



AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

**A NAVY IN BALANCE?
A CONVERSATION WITH CHIEF OF NAVAL
OPERATIONS ADMIRAL JOHN RICHARDSON**

INTRODUCTION:

JIM TALENT, AEI

DISCUSSION

ADMIRAL JOHN RICHARDSON, US NAVY

JIM TALENT, AEI

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JIM TALENT: Admiral Richardson was the commander of Navy nuclear reactors when he was chosen by the president and Secretary Carter to be the chief of naval operations in September of 2015. I was talking to him in the green room and he said that seems like it was just yesterday because things have gone by so quickly.

One of his most important jobs as CNO will be to shepherd the Ohio class replacement program to completion, or at least well on the way to completion. Since becoming CNO, he has released a design for maintaining maritime superiority, his articulation of the means for our naval strategy that focused on high-end war-fighting. He mentioned China and Russia by name and reiterated the time-tested characteristics of the Navy.

He has publicly backed rapid acquisition, including for the UCLASS program. And now it's the CBARS program, I guess. He's defended the LCS ship and program and addressed in a quite constructive way the ongoing debate about the tension between lethality and presence.

Welcome, Admiral Richardson, to AEI.

ADMIRAL JOHN RICHARDSON: Thank you, very much. I'm thrilled to be here.

MR. TALENT: And the ground rules today, as we do with these kinds of programs, is we'll have a little bit of a conversation up here for a while, and then, in about 20 or 25 minutes, depending on how it goes and whether we're in the middle of something really interesting, we'll go to questions from the audience. We have a microphone and so if you want to ask a question, please wait for the mic and let us know who you are and then fire away at the admiral. Perhaps that was inaptly phrased. Ask whatever questions you want to.

ADM. RICHARDSON: I'm used to it. (Laughter.)

MR. TALENT: Yes. I'm sure that's true. Admiral, in your design document, you do mention Russia and China, and, of course, we're all aware that the Iranians are also developing swarming capabilities. And, in fact, that there are – you look around the world, there's a lot of challenges that seem to be growing for the Navy.

Which of those trends and adversarial naval capabilities worry you the most? I always think in terms of China, and I'm wondering if maybe that's because that's such a maritime theater, and maybe I shouldn't be doing that. So, you know, what are your views on that?

ADM. RICHARDSON: Well, when we put the design together, we really tried to step back even from that perspective and talk about not only the players on the field, if you would, but the character of the game itself.

And so, you know, we spent a fair amount of time in our articulation of the environment that perhaps as challenging as any of the individual nations that you mentioned and the transnational counterterrorism threat, there is this – there are these forces at play in the environment that if we do not respond to those forces, we're just going to be left behind.

You know, I like to use a lot of sports analogies, and the one I use for this is that we could have the best defensive roster in the NFL, but if our team is not trained to compete against a no-huddle offense, you know, we're just going to be continuously caught out of position. We're going to be too many men on the field. You can imagine just the disruption that will cause.

And so we – you know, the maritime domain in and of itself, the system of oceans and seas, you know, it's been in place since man first put to sea, but even within that context, as much as so many things have remained the same, you know, the traffic on that system has increased by a factor of four since the early 1990s. And so there is this really rapid increase in the use of those seas and access to resources on the sea floor, access to continental shelves, both by virtue of the climate change and the change in the north and also technology which gives that access.

So the maritime system is increasingly used and increasingly contested. There is this system of information which is really just exploding and changing the way we do business worldwide, including the maritime. And then there is – and they're all interrelated, but the rate at which technology is introduced as well, kind of going to the call to become more rapid in acquisition. You know, that has picked up tremendously, not only the introduction of technology but also the rate at which is adopted by, you know, our people.

And so if we don't keep up with that, we're just going to be fundamentally out of position to address whatever challenge in terms of competitors come our way. And so we spend a fair amount of time articulating that challenge and the need to address that challenge.

And then, of course, there are though the players on that field – you mentioned, you know, I see them sort of as in three groups, if you will. You know, one is kind of the great power competition group, and so that would be Russia and China, and you mentioned those, sir.

MR. TALENT: And you noted in the design document that we're now back in an era –

ADM. RICHARDSON: I think we are. I think we are, you know, and it has been some time really since the fall of the wall, you know, the early '90s you might say that we were in a time of a great power competition.

And also, you know, that has great implications for our business on the maritime because I would say – and you mentioned it – in many areas, for the first time in 25 years, we are being challenged on the high seas in a way that we haven't seen in a long time. And so that's one group.

And then, the second group would be sort of Iran, North Korea. You know, I hesitate to call them regional because nothing's regional anymore. Everything has global dimensions and so – but they're a different group of threat. And then there is this transnational counterterrorism threat. And so that's how I kind of see the competitive environment in which we're operating right now.

MR. TALENT: Yeah. The design document talked about these disruptive forces, which I thought were very interesting. And one thing that was common to all of them is that they introduce elements which cause everything to move quicker. I mean, decision-making – one of the concerns, you know, I have about decision-making in a crisis situation is that, you know, your top-level people have to make decisions because the pace of combat has grown so much.

Now, you also – in connection with this, another phrase that caught my eye in the document is that we can't have a top-down Navy in terms of decision-making process.

ADM. RICHARDSON: Right.

MR. TALENT: So is that because you're concerned that a top-down institutionalized approach won't respond quick enough? And give a little more granularity about what you think a bottom-up Navy would look like that you're not doing today.

ADM. RICHARDSON: I would say it just a little bit differently, not so much, you know, top-down versus bottom up but I would say centralized versus decentralized. And so I've always been sort of an advocate of decentralized operations because it allows those commanders that are out on point, distributed, to take best advantage of those opportunities and threats that only they will see.

And so I think it's as much – you know, there's a geographic dimension to it. A centralized commander will never have full awareness – as full of awareness as the commander in situ.

As well, you know, there's opportunities that will come and go. They'll be fleeting. And there just may not be time to go and check back. Now, technology has sort of worked against us in many ways here. It's made us – you know, it's made it easier to connect, therefore, easier to check in, if you will.

And so I think that not only is there some technological aspects to this, but there's some training and leader development aspects of this in terms of how do I craft commander's guidance that will allow those subordinate commanders go out in a decentralized manner and still, you know, achieve the mission, right, in the broader sense.

One thing that I think is fundamental to that, and what we're really talking about here is a level of trust and confidence, is that we have a common set of values, and so we spend amount of time in the document talking about – in the design, talking about core values and the behaviors or attributes that would, you know, support those core values.

And so, you know, one thing I'm focused on very intently is to make sure, you know, it's a very competitive environment for people and despite many, many choices, we have still very, very talented people coming into the Navy and raising their right hand and taking an oath to support and defend the constitution. And, you know, we don't offer them some of the compensation that other options would offer. But I think that they're attracted to the fact that we offer them a set of values and the opportunity to be part of something that's bigger than themselves.

And so we have to make sure that our organization, our behaviors are as consistent with those values as we can make them. And that allows us to have that trust and confidence so that when I send a commander over the horizon with his or her team, I can be confident that they're going to come back stronger in every way, not only from a war-fighting perspective, but also in terms of this, you know, value-centric belief system that we have.

MR. TALENT: Now, you also mentioned, because you're talking about decentralizing and trusting commanders who are on the side. You also in the document talk about the importance of accountability, so let me ask you a question in a little bit different context.

I'm curious about your response because, as you know, the NDAA, the National Defense Authorization Act, addressed acquisition reform. And Senator McCain and others felt very strongly it was important to empower the service chiefs really in implementation of the idea you just talked about – you know, that you have certain people that have responsibilities so you give them the authority commensurate with those responsibilities.

So it may be a little self-serving to ask you, but what do you think of those trends? What other changes would you like to see in the acquisition process, if any, that maybe you're talking to the secretary about or the oversight committees? And do you want to offer any views on where you think Goldwater-Nichols ought to go to or ought to go, if at all? I won't press you on the final point if you don't want to share about that.

ADM. RICHARDSON: Well, at least in the acquisition part, I'd be happy to talk about that.

MR. TALENT: Sure.

ADM. RICHARDSON: And so, you know, I welcome getting more involved in the acquisition programs. If I could just sort of camp out on the accountability element first.

You know, oftentimes, now in particular, I think we too often conflate the term accountability with discipline. And accountability in my mind is a much broader concept than discipline. And so I see myself as being responsible or accountable for delivering the Navy that the nation needs to execute our mission.

And so, you know, that's something I have to deliver, right? And so I'm ready to be held accountable for that – to be accountable for delivering that if that is not always consistent with just punishing everybody.

MR. TALENT: Sure.

ADM. RICHARDSON: So we have to make sure that we have the fullest sense of accountability when we talk about that. And so, you know, we try and take a stab at that in the design.

With respect to applying that to acquisition, you know, I like to think of a concept of ownership, which is broader than accountability still, and includes, you know, not only accountability, but also authority and responsibility and, very importantly, the technical knowledge, you know, to know what you're running.

And so I think that with the '16 National Defense Authorization Act and also combined with Navy policy – you know, the combination of those two things allow me to exercise ownership much more so over Navy acquisition. And I look forward to exercising that completely.

Other areas where I think where we're striving to improve in acquisition is, you know, not only the oversight and, you know, controls, I would say, the discipline, but also the speed, as you mentioned.

And so we've got some initiatives to do some – you know, to create a speed lane, if you will, for those programs, technologies for which it's appropriate to get quickly out and do some rapid prototyping and experimentation, get those out to the fleet, maybe even some technologies that are well enough conceived to go rapidly from cradle to grave and deliver.

And so we're looking to try and build that speed lane for acquisition doing this very much with the secretary and OSD and then – and also discussing this with the Congress and then we'll migrate, you know, more and more of our acquisition processes out to the speed lane as it becomes applicable.

MR. TALENT: Let me follow up on a broad acquisition issue. I referred before to the tension or the potential tension between presence and posture, presence and lethality, you know, you can describe it different ways. And the truth is, as you said, and as even the people on both sides of it who are perceived as being able to recognize we need both presence and posture. We at AEI have been working very hard to get substantial increases in the top line of the budget.

I mean, absent that, can we really – can you figure out a way, you think, to afford both in the – you know, in the necessary amounts? Are we headed towards a Navy of smaller vessels? Are we trying to make more lethal – share your ideas and your thinking about that.

ADM. RICHARDSON: Well, a tension is a great way to talk about it. And it's sort of my job with my leadership team to sort of walk that knife edge, you know, right down the middle of that.

And so I have been deflecting, you know, kind of trying to be pigeonholed into that false choice, are you a capacity person or are you a capability person? Well, you know, the truth of the matter is I've got to be both. And that's exactly what the nation expects. And, you know, I see it sort of as a needle that has to strike that balance. And sometimes it has to correct over this way and sometimes it has to correct back, you know, another way. But as long as we sort of do our best to strike that balance, we're doing our job.

And so – and this budget I think reflects, you know, a movement in that as well. Maybe back towards high-end capability if you wanted to, you know, talk about which way the needle is moving right now. But I think you've pointed out that you really need both, right? You can't go all in one direction or all in the other because you just won't have a Navy that can execute its mission.

And so as we look for future concepts – and these sorts of ideas are in the design as well – we're really looking to – and it's in this, you know, like of effort that describes operations and war-fighting, look forward now, anticipate some of these technologies, try and do our best to anticipate what the competitive maritime war-fighting environment will be.

And then, you know, as our fleet, you know, posture, are we leaning forward into that future? Are we looking at all possibilities in terms of employing not only the fleet we have today as creatively and effectively and efficiently as possible, but also are looking to what's the next generation – what must that look like, you know, with all of these technologies, particularly with the advent of information warfare really becoming a mainstream of our business? You know, what does the next warship look like? I think that that's also a responsibility I have, and we look forward to getting after that.

MR. TALENT: And in trying to fulfill both of those, and fulfilling both of those responsibilities – I don't like to refer to the Navy as trying. I think you succeed. But there's no question that it's a tremendous task, especially with the Navy, where the number of ships has declined, your sailors are working very hard. They're deploying for a long time. Each of the services is struggling with readiness issues.

Are there any in the Navy which concern you particularly where you're putting more personal attention to, in terms of readiness, stress, readiness issues, readiness vulnerabilities?

ADM. RICHARDSON: What we're paying a lot of attention to is, again – and it is striking a balance. Certainly, you know, those forces that we deploy forward are going to be our absolute top priority. We will never deploy forces that aren't fully ready to confront the full spectrum of challenges that they may face out there.

But in the long term, we've done a lot to return to a model – you know, a force provision model that delivers forces at what I would call a sustainable rate, OK? So we're bringing deployment lengths back under the control. You know, at the end of this year, the plan will be for seven-month deployments, which is at a sustainable rate both from a material standpoint, but even more importantly from a people standpoint.

MR. TALENT: Now, when I was in the Congress, the idea was six months was what was, but you're convinced that seven is sustainable.

ADM. RICHARDSON: We can get seven, yes, sir. And so that's our going-in model. Now, the responsibility to execute that plan, get through maintenance on time, get through the training cycle on time so that you deploy ready from every aspect, you know, that's what this optimized fleet response plan is doing.

Within that, you know, we've got – so we've got this deployed readiness that we deliver and then we've got kind of the reserves that, you know, the reinforcements that would go out. And so, you know, that's where are a looking to invest, recover that readiness as quickly as possible. We're still digging out of the trough that we dug with the 10-month deployments and, you know, driving ourselves into a readiness debt.

And we're seeing that, you know, a bit across the board. Some areas are more acute than others. Our strike fighter inventory management has got my attention in a very focused way, but I think across the board the plan to recovery is well understood. It's going to take a little bit of time. It's going to take, you know, predictable, sustained resources to get there. Any fluctuations in that, either from a – you know, the amount or even the uncertainty of, you know, the delivery of that, those ripples get felt through all the contracting actions and everything else that we need to do to return ships and people back to full readiness.

And so we just look for as much stability and predictability and adequate resources to recover that.

MR. TALENT: And do you think – I'm sure you're focusing on getting a buy-in for these from the sailors, you know, from the men and women that actually have to go out and do it. Are you satisfied with where morale is? I mean, do you think that people get this future and are buying into it?

ADM. RICHARDSON: Well, you know, they're – I think that they are, right? One of the first things I did was I had the opportunity to sort of visit our Navy around the world. And it was inspiring really to see in the Seventh Fleet, you know, out in Asia, in the Fifth Fleet in the Middle East, Sixth Fleet in Europe, every one of those theaters, very, very challenged in very different ways.

And everywhere I went – and I talked to a lot of sailors, they have a solid understanding of the role that they're playing for our nation protecting our interests abroad. They're partnering with other nations and other navies and multi-national coalitions. They're meeting challenges head on and they are focused and ready. They have a great sense of their purpose.

And so I think that right now morale is good. They're very interested in this. I mean, you would I think be amazed at the strategic nature of the questions you get in an all-hands call, you know, and this is from, you know, a seaman all the way up to a senior officer.

They're all asking great questions about, you know, what about this readiness thing? Are we going to come back to sustainable levels of readiness, sustainable deployment lengths? And so they know about this plan. You know, we're returning to seven-month deployments, is that sustainable? I don't think that they argue that number but they've – you know, they're eying it and they're watching it closely as we deliver.

MR. TALENT: Yeah. And that's one of the reasons I was so interested in your bottom-up or your – because you have such a reservoir of expertise, energy out there in the Navy.

ADM. RICHARDSON: Right.

MR. TALENT: And people are thinking about issues that are – you normally would think it was the level above, where they're actually, you know, operating in is a tremendous amount.

Let me ask you one more and then we're going to go to questions. I'm going to switch a little bit here. You and the commandant, General Miller, have – mentioned last week that you're looking at an improved integration between the carrier strike groups and the amphibious ready groups.

Can you just talk a little bit about what you think that might entail from your side of the team? And then we'll go to questions from the audience.

ADM. RICHARDSON: Sure. It's work to be done still, but General Miller and I are really committed and it falls right into that line of effort that talks about operations and war-fighting. And it is about naval operations and naval war-fighting, right? And so, you know, the Navy-Marine Corps team as a combination is sort of – you know, we call them America's away team, response team, what have you. And so we can't do anything in isolation, I don't think.

So as we start to develop new and creative ways to employ our force, to design our future force, we need to make sure that we are doing so, you know, with our arms locked with our Marine Corps brothers because, you know, they get to and from on ships, right? Their mission is highly dependent upon, you know, our part of the naval team, and vice versa. And so this – you know, this great partnership, we've just committed to take this on together so that we're as synchronized as possible as we go forward.

MR. TALENT: I was pleased to see that because one of my experiences has been Congress can – or the secretary can tinker around with structures and lines of command, and that's important, but if the people who are actually in the positions are not committed to working together, there isn't any org chart that will fix that problem.

ADM. RICHARDSON: Right. No, that's right. Personalities matter and all those things. And so we got together very – I think we were confirmed within a week of each other and we said, OK. We got together very quickly after that. We've met many, many times since, just to kind of reinforce and visibly demonstrate to everybody who is looking that there's no daylight between us. And I think that's going to be important.

Before we go to questions, if I could just come back to your point about, you know, the – I guess the astuteness of our junior sailors. You know, another part of the design is in this core attribute of initiative.

MR. TALENT: Right.

ADM. RICHARDSON: And, you know, it's just kind of part of my upbringing that we're always, you know, conscious that the very best question or the very best idea might come from one of the most junior people in the room. And we need to be open to all of that contribution and open to all of the curiosity that they bring and encourage them to ask questions when they don't know something, encourage them to contribute, you know, because they may have the one thing that saves the day, so yeah.

MR. TALENT: Right. I always felt that's an important principle in acquisition if to air on the side of getting the platform out there because once the guys and the girls work with it, they can tell you then what you need to do.

ADM. RICHARDSON: Right. Exactly right.

MR. TALENT: I don't want – this isn't about my views. It's about yours. So let's go to questions. We need a mic probably there, right?

Q: I can be loud.

MR. TALENT: As we well know.

Q: Yes.

MR. TALENT: Go ahead.

Q: Sydney Freedberg.

ADM. RICHARDSON: Sydney and I have been having this running gun, you know, conversation that – yeah.

Q: Yes. Sydney Freedberg –

MR. TALENT: So when I said fire away, that was like –

ADM. RICHARDSON: Yeah. Sidney – you could see Sidney sit up straight or –

MR. TALENT: He's going to fire away. OK. Now that we've prepared the ground for you, Sidney, go ahead.

Q: Sydney Freedberg, Breaking Defense, loud guy. You said something tantalizing which is that you guys are looking at the next generation of warship, the warship of the future. Obviously, you do not have a model in your pocket to pull out at this stage.

ADM. RICHARDSON: Right. Right.

Q: But what are some of the considerations that are going into that concept? What are some of the technology we have to sort of investigate now to make that happen? And, for that matter, you know, the sailors and – the sailors and officers who are going to be on that, who are probably in grade school now, what different qualities do they need to show in terms of initiative, in terms of, you know, being digital natives versus the current iteration of sailors, as good as they are?

ADM. RICHARDSON: Right. So I think – you know, one is a technical aspect, Sydney, and I think related to that will be a development aspect. And so you talk about digital natives, you know, so many people who are coming into the Navy and the workforce in general are so very, very adept and comfortable with some of these digital technologies. I think that, you know, that's going to be a key part of the next generation of warship. It will also be I guess digitally native or information native.

And so my sense is the way we are incorporating informational warfare now is – you know, we’re taking the platforms that we have and we’re making them very capable by adding systems on. The next generation I think is going to be, you know, information technologies and information warfare will be in the DNA of the ship from the very design.

And we also have to be mindful that I don’t think that the next generation that will man that ship is in grade school. I think we’re going to have to do that much faster. We’re going to have to move to an overall concept where we might deliver a platform that will – or a family of platforms. But inside that family, that platform may last the life of a traditional ship, 25, 30 years. But inside that, I think increasingly so, we have to make it very much more modular or adaptable to improving technologies.

So you can sort of see two things. There will some aspects of that ship that will last 25, 30 years and maybe but there will be an increasing percentage of that ship that will riding that Moore’s law curve, if you will, and refreshing in terms of payloads, in terms of sensors. All of that will be improving much more quickly.

Now, the leadership that’s going to have to eventually run those ships is going to be another part of it, and so it goes back I think to this decentralized approach. And I think that, you know, on one hand, it’s tempting to think that all of that information and everything is going to bring with it a lot more decision clarity. But I think when you really consider full on information warfare, it’s going to be at least as challenging right now, if not more so, to ferret through all of that – what’s real, what’s not, what’s relevant, what’s not – and make decisions in that environment.

So we still need to continue to address sort of the fundamental nature of warfare, which is a competition between two thinking adversaries, and find the best way to pit those two minds against each other.

MR. TALENT: Yes, ma’am?

Q: Mitzi Wertheim of the Naval Postgraduate School. Admiral, I’m really impressed with your statement and story for us. Having worked on acquisition reform back in the Carter years and knowing how hard that is, what’s the plan of educating, I guess, the people who are in the acquisition system so that they become attuned to the new things that are needed because so many of them are caught in their own stovepipes. And I guess it’s the question of continuing to educate the workforce so they keep up with the 20th century changes.

ADM. RICHARDSON: Right, so I think there’s a couple of aspects, Mitzi. One is – you know, one line of effort in the design talks about partnerships. And within that, we talk about partnerships with industry and within academia and labs and those sorts of things. And so we need to make sure we’re doing everything possible to lower the impedance barriers for that community to collaborate, right? And I think we’re making progress on that regard.

And so that will just make our, you know, government technologists as deeply ingrained and as fully knowledgeable as possible of what sort of the state-of-the-art out there, what is the – what is possible.

And then, within, you know, the kind of the standard acquisition muscle movements, I think we do a pretty good job with our budgeting team, right, so you know, those N8 folks, they get identified earlier. They get a tattoo and they're never out of that. They come back and back and back, right?

Similarly, the program managers go down to Defense Acquisition University and there's some nice formal training there. And you know, that curriculum can be refreshed as the conditions change as well.

Where I think there might be some gains to be made is in the requirements officer part of that, which is often the most important part. And so, you know, I'm looking to formalize a little bit more how to educate our requirements officers, so that they know sort of what is really truly needed. And then you get the team together and you find out, you know, kind of where is that need of the curve, right? So that my requirements – I might have articulated a requirement that would be terrific, except that when I bring the technologist in and the budgeter in, I can't afford it, right? So I've got to find that sweet spot, and those early conversations I think are absolutely critical to getting that right.

And then, we've got to have the discipline to execute, so we don't creep off either in requirements or what have you, so that there's discipline through execution.

Q: Thank you.

MR. TALENT: That gentleman there.

Q: Thank you so much. My name is Atsushi Okudera from Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun. Thanks so much for great speech. I'd like to ask about the South China Sea. As you know, China is building up an artificial island and military outpost in South China Sea, the Spratly Island. For United States Army, you know, strategically I'm asking about what is your estimation of how serious the building, these kind of building artificial island or possible military outposts in South China Sea, particularly in terms of A2/AD or Chinese surveillance capability or some, you know, (exit opp ?) Chinese submarine or power balance in case of that dispute. How you think its seriousness –

ADM. RICHARDSON: Right.

Q: Particularly from the military aspect. Thanks so much.

ADM. RICHARDSON: I think that I'll just take your question and address it at a little higher level if I could and try and put any kind of military activity there in context. And you know, the reason we have a navy is to protect, you know, our interests, which

mostly, you know, relate to prosperity and growth, right? And so it's that maritime security that allows us to do that.

You know, we've had in place now a set of rules, norms of behavior, international laws, you know, for 70 years that have allowed many, many nations to grow and prosper. It's a pretty level playing field in terms of – and it's pretty well articulated. And you know, so international waters are open to everybody. And there are rules governing, you know, maritime trade, which is so important to so many nations, particularly in that region of the world.

I just came back from a visit to India and, you know, when you think about how much we have in common – and it's similar with Japan. You know, we are maritime nations. We all get 90 percent plus of our trade via the sea. And so the rule set that governs traffic over the seas is extremely important. And the rule set that's been in place for the last 70 years has been an inclusive set that allows everybody to prosper. And many of the nations, including China, have benefited greatly from that rule set.

So where I get concerned is, you know, in many ways, you know, China as a very complex growing nation is behaving consistent with that rule set, right? We do exercises together. There's things that are very consistent with that. This activity in the South China Sea with respect to island building, excessive maritime claims, you know, it injects a tremendous amount of uncertainty and disruption in terms of, you know, trying to ferret out what are the intentions here. And anything that would sort of threaten or bring into question that set of international rules, that set of norms, I think we'd be very concerned with.

MR. TALENT: Bob. Gentleman in green, Bob.

Q: Hi, Admiral, Tony Capaccio with Bloomberg News. Can you address the – as a submariner, the real challenges with the Littoral Combat Ship as well as the perceived problems with the program that you've inherited that you need to either fix or disabuse people of in order to retain support of the program?

ADM. RICHARDSON: Tony, what does my being a submariner have to do with that? (Laughter.)

Q: You're not invested emotionally in the program.

ADM. RICHARDSON: As a submariner, I have no emotions at all, Tony. So – (laughter). I think that – we just have to take a very non-emotional view of the Littoral Combat Ship. I think it absolutely has a role to play in the United States Navy. And that role I think has been very well articulated. And so we have to make sure we all understand what that role is and what it is not, right? And so this is not a ship that was ever designed to be, you know, the one-stop, high-end, you know, solo war-fighting ship. It does some things well on it's own, right? I mean, certainly it's – and we've done that, right, with a couple of deployments. It does other things very, very well in concert with

other, you know, platforms. And so, you know, I just think we just, like you said, non-emotionally understand the role of the ship and what it can do and what it can't do.

We also have to understand, like every new ship, every new class of ship, we're learning as these ships come out and go to sea. And you know, as we learn those lessons, we are bringing those on board and we're adapting. And as we talked about a little bit before, you know, the crews and the sailors that go out and run these things around and, you know, given those initial deployments and tests, their creativity starts to enter into the equation. And they say, hey, you know, we never thought of this when we designed the thing, but this thing works pretty well if you just do this. It's designed, you know, kind of in an open architecture, maybe leaning forward into this modular type of an approach.

You know, some of the things that we can put in those modules now, today, weren't even a twinkle in the eye when we designed that ship. That's how fast things are changing. But there's some open architecture there.

I think we also have to be clear-eyed that, as with any new ship, there are some challenges, right? There're some engineering challenges and those sorts of things. And we don't want to walk past those, and we'll address those as they go. But overall, I think that this type of a platform, in terms of achieving overall maritime superiority has a legitimate, important role to play. And I look forward to, you know, learning and addressing problems as they arise and helping this program achieve not only the role for which it was designed, but also maybe things that we never conceived of.

MR. TALENT: Let's go – all right, yes, sir.

Q: Hi, my name is Alex Sanchez. I write for the Center of International Maritime Security. Admiral, thank you for your comments. My question's about the Fourth Fleet, also known as the Paper Fleet, since the only vessel that seems to be deployed is USNS Comfort when it carries out humanitarian missions in Haiti or the Caribbean. I was wondering what you think about it, the Fourth Fleet's future. You talked about budget cutting – redundant bureaucracy and operational costs. And have you ever talked to Admiral Ballance, the commander of Navy South about where U.S. need to continue having this fleet in existence? Thank you.

ADM. RICHARDSON: Right. I think the Fourth Fleet it's a very important fleet. And we, you know, it's really just fundamentally a matter of prioritization. But we do provide sort of a steady capability down there. And that capability – I mean, we can show the numbers in terms of illicit trafficking interdiction and those sorts of things that it's involved in that does – you know, the productivity, if you will, of that fleet continues to show its value.

We also recently had the George Washington Strike Group go around and do tremendous exercises with many South American nations as it transited around, you know, the continent and up to Norfolk. And we'll look for every other opportunity like that to do what we can to support, you know, our allies and partners down there, exercise

with them. And so I think it's a fleet that is overall doing solid work. We will continue to support it with every resource that we can spare. And so I think it's, you know, a very valuable asset down there.

MR. TALENT: You know, it's an example of the concern about presence, right, versus lethality. You know, when you only have a certain number of ships, they only go so far.

Yes, in the back.

Q: Yes, I'm Russell King. Yes, Admiral, I was wondering if you could discuss generally naval chokepoints because I understand there're certain nations who station forces near chokepoints. I believe Bab-el-Mandeb might be one for Chinese, maybe stationing some troops near there. I think the Russians maybe have had some troops near the Turkish Straits. And the Turkish Straits, actually, I think it's more free for Russians going back and forth because of the Montreal Convention. But is there any particular threats to chokepoints that you need to consider, and especially with the smaller number of ships we have in the Navy today?

ADM. RICHARDSON: Right. So this idea of chokepoints is a really interesting one, I think. And some things regarding chokepoints have really not changed, right? The tectonic plates are not moving fast enough. The geographic chokepoints that we confront today are the same ones that, you know, we confronted when we deployed against the Barbary pirates, right, off the Straits of Gibraltar. And so if you look at a map of the oceans, although, you know, it's – one great thing about the oceans is you can move so uniformly across it. Right, it's a very fluid environment, if you will, if you'll allow me that pun.

But they don't, right? I mean, it's not a uniform distribution of traffic. And sea-lanes and everything are defined by those chokepoints. And I don't think that that fundamentally has changed in the history of, you know, maritime trade and maritime security. What has changed is some of those other forces that I talk about in the design. And so when you combine information technology with information availability, you now, you know, what was a fairly local chokepoint, if you've got the right systems there, you've really – let say that you could influence traditionally out to 100 miles, you know, from a point. When I get technologies that can strike at a distance with very great precision out to 800 miles, let's say.

So you start to overlay – you know, you compare 200-mile circles with 800 miles circles and lay those over the chokepoints, and you start to see what we mean by these anti-access types of technologies that make things much more challenging. So I think that it's really, you know, a much broader problem in terms of chokepoints. We're not restricted necessarily to those confines of the geographic chokepoints. They've been spread out by virtue of some of these technologies.

You know, we talk about the information system. And again, you log on to your computer and you think it's all very accessible, it's all very fluid. But the fact of the matter there, too, is that that information flows on cables and wires and servers and all those sorts of things. And so – satellites – and so there's a structure even there. There's chokepoints in that information system as well.

And so this idea of chokepoints, because they offer so much in terms of opportunity and vulnerability, I think is one that we have to monitor in all the systems in which we operate. And these forces that – you know, I take a stab at describing in the design, I think are changing the nature of what a chokepoint is.

MR. TALENT: Let me ask a follow-up on that because you mentioned information flow several times and appropriately so. So we know the Department's more concerned and I think we're all concerned about the viability, survivability of the space architecture in the event of a conflict. And we've really only just begun to think about what we need to do there. But when you are working through your new ship building programs, are you thinking in terms of systems that would be able to maintain that flow of information in a theater of combat, even if something happens, the GPS system is compromised, is that a promising line and are you, you know, are you concerned about those kinds of capabilities?

ADM. RICHARDSON: I think it's absolutely fundamental line. I think we're negligent if we don't consider that. And so we're focused on that on a great deal. So when we – you know, in the design, if you look at the mission statement that we highlight there, there's really not a whole not new about it. It's taken right from Title X. So it's solid ground to stand on.

The only thing that I would – that I dare to add to that is to just highlight that this mission now has to be executed in multiple domains at once because it all comes at you at one time. And so from the sea floor up to space, you know, from the deep water into littoral and in this information domain, we've got to be ready to prevail in every one of those at once. And so you know, you just look at some of the vulnerabilities that arise in every one of those domains, information domain you highlighted – space and other places – if we're not looking to mitigate the vulnerabilities there, then I should be held accountable for that.

MR. TALENT: And a good thing is that given the abilities of our sailors, if we can provide them capabilities in that regard, I would count on our forces being able to operate and innovate in that kind of a context, as well as anybody's or better than anybody's in the world.

ADM. RICHARDSON: Right, I would agree with you. It's sort of asymmetric advantage is our creativity and ingenuity and our ability to act independently. We need to make sure that we continue to foster that. And so one thing that I'm always evaluating is has that connectivity led to, you know, a dependence that may have gone past the point of being healthy, you know. So that I want to – this goes back to the distributed command

that we talked about, you know, are they ready to act independently. So we need to make sure that's part of our development programs.

MR. TALENT: All right. This gentleman right here.

Q: Sir, excellent presentation. George Nicholson from the Global Special Operations Forces Foundation. Issue involving Navy SEALs. Congressman Zinke, from Montano, former Navy SEAL who's on the House Armed Services Committee has expressed serious concern about the decision of shutting down the two units, HSA units that's been supporting – support to the SEALs. Are you looking at how what they provided in the past is going to be able to – how they're going to be supported?

And the other question is the original requirement for the V-22 for the Navy was 48 aircraft. It was to support COD support, it was to support CSAR, and support the SEALs. Now, you're going to – you made the decision to acquire 42 for the Navy. I'd asked the question about are they also going to have a mission of supporting the SEALs and CSAR. And I'd been told, no, that's not in our charter.

ADM. RICHARDSON: Well, with respect to the helicopter squadrons that you talk about, the budget we just dropped does retain some of that capability. So I think we've – and we've been working very closely with, you know, Special Forces community to make sure that we've continued that support.

With respect to the Osprey, you know, I mean the world's wide open for that aircraft, right? It's just so versatile. We're buying a bunch of them, mostly to replace our C-2s right now is kind of where we're focused. But again, you know, with something that versatile, I don't think that we'd want to preclude any kind of a role for it.

MR. TALENT: Yes, ma'am, on the side, over there.

Q: Thank you. Leandra Bernstein, Sputnik International News. In the latest Pentagon budget request there was, I believe, \$3.4 billion for the NATO European Reassurance Initiative, and I'm wondering what that means for you. It's about a fourfold increase over the previous year. So I'm wondering what it means in terms of Navy presence, whether rotational or permanent, specifically in the Aegean, Black, and Mediterranean.

ADM. RICHARDSON: Right. You know, one of the stops I made when I first came to the job was this Regional Seapower Symposium held in Italy. And it was for sort of Eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea nations. So I got a chance to talk with all of my chiefs of navy, you know, counterparts there. And you know, the one thing that dominated that was the concern with this resurgent Russia, particularly in the Eastern Med. And you've seen it throughout, right, the Black Sea, even the Caspian Sea in terms of the Russian navy becoming much more active.

Their role in Syria was, you know, a brand new thing at the time. And so we have been increasing our presence there. We've got four destroyers now forward stationed in Rota, and so we've been doing that. You know, the other area which has been sort of a consistent demand signal is activity in the undersea. And so I would say that, you know, I'm in constant conversations with Admiral Foggo and Admiral Ferguson out there in terms of what sort of, you know, thing they need. And so we will play a role on that. It'll be responding to sort of the demands that the theater imposes. And I'll be, you know, in very close touch with our Navy commanders out there.

Q: But what those demands, do you have any sense of what those demands are now?

ADM. RICHARDSON: You know, I hesitate to – I mean, we talked some of the threats that are coming out. But, you know, I hesitate to kind of commit to specifics in terms of what we'll forward deploy.

MR. TALENT: Let me go to somebody over here. Yes, sir.

Q: Sir, Admiral, Byron Callan, Capital Alpha Partners. We seem to go through these generational debates about ship size, Jefferson's Gunboats, Admiral Zumwalt sea-control ships. You know, the Senate wants to have a look at the size of our carriers and I just wonder if, you know, there're arguments for larger platforms in terms of their endurance and survivability. Is there anything you see over the next four or five years that would kind of fundamentally change that debate. It may go back to some of the earlier questions on Littoral Combat Ship and fleet architecture. Or do you think there is just an enduring argument for these large platforms that are simply going to be more survivable, endure longer?

ADM. RICHARDSON: Right. I think that – I mean, this is just, you know, speculation going forward, but I think that's the lethality and effectiveness of some of our systems going forward, both kinetic, you know, sort of traditional weapons, missiles with payloads, warheads. And then, also sort of the non-kinetic, electromagnetic types or directed energy types of payloads – that will cause us to think hard about the value and the shape of – you know, the value of size in and of itself and the, you know, the shape of future warships.

So, you know, as we think about the sort of the next Navy, it goes back to Sidney's question, I guess, is if we're not building that type of thing into the DNA of the ship, then I think we're missing an opportunity to open those questions up and take a look. We may, at the end of that, find that there is just sort of an intrinsic greatness to size. You can carry more stuff, right? It's just displacement.

How that relates to size, survivability, or increased vulnerability in this new world, I think we have to really take on very hard. So it seems to me that a trend is that you can get more and more capability, just miniaturization, right, into a smaller package. What that means from a war ship standpoint is, I think, all has to be on the table, right?

So certainly some things can be delivered in a smaller package, but some things just can't. And so how do we combine all that together? Mass is becoming more and more a vulnerability than it is, you know, an advantage. And so we're going to be operating more distributed, you know, dispersed. And so how each and every warship fits into that, that's the really creative work, I think, that we need to do.

But if we don't think ahead, you know, if we think behind and we kind of take out the last plan and say, how can we upgrade this, I think we're going to fall behind our potential there.

MR. TALENT: And the natural tendency is to go for a mix, but you have to guard against – or tell me if you think – sort of compromising as a way of avoiding making decisions. In other words, we're not certain what direction we want to go in, so we'll try and go in both directions. Is that a concern you think about?

ADM. RICHARDSON: Well, yeah. So you get to this sort of gray middle that really doesn't achieve anything very well. But on the other hand, you know, not everything that the Navy does is high-end war-fighting. So in terms of assuring our allies, deterring, responding to crises, you know, the Navy is – I think it's – in its fullest manifestation does more for the nation than war-fighting. Certainly, we must be able to fight and win our nation's wars at sea. That is, you know, the go, no-go criteria. And we'll never take our eye off of that.

But there are other things as well. And you know, they have a legitimate role in that maritime security.

MR. TALENT: Let me see if we can get one or two more in. Right, yes, ma'am.

Q: Admiral, Navy Aviation, can you tell us a little bit more about that strike fighter shortfall that has you concerned? And what do you see – what do you want on the deck in terms of unmanned aviation?

ADM. RICHARDSON: Right, that's a great question. So you know, some of the today's concerns about strike fighter inventory are fairly, you know, well defined, I think. So we have, you know, aircraft that just need to get through their depot maintenance period and get back out on to the runways as ready aircraft so that we can put them back into the inventory and get our pilots flying them. Particularly for the legacy Hornets, we ran into some unanticipated problems, getting through those. We're addressing that by increasing, you know, the number of workers in the depot. We're getting some help from the private sector where it's necessary. And so that's just a matter of depot throughput.

As we're sort of seeing this shortfall on the legacy Hornets, while we're flying our Super Hornets fast, you know, more, and so you can see flight hours building up on those. And we're learning – we're taking all the lessons we learned from the legacy Hornet challenge and – looking forward and making sure that we incorporate all of that going forward.

And then, there's the, you know, the new platforms, the Joint Strike Fighter, the fifth generation aircraft, the continuing role of the new Super Hornets, and then, as you said, you know, unmanned technologies. I'm eager to get started in unmanned technologies. And so I want to get, you know, something on the deck of an aircraft carrier, unmanned as quickly as we can with a legitimate role to play because there is so much we've got to learn there, so many unexplored questions.

And so, you know, we've kind of revamped our strategy there with UCLASS now, CBARS. I'm not sure I'm too much in love with that CBARS name. So you know, I keep – you know – we'll come up with something better than that. But, you know, so we're looking at something that we can get there. It has a legitimate role in terms of tanking. And I would say that ISR is on the table for sure. And you know, we'll free up tactical aircraft by virtue of taking on that mission, but even more important we'll learn how to integrate unmanned aircraft into our air wing. And what does that mean, flying on and off a carrier? Well, there's just so much to learn now that I want to get after that.

In the meantime, you know, the decisions that we make now will – we'll do our very best not to preclude increasing the platform's capability in other areas as technologies come available, as we learn those lessons and we kind of grow into that. So – but I think there's just so much to learn right. I'm eager to get started.

MR. TALENT: And I'd love to keep going, but we have reached our closure point. So thanks to the audience for your attendance and your great questions. I think we had a lot of great questions.

ADM. RICHARDSON: No, it's terrific. Thank you.

MR. TALENT: And thank you, CNO, for being here.

ADM. RICHARDSON: Senator, thanks so much. (Applause.) Thank you very much. Thanks.

(END)