



Chief of Navy Australia Address

IMSC Panel 2 Discussion Address 04 May 2023

Enhancing Peace and Stability to Emerge Stronger from Uncertainty.

As delivered.

Good morning distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is a pleasure to join you here today.

I'd like to thank the Singapore Ministry of Defence for the invitation to speak and I would like to acknowledge the professionalism and friendship of the members of the Singaporean Armed Forces which have once again been on display this week. Sean [RADM Sean Wat, CNV RSN], my personal gratitude to you and your team for taking such great care of us.

It is an honour to join my distinguished counterparts on this panel. Each of them are leaders and Ambassadors for the respective countries and I also look forward to hearing their perspective on our topic today. Whilst we represent four very differently sized Navies, but we have so much in common.

Taking the opportunity to come together and talk freely, and listen to each other, shows how much our respective nations value the opportunity to increase our understanding, and it shows a willingness to partner with respect and transparency in the interests of a peaceful and a prosperous shared future.

Singapore, in many respects, is the very heart of our maritime region. The Indo-Pacific, our region, a maritime domain, is rich in resources and for centuries it has been shaped and influenced by the waters that surround and connect us.

The world's oceans are global superhighways that facilitate the economic interdependence which now characterises the global economy.

Billions of people across the world rely upon the natural resources drawn from or transported on the oceans for their livelihood and for their future.

Even more take for granted that unseen in the depths of the oceans lie the data cables which are the arteries and veins pumping and transferring data which animates the modern world.

Safe and secure shipping lanes, and intact underwater sea cables and pipelines, are the arteries fuelling economic prosperity and political stability across the region. And it has been thus for nearly 80 years.



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This is no different for my island nation. This global connectivity - enabled by the international system of near universally accepted norms - is the lifeblood that animates Australia's \$2.3 trillion dollar economy. Maritime security is, to paraphrase a previous speaker, an existential issue for our maritime nation.

The 'rules based order' is credited with providing good order at sea in the collective interests of all nations. It is a system underpinned by a complex array of treaties, laws and norms that for almost 80 years have been iterated and improved for the benefit of all. It has been almost universally supported.

In my lifetime freedom of the seas has been the default condition, unquestioned and unthreatened.

Military professionals, know that this has also been underpinned by naval forces like ours partnering together as a global force for maritime security and peaceful trade.

As this role is performed largely well out of sight of the public, and often far from our respective shores, it has been easy to overlook the fact that the rules based order is something that needs to be maintained, valued and nourished. It developed slowly, and ultimately allowed hundreds of millions of people be lifted from poverty in recent decades. Importantly, it was informed by, and endorsed by, all members of the Indo-Pacific.

However, today, there are complex changes playing out on, and under, the world's oceans. The Maritime domain has once again become the frontline for strategic conversations between nations.

It is in this context that I am considering today's topic of *Enhancing Peace and Stability to Emerge Stronger from Uncertainty*.

The last four years have certainly provided much uncertainty. The Ukraine conflict has provided us numerous lessons and reiterated the importance of logistics, the value of partnerships, the criticality of rapid learning and adaptation, and national resolve and resilience, and the necessity to swiftly integrate new technology.

Concurrently, in just the last few years, COVID, and the grounding of *Ever Given* which forced the closure of the Suez Canal in March 2021, has sharpened community focus in our region on the importance of the maritime domain and it has increased our understanding of how interconnected our world is, and how vulnerable we are to global supply chain disruption.



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I would like to say that we are emerging from this period of uncertainty, but I am a realist and the reality is that despite conflict in the Ukraine, it is the Indo-Pacific that really garners my attention. As we have already heard today, the Indo-Pacific is characterised by uncertainty.

I think Professor Sarah Payne, from USN War College, shines light on an opportunity. Sarah highlights:

There is only one win-win solution. It is to share the oceans, trade in peace, and continue to hash out universal rules that we can all live by.

Many of us, including myself, thought this had been resolved through the development of UNCLOS.

We live today in a region characterised by military modernisation and expansion, renewed great power competition, and where the global rules based order is not being enforced, not being adhered to by all nations.

Australia desires a region characterised by international law, acceptance of and adherence to the rules based order and where the sovereignty of all states – big and small – is equally respected.

Respect. This to me is key to a future of *peace* and *prosperity* in our region.

We all have an interest in a stable, prosperous region, where nations' actions are constrained and enhanced by mutual respect, adherence to rules, and not determined by economic weight or willingness to use force or coercion.

How does Naval Power enhance peace and security?

From Australia's perspective, Naval Power has three dimensions – Diplomacy, Deterrence and Defence. They are not unique to Australia's Navy, indeed, they are timeless naval missions.

With respect to diplomacy, the employment and deployment of our naval forces is a visible expression of government priorities and national identity. You can read much about a nation's priorities by the way their fleet is employed.

Today in Singapore I am joined by the 192 Australians, the crew of HMAS *Toowoomba*, they are here representing our nation; a visible representation of just how much we value this conference and our



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partners in the room. And we value this dialogue, we value the opportunity to participate with you all, as we value the rules based order.

We are reliant on each other, and we are reliant on the oceans connecting us to the world, and that is one of the reasons that for the 122 years that the Royal Australian Navy has been in existence, we have been operating across this region. In many respects, where we operate and how we operate has not really changed in over 100 years. We have always been interested in, committed to and dedicated to partnering with respect and transparency with our neighbours across the Indo-Pacific. I believe the most powerful force, the most powerful potential, of our naval capabilities is our ability to build trust with friends and neighbours, to partner together, to act with common purpose, respect and transparency for the benefit of all.

AUKUS was mentioned earlier, and Australia does enjoy a very deep, historic and purposeful relationship with the United Kingdom and the United States. These strong historic partnerships do not, in themselves, define us. As an Indo-Pacific nation connected to Asia, resident in Asia, our Government has made it clear that we resoundingly seek our security as part of the region, as part of Asia, with our neighbours, and with our friends. For our Navy this means working to ensure freedom of access to the sea, something we all depend upon for a peaceful and prosperous future. In my view, that can only be achieved through diplomatic engagement, partnerships for the rules based global order and transparency of intent.

Back to that issue of AUKUS, I submit that I am probably one of the most transparent naval Chiefs in the room when it comes to the development of our naval force. You can see what we are going to be doing with our submarine capability over the next 30 years and it is now a matter of public record. And you can see what we are doing with our Australian Defence Force as a result of the Defence Strategic Review which was announced last Monday. I think transparency of intent with regards to military capability is a foundational pillar on which trust is built. And if trust is the key, which we heard in the last panel, to stabilising the situation and dealing with the uncertainty in the region, then I submit Australia has just laid down a blueprint that others may consider following.

I hope to see the three themes of respect, partnership, and transparency characterise our region over the coming years, just as Singapore's International Maritime Security Conference has com to characterise, in many respects, Singapore's determination to partner transparently with the region.



I would like to, once again, thank the Republic of Singapore Navy, and the Singapore Ministry of Defence for convening this panel and providing Australia an opportunity to participate and give us a voice. I thank my fellow panellists for their contribution in advance. And to everyone, Australia looks forward to partnering with everyone with respect and transparency in the interest of peace and prosperity for our time.

Thank You.