

Keynote Address to the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium

Senator The Hon. Michaelia Cash

Perth, Wednesday 26 March

Vice Admiral Griggs, Chief of Navy and incoming Chair of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium; Rear Admiral Pillay, representing the Chief of Navy for South Africa and outgoing Chair; Chiefs of Navy, Heads of Coastguards and Marine Police from around the Indian Ocean; Honoured Guests; Ladies and Gentlemen;

Welcome to Perth, Australia's gateway to the Indian Ocean.

I want to welcome you here today on behalf of the Government of Australia and the Minister for Defence, Senator David Johnston, whom I am representing today. As a great supporter of both Navy and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium construct. He really wishes he was the one delivering this speech today but he has pressing parliamentary and government business in Canberra which could not be avoided.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as a proud Western Australian, I can think of no better a place for Australia to begin its chairmanship of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium.

The founder of modern Perth was a naval officer, Captain James Stirling, who was married to a daughter of one of the directors of the British East India Company, so the nexus between navies, maritime forces and global maritime trade has always been at the heart of this city.

Here in Western Australia we have been fortunate enough to have great demand for the minerals and resources we produce. There has been huge effort to develop these resources, from the oil and gas of the North West Shelf, to the iron ore of the Pilbara, to the wheatfields which surround Perth. Most of the production of Western Australia is exported to the world via the Indian Ocean. And I know that this pattern is reflected elsewhere, with manganese, coal and wheat from South Africa, iron ore and chemicals from India and petroleum products from the Middle East. It should therefore come as no surprise to this audience for me to suggest that the Indian

Ocean Region is an area of growing strategic and economic importance, to Australia, to the region and to the world.

Today I'd like to focus specifically on the importance of trade and the sea lanes of communication that are the arteries of the global economy within the context of the Indian Ocean region. Behind me is a slide of the Indo-Pacific prepared by the Department of Defence. It shows many aspects of the region, but one of the most immediately obvious is the range of sea lanes which criss-cross the oceans.

I'll just leave this slide up as I talk, as I think it is an excellent reminder of our maritime region and how the maritime trading system links our region with the rest of the world.

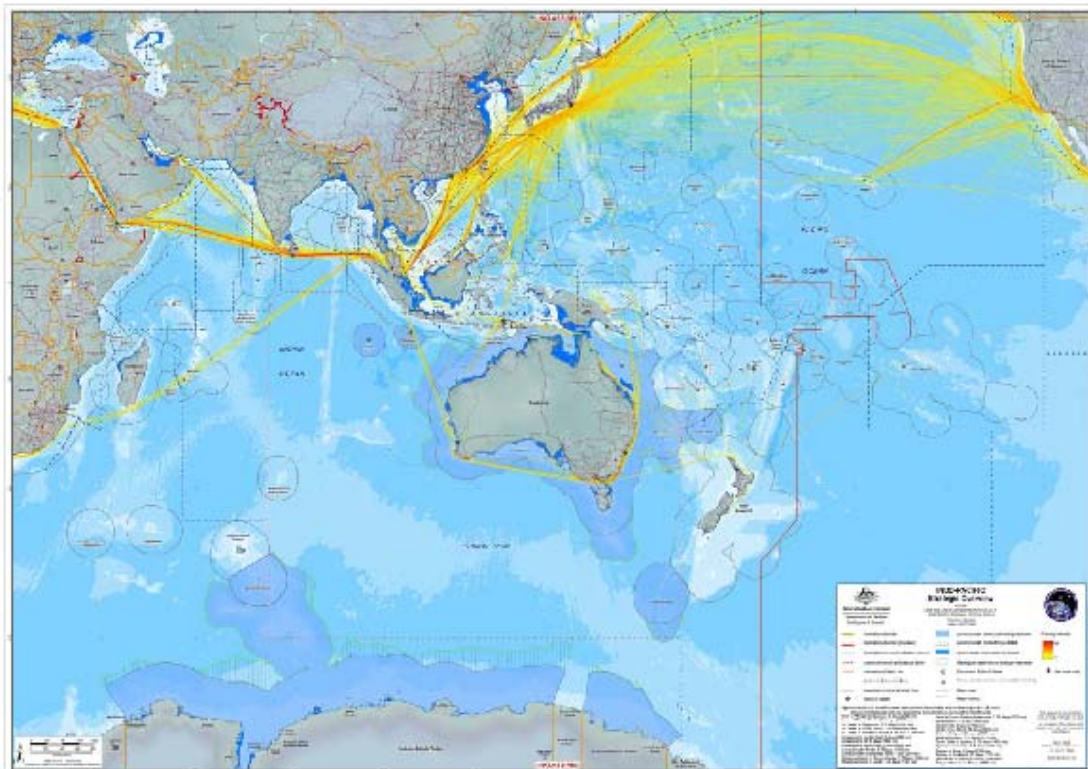


Figure 1: An Overview of the Indo-Pacific Region

One of the things which stands out most strongly in this slide is the so called “Iron Highway” linking the Bab- El Mandeb, the Straits of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca. Roughly three-quarters of the world’s oil and about half of all containerised trade uses the Iron Highway, along with some of the most significant iron ore and natural gas trades. These trade flows are vital to the national economies of all of the

countries represented here, as well as to our major trading partners, China, Japan, the Republic of Korea, the United States to name just four.

But the Iron Highway is not just an express route from Europe and the Middle East to North Asia and the Americas. Demand within the Indian Ocean states themselves is also a major factor of the Iron Highway. The Iron Highway has many “on ramps”. As just one example, India’s projected economic growth over coming decades alone will change the Indo-Pacific region’s energy and trade balance and reinforce the Indian Ocean region’s position as a destination in its own right as well as a transit point for regional trade flows. The ability to trade is important to all the nations of the Indian Ocean. The importance of these trade flows cannot be underestimated. Nor can the shared interests of all Indo-Pacific states in ensuring that these flows are secure, delivering economic benefit for all. As we know, the costs of a breakdown of security could and would reverberate across the Indo-Pacific region.

That says to me that arrangements such as this Indian Ocean Naval Symposium are key to the region’s future. We’ve got very important work to do here and that should not go unstated.

If the trends we have observed over the last decade continue, and I have every reason to think they will, then it seems to me that the ability, within and from the Indian Ocean, to access the global maritime trading system has become one of the most important security challenges for all of the nations in the Indian Ocean region. Any disruption to the global maritime trading system is thus a matter of critical importance to governments across this region. The role that navies, coastguards and marine police around our region perform in securing our access to, and the ongoing security of, the global maritime trading system, is thus fundamental to each nation’s security.

This is, of course, where you all - Chiefs of Navy, Heads of Coastguards and Maritime Police, and your organisations - have such an important role to play. Quite simply, you are the people who can and do preserve good order at sea. Without good order at sea, the ability to trade is compromised – it becomes less reliable and more expensive. If that happens, the economic potential and the long term stability and security for all our nations are diminished.

Today, and into the future, the region faces many challenges. The most broadly publicised of these challenges is, of course, piracy. But there are many others, including arms trafficking, proliferation, terrorism, extremism, fisheries exploitation, environmental challenges and many others.

I am pleased to note that much good work has been done collectively to address some of these challenges. The work of the Combined Maritime Forces, the multi-national naval partnership is one great example of the work being done in the Indian Ocean. Covering the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, Gulf of Aden, Gulf of Oman and parts of the Indian Ocean, the Combined Maritime Forces have delivered great success in their efforts to defeat terrorism, prevent piracy, encourage regional cooperation, and promote a safe maritime environment.

Australia currently has the guided missile frigate HMAS *Darwin* deployed to the region – our 57th individual ship deployment to the Middle East since 1990. Australia and Pakistan have the honour to be the current commanders of Combined Task Force 150 and 151 respectively. And I know there are many nations here which also contribute to the work of the Combined Maritime Forces – France, Malaysia, Pakistan, Seychelles, Thailand, the United Kingdom, United States, Yemen. And many more here that do similar work through either the EU or NATO constructs or contribute independently.

Turning to another exemplar of the security challenges that this region faces, it may surprise you all to note that the eastern Indian Ocean alone is home to about 45% of the world's fishers. So when we look at regional fisheries, even without considering industrial deep water fishing, we are looking at an issue of fundamental importance to hundreds of millions of people. While much of this obviously occurs within national waters and exclusive economic zones, fish are not confined by lines drawn on charts and maritime borders are porous, so the food-security issue is underpinned by the cooperative enterprise of good order at sea.

But good order at sea does not simply happen by itself. It takes concerted, consistent and cooperative efforts to ensure the freedom of the seas for those who go about their lawful business and to suppress and disrupt those who would use the sea for purposes which are against our common interests. I do not underestimate the time

It will be important for the future security and prosperity of the nations you represent, that we be honest about the state of our regional security architecture. Whilst there have been some significant developments in recent years, not least of all the maturation of this Indian Ocean Naval Symposium and the evolution of the parallel Indian Ocean Rim Association, the security architecture of the Indian Ocean region is not as mature as that of other regions and we need to work on this.

I think there is a need to better develop this security architecture and in this context I think that you in this room have a key role to play.

There are three key areas that I would urge you to look at during your deliberations over the next few days, and going forward. These are your business practices; the structured manner in which you as a group look at addressing regional challenges; and, how we can work together collaboratively to build regional security capacity through practical action. I won't go into the detail of these challenges, because I know that Admiral Griggs plans to do so shortly, and I would hate to steal his thunder. But I truly believe that through efforts in these areas we can best advance the security architecture of our region. Through forums such as this, I think we could see that the region's seas are not something to keep us apart; they are the place where we find new needs and new areas of cooperation.

I do not expect that it will be easy but I do think the effort is worthwhile and strongly believe it will be in the best interests of all our nations to make the effort. The habits of cooperation that are developed from working together are habits that can have positive benefits far beyond their immediate aims. Though our region has been and will likely always remain a diverse one, I think our mutual interests in good order at sea, and our mutual interests in protecting our collective ability to trade, are powerful forces which bring us together. Your presence here, your continued support of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium is to me a positive sign and I thank you for that.

It is an honour and a great responsibility for the Royal Australian Navy to be the Chair of Indian Ocean Naval Symposium – a responsibility I know that is taken very seriously. I welcome the contribution everyone will make to this Symposium.

Once again, on behalf of the Australian Government, I have great pleasure in welcoming you to Australia and, as a Western Australian, I have great pleasure in welcoming you to our state capital Perth. I hope you enjoy your visit and have a very productive Symposium.

Thank you.