

**STATEMENT OF  
ADMIRAL HARRY B. HARRIS, JR. U.S. NAVY  
COMMANDER, U.S. PACIFIC COMMAND  
BEFORE THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
ON MARITIME SECURITY STRATEGY IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION  
17 SEPTEMBER 2015**



Chairman McCain, Senator Reed, and distinguished members, it's my honor to appear once again before this committee. I am pleased to be here with Assistant Secretary Shear to discuss the Asia Pacific Maritime Security Strategy.

The United States is a maritime nation and the importance of Asia-Pacific region to our Nation's security and prosperity cannot be overstated. Almost 30 percent of the world's maritime trade – \$5.3 trillion – transits the South China Sea annually. This includes \$1.2 trillion in ship-borne trade bound for the United States. The Asia-Pacific region is critical for our nation's economic future.

For decades, this region has remained free from major conflicts, allowing the United States and other Pacific nations, including China, to enjoy the benefits of its vast maritime spaces. However, the security environment is changing, potentially placing this stability at risk. Rapid economic and military modernization and a growing demand for resources have increased the potential for conflict. Peacetime freedom of navigation is under pressure.

If not handled properly, territorial and maritime disputes in the East and South China Seas could disrupt stability throughout the region. Claimants to disputed areas routinely use maritime law enforcement and coast guard vessels to enforce their claims while nominally keeping these issues out of the military sphere. While no country appears to desire military conflict, tactical miscalculations can lead to strategic consequences.

The United States does not take sides on issues of sovereignty with respect to these territorial disputes, but we do insist that all maritime claims be derived from naturally-formed land features in accordance with customary international law, as reflected in the Law of the Sea Convention. The United States also emphasizes the importance of peacefully resolving maritime and territorial disagreements in accordance with international law, and we oppose the use of intimidation, coercion, or aggression. The U.S. believes every nation, large or small, should have the opportunity to develop and prosper, in line with international laws and standards. If one country selectively ignores these rules for its own benefit, others will undoubtedly follow, eroding the international legal system and destabilizing regional security and the prosperity of all

Pacific states. Part of PACOM's role in the Asia-Pacific Maritime Strategy will be ensuring all nations have continued access to the maritime spaces vital to the global economy.

International recognition and protection of freedom of navigation is vital to the world's economy and our way of life. To safeguard the freedom of the seas, USPACOM routinely exercises with allies and partners, executes Freedom of Navigation operations, and maintains a robust presence throughout the region. These activities help build partner capacity to contribute to the region's security, enhance relationships, improve understanding of shared challenges, and message the U.S.'s resolve.

The Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy outlines our plan to safeguard freedom of the seas, deter conflict, and promote adherence to international law and standards. It reaffirms our commitment to the principles found in UNCLOS. In accordance with this strategy and in pursuit of these goals, Pacific Command's forces will fly, sail, and operate wherever international law allows, while continuing to strengthen the relationships and rule of law that enabled the peaceful rise of every nation in the region.

A fundamental factor in the feasibility of this new strategy has been the Rebalance to the Pacific. The Rebalance, initiated almost four years ago by President Obama, set the conditions for the implementation of this strategy. The Rebalance strengthened treaty alliances and partnerships, increased partner capacity and cooperation, improved interoperability, and increased security capabilities in the region. DoD's new maritime strategy capitalizes on the momentum of the Rebalance and continues with its initiatives. In executing the new maritime strategy, PACOM will continue to:

- Employ the most advanced and capable platforms as they are deployed or assigned to the Pacific.
- Use the forward presence of military forces to engage allies and partners and deter aggression.
- Reinforce internationally accepted rules and norms including the concepts of freedom of navigation and innocent passage.

- Train and exercise with allies and partners to increase interoperability and build trust.
- Implement risk reduction mechanisms such as the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea and the U.S.-China Confidence Building Measures to help prevent accidents and tactical miscalculations.
- Continue deepening alliances and partnerships through strategic efforts in places like Japan, Korea, Australia, Thailand and the Philippines, while building new and deeper military relationships in places like Singapore, India, Vietnam, and with other like-minded friends and partners.

Thank you for your continued support to USPACOM and our men and women in uniform, and their families, who live and work in the vast Asia-Pacific region. I look forward to answering your questions.