

SECNAV Spencer: Navy, Marine Corps 'More Ready, Lethal' Now than Last Year

ARLINGTON, Va. – The civilian head of the Department of the Navy said that measures taken over his first year in office have improved the condition of the Navy and Marine Corps forces and enabled future growth of the fleet.

“We’re a more ready and lethal force than we were last year – in both services,” said Navy Secretary (SECNAV) Richard V. Spencer, speaking Aug. 7 to reporters at a media roundtable in the Pentagon.

Spencer said that as he dove into his job last year he “did not have a full appreciation of the readiness hole, how deep it was, how wide it was.”

Having commissioned his Strategic Readiness Review, Spencer set out to change the culture of the Navy and Marine Corps, adopting best practices from corporations that executed successful turnarounds from crises.

A data sheet for the roundtable said that “all of the recommendations of the Readiness and Reform Oversight Council are in progress; 78 will be implemented by the end of the fiscal year (out of 111 under review).”

Spencer cited improvements in aviation readiness, particularly progress in processing aircraft through depot-level maintenance and saving labor time when the aircraft were returned to their squadrons.

Regarding sustainment, Spencer said the historical emphasis on acquisition of new systems lacked focus on sustainment over the life of the systems. He said the Navy is trying to bake

that sustainment into the total process.

Surface ship maintenance, which the Navy has struggled to sustain for years, is an area that remains of concern to the secretary.

“We have a capacity issue that we are going to have to deal with,” he said, a challenge that will increase as the fleet grows to the mandated 355-ship battle force.

One measure undertaken by the secretary was to streamline and clarify the chain of accountability, with the type commander being “the belly button that’s responsible for the maintenance of the ships.”

Regarding the Optimized Fleet Response Plan’s record of ships emerging from planned maintenance on time, Spencer said he had seen demonstrable evidence that it’s better.

“I’ve seen little pockets of sunshine here and there. This is getting to the mantra that ‘You’ve got to keep to schedule.’ What will it take to get us back to a fleet schedule? That is about two years away.”

He also cited a savings of approximately \$4 billion with multi-year procurements of the Virginia-class attack submarine, the F/A-18 Super Hornet strike fighter, the E-2D Advanced Hawkeye early warning aircraft and the SM-6 surface-to-air missile.

Talking with defense industry representatives was critical to acquisition success and sustaining readiness, he said. He also pointed out that shared risk results in shared benefits, and that industry needs to make a profit to be able to provide the needed weapons.

The SECNAV also pointed out success in strengthening U.S. partners and allies with new and more weapons, with \$25 billion of Foreign Military Sales (FMS).

“FMS now operates at the speed of relevance,” he said.

Spencer also pointed to the new initiative to develop a hypersonic weapon was benefiting from inter-service cooperation, with a tri-service memorandum of agreement in place to synchronize resources and expertise.

The focus on continuous education of the acquisition work force has yielded good results, he said, with 97 percent of the 55,000 workers having earned their respective certifications.

In a wrap-up, Spencer said that “we’re going to get to 355 [ships] – I’m totally convinced.

“We’re going to have to self-fund some of our expansion,” he added later in response to a reporter’s question.