

## US Navy hopes stealth ship answers a rising China

Associated Press - Mon, 4th Jun 2012 07:59 AM

**AP**



SINGAPORE (AP) — A super-stealthy warship that could underpin the U.S. navy's China strategy will be able to sneak up on coastlines virtually undetected and pound targets with electromagnetic "railguns" right out of a sci-fi movie.

But at more than USD 3 billion a pop, critics say the new DDG-1000 destroyer sucks away funds that could be better used to bolster a thinly stretched conventional fleet. One outspoken admiral in China has scoffed that all it would take to sink the high-tech American ship is an armada of explosive-laden fishing boats.

With the first of the new ships set to be delivered in 2014, the stealth destroyer is being heavily promoted by the Pentagon as the most advanced destroyer in history — a silver bullet of stealth. It has been called a perfect fit for what Washington now considers the most strategically important region in the world — Asia and the Pacific.

[Related: [Spy agency wants cyber-ops studies at select colleges](#)]

Though it could come in handy elsewhere, like in the Gulf region, its ability to carry out missions both on the high seas and in shallows closer to shore is especially important in Asia because of the region's many island nations and China's long Pacific coast.

"With its stealth, incredibly capable sonar system, strike capability and lower manning requirements — this is our future," Adm. Jonathan Greenert, chief of naval operations, said in April after visiting the shipyard in Maine where they are being built.

On a visit to a major regional security conference in Singapore that ended Sunday, U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said the Navy will be deploying 60 percent of its fleet worldwide to the Pacific by 2020, and though he didn't cite the stealth destroyers he said new high-tech ships will be a big part of its shift.

The DDG-1000 and other stealth destroyers of the Zumwalt class feature a wave-piercing hull that leaves almost no wake, electric drive propulsion and advanced sonar and missiles. They are longer and heavier than existing destroyers — but will have half the crew because of automated systems and appear to be little more than a small fishing boat on enemy radar.

[Related: [U.S. launched cyberattack from a thumb drive](#)]

Down the road, the ship is to be equipped with an electromagnetic railgun, which uses a magnetic field and electric current to fire a projectile at several times the speed of sound.

But cost overruns and technical delays have left many defense experts wondering if the whole endeavor was too focused on futuristic technologies for its own good.

They point to the problem-ridden F-22 stealth jet fighter, which was hailed as the most advanced fighter ever

built but was cut short because of prohibitive costs. Its successor, the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter, has swelled up into the most expensive procurement program in Defense Department history.

"Whether the Navy can afford to buy many DDG-1000s must be balanced against the need for over 300 surface ships to fulfill the various missions that confront it," said Dean Cheng, a China expert with the Heritage Foundation, a conservative research institute in Washington. "Buying hyperexpensive ships hurts that ability, but buying ships that can't do the job, or worse can't survive in the face of the enemy, is even more irresponsible."

The Navy says it's money well spent. The rise of China has been cited as the best reason for keeping the revolutionary ship afloat, although the specifics of where it will be deployed have yet to be announced. Navy officials also say the technologies developed for the ship will inevitably be used in other vessels in the decades ahead.

But the destroyers' USD 3.1 billion price tag, which is about twice the cost of the current destroyers and balloons to USD 7 billion each when research and development is added in, nearly sank it in Congress. Though the Navy originally wanted 32 of them, that was cut to 24, then seven.

Now, just three are in the works.

"Costs spiraled — surprise, surprise — and the program basically fell in on itself," said Richard Bitzinger, a security expert at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University. "The DDG-1000 was a nice idea for a new modernistic surface combatant, but it contained too many unproven, disruptive technologies."

The U.S. Defense Department is concerned that China is modernizing its navy with a near-term goal of stopping or delaying U.S. intervention in conflicts over disputed territory in the South China Sea or involving Taiwan, which China considers a renegade province.

China is now working on building up a credible aircraft carrier capability and developing missiles and submarines that could deny American ships access to crucial sea lanes.

The U.S. has a big advantage on the high seas, but improvements in China's navy could make it harder for U.S. ships to fight in shallower waters, called littorals. The stealth destroyers are designed to do both. In the meantime, the Navy will begin deploying smaller Littoral Combat Ships to Singapore later this year.

Officially, China has been quiet on the possible addition of the destroyers to Asian waters.

But Rear Adm. Zhang Zhaozhong, an outspoken commentator affiliated with China's National Defense University, scoffed at the hype surrounding the ship, saying that despite its high-tech design it could be overwhelmed by a swarm of fishing boats laden with explosives. If enough boats were mobilized some could get through to blow a hole in its hull, he said.

"It would be a goner," he said recently on state broadcaster CCTV's military channel.

---

AP writer Christopher Bodeen contributed to this report from Beijing.

---

u.s.

---

world

---

entertainment

---

sports

---

science

---

health

---

[Set My Location](#)

[Sign in](#) | [Settings](#)

[Privacy](#) | [Legal](#) | [Help](#)

© 2012 Yahoo! Inc. All rights reserved