

Navy Strategic Systems Director: New W93 Warhead Needed to Pace Threat



A Trident 2 D5 is launched from the Ohio-class sub USS Maine off San Diego in February during a test of the ballistic missile. U.S. Navy

WASHINGTON – The admiral in charge of the U.S. Navy's nuclear weapons arsenal said the new warhead in development is needed to modernize the arsenal.

Vice Adm. Johnny Wolfe, director of Strategic Systems Programs (SSP), testifying on March 3 in Washington before the Strategic Forces subcommittee of the House Armed Forces Committee, said the W93 warhead and Mark 7 re-entry aeroshell are needed to pace the threat.

The proposed fiscal 2021 budget reflects the direction to pursue the W93 warhead and Mark 7 aeroshell program of record, which "will address an evolving threat environment and ballistic missile warhead modernization requirements, will improve operational effectiveness for U.S. Strategic Command and will mitigate technical, operational, programmatic and geopolitical risk in the sea-based leg of the deterrent," Wolfe said.

"The SSP fiscal 2021 budget request not only funds the sustainment of today's deterrent but it also begins the investment to build and re-energize capabilities, technologies, work force and critical skills required of any nuclear nation."

The SSP budget "reflects important investments in our follow-on Trident D5 Life-Extension 2 need for strategic deployment no later than 2039 in an evolving threat environment," he

said.

Wolfe said the modernization efforts will produce “just-in-time replacements,” noting that the recapitalization “has left no margin for unanticipated challenges and technical work that we have not executed in over 30 years. ... We must begin now. Now is the right time to ensure that the sea-based deterrent continues to meet strategic requirements.”

He said the refurbishment of the W76 warhead family has been completed and a small number of them have been modified with a low-yield option. The timeline for completion of the W88 Warhead Alteration 370 program has been modified to reach production in 2021.

Lisa Gordon-Haggerty, administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration who also testified at the hearing, said the W93 warhead will be based on previously deployed and tested nuclear explosive components.

Wolfe said it has been 30 years since a new aeroshell had been developed and that “we’ve got to look how we can produce an aeroshell, agnostic of whatever the final solution is. We’ve got to have this for all of our systems as we move into the future.”