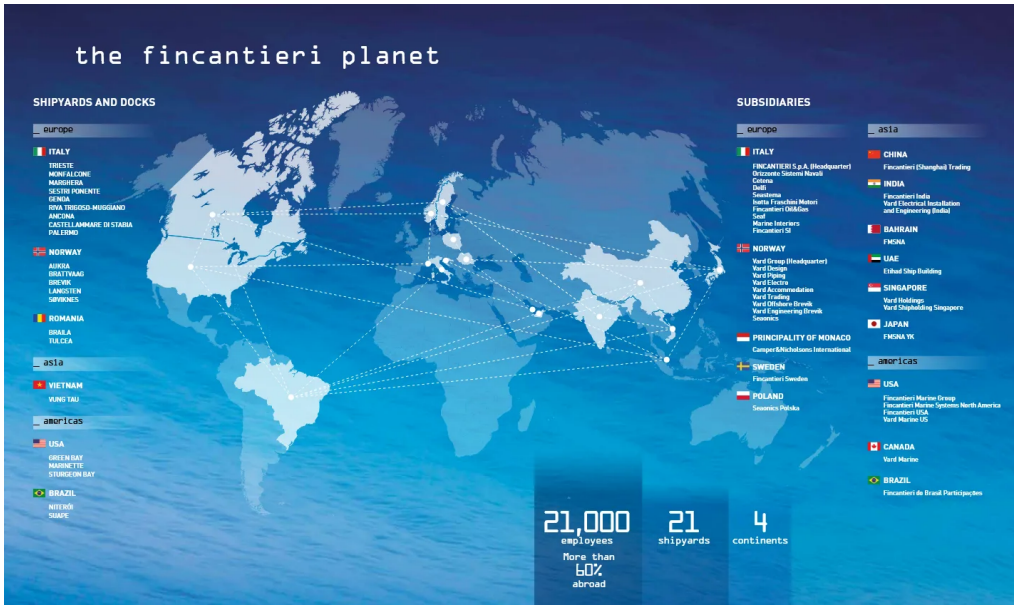

USA: not only FREMM for the Navy of the future

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The decision of the US **Navy** Secretary John Phelan to cancel four of the six Constellation-class frigates is not just an American issue: it directly affects **Fincantieri**, the Italian naval industry, and the “family” of **FREMM** from which the project originates. The Constellation indeed arises as an evolution of the Italian-French FREMM, particularly the Italian variant Bergamini class, chosen as the “parent design” in the FFG(X) program. The idea was to leverage a frigate already tested by the Italian Navy, adapting it to US standards to reduce time, risks, and costs. In reality, Washington's continuous modification requests – more systems, more growth margins, larger volumes – have turned what was supposed to be an adaptation into an almost new project: larger, heavier, more complex. The result was an escalation of costs and delays, leading to Phelan's “strategic shift”: confirming only the first two units and scrapping the subsequent four, while reaffirming the intention to redirect cooperation with Fincantieri to other types of ships.

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Fincantieri between Italy, Wisconsin and the FREMM model

For Fincantieri, which through Marinette Marine has invested heavily in the **Wisconsin** shipyards and built its offer precisely on the success of FREMM, the downsizing of the program is a political and industrial blow, but not a farewell. Investments in the United States remain strategic, and the US Navy continues to consider the Italian group a pillar of its industrial base, especially for amphibious units, icebreakers, and special platforms. In parallel, the Italian FREMMs – thanks to their multi-mission flexibility and a successful balance between sensors, armament, and management costs – continue to be a case study: they are operational in the Mediterranean, integrated into NATO, and sold for **export** to countries like Egypt and Indonesia. The comparison between the FREMM program, managed in Italy with a relatively compact supply chain and controlled timelines, and the complex “Americanization” of the Constellation highlights a lesson for Washington: starting from a good design is not enough if the political-bureaucratic machine distorts the project to the point of making it unmanageable.

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Innovation, Navier, and strategic choices for Italy

At the heart of this story is the great challenge of **maritime supremacy** in a world where **China** churns out ships at industrial rates and where the technological quality of hulls is increasingly important. Phelan's “strategic shift,” with fewer traditional frigates and more focus on truly combat-ready capabilities, intertwines with the growth of innovative players like the startup Navier, which works on hybrid-electric hydrofoils and dual-use platforms for patrol, surveillance, and advanced logistics. Here Italy has a direct interest: to systematize Fincantieri's experience, the FREMM and **PPA** legacy, and an ecosystem of emerging naval technologies, to position itself as an essential partner in future allied programs. The lesson from the Constellation case is clear: no foreign program is guaranteed forever, and the true strength of a maritime nation lies in its ability to design, build, and update reference **platforms** at home, while simultaneously making itself indispensable in international supply chains and allies' choices.

News link: https://www.axios.com/2025/12/03/secnav-phelan-constellation-frigate-canceled?utm_source=chatgpt.com