



**Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet**  
**Admiral Scott H. Swift**

*A Cooperative, Prosperous Indian Ocean Region*  
*China Maritime Studies Institute Workshop*

*Honolulu, Hawaii*

*January 13, 2016*

*As delivered*

I'd like to thank the Naval War College's China Maritime Studies Institute and the University of Adelaide for sponsoring this timely workshop. Peter Dutton deserves special thanks for bringing this expert group of analysts and professionals together to share a broad range of perspectives on naval power in the Indian Ocean. Looking around the room, I see many familiar faces from the region, including my good friend, Admiral Verma who I've known since he served as India's Chief of Navy. I'm also pleased representatives from the Chinese navy are here as well.

Judging by the agenda, and by the feedback I received on your discussions, this workshop already touched upon many key regional issues. My goal with these remarks will be to avoid too much repetition and to ultimately hear more from you during the Q&A session. Though I would've liked to attend all of the past two days of sessions, my excuse is apropos, having just returned from a trip to India and Bangladesh last night to participate in the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS).

My interactions with Indian Ocean leaders at IONS reinforced my view that the term Asia-Pacific does not adequately describe regional equities. The Indian Ocean is important in its own right, but it is also a vibrant part of the broader Indo-Asia-Pacific, which includes the United States. Especially from a naval perspective, the latter phrase more accurately captures the Indian and Pacific oceans as the connective tissues that bind maritime Asia together along sea routes established centuries ago when monsoon winds governed the age of sail.

Then and now, countries on both sides of the Straits of Malacca and Singapore share deeply vested interests in the optimized flow of maritime trade, energy and investment to sustain economic prosperity. Thirty percent of global maritime trade, roughly \$5.3 trillion yearly, passes through the South China Sea alone; of that, \$1.2 trillion transits to ports in the United States. About two-thirds of global oil shipments from the Indian Ocean are bound for the Pacific Ocean. Beyond trade, access to oil and gas resources below the sea and fishing stocks on the surface are enduring sources of livelihoods and national wealth for many regional countries.

The Indian and Pacific Oceans are also critical conduits for the international rules-based system that emerged from the ashes of World War II and benefitted so many nations over the past 70 years. Codified by a series of norms, standards, rules and laws, adherence to this system remains the best possible way for all nations – large and small – to continue to rise peacefully, prosperously and securely. As I have said before in the context of dubious behavior in the South China Sea, my concern is that after many decades of peace and prosperity at sea, we may be seeing the leading edge of a return of “might makes right” to the region.

There is no need for this kind of instability to become our shared destiny. How Indo-Asia-Pacific nations employ naval forces to pursue economic interests at sea matters greatly. It is well known that a safe and secure maritime environment is a precondition for the free flow of international trade and investment. When nations employ naval forces on behalf of protectionist policies or to enforce maritime claims in questionable ways, the entire region suffers. When nations employ naval forces to deter aggression and protect freedom of the seas on behalf of all military and commercial vessels, the entire region is valued, becoming more stable, secure and prosperous. Both trends exist in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region, but I am most encouraged by many positive Indian Ocean examples.

As a start, the Indian Ocean region has relatively few maritime disputes compared with other parts of the Indo-Asia-Pacific. In recent years, two longstanding maritime border disputes on either side of the Bay of Bengal were resolved peacefully in accordance with international law. In 2012, the International Tribunal for the Law of the Seas (ITLOS) decided a maritime border dispute between Bangladesh and Burma that benefitted both nations and marked the first time ITLOS adjudicated such a case.

A different organization, the Permanent Court of Arbitration, resolved Bangladesh's western maritime border dispute with India two years later. India demonstrated regional leadership by agreeing to arbitration with its smaller neighbor and by accepting the ruling. I'm hopeful that other Asian nations involved in protracted maritime disputes will consider this example and pursue similar approaches and settlements in forums recognized by international law as viable options for peaceful resolution.

The typical challenges we face in the Indian Ocean favor cooperation over competition as well. Maritime security threats such as piracy, smuggling, violent extremism and other types of illicit activities currently represent the most immediate and widespread challenges to the rules-based system at sea. Natural and manmade disasters are another pressing demand signal for naval forces. At the same time, there is always the potential risk of longstanding rivalries between neighboring states flaring up or of maritime competition between extra-regional states taking an aggressive turn inward.

Though national differences are inevitable, Indian Ocean naval forces operating independently and multilaterally are net security providers in the face of these maritime security challenges. When the Bangladesh Navy and Coast Guard push piracy, smuggling or other illicit activities out of inter-coastal waters in the Ganges River basin or from their exclusive economic zone in the Bay of Bengal, these naval forces are not only enhancing security for Bangladesh but also creating stable conditions for international maritime trade and investment. Further west, the same is true for ongoing multinational patrols to eradicate piracy off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden. More than a decade ago, combined relief efforts during the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, and more recently, extensive search efforts led by the Royal Australian Navy for the missing commercial airliner MH-370 are positive examples of regional navies working together in response to tragic events beyond the resources of any single nation.

Regional leadership plays a key role in promoting this maritime cooperation. India is undoubtedly the traditional core of the Indian Ocean region and a key guarantor of regional peace, security and prosperity. A responsible power, India is also an example for other Indo-Asia-Pacific nations to emulate both in how they exercise their authorities and responsibilities in exercising power. The Indian Navy participated in all of the multinational missions I have mentioned and continues to escort merchant ships transiting the Gulf of Aden on behalf of both Indian and international commerce.

Responsible leadership is also evident in efforts to develop regional security architecture. Modeled after the Western Pacific Naval Symposium (WPNS), IONS began in 2008 as an Indian Navy initiative that reflected great foresight. As an inclusive meeting for Indian Ocean Chiefs of Navy to foster maritime cooperation, IONS also provides opportunities for non-Indian Ocean nations to participate. Along with the Royal Australian Navy's Seapower Conference, Singapore's Shangri La Dialogue and Sri Lanka's Galle Dialogue, IONS has become a critical node in the regional security architecture that engages multiple Indo-Asia-Pacific nations. U.S. Navy participation in these venues is all the more important given the positive maritime leadership examples being demonstrated in the Indian Ocean region compared with other parts of the Indo-Asia-Pacific.

Based on our shared democratic values and maritime heritage, it's no surprise that the Indian and U.S. navies are natural partners committed to protecting freedom of the seas and promoting the international rules-based system. Like the many defense milestones achieved in the U.S.-India strategic partnership in 2015, such as the Joint Strategic Vision, Defense Framework and Defense Trade and Technology Initiative, our naval relationship has also flourished last year. A series of senior leadership visits, aviation exchanges, and port visits culminated in the most complex convening of exercise Malabar to date, including participation by the Japan Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF). 2016 will continue that momentum with U.S. Navy participation in the Indian Navy Fleet Review in Visakhapatnam and with the Indian Navy's return to the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise hosted by Pacific Fleet in Hawaii.

Multilateral exercises are another potential growth area for Indian Ocean cooperation. In addition to Malabar, Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) Bangladesh wrapped up its fifth convening off the coast of Chittagong last October, and we continue to look at ways to make select phases of the 2016 CARAT exercise series multilateral. Also in 2015, the Bangladesh Navy became the first South Asian navy to observe the Southeast Asia Cooperation and Training (SEACAT) exercise in Singapore. The Indonesian Navy's biennial Komodo exercise is another promising example of multilateral cooperation on behalf of shared interests across the Indo-Asia-Pacific. Along with these examples, Australia's strong leadership in the Indian Ocean region certainly deserves more than a mention in passing which I hope to address in the Q&A.

With that, I'd like to again thank CMSI and the University of Adelaide for hosting this event and I look forward to your questions.