Deputy Secretary of Defense Hicks Announces First Tranche of Replicator Capabilities Focused on All Domain Attritable Autonomous Systems

AeroVironment Switchblade UAS
MAY 6, 2024

Exemplifying the Department's focus on harnessing the value of commercial technology to solve critical operational challenges, the first iteration of the Replicator initiative has reached an execution milestone.

Deputy Secretary Hicks announced today some of the capabilities and one of the systems selected for accelerated fielding as part of the first tranche of the Replicator initiative, which is focused on fielding all-domain attritable autonomous (ADA2) systems.

The Department has secured its needed funding of about $500 million for FY24, to include approximately $300 million from the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 defense appropriations bill supporting the Department's reprogramming request and additional funding identified using existing authorities and Defense-wide sources. In PB25, the Department has requested a roughly equal amount to the FY24 total and will work with Congress to support this request.

These investments bring together the capabilities of a broad range of traditional and nontraditional technology companies, including systems vendors, component manufacturers, and software developers.

"I am pleased to announce that the Department will begin investing in scalable production for these critical capabilities," said Hicks. "We are taking an important step toward strengthening our defense and technology industrial base. And, we are demonstrating the Department's ability to break down barriers to scaling innovation at speed not just for ADA2 systems, but in our ability to develop new capabilities and processes for the Department and key stakeholders, including Congress."

The first tranche of Replicator capabilities include uncrewed surface vehicles (USV), uncrewed aerial systems (UAS) and counter-uncrewed aerial systems (c-UAS) of various sizes and payloads from several traditional and non-traditional vendors.

In the air domain, the Department will accelerate fielding of the Switchblade-600 loitering munition, produced by Simi

Valley, CA-based AeroVironment Inc. U.S.-supplied Switchblade drones have already demonstrated their utility in Ukraine, and this system will provide additional capability to U.S. forces.

“This is a critical step in delivering the capabilities we need, at the scale and speed we need, to continue securing a free and open Indo-Pacific” said Admiral Samuel Paparo, commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. “The entire Department has come together to help make this a reality.”

In the maritime domain, the Department is diversifying the vendor base for USVs through the recently announced Production-Ready, Inexpensive, Maritime Expeditionary (PRIME) Commercial Solutions Opening (CSO). The CSO process allows U.S. and international companies to pitch technologies to the Department in a fast-track process for a prototype contract. Launched on January 30, 2024, the PRIME CSO received over one hundred applications from commercial technology companies. With FY24 funding secured, the Department is on track to award several contracts this summer.

The first tranche of Replicator also includes certain capabilities that remain classified, including others in the maritime domain and some in the counter-UAS portfolio.

“Meeting the strategic imperatives facing the nation requires that we harness the very best of America’s commercial technology in non-traditional partners, alongside our traditional sources of defense capabilities,” said Doug Beck, Director of the Defense Innovation Unit (DIU). “Replicator is doing just that, and that is why we at DIU are proud to work with our partners from across the Department of Defense to make it a reality.”

Since Deputy Secretary Hicks’ announcement of the Replicator initiative and its initial focus on ADA2 systems just over seven months ago, the Department-wide effort has

systematically aligned senior leaders around a common vision to identify and validate key joint operational gaps and rapidly field solutions in 18-24 months. The Department is also preparing the next tranche of capabilities to add to the ADA2 portfolio.

“This is just the beginning,” said Admiral Christopher Grady, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. “Replicator is helping us jumpstart the delivery of critical capabilities at scale. We will build on that momentum with industry partners to deliver what the warfighter needs, and remove barriers to doing so again and again.”

U.S. Navy Celebrates Expanding Talent Pipeline for Submarine Industrial Base

Credit: General Dynamics Electric Boat
From Naval Sea Systems Command, May 3, 2024

WASHINGTON – This May, the U.S. Navy's Submarine Industrial Base (SIB) program is hosting a series of Talent Pipeline Project (TPP) Signing Day events across key maritime hubs to recognize the latest wave of skilled workers joining the Defense Industrial Base.

These events, taking place in Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, Hampton Roads, Boston, and Long Island, mark the culmination of the SIB program's multiyear effort to develop robust talent pipelines in these regions. Working with partners in industry, academia, and local government, the SIB program has launched training and recruitment initiatives to cultivate the next generation of welders, pipefitters, electricians, and other critical tradespeople. These five programs represent

tremendous enterprise collaboration and include more than 290 defense industry and 140 academic partners.

The May Signing Days will celebrate more than 2,100 individuals who are now embarking on careers at small and medium-sized defense industrial base suppliers – the vital network of companies that provide components, materials, and services critical to new construction and sustainment of our maritime forces. Local shipbuilding companies, elected officials, and community leaders will be on hand to celebrate the graduates and welcome them into this critical defense industry.

“These Signing Days highlight the many meaningful careers paths to be found in submarine manufacturing and the good-paying jobs being created in communities across the country,” said Rear Adm. Scott Pappano, Program Executive Officer for Strategic Submarines. “These events represent merely the beginning as we work to grow and sustain the submarine industrial base for the long term,” Pappano said, highlighting the importance of these programs.

The TPPs are critical to the Navy’s efforts to recapitalize its submarine fleet and maintain a strong, resilient industrial base. The SIB program must address persistent workforce challenges with plans to build one Columbia-class and two Virginia-class submarines per year by 2028.

“I am thankful for the young men and women taking part in these events and those who will support their country and embark on an extraordinary career path through the Talent Pipeline Programs,” said Pappano. “These women and men are critical to the defense of our nation.”

With the U.S. Navy needing to hire over 140,000 skilled workers over the next decade to meet submarine production goals and to maintain the current submarine fleet, programs like the SIB’s Talent Pipeline are essential.

“Those who embark on a career in the Submarine Industrial Base are to be applauded for responding to their nation’s call to preserve freedom of the seas and our American way of life,” said Pappano.

The Navy is invested in cultivating this new generation of submarine builders. The SIB program expanded its Talent Pipeline initiatives this year, adding events in Long Island and Boston. In April, the SIB hosted a Demand Signal Roundtable in Newport Beach, Calif., as a way to expand the talent pipeline initiative into the Southern California region as it seeks to develop a deep, capable workforce for America’s undersea fleet.

As the U.S. faces evolving global security threats, a strong, resilient submarine force remains a cornerstone of American naval power. The SIB program’s investment in workforce development is crucial to ensuring the submarine industrial base can meet the Navy’s ambitious production goals in the years ahead.

Navy to Christen Future Expeditionary Sea Base USS Robert E. Simanek

From the Chief of Information, 3 May 2024

The Navy will christen the future USS Robert E. Simanek (ESB 7) as the newest Expeditionary Sea Base ship (ESB) during a 9:00 a.m. PST ceremony on Saturday, May 4, in San Diego, California.

The christening ceremony's principal address will be delivered by the Honorable Sean Coffey, General Counsel of the Navy. Remarks will also be provided by the Honorable Scott Peters, U.S. Representative, California's 50th District; Master Chief Britt Slabinski, President of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society and Medal of Honor Recipient; Vice Admiral Yvette Davids, Superintendent of the U.S. Naval Academy; Brigadier General Robert Weiler, Assistant Division Commander, First Marine Division; and Mr. David Carver, President of General Dynamics NASSCO. The ship's sponsor is Ann Simanek Clark, Private first class Simanek's daughter.

The first of its name, the ship honors United States Marine Corps Private First Class Robert E. Simanek, Ret., who was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions during the Korean War at Outpost Irene, Korea. Pfc. Simanek was presented the Medal of Honor by President Eisenhower on October 27, 1953.

The future USS Robert E. Simanek (ESB 7) is a highly flexible platform used across various military operations. When commissioned, the ship will be employed as a mobile sea-based asset. It will be a part of the critical access infrastructure supporting the deployment of forces, equipment, supplies, and warfighting capability. Specifically, ESB 7 will support missions such as Mine Countermeasures, Special Operations, Unmanned Aircraft Surveillance and Reconnaissance, Counter-Piracy, Humanitarian Aid, and Crisis Response.

General Dynamics NASSCO built and delivered the following ships to the fleet: USNS Montford Point (T-ESD 1), USNS John Glenn (T-ESD 2), USS Lewis B. Puller (ESB 3), USS Hershel "Woody" Williams (ESB 4), USS Miguel Keith (ESB 5), and USS John L. Canley (ESB 6). Follow-on ship Hector A. Cafferata Jr. (ESB 8) is under construction.

Navy Announces Flag Officer Assignments

MAY 3, 2024

The secretary of the Navy and chief of naval operations announced May 3 the following assignments:

Rear Adm. Heidi K. Berg will be assigned as deputy commander, Navy Space Command; and deputy commander, Fleet Cyber Command, Fort Meade, Maryland. Berg is currently serving as assistant deputy chief of naval operations for Operations, Plans, and Strategy, N3/N5B, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Washington, D.C.

Rear Adm. Nicholas M. Homan will be assigned as deputy director, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Operations; and director, Joint Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance Operations Center, J-3, Joint Staff, Fort Meade, Maryland. Homan is currently serving as director, J-2, U.S. Central Command, MacDill Air Force Base, Florida.

Rear Adm. Kevin P. Lenox will be assigned as director, J5, U.S. Cyber Command, Fort Meade, Maryland. Lenox is currently serving as commander, Carrier Strike Group Three, Bremerton, Washington.

Rear Adm. Darryl L. Walker will be assigned as president, Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island. Walker is currently serving as commander, Combined Joint Task Force, Cyber, Tenth Fleet, Fort Meade, Maryland.

Rear Adm. (lower half) Benjamin R. Nicholson, selected for promotion to rear admiral, will be assigned as assistant

deputy chief of naval operations for Operations, Plans, and Strategy, N3/N5B, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, Washington, D.C. Nicholson is currently serving as commander, Expeditionary Strike Group Two, Virginia Beach, Virginia.

Rear Adm. (lower half) Kristen Acquavella will be assigned as commander, Naval Supply Systems Command Weapons Systems Support, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Acquavella is currently serving as director, Logistics, Fleet Supply and Ordnance, N4, U.S. Pacific Fleet, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Rear Adm. (lower half) Eric J. Anduze will be assigned as deputy director for Joint Training, Joint Staff, Suffolk, Virginia. Anduze is currently serving as deputy commander, Combined Joint Task Force, Horn of Africa, Djibouti, Africa.

Rear Adm. (lower half) Kurtis A. Mole will be assigned as deputy commander, Joint Forces Headquarters-Cyber (Navy); and deputy commander, Fleet Cyber Command, Fort Meade, Maryland. Mole is currently serving as deputy commander, Tenth Fleet, Fort Meade, Maryland.

Capt. Kevin J. Brown, selected for promotion to rear admiral (lower half), will be assigned as commander, Naval Medical Forces Atlantic, with additional duties as director, Tidewater Market/chief of Medical Service Corps, Portsmouth, Virginia. Brown is currently serving as commanding officer, Navy Medical Readiness and Training Command/Naval Medical Center Camp Lejeune, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina.

Capt. Todd F. Cimicata, selected for promotion to rear admiral (lower half), will be assigned as commander, Logistics Group, Western Pacific; and commander, Task Force Seven Three, Singapore. Cimicata is currently serving as chief of staff, Naval Air Forces/Naval Air Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, San Diego, California.

Capt. Jorge R. Cuadros, selected for promotion to rear admiral

(lower half), will be assigned as commander, Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command Atlantic; and director, Fleet Installations and Environmental Division (N46), U.S. Fleet Forces Command, with additional duties as fleet civil engineer (N01CE), U.S. Fleet Forces Command, Norfolk, Virginia. Cuadros is currently serving as chief of staff, Naval Facilities Engineering Systems Command, Washington, D.C.

Capt. Marcos A. Jasso, selected for promotion to rear admiral (lower half), will be assigned as deputy director, Plans, U.S. Space Command, Peterson Air Force Base, Colorado. Jasso is currently serving as director for Operations, N3, Maritime Operations Center, U.S. Pacific Fleet, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

Capt. Cassidy C. Norman, selected for promotion to rear admiral (lower half), will be assigned as director, Joint/Fleet Operations, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, Norfolk, Virginia. Norman is currently serving as chief of staff, Naval Air Force Atlantic, Norfolk, Virginia.

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30 Injured in LCAC Incident During Training

An LCAC departs the well deck of a San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship. (U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Jesse Turner)

02 May 2024

From Commander, U.S. 2nd Fleet, Public Affairs

NORFOLK, Va. – On the evening of May 1, an incident occurred involving two landing craft, air cushions (LCAC) from USS Wasp (LHD 1) and USS New York (LPD 21) off the coast of Jacksonville, Fla.

30 Sailors and Marines were injured. Five Sailors were medically evacuated for further care at Savannah Memorial University Medical Center. Four of the five Sailors have been released from the hospital after treatment. One Sailor remains under medical care and is being assessed for further treatment.

Sailors and Marines with minor injuries were treated aboard Wasp and New York.

Sailors and Marines assigned to the Wasp Amphibious Ready Group and 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) were conducting a training exercise when the incident occurred.

The recovery and investigation processes are ongoing, and more information will be provided by U.S. 2nd Fleet once available. For any inquiries, contact c2f_pao@us.navy.mil.

May 2 Red Sea Update

From U.S. Central Command, May 2, 2024

TAMPA, Fla. – At approximately 2:00 p.m. (Sanaa time) on May 2, 2024, U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) forces successfully engaged and destroyed three uncrewed aerial systems (UAS) in an Iranian-backed Houthi controlled area of Yemen.

It was determined these systems presented an imminent threat to U.S., coalition forces, and merchant vessels in the region. These actions are taken to protect freedom of navigation and make international waters safer and more secure for U.S., coalition, and merchant vessels.

SECNAV Names Future America-class Amphibious Assault Ship

USS Helmand Province

From SECNAV Public Affairs

WASHINGTON – Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro announced that a future America-class amphibious assault ship will be named USS Helmand Province (LHA 10). Secretary Del Toro made the announcement, today, during the final day of Modern Day Marine 2024 at the Walter E. Washington Convention Center in Washington, D.C.

The future USS Helmand Province commemorates the multiple U.S. Marine Corps operations that took place in Afghanistan's Helmand Province as part of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). The name selection follows the tradition of naming amphibious assault ships after U.S. Marine Corps battles, early U.S. sailing ships, or legacy names of earlier carriers from World War II. Secretary Del Toro named LHA 9, the future USS Fallujah, in 2022.

“In keeping with naval tradition of naming our Navy’s amphibious assault ships after U.S. Marine Corps battles, I am honored to announce today that the future LHA-10 will be named USS Helmand Province,” said Secretary Del Toro. “Recognizing the bravery and sacrifice of our Marines and Sailors who fought for almost 20 years in the mountains of Afghanistan.”

Initiating the first U.S. ground offensive of OEF, on Oct. 19, 2001, helicopters launched from USS Kitty Hawk (CV 63) lifted Task Force Sword (FT-11) to Objective Rhino, a remote airstrip in Helmand Province. Following the airstrip’s seizure, the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) arrived on Nov. 25, 2001 to establish Camp Rhino. It was one of the longest ship-to-shore amphibious operations in history. Elements of the 26th MEU (Special Operations Command) subsequently reinforced the 15th MEU on Dec. 4, 2001. Afterward, Marine presence in Helmand remained constant, though minimal. On April 29, 2008, the 24th MEU stormed Taliban-held Garmser, then staged into southern Helmand on June 1, 2008. With allied support, the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade launched Operation Strike of the Sword on July 2, 2009. The 1st Battalion, 7th Marines later conducted operation Sangin Moshtrarak Naweed in May 2012. This was one of OEF’s largest air assault operations. By 2013, with relative regional stability secured, Marines trained Afghan forces to maintain security in advance of the late 2014 drawdown.

“For Marines, Helmand Province is a place of bittersweet memories,” said Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen. Eric M. Smith. “An entire generation of Marines wrote another chapter in the storied history of our Corps there, as warriors, but also as peacebuilders. Their legacy is defined by the spirit they embodied and the lives they touched. I look forward to the day when the USS Helmand Province will steam forward and carry Marines on their way to write new chapters—in peace, and if called, in war.”

Along with the ship's name, Secretary Del Toro announced the sponsor for the future USS Helmand Province as Mrs. Trish Smith, the spouse of Gen. Smith. She is an active volunteer for Marine Corps programs, including the Cornerstone Program, and Lifestyle, Insights, Networking, Knowledge and Skills (LINKS) program. She is an advocate and mentor for military families. In her role as sponsor, Trish Smith will represent a lifelong relationship with the ship and crew.

"Sponsoring the USS Helmand Province is an honor beyond words," said Trish Smith. "I am looking forward to a lifelong relationship with the ship's leaders, but more importantly, with the generations of Marines, Sailors, and their families that she will carry abroad. Together, we will forever carry the memories of those who served in Helmand."

During his remarks, Secretary Del Toro reiterated that Marines on naval vessels, such as the future USS Helmand Province, are building relationships with our allies and partners in support of integrated deterrence. The Marine Corps remains focused on modernizing to fight and win against current and future threats in any clime and place.

"The work we ask our Marines and Sailors to do every day is anything but ordinary or routine, and in many cases extremely dangerous. It is incumbent upon all of us, including government and industry, to leverage every resource at our disposal to ensure our Marines have what they need to be successful in their assigned missions and return home safely to their loved ones," said Secretary Del Toro.

America-class amphibious assault ships are designed to support Marine Corps Operational Maneuver From the Sea and Ship to Objective Maneuvers. The America-class ships replaced all of the decommissioned Tarawa-class LHAs and are now optimized for aviation ability, accommodating the Marine Corps' future Air Combat Element while adding additional aviation maintenance

capabilities and increasing fuel capacities, and extra cargo storage. With the unique inherent powers of the amphibious assault ships, they are often called upon to also support humanitarian and other contingency missions upon short notice.

More information on amphibious assault ships can be found here.

Modern Day Marine is an annual trade show and exposition which showcases the latest innovations and technologies in military equipment, weapons, and gear and is primarily aimed at U.S. Marines and defense industry representatives. The show provides a forum for Marine Corps leaders to collaborate with our industry partners, Congressional stakeholders, and Department of Defense leadership on current and future initiatives. Engagements during the expo are intended to reinforce existing programs and priorities and set conditions for future initiatives.

KONGSBERG turret delivers firepower to U.S. Marine Corps' ACV-30

From Kongsberg Aerospace & Defense, April 30, 2024

A new Amphibious Combat Vehicle that is undergoing testing by the U.S. Marine Corps includes a PROTECTOR remote turret (RT-20) from Kongsberg Defence & Aerospace.

BAE Systems delivered the first production representative test vehicle (PRTV) of the new Amphibious Combat Vehicle 30mm Cannon (ACV-30) to the customer earlier this year. ACV-30 is the third variant in the ACV family of vehicles designed, developed, and built since BAE Systems was selected as the prime contractor for the program in 2018.

“We are proud to be working with BAE Systems and partners on a vehicle and weapon system that will increase the USMC firepower and the capacity to the Marines. The PROTECTOR RT-20 is a modern remotely operated turret with highly accurate firepower for wheeled, tracked, and robotic combat vehicles. The modularity and digitalization of the system has growth potential to incorporate new technologies to deter and defeat future threats,” said Jørgen Bull, Vice President, land

systems at Kongsberg Defence & Aerospace.

The vehicle mounts a stabilized, medium caliber Remote Turret System manufactured by KONGSBERG that provides the lethality and protection Marines need while leaving ample room for troop capacity and payload while keeping the crew under armor.

The remote turret eliminates the space requirement of legacy turreted cannon systems and provides more room to transport troops and associated mission essential equipment and reduces weight for better mobility.

BAE Systems' customizable ACV variants provide true open-ocean and ship-to-objective capability, land mobility, survivability, and growth potential to meet the evolving operational needs of Marines around the world.

"Delivering capability like the ACV-30 to the U.S. Marine Corps remains critical in the ever-changing battle space," said Garrett Lacaillade, vice president of the amphibious vehicles product line for BAE Systems. "The collaboration we have with Kongsberg on this PRTV enables our customer to see and test a modern and lethal firepower technology on the battlefield."

Kaman's KARGO UAV Makes First Flight

From Kaman Air Vehicles

BLOOMFIELD, Conn. – (BUSINESS WIRE)–April 30, 2024–Kaman Corporation proudly announces the significant achievement of the first flight of the full-scale KARGO UAV, a purpose-built, autonomous, expeditionary resupply vehicle. This milestone, which took place in December of 2023, signifies a major accomplishment in the ongoing flight test progression. The development of this medium-lift UAS, initiated in 2021 to address logistics needs for U. S. Marine Corps operations, is now well underway.

“It is difficult to describe the sense of satisfaction one feels when watching an aircraft take flight for the first time, and very few people get the opportunity to participate in something like this,” said Romin Dasmalchi, General Manager of KARGO UAV. “This team worked hard to get here, and the intensity continues as we look to move from prototyping to production,” he added. KARGO UAV is intended to support the U. S. Military, partners, allies, and commercial customers by providing affordable, reliable, and maintainable logistics

support in austere and maritime environments. The design leverages existing high-TRL components so that a suitable system could be deployed as soon as 2026.

Contributions from partners significantly aided the success of the KARGO UAV flight test. Near Earth Autonomy, Kaman's partner for the autonomy system based in Pittsburgh, PA, provided autonomy features on the KARGO UAV. The two companies had previously collaborated on the K-MAX unmanned system and had showcased an earlier version of the autonomy technology to the Marines in April 2021. The Alaska Center for UAS Integration, part of the University of Alaska Fairbanks Geophysical Institute, was key in facilitating KARGO UAV flight test operations.

KARGO UAV is currently competing under the Marines' Medium Autonomous Resupply Vehicle—Expeditionary Logistics (MARV-EL) program, which is managed by NAVAIR PMA-263 and culminates in a fly-off in July of this year.

April 30 Red Sea Update

From U.S. Central Command

April 30, 2024

TAMPA, Fla. – At approximately 1:52 p.m. (Sanaa time) on April 30, U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) forces successfully engaged and destroyed an uncrewed surface vessel (USV) in Iranian-backed Houthi terrorist-controlled areas of Yemen.

It was determined the USV presented an imminent threat to U.S., coalition forces, and merchant vessels in the region. These actions are taken to protect freedom of navigation and

make international waters safer and more secure for U.S., coalition, and merchant vessels.