

**As we launch the USNS Trenton, a look at Alabama's role in the future of the Navy:
opinion**

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By Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus

January 10, 2015

Today I'm visiting Mobile for the christening of the Navy's newest ship, the USNS Trenton. This important event continues a long tradition of naval ships built on the Gulf Coast to defend our great nation and recognizes the strong connection between the American people and our Sailors and Marines. But it also continues the commitment of this administration to grow our Navy fleet.

On any given day the United States Navy has 100 ships at sea and 30,000 Marines deployed around the world. Uniquely, our maritime forces provide a presence around the globe. Coming from the sea, we get there sooner, stay there longer, bring everything we need with us, and we don't ask anyone's permission. Many times, our Navy and Marine Corps are already there. And being there - where it matters, when it matters - provides our country's leaders an array of options, from providing humanitarian assistance to our Japanese allies after the earthquake and tsunami to delivering the first strikes against ISIL in Iraq and Syria with F/A-18s off the carrier USS George H.W. Bush.

Providing that presence is why our fleet size matters. When North Korea threatens regional stability, our forward deployed naval forces are there to respond. When the earthquake ravaged Haiti or storms tore through the Philippines, Navy ships were the bases needed for Sailors and Marines to deliver lifesaving aid. Without a properly sized fleet we cannot execute our missions when the President and the American people call.

Alabama and the Gulf Coast have had a vital role in our nation's naval history. For generations it has been home to shipyards that built our ships, part of what President Roosevelt called the Arsenal of Democracy. The importance of the workers in our shipyards led my predecessor Secretary William Jones to write during the War of 1812 that they "are a valuable and

independent class" and deserving of our respect for all that they do. In 200 years very little has changed. Platforms matter. The ships, aircraft, and equipment our Sailors and Marines depend on all over the globe are the result of American workers and American innovation.

Much has been said about the size of our Fleet, but a few facts are in order. On September 11, 2001, the Navy's battle force stood at 316 ships. What followed was one of the great military buildups in our history, but even as other parts of the military grew our fleet had shrunk to 278 ships by 2008. In the five years before I took office as Secretary, the Navy only contracted for 27 ships, far too few to even maintain the size of the fleet.

In the five years since I took office we have contracted for 70 ships. We have halted the decline. In 2014 we launched 9 new ships, the ships being built in Mobile have joined Burke Class destroyers and Virginia Class submarines in full production, and by the end of the decade our plan will return the fleet to over 300 ships.

We celebrate that USNS Trenton, named for another historic industrial center of our nation, is joining the fleet. Our Joint High Speed Vessels like Trenton deploy around the world to work with our partners and supply our Navy and Marine Corps. Because of their innovative design and shallow draft they can go places many of our other ships can't. These ships, and the people that build them in the Mobile shipyard, give us a technological edge.

Another edge comes from our highly trained, dedicated, always strong, always faithful United States Sailors and Marines. Around the world, far from their homes, far from their families, they are deployed in defense of America. They truly are America's "Away Team." Today the partnership between our men and women in uniform and the people of Alabama is playing a vital role in maintaining American seapower around the world.

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