

Wolfe: Navy Plans to Start Development of Nuclear Sea-Launched Cruise Missile in 2022



The USS Philippine Sea launches a Tomahawk cruise missile to conduct strikes against ISIL targets as seen from the aircraft carrier USS George H.W. Bush in this 2014 photo. The DoD's previous nuclear-armed cruise missile was based on the Tomahawk, but development of a new one is expected to begin in 2022. U.S. Navy / Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Eric Garst

ARLINGTON, Va. – The Navy plans to wrap up an analysis of alternatives (AoA) for a ship-launched nuclear-armed cruise missile in 2021 and begin development of the missile in 2022, said the admiral in charge of strategic weapons .

“We will finish the AoA this year per what was required by the NDAA [National Defense Authorization Act],” said Vice Adm. Johnny Wolfe Jr., director, Strategic Systems Programs, speaking Jan. 14 in a Nuclear Deterrence Forum webinar sponsored by the Mitchell Institute for Aerospace Studies, a Washington think tank. “With that AoA, going forward and with the Department of Defense’s concurrence, design would start in [fiscal] ’22.”

The Defense Department’s (DoD’s) 2018 Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) said the department would pursue a Sea-Launched Cruise Missile – Nuclear (SLCM-N), “leveraging existing technologies to help ensure its cost effectiveness. SLCM will provide a needed non-strategic regional presence, an assured response capability. It also will provide an arms-control compliant response to Russia’s non-compliance with the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty, its non-strategic nuclear

arsenal, and its other destabilizing behaviors.”

The review asserted that a SLCM “will not require or rely on host nation support to provide deterrent effect. They will provide additional diversity in platforms, range, and survivability, and a valuable hedge against future nuclear ‘break out’ scenarios.

“In the 2010 NPR, the United States announced the retirement of its previous nuclear-armed SLCM, which for decades had contributed to deterrence and the assurance of allies, particularly in Asia,” the 2018 NPR said. “We will immediately begin efforts to restore this capability by initiating a capability study leading to an Analysis of Alternatives (AoA) for the rapid development of a modern SLCM.”

The previous nuclear-armed SLCM was a version of the Tomahawk cruise missile.

Wolfe said the strategic Systems Program Office will be briefed “up through the Navy and OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense] which will eventually go to the CAPE [Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation]. Based on what the AoA says would be the right course of action to have a sea-launched cruise missile, then we would start taking whatever the AoA said and then start to look how would I design it, how would I start to integrate it.”

The Navy would request funds in the fiscal 2022 budget to develop the SLCM-N based on the decision of the DoD.