

Navy Determines Planned Ship Inactivations for Fiscal 2026



Henry J. Kaiser-class underway replenishment oiler USNS Pecos (T-AO-197) sails during the at-sea phase of Exercise Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2024. (U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Terrin Hartman)

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy plans to deactivate or transfer eight ships during fiscal 2026, including two warships and six auxiliary ships, the service said in a Sept. 12 internal message to the force.

The navy plans to deactivate two Los Angeles-class attack submarines, USS Newport News (SSN 750) on Jan. 31, 2026, and USS Alexandria (SSN 757) on Aug. 4, 2026. The two submarines will be scrapped in Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, Washington.

Two Henry J. Kaiser-class fleet replenishment oilers will be withdrawn from service with Military Sealift Command by July 31, 2026. USNS John Ericsson (T-AO 194) will be retired but retained as a logistics support asset as a parts source for remaining ships of its class. USS Pecos (T-AO 197) will be transferred to the Maritime Administration (MARAD).

Three Watson-class large, medium-speed roll-on/roll off ships will be transferred from the Military Sealift Command's Prepositioning Force: USNS Pomeroy (T-AKR 316) by Apr. 1, 2026; USNS Watkins (T-AKR 315) by July 1, 2026; and USNS Red Cloud (T-AKR-313) by Sept. 30, 2026.

Also being transferred to MARAD on July 1, 2026, is the USNS VADM K.R. Wheeler (T-AG 5001), a ship which uses an offshore petroleum distribution system to pump fuel ashore from a distance of eight miles to U.S. forces ashore.

Naval Aviation at Highest Readiness in Years, 'Air Boss' Said



The world's largest aircraft carrier, USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78), transits the North Sea, Aug. 23, 2025. (U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Tajh Payne)

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Virginia – U.S. naval aviation is at its highest readiness in years, a senior naval aviation admiral said to an audience in Washington and online.

Speaking Aug. 26 in an event of the U.S. Naval Institute and the Center for Strategic and International Studies sponsored by HII, Vice Admiral Daniel L. Cheever, commander Naval Air Forces and commander, Naval Air Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet – the Navy's Air Boss' – said the Naval Air Forces are "sustaining the readiness increases that we enjoyed" and "we're at the "highest state of readiness we've had in at least 10 to 15 years back. And so, both carriers and the air wings with the carriers and our expeditionary forces are all at that heightened readiness."

Cheever said that small pockets of challenges to readiness

remained, particularly with the management of the supply chain and sustainment,

“We have a good playbook,” he said. “When there is a challenge, we get after it, and we have a perform-to-plan that re-energizes and gets us back to where we should be for readiness, and that’s across the board. And it’s pretty exciting to be part of that. It’s a lot of hard work but it is totally worth it. The return on investment from all of that parts supply is in the readiness of the force.”

Cheever praised the F-35 Lightning II strike fighter as “a game changer, a difference maker in the fleet,” while noting that there are some supply-chain challenges that are being addressed.

He said that a mixture of 4th-, 5th-, and 6th-generation mix of carrier-based strike fighters with manned-unmanned teaming is the “right blend.”

The 6th-generation strike fighter is being designed to replace the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet strike fighter and the EA-18G Growler electronic attack aircraft.

Cheever offered no details of the concept for the 6th-generation strike fighter but said that “I see a maritime version of the aircraft that starts at the carrier, is made for the carrier, and is a complete carrier version ... I’m looking forward to the down-select... because that 6th generation means air superiority in that timeframe in the future, which means sea control.”

He affirmed that aircraft carriers will be central to air superiority in the future for the Navy and America as a maritime nation.

He noted that the MQ-25 Stingray unmanned refueling aircraft will fly this year and be integrated with the aircraft carrier next year.

The air boss praised the design of the USS Gerald R. Ford, lead ship of the Navy's newest class of aircraft carriers. The position of the island superstructure is farther aft than on the Nimitz class produces less of an air burble for approaching aircraft. The increase of aircraft parking space forward of the island eases aircraft handling and enables an aircraft to park directly over a weapons elevator for weapons download.

He also noted that, unlike the Nimitz class carriers, the Gerald R. Ford is completely air conditioned.

Navy F-35C Jet Crashes Near NAS Lemoore

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – A U.S. Navy F-35C Lightning II strike fighter crashed on July 30 near Naval Air Station Lemoore, California, the air station said in a Facebook post.

“NAS Lemoore can confirm an aviation incident on the Operations side of the installation,” the announcement said. “At 1830, an F-35C attached to the VFA-125 Rough Raiders went down not far from NAS Lemoore. We can confirm the pilot successfully ejected and is safe. There are no additional affected personnel.”

VFA-125 is the fleet replacement squadron for the F-35C, training aviators and maintenance personnel for Navy and Marine Corps squadrons that operate the F-35C.

The jet is the fourth tactical jet that the Navy has lost this

calendar year.

HASC Marks National Defense Authorization Bill

Edited by Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

Arlington, Va. – The House Armed Services Committee (HASC) filed the bill for the 2026 National Defense Authorization Act, the bill's leaders, Committee Chairman Sen. Roger Wicker (R-Miss.) and Sen. Jack Reed (D-R.I.) announced in a July 16 release.

Some announced naval-related provisions are listed below:

- Authorizes procurement for not more than five Columbia-class submarines.
- Authorizes a block buy of up to 15 Medium Landing Ships (LSM) to support testing and experimentation of the Marine Littoral Regiment formation.
- Limits funding for TAGOS Ship unless the Secretary of the Navy provides information on the Navy's management of the program and an assessment of alternative solutions for the mission.
- Requires the Navy, in implementing the Medium Landing Ship and Light Replenishment Oiler programs, to utilize a Vessel Construction Manager (VCM) acquisition

strategy, employing commercial design standards, construction practices, and an external entity to contract for construction.

- Exempts unmanned surface vessels and unmanned underwater vehicles from the Senior Technical Authority requirement and limits certain technical requirements from the Chief Engineer of the Naval Sea Systems Command without prior approval of the program manager.
- Modifies certification requirements of operational demonstrations for propulsion and electrical systems of large and medium unmanned surface vessels to increase industrial base participation.
- Limits funding to certain Navy-developed software for autonomy and command and control of unmanned surface vessels.
- Directs a briefing to the congressional defense committees to prioritize innovative, commercially driven solutions to deliver a scalable medium unmanned surface vessel (MUSV) capability that meets the urgent needs of the fleet while fostering a competitive industrial base.
- Requires the Navy to move leadership for conventional surface ship maintenance to the Type Commanders, delegates decision-making authority to project managers, port engineers, and ship commanding officers, and directs a new contracting strategy that emphasizes workload stability and collaborative planning.

- Requires the Navy to investigate, and where feasible qualify and fully integrate, 23 advanced technologies and processes into Navy surface ship readiness.
- Supports amphibious warship production and readiness by limiting funding of the Secretary of the Navy and the Secretary of Defense if the 30-year shipbuilding plan does not comply with the statutory requirement for 31 amphibious ships, 15 defines “temporarily unavailable” within the 31 amphibious ship requirements, and requires a plan to maintain and extend the service lives of amphibious ships
- Requires DOD to develop a comprehensive plan to establish a government-controlled open mission systems computing environment for all variants and blocks of the F-35 aircraft operated by the DOD.
- Directs the Navy and Air Force to conduct a comparative study, independent of the air vehicle manufacturer, on the two propeller systems on the C-130J platform.
- Accelerates development of the nuclear-armed sea-launched cruise missile and creates a supplementary parallel pathway for rapid fielding.
- Strongly encourages the Secretary of Defense to invite the naval forces of Taiwan to the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise, as appropriate, and requires a notification and justification if the Secretary chooses not to do so.

- Requires the Navy to develop options for two sources of domestic solid rocket motors in the Navy Modular Missile program.
- Directs a briefing on opportunities for the Irregular Warfare Technical Support Directorate to complement innovation efforts by Naval Special Warfare Command for research, experimentation, and prototyping of unmanned maritime vessels.
- Authorizes personnel end strength for the active component at 344,600 for the Navy; 172,300 for the Marine Corps; 57,500 for the Navy Reserve; 33,600 for the Marine Corps Reserve; and 7,000 for the Coast Guard Reserve.

[Read the FY26 NDAA Bill Language.](#)

[Read the FY26 NDAA Executive Summary.](#)

Navy, Marine Corps in Planning for Third Large-Scale Exercise

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy and Marine Corps are planning for execution later this month for Large-Scale Exercise (LSE) 2025, the third of such exercises since 2021. The LSE will largely be conducted through Live Virtual Construct (LVC)

environment but will encompass units from around the world, including—for the first time—allies and partner nations.

LSE 2025, scheduled to begin on August 30, will be conducted “nearly fully virtual” over 22 time zones, said Rear Admiral Kenneth Blackmon, vice commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, during a briefing to reporters on the exercise, pointing out that LVC allows for safer exercises and conserves resources.

Approximately 880 personnel will be directly involved in the exercise, which will include personnel in six regional combatant commanders, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, the U.S. Pacific Fleet, Naval Forces Europe/Africa, Marine Forces Europe/Africa, seven numbered fleets, 10 maritime operations centers (MOCs), Marine Forces Pacific, II Marine Expeditionary Force operations center, five carrier strike groups, two amphibious ready groups, the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations (OPNAV), various systems commands and type commanders, and Reserve Forces Command, said Capt. Captain Christopher Narducci, the exercise lead who briefed the details of the upcoming exercise.

“This is the only naval exercise spanning all 10 Maritime Operations Centers (MOCs), incorporating both the Navy and Marine Corps worldwide to evaluate and address gaps and seams between fleets,” Blackmon said. Many exercises focus on a single fleet, but LSE raises the bar by requiring coordination across all fleets, providing critical reps and sets at the operational level.”

Allied participation will include a NATO response cell, the Royal Canadian Navy, and the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force.

The LSE is designed to exercise such aspects as the Global Maritime Response Plan (GMRP), global contested logistics and sustainment operations, reserve mobilization, and the wartime responsibilities of the type commanders.

GMRP “is a new concept that is being developed right now,” Narducci said. “It aims to accelerate our ability to generate forces in wartime or in a crisis scenario. GMRP is about getting more players on the field sooner.”

Brigadier General Thomas M. Armas, deputy commander of U.S. Marine Corps Forces Command, also briefing reporters, said that the LSE would exercise the passing of carrier strike groups and amphibious ready groups from fleet to fleet.

“This exercise provides an incredible opportunity to hone command and control across the most lethal amphibious task forces in the world, ensuring sea lanes remain open and global commerce flows freely, maintaining peace and stability worldwide,” Armas said.

“Exercises like this help us identify and close gaps across multiple time zones, preparing our Amphibious Ready Groups (ARGs) and Carrier Strike Groups (CSGs) to seamlessly transition forces during crises. It’s challenging enough to operate within one time zone; coordinating across many, especially in adverse conditions, demands realistic practice.

“Being able to rehearse these scenarios ensures we can guarantee the lethality and readiness our nation depends on,” he said. “When our ARGs are deployed around the world during times of crisis, exercises like LSE 25 ensure those forces are synchronized, on time, and on target. Practicing lethality guarantees we can execute it when needed.”

Narducci said the Naval Warfare Development Center will be responsible for overall exercise control, assisted by six global distributed controllers and supported by 17 flag and general officers, including retired officers.

The Navy Continuous Training Environment will be the network for the LSE, Narducci said.

Airspace around Coast Guard Cutters Now Restricted for Drones

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Federal Aviation Administration has declared the airspace in the vicinity of U.S. Coast Guard cutters to be restricted airspace to unmanned aerial systems (UAS).

In a June 16 directive from Coast Guard Headquarters, the commandant of the Coast Guard announced the new policy that “explicit approval is required to fly UAS in the immediate vicinity of a Cutter.”

All UAS are prohibited from flying “within a stand-off distance of 3,000 feet laterally and 1,000 feet above all Cutters operating, transiting, or at port within U.S. territorial waters,” the directive said.

The directive applies to all Coast Guard cutters greater or equal to 65 feet in length, which is the length that distinguishes a cutter from a boat.

'All of Our Programs Are a Mess,' SECNAV Said of Shipbuilding



By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV) told Congress that many major shipbuilding and other programs are behind schedule and above planned cost, and he is looking for possible long-term solutions to correct the situation and rebuild readiness for the challenges of the future.

“All of our programs are a mess, to be honest,” said Navy Secretary John C. Phelan, who was testifying June 11 on Capitol Hill before the House Armed Services Committee along with Chief of Naval Operations James W. Philby and General Eric M. Smith, commandant of the Marine Corps.

“We are behind schedule, over budget,” Phelan said. “Our best-

performing one [program] is six months late and 57% over budget. ... So, we are working very hard to get these fixed. The Navy has begun to make some rapid changes at the public shipyards, and we've been talking with Electric Boat and Huntington Ingalls [HII]."

Of particular concern to the SECNAV are the Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarines and Virginia-class submarines, both classes of which are behind schedule.

Schedule and cost issues also plague the Constellation-class frigate program, and some Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers are behind schedule. Many amphibious warfare ships are in poor condition, Navy officials said.

"The United States Navy and Marine Corps are prepared and ready to fight and win, anytime and anywhere," Phelan said. "However, our naval superiority is under threat. For too long we have allowed our shipbuilding industry to erode, hollowing out the very capacity we need to maintain credible naval deterrence. That must change."

Phelan said he has had conversations with shipbuilders in South Korea, noting that a modern guided-missile destroyer built in South Korea – "10 5 bigger than ours" – cost one third that of its U.S. counterpart.

He said that rebuilding the maritime industrial base is a "national security imperative."

Marines for Los Angeles

Trained in Crowd Control, Commandant Said



By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Marines in the regiment being surged to protect federal buildings and personnel in Los Angeles are trained in crowd control, the commandant of the Marine Corps told Congress.

“All Marines are trained in crowd control, embassy

reinforcement, etc., so this is part of their training, sir," said General Eric M. Smith, commandant of the Marine Corps, testifying June 10 on Capitol Hill before the Senate Armed Services Committee. "The standard Marine expeditionary unit – before they deploy – is trained, and this battalion is ready for that."

Smith was responding to questions from Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Connecticut, about the imminent deployment of Marines to Los Angeles in response to recent rioting from people protesting the enforcement actions of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) personnel in the city.

The 700 Marines assigned to Los Angeles are from the 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, based at the Marine Air-Ground Combat Training Center at Twentynine Palms, California.

The Marines were activated on June 9 by U.S. Northern Command.

"The activation of the Marines is intended to provide Task Force 51 with adequate numbers of forces to provide continuous coverage of the area in support of the lead federal agency," NORTHCOM said in a June 9 release. "Task Force 51 is U.S. Army North's Contingency Command Post, which provides a rapidly deployable capability to partner with civil authorities and DoD entities in response to a Homeland Defense and Homeland Security Operations. It is commanded by Maj. Gen. Scott M. Sherman."

Task Force 51, which includes up to 2,100 personnel from the California National Guard, is has been trained "in de-escalation, crowd control, and standing rules for the use of force," the NORTHCOM release said.

"They are there at the SECDEF's [Secretary of Defense's] direction to NORTHCOM [U.S. Northern Command]," Smith of the Marines in response to a question from Sen. Mike Rounds, R-

South Dakota. "It's one of our most ready battalions. They're prepared to respond to lawful orders from the chain of command. They're there to protect federal property and federal officers.

Blumenthal asked about the equipment the Marines would have in Los Angeles and if the Marines would have arrest authority.

"Sir, they have shields and batons," Smith said. "They need not have arrest authority. They are there to protect federal property and federal personnel."

When Blumenthal expressed concern for the reputation of the Marines thrust into a civil disturbance, Smith replied, "I am not concerned. I have great faith in my Marines and their junior leaders and their more senior leaders to execute the lawful tasks that they are given."

Navy Selects Mobile, Ala., Company to Scrap World's First Nuclear-Powered Aircraft Carrier



The nuclear-powered aircraft carrier ex-USS Enterprise is shown being moved to Newport News Shipbuilding in 2013 following its decommissioning in 2012. (NHHC)

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy has selected NorthStar Maritime Dismantlement Services LLC, a company with facilities in Mobile, Alabama, to scrap the former USS Enterprise (CVN 65), the Navy’s – and the world’s – first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier.

The Defense Department said in a May 30 contract announcement that NorthStar, headquartered in Vernon, Vermont, was being awarded a \$536.7 million firm-fixed-price contract from the Naval Sea Systems Command for “the dismantling, recycling, and disposal of Ex-Enterprise (CVN 65).

“Under this contract CVN 65 will be dismantled in its entirety, and all resulting materials will be properly recycled or disposed of. Specifically, hazardous materials, including low-level radioactive waste, will be packaged and safely transported for disposal at authorized licensed sites,”

the announcement said. "Work will be performed in Mobile, Alabama, and is expected to be completed by November 2029."

The Ex-Enterprise, commissioned in 1961, served the nation in numerous crises and conflicts, including the Cuban Missile Crisis, Vietnam War, and Operations Frequent Wind, Earnest Will, Desert Fox, Southern Watch, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom.

The carrier was deactivated in December 2012 and, when its nuclear reactors were defueled, it was decommissioned in February 2017. The hull remained at Newport News Shipbuilding at Newport News, Virginia, awaiting the Navy's plans for disposal.

"NorthStar is partnered with Modern American Recycling and Radiological Services, LLC (MARRS) in Mobile, Alabama, where the dismantlement work will take place," the Naval Sea Systems Command said in a June 2 release posted on linkedin.com. "Waste Control Specialists LLC, of Andrews, Texas, will serve as the licensed facility for disposal of low-level radiological and mixed hazardous waste. Non-hazardous materials will be recycled or disposed of in accordance with all applicable federal, state, and local regulations."

The Navy's selection of a commercial company to dismantle nuclear-powered ship is a change from its normal practice of scrapping nuclear-powered ships, which heretofore included nuclear-powered submarines and cruisers. In recent years, the Navy's Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Bremerton, Washington, has been the facility that has handled the tasks.

"By leveraging private-sector expertise in commercial nuclear power plant decommissioning, the Navy is achieving an estimated \$1 billion in cost savings compared to conducting the effort in public shipyards, the Navy release said. "This approach enables the Navy to prioritize public yard resources toward fleet readiness and modernization – while upholding its

longstanding commitment to environmental stewardship and nuclear safety.”

Navy Reserve Chief Looks Forward to KC-130J Aircraft



MISAWA, Japan (July 12, 2021) A C-130T Hercules, assigned to the Condors of Fleet Logistics Support Squadron (VR) 64, recovers at Naval Air Facility (NAF) Misawa. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Benjamin Ringers)
By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The admiral in charge of the U.S. Navy Reserve Force expressed appreciation for congressional support in procuring KC-130J Super Hercules tanker/transport aircraft to modernize the force’s organic airlift fleet.

“We are grateful for the strong bi-partisan alignment on this priority,” said Rear Admiral Nancy S. Lacore, chief of Navy Reserve, testifying May 20 before the House Appropriations Committee’s defense subcommittee. “We are grateful for the adds we got in 2024 [and] 2025 for the C-130. The C-130 is our number one equipment priority, and we are behind in that re-capitalization effort.”

The Navy Reserve operates 27 C-130T/KC-130T Hercules aircraft with an average age of 34 years and a mission-capable rate of 40%. Lacore anticipates a mission-capable rate of 75% with a fleet of KC-130Js.

We’re also anticipating a 75% mission-capable rate, which will go a long way,” Lacore said. “The plan was to be at 32 aircraft by 2030. We got one in 2024, two in 2025 and we’re super-grateful for them. Right now, in the out years, we need to be looking at six per year in order to get us to where we need to go.”

Lacore said the C-130T Hercules “operates exclusively by the Reserve is the Navy’s only long-range, inter-theater airlift for oversize cargo. Its capability is in high demand from fleet commanders, particularly in the Indo-Pacific, playing a critical role in the contested logistics necessary to sustain a maritime fight.

“For the past few months, Reserve C-130 crews have transported thousands of pounds of ordnance into the Red Sea fight, keeping our ships on station intercepting Houthi missiles, conducting precision strikes, and safeguarding global commerce,” she said. “When the fleet needs logistics, whether to deliver firepower or staying power, Navy Reserve answers the call.”

She pointed out that the C-130T fleet “lacks the survivability necessary to operating in a contested environment. Recapitalizing with the KC-130J is critical to ensuring that

we effectively and safely carry out the critical inter-theater logistics mission for the fleet in 2027 and well beyond that.”

Lacore also noted the need for improved aerial refueling capability in the Pacific theater.

“The PACFLT [U.S. Pacific Fleet] commander has already asked us to work on organic aerial refueling and we are doing that with the Tangos [KC-130Ts],” she said. “It’s a long haul; they’re not all plumbed for that, whereas the Juliets [KC-130Js] will come with that plumbing already established. We anticipate that at least two times the aerial refueling rate. And if we include ground refueling as well, we’re looking at probably eight times our refueling capability in theater, which is a huge win for us in the Pacific.