

Admiral Mike Mullen
Pod cast Transcript 18JUNE07

MC1 MCNEELEY: Welcome to the Chief of Naval Operations pod cast for June 18th. I'm Petty Officer Chad McNeeley. This is a continuing discussion with CNO Admiral Mike Mullen. Topics discussed this week will revolve around the recent annual current strategies forum at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island and humanitarian deployments by USS Peleliu to the western pacific and USNS Comfort to South America.

(Music Plays)

MC1 MCNEELEY: Afternoon, sir. I'd like to begin on noted in the news last week and off my congratulations on Secretary Gates' recommendation to President Bush that you be nominated as the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Can I ask you about your reaction to the recommendation?

ADMIRAL MICHAEL MULLEN: Well, thanks. First of all, thanks and secondly, I'm honored and very humbled that Secretary of Defense would be recommending me to the president. And I haven't at this point and time been nominated, that's obviously up for the president to do. And then we need to take this who process one step at a time. But it's been a privilege to serve for this long and clearly it will continue to be as we move through this process.

MC1 MCNEELEY: Great. Yesterday you spoke at the Naval War College concerning the new maritime strategy that will be released this fall. What have you learned in the year-long development of this strategy, sir?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: Yesterday's forum was actually called the Current Strategy Forum. We do it every year. It's a two-day session. And I found the one yesterday to be an incredibly lively, filled with energy, and the focus this year really was on the development of this maritime strategy. What we've learned over the last year is that America's not intimately familiar with why we need a navy. It's a new era. There are new challenges out there and we need to work hard on making sure we touch base with America, throughout America on why we do need a navy and what our Navy's up to.

I also came to believe though this last period of time over the last year that the Navy needed a new strategy. The current plan was a Cold War plan and really isn't relevant to what's going on in the world today. And the other thing I wanted to do is reshape and reorganize our priorities. So we've taken a lot of time to red cell, look at it from a different perspective, on what we should be doing and how we should be doing it and also what we should not be doing.

So those are some of the things that we've learned in the last year. I've great confidence in the process. And the intent is to roll this strategy out. A very relevant strategy for the challenging times that we're in later on this fall. And I'm excited about that.

MC1 MCNEELEY: You also mentioned yesterday in your speech about the imperatives of the maritime strategy. Can you explain to us what a few of them are and why they are important?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: Sure. There's lots of imperatives that will come out in the strategy. I'd just like to talk about a couple of them, if I can, and try to connect those that really are tied to what's going on in the deck plates. I mean, we have a navy. One of the reasons we have a navy is to win our nation's wars but a big piece of that is also a deterrent and preventing wars. And I would argue that part of winning wars is never having them and so that will certainly be one of the imperatives we look at as we put the final pieces of our strategy together.

Secondly, another strategic imperative from the maritime perspective and we've reviewed this with the Marine Corps and the Coast Guard side-by-side. But cooperation and partnerships around the world are also key. That nobody can do it alone now. Global partnerships with other navies, with other coast guards, with other maritime services are really critical.

And then thirdly is something I've seen my entire life throughout the time I've been to sea, is the influence that naval forces have. Navies in particular, as we are out and about, present in many places in the world and just that presence – presence with a purpose – really makes a big difference in terms of engagement, prevention, deterrents, and if need be, the requirement to have to fire and win.

MC1 MCNEELEY: Can I ask you about the force structure implications on the new maritime strategy?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: As far as force structure is concerned, I'm happy to report that we've stopped the decline of the number of ships we have in the Navy. We commissioned a new destroyer just last week and we're at 277. And that number will continue to increase to our overall goal of 313 ships. And that's a minimum number of ships that we need in this very dangerous world in which we exist. So clearly what we will do with this strategy is look at the force structure. Along with the strategy there's an operational concept. There's a plan associated with the concept and the strategy. And that plan eventually directs where we'll spend resources.

And so it's those four pieces, really, which with an overarching strategy we'll look at each one and update it. And this is a process that we can repeat in time and figure out where's the best investment. And that will certainly guide what our force structure will be. Although I have a great deal of confidence that the number 313 is the right number in terms of minimums and that we certainly will continue to evaluate that over time. If anything, I would expect that number, not to go down, but to go up.

MC1 MCNEELEY: Going back to one of the imperatives we discussed, cooperation and partnerships. Pacific Partnership 2007 was launched at the beginning of the month as

USS Peleliu departed Pearl Harbor for a four-month humanitarian mission to Southeast Asia and Oceania. Where do these types of mission in conjunction with the USS Comfort deployment to Southern Command AOR and last year's USNS Mercy deployment to Asia support the maritime strategy and how do these deployment contribute the global war on terror?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: Well, first of all, I'd like to say hats off to the crew on Peleliu. That's some 1600 sailors who are really stepping up to the plate in a really important area for us. In the world in which we're living in it isn't all just about combat anymore because there's an expanded mission set. Clearly what the Navy and the Marine Corps were able to do in the tsunami relief in 2004 had a significantly positive impact on the people of Indonesia and that part of the world.

Mercy went back last year and tended to some 61,000 patients in the Philippines and Indonesia, in Bangladesh. And the positive side of who we are, the good will that we bring for that, the long-lasting impression, and the engagement with people that really make a difference in their lives. And in the long run, these are countries and peoples and a part of the world that we want to have a good relationship with. So it's very much a part of the humanitarian assistance piece of this is very much a part of prevention and creating security. And at the very high level, I'm a believer that if you have these kinds of relationships, they would go a long way to ensuring that we don't get into a war or get into a fight with people that we're engaged with like this.

Navies bring a unique capability in that regard. The United States Navy in particular and I want to commend the USNS Mercy and USNS Comfort. We're involved with non-governmental organizations. We've got lots of doctors and nurses from other organizations who are helping us now, other services, the Marine Corps, our special forces, our special operations forces. So it is really an important mission that's being carried out by there by Peleliu. Clearly Comfort is headed that way down into Latin America and we'll do it later on off of Africa with one of our other amphibious ships.

So the whole goal here is it's an opportunity to foster and sustain relationships this year, specifically with Peleliu in the Asia-Pacific region and to show the United States commitment to working with other stakeholders. And we are committed to providing humanitarian assistance around the world where needed. So it's a mission that continues to grow and one about which I am very excited. And like sailors around the world, they're making such a difference in people's lives and I think that's, in the long run, how we'll impact the global war on terror.

MC1 MCNEELEY: Just one more question about the maritime strategy and it's a broad concept that I want to make sure that a deck-plate sailor understands. What would you say to a sailor serving on Peleliu or USNS Comfort and their role in fulfilling the new maritime strategy?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: Each one of the sailors on Peleliu and Comfort and really in the other humanitarian assistance kinds of missions should know that they're a key part of

our maritime strategy. They're building relationships. They're making a difference in people's lives. They're doing what navies can do because we are out and about and around the world. And it's the strength of the fabric of those relationships, which I think will be remembered for many, many years by the young children that they are engaged with who grow up. By the adults in those countries that grow up to become leaders and that they see who the United States is through the sailors that represent the United States of America so well. So they're really making a difference and it's a key part of this emerging new maritime strategy of ours.

MC1 MCNEELEY: Very good. Thank you again, sir and congratulations.

ADMIRAL MULLEN: Thanks a lot. It's good to see you.

MC1 MCNEELEY: You've been listening to the Chief of Naval Operations podcast for June 18th. We won't have an edition on Monday, June 25th, but rather Tuesday, June 26th. Check back then for our next edition. Thanks for listening. I'm Petty Officer Chad McNeeley.

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