

Adm. Caldwell: Submarine Force in 'Very High Demand'



The U.S. Navy's submarine force is in high demand, and construction is up, says Adm. Frank Caldwell, director of the Navy's Nuclear Power Program. In this 2012 photo, the Virginia-class attack submarine Minnesota (SSN 783) is shown under construction at Huntington Ingalls Newport News Shipbuilding. U.S. Navy / Newport News Shipbuilding
ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy's submarine force is in high demand worldwide and is in the midst of a very high operations tempo (optempo), a Navy senior admiral said.

"Navy leaders, fleet commanders, combatant commanders have high expectations for us," said Adm. Frank Caldwell, director of the Navy's Nuclear Power Program, speaking Nov. 16 in a webinar for the annual symposium of the naval Submarine League. "They love what we bring to peacetime operations and they are absolutely counting on us and our warfighting capability and our readiness to execute those wartime responsibilities.

"We are a force that's in very high demand," Caldwell said. "In fact, all of the maritime commanders want a lot more of what the submarine force can bring and what we bring to the undersea domain. Our team is out there every single day doing eye-watering work on submarine missions or on patrols. The deployed OpTempo is very high right now and our boats and our crews are stepping up to the challenge. This is true even in the midst of COVID, which has put friction in the entire system, whether it's from building new-construction submarines, delivering boats from deep maintenance, or simply executing the operational schedule.

The admiral said there "has been a strain on our families and on our crews. But through it all I have been really impressed

with the way our submarine commanders have kept their crews safe and continued to meet deployed operational commitments not only for missions but also for strategic deterrent patrols.”

In addition to a high optempo, the submarine force also is in a construction boom at a level not seen in two decades, he said.

“We are building submarines at rates that we have not seen in over 20 years,” Caldwell said. “The new-construction build halls are full and more facilities are under construction. We have modern, high-end fixturing that allows us to hold large components in place and allow high-precision, automated cutting and welding. While submarine construction in the 1980s and 1990s relied on retaining large openings in the hull in order to insert components and equipment, today we are building more and more components on rafts or on modules, long before we slide them together into the hull to complete the submarine.”

Caldwell said the Navy “strives to keep the individual construction efforts on a steady, uninterrupted drumbeat. We refer to this as continuous build ... capitalizing on the work force learning to build more efficiently, to reduce construction timeline, and continue to gain efficiency as we go forward.”