



Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

IN THE NEWS

Tons More Subs, Carriers, and Robot Ships, as Esper Details Vision for 'Battle Force 2045' and a 500-Ship Navy to Counter China

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'MORE LETHAL, SURVIVABLE, ADAPTABLE, SUSTAINABLE': Defense Secretary Mark Esper has unveiled his vision for a 500-ship Navy, the cornerstone of his "Battle Force 2045" plan to outpace China in the race for global military supremacy.

In remarks at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments yesterday, Esper outlined an ambitious plan to completely overhaul the structure and fighting strategy of the U.S. Navy around a fleet of more than 500 manned and unmanned ships. "Battle Force 45 [will be] a more lethal, survivable, adaptable, sustainable, modern, and larger force than we have seen in many years," Esper said.

The plan would augment the long-standing goal of a 355-ship conventional Navy with an array of unmanned or optionally manned systems, including undersea drones and robotic surface ships, along with an array of unmanned, ship-based aircraft.

BY THE NUMBERS: Here's a breakdown of Esper's Navy, to be built over the next 25 years, along with his comments from yesterday's event:

- **70 - 80 Attack Submarines.** "If we do nothing else, the Navy must begin building three Virginia-class submarines a year as soon as possible. Additionally, we intend to refuel the seventh Los Angeles-class submarine and continue investing in the future attack submarine."
- **8 - 11 Nuclear-powered Carriers.** "Our most visible deterrent, with the ability to project power ... to continue enhancing their survivability and lethality, we are developing the air wing of the future, capable of engaging at extended ranges."
- **6 Light Carriers.** "Light carriers provide additional presence and capacity to carry out day-to-day missions and free up supercarriers for more critical high-end fights ... One model we are considering is the *USS America* that is equipped with more than a dozen F-35Bs."
- **140 - 240 Robot Ships.** "Unmanned and optionally manned surface and sub-surface vessels of all types [will have] the potential to perform a wide range of missions from resupply and surveillance to mine laying and missile strikes."
- **60 - 70 Smaller Surface Combatants.** "Study results indicate the introduction of 60 to 70 smaller combatants into the fleet will not only increase capacity to conduct distributed maritime operations, but it will also free other critical assets for more efficient mission distribution."
- **50 - 60 Amphibious Warfare Ships.** "The Marine Corps is currently in the process of implementing its force structure plan, and I support the commandant's visions to recalibrate the great power competition. As such, we see a need for more amphibious warfare ships than previously planned."
- **More unmanned ship-based aircraft.** "The Navy must develop and deploy carrier-based unmanned aircraft of all types. This includes fighters, refuelers, early warning, and electronic attack aircraft."