An Interview with
Timothy J. Keating

Admiral Timothy J. Keating, USN, is Commander, U.S. Pacific Command.

JFQ: *You've had an interesting journey from flag lieutenant at USPACOM* [U.S. Pacific Command] *to commander. We would like to hear about your goals while in office and your mandate coming from Northern Command.*

Admiral Keating: You're right, I was in Hawaii in the mid 1980s serving as the commander's flag lieutenant, and I would walk through the front office. In the vestibule, there were all the former commanders in chief of Pacific Command, and I'd pass Admiral [William] Crowe's picture every day. There has been so much that has changed in the 20-something years, and we have been through the Pacific much of those intervening 22 years now. We've been in Japan for 2-plus years with the *Kitty Hawk* battlegroup—the *Independence* and *Kitty Hawk* from 1998 to 2000—so it's not like we were there in 1985 and then were off in a closet somewhere. But now that we can course around in this capacity, the relationships that we enjoy with countries, the security in the region, the economic growth, the vitality, the partners and allies that we enjoy—all of these are different, stronger, and better. And it is a result of hard, hard work. All of our departments—State, Commerce, Energy, Defense, et cetera—have been working the Pacific assiduously. There have been hot spots in other parts of the world, of course, and the Pacific has had its spikes, but generally speaking, it has been a peaceful region. But that doesn't mean it's all sweetness, harmony, and light; there are areas that we watch carefully. But from 1985 to 2007, there has been much improvement—a huge increase in the economic engines that are turning, more folks "breathing free air" than in the mid-1980s, and it is a generally more positive, secure, tranquil area by almost any standard.

JFQ: *What are the biggest challenges and opportunities you are presented with in the current strategic environment?*

Admiral Keating: Maybe it's just because I'm older, but I don't think of things today in a straight "Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, civilian" perspective—a military perspective. There is much to recommend a pol-mil [political-military] or even an econ-pol-mil [economic-political-military] prism rather than just air wings and amphibious groups, whatever.

Take energy, for example. China, Japan, Korea—they import much more than they produce in terms of resources for energy. In China alone, their energy consumption is increasing; their environmental issues are not insignificant attendant to energy consumption. Australia now enjoys a huge commercial market with the People's Republic of China that hardly existed, I'd say, 10 years ago, 20 years ago for sure. And so the movement of commerce of various kinds through the waters and the airspace of the Pacific is a considerable factor in our day-to-day concern.

The growth of the militaries in the region is very interesting. It isn't just China. Australia, India, Indonesia/Malaysia, the Philippines to a lesser extent, Japan, South Korea—and North Korea. Are the North Koreans really going to "denuclearize the peninsula"? Clearly, the challenges that we have in the AOR [area of responsibility] are not insignificant. Again, a long, measured, steady hand on the rudder, with all agencies of the government and frequent, candid collaboration with our allies and partners, recommends to me the same picture ahead of us that we've enjoyed behind us, if not better.

JFQ: *The focus of our Forum is China. Chinese authorities are reportedly ready to establish a telephone link to enable senior-level conversations in the event of a defense crisis. Is there a need for a military-to-military link at a level below the political?*

Admiral Keating: I don't know that I would say that there's a need. I would say that this hotline—everybody thinks of the Moscow hotline—is not just for military applications. The ability to communicate quickly and accurately, but in a secure fashion, with the Chinese would be an advantage for us to be sure. There are other ways of doing it besides some big, super-sophisticated, spooky, only-5-people-in-the-world-can-use-it type of landline or satellite or whatever. This is one of the points we make with our Chinese counterparts: not much good happens when countries try to withhold or conceal or subvert information capabilities and technologies. Now, we all have our programs that we don't so much want folks to know about, but the way we tried to describe it when we were in China last time was if we can reduce potential for misunderstanding, whether meeting face-to-face, exercising at lower levels, exchanging noncommissioned officers—if we can reduce the gaps where either misunderstanding exists today or could develop, that would go a long way toward further reducing, if not eliminating, the chances for a significant misunderstanding.

So, a long answer to a short question. Is a hotline a good idea? Yes. Is it the only way? Absolutely not. Are there current efforts under

Col David H. Gurney, USMC (Ret.), and Dr. Jeffrey D. Smotherman of *Joint Force Quarterly* interviewed Admiral Keating at his Pentagon liaison office.

way that are bearing fruit? Yes. Do we want to put a hotline in? I think we're close to getting the T's crossed and the I's dotted, and we may see it within, I'll say, 6 months.

JFQ: *The former Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Asia, Richard Lawless, recently noted that China's shrouded annual defense spending is "emblematic of our fundamental concerns over a lack of transparency in China's military and security affairs." China claims to be spending about $45 billion a year on defense, while U.S. estimates put the figure as high as $125 billion. Does PACOM have the resources at its disposal to adequately deal with the emergence of such a large military in its AOR?*

Admiral Keating: Yes, we do. The background, the texture, the hue is that we have PACOM forces who are out of our theater; they are in Iraq and Afghanistan, principally. That causes us, appropriately, to reassess the risk in our AOR constantly; we're doing it every day, and we have revised slightly our risk assessment, and we have reported that to the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman and to Congress. But in the end, the answer to the question of whether you can execute your mission is *yes*. Many people only point to China and the Korean Peninsula as examples of military growth in recent years. The reality is that any number of militaries in the region have more capability and capacity today than they did 20 or 30 years ago. It hasn't changed our perspective or position as the preeminent military power in the Pacific because at the end of the day, our job remains to protect our homeland and beat our adversaries, and we are capable of doing both readily today.

JFQ: *The Okinawa-based Marine Expeditionary Force is scheduled to relocate to Guam by 2014. What are the strategic implications of this move for your AOR?*

Admiral Keating: If you look at a map, you see that Guam is at the strategic crossroads of the Pacific. We will improve our ability to respond in an agile, flexible, powerful manner by moving some forces out of Okinawa and down to Guam. It will improve our strategic, operational, and tactical reach. There is, of course, the notion that Okinawans will get some of their land back. That's beneficial to the people of Japan, and it will allow us to increase our presence in important areas of the Pacific that are a little more difficult to reach today than they will be when we have more forces at Guam.

JFQ: *Under current procurement and decommissioning plans, the U.S. Navy's attack submarine fleet will shrink to fewer than 30 boats by the late 2020s. China has added more than 30 advanced submarines to its fleet over the past decade and has 6 new submarine programs under way. What is driving China's military buildup, and what should PACOM do in response?*

Admiral Keating: When we were in China in May, Chinese military officials said, "We have no offensive intentions. Our military is designed exclusively for defensive purposes. We want to protect our borders, we want to protect our coastlines, and we want to protect our assets and resources." That said, their weapons system development is somewhat curious if one does accept the fact that it is just for defensive purposes. So we can quibble about whether a submarine is a defensive or an offensive weapon. Are antiship cruise missiles offensive or defensive weapons? Shelve that for just a second. China's military is growing: They are operating in areas of the Pacific where they had not operated before, and they are developing systems and platforms that are, while not at the same level of capability as ours, not insignificant in their capability and capacity and volume. So we're watching very carefully the Chinese military's tactics, techniques, and procedures, and we're attempting to work more closely with them in fundamental search and rescue missions and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in a kind of building-block approach to make sure we are apprised of their capabilities. I go back to reducing the potential for misunderstanding, and we make sure they are absolutely clear on our capabilities. That's part of the strategy, an important piece of the strategy for Pacific Command: we're going to let them know how good we are. We're not going to disguise anything. We have a significant technological and capabilities advantage, and we're not going to forfeit that.

JFQ: *What are the key enablers for peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region?*

Admiral Keating: Dialogue. We move around a lot in the AOR. It's big, and you don't go anywhere in less than 8 hours. But we're getting out there and sitting down with folks and talking to them and making sure their intentions are clear. We're making sure our goals are clear, too. We're working as hard as we can to understand their intentions, their strategy—"they," by the way, is all of them, both partners and allies. There are folks out there who would rather not be seen as terribly close to the United States. That's understandable; we don't quarrel with them. But we want to reassure them of our understanding and of our support when requested. We're not going to show up unless we're needed. And when we are requested, we're going to get there with the full kit bag of capabilities, and then we'll leave when we're done. That happens principally with disaster relief—the tsunami is perhaps the foremost example. So there are other countries, the Philippines, for example, where our special operations forces are providing very important and effective training to the Filipinos. We're not doing the actual antiterrorist work; we're teaching them how, we're showing them how, and then we will watch from a distance as they execute the tactics, techniques, and procedures that we have taught them. When we help them, we are essentially helping them learn. So we are looking to be a subtle but unmistakable presence throughout the theater, we're looking to provide a clear message of support, and we want to do this through dialogue, through presence, through the theater security cooperation plan. And we want it to be a mutual, candid exchange, not a one-way dialogue.

JFQ: *Thank you, sir.*