

Captain of COVID-19-Plagued Aircraft Carrier Relieved of Command



Capt. Brett Crozier addresses the crew for the first time as commanding officer of the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt during a change-of-command ceremony in November on the ship's flight deck. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Sean Lynch

ARLINGTON, Va. – The commander of the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt – whose letter to U.S. Navy brass about leadership's slow response to a coronavirus outbreak that endangered his crew was leaked to a San Francisco newspaper – has been relieved of his post.

Acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly announced April 2 that the carrier's commander, Capt. Brett Crozier, was being relieved of command of the ship, now docked in Guam, where nearly 100 Sailors tested positive for the novel coronavirus, COVID-19.

[See: New York, L.A. Hospital Ships Brace for Expected Wave of Patients](#)

In a hastily called press briefing, Modly said Crozier was not fired in retaliation for his letter but because the secretary had lost confidence in his leadership. Crozier “had allowed the complexity of his challenge with the [COVID-19] breakout on the ship to overwhelm his ability to act professionally, when acting professionally was what was needed.”

On March 30, in a four-page letter to Navy leadership, Crozier said that his ship had inadequate space to isolate or quarantine Sailors in keeping with guidance from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and the Navy.

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Acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly

“The spread of the disease is ongoing and accelerating,” Crozier wrote. He called for disembarking all but a token force of about 10% of the crew from the ship until all could be tested for the infection, isolated for the required 14 days and the ship adequately cleaned.

The letter was leaked to the San Francisco Chronicle, which published it two days later. The Chronicle article, which gained wide attention, included Crozier’s position that: “We are not at war. Sailors do not need to die. If we do not act now, we are failing to properly take care of our most trusted asset – our Sailors.”

Reaction to Crozier’s April 2 dismissal was swift from at least some leaders on Capitol Hill, where Democrats on the House Armed Services Committee – including its chairman, Rep. Adam Smith (D-Wash.) – decried the move. “While Captain Crozier clearly went outside the chain of command,” the congressmen wrote in a statement, his dismissal “is a destabilizing move that will likely put our service members at greater risk and jeopardize our fleet’s readiness.”



Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Michael Lusk takes a swab sample for COVID-19 testing aboard the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt on April 1 with the ship docked in Guam. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Dartañon D. De La Garza

At an April 1 press briefing at the Pentagon, Modly declined to say whether Crozier would be fired for going outside channels to draw attention to his ship’s plight. Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday also declined to comment on

the fate of Crozier's command of the Theodore Roosevelt.

Modly noted that Crozier stayed within Navy channels by sending his letter up the chain of command and added that the special medical team which deployed to the Roosevelt echoed some of the captain's concerns.

"Let me emphasize that this is exactly what we want from our officers and our medical teams. We need a lot of transparency in this situation and we need that information to flow up through the chain of command," Modly said at the briefing.