

Surface, Expeditionary Warfare Directors Outline Challenges, Programs

ARLINGTON, Va. – The directors of Surface Warfare and Expeditionary Warfare described their extensive and well-coordinated programs to build the forces needed to meet the challenges of the renewed era of great power competition, during a presentation to the Surface Navy Association's annual symposium Jan. 15.

Surface Warfare Director Rear Adm. Ronald A. Boxall warned that the challenges being presented by a resurgent Russia and the rapidly growing Chinese navy means "we can't continue doing what we've been doing," but must build a lethal, distributed surface force that "can take the fight to the enemy."

The path to that capability is set by the Surface Capability Evolution Plan that seeks to put the most capability at sea, Boxall said.

That plan is looking at a new frigate as the future small surface combatant, a new large surface combatant and a range of unmanned vessels, he said.

But there will be a focus on producing a common combat system for all those ships, to eliminate the different training programs now required by the various combat systems in the fleet. The plan also will emphasize increased offensive lethality and improving the speed by which new capabilities reach Sailors, he said.

Boxall repeated his view that the replacement for the aged Ticonderoga-class cruisers "may not be a cruiser." The focus is on looking at what capabilities that ship will need that

the future DDG 51 destroyers cannot provide. The ship will be designed with the space, weight, electrical power and cooling to support whatever sensors, payloads and command and control systems it will need.

But they also will be seeking smaller versions of those systems that could be put on smaller combatants or even unmanned vessels, he said.

Boxall also stressed a focus on improving integrated training systems on the future ships to allow crews to get the quality training at sea now being provided in port.

Marine Maj. Gen. David W. Coffman said his office is working on the next generation of expeditionary warfare and the “need to reinvigorate maritime maneuver warfare.”

Coffman cited the plans for the future amphibious fleet, which will be built around 12 of the “big-deck” amphibious assault ships capable of employing the fifth-generation F-35B fighter, helicopters and surface connectors – including the new model of the landing craft air cushion, a new landing craft utility and the amphibious combat vehicle – and 36 versions of the LPD 17 amphibious platform ships.

But his job includes a drive to rebuild a mine warfare capability with both the mine clearance mission and offensive sea mining, which has virtually disappeared, and supporting the Expeditionary Combat Command that includes the riverine and coastal operations craft and the Sea Bee construction teams, and the Naval Special Warfare Command’s SEAL commandos and special warfare delivery craft.

Coffman said he also is working to meet the demand from Marine Corps Commandant Gen. Robert B. Neller to regain the small boat capability the Marines gave up more than a decade ago.

Asked what is being done to improve the amphibious force’s capability to support the Navy in the fight for sea control in

the littoral areas, Coffman said no decision has been made on whether the amphibious ships will be armed and, if so, with what weapons. But, he said, the Marines are developing plans to use their weapons from the shore to support the fleet's sea control fight.