

Gilday: Fleet Commanders Ought to 'Drive the Fight'



Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday participates in a discussion panel during the Defense Forum Washington 2019 hosted by the U.S. Naval Institute on Dec. 6. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Raymond D. Diaz III

WASHINGTON – The new chief of naval operations (CNO) is planning on a return to large fleet exercises and plans to hold them annually, part of an initiative to conduct fleet-level naval warfare in an era of great power competition.

In his Fragmentation Order (“Frago”) 01/2019, a refinement of his predecessors Design for Maritime Security 2.0, Adm. Mike Gilday called for a mastery of fleet-level warfare, noting that “fleet design and operating concepts demand that fleets be the operational center of warfare.”

At the Dec. 5 U.S. Naval Institute’s Defense Forum in Washington, Gilday said that fleet commanders ought to “drive the fight.”

In the Frago, Gilday said the Navy “will learn from fleet battle problems and the Large-Scale Exercise (LSE) 2020, then restore annual LSEs as the means by which we operate, train and experiment with large force elements. Fleet exercises will be led by fleet commanders leveraging operational concepts like Distributed Maritime Operations, Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations, and Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment.

“Combined with wargaming, the exercises will serve as the key opportunity for experimentation and the development and testing of alternative concepts,” he wrote. “These exercises and experiments will inform doctrine and tactics; future fleet headquarters requirements, capacity and size; and investments

in future platforms and capabilities. As we develop our plans for future LSEs, we will leverage experience from Combatant Command, Joint and other service exercises to better prepare the Navy to integrate, support and lead the Joint Force in a future fight.”

Gilday said at the forum that “fleet commanders ought to own the physical and virtual battlespace that they are responsible for and then drive the fight.”

“In order to be able to fight as a fleet, we can’t continue to use strike groups and ARGs [amphibious ready groups] around the world in these constabulary positions,” he said. “As some point, you’re going to have to bring together the garage band and make it work at the fleet level. Then we have to exercise as a fleet.”

The CNO noted that the Navy has invested in maritime operations centers at fleet headquarters.

“These are a great capability that give that fleet commander the ability to fight,” he said. “We need to do more than war-gaming; we need to exercise it. The only way to do that is with iron out there at scale.”

Gilday said the LSEs will involve several strike groups – carrier strike groups and amphibious ready groups – and will be run from the fleet level.

For the 2020 LSE, he also plans to introduce an information warfare cell inside the fleet maritime operations center to conduct cyber and influence operations.

Lessons learned from the exercises will be used to inform budget submissions for fiscal 2023.