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Galle Dialogue

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Thanks, Admiral Wijegunaratne for that kind introduction. In addition to being an expert in asymmetric naval warfare and special boat operations, the Admiral is also a well-known Rugby player – definitely a man you’d want on your side! So I’m pleased to call him friend.

I’d also like to express my gratitude to the Sri Lanka Navy for its assistance in an emergency evacuation of a Sailor from USS Hopper to a hospital in Colombo last September. And my deep thanks to both the Sri Lanka Navy and the Sri Lanka Air Force for help in facilitating the urgent medical evacuation of another US Sailor, this time from USS Makin Island, to a Colombo hospital just this past weekend.

The prompt professionalism and care shown by the Sri Lankan Armed Forces saved lives. The assistance provided in these emergencies is deeply appreciated.

I also appreciate the time and energy by all those involved in putting this important event together. I’d specifically like to acknowledge:

- **President Sirisena and Prime Minister Wickremesinghe, thank you for your hospitality;**
- **Sri Lankan leaders;**
- **Ambassador Keshap, your amazing work here in Sri Lanka, with both the people and the government, is building the foundation for deep and lasting bilateral ties between our two nations;**
- **Field Marshall Fonseka, fellow flag and general officers;**
- **Your excellencies, distinguished guests;**

Ladies and gentlemen, it's truly an honor to be here with you at the Galle Dialogue, which has become one of the premier venues to discuss maritime security issues in the Indian Ocean.

As Arthur C. Clarke, a longtime resident of Sri Lanka, was fond of saying: 'How inappropriate to call this planet Earth, when it is clearly ocean.'

Colombo is a beautiful modern city that reveals the ancient heritage of Sri Lanka around every corner. I'm thrilled to have the chance to get to know the people of this country better, as I work to deepen our military-to-military relationship.

And more generally speaking it's great to be here in the Indian Ocean part of the vast Indo-Asia-Pacific region. I'm sometimes asked why I

use the term ‘Indo-Asia-Pacific’ instead of the more commonly used term ‘Asia-Pacific’ when describing this critical region.

My answer is simple. ‘Indo-Asia-Pacific’ more accurately captures the fact that the Indian and Pacific Oceans are the economic lifeblood linking the Indian Subcontinent, Southeast Asia, Australia, Northeast Asia, Oceania, and the United States together. Oceans that once were physical and psychological barriers that kept us apart are now maritime superhighways that bring us together.

The Indian Ocean matters to the United States. Sri Lanka matters to the United States. And I believe that the United States matters to Sri Lanka.

As the first American four-star officer to visit Sri Lanka in almost a decade, I’m pleased to see the strengthening of security ties between our countries – making my description of this strategically significant region even more apt.

I’ve heard it said that there are three things that one must take into consideration when evaluating strategic significance: location, location, and location. As State Minister of Defence Wijewardene just said, Sri Lanka is a strategically important location – truly the pearl of the Indian Ocean on one of our planet’s most critical trade routes.

You can't get from Hormuz to Malacca – or from the Red Sea to the South China Sea – without going near Sri Lanka. This east-west trade route links the global economy. Thanks to unimpeded sea lanes, the Strait of Malacca sees over 25 percent of global oil shipments each day, and the South China Sea sees \$5.3 trillion in annual global trade. Modern life everywhere depends on this region's stability.

But location without stability and security is a hollow place.

That's something to keep in mind as we discuss the theme to this year's Galle Dialogue, 'Fostering Strategic Maritime Partnerships.'

Indeed, I submit that the rules-based international order – or what I've been calling the 'global operating system' since I stole that phrase from my good friend Danny Russel – has been underwriting prosperity throughout the Indo-Asia-Pacific for the last seven decades.

And although the focus of this conference is the maritime domain, the system serves to protect all of the shared domains – maritime, air, space, and, now, cyber.

Peace and prosperity are made possible through adherence to the principles that are the foundation of the global operating system –

freedom of navigation and overflight for all civilian and military vessels, unimpeded lawful commerce, and the peaceful resolution of disputes.

These principles are not abstractions, nor are they subject to the whims of any one country. They are not privileges to be granted or withdrawn. They make sense because they have worked so well and for so long.

So my message today is a simple one: To continue along a prosperous path, we must expand partnerships among like-minded nations to uphold the rules-based global operating system. This helps build what US Defense Secretary Carter calls a principled security network.

This network ensures that all nations, big and small, have equal access to the shared domains. And the global operating system is a rising tide that can lift all nations who choose to enter it and to maintain it.

Sri Lanka is a welcome and significant contributor to the system. For example, Sri Lanka is conducting UN peacekeeping operations in Lebanon, Mali, Central African Republic, and South Sudan. And I believe that Sri Lanka could be a convening power to discuss freedom of navigation in the Indian Ocean. Your voice matters.

That's especially important considering this year's first port visits to Sri Lanka by US Navy ships since 2011. This validates the strengthening of

military ties – a benchmark event in the Sri Lanka-US bilateral relationship.

In March, USS Blue Ridge, the US 7th Fleet Flag Ship, hosted President Sirisena right here in Colombo's port. Its success paved the way for subsequent port visits by three other US ships this year – USS New Orleans, USS Frank Cable, and most recently the USS Somerset which visited Trincomalee just a few days ago.

Significantly, USS Somerset and her embarked Marines conducted a theater security cooperation exchange with the Sri Lanka Navy and Marine Corps. This exchange focused on honing basic military skills and small boat operations that could support humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions.

These engagements are clear demonstrations of our commitment to Sri Lanka and to this region.

Expanded cooperation with the United States – cooperation that benefits both countries in meaningful ways – will be matched with Sri Lanka's efforts to continue on its path of reconciliation and transparency after three decades of tragic conflict.

Indeed, American history tells of our own struggles after civil war – as President Abraham Lincoln spoke of the need ‘to bind up the nation’s wounds.’ So I understand the difficulty – and the enormity – of this task.

The people of Sri Lanka have spoken, demonstrating the power of democracy to overcome difficult times and to ensure peace and prosperity. Sri Lanka has adjusted its course away from civil war and isolation, to one of reconciliation and inclusion.

Under the leadership of President Sirisena and Prime Minister Wickremesinghe the people of Sri Lanka have witnessed the restorative effects of democracy in action.

I personally admire the tough steps taken by the people of Sri Lanka and your leaders. Your continued commitment to justice and the rule of law will bring expanded cooperation with the United States.

And one area of cooperation is in maritime security. Sri Lanka and the United States, as well as India and Australia, rightfully take maritime security in the Indian Ocean seriously as a result of the significant challenges that exist in this region to threaten stability and prosperity – challenges like piracy, terrorism and illegal trafficking in all its bad forms.

As Admiral Columbage has said, global terrorism is on the rise in the contemporary world. The ungoverned global common of the ocean has been exploited by various terrorist organizations. I'm particularly concerned about ISIL's influence in this region. We must also be ready to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and ensure unencumbered and safe navigation in the region's vital shipping lanes.

Maritime security begins with overcoming what I call sea blindness by improving maritime domain awareness. To gain maritime domain awareness, you must have an accurate operating picture, coupled with an understanding of what you are seeing, coupled with a means to act upon what you're seeing.

I believe we must share information between navies and law enforcement, at both the national and regional levels, to build a common operating picture. This common operating picture will help us understand what those many vessels at sea are doing – whether they are military or merchant ships lawfully operating in the exclusive economic zones, or commercial vessels potentially engaged in drug smuggling, illegal fishing or trafficking in persons.

Understanding the situation allows leaders to make informed decisions on how best to respond. A regional common operating picture,

developed from interoperable communications and collaboration between nations, will foster a foundation for combined responses to maritime challenges. The key is information sharing. I realize that this is an ambitious goal that requires a lot of hard work and treasure.

But as Albert Einstein once said that, ‘In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity.’ Such is the case with building maritime domain awareness – a difficult task but one worthy of our effort.

Ladies and gentlemen, US Pacific Command, or PACOM, will turn 70 years old this January 1st. Since the end of World War II, we’ve represented America by fostering strategic partnerships with like-minded countries to enhance collective security. And we are strongly committed to doing this with Sri Lanka.

The US values our growing principled security network in the Indo-Asia-Pacific. And I value engagements like this one – the Galle Dialogue – where we can collaborate and share ideas.

Api Eketah Vede Kerahmoo – we will work together. So I look forward to continuing conversations of how we can deepen the military relationship between Sri Lanka and the United States, as we all work together to keep this region secure, to keep this region prosperous, and to keep this region peaceful. Thank you very much.