

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."