Wittman: DDGs Still Needed as Cruisers Retire; Go Slow on USVs

The guided-missile destroyer USS Forrest Sherman transits the Arabian Gulf. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Raymond Maddocks

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Navy still needs a large fleet of guided-missile destroyers (DDGs) to replace the guided-missile cruisers (CGs) being retired, a senior member of the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) said.

Speaking March 9 at the Hudson Institute, a Washington think tank, Rep. Rob Wittman (R-Va.), the ranking member of the Seapower and Projection Forces subcommittee of the HASC, expressed concern over the Navy's announcement that it would not extend the service life of the older Arleigh Burke-class (DDG 51) DDGs, some of which reach their maximum life in the mid-2020s.

"Our DDG 51s are incredibly important, and doing the upgrades, especially on the Flight IIs, are important," Wittman said. "There is still a lot of utility and life left in Flight I – there are some upgrades they can do … and bring the Aegis baseline systems up, put some more capable radars on those ships – I think that those things need to stay on track."

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>
> *Rep. Rob Wittman (R-Va.)*

Noting the Navy's 2021 budget plan to slow the rate of production on the new Flight III DDGs, Wittman said the plan "doesn't get us to where we need to be, especially in light

of retiring four CGs. If you're going to take those cruisers out – remember, those cruisers are either part of the carrier strike group or the ballistic-missile defense mission – my counter to that is, what are you going to do to then replace them at some fairly fast pace with DDG 51s?"

Wittman noted that "going south" on upfitting older DDGs, retiring CGs and not building the Flight III DDGs at a quick enough pace, a 355-ship Navy gets more distant.

Asked by moderator Seth Cropsey about increasing the number of small combatants and unmanned surface vessels (USVs) instead of DDGs, Wittman said integration of USVs raises questions that have not yet been answered.

"The only way you know that is to implement that, put it in place, and figure out what does it do well, what doesn't it do well, and then you can ramp up production," he said. "My concern is that if you replace a DDG 51 Flight III – that we know is an extraordinarily capable ship, even a modernization of a Flight I or you replace that with a unmanned platform – you have no idea at this particular point how useful that is going to be integrating these missions into the fleet.

"Let's build a number of [USVs], let's integrate them in, let's figure out what works and what doesn't work, and then at some future date you can ramp up production and get a significant amount of capability and capacity," he said. "But don't do it too soon, where you waste resources and say, well these ships hadn't worked out so well and we're going to retire these. We see this with [littoral combat ships] and it really takes away from the effort necessary to build the fleet that we need for the future."

Navy Gives Boeing Long-Lead Contract for 18 P-8A Patrol Aircraft

A P-8A Poseidon aircraft makes a pass over Naval Air Station Sigonella, Italy, following a flight in support of Dynamic Manta 2020 in February. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Juan Sua

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy has ordered long-lead materials and activity to support production of eight P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft for its patrol squadrons plus 10 more for foreign military sales.

Naval Air Systems Command has awarded an $800 million contract modification for long-lead materials and activities for Lot 11 production of 18 P-8As, including eight for the U.S. Navy, six for the Republic of Korea Navy and four for the Royal New Zealand Air Force, according to a Pentagon contract announcement.

The funds for the work were appropriated in the fiscal 2020 budget.

The Navy was authorized to procure nine P-8As in the 2020 budget, but one was targeted to be delayed or cancelled as part of a reprogramming request to shift some Defense Department funds to construction of a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Navy to Commission Expeditionary Sea Base USS Hershel ‘Woody’ Williams

The Military Sealift Command expeditionary sea base USNS Hershel ‘Woody’ Williams (ESB 4) is at anchor in the Chesapeake Bay, Sept. 15, 2019 during mine countermeasure equipment testing. U.S. Navy/Bill Mesta

WASHINGTON – The Navy will commission its newest Expeditionary Sea Base, USS Hershel “Woody” Williams (ESB 4), during a 10 a.m. EST ceremony Saturday, March 7, in Norfolk, Virginia, the Navy’s Office on Information announced in a March 6 release.

The future Hershel “Woody” Williams is the first ship to bear the name of Marine Corps Chief Warrant Officer Four Hershel Woodrow Williams, the last surviving Medal of Honor recipient recognized for heroism at the Battle of Iwo Jima during World War II.

U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia will deliver the commissioning ceremony’s principal address. The ceremony will be highlighted by a time-honored Navy tradition when Ms. Tracie Jean Ross and Ms. Travie Jane Ross, ship sponsors and daughters of Hershel “Woody” Williams, will give the first order to “man our ship and bring her to life!”

“This ship honors a man who dedicated his life to service – heroic service as a Marine, and continued service to his fellow veterans,” said Acting Secretary of the Navy Thomas Modly. “This dedication will live on in USS Hershel ‘Woody’ Williams as the ship is deployed around the world bringing additional capability to our growing fleet. The ceremony on Saturday will also represent the dedication to service demonstrated by the men and women who worked tirelessly to build this ship and their commitment to quality

and innovation.”

The future Hershel “Woody” Williams is optimized to support a variety of maritime-based missions and designed around four core capabilities: aviation facilities, berthing, equipment staging support, and command and control assets. ESBs can be enhanced to meet special operations force missions through increased communications, aviation and unmanned aircraft system support.

Built by General Dynamics NASSCO, the Montford Point-class is comprised of five ships across two variants: Expeditionary Transfer Docks and Expeditionary Sea Bases. Acting as a mobile sea base, ESBs are part of the critical access infrastructure that supports the deployment of forces and supplies to provide prepositioned equipment and sustainment with flexible distribution.

The platform has an aviation hangar and flight deck that include four operating spots capable of landing V-22 and MH-53E equivalent helicopters, accommodations, work spaces, and ordnance storage for an embarked force. The platform will also provide unmanned aviation vehicle operations, enhanced command and control, communications, computers, and intelligence capabilities to support embarked force mission planning and execution. The reconfigurable mission deck area can store embarked force equipment including mine sleds and rigid hull inflatable boats.

Commandant: Tomahawks Will

Enable Marines to Contribute to Sea Control, Denial

A Tomahawk is launched from the Arleigh Burke-class destroyer USS Curtis Wilbur during a demonstration last May. The fiscal 2021 budget calls for a new variant of the missile that the Marines hope will help in sea-control and sea-denial missions, the commandant of the Marine Corps told U.S. senators on March 5. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Taylor DiMartino

WASHINGTON – The fiscal 2021 budget proposal for a new version of the Tomahawk cruise missile will give the U.S. Marine Corps a new weapon for sea-control and sea-denial missions, the Corps' top officer said.

The budget proposes the procurement of 44 Maritime Strike Tomahawk (MST) missiles, which have a terminal multimode sensor for striking moving targets such as ships.

Marine Commandant Gen. David H. Berger, testifying March 5 before the Senate Armed Services Committee, said that as the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps have been thinking about future operations as an integrated naval force against a peer competitor, the Corps "assumes a role which we have not had in the past 20 years which is, how do we contribute to sea control and sea denial? The Tomahawk missile is one of the tools that is going to allow us to do that."

Asked about the MST by Sen. Tom Cotton (R-Ark.), Berger said that much like the MQ-9 Reaper unmanned aerial vehicle, "for us [the MST] could be the answer or it could be the first step toward a longer-term answer five, six, seven years from now. But what we need is long-range precision fires for a small unit, a series of units, that can from ship or from shore hold an adversary's naval force at risk. That missile is going to help us do that."

Asked by Sen. Josh Hawley (R-Mo.) about the Ground-Based Anti-Ship Missile and the Remotely Operated Ground Unit Expeditionary (ROGUE) Fires Vehicle, Berger said that both capabilities – in wargames and in simulations – have proven useful, not necessarily game-changers, but definitely changing the calculus of an adversary.

The ROGUE fires vehicle will be an unmanned vehicle based on the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle.

“Right now, that capability is something we don’t have,” he said. “Posed with that, [adversaries] have to act differently.”

The commandant said that “ROGUE Fires in particular are on a great glidepath. We are investing in it. Who knows if that is the solution 10 years from now, but we are going down that glidepath right now. Ground-launched cruise missiles and everything long-range precision fires that’s in a small-enough that a small Marine unit can embark it and use it, we’re after it.

Berger stressed that “we need naval ISR [intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance] that an expeditionary naval force that is operating in EUCOM [the European Command] or in the first island chain [of the Western Pacific] or wherever, has the means to pick up the targets forward in an expeditionary manner. They’ve got to be able to launch from naval platforms [and] from shore, and they’ve got to be small enough if they are going to be embarked with us that we can sustain them.”

He said the Corps “has used MQ-9s for a year and a half in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, as a learning platform for us. That could close that kill chain organically.”

Columbia SSBN Not a Factor in 2021 Budget Cut to One Virginia-Class Sub, Geurts Says

A 34-foot Dauntless-class patrol boat transfers supplies to the Virginia-class fast-attack sub USS Texas in the Gulf of Tadjoura. The Virginia class has been at the center of a budget tussle between the Navy and Congress since the fiscal 2021 budget was introduced weeks ago. U.S. Navy/Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Kenji Shiroma

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Navy's controversial decision to propose one Virginia-class attack submarine (SSN) instead of two in the fiscal year 2021 budget was a matter of budget priorities – not a concern over shipyard or program capacity to start construction of the Columbia ballistic-missile sub, the Navy's top acquisition official told Congress.

"I had less confidence six to nine months ago where we were seeing some of the Block IV [Virginia SSN] deliveries starting to move to the right, and the concern was can we maintain the cadence to not add risk to Columbia," James F. Geurts, Navy assistant secretary for research, development and acquisition, said March 4 during testimony before Seapower and Projection Forces, a subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee.

Geurts repeated his previous assertion that "the No. 1 way to reduce risk to Columbia is a stable, well-performing Virginia program."

The Navy worked closely with the submarine builders, Electric Boat and Newport News Shipyard, to stabilize the transition from Block III to Block IV.

> *"The No. 1 way to reduce risk to Columbia is a stable, well-performing Virginia program."*
>
> *James F. Geurts*

"I am happy to report that over the last six months that has stabilized," he said. "My concerns are not, now, 'Can they execute?' he said. "They just need to continue to execute."

Geurts said that at the time a "relief valve" was created by making the 10th Virginia-class SSN an option in the recent multiyear Block V procurement. The second 2021 Virginia SSN became "more of an affordability issue, not an execution issue," he said. "I'm confident [the shipyards] can execute [building] the ship."

The second Virginia SSN is atop the Navy's list of 2021 unfunded priorities.

"We need to add that ship in this year, or we'll just have to work on that at the start of Block VI," Geurts said. "I don't think there is a way to execute three [submarines] in a Columbia year with a high degree of success."

"Submarine construction is very sensitive to cadence … and dips in workload, so there is some work we're going to do at the end of 2023 with the shipbuilder," he added. "The last thing we want to do is lay off folks [only] to climb this giant Columbia wall.

"If we cut short and have a large gap at the end of Block V [production] before having Block VI move in and Columbia start up, that will be a risk to execution not only in Virginia but to Columbia."

Geurts: Navy Looking at Money-Saving Strategies in Procurement of Four Amphibs

The amphibious assault ship USS America receives cargo from the dry cargo and ammunition ship USNS Cesar Chavez during a replenishment-at-sea on March 1. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Vincent E. Zline

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Navy is looking at acquisition strategies for procuring four amphibious warfare ships over the next few years to achieve economies, the Navy's top acquisition official said.

During March 4 testimony about the fiscal 2021 shipbuilding proposal before the Seapower subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee by James F. Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition, Sen. Roger Wicker (R-Miss.) said he was pleased that the 2021 proposal had accelerated the planned procurement of amphibious assault ship LHA 9 from fiscal 2024 to fiscal 2023.

Geurts said that the acceleration was enabled because Congress had appropriated funds and given incremental funding authority "relatively early to that need."

"Our challenge in the future budgets will be to place that money back in the program so we can deliver that LHA," he said.

Wicker asked about the possibility of a multiyear procurement for three Block II San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock

ships (LPDs 31, 32 and 33) and LHA 9. He referred to a request last year from the Seapower subcommittee to "review alternative acquisition strategies for amphibious ships to leverage multiple-ship contracts, which have saved billions of dollars. In this review, the Navy reported that significant savings could be achieved by procuring various combinations of amphibious ships."

"There is tremendous potential as [said] in our report to Congress, and as we've looked at it even further to doing a block buy of the three LPDs and the LHA," Geurts said.

"We see that savings to be in that 8% to 12% range, which would be a billion dollars back in taxpayer savings. So, we're looking at that closely. We're also executing that advance procurement, long-lead funding that's been appropriated with the incremental authority. The things that I've seen in the draft of the SHIPS Implementation Act in terms of giving us more authorities to do smart procurement will be tremendously beneficial."

The Huntington Ingalls shipyard where the Navy's amphibious warfare ships are built is in Pascagoula, Mississippi.

Construction Begins on Bath Iron Works' First Flight III Arleigh Burke Destroyer

BATH, Maine – Construction of the future USS Louis H. Wilson Jr. (DDG 126) officially began at General Dynamics Bath Iron Works (BIW) shipyard on March 3. The milestone was marked by a ceremony at BIW's structural fabrication facility in

Brunswick, Maine, the Program Executive Office (PEO)-Ships said in a release.

DDG 126 will be the first Arleigh Burke-class destroyer built in the Flight III configuration at BIW. Flight III destroyers will have improved capability and capacity to perform anti-air warfare and ballistic missile defense in support of the integrated air and missile defense mission.

This system delivers quick reaction time, high firepower, and increased electronic countermeasures capability for anti-air warfare.

The ship will honor Marine Corps Gen. Louis Hugh Wilson Jr., who was awarded the Medal of Honor for his leadership and daring combat tactics in the Battle of Guam in 1944. During a prolonged firefight with Japanese forces, Wilson led Marines under his command across rugged terrain to secure a strategic objective. Despite being wounded three times, Wilson and his men defended their position for more than 10 hours of combat. The following day, Wilson led a 17-man patrol to capture, secure, and hold a second position.

“This is a tremendous occasion as we mark the start of construction on BIW’s first Flight III Arleigh Burke-class destroyer.” said Capt. Seth Miller, DDG 51 class program manager, PEO-Ships.

“General Wilson embodied the spirit of our nation in his will to protect his fellow Marines and countrymen. What better way to honor him than to build a highly capable warship that advances our Navy’s ability to protect and defend our nation.”

BIW also is in production on the future Arleigh Burke-class destroyers Daniel Inouye (DDG 118), Carl M. Levin (DDG 120), John Basilone (DDG 122), Harvey C. Barnum Jr. (DDG 124) and Patrick Gallagher (DDG 127) as well as the Zumwalt-class destroyer Lyndon B. Johnson (DDG 1002).

U.S. Lacks Ice Hardened Ships, Repair and Refueling Ports for Arctic Ops

WASHINGTON – Unlike the South China Sea and other contested areas, the U.S. Navy does not have the capability to conduct freedom-of-the-seas operations in the icebound waters of the Arctic, a key Pentagon official conceded.

With only one heavy and one medium icebreaker and no Navy ships with hulls hardened against ice, "We do have limitations in the Arctic right now," James H. Anderson, assistant secretary of defense for strategy, plans and capabilities, told a readiness subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee on March 3 during a hearing on U.S. military readiness in the Arctic.

The subcommittee chairman, Sen. Dan Sullivan (R-Alaska), said he doubted the Navy could today follow the route across the Arctic that Allied supply convoys took to the Soviet Union in World War II. Sullivan noted that previous Defense Department Arctic strategies called for protecting "our sovereign territory, our sea lanes through Freedom of Navigation operations (FONOPS)."

The drastic decline of sea ice in the Arctic has opened sea lanes across the top of the world, sparking territorial

disputes. Russia, Norway, Canada and the United States all have boosted their military presence in the Arctic at a rate not seen since the Cold War.

Last year, Russia completed a large new base at Alexandra Island in the Franz Josef Land archipelago, while reopening and refitting seven former Soviet bases within the Arctic Circle. Russia also has modernized its powerful Northern Fleet. In response, the U.S. has reconstituted the 2nd Fleet, adding the North Pole to that fleet's area of responsibility. Last October, a U.S. aircraft carrier, the USS Harry S. Truman, entered Arctic waters for the first time since 1991.

Sullivan said the Navy has assured him that U.S. submarines are all over the Arctic, but "you can't see a sub. The whole point of a FONOP is to demonstrate presence."

When pressed at the hearing about conducting FONOPS in the large stretches of the Arctic still covered by ice, Anderson said the Navy had determined that to exercise its Arctic strategy, "they do not have a requirement for ice-hardened ships."

In addition to a deficit of ice-hardened hulls, Sullivan said the U.S. lacks a strategic port on – or even near – the Arctic Ocean that could handle repairs or refueling of large Navy or even U.S. Coast Guard vessels.

"Russia has close to a dozen or two dozen ports," he said, noting the closest viable port at Anchorage or Dutch Harbor,

Alaska, was 1,000 nautical miles or more from Arctic waters. In addition to ports and military bases, Russian President Vladimir Putin has 54 icebreakers, Sullivan said. “He’s got all the cards.”

Anderson, who is performing the duties of deputy undersecretary of defense for policy, for which he is expected to be nominated by President Trump, said the Pentagon, under the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2020, is assessing infrastructure needs in the Arctic to support operational flexibility and power projection. That includes an Army Corps of Engineers study of Nome as a possible large ship harbor. A draft report is expected in December, Anderson said.

Navy Strategic Systems Director: New W93 Warhead Needed to Pace Threat

A Trident 2 D5 is launched from the Ohio-class sub USS Maine off San Diego in February during a test of the ballistic missile. U.S. Navy

WASHINGTON – The admiral in charge of the U.S. Navy’s nuclear weapons arsenal said the new warhead in development is needed to modernize the arsenal.

Vice Adm. Johnny Wolfe, director of Strategic Systems Programs (SSP), testifying on March 3 in Washington before the Strategic Forces subcommittee of the House Armed Forces Committee, said the W93 warhead and Mark 7 re-entry aeroshell are needed to pace the threat.

The proposed fiscal 2021 budget reflects the direction to pursue the W93 warhead and Mark 7 aeroshell program of record, which "will address an evolving threat environment and ballistic missile warhead modernization requirements, will improve operational effectiveness for U.S. Strategic Command and will mitigate technical, operational, programmatic and geopolitical risk in the sea-based leg of the deterrent," Wolfe said.

"The SSP fiscal 2021 budget request not only funds the sustainment of today's deterrent but it also begins the investment to build and re-energize capabilities, technologies, work force and critical skills required of any nuclear nation."

The SSP budget "reflects important investments in our follow-on Trident D5 Life-Extension 2 need for strategic deployment no later than 2039 in an evolving threat environment," he said.

Wolfe said the modernization efforts will produce "just-in-time replacements," noting that the recapitalization "has left no margin for unanticipated challenges and technical work that we have not executed in over 30 years. … We must begin now. Now is the right time to ensure that the sea-based deterrent continues to meet strategic requirements."

He said the refurbishment of the W76 warhead family has been completed and a small number of them have been modified with a low-yield option. The timeline for completion of the W88 Warhead Alteration 370 program has been modified to reach production in 2021.

Lisa Gordon-Haggerty, administrator of the National Nuclear Safety Administration who also testified at the hearing, said the W93 warhead will be based on previously deployed and tested nuclear explosive components.

Wolfe said it has been 30 years since a new aeroshell had been developed and that "we've got to look how we can produce an aeroshell, agnostic of whatever the final solution is. We've got to have this for all of our systems as we move into the future."

NAVAIR Orders One UC-12W Utility Transport

ARLINGTON, Va. – Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR) has ordered another UC-12W Huron utility transport aircraft from Textron Aviation.

NAVAIR awarded Textron Aviation Inc. $14.3 million to fund the production and delivery of one King Air 350C Cargo Slick aircraft modified to a UC-12W, according to a March 2 Defense Department announcement.

The UC-12W Huron is the most recent naval version of the C-12 light utility transport aircraft. It is used as a base flight aircraft for Marine Corps air stations. The UC-12W, an FAA-certified military variant of the King Air 300 series aircraft, is a low-wing, fully pressurized, multifunction T-tail monoplane with two turboprop engines.

The aircraft is certified to operate on unimproved runways, certified/capable of operating in extreme weather conditions and equipped with the latest FAA mandates for operations in

and outside of the continental United States. The cabin can be configured to accommodate passengers, cargo or both.

The Marine Corps operates 8 UC-12Ws equipped with extended-range fuel tanks, additional aircraft survivability equipment, night-vision compatible lighting and satellite phone communications. The UC-12Ws are replacing UC-12F/M versions of the Huron.