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Good evening ladies and gentlemen, it's an honor to be here with you this evening. I'd like to thank the Los Angeles World Affairs Council for hosting this event and for inviting me to share a few thoughts with you regarding maritime security in the Pacific.

So I'm mindful that when we talk about "Securing the Pacific," each of us may have a different definition of what that looks like. With that in mind, I thought it would be helpful to begin by providing a baseline of who we are in the U.S. Pacific Fleet and what we do in the dynamic region that is the Indo-Asia-Pacific.

The U.S. Pacific Fleet area of responsibility encompasses 100 million square miles, from Antarctica to the Arctic Circle, and from here on America's West Coast to roughly the midpoint of Indian Ocean. That's nearly half the world's surface. Headquartered in Pearl Harbor, we have two subordinate fleets, Third Fleet headquartered in San Diego, and Seventh Fleet, forward deployed in Yokosuka, Japan, as a rule headquartered aboard the Seventh Fleet Command ship, USS Blue Ridge. Nearly 60 percent of U.S. Navy assets are assigned to the Pacific Fleet, which translates to 200 ships and submarines, 1,180 aircraft; and more than 140,000 Sailors and Civilian Sailors that stand ready to respond whenever and wherever crisis may occur.

The strategic framework within the Indo-Asia-Pacific region is complex. The region we operate in is dominated and defined by the maritime domain. It is home to the three largest economies in the world, along with 10 of the 14 smallest; 15 of the 20 world's busiest container ports; 7 of the world's 10 largest militaries; five of the world's declared nuclear nations; and more than 50 percent of world population. Seven of the top 15 U.S. trading partners border the region, and billions in trade passes through the South China Sea annually, including \$1.2 trillion in U.S. trade alone.

When you consider that 90% of world trade is moved by sea, which remains the most cost-effective way to move raw materials and goods around the globe, it is easy to understand that a safe and secure maritime environment is a precondition for the free flow of international trade and investment. In an increasingly interconnected global economy, many nations across the globe, including the U.S., have vested interests in the resources and trade that transit these waters, and attendant interests in maintaining stability. Of note, the vast majority of internet traffic does not travel by satellite through space; it travels by cable through the seas. That's an example of freedom of navigation most don't consider. This is the context within which I consider maritime security in the Indo-Asia-Pacific.

It is worth noting that security for security's sake is not very useful. Rather, the value of security is that it sets the conditions for stability, which in turn makes space that enables prosperity to grow.

With that in mind, what I see as the most pressing maritime challenge facing the Indo-Asia-Pacific today is the targeted erosion of the rules-based international system that has lifted millions out of poverty and benefitted so many nations for the last 70 years. This system emerged out of the ashes of World War II, created by consensus and conciliation among nations that sought a more hopeful future in which all nations, large or small, are afforded the opportunity to reap the collective rewards of cooperation.

Economies throughout the Indo-Asia-Pacific continue to flourish today because of our mutual respect for – and adherence to – norms, standards, rules, and laws that have produced the longest era of peace and prosperity in modern times. But on land and at sea, that prosperity, rightfully belonging to all nations regardless of size, strength, or wealth is being challenged by some nations that seem to prefer a return to a world order in which might-makes-right was the dominant mindset guiding international affairs.

This is apparent in the South China Sea, where the use of the mechanisms in place for resolving disputes or advancing national claims is being rejected in favor of an emerging alternative to the global order, one which leverages national power to coerce neighbors to the reluctant acceptance of unilateral actions.

Disputed maritime claims in the South China Sea have existed for decades, but for the last 8 years, China has claimed absolute sovereignty over a large swath of the South China Sea encompassed by its self-proclaimed nine-dashed line. That assertion has come at the expense of several other states with competing claims in those waters.

Admiral Harry Harris, Commander U.S. Pacific Command offered this assessment regarding China's actions: [QUOTE] "China is using its military and economic power to erode the rules-based international order . . . [they] are building up combat power and positional advantage in an attempt to assert de facto sovereignty over disputed maritime features and spaces in South China Sea . . . where they are fundamentally altering the physical and political landscape by creating and militarizing man-made bases." [END QUOTE]

What seems apparent by these actions is that China intends to apply national law in international space in an effort to restrict freedom of navigation, a condition that has an impact well beyond just the maritime domain. If states are willing treat control of the global commons at sea as up for grabs, there is little reason for confidence that global commons within other domains like space and cyber are any more protected. At the heart of freedom of navigation discussions is the principle of unfettered access to the shared global spaces for all nations. China is challenging that principle across all elements of national power characterized by the acronym DIME: Diplomatic, Information, Military, and Economic.

In the diplomatic element, China has refused to seek multilateral solutions to conflict resolution in the South China Sea. Instead, it insists on bilateral negotiations in which China's size, strength, and economic power serves to tilt the diplomatic landscape heavily in its favor.

In the information element, China seeks to control information exchange and restrict the potential for dissent. There are numerous examples of this, like the national impingement on the use of Virtual Protected Networks, or VPNs, a policy which abrades an individual's rights to share their information privately and freely, and more widely limits international exchange in a way that has far-reaching effects. In another example, a relatively new Chinese law requires all foreign companies to keep servers intended for serving Chinese users within China's borders. This requirement puts personal and professional information, business proprietary information, and even banking information at risk of monitoring and theft, with no guarantees that Chinese actors will be dissuaded from doing so.

In the economic element, when South Korea announced it would deploy a Theater High Altitude Air Defense system to defend against North Korean provocation, the Chinese government has used unofficial sanctions against neighboring South Korea's auto, retail, and tourism industries to debilitating effect. In another expression of abusive economic power, large Chinese fishing fleets have repeatedly encroached on the exclusive economic zones of other sovereign nations, in complete disregard to international law, and ransacked resources that are intended for that coastal nation's economic benefit. The most recent example of this occurred just a few weeks ago, when a 200-ship Chinese fishing fleet was intercepted in the Galapagos Marine Reserve within Ecuador's EEZ while poaching 330 tons of fish, including many protected species. This is not how those who have embraced the long established rules based order would describe a Great Power relationship.

In the military element, China reinforces its excessive territorial claims with coercion and threats. Largely ignoring a ruling against Chinese excessive maritime claims in a decision that was released last year by the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague, China continues to patrol disputed waters while denying access to other nations. China enforces its excessive claims using its greatly enlarged and modernized Coast Guard in conjunction with a well-resourced and prolific maritime militia to deny lawful access to the sea and freedom of navigation in ways that are calculated to fall below the threshold of provoking conflict. Various media reports of those interactions relay accounts of foreign mariners being harassed, intimidated, and in some cases, having their vessels confiscated and destroyed in encounters with Chinese law enforcement patrols. This raises more questions than answers regarding China's commitment to international law at sea and increases anxiety and uncertainty across the region. Smaller nations facing this growing preponderance of military and para-military force just beyond their shores have little recourse but to acquiesce within such a coercive system.

Not surprisingly, the climate of uncertainty created by these kinds of actions at sea has elicited a response. Nations are transferring ever larger shares of national wealth to develop more capable naval forces to defend their access to the global commons and assert their own national ambitions, thereby raising the risk of increased regional tension, instability, and costly miscalculation.

Each nation gains security in concert with other nations, and we all stand to lose when one nation chooses to abandon those principles that supported our collective growth. In contrast, freedom of navigation operations serve to reassert the inviolability of shared spaces and reaffirms America's commitment to upholding the rules-based international system. Accordingly, U.S. forces will continue to fly, sail and operate throughout the globe in accordance with international law, to ensure that access to global commons afforded to all nations is not superseded by the ambitions of one.

This is not to say that American and Chinese interests are locked in spiral of escalation that will inevitably lead to military clashes. On the contrary, our goal remains to convince China that its best future comes from peaceful cooperation, meaningful participation in the current rules-based international order, and honoring its international commitments. But the United States won't allow the shared domains to be closed down unilaterally, so we'll cooperate where we can, but remain ready to stand on principle where we must.

Unlike China, North Korea has not reaped the collective benefits of participation in the rules-based order. Nighttime satellite imagery shows the stark contrast between a darkened North Korea and the bright lights of its prosperous neighbors, underscoring the benefits of participation in the rules-based order and the consequences of self-imposed isolation. That isolation is chosen at the expense of the North Korean people who suffer in misery as their government continues to prioritize its self-destructive pursuit of nuclear weapons over the well-being of their populace.

Faced with the results of their rejection of the rules-based system, the Kim regime irrationally lashes out at the global community with inflammatory threats of nuclear attack and misguided choices that defy logic and explanation. Within the last three weeks, North Korea has conducted several missile launches in violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions, including two midrange ballistic missile launches across the Japanese island chain. Then, earlier this month, they carried out their latest and largest nuclear test. These provocations only serve to increase the international resolve to counter the DPRK's prohibited activities.

The concert of nations continues to roundly condemn North Korean actions. Both the European Union and ASEAN have publicly denounced North Korea's actions as threats to international peace, security, and stability, as have many other regional and global voices. Even those nations with diplomatic and commercial ties to North Korea, like Russia, Indonesia, and the United Arab Emirates, have called for Pyongyang to end its provocations. Last month's unanimous United Nations Security Council resolution imposing new sanctions on the Kim regime underscores the extent to which North Korea has chosen to isolate itself from the international community.

That isolation need not continue, and I leave it to political leadership to determine the course of action that will bring Pyongyang to its senses. Should diplomacy fail, U.S. Pacific Fleet stands ready if called, to provide overwhelming combat power in defense of our nation and our allies. 67 years ago, Pacific Fleet ships dominated the waters surrounding the Korean Peninsula; today's Pacific Fleet continues that heritage of victory.

In the wake of recent tragedies onboard USS Fitzgerald and USS John S. McCain, some adventurist states might feel there is an opportunity to take advantage of a perceived moment of weakness. Please allow me to dispel that notion altogether. Allies, partners, and friends can be reassured knowing that America's Pacific Fleet remains strong, with a host of highly-capable forces available, like Carrier Strike Groups, Up-gunned Expeditionary Strike Groups, AEGIS ships, the world's most advanced submarine force, and aircraft like the F-35, P-8, and the MH-60R. Our sailors are exceptionally trained and our platforms have longer reach, are more interconnected, and possess more lethality that has ever been fielded before.

Along with like-minded allies, partners, and friends, U.S. Pacific Fleet will continue to wield this power responsibly to provide security . . . for the sake of stability . . . to enable the ever rising tide of prosperity that continues to sweep across the Indo-Asia-Pacific region.

Thank you.