

Beyond the Horizon: The Royal Australian Navy in the Indian Ocean

Address by Vice Admiral Ray Griggs, Chief of Navy

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Good Morning; the Honourable Stephen Smith, former Minister for Defence and board member of the Perth USAsia Centre, Gordon Flake, CEO of the Perth USAsia Centre, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you Stephen for the kind introduction, and the opportunity to speak today in what is a very important week for Perth and a very important week for the navies, coastguards and marine police forces of the Indian Ocean region.

Can I start by acknowledging the Noongar people, traditional owners of this land on which we meet and pay my respects to elders both past and present and to other indigenous Australians present.

I am delighted to have been asked to speak here at the Perth USAsia Centre and to talk about our Navy in the Indian Ocean. I suspect that I will speak more about the Indian Ocean more than the Navy. I have titled today's talk *Beyond the Horizon* for a reason. Like many Chiefs of Navy around the world, operating beyond the horizon as we all do makes for a tough time selling your message about the utility of this particular instrument of national power.

Beyond the horizon too often means out of sight out of mind. I jokingly say that our national anthem really needs to be modified from girt by sea, to girt by beach as that is about as far to seaward as the average person thinks about maritime issues – if its not Nippers or the odd yacht race forget it.

What we have not done well, both in Navy and nationally, is to articulate our maritime narrative. Michael Wesley, who many will know of, says we are a country lacking a maritime imagination. Professor Mike Evans, one of our best military strategic thinkers, describes Australia as a maritime nation with a continental culture.

Today I will attempt to shape part of the maritime narrative by talking about the Navy in the context of the Indian Ocean and indeed talking about the Indian Ocean region itself. In doing that I will be talking about the Indian Ocean region and Navy's role within it using two key constructs, the notion of the Indo-Pacific region and in a more specialised way the Indian Ocean as part of the global maritime trading system.

The Indo-Pacific is a very useful term from my perspective and, I believe, a far superior construct than Asia-Pacific. Why do I say that? Primarily because it reinforces the focus on these two massive waterways that connect our economies. It puts the sea and what it represents for this essentially maritime region front and centre. I will focus on the military instrument of national power with a particular focus on the maritime dimension of that. Some caveats, if I may, so I provide you a clear view of where I am coming from and also so we minimise the intellectual rock throwing around what I say

in the Question and Answer. I fully acknowledge that talking about just one instrument of national power is fraught; national power can only be effectively utilised if it is done so in a coordinated, coherent way using the best combinations of those instruments that are available and, more importantly, are appropriate for the circumstances that are faced. Second, when I use the term maritime I do not mean naval. I use it in the most expansive way possible; in a military sense it's about the maritime dimensions of all three service environments and of course it must more broadly capture the whole of government, and in fact whole of nation aspects of what happens in, around, on, under and over the sea.

It might be worthwhile to have a brief historical look at the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) in the Indian Ocean. One thing that strikes you when you look at the historical aspects of the RAN in the Indian Ocean is the very strong strategic understanding that Governments from Federation have had about its importance. This has no doubt been helped along by the fact that 9 of the 51 Ministers for Defence since Federation have been from the West. From Sir John Forrest to the current Minister there has been a regular head of the Defence portfolio who inherently appreciate the importance of the strategic geography of this part of the world.

Since the formation of the RAN in 1911, the idea of our enduring connection to the Indian Ocean has been present – we are certainly no strangers here, one of the reasons I reject assertions from journalists and others when they sometimes imply the Indian Ocean is an emerging concept to Navy. Last year we marked the centenary of the 1913 arrival into Sydney of Australia's first fleet. The passage from Britain, where most of these ships were built, took them across the Indian Ocean. The fleet's flagship, HMAS *Australia's* first contact with this country was by radio, at a range of over 3000 nautical miles, when she made contact with the Perth wireless telegraphy station on 10 September 1913; and her first port of call was Albany, when she anchored in King George Sound nine days later.

A little over a year after that, following a campaign to seize German possessions around what is now Papua New Guinea, the Navy was back in Albany, to escort the first ANZAC convoys carrying the Australian and New Zealand land forces to the European theatre. It was part of the escort for that convoy, the cruiser *Sydney*, which found and destroyed the German raider *Emden* off the Cocos-Keeling Islands in the Navy's first single ship engagement and our Navy's first 'victory at sea'. We will celebrate the centenary of that engagement later this year.

The 1914 Anzac convoy was the first of many convoys in both world wars that Navy escorted through the Indian Ocean; they were Australia's link to the war in Europe and without which we could not have assisted our allies. The 1942 campaign to defend against the Japanese advance through South East Asia and the South West Pacific was just as much an Indian Ocean campaign as anything else; the ability to trade and operate in the Indian Ocean was crucial to the campaign and the Indian Ocean was the furthest extent of Japanese advances in the west and south west. Indeed 28 RAN ships hold campaign and battle honours for the Indian Ocean and sadly nearly a thousand men of the RAN lie forever in Indian Ocean graves.

The Indian Ocean featured again during the Cold War, particularly after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, when the RAN was deployed on independent presence patrols in the north west Indian Ocean. And since 1990, the RAN has conducted 57 individual ship deployments back to the north west Indian Ocean to the Middle East Area of Operations – HMAS *Darwin* is the current ship deployed, her sixth such deployment.

From 1997, we have been heavily involved in border protection operations from the south western extremity of our sovereign territory around Heard and McDonald Islands to our northern and north-western coasts, in the Arafura Sea and Indian Ocean. The Navy's patrol boats have, for five decades, routinely operated on our Indian Ocean coast since the declaration of the Australian Fishing Zone. Today of course HMAS *Success* is commanding the surface response segment of the Southern Indian Ocean search for Malaysian Airlines Flight MH370.

I would suggest that there are very few people serving in the Navy today who have not served on operations or been deployed to the Indian Ocean. And I suspect that if you go back through our history, you will find very few periods where it was very different.

So what are the key features of the Indian Ocean that are relevant to the RAN and how it operates today? Firstly it is a remarkably diverse region, huge variances in cultural, ethnic, economic, legal and demographic composition. While we have spent a lot of time operating in this region, I venture to say we do not understand a lot of that diversity particularly well. That presents particular operational challenges and only something that continuing interaction can overcome.

While being diverse it is also dominated by a single regional power. India looms large in any discussion of the Indian Ocean and sits in the most dominant of positions from the perspective of maritime geography. It has a very strong sense of its role in the Indian Ocean, a genuine desire to play a positive shaping role in the Indian Ocean going forward, and has the force structure to make a real difference. It was great to see the Indian Navy participating in the International Fleet Review in Sydney last year and even more importantly in the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus Expert Working Group (EWG) on Maritime Security exercise before the Review. This was an important step. Presently we are working towards the realisation of a Bilateral Maritime Exercise in late 2015. This was something that was agreed last year when Indian Defence Minister Antony visited his counterpart Stephen Smith both here in Perth and in Canberra. Indian maritime power projection capabilities are impressive and they continue to grow. The Indian Navy is also more active in South East and East Asia, giving practical expression of the look east policy.

In naval force structure terms it is also a very diverse region with a significant mix in the size, shape and complexity of maritime forces from large navies to small marine police forces. This makes applying any templated approach to interaction very difficult.

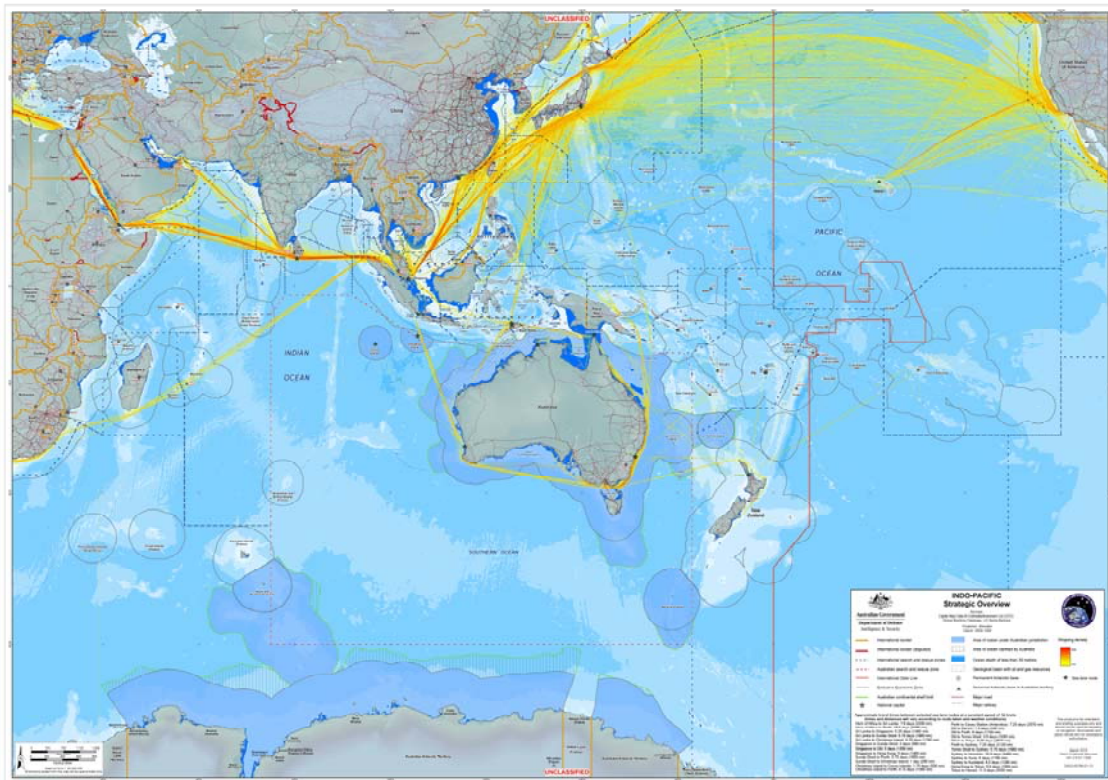


Figure 1: Overview of the Indo-Pacific Region

In the Indian Ocean, trade and trading routes are so much more concentrated than they are in the Pacific or the Atlantic. I think this map shows the picture of this concentration very well, the 'Iron Highway' as that central strip across the Indian Ocean is often described, is a significant global maritime trading artery. With a concentrated strip like the 'Iron Highway' it means the region is dominated by several maritime choke points: the Bab Al Mandeb, Hormuz, Malacca, south of India and south of Sri Lanka (off the coast of Galle) are either physical or virtual choke points. This presents some positives in the sense of the ability to control key parts of the system, but it also means that both traditional and non-traditional threats can be focused for maximum effect.

Another key feature of the Indian Ocean is the active presence of extra regional players. I think it's fair to say that the presence of extra regional powers is a point of enduring sensitivity in this region. It is in many ways a unique aspect for the Indian Ocean. Of the key players in the Pacific over the last century only the British would be considered as extra regional, but I suspect that might be debated in London. In the Atlantic there have not really been any key extra regional players involved in conflict there. In the decolonisation phase post WW2 both the British and French maintained robust presence in the Indian Ocean and as the Cold War took hold we saw, for the first time in any strength, both US and Soviet presence. US presence has remained constant but highly focused on the extreme north west of the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf itself.

In more recent years, as the world grappled with the Piracy challenges off the Horn of Africa, it provided the opportunity for more extra regional actors to establish a regular presence. The Chinese Navy has sent around 15 counter piracy task groups over the last few years. Apart from the contribution to the counter piracy effort, this has been very valuable for them as they learn to regularly operate at significant distances from their national support base; experience that in my view has been instrumental in the Chinese Navy task groups that have been able to quickly deploy to the southern and northern Indian Ocean as part of the MH370 search.

We are also seeing a re-emergence of the Russian Pacific Fleet and I would not think it will be long until Vladivostok based units are regularly deploying into the Indian Ocean again. I note that several Russian ships will participate in the Indonesian led Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Exercise Komodo at the end of this week. As several of the larger Indo-Pacific regional players have become net energy importers, the need to assure their energy security has led to their growing presence in the Indian Ocean region. What does it all mean? For me it is that the extra regional presence issue will continue and generally will be for very legitimate reasons.

There is of course no regional maritime security architecture to shape the context of any regional response. You could go far enough to say there is no sense of an Indian Ocean region per se anymore than there is any sort of Pan Pacific grouping. In a region that is lacking a strong security architecture, this relative vacuum is something that I think does need to be addressed. The Indian Ocean Region Association (IORA) is the successor organisation to the Indian Ocean Region Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC). It has traditionally had a very low key focus on security matters but that is changing as IORA is revitalised. Australia took chairmanship of IORA late last year for the next two years.

By happy coincidence I am about to take Chairmanship of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) this week as we gather for our biennial meeting of Indian Ocean naval chiefs. While the two are only loosely connected and have different memberships and aims, both IORA and IONS have a vital role to play in moving the development of an Indian Ocean security structure forward.

Trade is clearly at the heart of maritime issues in the Indian Ocean. The fusion of military strategic and economic strategic perspectives borne out by trade and the need to either protect it or at times interdict it has been an enduring feature of naval thinking over centuries.

I have been arguing for some time now, that the ability to trade, the ability to connect with the global maritime trading system is Australia's economic centre of gravity. Protecting that ability to trade, to get commodities and manufactures out and to bring in other things, above oil else, liquid fuels, is, in my view, one of the ADF's most important tasks. Our offshore infrastructure is also a significant component of our ability to trade. It is worth noting that by 2017, one of the largest ever man-made objects will be moored in the Browse basin – Shell's Floating LNG Processing Plant, the Prelude, which is 488 metres long, 74 metres wide and displaces about 600,000 tonnes.

The size, value and significance of our offshore infrastructure are only going to increase.

As you look at Australia's contribution to global maritime trade, it becomes apparent that not only do we make a relatively big contribution, but that trade to and from Australia is readily identifiable in many circumstances and over a large area. The bulk trades which are carried on predominantly north-south routes are quite distinctive and easily identified for much of their passages, as are some of the petroleum supplies on which our economy depends. In other words, our strategic centre of gravity **is not** located around Canberra, not in the Pilbara, nor Sydney, nor Melbourne. Our strategic centre of gravity **is** located at sea, potentially far from our coastline; and if it were to have a geographic representation I would suggest the Indian Ocean is probably its hub.

Obviously neither the Navy nor the ADF are large enough to protect all Australian related trade, all the time, all around the world. The certainty we need for Australia's continued prosperity is underpinned by Good Order at Sea, as it allows the safe, efficient and reliable operation of the global maritime trading system on which we depend, and on which every trading nation depends. No single nation has a force capable of doing this; the answer lies in effective collaborative and cooperative practices. What we need to be able to do is to have an ADF that has range, endurance and the persistence to protect that ability to trade with our friends, partners and allies. So this lies at the heart of Navy's Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) mission. But, we have other important roles of course.

We have distinct power projection capabilities which we have variously exercised. The power projection spectrum spans HADR (soft power projection) through non-combatant evacuation and stabilisation operations through to higher-end combat scenarios. With our new amphibious capability we, for the first time, have a true full spectrum power projection capability. I have alluded to asset protection, particularly offshore infrastructure protection. This is a vital role, which not only involves the ADF, but Border Protection Command and industry itself. It also includes fixed port infrastructure, which brings in additional jurisdictions.

Then there are our constabulary roles, particularly sovereignty protection that currently manifests through our border protection missions. This role is centuries old and I do find it amusing to listen to those who insist it is not a role for navies. At the end of the day though, it's all about balance. With a small force we have to work that little bit harder to be good at the roles I have articulated and even better at integrating with others where this makes sense.

There is no doubt that there is much for us to contribute to in the Indian Ocean. Hopefully you are convinced when I say that Navy takes our role in this region seriously. It is after all a region of crucial importance to us all.