

Navy 2021 Budget Relatively Flat; Only 8 Ships Funded, Ship Retirements Accelerated



An artist rendering of the future Columbia-class ballistic missile submarine. Though the U.S. Navy's fiscal 2021 budget is relatively flat, it does fund construction of the first sub of the Columbia class. U.S. Navy

ARLINGTON, Va. – The U.S. Navy's 2021 budget seeks funding for only eight battle force ships, financed by \$19.9 billion of a \$207.1 billion Department of the Navy budget that is only slightly larger than the \$205.2 billion budget enacted for fiscal 2020. The Future Years Defense Plan also forecasts some accelerated retirements or reductions in some ship and aircraft types.

The \$207.1 billion includes a base budget of \$194.1 billion; a set-aside for Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) for Base of \$4.3 billion; and OCO funding of \$8.7 billion. Of the \$207.1 billion, \$161 billion is for the Navy and \$46 billion is allotted to the U.S. Marine Corps.

The budget shaves Marine funding and end strength. See story [here](#).

The relatively flat budget includes \$70.6 billion for operations and maintenance; \$57.2 billion for procurement; \$55.2 billion for personnel; \$21.5 billion for research and development; and \$2.6 billion for infrastructure.

The Navy says the 2021 budget is focused on all-domain dominance – sea, air, land, cyber, space, assured command and control, battlespace awareness and an integrated force. The service is making a priority of “capable capacity over less-capable legacy platforms to pace a rapidly changing threat.”

The investments in the 2021 budget also are designed to enable distributed maritime operations with lethality capable enough to impose cost on competitors.



The aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman transits the Arabian Sea on Jan. 31. The fiscal 2021 budget restores the midlife refueling and complex overhaul of the Truman, which had been slated for early retirement. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Scott Swofford

Nuclear deterrence remains the Navy's top priority as it recapitalizes the ballistic-missile submarine (SSBN) fleet to ensure on-time delivery of the Columbia SSBN.

The 2021 budget also advances development of new capabilities in the form of long-range hypersonic strike weapons such as Conventional Prompt Strike capability, with research funded at \$1 billion aiming for an initial operational capability in 2028. The Standard Missile-6 Block 1B also is funded as well as the Navy Laser Family of Systems at \$68.2 million. Other funded technological advances include additive manufacturing and applied artificial intelligence.

The 2021 shipbuilding budget of \$19.9 billion – compared with \$24 billion enacted for 2020 – will fund the construction of the first Columbia-class ballistic-missile submarine. Other ships funded are one Virginia-class attack submarine; three Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyers; the first FFG(X) next-generation guided-missile frigate; one Flight II San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship; and two Navajo-class towing, salvage and rescue ships.

The five-year Future Years Defense Plan includes plans for an amphibious assault ship in 2023; a replacement submarine tender in 2024; a new ocean surveillance ship in 2022; and a new cable-laying ship and a new sealift ship in 2023.

Other ships funded are one Virginia-class attack submarine, three Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyers and the

first FFG(X) next-generation guided-missile frigate.

The shipbuilding budget also includes funds for five LCU 1700-class utility landing craft. Two large unmanned surface vessels (LUSVs) are funded by research and development funds, with the seven LUSVs in the future to be built using shipbuilding funds. The shipbuilding request also restores the refueling and complex overhaul of the aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman, which last year the Navy wanted to retire to instead fund modernization and new technologies.

Two large unmanned surface vessels (LUSVs) are requested with \$239 million in R&D funds, with the seven LUSVs in the future to be built using shipbuilding funds. R&D funds include \$288 million for unmanned undersea vehicles (UUVs), including \$116 million for the Orca Extra-Large UUV program and \$78 million for the Snakehead large-diameter UUV.

The Navy plans for the early retirement of four littoral combat ships (LCSs) and one dock landing ship (LSD) in 2021 as part of an effort to garner \$1.4 billion in savings to help fund modernization. The four LCSs are the first four commissioned – Freedom, Independence, Fort Worth and Coronado – and are considered test and training ships. The LSD being retired in 2021 will be one of three – Germantown, Fort McHenry and Gunston Hall – that will be retired early over the next few years.



The Cyclone-class coastal patrol ship USS Tornado approaches the Bridge of the Americas in Panama City, Panama. The Navy plans to decommission its 12 Cyclone-class ships, but no timetable has been announced yet. U.S. Navy/Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Louis Thompson Staats IV

The service also announced plans to decommission its four least modern Ticonderoga-class cruisers that have ballistic-missile defense (BMD) capability – Monterey, Shiloh, Vela Gulf and

Port Royal – although no timetable was announced in budget documents. The BMD capabilities of these ships will be assumed by new Arleigh Burke-class DDGs.

The Navy also plans to decommission its 12 Cyclone-class coastal patrol ships, but no timetable has been announced yet.

R&D funds will be invested in 2021 for two new intra-theater lift vessels designed to support expeditionary advance-base operations and littoral operations in a contested environment. These investments will inform development of next-generation medium amphibious and logistics ships.

If enacted as planned, this budget would bring the ship count of the battle force to 306 at the end of 2021, up from the current 293.

The Navy plans to fund 121 aircraft with \$17.2 billion in 2021, compared with \$19.7 billion enacted in 2020. These include 24 F/A-18E/F Super Hornet strike fighters; 10 F-35B and 10 F-35C Lightning II strike fighters for the Marine Corps and 11 F-35Cs for the Navy; four E-2D Advanced Hawkeye early warning aircraft; six CMV-22B Osprey tilt-rotor carrier onboard delivery aircraft; three MV-22B Osprey transports; five KC-130J Super Hercules tanker/transports; seven CH-53K King Stallion transport helicopters; 36 TH-73A training helicopters; and five VH-92A presidential transport helicopters.

The Navy plans to fund 121 aircraft, including 24 F/A-18E/F Super Hornet strike fighters, 10 F-35B and 10 F-35C Lightning II strike fighters for the Marines and 11 F-35Cs for the Navy.

Fiscal 2021 will fund the last batch of Super Hornets for the Navy. The 2021 budget does not fund any more P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft, although with the production line

open for foreign procurement the Navy could order more if Congress funds them in the next few years.

The large quantity of TH-73As being procured in 2021 will allow the Navy to accelerate retirement of the TH-57B/C training helicopter fleet and allow the Navy to cancel further depot-level overhauls of the TH-57.

The budget funds research and development of the MQ-25A Stingray unmanned aerial refueling aircraft for initial production in 2023 and initial operational capability in 2024.

The plans to accelerate retirement of the MH-53 Sea Dragon mine-sweeping helicopter to begin in 2022. The Navy also plans to start retiring the MQ-8B version of the Fire Scout UAV in 2024, with 14 of the 23 being retired initially until the MQ-8C version reaches initial operational capability with a mine-countermeasures capability – projected to be 2028 – when the last MQ-8Bs will be retired.

Procurement of the MQ-4C Triton UAV is being gapped for 2021-2022 to allow time to mature the UAV's signals intelligence suite. The RQ-4A Global Hawk Broad-Area Maritime Demonstration UAV will be retired beginning in 2023, freeing up funds for MQ-4C sustainment. The MQ-4C will replace the EP-3E electronic reconnaissance aircraft in 2022.

The Navy Reserve plans in 2022 to deactivate Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 85, a unit that supports special operations forces with its MH-60S helicopters. The Air Force and Army field will retain a robust SOF support capability and the Navy's general-purpose MH-60S squadrons also are trained to provide similar capability.

For ship depot-level maintenance, \$10 billion is provided for 2021, the same as in 2020, and aircraft depot-level maintenance increases to \$1.7 billion, up from 2020's \$1.4 billion. The budget is focused on improved predictability and

optimized performance of shipyard maintenance.

If enacted, the budget would increase Navy military end-strength to 347,800 Sailors, up from 340,500 enacted in 2020. The Navy Reserve would remain stable at 58,800 Sailors.