

WASHINGTON REPORT

Administration Review Calls SSBNs 'Most Survivable Leg' of Nuclear Triad

The Obama administration's much-anticipated Nuclear Posture Review, released last month, stated a resolute commitment to replacing the Navy's Ohio-class ballistic-missile submarines (SSBNs) with a new class of more capable boats.

The 72-page interagency review of the country's nuclear capabilities and requirements called strategic nuclear submarines and the ballistic missiles they carry the "most survivable leg of the U.S. Nuclear Triad."

The review acknowledged that, by 2020, the Ohio-class boats will have been in service longer than any other submarines and that the Navy "must continue" to follow on to the program to maintain an at sea presence for the long term.

Current plans call for the first of the 14 Ohio-class SSBNs to reach the end of its 42 year service life in 2027. The remaining 13 will reach the ends of their service lives at a rate of roughly one boat per year thereafter, with the last retiring in 2040.

The Nuclear Posture Review leaves the door open to reducing the Ohio-class fleet to 12 boats in the second half of this decade, depending on future force structure assessments and how the submarines age in the coming years.

Only 12 boats are typically available for operations, with two undergoing midlife refueling overhauls at any given time. But all 14 SSBNs will have completed refuelings by around 2020.

Regardless, the Ohio class will be in the fleet for decades. But, as the nuclear review pointed out, the lead times associated with designing, building, testing and deploying new submarines are particularly long, making it necessary to begin development of a replacement program now.

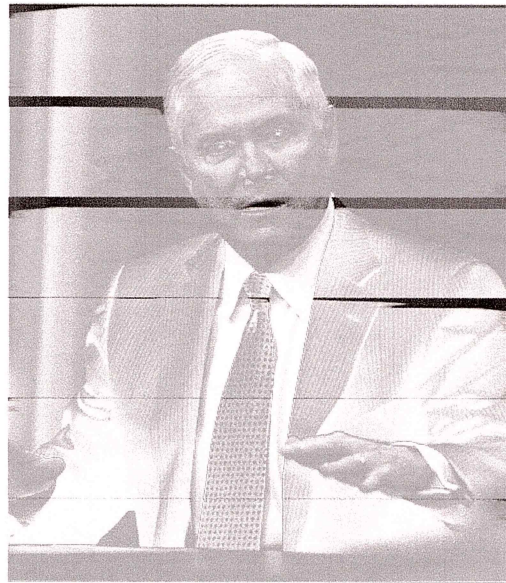
"Today, there appears to be no credible or midterm threats to the survivability of U.S. SSBNs,"

according to the report. "However, given the stakes involved, the Department of Defense will continue a robust SSBN Security Program that aims to anticipate potential threats and develop appropriate countermeasures to protect current and future SSBNs."

The fact that the review backed the Ohio-class replacement program is not a significant surprise. After all, the Navy received \$497.4

million in research and development dollars for the program this year and requested \$672.3 million for the program next year.

But the strength of the endorsement in the high-level report could prove key down the road, when the cost of the 12 next-generation ballistic-missile submarines the Navy plans to buy puts a strain on other shipbuilding priorities. The new boats are expected to have a



DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates has warned that when the Ohio-class submarine replacement, or SSBN03, program "really begins to ramp up, in the latter part of this decade, it will suck all the air out of the Navy's shipbuilding program."

40-year service life and not require a mid-service refueling.

Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates warned House appropriators of the financial pressures the Ohio-class replacement, or SSBN(X), would place on the already constrained shipbuilding budget during a budget hearing March 24.

"One of the new program starts in the [fiscal 2011] budget is for the next-generation ballistic-missile submarine. And when that program really begins to ramp up, in the latter part of this decade, it will suck all the air out of the Navy's shipbuilding program," he said. "And so some tough choices are going to have to be made, either in terms of more investment or choices between the size of surface fleets you want and the submarine fleets."

The Navy preliminarily estimates the procurement cost of each SSBN(X) at \$6 billion to \$7 billion — a figure equivalent to roughly one-half of its shipbuilding budget each year, according to an April 7 report from the Congressional Research Service. Those costs do not include billions more needed up front for research and development.

In its annual shipbuilding report to Congress, the Navy acknowledged that while the SSBN(X) is being procured, the service "will be limited in its ability to procure other ship classes."

The Navy wants to procure the first SSBN(X) in fiscal 2019 and have it ready to enter service in fiscal 2028. The remaining 11 boats would be procured between fiscal 2022 and 2033 and enter service between fiscal 2029 and 2040.

In its shipbuilding report, the Navy said the SSBN(X) schedule is "inextricably linked" to the Ohio-class retirement schedule and that there is "no leeway in this plan to allow a later start or any delay in the procurement plan."

But as important as keeping the program on schedule is, the Navy

INTERCEPTS

"It used to be that the most dangerous job in the military was infantry. In Iraq, it was truck driver."

Maj. Gen. Anthony Jackson

Commander, Marine Installations West

Citing one of the reasons for the Department of the Navy's aggressive new energy efficiency goals.

North County, Calif., Times, March 21

"This could be the beginning of a violent period. If the pirates see guys with shiny pistols pointing at them, they might fire first."

E.J. Hogendoorn

Head of the Horn of Africa program at the International Crisis Group's office in Nairobi, Kenya

On the possible repercussions of the shooting death of a suspected Somali pirate by private security guards protecting the Panamanian-flagged MV Almezaan off the coast of Somalia.

Christian Science Monitor, March 24

also is stressing that, with the last SSBN(X) to remain in service until 2080, the boats must be designed to counter threats that will exist decades from now.

"The importance of getting the design done properly and thoroughly and thoughtfully is absolutely key to ensuring that very survivable leg of the triad remains, almost to the end of this century," Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Gary Roughead told the Senate Armed Services Committee Feb. 25. "If that capability were not to exist, it would not be in the best security interest of the nation."

Navy Bans Smoking Aboard Submarines

The Navy is instituting a smoking ban on submarines, effective no later than Dec. 31, Vice Adm. John Donnelly, commander, Submarine Forces, announced April 8.

The decision follows a 2006 Surgeon General report that found that there is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke.

"Our Sailors are our most important asset to accomplishing our missions. Recent testing has proven that, despite our atmosphere purification technology, there are unacceptable levels of secondhand smoke in the atmosphere of a submerged submarine," Donnelly said in a statement. "The only way to eliminate risk to our non-smoking Sailors is to stop smoking aboard our submarines."

The Navy is offering smoking cessation assistance to Sailors, which incorporates education techniques and nicotine-replacement therapy, such as nicotine patches and nicotine gum. In keeping with current submarine policy, drugs such as Tyban and Chantix are not authorized.

"What we want to discourage is smokers turning to alternative methods of tobacco use such as chewing tobacco," said Capt. Mark Michaud, Submarine Force Atlantic surgeon.

USCG Lays Keel, Names First Sentinel Cutter

The Coast Guard Sentinel-class Fast Response Cutter program passed two