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THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT

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BEFORE THE

READINESS SUBCOMMITTEE

AND

SEAPOWERS AND PROJECTIONS FORCES SUBCOMMITTEE

OF THE

HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

ON

THE NAVY'S AIRCRAFT CARRIER PROGRAM

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I. Introduction

Chairman Forbes, Ranking member Courtney, Chairman Wittman, Ranking member Bordallo, and distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to address the capability provided by our nation's Aircraft Carriers.

Aircraft carriers are central to our nation's defense strategy, which calls for forward presence; the ability to simultaneously deter potential adversaries and assure our allies; and capacity to project power at sea and ashore. These national assets are equally capable of providing other core capabilities of sea control, maritime security, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Aircraft carriers provide our nation the ability to rapidly and decisively respond globally to crises, with a footprint that does not impose unnecessary political or logistical burdens upon our allies or potential partners.

The aircraft carrier is the centerpiece of the Navy's Carrier Strike Groups (CSG) and central to Navy core capabilities. The Navy remains committed to maintaining an aircraft carrier force, and associated carrier air wings, that provide unparalleled responsiveness and flexibility to operational commanders across the full range of military operations. Our aircraft carrier force structure is based on a combination of operating current nuclear powered aircraft carriers (CVNs) for their full 50-year service life, maintaining an in-service aircraft carrier life cycle support program, recapitalizing the NIMITZ Class via the Refueling and Complex Overhaul (RCOH) program, and a steady state FORD Class procurement plan. This will ensure the United States Navy can operate where it matters, when it matters.

II. Vital Employment of Aircraft Carriers

The history of the United States is filled with instances when United States Navy aircraft carriers were central to our nation's response. Our recent history is no exception. In August 2013, the Navy responded to chemical weapon attacks in Syria by quickly repositioning the USS NIMITZ (CVN 68) in the Red Sea and Eastern Mediterranean while the USS HARRY S TRUMAN (CVN 75) safeguarded the northern Arabian Sea. USS NIMITZ gave the President immediate response, presence, and deterrence capability. In November 2013, the Navy and Marine Corps responded following the devastation of Typhoon Haiyan. USS GEORGE WASHINGTON (CVN 73) transited to the Philippines and was quickly in position to lead and coordinate United States relief efforts in the region. The Navy and Marine Corps team delivered supplies to the thousands of survivors left without food and water. In 2014, the GEORGE H.W. BUSH (CVN 77) CSG relocated from the Arabian Sea to the north Arabian Gulf and was on-station within 30 hours, ready for combat operations in Iraq and Syria. The CVN 77 CSG was the only United States strike option for 10 days while other assets could be repositioned and remained the primary strike option for two months while diplomatic permissions for land-based strikes were obtained. Navy and Marine Corps strike fighters from the carrier generated 20 to 30 combat sorties each day for 54 days to project power against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. The CARL VINSON Strike Group and CSG ONE followed, flying 12,300 sorties, including 2,383 combat missions. Now, the USS THEODORE ROOSEVELT with CSG TWELVE is returning from deployment, where it continued the battle against the Islamic State of Iraq and was able to quickly relocate from

the Northern Arabian Gulf to the coast of Yemen to respond to the Houthi insurgency, keep shipping lanes in the region safe and open, and intercept weapons shipments meant for the Houthi rebels. These examples are just a few of the most recent instances where the presence of a United States Navy aircraft carrier shaped events and enabled the President to execute the full array of foreign policy options. There is no greater proof of the tangible effects of the modern aircraft carrier on global events. No other navy in the world today has the reach, presence, capability, training, and resolve to immediately respond to and shape current events.

NIMITZ and FORD Class aircraft carriers will be the premier forward deployed asset of choice for crisis response and early decisive striking power in major combat operations for the next half-century. USS EISENHOWER (CVN 69) recently completed a highly successful series of developmental tests for the F-35C, the fifth generation strike-fighter that will ensure the Navy's aircraft carriers deliver air dominance in the high-end warfight. The E-2D Advanced Hawkeye is now deployed and brings superior long range battle management command and control with sensors that support offense and defense for the entire CSG. The aircraft carrier based F/A-18G "Growler" is the only tactical aircraft in the joint force that ensures spectrum dominance of the battlespace. Advanced weapons for carrier based aircraft continue to be adapted in anticipation of future adversaries, such as the Long-Range Air to Ship Missile, which will help ensure CSGs establish sea control in any environment.

The Navy has established a steady state FORD Class procurement plan designed to deliver each new ship in close alignment with the NIMITZ Class ship it replaces. The FORD Class design improves warfighting capability, survivability, operational availability, and quality of life for sailors, while reducing the ship's crew by 500 to 900 personnel and decreasing total ownership costs by approximately \$4 billion per ship. Advances in technology continue to be evaluated to ensure all of the Navy's aircraft carriers are prepared for any contingency, including the latest developments in high energy lasers. Modernization of current aircraft carriers, and ongoing procurement of the new FORD Class ships will ensure Navy's aircraft carriers and CSGs continue to pace the threat and bring unparalleled warfighting capability for the Combatant Commanders (COCOMs).

III. Aircraft Carrier Force Structure

In 2006, the Navy determined it could meet operational requirements with acceptable risk with a reduction from a 12 to 11 aircraft carrier force. This decision was supported by the business case analysis to decommission JOHN F KENNEDY (CV 67) in Fiscal Year (FY) 2007, the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review decision for 11 CSGs, and was codified by the FY 2007 National Defense Authorization Act. Six years later, the Navy's 2012 Force Structure Assessment (FSA) identified a 306 ship combat force as the requirement to enable the Navy to deter and respond to crises, and protect the interconnected systems of trade, information, and security that underpin American prosperity. The 306 ship force possessed the required capability and capacity to deliver credible deterrence, sea control, and power projection to deter or contain conflict and, if called upon, to fight and win our nation's wars. This force included a requirement for 11 nuclear powered aircraft carriers that provide

immediate response and the subsequent arrival of forces needed to meet all warfighting commitments, as well as the most critical COCOMs' requirements for persistent presence in support of national goals. In the 2015 FSA Report to Congress, the requirement for 11 carriers was reaffirmed to meet the National Military Strategy for presence operations, contingency response, and warfighting capability.

The Navy is currently operating under a congressionally approved ten aircraft carrier waiver and the Joint Staff accepted moderate risk associated with this temporary force structure reduction with inactivation of USS ENTERPRISE (CVN 65) in 2013. The Navy assessed that most of the operational impacts during this period could be mitigated by adjusting maintenance and operational schedules, resulting in extended deployment lengths. The 2016 delivery of GERALD R FORD (CVN 78) will restore the aircraft carrier fleet to 11 ships. The Navy plans to make the ship deployable by 2019. Returning to and maintaining an 11 aircraft carrier deployable force is of highest priority and enables the necessary, sustained capacity in global CVN presence and Global Force Management (GFM) allocation plan support, aligned with Navy's overall force structure planning.

For the last three years, the Navy has been operating under reduced top-lines generating capability shortfalls of \$25 billion less than the President's Budget (PB) requests. With each year that the Navy receives less than requested, the loss of force structure, readiness, and future investments cause options to become increasingly constrained. The Navy has established a steady state FORD Class procurement plan that delivers each new ship closely aligned with the notional 50-year service life of the corresponding NIMITZ Class ship it will replace. PB 2016 continues procuring FORD Class aircraft carriers at five year intervals between construction starts, with CVN 80 first-year full-funding in 2018, occurring five years after the first-year full-funding for CVN 79 in 2013.

IV. Operational Implications

The effect on capabilities for power projection and global engagement due to a reduction in aircraft carrier force structure falls into two broad categories, presence and surge. Aircraft carrier presence supports COCOM peacetime operations and demonstrates resolve, deters aggression, builds partnerships, and supports ongoing operations across the globe. Surge provides additional capacity to respond to crises and meet COCOM war plan demand. Operating with fewer than 11 aircraft carriers, particularly for extended periods of time, degrades the Navy's ability to provide both presence and surge capacity, and results in less global presence and fewer days that an aircraft carrier is available for operations in a forward theater. This results in reduced global engagement opportunities to build partnerships and assure allies of U.S. commitment and ability to provide a credible response in time of crisis. Reduced presence also negatively affects the nation's ability to deter regional adversaries. This is exemplified by the recent announcement of USS THEODORE ROOSEVELT (CVN 71) exiting the Arabian Gulf. For the first time in nearly a decade, the United States does not have a carrier on station near the Middle East.

CSGs are the centerpiece of COCOM operations plans (OPLANs). Reduced carrier availability hinders our ability to execute major war plans. In terms of crisis response,

opportunistic action by an adversary who chooses to act during a period of reduced presence would limit the COCOMs' ability to immediately respond with the full range of military operations afforded them by a CSG. CVNs, with their associated CSG, provide multi-mission capability, including maritime and ground strike, close air support, command and control, and electronic attack. They are inherently flexible, with the ability to reposition as required, and allow COCOMs to respond with no concerns of obtaining basing or overflight permissions. Additionally, the CSG as a whole provides significant anti-submarine warfare, land attack cruise missile, and intelligence gathering capabilities. The slower flow of surge forces with these capabilities into a theater would jeopardize the COCOM's ability to execute his OPLANs on a timeline with an acceptable degree of risk. A reduced aircraft carrier force also has the potential to increase the time required to generate fully ready forces, and potentially reduces the maximum number of aircraft carriers that can be committed to a response. A delay in CVN 78's maiden deployment results in the Navy not fully realizing the increased operational capacity of an 11 CVN force until FY 2021.

When the Navy responded to increased COCOM demand for CSG presence beginning in 2011, the need to recover readiness in subsequent years was understood up front. The increased frequency and extension of CSG deployments increased wear on the force, leading to increased maintenance and repair requirements. Stemming from Navy's efforts to meet increased COCOM demand, sequestration's impacts to naval shipyards, and the temporary reduction in force structure to ten aircraft carriers, the Navy is unable to provide a continuous, concurrent aircraft carrier presence in both Central Command (CENTCOM) and Pacific Command (PACOM) Areas of Responsibility (AORs) until FY 2021.

Demand for CVN presence exceeds service capacity, and trends indicate that this will continue. The Navy's force offering represents the Navy's best military advice for a global allocation that can be sustained at the proper level of readiness without negatively impacting future forces. To provide more presence than the Navy can sustain consumes the service life of assets, reduces surge capacity, risks the long term health of the force, and will open up larger presence gaps later. The Joint Staff, via the GFM process, balances competing COCOM demand with available resources and strategic objectives. GFM allows the Secretary of Defense to make risk informed decisions to align United States military forces and capabilities against priority requirements. Although there is no direct replacement for a CSG, the current process addresses a COCOM's concerns when a CSG is not available to provide presence in their AOR. The Navy will continue to operate where it matters, when it matters. However, it should be noted that the Navy's ability to respond when needed will be reduced until the CVN force is restored to 11.

V. *New CVN Construction*

CVN 78 delivery will restore the aircraft carrier fleet to 11 ships, provide significant capability improvement, and offer 25 percent more operational days than NIMITZ Class aircraft carriers. Reduced maintenance requirements coupled with decreased crew requirements will reduce CVN 78's life cycle costs in comparison to NIMITZ Class aircraft carriers by approximately \$80 million per ship per year. CVN 78 will deliver in 2016, conduct operational testing, and execute Full Ship Shock Trials in 2019. CVN 79 is the

numerical replacement for CVN 68 to maintain the 11 aircraft carrier force level and is a major opportunity to reduce construction costs.

Stability in requirements, design, schedule, and budget are essential to controlling and improving new construction aircraft carrier cost, and therefore is of highest priority for the program. Requirements for the program are set and cannot be changed without approval from the Chief of Naval Operations and Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Research, Development and Acquisition). At the time of construction contract award, CVN 79 had 100 percent of the design product model complete (compared to 65 percent for CVN 78) and 80 percent of initial drawings released. Further, CVN 79 construction benefits from the maturation of virtually all new technologies inserted on CVN 78.

The Navy outlined its cost savings initiatives in its Report to Congress in May 2013, and is executing according to plan. One example of an initiative to reduce acquisition cost is the employment of the CVN 79 two-phase delivery strategy. Both Phase I and Phase II are funded within the CVN 79 budgeted end cost and are included within both the \$11,498 million service cost estimate and Congressional cost cap. The Navy's two-phase delivery strategy is the lowest cost option for the acquisition of CVN 79 as well as maintaining an 11 aircraft carrier force.

CVN 79's circumstances are unique in that additional time is available before CVN 79 is required as the numerical replacement for CVN 68 to maintain the 11 aircraft carriers force level. This time could be used to temporarily increase CVN force level above the minimum requirement until CVN 68 goes out of service in 2025, but this requires additional manpower to operate a 12 aircraft carrier force for a brief period. Therefore, a two-phase delivery approach allows the Navy to introduce competition for work that can be performed in the aircraft carrier's homeport.

The two-phase acquisition strategy also allows the Navy to install the Enterprise Air Surveillance Radar (EASR), a more cost effective radar than Dual Band Radar (DBR). The EASR suite will be used on large-deck aviation capable ships, including LHA(R), LPD, LX(R), and CVN 79 and later aircraft carriers. Implementing the two-phase strategy provides the opportunity to install the EASR suite on CVN 79 in the Phase II availability. The substitution of the EASR suite alone is projected to save \$180 million in Government Furnished Equipment (GFE) costs compared to the DBR installed on CVN 78.

An optimum procurement plan is required to deliver CVN 79 within the Congressional cost cap of \$11,498 million. Efficiencies are targeted and savings will be achieved by procuring and installing shipboard electronic systems at the latest possible date, thus avoiding the early installation of equipment which is likely to go obsolete and require replacement prior to CVN 79's first deployment in 2027. Additionally, CVN program manpower savings will be achieved by delaying full crew manning until the corresponding government furnished systems are installed late in ship construction. By carefully coordinating the arrival of the full crew, unnecessary and costly temporary variations in the CVN manpower and training accounts can be avoided. Finally, a number of CVN 79 systems and spaces will be installed

in Phase II with the use of competition to reduce installation cost.

VI. *Conclusion*

Aircraft carriers are central to the nation's defense strategy, which calls for forward presence; the ability to simultaneously deter potential adversaries and assure our allies; and capacity to project power at sea and ashore. An 11 aircraft carrier force structure represents the best balance to deliver the capability and capacity to accomplish the objectives of the Defense Strategic Guidance while continually modernizing the force to keep pace with evolving technologies. The Navy will continue to instill affordability, stability, and capacity into the nation's aircraft carriers. The FORD Class will provide major operational improvements including increased operational availability and reduced life cycle costs. The 11 aircraft carrier force will be deployed under the Optimized Fleet Response Plan to best address COCOM demands with the required maintenance program to sustain the fleet through each ship's 50-year service life, providing our nation the ability to rapidly and decisively respond globally to crises for decades to come.