

Geurts Closes Navy Unmanned Systems Secretariat, Citing Progress, Integration

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy has eliminated the position of its “drone czar” in its secretariat after only two and a half years, citing goals achieved and integration progress.

In an April 30 directive, James F. Geurts, assistant secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition, directed the disestablishment of the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Unmanned Systems) (DASN(UxS)) effective May 7.

Under then-Navy Secretary Ray Mabus, the Navy established DASN(UxS) to put appropriate bureaucratic horsepower and centralized leadership behind the development of unmanned systems. Mabus made the announcement on Oct. 27, 2015, that retired Marine Brig. Gen. Frank Kelley would be the first head of the office.

Geurts cited the completion of the Navy Department’s comprehensive Unmanned Systems Roadmap and its submission to Congress as “a logical point to move forward as expressed in our Goals and Roadmap. Both documents state that the integration of manned and unmanned systems into a seamless fighting force is an objective of our unmanned systems strategy and critical to our future naval force.”

Geurts said the DASN(UxS) had satisfied Mabus’ Nov. 13, 2015, directive to “Treat unmanned as unmanned.

“That work continues, but that work, to integrate unmanned systems into all that we do, now belongs to all of us,” Geurts said.

Earlier this year, the Unmanned Warfare Systems Division (N99) in the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations was eliminated and its mission merged into the directorate of Warfare Integration. N99 had been established on Sept. 15, 2015, with now-retired Rear Adm. Robert Girrier as director.

Navy to Establish Type Wing for F-35C Squadrons

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy will establish a new type wing as commander over the service's growing F-35C Lightning II strike fighter community.

According to an internal directive, commander, Joint Strike Fighter Wing, will be established on Aug. 1 at Naval Air Station (NAS) Lemoore, California. The new wing will man, train and equip the three current F-35C strike fighter squadrons (VFAs): the two fleet replacement squadrons, VFA-101 at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida, and VFA-125 at Lemoore, plus VFA-147, an operational squadron currently in transition from the F/A-18E to the F-35C.

As more fleet squadrons make the transition to the F-35C, they will be reassigned from their current wing, Strike Fighter Wing, U.S. Pacific Fleet – also at Lemoore – or Strike Fighter Wing Atlantic at NAS Oceana, Virginia. Those wings will continue to man, train and equip the Navy's F/A-18 strike fighter squadrons.

Thornberry: Take “More Out of the Tail,’ Put ‘More into the Tooth’ of Defense Budget

WASHINGTON – House Armed Services Chairman Mac Thornberry, R-Texas, said he is convinced that the military’s readiness problems are far more serious than many people believe, and he is determined to get the maximum impact from the current defense funding increase to attack that problem.

That includes getting the defense authorization and funding bills enacted on time to avoid the waste and inefficiencies of the past year’s continuing resolutions and finding savings from the Pentagon’s administrative functions to “put more in the hands of the warfighters,” Thornberry said May 15.

Addressing a forum hosted by Bloomberg News, Thornberry said he did not expect any major issues to delay House passage of the 2019 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) that his committee approved last week.

“My goal is to get it done on time, for a change,” he said.

That means passage before Oct. 1, when the new fiscal year begins.

Thornberry noted that due to the two-year budget agreement that covers the current year and fiscal 2019, “we have had a big turnaround on funding.” But even with the 10 percent increase allowed for ’19, defense is still behind where it was in 2010, before passage of the restrictive Budget Control Act.

“We can’t count on Congress continuing to have 10 percent [growth] in the future. That means we’re going to have to have more savings out of the defense budget. ... More out of the tail, more into the tooth,” he said.

One of the ways the NDAA seeks to do that is in the proposal to cut personnel and administrative cost in the so-called Fourth Estate, support functions outside of the armed services. Although Thornberry had tried to enact a mandatory 25 percent cut in the cost of those programs, due to opposition in his committee, he accepted language that gives the Pentagon's new chief management officer the discretion to make whatever cuts he can in those functions.

Opposition to his proposed cuts, the chairman said, "is a key example of where Congress adds to the inefficiencies" in defense.

Perhaps another example of that is the language imposed in the NDAA that blocks the plan by the Maritime Administration and the Maritime Sealift Command (MSC) to buy a number of retired foreign-made commercial cargo ships to replace the badly aged sealift vessels MSC would need to support a major overseas conflict. Those ships could be bought and modified for a fraction of the cost of new U.S.-built ships, which the bill requires.

Thornberry said he is "sympathetic to the idea" of buying a certain number of the commercial ships, "that do not imperil your industrial base." But he said he had to "be realistic about the Buy America sentiment" among his committee members "so we can get something moving.

"I'm convinced the readiness problems that have emerged over the last 10 years are far deeper than most people think," he said.

While conceding that he did not expect to get anything like this year's 10 percent funding increase in the future, he noted that Defense Secretary James Mattis and Joint Chiefs Chairman Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford have testified they would need 3 to 5 percent more a year just to keep from falling further behind. "That's the benchmark" for the future,

Thornberry said.

Thornberry said he is “skeptical” about the chances of getting North Korea to agree to “permanently and verifiably” give up its nuclear weapons. And even if that were achievable, he said, continued U.S. military presence in Asia and continued improvements in U.S. missile defense “are essential.”

AEI: Navy Needs Rebuilding to Reach 355-Ship Fleet

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy faces serious challenges in reaching its goal of 355 ships and the capabilities they need, a Washington think tank said, recommending a series of steps that will help the service to increase its warfighting strength.

In a new study from the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) – *Rough Seas: An AEI Study in Crisis Response for Tomorrow’s Navy and an Improved Navy for the Future* – scholars John W. Miller, Thomas Donnelly and Gary J. Schmitt considered four table-top scenarios to model the future fleet to come up with recommendations.

The authors identified four key challenges. The Navy:

- “Lacks sufficient funding to meet the stated requirement of a 355-ship fleet;
- Is not large enough to carry out its primary missions of peacetime engagement, crisis response, and combat operations;
- Has a maintenance system that cannot respond effectively to unexpected contingencies;

■ Lacks the global presence and capabilities to deal decisively with the new great-power competitors, Russia and China.”

The authors made several specific recommendations for the Navy to:

■ Expand forward presence in the North Atlantic, the Mediterranean, and the Pacific.

■ Fully fund Navy operations and maintenance accounts.

■ Adopt “best maintenance” plans and practices from the private sector.

■ Install vertical launch systems (VLSs). The Navy should install 16-cell VLS systems on at least six amphibious ships and six cargo ships by 2022.

■ Install integrated fire control and counter-air systems.

■ Install Harpoon anti-ship missiles. The Navy should equip all expeditionary fast transport ships with Harpoon anti-ship missiles.

■ Install heavyweight torpedoes. The Navy should equip all Ticonderoga-class cruisers with heavyweight torpedoes.

■ Keep all 22 Ticonderoga-class cruisers.

■ Accelerate production and fielding of the amphibious assault ship Bougainville.

■ Buy more F-35 joint strike fighters.

The study said “the proposed short-term investments can ameliorate future strategic vulnerabilities and increase future strategic opportunities. But these proposed investments are not a substitute for the larger, overdue and essential rebuilding that the Navy needs.

“In short, the 355-ship Navy will take decades and billions of dollars not only to build but also to maintain,” the study said. “Neither the Obama administration nor the Trump administration has proposed defense budgets commensurate with reaching or sustaining this significantly expanded fleet.”

The authors recommended that the Navy buy in bulk – as is done through block buys and multiyear procurements – because it has shown that it “improved shipyard performance and saved money. To expand significantly in size, it is imperative the Navy do so as smoothly as possible.”

The authors concluded that “while these improvements can help close a window of maritime vulnerability and assist in stabilizing critical regions, deterring increasingly aggressive adversaries and reassuring increasingly skittish allies, they are not a substitute for the larger, overdue and essential rebuilding that the Navy needs. Today’s Navy is too small, insufficiently lethal, not well enough maintained and, at its bases on the East and West Coasts of the United States, positioned too far away from crises and conflicts that might threaten American interests.”

Coast Guard Commandant: Jones Act Repeal Would Bring ‘Severe Repercussions’

WASHINGTON – The commandant of the Coast Guard said that the recent congressional focus on the Jones Act in the wake of the 2017 hurricane relief efforts for Puerto Rico threatens to invite repeal of the act, one that would have unintended negative consequences for national defense, maritime commerce

and shipbuilding.

“There’s this fixation that we need to get after the Jones Act,” Adm. Paul F. Zukunft said in response to a question from the audience May 8 at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think tank. “The consequences of the Jones Act [repeal] could have severe repercussions as well.”

The Jones Act – formally titled the Merchant Marine Act of 1920 – generally prohibits foreign-built, foreign-owned or foreign-flag vessels from conducting coastwise trade within the United States and between the United States and its overseas territories. It also generally applies restrictions that effectively prohibit ships under the Jones Act from being overhauled at foreign shipyards. Ship crews must be composed of U.S. citizens or legal residents of the United States.

Zukunft listed three consequences he said would ensue if the Jones Act is repealed.

“All of our coastwise trade will probably be done by a third nation, namely China, [and] not just coastwise trade, but plying our inland river systems as well,” he said. “If we’re looking at, ‘hey, if we can lower the cost of doing business, we can have a third nation do it on our behalf.’”

“The next thing that goes away is the [U.S. and state] maritime academies,” he said. “You don’t need them because we have foreign mariners. We don’t know who they are, but they’re foreign mariners plying our waters and our internal waters as well to conduct maritime commerce, which is a \$4.6 trillion enterprise in the United States.

“Then the next thing that goes is our shipyards and the technology that goes with the shipyards,” he said, speaking of the smaller labor costs of foreign shipyards.

Navy Completes Lightweight Torpedo Defense Mission Module Testing

WASHINGTON – The Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) Mission Modules (MM) program announced the successful completion of two days of at-sea testing of the AN/SLQ-61 Lightweight Tow (LWT) Torpedo Defense Mission Module (TDMM), May 2.

Similar to the AN/SLQ-25 “Nixie” system currently installed in the fleet, the LWT is a modular, digitally controlled, soft-kill countermeasure decoy system. It employs an underwater acoustic projector deployed from the ship’s stern on a tow cable to defend ships against wake-homing, acoustic homing and wire-guided enemy torpedoes. The LWT system is significantly lighter in weight than the current “Nixie” system and has a different tow profile, making it ideally suited for small combatant warships operating in littoral environments.

“This test was highly successful and demonstrated that this technology, which provides critical torpedo defense capability for the LCS class of ships, is ready for integration aboard an LCS,” said Capt. Theodore Zobel, LCS Mission Modules program manager.

The test event was the final at-sea test on a commercial vessel. The program is incorporating lessons learned from this event as it prepares for TDMM integration and formal developmental and operational tests aboard an LCS. The torpedo defense capability the TDMM provides is envisioned for eventual deployment on all LCS ships, and potentially other small combatants.

Program Executive Office Unmanned and Small Combatants (PEO USC) provides a single program executive responsible for acquiring and sustaining the littoral combat ship class and mission capabilities; the future frigate; the multi-mission surface combatant – an LCS variant for international customers; mine, anti-submarine and surface warfare systems; and unmanned maritime systems.

LPD to be Named for Navy Medal of Honor Recipient

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy's 13th San Antonio-class amphibious dock ship (LPD) will be named for a naval officer who was awarded the Medal of Honor for gallantry during a kamikaze attack during the 1945 Okinawa campaign.

Speaking May 2 to reporters at the Pentagon, Navy Secretary Richard V. Spencer said the next LPD would be named for Capt. Richard M. McCool Jr., the former commanding officer of a landing craft support ship, large, Mark 3, that went to the aid of the crew of a sinking destroyer, USS William D. Porter, and then came under attack itself, but saved his ship despite being wounded and knocked temporarily unconscious.

Below is the text of the official citation for the Medal of Honor presented to then-Lt. McCool by President Harry S. Truman on Dec. 18, 1945:

“For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as Commanding Officer of the U.S.S. LCS 122, during operations against enemy Japanese forces in the Ryukyu Chain, 10 and 11 June 1945. Sharply vigilant during hostile air raids against Allied ships

on radar picket duty off Okinawa on 10 June, Lieutenant McCool aided materially in evacuating all survivors from a sinking destroyer which had sustained mortal damage under the devastating attacks. When his own craft was attacked simultaneously by two of the enemy's suicide squadron early in the evening of 11 June, he instantly hurled the full power of his gun batteries against the plunging aircraft, shooting down the first and damaging the second before it crashed his station in the conning tower and engulfed the immediate area in a mass of flames. Although suffering from shrapnel wounds and painful burns, he rallied his concussion-shocked crew and initiated vigorous fire-fighting measures and then proceeded to the rescue of several trapped in a blazing compartment, subsequently carrying one man to safety despite the excruciating pain of additional severe burns. Unmindful of all personal danger, he continued his efforts without respite until aid arrived from other ships and he was evacuated. By his staunch leadership, capable direction and indomitable determination throughout the crisis, Lieutenant McCool saved the lives of many who otherwise might have perished and contributed materially to the saving of his ship for further combat service. His valiant spirit of self-sacrifice in the face of extreme peril sustains and enhances the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

McCool, an Oklahoma native, served in the Korean and Vietnam wars as well, retiring with the rank of captain. He died in 2008.

Spencer broke the tradition of naming LPDs for cities and counties in the United States by naming the ship after a naval hero.

LPD 29 will be built by Huntington Ingalls' shipyard in Pascagoula, Mississippi, under a \$1.4 billion contract awarded in February.

Aircraft Carrier John F. Kennedy Reaches 75 Percent Structural Completion

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. – The nuclear-powered aircraft carrier John F. Kennedy (CVN 79) is 75 percent structurally complete following the recent installation of the forward area of the ship's main deck, Huntington Ingalls Industries announced in an April 30 release.

Kennedy, the second ship in the Gerald R. Ford class of carriers, has been taking shape at the company's Newport News Shipbuilding division since the ship's keel was laid in August 2015. The ship is being built using modular construction, a process where smaller sections of the ship are welded together to form a structural unit, known as a superlift. The superlift is then outfitted with piping, electrical equipment, cable, ventilation and joiner work, and is lifted from the assembly area into the dry dock.

The 750-metric-ton forward section of the main deck includes the machinery spaces located over the ship's forward diesel generators. Also installed was the first piece of the aircraft carrier flight deck, which includes command and control, pilot ready rooms and additional support spaces, a jet blast deflector and components of the advanced arresting gear system.

With the recent superlifts, 341 of the total 447 sections are currently in place. Kennedy stands about 100 feet in height in the dry dock with only the island and main mast remaining to bring the ship to its full height of 252 feet.

A third key milestone also was achieved recently when the first two generators supporting the electromagnetic aircraft launch system were installed.

“We are very proud of the progress we are making on the Kennedy,” said Lucas Hicks, Newport News’ vice president, CVN 79 program. “The ship now is 75 percent structurally erected and more than 40 percent complete. Many of the improvements we have made over the construction of CVN 78, including increased pre-outfitting and performing more complex assemblies in our shops, will allow us to launch the ship three months earlier than planned.”

Kennedy is scheduled to be christened in the fourth quarter of 2019 and delivered to the U.S. Navy in 2022.

HASC Seapower Chairman’s Mark Pushes Two-CVN Buy, Study of Nimitz Extension

WASHINGTON – The markup of the National Defense Authorization bill by the chairman of the Seapower and Projection Forces subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee advocates a two-carrier buy to save Navy funds and a study of another life extension of the USS Nimitz to enable the fleet to maintain a force level of 12 aircraft carriers.”

“The Secretary of the Navy may enter into one or more contracts, beginning with the fiscal year 2019 program year, for the procurement of one Ford-class aircraft carrier to be designated CVN-81,” the markup said. “The aircraft carrier authorized to be procured may be procured as an addition to

the contract covering the Ford-class aircraft carrier designated CVN-80 that is authorized to be constructed under Section 121 of the John Warner National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2007. ... The Secretary of the Navy may use incremental funding to make payments under the contract.”

Navy leaders have encouraged a two-carrier buy as a way to reduce the carrier construction cost while building up the fleet faster to the 12-CVN part of the 355- ship requirement.

“With the delivery of the USS John F. Kennedy (CVN 79) in 2023, the Navy will reach their 12 aircraft carrier goal but will quickly lose this overall capacity with the programmed retirement of USS Nimitz (CVN 68) in fiscal year 2023,” the markup said. “The committee believes that there are several options to retain required aircraft carrier force structure to include accelerating construction of the Ford-class carriers. Additionally, the committee believes that service life extension options may be available for USS Nimitz. Therefore, the committee directs the Secretary of the Navy to provide a briefing to the House Committee on Armed Services by March 1, 2019, on options that exist to extend the service life of USS Nimitz, to include the extension of major components. Additionally, such a briefing should include cost estimates and major modernization components.”

The bill as marked up also would:

- Require the Secretary of the Navy to procure the data rights to the new guided-missile frigate and recompete the frigate not later than the contract award of the 10th frigate.

- Authorize the Secretary of the Navy to enter into one or more multiyear contracts for 625 Standard Missile-6 missiles beginning in fiscal 2019.

- Authorize the Secretary of the Navy to enter into one or more multiyear contracts for up to 52 C-130J aircraft beginning in fiscal 2019.

■ Authorize the Secretary of the Navy to enter into one or more multiyear contracts for up to 24 E-2D Advanced Hawkeye aircraft beginning in fiscal 2019.

■ Authorize the Secretary of the Navy “to procure up to 10 foreign-constructed ships if the secretary certifies that the U.S. Navy has initiated an acquisition strategy for the construction of 10 new sealift vessels. Additionally, this section would limit 25 percent of the U.S. Navy Military Sealift Command’s fiscal year 2019 expenditures until the Secretary of the Navy enters into a contract for the procurement of two used National Defense Reserve Fleet vessels and completes the capability development document for the common hull multimission platform.”

■ Limit the Maritime Administration from “procuring used training vessels for use as school ship replacement vessels,” noting that the Maritime Administration’s “short-term strategy would not support the long-term maritime academies’ interests. The committee continues to support the new construction of these training vessels in the United States.”

■ Support development of the Advanced Low-Cost Munition Ordnance, a guided 57 mm projectile, to counter the growing threats posed by small boat swarms, unmanned aerial systems and other emerging threats.

■ Directs the Secretary of the Navy to provide to the HASC “an assessment of the current and foreseeable torpedo threats facing high-value units and the Navy’s plan to adequately protect them, a description of the requirements for SSTD [surface ship torpedo defense], an assessment of the development program concerning each of the SSTD capability elements, the plan to consolidate responsibility of the SSTD program, and the plan to manage and sustain currently fielded SSTD systems.”

NRL Testing New Structural Acoustic Sonar for AUV Mine Hunter

NATIONAL HARBOR, Md. – The Navy is pushing out new autonomous underwater vehicles (AUVs) that utilize low-frequency wavelengths to identify objects deep underwater. The Office of Naval Research (ONR) and the Naval Research Laboratory (NRL) presented data at their Sea-Air-Space booth April 11 showing how this method makes it easier for ships to see mines below the sea bottom.

Zachary Walters, researcher at NRL, noted that every object has a unique acoustic fingerprint, and with the new method, structural acoustic (SA) sonar, AUVs can determine what each individual object is.

The low-frequency wavelengths used in SA also offer the chance to “punch into the deeper sediment” in the ocean, Walters said.

Of course, there are infinite number of objects potentially hidden in the sea, so NRL is focusing more on target recognition rather than identifying every bit of clutter.

“We do know what our targets that we are interested in look like, either through laboratory measurements, at-sea measurements or through forward numerical modeling,” Walters explained. “And, so, we use those ... to build up a library of objects that we are interested in, and we pass this on, along with the data we measure at sea, to our automated classifiers.”

According to Waters, SA is currently being transitioned out to the field for testing with Knifefish, a mine-hunting AUV. As it gathers more research, NRL hopes to "extend to much larger ranges and higher area of coverage," which will be transitioned to Knighfish in later updates.

The NRL's ultimate goal for SA is to create AUVs that run fully autonomous operations. Walters believes that effort will rely on the continued cooperation of ONR and NRL.