

Executive Summary

“There has been a long-standing request by the Central Command (CENTCOM) for an afloat forward-staging base, which is, effectively, a “mother ship” that supports smaller craft or aviation platforms.”

- Chief of Naval Operations[1]

Throughout Naval history, when an at-sea platform is required for various missions, an older vessel is converted into a staging base to temporarily provide a solution to this capability gap. These ships are run hard into the ground until they are literally forced into decommission several years after being converted into the afloat staging base. Most recently, the USS PONCE, the ex-LPD 15, was converted into an interim afloat staging base and deployed to Fifth Fleet to serve as a floating, staging platform. The current front line has shifted from deep sea support to littoral combat. The 570-foot ship is limited in mission capability by the confines of the LPD 15 hull and is expected to last another four years when the fleet will again be in need of a forward deployed staging base to maintain front line presence. The US Central Command (USCENTCOM) has requested a clean-sheet design Afloat Forward Staging Base (AFSB) to replace the USS PONCE.

Currently there are no ships in the US Navy with the versatility to support operations ranging from minesweeping to SOF operations aside from CVNs and LHD/LHAs. Because of their expense and limited number they must be reserved to conduct their primary missions and cannot be used exclusively for these missions.

In order to fill this urgent request and mission void, an Afloat Forward Staging Base, AFSB(X), is proposed to efficiently meet the operational mission requirements of the US Military and maintain a dominant, command presence on the front line. The AFSB(X) platform is designed with the flexibility to meet both Mine Countermeasures mission parameters and the demands of the Special Operational Forces (SOF) as requested in a NAVSEA issued Request for Proposal. This ship is capable of launching and recovering four (4) MH-53 Sea Dragons in support of Aviation Mine Countermeasure missions. Within the same mission area, the AFSB(X) can launch four (4) MK-105 sleds to detect and detonate mines, two (2) MQ-8B Fire Scouts for aerial surveillance, and launch and recover RHIBS for support operations out of a boat ramp. Additionally, the AFSB(X) can be “flexed” into a floating base for SOF operations as well. The expansive flight deck can launch and recover an entire 160th squadron made up of AH/MH-6 Helicopters and SH-60 Sea Hawk to maneuver SOF personnel onto or off the ship. The aft boat ramp can also launch and recover combatant crafts for the SOF detachment. Staging areas, armories, planning rooms, interrogation centers, triage rooms, and SCIFs are provided internally to support any and all SOF operations while in the AFSB(X) is in the SOF configuration.

The Initial Concept Design of the AFSB(X) is capable of meeting the mission requirements set out by NAVSEA and has the ability to replace the USS PONCE on time and on station. Thus, the AFSB(X) is a viable answer to the CNO and CENTCOM’s cry for help. With a projected life cycle of 40 years, the AFSB(X) will enhance the application of U.S. military force and global power projection.



Hydrostatics		Accommodations (With Margin)	
Draft (Midships)	8.26 m	Officers	72
Length (L_{WL})	194.48 m	CPO	84
Beam	32.20 m	Crew	323
Wetted Surface Area (A_{WS})	7334.52 m ²	Total	479
Max. Section Area (A_x)	261.72 m ²	Weapons	
Waterplane Area (A_w)	5178.83 m ²	RAM	2
L/B	6.04	CIWS	2
B/T	3.90	Crew-Served Weapon	4
Displacement-to-length Ratio (DLR)	137.39	AMCM	
Prismatic Coefficient (C_p)	0.688	MH-53	4
Block Coefficient (C_B)	0.701	MQ-8B	2
Max Section Coefficient (C_x)	0.984	MK 105 Sled	4
Waterplane Coefficient (C_{WP})	0.827	RHIB	2
Speed		SOF	
Endurance Speed	18.13 kts	SH-60	4
Sustained Speed	20.14 kts	MH/AH-6	4
Max Speed	21.40 kts	MQ-8B	2
Propulsion- IPS		RHIB	2
Main Engines	2	CC-A	4
Secondary Engines	4	CC-M	2
Total Power from Main Engines	43310 kW	Elevators	
Total Power from Secondary Engines	10112 kW	External/Aviation Elevator	1
Overall Power Available	53422 kW	Internal Elevators	2