

NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY THE  
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS

**STATEMENT OF**

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**ON**

**AVIATION READINESS AND SAFETY**

**BEFORE THE**

**HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS**

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## **Intro**

Chairman Wilson, Ranking Member Bordallo, and distinguished members of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Readiness, I would like to express my appreciation for the opportunity to share the current state of Naval Aviation, Safety, and the challenges ahead in restoring higher levels of manpower, training, and equipment readiness. On behalf of all the Sailors in Naval Aviation, I would like to thank the members of this subcommittee for their bipartisan cooperation, and for the hard work of all involved in authorizing the funding that will allow us to improve the readiness posture required to continuously protect our national interests.

Our Naval Forces continue to provide lethal capabilities and project power world-wide, fully prepared for conflict in the full range of military operations. The publication of the 2018 National Defense Strategy, alongside the enactment of the 2018 Omnibus Appropriations Bill, will allow Naval Aviation to continue to correct many of the readiness and sustainment shortfalls that have increased under Budget Control Act funding limitations. Our efforts are strongly aligned with the National Defense Strategy, which highlights a return to Great Power Competition and directs increased naval power and response. Naval Aviation will benefit directly and substantively from the recent investments into aviation readiness accounts. Your authorization will allow us the funds necessary to field and deploy our next aircraft carrier, create modest gains in end strength to address critical manpower shortages, and to purchase the spares and material needed to increase the number of fully mission capable airframes.

As we reflect on the lessons we have learned from the impacts of the Budget Control Act funding limitations, we realize that there is much work to be done, and it is important to maintain realistic expectations about the speed with which readiness will be restored. As the Chief of Naval Operations, ADM John Richardson, recently testified, it took us a decade to get into this readiness decline, it will take us some time to get out. It is my expectation that we will begin to see marked improvements in readiness 18-24 months from now, as the effects of proper funding need time to be correctly allocated and spent on our people, our training institutions, and our parts supply system.

## **Readiness and Safety**

Naval Aviation's number one priority is rebuilding and maintaining readiness. All of our units are departing on deployment fully certified and combat ready, but the margins of their readiness are not at the same standards experienced in the past. We are forced to make sacrifices in readiness generation at home to ensure those forward have the training and resources necessary to be successful. In order to

do this, Naval Aviation utilizes a “tiered readiness” construct to ensure our resources are focused on deployed and soon to deploy squadrons. When a squadron returns from deployment, we reassign many of their aircraft, parts, and people to give to the squadrons preparing for work-ups and deployment. We’ve been forced to assume risk in maintenance and production and, as a result, our ability to fix and produce flyable aircraft, and therefore train aircrew, has suffered. There is a critical need for aircrew to fly and acquire qualifications, and there is a need for well-staffed maintenance departments to fix, groom, and support modification upgrades to aircraft throughout the entire Optimized Fleet Response Plan (OFRP). Ideally, 50% of all aircrew qualifications should occur during the Basic and Maintenance phases of the OFRP cycle, the two phases where we consistently “rob” squadrons of their needed planes, parts, and people.

As of April 2018 our Super Hornet community had 270 aircraft mission capable (MC), only half of our total inventory of 545. Of those “up” aircraft, only 174 had all their mission systems fully functional, or were fully mission capable (FMC), possessing the full suite of Strike-Fighter capability. The last time the Super Hornet community hit the CNO’s goal of 75% MC and 58% FMC rates was 2007. A similar story can be told in other communities. Recent funding initiatives are beginning to move us in the right direction and with continued, sustained funding Naval Aviation will transform from where we are today into a more lethal, ready force able to meet the mission goals and challenges of Great Power Competition.

With our focus on Super Hornets at Naval Air Station (NAS) Lemoore, CA, we have begun to see positive gains from our recovery efforts. VADM Chip Miller, who took over the Air Boss position at Naval Air Force Pacific in January 2018, implemented changes to include standing up a Naval Aviation Maintenance Center of Excellence (NAMCE). This unit, comprised of both military and civilian contract personnel, is focused solely on bringing long term down aircraft back to a mission capable status. To date, our efforts at NAS Lemoore have recovered 51 total aircraft to an MC status, 29 of which were long term down. Material availability continues as the pacing item for meeting mission capable readiness, especially within the F/A-18E/F/G communities. We apply each lesson from the Super Hornet community today to enhance our ability to repair aircraft, predict future challenges across the aviation force, and support the warfighter in each of our aviation communities.

Naval Aviation is not narrowly focused on the Super Hornet community readiness challenges. Our ability to win the high end fight will depend on every platform and each of these communities must

bring to bear the people, planes, and parts that are properly trained and resourced. We have our eye on the ball and are actively working to achieve and sustain readiness across the force.

We are making great progress in transitioning out of legacy platforms such as F/A-18C to F/A-18E/F and P-3C to P-8A. VFA-34 and VFA-37 are the final two F/A-18C squadrons the Navy has remaining as active duty squadrons and will complete their transitions to Super Hornets in 2019. We have just recently completed the ninth P-3 to P-8 squadron transition and in March of this year we began the first fleet squadron transition of F/A-18 to F-35C, with that squadron, VFA-147, becoming safe for flight by October 2018.

While a ready Fleet is a lethal Fleet, capable of winning when called upon, it must also be a safety-conscious Fleet. It is our mission to maintain the readiness of our Navy in order to prevent it from degrading to the point where the very safety and well-being of our Sailors is in question. Some say Naval Aviation operations are inherently dangerous, whether conducted in peacetime or during combat operations. While I do not disagree, I prefer to think of Naval Aviation as terribly unforgiving. It is an environment where the margins are measured in inches and seconds. Aviation training operations are a complex and resource-intensive effort which requires careful oversight, management, and leadership to sufficiently mitigate risk to an acceptable level. There is no question that well trained and practiced aviators react to malfunctions and difficult circumstances far better and are much less likely to make mistakes, which in turn decreases the likelihood of these aircrews experiencing a mishap.

Over the past five decades, the Navy dramatically reduced major aviation accident rates, though there has been a recent spike. In particular, Class C mishap rates (\$50,000 to \$500,000 or nonfatal injuries or illnesses) in 2017, and thus far in 2018, are approximately double the rate that Naval Aviation experienced in 2012. A majority of these mishaps occur during routine maintenance evolutions. Research done by the Center for Naval Analysis established that there is a strong correlation between the number of these type of mishaps, and the (lower) experience and longevity (years in service) of mid-grade and senior-grade enlisted maintainers on the flight line. We also recognize that with reduced flight hours, Sailors are receiving fewer opportunities to perform routine maintenance and are missing out on the opportunity to practice their skills.

Naval Aviation Leadership has implemented several initiatives to increase aircraft maintenance personnel manning and experience levels, including doubling the initial Apprentice (E-1 to E-3) tour length at shore maintenance facilities from two to four years. This initiative will improve productivity at

intermediate level shore maintenance activities and Fleet Replacement Squadrons (FRS), eventually providing the Fleet with more experienced aircraft maintenance personnel.

Additionally, the increased use of Aviation Maintenance Experience (AMEX) and AMEX Version 2.0 as a management tool will increase visibility on the existing experience levels and actions needed to increase experience levels of maintenance personnel assigned to squadrons in all Type/Model/Series (T/M/S). AMEX 2.0 establishes a “Maintenance Readiness Floor” developed by wing maintenance officers and their subject matter experts for fleet squadrons. The program is designed to ensure enough maintenance personnel are available to perform two-shift maintenance and to improve alignment of personnel qualifications. The enhancements provided by this tool are already in use by the Navy’s detailing community, allowing for better resourcing of commands and ensuring that proper platform knowledge and experience levels are maintained throughout the detailing cycles.

The Naval Aviation Enterprise is also mitigating the risks and addressing current mishap rates with increased leader involvement, policy additions, and by improving communication Fleet-wide to better understand the lessons learned from prior mishaps and near misses. The Air Boss has published several Force-wide messages directly addressing safety and mishap concerns affecting Naval Aviation. Additionally, as part of the Comprehensive Review, we conducted a thorough analysis of two topics: 1) crew endurance policies and their application to non-aircrew members of our Force where fatigue can be a factor that can lead to an increase in mishaps; and 2) increased command focus on meaningful Hazard Report (HAZREP) reporting to include recording “near miss” events. We are also supporting the Naval Safety Center as it transforms to create a new, robust analytical cell, with the goal of providing improved predictive analysis for mishap prevention.

As you are well aware, Naval Aviation’s number one safety concern and priority is reducing the risks and effects of Physiological Episodes (PEs) for our aircrew, a concern I know this committee shares. We have implemented numerous technical and operational measures to mitigate the risk to our aircrew and I am cautiously optimistic as we move forward. In April 2017, the Chief of Naval Operations established the Physiological Episode Action Team (PEAT). Led by an aviation admiral, the PEAT is a unified, single-source entity which directs Department of the Navy efforts to combat PEs and synchronizes these efforts with the Department of Defense, non-DoD entities and our foreign partners. The PEAT follows three lines of effort, warn the aircrew, fix the machine, protect and prevent. To date, we have identified multiple interrelated causal factors but the entirety of the root cause(s) of physiological episodes remains unidentified. Mitigation efforts currently in place, including software

modifications, personnel education, and equipment changes are positively affecting the PE rate for all Type/Model/Series aircraft but most notably in T-45s and T-6s, our training platforms. In our F/A-18 aircraft, we continue to implement changes that are improving the Environmental Control System, increasing system stability of failure modes and improving the cockpit environment for our aviators. More work remains to be done and this will remain our top safety priority until we fully understand, and have mitigated, all possible PE causal factors. Fleet awareness is high, confidence in their platforms and our processes are improving, protocols are in place and we will continue to apply every resource to solve this challenging problem.

### **Conclusion**

Naval Aviation continues to operate forward – fully prepared for conflict across the full range of military operations while managing near-term service-life, mid-term capability improvements and long-term investments in research and development for delivery of future capabilities. In recognizing the importance of predictable and sustained funding, fully funding our readiness accounts across multiple Fiscal Year Development Plans (FYDPs) is the foundation of operational readiness that we require to build and sustain a lethal, resilient force through balanced investments across readiness, capability and capacity. Your continued oversight and support are greatly appreciated.

Mr. Chairman and distinguished Members of this Subcommittee, thank you for your steadfast and strong support of the outstanding men and women in uniform, our Navy Civilians, and their Families.