

General Dynamics Land Systems Delivers Advanced Reconnaissance Vehicle Prototype to U.S. Marine Corps



General Dynamics Land Systems Advanced Reconnaissance Vehicle

STERLING HEIGHTS, Mich. – General Dynamics Land Systems, a business unit of General Dynamics, submitted its Advanced Reconnaissance Vehicle (ARV) prototype to the U.S. Marine Corps for evaluation in the service’s ongoing competition, the company said in a release.

“We are proud to have delivered this transformational capability to the Marine Corps,” said Gordon Stein, General Dynamics Land Systems vice president and general manager of U.S. operations. “Our purpose-built ARV prototype is the fruition of several years of research and development

internally and in collaboration with the USMC. We can't wait for Marines to get their hands on this ARV and use it as their quarterback on the multi-domain battlefield."

General Dynamics Land Systems' ARV connects to an array of onboard and offboard sensors, uncrewed aerial vehicles, and will eventually include ground robotic systems.

Along with the ARV prototype, General Dynamics Land Systems also delivered a system integration lab, and a blast hull for survivability testing.

"We have continued to align with the Marine Corps' 10-year transformational initiative, Force Design 2030, and our ARV capability furthers that objective," said Phil Skuta, General Dynamics Land Systems director of strategy and business development for U.S. Marine Corps and Navy programs. "The ARV is highly mobile on land and in the water and will allow Marines to sense and communicate like never before. Our design also ensures growth margins and modular open architecture to rapidly incorporate new technology as it develops."

Congress Orders Report on Plan for Future of Navy's Expeditionary EA-18G Squadrons



A U.S. Navy EA-18G Growlers assigned to the “Garudas” Electronic Attack Squadron (VAQ) 134, Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, Washington, waits to receive air-to-air refueling from a Royal Air Force Voyager tanker assigned to 101 Squadron, RAF Brize Norton, United Kingdom, during a Red Flag-Nellis 22-1 mission Feb. 3, 2022, at Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada. *U.S. AIR FORCE / Airman 1st Class Zachary Rufus*

ARLINGTON, Va. – Congress rejected the U.S. Navy’s 2023 budget proposal to deactivate five electronic attack squadrons (VAQs) that operate the Boeing EA-18G Growler electronic attack jet in the defense policy bill recently signed into law by President Joe Biden. Instead, Congress directed the Defense Department to submit a plan to meet the joint airborne attack requirements.

In its 2023 budget submission, the Navy proposed to deactivate its entire expeditionary VAQ force, which deploys to overseas bases in order to provide electronic attack capabilities to the joint force. The five expeditionary VAQ squadrons are separate from the Navy’s VAQ squadrons that deploy aboard aircraft carriers.

The five squadrons originally slated for cut included a total of 25 EA-18Gs, which would have been placed in storage at the Aerospace Maintenance and Regeneration Group at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base in Tucson, Arizona. The cuts also would have freed up approximately 1,020 officers and enlisted personnel. The Navy estimated the savings over the Future Years Defense Plan would be \$807.8 million.

In the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, Congress directed the Navy to retain all 160 EA-18G aircraft and required the following:

A report outlining a strategy and execution plan for the Navy and Air Force to continuously and effectively meet airborne electronic attack training and combat requirements of the joint force, to include establishment or continuation of one or more land-based, joint service electronic attack squadrons and integration of both active and reserve components of both services.

The Navy is the only provider of expeditionary electronic attack jets to the joint force. The Air Force retired its last EF-111A Raven jets in 1998, and the Marine Corps retired its last EA-6B Prowler tactical jets in 2019. The expeditionary VAQ squadrons have deployed to Southwest Asia, Japan, and Italy over the years in support of U.S. and coalition forces. Last year, one squadron – VAQ-134 – was deployed to the European Command as part of the build-up of forces in support NATO's eastern flank after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The expeditionary VAQ squadrons are considered high-demand/high-value assets by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

The Navy's five expeditionary VAQ squadrons are all based at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, Washington: VAQs 131, 132, 134, 135, and 138. The Navy's only reserve VAQ squadron, VAQ-209, has also been used in an expeditionary role.

The carrier-deployable VAQ squadrons are VAQs 130, 133, 136,

137, 139, 140, 141, 142, and VAQ-144, the latter established in October 2022. All are based at Whidbey Island, except for VAQ-141, which is based at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan, as part of the forward-deployed Carrier Air Wing Five for the USS Ronald Reagan.

French Warship Seizes Illegal Drugs in North Arabian Sea



MANAMA, Bahrain – A French warship seized illegal drugs worth a total estimated U.S. street value of \$24 million from a fishing vessel transiting international waters in the North Arabian Sea, Dec. 27, Combined Maritime Forces Public Affairs said in a Jan. 3 release.

French Marine Nationale frigate FS Guépratte (F714) was patrolling regional waters in support of Combined Task Force (CTF) 150 when it seized 3,492 kilograms of hashish and 472

kilograms of heroin from the fishing vessel.

Led by the Royal Saudi Navy, CTF 150 is one of four task forces organized under the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF), the largest international naval partnership in the world consisting of 34 member-nations.

CMF has seized nearly \$1 billion worth of illicit narcotics since 2021 while patrolling international waters in the Middle East.

Guépratte previously seized 271 kilograms of heroin from another fishing vessel while patrolling the Gulf of Oman in February 2022.

Cohesion at Sea: Maritime Deterrence and Defense throughout 2022



Naples, Italy – In the Baltic Sea, Estonian troops and U.S. Marines rehearse amphibious assault drills, storming the beach and quickly seizing objectives in concert as the Wasp-class amphibious assault ship USS Kearsarge (LHD 3) patrols the horizon.

Farther south, in the Mediterranean Sea, a French Navy Rafale lands aboard the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77) during multicarrier operations comprising Bush, the FS Charles de Gaulle (R 91) Carrier Strike Group (CSG), and ITS Cavour (C-550) CSG.

In the Atlantic Ocean, the Officer of the Deck on the first-in-class aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) looks out at the Canadian, Danish, Dutch, French, German, and Spanish ships in company during Silent Wolverine, an exercise designed to test the carrier's capabilities through integrated high-end naval warfare scenarios during its first overseas deployment.

Through combined evolutions like these, NATO Allied and partner maritime forces exhibited unparalleled cooperation and interoperability throughout 2022. From the High North to the Mediterranean, and in nearly every body of water in between, these navies and coast guards embarked on a banner year of sustained, uncompromising strength and vigilance throughout the European theater. Lt. Cmdr. Tyler Barker of U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa.

“Our Allies and close partners like Finland and Sweden have never been more unified than we are today,” said Adm. Stuart Munsch, commander, U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa (NAVEUR-NAVAF) and commander, Allied Joint Force Command Naples. “Our interoperability at sea delivers true warfighting advantage for NATO, enabling the Alliance to deter and defend In the midst of armed conflict in Europe.”

The ships of the Harry S. Truman carrier strike group (HSTCSG), including the Royal Norwegian Navy frigate HNoMS Fridtjof Nansen (F310), kicked off 2022 with a bang and set the pace for the year to come with port visits to Cyprus, Greece, Spain, and Türkiye. Deployed to the NAVEUR-NAVAF area of operations in December 2021, the HSTCSG remained in the region until August 2022, flying hundreds of sorties in support of NATO’s enhanced Air Policing and other missions, safeguarding the integrity of Allied airspace before turning over these duties to the George H.W. Bush Carrier Strike Group (GHWBCSG).

The HSTCSG, along with other Allied and partner maritime forces, came under NATO command and control for vigilance activities Neptune Strike 22.1 and Neptune Shield, in January and May, respectively. Neptune Strike 22.1 marked the first time since the Cold War NATO assumed command and control of a U.S. carrier strike group.

The GHWBCSG picked up where the HSTCSG left off, leading the way during Neptune Strike 22.2 in October, the eighth phase of the overall Project Neptune series, which includes named activities as well as vignettes within Allied strike group training events.

“The full integration into NATO of powerful Allied Carrier Strike and Expeditionary Strike Groups, and additional capabilities from across the Alliance, is a perfect example of our deter and defend strategy,” said Rear Adm. James Morley, deputy commander, Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO (STRIKFORNATO). “We demonstrate through coordinated Vigilance Activities and routine operations just how closely national and Alliance military plans are aligned, as we exploit every opportunity to improve interoperability at sea, in the air, and on the ground, seamlessly aligning military effects with political objectives.”

This flexible command and control structure and rapid and seamless integration of Allied forces in multiple domains was a hallmark of NATO operations in 2022. Throughout the year, Allied strike groups, including those gathered around aircraft carriers Harry S. Truman, George H.W. Bush, Gerald R. Ford, FS Charles de Gaulle, ITS Cavour, HMS Queen Elizabeth (R08), and ESPS Juan Carlos I (L-61), validated NATO’s ability to coalesce credible combat power. Allied surface combatants routinely integrated into other nations’ strike groups, too, increasing the pace and scale of multinational strike group interchangeability.

While these strike groups ensured the integrity of European waters and airspace, Allied amphibious forces also enhanced their effectiveness, operating in a variety of climates and conditions, from Norwegian and Icelandic fjords to the sands of North Africa and to the rocky beaches and islands of the Aegean and Mediterranean Seas. Though a series of bilateral and multinational exercises and training events, the Kearsarge

Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) and embarked 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) sharpened their skills in joint and coalition amphibious evolutions as they bolstered trust and refined tactics with like-minded nations.

“Bringing the capability and expertise of the Kearsarge ARG-MEU into theater fostered relations with our counterparts in Europe and Africa and provided some of the best hands-on training our team could have hoped for,” said Capt. Aaron Kelley, commander, Kearsarge ARG and Amphibious Squadron (PHIBRON) Six. “A recurring theme our team took away from deployment is that our Allies and partners are incredibly proficient at what they do, and training together allows us to become stronger together.”

These evolutions paid dividends on all sides and laid a foundation for continued collective improvement in amphibious operations across the Alliance, all while demonstrating NATO’s resolve and commitment to the region. U.S. forces gained invaluable experience operating in European areas, while European Allies and partners honed their skills alongside their American counterparts.

“Exercises and operations with NATO nations, including USS Kearsarge ARG-22 MEU’s participation in the Estonian exercise Siil, are invaluable toward enhancing our overall capability,” said Commodore Jüri Saska, commander of the Estonian Navy. “All of our Allies and partners are committed to the security and stability of the Baltic Sea region, and we validate that commitment through our coordinated work together in the maritime domain.”

Numerous U.S., Allied, and partner surface combatants, including cruisers, destroyers, frigates and corvettes, delivered continuous presence throughout the region, whether sailing with a strike group, or independently. These warships, hailing from multiple nations, surface action groups, and

Standing NATO Maritime Groups (SNMG), manned the watch, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, providing unremitting vigilance across the continent. These ships joined an extensive array of bilateral and multinational exercises and operations, underscoring the versatility maritime forces supply to the Alliance.

“2022 has been a significant year in improving our maritime coordination with our many NATO Allies and partners,” said Vice Adm. Aurelio De Carolis, commander, Italian Naval Fleet Command. “Through our multinational exercise Mare Aperto, integration with Allied carrier strike groups, and routine operations with Allied units, we have shown the true power and proficiency of our combined maritime forces. We very much look forward to continuing the pace in 2023.”

As surface ships sailed the seas, maritime patrol aircraft, submarines, and special operations forces personnel provided continuous maritime domain awareness, furthering warfighting advantage and enhancing joint and coalition expertise. High in the skies, deep below the ocean surface, on land, and in the littorals, these units and personnel accomplished their missions with skill and precision.

In multi-domain operations, the ability to synthesize capabilities from such a wide variety of assets and mission areas is essential to overall success. Altogether, the Alliance has illustrated their unrivaled unity in the maritime domain as they continue to advance their interoperability and interchangeability.

“As NATO Allies face a complex and uncertain security environment in Europe, we face it together,” said Vice Adm. Thomas Ishee, Commander, U.S. Sixth Fleet and Commander, Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO (STRIKFORNATO). “Through activities, exercises, and operations, our nations and commands prove every single day that NATO is the strongest

Alliance in the history of the world. We and our Allies and partners remain vigilant, operate professionally, and stand ready to defend our nations and our Alliance.”

For over 80 years, U.S. Naval Forces Europe-U.S. Naval Forces Africa (NAVEUR-NAVAF) has forged strategic relationships with allies and partners, leveraging a foundation of shared values to preserve security and stability.

Headquartered in Naples, Italy, NAVEUR-NAVAF operates U.S. naval forces in the U.S. European Command (USEUCOM) and U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM) areas of responsibility. U.S. Sixth Fleet is permanently assigned to NAVEUR-NAVAF, and employs maritime forces through the full spectrum of joint and naval operations.