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Navy TAGOS-25 (Previously TAGOS[X]) Ocean Surveillance Shipbuilding Program: Background and Issues for Congress

Introduction

The first of a planned class of seven new TAGOS-25 class ocean surveillance ships was procured in FY2022 at a cost of \$434.4 million. The Navy wants to procure the second ship in FY2025. The Navy’s proposed FY2023 budget requests no FY2023 procurement funding for the program.

Meaning of TAGOS Designation

In the designation TAGOS (also written as T-AGOS), the *T* means the ships are operated by the Military Sealift Command (MSC); the *A* means they are auxiliary (i.e., support) ships; the *G* means they have a general or miscellaneous mission; and the *OS* means the mission is ocean surveillance. The TAGOS-25 program was previously known as the TAGOS(X) program, with the (X) meaning that the precise design for the ship had not yet been determined. Some Navy budget documents may continue to refer to the program that way.

TAGOS Ships in the Navy

TAGOS ships (Figure 1 and Figure 2) support Navy antisubmarine warfare (ASW) operations. As stated in the Navy’s FY2023 budget submission, TAGOS ships “use Surveillance Towed-Array Sensor System (SURTASS) equipment to gather undersea acoustic data. The ships also carry electronic equipment to process and transmit that data via satellite to shore stations for evaluation.” Figure 3 shows a simplified diagram of a TAGOS-25 ship with its SURTASS arrays.

Figure 1. USNS *Impeccable* (TAGOS-23)



Source: U.S. Navy photograph accompanying “Ocean Surveillance Ships,” Military Sealift Command, accessed May 25, 2021.

Current TAGOS Ships

The Navy’s five aging TAGOS ships include four *Victorious* (TAGOS-19) class ships (TAGOS 19 through

22) that entered service in 1991-1993, and one *Impeccable* (TAGOS-23) class ship that entered service in 2000. As of the end of FY2021, all five were homeported at Yokohama, Japan. The ships use a Small Waterplane Area Twin Hull (SWATH) design, in which the ship’s upper part sits on two struts that extend down to a pair of submerged, submarine-like hulls (Figure 2). The struts have a narrow cross section at the waterline (i.e., they have a small waterplane area). The SWATH design has certain limitations, but it has features (including very good stability in high seas) that are useful for SURTASS operations.

Figure 2. USNS *Effective* (TAGOS-21) in Dry Dock



Source: U.S. Navy photograph 070913-N-2638R-004 posted at Wikimedia Commons, accessed May 25, 2021.

Figure 3. TAGOS Ship with SURTASS Arrays



Source: Detail from slide 13, entitled “TAGOS(X) Concept of Operations (CONOPS),” in Industry Day briefing for TAGOS(X) program, June 26, 2019, accessed May 26, 2021, at GovTribe.com.

TAGOS-25 Program

Quantity, Schedule, and Design

The Navy wants to procure seven TAGOS-25 class ships as replacements for its five in-service TAGOS ships. The first TAGOS-25 class ship was procured in FY2022. The Navy’s FY2023 budget submission calls for procuring the second in FY2025, the third and fourth in FY2026, and the fifth in FY2027. The Navy’s notional design for the TAGOS-25 class (**Figure 4**) employs a SWATH design that would be larger and faster than the in-service TAGOS ships (see **Table 1**).

Figure 4. Notional Navy Design for TAGOS-25



Source: Artist’s rendering accompanying press released entitled “Halter Marine Secures Contract for Industrial Studies for T-AGOS Program,” Halter Marine, July 20, 2020.

Table 1. TAGOS Ship Designs

	TAGOS-19	TAGOS-23	TAGOS-25 (notional)
Length	235 feet	282 feet	356 feet
Maximum speed	10 knots	13 knots	20 knots
Displacement	3,384 tons	5,370 tons	8,500 tons
Accommodations	~48	54	68

Sources: “Ocean Surveillance Ships - T-AGOS,” U.S. Navy, and (for TAGOS-25) slide 22, entitled “T-AGOS Class Comparison,” from Industry Day briefing for TAGOS(X) program, June 26, 2019, accessed May 26, 2021, at GovTribe.com.

The Navy’s desire to replace the five in-service TAGOS ships with seven larger and faster TAGOS-25s can be viewed as a response by the Navy to the submarine modernization efforts of countries such as China and Russia. For more on China’s submarine modernization effort, see CRS Report RL33153, *China Naval Modernization: Implications for U.S. Navy Capabilities—Background and Issues for Congress*, by Ronald O’Rourke.

Procurement Cost

The Navy estimates in its FY2023 budget submission that the seven TAGOS-25s will cost an average of \$426.3 million each in then-year dollars to procure.

Acquisition Strategy

The Navy wants to use a single shipbuilder to build all seven TAGOS-25s. The Navy intends to competitively award in FY2022 a firm fixed-price contract for the detailed design and construction (DD&C) of the lead ship, with options for building up to six additional ships.

In January 2020, the Navy released a request for proposals (RFP) for contracts to perform initial industry studies for the program. On July 2, 2020, the Navy awarded four contracts for these studies to BMT Designers and Planners of Arlington, VA (with a contract value \$2.37 million); Bollinger Shipyards of Lockport, LA (\$2.78 million); Thoma-Sea Marine Constructors of Houma, LA (\$2.26 million); and VT Halter Marine of Pascagoula, MS (\$2.17 million).

The Navy used the industry studies to inform its understanding of TAGOS-25 design-cost tradeoffs in support of the RFP for the DD&C contract. The Navy posted the RFP for the DD&C contract on November 19, 2021, and amended it on December 21, 2021. Responses to the RFP were due by April 19, 2022.

Issues for Congress

Potential issues for Congress for the TAGOS-25 program include the following:

- whether the Navy has accurately identified the required number and capabilities (and resulting size and cost) of TAGOS-25s needed to perform future missions;
- whether the Navy’s estimated procurement cost for TAGOS-25s is accurate;
- whether to accelerate the procurement of the second ship in the program from FY2025 to FY2024 or FY2023; and
- the impact of the TAGOS-25 program on U.S. shipyards and associated supplier firms.

FY2023 Procurement Funding

The Navy’s proposed FY2023 budget requests no FY2023 procurement funding for the TAGOS-25 program, which is line 23 in the Navy’s FY2023 Shipbuilding and Conversion, Navy (SCN) appropriation account.

The House Armed Services Committee, in its report (H.Rept. 117-397 of July 1, 2022, page 432) on the FY2023 National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 7900), and the House Appropriations Committee, in its report (H.Rept. 117-388 of June 24, 2022, page 140) on the FY2023 DOD Appropriations Act (H.R. 8236), both recommend no FY2023 procurement funding for the TAGOS-25 program.

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