

THE PENTAGON'S FLOATING FIASCO

The Zumwalt class finally gets a mission

The Bunker found it eye-watering [to report](#) on the *Zumwalt* class of destroyers two years ago. The Navy ended up with a trio of warships costing \$24 billion. But it has paid a far higher price in the public perception that it no longer knows how to build ships, or manage those trying to do so. The [Ford](#) class of carriers and the flubbed [Littoral Combat Ship](#) program have only reinforced that grim realization.

So maybe it shouldn't come as a surprise to see that the Navy, on March 18, [declared](#) that it wants to install its first ship-based hypersonic weapons aboard the *Zumwalt* class. The decision to put a radical new kind of weapon aboard those hulls comes after the service tried and [failed](#) to put a new kind of supergun on them. Swapping the useless guns for hypersonic launchers would be "giving the three ships a mission for the first time in their troubled build and services lives," Paul McLeary [reported](#) in *Breaking Defense*.

"Troubled" is right. The Navy's official ship registry [says](#) the *USS Zumwalt* is "active, in commission," but it remains only active in that it's [hunting](#) for a mission it can perform. The *Zumwalt* "was commissioned into service on September 7, 2016. Its delivery date was revised multiple times. In the Navy's FY2021 budget submission, the ship's delivery date was revised to March 2020," the Congressional Research Service said in a [report](#) last month. "This created an unusual situation in which a ship was commissioned into service more than three years prior to its delivery date."

Things haven't gone any better for the other two vessels. "The delivery dates for the second [*USS Michael Monsoor*] and third [*USS Lyndon Baines Johnson*] ships have also been revised multiple times," the CRS said. "In the Navy's FY2021 budget submission, the delivery dates for the two ships were revised to September 2020 and September 2022, respectively. In January 2021, it was reported that the delivery date of the second ship had been delayed from September 2020 to sometime in FY2022."

The *Johnson* is "[under construction](#)," according to the Navy's ship registry. And the *Monsoor* is [listed](#) as "in commission, special" on the Navy's books. When you click to find out what that means, you get to a page that [says](#) "No definition has been created for this term."

Whoosh! Eight billion dollars, up in smoke.

Like the F-35, the Navy tried to do too much when it designed the *Zumwalt*. "Cramming a lot of new technologies into one platform was just crazy," John Lehman, who served as President Ronald Reagan's Navy secretary for six years, told *The Bunker* two years ago. "It was doomed from the start."

The real twist is that the hypersonic program the Navy wants to put aboard the *Zumwalt* class is a so-called "prompt strike" weapon. Quite a side-splitter for a destroyer designed and delayed into oblivion, and now camouflaged as a testbed for exotic weapons...just like itself.