

Statement of the Honorable John Garamendi

Chairman, Readiness Subcommittee

“The State of the Surface Navy”

March 3, 2022

Thank you, Chairman Courtney.

Even as we grow more distant from these events, let us say at the outset that we continue to grieve and remember the seventeen sailors who died in the USS McCain and USS Fitzgerald collisions of 2017. We also honor the over sixty sailors and civilians who were injured while battling the fire on the USS Bonhomme Richard.

We are holding this hearing today because, unfortunately – as the Navy itself has concluded – these tragedies in the surface Navy were avoidable. Ensuring that they never happen again requires consistent oversight. I very much appreciate the Navy’s attention to the manning, training, maintenance, and cultural issues that contributed to these losses and our witnesses’ continued willingness to engage with our subcommittees. I also recognize that institutionalizing significant reforms takes time.

However, I remain haunted by some of the turns of phrase that appeared consistently throughout the investigations of these accidents. “Cascade of failures.” “Accumulation of risk.” While I know that this slate of Navy leadership takes these issues extremely seriously and has given deep thought to improving the readiness and well-being of the surface force, a GAO report released just last month contains troubling testimony from sailors in the fleet today. They report being overworked, understaffed, sleep-deprived, insufficiently trained, and ill-equipped to perform basic maintenance tasks.

I worry that the Navy’s progress in implementing findings from these accidents’ investigations might be mostly “on paper,” and that in practice they are not translating into lasting change. I do not see evidence that the surface Navy has yet achieved sufficient progress reversing the entrenched habits of inadequate manning and training, delayed maintenance, and chronic overuse of the force. I worry that the surface Navy is not thinking deeply enough about how to change its culture to elevate morale and to empower officers and sailors to voice concerns when they see problems.

Finally, as we consider the sources of these problems and their potential solutions, I must ask our witnesses to consider whether they could be doing more to constrain combatant commander demand for use of the surface force. We are experiencing unprecedented challenges and must consider whether some combatant commander requests should be deprioritized to ensure our ships and sailors get the adequate time in port to be prepared for any contingency.

With that, I turn it over to Ranking Member Waltz.