

Return of Great Power Competition Demands Shift to 'Culture of Excellence'

ARLINGTON, Va. – The return of great power competition requires the Navy's surface forces to move from "a culture of compliance to a culture of excellence," one that recognizes standards as the baseline, strives to be the best of the best and focuses on owning the fight, the commander of Naval Surface Forces said Jan. 15.

While compliance is important, a culture of excellence is essential to bringing "superior performance and winning," and a "sense of urgency in all we do," Vice Adm. Richard J. Brown, who also is commander of Naval Surface Forces Pacific, told the opening session of the Surface Navy Associations annual symposium.

That sense of urgency is required because the national security and national defense strategies, and the Navy Strategy from Chief of Naval Operations Adm. John Richardson, are all maritime strategies "that call for sea control whenever and wherever we need it, requiring our surface navy to deter, but if necessary, fight and win the battle for sea control now in an age of great power competition," Brown said.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989, the Navy had "unfettered access and control of the sea to go wherever we wanted to go and do whatever we wanted," the admiral said. But now Russia has re-emerged to challenge the Navy in the Atlantic and the eastern Mediterranean and China is "in full challenge mode inside the first island chain" in the Pacific.

Meeting those challenges requires the surface force to not only shift to a culture of excellence, but to "embrace the concept of mission command," that requires combat-ready ships,

with full system redundancy “to go to sea and support sustained combat operations.

It also requires tough, battle-minded crews and bold, confident commanding officers “driven to win and hungry for the challenge of command,” he said.

Brown said the surface force also needed “an integrated combat system that doesn’t care if it is on a cruiser, a destroyer, a frigate or an amphib, but that provides for rapid capability upgrades and fleet commonality. It also needs advanced long-range, multimission weapons; small, medium and large unmanned surface vessels; a capable frigate and a new large surface combatant, he said.

The surface naval force is making the changes needed, with 2018 focused on raising standards, improving training, tightening up qualifications, re-emphasizing certifications and reasserting the primacy of command, Brown said. In 2019, “we must turn readiness into lethality ... through unrelenting pursuit of excellence.”

Brown also touted the role of a surface warfare development command that can take risks and develop concept of where the surface navy should go in the future.