

Atlantic Fleet Name a No-Go, for Now



Vice Adm. James Kilby, deputy commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, departs the Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Gettysburg (CG-64), following a visit to the ship, Feb. 10. Plans to redesignate Fleet Forces Command as the U.S. Atlantic Fleet appear to have been abandoned. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Jacob Milham*

ARLINGTON, Va. – Just over a year ago, the president approved the proposal to re-designate the U.S. Fleet Forces Command as the U.S. Atlantic Fleet. The proposal – for now, at least – is in the dustbin of history.

In January 2021, shortly before leaving office, the re-designation was approved by then-President Donald Trump. Now, more than a year later, the proposal has not been enacted.

“From my understanding, that proposal was not forwarded following the Global Posture Review,” said Capt. Jereal Dorsey, special assistant for public affairs for the secretary of the Navy, in response to a query from *Seapower*.

The Defense Department’s Global Posture Review was ordered by President Joe Biden on Feb. 4, 2021, and its recommendations were approved by him in November 2021. The Navy said in the interim that the renaming proposal for U.S. Fleet Forces Command would depend on the results of that review.

The original commander, U.S. Atlantic Fleet staff, had a long pedigree that began in 1906, when the North Atlantic Squadron and South Atlantic Squadron were combined. The fleet existed in various forms until 2006, when the chief of naval operations renamed Commander, U.S. Atlantic Fleet, to Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, which assumed the duties of the former fleet plus the mission of the former Commander,

Fleet Forces Command, which was “to serve as the primary advocate for fleet personnel, training, requirements, maintenance and operations issues,” according to the U.S. Fleet Forces Command website.

The re-designation plan originally was announced by then-Navy Secretary Kenneth J. Braithwaite, testifying Dec. 2, 2020, before the Readiness and Management Support subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee, noting the changing world requires that the Navy must evolve to meet the threat.

Atlantic Theater Challenges

“Our existing structure operates on the premise that we still live in a post-9/11 state, where NATO’s flanks are secure, the Russian Fleet is tied to the pier, and terrorism is our biggest problem,” Braithwaite said. “That is not the world of today. As the world changes, we must be bold, evolved, and change with it. Instead of perpetuating a structure designed to support Joint Forces Command, we are aligning to today’s threat.

“To meet the maritime challenges of the Atlantic Theater, we will rename Fleet Forces Command as the U.S. Atlantic Fleet and will refocus our naval forces in this important region on their original mission, to controlling the maritime approaches to the United States and those of our allies,” he said. “The Atlantic Fleet will confront the reassertive Russian navy, which has been deploying closer and closer to our East Coast with a tailored maritime presence, capability and lethality.”

Speaking Jan. 11, 2021, in a webinar of the Surface Navy Association convention, CNO Adm. Michael Gilday discussed the pros of the redesignation.

“It underscores the importance of the Atlantic in a way that the title ‘Fleet Forces’ doesn’t,” Gilday said. “It actually is a testament to recent tangible decisions that we made to

increase our power in that body of water, to include bringing 2nd Fleet back, standing up SubGru 2 [Submarine Group 2]. It will also include standing up [NATO's] Joint Force Command Norfolk, which is focused on the Atlantic."

Gilday said, "in a day and age when the homeland is no longer a sanctuary, and homeland defense is at the fore of every plan the combatant commanders have put together, the name 'Atlantic Fleet' always carries some gravitas with respect to defense of the nation."

He noted the complexity of the re-designation, saying the command "also has responsibilities as a component [command] for [U.S.] Northern Command and the Eastern Pacific that extend up to the Arctic as well as their role as component of the [U.S.] Strategic Command. They really have a global responsibility with respect to the command and control of our SSBNs [ballistic-missile submarines]."

Adm. Christopher W. Grady, then-commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, seconded the complexity in a Jan. 13, 2021, webinar at the convention, noting the downside "might be that we would lose emphasis on what we do for the homeland. Indeed, I control forces in both the Pacific and down south [in U.S. Southern Command area of responsibility].

"So, we will balance all that, and in the end the name change is an important branding opportunity, and we will move out on that," Grady said.

Grady is now vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.