

U.S. 6th Fleet Commander: No Fixed Boundaries Between 6th, 2nd Fleets

ARLINGTON, Va. – The commander of the U.S. Navy's fleet in Europe and African waters said there will be no hard distinction between the respective areas of responsibility of the U.S. 6th Fleet and the newly established U.S. 2nd Fleet.

2nd Fleet was established in August and is scheduled to reach initial operational capability in mid-year. An earlier iteration of the 2nd Fleet, a fixture of the Cold War, was disestablished in September 2011. It operated primarily in the North Atlantic.

"Our idea is not to make a line in the water, because when you make lines, adversaries exploit them," Vice Adm. Lisa M. Franchetti, commander, U.S. 6th Fleet, Jan. 16 at the Surface Navy Association symposium. "Our idea is to work together between myself and [2nd Fleet Commander Vice Adm. Andrew L. "Woody"] Lewis to be able to figure out how to flow forces and work together to address whatever challenges come our way.

During the Cold War, 6th Fleet was much larger than its current force and mostly operated in the Mediterranean and Black Seas. Over the last five years, it has expanded its operations to include the Baltic Sea and North Atlantic and Arctic Ocean and off West Africa.

Franchetti said that until recently 6th Fleet had a relatively quiet existence, but the resurgence of Russian activity in the region has changed since 2014. Russian naval forces have been increasingly present in the Eastern Mediterranean, often in support of the Syrian forces in that country's civil war, and in the Baltic and North Atlantic, the latter reminiscent of the submarine activity during the Cold War.

"We are rebuilding muscle by dusting off the books [of the Cold War]," she said.

"The 6th Fleet has been operating at flank speed," Franchetti said. "Operationally, it's night and day different in 6th Fleet. The days of lengthy port visits and wine and cheese events have long since disappeared."