

CNO Defends Survivability, Utility of Aircraft Carriers

WASHINGTON – The Navy’s top officer defended the notion of survivability for U.S. aircraft carriers and their battle groups in an era when great power competitors are developing advanced weaponry such as hypersonic missiles.

“There is a great virtue to being able to move an airfield 720 miles in a day,” Adm. John M. Richardson, chief of naval operations, said Jan. 28 to an audience at the Brookings Institution, referring to the mobility of an aircraft carrier as opposed to a land-based airfield.

Stating that the topic of hypersonic missiles necessarily involved classified information that he could not discuss, Richardson said that the Navy was very much engaged in ensuring the survivability of its aircraft carriers.

“So rather than talk about the vulnerability of the carrier strike group, we should think about it as the most survivable airfield in the region,” Richardson said. “If you look at the history of the vulnerability of aircraft carriers, we’re less vulnerable now than we have been since and including World War II.

“In the Cold War, the Soviet submarine force was out there in great numbers, so there was vulnerability associated with that. So a combination of operational concepts and defensive systems – it is a give and take as we go – those carriers are able to have a big impact on the operational space.”