

March 21 Daily Red Sea Update



USCENTCOM

March 21, 2024

TAMPA, Fla. – On March 21, between 8:50 a.m. and 11:40 a.m. (Sanaa time), a coalition aircraft successfully engaged and destroyed one unmanned surface vessel (USV) launched by Iranian-backed Houthi terrorists from a Houthi-controlled area of Yemen.

Additionally, coalition forces successfully engaged and destroyed two anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBMs) launched by Iranian-backed Houthi terrorists from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen toward the Red Sea. There were no injuries or damage reported to U.S. or coalition vessels.

It was determined these weapons presented an imminent threat to coalition and merchant vessels in the region. These actions are taken to protect freedom of navigation and make international waters safer and more secure for coalition and

merchant vessels.

MV Roy P. Benavidez Departs in Support of JLOTS Mission



From Military Sealift Command Public Affairs

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. (March 21, 2024)—The Bob Hope-class MV Roy P. Benavidez (T-AKR 306), a large, medium speed roaying heavy equipment and material needed to construct a temporary pier to support the flow of multinational humanitarian aid into Gaza.

The ship will anchor in the area to receive fuel prior to proceeding to the Mediterranean Sea.

MV Roy P. Benavidez, part of the U.S. Department of Transportation, U.S. Maritime Administration's (MARAD) Ready Reserve Fleet, is transporting components for a floating modular pier system which will be delivered to the U.S. Army's 7th Transportation Brigade who will construct the temporary pier in the Mediterranean.

This capability is known as Joint Logistics-Over-the-Shore, or JLOTS.

"JLOTS is a critical capability that allows ship-to-shore cargo distribution in the absence of a usable pier," said Army Lt. Gen. John P. Sullivan, deputy commander, U.S. Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM). "It can be used to augment an established port or to create a pier where one is needed, and allows us to support areas where large populations are isolated from food, water, and other forms of humanitarian aid."

JLOTS operations are part of USTRANSCOM's strategic sealift mission.

Operated by Military Sealift Command for the current JLOTS mission, MV Roy P. Benavidez is crewed by contracted merchant mariners and is dry cargo surge sealift carrier capable of transporting up to 380,000 square feet of containerized cargo and rolling stock between developed ports.

"MARAD's ability to activate the Ready Reserve Force vessel MV Roy P. Benavidez is a hallmark of our strategic sealift capability," said Maritime Administrator Ann C. Phillips. "Missions like this – supporting the Armed Forces, highlight the cornerstone capabilities MARAD delivers in support of interagency operations."

Keel Laid for Future USNS Muscogee Creek Nation



By Team Ships Public Affairs, March 21, 2024

HOUMA, La. – A keel laying ceremony for the future USNS Muscogee Creek Nation (T-ATS 10), the fifth ship of the Navy's Navajo class of Towing, Salvage, and Rescue vessels was held at Bollinger Houma Shipyards, Mar. 20.

Sponsors Geri Wisner, Attorney General of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation; Nicole Foster, wife of Rear Admiral Calvin Foster; and Muscogee (Creek) Nation Principal Chief David Hill attended to authenticate the keel. Members of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation were also in attendance.

The keel laying ceremony formally marks the start of a ship's life and the joining of the ship's modular components. The keel serves as the symbolic backbone of the ship.

During the ceremony, the keel authenticators watched a welder etch their initials into the keel plate and declared it to be "truly and fairly laid."

"We are honored to have representatives of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation here to celebrate this milestone with us," said Program Executive Office, Ships Auxiliary and Special Mission Ships Program Manager, John Lighthammer. "The ship is critical to the operations of our fleet. Today's ceremony is a reminder of the pride and determination of the Muscogee people it is named to honor."

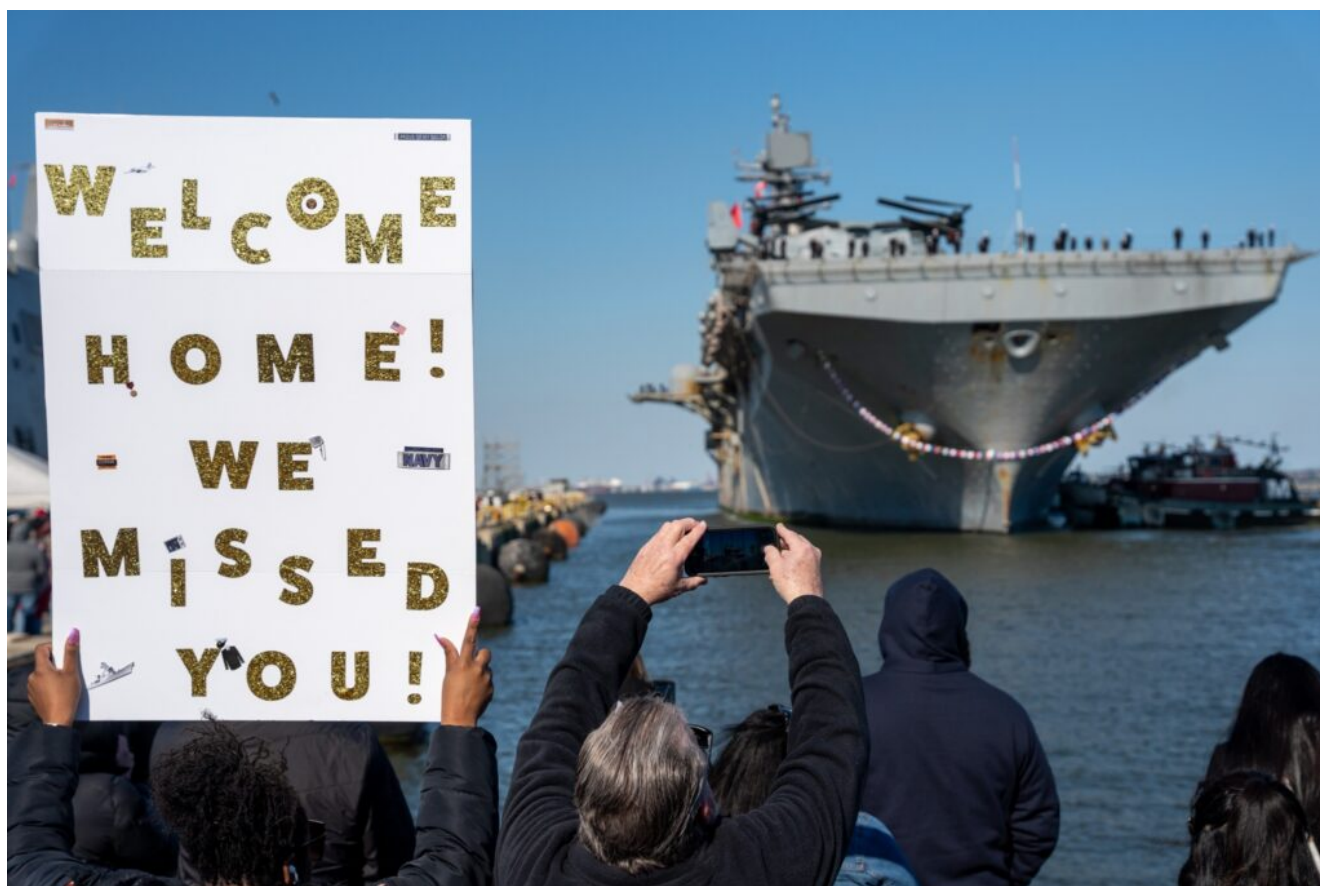
The Navajo class of ships will provide ocean-going tug, salvage, and rescue capabilities to support Fleet operations. The 10 ships are intended to provide continuity of capability following on after the Powhatan and Safeguard classes of vessels, which are nearing the end of their expected service lives.

Navajo-class ships will be capable of towing U.S. Navy ships and will have 6,000 square feet of deck space for embarked systems. The platform will be 263 feet long, have a beam of 59 feet, and will be able to carry a load of nearly 2,000 tons.

In addition to the future USNS Muscogee Creek Nation (T-ATS 10), Bollinger Houma Shipyards is in the process of constructing the future USNS Navajo (T-ATS 6), USNS Cherokee Nation (T-ATS 7), USNS Saginaw Ojibwe Anishinabek (T-ATS 8) and USNS Lenni Lenape (T-ATS 9).

As one of the Defense Department's largest acquisition organizations, PEO Ships is responsible for executing the development and procurement of all destroyers, amphibious ships and craft, auxiliary ships, special mission ships, sealift ships and support ships.

Bataan ARG, 26th MEU(Soc) Return From 8-month Deployment



[By Chief Mass Communication Specialist Eva-Marie Ramsaran,
Amphibious Squadron 8 Public Affairs](#)

21 March 2024

NORFOLK, Virginia – More than 4,000 Sailors and Marines assigned to the Bataan Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) and embarked 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (MEU(SOC)) returned to Hampton Roads following an eight and a half-month deployment to the U.S. 2nd, 5th and 6th Fleet areas of operations, March 21.

Two of the ARG ships, the Wasp-class amphibious assault ship USS Bataan (LHD 5) and Harpers Ferry-class dock landing ship USS Carter Hall (LSD 50), returned to Naval Station Norfolk and Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek in Virginia.

“It is great to be home,” said Amphibious Squadron (CPR) 8 Commodore, Capt. Martin Robertson. “I’m proud of the Sailors and Marines of the Bataan Amphibious Ready Group who return home today knowing that for eight and a half months, they were the nation’s rapid response force.”

The San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship USS Mesa Verde (LPD 19) is expected to return to Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia, in the coming days. Most of the Marines assigned to the 26th MEU(SOC) departed the ARG ships and returned to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina earlier this week.

While in the U.S. 5th and 6th Fleet areas of operations, the Bataan ARG and 26th MEU(SOC) team supported a wide range of interoperability opportunities and exercises across the North Atlantic, Eastern Mediterranean, Baltic region, Red Sea and Arabian Gulf, increasing combat readiness and crisis response capabilities while strengthening relationships with both Allies and partners.

“These young men and women were called into action from the start to help stop the spread of wildfires in Southern Europe, to deter Iran from seizing U.S.-flagged merchant vessels in the Middle East, and they reacted swiftly at the onset of the crisis in the Bab-El Mandeb to ensure merchant shipping access to the Red Sea,” Robertson said. “Your sons and daughters stood ready to assist American citizens in countries impacted by the Israel-Hamas conflict, and their efforts directly prevented the conflict from expanding to other nations in the region. Simultaneously, we operated close to Russia in the high north and Baltic regions, reinforcing America’s commitment to the NATO alliance, emphasizing the importance of regional peace and security. Thank you to our families and

friends. Your love and support made all our successes possible.”

In July 2023, following the wildfires in Greece, the Bataan ARG disaggregated, with Mesa Verde remaining in the U.S. 6th Fleet area of operations supporting Allies and partners through various bilateral exercises and operations across the theater. Mesa Verde and the embarked Marines visited Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Norway, Spain and the United Kingdom. Additionally, Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro visited Mesa Verde while the ship was in Dublin, Ireland, for the U.S. Naval Academy versus University of Notre Dame football game, Aug. 26, 2023.

Bataan and Carter Hall transited the Suez Canal and operated in the U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations for more than four months, ensuring the free flow of navigation and regional stability. Following the outbreak of conflict between Israel and Hamas, both ships participated in Operation Prosperity Guardian in the Red Sea to deter further escalation and protect open sea lanes.

“It’s been a challenging deployment, but we have accomplished a lot, and I am extremely proud of the hard work and resilience of every member of the Bataan team,” said Capt. Paul Burkhart, Bataan’s commanding officer. “Throughout the past eight months, we have really shown what it means to be ‘Bataan tough.’ We were able to showcase our amphibious capabilities throughout three Navy fleets, deter aggression through our presence and were able to create and share countless memories that will last a lifetime.”

Notable visitors to the Bataan and Carter Hall included commanders and staff of U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa, U.S. 6th Fleet, U.S. 5th Fleet, U.S. Central Command, Task Force 61/2, Task Force 51/5, French, Italian and Turkish navies, along with distinguished guests from the Kingdom of Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,

United Arab Emirates and U.K.

The ARG/MEU presence overseas supported strategic interests and contributed to regional security and stability and reassured U.S. commitment to multiple regions. The blue-green team provided operational flexibility to combatant commanders by providing a versatile contingency response force using sea, air, land and logistical assets. The versatility inherent to the amphibious force allowed for flexible and mission-tailored forces, while representing our nation's strength, capability and resolve to partners and Allies and deterring potential adversaries.

"History has proven the necessity of having forward-deployed Marines, embarked aboard amphibious ships. Over the past eight months, the Marines and Sailors of the 26th MEU(SOC) have showcased the value, utility and unique all-domain operational capabilities you only find in a marine expeditionary unit," said Col. Dennis Sampson, commanding officer of the 26th MEU(SOC). "When coupled together, the ARG and the MEU(SOC) form a flexible naval expeditionary force capable of reassuring our Allies and partners of our commitment to maritime security and capable of dominating within the littorals against any adversary in any clime or place."

The Bataan ARG is comprised of the Bataan, Mesa Verde, and Carter Hall. Embarked commands include CPR 8, Fleet Surgical Team 8, Tactical Air Control Squadron 21, Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 26, Assault Craft Unit 4, Beach Master Unit 2 and the 26th MEU(SOC).

The 26th MEU(SOC) consists of the Command Element; Aviation Combat Element, Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 162 (Reinforced); Ground Combat Element, Battalion Landing Team 1/6; and Logistics Combat Element, Combat Logistics Battalion 22.

March 20 Red Sea Update

USCENTCOM, March 20, 2024

TAMPA, Fla. – Between 10:10 a.m. and 7:40 p.m. (Sanaa time) on March 20, a coalition aircraft successfully engaged and destroyed one unmanned aerial vehicle, and U.S. Central Command successfully engaged and destroyed one unmanned surface vessel, both launched by Iranian-backed Houthi terrorists from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen. There were no injuries or damage reported to U.S. or coalition ships.

It was determined these weapons presented an imminent threat to merchant vessels and U.S. Navy ships in the region. These actions are taken to protect freedom of navigation and make international waters safer and more secure for U.S. Navy and merchant vessels.

Coast Guard Commandant Delivers Annual State of the Coast Guard Address



Headquarters, U.S. Coast Guard, March 21, 2024

WASHINGTON – Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard, Admiral Linda L. Fagan, delivered the annual State of the Coast Guard Address at the Cannon House Office Building in Washington, DC Wednesday.

Fagan expressed pride in recent Coast Guard operations and the increasing global impact the service has in protecting our economic prosperity and national security, alongside the Department of Homeland Security, federal, interagency and international partners.

“Last year, the United States Coast Guard saved nearly five thousand lives and ensured the safety of thousands more through our operations to prevent maritime accidents before they happen,” said Fagan. “This is the Coast Guard people see every day protecting our economic prosperity and national security. This is the Coast Guard that is respected and admired around the world.”

She also highlighted the rapidly evolving threats the service is facing which impact the workforce, mission readiness, and recruiting. As the Coast Guard faces significant personnel, shoreside infrastructure and asset maintenance shortfalls, she called for consistent and reliable funding to meet readiness requirements.

“The quality of our facilities and ships not only impact mission readiness; it is an important factor potential recruits think about when they consider Coast Guard service,” said Fagan. “And recruiting is critical to operational readiness.”

Focusing on the importance of the Coast Guard’s core values of Honor, Respect and Devotion to Duty, Adm. Fagan highlighted new policies and training the service has implemented to prevent and stop harmful behavior, as well as a long-term initiative to strengthen service culture.

“Strengthening our culture demands consistent work and long-term commitment, and our values must always be reflected in our daily actions and traditions,” said Fagan. “This effort is as critical to our workforce and mission readiness as building new ships or infrastructure. A culture intolerant of harmful behaviors is the standard the American people expect. It is the standard I set for the service.”

View the full remarks and the recorded address at [USCG Commandant’s Home Page](#) and on [U.S. Coast Guard – YouTube](#).

Navy to Send Beach Group,

Sealift Ships to Support Gaza Relief



A Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore Trident floating pier and causeway is shown under assembly. (US Army photo by Sgt. Ashunteia Smith)

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy is sending an expedition of beach cargo handling forces to assist in the establishment of a floating causeway and pier to handle delivery of relief supplies to Gaza.

Speaking on background, a Navy official told reporters on March 20 that Beach Group One, augmented by other logistics forces, would be deployed to the eastern Mediterranean Sea to deliver and assemble lighterage of the Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore (JLOTS) system to convey supplies to the Trident pier and causeway Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore (JLOTS) pier

that will be assembled by the Army's Transportation Corps.

Beach Group One, based in San Diego, is a command that provides beachmasters and LCAC air cushion landing craft to amphibious warfare ships, as well as a JLOTS.

The JLOTS equipment – positioned in Jacksonville, Florida – will be transported to the Mediterranean on three sealift ships – 2nd USNS LT John P. Bobo, USNS1st LT Baldomero Lopez, and Maritime Administration's Ready Reserve Force ship Roy P. Benevidez – with the latter transporting Army equipment. The ships will deploy nonstop straight to operations area and remain on station off Gaza to provide berthing and support for the Sailors and Soldiers involved in the relief operation. The Beach Group One personnel will be flown to the Mediterranean to join their equipment.

The official said the Navy would be sending 260 personnel to the operation, including augmentees from Beach Group Two and Navy Cargo Handling Battalion One. The personnel would include boatswain's mates, Seabees, hospital corpsmen, quartermasters, and operations specialists, as well as other ratings.

The beach group will assemble a Roll-On/Roll Off Discharge Facility (RRDF), a 72-foot-by-270-foot floating platform built from nine sections that join together. The official said the RRDF takes four-to-five days to assemble. The RRDF, positioned three miles from the beach, will be moored alongside ships to accept their cargo containers, offloaded onto the RRDF by cranes. The containers are then loaded onto lighterage that are moved by tugboats to the Army Trident pier, which is attached to a causeway that leads to the shore. The containers are then trucked ashore by the tractor-trailers.

The sealift ships and the JLOTS will be supported by medium landing craft, repair craft, and small boats.

The JLOTS was last used in Exercise Talisman Saber in July 2023. The official said that the JLOTS is assembled regularly

for training and proficiency, usually once or twice per year.

The official confirmed that no U.S. military personnel will be operating ashore in Gaza. Contract personnel will be used to drive the tractor-trailers onto the pier to receive the cargo.

The duration of the operation is yet to be determined. The official said the beach group would be meeting whatever was required by its operational commander. He said the command-and-control structure in the theater was still being worked out.

Navy Orders 17 Block III Super Hornets Plus Data Package



PHILIPPINE SEA (Dec. 4, 2023) An F/A-18E Super Hornet from the “Stingers” of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 113 prepares to launch from the flight deck of the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70). (USN photo by MC3 Joshua Sapien)

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy has ordered 17 more Block III F/A-18E/F Super Hornet strike fighters for the fleet, with the contract action also providing for the initial phase of delivery of the aircraft’s data package.

In a March 19 Defense Department contract announcement, the Naval Air Systems awarded to Boeing a not-to-exceed \$1.14 firm-fixed-price, undefinitized contract modification to procure “10 F/A-18F Lot 46 aircraft, as well as two F/A-18F and five F/A-18E Lot 47 aircraft.”

The contract also shows progress in resolution with Boeing over the rights to the aircraft’s data package, important to the sustainment of the Super Hornet fleet.

“This modification also provides for Phase One of the F/A-18E/F and EA-18G technical data package including the operation, maintenance, installation and training data in support of F/A-18 and EA-18G sustainment efforts for the Navy,” the release said.

“The technical data package was a crucial part of this negotiation; it is necessary for naval aviation’s operational readiness and post-production sustainment,” said Rear Adm. John Lemmon, program executive officer for Tactical Aircraft Programs, in a March 19 Navy release. “The Super Hornet remains a predominant aircraft in the carrier air wing and will continue to provide significant combat capability into the 2040s. The Navy received appropriated funds from Congress to purchase these Super Hornets to help mitigate the strike fighter shortfall. The award is an Undefinitized Contract Action with the intent to definitize within the next few months.”

Delivery of the new Super Hornets is scheduled from late 2026 through to begin in the winter of 2026, with final delivery no later than April 2027.

The Block III version of the Super Hornet completed its first carrier deployment last month with the return of the USS Carl Vinson from the Western Pacific Ocean. Strike Fighter Squadron 113 took the Block IIIs on the deployment.

**Poland Joins Combined
Maritime Forces in Middle**

East as 42nd Member



By Combined Maritime Forces Public Affairs | March 20, 2024

MANAMA, Bahrain – Combined Maritime Forces welcomed the Republic of Poland as the 42nd member of the world’s largest maritime security partnership, March 17.

“We’re thrilled to welcome Poland as a member of CMF,” said Vice Adm. George Wikoff, CMF commander. “We greatly benefit from Poland’s participation in this coalition of nations committed to regional maritime security. I look forward to being ‘Ready Together’ with our new partners as CMF continues to set the global standard for maritime cooperation.”

CMF is comprised of a headquarters staff and five combined task forces focusing on defeating terrorism, preventing piracy, encouraging regional cooperation, and promoting a safe maritime environment. The naval partnership upholds the international rules-based order by supporting security and stability across 3.2 million square miles of water encompassing some of the world’s most important shipping lanes.

With 42 nations, CMF is the largest naval partnership in the

world. Other task forces include CTF 150, focused on maritime security in the Gulf of Oman, Arabian Sea and eastern Gulf of Aden; CTF 151, which leads regional anti-piracy efforts; CTF 152, dedicated to maritime security in the Arabian Gulf; CTF 153, responsible for maritime security in the Red Sea, Bab al-Mandeb, and western Gulf of Aden; and CTF 154, established in May to enhance maritime security training throughout the region.

GA-ASI Tests Sonobuoy Dispensing System with MQ-9B Seaguardian UAV



SAN DIEGO – 20 March 2024 – On Feb. 27, 2024, General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Inc. (GA-ASI), in cooperation with the Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR), conducted a series of tests on GA-ASI's Sonobuoy Dispensing System (SDS) using the MQ-9B SeaGuardian Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) on the U.S.

Navy's W-291 test range in southern California.

GA-ASI's SeaGuardian flew the full test flight event configured with the SDS pod and SeaVue multi-role radar from Raytheon, an RTX business. During the test, the SDS pod dropped eight AN/SSQ-53 and two AN/SSQ-62 sonobuoys. Upon dispensing, the sonobuoys were successfully monitored by the SeaGuardian's onboard Sonobuoy Monitoring and Control System (SMCS).

"This was a very successful demonstration of our SDS capability," said GA-ASI President David R. Alexander. "The demonstration helped us prove out the SDS, which is an important component for our Anti-Submarine Warfare capability."

The SeaGuardian was flown under a NAVAIR Interim Flight Clearance. The SDS pod is fitted with an advanced pneumatic ejection system developed, designed, and manufactured by AEREA in Italy. AEREA also supplies the internal structure assembly.

MQ-9B SeaGuardian is a medium-altitude, long-endurance RPA system. Its multi-domain capabilities allow it to flex from mission to mission. SeaGuardian has been used by the U.S. in several recent demonstrations, including Northern Edge, Integrated Battle Problem and Group Sail. The aircraft is currently being operated by the [Japan Coast Guard](#) (JCG) and the [Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force](#) (JMSDF).