

Vice Adm. Wolfe: Hypersonic Weapon Load for Zumwalt DDGs Under Study



The Zumwalt-class guided-missile destroyer USS Michael Monsoor (DDG 1001) transits under the Golden Gate Bridge during San Francisco Fleet Week 2021. *U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Hector Carrera*

ARLINGTON, Va. – With the Zumwalt-class destroyer set to be the first ship to be armed with the Conventional Prompt Strike (CPS) hypersonic missiles, the Navy is studying the parameters for the weapon load-out for the ships, a senior Navy admiral said.

Vice Adm. Johnny Wolfe, director, Strategic Systems Program, speaking Nov. 18 at the Naval Submarine League's annual symposium in Arlington, said the CPS "will be the primary weapon system" on the Zumwalt DDGs.

The Zumwalt is equipped with 20 four-call Mk57 peripheral vertical launch systems which can launch Tomahawk, Standard, Evolved SeaSparrow and Vertical-Launch Anti-Submarine Rockets. The ship is expected to be fitted with separate launchers for the CPS. The two Advanced Gun Systems on the ship – which are inactive because of lack of an affordable munition – may be removed to make room for CPS launchers.

The Navy originally had planned to deploy the CPS on the Ohio-class guided-missile submarines (SSGNs), but the delay in funding for an underwater launch test facility for the missiles pushed development into the future such that, with the Navy's plan to decommission the SSGNs in the mid-2020s, Wolfe said it made more sense to skip the SSGNs as a platform. The underwater launch test facility development will be restarted in 2022.

The Block V Virginia-class attack submarine (SSN) equipped with the Virginia Payload Module will be the second platform to be armed with hypersonic missiles.

“What we’re doing is trying to leverage Zumwalt – even though it is a surface platform,” Wolfe said. “A lot of things that we’re going to test on Zumwalt are still going to be applicable on Virginia [SSN] and we’re looking at how we can get that learning to get to that platform sooner.”

Wolfe said, “We’ve been hitting our milestones” toward fielding all-up rounds for the Army in 2023 and the Navy in its Zumwalt DDGs in 2025.

Two tests of all-up rounds for the Army will be tested in fiscal 2022 and he said the Navy will start ramping up to five Advanced Payload Modules which will go into the Zumwalts and then go into the Virginia SSN.

Wolfe said the Navy has been including CPS equipment in sounding rocket sorties from NASA’s facility in Wallops Island, Virginia, along with payloads from other users to advance technology maturation.

The hypersonics program so far has had three successful rocket motor tests and the first slug test, the latter demonstrating the ability to eject-test in a cold launch.