Analysis Underway for E-6B Mercury Aircraft Replacement

A U.S. Navy E-6B Mercury airborne command post flies over Solomons Island, Maryland. An analysis is underway for a replacement for the E-6B. U.S. Navy photo.

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. – An analysis of alternatives (AOA) is underway in the Office of the Secretary of Defense for a replacement for the Navy's E-6B Mercury strategic communications aircraft.

Speaking to an audience at the Navy League's Sea-Air-Space conference here, Marine Maj. Gen Greg Masiello, the Navy's program executive officer for Air, ASW, Assault and Special Mission PEO (A), said that his office is supporting the AOA. PEO(A)'s portfolio includes the E-6B aircraft.

The E-6B is the legacy platform that relays strategic communications to and from the Navy's ballistic-missile submarines and national command authority, a program called TACAMO (Take Charge and Move Out). The E-6B also serves in the airborne command post (ABNCP) role for U.S. Strategic Command, flying with a battle staff onboard.

The AOA is for the NEAT program, which is a simplification of the terms NAOC (National Airborne Operations Center)/EA (ABNCP/TACAMO). The AOC mission is performed by the Air Force E-4B

aircraft.

Pentagon Report Cites Rapidly Modernizing Chinese Navy

A Chinese Type 052C destroyer, the Changchun, in Malaysia in 2017.

ARLINGTON, Virginia — China's first home-built aircraft carrier is likely to join the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) fleet this year, a highlight of China's effort to modernize its fleet with modern, farther-ranging platforms and weapons.

Construction began on a second aircraft carrier in 2018, said a new report to Congress from the Defense Department, "Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019." This carrier, which should reach the PLAN fleet in 2022, is likely to be fitted with a catapult aircraft launch system, according to the report.

A coastal defense navy during the Cold War, the PLAN is continuing a two-decade build-up with numerous blue-water platforms

"The PLAN is

rapidly replacing obsolescent, generally single-purpose platforms in favor of larger, multirole combatants featuring advanced anti-ship, anti-air and anti-submarine weapons and sensors," the report said. "This modernization aligns with China's growing emphasis on the maritime domain and increasing demands on the PLAN to conduct operational tasks at expanding distances from the Chinese mainland using multimission, long-range, sustainable naval platforms possessing robust self-defense capabilities."

"Modernization of China's submarine force remains a high priority for the PLAN," the report said. "The PLAN currently operates four nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBN), six nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSN) and 50 conventionally powered attack submarines (SS). The speed of growth of the submarine force has slowed and will likely grow to between 65 and 70 submarines by 2020."

The PLAN also continues to modernize its surface warship fleet.

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>
> *A new Pentagon report to Congress on China's naval modernization*

China has built new guided-missile cruisers (CGs), guided-missile destroyers (DDGs) and guided-missile frigates (FFGs) that “will significantly upgrade the PLAN’s air defense, anti-ship, and anti-submarine capabilities. These assets will be critical as the PLAN expands operations into distant seas beyond the range of shore-based air defense systems” the report said.

China has built four Renhai-class CGs over the last two years and has several more under construction. The lead CG is scheduled to join the fleet in 2019. At least three Luyang-class DDGs joined the PLAN fleet in 2018, bringing the total to nine with at least four more under construction. A larger variant forthcoming, Luyang III, will be equipped with a vertical launcher system.

China also emphasizes small surface combatants, with 27 or more Jiangkai II FFGs and more than 40 Jiangdao-class corvettes, with more of both types under construction.

All new attack submarines and surface combatants are being armed with modern anti-ship missiles.

“The PLAN recognizes that long-range ASCMs require a robust, over-the-horizon targeting capability to realize their full potential,” the new Pentagon report said. “China is investing in reconnaissance, surveillance, command, control

and
communications systems at the strategic, operational and tactical levels to
provide high-fidelity targeting information to surface and subsurface launch
platforms.”

China also is
building a fleet of amphibious warfare ships, adding three to the current five
Yuzhao-class amphibious transport dock ships.

China also is expanding the
PLAN marine corps from two brigades and 10,000 marines to seven brigades and
30,000 marines by 2020. The Chinese marine corps also now has its own commander
and a new central headquarters.

Navy’s Heliborne EW Pods Set for Delivery at Year’s End

ARLINGTON, Va. – Lockheed Martin is set to deliver to the Navy the first Advanced Off-Board Electronic Warfare AOEW pods at the end of 2019, the company’s program manager said.

The first set of pods is on track for delivery in December 2019 or January 2020, said Joe Ottovanio, director of electonic warfare solutions for Lockheed Martin, speaking to reporters May 1 in Arlington.

Ottoviano also said the program expects a Milestone C decision for Low-Rate Initial Production of the AOEW pod in December.

The AOEW is a pod designed to be carried aloft by and MH-60R or MH-60S helicopter and function as an extension of a warship's SLQ-32(V)6 electronic warfare system.

Boeing's MQ-25 Prototype Will Save the Navy 18 Months of Development

ARLINGTON, Virginia – The existence of a working prototype of the Navy's MQ-25A Stingray carrier-based aerial refueling UAV will save 18 months of development time and could be a factor if the Navy decides to move up the date of the aircraft's Initial Operational Capability (IOC), currently planned for 2024.

"Eighteen months of early learning is the biggest step" to pushing up IOC, said Dave Bujold, Boeing's MQ-25 program director, speaking to reporters April 29 at Boeing's facility in Arlington.

Boeing built its company-owned prototype, called T-1, for the canceled UCLASS (Unmanned Carrier-Launched Aerial Surveillance and Strike) UAV program and, unlike its competitors, had the prototype on hand for the MQ-25 competition. T1 has not yet flown but has participated in taxi tests and overnight on April 28 was transported from the St. Louis, Missouri, plant to Mid-America airport in southern Illinois for additional ground tests and eventually its first flight.

Boeing expects to fly T-1 later in 2019.

Bujold said that T-1 is a "very strong representation of the

EMD [engineering and manufacturing development] aircraft" and that waiting for the first EMD aircraft to emerge from the factory would add 18 months to the program.

At Mid-America, T-1 will receive the aerial refueling system of the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet strike fighter and the Joint Precision Aircraft Landing System. The plan includes, in addition to more ground testing, a "couple hundred flight hours," Bujold said.

Eventually, T-1 will be transported to participate in risk-reduction deck handling trials on board an East Coast aircraft carrier.

Testing is planned to continue through fiscal 2021, the year the first EMD MQ-25A is completed. Bujold said the design will be frozen sometime in 2020.

He said that a factor that could help speed up development is the fact that Navy program officials are embedded with Boeing officials in a common government maritime acceleration team. Rather than having to communicate with stacks of documents, Boeing and Navy officials operate through a shared network drive, a method that, he said, "speeds up acquisition," using "rolling [program] reviews."

Lack of Well Deck Seen as a Wash for LHA USS America

PACIFIC OCEAN (Feb. 1, 2018) An MV-22 Osprey helicopter assigned to Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron (VMM) 161 (Reinforced) aboard the amphibious assault ship USS America (LHA 6) lands on the flight deck.

ARLINGTON, Va.— The transfer of the new amphibious assault ship USS America to the Forward-Deployed Naval Force (FDNF) next fiscal year will bring a change in capabilities to the 7th Fleet's amphibious ready group, but the Marines that will go on patrol on America will be able to adjust to the changes and maintain a similar level of combat capability.

America (LHA 6) is scheduled to replace USS Wasp (LHD 1) as the "bog-deck" amphib deployed to Sasebo, Japan. The major difference in the two ships is that America lacks a well deck, a feature on all earlier LHAs and LHDs that can float landing craft and amphibious assault vehicles.

The America and its soon-to-be commissioned sister ship Tripoli were designed to be more aviation-centric. The trend was reversed with the third ship of the class, the future Bougainville, which will have a well deck.

The Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), the 31st MEU, which deploys on the ships of the Sasebo-based amphibious ships, differs from other MEUs in that it does not include M1A1 tanks in its load-out.

"I do not possess tanks, because we don't have tanks on Okinawa," said Col. Robert Brodie, commander of the 31st MEU, speaking April 23 to the Potomac Institute in Arlington of the 31st MEU's patrol in the Western Pacific in early 2019.

With somewhat of a lighter load, the 31st MEU will have less of a problem handling the unit's equipment of the America-centric amphibious ready group (ARG).

Brodie said his staff already is looking at the optimum way to configure the MEU's equipment load-out to best operate from the America. The ship's lack of a well deck means that three fewer landing craft – LCACs or LCUs – would be carried by the ships of the ARG.

Brodie is optimistic that the increased aviation capacity of

the America could make up for the loss of a well deck. The America would more easily accommodate 12 MV-22B Osprey tiltrotor aircraft rather than the 10 that the Wasp typically carried. The two additional Ospreys would add to the overall airlift capability that could make up for some of the loss of lift by landing craft, especially without the requirement to accommodate tanks.

The America's increased aviation capacity also would enable the America to deploy with perhaps as many as eight F-35C Lightning II strike fighters instead of six as on the Wasp. The additional MV-22Bs also would make the eventual installation of an aerial refueling hose on one or more of the MV-22Bs a plus for the range and endurance of the F-35.

The air combat element of the 31st MEU also normally deploys with four CH-53E Super Stallion heavy-lift helicopters on board the Wasp, in addition to the three Navy MH-60S armed helicopters. The four AH-1Z Viper attack helicopters and three UH-1Y Venom utility helicopters are normally staged on the amphibious platform dock ship and dock landing ship of the ARG.

Marines to Rebuild WWII B-29 Airfield on Tinian for Training Use

ARLINGTON, Virginia – The airfield that launched the B-29 bombers that dropped the atomic bombs on Japan in World War II is being partially refurbished for use as a divert field and refueling point for Marine Corps aircraft in training events.

The United States has “opened up a long-term contract to be able to utilize the north [air]field” on Tinian, agreed to with a 40-year deal with the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands to use the north airfield on Tinian, said Col. Robert Brodie, commander of 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), speaking April 23 to the Potomac Institute in Arlington of the MEU’s recent patrol in the western Pacific in early 2019.

One of the coral runways of the airfield will be improved, Brodie said. That runway currently is in condition to receive KC-130 aerial refueling/transport aircraft, but “it isn’t user-friendly for a lot of jet airplanes,” said Brodie, an F/A-18 Hornet pilot.

The runway refurbishment is expected to cost $20 million.

The Mariana Islands and Guam are becoming increasingly important to the upcoming move of thousands of Marines and Sailors from Okinawa to Guam, forces who will need combat training sites for maintaining readiness.

Brodie took the opportunity to look at potential beach landing sites and live-fire training sites. He noted that two new hangars for aircraft have been built at Andersen Air Force Base on Guam for Marine Corps aircraft.

The 31st MEU was heavily involved in relief efforts in Tinian after Typhoon Mangkhut swept through the Marianas in mid-September 2018, when the rooves of most buildings on Tinian were destroyed. The MEU’s Marines and the Sailors spent a month on Tinian rebuilding and relieving the suffering of the island’s 2,500 residents.

Brodie said the Marines and Sailors were gratified by the opportunity to help fellow American citizens, telling the islanders, “We’re here to support America!”

He said Tinian’s mayor has asked for a Marine Corps recruiter

to come to the island to “focus their high school kids” on considering service in the Corps.

“I can’t tell you what a good feeling it is to have a great relationship with the leadership of the Northern Marianas,” Brodie said. “What I think that is going to directly contribute to the Marine Corps in our path forward as we start to move forces down there.”

Coast Guard Releases New Arctic Strategic Outlook

ARLINGTON, Virginia – The U.S. Coast Guard has updated its Arctic strategic outlook for the first time since it published its strategy for the region in 2013 as it focuses more attention on an area of increasing interest regarding national defense, commercial shipping and natural resources exploration.

Released in an April 22 announcement, the new strategic outlook noted that as “the Arctic region continues to open, and strategic competition drives more actors to look to the Arctic for economic and geopolitical advantages, the demand for Coast Guard leadership and presence will continue to grow.

“Since the release of the Coast Guard Arctic Strategy in 2013, the resurgence of nation-state competition has coincided with dramatic changes in the physical environment of the Arctic, which has elevated the region’s prominence as a strategically competitive space,” the document said. “The United States is an Arctic nation, and the U.S. Coast Guard has served as the lead federal agency for homeland security, safety and environmental stewardship in the Arctic region for more than

150 years."

The shrinking and thinning of the Arctic Ocean ice pack in recent years has tempted Arctic nations – and some non-Arctic nations such as China – to expand their presence in the region and to build ships capable of navigating through the ice. The U.S. Coast Guard this year was funded by Congress to build a new class of icebreakers called polar security cutters. The service does not have any ports on the Arctic Ocean and has only one ship, USCGC Healy, that routinely operates in the Arctic.

"As the nation's primary maritime presence in the Polar Regions, the Coast Guard advances national interests through a unique blend of polar operational capability, regulatory authority and international leadership across the full spectrum of maritime governance," the announcement said. "The Coast Guard will continue to work with our allies and partners on the mutual goal of ensuring a safe, secure, and cooperative Arctic, even as our aspiring near-peer competitors maneuver for strategic advantage in the area."

"The Arctic Strategic Outlook reaffirms the Coast Guard's commitment to American leadership in the region through partnership, unity of effort and continuous innovation," said Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Karl L. Schultz. "We understand the significant investment required to secure the Arctic, and we appreciate and embrace the trust the American people have placed in the U.S. Coast Guard. We will remain vigilant in protecting our national interests in the Polar Regions."

The outlook is organized along three lines of effort, listed below:

• Enhance capability to operate effectively in a dynamic arctic – The Coast Guard has ample authorities and a robust network of strong and resilient partnerships, but there are critical gaps in capability and capacity that must be filled

in order to uphold American sovereignty and deliver mission excellence.

• Strengthen the rules-based order – The Coast Guard will lead institutions and cooperate with partners to promote rule of law and prevent malign influence in the Arctic.

• Innovate and adapt to promote resilience and prosperity – The sea service will collaborate with partners and stakeholders to develop innovative ways to deliver mission-critical services – including search and rescue, incident management, law enforcement and marine safety – to the region.

VCNO Moran: Surface Warriors Need Better Simulators, More Training from COs

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Navy's surface warriors need more and better simulators to hone their skills, the vice chief of naval operations said April 16, also noting that crews would benefit from more attention from their commanding officers.

"Commanding officers need more time to train their crews," VCNO Adm. Bill Moran said, speaking at an event of the U.S. Naval Institute and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think tank, and sponsored by Huntington Ingalls Industries.

"More freeplay," Moran said.

Moran, the nominee to become the next and 32nd chief of naval

operations, was responding to a question about the results of the Navy's investigations and reviews of the 2017 collision of the destroyers USS Fitzgerald and USS John S. McCain.

The Navy has adopted 111 recommendations, Moran said, and has been implementing them at a pace such that would not "crush the fleet." The recommendations are being implemented in three tiers of priority: safety, effectiveness and excellence – moving from a culture of just meeting the standards to exceeding the standards.

Moran, a P-3 pilot, said the Navy needed to "build better simulators," noting his concern that the quality of the simulators used in the surface warfare community "were well below what I am used to in the aviation community."

"We [also] don't have the capacity I think the fleet needs," he said.

He cited the littoral combat ship community for the good quality of its training simulators and said that "we should have that for every ship class in the Navy."

"That, to me, will make the biggest difference over time," he said.

The Navy is building two new structures to house ship simulators in the fleet concentrations of Norfolk, Virginia, and San Diego. The Navy has had in place the NSST (navigation, seamanship and shiphandling trainer) for more than a decade.

Moran stressed that even with excellent simulation, Sailors need "some seawater under your legs." He praised the measures taken by the Navy's commander of surface forces, Vice Adm. Rich Brown, to restructure the career path of junior surface warfare officers to give them more time at sea earlier in their careers.

He said that COs can give more time to training their crews by

getting maintenance and schedules under control. The Navy has reduced the number of required inspections – knocking out some 60, he said – to free up crews for developing warfighting skills.

VCNO Moran: Strike Fighter Readiness Highs and Lows Getting Higher

WASHINGTON – The Navy's vice chief of naval operations said that readiness of the strike fighter community is improving and is approaching the 80% goal set by former Defense Secretary James Mattis.

"The highs are getting higher and the lows are getting higher," said VCNO Adm. Bill Moran, speaking of the daily readiness statistics that come in from the fleet.

Moran was answering questions April 16 at an event of the U.S. Naval Institute and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think tank, and sponsored by Huntington Ingalls Industries.

Moran, a P-3 pilot and now nominee for chief of naval operations, said that less than two years ago, the readiness of the F/A-18 strike fighter was less than 50% mission capable.

The running 10-day average last week was 76%, he said.

Moran said the Navy had "accepted normalization of deviancy" in a time of budget turbulence and that "naval aviation had fallen into that trap."

He said the Navy recruited the expertise of the commercial aviation industry to look at its processes and metrics and implemented changes that helped to turn the situation around. He also said the lessons also were being applied to surface ship maintenance.

Burke Nominated to Be Vice CNO

ARLINGTON, Virginia – The chief of naval personnel (CNP) has been nominated by President Donald J. Trump for promotion to admiral and to become the next vice chief of naval operations (VCNO), Acting Defense Secretary Patrick M. Shanahan announced in an April 11 release.

If confirmed, Vice Adm. Robert P. Burke, deputy chief of naval operations for manpower, personnel, training and education, would follow his CNP predecessor, Adm. Bill Moran, as VCNO. Moran was nominated to serve as CNO.

Burke is a nuclear submariner who has served onboard USS Von Steuben (SSBN-632), USS Maryland (SSBN-738) and USS Bremerton (SSN-698), according to his official biography.

"He commanded USS Hampton (SSN-767) and later became commodore of Submarine Development Squadron 12. Burke was recognized by the United States Submarine League with the Jack Darby Award for Leadership in 2004 and the Vice Admiral James Bond Stockdale Award for Inspirational Leadership in 2005.

"His staff assignments include tours as an instructor and director for the Electrical Engineering Division at Naval

Nuclear Power School, junior board member on the Pacific Fleet Nuclear Propulsion Examining Board, submarine officer community manager/nuclear officer program manager; senior Tactical Readiness Evaluation Team member at Commander, Submarine Force, U.S. Atlantic Fleet; the deputy director for Operations, Strategy and Policy Directorate (J5) at United States Joint Forces Command; the division director, Submarine/Nuclear Power Distribution (PERS-42); and director, Joint and Fleet Operations, N3/N5, U.S. Fleet Forces Command," according to the biography.

Burke's assignments as a flag officer include deputy commander, U.S. 6th Fleet; director of operations (N3), U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa; commander, Submarine Group 8; and director, Military Personnel Plans and Policy (OPNAV N13). He assumed duties as the Navy's 58th chief of naval personnel on May 27, 2016, serving "concurrently as the deputy chief of naval operations (manpower, personnel, training and education) (N1), responsible for the planning and programming of all manpower, personnel, training and education resources for the U.S. Navy."

Burke, from Portage, Michigan, holds bachelor's and master's degrees in electrical engineering from Western Michigan University and the University of Central Florida, respectively.