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USS George Washington to return to Yokosuka on Wednesday

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Stars and Stripes
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YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan – The USS George Washington is expected to return to its home port Wednesday, one month after the ship left Yokosuka amid radiation concerns stemming from the damaged Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant.

The crew will arrive at a much quieter place than they left, as the roughly 4,500 family members and others who left the base in the aftermath of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami are just starting to make their way back.

The ship left March 21 despite having all of its major systems in a state of disassembly when the initial earthquake struck. It had been undergoing scheduled maintenance and upgrades since January. Elevated radiation levels in Yokosuka caused by winds blowing from the Fukushima plant, located nearly 200 miles to the north, led Navy officials to order the George Washington to sea.

The detected radiation wasn't a health hazard, but an accumulation of radiation would have made the ship's overhaul period cumbersome, Adm. Robert Willard, head of U.S. Pacific Command, said at Yokosuka on March 23.

Although the situation at Fukushima has stabilized, it remains uncertain enough that the George Washington isn't ruling out heading back to sea, Navy officials said. On Monday, officials from Tokyo Electric Power Company said they are aiming for a cold shutdown of the damaged reactors in six to nine months.

The George Washington's sailors "are going to maintain a higher level of readiness to go back to sea than perhaps they normally would," U.S. Seventh Fleet spokesman Cmdr. Jeff Davis said Tuesday.

There are no current expectations or indications that radiation will increase significantly above normal background levels, Davis added.

In addition to a complement of about 2,500 sailors, the ship left last month with 466 civilian contractors who were in Yokosuka to complete repairs and upgrades. Carrier Air Wing 5, which normally embarks with the ship, instead flew to Misawa Air Base and other locations in support of relief and recovery efforts for areas devastated by the earthquake and tsunami.

The ship spent most of its time since March 21 off the Japanese islands of Shikoku and Kyushu, where it performed whatever maintenance it could without access to a shipyard.

The George Washington also visited Kyushu's Sasebo Naval Base on April 5, and again from April 12 through April 14. While in Sasebo, they rotated shipyard personnel, and exchanged maintenance components and equipment, officials said.

The George Washington was originally expected to finish its maintenance sometime in the next few weeks. On Tuesday, fleet officials declined to state whether the time at sea would lengthen the maintenance period timeframe, citing operational security concerns.

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I always question your facts, found at least one that wasn't true in this article....
"ship left last month with 466 civilian contractors who were in Yokosuka" the majority were civilian DoD workers not contractors.

I also wondered as I was reading the articles about the voluntary departure and all the items around it and the EQ how much of what was written was just to get people stirred up. Because I lot of what was wrote was hearsay and supposition. Your "journalists" I believe are getting as bad as FOX in not checking their fact first.....

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Good luck, guys and gals. I was stationed at Yokosuka from 98-00 and enjoyed it immensely. Wish I hadn't left. Keep up the great work and know I'm thinking about you all.

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