

CNO Calls Unmanned MQ-4C Triton 'Game-Changing'



An MQ-4C Triton taxis after landing at Andersen Air Force Base, Guam, in January. U.S. Air Force/Senior Airman Ryan Brooks

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Navy's top officer said the high-altitude, high-endurance unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) is providing support to the fleet on its first deployment that was not available before.

"We're still committed to the [MQ-4C Triton]," Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael Gilday said, responding to a question from Sen. John Hoeven (R-N.D.) during a March 11 hearing of the Senate Appropriations Committee's Defense subcommittee.

"We just accelerated the deployment of our first two out to Guam, so they are on station and on mission right now," Gilday said. "The capabilities that the MQ-4 brings are game-changing in terms of long-range ISR [intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance] at altitude, with sensors that we haven't had supporting the fleet before."

"We just accelerated the deployment of our first two [MQ-4C Tritons] out to Guam, so they are on station and on mission right now."

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael Gilday

Gilday took the opportunity to mention the Navy's future unmanned, carrier-based aerial refueling aircraft, the MQ-25A Stingray, which is now in testing. He pointed out the aircraft's potential ISR sensing capability as well as its primary aerial refueling role.

Also testifying was Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David H.

Berger, who said ISR unmanned assets “would become even more important. It does complement the manned ISR platforms like an F-35, which is a flying sensor platform. Especially critical for the forward force, the Navy-Marine Corps expeditionary team that’s up forward, as a stand-in forward force. That’s your eyes and ears. The joint force has to have a picture of what’s in front of them. I would expect, four or five years from now, much more unmanned ISR and [in] 10 years exponentially more than that.”

Berger added that a family of all sizes of UAVs is needed.

“We have the means for a sergeant to launch, recover, control a hand-held unmanned platform. He also has to be linked to medium, high-altitude, longer endurance as well, either kinetically to engage something for a target or just to collect information.”

“Unmanned is going to be a huge part of our future,” acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly said. “Unmanned is a critical element – not just aerial but unmanned ships as well.”