

US Navy readies 'laser attack' weapon in 2014

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A MH53E helicopter takes off from the USS Ponce to conduct a mine clearance exercise in the Gulf on September 24, 2012. The US Navy said it is preparing to roll out a sea-based laser weapon capable of disabling small enemy vessels and shooting down surveillance drones.

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The [laser](#) system will be deployed in 2014, two years ahead of schedule, aboard the USS Ponce, an amphibious transport ship retrofitted as a waterborne staging base, the [Navy](#) said Monday.

Chief of Naval Research Admiral Matthew Klunder said the cost of one blast of "directed energy" could be less than \$1.

"Compare that to the hundreds of thousands of dollars it costs to fire a missile, and you can begin to see the merits of this capability," he said in a US Navy statement.

The [Office of Naval Research](#) (ONR) and Naval Sea Systems Command successfully tested high-energy lasers against a [moving target](#) ship and a remotely piloted drone.

"The future is here," ONR official Peter Morrision said.

"The solid-state laser is a big step forward to revolutionizing modern warfare with directed energy, just as gunpowder did in the era of knives and swords."

The laser runs on electricity, so the weapon "can be fired as long as there is power," and is a lot safer than carrying explosives aboard ships.

The New York Times, which said the USS Ponce would deploy to the Gulf, noted the Pentagon had a "long history of grossly inflating" claims for experimental weapons.

Navy officials had acknowledged that the prototype laser was not yet strong enough to bring down a jet fighter or a missile, although those remained the long-term targets, The Times reported.

A March 14 report from the non-partisan Congressional Research

Center said the new weapon was a potential game-changer in naval warfare.

"Compared to existing ship self-defense systems, such as missiles and guns, lasers could provide Navy surface ships with a more cost effective means of countering certain surface, air, and [ballistic missile](#) targets," the report read.

Equipping Navy ships with lasers "could lead to changes in naval tactics, ship design and procurement plans for ship-based weapons, bringing about a technological shift for the Navy - a 'game changer' - comparable to the advent of shipboard missiles in the 1950s," it added.

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