

CNO Message to the Fleet

Shipmates, I am certain the vast majority of men and women in the United States Navy serve with honor, character, and integrity. But we cannot be under any illusions that extremist behaviors do not exist in our Navy.

Just in the past few weeks, there have been two separate incidents where symbols of hate and violence were anonymously left in living areas aboard ships in our Fleet. The chain of command took both of those incidents seriously and immediately launched investigations, which are ongoing.

But there is more we must do, together, because these symbols are contrary to our Navy culture, core values, and warfighting effectiveness.

As directed by the Secretary of Defense and across the Fleet, each command will conduct a stand down by April 6, 2021, to address extremism within our ranks. We must better understand the scope of the problem, get after this issue, and eliminate conduct that is driven by extremist beliefs. No doubt, this is a leadership issue. We will own this.

As a Navy uniform and civilian, active and reserve - we cannot tolerate extremist behavior of any kind, and must engage in open and honest conversations with each other and take action. Leaders at all levels must lead by example. You must set the tone. You must model correct behavior 24/7/365 in person and online.

We also have a responsibility to educate, and inspire those in the Navy, those coming into the Fleet, and those leaving our service that extremist behavior is unacceptable. Hate and extremist ideology are wedges that divide us. These actions stoke resentment and tear others down. That's the opposite of how we will treat each other as shipmates. We build each other up, we encourage each other, and we celebrate our shipmates' success.

If we don't eliminate extremist behaviors from our Navy, then racism, injustice, indignity, and disrespect will grow and continue to keep us from reaching our potential - an inclusive, respectful, professional fighting force that answers the Nations call. If we must first question the intentions of our shipmate standing the watch with us, now, and especially, when taking fire, we will fail when the Nation needs us most in combat.

Some Sailors may think their voices do not matter right now, or feel frustrated seeking to be seen and be heard. But let me be clear, each of your voices matter. This stand-down is another in our efforts to listen, to learn, and to improve.

Now is the time for us to come together and be guided by a strong moral compass. We must eliminate extremist behavior and its corrosive effects on our fighting force. And we must remember that we swear an oath to support and defend the Constitution above all else.

Today, and every day, our Navy must be a shining example of an organization centered on respect, inclusive of all.

Simply put, we must demand of each other that we treat everyone with dignity and respect. That is how we will become a stronger Navy.