

SecNav Braithwaite Aims to Create New 1st Fleet for Indo-Pacific



Secretary of the Navy Kenneth J. Braithwaite, second from right, shown during a visit to the National Museum of the U.S. Navy in early November. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Alexander C. Kubitza

ARLINGTON, Va. – U.S. Navy Secretary Kenneth J. Braithwaite says he plans to establish a new numbered fleet as a “formidable deterrence” to China, basing it closer to allies and partner nations “at the crossroads between the Indian and Pacific oceans.”

“If we’re really going to have an Indo-Pacom (U.S. Indo-Pacific Command) footprint, we can’t just rely on the 7th Fleet in Japan,” Braithwaite announced Nov. 17 to webinar participants at the annual symposium of the Naval Submarine League.

“We have to look to our other allies and partners like Singapore, like India and actually put a numbered fleet where it would be extremely relevant if, God forbid, we were to get in any kind of a dust-up,” Braithwaite said. His announcement came just after describing his recent visit with Pacific and Asian partners concerned about China’s aggressive actions in the South China Sea and elsewhere.

Braithwaite said he was alarmed by China’s “aggressiveness around the Globe,” from the Arctic to the Far East. “Not since the War of 1812 has the United States and our sovereignty been under the kind of pressures that we see today,” he said, adding the planned 1st Fleet, “can provide a formidable deterrence.”

Braithwaite said he had not yet discussed his plan with new acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller, "but I've crossed all the T's and dotted all the other I's."

He said the new 1st Fleet might be based in Singapore, where he recently met with officials to discuss enhanced Naval presence. If not in Singapore, "we're going to look to make it more expeditionary oriented and move it across the Pacific until it is where our allies and partners see that it could best assist them as well as assist us," said Braithwaite.

He added that he wanted to ensure in the time he has left as Navy Secretary "that I opened the door to these nations, recognizing the challenges they have and to offer them the kind of support that we can provide." Braithwaite also said he was seeking their partnership and alliance with us, because the United States alone will never be able to stand up against the PRC (People's Republic of China) without having our allies and partners close to us.