Admiral John M. Richardson, Chief of Naval Operations
Defense News Conference – Theme: Great Power Competition
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Admiral Richardson: On behalf of the 600,000 Sailors and Civilians in the United States Navy and our partners around the world, again, thank you for having me.

The theme of the conference is great power competition, picking up from the National Defense Strategy, and I would say just looking at the news that the strategy has that exactly right. So we’ll just take some time to talk about how the Navy is addressing this challenge, how the Navy is fulfilling its obligations as pertains to the National Defense Strategy.

So I would say that the strategy makes clear, and I’m going to kind of go back to the guiding document that we put out in 2016, you may remember, the Design for Maintaining Maritime Superiority, Version 1. And it outlined the challenge of great power competition then, and also talked about the security environment from the perspective that the last time we were sort of in this type of a competition, much has changed.

So in addition to just talking about the competitors, which is a temptation when you talk about competition, not only the competitors are different but also the character of the competition has changed. Particularly the pace of competition. The pace of the introduction of technology, the pace of adoption of that technology and the dominant role that information is playing in competition right now is completely new. In fact, we have two recognized warfighting domains now -- Space and Cyber -- that were not around the last time we did this great power competition business about 25 years ago with the Soviet Union.

So the rules of the game have changed quite a bit, and the competitors have changed. Back then we were dealing with a very bipolar sort of single focus. There was no ambiguity about the Soviet Union and the relationship between the West and the EasternBloc. Now it’s multiple adversaries. It’s not quite as straightforward as it was back then, so we need to keep that in mind.

So this was all captured in the original version of the design. The one thing that has changed a bit since then, sort of our awareness, is that this competition really is described by a spectrum. A spectrum of competition. An almost continuous
spectrum from competition to confrontation all the way up to conflict. It’s more continuous and smooth than ever. You’ve heard terms like Gray War, I think, try to get after some of this. You’ve heard terms like competition below the level of conflict. All of these sorts of phrases I think are attempts to grasp and contend with this very smooth spectrum of competition all the way, as I said, from just sort of competition, through competition all the way up to conflict.

Our response to that going forward is going to be key to making sure that we remain not only competitive, but ahead. It’s necessary but not sufficient to be competitive. We also want to be winning this.

So for our Navy to achieve the objectives of the National Defense Strategy, we’ve got to embrace every avenue to gain a competitive advantage, and to improve our agility, really, to move up and down that spectrum, and to advance in particular our high-end capabilities so that we can always ensure that we can control de-escalation, and we’re going to have to do this from the sea floor to space and in the information domain.

Our thinking is that we’ve got to be executing this mindful -- this is a long-term competition. So thinking more along, theoretically more like an infinite game rather than a finite game. So this brings into the fore issues like sustainability. The idea of doing all of this without over-extending ourselves is going to be key. Over-extension is going to be a self-defeating thing if we don’t mind that.

So I thought we could just explore those themes, maybe revisit the first version of the design, its structure a little bit, describe how the Navy is addressing this new challenge, this new version of great power competition, and then we’ll finish up and open up the floor for questions. I want to leave as much time for questions as I can.

If you do recall the design, we did open up by describing a little bit the security environment, and I gave a quick summary of that already. And then in terms of how we were going to address the environment, the design is organized into four lines of effort which we differentiated or distinguished by color. We didn’t want to use numbers or letters or anything like that because there’s these implicit priorities that emerge, you know, line of effort number one. So they’re all different colors.
So the blue line of effort was enhancing naval power at and from the sea.

The green line of effort -- I’m going to come back to the green line of effort because, as Kermit the Frog said, it’s not easy being green, and that was the most confusing line of effort of all of ours.

We had a gold line of effort that talked about strengthening our Navy team the way we train and educate our people.

Then a purple line of effort which talked about expanding and strengthening our network of partners.

Then there was this green line of effort which was I guess the least traditional, which talked about the need to learn fast. To achieve high velocity learning, really at every level, every echelon inside the Navy. We can talk about that as we go forward.

All four of these lines of effort rested on what I will call a foundation of four core attributes of integrity, accountability, initiative and toughness. And of course the design was not an end in itself. Its purpose was to really orient and focus our action. So I really want to spend some time really just providing a menu or a summary of some of the things that we’ve done to get after that, perhaps with an element of why we took these particular decisions, took these particular actions. And then, of course, I look as always to be challenged by you.

So we’ll start with the foundation, the attributes. I will tell you that sometimes it’s easy to breeze past these and get right into the meaty stuff of building capability, acquisition, training, et cetera, but we go past those too quickly at our own peril. Everything that we do, particularly in the all-volunteer force, begins and ends with trust and confidence. That is the coin of the realm, trust and confidence. Everything relies on that. Both trust and confidence within our ranks, up and down the chain of command, and also trust and confidence between the Navy and the American people. And so these attributes and our strengthening of those attributes, and every person in the Navy is key to maintaining and strengthening that bond of trust and confidence that we have.

So along those lines, some of the things that we’ve done, some, have been to release two versions, in fact, of the Navy Leader Development Framework which guides our Navy in terms of how we
develop our leaders. To assist in that we stood up the College of Leadership and Ethics at the Naval War College -- a separate college dedicated to the ethical and character part of leadership. So now we have sort of an operational competence part of leader development, and we have this other lane towards becoming a leader which is building character. And in the years since those frameworks have been released, every single community leader has come to me or the Vice Chief and described and explained how they’re going to develop their leadership in their communities along both of these lines, enhancing both competence in warfighting skills but also character.

And we’re starting this very, very early. The Navy is a leadership factory. If you see our Sailors, it’s not too long. You report aboard as a brand new Sailor or a brand new officer, and before you know it, you switch from the person who’s being taught everything and you have a leadership position. It happens very, very fast so we have to get started building these leaders who we would be proud to have standing in front of the sons and daughters of the American people.

So we have this kind of equation that its competence and character will equal, or lead to trust and confidence. And so we’ve been doing a lot of work to strengthen our leader development in both lanes, but particularly in character.

So the foundation, we’ve been looking to build and strengthen that foundation throughout.

Now in terms of the lines of effort, I’ll begin with the blue one which is enhancing naval power at and from the sea. I’ll just kind of go down a pretty quick list. The foundation for what we do, the Columbia Class, sea-based leg of the strategic deterrent remains on track.

We’ve commissioned CBN-78, the USS Gerald R. Ford, and she’s sailed and is working through her testing program. We just recently awarded the rapid acquisition contract for the MQ25, a carrier-based unmanned tanker. A bit of a victory, if you will, for rapid acquisition, and we look forward to getting that out in the air wing as quickly as we can. And in other parts of the unmanned business, right behind the MQ25 is a family of unmanned underwater vehicles and unmanned surface vehicles. Moving fast towards capability as well.
F-35, the Joint Strike Fighter, the Charlie version, is making progress. Operational and testing milestones aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln.

The LCS program has stabilized. We’ve rationalized that after a troublesome period. I think that we’ve got a program that is now understandable, it’s sustainable, it’s much simpler than it was. It could probably be simpler still, and we’re working on that. And we’ve got some modifications to make those ships both more lethal to the enemy and survivable. So it’s going to be quickly the case that if you are out, you’re going to want to know where each one of these ships are, because if you lose sight of one, one of them can hurt you.

And we’re moving beyond, forward from LCS into the frigate. Another thing that’s on a very fast track, and I’ll talk about how we’re accelerating and achieving this speed a little bit later when I talk about the purple line of effort, particularly the partnership with industry.

We’re moving a lot of, we’re making a lot of progress in electronic warfare. Electromagnetic warfare. So this is a new area of maneuver. Right now the John C. Stennis Strike Group is going through their final paces for certification, and in the combined warfare commander construct, the information warfare commander is usually the first person who speaks at the brief, and the last person who speaks at the brief. It’s just become such an important part of our business. And we’re moving forward in this area to bring to bear some directed energy types of capabilities, both in the RF spectrum, microwave spectrum, and in the laser spectrum.

Leveraging what we learned from the frigate, which, you know, the small surface combatants. We are moving quickly into the large surface combatant, a future large surface combatant, which we hope to get to the same level of maturity as the frigate in just a couple of years. Very quickly. And it’s not all about capability and platforms. As you know, we recently stood up the 2nd Fleet to enhance our response to command forces in the Atlantic, treating the Atlantic as a single operational space responding towards challenges and missions such as high end theater anti-submarine warfare, high end carrier strike group operations.

We established the Digital Warfare office. This office completely focused on the opportunities that arise from kind of the digital world that we live in, right? Big data providing
information from the maximum number of sensors to the maximum number of payloads. The Digital Warfare Office is managing how we stitch all that together.

The Comprehensive Review, and the Strategic Readiness Review actions are in full swing to improve the readiness of our Navy really across the board, especially in our surface fleet. And this includes adjustments, improvements in the career path, training improvements, again, organizational improvements across the board.

As important as anything, the efforts that are coming from this Comprehensive Review are really to reinvigorate or invigorate the commanding officers in the Navy, to instill their sense of confidence, to instill boldness and creativity at the command level, to prepare their crews for the challenges that we face. Our CO’s are the center of gravity. We need to support them in every way. We need, indeed, to celebrate command and so we’re using this to readjust our focus back to our center of gravity.

So those are just some of the things that we’ve done in the blue line of effort.

In the green line of effort, this is about how we are learning and adapting faster. You’re maybe familiar that the Harry S. Truman recently deployed, did things very differently under this concept of Dynamic Force Employment. Our idea there is that with all of our naval forces, which are by design global maneuver forces, we want those to be as globally maneuverable as we can, and move those around, making the environment respond to us. To stop being so predictable where we charge naval forces into a very predictable spot and do predictable things. So Harry S. Truman did some new things and then she returned to Norfolk, just recently got back underway, where she’ll do some more new things. And you’ll see more of this throughout all of our fleets as we kind of work our way into this idea of distributed and dynamic maritime operations.

To help us there, we stood up the Navy Analytic Office. This team working to, again, bring all of that analytic power to this competition in a very focused way.

In the gold line of effort, which it’s not by accident that we named this line of effort which focuses on our people the gold line of effort. We’re doing some tremendous things there to really upgrade and modernize our personnel system. Focusing, as I said, on leader development.
You’ve seen in the recent National Defense Authorization Act the DOTMA reforms, thinking beyond the personnel policy that came into being in kind of the industrial age. So now we’re incentivizing folks who are expert aviators, for instance, to remain on active duty, authorizing people to come in horizontally in mid-career, particularly in those skill sets like cyber security, cyber, coders, those sorts of things, and moving from a more traditional conveyor belt up or out type of an approach to a more conditions-based up and stay, up and return, you know, a lot more flexibility in terms of the options that we’re offering our people while keeping the training and certification standards very high.

With respect to just removing distractions from our Sailors so that they can focus on building confidence and character. Admiral Burke is really moving quickly to modernize the manpower, personnel, training system, integrated pay. I mean if you think about all of the things that you do on your smart device right now with banking and some of the other things, this is exactly how now your orders are going to work. Okay?

How many people have served in the military in the room? Okay. So I think I’m on pretty familiar ground when I talk about the frustration of the PCS experience. You get orders and that is just sort of sometimes the first volley of sitting in the dental chair without Novocain until you finally report to your final command. And we’re almost literally to the point where it’s all going to happen on your smart phone.

So at some point before your detachment date, you’re going to get a reminder on your phone that it’s about time to do these things, and you’re going to get your orders with respect to travel claims. Just like you can take a picture of a check, you’re going to be able to take a picture of your receipts. You upload them. And all of the money will flow within a matter of hours instead of weeks. And we’re looking to do all of this. Not only with orders and pay, but across the spectrum of detailing and all of that. All available on your smart device. And if you have trouble, what do you do when you have trouble with your banking? You call, right? There’s generally a pretty well-informed call center there. There’s a science to that call center business, as many of you know, and that’s exactly the model that we’re having. So we’ll have some folks standing by. And we’re going to be able to sunset a lot of the traditional structure that has been in place to date.
Sailor 2025 is our program that gets after a lot of, about 45 different initiatives. It’s the bundle of those initiatives by which we recruit, retain, and recognize sailors and so we’re doing things like enhancing and expanding the Meritorious Advancement Program where commanding officers can pick out their best performers and advance them. Secretary of the Navy Tours with Industry. Ready Relevant Learning which is an exciting program that moves relevant training, skills-based training, more towards the relevant time frame. So we can talk about that. Rating Modernization. And a whole host of packages.

In the purple line of effort which talks about partnerships, when you think about the Navy is a node in many different networks. We have a lot of different partners. So our first partner to think about is our partnership with our sister services as part of the Joint Force. And this Digital Warfare Office and a lot of these tactical grids are now really starting to move beyond the tribe within the service to not only encompass the whole service but all the services talking together. A seamless force that can pass data, it can sensor data, it can discern and target across all sensors and shooters no matter what the uniform.

The other part of the network of partners is our international partners. Right now we have about 90 ships deployed around the world. Many of those ships are involved operating with our allied and partner navies today. In FY2018 alone, we participated in 124 multilateral exercises and while that’s a decent number, many people could say okay, well, what did you get out of that? Well, we got a lot more capable team. We’re focusing those exercises on really working to enhance our combined maritime warfighting capability, really pushing it all much more towards the high end. So we’re pushing teams, including ourselves, to get to sort of the maximum combat capability together.

This has been a welcome engagement. I’ve got a list of exercises, but in the interest of time, we’ll maybe leave that to questions and answers.

In just a week or two we’re going to host the International Sea Power Symposium in Newport, Rhode Island. More than 100 Chiefs of Navy. It’s the biggest event of this type in the world. They’ll all converge on Rhode Island. We’ll talk about exactly this, this world of competition that we’re in. The choices that lay out in front of us.
All of these measures put the United States and the United States Navy in a good position to respond as a team with our allies and partners to challenges up and down that spectrum from competition to conflict.

Then the final team, well, we can think about partnerships with industry. I mentioned that and how important it is with respect to speeding up acquisition. It seems that the first conversation we need to have involves not only the budget person, not only the program manager, but also the requirements officer, and we’ve stood up and formalized a requirements officer community in the Navy. Then also the technologists. Those technologists often come from private industry to show us hey, what is really the art of the possible today? It’s not helpful when the requirements officers go behind the door, white smoke comes out, the seal breaks and they say okay we’ve got it all figured out, we just need time travel. Okay? Great. That’s fantastic.

Of course industry, there’s nothing that can’t be solved with a lot of money, so we’ll just get started on that right now and at some point in the distant future we will travel in time.

I’d much rather have a conversation about what’s at the knee of the curve right now. What is the most mature technology that will give me a schedule and a cost that I can have some confidence in. We can achieve that in a much shorter time frame. And then even as we put that marker down, we’re going to be thinking about the next knee of the next curve and ride that technology curve a lot closer with shorter iterative steps. Partnership with industry, absolutely fundamental to making that work.

Finally, looking a little bit further out in basic R&D, partnerships with academia and labs. These are the cutting-edge places looking far out. We’re working particularly in the area of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and a number of different areas. Task Force Ocean. The idea of reinvigorating an academic focus on oceanography, ocean acoustics, those sorts of things.

So that’s kind of a very quick lineup. A quick review of sort of the last year’s efforts to get after this great power competition.
Since the release of the National Defense Strategy, it’s really time to I think refresh the design. There was a purpose for making Design Version 1, and we’re closing in on releasing Version 2 this fall.

So that’s really about it. I’ll stop talking so that we can get to a few questions. We’re just looking to continue to plug into this great power competition. Be as agile up and down that spectrum of competition as we can, and make sure that particularly at the high end of that competition we have the dominant capability that will allow us to always be able to, as I said, address and de-escalate any crisis on our terms.

Thank you all very much for your time and attention.

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