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Navy LPD-17 Flight II and LHA Amphibious Ship Programs: Background and Issues for Congress

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Summary

The Navy is currently building two types of amphibious ships: LPD-17 Flight II class amphibious ships, and LHA-type amphibious assault ships. Both types are built by Huntington Ingalls Industries/Ingalls Shipbuilding (HII/Ingalls) of Pascagoula, MS. Required numbers and types of amphibious ships are reportedly ongoing matters of discussion and debate between the Navy, the Marine Corps, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD). Projected numbers of amphibious ships, procurement of LPD-17 Flight II class ships, and proposed retirements of older amphibious ships have emerged as prominent items in Congress' review of the Navy's proposed FY2024 budget.

The Navy's 355-ship force-level goal, released in December 2016, calls for achieving and maintaining a 355-ship fleet with 38 larger amphibious ships, including 13 LPD-17 Flight II class ships. The Navy and OSD have been working since 2019 to develop a new force-level goal to replace the 355-ship force-level goal, but have not been able to come to closure on a successor goal. Required numbers of amphibious ships are reportedly a major issue in the ongoing discussion. The Marine Corps supports a revised Navy ship force-level goal with 31 larger amphibious ships, including 10 LHA/LHD-type ships and 21 LPD-17s. Section 1023 of the FY2023 NDAA amends 10 U.S.C. 8062 to require the Navy to include not less than 31 operational larger amphibious ships, including 10 LHA/LHD-type ships and 21 LPD- or LSD-type amphibious ships.

The Navy's FY2024 30-year (FY2024-FY2053) shipbuilding plan shows the projected number of amphibious ships remaining below 31 ships throughout the 30-year period, with the figure decreasing to 26 ships in FY2035 and to 19 to 23 ships in FY2053. Marine Corps officials have stated that a force with fewer than 31 larger amphibious ships would increase operational risks in meeting demands from U.S. regional combatant commanders for forward-deployed amphibious ships and for responding to contingencies

The Navy's FY2023 budget submission proposed truncating the LPD-17 Flight II program to three ships by making the third LPD-17 Flight II class ship—LPD-32—the final ship in the program. The Navy's proposed FY2023 budget submission requested funding for the procurement of LPD-32 in FY2023, but programmed no additional LPD-17 Flight II class ships or LPD-type ships of a follow-on design through FY2027. Congress, in acting on the Navy's proposed FY2023 budget, funded the procurement of LPD-32 in FY2023 and provided \$250.0 million in advance procurement (AP) funding for the procurement in a future fiscal year of LPD-33, which would be a fourth LPD-17 Flight II class ship.

The Navy's FY2024 budget submission, like its FY2023 budget submission, proposes truncating the LPD-17 Flight II program to three ships by making LPD-32 the final ship in the program. The Navy's FY2024 budget submission does not request any funding for the procurement of LPD-33 and programs no additional LPD-17 Flight II class ships or LPD-type ships of a follow-on design through FY2028. The Marine Corps' FY2024 unfunded priorities list (UPL) includes, as its top unfunded priority, \$1,712.5 million in procurement funding for procuring LPD-33 in FY2024.

The most recently procured LHA-type ship is LHA-9. The Navy's FY2024 budget submission estimates its procurement cost at \$3,834.3 million (i.e., about \$3.8 billion). The ship has received a total of \$2,004.1 million in prior year advance procurement (AP) and procurement funding. The Navy's proposed FY2024 budget requests the remaining \$1,830.1 million needed to complete the ship's procurement cost.

Section 129 of the FY2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) (H.R. 7776/P.L. 117-263 of December 23, 2022) permits the Navy to enter into a block buy contract for procuring up to five LPD-17 and LHA-type amphibious ships.

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Introduction

This report provides background information and issues for Congress on two types of amphibious ships being built for the Navy: LPD-17 Flight II class amphibious ships and LHA-type amphibious assault ships. Both types are built by Huntington Ingalls Industries/Ingalls Shipbuilding (HII/Ingalls) of Pascagoula, MS.

The Navy's LPD-17 Flight II and LHA shipbuilding programs pose multiple oversight issues for Congress. Congress's decisions on the LPD-17 Flight II and LHA programs could affect Navy capabilities and funding requirements and the shipbuilding industrial base.

A separate CRS report discusses the Navy's Medium Landing Ship (LSM) program, previously known as the Light Amphibious Warship (LAW) program.¹

Background

U.S. Navy Amphibious Ships

Roles and Missions

Navy amphibious ships are operated by the Navy, with crews consisting of Navy personnel. They are battle force ships, meaning ships that count toward the quoted size of the Navy and toward the Navy's force-level goal. The primary function of Navy amphibious ships is to lift (i.e., transport) embarked U.S. Marines and their weapons, equipment, and supplies to distant operating areas, and enable Marines to conduct expeditionary operations ashore in those areas. Although amphibious ships can be used to support Marine landings against opposing military forces, they are also used for operations in permissive or benign situations where there are no opposing forces. Due to their large storage spaces and their ability to use helicopters and landing craft to transfer people, equipment, and supplies from ship to shore without need for port facilities,² amphibious ships are potentially useful for a range of combat and noncombat operations.³

On any given day, some of the Navy's amphibious ships, like some of the Navy's other ships, are forward-deployed to various overseas operating areas in multiship formations called amphibious groups (ARGs). Amphibious ships are also sometimes forward-deployed on an individual basis, particularly for conducting peacetime engagement activities with foreign countries or for responding to smaller-scale or noncombat contingencies.

¹ CRS Report R46374, *Navy Medium Landing Ship (LSM) (Previously Light Amphibious Warship [LAW]) Program: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke.

² Amphibious ships have berthing spaces for Marines; storage space for their wheeled vehicles, their other combat equipment, and their supplies; flight decks and hangar decks for their helicopters and vertical take-off and landing (VTOL) fixed-wing aircraft; and in many cases well decks for storing and launching their landing craft. (A well deck is a large, garage-like space in the stern of the ship. It can be flooded with water so that landing craft can leave or return to the ship. Access to the well deck is protected by a large stern gate that is somewhat like a garage door.)

³ Amphibious ships and their embarked Marine forces can be used for launching and conducting humanitarian-assistance and disaster-response (HA/DR) operations; peacetime engagement and partnership-building activities, such as exercises; other nation-building operations, such as reconstruction operations; operations to train, advise, and assist foreign military forces; peace-enforcement operations; noncombatant evacuation operations (NEOs); maritime-security operations, such as anti-piracy operations; smaller-scale strike and counterterrorism operations; and larger-scale ground combat operations. Amphibious ships and their embarked Marine forces can also be used for maintaining forward-deployed naval presence for purposes of deterrence, reassurance, and maintaining regional stability.

Current Types of Amphibious Ships

The Navy's current amphibious ship force consists entirely of larger amphibious ships, including the so-called "big-deck" amphibious assault ships, designated LHA and LHD, which look like medium-sized aircraft carriers, and the smaller (but still quite sizeable) amphibious ships, designated LPD or LSD, which are sometimes called "small-deck" amphibious ships.⁴ As mentioned earlier, a separate CRS report discusses the Navy's Medium Landing Ship (LSM) program, previously known as the Light Amphibious Warship (LAW) program, which is a program to build a new type of amphibious ship that would be much smaller than the Navy's current LHA/LHD- and LPD/LSD-type amphibious ships.⁵

Amphibious Ship Force-Level Requirement in 10 U.S.C. 8062(b)

10 U.S.C. 8062(b) requires the Navy to include not less than 31 operational amphibious warfare ships. The 31 amphibious ships are to include not less than 10 LHA/LHD-type "big deck" amphibious assault ships, with the remaining amphibious ships within the total of not less than 31 amphibious ships being LPD/LSD-type amphibious ships. The requirement for the Navy to include these numbers and types of amphibious ships was added to 10 U.S.C. 8062 by Section 1023 of the FY2023 (NDAA) (H.R. 7776/P.L. 117-263 of December 23, 2022).

Amphibious Ship Force Level at End of FY2022 and Projected Through FY2053

The Navy's force of amphibious ships at the end of FY2022 included 31 larger ships, including 9 amphibious assault ships (2 LHAs and 7 LHDs), 12 LPD-17 Flight I class ships, and 10 older LSD-41/49 class ships. The Navy's FY2024 budget submission projects that the Navy at the end of FY2024 will include 29 larger amphibious ships, including 9 LHA/LHD-type ships, 13 LPD Flight I class ships, and 7 LSD-41/49 class ships.

The Navy's FY2024 30-year (FY2024-FY2053) shipbuilding plan, released on April 18, 2023,⁶ includes three 30-year shipbuilding profiles and three resulting 30-year force-level projections. The three alternatives are called PB2024 (meaning the President's budget for FY2024), Alternative 2, and Alternative 3. The document shows the projected number of amphibious ships remaining below 31 ships throughout the 30-year period, with the figure decreasing to 26 ships in FY2035 and decreasing further, to 19 ships (PB2024), 20 ships (Alternative 2), or 23 ships (Alternative 3), in FY2053.

⁴ U.S. Navy amphibious ships have designations starting with the letter L, as in amphibious *landing*. LHA can be translated as landing ship, helicopter-capable, assault; LHD can be translated as landing ship, helicopter-capable, well deck; LPD can be translated as landing ship, helicopter platform, well deck; and LSD can be translated as landing ship, well deck. Whether noted in the designation or not, almost all these ships have well decks. The exceptions are LHAs 6 and 7, which do not have well decks and instead have expanded aviation support capabilities. For an explanation of well decks, see footnote 2. The terms "large-deck" and "small-deck" refer to the size of the ship's flight deck.

⁵ CRS Report R46374, *Navy Medium Landing Ship (LSM) (Previously Light Amphibious Warship [LAW]) Program: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke

⁶ U.S. Navy, *Report to Congress on the Annual Long-Range Plan for Construction of Naval Vessels for Fiscal Year 2024*, March 2023, with cover letters dated March 30, 2023, released April 18, 2023, 31 pp.

Amphibious Ship Force-Level Goal

Force-Level Goal under 355-Ship Plan of 2016

The Navy's current force-level goal, released in December 2016, calls for achieving and maintaining a 355-ship fleet that includes 38 larger amphibious ships—12 LHA/LHD-type ships, 13 LPD-17 Flight I class ships, and 13 LPD-17 Flight II class ships (12+13+13).⁷ This 38-ship force-level goal predates the LSM program and consequently includes no LSMs.

Successor Force-Level Goal

The Navy and OSD have been working since 2019 to develop a new force-level goal to replace the Navy's 355-ship force-level goal, but have not been able to come to closure on a successor goal. Required numbers of amphibious ships are reportedly a major issue in the ongoing discussion. The Navy's FY2023 30-year (FY2023-FY2052) shipbuilding plan, released on April 20, 2022, includes a table summarizing the results of studies that have been conducted on the successor force-level goal. These studies outline potential future fleets with 6 to 10 LHAs/LHDs and 30 to 54 other amphibious ships, including but not necessarily limited to LPDs and LSMs.⁸ Marine Corps officials state that, from their perspective, a minimum of 66 larger and smaller amphibious ships will be required in coming years, including a minimum of 31 larger amphibious ships (10 LHAs/LHDs and 21 LPD-17s) plus 35 LSMs (aka "31+35").⁹ Marine Corps officials have stated that a force with fewer than 31 larger amphibious ships would increase operational risks in meeting demands from U.S. regional combatant commanders for forward-deployed amphibious ships and for responding to contingencies.¹⁰

At an April 26, 2022, hearing on Department of the Navy (DON) investment programs before the Seapower subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee, the Department of the Navy testified that

In order to ensure the future naval expeditionary force is maximized for effective combat power, while reflecting and supporting the force structure changes addressed in USMC's Force Design, the Secretary of the Navy directed an amphibious requirement study that will inform refinement of amphibious ship procurement plans and shipbuilding profiles, as well as inform the ongoing overall Naval Force Structure Assessment.¹¹

⁷ For more on the Navy's 355-ship force-level goal, see CRS Report RL32665, *Navy Force Structure and Shipbuilding Plans: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke. For a more detailed review of the 38-ship force structure requirements, see Appendix A of archived CRS Report RL34476, *Navy LPD-17 Amphibious Ship Procurement: Background, Issues, and Options for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke.

⁸ For additional discussion, see CRS Report RL32665, *Navy Force Structure and Shipbuilding Plans: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke.

⁹ See, for example, Todd South, "Back to Ship: Marines Need Ships to Fight. Will They Get Them?" *Military Times*, March 24, 2022; Megan Eckstein, "Some Lawmakers Back Marines in Disagreement over Navy Amphib Force," *Defense News*, April 5, 2022; Caitlin M. Kenney, "Marines Push Light Amphib Warship While Navy Secretary Awaits Study," *Defense One*, April 5, 2022; Mallory Shelbourne, "Navy and Marines Divided Over the Amphibious Fleet's Future as Delays and Cancellations Mount in FY 2023 Budget Request," *USNI News*, April 3, 2022.

¹⁰ See, for example, Caitlin M. Kenney, "'We Didn't Have the Ships' to Send 'Best Option' to Help Earthquake Victims, Commandant Says," *Defense One*, February 15, 2023; Caitlin M. Kenney, "Marines Issue Warning on Amphib Fleet, The Assistant Commandant Says 31 Large Amphibious Warfare Ships Are Needed to Avoid Risk," *Defense One*, February 14, 2023.

¹¹ Statement of Frederick J. Stefany, Principal Civilian Deputy, Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Research, Development and Acquisition), Performing The Duties Of The Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Research, Development and Acquisition), and Vice Admiral Scott Conn, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations, Warfighting (continued...)

In January 2022, Navy officials reportedly anticipated that the above-mentioned study would be completed by the end of March 2022.¹² At the end of March 2022, the study reportedly was expected to be completed shortly.¹³ At the beginning of April 2022, the study reportedly was in its final stages.¹⁴ A January 20, 2023, press report states

The long-awaited Navy study to determine the future makeup of the U.S. amphibious warship fleet has finally made it to Congress, but don't hold your breath for the results: they're classified.

The Navy sent the Amphibious Force Requirements Study to the Congressional defense committees on Dec. 28. Lt. Gabrielle Dimaapi, a spokeswoman for the Navy secretary, said in an email statement Friday to Defense One.

The study was "closely coordinated with the Office of the Secretary of Defense Cost Analysis and Program Evaluation and Office of Management and Budget prior to providing it to Congress," Dimaapi said. It "assessed the risk associated with the size and composition of the future amphibious warship fleet. It focused on both traditional and planned amphibious warships and platforms."

Though the service "is not planning to release an unclassified summary of the report," the results "will be incorporated into an ongoing battle force ship assessment that will be published later this year," she said.

But it's unclear how much of the amphibious ship study results will be revealed in the battle force ship assessment. Last year's assessment was also classified, and only the top-level number of 373 ships was released, U.S. Naval Institute News reported.

Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro has been promising for months that the amphibious ship study would be ready in a matter of weeks, even testifying to that during a May Senate Armed Services Committee hearing. When no study materialized, Sens. Tim Kaine, D-Va., and Roger Wicker, R-Miss., sent a letter in November to Del Toro asking for the study. In early December, the secretary told reporters the document was almost ready, but was still "being briefed to senior leadership."¹⁵

The Navy's FY2024 30-year shipbuilding plan states

The Department [of the Navy] is conducting an LPD 17 Flt II amphibious ship cost/capability study... to inform PB2025's way ahead [the Navy's proposed FY2025 defense budget, to be submitted to Congress in early 2024] with respect to this platform....

The Navy has started an Amphibious Ship Study to assess cost/capability tradeoffs to LPD Flt II, with study completion expected in June 2023....

Requirements And Capabilities (OPNAV N9), and Lieutenant General Karsten S. Heckl, Deputy Commandant, Combat Development and Integration, Commanding General, Marine Corps Combat Development Command, before the Subcommittee on Seapower of the Senate Armed Services Committee on Department of the Navy Fiscal Year 2023 Budget Request for Seapower, April 26, 2022, PDF page 12 of 37.

¹² See Megan Eckstein, "Amphib Ship Requirements Study Could Spell Bad News for Marines, Industry," *Defense News*, January 18, 2022.

¹³ Megan Eckstein, "US Navy Seeks to End San Antonio-Class Ship Production, Reducing Fleet by 8 Amphibious Hulls," *Defense News*, March 28, 2022.

¹⁴ Mallory Shelbourne, "Navy and Marines Divided Over the Amphibious Fleet's Future as Delays and Cancellations Mount in FY 2023 Budget Request," *USNI News*, April 3, 2022; Caitlin M. Kenney, "Marines Push Light Amphib Warship While Navy Secretary Awaits Study," *Defense One*, April 5, 2022.

¹⁵ Caitlin M. Kenney, "Navy Won't Publicly Release Results of Amphibious Ship Study, The Study, Which Had Been Delayed for Months, Has Been Sent to Lawmakers," *Defense One*, January 20, 2023.

[Projected] Amphibious ship inventories reflect a pause in the current LPD [procurement] line. The analytic results of the medium deck amphibious ship study and the BFSAR will be reflected in future shipbuilding plans.¹⁶

FY2023 NDAA Provisions Regarding Amphibious Ship Force-Level Goal

The FY2023 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) (H.R. 7776/P.L. 117-263 of December 23, 2022) included the following provisions relating to the amphibious ship force-level goal:

- Section 1022 amended 10 U.S.C. 8026 to require the Secretary of the Navy to ensure that the views of the Commandant of the Marine Corps are given appropriate consideration before a major decision is made by an element of the Department of the Navy outside the Marine Corps on a matter that directly concerns amphibious force structure and capability.
- Section 1023, as noted earlier, amended 10 U.S.C. 8062 to require the Navy to include not less than 31 operational larger amphibious ships, including 10 LHA/LHD-type ships and 21 LPD or LSD type ships.
- Section 1025 amended 10 U.S.C. 8695 to state that, in preparing a periodic battle force ship assessment and requirement, the Commandant of the Marine Corps shall be specifically responsible for developing the requirements relating to amphibious warfare ships.

Existing LSD-41/49 Class Ships

The Navy procured a total of 12 Whidbey Island/Harpers Ferry (LSD-41/49) class ships (**Figure 1**) procured between FY1981 and FY1993. The ships entered service between 1985 and 1998.¹⁷ The LSD-41/49 class included 12 ships because the class was built at a time when the Navy was planning a 36-ship (12+12+12) amphibious force. LD-41/49 class ships have an expected service life of 40 years. Two of the ships were retired in 2021 and 2022. The Navy's proposed FY2024 budget proposes retiring three more in FY2024 at ages of 34, 35, and 38 years, which would leave seven in service at the end of FY2024.

Amphibious Warship Industrial Base

Huntington Ingalls Industries/Ingalls Shipbuilding (HII/Ingalls) of Pascagoula, MS, is the Navy's current builder of both LPDs and LHA-type ships, although other U.S. shipyards could also build amphibious ships.¹⁸ The amphibious warship industrial base also includes many supplier firms in numerous U.S. states that provide materials and components for Navy amphibious ships. HII

¹⁶ U.S. Navy, *Report to Congress on the Annual Long-Range Plan for Construction of Naval Vessels for Fiscal Year 2024*, March 2023, with cover letters dated March 30, 2023, released April 18, 2023, pp. 5, 14, 15 (note).

¹⁷ The class was initially known as the Whidbey Island (LSD-41) class. The final four ships in the class, beginning with *Harpers Ferry* (LSD-49), were built to a modified version of the original LSD-41 design, prompting the name of the class to be changed to the Harpers Ferry/Whidbey Island (LSD-41/49) class. Some sources refer to these 12 ships as two separate classes.

¹⁸ Amphibious ships could also be built by U.S. shipyards such as HII/Newport News Shipbuilding (HII/NNS) of Newport News, VA; General Dynamics/National Steel and Shipbuilding Company (GD/NASSCO) of San Diego, CA; and (for LPDs at least) General Dynamics/Bath Iron Works (GD/BIW) of Bath, ME. The Navy over the years has from time to time conducted competitions among shipyards for contracts to build amphibious ships.

states that the supplier base for its LHA production line, for example, includes 457 companies in 39 states.¹⁹

Figure I. LSD-41/49 Class Ship



Source: Cropped version of U.S. Navy photo dated July 13, 2013, showing the *Pearl Harbor* (LSD-52).

LPD-17 Flight II Program

Program Origin and Name

The Navy decided in 2014 that the LSD-41/49 replacement ships would be built to a variant of the design of the Navy’s San Antonio (LPD-17) class amphibious ships. (A total of 13 LPD-17 class ships [LPDs 17 through 29] were procured between FY1996 and FY2017.) Reflecting that decision, the Navy announced on April 10, 2018, that the replacement ships would be known as the LPD-17 Flight II class ships.²⁰ By implication, the Navy’s original LPD-17 design became the LPD-17 Flight I design. The first LPD-17 Flight II class ship is designated LPD-30. Subsequent LPD-17 Flight II class ships are to be designated LPD-31, LPD-32, and so on.

Whether the LPD-17 Flight II class ships constitute their own shipbuilding program or an extension of the original LPD-17 shipbuilding program might be a matter of perspective. As a matter of convenience, this CRS report refers to the Flight II class shipbuilding effort as a separate program. Years from now, LPD-17 Flight I and Flight II class ships might come to be known collectively as either the LPD-17 class, the LPD-17/30 class, or the LPD-17 and LPD-30 classes.

¹⁹ Source: HII statement as quoted in Frank Wolfe, “Navy Budget Plan Delays Buy of Amphibious Ships,” *Defense Daily*, March 15, 2019.

²⁰ Megan Eckstein, “Navy Designates Upcoming LX(R) Amphibs as San Antonio-Class LPD Flight II,” *USNI News*, April 11, 2018. Within a program to build a class of Navy ships, the term *flight* refers to a group of ships within the class that are built to a particular version of the class design. The LPD-17 Flight II program was previously known as the LX(R) program and before that as the LSD(X) program.

On October 10, 2019, the Navy announced that LPD-30, the first LPD-17 Flight II class ship, will be named Harrisburg, for the city of Harrisburg, PA.²¹ As a consequence, LPD-17 Flight II, if treated as a separate class, would be referred to as Harrisburg (LPD-30) class ships.

Design

Compared to the LPD-17 Flight I design, the LPD-17 Flight II design (**Figure 2**) is somewhat less expensive to procure, and in some ways less capable—a reflection of how the Flight II design was developed to meet Navy and Marine Corps operational requirements while staying within a unit procurement cost target that had been established for the program.²² In many other respects, however, the LPD-17 Flight II design is similar in appearance and capabilities to the LPD-17 Flight I design. Of the 13 LPD-17 Flight I class ships, the final two (LPDs 28 and 29) incorporate some design changes that make them transitional ships between the Flight I design and the Flight II design.

Figure 2. LPD-17 Flight II Design

Artist's rendering



Source: Cropped version of Huntington Ingalls Industries rendering accessed March 2, 2021, at <https://newsroom.huntingtoningalls.com/file?fid=5c9a85ca2cfac22774673031>.

²¹ Secretary of the Navy Public Affairs, “SECNAV Names Future Amphibious Transport Dock Ship in Honor of the city of Harrisburg, Pennsylvania,” *Navy News Service*, October 10, 2019.

²² The Navy’s unit procurement cost targets for the LPD-17 Flight II program were \$1,643 million in constant FY2014 dollars for the lead ship, and an average of \$1,400 million in constant FY2014 dollars for ships 2 through 11. (Source: Navy briefing on LX(R) program to CRS and CBO, March 23, 2015.) The cost target for the lead ship was greater than the cost target for the subsequent ships primarily because the procurement cost of the lead ship incorporates much or all of the detail design and nonrecurring engineering (DD/NRE) costs for the program. Incorporating much or all of the DD/NRE costs of for a shipbuilding program into the procurement cost of the lead ship in the program is a traditional Navy shipbuilding budgeting practice.

Procurement Cost

LPD-17 Flight II class ships have a current unit procurement cost of about \$1.9 billion.

Procurement Quantity and FY2024 Funding Request

Although the Navy’s 355-ship force-level goal, released in December 2016, calls for achieving and maintaining a 355-ship fleet with 38 larger amphibious ships, including 13 LPD-17 Flight II class ships, the Navy’s FY2023 budget submission proposed truncating the LPD-17 Flight II program to three ships by making the third LPD-17 Flight II class ship—LPD-32—the final ship in the program. The Navy’s proposed FY2023 budget submission requested funding for the procurement of LPD-32 in FY2023, but programmed no additional LPD-17 Flight II class ships or LPD-type ships of a follow-on design through FY2027. Congress, in acting on the Navy’s proposed FY2023 budget, funded the procurement of LPD-32 in FY2023 and provided \$250.0 million in advance procurement (AP) funding for the procurement in a future fiscal year of LPD-33, which would be a fourth LPD-17 Flight II class ship.

The Navy’s FY2024 budget submission, like its FY2023 budget submission, proposes truncating the LPD-17 Flight II program to three ships by making LPD-32 the final ship in the program. The Navy’s FY2024 budget submission does not request any funding for the procurement of LPD-33 and programs no additional LPD-17 Flight II class ships or LPD-type ships of a follow-on design through FY2028. The Marine Corps’ FY2024 unfunded priorities list (UPL) includes, as its top unfunded priority, \$1,712.5 million in procurement funding for procuring LPD-33 in FY2024.

LHA-9 Amphibious Assault Ship

Overview and FY2024 Funding Request

LHA-type amphibious assault ships (**Figure 3** and **Figure 4**) are procured once every few years. LHA-8 was procured in FY2017. The most recently procured LHA-type ship is LHA-9. The Navy’s FY2024 budget submission estimates its procurement cost at \$3,834.3 million (i.e., about \$3.8 billion). The ship has received a total of \$2,004.1 million in prior year advance procurement (AP) and procurement funding. The Navy’s proposed FY2024 budget requests the remaining \$1,830.1 million needed to complete the ship’s procurement cost.

LHA-9 Procurement Date

The Navy’s FY2024 budget submission, similar to its FY2023, FY2022, and FY2021 budget submissions, presents LHA-9 as a ship procured or projected for procurement in FY2023.²³ Consistent with congressional action on the Navy’s FY2020 and FY2021 budgets, this CRS report treats LHA-9 as a ship that Congress procured (i.e., authorized and provided procurement—not advance procurement—funding for) in FY2021. Navy officials described the listing of LHA-9 in the Navy’s FY2023 budget submission as a ship being requested for procurement in FY2023 as an oversight.²⁴ (For additional discussion, see the **Appendix**.)

²³ The Navy’s FY2022 budget submission did not show an LHA as having been procured in FY2020 or FY2021, and referred to LHA-9 as an “FY23 ship.” (*Department of Defense, Fiscal Year (FY) 2022 Budget Estimates, Navy, Justification Book Volume 1 of 1, Shipbuilding and Conversion, Navy, May 2021, p. 271 [PDF page 291 of 390].*)

²⁴ Source: Navy briefing on Navy’s proposed FY2023 budget for Congressional Budget Office and CRS, March 30, 2023.

Figure 3. LHA-8 Amphibious Assault Ship

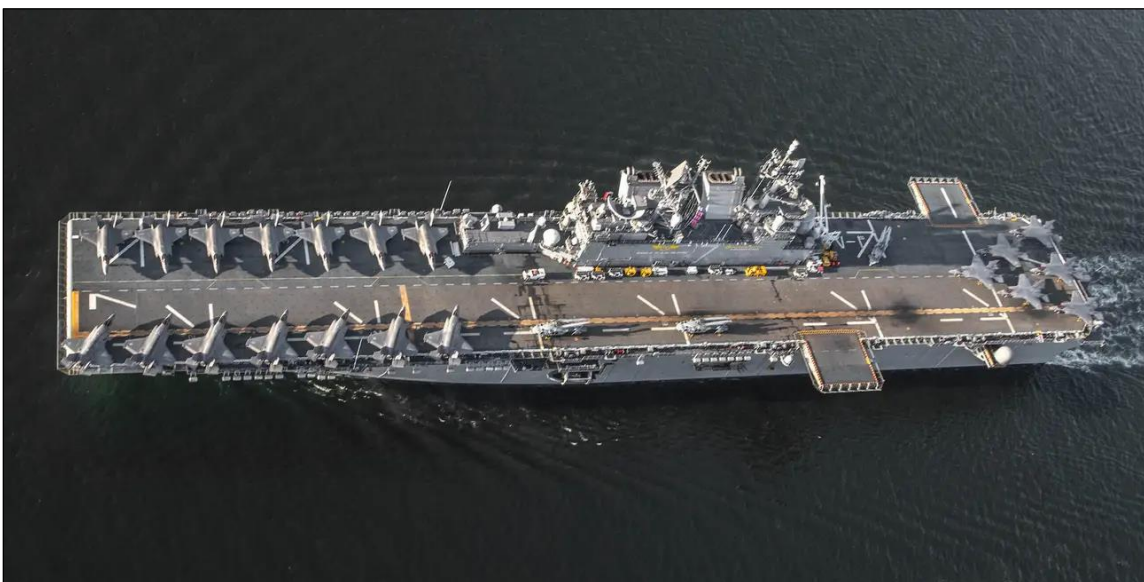
Artist's rendering



Source: Rendering accompanying Tyler Rogoway, "The Next America Class Amphibious Assault Ship Will Almost Be In a Class of its Own," *The Drive*, April 17, 2018. A note on the photo credits the photo to HII.

Figure 4. LHA-7 Amphibious Assault Ship

Shown with 20 F-35B Joint Strike Fighters (JSFs) on Flight Deck



Source: Photograph accompanying Stavros Atlamazoglou, "The US's Experimental 'Lightning Carriers' Are 'Much More Capable' than China's Current Carriers, US Admiral Says," *Business Insider*, December 6, 2022. The article credits the photograph to U.S. Marine Corps/Sgt. Samuel Ruiz.

FY2021-FY2023 NDAA Provisions Regarding Block Buys and Ship Procurement Dates

Block Buy Authority in FY2021 and FY2022 NDAA

Section 124 of the FY2021 NDAA (H.R. 6395/P.L. 116-283 of January 1, 2021), as amended by Section 121 of the FY2022 NDAA (S. 1605/P.L. 117-821 of December 27, 2021), permitted the Navy to enter into a block buy contract in FY2021 or FY2022 for the procurement of three LPD-17 class ships and one LHA-type amphibious assault ship. Such a contract would have been the first block buy contract to cover the procurement of ships from two separate ship classes. Using block buy contracting could reduce the unit procurement costs of LPD-17 Flight II and LHA-type ships and affect Congress's flexibility for making changes to Navy shipbuilding programs in response to potential changes in strategic or budgetary circumstances during the period covered by the block buy contract.²⁵ The Navy did not use this authority.

Block Buy Authority in FY2023 NDAA

Section 129 of the FY2023 NDAA (H.R. 7776/P.L. 117-263 of December 23, 2022) permits the Navy to enter into a block buy contract for procuring up to five LPD-17 and LHA-type amphibious ships. Similar to the point made in the previous paragraph, such a contract would be the first block buy contract to cover the procurement of ships from two separate ship classes. Using block buy contracting could reduce the unit procurement costs of LPD-17 Flight II and LHA-type ships and affect Congress's flexibility for making changes to Navy shipbuilding programs in response to potential changes in strategic or budgetary circumstances during the period covered by the block buy contract.

Ship Procurement Date Provision in FY2021 NDAA

The Department of Defense's (DOD's) decision to present LPD-31 and LHA-9 in its FY2021 budget submission as ships requested for procurement in FY2021 and FY2023, respectively, even though Congress procured the two ships in FY2020 and FY2021, respectively, posed an institutional issue for Congress regarding the preservation and use of Congress's power of the purse under Article 1 of the Constitution, and for maintaining Congress as a coequal branch of government relative to the executive branch. Section 126 of the FY2021 NDAA (H.R. 6395/P.L. 116-283 of January 1, 2021) states

SEC. 126. TREATMENT IN FUTURE BUDGETS OF THE PRESIDENT OF SYSTEMS ADDED BY CONGRESS.

In the event the procurement quantity for a system authorized by Congress in a National Defense Authorization Act for a fiscal year, and for which funds for such procurement quantity are appropriated by Congress in the Shipbuilding and Conversion, Navy account for such fiscal year, exceeds the procurement quantity specified in the budget of the President, as submitted to Congress under section 1105 of title 31, United States Code, for such fiscal year, such excess procurement quantity shall not be specified as a new procurement quantity in any budget of the President, as so submitted, for any fiscal year after such fiscal year.

²⁵ For more on block buy contracting, see CRS Report R41909, *Multiyear Procurement (MYP) and Block Buy Contracting in Defense Acquisition: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke. See also Megan Eckstein, "Ingalls Eyeing LPD Cost Reductions, Capability Increases As Future Fleet Design Evolves," *USNI News*, January 21, 2021.

Regarding the original Senate version of this provision, the Senate Armed Services Committee's report (S.Rept. 116-236 of June 24, 2020) on the FY2021 National Defense Authorization Act (S. 4049) states

Treatment of weapon systems added by Congress in future President's budget requests (sec. 126)

The committee recommends a provision that would preclude the inclusion in future annual budget requests of a procurement quantity of a system previously authorized and appropriated by the Congress that was greater than the quantity of such system requested in the President's budget request.

The committee is concerned that by presenting CVN-81 as a ship that was procured in fiscal year 2020 (instead of as a ship that was procured in fiscal year 2019), LPD-31 as a ship requested for procurement in fiscal year 2021 (instead of as a ship that was procured in fiscal year 2020), and LHA-9 as a ship projected for procurement in fiscal year 2023 (instead of as a ship that was procured in fiscal year 2020), the Department of Defense, in its fiscal year 2021 budget submission, is disregarding or mischaracterizing the actions of Congress regarding the procurement dates of these three ships. (Page 11)

Issues for Congress

Future Amphibious Ship Force-Level Goal

One issue for Congress concerns the future amphibious ship force-level goal, which could affect future procurement quantities for LPD- and LHA-type amphibious ships. As noted earlier

- The Navy's FY2023 30-year (FY2023-FY2052) shipbuilding plan, released on April 20, 2022, includes a table summarizing the results of studies that have been conducted on the successor force-level goal. These studies outline potential future fleets with 6 to 10 LHAs/LHDs and 30 to 54 other amphibious ships, including but not necessarily limited to LPDs and LSMs.
- Marine Corps officials state that, from their perspective, a minimum of 66 amphibious ships will be required in coming years, including a minimum of 31 larger amphibious ships (10 LHAs/LHDs and 21 LPD-17s) plus 35 LSMs (aka "31+35").

Required numbers and types of amphibious ships are reportedly ongoing matters of discussion and debate between the Navy, the Marine Corps, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD).²⁶ Potential oversight questions for Congress include the following:

²⁶ Megan Eckstein, "Marines Want 31 Amphibious Ships. The Pentagon Disagrees. Now What?" *Defense News*, May 2, 2023; Laura Heckmann, "Navy, Marine Corps at Odds Over Fleet Requirements," *National Defense*, March 29, 2023; Brent D. Sadler, "This Ugly Dispute Over Amphibious Warships Didn't Have to Happen," *Defense One*, March 23, 2023; Paul McLeary, "Marines Furious over the Navy's Plan for Troop-Carrying Ships," *Politico Pro*, March 17, 2023; Caitlin M. Kenney, "Is the LPD-17 Flight II Amphib Worth It? Depends Who You Ask," *Defense One*, March 16, 2023; Rich Abott, "Pause in Procurement of LPDs is Mostly Due To Price, CNO Says," *Defense Daily*, March 15, 2023; Megan Eckstein, "Naval Chief Says Rising Cost Spurred Amphib Production Pause," *Defense News*, March 15, 2023; Justin Katz, "Both Citing Cost, Leaders of Navy, Marines Dig In on Amphib Ship Fight," *Breaking Defense*, March 15, 2023; Mallory Shelbourne, "Navy and Marine Corps Debate Amphibious Ship Costs as Clash Over LPD-17 Flight II Line Continues," *USNI News*, March 15 (updated March 16), 2023; Nick Wilson, "Berger: LSD Decommissioning Would Violate Amphib Requirement; Unfunded Priorities Coming Soon," *Inside Defense*, March 15, 2023; Nick Wilson, "CNO: LPD Pause Is Cost-Driven, Budget Growth Will Not Last," *Inside Defense*, March 15, (continued...)

- What are the comparative potential costs and operational risks associated with an amphibious force that includes
 - 6 LHAs/LHDs and 30 LPDs and LSMs?
 - 10 LHAs/LHDs and 54 LPDs and LSMs?
 - 10 LHAs/LHDs, 21 LPDs, and 35 LSMs?
- To what extent, if any, do the Navy and Marine Corps disagree regarding future required levels of LHA- and LPD-type amphibious ships?

LPD-17 Flight II Procurement and Amphibious Ship Force Level

A related issue for Congress—one that has emerged as a prominent item in Congress’s review of the Navy’s proposed FY2024 budget—concerns the Navy’s plans for procuring LPD-17 Flight II class ships, the Navy’s proposals for retiring older amphibious ships, and projected numbers of amphibious ships.

As noted earlier, 10 U.S.C. 8062(b) requires the Navy to include not less than 31 operational amphibious warfare ships. The 31 amphibious ships are to include not less than 10 LHA/LHD-type “big deck” amphibious assault ships, with the remaining amphibious ships within the total of not less than 31 amphibious ships being LPD/LSD-type amphibious ships. The requirement for the Navy to include these numbers and types of amphibious ships was added to 10 U.S.C. 8062 by Section 1023 of the FY2023 (NDAA) (H.R. 7776/P.L. 117-263 of December 23, 2022).

As also noted earlier, the Navy’s FY2024 30-year (FY2024-FY2053) shipbuilding plan shows the projected number of amphibious ships remaining below 31 ships throughout the 30-year period, with the figure decreasing to 26 ships in FY2035 and decreasing further, to 19 ships (PB2024 profile), 20 ships (Alternative 2 profile), or 23 ships (Alternative 3 profile), in FY2053.

Under the 38-ship amphibious force-level goal that is included in the Navy’s current 355-ship force-level objective, the Navy had planned to procure a total of 13 LPD-17 Flight II class ships. Under the Navy’s proposed FY2024 budget, as under its proposed FY2023 budget, the LPD-17 Flight II ship proposed for procurement (and funded by Congress)—the third LPD-17 Flight II ship—would be the final one to be procured. The Navy’s FY2024 budget submission, like its FY2023 budget submission, would thus truncate the LPD-17 Flight II program from a previously envisaged total of 13 ships to 3 ships. Ending LPD-17 Flight II procurement with the ship procured in FY2023 would make for a total of 16 LPD-17 Flight I and Flight II ships (13 LPD-17 Flight I ships procured in earlier years, and 3 LPD-17 Flight II ships).

The Navy’s FY2024 30-year shipbuilding plan states

2023; Justin Katz, “‘Unacceptable’: Marines Are Ready to Fight Tonight—About the Amphib Budget,” *Breaking Defense*, March 13, 2023; Caitlin M. Kenney, “Navy On Path To Violate 31-Amphibious-Ship Requirement in 2024,” *Defense One*, March 13, 2023; Mallory Shelbourne, “Navy: OSD Directed Amphib Procurement Pause, Joint Staff Says Current Amphib Force ‘Sufficient,’” *USNI News*, March 13 (updated March 20), 2023; Megan Eckstein, “Commandant pushes amphibious warship funding as next budget emerges,” *Defense News*, March 9, 2023; Mallory Shelbourne, “FY2024 Budget: Navy Won’t Buy Any More San Antonio Amphibs in the Next Five Years,” *USNI News*, March 9 (updated March 15), 2023; Megan Eckstein, “US Navy Reviews Cost-Saving Design Changes Before Resuming Amphib Buys,” *Defense News*, February 28, 2023; Rich Abott, “Rivers: Navy Not Talking About ‘Walking Away’ From LPD Flight II,” *Defense Daily*, February 27, 2023; Megan Eckstein, “White House Steps in as Navy, Pentagon Feud over Amphibious Ship Study,” *Defense News*, December 8, 2022; Justin Katz, “Del Toro: Navy-Marine Corps Amphib Study in ‘Final Stages’, Being Briefed to Leadership,” *Breaking Defense*, December 6, 2022; Lee Hudson, “Senators Press Del Toro for Update on Amphib Study,” *Politico Pro*, November 14, 2022; Megan Eckstein, “US Marines Warn Against Navy’s FY24 Decommission Plans,” *Defense News*, October 4, 2022.

The Department [of the Navy] is conducting an LPD 17 Flt II amphibious ship cost/capability study... to inform PB2025's way ahead [the Navy's proposed FY2025 defense budget, to be submitted to Congress in early 2024] with respect to this platform....

The Navy has started an Amphibious Ship Study to assess cost/capability tradeoffs to LPD Flt II, with study completion expected in June 2023....

[Projected] Amphibious ship inventories reflect a pause in the current LPD [procurement] line. The analytic results of the medium deck amphibious ship study and the BFSAR will be reflected in future shipbuilding plans.²⁷

Potential oversight questions for Congress include the following:

- Are the Navy's plans for procuring amphibious ships and the Navy's projected numbers of amphibious ships consistent with the requirement in 10 U.S.C. 8062(b) for the Navy to include not less than 31 amphibious ships? If not, why not?
- 10 U.S.C. 8062(b) requires the Navy to include not less than 11 operational aircraft carriers. When the Navy projected that for a period of several years, it would have 10 rather than 11 operational aircraft carriers, the Navy requested, and Congress approved, a legislative waiver permitting the Navy to include 10 rather than 11 operational carriers during that period.²⁸ As noted above, the Navy's FY2024 30-year (FY2024-FY2053) shipbuilding plan shows the projected number of amphibious ships remaining below 31 ships throughout the 30-year period. Has the Navy requested a legislative waiver of the requirement under 10 U.S.C. 8062(b) for the Navy to include not less than 31 operational amphibious warfare ships? If the Navy has not requested such a waiver, why not?
- What changes to the Navy's FY2024 budget submission would be needed to better align Navy plans with the amphibious ship force-level required by 10 U.S.C. 8062? How much additional funding for procuring amphibious ships and for operating and supporting amphibious ships would be needed to achieve and maintain a force of not less than 31 amphibious ships, including not less than 10 LHA/LHD-type "big deck" amphibious assault ships, as required by 10 U.S.C. 8062(b)? In a situation of finite defense funding, what impact might providing this additional funding have on funding available for other Navy or DOD priorities?
- What are the potential operational consequences of the projected numbers of amphibious shown in the Navy's FY2024 30-year shipbuilding plan?
- Is the Navy's proposal to truncate the LPD-17 Flight II program to three ships, and not procure any more such ships during the five-year period FY2024-FY2028, consistent with the requirement under 10 U.S.C. 8062(b)?

²⁷ U.S. Navy, *Report to Congress on the Annual Long-Range Plan for Construction of Naval Vessels for Fiscal Year 2024*, March 2023, with cover letters dated March 30, 2023, released April 18, 2023, pp. 5, 14, 15 (note).

²⁸ As discussed in in the CRS report on the Gerald R. Ford (CVN-78) class aircraft carrier program (CRS Report RS20643, *Navy Ford (CVN-78) Class Aircraft Carrier Program: Background and Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke), the aircraft carrier force dropped from 11 ships to 10 ships between December 1, 2012, when the aircraft carrier *Enterprise* (CVN-65) was inactivated, and July 22, 2017, when the aircraft carrier Gerald R. Ford (CVN-78) was commissioned into service. Anticipating the gap between the inactivation of CVN-65 and the commissioning of CVN-78, the Navy asked Congress for a temporary waiver of 10 U.S.C. 8062(b) to accommodate the period between the two events. Section 1023 of the FY2010 National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 2647/P.L. 111-84 of October 28, 2009) authorized the waiver, permitting the Navy to have 10 rather than 11 operational carriers between the inactivation of CVN-65 and the commissioning of CVN-78.

- If the Navy has not yet released a definitive new force-level goal to replace the 355-ship goal, how can the Navy know that the requirement for LPD-17s will be no more than 16 ships?
- What impact would the truncation of LPD-17 Flight II procurement to a total of three ships have on the shipyard that builds LPD-17 Flight IIs (HII/Ingalls—the Ingalls shipyard of Pascagoula, MS, which is part of Huntington Ingalls Industries) in terms of workloads, employment levels, and costs for building other Navy warships (including DDG-51 destroyers and LHA-type amphibious assault ships) that are built at that yard? What impact would the truncation of LPD-17 Flight II procurement have on supplier firms associated with construction of LPD-17 Flight II ships?

A May 1, 2023, press report stated

In the aftermath of a powerful February earthquake in Turkey, Marine Corps' leadership was publicly lamenting its response to aid an ally. The service's "best option," a Marine Expeditionary Unit hauling shelter, medical supplies and other humanitarian assistance aboard a big deck amphibious ship, was not available.

"When the earthquake happened in Turkey, a NATO ally, the MEU was not on station and it should have been," Lt. Gen. Karsten Heckl, one of the commandant's deputies, told lawmakers in March.

The commandant himself, Gen. David Berger, in a separate interview with Defense One said as a service chief, he owes the president and the defense secretary "options...all the time. Here, I felt like the best option, we couldn't offer them because we have the Marines and the equipment and they're trained, [but] we didn't have the ships."

Now, in the wake of the dramatic evacuation of American diplomats and citizens from Sudan, an African nation with two opposing generals threatening war, the Marines again were unable to provide the combatant commander with its premiere capability for evacuations, a senior official told *Breaking Defense*.

It's a perceived failure about which top Marine officials have been unusually and publicly blunt. That bluntness, analysts and former military officials say, has been driven by a cultural ethos that demands they be the nation's "crisis response force" as well as a genuine need to shore up the embattled amphibious fleet.

"I feel like I let down the combatant commander cause Gen. [Michael] Langley needs options," Berger said during an April 28 congressional hearing of the four-star Marine Corps general leading US Africa Command. "He didn't have a sea-based option [from the Marine Corps]. That's how we reinforce embassies. That's how we evacuate them. That's how we deter."²⁹

An April 21, 2023, press report stated

The Pentagon is wrapping up a study on how it can slash costs on a key shipbuilding program central to an ambitious retooling of the Marine Corps, as the Navy enters a cash crunch in the coming years.

²⁹ Justin Katz, "Short on Amphibs for Turkey, Sudan, the Marines Grapple with Crisis Response Ethos," *Breaking Defense*, May 1, 2023. See also James G. Foggo, "Evacuating Sudan: An Amphibious Gap and Missed Opportunity," *Defense News*, May 3, 2023; Nancy A. Youssef, "Grounding of U.S. Marine Unit Spotlights Lack of Ships in Asia-Pacific," *Wall Street Journal*, April 30, 2023. Richard R. Burgess, "Berger: Lack of Amphibs Left AFRICOM with No Sea-Based Option for Sudan Evacuation," *Seapower*, April 28, 2023; Konstantin Toropin, "I Let Down the Combatant Commander': Marine Leader Regrets His Forces Weren't Available for Recent Crises," *Military.com*, April 28, 2023.

The study, launched in January, has caused plenty of angst on Capitol Hill and within the Marine Corps, both of which charge that the relook is wasting time in growing the fleet and imperiling shipyards' ability to plan for the future.

But the Pentagon says the review is focused solely on how to drive down costs on the San Antonio-class of amphibious ships, whose price tag has emerged as a point of contention between the Navy and the Corps.³⁰

An April 18, 2023, press report stated

Like its predecessor, the U.S. Navy's 2024 long-range shipbuilding plan is a tardy, multiple-choice document that appears to fall short of the legal requirement for amphibious warships. And some lawmakers are not happy.

"Why are you violating the law? And why does your shipbuilding plan have no remote interest for the next 30 years, as far as I can tell, of hitting the statutory mandate that we told you to hit?" [Senator Dan Sullivan] asked Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro at a Tuesday [April 18] hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

"It is my responsibility to follow the law. It's also my responsibility to ensure that we just don't waste taxpayer money on vessels, for example, that will never see the light of day," Del Toro replied....

Sullivan was complaining about the Navy's stated plan to allow its amphibious fleet to drop to 29 ships in 2024, below the 31-ship floor that Congress mandated in the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act.

He was not alone. Several senators remarked on the amphibious-ship plan during the hearing or in later emailed statements....

[Senator Tim Kaine, who leads the committee's Seapower subcommittee, said in his statement:] "'Lastly, on the issue of amphibious ships: the Marine Corps has made it clear that they need 31, and Congress shares that view. I'm frustrated that neither this plan nor the President's budget gets us there.'"...

The top request in the Marine Corps' 2024 unfunded priorities list is to fully fund LPD 33 to try to get the fleet back to the minimum requirement, Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger told senators at Tuesday's hearing.

"In the shipbuilding plan and the budget submitted, there is no plan to get to that number. And that's why I put it as the top of the unfunded list," Berger said. "I know it to be the operational requirement and the law. And I saw no plan to get there."³¹

A March 30, 2023, press report stated

The U.S. Navy's plan to decommission three amphibious warships ahead of schedule has drawn ire from some legislators, who last year put into law a requirement for the service to maintain a fleet of at least 31 ships for the Marine Corps to use.

The Navy in its fiscal 2024 budget request asked to decommission three Whidbey Island-class amphibious dock landing ships — the Germantown, Gunston Hall and Tortuga — which it tried to decommission last year and Congress voted to save.

Vice Adm. Scott Conn, the deputy chief of naval operations for warfighting requirements and capabilities, explained during a Tuesday [March 28] hearing before the Senate Armed

³⁰ Paul McLeary, "Pentagon Defends Amphib Review amid Angst from Marine Corps, Lawmakers," *Politico Pro*, April 21, 2023.

³¹ Caitlin M. Kenney, "Navy Shipbuilding Plan Draws Lawmakers' Ire Anew," *Defense One*, April 18, 2023. See also Doug G. Ware, "'You're Ignoring the Law': Navy Secretary Grilled in Senate over Lack of Amphibious Ships," *Stars and Stripes*, April 18, 2023.

Services Committee’s sea power panel that these ships are not viable options for overseas operations given their poor condition. The vessels have not reached the end of their planned 40-year life span.

Conn said the ships’ original service life was meant to be 35 years, but in the 1990s the Navy changed that to 40 based on the assumptions the ships would operate in six-month deployments and be properly maintained along the way.

Throughout the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, “we operated those ships much longer than six-month deployments,” Conn said. “We know we didn’t put the resources [toward] those ships to be able to sustain them. So now we’re in a position where we have some hard choices to make.”

As the Navy watches their performance in ongoing maintenance availabilities, “we don’t have the confidence, as we’re seeing growth work and new work, that those ships will get out of the maintenance phase, be able to get through a work-up cycle ... which is a year long, and then go on deployment.”

Why keep them if “we can’t get them away from the pier,” Conn wondered.

It would cost about \$3 billion to keep the Whidbey Island amphibious ships and cruisers the Navy wants to decommission, but Conn argues that money would be better spent on other ships. Additionally, decommissioning the ships rather than continuing their unsuccessful maintenance availabilities would free up sailors for other ship assignments at sea and would free up repair yards to work on ships that are more badly needed by the fleet.

Sen. Dan Sullivan, R-Alaska, who serves in the Marine Corps Reserve, told Conn the Navy’s plan to decommission these ships brings the fleet lower than the now-statutory requirement for 31 ships.

“This is not a suggestion, it’s a law,” he said. “You have a law, we passed it ... and the Navy comes out and says: ‘Eh, we’ll just blow off those silly U.S. senators.’ ”

Conn told him that “having 31 ships, of which three of them may be tied to a pier for the next five years, is not really 31.”³²

Another March 30, 2023, press report stated:

The Pentagon team leading the charge to reduce the cost of amphibious warships has shown the Marine Corps drawings of scaled-down, less expensive ship designs—but a service general told Defense News he won’t accept them.

During a Tuesday [March 28] hearing with the Senate Armed Services Committee’s sea power panel, Lt. Gen. Karsten Heckl, the deputy commandant for combat development and integration, told lawmakers he will not change his current requirements.

“The trade space will be my requirements. And I’m the requirements officer for the Marine Corps: I am not coming off the requirement any further,” Heckl said, amid an effort by the Office of the Secretary of Defense to reduce the cost of building San Antonio-class amphibious transport docks, or LPD....

The general told Defense News after the hearing he has two major concerns with the Pentagon’s suggested designs.

First is that amphibious ready groups — a collection of one amphibious assault ship and two smaller San Antonio or Whidbey Island amphibious ships — hauling Marine expeditionary units typically disaggregate as soon as they deploy to a theater. The Whidbey Island LSDs cannot operate alone, but the LPD Flight II replacements can, making this

³² Megan Eckstein, “Lawmakers Decried US Navy’s Plan to Decommission Aging Amphibious Ships,” *Defense News*, March 30, 2023.

design a boon for the Corps and the combatant commanders who want flexibility in how they operate ships in theater.

Heckl said the proposed designs take away the ability of this revised LPD to operate independently.

Additionally, he said the flight deck and vehicle cargo storage spaces would be “reduced dramatically.”

He said the Office of the Secretary of Defense offered up “very rough ideas, and I’ve seen, like, three of them not flushed out at all. And none of them are acceptable. The Marine Corps will not accept them.”³³

A March 15, 2023, press report stated

The Navy halted its pursuit of the San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock line because of the program’s growing costs and delays in the shipyard, the service’s top officer said Wednesday.

The pause to reassess the LPD-17 Flight II line started a year ago at the direction of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday said at the annual McAleese Conference....

The pause on buying amphibious ships is so the Navy can perform a Battle Force Ship Assessment and Requirements Study, which will help inform amphibious ship buys and likely wrap up in the third quarter of FY 2023, and evaluate both possible cost savings and capabilities, officials have said....

The Navy wanted [LPD-32] to be the last LPD-17 Flight II purchase, as the service last year tried to end the line early after only buying three ships instead of the originally planned 13.

After appeals from the Marine Corps for advanced procurement funding for LPD-33, lawmakers opted to continue the line and allotted \$250 million in advanced procurement dollars for that ship in the FY 2023 funding and policy bills.

But the service did not include the ship in its five-year budget outlook released Monday [March 13]. The Navy could buy LPD-33 in FY 2025 if it followed industry’s recommendation to order the ships every two years to keep a stable work force and maintain the supply chain. Because of the two-year centers, Gilday said the Navy has time to evaluate the LPD-17 Flight II line.

“Congress has given us the authorities in the latest [National Defense Authorization Act] to do a bundle buy and we all agree that that’s the way that we ought to go after these ships. But to go after a single ship in ‘25, and put that in the budget now – based on where we are with all this churn on cost and so forth and this concern about the cost of those ships – it’s like telling a car dealer, ‘hey I really want to buy that minivan. I’m going to buy that minivan. Now let’s roll up our sleeves and talk about price,’” Gilday said.

“It’s not going to drive down the price of that ship. It needs to be competitive. Actually, with that production line and that ship, it’s not competitive. One company builds it,” the CNO added.

But the Marine Corps has a different take. At the same conference, Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger made the case for the LPD-17 Flight II line and said a block buy acquisition strategy is the way to pursue the ships to save money. The commandant argued that HII’s Ingalls Shipbuilding is approaching the point in the line

³³ Megan Eckstein, “Marine Corps Rejects Pentagon’s Pitch for New Amphibious Ship Designs,” *Defense News*, March 30, 2023.

where they can see cost savings and that increased costs to buy new LPDs are because of inflation....

Berger was part of the team in 2014 that assessed the LPD-17 line and chose to pursue an altered design – Flight II – instead of starting from scratch on a new amphibious ship program. He expressed doubt that the Navy could find more cost savings by doing another assessment and said halting the line would affect the workforce and drive the price up....

Naval Sea Systems Command chief Vice Adm. Bill Galinis could not provide details when asked if NAVSEA is formally assessing the LPD design or looking at a potential Flight III....

Both Berger and Gilday argued for block buys to achieve cost savings, a point Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro echoed in advocating for potential multi-year procurement strategies.

“I think it’s necessary to try to get to why is the cost of the LPD going up as significantly as it has. It’s now approaching pretty much the cost of a DDG Flight III destroyer,” Del Toro said.

“So there are some concerns to that. So we’re going to actually take a look at that over the next few months actually, hopefully by either June or September we’ll have the final answer to are there ways that we could perhaps bring that cost down a bit.”...

Berger cited his minimum requirement of 31 amphibious ships, which Congress signed into law in FY 2023, as the reason why he cannot support the pause in purchasing LPDs.

“They’re right at the point in the curve that’s the most efficient and we’re going to take a time out. From my perspective, I can’t accept that when the inventory – the capacity has to be no less than 31,” the commandant said.³⁴

A March 13, 2023, press report stated

The Navy is proposing to drop its amphibious fleet below 31 ships, despite an agreement with the Marine Corps and a potential violation of last year’s defense policy law.

Sent to Congress on Monday [March 13], the Navy’s proposed \$255.8 billion 2024 budget aims to retire eight warships before the end of their intended service life, including three Whidbey Island-class dock landing ships, or LSDs, that it proposed to scrap last year but which were saved by the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act....

“We’ve gone through, not only on LSDs but the other divestments proposed in this budget, did a ship-by-ship review, to understand the material state of each of the ships. What we found on the LSDs is that they are challenged in terms of readiness. We want to make sure that the capabilities that we field are the right capabilities, and are able to perform the mission to the standards that we expect,” Navy Undersecretary Erik Raven told reporters ahead of the proposed budget’s release.

“And so we’re proposing those divestments because we think the return on investment, on further investments on those particular ships, as judged hull by hull, that return on investment is not there,” Raven said. “Additionally, say that we have sailors and Marines who are serving on these ships, we think that getting them matched up to the right platforms is the way to go.”

Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger last week rejected any plans that would cut these aging LSDs before their replacements were delivered.

³⁴ Mallory Shelbourne, “Navy and Marine Corps Debate Amphibious Ship Costs as Clash Over LPD-17 Flight II Line Continues,” *USNI News*, March 15 (updated March 16), 2023.

Despite the delivery of one LPD in 2024, the early retirement of the three LSDs would mean the total number of amphibs that year would drop below the legally required 31 ships minimum laid out in the 2023 NDAA, according to the budget documents. Raven told reporters that the Navy is not seeking a waiver at this time....

Berger on Monday reiterated the reasoning behind the 31-ship requirement for amphibs.

“Anything less incurs risk to national defense by limiting the options for our combatant commanders,” he said in a statement to *Defense One*. “Per strategic guidance, the Marine Corps must be able to provide the nation with crisis response capabilities and build partnerships with allies and partners in support of integrated deterrence—difficult to achieve without the requisite number of amphibious warships.”...

Last month, Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro said the service is taking a “strategic pause” on buying more LPDs until additional studies are completed, *Defense News* reported. Afterward, the Navy would “probably” start buying them again, according to the report.

On Monday, Raven told reporters at the Pentagon that the office of the Secretary of Defense had directed the pause and a capabilities-based assessment, and that there is an “integrated team” to assess the ships.

“What we are making sure that we are doing as we move forward with our budget plans, is making sure that we have the right capabilities at the right price aligned to not only meeting military requirements, but working with industry,” Raven said. “And for LPD, we’re taking a look at the acquisition strategy moving forward, again, to make sure that we would have the right capabilities at the right price and working with industry partners to put together that plan moving forward.”

The Navy has “time to get this right” with the LPD, and that the Navy and Marine Corps are “fundamentally aligned” on the 31-ship requirement, Rear Adm. John Gumbleton, the deputy assistant secretary of the Navy for budget, said Monday.

“Both service chiefs like 31 [ships] as a requirement. Both service chiefs like multiyear procurements. Both service chiefs want to buy in a predictable future. And so if we can do a study and actually lower the costs of this, that’s all to the good of the Department of the Navy and Marine Corps,” Gumbleton said.³⁵

Another March 13, 2023, press report stated

The future amphibious warship fleet — and its production line — are in peril of being sunk by budget politics. And the Marine Corps is ready to fight about it.

“Without a programmed replacement for [dock landing ships] being decommissioned, substantial risk falls on the combatant commander as the requirement for 31 ships will not be met,” Maj. Joshua Benson, a spokesman for the service’s three-star general in charge of combat development and integration, told *Breaking Defense* today. “This is unacceptable.”

The Navy’s new fiscal 2024 budget request follows up on previous comments from Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro, who has said the service will take a “strategic pause” in purchasing new amphibious warships, which are designed to ferry Marines and their equipment into strategic locations where they can deploy from ship to shore. At the time, Del Toro said the pause was so the Navy can consider both how many ships it needs as well as the capabilities onboard those vessels.

Speaking to reporters ahead of the budget rollout, Navy Undersecretary Erik Raven declined to answer several questions about the pause, instead thanking for Congress for its

³⁵ Caitlin M. Kenney, “Navy On Path To Violate 31-Amphibious-Ship Requirement in 2024,” *Defense One*, March 13, 2023.

support in the previous budget and promising to work with industry and the Hill moving forward.

During an event on the Hill last week, Commandant Gen. David Berger also declined to explain the logic behind the “strategic pause,” saying it was Del Toro’s place to articulate the administration’s position. But he was blunt about the risk in not meeting what the Marines say is a minimum of 31 amphibious ship fleet, a figure backed up by a recent joint Navy-Marine Corps assessment delivered to lawmakers.

“The inventory is going to go down, the risk is going to go up,” he said then. “The risk meaning our ability as a nation to respond when needed, and sometimes you can’t predict that the risk goes up — that a combatant commander doesn’t have the right tool for the job. That’s the risk.”

But the new comments from the Marine Corps’ three-star command in charge of developing warfighting technologies represent major, public push-back against the Pentagon’s formal request.

In follow up comments today to *Breaking Defense*, Benson emphasized that risk, citing the ongoing humanitarian crises in Turkey prompted by multiple earthquakes.

“The ongoing humanitarian disaster in Turkey is the most recent example of a situation that would benefit from the capabilities organic to an [amphibious ready group/ Marine expeditionary unit]. Unfortunately, no operationally deployable amphibious warfare ships were available,” said Benson.

In terms of the industrial base, the Marine Corps views the “strategic pause” as putting its ship production lines at risk of completely shutting down. “Depending on the length of the pause,” Benson said shipyards may be forced to cut their workforce, losing “years of experience that have been carried forward from keel to keel.”

“If a shipbuilder is forced to make these decisions due to forecasted gaps in production, re-starting a line becomes much more expensive,” he added.³⁶

Another March 13, 2023, press report stated

A new study directed by the Office of the Secretary of Defense led to the halt in amphibious ship procurement so the Navy can evaluate requirements and cost efficiencies, a Navy official said Monday [March 13].

“We received direction from OSD, but this will be an integrated team moving forward for that assessment,” Navy Under Secretary Erik Raven told USNI News when asked who directed the pause and reassessment.

Rear Adm. Gumbleton, the Navy deputy assistant secretary for budget, said the Department of the Navy will work with both OSD and its Cost Assessment and Program Evaluation office on the evaluation....

When questioned by USNI News, Gumbleton disputed the notion that the Navy chose to invest in the Landing Ship Medium over the LPD platform. He acknowledged the service would ideally buy the San Antonio-class ships on two-year centers, a procurement plan industry advocates for to keep the shipyard workforce and supply chain stable.

“The intent here is not an either-or between an LPD or a Medium Landing Ship. It’s a both,” Gumbleton said.

“I believe the services are fundamentally aligned on this requirement. Both service chiefs like 31 as the requirement. Both service chiefs like multi-year procurements. Both service

³⁶ Justin Katz, “‘Unacceptable’: Marines Are Ready to Fight Tonight—About the Amphib Budget,” *Breaking Defense*, March 13, 2023.

chiefs want to buy in a predictable future. And so if we can do a study and actually lower the cost of this, that's all to the good of the Department of the Navy and the Marine Corps," he added, referring to the 31-amphibious ship floor that Congress signed into law in FY 2023.

Since Navy Secretary Carlos Del Toro said last month that there was a "strategic pause" on buying amphibious ships, the Navy opted not to include LPD-33 in today's budget proposal. In FY 2023 legislation, Congress appropriated and authorized \$250 million in advanced procurement money for that ship, but a Navy official told USNI News the service plans to hold that contract for the duration of the pause.

The halt is so the Navy can perform a Battle Force Ship Assessment and Requirements Study, a new evaluation that will inform its amphibious ship procurement, according to Del Toro. Speaking at the Pentagon's budget rollout, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Christopher Grady said that study will wrap in the third quarter of FY 2023....

The current amphibious force can meet the military's missions for the immediate future, Vice Adm. Sara Joyner, the director of Force Structure, Resources and Assessment on the Joint Staff (J8), told reporters Monday.

"As far as amphib studies, with the new [National Defense Strategy] that came out in '22, the thought is that what we have right now is sufficient for what we need in order for near-term requirements for amphibs," Joyner said. "But the chance to redirect and take another look was something that was valued and that so the Department of the Navy is moving forward with that study. And it will be their study that they will bring forward is to my knowledge how that will occur."

Since Del Toro announced the pause, the Marine Corps has voiced concern over the amphibious force structure and investment plans, particularly as the Navy seeks to retire the older Whidbey Island-class dock landing ships. The Navy's FY 2024 proposal asks to retire three LSDs: USS Germantown (LSD-42), USS Gunston Hall (LSD-44) and USS Tortuga (LSD-46).

"We have to have the inventory not less than 31 [ships]. To me, that's a combination of old and new. We cannot decommission a critical element without having a replacement in our hand," Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger said at an event last week.

"We can't do that, or else, back to risk ... we're not going to have the tools or it's not going to be available. So the decommissioning of the LSDs to me is directly tied to the inventory as fast as we can procure and field."

Both Defense Department and Navy officials during the budget rollout emphasized that the ongoing evaluations are meant to assess both cost and capabilities to ensure the service is making the right investments.

"We remain committed to Landing Ship Medium, and for LPD we're taking a look at the acquisition strategy moving forward again to make sure that we will have the right capabilities at the right price and working with industry partners to put together that plan moving forward," Raven said.

Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks emphasized that amphibious ships are crucial to the Indo-Pacific, the Pentagon's priority theater.

"We believe that's vital to the Indo-Pacific region in particular, and as we look at all the investments we're making, for example, in the Marine Corps' Force Design 2030, of course it includes the ability to move around our Marine forces," Hicks said.

“The question really is what is the right mix of capabilities for today and for tomorrow, and that’s where we’re taking time to look at what that right mix of capabilities looks like, including, of course ... in the case you’re pointing out on the amphibious forces.”³⁷

FY2024 Procurement Funding for LPD-33

Another related issue for Congress is whether to provide FY2024 procurement or advance procurement (AP) funding for LPD-33, and if so, how much. As noted earlier, the Navy’s proposed FY2024 budget requests no procurement funding for LPD-33, and the Marine Corps’ FY2024 unfunded priorities list (UPL) includes, as its top unfunded priority, \$1,712.5 million in procurement funding for procuring LPD-33 in FY2024.

Use of Block Buy Contract Authority

Another issue for Congress is whether the Navy intends to use the LPD-LHA block buy contracting authority provided by Congress in Section 129 of the FY2023 NDAA, and if not, then what, if anything, Congress should do in response. As noted earlier, the Navy previously did not use the LPD-LHA block buy contracting authority provided in the FY2021 and FY2022 NDAs.

An April 3, 2023, press report stated:

The Chief of Naval Operations wants the Navy to pursue a multi-year procurement strategy for the amphibious warship program the service indicated it would end in the latest budget submission.

“Most recently, on Friday, we put LPD-32 on contract at a good price and we hope to leverage the multi-year authorities that we have to keep that great line of ships going,” Adm. Mike Gilday said Monday [April 3] at the annual Navy League’s Sea Air Space symposium.

A March 9, 2023, press report stated that Marine Corps Commandant General David Berger

today doubled down on the need for 31 traditional amphibious warships and endorsed block buys and other contracting strategies to signal consistent demand to industry....

“We have bought these one at a time. That’s not the way you do it,” Berger said at a Thursday [March 9] forum hosted by the Amphibious Warship Industrial Base Coalition. “We do block buys for other platforms—destroyers, submarines aircraft carriers—for all the right reasons. We need to do it also for amphibious ships.”³⁸

At a June 22, 2021, hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee on the Department of the Navy’s proposed FY2022 budget, General David Berger, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, stated that using the block buy authority in the FY2021 and FY2022 NDAs would reduce the combined cost of the four ships by \$722 million.³⁹ At a June 17, 2021, hearing before the Seapower and Projection Forces subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee on

³⁷ Mallery Shelbourne, “Navy: OSD Directed Amphib Procurement Pause, Joint Staff Says Current Amphib Force ‘Sufficient,’” *USNI News*, March 13 (updated March 20), 2023. See also Mallery Shelbourne, “FY2024 Budget: Navy Won’t Buy Any More San Antonio Amphibs in the Next Five Years,” *USNI News*, March 9 (updated March 15), 2023; Caitlin M. Kenney, “Marines Issue Warning on Amphib Fleet, The Assistant Commandant Says 31 Large Amphibious Warfare Ships Are Needed to Avoid Risk,” *Defense One*, February 14, 2023.

³⁸ Nick Wilson, “Commandant Endorses Block Buys for Amphibious Warships,” *Inside Defense*, March 9, 2023. See also Mallery Shelbourne, “FY2024 Budget: Navy Won’t Buy Any More San Antonio Amphibs in the Next Five Years,” *USNI News*, March 9 (updated March 15), 2023.

³⁹ Richard R. Burgess, “Senators Hammer \$1 Billion Loss, Industrial Instability with Navy’s Planned 2022 Shipbuilding,” *Seapower*, June 22, 2021.

seapower programs in the Department of the Navy’s proposed FY2022 budget, Frederick J. Stefany, Acting Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development and Acquisition (ASN RDA) (i.e., the Navy’s acting acquisition executive), stated that this would equate to a reduction of 7.1%.⁴⁰ At a June 8, 2021, hearing before the Seapower subcommittee of the Senate Armed Services Committee on Navy and Marine Corps investment programs, the Department of Navy witnesses were asked about the Navy’s intentions regarding the block buy contracting authority granted by Section 124. Stefany replied that

to update you on that authority that your—your committee provided last year, the Section 124 Authority, we have finished negotiating with HII Ingalls to document a ... contract structure that could be put in place to implement the four-ship procurement that you’re referring to, that—that we just finished that up about a week ago.

And, so we had a—a handshake agreement [with HII Ingalls] on what that would look like if we were to actually enact it into a contract and we packaged that up and we’re sending it to the department⁴¹ leadership for—for a decision. But what—and—and get that in place before the authority that expires at the end of this year, that you provided us.

But—in—I’ll just let you know the initial indications we’re getting from the department is that they would like to defer this decision so that they can make an overall, as they do their overall [FY]’23 budget review this summer and fall, of the overall force structure, work with Admiral Kilby and General Smith on the right mix of ships of the future, the commitment of four ships at once, they would like to make—defer that commitment until they are able to make that force-structure assessment.

So, right now, indicators are that we are not gonna be able to execute that, but it’s not a done deal. It’s going through the process within the department for a final decision sir.⁴²

FY2024 Advance Procurement Funding for LHA-10

Another potential issue for Congress is whether to provide FY2024 advance procurement (AP) funding for the next LHA-type ship, LHA-10. The Navy’s FY2024 budget submission programs the procurement of LHA-10 for FY2027. Congress, as part of its action on the Navy’s proposed FY2023 budget, provided \$289.0 million in advance procurement (AP) funding for LHA-10. The Navy’s FY2024 budget submission does not request additional AP funding for the ship in FY2024; it does program additional AP funding for the ship in FY2025 and FY2026.

Technical and Cost Risk in LPD-17 Flight II and LHA Programs

Another potential issue for Congress is technical and cost risk in the LPD-17 Flight II and LHA programs.

⁴⁰ Megan Eckstein, “Marines Explain Vision for Fewer Traditional Amphibious Warships,” *Defense News*, June 21, 2021.

⁴¹ This is a reference to the Department of the Navy or the Department of Defense.

⁴² Transcript of hearing as posted by CQ.com. The passage as printed here includes some minor typographical corrections done by CRS for readability. See also Megan Eckstein, “Deal to Buy Four Amphibious Warships Losing Steam, as Navy Takes Another Look at Future Force Needs,” *Defense News*, June 8, 2021; Mallory Shelbourne, “Navy Reaches ‘Handshake’ Deal on Four-Ship Amphib Buy, Pentagon Wants New Navy Force Structure Assessment,” *USNI News*, June 8, 2021.

LPD-17 Flight II Program

Regarding technical and cost risk in the LPD-17 Flight II program, a June 2022 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report—the 2022 edition of GAO’s annual report surveying DOD major acquisition programs—states the following about the LPD-17 Flight II program:

Current Status

The LPD 17 Flight II designs are complete and include roughly 200 changes from the prior flight, according to the program. As we reported last year, the Navy is adding some planned Flight II enhancements to the last Flight I ships, LPD 28 and 29, to lower risk for Flight II ships. Navy officials told us that one key enhancement for LPD 29 and Flight II ships, the Enterprise Air Surveillance Radar, is on track to deliver as planned by summer 2022.

Program officials said that work on LPD 30 and 31 is underway, with keel-laying for LPD 30 in October 2020 and construction scheduled to begin on LPD 31 in April 2022. COVID-19 led the shipbuilder to draw workers from LPD 30 to mitigate shortages on LPD 28. As a result, construction of LPD 30 is delayed and the schedule is currently being reassessed. The LPD 30 workforce—which was about half of planned levels in mid-2020—is now approaching 70 percent of planned levels. Program officials told us they intend to assess COVID-19-related cost and schedule changes for LPD 30 in spring 2022.

The program plans to begin operational testing for LPD 30 in fiscal year 2024. Program officials told us that over the past year, the program’s testing approach changed. They originally planned for some testing conducted on LPD 28 to count toward Flight II testing because this ship will have some Flight II equipment. However, the testing authority clarified that LPD 28 testing could not replace testing on Flight II. Revisions to the test and evaluation master plan are underway, and several decisions regarding testing remain, such as a requirement for a Full Ship Shock Trial.

Program Office Comments

We provided a draft of this assessment to the program office for review and comment. The program office provided technical comments, which we incorporated where appropriate. The program office stated that Flight II will provide increased capability, including improved command and control capabilities, and ensure the Navy meets evolving missions using the new technologies. It added that the shipbuilder and Navy continue to identify and manage risks for all LPD 17 class ships currently under construction.⁴³

LHA Program

Regarding technical risk in the LHA program, a January 2023 report from DOD’s Director, Operational Test and Evaluation (DOT&E)—DOT&E’s annual report for FY2022—stated the following:

TEST ADEQUACY

Between March and April 2022, the Navy and Marine Corps tested the USS Tripoli (LHA 7) in the F-35B-heavy configuration consisting of 20 F-35B Joint Strike Fighter aircraft, 3 SH-60S Seahawk helicopters, a Marine Aviation Combat Element, and a Marine Command Element. Testing evaluated the ability to embark, operate, support and maintain the fixed and rotary wing aircraft in this configuration. The Navy conducted this FOT&E [follow-on operational test and evaluation] period of the LHA 6 Flight 0 in accordance with a DOT&E-approved test plan, and tests were observed by DOT&E. Testing was adequate

⁴³ Government Accountability Office, *Weapon Systems Annual Assessment[:] Challenges to Fielding Capabilities Faster Persist*, GAO-22-105230, June 2022, p. 189.

for demonstration of capability. Additionally, the test will inform future F-35B-heavy operational concepts and tactics, techniques, and procedures.

In FY22, the Navy conducted no LFT&E [live fire test and evaluation] of LHA 6 Flight 0 or operational test of LHA 6 Flight 1. DOT&E and the Navy have yet to agree on a LFT&E strategy to evaluate the survivability of the LHA 6 Flight 1 to air delivered or underwater kinetic threats.

PERFORMANCE

Effectiveness

Under the operational conditions imposed during FOT&E, the LHA 6 Flight 0 demonstrated capability to operate in the F-35B-heavy configuration consisting of 20 F-35B Joint Strike Fighter aircraft, 3 SH-60S Seahawk helicopters, a Marine Aviation Combat Element, and a Marine Command Element. However, no preliminary assessment of mission performance attributes can be made from this FOT&E event as analysis remains in progress. DOT&E expects to deliver an LHA 6 Flight 0 FOT&E report in 2QFY23.

Suitability

Insufficient data are available to determine operational suitability from the FOT&E, however LHA 6 Flight 0 suitability was evaluated as satisfactory during IOT&E. FOT&E suitability evaluation is limited to reliability, maintainability, logistics supportability, and availability of ship's systems that directly supported F-35B operations. DOT&E observed no significant issues related to suitability, but analysis remains in progress. DOT&E expects to deliver an LHA 6 Flight 0 FOT&E report in 2QFY23.

Survivability

No data are available to change the lethality assessment of LHA 6 Flight 0 from IOT&E or assess survivability of LHA 6 Flight 1.

RECOMMENDATION

The Navy should:

1. Collaborate with DOT&E to deliver an LFT&E strategy that adequately evaluates the survivability of the LHA 6 Flight 1 with the update to the TEMP [test and evaluation master plan] in FY23.⁴⁴

The June 2022 GAO report stated the following about the LHA program:

Current Status

LHA 8 construction progress is 37 percent complete as of September 2021 and the ship is expected to be delivered in February 2025—about a year later than originally planned—per program officials. They said one of the main reasons for the delay was due to a 14- to 18-month delay in receiving the ship's main reduction gears after manufacturing defects required correction. They added that the shipbuilder continues to prioritize completing ships with earlier delivery dates, leaving LHA 8 construction understaffed. Program officials said they can do little to address the issue beyond delaying LHA 8's delivery by about a year. According to the program, changes to the ship to accommodate integration of the Enterprise Air Surveillance Radar (EASR)—a new radar system based on the preexisting Air and Missile Defense Radar assessed separately in this report—is another contributor to LHA 8's schedule delay. Officials told us they expect LHA 8's final price to exceed the original target cost by \$68 million due to the delays. Costs above the target cost but below the contract's price ceiling will be shared by the shipbuilder and the Navy.

⁴⁴ Director, Operational Test & Evaluation, January 2023, pp. 190-191.

The planned timing of LHA 9’s detailed design and construction contract was accelerated from fiscal year 2024 to late fiscal year 2021 after Congress provided fiscal year 2019 advanced procurement funding. However, program officials said the contract was not awarded in late fiscal year 2021 as planned. They do not expect to delay construction start, currently planned for fiscal year 2023.

Program Office Comments

We provided a draft of this assessment to the program office for review and comment. The program office provided technical comments, which we incorporated where appropriate. The program office stated that, as of mid-December 2021, LHA 8 is roughly 42 percent complete. The program office added that the shipbuilder and the Navy continue to identify and manage risks where appropriate and that LHA 8 is on track for delivery in 2025.⁴⁵

Legislative Activity for FY2024

Summary of Congressional Action on FY2024 Funding Request

Table 1 summarizes congressional action on the Navy’s FY2024 procurement and advance procurement (AP) funding request for the LPD-17 Flight II and LHA-9 programs.

Table 1. Summary of Congressional Action on FY2024 Procurement Funding Request

Millions of dollars, rounded to nearest tenth

	Request	Authorization			Appropriation		
		HASC	SASC	Final	HAC	SAC	Final
LPD-33 advance procurement (AP) funding	0						
LPD-33 procurement funding	0						
LHA-9 procurement funding	1,830.1						
LHA-10 advance procurement (AP) funding	0						

Source: Table prepared by CRS based on Navy’s FY2024 budget submission, committee and conference reports, and explanatory statements on FY2024 National Defense Authorization Act and FY2024 DOD Appropriations Act.

Notes: **HASC** is House Armed Services Committee; **SASC** is Senate Armed Services Committee; **HAC** is House Appropriations Committee; **SAC** is Senate Appropriations Committee.

⁴⁵ Government Accountability Office, *Weapon Systems Annual Assessment[:] Challenges to Fielding Capabilities Faster Persist*, GAO-22-105230, June 2022, p. 188.

Appendix. Procurement Dates of LPD-31 and LHA-9

This appendix presents background information regarding the procurement dates of LPD-31 and LHA-9. In reviewing the bullet points presented below, it can be noted that procurement funding is funding for a ship that is either being procured in that fiscal year or has been procured in a prior fiscal year, while advance procurement (AP) funding is funding for a ship that is to be procured in a future fiscal year.⁴⁶

An institutional issue for Congress in FY2021 concerned the treatment in the Navy's proposed FY2021 budget of the procurement dates of LPD-31 and LHA-9. The Navy's FY2021 budget submission presented LPD-31 as a ship requested for procurement in FY2021 and LHA-9 as a ship projected for procurement in FY2023. Consistent with congressional action on the Navy's FY2020 and FY2021 budgets regarding the procurement of LPD-31 and LHA-9, this CRS report treats LPD-31 and LHA-9 as ships that Congress procured (i.e., authorized and provided procurement funding for) in FY2020 and FY2021, respectively. Potential oversight issues for Congress included the following:

- By presenting LPD-31 as a ship requested for procurement in FY2021 (instead of a ship that was procured in FY2020) and LHA-9 as a ship projected for procurement in FY2023 (instead of a ship that was procured in FY2021), was DOD, in its FY2021 budget submission, disregarding or mischaracterizing the actions of Congress regarding the procurement dates of these three ships? If so
 - Was DOD doing this to inflate the apparent number of ships requested for procurement in FY2021 and the apparent number of ships included in the five-year (FY2021-FY2025) shipbuilding plan?
 - Could this establish a precedent for DOD or other parts of the executive branch in the future to disregard or mischaracterize the actions of Congress regarding the procurement or program-initiation dates for other Navy ships, other Navy programs, other DOD programs, or other federal programs? If so, what implications might that have for the preservation and use of Congress's power of the purse under Article 1 of the Constitution, and for maintaining Congress as a coequal branch of government relative to the executive branch?

The Navy's FY2024 budget submission, similar to its FY2023, FY2022, and FY2021 budget submissions, presents LHA-9 as a ship procured or projected for procurement in FY2023. Navy officials have described the listing of LHA-9 in the Navy's FY2023 budget submission as a ship being requested for procurement in FY2023 as an oversight.

LPD-31 — an LPD-17 Flight II Class Amphibious Ship

The Navy's FY2021 budget submission presented LPD-31, an LPD-17 Flight II class amphibious ship, as a ship requested for procurement in FY2021. This CRS report treats LPD-31 as a ship that Congress procured (i.e., authorized and provided procurement funding for) in FY2020, consistent with the following congressional action on the Navy's FY2020 budget regarding the procurement of LPD-31:

⁴⁶ For additional discussion, see CRS Report RL31404, *Defense Procurement: Full Funding Policy—Background, Issues, and Options for Congress*, by Ronald O'Rourke and Stephen Daggett.

- The House Armed Services Committee’s report (H.Rept. 116-120 of June 19, 2019) on H.R. 2500, the FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act, recommended authorizing the procurement of an LPD-17 Flight II class ship in FY2020, showing a quantity increase of one ship above the Navy’s request and recommending procurement (not just AP) funding for the program.⁴⁷
- The Senate Armed Services Committee’s report (S.Rept. 116-48 of June 11, 2019) on S. 1790, the FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act, recommended authorizing the procurement of an LPD-17 Flight II class ship in FY2020, showing a quantity increase of one ship above the Navy’s request and recommending procurement (rather than AP) funding for the program.⁴⁸
- The conference report (H.Rept. 116-333 of December 9, 2019) on S. 1790/P.L. 116-92 of December 20, 2019, the FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act, authorized the procurement of an LPD-17 Flight II class ship in FY2020, showing a quantity increase of one ship above the Navy’s request and recommending procurement (rather than AP) funding for the program.⁴⁹ Section 129 of S. 1790/P.L. 116-92 authorizes the Navy to enter into a contract, beginning in FY2020, for the procurement of LPD-31, and to use incremental funding to fund the contract.
- The Senate Appropriations Committee’s report (S.Rept. 116-103 of September 12, 2019) on S. 2474, the FY2020 DOD Appropriations Act, recommended funding for the procurement of an LPD-17 Flight II class ship in FY2020, showing a quantity increase of one ship above the Navy’s request and recommending procurement (rather than AP) funding for the program.⁵⁰
- The final version of the FY2020 DOD Appropriations Act (Division A of H.R. 1158/P.L. 116-93 of December 20, 2019) provided procurement (not AP) funding for an LPD-17 Flight II class ship. The paragraph in this act that appropriated funding for the Navy’s shipbuilding account, including this ship, includes a provision stating “*Provided further*, That an appropriation made under the heading ‘Shipbuilding and Conversion, Navy’ provided for the purpose of ‘Program increase—advance procurement for fiscal year 2020 LPD Flight II and/or multiyear procurement economic order quantity’ shall be considered to be for the purpose of ‘Program increase—advance procurement of LPD–31’.” This provision relates to funding appropriated in the FY2019 DOD Appropriations Act (Division A of H.R. 6157/P.L. 115-245 of September 28, 2018) for the procurement of an LPD-17 Flight II class ship in FY2020, as originally characterized in the explanatory statement accompanying that act.⁵¹

LHA-9 Amphibious Assault Ship

The Navy’s FY2024 budget submission, similar to its FY2023, FY2022, and FY2021 budget submissions, presents LHA-9 as a ship procured or projected for procurement in FY2023. This CRS report treats LHA-9 as a ship that Congress procured (i.e., authorized and provided

⁴⁷ H.Rept. 116-120, p. 379, line 012.

⁴⁸ S.Rept. 116-48, p. 433, line 12. See also pp. 23-24 for associated report language.

⁴⁹ H.Rept. 116-333, p. 1566, line 012. See also p. 1144 for associated report language.

⁵⁰ S.Rept. 116-103, p. 118, line 12. See also p. 122 for associated report language.

⁵¹ See PDF page 176 of 559, line 12, of the explanatory statement for H.R. 6157/P.L. 115-245.

procurement funding for) in FY2021, consistent with the following congressional action on the Navy's FY2020 and FY2021 budgets regarding the procurement of LHA-9:

- The Senate Armed Services Committee's report (S.Rept. 116-48 of June 11, 2019) on S. 1790, the FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act, recommended authorizing the procurement of LHA-9 in FY2020, showing a quantity increase of one ship above the Navy's request and recommending procurement (rather than AP) funding for the program.⁵²
- The conference report (H.Rept. 116-333 of December 9, 2019) on S. 1790/P.L. 116-92 of December 20, 2019, the FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act, authorized the procurement of LHA-9 in FY2020, showing a quantity increase of one ship above the Navy's request and recommending procurement (rather than AP) funding for the program.⁵³ Section 127 of S. 1790/P.L. 116-92 authorizes the Navy to enter into a contract for the procurement of LHA-9 and to use incremental funding provided during the period FY2019-FY2025 to fund the contract.
- The Senate Appropriations Committee's report (S.Rept. 116-103 of September 12, 2019) on S. 2474, the FY2020 DOD Appropriations Act, recommended funding for the procurement of an LHA amphibious assault ship in FY2020, showing a quantity increase of one ship above the Navy's request and recommending procurement (rather than AP) funding for the program.⁵⁴
- The final version of the FY2020 DOD Appropriations Act (Division A of H.R. 1158/P.L. 116-93 of December 20, 2019) provided procurement (not AP) funding for an LHA amphibious assault ship. The explanatory statement for Division A of H.R. 1158/P.L. 116-93 stated that the funding was for LHA-9.⁵⁵
- The procurement (not AP) funding provided for LHA-9 in the FY2020 DOD Appropriations Act (see previous bullet point) was subsequently reprogrammed to provide support for counter-drug activities of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) along the U.S. southern border.⁵⁶ The final version of the FY2021 DOD Appropriations Act (Division C of H.R. 133/P.L. 116-260 of December 27, 2020, the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021), however, once again provided procurement (not AP) funding for an LHA amphibious assault ship. The explanatory statement for Division C of H.R. 133/P.L. 116-260 stated that the funding is for "Program increase—LHA 9."⁵⁷ As a result of the FY2021 procurement (not AP) funding for LHA-9, the ship once again has an authorization (provided in the FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act), authority for using incremental funding in procuring it (provided by Section 127 of the FY2020 National Defense Authorization Act), and procurement (not AP) funding (provided in the FY2021 DOD Appropriations Act).

⁵² S.Rept. 116-48, p. 433, line 15.

⁵³ H.Rept. 116-333, p. 1566, line 015.

⁵⁴ S.Rept. 116-103, p. 118, line 15.

⁵⁵ Explanatory statement for Division A of H.R. 1158, PDF page 175 of 414, line 15.

⁵⁶ Reprogramming action (Form DD 1415) FY 20-01 RA, February 13, 2020, page 3 of 5.

⁵⁷ Explanatory statement for Division C of H.R. 133/P.L. 116-260, PDF page 204 of 469, line 17.

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