AI Likely to Be Integrated into Naval Vessels in Next Five Years, GlobalData Says

One of the manned vessels converted to unmanned for the Ghost Fleet Overlord Program. A new report from GlobalData forecasts much more artificial intelligence is coming to naval ships. *U.S. NAVY*

LONDON – Artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to make major improvements to modern ships, including decreasing the number of crew required for operations and enabling faster and better-informed decision making in a fast-moving environment, GlobalData, a data analytics company, said in a June 16 release.

A survey by GlobalData finds that 43% of respondents believe that AI will be integrated in a significant way into naval vessels within the next five years, while 31% think this process will take place within 10 years, and only 25% believe that it will take longer than 10 years.

According to GlobalData's report, "AI in Aerospace and Defense," the development of AI presents long-term cost-cutting potential, as well as providing easy-to-understand analysis based on large datasets. While fully autonomous ships powered by AI may not become the norm within the next 10 years, it is likely that the technology will increasingly be used to aid decision-making in coming years.

"Advanced navies significantly invest in AI, computer and communication technologies in order to have larger and more capable autonomous vessels," said William Davies, Aerospace and Defense Associate analyst at GlobalData. "For instance, the U.S. Navy converted two existing commercial fast supply vessels into unmanned surface vehicles (USVs) for its Ghost

Fleet Overlord Surface program, which aims to inform and accelerate the Navy's large and medium USV programs. Furthermore, on June 7, 2021, the U.S. Department of Defense awarded a $44 million contract to Austal USA to carry out the design, procurement, production implementation, and demonstration of autonomous capability in Expeditionary Fast Transport (EPF) vessel, USNS Apalachicola (T-EPF-13).

"Outside of the U.S., there have also been significant investments in AI. For instance, the U.K. invested £4m in 2020 for warship AI development projects, which will help warships to process data and provide crews with improved situational awareness," Davies said. "Moreover, in 2017, China announced its next generation AI development plan, with a goal of becoming the world leader in the technology by 2030, and in 2020 the country unveiled a multi-purpose unmanned surface vessel, as well as reportedly developing AI-enabled submarines."