

Transcript

Adm. John Richardson, chief of naval operations, is questioned by journalist Christopher P Cavas about transparency during a Jan. 9 press conference at the Surface Navy Association annual symposium in Arlington, Virginia.

Cavas: You just talked about history out there [during your speech]. The president of the United States has said that his defense policy is to build a military so big and powerful and with so much capability that no one will ever think about messing with us. Clearly people are thinking about messing with us one way or another. You have a longstanding policy now of discouraging open discussion of capabilities, and operations and all kinds of description of that and that is increasing ever more. You've equated that with, well, we're talking to the Chinese and the Russians, so we don't want to talk to the American people, the media or any of our supporters [about] capabilities. So, the question really is, if you're going to be secret about [everything], and you're talking about history and you want to be a deterrent, can you cite some examples where secrecy was a successful deterrent, where somebody said: 'I don't know what they got, but I don't want to do it?'

Richardson: One, I would say that you've probably oversimplified the aim of what I'm doing. First of all, there's no direction from me to stop talking to the media.

Cavas: The March 1 memo was a ...

Richardson: It wasn't to stop talking, it's to be careful about what we talk about.

Cavas: But it's had that effect, but even if you didn't spell it out, it's absolutely had that effect.

Richardson: Well, we might be searching for the right things to talk about, right, because my sense was that we talk too much about it openly.

Cavas: You're searching for the right things to talk about?

Richardson: Just figuring out how do we change this dialogue? Right? So I want to talk less about military capabilities or find the right way to cast those so that they have the deterrent effect that you have without allowing potential adversaries to reverse engineer or come up with ways to defeat those technologies or warfighting concepts.

Cavas: In 10 months, are you still searching for a way to do that?

Richardson: There has been a lot of dialogue.

Cavas: Where?

Richardson: Again, I think you've sort of oversimplified it. We're ready to talk.

Cavas: Constantly, where people are not talking, people are batting us back, people are afraid to talk about certain topics and a growing number of specific topics. We don't hear a lot of specificity about lots of things. Huntington Ingalls had no briefings this year at this show precisely because of the example that you're setting of not talking to people.

Richardson: Well I certainly don't have any authority over Huntington Ingalls.

Cavas: I understand that, but industry is taking a cue from you. That's just one example.

Richardson: "If we talk less about specific capabilities and concepts, I'm fine with that."

Cavas: And how is that a deterrent?

Richardson: I'm very certain that we can figure out a way to talk about what our joint force and our Navy as a component are delivering.

Cavas: Can we expect that to happen anytime soon. It's been 10 months since this policy since you put the memo out.

Richardson: Again, I think you're painting it in stark terms

Public Affairs Officer: Hey, Chris, I'd like to move on.