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SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT OF

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VICE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS

BEFORE THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

ON

NAVY READINESS – UNDERLYING PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE USS
FITZGERALD (DDG 62) AND USS JOHN S. MCCAIN (DDG 56)

SEPTEMBER 7, 2017

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Chairman Thornberry, Chairman Wilson, Chairman Wittman, Ranking Member Bordallo, Ranking Member Courtney, and distinguished members of the subcommittees, I appreciate the opportunity to testify today.

First and foremost, I want to express our deepest regret and sadness for the recent loss of 17 members of our Navy family who served their country and their Navy with pride and honor. At the dignified return of remains last week for the ten John S. McCain Sailors, we were once again reminded of our solemn obligation for the safety of our teammates. Family members present were strong, faithful, proud and of course anxious to find out what happened, why it happened and wanted reassurance that we learn from this tragedy in order to prevent mishaps like this from occurring in the future. Just like with families of USS Fitzgerald, our immediate concern and focus was and continues to be providing full support to these families and to our crews.

I'd like to reiterate that the process of determining cause and affixing responsibility is methodical, and while it's frustrating and often difficult, all of us must resist making assumptions or arriving at conclusions in the absence of evidence. It is critical that the integrity of the ongoing investigations be protected and that the greatest degree of transparency is demonstrated in their results to the Administration, Congress and the American people.

These incidents were tragic. But in the midst of catastrophic flooding, loss of critical systems, and crew casualties, our Sailors saved shipmates and kept their ships afloat. This doesn't just happen; it's a testament to the effective training, proficiency, and discipline of the Sailors on FITZGERALD and MCCAIN.

Today I will return to many of the same themes that you heard from me in February. Our operational demands continue to grow with an undersized fleet. In short, we continue to have a supply and demand problem which is placing a heavy strain on the force. The Navy has deployed, on average, about 100 ships around the world each day, collectively steaming thousands of underway days each year, despite having the smallest battle fleet since before World War I, and significantly smaller than the Navy we had immediately after 9/11 over a decade ago.

Although warfighting capabilities of ships have dramatically increased in the last century, the size and scope of U.S. responsibilities around the world have also increased. The old adage that “quantity has a quality all its own” rings true in today’s maritime environment. And we’ve taken important steps to address this issue by stationing more forward deployed units in the Western Pacific, Arabian Sea and Europe which enables greater presence than the current fleet size could otherwise support. This allows us to deter aggression, and when necessary, defuse threats and contain conflict to prevent wider regional disruption. However, even with adding more forward deployed naval forces (FDNF), demand continues to grow, exposing these forces to the strains of persistently high operational tempo.

An often-overlooked aspect of funding readiness is that we don’t just fund readiness with dollars. We also fund it with time. Like dollars, time is a currency that must be budgeted and protected to ensure our ships are maintained, modernized, and trained to carry out the missions assigned. Persistent high operational tempo costs us time to prepare, maintain and thoroughly train our crews. Add to this mix, a lack of timely approved budgets which generate impacts on planning large events like ship maintenance and modernization yard periods and we end up piling work, time and difficult resourcing decisions on the Fleet.

Back in February, I cited funding reductions and consistent uncertainty about Congressional budget approvals as especially damaging, as they prevent us from taking steps to mitigate the burden on ships and sailors imposed by the high operational demand.

Crucially, Congress approved \$2.8B in funding in the Fiscal Year 2017 Request for Additional Appropriations that addressed the most significant readiness shortfalls in the Fleet. This helped us begin to dig out from readiness holes that resulted from repeated Continuing Resolutions and Budget Control Act (BCA) impacts. The addition of the FY17 funds enabled us to retain five deployments, fund fourteen maintenance availabilities, add needed flying hours, improve cyber security afloat and ashore, reduce gaps at sea in key operational billets and provide critical facility restoration and modernization. We have continued to build on this foundation in the Navy’s submission in the Fiscal Year 2018 President’s Budget, which adds \$3.4B in order to maintain these readiness gains and also make the Fleet whole. Our Fiscal Year 2018 requests target Fleet wholeness through investments that increase end strength, increase the numbers of people who maintain and repair our ships and aircraft, fund afloat

readiness accounts to their maximum, and purchase future platforms and capabilities needed to sustain the advantage over our adversaries.

These funds will only have the desired impact if they are approved and executed in a stable manner. While we have prioritized our maintenance and readiness dollars, the positive effects of funding do not remove this deficit overnight; they take both time and predictable resources that are adequate to sustain the upward trend. Funding at prior year levels through a Continuing Resolution not only disrupts the gains, it begins to reverse them.

As documented in various studies and reports, both from within and outside the Navy, managing these challenges is complex and we don't always get it completely right. We are constantly developing, measuring and refining our force generation methods. Naval Forces are accustomed to long and arduous hours at sea, and are accustomed to short notice high intensity demands in congested waterways, rapidly shifting mission sets and persistent threats in all theaters. The Navy remains a force that prioritizes getting the mission done in support of our Nation.

All of this, in light of recent mishaps at sea, demands we take a hard look at our processes, organizations, training, and systems to ensure that we are providing our Sailors with the necessary resources and adequate training to effectively carry out our missions. No matter how tough our operating environment, or how strained our budget, we shouldn't be and cannot be colliding with other ships and running aground. That is not about resourcing; it is about safety and it is about leadership at sea. We are shocked by these recent events, and that is why the Chief of Naval Operations has initiated a 60-day Comprehensive Review, led by Admiral Davidson, Commander United States Fleet Forces.

These reviews will include, but not limited to, trends in individual training, unit level training, development and certification of deployed forces, operational tempo and risk management, and material readiness and practical utility of navigation equipment, sensors, and combat systems. They will also focus on surface warfare training and career development, including tactical and navigational proficiency. All resources will be available for these reviews.

There are also multiple investigations into the cause of the mishaps ongoing to determine specific root causes of these two separate incidents. As stated in my opening, drawing conclusions at this point is premature, but I am confident the Navy's investigation process will highlight the areas that contributed to the mishaps, and point us to areas that we must address.

I'll conclude by stating that professional seamanship is the standard with no exceptions. We owe it to the Sailors and families of the lost to learn from these tragic events. Although we operate in a dangerous and demanding environment and will never be able to eliminate all risk, you have my assurance that we will, with great speed, provide you, the American people, and our Navy team with our assessment of how to best move forward. On behalf of all Sailors, their families, and our Navy Civilians, I thank you for your continued support, and look forward to your questions.