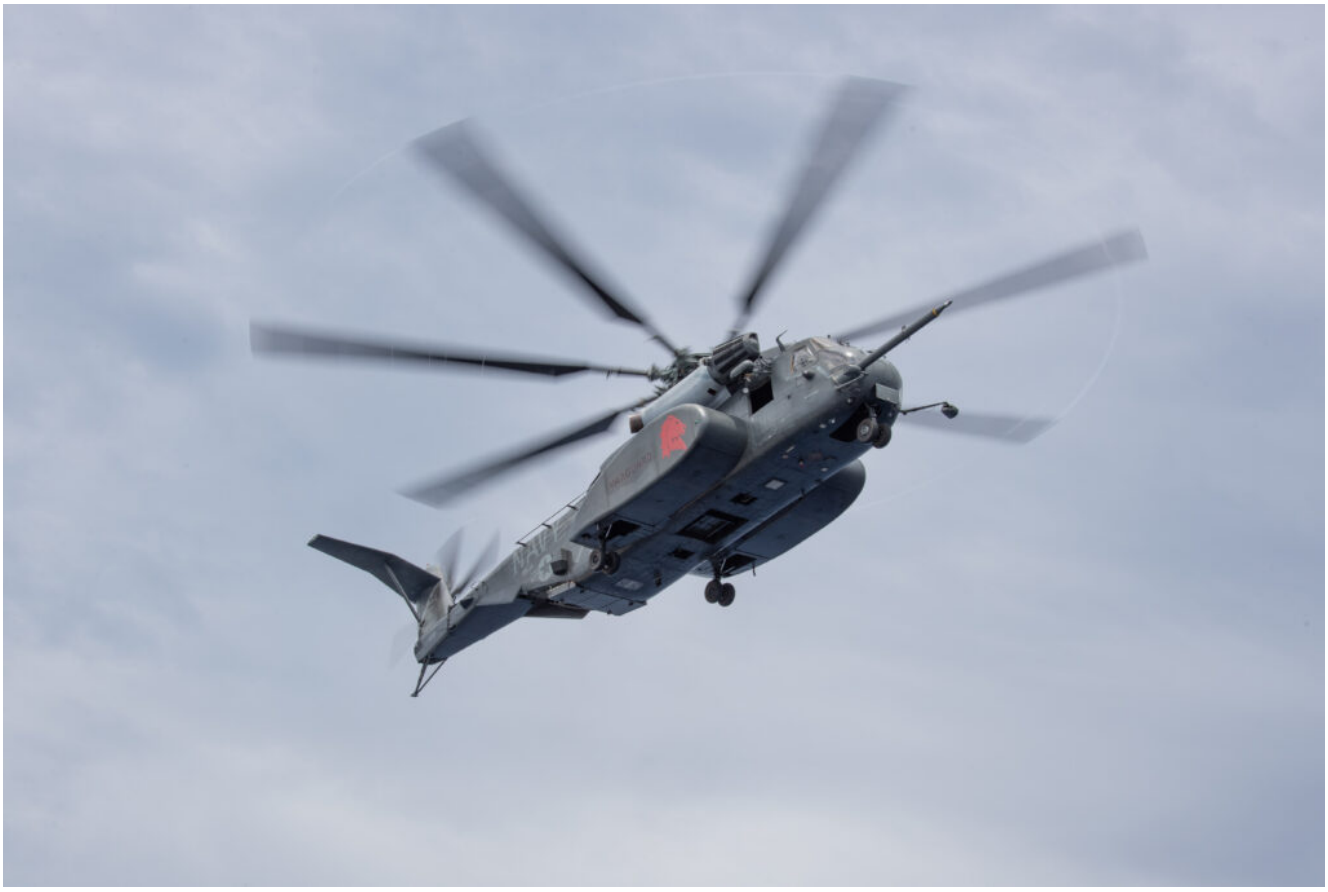
HM-14 Squadron Makes its Final Flight in MH-53E Helicopter



An MH-53E Sea Dragon, attached to the “Vanguard” of Helicopter Mine Countermeasures Squadron takes off from the Ford-class aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford’s (CVN 78) flight deck, June 16, 2022. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Jackson Adkins*

NORFOLK, Va. – The World-Famous Vanguard of Helicopter Mine Countermeasures Fourteen (HM-14) flew the final flight of the squadron in Norfolk, Virginia, on Dec. 8, said the squadron’s commanding officer, Cdr. Nicklaus Smith, in a release.

After nearly 45 years of service, flying the RH-53D and the MH-53E, the Vanguard are officially de-activating in July 2023. The sailors of HM-14 have served and flown on every continent in the world over their 45-year history and have

been a part of numerous critical military operations. With the Navy's decision to develop and field new technologies and approaches to mine countermeasures, to include a family of manned and unmanned systems, the MH-53E Sea Dragon is entering its final years of service.

HM-14 is the first of the Navy's two operational MH-53E squadrons to disestablish, ending a run of 45 years of service to the country. Throughout its history, the squadron underwent numerous changes to its manning and structure and even introduced a new helicopter, but always remained steadfast to Norfolk, Virginia.

Some of HM-14's aircraft and personnel will be absorbed by sister squadron HM-15.

The tens of thousands of sailors who called HM-14 home have served the community well, and many have permanently called Hampton Roads home. The final sailors of HM-14 have finished strong over the last year few years, winning the Battle E award in both 2020 and 2021.

"There is no greater honor than serving our fellow citizens of the USA, and doing it maintaining and flying the world's biggest and most powerful helicopter! We have so much fun doing what we do, and playing a small part in maintaining freedom in America and around the world!" Smith said. "I'm so proud of all the sailors of the Vanguard, both past and present, who have served with distinction. Our alumni have attained MCPON [master chief petty officer of the Navy] and Admiral, but I'm most proud of the young men and women who gave blood, sweat and tears, in challenging environments across the world, and kept the Big Iron flying!"

Attack Submarine USS California Returns from Deployment

GROTON, Conn. – The Virginia-class fast-attack submarine USS California (SSN 781) returned home to Naval Submarine Base New London on Thursday, Dec. 8, after a four-month deployment, said Lt. Cmdr. Seth Koenig of Commander, Submarine Force Atlantic, in a release.

“Our submarines provide our nation with unmatched stealth and firepower that can be wielded at any time,” said Capt. Thomas O’Donnell, commander of Submarine Squadron 12, under which California operates. “Cmdr. Henry and his California crew exhibited that high state of readiness and effectiveness over the last several months by executing a short-notice, unscheduled surge deployment to the European Command area of operations. We’re glad to welcome them home now to spend the holidays with their families after another job well-done.”

After California moored to the pier, the ship’s Petty Officer 3rd Class Louis Longwell and his girlfriend Sabine Saladrigas were recognized with the ceremonial first kiss on the pier, while Senior Chief Petty Officer Joseph Wisniewski and his three children were recognized with the ceremonial first hug.

Lt. Tom Krysil, California’s navigator, met his baby son, Christopher, for the first time. Krysil’s wife – and Christopher’s mother – is Molly Krysil, who is also a submarine-qualified Navy officer.

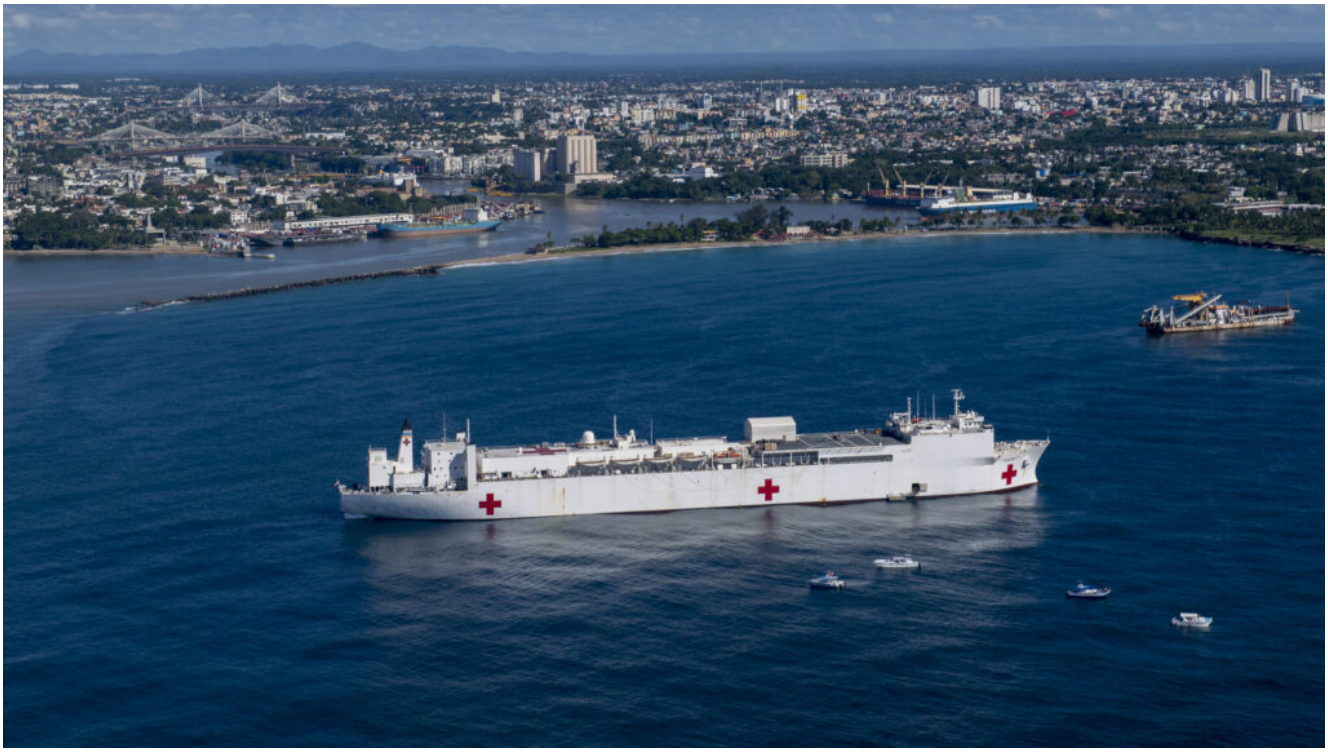
“I’m incredibly proud of the crew of California, who showed once again that America’s Submarine Force is agile and mission ready at all times,” said Cmdr. James Henry, commanding officer of USS California. “This is a dedicated, hard-working

team of Sailors and I’m honored to serve alongside them at sea. As with any operational period, we couldn’t do it without the love, support and sacrifice of our families back home, and I’m happy to lead this crew home for the holidays.”

USS California was commissioned on Oct. 29, 2011. SSN 781 is the seventh U.S. warship commissioned under the name California, following a Tennessee-class battleship active during World War II and the 1974 lead ship of a class of nuclear-powered guided missile cruisers, among others. The submarine California has a crew of more than 130 personnel, is more than 377 feet long and can displace nearly 7,900 tons.

Fast-attack submarines are multi-mission platforms enabling five of the six Navy maritime strategy core capabilities — sea control, power projection, forward presence, maritime security and deterrence. They are designed to excel in anti-submarine warfare, anti-ship warfare, strike warfare, special operations, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, irregular warfare and mine warfare. Fast-attack submarines project power ashore with special operations forces and Tomahawk cruise missiles in the prevention or response to regional crises.

USNS Comfort Completes Continuing Promise 2022 Stop in the Dominican Republic



The hospital ship USNS Comfort (T-AH 20) sits anchored in the harbor of Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic on Nov. 27, 2022. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Deven Fernandez*

SANTO DOMINGO, Dominican Republic – U.S. Navy hospital ship USNS Comfort (T-AH 20) completed its fourth mission stop of Continuing Promise 2022 in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, Dec. 6, 2022, Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Sophia Simons of the U.S. Fourth Fleet said in a Dec. release.

For the duration of the 10-day visit to the Dominican Republic, the Comfort team, comprised of medical professionals from the U.S., the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Canada, U.K., the Netherlands and Chile, service members from the Puerto Rico National Guard, and interpreters and medical students, provided care for 4,435 patients at the medical sites in Santo Domingo and Azua. The team also filled 7,446 prescriptions, conducted 209 x-rays and 78 ultrasounds, and performed 87 surgeries aboard the ship.

“The Comfort team hit their stride in the Dominican Republic, incorporating lessons learned from previous port stops and improving our process daily,” said Cmdr. Bryan Carmichael,

commodore of Amphibious Squadron (PHIBRON) 4. “Despite the added difficulty of two medical sites, rough seas and transportation of two medical sites equipment via helicopter, the Continuing Promise team adapted and carried out their mission in stride with the utmost professionalism. As we prepare for our last mission stop, the team will continue to improve on these lessons learned, maintaining an attitude of gratefulness towards the experience gained along the way.”

In addition to providing medical assistance, the Comfort worked alongside the local government and 25 non-government organizations to conduct subject matter expert exchanges (SMEEs), Women, Peace and Security (WPS) initiative seminars and activities, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) projects, and community relations (COMREL), in line with Continuing Promise lines of effort.

Twelve SMEEs were completed during the mission stop in the form of basic life support, side-by-side at hospital Moscoso Puello, veterinary services, food safety, dermatology and other subject areas. This support allowed for a total of 12,941 personnel from the community to be engaged by the Comfort Team, along with the two medical sites.

Working alongside the Dominican Ministry of Women, the team hosted two women’s health fairs, a military-to-military roundtable and a volleyball event to support the WPS line of effort.

To enhance HADR readiness, Comfort organized an academics day, held a mass fire drill alongside the “Chargers” of Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 26, directed SMEE and aircraft loading training.

Additionally, military and civilian personnel assigned to Comfort participated in three COMRELs in conjunction with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and

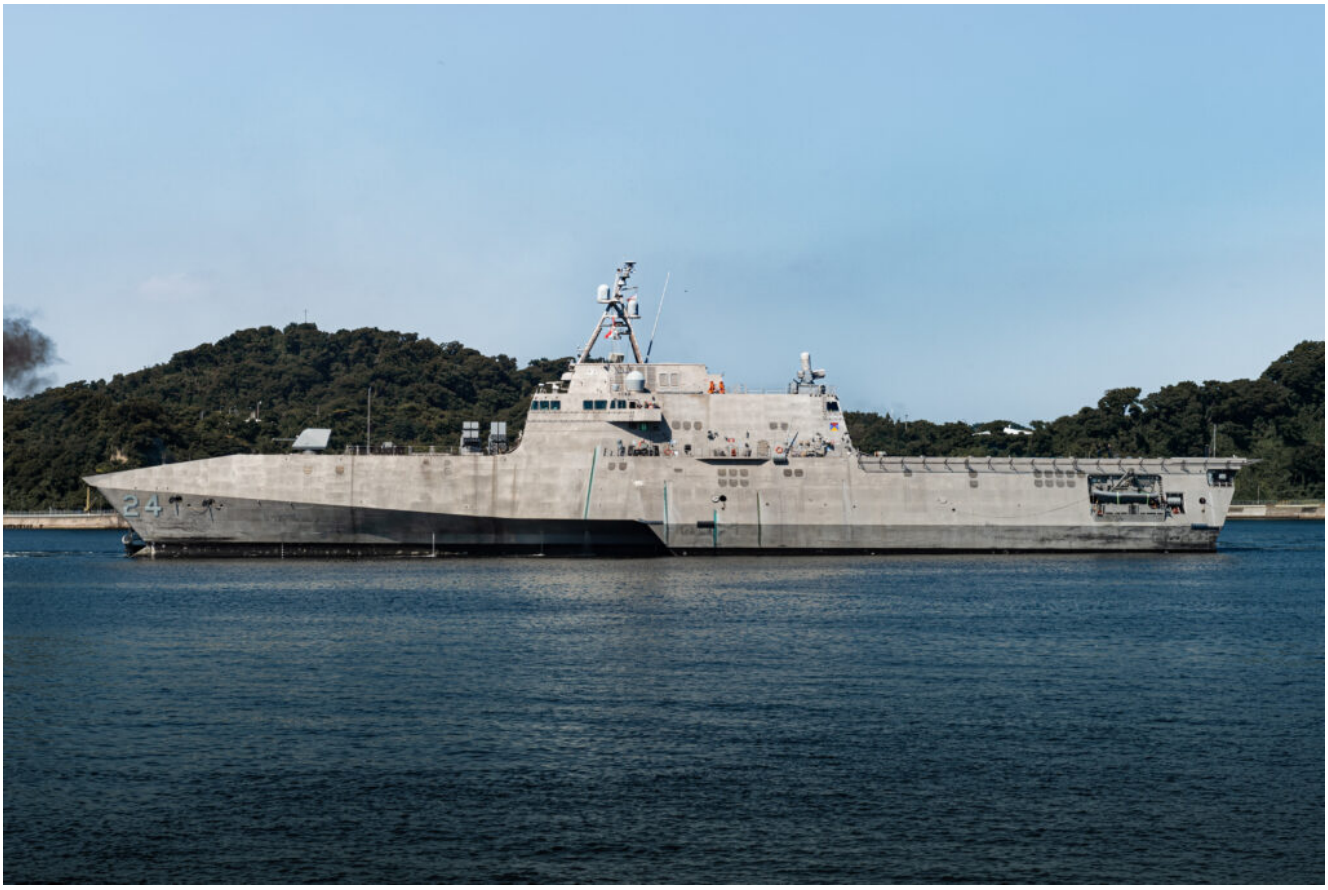
local schools to provide education exchanges for the students in the community. Concurrently, members of the U.S. Fleet Forces Band supported mission events, held concerts and fostered the Empowerment Through Music program.

“This multi-national public-private multi-service team demonstrated the power of partnership, as well as demonstrated how health security is national security.” said Gen. Laura Richardson, “This team has changed lives and built relationships that will last a long time. In working together, we are striving to build a future with our partners, neighbors and friends. It’s a future based on mutual respect, protection of sovereignty, defense of democracy and service to the citizens of this great country.”

Since the inauguration of Continuing Promise in 2007, Comfort medical teams have treated more than 484,000 patients, which comprises over 83% of the patients treated during all Continuing Promise missions, and conducted more than 7,400 surgeries, including over 800 surgeries during the 2010 earthquake relief mission in Haiti. Comfort’s current mission is the 12th Continuing Promise mission conducted in U.S. Southern Command/U.S. 4th Fleet area of responsibility.

U.S. Naval Forces Southern Command/U.S. 4th Fleet supports U.S. Southern Command’s joint and combined military operations by employing maritime forces in cooperative maritime security operations to maintain access, enhance interoperability, and build enduring partnerships in order to enhance regional security and promote peace, stability and prosperity in the Caribbean, Central and South American region.

Saab Receives US Navy Readiness Support Tasking for Littoral Combat Ships



The Independence-variant littoral combat ship USS Oakland (LCS 24) arrives at Commander, Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) for a scheduled port visit. Oakland is currently operating in the U.S. 7th Fleet area of operations. *U.S NAVY / Seaman Darren Cordoviz*

STERLING, Va. – The Naval Surface Warfare Center – Port Hueneme Division (NSWC PHD) awarded Saab Inc. (Saab) two new tasks via modifications awarded Sept. 26 and 29, 2022, to provide readiness support to the Independence-class Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) fleet. The funded value of these tasks totals $19.2 million and was booked in the third quarter of 2022.

The first of the two tasks, valued at USD 10.1 million,

requires Saab to produce an AN/SPS-77 ship radar system (also known as Sea Giraffe AMB), as a government-owned test system to support development, test and evaluation for emerging operational requirements. The system will allow Saab to more rapidly develop and implement changes, and so more efficiently provide those changes to the radars on the ships. It will be located at Saab's headquarters in Syracuse, New York.

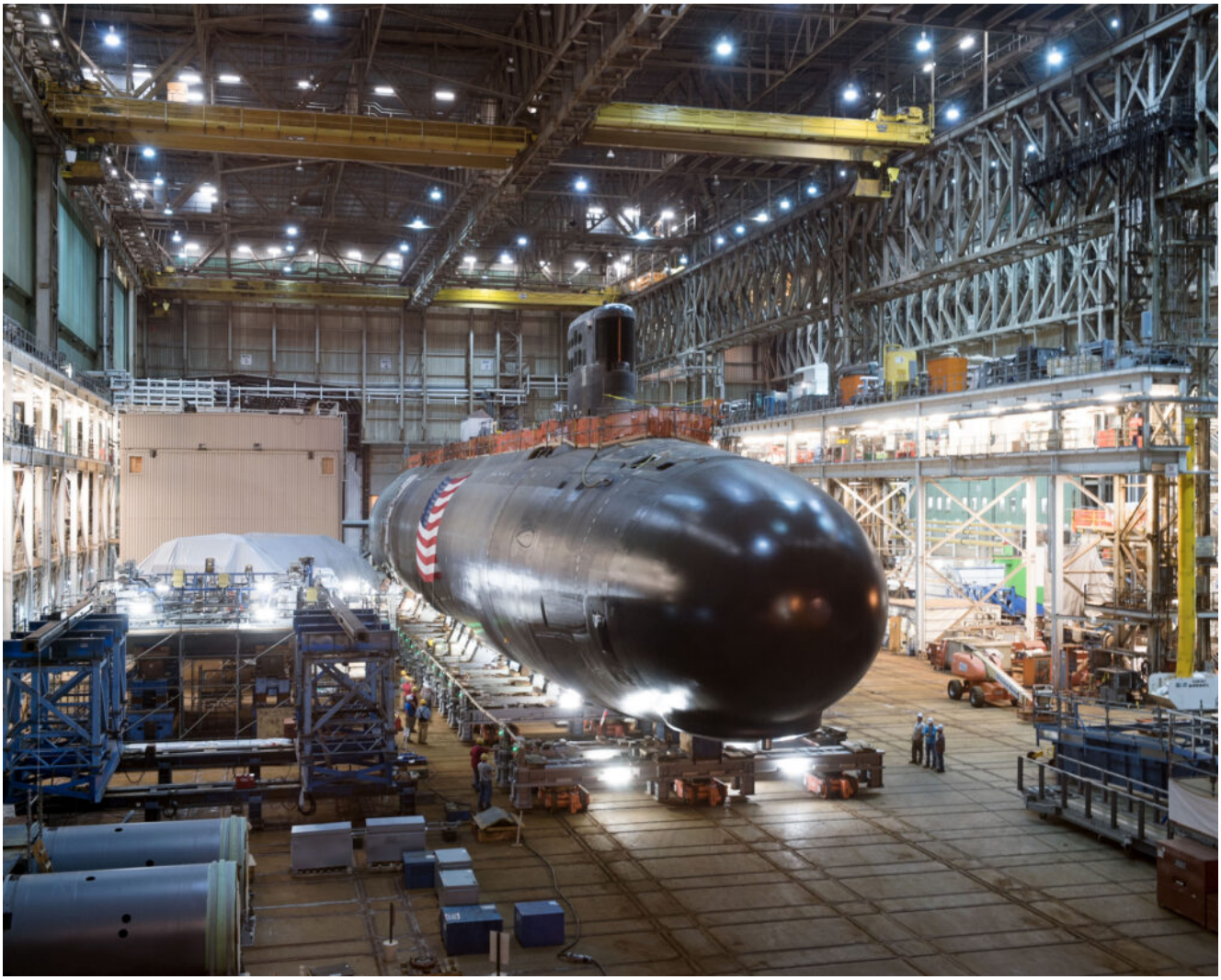
The second task, valued at USD 9.1 million, will see Saab delivering Maintenance Assist Modules (MAMs) kits.

"This award is in direct response to input received from the Navy's technical authorities and sailors on the ships about what is most needed to support their ships at sea," said Erik Smith, president and CEO of Saab Inc. "We greatly value the opportunity to increase the readiness and capability of LCS and look forward to completing this work at our facility in Syracuse, New York."

The AN/SPS-77 is a multi-role medium-range 3D surveillance radar system for maritime operations. It provides simultaneous air and surface surveillance and is suitable for demanding naval environments from the littorals to blue-water operations. Saab has built a center of radar excellence in central New York, supporting radars on seven classes of Navy and Coast Guard ships, and also produces a substantial portion of the Ground/Air Task-Oriented Radar system for the U.S. Marine Corps.

Navy Authenticates Keel for

Future Attack Submarine USS Arizona



The future USS Arizona will be similar to this Virginia-class attack submarine shown in the General Dynamics Electric Boat shipyard in Groton, Connecticut. *GENERAL DYNAMICS*

WASHINGTON – Senior Navy leaders, elected officials and industry partners gathered at General Dynamics Electric Boat's Quonset Point Facility, Dec. 7, to attend a keel-authentication ceremony for future Virginia-class submarine USS Arizona (SSN 803), Team Submarine Public Affairs said in a release.

The submarine will be the first U.S. naval vessel to bear the name Arizona since battleship USS Arizona (BB 39) was sunk during the attack on Pearl Harbor on Dec. 7, 1941. After being

struck with several bombs, Arizona burned for two days and more than 1100 of her crew were lost. The lives lost during the attack are now permanently memorialized by the USS Arizona Memorial, erected over her sunken hull in the berth she has occupied since that historic day.

“The boats in this class are the most advanced attack submarines ever designed. Their stealth, firepower and maneuverability are superior to every other attack submarine force in the world. Additionally, Arizona will be the first of the Virginia-class equipped with the Virginia Payload Module, enabling the submarine to deliver an even wider variety of capabilities,” said Rear Adm. Jonathan Rucker, Program Executive Officer, Attack Submarines. “Building, operating and maintaining Arizona and other Virginia-class subs is crucial to ensuring the Navy’s ability to project power in an ever-shifting global threat environment, and to maintaining peace and the free operation of our sea lanes.”

The ship’s sponsor, Nikki Stratton, is the granddaughter of Donald Stratton, who was serving as a Seaman First Class aboard Arizona during the 1941 attack. Badly burned, he was discharged in 1942, but successfully reenlisted in 1944 and returned to the Western Pacific serving aboard destroyer USS Stack (DD 406) to fight in New Guinea, the Philippines and the Battle of Okinawa. Stratton spent the remainder of his life helping honor those who gave their lives during the attack on Pearl Harbor and other battles. He died at the age of 97, in February 2020.

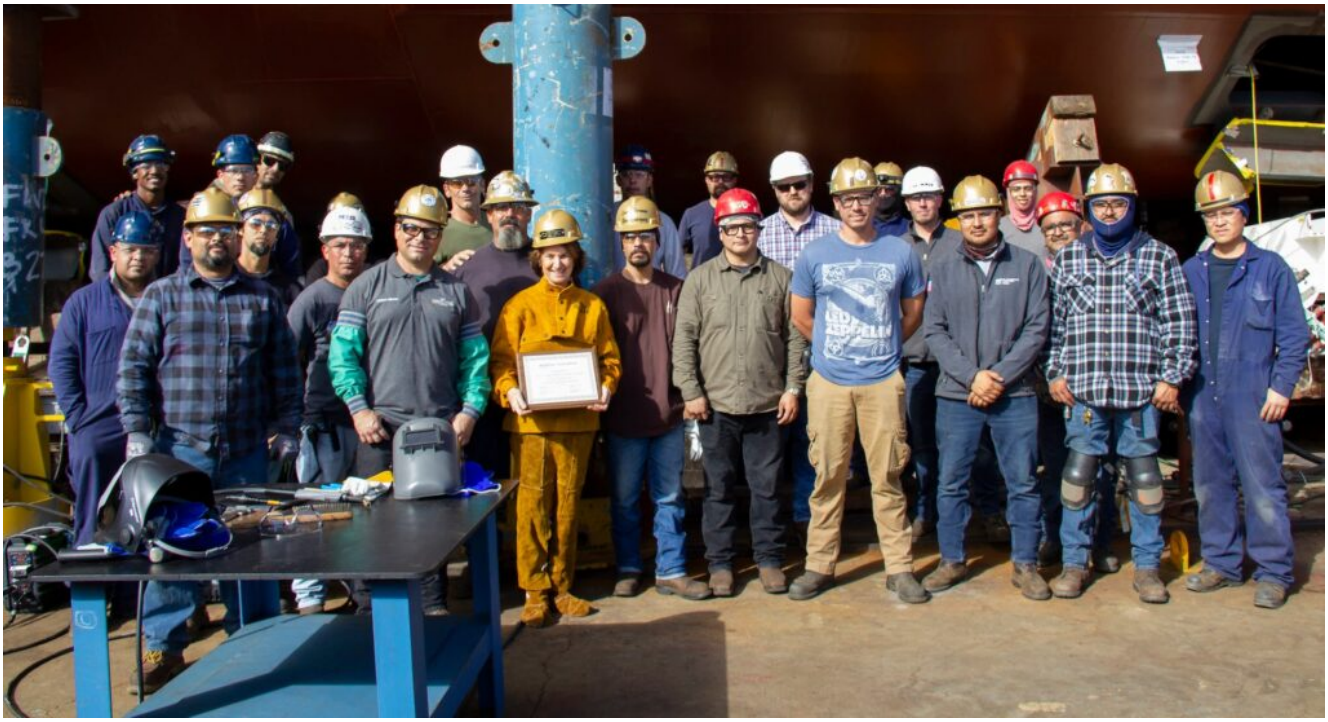
Per Navy tradition, the ship’s sponsor’s initials were welded onto a steel plate to be permanently mounted in a place of honor on the completed vessel.

Arizona will be the 30th Virginia-class submarine. Boats in this class can hit shore-based targets with highly accurate Tomahawk cruise missiles and are capable of long-term, stealth

surveillance of sea forces, littoral waters or ground targets. Their design also provides for Special Forces delivery and support, mine delivery and minefield mapping, and anti-submarine and anti-ship warfare.

Arizona's Virginia Payload Module will comprise four large-diameter, vertical payload tubes in a new hull section inserted into the existing Virginia-class submarine design. The tubes enable the submarine to deliver a variety of capabilities, including weapons, unmanned undersea vehicles and other undersea payloads.

Keel Authenticated for Future USNS Robert F. Kennedy



The Honorable Kathleen Kennedy Townsend etched her initials into the keel plate for the future USNS Robert F. Kennedy Dec. 5. *U.S. NAVY*

WASHINGTON – The keel for the future USNS Robert F. Kennedy

(T-AO 208), the Navy's 4th John Lewis-class fleet replenishment oiler, was laid at General Dynamics National Steel and Shipbuilding Company Dec. 5, Team Ships Public Affairs said in a release.

A keel laying is the recognition of the start of a ship's construction. It is the joining together of a ship's modular components and the authentication or etching of an honoree's initials into a ceremonial keel plate. The ship's sponsor, the Honorable Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, etched her initials into the keel plate.

"We are excited to celebrate this milestone as we work to bring another oiler to the fleet to support at-sea operations," said Jana Polzin, deputy program manager, Auxiliary and Special Mission Shipbuilding Program Office. "The USNS Robert F. Kennedy will bring significant contributions to the fleet as the primary fuel pipeline to refuel ships at sea."

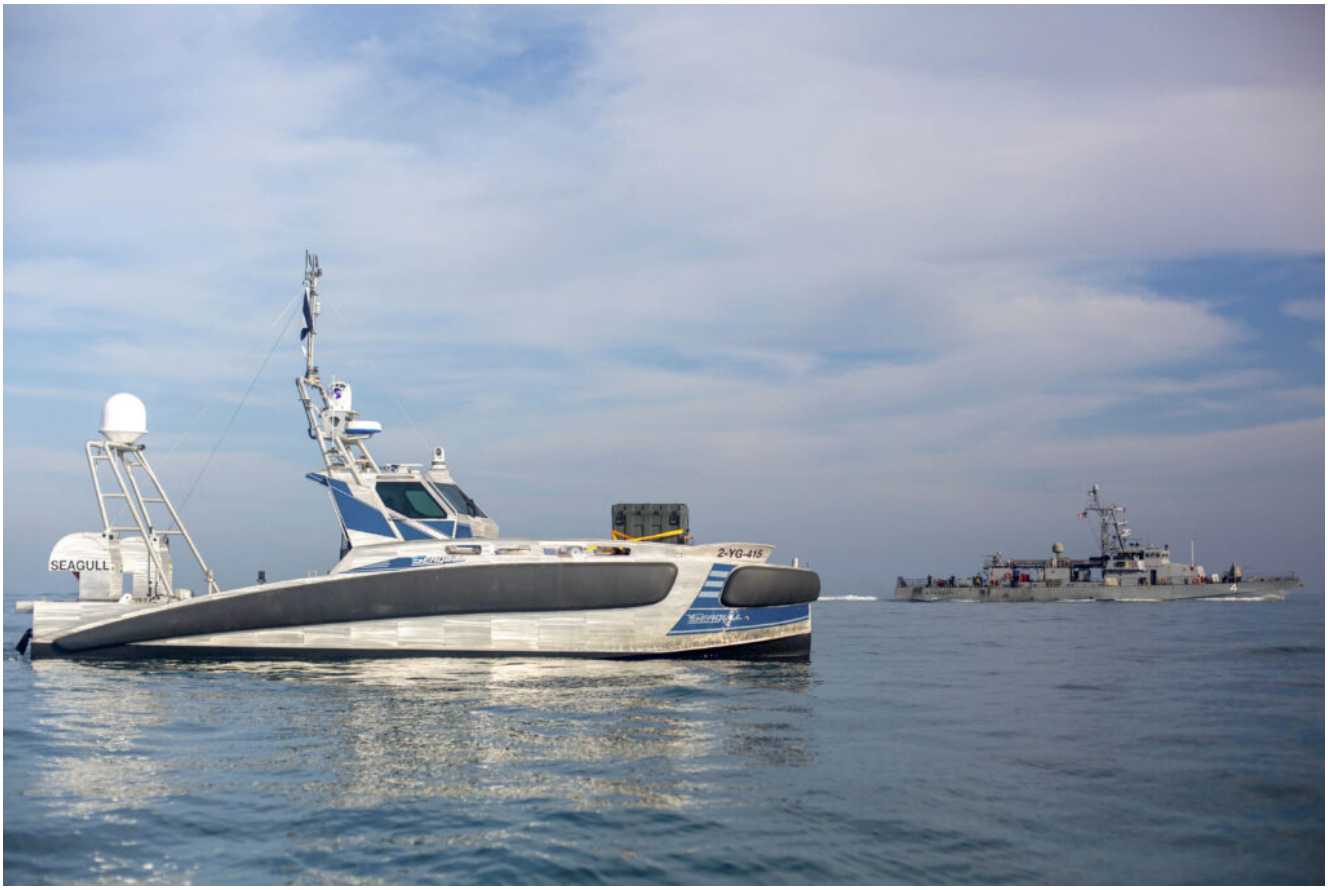
USNS Robert F. Kennedy is based on commercial design standards and will recapitalize the current T-AO 187 Class Fleet Replenishment Oilers to provide underway replenishment of fuel to U.S. Navy ships and jet fuel for aircraft assigned to aircraft carriers.

The oilers feature substantial volume for oil, a significant dry cargo capacity, aviation capability and a speed of 20 knots. NASSCO designed the new vessels with double hulls to protect against oil spills and strengthened cargo and ballast tanks. The new T-AOs will add capacity to the Navy's Combat Logistics Force and become the cornerstone of the fuel delivery system.

NASSCO is currently in production on the future USNS Lucy Stone (T-AO 209) as well as in production on two Expeditionary Sea Bases (ESB) – the future USS John L. Canley (ESB 6) and USS Robert E. Simanek (ESB 7). They also have the future USNS

Sojourner Truth (T-AO 210), the future USNS Thurgood Marshall (T-AO 211) and the future USNS Ruth Bader Ginsburg (T-AO 212) as well as ESB 8 under contract.

Maritime Domain Awareness Starts with Seeing What's on the Sea



An Elbit Systems Seagull unmanned surface vessel operates alongside the patrol coastal ship USS Monsoon (PC 4) in the Arabian Gulf, Nov. 29, during Digital Horizon 2022. The three-week unmanned and artificial intelligence integration event involves employing new platforms in the region for the first time. U.S. ARMY / Sgt. Brandon Murphy

MANAMA, Bahrain – The U.S. Fifth Fleet's Task Force 59 is

conducting Digital Horizon, an unmanned systems demonstration featuring a flotilla of different unmanned surface vessels to help build maritime awareness.

Digital Horizon is one of the ways that Task Force 59 is moving ahead with its objective of establish an international fleet of 100 unmanned systems by next summer.

While several platforms are currently operationally deployed by TF 59, Digital Horizon brought 10 new systems to Bahrain to work together to use their sensors and unique capabilities to share data to TF 59's shore-based Robotics Operations Center (ROC) by means of a communication "mesh network." At the ROC, the information is processed and analyzed using artificial intelligence and machine learning to sift through the voluminous data and determine what is normal activity and what is extraordinary so the abnormal contacts can be further investigated.

The unmanned surface vehicles (USVs) taking part in Digital Horizon include Elbit Systems' Seagull; Exail DriX; L3Harris Arabian Fox and MAST-13; Marine Advanced Robotics WAM-V; MARTAC's MANTAS T-38 and Devil Ray T-12; Ocean Aero TRITON; Open Ocean Robotics Data Xplorer; Saildrone Explorer; Seasats X3; and SeaTrac SP-48. Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) are also participating in Digital Horizon, including two vertical take-off and landing systems, Aerovel's Flexrotor and Shield AI's V-BAT, as well as Easy Aerial's tethered UAV, which is carried in a container on top of one of the USVs.

Silvus Technologies is providing the line-of-sight radio communications system and Accenture Federal Services and Big Bear AI are providing data integration and artificial intelligence systems for the exercise. An Ocius USV is also operating off Western Australia and linking into the network.

Each of the different participating platforms offer unique specialized capabilities and attributes. All carried basic

sensors such as cameras and AIS transponders. Some had more sophisticated sensor payloads like radar and meteorological. Some are relatively large and fast, while others are small but able to remain at sea for extended periods. Some could deploy small USVs or small aerial surveillance drones, and one could submerge and operate underwater. The USVs had various means of power and propulsion, including diesel engines, solar panels and sails.

The companies that have brought their systems to the exercise responded to a call for industry partners to share their technology and help TF 59 learn how to build effective networks and evaluate commercially available systems capable of performing well in the harsh at-sea environment in the Fifth Fleet area of operations. A selection committee of experts from different disciplines measured the dozens of candidate systems and technologies against a set of criteria to pick the companies to come and take part in Digital Horizon.

For Digital Horizon, Capt. Michael Brasseur, commander of Task Force 59, said TF 59 and the industry partners are taking a methodical approach. “For the purposes of our exercise, we are at the early stages, getting our communications and network established. Then we’ll start daytime operations, and then we’ll go 24/7. What we’re trying to do is not easy to accomplish with these different platforms and technologies, particularly here in the challenging operating environment of the Arabian Gulf.”

While reporters were able to see USVs on the pier, being placed in the water, and operating at sea, Brasseur said the exercise will later employ the UAVs, with the information from each of the platforms “all integrated on a single pane of glass” at the ROC.

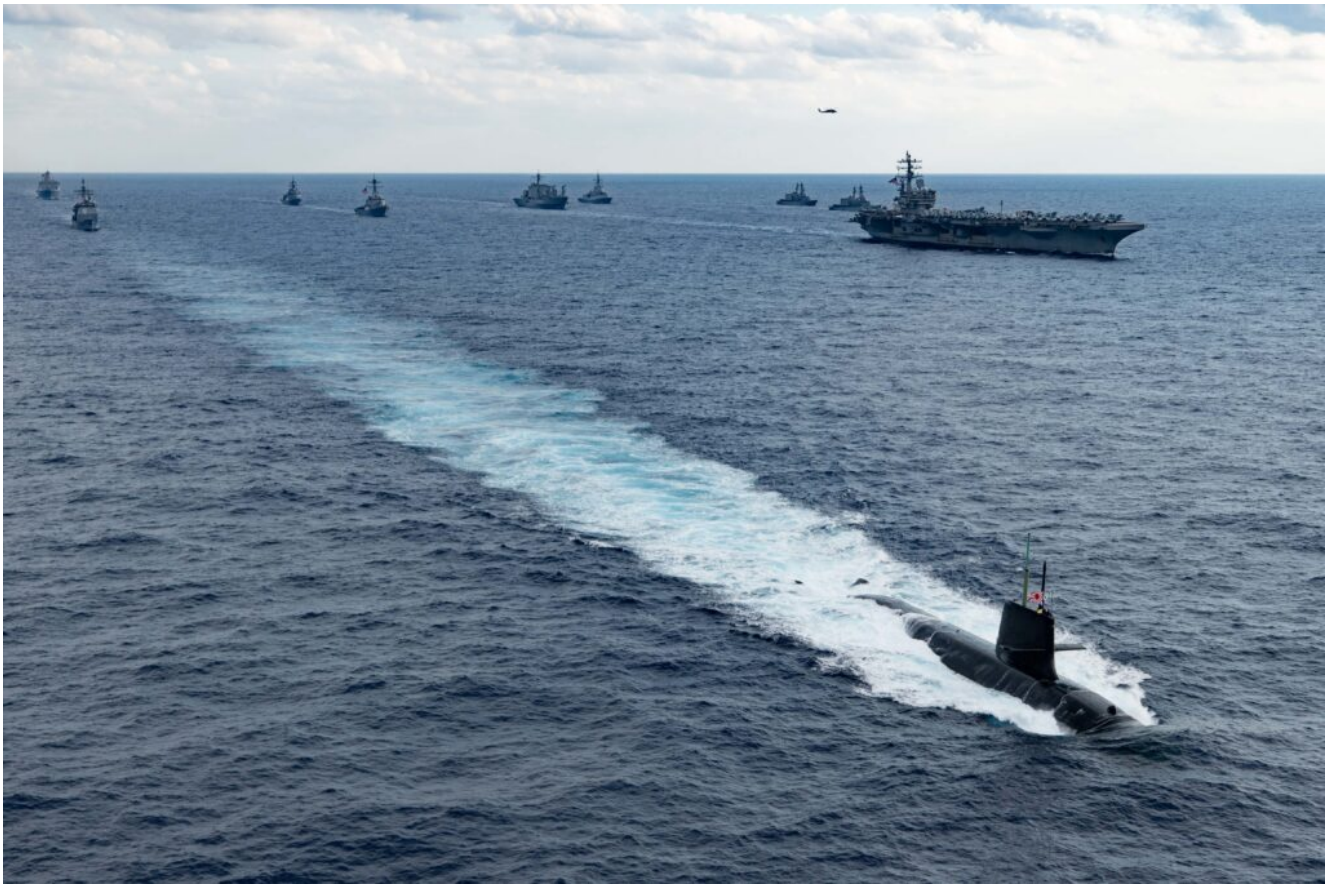
“We’ll be running a series of vignettes that emulate real-world operations around this region to test how these systems

perform and how the data is integrated," Brasseur said. "We've been working through our communications and making sure we were able to receive and present live video and radar feeds, and making sure that data flow could be integrated into the system where we can leverage the machine learning and AI moving forward with the exercise. The scenarios and the challenges will become more complex as the exercise progresses. We'll have a better understanding of the limitations of the sensors and the communications, as well as the power of the machine learning and AI to make sense of all the data."

TF 59 is already deploying USVs from operational hubs in Bahrain and Aqaba, Jordan, with the objective of having 100 operational platforms by summer 2023. According to Brasseur, meeting that goal will be achieved by including partner nations in the region with a shared interest in creating the most complete understanding of the maritime environment. Digital Horizon will inform how best to employ the available technology to achieve that goal.

"The pace of innovation is amazing," said Brasseur. "We are challenging our industry partners in one of the most difficult operational environments, and they are responding with enhanced capability, fast."

INDOPACOM's Aquilino: Ukraine Situation Could Happen in Taiwan



Ships from the U.S. Navy, Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF), Royal Navy, Royal Australian Navy and Royal Canadian Navy break away from formation after Keen Sword 23 in the Philippine Sea, Nov. 14, 2022. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Louis Thompson Staats IV*

SIMI Valley, Calif. — The situation in Ukraine could easily happen in Taiwan if the main actors aren't careful, a top admiral warned during comments at the Reagan National Defense Forum here on Dec. 3.

Adm. John C. Aquilino, commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, said that while people were "surprised" at what happened in Europe with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, many aspects of it could be repeated in Taiwan should a conflict there erupt.

"This could happen in the Pacific region," he said. "We shouldn't be surprised that it can happen."

He said that he takes several lessons from the conflict in Ukraine that apply to Taiwan.

“Once the fight starts, it’s going to be really hard to end,” Aquilino said. “Which means we ought to take action now. We need a sense of urgency to deliver the force, the capabilities, the industrial base, the budgets and what is needed now to move as fast as possible to deliver deterrence and sustain our deterrence efforts.”

When asked why Taiwan was worth sending U.S. troops to die over a conflict there, Aquilino said Taiwan is “geographically and strategically important” to the United States.

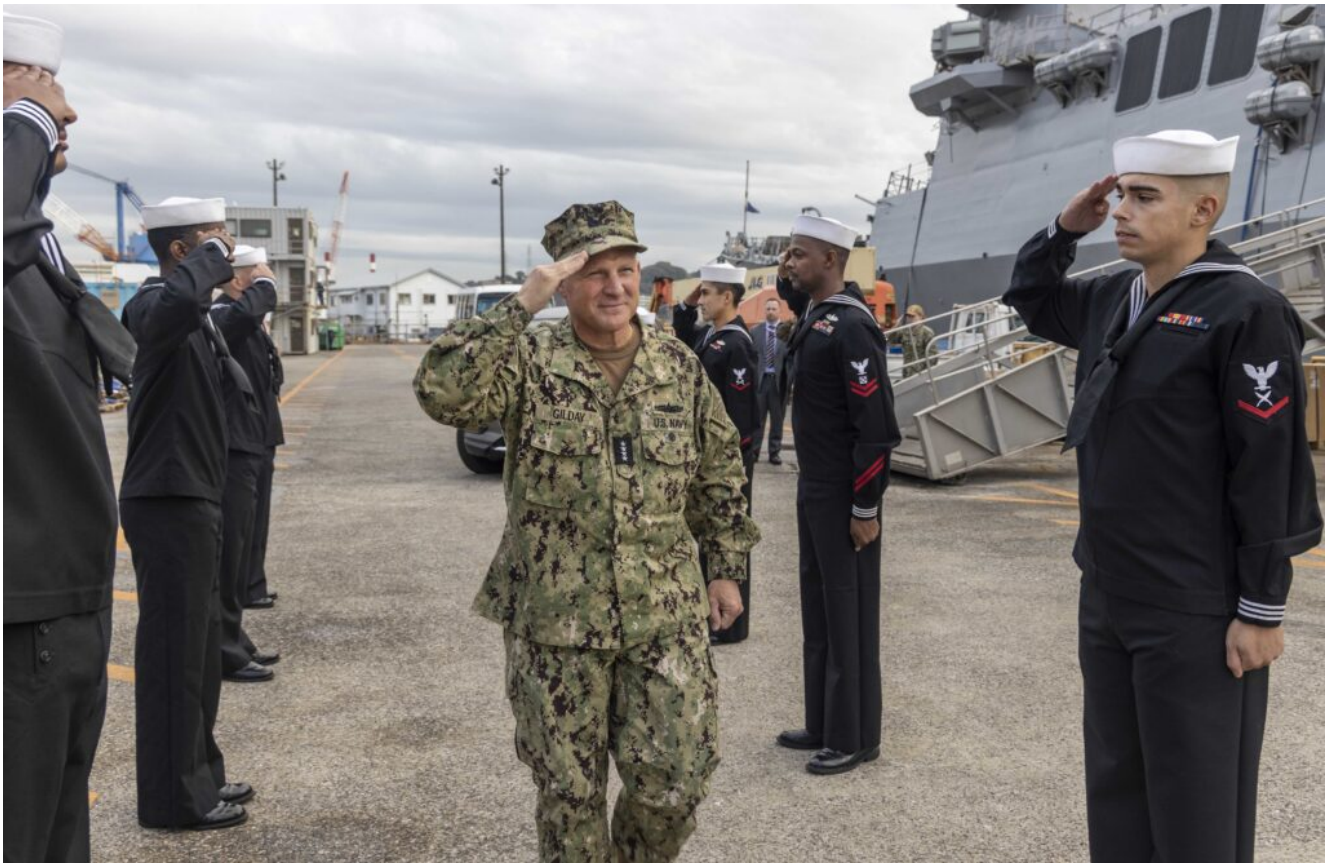
“There’s economic capabilities there that are important to the United States economy,” he said. “There’s a number of reasons why we believe it’s important.”

Aquilino said he hopes that his counterparts in China are also watching the Ukraine conflict and taking lessons from it, such as the necessity to avoid underestimating how difficult of an undertaking it would be to take Taiwan, and the fact that it will cost “blood and treasure.”

He also warned China that the United States could enact sanctions that could have “500 times more devastating effects” than those on Russia because of how interconnected China was with the global economy. When the moderator pointed out that the same could be said of the United States and such sanctions could have a rebound effect, Aquilino said he was confident that the combined power of the United States, Japan and South Korea economies would “dwarf” China’s economy.

Aquilino pledged that the Navy will continue to perform military exercises in China’s backyard, claiming that the Navy performs 150 exercises in the Indo-Pacific region each year with allies.

CNO on China: Shipbuilders Can Expect High Revenue for Foreseeable Future



Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday salutes as he passes through sideboys while visiting the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Rafael Peralta (DDG 115) moored at Commander, Fleet Activities Yokosuka. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Deanna C. Gonzales*

SIMI VALLEY, Calif. – The defense contractors who run U.S. Navy shipyards can expect plenty of revenue in the coming years as the Navy faces off with China, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael Gilday said Dec. 3 at the Reagan National Defense Forum here.

Addressing a question about the U.S. Navy's ability to counter

China, Gilday said that the Navy had submitted to Congress the "largest shipbuilding budget in the history of the United States" at $27.5 billion, and that is likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

"You cannot throw much more money at the seven shipbuilders that build U.S. warships in the United States of America right now," Gilday said. "Their capacity is about at max, and Congress is helping us max them out. I would say the same thing for weapons production."

Gilday said that the Navy is very focused on supporting industry during this ramp-up in weapons production.

"If you take a look at our budget and where we're putting money, we are trying to send a very strong signal to industry that we need consistent, stable production lines for weapons with range and speed for a long time," he said.

Gilday did not directly answer the moderator's question about whether the Navy was prepared to counter a Chinese move on Taiwan, instead opting to tout the Navy's presence across the globe and readiness to react to any developing situation.

"About a third of the Navy is at sea today," Gilday said. "We have more ships in the European theater than the rest of the NATO nations combined – more than 25 ships. … We have ships right now in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea.

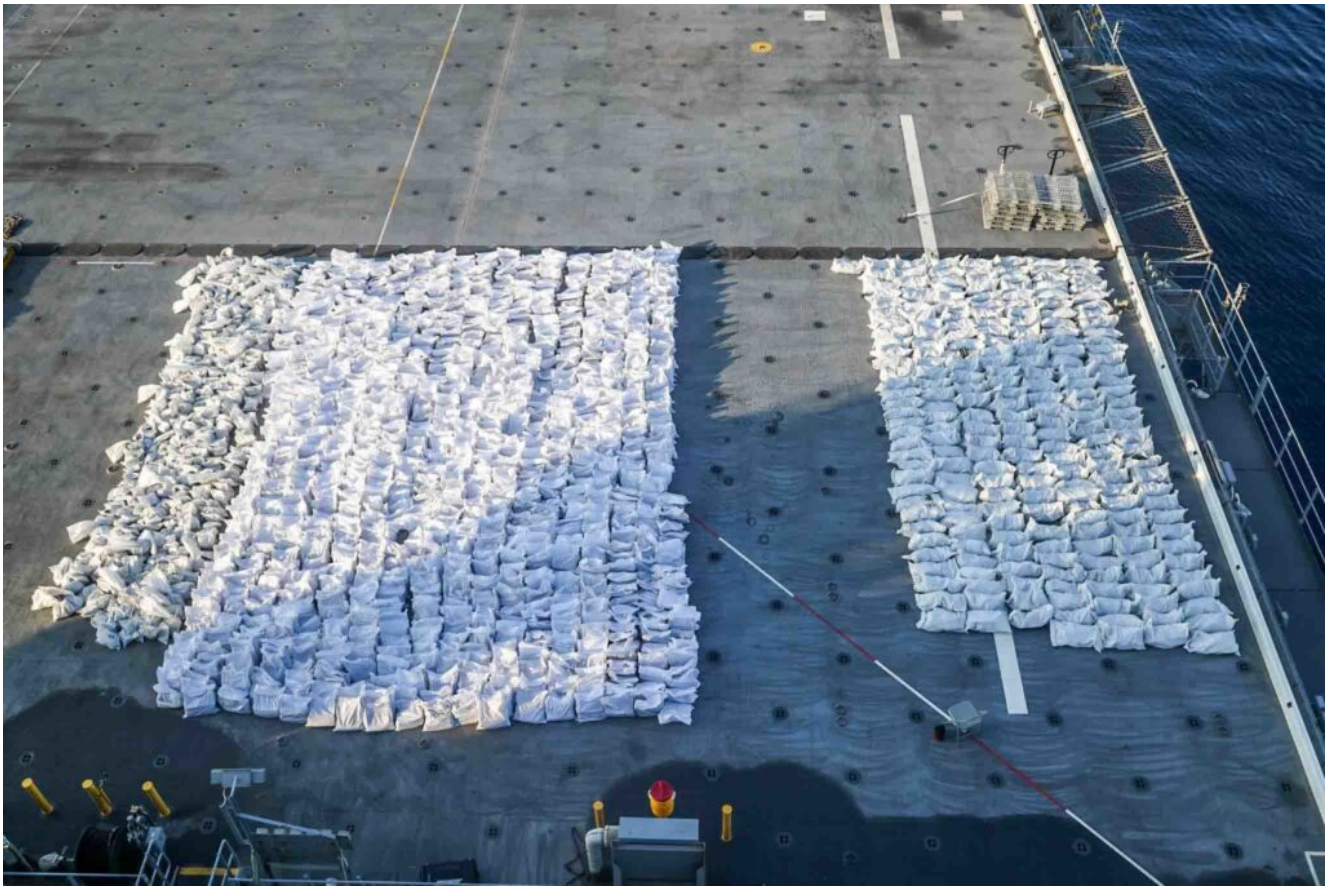
"We have significant overmatch in that domain against any competitor," he added.

He also appeared to imply that the U.S. Navy was in constant contact with the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN).

"The U.S. Navy is in contact with peer competitors on the sea, under the sea and in the air every single day," Gilday said.

“You see snippets of it with ships going through the Taiwan Strait and going nose-to-nose with Chinese ships. You see it with our aircraft in the eastern Mediterranean or by the Sea of Japan with the Russians.”

U.S. Seizes 1.1 Million Rounds of Ammunition, Illegal Weapons in Gulf of Oman



Bags containing more than 50 tons of fuses and propellants for rockets and ammunition rounds sit on the flight deck of expeditionary sea base USS Lewis B. Puller (ESB 3), Dec. 3. *U.S. NAVY*

MANAMA, Bahrain – On Dec. 1, U.S. naval forces in the Middle East intercepted a fishing trawler smuggling more than 50 tons

of ammunition rounds, fuses and propellants for rockets in the Gulf of Oman along a maritime route from Iran to Yemen, U.S. Naval Forces Central Command Public Affairs said in a Dec. 3 release.

Navy personnel operating from expeditionary sea base USS Lewis B. Puller (ESB 3) discovered the illicit cargo during a flag verification boarding, marking U.S. 5th Fleet's second major illegal weapons seizure within a month.

Forces from Lewis B. Puller found more than 1 million rounds of 7.62mm ammunition; 25,000 rounds of 12.7mm ammunition; nearly 7,000 proximity fuses for rockets; and over 2,100 kilograms of propellant used to launch rocket propelled grenades.

"This significant interdiction clearly shows that Iran's unlawful transfer of lethal aid and destabilizing behavior continues," said Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, commander of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command, U.S. 5th Fleet and Combined Maritime Forces. "U.S. naval forces remain focused on deterring and disrupting dangerous and irresponsible maritime activity in the region."

The direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer of weapons to the Houthis in Yemen violates U.N. Security Council Resolution 2216 and international law.

U.S. 5th Fleet previously intercepted a fishing vessel illegally shipping lethal aid from Iran to Yemen on Nov. 8. U.S. Coast Guard ship USCGC John Scheuerman (WPC 1146) and guided-missile destroyer USS The Sullivans (DDG 68) intercepted the vessel in the Gulf of Oman.

A weeklong search assisted by patrol coastal ship USS Hurricane (PC 3) and Navy explosive ordnance disposal technicians from U.S. 5th Fleet's Task Force 56 discovered more than 70 tons of ammonium perchlorate, a powerful oxidizer commonly used to make rocket and missile fuel as well as

explosives. U.S. forces also found more than 100 tons of urea fertilizer, a chemical compound with agricultural applications that is also known for use as an explosive precursor.

The U.S. 5th Fleet operating area includes 21 countries, the Arabian Gulf, Gulf of Oman, Red Sea, parts of the Indian Ocean and three critical choke points at the Strait of Hormuz, Bab al-Mandeb and Suez Canal.