

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH LIEUTENANT GENERAL  
BENJAMIN MIXON, COMMANDER, U.S. ARMY, PACIFIC VIA TELECONFERENCE SUBJECT:  
COBRA GOLD 10 IN THAILAND TIME: 7:30 A.M. EST DATE: TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 2,  
2010

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LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG (Office of the Secretary of Defense  
for Public Affairs): Okay, great. I'd like to welcome you all to the  
Department of Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Tuesday, February 2,  
2010. My name is Lieutenant Jennifer Cragg with the Office of the  
Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, and I'll be moderating this call  
today.

A note to the bloggers on the line, please clearly state your  
name and organization you're with prior to asking your questions. And if  
you have to place your phone on hold, please exit the call and call back  
in. We will hear your hold music.

Without further ado, I'd like to welcome you all to Lieutenant  
General Benjamin Mixon. He's the commander of U.S. Army Pacific, and  
he's going to be discussing Cobra Gold 2010. Without further ado, I'm  
going to turn it over to you, sir. If you'd like to start with an  
opening statement, and we'll go to questions. The floor is yours, sir.

GEN. MIXON: Yes. Thank you.

Briefly, as many of you know, we're involved in the 29th annual  
iteration of Exercise Cobra Gold. This is an exercise that takes place  
in Thailand, and we have military people representing the countries of  
Thailand, Singapore, Japan, Indonesia, South Korea, and approximately  
6,000 U.S. service personnel is involved in a peace enforcement,  
computer-driven exercise along with field-training exercise, a United  
Nations type of training. And also we are doing several humanitarian  
assistance projects inside of Thailand, such as medical treatment, dental  
treatment, and building a few schools and things of that nature.

As I've covered with some of you before, I think, U.S. Army  
Pacific is involved throughout the Pacific with many of the nations here  
in the Pacific. We recently completed an exercise in Japan known as Yama  
Sakura. Back in October, we had U.S. forces deployed to India.

This exercise is important not only because it is one of the largest, if not the largest, multi-lateral exercises, but it also involves the first-ever deployment of the contingency command post, which is a part of U.S. Army Pacific.

We are standing up this command post and started this process about a year ago as part of our transformation process, and we envision this deployable command post to be involved in military operations on the lower end of the spectrum, such as humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, peacekeeping and peace enforcement types of operations.

So we are watching very closely, as you might imagine, the operations ongoing in Haiti because effective ground command and control and military coordination with civilian agencies and other agencies is one of the reasons that we decided a year ago to enhance our capability to deploy with this command post.

In conclusion, Cobra Gold is one of the best and most important exercises that we do as a part of U.S. Pacific Command. Our relationship with the Thai government goes back over 177 years. We have an extremely long-standing relationship, and Cobra Gold simply highlights many of the activities that we do in the Asia-Pacific region, a region that is extremely important to the United States, obviously economically, but also from a standpoint of security, peace, and stability and its effect on the U.S.

So I will stop there and take any questions that you might have.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. We're going to go with Jim. He was the first on the line. Jim, please go ahead.

Q Good evening, General. Jim Dolbow from the U.S. Naval Institute blog.

Can you give us a little background on why Cobra Gold, the history of it and why was it -- this exercise created 29 years ago, and what made it an annual event?

GEN. MIXON: Yeah, it's a great question.

It originally started as a bilateral exercise between Thailand and the U.S. military as a part of the U.S. Pacific Command theater engagement strategy. And over the years, it has expanded as additional nations have become interested in participating, and they have found that it provides an excellent training venue. As I said, one of the best multilateral training events that occurs within the region.

The Thai government and military has accepted these other countries as they come in to participate in the exercise, so it has expanded and evolved into a very realistic scenario as far as the command post exercise is concerned, and has expanded to include United Nations-type training for ground forces and a fairly large field-training exercise which includes amphibious operations with U.S. Marines and Thai

marines and marines from South Korea, and other activities to make it a very large exercise.

Q Thank you, General.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Jim.

Grim, you're next.

Q Yes, sir. This is Grim at Blackfive.net.

I wanted to ask you -- I know one of the things that we've been watching closely for about five or six years now is the relationship between Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia to kind of patrol the Malacca Straits and things like that.

Are there efforts to get Malaysia to consider involving itself in spite of its, you know, highly prized neutral status in these games, and you know -- can you kind of give us a sense of whether that's the case and what the status of that might be?

GEN. MIXON: Yes. There has been some informal discussions between myself and the Army elements within Malaysia proposing the idea that they might consider participating in Cobra Gold. They seem to be receptive to that. If I'm not mistaken, I believe there may be some observers from Malaysia that are looking at the exercise. So my perspective, having just come from Malaysia prior to coming into Thailand and having made a couple of visits there, that they are very much interested in becoming more involved with the regional security issues as they work with, you know, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, and other countries and in the region. Q Thank you, sir.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Grim.

Dale, please go ahead.

Q Good evening, sir. This is Dale Kissinger from MilitaryAvenue.com.

Quick question on your humanitarian efforts. Did you feel like this prepared you for a Haiti-type environment in Thailand or Southeast Asia? I mean, something like the tsunami that we've recently seen there?

GEN. MIXON: Well, U.S. Pacific Command has rendered aid in numerous natural disasters over the last couple of years. You know, they were involved in relief efforts during the most recent tsunami that occurred here. Also, in the past several months, as we had the floods in the Philippines, the earthquake that occurred in Indonesia, and the tsunami in American Samoa, all of us -- all of the forces, Army, Navy and Marines, were apportioned out to provide relief effort in coordination with civil and military authorities in those areas.

So we've been doing this for a while. But one of the shortfalls that I felt like we had on the Army side was a fairly capable land-based

command post that could set up very rapidly, work with the host nation and NGOs and establish communications and control the military effort that would be land-based, such as helicopters and so forth.

So that's a big part of this exercise as we enhance our capability.

Q And, sir, as a quick follow-on, I'm a former C-17 guy. How many loads did it take to move that command post?

GEN. MIXON: Well, what we have done -- and that's a great question -- is we, for those type of operations, we have echeloned our load plans to where we have determined that, with two C-17 loads, we can get an initial command post up and running. It will have the necessary comms to communicate across the Pacific -- satellite communications and other activities. And then we could expand it, if needed be, for more long-term operations.

But given the nature of airlift these days, supporting the war, we move most of that equipment -- almost all of it -- out here by ship in this particular case because we have the time to do that.

Q Okay. Sir, thank you very much.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Dale.

ASP, please go ahead.

Q Hi. Thank you for doing this. This is Shaun Tandon with ASP.

If I understand it right, this is the first time that South Korea has participated in the exercises. I wanted to see how you saw a South Korean role in this and, more broadly, in terms of what -- what South Korea could contribute and what the exercises could do that would be of interest to South Korea, particularly in light of South Korea's constant concerns about security in its region.

GEN. MIXON: Yeah. I mean, that's a great point. And we're just thrilled to have South Korea participating this year. They're, obviously, an important power out in the region, and to have them out here participating with the other nations, I think, certainly will open up other opportunities for them to train in a bilateral or multilateral respect.

We have had discussions with both the Japanese ground self-defense force, South Korea, and the U.S. about putting together a multilateral or at least trilateral exercises based on humanitarian assistance and disaster relief capability. So I think it's a good sign, and it shows a lot of understanding by the South Korean military that they are an important part of peace and stability within the region.

Q Sure. Can I just follow up briefly? When you're mentioning potentially trilateral mechanism -- the trilateral exercises,

that would be a new thing. The three countries currently don't do anything just the three of them together.

GEN. MIXON: That's correct. And there's been a lot of exchanges of information and so forth, but a specific exercise of a trilateral nature would be something new. There's been interest shown concerning that, and so we're awaiting some ideas and information from both of the armies, and we intend to move forward on that as soon as we can.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Shaun. Let's go around the horn. We have a good -- about ten minutes left. So let's go with Jim.

Jim, please go ahead.

Q Jim Dolbow again with the U.S. Naval Institute blog.

General, the Mongolian armed forces have retooled their mission to be more peacekeeping oriented. Do you think they will be someday invited to participate in Cobra Gold?

GEN. MIXON: I can certainly see that in the future. We've worked closely with the Mongolian military on their initiative to stand up the peacekeeping center, and also have worked with them on professionalization of their noncommissioned officer corps.

So I -- and they have been participating in some peacekeeping training that took place down in Indonesia last summer, an exercise called Garuda Shield. And so I certainly see them being more active in these types of exercises.

Q Thank you, General.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Jim.

Grim, you're next if you want to go ahead.

Q Yes, sir. I know that this year, as many years in the past, there is some political turmoil in Thailand at the same time as this exercise and, also, that this year, like many years in the past, there's been a recent bombing associated with the insurgency in southern Thailand. But the exercises always seem to go off well in spite of these continuing tensions.

Can you talk about how our partners in the Thai military are managing to kind of handle force protection and secure the area so that we can do these things successfully year after year?

GEN. MIXON: Yeah. The security situation here is very good. We've done appropriate force protection analysis of all the sites. Thai military and police are providing good access control and local security.

So we really have little to no concern about the overall security situation.

Q Yes, sir. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Grim.

Dale, do you have any follow-up questions?

Q Yes, sir. Dale again from MilitaryAvenue.com. The -- you mentioned earlier, or I read someplace, where the United Nations might have been involved in Cobra Gold. Were they there as an observer, or were we just talking to them about it, or what was their role?

GEN. MIXON: Yeah. We do two things that involved United Nations types of operations. We run training lanes which focus on United Nations types of operations, checkpoint control and that sort of thing. And that's done under the United Nations standard training procedures. And then, on the other side, we have a U.N. headquarters configuration that is participating in training and as a part of the CPX that is representing a U.N.-type command that the headquarters that I'm a part of, and my elements and the other countries are a part of, are conducting the operations.

So to say that the U.N. is involved is true from the standpoint of using U.N. processes and procedures. And there are some folks here that represent the U.N., but they are not running the exercise per se.

Q Yes, sir. Thank you very much.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Dale.

Shaun?

Q Sure. Just you were mentioned that you were looking carefully at what's going on Haiti right now as you go ahead with these exercises. Of course, that region of the world had a major disaster in 2004 with the tsunami.

In terms of the lessons that one could learn of that, is there a need for more cooperation among the nations in the region with the U.S. to respond to disasters? Or what type of lessons do you see from both Haiti and both the -- and also the tsunami in 2004 that could be a benefit going ahead?

GEN. MIXON: Yeah. I'm watching the Haiti operation from the standpoint of how the command and control was established and how the coordination between the military force that is there under U.S. Southern Command, and all the other agencies that are involved, and the international effort that is now flowing into the region.

Lessons learned from my headquarters: Regional cooperation is always important. In this region, the countries that are here have responded very well to the major disasters in the past. So I think, as

we continue to do this training, we will only get better at the ability to respond rapidly and then to work together with all the other governmental agencies that would be involved in disaster relief. Q  
Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Shaun.

We have roughly about five minutes before we wrap up, so I want to make sure -- any follow-on questions? Any of the others?

Q Yep. General, Jim Dolbow.

When does planning start for the next Cobra Gold?

GEN. MIXON: Excuse me?

Q When do you begin planning for the next Cobra Gold exercise?

GEN. MIXON: As soon as this one ends, there will be an initial conversation, but it's already on the books for next year. The way we do these types of exercises in U.S. Pacific Command is, the Army component, which is myself, of course, takes Cobra Gold for two years while the Marine component takes exercise Balikatan in the Philippines, which is also a disaster relief, but it's bilateral.

And so I will switch with the Marines next year and take Balikatan while the Marines will take Cobra Gold.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Jim.

Grim?

Q I have no further questions. But thank you, General, for what you're doing out there.

GEN. MIXON: Yeah. I appreciate the -- you guys getting on the line.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Grim.

Dale or Shaun? Dale?

Q Yes, sir. This is Dale again.

How would you assess the morale of the Army folks that participated in the exercise, and their families as well?

GEN. MIXON: Well, morale here is high. The soldiers enjoy coming out to Thailand. A large majority of these soldiers here have had deployments into Iraq and Afghanistan and even multiple deployments. So to come out here on an exercise like this, they enjoy it. The length

of the separation with their families is not that long, but we're always concerned about that impact. But what I'm seeing is the families also enjoy the ability of the soldier to get out and do something that's different and very interesting.

Q Thank you for your service.

GEN. MIXON: Thanks.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Dale.

And then Shaun.

Q I'm okay, actually. I think I've asked what I wanted to ask. But thank you for doing this.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you very much. I believe I went around the horn, and I believe no one has any follow-on questions. So what I want to do at this time is turn it back over to Lieutenant General Mixon.

Sir, if you would like to end with any closing thoughts.

GEN. MIXON: Well, the thought is, of course, that the Asia-Pacific region has been highlighted over the last many months by the secretary of Defense, the secretary of State, and our president about its ever-increasing presence and impact on the United States. So we're out here and engaged across the board, both the Army in the Pacific and U.S. PACOM, and we continue to remain engaged out here in the region because it is of vital importance to the United States.

And that would be about it.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. And thank you for the bloggers. Just to remind everybody, you've been listening to Lieutenant General Benjamin Mixon, commander of U.S. Army Pacific, who's been discussing Cobra Gold 2010.

Just a reminder for everybody, you can access a transcript from this call as well as the audio file if you go to [www.dodlive.mil/bloggerroundtables](http://www.dodlive.mil/bloggerroundtables).

Thank you, sir, very much for calling in today, and thank you to all the bloggers who called in this early. Appreciate everyone.

GEN. MIXON: Can I mention one more thing right quick?

LT. CRAGG: Yes, sir.

GEN. MIXON: I just thought about it. We do have a Web page up and running on Cobra Gold, so they might be able to pull some things down from that. And we'll continue to post pictures and other things on the Web page concerning Cobra Gold. LT. CRAGG: Roger that. I have that Web site, so I will e-mail it to Jim, Grim, Dale, and Shaun as well. Thank you, sir.

GEN. MIXON: Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: This concludes today's event. Thank you.

END.