



INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 661

June 1, 2026

The New Trump-Class Battleship

Dr. Mark B. Schneider

Dr. Mark Schneider is a Senior Analyst with the National Institute for Public Policy. Dr. Schneider previously served in DoD as Principal Director for Forces Policy, Principal Director for Strategic Defense, Space and Verification Policy, Director for Strategic Arms Control Policy and Representative of the Secretary of Defense to the Nuclear Arms Control Implementation Commission. He also served in the senior Foreign Service as a Member of the State Department Policy Planning Staff.

In December 2025, President Donald Trump and then Secretary of the Navy John C. Phelan announced the decision to produce a new major surface combatant, the Trump-class battleship (BBG[X]).

This constitutes a major change in previous plans which, due to inadequate funding levels, involved no surface combatant larger than a large destroyer and the near-term elimination of all U.S. cruisers. The Trump-class battleship will carry a large array of advanced weaponry, including lasers and a rail gun. It will be nuclear powered.¹ According to the U.S. Navy, the Trump-class battleship will be:

Engineered to outmatch any foreign adversary, the new battleship class will be the centerpiece of naval power. At triple the size of an Arleigh Burke-class destroyer, its massive frame provides superior firepower, larger missile magazines, and the capability to launch Conventional Prompt Strike hypersonic missiles and the Surface Launch Cruise Missile-Nuclear.

The Trump class will be capable of operating in a traditional Integrated Air and Missile Defense role with a Carrier Strike Group or commanding its own Surface Action Group for Surface and Anti-Submarine Warfare efforts in addition to



INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 661 | June 1, 2026

delivering long range hypersonic strategic fires and quarterbacking the operations of an entire fleet as the central command control node.²

The Trump-class battleship will be the first U.S. surface combatant since ships built during and just after World War II to be protected extensively. According to President Trump, it will be "...100 times more powerful than the previous Iowa class..." and will be protected by "powerful steel."³ While there was no elaboration on the scope of the armor protection, reportedly this ship will be heavily armored.⁴ This is a good idea. At this point, the precise nature of the protection has not been released, but it will probably use advanced technology rather than just steel armor.

Much of the design of post-World War II warships was based upon 1) the assumption that nuclear weapons would be used in any major war and 2) the results of the 1946 Bikini nuclear tests against warships. Ship size and armor mean little against nuclear weapons. Current events demonstrate that large-scale conventional war is possible *if nuclear escalation is deterred*.

For decades the United States has sought to avoid adversary nuclear escalation through a policy of nuclear deterrence, which is the only serious strategy to deter nuclear weapons use. For example, the 2026 National Defense Guidance states, "We will modernize and adapt our nuclear forces accordingly with focused attention on deterrence and escalation management amidst the changing global nuclear landscape."⁵ A bad combination of underfunding, flawed arms control concepts and agreements, and the increase in adversary nuclear modernization and force expansion have made deterring nuclear escalation more difficult. The critical need to deter nuclear escalation is a major reason the Trump-class battleship will carry nuclear-armed cruise missiles. President Trump's statement that the new battleships will be "100 times more powerful than the previous Iowa class" reflects the power of its nuclear missiles, not its conventional strike capability. The upgraded Iowa-class battleships deployed by the Reagan Administration carried 32 long-range Tomahawk cruise missiles.⁶ Based upon the number of missile launchers on the Trump-class battleship, it probably will not carry more.

The same nuclear cruise missiles could be carried by a small corvette-sized warship. The Russians do this. Indeed, while the Trump-class battleship's long-range conventional strike capability may be greater than existing U.S. warships, the difference is not going to be large.

The current Ukraine War and the Iranian conflict point to the importance of a large missile magazine for both offensive and defensive purposes. Some of the advanced weapons carried by the Trump-class battleships will substantially improve survivability against massive drone and missile attacks, which have become common. Its armor protection will also help. However, the offensive and defensive capabilities of the Trump-class battleships will be significantly determined by the number of missile launchers they carry.

The rail gun carried by the Trump-class battleships reportedly will have a range of 320-km.⁷ This will give it a massive advantage over every other surface combatant with regard to artillery capability. It is a much cheaper substitute for short-range missiles. However, to be effective militarily at such a range, the gun would have to fire either conventional precision-



INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 661 | June 1, 2026

guided munitions (which will be expensive) or tactical nuclear weapons for which there is no current program or capability.

While the rail gun should provide a new type of strike capability much cheaper than ballistic missiles of the same range and with much greater magazine depth, it will be the long-range missiles that provide the most important offensive and defensive capabilities. Trump-class battleships will carry 128 Mark 41 missile launchers.⁸ This is just six more launchers than the Ticonderoga-class guided missile cruiser carries (now being retired due to age). This cruiser has about one-third the displacement of a Trump-class battleship.⁹

The Trump-class battleship will also carry 12 long-range hypersonic missiles.¹⁰ The modified Zumwalt-class destroyers, with less than half the displacement of the Trump-class battleship, will also carry 12 of these missiles.¹¹

The number of Mark 41 vertical launchers (VLS) is very important because these carry some of the most important weapons on the ship – the Tomahawk long-range cruise missiles, anti-submarine warfare missiles, air-defense missiles and ballistic missile defense interceptors.¹² This number (128) is not very impressive in comparison to adversary warships. Russia's rebuilt large nuclear-powered battle-cruiser Admiral Nakhimov carries 256 missile launchers.¹³ Yet, its displacement is significantly less than the Trump-class battleship.¹⁴ China's new type-055 cruiser (12,000-13,000 tons or about one-third that of a Trump-class battleship) carries 112 VLS.¹⁵ Except for missile defense, the type 055 carries the same types of missiles as U.S. destroyers and cruisers.¹⁶ Even primitive North Korea is building a destroyer (really small frigates of 5,000 tons) that carries 72 VLS.¹⁷

U.S. warships have to operate on a global basis while Russian, Chinese and North Korean ships generally do not. This explains some of the design differences, but not all of them. Since the 1980s, the U.S. Navy has introduced one failed warship design after another – the Littoral Combat Ships, the Zumwalt-class destroyers (actually cruiser sized), and the large Constellation-class Frigates. One common element these ships share is that they carry comparatively little firepower in comparison to their displacement and cost. For example, the Zumwalt-class destroyer carries only 80 VLS compared to 96 on the much smaller Burke-class destroyers.¹⁸ The Constellation class frigate carries only 32 VLS.¹⁹ The Littoral Combat ship carries none.²⁰ Neither does the new FF(X) frigate, which will replace the Constellation-class. It will carry no vertical launchers in its initial configuration.²¹ Amazingly, the initial version apparently has no antisubmarine warfare capability.²² This means it can be sunk by any submarine in the world.

All of these cancelled programs were terminated with many fewer ships than were originally planned. If the Navy does not want the Trump-class battleships to follow in their footsteps, it had better increase the number of Mark-41 vertical missile launchers by a factor of two or three. It has already been argued that "...three Arleigh Burke ships would provide 125 percent more firepower (288 cells versus 128) for less expense than one of the Trump class."²³ The survivability enhancements of a Trump-class battleship are significant, but these alone are not likely to sustain the program in the context of a future left-wing presidency, or control of Congress.²⁴



INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 661 | June 1, 2026

Enhancing the long-range strike and defensive firepower of the Trump-class battleship should be relatively easy in light of the size of the ship and the fact that the design is not yet complete, even if it requires a modest increase in the ship's displacement. Estimates of its displacement range from 30,000-40,000 tons.²⁵ Thus, the weight and cost of the additional Mark 41 missile launchers is in the noise.

The Trump-class battleship will be an important asset. It will represent a very useful battle management platform. However, under-arming the Trump-class battleships in relation to their size and cost creates a tempting target for the left who routinely oppose adequate defense spending. The cancellation of the new destroyer, the DDG(X), was a mistake. Even if Congress funds the maximum number of battleships now being discussed (15), they cannot be a replacement for Burke-class destroyers which represent the core of the protection for the supercarriers. The FY2027 Navy budget funds only one Burke-class Flight III destroyer and this will not increase to two until FY2030.²⁶ If this is not changed the number of U.S. destroyers may even decline once the United States is forced to start retiring the aging Burke-class destroyers in 2030.

¹ Joseph Trevithick, "Trump Class Battleships Will Be Nuclear Powered," *The War Zone*, May 11, 2026, https://www.twz.com/sea/trump-class-battleships-will-be-nuclear-powered?utm_campaign=dfn-ebb&utm_medium=email&utm_source=sailthru.

² U.S. Navy, "President Trump Announces New Battleship," December 22, 2025, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/Press-Releases/display-pressreleases/Article/4366856/president-trump-announces-new-battleship/>.

³ "Transcript: President Trump Announces a New Class of Naval Vessel in Mar-a-Lago, 12.22.25," December 22, 2025, <https://www.democrats.senate.gov/newsroom/trump-transcripts/transcript-president-trump-announces-a-new-class-of-naval-vessel-in-mar-a-lago-122225>.

⁴ Dr. James Bosbotomis, "The Arsenal of Democracy – Developing a 21st Century Battleship," *Warships International Fleet Review*, January 2026, p 18.

⁵ Department of War, *2026 NDS – National Defense Strategy*, 2026, p. 17, <https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jan/23/2003864773/-1/-1/0/2026-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY.PDF>.

⁶ Brent M. Eastwood, "The Navy's Iowa-Class Battleships Summed Up in 2 Words," *National Security Journal.org*, August 30, 2025, <https://nationalecurityjournal.org/the-navys-iowa-class-battleships-summed-up-in-2-words/>.

⁷ James Holmes, "Is the 'Trump-Class Battleship' Really a Battleship?," *National Interest.org*, January 10, 2026, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/is-trump-class-battleship-really-battleship-jh-011026>.

⁸ Mallory Shelbourne and Sam LaGrone, "Trump Unveils New Battleship Class; Proposed USS Defiant Will Be Largest U.S. Surface Combatant Since WWII," *U.S. Naval Institute News*, December 22, 2025, <https://news.usni.org/2025/12/22/trump-unveils-new-battleship-class-proposed-uss-defiant-will-be-largest-u-s-surface-combatant-since-wwii>.

⁹ U.S. Naval Surface Force Atlantic, "Cruisers - CG," no date, <https://www.surflant.usff.navy.mil/Organization/Operational-Forces/Cruisers/Ticonderoga-Class-Cruiser-CG-Info-Page/>.

¹⁰ Shelbourne and LaGrone, "Trump Unveils New Battleship Class; Proposed USS Defiant Will Be Largest U.S. Surface Combatant Since WWII," *op. cit.*



INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 661 | June 1, 2026

¹¹ “US Navy’s Stealth Destroyer Just Got Hypersonic Missiles,” *Military World*, April 2025, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wIKsUyypKwk>.

¹² Vadim Kushnikov, “Russian Nuclear Cruiser Admiral Nakhimov Sets Sail After a Quarter Century of Repairs,” *Militarnyi.com*, August 19, 2025, <https://militarnyi.com/en/news/russian-nuclear-cruiser-admiral-nakhimov-sets-sail-after-a-quarter-century-of-repairs/>.

¹³ Bosbotomis, “The Arsenal of Democracy – Developing a 21st Century Battleship,” op. cit., p. 8.

¹⁴ Kushnikov, “Russian Nuclear Cruiser Admiral Nakhimov Sets Sail After a Quarter Century of Repairs,” op. cit.

¹⁵ Eric Wertheim, “Type 055 Renhai-class Cruiser: China’s Premier Surface Combatant,” *Proceedings*, Vol. 149/3/1,441, March 2023, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2023/march/type-055-renhai-class-cruiser-chinas-premier-surface-combatant>; Daniel Caldwell, Joseph Freda and Lyle J. Goldstein, “China Maritime Report No. 5: China’s Dreadnought?,” U.S. Naval War College, 2-2020, <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1004&context=cmsi-maritime-reports>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ “How North Korea Challenges US Sea Dominance With New Choe Hyon Destroyers,” *Sputnik News*, April 14, 2026, <https://sputnikglobe.com/20260414/how-north-korea-challenges-us-sea-dominance-with-new-choe-hyon-destroyers-1123987782.html>.

¹⁸ “Destroyers (DDG 1000),” *Navy.mil*, January 5, 2023, <https://www.navy.mil/Resources/Fact-Files/Display-FactFiles/Article/2391800/destroyers-ddg-1000/>; Naval Surface Force Atlantic, “Arleigh Burke (DDG 51 - Flight I),” no date, <https://www.surflant.usff.navy.mil/Organization/Operational-Forces/Destroyers/Destroyer-Ship-Class-DDG-Info-Page/>.

¹⁹ Ronald O’Rourke, “Navy Constellation (FFG-62) and FF(X) Class Frigate Programs: Background and Issues for Congress,” Congressional Research Service, January 5, 2026, file:///C:/Users/anner/Downloads/R44972.136.pdf.

²⁰ “Freedom class Littoral Combat Ship - LCS.” no date, <https://www.seaforces.org/usnships/lcs/Freedom-class.htm>.

²¹ Richard Thomas, “US Navy FF(X) vs Constellation frigate – a comparison,” *Naval Technology*, January 2, 2026, <https://www.naval-technology.com/news/us-navy-ffx-vs-constellation-frigate-a-comparison/>.

²² Joseph Trevithick, “Navy’s New Frigate Program Makes Big Bet On Containers Loaded With Missiles,” *The War Zone*, January 16, 2026, <https://www.twz.com/sea/navys-new-frigate-program-makes-big-bet-on-containers-loaded-with-missiles#:~:text=It%20is%20important%20to%20note%20here%20that,anti%2Dsubmarine%20warfare%20missions%20module%20for%20its%20LCSs.>

²³ Trent Hone, “Why the U.S. Navy Doesn’t Build Battleships Anymore,” *War on the Rocks*, January 12, 2026, <https://warontherocks.com/2026/01/why-the-u-s-navy-doesnt-build-battleships-anymore/>.

²⁴ Robert Farley, “The Trump-Class Battleship Summed Up In 1 Word,” *National Security Journal*, December 23, 2025, https://nationalecurityjournal.org/the-trump-class-battleship-summed-up-in-1-word/?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ U.S. Navy, “Department of the Navy Releases FY27 Budget Request,” April 12, 2026, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/Press-Releases/display-pressreleases/Article/4464720/departement-of-the-navy-releases-fy27-budget-request/>; Trevithick, “Trump Class Battleships Will Be Nuclear Powered,” op. cit.

The National Institute for Public Policy’s *Information Series* is a periodic publication focusing on contemporary strategic issues affecting U.S. foreign and defense policy. It is a forum for promoting critical thinking on the evolving international security environment and



INFORMATION SERIES

Issue No. 661 | June 1, 2026

how the dynamic geostrategic landscape affects U.S. national security. Contributors are recognized experts in the field of national security. National Institute for Public Policy would like to thank the Sarah Scaife Foundation for the generous support that made this *Information Series* possible.

The views in this *Information Series* are those of the author(s) and should not be construed as official U.S. Government policy, the official policy of the National Institute for Public Policy, or any of its sponsors. For additional information about this publication or other publications by the National Institute Press, contact: Editor, National Institute Press, 12150 Monument Dr., Suite 125, Fairfax, VA 22033, (703) 293- 9181, www.nipp.org. For access to previous issues of the National Institute Press *Information Series*, please visit <http://www.nipp.org/national-institutepress/informationseries/>.

© National Institute Press, 2026