

Navy's SSP Admiral: New Missile Planned for Introduction on 9th Columbia SSBN



An unarmed Trident II D5 missile launches from the Ohio-class ballistic missile submarine USS Nebraska (SSBN 739) off the coast of California in 2018. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Ronald Gutridge*

ARLINGTON, Va. – The admiral in charge of developing and sustaining the U.S. Navy's strategic weapons said the service needs to have the new Trident D5LE2 ballistic missile ready to deploy in fiscal 2039 on the ninth hull of the Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarine.

"It is imperative that we start the work on a future missile and corresponding weapon system now, said Vice Adm. Johnny Wolfe, director, Strategic Systems Programs (SSP), testifying June 10 before the Strategic Forces subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee. "This next generation of the current D5LE missile – a missile in service in 1989 and boasting a remarkable history of 182 successful flight tests –called the D5LE2, will yield multiple benefits in missile performance to include extending its service life. D5LE2 is required to completely outload out Columbia SSBNs and ensure that Trident remains credible in the face of a dynamic threat environment. A D5LE2 missile must be developed, tested and produced with the lead time sufficient to deploy on Columbia class hull 9 in FY39 and be backfitted for the first eight hulls of the class."

The D5LE2 effort is one of four SSP lines of effort (LOEs) in the coming years.

"First, we must maintain the current D5LE missile inventory and provide the necessary operational support to sustain Ohio-class submarines through their service lives," Wolfe said. "This is being accomplished through an update to all of our subsystems. All of our life-extension efforts remain on track and our current program will support the deployment of all existing warheads. We must also recapitalize all of our strategic weapons facilities to continue to support and sustain SSBN operations that enable our continuous at-sea presence."

Wolfe said the second LOE is to continue to work Program Executive Office-Columbia "to ensure that the transition between Ohio-class and Columbia-class submarines stays on schedule. For SSP, this requires a seamless transition of the current D5LE weapon system and missile inventory onto the new Columbia class. During this time of transition, we will ensure that the Navy's portion of the nuclear triad remains credible by introducing the W93 [warhead]/Mark 7 [re-entry body] to rebalance the stockpile of W76 and W88 [warheads] and meet [U.S. Strategic Command] requirements."

The admiral said that his fourth LOE is, as the U.S. project officer for the Polaris Sales Agreement, to "continue to support the U.K. sovereign deterrent for today's Vanguard-class submarines and their successor, the Dreadnought class.

"For decades, U.S. policy has recognized that the independent nuclear deterrent adds to global stability," Wolfe said. "Under the 1958 mutual defense agreement and 1962 Polaris Sales Agreement, the United States has provided assistance and material consistent with international law to the U.K. deterrent program. Without this assistance, the cost and schedule risk to maintain the U.K.'s independent deterrent would rise significantly, thus creating additional challenges for the U.K. in sustaining its nuclear contribution to NATO alongside the U.S."