

March 27 Red Sea Update

SEAPOWERS

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From U.S. Central Command, March 27, 2024

TAMPA, Fla. – Between 2:00 and 2:20 a.m. (Sanaa time) on March 27, United States Central Command successfully engaged and destroyed four long-range unmanned aerial systems (UAS) launched by Iranian-backed Houthi terrorists in Yemen. These UAS were aimed at a U.S. warship and engaged in self-defense over the Red Sea. There were no injuries or damage reported to U.S. or coalition ships.

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

Navy's Top Officer Credits Training, Logistics with Meeting Red Sea Mission



By Matthew Olay, DOD News

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Lisa Franchetti yesterday said she credits both a recent transformation in the Navy's surface warfare training regimen and the quality of logistics operations for the service's ability to successfully counter recent attacks by Iranian-backed Houthi terrorists in the Red Sea.

Navy assets have been operating in the Red Sea since December as part of Operation Prosperity Guardian, a U.S.-led, multinational coalition established to counter attacks by Houthi terrorists on merchant and naval vessels.

"[Operation Prosperity Guardian] is a great coalition of

nations that are really standing up for the rules-based international order as we work to preserve the free flow of commerce through the Red Sea, through the Bab el-Mandeb , and on into the Gulf of Aden,” Franchetti said.

During a discussion on the overall state of the Navy with the Defense One digital media platform in Washington, Franchetti was asked about what lessons the Navy has learned in the months since it first began participating in the coalition.

The first lesson, Franchetti said, relates to a transformation in surface warfare training that began roughly nine years ago. At that time, the Navy brought in highly trained instructors to teach members of the surface warfare community how to bring a tactical edge to the field.

“And now you see nine years later, ... we’ve set up reach-back to our warfighting centers to be able to really understand what’s going on in the operating environment, to be able to adjust tactics, techniques procedures,” said Franchetti, who lauded the quality of Navy training across all surface-ship platforms and the entire joint force.

“I think the investments that we made are really paying off,” she said, “ those great lessons that we’re learning about how to innovate while we’re out there in the same battle space.”

Franchetti also highlighted how the evolving quality of the logistics operations being conducted during Operation Prosperity Guardian is contributing to the Navy’s overall operational readiness.

“We had to bring some of our ships out of the Red Sea, originally, to be able to do some of the things they needed to do,” explained Franchetti. “But now we’ve been able to work with allies and partners to be able to do that right on station and really keep everybody in the fight.”

Franchetti pointed out that the Navy is successfully conducting multiple logistics operations on a daily basis in regions beyond the Red Sea.

“I’m really proud of how our forces are set up across all of our different regions to be able to respond and to be able to pull together to provide the resources we need to keep our operations going,” she said. “I think it’s a real testament to the work that’s been done in the past to enable us to do this work now and into the future.”

Houthi militants have attacked or threatened Navy and commercial vessels more than 100 times since late November of last year, according to U.S. Central Command. In response to these attacks, U.S. and coalition forces have conducted 50 self-defense strikes as of March 25.

Beyond current and future naval operations, Franchetti, who was promoted to chief of naval operations last November, also discussed unmanned vehicles, shipbuilding, retention and quality of life.

“I could not be more proud of our Navy team or more focused on building the Navy that our nation needs to do all the missions that count on us to do every single day,” said Franchetti.

“And I’m really looking forward to working ... with all of our stakeholders to be able to do that over the next four years that I’m here as CNO.”

Benign 4th Fleet AOR Useful

for Unmanned Vehicle Operationalization, Admiral Says



230913-N-N3764-1001 NAVAL STATION KEY WEST, Fl. – (Sept. 13, 2023) – Commercial operators deploy Saildrone Voyager Unmanned Surface Vessels (USVs) out to sea in the initial steps of U.S. 4th Fleet’s Operation Windward Stack during a launch from Naval Air Station Key West’s Mole Pier and Truman Harbor, Sept. 13, 2023.

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy’s use of unmanned systems in the U.S 4th Fleet area of operations (AOR) is enabling the fleet to move from experimentation to operationalization of the unmanned systems, even discovering unanticipated advantages of those systems.

The stability of the region and the relatively benign environment – from high-end threats – of the fleet’s AOR has enabled the fleet to experiment with unmanned systems and develop trust in them, said Rear Admiral James Aiken, commander, U.S. 4th Fleet and commander, Naval Forces, U.S. Southern Command, in a March 27 Defense One webinar conversation.

“This is a take-risk AOR,” Aiken said, noting that the environment allows the fleet to experiment in “creative ways” with unmanned systems.

“We want to take unmanned systems and operationalize them,” he said.

For one example, he said that unmanned surface vessels can identify ships and boats engaged in illegal fishing.

The admiral said that leasing unmanned systems for experimentation – as opposed to procuring them – enables the fleet to more easily discontinue use of systems that prove inadequate. He mentioned one system – which he did not name – that proved to be deficient for its role in high sea states.

Aiken said that during the last UNITAS exercise with regional navies, a representative from the U.S. 5th Fleet attended as an advisor. The 5th Fleet’s Task Force 59 has for several years conducted experimentation with unmanned surface vessels (USVs) in the Missile East.

Aiken said that one surprising discovery was the deterrent value of USVs. He said that the very presence of Saildrone USVs north of the northern coast of Haiti served as a deterrent to migrants seeking to reach another shore, including the United States.

U.S. Navy Achieves Significant Engine Testing Milestones for LUSV Program



By Program Executive Office Unmanned and Small Combatants,
March 22, 2024

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Navy’s Large Unmanned Surface Vessel (LUSV) program reached pivotal milestones earlier this year after several industry teams successfully completed extended reliability demonstrations of four different engine configurations, officials announced today.

The four 720-hour tests demonstrated the capability and durability of different engine plants to operate for extended periods without human intervention – a critical enabler for advancing unmanned maritime operations and the Navy’s manned-unmanned Hybrid Fleet concept.

Mandated by a congressional requirement in the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act, the engine testing milestones must be completed before the LUSV can proceed into a formal development phase. An engine system only qualifies for use in the program after successful demonstration events.

Demonstrations of each engine configuration took place over 720 continuous hours. No human intervention or preventative/corrective maintenance on the equipment was permitted during this time. Successfully completing the demonstration meant that an engine system could not exhibit any failures or issues that would require maintenance of any kind during operations on an unmanned ship for 30 days.

Four teams have successfully completed their separate 720-hour testing milestones. The successful teams include:

- Bollinger and Carter Machinery on behalf of Caterpillar in Chesapeake, Virginia was the first team to achieve this milestone in December of 2023. They demonstrated sufficient mechanical reliability of the 1550 kw Caterpillar 3512C model engine.
- Fincantieri Marinette Marine (FMM) and Carter Machinery on behalf of Caterpillar in Chesapeake, VA demonstrated mechanical durability of the Caterpillar 2300 kW rated 3516 main propulsion diesel, lube oil and fuel system.
- Gibbs & Cox and Southwest Research Institute in San Antonio, Texas on behalf of Cummins also validated the reliability of the QSK95 diesel engine paired with an ABB AMG 0560M04 LAE generator.
- Huntington Ingalls Incorporated (HII), in partnership with the U.S. Coast Guard, conducted a successful 720-hour demonstration on behalf of MTU of the MTU 20V 4000 M93L, a Main Propulsion Diesel Engine configuration.

Each of these respective engine configurations are all now

eligible for use on the LUSV program.

“These successful test events mark a significant milestone for our team and brings us one step closer to delivering the Large Unmanned Surface Vessel to the Navy,” said Capt. Scot Searles, program manager of the Unmanned Maritime Systems (PMS 406) program office. “The completion of these rigorous engine tests is a testament to the hard work and collective expertise of both our Navy team and our industry partners. We are pleased with the results and look forward to continuing our work with industry to forge the future Hybrid Fleet.”

LUSVs will supplement the Fleet’s missile magazine capacity as part of the Navy’s Distributed Maritime Operations (DMO) concept. Currently, the LUSV is envisioned as a vessel greater than 200 ft. in length with a full load displacement of approximately 1,500 tons. LUSVs are intended to be low cost, high endurance, modular USVs that can employ a variety of payloads.

The Navy in 2020 awarded six LUSV conceptual design contracts to industry teams to refine program requirements and to provide informed feedback on the Navy’s LUSV requirements. As part of these contracts, each of these teams have been pursuing propulsion plant efforts, culminating in these engine test demonstrations.

PEO Unmanned and Small Combatants leads the Navy’s efforts to develop, deliver and sustain capable and affordable unmanned maritime systems to meet Fleet requirements.

Keel Laid for Future USNS Muscogee Creek Nation



By Team Ships Public Affairs, March 21, 2024

HOUMA, La. – A keel laying ceremony for the future USNS Muscogee Creek Nation (T-ATS 10), the fifth ship of the Navy's Navajo class of Towing, Salvage, and Rescue vessels was held at Bollinger Houma Shipyards, Mar. 20.

Sponsors Geri Wisner, Attorney General of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation; Nicole Foster, wife of Rear Admiral Calvin Foster; and Muscogee (Creek) Nation Principal Chief David Hill attended to authenticate the keel. Members of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation were also in attendance.

The keel laying ceremony formally marks the start of a ship's life and the joining of the ship's modular components. The keel serves as the symbolic backbone of the ship.

During the ceremony, the keel authenticators watched a welder etch their initials into the keel plate and declared it to be "truly and fairly laid."

"We are honored to have representatives of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation here to celebrate this milestone with us," said Program Executive Office, Ships Auxiliary and Special Mission Ships Program Manager, John Lighthammer. "The ship is critical to the operations of our fleet. Today's ceremony is a reminder of the pride and determination of the Muscogee people it is named to honor."

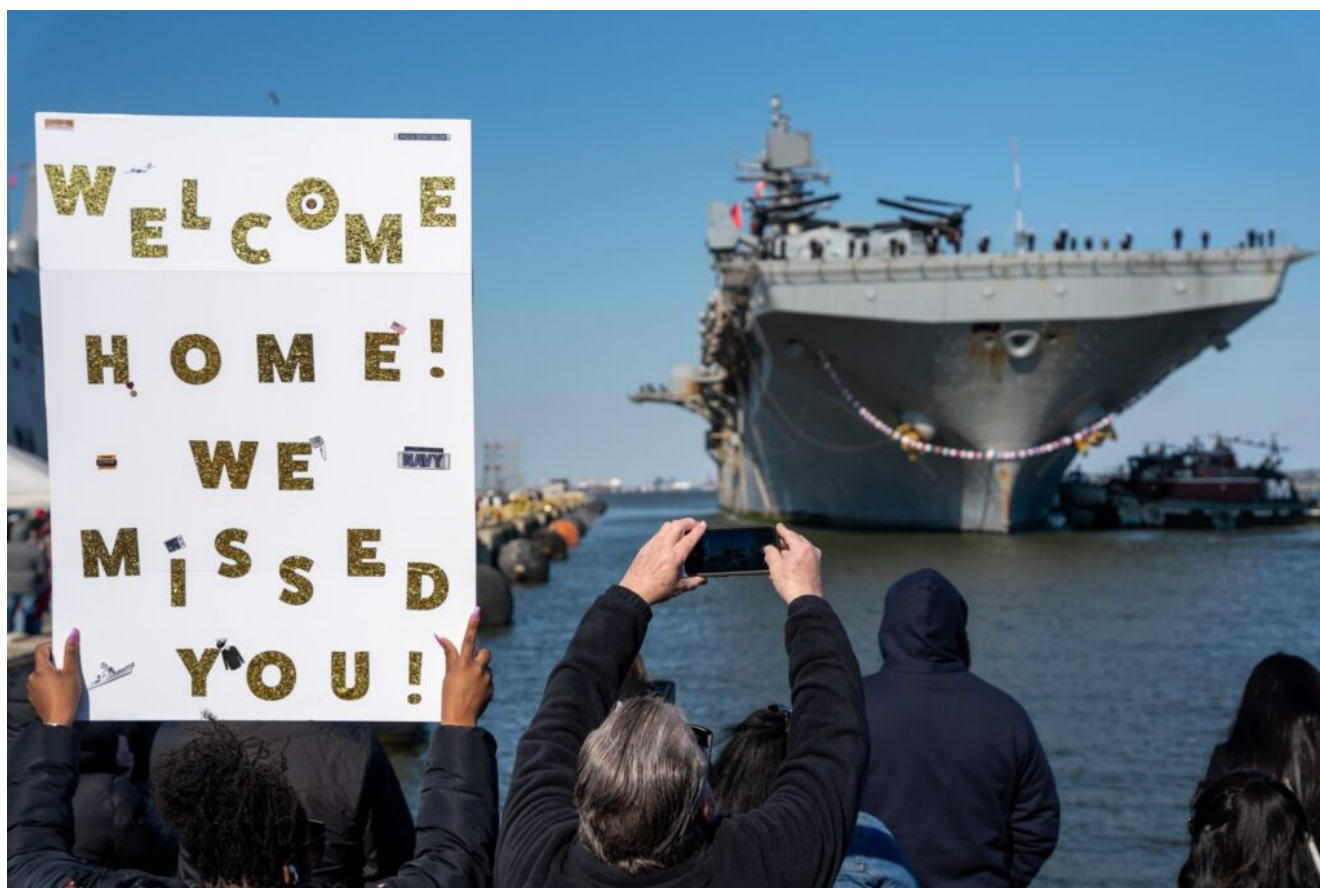
The Navajo class of ships will provide ocean-going tug, salvage, and rescue capabilities to support Fleet operations. The 10 ships are intended to provide continuity of capability following on after the Powhatan and Safeguard classes of vessels, which are nearing the end of their expected service lives.

Navajo-class ships will be capable of towing U.S. Navy ships and will have 6,000 square feet of deck space for embarked systems. The platform will be 263 feet long, have a beam of 59 feet, and will be able to carry a load of nearly 2,000 tons.

In addition to the future USNS Muscogee Creek Nation (T-ATS 10), Bollinger Houma Shipyards is in the process of constructing the future USNS Navajo (T-ATS 6), USNS Cherokee Nation (T-ATS 7), USNS Saginaw Ojibwe Anishinabek (T-ATS 8) and USNS Lenni Lenape (T-ATS 9).

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

Bataan ARG, 26th MEU(Soc) Return From 8-month Deployment



[By Chief Mass Communication Specialist Eva-Marie Ramsaran,
Amphibious Squadron 8 Public Affairs](#)

21 March 2024

NORFOLK, Virginia – More than 4,000 Sailors and Marines assigned to the Bataan Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) and embarked 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (MEU(SOC)) returned to Hampton Roads following an eight and a half-month deployment to the U.S. 2nd, 5th and 6th Fleet areas of operations, March 21.

Two of the ARG ships, the Wasp-class amphibious assault ship USS Bataan (LHD 5) and Harpers Ferry-class dock landing ship USS Carter Hall (LSD 50), returned to Naval Station Norfolk and Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek in Virginia.

“It is great to be home,” said Amphibious Squadron (CPR) 8 Commodore, Capt. Martin Robertson. “I’m proud of the Sailors and Marines of the Bataan Amphibious Ready Group who return home today knowing that for eight and a half months, they were the nation’s rapid response force.”

The San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship USS Mesa Verde (LPD 19) is expected to return to Naval Station Norfolk, Virginia, in the coming days. Most of the Marines assigned to the 26th MEU(SOC) departed the ARG ships and returned to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina earlier this week.

While in the U.S. 5th and 6th Fleet areas of operations, the Bataan ARG and 26th MEU(SOC) team supported a wide range of interoperability opportunities and exercises across the North Atlantic, Eastern Mediterranean, Baltic region, Red Sea and Arabian Gulf, increasing combat readiness and crisis response capabilities while strengthening relationships with both Allies and partners.

“These young men and women were called into action from the start to help stop the spread of wildfires in Southern Europe, to deter Iran from seizing U.S.-flagged merchant vessels in the Middle East, and they reacted swiftly at the onset of the crisis in the Bab-El Mandeb to ensure merchant shipping access to the Red Sea,” Robertson said. “Your sons and daughters stood ready to assist American citizens in countries impacted by the Israel-Hamas conflict, and their efforts directly prevented the conflict from expanding to other nations in the region. Simultaneously, we operated close to Russia in the high north and Baltic regions, reinforcing America’s commitment to the NATO alliance, emphasizing the importance of regional peace and security. Thank you to our families and

friends. Your love and support made all our successes possible.”

In July 2023, following the wildfires in Greece, the Bataan ARG disaggregated, with Mesa Verde remaining in the U.S. 6th Fleet area of operations supporting Allies and partners through various bilateral exercises and operations across the theater. Mesa Verde and the embarked Marines visited Greece, Ireland, Latvia, Norway, Spain and the United Kingdom. Additionally, Secretary of the Navy Carlos Del Toro visited Mesa Verde while the ship was in Dublin, Ireland, for the U.S. Naval Academy versus University of Notre Dame football game, Aug. 26, 2023.

Bataan and Carter Hall transited the Suez Canal and operated in the U.S. 5th Fleet area of operations for more than four months, ensuring the free flow of navigation and regional stability. Following the outbreak of conflict between Israel and Hamas, both ships participated in Operation Prosperity Guardian in the Red Sea to deter further escalation and protect open sea lanes.

“It’s been a challenging deployment, but we have accomplished a lot, and I am extremely proud of the hard work and resilience of every member of the Bataan team,” said Capt. Paul Burkhart, Bataan’s commanding officer. “Throughout the past eight months, we have really shown what it means to be ‘Bataan tough.’ We were able to showcase our amphibious capabilities throughout three Navy fleets, deter aggression through our presence and were able to create and share countless memories that will last a lifetime.”

Notable visitors to the Bataan and Carter Hall included commanders and staff of U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa, U.S. 6th Fleet, U.S. 5th Fleet, U.S. Central Command, Task Force 61/2, Task Force 51/5, French, Italian and Turkish navies, along with distinguished guests from the Kingdom of Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia,

United Arab Emirates and U.K.

The ARG/MEU presence overseas supported strategic interests and contributed to regional security and stability and reassured U.S. commitment to multiple regions. The blue-green team provided operational flexibility to combatant commanders by providing a versatile contingency response force using sea, air, land and logistical assets. The versatility inherent to the amphibious force allowed for flexible and mission-tailored forces, while representing our nation's strength, capability and resolve to partners and Allies and deterring potential adversaries.

"History has proven the necessity of having forward-deployed Marines, embarked aboard amphibious ships. Over the past eight months, the Marines and Sailors of the 26th MEU(SOC) have showcased the value, utility and unique all-domain operational capabilities you only find in a marine expeditionary unit," said Col. Dennis Sampson, commanding officer of the 26th MEU(SOC). "When coupled together, the ARG and the MEU(SOC) form a flexible naval expeditionary force capable of reassuring our Allies and partners of our commitment to maritime security and capable of dominating within the littorals against any adversary in any clime or place."

The Bataan ARG is comprised of the Bataan, Mesa Verde, and Carter Hall. Embarked commands include CPR 8, Fleet Surgical Team 8, Tactical Air Control Squadron 21, Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 26, Assault Craft Unit 4, Beach Master Unit 2 and the 26th MEU(SOC).

The 26th MEU(SOC) consists of the Command Element; Aviation Combat Element, Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 162 (Reinforced); Ground Combat Element, Battalion Landing Team 1/6; and Logistics Combat Element, Combat Logistics Battalion 22.

March 20 Red Sea Update

USCENTCOM, March 20, 2024

TAMPA, Fla. – Between 10:10 a.m. and 7:40 p.m. (Sanaa time) on March 20, a coalition aircraft successfully engaged and destroyed one unmanned aerial vehicle, and U.S. Central Command successfully engaged and destroyed one unmanned surface vessel, both launched by Iranian-backed Houthi terrorists from Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen. There were no injuries or damage reported to U.S. or coalition ships.

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

Navy to Send Beach Group, Sealift Ships to Support Gaza Relief



A Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore Trident floating pier and causeway is shown under assembly. (US Army photo by Sgt. Ashunteia Smith)

By Richard R. Burgess, Senior Editor

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy is sending an expedition of beach cargo handling forces to assist in the establishment of a floating causeway and pier to handle delivery of relief supplies to Gaza.

Speaking on background, a Navy official told reporters on March 20 that Beach Group One, augmented by other logistics forces, would be deployed to the eastern Mediterranean Sea to deliver and assemble lighterage of the Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore (JLOTS) system to convey supplies to the Trident pier and causeway Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore (JLOTS) pier that will be assembled by the Army's Transportation Corps.

Beach Group One, based in San Diego, is a command that provides beachmasters and LCAC air cushion landing craft to amphibious warfare ships, as well as a JLOTS.

The JLOTS equipment – positioned in Jacksonville, Florida – will be transported to the Mediterranean on three sealift ships – 2nd USNS LT John P. Bobo, USNS 1st LT Baldomero Lopez, and Maritime Administration's Ready Reserve Force ship Roy P. Benevidez – with the latter transporting Army equipment. The ships will deploy nonstop straight to operations area and remain on station off Gaza to provide berthing and support for the Sailors and Soldiers involved in the relief operation. The Beach Group One personnel will be flown to the Mediterranean to join their equipment.

The official said the Navy would be sending 260 personnel to the operation, including augmentees from Beach Group Two and Navy Cargo Handling Battalion One. The personnel would include boatswain's mates, Seabees, hospital corpsmen, quartermasters, and operations specialists, as well as other ratings.

The beach group will assemble a Roll-On/Roll Off Discharge Facility (RRDF), a 72-foot-by-270-foot floating platform built from nine sections that join together. The official said the RRDF takes four-to-five days to assemble. The RRDF, positioned three miles from the beach, will be moored alongside ships to accept their cargo containers, offloaded onto the RRDF by cranes. The containers are then loaded onto lighterage that are moved by tugboats to the Army Trident pier, which is attached to a causeway that leads to the shore. The containers are then trucked ashore by the tractor-trailers.

The sealift ships and the JLOTS will be supported by medium landing craft, repair craft, and small boats.

The JLOTS was last used in Exercise Talisman Saber in July 2023. The official said that the JLOTS is assembled regularly for training and proficiency, usually once or twice per year.

The official confirmed that no U.S. military personnel will be operating ashore in Gaza. Contract personnel will be used to drive the tractor-trailers onto the pier to receive the

cargo.

The duration of the operation is yet to be determined. The official said the beach group would be meeting whatever was required by its operational commander. He said the command-and-control structure in the theater was still being worked out.

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.

GA-ASI Tests Sonobuoy Dispensing System with MQ-9B Seaguardian UAV



SAN DIEGO – 20 March 2024 – On Feb. 27, 2024, General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Inc. (GA-ASI), in cooperation with the Naval Air Systems Command (NAVAIR), conducted a series of tests on GA-ASI's Sonobuoy Dispensing System (SDS) using the MQ-9B SeaGuardian Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) on the U.S. Navy's W-291 test range in southern California.

GA-ASI's SeaGuardian flew the full test flight event configured with the SDS pod and SeaVue multi-role radar from Raytheon, an RTX business. During the test, the SDS pod dropped eight AN/SSQ-53 and two AN/SSQ-62 sonobuoys. Upon dispensing, the sonobuoys were successfully monitored by the SeaGuardian's onboard Sonobuoy Monitoring and Control System (SMCS).

"This was a very successful demonstration of our SDS capability," said GA-ASI President David R. Alexander. "The demonstration helped us prove out the SDS, which is an important component for our Anti-Submarine Warfare capability."

The SeaGuardian was flown under a NAVAIR Interim Flight Clearance. The SDS pod is fitted with an advanced pneumatic ejection system developed, designed, and manufactured by AEREA in Italy. AEREA also supplies the internal structure assembly.

MQ-9B SeaGuardian is a medium-altitude, long-endurance RPA system. Its multi-domain capabilities allow it to flex from mission to mission. SeaGuardian has been used by the U.S. in several recent demonstrations, including Northern Edge, Integrated Battle Problem and Group Sail. The aircraft is currently being operated by the [Japan Coast Guard](#) (JCG) and the [Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force](#) (JMSDF).