

Navy applies lessons from Costly Mistakes

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DAVID SHARP Associated Press



Spectators watch the USS Lyndon B. Johnson Zumwalt class destroyer travel down the Kennebec River on its way to sea Jan. 12, 2022, in Phippsburg, Maine.

The U.S. Navy, following costly lessons after cramming too much new technology onto warships and speeding them into production, is slowing down the design and purchase of its next-generation destroyer, and taking extra steps to ensure new technology like lasers and hypersonic missiles have matured before pressing ahead.

BATH, Maine — The U.S. Navy appears to have learned from its costly lessons after cramming too much new technology onto warships and speeding them into production as it embarks on building new destroyers, which are the backbone of the fleet.

Military officials say they're slowing down the design and purchase of its next-generation destroyers to ensure new technology like powerful lasers and hypersonic missiles are mature before pressing ahead on construction.

The Navy has learned "sometimes the hard way, when we move too fast we make big mistakes," said Adm. Michael Gilday, chief of naval operations. "Let's be deliberate. Let's not have our eyes become bigger than our stomach and get too far ahead of ourselves," Gilday said last week at an event for defense industry officials in San Diego.

The Navy wants to turn the page on recent shipbuilding blunders. Several newer combat ships designed for speed are being retired early after being beset by problems. A \$13.3 billion aircraft carrier experienced added costs from new catapults that launch airplanes. Workers completed construction of a stealth destroyer before its advanced gun system, already installed, was scrapped.

For the new ship, the Navy is reducing risk by conducting more land tests and borrowing the radar and targeting system from the latest destroyers that'll soon join the fleet, said LCDR Javan Rasnake, spokesman for the assistant secretary of the Navy for research, development and acquisition. It's also working with shipbuilders and designers to refine the ship's blueprint, cost estimates, and workforce and supply forecasts, Rasnake said.

The Navy still plans to field some new technologies on the destroyer. Last week, it awarded Lockheed

Martin a \$1.2 billion contract for hypersonic missiles that travel at five times the speed of sound, and can be fired from destroyers. Last summer, it awarded the first design contract for the new ship outfitted with those missiles and lasers powerful enough to shoot down aircraft.

Matt Caris, a defense analyst with Avascent, said it's important that the Navy gets it right by balancing the best technology that's reliable, affordable and attainable. "The Navy is trying to thread the needle with some potentially revolutionary capabilities in as low risk and evolutionary process as possible. This was a lesson learned by the Navy's laundry list of shameful acquisition programs," he said.

Some worry about history repeating itself. There are new Navy leaders overseeing many programs and "it's easy to imagine them making similar mistakes again with a new cast of characters," said Loren Thompson from the Lexington Institute, a security think tank.

The Navy is in the midst of juggling its priorities as it seeks not just a new destroyer but also a new attack submarine and a replacement for the F/A-18 Super Hornet fighter jet. It's in a difficult spot because the Biden administration is not interested in dramatically increasing the military budget, said Bryan Clark, a defense analyst at the Hudson Institute.

Submitted by xAG2 Gary Cox, USN (Rel)