

Clock Ticking for Strategy to Maintain U.S. Global Lead in Artificial Intelligence



Naval Information Warfare Center (NIWC) Atlantic's Amazon Web Services (AWS) DeepRacer vehicle is opened up for maintenance and a last minute check before being shipped off to participate in the First Annual virtual Army-Navy AWS DeepRacer Challenge. The challenge is centered around racing autonomous vehicles. U.S. NAVY / Joe Bullinger

ARLINGTON, Va. – U.S. technological advantages over great power competitor China could be lost in less than 10 years without a robust and comprehensive artificial intelligence (AI) security strategy, according to the findings of an independent government commission.

“For the first time since World War II, the United States’

technological predominance – which undergirds both our economic and military competitiveness – is under severe threat by the People’s Republic of China,” Robert Work, vice chairman of the National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence, told a live-streamed Pentagon press briefing April 9 on the commission’s final report.

And the most important technology “that the United States must master is artificial intelligence and all of its associated technologies,” Work added. Likening artificial intelligence to how harnessing electricity opened up a field of fields, Work said AI would affect quantum computing, healthcare, finance and military competition.

Work, who served as deputy secretary of defense in the Obama and Trump administrations, stressed the immediate and long-term risks. He noted China has advantages in data collection, with no privacy restraints like Western democracies have, as well as applications and integration of AI. The United States has advantages in talent, hardware and algorithms.

“Although the Chinese are really pushing hard [on algorithms] and we think they could catch up with us within five to 10 years,” he cautioned. However, overall, Work explained, “we do not believe China is ahead right now in AI.”

But that could change, said Marine Corps Lt. Gen. Michael S. Groen, director of the Joint Artificial Intelligence Center.

“China’s declared intent is to be globally dominant in AI by 2030,” he told reporters. JAIC’s mission is to transform to accelerate the delivery and adoption of AI to achieve mission impact at scale across the Defense Department. He said there was positive momentum toward implementation of AI at scale. “We certainly have a long way to go, but you can see the needle trending positive.”

The Chinese “are far more organized for competition and have a strategy to win the competition,” backed by a lot of

resources, Work added. By contrast, the United States is not organized to win the competition for AI dominance. “We do not have a strategy to win the competition,” Work said, adding “We do not have the resources to implement a strategy – even if we had one.”

That’s where the commission’s recommendations come in. They include setting up a steering committee of emerging technology, consisting of the deputy defense secretary, the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the principal deputy director of national intelligence to coordinate all AI activities between the intelligence community and the Pentagon.

Other recommendations include establishing a dedicated AI fund to assist small innovative AI companies bridge the gap between initial research funding and program acquisition; creating a Defense Department digital corps, modeled on the Medical Corps, to identify and utilize digital-savvy warfighters and leaders; and boosting science and technology research and development to 3.4% of the defense budget and spend \$8 billion on AI annually.

Groen described the massive NSCAI report as a “760-page to-do list.” With tightened future defense budgets expected, “the productivity gains and the efficiency gains that AI can bring to the department becomes an economics necessity.”

**China is the Biggest
Challenge and Taiwan the**

Biggest Risk: INDO-PACOM Nominee Says



Adm. John Aquilino, Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet, speaks during the 79th Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day ceremony at the Pearl Harbor National Memorial in Honolulu, Hawaii, in 2020. Aquilino, nominated to be the next commander of Indo-Pacific Command, testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee March 23, 2021. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Jessica O. Blackwell*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy admiral nominated to lead U.S. Indo-Pacific Command says his immediate challenge is to deter China from seizing Taiwan, while assuring regional allies and partners that the United States is serious about opposing Beijing's belligerence.

"This problem is much closer to us than most think," Adm. John C. Aquilino, currently commander of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, told the Senate Armed Services Committee at his confirmation hearing March 23.

"The Indo-Pacific is the most consequential reason for America's future and remains the priority theater for the United States," he said, adding that the region includes four of the five security challenges for the U.S. military: China, Russia, North Korea and violent extremist organizations.

But "of all the threats we face, [Defense Secretary Lloyd J.] Austin was very clear when he stated, 'China is our pacing threat,'" Aquilino added. The admiral said he agreed with the assessment of the departing INDO-PACOM commander, Adm. Philip S. Davidson, that the most dangerous concern with China was if it used "military force against Taiwan." To deter that, forward deployed U.S. forces rely on the support of "our allies and partners –those nations with common values," he said.

While the threat of a Chinese attack is not immediate, Aquilino said it was likely sooner than the six years Davidson projected in testimony before the committee March 9. If China seized Taiwan and subsequently based ships and aircraft there, "it would certainly extend their reach. It would extend the contested environment. It would threaten our allies and partners, think [of] the Philippines," he said.

Aquilino said conducting exercises with allies and partner nations, like Japan, Korea and India would complement the administration's focus on deterrence through diplomatic, development and economic means. He also said the Pacific Deterrence Initiative (PDI) a multibillion dollar fund created by Congress last year, "is the foundational approach" to advancing capabilities and capacity in lethality, force design and logistics to help strengthen partnerships for an integrated joint force.

Reclaiming Taiwan, which broke away from the People's Republic of China in 1949, is important "because the rejuvenation of the Chinese Communist Party is at stake," the admiral said, adding "They view it as their No. 1 priority." The fate of the island nation of 23 million, located about 100 miles from China, puts U.S. credibility on the line with regional partners. "The status of the United States as a partner with our allies and partners also is at stake should we have a conflict in Taiwan," Aquilino said.

"The United States maintains its longstanding commitments as outlined in the Three Communiqués, the Taiwan Relations Act, and the Six Assurances. We will continue to assist Taiwan in maintaining a sufficient self-defense capability," Aquino said in written answers to questions previously submitted by the committee.

A 1984 U.S. Naval Academy graduate and naval aviator since 1986, Aquilino was nominated in December 2020 by then-President Trump for the INDO-PACOM post but was not confirmed by the Senate before the change in administrations. He was nominated again by President Joe Biden, Austin announced March 5.

A graduate of the Navy Fighter Weapons School (TOPGUN), Aquilino made several extended deployments in support of operations Deny Flight, Deliberate Force, Southern Watch, Noble Eagle, Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom. His flag assignments have included deputy director, Joint Force Coordinator on the Joint Staff; commander, CSG-2, director of Maritime Operations, U.S. Pacific Fleet and commander, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, U.S. 5th Fleet, Combined Maritime Forces.

With Scant ISR Resources, SOUTHCOM Turns to ISR, Machine Learning



A Coast Guard Cutter Munro (WMSL 755) boarding team member sits atop an interdicted low-profile vessel in the Eastern Pacific Ocean after crews seized 3,439 pounds of cocaine from the LPV, Jan. 27, 2021. Munro is one of two California-based cutters whose crews interdicted a combined three suspected drug smuggling vessels in the Eastern Pacific Ocean between Jan. 26 and Feb. 1 resulting in the seizure of more than 9,000 pounds of cocaine worth an estimated \$156 million. U.S. Southern Command is looking to combine analytics, AI and machine learning to close the ISR gap in the battle against transnational criminal organizations. *U.S. Coast Guard*

ARLINGTON, Va. – U.S. Southern Command is turning to artificial intelligence and machine learning to compensate for underfunded intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities to monitor international criminals and

great power competitors in Latin America.

SOUTHCOM accounts for less than 1% of Defense Department ISR resources to counter external state actors, like Russia and China, and transnational criminal organizations in the region, the combatant command's chief, Navy Adm Craig S. Faller, told a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing March 16.

"Intelligence drives everything. That allows us to have the domain awareness," Faller said, "so we can then inform our other interagency partners of what the threats are up to." He and another witness at the hearing, Air Force Gen. Glen Van Herk, commander of U.S. Northern Command, identified China and Russia as the two biggest threats to stability in the Hemisphere.

Faller singled out China as the main threat to U.S. interest in Latin America. "The intervention goes well beyond economic influence, [China's] outlook with over 40 ports in progress, significant loans that are used as political leverage and predatory practices demonstrated in illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing are weakening democratic institutions and leveraging the future of this Hemisphere. We have seen many of these same tactics in Asia and Africa over the last few decades," he said.

The admiral went into greater detail at a Pentagon press briefing later in the day, calling those tactics "a very insidious move for global economic dominance."

Regarding ISR limitations in the face of growing threats, from regional and international extremist groups and drug cartels, Faller said intel wasn't limited to "big wing stuff" like P-8 maritime patrol aircraft and MQ-9 drones. SOUTHCOM has turned to what he called "21st century tradecraft," non-traditional ISR that leverages analytics with "AI and machine learning for all the data out there that's available in open source."

He said two pilot programs, if converted to programs of record or based more broadly, “show great promise.” The Technical Network Analysis Cell provides actionable intelligence, in cooperation with law enforcement partners, that is shared with partner nations and interagency partners leading to disruption of criminal activities. The Asymmetric Target Acquisition Center, run by Special Operations Command South, supports law enforcement efforts to counter transnational crime organizations.

HASC Chairman: Don't 'Waste Any More Money' on F-35 Strike Fighter



Aviation Boatswain's Mate (Handling) 3rd Class Joshua Ott conducts flight operations with an F-35B Lightning II fighter aircraft assigned to the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU).
U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Matthew Cavenaile

ARLINGTON, Va. – The chairman of the House Armed Services Committee says he'd like the Defense Department to stop buying the troubled and massively expensive F-35 Lightning II strike fighter.

In a wide-ranging discussion livestreamed March 5 by the Brookings Institution, a Washington think tank, the chairman, Washington Democrat Rep. Adam Smith, said "our acquisition and procurement process over the last 20 years can only be described as a complete disaster."

Citing development and maintenance problems or cost over runs with the F-35 – believed to be the world's most expensive weapons platform – as well as the Navy's Littoral Combat Ship and the Marine Corps' canceled Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle, Smith said "we on the Armed Services Committee have to seriously scrub those programs like the F-35," adding "we have to make sure that we don't waste any more" money.

"What does the F-35 give us, and is there a way to cut our losses?" Smith asked, noting "the sustainment costs are brutal." Originally planned to replace 90% of U.S. strike fighter aircraft, Smith conceded "you can't get rid of the program," but as HASC chairman said he was seeking "a mix of fighter/attack aircraft that's cost effective."

The Marine Corps has converted five squadrons to the F-35B vertical takeoff and short landing variant of the fifth-generation strike fighter. The Navy's first fighter squadron to transition from the F/A-18E Super Hornet to the F-35C Lightning II aircraft carrier variant is slated to deploy later this year on USS Carl Vinson. Another squadron will become the Navy's second fleet F-35C squadron after training at Naval Air Station Lemoore, California. Meanwhile, a Marine

Corps squadron has completed transition to the F-35C and is expected to deploy on a carrier in fiscal 2022.

Smith also dismissed Pentagon plans late in the Trump administration to create a 500-ship Navy, many of which would be small ships or unmanned vessels. However, he called submarines “the most important part” of the nuclear triad that includes long range bombers and ground-based intercontinental ballistic missiles.

“We must have nuclear deterrent,” Smith said, “so that nobody thinks they can ever launch any nuclear weapon of any size without paying an unacceptable cost.” He did question, however, whether the United States needed 5,000 nuclear-armed missiles as a deterrent when China has less than 200 nuclear weapons and is projected to double that amount to slightly under 400 weapons in coming years. He wondered whether the United States needed to spend more than \$1 trillion to maintain that advantage.

The chairman said he wanted to have a conversation with missile hawks about how large a deterrent nuclear force is needed.

“I will say the submarines are the most important piece of this without question,” he said, adding, “the ability to deliver from the submarines is the most survivable leg of the triad.”

Lawmakers should examine if the United States can achieve the same level of deterrence for less money, “as China has,” he said.

Looser Intel-Sharing Restraints May Be Worth a Look to Facilitate Joint Ops, Navy Data Chief Says



U.S. Sailors conduct pre-flight checks on an E-2C Hawkeye, assigned to the “Liberty Bells” of Airborne Command and Control Squadron (VAW) 115, as it starts up on the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt (CVN 71) Jan. 30, 2021. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Zachary Wheeler

ARLINGTON, Va. – Getting actionable, timely data to deployed expeditionary forces is tougher than keeping that data secure from prying adversaries, according to the U.S. Navy’s top data official.

“We’re pretty good at securing information and keeping it from people, which is the exact opposite of making it available for

decision making,” concedes Thomas Sasala, chief data officer, Department of the Navy.

Enhancing data sharing is a key element in the Navy’s Project Overmatch, as part of the Defense Department’s Joint All-Domain Command and Control (JADC2) concept to connect sensors from all of the military services into a single network.

For years the Army, Navy, Marine Corps and Air Force have been developing tactical communications networks that can’t interface with other services’ networks, hampering joint operations, a pillar of the National Defense Strategy. And that’s keeping crucial data from getting to front-line commanders in an actionable timeframe. It may be worth taking a look at whether security culture is getting in the way, Sasala told the Feb. 17 webinar of the C4ISRNET website’s “Removing Stovepipes” series.

“You have to understand the concept of perishability,” Sasala said. The information given warfighters “is generally highly perishable. And so, if that information is hacked or compromised for one reason or another, it is not useful outside its lifecycle.”

Big strategic decisions are not being sent downrange for kicking-down-the door activity, Sasala said.

“Literally, it’s ‘This guy is on the roof right now.’ And five minutes from now that information is not useful to anyone because he’s no longer on the roof. And so, we have to take that risk calculus into the equation – which we don’t do today.”

All data is treated with the same sensitivity level, the same protection level, Sasala said, adding, it might be time to take a step back.

“The information might be classified. It might come from a highly classified intelligence source, but if it’s only good

for five minutes, and only these three people need to see it, maybe we can just lighten up a little bit on how we get it to them.”

However, he added, issues like keeping sources and methods secret or maintaining plausible deniability on sensitive operations have to be considered when passing data.

“It’s a balancing act,” he said, “more cultural than anything. There are some bandwidth restraints. There are data operability and exchange restraints, but our general risk aversion to kind of opening up the aperture a little bit on what data we send is probably the biggest barrier more than anything.”

The goal of Project Overmatch is to develop networks, infrastructure, data architecture, tools and analytics that enable Navy and Marine Corps operations that swarm the sea, delivering synchronized lethal and non-lethal effects from near-and-far in every domain.

Sasala called Overmatch the maritime contribution to the broader multi-domain battle space.

“From a data perspective, data simply doesn’t care whether you’re Army, Navy, Air Force. Position data is position data whether it’s a plane or a boat – whatever,” he said. But breaking down military department silos or stovepipes “is really the key to getting at something like JADC2.”

With Crew Vaccinations

Increasing, Newest Navy COVID-19 Guidance Looks to Ease Liberty Restraints



Sailors prepare syringes of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine aboard Wasp-class amphibious assault ship USS Essex (LHD 2). This marked the first time personnel received vaccines aboard a Pacific Fleet warship. Essex is homeported in San Diego. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Brett McMinoway ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy’s newest operational guidance for dealing with the coronavirus pandemic includes provisions for more Safe Haven ports like Guam and Rota, Spain to provide secure liberty opportunities for crews on increasingly lengthy deployments, according to senior officers.

COVID-19 Standardized Operational Guidance (SOG) 4.0 is the first directive for commanders since vaccines against the novel coronavirus became available in January. Although

predominantly focused on shipboard environment, SOG 4.0 applies to all uniformed Navy personnel at home and deployed.

Fully immunized Sailors enable the Navy “to begin to unwind the limits” placed on Sailors at sea, where the consequence of a wide-spread outbreak is greatest, the Guidance issued Feb. 16, noted.

“Where a ship at sea can be a challenge to contain the spread, having a high immunization rate [among crew] could cause the disease to have nowhere to go and burn itself out,” Rear Adm. Karl Thomas, Assistant Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Operations, Plans, and Strategy, (N3/N5B), said Feb. 19.

In a roundtable with reporters, Thomas said 35,000 Sailors have received at one vaccine injection and 45,000 are totally immunized. Rear Adm. Bruce Gillingham, the Surgeon General of the Navy, said those numbers amounted to about 23% of the Fleet having at least one dose of the vaccine. Whether immunized Sailors can still transmit the virus remains “the \$64,000 question,” Gillingham said.

Since a COVID outbreak in early 2020 infected more than 1,000 crew members of the USS Theodore Roosevelt and sidelined the aircraft carrier at Guam for months, deployed ships have spent nearly all their time at sea. Additionally, increased operational tempo has led to longer deployments and quick turn arounds, or double pumps, for carrier strike groups, causing stress for crews and their families. The carrier USS Dwight Eisenhower, at sea for seven months in 2020, was deployed again in February.

“Up until this point, we’ve really had to restrict the Sailors to liberty on the pier,” Thomas said, adding. “In Guam there’s a beach right next to the pier and we’re able to keep it segregated from the population so they can get some liberty on the pier as well as get down to the beach.”

But in SOG 4.0, he said “we actually put a paragraph in there

about Safe Haven ports in places like Guam, Yokosuka, Bahrain.” Officials hope that crews with higher immunization rates will be able to have more quality liberty opportunities at ports with more services like Exchanges and Morale, Welfare and Recreation facilities.

The final decision on safe haven ports will be up the geographically dispersed Navy component commanders “but we wanted to put [the opportunity] into the guidance for them to be able to do that type of thing,” Thomas said.

Besides Supplying Food, Fuel and Equipment, Logistics Could Confuse an Adversary, Pentagon Planner Suggests



Gunner's Mate 3rd Class Gage Duncan, from Cardington, Ohio, fires a shot line from the deck of the guided-missile destroyer USS Sterett (DDG 104) to the fleet replenishment oiler USNS Leroy Grumman (T-AO 195) during a replenishment-at-sea. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Drace Wilson

ARLINGTON, Va. – Supporting United States forces in the vast and likely contested areas of great power competition will be an enormous challenge, but a top Defense Department planner says using logistics “as a warfighting function” could throw adversaries off balance.

Logistics isn't just about planes, ships and trucks carrying stuff, Marine Corps Maj. Gen. David Maxwell, the Pentagon's vice director for logistics (J4) told a virtual defense industry conference Feb. 3. “In fact, I would offer that we really need to be thinking about employing logistics as a warfighting function,” he said.

“The military challenge for logistics,” Maxwell told the Defense Industrial Association's Expeditionary Warfare

Conference, “is that under all domain persistent attack, we have to be able to rapidly aggregate and deploy forces worldwide and support those forces potentially over vast distances, through contested domains and most likely over a protracted time frame.”

That’s going to be a tall order, compared to the decades after the Cold War, when the maritime environment was largely uncontested.

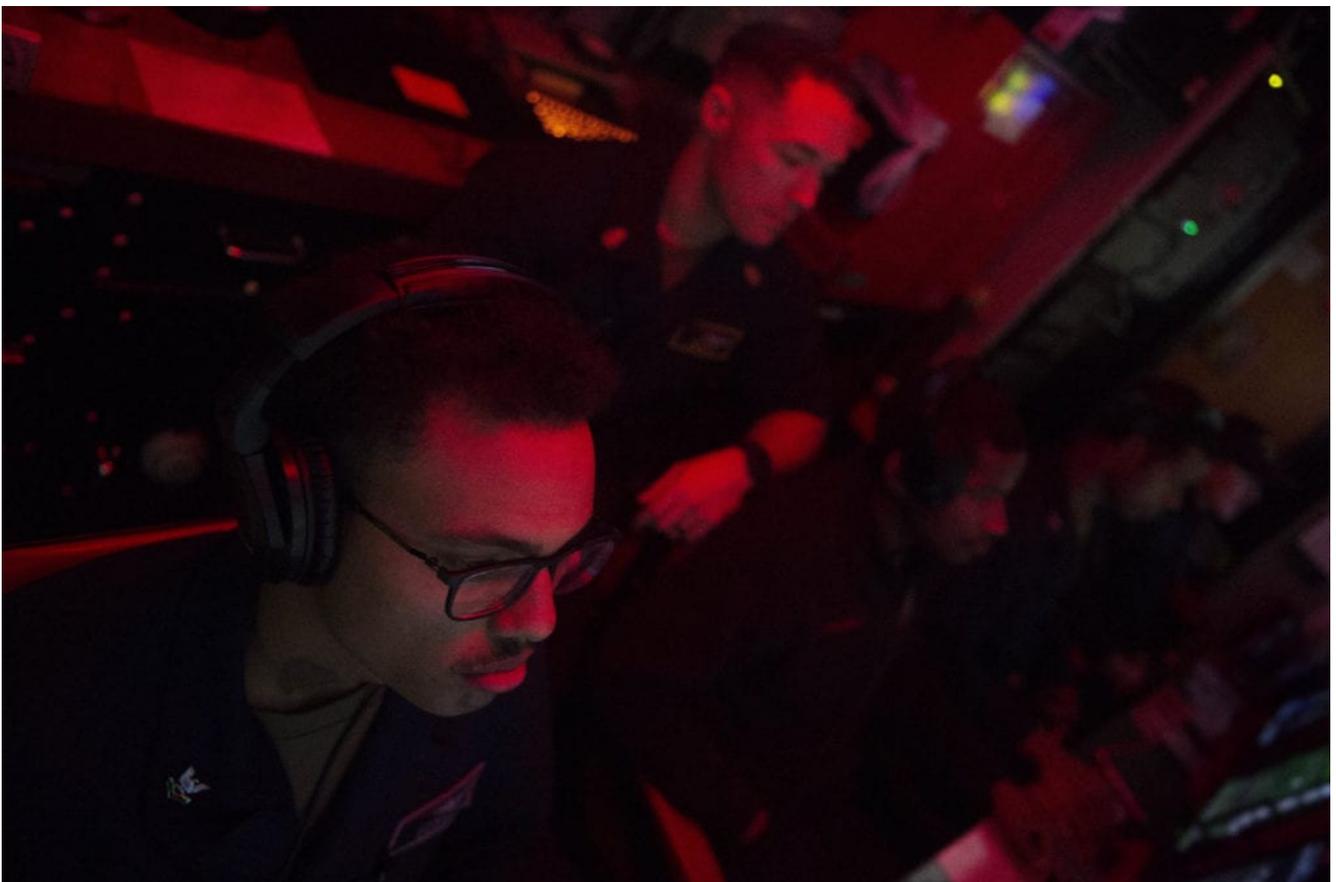
“Logistics support, something we’ve taken for granted for quite a while, is no longer a given,” Maxwell said, adding that in a contested environment the integration of logistics, operations and command and control is more critical than ever, but “our ways of doing it are no longer adequate.”

U.S. strategy calls for a geographically distributed force across the Pacific to confound and deter adversaries armed with increasingly formidable air and sea denial capabilities. In addition to reducing the signatures of supply vessels, greater use of autonomous vehicles, artificial intelligence, machine learning and better training the troops who will use those digital tools, Maxwell said logistics, itself, should be added to the commander’s toolbox.

He suggested logistics could be used as a reconnaissance or counter reconnaissance tool “to probe and identify” competitors’ surface areas. “Would a commander intentionally use logistics movement as a signaling activity to assess adversary reactions as either a deterrent or an indication of escalation?” he asked. He also suggested a commander could conceal logistics activities “in order to deceive the adversary and retain an element of surprise.”

Those actions “have the potential to either deter or deny adversary objectives if we employ them intentionally,” Maxwell said.

Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning Top Naval Intelligence Technology Needs, Director Says



Sailors stand watch in the sonar room of the Los Angeles-class fast-attack submarine USS Chicago (SSN 721) in support of Valiant Shield 2020. Valiant Shield is a U.S. only, biennial field training exercise (FTX) with a focus on integration of joint training in a blue-water environment among U.S. forces. This training enables real-world proficiency in sustaining joint forces through detecting, locating, tracking, and engaging units at sea, in the air, on land and in cyberspace in response to a range of mission areas. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Derek Harkins

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy will need more help from artificial intelligence systems to answer the technology challenge posed by vast amounts of data and information available from every domain, the deputy chief of naval operations for information warfare says.

The challenge is with “the amount of data and information that is out there,” according to Vice Adm. Jeffrey Trussler, who is also director of Naval Intelligence. “We’re well beyond the point where rooms full of analysts” can handle digital information coming from open source, signals and acoustical intelligence, Trussler told a Jan. 27 webinar hosted by the Intelligence and National Security Alliance. “We’re going to have to put machines on that, with the algorithms in place to manage it.

“Every advancement that exists for AI [artificial intelligence] and ML [machine learning], we need to suck in and learn from,” Trussler said when asked about the top Naval Intelligence technology needs. “I think across the board, AI/ML is what is top.”

Trussler said there were already “some tremendous AI projects underway” at the acoustics intelligence agency. Of all the domains from seabed to space, only the U.S. Navy deals with intelligence gathering underseas, said Trussler, a submariner for most of his career. “And that is the domain where we still have a dominant margin. But we need to keep pressing and keep learning in that arena.”

He also urged industry to keep pressing the Navy. “The innovations and ideas from industry are huge. Keep pressing us. Keep knocking on the door. Keep showing us what’s available and what you can do,” he said. However, the Navy isn’t looking for proprietary technology that can’t mesh with existing or future platforms. “We’re going to be more interested in ‘How is this going to link into the systems we have? How is this going to help us advance a collaborative web

to close our kill chains?’”

In the future, Trussler said, the Navy Department won't invest in “proprietary things that we can't crack open. That aren't open architecture, that we can link in with the rest of our systems.”

INDO-PAC Commander Says Chinese Aggressiveness Helps U.S. Make More Friends



A Royal Australian Navy MH-60R Sea Hawk helicopter takes off from the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS John S. McCain during exercise Malabar 2020 in the Bay of Bengal, Nov. 3, 2020. Ships, aircraft and personnel from Australia, Japan, the United States and host nation India took part. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Markus Castaneda

ARLINGTON, Va. – China's political, economic and military aggressiveness is driving Asian countries like India and Vietnam toward closer ties with the United States, the head of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command says.

In recent years, China has locked horns politically and sometime physically with the Philippines, Vietnam and other nations bordering the South China Sea where the People's Liberation Army Navy has built military outposts on artificial islands in disputed waters. Last summer China exchanged gunfire with India over their ill-defined border in the Himalayan region, leaving at least 20 Indian soldiers dead.

"The Communist Party of China represents the greatest long term strategic threat to security in the 21st Century," Indo-Pac Commander Adm. Philip Davidson told the Surface Navy Association virtual symposium Jan. 12 in a live-streamed appearance from his headquarters in Hawaii.

The new U.S. Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard Maritime Strategy focuses on China and Russia, as the two most significant threats to global peace and prosperity. But in its introduction, the document singles out China "due to its growing economic and military strength, increasing aggressiveness, and intent to dominate its regional waters and remake the international order."

The ill will China is generating has made several nations in the Indo-Pacific region reconsider their relations with the United States, Davidson said, citing particularly India and Vietnam.

“The strategic opportunity for the United States in the century going forward is a budding and building relationship with India,” he said, adding, “when you think about the economic potential, the opportunity for collaboration on issues that challenge the whole of the Indo-Pacific and around the globe, having India more closely cooperating with the United States – where possible – I think is a very important strategic opportunity.”

As for former enemy, and not-quite-ally Vietnam, Davidson said the relationship “has advanced greatly over the course of the last several years. In the near term, we’re very focused on immediate needs they have.” In addition to some military-to-military training, U.S. help included the remediation of dioxin contamination and unexploded ordnance left over from the war.

“We continue the accounting for our missing in action from the Vietnam War as well. That’s a gateway to deeper collaboration in the future,” Davidson said.

Davidson said there are a number of other countries with deep interest in the Pacific that the United States is working with, including Japan, the U.K., France, New Zealand, Australia and Canada.

“We can’t forget the Philippines is our ally, Thailand is our ally,” he said, adding there’s also more opportunity with Singapore, which supports the forward-deployment of U.S. Navy littoral combat ships.

SOUTHCOM Chief: Maintaining Ties with Latin American Partners is Key in Great Power Competition



Peruvian navy divers check diving equipment prior to entering the water, during a subject matter expert exchange with U.S. Navy divers from Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit (MDSU) 2, as part of Southern Partnership Station 2019. Competition with Russia and China is spurring the United States to seek a global advantage through partnerships in Latin America. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Peter Lewis
ARLINGTON, Va. – Great power competition with an emerging China and a resurgent Russia is driving the United States to seek an all-domain, global positioning advantage, through alliances and partnerships in Latin America, the head of U.S. Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) says.

“Russia has interest in Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela, and some legacy interests in other [Western Hemisphere] countries,” U.S. Navy Adm. Craig Faller, said Jan. 14 at the Surface Navy Association Virtual Symposium. “Their interest really is to counter U.S. interest, while China’s interest “is economic dominance,” he said.

There are 31 countries in SOUTHCOM’s area of responsibility – Central and South America, south of Mexico, and the Caribbean Basin – 28 of them democracies, and the United States has good relations with most of them, the admiral said. However, China has been actively engaging several of those countries with economic and land deals leading to large infrastructure projects with possible military and diplomatic implications.

“Why would China want to achieve a deep-water seaport off El Salvador, Jamaica, perhaps the Dominican Republic?” Faller asked. “Their long term interest is economic dominance, and they’ll do what it takes,” he said.

“The Panama Canal is key terrain in all of this,” Faller said, noting China is negotiating deals for ports at either end of the canal. “South America has a positive water ratio and much, much excess arable land. China has none of that,” Faller said, noting that China “is working river access, energy access. Access to soybeans.

“Additionally, hundreds of Huawei systems are in place, in Latin American cities, well ahead of any competitor in that space,” Faller said. The Chinese telecom giant is the world’s second largest phone maker. American officials are concerned Huawei networks will give the Chinese government new avenues of surveillance. Huawei says that it does not spy for the Chinese government. The Pentagon is worried Chinese telephonic equipment sold to South American governments could make communication between the U.S. and partner nations less secure.

“The U.S. is responding in a good way with a clean network program by the State Department,” Faller said.

The best way to counter Chinese influence in Latin America and the Caribbean is to build and maintain military-to-military partnerships, continue joint naval exercises, cooperate in counter narcotics operations and maintain constant U.S. presence in the region, Faller said.