

Kilby: LUSV's Missile Cells Would Replace Cells Lost with Decommissioned Cruisers



The guided-missile cruiser USS Anzio (CG 68) transits the Gulf of Aden in this 2011 photo. Anzio is now slated for decommissioning along with five other guided-missile cruisers. It had not been previously planned for retirement. *U.S. NAVY* ARLINGTON, Va.— A senior Navy admiral defended the 2022 budget proposal to decommission seven guided-missile cruisers (CGs) and noted their missile cells numerically could be replaced by those on the future Large Unmanned Surface Vessel (LUSV).

The Navy is proposing to retire seven Ticonderoga-class CGs during fiscal 2022, including two – USS Hue City and USS Anzio – which were not previously planned for retirement. The material condition of the cruisers' hull and mechanical systems has attracted considerable concern while the cost of keeping the cruisers in service has risen.

Vice Adm. Jim Kilby, deputy chief of naval operations for Warfighting Requirements and Capabilities, testified June 17 before the Seapower and Projection Forces subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee. He recounted that when he was a carrier strike group commander in 2017, his air-and missile-defense ship, USS Lake Champlain, missed one third of its deployment because of maintenance issues such as tank-top cracking. He also cited USS Vela Gulf, which missed a month of its previous deployment and 2.5 months of its current deployment.

“All of that in my mind has to go into the mix when we factor the availability and reliability of those ships,” Kilby said. “Those missile tubes will only count if they're underway alongside the carrier.”

“The seven cruisers alone have more missile capacity than the entire British fleet,” said Rep. Rob Wittman, R-Virginia, the ranking member of the subcommittee, in his opening statement. “We’ve already spent hundreds of millions of dollars on ensuring these cruisers are returned to the fleet. Yet now we find that we’re going to retire them. While this administration is fiddling, the administration indicates they cannot afford a second destroyer [in the 2022 budget], a critical platform to deter maritime conflict. While we’re retiring other surface combatants, we’re saying we’re going to exacerbate that by now not building an additional destroyer.”

The seven cruisers deploy a total of 910 missile cells. The Navy plans to use LUSVs as missile arsenals, with each carrying 64 cells, Kilby said. A total of 14 LUSVs would be required to match the missile load of the seven cruisers.

“I don’t want to dismiss the value of 122 missile cells [on a CG] or an Aegis cruiser,” Kilby said. “[The] average age of our cruisers is 32 years. They were built for 30 years. Four of four [CGs] are over 34 years. So, I’m really trying to look at the most valuable ship that we can fund, the most valuable program within our budget, to make our force equal across all functions – air, surface and subsurface – to align to the threats as we see them.”

Kilby said retaining the seven CGs would cost roughly \$5 billion across the Future Years Defense Plan. Retaining the ships for two years would cost more than \$2.87 billion. He said the cost to modernize Hue City and Anzio alone would cost approximately \$1.5 billion.

Extending the service lives of the cruisers “is costing more than we thought it would be,” he said. “Initially it was \$2.4 billion, but we’re adding a lot of money to do that.”

Kilby said the Flight III Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile

destroyers (DDGs) will replace the CGs as platforms for the strike group's air- and missile-defense commanders and will be commanded by skippers with the rank of captain. The Flight IIA and earlier DDGs are commanded by officers with the rank of commander.