



NATO Foundation  
*Defense College*

## Emerging Challenges July 2016

### **Maritime security and the U.S. Navy trends**

Contrary to what is happening in Europe with the dogma of spending reviews and common (but not shared) austerity policies, the US Navy is not willing to save a single cent for maritime security and for technology developments. This approach is not an administrative process but a political choice yearly upheld in order to guarantee modernisation. It is the result of a political agenda focussed on maritime defence and based on effective decision-making.

The \$12,9 billion USS Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier, the most expensive warship ever built, is the first of three carriers ordered up in a \$42 billion programme. It is supposed: to be deployed in the 2021; to have stealth features for the reduction of its detectability from enemy radars; to embark for the first time the advanced Joint Strike Fighter F-35C Lightning II multirole combat aircraft; to increase the sortie rate of combat aircraft to 160 per day for more than 30 days with a short surge capability of 270 sorties/day and to have a very sophisticated sensor and missile suite for the self-defence against missiles.

The littoral combat ship USS Detroit (LCS 7), the fourth Freedom-class built by Lockheed Martin, will be delivered on October 2016. It will be the fastest surface combatant with a speed of 40+ knots. It belongs to a new surface combatants class specifically designed to operate along enemy coast and suppressing threats deployed along them through a number of modular weapon system and ammunition packages. Its flight deck much larger than any other on a currently deployed frigate, destroyer or cruiser. The ordinary complement is two medium helicopters and a medium helicopter reconnaissance drone.

The USS Zumwalt destroyer (DDG 1000) will be the lead ship of the Navy's next-generation multi-mission surface destroyers. While past destroyer classes were designed pre-eminently for naval warfare in its three dimensions (anti-air, anti-surface, anti-submarine), this guided missile vessel integrates expressly the anti-coastal fire support mission, trying to compensate the loss of the obsolete Iowa fast battleships. Its design incorporates stealth features and materials like no other major ship in the world and it applies a new concept for the deployment of missiles (long range attack cruise missiles Tomahawk; short-range anti-aircraft missiles; anti-submarine VL-ASROC missiles) in order to reduce vulnerability to hits against ammunition packages. It will be probably delivered before the end of this year

Furthermore, the US Navy is going to spend \$6,3 billion for a fleet up to 17 new Military Sealift Replenishment Oilers (T-AO 205) with the first build scheduled for 2018. This financial envelope includes also another LHA-8 (Landing Helicopter Assault) amphibious warfare ship. It will transport land elements of a Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) or Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) with a combination of aircraft and landing craft. It is a capital ship for the US Marine Corps and can host a mix of F-35B short take-off/vertical landing combat aircraft, M-22 transport tilt-rotors, tactical transport and attack helicopters.

If in the US political debate-burden sharing with the allies is an issue, it must be considered an element of Realpolitik and not of budget policies.