CNO: Secure Maritime System Imperative for Global Way of Life

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday (right center) and Linda Gilday (left center) speak with international delegates during the International Seapower Symposium welcome reception at Rosecliff Mansion in Newport, Rhode Island. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Sean Castellano*

ARLINGTON, Va. – Many of the Mahanian principles of sea power are as applicable today as ever, the U.S. Navy's top officer said, noting that navies and coast guards are the guarantors of the world's commerce and hence the well-being of nations.

"Providing a safe, secure, and stable maritime system is an imperative to all of mankind … and it is an essential part of what our navies do every day," said Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Adm. Mike Gilday. "We are not simply the "keeper of the seas" … but the 'keeper of the global way of life' as well."

Gilday was addressing a gathering of naval leaders from around the world during the Sept. 15 opening day of the 24th International Seapower Symposium, an event normally held every two years at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island. The event was attended in person or over the internet by 135 delegates from 104 nations. Last year's planned symposium was cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Like all of you … I believe that robust, resilient, and responsible sea power is an international consortium of like-minded nations," Gilday said. "We are the primary guarantors of peace, prosperity, and the open flow of goods along the oceans.

Our navies provide these benefits to the citizens we serve every day … in peacetime and especially during these times of

competition … not just in rare moments of conflict.”

The CNO pointed out that the ideas of Capt. Alfred Thayer Mahan bring to mind decisive battles at sea, sea control, and combat credibility.

“I think many of those arguments are still relevant today,” Gilday said. “But over time … Mahan refined the rationale for sea power. Naval combat power became less pronounced, and economics took a more central role. Mahan believed that one of the fundamental applications of naval power was to protect an increasingly globalized world economy. You see, wealth generation comes from commerce … and commerce … floats on seawater. … Our economies, our values, and our cultures are more attached to the sea than any point in history.”

The CNO noted several facts that illustrate the magnitude of the maritime economy today. The world’s trading fleet today includes more than 60,000 ships. New container ships nearly 400 meters long can carry more than 20,000 containers. There are more than 160 offshore wind farms providing electrical power to millions of homes and businesses. There are 20,000 desalinization plants that provide fresh water to hundreds of millions of people. Ships are engaged in deep-sea mining to extract critical minerals. He also noted the importance of underwater cables that transnational communications traffic.

In a press conference following the speech, Gilday said “the seas are getting more contested and more congested,” and that “almost 100% of our internet connectivity is connected through trans-oceanic cables.”

Gilday championed the international rules-based order that “preserves the maritime commons for freedom and fairness … for coexistence and for harmony … where the collective goals of all people – regardless of where they call home – can be

advanced.

“Since it is in the political, social, and economic interests of all of us to ensure the freedom of the seas … this is a responsibility with truly global consequences, not just for today, but for our children and their children,” he said. “It cannot be taken for granted … peace does not happen by accident. When the rules prevail, everyone prospers. When the rules are undermined … or worse, broken altogether … the world is a less secure and poorer place for all of us.”

The CNO stressed the importance of the navy-to-navy and coast guard-to-coast guard relationships that “serve as a strong and stable keel for the broader international community. This keel serves as a shock absorber … and in turn … provides the underlying structure for global stability.

“Every day … our Sailors send a “bow wave” of diplomacy in front of their path … assuring our allies, partners, and friends … and deterring malign behavior that threatens the international order that is so important,” he said.

Navy Orders First Lot of AARGM-ER Missiles

The Navy’s Advanced Anti-Radiation Guided Missile-Extended Range (AARGM-ER) completes its first live fire event July 19 off the coast of Point Mugu Sea Test Range in California. *U.S. NAVY*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy has ordered the first lot of Navy’s AMG-88G Advanced Anti-Radiation Guided Missiles – Extended Range (AARGM-ER) following approval from the Defense

Department.

Naval Air Systems Command Awarded Alliant Techsystems Operations – a wholly owned subsidiary of Northrop Grumman Defense Systems – a $41.2 million firm-fixed-price contract for low-rate initial production lot 1 of the AARGM-ER, according to a Sept. 14 Defense Department contract announcement.

“This contract provides for the production and delivery of 16 AGM-88G AARGM-ER All Up Rounds, six AGM-88G AARGM-ER Captive Air Training Missiles, four Common Munitions BIT Reprogramming Equipment Plus interface devices, initial spares, and required supplies and support,” the announcement said.

The AARGM-ER received Milestone C approval on Aug. 23.

The AGM-84G AARGM-ER, designed to attack hostile emitters, particularly radars that guide surface-to-air missiles, is a development of the AGM-84E AARGM that has been in service since 2012 with the role of destruction of enemy ground-based air defenses. The ER missile is considerably different in planform and appearance than the basic AARGM. The ER version is slightly shorter (160 inches versus 14 inches) than the basic AARGM but has a larger diameter (11.5 inches versus 10 inches) and is controlled by its tailfins rather than fins at the mid-body. The ER features a new rocket motor that takes up more of the length of the missile and is equipped with a new warhead. The aerodynamic characteristics of the ER plus its larger motor give the missile twice the tactical range in the same amount of time.

The AARGM-ER will be carried on Navy F/A-18E/F Super Hornet strike fighters and EA-18G Growler electronic attack aircraft. The missile also is sized to eventually be carried in the weapons bay of F-35A and F-35C Lightning II strike fighters and on wing stations of the F-35B version.

The Navy plans to continue captive and live-fire flight

testing of the AARGM-ER through 2022. Initial operational capability is planned for 2023.

Northland Returns Home after 80-day Eastern Pacific Patrol, Miami Drug Offload

Coast Guard Cutter Northland crews rescued three people after their boat caught fire approximately 150 miles south of Golfito, Costa Rica, August 18, 2021. Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre Costa Rica contacted 11th Coast Guard District command center watchstanders to relay the report of a vessel fire and requested Coast Guard assistance. *U.S. COAST GUARD*

PORTSMOUTH, Va. – USCGC Northland (WMEC 904) returned to Portsmouth Sept. 13, following an 80-day patrol in the Eastern Pacific Ocean in support of the Coast Guard 11th District and Joint Interagency Task Force South, the Coast Guard Atlantic Area said in a Sept. 15 release.

The Northland's crew patrolled the Eastern Pacific performing counter-drug operations with the support of an aviation detachment from the U.S. Coast Guard Helicopter Interdiction Tactical Squadron flying an MH-65 Dolphin Helicopter. In addition to Northland's HITRON detachment, aircraft crews from the U.S. Navy and Customs and Border Protection provided critical aerial surveillance and reconnaissance for the cutter throughout the patrol.

During the patrol, Northland successfully interdicted several suspected drug smuggling vessels. On Sept. 8, the cutter

pulled into U.S. Coast Guard Base Miami Beach and offloaded 7,833 pounds of cocaine with an estimated street value of $148 million. The cutter crew also transferred three suspected narcotics smugglers to Coast Guard Seventh District and U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration personnel, signaling the culmination of a successful joint interagency effort in the Eastern Pacific.

Aside from successfully interdicting suspected drug smuggling vessels, Northland maintained a maritime assistance presence in the region throughout the patrol. On Aug. 11, the Coast Guard Eleventh District relayed an alert from the Maritime Rescue Coordination Center Costa Rica reporting the fishing vessel Baula X on fire with three mariners trapped aboard. On Aug. 18, Northland launched the Dolphin crew in search of the boat. Upon successfully locating the burning fishing vessel, the helicopter crew guided Northland's small boat team to the location. They safely rescued the three fishers and delivered them to the nearby cargo vessel Avra GR, participating in the Automated Mutual-Assistance Vessel Rescue program.

When not actively chasing drug runners or rescuing fishers, Northland maintained a steady training regimen for new and veteran crewmembers on navigation, engineering, and nautical activities. Training for emergencies and routine operations is critical to sustaining Northland's peak mission effectiveness and is in keeping with the Coast Guard's motto, Semper Paratus – Always Ready.

"During this patrol, our crew showed terrific adaptability when responding to equipment malfunctions, scheduling changes, issues spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic, and a litany of other challenges faced. Throughout all of this, the crew displayed tremendous determination and teamwork, resulting in multiple mission accomplishments. I am extremely proud of the effort put forth by Northland, our embarked aviation detachment, and all of the support elements that worked to ensure our safety and success throughout," said Cmdr. Patricia M. Bennett,

Northland’s commanding officer.

USCGC Northland is a 270-foot Famous-class medium-endurance cutter homeported in Portsmouth. The crew routinely deploys in support of counter-drug, migrant interdiction, fisheries, search and rescue, and homeland security missions.

Bell Completes 100th Consecutive On-Time Delivery of AH-1Z to Marine Corps

A Bell AH-1Z conducts flight testing at Bell’s Amarillo Assembly Center before delivery to the U.S. Marine Corps. *BELL TEXTRON / Anthony Boyer*

AMARILLO, Texas – Bell Textron, a Textron company, has successfully completed its 100th consecutive on-time delivery of the AH-1Z aircraft to the U.S. Marine Corps, which began nearly four years ago, the company said in a Sept. 14 release.

Bell accomplished this milestone through tight coordination with its manufacturing and assembly facilities, UAW 218, numerous suppliers, and government partners. The H-1 series consists of the AH-1Z Viper and UH-1Y Venom, which provide light attack and utility helicopter support to the Marines while maintaining a small logistical footprint through the 85% commonality between the airframes.

“Performance like this takes a lot of work, communication, and trust to ensure alignment between numerous partners, all working toward the same objective. I could not be more

proud of our Bell employees.” said Mike Deslatte, Bell H-1 vice president and program director. “Our front line workers, engineers, and supply chain professionals all help support the Marines. Their work designing, manufacturing, and assembling critical components while ensuring quality parts reach the production line on time help the Marines ensure our nation’s security.”

Bell and its Team Viper/Venom partners collaborate with the U.S. Marine Corps H-1 Light/Attack Helicopter program (PMA-276) to provide integrated solutions and increase combat lethality and readiness. In addition to delivering production aircraft on time, Bell directly supports scheduled maintenance. The company is also working on new capability upgrades to equip the Marines with the most advanced technology available.

“This is a feat only possible through the determination of our production team and the program’s strong relationship with our industry partners and suppliers,” said Col Vasilios Pappas, PMA-276 program manager.

Bell is currently working toward the U.S. Marine Corps program of record and anticipates production of Marine Corps H-1 through 2022. The U.S. Marine Corps H-1 production contract is for 349 aircraft, consisting of 160 UH-1Y and 189 AH-1Z. Bell will continue manufacturing aircraft for foreign military customers including contracts for Bahrain AH-1Zs and a mixed Czech Republic fleet of both AH-1Zs and UH-1Ys.

CH-53K King Stallion Logs

First Successful Fleet Mission

A Marine Corps CH-53K King Stallion lifts a Navy MH-60S Knighthawk helicopter from a draw in Mount Hogue, California, Sept. 5, 2021. The Knighthawk conducted a hard landing during a search-and-rescue mission, which resulted in no casualties or injuries of its crew. The two-day operation was the first official fleet mission for the CH-53K King Stallion, as it is currently undergoing an operational assessment while the Marine Corps modernizes and prepares to respond globally to emerging crises or contingencies. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / Cpl. Therese Edwards*

NAVAL AIR STATION PATUXENT RIVER, Md. – The CH-53K King Stallion successfully recovered a Navy MH-60S Knighthawk helicopter from Mount Hogue in the White Mountains of California on Sunday, Sept. 5, the Naval Air Systems Command said in a release.

The two-day operation was the first official fleet mission for the Marine Corps' new heavy lift capability, which is in the midst of initial operational test and evaluation with Marine Operational Test and Evaluation Squadron One (VMX-1) at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms, California.

"VMX-1 received a request for assistance from the Naval Safety Center about an MH-60S Knighthawk that suffered a hard landing near Mt. Hogue [California], at an elevation of 12,000 feet mean sea level in July," said Lt. Col. Luke Frank, CH-53K detachment officer in charge for VMX-1.

The MH-60S Knighthawk was sitting on a high-altitude ridge in very rugged terrain near the California-Nevada line on July 16 following a hard landing. The helicopter was supporting a search and rescue effort for a lost hiker. All four crewmembers survived without injury and were rescued the

following day.

According to Frank, both the MH-60S unit and the Naval Safety Center had exhausted all other resources for recovery, including Army National Guard, Navy and Marine Corps fleet squadrons. “They all lacked the capability to lift the aircraft without an extensive disassembly,” he said.

VMX-1’s CH-53K detachment quickly examined the environmental conditions and conducted a quick feasibility assessment of support and determined that the CH-53K could conduct the lift. The CH-53K fulfills the heavy lift mission of the Marine Corps as it greatly expands the fleet’s ability to move equipment and personnel throughout its area of operations.

“After two weeks of exhaustive planning and assembling a team of more than 25 Marines and Sailors from VMX-1 and 1st Landing Support Battalion from Camp Pendleton, [California],. we deployed two CH-53Ks to Bishop, California, and got to work,” he said.

The CH-53K was designed to lift nearly 14 tons (27,000 pounds) at a mission radius of 110 nautical miles in high and hot environments, a capability that expands the service’s range in supporting joint and coalition forces against potential adversaries.

The MH-60S weighed approximately 15,200 pounds and was positioned in a tight ravine at nearly 12,000 feet mean sea level and needed to be transported over 23 nautical miles to the Bishop, California, airport.

“After six months of flight operations with the CH-53K, the detachment had every confidence in the aircraft’s abilities to conduct the mission safely. Our main concern was the environmental factors ground support personnel would have to endure,” said Frank.

“This is exactly what the K is made to do,” he said. “Heavy

lift is a unique and invaluable mission for the Marine Corps. Horsepower is our weapon system and the CH-53K is armed to the teeth. The entire team of Marines at VMX-1, 1st Landing Support Battalion, and NAS Fallon Search and Rescue were extremely motivated to execute this mission and we are all very proud to have completed this one flawlessly.

“To be the first group of professionals to complete a real-world, heavy lift/high altitude mission in support of a unit who thought all options were off the table is extremely rewarding,” said Frank. “This is sure to be the first of what will be many, many successful missions for this aircraft and for heavy lift squadrons.”

U.S. Navy, Boeing Conduct First MQ-25 Refueling Mission with F-35C

An unmanned Boeing MQ-25 T1 Stingray test aircraft, left, refuels a manned F-35 Lightning II, Sept. 13, 2021, near MidAmerica Airport in Mascoutah, Illinois. *U.S. NAVY*

ST. LOUIS – The U.S. Navy and Boeing have used the MQ-25 T1 test asset to refuel a U.S. Navy F-35C Lightning II fighter jet for the first time, again demonstrating the aircraft’s ability to achieve its primary aerial refueling mission, the company said Sept. 14.

This was the third refueling mission for the Boeing-owned test asset in just over three months, advancing the test program for the Navy’s first operational carrier-based unmanned aircraft. T1 refueled an F/A-18 Super Hornet in June and an

E-2D Hawkeye in August.

“Every test flight with another type/model/series aircraft gets us one step closer to rapidly delivering a fully mission-capable MQ-25 to the fleet,” said Capt. Chad Reed, the Navy’s Unmanned Carrier Aviation program manager. “Stingray’s unmatched refueling capability is going to increase the Navy’s power projection and provide operational flexibility to the Carrier Strike Group commanders.”

During a test flight Sept. 13, an F-35C test pilot from the Navy’s Air Test and Evaluation Squadron 23 (VX-23) conducted a successful wake survey behind T1 to ensure performance and stability before making contact with T1’s aerial refueling drogue and receiving fuel.

“This flight was yet another physical demonstration of the maturity and stability of the MQ-25 aircraft design,” said Dave Bujold, Boeing’s MQ-25 program director. “Thanks to this latest mission in our accelerated test program, we are confident the MQ-25 aircraft we are building right now will meet the Navy’s primary requirement – delivering fuel safely to the carrier air wing.”

The T1 flight test program began in September 2019 with the aircraft’s first flight. In the following two years, the test program completed more than 120 flight hours, gathering data on everything from aircraft performance to propulsion dynamics to structural loads and flutter testing for strength and stability.

MQ-25 is benefitting from the two years of early flight test data, which has been integrated back into its digital models to strengthen the digital thread connecting aircraft design to production to test to operations and sustainment. Boeing is currently manufacturing the first two MQ-25 test aircraft.

T1 will be used to conduct a deck handling demonstration aboard a U.S. Navy carrier in the coming months to help

advance the carrier integration progress.

Pentagon and Lockheed Martin Agree to F-35 Sustainment Contracts

Pilots with Marine Fighter Attack Training Squadron 501 (VMFAT-501) fly the F-35B Lightning II during the Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort Air Show, April 28. *U.S. MARINE CORPS / Warrant Officer Bobby J. Yarbrough*

FORT WORTH, Texas – The F-35 Joint Program Office awarded the Lockheed Martin industry team annualized contracts covering fiscal years 2021-2023 to support operations and sustainment of the global F-35 fleet, supporting mission readiness and further reducing costs, the company said in a Sept. 13 release.

The annual contracts fund critical sustainment activities for aircraft currently in the fleet and build enterprise capacity to support the future fleet of more than 3,000 F-35 aircraft. This includes industry sustainment experts supporting base and depot maintenance, pilot and maintainer training, and sustaining engineering for the U.S. and allies across the globe. It also covers fleet-wide data analytics and supply chain management for part repair and replenishment to enhance overall supply availability for the fleet.

“Together with the F-35 Joint Program Office, we recognize the critical role the F-35 plays in supporting our customers’ global missions and the need to deliver this capability affordably,” said Bridget Lauderdale, Lockheed Martin vice

president and general manager of the F-35 program. “These contracts represent more than a 30% reduction in cost per flying hour from the 2020 annualized contract and exemplify the trusted partnership and commitment we share to reduce sustainment costs and increase availability for this unrivaled fifth-generation weapon system.”

The fiscal 2021-2023 contracts represent a planned next step in further reducing overall operations and support costs for the F-35 program, which are shared between government and industry. Lockheed Martin has reduced our cost per flight hour by 44% in the past five years, with a forecasted reduction of an additional 40% in the next five years. The cost savings in the fiscal 2021-2023 annualized sustainment contracts support Lockheed Martin’s efforts to realize these goals. The savings will be achieved through improved cost and velocity in the supply chain, continued reliability improvements, and greater manpower efficiencies to provide product support solutions across the growing, global fleet.

The contracts also pave the way for a longer-term, performance-based logistics (PBL) agreement for the F-35 program. PBLs are an industry best practice, facilitating agile sustainment solutions for the fleet and incentivizing even further affordability and performance results.

The F-35 Joint Program Office, together with each U.S. service, international operators and the F-35 industry team, leads F-35 sustainment and global support. The 2021 annualized sustainment contract will cover industry sustainment activities through Dec. 31, 2021.

Program data shows the F-35’s reliability continues to improve as the jet is approximately twice as reliable as fourth-generation fighters. It also shows maintenance labor hours needed per flight hour are well within the contractual requirement, while the global fleet is averaging around 70% mission capable rates. Lockheed Martin has significantly

lowered its share of cost per flight hour over the last five years, and the broader F-35 team is working across government and industry to achieve greater affordability.

More than 690 aircraft have been delivered and are operating from 21 bases around the globe. More than 1,460 pilots and 11,025 maintainers have been trained and the F-35 fleet has surpassed 430,000 cumulative flight hours.

Coast Guard Crews Observe Chinese Warships near Alaska

During a routine maritime patrol in the Bering Sea and Arctic region, U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Bertholf spotted and established radio contact with Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) task force in international waters within the U.S. exclusive economic zone, Aug. 30, 2021. All interactions between the U.S. Coast Guard and PLAN were in accordance with international laws and norms. *U.S. COAST GUARD / Ensign Bridget Boyle*

JUNEAU, Alaska – The U.S. Coast Guard demonstrated its commitment to the Bering Sea and Arctic region with deployments of national security cutters Bertholf and Kimball, and a U.S. Arctic patrol by icebreaker Healy, the Coast Guard 17th District said in a Sept. 13 release.

"Security in the Bering Sea and the Arctic is homeland security," said Vice Adm. Michael McAllister, commander Coast Guard Pacific Area. "The U.S. Coast Guard is continuously present in this important region to uphold American interests and protect U.S. economic prosperity."

Crews interacted with local, national and international

vessels throughout the Arctic. During the deployment, Bertholf and Kimball observed four ships from the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) operating as close as 46 miles off the Aleutian Island coast. While the ships were within the U.S. exclusive economic zone, they followed international laws and norms and at no point entered U.S. territorial waters.

The PLAN task force included a guided-missile cruiser, a guided-missile destroyer, a general intelligence vessel, and an auxiliary vessel. The Chinese vessels conducted military and surveillance operations during their deployment to the Bering Sea and North Pacific Ocean.

All interactions between the U.S. Coast Guard and PLAN were in accordance with international standards set forth in the Western Pacific Naval Symposium's Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea and Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea.

The Bering Sea produces more than 50 percent of the nation's fish and shellfish harvest – worth more than $5 billion annually – and is the gateway to the Arctic, which encompasses 900,000 square miles of the U.S. exclusive economic zone off the Alaskan coast.

Bertholf and Kimball are 418-foot legend-class national security cutters homeported in Alameda, California, and Honolulu, Hawaii, respectively.

Healy is a 420-foot medium icebreaker homeported in Seattle.

RE2 Robotics to Develop Underwater Autonomous System for U.S. Navy

RE2 Robotics will create an underwater robotic system for the autonomous neutralization of underwater mines. *RE2*

PITTSBURGH, Pa. – RE2 Robotics has received a $9.5 million contract from the Office of Naval Research to create an underwater robotic system for the autonomous neutralization of underwater mines for the U.S. Navy, the company said in a Sept. 14 release.

The program, called Maritime Mine Neutralization System (M2NS), will utilize the RE2 Sapien Sea Class system to precisely place and attach neutralization devices to underwater mines and water-borne improvised explosive devices (WBIEDs).

RE2 will serve as the systems integrator for this program. In addition to RE2 Sapien Sea Class, the M2NS will use components, including RE2's advanced computer vision and autonomy software, RE2 Detect and RE2 Intellect, to enable the precise, autonomous, and clandestine neutralization of a target.

"The detection and neutralization of WBIEDs and other underwater explosives is a critically dangerous task for Navy divers. Consistent with our mission of improving worker safety, the M2NS will enable the Navy to find and autonomously neutralize targets in deep ocean waters, while experienced divers supervise from a safe distance," said Jorgen Pedersen, president and CEO of RE2 Robotics.

The M2NS comprises best-in-class technologies such as RE2's Sapien Sea Class arms and VideoRay's Defender remotely

operated vehicle, which both exhibit unprecedented power density. In particular, RE2 Sapien Sea Class arms, which were originally designed and developed for the ONR, feature a compact, strong, electromechanical design with human-like dexterity (seven functions per arm) that is neutrally buoyant. The fusion of these key technologies provides superior strength and precision while manipulating neutralization devices.

“The M2NS will use RE2 Detect computer vision software to locate targets underwater, and RE2 Intellect to autonomously and precisely place devices on those targets,” said Amanda Sgroi, director of computer vision and autonomy at RE2. “We also will integrate new sensors to provide situational awareness and aid autonomy, allowing the system to potentially navigate to extended depths in the ocean.”

In addition to defense tasks, the human-like capability of the M2NS allows it to be used for complex offshore infrastructure and maintenance applications in the oil & gas and renewable wind industries. For example, M2NS can be used for weld inspection of rig piles, ships and FPSO (floating production storage and offloading) systems, mooring inspection and measurement and valve inspection and manipulation.

Essex Amphibious Ready Group Enters 5th Fleet AOR

Amphibious assault ship USS Essex (LHD 2), middle, amphibious dock landing ship USS Pearl Harbor (LSD 52), left, and amphibious transport dock ship USS Portland (LPD 27), transit

the Arabian Sea, Sept. 13. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Brett McMinoway*

ARABIAN SEA – Amphibious assault ship USS Essex (LHD 2), flagship of the Essex Amphibious Ready Group (ESX ARG), along with amphibious transport dock USS Portland (LPD 27), dock landing ship USS Pearl Harbor (LSD 52) and embarked 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), entered the U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations, Sept. 12, Petty Officer 2nd Class Brett McMinoway said in a Sept. 14 release.

While in the U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations, the ESX ARG and 11th MEU will operate and train alongside regional and coalition partners.

As an inherently flexible maneuver force, capable of supporting routine and contingency operations, the ARG/MEU's presence demonstrates the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps commitment to regional partners and maritime security.

The U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations encompasses about 2.5 million square miles of water and includes the Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Red Sea and parts of the Indian Ocean. The expanse is comprised of 20 countries and includes three critical choke points at the Strait of Hormuz, the Suez Canal, and the Strait of Bab al Mandeb at the southern tip of Yemen.