CNO Calls Unmanned MQ-4C Triton 'Game-Changing'

An MQ-4C Triton taxis after landing at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, in January. U.S. Air Force/Senior Airman Ryan Brooks

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Navy's top officer said the high-altitude, high-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) is providing support to the fleet on its first deployment that was not available before.

"We're still committed to the [MQ-4C Triton]," Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael Gilday said, responding to a question from Sen. John Hoeven (R-N.D.) during a March 11 hearing of the Senate Appropriations Committee's Defense subcommittee.

"We just accelerated the deployment of our first two out to Guam, so they are on station and on mission right now," Gilday said. "The capabilities that the MQ-4 brings are game-changing in terms of long-range ISR [intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance] at altitude, with sensors that we haven't had supporting the fleet before."

> *"We just accelerated the deployment of our first two [MQ-4C Tritons] out to Guam, so they are on station and on mission right now."*
>
> *Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael Gilday*

Gilday took the opportunity to mention the Navy's future unmanned, carrier-based aerial refueling aircraft, the MQ-25A Stingray, which is now in testing. He pointed out the aircraft's potential ISR sensing capability as well as its primary aerial refueling role.

Also testifying was Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David H.

Berger, who said ISR unmanned assets “would become even more important. It does complement the manned ISR platforms like an F-35, which is a flying sensor platform. Especially critical for the forward force, the Navy-Marine Corps expeditionary team that’s up forward, as a stand-in forward force. That’s your eyes and ears. The joint force has to have a picture of what’s in front of them. I would expect, four or five years from now, much more unmanned ISR and [in] 10 years exponentially more than that.”

Berger added that a family of all sizes of UAVs is needed.

“We have the means for a sergeant to launch, recover, control a hand-held unmanned platform. He also has to be linked to medium, high-altitude, longer endurance as well, either kinetically to engage something for a target or just to collect information.”

“Unmanned is going to be a huge part of our future,” acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly said. “Unmanned is a critical element – not just aerial but unmanned ships as well.”

SAIC Wins Award to Support Navy, Marine Corps Tactical Warfare Training

MCLEAN, Va. – SAIC has been awarded a $45.2 million follow-on contract to support the tactical warfare training of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps, the company said in a release. The single-award contract has a three-year period of performance.

SAIC will continue providing technical and tactical expertise to support tactical warfare training of the Tactical Training Group Pacific (TTGP) stationed in San Diego, the Expeditionary Warfare Training Group Pacific (EWTGP) based in Coronado, California, Tactical Training Group Detachment (TTGPDY) Yokosuka, Japan, and Carrier Strike Group 15 in San Diego.

SAIC's support provides the Navy and Marine Corps the most up-to-date training, including instruction related to tactics, techniques and procedures as well as practical applications and wargaming support, utilizing government-furnished training systems for classroom training, Fleet Synthetic Training, and Live, Virtual, Constructive Training. This support enables TTGP and EWTGP to execute their primary mission to train carrier strike groups, expeditionary strike groups, and amphibious ready groups of the Navy's Third and Seventh Fleets.

"SAIC is proud to continue our support of TTGP and EWTGP as they train groups for deployment," said Jim Scanlon, SAIC executive vice president and general manager of the Defense Systems Customer Group. "We want today's Navy and Marine Corps forces to be as mission-ready as possible and this program enables that preparation."

SAIC was the only awardee for this contract. Three subcontractors – American Systems, Prairie Quest, and Stellar Peak – will work with SAIC on this contract.

"Our years of successful engagement on this program, coupled with key personnel, secured this win and cemented the trust between us and our customers in this contract," Scanlon said.

Navy Assumes ‘Balanced’ Risk of Strike Fighter Inventory with Super Hornet Curtailment

An F/A-18E Super Hornet launches from the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Brianna Thompson

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Navy is working to manage its strike fighter inventory by focusing on restoring grounded fighters while curtailing future procurement of the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet after 2021, Navy officials said.

The Navy is requesting 24 Super Hornets in the fiscal 2021 budget but has cancelled plans to procure 36 more beyond 2021.

In a March 10 hearing of the Tactical Air and Land Forces subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee, Rep. Hartzler (R-Mo.) said the Navy has a shortfall of 49 strike fighters – more than the 44 strike fighter complement of a carrier air wing – and that the Navy’s decision to curtail Super Hornet procurement “is creating too much operational risk in the near term.”

Rear Adm. Gregory N. Harris, director of air warfare in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, said that ensuring enough fighters are coming out of depot-level maintenance while others are inducted into service-life modification (SLM) program is “a balanced risk that we are taking right now based on the current budget.”

Commenting on the large amount of corrosion found on the first two Super Hornets inducted into the SLM program, James F. Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition, said the Navy has

added to the program “so that we deliver a fully mission-capable airplane out of SLM,” including phase maintenance checks, “so when we hand it back to the wing and the squadron, it’s ready to go. Previous service-life extension programs have just done things to the airplane but not taken advantage of the fact we had the airplane all pulled apart.”

Geurts said that the Navy is working closely with Boeing “to productionize the service-life extension – not getting every airplane its own custom artisan activity. We need to get that in the production flow. So, some of the risk of shoving the F/A-18 down after [fiscal] ’21 will be taking advantage of that line to productionize to get to our goal of 40 airplanes a year through that SLEP line.”

Geurts also said the improved mission-capable rate of the current Super Hornet fleet “gives us additional ‘up’ aircraft to help balance that shortfall.”

He said it takes 18 months to get a Super Hornet through SLM, but his goal is to reduce that to 12 months.

He predicted that by 2029 the Navy would reach its full fighter inventory.

The U.S. Marine Corps, having inherited many of the Navy’s divested F/A-18C Hornets, has 275 Hornets on hand to meet an inventory requirement of 143, said Lt. Gen. Steven R. Rudder, deputy commandant for aviation.

“We have enough Hornets, we have enough [AV-8B] Harriers,” Rudder said. “The challenge for us is the transition [to the F-35] … to maintain a 20 F-35 buy a year – at least – so we can stand up at least two squadrons a year as we go forward.”

Keel-Laying of Coast Guard's First OPC Set for April

An artist rendering of the offshore patrol cutter. Eastern Shipbuilding Group Inc.

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Coast Guard plans to celebrate the keel-laying of the first Heritage-class offshore patrol cutter (OPC) next month in Panama City, Florida.

Testifying March 10 before the House Homeland Security Committee, Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Karl L. Schultz said the keel of the Argus, the first OPC hull, would be laid in April at the Eastern Shipbuilding Group Inc. shipyard.

The OPC is designed to replace the current fleet of medium-endurance cutters, which are between 30 and 50 years old. OPCs will provide a capability bridge between the national security cutter and the fast-response cutter. Each OPC will feature a flight deck and advanced C4ISR (command, control, computers, communications, intelligence and reconnaissance) capabilities.

Delivery of the first OPC is expected in fiscal 2022. The Coast Guard plans to acquire 25 OPCs. The damage inflicted on the Eastern Shipbuilding facilities by Hurricane Michael in October 2018 resulted in the sea service granting relief to the shipbuilder, reducing its planned construction to four OPCs instead on nine and deciding to recompete the remainder of the OPC program.

Textron Delivers First Next-Generation Ship-to-Shore Connector to the Navy

The next-generation air-cushion vehicle, Ship-to-Shore Connector. Textron Systems Corp.

NEW ORLEANS, La. – Textron Systems Corp. successfully delivered its first next-generation air-cushion vehicle, Ship-to-Shore Connector (SSC) Craft 100, to the U.S. Navy in February, the company announced.

"We are proud to deliver the first of many Ship-to-Shore Connectors to the U.S. Navy," said Henry Finneral, senior vice president of Textron Systems. "This delivery is the result of the dedication by the joint Navy and industry team and will provide the Navy with a needed capability to rapidly transport material, personnel and humanitarian assistance to shorelines."

Prior to delivery, Craft 100 underwent integrated testing to demonstrate the capability of its fly-by-wire steering, electrical and propulsion systems and completed its acceptance trials in December 2019.

As the replacement for the existing fleet of Landing Craft, Air-Cushion (LCAC) vehicles, follow-on SSCs will primarily transport weapon systems, equipment, cargo and personnel through tough environmental conditions to the beach. The craft can travel at a sustained 35 knots and shares less than 1% of legacy LCAC original parts, representing a true upgrade for the LCAC forces at Assault Craft Unit (ACU) 4, ACU 5, and Naval Beachmaster Unit 7. The SSC also has an increased payload and service life of 30 years.

The SSC is constructed at Textron Systems in New Orleans and

built with similar configurations, dimensions and clearances to existing LCAC, ensuring the compatibility of this next-generation air cushion vehicle with existing well deck-equipped amphibious ships as well as expeditionary transfer docks and expeditionary sea bases.

The Navy will continue to utilize Craft 100 as a test and training craft. There are 13 additional SSCs in various states of production. Builder's trials for Craft 101 are scheduled for the first quarter of this year with acceptance trials following in the spring.

GE Engines to Power Four New Chamsuri II-Class Patrol Boats for Korean Navy

EVENDALE, Ohio – GE Marine's 4.6 MW LM500 marine gas turbines will power ships 13 through 16 of the Republic of Korea Navy's PKX-B patrol boat program, the company said in a release.

The 220-ton PKX-B Chamsuri II class ships will be built by the Hanjin Heavy Industries and Construction shipyard, and the GE LM500 gas turbine modules will be manufactured, assembled and tested in-country by Hanwha Aerospace.

In December 2019, the ROK Navy launched PKX-B ships five through eight with expectations to be delivered to the fleet by the end of 2020. Each ship can attain speeds over 40 knots powered by two GE LM500 gas turbines and two diesel engines in a combined diesel and gas turbine (CODAG) configuration.

The PKX-B complements the larger, 500-ton PKX-A Gumdoksuri

class patrol boats to provide maritime protection and defense in and along the ROK's seaways. Both the PKX-A and PKX-B ships are powered by GE LM500 marine gas turbines; the first PKX-A Gumdoksuri in the 18-ship program entered service in 2008.

"Thanks to our long-standing relationships in the Republic of Korea, we worked directly with key component manufacturers on a complete system design analysis and improvement program," said GE's Kris Shepherd, vice president and general manager of marine operations. "The end result was the PKX-B realized a 45% reduction in size and weight from its PKX-A predecessor by optimizing the package and gas turbine auxiliary systems to include an electric start system."

Navy Secretary to Commission Future Carrier 2030 Task Force

A C-2A Greyhound prepares to move across the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Apprentice Angel Thuy Jaskuloski

WASHINGTON – Acting Navy Secretary Thomas B. Modly announced that he is commissioning a Blue-Ribbon Future Carrier 2030 (FC-2030) Task Force to conduct a six-month study that will reimagine the future of the aircraft carrier and carrier-based naval aviation (manned and unmanned) for 2030 and beyond.

FC-2030 will be complementary to, and informed by, a broad review of national shipbuilding requirements being conducted

by Deputy Defense Secretary David L. Norquist. U.S. Navy and Marine Corps uniformed and civilian leadership will be engaged in both efforts.

FC-2030 will attract current and former leaders from Congress, leaders from the U.S. shipbuilding and supporting technology industries and current and former Pentagon leaders as well as thought leaders at war colleges, think-tanks and futurists from around the nation.

“The long-term challenges facing our nation and the world demand clear-eyed assessments and hard choices,” Modly said. “Because we have four new Ford carriers under contract, we have some time to reimagine what comes next. Any assessment we do must consider cost, survivability and the critical national requirement to sustain an industrial base that can produce the ships we need –ships that will contribute to a superior, integrated naval force for the 2030s and far beyond.

“Aircraft carrier construction sustains nearly 60,000 skilled jobs in over 46 states,” Modly added. “It can’t be simply turned on and off like a faucet. We must be thoughtful in how we approach changes as they will have lasting impacts on our national industrial competitiveness and employment.”

The task force will be led by an executive director chosen from within the Department of the Navy’s Secretariat staff and assisted on a collateral-duty basis by representatives from the Office of Naval Research and the deputy chief of naval operations for Warfighting Development.

With an executive director, the FC-2030 senior executive panel will consist of thought leaders with historical records of leading and contributing to large change in maritime defense strategies and programs. Former Sen. John Warner (R-Va.) has agreed to serve as the honorary chairman of the executive panel. Former Nav Secretary John Lehman, former acting Deputy Defense Secretary Christine Fox, former

Deputy Navy Undersecretary Seth Cropsey and former Rep. Randy Forbes (R-Va.) have agreed to serve as executive members of the panel.

“Our future strength will be determined as much by the gray matter we apply to our challenges as the gray hulls we build,” Modly said. “We need the best minds from both inside and outside of government focused on this issue.”

The study will be conducted with the assistance of the Naval University System (U.S. Naval Academy, Naval War College, Marine Corps University and Naval Postgraduate School) as well as eligible federally funded research and development centers and naval warfare centers.

Wittman: DDGs Still Needed as Cruisers Retire; Go Slow on USVs

The guided-missile destroyer USS Forrest Sherman transits the Arabian Gulf. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Raymond Maddocks

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Navy still needs a large fleet of guided-missile destroyers (DDGs) to replace the guided-missile cruisers (CGs) being retired, a senior member of the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) said.

Speaking March 9 at the Hudson Institute, a Washington think tank, Rep. Rob Wittman (R-Va.), the ranking member of the Seapower and Projection Forces subcommittee of the HASC, expressed concern over the Navy’s announcement that it would

not extend the service life of the older Arleigh Burke-class (DDG 51) DDGs, some of which reach their maximum life in the mid-2020s.

“Our DDG 51s are incredibly important, and doing the upgrades, especially on the Flight IIs, are important,” Wittman said. “There is still a lot of utility and life left in Flight I – there are some upgrades they can do … and bring the Aegis baseline systems up, put some more capable radars on those ships – I think that those things need to stay on track.”

> *“Our DDG 51s are incredibly important, and doing the upgrades, especially on the Flight IIs, are important.”*
>
> *Rep. Rob Wittman (R-Va.)*

Noting the Navy’s 2021 budget plan to slow the rate of production on the new Flight III DDGs, Wittman said the plan “doesn’t get us to where we need to be, especially in light of retiring four CGs. If you’re going to take those cruisers out – remember, those cruisers are either part of the carrier strike group or the ballistic-missile defense mission – my counter to that is, what are you going to do to then replace them at some fairly fast pace with DDG 51s?”

Wittman noted that “going south” on upfitting older DDGs, retiring CGs and not building the Flight III DDGs at a quick enough pace, a 355-ship Navy gets more distant.

Asked by moderator Seth Cropsey about increasing the number of small combatants and unmanned surface vessels (USVs) instead of DDGs, Wittman said integration of USVs raises questions that have not yet been answered.

“The only way you know that is to implement that, put it in place, and figure out what does it do well, what doesn’t it do well, and then you can ramp up production,” he said. “My concern is that if you replace a DDG 51 Flight III – that we

know is an extraordinarily capable ship, even a modernization of a Flight I or you replace that with a unmanned platform – you have no idea at this particular point how useful that is going to be integrating these missions into the fleet.

"Let's build a number of [USVs], let's integrate them in, let's figure out what works and what doesn't work, and then at some future date you can ramp up production and get a significant amount of capability and capacity," he said. "But don't do it too soon, where you waste resources and say, well these ships hadn't worked out so well and we're going to retire these. We see this with [littoral combat ships] and it really takes away from the effort necessary to build the fleet that we need for the future."

Navy Gives Boeing Long-Lead Contract for 18 P-8A Patrol Aircraft

A P-8A Poseidon aircraft makes a pass over Naval Air Station Sigonella, Italy, following a flight in support of Dynamic Manta 2020 in February. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Juan Sua

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy has ordered long-lead materials and activity to support production of eight P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft for its patrol squadrons plus 10 more for foreign military sales.

Naval Air Systems Command has awarded an $800 million contract modification for long-lead materials and activities for Lot 11 production of 18 P-8As, including eight for the U.S. Navy, six

for the Republic of Korea Navy and four for the Royal New Zealand Air Force, according to a Pentagon contract announcement.

The funds for the work were appropriated in the fiscal 2020 budget.

The Navy was authorized to procure nine P-8As in the 2020 budget, but one was targeted to be delayed or cancelled as part of a reprogramming request to shift some Defense Department funds to construction of a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Navy to Commission Expeditionary Sea Base USS Hershel 'Woody' Williams

The Military Sealift Command expeditionary sea base USNS Hershel 'Woody' Williams (ESB 4) is at anchor in the Chesapeake Bay, Sept. 15, 2019 during mine countermeasure equipment testing. U.S. Navy/Bill Mesta

WASHINGTON – The Navy will commission its newest Expeditionary Sea Base, USS Hershel "Woody" Williams (ESB 4), during a 10 a.m. EST ceremony Saturday, March 7, in Norfolk, Virginia, the Navy's Office on Information announced in a March 6 release.

The future Hershel "Woody" Williams is the first ship to bear the name of Marine Corps Chief Warrant Officer Four Hershel Woodrow Williams, the last surviving Medal of Honor recipient recognized for heroism at the Battle of Iwo Jima during World War II.

U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia will deliver the commissioning ceremony's principal address. The ceremony will be highlighted by a time-honored Navy tradition when Ms. Tracie Jean Ross and Ms. Travie Jane Ross, ship sponsors and daughters of Hershel "Woody" Williams, will give the first order to "man our ship and bring her to life!"

"This ship honors a man who dedicated his life to service – heroic service as a Marine, and continued service to his fellow veterans," said Acting Secretary of the Navy Thomas Modly. "This dedication will live on in USS Hershel 'Woody' Williams as the ship is deployed around the world bringing additional capability to our growing fleet. The ceremony on Saturday will also represent the dedication to service demonstrated by the men and women who worked tirelessly to build this ship and their commitment to quality and innovation."

The future Hershel "Woody" Williams is optimized to support a variety of maritime-based missions and designed around four core capabilities: aviation facilities, berthing, equipment staging support, and command and control assets. ESBs can be enhanced to meet special operations force missions through increased communications, aviation and unmanned aircraft system support.

Built by General Dynamics NASSCO, the Montford Point-class is comprised of five ships across two variants: Expeditionary Transfer Docks and Expeditionary Sea Bases. Acting as a mobile sea base, ESBs are part of the critical access infrastructure that supports the deployment of forces and supplies to provide prepositioned equipment and sustainment with flexible distribution.

The platform has an aviation hangar and flight deck that include four operating spots capable of landing V-22 and MH-53E equivalent helicopters, accommodations, work spaces, and ordnance storage for an embarked force. The platform will

also provide unmanned aviation vehicle operations, enhanced command and control, communications, computers, and intelligence capabilities to support embarked force mission planning and execution. The reconfigurable mission deck area can store embarked force equipment including mine sleds and rigid hull inflatable boats.