

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH LIEUTENANT GENERAL BENJAMIN  
MIXON, U.S. ARMY PACIFIC COMMANDER SUBJECT: YAMA SAKURA VIA TELECONFERENCE TIME:  
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LINDY KYZER (U.S. Army Public Affairs): This is Lindy Kyzer with Army  
Public Affairs. Thank you so much for everyone who's on the line.

I'm very pleased to introduce Lieutenant General Mixon. He started his  
service to the nation upon graduating from North Georgia College. He has had a  
33-year career with the Army, was the Hawaii 25th Infantry Division commander.  
And upon his return to Hawaii, from a deployment, he was promoted to Lieutenant  
General and assumed command of the United States Army Pacific.

He's going to be discussing an exercise that's currently happening. I  
believe that they're going to be on their third day, if I can get the time  
difference correct. But it's Yama Sakura. So I will turn it over to  
Lieutenant General Benjamin Mixon to discuss, spend a few minutes discussing  
that exercise and what they're doing. And then I will turn it over to you all  
for questions.

Lieutenant General Mixon.

GEN. MIXON: Yes.

Well, thanks to all of you for dialing in, this afternoon in your  
location and early morning over here in Japan.

Just very briefly Yama Sakura is the premier exercise between the  
United States Army Pacific and the Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force, one of  
their armies and this year, it happens to be the eastern army, where we actually  
work through some of the war plans for the defense of Japan. And we're  
operating in a scenario that presents a very high-end threat, which allows us to  
work on some of those skills that aren't exactly a part of ongoing  
counterinsurgency operations and doctrine that we've been working the last  
several years.

What makes this exercise particularly important to U.S. Army Pacific  
is, I had been in the process of transforming my headquarters to have more  
operational capability. And this is the first year that the operational command  
post of my headquarters has participated, as the land force U.S. Army command,  
in this particular exercise.

So it's going pretty well. We're learning a lot of lessons about bilateral relationships with our Japanese counterparts, and we're getting a chance to practice some of those operations that are in the high end of the spectrum, which we have not worked on recently.

So that's kind of an opening comment. I'll be glad to take any questions.

MS. KYZER: Okay. Andrew, we'll start out with you. Did you have a question?

Q Absolutely. General, Andrew Lubin again, from U.S. Naval Institute's Proceedings. Sir, does the -- does the defense of Japan start from the 38th Parallel? How far do you go offshore?

GEN. MIXON: Actually, it goes out into the territorial waters of Japan. As you know, their constitution forbids them from doing out-of-sector combat operations. So it's focused on the territory of Japan. And in this particular scenario, we are playing naval and air forces that would be protecting the territorial area of Japan.

Q Okay. Thank you.

MS. KYZER: Great. And Todd, did you have question?

Q Sir, can you tell us who all is participating in this? And how do the different organizations, different militaries, different components get along in these types of exercises? How is that beneficial?

GEN. MIXON: Yeah, a great -- yeah, a great question. And that's one of the key parts of any exercise like this. It's building relationships and then understanding each other's capacity.

On the U.S. side -- and of course I've mentioned my headquarters -- I have a Marine expeditionary brigade, and we're playing with the II MEF Headquarters out of Okinawa as the primary headquarters. We have a National Guard division that is playing with us, the 29th Division. We have a National Guard aviation brigade.

Just to name a few of the different organizations, we have air forces that are playing. My higher command back in -- playing out of Hawaii, U.S. Pacific Command, is playing the higher-level command in this particular exercise. Then on the Japanese side, we have the eastern army, which has responsibility for the defense of Tokyo and the land mass that runs basically due east all the way to the shores of Japan proper. And they have airborne forces, ground forces, and also they are playing their Japanese Self-Defense air and naval forces.

So it's a good mix of joint and combined forces. It's given us a great chance to work through some of the challenges that you have when you've got multinational elements, in this case bilat with the Japanese. Been a great exercise so far.

MS. KYZER: Great. And Christian, did you have a question?

Q Yes, I did. General Mixon, thanks a lot. This is Christian Lowe with military.com.

I've got a couple questions, but I'll start with, first, to what extent have you seen the Japanese forces evolving since 9/11? They've been much more assertive in a -- on a global basis. And I'm curious to know how you see that translated into operations and other aspects, since they've been a little more expeditionary than they used to be.

GEN. MIXON: Yeah, I think that's a great observation. They certainly have been more expeditionary, from the perspective of participating in noncombat types of operations or providing support to the war on terror.

You know, they're in fact one of our staunchest allies here in the Asia-Pacific region. And this new focus that they have on supporting the war on terror operations, humanitarian assistance -- it would be off-island, if you will -- really is going to be good for the entire region, and particularly for the United States, as we look at the Asia-Pacific region being so vitally important to, really, everything that happens in the United States, from an economic perspective to a security perspective. So we have seen that change, and I think they're very interested in continuing on and developing their capabilities.

MS. KYZER: Great. And does anyone else who's joined us or who hasn't asked a question yet have a question?

Okay. We'll go ahead and go down the line again.

Andrew, did you have another question?

Q I'm sorry, Lindy. That was Christian -- this is Christian again. I got knocked off the line there. I'm (very ?) sorry.

MS. KYZER: Oh, no. (Laughs.) Okay. Well, we're going through and asking for other questions, so if you have a follow-up question, you can go ahead. Q Yeah, I do.

Q I do. Thanks, General Mixon.

The other question I had was -- you said you're working with the Marines on this. How has the Marines' decision to move most of their forces off of Japan proper -- how has that affected how this will work?

Are you playing in scenarios where they're not actually commanding out of Okinawa, and they're commanding out of -- I think they're going to Guam, right?

GEN. MIXON: Yeah, there's a portion of them that are going to Guam, about 8,000, once it's all settled out. In this particular case, they're still located down in Okinawa, and we are playing the headquarters from Okinawa. But the actual forces that we're playing in the ground element would most likely have come from off -- off-island -- so still a fairly realistic scenario, regardless of whether the Marines would be located in Guam or located up in Okinawa.

Q Okay. Thanks.

MS. KYZER: Okay. And Andrew, you had a question?

Q Yeah, General, Andrew Lubin again. You've got the Marines out there, coming out of -- you know, who are all pretty much Afghanistan vets. Your Army in the Pacific has probably got a fair amount of vets there. How well do the Japanese soldiers stand up?

GEN. MIXON: As far as --

Q As far as being able to fight side by side, are they well enough trained? Would they be able to stand in with the Americans?

GEN. MIXON: Well, they're well trained, but of course, when they were deployed into Iraq, their primary focus was civil-military reconstruction types of projects, because the nature of their constitution requires their forces to be for self-defense, and anything that's done out of -- off-island or out of sector, if you will, is focused on, you know, United Nations peacekeeping-type operations or reconstruction, humanitarian assistance.

But having said that, they're extremely disciplined and dedicated soldiers. They do do live-fire training here in Japan. And I would tell you that, you know, if the situation warranted, there's no doubt in my mind that they could handle themselves very well.

Q Do you think they get enough live-fire and in-the-field training, or could they use some more of that?

GEN. MIXON: We all could use more live-fire. There's no question about it. They've got limited live-fire training areas, so that's one of the reasons that they go out to Yakima and use our great facilities we have out there.

So I'd say they probably do want to do more live-fire training, and they're just going to have to work that out as far as space and so forth is concerned.

Q Okay. Thank you.

MS. KYZER: And Tom, did you have another question?

Q Pass, Lindy.

MS. KYZER: Okay. It's a free-for-all.

Any other questions out there?

I do have a couple questions from someone who submitted them via e-mail. I got some questions from Steeljaw Scribe, so -- how is that for a pen name? He wants to know, Lieutenant General Mixon, if you've incorporated missile defenses into the exercise.

GEN. MIXON: Yes, we have. That's an important part of the -- of the agreements we have with the Japanese. And we have -- we're working through the very complicated process of anti-ballistic missile defense for this -- for the territory of Japan. So the answer is yes, we are working -- we have worked it into the exercise.

MS. KYZER: And you kind of just answered this, but he also asks, if so, is it a combined effort between U.S. and JSDF elements, or U.S. and JSMDf (sic/ JMSDF) elements?

GEN. MIXON: Yeah, it's a combined effort. The primary players, the Ground Self-Defense Force, which -- that being their army, but we also have worked in a scenario of the ground air forces as well as the naval forces, so that we can make the exercise and our considerations for employment of forces as joint and as combined as possible.

MS. KYZER: Again, just -- I want to make sure I answered everything he had. And he also asked, point defense and theater or just point defense?

GEN. MIXON: It's point defense and offensive operations and -- within the territory of Japan.

MS. KYZER: Okay. Great, sir.

Are there any other last questions out there?

Q I've got --

Q I do, Lindy --

Q Go ahead. (Off mike.)

Q Lindy, it's Christian again.

MS. KYZER: Oh, yep. Go ahead. Q General Mixon, you mentioned early in your -- in your opening comments that this is -- and if I'm paraphrasing incorrectly, please tell me, but this is one of the rare opportunities that U.S. forces are able to do a large combined-arm exercise kind of thing or think in that way in an exercise. Do you sort of look at it that way, as one of the few opportunities these days in -- where U.S. forces are -- you know, in counterinsurgency operations, this is one of those rare opportunities where you get to do sort of this, you know, old- style combined-arms warfare exercise?

GEN. MIXON: Yeah. I wouldn't necessarily classify it as old style, given the technology that we're using, but, you know, we have to have a balanced approach. And Secretary Gates even talked about that in a recent speech that he made.

And so what we're trying to do in the Army, in -- where it is appropriate, and as we have more time with our units back at home station, particularly brigade division, corps-equivalent headquarters like mine, when we're doing command post exercises, to operate at the higher end of the spectrum.

Now, at the same time, incorporated into our scenario, of course, we've got civil military considerations that we have to be able to operate within. So we -- we're going to take the opportunity, when it -- when it fits the scenario and the training, to train those high-end skills, work out of joint operations, the ballistic missile defense, large ground offensive maneuvers, while at the same time we'll continue to train our forces for counterinsurgency fights in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Q Okay. Thanks.

MS. KYZER: And Andrew --

GEN. MIXON: Yeah, it's a balanced approach, I guess, is the best thing, the best way I could give it to you. Time available, we're going to practice all of our skills.

Q Roger. Okay.

Q Okay. General, a quick one here. Andrew again. Can you talk to -- a bit about the Army of -- our Army of the Pacific? How big are they, and what units, and what's the makeup of them?

GEN. MIXON: Yeah, a great question, because it's kind of little understood about the U.S. Army in the Pacific, we've been undergoing a pretty significant transition the last couple of years.

In the neighborhood of 40(,000) to 45,000 total soldiers -- I'll kind of run it down from West Coast out into the Pacific. I command the forces -- Army forces that are in Alaska. We've got an airborne brigade up there, a Stryker brigade, an aviation brigade-minus and other support elements that are there. I've got a two-star general that commands U.S. Army, Alaska.

Into Hawaii, the 25th Division is under my command, its division headquarters, with a Stryker brigade and also a brigade combat team. We've got a sustainment brigade there. We have an engineer brigade, an MP brigade. And then I've got several theater-enabling commands that provide my theater logistics intelligence communications capability, civil affairs capabilities and so forth.

The U.S. Army in Japan is under my command. That's a smaller headquarters which consists of U.S. Army, Japan and I Corps (Forward), a new headquarters that we're standing up to have a forward presence with the -- with a very small tactical headquarters that will be relevant in the next 12 months for operations in Japan or out of Japan.

I've got a special relationship with the Guard and Reserve forces that are located in Hawaii, Guam and the American territories, where I've got training and readiness responsibilities for them.

Inside my headquarters I have a small JTF of about 45 people that's responsible for homeland defense in Hawaii and the American territories in the Pacific. Any terrorist activity or natural disaster, that headquarters would do that.

And then finally, as a wrap-up, I have an OPCON relationship with I Corps at Fort Lewis and the Stryker brigades that are there, that they're available to me when they're not deployed for Theater Security Cooperation events in the area.

So a little over 40,000, when you count all of them together, a great capability. And over the last, you know, six to seven years that we've been involved, in the global war on terrorism, we have rotated forces in and out of the theater. I think my count right now is somewhere between 18 and 20,000 U.S. Army Pacific soldiers, either in Afghanistan or Iraq.

Q Okay, excellent. Thanks very much.

GEN. MIXON: Thank you.

I should mention also that there is a war on terror mission going on, down in the southern portion of the Philippines, which is being run by a Special Operations task force. But we provide soldiers to that element, for intelligence work and also for force protection down there.

That's something that's been written about, you know, over the last couple of years, about a classic counterterrorism operation that's done, with a very small number of soldiers basically working on intelligence and enabling units like the Philippine military to fight their own fight down there, so to speak.

Other questions.

Q Are you able to speak more on the Philippines direction? Or is that maybe for another time?

GEN. MIXON: I can speak about that, if you'd like.

Q Yeah.

(Cross talk.)

GEN. MIXON: Well, what it is, is it's a joint Special Operations task force, under the command of a full colonel. And he has a headquarters down there that is primarily focused on training the Philippine military and also working with the Philippine security forces.

We assist with some logistics capability, do not do any direct action, by the agreement with the Philippine government. They do all the direct action missions. And then we have regular U.S. Army forces down there that provide some of the force protection, base camp security and other activities. It's a great mission. It's a very delicate situation in that area. They've had some success in policing up some of the individuals involved in that local insurgency. But we're also concerned, because there are some international ties to some of the groups down there. And that's principally what we're watching.

(Cross talk.)

Q What did you mean by that, General Mixon, international ties?

GEN. MIXON: Well, we know that certain members of the group are receiving training on explosives, improvised explosive devices, through international means, either things they're pulling off of some of these Web pages. And in the past, there have been some indicators of some movement of some trainers, if you will, from outside, from outside the Philippines, moving in there to assist in some of their activities.

And any time that happens, you know, we consider that to be some kind of international movement, and it gets our attention.

Q Okay.

Sorry, Andrew.

Q No problem.

General, could you talk about the Marines' role in this? They've got a pretty active and aggressive Marine training program in the Philippines too, I understand. Are they -- (inaudible) --

GEN. MIXON: Yeah, all of us outside of that specific mission work with the Philippine military, with small exchanges and large exchanges. We do a very large exercise with them every year called Balikatan. It's focused on a disaster relief scenario, humanitarian assistance, but it enables us to work with the Philippine military.

The Army runs that for two years, and then we pass it over to the Marines, and they run it for two years.

And it's very similar to the other exercises we run, really, throughout the region. We do a large exercise with Thailand called Cobra Gold. Of course, we have Yama Sakura going on here. We do brigade command post exercises with the Indian military. I mean, I could go on and on -- over 75 different engagements throughout the Pacific region that we do with the militaries, building those relationships and trying to enhance their capacities.

Q Okay. Great. Thank you.

GEN. MIXON: And I know --

Q But we're not actually doing any shooting, then; we're just kind of official advisers?

GEN. MIXON: Well, we -- yeah, it's advising. Of course we -- force protection and the right to self-defense is always there. But this is one of those cases where the Philippine military is capable. They desire to do the operations themselves. So it's mainly in an advisory role.

Q And General Mixon, one quick follow-up. About how many forces do you have down there in that Philippine mission? GEN. MIXON: I will just give you some round numbers.

Q Sure.

GEN. MIXON: As I say, there's the Special Operations Task Force. It's in the neighborhood of 200 or so, not a large force at all.

Q That's included -- including the regular troops that are doing the force protection, base security, that kind of thing?

GEN. MIXON: Yeah, pretty much so.

Q Okay. Roger that. Thanks.

GEN. MIXON: And of course anything that you want to know about U.S. Army Pacific, you know, we've got a web page, like everybody else does. It outlines some of the things that we're doing around the Asia-Pacific region. So you can gather more information in there.

Q (Inaudible) -- then.

GEN. MIXON: Anybody else?

Q No, I'm good. General, just -- I appreciate the time, especially -- you're up at the crack of dawn. I appreciate it a lot.

GEN. MIXON: Well, I had to get up anyway, but I -- any time we can get information out, you know, through the blogosphere or -- and other sources, keep the American people informed about all the great things that their military, particularly the Army, is doing out in the Pacific -- as I said, very important part of the world that -- not only economically but from a security perspective. If you just look at the events that have happened recently, you know, in India and other places, we know that we got to keep our head in the ball game out here.

Q General, any chance of getting some photos of the Army in the Pacific and the Japanese working together?

GEN. MIXON: Sure, we can do that.

Q Lindy, you listen in on that one?

MS. KYZER: Yep, I'm here. So if -- I know that Colonel Wayne Shanks is on the line and he did all the hard work and logistics getting that -- this set up. We'll be in touch, the Public Affairs officers on the line. And I'll make sure I send out the photos to you guys on the line.

Q Yes, excellent.

GEN. MIXON: Colonel Shanks has got some photos and we've got some great stuff of all of the things that we've been doing over here. So I know that Wayne can get those out to you.

COL. WAYNE SHANKS (spokesman, U.S. Army Pacific): Roger, sir. This Wayne here. We already have a number of them posted to the website. It's [www.usarpac.army.mil](http://www.usarpac.army.mil). If you need anything else, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Q Okay. (Off mike) -- on that, then.

MS. KYZER: Great, well, thank you so much, everyone who has joined us on the line. Thank you very, very much, Lieutenant General Mixon, for your time. And we hope the exercise continues to go well.

We'll be getting any additional photos out to you, but that website certainly sounds like a great resource.

So thank you, everyone. You can find the transcript at [defenselink.mil/blogger](http://defenselink.mil/blogger). Have a great day.

END.