

The U.S. Pacific Commander's Perspective on the Asia-Pacific Rebalance

A Special Open Forum Breakfast with

Admiral Samuel J. Locklear III
Commander of the U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM)



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On February 8, 2013, USINDO and the U.S. Embassy in Jakarta hosted a Special Open Forum breakfast and discussion with the Commander of the U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM), Admiral Samuel J. Locklear III in Jakarta. Admiral Locklear discussed the importance of the Indo-Asia-Pacific, the U.S. rebalance in the area, and the challenges of the security environment. This brief is USINDO's summary of his speech and of the Q and A's. For the text of the Admiral's speech, click [here](#).

The Significance of the Indo-Asia-Pacific

Admiral Locklear outlined key points demonstrating the importance of the Indo-Asia-Pacific: As an area that encompasses over half the earth's surface and over half of its population, the Indo-Asia-Pacific is incredibly diverse culturally, economically, and geo-politically. Given its size and diversity, using the term "region" to describe this area tends to oversimplify the significance of the security challenges we face.

The Indo-Asia-Pacific is the most militarized area in the world, containing seven of the world's ten largest standing militaries, the world's largest and most sophisticated navies, and five of the world's declared nuclear nations. This area also contains five of the United States' seven treaty allies, the three largest economies in the world, and seven of the ten smallest. As well, the Indo-Asia-Pacific contains the most populous nations, including the three largest democracies and the world's smallest republic. It has nine of the world's ten largest ports and the busiest sea lanes in the world.

Challenges to the Security Environment in the Indo-Asia-Pacific

Admiral Locklear noted some significant challenges in the Indo-Asia-Pacific that, if not managed properly, have the potential to stress the security environment significantly. Among them are: the effects of climate change, natural disasters, transnational non-state threats such as pandemics and terrorists, historic and emerging territorial disputes. Other key aspects include instability on the Korean Peninsula, the rise of China and India as global economic powers, the lack of a single governance mechanism such as NATO to help manage relationships and provide a framework for conflict resolution.

It is important to remember that a strong security environment consists of interwoven security relationships shaped by history and shared interest, driven by our economic interconnectedness. It can be challenging when nationalistic tendencies divide us and nations seek to preserve their own access to shared domains or shift military resources to suit their needs. Admiral Locklear stressed that we must work together to create a security environment that is resilient.

The U.S. Asia-Pacific Rebalance

Admiral Locklear explained that the U.S. "rebalance" is not just a security or defense-centered policy. Like the U.S.-Indonesia Comprehensive Partnership, it is intended to encompass all aspects of the U.S. government's efforts, which include diplomatic, economic, political, and military. It is also not a strategy of containment, but one of collaboration and cooperation intended to affirm to the people of the Indo-Asia-Pacific that the United States is a Pacific nation that remains committed to peace and prosperity for all.

Indonesia in the Emerging Security Environment

Since President Yudhoyono proposed a Comprehensive Partnership between Indonesia and the United States in 2008, significant progress has been made in our military relations, such as collaboration in the areas of maritime security and disaster risk reduction. An excellent example of the expanding relationship between the two countries is the effort to combat threats to the flow of goods through the Strait of Malacca and other key global trading and shipping straits. Admiral Locklear praised Indonesia as a vibrant democracy, emerging economy, and highly competent military power, following its decade of reform.

Indonesia and the U.S. will be playing key roles in upcoming international meetings. In September 2013, they will be facilitating a strategic level multilateral table-top exercise for the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM-Plus), an exercise designed to identify political issues and the gaps generated across agencies and ministries. Also, Indonesia and the U.S. were designated as co-chairs for both the Asia-Pacific Intelligence Chiefs Conference and the Experts Working Group for ADMM-Plus in 2014. Admiral Locklear views these opportunities as further examples of the deepening relationship between the U.S. and Indonesia.

Admiral Locklear suggested that, as its capabilities grow, the Indonesian military build on its tradition of contributing forces to U.N. peacekeeping operations. He recognized this as another area where the Indonesian and American militaries can collaborate more closely and increase their level of inter-operability.

Crisis Prevention for a Resilient Security Environment

Both the U.S. and Indonesia have a significant interest in improving their ability to respond to and mitigate the effects of climate change and natural disasters, as both countries have large populations that are vulnerable to these threats. To address these threats, Admiral Locklear stated, working on disaster response alone is no longer the answer. With the presence of these challenges, disaster risk reduction and preparation are required to create more resilient societies. Disaster risk reduction includes mitigation, planning, and recovery that should be started at the community level. At the national level, there is the necessity to forge relationships between and among the nations of the Indo-Asia-Pacific to address these shared risks.

USPACOM, together with the Indonesian government and ASEAN, will continue to develop a more robust capacity through exercise programs, civil-military operations, and public-private partnerships. As the U.S. and Indonesia move forward with the Comprehensive Partnership, Admiral Locklear advocated expanding military-education exchanges, increasing language training, and modernizing technology.

"The Pacific Ocean does not separate the United States from Indonesia," Admiral Locklear concluded, "it connects us." The focus of the U.S. rebalance is learning from challenges in the past, and adapting for a prosperous future.

Questions and Answers

Q: I consider your speech very important not only for the relationship between U.S. and Indonesia, but also for security in this region. I think many people in Indonesia agree that we need to have a strong leader. When I say strong leader, I do not mean the definition of a strong leader as we (Indonesia) had in the past, but a strong leader who must have a good relationship with other countries, particularly in this context between Indonesia and the U.S. As the commander of PACOM, do you agree that Indonesia needs to have a strong leader in the future?

In the end security requires good governance. Good governance needs process. Each country has a different perspective of good governance. But in the end, it is about good governance. Good governance will result in strong leadership.

Q: Could you elaborate on the U.S. Pacific rebalance in the context of economic and currency wars? I would like to know what your strategy is in the U.S.-Asia Pacific rebalance.

I am not an economics or currency war expert. But I would say today the global community realizes that there will be inevitable challenges in the economic sphere such as competition, protective barriers, and other issues. My concern is that we should have a security environment that allows the challenges to be addressed without leading to the miscalculation that can lead to conflict and military downfall. This is what I mean by a resilient security environment that allows for increased global economy cooperation.

About what is happening in the South China Sea over territorial disputes: in my view, this is just one of the things that will occur with an economy that is more globalized, and it is one of our security concerns. Those issues won't automatically be resolved, but we want them to be resolved by the experts in these fields, not by the military. What we can do is to protect your business and provide resiliency for the people. This is what I mean by the security environment.

Q: You stated that the NATO model of security alliance is not suitable for the Asia-Pacific. In my opinion, this model is one of the solutions for a country like Indonesia which has potential military capability but a low defense budget. What is your opinion?

I would say that at a certain level, their governance model might have some aspects suitable in the Asia-Pacific; however, to try to provide security governance across half of the world would potentially be quite difficult. We should, rather, look forward with the security interaction, security organization, and security perspectives of today. I think we can collectively work together to create a resilient security environment. I believe there is hope that just with ASEAN alone, not necessarily a security organization, we can address many areas that will impact the security environment overall. In the end, I think the role of ASEAN will be important in the shaping of the security environment.

Q: My question is about security and political stability in Indonesia. Indonesia has two challenges which are political and presidential election stability. So I just want to know your security perspective, how do you see Indonesia in the future?

I am talking from the PACOM perspective, and it is not my place to give an opinion on your political stability. This is what democracy does: you will elect your leader, and then we will work with that leadership. We will provide aid to insure that there is a peaceful democracy process. My perspective is the security in this region has to be properly addressed so that we can continue to partner together to address our mutual interests, our mutual security perspective.

Q: The title of your speech is intriguing to me – the word “rebalance” specifically. Does that mean something needs to be balanced? Is there something that is not in balance? And my question is in the area of the Asia-Pacific, who needs to be balanced? Is it China or the rest of Asia? Could you explain what is the meaning of “rebalancing”?

As mentioned in my speech, the U.S. rebalance in the Asia-Pacific does not mean a strategy of containment. Instead, it is a strategy of cooperation and collaboration. Regarding the rise of China, I find that the rise of China is inevitable. We respect that each country wants to meet its national interest. To meet this national interest, together we need a resilient security environment. This is also why there needs to be a rebalancing strategy. The resilient security environment that will be achieved through the rebalancing will furthermore create an opportunity to reshape the security environment that will benefit everyone, including China.

Q: You mentioned in your speech climate change as the common enemy. What is the armed forces strategy and how can the world mitigate the climate change impact?

In terms of climate change and global warming, I am not an expert in this field. What I can say is about what we have to do and what we can do within the security environment. I can say that the resilient security environment will be able to slow down the pace of global warming. The military of the nations in the Indo-Asia-Pacific can cooperate together to overcome the crisis after disaster. Furthermore, they can also help to boost the recovery process after disaster.

But that is just about the responsive perspective. We can do a lot more with the military to encourage proper disaster preparation and the ability of problem solving. We can build resilience throughout the society that will allow the community to respond to the disaster.

Q: We see that today there is a fair amount of budget insufficiency, particularly in defense, putting us in a kind of stuck situation. How can the need of resilience be accommodated with this budget situation?

Of course we acknowledged the budget cuts and discussed the importance of maintaining security and resiliency. Let me just try to address this from my military perspective. With

every major conflict where the U.S. has been involved; the operation in Afghanistan, in Iraq, World War II, Korea, Vietnam, we had an increase in our military size, and then once the efforts were over there was an extraordinary ramp down of the military. Though we may wish this does not happen again, it may. That is why rebalance is so important.

We have freedom on where we put our assets in a future military. So on the effort to reinforce the security environment, it may be needed to discuss about investment, for example in maritime security procedures, space assets, or other assets.

So let's be concerned about how to get it right in the Asia Pacific. Together we can work with you here to insure that the partnerships, the alliances, remain strong, and our security interests are protected. As countries emerge -- Indonesia, China, Thailand -- they will have the capability to be contributors to the security environment. When we each play our role, get involved together, we can pack our capabilities together in a lot bigger framework and make a lot of [collective] investment to be able to support the security environment. So this security architecture network that we are talking about in the military is very important.

Q: We would like to request if there is an opportunity to send more of our marines, our troops abroad for exercises, as the existing exercise is only a small portion. Hopefully after this event, Indonesia also has an opportunity to give more influence in the exercises themselves. As we know, now that transnational crimes have become a major problem in the Asia-Pacific, it would be helpful if we can improve our skills, especially in the area of Special Forces.

And second, with the increase of global technology and after the experience of dealing with the pirates of Somalia, I think we need cooperation in several specific subjects.

Well, thank you, Major. I see a future of accommodating the military exercises especially with the marines. To the degree that we continue to extend our cooperation in the Asia-Pacific, we coordinate with your government, your leadership, and your military. As we have talked about the comprehensive agreement between our two presidents, we've been asked to prepare to work on the possibility of a more detailed partnership.

Q: My first question is regarding the U.S. rebalance and the rise of China. Would the U.S. ever intervene in maritime conflict between China and Southeast Asian countries? The second one is regarding cooperation between the United States and Indonesia. Our main problems are actually illegal fishing, piracy, smuggling, and illegal passing by foreign countries. So what do you think PACOM can do to help the Indonesian marine, the Indonesian military to guard our seas? And lastly, you already mentioned various regional institutions in the Asia-Pacific. I wonder where you put the ASEAN Regional Forum in this context. Because you have mentioned several organizations, but not the ASEAN Regional Forum which we established several decades ago to maintain security cooperation.

I think we need to talk again about the South China Sea. What we need in the South China Sea is a mechanism that prevents us from turning over our diplomacy to young commanders who are out there trying to make decisions about how to deal with this particular scenario. We also need to make decisions that will prevent the problem among nations to escalate to a military conflict.

So now we will talk about the second question. We need an organization that has a role in guarding the security environment. It must be supported by other regional powers, as well as the U.S. and China. The voice of ASEAN, I recognize, is very important.

To the question of Indonesia's main security concerns and whether there is protection, I think we have a military relationship that can be improved to be able to assist us to understand more about how to build a better structure, maintain the situation, and how we can communicate throughout the mass of the archipelago. This improved military relationship can also help us to understand more about how we would like to address the challenges faced by the Indonesian military. However, we will only do that at the request of the Indonesian military. There are aspects of your military and maritime capabilities that are already remarkable.

So in that circumstance, you can see the world from a different perspective. I suggest you to see the problem from various perspectives, including from each neighboring countries' perspective. And then you will try to work together with the neighboring countries to solve these problems.