CNO Richardson: 'Looking at 25-50 years of a maritime-centric world'

WASHINGTON – The role of the U.S. Navy as a diplomatic and economic actor in U.S. foreign policy and execution is as strong as ever and likely to remain so for the next several decades, the Navy's top officer said.

"In general, we're looking at 25 to 50 years – easy – of a maritime-centric world," said Adm. John M. Richardson, chief of naval operations, speaking Feb. 6 to an audience at the Atlantic Council, a Washington think tank. "[There will be] lots of responsibilities for maritime forces coming in the next 50 years.

"Those responsibilities are not the only military dimension of national power, but the Navy has a tremendous history of enhancing the diplomatic element of national power," Richardson said. "There have been major treaties and leader summits conducted on U.S. warships. Gunboat diplomacy—there is something to that still. When we visit foreign ports, it's almost a given that the U.S. ambassadors to that country will host a reception on the ship because its sovereign U.S territory."

The CNO noted the Navy's rich role in U.S. diplomatic history, saying that there is "a role for that going forward."

Regarding influence on economic power, Richardson said the Navy's role "in preserving sea lines of communication – 90 percent of the world's trade goes over the seas."

Richardson said the maritime rules set developed over decades since World War II "provide that level playing field" that has benefited the nations, "perhaps most especially China, which

has grown tremendously.

“We need to advocate for preserving that,” he said.

Richardson has advocated consistency in complying with and enforcing international rules regarding freedom of navigation in current areas of tension – the South China Sea and the Taiwan Straits – as necessary to preserve the freedom of maritime commerce in international waters.