

Speech to the 2012 Galle Dialogue

Vice Admiral Ray Griggs, Chief of Navy Australia

13 December 2012

The Role of Navies in Collective Prosperity

- Foreign Minister Professor Peiris, Defence Secretary Rajapaksa, Chief of the Defence Staff, Service Chiefs, in particular my counterpart Vice Admiral Colombage, Commander of the Sri Lankan Navy, Excellencies, heads of delegations, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen – Good morning.
- Firstly can I, on behalf of all international delegates, thank our Sri Lankan hosts for arranging this important dialogue and in particular for providing me an opportunity to make a short presentation today. There is one thing that we can not do too much of and that is to talk about key issues relating to maritime security. They are issues that affect all of us and only through a transparent dialogue can we shine a light on key issues and navigate our way through the broad range of challenges that we face and must conquer.

- Today I would like to talk to you briefly about the role of navies in collective prosperity. I know that the term prosperity means different things to different people. In the context of this presentation though it is the prosperity that we all experience to varying degrees through the global maritime trading system that is my focus. For island nations like Sri Lanka and Australia the dependence on that trading system for our prosperity and much of our security is absolute as Admiral Colombage alluded to with the reference to Kipling's quote. It is critical too for archipelagic nations such as Indonesia and Philippines. And of course It is no less relevant for continental powers such as the US, China and India.
- We all share in the prosperity that a free and effective global maritime trading system brings. Traditionally though individual national interest has been the key driver in the efforts to keep the system open. There have been times when the system has been maintained by a dominant power, where that power's national interest has had positive spin offs for others.
- I would contend though that the complexity of the global maritime trading system is now such that no one power can assure their own interests across the entire system. We all have a responsibility to play

our part, no matter how localised or how small that part is, in what I think is clearly a collective endeavour to manage a highly connected and interdependent system.

- Nowhere is that collective responsibility more important than in the Indian Ocean, the trading lifeline that connects key markets and carries vast amounts of raw materials that power our economies.
- International maritime trade is of course a competitive activity, but it relies on the provision of good order at sea to enable this competition to occur. Good order at sea is effectively a public good, produced cooperatively by governments from all nations, for the collective prosperity of all.
- For this reason, I whole heartedly endorse the theme of this year's dialogue, *Strategic Maritime Cooperation and partnerships to face the future with confidence*. It is only with this cooperation and partnerships that we can face the future with confidence.
- The quest to maintain good order at sea is in many ways deceptively simple. We all benefit from it and it makes sense we should all contribute to it. But the cost of putting trained crews in safe, capable vessels is high and governments rightly look to achieve security while using available resources wisely. Furthermore, the great advances in

maritime transportation have changed perceptions. Maritime communications are fundamental, but largely out of sight of the people who depend on them. Many people, particularly in Australia, do not have a good understanding of the importance of maritime trade to their daily lives.

- So we must continue to explain the importance of maritime trade to the prosperity of all nations. In doing that we also need to continue the dialogue with our respective populace around the navy's role in underpinning the effective operation of maritime trade and importantly making that link between what navies do for this trading system, a nation's prosperity and .
- Regretably many of us face the challenge that our national strategic debate being fundamentally driven by a deeply entrenched land centric discourse. I do need to stress that I do not use the term land centricity in a pejorative way. While this land centricity is understandable at one level, it has always intrigued me why it is, that even in the most maritime of countries, that navies and the maritime narrative that explains what they do, cannot penetrate the consciousness of our publics.

- In the Australian example I think our big issue has been the concepts we are trying to use to connect with people. Talk of Sea control and SLOC protection has not worked well, but exposing people to the impact of the disruption of the maritime trading system and the consequent impact on their individual prosperity seems to be an effective way to grab attention.

The importance of the maritime environment to collective prosperity

- I think it is important to recognise that the value of national assets in the maritime environment has increased greatly in the last forty to fifty years. And I use the term “national assets” in a specific way. It includes not just maritime trade, but also national maritime infrastructure.
- Humanity’s increasing technological capacity has enabled us to do much, much more in the maritime environment and there is much greater permanent and pervasive coastal and offshore infrastructure. The most obvious example is the offshore oil and gas industry, which is important for many Indian Ocean countries – the North West shelf for Australia, Sumatran fields for Indonesia, Burmese fields and the growing potential of East African fields, such as those off Kenya.

- But oil and gas infrastructure is only part of the story – fish farms are assuming greater importance as the demand for food continues to grow and the stocks of wild fish are found and fished with ever greater efficiency. Alternative energy generation, through offshore wind farms and tidal and wave energy installations, is likely to continue to grow. And the importance of maritime biodiversity is increasing, not just for food production, but also for tourism and the ongoing health of the marine environment as a whole.
- I have spoken of trade, the massive volume of trade that passes along the Iron Highway as but one example is crucial to all nations around the world, not just those that border the Indian Ocean. This volume, enabled by modern containerised transport, underscores just how pervasive maritime trade is for national economies. International trade has always been important, but the number of individual connections, which link millions of companies and customers around the world who are all dependant on just in time methodologies, has made national economies much more sensitive to any disruption to the flow of exports an imports.
- One final aspect we should not forget is the importance of maritime communications to the functioning of the internet. The huge benefits

from internet communications are possible through the growing network of oceanic submarine cables – yet another aspect of the importance of the maritime environment to national prosperity.

- In my view, these trends are only likely to continue.

The role for Navies in contributing to collective prosperity

- At one level, it would seem this is a very simple issue – navies and coastguards ensure good order at sea. But as we all know, what seems simple in theory, is very complex in practice.
- In the first instance there is the simple question of scale - no single maritime focused force can achieve this mission, there must be cooperative arrangements and contributions across the whole system. And of course this mission cannot be achieved solely with the military instrument of national power – something the Australian Government has made clear in its recent White paper on *Australia in the Asian Century*.
- We do things well in many areas when our collective interests are directly engaged. The challenge is to do them well when, on the surface at least, those interests might not be so obviously engaged.

- The counter piracy effort around the Horn of Africa is a great example of navies operating collectively to combat a major challenge. We have seen through this activity that there is no one way to operate and that a collective approach can take many forms but be none the less effective.
- In the Australian context, we are currently dealing with the challenge of people smuggling and the irregular arrival of people by sea. With over 14,000 arrivals this year, it requires a very high rate of effort for us domestically to effectively and safely manage this challenge. That effort is of course not just ours as the Defence Secretary highlighted already this morning, The Australian Government realises that what is required to break the people smugglers wicked business model is a collaborative, regional approach. There are many countries playing a vital role in helping to curb this scourge. A number of navies are also involved, none more so than the Sri Lankan Navy who are proving that taking a collective and system wide view of the issue can be very effective. We are very appreciative of this support.
- We also see this in combating illegal fishing where the Australia Navy has worked over the years with Indonesia, many of the Pacific Island

nations, France and South Africa to ensure that our natural resources are not illegally exploited.

- So as we look at how navies contribute to good order at sea, how can we move from analysing the problem to forging a practical way forward. I think above all we should focus on those aspects of maritime operations that better enable us to cooperate. In my mind they are principally: to be able to communicate; share both information and some basic operating procedures to prevent issues following unalerted encounters at sea; to understand each others capabilities and we need to appreciate, in general terms at least, how our national interests complement and reinforce or even compete with each other.
- You do not need to be an Indian Ocean rim nation to have a legitimate interest in maritime security in the Indian Ocean just as you don't have to be Indonesian, Malaysian or Singaporean to have a legitimate interest in the Malacca Strait or to be Omani, Iranian or from the UAE to be concerned about the Straits of Hormuz.
- In essence, we cannot predict what uses our governments may direct of us, but we can know the means by which we will cooperate to

achieve the aims we are given. So it is by focussing on the means of cooperation that navies can best contribute to collective prosperity.

- I think this focus on the means of cooperation has another important outcome. By increasing understanding, we achieve greater transparency. We cannot afford for this understanding and transparency is held not just at senior levels, it must also extend to the middle ranking and junior operational levels as well. We can only achieve this through interaction, through exercising and discussion.
- As a result, navies can reduce the chances of misunderstanding or error during times of tension between nations. This goes a long way to helping preserve peaceful relations between nations, which are also fundamental to collective prosperity. That is why such institutions as the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium are critical to building an effective maritime security architecture in the Indian Ocean region. That is why I am looking forward to becoming the chair of IONS in March 2014 when Australia hosts the next conclave in Perth, Western Australia. Our aim is to build on the leadership and momentum provided by former chairs as we take IONS forward.
- Likewise, I think activities such as this dialogue are crucial in helping to build understanding and cooperation and I thank the Sri Lankan

Navy for their efforts to organise the dialogue and their willingness to allow me to contribute to the discussion.

- Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your attention.