

USMI to Build Special Operations Combatant Craft

ARLINGTON, Va. – United States Marine Inc. (USMI) has been awarded a \$108 million contract to build combatant craft for the U.S. Special Operations Command, the Defense Department said in a release.

The \$108 million maximum indefinite-delivery/indefinite-quantity delivery order contract with a five-year ordering period calls for combatant craft assault vessels to support Special Operations Command (USSODOM) missions around the world, the release said. USSOCOM operates a fleet of coastal and riverine craft in support of those operations.

USMI CEO Barry Dreyfus Jr. said the contract would allow the company to retain and possibly expand its workforce, according to another release from the office of Sen. Roger Wicker (R-Miss.). USMI is based in Wicker's state in Gulfport.

"USMI looks forward to continuing our work on behalf of the warfighter, and we appreciate the confidence [USSOCOM] continues to have in us," Dreyfus said.

The sole source contract is expected to be completed by April 2025.

Coast Guard: Illegal Fishing in Oceans a National Security

Issue



Boarding officers from the U.S. Coast Guard and Canadian Conservation and Protection navigate to board a fishing vessel in the South Pacific in January 2019. Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans

WASHINGTON – Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) is a national security issue that threatens global economic order and the sovereignty of nations and that enforcement is over-stretched to counter the threat, U.S. officials said.

IUU includes fishing without a permit, catching over a legal limit, catching the wrong species and catching fish that are too small.

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

Speaking during a Navy League Sea-Air-Space: Virtual

Edition webcast on April 13, Rear Adm. Doug Fears, the Coast Guard's assistant commandant for response policy, said that IUU "is an issue of sovereignty and a national security issue because the competition for global fish stock and protein is ongoing."

Fears said the Coast Guard "is as an internationally trusted partner and is a supporter of an international rules-based governance structure that benefits each country that has an economic exclusion zone."



Rear Adm. Doug Fears (left), the U.S. Coast Guard's assistant commandant for response policy, and Dave Hogan, acting director of the Office of Marine Conservation with the U.S. State Department, discuss Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing during a Navy League Sea-Air-Space: Virtual Edition webinar.

Dave Hogan, acting director of the Office of Marine Conservation with the U.S. State Department, who also spoke during the Navy League webcast, said the State Department negotiates with international and regional partners to establish the rules to manage the fish stocks on the high seas in cooperation with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Fisheries Service, the Coast Guard and other agencies.

“Each nation exercises sovereignty over its economic exclusion zone,” Fears said. “When another nation violates that, [IUU] is harming the fish stock that may not be recoverable.”

Fears also pointed out that some nations are engaging in aggressive behavior against others in driving away fishing boats of other nations that are legally fishing and thus violating the sovereignty of those nations. He cited a recent example of Chinese coast guard activity against an Indonesian fishing vessel. The U.S. Defense Department on April 9 called out China’s coast guard for [sinking a Vietnamese fishing vessel](#).

“The United States Coast Guard has the authorities, the capability, the global reach – we’re trusted partners. Our model is a well-respected model. Our limiting factor is capacity.”

Rear Adm. Doug Fears

Hogan said the United States has an ongoing dialogue with China on IUU issues. He said the State Department has asked China to “do better” with its distant-water fleet fishing in the waters of other countries.

He said IUU fishing is going on in all the world’s oceans, and that the violators include stateless high-seas drift-net vessels in the North Pacific. Whereas most fishing companies worldwide are privately owned, China’s are state-run.

“The United States Coast Guard has the authorities, the capability, the global reach – we’re trusted partners,” Fears said. “Our model is a well-respected model.”

“Our limiting factor is capacity,” he added. “While we operate around the world, we can’t operate in all the places that deserve the attention in IUU fishing.”

Fears cited the South China Sea, the waters off West Africa and the central and western Pacific and the Gulf of Mexico as prime areas where IUU occurs.

Hogan said the United States is still trying to find a multilateral solution to the competing claims in the South China Sea. He also said he encourages nations to cooperate, despite their disputes, so fish stocks aren't depleted and that their own economic security and the environment aren't undermined.

Fears said that IUU often is networked by organized crime, such as the drug cartels, which have "tentacles" in human trafficking and other smuggling operations. "A lot of the drug cartels and similar organizations monetize illicit activities, whatever they be," he said.

Fears also said a Coast Guard presence is an effective counter to IUU fishing but that the sea service needs more ships, aircraft and personnel to project that presence.

Wicker Praises HII Contract for Amphibious Transport Dock Ship



An artist's rendering of an amphibious transport dock ship. Huntington Ingalls Industries
ARLINGTON, Va. – The earlier-than-expected April 3 award to Huntington Ingalls Industries' shipbuilding division of a \$1.5 billion contract modification for the procurement of the detail design and construction of amphibious transport dock ship LPD 31 was praised by a U.S. senator as a move to shore up shipbuilding.

Sen. Roger Wicker (R-Miss.), a senior member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, commended the decision to award the shipbuilding contract for LPD 31, which he said "was announced earlier than expected and intended to help the Mississippi shipbuilder mitigate the destabilizing effects of the coronavirus outbreak on its workforce," according to a release from the senator.

"This is great news for the dedicated men and women of Ingalls Shipbuilding and the many other suppliers who rely upon a stable rate of construction at the shipyard," Wicker said. "The talented tradespeople in Pascagoula have been continuing

the fight to get our Navy the ships it needs, even in the midst of the great uncertainty brought on by the coronavirus epidemic.”

LPD 31 will be the 15th in the San Antonio class and the second Flight II LPD, according to an April 3 release from Huntington Ingalls.

“In building this 15th LPD, Ingalls experienced shipbuilders will continue this hot production line of great amphibious warships for our Navy/Marine Corps team,” Ingalls Shipbuilding President Brian Cuccias said in the release.

Wicker worked with the other members of the Senate Armed Services Committee to authorize procurement of LPD 31 and provide incremental funding authority to the Navy in the fiscal 2019 and 2020 National Defense Authorization Acts, his release said. Both actions gave the Navy the flexibility to expedite the ship’s purchase.

The San Antonio class is a major part of the Navy’s 21st century amphibious assault force. The 684-foot-long, 105-foot-wide ships are used to embark and land Marines, their equipment and supplies ashore via air cushion or conventional landing craft and amphibious assault vehicles, augmented by helicopters or vertical takeoff and landing aircraft such as the MV-22 Osprey.

Navy Orders Materials for Harpoon Missiles for Six

Allies and Partners



A Harpoon missile launches from the missile deck of the littoral combat ship USS Coronado off the coast of Guam. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Kaleb R. Staples ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy has ordered materials for AGM/RGM-84 Harpoon anti-ship cruise missiles for six allied and partner nations, the Defense Department said in an April 2 release.

Naval Air Systems Command awarded Boeing a \$73.2 million contract modification to provide additional long-lead material funding for full-rate production Lot 91 of the Harpoon missile under the foreign military sales program. Work is expected to be complete by December 2023.

When produced, the missiles will be delivered to the governments of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Thailand, South Korea, Brazil and Japan.

The Harpoon missile family is deployed by the armed forces of

31 nations.

Navy Orders Four New LCU 1700 Utility Landing Craft from Swiftships



A Swiftships Landing Craft Utility 1700. Swiftships
ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy has ordered four more of its new utility landing craft (LCU) for its amphibious warfare forces.

Naval Sea Systems Command awarded Swiftships of Morgan City, Louisiana, a \$50.1 million modification to a previously-awarded contract “to exercise an option for the construction of four Landing Craft Utility (LCU) transportation boats (1703 through 1706),” the Defense Department said in an April 2 announcement. Delivery is expected by October

2022. The funds will come from the fiscal 2020 budget.

In February 2019, the Navy ordered LCU 1701 and 1702 under a \$26.7 million contract modification. The craft will follow the prototype of the LCU 1700 class. Delivery is expected by May 2021.

“The LCU 1700 class will recapitalize the LCU 1610 capabilities and have a design life of 30 years,” the contract announcement said. “LCU 1700 craft will be a highly reliable and fuel-efficient heavy-lift platform whose capability will be complementary to the faster air cushion landing craft, which have a significantly shorter range, smaller payload capacity, no habitability and operating hour limitations.”

The Navy’s amphibious warfare ships equipped with well decks routinely deploy with LCUs embarked. The Navy plans to procure a total of 32 LCU 1700 craft.

Navy Orders Two E-2D Advanced Hawkeye Aircraft



A E-2D Hawkeye lands on the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Ryan Carter

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy has ordered two more E-2D Advanced Hawkeye battle management aircraft, the Defense Department said in a contract announcement.

Naval Air Systems Command awarded Northrop Grumman Aeronautics Systems of Melbourne, Florida, a \$404 million contract modification to the previously awarded, fixed-price-incentive-firm-target contract, the department said in an April 1 release.

One of the E-2Ds is being procured as part of fiscal 2019's full-rate production (FRP) Lot 8 while the second as part of fiscal 2020's FRP Lot 9.

This modification exercises contract options for nonrecurring engineering and software support activities. Work is expected to be complete by March 2025, the release said.

The Navy expects to procure a total of 86 E-2Ds. Japan has received four E-2Ds of and has ordered an additional nine. The E-2Ds are replacing E-2C Hawkeye aircraft in both the U.S. Navy and the Japanese Air Self-Defense Force.

Navy, Coast Guard to Surge Drug-Interdiction Support to SOUTHCOM



Chief Hospital Corpsman Bianca McQueen briefs contractors on COVID-19 mitigation tactics on the flight deck of the Freedom-variant littoral combat ship USS Detroit while in port in Key West, Florida. Detroit is deployed to the U.S. Southern Command area of responsibility to help counter drug trafficking. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Anderson W. Branch

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy and Coast Guard will surge ships and aircraft to the U.S. Southern Command's area of

responsibility to counter increased cartel drug running amid the COVID-19 pandemic, President Trump and Defense Department officials announced.

At an April 1 press briefing at the White House, Trump announced that SOUTHCOM “will increase surveillance, disruption and seizures of drug shipments and provide additional support for eradication efforts, which are going on right now at a record pace.”

“We’re deploying additional Navy destroyers, [littoral] combat ships, aircraft and helicopters; Coast Guard cutters; and Air Force surveillance aircraft, doubling our capabilities in the region,” he added. “Very importantly, our forces are fully equipped with personnel protective equipment, and we’ve taken additional safety measures to ensure our troops remain healthy.”

[#COVID19](#) will not stop the [@DeptofDefense](#) from protecting the American people from illegal drugs. At the direction of the [@POTUS](#), additional U.S. ships, aircraft, and security forces are underway to disrupt narcotics trafficking. pic.twitter.com/BFTbxqcFGn

– Archive: Dr. Mark T. Esper (@EsperDoD) [April 1, 2020](#)

Gen. Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said at the briefing that “we came upon some intelligence some time ago that the drug cartels, as a result of COVID-19, were going to try to take advantage of the situation and try to infiltrate additional drugs into our country. As we know, 70,000 Americans die on an average annual basis to drugs. That’s unacceptable. We’re at war with COVID-19, we’re at war with terrorists, and we are at war with the drug cartels as well.”

“This is the United States military,” Milley added. “You will

not penetrate this country. You will not get past Jump Street. You're not going to come in here and kill additional Americans. And we will marshal whatever assets are required to prevent your entry into this country to kill Americans."

Attending the briefing as well was Defense Secretary Mark Esper, who added: "This initiative is part of the administration's whole-of-government approach to combating the flow of illicit drugs into the United States and protecting the American people from their scourge."

Esper said the additional forces would "nearly double our capacity to conduct counter-narcotics operations in the region. Last year alone, United States Southern Command's operations resulted in the seizure of over 280 metric tons of drugs, much of which was designated for shipment to America."

"This initiative is part of the administration's whole-of-government approach to combating the flow of illicit drugs into the United States and protecting the American people from their scourge."

Defense Secretary Mark Esper

In a tweet that day, Esper posted a briefing slide listing in more detail the types of forces that would be surged into the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific areas off the coast of Central and South America.

The list included Navy destroyers and littoral combat ships, Coast Guard cutters, Navy P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft and Air Force E-3 Sentry and E-8 Joint STARS surveillance aircraft. The destroyers and littoral combat ships carry MH-60 Seahawk helicopters, while some Coast Guard cutters carry MH-65 Dolphin helos.

Geurts: Ship Construction Ongoing, Repairs Continuing Amid COVID-19 Outbreak



Earl Cobbs of Newport News, Virginia, grinds a bulkhead in the hangar bay aboard the aircraft carrier USS John C. Stennis in Norfolk during the carrier's refueling and complex overhaul. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Joshua L. Leonard

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy is continuing to build and repair ships amid the COVID-19 pandemic but also is looking ahead to position itself to accelerate as the nation recovers from the pandemic, the service's top acquisition official said.

The repair yards are "continuing to get the work done," James

F. Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition, said during an April 1 teleconference with media.

“We’ll see some challenges,” Geurts said, but noted that his office is focused on “one or two steps down the road” and on “how to accelerate out of recovery” to maintain the readiness of the fleet.

[See: COVID-19 Testing, Isolation Expand for Crew of Aircraft Carrier](#)

He said that 95% to 98% of the Navy’s acquisition work force is teleworking and that he “was not seeing a drop-off in performance.”

The assistant secretary reiterated his focus on three lines of operation:

- The health of the defense industrial work force, including the government work force and its industrial partners such as prime contractors, subcontractors, small suppliers and individuals.
- Ensuring the health of the industrial base.
- Ensuring warfighting readiness of the Navy and U.S. Marine Corps.

“We haven’t slowed down,” he said, and that the work force “is continuing to press hard.”

Geurts said he continues to see some tightening in the supply chain and that his workforce is continually reassessing measures to work out the challenges. He lately is focusing attention on the transportation and distribution networks to monitor potential disruptions in the supply chain.

Geurts has been pressing to get contracts issued earlier than normal to assure the shipbuilders and repair yards and their suppliers that “work is coming.”

He pointed out that awarding contracts two months early has the advantage of getting planning and work started early; “creating some resiliency” as challenges arise; and making possible an acceleration of the post-pandemic recovery.

He said that contracts awarded recently included those for two Navajo-class towing, salvage and rescue ships; 18 P-8A maritime patrol aircraft, the AIM-9X Sidewinder air-to-air missile, berthing barges and patrol boats, and that contracts were imminent for a Block II San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship and for the new class of utility landing craft.

He also said he has yet to see the impact of the pandemic on the next-generation frigate program.

Geurts also pointed to the upcoming April commissionings of the Virginia-class attack submarines Delaware and Vermont and the upcoming combat systems completion of the guided-missile cruiser USS Zumwalt as evidence that the Navy’s acquisition of ships is not slowing down.

Navy Regional Maintenance Centers Continuing Work Amid COVID-19 Crisis



A docking team from the Japan Regional Maintenance Center (RMC) collaborates with port operations workers to close a caisson. The RMCs are continuing to maintain Navy ships amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the sea service says. U.S. Navy/Ryo Isobe

WASHINGTON – In the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. Navy’s Regional Maintenance Centers (RMCs) are continuing to maintain the Navy’s ships, even in countries where the pandemic is especially severe, the Navy said.

“Our priority is the protection of our workforce, [and] our commanders have the flexibility to respond to conditions in their areas to effectively carry out their missions while meeting the critical needs of their people,” said Colleen O’Rourke, spokeswoman for Naval Sea Systems Command, in response to a query from *Seapower*. “Our RMCs continue to maintain the readiness of our fleet.”

The Navy has RMC activities in two countries hardest hit by the virus, at Rota, Spain, and Naples, Italy.

“We are committed to taking every measure possible to protect the health of our force,” O’Rourke said. “We remain in close coordination with host nation authorities, U.S. Embassy and public-health authorities to ensure the well-being of our personnel and local population.”

Q&A With CNO Adm. Mike Gilday



Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday visits with Sailors aboard USS Kearsarge in August during his first ship visit following the CNO change-of-office ceremony. U.S. Navy/Chief Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Nick Brown

Since August, Adm. Mike Gilday has led the world’s most powerful navy as the 32nd chief of naval operations. The son of a Sailor and a native of Lowell, Massachusetts, he is a surface warfare

officer who graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy and holds master's degrees from the Harvard Kennedy School and the National War College.

At sea, he deployed with USS Chandler (DDG 996), USS Princeton (CG 59) and USS Gettysburg (CG 64). He commanded destroyers USS Higgins (DDG 76) and USS Benfold (DDG 65) and subsequently commanded Destroyer Squadron 7, serving as sea combat commander for the Ronald Reagan Carrier Strike Group.

As a flag officer, he served as commander, Carrier Strike Group 8, embarked aboard the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN 69), and as commander, U.S. Fleet Cyber Command and U.S. 10th Fleet.

Check out the digital edition of the April Seapower magazine [here](#).

His staff assignments include the Bureau of Naval Personnel, staff of the CNO and staff of the vice CNO. Joint assignments include executive assistant to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and naval aide to the president.

As a flag officer, he served in joint positions as director of operations for NATO's Joint Force Command Lisbon; as chief of staff for Naval Striking and Support Forces NATO; director of operations, J3, for U.S. Cyber Command; and as director of operations, J3, for the Joint Staff. He recently served as director, Joint Staff.

Gilday answered questions from Senior Editor Richard R. Burgess in writing.

Why the renewed emphasis on mastering fleet-level warfare?

GILDAY: The nature of war at sea today is changing. Maritime operations stretch from the seabed to space and across the electromagnetic spectrum. Long-range missiles that fly at supersonic and hypersonic speed have decreased the amount of time a commander has to make decisions, and the emergence of cyber and space as warfighting domains have created a much more complex operating environment for our Sailors.

To meet these challenges, our fleets must be the operational center of warfare. Fleet commanders must own the physical and virtual battlespace they are responsible for and drive the fight, if required to do so.

“We fight and win as a team, and we are better when we integrate more closely with the Marine Corps. We will build capability with our most natural partner, tying more closely with them at all levels.”

However, to be able to fight as a fleet, we must exercise as a fleet. We have made great investments in our maritime operational centers [MOCs], which gives fleet commanders the ability to do just that. We need to exercise – and the only way to do that is with iron out there at scale.

Upcoming fleet exercises, like Large

Scale Exercise 2020, will leverage operational concepts like Distributed Maritime Operations, Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations and Littoral Operations in a Contested Environment. Combined with war-gaming, future exercises will serve as the key opportunity for experimentation and the development and testing of alternative concepts. These exercises and experiments will inform doctrine and tactics, and future fleet headquarters requirements, capacity and size, and investments in future platforms and capabilities.

Going forward, we must leverage experience from combatant command, joint and other service exercises to better prepare the Navy to integrate, support and lead the joint force in a future fight.



Gilday delivers remarks Feb. 7 during a full honors ceremony for Vice Adm. Michael Noonan, chief of the Royal Australian Navy, at the Navy Yard in Washington, D.C. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Raymond D. Diaz III

The Optimized Fleet Readiness Plan and Dynamic Force Employment, in theory, would seem to be in tension. How should the Navy ensure a sustainable personnel tempo while keeping adversaries off balance?

GILDAY: People are our most important resource, and the Navy cannot succeed without its Sailors – they are our asymmetric advantage.

While we strive to have a predictable model for our Sailors and their families, it's important to remember that sometimes the world gets a vote, which may require us to respond at a moment's notice – and differently than we planned.

In which aspects do you see integration with the U.S. Marine

Corps as having the greatest potential for improving naval power?

GILDAY: We fight and win as a team, and we are better when we integrate more closely with the Marine Corps. We will build capability with our most natural partner, tying more closely with them at all levels.

Together, we will build Navy-Marine Corps integration by aligning concepts, capabilities, programming, planning, budgeting and operations to provide integrated American naval power to the Joint Force. Opportunities for increased integration include our cyberspace operations, war-game and exercise programs, development of the Naval Tactical Grid, and potential Dynamic Force Employment options.

Alongside the United States Marine Corps, our Navy is the bedrock of integrated American naval power.



Gilday visits with Sailors assigned to Helicopter Maritime Strike Squadron 40 during his first visit as CNO to Naval Air Station Jacksonville and Naval Station Mayport, Florida, on Sept. 17. U.S. Navy/Chief Mass Communication Specialist Nick Brown

Where

do you see the best application of unmanned systems for naval warfare?

GILDAY: Unmanned is an important part of the future. It must be a central component of our future battle force to support the way we want to fight in a distributed way. Going forward, I believe there will be a requirement for seaborne-launched vehicles to deliver effects downrange, likely using a mix of manned and unmanned assets. Ultimately, we must leverage technology to expand our reach,

lethality and warfighter awareness in undersea, surface and air domains. We must continue to experiment more with unmanned, and we need to do it with greater speed.

Based on your experience, what does the Navy need to do to be prepared for war in the cyber domain?

GILDAY: Cybersecurity is commanders' business. Commanders need to own it. Commanders must understand the status of their networks and systems and the potential operational risk they are assuming if readiness has degraded.

Going forward, we need to invest in training and retaining the best and brightest, and in cyber infrastructure; treat the network ([Navy-Marine Corps Intranet], ONE-NET, afloat networks) like the warfighting platform it is, giving priority to ensure it is secure and defended; defend forward – disrupt threats before they reach our networks; develop cyber-resiliency (think shipboard damage control) – identify, protect, detect, react and restore the network; integrate MOC to MOC, across the fleets and interagency, in every major exercise and operation; [and] partner with other services, interagency, industry, allies and partner nations.

“We must ensure the fleet’s readiness today so we can deliver credible ready forces tomorrow. This includes the prioritization of force design and the delivery of naval forces capable of imposing lethal power to any adversary and aggressive pursuit of increased lethality and modernization across the Navy.”

What have you learned the most about your role so far as a member of the Joint Chiefs?

GILDAY: My role as a Joint Chief is one that I take extremely seriously, and it is important that I provide the president,

secretary of defense and chairman of the Joint Chiefs the best military advice I can. That is why I spend a lot of time studying and thinking about near-peer competitors, potential adversaries and our future force.

What are the main priorities of the Navy's 2021 budget?

GILDAY: The Navy's first acquisition priority is recapitalizing our strategic nuclear deterrent. We will continue to drive affordability, technology development and engineering integration efforts to support Columbia's [ballistic-missile submarine] fleet introduction on time or earlier, maintain mastery of the undersea domain and sustain a formidable forward presence through our aircraft carrier fleet.

We must ensure the fleet's readiness today so we can deliver credible ready forces tomorrow. This includes the prioritization of force design and the delivery of naval forces capable of imposing lethal power to any adversary and aggressive pursuit of increased lethality and modernization across the Navy.



Gilday visits with Sailors on Sept. 17 at the Littoral Combat Ship Operational Trainer Facility at Naval Station Mayport, Florida. U.S. Navy/Chief Mass Communication Specialist Nick Brown

How do you explain the lower shipbuilding budget and the early ship retirements given the need for a larger fleet?

GILDAY: The fiscal 2021 budget supports implementation of the National Defense Strategy, which remains our guidepost and drives our decision-making. While we are committed to building the largest Navy we can, the capacity reductions in the recent budget submissions were made with the service's priorities of strategic deterrence, readiness, lethality and modernization in mind. We remain focused on maximizing the naval power of our ships, aircraft, unmanned vehicles, weapons and systems we

have today in our fleet.

Our balanced approach in our budget submission provides a Navy ready to fight today while committing to the training, maintenance and modernization to provide a Navy ready to fight tomorrow. Naval power is critical to implementing the National Defense Strategy. But naval power is not just a function of fleet size: It is a combination of the readiness, lethality and capacity of that fleet.

Our

No. 1 priority is the Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarine. This request also heavily invests in readiness accounts, such as ship and aircraft depot maintenance and modernization, manpower, live virtual constructive training, steaming days, and flying hours. It invests in new systems to make our fleet more lethal, including increasing our weapons inventory, bolstering the range and speed of those weapons, exploring directed energy weapons, and incorporating new technologies such as hypersonics. This request grows our fleet in size, generating sustainable, capable capacity.

The

configurations in some older platforms require a significant amount of modernization, and we believe that the significant investment necessary for modernization necessary to ensure platforms can operate in contested environments is better utilized in other programs.

Looking to the next 10 years, how can the Navy best balance the funding needs between current readiness and new

acquisition

GILDAY: Mission No. 1 for every Sailor – active and Reserve, civilian and uniform – is the operational readiness of the fleet.

We

must ensure the fleet's readiness so we can deliver credible ready forces. This

includes the prioritization of force design and the delivery of naval forces

capable of imposing lethal power to any

adversary. That must be balanced with an aggressive pursuit of increased

lethality and modernization across the Navy, against the constraints of our

budget topline.

Going forward, we will continue to

prioritize investments using the National Defense Strategy as our

guidepost.

With the nuclear deterrent as the Navy's No. 1 priority, what concerns do you have about the Columbia SSBN being on track to deploy on time?

GILDAY: Lead-ship construction for Columbia began in 2020 and the Navy continues to identify opportunities to drive schedule and cost margin. While the construction schedule is aggressive, it is achievable. The Navy is actively overseeing shipbuilders as they manage the submarine and aircraft carrier industrial base suppliers to minimize risk and incorporate recent lessons learned.

Why is the Navy asking for more Sailors for the fleet?

GILDAY: To operate effectively as a force, we

need to properly man our ships, submarines and aviation squadrons, and this budget request supports that effort with a 2% increase in active-duty Sailors (plus 7,300 from fiscal 2020 to 2021). Recruiting, developing and retaining a high-quality military and civilian workforce is essential for our warfighting success.

How is the budget strengthening the nation's sealift capability?

GILDAY: We have a three-prong approach to strengthening our sealift capability, which includes the procurement of commercial vessels with 20 to 25 years of life remaining at a cost of \$30 million, as opposed to acquiring new vessels at a cost of \$300 million, \$400 million or \$500 million. Additionally, the Navy is conducting at service life extension [SLE] on existing sealift ships, which includes six service life extensions, put in place last year. The Navy intends to increase SLEs from six to 10 in 2021.