Navy 30-Year Shipbuilding Plan Shows 355 Ships in 2030s, Growing Numbers of Unmanned Vessels



The attack submarine USS Virginia departs Naval Submarine Base New London in this 2010 photo. The Navy's new shipbuilding plan calls for more such submarines and many other types of ships. U.S. Navy / Petty Officer 1st Class Steven Myers

ARLINGTON, Va. — The U.S. Navy's 30-year shipbuilding plan, released Dec. 10, shows the planned battle force reaching a congressionally mandated level of 355 ships in the 2031-2033 time frame, including increasing numbers of smaller warships and a growing number of unmanned vessels.

The plan, contained in the Department of the Navy's Report to Congress on the Annual Long-Range Plan for Construction of Naval Vessels — prepared by the deputy chief of naval operations for Warfighting Requirements and Capabilities — shows the future fleet architecture to reach 406 battle force ships by 2045, plus 119 unmanned surface vessels (USVs) and 24 unmanned undersea vessels (UUVs). These numbers are within the ranges of the categories determined as needed by the Future Naval Force Study (FNFS) conducted by the Department of the Navy.

The 2022-2051 shipbuilding plan affirms the Defense Department's and the Navy's top priority of strategic deterrence with the continued plan to build the Columbia-class ballistic missile submarine. The plan also shows investment in increased "lethality/modernization with the greatest potential to deliver non-linear warfighting advantages against China and Russia in mid-to-far-term," the report said.

The Future Years Defense Plan (FYDP), which looks ahead five years from the current fiscal year, plans for 12 Large USVs, one Medium USV, and eight Extra-Large UUVs over the period.

Traditional ships to be funded over the FYDP include advanced funding for CVN 82; two Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarines; 12 Virginia-class attack submarines (SSNs); 10 Flight III Arleigh Burke-class destroyers (DDGs); 15 Constellation-class frigates; one America-class amphibious assault ship; two Flight II San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ships; nine John Lewis-class fleet replenishment oilers, six Spearhead-class expeditionary fast transports; and two Navajo-class towing, rescue and salvage ships. New-designs to replace legacy ships include two AS(X) submarine tenders; five new-design T-AGOS(X) ocean surveillance ships; and two T-ARC(X) cable-repair ships.

New types of manned ships in the FYDP include 10 light amphibious warships (LAWs) beginning in 2022, and, beginning in 2023, and six new generation logistic ships (NGLSs). These ships are to enable more distributed amphibious operations for the Marine Corps, especially for its new Marine littoral regiments.

The FYDP continues the multi-year procurement of 10 Block V Virginia-class SSNs and plans for a multi-year procurement for 12 Block VI Virginia-class SSNs. The Navy plans to invest $1.2 billion into submarine construction facilities to increase annual production to three SSNs.

The FYDP also reflects a Navy decision to cancel plans for a class of new-construction strategic sealift ships and instead procure 16 used vessels for conversion into sealift ships.

The Navy plans to sustain 11 nuclear-powered aircraft carriers out to 2039 with minor variations, but its carrier force requirement could change, the report said, as the Navy studies options for light aircraft carriers.

The 30-year plan recognizes the funding challenges of such a large naval build-up "with the "procurement of the Columbia-class SSBN – and the imperative to invest in readiness recovery, improved lethality, and a larger great power competition fleet," the report said. "This shipbuilding plan reflects the necessary increased funding for both shipbuilding and ship sustainment funding. A combination of topline increases and major internal efficiency savings are used to procure, modernize, man, train, equip and sustain the fleet that the NDS [National Defense Strategy] and great power competition require."

"The plan calls for a larger fleet of both manned and unmanned vessels prepared to face greater challenges on, above, or under the sea by accelerating submarine construction, modernizing aircraft, extending the service life of cruisers, and increasing the number of destroyers," said David L. Norquist, deputy secretary of Defense, in a statement. "Although we reach 355 ships by the early 2030s, the plan is about more than numbers of ships. It is about equipping our future force for the enduring defense of our nation."

The shipbuilding plan can be found here: https://media.defense.gov/2020/Dec/10/2002549918/-1/-1/0/SHIPBUILDING%20PLAN%20DEC%2020_NAVY_OSD_OMB_FINAL.PDF/SHIPBUILDING%20PLAN%20DEC%2020_NAVY_OSD_OMB_FINAL.PDF