

Executive Summary

The US Navy budget is facing a severe squeeze in the coming years that may force a second look at the force size and structure. This is already evident in the FY 2013 Department of Defense budget proposal that recommended the early retirement of 7 Ticonderoga-class cruisers. The retirement of the cruisers, along with the planned retirement of the Perry-class frigates and the ever-increasing requirement for ballistic missile defense, is placing an enormous operational requirement on the Arleigh Burke-class destroyers. While the Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) will alleviate some of these stresses, these vessels are not optimized for blue water operations. By leveraging the US Coast Guard's investment in the Legend-class National Security Cutter (NSC), an affordable option may be available to better meet fleet needs.

This study evaluated the technical feasibility and cost of performing a modified repeat of the NSC into a Small Patrol Combatant (SPC). The NSC is designed to operate in blue water for extended periods and is designed with modern control features that allow the vessel to be operated with a relatively small crew. Adding an Aegis combat systems suite, AAW missiles, passive and active sonar arrays, and increased armament make the SPC capable of performing a relevant set of Navy missions. A combination of improved sensors and weapons systems, built in survivability features, and assessment of missions and standards can ensure adequate survivability for the Coast Guard-based SPC.

Results of this study confirm the SPC provides a robust platform capable of operating in a wide variety of mission areas. The ship has greater organic warfighting capability than current LCS or Perry-class. With an estimated cost of \$910M (FY11), this vessel could be produced at approximately half the cost of a current Burke-class destroyer, making it an affordable blue water option for the fleet.