

Port Visits Cancelled, Submariners' Health Monitored to Contain Coronavirus Spread at Sea



Retail Services Specialist 3rd Class Thuy Nguyen and Airman Manuel Lozano stand watch in front of the barge quarterdeck of the amphibious assault ship USS Bonhomme Richard to screen oncoming traffic for COVID-19 symptoms. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Devin Kates

ARLINGTON, Va. – Nonessential port visits by U.S. Navy ships have been cancelled and Sailors' health aboard the nuclear deterrent submarine force is being closely monitored, top officials said in the latest report on combatting the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday said he believed "every port visit, with the exception of ships that need to pull in for maintenance or resupply," had been cancelled. He was sure with "high certainty" that all ships in the Pacific Ocean were no longer making scheduled port calls and crews of ships that do make stops would be confined to the pier area while in port.

[See: Ship Commissionings on Track, But Ceremonies Delayed](#)

In a March 24 press briefing, Gilday and acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly announced that three Sailors deployed in the Pacific aboard the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt were diagnosed with COVID-19 and were being evacuated from the carrier. It was the first appearance of the novel

coronavirus on a deployed ship at sea, Modly said, adding that all those who encountered the three sick individuals were being quarantined aboard the Roosevelt. There were no plans to recall the carrier or any other deployed ship, Gilday said.

“We have not missed any operational commitment in the Navy at this time,” he said, adding that the impact to force readiness has been low “but that’s not to say that this couldn’t spike at any given time. We continue to watch this very closely in every ship, squadron and submarine.”

Gilday said all crews of the ballistic missile submarine force – which forms the maritime leg of the nuclear triad of submarines, bombers and ground-based missiles – undergo enhanced medical screenings and 14-day isolation before beginning training or deployment aboard a sub. “We have not seen a single case yet” of COVID-19 within the submarine force, Gilday said.

Elsewhere, two Navy hospital ships were being readied to ease the burden on health care workers and institutions in two cities hard-hit by the coronavirus pandemic, Los Angeles and New York, Modly said.



From left: Acting Secretary of the Navy Thomas Modly, Master Chief Petty Officer of the Navy Russell Smith, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael Gilday and Rear Adm. Bruce Gillingham, the Navy surgeon general, speak to the media about the ongoing efforts to combat COVID-19 while maintaining operations. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Sarah Villegas

The hospital ship USNS Mercy, which is based in San Diego, was doing some initial training off the coast of California and would reach Los Angeles “within the next few days,” he said, adding that Mercy would need another 24 hours after arriving in L.A. “to prepare for how she’ll receive patients” before the sick are brought aboard. The USNS Comfort, based in Norfolk, Virginia, tasked with aiding New York City’s medical services squeezed by the surge of COVID-19 cases, is still preparing for its mission, Modly said.

Both ships will serve as referral hospitals for patients not infected with the coronavirus to allow local medical services to focus on those who are, Modly stressed. “They’re there to handle the overflow of acute trauma cases and other urgent needs, and they will not be handling pediatric or OB-GYN cases,” the acting Navy secretary said.

“We continue to watch this very closely in every ship, squadron and submarine.”

Acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly

Because of the pandemic, the Navy has postponed, until 2021, this summer’s Large-Scale Exercise 2020, the first of a planned return to annual large exercises involving several strike groups. Modly said no decision has been made yet on scrubbing Hawaii-based Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC), the world’s largest international maritime exercise that runs every two years in June and

July.

Both Modly and Gilday said they expect COVID-19 shutdowns will challenge work tempo at Navy and private shipyards. While the work of the private shipyards is essential in producing and repairing ships “we are also concerned about the health of their people. We don’t want them putting them at risk, either,” Modly said, noting Navy officials were talking with company executives daily.

Meanwhile, large prime contractors were, in effect, creating task forces to monitor the supply chains “to keep all of those production lines running and to see where we might be incurring risk out through, 2021, so that we can then prioritize what type of work we need to do,” Gilday said.



Hospitalman Katelynn Kavanagh sanitizes equipment aboard the USNS Mercy on March 24. The hospital ship is deploying to Los Angeles in support of the nation’s COVID-19 response efforts. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Ryan M. Breeden

Theodore Roosevelt Becomes First Navy Ship at Sea with

COVID-19 Cases



An F/A-18F Super Hornet lands on the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt. The Navy reported on March 24 three cases of the coronavirus on the ship. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Nicholas V. Huynh ARLINGTON, Va. – In the first case of COVID-19 detected aboard a U.S. Navy ship at sea, three people quarantined with the coronavirus aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt in the Pacific Ocean have been evacuated for further treatment, acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly announced.

“These are our first three cases of COVID-19 on a ship that’s deployed,” Modly told a Pentagon press briefing on March 24. “We’ve identified all those folks they’ve had contact with, and we’re quarantining them as well,” he added.

To date, 86 cases of COVID-19 have been detected among people connected with the Navy, including 57 uniformed personnel, 13 civilian employees, 11 dependents and five contractors, Modly said.

“We’ve begun to take a look inside the ship, how we can isolate and contain as best we can.”

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday

The Roosevelt left its last port of call, Da Nang, Vietnam, 15 days ago and has been self-quarantined at sea for 14 days, the incubation period of the virus, a procedure required of all Navy ships at sea since the disease began to spread, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday said. He

said it would be difficult to definitively link the outbreak on the Roosevelt to the port visit in Vietnam.

“We’ve had aircraft flying to and from the ship, so we just don’t want to say it was that particular port visit,” Gilday noted, adding that enhanced medical screening of the crew was done after leaving port.

The CNO said the three Sailors who tested positive for COVID-19 were not showing symptoms that would necessarily require hospitalization, only an elevated body temperature and body aches. However, leaders moved quickly to isolate them and evacuate them by aircraft to a Defense Department hospital in the Pacific region, which Gilday declined to identify.

“We’ve begun to take a look inside the ship, how we can isolate and contain as best we can,” Gilday said, adding there is testing capability on the ship, including the capacity to test for non-COVID but influenza-related incidents.

The CNO said Navy officials are working with the Roosevelt’s commander to assess the situation both medically and in terms of the carrier’s mission. “We’re taking this day-by-day, and we’re being very deliberate how we do it,” Gilday said. “We are not at a position right now to say we have to pull that ship in – or to take that ship off the front line.”

Given the busy comings and goings on an aircraft carrier, including helicopters delivering supplies and personnel,

Gilday was asked if the Navy is planning any change in procedure for other deployed carriers. He said there were no specifics yet but noted that after every COVID-19 case is detected, practices and procedures are examined to determine “the dos and the don’ts we can quickly promulgate fleetwide.”

Simple Unmanned Systems Could Impose ISR Tax on Adversaries, Marine General Says

WASHINGTON – One of the ways to counter rivals in the Great Power Competition is to impose costs on a potential adversary. An effective way to do that is with a big, unmanned inflatable boat, according to a top Marine Corps commander.

The Marines are looking to reduce their exposure to increased long-range precision fire with unmanned systems in the air, on land and sea. In addition to accomplishing a mission without exposing troops to danger, unmanned systems are also seen as a way to flood an adversary’s decision-making and targeting processes with an array of low signature,

affordable and risk-worthy platforms, according to written testimony prepared for a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing March 11.

Asked by Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.) to explain how the Corps is leveraging unmanned systems to upset adversaries' decision-making, Lt. Gen. Eric Smith cited the Long Range Unmanned Surface Vessel (LRUSV), a 33-foot long rigid hulled inflatable boat that can travel far to enemy littorals and unleash a swarm of small aerial drones.

Smith, the deputy commandant for Combat Development and Integration, said the LRUSV had been tested at the annual Advanced Technology Exercise last July. The autonomous boat traveled down the Inland Waterway from Norfolk, Virginia, to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, about 200 miles, with no one aboard, controlled from Norfolk. On arrival, the LRUSV launched a swarm of small, expendable Raytheon Coyote drones that could either attack or observe the target.

"That's the kind of capability that we will provide to those forces forward," Smith said, adding that LRUSV and other lighter, more lethal, resilient capabilities like the Remotely Operated Ground Unit Expeditionary (ROGUE) naval strike missile-firing vehicle, would be transported to overseas exercises in 40-foot long shipping containers.

"That complicates an adversary's calculus, because if you don't know what's in that, it could be weights for a weight room or a lethal strike missile," Smith said. As the Marines and their weaponry are dispersed in support of distributed maritime operations, "You impose an intelligence, surveillance

and reconnaissance tax on an adversary,” he added.

Coronavirus Outbreak Could Have Lasting Impact on Sea Services' Supply Chain, Official Says

WASHINGTON – In addition to imposing immediate travel restrictions on personnel and forcing U.S. Navy ships at sea to self-quarantine between visits to foreign ports, the worldwide coronavirus outbreak could be an “impacting element” on acquisition and sustainment programs, a Department of the Navy official said.

“We’ve been working for a long time on supply chain integrity, and so [the virus outbreak] plays into the supply chain, understanding our supply lines where we’ve got fragility, [and] planning forward on that,” James Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition, told the readiness subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee on March 12.

Rep. John Garamendi (D-Calif.), the readiness subcommittee chairman, used his first question at the hearing on Navy and U.S. Marine Corps readiness not

about destroyers or shipyards but on how the sea services are dealing with the coronavirus outbreak, which the World Health Organization on March 11 designated as a pandemic.

Marine Corps Deputy Commandant Gen. Gary Thomas said the Corps is reviewing disease containment plans, starting to restrict large gatherings, implementing measures to screen and quarantine Marines when necessary, and screening personnel in unique places “in the sense that they bring people from all over the country, for example entry level training.”

Vice Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Robert Burke said the Navy’s top priority is the “well-being of our Sailors and their family members.” He added that the Navy, along with the other armed services, is providing support to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), being coordinated by U.S. Northern Command.

The Navy is following CDC guidance regarding minimum requirements with implementation “above and beyond those requirements as necessary to meet the unique needs of the service,” Burke said.

Ships at sea are on self-quarantine for 14 days between every port departure and arrival and are monitoring their crew for symptoms of the virus. The at-sea quarantines, first initiated in the Pacific, are now in force worldwide, Burke said. “We are very sensitive to the fact that we’re moving from place to place rapidly. We do not want to be the source of transmission

of the virus," he added.

U.S. Lacks Ice Hardened Ships, Repair and Refueling Ports for Arctic Ops

WASHINGTON – Unlike the South China Sea and other contested areas, the U.S. Navy does not have the capability to conduct freedom-of-the-seas operations in the icebound waters of the Arctic, a key Pentagon official conceded.

With only one heavy and one medium icebreaker and no Navy ships with hulls hardened against ice, "We do have limitations in the Arctic right now," James H. Anderson, assistant secretary of defense for strategy, plans and capabilities, told a readiness subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 3 during a hearing on U.S. military readiness in the Arctic.

The subcommittee chairman, Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska), said he doubted the Navy could today follow the route across the Arctic that Allied supply convoys took to the Soviet Union in World War II. Sullivan noted that previous Defense Department Arctic strategies called for protecting "our sovereign territory, our sea lanes through Freedom of Navigation operations (FONOPS)."

The drastic decline of sea ice in the Arctic has opened sea lanes across the top of the world, sparking territorial disputes. Russia, Norway, Canada and the United States all have boosted their military presence in the Arctic at a rate not seen since the Cold War.

Last year, Russia completed a large new base at Alexandra Island in the Franz Josef Land archipelago, while reopening and refitting seven former Soviet bases within the Arctic Circle. Russia also has modernized its powerful Northern Fleet. In response, the U.S. has reconstituted the 2nd Fleet, adding the North Pole to that fleet's area of responsibility. Last October, a U.S. aircraft carrier, the USS Harry S. Truman, entered Arctic waters for the first time since 1991.

Sullivan said the Navy has assured him that U.S. submarines are all over the Arctic, but "you can't see a sub. The whole point of a FONOP is to demonstrate presence."

When pressed at the hearing about conducting FONOPS in the large stretches of the Arctic still covered by ice, Anderson said the Navy had determined that to exercise its Arctic strategy, "they do not have a requirement for ice-hardened ships."

In addition to a deficit of ice-hardened hulls, Sullivan said the U.S. lacks a strategic port on – or even near – the Arctic Ocean that could handle repairs or refueling of large Navy or even U.S. Coast Guard vessels.

“Russia has close to a dozen or two dozen ports,” he said, noting the closest viable port at Anchorage or Dutch Harbor, Alaska, was 1,000 nautical miles or more from Arctic waters. In addition to ports and military bases, Russian President Vladimir Putin has 54 icebreakers, Sullivan said. “He’s got all the cards.”

Anderson, who is performing the duties of deputy undersecretary of defense for policy, for which he is expected to be nominated by President Trump, said the Pentagon, under the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2020, is assessing infrastructure needs in the Arctic to support operational flexibility and power projection. That includes an Army Corps of Engineers study of Nome as a possible large ship harbor. A draft report is expected in December, Anderson said.

House Panel Questions Navy Shipbuilding, Systems, Acquisition, Unmanned Submarine



The Virginia-class fast-attack submarine USS Washington returns to Naval Station Norfolk on Feb. 11 after its maiden deployment. Lawmakers continue to criticize the Navy’s plan to

fund just one Virginia-class sub – not two – in fiscal year 2021. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Alfred A. Coffield

WASHINGTON –

Lawmakers challenged U.S. Navy leaders at a fiscal year 2021 budget hearing on how long it will take to acquire a 355-ship fleet, how many vessels will be unmanned and why more ships of the fleet aren't submarines.

Acting Navy

Secretary Thomas B. Modly, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael Gilday and Commandant

of the Marine Corps Gen. David Berger acknowledged the Navy Department's

relatively flat budget request of \$207.1 billion – \$161 billion for the Navy

and \$46 billion for the Marines – had forced hard choices in procurement and end strength.

The budget

request slows the trajectory toward a fleet of 355 or more ships, but “it does

not arrest” that goal, Modly told the House Armed Services Committee on Feb.

27, offering his personal assurance that the Navy is “deeply committed” to

building a larger, more capable, more distributed force within a time frame of

no more than 10 years.

Both the

committee chairman, Rep. Adam Smith

(D-Wash.), and the ranking member, Rep. Mac Thornberry (R-Texas), said they are

more interested in ships' capabilities than numbers. “The 355 number kind of

offends me," Smith added. "You know, you can have 355 rowboats, theoretically, and you would have 355 ships." Rep. Robert Wittman (R-Va.) called getting to 355 ships by 2030 "an impossible task based on the current pace."

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Rep. Adam Smith (D-Wash.)

Modly

disagreed, but he said two things are required for the goal to become reality:

a reasonable plan and the political will. Modly's plan starts with finding ways

to wring between \$5 billion and \$8 billion per year out of the existing Navy budget,

and he's conducting a 45-day stem-to-stern review to find outdated or

unnecessary expenses for elimination. He said he would do what he could to stir

political will.

Several

lawmakers were concerned about the size and numbers planned for air, surface

and underwater unmanned vehicles.

"We have to

really accelerate our investment in unmanned platforms," Modly said, explaining

why the Navy is seeking funding for the serial production of a large unmanned

surface vessel before prototyping and testing are complete. It would be hard to

experiment with concepts to understand how the technology will

work with others
without an existing platform, he said.

Regarding
lethal unmanned aircraft, Berger said he didn't yet know how they would operate in cooperation with manned aircraft. He did know "we have got to move faster than we have in the past three or four years," he said. "We can cover a lot more ground if it is a mix of manned and unmanned. It is also more survivable," by complicating targeting for enemy air defense systems, Berger said.

Rep. Joe
Courtney (D-Conn.), chairman of the House Seapower and Projection Forces subcommittee, complained about the Defense Department's last-minute reduction in shipbuilding accounts that led to the elimination of one of two planned Virginia-class attack submarines from the proposed 2021 budget.

Courtney
noted that Gilday's predecessor as CNO, Adm. John Richardson, said there was no greater need in warfighting requirement and current inventory than the attack submarine. With older subs scheduled to retire in coming years, the Navy will be down to 42 attack boats by 2028. Modly said he wasn't part of the discussion about shifting shipbuilding money, but the elimination wasn't helpful "because it takes a ship out of a plan that we are driving toward."

Gilday said

his first objective is to fully fund the new Columbia-class ballistic missile sub.

Noting the Ohio-class subs, “the nuclear seaborne deterrent that this nation depends upon” is aging out. “We need to deliver Columbia on time for its first patrol in 2031,” he said.

As Part of Investment Plans, Coast Guard Creating Major Base in South Carolina



A Coast Guard Air Station Savannah MH-65 Dolphin helicopter crew conducts a search-and-rescue demonstration on Feb. 19 in Charleston, South Carolina. The demonstration was performed for members of the media attending the State of the Coast Guard address in Charleston. U.S. Coast Guard/Petty Officer 2nd Class Ryan Dickinson

ARLINGTON,

Va. – The U.S. Coast Guard is expanding its Charleston, South Carolina, station into a major Atlantic base and home to its newest class of cutters.

In addition to five 418-foot national security cutters, the Coast Guard’s largest and newest sea-going patrol vessels, Charleston will be the homeport for a complement of yet to be built offshore patrol cutters.

“Charleston

is a first stop to nationwide investment in our service, our facilities and our

people,” Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz said in his State of the Coast Guard

address, which was live streamed from Charleston on Feb. 20.

Over the

next five years the Coast Guard plans to consolidate its campus along one

waterfront, starting with \$140 million to begin upgrading shoreside facilities.

The improvements could turn Charleston into one of the nation’s largest

concentrations of Coast Guard assets and people. The port of Charleston is experiencing

unprecedented change, Schultz said, noting that by 2021, Charleston will have

the deepest harbor on the East Coast.

However, 40%

of Coast Guard buildings around the country are over 50 years old, leading to a

\$2 billion backlog of facility repairs for mold, leaky roofs, flooding and

outdated building standards. The Coast Guard’s fiscal year 2021 budget request

is \$12.3 billion, \$77 million more than the \$12.2 billion approved last

year.

“As commandant, I need my operational commanders to be able to communicate with every Coast Guard asset – anytime, anywhere.”

Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz

There are

also problems with the agency's 1990s-era computer hardware and software.

"Years of investment tradeoffs have brought our information technology to the brink of catastrophic failure," Schultz said. Over the summer, more than 95 vital systems went off-line for several days due to a single server malfunction.

To address information technology issues, Schultz released the Coast Guard's Tech Revolution Road Map for digital modernization. Upgrades are planned over the next three years, starting with increasing Coast Guard external internet speeds and doubling connectivity for major cutters in 2020.

Communication is also a problem in the Arctic, Schultz noted. The medium icebreaker Healy is without reliable communications for a large part of its multimonth patrol above the Arctic Circle. Last month the harsh environment in Alaska knocked out communications equipment.

"As commandant, I need my operational commanders to be able to communicate with every Coast Guard asset – anytime, anywhere," Schultz said. "We are exploring new satellite communications capabilities with the Department of Defense and industry, as well as renewing land-based communications capabilities in Alaska." Arctic communications, however, are a "whole-of-government" issue, he said, adding "we must work together to solve our communication blackout in the Arctic now."

The first of the 360-foot offshore patrol cutters, the Argus, is under construction with delivery planned in 2022. The OPC

program calls for 25 hulls, ultimately making up almost 70% of the Coast Guard's offshore presence.

They will replace the service's 210-foot medium-endurance cutters and become "the backbone of our modernized fleet," Schultz said. They will also play a critical role in the Coast Guard's campaign against narcotics trafficking in the Western Hemisphere.

In a move to expand maritime domain awareness across the Pacific Ocean, the service is partnering with Global Fishing Watch, an international, no-profit big data technology platform that leverages satellite data to track global commercial fishing activity.

Digital Modernization Among the Money Savers That Could Help Navy Reach 355 Ships, Modly Says



Acting Navy Secretary Thomas B. Modly during the CSIS panel discussion on Feb. 21.

WASHINGTON – Digital modernization of U.S. Navy back-office operations is a largely overlooked activity that can improve readiness, cut

costs and deliver educational content and training to personnel, acting Navy Secretary

Thomas B. Modly said on Feb. 21.

Participating in a panel discussion with U.S. Army Secretary

Ryan McCarthy and U.S. Air Force Secretary Barbara Barrett at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Modly and the others were asked what technologies were underappreciated or promised unexpected benefits.

The Army secretary cited long-range precision fires. The Air Force secretary mentioned GPS and the other existing technologies in space that she noted were “ubiquitous but invisible.” Modly singled out digitalization for opening up “huge opportunities to improve our networks and how we do business through better use of technology.”

The Department of the Navy is at least 15 years behind the private sector in the ability “to understand where things are in our inventory system,” Modly said. As an example, he cited an audit conducted in 2019 that found a warehouse in Florida containing aircraft parts worth \$150 million.

“We didn’t know we had the parts. We didn’t know we had the warehouse,” he said. A week after the parts were input into the Navy’s inventory system, there were \$20 million in requisitions for those parts “for aircraft that were down for [lack of] parts we didn’t know we had,” Modly said.

During discussion of other topics, Modly said he didn’t think the Navy Department budget top line – or the Defense Department’s – was likely to grow much soon. To contend with the pressures of increasing the size of the surface force to 355 ships and improving readiness,

Modly said leaders will need to look internally to find savings “in the way we traditionally do things” to fund the priorities outlined in the National Defense Strategy.

He said some “North Stars” point the way in the recently completed Integrated Naval Force Structure Assessment, which has not been made public. Additionally, Modly has ordered a stem-to-stern review to find savings to fill the budget gap. If 5% to 6% of the \$207 billion Navy budget can be freed up, he said, “we can start moving down the path” to a 355-ship-plus Navy in the next 10 years. All three secretaries said they were cooperating with each other and industry on the development of hypersonic weapons.

However, Modly noted that moving such new technology to production is a “big, big leap.” He added that the military needs to send strong signals to industry about where it is headed. “But a lot of this technology is really new, so we have to make sure it works before we jump too far.”

Coast Guard Commandant: Illegal Chinese Fishing a ‘National Security Challenge’ That Warrants U.S. Response



U.S. Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Karl Schultz delivers his State of the Coast Guard address on Feb. 20. Defense Media Activity

ARLINGTON, Va. – The “Great Power Competition” with Russia and China isn’t limited to winning allies in geostrategic flash points or sailing through contested areas to promote freedom of the seas, according to the commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard.

Near-peer adversaries “are actively exploiting other nations’ natural resources, including fish stocks. In many cases [they are] challenging the sovereignty of smaller or less-developed nations,” Adm. Karl Schultz said in his annual State of the Coast Guard address, live-streamed Feb. 20 from Charleston, South Carolina.

Schultz identified China, which has the world’s largest distant water fishing fleet, as “one of the worst predatory fishing offenders,” engaging in Illegal, unreported, unregulated fishing (IUU). The problem goes beyond conservation and sustainability, he said – “This is a national security challenge warranting a clear response.”

An essential protein source for more than 40% the world’s population, fish stocks are critical to the sovereignty and economic security of many nations. The most conservative estimates put the annual loss to the global economy from IUU fishing at more than \$23 billion.

The Coast Guard could be a global leader in combatting IUU fishing through international cooperation and targeted operations, Schultz

said, adding that the agency was developing a progressive IUU Strategic Outlook, planned for release in late summer.

Continuing to strengthen our military support platform with [@weareboeingsc](#) at the State of the Coast Guard Address by admiral Karl Schultz today! pic.twitter.com/zlMiha3vLQ

– Charleston RiverDogs (@ChasRiverDogs) [February 20, 2020](#)

The United States already holds 16 counter-IUU fishing bilateral agreements in the Pacific and West Africa. “And we are pursuing additional agreements to help us push back against the destructive fishing practices that are leaving vast expanses of the ocean and seabed in ruins,” he said.

Nowhere is this more important than the Indo-Pacific, the epicenter of global maritime trade and geostrategic influence, Schultz said.

Many Pacific Island countries – even U.S. island territories – lack the capability to fully police their sovereign waters. Without mentioning any country by name, Schultz said he was most concerned by a “coercive state’s influence operations, intentions to construct dual-use infrastructure projects and implied military threats to persuade other states to heed their strategic agenda.”

To strengthen the community of island nations in Oceania, the Coast Guard will continue Operation AIGA, which last year deployed an oceangoing

tender and a fast-response cutter (FRC) to Samoa and American Samoa, where they conducted exercises with ships from the Royal Australian and Royal New Zealand navies. By year's end, delivery is expected of the first two, 154-foot FRCs to be homeported in Guam.

Marine Corps to Shift Acquisition Strategies, Training for China Rivalry, Commandant Says



Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David H. Berger speaks to Marines and Sailors during a visit to Marine Corps Air Station, Miramar, California, on Aug. 27. Berger told a congressional forum on Feb. 11 that the Navy and Marine Corps are discarding development measures that have slowed the production of new amphibious ships and other platforms. U.S. Marine Corps/Sgt. Olivia G. Knapp

WASHINGTON – To meet the pressing needs of the National Defense Strategy (NDS), the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps are discarding development measures that have slowed the production of new amphibious ships and other platforms, Marine Commandant Gen. David H. Berger said.

“We’re not going to do that,” Berger said of past procedures where “the Navy and Marine Corps figure out what we might need, then we get with industry, then we go back and forth for

a couple of years.”

Instead, he told a Feb. 11 congressional forum on amphibious warships, “We have to accelerate production now. We cannot wait four or five years to begin.” The requirements evaluation process is already underway, and it is teamed with industry to determine what is in the realm of possibility, Berger added.

Chairman of the Amphibious Warship Industrial Base Coalition Sam Perez spoke to coalition members and lawmakers this morning at our annual Congressional Forum, where he emphasized the importance of stable and predictable funding to maintain a strong industrial base.
pic.twitter.com/HThiH0zNP6

– *Amphibious Warship Industrial Base Coalition (@amphibwarships) [February 11, 2020](#)*

When he became commandant in July, Berger said his top priority is designing a force that could meet the threat of strategic competitors like China, which is outlined in the NDS. His Commandant’s Planning Guidance states that Marines will be trained and equipped as a naval expeditionary force-in-readiness, prepared to operate inside actively contested maritime spaces in support of fleet operations. His plan calls for both force structure and operational changes, including dispersing smaller and highly mobile Marine expeditionary units – carried by smaller, cheaper and more numerous surface vessels – that can move their base of

operations within 48 to 72 hours.

“The capability, the lethality of a forward Navy/Marine Corps team is the unique contribution that we have. This is what amphibious forces bring – the ability, at the times and place of your choosing, to put your forces where you want to, when you want to,” Berger told the Capitol Hill gathering, which was sponsored by the Amphibious Warship Industrial Base Coalition.

In his opening remarks at the forum, retired Navy Rear Adm. Sam Perez, the coalition’s chairman, noted that more than 70 companies in 44 states and more than 250 congressional districts provide parts worth more than \$1.4 billion for the construction of amphibious warships.

“We’re not getting smaller for smaller’s sake. We need resources, and when we shrink a little bit in structure, we’re going to take that money and pour it into the Marine Corps.”

Marine Commandant Gen. David H. Berger

Two long-term studies – to determine how many and what kind of ships the Navy will need in the next five to 15 years and what kind of Marines and Sailors should man them – will be released soon, Berger said. A Force Structure Assessment (FSA) conducted by the Navy in 2016 called for a 355-ship fleet. A new FSA, known as the Integrated Naval FSA (INFSA), to include the new integration of Navy and Marine Corps personnel and assets, is expected to

initiate a once-in-a-generation change in the Navy's mix of ships. Berger said the Corps' work on the INFSA is done, and he's waiting for Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Deputy Secretary David Norquist to complete their review.

In addition to the INFSA, the Marines have conducted their own Force Design Assessment to determine the size and structure of Marine end strength. That document also is awaiting review by Esper and acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly. In his commandant's guidance, Berger said he was prepared to reduce force structure in exchange for more modernization funding. The Department of the Navy's fiscal 2021 budget, released Feb. 10, called for reducing the size of the Marine Corps by 2,100 to 184,100 active-duty personnel.

"We're not getting smaller for smaller's sake," Berger told reporters after his speech to the amphibious group. "We need resources, and when we shrink a little bit in structure, we're going to take that money and pour it into the Marine Corps."