



7.1 EVOLVING NAVAL FORCES TO SUPPORT OPERATIONS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Admiral Timothy J. Keating

I think what I have agreed to do today is provide a fairly broad overview of naval operations in Asia and the Pacific and then use

Admiral Timothy J. Keating (Retired) graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1971. After duty aboard USS Mason (DD 852) in the western Pacific, he completed flight training in August 1973. Admiral Keating completed various assignments aboard USS Nimitz (CVN 68), USS Kitty Hawk (CV 63), USS Enterprise (CVN 65), USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71), and the USS Nimitz (CVN 68), deploying to locations all over the world. In addition, he participated in combat operations in support of Operation Desert Storm aboard USS Saratoga (CV 60). Admiral Keating held various other positions including Head of the Aviation Junior Officer Assignments Branch, Naval Military Personnel Command; Deputy Commander, Carrier Air Wing Seventeen; Chief of Naval Operations Fellow with the Strategic Studies Group; Deputy Commander, Carrier Air Wing Nine; Commander of CVW-9; Commander, Naval Strike Warfare Center; Director, Aviation Officer Distribution Division; Deputy Director for Operations (Current Operations/J33), Operations Directorate, the Joint Staff; Commander of Carrier Group Five; Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Plans, Policy and Operations (N3/N5); Commander of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command and U.S. Fifth Fleet; Director, Joint Staff; Commander of North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command. Admiral Timothy J. Keating retired in December 2009 after serving nearly 3 years as the Commander of the U.S. Pacific Command. His awards include the Defense Distinguished Service Medal with four Oak Leaf Clusters, Distinguished Service Medal with Gold Star, Legion of Merit with three Gold Stars, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal with Gold Star, three Air Medals, Navy Commendation Medal with two Gold Stars and Combat "V," and various unit and campaign awards. He has received military decorations from Great Britain, Bahrain, Canada, Japan, Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Singapore, and is a proud Honorary Master Chief Petty Officer in the U.S. Navy. He has more than 5000 flight hours and 1200 arrested landings.

the remainder of my time to respond to your questions. First, though, I want to briefly describe the role that U.S. naval forces played after Hurricane Katrina. At the time, I had the privilege of commanding the U.S. Northern Command (USNORTHCOM). We were involved in a fairly big way, as it turns out.

You may recall that when Katrina came across southern Florida, it did not seem like a big deal. However, when the storm reached the Gulf, it intensified rapidly. Then it hung a hard right and bore-sighted New Orleans. At the last minute, the storm turned slightly east and hit southern Mississippi square on. By that time, its intensity had lessened from category 5 to category 4, as I recall. We in the USNORTHCOM Command Center were somewhat relieved because it obviously could have been a lot worse. Please do not misinterpret what I am saying. I do not mean for a second to diminish the hurricane's impact on all those who were affected; we realized fully that southern Mississippi had been devastated. But, at least temporarily, it seemed that New Orleans had been spared the worst of the storm.

The next day, headlines in papers around the country reflected that same feeling. "New Orleans Dodges Bullet" one said. Then, as you know, everything changed. Late on Monday afternoon, we got a phone call in the Command Center and the duty officer turned to me and said "the 19th-street levee is leaking." One of the officers pulled up a topographical map of New Orleans, and we quickly saw that the city was surrounded by water. Lake Pontchartrain lies to the north, and the Gulf of Mexico lies to the south. Parts of New Orleans lie as much as 80 feet below sea level. And so, at about 1630 that Monday afternoon, we realized that trouble was on the way. Sure enough, during the night, the levee broke, and water, being not very smart but quite obedient, went where it could go as fast as it could get there. As a result, much of the city was awash.

The point of all that is that, before we were even up on the Internet on Sunday afternoon and Monday morning, naval forces were moving to the New Orleans/southern Mississippi area. In fact, the captain of the USS *Bataan* (LHD-5) did not wait for anyone to call her. She simply moved the ship on her own initiative, without waiting for orders. As a result, *Bataan* was first on the scene, with

significant resources including landing craft and helicopters. Later, we sent an aircraft carrier down as well as a hospital ship. And, as you know, the U.S. Coast Guard also provided substantial assets.

So this incident, as well as day-to-day U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) operations, aptly illustrates the remarkable capacity and capability resident in the U.S. Navy and our other armed forces. These forces can be readily accessed, are available, and are capable of performing tasks with little or no advance warning. This capability made a huge difference in USNORTHCOM's ability to say to the Secretary of Defense and the President, in some very tense moments, we have got 25 hospital beds, we have got medical personnel, and we have got dental personnel. In short, we have all sorts of capability in a ship that can be positioned just 20 miles off the coast.

Now let's fast forward to USPACOM. For those of you who are not familiar with the command, USPACOM's area of responsibility (AOR) extends from the west coast of the United States to the east coast of Africa, although the U.S. Africa Command is taking a little bit of the Indian Ocean. In the other direction, the AOR extends from the North Pole to the South Pole. It includes the eastern half of Russia along with Mongolia, China, India (but not Pakistan), and on down through Australia and New Zealand. The USPACOM AOR covers just more than 50% of the Earth's surface and is home to fully half of the Earth's human population.

Those of us who have been in the armed services understand that it is the best job in the world. It really is. There is so much happening on a day-to-day basis. Despite the fact that national security policy and national defense policy are run out of the Pentagon, being 6000–7000 miles away from the flagpole has its advantages. Most of the time, we are able to move forces around on our own because we have operational control of those forces. As USPACOM commander, I did not have to go to the Joint Forces Command or the Joint Staff to get the Secretary of Defense to write a deployment order. The forces were mine, if you will, and I could move them from one location in the AOR to another as necessary.

There is a point to all this. In the course of our travels throughout the Asia–Pacific region, we visited 30 of the 38 countries that lie within the command’s geographic boundaries. We visited some of them several times, and one of them—Japan—12 times. Some countries you cannot visit often enough.

In each and every visit, regardless of the country or whether we were meeting with senior ministry of defense officials, senior military officers, senior diplomats, labor folks, energy folks, commerce folks, private industry, personnel in think tanks, or personnel participating in war games, there was a common element in virtually every such interchange. We were invariably told: “You, the United States of America, represented most frequently by U.S. Pacific Command forces, are an indispensable element for peace and stability in the region.”

Someone in every country, in one way or another, whether in public or in a sidebar conversation, told us: “We can’t do what we want to do without you.” Some of the people we met were pretty subtle in expressing that feeling. Indonesia, for example, is a country of staggering importance to us from both global and regional perspectives. It is home to 210 million people, the vast majority of them Muslims. It is also a rich melting pot of ethnic and religious varieties.

We had just sent a hospital ship to Indonesia as part of our Pacific Partnership program. We put a lot of doctors, nurses, engineers, and, yes, veterinarians on these ships, and we made ports of call to take care of the people, their facilities, and their animals. In Indonesia, the water buffalo is not only the family pet but it’s also their John Deere tractor and Ford pickup. If Buffalo Bessie gets sick, the family cannot tend to the crops and thus cannot eat or earn any money. So veterinary medicine is a huge part of our outreach program.

Shortly after we had sent the hospital ship to Indonesia, I went down for a visit, expecting to receive verbal bouquets and bask in the reflected glory from the ship’s visit. Although the Indonesian leaders expressed their gratitude, they also said: “Next time, we can do without the big white ship with the big red cross. To our people, it denotes an over-reliance on your country and an inability

on the part of our country's leaders to satisfy the needs of our people. We are grateful for the help, but we do not particularly appreciate the symbol."

So instead of sending a hospital ship, we now send C-17s and C-130s, providing about the same care in a more understated way. This seems to work better because Indonesia wants us to be nearby. They do not want us there all the time. They do not want to be an allied partner of the United States. They would like to be our friend because we are an indispensable element of their strategy for peace, stability, and security in the region.

Now let's take a look at some economic facts that are a daily concern to us at USPACOM as well as to countries such as China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. As it turns out, 75–80% of the oil that these countries consume comes through the Strait of Malacca. It is a super highway of I-95 proportions. Every 7.5 minutes, a big ship enters the Strait of Malacca, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Many of those ships are carrying oil: 75% of China's oil, 90% of Japan's oil, 90% of Korea's oil, and 90–95% of Taiwan's oil arrives on bulk carriers that come through the Strait of Malacca. About 90% of the goods that we in the United States consume or that our friends and allies in Europe consume at one point or another in their development as products are on ships that float somewhere in the Indian Ocean or the Pacific Ocean. Forty percent of the world's gross domestic product arises from countries in the Asia-Pacific region. It is an area of staggering economic importance to us.

Most of that economic engine benefits considerably from free, unfettered access to the maritime domain. This is the bond that unites the countries in that region. USPACOM is the most visible manifestation of that provision, that foundation. When folks say: "Well, you must have really worried about China when you were there at U.S. Pacific Command." I answer, "Not so much. I believe that in time, with concerted effort on our part, China will realize they need not confront us."

Cooperation and collaboration will produce a system of systems that assures them free, unfettered access to the maritime domain, and all of our other friends and allies and partners, and

that helps us, the United States, provide the assurance of a hedge to every country in the world and every country in that AOR. To some extent, China is concerned about Japan getting a little stronger and South Korea's capacity as a developing power.

China also wants to be able to go into the Indian Ocean, and they watch very warily as India's navy gets stronger and India's air force gets stronger. So China likes us to be around. We should continue to work with them and draw them out and assure them that we have no hegemonic intentions—we do not want to put an American flag in downtown Beijing, we do not want to put an American flag in any country in the AOR; we want to be able to assure folks that our reasons for being there are peaceful and that we want to help them help themselves.

The instrument of foreign policy that works best in that part of the world is the U.S. Navy. The junior officers at the command coined a phrase, "virtual presence equals actual absence." That is the one point I would emphasize to you when you talk about climate and energy. There is no substitute, in both my personal and my professional opinion, for American forces being present. And as the Navy works through the challenges, and the Air Force works through the challenges, and, to a lesser extent, our Army and Marine Corps, because those forces that are generally in garrison are of less utility to the commander of USPACOM, unless we have the lift capability to move those forces out of garrison and be present for exercises and training in the countries of the AOR.

If we do not have a Navy of sufficient numbers and an Air Force of sufficient numbers and lift capability, we are not present. We are absent. You can do all of the video teleconferencing you want. You can have as many meetings as you want. But you have to be out there and train with, and develop the trust and confidence of, and build relationships with, the younger men and women in the armed forces of the AOR so that they can grow up knowing that we are not going to leave them high and dry.

A great way of manifesting that faith, trust, and confidence that they should have in us is through humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations like those after Katrina. I cannot recount

for you the number of times that a hurricane, a typhoon, a cyclone, or an earthquake has hit, or a cold snap has affected hundreds of thousands of people in the USPACOM AOR, and because we are there, because we are present, or we have sufficient reach and lift, we can provide assistance immediately. Such operations have dramatic impact.

Several years ago, a devastating tsunami hit the western tip of Indonesia. Although the first forces to get on scene came by air, the second forces and the most sustainable forces came by sea. When Myanmar was hit by a tropical cyclone, I flew out there to offer the use of some of our medium- and heavy-lift helicopters and C-130s. We and our allies had deployed four ships off the coast. But the Myanmar government said, "No thanks, we don't need the help." Thousands of lives were lost as a result; it was one of the significant regrets I have in my tour there.

When an earthquake and a bout of extremely cold weather occurred in China, the first American expression of support came in the form of two C-17s loaded with relief supplies. We had to get permission to let them land, but that is the authority that we enjoyed at USPACOM. So it is presence. It is readiness. It is partnership. These three essential elements of USPACOM strategy, I am convinced, provide the basis for success in the region.

That part of the world is critical to us from the perspectives of economics, energy, and the environment. We need to maintain free and unfettered access to the maritime domain and the air domain. It is easy for folks in the Navy to think of USPACOM as a Navy command. However, a senior Air Force officer once reminded me that there is air over every drop of water out there, so it should be an Air Force command as well. At any rate, think about how our Navy and our Air Force in particular are going to have to manage the challenges confronting them in terms of energy. I will talk about one last point on climate here in just a second.

How do we manage those challenges so as to be able to assure our friends, allies, and partners in the region that we will be present—not virtually, but actually? We need to be there in times of crisis, in times of training, and in times of readiness preparation.

Then, when we are done, we will leave. But once we are over the horizon, you do not know how far away we are. It is a wonderful thing to be able to say yeah, we are nearby. It is a relative term. We could be 2 miles over the horizon or 200 or 2000, but we will get there in a big hurry.

Let's talk for a minute about climate change. Twice a year, USPACOM gathers many of the chiefs of defense from all of the countries in the region. The most recent meeting of this type was held in Indonesia, at Bali, just after Thanksgiving 2008. As I recall, we had about 28 chiefs of defense or chairmen of other countries' versions of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It was just after President Obama had won the election. I soon discovered that I had underestimated the impact of Barack Obama being the president-elect in the Pacific region. These gentlemen were consumed with hope. Expectations were going through the roof.

As usual, we had arrived armed with briefing books on exercises and power projection and seminars and war games and all that. But many of the countries in attendance, especially the smaller countries, the island nations, wanted to talk about climate change. For nations like Tonga, which it turns out is an important partner of ours, climate change is turning out to be an existential threat.

They are worried about their country going away, and they expect the United States to help. They expect President Obama to provide some assistance. Most of their islands are just a foot or two above sea level. A sea level rise of 18 inches will reduce their territorial land mass by 75%. So they're worried about climate change.

They're not the only country out there that will be adversely affected. Through our ability to be present, we can help manage these challenges. Whether it is China and energy and oil and environment, or Tonga and the rising seas, the one element that countries in the Pacific region depend on and trust are the forces of the United States of America. I will be happy to entertain your questions.

Q&A WITH ADMIRAL TIMOTHY J. KEATING

Q: *Earlier, you spoke about the difference between actual presence and virtual absence. Now that you are retired, can you comment perhaps more specifically as to the adequacy of USPACOM's capacity to provide presence in terms of aircraft, ships, and so forth?*

ADMIRAL TIMOTHY J. KEATING: I will try. One can easily get into some controversial discussions here. While still on active duty, I made some comments that, although appreciated inside of the Pentagon, were not universally endorsed. At the time, the Navy had plans to build some very high-end, very sophisticated combatants. Out in USPACOM, we like the Arleigh Burke class DDG destroyers. On the aviation side, the department is committed to the F-35, the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF). Out in USPACOM, we like F-16s, F-15s, and F-18s because we have them in sufficient numbers to execute the plans that are on the shelf, but certainly in greater numbers than we could have 10, 20 years from now. That goes for ships as well, not to mention tankers and heavy airlift capacity and sealift capacity. Those of us who have spent a lot of time in the Pacific tend to agree with Napoleon that quantity has a quality all its own. As a result, I tend to prefer highly capable, albeit not the most advanced fifth-plus generation, military air capability and very capable surface capability in numbers that we can use to sustain or even enhance presence and crisis response. I like the DDG-51 and the F-18EF over the alternatives. So, I have provided a long answer to a short question. We do not have as much as we would like. Who does? If current budgets are executed, if the current program is executed as is designed, I think we will be in more trouble than we know 5–25 years from now because we will just be out of certain elements that are essential to USPACOM.

We have B-2s and F-22s. We have incorporated them, as you might imagine, in the plans that we have on the shelf. And we use them. We are also making use of a variety of unmanned aircraft.

But there comes a time when you simply need numbers, and I do not think we are going to have enough.

Q: *Sir, could you highlight a few successes of military-to-military engagements with foreign nations to build capacity for military adaptation to climate change?*

ADMIRAL TIMOTHY J. KEATING: We conduct an exercise called Cobra Gold annually in Thailand. Five nations are principal players; 10 nations attend in observer status. Soldiers and Marines storm ashore, ships shoot, airplanes fly, and there is a United Nations (UN) peacekeeping aspect to it now that was not there 5 years ago.

From an environmental impact perspective, this is a very kinetic activity, but the government of Thailand has told me that the beaches are cleaner after the exercise than they were before it took place. The land is in better shape after the exercise than it was before. Countries in that part of the world understand and appreciate the sense of pride we have in leaving it better than we found it.

So that is a kind of a second-order effect. It may not directly address the question you are asking, but there are points in the training programs that are sensitive to the environment and sensitive to energy consumption. However, if you want to fly, if you want to storm ashore, if you want to shoot, you are going to have to expend some energy. We are paying closer attention to it today by far than we did when I was a captain, much less a lieutenant. As a rule however, our exercises are not constructed with the express purpose of accounting for energy and climate considerations, but we work hard to have such considerations included during planning.

Q: *Sir, I wanted to ask you about climate predictions in your AOR. Are they adequate? Were you able to obtain the information that you needed? Do you need better environmental assessment and forecasting tools?*

ADMIRAL TIMOTHY J. KEATING: We spend considerably more time today worrying about the environment, the climate, and the weather than we did when I was a junior officer. We often have to move forces out of the way of weather, which is perhaps obvi-

ous. More critically, we also move forces in behind weather patterns, so as to provide assistance to Manila when a 30-hour deluge leaves 2 feet of water in the streets and the only things that can float around are shallow water boats, landing craft, and amphibious vehicles off U.S. Navy amphibious ships. So, we pay close attention to weather for that purpose.

As for the role of meteorology in joint operations, although weather can occasionally be a “no-go” factor, most of the time we are going to lean into it. If the weather proves to be insurmountable, we will hold what we have until it clears. Although our meteorologists usually are not the determining factor in deciding whether we conduct some operation, they have more input than they used to. And USPACOM and USNORTHCOM, we have crackerjack meteorologists, but they are in a supporting role.

Q: *My question is about contingency plans to deal with the effects of climate change. You mentioned Tonga, but you could also have talked about the Maldives as well as some other places. Although the Department of Defense (DoD) may not have the lead in dealing with such eventualities, do we need to be thinking about contingency plans for these places, especially if people are relying on us as their friends? We probably have a little bit of time, at least, to develop plans and put them on the shelf.*

ADMIRAL TIMOTHY J. KEATING: I would bet that folks would say we are not doing enough right now. At USPACOM, we did not stop everything we were doing to begin to address Tonga’s issues or American Samoa’s issues. Life could easily change for many of the island nations in the Pacific region, and for some of them in a very big way. The efforts that we have undertaken so far are at best rudimentary, which may be an unsatisfactory answer. All of us understand that the challenge of managing the wolf closest to the sled is not just a glib response, but a fact. So I would say we would get not a passing grade and we are not shooting ahead of the duck.

Work needs to be done. We are not doing much. Another important consideration is, who has the lead? Is it the State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Department of Commerce, or the Department of

Homeland Security (DHS)? Some of the islands of concern are American protectorates, and so it would become a DHS lead, perhaps. Overall though, I do not think we have a satisfactory answer on this.

Q: *I am interested in your perspective on a comment that was made last year at an Arctic conference at the Naval War College. A representative from Japan asked: "If the United States shifts its focus to the Arctic, who is going to be in the Pacific?"*

ADMIRAL TIMOTHY J. KEATING: Well, let me come at it a slightly different way, but I hope I answer your question in so doing. When I made my first visit to Japan, I was scheduled to meet the prime minister. So while getting prepped for the meeting, I visited the ambassador and the country team at our embassy and sat through reviews on a host of issues—economic, environmental, military, home porting, nuclear carrier, Japanese maritime self-defense force, and so on. We ran through all of the issues that we thought that the prime minister might possibly bring up.

When I finally met the prime minister, the first words out of his mouth were: "Can I assume that the nuclear umbrella of the United States will continue to extend over Japan for the foreseeable future?" Of course that was true, but he just wanted to ask it of some guy wearing a U.S. uniform. Of course, it is a much broader policy issue than what little Timmy Keating thinks about it, but I felt safe in saying it was true. So all of these countries look to us in ways that we do not necessarily realize.

As I mentioned, I had spent a lot of time with desk officers getting ready for this meeting. It never crossed our minds that he would be thinking in truly global strategic terms. Over time, however, I learned that many of the countries in that particular part of the world have such concerns. They think, they feel, they worry that we are distracted by Iraq and Afghanistan and therefore that we are not paying as much attention to them. It is critical for us to be there, to go out, to leave the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations (OPNAV) and go visit. It is easy to say. I know it is a hell of a long way. I understand all that. So your question about do

they worry about our being distracted in pursuit of this gold, the brass ring that is represented in the Arctic, I think they do.

An area where such concerns might be manifested is in the South China Sea, where there are similar disagreements over ownership and freedom of navigation. Vietnam, Brunei, the Philippines, Malaysia, and China have all made claims to water and minerals and resources on the bottom of the South China Sea. When we discuss such issues with our Chinese colleagues, they stop and say, "Wait a minute, what did you just call it? The South *China* Sea. You see. We rest our case." They think it is their water, and the stuff underneath it and the small islands on it, they think are theirs.

As I noted, several other countries in the region have differing opinions. Those of us who have flown off of carriers and steamed in ships and submarines and flown in airplanes over it also tend to have a different perspective from the Chinese. So, I worry about confrontation in the South China Sea.

Again, I think there is reason for concern that countries in the Asia–Pacific region would worry about our being distracted by the siren call of all of the wonderful things could happen in the Arctic. I do not see it happening quickly. It will be incumbent upon us to reassure our friends, allies, and partners, through continued presence, through visits, and by inviting foreign military officers and foreign government officials to attend conferences like this. Doing so will pay massive dividends, and it is a relatively small investment.

Afterward, they will go home and say, "Those folks back in the United States, they are sweating it! They are worried about it!" It is that reassurance that I think can disabuse them of the notion that we are going to leave them high and dry while we chase that brass ring in the Arctic.