Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

Event

Maritime Security Dialogue
"U.S. Navy Fighting Instructions with the Chief of Naval Operations"

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FEATURING

Admiral Daryl Caudle
34th Chief of Naval Operations

Rear Admiral Raymond A. Spicer, USN (Ret.)
CEO and Publisher, U.S. Naval Institute

CSIS EXPERTS

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Kari A. Bingen: All right. Well, good afternoon, everyone. I'm Kari Bingen. I'm the director of the Aerospace Security Project and senior fellow with the Defense and Security Department here at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

On behalf of CSIS and the United States Naval Institute, it is my pleasure to welcome you to today's Maritime Security Dialogue. This series is made possible through the generous support of our partner, HII. So thank you.

We are pleased to welcome today Admiral Daryl Caudle, chief of naval operations. He's an engineer by background. Admiral Caudle has commanded at all levels of the Navy, from individual fast-attack subs, to leading Pacific- and Atlantic-based submarine task forces, including our sea-based nuclear deterrent force. He also brings tremendous experience supporting the joint force, leading Navy component commands to NORTHCOM and to STRATCOM, and on the Joint Staff as vice director for strategy, plans, and policy.

Admiral, this is an incredibly challenging time for the Navy and we're grateful for your leadership through it. You're leading a force under constant demand with sustained operations in the Western Hemisphere, in the Middle East driving longer deployments, deferred maintenance, and strain on critical munitions. That operational tempo is putting real pressure on readiness and forcing difficult strategic tradeoffs as naval assets in the Pacific are being shifted to the Middle East. At the same time, he's preparing the Navy for future conflicts – incorporating new strategies, new technologies; confronting real limits in shipbuilding capacity and weapons replenishment, including high-demand systems like Tomahawks; evolving our sea-based nuclear forces to deter two peer threats; and modernizing the Navy's infrastructure. In February Admiral Caudle released his Fighting Instructions, a strategy centered on the sailor, the foundry, and the fleet that I anticipated he'll discuss today.

Admiral, thank you for coming here to talk about all of this. I can't emphasize enough how important your leadership is to the Navy and to our nation at this point in time.

And so now, to lead the discussion, I'll hand it over to Rear Admiral Ray Spicer, chief executive officer and publisher of the U.S. Naval Institute. Ray, over to you.

Rear Admiral Raymond A. Spicer (Ret.): Thanks, Kari. And thanks to HII for your sponsorship, as always. Couldn't do this without you. So Paul Tennant's here today; thank you for supporting us.

Thank you all for being here, both in person and virtually. I know there are tons of folks that are joining us remotely today, so welcome. The way it's

going to work, I'm going to talk with CNO for about 30 minutes or so but I want to make sure I allow enough time for all of you to get your questions out. And usually at these go I get way more questions than we have time for, but I'll try to work them in as quickly as I can and get right to the Q&A part of the program.

So mostly I want to thank the CNO for spending some time with us. I know very busy time for the Navy and for the nation right now, so we really appreciate you spending a little time with us today.

Admiral Daryl Caudle: My pleasure, yeah.

RADM Spicer: One other – one other thing. If you have a question, everybody's going to be using either the QR code that you see displayed up here or, if you're back remotely, just use the website and you can ask a question that way. They're going to appear on this iPad, and then I'll ask them from the iPad.

CNO, so you've had the Fighting Instructions out for a couple months now, and I know that you've been out to visit the fleet as you often do. What's the reaction from the fleet? Is it – is it getting down to the deckplate level? What's the perception of the Fighting Instructions? Are they implementing it? Are you happy with the progress? Are you getting questions on it? What's the – kind of the take that you get from the –

Admiral Caudle: Ray, I'd say yes, yes, and yes to all that.

You know, I had a chance as U.S. Fleet Forces commander to lay a little bit of the pavement before I got in the job as CNO. This concept of responding with a force package that meets the need of a combatant commander or a Navy component commander, you know, it's a little bit, you know, kind of when you got poor-man problems you have to start thinking sometimes. And so we found ourself as Fleet Forces a bit oversubscribed for things that we're needing to answer with the normal force-generation process, and so, you know, building out forces that were designed to go answer a specific problem for a combatant commander, you know, just anywhere in the world was an idea that – you know, that became kind of solidified once I became the CNO in a way to put that out in wholesale with these Fighting Instructions.

So what the goal there was, was really about three things, three main things.

One is, one, it's going to – you know, I call it the U.S. Navy Fighting Instructions, and there's a whole history behind that, but really it's a strategic document. And for those that have worked in strategy, you'll see different ways to express a strategy. You can express them within ends, ways, and means constructs; very typical for military organizations to do that.

You'll see these pillar diagrams, little arrows, and things that describe, you know, your strategy. You'll see a vision roadmap that kind of, you know, couples resources, you know, with time-phased activity is kind of a way you can see these.

But then, you know, in industry, when I started thinking about the way I was going to approach it, you see another way to do a strategic document is highlighting the differentiated value of the organization, and that's the approach I took. And so I laid out at the beginning of it, you know, what the Navy's differentiated value is, one, to the nation; and to the joint force. And that's where I try to take no risk. I try to center our budget submission around that differentiated value. That's what answers the call globally to go do the things that a world-class navy needs to do. And so this idea these attributes that are laid out in the document that, you know, I feel that the Navy uniquely provides joint force commanders was laid out there. So I think that was very accepted, you know, around, you know, the different parlances out there that are reading this thing.

But then, you know, when you try to figure out what to do with, you know, a Navy that's often oversubscribed, can I do more than just the generalized force-generation process that we typically do? It's on a 36-month conveyor belt. And you know, just thinking through that with the team, the answer is of course yes. And so this idea – and it built on some work that Bryan Clark had done with the Hudson Institute on edge – is, how does the Navy hedge its force to address the specific key operational problems that I face as a CNO around the world, leveraging one of my differentiated values of mobility to mass when I want to but still answer the call and do things with the right amount of force at the right time, right tempo, and right certification? So this idea of tailoring the force, and then up-gunning that with these tailored offsets, you know, building on work that had been done with unmanned, you know, from Task Force 59 to 49 to things that we do in the Western Pacific to make sure that that tailored force can actually do more than its weight class, if you will, would normally be thought of by coupling unmanned to that.

And so the reason we picked the language was very – it was thoughtful. The term that was gaining traction was this hybrid fleet, and I was just not a fan of that. The mental bubble I kept having every time I hear "hybrid fleet" – and we were talking a little about this at the beginning here before I came in – was this pie chart where you see this kind of manned fleet and this section of the pie chart that's unmanned. I just think that's unsophisticated and not the way I see the Navy. I mean, we have, you know, a Navy that for any intensive future will be manned, OK? We'll have manned. And so what makes that on steroids is the way I couple robotic and autonomous systems to it to answer very specific problems. So tailored forces and tailored offsets is where we landed on that lexicon.

RADM Spicer: Yeah. I think we're going to get into that a little bit.

As you developed these Fighting Instructions, you said, hey, I want the – I want the fleet to move faster, to learn faster, to fight differently, just have that as kind of their mindset. When you developed these, what was the most – if there is one, what was the most challenging warfighting issue that you were trying to address with these Fighting Instructions?

Admiral Caudle: Well, I think it's just to break down a very parochial and traditional way that we generate force in the Navy. You know, we just – we fall in love with a process, man, it's hard to get us off of it. (Laughs.)

RADM Spicer: Right.

Adm Caudle: You know, we get this machine rolling and, you know – and if we can do it and rinse, lather, repeat, that's what we like to do. We get a lot of trust in it. We like, you know, the end result of it. And so typically the way you express that is through our carrier strike group, you know, FRP. And you know, it's a 36-month-by-design process. It starts from a ship post-maintenance period after a deployment, it runs for three years, and then it generates a strike group, it gets major combat operationally certified in a COMPTUEX, it forward-deploys to a combatant commander somewhere, it does a deployment, and comes back, and we just go do this thing.

Well, unfortunately, that won't generate enough Navy, OK, to actually answer the call here. And so now there's – you got to take some risk here and doing something different than just what that process will do. And so that ties to so many things. Even though that was just one sentence that I just said, that ties to how the class maintenance plan works. That ties to your force generation. That ties to this combat – this combat surge ready, you know, kind of approach that we've taken. That ties to how combatant commands ask for force through the global force management process. That ties to so many other things – how I do training curriculum, how I – you know, I take risk with, you know, loadouts, all these – parts, supplies. All these things are tied to this structure, the how we actually generate differently and where you take risk. So the risk management and risk transfer here is an important part of this.

RADM Spicer: Yeah. I think if I understand it correctly you talk about it in your Fighting Instructions, but you talk about, is Optimum (sic; Optimized) Fleet Response Plan – OFRP – that essentially, if you break – my simple mind, you break it down into thirds. A third of the Navy is deployed at any one time, a third is in deep maintenance, and the other third is in some form of post-deployment standdown or workups for the next deployment. And what you're looking at is this Global Maritime Response Plan where you take that one-third that is

in this, you know, gray area of preparedness and you optimize that portion, if I'm not mistaken. And that is this combat surge ready.

Adm Caudle: No, that's right. There's a couple things going on in parallel here, and it's a good chance to kind of clear this up.

In the process that I laid out in the – in the journey to go get major combat operationally certified for your standard scheduled deployment – it's on a schedule. It's on a big horse blanket where you can see this for the next three years. It's usually classified, but you know, we know it and it's laid out with a lot of specificity. In that journey of that third you're talking about is, you know, unfortunately, the world gets a vote when conflict happens. So, you know, you're an adversary and you kind of pay attention, just kind of track strike groups, it wouldn't take a rocket scientist to know, like, hey, the Navy's, like, really thin, like, right here; like, I guess they can't do anything right now – (laughs) – because, you know, you're not ready to pop out a strike group out of the end of this thing. Well, this idea of combat surge ready denies that, OK?

And so this idea of being a zero from a standpoint of something I can add value to the – you know, for our combatant commanders, and then after the certification become a one, idea of how the Navy generates force to me is just not good enough. So can I kind of get a – you know, a .8 along the way? And so this idea of, you know, 80 percent of that one hundred ships being in a state that's actually ready to surge into combat is very attractive to me as a service chief.

I get to go tell, you know, the secretary of the Navy and secretary of war that, you know, not only do you have the hundred deployed, but we have an additional 80 ships that we have high confidence they're not going to die day one because they've gone through a certification event that ensures they can shoot, defend, communicate, maneuver to an acceptable level of risk, that if you need them they can flow. And so that's the idea there.

RADM Spicer: Good. Thank you.

As you think about the Fighting Instructions and implementation in the fleet, what are two or three things that you want commanders/staffs focused on as they think, train, and prepare to implement these instructions?

Admiral Caudle: Well, I've got on my desk right now what – you know, we've called it an EXORD, really the Fighting Instruction EXORD, where my team took the entire Fighting Instructions, you can throw that thing into, you know, a large language model – (laughs) – and tell it to give me all the task out of it that are in there. Some are very clear things that need to go be done and some thing are implicit, but we mined all that out. There were a bunch of them in there.

And we've kind of binned, collated, and structured this – basically, this task list where we have single accountable officers and office of primary responsibility and OCR is assigned. That thing'll be coming out here, you know, probably within the next week or so, and it's going to delineate all the things that need to be done.

A lot of that lives, kind of, in the PESTO world. A lot of it lives in the force-generation world. But a lot of it's tied to the creativity that needs to be, you know, done to how we actually think about warfighting in the future as well, because all that's tied to, again, how do I solve key operational problems simultaneously in the world with the right force package that can be put together.

One of the places I'm working with right now is with General Donovan in SOUTHCOM on that. He's going to be probably a test bed for this because he's kind of – historically, SOUTHCOM has been – you know, until recently, you know, but typically has been a bit of a discounted customer for naval force. And so what does he need, an enduring package, look like? You know, like, you know, an afloat forward staging base, you know, an LCS. You know, can you do something with (inaudible)? And can I put together a thing that solves his problem?

And so that's not a natural muscle-memory thing for us in the Navy. So a lot of this work that has to be done is figuring out what those things look like. And then, how do I certify them? Because they fall outside our traditional Strike Group 4 and 15 certification arms of our fleet commanders. So I've got to go retune how that looks like as well.

But there's so much more that, you know, I could go on on this question, because there's a lot to what we're talking about across the spectrum from, you know, our maritime operations centers and how they're structured, you know, all the way down to you know, DOTMLPF, and concepts of deployment, and how I deploy unmanned most effectively.

RADM Spicer: Yeah. I want to dig into combat surge readiness a little bit.

Adm Caudle: OK.

RADM Spicer: So I know that's part of the Maritime Response Plan – the Global Maritime Response Plan. It's a big component of it. We just talked a little bit about what it means. I know you have an objective of 80 percent combat surge ready across the force.

Admiral Caudle: Yes.

RADM Spicer: And I think, you know, we see today – in current conflicts we've seen DDGs are all over the place. I think they're showing that that concept works, right? They're either forward deployed or they're ready to go, and we're sending them, you know, left and right.

We've always struggled or for the last several years struggled on the amphibious ship side.

Admiral Caudle: Yeah.

RADM Spicer: So in the current conflict we didn't have a forward-deployed amphibious ready group with a Marine expeditionary unit, ARG/MEU, so now we're flowing the forward-deployed naval forces in Japan to the Middle East. We just deployed Boxer ARG with their MEU –

Admiral Caudle: Yes.

RADM Spicer: – to go join. How are we doing at amphibious force readiness from a combat surge readiness perspective?

Admiral Caudle: Well, you know, there's been a lot of movement that – and energy we've put into improving amphibious force readiness. You know, it's been – you know, I think I undersell – you know, I see Roy on the – on the front row here – how much work has been done even under his leadership, Brendan McLane's leadership, Jim Kilby's personal leadership into this. And you know, things – when you get yourself kind of in a – in a hole with big capital ships, especially ones of the age of our large-deck LHA-/LHD-class, that's not a thing you just throw the rudder on over immediately and get, you know, a lot of results from. But we have made marked improvement on it, you know, probably I'm going to say to the tune of, like, 20 percentage points improvement in readiness in, really, over the last year, OK?

RADM Spicer: Yeah. That's great.

Admiral Caudle: And so we're working hard.

Part of that is a body of work that was done by Admiral McLane. It looked holistically of what was actually impeding our ability to generate amphibious forces. And it shouldn't be a surprise to anyone in the maintenance world that, you know, adhering to the Joint Fleet Maintenance Manual milestones on, you know, your key countdown milestones at A-minus-120, A-minus-40, you know, stock cans, long lead-time material, planning, war package definition, locking it in – (laughs) – and hitting the deckplates first day one and get, you know, the availability started, you know, with a lot of momentum was crucial to that.

We've also set up an executive steering committee that basically is chaired with the – with the vice chief of naval operations and the assistant commandant of the Marine Corps, and then the associated cast of folks that have stake in amphibious ready. You know, it meets on a quarterly basis, we all brief the secretary of the Navy on this, just so we can really keep heat and light on the actual LIMFACs. And any barriers that need that level of attention, we knock that down very quickly. And so I'm very optimistic about that point as well.

But when it comes to definitions of combat surge ready for amphib, that's still a discussion, OK, because, you know, it is an ARG/MEU. So without my – you know, my good friend Eric Smith having a similar definition of how he gets a MEU combat surge ready, it doesn't do any good for me to have, you know, three ships, you know, in that status without the ability to embark the actual Marine elements onboard. He's looking at that hard on what does that look like for him. You know, you could think of some kind of, you know, special MAGTF type of structure that he could surge that onto the available units and we could rapidly get that kind of force underway. But that doctrine and structure is new for them.

You know, everything I told you about our, you know, being in love with our force-generation process, multiply that times 10 for the Marines. They love their force – they just love it so much. And they know they can get sucked into these little special, you know, demand signals on their forces and, you know, pop them up everywhere because they're a Swiss army knife for the joint force too. And so he pushes back on that getting abused a bit, so we want to be mindful and deliberate of how we walk through this together to makes sure we're kind of going down the combat surge ready definition for him at the same time.

But I'm onboard with him. He has set this – you know, really this North Star and a goal of 3.0 presence. You know, we have a legal mandate in force structure right now of 31 ships. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that if I want 3.0 worldwide with three ships that's nine, something between a four to make one or a five to make one, and something between 36 and 45 ships. And so let's call it something in the middle of 42 ships. (Laughs.) And so you need a force structure with the existing force-generation process to give him a 3.0 ARG/MEU.

So force structure wise, we're not there to do that today. So I'm trying to dial in the force generation to do the most I can do until I get the force structure built to do the 3.0. But I'm all ahead with it. It's been directed that we generate that, and we will put that in the shipbuilding plan, and you'll see us trying to achieve the 3.0 ARG/MEU.

RADM Spicer: Great. You just – you just took one of my questions and answered it, so that's good.

Admiral Caudle: OK.

RADM Spicer: I'm going to shift now, because I know it's on a lot of people's minds, it's about minesweepers or minesweeping capability. So I think everyone knows we recently decommissioned the four Avenger-class minesweepers that were forward-deployed in Bahrain.

Admiral Caudle: Correct.

RADM Spicer: Brought them home. The replacement capability was three LCSes with mine countermeasures packages. Then all of a sudden this conflict occurs and the mine countermeasures capability is – two of them are in Singapore. (Laughs.) One of them is somewhere in the IO. Don't want to get into operational stuff and I know you don't want to either, but the question is: Are we confident in our mine countermeasures capability with what we have now, or is it a combination of our capability with allies and partners? What's the – what's the status of, you know, the mine countermeasures?

Admiral Caudle: No, that's a fair question. You know, you never are going to do mine countermeasures until you, like, need it. (Laughs.) I mean, like, who would have thought, you know? So you can be a bit vulnerable on how you lay that down on something that's a very, very infrequent mission set and then – but very critical when you need it.

And so, obviously, you know, ships that are built specifically to do that mission is always the – you know, the best solution that you can possibly have, and the Avenger class served us very well. And it's interesting when the demand really came to go make sure that we were making ourself whole, you know, all four of those had just shown up on the East Coast. (Laughs.) You know, there's a bit of irony there on the timing of that.

But when the capability embarked on an LCS is full up and – it's a very, very good package, OK? It's effective. So let me put that on the side burner and let me answer – I'm going to build the answer out a bit here.

RADM Spicer: OK.

Admiral Caudle: You know, we have CH-53 capability as well, OK? That's still – some of that still remains, even though that was part of the – you know, the transition for LCS as well. So that's part of this.

And then, of course, allies and partners.

And then, of course, expeditionary capabilities. Expeditionary has been very effective. You know, we utilize and practice this a lot in the Baltic Sea. We still find real World War II mines today with that capability.

But none of that, you know, from LCS doing that kind of work to bringing back the Avengers that remain from Japan to CH-53s that are still available to expeditionary to allies and partners, work in a nonpermissive environment. I mean, mine countermeasure search and destruction of mines is very time consuming. It's not quick. And to do that makes the mine countermeasure capability, whatever one you pick from that menu, vulnerable if the – if the environment's not permissive. So that's where, you know, Fifth Fleet and Central Command find themself now, is making sure that if they want to embark on actually doing some of that type of work that, you know, we have an environment that's conducive for it.

RADM Spicer: Yeah.

Admiral Caudle: OK.

RADM Spicer: Agree. Thank you.

And again, without getting into the conflict, but there are impacts from the conflict. And I want to ask about, are you concerned about from a readiness standpoint that, you know, we're using a lot of assets? We're using hulls. We're using people, munitions. And yet, you know, the National Defense Strategy says, hey, we got to focus on the homeland, but we also have to focus on China.

Admiral Caudle: Yes.

RADM Spicer: Is it eroding our capability or our ability to deter China, or are you concerned at all about that?

Admiral Caudle: Oh, of course I am. I mean, it's a mathematical certainty that if you consume a fixed resource – (laughs) – then your ability to, you know, bring that to bear on another problem set is diminished by the amount you subtract it. So it'd be silly for me to say anything other than I'm concerned. Readiness is being consumed. I mean, we're built to do that. I mean, it's a conflict. And so we're designed to go do that. And so now the challenge that you're getting at is how do you buy down risk in other parts of the world while you're focusing, you know, a lot of resources in one area. And that's why there's a DIME, OK, if you will. And, you know, put some of that over to economic, you know, side of business, diplomacy as well, to help, you know, assuage any type of opportunism that might occur while we're, you know, focused very heavily in the Middle East.

So, you know, this is, you know, full, whole-of-government approach to actually do that. And there's a whole joint force. You know, some of the force elements that are being consumed, you know, are not unilaterally applied across the entire joint force as well. So, but, yes, I'm concerned. I mean, it's, again, we've shot a lot of munitions. o the munitions have taken a hit. You know, you're going to see a record-breaking deployment by Ford. You know, there we'll probably go into the 11th month of deployed operations. For those that are not in the Navy, that's an extraordinary thing to even think about something of that kind of deployment length. So my hat's off to the Ford. I mean, she did have a fire in her laundry. And they fought that, put it out, recovered from that, and started flying, you know, sorties two days after that. So I'm very proud of that crew.

So we've got her reset. We just pulled her. You know, she went into Souda and then into Croatia. And so, you know, she's going to be back on station again here soon, on some much-deserved leave. And so, anyway, so – you know, but, you know, the DDGs that go with that, you know, there's some marine implications of this. There's P-8 that, you know, they're flying every single day. So, yeah, this is a CNO's challenge to how we sustain that tempo and think long-term about how I'm going to regain that again. And then, you know, there's financial implications of that, of course. And there's just impacts on humans and people and quality of service and quality of life, which I'm very much into with the sailor first initiatives that I have. So all that's in my mind, Ray.

So, yeah, it's a challenging time for that. But we're built for that. I mean, we're built for that. This is what we do for a living. So there's a bit of a backhanded compliment in there, that sailors that are doing this. You know, it's what they signed up for.

RADM Spicer: Right. Thank you. Along those lines, munitions. So we've seen, you know, starting with the Red Sea, where there was some – you know, we were using pretty high-end munitions to take down pretty low-end targets, right? So now combine that with the current conflict, where there's lots of use of drones and one-way attack vehicles and things like that. Is that causing us to rethink what we want to have in our arsenal of munitions? You know, rather than, you know, filling the VLS cells with Standard Missile and Tomahawks, are we thinking about other smaller weapons that could be utilized as part of our arsenal?

Admiral Caudle: Oh, yes. Yeah. Of course. I mean this – I mean, really, that's the epitome of tailored, you're right, application of force. So this idea of tailoring is not just on – you know, at the force element. It's all the way down to any type of theoretical optimization and coupling of a solution to a problem. And so, yeah, we were upside down, you know, shooting an SM-6 at a $5,000 one-way UAV, of course. And so, you know, we answered that pretty quickly by

several systems that we tried out, like Coyote and Road Runner, you know, and these versions of, you know, Hellfire-size missiles. They can really do very well in that environment.

And so it's one of the times I watched the community of practices come together and try that out. And I credit Joe Cahill kind of leading this at SURFLANT for me. You know, we tried out several of these systems across some different solutions. Got that, you know, out into the VACAPES, practiced some shots, got that dialed in with some doctrine, and TTPs, trained the crew up on it, and deployed with it, and utilized it. And that from, you know, the Warfighting Development Center to, you know, the acquisition community, to, you know, the tactics being developed by the surface community, all that came together to do that very quickly.

What that does – and you can imagine that's why I'm so high on directed energy. You know, I'm talking like real directed energy, not tinkering with it. I'm talking like megawatt class directed energy. Is it enables, to your question on load out, that everything that's in a Mark 41 cell is offensive, because I'm not having to put things in there for defense. So you want to combat ship to just be nothing but offense and not have to, you know, to use, basically, its precious payload volume for point defense and self-defense. And so, yeah, that's the goal here, to get a better matching. It's not only smart financially, it's just better for the actual effort.

RADM Spicer: Thank you. Well, not surprisingly, I've got about a thousand questions in here for you. So I'm going to go cut myself off here and I'm going to go to audience questions.

So this first one I have is from Michael Stewart at McKinsey. He said: You recently published your Fighting Instructions and we're currently conducting military action against Iran, and recently against Venezuela, and potentially against China. Do you feel that what's occurred has strengthened your belief that you were right? Or do we need to have an adjustment of your Fighting Instructions?

Admiral Caudle: No, I mean, I think it's the test case for it. I would argue that thank God I published it. Nailed it. And just in time. Got that right under the wire. You know, yeah. I mean, you know what I wish I had been further down the road in developing, you know, some ideas on providing solution, so when I pull out the Ford strike group down from, you know, being off the coast in the Caribbean there, that I could have offered, you know, U.S. Southern Command something that would have been more, you know, suited for maritime domain awareness and interdiction. That's his – that's his main problem set. And so, you know, you can think about different ways to go do that. I don't think I need a carrier to do that.

And there was some question about whether or not my comments on this idea of carriers being, you know, this thing on a silver bullet or not. There is no one on Earth that's more pro-carrier than me. There is nothing to deliver sustained combat naval mass than an aircraft carrier, OK? So I love aircraft carriers so much. They are the cornerstone of the Navy and the capital ship of the Navy, and will be for any foreseeable future because of the air wing that it carries. And so, I mean, I'm a submarine officer. Submarines are great at what they do. We overmatch there in every extent of that word. But if I want to actually bring the lead, it will always be centered around what a carrier strike group and its associated air wing can do. But I don't need that to do maritime interdiction. That's the point. So I want to reserve the carrier for where the application that is great for power projection and deterrence in the theaters that really need that kind of capability. So that's the point.

RADM Spicer: OK. You hear that aviators? The CNO loves the carriers.

Admiral Caudle: I do. I mean, it ought to be obvious. All three fleet commanders are wearing wings, so.

RADM Spicer: (Laughs.)

Next one's from Austin Gray, Blue Water Autonomy: PAE RAS, robotics and autonomous systems, last week reset the acquisition strategy for unmanned ships, relabeling MASC as MUSV, and changing vessel requirements. Is this time different? Or will resets and false starts keep happening every year? What's the path forward in getting unmanned ships into the fleet?

Admiral Caudle: Yeah. You know, I can sense the frustration there. You know, I get equally frustrated with the number of times we try to start doing modules in the Navy. And I'm about to release a thing, I mentioned it at one of the speeches recently, that I'm calling the Containerized Capabilities Campaign, Plan C-Cubed – you know, everything's in a name, as you know. And so I'm trying to containerize everything. If you can put it in a container, I want it. You know, you can think of, you know, swarms, to total race, to missile systems. And so this idea to entice industry to start containerizing things for MUSV, but not just that. The new frigate will need that, OK? A cargo ship that I may want to actually employ, or something that I rent out, you know, could use those types of capabilities.

And so, you know, we're just starting to scratch the surface on this. And so, you know, there's science actually in the container. And so that's part of this. And so I got folks working on that part of it too. And so if you design the capability, how you actually get it out of the container is a bit of a part of that solution as well. So I want this, you know, from C4I, you know, just think of ways you could put things in that do that type of things. Of course unmanned,

of course, lethal options as well. So I'm hopeful, and I'm working very hard with Jason Potter and his team of PAEs to start locking this down and start delivering this.

Now to the question, you know, of how it's integrating, you know, we're on a journey here to get unmanned normalized into the fabric of how we do things in the Navy, so that it's not a gadget, OK? And so, you know, I tell people I'm not short on people coming to me with an OV-1. They usually show the unmanned thing they're trying to sell me on. It's already in the theater, right? There's a little lightning bolt coming and a bomb being released, and it's all there perfectly. The timing is exquisitely matched to the need. And nobody tells me how to get it there. Once I get it there, how do I sustain it? What if it's off by four hours? You know, does it last? You know, where do I home port it? Do I need AVO? Is there a mothership requirement? What's the PMS? What O-rings need to be replaced? (Laughs.) I mean, there's a – there's a bunch to this thing that has to be worked through, right?

And so to do that, we fall back to what in the Fighting Instructions I call the standard model. And the standard model is when you have an O-5 commander with an ISIC attached to a type commander, attached to a fleet, attached to a resource sponsor, and an acquisition process. That's our – that's when we're at our best. So you're seeing the stand up of USVRONs, UUVRONs, OK, and V-U-P, VUP, you know, for Triton, and et cetera. And so that starts putting this into the standard model. And we just started really in earnest starting thinking about how we actually generate that force and actually get it integrated into how we actually deploy as a Navy.

If you don't do it that way, everything's just kind of this, you know, again, a PowerPoint deep gadget. And it doesn't bring any real Navy combat power. And so how we build out these packages – I have to be able to define it in a way a combatant commander can GFM for that, can put that in what we call an FTN line, so I can know to have it ready. What does that mission do when it gets in theater? And so what we got in mind is kind of this, I don't know, I think the Ukraine-Russia conflict has got us kind of in this mind of we just do a bunch of unmanned things and it seems appealing, right? But I actually – as a CNO, actually have to force generate that, sustain it. And if it's not ready to be used, you know, where do I put it all, right, if you go buy me a bunch of this stuff? So there's a laydown part of this. It's complicated.

And the most important part of all the things I just went through is really the concept of deployment. We know how to use this typically, because it's form, fit, and functioned, you know, by design of when we purchase it. But the deployment model is what's the most hardest challenge. It's getting to the place where the last tactical mile, it's cocked and ready to go to actually implement it against the effects we want to achieve.

RADM Spicer: Sir, thank you. I was going to ask this one from Greg Glaros at SYNEXXUS, but you just answered it, I think. So it was about, how does OPNAV accelerate the use of unmanned systems? So I won't ask that.

Admiral Caudle: It's certainly a team effort. And I know the secretary of the Navy's really got his head into it. He's challenging us organizationally to make sure they're organizationally ready.

RADM Spicer: Sure.

I'm going to change topics here a little bit. Daniel Wang at NGA: What innovations and strategies would you like to see developed and explored for a modern United States Merchant Marine to support the Navy's mission? Would there be any effect for U.S. merchant marine to pivot to smaller littoral sealift capabilities to provide a variety in multipurpose logistics support? And I think I saw an article today out of Reuters that talked about an award, I think, to Hanwha, to build, I think, what he's talking about here – smaller, logistics-type ships.

Admiral Caudle: OK. Could be. You know, sometimes those things even lead turn my understanding of those contracts. But, you know, I think, one, I need to get our military sealift command healthy. That's on my mind. You know, we've been late on maintenance, late on new construction, short on merchant marine mariners – merchant mariners. Our civilian team there is so important, all the way from masters to first mates to chief engineers.

You know, and so we, you know, are really working that with a lot of ledge props, or the compensation packages, and leave accrual. And those types of things are healthy and competitive. Because, quite frankly, there's a lot of demand out there for that force and those people that do that for a living. And so I've got to be competitive in that. And then, so logistics, you know, of course, is the way you fight and win, you know conflicts. So there's always going to be a need for your, you know, T-AOs, your oilers, and T-AKEs, and resupply at that large scale supply. And so that's not going to go away.

Now, I think to the question, is there room to have some more tactical things? Absolutely, there is. You know, some of these things, again, that I can do with unmanned, you know, this is the Amazon delivery of a critical part, you know, to a ship. You know, do I need a manned helicopter or an MV-22 to do that? Probably not. You know, could an MUSV actually come alongside and do some replenishment? Of course. So is there a need to actually start thinking about how we go do this in the CLF world? Yes. It is ripe for thinking and utilization for unmanned in this space.

We've, again, kind of tinkered with this, a bit done some experimentation with it. But I need to get it kind of, you know, scaled in a way to where, again,

a number fleet commanders and their CTF – you know, CLF commanders have some of this kit available for options for them. And you can park on ships too. You know, motherships can do this as well, especially large deck ships can supply other ships with unmanned. So we just have to get that fielded. But I appreciate that question, because I think it's exactly the way we need to go for so many applications.

RADM Spicer: Sure. Thank you.

Admiral Caudle: Most things are actually, quite frankly, you know, especially if you got this capability, well within the capacity to move via something unmanned. Including food.

RADM Spicer: Mmm hmm.

Next one. Alex Lee, Wyndham Knox: Amid shipbuilding struggles, it seems like the U.S. is hedging its bets by developing ground-based systems to replace VLS cells on ships. Do you think we would get more bang for our buck by ramping up ground-based systems like PrSM and Typhon, or by committing those resources to our shipyards?

Admiral Caudle: I want to make sure I understand the question. You know, is it about ground-based interceptors versus –

RADM Spicer: Yeah, I think so.

Admiral Caudle: Yeah, versus ship-based. You know, there's a Department of War pie chart between the service chiefs. (Laughs.) And, you know, of course, the CNO would say, I need more of that. You know, because, quite frankly, I think I'm more important than the other ones. But that may be a bit biased. But, you know, there are certain missions we're great at doing and there's certain things that are better done land based. Personally, I'm not a big fan of DDGs doing just the BMD mission as a primary mission set. I like – I want it to have the capability for that as a standing capability, no question. But, you know, it's such a capable ship, tying it to a BMD mission as a standalone, you know, it's a function of the geometry of the shot, you know, so where to put it, it is always in play there, is it in the right place, in the right posture?

So I always think there's a – there's an optimal laydown from ground-based interceptors versus what the BMD ship can do. And so that's something that you got to work through a joint force solution set, joint CONOPS, work with the combatant commander to get that optimal laydown. But, you know, I like the ability to have that DDG to go do more things than just a BMD station.

RADM Spicer: Right. Yeah. If they're just doing BMD, it can't do anything else really.

Admiral Caudle: It can't do much anything else. And, you know, and I guess like, you know, you can look at, you know, Title 10-type of responsibilities. Ground-based interceptor work is traditionally an Army mission, even though we run the AEGIS ashore facilities. There's always been a little bit of a battle about who should really own that. I mean, we decided to fill that by a mock-DDG ashore. And so it's naturally that we would be able to generate the actual – you know, the operators that could do that. But traditionally, that's been an Army mission.

RADM Spicer: Thank you.

I just mentioned Hanwha. This is from Mike Smith at Hanwha Defense USA: We've seen the devastating effects of asymmetric deployment of small USVs in the Black Sea. A few of those companies are looking to bring similar capabilities to the U.S. Given current doctrine, where do you see these systems fitting into force structure? You talked a little bit about this.

Admiral Caudle: Yeah. Yeah, they're part of, you know, unmanned surface vehicles. You know, that today organizationally they're tired to, you know, our USVRONs, and tied to our surface-type commanders. So they fit naturally into other surface application of force, just, you know, through flotillas, if you will, that have been organized to go handle that type of capability. So it's a natural plug into that. You know, I think the use case for, you know, using an unmanned surface vehicle as a high-speed kamikaze-type ship, you know, then that's not a rocket science type of thing. You know, whether or not it can start at one point, get to its objective, and blow up is, you know, there's a lot of things that can get in the way of pulling that off. But that concept of operation in itself is not complicated, right? And so do I need some of that? Sure, I do. And so the ability to go do that mission is not hard.

I told you, the challenge is where does it start, and where does it finish, and how do I get it there, for a global Navy? You know, again, the Black Sea use case is pretty easy when you're thinking about something about the size of a few states originating in part of one state and ending in another state, in the same state, is a much easier problem than a global CNO has for that same type of capability deliverance. So but it definitely fits in. We definitely need it. And it is part of our future.

RADM Spicer: Thank you.

Next one, Michael Beautyman, principal assistant program manager, Arleigh Burke-class Destroyer Program: How do you envision the Navy deliberately accepting technical or material risk at ship delivery, particularly in relation to INSURV acceptance trial recommendations, when the operational demand signal argues for speed? How do you intend to ensure that ship acquisition policies, delivery criteria, and readiness definitions are explicitly aligned

with the war fighting priorities outlined in your Fighting Instructions, rather than optimized for peacetime compliance and risk avoidance? Kind of a long question, but it's –

Admiral Caudle: Yeah. I'll try to break that down. I think what the question is getting at is how do you snap the chalk line on how long I hold a unit in new construction to get it to the level I want it at, versus delivering that quicker, taking some risk, perhaps, on completely modernizing it, delivering it to the fleet earlier, you know, or there's some technical standard changes that I can relax a bit to deliver that. How do we do that? I think it's all a conversation with our acquisition professionals and system command professionals on that. It's something that we are looking at hard. You know, perfect can't be the enemy of good enough here. You know, so those are challenged by a couple things I'll mention.

You know, for – and most in this space listening to me this afternoon know that, you know, from napkin to delivery of a ship, you know, best case is about 15 years, for a warship. The average case is probably 20, and maybe the worst case is, like, 25 years, OK? So regardless of say, it's too long from the time I conceive of this thing, get it under contract, and start rolling them off. The world changed underneath us. And so it's a valid question to think that what I'm delivering a ship with when I conceived of it is not going to be the right set of kit at time of delivery. So there's things you can do to improve that.

One is we need to, you know, really think about reenvisioning how we modernize once it is delivered. That's got to be broken up into shorter time frames that match the class maintenance plan modifications I'm doing for more frequent avails. You know, and it's work that, you know, we've been working on a long time. Short avails, they tend to get done quicker. Avail overruns tend to be a percentage of the actual length of the avail. So there's this compounding effect. So the shorter you make it, you just – you finish quicker, and you actually improve readiness. And then you do some – periodically some long avails to get some of these things that take a long time to get done.

But the modernization has to fit in that. So, you know, working with Seiko and the team with Jason Potter and the team there at RD&A, we've got to design modernization better to go do that within that period. To tee them up to do that is we've got to decouple a lot of the structural work that a lot of our modernizations require today. Some of these modernizations are, like, incredibly complex. So they physically change the entire structure of the combat system, or the – you know, the superstructure of the ship and all this. It's just too complicated.

So, you know, this racks for life is, you know, this idea that really you're just basically upgrading the actual, you know, integrated combat system from a hardware, you know, rack perspective and software. Virtualization is part of this, building that virtualization layer that decouples the hardware from the software, builds in cybersecurity. App-based, you know, upgrades are part of virtualization. So that helps with modernization as well. And so, you know, we just got to figure out how to do that more effectively.

And then I do think there is some risk that the fleet has to take – and, by extension, me – on going ahead and delivering the ship and getting it out there, and then, you know, allowing it to, you know, operate with, you know, maybe 80-90 percent of its capability, and then kind of work on the modernization piece, you know, at a later time. Versus a zero, and then deliver it perfect, which never happens anyway, so.

RADM Spicer: (Laughs.) All right, I'm going to throw this one in. There's a ton of questions, sir. But this from an Army guy and it's about submarines. So two reasons to ask it.

Admiral Caudle: OK. All right. (Laughter.) He's going to take credit for sinking that first submarine over there, I know, with an ATACM. No, I'm just kidding. Even though it's true.

RADM Spicer: This is Kent Barr, U.S. Army, retired: Having read articles in Proceedings – thanks for the plug – regarding diesel submarines, is there any consideration of using these type boats in the U.S. Navy?

Admiral Caudle: Not really. No.

RADM Spicer: Or leveraging our allies and partners? How about that?

Admiral Caudle: It comes up periodically. I've addressed this question over a 40-year career several times. You know, we made a decision that the really only true submersible is one that really kind of can, you know, operate with nuclear power. And I think that's why you're seeing that be appealing to other partners today. And they keep, you know, envisioning, you know, themselves with nuclear-powered submarines. You know, I tell those partners, you know, it's like the dog running after the car. Be careful what you – (laughs) – when you when you finally catch it kind of thing, because, you know, what we have built in the United States Navy to build, field, sustain, generate, train a safe and effective nuclear-powered submarine force, is an incredible journey that's hard to replicate.

And so, you know, it's just something we're not going to turn back on. You know, is there some use cases for, you know, non-nuclear submarines? I think there is. But I think what you'll see for those types of applications that what

you want to see kind of your extra-large UUVs doing most of that. And so what I really need energy – and this is no pun in the word there – is an energy source. You know, it's all tied to the battery technology, which at the end of the day is a material science. So those out there that are listening that are in material science, I mean, that's where it all – where the rubber meets the road. Everything comes down to a material science problem for us. Either, you know, something strong enough to take a force, you know, store enough energy to make it last longer, you know, all these things – you know, cyclic fatigue. All these things tie into a material science question. And so, you know, that's something we need to invest heavier in, in academia. You know, it's not necessarily as glamorous as some of the other things. And we do need a lot of work there. But as far as the wholesale going to a diesel submarine, a manned diesel summary, nah.

RADM Spicer: Not happening. Good.

This is from a Coast Guardsman, Commander Dan Wiltshire: Given today's combination of resource constraints and expanding threats, is there a place for increased combat systems integration and training between the Navy and Coast Guard ships and cutters? Specifically, could potential synergies created by the Navy's decision to base the FF(X) on the Coast Guard's National Security Cutter be leveraged to increase the number of ready combat-credible hulls available for contingencies?

Admiral Caudle: Yeah. It's a super question. And no better partner to me than Kevin Lunday, the commandant of the Coast Guard. And no other partner, you know, that I could ask for who deploys their forces globally to support the United States Navy already. So the integration across the joint force, he sits at the table already as one of the, you know, Joint Chiefs, even though he's in the, you know, Department of Homeland Security. And, you know, and I want to get him paid, you know. So that's part of this. But no better partner in the world. And there will be no one that I will go to more quickly with – you know, to learn how to operate the new frigate than he and his team, to understand, you know, this – you know, get them on board with us. When we deliver that first frigate that's based on the National Security Cutter, that they're right alongside us with the procedures, you know, that that ship is run by.

You know, there's always nuances in how ships operate. They will need to know that we can get up – very quickly up on the learning curve of how to employ that, how it handles, and some of the maintenance, you know, and nuances, and how to sustain it. So I look forward to that partnership. And that's one of the reasons that was chosen, because it is a proven design. We know we can outfit it. We know we can build it quick. And that's why I need a containerization campaign plan to actually put kit on it that will up-gun what it's naturally going to come with as a combat ship in the first flight.

RADM Spicer: Thank you.

CNO, I'm going to ask you one more, and then turn it over to you if you have any closing comments. This is from Paul Tennant, HII: The current rate of change technologically and geopolitically seems awfully fast. How can CONOPS keep pace?

Admiral Caudle: Yeah. That's a good question because, just another one of my initiatives, I've created this thing. You'll see this – I announced this at a speech recently too – that I call the Fleet Introduction Operating System. And what I'm trying to do with that is take the sailor out of the critical path of adopting technology very quickly, which I feel like I'm too in right now. You know, no one here when you – you know, that owns an iPhone or whatever type of smartphone, you know, thinks twice about downloading an app and worrying whether or not they're going to be able to use it immediately, right? So, you know, Apple's done this great job of taking the human concern out of – getting up on the step – out of that equation of increased capability that's in the palm of their hand.

We're not built that way. You know, my current A school and C school structure, and the way I build mastery and proficiency at sea, and qualification at sea, and maintaining that, is not structured to have a rapid introduction of capability and technology very quickly. So this fleet introduction process to how I take myself out of that critical path, how I build sailors, how I train, how I deliver content, how I force the acquisition community to make it more similar in form, fit, and function so that it's easier to adopt and get into the fleet more quickly, is all tied into that effort.

RADM Spicer: Thank you, sir. Any closing thoughts?

Admiral Caudle: No, I'll just say, Ray, thank you for this. It's a good spectrum of things. I think people kind of see where we're heading as a Navy. Appreciate the opportunity to talk to you and the folks here in the room and online. And appreciate being asked to do this.

RADM Spicer: Well, thanks again for spending some time with us, CNO. We know you're very busy. Appreciate all you're doing for our Navy and nation. How about a round of applause for the chief of naval operations? (Applause.)

(END.)