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Western Pacific Naval Symposium
Padang, Indonesia
April 14, 2016
As delivered

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this morning. I'm here on behalf of my Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral John Richardson, and am grateful for the opportunity to represent the U.S. Navy here today. He sends his best regards, regrets he could not be here himself, but looks forward to seeing many of you at the International Sea Power Symposium he is hosting in September of this year at our Naval War College in Newport Rhode Island.

Looking around the room, I see many familiar faces from my travels in the region. I have been looking forward to attending the Western Pacific Naval Symposium for some time now. It is one of those critically important venues where so many naval leaders gather to discuss key issues.

That dialogue is already playing out in other Indo-Asia-Pacific conferences, such as the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium hosted by the Bangladesh Navy, and will continue at the upcoming Shangri La Dialogue in Singapore. This evolving regional conference architecture speaks to the increasing demand signal for multilateral fora to address shared priorities and concerns at sea in a transparent, inclusive way.

I pass my special thanks to the Indonesian Navy and to the Kasal for hosting WPNS and bringing us together in Padang. As the world's largest archipelagic state, and third most populous democracy, Indonesia spans across the Indian and Pacific oceans, sources of prosperity for the entire Indo-Asia-Pacific region. Its people have sailed, traded, fished and patrolled these waters for millennia.

Being in Sumatra today, I naturally recall Indonesia's traditional role as a regional maritime leader which dates back centuries to the renowned kingdom of Srivijaya, which was part of a continuum of Malay entrepots that included the kingdoms of Melaka, Johor, Brunei and Riau. As in modern Indonesia, this rich seafaring heritage still shapes the modern states of Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore, all of which continue to thrive based on unimpeded access to the sea. It is interesting to note, given their historical regional maritime experiences dating back centuries, none of them presume a monopoly on their traditional trade routes and fishing grounds, instead embracing the international rules and laws that have enabled the rising tide of prosperity that has benefited the entire region.

As the guarantor of national maritime security, the Indonesian Navy understands the direct relationship between naval presence and national prosperity, and how this relationship extends more broadly through multilateral cooperation at sea.

A national challenge may be piracy one day, or a natural disaster the next, but either could also disrupt neighboring countries. Exercise Komodo, which continues this week, is just the latest manifestation of Indonesian-led efforts to put the dialogue and protocols developed at conferences like WPNS and IONS into practice at sea. Komodo is now part of a growing network of multilateral exercises. It includes ASEAN's ADMM-plus series, Singapore's IMDEX, the FPDA serials, Malabar, CARAT and RIMPAC just to name a few. These exercises also reflect the increased demand signal I mentioned before, and with that, an implicit rejection of unilateral assertiveness at the expense of other regional countries.

Increased participation in multilateral venues like WPNS and IONS, and in exercises like Komodo and RIMPAC, promotes the concept of an inclusive Indo-Asia-Pacific neighborhood. It's a neighborhood held together by shared values and common rules, not by national rules applied in international space. It is a neighborhood in which exclusivity and hierarchy have no place. We are all locals here, and there are no outsiders or subordinate states among the Indo-Asia-Pacific nations. We were all given equal, common voice after World War Two, regardless of geographic size, economic strength, heritage, culture, form of government, or military power. Permanent reminders of the costs of that war are scattered throughout the Pacific, and I am reminded locally thinking of the USS Houston and the Royal Australian Navy's HMAS Perth at rest on the bottom of the Sunda Strait.

That common voice and inclusive issue resolution process came from an equally inclusive series of conventions that followed World War Two which ultimately led to the international rules-based order that has benefited so many nations – large and small – for the past seventy years.

Unfortunately the application of the rules-based order is not as uniform across the Indo-Asia-Pacific as it used to be. At IONS, I remarked that if I stood in the Straits of Malacca, and look east into the Western Pacific, I saw protracted maritime disputes and a lack of transparency in contested waters.

Looking west, into the Indian Ocean, I saw neighboring nations, large and powerful such as India, as well as smaller and more vulnerable, such as Bangladesh and Myanmar/Burma, working together in international fora to resolve similar types of disputes peacefully and promote cooperation at sea. By admitting longstanding disputes to international institutions, and agreeing to honor the outcomes, these nations demonstrated the responsible application of a 70 year old model, forged in war, tested by time, modified by consensus decisions, and adjudicated in accordance with international law.

If I now, here today, re-center my orientation from the Straits of Malacca to the center of the Indian Ocean, I am struck by what I now see looking west.

There the situation deteriorates rapidly in parts of Eastern Europe, the Levant and the Maghreb. Ongoing turmoil in Syria, Libya and Ukraine reflects the resurgent challenges of international terrorism, failed states and cross-border armed incursions.

These challenges extend to the vital waters of the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea, seas which enabled the prosperity that region has enjoyed for so long. Instead of transporting prosperity these seas now serve to transport sources of regional instability that erode governance structures and challenge the structure of international communities of interest.

There is no need for this instability and disorder to become our shared destiny in the Asia-Pacific neighborhood. As I mentioned before, a shared seafaring heritage remains a major source of prosperity throughout this region.

Most of the nations involved in territorial disputes in the Western Pacific have clarified their claims based on natural land features in accordance with international law. We must avoid revanchist cartography. We have all seen that model fail before, which is why we should collectively ensure international law prevails throughout the region.

A mechanism to ensure that happens is to acknowledge through our collective action that our navies have an obligation to enhance cooperation through greater inclusivity, transparency and development of maritime protocols. For example, launching the CUES initiative at WPNS in 2014 and the subsequent endorsement of CUES at IONS were major steps towards reducing the overall [risk of] miscalculation at sea.

U.S. Navy ships have used CUES repeatedly to communicate intentions safely and professionally since then with regional navies. We do hope that the CUES protocol will expand to coast guards and other maritime forces that share the seas, and I am encouraged by the acceptance of the French proposal to establish a CUES working group to refine this initiative further based on inputs from all WPNS countries.

Just before arriving here in Padang I visited my good friend First Admiral Norazmi in Brunei. During my visit I had the honor of an audience with his Majesty, the Sultan of Brunei. We discussed his Majesty's personal initiative for an ASEAN hotline, which in his view would serve to reduce tensions and decrease the likelihood of conflict if there were to be an incident between ASEAN countries. I could not agree more.

His Majesty's leadership on this issue is another example of how countries can make meaningful contributions to both reducing the potential for, as well as preventing, miscalculations by increasing transparency and understanding.

In that same vein of expanding the power of cooperation, I also strongly commend the expansion of WPNS and recognizing the value of an inclusive approach by the granting of observer status to Colombia and the United Kingdom. The UK and the Royal Navy have longstanding ties to the Indo-Asia-Pacific with thousands of UK citizens living in the region. Colombia will bring added value to WPNS not only because they are a Pacific nation, but by also bringing an experiential understanding of the importance of maritime security into the WPNS dialog.

I note that both the Royal Navy and the Colombian Navy are regular participants in RIMPAC. I have already talked about the value of multilateral exercises, but I would be remiss for not taking this opportunity to highlight RIMPAC as an excellent example for Indo-Asia-Pacific nations to practice sharing the seas in an inclusive and transparent way. For all those who will attend RIMPAC, I look very much forward to welcoming you to Hawaii this summer.

In closing, I would like to commend the Indonesian Navy for the exceptional hosting of the WPNS 15. I have found the experience professionally and personally rewarding, informative and enriching. Thank you.