Doing the hard work of making peace

Lt. Gen. Daniel Leaf
Director, Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies

Thank you very much, Ambassador Nishida. Ambassador Nishida is the reason I'm here, a most impressive man.

I want to talk to you about my perspective on the hard work of making peace. Sometimes peacemaking is referred to as soft power. But in my experience in war and peace, peace is much more difficult to make than war. And so, I think as we look at the challenges of making peace in what I call the Indo-Asia-Pacific region, we should look at some examples of successful hard work and look to replicate them. I would like to talk about three examples I am quite familiar with.

The first example is the US-Vietnam relationship. As many of you know, President Obama, before he came to Hiroshima this past summer, made a landmark visit to Vietnam. The US-Vietnam relationship is in a very good place, which is remarkable just 40 years after a bloody and bitter war. It is easy simply to feel good about this, and to say that it is due to China, and the need for the US to have allies in the region that will stand up to China. But that's not the case. The truth of the matter is that the remarkable US-Vietnam relationship is the product of 20-plus years of very hard work, a very hard and specific work of disagreeing, of recognizing that the two countries have vastly different systems of government, that they have different priorities, and that they have a very difficult shared past.

The two countries have addressed key issues like Agent Orange, the defoliant dioxin that was used to deforest parts of critical territory during the Vietnam War. Unexploded ordinance remaining from the war still poses a risk to the people of Vietnam. For the United States, a very emotional issue is those service members that went missing in action during the war and are still unaccounted for. None of these are easy issues. None of them are solved in a week, a month, a year, or even 10 years. They have been addressed through hard work and a focus on the future. The past is not unimportant and it's not forgotten. But the remarkable thing about the US-Vietnam relationship is the clear and consistent focus on the future and the prioritization of that over the past. And so, I think it is a great exemplar of the hard work needed to create a lasting peace and a brighter future.

The second example that I want to use is one of internal conflict: the bloody civil war in the country of Nepal. After around 10 years of civil war, the foes in that conflict finally made peace. There were multiple elements of making that peace. One of the key elements of making peace in Nepal was to bring the former enemy, the Maoist insurgents as they are called, into the Nepal National Army. That's right—the bad guys became good guys, the enemy was integrated into the national armed forces. This has been tried in many conflicts and it almost always fails. It's very difficult to do: to put aside the past and to join hands with your enemies to become friends and to serve the same country. But they did it in Nepal. And I know how they did it, because the group of leaders who facilitated the integration of the former enemy were all graduates of our center. They were alumni of the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies.

In my first visit to Nepal, to Kathmandu, I had to ask the question: How in the world did you do that? How were you successful in integrating insurgents into the Army? I had watched from afar, very pessimistically, as this was happening. In answer to my question, the leader of the group that facilitated this integration said that they had done two things. First, he explained, they had taken the skills and knowledge they had learned at our center and applied them. These were practical skills such as how to frame and solve problems and how to negotiate.

That's good, I said. And what was the second thing? He said that they had taken the Aloha spirit back from Hawaii. Hawaii has a very warm spirit, and this is part of our culture in Hawaii. But that was not an answer I expected. He explained that he knew these would be difficult discussions and it would be almost impossible to reach agreement. So they used that Aloha spirit, even wearing their Hawaiian shirts to some of the negotiations to change the tone of the discussion. Now, that is hard work—the hard intellectual work of looking at the problem you're trying to solve and finding a new solution. It's not an outside-the-box solution, to use the cliché. It's inside the box, or perhaps a turning of the box .

Does that matter? Yes, it seems to matter. The country of Nepal is making good progress. They have a difficult future. But let me paint this picture for you. You are probably aware of the massive earthquakes that hit Nepal last spring, devastating earthquakes. You may remember that there was a young baby buried under the rubble for 22 hours. You may remember the picture of a soldier covered in dust, bending down and picking up that baby from the rubble. That soldier was a former rebel, a former Maoist insurgent. That's integration. That's the hard work of making peace.

The third example is different as

well, and it's quite recent. In November, there was an election in Myanmar, or Burma, depending on which you prefer to call the country. The results of the election were quite surprising. Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate, and her NLD party won the election resoundingly by a big margin. Now, they have to govern. I wish them good luck—governance is hard. But the fact that they won and that they won so convincingly was not the real surprise of the election. The real surprise of the election was that it was both validated and almost totally free of violence. I think it is fair to say that the transition to democracy in Myanmar is the most peaceful transition to democracy we have seen in modern times.

How did that happen? Is it just because the people in Myanmar are nice? (They are.) Was it the power of Aung San Suu Kyi, who is an extraordinary person? No. It was the result of hard work: the hard work of building a plan that provided security and equal access to the polls, and implementing the plan countrywide. It was a solid, detailed, practical plan. I know that, because Colonel Zhao Zan [ph] was the Myanmar police official who wrote it. He wrote it at our center in Hawaii as a course project. He took it back to Myanmar, he implemented it, and he changed his country and the world's perception of his country.

Especially for the young people in the audience, I offer Colonel Zhao Zan as an example of what can be accomplished with hard work and determination. Don't ever think that you cannot change the world, because you can. Colonel Zhao Zan did. The group that integrated the insurgents into the army in Nepal did. The hard working diplomats in the US and Vietnam have changed the world.

But there are impediments and risks to changing the world and making it more peaceful, and that's the fourth and final topic of my discussion. Some of those impediments are people like me, people who choose to serve in the armed forces, because we don't get paid to make peace as much as we get paid to be ready for war.

I'd like to relate a story from the past that involves Japan, an incident that many in this crowd may not be aware of. In September 1983, the Air Force of the Soviet Union intercepted and shot down a Korean Airliner, KAL 007. 236 people were killed, including a United States Congressman. This was clearly a critical point in the hardest time in the Cold War. There was a great deal at risk. To protect the search for survivors, the United States sent 5 F-15 fighters to Misawa Air Base in Northern Japan. They landed at Misawa just after midnight on September 2nd, and two pilots immediately were placed on alert with fully armed aircraft ready to go. The leader of those two aircraft was a very young captain, and he thought that he was going to be in on the beginning of World War III. His orders were clear: if you are

told to take off, turn north, arm hot, and go shoot down Russian airplanes. He thought this was great: if it was possible that World War III was about to start, there was nowhere else he wanted to be. I know this, because that young captain was me. Now I look back on that moment with a lifetime of experience and I think, "Were you crazy?" No, I wasn't crazy. I was a fighter pilot doing what I was trained to do: be ready to attack in a situation in which that might be necessary.

When you are building peace, you have to remember that there are people like me out there and sometimes people like me are needed. But if you don't build safeguards against the accidents, coincidences, and misunderstandings that can cause that aggressive young man or woman to trigger an accidental conflict, you are going to be building peace in an aftermath instead of in the present. What this means is that countries and organizations should actively practice cooperation, and building bridges, and building peace, and attacking the most difficult problems we face.

I'll give you one example of what I mean and what I believe. I've been to many conferences where US and Chinese scholars and officials talk about how our two countries will avoid conflict. Those discussions are heartwarming. But I also think they are often ridiculous, because people speak as if suddenly, when things are going their worst, we'll learn how to communicate, we'll learn how to cooperate as if a miracle will happen. It won't happen. It's not going to happen when things are bad. So, we have to practice communication and cooperation before that, when things are not so bad. My suggestion would be that every time there is a major natural disaster—a cyclone, an earthquake, all the things that happen in our region—the United States and China should immediately arrange to address the needs of the affected population together, jointly, when time is short, when things are difficult, when there are disagreements. Not when it's about fighting, but when it's about helping humanity. Because if these two nations and their leaders and their militaries are not in the practice of cooperating in times of peace, they're not going to figure out how to do that in those terrible moments when peace can turn into war. That's not a realistic expectation.

Let me close with one more point about peacemaking, about building and sustaining peace. If I have learnt one thing over the past 15 years of my life, it is that building and making peace cannot be done unless women are adequately represented in the process. This is a truth that I believe deeply. You cannot build a sustainable peace, you cannot solve a national problem, you cannot fix a major conflict if you exclude half the population. Furthermore, whatever solutions you come up with, if they don't consider the needs of half the population and if they don't

incorporate the dynamics of the divergent views of gender perspectives, they won't be as good as they could be, and they probably won't work. At the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, since I have been there, we have doubled the enrolment of women in our programs. We have added inclusion instruction to every course. And I think we're becoming very well-known for our understanding of the inclusion of women under UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. For men, women, peace and security does not mean men, war and insecurity. It's not about excluding men. It's about bringing together the power and perspectives of both genders to address the most difficult challenges we face, and perhaps the most difficult challenge is peace. Thank you.