As Funding Increases, How Can the Navy and Its Partners Work Together?



A Marine loads an AMRAAM onto an AV-8B Harrier aboard the amphibious assault ship USS Essex (LHD 2). A Department of Defense initiative to expand AMRAAM and other weapons buys helped stabilize the defense industry. Credit: U.S. Navy | Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Isaak Martinez

By Vicky Uhland, *Seapower* Correspondent

In a new era of acquisition, it's important to remember the most pressing operational need for the U.S. Navy is readiness. And the good news is that "today's fleet is more forward than it's ever been in my career. We are absolutely ready," said Rear Admiral Thomas Dickinson during the Monday afternoon panel discussion "Speed to the Fleet."

“Readiness in nonnegotiable. Without it you don’t have capability or capacity,” said Dickinson, USN program executive officer for integrated warfare systems. “It might not be as sexy as new capability, but readiness is the king.”

In a standing-room-only session, Dickinson and panelists from industry and the research community discussed how they can best work together to deliver readiness faster to the fleet, both now and in the future.

“We’re moving from a just-in-time to a just-in-case mentality,” Dickinson said. “That’s the mentality we need. We cannot be ready enough. Urgency and resilience is really the call.”

Dickinson said industry partners can help the Navy achieve readiness through detailed, real-time insights and data. In the current warfare environment, “it’s a gift to be able to see how we’re performing and make improvements. Innovation and learning go hand-in-hand.”

But as the Navy ramps up its readiness, it’s logical there will be more risk, Dickinson said. That’s where data from both the Navy and its partners comes in. “We have to be able to quantify risk, and it has to be based on data,” he said. “We’re getting better at collecting data quickly.”

Industry Viewpoints

Panelist Barbara Borgonovi, president of naval power for Raytheon, said one of the main things helping her company aid the Navy in its readiness initiatives is the landmark agreement with the Department of Defense to expand five critical munitions: The AMRAAM missile; the block IB and block IIA variants of the SM-3 interceptor; the SM-6 missile; and the land attack and maritime strike variants of the Tomahawk cruise missile.

Borgonovi said this multiyear commitment ensures that Raytheon

will have consistent demand, which will help the company make investments in suppliers, employees and other sources.

“We’re going to make billions of dollars in investments” in the five critical munitions, she said, noting that some Raytheon programs are increasing capacity by five to 10 times.

From the data standpoint, the Navy’s change in focus from activities to outcomes is altering how it interacts with industry, said Vincent Bauer, research program director, data science integration, CNA.

“The Navy is extremely complex” and its processes can be its biggest bottleneck in working with industry. “Data cuts through that complexity” and helps the Navy become a better customer for industry, he said.

Panelists also answered questions from audience members and session moderator Megan Eckstein, founder of Maeday Communications, including:

What challenges does money solve, and what will it not fix?

The Navy is making generational investments for critical munitions and new entrants, Dickinson said. But “money is unfeeling and unthinking. It doesn’t hire talent; it doesn’t drive outcomes over process. We are on the hook to maximize the use of those taxpayer dollars.”

The key, he said, is to create a culture and conditions to best spend new acquisitions money. “It comes down to leadership at the end of the day.”

Borgonovi said threats are going to continue to evolve for weapons systems, so industry needs to stay flexible, including learning from operational use and making investments in data sets.

“We’ve been given an opportunity that allows us to fill in the

lines," she said "We have a lot of flexibility to get to the outcome we want."

What's good for a production line is stability; what's good for the fleet is innovation. How do you balance this?

Borgonovi said Raytheon has seen "incredible engagement" with the Navy on sharing data from Operation Epic Fury. She said her company's focus is on having the ability and capacity to meet multiple needs for customers, including design scalability and composable designs.

Dickinson said the Navy wants to be in an environment where software rather than hardware is driving capability. "It puts us in a much better place to be agile and address threats," he said.

What does the industrial base need to look like to support the modern wartime environment?

Borgonovi believes suppliers and the military need to share data across all companies involved, not just a single contractor.

Bauer noted the defense industry works differently than the consumer industry. "Just-in-time isn't the kind of production system we need in missions," he said, as a wartime environment creates the ability for production surges and opens new pathways to invest in the future.