Sub Admiral on China: ‘We Will Not Yield Any Ground to Our Competitor’



Tugboats assist the Los Angeles-class fast-attack submarine USS Key West (SSN 722) as it prepares to moor in Busan, South Korea, Oct. 31, 2022. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Adam Craft*

ARLINGTON, Va. — The commander of U.S. submarine forces in the Pacific Fleet struck a defiant tone in discussing the challenge posed by China at the Naval Submarine League’s annual symposium in Arlington, Virginia, Nov. 2, vowing that the United States would “not yield any ground to our competitor.”

Competition between the United States and China has increased in recent years due to U.S. naval drills in China’s backyard and U.S. involvement in Taiwan, and U.S. officials in recent

years have taken an even sterner tone with how the growing naval power operates in the East and South China seas. Rear Admiral Jeffrey T. Jablon, commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet submarine force, told symposium attendees that his “No. 1 focus” is the People’s Republic of China (PRC), despite Russia’s more acute and immediate activity in Ukraine, and he vowed that the United States would only increase its presence off the coast of China.

“The PRC’s rapid growth in military capability reinforces the critical importance of not only maintaining but … expanding our reach,” Jablon said. “We will maximize our strength in the undersea domain.”

He said that he would ensure the Pacific submarine fleet would be “ready at all times for full-spectrum cross-domain operations,” adding that his office had established a campaign plan for submarine forces that he described as “warfighting first, people always and safety is the bedrock of everything we do.”

The most important line of effort in that plan, he said, is modernizing the Navy’s fleet of ballistic missile submarines armed with nuclear weapons, pointing to efforts to maintain the Ohio-class SSBNs out until the 2040s while building the follow-on Columbia-class program.

Another line of effort is to “prepare for the fight in the ‘decade of maximum danger,'” Jablon said.

“That specifically refers to the PRC,” he said. “We’ve heard ‘we’re in an inflection point,’ ‘it’s a critical decade,’ ‘it’s a decisive decade.’ And it’s true. That’s my No. 1 concern. … China has built the largest Navy in the world, guaranteeing its numerical advantage in the South and East China seas.

“We will intensify our efforts to prepare our undersea force to deter and, if necessary, to beat the PLAN [People’s

Liberation Army Navy],” he continued. “We will not yield any ground to our competitor.”