

**General Kenneth S. Wilsbach
Commander, U.S. Pacific Air Forces**

**Defense Writers Group
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DWG: Thank you General Kenneth S. Wilsbach, Commander of U.S. Pacific Air Forces for joining us today with the Defense Writers Group.

Our format is strictly Q&A and it's on the record. People do a question and if they want to, a follow-up.

I start, and I'm going to throw you a softball and just ask you, because you're new, how do you see the job? What are your priorities? How do things look from where you sit at the moment?

Gen. Wilsbach: Thanks. It's great to be with you today. I really appreciate the opportunity to answer your questions.

I know there's a lot of interest. We get a lot of questions almost every day about what's going on out here in the Indo-Pacific theater, so I know there's interest.

From my standpoint, the priorities are a ready and resilient force. And I'll expand on these a little bit later. Working with our allies and partners along with our joint services. And then taking care of airmen and their families. I'll start with that one, just a little bit of an expansion.

In the Indo-Pacific theater unless our airmen and their families happen to be from where they're serving, everybody is away from their home and they have a hard time, especially in the age of COVID, getting back to their homes. So we are principally in Alaska, Hawaii, Guam, Japan and Korea. And it's pretty hard. You can drive from Alaska, but it's a long drive and everywhere else you need to take a flight and in the age of COVID that's made it really hard. So we've got a lot of airmen and their families that haven't seen their families in a long time. So taking care of them, making sure that they're resilient and able to do the mission, that's been really important to me.

Then working with allies and partners, that is something that is

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really important to our strategy. I think everybody on this net probably gets it, but when you think about who our primary adversaries and competitors are in the Indo-Pacific theater with principally China, Russia and also North Korea, and you line up who their allies and partners are, it's a relatively short list, but it's not true for us. We enjoy a pretty long list of allies and partners and working with them, retaining really good relationships with them, being interoperable and in some cases integrated with them is really important and it's something that our adversaries have to put into their calculus if they choose to have a conflict with us, so that's really important.

Very similarly, working with our joint services, so the Army, the Navy, the Marines as well as now the U.S. Space Force. So putting together the joint capabilities and creating joint effects is something that we work on every single day.

With all of that, that allows us as PACAF to be a ready and resilient force, to do what our national leadership asks us to do, and in the event of a conflict we'll be ready to fight tonight.

DWG: Thank you.

Valerie Insinna, you were first on my list if you're on and have a question. From Defense News.

DWG: I don't have a question right now.

DWG: How about Brian Everstine of Air Force Magazine. Brian, are you on and do you have a question?

How about Robert [Kopigar] of Air Forces Monthly? Are you on, Robert?

Well, how about Pat Host, from Janes.

DWG: Hello, sir. I was wondering about how the strategy for expeditionary basing for the Air Force in the Pacific is coming along, and if you have anything you could give us a little bit of clues about.

Gen. Wilsbach: I'm pretty pleased with the progress that we're making. In my career, which I've had a lot of assignments in the Pacific, we actually started working on this pretty diligently,

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probably about four to five years ago. And actually I was here then when we started it. I was the commander in Alaska at the time. We really started getting into this in Alaska at first and then it's expanded throughout all of the Indo-Pacific. We've made steady progress over the years to the point now where we're really trying to inculcate it into a foundational skillset for every single airman to be able to do what we call Agile Combat Employment -- ACE.

The premise behind ACE is instead of having a few number of really big bases, we disburse the forces and we become a lot more agile and a lot more mobile so that when you go to, if you're at a hub, for example, and that hub may have five or six folks, which would be outlying bases, you may or may not be at a spook for very long. You may not be at the hub very long. And as the adversary looks at it, it would appear to be random. It wouldn't be random to us, we would certainly have a plan, and that plan would have audibles baked into it as well so that when you command and control those forces you could have them coming and going from places where they can get fuel, weapons, perhaps change out the air crew as well as get additional tasking and then launch again.

So we are adding skillset after skillset almost every month to that capability.

We recently did an exercise out at Guam called Value Shield where we practiced this. We had F-22s going to we call it BaseX. So not one of the hub bases but a BaseX, get refueled, and they also practice what we call multi-skilled airmen. So you can send a smaller team to one of the out-bases and instead of having an airman that all they do say is refuel an aircraft, we ask them to learn multiple skills. We might want them to be able to refuel the aircraft as their primary duty, but we also may need them to do base defense, or we may need them to change a tire, or we may need them to change an avionics component. So we're training our airmen to be able to take on these multiple skills so that you need to send fewer people out to the spoke bases and you can still accomplish your mission.

DWG: Cool. Real quick, to follow up, when can we expect the Air Force to actually start building these expeditionary bases? And how are you going to design them? I understand that one problem with these expeditionary bases is that if they're very exquisite they're going to be very expensive. So how are you drawing that

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line there to be able to have expeditionary bases without making them too expensive?

Gen. Wilsbach: I think if I can adjust maybe your thought process on how we view the hubs and the spokes, because we really don't intend to "build" the bases. What we're doing is taking advantage of airfields that already exist. So a certain criteria for, if you're going to put an F-22 or an F-15 or a C-130, the airfield has to have certain criteria. So we've actually studied every single piece of concrete in the Pacific, in the Indo-Pacific, and have evaluated them for whether they would meet our criteria. So we have a plan for all of those airfields. Some of them meet the criteria and they're therefore a part of, we call them clusters. So a cluster would be a hub with the spokes. So we have a plan for the various clusters, which unfortunately I'm not going to go into because it gets into some classified information. So we're not building them. So we're accepting the facilities that are there.

And as you might imagine, some of them are pretty bare. So what you might expect is it's a runway with a ramp. Maybe that's it. So we go there for a short period of time, we stay there maybe a little bit, or maybe we just go there for some gas and weapons and we're out. Everybody's out.

We actually have had a chance to practice this on a number of occasions. I know when I was in Alaska we did this at literally a bare base and everybody was camping in tents next to the ramp. They were commercial tents. We bought all the tents before the exercise. Everybody pitched a tent. They were eating Meals Ready to Eat, MREs, and we operated from that bare base for two weeks.

DWG: When are you going to stop studying this and when are you going to start doing this?

Gen. Wilsbach: It's been going on now for a number of years. So we're not stopping our study, because a that wouldn't be too wise to do so we're continuously studying it for the purpose of continuous improvement. But with that being said, almost every exercise that we do now has an ACE component to it. So we'll have another, we've got another exercise coming up where we'll have multiple ACE events occurring and this is all designed to increase our skillset. So we're building more and more skillsets so this becomes a foundational ability for us in PACAF.

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DWG: Thank you.

DWG: Thank you, General.

Michael Gordon of the Wall Street Journal.

DWG: It's been about I think six or seven months since the continuous bomber presence in Guam ended and the model became these bomber task forces which have been very active in your AOR. But I'd be interested in hearing a little more from you on how that really works. How you decide where to send them. Do you key it to particular activities that you project or that the Chinese are doing? How that decision is made. Also for the crews themselves, how scripted are these? Are these things that the Bomber Task Force knows weeks in advance, months in advance, days in advance? Just how are you going about exercising this capability and deciding where to do it?

Gen. Wilsbach: I would love to show you all of my cards on this, but certainly you can understand I'm only going to share a few of them with you because it gets into a lot of our tactics, techniques, procedures.

What I will share with you is yes, we've been doing the Bomber Task Force now for coming up on nine months. It's been really, really successful. The reason why it's been successful is one, we've actually flown, in the about nine months that we've been flying the Bomber Task Force, we've actually flown more of the bomber type missions than we did in the last nine months of the continuous bomber presence. So we're getting more missions flown.

The other thing that we're incorporating into it is what we're calling CONUS to CONUS missions, sometimes you may see it as C2C, CONUS to CONUS. It's an abbreviation we use. That's where the bomber crews take off out of the continental U.S. and they fly all the way to either the East China Sea, and sometimes we go into the South China Sea, and execute the mission.

The really cool thing about these is it's not just one bomber or four bombers flying a straight line for sometimes 24 hours, there are some training events that are occurring all throughout. We train with our allies and partners, we train with the Joint Forces and of course we do train with the United States Air

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Force. So there's a number of events that occur.

To kind of get at the gist of your question of yes, we do absolutely have a method to our procedures of why we go in certain areas, when we do that, and what our objectives are which we don't share publicly. But what I can report to you is that our adversaries, principally the People's Liberation Army Air Force, the Chinese Air Force, as well as the Russian Air Force, are paying attention, close attention to our missions, and our allies and partners are really appreciating it. To name a few, Japan. We frequently will train with the Koku Jeitai which you probably know as the Japanese Air Force as our bombers fly past Japan. Australia, we've done some training. We have plans to do some other training with some of our other allies and partners. So our allies and partners have reflected back to me that they really appreciate these missions as we continue to do them.

I hope that answered the question enough to satisfy you without me getting myself in trouble for telling you classified information.

DWG: I just have a very quick follow-up. You mentioned the Chinese are paying close attention so can you unpack that a little bit? How are they reacting to these? What specifically are they --

Gen. Wilsbach: We're seeing intercepts occasionally. So they'll send their fighters out. And of course we, through our collections we can tell that they see us with their radars and we have other methods to figure out what they're thinking as well as the Russians.

We have seen the Russians do maybe some countering missions. So if you've been watching especially in the Alaska area of responsibility, we did a fairly large mission a few months ago, and then a few days later the Russians reciprocated with a pretty large mission into the Alaska Air Defense Identification Zone. So there's a little bit of back and forth there with flying missions inside of our Air Defense Identification Zone.

The Chinese bombers are quite active in the South China Sea almost every day. And occasionally in the East China Sea. A little bit less so than they do work in the South China Sea, so we're seeing their activities perhaps as a counter to what

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we've been doing.

DWG: Steve Trimble, Aviation Week. Do you have a question?

DWG: I do. Thank you very much, General Wilsbach. It's very good to talk to you again.

I went a bit further west, we normally talk to you about China or North Korea, but just a couple of days ago the Secretary of the Navy announced plans to establish a numbered fleet in the Pacific, or in the Indian Ocean for India. To focus on that part of the Indo-PACOM AOR.

I'm curious, this is a good opportunity to understand how PACAF views its posture for that region of the AOR, and if you think there's any need for something like a Numbered Air Force dedicated west of Singapore, perhaps, north of Diego Garcia.

Gen. Wilsbach: In the current discussions we haven't really talked about any additional posturing in the South China Sea region, but what I will tell you is we've got a great relationship with India and we're going to be doing some more events with them coming up in the new year. Very soon after the new years we've got some events that I'll save to announce to a later date.

We're constantly talking to Singapore. A great relationship with Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and so we have training and events with them quite frequently. This year COVID has slowed some of those down and caused us to postpone some of them, but in fact I'm going to have a chance to go to Singapore and Indonesia as well as the Philippines next week, really starting at the end of this week I'm going to start my travels. So we'll continue to have really good discussions with them.

But no additional Numbered Air Forces. We have three Numbered Air Forces as you probably know in Pacific Air Forces. 5th Air Force, which covers Japan; 7th Air Force which covers Korea; and then 11th Air Force covers Alaska, Hawaii and Guam. A lot of times on the areas that don't typically have a specified Numbered Air Force, we get the 11th Air Force Commander to cover those. Like if we have an event in Australia or in Singapore, I'll ask our 11th Air Force Commander to cover those kind of events for me.

DWG: It's a long way to go from Alaska. And that was your job

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before this.

Gen. Wilsbach: I've done a 53 hour flight one time. So I've done the long trips.

DWG: Do you expect Cope India to continue?

Gen. Wilsbach: We do. There's a plan for Cope India. I can't recall the date but we've got that coming up. Then we've got some, you probably know about Aero India which is India's really big airshow, so PACAF will have a presence there. Those are training events. But from the real world standpoint we've gotten closer this year with India, especially in the intelligence sharing, particularly related to the situation that's occurring on their northeast border with China. So we've been doing quite a bit of intelligence sharing, as much as we can, with them to help out our great friend India.

DWG: Oriana Pawlyk of Military.com. Are you on and do you have a question?

DWG: Yes, I do. Thanks so much for doing this.

We're seeing a lot of lawmakers who really want to punch up the narrative on China deterrence, and we've seen that they've already introduced the Pacific Deterrence Initiative which has yet to become law but at least it's out there I know it's modeled after the European Deterrence Initiative, but should that actually become the standard? What is it that the Pacific Air Forces need from that additional funding? And essentially what does PACAF want from that funding to accomplish what it's been doing?

Gen. Wilsbach: Thanks for that question. I actually spend quite a bit of time thinking about things that I would like to have.

You probably have heard about the hypersonic weapons, but that's something that is very interesting to me and probably something very obvious to this group but I'll just explain why I want hypersonic weapons.

These weapons travel at such a speed and they go such a great distance that it's very difficult to defend against. That means you can hold targets at risk with a minimum amount of time, it really cuts the time of flight of the weapon down, and the

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success that the weapon hits the target is considerably higher than the current family of weapons that we have. So that would be the first thing. And we're already on our way to realizing some of these weapons in our acquisition and procurement plan.

Another aspect is something really important to me and we've had a chance to do some experimentation on this, which is the concept called Joint All Domain Command and Control. You may have heard it called JADC2.

What is JADC2? It's the ability to command and control your joint forces to create an integrated set of dilemmas for your adversary at a volume as well as at a pace that your adversary really has a hard time keeping up with. A method of doing JADC2 is realized through a system called ABMS, Advanced Battle Management System. The simple way to explain what ABMS is, is it's the software network of networks that allow you to have the situational awareness of what the targets are, where they are, where your forces are, and to communicate a tasking to those forces to strike the target. And it's all domain, so everybody's thinking putting bombs on target and that's certainly one option; but it's space effects, it might be non-kinetic effects through cyber, could be maritime effects and so on and so forth.

So we've had a chance to do some experimentation this year. Just a few weeks ago we did an ABMS experiment here in the Indo-Pacific. European Command is going to have an experiment in a few weeks. Then we'll have two more experiments on ABMS coming up in 2021. That is something that, that is another thing that we definitely want.

Then the advanced weapons as well as the JADC2 concept, again, these are things that we want to share with our allies and partners because we get a synergistic effect when all of us can be on the same networks and share our situational awareness. Then again, if called upon, be able to prevent those dilemmas.

DWG: Really quickly to follow up. Any hypersonic program in particular that you're eyeing with [inaudible] that would apply to the Pacific better than some of the others that are already being experimented out there?

Gen. Wilsbach: No, I'm going to wait to see how the tests go. My requirements are certainly at Headquarters Air Force and my requirement also go up through Indo-Pacific Command to the Joint

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Staff. So it's a little bit early to tell which one of the weapons can meet my requirements. So I'll just leave it at that. Not to pick a weapon before it's actually ready. It wouldn't be too wise at this point.

DWG: Sara Sirota, Inside Defense, do you have a question?

DWG: Yeah. If I can just follow up on the hypersonics question. Could you maybe share your views on between Scramjet hypersonic capabilities and Boost Glide capabilities? Do you see one or the other or perhaps a mixture of both offering better capability for you in the Pacific?

Gen. Wilsbach: I'm a bit agnostic to that. The technologies are also different ways of figuring out how to solve the problem. And really, again, for me I'm agnostic as long as I can hit the target with a weapon that's difficult to defend against I'll be relatively satisfied. And it still remains to be seen which one of the variants will be the best to do that.

DWG: Takashi Wantanabe of Asahi Shimbun, I think you're on. Do you have a question, sir?

DWG: Thank you very much, General.

Could you discuss a little bit more how U.S. Air Force has been contending with China including military action in the region and in North Korea [inaudible] action. And what is the U.S. expectation to allies in the region including the Japanese Civil Defense Force during the next U.S. administration?

Gen. Wilsbach: Can you just repeat the one part of your question, what are my expectations for what?

DWG: The expectations to the allies in the region including Japanese Civil Defense Force during the next administration.

DWG: During transition and into the next presidency, I suppose.

Gen. Wilsbach: Let me get the first part of your question as to what we're doing with respect to what we're seeing China execute in and around the theater.

I think it's important, maybe not a baseline a little bit, because it's not just what the United States has been seeing

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China do militarily, but really it's also our allies and partners. We have frequent conversations with our allies and partners. One of the things that we're all, all of us have in mind is a free and open Indo-Pacific theater. That is a shared objective, a shared goal for all of our allies and partners.

From my assessment, that's not China's objective, especially if you focus in on the Chinese Communist Party. What I assess that they want is an Indo-Pacific that is dictated by the Chinese, that is beneficial to them. It seems to me, just based on what they've been doing in recent years, they aren't even trying to accomplish that inside the rule of law and international standards.

So what we're doing is challenging in as many places as we can - - not just us but our allies and partners have joined in with this -- challenging the CCP where we feel like they aren't abiding by those international norms, international law.

As examples, territory that has historically belonged to China and they're taking over. Like what I talked about earlier with the border with India or building new islands in the South China Sea and claiming oh, yeah, this has always been China. Revisionist history, I'd say.

And then when we're flying around the East China Sea or the South China Sea and we get radio calls that say something to the effect of U.S. aircraft flying in the Chinese domain. It's not the Chinese domain. It's international airspace and we have every right to fly there in accordance with international law.

So these are just some examples of what we're doing in the U.S. Air Force to counter what the Chinese are doing.

For the question that you asked about, what's the expectation for our allies and partners. One of the things that I would say is I'm really pleased with where we're at with the allies and partners. We have good relationships with all of them and of course some of them we're very interoperable with. Some of them we're nearly integrated with. So what my expectations would be is let's keep doing that and keep improving our relationships and our ability to work together and have common objectives that we can achieve together.

If you think about it, back to the list of allies and partners

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that each side has, with China having a pretty short list. When China has to view their situation, they can't just look at the United States. They have to look at the United States and our allies and partners that are with us together, executing the strategy in one way or another, depending on which country you come from. That's something that China has to contend with. That is a strength that we have that China doesn't.

DWG: Thank you very much.

DWG: Dmitry Kirsanov, TASS. Do you have a question?

DWG: Thank you very much for doing this, General.

I wanted to ask you about the specific deterrence initiative as well and to slightly expand this issue. Is the thinking on behalf of the Department of Defense now to get as many sophisticated weapons as you can into the Indo-Pacific region? Like cruise missiles, intermediate range missiles, hypersonics? Are we looking at an arms race there? Because obviously the Russians and the Chinese are going to retaliate. As a four star you know they're just not going to sit idly and watch you do that, right? So what is the thinking?

Gen. Wilsbach: First of all let me just say the Pacific Defense Initiative isn't law yet and certainly we don't even know how much money is going to be in the PDI. So I'm not tying any modernization of our forces to PDI. I set my requirements and state what I'd like to have in the Pacific based on the situation that I view from our adversaries here in the Pacific. We already have pretty advanced weapons when you consider F-22, F-35, we have THAAD in the theater, we have Patriot in the theater. The U.S. Navy is here with carriers, submarines. So we have considerable capability in the theater. So my request for additional capability in a lot of cases is to ensure that we can execute our objectives if we get called, which we don't want. But if we do get called, to have a conflict our intent is to win. That is why we have the request in for the additional capability.

DWG: On an idea to create another operating base or hub for the F-35s in the Pacific region, is that what you would like to do?

And you have two at the moment, right? In Japan?

Gen. Wilsbach: As far as F-35 bases?

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DWG: Yes, sir.

Gen. Wilsbach: Right now the only place that the U.S. Air Force has F-35s is at Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska. We haven't decided where another base and if we're going to have another F-35 base for the U.S. Air Force in the theater.

So as you also know, Australia has F-35s. The Republic of Korea Air Force has F-35s. And the Koku Jeitai from Japan has F-35s, and the U.S. Marines have F-35s in theater.

DWG: I was talking about the Marines, I'm sorry.

Gen. Wilsbach: Yes, you bet.

DWG: Thank you.

Gen. Wilsbach: But just to finish up, we, as you know, we're still acquiring additional F-35 airframes and the Secretary of the Air Force has not let us know where, if at all, there will be additional F-35 bases in the Pacific.

DWG: Kim Underwood of Signal Magazine, do you have a question?

DWG: Yes. Thank you, sir, for your time today.

This is about the future ABMS exercises, you know, European Command, World War I, and then your region, World II in 2021. And I know you're busy with other exercises such as Keen Sword with Japan, and then the joint operability exercises this week with the Navy which I think we called Green Flag.

I guess my question is, are you looking at those exercises you had recently, are you looking at how the ABMS could work there even if it's not a specific ABMS on-ramp exercise?

And I guess the second part of the question is kind of how are you increasing interoperability overall with or without the ABMS idea?

Gen. Wilsbach: Let me just write this down because I'll forget, because the ABMS will take me -- I want to make sure I get through your interoperability question too, so I wrote myself a note.

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But yes, the answer to your question about are we looking at how ABMS works during the current exercises.

Just a few weeks ago we completed an exercise called Valiant Shield. And Valiant Shield was a joint exercise. Many of the forces were centered in and around the island of Guam. So there were Army, Marines, Navy and Air Forces around Guam, and then we also had forces here on Oahu that were connected to that exercise. In fact I had a chance to go to the Joint Operation Center that was set up in a tent on Pearl Harbor here, and it had a lot of the software and hardware and it had operators from all the services working together on a pier, basically at Pearl Harbor. They were commanding and controlling not only the operations that were happening around Guam, and they were integrating the effects in all domain around that fight in Guam, but they were also doing it for the activities that were happening off of Oahu.

I also had, that same day I also flew on a KC-46 which was linked, and we had -- KC-46 as you probably know is a tanker, right? So we think they pass fuel to other aircraft. Well we were actually commanding and controlling the -- we were flying around the Hawaiian islands and we were commanding and controlling activities that were happening over by Guam from the back of the KC-46 with a couple of laptops.

You might think what's the big deal? I can do that from my iPhone. That's because you have WiFi or you have a cell signal, but what we were actually doing is setting up our own network that's not using WiFi and cell coverage, a military network that was linked together and enabled us to be able to do that evolution. As we go forward one of the aspects of ABMS is going to make that network much more robust because if I wanted to get a message to you I could Zoom call you like I'm doing now; I could text you; I could email you; I could call you on the phone; I could send you a letter. There's multiple ways that I can send you a message, right? But we want the same thing for ABMS because we fully intend and expect that our adversaries are going to try to take away our communications. So it has to be robust and we have to be able to fight through that. So those are things that we're adding to the ABMS aspect of JADC2. With respect to interoperability, it's a foundational aspect of what we do. Not only interoperability from the Joint Force aspect, and we have really good interoperability with U.S. Joint

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Forces. We're extremely experienced, a combat experienced force because of all the things that have been happening in the Middle East in the last few decades. So we have, a lot of our people have combat experience and when they do that, it's joint. So interoperability between the services is solid.

And it's rally good also with our allies and partners, some better than others. But this is a conversation that I have with every one of my counterparts from the other countries in the region, our allies and partners. Always trying to improve.

As an example we're daily working with our Republic of Korea partners as well as our Japanese partners. Every single day we're working side by side, yet we still, every day, have an interoperability discussion because you can always improve it. So that's foundational.

So the exercises that are coming up with our allies and partners, every one of them has an interoperability objective and we set the exercises up to be able to test and expand our interoperability envelope so we continue to get better and better.

DWG: In those recent episodes of Keen Sword and the other ones this week, are you testing any ABMS components yourself without these lager on-ramp exercises?

Gen. Wilsbach: We didn't test Keen Sword a few weeks ago, and I'm not familiar with the Green Flag exercise. We're not doing that one here in PACAF. We're not doing any ABMS experiments right now. We'll have two more in 2021 I think in the summer and the fall, as I recall. Don't quote me on that one. I'm not positive on the date but it's in 2021. But EUCOM has got one coming up here in a few weeks.

DWG: Thank you, sir.

DWG: Rebecca Kheel of The Hill, do you have a question?

DWG: Yes. Thank you so much for doing this.

I wanted to talk North Korea. There's been quite a bit of speculation about whether North Korea will try something provocative during the presidential transition or to test the new administration. So I'm wondering if you've seen any indications

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that they might be preparing to do anything.

DWG: I haven't seen any indication but that's not unusual. I've been studying North Korea nearly my whole career and as you might imagine, we keep a fairly close eye on them. We have intelligence collection on them every single day. So we're watching very closely.

In fact one of the conversations that I had with my staff this week about North Korea is don't be surprised if you're surprised because they, if you look back on their history, they go through cycles of charm and provocation, charm and provocation. All the way back to really the beginning of their current country, their current nation.

So lately it's been relatively charming I would say. We haven't see the bellicose rhetoric. We haven't seen the missile shots. We haven't seen any provocation in a while. But they can generate those very quickly, so I've got my staff expecting that it could happen. And of course our forces in the Republic of Korea especially are always ready to fight tonight. That's one of their key objectives. We hope it never comes to that, but they're ready if they get called on. So we will keep a close eye. They do have a history of testing new administrations, so just like you, we're seeing what's going to happen. We hope it doesn't because the way things have been going lately, there's a marked change in really the stress on the peninsula, which is good. We're not faced with perhaps a conflict that would start very quickly. But you never know with North Korea because they are unpredictable.

DWG: So would you say you're keeping any like extra alert in these next few months during the transition period in case something does change with North Korea?

Gen. Wilsbach: I wouldn't say we're keeping extra alert, but I will tell you that our forces in Korea are very ready. AS you probably know, my previous assignment was the 7th Air Force Commander and the Deputy Commander of U.S. Forces Korea, so we stay extremely ready and we're basically always on the alert. We can kick off operations in very short order.

DWG: The gentlemen at PBS News Hour, both Dan and Nick, you're on. Do you want to ask one question each or how would you like to handle it?

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DWG: Sure, one question each. I was going to ask a question about Korea so it's good that you were just talking about Korea.

How eager are you to get back to full-scale exercises with South Korea? Has scaling back exercises had a negative impact? Do you need to get back to full-scale exercises or can you continue on the path you're on now?

Gen. Wilsbach: I would say that we really haven't canceled any full-scale exercises. We have scaled them back to a degree, and a lot of the scale-back has been the way that we put the forces together. Many especially the flying exercises, what we would do is we put all the forces at one base so you could plan and brief, execute and debrief all in the same place. So in lieu of doing that we've left the forces where they're based at, and they do this kind of thing for the planning and the briefing and the debrief, and they meet in the airspace and it's a COVID countermeasure.

So we've seen that a number of times throughout, really since about February we've adjusted the way that we've been doing the exercises.

Then the Republic of Korea was supposed to come to a Red Flag in Alaska which they postponed, so they're planning on coming to a Red Flag in Alaska next month. What we did is we just switched around units that went to the Red Flag in Alaska in lieu of the Republic of Korea Air Force this year, and the Republic of Korea Air Force picked another slot for '21. So we've just really adjusted that training.

So I would say it's had very minimal effect.

One of the things, a lot of people maybe don't think about but in our society and in our cultures we've done a lot of stay at home orders and we've had shutdowns and lock-ins, and a lot of different countermeasures to COVID and the U.S. military doesn't have that option. So we've had to continue to be ready to do our missions. We don't get a COVID excuse of oh yeah, we couldn't do our real world mission because of COVID. That's not one of the options that I have as a commander and I wouldn't expect any of my subordinate commanders to use that excuse.

So we've had to be very cautious and very conservative with our

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countermeasures and they've worked. And I pay really close attention to what's happening on the bases with what's going on with COVID and off the base. What's a standard around the Pacific Air Forces is the numbers inside the gate are always lower than outside the gate, no matter where you look. So whether it's in Korea, in Alaska, in everything in between, we're doing a really good job of countering COVID which has allowed us to maintain our readiness.

So we've had to rescope some of the exercises but we're working our way through that.

I'll give you another example, the Valiant Shield that we did a few weeks ago that I was talking about on a previous question. We sent people to Guam and we were able to work through no quarantine because of the way that we kept everybody in a bubble, and we had one COVID case in all the participants for two weeks. And if you're following the Guam cases, they've got a pretty good set of, a really good pandemic going there, right? So we were able to create a bubble of our forces that deployed in there from really all over the Pacific and we were able to work our way through that.

So that is something that has been really important to us. Even in the midst of COVID, continue to keep our readiness.

DWG: Nick and then Marcus.

DWG: I was going to ask a follow-up to that which is if the adjustments you do to the training exercises haven't made much of a difference, would you even argue to a new administration that they should resume?

But I also wanted to ask about Taiwan and whether some of the push in recent weeks to advanced arms sales there will make a difference do you predict? And/or has already made a difference in China's behavior?

Gen. Wilsbach: I apologize, but you got a little bit garbled on my end. You said something about Taiwan arms sales. Could you finish the rest of your question for me please?

DWG: The Taiwan arms sales, as you know better than us, [inaudible] sales recently. Has that changed China's behavior at all? Or do you anticipate those arms sales changing China's

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behavior at all?

Gen. Wilsbach: We've seen what we perceived as a reaction. It's often hard to tell whether it's coincidental or whether it's a reaction, but we've certainly seen some flights of aircraft that are I'll call them unusual or different for China in and around Taiwan. We've certainly -- you've seen the rhetoric coming out of the CCP about the arms sales. So you've seen those too, as we have. And I would be shocked if we didn't see future activities that would be a response to those arms sales just because that's the way China rolls, right? And so they clearly don't like the United States selling Taiwan arms and they take frequent opportunity to communicate that in various methods.

To get to your first question, yes, I'm going to continue the exercises at full rate because I want our people as ready as they possibly can be because it's one of my primary objectives is readiness.

Do you play any sports?

DWG: Used to play baseball.

Gen. Wilsbach: If you swing at a baseball once a week, you're not very good. If you swing at it every day, you're going to get some home runs, right? Same thing in proficiency with the military.

DWG: Just to be clear, so the way you're doing exercises now, slightly scaled back, is fine. It's not having an impact on interoperability with the South Koreans if you continue the path you're on now? Or you need to change?

Gen. Wilsbach: I think we still have our interoperability. Look, we're very close with the Republic of Korea. Not just with the ROKAF and the USAF but from the Joint Forces. I just came from there,. The military alliance and the amount of training that we do together on a frequent basis on the peninsula, we are very tight with the Republic of Korea, especially on the military side, and I have no concerns whatsoever about interoperability with Korea.

IT's not to say that you don't want to get better, because there's always areas where we can improve and we're constantly trying to do that. But we realize that through these frequent

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training evolutions.

DWG: Marcus Weisgerber, Defense One.

DWG: Thank you. I have a China question.

Is there any senior military to military contact right now between the U.S. and China either by you or by any of your counterparts in the region?

Gen. Wilsbach: No. I don't have frequent interaction with the Chinese. We occasionally do have some meetings. I actually participated in a meeting with my predecessor General Brown who is now our Chief of Staff of the Air Force. This was probably maybe a year ago, maybe a little bit beyond that. I can't remember the date exactly. But it was in Korea. So I was the commander in Korea. General Brown came to Korea and one of the Chinese commanders from the Northeast of China was also there and there was a bilateral discussion, about 20 minutes long.

But no, we don't have regular meetings with them.

DWG: Are they formally suspended?

Gen. Wilsbach: I'm not sure. I'll have to check on that. I don't believe they're formally suspended but we don't typically have occasion to meet with them except for when there's an air show. Like I wouldn't be surprised if there was something at Aero India or like the air show that we did in Korea was the occasion where it's a very international event and the normal routine for the PACAF Commander, we jokingly call it speed dating but you go almost a whole day and you'll just go one office call after the next with various countries. You just talk about issues that you want to bring up.

DWG: And just real quick, in your opinion would it be beneficial to resume these or have these, any type of discussions like this?

DWG: With China.

Gen. Wilsbach: It could be. I'll say that the previous meeting that I was involved with, it was interesting to hear their perspective. I'm sure it was interesting to hear our perspective from their point of view. So it all depends on what came of the meeting.

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As you might imagine, our time's pretty valuable so I don't want to have a meeting just to have a meeting. I want something to actually come of the meeting and some progress to be made.

So it could be.

DWG: Chris Woody, we're getting close to the end here. Business Insider. Do you have a question?

DWG: I do. Hi, General. Thanks for speaking with us today.

You mentioned Valiant Shield and joint exercises, I wanted to ask specifically about interoperability with the Navy. What is it you're looking -- what capability are you looking to establish and exercise with Navy forces?

Gen. Wilsbach: The interoperability is really good. In fact Admiral Aquilino, the PAC Fleet Commander is a very good friend of mine. In fact we were just in a meeting yesterday -- not just with me and him but all of the component commanders from the Pacific. So we had Marines there, the Air Force was certainly there, Navy was there, Army was there, and Special Operators were also there. So we do this regularly. We meet and we discuss ways to be more interoperable. And it gets pretty specific.

But from the standpoint of what we want to do with the Navy -- and you really can't just say what are the Air Force and the Navy doing, because you actually have to bring in the Army and the Marines and the Special Operators. And we haven't talked much about it, but Space as well is incredibly important to all of us. In fact we're not having a Zoom call if it wasn't for space, right? So we scarcely can get a time hack on our watch without space being a factor. So Space is really important too.

The ability to hold whatever target you desire to create an effect again at risk and not being too concerned about who does that, right? It's something that is of mutual interest to all of the components here in the Indo-Pacific theater which is why we're really going after this Joint All Domain Command and Control and ABMS, because that concept and the system allows you to do this with, that in the future you're going to have artificial intelligence that's going to be a part of this and the pace at which you'll be able to create these dilemmas for the adversaries will be really high and our contention is that they

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will not be able to persevere through the multiple dilemmas that we want to create.

So as you look at the operational problem from a theater level as both Admiral Aquilino and I do along with the other component commanders and you have a dilemma that you want to create, maybe you can achieve that via submarine. Or maybe you can achieve that with an aircraft carrier, or maybe you can achieve that with a bomber, or maybe it's some other kind of long range fire, or maybe it's something the Marines have. This is what JADC2 and ABMS will allow you to do at a really, really fast pace. So I've been giving you one simple example, but the idea is across a broad swath of battle space from subsurface into space, you're creating those dilemmas.

DWG: Jeff Seldin of Voice of America.

DWG: General, thank you very much for doing this.

I'm just wondering who do you see or what country do you see as the biggest threat right now in terms of air command and air superiority? And 10 years from now, 15 years from now? Is it going to be somebody else? When do you see that changing?

Gen. Wilsbach: I definitely see the People's Liberation Army Air Force as the leader as far as the adversary in our AOR and I don't see that changing in ten years.

We've seen unprecedented advancements by Chinese military forces especially in the last ten years. They've invested a lot. They've improved a lot. They've stolen some intellectual capital from the West. They've done a respectable job of advancing especially their Air Force which is the gist of your question. So I see them being basically the pacer as far as adversaries go that would try to challenge air superiority and deny us from flying in airspace.

DWG: Where does Russia fit in then? Have they fallen behind the Chinese? Or is it apples and oranges?

Gen. Wilsbach: I believe the Chinese have outpaced the Russians. Not that the Russians are a pushover because they have considerable capability. I just believe the Chinese have outpaced them.

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DWG: That's already the case, sir.

Gen. Wilsbach: I believe it to be true.

DWG: That's interesting.

General, thank you so much for spending an hour with us. It's been fascinating. I must say the capability of Zoom allows us to talk to Hawaii and it feels like you're in the next room. I think even after COVID we may want to keep doing these kinds of programs for commanders like yourself who are far away and not often in Washington.

Gen. Wilsbach: I'm sure we will, but I really value the relationship that you get on a face to face meeting. So we'll maybe endeavor to do both. But it's been my pleasure to spend time with you.

I love seeing the dog, Nick. I'm a dog lover.

DWG: So hopefully sometime in 2021 we'll get back to scrambled eggs and meeting face to face.

Gen. Wilsbach: Have a great day. Thanks for letting me answer your questions. I appreciate it.

DWG: Thank you so much. Thanks to everyone.

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