

## **Interview with US Navy Secretary Ray Mabus**

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with Chris Cavas

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**Q:** You and Adm. Jonathan Greenert, the chief of naval operations, are quite adamant about your support for 52 littoral combat ships. But there are always groups talking about cutting this particular program.

**A:** Absolutely, and there are numbers floating around and there are various things on the table. It's true, not just for LCS but for everything else in this budget environment. I've seen all sorts of numbers. Everything right now is pre-decisional. As you pointed out, the CNO and I believe strongly that you need the 52 ships. I think this [controversy] is pretty normal for a new ship, and particularly for one as new as LCS — new in a lot of different ways. This ship doesn't look a lot of Navy ships.

One of the things [I had done] was pull out for the [Oliver Hazard Perry-class] frigates, the Arleigh Burke-class destroyers and the Virginia-class submarines, the things that were written about them at the time —that we needed to truncate, that we needed to curtail, that we needed to stop building, that they were too expensive or useless or they were dangerous. I know in the case of the frigates, somebody in the Navy said you ought to get submarine pay if you're on there because those things are going to go down. You're absolutely right that there are normally factions, groups that for whatever reason this is the program that they're aiming at.

CNO and I can make a very good case as to why this is a large part of the future of the fleet. And that we have, over the last four years, driven the cost down so dramatically that you can build the 52 ships inside the budget and get to the fleet that you need to get to with the right mix of ships. But, you can't do it without LCS.

**Q:** We're in September and it's looking like we're going to enter another round of continuing resolutions on top of sequestration issues. What is the cumulative effect of years of CRs of unknown duration? Is there a snowball effect to all this?

**A:** There's a snowball effect to both the CR and sequestration — similar, but distinct types of snowball effects. Since I've been here there's never been a budget passed on time. We've always had to deal with continuing resolution. It messes up financial planning. But, it also has a big impact particularly on Navy because of things like ship availabilities, because of the “new start

provisions”, particularly if they’re the clean CRs that don’t have the anomalies to allow us to do things like start a refueling of a carrier, which is what happened last year. The unknown duration of this causes a lot of problems.

I always try to make this distinction — we can cut the amount of money we spend, if we're allowed to do it in a smart way and not in this sort of dumb way. Everybody agrees we shouldn't be [cutting] this much. Everybody agrees that CRs are harmful. Nothing is happening.

**Q:** It looks like you have an alt-POM and a POM (Program Objective Memorandum) and the POM is, as I understand it, is the real budget that you're preparing without sequestrations. The alt-POM is with sequestration. Of course the law of the land is sequestration. So, it seems to me that it's probably backwards. But the alt-POM is going to have to go forward.

**A:** Well, but you've also got budgets being passed in both houses that ignore sequestration, that will be subject to sequestration of it passes. There are many pernicious effects of sequestration — having to do two different budgets is one of them.

**Q:** A lot of people have always had doubts about the ability of the service to reach 300 ships. The CNO now is talking about a sequestration fleet of 257 ships. Whatever that number is, today's 286 probably isn't going to grow much higher. It's going to come down.

**A:** I disagree with that. I think CNO and I are both in the same place about the protective ship build. Since I've been here - May of '09 -- we're put 60 ships under contract. So even -- and this is never going to happen -- even if we quit building ships when the number under contract is finished, we're going to get right at 300 ships, probably by the end of this decade. Now what happens after that could be problematical if sequestration continues.

**Q:** Sequestration and budget reductions will likely lead to fewer new ship orders. Of the five major yards doing Navy work, National Steel and Shipbuilding (NASSCO) in San Diego is the most precarious, with a dearth of significant government work. Are you worried about them?

**A:** You're pulling on NASSCO right now because of the budget situation, because of sequestration. We haven't been able to award the contract for the [Afloat Forward Staging Base]. NASSCO is one of our best performing yards. They come in on or ahead of schedule and their learning curve in terms of man hours it takes, in terms of the budget, is dramatic on every ship. If you look at the Mobile Landing Platform, from time of decision to build until acceptance in the

fleet, the first MLP is less than five years. In shipbuilding terms, that's very fast. So, I'm worried about it even in this budget, without looking to the T-AOX oiler or LRX amphibious ship.

One of the things that NASSCO has done and that we have worked with them to do, they're getting some commercial business now. One of the reasons they're getting commercial business is because two years ago in '11 we signed the agreement to allow them to move overhead between contracts. That saves us money in the long run and makes them more competitive for commercial ships. They've got one commercial ship, cargo carrier ship now. They're in the hunt for some others. But, from an industrial base standpoint my sort of bottom line is that one of the things we've got to keep is competition. One of the things we've got to keep is enough shipyards so that we can have some competition because the one thing that has been shown to be effective in driving these ship costs down is competition.

So yes, I'm concerned. I'm concerned about particularly NASSCO. I'm concerned about the industrial base in general. That's one of the things that as we look forward to how we deal with the budget situation that we've got to keep in the front of our minds.

**Q:** Let's switch topics. You are an international person.

**A:** I am.

**Q:** Your international travel is a little more interesting than maybe your typical Navy secretary. You just got back from a to Middle Africa and North Africa. You did a big Asian trip earlier this year. You're on the go an awful lot. You're going to some places that are off the beaten track. What is tying these trips together?

**A:** There are two things. One is to see sailors and Marines in the field, where they are. But the second is the security. The national defense strategy has three legs. One is Western Pacific. I have been to Japan twice this year already, and the Arabian Gulf, which I've been to a lot.

But it also says build partnerships with allies, friends, and people around the world. That is sort of an amorphous concept when you just read it on paper, but it is something that is going to allow us to do some things globally that we couldn't do by ourselves by building capability and capacity in partners.

What a lot of my travel is trying to do is put meat on the bone of this partnership notion. The Africa trip is a good example of that. I went to six countries, four are around the Gulf of Guinea. The Gulf of Guinea has got good potential and bad potential. The bad potential is it could come

up as one of the world's hot spots. It's got a lot of mineral resources. You're seeing an increase in piracy. You're seeing an increase in illegal trafficking in drugs, people, arms, and things like that. You're seeing inland extremists as you look at Mali and coming across the Sahel that they're going to have to deal with. And, the four countries that I went to, we already have close relations with all of them.

In Senegal, they have one of the best maritime operation centers. They have the best in West Africa. They've got one of the best anywhere. It's mostly our equipment. Their CNO just got back from the Navy Post Graduate School, a resource management course there. Their Navy has some capability in terms of interdiction. They're getting good enough that we train them on visit board search and seizure and they are now training other people.

Getting these navies in the area to work together on some of these issues...we run exercises with them. We run some operations with them – Africa Partnership Stations, which is going on this year on a Dutch ship, not just American ships. Go down to Ghana where they also have a competent Navy that...and everyone I just named is a pretty vibrant democracy in a part of the world that has had some issues with that. Ghana, Senegal, Gabon, Sao Tome and places I've been. Sao Tome is an example of a country that is pretty small but in a geographically crucial area. They've got a maritime operations center that they have maintained incredibly well. What they don't have is much capability to do anything with the information. But if they can provide the information to some of these other countries, like Gabon, which they're right off the coast of, which does have some funds and which now increasingly needs to counter piracy and trafficking and things like that coming through their coast, if we can help them work together, help them through assessment teams, if we can help them through mobile training teams, if we can help them through visits like Africa Partnership Station, if we can help them like the Marines went in and have helped Gabon training some specialized military forces that they have. And, these are democracies that share a lot of our values. if we can move the Gulf of Guinea from being a potential hot spot in a bad way to being a potential example of how smaller countries can work together with us to do things, then I think that's very worthwhile.

**Q:** Of course the biggest nations there is Nigeria and you didn't go to Nigeria.

**A:** I did not, but they have a capable Navy. I have made two trips to West Africa now as secretary. There were specific reasons each time why Nigeria just couldn't fit into the schedule. But we're dealing with the Nigerians. They and Cameroon are working together. And in fact, they are actually pushing pirates out of Cameroon and parts of the Nigerian waters.

[Former CNO] Gary Roughead used to say you can surge people, you can surge equipment, but you can't surge trust. What you can't surge is interoperability and the working together that goes on over time. I can move the ball more in trips like this to places that people don't go to as much perhaps more than I can in some of the more traditional areas – although I'm sure not ignoring Japan, Korea, Philippines, Australia, New Zealand. And the Navy is a global enterprise. We are America's away team.

**Q:** Do you see yourself still in this position a year from now?

**A:** Yes. Why would anyone want to leave this job? All you can ask for is to have an impact, and particularly to have an impact on the future and on people in their lives and families and on this nation's security. We've got a great team here in the Navy. I think we're having an impact.

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