



**Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet  
Jakarta International Defence Dialogue  
"Managing Contested Waters" Panel Opening Statement  
Jakarta, Indonesia  
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It's an honor to represent the United States here at the Jakarta International Defense Dialogue, and I'd like to thank Minister of Defense Purnomo for bringing all of us together. I appreciate the opportunity to sit on this panel and discuss my thoughts on "managing contested waters." But more than that, I'm looking forward to learning from my fellow distinguished panelists, and from all of you, as we share views, express concerns, and consider possible solutions on this important topic.

As each of you knows, nations today are increasingly interconnected and interdependent on each other. The oceans, that for centuries kept us apart, are now the highways that bring us together. Freedom of the seas is the minimum condition necessary for global prosperity and trade to flourish. That applies to the United States – a true maritime nation and a Pacific power – and that applies to every country represented here today and in every other country in the world. We all rely on the seas.

Of course you can't have freedom of the seas without security and stability throughout the maritime domain. Lack of security and stability, whether caused by natural disasters or regional man-made crises, can have a ripple effect on the entire global economy.

Just consider the current global tensions caused by one neighbor against another in the Crimean peninsula. It's imperative for every nation represented here today that we keep something like that from ever happening in this region of the world. All states, and especially major countries, must respect international law and not infringe upon the territorial integrity of their neighbors. We must resolve disputes through dialogue, forsaking unilateral actions and inflammatory rhetoric, to ensure Asia does not experience what we are seeing right now in Europe. The prosperity of all of our nations depends on it.

American leaders recognize that our economic prosperity and security are inextricably linked to this vital region. The U.S. has only seven bilateral treaty partners in the world, and five of them are in the Pacific. Ladies and gentlemen, we understand and honor our treaty obligations. This is one reason why we have an ongoing strategic rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region.

Our rebalance is tangible and real, and based on a strategy of collaboration and cooperation. But the rebalance is not just a defense-centered policy, it is a whole of government effort: diplomatic, economic, political, and security. All of these aspects are important to managing contested waters in the Pacific. But I'll focus for just a moment on the part the U.S. Navy deals with – security.

As part of the rebalance, the U.S. Pacific Fleet has been helping manage contested waters by enhancing defense relationships with our allies and security partners throughout the Indo-Asia-Pacific. Our goal is to lessen the chances of conflict by increasing security and stability more broadly throughout the region.

Of course, the U.S. Navy's forward presence is also critical. For more than 70 years, the U.S. Pacific Fleet has maintained a robust presence in the Western Pacific, giving us the ability to be where it matters, when it matters.

Our forward presence is why we were so quickly able to respond last November when the Philippine government requested our help in the wake of the Typhoon Haiyan.

Simply put, friends help friends.

Most recently, we rushed U.S. Navy ships and aircraft to assist our friends in Malaysia in the search for their recently lost airliner. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families and loved ones involved in this tragic incident. And we're still looking. But I think it's worth pointing out that this is a multinational effort to assist Malaysia in this extremely complex search operation.

When we work together in a multilateral way, we can accomplish great things. Obviously, every nation in the region won't agree on every issue. And American leaders understand that contested waters and territory in the Pacific are passionate issues for many countries here.

While American leaders have also been clear that we do not take sides on these matters, no one should misinterpret that diplomatic position from our very strong stance on the behavior of nations involved in these disputes. We firmly oppose the use of intimidation, coercion, or force by any nation to assert territorial claims. Territorial claims must comport with customary international law. We support dispute resolution venues such as the International Tribunal for Law of the Sea.

And we oppose any claim that impinges on the rights, freedoms, and lawful use of the sea that belong to all nations.

But our strong position on contested claims alone does not head off possible conflict over these issues -- and we know that. It takes all of us in this region, working together, to find acceptable solutions.

That is why I believe it is so important for ASEAN and China to agree on a Code of Conduct in the South China Sea. Here today, I want to publicly acknowledge and express my admiration for Indonesia's leadership in this important effort. The United States encourages claimant countries to abide by established international norms and the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea.

It's important that we continue to work together peacefully to resolve disputes through multilateral forums like ASEAN, and at important conferences like this one, where we can work toward gaining consensus on those issues that affect all nations in this region.

There's also tremendous value in multinational defense cooperation. Indonesia will hold exercise Komodo later this month. This summer, the U.S. Navy will host the world's largest international maritime exercise, the Rim of the Pacific, in waters near Hawaii. RIMPAC 2014 will be the biggest in its 43-year history, with armed forces from 23 nations, including for the first time, Brunei and China. RIMPAC is designed to expand cooperation, improve safety, build trust, and increase transparency between participating nations. And perhaps I'll see some of you there.

Finally, while we all have individual interests related to this important region, security and stability are key to our shared prosperity and peace. While we respect healthy competition, we can all appreciate that conflict and crisis are bad for business. As we work through the challenges faced by competing claims, let's keep the channels for dialogue open. Let's work to peacefully resolve our differences and adhere to the international rule of law and accepted standards of behavior. I believe it's the responsibility of any great power to do so and truly a win-win for all.

Thank you.