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Australian Strategic Policy Institute
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Admiral Harry B. Harris Jr.
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Thanks, Ian, for that kind introduction. It's a great pleasure to be back in Australia and Canberra at this magnificent Australia War Memorial -- under the protecting wings of "G for George" and the watchful glare of Admiral Glossup, commanding officer of HMAS Sydney in the glorious over SMS Emden in World War I -- and to have this opportunity to acknowledge the strong friendship and enduring alliance between Australia and the United States.

This is my third visit to Australia since I assumed command last October -- the first was to Canberra for the Kokoda Strategic Dialogue, two weeks ago I was in Perth for the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium and here I am again.

I'm familiar with the Australian saying, "Third time lucky." So, hopefully, this means I'm being favorably considered for my blue passport.

Minister Johnston, Senator Fawcett, Secretary Winter, Admiral Roughead, Admiral Griggs -- congratulations sir, or perhaps condolences, for your new appointment -- ladies and gentlemen, good evening. Let me begin by saying how honored I am to be here tonight.

I'd like to thank the Australian Strategic Policy Institute for all that you do in stimulating open and frank dialogue on issues of strategic importance to Australia and to all of us in the Indo-Asia-Pacific.

Tonight, I bring you best wishes and highest regards from Admiral Sam Locklear, the commander of United States Pacific Command, and my boss. The Admiral sends his regrets that he could not be here. So just pretend I'm taller, grayer, more distinguished looking, and a steely-blue-eyed ship-driver, and we'll be okay.

Admiral Locklear looked hard for the right speaker to represent him tonight. A speaker with the right amount of gravitas. A speaker with a true strategic persona. Well, when he couldn't find one, he settled on me, probably because he knows that I follow the first principle of public speaking: promise to be brief no matter how long it takes.

So I promise to be brief. Let me get right into it by sharing some encouraging words my father gave to me about speaking in front of large and learned audiences. He told me not to be too self-conscious when people start looking at their watches while I'm speaking, but that I should wrap up my speech before they start tapping their watches to check if they're still working.

So tonight I've been asked to talk about "The Evolution of the United States Pacific Strategy," and I see some of you tapping your watches already.

So let me tell you what's behind the evolution of our strategic rebalance to the Indo-Asia-Pacific. I use the word "evolution" intentionally because America never left the Pacific. At the height of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, we were here in force as Secretary Clinton emphasized in 2011 when she addressed the vital importance of Asia and America's role in the region.

As each of you knows, nations today are increasingly interconnected and interdependent. The oceans, which for centuries kept us apart, are now the pathways that bring us together. Today, not only does 90 percent of the world's commerce travel by sea, but 99 percent of all international electronic communications like the internet and telephones travels under it. That's reason alone for a strong undersea warfare capability.

Here in Australia, more than 99.5 percent of trade by volume goes by sea. I'm no statistician but 99.5 percent sounds like "all" to me.

Freedom of the seas is the minimum condition necessary for global prosperity and trade to flourish. This applies to the United States, a maritime nation and a Pacific power. This applies to Australia, a maritime nation and a Pacific and Indian Ocean power, and this applies to almost every other country in the world. We all rely on the freedom of the seas so that our economies can thrive.

That's why the United States Pacific Fleet maintains a strong presence throughout this vast arena. We know this region will drive the global economy for the next century. Our national interests are at stake here.

In his recent book "Asia's Cauldron," Robert Kaplan wrote, "Starting in the last phase of the Cold War the demographic, economic, and military axis of the earth has measurably shifted to the opposite end of Eurasia, where the spaces between the principal nodes of population are overwhelmingly maritime." Ray Griggs said it better in his recent article in Proceedings when he commented that Australia's enduring strategic geography is maritime.

Strong maritime nations need strong navies. No conjecture, no theory, but a fact. Australia and the U.S. are in the same boat, pun intended.

And we recognize the risks in this maritime region, risks that we must be ready to confront, where conflict or calamity on a regional scale can negatively impact the entire global economy.

Consider the full range of natural disasters that we know all too well, droughts, wildfires, earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, typhoons. If Mother Nature can dish it out, it's on the menu here in the Pacific.

Back in November, we responded to the devastation left in the wake of a massive typhoon that hit the Philippines. Friends help friends, and we didn't hesitate to do so, as we responded with the George Washington Carrier Strike Group, an Amphibious Ready Group, Ospreys, P-3s, helicopters, specialized medical units, and a shallow water survey ship, and almost 14,000 troops. We acted decisively and rapidly because of our forward deployed naval posture. Forward presence matters.

In addition to natural disasters, we are contending with new challenges like cyber-security. And we still face challenges with terrorism, piracy, trafficking in all of its bad forms, and all types of trans-national criminal activity. USS Kidd recently completed a long-distance patrol through Oceania in conjunction with our Coast Guard.

And Kidd was among the first to respond as we started our hard work, together with you, trying to unlock the ongoing mystery of Malaysian Air Flight 370. Our newly deployed P-8 Poseidons are flying missions with your P-3 Orions, as part of a huge international effort -- led by Australia -- to search the vast Indian Ocean so that we can understand what happened and why.

Then there are the more volatile threats in the region, like North Korea, with their quest for nuclear weapons and efforts to operationalize a long-range missile that can deliver them, and their attempts to sell powerful weapons systems and arms to other rogue states and entities. As Admiral Locklear said, "We all have a stake in a complete de-nuclearization of North Korea, this isn't just about South Korea and the United States." This is about all of us. Our Secretary of State has been clear, "The United States will not accept a nuclear armed North Korea."

In the clamor for increasingly scarce resources, we see tensions on the rise between nations over rocks and shoals all through the East and South China seas. Ladies and gentlemen, I'm the farthest thing from a math major that you'll ever see, but I remember "Pi R squared" from my schoolboy days, and when the "R" is a 200 nautical mile range circle -- you could call it an "EEZ" -- that pin-prick of a rock in the middle of the ocean now matters. Forty percent of the world's oceans are covered by someone's EEZ.

Recently, China declared an Air Defense Identification Zone over much of the East China Sea. The way China went about it this was dangerous -- unilaterally without prior consultation with other parties, and over disputed waters.

In tense times, it's all the more important that nations consult and coordinate, especially when national intentions are unclear. I am concerned by the aggressive growth of the Chinese military, their lack of transparency, and a pattern of increasingly assertive behavior in the region. This includes maritime sovereignty claims that have no basis in, or relationship to, international law, such as the area within the so-called "nine-dash line." China's neighbors are concerned. Attempts to unilaterally change the status quo negatively affect regional stability. There's both growing uncertainty in the region and increasing tensions: A witches' brew for miscalculation. Our continued diplomacy in Asia amid these challenges underscores the importance of the United States remaining active and strong in the Indo-Asia-Pacific.

Let me be clear: we have key interests in this region and America takes its treaty commitments seriously. We strongly oppose coercion as a means to resolve territorial disputes. A peaceful resolution to territorial disputes is in the interests of all nations of the region.

For this reason, we applaud the recent decision by the Republic of the Philippines to take their on-going territorial disputes with China to the International Tribunal on the Law of the Sea.

I applaud and admire Australia's leadership in the maritime, including the Royal Australian Navy's hosting of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium; Australia's long-term leadership in the Combined Maritime Force in the North Arabian Sea and Arabian Gulf; your growing partnership and defense relationships with Japan and India; and longstanding leadership in the Five Power Defense Arrangement. There are those who would have us believe that there are only two "great powers" in the Pacific -- nothing could be further from the truth.

Like you, we are laser-focused on working with our regional allies and partners to maintain security, stability, prosperity and peace.

Around the world, the United States has only seven bilateral treaty allies, and five of them are in the Indo-Asia-Pacific. We work closely with each of them, and that's especially true of Australia. Ours is a celebrated relationship. We have fought, bled and died together in many of the very conflicts honored here in this war memorial, from World War I and II to Korea and Vietnam. Everyone here knows the battles of Kapyong and Long Tan. Throughout the Cold War all the way to our modern day fights in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the heroism of the Diggers there, justifiably honored with four Victoria Crosses of Australia. And we've served together on the high seas in operations and exercises.

One of these exercises is the upcoming Rim of the Pacific Exercise, or RIMPAC 2014, in the waters near Hawaii. RIMPAC is the world's largest international maritime exercise and expands cooperation, improves safety, builds trust, and increases transparency between all participating navies.

This year will be the biggest RIMPAC in the exercise's 43-year history, with 23 participating nations. It will be the first with an Australian two star, Rear Admiral Simon Cullen, leading as the RIMPAC Deputy Commander. Air Commodore Chris Westwood will lead the air component.

And, for the first time ever, Brunei and yes, China, will be participating. China's acceptance of our RIMPAC invitation is an important milestone. Despite the concerns I've mentioned, we welcome the emergence of a peaceful, responsible and prosperous China as a positive contributor to Asian stability and member of the community of nations.

It is in the best interests of all of us that we manage friction and prevent misunderstanding at sea through sustained navy-to-navy dialogue and practical cooperation on maritime challenges faced by all Pacific nations. And that's what RIMPAC is all about.

Now I'm sure you've all have heard the story of the guy who went on holiday in the Himalayas. While he was there he got the rare opportunity to visit a monastery. Now this monastery was on top of a steep mountain and the only way you could get to it was to be pulled up the side of a 300-meter cliff ... in a basket.

As he looked up at the rope, he noticed it was fraying a bit, so he asked the monk sitting next to him, "How often do you guys replace the rope?"

The monk replied, "Every time it breaks."

Now that kind of logic doesn't work for most of us, there's simply too much at stake. We can't allow the rope to break. We've got to remain proactive in this region in order to address the challenges we see today and tomorrow.

Today the U.S. continues our whole of government rebalance to the Pacific. Our nation's military forces -- all of them -- will play an important role, as will the civilian side. As the commander of the Pacific Fleet, I'm committed to ensure that our Navy leads our rebalance to the Pacific.

In fact, we're moving out on that effort as we develop new platforms, equipment, innovative new technologies and bringing them, first, to this region. By 2020, 60 percent of our Navy will be in the Pacific.

Now the topic of this conference isn't lost on me, where you're debating Australia's future submarine -- a worthy debate. As Minister Johnston said this morning, submarines provide you with a "highly potent, asymmetric capability." I know this is an important issue for you and for all who value having a strong and advanced Australian maritime presence to help protect and defend your national interests. It's not easy to build and maintain a modern submarine force, as you well know. You've been there, done that. Australia has the experience and know-how and political will to do this.

"The Submarine Choice" is a fitting title for this conference. In my opinion, Australia does, indeed have a choice: to be a relevant maritime power or not. The type of submarine, the numbers you buy, and even where you build them are tactical questions. But whether you have submarines, or not, is a strategic issue because it gets at what kind of country you want to be for the rest of the 21st century.

The U.S. Navy would not be the Navy we are without our submarine force. In fact, we rely heavily on that force for their asymmetric capabilities, endurance, weaponry and stealth. Submarines are the original stealth platform. Submarines are leading our rebalance, as 60 percent of our entire submarine force is already in the Pacific. This includes our newest Virginia-class attack submarines homeported in Pearl Harbor and the submarine squadron in Guam.

Now, while I am sure most of you would like for me to continue talking about submarines, I simply can't pass up the opportunity to mention that for most of my career I've been in the business of hunting them while flying the mighty P-3 Orion.

We are replacing that wonderful airplane with the P-8 Poseidon, and I applaud Australia's recent announcement to acquire the P-8, as well as the MQ-4C Triton unmanned aircraft. I've flown in the P-8 already and I'm impressed. It brings to the table quantifiable advantages in ASW, ISR and sensor integration. We have two P-8s deployed to Perth looking for that missing Malaysian airliner.

And speaking about deployments to Australia, our Marines are now rotating to Darwin and flying their new MV-22 Ospreys. Now, after more than a decade of fighting ashore, the Marine Corps is returning to its roots and deploying from Navy ships, from the sea if you will.

We call this "amphibiosity." While amphibiosity may be a new word, the concept's an old one, familiar to both of our nations. You've been doing amphibious warfare for a long time, just as we have. I know you've started sea trials on HMAS Canberra, the first of your impressive new amphibious ships, as well as your progress on the new Hobart-Class Air Warfare Destroyers. With their new AEGIS systems, the Hobarts will further increase interoperability between our two navies. Australia is truly a great maritime power, indeed.

Ladies and gentlemen, I've talked too long. Too many of you are tapping your watches. I'm reminded of the man who shot and killed a long-winded speaker. He went to the sheriff's office and said, "Sheriff, I've just shot a keynote speaker." The sheriff turned to the man and said, "Son, you're in the wrong place. You pick up your reward money down at the courthouse."

For those of you thinking about collecting some reward money, let me close with this thought: Though we all have many interests related to this important region, security and stability underpin prosperity and peace. While we certainly respect and value competition, we all appreciate the fact that conflict and crisis are bad for business. That is why the United States and so many of our allies, partners and friends in this region are committed to fostering a rules-based system that respects international law and adheres to international norms. This is a strategy that makes great powers great.

But, while peace and prosperity are the most desirable outcomes of our strategic efforts, I never lose sight of the fundamental function of the United States Navy, and that is to fight and help win our nation's wars, particularly at sea. The Pacific Fleet must be ready to fight tonight. From Hollywood to Bollywood, from polar bears to penguins, and everywhere in between, we have to be ready, just in case the rope breaks.

Folks, thank you for your attention and kindness tonight.

May God bless Australia. May God bless America. And may God bless our American and Australian fighting men and women who wear the cloth of our nations wherever they may be. Thank You.