Shipbuilding Investment: The Policy Proposals and Political Environment in Washington

By Luke Lorenz and Sonia Toloczko

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Since American shipbuilding peaked during WWII, the production of U.S.-flagged vessels has dropped precipitously despite American imports rising at a similarly steep rate. The text of the recently introduced SHIPS for America Act of 2025 illustrates the dire state of American shipbuilding through several alarming statistics.

Although 80% of goods imported to the U.S. arrive by sea, fewer than 1.5% of the ships carrying them are American. This percentage is surprisingly low, but the number of U.S.-flagged vessels in operation is even more startling: approximately 80 American ships

are engaged in international commerce. Without intervention, that figure is unlikely to see any significant increase given the weakened state of the shipbuilding industry and its infrastructure. Only a handful of U.S. shipbuilders can produce large ocean-going vessels. In 2023, these shipyards received just five orders for oceangoing ships, most of which engage in domestic trade. As it stands, American shipbuilding capacity is so diminished that even the most concerted efforts to expand it could take years to produce results. That is why Congress needs to start addressing the problem now.

Ramping up production of U.S.-flagged ships is imperative to America's maritime security, and doing so will require the government to invest in all aspects of the shipbuilding industry. China's shipbuilding capacity already outpaces that of the United States by an order of magnitude. Still, Congress and the president have yet to enact legislation providing the consistent funding to close that gap. Lawmakers are late to address this problem, but the political will to do so is steadily growing.

In congressional committee hearings, many lawmakers recognize the dire state of America's shipbuilding and Merchant Marine. Speaking to Dr. Kurt Campbell in a May 15 House China Committee hearing, Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-New York) remarked that "one Chinese shipyard has more capacity than all our shipyards combined. China's shipbuilding capacity is over 23 million deadweight tons. The United States has less than 100,000 deadweight tons. The difference is a multiple of 230." In an April 10 Senate Armed Services INDOPACOM posture hearing, Sen. Roger Wicker (R-Mississippi) observed, "we need a drastic improvement in our shipbuilding. The risk is simply too high for us to avoid making these changes." In nomination, posture and budget hearings across Congress, many other legislators have echoed these statements.

Two major legislative developments this Congress are indicative of the growing support for shipbuilding in Congress: the House passage of a reconciliation spending bill providing for millions in shipbuilding investment and the introduction of the bicameral and bipartisan SHIPS for America Act. This month's Washington Report will explore the bills' potential impact and lawmakers'

responses to them so far.

The ‘One Big Beautiful Bill Act’

Commercial and Military Shipbuilding Provisions

The House-passed reconciliation bill promises landmark investment in military and commercial shipbuilding as well as Coast Guard operations and facilities. Many shipbuilding funding allocations in the bill, or H.R.1, the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act,” align with the Navy League’s legislative recommendations. However, the Navy League advocates that Congress provide consistent funding through the annual budget process, not only reconciliation spending bills.

H.R.1 provides $2.6 billion in funding to improve military shipbuilding capacity and technology. The bill also allocates $2.4 billion to expand and modernize the commercial shipbuilding industrial base. Most notably, Section 20002 of H.R.1, “Enhancement of Department of Defense Resources for Shipbuilding,” promises $28 billion in funding for naval ship construction, technology, maintenance and repair, and autonomous systems. Although the investment is less remarkable in comparison, it bears noting that the bill also includes $100 million for the procurement of commercial logistic ships and $700 million for the lease and purchase of ships under the National Defense Sealift Fund.

Section 20009 of the reconciliation bill, “Enhancement of Department of Defense Resources to Improve Capabilities of United States Indo-Pacific Command,” also allocates $9.7 billion for INDOPACOM operations and infrastructure. Of that funding, INDOPACOM would receive $35 million for additive manufacturing capabilities and $19 million for the development of naval small craft capabilities. Under Section 20010, “Enhancement of Department of Defense Resources for Improving the Readiness of the Armed Forces,” the DoD can expect $2 billion in funding for Navy depot and shipyard modernization and capacity enhancement, as well as $241 million for the production and integration of Marine Corps amphibious vehicles. H.R.1 would provide the DOD with $13 billion

to build 16 warships. When combined with the proposed annual budget, the reconciliation bill's passage would result in a $33.8 billion shipbuilding budget

However, the $13 billion plus-up provided by the reconciliation bill is only for 2026, leaving $20.8 billion as the starting point for shipbuilding in 2027. H.R.1 promises the shipbuilding industry a historic one-time influx of investment. But shipbuilders and shipbuilding component manufacturers will expect demand to drop back down in 2027 when funding from the reconciliation bill ends. If the maritime industry cannot expect consistently elevated funding from an increased annual budget, manufacturers will be wary of making the long-term investments crucial to expanding American shipbuilding capacity.

Coast Guard Funding

In addition to large investments in the military and commercial shipbuilding industries, the reconciliation bill also promises $14.6 billion in funding for Coast Guard offshore patrol cutters, fast response cutters, polar security cutters, and Arctic security cutters. Section 100001, "Coast Guard Assets Necessary to Secure the Maritime Border and Interdict Migrants and Drugs," allocates $3.2 billion for Coast Guard shoreside infrastructure, $1.3 billion for all facility depot maintenance and $180 million for autonomous maritime systems providing maritime domain awareness. The $20 billion that H.R.1 allocates to the Coast Guard mirrors the $20 billion budget recommended by the Navy League but still does not offer the commercial and military shipbuilding industries the reliable investment of an increased annual budget.

The SHIPS Act

Introduction and Impact

At the beginning of May, Sens. Mark Kelly of Arizona and Todd Young of Indiana and Reps. Trent Kelly of Missouri and John Garamendi of California reintroduced legislation colloquially referred to as the SHIPS for America Act in their respective chambers of Congress. Kelly and Young initially introduced two

bills, splitting the House version of the SHIPS Act into one piece of legislation with tax policy provisions and another with the remaining proposals for increasing American shipbuilding.

The 2025 SHIPS for America Act includes the policies proposed in the original 2024 legislation, such as implementing a National Maritime Strategy under an executive branch Maritime Security Advisor and creating a 250-ship fleet of "commercially operated, U.S.-flagged, American crewed, domestically built merchant vessels" referred to as the Strategic Commercial Fleet. In addition to these original provisions, the 2025 bill has a few notable updates. For one, the original bill introduced a Maritime Security Trust Fund that would "reinvest duties and fees paid by the maritime industry into maritime security programs and infrastructure supporting maritime commerce."

Along with those duties and fees, the updated SHIPS Act would also supply the Maritime Security Trust Fund with fines resulting from the U.S. Trade Representative's April 2025 Section 301 investigation into China's illegal shipbuilding trade practices. The other new provisions in the 2025 SHIPS Act similarly tighten restrictions on activity hindering the expansion of America's shipbuilding industry.

Barriers to Passage

Although support for shipbuilding legislation is growing, the budget reconciliation bill may prevent Congress from acting on the SHIPS Act for some time. President Trump and Speaker of the House Rep. Mike Johnson (R-Louisiana) have publicly aimed to push the One Big Beautiful Bill Act through the Senate and onto the President's desk by the Fourth of July. If the Senate passes the legislation, current speculation indicates it will likely be a revised version. Congressional Republicans may not be able to debate and vote on the revised bill in time to meet the July 4 deadline to which they previously agreed.

Whether Congress passes the reconciliation bill by Independence Day, senior lawmakers will be busy trying to finalize committee budget bills throughout July before their summer recess begins at

the end of the month. With budget deadlines quickly following Congress' return from recess in September, activity on the SHIPS Act could be stalled until mid-fall, assuming the appropriations process runs on schedule. While this timeline is entirely speculative, it illustrates how the upcoming congressional calendar could impede the timely passage of the SHIPS Act. To push the bill through Congress, advocates for its passage will need to capture lawmakers' attention during the busiest working period of this Congress.

The State of Support

The current political climate and growing support for shipbuilding in Washington are promising indicators the SHIPS Act will continue to gain traction in Congress. Sen. Kelly, one of the bill's original sponsors, was optimistic about its reception in Washington during an April 30 press conference. "I'm glad that my colleagues in Congress – Republicans and Democrats in both the House and the Senate – and the administration see this challenge too and are ready to do something about it," he said.

Kelly's observations are borne out by the number of sponsors for the 2025 SHIPS for America Act legislation. In addition to its sponsors, the 2025 bills now boast a combined total of 38 Republican and 32 Democratic co-sponsors. Supporters like Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) have been enthusiastic about the bills' benefits for their states.

"Because of our vast geography, the maritime industry is uniquely vital to Alaska, with many of our coastal communities relying on a strong U.S.-flagged fleet for everything from everyday logistics, to commercial fishing and homeland defense," Murkowski said. "I am proud to cosponsor the SHIPS Act, which advances common-sense solutions that will invest in the workforce and revitalize our nation's shipbuilding, increasing Alaska's resilience and security."

Other legislators, such as Sen. John Fetterman (D-Pennsylvania), have expressed support for the bill's international and local impacts, saying, "not only will this [bill] strengthen our

national security, but it'll also grow our local economies and support working families right here in Pennsylvania. I'm proud to support this commonsense, bipartisan legislation that will help us build more ships in America and stand up to China."

Alongside lawmakers, several prominent maritime organizations have also publicly backed the SHIPS for America Act. Among the most notable of these supporters are several state maritime academies, USA Maritime, American Maritime Partnership, United Steelworkers, AFL-CIO, Marine Machinery Association, Transportation Institute, National Defense Transportation Association and Shipbuilders Council of America.

Still to Come

Congressional activity on the One Big Beautiful Bill Act may not indicate very much about legislators' attitudes toward shipbuilding investment. However, the bill's inclusion of such significant funding for the commercial maritime industry, new warships and the Coast Guard signals there may be enough political will to push shipbuilding bills, like the SHIPS for America Act, through Congress. Many members of Congress have come to understand a shipbuilding investment is a necessary element of safeguarding America's economic and national security future. Now that lawmakers have become aware of the dire state of American shipbuilding, it remains to be seen how committed they are to improving it.

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Coast Guard Academy Think Tank Puts Polar Issues Front and Center

Coast Guard Cutter Bertholf (WMSL 750) transits through Glacier Bay, Alaska, Oct. 24, 2024. During the patrol, Bertholf's crew operated as far north as the Arctic Circle, patrolling along the maritime boundary line between the United States and Russia and supporting U.S. strategic interests in the North Pacific Ocean. *Photo credit: U.S. Coast Guard | Troy Spence*

The Arctic is a hot topic these days. As sea ice melts, many questions surface: How should Arctic nations manage more shipping traffic while preserving the delicate environment? Can countries maintain a history of regional cooperation in this increasingly contested space?

As these and other concerns come to the fore, there's one entity keeping all things polar on the front burner: the Center for Arctic Study and Policy, or CASP.

This tiny U.S. Coast Guard Academy office – with an annual

operating budget of just $150,000 and two salaried positions — plays an outsized role in promoting knowledge of the north and south polar regions, a growing area of human interest as the environment rapidly changes.

The Arctic polar region is primarily ocean, surrounded on its edges by the eight member states of the Arctic Council: Canada; the Kingdom of Denmark, which includes Greenland and the Faroe Islands; Finland; Iceland; Norway; the Russian Federation; Sweden; and the United States, where Alaska includes a 1.5-million-square-mile exclusive economic zone in its surrounding waters.

Council decisions are achieved in agreement with six "permanent participants" that represent Aleut, Arctic Athabaskan, Gwich'in, Inuit, Saami and Russian Indigenous people, who have inhabited the Artic for millennia. About 10% of the 4 million Arctic residents are native peoples, according to the "Arctic Review," an online publication covering polar issues.

There is a long history of international cooperation regarding Arctic scientific research and discovery and access to the region's abundant fisheries, oil and gas assets, minerals, tourist sites and other resources. But rapid changes to the area's physical, economic, geopolitical and technological characteristics have altered the future of polar affairs. As a result, many nations, including the United States, have intensified their focus on the region.

The U.S. Coast Guard, part of the Department of Homeland Security, underscored the region's strategic importance in its 2023 Arctic Strategic Outlook Implementation Plan: "Global geopolitical trends combined with changes to the Arctic's physical environment are increasing the region's economic opportunities and strategic importance while hastening the impacts and risks to U.S. Arctic residents, commercial activity, and U.S. national security."

In the middle of the action is CASP, the U.S. Coast Guard's only scholarly center and internal think tank. It focuses only on the polar regions – mostly the Arctic but also Antarctica.

Widening Interest, Changing Arctic

Tony Russell, CASP's executive director since 2022, said his personal interest in the Arctic started in 2007. He was serving as an active-duty officer in the Coast Guard and completing a master's degree at the Marine Corps University. The Arctic, Russell thought, would be a unique thesis topic.

"That was when folks were just beginning to understand how access – physical access – was increasing via the sea ice reducing [and asking] what does that mean?" said Russell, who retired from the Coast Guard as a captain in 2020. Global attention to the region also coalesced around a 2008 U.S. Geological Survey report predicting the Arctic Circle had massive stores of undiscovered oil and gas reserves.

Then, as now, the drastic environmental changes were hard to ignore: According to the National Snow and Ice Data Center, scientists have observed a consistent decline in Arctic sea ice cover in nearly 50 years of continuous satellite monitoring – a rate of decline of more than 2% per decade. In 2025, sea ice cover is at its lowest level since recording began in 1979.

The Arctic in the past four decades has warmed three times faster than the worldwide average, according to "Arctic Climate Change Update 2024: Key Trends and Impacts – Summary for Policymakers," a report by the Arctic Council's Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme.

The evolving situation sparked new areas of concern, collaboration and potential conflict among nation-states, residents, the scientific community and industry players.

The area's residents, land, waterways and wildlife face new

threats from erosion, flooding, wildfires and greater human activity. The Arctic is at risk from more air crashes, vessel collisions and groundings. It's also exposed to threats to subsea cables, unsafe shipping through the Russian maritime Arctic and friction from regional military exercises (involving the U.S. and its allies but also Russia and China).

"That all speaks to rising interest for U.S. national security," Russell said.

Dr. Abbie Tingstad poses for a photo at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy, Sept. 25, 2024. Tingstad is a renowned Arctic analyst, a trusted voice on the challenges posed by the changing environment in the region and also the first Visiting Research Professor at the Center for Arctic Study and Policy (CASP) at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy. *Photo credit: U.S. Coast Guard | Petty Officer 2nd Class Janessa-Reyanna Warschkow*

Renewing the Center's Mission

Although CASP was founded in 2014, Russell's tenure began as the Coast Guard Academy was relaunching and revitalizing the

center, complete with new offices at the academy's New London, Connecticut, headquarters. The center is now housed within the academy's Office of Scholarship, Research and Innovation. Its renewed mission is focused on educating cadets, conducting research and analysis, and broadening partnerships.

At the reborn CASP, a federally funded rotating research professor position was first filled in 2023 by Arctic analyst Abbie H. Tingstad, who holds a Ph.D. and the title of visiting arctic research professor. Tingstad's predecessors, Drs. Rebecca Pincus and Barry Zellen, were funded by Coast Guard Academy alumni donations.

In addition to overseeing a two-year research agenda, Tingstad is a sought-after expert on Arctic affairs and widely published author of Arctic peer-reviewed research, policy papers and presentations, and media commentaries. Her work has touched on topics such as the role of icebreakers in diplomacy and the effects of a poleward shift in fish stocks in the Northern Bering Sea.

Tingstad also directs CASP's participation in international policy development for the Arctic.
"For example," Tingstad said, "we are part of a multinational network of research and educational institutions that are shaping the conversation about all the facets of Arctic security and what that means, and how it's changing, and what it implies for governance and cooperation in the Arctic region."

CASP is also educating the next generation of Coast Guard officers. It accepts some 18 to 20 cadets every other semester into its polar studies course, focused on U.S. and international strategies and policies in the region. In addition to studying Arctic history and policy, cadets attend expert lectures involving academia, the military, business, Indigenous communities and political spheres.

They also benefit from CASP's reorganization, which "allowed us to increase our access to all of the academic disciplines at the academy," Russell said. That's important because "the challenges that the Arctic faces are definitely multidisciplinary," he said, involving infrastructure, science, policy, business and more. "All of those things factor into what's going on in the Arctic region."

Each year, CASP encourages six to eight cadets to delve deeper into polar issues as Arctic scholars. Russell highlighted two cadets, among others, making important contributions to Arctic policy.

Elise Beauchemin, an Arctic scholar studying marine environmental science, completed CASP-sponsored internships last year with the University of Alaska Anchorage and at CASP. She worked with the Coast Guard Research and Development Center, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Lincoln Labs, and the Navy's Undersea Warfare Development Center. She also completed a course supporting Tingstad's research. Beauchemin was accepted into the prestigious Fulbright U.S. Student Program and recognized by DHS Secretary Kristi Noem at the Coast Guard Academy commencement in May.

And, after completing the Arctic studies course, Emelia Campbell was one of three team members invited to partner with the Coast Guard's Maritime Law Enforcement Fisheries Division to research implementation options for the Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement. This 10-party pact bans commercial fishing in the central Arctic Ocean for 16 years while scientists study the ecological impact. With CASP, Campbell participated in the Fridtjof Nansen Institute's Arctic Security Conference in Oslo, Norway. In January 2025, she presented research findings at the Arctic Frontiers conference in Tromsø, Norway, and later briefed Coast Guard executives.

CASP has also sponsored cadets to attend and present at industry conferences, such as the Navy League's Sea-Air-Space,

American Society of Naval Engineers symposia and International Marine Design Conference.

The center supports summer internships for roughly eight cadets each year. “We have two cadets right now on an exchange with the Icelandic Coast Guard,” Russell said, where they’re “getting some great exposure” working with another Arctic nation partner.

Other cadets have interned at the Marine Exchange of Alaska, a nonprofit focused on preventing maritime disasters; the Arctic Domain Awareness Center, a DHS research center at the University of Alaska Anchorage; and the Defense Department’s Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies.

Promoting International Partnerships

In addition to maintaining a spirit of cooperation, CASP’s ongoing outreach and engagement with most Arctic nations and dozens of U.S. and international organizations – through cadet exchanges, tabletop exercises, policy and research development, and other areas – is yielding Arctic insights for potential action by U.S. and allied militaries, policymakers, industry groups and affected populations.

For the Coast Guard decision-makers, Russell said, CASP “helps flatten the learning curve and it helps maintain consistency and quality of information we’re using for those decisions.” And for external partners who need or want to share information with the Coast Guard, “we know who the subject matter experts are within the service that do that.”

Through its extensive partner network, CASP can foster international dialogue on issues such as illegal fishing, homeland defense, Arctic-capable shipping design, transportation safety, biodiversity preservation, ecosystem management and emergency preparedness.

For instance, CASP helps nations better prepare for Arctic

emergencies, which now occur with relative frequency. That includes this year's Bering Air Flight 445 that crashed on the sea ice on the way to Nome, Alaska, killing 10 people on board; and the 2023 grounding of a 206-person cruise ship stranded for days on Greenland's remote East Coast.

A recent CASP-hosted tabletop exercise convened emergency response and aviation representatives from four nations and several U.S. military and federal organizations to wargame crises in remote areas of the Arctic. The exercise revealed potential gaps in training, infrastructure, communication and hardware. CASP also moderated a panel discussion on cruise ship search and rescue with the Association of Arctic Expedition Cruise Operators and maritime rescue organizations.

"At the end of the day," Russell said, "the process is as important as the answer, and we strive to provide the kind of analytical research and defendable background knowledge that best informs polar policy choices and answers."

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Securing the Backbone: The Defense Industrial Base

PHOTO BY: Air Force Staff Sgt. Marco Gomez

By Ryan Caughill, President, Western New York Council, Navy League of the United States.

“You can’t fight tomorrow’s war with yesterday’s plans.”

In the summer of 2018, I completed my internship at Moog Inc., one of the United States’ premier defense contractors. My role was in Environmental Health & Safety, but my mission went deeper: I was tasked with modernizing and guiding emergency management planning across an organization that was deeply integrated into the Defense Industrial Base (DIB), and yet, lacked a dedicated emergency management function.

Like my time later at M&T Bank, this experience left a lasting impression. It showed me that even companies at the forefront of defense technology can have blind spots when it comes to continuity, resilience, and crisis preparedness.

[While this article isn't just about my singular experience, but a holistic and general overview,] that's what makes the Defense Industrial Base one of the most paradoxical critical infrastructure sectors in America: incredibly advanced, but dangerously lacking.

The Backbone Behind the Uniform

The Defense Industrial Base is more than just tanks, missiles, or aircraft. It's an expansive network of over 100,000 private companies that provide products, services, logistics, and technologies to support the U.S. military.

This includes:

- Weapons systems and munitions
- Aerospace components and military-grade software
- Advanced electronics and cyber capabilities
- Research and development institutions
- Transportation and supply chain networks
- Small manufacturers producing critical, often irreplaceable, parts

Some of these are Fortune 500 giants. Many are small, family-owned machine shops in rural communities. All are vital.

But here's the problem: there is no unified resilience standard across the DIB. And that's a problem hiding in plain sight.

The Vulnerabilities No One Wants to Talk About

During my time at Moog, I saw firsthand how emergency management often sits outside the core of DIB corporate culture. Not out of apathy, but due to the sheer scale and complexity of operations. Many companies have excellent safety and security programs, but few have comprehensive crisis management systems. Fewer still have trained emergency managers or business continuity professionals guiding cross-

functional coordination across cyber, physical, and operational risks. This isn't to say they don't exist, I've met some, and they do a really great job.

That makes this sector vulnerable in ways most people don't understand.

The DIB is:

- Extremely decentralized: A single failed supplier can halt delivery of critical weapons platforms.
- Highly classified: Cyber breaches can compromise national defense secrets, yet many companies, especially smaller ones, lack mature cyber defenses.
- Logistically fragile: Long-lead items, global supply chains, and just-in-time manufacturing leave little room for error.
- Resource-limited: Many smaller firms simply don't have the bandwidth or expertise to build robust resilience programs.

Worse yet, we take it for granted that these companies – because of what they do – are already hardened. That's not always true.

Why This Sector Isn't Taken Seriously – Until It's Too Late
The Defense Industrial Base occupies an odd place in the national consciousness. We respect the military. We fund the military. But we rarely consider who makes the military work.

The supply chains, R&D labs, fabrication shops, and logistics hubs that build and sustain America's warfighting capability are not invincible. And yet, the DIB isn't regularly treated like critical infrastructure in the traditional emergency management sense , even though it underpins our strategic deterrence, military readiness, and wartime surge capacity.

That disconnect has consequences. If a natural disaster,

ransomware attack, insider threat, or geopolitical disruption strikes a key node in this ecosystem, the effects won't be immediate headlines. They'll show up months or years later when a military platform is delayed or compromised.

In an age of strategic competition with China and resurgent threats in Europe and the Middle East, that delay could mean the difference between deterrence and disaster.

Strengthening the Arsenal of the Republic
If we want the DIB to remain viable, competitive, and secure, we must elevate resilience as a strategic imperative, not an afterthought.

At the Federal Level:

- The DoD must go beyond cybersecurity compliance and require holistic emergency management, business continuity, and crisis communications programs for Tier 1 and Tier 2 contractors
- Congress should fund regional DIB resilience initiatives and technical assistance hubs to help small firms build preparedness capacity
- DIB firms must be integrated into DHS-FEMA and CISA exercises, not treated as isolated contractors

In the Private Sector:

Contractors should invest in full-time emergency managers or resilience officers, especially at multi-site operations
Continuity of Operations plans (COOP) must be tested regularly and integrated across functions – especially cyber, facilities, HR, and production
Leadership should prioritize exercises and scenario planning, particularly for cyber-physical convergence threats

Across the Supply Chain:

Vendors must be mapped and tiered by criticality, with redundancy plans in place for sole-source dependencies.
Smaller manufacturers should be given access to resilience toolkits and grant-supported planning assistance.

For the Defense Community:

Collaboration must improve across DoD, DHS, and the intelligence community to identify emerging threats to the DIB
Emergency management professionals should be embedded, or a partner, in acquisition planning and supplier vetting
The public and political class must recognize that defense readiness includes domestic resilience

Resilience is Readiness
The Defense Industrial Base is one of the quietest, but most consequential, sectors in the nation's infrastructure portfolio. You don't see it in parades. But it's there in every missile defense test, every jet engine, every encrypted radio, and every armored vehicle.

If we allow it to weaken, structurally, logistically, or digitally, we erode not just our defense capability, but our credibility.

We cannot afford to wait for crisis to realize that the arsenal of our Republic isn't just built on innovation or budgets.

It's built on resilience.

These challenges aren't theoretical, they're unfolding in real time. Delays in the F-35 rollout, the Navy's struggles and eventual cancellation with the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) program, and schedule slippages in the next-generation aircraft carriers, guided missile frigates, and Columbia-class ballistic missile submarines all point to a sector under immense strain. While these issues stem from a mix of design complexity, funding cycles, and industrial bottlenecks, one

thing is clear: the Defense Industrial Base cannot afford additional disruption.

A well-funded, well-placed crisis management function, integrated at both the facility and enterprise level, won't solve design flaws or procurement hurdles, but it can absorb shock, accelerate recovery, and ensure continuity when disaster strikes. In a sector already grappling with compounding risks, crisis management isn't a luxury, it's a strategic buffer against the unpredictable threats of 21st century warfare.

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 SECEDEF'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, conduction 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.

Coast Guard to Reduce Flag Officer Positions by 25%

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. — The U.S. Coast Guard has been ordered to reduce the number of admirals by at least 25% before next year, the service announced.

In a May 25 directive from Acting Commandant Adm. Kevin Lunday, the service announced that the reductions were part of its Force Design 2028 initiative.

"As part of Force Design 2028, the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security has determined that there is redundant executive oversight in our force structure which hinders

efficient decision making and Service effectiveness," The opening statement of the announcement said.

"As a result, and consistent with similar efforts within the Department of Defense, the Secretary has ordered a reduction of no less than 25% of flag officer positions by 1 January 2026," the announcement said. "The positions to be eliminated and the plan to reorganize the flag corps will be announced in separate correspondence."

The Coast Guard currently has approximately 45 flag officers.

The service also has negated the results of its fiscal 2025 promotion board for the rank of rear admiral (lower Half) while folding opportunity in next year's selection board.

"The Secretary also disapproved the Promotion Year (PY) 2025 rear admiral (lower half) (RDML) selection board report after determining that the guidance to that board did not align with this Administration's policies," the announcement said. "The Secretary's action also supports planning to reorganize the leadership structure. Officers who were considered by the PY25 RDML selection board and who are otherwise eligible, including those previously selected, will be considered by the PY26 RDML selection board that will convene under new guidance."

Virtual Tools Help Real-World

Suicide Prevention Efforts

A Sailor assigned to Mid-Atlantic Regional Maintenance Center tests the Oculus headset utilized for sexual assault prevention and suicide prevention virtual reality training onboard Naval Station Norfolk, November 14, 2024. *Photo credit: U.S. Navy | Harrison Cox*

Veterans, service members and military family members have significantly higher rates of suicide than the general population. The demands of military life can cause anxiety, depression, interpersonal conflicts and emotional distress. Exposure to combat and traumatic experiences can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health issues; chronic pain and disability from service-related injuries can worsen these challenges. Access to and familiarity with weapons increases the risk.

Reducing the risk of suicide among service members and their families is the chief mission of the Defense Suicide

Prevention Office, a division of the U.S. Department of Defense. It works with military branches, veterans' organizations and mental health professionals to enhance suicide prevention resources. As part of its mission, it is constantly exploring new technology to support or expand existing programs.

Emerging technologies show great promise in the mission to reduce suicides among active-duty forces and veterans. Artificial intelligence, machine learning and advanced algorithms can help identify high-risk individuals and connect them with early intervention resources. Virtual reality technology is enhancing suicide prevention training, while VR-based therapy and online gaming provide veterans with tools to cope with PTSD and foster community engagement.

Early intervention aims to identify service members and veterans who are experiencing an elevated risk of suicide and proactively connect them with prevention resources. AI-powered algorithms can help improve early intervention efforts. These programs can analyze an individual's speech patterns, social media activity and biometric data to detect warning signs of suicidal thoughts.

One example is the Recovery Engagement and Coordination for Health – Veterans Enhanced Treatment, or REACH VET, program used by the Department of Veterans Affairs. It uses predictive analytics to identify at-risk veterans and offer early intervention before a crisis occurs.

REACH VET uses sophisticated AI and machine learning techniques to review and assess a veteran's medical history, psychiatric records and prescriptions. It also considers nontraditional indicators such as chronic pain diagnoses, sleep disorders and major life stressors. The system then runs complex statistical models, evaluating each individual's data and flagging those whose health patterns resemble others who have attempted or died by suicide.

If the system identifies an individual as high-risk, a VA healthcare provider contacts them for a wellness check and assessment. To mitigate risk, the provider offers personalized care plans, therapy sessions, medication adjustments and peer support programs. Studies show veterans enrolled in REACH VET experience lower hospitalization rates and improved mental health engagement, a point in favor of proactive, data-driven intervention.

Programs like REACH VET may see additional improvement by integrating data from wearable devices like smartwatches and fitness trackers. These devices monitor sleep patterns, heart rate variability and stress levels. Incorporating this data could offer another layer of early detection and support, alerting caregivers or medical professionals if a veteran's vitals indicate distress or elevated risk.

Real actors portray Sailors in realistic environments to allow trainees to have significant conversations. *Image credit: Moth + Flame*

VR Tech and Suicide Prevention Training

Traditional suicide prevention training is derisively and ironically referred to as "death by PowerPoint." These boring

presentations convey information about available resources but do little to help service members learn what to actually do to help a friend, comrade or family member in crisis.

New York City-based Moth+Flame, a leading developer of immersive VR training solutions, partners with the U.S. Navy and other military branches to provide state-of-the-art training programs. Although it offers many types of interactive simulations, one area of focus is suicide prevention. It provides customized training modules for each branch of service, addressing their specific environmental stressors.

Its VR training encompasses many suicide prevention strategies, including leadership development, crisis response and mental resilience. Officers can improve their ability to foster a better atmosphere for everyone's mental well-being as well as learn how to support individuals in crisis.

Unlike traditional classroom-based training, VR immerses service members in lifelike conversations where they must recognize distress signals, respond to struggling comrades and practice de-escalation techniques. Participants engage with AI-driven, emotionally responsive avatars in realistic, high-pressure scenarios. The avatars are based on real actors, which the Navy helps select to make sure they look, sound and interact as authentically and realistically as possible.

These scenarios simulate interactions with colleagues, subordinates and family members. Using VR technology, participants can rehearse difficult conversations, building their empathy and confidence in handling real-life crisis situations. As the participant responds, the program provides real-time feedback and suggestions. It also provides post-session feedback and analysis.

"So, in this goggle is a character that is a peer in crisis that the shipmate has to talk to using his or her own voice. …

They will have a practical application that they guide hopefully to a successful outcome," said Matt Frost, an account executive for Moth+Flame, speaking at the Surface Navy Association meeting in January. "We're not making a video game. This is a real actor in a real environment."

The biggest users of the technology in the Navy are OPNAV N-17, the Navy Culture and Force Resilience Office; Naval Surface Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet; Naval Surface Force Atlantic; and Naval Special Warfare Command, Frost said.

Studies show that VR-based training improves knowledge retention and engagement compared to PowerPoint-based instruction. Trainees must actively interact with avatars, ensuring a hands-on learning experience. Early reports suggest that VR enhances readiness and significantly boosts confidence in suicide prevention efforts among active-duty service members.

Improving Mental, Physical Wellness

Virtual reality therapy is also transforming mental health care for service members and veterans. It is especially beneficial because it offers a customizable, controlled environment to help process PTSD, anxiety and depression.

A leading program is Bravemind, which was developed in collaboration with the VA Innovation Center and the SoldierStrong charitable organization. It uses VR to facilitate prolonged exposure therapy, a treatment that helps individuals confront and reprocess traumatic memories in a safe setting.

Bravemind creates virtual environments based on real-world combat settings, allowing therapists to guide individuals through difficult memories while helping them develop coping mechanisms. Though exposure therapy is challenging, it has been proven effective in reducing PTSD symptoms and improving emotional resilience.

In addition to structured therapeutic uses, VR can help service members manage stress during long deployments or offshore missions. VR relaxation programs can transport users to peaceful, calming environments, such as beaches, forests or familiar cities to help manage anxiety and promote well-being. Providing these tools to active-duty service members can help improve their overall health and wellness, another building block in fostering readiness and reducing psychological distress.

Legalman1st Class Alejandra Lozada, assigned to Commander, Naval Surface Force Atlantic, dons virtual reality equipment to complete training at SURFLANT, Aug. 6, 2024. *U.S. Navy | Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Sophie A. Pinkham*

Gaming the (Mental Health) System

First-person shooter video games can be unexpectedly helpful for individuals coping with PTSD. Hyperrealistic games like

Call of Duty, Battlefield and Escape from Tarkov allow combat veterans to experience combat-like scenarios in a safe, controlled manner, which can help them process trauma and manage stress.

These games can help players regain a sense of control and desensitization to triggers. They can also induce an adrenaline rush similar to real-life combat, allowing players to practice self-regulation in high-stress situations without real-world consequences.

However, there is another surprising benefit to FPS games, one that has nothing to do with their technological wizardry but is likely far more powerful. Service members and veterans often struggle with isolation and loneliness, feelings that sharply increase suicide risk. They may be reluctant to seek therapy or discuss their issues with their command, family members or real-world friends. Online gaming communities can provide crucial support in ways traditional resources can’t, reaching individuals who slip through the cracks of conventional support systems.

Multiplayer gaming fosters teamwork, communication and camaraderie, mirroring the bond of military units. Organizations like MilitaryGamers.com, Stack Up and Warfighter Engaged provide gaming communities centered around service members and veterans. Twitch streamer GrndPa Gamer, a veteran himself, has built a supportive online community where service members and fellow veterans can share experiences, find camaraderie and use gaming as a mental health tool.

As technology advances, VR therapy, AI-powered analytics and other developments will continue to change the landscape of suicide prevention efforts. The integration of biometric tracking, real-time clinical feedback and AI-driven therapy solutions has the potential to make suicide prevention efforts even more effective. By combining cutting-edge technology with compassionate care and community involvement, the military and

veteran support organizations can provide life-saving resources and a path toward better mental health.

Jamie L. Pfeiffer was a lawyer in Illinois, Oregon and Washington states before retiring. She is currently based in Chicago. This story first appeared in the May issue of Seapower *magazine.*