

Navy Orders 17 Block III Super Hornets Plus Data Package



PHILIPPINE SEA (Dec. 4, 2023) An F/A-18E Super Hornet from the “Stingers” of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 113 prepares to launch from the flight deck of the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70). (USN photo by MC3 Joshua Sapien)

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy has ordered 17 more Block III F/A-18E/F Super Hornet strike fighters for the fleet, with the contract action also providing for the initial phase of delivery of the aircraft’s data package.

In a March 19 Defense Department contract announcement, the Naval Air Systems awarded to Boeing a not-to-exceed \$1.14 firm-fixed-price, undefinitized contract modification to

procure "10 F/A-18F Lot 46 aircraft, as well as two F/A-18F and five F/A-18E Lot 47 aircraft."

The contract also shows progress in resolution with Boeing over the rights to the aircraft's data package, important to the sustainment of the Super Hornet fleet.

"This modification also provides for Phase One of the F/A-18E/F and EA-18G technical data package including the operation, maintenance, installation and training data in support of F/A-18 and EA-18G sustainment efforts for the Navy," the release said.

"The technical data package was a crucial part of this negotiation; it is necessary for naval aviation's operational readiness and post-production sustainment," said Rear Adm. John Lemmon, program executive officer for Tactical Aircraft Programs, in a March 19 Navy release. "The Super Hornet remains a predominant aircraft in the carrier air wing and will continue to provide significant combat capability into the 2040s. The Navy received appropriated funds from Congress to purchase these Super Hornets to help mitigate the strike fighter shortfall. The award is an Undefinitized Contract Action with the intent to definitize within the next few months."

Delivery of the new Super Hornets is scheduled from late 2026 through to begin in the winter of 2026, with final delivery no later than April 2027.

The Block III version of the Super Hornet completed its first carrier deployment last month with the return of the USS Carl Vinson from the Western Pacific Ocean. Strike Fighter Squadron 113 took the Block IIIs on the deployment.

Aircraft Carrier Suppliers Alarmed at Navy's Planned Delay of CVN 82



STRAIT OF GIBRALTAR (Jan. 5, 2024) The world's largest aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford (CVN 78) transits the Strait of Gibraltar, Jan. 5, 2024. (USN photo by MC2 Jacob Mattingly)

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The coalition of suppliers of components, parts, and services for the construction of the U.S. Navy's aircraft carriers (CVNs) is alarmed at the proposed two-year delay of authorization for CVN 82 – the fifth Gerald R. Ford-class CVN – and the potential disruption to the supplier base for the ships.

Lisa Dante Papini, chair of the Aircraft Carrier Industrial Base Coalition (ACIBC), which represents more than 2,000

businesses, said she is “extremely concerned” about the proposed delay for CVN 82 from 2028 to 2030, noting that 40% of the suppliers said in a survey that they would be negatively affected by the delay.

Papini said the delay likely would involve worker layoffs, production lines going cold, and suppliers de-prioritizing military requirements and seeking more work in other sectors. She noted that re-starting cold production lines and hiring or re-hiring workers is a lengthy and expensive process. The skills needed – such as welding – are in high demand in other industries as well, complicating the attraction of new workers.

“That’s why we’re concerned about going cold,” she said.

She also explained the need for advance funding for supplying aircraft carrier construction three years in advance of construction start.

“We’re so far to the left of those delivery dates,” she said. That’s why we ask for advance funding.”

Papini, like her counterparts in the Amphibious Warfare Industrial Base Coalition and the Submarine Industrial Base Coalition, emphasizes that stability and predictability of shipbuilding helps the supplier base “level-load their work;” recruit, train, and retain their workers; reduce costs, and deliver products on time.

The ACIBC met with senators and congressmen on March 20 on Capitol Hill to explain its concerns and priorities.

Navy Narrows Fiscal 2025 Aircraft Procurement to Five Types



PHILIPPINE SEA (Jan. 29, 2024) An F-35C Lightning II from the “Warhawks” of Strike Fighter Squadron (VFA) 97 prepares to recover on the flight deck of Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson (CVN 70). (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Isaiah B. Goessl)
By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Department of the Navy is proposing to procure 75 aircraft with \$16.2 billion in the fiscal 2025 budget, but those 75 are divided among only five types.

The 2025 budget proposed funding 13 F-35B Lightning II strike fighters for the Marine Corps; 13 F-35C carrier-based variants for the Navy and Marine Corps; 19 CH-53K King Stallion heavy-

lift helicopters for the Marine Corps, 27 T-54 multi-engine training aircraft for the Navy, and three MQ-25A Stingray unmanned aerial refueling aircraft for the Navy.

The budget is noteworthy in that the 2025 procurement funding of such types as the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet strike fighters, EA-18G Growler electronic attack aircraft, E-2D Advanced Hawkeye radar warning aircraft, MH-60R/S helicopters, MV-22B and CMV-22B Osprey transport aircraft, AH-1Z Viper and UH-1Y Venom helicopters, P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft, MQ-4C Triton and MQ-9A Reaper unmanned surveillance aircraft, and TH-73A Thrasher training helicopters – barring adjustment by the Congress – has been completed, although in some cases deliveries are ongoing. In some cases, the production lines will remain open for some time, building aircraft for foreign customers and which could resume production for the Navy and Marine Corps if needed.

The only new types on the five-year horizon are a replacement for the T-45 Goshawk training jet and a replacement for the E-6B Mercury strategic communications aircraft, planned to be a version of the C-130J Super Hercules.

Procurement of the KC-130J Super Hercules tanker/transport for the Marine Corps is being gapped for four years, with one planned for fiscal 2029. The fact that C-130Js are in production for other services and nations means that this gap does not have major implications for the Lockheed Martin production line.

The 2025 Future Years Defense Plan lists planned Department of the Navy procurement for 2026 through 2029 as 58, 67, 77, and 90 aircraft, respectively.

Noteworthy is – as of this writing – that the fiscal 2024 defense budget still is mired in the Congress.

The Correspondent and the Colonel: Pearl Harbor and 9/11 Link Defender and Daughter



Charles Compton at Coastal Air Patrol Base 1 in Atlantic City, New Jersey. *Compton family*

Charles Compton was like many a Chicago teenager who learned to fly in the late 1930s and impressed a lovely girl or two along the way on airborne dates. One beauty would become his wife.

“It was a lot of fun years. But then it all changed,” Compton said in 2011 when he was promoted to the rank of colonel by

the Civil Air Patrol to honor his life of service.

Dec. 7, 1941

"I was out practicing touch and goes, and I landed. Somebody came out and said, "all aircraft are grounded," he said. No one knew what was coming next.

Sept. 11, 2001

ABC News White House Correspondent Ann Compton started a routine day with a chore made easier by a run of the mill story. She was the pool reporter responsible for doing all the fact gathering for other broadcast news media outlets as President George Bush listened as Florida grade schoolers read for him. As a parent It was a lot of fun to witness. But then it all changed.

Compton watched the President's face as White House Chief of Staff Andy Card whispered in his ear, "A second plane hit the second tower. America is under attack."

"The Pearl Harbor moment was immediate," Compton said. "As we were taking off, the Pentagon was hit."

For the next 10 hours, the network TV reporter was one of the few on Air Force One as the presidential aircraft and its fighter escorts headed for cross-country protection, soaring above a nation of planes quickly descending and landing as fast as they could, wherever they could. All aircraft were grounded, and no one knew what was coming next.

August 1943

A little plane flew through the mist of a New Jersey morning off New York Harbor and pulled into a tight circle to sweep low, glancing for U-boats ravaging shipping just outside major harbors and along the coast. Charlie Compton was in his own plane, wearing a makeshift Army Air Corps uniform of the Civil Air Patrol. The CAP was organized formally six days before

Pearl Harbor. America wasn't ready to defend itself on the home shores due to limited military planes and pilots.

Right after Pearl Harbor, Compton tried to get into the fight and fly with the Army and Navy but was denied by both for having only one kidney. He eventually found his way to the first coastal patrol base of the Civil Air Patrol in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

The Axis Powers were more than ready. An east coast oceanfront of sunbathers and ship traffic quickly became a kill zone of merchant convoys being attacked within sight of shore. The bodies of merchantman washed ashore as ships carrying vital supplies and war materiel to Europe were sometimes sunk amid the explosions and towering flames of torpedoed tankers.

The Germans called it "the happy time." But the little yellow planes kept coming.

One of them would be Compton and a fellow pilot hunting for submarines one day, escorting a convoy the next. Through the Army and then Navy, the escorts began to make a difference.

The goal wasn't necessarily to sink subs but to drive them away, like a border collie does predators of the sheep. And in short order, the sheep were no longer going to the slaughter and the hunter became the harried.

The network of coastal patrol bases stretched from Maine to Mexico.

For some time now the CAP planes had been armed with an assortment of bombs, singly and in pairs.

"In mid-May 1942, senior Army and Navy leaders authorized the arming of CAP coastal patrol aircraft," according to Frank Blazich Jr., the military history curator at the National Museum of American History. "Depending on capacity, aircraft typically carried one to three 100-pound AN-M30 general

purpose demolition bombs; larger aircraft carried either the AN-M57 250-pound demolition bomb, or one 325-pound Mk 17 depth bomb."

The nascent Battle of the Atlantic wasn't meant to be won by attrition as much as by harrassing the German subs into diving to avoid being attacked from the air. Every dive to avoid being spotted or attacked meant less time to charge their batteries on the surface.

"We were all out there pretty gung-ho and looking for a fight," Compton said, but that made the Army weaponers cautious as to when the CAP planes would be armed. "We could tell what kind of day it was going to be if we saw the Army ordnance trailers out there arming the aircraft," he said.

No bomb loading meant the focus was to be on escort and observation, reporting back to female CAP radio operators.

"And then we would generally fly three-hour missions, by escorting the tankers and the colliers and the cargo ships, up and down the coast ... and then hand off to other sections," he said.

But often there was no one to hand off the overwatch duties to, because the imperiled convoys were making a beeline to Europe. They were on their own, escorted by a handful of navy ships from the U.S., Canada and Great Britain.

"We did fly low enough to give them a wave. And when we saw them off and dipped our wing, and saw them heading east into harm's way while we were able to go back to our safe haven. We thought a lot about those brave souls, some that didn't make it," Compton reflected during his promotion ceremony.

Even today, his daughter Ann speaks passionately about her father's feelings of the time.

"That's a long trek for a merchant ship," she says, recalling

how this part of his service laid heavy on his heart then, and on hers today. "The pain he felt that they were sailing into harm's way and he could no longer protect them – he took that very hard."

Blazich wrote that "on July 19, 1942, German Admiral Karl Doenitz, commander of all German U-boats, withdrew his last submarines operating off the East Coast after increasing losses and reduced success against merchant traffic."

The former national historian of the Civil Air Patrol, Blazich said "the CAP coastal patrol operation ceased on August 31, 1943, in accordance with an Army agreement to transfer all anti-submarine operations to the Navy." His definitive and painstakingly researched book, "An Honorable Place in American Air Power" (2020 Air University Press, Maxwell AFB Florida) tells the full tale, as does this fact sheet:

The CAP reported the following to the U.S. military regarding the 18 months of coastal patrol operations:

- 57 attacks on enemy submarines
- 82 bombs dropped against submarines
- 173 radio reports of submarine positions
- 17 floating mines reported
- 36 dead bodies reported
- 91 vessels in distress reported
- 363 survivors in distress reported
- 836 irregularities noted
- 1,036 special investigations at sea or along the coast
- 5,684 convoy missions as escorts for Navy ships

- 86,685 total missions flown
- 244,600 total flight hours logged
- Over 24 million total miles flown
- 26 fatalities, 7 serious injuries, 90 aircraft lost.

The cost of freedom was paid for with the blood and sweat of brave civilian volunteers whose limitations for military service were transcended to remarkable service to the country.

Colonel Charles Compton lived on to have a family that included two boys and the reporter girl who would be an eyewitness to the next time the improbable happened, America caught unaware and under siege. His daughter Ann reports his final years, including his 104th in 2020, were marked by birthday tributes by the cadets he cared so much about, and cared for him in turn. His legacy and theirs lives on in the Evanston, Illinois, squadron that bears his name.

A larger family exists today in the 60,000 adult and cadet volunteers of the Civil Air Patrol, whose core missions of emergency services, aerospace education and youth program continue to serve America in “defending the skies of the homeland,” including security exercises with intercepting Air Force and Air Guard jets, drug interdiction maneuvers with homeland security aircraft, along with humanitarian disaster relief and search and rescue missions saving dozens of lives each year with the world’s largest fleet of single-engine airplanes.



Colonel Compton (far left) with sons and daughter Ann Compton at Naval Air Station Glenview, Illinois. *Compton family*
Sept. 12, 2001

As yet another small plane of the Civil Air Patrol took off from New Jersey, the situation was that all planes were grounded and no one knew what would happen next.

Like so many before, it rose over the New York and New Jersey shores, yet this time it did not swoop low over the coastline or sweep past the harbor and out to the shipping lanes.

Instead of turning back to the harbor of New York City it headed up above Manhattan, the sole civilian plane in the skies of all America, swooping low to begin its circling run through the mist and around smoke rising over the wreckage of the twin towers of the World Trade Center.

New Yorkers below were still in a state of shock. Their only sense of security that remained came from the swift arrival of Navy fighters from the aircraft carriers George Washington and

John F. Kennedy the day before. Those F/A-18 Hornets joined Air Force and Air National Guard interceptors in an ongoing aerial combat aircraft patrol. An obvious deterrent to terrorism, but more importantly a visual representation of protection from above.

The little red, white and blue aircraft circling the towers was doing a familiar role in a new way. Beneath its red tail marked USAF AUX and bearing the crest of the Civil Air Patrol, Lt. Col. Jacques Heinrich and his mission crew digitally photo-mapped the wreckage, to show the paths to save and the ways to recover.

The vital images from that CAP colonel were authorized by, and delivered to, President Bush at the White House as Ann Compton continued her journalistic vigil, an echo of the living example father set, protecting the sea lanes and the sea services with no pay or fanfare six decades before.

Jim McClure is a life member of the Navy League of the United States and a frequent contributor to Seapower. This story originally appeared in the February-March issue of Seapower magazine.

Navy Awards Bell Textron Contract for 12 AH-1Z Helicopters for Nigeria



KOREA STRAIT (March 29, 2023) An AH-1Z Viper helicopter takes off from the amphibious assault ship USS Makin Island (LHD 8), March 29, 2023. (U.S. Marine Corps photo by Gunnery Sgt. Chad J. Pulliam)

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The government of Nigeria is slated to receive 12 AH-1Z Viper helicopter gunships, becoming the third foreign customer for the Viper.

In a March 12 contract announcement, the Naval Air Systems Command awarded to Bell Textron of Fort Worth, Texas, a \$455 million “firm-fixed-price, undefinitized contract for the production and delivery of 12 AH-1Z helicopters for the government of Nigeria, as well as provides associated engineering, program management and logistics support, and non-recurring engineering for obsolescence.”

Deliveries to the Nigerian government are expected to be complete by July 2028.

Bell built 189 AH-1Zs for the U.S. Marine Corps and 12 for

Bahrain, and is building four for the Czech Republic, along with eight UH-1Y Venom utility helicopters. The Czech Republic also is receiving free of charge six AH-1Zs and two UH-1Ys that formerly were part of the U.S. Marine Corps' inventory.

Navy 2025 Budget Requests Only 6 Battle Force Ships



NAVAL STATION NORFOLK – The Virginia-class fast-attack submarine USS Washington (SSN 787) prepares to moor pierside during the boat's homecoming at Naval Station Norfolk, Dec. 15, 2023. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Cameron Stoner)

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy's fiscal 2025 budget request proposes only six battle force ships, which, combined with planned ship retirements, would reduce the size of the battle force from 296 ships to 287 ships.

The Navy's proposed \$257.6 billion budget – which officials said prioritizes readiness over procurement, would include \$32.4 billion for ship construction. Those funds would procure one Block VI Virginia-class attack submarine (SSN), two Flight III Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers, one Constellation-class guided-missile frigate, one Flight II San Antonio-class amphibious platform dock ship (LPD), and one medium landing ship.

The proposal for only one Virginia-class SSN, rather than two, was made out of concern for the submarine industrial base, which currently is delivering only 1.3 hulls instead of the desired two SSNs per year. The gap is designed to help realign the investments in the submarine industrial base. Under the Future Years Defense Plan (FYDP), the Navy expects to return to the procurement rate of two SSNs per year in fiscal 2026. Navy Undersecretary Erik Raven, speaking to reporters March 11 at the budget roll-out, said advance procurement for the SSNs is proceeding to "set up the program for long-term success."

The ship construction budget also includes continued incremental funding for two aircraft carriers and second Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarine, the refueling and comprehensive overhaul of a Nimitz-class aircraft carrier, the service-life extension of three air cushion landing craft, and the purchase of two used commercial ships for use as sealift ships.

The procurement of the San Antonio-class LPD would mark a reversal from the 2024 plan to end procurement of the class. Navy Undersecretary Erik Raven, speaking to reporters March 11 at the budget roll-out, said the Navy is intent on growing the large- and medium amphibious warfare ship fleet to a minimum

of 31 ships.

The FYDP features the procurement start in fiscal 2027 of a new class of ship, the light replenishment oiler (T-AOL).

Raven said the Navy currently has 88 ships under contract, with 66 of those under construction.

Planned ship retirements include two Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruisers (Shiloh and Lake Erie); two Independence-class littoral combat ships (Jackson and Montgomery), one Whidbey Island-class dock landing ship (Germantown); one Montford Point-class expeditionary transfer dock ship (John Glenn) and the four oldest Spearhead-class expeditionary fast transports (Spearhead, Choctaw County, Millinocket, and Fall River).

Rep. Rob Wittman, R- Virginia, a member of the Seapower subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee, criticized the ship construction plan as too little.

“The president is once again proposing to shrink the Navy by reducing the Navy force structure from 296 ships in FY24 to just 287 in FY25. By only building six ships, President Biden is also threatening to devastate our naval fleet and the Hampton Roads industrial base by slowing aircraft carrier construction and failing to meet the two Virginia-class submarines per year cadence required to support the AUKUS security pact,” Wittman said in a March 11 statement.

Navy Reserve Receives Its

First P-8A Poseidon Maritime Patrol Aircraft



TUKWILA, Wash. (March 6, 2024) Cmdr. James Tilden (fifth from left), executive officer of Patrol Squadron 62, presents a dedication plaque to Vice Adm. John B. Mustin (sixth from left), chief of Navy Reserve and commander of Navy Reserve Force, after taking delivery of the first new P-8A Poseidon for the Naval Air Force Reserve during a ceremony at Boeing Military Delivery Facility in Tukwila, Washington, March 6, 2024. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Harry Andrew D. Gordon)

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The first Boeing P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft for the Navy Reserve has been delivered to Patrol Squadron 62 (VP-62).

In March 6 ceremonies at the Boeing Military Delivery Facility

in Tukwila, Washington, Vice Adm. John B. Mustin, chief of Navy Reserve and commander of Navy Reserve Force, was on hand for the delivery, where a dedication was presented to him by Cmdr. James Tilden, executive officer of VP-62.

VP-62, based at Naval Air Station Jacksonville, Florida, is one of two Navy Air Reserve patrol squadrons. It formerly operated the P-3C Orion maritime patrol aircraft. The transition brings the Navy closer to full operational capability with the P-8A. The other reserve VP squadron, VP-69 at Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, Washington, also will be equipped with the P-8A.

Navy Opens Second Triton UAV Forward Deployment Site



Caption: NAVAL AIR STATION SIGONELLA, Italy (March 2, 2024) – Capt. Ronald H. Rumfelt, Jr., commanding officer, Unmanned Patrol Squadron (VUP) 19 “Big Red” (left), Vice Adm. Daniel “Undra” Cheever, commander, Naval Air Forces (center), and Capt. Aaron Shoemaker, commanding officer, Naval Air Station (NAS) Sigonella (right), participate in a ribbon cutting ceremony to celebrate the inaugural deployment of VUP- 19’s second forward-deployed detachment, and the opening of a new MQ-4C Triton hangar at NAS Sigonella, Italy, March 2, 2024 (U.S. Navy Photo by Mass Communication 2nd Class Jacquelin Frost)

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy squadron that operates the MQ-4C Triton high-altitude, long-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle has opened its second deployment site, with this one located at Naval Air Station (NAS) Sigonella, Sicily.

During March 2 ceremonies at Sigonella, the commanding officer of Unmanned Patrol Squadron 19 (VUP-19), Capt. Ronald H.

Rumfelt Jr., was joined by Vice Adm. Daniel “Undra” Cheever, commander, Naval Air Forces, and Capt. Aaron Shoemaker, commanding officer, of NAS Sigonella in a ribbon cutting for the new hangar on the station that will support the Triton aircraft operating from the station, according to an NAS Sigonella release.

Home-based at NAS Jacksonville, Florida, Unmanned Patrol Squadron 19 (VUP-19) brought the Triton to its Initial Operational Capability status last summer with the establishment of an orbit at Andersen Air Force Base in Guam. The squadron had maintained two Tritons – equipped with the baseline Integrated Functional Capability (IFC) 3 configuration – on an Early Operational Capability deployment in Guam from May 2020 until March 2023. The Tritons provided MISR&T (maritime intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and tracking) for the U.S. 7th Fleet while developing the concept of operations and the tactics to refine the Triton’s operations. The detachment operated from Guam; Naval Air Facility Misawa, Japan; and Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan.

VUP-19 since has received newer versions in the IFC 4 configuration, which are equipped with a more capable sensor suite that will allow them to replace the Navy’s fleet of EP-3E Orion electronic reconnaissance aircraft.

From Sigonella, also a rotational site for squadrons of the Navy’s P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft, the Tritons will provide the U.S. Sixth Fleet with MISR&T support.

STRATCOM Commander Affirms Need for Sea-Launched Cruise Missile-Nuclear



Caption: PACIFIC OCEAN (Nov. 30, 2020) The guided-missile destroyer USS Chafee (DDG 90) launches a Block V Tomahawk, the weapon's newest variant, during a three-day missile exercise. The Navy is developing a nuclear-tipped sea-launched cruise missile as a future nuclear deterrent. (U.S. Navy photo by Ensign Sean Ianno)

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va.—The operational commander of the nation's nuclear arsenal has reiterated to Congress the requirement for a sea-based nuclear-tipped cruise missile.

Testifying Feb. 29 before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Air force General Anthony J. Cotton, commander, U.S. Strategic Command called for development and deployment of the Sea-Launched Cruise Missile – Nuclear (SLCM-N), a program called

for in the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR).

Cotton called for continued modernization of the U.S. nuclear deterrent forces, including the SLCM-N.

“While our legacy systems continue to hold potential adversaries at risk, it is absolutely critical we continue at speed with the modernization of our nuclear triad, including land-based ICBMs [intercontinental ballistic missiles], the B-21 [bomber], the B-52 [bomber], the Columbia-class submarine, the nuclear sea-launched cruise missile, and LRSO [Long-Range Stand-Off weapon],” Cotton said.

The 2018 NPR called for the United States to “pursue a nuclear-armed SLCM, leveraging existing technologies to help ensure its cost effectiveness. SLCM will provide a needed non-strategic regional presence, an assured response capability. It also will provide an arms-control-compliant response to Russia’s non-compliance with the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty, its non-strategic nuclear arsenal, and its other destabilizing behaviors.”

The Biden administration, with support of Democratic representatives in the Congress, has opposed development of the SLCM-N, citing what they said was the cost of the program, the adequacy of the current nuclear deterrent arsenal, and a risk to nuclear stability.

Despite the administration’s opposition, Congress authorized \$25 million in the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act for research for the SLCM-N. The administration did not request funding for research for the SLCM-N in its fiscal 2024 budget request, but Congress approved establishing the SLCM-N as a program of record.

The fiscal 2024 NDAA “authorized the Sea-Launched Cruise Missile – Nuclear, or SLCM-N, as part of the program of record with initial operating capability by 2034, said Jill Hruby, National Nuclear Security Administration administrator,

speaking Feb. 1 at the 2024 Nuclear Deterrence Summit. “SLCM-N will provide a new low yield at sea nuclear deterrent. NNSA is working closely with the Navy and Office of Secretary of Defense to develop a recommendation for Congress by early March on the details of the SLCM-N program.”

The Navy used to field a nuclear-armed version of the Tomahawk Land-Attack Missile – the TLAN-N – which was retired about 2010.

Raven Warns of CR Impact on Navy Department Budget



By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Department of the Navy (DON) is facing a reduction of \$12 billion of buying power if the Defense Department has to operate through fiscal 2024 under a continuing resolution (CR) and Congress does not pass a supplemental budget, a top DON official said.

“The misalignment in funding lines results in \$26 billion of funding misalignments that we may have in our coffers – but not be able to spend it on the programs that matter,” said Under Secretary of the Navy Erik Raven, speaking Feb. 28 to reporters. “When you add all this up, this is nearly a 10% impact to our topline. This is getting into the territory of the 2013 sequester in terms of fiscal impacts. So, this is a very serious situation.”

Raven said that if a full-year CR is the case, the DON’s

priorities would be readiness first and people second. “[W]hat that means is taking risk and investment programs. And I’m very concerned about our ability not only to execute that strategy unless given really unprecedented flexibilities by Congress, but also the follow-on impacts on industrial base and our modernization plans.”

Regarding readiness, Raven said that current operations, such as the effort to defend commercial shipping in the Red Sea from Houthi rebels, would take precedence.

“We need to be able to perform our mission,” he said. “And simply if we don’t have the resources that we need to execute all of our missions, we have to make tough choices. But between the ability to fight tonight and be ready for all the threats versus preparing for the future and modernizing our forces it is a tough decision. But we have to lay our chips somewhere and that’s on the ability to perform our missions today.”

He listed a few programs that would be severely affected by a year-long CR and lack of a supplemental from Congress:

- The overhaul of the attack submarine USS Boise, delayed for seven years and finally slated, would not be executed.
- The amphibious assault ship construction program would not be kept on track.
- The Virginia-class attack submarine program would face a \$2 billion shortfall.
- Munition funding would suffer “across the board.”

- Construction of three child-development centers – two in Virginia and one in Guam – would be delayed.
- Doubling of funds for SM-6 missiles – used in the Red Sea operations – would not be doable.
- A \$3.4 billion investment in the submarine industrial

base – to enable production of submarines at a rate of one Columbia ballistic-missile submarine and two Virginia-class submarines – would have to be delayed.