Trump, steamed over delays, pulls plug on electric carrier catapults

Enlarge / US President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump pose for a photograph with US military personnel aboard the USS *Wasp* aircraft carrier at the US naval base in Yokosuka, Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan, on Tuesday, May 28, 2019. Trump told troops stationed in Japan he plans to order traditional steam-powered catapults aboard American warships instead of newer electromagnetic systems that he said may not work as well during wartime.

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During his Memorial Day visit to the USS *Wasp* (LHD-1) at anchor at Yokosuka, Japan, President Donald Trump made comments indicating that he is ordering changes to the aircraft catapult system of the USS *Gerald R. Ford* and the remaining ships of its class.

Trump has long derided the Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System (EMALS), an all-electric aircraft catapult designed for the *Ford*, as too complicated and too expensive. After polling the preference of assembled Marines and sailors, he declared he was ordering the Navy to switch to steam.

> *PRESIDENT TRUMP: So then, let me ask you a question. Catapult—right? The catapult system. Do you like electric or steam?*

AUDIENCE MEMBERS: Steam!

AUDIENCE MEMBERS: Electric!

PRESIDENT TRUMP: Steam. Who said "electric"? There's one guy back there. (Laughter.) OK, I really need this information because, you know, we're building carriers. We're building one. They're using an electric catapult and an electric elevator. Number one, I can't imagine, in the case of battle—it must be very delicate, OK? And, you know, steam has only worked for about 65 years, perfectly. And I won't tell you this because it's before my time by a little bit, but they have a $900 million cost overrun on this crazy electric catapult. I said, "What was wrong with steam?" I would like to know—all of the folks that know exactly what I'm talking about, the catapult system—steam or electric? Ready? Steam. (Applause.) Electric.

AUDIENCE MEMBERS: Yeah! (Laughter.)

PRESIDENT TRUMP: He works for the enemy.

Then Trump declared, "No, we want to go with steam." He complained that "They're always coming up with new ideas… they're making planes so complex you can't fly them. They want to show next, next, next… and we all want innovation, but it's too much. But there's never been anything like the steam catapults."

Trump said that he had visited the *Ford*, which is still being outfitted—and has had problems during EMALS' initial testing.

"I was talking to the catapult people, and they said 'steam,'" Trump said. "In the meantime, we're spending all that money on electric, and nobody knows what it's going to be like in bad conditions. So I think I'm going to put an order. When we build a new aircraft carrier, we're going to use steam. We don't need that extra speed."

Ars called a US Navy spokesperson for comment, who directed all inquiries to the White House press office. The White House has not responded to inquiries about Trump’s statements.

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