

Navy Base in Diego Garcia Welcome to Stay After Transfer of Sovereignty, Official Says



Logistics Specialist 1st Class Joanna Caldwell, the officer of the deck, and Master-at-Arms 2nd Class James Wilson raise the ensign at Naval Support Facility Diego Garcia on June 4. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Carlos W. Hopper

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy base in Diego Garcia, an outpost in the Chagos archipelago in the Indian Ocean, would be welcome to remain if Mauritius succeeds in its sovereignty claim over the archipelago, currently known as the British Indian Ocean Territories (BIOT), a Mauritian official said.

Diego Garcia, located in the middle of the Indian Ocean, hosts an air and naval base that have been strategically important to U.S. military operations in the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf and Southwest Asia since the mid-1970s.

The Chagos archipelago in which Diego Garcia is located has been claimed by the United Kingdom, which in 1965 moved the Chagocian population from the islands to Mauritius and the Seychelles. Mauritius, an island group to the southwest between the Chagos and Madagascar, disputes the sovereignty over the Chagos by the U.K. The British have claimed the islands since 1814.

Speaking in a June 24 online discussion sponsored by Arlington, Virginia-based think tank CNA, Ambassador Jagdish Koonjul, the permanent representative of Mauritius to the United Nations, said the UN's International Court of

Justice (ICJ) declared in February 2019 that the Chagos Archipelago “is and always has been an integral part of Mauritius.”

Last May, the UN General Assembly voted 116-6 in favor of the Chagos being returned to Mauritius. The ICJ gave the British until last November to withdraw, which did not occur.

The British partitioned the Chagos from Mauritius in 1965 when the U.K. purchased the Chagos for 3 million pounds. Mauritius claimed the separation was forced in order for Mauritius to gain its independence from Britain, finalized in 1968.

The U.S. has a lease on the facilities there until 2036. Koonjul said Mauritius would propose a 99-year lease for the U.S. to retain the facility and would even allow the British to maintain facilities there if such an agreement were reached. But he said the current impasse is unsustainable.

As part of an agreement, Mauritius would insist that any Chagocians wishing to re-locate back to the Chagos be allowed to do so, excluding Diego Garcia, but that Mauritians and Chagocians be allowed to seek employment on Diego Garcia.

Koonjul noted that Mauritius favors the stability that the U.S. base brings to the Indian Ocean and that, as a close partner of India, it favors the increasingly close defense relationship of the United States with India.

“Mauritius stands ready to be a reliable partner to the United States,” Koonjul said.

Also speaking in the discussion was Mark Rosen, senior vice president and general counsel for CNA, who said that Diego Garcia was “already developed” and “very precious from a logistics standpoint” and that its isolation from civilian

populations gave it “more operational freedom.”

Rosen said the United Kingdom’s position has substantially weakened” in light of the ICJ decision and UN resolution and that the “political optics” for Britain were “not good” in an era of anti-colonialism.

He said that time is not on the side of the United States and the U.K. and that the U.S. needs to be proactive in seizing the opportunity to resolve the impasse.

Koonjul said that Mauritius has “no objection whatsoever to the U.S. base in Diego Garcia. ... The importance of the base cannot be underestimated.”

He stressed the endurance of an agreement between the U.S. and Mauritius in that all Mauritian political parties support the base in Diego Garcia.

By an earlier agreement, the United States is not allowed to base nuclear weapons in Diego Garcia, although nuclear-armed or nuclear-powered ships are allowed in and out of the port facilities.

Commandant Honors Cutter John Midgett as Decommissioning Approaches



The John Midgett is the 12th and last high-endurance cutter to be built. U.S. Coast Guard

WASHINGTON – The commandant of the Coast Guard saluted the cutter John Midgett as the ship heads for decommissioning

after 48 years of service.

In a June 23 message to the Coast Guard, Adm. Karl L. Schultz commended the John Midgett crew as having embodied the cutter's motto – dedication, service, excellence.

"The John Midgett was named in honor of Chief Warrant Officer John Allen Midgett Jr., who served for nearly 40 years with the U.S. Lifesaving Service and the Coast Guard," the commandant said.

"He was one of five Midgett family members awarded the Gold Lifesaving Medal for heroic action during the rescue of 36 crewmen from the torpedoed British tanker Mirlo in 1918."

The high-endurance cutter – the 12th and final of the Hamilton class – is in an "In-Commission Special" status as it is prepared for transfer to another nation. It was named simply "Midgett" until a new Legend-class national security cutter, the Midgett, was commissioned, upon which the older Midgett's name was changed to John Midgett.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eu5cP3E1EIE>

The John Midgett was built by Avondale Shipyard in Louisiana and commissioned on March 17, 1972. The cutter was homeported in Alameda, California, until it was temporarily decommissioned in 1991 to undergo fleet renovation and modernization (FRAM). Upon completion of FRAM in 1992, the cutter changed its homeport to Seattle.

"Throughout the cutter's distinguished career, John Midgett served in domestic and international theaters, from the Bering Sea to the South China Sea, and from the eastern Pacific Ocean to the Arabian Gulf," the commandant's message said.

Schultz said that the John Midgett's "proud legacy of honorable service to the nation spanned nearly five decades." He noted some highlights of that service:

- On Christmas Day 1996, the cutter's crew conducted a "power rudder" tandem tow of the disabled M/V Banasea to Adak, Alaska, with the tug Agnes Foss.
 - In 1999, John Midgett became the first Coast Guard cutter to deploy to the Arabian Gulf with a U.S. Navy battle group, helping to enforce U.N. Security Council sanctions against Iraq.
 - From September 2006 to March 2007, the cutter deployed as part of Expeditionary Strike Group 5 in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, circumnavigating the globe and transiting the Suez and Panama canals.
 - While deployed to the eastern Pacific in support of Joint Interagency Task Force South from December 2016 to March 2017, John Midgett's crew seized more than three tons of cocaine.
 - During the cutter's last year of service, it patrolled the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska for more than 200 days, boarding 67 fishing vessels and prosecuting 16 search-and-rescue cases, ultimately assisting 20 mariners and four vessels in distress.
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Large, Medium USVs to Enhance Distributed Maritime Operations



The medium-displacement unmanned surface vehicle prototype Sea Hunter pulls into Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii, Oct. 31, 2018. There is currently one Sea Hunter operating with Surface Development Squadron One and a second is planned. U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Corwin M.

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ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy is working hard and making progress in developing concepts and making technological advances in developing its planned large and medium unmanned surface vessels (USVs), said the admiral in charge of their development.

“USVs are one of the centerpieces of distributed maritime operations,” said Rear Adm. Casey Moton, program executive officer, Unmanned and Small Combatants (PEO-USC), speaking June 23 at an event sponsored by the U.S. Naval Institute, Huntington Ingalls Industries and the Center for Strategic and International Studies – a Washington think tank.

Moton said the Navy views the future Large USV (LUSV) and Medium USV (MUSV) as platforms that will enable the fleet to operate in a more distributed manner either as part of a carrier strike group or as vessels pressed forward with an acceptable risk of attrition.

The LUSV and MUSV are envisioned as distributed platforms with lower cost than manned warships that will have sensors and/or missiles and that normally will operate under the protection of a carrier strike group. Both types of USVs will need to be capable of open-ocean transits, Moton said.

The LUSV, for example, is envisioned to be a node in the Aegis protective network and could function as an “add-on magazine” of missiles, Moton said.

Moton’s office is “laying a lot of the foundational work” for USV operations by developing mission autonomy; navigation and control systems; hull, mechanical and electrical reliability; cyber and anti-tamper protection; and integration of the USV into the Aegis Combat System, with a focus on retiring risk in the prototype phase of development. Moton said the LUSV to be equipped with vertical-launch systems.

The Navy’s Surface Development Squadron One in San Diego now

operates the single Sea Hunter USV, which he said has been exercising with guided-missile destroyers. A second Sea Hunter is under construction.

The Navy's two Overlord commercial-standard vessels with unmanned systems also have been busy with concept and systems development. One of the Overlord vessels made two long transits of 1,400 nautical miles from the Gulf of Mexico to Norfolk, Virginia, and back, in an autonomous mode, Moton said.

One of the concepts being worked on is the degree to which people will be involved in servicing the LUSV, for example. Personnel will need to be involved in maintenance, resupply, protection, and moving the vessel in and out of port. The need for personnel to temporarily board and stay onboard these vessels for a period is one of the areas being studied. Redundancy of some systems may reduce the need for unscheduled maintenance. A goal is to have a 30-day threshold of operation between preventative maintenance periods.

"Our starting point for those two vessels [LUSV and MUSV] is we are driving from a technology standpoint to try and automate everything that we can," Moton said.

He said the Navy has two more Overlord vessels under construction that will be delivered in fiscal 2021.

"The plan is to push our prototypes out to the West Coast [for the Surface Development Squadron One] but we're looking for opportunities for the East Coast as well," Moton said.

The first program-of-record LUSV is planned for procurement in fiscal 2023.

Navy Positions Contract Option for 2 Columbia SSBNs



An artist rendering of the future Columbia-class ballistic missile submarines. U.S. NAVY

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy has awarded an \$869 million contract modification for continued work on the Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarine (SSBN) design and support, but which also includes an option to build the first two Columbia SSBNs when funds are authorized and appropriated by Congress, the Navy announced on June 22. The work to ready the contract option will enable the Navy, if authorized, to begin construction of the first Columbia in October 2020.

Naval Sea Systems Command awarded General Dynamics Electric Boat the \$869 million contract modification to pursue “continued design completion, engineering work, affordability studies and design support efforts for the Columbia class,” the 22 June Defense Department contract announcement said. “This modification also includes submarine industrial base development and expansion efforts as part of the integrated enterprise plan and multi-program material procurement supporting Columbia SSBNs and the nuclear shipbuilding enterprise (Virginia-class [submarine] and Ford-class [aircraft carrier]). The contract modification also provides additional United Kingdom Strategic Weapon Support System kit manufacturing and effort to support expansion of the domestic missile tube industrial base.”

The contract modification also features an option – that already has been fully priced by the Navy – that would start construction of the first Columbia, SSBN 826, in October 2020, and fund advance procurement, advance construction and 2024 construction start of the second Columbia, SSBN 827. If exercised, the option would increase the value of the contract

to \$9.5 billion.

In a June 22 teleconference with reporters, James F. Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for research, defense and acquisition, said the Navy is focused on its supplier industrial base and improving the capacity of its sub-tier vendors, which would reduce risk in its nuclear ship programs and thereby reduce risk and delay in the Columbia program. He expressed appreciation of Congress for its support of the Navy's efforts to shore up the industrial base.

Geurts said the work of the Navy to price out the two SSBN contract option will help the service keep on schedule and achieve economies on materials and advance procurement for the class.

Rep. Joe Courtney, D-Conn., chairman of the House Seapower and Projection Forces Subcommittee, in whose district Electric Boat's main facility is located, praised the Navy's initiative in a June 22 statement.

"Today's announcement means 'game on' for this exciting and transformational project that will shape our region's economy for the next two decades – and I know that our talented shipbuilders of Electric Boat are up to the challenge," Courtney said. "This award is the culmination of nearly a decade's worth of preparation for this milestone moment for our region and our nation," Courtney said. "The replacement of our sea-based strategic deterrent comes only once every other generation, and this work is already fueling unprecedented growth in the workforce in Groton and transformation of the shipyard. This isn't just good news for Groton – the work that will be done on this program will fuel activity at suppliers across our state and our nation for years to come. This exciting news is a testament to the hard work of countless designers, engineers and waterfront tradesmen and women who have worked so hard each and every day for more than a decade to see this day come."

Geurts said the strategic imperative of fielding the USS Columbia on its first deterrent patrol in 2031 requires a delivery of the submarine in 2028.

The Navy plans to build 12 Columbia-class SSBNS to replace 14 Ohio-class SSBNs. The Trident D5LE nuclear-armed ballistic missile will arm both classes.

Navy Orders 2 MQ-9 Reaper UAVs for Marine Corps



An MQ-9 Reaper sits on the flight line at Hurlburt Field, Florida, in 2014. U.S. AIR FORCE / Staff Sgt. John Bainter ARLINGTON, Va. – The Naval Air Systems Command has ordered two MQ-9A Reaper unmanned aerial vehicles for the Marine Corps.

The Naval Air Systems Command ordered the two Reapers from General Atomics Aeronautical Systems Inc. (GA-ASI), of Poway, California, with a \$26.9 million firm-fixed-price contract, according to the June 22 Defense Department announcement. The contract also provides for one dual-control mobile ground-control station, one modular data center and one mobile ground-control station

The MQ-9 Reaper is a medium-altitude, long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle used for surveillance and strike operations. The Reaper is a battle-proven development of the RQ-1 Predator, upgraded for longer endurance, a heavier payload, and the ability to launch heavier precision munitions in a benign aerial environment.

The Marine Corps selected the Reaper in 2018 to fill an urgent

needs request for intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) in support of forward operations in Southwest Asia. GA-ASI has provided ISR services since September 2018 through contractor-owned/contractor-operated (COCO) Reapers and their teams to support Marine Corp forces in Afghanistan. Marine UAV squadrons (VMUs) have been learning to operate the Reaper in preparation for the Corps' procurement of government-owned/government operated MQ-9s. On March 20, 2020, a Marine crew of VMU-1 controlled a COCO Reaper for the first time on an operational mission in support of forward-deployed ground forces.

The Marine Corps plans to begin operations with its own Reapers in 2021.

House Seapower Subcommittee Announces Proposals for 2021



The release by Reps. Courtney and Wittman details the need for four more V-22 Ospreys. U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Vance Hand

ARLINGTON, Va. – The House Committee on Armed Services Subcommittee on Seapower and Projection Forces has announced its proposals for the mark-up of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021.

In a June 22 release, chairman Rep. Joe Courtney, D-Conn., and ranking member Rep. Rob Wittman, R-Va., released the proposals the day before the scheduled June 23 mark-up session.

Of major naval-related items, the proposal:

- Recommends the restoration of a second Virginia-class submarine and the required advanced procurement to maintain the two-per-year build rate.
- Recommends to the full committee that the Navy procure eight battle force ships, including one Columbia class fleet ballistic missile submarine; two Virginia-class submarines; two Arleigh Burke destroyers; one guided-missile frigate (FFG); and two T-ATS towing, salvage, and rescue ships.
- Prohibits the retirement of littoral combat ships LCS 3 and LCS 4 until all operational tests have been completed.
- Prohibits the retirement of any aircraft carrier before its first refueling.
- Recommends six P-8 Poseidon aircraft.
- Recommends four additional V-22 Osprey aircraft.
- Authorizes efficient construction of the first two Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarines.
- Restricts funds associated with the secretary of defense until the 30-year shipbuilding plan is delivered.
- In fiscal 2021, prohibits the retirement of any Navy vessel until the secretary of defense provides a Navy force structure assessment.
- Authorizes the procurement of up to four used sealift vessels.
- Requires the secretary of defense to provide ship requirements to implement the Commandant's Planning Guidance.
- Establishes a Tanker Security Fleet to help fill the gap in at sea logistics.
- Recommends funding of the fourth National Security Multi-Mission Vessel for the state maritime academies and recommends additional funds for previously authorized ships.
- Continues to provide strict oversight of the Large Unmanned Surface Vessel.

Navy Concerned About Labor Strike at Bath Iron Works

ARLINGTON, Va. – The decision of shipyard workers at General Dynamics Bath Iron Works (BIW) in Bath, Maine, to go on strike has U.S. Navy officials concerned about slowed delivery of new-construction guided-missile destroyers (DDGs).

With shipbuilding and ship repair troubles exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting supplier base disruption, as well as earlier budget shortfalls, the strike piles on the Navy at a bad time.

“We’re very concerned with the dispute up at BIW,” said James F. Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition, said in a June 22 teleconference with reporters. “The Navy’s expectations are that the leaders of General Dynamics Bath Iron Works and the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers work very diligently and with a sense of urgency to come to agreement so that we can keep our ship construction on track. We are very dependent on Bath Iron Works for their production and support of our ships for our Sailors. My expectation is both sides will work aggressively and a sense of urgency so that we can get these programs to continue to execute.

The shipyard workers voted to strike on June 21 at BIW, a General Dynamics company. BIW is one of two shipyards that builds the Arleigh Burke-class DDGs, the other being Huntington Ingalls in Pascagoula, Mississippi. BIW is the sole builder of the Zumwalt-class DDG, the last of which is still at the shipyard and yet to be delivered to the Navy.

In a teleconference last week, Geurts said the Navy still has

a pending contract award to make in 2020 for a DDG.

DoD Acts to Shore Up Shipbuilding Industrial Base Amid Pandemic



Austal USA's shipyard in Mobile, Alabama. AUSTAL ARLINGTON, Va. – The Defense Department is taking more actions to shore up the shipbuilding industrial base, among other industrial sectors, the department said in a June 18 release.

The actions, made under the Defense Production Act Title III, are designed to “help sustain and strengthen essential domestic industrial base capabilities and defense-critical workforce in shipbuilding, aircraft manufacturing, and clothing and textiles,” said Lt. Col. Mike Andrews, Defense Department spokesman, in the release. “These actions will help to retain critical workforce capabilities throughout the disruption caused by COVID-19 and to restore some jobs lost because of the pandemic.”

DoD made a \$50 million agreement with Austal USA, a shipbuilder in Mobile, Alabama, “to maintain, protect, and expand critical domestic shipbuilding and maintenance capacity. These investments will have long-term benefits for U.S. Navy shipbuilding while accelerating pandemic recovery efforts in the Gulf Coast region,” the release said.

Austal is the builder of the Navy's Independence-class littoral combat ships and Spearhead-class expeditionary fast

transport ships.

In addition, DoD entered into a \$55 million agreement with W International, based in Goose Creek, South Carolina, “to maintain, protect and expand critical domestic industrial base capability for the U.S. Navy nuclear shipbuilding industry. These investments will have long-term benefits for Navy shipbuilding while accelerating pandemic recovery efforts in the South East region of the United States,” the release said.

W international is a fabrication corporation “that provides manufacturing, custom fabrication, project management, tooling and engineering services to clients in the aerospace, defense, automotive, energy and commercial industries,” according to the company’s website.

In both cases, the DoD actions are being taken to “ensure critical capabilities are retained in support of U.S. Navy operational readiness,” Andrews said.

F/A-18F Crash Only Second Navy Aircraft Lost So Far in 2020



An F/A-18F Super Hornet, shown here in January 2020 as it lands on the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78), was the second Navy aircraft lost so far in 2020 during a sortie from the USS Theodore Roosevelt. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Jesus O. Aguiar
ARLINGTON, Va. – The crash of a Navy F/A-18F Super Hornet

strike fighter on June 18 was only the second loss of a Navy aircraft so far in 2020 – or in fiscal 2020 as well – according to an unofficial count.

The F/A-18F lost on June 18 crashed into the Philippine Sea during a sortie from the USS Theodore Roosevelt. The aircraft's pilot and weapon system operator were rescued by an MH-60S helicopter from Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron Eight (HSC-8), according to a release from the aircraft carrier.

The F/A-18F was assigned to Fighter Squadron 154 (VF-154), according to a source.

“The incident occurred as the F/A-18F Super Hornet assigned to Carrier Air Wing 11 was conducting routine pilot proficiency training. The incident is currently under investigation,” the carrier said in its release. “Both aviators were assessed by the medical team on board Theodore Roosevelt and are in good condition.”

The other loss in 2020 so far was an MH-60S operating from the 7th Fleet command ship USS Blue Ridge on Jan. 25. The helicopter crashed into the Philippine Sea and all five personnel on board were rescued.

Block III Super Hornets Headed for Navy Flight Tests



F/A-18 Block III flight test aircraft F287 makes its first flight in May. Boeing has delivered the first two Block IIIs to the U.S. Navy. Boeing

ARLINGTON, Va. – Boeing has delivered the first two Block III

Super Hornet strike fighters to the U.S. Navy. The aircraft, an F/A-18E and two-seat F/A-18F, will go through comprehensive testing by Navy air test and evaluation (VX) squadrons over the next year.

VX-23 at Naval Air Station Patuxent River, Maryland, will receive the F/A-18F (the 287th built) aircraft for “shore-based carrier testing” and will be used for testing of hardware and aeromechanical aspects, the Program Executive Office-Tactical Aircraft (PEO(T)) said in a June 17 release.

Once that testing is completed, the F/A-18F will go to VX-31 at Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake, California, to complete Block III testing. The F/A-18E (the 323rd built) will go to VX-31 for software functionality and network architecture testing.

The Block III Super Hornet features several major structural and mission system improvements over the Block II, Jennifer Tebo, Boeing’s director of development for F/A-18E/F & EA-18G Programs, said in a June 17 teleconference with media.

The Advanced Cockpit System includes replacement of a set of displays with a single large touch-screen display for improved user interface and display of the Common Tactical Picture, the PEO said.

The Advanced Network Infrastructure will have 17 times the computing power of the mission computer of the Block II through the Distributed Targeting Processor Network and Tactical Targeting Network Technology (TTNT).

Tebo described the TTNT as a “big data pipe – low latency, high-data” for better situational awareness. The infrastructure will be open to accept third-party applications for “speed to the fleet with urgent needs,” she said.

The Block III Super Hornets will feature an improved radar cross section for better survivability.

The most distinguishable characteristic of the Block III is the addition of streamlined, low-drag conformal fuel tanks to the upper wing and fuselage junctions. These will be optional for use and will enable the Super Hornet to carry 3,500 pounds more fuel, reducing the need for underwing external fuel tanks and freeing up the pylons to carry more weapons.

When delivered, each Block III will have a service life of 10,000 flight hours, far more than the 6,000 hours of a Block II strike fighter.

“In addition to the Block III delivery, Boeing will also perform service life modification (SLM) to hundreds of Block II Super Hornets, to extend their service life and integrate Block III capabilities,” the PEO said. “SLM is key to building the capacity and capability to ensure the Navy has jets ready to fight into the mid-2040s.”

Tebo said the SLM will extend the life of Block IIs to 10,000 hours and that deliveries of Block IIIs converted from Block IIs will begin in 2023 and continue into the mid-2030s.

Tebo said the Block III Super Hornet made its first flight on May 14. Delivery of 78 full-up production Block IIIs is planned to begin in mid-2021 at a rate of two per month through early 2024.

“The first squadron deployment of Block III Super Hornet is anticipated in mid-2023, with a plan in place to have two Block III squadrons, composed of new production and Block IIs that have undergone SLM, accompanying each carrier air wing by 2027,” the PEO said in the release.

“Now it’s up to our test squadrons and our integration team to verify requirements are met and ensure the engineering behind the Block III is validated prior to full-scale production and delivery of the Block III to the fleet,” Capt. Mike Burks, F/A-18 E/F deputy program manager, said in the release.

“These new capabilities are essential for ensuring we maintain the tactical advantage in the Great Power Competition,” Capt. Jason Denney, the Navy’s F/A-18 & EA-18G Program Manager, said in the release. “Block III production and SLM for our Block IIs also demonstrate contracting efficiency and solid partnerships with industry – an all-around win for the Navy, for Boeing, and for the warfighter.”