

**Admiral Lisa Franchetti
Chief of Naval Operations**

**Defense Writers Group
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Moderator: Good morning, everyone. I'm Thom Shanker, Director of the Project for Media and National Security. We have a very special guest today, Admiral Lisa Franchetti, Chief of Naval Operations. I know you know her distinguished military bio. What you might not know, she has an undergraduate degree in journalism from Northwestern, one of the finest J schools in the country. I know the Navy's your home, so I'm not going to say welcome home, Admiral -- I'll say welcome back.

Admiral Franchetti: Thank you.

Moderator: The ground rules are the same as always. This is on the record. You can record for accuracy of quotes, but there's no rebroadcast of audio or video. I'll ask the first question, then we'll go to the table. More than a dozen people emailed in advance. We'll get to as many as we possibly can in the time allowed, and then we'll save the last few minutes for the Admiral's closing comments.

Admiral, thank you for joining us.

Admiral Franchetti: Thank you.

Moderator: My opening question. You recently released your Strategic Guidance to the Navy. Your Navigation Plan focuses heavily on the PRC and the year 2027. I'm sure it's not a coincidence that's also the year that Xi Jinping has said he wants his military to be capable of retaking Taiwan.

So, can you talk about your concerns, analysis of Chinese defenses and offenses that are so worrisome to you, and how will you structure and restructure the Navy between now and 2027 to deter China? And I use deter especially because of the military axiom, it's always better to deter war than fight one.

Admiral Franchetti: Definitely. Thanks, Thom, and again, thank you for organizing and thanks everybody for being here. And thanks for the opportunity to talk a little bit about the Navigation Plan and the thinking that went into that.

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I would say to your specific question, first of all I don't believe that conflict with China is inevitable or imminent, but it's pretty clear that based on what Chairman Xi has said, that his military forces need to be ready by 2027 for war. He wants them to be a world class military, capable of global operations by 2035. And we know that they are really doing their investments through their industrial base, through their production of military capabilities, through the integration of their different forces, that they are taking action to get after his charge to be ready.

So as the CNO who's going to be the CNO in 2027, I'm compelled to do more and do more faster.

So as I step back and I looked at everything that China is doing both in their defense industrial base, in the capabilities they're doing, as well as their aggressive behavior that we're seeing all around the region, their Belt and Road Initiative, they're getting footholds in various countries all around the world, I knew that as the NDS says, that China is the pacing challenge and that's what I really need to be focused on.

So I'm looking at what can I do to think, act and operate differently to make our Navy even more ready? I think we're ready today for anything that comes our way, but we need to be more ready by 2027.

So that's what the Nav Plan is really all about. It looks at sort of two different time horizons, and we can certainly talk about this more during the course of the conversation.

The near term time horizon where I have put forth Project 33 which are seven areas that we've already been working on, but I think they're areas where I can really put my thumb on the scale and where we can accelerate our advantage in those seven areas to get after the capabilities we need and raise that baseline level of readiness for our forces by 2027.

The second part is really getting after the capabilities we need for a longer term advantage, and that's all about the Navy's contribution to what I call the Joint Warfighting Ecosystem. One of those capabilities that we need to be able to integrate with the other services and with our allies and partners to have that long term enduring advantage.

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So that's how I'm framing the Navigation Plan. I'm really excited about it. It was a very good discussion with all of our four-star leadership that these are the areas that we need to get after and I have broad commitment across the Navy that this is what we need to do to think, act and operate differently, to be in a more ready place by 2027.

Moderator: Thanks. I have some follow-ups but I want to be a good host and get to the other questions.

Also, one small audio/visual. In your plan you talk about setting some North Stars. That's why I wore my constellation neck tie, so you can always find the North Star.

Admiral Franchetti: Excellent. It is a really important concept and I'd be happy to talk about that a little bit, but the North Star is to be more ready by 2027 and raise that base line [inaudible] talks about in the Nav Plan. But having those stretch goals, having the objectives that we really need to reach for, that's going to drive more effective performance and our ability to measure ourselves along the way to make sure that we're either on plan, off plan, ahead of plan, and what do we need to do to make sure we're going to meet those targets?

Moderator: Thanks so much.

Our first questioner is Lolita Baldor, AP. I didn't see her.

Sam LaGrone, US Naval Institute News.

DWG: I think that's me here today. [Inaudible].

I wanted to ask you about the proposed [inaudible] shift [inaudible] manning issues. Do you have an update on that potential proposal and how the Navy will implement it and mitigate any impacts of that across the fleet?

Admiral Franchetti: Sure. First of all, our logistics force capability is really important to everything we do. We've talked a lot in the past few years really about the importance of that force, the importance of logistics. Certainly there are many examples throughout history that amateurs talk tactics and professional talk logistics. This is a critical capability for us.

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So we have been working with our Secretary and Military Sealift Command to really better understand what are the challenges that our civilian mariners are facing in their ability to really get after their rotational employment as they have their model of operating on all of our different classes of ships.

So what we're doing now is really taking a step back to look at what is the health of the civilian mariner community, how do we continue to provide incentives for that community to be able to serve to the best of their ability, and really value their performance every single day.

We had a lot of barriers in place, maybe some of them even administrative, for them to be able to easily go from their home to their work and back and forth. So we really want to improve the processes we're doing. We also have a legislative proposal in to be able to raise their salaries. Again, some of these things are really important as we're competing with a very high demand across the global maritime industry to be able to man both our commercial ships, but for us in, in particular the Military Sealift Command ships.

So what we're looking at doing is how do we best man the ships that we have, because we need to maintain the standards of operational effectiveness and safety. We know we need to have our ships out there to be able to resupply all of our carrier strike groups and our amphibious readiness groups as they're out. So we're working to do that right now. So that's step one of the process. While we continue to go out and meet with all the input sources through our merchant marine academies to talk with the sailors, the students there about the value of service and how they can be part of our team.

DWG: Do you have a timeline for when you're looking to make any decisions on that? Or [inaudible] sideline [inaudible]?

Admiral Franchetti: I don't know that that's a good word. I wouldn't say that we're sidelining them. I would say that we're reprioritizing our manning to make sure that we can have the ships that we need out there right now to be able to support all of the operations all around the world while we get more healthy with the number of civilian mariners we have. Then look at phasing the ships back into service, full service.

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DWG: It sounds like this is an FY25 manning issue that you have to solve for this next fiscal year. Would you say that's fair?

Admiral Franchetti: I think we need to look at it over the long term. I think this is a challenge that we really identified that started really in the pandemic with some of the practices that were in place that made it difficult for our civilian mariners to get relieved on time. This is really the biggest focus of our civilian mariners. They want to be, like everyone else, have a predictable life, and they want to be able to do that and we owe that to them, so that's what we're getting after. I can't give you a timeline on how long it's going to take to work our way through that, but again, it's really focused on putting the civilian mariner at the center of the universe, and how can we best make it -- just like we do with our sailors. What's their quality of service? What's their quality of life? And again, how can we continue to retain the ones we have and increase the population of CivMars. Thank you.

Moderator: Next is Dan Lamothe of the Washington Post.

DWG: Thanks for your time this morning.

Sort of a two-part question. The first half, the Navy was involved [inaudible] yesterday as we saw that attack on Israel. Did you connect the ship COs that were involved? What did they use to participate? How did they do with those 12 missiles they launched?

And then taking a step back and looking at this more broadly, we're a year into heightened ops now in the Middle East as a result of the war in Gaza. How are you looking at that? How are you getting after that? Particularly given the plan that you just released when you have so many scarce assets -- the MEUs, the carrier strike groups and other things that are involved and seemingly very hard to pull away from that conflict?

Admiral Franchetti: Thank you. First let me say how proud I am of our team that's operating over there. As you said, we've had forces there in the Middle East for just about a year, and I'm really proud and happy that we've been able to provide all these different options for our nations' decisionmakers initially with our forces that were available to make sure that the conflict did not escalate out of the region. Again, we've been on

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station being able to drive those options. And again, I'm super proud of the team that's out there. I had a chance to talk with all of the Ike ships and their crews when they came back, and I could not find a more motivated group of people and proud of their mission to save lives and really get after the things that they've been trained to do.

I can't really provide a lot of details on the specific operations of yesterday, but what I can say is it's our commitment to Israel to ensure that Israel is able to defend itself for our ability to commit to their defense and support the defense of both Israel as well as our forces and our troops and our ships that are operating there in the region. And that commitment is ironclad.

Our ships are arrayed in the manner that the CENTCOM commander wants them to be, to be able to be postured, to be able to respond to an attack like this. And again, as you saw in the reporting yesterday, the Cole and the Bulkeley were able to provide for that defense.

So again, we are ready for any action that comes our way there in the Middle East, just like we are all over the rest of the world.

DWG: Can we drill down on the second half?

Admiral Franchetti: Again, our force is a global force and we have a force generation process that allows us to be able to have carrier strike groups, ARG MEUs ready for tasking. And all of our forces that are deployed and have been deployed in the Middle East are operating on their regular schedule. These are their planned deployments. Where they go during the deployment from a CNO perspective, that is an agnostic about where they go, because they're operating wherever the nation needs them to operate. My responsibility is to make sure that they're trained, manned, certified, ready to go, and that we manage their schedule so when they come back they are able to get into their maintenance cycle and be ready to start all over again,

So the good news is that again, because all of these deployments have been on their schedule, we've been able to meet all of our commitments in the Middle East, we're meeting our commitments all over the world with our forces, and the ships especially in the Ike strike group, they're all back right now. None of their

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maintenance was either delayed or deferred. They're actually starting into their maintenance phases right now.

What we can anticipate out of that is because the ships were extended several months on deployment, what we normally see is there will be some additional work that will need to be done during the yard period, so it will perhaps be extended a little bit longer, but we don't intend to delay any of the starts of these maintenance periods, and we want to get them ready go to as soon as they're able to go.

DWG: Is it fair to assume we may see the deferred maintenance on the vessels that are there now that the Secretary mentioned I believe Sunday would also likely be extended?

Admiral Franchetti: All of the ships out there, we're continuing to monitor them on their extensions. But Ike strike group and her units associated with her, they were extended to almost nine months when they came home. And again, we've been able to manage their schedules, getting them back and adjusting their maintenance periods to make sure that we're going to get everything done that we need to get done.

And I think that ties right into the Nav Plan that you just mentioned, how does that affect the Nav Plan. My goal, and it has been my goal since day one is to get more players on the field. That's more platforms that are ready to be able to do their job with all the capability and capacity that they need to do their job, but also the people that go with that.

So this commitment to getting this maintenance done, getting people back into their regular routine trading cycle. That is how we're going to get more players on the field.

Moderator: Next is Tony Capaccio of Bloomberg.

DWG: I might try the Middle East question again. The ecosystem you talk about, you want to improve the ecosystem and the Navy's participation. What ecosystem did the Cole and the Bulkeley fall in on yesterday? Did they work with the Israeli command and control space-based assets from the Air Force? What ecosystem did they participate in to allow their shots?

Admiral Franchetti: I can't speak to the actual operations that happened yesterday so I don't have any ability to provide more

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information on the direct actions that happened yesterday. But I think more broadly when I talk about the joint warfighting ecosystem, just from a global perspective, I mean the idea is that we have -- it's a system of systems conversation. So you have a warfighting ecosystem which is enabled by the information warfare domain, space, cyber, the things that you've mentioned. Then we have all of the services as well as our allies and partners are bringing different capabilities into that space.

So sometimes your capability is enabling the capabilities of another service. Sometimes you are the one that is enabled by other services. So I like to think about it as an orchestra. All of the parts of an orchestra are going to play and you're going to get the music and you're going to create that music because everyone knows what their role is and they're playing at their right time. So if you think about an ecosystem with that orchestra in a warfighting domain, maybe you have a DDG that's operating far forward. It knows it needs to do a land-based strike but it doesn't have any organic information about that. It may get that initially from an overhead sensor, and then maybe the targeting is refined by a forward operating sensor, maybe from a Marine or Army or Special Forces or some other sensor, an allied and partner sensor. And then it can refine that. Maybe you need to have some type of deception that goes with that launch. All that is not really being seen by the individual CO, so that's about fighting from our Maritime Operation Center. But it also is that ecosystem.

I don't have any specific examples for yesterday but I just think more broadly if you look to future warfighting in 5, 10, 15 years from now, we need to be able to operate in that broader environment.

DWG: Getting more players on the field. Two of your big players are submarines, the Virginia-class and Columbia. Both are having major issues right now. You're a journalism student. Would you consider the submarine program's in crisis right now given the delays this welding issue -- I'm not trying to [inaudible] but delays and the cost overruns on both Virginia-class and Columbia. Are they in a crisis right now from your journalism background?

Admiral Franchetti: As you rightly said, Columbia is our number one acquisition priority. Virginia is really important to us.

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These are advantages that we have that are really important in this warfighting ecosystem that we know that our ballistic missile submarines are critically important to underwriting our strategic deterrence all around the world. And of course Virginia's continuing to provide us distinct advantage.

So I'm focused on the industrial base and all of our investments that we're making right now to really get after some of the challenges in workforce, in workforce retention, in supply chain, and that is what I'm focused on. And how do we accelerate the building of those submarines, both Columbia and the Virginias, to get them up to the cadence that we need them to be at.

DWG: You've got a \$20 billion cost overrun projected on the Virginia-class, ma'am, in the next five years. How are you trying to deal with that?

Admiral Franchetti: With our eyes wide open and working with industry on all of the challenges that industrial base is facing right now. And again, I'm really confident that through these investments that we're making right now and through some of the things that we're doing to make sure that we have a target investment, we understand the return on investment, and that they are moving the needle in the direction that we want to see, that we are going to get where we need to be on that.

Moderator: Just to use the prerogative of the chair, we had Jane Harmon and Eric Edelman here a few weeks ago, the Congressional National Defense Review, and they made the point that our industrial base, the workers in the industrial base, need to be a national security priority. There just aren't enough people to do that kind of work.

Admiral Franchetti: And I would just offer, I talk about call to service, and I've been talking about that really since I was the Vice Chief. To me it's not just about call to service in a uniform, it's call to service in the defense or weapons industrial base too. AS I've gone around and you meet with industry, that's their number one concern. It's not just recruiting the workers, but it's also retaining them. People get a lot of options out there with the choices that they can make in their lives and I really want to appeal to people to serve whether it's in the uniform or whether it's in the defense industrial base.

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And I do think it starts back in high school. So it's a partnership that we need to have with local, state, governors, education, to make sure that as we can create pipelines and people want to be a welder, they can see that this is an amazing way to live and have a great career for your family. A great place for you to put down your roots. There's a lot of good work that can be done, and we have a lot of initiatives going in that regard. I as at HII, and they have a ship fitter training program with Blue Forge Alliance, the contract that was just let, they have their BuildSubmarines.com which is heavily recruiting in that, but they also have in place a welder school in Danville, additive manufacturing. So these are some things that we really need to get after. I think to really kind of put that acceleration into the workforce, that's going to help everywhere. Not just in submarines, but in shipbuilding, aircraft, everything we need to be able to do.

Moderator: Next is Nick [Mosler] of Inside Defense.

DWG: The Nav Plan of course sets its sights on 2027 but it also speaks to the need to balance modernization and [inaudible] readiness. So we've already seen the Navy's 2025 budget, but I'm curious in 2026 and 2027 can you give us an idea of the kind of budget priorities, especially with 2027, really near term [inaudible]?

Admiral Franchetti: First, on the acquisition side, definitely Columbia, number one priority and those investments are really top of mind. But I'm focused broadly in readiness as my first priority, then capability, then capacity in that order. If we want to be more ready by 2027, that really needs to be my focus so that's what I'm going to be focused on through the budget process and really through, more broadly, when you talk about readiness and raising the combat surge readiness by 80 percent, getting more players on the field, that means that we really need to attack getting ships and submarines, aircraft in and out of maintenance on time. So that's a big priority for me in the upcoming budget for sure.

The other part is capabilities. What are the capabilities that we can get in the near term to be more ready for 2027. I think that comes from an integrated view, again, holistically of how we're going to fight and that's a little bit about the joint warfighting ecosystem in the second part of the Nav Plan. We

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talk about that enduring advantage, really looking at what capabilities can deliver by 2027 and where can we accelerate them, whether they're with our conventionally manned platforms or whether it's things we can do in robotic and autonomous systems to be able to expand the reach, the lethality and the depth of our conventional platforms.

DWG: On the subject of those capabilities, are there any specific systems or capabilities in mind, like you said that you could field that quickly?

Admiral Franchetti: There's a lot of good initiatives that are going on in that. We stood up our Disruptive Capabilities Office probably just a little bit over a year ago now, to really take and find that technology that's already out there, ripe and ready to go and ready to be integrated, then working through the [Raider] Fund, working with DIU and through our Fleet Experimentations, which happens very extensively. Because what we really want to do is understand what the fleets need and then we can help get after those capabilities more effectively, whether we're using the prototypes that we've been using out at Fifth Fleet in Task Force 59, whether we're leveraging the work done in the Flex series at Fourth Fleet where they have a lot of unmanned ISR platforms going to get after that large space for more effective maritime domain awareness. So those are some things. And then even most recently with the unmanned surface vessels that we've been able to operate going from San Diego to Guam to Australia and back. We're learning a lot in that space.

So as the service chief, once I know what the fleets need, I need to get the concept operation and employment from the fleets, then I can figure out how do we need to man, train, sustain, organize ourselves to be able to have a home for them, be able to effectively employ them, and make sure that we have all the right tools in place that when we get the capability we can actually use it and integrate it.

That's what I'm focused on in my objective in the Nav Plan is really to make sure that we have going forward, are fully able to integrate the manned/unmanned teaming concepts through these platforms. Whether it's under the sea, on the sea, or above the sea.

DWG: You mentioned a lot of unmanned systems in that kind of synopsis. Do you see unmanned as like a critical deterrence

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difference-maker by 2027?

Admiral Franchetti: I definitely do. Unmanned has the ability both in the traditional types of things, the maritime domain awareness, sea control, all the things you think about. I like to think about unmanned platforms as things that can do things that are dull, dirty or dangerous. You think about having unmanned platforms to go after mines, things that you really wouldn't want to put a person in, but you can get unmanned platforms for that. Dull, maritime domain awareness. I've certainly done my share of driving around in the ocean looking for stuff, but if you can get an unmanned platform to do that, you can get a person to look at an anomaly. And of course dirty. Where can we free up the sailors. You can get a Roomba to clean your bilge. That's what I'd rather do rather than having a sailor down there.

So I'm excited about all of the things that we're going to be able to do.

Moderator: I like that -- dull, dirty and dangerous.

Next is Steve Trimble, Aviation Week.

In your aviation portfolio, the U.S. Air Force this year has deferred their [inaudible] Next Generation Air Dominance, the platform, the crewed platform. The U.S. Navy is planning to do that in a year. The Air Force has said that they deferred it so that they can review the requirements with a focus on adaptability and affordability. How does the Navy look at that? Has that changed how the Navy views it or the timeline for it? And is it taking any of those Air Force changes no board?

Admiral Franchetti: Certainly our aviation, as you talked about submarines being a strategic advantage, and certainly our air platforms are equally one of our strategic advantages we have. With F/A-XX, you know, we're focused on that being our replacement for F/A-18 and the Growlers in the 2030s timeframe. And again, we expect that sixth generation platform to be able to have advanced sensor, advanced lethality, advanced range, and being able to integrate with manned and unmanned capabilities together. I think that's one of the things we learned from the Air Force and the work they're doing to integrate that with what we know that we need to be able to do. That's what we're looking at.

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We have three companies that have provided proposals for that and we're actually in source selection right now.

DWG: Is there any concern that with the Air Force [inaudible], there are some potentially common enabling technologies. Next Generation Adaptive Propulsion is one of them. The Air Force is taking the lead on that. If they continue to push out their NGAD does that have an effect on your F/A-XX?

Admiral Franchetti: I think it's important, and this is I think more broadly, that as all the services work together to make sure that they have complementary capabilities, where can we learn from each other, and again, where can we leverage that learning so we can be more common in the future? I think that's actually really important.

Moderator: Caitlyn Burchett of Stripes.

DWG: Good morning. I wanted to talk about the Navy recently awarded the multi-amphib deal to HII. I understand that these ships are not going to join the fleet for years, but do they play into Project 33 at all? What does this mean for the Navy? Especially with a potential future conflict with China?

Admiral Franchetti: I'm really excited about the award. Again, the Navy/Marine Corps team, I keep talking about all these strategic advantages that we have, but I really do -- the Navy's doing an amazing job and I'm so proud of them, and the fact that we can work with the Marine Corps everywhere, that really gives us a lot of flexibility and it provides more options.

So the good news about this multi-ship award, a couple of things. First of all, it just reaffirms our commitment to the Marine Corps, their mission, force design, all the things that the Marine Corps and Navy team need to be able to do in the future. So there's a requirement for 31 amphibs. This will make sure that we stay at the 31 amphibs in the right arrangements that we need them, and the Marine Corps is very focused on that and so are we.

I think the other piece is, I've gone around to industry and visited all of our shipbuilders. They really want predictability. They want to know. They want to have headlights, they want to know what's coming because then they

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can make the capital investments they need to make, they can hire the workforce they need to make. And I think with this predictability and then kind of the ability to learn quickly and fold that learning into the construction of the next ship, we see that when shipyards are working on similar classes of ship. They can really accelerate their performance, just because they get the routines down and they can really save time, and we're excited about that.

So this, again -- Project 33 is really focused on the what can we do by 2027 timeframe, but the long term enduring advantage, we know that amphibious ships, ARG MEUS, they're going to have a role to play in the delivering future warfighting advantage. So this is a great news story.

Some of our amphibs are older and again, so as new ships come on line this will allow us to have the best technology and capability for our Navy/Marine Corps team and really for the Joint Force going forward.

DWG: A quick follow-up, some of the amphibs just over the past year have had some mechanical problems and [inaudible] it did cause s delay for its deployment. Is that just an issue of just not being able to prioritize maintenance? And is that something that you would like to see prioritized more so in the future going forward?

Admiral Franchetti: I'm very focused on maintenance for all of our ships, amphib ships, destroyers, submarines, every type of platform we have because again, getting ships in and out of maintenance on time is going to get more players on the field.

I think a lot of things that we've done, and we're doing deep dives on amphibious readiness in particular, but more broadly when we took a step back and looked at some of the systemic problems that we were seeing in maintenance, there are some things that we needed to do on the Navy side, so a few things that we've done.

Number one, we are backing up our planning to make sure that the work packages are locked in ahead of time, at least 180 days out. Believe it or not, sometimes those packages weren't locked in until a little bit closer to the availability. It makes it really difficult for everyone to plan.

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The other one is, we had had sort of a just-in-time approach to being able to order some of the supplies, the government furnished materials, the spare parts. We know there's going to be some consistent things that we need to do in maintenance periods, so how do we get ahead of that? So instead of just-in-time have just-in-case. So we're buying [routable] pools, we're having more parts available. So when the shipyard needs them they're ready, so we don't have a delay just because they don't have the parts that they can be able to use.

Those are just some of the things we've done.

This is really showing promise. We have a perform-to-plan process where we are using data to understand what is our plan, where are we on the plan, and if we're off plan, why, and how do we solve that. And I think we've seen already at Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard, the United States Hawaii almost came out on time. She had a last minute mechanical challenge that needed repaired that wasn't related to the overhaul. Then the Minnesota, she came out on time. And again, this is one of the yards where we have the pool of parts and also they have repetitive procedures because they're doing maintenance on the same class of submarine.

I think if you look at our ships, I want to make sure I get my numbers right. In FY22 our on-time completion rate of availabilities was 36 percent. In '23 we moved up to 41 percent. And as of June of this year we're on track for 67 percent on-time maintenance completion rate on that ship side of the house.

And of course aviation led the way with all of this. As Secretary Mattis challenged us back in 2018 to raise our fighter readiness from 50 percent to 80 percent, and we were able to achieve that and we've been able to maintain that. Now scaling that to all the other type model series.

So maintenance -- I'm sorry to go on so long, but maintenance is a very big priority for me because in and out on time, that is really the lynch-pin to all of our training, readiness and certification, deploying on time, and having more forces ready at any time that we might need them.

Moderator: Jim Garamone is next on the list. I don't see Jim today.

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Dmitry Kirsanov, TASS.

DWG: Good morning, Admiral. Thank you for doing this.

I was hoping to get an update on the Incidents At Sea, the agreement signed by Moscow in Washington in 1972. Is the agreement still being implemented? Is it operational? We haven't heard about it for a while. And do the two sides still hold annual meetings to discuss the implementation of the [inaudible]. Is the U.S. committed to the INCSEA agreement or thinking about pulling out of it?

Admiral Franchetti: Thank you for that question. The INCSEA agreement, as you said, it's been in place since 1972. It is something that we continue to train to. Again, prevention for the International Agreement for Prevention of Incidents at Sea. We do train to that.

As far as the annual talks, I think our last talks were held in 2021. There haven't been any talks since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. But I don't have any information on any further developments on the treat itself or if there are any conversations going on about it.

DWG: What is the current thinking?

Admiral Franchetti: I don't have any other information on that.

DWG: Thank you.

Moderator: Diego Laje of Signal. Nope

Justin Katz of Breaking Defense.

DWG: Hi, thank you for doing this.

I wanted to ask you about, in your Nav Plan you have this 80 percent surge readiness. All of your recent predecessors have kind of focused on maintenance and readiness in some way, but this goal that you've set with surge readiness seems a little bit unique for how they characterized it. So I wanted to ask you kind of your thinking on how you arrived at that statistic and why did you characterize it in surge readiness rather than how Maybe Admiral Gilday did it?

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Secondly, what do you need to do to get there? And do those actions differ from the normal actions we've heard of whenever we've talked about how do you get ships out of maintenance on time?

Admiral Franchetti: It is a different term. Probably the most important thing is to have a good discussion just about the term in general. So combat surge readiness. Really the way I'm thinking about it, it's a crisis force generation term and it's really identifying units that can be made ready through tailored training and certification to go out and be deployed to do a mission outside of the OFRP. So normally we have a pretty lock-step process -- maintain, train, certify, deploy. This is outside of that process. Think back to 9/11. We know that all of a sudden we needed to get ships underway to do different missions, to go somewhere and do something. We want to be able to have a process through each one of our communities -- aviation, surface and submarines -- that they can certify a ship as combat surge ready and get it out the door on the timeline that it's needed.

So that's what I'm thinking about in terms of combat surge ready. So that's how I got to that idea.

Then it's a stretch goal. Like all of the goals in the Nav Plan, every one of them is a stretch goal. Every one of them has a single accountable individual that's responsible to me. I'm responsible but I'm holding them accountable also for getting after the goal.

They're measurable for a reason, which is why we picked the 80 percent, because we think that's a stretch goal and it will push people harder to get after that. So each community will be looking at how do they get to that 80 percent right now like I talked about with the F-18s being 80 percent ready right now. How do we get that across every other type model series, how do we get that out of our ships, and how do we get that out of our submarines?

DWG: So it sounds like you corrected my understanding a little bit. If this is less about individual ships and this is more about 80 percent across the Navy's combat units, for lack of another term?

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Admiral Franchetti: Across the combat units.

DWG: I was thinking about it purely in terms of ships, but you were just saying aviation included --

Admiral Franchetti: It's every platform. Aviation, submarine and ships too.

DWG: Thank you.

Admiral Franchetti: I try to be more broadly about the Navy. We tend to sometimes focus on just the ships, but it's really everything. Because, again, we need that whole ecosystem to be available for the Secretary of Defense and for the president to be able to use all the tools available.

Moderator: Joshua Keating.

DWG: Thanks so much, Admiral, for doing this.

You talked a bit about China as the pacing challenge and their military buildup. But we've also seen China increasingly using some gray zone tactics, using Coast Guard ships, [inaudible] mission [inaudible], tools of power projection both [inaudible] and Taiwan. Can you highlight [inaudible] and how you sort of plan for contingencies [inaudible]?

Admiral Franchetti: Thank you. As I mentioned earlier, we've certainly seen China not just on the wartime footing on its industrial base, but we're seeing that use of all the different types of forces to get after and create really a challenged environment especially in the South China Sea for its neighbors.

I think the way I think about it is, it's really important to make sure that we are present in this space and that we are operating alongside our allies and partners over there in the South China Sea. We're continuing to do, we just finished up another big maritime activity, I think we like to call it, over there with the U.S., Philippines, Australia, Japan. And I think being present and continuing to operate and make sure that all of our navies can work together to deter that type of behavior and then respond to it if necessary. That's how I'm thinking about it.

I was just in the Philippines earlier this summer, had a great

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chance to meet with their head of the Navy and get some ideas on what he's thinking about and how he's training his forces to be able to be ready to respond because, again, every Navy should be able to operate freely in international waters and not be intimidated and we really want to stand up for that. I know we have like-minded navies over there that want to do that as well. We really have to keep that rules-based international order in place to make sure everybody has free use of the commons.

Moderator: Chris Gordon, Air and Space Forces.

DWG: Thank you, ma'am.

What [inaudible] carriers from the Pacific to the Middle East, and what have you done to perhaps mitigate some of those gaps in capability [inaudible] carriers to the Middle East?

Admiral Franchetti: I think the great thing about the Navy is that we are a globally deployable force and we provide that flexibility, really. There's no boundaries in the ocean. Adversaries know no boundaries in the ability to flex ships back and forth. I think it's really a testament to the training process that we have and the certification and the ability of all our forces to be able to really meet whatever the challenge is. Whether they originally plan to go to the Pacific or then they plan to go into the Middle East, they're ready to be able to respond wherever they need to go.

So the combatant commanders, they work together with the Secretary of Defense to mitigate and understand the risk that they are having, if they have any risk due to that. But certainly we have a robust complement of forces in the Indo-Pacific right now.

As I just mentioned, we're continuing to do all of our routine exercises that we have there.

The other part that's very interesting is that our European partners, they're deploying into the Indo-Pacific as well so the Italian Ship Cavour, she was just over there, fully integrated with all the different navies there. The French are planning on doing a deployment of Charles de Gaulles in the coming year. And then of course the British will be back with their Prince of Wales, and then Queen Elizabeth as they go through their deployments.

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So that's how I look at it. It's really an integrated strategy wherever we are around the world, having all the forces that we need to be able to respond, deter our potential adversaries and respond in a crisis. And I think we're well positioned and postured to be able to do that.

DWG: [Inaudible] in the Pacific [inaudible] carriers deployed to the Middle East to cover that?

Admiral Franchetti: As the Chief of Naval Operations my job is just to provide the forces, and it's really the combatant commander and the fleet commander's job to operate them. So I personally haven't done anything other than make sure that all of our forces are ready to go and able to meet their commitments over there.

Moderator: That was the last from the list. We have time for some from the table.

DWG: Admiral, thank you for coming here. Mike Lynn, with the Washington Times.

I know from my own military background when -- a more philosophical question. When one military organization has an action, combat action, everybody else tends to study it and see lessons learned. In terms of Ukraine and Russia, despite the fact of it not really having a Navy, Ukraine has managed to have several significant naval victories against Russia, sinking a number of their capital ships like the Moskva and the Tsezar Kunikov. I was wondering what does the U.S. Navy -- I assume you're looking at it and analyzing and seeing what lessons learned you can pick up from what the Ukrainians have been doing there in the Black Sea.

Admiral Franchetti: Thank you. We are a learning organization, and it's really important that we continue to look. I talk a lot in the Nav Plan about the changing character of war, and this is one of the key areas that we've seen, whether you look back to the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict where you saw the first really largescale use of unmanned capabilities, and now you're seeing, what you see after Russia's horrific invasion of Ukraine and the work that Ukraine continues to do to retain its sovereignty. We are learning a lot from that.

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I think the key one, and it comes back to your question a little bit, is about sea denial. So we talk a lot about sea control and the ability to have free and open access in the sea. I think the other piece is being able to deny your adversary's use of the sea. As you'll see in the Nav Plan when I talk about expanding the warfighting ecosystem, this is one thing I added from Admiral Gilday's Nav Plan 22 is the sea denial capability.

So we know that we need to be able to do sea denial. Critically important. You can look at the success, again, that Ukraine has had in pushing the Russian Black Sea fleet really past into the east side of Crimea and again holding them at risk. So we know that we need to be able to do that, and working to develop those capabilities and the geographies that we might be able to use, and it's really important.

I will say also, just on the learning organization side, we've learned a lot also in the Red Sea through our experiences there. We've been there now through Operation Prosperity Guardian along with 20 other nations, so you learn a couple of things from that.

One is the power of allies and partners being able to work together. Like-minded nations to stand up again for that rules based international order.

The second thing we've learned is conventional platforms defeating unmanned platforms. We see that again every day that our ships are there and that our weapon systems and our training process that we've invested in over the last 10 to 15 years has really paid off. Our weapons are working as designed, our people know how to use them as designed, and I think that confidence is really important as they integrate our capabilities along with the capabilities of the Air Force, with allies and partners there.

I think the third thing we learned out of there, which is germane to this is that we can analyze the engagements as we're seeing them in the Red Sea. We can take the data that our weapon systems are seeing, we can take that back here to the U.S. and we can let our engineers work with our people that develop tactics and procedures and work with industry to look at what is the adversary doing, how is the adversary in terms of the Houthis well supplied by Iran, what are they doing with their capabilities, and how can we get ahead of them to be able

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to continue to defeat them. So this is learning that we have made, and I think when you talk with the strike group commander, Admiral Miguez from the Ike, everything that we've learned in the Red Sea, also in the Black Sea if you talk to Admiral Munch, we are directly, that's directly transferrable to any other theater that we're going to operate in.

DWG: Brad Peniston from Defense One. Thanks for doing this.

A question about the submarine industrial base. The Navy's doing something that appears a bit unusual. The Navy has made special investments in various sub suppliers to kind of frame that up, but in the past year the Navy has committed up to \$2 billion I think it is in options and [others] for giving third parties, Blue Force Alliance you mentioned, the Pentagon -- I know that's not you, but the Pentagon has kicked in another \$2 billion to [Deloitte]. What is the thinking behind bringing these third parties in to help out?

Admiral Franchetti: First of all, this is a huge priority for me. This is the thing that I believe and I know our Secretary believes the same thing, that we really need to invest in the defense industrial base, especially our submarine industrial base, but it also extends to our weapons industrial base. And we really need to help generate the speed and acceleration of production that we need to get out.

I think by doing things like I think specifically with the Blue Force Alliance that you just talked about, that gives us a direct relationship with them to help get after these challenges that we've all been talking about, whether it's work force development, supply based development. I think the other things are with Blue Force Alliance in particular, work through our foreign military sales, so that will be able to allow us to work with our office partnership.

Again, these things are giving us this direct relationship. And as our Secretary continues to work really hard to make sure that we've got the investments going in the right place, we're measuring our return on investment so we can vector the money to where it needs to go to be the most effective, that's what we're really getting after through these relationships.

DWG: A GAO report that was just released publicly I think yesterday, but actually came out in sensitive form over the

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summer, said the Navy does not have a handle on return on investment for these submarine investments, and the Navy concurred with the four recommendations that GAO offered. You just said you're really confident in this, and it's not the summer anymore. Has something changed? Or did you not get it right?

Admiral Franchetti: This is an area that we know -- we're making significant investment in there, and we're the stewards of the taxpayers' money. We need to make sure that we can show and prove that return on investment. I know our Secretary stood up an organization to be able to make sure that we're able to do that going forward. So we're very focused on that, and it is a substantial amount of our taxpayers' money and we need to get this right, and I'm committed to doing that, alongside our Secretary.

Moderator: We have time for one last question before closing comments.

DWG: Mark Pomerleau with Defense Scoop.

I wanted to pick up on some of your comments from the Red Sea. Can you maybe drill down a little bit about what the Navy learned from the latest deployment there and how it's looking to maybe win the cost curve battle against those threats? How are you looking at maybe non-kinetics, either from a [DDG-4] [inaudible] launch perspective on that?

Admiral Franchetti: Thank you.

Beyond the things I talked about about learning, working with allies and partners, working alongside [Inaudible] and our efforts there are really led by our coalition maritime force there. Again, it just reiterates the value of allies and partners which our adversaries simply don't have.

As far as the other learnings, and beyond the tactics, techniques and procedures development, I think it's clear that unmanned platforms are part of that changing character of war. You need to have them to be able to take advantage of all the extended range, lethality, and the three Ds. But you also need to be able to defeat them.

This is a strong area of focus for our Secretary of Defense.

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He's really put a lot of emphasis on counter-UAS and using creative solutions to get after that. So we're focused on that too.

I think all five services are working on that so there will be some integrated capabilities that we're able to come up with. For us, we're certainly looking at continuing to work on the HELIOS laser program that's embarked in Preble right now and continuing her testing as well as ODIN that is already on eight of our ships.

So we know that this changing character of war is that we are going to have to be able to defeat those types of technologies, whether it's kinetically or non-kinetically or, as you mentioned, farther left of launch, and look forward to working on that. But I say you can't really put a price tag on the 300 sailors on those DDGs, so I'm very proud of them. Speaking with them direction, they have been in a weapons engagement zone and working at a level of intensity really we've never seen in my lifetime and really since World War II. So I am very grateful for the weapon systems we have and for their ability to employ them.

DWG: Are there any sort of quick lessons that you learned maybe to improve force protection in the near term? [Inaudible] longer term fixes, I guess.

Admiral Franchetti: I don't want to talk specifically about operations because again, they're still going on and I don't want to disadvantage our folks that are out there right now. But we're continuing to learn. And again, I'll just go back to the changing tactics, techniques and procedures based on adversaries. Again, the Houthis are using the best Iranian technology and we know that we need to be able to defeat that. And again, our ships are doing an amazing job. And our aircraft.

And I would say the other lesson learned which I didn't mention is really using what you have differently. Using Hellfire against unmanned surface vehicles. Air-to-air. Aviation platforms shooting down UAVs. These are things where we're really learning.

I think Ukraine has shown us that you can innovate on the battlefield. I want to innovate before the battlefield so we

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can stay ahead of any adversary any time.

Moderator: Admiral, before I give you the final word, I want to thank you and your staff for being here. This is your first visit to the Defense Writers Group. I hope it's not your last. And I thank all the reporters for coming and for your smart questions.

Admiral, final comments.

Admiral Franchetti: I just want to say again thank you very much. Thank you for the opportunity.

I'm really excited about the Navigation Plan. Again, I thought very hard about the changing environment and the geostrategic environment, the changing character of war, and I really tried to focus on what are the things I can do in my tenure using the 2027 as my North Star, to raise that base line of readiness of our Navy. We're ready today, but we know we need to be more ready in the future, and I think I can put my thumb on the scale in these areas and get after it.

But again, as a unique steward of the Navy's future as well, I have to look at that long term advantage.

So the work, and we didn't talk about it too much, but on expanding the warfighting ecosystem. In Nav Plan 2022 there were about 18 areas that Admiral Gilday wanted to get after. He put a lot of work in place to develop a process and venues and accountable individuals to get after those things. Those are all well underway.

The five plus four that are on here, these are capabilities that we know we need to have, and again, I really want to drill down and focus on the five capabilities plus the four enablers because for the future we know that's where we need to go.

Again, I look forward to talking more about the Nav Plan with you and getting you out to see our sailors in action, because they tell our story way better than I do. So I look forward to seeing you and getting Desiree to get you our there on our platforms.

Moderator: You've told it very well. Thank you for a very thoughtful and thought-provoking discussion today.

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Admiral Franchetti: Thank you very much.