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(54) **ROTATING DETONATION COMBUSTOR WITH DISCRETE DETONATION ANNULI**

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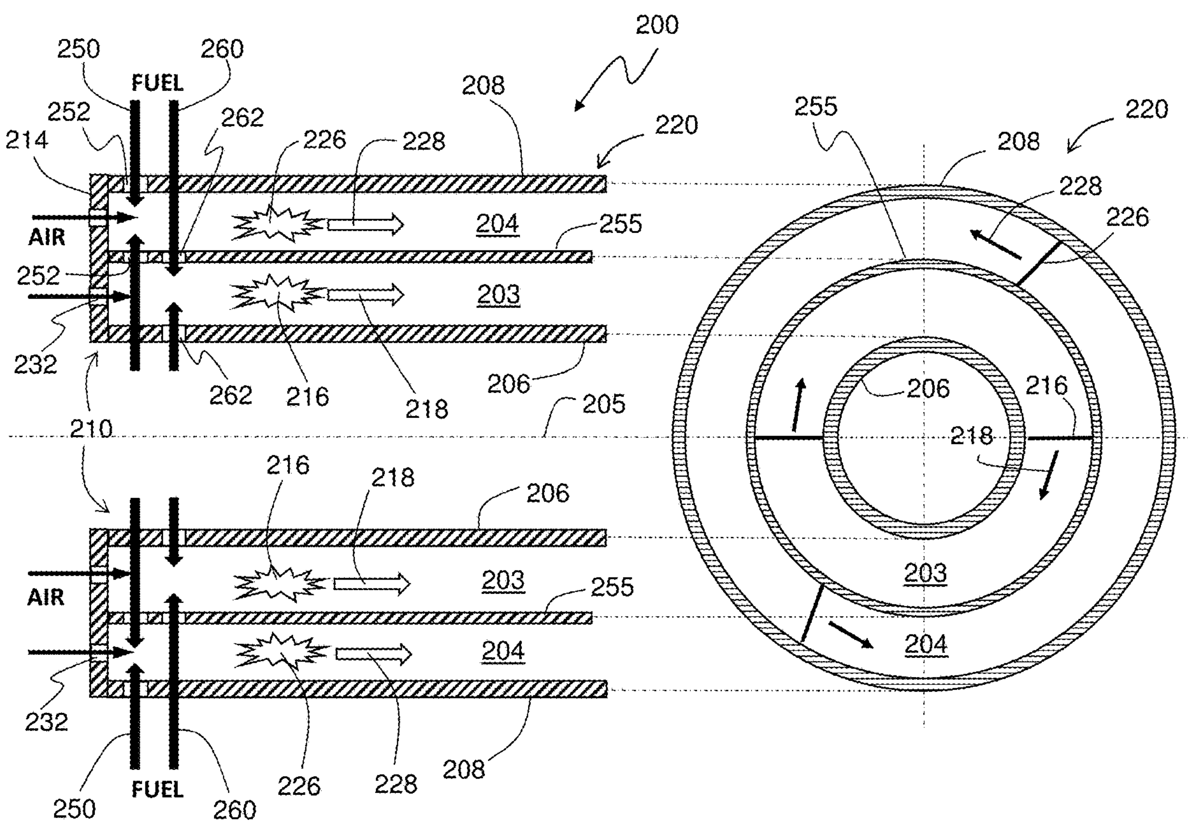
(57) **ABSTRACT**

The present disclosure is directed to a rotating detonation combustor that includes a forward wall, a radially inner wall, and a radially outer wall. The forward wall is disposed at an inlet end of the rotating detonation combustor. The radially inner wall surrounds a longitudinal axis and extends downstream from the forward wall to an outlet end of the rotating detonation combustor. The radially outer wall extends downstream from the forward wall to the outlet end and surrounds the radially inner wall to define at least one annular plenum between the radially inner wall and the radially outer wall. At least one partition is proximate to the inlet end and defines at least two mixing zones. A plurality of oxidizer inlets and a plurality of fuel inlets are disposed at the inlet end in fluid communication with the at least two mixing zones.



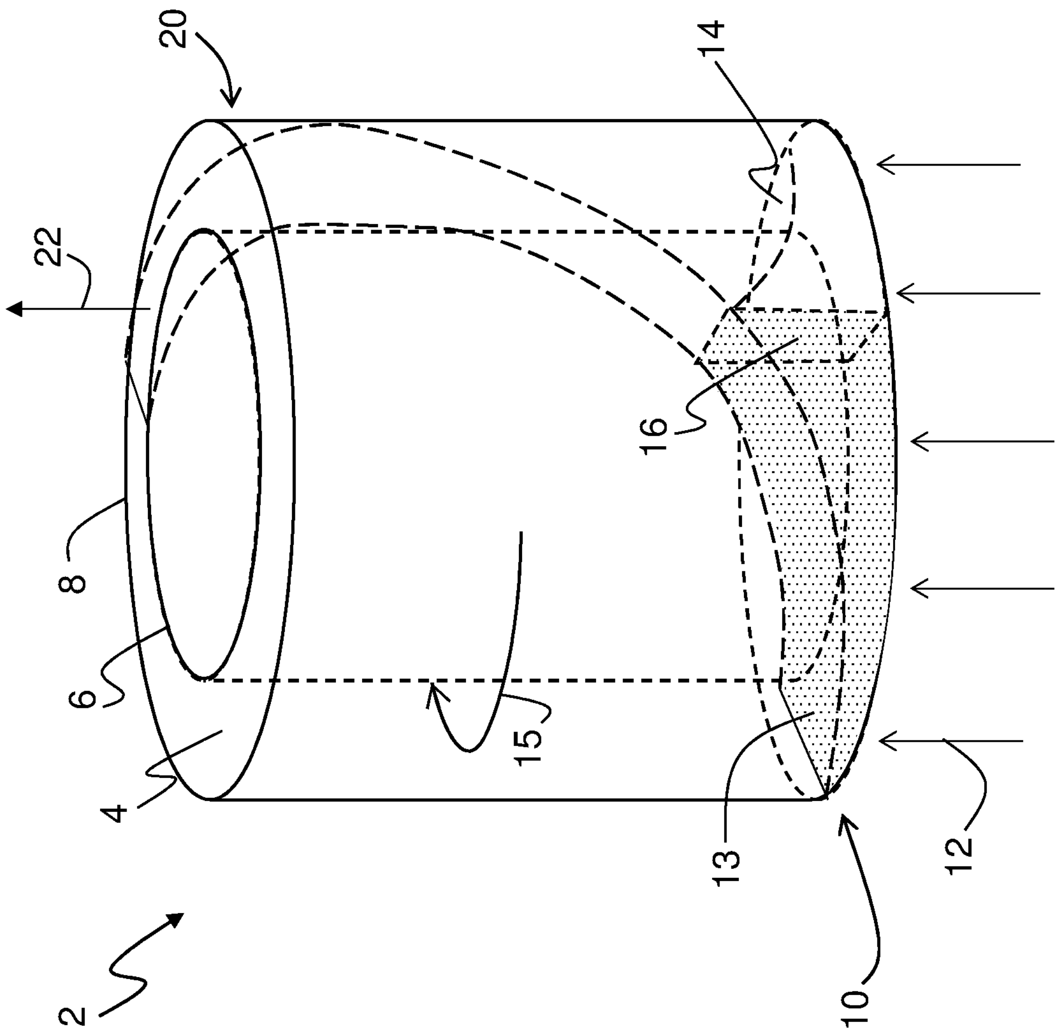
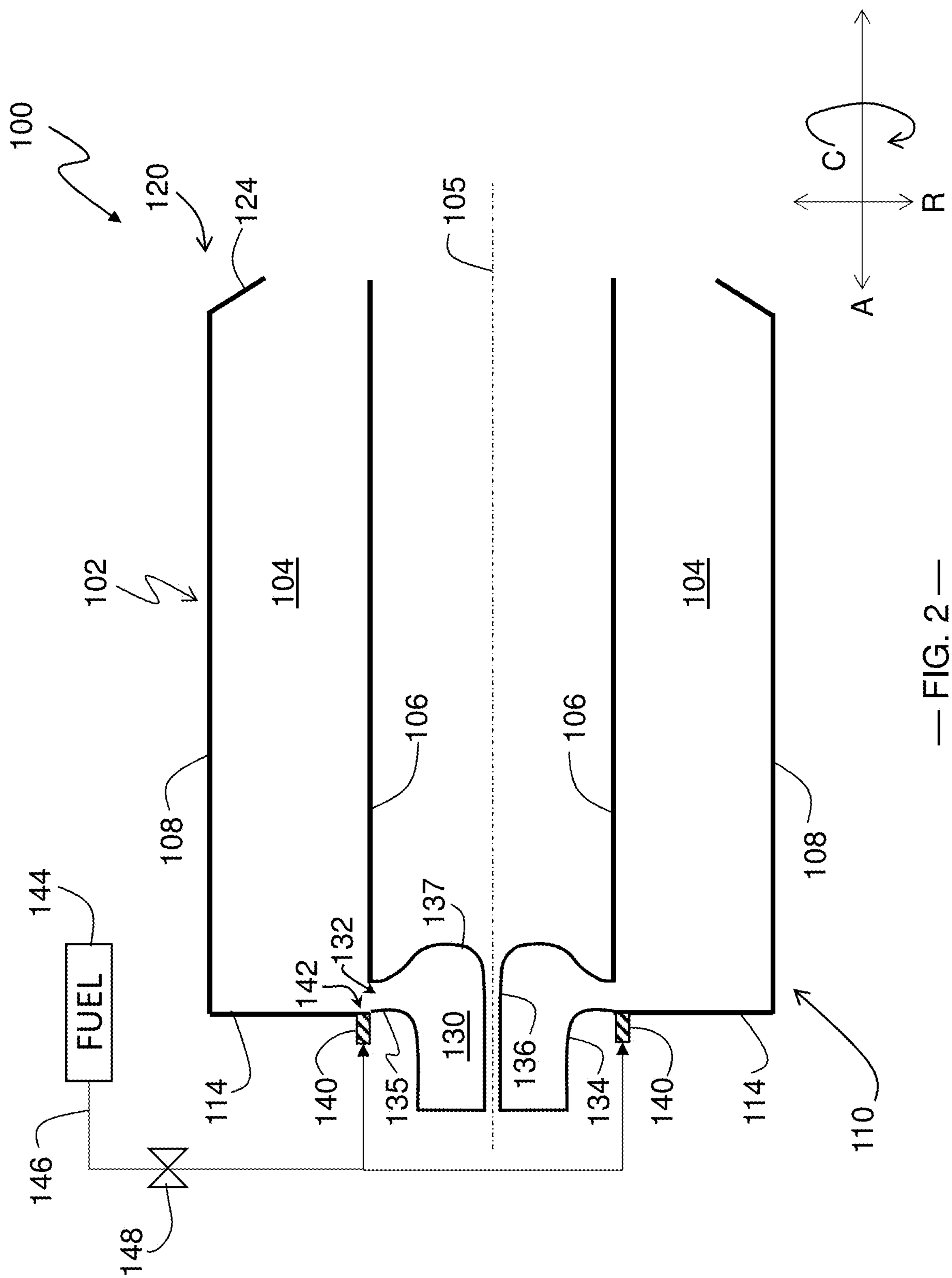


FIG. 1



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144
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C
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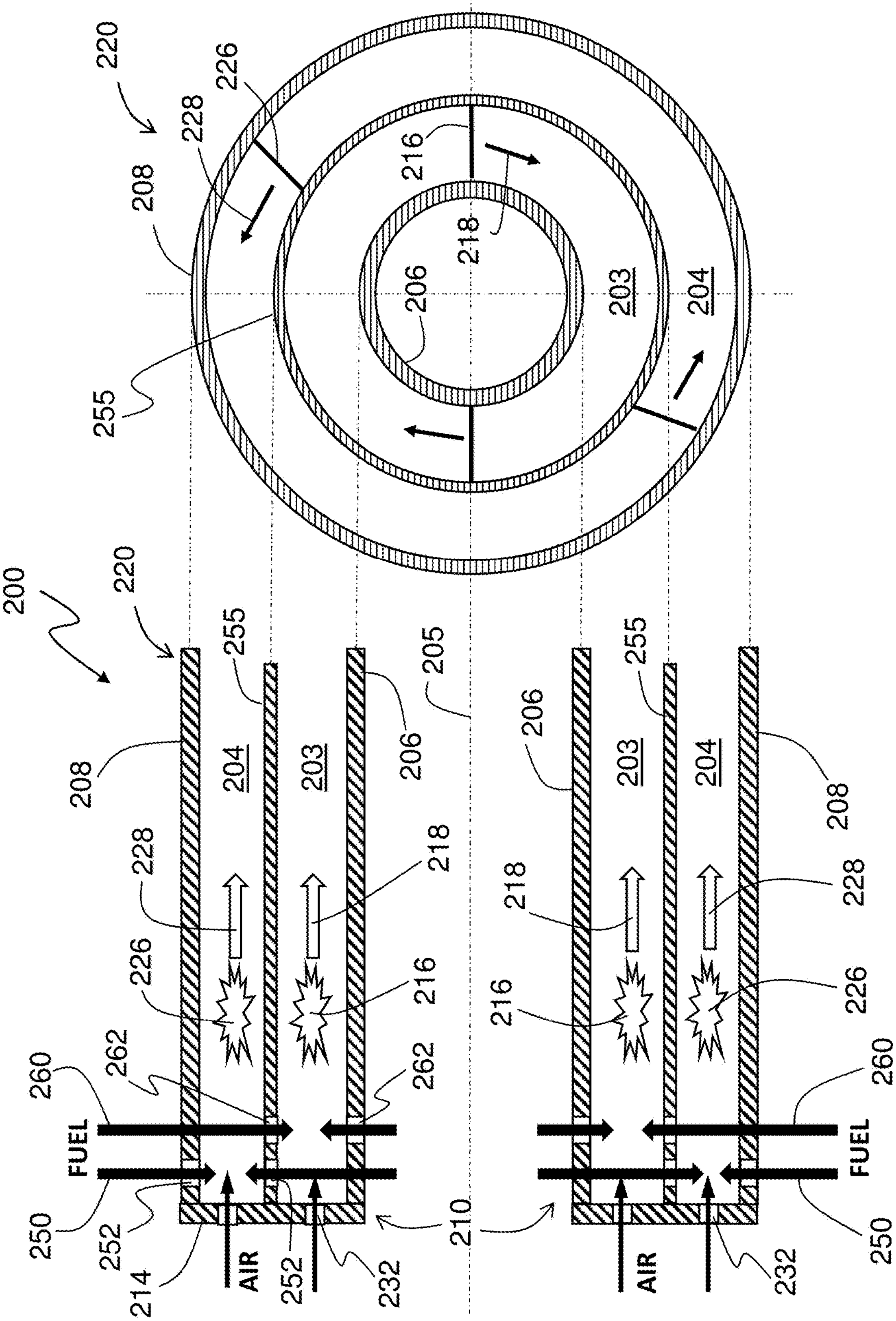
A

— FIG. 2 —


200
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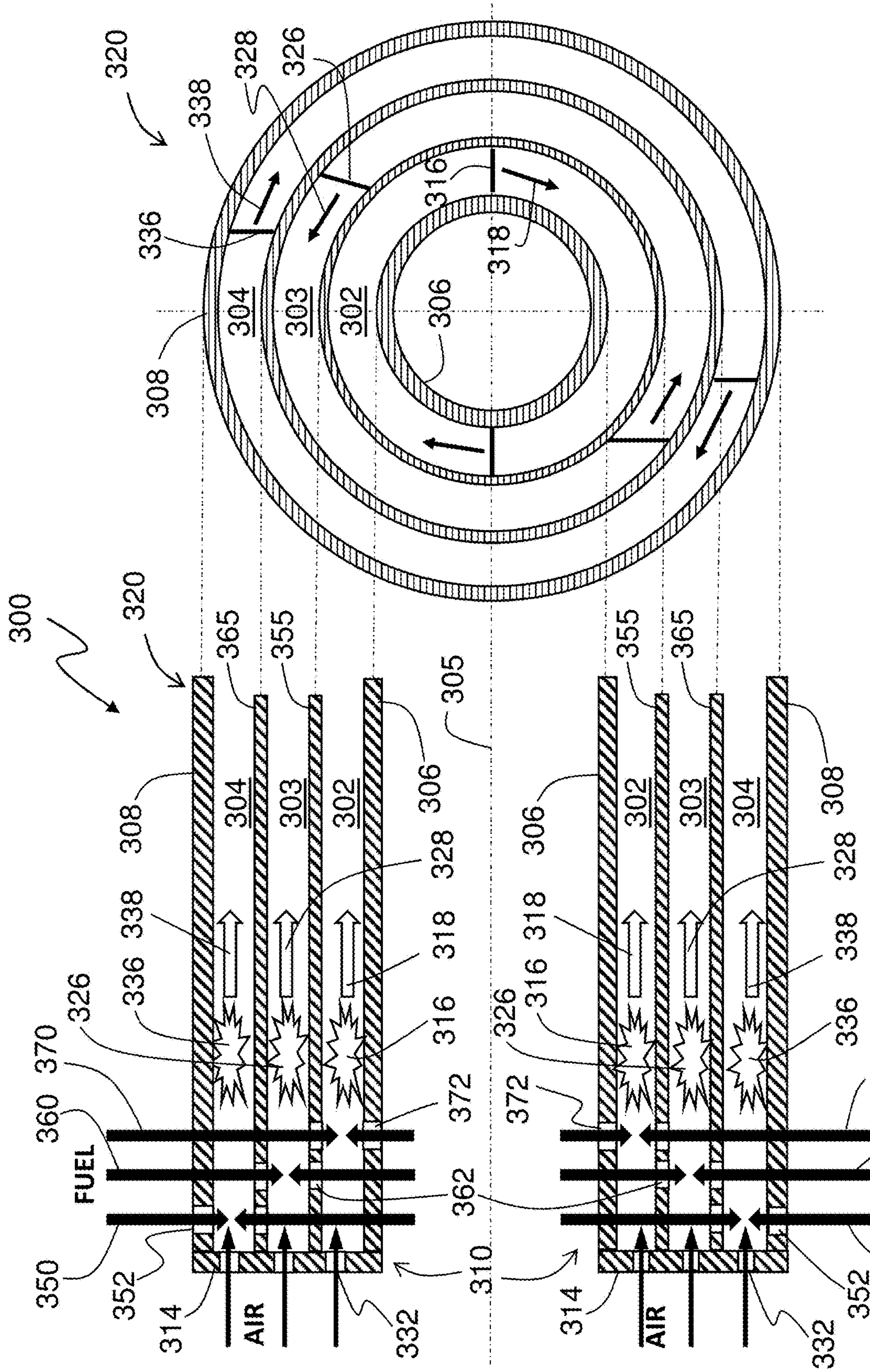
— FIG. 3 —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372
FUEL
AIR

FIG. 4

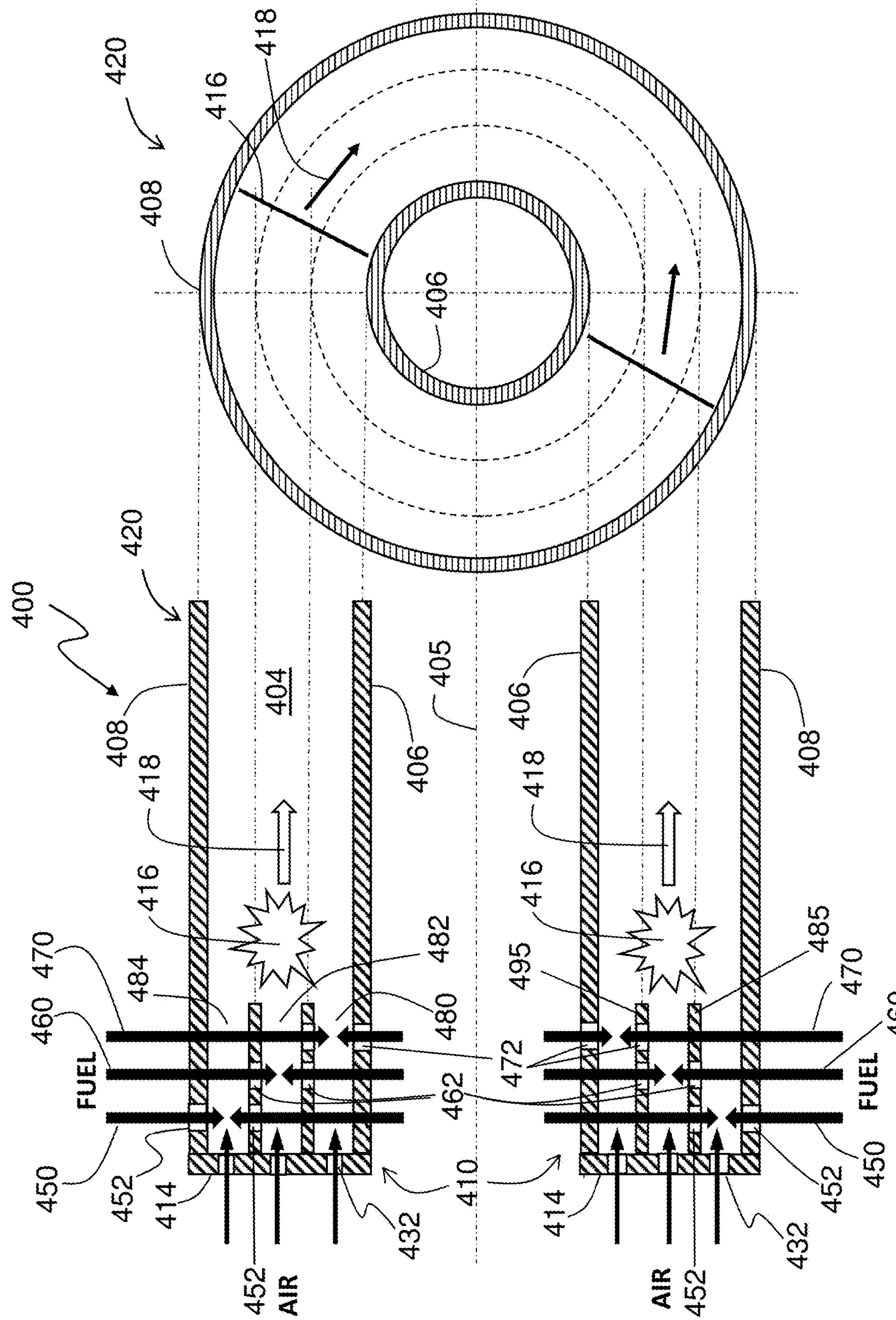
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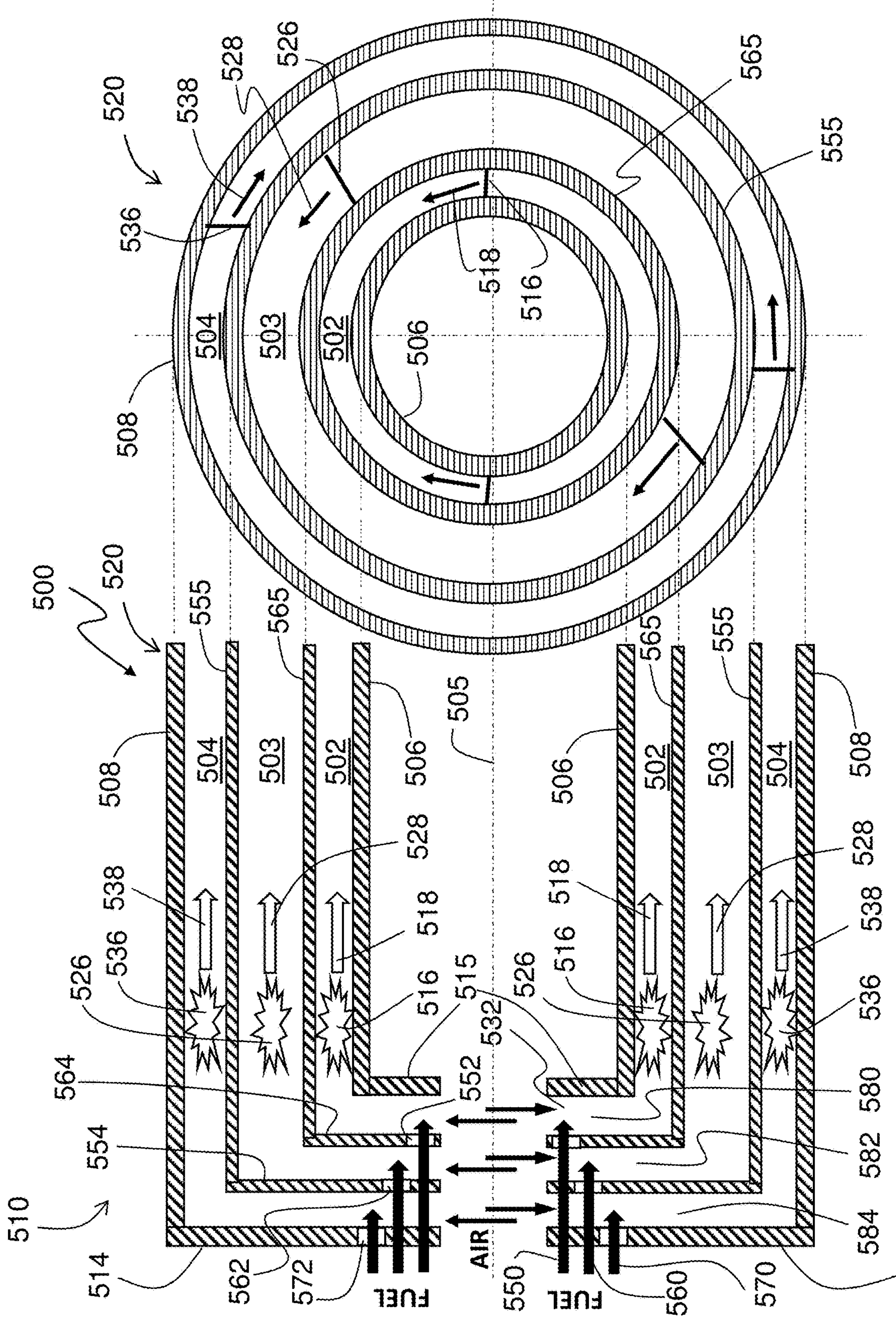
FIG. 5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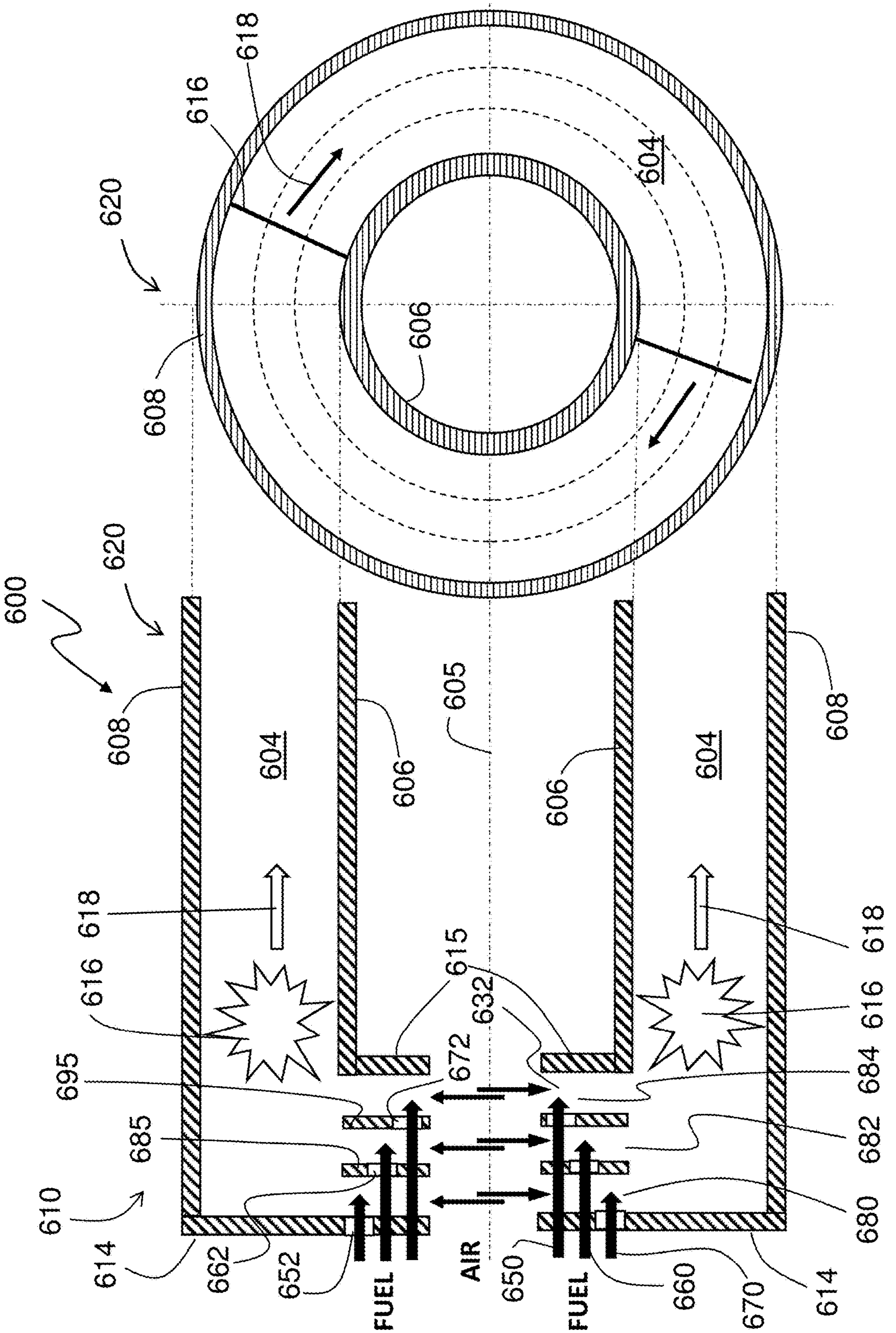
AIR
FUEL
FUEL

— FIG. 6 —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618
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660
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684
685
695
FUEL
AIR
FUEL

FIG. 7

ROTATING DETONATION COMBUSTOR WITH DISCRETE DETONATION ANNULI

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a divisional of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 16/267,473 filed on Feb. 5, 2019, the contents of which are hereby incorporated by reference in their entirety.

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0002] The present disclosure relates generally to the field of gas turbine engines and, more particularly, to rotating detonation combustors with discrete detonation annuli.

BACKGROUND

[0003] Some conventional turbo machines, such as gas turbine systems, are utilized to generate electrical power or to provide propulsion for aircraft. In general, gas turbine systems include a compressor, a combustor, and a turbine. Air may be drawn into a compressor, via its inlet end, where the air is compressed by passing through multiple stages of rotating blades and stationary nozzles. The compressed air is mixed with fuel and burned in a combustor, and the resulting combustion products (hot gases) are directed to a turbine to convert the thermal and kinetic energy into work.

[0004] Rotating detonation combustors, which are currently the subject of considerable worldwide research, are believed to offer an efficiency benefit over pulse detonation combustors and conventional deflagrative combustors. The combustion process begins when a fuel/oxidizer (e.g., air) mixture in a tube or pipe structure is ignited via a spark or another suitable ignition source to generate a compression wave. The compression wave is followed by a chemical reaction that transitions the compression wave to a detonation wave. The detonation wave travels circumferentially and axially through the combustion chamber defined by the tube. As air and fuel are fed into the combustion chamber, they are consumed by the detonation wave. As the detonation wave consumes air and fuel, combustion products traveling along the combustion chamber accelerate and are discharged from the combustion chamber.

[0005] Specifically, as shown in FIG. **1**, a rotating detonation combustor **2** includes an inner wall **6** and an outer wall **8** that together define an annular passage **4**. The combustor **2** has an inlet end **10** defined by a forward wall **14** and into which the compressed air from the compressor (not shown) is introduced for mixing with fuel. Once ignited at the detonation front **16**, the fuel and air mixture **12** produces one or more self-sustaining detonation waves that travel in a circumferential direction **15** as an oblique shock wave **18** through the annular passage **4** (i.e., around a longitudinal axis of the combustor **2**) and that provide a high-pressure region **16** proximate to the detonation front **16**. As the waves **18** travel through the annulus **4**, the incoming reactant fill **13** is consumed, which helps to push the combustion products **22** from the annular passage **4**. The combustion products **22** exit the combustor **2**, via the outlet end **20**, for delivery to the turbine (not shown).

[0006] The combustion products **22** flow through a fluid flow path in a turbine, which is defined between a plurality of rotating blades and a plurality of stationary nozzles disposed between the rotating blades, such that each set of rotating blades and each corresponding set of stationary nozzles defines a turbine stage. Typically, the rotation of the turbine blades also causes rotation of the compressor blades, which are coupled to the rotor.

[0007] In the development of rotating detonation combustors, the paradigm has been to use a common annulus for the detonation of the fuel/air mixture and the transmission of a single shock wave. However, inadequate mixing can lead to inefficient performance, thereby degrading the benefits of the rotating detonation combustor. Additionally, when detonation occurs within a single annulus, the volumetric heat release associated with the detonation operation is concentrated, which can lead to thermomechanical design challenges.

SUMMARY

[0008] The present disclosure is directed to a rotating detonation combustor. The rotating detonation combustor includes a forward wall, a radially inner wall, and a radially outer wall. The forward wall is disposed at an inlet end of the rotating detonation combustor. The radially inner wall surrounds a longitudinal axis and extends downstream from the forward wall to an outlet end of the rotating detonation combustor. The radially outer wall extends downstream from the forward wall to the outlet end and surrounds the radially inner wall to define at least one annular plenum between the radially inner wall and the radially outer wall. At least one partition is proximate to the inlet end and defines at least two mixing zones. A plurality of oxidizer inlets and a plurality of fuel inlets are disposed at the inlet end in fluid communication with the at least two mixing zones.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0009] The specification, directed to one of ordinary skill in the art, sets forth a full and enabling disclosure of the present system and method, including the best mode of using the same. The specification refers to the appended figures, in which:

[0010] FIG. **1** is schematic illustration of a rotating detonation combustor, according to conventional practice;

[0011] FIG. **2** is schematic cross-section of a rotating detonation combustor, according to one aspect of the present rotating detonation combustor;

[0012] FIG. **3** is a schematic depiction of a cross-section and an end view of a first exemplary rotating detonation combustor in which the oxidizer is introduced in an axial direction into two discrete annuli, according to a first aspect of the present disclosure;

[0013] FIG. **4** is a schematic depiction of a cross-section and an end view of a second exemplary rotating detonation combustor in which the oxidizer is introduced in an axial direction into three discrete annuli, according to a second aspect of the present disclosure;

[0014] FIG. **5** is a schematic depiction of a cross-section and an end view of a third exemplary rotating detonation combustor in which the oxidizer is introduced in an axial direction into three discrete annuli at an inlet end of the rotating detonation combustor, according to a third aspect of the present disclosure;

[0015] FIG. **6** is a schematic depiction of a cross-section and an end view of a fourth exemplary rotating detonation combustor in which the oxidizer is introduced in a radial direction into three discrete flow passages that direct flow into three discrete annuli, according to a fourth aspect of the present disclosure; and

[0016] FIG. **7** is a schematic depiction of a cross-section and an end view of a fifth exemplary rotating detonation combustor in which the oxidizer is introduced in a radial direction into three discrete flow passages at an inlet end of the rotating detonation combustor, according to a fifth aspect of the present disclosure.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0017] Reference will now be made in detail to various embodiments of the present disclosure, one or more examples of which are illustrated in the accompanying drawings. The detailed description uses numerical and letter designations to refer to features in the drawings. Like or similar designations in the drawings and description have been used to refer to like or similar parts of the disclosure.

[0018] To clearly describe the current rotating detonation combustor with discrete detonation annuli, certain terminology will be used to refer to and describe relevant machine components within the scope of this disclosure. To the extent possible, common industry terminology will be used and employed in a manner consistent with the accepted meaning of the terms. Unless otherwise stated, such terminology should be given a broad interpretation consistent with the context of the present application and the scope of the appended claims. Those of ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that often a particular component may be referred to using several different or overlapping terms. What may be described herein as being a single part may include and be referenced in another context as consisting of multiple components. Alternatively, what may be described herein as including multiple components may be referred to elsewhere as a single integrated part.

[0019] In addition, several descriptive terms may be used regularly herein, as described below. The terms "first", "second", and "third" may be used interchangeably to distinguish one component from another and are not intended to signify location or importance of the individual components.

[0020] As used herein, "downstream" and "upstream" are terms that indicate a direction relative to the flow of a fluid, such as the working fluid through the turbine engine. The term "downstream" corresponds to the direction of flow of the fluid, and the term "upstream" refers to the direction opposite to the flow (i.e., the direction from which the fluid flows). The terms "forward" and "aft," without any further specificity, refer to relative position, with "forward" being used to describe components or surfaces located toward the front (or compressor) end of the engine or toward the inlet end of the combustor, and "aft" being used to describe components located toward the rearward (or turbine) end of the engine or toward the outlet end of the combustor. The term "inner" is used to describe components in proximity to the turbine shaft or longitudinal axis of the combustor, while the term "outer" is used to describe components distal to the turbine shaft or longitudinal axis of the combustor.

[0021] It is often required to describe parts that are at differing radial, axial and/or circumferential positions. As shown in FIG. **2**, the "A" axis represents an axial orientation. As used herein, the terms "axial" and/or "axially" refer to the relative position/direction of objects along axis A, which is substantially parallel with the axis of rotation of the gas turbine system. As further used herein, the terms "radial" and/or "radially" refer to the relative position or direction of objects along an axis "R", which intersects axis A at only one location. In some embodiments, axis R is substantially perpendicular to axis A. Finally, the term "circumferential" refers to movement or position around axis A (e.g., axis "C"). The term "circumferential" may refer to a dimension extending around a center of a respective object (e.g., a rotor).

[0022] The terminology used herein is for the purpose of describing particular embodiments only and is not intended to be limiting. As used herein, the singular forms "a", "an" and "the" are intended to include the plural forms as well, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise. It will be further understood that the terms "comprises" and/or "comprising," when used in this specification, specify the presence of stated features, integers, steps, operations, elements, and/or components, but do not preclude the presence or addition of one or more other features, integers, steps, operations, elements, components, and/or groups thereof.

[0023] Each example is provided by way of explanation, not limitation. In fact, it will be apparent to those skilled in the art that modifications and variations can be made without departing from the scope or spirit thereof. For instance, features illustrated or described as part of one embodiment may be used on another embodiment to yield a still further embodiment. Thus, it is intended that the present disclosure covers such modifications and variations as come within the scope of the appended claims and their equivalents.

[0024] Although exemplary embodiments of the present disclosure will be described generally in the context of rotating detonation combustors for use in aircraft propulsion for purposes of illustration, one of ordinary skill in the art will readily appreciate that embodiments of the present disclosure may be applied to land-based power-generating gas turbines as well.

[0025] Referring now to the drawings, FIG. **2** illustrates a side view of a rotating detonation combustor **100**, according to various embodiments disclosed herein. The combustor **100** includes a combustion tube **102** extending between an inlet end **110** and an outlet end **120**. The combustion tube **102** includes an inner wall **106** and an outer wall **108** radially spaced from, and circumferentially surrounding, the inner wall **106** to define an annular passage **104** therebetween.

[0026] In the present embodiments, the annular passage (e.g., **104**) is symmetrical about a centerline **105**, or longitudinal axis, of the combustor **100**, which may be co-linear with the engine centerline. In this context, the term "annular" is not limited to a passage defining a circular cross-section. Rather, the term "annular" broadly encompasses any unobstructed passage of any shape that circumferentially surrounds the centerline **105** and that defines a passage through which a fluid (e.g., combustion products) may flow.

[0027] The inlet end **110** of the combustor **100** includes a forward wall **114**, while the outlet end **120** includes an aft wall **124**. The forward wall **114** defines the upstream boundary of the annular passage **104**, while the aft wall **124** defines the downstream boundary of the annular passage **104**.

[0028] A plenum **130** is fluidly coupled to the combustor tube **102** upstream of a fluid inlet **132** for delivering air, oxidizer, or other fluids to the annular passage **104**. In the illustrated embodiment, the plenum **130** is an air plenum, which receives air from an air supply (such as a compressor, not shown). However, the plenum **130** may instead deliver a mixture of fuel and air into the annular passage **104**.

[0029] The plenum **130** is defined within a first sidewall **134** (that defines a radially outer boundary of the plenum **130**), a second sidewall **136** (that defines a radially inner boundary of the plenum **130**), and a plenum end wall **137** (that defines an axially aft boundary of the plenum **130**). Each of the first and second sidewalls **134**, **136** extend in an axial, or substantially axial, direction. A curved transition portion **135** extends between the first sidewall **134** and the forward wall **114** of the combustor tube **102**. The plenum end wall **137** extends between the second sidewall **136** and the inner wall **106** of the combustor tube **102**. Specifically, the plenum end wall **137** defines a curved surface extending from the second sidewall **136**, which includes a concave portion that opens in the direction of fluid flow into the plenum **130**. The curved surface of the plenum end wall **136** forms a generally radial transition to the fluid inlet **132** at the inlet end **110** of the combustor tube **102**.

[0030] Fuel injectors **140** may be disposed in a circumferential array through the forward wall **114** positioned at a radial location corresponding to the fluid inlet **132**. The fuel injectors **140** may be disposed in the forward wall **114** that is axially forward of the inner wall **106**. The fuel injectors **140** disperse fuel from a fuel supply **144**, via fuel inlets **142**, into the inlet air, as the inlet air flows in a radially outward direction through the fluid inlet **132** and into the combustor annular passage **104**.

[0031] In the illustrated embodiment, the fuel inlets **142** disperse fuel in an axial direction, orthogonal to the direction of flow of the inlet air, which flows into the annulus **104** in a radially outward direction. A fuel line **146** fluidly couples the fuel supply **144** to the one or more fuel injectors **140** for deliver fuel to the one or more fuel injectors **140**. A first fuel control valve **148** is fluidly coupled to the fuel line **146**.

[0032] In the exemplary combustors described herein, the air and fuel are introduced in discrete mixing zones that are defined between the inner and outer walls (e.g., **106**, **108**) and one or more partitions. In some embodiments (such as those shown in FIGS. **3** and **4**), the partition extends along the axial length of the combustor from the forward wall to the combustor outlet. In other embodiments (such as that shown in FIGS. **5** and **7**), the partitions are disposed at the forward end of the combustor, whether the combustor is configured for axial air entry (as in FIG. **5**) or radial air entry (as in FIG. **7**). FIG. **6** illustrates an embodiment of a combustor with radial air entry, in which each partition has a divider that extends in a radial direction and a plenum wall that is coupled to the divider and that extends in an axial direction to the combustor outlet.

[0033] FIG. **3** illustrates a rotating detonation combustor **200**, according to a first aspect of the present disclosure. The rotating detonation combustor **200** includes an inner wall **206** and an outer wall **208** that is radially outward of, and that circumferentially surrounds, the inner wall **206**. The inner wall **206** and the outer wall **208** are concentric about a common longitudinal axis **205**. The inner wall **206** is coupled to the outer wall **208**, via a forward wall **214**, at an inlet end **210** of the combustor **200**.

[0034] An intermediate plenum wall **255** is disposed radially between the inner wall **206** and the outer wall **208**, thereby producing a first annular plenum **203** between the inner wall **206** and the plenum wall **255** and a second annular plenum **204** between the plenum wall **255** and the outer wall **208**. In the illustrated embodiment, the intermediate plenum wall **255** extends over the axial length (or a majority of the axial length) of the combustor **200**, causing the plenums **203**, **204** to be fluidly isolated from one another. In this configuration, the plenum wall **255** functions as a partition that defines the annular plenums **203**, **204** and that defines separate mixing zones at the forward end of the combustor **200**.

[0035] In the illustrated embodiment, the plenum wall **255** is uniformly spaced between the radially inner wall **206** and the radially outer wall **208**. In other embodiments (not shown), the plenum wall **255** may be disposed non-uniformly between the radially inner wall **206** and the radially outer wall **208**. That is, the plenum wall **255** may be closer to the radially inner wall **206** or to the radially outer wall **208** to produce plenums **203**, **204** of different sizes.

[0036] Oxidizer (e.g., air from a compressor, not shown) is directed in an axial direction through air inlets **232** in the forward wall **214**. Fuel circuits **250**, **260** are axially spaced to deliver fuel into the oxidizer flowing into the plenums **204**, **203**, respectively. In the radially inward plenum **203**, the fuel is introduced via fuel inlets **252** defined through the inner wall **206** and/or the plenum wall **255**. In the radially outward plenum **204**, the fuel is introduced via fuel inlets **262** defined through the plenum wall **255** and/or the outer wall **208**.

[0037] Although the arrows indicate fuel flow into each plenum in a radially inward and a radially outward direction, it should be understood that the fuel flow into each plenum **203**, **204** may be delivered in a single direction (radially inward or radially outward), and there is no requirement that both plenums **203**, **204** receive fuel in the same direction of flow. Moreover, the fuel flow into one or both plenums **203**, **204** may occur at a tangential angle relative to the axial flow of oxidizer through the forward wall **214**.

[0038] In the radially inward plenum **203**, fuel and oxidizer ignite at one or more detonation fronts **216** and produce one or more detonation waves **218** that travel through the annular plenum **203** to the outlet end **220** of the combustor **200**. In the radially outward plenum **204**, the fuel and oxidizer ignite at a detonation front **226** and produce one or more detonation waves **228** that travel through the annular plenum **204** to the outlet end **220** of the combustor **200**.

[0039] In the illustrated embodiment, the detonation waves **218** in the radially inward plenum **203** are co-rotating relative to one another, meaning that the detonation waves **218** are travelling in the same circumferential direction. Similarly, the detonation waves **228** in the radially outward plenum **204** are co-rotating with one another. However, in the exemplary embodiment, the detonation waves **218** rotate in a first direction (e.g., clockwise), while the detonation waves **228** rotate in a second direction opposite the first direction (e.g., counterclockwise).

[0040] Alternately, the detonation waves **218** may be counter-rotating within the radially inward plenum **203** and/or the detonation waves **228** may be counter-rotating within the radially outward plenum **204**. In another embodiment, the detonation waves **218** and the detonation waves **228** may rotate in a single direction (i.e., clockwise or counter-clockwise).

[0041] It should be understood that the fuel may be supplied independently to the combustor from the fuel circuits **250**, **260**. That is, the second fuel circuit **260** may deliver fuel to the radially inward plenum **203**, while the first fuel circuit **250** remains idle. Alternately, the first fuel circuit **250** may deliver fuel to the radially outward plenum **204**, while the second fuel circuit **260** remains idle. In some circumstances, it may be desirable to provide different amounts of fuel through the fuel circuits **250**, **260**. By providing greater flexibility over the delivery of fuel to the respective plenums **203**, **204**, a greater degree of operational freedom is achieved (e.g., at start-up, loading, and turndown).

[0042] FIG. **4** illustrates a rotating detonation combustor **300**, according to a second aspect of the present disclosure. The rotating detonation combustor **300** includes an inner wall **306** and an outer wall **308** that is radially outward of, and that circumferentially surrounds, the inner wall **306**. The inner wall **306** and the outer wall **308** are concentric about a common longitudinal axis **305**. The inner wall **306** is coupled to the outer wall **308**, via a forward wall **314**, at an inlet end **310** of the combustor **300**.

[0043] The combustor **300** includes a first intermediate plenum wall **355** and a second intermediate plenum wall **365**, which are positioned in a concentric relationship between the inner wall **306** and the outer wall **308**. The first intermediate plenum wall **355** is disposed radially outward of the radially inner wall **306**, thereby producing a first annular plenum **302** between the inner wall **306** and the first plenum wall **355**. The second intermediate plenum wall **365** is disposed radially inward of the radially outer wall **308** and radially outward of the first plenum wall **355**, thereby producing a second annular plenum **303** between the first plenum wall **365** and the second plenum wall **365** and a third annular plenum **304** between the second plenum wall **365** and the radially outer wall **308**. In the illustrated embodiment, the intermediate plenum walls **355**, **365** extend over the axial length (or a majority of the axial length) of the combustor **300** and function as partitions within the combustor **300**, causing the plenums **302**, **303**, **304** and the associated mixing zones to be fluidly isolated from one another.

[0044] In the illustrated embodiment, the plenum walls **355**, **365** are uniformly spaced between the radially inner wall **306** and the radially outer wall **308**, although such spacing is not required.

[0045] Oxidizer (e.g., air from a compressor, not shown) is directed in an axial direction through air inlets **332** in the forward wall **314**. Fuel circuits **350**, **360**, **370** are axially spaced to deliver fuel into the oxidizer flowing into the plenums **304**, **303**, **302**, respectively. In the radially inward plenum **302**, the fuel is introduced via fuel inlets **372** defined through the inner wall **306** and/or the first plenum wall **355**. In the radially intermediate (central) plenum **303**, the fuel is introduced via fuel inlets **362** defined through the first plenum wall **355** and/or the second plenum wall **365**. In the radially outward plenum **304**, the fuel is introduced via fuel inlets **352** defined through the second plenum wall **365** and/or the outer wall **308**.

[0046] Although the arrows indicate fuel flow into each plenum in a radially inward and a radially outward direction, it should be understood that the fuel flow into each plenum **302**, **303**, **304** may be delivered in a single direction (radially inward or radially outward), and there is no requirement that all plenums **302**, **303**, **304** receive fuel in the same direction of flow. Moreover, the fuel flow into one, some, or all of plenums **302**, **303**, **304** may occur at a tangential angle relative to the axial flow of oxidizer through the forward wall **314**.

[0047] In the radially inward plenum **302**, fuel and oxidizer ignite at one or more detonation fronts **316** and produce one or more detonation waves **318** that travel through the annular plenum **302** to the outlet end **320** of the combustor **300**. In the radially intermediate (center) plenum **303**, fuel and oxidizer ignite at one or more detonation fronts **326** and produce one or more detonation waves **328** that travel through the annular plenum **303** to the outlet end **320** of the combustor **300**. In the radially outward plenum **304**, the fuel and oxidizer ignite at a detonation front **336** and produce one or more detonation waves **338** that travel through the annular plenum **304** to the outlet end **320** of the combustor **300**.

[0048] In the illustrated embodiment, the detonation waves **318** in the radially inward plenum **302** are co-rotating relative to one another, meaning that the detonation waves **318** are travelling in the same circumferential direction. Similarly, the detonation waves **328** in the radially intermediate plenum **303** are co-rotating with one another; and the detonation waves **338** in the radially outer plenum **304** are co-rotating with one another. However, in the exemplary embodiment, the detonation waves **318**, **338** rotate in a first direction (e.g., clockwise), while the detonation waves **328** rotate in a second direction opposite the first direction (e.g., counterclockwise).

[0049] Alternately, the detonation waves **318** may be counter-rotating within the radially inward plenum **302**, the detonation waves **328** may be counter-rotating within the radially intermediate plenum **303**, and/or the detonation waves **338** may be counter-rotating within the radially outward plenum **304**. In another embodiment, all the detonation waves **318**, **328**, **338** may rotate in a single direction.

[0050] It should be understood that the fuel may be supplied independently to the combustor **300** from the fuel circuits **350**, **360**, **370**. That is, one or more fuel circuits may deliver fuel to a respective fuel plenum, while one or more other fuel circuits remain idle. In some circumstances, it may be desirable to provide different amounts of fuel through the fuel circuits **350**, **360**, **370**. By providing greater flexibility over the delivery of fuel to the respective plenums **302**, **303**, **304**, an even greater degree of operational freedom is achieved (e.g., at start-up, loading, and turndown).

[0051] FIG. **5** illustrates a rotating detonation combustor **400**, according to a third aspect of the present disclosure. The rotating detonation combustor **400** includes an inner wall **406** and an outer wall **408** that is radially outward of, and that circumferentially surrounds, the inner wall **406**. The inner wall **406** and the outer wall **408** are concentric about a common longitudinal axis **405**. The inner wall **406** is coupled to the outer wall **408**, via a forward wall **414**, at an inlet end **410** of the combustor **400**.

[0052] The combustor **400** includes a first intermediate divider **485** and a second intermediate divider **495**, which are positioned in a concentric relationship between the inner wall **406** and the outer wall **408** at the inlet end **410** of the combustor **400**. The first intermediate divider **485** is disposed radially outward of the radially inner wall **406**, thereby producing a first annular mixing zone **480** between the inner wall **406** and the first intermediate divider **485**. The second intermediate divider **495** is disposed radially inward of the radially outer wall **408** and radially outward of the first intermediate divider **485**, thereby producing a second annular mixing zone **482** between the first divider **485** and the second divider **495** and a third annular mixing zone **484** between the second divider **495** and the radially outer wall **408**. In the illustrated embodiment, the intermediate dividers **485**, **495** extend over only an upstream portion of the axial length of the combustor **400**. These partitions (that is, dividers **485**, **495**) cause the fuel and oxidizer to be mixed in separate mixing zones **482**, **484**, although detonation of the fuel/oxidizer mixtures occurs in a common plenum **404** downstream of the dividers **485**, **495**.

[0053] In the illustrated embodiment, the dividers **485**, **495** are uniformly spaced between the radially inner wall **406** and the radially outer wall **408**, although such spacing is not required.

[0054] Oxidizer (e.g., air from a compressor, not shown) is directed in an axial direction through air inlets **432** in the forward wall **414**. Fuel circuits **450**, **460**, **470** are axially spaced to deliver fuel into the oxidizer flowing into the mixing zones **484**, **482**, **480**, respectively. In the radially inward mixing zone **480**, the fuel is introduced via fuel inlets **472** defined through the inner wall **406** and/or the first divider **485**. In the radially intermediate (central) mixing one **482**, the fuel is introduced via fuel inlets **462** defined through the first divider **485** and/or the second divider **495**. In the radially outward mixing zone **484**, the fuel is introduced via fuel inlets **452** defined through the second divider **495** and/or the outer wall **408**.

[0055] Although the arrows indicate fuel flow into each plenum in a radially inward and a radially outward direction, it should be understood that the fuel flow into each mixing zone **480**, **482**, **484** may be delivered in a single direction (radially inward or radially outward), and there is no requirement that all mixing zones **480**, **482**, **484** receive fuel in the same direction of flow. Moreover, the fuel flow into one, some, or all of mixing zones **480**, **482**, **484** may occur at a tangential angle relative to the axial flow of oxidizer through the forward wall **414**.

[0056] After mixing in the mixing zones **480**, **482**, **484**, the fuel and oxidizer ignite at one or more detonation fronts **416** within an annular plenum **404** defined between the inner wall **406** and the outer wall **408**. The resulting one or more detonation waves **418** travel through the annular plenum **406** to the outlet end **420** of the combustor **400**.

[0057] In the illustrated embodiment, the detonation waves **418** in the plenum **402** are counter-rotating relative to one another, meaning that the detonation waves **418** are travelling in the opposite circumferential directions. Alternately, the detonation waves **418** may be co-rotating within the plenum **402**.

[0058] It should be understood that the fuel may be supplied independently to the combustor **400** from the fuel circuits **450**, **460**, **470**. That is, one or more fuel circuits may deliver fuel to a respective mixing zone, while one or more other fuel circuits remain idle. In some circumstances, it may be desirable to provide different amounts of fuel through the fuel circuits **450**, **460**, **470**. By providing greater flexibility over the delivery of fuel to the respective mixing zones **480**, **482**, **484**, an even greater degree of operational freedom is achieved (e.g., at start-up, loading, and turndown).

[0059] FIG. **6** illustrates a rotating detonation combustor **500**, according to a fourth aspect of the present disclosure. The rotating detonation combustor **500** is configured to receive a flow of oxidizer in a radial direction and a flow of fuel in an axial direction. The rotating detonation combustor **500** includes a first inlet wall **514** and a second inlet wall **515** spaced axially downstream of the first inlet wall **514**, which define an inlet end **510** of the combustor **500**. The second inlet wall **515** is coupled to an inner wall **506**, and the first inlet wall **514** is coupled to an outer wall **508** that is radially outward of, and that circumferentially surrounds, the inner wall **506**. The inner wall **506** and the outer wall **508** are concentric about a common longitudinal axis **505**.

[0060] In this embodiment, the combustor **500** includes one or more partitions having a radially oriented segment (a "divider") coupled to an axially oriented segment (a "plenum wall"). Specifically, the combustor **500** includes a first divider **554** and a second divider **564** axially downstream of the first divider **554**, both of which are disposed between the first inlet wall **514** and the second inlet wall **515**. The combustor **500** further includes a first intermediate plenum wall **555** and a second intermediate plenum wall **565**, which are positioned in a concentric relationship between the inner wall **506** and the outer wall **508**. The first intermediate plenum wall **555** is coupled to the first divider **554**, and the second intermediate plenum wall **565** is coupled to the second divider **564**, thereby partitioning the flow path of the fuel/oxidizer from the inlet end **510** to the outlet end **520**.

[0061] The first intermediate plenum wall **565** is disposed radially outward of the radially inner wall **506**, thereby producing a first annular plenum **502** between the inner wall **506** and the first plenum wall **565**. The second intermediate plenum wall **555** is disposed radially inward of the radially outer wall **508** and radially outward of the first plenum wall **565**, thereby producing a second annular plenum **503** between the first plenum wall **565** and the second plenum wall **555** and a third annular plenum **504** between the second plenum wall **555** and the radially outer wall **508**. In the illustrated embodiment, the intermediate plenum walls **555**, **565** extend over the axial length (or a majority of the axial length) of the combustor **500**, causing the plenums **502**, **503**, **504** to be fluidly isolated from one another.

[0062] In the illustrated embodiment, the plenum walls **555**, **565** are non-uniformly spaced between the radially inner wall **506** and the radially outer wall **508**. Specifically, the plenum walls **555**, **565** are disposed in relatively close proximity to the radially outer wall **508** and the radially inner wall **506**, respectively, causing the intermediate plenum **503** to be larger than the plenums **502**, **504**. Other spacing of the plenum walls **555**, **565** (including uniform spacing) may instead be used, as needs dictate.

[0063] Oxidizer (e.g., air from a compressor, not shown) is directed in a radially outward direction from the longitudinal axis **505** through air inlets **532**. Fuel circuits **550**, **560**, **570** are radially spaced to deliver fuel into the oxidizer flowing into the inlet mixing zones **584**, **582**, **580**, respectively. In the axially aft mixing zone **580**, the fuel is introduced via fuel inlets **552** defined through the second divider **564** (as shown) and/or the second inlet wall **515** (not shown). In the axially intermediate (central) mixing zone **582**, the fuel is introduced via fuel inlets **562** defined through the first divider **554** (as shown) and/or the second divider **564** (not shown). In the axially forward mixing zone **584**, the fuel is introduced via fuel inlets **572** defined through the first inlet wall **514** (as shown) and/or the first divider **554** (not shown).

[0064] Although the arrows indicate fuel flow into each plenum in a single axial direction, it should be understood that the fuel flow into each mixing zone **580**, **582**, **584** may be delivered in both upstream and downstream axial directions, and there is no requirement that all mixing zones **580**, **582**, **584** receive fuel in the same direction of flow. Moreover, the fuel flow into one, some, or all of mixing zones **580**, **582**, **584** may occur at a tangential angle relative to the radial flow of oxidizer through the air inlets **532**.

[0065] The fuel/oxidizer mixture from the axially aft mixing zone **580** flows into the radially inward plenum **502**. In the radially inward plenum **502**, fuel and oxidizer ignite at one or more detonation fronts **516** and produce one or more detonation waves **518** that travel through the annular plenum **502** to the outlet end **520** of the combustor **500**.

[0066] The fuel/oxidizer mixture from the axially intermediate mixing zone **582** flows into the radially intermediate plenum **503**. In the radially intermediate (center) plenum **503**, fuel and oxidizer ignite at one or more detonation fronts **526** and produce one or more detonation waves **528** that travel through the annular plenum **503** to the outlet end **520** of the combustor **500**.

[0067] The fuel/oxidizer mixture from the axially forward mixing zone **584** flows into the radially outward plenum **504**. In the radially outward plenum **504**, the fuel and oxidizer ignite at a detonation front **536** and produce one or more detonation waves **538** that travel through the annular plenum **504** to the outlet end **520** of the combustor **500**.

[0068] In the illustrated embodiment, the detonation waves **518** in the radially inward plenum **502** are counter-rotating relative to one another, meaning that the detonation waves **518** are travelling in the opposite circumferential direction. Similarly, the detonation waves **528** in the radially intermediate plenum **503** are counter-rotating with one another; and the detonation waves **538** in the radially outer plenum **304** are counter-rotating with one another.

[0069] Alternately, the detonation waves **518** may be co-rotating within the radially inward plenum **502**, the detonation waves **528** may be co-rotating within the radially intermediate plenum **503**, and/or the detonation waves **538** may be co-rotating within the radially outward plenum **504**. In another embodiment, the detonation waves **518**, **528**, **538** may rotate in opposite directions from plenum to plenum.

[0070] It should be understood that the fuel may be supplied independently to the combustor **500** from the fuel circuits **550**, **560**, **570**. That is, one or more fuel circuits may deliver fuel to a respective fuel plenum, while one or more other fuel circuits remain idle. In some circumstances, it may be desirable to provide different amounts of fuel through the fuel circuits **550**, **560**, **570**. By providing greater flexibility over the delivery of fuel to the respective plenums **502**, **503**, **504**, an even greater degree of operational freedom is achieved (e.g., at start-up, loading, and turndown).

[0071] As shown in FIG. **6**, the divider walls **554**, **564** and the associated plenum walls **555**, **565** may be arranged to define plenums **502**, **503**, **504** of different sizes. In some instances, for example, it may be desirable that the intermediate plenum **503** define a larger area than the plenums **502**, **504** immediately adjacent the inner wall **506** and the outer wall **508**, respectively.

[0072] FIG. **7** illustrates a rotating detonation combustor **600**, according to a fifth aspect of the present disclosure. The rotating detonation combustor **600** is configured to receive a flow of oxidizer in a radial direction and a flow of fuel in an axial direction. The rotating detonation combustor **600** includes a first inlet wall **614** and a second inlet wall **615** spaced axially downstream of the first inlet wall **614**, which define an inlet end **610** of the combustor **600**. The second inlet wall **615** is coupled to an inner wall **606**, and the first inlet wall **614** is coupled to an outer wall **608** that is radially outward of, and that circumferentially surrounds, the inner wall **606**. The inner wall **606** and the outer wall **608** are concentric about a common longitudinal axis **605**.

[0073] The combustor **606** includes a first divider **685** and a second divider **695** axially downstream of the first divider **685**, both of which are disposed between the first inlet wall **614** and the second inlet wall **615**. The first divider **685** and the second divider **695** extend from the air inlets **632** to the plane defined by the inner wall **606**, thereby partitioning the inlet end **610** into separate mixing zones **680**, **682**, **684**.

[0074] In the illustrated embodiment, the dividers **685**, **695** are uniformly spaced between the first inlet wall **614** and the second inlet wall **615**, although such spacing is not required.

[0075] Oxidizer (e.g., air from a compressor, not shown) is directed in a direction radially outward from the longitudinal axis **605** through air inlets **632**. Fuel circuits **650**, **660**, **670** are radially spaced to deliver fuel into the oxidizer flowing into the inlet mixing zones **680**, **682**, **684**, respectively. In the axially forward mixing zone **680**, the fuel is introduced via fuel inlets **652** defined through the first inlet wall **614** (as shown) and/or the first divider **685** (not shown). In the axially intermediate (central) mixing zone **682**, the fuel is introduced via fuel inlets **662** defined through the first divider **685** (as shown) and/or the second divider **695** (not shown). In the axially aft mixing zone **684**, the fuel is introduced via fuel inlets **672** defined through the second divider **695** (as shown) and/or the second inlet wall **615** (not shown).

[0076] Although the arrows indicate fuel flow into each plenum in a single axial direction, it should be understood that the fuel flow into each mixing zone **680**, **682**, **684** may be delivered in both upstream and downstream axial directions, and there is no requirement that all mixing zones **680**, **682**, **684** receive fuel in the same direction of flow. Moreover, the fuel flow into one, some, or all of mixing zones **680**, **682**, **684** may occur at a tangential angle relative to the radial flow of oxidizer through the air inlets **632**.

[0077] The fuel/oxidizer mixtures from the axially forward mixing zone **680**, the axially intermediate mixing zone **682**, and the axially aft mixing zone **684** flow into a common annular plenum **604** defined between the inner wall **606** and the outer wall **608**. In the common annular plenum **604**, the fuel and oxidizer ignite at one or more detonation fronts **616** and produce one or more detonation waves **618** that travel through the annular plenum **604** to the outlet end **620** of the combustor **600**.

[0078] In the illustrated embodiment, the detonation waves **618** in the common plenum **604** are co-rotating relative to one another, meaning that the detonation waves **618** are travelling in the same circumferential direction. Alternately, the detonation waves **618** may be counter-rotating within the common plenum **604**.

[0079] It should be understood that the fuel may be supplied independently to the combustor **600** from the fuel circuits **650**, **660**, **670**. That is, one or more fuel circuits may deliver fuel to a respective mixing zone, while one or more other fuel circuits remain idle. In some circumstances, it may be desirable to provide different amounts of fuel through the fuel circuits **650**, **660**, **670**. By providing greater flexibility over the delivery of fuel to the respective mixing zones **680**, **682**, **684**, an even greater degree of operational freedom is achieved (e.g., at start-up, loading, and turn-down).

[0080] Exemplary embodiments of the rotating detonation combustor with discrete detonation annuli are described above in detail. The rotating detonation combustors described herein are not limited to the specific embodiments described herein, but rather, components of the rotating detonation combustor may be utilized independently and separately from other components described herein.

[0081] While the technical advancements have been described in terms of various specific embodiments, those skilled in the art will recognize that the technical advancements can be practiced with modification within the spirit and scope of the claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A rotating detonation combustor comprising:

a forward wall disposed at an inlet end of the rotating detonation combustor;

a radially inner wall surrounding a longitudinal axis and extending downstream from the forward wall to an outlet end of the rotating detonation combustor;

a radially outer wall extending downstream from the forward wall to the outlet end, the radially outer wall surrounding the radially inner wall to define at least one plenum between the radially inner wall and the radially outer wall;

one or more intermediate dividers proximate to the inlet end and defining at least two mixing zones, wherein the one or more intermediate dividers are disposed radially between the radially inner wall and the radially outer wall, and the one or more intermediate dividers extend axially from the forward wall at only a forward end of the rotating detonation combustor such that the at least one plenum is downstream of the one or more intermediate dividers;

a plurality of oxidizer inlets disposed at the inlet end and in fluid communication with the at least two mixing zones; and

a plurality of fuel inlets disposed at the inlet end and in fluid communication with the at least two mixing zones.

2. The rotating detonation combustor of claim **1**, wherein the rotating detonation combustor is configured to produce one or more detonation waves in the at least one plenum between the radially inner wall and the radially outer wall.

3. The rotating detonation combustor of claim **1**, wherein the plurality of oxidizer inlets is oriented to direct oxidizer in an axial direction.

4. The rotating detonation combustor of claim **3**, wherein the plurality of oxidizer inlets is disposed in the forward wall.

5. The rotating detonation combustor of claim **1**, wherein the plurality of fuel inlets is oriented to direct fuel in a radial direction.

6. The rotating detonation combustor of claim **5**, wherein the plurality of fuel inlets includes at least one fuel inlet disposed in each of the radially inner wall and the radially outer wall and in fluid communication with the at least two mixing zones.

7. The rotating detonation combustor of claim **5**, wherein the plurality of fuel inlets includes one or more fuel inlets disposed in the one or more intermediate dividers.

8. The rotating detonation combustor of claim **1**, wherein the one or more intermediate dividers include a first intermediate divider that is disposed radially outward of the radially inner wall and a second intermediate divider that is disposed radially between the first intermediate divider and the radially outer wall.

9. The rotating detonation combustor of claim **8**, wherein the first intermediate divider and the second intermediate divider are uniformly spaced between the radially inner wall and the radially outer wall.

10. The rotating detonation combustor of claim **8**, further comprising at least one fuel inlet disposed in each of the radially inner wall and the radially outer wall and in fluid communication with the at least two mixing zones.

11. The rotating detonation combustor of claim **10**, further comprising a first fuel inlet configured to introduce fuel into a first mixing zone of the at least two mixing zones and extending between an outer surface of the first intermediate divider and an inner surface of the first intermediate divider.

12. The rotating detonation combustor of claim **11**, further comprising a second fuel inlet configured to introduce fuel into a second mixing zone of the at least two mixing zones and extending between the inner surface of the first intermediate divider and the outer surface of the first intermediate divider.

13. The rotating detonation combustor of claim **12**, further comprising a third fuel inlet configured to introduce fuel into the second mixing zone, the third fuel inlet extending between an outer surface of the second intermediate divider and an inner surface of the second intermediate divider.

14. The rotating detonation combustor of claim **13**, wherein the third fuel inlet is axially aligned with the second fuel inlet.

15. The rotating detonation combustor of claim **13**, further comprising a fourth fuel inlet configured to introduce fuel into a third mixing zone of the at least two mixing zones, the fourth fuel inlet extending between the inner surface of the second intermediate divider and the outer surface of the second intermediate divider.

16. The rotating detonation combustor of claim **15**, wherein both the at least one fuel inlet disposed in the radially inner wall and the first fuel inlet are axially spaced from each of the at least one fuel inlet disposed in the radially outer wall, the second fuel inlet, the third fuel inlet, and the fourth fuel inlet.

17. The rotating detonation combustor of claim **15**, wherein the at least one fuel inlet disposed in the radially inner wall introduces fuel into the first mixing zone and the at least one fuel inlet disposed in the radially outer wall introduces fuel into the third mixing zone.

18. The rotating detonation combustor of claim **15**, wherein the at least one fuel inlet disposed in the radially inner wall is axially aligned with the first fuel inlet and the at least one fuel inlet disposed in the radially outer wall is axially aligned with the fourth fuel inlet.

19. The rotating detonation combustor of claim **15**, wherein the at least one fuel inlet disposed in the radially inner wall and the first fuel inlet are coupled to a first fuel circuit and the at least one fuel inlet disposed in the radially outer wall and the fourth fuel inlet are coupled to a second fuel circuit operated independently of the first fuel circuit.

20. A rotating detonation combustor comprising:

a forward wall disposed at an inlet end of the rotating detonation combustor;

a radially inner wall surrounding a longitudinal axis and extending downstream from the forward wall to an outlet end of the rotating detonation combustor;

a radially outer wall extending downstream from the forward wall to the outlet end, the radially outer wall surrounding the radially inner wall to define at least one plenum between the radially inner wall and the radially outer wall;

one or more intermediate dividers proximate to the inlet end and defining at least two mixing zones, wherein the one or more intermediate dividers are disposed radially between the radially inner wall and the radially outer wall, and the one or more intermediate dividers extend axially from the forward wall at only a forward end of the rotating detonation combustor such that the at least one plenum is downstream of the one or more intermediate dividers;

a plurality of oxidizer inlets disposed at the inlet end and in fluid communication with the at least two mixing zones, wherein the plurality of oxidizer inlets is oriented to direct oxidizer in an axial direction; and

a plurality of fuel inlets disposed at the inlet end and in fluid communication with the at least two mixing zones, wherein the plurality of fuel inlets is oriented to direct fuel in a radial direction, and

wherein the rotating detonation combustor is configured to produce one or more detonation waves in the at least one plenum between the radially inner wall and the radially outer wall.

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