

# Navy Leadership Must Have Balance of Expertise from Civilian, Military and Industry Backgrounds: Analysts



Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday, center, participates in a panel discussion, Restoring Strength at Home: Toward a Robust and Resilient Industrial Base, at the Reagan National Defense Forum (RNDF), Simi Valley, Calif., Dec. 3, 2022. *U.S. NAVY / Lt. Michael Valania*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – To have a successful future, the U.S. Navy needs to have a proper balance of expertise within its leadership of those with military, civilian and industry backgrounds, analysts with the Center for Strategic and International Studies said during a Dec. 14 event at CSIS headquarters.

Rear Adm. David Oliver (Ret.) and Associate Professor Anand Toprani made the arguments while unveiling their latest book, “American Defense Reform: Lessons from Failures and Successes in the Navy.” The book analyzes the service over “four key periods of disruptive transformation,” such as the Cold War and the fallout from the Vietnam War. In the book, they argue that a collaborative effort between civilians, the military and industry is key to setting the Navy on a course for success in the future.

“When it becomes time to reshape and rebalance defense, process is more important than personalities,” read one slide presented by Oliver. “The military – our country’s subject matter experts – must be integrally involved while civilian leaders provide leadership but not direction.”

Toprani argued that often, civilian leaders step in to provide direction on military matters when they are not qualified to do so, and civilian leaders should trust military leaders to handle those aspects.

“Just because you have the statutory power to direct, doesn’t mean they should direct it in matters they don’t have competency too,” he said.

Also, the military is often reluctant to accept innovation, and so the commercial world should become more involved in the defense industry to stem the “explosive” weapons cost growth, they argued.

To address this imbalance, Oliver and Toprani say the Navy should establish a representative team of senior subject matter experts; gather information on past, present and future trends from the trusted sources of each of the services and the Office of the Secretary of Defense; regularly review advancements in commercial technology; audit existing programs to determine opportunity costs; and review major defense acquisition programs.

People from both civilian and military backgrounds have something to offer, and the Navy should be doing a better job at leveraging their expertise, Toprani argued.

“Both sides should seek to leverage each other’s strengths,” he said.