

Coast Guard Brings Unique Authorities, Capabilities to Tri-Services Maritime Strategy, Commandant Says



Bollinger Shipyards LLC delivered the USCGC Charles Moulthrop to the U.S. Coast Guard in Key West, Florida. This is the 41st Fast Response Cutter delivered under the current program. The FRC is the first of six to be home-ported in Manama, Bahrain, supporting the Patrol Forces Southwest Asia. Bollinger Shipyards

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Coast Guard will bring a less militaristic face to the persistent global presence of U.S. naval power outlined in the new Tri-Service Maritime Strategy, the Coast Guard's commandant says.

The strategy, unveiled in mid-December, seeks an integrated, all-domain naval power consisting of the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard, that will maintain freedom of navigation globally, defend the homeland and “prevail across a

continuum of competition – composed of interactions with other nations from cooperation to conflict.”

The Tri-Services strategy focuses on an emerging China and resurgent Russia as “the most significant threats” to the rules-based international system that existed since the end of World War II.

“The Coast Guard is poised today, more than ever, to seamlessly integrate into our nation’s joint maritime naval force, as captured in this document,” Adm. Karl L. Schultz, the Coast Guard’s commandant, said Jan. 13 at the Surface Navy Association’s Virtual Symposium.

With its unique law enforcement and military authorities, multi-mission capabilities, wealth of multilateral and bilateral agreements and partnerships, the Coast Guard has unfettered access to the global commons, he added, making the agency “a perfect complement to the lethality of the Navy and Marine Corps. And united, we bring a range of maritime capabilities to employ across the cooperation, competition, lethality continuum.”

The Coast Guard operates generally below the level of conflict or lethality and that’s the bridge between “State Department diplomacy and Defense Department lethality,” Schultz said. “Coast Guards offer a less militaristic face of state power in disputed maritime areas. They present options. They’re like Swiss Army Knives,” he said.

Other maritime nations have also recognized the agility and capability of their coast guards to operate along this continuum below lethality, Schultz said. Between 2010 and 2016, China increased the tonnage of its Coast Guard by 73% percent, and Japan did so by 50%, he said, citing RAND Corp. research.

While the U.S. Coast Guard is part of the Department of Homeland Security, charged with law enforcement at sea,

fisheries protection, marine safety and maritime security, the tri-service strategy noted Navy and Coast Guard ships conduct freedom of navigation operations globally, challenging excessive and illegal maritime claims. Coast Guard cutters and law enforcement detachments aboard Navy and allied ships exercise unique authorities to counter terrorism, weapons proliferation, transnational crime and piracy, the strategy document stated.

Coast Guard cutters have supported all six combatant commands from Indo-Pacific Command to Africa Command, Schultz said, noting the next commissioned Fast Response Cutter will be the first of that class sent to Bahrain. "We've been operating in that theater since 2003 and we will bring additional capabilities and additional capacity with these new cutters," he said.

The Coast Guard's fleet modernization, including acquisition of the Offshore Patrol Cutter, Polar Security Cutter, Arctic Security Cutter and Waterways Commerce Cutter, will provide the capacity and capabilities necessary to facilitate advancing maritime governance and protecting U.S. maritime sovereignty, according to the strategy document.

Marine Heading Navy's Expeditionary Warfare Unit Wants to Keep Amphibs Mobile and Enemies Guessing



Jarred Kinder, an engineer at Naval Surface Warfare Center Panama City Division, discusses mine countermeasures technology with Maj. Gen Tracy W. King, director of expeditionary warfare (OPNAV N95) during a familiarization tour Jan. 22. U.S. Navy / Eddie Green

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Marine Corps general who heads the U.S. Navy's expeditionary warfare directorate says his top priority is the acquisition of the Light Amphibious Warship (LAW) for future operations by a highly mobile and distributed deterrent force.

The LAW is designed to complement and fill a gap in capability between the Navy's large, multi-purpose amphibious warships and shorter range landing craft, Maj. Gen. Tracy King said Jan. 12 at the Surface Navy Association's virtual symposium.

King said the LAW will be a force multiplier allowing naval forces to maintain a persistent but mobile presence to deter adversaries . "We're going to be able to stay there. Think of a lily pad," he added.

LAW is being designed as an affordable, low signature, high endurance, shore-to-shore vessel that can run up on the beach, "capable of operating independently, or in collaboration with other service warships and platforms and naval task forces," the general said.

He added that LAW was leveraging commercial support vessel design elements. The new amphib would resemble a 21st century version of the World War II Landing Ship Medium (LSM) landing craft. "Think 300-to-400 feet long, about 2,000 tons, long-range, endurance, with a mission bay full of whoop ass," King said.

LAW is not an auxiliary, connector or forcible entry platform, said King. "It is a combatant that will enable persistent presence and enhanced tactical ability in the pursuit of sea denial," he said, adding "We're going to capitalize on the benefits of mass without the risk of concentration."

On a related issue, arming large amphibious warships with anti-ship missiles to be fired by embarked Marines, King said "Do we need to put fixed launchers that look like something on an LCS? No, I don't think so." But he didn't see why the containerized weapons systems traveling with the Marines couldn't be made available to the ship's captain. "To me, that's what the future looks like. If we proliferate the battlefield and the battlespace with these systems, then we keep the enemy guessing as to who's got what."

The concept of a light amphibious warship has been gaining ground since Gen. David H. Berger, the commandant of the Marine Corps, said the Navy needed to broaden its family of amphibious warfare ships. A more distributed, survivable force was needed to operate in a future high-intensity conflict with a peer competitor, Berger maintained.

"It's no secret the next fight is going to have a distinct maritime flavor," King said during a joint appearance at the

Surface Navy event with Rear Adm. Paul, Schlise, the director of the Navy's surface warfare division.

Schlise said his top priority was completing the first Flight III Arleigh-Burke class guided missile destroyer, DDG-125, the USS Jack Lucas. The 75th ship in the Arleigh Burke line is "really the first ship of the future surface architecture," Schlise said. The ship is 44% complete and on track to be commissioned in 2023. DDG-125 will serve as a bridging platform to a future large surface combatant, DDGX, the admiral said.

New Pentagon Counter Drone Strategy: Unify Solutions Search, Avoid Duplicated Efforts



1st Lt. Taylor Barefoot, a low altitude air defense officer with Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 163 (Reinforced), 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit, programs a counter-unmanned aircraft system on a Light Marine Air Defense Integrated System (LMADIS) during a predeployment training exercise at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, Calif., Nov. 13, 2018. U.S. Marine Corps / Lance Cpl. Dalton S. Swanbeck

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Defense Department's new strategy to thwart attacks and spying by small unmanned aircraft systems calls for protecting the force at home as well as overseas, while coordinating technology development across the services to avoid redundant programs that waste time and money.

In development since November 2019, when the Army was picked to unify counter-UAS efforts across the services, the strategy addresses both the potential threats from foreign adversaries and the hazards posed by reckless drone operators domestically.

The Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps have all been developing systems to detect, deter, disable or destroy enemy

drones. However, as the worldwide use and misuse of small, unmanned aircraft has grown exponentially, a coordinated effort to counter the risk – not only with technology but other solutions like doctrine, training and policy changes [was needed, according to the report outlining the new strategy.

Most current solutions aim to sever the link between a remotely piloted drone and its operator, Army Major Gen. Sean Gainey, the director of the Pentagon's Counter-UAS Office (JCO), told an online discussion of the new strategy Jan. 8 at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington think tank.

"But where we see the threat going in the future," Gainey said, is toward "autonomous, massing swarming capability, [drones] integrating AI [artificial Intelligence] and potentially leveraging 5G" cell phone technology.

The JCO will create integrated plans, technology, training concepts and doctrine that focus "appropriate resources on countering the UAS threat, while minimizing unnecessary duplication and redundancy," said Gainey.

In addition to coordinating countermeasure steps across the U.S. military and with allies and partner nations, the Pentagon is also coordinating domestic efforts with the departments of Justice and Homeland Security, which includes the U.S. Coast Guard.

The widening use of small drones by non-state actors and terrorists has led some to call small UAS "the new IEDs" (improvised explosive devices). Mindful of the expanding commercial use of small unmanned aircraft, Nicole M. Thomas, the JCO's division chief for strategy and policy, noted "there are legitimate uses of drones," although incompetent or deliberate misuse of a UAS could be a hazard.

Thomas said the JCO is completing details of the

implementation plan, expected to be released by the end of January. “Those will all be action plans of things we’re going to do to make the strategy a reality,” she added.

In mid-January, the JCO will invite industry to demonstrate their “low collateral effectors,” non-lethal, low collateral damage capabilities, including jammers, at a common test range during the first week of April “and we’ll select the best ones, and move forward with that as the joint solution” Gainey said.

Geurts: Ramping up for Wartime Demands Increased Shipyard Efficiency During COVID Siege



Norfolk Naval Shipyard workers prepare to install a 2,400-pound pilgrim nut on a propeller of the aircraft carrier USS George H. W. Bush (CVN 77). George H.W. Bush is currently in Norfolk Naval Shipyard for its Docking Planned Incremental Availability. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Indra Beaufort

ARLINGTON, Va. – Planning for the unplanned before a crisis like COVID-19 helped the U.S. Navy continue ship maintenance and acquisition at a rapid pace despite the coronavirus pandemic, the service’s top procurement official says.

“It has been fairly remarkable that we have not slowed down, in fact our operations are at an all-time high. We’ve never shut down a shipyard – private or public – for a day during

COVID,” James “Hondo” Geurts, the assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition, told an Atlantic Council webinar on leadership Dec. 16.

Much of that success stemmed from the resiliency of individual Sailors, shipbuilders and Marines. Geurts said, adding that having a resilient organization was also key. “You can plan for the unplanned,” he said, “you can get in sets and reps and start building while you have the time to absorb the inefficiency of that learning.”

When he came to the Navy from U.S. Special Operations Command three years ago, “we didn’t have a good wartime plan on the acquisition side. We were very focused on being hyper-efficient in a peacetime mode,” Geurts said.

The Navy was able to pivot quickly when COVID-19 struck, Geurts said, not because the service had been rehearsing for a pandemic, but because it had ramped up teams, procedures and tools to be more efficient in wartime and adapted the improvements to the coronavirus challenge.

Geurts doesn’t want to see things roll back once the coronavirus crisis is over. The pandemic showed new ways to handle old problems and make ships more self-reliant, he said adding: “Success for us is not going back to where we were a year ago. That’s failure.”

Instead, “our focus now is taking all the hard lessons we’ve learned from the terrible challenges of COVID, how we continued to operate through that,” and apply them to the future he said, adding “I think we are a stronger force than we were nine months ago.”

Seven Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard Facilities in DoD COVID-19 Vaccination Pilot



Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs Thomas McCaffery speaks in a media briefing with Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs Jonathan R. Hoffman (Right), and Army Lt. Gen. Ronald J. Place, Defense Health Agency director, about the Defense Department's phased, standardized, and coordinated strategy for distribution and administering COVID-19 vaccines, the Pentagon, Washington, D.C., Dec. 9, 2020. DoD / Air Force Staff Sgt. Brittany A. Chase

ARLINGTON, Va. — The U.S. Defense Department will start a COVID-19 vaccination pilot program at 16 facilities in the United States and overseas, as soon as the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) grants emergency authorization, which is expected in the next few days, Pentagon officials said Dec 9.

Vaccination, which will be voluntary as long as the department is operating under an Emergency Use Authorization from the FDA, could start distributing almost 44,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine, the military's expected share of a limited initial production, "as early as next week for immediate use," Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs Thomas McCaffery told reporters at a live-streamed Pentagon briefing.

The phase-in of other prioritized personnel at additional locations will continue until 60% of Defense Department personnel, about 11 million, have received the vaccine. By then, the department assumes vaccine production will have ramped up enough to permit unrestricted vaccination rates.

The first phase of voluntary vaccinations will target the coronavirus pandemic's first responders: Healthcare providers

and support staff, emergency services, and public safety personnel at Military Treatment Facilities. At first, only a very small percentage of those first vaccinations will go to critical national capabilities forces, such as the long range bombers, ballistic missile submarines and land-based missiles that make up the nuclear deterrence triad, officials said. In the meantime, mandatory counter-COVID-19 procedures such as wearing a face-covering, social distancing and quarantining before and after deployments will remain in force, they added.



The initial vaccine distribution sites. DoD

The 16 vaccination sites were picked because they had extra cold storage capability for the temperature-sensitive vaccines, sizeable local populations to vaccinate and large medical staffs, including an on-site immunization health specialist, said Director of the Defense Health Agency Army Lt. Gen. Ronald Place.

The 13 vaccination sites in the continental United States include several Navy, Marine Corps and Coast Guard facilities: Navy Branch Health Clinic at Naval Air Station Jacksonville, and the Naval Hospital Pensacola, both in Florida; the Alameda Health Services clinic at the Coast Guard Base Alameda, the Naval Medical Center at San Diego, the Naval Hospital at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, all in California; Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, Bethesda, Maryland and the U.S. Coast Guard Base Clinic, Portsmouth, Virginia.

The Pentagon announcement came eight days after a Navy reservist assigned to Navy Operational Support Center Akron, Ohio, died at a local hospital in Canton, Ohio from apparent complications associated with the coronavirus.

Builder 2ns Class Nathan Huff Bishop, 33, a Seabee, was only the second Sailor to succumb to COVID-19 despite widespread spikes in infection and death rates across the country. The first was Chief Petty Officer Robert Thacker Jr., 41, assigned

to USS Theodore Roosevelt, the first Navy vessel to suffer a COVID-19 outbreak at sea. He died in April at the U.S. Naval Hospital on Guam. As of Dec. 2, a total of 17,035 uniformed Navy personnel have tested positive for COVID-19 in 2020, 14,217 have recovered, nine remain hospitalized and two have died.

Joint Chiefs Chairman Says Bigger Fleet Needed to Check China, But Budget Growth Unlikely



Army Gen. Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, speaks in a virtual meeting during a U.S. Naval War College Advanced Flag and Executive Course (AFLEX) at the Pentagon, Oct. 26, 2020. DOD / Navy Petty Officer 1st Class Carlos M. Vazquez II

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy will have to significantly increase the size of the fleet in coming decades to deter China from a risky escalation of the great power competition, the Defense Department's top uniformed officer says.

"We're maritime nation," the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army Gen. Mark Milley, told the U.S. Naval Institute's Dec. 3 Defense Forum Washington webcast. "And the defense of the United States depends on air power and sea power, primarily."

Milley said the international rule-based order that arose after World War II, and for seven decades was maintained by

the U.S. Navy “perhaps more than any other element,” is under stress, from climate change and the economic distress caused by the coronavirus pandemic to the diffusion of power, from two Cold War super powers, to regional powers like Russia, Iran and North Korea. If that order falls apart, Milley warned, the great power competition could “turn into great power war.”

The transformation of China into the world’s second-largest economy, with an equally robust military, both in size and capability, poses a “longer term, almost existential challenge,” Milley said. “I’m not saying you’re going to have a war with China. I’m saying we want to prevent a war with China.”

However, it will take large investment in U.S. forces to prevent that from happening, he said.

“We’re going to have to have a much larger fleet than we have today, if we’re serious about great power competition and deterring great power war, and if we’re serious about dominant capability over something like China or some other power that has significant capability,” Milley said.

However, he expects funding to be tight.

“We need, roughly speaking, a consistent, predictable and timely budget that gives about 3 to 5 percent real growth,” Milley said. But with the demand to address the ongoing coronavirus pandemic and the damage it’s done to the U.S. economy, “I don’t see that as a realistic thing in the coming year.”

Acquiring a 500-plus-ship Navy in the next 25 years, as recommended in the Pentagon’s Battle Force 2045 plan, is “an aim point, an aspiration” Miley said, but to stay ahead of China and other competitors may require at least 500 ships in the future. As many as 140 to 250 vessels will be unmanned, he noted.

“Sailorless ships, robots on the water and under the water. That’s as big a change as going from sail to coal,” Milley said.

The U.S. Navy will also need between 70 and 90 more submarines, he added.

In the changing battle environment, air, land and sea forces will need to be small, widely distributed and difficult to detect while remaining movable and highly lethal using long range precision, directed fires, Milley said. Unlike the conflicts in the Middle East and Afghanistan, the environment in a great power battle will be contested, and “all forces are going to have to assume they are going to be cut off. So tactical data is essential,” Milley added.

Navy/Marine Corps Wish List: Subs, Hypersonics, Training and Education



Adm. Michael Gilday, CNO, shown here in a 2017 photo, says he would buy more submarines and hypersonic weapons if he had more money to spend. The head of the Marine Corps said he would use such a hypothetical surplus on personnel, training and education. U.S. Navy / Petty Officer 2nd Class Robert A. Hartland

ARLINGTON, Va. — More submarines and hypersonic weapons for the Navy, and more personnel and training for the Marine Corps, top the wish list, say the U.S. sea services’ commanders, if Congress added an imaginary \$5 billion to their budgets.

The last question posed to Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael Gilday and Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger at a Dec. 3 live-streamed panel discussion on transforming the fleet's architecture was what would they buy if, hypothetically, Congress gave them each an extra \$5 billion.

Gilday told participants at the U.S. Naval Institute's Defense Forum Washington webcast that some of the money would go to shipbuilding, "most notably submarines." In terms "of things I need to close down on now, I'd go faster with respect to the fielding of hypersonics." The CNO added that he would go "way faster" on laser technology. "I need to be able to knock down missiles."

Gilday said he would also put money in Project Overmatch, the plan to create a massive data network linking weapons and sensors across all domains. "We have to get that right, and that remains a priority for me," Gilday said. If he had any money left over, he would put it in live, virtual constructive training and "ready learning" to use technology to train Sailors faster.

"Hypersonics, the network and lasers would be the top three on my list," he said.

Berger said he would put all his money in manpower, personnel, training and education, noting the maxim "Don't buy anything you can't maintain." Instead of a thing, he would invest in people and their training. "To elevate and modernize a force, you have to pour the resources into those areas," Berger said, adding that he was shrinking the size of the Marine Corps, "based on my assumption that we're not going to have a higher topline, more money," in coming defense budgets.

If someone did write him a check for \$5 billion, Berger said his second question would be "Is this a onetime deposit in my bank account or is this a sustained effort? Because we're not going to have a hollow force."

Pentagon Leaders Say Preparing for a Biological Attack is Among Lessons Learned from Pandemic



Naval Aircrewmen (Tactical Helicopter) 2nd Class Isaac Lynn with Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron 37 attached to the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS William P. Lawrence, verifies his information with U.S. Army Capt. Danielle Crawford, Joint Task Force-Bravo Combat Support Hospital commander prior to a COVID test at Soto Cano Air Base, Honduras, Nov. 26. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Russell Scoggin

ARLINGTON, Va. — Among the lessons learned from the coronavirus pandemic is a better understanding of what it will take to defend against a biological attack or other weapons of mass destruction, leaders of the U.S. Navy and Defense departments said Dec. 2.

“We are today a better force, prepared for nuclear, biological, chemical warfare in the future because of the lessons we’ve learned from this pandemic,” Navy Secretary Kenneth Braithwaite told a Senate hearing on Navy and Marine Corps readiness.

The novel coronavirus, COVID-19, “caught the [Navy] Department off-guard, as it did the entire world,” Braithwaite told Senate Armed Services Committee’s Readiness and Management Support subcommittee, adding, “the Navy in particular struggled through the early weeks of this because the close proximity in which our Sailors live aboard ship made this a

real threat to our ability to operate at sea.”

He praised Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael Gilday for identifying ways to mitigate the risk and “keep our ships operating. We have over 100 ships today at sea.”

In a separate, live-streamed discussion the same day at a Washington think tank, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley said it wasn’t likely a nation state would attack the United States with a biological weapon but he was more concerned that a terrorist organization might try.

“We know some organizations are, in fact, looking into that,” Milley told viewers on the Brookings Institution’s website. “They don’t have that yet, but it’s something that’s a possibility, something we need to be on guard against.”

In addition to “interdicting, disrupting and destroying any capability” to weaponize a virus or other disease, Milley said “we also need to take the lessons learned from this current pandemic and roll those into capabilities to defend ourselves,” including stockpiles of PPE (personal protective equipment), organizations capable of rapid deployment, protocols and procedures to limit the effects of any biological weapon.

“We have a very rigorous lessons learned program ongoing with the current crisis,” he added.

At the Senate hearing, Gilday said the Pentagon is working closely with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on two plans to distribute COVID-19 vaccine. Ten Defense Department locations across the continental United States will distribute Pfizer’s vaccine, which must be stored at minus 70 degrees Celsius. Three or four overseas locations will distribute the Moderna vaccine, which only requires refrigeration at minus 20 degrees Celsius for up to 30 days before use.

The vaccination plan grew out of lessons learned from the Defense Department's tiered COVID-19 testing program, Gilday said. It calls for health care and emergency and safety personnel to be vaccinated first because they're more likely to be in contact with the infected, strategic forces, such as the crews on nuclear missile submarines, followed by forces to be deployed within the next three months.

Sailors on Pacific Fleet Destroyer Test Positive for COVID-19



Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Priscilla Jean-Francois checks the temperature of a Greek pilot, as a COVID-19 mitigation, as the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Donald Cook (DDG 75) arrives in Souda Bay, Greece, Nov. 8, 2020. The temperature checks are part of the COVID-19 protection effort. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Will Hardy ARLINGTON, Va. – Despite mitigating actions that have prevented any widespread outbreaks since March, the novel coronavirus COVID-19, continues to vex the U.S. sea services, with the destroyer USS Michael Murphy the latest vessel to report personnel testing positive for the disease.

Navy officials confirmed that an outbreak was reported on the Arleigh Burke class guided missile destroyer in the Pacific Fleet Nov. 4. Under Defense Department policy, officials do not reveal specific COVID-19 numbers on individual ships or bases. However, no Sailors from the Michael Murphy were admitted to the hospital, according to a Navy spokesperson.

"Personnel who tested positive for COVID-19 were placed in isolation. Out of an abundance of caution, all close contacts and non-essential crew members are undergoing a two-week self-isolation period in accordance with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Guidelines," Cmdr. Nicole Schwegman, a spokesperson for Naval Surface Forces Pacific, said in a statement to *Seapower* Nov. 20.

She said most of the crew that had been in self isolation "will be coming out over the weekend and will be back to work next week."

The ship, currently in its basic phase training cycle, was cleaned in accordance with strict protocols, Schwegman said. She declined to discuss future operations of the ship due to operational security requirements.

The test positive cases on the Michael Murphy were the latest small outbreak on Navy vessels, most of them dockside, including the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt, where "a small number of Sailors" tested positive for the novel coronavirus in October. None of those outbreaks have come close to the ordeal of the Roosevelt, the first U.S. warship to battle a COVID-19 outbreak at sea in March. The carrier was sidelined in Guam for months as scores of Sailors became ill and more than a thousand tested positive. The ensuing controversy over how the incident was handled cost the ship's captain and the acting Secretary of the Navy their jobs.

The latest figures released by the Navy on Nov. 18 showed 14,947 uniformed personnel have tested positive for COVID-19. Of that number, 12,715 have recovered. Only 11 cases currently require hospitalization, and only Sailor, from the Roosevelt, has died since the pandemic began last winter.

A multidisciplinary team of U.S. Navy Medicine personnel published a comprehensive analysis of the Roosevelt's COVID-19 outbreak in the *New England Journal of Medicine* on Nov. 11.

The paper provided an epidemiological description of the outbreak that includes all 4,779 crew members.

Over the course of the outbreak, 1,271 sailors (27% of the crew) tested positive for severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). More than 1,000 infections were identified within five weeks after the first laboratory-confirmed infection. An additional 60 crew members had suspected Covid-19.

The paper's authors found that COVID spread quickly among the predominately young crew (mean age 27). Transmission was facilitated by close-quarters conditions and by asymptomatic and pre-symptomatic infected crew members. Nearly half of those who tested positive for the virus never had symptoms. Additionally, a history of using a medication to control high blood pressure (an angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitor), respiratory disease and obese body mass index were associated with an increased risk of infection, according to the paper.

SecNav Braithwaite Aims to Create New 1st Fleet for Indo-Pacific



Secretary of the Navy Kenneth J. Braithwaite, second from right, shown during a visit to the National Museum of the U.S. Navy in early November. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Alexander C. Kubitza

ARLINGTON, Va. – U.S. Navy Secretary Kenneth J. Braithwaite says he plans to establish a new numbered fleet as a “formidable deterrence” to China, basing it closer to allies

and partner nations “at the crossroads between the Indian and Pacific oceans.”

“If we’re really going to have an Indo-Pacom (U.S. Indo-Pacific Command) footprint, we can’t just rely on the 7th Fleet in Japan,” Braithwaite announced Nov. 17 to webinar participants at the annual symposium of the Naval Submarine League.

“We have to look to our other allies and partners like Singapore, like India and actually put a numbered fleet where it would be extremely relevant if, God forbid, we were to get in any kind of a dust-up,” Braithwaite said. His announcement came just after describing his recent visit with Pacific and Asian partners concerned about China’s aggressive actions in the South China Sea and elsewhere.

Braithwaite said he was alarmed by China’s “aggressiveness around the Globe,” from the Arctic to the Far East. “Not since the War of 1812 has the United States and our sovereignty been under the kind of pressures that we see today,” he said, adding the planned 1st Fleet, “can provide a formidable deterrence.”

Braithwaite said he had not yet discussed his plan with new acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller, “but I’ve crossed all the T’s and dotted all the other I’s.”

He said the new 1st Fleet might be based in Singapore, where he recently met with officials to discuss enhanced Naval presence. If not in Singapore, “we’re going to look to make it more expeditionary oriented and move it across the Pacific until it is where our allies and partners see that it could best assist them as well as assist us,” said Braithwaite.

He added that he wanted to ensure in the time he has left as Navy Secretary “that I opened the door to these nations, recognizing the challenges they have and to offer them the

kind of support that we can provide.” Braithwaite also said he was seeking their partnership and alliance with us, because the United States alone will never be able to stand up against the PRC (People’s Republic of China) without having our allies and partners close to us.