

Surface Sitrep Winter 2007

An Interview with ADM Mike Mullen Chief of Naval Operations

Nearing the 18 month point in his tenure as Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Mike Mullen graciously accepted *Surface Sitrep's* request for an interview.

Admiral, Our theme for the SNA Symposium this year is "Brown Water to Missile Defense." That's a pretty broad warfare spectrum. Is our Navy just as capable of dealing with sophisticated missile threats as it is with countering small, armed boats in the littoral? How would you characterize the threats we face?

The threats we face are very diverse, and getting more so by the day. Most are transnational and related directly to the war on terror. But we must also counter more traditional threats by regional powers with conventional capabilities. Many of these threats have a distinctly maritime dimension. All of them have the potential to lead to major combat operations. Our job is, as it has always been, to help deter such war, and failing that, to fight and win it. The freedom to conduct naval operations in support of joint, allied and coalition operations, assuring access and projecting persistent combat power -- must be preserved through enduring, warfighting capabilities. Preeminence at sea still matters. I think we are proving our ability to sustain that preeminence, and the Surface Navy is in the thick of it. You mentioned ballistic missile defense. We've seen great success this year with BMD tests out in the Pacific off our Aegis ships. I believe we are going to see a continued requirement for that sort of adaptability in those platforms, and I think it's going to prove even more critical to the nation's defense.

How would you characterize the Navy's readiness? Is our Navy ready for sea?

We are doing phenomenally well in readiness. The Navy is more ready now than I've ever seen it. We stayed fully manned at sea and didn't miss a call for fire or a single mission this past year. In fact, thanks to the Fleet Response Plan, we were able to respond to all manner of disaster and emergency relief efforts that no one could have predicted. Take the Lebanon evacuation, for example. On virtually no notice, we dispatched 11 ships right off the coast and evacuated some 14,000 Americans without a hitch -- all while continuing to support combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. To me, that really speaks to the flexibility inherent in naval forces and the sound investments we have made, and continue to make, in our readiness accounts. And this is just one example. There are plenty more, such as joint and coalition maritime efforts in the Persian Gulf, disaster relief efforts in the Philippines and Pakistan, and anti-ballistic missile testing in the Pacific.

How is the Navy Enterprise - and the Surface Warfare Enterprise in particular - helping ensure that we have warships ready for tasking?

The Navy Enterprise Framework is just taking off, but I think it holds out great promise to improve readiness and control costs in new acquisitions. What we are doing, essentially, is creating TYCOM-led warfare domains: Aviation, Surface, Undersea, Naval Expeditionary, Special Warfare, and Net Warfare. Each domain will be supported by nine domain providers/enablers: Navy Manpower, Personnel, Training and 2006 Education; NAVSEA and applicable Program Executive Offices (PEOs); NAVAIR and applicable PEOs; SPAWAR and applicable PEOs; NAVFAC; NAVSUP; Commander, Naval Installations Command; Office of Naval Research; and BUMED. The job of the supporting domains is to align to and support the warfare enterprises and to manage value streams (dollars, people, equipment, supplies, and services) with common processes and metrics linked to those of the supported warfare enterprise.

The Surface Community leadership embraces the idea fully and has been hard at work at institutionalizing it. I commend them all for their efforts and look forward to seeing where they take it. I really believe, as I know they do, that the Enterprise approach will give us the very best readiness and future capabilities at the absolute best cost to the taxpayer.

You've been very adamant about the need to build a fleet for the future. Are we building a balanced fleet to meet the threat of tomorrow? What are the key capabilities we are acquiring?

The shipbuilding plan we submitted is all about balance. We're building to the whole spectrum of conflict, from Phase 0 right up to major combat and post conflict stability operations. You'll see a fleet that can handle the low end and the high end. It will include 11 aircraft carriers, 88 surface combatants (including seven DDG-1,000 destroyers), 48 submarines, and 55 Littoral Combat Ships. We get a fair start in FY-07, with seven new ships (1 SSN 774, 2 DD(X), 2 LCS, 1 LHA(R), 1 T-AKE) -- moving the count up to 285. And we'll be up to 294 in FY-08. In fact, there are a total of 54 new ships planned across the FYDP.

A significant new part of this fleet are the expeditionary and littoral capabilities we will get from the LCS and from the Riverine Squadrons we are standing up. But we are not forsaking our blue-water focus. We must improve our core warfighting competencies: ASUW, ASW, strike, mine warfare, sea-based missile defense, and other maritime supremacy missions. And the QDR gave us clear direction to shift a portion of those assets to the Pacific theater -- six operational carriers and 60% of our submarines. We must be able to fight both the big and small wars: two challenges, one fleet.

Is your 313-ship Navy shipbuilding plan on track?

I certainly think so, yes, though it will be a long-term effort. We've only had the plan over on the Hill since February. I can say, though, that we've received very strong support from Congress, from OSD and from industry.

I think everybody realizes where we want to go with shipbuilding -- the importance of both numbers and balanced capabilities -- and how we want to get there. Now, we just have to execute. That's the most important thing. If we don't do what we promised to do with regard to controlling costs and curbing our appetite for growing requirements, then I think we'll be in trouble. We're working through the '08 budget right now, and I am committed to making sure it squares with the plan. Stability and predictability are keys.