2015 Fact Sheet

Ford Class Aircraft Carrier (CVN-78+)

BACKGROUND
The Ford Class aircraft carriers, also known as the CVN Replacement Program or CVN-21st Century (CVN-21), are currently being built in Newport News, VA and will replace the Navy’s 10 Nimitz Class carriers. They will provide the U.S. with forward presence, power projection, deterrence, sea control, maritime security, and humanitarian assistance. Construction of the USS Gerald Ford (CVN-78) began in August of 2005, with the laying of its keel in August of 2009. The vessel was christened in November of 2013. CVN-78 was originally planned to be delivered in 2015, but delays have caused delivery and sea trials to be pushed into 2016. The USS Gerald Ford (CVN-78) will replace the recently decommissioned USS Enterprise (CVN-65). The USS John F. Kennedy (CVN-79) is scheduled to replace the USS Nimitz (CVN-68), and the next generation USS Enterprise (CVN-80), will replace the USS Dwight D. Eisenhower (CVN-69).

The USS John F. Kennedy (CVN-79) is estimated to be procured with Fiscal Year 2013 (FY13)-Fiscal Year 2018 (FY18) dollars, with a total cost of $11.4 billion and delivered in September 2022. CVN-80 is estimated to be procured with FY18-Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) dollars, with a total cost of $13.4 billion and delivered in 2027. Recent reports estimate the average cost of a Ford Class carrier to be over $12.8 billion, with the current three carrier program cost totaling close to $40 billion. Due to the high cost, Congress has used a combination of incremental and advanced procurement funding to fund carrier construction.

IMPORTANCE
The Ford class implements many new technologies that bring U.S. carriers into the 21st Century. The Ford class replaces the steam-powered CATOBAR launch system with the Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System (EMALS) and a new advanced arresting gear (AAG) system. EMALS has finer aircraft acceleration control and allows a wider window of wind-over-deck speed required for launch, allowing a 25% increase in sortie generation rate compared to Nimitz carriers. Each Ford carrier will save more than $4 billion in operating costs during its 50-year service life, due to advances in automation and maintenance resulting in 700 fewer crew members than Nimitz class carriers. Ford carriers will have three times the power generation capacity of Nimitz carriers, and ten million feet of electric cable.

The carriers will handle approximately 75 aircraft including F-35 Joint Strike Fighters (JSF), F/A-18E/F “Super Hornets,” E/A-18G “Growlers,” E-2D “Advanced Hawkeyes,” MH-60R/S “Seahawk helicopters, and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs). The larger flight deck allows for no catapult-specific restrictions on launching aircraft, centralized rearming and refueling locations and three elevators able to lift two fighter jets at a time. Other new technologies and systems include the Evolved Sea Sparrow missile (ESSM) Block 2 for anti-ship missile defense, the AN/SPY-3 New Dual Band Radar (DBR) which combines S and X-band radar, stern-facing joint precision approach landing system (JPALS), and a new nuclear reactor design (A1B reactor).

RECOMMENDATION
The Association of the United States Navy agrees with the Navy that procurement of Ford Class carriers must continue on schedule while encouraging cost saving methods through uninterrupted procurement. Furthermore, the Association of the United States Navy recognizes and supports the Navy’s position for an 11 carrier fleet in accordance with the Navy’s 306 ship fleet plan.