

SECNAV Wants to Put Naval Strike Missiles on All Littoral Combat Ships



Known for its “sea-skimming” capability, the Naval Strike Missile can fly at very low altitudes over water and land. (Photo: Kongsberg)

ARLINGTON, Va. – Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro is still keen on the role the littoral combat ship (LCS) have yet to play, despite a troubled history.

“I’m very enthused about the future of LCS and what we’re going to do with it,” Del Toro said Jan. 11 at the [Surface Navy Association’s 2023 National Symposium](#). “We need to put a Naval Strike Missile on each and every single one of them.”

Littoral combat ships were [designed to be fast, optimally manned](#), mission-tailored surface combatants that could operate in near-shore and open-ocean environments. The 33rd ship in the LCS program, the future USS Augusta, was christened in December.

However, LCS, were plagued with reliability and maintainability issues. Serious propulsion problems developed with the newest Freedom-class littoral combat ships. The Navy wanted to retire nine LCS, but Congress pushed back on the plan. The fiscal 2023 [National Defense Authorization Act](#) (NDAA), signed into law by President Biden Dec. 23, 2022, blocked early retirement of five of the nine LCS on the Navy's hit list.

Creative Use

Del Toro acknowledged a small number of LCS deemed "least capable in the high-end fight" still may have to go. When he became Navy secretary, Del Toro said he and Navy leaders were confronted with problems on the Freedom class, and, "so we had to make some difficult choices."

Del Toro noted LCS was being used creatively by the Navy in Central and South American waters. The five-month deployment of USS Sioux City (LCS 11) with the 5th and 6th Fleets demonstrated LCS utility. Sioux City was the first LCS to deploy in the Baltic, Mediterranean and Red seas, the Gulf of Aden, Northern Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman and Arabian Gulf.

"I look forward to deploying LCS to its fullest with all the years that they have remaining," Del Toro said.

Concern about COVID Policy

After his speech, Del Toro met with reporters and was asked about the impact of Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin ending his 2021 mandate requiring all members of the armed forces, to be vaccinated against COVID-19. Austin's rescission of the mandate was required by language in the fiscal 2023 NDAA.

Before the legislation passed, Del Toro was concerned that a repeal of the vaccine mandate might lead to potential movement

restrictions. "It will create almost two classes of citizens in our services – those that can't deploy and those that can deploy," he said on Dec.6.

Del Toro said the Navy Department had followed Austin's directive, but he expected additional guidance from the Pentagon.

Asked if he anticipated any short-term problems absent specific guidance, Del Toro said, "No, I think the majority of service members, across all services, quite frankly, get the COVID vaccination whether they're told to, or not."

While more than two million service members have been fully vaccinated, according to the Defense Department, thousands who declined the shot were separated from the military. "I suspect that a lot of people who wanted to leave the military, perhaps, did not go down that path [vaccination], so they could leave the military, perhaps before their contract expired," Del Toro said.