

Remarks by the
Honorable BJ Penn
Secretary of the Navy (Acting)
UNITAS 50th Iteration Commemorative Dinner
Hyatt Regency Jacksonville - Riverfront
Jacksonville, FL
Tuesday, May 5, 2009

Thank you, Admiral, for that kind introduction and for inviting me here this evening.

I must tell you all that when I was asked to come and give this speech, I was warned that my remarks would be the only thing standing in the way of a delicious piece of cake - and I love cake.

So I asked myself - given this information - what the audience here tonight would *really* want to hear, and came up with the perfect speech.

In its entirety, it read: "Welcome. Nice work. Lets eat!"

Reluctantly, I added to the speech - but I'll know I've gone too long if one of you gets up and starts helping yourself.

* * *

First, I want to thank Rear Admiral Kernan and his staff for their efforts in making the 50th iteration of UNITAS such a successful event.

Mayor Peyton, thank you and the city of Jacksonville for the hospitality you have shown our Sailors, Marines, and our partner nations.

To the international guests, attaches, distinguished visitors, and representatives here tonight - gracias, obrigado, danke, and thank you - for your long-lasting partnership.

Together we have made UNITAS not only the world's longest running multi-national maritime exercise, but also the best.

* * *

Tonight, as we celebrate the conclusion of this historic edition of UNITAS, the first ever to be held in the United States, I cannot help but reflect on the storied history and the evolution of this event, the shifting nature of the maritime security environment, and the continued need to meet the security challenges of the 21st Century.

UNITAS was borne from the emerging Cold War Soviet submarine threat - under the very real risk of nuclear annihilation.

For those of us who grew up in that time, the historic origins and importance of the UNITAS GOLD are enduring.

As a child, I can vividly remember air raid drills in school, crawling under my desk in Peru, Indiana - hoping that catastrophe could be avoided. Clearly, it was a frightening time.

Thankfully, leaders from the Americas refused to resign their nations to insecurity.

Instead, they decided to take action.

Together, they created a training exercise to develop their naval establishments for effective, combined Cold War operations.

But this effort went far beyond developing capabilities. UNITAS was equally about building partnerships and friendships.

This concept remains a fundamental premise of U.S. maritime strategy today.

* * *

Almost two years ago, the collective maritime forces of the United States - the Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard - came together to create a unified maritime strategy.

They reaffirmed the use of seapower to positively influence actions at sea and ashore, and the essential role of global maritime partnerships.

They did this because maritime forces share the seas.

The oceans have no fences – so maintaining freedom of the seas and maritime security requires a cooperative effort by international maritime forces.

The rapid pace of globalization has led to the interdependence of world economies, proliferation of technologies, the explosion of information, and is the driving force behind today’s evolving security threats.

Although maritime forces are able to rapidly surge in response to crises, trust and cooperation cannot be surged. Mutual understanding, respect, and interoperability must be developed over time.

Admiral Arleigh Burke understood this ideal 50 years ago, when he envisioned UNITAS as more than a simple naval exercise.

He believed in the importance of developing enduring friendships with our partners in the Western hemisphere and more broadly, across the globe.

He knew the critical importance of outreach, security cooperation, humanitarian assistance, and cultural awareness – and instilled them as the pillars of this exercise.

We see the continuation and evolution of this half-century of outreach today in Southern Partnership Station and Continuing Promise.

Indeed, effective security cooperation efforts are a form of extended deterrence. By removing barriers of trust and creating a sense of collective security, we better understand our respective capabilities and needs.

* * *

As the security environment has changed over the last half-century, so has UNITAS grown and evolved.

From a primarily Inter-American Anti-Submarine Warfare exercise to the truly global multi-mission exercise we see today.

Throughout its storied history, UNITAS has been the model for international cooperation and maritime strategy innovations.

The security of the global commons is a challenge that requires a global solution.

Today's emerging dangers, such as piracy, terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and drug trafficking are not limited to any geographic boundaries or borders.

They involve non-state actors using a mix of simple and sophisticated technologies applied in innovative ways.

The proliferation of weapons technology and information has increased the ability of these transnational actors to challenge our collective maritime security.

Defeating these irregular threats enhances global maritime security, secures freedom of navigation on the high seas, and ensures the safety of the homeland for all nations.

* * *

Despite the evolving threats of the past 50 years, our mission – to protect freedom and promote hemispheric security - remains unchanged.

Our maritime nations share mutual interests and mutual goals. We have a shared vision of security, stability, democracy and prosperity.

And for several weeks each year, our navies come together and train in common waters and on common ground.

We do this to better address the challenges of our time.

But we also do this to remind ourselves that we, collectively, form a more formidable navy – more powerful than any one, individual navy.

By partnering together, we ensure our security and prosperity.

One example of this principle can be seen in the area of maritime domain awareness, where capability and capacity to enforce national sovereignty can be multiplied through collective information sharing on ungoverned spaces in the maritime domain.

And we do this in an increasingly complex and unpredictable world, where national perceptions of territorial sovereignty can shift and change, creating a challenging operational environment for our navies.

* * *

The reality of today's global economy and defense budgets is such that no nation, acting alone, can evolve its fleet as rapidly as these new threats.

Instead, our leaders, Sailors, Marines and Coast Guardsmen must learn to be more flexible, and demonstrate a unified effort with our maritime partners to meet and defeat these challenges.

Coalitions like UNITAS bring together a blend of capabilities and perspectives that enable our leaders to develop strategies to best utilize each nation's resources and adapt our fleets to these 21st Century adversaries.

That is why UNITAS is the perfect forum to share our collective knowledge as we develop and test innovative tactics to defeat these threats.

* * *

At the second Inter-American Naval Conference, Admiral Arleigh Burke stated: "Historically, sailors understood each other, we have a common brotherhood of the seas, we all live the same kind of life...Because of that, we as Sailors can help a great deal, not in defense alone, but also in creating a good solid mutual understanding between our countries and people."

His message endures today.

Over the years, our nations have shouldered great responsibilities – all in an effort to break down the barriers of tyranny and oppression.

Today more than ever, the potential threats to the global maritime community come in many forms: fishing vessels trafficking illicit drugs, pirates in a skiff, semi-submersibles smuggling contraband, or merchant vessels transporting weapons of mass destruction.

As we develop the trust and information-sharing between our naval forces in exercises like UNITAS, we will reduce the danger of the anonymous seaborne threats and increase our ability to neutralize these threats as far from our respective shores as possible.

The parade of ships I flew over yesterday was an awe-inspiring demonstration of fellowship and community.

Seeing that diverse flotilla proudly sailing into port really enforced the meaning of UNITAS for me - UNITY.

While you may have sailed from Europe, from North or South America—we are all united by our common interests... by a shared history...and a strong friendship.

For the past 50 years, this exercise has fostered a mutual understanding between our Navies, which has better prepared our nations for challenges past and present.

As we begin the next chapter, let Admiral Stavridis' four words be our guide - Transparency ... Trust ... Cooperation and friendship.

Thank you for sharing this extraordinary commemoration and evening with me.

I wish you all fair winds and following seas.