

Work Praises Navy League's Maritime Policy Statement



Former Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert O. Work praised the policy positions of the 2021-2022 Maritime Policy Statement of the Navy League of the United States during a webinar on Feb. 24. U.S. Navy / Chief Mass Communication Specialist Mike DiMestico

ARLINGTON, Va. – Former Deputy Secretary of Defense and former Under Secretary of the Navy Robert O. Work praised the policy positions of the 2021-2022 Maritime Policy statement of the Navy League of the United States (NLUS) during a webinar. He also noted aspects that the policy statement did not address.

The Maritime Policy statement is a document produced biennially by the Navy League to advocate for national support for a strong Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and Merchant Marine.

The keynote speaker of a Feb. 24 webinar conducted by the Navy

League and sponsored by Crowley Marine, Work gave four “big Bravo Zulus” (BZs) to the Navy League for focusing on policy.

Work’s first BZ praised the Navy League from avoiding getting dragged into the ship numbers game. He ran through the various studies of naval force structure assessments that were conducted over five years and noted that the ship force level made law by Congress is the one the Navy League policy supports. That level is 355 ships.

“The Constitution says that Congress should provide and maintain a Navy, and unstated is that these naval forces need to preserve and protect the interests of the United States,” Work said. “So, I’m very happy that the Navy League didn’t jump into a big argument over the exact number of ships. They focused on policy, which is where they should have focused.”

Work did note that the Navy League should have recommended “forthrightly” a position on whether unmanned ships are to be counted in the battle force or not, noting that “Congress is not fully convinced that we should do so. So, it’s a policy question that is very, very important, and the Navy League’s voice is very important, and by not saying anything I found that to be significant.”

In his second BZ, Work said the Navy League’s policy is the “closest thing we have to a description to what I’ll call the National Fleet.”

He noted that the focus on the counting rules of the Navy’s battle force often obscures the “tremendous maritime capabilities of the United States.”

Work said given the new presidential administration’s expansion of national security, such as countering pandemics, the force should count hospital ships. He also said the count might include unmanned ships and craft, coastal patrol ships, patrol boats, prepositioning ships, Coast Guard cutters, surge sealift ships, the Ready Reserve Force of the Maritime

Administration, the ships of the Maritime Security Program, the Tanker Security Program ships, cable repair ships and the ships of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The third BZ praised the Maritime Policy Statement's emphasis on sealift.

"We've known that our sealift fleet is going to need recapitalization in the 2020s, but we never do anything about it," Work said. "It's always 'next year.' Another study. We've gotten to the point where we've got to do something, or we're not going to have any sealift, which for a power projection nation is a bad thing."

Work's fourth BZ is that the Maritime Policy comes out "in support of the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea [UNCLOS]. It is a disgrace that the United States has not acceded to that convention. The Chinese practice 'lawfare' against us all the time. Yes, we do freedom-of-navigation missions, but we are not a signatory to the policy, which undercuts what we're saying. I was very happy to see that the Navy League come out four-square in support of signing UNCLOS."

Work said he was disappointed that the key enabler of the National Fleet, the nation's shipbuilding capacity in the industrial base, was not addressed in the policy statement. He said that, as a minimum, he would have expected the Navy League to come out in support of the Navy's Shipyard Infrastructure Optimization Plan.

He said given the looming maritime competition with China, it is more important to invest more in the shipyard industrial base "right now" than in increasing the number of ships.

"We simply have to have more submarine building capacity [and] more shipbuilding capacity," he said. We have to be able to repair ships, more repair yards, more graving docks. This is an important part of a global navy.

Naval analysts Bryan McGrath and Bryan Clark, both of the Hudson Institute, praised the Maritime Policy statement.

McGrath emphasized that the nation needs more maritime power. He also questioned the Marine Corps plan to reduce its force by 12,000 Marines. He said the Navy League should “support what the Navy needs,” not just support the Navy’s budget as submitted, which is a consensus document.

Clark praised the policy statement’s emphasis on sealift, tankers and the other often neglected aspects of the National Fleet. He also said maritime air power needs to be re-examined, given the changing environment of great power competition.

The Navy League of the United States’ Maritime Policy statement can be found here:
<https://www.navyleague.org/programs/legislative-affairs/>.