

Remarks by the Honorable Ray Mabus
Secretary of the Navy
Gulf of Guinea Maritime Security Dialogue 2015
U.S. Naval Academy
Annapolis, Maryland
Wednesday, December 9, 2015

Well, good morning to everyone. Welcome, again, to the Gulf of Guinea Maritime Security Dialogue. And to show you just the importance that is being placed on this region, on this effort, and on this conference, you just head from General Rodriguez, head of Africa Command. We also have here, as you've heard from, the Chief of Naval Operations. We have the Commandant of the Marine Corps. And we have the Commandant of the Coast Guard, because of the critical nature of what we're doing here, because this is the third event in just over a year that's intended to advance a collaborative effort in this strategic and vibrant region.

Last September, many of you were at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island for our first get-together on the importance and the strategy for the Gulf of Guinea. In May, I was honored to host your diplomatic counterparts, ambassadors from 30 different African, European, North and South American nations, at the Washington Navy Yard. In July, I made my seventh trip to Africa. I visited Guinea Bissau, Namibia, Madagascar, and Mauritius. And so I'm really happy to have you join us all here again at the United States Naval Academy.

It's really fitting that we hold our conversations here, because this institution is one focused on creating tomorrow's naval leaders, not just from the United States, but from the Americas, Africa, and Europe. As part of its student body, the Naval Academy trains midshipmen from all over the world. Right now we have midshipmen from Gabon, Nigeria, Cameroon, Senegal, Spain, Germany, France, Canada, and Turkey. In the decades to come, maybe one of them will be sitting here in your shoes, leading your Navy and working with others regionally and around the world.

And I want to say just one special word about the hospitality of the Naval Academy. Admiral Ted Carter and his folks here at the Naval Academy have once again done an excellent job. And I am reasonably sure that we can guarantee General Rodriguez's safety over the course of the next week, because we are very interested in Army showing up – (laughter) – to be defeated by the Naval Academy for the 14th straight year. I hope that – and I'm going to take a little detour here. This good-natured kidding between our Army and our Navy over this one ball game one day a year, I think exemplifies, though, the partnership that our militaries have together, that our whole of government has together, as we tackle issues like the Gulf of Guinea and the security that we have.

We work closely together. We play hard against each other. But at the end of the day, we're all on the same team. At the end of the day, we all have the same objective. And so I hope what we're able to accomplish here together is a continuation of the actions that we have

taken, and that what we accomplish together over the next two years will be a prelude to the actions that we take in the next months and years to come.

We have 53 heads of the Navy, delegates, representatives from across Africa, and Europe, and the Americas, as well as from international organizations like the European Union and the Economic Council of Central Africa States, the Economic Council of Western African States, and the African Union. And with that sort of group, I feel very confident that we are not only off to a great start, but that we will have an excellent conference. Our nations, our navies, the young men and women studying in these buildings all around here and similar institutions in every one of the countries represented here today are counting on us.

And everywhere I go, and regardless of what audience it is, I talk about the unique capability of the sea services to maintain a security presence. Presence means not just being in the right place at the right time, but the right place all the time. Presence gives our leaders options in times of crisis. The type of presence to deter adversaries, ensure stability, protect sea lanes in the Gulf of Guinea, can only be maintained – as you’ve heard from the Chief of Naval Operations and from General Rodriguez – can only be maintained by a network of concerned countries.

As Commodore Yawson of Ghana, flag officer of the fleet of the Ghana Navy, rightly noted, no one nation can do it alone. Therefore, putting our effort together with the assistance of international partners is the right direction. That kind of partnership is critical in the Gulf of Guinea – 6,000 kilometers of coastline, vital trade routes, fertile ocean resources. Many West African countries are experiencing remarkable economic growth and population increase and resource development. Maritime shipping is not only vital to them, not only vital to that region, but vital the world’s economy.

The world’s attention, as you have heard, has also been drawn to the Gulf of Guinea by news of the depravity of Boko Haram, the outbreak of Ebola, increase piracy, and the use of poaching to finance extremist movements and civil wars. Each of these dangers is facilitated by seaborne terrorism, sea-based and seaborne crime, trafficking in drugs and weapons and people, and the threats of modern piracy. But the fact that there are risks means that also there are incredible opportunities for cooperation and progress for those who pursue them. Changes in economics, and governance, and security raise the promise of a better future. And the key to that future will be a greater commitment to maritime domain awareness and security.

Maritime security and naval presence mitigate risk in a way that benefits everyone, from the prices we pay for goods and services to the protection of human rights. And although we as navies, we as sea services, often operate outside the sight of most of our populations, international naval presence is far from being just a theory. It impacts the entire world. It impacts landlocked countries. Leading economists have linked the stability and smooth functioning of the world’s economy to the presence of the navies and their collective work in keeping the sea lanes open for legitimate, peaceful commerce.

Our President has strengthened and broadened our partnership with Africa. And the United States Navy and Marine Corps are placing a high priority on the Gulf of Guinea for our

international engagement. Since we last gathered in Newport, we've accomplished a lot together, some of which Admiral Richardson and General Rodriguez have already talked about – Obangame Express, French-led Nemo Exercise, Angola-hosted international conference on maritime and energy security, and Naval Forces Africa Turn on the Lights event, during which we increased real time automatic identification system, AIS, data by 80 percent. We illuminated more than 50 dark targets, the non-AIS vessels, per day. We increased SeaVision logins by 15 percent, and increased the overall quality of our tracking.

All of this – all of these successes was a result of the increased cooperation between partner nations and a deeper commitment to maritime domain awareness. On land just a few weeks ago, as a part of Africa Partnership Station, United States Sailors and Marines, alongside their U.K. counterparts, worked to build a maritime capacity to counter piracy and illegal trafficking in Angola, Ghana, Nigeria, and Togo. In the classroom, 33 senior naval leaders from maritime countries across Europe and Africa gathered in Naples, Italy for the Combined Forces Maritime Component Commander Course. Every one of these officers returned to their respective navies with new ideas and with a strengthened sense of working together in partnerships.

As the United States Secretary of the Navy, I've made a personal commitment to these important initiatives and efforts of support in the Gulf of Guinea. But none of this – none of this will succeed unless all the nations represented here today, those either on the Gulf of Guinea or who have demonstrated their commitment to the Gulf of Guinea over time, are fully invested in its success. The intent of our discussions today and tomorrow is to – first, to describe what we've done and what we're doing, to reiterate the importance of this collaboration, and most importantly, to sustain the momentum and keep the focus in the future on maritime cooperation. We want to hear your thoughts, your ideas about what you're doing, about how we can work more together, and how we can help. You can count on the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps to make our contribution.

When you entered this hall, Mahan Hall, you probably noticed a number of displays. And I hope you'll take time during the conference to go out and look and visit with the people around them. Most of you are already familiar with SeaVision, a web-based system designed to expand Maritime coverage that was a key component to the Turn on the Lights demonstration. We also have Topside on display, which was developed by our Office of Naval Research. Topside is a data fusion system that provides enhanced vessel tracking with automatic identification and vessel monitoring system. It uses aircraft-based sensing, environmental model forecast, and much more. I got the chance to see Topside in action on a visit to Palau and was extraordinarily impressed with the reach and the scope and the detail of this system. And I know you will be to.

The Naval Small Craft Instruction and Technical Training School has a representative here as well. What this organization does is trains and educates foreign security force and other international students on small craft strategy operations, communications, weapons, maintenance, and instructor developments. They also have the great advantage of being based in my home state of Mississippi. And I'll be making a trip back home in January to visit their school house. And I'm glad to have them here to be with all of you this morning.

And last, Director Andy Traver of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, NCIS, and a number of NCIS special agents are here to highlight their diverse and very flexible mission, and the ability to perform complex law enforcement operations, security capacity building, and investigation of maritime crimes like piracy and drug and weapon smuggling, human trafficking. Doing all of this in conjunction with our partners. Now, some of you may know NCIS mainly as a very popular fictional television show. But I can tell you, it's pretty real and effective. And its origins date back more than a century, into the 1800s.

So if you have questions about these systems and how they can help, please ask. That's why these folks are here today. That's why they have their displays up. If you'd like to know how each other's programs and organizations work together to strengthen maritime domain awareness and security capability in the Gulf of Guinea, let's discuss this over the next two days as we make our theme of collaborative solutions to common challenges a reality. I've looked forward to this meeting, this conference, for a long time. And I look forward to a productive dialogue that will strengthen these incredibly crucial partnerships.

And while we engage in these panel sessions, I want to encourage you to be a full participant. Give this group your comments, your ideas, your concerns, what you're doing, how we can do it better, how we can work closer together. Together we can do this. If we do it right, future generations, like those studying here and at equivalent institutions in your countries, and everybody else engaged in peaceful commerce will enjoy the benefits of a secure and prosperous Gulf of Guinea. Together, but only together, we can make the Gulf of Guinea a model of success and cooperation. That's our challenge. That's our job. Here's where we can get it done. Thank y'all very much.