The Department of the Navy is Establishing a Naval Strategic Studies Group (NSSG) Program

From the U.S. Navy Office of Information, 31 October 2024

The Department of the Navy is establishing a Naval Strategic Studies Group (NSSG) program in January administered by the DON Office of Strategic Assessment (OSA).

The Department of the Navy is establishing a Naval Strategic Studies Group (NSSG) program in January administered by the DON Office of Strategic Assessment (OSA).

The NSSG will be modeled after the Strategic Studies Group created during the Cold War, which had a twofold mission to train future flag officers in strategic thinking and to conduct research on some of the DON's most vexing strategic challenges.

The first cohort will include uniformed and civilian members from the Navy and Marine Corps. These plank-owners will conduct a capstone research project that advances Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro's strategic maritime statecraft initiative.

"I expect my seasoned, mid-grade officers to be brilliant on naval tactics and operations by the time they report for graduate education," Del Toro said. "I need future flag and general officers who will think strategically about how to lead naval forces in an increasingly contested maritime domain and amidst intense economic, technological and military competition."

The education in strategic studies the NSSG members will receive supports DON's focus on reinvigorating the strategic workforce, under the Secretary's enduring priority of building a culture of warfighting excellence.

Members' research – focused on broad strategic challenges, rather than narrower problems already addressed by fleet experimentation on specific tactics or technologies – will support DON's aim of strengthening maritime dominance.

"The Department of the Navy meets our nation's maritime needs, both today and into the future. As the Office of Strategic Assessment builds a net assessment capability for the DON to understand the complex challenges we face, the Naval Strategic Studies Group will bring together a cohort of rising leaders who will address these challenges and build the strategic leadership skills to guide our Navy and Marine Corps in a dynamic and shifting global environment," OSA Director Dr. Cara LaPointe said.

The chief of naval operations created the previous SSG in 1981 to tackle key strategic challenges related to the Cold War. Over time, the SSG's focus evolved to reflect the needs of the Navy until 2016, when it was sundowned.

As the Department of the Navy returns to an era of competition, stakeholders have agreed on the need to amplify strategic leader education as the United States faces an increasingly complex web of threats that includes China, Russia, Iran and North Korea. In 2023 Secretary Del Toro released a Naval Education Strategy to guide investments to modernize naval schools and professional military education. The NSSG will focus students' strategic leadership studies on DON's most pressing strategic challenges for greater effect.

"Today we face a comprehensive maritime power in the Indo-

Pacific, Russian aggression in Ukraine, and Houthi attacks in the Red Sea – all of which will shape our security environment for several decades," Del Toro said. "A revitalized, Naval SSG will help the Department of the Navy engage with and look ahead of these trends with sufficient access, resources, and guidance from leadership."

The first cohort will also tackle questions that will help shape the enduring NSSG program, including working with the Naval University System to deliver a world-class curriculum, and will be located in Washington, D.C.

Lt. Gen. Benjamin Watson, the commanding general of the Marine Corps Training and Education Command, said recent conflicts have reinforced the importance of having Marine Corps leaders at all levels who can outthink the enemy.

"Domains like information and cyber, along with the rise of non-state actors, don't fit neatly into old frameworks. Our current operating environment demands nothing less than a renaissance in strategic thinking," said Watson. "To stay ahead of our adversaries, we need to keep evolving—updating our training, sharpening our minds, and learning – not just observing – the lessons of contemporary conflict. The fight isn't just on the battlefield anymore, and we need every Marine to possess the training, education, and intellectual agility to adapt and overcome."

Vice Adm. Daniel Dwyer, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Operations, Plans, Strategy and Warfighting Development, agreed the Navy needs Sailors and civilians "with superb education and training, who are able to think, act and operate differently to ensure we can defeat our adversaries."
"The establishment of the NSSG will enhance our culture of warfighting excellence and strengthen our maritime dominance by developing strategically minded warfighters who will be the future senior leaders of the service and will lead our Navy

through uncertain times," said Dwyer.

Del Toro established the Office of Strategic Assessment in October 2023 and tasked the office to reconstitute the strategic studies program to help rebuild the naval strategist community.