

Next Sub-Launched Ballistic Missile 'Won't Be Completely New'

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy's next-generation submarine-launched missile (SLBM) will not be a completely new design but will incorporate some of the current Trident D5 Life-Extension (D5LE) version systems.

The follow-on missile is currently known as the Trident D5LE2, according to Vice Adm. Johnny Wolfe, director of Strategic Systems Programs (SSP).

"What Ohio [-class SSBN] has today [D5LE] is what Columbia will initially have until we get the Life-Extension 2," Wolfe said Nov. 8 at the Naval Submarine League's annual symposium.

To lower technical and schedule risk in the Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarine program, the Navy decided to arm the boats initially with the existing Trident D5LE missile rather than develop an entirely new missile concurrent with the development of the submarine. At some point in the service life of the Columbia class, the boats will receive the D5LE2.

Wolfe said the SSP will begin trade studies in 2020 to "define an SLBM that can deploy throughout the life of Columbia," which is slated to serve to 2084. The studies will determine which D5LE components can be continued in the next missile and which will need to be modernized or replaced for D5LE2.

The D5LE2 "won't look like the D5 that we've got today, it won't be completely new, it will be somewhere in the middle," he said.

"If you look at the decisions that we made on Columbia, as we went down to 16 [launch] tubes [from 24 on the Ohio class],

part of that decision was made because there was an assumption that the reliability of this weapon system way out in the 2070s and 2080s will be just as reliable and supportable as it is today with the current Trident," he said.

Wolfe pointed out that the Trident missile inventory will decline to a point where new production will be needed. Part of the challenge is to sustain the industrial base to build, for example, rocket motors, so that the expertise is not lost during procurement troughs and would not have to be reconstituted.

"Our challenge is that whatever we do next has, at a minimum, the reliability, accuracy and supportability that we've got today," he said.