Partnerships Key to Confronting Adversaries, Harker Says



Acting Secretary of the Navy Thomas Harker addressing Sea-Air-Space 2021 on Aug. 4. *NAVY LEAGUE / Lisa Nipp*

NATIONAL HARBOR, MD. – That Sea-Air-Space 2021 was able to be held this year shows the power of partnerships, acting Secretary of the Navy Thomas Harker said Aug. 4.

"The fact that we're able to gather today is a testament to the power of partnership – pharmaceutical companies, scientists, government researchers, military and civilian leaders – all working together to develop the vaccine," Harker said. "That's how we must confront all of our adversaries. Together."

Future military planning requires a transparent understanding of needs and limitations, Harker said, adding that such an approach will protect the supply chain while strengthening small-business opportunities.

"Keep challenging the Navy and Marine Corps to innovate and transform," Harker said. "That's how we keep the faith with the American taxpayers and our oversight partners on the Hill. Every dollar is a strategic asset that must be maximized."

The decision-making process for the coming budget has been tough, Harker said, acknowledging that costs associated with personnel, maintenance and recapitalization efforts have exceeded the rate of inflation. As a result, investment planning by vital industrial-base partners will be affected.

"We refuse to create a hollow force. We will not leave holes in units and create a force that leaves our Sailors and

Marines without proper training," Harker said, citing the lessons learned from the separate collision incidents involving the destroyers Fitzgerald and McCain.

The two incidents occurred because Sailors and Marines were asked to do more with less, Harker said.

"One-time fixes aren't enough," Harker said. "We have to make changes, putting controls in place to prevent future events. We're putting procedures in place to ensure that we don't return to bad habits of the past."

The acting secretary highlighted efforts to improve a moribund auditing process, after independent government assessments revealed discrepancies and shortcomings he said must be addressed.

Harker called for a "get real, get better approach, demanding rigorous self-assessment, strong characterization of current performance, detailed analysis based on accountability and the opportunity to implement needed improvements."

Citing personal experience, Harker reiterated the Defense Department's stance that mental-health counseling must be destigmatized and treated equally with any other form of health care treatment. He also reiterated the overall commitment to rid the ranks of sexual harassment and assault.

"Data shows that a command that tolerates harassment and destructive behaviors increases the risk of sexual assault," Harker said. "We've distributed a watch list which has the top five signals of risk for sexual assault, to assist commanders in both the Navy and Marine Corps to identify warning signs and signals so they can take action to improve their command."