Remarks by Donald C. Winter
Secretary of the Navy
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Admiral Green, thank you for that kind introduction.

It is great to be back here for my fourth and final time as Secretary of the Navy.

As I reflect on the past three years, I feel humbled by the experience, and gratified by the way the Navy and Marine Corps have faced the challenges that have come our way.

Tonight, I would like to offer a few departing observations, particularly with respect to the surface Navy and the industrial base which supports it.

All of our efforts are taking place in the context of multiple missions—prosecuting two wars; taking care of our wounded and their families; and building the future Fleet.

As Secretary Gates has recently emphasized, it is often necessary to seek a balance between short-term and long-term imperatives, and that desire applies especially to the long-term challenge of building the future Fleet.

The surface Navy has been the backbone of the Fleet and the central focus of our maritime capabilities ever since the Founding Fathers realized more than two centuries ago that America needed a strong Navy if she wanted to be a respected nation on the world stage.

In that regard, I will remind you that three years ago I noted that piracy was once again becoming an increasingly worrisome problem, as recent events have repeatedly confirmed.

Piracy should be understood as an example of the broad spectrum of challenges we face, challenges that are characterized by many uncertainties.

If I had also predicted three years ago that Russia would engage militarily with Georgia, or that the Russian Navy would exercise with Venezuela and re-visit Cuba, many would have dismissed my predictions as alarmist.

One more time, we have been reminded that we cannot predict the course of future events, or divine the intentions of nations.

The uncertainties are such that we would be well-advised to maintain a portfolio of capabilities to respond to the variety of threats we might face, rather than to depend on specific threat scenarios to define our future Fleet.

The uncertainties are simply too great.

We must maintain capabilities ranging from major combat operations with carrier-based tactical air support, to operations in the littorals with Riverine forces and special operations capabilities.

The surface Navy is in the habit of taking on multiple missions and responding to evolving challenges, and there is little doubt that you will continue to train and execute a broad spectrum of operations.

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As I survey the performance of this community over the past three years, I see many successes.

We have seen stunning achievements by the Navy in the area of missile defense.

Missile defense has evolved into a surface Navy mission that is vital to our future security.

With each successful test, with each technological barrier broken, the critics have been proved wrong, and the feasibility of a sea-based missile defense system is brought closer to our reach.

Rogue nations are not going away.

Nor are terrorist groups, some of whom are actively seeking to acquire missile capability.

Given this reality, developing the ability to provide strike group, theater-wide and strategic missile defense capabilities will inevitably be central to the Navy's contribution to the joint fight.

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An increased focus on maritime domain awareness is also an area that our Navy can point to with pride.

MDA is the basis for maritime security, and it is the enabling capability that

facilitates the full spectrum of operations, from counter-piracy to high end combat operations.

The recent attacks on Mumbai—initiated by a terrorist infiltration by sea—serve as telling reminders of the importance of maritime security, and as a wake-up call that maritime security is a common interest to every coastal nation.

We have been working hard to expand cooperative engagement with maritime nations, and we are hopeful that this engagement will translate into closer ties across a range of common security interests.

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We can also point with pride to the many successes achieved by the Sailors and Marines in the amphibious Navy, which has demonstrated again and again that it is a critical element of power projection around the world in operations ranging from soft power missions to forcible entry from the sea.

With Marines onboard our ships, U.S. power projection achieves a level of capability and versatility that no other military can match, and continues to distinguish our Navy.

Our amphibious forces have also been on the leading edge of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts, with USS Kearsarge providing relief to victims of a cyclone in Bangladesh, and USS Peleliu deployed in support of a Pacific Partnership mission to numerous Asian nations in need of medical and other humanitarian assistance.

We have learned from these experiences that amphibious platforms provide us with capabilities that are well-suited to humanitarian assistance/disaster relief missions.

Not only do amphibious assets provide significant medical capabilities, but their sea-shore connectors can support critical engineering operations as well.

I saw that in the Solomon Islands, where Seabees embarked on USS Peleliu were able to replace the fresh water infrastructure that had been destroyed by a tsunami.

Instead of merely treating victims of contaminated water, our forces provided an enduring solution to one of the many problems caused by the tsunami.

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A list of highlights in the surface Navy should also include the standing up of our new Riverine force.

While some in this room may not regard Riverine forces as a core component of the surface Navy, they are critical to the extension of our capabilities into brown water.

While it has not gotten much attention, the Riverine platforms now in the Fleet have significantly enhanced our capabilities.

I have had an opportunity to ride our new Riverine craft and I am pleased by what I have seen.

The new boat's more robust design, better armor, and greater carrying capacity give us the capability we need in a variety of Riverine environments, not just in Iraq, but elsewhere around the world.

This evolution in Riverine forces represents the direction we need to go as we continue to shape the Fleet to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

As the Riverine forces have chartered new territory in brown water, the Littoral Combat Ship will similarly chart new territory in green water.

Just last October, we commissioned USS FREEDOM, the first of fifty-five Littoral Combat Ships.

Much has been made of the problems associated with the development of this new class of warship, causing many to overlook the significance of LCS.

LCS is an effective and appropriate response to the evolving threat environment.

The modularity of LCS gives it multi-mission capability, and enables it to both adapt to the challenges of the moment and evolve with time.

In addition, its shallow draft and exceptional maneuverability allow us to engage in the littorals as never before.

With these capabilities, it is expected that LCS will provide us with a cost-effective solution to our ever-increasing presence requirements.

The transformation of the Fleet to encompass green and brown waters is reflected in LCS, and USS FREEDOM represents a significant milestone in the history of the surface Navy.

At the same time we are transforming, I feel compelled to emphasize that no one should question our commitment to maintain blue water capabilities, a core component of which is maintaining our nuclear deterrence.

We may wish that all nuclear weapons disappear from the arsenals of nations and

the dreams of aggressors.

Unfortunately, this is simply not the case, and indeed, the reverse is true.

We are seeing nuclear proliferation to an ever-expanding list of rogue nations, and the possibility that bad actors will acquire them is an increasingly worrisome threat.

So long as anyone possesses nuclear weapons, we must maintain our nuclear deterrence.

And I know no better way of doing so than by maintaining our ballistic missile submarine force.

To that end, we have made significant progress working with our long-term coalition partners in Great Britain, and established a course of action that supports the United Kingdom's goal of maintaining an independent nuclear deterrent while meeting our need to replace the OHIO class submarine in a timely manner.

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Despite the many positive achievements and successes, I also have to admit that there have been disappointments as well.

In that regard, there has been much attention given to USS San Antonio.

I consider the broad-brush, generally negative coverage of the San Antonio's difficulties to be most unfortunate.

The Sailors on San Antonio are fiercely proud of their ship, and they are successfully making the efforts needed to overcome the challenges associated with bringing her to life.

The undue focus on San Antonio is also unfortunate because the challenges we face are much broader than those associated with San Antonio, and even with the LPD class.

We are seeing fundamental quality issues throughout much of the Fleet that need to be addressed in a systematic and aggressive manner.

The real shortcomings in shipbuilding will be rectified when we incorporate appropriate and significant design margins, ensure that the workforce is properly trained and supervised, and modernize shipyard facilities, embracing automated processes that are inherently predictable and repeatable.

Inadequate attention to design, personnel, and process re-engineering—

complicated by an insufficient Navy inspection and oversight process—have brought us to our current state of affairs, and until those fundamentals are addressed, we should not expect future results to be any different.

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When I talk about quality issues, I want to make clear that my concerns relate not only to shipbuilding, but to combat systems, missiles, and other components of our Fleet.

What we need for our Navy is a true quality culture.

Quality must be a consideration greater than or equal to performance in importance as we evolve our Fleet.

As I have noted on numerous occasions, this assertion merely reflects what is important in today's wars.

Take the case of UAV's.

Today, the number of operational UAV orbits is more important to the warfighter than the degree of image resolution we are able to achieve.

In other words, reliability and availability are more important than what we commonly refer to as "performance" parameters.

Our emphasis on quality takes place in the context of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and with a solemn obligation to do right by the Sailors and Marines who go in harm's way.

The work of Sailors and Marines is inherently dangerous, and our Navy has long been a leader in establishing quality programs to address high risk operations.

Subsafe is a highly successful example of that effort, and it is considered the gold standard in the realm of quality assurance and safety.

We need to extend that approach throughout the Navy—and throughout the shipbuilding community.

Combat and continuing engagements in hostile areas put an added premium on quality and the ability to conduct operations under unanticipated conditions.

One of the great lessons learned from our experience in Iraq has been the challenge of dealing with an unconventional and adaptive adversary.

After decades of planning to address specific and relatively well-known threats from the Warsaw Pact, we have been faced with the challenges of Improvised Explosive

Devices—a threat which changed repeatedly during the course of the engagement.

Providing margin in survivability, avoiding quality defects that would result in points of vulnerability, and ensuring that the vehicles are able to operate reliably—even over unmaintained roads—have been key challenges for the MRAP program.

As this audience knows full well, I am not one to offer praise lightly, but I have to state that I am most pleased by what industry and the Navy-Marine Corps team have provided as MRAP vehicles, and I am impressed at the way those involved were able to successfully overcome early procurement challenges in a very compressed time frame.

The significance of what you were able to achieve is hard to overestimate.

The last thing in the world you want is to force a team on patrol to dismount their vehicle in a hostile zone because the vehicle has broken down.

In this context, quality is not just a financial matter.

One cannot "make whole" the buyer by reimbursing the costs of repair.

There are significant opportunity costs that have profound implications for our presence, deterrence, and operational capabilities.

Most importantly, the lives of our Sailors and Marines are dependent on the degree to which we have embraced a culture of quality.

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The focus of these comments admittedly has been on the systems that we are acquiring.

But the quality of our people is the real secret of our success, and it distinguishes our Navy from the Navies of all other nations.

I have had the opportunity to observe first-hand the human factor at work.

From SEAL's and Marines deployed throughout Central Command, to Sailors in the Arabian Gulf to the pride and professionalism of our medical personnel, we enjoy an edge in the quality of our people that is the envy of the world.

Our Navy is blessed to be in the hands of such dedicated and highly motivated Naval warfighters.

We must continue to provide them the full spectrum of training opportunities, from anti-submarine warfare to pilot training on Outlying Landing Fields to live fire gunnery exercises at sea.

Litigation or legislation that would result in crippling blows to our training is a chronic threat, and we must do everything in our power to ensure that we are not prevented from conducting proper and necessary training.

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It has been an honor to serve with you.

There have been many highlights, and many memorable experiences.

Visiting our ships, celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Great White Fleet, and meeting everyday Sailors—from recruits at Great Lakes to Navy recruiters on Long Island to "sand Sailors" in Iraq and Afghanistan—these experiences have deepened my affection and appreciation for all that you do.

America needs a strong Navy.

Our destiny as a world power and as a maritime Nation depends on it.

No world power in history has ever gone unchallenged, and we should not expect to be immune from this reality.

Many aspiring powers are focusing on their Navies as they modernize and build up their militaries.

Given such trends, new challenges await you.

All of you who serve in uniform, and those of you in the vital industrial base who support you, have chosen a worthy and noble profession, and you are vital to our national security.

I bid you farewell with a humble heart, and with great pride in having been a part of this great organization.

I salute you all, and I wish you every success in your future endeavors.

May God bless the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps, and may God continue to bless America.