

ISSUE BRIEF

No. 4190 | APRIL 02, 2014

Tomahawk Cancellation an Error of Defense Strategy and Alliance Policy

Steven P. Bucci, PhD, and Ted R. Bromund, PhD

Earlier this month, the U.S. Navy announced that it will stop buying Tomahawk cruise missiles in fiscal year (FY) 2016 and will seek to field a replacement within a decade.

This decision is an error of both defense strategy and alliance policy. Congress should reject the Navy's plans and require that it continue to buy a sufficient number of Tomahawks annually to keep production lines open and unit costs affordable until a replacement can be effectively deployed into service and until Britain and Australia (which use or plan to use the Tomahawk), after close consultation with the U.S., are satisfied that the replacement will affordably offer them capabilities that are equivalent or superior to those of the Tomahawk.

U.S. Navy Plans to End Tomahawk Purchases.

On March 4, Navy spokeswoman Lieutenant Caroline Hutcheson publicly confirmed that the Navy had made substantial reductions in the number of Tomahawks it planned to purchase.¹

In FY 2014, the Navy bought 196 Tomahawks, but in its proposed budget for FY 2015, the Navy plans to buy only 100 missiles and none thereafter. Instead, it will shift investment to a next-generation system

and, beginning in FY 2019, will establish a recertification program for its stockpile of approximately 4,000 missiles.

In a March 27 hearing, Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus argued that “the supply of Tomahawks that we have today that have been manufactured are sufficient ... [to] carry us through any eventuality that we can foresee.” Senator John McCain (R-AZ) expressed surprise at the decision, describing it as “really rolling the dice ... when we haven’t even begun the assessment of what that new weapon would look like.”²

Implications of Navy Plans for U.S. Defense and Industrial Base. The Navy's plans raise four serious issues for the United States:

1. The argument that the existing stockpile of Tomahawks is ample because it is large enough for “any eventuality that we can foresee” ignores the fact that most U.S. military operations are not foreseen. In 1999, during the Kosovo campaign, missile stockpile levels were critically low due to heavy expenditures in the previous years. In 2003, coalition forces fired more than 725 missiles in the opening phases of the Iraq War—one-third of the entire inventory.³ These precedents make it clear that it is imprudent to end production of a vital weapons system on the grounds that the future can be foreseen with sufficient clarity to know that no further purchases will be needed.
2. While the Navy's budget proposal allocates funds to maintain the industrial base for unplanned maintenance before the FY 2019 recertification

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at <http://report.heritage.org/ib4190>

Produced by the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign and National Security Policy

The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 546-4400 | heritage.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

program, the specialized component suppliers and the skilled personnel necessary for maintenance are unlikely to survive the proposed 98 percent decline in the program's budget from FY 2014 to FY 2018, especially since the manufacturer's legal responsibility to ensure that the Tomahawk works ends when production does.

3. The Navy has argued that foreign military sales would help "sustain the Tomahawk industrial base" to FY 2019, but, to date, Britain is the only other nation that has purchased the Tomahawk.⁴ It is a rule of defense production that unit cost decreases as production increases. With only British purchases to keep the program going, the cost of the Tomahawk would rise substantially, as it will start to do in FY 2015 as U.S. purchases shrink. Moreover, the Navy has contradicted itself by asserting that the costs of winding down the Tomahawk program assume that foreign sales "are no longer viable."⁵
4. Any replacement for the Tomahawk is still years from deployment. The Navy announced on March 26 that its goal is to develop new missiles "for delivery around 2024." New weapons systems are regularly subject to delays. It is possible—even likely—that the new missile will not enter service until well after 2024. Even if the 2024 deadline is met, the new missile will not be available in sufficient quantities to address service requirements until well after that date. In either case, the U.S.'s stockpile of Tomahawks runs even greater risks of being inadequate.

The decision to terminate the Tomahawk program is particularly perplexing given the Administration's own decision in its 2012 Defense Strategic Guidance to reduce the size of U.S. forces so that they cannot "conduct large-scale, prolonged stability operations."⁶ The implication of this policy is that U.S. reliance on stand-off weapons like the Tomahawk will only increase.

Implications of Navy Plans for Alliance Policy. On March 26, speaking at an event at The Heritage Foundation, U.K. Defense Secretary Philip Hammond dismissed concern over the future of the Tomahawk program:

Very fortuitously, *The Washington Post* tweeted this morning about Tomahawk being ... zeroed out.... [S]ince I was at the Pentagon [this morning], I took the opportunity to ask, and I was told that there is no such decision, that budgets in that level of detail for 2016 have not yet been published and any such suggestion must be speculation at this stage.⁷

The Navy's published budget, the statement of Secretary Mabus, and the Navy's public comments dating as far back as March 4—three weeks before Secretary Hammond's speech—make it clear that the fate of the Tomahawk program is not speculation. It is difficult to understand why he was told otherwise.

It appears that Britain has not been consulted about the fate of the Tomahawk program. Since its entire attack submarine fleet has been fitted to fire this missile, this lack of consultation, like the U.S. cancellation of the Skybolt missile system in 1962, is

-
1. Christopher P. Cavas, "U.S. Navy Budget Takes Bite Out of Aircraft, Weapons," *DefenseNews*, March 4, 2014, <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20140304/DEFREG02/303040039/US-Navy-Budget-Takes-Bite-Out-Aircraft-Weapons> (accessed March 28, 2014).
 2. U.S. Department of Defense, Department of the Navy, *Department of Defense Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 Budget Estimates*, March 2014, p. 37, http://www.finance.hq.navy.mil/FMB/15pres/WPN_BOOK.PDF (accessed March 27, 2014), and Raymond E. Mabus Jr., Jonathan W. Greenert, and James F. Amos, "Posture of the Department of the Navy," testimony before the Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate, March 27, 2014, http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings/posture-of-the-department-of-the-navy_03/27/2014 (accessed March 27, 2014).
 3. *Global Security*, "BGM-109 Tomahawk," <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/systems/munitions/bgm-109-operation.htm> (accessed March 28, 2014).
 4. Andrea Shalal, "U.S. Navy Plans Competition for Next-Generation Missile," *Reuters*, March 26, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/27/us-navy-missiles-idUSBREA2Q07620140327> (accessed March 28, 2014).
 5. U.S. Department of Defense, Department of the Navy, *Department of Defense Fiscal Year (FY) 2015 Budget Estimates*, Exhibit P-5.
 6. U.S. Department of Defense, "Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense," January 2012, p. 6, http://www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf (accessed March 28, 2014).
 7. Right Honorable Philip Hammond MP, British Secretary of Defense, speech at The Heritage Foundation, March 26, 2014, <http://www.heritage.org/events/2014/03/philip-hammond-mp> (accessed March 28, 2014).

a serious breach by the U.S. of its responsibilities to its closest ally.

It is true that the U.S. could sell Tomahawks to Britain from its stockpile, but Britain might be unwilling to invest in a system with a fading defense industrial base behind it. Moreover, the unexpected U.S. decision to end the program means that Britain will now have to contemplate the retrofit of its attack submarine fleet, at considerable expense, to fire an entirely new missile.

The Royal Australian Navy may also be surprised by the U.S. decision, as it is currently completing three destroyers equipped with Tomahawk-capable launch systems. The Australian government's incorporation of this capability has also been jeopardized by the Navy's actions.⁸

Continue Tomahawk Production. All weapons eventually go out of service, but it is only sensible not to end production of one weapon until its replacement is ready. This is particularly true when the weapon in question is a mainstay of both U.S. forces and the forces of the U.S.'s closest allies. British and

Australian dependence on continued U.S. production imposes a serious responsibility on the U.S. that it should not shirk.

There are good reasons to be wary of congressional micromanagement of defense acquisition,⁹ but Congress has a vital role to play in correcting policy errors made by the executive branch. Because of its impact on U.S. security and on the alliance with the U.K., the decision to terminate the Tomahawk program is such an error, one that should be corrected by a congressional decision to continue Tomahawk production until a replacement can be effectively deployed into U.S. and allied service.

—*Steven P. Bucci, PhD, is Director of the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign and National Security Policy and Ted R. Bromund, PhD, is Senior Research Fellow in Anglo-American Relations in the Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom, divisions of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, at The Heritage Foundation. The authors thank Emil Maine, Research Assistant in the Davis Institute, for his assistance.*

8. Australian Government, Department of Defence, *Defending Australia in the Asian Pacific Century: Force 2030*, Defence White Paper, 2009, p. 81, http://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper2009/docs/defence_white_paper_2009.pdf (accessed March 31, 2014).

9. Baker Spring, "Congressional Restraint Is Key to Successful Defense Acquisition Reform," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 1885, October 19, 2005, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2005/10/congressional-restraint-is-key-to-successful-defense-acquisition-reform>.