

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.