



NAVY LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA
WESTERN AUSTRALIA

September 2023
Volume 7, Issue 9

DOWN THE VOICEPIPE *do you hear there!*

COMING UP

NLWA Executive meeting

Monday 8th. January 2024

HMAS PERTH (H) Memorial Foundation
Executive meeting Saturday 28th. October
2023 at 1000

Facility open each Wednesday morning
0900-1200

THE GULLIVANS

ALL ARTICLES PUBLISHED IN THIS
NEWSLETTER ARE PRINTED IN GOOD
FAITH AND DON'T NECESSARY REFLECT



Navy League of Australia Western Australia Division News update



Friday the 1st of September saw our traveling group hit the road again, this time venturing a few hours north east of Perth to Perenjori in search of some wild-flowers, the Wreath Flower in particular. You could almost say, with so many activities occurring throughout the past month, there was more than a couple of people looking forward to the getaway as a time to rest and relax.

Mid-month we caught up with CMDR Cam Hooper and his crew for a coffee and chat, which was a good opportunity for us to stay up to date with what's happening and likewise, I hope, provided a good excuse for Cam and his crew to have a little break from their training schedule. Each and every person who attended was very engaging and informative, answering questions and having a general chit chat as sailors do. It was a pleasure to host them and we look forward to seeing them again in the not too distant future.

Regrettably, after the main structure standing in place for several decades, vandals have struck, pulling off the fairly recently added HMAS PERTH I crest from our not that long-ago renovated building. It's just such a shame that so many people these days can't respect others property, particularly a structure set up as a living memorial for those who fought for the country and through their actions, even allow malicious individuals to live the lives they do.

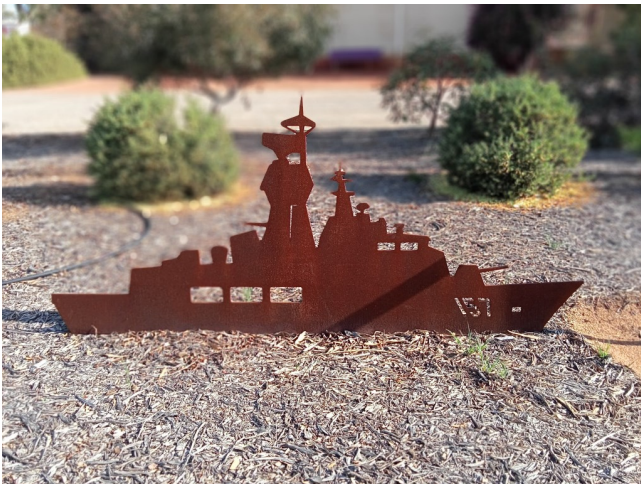
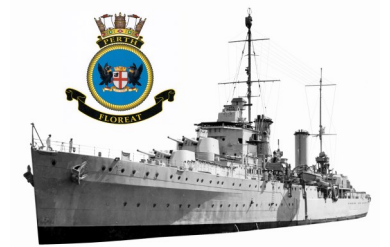
Our deepest sympathy extends to CDRE Ivan Ingham RAN, former CO HMAS PERTH III and his family on the recent passing of his wife Celia, who truly was a lovely lady and will be sadly missed. Celia, in company with Ivan, attended several NLWA functions and we always found her to be one of those people that you just enjoy talking to. Again, our thoughts are with Ivan and his family in some not so good times.

Sunday the 22nd of October will see the sporting members and the not so sporting members hit the golf course, albeit smaller and in the name of fun at our Jumbo Golf Day which has been set up to encourage as many as possible to get out in the fresh air for a couple of hours, relax among friends, have a chat, some lunch, a brew and just unwind from the mundane stresses of life. This will be our second such activity with donations being sought to help the Merredin Military Museum. If you can play golf or even if you can't, come out and have a laugh, we promise not to tease you too much.

Until next month

Brad





Perenjori War Memorial



HMAS PERTH (I) MEMORIAL UPDATE Incorporating NLWA and the HMAS PERTH (I) Memorial Foundation Incorporated



Jim O'Neill
 CMDR ANC RTD
 Project Manager



The concrete has now been laid for the last remaining stage of the project. However, we are still held up with technical and engineering stages of the glass and steel work. A decision will be made later this month to defer the opening of the memorial to a later date next year if it is clear the stage wont be completed in time.



Lions International gathered at the Memorial recently
Hello Jim

On behalf of District Governor, Tim Moore, and myself, I wish to sincerely thank both you and your Team for organising the visit to your exciting and impressive memorial facility and for the warmth shown towards Past International President, Brian Sheehan, and wife Lori.

As you could probably tell, IPIP Brian, International Director Tim Irvine and the both of us were immensely impressed by what we saw and to hear of the plans you have for the near future.

IPIP Brian certainly left your facility full of praise for your efforts. Please pass this on to your crew.

Regards **DG Peter Kennedy**
District 201 W2 (2023-24)
Lions Club of Atwell Inc



MARITIME SECURITY VESSEL NEWS ROUNDUP | JUNE 2 – MIDDLE EAST AND PHILIPPINE SURFACE COMBATANTS PLUS CONSTRUCTION APPROVAL FOR FUTURE ITALIAN SUBMARINE

By **Baird Maritime**

Philippine Navy commissions two newest fast attack boats



Photo:

Philippine Navy

The Philippine Navy recently commissioned its two newest fast attack interdiction craft (FAIC).

Like their earlier sisters BRP *Nestor Acero* and BRP *Lolinato To-ong*, BRP *Gener Tinangag* and BRP *Domingo Deluana* were named after two Philippine Marine Corps personnel who were posthumously awarded the Medal of Valor, the Philippine armed forces' highest combat decoration.

The newer FAICs are the third and fourth in the series, which are variants of the Shaldag Mark V class patrol boats built by Israel Shipyards. The navy will take delivery of a total of nine FAICs, which also includes four to be built locally in the Philippines.

Each vessel's armament includes a 30mm autocannon, two 12.7mm machine guns, 7.62mm general purpose machine guns, and Rafael Spike NLOS anti-ship missiles.

Two diesel engines will propel each FAIC to a maximum speed of 43 knots while a range of 1,600 nautical miles can be achieved at a cruising speed of 15 knots.

Egyptian Navy takes delivery of second Al-Aziz-class frigate



Photo: MarineTraffic.com/Lars Larson

German shipbuilder ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems (TKMS) has delivered the second ship of a new class of four frigates ordered by the Egyptian Navy.

ENS *Al-Qahhar* (“The Irresistible Subduer”) belongs to the Al-Aziz-class, which are variants of the MEKO A-200 frigates originally developed by German defence firms for the export market. Missions will include anti-surface warfare, anti-air warfare, patrol, interdiction, and humanitarian response.

The ship has a length of 118 metres, a beam of 14.8 metres, a draught of 4.3 metres, and a crew complement of 220. Armament includes a 127mm naval gun, 30mm autocannons, 16 Exocet anti-ship missiles, and 32 MICA surface-to-air missiles.

Power is provided by a combined diesel or gas (CODOG) propulsion arrangement that consists of a GE LM2500 gas turbine and two MTU 12V1163 TB83 diesel engines driving two controllable-pitch propellers. This configuration will deliver a maximum speed of 32 knots and a range of 6,000 nautical miles at a cruising speed of 18 knots.

Construction of Italian Navy’s third U212NFS submarine gets parliamentary approval



Rendering of a U212NFS submarine (Photo: Fincantieri)

Fincantieri has confirmed that the Italian parliament has given its approval for the construction of a third U212NFS diesel-electric submarine for the Italian Navy.

Two submarines will initially be built under the class. The navy may still exercise an option for a fourth boat. Deliveries of the first two U212NFS submarines are scheduled for 2027 and 2029. These will replace the four ageing Nazario Sauro-class boats that entered service from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s.

The U212NFS boats will be used for missions including anti-piracy, security of energy supply routes, anti-terrorism, and protection of offshore and subsea infrastructure.

UAE builder unveils new 92-metre corvette design



Photo: Abu Dhabi Ship Building

Abu Dhabi Ship Building (ADSB) has unveiled a new class of naval corvette designed for operation in coastal waters. The 92-metre vessel will have space for a helicopter deck and hangar, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), two rigid inflatable boats (RIBs), electronic warfare systems, and a broad range of countermeasures. Stealth features and ballistic protection will also be incorporated in the standard design. The propulsion system will consist of diesel engines in a combined diesel and diesel (CODAD) arrangement that will deliver a top speed of 28 knots and a range of more than 4,500 nautical miles.



CMDR Cam Hooper RAN Commanding Officer NS ARAFURA dropped in with some of his crew to join us for morning tea recently and learn about the memorial.

Collins-class submarine suffers on-board electrical fire

Story by Exclusive by defence correspondent Andrew Greene and Four Corners' Angus Grigg •
The operations of Australia's six Collins-class submarines are shrouded in secrecy. (Defence Department: Petty Officer James Whittle)



The operations of Australia's six Collins-class submarines are shrouded in secrecy. (Defence Department: Petty Officer James Whittle)
© Provided by ABC News (AU)

One of Australia's oldest submarines has suffered an on-board electrical fire while at sea, with the crew able to continue their mission after managing to extinguish the blaze.

The ABC can reveal the emergency inside HMAS Farncomb occurred last month while the Collins-class boat was on deployment in its 25th year of service.

Details of the incident, including where the submarine was located at the time, are being tightly held but one figure familiar with the events has described the experience as "concerning".

The operations of Australia's six Collins-class submarines are shrouded in secrecy with Defence declining to confirm where HMAS Farncomb currently is or what repairs were required once she returned to Australia.



"A Royal Australian Navy Collins-class submarine suffered a small electrical fire while at sea last month," a Defence spokesperson told the ABC.

"There were no injuries and the vessel continued its operations," the spokesperson added while refusing to offer any further specifics about the incident."

A serving member of the Navy's so-called "silent service" said fellow submariners had now taken to calling HMAS Farncomb the "Farnkursk", a macabre reference to the doomed Russian submarine Kursk which sank in 2000 killing all on board.

Former Senator and submariner Rex Patrick says the blaze would have been a frightening experience for the crew.

"Fires are very dangerous on a submarine because they let off toxic fumes, you've got to get them under control really, really quickly."

"I can remember in my day as a submariner putting out a fire [while] in my underwear because you've just got to get to it really quickly or disaster will occur," he recalled.

HMAS Farncomb is the second of the diesel-electric Collins-class fleet to enter service for the Royal Australian Navy after being commissioned in 1998.

The Adelaide-built boat is due to begin a life of type extension (LOTE) program in 2026, a process which involves cutting the hull open and replacing its engine, as well as other upgrades.

Australia's Collins-class fleet was originally due to start retiring from 2025 but the Navy has conceded the boats could be operating for decades as it waits for the arrival of nuclear-powered submarines under the AUKUS partnership. "Submarines are dangerous places, you often end up with incidents occurring – the problem we've got to watch out for here is the Collins-class submarines are getting old," Rex Patrick warns.

"As submarines get older their propensity for things to go wrong increases and we've got to keep our eye out for that". In September last year, the Navy denied reports that HMAS Farncomb had been "stranded" in Hawaii while technicians were flown out from Australia to conduct repairs.

"[HMAS Farncomb] is alongside in Hawaii conducting a period of planned maintenance. Defence does not comment on specifics of submarine operations," a defence spokesperson was quoted as saying at the time. In December Indonesian military observers noted that HMAS Farncomb had remained moored in Surabaya for several days longer than planned, with a Royal Australian Air Force transport plane picking up "spare materials" belonging to the submarine in January.



Luersssen pitches C90 corvette derivative to RAN

By Max Blenkin | Varna, Bulgaria

German shipbuilder Luersssen says it can build small capable warships in Australia for the Royal Australian Navy within five years if the government decides to go down the corvette path.

Luersssen is well established in Australia as builder of the Navy's Arafura-class Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPVs). The company is proposing its C90 corvette for Australia, based on the Multipurpose Modular Patrol Vessels (MMPVs) it is building for the Bulgarian Navy at a yard at Varna on the Black Sea.

The C90 is a 2,300-tonne 90-metre steel-hulled warship, derived from the OPV design but with vastly increased firepower, including a 16 VLS cells, a 76mm main gun, 35mm secondary gun NSM anti-ship missiles and a pair of triple torpedo tubes. Luersssen says the vessel could be equipped with an Australian CEA radar with Saab 9LV combat system.

Whether Australia needs corvettes is likely to be decided by the independent surface warship review which will report back to the government in September. This review emerged from the Defence Strategic Review, released in April. At the time, Defence Minister Richard Marles noted two main takeaways.

One is that the current surface fleet was crafted at a time when the Navy was acquiring conventionally powered submarines. But it's now acquiring nuclear submarines, vastly more capable in the anti-submarine warfare role. The other is a trend in world navies towards operating a larger number of smaller vessels, rather than small numbers of larger exquisitely capable but expensive vessels. The DSR said the surface fleet should comprise Tier 1 and Tier 2 vessels to provide for increased strike, air defence, presence operations and anti-submarine warfare.

It didn't define what it means by Tier 1 and Tier 2, though Tier 1 is understood to include the Navy's three DDGs and eight Anzac frigates. Tier 2 includes combatants around the 2,000-tonne mark. Many companies offer corvettes and are pitching to the Commonwealth, among them Navantia of Spain and possibly Babcock and TKMS. Luersssen was quick off the mark, saying it could deliver vessels with capabilities for anti-air warfare, anti-surface warfare and anti-submarine warfare by 2028, two years sooner than anyone else.

It could do that by using its existing Australian supply chain and OPV production facility at Henderson, Western Australia. The company said this was a one-off opportunity for the Commonwealth to purchase highly capable missile-equipped vessels of the type currently being built for the Bulgarian Navy.

It said pivoting the existing OPV production line at Henderson created exceptionally advantageous circumstances which under the procurement rules allowed Defence to do a fast-track limited tender directly to Luersssen. Speaking to Australian reporters in Hamburg, Peter Luersssen, Head of the parent company Naval Vessels Luersssen (NVL), said the company had demonstrated that it took Australian industry content very seriously.

"We are above the threshold we needed originally. We have a great experience. We understand how the Commonwealth works and we will be in the position to respond to whatever need the government may have, in my belief, faster than any competitor," he said. "We can have the first ship in the water by 2028." In line with the DSR call for rationalisation of shipbuilding in Western Australia, Luersssen said it was keen to participate through a yet-to-be-decided arrangement, likely with Australian shipbuilder Austal.

"A joint venture between two companies is not the most efficient way but we are happy to combine in a joint company for efficiency's sake and we would like to be one of the builders in Australia," he said. "We would like to be in a form to be defined involved in being the WA shipbuilder for the Commonwealth." He sees a role for the Commonwealth in the business. "The best way to ensure confidence and trust in the industry is by giving the government a stake in the industry," he asserted.

I spy with my little eye: BAE presentation reveals interesting next-gen Destroyer concept

By: [Stephen Kuper](#)



Artists impression of the Type 83 Destroyer

Australia isn't alone in facing questions about the amount of firepower available to our surface fleet and recognising this, it appears that [BAE Systems](#) has been quietly working away on a next-generation destroyer concept building on the Type 26 base, with some impressive results.

As an island nation, Australia's sovereignty, security, and prosperity is intrinsically linked to our maritime surrounds and the uncontested and unmolested access to the global maritime commons.

Driven in large part by the continued expansion of Beijing's own already formidable naval forces, coupled with the rising capability of emerging powers throughout the Indo-Pacific, the relative power and capability of the Royal Australian Navy's surface fleet has been called into question.

Front and centre for these concerns is the declining number of missile cells and accordingly firepower the Royal Australian Navy can bring to bear at any given time. This reality has drawn the attention of many strategic policy analysts, thought leaders, and policymakers as the nation grapples with how best to equip the Navy.

Detailing this truly terrifying state of naval firepower, former Chief of Navy, Vice Admiral (Ret'd) David Shackleton [explains](#), "In 1995, the Royal Australian Navy possessed 368 missile cells on its major surface combatants. By 2020, that had reduced to 208, a 43 per cent reduction in firepower. It will take until 2045 for the Navy to get back up to its 1995 capacity. From 2050, it will plateau at 432, a net increase of 64 cells."

Unpacking this further, this time focusing on the number of hulls at sea, VADM (Ret'd) Shackleton adds, "By 2006, when the RAN's final Anzac frigate, HMAS *Perth*, was commissioned, the class had 64 cells, but the ESSMs they contained were to be used for self-defence. In the interim, two of six older Perry Class ships were decommissioned to provide funds to upgrade the remaining four, including adding eight VLS cells. That gave each ship 48 cells, and an improved capability with the longer-range SM-2. After modernisation, the Perry Class went from six ships to four, but the total number of cells went from 240 to 192.

"In 1995, the RAN operated three guided missile destroyers, six guided missile frigates and the first of eight smaller frigates, with 368 missile cells in all, the most it has ever possessed. By 2020, the combined effect of several force structure changes meant that across its fleet of eight Anzac Class and three Hobart Class surface combatants, the RAN could provide only 208 cells," Shackleton adds

Recognising this serious shortfall in the face of mounting challenges and adversary capabilities across the Indo-Pacific, the Albanese government's Defence Strategic Review has moved to reshape the Royal Australian Navy into a flexible, future-proofed force capable of meeting the tactical and strategic operational requirements placed upon the service by the nation's policymakers.

VESSEL REVIEW | BUNG KARNO – INDONESIAN NAVY CORVETTE TO ALSO SERVE AS PRESIDENTIAL YACHT

By **Baird Maritime**



Photo: Indonesian Navy

The Indonesian Navy recently placed a new locally-built guided missile frigate into service. Built by state-owned shipyard Karimun Anugrah Sejati, the vessel has been christened KRI *Bung Karno* ("Brother Karno") in honour of Sukarno, the first president of Indonesia. The name chosen is appropriate, for the corvette will also perform the role of a presidential yacht when not utilised for maritime security missions. *Bung Karno* has a steel hull, a length of 73 metres, a beam of 12 metres, a displacement of 650 tonnes, and accommodations for 55 crewmembers. Two diesel engines will deliver a maximum speed of 24 knots and a cruising speed of 20 knots.



Photo: Indonesian Navy

Navy

The vessel's armament presently includes a BAE Systems Bofors 40mm naval gun and two Yugoimport 20mm autocannons, though an additional Leonardo 40mm gun, torpedoes, and twin launchers for up to four MBDA Mistral surface-to-air missiles will be fitted in the future. The flight deck and hangar can meanwhile accommodate an AS565 helicopter that can augment the corvette's anti-submarine warfare capability. Also installed are an active stabiliser and ballistic protection panels. Starboard side deck space is meanwhile available for a small tender.

Bung Karno replaces the older KRI *Barakuda*, which served for over 27 years in the presidential transport role and is now being refitted for patrol duties. The newer vessel will also be equipped to operate as a command and control ship during disaster response operations.

Bung Karno is also the first ship of a new class of corvette. Indonesian Navy officials recently confirmed that a sister ship possessing the same general layout and armament but with a slightly longer hull will be completed and delivered in 2024.

Austal delivers sixth evolved Cape-class patrol boat to Australia

by Fatima Bahtić



Austal Australia

The vessel, ADV Cape Pillar, was officially accepted by the Commonwealth of Australia at Austal's Henderson, Western Australia shipyard.

Austal Limited Chief Executive Officer **Paddy Gregg** said that Cape Pillar was the third evolved Cape-class Patrol Boat delivered to the Royal Australian Navy in CY2023, continuing an enviable track record of Australian shipbuilding efficiency and productivity.

"The Austal Australia team, collaborating with the Department of Defence, the Royal Australian Navy and our valued supply chain partners, are very clearly demonstrating what the National Naval Shipbuilding Enterprise is capable of – delivering sovereign capability for Australia," Gregg said.

"ADV Cape Pillar is the sixth Evolved Cape-class Patrol Boat Austal delivered in just over 18 months, effectively providing a new capability for the Royal Australian Navy every three months. Austal is on track to deliver the remaining two Evolved Cape-class Patrol Boats currently under construction at Henderson, Western Australia in 2024; completing the fleet of eight vessels that are enhancing Australia's maritime security."

The project to construct the eight, 58-metre aluminium monohull patrol boats for the Royal Australian Navy commenced in May 2020.

The first five evolved Cape-class patrol boats, Cape Otway, Cape Peron, Cape Naturaliste, Cape Capricorn and Cape Woolamai were delivered within an eighteen-month period, from March 2022.

The evolved Capes feature new, larger amenities to accommodate up to 32 people, improved quality of life systems and advanced sustainment intelligence systems that further enhance the Royal Australian Navy's ability to fight and win at sea. The patrol boats will be utilised for a wide variety of constabulary and naval missions and play a critical role in Australia's national security, as a high-performing, reliable and effective maritime asset.

USS Ronald Reagan arrives in South Korea

By Hyung-Jin Kim, The Associated Press



U.S. nuclear-powered aircraft carrier Ronald Reagan is escorted as it arrives in Busan, South Korea, Thursday, Oct. 12, 2023. (Kang Duck-chul/Yonhap via AP)

SEOUL, South Korea — A U.S. nuclear-powered aircraft carrier arrived in South Korea on Thursday in a demonstration of strength against North Korea, as [the North's leader reaffirmed his push to bolster ties with Russia](#). The [USS Ronald Reagan](#) and its battle group came to the southeastern South Korean port of Busan after participating in a trilateral South Korean-U.S.-Japanese maritime exercise in international waters off a southern South Korean island earlier this week, the South Korean Defense Ministry said.

The aircraft carrier is to stay in Busan until next Monday as part of a bilateral agreement to enhance “regular visibility” of U.S. strategic assets to the Korean Peninsula in response to [North Korea's advancing nuclear program](#), according to an earlier Defense Ministry statement. It's the first arrival of a U.S. aircraft carrier in South Korea in six months since the USS Nimitz docked at Busan in late March, the statement said.

The arrival of the USS Ronald Reagan is expected to enrage North Korea, which views the deployment of such a powerful U.S. military asset as a major security threat. When the USS Ronald Reagan staged joint military drills with South Korean forces off the Korean Peninsula's east coast in October 2022, North Korea said the carrier's deployment was causing “considerably huge negative splash” in regional security and performed ballistic missile tests.

The U.S. carrier's latest arrival comes as concerns grow that [North Korea is pushing to get sophisticated weapons technologies from Russia in exchange for supplying ammunitions](#) to refill Russia's conventional arms stores exhausted by its protracted war with Ukraine. Such concerns flared after North Korean leader Kim Jong Un visited Russia's Far East last month to meet President Vladimir Putin and inspect key weapons-making facilities.

Many experts say Kim would want Russian help to build more reliable weapons systems targeting the U.S. and South Korea. Washington and Seoul have warned that Moscow and Pyongyang would pay a price if they move ahead with the speculated weapons transfer deal in breach of U.N. Security Council resolutions that ban any weapons trading with North Korea. On Thursday, Kim and Putin exchanged messages marking 75 years of diplomatic ties between the two countries.

In his message to Putin, Kim said he was “very satisfied” over “an exchange of candid and comprehensive opinions” with Putin during his Russia trip, while expressing a firm belief that bilateral ties will develop onto a new level. Kim also hoped that the Russian people would defeat “the imperialists' persistent hegemonic policy and moves to isolate and stifle Russia,” according to the official Korean Central News Agency. Putin, for his part, told Kim in his message that he was satisfied with the fact that bilateral ties continue to positively develop in all aspects, KCNA said.

UK launches ship dedicated to drones and underwater surveillance



RFA Proteus in London, where she was formally dedicated (Picture: Royal Navy).

British protection has been enhanced with the launch of a new ship dedicated to underwater surveillance in areas of UK interest.

RFA Proteus, which started life as an oil rig support vessel, will be used as a launchpad for remotely-operated vehicles and a number of specialist capabilities used in the oil and gas industry.

Operated by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, and named after the god of rivers and water in Greek mythology, the ship will also serve as a testbed for technology to be used beneath the waves.

She will carry a crew of 26 officers and sailors from the RFA, as well as 60 Royal Navy personnel responsible for the undersea surveillance and survey and warfare systems.

RFA Proteus also comes with a flight deck, a 1,000 sq metre cargo deck and a heavy-duty crane for lifting and lowering operations.

Commanding Officer Captain Martin Jones RFA said it was a "huge honour to be able to bring RFA Proteus to the City of London for her official naming ceremony".



RFA Proteus also comes with a flight deck, a 1,000 sq metre cargo deck and a heavy-duty crane for lifting and lowering operations (Picture: Royal Navy).

"To be berthed at such an auspicious location alongside HMS Belfast on the River Thames, is a unique opportunity to present the RFA to the public eye and allow the ships company to enjoy the sights and sounds of London."

The ship was formally dedicated on the Thames in front of RFA Commodore-in Chief, Prince Edward, The Duke of Edinburgh.

The ceremony comes just 11 months since the Ministry of Defence (MOD) committed to invest in Proteus as the first ship in its Multi-Role Ocean Surveillance (MROS) programme.

After leaving Merseyside last month, the ship has undergone trials off Portland before heading to London, berthing alongside iconic wartime cruiser HMS Belfast, for today's service of dedication.

Commodore David Eagles, head of the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, said it was a "huge honour" to crew and operate the ship.

"Bringing a ship into service is a demanding endeavour which relies on a diverse, multi-skilled team, strong leadership, and unflinching determination," he added.

"Proteus is no different and I pay tribute to the men and women in the UK, military and civilian who have contributed to this project and made today possible."

Akshata Murty, a businesswoman and wife of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, will serve as RFA Proteus sponsor throughout her active life and said it was "a privilege" to sponsor the ship.

"The Royal Fleet Auxiliary are unsung heroes of our maritime security, and I am incredibly proud of all those who have worked on her to date, and all those who will serve on board in the years to come," she said.

"I look forward to a long and rewarding relationship with Proteus and all associated with her."

OPINION | CHINA'S "BLUE DRAGON" STRATEGY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

By **Patrick Mendis**



The Chinese aircraft carrier Liaoning underway with escorts (Photo: People's Liberation Army Navy)

To compete strategically with the United States and undermine President Joe Biden's Indo-Pacific policy, China has quietly been advancing its stealthy divide-and-conquer foreign policy agenda on four different but connected frontiers.

The core of Beijing's comprehensive plan can be described as a "blue dragon" strategy, anchored primarily between two "unsinkable aircraft carriers", Sri Lanka and Taiwan. The plan targets three bodies of water in the Indo-Pacific region and the major river systems in Southeast and South Asia originating in the Himalayas.

Despite Washington's public denial of a containment policy against China, the US has continued its global spy operations and increased its defensive military posture in the Indo-Pacific. The Biden administration's recent re-engagement with Beijing emerges from the tense diplomatic hiatus following the Sino-Russian "no limits" pact in February 2022 and the US Air Force's downing of a suspected Chinese spy balloon in February 2023.

But can a traditional containment policy prove effective in countering China's ambitious blue dragon strategy? **"With the release of the 'new standard' map of China in August, Beijing has claimed a vast swath of contested waters and reefs, reinforcing its 'nine-dash line'."**

The first frontier in the strategy is related to territorial disputes over Taiwan and the Senkaku Islands (as known in Japan). While continuing its operational air and sea activities encircling Taiwan and the cross-strait region, China has been penetrating the East China Sea and beyond into the Western Pacific. The increasingly militaristic China has clearly been demonstrating its show of force to Taiwan, while simultaneously sending a message to the United States and Japan.

Armed with two aircraft carriers—*Liaoning* and *Shandong*—and a fleet of modern ships and aircraft, China's unyielding pressure on Taiwan is closely tied to President Xi Jinping's dedication to the "reunification" of the "breakaway province". The Chinese government has explicitly stated that "national reunification is the only way to avoid the risk of Taiwan being invaded and occupied again by foreign countries [and] to foil the attempts of external forces [i.e., the US] to contain China."

The constant Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy and Air Force exercises mark an escalation of Beijing's grey-zone warfare in the Taiwan Strait and the Senkaku Islands, and even in the vicinity of US military bases in Okinawa and Guam. China's strategy includes normalising Beijing's territorial claims.

Beijing's second frontier is linked to its militarised artificial islands in the South China Sea. With the release of the "new standard" map of China in August, Beijing has claimed a vast swath of contested waters and reefs, reinforcing its "nine-dash line" in the South China Sea. China's neighbouring countries—including India, the Philippines, and Vietnam—were infuriated by the new map.

In 2016, an arbitral tribunal ruled that Beijing had “no legal basis” for its “expansive claim to sovereignty over the waters” of the South China Sea. The global community at the time hoped that the landmark ruling would force China to reconsider its claims and honour international law.

Despite the ruling, however, China’s militarisation of the South China Sea continues, and its escalating assertiveness has compelled the US to try to thwart its expansion efforts. While the US hasn’t ratified the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, it continues in practice to operationalise the convention’s principles, maintaining that “all States [should] enjoy the freedoms of navigation ... [and] lawful uses of the sea”.

“Beijing’s goal is to transform the Indian Ocean into the ‘Western Ocean’—a name that can be traced back to ancient Chinese literature and poetry.”

China’s third blue dragon frontier is associated with India, Sri Lanka, and the Indian Ocean. Beijing continues to claim Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh as Chinese territory. These claims are carefully devised to keep India perpetually restless and to drain its military and financial resources rather than finding a permanent solution to the border conflict.

The northern encirclement of India is also strategically linked to China’s “Buddhist diplomacy” with Sri Lanka and its surrounding Indian Ocean. Beijing’s goal is to transform the Indian Ocean into the “Western Ocean”—a name that can be traced back to ancient Chinese literature and poetry. This tale of China’s “peaceful rise” and historical relationships is showcased in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is the “crown jewel” of the Belt and Road Initiative, as evidenced by Beijing’s construction of the Hambantota Port, the Colombo Lotus Tower, and other massive infrastructure with loans to the island.

Sri Lanka continues to play a pivotal role between China, India, and the US. When Sri Lanka was declared bankrupt after defaulting on its international loans and other financial obligations in May 2022, it was India that provided the needed loan of US\$3.8 billion. Out of concern for disclosing China’s “art of war” in secret dealings, Beijing has advocated a bilateral Sino-Sri Lankan solution and declined to involve a multilateral framework aimed at achieving a sustainable debt-restructuring scheme.

Instead, China has announced the sending of the PLA Navy ship *Shi Yan 6* to Sri Lanka later this month, raising “concerns” in both New Delhi and Washington. In August 2022, India and the US also expressed security concerns over *Yuan Wang 5*’s berthing at the Hambantota Port, which is widely considered the next Chinese military base. US Senator Chris Van Hollen recently reiterated in Colombo that Washington is committed to protecting Sri Lanka’s sovereignty “whether it comes to a free and open Indo-Pacific or debt restructuring” by providing assistance through the International Monetary Fund and supporting the Sri Lanka Navy to safeguard the island’s territorial waters. Thus, the competition over Sri Lanka continues.

Beijing’s fourth frontier is related to the geopolitics of water in the Brahmaputra River basin in India and Bangladesh and the Mekong River in the Southeast Asia.

China has been using the rivers in East, South, and Southeast Asia, derived from their tributaries in the Tibetan plateau, to produce hydroelectric power through a vast network of dams. Control over the sources of transboundary rivers, like the Brahmaputra and the Mekong, has also given Beijing significant geopolitical and geoeconomic leverage against the downstream countries. With the expansion of its dam system, China has manipulated the water level of cross-border rivers, disrupting agriculture, farming methods and transportation networks throughout Asia.

Beijing might keep using the powerful water card of manipulation against downstream countries, forcing them into various compromises and concessions. In other words, China possesses a water blackmail tool to pressure lower riparian countries and punish them for policies and actions that don’t correspond with Beijing’s will.

“The US would be wise to sustain a highly agile containment policy through active partnerships with friends and allies while allowing Beijing to make its own mistakes and miscalculations.”

China’s philosophy to win a war without fighting a battle is illustrated by a range of carefully designed tactics from Taiwan to Sri Lanka. America’s traditional containment methods stemming from the Cold War can’t be used in the context of an increasingly versatile and powerful China. Today’s world is more closely interconnected by political and corporate lobbying as well as technology and trade than it was during the Cold War period. Thus, it is nearly impossible to divide the world into pro-American and pro-China camps, especially when the US-Sino trade regimes are inextricably intertwined and expanding.

Washington needs to keep ahead of China’s scientific and technological advancements and maintain US security guarantees to allies and like-minded democratic countries in the Indo-Pacific. However, American military cooperation—in the forms of Quad and AUKUS, or bilateral defence treaties with the Philippines and Vietnam—is not a panacea. The US should treat its small allies and friends as partners in both the military and economic realms. The Biden administration has begun a “charm offensive” by courting the 18-nation Pacific Islands Forum aimed at curbing Chinese inroads in the South Pacific.

With its growing centralised power and autocratic mindset, Beijing might miscalculate by overestimating its military might and economic capacities. After all, while America's Cold War containment policy contributed to the downfall of the Soviet Union, the autocratic empire in Moscow collapsed under the weight of its own miscalculations and weaknesses of the centralised system.

Unlike democratic governing systems that have naturally embedded self-correcting mechanisms—such as regular elections, multi-party platforms, and freedom of expression—autocratic and centralised systems tend to erupt from the top, the sides, and the bottom like a volcano. In this worldview, perhaps, China might be its own worst enemy.

The US would be wise to sustain a highly agile containment policy through active partnerships with friends and allies while allowing Beijing to make its own mistakes and miscalculations.

Co-written with Antonina Luszczkiewicz, assistant professor at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow.

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Museum chiefs battling for sunken WW2 British warships memorial

8th October 2023 at 11:49am



Prof Tweddle wants to commemorate the sinking of HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Repulse (pictured) by the Japanese in 1941 (Picture: PA/ Alamy).

Museum chiefs are reportedly battling with the government over plans for a memorial for the sailors who lost their lives in one of Britain's worst naval disasters of the Second World War.

Professor Dominic Tweddle, the head of the National Museum of the Royal Navy, [told the Mail on Sunday](#), that the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and Foreign Office had blocked his plans to commemorate the sinking of HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Repulse by the Japanese in 1941.

The Mail reported that Prof Tweddle wanted to bring up artefacts from the shipwrecks in the Pacific to create a memorial in Portsmouth but said he was "somewhat disappointed with the response that the MOD wants it to stay in Malaysia for some unknown reason."

Earlier this year, it emerged that the Prince of Wales had been targeted by Chinese pirates who had looted material from the ship.

In May, Malaysia detained a Chinese-registered vessel, which was suspected of shipwreck looting.

Ammunition believed to be from the HMS Prince of Wales and HMS Repulse was found on board after it had anchored illegally at the site in the South China Sea.

Authorities in Malaysia have since recovered much of the stolen objects, Prof Tweddle wants to bring them back to Britain.

MOD Response

An MOD Spokesperson said: "We are working closely with appropriate authorities and partners to ensure the future preservation of the recovered artefacts.

"We consider these sunken British warships to be the final resting place of our servicemen who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country and have engaged with the local and regional authorities to ensure that our position is understood."

Where is the urgency? Surface fleet review delay only leaves us more vulnerable

By: [Stephen Kuper](#)



Revelations that the government's response to the findings of its own surface fleet review is still some time off, ultimately spells trouble for Australia's national security.

It goes without saying that as an island nation, Australia's sovereignty, security, and economic prosperity is intrinsically linked to the stability of our maritime surrounds and the nation's uncontested and unmolested access to the global maritime commons.

Recognising this fundamental strategic and tactical reality, the Albanese government's Defence Strategic Review, released in late-April 2023, has moved to fundamentally reshape the Royal Australian Navy.

This realignment of Navy's force structure and capability is part of government's recognition that the Australian Defence Force as a whole is no longer fit for purpose in the era of increased great power competition and multipolarity, heralding a shift away from a "balanced force" towards a "focused force" in the face of mounting great power competition in the Indo-Pacific.

First and foremost is the rapidly deteriorating geopolitical, tactical, and strategic situation emerging across the Indo-Pacific, necessitating the development of a flexible, future-proofed force capable of reliably responding to the tactical and strategic requirements placed upon the service by the nation's policymakers.

Highlighting this emphasis, the Defence Strategic Review states, "Australia's Navy must be optimised for operating Australia's immediate region and for the security of our sea lines of communication and maritime trade."

Second is Australia's planned fleet of nuclear-powered, conventionally armed submarines to be delivered as part of AUKUS Pillar 1.

Lastly is the necessity to fundamentally overhaul the Navy's surface fleet in order to deliver "An enhanced lethality surface combatant fleet, that complements a conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarine fleet, is now essential given our changed strategic circumstances."

In response to these factors, the government also announced at the release of the Defence Strategic Review that the Royal Australian Navy's surface fleet would be undergoing a "short, sharp" review into the constitution of its force structure to support the delivery of the nation's new defence posture of "impactful projection".

All of these factors are set against the backdrop of repeated reminders by the government that we live in a truly unpredictable, dangerous, and competitive period of global history, not experienced since the interwar years.

Yet, despite this combination of factors, recent revelations have left questions about the government's commitment to deliver the necessary capabilities to ensure that the Royal Australian Navy in particular is fit for purpose in face of the deteriorating Namely, the government's decision to delay its response to the findings of the review conducted by US Vice Admiral (Ret'd) William Hilarides, until Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Richard Marles explained at a [Submarine Institute of Australia](#) event in mid-September, "Our intention is to provide our response to that, meaning the decisions which come from that, in really the first part of the first couple of months of next year. We'll try and get this out the door as quickly as we can, but that's essentially the timeframe that we're working on."

This is further reinforced by Defence Industry Minister Pat Conroy, who said, "It's an incredibly complex piece of work, detailing recommendations around platforms that cost tens of billions of dollars. It really will drive the structure of the Royal Australian Navy for 30, if not 50 years to come, and government will take our time working through its recommendations, and we will respond to it, and we're aiming to release a response in the first couple of months of next year at the latest."

While commendable they're taking the time to "do the hard yards", this seeming lack of urgency seems to fly in the face of repeated reminders about the precarious position in which we now find ourselves. regional and global outlook.

What we know so far

At the centre of VADM Hilarides' review emphasis is the major step change in the conceptualisation of Navy's mission profile, responsibilities and subsequently, the implications for force structure.

To this end, the government has spruiked plans to field two distinct tiers of surface combatant that are capable of "enhancing Navy's capability in long-range strike (maritime and land), air defence, and anti-submarine warfare requires the acquisition of a contemporary optimal mix of Tier 1 and Tier 2 surface combatants, consistent with a strategy of a larger number of small surface vessels".

This seems to indicate an "expansion" of the Royal Australian Navy's surface fleet, bulking the fleet out with smaller, corvette style vessels to provide a continuous, regional presence, with vessels that aren't as focused on high-intensity conflict, but still capable of adding something to any prospective fight.

The government envisages that these "Tier 2" vessels would be complemented by larger, more complex "Tier 1" vessels, similar to the Hobart Class and Hunter Class, respectively.

As part of this, it would seem that the Defence Strategic Review as the foundational document for the surface fleet review articulates the need to "significantly increase Navy's capability through a greater number of lethal vessels with enhanced long-range strike (maritime and land) and air defence capabilities, together with the ability to provide presence in our northern maritime approaches".

This approach, seems to in large part, predict the outcome, with mounting commentary advocating for corvettes to meet the "Tier 2" capability slot of Australia's still (let's face it) poorly misunderstood tactical and strategic requirements, highlighting just how quickly the "new and shiny" can seduce even the most discerning minds.

While we can (and will continue to) debate the individual platforms that best suit our requirement, again we come back to Australia's seeming lack of urgency in the face of this rapidly deteriorating global and regional circumstances – if they're so bad, where is our urgency?!

Final thoughts

The rapidly deteriorating geopolitical and strategic environment that is transforming the global and regional security paradigm requires a realistic analysis and assessment by Australia's policymakers.

Equally, while taking shortcuts to end up with 50 per cent of something, as opposed to 100 per cent of nothing is an admirable goal, however, ultimately it will only prove more costly in the long run as we scramble to rapidly develop high-end warfighting capability.

Equally, both the Australian government and the Australian public have to accept and understand that we will need to dramatically increase spending in our national defence and do so over the long term, rather than short term sugar hits or sleight of hand that push money out over the forward estimates and allow inflation to account for "increases" in spending, despite there being little-to-no new money in real terms.

Ultimately, this comes back to the government's shift away from a "balanced force" towards "focused force" as championed in the Defence Strategic Review. It equally fails to account for the planned increase in ADF personnel by 2040 and places ultimate hope in a series of as yet to be developed "wunderwaffe" or wonder weapons, like autonomous systems, cyber or tactical weapons like HIMARs and others to provide both "impactful projection" and deterrence against "any potential adversary".

Importantly, no one has said that defending the nation in this era of renewed and increasingly capable great power competition will be cheap or easy and we have to accept that un-



Last month CMDR Bob Mummery OAM RAN RTD visited some of his relatives overseas in Wales and came across a model of a cruiser in a little museum. After making some enquiries it was discovered it was a model of HMS AMPHION the original name of HMAS PERTH (I) . It was determined that the model was surplus to their requirements and permission was sought to transfer it to the HMAS PERTH (I) Memorial. With the help of Lions International they have kindly taken on the project of delivering it to us and refurbishing some of the damaged and missing parts.



Defence seeks drone solutions for Guardian vessels

By Ben Felton | Canberra

Defence is seeking a suite of Group 1 Uncrewed Aerial Vehicles (UAV) to supply Australia's Pacific neighbours with. The small drones are intended to operate from the Guardian-class patrol boats provided to 13 Pacific nations and Timor-Leste through the Pacific Maritime Security Program (PMSP).

The planned UAV capability forms half of the new Enhanced Aerial Surveillance Program, which also includes the procurement of [new surveillance aircraft](#) for the Pacific Island Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA).

The UAVs are intended to provide the vessel's crew with better situational awareness, increasing their efficacy during surveillance, boarding, and search and rescue (SAR) operations. In particular, they will allow crews to remotely inspect, assess and monitor vessels before approaching closer. According to Defence, this requires a minimum of 2 kilometres of range with at least 30 minutes of in-flight endurance.

To reduce cost and complexity as well as simplifying maintenance, Defence is only pursuing commercially available models that can fulfil the requirements for underway operation aboard the Guardian class vessels. These requirements include vertical take-off and landing, waterproofing, the ability to float and, ideally, the ability to take off and land from patches of calm water.

Payload options include thermal, night vision, video and still cameras as well as loudspeakers. The vehicles are also required to include a remote payload carriage and release system, as well as extension bars for all compatible accessories.

Due to the limited performance requirements, the lack of aviation fuel facilities aboard the Guardian class, and perhaps most importantly, the relatively high cost of fuel in much of Oceania the UAV are expected to be electrically powered through the use of interchangeable batteries. This is particularly important as high fuel costs have been a historic barrier for Guardian- and Pacific-class patrol boat operations.

The program has a relatively quick turnaround, with the deed of standing offer due to enter into force in April next year, following a contract award towards the end of February 2024. While the UAVs being procured through the standing offer are currently only intended for use aboard donated Guardian class patrol boats, Defence has also left the door open for future orders in support of other Pacific nations or emergent requirements.

Indian Navy seeks to add third carrier to expand power projection capacity

By: [Stephen Kuper](#)



Asia's other rising power, India, is rapidly accelerating its capacity to project long-range power and sea control to counter a myriad of challenges to their national interests, with eyes firmly set on an extra aircraft carrier to beef out this capacity.

At the end of the Second World War, the aircraft carrier emerged as the apex of naval prestige and power projection. Unlike their predecessor (the battleship), aircraft carriers in themselves are relatively benign actors, relying heavily at their attached carrier air wings and supporting escort fleets of cruisers, destroyers, and submarines to screen them from hostile action.

In recent years, nations throughout the Indo-Pacific have begun a series of naval expansion and modernisation programs with traditional aircraft carriers – and large-deck, amphibious warfare ships serve as the core of their respective shift towards greater maritime power projection.

Driving this change is an unprecedented period of Chinese assertiveness in the South China Sea and the growing capabilities of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), which has seen the Chinese fielding or preparing to field a range of power projection capabilities, including aircraft carriers and supporting strike groups, fifth-generation combat aircraft, modernised land forces, area-access denial, and strategic nuclear forces, combined with growing political and financial influence throughout the region.

In the Indian Ocean, Beijing's spreading influence and presence driven by economic opportunities in the Middle East and Africa have brought these two nations into further competition, separate to their longstanding and periodic conflicts in the Himalayan mountains.

In response, India, a well-established aircraft carrier power, with major economic, political, and strategic interests across the Indian Ocean and well-publicised animosities with the People's Republic of China, has increasingly moved to modernise and expand its own carrier capabilities, embarking on a period of what Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has described as Indian self-reliance or "Aatmanirbhar Bharat".

Aircraft carriers remain a potent symbol of India's emerging economic, political, and military ambitions and capabilities in the region and a defining mechanism for countering mounting Chinese tensions in the region.

Following the rule of three?

A key part of India's extensive and rapidly growing naval modernisation efforts under Prime Minister Modi has been the emphasis on establishing the Indian Navy as a credible "two-carrier" force, at a minimum – that is a fleet, capable of operating two aircraft carriers and supporting battlegroups concurrently throughout the Indian Ocean, with specific focus on the operating areas close to the Middle East, namely the Persian Gulf, and the critically important Straits of Malacca in Southeast Asia.

To achieve this new focus, the Indian Navy's newest aircraft carrier, the INS *Vikrant* (R11), is completing a major operational milestone in early-2023.

This includes the successful integration of the Russian-built MiG-29K into the ship and, in a major first for India's burgeoning defence industry, successfully landing and launching the nation's indigenous Hindustan Aeronautics Limited designed and built light combat aircraft (LCA) on the vessel for the first time.

However, despite this achievement, the growing challenges presented by China's own growing power projection capabilities, particularly with its interests in the Indian Ocean, has prompted a major rethink behind the scenes within India's political and military hierarchy.

At the core of this tactical and strategic rethink is the Indian Navy's Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral R Hari Kumar, who announced in early-September, "We are working for a third aircraft carrier which will be a repeat of the INS *Vikrant*. There has been a lot of expertise that has been generated in terms of building an aircraft carrier.

"We are looking at having an IAC (indigenous aircraft carrier), a follow on I would say, a repeat order being made. We are preparing a case for it," ADM Kumar told [journalists](#) at an event in New Delhi.

This proposed capability would be reinforced by plans for the Indian Navy's broader expansion which would see the fleet grow to 155–160 by the end of this year, with a further ambitious target for a total fleet of approximately 175 major fleet units by 2035.

The addition of a third aircraft carrier meanwhile would expand the tactical and strategic flexibility of the Indian Navy and its existing carrier fleet in particular, with the extra carrier easing the operational burden on both the ships and the aircraft operated.

Additionally, the third carrier will enhance the Indian Navy's capacity to operate multiple major carrier battlegroups concurrently across the Indian Ocean areas of interest, while also enabling sustained blue water operations including long-range patrols in Southeast Asia and the South China Sea.

Final thoughts

There is no doubt that Australia's position and responsibilities in the Indo-Pacific region will depend on the nation's ability to sustain itself economically, strategically, and politically in the face of rising regional and global competition.

Despite our virtually unrivalled wealth of natural resources, agricultural and industrial potential, there is a lack of a cohesive national security strategy integrating the development of individual, yet complementary public policy strategies to support a more robust Australian role in the region.

While contemporary Australia has been far removed from the harsh realities of conflict, with many generations never enduring the reality of rationing for food, energy, medical supplies or luxury goods, and even fewer within modern Australia understanding the sociopolitical and economic impact such rationing would have on the now world-leading Australian standard of living.

This rapidly deteriorating geopolitical and strategic environment transforming the global and regional security paradigm requires a realistic analysis and assessment by Australia's policymakers.

Equally, both the Australian government and the Australian public have to accept and understand that we will need to dramatically increase spending in our national defence and do so over the long term, rather than short-term sugar hits or sleight of hand that push money out over the forward estimates and allow inflation to account for "increases" in spending, despite there being little-to-no new money in real terms.

Ultimately, this comes back to the government's shift away from a "balanced force" towards "focused force" as championed in the Defence Strategic Review. It equally fails to account for the planned increase in ADF personnel by 2040 and places ultimate hope in a series of as yet to be developed "wunderwaffe" or wonder weapons, like autonomous systems, cyber or tactical weapons like HIMARs and others to provide both "impactful projection" and deterrence against "any potential adversary".

Importantly, no one has said that defending the nation in this era of renewed and increasingly capable great power competition will be cheap or easy and we have to accept that uncomfortable reality.



Defense

Can the US Navy save money by accepting the LCS as a sunk cost?

By [Noah Robertson](#)



The Independence-class LCS Gabrielle Giffords launches a Naval Strike Missile in October 2019 during the exercise Pacific Griffin. (Chief MC Shannon Renfro/U.S. Navy)

WASHINGTON — It's been called an "entirely new breed of U.S. Navy warship" and a "lemon." A "mothership" for unmanned systems and "the wrong ship at the wrong time." A cornerstone of the Navy's "transformation" and the "little crappy ship."

This is the littoral combat ship, which in its 22-year history has never been easy to label. That is until recently; the LCS has now become an enormous sunk cost. The Navy is decommissioning nine of 35 littoral combat ships in the next few years, alongside the five already abandoned. Some, like the recently retired LCS Sioux City, entered service less than five years ago.

Decommissioning these ships early amounts to a loss of almost \$7 billion based on analysis by Defense News using data from the Congressional Budget Office. But experts say the opportunity cost is more significant as the Pentagon prepares for a potential war with China, which in the last 20 years has built extensive anti-access, area denial defenses to keep ships like the LCS away from its shores.

"[These] ships were built for a world that no longer exists," said Jerry Hendrix, a retired Navy captain and former Pentagon official, who is now a senior fellow with the Sagamore Institute think tank. It's a moment of irony for the Navy: decommissioning young ships while trying to expand its fleet. The LCS, analysts and former Pentagon officials told Defense News, was designed to be the Navy's ship of the future. But in the process, it became a program meant to do too much, too soon, and at too low a price tag to succeed. "Decommissioning them is a terrible decision," said Bryan McGrath, a former naval officer and lead author of the Navy's 2007 strategy document, who is now managing director of The FerryBridge Group defense consultancy. "But the only decision worse than that would be keeping them."

'Pedal to the metal'

In 2001, the Navy had a numbers problem. In the previous decade, following the end of the Cold War, the service had [retired more than 200 active ships](#). A further 50 destroyers and frigates were set to retire, starting in 2005.

New ships were under development, including the Zumwalt-class destroyer and Ford-class aircraft carrier. But these large-scale combatants were too expensive to replace the outgoing ships one for one. The Navy needed a small combatant, cheap enough to build in mass and nimble enough for lower-level missions. Indeed, the Office of the Secretary of Defense told the Navy there would be [no Zumwalt](#) without plans for a small combatant, which would need to cost a third of one Arleigh Burke-class destroyer — or around \$400 million.

The LCS was designed to be just that ship. But from the start, the program served two masters: On one hand, it was meant to fill a demonstrated need; on the other, it became a catchall for the Pentagon's new initiatives. "It was just born in a way that was almost guaranteed to fail," said Bryan Clark, director of the Center for Defense Concepts and Technology at the Hudson Institute think tank.

Before becoming defense

secretary in 2001, Donald Rumsfeld had spent years arguing the Pentagon needed "transformation," or as he said in 2002, "to behave somewhat less like bureaucrats and more like venture capitalists." This ship would test that model.

First was the concept. The Navy had identified three missions suited for a small combatant: anti-submarine warfare, surface warfare and minesweeping. Rather than build three ships, or even three different hulls, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Vern Clark pushed for one. (Clark served as CNO from 2000 to 2005.)



U.S. Navy personnel demonstrate the mine countermeasure mission package aboard an expeditionary sea base vessel in 2019. The demo showed the package could be used aboard vessels in addition to littoral combat ships. (Anthony Powers/U.S. Navy) It would have a single “seaframe” with modular “mission packages” that could be swapped out depending on the need — like a Swiss Army knife. “The idea [for the ship] was rather radical at the time,” said Bob Work, who served as deputy defense secretary and undersecretary of the Navy during the Obama administration. “What people don’t remember is this is something the Navy had never done before.”

To lower personnel costs, the ship would have a condensed crew — [less than 90 members compared to the 200 or so for a frigate](#). Hence, its sailors would need to be highly trained and make greater use of unmanned systems, which soon became a priority for the Navy as the Air Force began using Predator and Reaper drones in the Middle East. “Nobody wanted to say no [to these requirements] because this was an example of transformation,” said Clark of the Hudson Institute.

The second hallmark was the program’s speed. The LCS skirted the usual process for vetting a new ship, instead taking a path later referred to by a budget expert as an [“analytical virgin birth.”](#) Congress funded the Navy’s budget request for the ship in 2003 while warning that the service lacked a “road map.” From there, the LCS moved quickly. The first model entered service in 2008, three or four years ahead of the Pentagon’s usual acquisition pace. “We made the decision to put the pedal to the metal all at once,” Hendrix said.

Problems and price tags

The program had three core goals: to be high tech, low cost and fast paced. But its aims were too high. “What went wrong was the Navy couldn’t get the mission packages to work,” said Work.

There were engineering snags. The submarine warfare package, intended to detect and attack submarines in shallow waters, needed a sonar hitched to the back of the ship, but it wasn’t trailing correctly. The minesweeping package, designed to clear mines with unmanned systems, began hitting delays.

Compounding these flaws were problems with the hulls. Some experienced transmission issues, and others [began to crack](#) at high speeds — a problem since moving quickly was a priority for the ship. The modular design — in which users could rotate equipment — was also proving impractical in terms of [transporting the packages and quickly installing them](#). Furthermore, the specialized crews required for each mission drifted between ships, unable to gel with their vessel or their fellow sailors.

“Ultimately [the model requires] very senior crews that are stuck on these not-very-capable ships,” a Democratic aide with the House Armed Services Committee told Defense News on the condition of anonymity to speak candidly. These issues increased costs, but the extent of those overruns wasn’t immediately clear. Despite its technical problems, the LCS was still considered for years a low-cost way to expand the fleet.

To achieve this, Congress initially encouraged the Navy to have two companies develop models, and then pick one. Those companies — General Dynamics and Lockheed Martin — competed so aggressively that their advertised costs came in low enough it seemed possible to buy both. Congress approved block-buy contracts for 22 ships, starting in 2010.



The U.S. Navy's littoral combat ship Billings is a Freedom-class variant, built by Lockheed Martin and able to perform surface warfare missions. (MC3 Aaron Lau/U.S. Navy)

Adm. Vern Clark, the top Navy officer at the time, had initially [hoped each ship would cost \\$250 million](#), or five for every one Arleigh Burke destroyer. But with engineering woes and program delays, prices began to rise. In 2016, after persistent engine problems, the Navy ordered a 60-day review of the program, which recommended a host of technical and personnel changes. However, the engineering problems didn't stop. In 2022, the Navy dropped its plan for an anti-submarine warfare mission package. By then, the service had already started decommissioning several of the first LCSs built, which hadn't received any upgrades since construction and were projected to cost \$2.5 billion to update.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, each ship cost about \$500 million — some more than \$600 million — after factoring in the mission packages. "I don't think we're going to be decommissioning many that are all sunshine, no rain clouds," said Mark Montgomery, a retired Navy rear admiral and a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies think tank. "I'm pretty confident that we're decommissioning things that are maintenance burdens."

The new small combatant

In spring 2022, the Navy announced a plan to decommission nine LCSs in the coming years because they wouldn't help the service in a potential fight against China, which is among the Biden administration's priorities for military planning. Analysts and former Pentagon officials interviewed by Defense News largely agreed with that assessment, though some questioned whether it's the best way to judge the fleet.

Under the Biden administration, "my impression of the way the Navy responds to its political tasking is that if your widget, your ship, your platform does not directly contribute to the fight with China, it is in jeopardy," said McGrath, the former naval officer. But he noted the Navy also has peacetime missions and requires a mix of high- and low-end systems to accomplish its different goals.

"We spend most of our time not being shot at," he said. Others said they felt frustrated at seeing the ships abandoned so soon, given the Navy reported to Congress last year that the LCS was at last "on trend to meet design requirements for the [minesweeping] and [surface warfare] missions as they were established."

This March, more than 20 years after the LCS program began, the minesweeping mission package reached initial operating capability. That marks two of the program's three main successes, said Clark of the Hudson Institute. The mine-clearing mission package is the world's first to entirely use unmanned vehicles to neutralize minefields, he said. In addition, most of the Independence-class LCSs, whose design was less afflicted by engineering issues than the Freedom class, will remain in service.

The other success is the industrial capacity the program protected, according to Hendrix. By keeping two shipyards open, he said, the Navy maintained skilled workers. For example, the Marinette Marine shipyard in Wisconsin, which produced the rapidly decommissioning Freedom-class LCS, is now building the Constellation-class frigate, the Navy's new small combatant.

This frigate has in some ways benefited from the failures of the LCS program. Its multimission design makes it capable of air warfare, surface warfare and anti-submarine warfare, but without needing to attach or detach equipment, like the LCS.

In some ways, accepting the littoral combat ships as a sunk cost will save money, experts said. The operating costs for each one are around \$70 million each year, said Mackenzie Eaglen of the American Enterprise Institute think tank. Operating and support costs end up being [about 70%](#) of the total price tag for a ship's expected life span.

Better to discard systems with little utility than to keep wasting money on them, said Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., the ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee. "The lesson that LCS has proved is that if a ship doesn't provide capable and relevant warfighting ability, it doesn't matter what capacity they provide," he told Defense News.

Keeping up with threats

Operating costs aside, the LCS program is still largely defined by its delays and waste.

Defense News estimates the value of lost service life at \$7 billion by dividing the cost of each LCS seaframe (in 2023 dollars) by its intended service life of 25 years, and then multiplying out the cost of each unused year.

For example, a ship that cost \$500 million and was intended to sail for 25 years should cost \$20 million per year — plus operating costs, which were saved. But if it only served for five, it left 20 years — and hence \$400 million worth of intended service life — dormant. Still, the most significant waste for the LCS program may be a lost opportunity, Hendrix said. The time and resources spent building these ships could have gone toward building more capable and better-suited vessels for today's threats.

Certainly the three missions of the LCS focused on countering anti-access, area denial capabilities, but that technology from the early 2000s has since advanced, rendering the LCS nearly useless against China. Years before the program began, in 1996, the U.S. sailed a carrier strike group through the Taiwan Strait as a warning to China, which considers the island nation a rogue province. It angered Chinese leadership, who began working on missile defense systems with a range farther off its coast.

This took place around the same time the U.S. Navy was preparing for a “brown water” fleet, which would operate closer to land, said Eaglen. The LCS was one of several systems designed for such environments and perhaps the clearest example of that thinking's obsolescence.

Now, given China's defenses, the Navy no longer has the same freedom to operate in littoral environments — at least in a hypothetical war over Taiwan. A generation of U.S. Navy programs, argued Hendrix, were designed for the wrong challenges. “We zigged and the world zagged,” he said.

The Navy isn't the only service that failed to prepare for today's threats. After 20 years mired in the Middle East, rather than preparing for an ascendant China, former Pentagon officials rue a missed opportunity. The services have since pivoted to intense competition with the Asian nation, but for the U.S. Navy, that came after it started buying the LCS. This left the service with a slew of ships it considers strategically irrelevant for its “pacing challenge.”

Technical issues aside, the Navy's ship of the future couldn't survive the challenges of the future. “It's a shame that we came to this realization after we bought all the ships,” the congressional aide said. “But I guess better late than never.”

About [Noah Robertson](#)

Noah Robertson is the Pentagon reporter at Defense News. He previously covered national security for the Christian Science Monitor. He holds a bachelor's degree in English and government from the College of William & Mary in his hometown of Williamsburg, Virginia.



Navy mothballs, commissions littoral combat ships back-to-back

By [Diana Stancy Correll](#)

The littoral combat ship Little Rock arrives at Naval Station Mayport in 2018. (MC2 Amanda Battles/Navy)

The Navy decommissioned littoral combat ships Detroit and Little Rock on Friday in Mayport, Florida, after less than a decade of service, while also commissioning a brand new littoral combat ship the next day.

Both the Detroit and the Little Rock, which each completed deployments earlier in 2023, are among the nine Freedom-variant littoral combat ships the [Navy announced in 2022](#) it wanted to place on the chopping block early so it could fund other priorities. The ships are expected to serve for 25 years.

Meanwhile, the Navy also commissioned the [17th Independence-variant littoral combat ship](#), Augusta, on Saturday in Eastport, Maine. The ship will be based out of San Diego.

“The USS Augusta and her crew will play an important role in defending our nation and enabling global maritime freedom and commerce,” Vice Adm. John Fuller, naval inspector general, said at the ceremony, according to a Navy news release. “She will be integrated into operations that provide presence and support both sea control and power projection, which are at the core of the Navy's mission.”



Navy League WA Jumbo Golf Day

Date: 22 October 2023

Location: Melville Golf Centre, 18 Dimond Court, Leeming (just off of Karel Ave)

Cost: \$25 per person, includes pull buggy, clubs, balls, game and *bbq lunch

Donation to chosen charity \$5 per player, can be more, chuck in your loose change

Melville Golf Centre is a licenced venue, no BYO alcohol

Plenty of parking

Jumbo golf is for everyone, you don't need any golfing background or special skills. The course length is shorter and much easier than a traditional golf course. Ultimately, it's a bit of fun and a chance to spend time with mates.

*BBQ lunch to consist of sausages, burger patties, salads, bread/rolls and condiments



Interested in Australia's Future?

Join the Navy League of Australia



The Navy League of Australia was established in Australia in 1900, and in 1950 became an autonomous national organisation with a Federal Council and Divisions covering all states and territories. Its aim today, as it was in 1900, is to create and interest in the sea and to keep before the Australian people the fact that we are a maritime nation and that a strong Navy and a sound maritime industry are indispensable elements to our national wellbeing and vital to the freedom of Australia.

So why don't you join us!

You do not need to have had a previous maritime history. Merely the basic requirements you need is to have an interest in maritime affairs.

Your membership will include a regular UpToDate news on maritime affairs, a monthly newsletter, and include a quarterly copy of the Navy League's magazine 'The Navy '. Together with outings and mate-ship.

Junior Members of the Navy League of Australia Western Australia Division aged between 16 – 18 years of age Subscription \$15.00 (includes \$1.36 GST) (Proof of age required)

Subscriptions are due on 1st. July in each year, and your membership will be current to 30th. June immediately following the date on which you join the league, except that if your first subscription is received during the period 01st. April to 30th. June in any year, your initial membership will be extended to 30th. June in the following year.inc

Subscription \$35.00 (including \$3.18 GST)

Bank details: National Australia Bank

BSB: 086918 A/C: 293707180

Navy League of Australia WA Division

The Navy League of Australia Western Australia Division – **Membership Application**

I wish to be come a member of the Navy League of Australia, the objects I support.

Name: [Mr] [Mrs] [Ms] [Rank]

Street:

Suburb: P/Code

Phone: Mobile:

Email:

Signature: Date:

Please email or post your application to the below address.

PO Box 735

Fremantle WA 6957

Bandjoneill.1@bigpond.com



HMAS PERTH (I) MEMORIAL FOUNDATION INCORPORATED

MEMBERSHIP / DONATION APPLICATION (*cross out which is not applicable*)

Name	<div>First</div> <div>Surname</div>		
Address	<div></div>		
Suburb	<div></div>	State	<div></div> P/C <div></div>
Email	<div></div>	Phone	<div></div>

Reply to: secretary@hmasperth1memorial.com.au (*Preferred*)

OR

Hon Secretary
HMAS Perth (I) Memorial Foundation Incorporated
PO Box 735 Fremantle
Western Australia 6959

Membership Fee

\$35.00

Banking Details: Bank West
BSB: 302-162 A/C: 1499868

Where possible please email applications / donations with a bank receipt

Subscriptions are due on the 1st. July in each year and your membership will be current to 30th. June immediately following the date you join the Foundation., except that if your first subscription is received during the period 1st. April to 30th. June in any year, your initial membership will be extended to 30th. June in the following year.

DONATION (Please complete this section if donating)

I wish to donate the following amount to THE HMAS PERTH (I) Memorial Building Fund

My details have been included in the above portion of the form

DONATION

\$	<div></div>
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JOIN THE AUSTRALIAN NAVY CADETS

What cadets do

Get Out There! If you're into adventure, you'll get as much as you can handle as an Australian Navy Cadet. You'll get to go sailing, hiking, canoeing and camping. Plus you'll learn everything about seamanship. From navigational training to Naval signals and communication.

But it's not all fun and games. You'll have to study first aid and pass muster in parade training. But if you can take on the challenge the rewards are good.



To join you must:

- Be a person ordinarily resident in Australia.
- Be at least 12 years and 6 months old and under the age of 19 years.
- Produce a statement from your family or any medical practitioner as to your ability to participate in Cadet activities.

So if you're ready to get fully trained in adventure, get into the Australian Navy Cadets and get out there!

In 88 Units across Australia, sponsored by the Royal Australian Navy, over 2,500 staff and cadets learn about sailing and seamanship, develop leadership skills and learn how to communicate effectively. The ANC is a voluntary youth organisation which trains young adults to become better citizens for the community. This training involves nautical and maritime activities within a military environment.

They develop confidence, pride and self-discipline whilst having an ocean of fun and making loads of new friends along the way.

Check out our website at www.cadetnet.gov.au/anc, find a Navy Cadet Unit near you and set sail on the voyage of a lifetime.

For information on how to join the ANC, email

ANCreuiting@cadetnet.gov.au

**THE
NAVY**

All enquiries regarding The Navy magazine, subscriptions and editorial matters should be sent to:

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NAVY LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA, GPO Box 1719, Sydney NSW 2001

PRODUCED BY THE NAVY LEAGUE OF AUSTRALIA WESTERN AUSTRALIA DIVISION

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