Virtual Event | The Future of the U.S. Navy: A Conversation with Representative Elaine Luria

TRANSCRIPT

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• Representative Elaine Luria, U.S. Representative, Virginia’s 2nd District, and Vice Chair, House Armed Services Committee
• Bryan Clark, Senior Fellow & Director, Center for Defense Concepts and Technology, Hudson Institute

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A video of the event is available: https://www.hudson.org/events/1923-virtual-event-the-future-of-the-u-s-navy-a-conversation-with-representative-elaine-luria32021

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Hudson seeks to guide public policy makers and global leaders in government and business through a vigorous program of publications, conferences, policy briefings, and recommendations.
Bryan Clark:

Welcome to the Hudson Institute. I'm Bryan Clark, a senior fellow at the Institute and Director of the Hudson Center of Defense Concepts and Technology. We're joined today by Congresswoman Elaine Luria from Virginia's second congressional district. Congresswoman Luria has been in Congress since 2018 following a 20 year career in the US Navy where she was a surface warfare officer, nuclear trained, who spent her time in the Navy on six different ships deploying to the Middle East and Western Pacific and culminating her career in the Navy by commanding a unit of more than 400 sailors that were combat ready and prepared for deployment.

Representative Luria is one of the first women to have completed the nuclear power program and one of the first women to have conducted all of her time in the Navy on combatant ships. She serves on the House Armed Services committee where she's the vice chair, he's also on the House committee on Veterans Affairs and the House committee on Homeland Security. Of all the members of the House Democratic Caucus, she has served the longest on active duty, having served 20 years and she graduated from the US Naval Academy and has a masters degree from Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia. Welcome, Congresswoman Luria.

Congresswoman Luria:

Well, thank you. Thanks for having me today, Bryan.

Bryan Clark:

So it's a very tumultuous time for the Navy, the topic today is the future of the Navy. The Navy has gone through a relatively significant number of leadership changes over the last year. Near the end of 2019, we changed out the Chief of Naval Operations and the intended Chief of Naval Operations ended up having to pull out. We got a surprise pick with Admiral Mike Gilday and then over the course of 2020, we lost several secretaries, an under secretary and now we're into 2021, a new administration, and still don't have a named Secretary of the Navy.

These leadership changes are coming at the same time as we've had a significant number of new for structure analyses that have come out of the Navy. Several different studies have led to different ship numbers, different ship mixes so there's just a lot going on in the Navy right now and not a lot of certainty. So as we go into the new administration getting ready to submit it's budget for 2022, what are your concerns with the Navy's plans or lack of plans?

Congresswoman Luria:

Well Bryan, I agree that over the course of the last year plus leadership in the Navy has turned over many times and there's been a lot of uncertainty. And I'll speak from my perspective in Congress in trying to understand what we need to do to support the Navy and provide those resources to the fleet. Is that we were really lacking in a 30 year shipbuilding plan and a for structure assessment and understanding the direction the Navy needed to go, but knowing that there is the looming threat of
China. And China's increased activity, their increased aggressiveness within the region and in support of the unrecognized maritime claims and that we need more presence in the Pacific.

And at the same time, I was a little curious when the budget submission came last year that although we know we need to grow the Navy, they actually asked for less ships and it took Congress to put those back. Including the second Virginia class submarine and there's just a lot of critical priorities that we have in understanding how we can best provide those resources to the Navy to counter the Chinese threat and other requirements for presence that we have around the world. At the end of the last administration, we got the Battle Force 2045 plan and I have a lot of questions about that plan. It jumped the number of ships currently in law, 355 is the goal that we’re going towards, but increased that number much higher and a mix including unmanned surface vessels.

That can be an aside, but really it's still looking forward to a briefing from the Navy on that concept and how they'll fully realize that and use them in operations. But what I feel what is lacking is really an understanding of with the Battle Force 2045, how did they get the numbers that are in the plan? I recently sent a letter to the Acting Secretary of the Navy and the CNO asking for additional information like what are the inputs to this plan? Understanding things like our most limiting operational plans in the Pacific, what are the assumptions that we make about the capacity of the industrial base, about the deployment cycles of our ships? If you think of there in Navy speak, we used to say it took four to make one.

So it took four ships to have one ship on station permanently at some point in some of these geographic locations around the world. And we've shifted with Optimized Fleet Response Plan the OFRP to really be in a model where it takes five to make one. Was that an assumption used in saying the number of ships that we have, or that we need to build in the future? And there are obviously things that we have to consider, it's not just numbers, but its capability and capacity and the number of VLS cells, the number of sorties that we can generate. And without any of that information, what were all the puzzle pieces that were put together and all the assumptions that were made?

And Congress we're only being given a number of ships, we should build this many per year and obviously it includes some questionable things, it reduces the number of large surface combatants, but how do we make up for that loss of number of VLS cells for example? I'm assuming based off of other things that have been said that that is part of what the unmanned surface vessels are intended for, but just to summarize we have a lot of questions. And I've spoken to my colleagues, Congressman Rob Whitman, also from Virginia, and he's the vice ranking member on the committee and the vice chair and we spent a lot of time and effort thinking about shipbuilding.

It's a huge impact of the Hampton Roads area because we're building all the carriers, half the submarines and I think these questions need to be answered really and a lot more visibility needs to be put on the role that the Navy plays in any conflict in the Pacific and what investments we're making today. And the choices we make about those ships are really going to have an impact for a generation and I think we need to do this right. There's quite a few recent shipbuilding programs that haven't gone as planned or on budget, we can look at the LCS. Although it is deployable, and it is being used for missions around the world, and actually Admiral Davidson Commander USPACOM, or INDOPACOM
mentioned yesterday at hearing that that platform has been useful for some of the theater engagement missions that are required within that AOR, it still is not fully capable for some of the missions.

It was supposed to have modules to do a whole variety of things, ASW and mine warfare and that's the real concern because our minesweepers are very old and that was supposed to replace those aging platforms, but it's still not fully operational. DDG-1004 and Ford as we go across some of our recent shipbuilding programs, they haven't really gone as planned on schedule, or budget wise and so when we look to the future, a new class of frigates and how we're going to get to where we need to get to with the future of the Navy, those are all things that are on my mind. I probably went well beyond the scope of your initial question [crosstalk 00:07:09]-

Bryan Clark:

No, that's exactly what I was getting at. Is that there's a lot going on, there's a lot of questions about where the Navy is going, its plans, the rationale for its plans, whether they are fiscally sustainable in a lot of ways. So I think that you're right, that the waterfront if you will is pretty broad when it comes to questions about the Navy. You raised a couple of things that I wanted to dig into a little bit. So the Navy and the Marine Corps and the Coast Guard just released their tri-service maritime strategy last year, which had a lot of good parts to it. I thought it was good that it emphasized competition as well as conflict, embraced the fact that this is not just about preparing for World War III, it's about actually winning the peacetime competition and preventing World War III from happening and it also highlighted China as the main competitor.

But then the Battle Force 2045 that came out seem to not be well aligned with it. It seemed like the Battle Force 2045 had a ship mix that maybe was weighted very much towards the high end, that may not be affordable. They may be setting themselves up for a situation where things get cut and then what gets cut is not strategic anymore, it's just being done as a budget exercise. So what did you think of the tri-service strategy and did you see anything in the Battle Force 2045 that supported it or what are your questions about the Navy’s implementation of its new strategy?

Congresswoman Luria:

I think that some of my questions go back to the same question that I had about the Battle Force 2045. It is useful to have a plan, but without understanding at least from the role that we sit in, in Congress what the assumptions are that went into developing a plan because I think there's a lot of things that we can invest in resource wise that can change some of those assumptions. Are there limitations in our public shipyards, in our industrial base? Are there limitations with personnel? Is it particularly munitions, is it training? There's all kinds of things that can be influenced, other than just here's the menu of the things we need to buy. We also have to operate them, we have to maintain them and when I think about the future structure of the fleet, there's three components that go into it.

We need to build what we can build in this... I don't want to say race, I don't want it to sound like an arms race, but in our pursuit of a larger fleet and more presence in the Pacific, you need to build more ships. We also need to maintain the ships that we have and operate them as efficiently as possible, so I can touch on some thoughts that I have there, and we need to quit getting rid of the ships we have still
have operational life left in them. The plan, the 2045 aggressively decommissions the cruisers, some of which we've spent a lot of money upgrading in recent years. And there's always a question of well it would just cost too much to upgrade them in a way that we could get 10 or 15 more years out of the ship. Well, we got to really think about what's our goal?

Do we need a lot of ships now? We can only build so many so fast, so is it really smart to get rid of the ones that we have? So I would really like to see a haul buy haul analysis of the issues with continuing the life, or extending the life of each cruiser. What we have already upgraded them to do and that really we need to make sure that we can fully analyze whether those investments will be worthwhile in order to continue to have that capability, continue to have that that presence. The cruiser is going to eventually be replaced by Flight III DDG, but that's going to take a while to bring those online and we need that capacity and capability of the Air Defense Commander, the VLS cells in the presence.

And we just need to see on paper is there life left in the cruisers and where would a smart investment would be made? And I was XO on a cruiser, I know what it's like to live through the DICOM don't DICOM cycle, I mean we had a crack in our hangar bay on Anzio that was like 14 feet long and two feet wide. The thing that just happened I think it was on late take off with the fuel tank leaking, we had a very similar thing happen and it was due to a ship where there had not been a lifecycle maintenance plan that had been implemented over the course of the life of that ship class. And so I'm also looking at, are we doing better with the DDGs and future classes of ships to make sure we have smart lifecycle maintenance plans coming from the carrier world as well?

Those things were all planned out over the course of the life of the ship and in our surface fleet at some point, we've deviated from that. Can we make investments to keep some of the ships we have longer and extend their lifecycle? There's this rumor brewing in the background and I say in the background, it is just purely a coincidence, but I do have this picture of a carrier behind me and it actually is the Harry S. Truman, but that is coming into the discussion again. Would it save money to decommission an aircraft carrier halfway through its lifecycle? People can make an argument that I don't buy that we'll save some money immediately because we won't spend money to refuel it, but there's a lot of sunk costs in this carrier with 25 years left, and it's life and decommissioning it is not going to be a long term money saving proposition.

And by law, we're supposed to have 11 aircraft carriers, there's no intention of changing that, and the Nimitz would be the first carrier to be decommissioned at the same time. Ford is slow to come online, but after Ford we have the JFK, and then the 8182, that have already been purchased in a dual carrier buy, but in order to keep that going I think that we need to look at... I probably could go for a long time on this, but we also need to look at our carrier deployment plans and how we're utilizing the carriers. But the bottom line is getting rid of ships when you're trying to build the Navy is not a smart decision and I would like justification as to why we're planning [crosstalk 00:12:58]-

**Bryan Clark:**

I'm glad you brought that up because one of the things we looked at when we worked on the Future Naval Force Structure Study last year, was this idea that keeping existing ships longer was a way to fill the gap. Because if you're realistic about how long it takes to bring a new class on, the new frigate, the
unmanned surface vessels, even if they're manned or unmanned you're looking at a decade before you really got those ships out and about in any sort of realistic numbers. Just because of the tech development time, the building time, the design, and then the testing. So if it's a decade before you get those frigates out, and those unmanned surface vessels out in numbers, what do you do between now and then to try to keep your ship capacity up?

And if you look at it in terms of ship years of service rather than just ships in service, then keeping cruisers around and keeping destroyers around for long enough to make that transition is really important. And so you think it'd be worth it for the Navy to put that money against maybe some SLEP that make sense. So not SLEPing for the sake of SLEPing, but SLEPing ships that are in good shape and that gives you that maybe 10 to 15 year window to bring on that next class of ships.

Congresswoman Luria:

Definitely, I don't see any other way that we can actually grow the fleet. If we're decommissioning ships at a faster rate than we're building them, the fleet size is going to shrink, we're going to reduce our capacity and that is really the opposite of what we're trying to do by needing to increase presence in a credible threat in the Pacific. We need to provide a credible threat and there's a lot of pieces going into this, Admiral Davidson commander USINDOPACOM just briefed us yesterday on the Pacific Defense Initiative and there are a lot of pieces, it's not just ships.

A missile defense capability for Guam such as an Aegis short type system and other infrastructure investments within the Western Pacific that will help us broaden our operations and ability to operate and maintain our ships in that region is very important. And so it's not only ships, but at the same time we can't just decommission ships faster than we can build them and expect the Navy to grow. The math doesn't work. We're both Navy nukes, we can figure that out.

Bryan Clark:

Right. And the question about the Truman is a good one too. I don't know, have you received any briefs or any discussion about that or is that just a rumor? Because one of the things we found in our own analysis during that last year's study was that the cost savings were so uncertain that it didn't make sense to try to retire a carrier early. Because you don't know if you're really going to save anything once think about decommissioning that carrier and the fact that you don't really get those savings until four or five years down the line anyway. So the benefit was really uncertain, whereas the operational impact was very certain. I don't know, but have had any discussions about that with the Navy since they, they might be resurrected, or since OSD might be resurrected from this idea?

Congresswoman Luria:

I would say that at this point it is only speculation and this is really not the first time that this has come up either with the Harry S. Truman or previous refueling. So it seems like when there is a discussion of finding efficiencies, this is one of those things that gets revisited over and over again and I'll tell you that I will fight for the same outcome as last year or last Congress. Is that we've invested a lot in our carriers and it's not time to decommission them halfway through their life.
They play a very vital role, the carrier fleet is very stressed, we’ve actually just seen two additional carrier strike groups deploy back to back to essentially meet requirements for presence in the Middle East because of Iran’s nefarious actions throughout the region. And to provide a deterrent there, we need more presence in the Western Pacific and in order to meet those requirements around the world reducing our carrier fleet is not something that I think we should consider at this point.

Bryan Clark:

So that brings us to readiness and I wanted to talk a little bit about readiness. The fleet obviously is having some readiness challenges now, we’ve got two carriers they’re getting ready to do a second deployment during their 36 month operational cycle. The OFRP in theory is supposed to allow for that because we would fund the readiness of those carriers during their entire cycle. The Navy has not routinely done that, so that’s one of the reasons why bringing carriers out for a second time is unusual. Do you think that the idea of double pumping carriers is something that we can continue to sustain? And if so, do we think we need to put more money into our readiness accounts to allow that to be a more routine operation until the carrier fleet grows to its required level? Or is there an infrastructure investment that we need to enable that to be sustained more readily because this might be dependent upon shipyard space and shipyard capacity?

Congresswoman Luria:

So all of your questions there’s multiple questions within your question. What I would say is that when the OFRP, Optimized Fleet Response Plan, came about if you got the briefing from Fleet Forces Command on the side it said surge and then in parentheses, if funded. And so what did that mean, if funded? That would be an internal Navy choice about if it was funded, but you say it’s not the norm, it really has become the norm. Truman did double deploy, now we’ve seen I think it’s Ike and TR have both been double deployed, but I think that’s missing the point of what surge was supposed to be. Surge is an additional capability to respond in a time of crisis or for an unplanned operation.

What we are doing now is we are double deploying, I won’t even call it surging, double deploying these ships to fill a gap for other ships that should have been doing routine deployments at that time, but are delayed in maintenance. And that goes your question of the industrial base public shipyard, because that’s where the carriers are maintained capacity and I’ll give an example of just one carrier, CVN-77 The Bush they’re in Norfolk Naval Shipyard. For when the Nimitz class was designed, the first docking availability in the ship’s lifecycle was supposed to be about 10 and a half months, they’re there for if I’m correct it’s 27 months for this availability.

And that lengthening of that availability came about because of capacity of the shipyard and there were decisions made that there were other priorities that needed to be bumped up. I know you had told me that you were the commanding officer of the MTS-635, one of the prototypes, but refueling the MTS’ to make sure there was a pipeline to continue to make sure we had our nuclear operators trained that got pushed up. There was a refueling of another, I think it was another Los Angeles class submarine I can’t read the haul before that and so all of those things led to with limited capacity at the shipyard, they needed to draw out the availability on the CVN-77 and it is still finishing that availability which is more than two and a half times planned when the ship was designed.
And so those things keep repeating because of limited capacity. And I've tried to think of when did we get to this point where we really couldn't keep up with carrier maintenance? And if you look at the point where we got to all nuclear carriers, I think there was when we got rid of Kitty Hawk, and Kennedy and Independence those were the three that were still in service when I was an ensign and I was commissioned. Once we got rid of those and all of our carriers became nuclear carriers, we had less capability, less yards that could do that in depth maintenance on them and so we need to look at that capacity. We're operating an all nuclear fleet and we need to have the ability to maintain those carriers. And that takes me to this shipyard optimization plan, last IOP plan which is drawn out over 20 years.

And I think that that is way too long of a period for that and I think we should make that investment for those upgrades to our shipyards to be made more quickly. And then when you look at Norfolk Naval Shipyard, which I'm most familiar with because it's the nuclear shipyard on the East Coast and it's where I've been during my time in the Navy. There's still upgrades that need to be made just to accommodate routine maintenance of the Ford, and so we really need to prioritize that. And the impacts of sea level rise, recurrent flooding in Hampton Roads, some of the dry docks we're using at Norfolk Naval Shipyard dates just post World War I and so there has been significant sea level rise.

There's temporary dams around the dry docks, basically to accommodate for any flooding events and then they lose workdays every time there's a hurricane or major weather event coming through because they have to disconnect all the services, float the ship. It's really not the condition or modern shipyard that we should have access to, to maintain these carriers.

Bryan Clark:

So the Biden administration's talking about doing a big infrastructure bill later this year, do you see public shipyards as being something that should be in the mix when it comes to infrastructure investment when we start looking at throwing a couple trillion dollars around?

Congresswoman Luria:

I would love to put that in there, it is definitely part of our infrastructure. Making sure that we can maintain our ships to defend our nation is certainly infrastructure to me, so as that comes about I would love to be able to be a proponent of including those types of projects in an infrastructure plan.

Bryan Clark:

Another big part of the industrial base that supports the Navy's readiness is the private ship repair facilities, and sometimes those get lost in the shuffle because they don't deal with the big ships or the submarines and they're distributed throughout the Navy. But there's some in your district I think so I'm wondering have they expressed concerns to you about the Navy's ability to schedule maintenance in a way that allows the shipyard to actually plan work and get it done or make capital investments that would support being able to bring in more ships.

Because the Navy's even noted, we have a shortage of dry docks on the East Coast within these private ship repair facilities. Do you get those concerns from the shipyards? The Navy really hasn't done a whole
lot to support that other than there's a couple of grant programs out there and they're trying to improve the contracting, but I don't know what their long term plan is to try to get that public infrastructure up to speed. Do you have a sense of where they should go there?

**Congresswoman Luria:**

Well I think there definitely is closer coordination between the Navy, I just went over to NAVSEA at the war room and sat down for a couple hours and had a long conversation about surface ship maintenance and some of the improvements and improved processes they're making and partnerships with our maintenance providers. And I was specifically focused a lot on things in the Hampton Roads area because we hear a lot from folks in our local area and some of the challenges that they face. So I think that the Navy is committing to finding efficiencies in the contracting process, and partnering with shipyards in order to ensure that the investments they make meet the needs of the Navy's future maintenance requirements.

So I think that that coordination is definitely improving and on track and I'm aware of at least one program in Hampton Roads that looks to hopefully increase the ability to use some dry docks locally. There would be some dredging required for this additional facility to be able to accommodate some of the Navy ships, but those things are being worked together between the Navy and the other entities involved to try to increase that capacity. But level loading is one of the biggest concern I hear from across the waterfront as far as private shipyard partners within the region. And think about Hampton Roads, the statistic is basically one quarter of all the shipbuilding and repair that happens in the country happens in Hampton Roads.

There will always be work and what can we do to better level load that and predict it? And the Navy has spent a lot of time trying to... And is getting really in the weeds for non Navy ship repair people, but the amount of time that basically the work package is locked down before the contract is awarded, they used to say your contract is awarded 30 days before the ship showing up. And that's just not enough time for the private contractors to get their workforce in place, to prepare all of the documents and plans and work packages and have all the materials ready to actually do the work when the ship shows up. So you ended up with the delay from the start.

So they've tried to improve that, have the work package at least 90% complete. Some emergent things could happen at the end of the deployment, but to have it 90% complete before the ship is going to show up at the yard and to do other things like I mentioned earlier about lifecycle maintenance. If you know that, if you're going to go in a tank or a void on a cruiser, you don't write the work package to just say open and inspect this, you're going to open it and inspect it and you're going to find metal that needs to be replaced the things that need to be preserved. So just doing a predictive based off of previous history for ships in the class and similar tanks.

How many square feet of metal are going to need to be preserved or replace? And putting that in a package up front, so you can truly accommodate them and how long all of this work is going to take. And then for any of us who've been in a shipyard, understanding just the initial conditions, you have to set to even do this work, to get inside the tanks. If the ship is not docked and you're trying to move fuel and other fluids around on the ship and ammunition, take all of that off in order to do any of this work it
was hard to reach tanks and voids, just setting the conditions to do the work takes time, but that has to be accounted for in the timeline. So we used say we had like the CNO avails 12 weeks, it was just 12 week, it was always just 12 weeks.

But being more realistic okay this is the extent of the work, this is the age of the ship, this is the last time we went in this tank, or the last time it was docked and saying it doesn't need to just be 12 weeks, there's 17 weeks of work here so let's be realistic about it and plan that. And then when you plan your operational plans that follow on to that maintenance, like the training the ship would do and when they would deploy again, just being realistic about that based off of the history of the ship and that type of maintenance. So they're really putting a lot of effort into that and I'm hoping that we can see a payoff for that as we move forward so that we can be realistic about the timelines for the ships maintenance and the repairs and when they get into play again.

**Bryan Clark:**

And which raises the question, one of the big issues in the past has been operational schedules change, you've got an availability scheduled either you don't go in or you go in late or you go in and you have to come out early, or somebody's late and you're having to wait in line behind them, all those things happen. So this idea would be to try to better align our operational and our maintenance schedules, I think would seem to be the things we should-

**Congresswoman Luria:**

The OFRP was supposed to just do that, everyone in the strike group went in at the same time, everyone came out at the same time. That's a real challenge for the waterfront as far as the shipyards go to accommodate that many ships on the exact same timeline. So I think that had some flaws in the assumptions as well.

**Bryan Clark:**

So building up the infrastructure really is a key element that's not really brought out very much. When the Navy presents these plans, you go and dig in and figure out well, what are the assumptions behind it in terms of rotation rate and ship availability. And then behind that are some assumptions about infrastructure capacity because they assume people will be able to get in and out of the shipyard on time.

**Congresswoman Luria:**

And workforce, there is a finite skilled workforce. Especially as some of that workforce ages and retires, what do we need to do to make sure that we have skilled workforce to come behind and maintain this capability of maintaining our ships? So I think that's really important to look at how we develop. The shipyard have apprentice programs and those types of things, but in Hampton Roads if you are a welder, an electrician, a pipe fitter, there is always an opportunity in the industrial base to find work and the employers are always looking for more people.
So I spend a lot of time talking to folks in Virginia Ship Repair Association [inaudible 00:29:11] with local partners to figure out how we can grow the workforce. And the fact that we can match people, especially now during the time of COVID when there is higher than we had before unemployment, how do we get some of those people who have been impacted by that, some of the skills to actually go into this work that pays really well and has an upward trajectory as people gain skills and experience in the ship [crosstalk 00:29:33].

Bryan Clark:

And there's also the ship building side where they've got demands for similar skill sets in a lot of ways, but of course the training and the preparation is more extensive maybe for the ship construction side because they've got to deal with a lot more if you're building nuclear ships for example, versus repairing conventional ships. So in the shipbuilding side, you expressed the concern about the fact that the Navy had submitted a budget with only one submarine in it Last year. So going forward, do you think one of the major considerations that should go into the shipbuilding plan is having the stable industrial base demand signal? So you don't have this need for workers to leave the shipbuilding side, go to work in the ship repair side, and then come back try to float because that seems like when I talk to people down there, that's a lot of what happens is people are floating between shipbuilding and ship repair. So you think the ship shipbuilding plan should really have those baked into it from the start?

Congresswoman Luria:

Right. I think a constant demand signal is the most efficient way both for cost and timeliness of building the ships. And so if we can keep that demand signals constant, building two Virginia class submarines a year and we're not just talking about... In the Virginia class submarines that's between Newport News and Electric Boat, but you've got the DDG program between Pascagoula and Bath and the other programs that we have and it's not just the work in the yards, but it's the supplier industrial base. They are unique components, some of them are long lead time, some of them are very large, very expensive and take a long time to build that go into these ships.

And so we need to make sure that we keep a constant demand signal for those items because to some degree, sometimes the Navy is the sole customer for these items. And if the Navy doesn't need to buy them and have a projected timeline that they're going to buy them on a routine basis for the new ships they're building, that business which today could be the only business left that makes shafts or propellers, or a particular type of pump or component that's very unique. If they go out of business where are we going to find those things that we need that are critical to our ships to build them, and then later on to repair them. So I think that that is an important aspect as well that we keep a steady demand so that when we need to buy those things, there's somebody out there that has the skills and the equipment to make them for us.

And that's very important as well within the nuclear industrial base, there is a very limited supply of who enriches the fuel and builds the fuel cells for our submarines. And if that is either accelerated too quickly, or stopped too quickly, then that whole workforce is a very, very unique skill set and we need to make sure that we just have a steady demand for that, for all of these components that go into our shipbuilding and ship repair.
Bryan Clark:

Absolutely. I think Eddie Chang has been in the position of having too on an older and so I have been and I think you have been too, is having to get a part that doesn't exist anymore and you got to get it off a decommissioned ship or-

Congresswoman Luria:

Inactive ships or... I have a crazy story that when I was on enterprise a component that had actually been sold through DRMO in the 1980s and they tracked it down and bought it back from a guy who had in his barn in Iowa. That's very rare and that's not how we should be operating and I don't want to imply to anyone listening who hasn't done this for a living, that that's what we do most of the time. But when a ship is 50 years old and the products are obsolete and the company that they made them is long gone out of business, sometimes you'll go to any extreme to get the component that you need that is suitable for use on the ships.

Bryan Clark:

Exactly. Yes. So I want to talk a little bit about the future of the Navy, but first I did want to ask about you have a lot of sailors in Hampton Roads obviously. And one of the things that we've seen with COVID, we've extended deployments because folks have to go into quarantine before they leave and then after they come back so they can be ready to redeploy if necessary. And then also when they're on deployment, they can't pull into port, they can't do a lot of the normal things that we would do to try to give people a chance to get off the ship. So do you get the impression that the fleet is handling this operational tempo and COVID, the combination of those things well or are we starting to see some fraying at this point?

Congresswoman Luria:

Well, I will say they've gotten through it and to imagine that on a smaller surface combatant, a DDG or a cruiser that you could go an entire deployment without a port visit is just really challenging. That is tough, really, really tough on those crews and they responded when the nation called and they got through it in a very tough time and I would say that is certainly not sustainable, we cannot continue to operate that way. We're getting the vaccines to our deploying sailors and troops that are going overseas, but we really need to make sure that... In my mind, everyone needs to get the vaccine, it hasn't been made mandatory, but in order for the military to continue to operate in an environment where COVID is not a major risk, I think the responsible thing for sailors and soldiers to do today is to choose to get the vaccine.

And I think once some hurdles with FDA approval are crossed the DOD needs to make it mandatory in order to continue to serve. We all had to get the anthrax vaccine back in the day you know what I mean? These things they're important to military readiness and when you serve there are certain choices that you should give up in order to continue to serve and your health and the health of the community, health of the Navy as a whole is important. So I think that the vaccine should be given to all sailors once it's fully approved by the FDA and it should be mandatory, but this just can't continue at this pace and in
the way it has had to be. There have been additional demands on sailors, I haven't seen any statistics yet about whether this has impacted retention.

But when I stopped to get gas at the Wawa on Hampton Boulevard, I talk to sailors and I can see on their ball cap I was like, "You just got back from another deployment." And they're like, "It has been really rough. I don't know if I'm going to re enlist." I have anecdotal evidence that it's tough on sailors, it's tough on their families and hopefully we can get through and get out of this additional strains that are caused by COVID because of the vaccine and encourage folks to continue to serve. But I wouldn't be surprised if we saw a dip in retention after this year, but at the same time when there's increased unemployment then maybe there's not as many opportunities drawing people out of the Navy, so it could balance out and not really have an operational impact.

And the Navy's actually had to be very adaptive and quick to keep the throughput with boot camp, and getting sessions and their training programs for critical skills to get people out to ships. Early on in COVID, there was just stop movement, no one moved and that was a big strain on families as well. And I was really concerned about people in our community who in the middle of a move here's your orders move out of your house, you have nothing but your suitcase and maybe your car to drive to your next assignment in San Diego, but stop, you can't go anywhere. It just took a lot on a lot of fronts to accommodate everything that happened very quickly because of COVID.

And I know and the Navy leadership I've spoken to is very, very concerned about the personal human toll and toll it's taken on the families and I know we're trying to mitigate that and work through that as we come to the other side of this pandemic.

Bryan Clark:

Yup, you bet. So longer term one of the things that the Navy has to do is to grow, because part of the reason we have a high op tempo today is that the Navy is not growing and to the degree it has grown, a lot of the new ships as you mentioned haven't really been deployable. Ford hasn't done deployment yet, the LCSes except for a few exceptions have not deployed even though 20 have been delivered, the Zumwalt have not deployed. So you've got ships coming into the fleet that aren't really making a difference in the deployed presence, so leaving the rest of the fleet to do more work.

And then we've got demands overseas, so the world gets a vote obviously, so as we move into the future you've expressed a desire to keep ships around longer. With these new classes of ships the Navy is building, there's been a tension between them and Congress on getting the required technological development done in advance before the ship is fielded. But that delay will cause the growth of the Navy to slow, so how do you think the Navy should grow the Navy and still try to evolve to bring in these new capabilities?

Congresswoman Luria:

Well, we kind of get this right. If you think about the four new major technologies that were employed on Ford, which includes the weapons elevators, the dual band radar, the catapults and the arresting gear, and the fact that there was not extensive prototyping done of the weapons elevators ahead of the
construction of the ship. So if you take a chance on that one thing, without weapons elevators a carrier that can't use its magazines and get its weapons up to the flight deck to arm the aircraft, it doesn't matter how many sorties per hour you can do if you can't arm the aircraft. And so it's a key component to the operability of the ship and so I think the Navy has acknowledged that additional prototyping and testing of that would have prevented some of these delays.

And also knowing that on the Kennedy, the lessons learned from how their electrototolators were installed and then the operational testing that has ensued on Ford, I think will prevent similar things from happening on the JFK. But at the same time when we look at future ship classes I don't think that we should just start building something before we fully designed it. And then you always get in this habitual back and forth between is it the Navy's fault or the contractors fault? If you give the contractor plans that are only 50% complete and you say, go build this, they just go build what you gave them the plans for. And then you want to put things on top of it that don't fit just right, well, that takes time and money to change it.

And so I think on both the contractor side and the Navy side it depends on the circumstances, but the Navy's responsibility is to provide the shipbuilder a plan to build something that they have enough confidence in that it's going to operate properly and whether that requires prototyping certain systems. Something that's really important that we haven't really emphasized a lot is continuity of the same types of systems across different classes of ships. The more you have a commonality of parts and pieces first of all, that makes the supply chain easier, it makes the operators understand how to operate that equipment. Whether they're on a DDG today or cruiser tomorrow, it has a similar whatever the system is, tubal purifier everybody knows how to operate it.

But as we build new classes of ships, introducing and even consistency across a class of ships, we haven't been very good at maintaining that either so I think that we need to do better on our next classes of ships. If we're going to invest money in new ship classes, we need to understand the technology is fully developed and tested because it doesn't do any good to build the ship and have it not accomplish the mission ever that's where we are with the LCS. We never got to the point where these mission modules were employable and we found other uses for the ship, which were really low end uses for that platform yet we've sunk a lot of money into these mission modules. Mine warfare being really the most concerning because we don't have a substitute capability for it so I think that we need to have more fully mature designs going into new ship classes in the future.

Bryan Clark:

And then arguably, having that more mature design in the end results in that capability being delivered earlier. We've seen with these previous classes that the ship showed up earlier, but the capability never showed up so in the end, that two or three year delay in designing the ship may have been well served. We may have been better off had we taken that time because then we would have had a capability delivered in a more reasonable period.

Congresswoman Luria:
Right. And so a couple things on that note specifically, and something I'm very enthusiastic about and really want to explore the possibility of building more of the Coast Guard National Security Cutters. I know that they have played a role in deploying to the Western Pacific and there is capability for that size of platform, and truly the Coast Guard has specific roles that they have in enforcing illegal fisheries and law enforcement capability that is unique to the Coast Guard operating that vessel, but just understanding the ability to add more platforms of that size with a smaller crew, with a shallow draft.

Since we got rid of the OHP, the FFG-7 class, we really haven't had a suitable ship of this lower draft that can operate in coordination with some of our partners who have smaller navies. And so I think that we need to look at that both the capability or possibility for that to operate within the Navy and certainly increased within the Coast Guard. So I'm now on the Homeland Security & Maritime Security subcommittee there, so we'll definitely be looking to talk to the Coast Guard a lot more about those platforms.

**Bryan Clark:**

I think that's great. So that new tri-service maritime strategy highlighted the fact that the competitive phase is really important, and the Coast Guard has a role to play in that is greater than that of the Navy maybe. And we saw with the West Capella incident, the Gabrielle Giffords did a great job of pushing back on Chinese aggression or Chinese assertiveness there. So the Coast Guard could be a bigger player and I know they have been integrating more closely with INDOPACOM so it's encouraging to see that. So yeah, building more of those kinds of ships would be a clear way to do that.

Before we wrap up here, the other part of the new fleet are these unmanned vessels. Which they get a lot of attention and we've paid a lot of attention to them, we had lots of debates inside the Future Naval Force Structure Study about them. Do you think the unmanned vessels will be able to really take on a role that helps the fleet address its capacity limitations? Or do you see them as being something that's really additive and provides a complimentary capability, but it's not going to address the overall fleet size problem the Navy has?

**Congresswoman Luria:**

I don't think it addresses the overall fleet size problem, but we should probably reference our earlier conversation that I don't understand fully all of the inputs that they used to make the Battle Force 2045. And secondly, I am eagerly awaiting the brief from the Navy to the Seapower subcommittee about their plans with unmanned surface vessels. And I would say that I'm not alone as a member of Congress, we really don't understand where the Navy's going with this. I have some ideas of the uses that they could be planning, but really haven't had a clear brief on this is what we want. Is it more VLS cells? Is it ISR?

What is it you're trying to accomplish? And if so, what capacity are you making up for in the fact that in Battle Force 2045 you actually reduce the number of large surface combatants? So I can only presume that you think you're going to add some VLS cells through adding these unmanned surface vessels. But are we going to be a situation where this is like LCS? It's going to be 20 years from now by the time we have this haul form, and this thing that can operate independently, and we get through all the
The biggest thing that I'm concerned about off the bat and no one has really been able to explain this to me yet is you can assume that in a conflict with China, you're going to end up operating a GPS denied environment. So if you're going to have an unmanned vessel and it does not have GPS navigation capability, and you also have other restrictions on communicating directly with it from another platform, because you obviously don't want to give away the position of the other platform that it's tethered to, how is it useful? How is it going to be operated remotely? So I'd just love to know more about the operational concepts for these unmanned vessels before I make a decision on whether I think there'll be useful tools for the Navy.

Bryan Clark:

Yeah, in the War gaming we found that there were a lot of difficulties trying to make a con up that would work against a capable adversary because you've got GPS denial, you've got the fact that when you deploy them if they stay with their battle group, they slow down the battle group, if they deploy on their own, they become a target or an indication that you're getting ready to fight. There are all kinds of problems in terms of trying to use them in a way that gave you what you needed the VLS cells, but didn't give you a vulnerability at the same time. So yeah, the con ops are going to be a key element of it and when are they manned and when are they unmanned.

Congresswoman Luria:

And I think that understanding the con ops and what you're going to use it for is pretty important before we decide to spend money in building it. I don't have any problem at continuing to do a modest investment in research and development because the technology is important. Unmanned and automated vehicles whether they be surface, subsurface, unmanned vehicles on our streets and in our communities all of that is good technology that we can benefit from. But I'm not really enthusiastic about starting to actually build these platforms until we understand what they're-
conversation, we could talk more about this future of the Navy stuff and unmanned vehicles and how they're going to roll into it. But it's been great talking to you today about the future of the Navy and hopefully we will get some clarity as we go into posture season and we maybe get a Secretary of the Navy and some actual published documents about the Navy's plans. But it's been great talking with you and I want to thank you for being here today and enjoy the rest of your posture season and thank you very much also to Sarah Russell for doing the producing today. Have a great day.

**Congresswoman Luria:**

Great. Thank you-