Can the U.S. Navy's E-2D Hawkeye Substitute for the Canceled Air Force E-7A Wedgetail?

An E-2D Hawkeye attached to the "Greyhawks" of Airborne Command and Control Squadron (VAW) 120 performs a touch-and-go landing aboard the Nimitz-class aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush (CVN 77). *Photo credit: U.S Navy | Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Pierce Luck*

The U.S. Air Force's E-7A Wedgetail Airborne and Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) aircraft was canceled by the Trump Administration in the summer of 2025, although Congress is moving to block such a decision and enacting legislation to prevent the movement of funds out of the E-7A program.

Can its duties be undertaken by the U.S. Navy's smaller, cheaper E-2D Hawkeye?

"I'll leave that to the decision makers in the United States Air Force as to what the right thing is," Vice Admiral Daniel L. Cheever, commander of Naval Air Forces and Naval Air Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, said during a Center for Strategic and International Studies' "Future of Naval Aviation" live webinar event on Aug. 26, in response to a question from *Seapower*.

"Is the E-2D one of the most capable command and control platforms out there? Yes, it is," he said. "It has air refueling, so we can stay on station and go serious long ranges. And that team, very small team in the E-2D, is incredibly capable … the three folks in the back are incredible warfighters. Talk about folks that can think strategic, operational, and tactical all at the same time. I think of them as a large umbrella over the whole force, and command and control, and give you the right call at the right time.

"And I think about the trust … the implicit trust I have in the E-2D crew. If they say something and direct me, I do it," said Cheever, an F/A-18 Hornet pilot. "I don't pause. I don't go `Is that the right decision?' I do whatever they say whenever they say it because they're always right. And they have that global essay situational awareness that the E-2D brings. And so, it's kind of inherent [in] that trust piece."

The E-7A program has been behind schedule and over budget. A single E-7A airborne battle management aircraft's cost increased by $136 million, or 23%, from $588 million to $724 million. The E-7A is needed to replace the decades old and outdated E-3 Sentry Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS). Both aircraft are manufactured by Boeing and both have aerial refueling capabilities.

The E-7A is already in foreign air forces' service, flying for

the Royal Australian Air Force, the Republic of Korea air force, and the Turkish air force. The E-7A production numbers are low, with 13 flying or in order with air forces around the world in 2025.

The U.S. Air Force has none, although it wanted 26 before the Pentagon canceled the program and concluded the E-2D Hawkeye can fulfill the AEW&C task, even though the turboprop-powered E-2D is much smaller and thus less capable in speed, range, and endurance. E-2Ds use a 360-degree rotating dorsal antenna that can switch from mechanical to electronic scanning for detecting threats over land, water, and in the littorals.

The jet-powered E-7A is based on a larger Boeing 737 Next Generation (737-700) commercial jetliner and has more range and endurance because it doesn’t have to take off from an aircraft carrier. E-7As use a Multi-role Electronically Scanned Array (MESA) fixed to the top of the aircraft, which provides 360-degree long-distance detection and tracking of airborne and sea targets.

“As an interim solution, the U.S. military wants to grow the Navy’s E-2D Hawkeye fleet to perform that mission while it builds a network of space-based sensors that can warn troops of enemy aircraft and missiles and help direct the movement of forces,” according to an article in Air & Space Forces magazine. “Hawkeyes would supplement a diminished [E-3] AWACS fleet, about half of which have already retired with no alternative in place.”

The Pentagon’s fiscal 2026 budget request calls for $1.4 billion to buy more E-2s, Bryn Woollacott MacDonnell, the department’s acting budget chief, told the magazine. It would also spend $150 million to create a joint expeditionary Hawkeye unit with five planes.

“The E-2D is in production and, as Admiral Cheever indicates, it’s a very capable platform that can operate with both

persistence and at range from areas of interest," Bradley Martin, a retired U.S. Navy captain and RAND Corporation's senior policy researcher, told *Seapower*.

"It could carry out missions for the joint force in an effective manner. The main advantage is that it's an aircraft in production with a capability for upgrades as new technology becomes available. This observation does not imply that RAND necessarily recommends the E-2D over the E-7A, just that E-2Ds could perform most of the missions the joint force requires."

Austal USA Launches First New Utility Landing Craft

MOBILE, Ala. – Austal USA launched the company's first Navy

Landing Craft Utility (LCU) vessel at its ship manufacturing facility in Mobile, Ala. on Aug. 22. LCU 1710 is the first of 12 Navy LCUs under contract at Austal USA, part of a $91.5 million contract awarded by the Navy in 2023. Austal USA has three LCU under construction.

“I am proud of the LCU program team for the hard work they’ve put forth to reach this important milestone,” stated Michelle Kruger, Austal USA President. “LCU is an important program that plays a critical role in supporting expeditionary operations for the Navy and Marine Corps. Each milestone achieved shores up our position as a key contributor to the strength and success of the maritime industrial base.”

LCU are carried aboard amphibious assault ships to the objective area and used across a range of military operations to deliver vehicles, personnel and cargo from sea-to-shore and back. These connectors provide a heavy-lift capability and can carry about the same payload capacity as several C-17 aircraft.

LCU is one of three shipbuilding programs in serial production at Austal USA’s facility. The company also has three Navy Navajo-class Towing, Salvage and Rescue ships (T-ATS) and two U.S. Coast Guard Heritage-class Offshore Patrol Cutters (OPC) under construction.

Navy Accepts Delivery of Ship to Shore Connector, Landing

Craft, Air Cushion 114

By Team Ships Public Affairs, Aug. 29, 2025

NEW ORLEANS – The U.S. Navy accepted delivery of Ship to Shore Connector, Landing Craft, Air Cushion (LCAC) 114, from Textron Systems, August 28.

Delivery of LCAC 114 follows completion of acceptance trials and represents the official transfer of the craft from the shipbuilder to the Navy. During acceptance trials, the Navy's Board of Inspection and Survey tested the readiness and capability of the craft to effectively meet requirements.

This addition to the fleet enhances Navy's amphibious capability, providing a vital asset for rapid deployment and logistical support.

"The delivery of LCAC 114 reinforces the urgency needed to deliver amphibious capabilities to the Navy and Marine Corps team," said Angela Bonner, acting program manager for Amphibious Assault and Connectors Programs, Program Executive Office (PEO) Ships.

The current LCAC is built with configurations, dimensions, and clearances similar to legacy LCACs—ensuring that it is fully

compatible with existing well deck-equipped amphibious ships. LCACs can carry an approximate 60 to 75-ton payload and primarily transport weapon systems, equipment, cargo, and assault element personnel through a wide range of conditions, including over-the-beach.

Textron Systems is currently in serial production on LCACs 115-126.

PEO Ships, one of the Department of Defense’s acquisition organizations, is responsible for executing the development and procurement of all destroyers, amphibious ships and craft, and auxiliary ships, including special mission ships, sealift ships and support ships.

Coast Guard Cutter Mohawk returns home to Key West, Florida after 75-day maritime border security patrol

Jamaica Defence Force Coast Guard patrol vessel HMJS George William Gordon and U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Mohawk (WMEC 913) conduct an at-sea transfer of contraband and suspected drug smugglers in the Caribbean Sea, Aug. 23, 2025. Mohawk's crew conducted a 75-day maritime border security patrol in the Caribbean Sea, Florida Straits and Caribbean Sea. (U.S. Coast Guard photo by Ensign Andrew Ferderer)

From U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Area, Aug. 29, 2025

KEY WEST, Fla. – The crew of Coast Guard Cutter Mohawk (WMEC 913) returned to their home port in Key West, Friday, following a 75-day maritime border security patrol in the Windward Passage, Florida Straits and Caribbean Sea.

During the patrol, Mohawk's crew deployed to the Coast Guard Southeast District (CGD-SE) area of responsibility, where crews conducted multi-mission operations with joint service, international, and interagency partners to protect America's maritime borders from illegal drug trafficking and prevent unlawful alien migration in the region.

Mohawk's crew initially deployed in support of Operation Vigilant Sentry (OVS) while on patrol in the Windward Passage

to deter illegal alien migration along the coast of Haiti.

On Aug. 16, Mohawk's crew assisted the Jamaica Defence Force by interdicting and transferring a vessel with five Haitians aboard who were attempting to illegally enter Jamaica.

The crew also patrolled the Caribbean Sea in support of the Joint Interagency Task Force – South (JIATF-S) mission of detecting and monitoring illegal drug shipments in the maritime domain for subsequent interdiction and apprehension.

On Aug. 21, a U.S. Navy aircrew identified a suspicious vessel in the Caribbean Sea, and a U.S. Coast Guard aircrew assisted in tracking the go-fast vessel with three suspected drug smugglers aboard. Once Mohawk was vectored in, crew members launched the cutter's primary interceptor boat, the service's newest 26-foot, Mk-V over-the-horizon cutter boat, for a 113-nautical-mile pursuit and later coordination with Jamaica Defence Force personnel, who interdicted the vessel in Jamaican waters.

In total, while working with the Jamaica Defence Force during four maritime law enforcement cases, Mohawk's crew interdicted or assisted in the interdiction or transfer of 13 suspected smugglers, two suspect vessels and seized marijuana to Jamaican authorities for prosecution in Jamaica.

In addition, Mohawk worked alongside Department of Defense and Department of Homeland Security partners, contributing to the disposition of 21 drug smugglers, 2,425 pounds of cocaine, and 4,300 pounds of marijuana with an estimated street value of nearly $23 million.

Throughout the deployment, Mohawk engaged in joint patrols and at-sea transfers with a variety of Coast Guard assets, including Coast Guard Cutter Spencer (WMEC 905), Coast Guard Cutter Vigorous (WMEC 627) and Coast Guard Cutter Alert (WMEC

630).

Reinforcing interagency cooperation, Mohawk partnered with the crews of the USS Cole (DDG-67) and USS Jason Dunham (DDG-109), who provided maritime patrol aircraft support and facilitated a critical transfer of contraband and detainees. These operations support U.S. national objectives and a commitment to a coordinated, multi-faceted approach to deter illicit trafficking and bolster regional security.

Collaborating with U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Mohawk's crew also provided offshore presence to support Coast Guard Sector Miami alongside additional Coast Guard air and surface assets to help prevent illegal immigration and drug smuggling, while augmenting search and rescue capability off the coast of Florida.

"Mohawk's recent operations demonstrate our unwavering commitment to safeguarding our nation's maritime approaches," said Cmdr. Taylor Kellogg, commanding officer of Mohawk. "Our efforts over the last 75 days have served as a deterrent to criminal organizations seeking to exploit our waterways and reinforce our dedication to a safe and secure maritime environment. I'm proud of our crew for their selfless service, teamwork and devotion to duty."

CGG-SE is responsible for Coast Guard activities throughout a 1.7 million square mile area including Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, as well as 34 foreign nations and territories. Interdictions are performed by members of the U.S. Coast Guard under the authority and control of CGD-SE, which is headquartered in Miami.

OVS is a Department of Homeland Security-led operation comprised of federal, state and local partners responsible for preventing and responding to maritime migration. OVS, previously known as Homeland Security Task Force – Southeast,

was established in 2003 and is comprised of more than 50 federal, state and local agencies.

JIATF-S, in conjunction with partner nations, works to target, detect and monitor illicit drug trafficking within the joint operating area. The organization facilitates the interdiction and apprehension of illicit traffickers to dismantle transnational criminal organizations while reducing the flow of drugs to the public. Once interdiction becomes imminent, the law enforcement phase of the operation begins, and control of the operation shifts to the U.S. Coast Guard throughout the interdiction and apprehension.

Mohawk is a 270-foot, Famous-class medium endurance cutter. The cutter's primary missions are counter-drug and alien interdiction operations, enforcement of federal fishery laws and search and rescue in support of U.S. Coast Guard operations throughout the Western Hemisphere. The cutter falls under the command of U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Area, which is based in Portsmouth, Virginia.

For more information on how to join the U.S. Coast Guard, visit **GoCoastGuard.com** to learn about active duty, reserve, officer and enlisted opportunities. Information on how to apply to the U.S. Coast Guard Academy can be found **here**.

Undersea Technology is a Top Priority for National Security Leaders

From the Undersea Technology Innovation Consortium, Sept. 2, 2025

NEWPORT, R.I. – The Undersea Technology Innovation Consortium (UTIC) reinforced its role as a leader in undersea defense innovation at SENEDIA's 11th annual Defense Innovation Days. The national event attracted nearly 400 influential defense decisionmakers and innovators.

"UTIC was proud to serve once again as a platinum sponsor for this important conference, which creates valuable opportunities for our members to connect, collaborate and

innovate," said Molly Donohue Magee, Chief Executive Officer of UTIC. "Our members displayed their cutting-edge technology that will provide solutions for future undersea challenges."

Government – Industry Collaboration

The sold-out event included panels and keynote speeches that touched upon the importance of government-industry collaboration and the need to move faster in the scaling of the technology that will maintain the United States' competitive advantage in undersea warfare.

"The battlespace is expanding from the seabed to space, in all oceans and seas across the globe. We must sustain our focus on the fleet needs to make certain our warfighters have the capabilities to dominate any fight, anywhere, any time," said Marie Bussiere, Technical Director at the Naval Undersea Warfare Center, Division Newport, as part of a panel discussion she moderated on undersea innovation. "To maintain the undersea advantage, we need to get solutions into the hands of the fleet faster."

Pathway to Procurement

UTIC manages the industry consortium for the U.S. Navy's Other Transaction Agreement (OTA), which provides members with the ability to rapidly research, test and prototype undersea and maritime technological innovations in support of Navy requirements.

Several speakers highlighted the U.S. Navy's increasing emphasis on the OTA as a tool for delivering the critical technology needed to enhance mission readiness.

"OTAs now make up 20% of the contracting portfolios spent at Division Newport, and that continues to increase. OTAs are now the first-look for contracting activities. We expect that there will be increased opportunities there," said Steve Lamb, Chief of the Contracting Office at the Naval Undersea Warfare

Center, Division Newport.

Sponsorships

More than a dozen UTIC members served as sponsors of Defense Innovation Days, supporting the event and in turn, promoting meaningful undersea tech innovation.

- Comark – A Division of SourceCode
- General Dynamics
- Globe Composite Solutions
- Granite State Manufacturing
- L3Harris Technologies
- Leidos
- McLaughlin Research Corporation
- Northrup Grumman
- Rite-Solutions
- RTX Corporation
- SEACORP

- SERCO
- Teledyne Marine
- Vatn Systems

A Welcome New NATO Maritime Strategy

NATO Maritime Component Command, Northwood, U.K., symbol. *Image credit: NATO MARCOM*

The latest Maritime Strategy document issued by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO,) on 22 July 2025 is a welcome refreshing of NATO's commitments to confront aggression within and outside of Europe, and for the need to exercise sea control in that effort. Many knew a major change was coming. Gone are the days of vanilla statements on maritime security. The new NATO Maritime Strategy focuses on

four vital interests: nuclear deterrence, sea control and maritime power projection, freedom of navigation, and protecting sea lanes and critical maritime infrastructure. These points closely parallel those of Admiral Stansfield Turner's "Missions of the U.S. Navy" document from 1974 and are a welcome return to great power rather than mere security strategy.

The document names as adversaries Russia and terrorism, and calls out China, Iran, and North Korean for challenging the security and prosperity of Alliance members. The document does not pose new means of organization or sourcing for the vital Standing NATO Maritime Groups that are the backbone of NATO maritime capacity day to day, and it does not talk about specific geographic threat areas. Climate change occupies a prominent role, but as the enabler of access to the contested Arctic, and not as a critique of national policies. The new Strategy also avoids a hyper-focus on NATO protecting sea lines of communication across the Atlantic, a European cultural phobia from the 20th century World Wars, but not a critical point of attack for the Soviet, or successor Russian naval forces.

Lots of New Good

The new maritime strategy sails aggressively into the future in ways its 2011 predecessor could only dream of when issued. Russia's specific threat to underwater maritime infrastructure, and especially that on the seabed is called out as a threat for the Alliance to counter. The malign partnership of China and Russia, and their mutual efforts to undermine the existing maritime order is noted, as is the fact that while Russian land and air forces may be depleted from combat, Russia's maritime force, "retains significant capability and is upgrading its maritime forces and introducing new technologies, particularly in underwater reconnaissance and underwater warfare." Unmanned systems and

hypersonic weapons are noted as emerging, disruptive technologies. Best of all, there is a renewed call to seize and retain sea control as part of Alliance maritime operations and to project power from the sea and provide a base of operations for Allied command and control.

Some Challenges

The new Maritime Strategy does have some points that the Alliance will be challenged to achieve. A 24/7, sea-based missile defense is a distant goal, outside what the United States Navy provides in terms of missile defense from *Arleigh Burke* class destroyers based in Rota, Spain as part of the 6th Fleet organization. European naval forces did not cover themselves in glory in recent Red Sea operations where German and Danish ships had technical challenges, the UK Royal Navy had intermittent presence, and other NATO nations abstained from anti-missile operations entirely. Those were legitimate political decisions and familiar points within an Alliance where so-called "national caveats" often take a ship(s) out of a coalition of the willing. Such moves, however, deprived some Alliance members of missile defense experience and could make that maritime strategy goal of 24/7 coverage hard to achieve. The new strategy does not discuss the reorganization of the Standing NATO Maritime groups (surface combatants SNMG and mine warfare forces SNMCMG) along geographic lines as some rumors in the bazaar suggested. Such changes would see a NATO Standing Maritime Group Baltic or Standing NATO Maritime Group Black Sea in place of the usual North/South division of NATO maritime forces. Sustainment of the SNMG's was incredibly good at the outset of the Russian invasion of Ukraine but has fallen off in recent months. NATO is correct to say that the standing maritime groups are the backbone of NATO maritime capacity and really its only forces likely ready for a "fight tonight" in defense of Alliance member states. Getting a regular drumbeat of maritime group sustainment has always been an Alliance challenge in the post-Cold War period and it is

hoped that NATO can yet achieve regular member state participation in maritime group sourcing.

Conclusion

The new June 2025 NATO Maritime strategy is a welcome return to the aggressive posture at sea NATO possessed during the late Cold War. The new document tick's multiple boxes that should be welcomed by the United States and by other democratic nations around the globe that regularly partner with NATO in both policy and operations. The new strategy could be more aggressive and talk about attacking the Russian maritime bastion in the Barents Sea rather than defending closer to alliance nations. It's certainly a more aggressive document than the new British Atlantic Bastion concept, and a favorable course change back on the strong warfighting track the Alliance last navigated in the 1980's.

Keel Authenticated for Future USS Wisconsin (SSBN 827)

GROTON, Conn. (Aug. 27, 2025) Dr. Kelly Geurts, ship sponsor of the future Columbia-class ballistic missile submarine USS Wisconsin (SSBN 827), welds her initials into the ship's keel during its keel-laying ceremony under the supervision of General Dynamics Electric Boat welder Robert Ray Jr. The future Wisconsin will be the second Columbia-class submarine, following the future USS District of Columbia (SSBN 826).
Release From Team Submarine Public Affairs, Aug. 28, 2025

GROTON, Conn. – The keel for the future USS Wisconsin (SSBN 827), a Columbia-class submarine, was laid during a ceremony on Aug. 27 at the General Dynamics Electric Boat Quonset Point facility in Kingstown, Rhode Island.

The keel laying ceremony signifies a major milestone in the life of a ship as it begins to transition from design to reality. The future Wisconsin will be the second Columbia-class submarine, following the future USS District of Columbia (SSBN 826).

"Our ballistic missile submarines are the most survivable leg of our nation's nuclear triad; they are the ultimate guarantee

that no adversary will ever miscalculate America's resolve," said Adm. William Houston, Director, Naval Nuclear Propulsion Program, in his keynote remarks. "From this keel, the Wisconsin will rise—an intricate structure of power, precision, and purpose. And just as the keel bears the weight of the ship, this vessel bears the weight of our nation's most solemn responsibility: to deter war and preserve peace through strength."

Houston directly addressed the workforce charged with building this intricate submarine. "To our shipbuilders, engineers and suppliers: your craftsmanship makes this possible," said Houston. "You are laying not just a keel, but the foundation of security for generations to come."

The submarine's sponsor is Dr. Kelly Geurts, a retired educator and military spouse. Her husband, the Honorable James Geurts, is a former Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition.

This is the third Navy ship to bear the name Wisconsin. The original Wisconsin (BB-9), an Illinois-class pre-Dreadnought battleship, was commissioned in 1901 and served as the flagship of the Pacific fleet until 1903. In 1908 the ship joined the Atlantic fleet for the trans-pacific leg of the Great White Fleet and was decommissioned in 1920.

Wisconsin (BB-64), an Iowa-class battleship, was commissioned in April 1944. The ship served in combat in the Pacific, notably at the Philippines, Iwo Jima, Okinawa and the final bombardments in Japan. Wisconsin was decommissioned after World War II and was later recommissioned for the Korean War serving until 1958. The ship was recommissioned once more in 1988 to participate in the Persian Gulf War before being decommissioned a final time, in 1991. The ship now operates as a museum battleship at Nauticus Berthing in Norfolk, Virginia.

The keel laying of future USS Wisconsin (SSBN 827) symbolizes the Navy's 250-year commitment to innovation and maritime dominance. From seabed to space, the Navy delivers power for peace – always ready to fight and win. This milestone marks the Navy's enduring legacy and commitment to shaping the future of maritime power.

Columbia-class submarines will replace the U.S. Navy's Ohio-class ballistic missile submarines. The Navy's ballistic missile submarines, often referred to as "boomers," serve as an undetectable launch platform for submarine-launched ballistic missiles. They are designed specifically for stealth and to provide an ensured second-strike capability forming the backbone of the Nation's strategic deterrence strategy.

For more information about Columbia-class ballistic missile submarines visit: https://www.navy.mil/Resources/Fact-Files/Display-FactFiles/Article/2169580/fleet-ballistic-missile-submarines-ssbn/

Crowley-managed CS Anthem Joins Tanker Security Program

From Crowley, Aug. 28, 2025

Through the program, CS Anthem and its crew will support MARAD's mission to ensure fuel transport readiness for the U.S. Department of Defense, while advancing the nation's strategic sealift capabilities.

JACKSONVILLE, Fla., Aug. 28, 2025 /PRNewswire-PRWeb/ — Crowley Stena Marine Solutions, the joint venture between Crowley and Stena Bulk, has received approval from the U.S. Maritime Administration (MARAD) to operate the CS Anthem tanker under the Tanker Security Program.

The addition of the CS Anthem demonstrates our commitment to strengthening U.S. maritime security and providing reliable, U.S.-crewed tanker capacity in support of national defense.

The CS Anthem, a U.S.-flagged, 49,990-metric-ton, medium-range tanker, is crewed and managed by Crowley under a bareboat charter through the joint venture. The vessel joins Crowley-managed tankers Stena Imperative and Stena Impeccable in the

Tanker Security Program, replacing the Stena Immaculate.

Through the program, CS Anthem and its crew will support MARAD's mission to ensure fuel transport readiness for the U.S. Department of Defense, while advancing the nation's strategic sealift capabilities.

"The addition of the CS Anthem demonstrates our commitment to strengthening U.S. maritime security and providing reliable, U.S.-crewed tanker capacity in support of national defense," said Tucker Gilliam, vice president of fleet operations for Crowley Shipping. "Together with Stena Bulk, we are proud to continue advancing solutions that serve both commercial and government energy transportation needs."

The Crowley Stena Marine Solutions joint venture combines Crowley's leadership in U.S. flag operations and mariner crewing with Stena Bulk's global tanker expertise, delivering agile, reliable and secure solutions for government and commercial customers.

National Security Leaders Underscore Need to Move at the Speed of Technology

For 11th Year, Defense Innovation Days Fosters Increased Collaboration in the Defense Industry

Release From SENEDIA, Aug. 28, 2025

NEWPORT, R.I. – SENEDIA, the Alliance for Defense Tech, Talent, and Innovation, yesterday concluded Defense Innovation Days, a signature national event that attracted nearly 400 of

the most important decisionmakers and innovators in the defense industry.

“It is more important today than any time in our history that we have the capacity and skills to not only be competitive with other countries, but to far exceed them,” said Senator Jack Reed (RI), Ranking Member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. Reed called on the defense industry leaders in attendance to continue to advance American innovation and security. “What you do ultimately ensures the safety and security of our men and women in uniform across the world. This is a common purpose we share.”

Distinguished speakers at the 11th annual sold-out event represented decades of experience across Navy, Army, Marine Corps, and private sector service, including RDML Peter Small, Chief Engineer and Commander of NAVSEA Warfare Centers; Dr. Andrew Erickson, Naval War College China Maritime Studies Institute; Dr. Michael Winter, Chief Scientist, RTX; COL David Brown (ret.), Naval War College Center for Irregular Warfare and Armed Groups; LtGen Eric E. Austin, Deputy Commander, Combat Development and Integration, US Marine Corps Combat Development Command, and BG Chris Hackler, Deputy Commanding General, US Army Combat Capabilities Development Command.

Panels included “Future of the Surface Navy and Hybrid Fleet” and “Mastering the Depths: Navigating the Engineering Battlespace.”

Key takeaways from this year’s event are:

- The threat landscape is rapidly evolving, including the unprecedented acceleration of China’s military capabilities and a global rise in authoritarianism.

- Innovation in autonomous vehicles and undersea technology is essential to stay competitive and has

redefined traditional warfare.

- The foundation for increased collaboration and innovation exists, and equally important must be the focus on scaling and speed to execution. The priority is a nimble and responsive defense ecosystem that can quickly get new and interoperable technologies into the hands of warfighters.

“More than a decade after we hosted the first Defense Innovation Days, SENEDIA continues to see the critical need to bring together industry and government, civilian and military leaders to connect, collaborate with one another, and ultimately innovate in service of our national security,” said Molly Donohue Magee, Chief Executive Officer of SENEDIA. “Investing in defense is an economic, workforce, and national security imperative.”

More from Defense Innovation Days

An Increasingly Challenging and Complex Environment

Rapid advancements in technology have made internal research and development processes more challenging and increased external and geopolitical pressures have likewise made the warfighting landscape more complex. A rise in authoritarianism around the globe represents a threat to American democracy – including from China.

Returning to Defense Innovation Days, Dr. Erickson provided a deep dive into changes in the Chinese military. He said that Chinese leader Xi Jinping has removed large numbers of military, defense, and political officials, but warned that it does not signal a slowdown. To the contrary, Erickson called it “the most dramatic military build-up since World War II.”

“China’s military capabilities development and operational

readiness are clearly advancing rapidly across the board," he said. "The speed and scope are breathtaking. That is what needs to inform our dedication, our sense of purpose, and the missions to which we are directed."

Several speakers noted the importance of the workforce to maintain American dominance.

"The Navy faces an urgent imperative to increase our capabilities, and our people are our biggest asset," said RDML Small. "It's not just the trades we need to strengthen. We need to rebuild the national maritime engineering workforce. A tremendous national effort to rebuild this workforce is underway."

The Unmanned and Undersea Advantage

The United States submarine program is widely viewed as the greatest deterrent to American adversaries, and two panel discussions focused on undersea challenges and opportunities in an ever-changing maritime landscape. Several speakers used the ongoing conflict in the Black Sea as an illustration of how maritime strategy is changing, where Ukraine has used naval drones to stave off a strong Russian Navy.

The Mastering the Depths panel was moderated by Marie Bussiere, the Technical Director of the Naval Undersea Warfare Center, Division Newport. She was joined on the stage by NUWC colleagues Mark Vacarro, Director of the Subsea and Seabed Warfare SSTM; Steve Plunkett, Next Generation Weapons and Defensive Systems SSTM; Steve Lamb, Chief of the Contracting Office, and CDR Shawn Stelzel of the Undersea Warfighting Development Center.

Collectively, they urged industry leaders – especially those who have yet to engage with NUWC – to consider delivering their best-in-class tools and technology for defense applications.

“To maintain the undersea advantage, we need to get solutions into the hands of the fleet faster,” Bussiere said.

On the Future of the Surface Navy and Hybrid Fleet panel, CAPT Colin Corridan (ret.), the former leader of Task Force 59, the Navy’s first maritime robotics and AI task force, moderated a panel that included Commander David Brannighan, Royal Navy, British Defence Staff USA, and Austin Gray, Co-Founder and CSO, Blue Water Autonomy.

One takeaway of the panel included a charge to industry to apply their solutions to national security and help ensure a high-low procurement strategy that is diversified between advanced yet expensive high-end systems and cheaper, more flexible low-end systems.

Moving at the Speed of Technology

Across all three days, multiple speakers talked about the need to move faster – from harnessing AI and new technology to developing and quickly scaling new capabilities – to ensure our warfighters have the systems and tools they need when they need them.

Just as undersea technology has changed the maritime landscape, COL Brown (ret.) pointed to drones as a comparable example of how airpower has been democratized. Beyond weapons, he also warned about disinformation as a weapon of war and how increasingly convincing deepfakes are making it difficult for military leaders and civilians alike to distinguish the truth.

“We are entering an era of breathtaking technological advancement,” he said. “The warning of history is clear: Unless we adapt, the upheavals of the last century may pale in comparison to what lies ahead.”

LtGen Austin and BG Hackler agreed on the importance of government and industry collaboration.

Speed to execution must consider future changes in technology. Dr. Winter shared that RTX has introduced a new military engine nearly every decade over the last century. Looking forward, RTX and other Primes – as well as the supply chain companies that support them – must bring together the digital thread, relying on model-based systems engineering that allows for greater efficiency and responsiveness.

"It is critical that we build these tools with enough longevity and enough forethought," he said.

Other speakers featured at Defense Innovation Days included Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (RI), Congressman Seth Magaziner (RI-02); and Congressman Gabe Amo (RI-01).

Thanks to Our Sponsors

Sponsors for Defense Innovation Days 2025 include Platinum Sponsors General Dynamics, RTX, and the Undersea Technology Innovation Consortium. Leidos served as Gold Sponsor and IM Technology, Quantic Electronics, Northrop Grumman, SAIC, and SEACORP as Silver Sponsors.

The sponsors for the two evening receptions were Adler Pollock & Sheehan and Anduril, and Bronze Sponsors included AstrodyneTDI, Comark – a Division of SourceCode, Exail Defense Systems, FORCYS, Globe Composite Solutions, Granite State Manufacturing, Guill Tool & Engineering Company, L3Harris Technologies, McLaughlin Research Corporation, NeQter Labs, PacMar Technologies, Preveil, Retlif Testing Laboratories, Rite Solutions, Serco, Teledyne Marine, and VATN Systems.

Coast Guard Awards Contract for Waterfront Homeport Improvements in Sitka, Alaska

Photo from U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Douglas Denman Facebook Page

Release From U.S. Coast Guard Arctic District

JUNEAU, Alaska –The U.S. Coast Guard's Facilities Design and Construction Center awarded a contract Aug. 14, 2025, to the Whiting-Turner Contracting Company to design and construct new homeport facilities in Sitka, Alaska.

The award, with a total potential value of $50.475 million, will construct waterfront facilities to support the arrival of one fast response cutter (FRC), Coast Guard Cutter Douglas

Denman (WPC-1149), and improve waterfront facilities for one 225-foot seagoing buoy tender, Coast Guard Cutter Kukui (WLB-203), that is already homeported in Sitka.

This work represents a significant investment in mission support infrastructure supporting Coast Guard operations throughout Sector Southeast Alaska and the greater Arctic District. By modernizing and expanding waterfront facilities, this initiative underscores the Coast Guard’s commitment to ensuring readiness and resilience in the region.

Construction of homeport facilities is expected to begin in 2026 and be completed in 2028.

The FRCs feature advanced command, control, communications, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance equipment, as well as over-the-horizon cutter boat deployment, enhancing the Coast Guard’s operations to control, secure, and defend the U.S. border and maritime approaches.

The Kukui’s primary mission is the servicing of aids-to-navigation (ATON) buoys within an area of responsibility extending across the inland and coastal waters of southeastern Alaska. Other missions include maritime law enforcement, ports and waterways security, marine environmental response, and search and rescue.