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Top House Republican tells Navy to scrap its 'fantasy' shipbuilding plan By Carlo Muñoz - 05/21/13 07:31 PM ET



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A top House Republican is demanding that the Navy face up to fiscal realities by overhauling its shipbuilding plan.

Rep. Randy Forbes (R-Va.), the chairman of the House Armed Services seapower subcommittee, said the Navy is living in a "fantasy land" by putting forward a 30-year shipbuilding plan when the service can't guarantee funding beyond five years.

That puts Forbes at odds with

senior Navy officials who are trying to map out what their fleet will look like over the next three decades.

His rewrite of the shipbuilding plan was included in the subcommittee's markup of the Navy's fiscal 2014 budget plan that was issued Tuesday.

The proposal will force the Navy to make its 30-year shipbuilding plan "a little more realistic ... instead of the fictional document" it was when it was submitted in the 2014 budget request, Forbes told The Hill in an interview on Tuesday.

Both sides need to figure out "realistically, what are we doing with the Navy" for future conflicts, he said.

The Virginia Republican, however, could face strong opposition from the sea service over concerns the rewrite might result in the Navy getting fewer ships.

The Navy's shipbuilding strategy would have the fleet top out at 300 warships over the life of the plan. Anything less than that would prevent the Navy from carrying out critical defense and national security missions across the globe, service officials say.

Asked whether his legislation would force the Navy into a worst-case scenario, Forbes replied: "I would call it a realistic scenario."

Navy officials declined to comment on the Forbes language, saying the proposal has yet to make it into the final version of the fiscal 2014 defense spending bill.

The call for a change in strategy appears to be a shift for Forbes, who had been calling for significant increases in Navy shipbuilding that would have bumped spending to levels last seen in the mid-1980s.

But he said his legislation is not a reversal because the "realistic scenario" could be dire enough to pry loose more shipbuilding dollars from Congress in future fiscal years.

Boosting Navy spending on ships "will not happen in two weeks or two months ... [because] it has a number of components" that will take several budget cycles to make work, according to Forbes.

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But the differences between how much the Navy now expects to spend to make the plan a reality, and what it has asked Congress to provide for the plan, essentially makes the current Navy ship plan a "fantasy land," Forbes said.

Navy leaders plan to spend roughly \$16 billion per year over the next five years to build up to the 300-ship force, according to service estimates.

That spending number falls in line with Navy spending levels for shipbuilding from previous fiscal years.

But recent analysis by the Navy and Congressional Budget Office claims the sea service will actually need between \$19 billion and \$22 billion annually to hit a 300-ship fleet over the next three decades.

The Navy cannot "place a lot of fidelity in the long term" on the success of the shipbuilding plan, service acquisition chief Sean Stackley told the House Appropriations Defense subcommittee in April.

Forbes said forcing the Navy to bring its ship plan in line with its \$16 billion per year spending estimates will provide a more accurate picture of where the force is and where it needs to go.

"We cannot run the U.S. Navy on fantasy [numbers]."

The Navy will field a total of 66 submarines, 11 aircraft carriers and 32 amphibious landing ships as part of the shipbuilding plan.

Those vessels would be supported by 145 large and small multimission warships, including the littoral combat ship.

The submarine force will include a mix of ballistic and cruise missile subs, including the new nuclear-powered Virginia-class boat and the Ohio-class replacement submarine, dubbed the SSBN-X.

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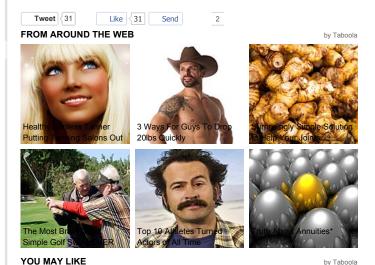
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