Admiral John M. Richardson, Chief of Naval Operations
2nd Fleet Establishment Ceremony
24 August 2018

Admiral Richardson: Good morning, everybody, and it is wonderful to be back here in the Norfolk Waterfront. The best thing about the weather today is that it shines so brightly and clearly on the fleet that’s out there. So really, you kind of want to ask everybody to turn around and look that way. That’s where all the action is—out there, and you see all these warships pointed to sea, and you get a sense for what we’re here for today. You really get that tangible sense.

Chris, thank you so much for that terrific scene-setter that you provided and that warm introduction. As we stand here on the deck of the USS George H.W. Bush which is in such great shape, Captain, thanks so much, you do get a sense for the gravity of this moment.

I’ve got to tell you, as the Chief of Naval Operations it is not a bad day when you are standing up a fleet. That is a good day. So we’ll take some time this morning—even with the brilliant efficiency of this ceremony—we’ll take some time to just appreciate what this moment means.

Congressman Scott, as you know, we’ve been down here in Norfolk a bunch, and we’ve had a number of these Changes of Command and you have been present for every one. I think it’s a symbol of the support, certainly your personal support, but also the support of Congress which has done so much for the Navy and the nation and even here in the Hampton Roads areas. So sir, thank you very much for being here. It’s wonderful to see you again.

And for all of our allies and partners, thank you so much for being here, and especially to the former Commanders of the 2nd Fleet, waiting for this moment probably, in fact in the reception before they said it’s about time. Right? I mean it’s really kind of been a little bit too long. So thank you very much for coming.

I will tell you, why are we here? Why do we take this moment to stand the 2nd Fleet back up? And I think that at the most fundamental level, this is the U.S.—the United States and the United States Navy’s dynamic response to a dynamic security environment. An environment that was very well laid out by
Admiral Grady and an environment that is clearly articulated in our National Defense Strategy.

If we just pause to appreciate that environment, you start to appreciate also what is called for in response to that environment. To meet that environment at the relevant levels of speed, capability and capacity. It will require every ounce of our tenacity, our ingenuity and our fighting spirit to focus on this mission and focus on how we can best accomplish the mission. The 2nd Fleet will be our spearhead doing that for the Atlantic, maintaining America’s maritime superiority that will lead to maintaining our security, our influence and our prosperity around the world.

And dynamic response, really, is nothing new to 2nd Fleet. If you think about the history of 2nd Fleet, it’s got a history of adapting to rapidly changing circumstances. Originally stood up in 1950 in response to the changing dynamic after World War II, and the beginning of the Cold War. So one of the very first missions of the 2nd Fleet is when President Kennedy charged the 2nd Fleet Commander to address the situation that we now know as the Cuban Missile Crisis.

So here we are, the emergence of the Soviet Union in the early '50s. The realization that we needed to adapt, to stand up a force, to confront this threat in the Atlantic, to appreciate the Atlantic as a continuous operational space. This was the original mission of the 2nd Fleet. And to address that Cuban Missile Crisis 2nd Fleet went right to the very highest end of naval warfare, commanding three carriers at the time -- the Essex, the Enterprise, and the Independence. This was one of the Enterprise’s very first missions that she took on when she went down to do duty in the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Then things changed. Right? This has been some of the most rapidly changing security circumstances in our nation’s history over the last 50 years.

Soon, fast forward, it was the 2nd Fleet that responded to Urgent Fury at the order of President Ronald Reagan and the invasion of Grenada. It was the 2nd Fleet that trained and certified all the forces that went forward to fight in Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

So when you think about that context, adapting to change, confronting this rapidly dynamic security environment, nothing new for 2nd Fleet.
And as Admiral Grady alluded in his remarks, this new dynamic prompted in part by a resurgent Russia, the National Defense Strategy made clear that there are countries once again competing to define this area not in the interest of opportunity and equality for all, but on their very restrictive terms. And once again the nation and the Navy is responding.

U.S. naval forces operate globally from the sea floor to the stars and in the information domain to deter aggression and to peacefully resolve crises on terms acceptable to us and our allies. But make no mistake, if that deterrence fails, our fleet, now the 2nd Fleet included, will conduct decisive combat operations and bring that to a close. A quick close.

For our Navy to achieve the objectives in the National Defense Strategy we must embrace every avenue to gain and maintain the competitive advantage, to maintain our maritime superiority. The United States, as I said, is a global power, and when we think about achieving and maintaining that competitive advantage, we’ve got to think globally, and that includes the Atlantic, particularly the North Atlantic.

So the creation of the 2nd Fleet, this recreation of the 2nd Fleet, represents the establishment of a well forged fighting force with a fighting mindset, restoring a largescale ocean maneuver warfare formation dedicated to the Atlantic Ocean. Responding, restoring dynamic maneuver in response to a dynamic challenge,

Now dynamic maneuver, what is that? I think there’s sort of three types of dynamic maneuver. First, there is maneuvering up and down the spectrum of conflict. The 2nd Fleet will be doing all of that. From partnership building, from conducting exercises with our partners and allies, from being present at those very important and influential parts of the world on one end, the competitive end, ready to transition if necessary from competition to confrontation and to conflict. This maneuver up and down the spectrum of competition to conflict with agility will be one of the hallmarks of the 2nd Fleet as we move forward, to make our Navy more supportive for our allies and partners and impose more cost on our adversaries.

Another type of dynamic maneuver is simply geographic maneuver. The new 2nd Fleet increases our strategic flexibility to respond from the Eastern Seaboard to the Barents Sea. 2nd Fleet will approach the North Atlantic, as I said, as one continuous
operational space and conduct expeditionary fleet operations where and when needed. And in doing so, it will enhance our alliances, make them stronger with our NATO partners and other European security partners through exercises and combined operations, particularly at the high end of naval warfare.

The third type of dynamic maneuver is the maneuver and agility in developing new capabilities and new concepts, and as an organization 2nd Fleet will have a central role in pioneering new and experimental concepts of operation and capabilities, restoring this sense of exploration and curiosity that has been a hallmark, it’s in the DNA of the United States to be a learning organization. And I look forward to seeing the 2nd Fleet experiment with and learn from our allies in this regard as well. And in doing so, we’ll ensure that we are learning and adapting faster than our adversaries around the globe.

So the combination of these three types of dynamic maneuver -- the maneuver up and down the scale of competition, the maneuver geographically across the Atlantic as a unified operational and fighting space, and conceptual and capability maneuver up and down technologies and concept development, this will be the hallmark of the 2nd Fleet here in Norfolk. It will enhance our responsiveness, invigorate our historical alliances and strategic partnerships and contribute to a much more lethal force, exactly what is called for in the National Defense Strategy.

As a prime example, as a precursor to what lies ahead, we need look no further than what we are seeing and what we are employing with the USS Harry S. Truman Strike Group, conducting now a working port visit in Norfolk during her deployment which has included conducting strikes against ISIS, conducting major force exercises with our partners to improve our combined punch at sea, and has experimented with new concepts and capabilities again at the high end of naval warfare as part of her certification to go and deploy.

There is much more to come. More to come with the Harry S. Truman Strike Group, and much more to come with 2nd Fleet.

Now I tell you, a dynamic security environment and a dynamic fighting organization requires dynamic leadership. We are fortunate, so fortunate, first and foremost to have Admiral Chris Grady here at the helm of U.S. Fleet Forces Command. And since we announced the intention to stand up 2nd Fleet at his Change of Command earlier this year, Admiral Grady and the Fleet
Forces team have steamed at all ahead flank to bring us to this day to establish all of the infrastructure and do the spade work to bring us here today.

We also have dynamic leadership in Admiral Woody Lewis, the new Commander of the 2nd Fleet. As you heard, a distinguished combat aviator and seasoned warfighter, but I would also say an eagerness and insatiable curiosity to learn, to get better with every day, and a deep professional humility which characterizes Woody in terms of his approach to leadership. Realizing that he is not the source of all good ideas, and that most often the good ideas are resident somewhere in his team and he is an absolute master of drawing those good ideas forward to the betterment of everybody involved.

Woody was also fundamental to the intellectual work to stand up 2nd Fleet. He was up on the OPNAV staff that he did all of the hard work to conceptualize it. He made this bed and now he’s got the privilege to sleep in it. So Woody, it’s so great to have you here. Mary, also wonderful to have you here. Although I did get daily dressed down by my wife Dana that somehow I let Mary slip out of the Washington, DC area and come on down here to Norfolk. But it’s in the best interest of the nation. I promise.

In conclusion, let me just say that as this day has approached there has been a lot of speculation that to send up a 2nd Fleet means that the United States Navy is posturing or even looking for a fight. I’ll tell you what, nothing could be further from the truth. But as our first President, George Washington said, “To be prepared for war is one of the most effective ways for guaranteeing and preserving the peace.”

We’re not looking for a fight, but the best way to avoid a fight is to develop the most powerful and deadly and competitive Navy possible, while strengthening our combined naval power within our alliances and expanding our maritime partnerships. So if called upon, have no doubt we’re not looking for a fight, but if we need to, the 2nd Fleet will conduct decisive combat operations to defeat any enemy. They will be at the lead of those efforts.

So to the team taking the watch as 2nd Fleet, your efforts are absolutely critical to maintaining our Navy’s fighting edge. To the sailors who will operate from sea floor to space in the information domain under the command of this Fleet, you said to defend freedom as soon as you clear the sea buoy and the challenges hit you right away. As soon as you go feet wet. As
soon as you rig for dive. You will be out there on the vanguard, at the pointy end of the spear, defending this very fragile thing that we call freedom.

So let’s get to it. Thank you all very much. God bless the 2nd Fleet. God bless the United States Navy. And God bless the United States of America.

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