

**Remarks by William J. Fallon, Admiral, U.S. Navy (Retired) at The 2<sup>nd</sup> International Symposium on Security and Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific Region in Beijing, China on May 27, 2014**

I am pleased to be here today representing the U.S.-China Policy Foundation. It is a pleasure to be included in this august group of leaders from around the Asia-Pacific region and an honor to be invited to address the assembly. This is a timely event and an opportunity to exchange views on a topic of great interest for people around the world. Today, I would like to speak about choices. I believe the word in Chinese is *xuan ze*.

Security in the Asia-Pacific area is important for many reasons. More than half of the world population lives in the region and, by any measure, the majority of world trade flows in or out or between states which make up the Asia-Pacific.

Recently, frictions have been increasing, disputes escalating and long smoldering historical issues rekindled. The differences in views and opinions have been highlighted by the media. The advent of social media has accelerated the proliferation of views and judgments, often without factual bases.

These worrisome trends are increasing against a backdrop of global change, highlighted by unprecedented technology advancement and social pressures.

Meanwhile, we find our lives increasingly intertwined by interdependencies on many levels and the rapid dissemination of information in way unimaginable just a few years ago.

The security situation today seems to be an increasingly charged atmosphere with pressure building from many causes and for many reasons.

These challenges offer opportunities to reverse the increasing tensions in the region, and to influence events in ways to ease the building pressure. But leaders will have to make good decisions. They, and we, face choices.

Before examining some of these choices, it is appropriate to recognize that this will not be easy, as there are many factors which tend to pull people into differing camps and in some cases, to polarize views.

First, there is history. We cannot change it, but we can be honest in recognizing it and try to learn from it.

Next, there are a variety of different political, cultural and social values among people and governments in the region. Countries often have conflicting national interests regarding security, trade, investment, global order and other subjects. It is difficult to build relationships based on interests, which may change over time.

Governments also have contradictory policy expectations in many cases and are often surprised by behaviors which seem contrary to their expectations.

Notwithstanding a lengthy list of differences, people in the region would be happy to see a more prosperous and stable world order, the peaceful resolution of territorial disputes and progress in issues such as the environment, poverty, disease eradication and an overall decrease in tension.

Many areas of common interest are shared, but will require cooperation, the second major discussion topic on the agenda of this symposium. Two points of common interest which immediately come to mind are energy and the environment.

As we discuss the various aspects of security and cooperation, can I suggest that we speak mostly about our own experiences and opinions and allow others to do the same rather than spend our time criticizing others' positions? We know there are differences. We are unlikely to resolve them unless we first attempt to understand the other opinions.

We, and our political leaders, have many choices to make as we contemplate the future. We could choose to:

- focus on past grievances and continue to blame others for problems.
- emphasize differences, escalate frictions and act as if we are in a zero sum international contest.
- shirk responsibility; allow uninformed opinion and emotion to guide actions.

Or, we could choose to:

- seek areas for cooperation and collaboration, such as the "Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea" (CUES) agreement, signed last month at the Western Pacific Naval Symposium in Qingdao.
- seize the initiative to act responsibly and decrease rhetorical attacks on one another, endeavoring to listen to and understand other opinions.
- share resources and information in ways that could address common problems for the greater good of people throughout the region.

We face choices of all kinds every day. Choices which impact the security of this region are very important. Leaders should lead by example; make good choices for the common good of our increasingly interdependent populations, proactively manage risk and instill confidence that we are going to move in a positive direction regarding security.

One of the most respected leaders of China, the late Premier Zhou Enlai, is said to have advised, "Keep your word and understand the repercussions of your behavior. Trust is most important".

This is good advice. We should step up to challenge, act with courage, and above all, choose wisely.

Thank you for your attention.