

# Q&A With CNO Adm. Mike Gilday



Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday visits with Sailors aboard USS Kearsarge in August during his first ship visit following the CNO change-of-office ceremony. U.S. Navy/Chief Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Nick Brown

*Since August, Adm. Mike Gilday has led the world's most powerful navy as the 32nd chief of naval operations. The son of a Sailor and a native of Lowell, Massachusetts, he is a surface warfare officer who graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy and holds master's degrees from the Harvard Kennedy School and the National War College.*

*At sea, he deployed with USS Chandler (DDG 996), USS Princeton (CG 59) and USS Gettysburg (CG 64). He commanded destroyers USS Higgins (DDG 76) and USS Benfold (DDG 65) and subsequently commanded Destroyer Squadron 7, serving as sea combat commander for the Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group.*

*As a flag officer, he served as commander, Carrier Strike Group 8, embarked aboard the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN 69), and as commander, U.S. Fleet Cyber Command and U.S. 10th Fleet.*

**Check out the digital edition of the April Seapower magazine [here](#).**

*His staff assignments include the Bureau of Naval Personnel, staff of the CNO and staff of the vice CNO. Joint assignments include executive assistant to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of*

*Staff and naval aide to the president.*

*As a flag officer, he served in joint positions as director of operations for NATO's Joint Force Command Lisbon; as chief of staff for Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO; director of operations, J3, for U.S. Cyber Command; and as director of operations, J3, for the Joint Staff. He recently served as director, Joint Staff.*

*Gilday answered questions from Senior Editor Richard R. Burgess in writing.*

### **Why the renewed emphasis on mastering fleet-level warfare?**

**GILDAY:** The nature of war at sea today is changing. Maritime operations stretch from the seabed to space and across the electromagnetic spectrum. Long-range missiles that fly at supersonic and hypersonic speed have decreased the amount of time a commander has to make decisions, and the emergence of cyber and space as warfighting domains have created a much more complex operating environment for our Sailors.

To meet these challenges, our fleets must be the operational center of warfare. Fleet commanders must own the physical and virtual battlespace they are responsible for and drive the fight, if required to do so.

*"We fight and win as a team, and we are better when we integrate more closely with the Marine Corps. We will build*

*capability with our most natural partner, tying more closely with them at all levels.”*

However, to be able to fight as a fleet, we must exercise as a fleet. We have made great investments in our maritime operational centers [MOCs], which gives fleet commanders the ability to do just that. We need to exercise – and the only way to do that is with iron out there at scale.

Upcoming fleet exercises, like Large Scale Exercise 2020, will leverage operational concepts like Distributed Maritime Operations, Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations and Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment. Combined with war-gaming, future exercises will serve as the key opportunity for experimentation and the development and testing of alternative concepts. These exercises and experiments will inform doctrine and tactics, and future fleet headquarters requirements, capacity and size, and investments in future platforms and capabilities.

Going forward, we must leverage experience from combatant command, joint and other service exercises to better prepare the Navy to integrate, support and lead the joint force in a future fight.



Gilday delivers remarks Feb. 7 during a full honors ceremony for Vice Adm. Michael Noonan, chief of the Royal Australian Navy, at the Navy Yard in Washington, D.C. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Raymond D. Diaz III  
**The Optimized Fleet Readiness Plan and Dynamic Force**

**Employment, in theory, would seem to be in tension. How should the Navy ensure a sustainable personnel tempo while keeping adversaries off balance?**

**GILDAY:** People are our most important resource, and the Navy cannot succeed without its Sailors – they are our asymmetric advantage.

While we strive to have a predictable model for our Sailors and their families, it's important to remember that sometimes the world gets a vote, which may require us to respond at a moment's notice – and differently than we planned.

**In which aspects do you see integration with the U.S. Marine Corps as having the greatest potential for improving naval power?**

**GILDAY:** We fight and win as a team, and we are better when we integrate more closely with the Marine Corps. We will build capability with our most natural partner, tying more closely with them at all levels.

Together, we will build Navy-Marine Corps integration by aligning concepts, capabilities, programming, planning, budgeting and operations to provide integrated American naval power to the Joint Force. Opportunities for increased integration include our cyberspace operations, war-game and exercise programs, development of the Naval Tactical Grid, and potential Dynamic Force Employment options.

Alongside the United States Marine Corps, our Navy is the bedrock of integrated American naval power.



Gilday visits with Sailors assigned to Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron 40 during his first visit as CNO to Naval Air Station Jacksonville and Naval Station Mayport, Florida, on Sept. 17. U.S. Navy/Chief Mass Communication Specialist Nick Brown

**Where**

**do you see the best application of unmanned systems for naval warfare?**

**GILDAY:** Unmanned is an important part of the future. It must be a central component of our future battle force to support the way we want to fight in a distributed way. Going forward, I believe there will be a requirement for seaborne-launched vehicles to deliver effects downrange, likely using a mix of manned and unmanned assets. Ultimately, we must leverage technology to expand our reach, lethality and warfighter awareness in undersea, surface and air domains. We must continue to experiment more with unmanned, and we need to do it with greater speed.

**Based on your experience, what does the Navy need to do to be prepared for war in the cyber domain?**

**GILDAY:** Cybersecurity is commanders' business. Commanders need to own it. Commanders must understand the status of their networks and systems and the potential operational risk they are assuming if readiness has degraded.

Going forward, we need to invest in training and retaining the best and brightest, and in cyber infrastructure; treat the network ([Navy-Marine Corps Intranet], ONE-NET, afloat networks) like the warfighting platform it is, giving priority to ensure it is secure and defended; defend forward – disrupt threats before they reach our networks; develop cyber-resiliency (think shipboard damage control) – identify, protect, detect, react and restore the network; integrate MOC to MOC, across the fleets and interagency, in every major exercise and operation; [and] partner with other services, interagency, industry, allies and partner nations.

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**What have you learned the most about your role so far as a member of the Joint Chiefs?**

**GILDAY:** My role as a Joint Chief is one that I take extremely seriously, and it is important that I provide the president, secretary of defense and chairman of the Joint Chiefs the best military advice I can. That is why I spend a lot of time studying and thinking about near-peer competitors, potential adversaries and our future force.

**What are the main priorities of the Navy's 2021 budget?**

**GILDAY:** The Navy's first acquisition priority is recapitalizing our strategic nuclear deterrent. We will continue to drive affordability, technology development and engineering integration efforts to support Columbia's [ballistic-missile submarine] fleet introduction on time or earlier, maintain mastery of the undersea domain and sustain a formidable forward presence through our aircraft carrier fleet.

We must ensure the fleet's readiness today so we can deliver credible ready forces tomorrow. This includes the prioritization of force design and the delivery of naval forces capable of imposing lethal power to any adversary and aggressive pursuit of increased lethality and modernization across the Navy.



Gilday visits with Sailors on Sept. 17 at the Littoral Combat Ship Operational Trainer Facility at Naval Station Mayport,

Florida. U.S. Navy/Chief Mass Communication Specialist Nick Brown

**How do you explain the lower shipbuilding budget and the early ship retirements given the need for a larger fleet?**

**GILDAY:** The fiscal 2021 budget supports implementation of the National Defense Strategy, which remains our guidepost and drives our decision-making. While we are committed to building the largest Navy we can, the capacity reductions in the recent budget submissions were made with the service's priorities of strategic deterrence, readiness, lethality and modernization in mind. We remain focused on maximizing the naval power of our ships, aircraft, unmanned vehicles, weapons and systems we have today in our fleet.

Our balanced approach in our budget submission provides a Navy ready to fight today while committing to the training, maintenance and modernization to provide a Navy ready to fight tomorrow. Naval power is critical to implementing the National Defense Strategy. But naval power is not just a function of fleet size: It is a combination of the readiness, lethality and capacity of that fleet.

Our

No. 1 priority is the Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarine. This request

also heavily invests in readiness accounts, such as ship and aircraft depot

maintenance and modernization, manpower, live virtual constructive training,

steaming days, and flying hours. It invests in new systems to make our fleet

more lethal, including increasing our weapons inventory, bolstering the range

and speed of those weapons, exploring directed energy weapons, and

incorporating new technologies such as hypersonics. This request grows our

fleet in size, generating sustainable, capable capacity.

The configurations in some older platforms require a significant amount of modernization, and we believe that the significant investment necessary for modernization necessary to ensure platforms can operate in contested environments is better utilized in other programs.

**Looking to the next 10 years, how can the Navy best balance the funding needs between current readiness and new acquisition**

**GILDAY:** Mission No. 1 for every Sailor – active and Reserve, civilian and uniform – is the operational readiness of the fleet.

We must ensure the fleet's readiness so we can deliver credible ready forces. This includes the prioritization of force design and the delivery of naval forces capable of imposing lethal power to any adversary. That must be balanced with an aggressive pursuit of increased lethality and modernization across the Navy, against the constraints of our budget topline.

Going forward, we will continue to prioritize investments using the National Defense Strategy as our guidepost.

**With the nuclear deterrent as the Navy's No. 1 priority, what concerns do you have about the Columbia SSBN being on track to deploy on time?**



**GILDAY:** Lead-ship construction for Columbia began in 2020 and the Navy continues to identify opportunities to drive schedule and cost margin. While the construction schedule is aggressive, it is achievable. The Navy is actively overseeing shipbuilders as they manage the submarine and aircraft carrier industrial base suppliers to minimize risk and incorporate recent lessons learned.

### **Why is the Navy asking for more Sailors for the fleet?**

**GILDAY:** To operate effectively as a force, we need to properly man our ships, submarines and aviation squadrons, and this budget request supports that effort with a 2% increase in active-duty Sailors (plus 7,300 from fiscal 2020 to 2021). Recruiting, developing and retaining a high-quality military and civilian workforce is essential for our warfighting success.

### **How is the budget strengthening the nation's sealift capability?**

**GILDAY:** We have a three-prong approach to strengthening our sealift capability, which includes the procurement of commercial vessels with 20 to 25 years of life remaining at a cost of \$30 million, as opposed to acquiring new vessels at a cost of \$300 million, \$400 million or \$500 million. Additionally, the Navy is conducting at service life extension [SLE] on existing sealift ships, which includes six service life extensions, put in place last year. The Navy intends to increase SLEs from six to 10 in 2021.