Geurts: Third Zumwalt DDG Will Be Commissioned After Combat Systems Activation

The USS Lyndon B. Johnson is made ready before flooding of the dry dock at General Dynamic-Bath Iron Works shipyard and subsequent launching of the third Zumwalt-class destroyer in 2018. U.S. Navy via General Dynamics-Bath Iron Works

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy's third Zumwalt-class guided-missile destroyer will be commissioned after its combat systems are fully installed and activated, rather than going through a two-part delivery, the Navy's top acquisition official said.

The future USS Lyndon B. Johnson (DDG 1002), under construction at the Bath Iron Works shipyard in Bath, Maine, will not be commissioned until after its combat systems are installed, unlike the process used for its two predecessors,

USS Zumwalt (DDG 1000) and Michael Monsoor (DDG 1001), said James F. Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition, speaking to reporters in an April 28 teleconference.

In the case of the first two of the class, the ships' hulls were completed and put through trials and then delivered to the Navy before their combat systems were installed. The Zumwalt was commissioned – in a status the Navy calls In Commission, Special – in Baltimore and then proceeded to San Diego for installation and activation of its combat systems. It was delivered to the Navy on April 24 and will begin at-sea testing of its systems preparing for its initial operational test and evaluation and its 2021 initial operational capability milestone.

The USS Michael Monsoor similarly was commissioned on Jan. 26, 2019, and proceeded to San Diego for its combat systems installation, which was completed in March.

The Lyndon B. Johnson is 93% complete, Geurts said, but will not be delivered and commissioned until its combat systems are installed. Since the combat systems activation will be conducted in San Diego, it will need to proceed there in a status other than as a commissioned ship.

"We did change to a single-phased delivery for that ship, and so we are adjusting that ship's future plans based on all the learning we've had on DDG 1000 and DDG 1001," Geurts said.

"I'm personally not a fan of two-phased delivery," he said. "I can understand why we do them. In certain cases, I think they're also problematic because you end up delivering the ship more than once and you can get into a delayed test-maintain-fix cycle."

Senate Bill Would Fund Second Virginia-Class Sub in 2021

The Virginia-class fast-attack submarine USS North Carolina departs Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam on March 25 for a regularly-scheduled deployment. A member of the Senate Armed Services Committee has introduced a $43 billion bill that would fund, among other things, a second Virginia-class sub in fiscal year 2021. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Michael B. Zingaro

ARLINGTON, Va. — A member of the Senate Armed Services Committee has introduced a $43 billion bill to strengthen U.S. forces in the Indo-Pacific to counter Chinese competition and that would fund, among other things, some of the U.S. Navy's priorities on its unfunded list, including a second Virginia-class attack submarine.

Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.) introduced the Forging Operational Resistance to Chinese Expansion (FORCE) Act on April 22, which his office said is a "critical investment in the United States' ability to compete with China."

The bill would include "$6.1 billion to regain the advantage in the Indo-Pacific region; $9.2 billion in capability increases for Great Power Competition; $11 billion for mitigating coronavirus impacts to procurement programs; $3.3 billion for mitigating coronavirus impacts to [the] defense industrial base; $1.5 billion for hospital ship recapitalization; [and] $12.0 billion to enhance national resilience and critical infrastructure."

The bill would provide $3.9 billion to upgrade naval lethality, a summary of the bill said, including funds for:

- A second fiscal 2021 Virginia-class submarine.
- Virginia-class submarine industrial base expansion.
- Subsea and seabed warfare capability for the Virginia class.
- Advanced procurement for the Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarine
- Additional Naval Strike Missiles and their launchers.
- Integration of the long-range air-to-surface missiles on all combat aircraft.
- Additional sonobuoys for anti-submarine warfare.
- Marine Corps modernization, including ground-based anti-ship missiles.

The bill also would fund adding hypersonic weapons on compatible fighter aircraft and accelerating development of directed energy weapons and cyber offensive and defensive capabilities.

Also provided in the bill would be $4.88 billion to the Navy and Marine Corps to "provide emergency aid for those programs that are most vulnerable" to mitigate the effects of the

COVID-19 pandemic, including funds for shipbuilding and conversion; the Columbia-class submarine industrial base; aircraft procurement; operations and maintenance; and research, development, test and evaluation.

Cotton's bill also specifically provides "funding for the Navy to replace the [hospital ships] USNS Comfort and USNS Mercy with new American-built vessels. This would be an opportunity to provide American jobs and grow the American industrial base for the future," the bill summary said.

The summary of the bill can be found here.

Trump Authorizes Navy to Fire on Harassing Iranian Craft

Iranian vessels harass a U.S. ship by crossing its bow and stern. U.S. forces are conducting joint interoperability operations in the U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations in the northern Persian Gulf. U.S. Navy

ARLINGTON, Va. — President Trump has authorized the U.S. Navy to fire on Iranian boats that harass American ships, following a recent episode where armed Iranian craft came dangerously close to and harassed Navy and U.S. Coast Guard vessels engaged in an exercise in the northern Persian Gulf.

“I have instructed the United States Navy to shoot down and destroy any and all Iranian gunboats if they harass our ships at sea,” Trump said in an April 22 tweet.

Under routine rules of engagement, U.S. ships are inherently authorized to fire in self-defense, but this new authority gives the ships’ commanders permission to fire if they are being harassed by the Iranian craft.

> *“If we see a hostile act, if we see hostile intent, we have the right to respond up to and including lethal force and, if it happens in the Gulf, if it happens in any way, we will respond with overwhelming lethal force, if necessary, to defend ourselves. It’s really that simple.”*
>
> *Air Force Gen. John Hyten, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*

“On April 15, 11 Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) vessels repeatedly conducted dangerous and harassing approaches of the USS Lewis B. Puller, USS Paul Hamilton, USS Firebolt, USS Sirocco, USCGC Wrangell and USCGC Maui while the U.S. vessels were conducting joint integration operations with U.S. Army AH-64E Apache attack helicopters in the international waters of the North Arabian Gulf,” the U.S. 5th Fleet said in a release.

“The IRGCN vessels repeatedly crossed the bows and sterns of the U.S. vessels at extremely close range and high speeds, including multiple crossings of the Puller with a 50-yard closest point of approach and within 10 yards of Maui’s bow,”

the release added.

“The U.S. crews issued multiple warnings via bridge-to-bridge radio, five short blasts from the ships’ horns and long-range acoustic noise maker devices but received no response from the IRGCN. After approximately one hour, the IRGCN vessels responded to the bridge-to-bridge radio queries, then maneuvered away from the U.S. ships and opened distance between them.”

The Iranians occasionally have used their small, fast, armed and highly maneuverable boats in swarms to harass naval and merchant ships in the Persian Gulf and last year captured merchant ships flagged in the United Kingdom and other nations.

Many U.S. ships are armed with Mk38 25 mm chain guns and M2 .50-caliber machine guns – in addition to larger-caliber guns on some ships – for countering fast attack craft, while many helicopters based on U.S. ships are armed with Hellfire and Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System guided missiles that are effective against such craft.

In January 2016, Iranian boats seized two U.S. Navy riverine command boats and detained the crews after the U.S. boats strayed into Iranian waters off Farsi Island in the Persian Gulf. The crews and boats later were released.

“The IRGCN’s dangerous and provocative actions increased the risk of miscalculation and collision, were not in accordance with the internationally recognized Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea ‘rules of the road’ or internationally recognized maritime customs and were not in accordance with the obligation under international law to act with due regard for the safety of other vessels in the area,” according to the 5th Fleet release.

Questioned at an April 22 Pentagon news conference, Deputy

Defense Secretary David L. Norquist said that “all of our ships retain the right of self-defense and people need to very careful in their interactions to understand the inherent right of self-defense.”

“Every capability that we deploy — every ship that deploys into harm’s way — has the inherent right of self-defense, as the secretary just described,” said Air Force Gen. John Hyten, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who also spoke at the news conference.

“What that means: if we see a hostile act, if we see hostile intent, we have the right to respond up to and including lethal force and, if it happens in the Gulf, if it happens in any way, we will respond with overwhelming lethal force, if necessary, to defend ourselves. It’s really that simple. Nobody should doubt that the commanders have the authority right now to respond to any hostile act or hostile intent.”

“I like that the president warned an adversary,” Hyten said. “That’s what he’s doing — he’s providing a warning. ‘If you want to go down that path, we will come, and we will come large, so don’t go down that path.’ He’s saying it in clear, certain terms. We understand that direction, and every commander that is deployed has the ability to execute that.”

Norquist said he thought the intent of the president’s tweet was clear. “When you talk about harassment, you’re talking about actions designed to provoke, actions designed to threaten. It’s a very clear message that the Iranians should understand.”

Hyten added: “You can’t let a fast boat get into a position where they can threaten your ship. We have very specific guidance on how we can use lethal force.”

Navy Cybersecurity Director: ‘No Relaxation of Defenses’ During Telework Time

Sailors stand watch in the Fleet Operations Center at the headquarters of U.S. Fleet Cyber Command. U.S. Navy

ARLINGTON, Va. — The U.S. Navy is maintaining a vigilant cyber watch over its data networks as it balances network security and protecting the health of its Sailors amid the COVID-19 pandemic, a Navy admiral said.

“We’re trying to balance two different priorities,” Rear Adm. Kathleen Creighton, director of cybersecurity in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, said during an April 17 webcast that was part of the Navy League’s Sea-Air-Space 2020:

Virtual Edition. “One is keeping our Sailors and civilians safe and to enable them to work remotely and second is to ensure operational readiness.”

To register and then watch this Sea-Air-Space 2020: Virtual Edition webinar live online, click here.

Creighton said the Navy has had to go through a big cultural shift from working in offices to “ensuring as many people as possible can work from home remotely.”

She said that, in addition to Defense Department partners, the Navy’s industry partners had taken a “first responder-type approach to helping the Navy” by adding infrastructure to handle the ballooning demand for secure telework.

> *“We’re trying to balance two different priorities. One is keeping our Sailors and civilians safe and to enable them to work remotely and second is to ensure operational readiness.”*
>
> *Rear Adm. Katherine Creighton*

The admiral cited the need for significant expansion of capacity, the need to maximize collaboration capabilities, and determination of any need to change cybersecurity policy “to ensure we can take advantage of remote telework options.”

She said that “on any given day probably only a few thousand people accessed the Navy’s network remotely … before COVID-19. Now, we are seeing upwards of 150,000 or more people accessing the network remotely.”

The great increase in telework required an expansion in capacity requirement for laptop computers, mobile phones, iPads and the VPN servers that they connect to as well as an expansion of Microsoft Outlook 365 use. Circuitry also had to be added to handle the increased use of devices as well as more people manning the help desk for the network.

Creighton said the Navy “has been on a road to modernize and to start using more collaboration capabilities, and this crisis has pushed us to roll those out faster. We’re using some temporary capabilities, and we’re looking to accelerate our permanent capabilities.”

She said the Navy is discovering where the bottlenecks in the network are and fixing them on a piece-by-piece basis. In addition to expanded circuitry, the Navy has been cleaning up user accounts and increasing licenses.

“Every time we increased the capacity, it was used. It filled right up,” she said. “So, the Navy is taking working from home very seriously, trying to protect our Sailors and civilians.”

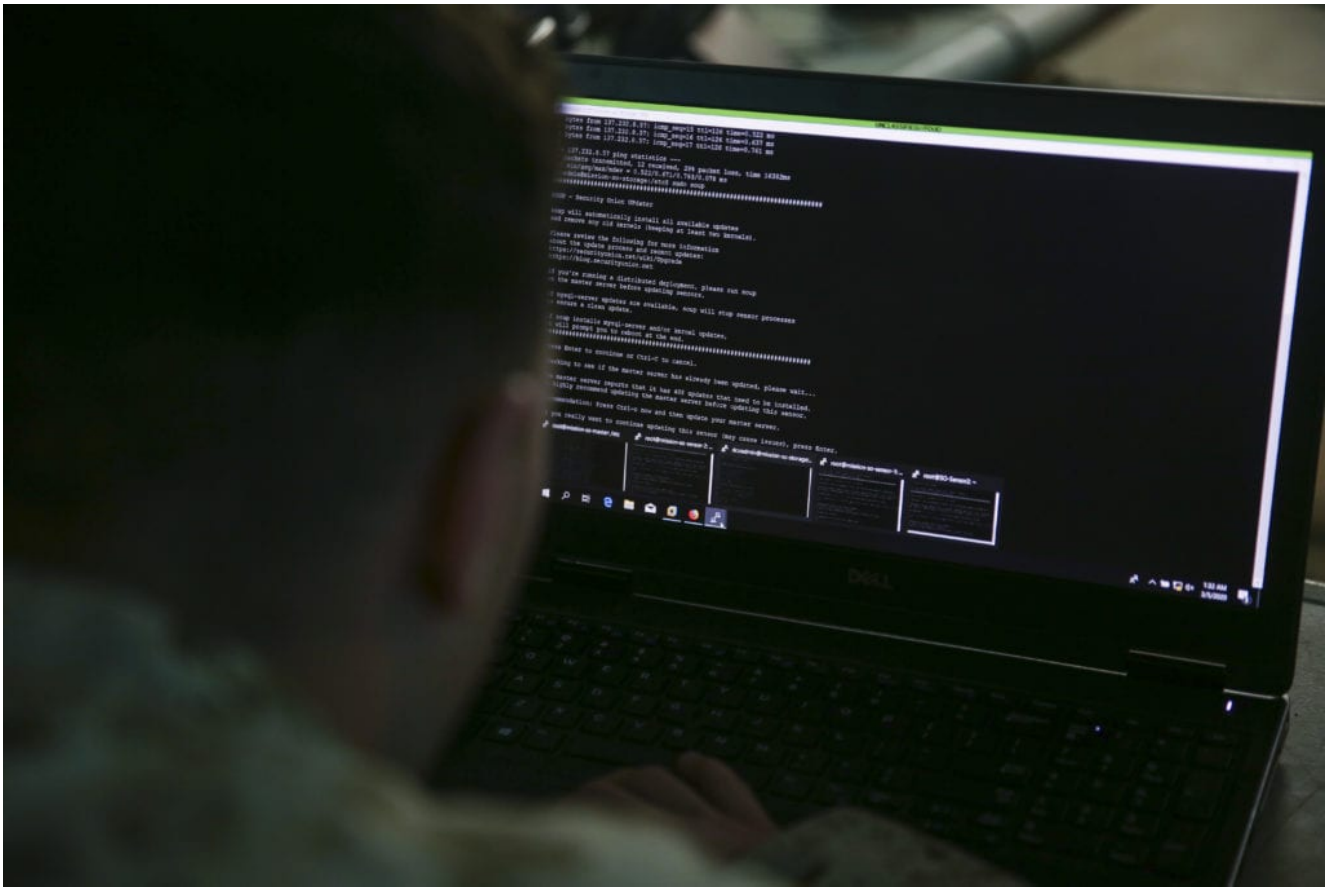
“Our adversaries in cyberspace know we were doing business differently, so they are responding in kind,” she said, “so we have made sure that anything we have done has not relaxed our cybersecurity standards.”

“There has been no relaxation of any defenses,” she said. “We are securely connecting with that same network from home.”

Creighton said a temporary cloud is being set up to handle a faster roll-out of Office 365.

Looking to the future after the COVID-19 pandemic, Creighton said she believes “there would be a desire to continue a greater level of telework than we saw in the past, so we need to be sure that our network has the capacity to do that, that we have the procedures in place to do it, but most importantly we’re able to do it securely to protect our information and our people’s identity and other things we value as a Navy.”

Marine Cyber Official: ‘Our Networks Are Resilient’ in COVID-19 Environment



A U.S. Marine assess data during an exercise, Native Fury 20, in the United Arab Emirates on March 5. U.S. Marine Corps/Sgt. Alexis Flores

ARLINGTON, Va. — The U.S. Marine Corps’ cyber networks are being defended and upgraded even as the COVID-19 pandemic forces ad hoc adaptation in their operation, a senior Marine Corps official said.

“Our networks are good, and they are operating at a good capacity and are resilient,” said Gregg Kendrick, executive director of Marine Corps Forces Cyberspace Command, speaking April 17 in a webcast for Navy League’s Sea-Air-Space 2020: Virtual Edition.

To register and then watch this Sea-Air-Space 2020: Virtual

Edition webinar live online, click here.

“We’re pleased with our effective efforts in our ability to support the force as it has gone to ad hoc telework or alternate work sites and maintain our capacity and, more importantly, our operational capability to support our warfighters and our commanders that are out there deployed in harm’s way.”

Kendrick said the Corps is monitoring its networks differently in the current environment.

“We do look at our virtual private networks and then we look at our physical and transport layer, our network stack from Layer 1 to Layer 4, so from that perspective we’re focused on those types of metrics and really watching our latency,” he said.

“So, we are very focused on the security. Every decision we have made in regards to supporting the ad hoc telework option has really [been] focused. We’ve had a fundamental security look, and we’ve really looked at our modernization efforts to ensure that we are aware of any of the advanced persistent threats and/or capabilities that are out there to ensure that we have a good, resilient as well as available network.”

> *“We’re pleased with our effective efforts in our ability to support the force as it has gone to ad hoc telework or alternate work sites and maintain our capacity.”*
>
> *Gregg Kendrick, Marine Corps Forces Cyberspace Command*

Kendrick said his force is looking at “which applications are in use the most, which are stressed the most at the highest capacity, what exactly are our latent measures, … and our overall bandwidth [including] by bandwidth region. Everything [security metrics] is funneled through our enterprise security desk so that we can rapidly pull metrics and shift resources

as needed to support our Marine warfighters."

He said Cyberspace Command is starting to see trends in the pandemic environment, "but we are definitely waiting for this to evolve and then we will be able to draw conclusions, but at the same time we don't want to let a trend propagate to a point where we have to go into a different work cycle."

"The bad guys are always looking at what we're doing, and they are looking to do harm," Kendrick said. "We protect our workforce. We secure, operate and defend the Marine Corps enterprise networks."

Kendrick said that through the Corp's new command-and-control network structure the service is bringing a "unity of command that provides a much clearer readiness picture of our network, our resiliency picture, and then a better overall visualization of the data flow from the end points all the way to the data centers and then back out where they need to go."

The executive director said the Corps is adopting Microsoft Office 365 to achieve a more efficient capability combined with a hybrid cloud architecture, aiming for higher velocity.

"In the end state the adversary gets a vote," he said. "They move at speed unconstrained by rules of engagement or the laws of nation states. We need to implement the best infrastructure, the best applications, the best operational processes as efficiently as possible so that we can modernize, provide the best capability to the warfighter, at the same time ensuring security from adversary actions and resiliency across the networks."

Ford Weapons Elevators Set for Completion by Summer 2021 Shock Trials

Huntington Ingalls Industries-Newport News Shipbuilding division contractors aboard the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford test a lower-stage weapons elevator. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist Seaman Apprentice Riley McDowell

ARLINGTON, Va. – The installation and turnover of the advanced weapons elevators on the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford is proceeding well, with the goal to complete the work by summer 2021, a top U.S. Navy official said.

"We need to get all of the elevators up and running prior to her full-ship shock trials planned for [summer 2021]," James. F. Geurts, assistant secretary for research, development and acquisition, told reporters during an April 16 teleconference.

He said that the carrier had just returned from 32 days at sea where it conducted carrier qualifications for fleet and student pilots, logging 1,352 catapult launches and arrested landings – "generating readiness for the fleet" – and that one lower elevator had completed testing.

"I'm pleased with the performance of the shipyard," Geurts said. "Ford in the [post-delivery testing and trials] period deployed at least 50% of the time. I have been very proud of the shipbuilder's creativeness in getting the elevators worked on while the ship is underway. We're ahead slightly of the schedule. My main focus is getting these first two lower elevators turned over [to the crew] because that will allow full access from the magazine all the way to the flight deck."

Geurts said the priority is to give the crew access to the magazines and the second is adding redundancy and capacity. He said a lesson learned during the elevator installation was to have elevator specialists among the shipbuilder's work force.

"You can't just have any trade work on the elevators," he said. "What the shipbuilder has done is create essentially an elevator trade [with] a separate schoolhouse. We're essentially using Ford to build the teams that will then continue and flow all the way through [the subsequent carriers, CVNs 79 through 81]. There is work being done on those follow-on carriers.

"They're also going to have to improve their efficiency at getting the work done."

In Perhaps a First, USS Delaware Commissioned Underwater

The USS Delaware transits the Atlantic Ocean with some company after departing Huntington Ingalls Industries Newport News Shipbuilding division during sea trials last August. U.S. Navy via Ashley Cowan/Huntington Ingalls Industries

ARLINGTON, Va. — The COVID-19 pandemic is driving the U.S. Navy to adapt some of the ways it conducts business, but the commissioning of a submarine underwater is likely to be a first.

The Virginia-class attack USS Delaware was commissioned into the Navy on April 4 while the sub was underwater, James F. Geurts, assistant secretary for research, development and acquisition, told reporters during an April 16 teleconference.

Geurts said the Delaware's crew replicated commissioning ceremony traditions that could be accomplished beneath the surface, including "bringing the ship to life" and sounding the claxon. The crew also fired water slugs through the Delaware's torpedo tubes.

"Due to public health safety and restrictions on large public events, the commissioning ceremonies for the future USS Delaware and future USS Vermont were canceled for April 4 and 18, respectively," Bill Couch, a spokesman for Naval Sea Systems Command, told *Seapower* back on March 24.

A Navy release added: "Although the traditional commissioning ceremony was canceled due to restrictions on large gatherings brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Navy commissioned USS Delaware administratively on April 4 and transitioned the ship to normal operations. Meanwhile, the Navy is looking at an opportunity to commemorate the special event with the ship's sponsor, crew and commissioning committee."

The Delaware is the eighth and last Block III Virginia-class SSN. The Vermont is the first of 10 Block IV Virginia-class subs. The two subs were built jointly by General Dynamics' Electric Boat and Huntington Ingalls' Newport News Shipbuilding.

Navy, Marine Officials: AI Will Augment — Not Replace — Humans

Rear Adm. David Hahn, chief of naval research, and Jennifer Edgin, the U.S. Marines Corps' assistant deputy commandant for information, were the guests on a webcast April 16 for the Navy League's Sea-Air-Space 2020: Virtual Edition on the two sea services' possible uses for artificial intelligence.
ARLINGTON, Va. — U.S. Navy and Marine Corps officials close to the effort to develop artificial intelligence in machines say the technology is advancing rapidly and will be used where it can add value.

Discussing AI in an April 16 webcast of the Navy League's Sea-Air-Space 2020: Virtual Edition were Rear Adm. David Hahn, chief of naval research, and Jennifer Edgin, the Marines' assistant deputy commandant for information. They said AI has an "incredible capability" and will have a "huge role to play" in warfighting.

To register and then watch this Sea-Air-Space 2020: Virtual Edition webinar live online, click here.

Hahn said that AI can help sort the enormous amounts of data available to the warfighter and perform many tasks that previously were performed by humans.

"Things advance faster when artificial intelligence is

applied," Hahn said.

He stressed, however, that AI will not replace humans, but will augment them.

"I don't think you should look at it as replacing [humans], he said. "I think you should look at it as a value add. That value add will come in speed of decision, or the efficiency of the operation, or the effectiveness of that decision or that event. I think that this [AI] is a force multiplier for the humans who are engaged in these activities.

"It's up to us to find the combinations of artificial intelligence and other technologies like autonomy to apply the appropriate ways to naval warfare," he said. "I don't think it's a one-for-one, and we're not going to trade out a human for a machine. We're going to make the whole team better with this human-machine teaming concept."

> *"I don't think you should look at [AI] as replacing [humans]. I think you should look at it as a value add.*
>
> *Rear Adm. David Hahn*

Hahn stressed that AI and autonomy are not the same, but where they intersect, AI can add value to autonomy.

"Autonomy is going to move along a pathway, and when machine learning or some other method of artificial intelligence can add to that autonomy to accomplish a mission, then there will be an intersection," he said. If it adds value to the mission, then it will make sense to do it."

Humans are still required for many types of decisions and the services are working on the issues that arise with the use of AI.

"That conversation is maturing," Hahn said.

The admiral said that he sees a “democratization” of the tools of AI, in which it becomes the domain not just of academia but will eventually spread to general use by the military and the public. A disadvantage of that democratization is that the AI in use will be available to adversaries, and AI that can be used for beneficial purposes also can be used for nefarious purposes.

AI “is an incredible capability that we in the Marine Corps seek to harness,” Edgin said. “Our philosophy is how do we want to pair Marines with machines to be more effective on the battlefield. We don’t want Marines to be spending their time putting a whole bunch of data into a spreadsheet. We want Marines to be able to make judgement decisions. We want them to use that Level 4 fusion capability that we have as humans to develop courses of action to lead at the small-unit level.”

“One of the most beneficial tools we have today is actually the individual Marine,” she added. “What we try to do is unleash their potential to identify technologies, identify problems, and then quickly implement a solution.

“If there is one truth in AI, there will always be something new and exciting that can potentially provide benefits to us.”

Geurts: Accelerated Acquisitions Position Navy,

Industry for Period After COVID-19 Crisis Wanes

An artist rendering of the Columbia-class ballistic missile submarine. The Navy's top acquisition official said April 15 during a Navy League Sea-Air-Space 2020: Virtual Edition webcast that work is proceeding on such programs as the Columbia SSBN and the next-generation guided-missile frigate, despite the disruption of COVID-19. U.S. Navy

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy's top acquisition official said the service's efforts to accelerate contract awards in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic are helping the defense industry sustain its economic health at all levels and positioning the Navy and industry to emerge from the crisis without falling behind on work and ready to resume normal operations.

James F. Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy

for research, development and acquisition, speaking during an April 15 webcast of the Navy League's Sea-Air-Space: Virtual Edition, said the Navy and the defense industry are working to keep on task and be in a position to accelerate "out of the crisis."

To register and then watch this Sea-Air-Space 2020: Virtual Edition webinar live online, click here.

"Ships still have to come out on time," Geurts said, noting that the Navy can't afford to lag once the world starts to recover from the crisis.

Geurts said the Navy has moved up the award of some contracts to inject "a lot of money in the system" to "get funds in the contractor hands" and "bring that work to the left" – meaning getting in started sooner. An example is the award last week – months early – of LPD 31, the second Flight II San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship.

James F. Geurts (right), assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition, and Sea-Air-Space 2020: Virtual Edition moderator Francis Rose discuss Navy and defense industry acquisitions preparedness during and after the pandemic.

Accelerating contract awards enables shipyards and other contractors to stack a backlog of work and keep their workers employed. The contractors also can push funds to their lower-tier subcontractors to the same effect.

Geurts said it was "counterintuitive … that the best way to secure [the health of the defense industrial base] was to accelerate going into a crisis. Most folks would want to slow down, wait and see, and that would exactly create the wrong conditions."

"The risk is being too risk-averse in our approach. The other risk is being reckless in our approach."

> *"Ships still have to come out on time," even as the Navy and industry weather but eventually recover from the pandemic.*
>
> *James F. Geurts*

He said that all of stakeholders are going at the situation "deliberately but urgently and thoughtfully. A challenge for us will be [that] it's not a one-size-fits-all solution. This crisis hits different areas of the country, different sectors differently at different times. The key to success will be great networks, leveraging the data we have and building on a foundation of trust."

As the Navy worked to advance contract awards, Geurts said he saw his now "massively distributed," largely teleworking work force shows greatly improved performance as it works to help the defense industry get though the pandemic.

The Navy also is ordering spare parts sooner to build up the supply and to shore up the suppliers who provide them.

Geurts said he confers with shipyard presidents or CEOs every other day to assess the status of work and provide opportunities to share lessons learned and to discuss best practices, ways to avoid disruption and how to speed up

recovery.

“It’s been awesome,” he said of the response from the defense industry.

The assistant secretary said the Navy’s acquisition priorities have not changed in the pandemic, citing that work is proceeding on such programs as the Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarine and the next-generation guided-missile frigate. He stressed the Navy’s ongoing efforts to minimize delays and disruptions to the service’s programs.

MARAD’s Buzby: Readiness of Sealift, Ready Reserve Force Suffering

The U.S. Military Sealift Command large, medium speed roll-on/roll-off ship Benavidez transits the English Channel. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Jordan R. Bair

ARLINGTON, Va. – U.S. strategic sealift fleets need recapitalization and some increased manning to achieve the readiness that the nation needs to sustain its maritime power, the U.S. maritime administrator said April 14.

"The readiness is suffering," a fact that sealift stakeholders recognize, Maritime Administrator Mark H. Buzby said during a webcast that is part of the Navy League's Sea-Air-Space 2020: Virtual Edition.

To register and then watch this Sea-Air-Space 2020: Virtual Edition webinar live online, click here.

Buzby pointed out that rusting ships, obsolete equipment, unavailable parts and repairing and replacing ships are the materiel challenges faced by the Maritime Administration (MARAD) and the U.S. Navy's Military Sealift Command (MSC).

MARAD's Ready Reserve Force of 46 ships and MSC's 15 sealift ships all need recapitalization, Buzby added.

He said the federal government is taking three approaches to recapitalizing the fleets and that a combination of those "will help us renew the fleet":

- Extending the service lives of some existing ships to possibly 60 years.
- Replacing 25 to 26 ships with new or converted used vessels.
- Procuring built-for-purpose sealift ships "from the keel up."

Recruiting and retaining enough mariners remains a challenge as well, Buzby said. Commercial mariners in the U.S. Merchant Marine – including those in the Ready Reserve Force, on Maritime Security Program ships available for mobilization and the declining U.S.-flag merchant fleet – and the government's civilian mariners who work for the MSC are part of the pool that man the sealift ships.

Maritime Administrator Mark H. Buzby participates in a webcast for the Navy League's Sea-Air-Space 2020: Virtual

Edition
He said that 24 ships in the Ready Reserve Force are steam-powered, operated by a shrinking pool of technicians qualified to operate and maintain the obsolete propulsion system.

Buzby said the mariner pool is “enough for a steady state today” but inadequate for a substantial mobilization requirement.

Of help would be to place more merchant ships “under the U.S. flag so it gets the pool … where it needs to be,” he added.

Building up the U.S.-flag merchant fleet is a considerable challenge, he said, because competitors such as China that have state-run enterprises can undercut the U.S. in terms of lower-cost shipbuilding and manning and can therefore compete more effectively for cargo business.

“We’re asking our merchant marine to play on an unlevel playing field,” he said.