Navy 2025 Budget Requests Only 6 Battle Force Ships



NAVAL STATION NORFOLK — The Virginia-class fast-attack submarine USS Washington (SSN 787) prepares to moor pierside during the boat's homecoming at Naval Station Norfolk, Dec. 15, 2023. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Cameron Stoner) By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. — The U.S. Navy's fiscal 2025 budget request proposes only six battle force ships, which, combined with planned ship retirements, would reduce the size of the battle

force from 296 ships to 287 ships.

The Navy's proposed \$257.6 billion budget — which officials said prioritizes readiness over procurement, would include \$32.4 billion for ship construction. Those funds would procure one Block VI Virginia-class attack submarine (SSN), two Flight III Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers, one Constellation-class guided-missile frigate, one Flight II San Antonio-class amphibious platform dock ship (LPD), and one medium landing ship.

The proposal for only one Virginia-class SSN, rather than two, was made out of concern for the submarine industrial base, which currently is delivering only 1.3 hulls instead of the desired two SSNs per year. The gap is designed to help realign the investments in the submarine industrial base. Under the Future Years Defense Plan (FYDP), the Navy expects to return to the procurement rate of two SSNs per year in fiscal 2026. Navy Undersecretary Erik Raven, speaking to reporters March 11 at the budget roll-out, said advance procurement for the SSNs is proceeding to "set up the program for long-term success."

The ship construction budget also includes continued incremental funding for two aircraft carriers and second Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarine, the refueling and comprehensive overhaul of a Nimitz-class aircraft carrier, the service-life extension of three aircushion landing craft, and the purchase of two used commercial ships for use as sealift ships.

The procurement of the San Antonio-class LPD would mark a reversal from the 2024 plan to end procurement of the class. Navy Undersecretary Erik Raven, speaking to reporters March 11 at the budget roll-out, said the Navy is intent on growing the large- and medium amphibious warfare ship fleet to a minimum of 31 ships.

The FYDP features the procurement start in fiscal 2027 of a new class of ship, the light replenishment oiler (T-AOL).

Raven said the Navy currently has 88 ships under contract, with 66 of those under construction.

Planned ship retirements include two Ticonderoga-class guidedmissile cruisers (Shiloh and Lake Erie); two Independenceclass littoral combat ships (Jackson and Montgomery), one Whidbey Iland-class dock landing ship (Germantown); one Montford Point-class expeditionary transfer dock ship (John Glenn) and the four oldest Spearhead-class expeditionary fast transports (Spearhead, Choctaw County, Millinocket, and Fall River).

Rep. Rob Wittman, R- Virginia, a member of the Seapower subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee, criticized the ship construction plan as too little.

"The president is once again proposing to shrink the Navy by reducing the Navy force structure from 296 ships in FY24 to just 287 in FY25. By only building six ships, President Biden is also threatening to devastate our naval fleet and the Hampton Roads industrial base by slowing aircraft carrier construction and failing to meet the two Virginia-class submarines per year cadence required to support the AUKUS security pact," Wittman said in a March 11 statement.

Amphib Warship Part Suppliers Press Congress for Stability in Shipbuilding



The future USS *Richard M. McCool Jr*. (LPD 29), the Navy's next Flight I San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship, seen on sea trials. (HII) By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. companies that supply components and parts for the U.S. Navy's amphibious warfare fleet expressed support for the Marine Corps baseline requirement of 31 large and medium amphibious warfare ships in the U.S. fleet and the industry's need for stability and predictability in schedules.

Retired Coast Guard Capt. Paul J. Roden, chairman of the board of the Amphibious Warfare Industrial Base Coalition (AWIBC), which represents approximately 650 companies throughout the United States, told Seapower that the Marine Corps has stressed that "ready and available" 31-ship requirement is "not a ceiling, it's the floor."

Roden stressed the point that it is difficult for suppliers to produce efficiently when production schedules are unpredictable. He said that the stability needed is best achieved when the large-deck amphibious assault ships (LHAs) are built with construction intervals of four-year centers and the amphibious platform dock ships (LPDs) are built with intervals of two-year centers.

Full funding by Congress for LPD 33 in the fiscal 2025 defense budget is a priority for the AWIBC, he said.

AWIBC recently conducted a survey of its member companies.

Regarding the shipbuilding intervals, "50% of the survey respondents replied that extending those would result in an increase in cost of their products and services. When you are throwing uncertainty to any procurement, then there is risk, and risk is addressed by cost, so it is really in the Navy's best interest to maintain those centers."

Roden said that if an LHA or LPD were delayed by a year or more, "40% of all of our members [companies] would anticipate needing to lay off workers due to uncertainty and not having full capacity in plants of the AWIBC suppliers. About a third said they would have to explore commercial contracts as well as de-prioritize shipbuilding, but in many cases, there is just not a commercial market."

He said that "about 70% of our respondents said that the most helpful thing that the government could do is provide predictability and stability.

"One way of going about that — that has been proven successful in other programs—is through multi-ship and multi-year procurement strategies," he said.

Roden also said that "just over 50% of the suppliers that contribute to both amphibious warship and submarine programs … said that steady amphib contracts benefit their company's capacity and capability to deliver on submarine programs. Having predictability and stability in shipbuilding programs allows suppliers to make investments. If they know the business is coming, they can make investments in work force training, enhancing work force, investing in equipment, investing in other infrastructure that would improve the quality and on-time delivery of products."

Navy Opens Second Triton UAV Forward Deployment Site



Caption: NAVAL AIR STATION SIGONELLA, Italy (March 2, 2024) – Capt. Ronald H. Rumfelt, Jr., commanding officer, Unmanned Patrol Squadron (VUP) 19 "Big Red" (left), Vice Adm. Daniel "Undra" Cheever, commander, Naval Air Forces (center), and Capt. Aaron Shoemaker, commanding officer, Naval Air Station (NAS) Sigonella (right), participate in a ribbon cutting ceremony to celebrate the inaugural deployment of VUP- 19's second forward-deployed detachment, and the opening of a new MQ-4C Triton hangar at NAS Sigonella, Italy, March 2, 2024 (U.S. Navy Photo by Mass Communication 2nd Class Jacquelin Frost)

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy squadron that operates the MQ-4C Triton high-altitude, long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle has opened its second deployment site, with this one located at Naval Air Station (NAS) Sigonella, Sicily.

During March 2 ceremonies at Sigonella, the commanding officer of Unmanned Patrol Squadron 19 (VUP-19), Capt. Ronald H. Rumfelt Jr., was joined by Vice Adm. Daniel "Undra" Cheever, commander, Naval Air Forces, and Capt. Aaron Shoemaker, commanding officer, of NAS Sigonella in a ribbon cutting for the new hangar on the station that will support the Triton aircraft operating from the station, according to an NAS Sigonella release.

Home-based at NAS Jacksonville, Florida, Unmanned Patrol Squadron 19 (VUP-19) brought the Triton to its Initial Operational Capability status last summer with the establishment of an orbit at Andersen Air Force Base in Guam. The squadron had maintained two Tritons - equipped with the baseline Integrated Functional Capability (IFC) 3 configuration — on an Early Operational Capability deployment in Guam from May 2020 until March 2023. The Tritons provided MISR&T (maritime intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and tracking) for the U.S. 7th Fleet while developing the concept of operations and the tactics to refine the Triton's operations. The detachment operated from Guam; Naval Air Facility Misawa, Japan; and Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan.

VUP-19 since has received newer versions in the IFC 4 configuration, which are equipped with a more capable sensor suite that will allow them to replace the Navy's fleet of EP-3E Orion electronic reconnaissance aircraft.

From Sigonella, also a rotational site for squadrons of the Navy's P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft, the Tritons will provide the U.S. Sixth Fleet with MISR&T support.

STRATCOM Commander Affirms Need for Sea-Launched Cruise Missile-Nuclear



Caption: PACIFIC OCEAN (Nov. 30, 2020) The guided-missile destroyer USS Chafee (DDG 90) launches a Block V Tomahawk, the weapon's newest variant, during a three-day missile exercise. The Navy is developing a nuclear-tipped sea-launched cruise missile as a future nuclear deterrent. (U.S. Navy photo by Ensign Sean Ianno)

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va.—The operational commander of the nation's nuclear arsenal has reiterated to Congress the requirement for a sea-based nuclear-tipped cruise missile.

Testifying Feb. 29 before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Air force General Anthony J. Cotton, commander, U.S. Strategic Command called for development and deployment of the Sea-Launched Cruise Missile – Nuclear (SLCM-N), a program called for in the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR).

Cotton called for continued modernization of the U.S. nuclear deterrent forces, including the SLCM-N.

"While our legacy systems continue to hold potential adversaries at risk, it is absolutely critical we continue at speed with the modernization of our nuclear triad, including land-based ICBMs [intercontinental ballistic missiles], the B-21 [bomber], the B-52 [bomber], the Columbia-class submarine, the nuclear sea-launched cruise missile, and LRSO [Long-Range Stand-Off weapon]," Cotton said.

The 2018 NPR called for the United States to "pursue a nuclear-armed SLCM, leveraging existing technologies to help ensure its cost effectiveness. SLCM will provide a needed non-strategic regional presence, an assured response capability. It also will provide an arms-control-compliant response to Russia's non-compliance with the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty, its non-strategic nuclear arsenal, and its other destabilizing behaviors."

The Biden administration, with support of Democratic representatives in the Congress, has opposed development of the SLCM-N, citing what they said was the cost of the program, the adequacy of the current nuclear deterrent arsenal, and a risk to nuclear stability.

Despite the administration's opposition, Congress authorized \$25 million in the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act for research for the SLCM-N. The administration did not request funding for research for the SLCM-N in its fiscal 2024 budget request, but Congress approved establishing the SLCM-N as a program of record.

The fiscal 2024 NDAA "authorized the Sea-Launched Cruise Missile – Nuclear, or SLCM-N, as part of the program of record with initial operating capability by 2034, said Jill Hruby, National Nuclear Security Administration administrator, speaking Feb. 1 at the 2024 Nuclear Deterrence Summit. "SLCM-N will provide a new low yield at sea nuclear deterrent. NNSA is working closely with the Navy and Office of Secretary of Defense to develop a recommendation for Congress by early March on the details of the SLCM-N program."

The Navy used to field a nuclear-armed version of the Tomahawk Land-Attack Missile – the TLAN-N – which was retired about 2010.

Raven Warns of CR Impact on Navy Department Budget



By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Department of the Navy (DON) is facing a reduction of \$12 billion of buying power if the Defense Department has to operate through fiscal 2024 under a continuing resolution (CR) and Congress does not pass a supplemental budget, a top DON official said.

"The misalignment in funding lines results in \$26 billion of funding misalignments that we may have in our coffers — but not be able to spend it on the programs that matter," said Under Secretary of the Navy Erik Raven, speaking Feb. 28 to reporters. "When you add all this up, this is nearly a 10% impact to our topline. This is getting into the territory of the 2013 sequester in terms of fiscal impacts. So, this is a very serious situation."

Raven said that if a full-year CR is the case, the DON's

priorities would be readiness first and people second. "[W]hat that means is taking risk and investment programs. And I'm very concerned about our ability not only to execute that strategy unless given really unprecedented flexibilities by Congress, but also the follow-on impacts on industrial base and our modernization plans."

Regarding readiness, Raven said that current operations, such as the effort to defend commercial shipping in the Red Sea from Houthi rebels, would take precedence.

"We need to be able to perform our mission," he said. "And simply if we don't have the resources that we need to execute all of our missions, we have to make tough choices. But between the ability to fight tonight and be ready for all the threats versus preparing for the future and modernizing our forces it is a tough decision. But we have to lay our chips somewhere and that's on the ability to perform our missions today."

He listed a few programs that would be severely affected by a year-long CR and lack of a supplemental from Congress:

- The overhaul of the attack submarine USS Boise, delayed for seven years and finally slated, would not be executed.
- The amphibious assault ship construction program would not be kept on track.
- The Virginia-class attack submarine program would face a \$2 billion shortfall.
- Munition funding would suffer "across the board."
- Construction of three child-development centers two in Virginia and one in Guam – would be delayed.
- Doubling of funds for SM-6 missiles used in the Red Sea operations – would not be doable.
- A \$3.4 billion investment in the submarine industrial

base — to enable production of submarines at a rate of one Columbia ballistic-missile submarine and two Virginia-class submarines — would have to be delayed.

Raytheon's Barracuda Sea-Mine Assassin Progresses in Development



ARLINGTON, Va. – Raytheon has completed the Technical Data Package for a sea mine destructor developed for the U.S. Navy as the test program continues, the company said in an interview with Seapower.

The Barracuda is a 26-pound, 48-inch-long anti-mine device housed in a tube the size of an A-size sonobuoy tube. When launched, the device is propelled by four small water jets that take the device to the datum of a suspected sea mine detected by the AQS-20C towed sonar. An acoustic communications data link buoy is released to which the device is tethered. Target updates, such as GPS coordinates, are transmitted to the device, which approaches the sea mine. A sonar and a camera mounted in the nose of the device enables a man-in-the-loop operator — for now — to confirm the mine. The device then is steered to the mine and detonated. Each Barracuda is a one-shot charge.

Since May 2023, Raytheon has been building 128 Barracudas for development, 63 for contractor trials and 65 for the Navy's trials.

Dan Seamans, Raytheon's director for mine warfare, including the AQS-20 sonar, the Airborne Mine Neutralization System, and the Barracuda at Portsmouth, Rhode Island, said the Navy has yet to finalize its decisions on what the launch platforms for the Barracuda will be. Candidates include the littoral combat ship's mine-countermeasures mission package, including the Mine Countermeasures Uncrewed Surface Vessel. The company is building a surrogate launcher for the test program and will proceed to a tactical launcher.

The Navy awarded the initial design and development contract to Raytheon in 2018. The Navy's spiral Critical Design Review of the Barracuda was completed in July 2023.

Low-Rate Initial Production for Barracuda is planned for fiscal 2027

Houthi Explosive USV

Detonated in Red Sea Attack



BAHRAIN (Jan. 2, 2024) Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, commander of U.S. 5th Fleet, speaks with Sailors aboard the Arleigh Burkeclass guided-missile destroyer USS Carney (DDG 64) after presenting combat medals to Sailors while the ship is in Bahrain, Jan. 2, 2024. Cooper also recognized the whole Carney crew with the Combat Action Ribbon. On Dec. 16, Carney Sailors shot down 14 Houthi unmanned aerial vehicles in the Red Sea. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Jacob Vernier)

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va.—An uncrewed surface vessel (USV) was detonated in the international shipping lanes Jan. 4 in the latest attack launched from Yemen by Houthi rebels.

"Fortunately, there were no casualties, and no ships were hit, but the introduction of a one-way attack USV is of concern," said U.S. Navy Vice Admiral Brad Cooper, commander, U.S. Fifth Fleet and commander, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, and commander, Combined Maritime Forces, speaking to reporters in a June 4 teleconference.

The attack was the 25th against merchant ships in the Red Sea since mid-November.

In response to the attacks, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III on Dec. 18 launched Operation Prosperity Guardian, a multinational effort to protect shipping through the Red Sea and Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. The Combined Maritime Forces under Commander, Task Force 153, are conducting the operation.

Cooper said that the coalition forces had shot down 11 drones, two cruise missiles, and two antiship ballistic missiles launched from Yemen since the operation began. In addition, three of four Houthi attack boats, which fired on U.S. Navy helicopters, were then destroyed by U.S. Navy MH-60 helicopters from the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Gravely and the aircraft carrier USS Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Cooper said a total of 61 drones and missiles had been shot down by U.S. Navy destroyers and F/A-18 Super Hornet strike fighters over the last two months. Other drones and missiles have been shot down by ships of the Royal Navy and French Navy.

Cooper made three key points in the conference:

"By number one, the number of nations participating has grown. Their contributions are meaningful, and our partners are doing great work at sea. Number two, about 1,500 merchant ships have safely transited the waters of the Red Sea since the operation began. And then number three, our collaboration with the maritime shipping industry has increased dramatically. We're reassuring them through persistent communications that are characterized as two-way, both before and during transits, so that's going well. "Now, having said this, the Houthi ruthless attacks have continued, as you know, and there are no signs their irresponsible behavior is abating," he said.

Coast Guard Upgrades Two Detachments to Full Bases

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. — The Coast Guard has upgraded two of its landbased detachments stations to full bases, according to two Coast Guard directives.

The Coast Guard's Operational Logistics Command formally established Base St. Louis, Missouri, in ceremonies held Nov. 30, with Lieutenant Commander John Waters in command, and established Base Borinquen, Puerto Rico, on Dec. 12, with Lieutenant Commander Thomas Kai in command.

The directives noted that each base "provides a new junior command opportunity for the mission support enterprise."

Base St. Louis will provice support to Coast Guard operations in the Western Rivers and heartland of the United States. Base Borinquen will provide support to Coast Guard operations in the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean.

Coast Guard to SLEP, Expand MH-60T Helicopter Fleet as Sikorsky Delivers First New Airframe



Sikorsky delivered the first of 45 new airframes to the Coast Guard for the service-life extension of the service's MH-60T helicopter fleet. *****

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va.—The U.S. Coast Guard has confirmed plans to expand is MH-60T Jayhawk helicopter fleet and make it the standard service-wide helicopter. The service life-extension of the current MH-60T fleet is being highlighted as Sikorsky, a Lockheed Martin company, delivers the first of 45 replacement MH-60T airframes to the Coast Guard.

Sikorsky on Nov. 30, 2023, delivered the first new "hull," as the airframe is called, which consists of the nose, cabin, and aft transition structure, combined as a single assembly, Sikorsky said in a release. Upon delivery, the new hull will be used to rebuild an older MH-60T with new and updated components by the Coast Guard's Aviation Logistics Center (ALC) in Elizabeth City, North Carolina starting in December 2023.

The Coast Guard's MH-60T fleet, the first of which originally began service as an HH-60J in 1990, is approaching the end of its service life of 20,000 hours per aircraft, with a current average of 16,000 flight hours per aircraft.

During the SLEP of 45 MH-60Ts, "the Coast Guard ALC will remove all dynamic (moving) components, digital cockpit, mission systems, and engines, then rebuild each aircraft around an all-new airframe," Sikorsky said, noting that the company's Troy, Alabama, facility is the site of the hull manufacture.

Sikorsky President Paul Lemmo told reporters at a Nov. 30 teleconference that the new hulls would be identical to those in the HH-60Js delivered between 1990 and 1996, but also would receive an anti-corrosion sealant in the joints.

The Coast Guard awarded Sikorsky a \$374 million contract to deliver all 45 MH-60T airframes to the ALC at a rate of 12 per year through 2027. Full-rate production will begin with fabrication of the fourth hull. The MH-60Ts going through SLEP will retain their Coast Guard serial numbers.

Rear Adm. Michael Campbell, Coast Guard director of Acquisition Programs and program executive officer, also speaking at the teleconference, said that the Jayhawk fleet went through an earlier SLEP during which the airframe life was extended from 10,000 to 20,000 flight hours. He said that without the SLEP the MH-60T fleet would have to be grounded by 2028. With the current SLEP, the MH-60T fleet would serve into the late 2040s.

The first MH-60T with the new hull is expected to fly in June

at the ALC.

The Jayhawks are put through overhaul every four years, with six in overhaul at any given time.

The Coast Guard currently operates 48 MH-60Ts, three of which will not receive the new hulls under this program because they were re-built with ex-U.S. Navy SH-60F or HH-60H helicopters. Some of the 45 Jayhawks receiving the new hulls also are ex-U.S. Navy H-60s that were re-built as Jayhawks.

According to the Coast Guard, the H-60 Jayhawk medium range recovery helicopter fleet has saved more than 11,900 lives during more than 48,300 search and rescue missions since 1990, accumulating more than 730,430 flight hours," Sikorsky said in the release.

Campbell said the Coast Guard plans to increase the size of its Jayhawk fleet because of the capabilities of its national security cutters and forthcoming offshore patrol cutters and polar security cutters to hangar H-60 helicopters. The rotors and tail rotor boom of the MH-60T can be manually folded, but the rotors of the Navy H-60s have the capability to be electrically folded. The Coast Guard plans to install the electrical fold capability beginning in 2024.

The Coast Guard also plans to replace its fleet of 98 MH-65 Dolphin helicopters with MH-60Ts.

"The Coast Guard is moving forward with plans to transition the service's rotary wing fleet to a standardized, singleplatform fleet of MH-60Ts," said Loretta Haring, Office of Strategic Planning and Communication (CG-925) Acquisition Directorate, in an email to reporters. "The Service plans to operate 127 airframes nationwide and intends to source the additional MH-60T hulls (termed "fleet growth") through a combination of both newly manufactured hulls and Navy conversion hulls. The number of each to be used has not yet been determined. The initial phase of fleet growth likely will be 36 hulls."

Navy's Second Ford CVN to Join the U.S. Pacific Fleet



MEDITERRANEAN SEA (Oct. 11, 2023) The world's largest aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) refuels from the underway replenishment oiler USNS Laramie (T-AO 203) in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, Oct. 11, 2023. The second Ford-class CVN, the future USS John F. Kennedy (CVN 79), will become a unit of the U.S. Pacific Fleet. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Jacob Mattingly) By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. - The Navy's second Gerald R. Ford-class

aircraft carrier, the future USS John F. Kennedy (CVN 79), will become a unit of the U.S. Pacific Fleet when it makes its first deployment.

Captain Brian Metcalf, the Navy's program manager for the Ford-class aircraft carriers, speaking Nov. 28 in a panel of the American Society of Naval Engineers' Technology Systems and Ships seminar, said the Kennedy would be delivered to the Navy in 2025. After commissioning and training work ups, the carrier would make a deployment to the Indo-Pacific region and arrive at its new homeport on the U.S. West Coast, he said.

Metcalf said the Kennedy is 90% complete at HII's Newport News shipyard.

He said that his program office plans to complete much of the Kennedy's Post-Shakedown Availability (PSA) work — that on the USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) was completed during its own PSA and added a year of delay to delivery to the fleet — would be completed on the Kennedy during its construction before commissioning and would enable the Kennedy to enter its basic training phase on time.

The lead ship, Gerald R. Ford, is deployed to the eastern Mediterranean Sea and has had its deployment extended twice because of the Israel-Hamas War. Metcalf said the Ford's systems, including the Electro-Magnetic Aircraft Launch System and the ship's once-controversial weapon elevators were performing well.

He said that maintenance and modernization work on the Ford planned for early 2024 would have to wait, given the Ford's deployment extensions.

The next two Ford-class CVNs—Enterprise (CVN 80) and Doris Miller (CVN 81)—did not start as a two-ship procurement but since have been combined as a program to achieve cost reductions. Metcalf said that his program office is working within the current Future Years Defense Plan to ensure that procurement of CVN 82 and CVN 83 is a two-ship procurement.