

'Building of Maritime Cooperation for Collaboration for Better Security; An Analysis of the last 10 years of United States Navy Deployments in Indian Ocean'



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Good morning, it is a distinct honor to be here with you today at this important forum of naval professionals and regional maritime stakeholders. I would like to thank our hosts, the Sri Lankan Navy, as well as the Sri Lankan Navy Chief of Staff, Admiral De Silva, for assembling this impressive group and for providing the US Navy an opportunity to provide our perspective on current and future challenges in this region. It is most fitting that this gathering takes place in a country located astride one of the world's most strategic Sea Lines of Communication, and to be hosted by the Sri Lankan Navy, which has contributed so greatly to regional maritime security and the enforcement of international law.

My first order of business is an "order," to me - to convey a warm greeting from the US Navy's new Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Mike Gilday, and from my immediate superior, the US Pacific Fleet Commander, Admiral Chris Aquilino. Both admirals regret not being able to be with us here today, but I can assure you that they are keenly interested in the dialogue and ideas that will be brought forward.

The concept paper and instructions for this session of the dialogue suggested a review of the US Navy's past decade in operating in this region and our lessons learned as a way to orient and look forward at the coming decade. I cannot help but note, as the US Navy recently celebrated its 244th birthday, that the basic premises of naval purpose and maritime power remain as valid today as they were in 1775 at our founding. In fact, I would submit that all of our respective Navies share at least two common core purposes; defend our homelands from maritime threats and protect our nations' interests on the high seas. And while these core truisms remain the same, the world has clearly changed since 1775, and perhaps at no time at a faster rate than the last decade.

At the start of this decade, in 2010, the US Navy had 288 commissioned ships operating across the globe, balanced fairly evenly between the oceans east and west of the United States. The center of gravity for US foreign policy, and thus the US military services, was fighting extremism in southwest Asia. As the last US combat brigade redeployed from

Iraq in August of that year, and the NATO-led security mission in Afghanistan entered a surge phase, the US Navy priority was supporting our land forces with power projection and maritime logistics. These priorities, tailored for a very specific operating environment, dictated our deployments and dominated preparatory training.

However, as a nation with global trade interests and a large network of allies and partners, our navy continued to deploy broadly. In the Indian Ocean, we were operating with our partners, conducting cooperative security, with a particular focus on countering piracy in the western Indian Ocean and Gulf of Aden. Combined Task Force 151, formed in 2009 under the auspices of a United Nations Security Council Resolution, was the mechanism. The 33 participating nations of Combined Task Force 151 are not bound by either a fixed political or military mandate; but, by working together, and also coordinating with parallel counter-piracy efforts including the European Union Naval Force and independently deployed naval ships from nations such as China, Russia, and India; instances of Somali piracy decreased dramatically to the point that there has only been once successful attack since 2012. Certainly, many lessons were learned, or relearned, in counter piracy operations. Most importantly, we proved that despite the complexities of differing national Rules of Engagement, jurisdictional boundaries, and statutory requirements associated with enforcing international law, we can successfully and enduringly conduct this maritime mission as naval coalition team.

We also responded to requests for humanitarian assistance in the IndoPacific. For example, in the spring of 2017, the USS LAKE ERIE was able to quickly offer support to the government of Sri Lanka in the wake of a flooding and landslide disaster that affected tens of thousands of people. Unfortunately there were several other regional humanitarian response events during the decade, the largest of which took place in 2011 at the request

of the Japanese government following the devastating Tohoku earthquake and tsunami. What we called Operation Tomadachi (translated Operation Friends) involved 24,000 US servicemembers, 189 aircraft, and 24 naval ships. The unique maritime capabilities and high state of readiness that all of our Navies maintain were quickly and flexibly redirected: helicopters for Search and rescue, drones for damage surveys, underwater divers for port clearance, cargo aircraft for the movement of relief supplies and aid workers. Of course the US was just one of 163 nations that offered assistance to Japan, but the response to this tragedy further proved what our navies can do when we leverage our strengths and work together for a common good. A key lesson learned was the payoff from the habitual working relationship between the US Navy and the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force. Our ability to work together effectively in crisis was enabled by the relationships and repetitions we practice in routine bi-lateral operations and regular exercises. As Admiral Aquilino often says, “anyone can surge forces, but no one can surge trust.”

The past ten years also saw a significant change in focus for the US Navy. As US military requirements in Iraq and Afghanistan abated and our government reassessed its global priorities, the importance of the IndoPacific region was brought to the forefront. In recognition of a region which contains over half of the world’s population, where 7 of the 10 largest militaries are fielded, and with which the US conducts roughly 2 trillion dollars in annual trade – mostly by sea - the US in 2014 announced a Pivot to the Pacific plan that was then followed up in 2017 by our comprehensive Free and Open IndoPacific strategy. Additionally drawing our attention, as our hosts have noted, the region saw a large increase in the maritime proliferation of arms, piracy, human trafficking, terrorism, and illicit narcotics. All of these things challenge our shared prosperity and security.

Our Free and Open IndoPacific strategy is similar to national documents put forward by other regional countries including Australia, India, France, New Zealand, and Japan. When we say Free, we mean Free, both in terms of security—free from coercion by other nations—and free to enjoy the rights and benefits afforded a nation in its internationally recognized sovereignty. When we say Open, we mean that the global commons should be available to all, such that every nation should enjoy unfettered access to, and lawful use of, the seas upon which all economies depend. While the term "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" is new, the underlying values and principles to which the vision speaks are not. We know, based on the last 70 years, that by working in a spirit of cooperation alongside the navies of like-minded Allies and partners, we can maintain a Free and Open IndoPacific where all nations, large and small, are safe, secure, and prosperous.

As we end this decade the US Navy is about the same size, at 290 commissioned ships, but we have redistributed our forces: 60 percent of our Navy is now assigned to the IndoPacific. On any given day roughly one third of our ships and submarines are at sea. We have recommitted our efforts to Pacific and Indian Ocean deployments that now include over 125 annual bi-lateral and multi-lateral exercises and patrols. We have grown our bi-annual Rim of the Pacific into the world's largest international maritime exercise with over twenty-five nations (including 7 Indian Ocean nations), 46 surface ships, five submarines, 17 land forces, and more than 200 aircraft and 25,000 personnel participating. We have increased our investments in security cooperation and partner capacity building, particularly in the area of maritime domain awareness. We have also evolved our annual Pacific Partnership deployment, which includes the Indian Ocean, into the largest annual multilateral humanitarian assistance and disaster relief preparedness mission on the planet.

Looking forward, the US Navy will continue to be a steady presence and reliable partner in this region. Based on our current shipbuilding plan,

our force will grow to 355 ships, many of which will be assigned to the IndoPacific. Our increased capacity will allow us to continue to expand and improve our regional exercises; including CARAT, SEACAT, and Pacific Partnership, such that we can learn from each other and build the relationships and trust that will be so critical in times of need. We will continue to press forward with information sharing initiatives, because as nations cooperate in building a common maritime picture of potential threats, regional security and confidence among neighboring countries increase significantly. Our efforts will not demand binary choices between competing systems, rather they will strengthen individual nation sovereignty through capacity building and maritime domain awareness. We will continue to work closely with like-minded Navies to support sustained and favorable regional balances of power that safeguard security, prosperity, and the free and open international order.

The Indian Ocean region has never been more important to global commerce and regional stability, and despite the transnational maritime threats we are challenged with today, our shared future is bright. Bright, if we stand together to protect the existing international rules based system that has fueled a prosperity that enabled hundreds of millions of people in the IndoPacific region to rise above poverty. Bright, if we reject coercion and support the concept of equilibrium among sovereign nations; regardless of size, economic power, or military might. Bright, if we work together to defeat terrorism, deny illicit trafficking, and protect our natural resources. Bright, if we use our navies not as a provocation to war, but as the surest guarantee of peace. Colleagues, working together is a winning formula. The US Navy is willing to work as equals with any nation that embraces these time-tested principles. Like the rising tide that raises all ships, enduring security and continued prosperity are in every nation's best interest.