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# **Realizing the Rebalance: The United States Marine Corps in Asia**

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Washington, DC

**Speaker:**

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**Moderator:**

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*Announcer:* You're listening to a podcast from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

*Jim Schoff:* Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. My name is Jim Schoff; I'm a Senior Associate here in the Asia program and in charge of our Japan studies. It's a pleasure to welcome you here on such a beautiful day. And it's a distinct pleasure to welcome Lieutenant General John Wissler here to Carnegie.

We were fortunate to catch him during a visit to Washington, and we appreciate the opportunity to hear from him directly about what he and his team have been doing in and around Japan, how the rebalance to Asia looks from his vantage point, and how he is partnering with Japan and with other countries in the region to pursue the objectives of the rebalance policy. General Wissler comes to us from Okinawa where he's Commander of the III Marine Expeditionary Force and the Commander of Marine Forces, Japan. Earlier in his career, he served in Okinawa as an executive officer in the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Air Wing, and he went on to serve in a wide range of field and staff positions, assignments, after that.

Among his field assignments, he served twice in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, and on the staff side, his résumé includes work for the White House as a Marine Corps aid to the president in the early 1990s. He headed up the War Room for General James Jones when General Jones was commandant to the Marine Corps. And he was a senior military assistant to Deputy Secretary of Defense Gordon England at the time. More recently and part of what we'll hear about today, he was assigned the responsibility to command Joint Task Force 505, which was the U.S. military support team that assisted the massive relief effort following the super typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in November of last year.

And General Wissler will touch on this and we'll have a chance to see a short video about that response. That brings me to one point I'd like to make before I turn the floor over to General Wissler, which is that his two experiences, Commander of U.S. Marines in Japan and Joint Task Force 505 Commander, to me, help highlight the evolution of the U.S. military presence in Japan and in Asia since the end of World War II and Japan's own transformation as well. The legacy of the Marines' presence in Okinawa began as a platform for the planned invasion of Honshu, Japan in 1945. It then became an integral part of the forward U.S. military presence in the region with the dual purpose of helping to protect Japan's security because of strict limits on Japan's armed forces and to support regional peace and stability in the region.

Early on on this latter purpose was characterized by large-scale conflicts in Korea and Vietnam, but this has given way to a less ideological and broader multilateral kind of security cooperation, even as North Korea remains an outlier in this evolving system. Now, we have seen since the



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late 1970s an increase in Japan's ability to do more for its own defense, and since the late 1990s, a willingness and ability in Japan to do more in support of regional peace and stability, not so much to replace the role of the United States on these fronts, but to be a more capable and valuable contributor opening up new opportunities bilaterally and with others to help meet the new challenges that we all face.

We've seen this in missile defense cooperation vis-à-vis North Korea and it was on clear display in the multilateral effort together with the Philippines last fall with the largest and fastest Japanese response that we've seen to date. And I believe there's an opportunity to do more in the future. So the important point I wanted to make is that this is a very dynamic evolution, and when – and with the United States and Japan as key players, and when you think of dynamic, you think of the Marines. And when you think of the Marines in Asia, you thin, now of Lieutenant General John Wissler and the III MEF. And with that, I'd like to introduce –

*Lt. General Wissler:* I hope not.

*Jim Schoff:* – the General to make his remarks. And then we'll have a chance to ask questions later on. [Applause] Thanks.

*Lt. General Wissler:* Thanks. Good afternoon, everybody. I am Lieutenant General John Wissler. I wear a number of hats in Okinawa, Japan. As it was mentioned, I'm the Commanding General of III Marine Expeditionary Force. I'm also, when required, when appointed by the Pacific Command Commander, Admiral Locklear, I am the Commander of JTF 505, Joint Task Force 505, a joint task force that is focused on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. I'm also the Commander of Marine Forces, Japan.

Today, the total number of personnel serving in Marine Forces Japan is three: myself; my deputy commander, Major General Chuck Hudson; and a government service employee who controls all of the military labor that we have with our Japanese partners in Okinawa. Obviously, in time of conflict, that could change and that staff becomes different. But I also wear a different hat. If you were to ask any Okinawan who I was, if you showed them a photograph, they would tell you that I'm the Okinawa Area Coordinator because I am the senior representative on Okinawa from all of the military services. And so when my name shows up in the press in Okinawa, it rarely shows up as the Commander and General of III Marine Expeditionary Force or the Commander of Marine Forces, Japan, but rather the Okinawa Area Coordinator.

There are many people in this audience who know a lot more about Asia than I do, so I'm not going to profess to be an expert. I don't know how many of you folks remember who the



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quarterback for the Green Bay Packers was after Bart Starr; probably not many of you; a guy name Zeke Bratkowski. Compared to some of the experts in the audience, General Gregson and others, I am the Zeke Bratkowski here today. But I will give you a lay-down of what is going on in Japan and in Asia with regard to Marines as we execute our responsibilities for Marine Forces, Pacific, and for Admiral Locklear.

As I said, one of those hats I wear is the JTF 505 Commander, III Marine Expeditionary Force, today about 19,470 Marines west of the International Dateline. Execute responsibilities across the range of military operations by being forward-present and forward-stationed in Asia to be able to respond to crises or contingencies. And by being forward-present and by being forward-stationed, we can do so in a period of hours and not days. And that ability to respond in hours and not days is what makes a difference in saving lives.

In Asia in any given year, about 70,000 people lose their lives to natural disasters. We feel that we made a big difference last fall when we were able to respond as Joint Task Force 505 to the destruction that occurred with Typhoon Yolanda, or Typhoon Haiyan, depending on if you were from the Philippines, it was referred to as Yolanda. And we were able to save lives because we were able to respond in hours and not days. The III Marine Expeditionary Brigade led by Brigadier General Paul Kennedy, within six hours of notification from the Pacific Command Commander that we were going to respond on behalf of the United States, left Okinawa and then two-and-a-half hours later was on the ground in Manila to begin operations.

The next day, we began distributing essential supplies with C-130s and the following day began using with our MV-22 Osprey, a tremendous aircraft that we could not have been able to succeed the way we did if we did not have that partnership between our C-130s and our V-22s. So that's what III MEF does. We're forward-present. We're forward-stationed, forward-based, to be able to respond to crises as they occur, whether it's humanitarian assistance and disaster relief or whether something should happen on the Korean Peninsula. At the end of this presentation, I'll show you a short video of a recent combined Marine Expeditionary Brigade operation that we conducted with our Korean counterparts and also our Australian counterparts on the Peninsula of Korea.

With that as lead in, I'll show you; this is just a quick summary of kind of what took place last November for III Marine Expeditionary Force as the headquarters of JTF 505, but a full complement of U.S. military capability, Air Force, Army, Marine, and Navy that responded to that tragedy. So with that –

*[Video 1 Begins]*



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On November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2013, Typhoon Haiyan made landfall in the Republic of the Philippines. With sustained winds of 185 miles per hour, it became one of the strongest storms in recorded history.

This looked like an F-5 tornado 60 miles wide that flattened everything in its path. The devastation was unlike any typhoon or hurricane that I've ever seen.

Before the debris could settle, Marines from III Marines Expeditionary Brigade deployed from Okinawa, Japan, and began to fly aid and supplies to those suffering in the hardest-hit areas.

From the first day we got there, we emphasized that we were there to provide a unique capability, to provide things that could not in fact be provided by the Armed Forces of the Philippines and by the government and the people of the Philippines themselves.

We're bringing food and water to people who are thirsty and hungry. The relief on their faces was immediate. People coming up to us saying, "As soon as we see an American helicopter, we know we're saved."

They started on Monday with C-130s, and on Tuesday, they started with the V-22s. Our MV-22s proved absolutely vital to provide a capability, life-saving capability, to the people of the Philippines.

After two weeks of around-the-clock operations, the unique capabilities of the Marines were no longer required. Joint Task Force 505 began a coordinated retrograde, allowing the Armed Forces of the Philippines, non-governmental organizations, and other friendly nations to continue the ongoing relief effort.

We worked until the Pilipino government was able to restore infrastructure and take over for themselves.

Tremendous capability represented by the Navy Marine Corps team, but one that would not have been capable had we not been forward-present.

Operation Damayan highlighted the importance of having Marines forward-deployed as the Expeditionary Force in the Pacific. The Marines were able to provide more than 2,400 tons of relief cargo and evacuated 21,000 victims from some of the most devastated areas of the country. The United States Marine Corps is committed to supporting humanitarian assistance and disaster relief throughout the Asia-Pacific region and around the world.



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*[Video 1 Ends]*

*Lt. General Wissler:* So that's kind of our most recent piece where we've been able to support humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. This slide here, which is I'm sure difficult for you to see in the back, but this is kind of the – this is the snapshot that I get every day of where my MEF is and what they're doing. As I said, over 19,000 west of the International Dateline, and a little over 6,000 who are currently spread across the Asia-Pacific region in different countries doing theater security cooperation, doing military-to-military operations. We also are operating against terrorists in the southern parts of the Philippines right now and continuing to build capabilities across all of Asia.

Do you want to show up the next slide? By the end of this – by the end, this is just a picture; this is kind of a snapshot of the year 2014 is going to look like when we're finished at the end of this fiscal year by the 30<sup>th</sup> of September. By the end of 30 September, we'll have been in 21 of the 36 countries in Asia-Pacific. Just recently, work we've done to reestablish demining efforts is an example in Cambodia. We'll exercise in Vietnam. We will have a near continuous presence in Korea, Japan, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand.

We have 81 exercises that are planned across the entire region, and in addition to those 81 exercises, we'll execute 57 unit-level training exercises, training on behalf of my Marines as we continue to maintain our proficiency to execute our responsibilities across that range of military operations. Just this week as we're standing here, the next iteration of our Marines in Australia have arrived. About 1,200 Marines, a Marine Air-Ground Task Force, four CH-53 helicopters, an infantry battalion reinforced with engineers and light-armored vehicles, as well as organic logistics capabilities. We'll operate for the next six months in partnership with our Australian partners, but also execute some amphibious – beginning of amphibious training with our partners in New Zealand.

New Zealand, Australia, and Japan, three of our national security – three of the five national security partners that we have, are building amphibious capability. The Japanese intend to have a brigade amphibious capability within the next five years. And I've been given the responsibility by Admiral Locklear and by Lieutenant General Robling, the Commander of Marine Forces, Pacific, to be that face-to-face partner with our Japanese counterparts.

We initiated work with our Japanese counterparts in January with an amphibious seminar, brought our experts, if you will, on amphibious warfare out to Okinawa, and had every element of the Japan self-defend force – air, maritime, and ground – in the same room at the general



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officer, flag officer, and senior planner level and ran through those things that are required to develop amphibious capability such that they could continue to develop this amphibious capability. We have partnered with them. They've had elements of the ground self-defense force that have actually deployed with the 31<sup>st</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit.

Most recently, we conducted small boat raid training with them where they conducted a 55-kilometer long-distance boat raids from sea to shore in some pretty miserable conditions. And they did it exceptionally well. So we're building that partnership. As I said, the New Zealanders are building an amphibious capability, as are the Australians. And as part of that, they sent a company of infantry to participate with us as we develop – as we executed our partnership with our Korean partners. Malaysia is in the process of building a small marine corps, and we will be partnered with them as they build their marine corps.

Not sure exactly what that will look like at this time, but we're there to help them build that capability. In addition to those three of our security alliance partners who are building amphibious capability, two of them, Korea and Thailand, already have amphibious capabilities and we exercised those capabilities. Most recently for us, we exercised in an exercise called Cobra Gold, the largest multilateral military operation in Asia, just concluded in late February, early March. And we executed amphibious operations with our Thai partners, but also with our Korean partners who were there for that training.

We will begin training in the Philippines, exercise Balikatan. That exercise annually is a large humanitarian assistance, disaster relief exercise. We completed that exercise last year in this spring timeframe, and then unfortunately had to execute those capabilities. What came out of the training last year and what came to absolute perfection in execution in Operation Damayan was the multinational coordination center concept to bring in all of these international capabilities.

In total, 18 other countries came to the assistance of the Philippines. And to be able to coordinate all of those military activities, some from ships; some from aircraft, C-130s; some simply from medical teams; and to be able to place those capabilities in the hardest-hit areas, where we needed them, when they needed them, was all facilitated, once again, by being forward-present, by our training and our ability to operate with the Armed Forces of the Philippines to create those personal relationships so that when I went to the Philippines as the JTF Commander and met with the head of the Armed Forces of the Philippines, it was not the first time that General Batista and I had seen each other, had sat down, had had discussions.

And more importantly, when General Kennedy arrived, he had been there less than one month before in an amphibious training exercise that we had completed with our Philippine partners. I



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mentioned that we have our Marines down in Australia, and they will be there for the next six months. They'll be there for six months because the weather is so bad that during the wet season, we will have no Marine presence down in Australia. Those Marines will come back – the next unit deployment program Marines will come back to Okinawa and they will train in other countries around the area.

It's a maritime theater and we have a great maritime capability. I already mentioned the III Marines Expeditionary Brigade. They stand for me an alert contingency, MAGTAF, or Marine Air-Ground Task Force, responsibility. They are required to be able to be airborne within six hours to respond to whatever the tragedy is and wherever it occurs. And we exercise them about monthly, either go to bed or wake up and make a phone call to the Command Center, and then within six hours, they're off going somewhere that we've pre-planned with our aviation assets.

When they arrive, they have to set up all their communications and then we begin passing both voice data and other things so that I know that they can go and command and control any sort of a disaster response. We always have on deck the 31<sup>st</sup> Marine Expeditionary unit, three amphibious ships from the forward-deployed naval force. Admiral **Weatherall** that you saw in that video is the Commander of the Task Force 76, the amphibious task force that supports us, our Navy partner and the Navy Marine Corps team that is forward deployed there in the Pacific. And we used three of the four ships that are in that forward-deployed naval force to conduct two patrols annually, a spring patrol, which is just coming to a close, and then there'll be a fall patrol.

And that fall patrol, we'll participate in operations in Malaysia, as I mentioned, in support of that budding capability that the Malaysians are trying to bring. And then it would be – I would be remiss if I did not mention our maritime pre-positioning squadron, which is home-based in Guam, but we use the ships from that maritime pre-positioning squadron to execute operations. Most recently, we used the USNS Sacagawea, a T-AKE, an amphibious cargo ship – or not amphibious, but a USNS cargo ship in support of this amphibious operation that we did in the Philippines – or excuse me, in Korea.

But we can also use it in many other places, most notably for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. We used one of the ships from the maritime pre-positioned force actually to take equipment down to Australia in support of the Marines who recently deployed down there. So it's a maritime theater. It's a maritime theater that requires us to be out and about to conduct those different operations that you see there. And over the course of time, 35,000 sets of Marine and sailor boots will set foot on those 21 countries.





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As I told you, I only have 19,000, a little more than, Marines west of the International Dateline. So that means every Marine in the MEF will get out to two, sometimes three different locations in the area of operations during their time in this next fiscal year. I mentioned that our responsibilities are across the range of military operations. We just completed, as I mentioned, the largest amphibious exercise in the Pacific in the last 20 years. Our Republic of Korea marine counterpart, my counterpart, was the Commandant of the ROK Marine Corps, Lieutenant General Lee. Lieutenant General Lee and our staff actually began this exercise in early January with training and follow that up with the beginnings of a maritime pre-positioning exercise, follow that up with a combined marine component command, command post exercise.

We're integrated into our staff. We're U.S. and ROK Marine counterparts where we exercised over a 14-day period the command post exercise and then culminated with the Marine Expeditionary Brigade, combined Marine Expeditionary Brigade landing. Over 20 ships from both the U.S. and the Republic of Korea, as well as I mentioned soldiers from the Australian defense force who are part of their 2<sup>nd</sup> division, which will be their amphibious division as they develop an amphibious capability and field their first amphibious ships sometime we think in 2015.

With that, I'll show this quick video, and then I will stand by to take your questions for the rest of the day.

*Jim Schoff:* Or at least the rest of the hour.

*Lt. General Wissler:* Or at least the rest of the hour.

*[Video 2 Begins]*

*[Music playing]* On March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2014, U.S. Marines and sailors worked in conjunction with marines and soldiers from the Republic of Korea and the Australian army to take part in exercise Ssang Yong 14. Ssang Yong 14 is the culmination of a multitude of training events and exercises between the U.S. and ROK forces, which take place across the Asia-Pacific region throughout the year. This year's evolution was the largest in historic history, and it was comprised of three expeditionary units, two U.S. and one ROK.

The exercise was led by the III Marines Expeditionary Brigade based in Okinawa, Japan, and showcased both interoperability and sea-based operations in the Korean Peninsula.



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When I watch 13 ships come together, both the U.S. Navy and the ROK Navy, and as we met yesterday for the first time, we folded into a tight formation seamlessly bringing these two forces together. And that's just an example of how mature our relationship is, how well we work together in whatever opportunity barbers.

As the exercise commenced, the Marines began training with their multinational counterparts. The focus of this year's exercise was sea-based power projection and the ability to rapidly deploy forces anywhere in the region to accomplish full-spectrum operations. As exercise Ssang Yong gained momentum, the multinational force partnered to engage in a full-scale amphibious beach assault.

This exercise is kind of a validation of the fact that it did not take us a generation of Marines to get back to doing amphibious operations on a larger scale, that we were able to do this through a lot of hard staff work and a lot of cooperation and a lot of just spirit.

As ships moved into position, the exercise transitioned from maritime to assault operations. Marine and ROK forces loaded into amphibious vehicles and began the shift to shore movement.

The integration's been seamless. Whenever we've had an opportunity to train, be it in field operations or just training exercises, we've tried to implement them in everything we do and vice versa. I would say that we've had an outstanding working relationship and look forward to working with them again.

While forces were swiftly moving across the beach, Marine Corps aircraft moved in overhead with speed and agility, Marine aviation moved seamless over the battle space, providing crucial aerial integration and fire support to the forces on the ground. As forces moved inland, they were able to integrate and focus on ground command and control while securing simulated objectives.

It's been really good, a lot of good training values coming out of it. Working with the Marines has been great. Every time I work with them, it's always good, always look after us really well. So it's a good exercise to come on, really a privilege.

Both U.S. and ROK forces were able to gain crucial knowledge and experience while training together. Despite language and cultural differences, the service members were able to create relationships and build on their expertise. As the exercise drew to a close and the ships set sail, the Navy and Marine Corps team were able to once again validate power projection from the sea and their commitment to being the "first to fight and win tonight".



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*[Video 2 Ends]*

*Lt. General Wissler:* Okay. Standing by for your questions.

*Jim Schoff:* Thank you very much, General, I appreciate that. If I may, I'd like to ask a couple of quick questions.

*Lt. General Wissler:* Sure.

*Jim Schoff:* Off the beginning. That was a very interesting video. Now I understand what the North Koreans were so animated about. *[Laughter]* But one quick question I wanted to ask you, 'cause I've heard you talk about this before, was the role that Japan played in the relief effort in the Philippines and your estimation of what – how that fit into the overall operation, what was particularly valuable there and what they brought to the table, and what that offers for the future.

*Lt. General Wissler:* Yeah. The Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force already has ships which while not necessarily amphibious ships can be used in an amphibious role. And in fact, just before the typhoon hit the Philippines, I had the opportunity to be out onboard the *Isse*, one of their helicopter destroyers; looks a lot like one of our old LPH amphibious ships, a large, flat deck from which you can fly lots of helicopters; has a large hangar deck you can do helicopter maintenance on.

And so I had been out; we had been supporting them as they were working on some amphibious operations from that platform, and then returned from that operation and we were then sent to the Philippines. As we were getting ready to leave the Philippines, they was about a four or five-day overlap with their amphibious task force, for lack of a better word, centered around the *Isse*. One of the concerns we had was how we would do air traffic control in and out of the airfield at Tacloban because that was a vital nerve center for bringing people and relief supplies.

And the ground lines of communication had been opened, but there was still a need for that airfield to operate. And so as we were looking how we would hand off the responsibilities in the Philippines to partners, our Japanese partners happened to show up with a ship which could, in fact, because of its radars and its other capabilities onboard the ship, control air traffic in and out of that area. They also came with a medical capability and as well embarked infantry that came ashore to assist in the further process of cleaning up after the disaster.

We were through the phase of getting relief supplies, water, and places for people to say, and we were now sort of beginning into that rebuilding phase. And the Japanese came in and were very



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helpful in kind of a seamless handoff in Tacloban. We had a very similar seamless handoff with the Australians in another part of that area. And we – with the Armed Forces of the Philippines – they had taken the overall command and control. So it was very helpful for us, one of our partners, the Japanese, who we had in fact worked with just before this operation to be able to hand off, if you will, those responsibilities.

And they brought a technical capability, as well as a partnered capability for us to talk with them to execute operations. I have on my staff in III MEF, I have liaison officers from the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force. My liaison, my senior liaison officer, I actually deployed to the Philippines with Japan's disaster relief response capability. And so he acted as the liaison between our two forces between the Joint Task Force and the Japan force as we did that handoff. So once again, someone who I work with every day was now working with us in a different role, but as a liaison officer between our two nations, if you will, our two nations' militaries, as we executed those responsibilities.

*Jim Schoff:*

Thank you. Very quickly I wanted to ask one other question, and it's connected to that. People who hear me talk know that I'm a big proponent of regional security cooperation as, be it a confidence building measure or building capacity to deal with collective challenges and support collective interests. It's a big part of the U.S. rebalance to Asia strategy, working with allies and partners in the region and regional institutions. We've made some progress, but a lot of the critics will say that what we've – it's still so limited in terms of what we can do in the region, whether it's for political reasons or because of capacity constraints in the region.

From your vantage point, what are – where do we kind of stand with that policy or approach? What are some of the priorities that you see going forward if we're going to make that to be a more valuable part of regional security going forward? How do we make it a little bit more successful?

*Lt. General Wissler:*

Well, I think we simply need to expand on some of the things that we're already doing. I mentioned the exercise Cobra Gold. Republic of Korea Marines were involved in exercise Cobra Gold. We had Australian defense force, the Singapore military was there, U.S. military, Thai, the – I don't remember all of the countries, but it was the largest multilateral operation. I think as we continue to do those sorts of multilateral operations, we will continue to build the partnership between countries.

It's very interesting, but most all of the militaries in the region want to work with the other militaries. And we can facilitate that because we can usually bring a capability, particularly with the Navy-Marine Corps team where we don't provide much of an impact to infrastructure



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because we can come from the sea, if you will, and we can live on the sea, but we can come and partner with them. And then we can just as unobtrusively as we've arrived, we can leave those countries and continue to build those relationships.

I think you'll see Cobra Gold will expand even more; the Japan Self-Defense Force, as it has asked, that perhaps they be allowed to participate in the amphibious portion of that exercise in this coming year. Whether that takes place or not, I don't know. That will probably be – I'm sure there'll be many country-to-country discussions that have to take place to make that happen. But similarly, the Chinese were representative last year. One of my engineer platoons executed a humanitarian construction project, for lack of a better word, in Thailand, partnered side-by-side with the Chinese military.

There's a large command post exercise that takes place as part of that exercise. And the participants in that exercise are ever-expanding. So I think as we just continue to kind of chip away at these different exercises, I know that General Batista had mentioned – I have not seen confirmation of it – but he was attempting to hold, after our exercise Balikatan, which will commence here in May, he was trying to hold a one- or two-day multinational seminar to once again look at where we were successful in that multinational coordination center, but also to see where we weren't so successful and how we can perhaps make that more successful and how we can build on a expectation of what other nations could bring to bear in the event of a crisis anywhere.

While we were executing those responsibilities in the Philippines, there was a volcanic eruption in Indonesia. It ended up not being so significant that we needed to do anything about it, but there was a time where I had another headquarters, my division headquarters, was sitting on the ramp in Okinawa ready to respond to be command and control for something that they would need to do in Indonesia. And so I think that as these nations, as I mentioned at the outset, natural disasters in Asia, I believe the statistics are they are 4 times more likely to happen than they are to happen in the African continent and 25 times more likely to happen than they are in the United States or North America.

And so something's going to happen. Seventy thousand people, on average, are killed in natural disasters annually. So these nations are starting to bring their militaries together to be able to respond. And the more times we can train together, to continue to operate together, to do bilateral and multilateral training, it improves greatly those capabilities.

*Jim Schoff:*

Thank you. Let me offer the audience a chance to ask questions. When I call on you, just let us know who you are and where you're from. And we'll begin here at the green tie. And we have a



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microphone coming as well. Oh, I was going to start here, but then we'll move to the back. Sorry.

*Audience Question:* Sir, good afternoon, **George Nicholson**, a policy consultant with U.S. Special Operations Command. A question about interface in the theater. You had alluded to supporting counterterrorist operations in the Southern Philippines. What's the lash-up with SOCPAC's activities down there? And the other thing I think about two months ago, General Amos and also Admiral McRaven announced the starting I think this spring there's going to be a five-man planning cell out of SOCOM or out of SOC deploying with each of the arcs going out that's going to include having a JSOC rep to give you that interface.

Along the same lines, we've withdrawn all of our rotary wing assets out of the Pacific until we put CV-22s out there. With the capabilities that you've got right now with MV-22s, is there any kind of interface with Admiral Locklear's commanders and extremist force being able to provide airlift for that unit, which again, is the first?

*Lt. General Wissler:* Our operations in the Philippines are directly in support of the Joint Special Operations Task Force, Philippines. So they're tightly coordinated with the operations that are going on in SOCOM and SOCPAC. In fact, those Marines are – that's their exclusive mission is to support the SOCPAC mission. So it's not a mission that I have other than to support SOCPAC. To get to your question about the Special Operations Force liaison elements, the SOFLEs, they've deployed the first SOFLE now with 11<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit, which is in the CENTCOM AOR.

But similarly, 31<sup>st</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit just this week concluded operations in support of Charlie 11, which is an Army Special Operations Detachments headquartered in Okinawa, Japan. Brought them out onboard the amphibious ship, did through a rehearsal and planning, and then exercised what would be an embassy rescue, if you will, with Special Operations Forces, using those MV-22 Ospreys as a rotary wing lift capability in support of them. In addition to that, my headquarters will gain a Special Operations Forces Liaison Element from SOCKOR, from the Special Operations Command, Korea Elements.

And we will use them in planning and then in execution and training as we execute our responsibilities on the Korean Peninsula. So we are tied very tightly to Special Operations Command. Marine Corps Special Operations Company is in the initial phases of their deployment from Guam, from which they will operate in support of SOCCOM, not III MEF. They just happen to be Marines out of Marine Special Operations Command. They will operate from Guam and operate all over the Asia-Pacific theater.



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We will have some logistics responsibilities to support them as they begin this build-up. And then ultimately when they deploy, should they need additional logistics capabilities, we would be able to provide that to them. So we have a very tight relationship with Special Operations Command and one that is growing based on the guidance and the partnership between Admiral McRaven and General Amos.

*Jim Schoff:* In the back there.

*Audience Question:* Thank you. David Lynch with Bloomberg. General, I'd like to ask you about the U.S. rebalance or pivot to Asia. First, has that shift in policy or in emphasis increased the forces as your disposal at all? And second, given the activities we've seen from the Chinese over the last six months or a year, I'm curious as to your assessment of China's intentions in the region.

*Lt. General Wissler:* Yeah, I'll certainly be glad to comment on the forces available. We just – we will complete in early fiscal year 2015, so this fall, October of 2014, we will complete the rebalance, the Marine Corps if you will, rebalance to the Pacific. That will include increased capabilities from where we were in 2003. In 2003, we had four infantry battalions as the core ground combat capability in III Marine Expeditionary Force forward-deployed to Okinawa. We've always had our additional two infantry battalions in Hawaii.

But I'm talking now about the forces West of the International Dateline. Our commandant, as we started to come out of Afghanistan, made the decision that we would begin as soon as we could support it and maintain at least a one-to-two deployment-to-dwell ratio, we would begin our redeployment. We concluded the buildup of those infantry battalions last year.

So we now have four infantry battalions at all times, either on Okinawa or training in some country in the Asia-Pacific west of the International Dateline. That does include the one infantry battalion I mentioned that is currently located in Australia. So I have an infantry battalion in Australia, I have one infantry battalion that's always with the 31<sup>st</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit, and I have two other infantry battalions that are participating in training either on Okinawa, on Mainland Japan, or somewhere else in the Asia-Pacific theater.

So our rebalance, yes, it has given more forces. If you were to look a snapshot of what III Marine Expeditionary Force looked like two years ago, you would've seen a significant growth in the capability. And it's not just infantry battalions. It's engineers. It's amphibious assault vehicles. It's light-armored vehicle capability. It's HIMARS; it's rocket capability; increased artillery; low-altitude area defense.



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We've built up now two MV-22 squadrons permanently on Okinawa. We have increased to a full STOVAL, short take-off vertical landing aviate Harrier capability, have a squadron minus capability with part of that squadron always with the Marine Expeditionary Unit. And then we've got our full complement of fixed-wing fighter aircraft up at Iwakuni Air Station on the Mainland.

So it has put a significant increase in the forces. In the next – within the next fiscal year, we look to put two additional MV-22 squadrons in Hawaii and then to round out fully our CH-53 capabilities there and our HMLA, our light-attack helicopter capability. So yes, significantly more capability from a Marine Corps perspective. But perhaps more importantly, funding; our commandant has put the priority of his funding to the operating forces in the Western Pacific.

So while the rest of Marine Corps has seen some degradation of operations and maintenance funds, I have seen virtually no degradation in my ability to operate and exercise across the theater. And so that's a significant commitment, if you talk about capability that's out there. Also, you've heard a discussion that because of our current budget situation that there's a very real possibility that the Marine Corps will shrink to 175,000 man Marine Corps from today where we sit slightly above 192,000, coming down from our all-time high of 202,000.

When that is complete, when we draw down to the last man and we're at 175,000 Marines, there will still be 30,000 Marines in III Marine Expeditionary Force nearly. And those 19,000 will grow to somewhere around 22,000 total west of the International Dateline. So even though our total force will draw down, our commitment to the Pacific as a percentage of that corps will actually increase significantly, but will in fact remain at its current level with the remainder of those – that round out that I said will be completed by the early fall this year.

So we are committed to that. In terms of what the Chinese intentions are, I pay no attention. It would be speculation on my part to tell you what the Chinese intentions are. I can tell you this; there's been a decided effort, and I've read in the papers today, agreement on expanded mil-to-mil opportunities between the U.S. and China in the Asia theater. And as I mentioned, it already took place; not well-publicized, but there was a Marine engineer platoon side-by-side with a Chinese engineer platoon in Thailand doing work together as part of exercise Cobra Gold.

So I think we're already seeing an expansion of those mil-to-mil relationships and building familiarity with each of our military capabilities. And based on what I read today, that looks to be increased somewhere in the future. What exactly that means, I can't tell you. Probably a better question for Admiral Locklear.





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*Jim Schoff:* We've got a question right here. Coming around.

*Audience Question:* General, thank you very much for the opportunity today. I'm **Ichiro Cabasa** with NHK Japanese Public TV. The governor of Okinawa is requesting to the Japanese government to return of \_\_\_\_ within five years. And my question is would it be operationally feasible for you to close them and to move all of your units from \_\_\_\_ to another air station until the new facility is completed?

*Lt. General Wissler:* If I understand, your question is do you think we can move before a facility –

*Audience Question:* The new facility is completed, yeah.

*Lt. General Wissler:* – is complete. The answer is no. I need a new facility to move the capabilities that are currently resident at Futenma. Now, that being said, the C-130 aircraft that are currently at Futenma will move to Iwakuni this summer. And so they will move because there is a facility at Iwakuni designed to take them. And that's been part of our long-term plan of how we will redistribute our aviation capability from Okinawa. But to move the remainder, to remove our light attack helicopters, to remove our support aircraft and to move our MV-22s, we will have to have the replacement facility complete.

Currently, as you know, scheduled to go up in Henoko up at Camp Swab as an extension of the existing Camp Schwab facility. And in fact, much of the work has already been underway for the past several years in anticipation of the governor signing the landfill permit, which he did in December. That work, the government of Japan, is now beginning the very detailed planning efforts and the letting of contracts. And it's expected that sometime about a year from now, we will start to see some of the work take place that will begin the reclamation of some ocean and other things that will be necessary in order to create that new airfield facility.

*Jim Schoff:* Let me go in the back here.

*Audience Question:* Hi. Thank you. I'm **Brad Harris** with the Committee for Human Rights in North Korea. A little less than a year ago, the Rand Corporation released a report talking that the militaries in the region should be prepared for a sudden collapse of the regime in North Korea. I'm curious today, if the North Korean regime collapsed today, how confident are you to be able to coordinate a response with your counterparts in China's military?



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*Lt. General Wissler:* In China's military? I haven't done any work with the Chinese military, nor do I think it probably would be our responsibility to work out that coordinator. Any response that we would make in support of a sudden collapse of North Korea, if it were to take place, would be through our Republic of Korea through the South Korean counterparts. And so it would be a coordination I believe not only between their governments, and obviously there would be coordination between our own governments that would take place, and then that direction would come down from the Pacific Command Commander, Admiral Locklear, and the coordination that he would execute to make that happen.

I am confident that Admiral Locklear would be able to coordinate anything that was necessary. And we – I have on 15 separate opportunities this year, I will send Marines in almost battalion-sized strength to the Republic of Korea to train with the Republic of Korea Marine Corps. So I'm very confident. And in addition to that, we will do two major exercises. We've just completed one, Key Resolve, and we will execute another major exercise, Ulchi Freedom Guardian, in the end of the summer that will allow us to integrate all military capability, not just Marines, but our Army, our Air Force, our Navy, with our Korean counterparts.

So I'm very confident that we would have a coordinated ability. But that coordination with the Chinese government would more than likely be, I would think, through the Koreans.

*Jim Schoff:* Okay, so I'll try to squeeze in as many as I can here. There's a woman there on the end. Oh, I'm sorry, \_\_\_\_.

*Audience Question:* Sorry. Thank you. Alison Kaufman from the Center for Naval Analyses, just one more follow-up question on security cooperation, which is, in your position now, what do you see as some of the key challenges in security cooperation in the region going forward?

*Lt. General Wissler:* I think probably the largest challenge to security cooperation as we go forward will be the resources to be able to do it. The Budget Control Act placed some very severe restrictions on the Department of Defense's funding. The Budget Balancing Act, which was recently passed, restored most of that funding in fiscal year '14, this current fiscal year, and put on the table better funding than the Budget Control Act but not great funding in fiscal year '15.

But in fiscal years '16 and beyond, remember, the Budget Control Act was 10 years and \$550 billion cut, a roughly \$52 billion to \$55 billion cut from the DoD budget annually. So a significant challenge to resources. And so in fiscal year '16 and beyond, those resources are not guaranteed right now. And so I would offer to maintain the pace of what I showed you, the 81



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exercises, the ability to get out there and be with our partners in 21 of 36 countries, it takes resources.

And it takes those kinds of resources that will be very, very difficult to maintain in light of the impact of the Budget Control Act. As I said, our commandant has committed his resources, but should the very real challenges of the Budget Control Act come to fruition in fiscal year '16 and beyond, operations and maintenance, readiness of the force, modernization, every account that we look at will be challenged, and one of those will be the operations and maintenance funds required to continue our theater security cooperation mission.

*Jim Schoff:* A question here.

*Audience Question:* General, I'd like to -

*Jim Schoff:* Sorry, we have a microphone coming. Thank you.

*Audience Question:* Thank you – commend you and your Marines for your operations in the Philippines. That was dynamic and wonderful. I'd like to ask you though an unprecedented 20 – 24 Marine general –

*Jim Schoff:* Could you just let us know who you are? Sorry, sir. *[Indiscernible]* No, no, just let us know your name and –

*Audience Question:* Oh, I'm Terry Paul with Cassidy & Associates.

*Jim Schoff:* Okay, thank you.

*Audience Question:* Twenty – twenty-four former Marine retired generals made a letter – produced a letter to Capitol Hill stating a concern about the lack of amphibious ships. I think it's numbers now on active force are probably less than 20 years ago. Does that concern you and you share their desire and need that we address that shortfall?

*Lt. General Wissler:* Yes, not because 20 retired generals said so. I mean, more importantly, the Chief of Naval Operations is recently as this week, Admiral Greenert said he needs 50 amphibious ships to meet the requirements that he has. Now, General Amos and Admiral Greenert have agreed that given the current funding environment that we can only probably afford 33 amphibious ships.

We have a real requirement for 38 in order to execute our support to operation plans, if you will. But the 50 is to meet the presence requirements around the world in support of combat and



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commanders. If we had 33, we would be able to generate 30 amphibious ships, which correlates to 10 of our amphibious ready groups to support operations around the world. So there is a challenge to amphibious ships, and our commandant refers to amphibious ships as the Swiss army knife, if you will, of capability in our Navy.

They can do things – we brought two amphibious ships down to support operations in support of the Philippines, brought the Marines – we didn't load them in the traditional way. We didn't load them with a Marine Expeditionary Unit. We loaded them heavy in water purification capability, in engineer equipment, the ability to move and to transport supplies. And we brought Marines, limited infantry capability, but more our medical capabilities and our ability with our engineers to do and to help things.

So those amphibious ships allow us to respond across that range of the military operations. And so not only are those retired general officers concerned about amphibious ships, but I would offer the Chief of Naval Operations and our Commandant of the Marine Corps are concerned about it as well. Now, what was kindly left out of my bio was I was the money guy for the Marine Corps for the three years before I went to III MEF and my parole was stamped approved from the Pentagon.

I know how hard a job the Navy has to produce those amphibious ships. So I'm not poking at the United States Navy. This – the maritime capabilities of this nation are critical to the rebalance to Asia-Pacific and central to those are their amphibious capabilities. And so the investment in amphibious capabilities must be made if we're going to be successful in this operation. And you heard Admiral Locklear, in fact in his testimony, say the exact same thing. So this isn't a rogue Marine who's trying to find some extra amphibious; I think all the people who know most about this theater and most about our national security strategy understand that amphibious ships are part and parcel to success.

*Jim Schoff:*

Well, General, unfortunately, we've come to the end of our time here. And I know plenty of people have more questions. So I apologize that we're not able to get more of them in. But I do want to thank you for coming today and be a part of this program on such a beautiful day. And General, I really want to thank you. It's been an honor to have you here with us and we appreciate what you and your team do and want to thank you for coming here to be with us today.

*Lt. General Wissler:*

Well, thanks. *[Applause]* I have the best job in the Marine Corps. I get to work with almost 30,000 of the best young Americans there are on the planet; soldiers and sailors who come to work every day who want to do what they did and you saw them do on that screen, make a



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difference for people in the Asia-Pacific theater. So I'm the lucky guy. I just get to represent all those young great Americans here today, so thanks.

*Jim Schoff:*

Thank you. Thank you, everyone.

*[End of Audio]*