want more ships than less. We want them more capable than less capable. And I think the Littoral Combat Ship represents a reasonable development.

But I would emphasize, it's more capability in number and not specific platform in which we in the Pacific Command are interested. And that goes for ships and airplanes as well.

**Q** Good morning. Mike LeVallee from *Tokyo Broadcasting System (TBS)*.

**ADM. KEATING:** Hi Mike.

**Q** Just wondering, since you've taken this job a couple years ago I'm sure you've been watching pretty closely North Korea's military potential and position. Have you noticed any change at all over the last couple of years in their positioning and their -- how they've deployed their forces, particularly with the tension with South Korea building and also within the region some of the times during the Six-Party Talks have not gone as well. And there was some discussion a couple of months ago that they might be getting ready to test a second nuclear device. Did you detect any of that?

**ADM. KEATING:** We have not, at Pacific Command, changed our military posture in and around South Korea since I have been at Pacific Command. So the first part, to your answer, is we haven't done anything different based on ebb and flow of Six-Party Talks, based on Kim Jong-il's apparent medical challenges, based on recalcitrance of the North Koreans on cross-DMZ traffic.

Writ large we haven't changed our posture other than normal adjustments with Naval forces moving in and out of the area or certain kinds of airplanes coming on and off the peninsula and our Army and Marine forces on and off the peninsula to supplement the -- General Sharp's troops on the peninsula. So a long answer to a short question, we haven't done much different, in particular on a strategic scale, with respect to North Korea.

What was the second part of your question?

**Q** The -- it was on speculation of ---

**ADM. KEATING:** Oh, with the nuclear test. Yeah, I'm better off not commenting on intelligence matters. We're -- and it kind of goes back to the larger issue of North Korea and nukes.

We're prepared to respond across a spectrum that could include nuclear weapons possessed by North Korea, should they have them. And I'm -- I'd rather not address the particulars of a potential nuclear test.

I don't -- think we ask them not to do it. (Laughter.) Should they be able to, we'd ask them not to. That's not to say whether I think they can or not but we would discourage them from conducting those tests.

**Q** (Off mike.)

**ADM. KEATING:** What would be our response? We've got a broad range of responses which are -- that goes back to our readiness, day-to-day readiness, that I report to the Secretary and the President and we're ready.

**Q** Admiral, David Morgan from *Reuters*. Can you give us you assessment, please, of relations between Pakistan and India in the aftermath of the Mumbai attacks? And do you think the two countries have successfully avoided the danger of military confrontation?

**ADM. KEATING:** It's a great question, David, and thank you. I mentioned earlier I would meet with General Dave Petraeus soon. One of the main topics of our conversation will be the Pacific Command and Central Command position on a mil-to-mil basis, vis-a-vis the response -- that's the wrong word -- the position of India and Pakistan following the horrific attacks on Mumbai on Thanksgiving.

We're working closely with Central Command and with Department of State, Office of the Secretary of Defense and the intelligence agencies to make sure we are as fully apprised, as fully aware of developments in that particular part of the world as we can be, and I'm satisfied that we are.

I have been in contact with our ambassador in India, with Indian military leaders, and am grateful for the very measured response that India has demonstrated. We have not done anything significantly different from the Pacific Command in terms of military presence or posture in the wake of the terrorist attacks.

We are working through the initial parts of a package that would -- we would offer to India to help them understand some of the lessons learned that we very painfully learned in the wake of our 11 September attacks, in information sharing, collaboration and cooperation. And I expressed our willingness to provide that to India in my conversations with Indian leaders shortly.

But, I think the most important thing is the very -- the horrific nature of the attacks, the very calm measured response demonstrated by India thus far and our hopes that all throughout our region in particular and all throughout the world, folks will understand that the struggle against violent extremes -- violent extremists continues to this day. Mumbai is just the latest place where the victims number -- innocent victims number in the hundreds. And it remains our foremost objective in the Asia-Pacific Region to deter and prevent those kinds of attacks.

**MODERATOR:** We have time for one final question. I'll go down right here.

**Q** Andrey Bekrenev, ITAR-TASS. Tell me again on Kim Jong-il. The North Korean state news agency today reported that the North Korean authorities have captured the South Korean-hired agent who was (thought ?) to assassinate Kim Jong-il. Admiral, do you have any updated information on that?

**ADM. KEATING:** The short answer is I do not. (Scattered laughter.) I asked our friends in the State Department and our good friends in DoD, the Pentagon this morning if there was anything late-breaking. This is news to me. I had not heard anything about that.

One more. Anybody? Yes, sir.

**MODERATOR:** The gentleman in back.

**ADM. KEATING:** Because I'm such a nice guy. (Scattered laughter.)

**Q** Admiral, Li Liu, *Voice of America*. Good morning, sir.

**ADM. KEATING:** Good morning. How are you?

**Q** Good, thank you. You -- earlier you mentioned that the United States will continue to have military presence in East Asia, and many in that region expressed so-called silent support for the United States military presence but they also asked for sensitivity and not taking it for granted. And I remember not too long ago there was a U.S. ship, a military ship that made a docking at a Japanese port and it was protested by Japanese officials. So can you tell us in what way the United States government and your troops are exercising sensitivity and not taking presence as a granted. Thank you.

**MR. KEATING:** I'll try to answer. I had the great -- my wife and I had the great privilege of living in Yokosuka, Japan for over two years in 1998, 1999 and 2000. It was our first time to be stationed in Japan. We learned firsthand of the remarkable support from the Japanese people. I have participated in many Pearl Harbor memorial ceremonies, right there this past 7 December, right there on the USS Arizona memorial site. So I have seen firsthand the dramatic progress that the countries of the United States and Japan in particular have made from the dark days of World War II.

We go to great lengths in the Department of Defense, to ensure that our soldiers, sailors, airman, marines, and civilians who are stationed overseas, or who visit overseas are carefully apprised of cultural differences, that we do our level best to observe those cultural differences and capitalize on the remarkable opportunities attendant to permanent overseas basing, whether it's in Japan or Korea or the attaches and folks who we have all throughout our area of responsibility.

So we're very careful to remain culturally sensitive, to observe the customs and morays of those countries where we visit, where we're stationed, where we exercise, and we actively seek more opportunities to do so.

Thanks very much everybody. Good to talk to you. And Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukah, Happy Holidays.

**MODERATOR:** Thank you all for coming. This event is now concluded.

END.



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