

NOT FOR PUBLICATION UNTIL RELEASED BY THE  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

**STATEMENT OF**

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**ON**

**AVIATION READINESS**

**BEFORE THE**

**HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON**

**READINESS**

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Chairman Wittman, Ranking Member Bordallo, and distinguished members of the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Readiness, I appreciate the opportunity to testify on the current state of Navy aviation readiness and the challenges we face in achieving Fleet readiness today and in the future.

Internationally, the 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen a proliferation of diverse threats to our national security. For the first time in twenty-five years, the Navy is facing a return to great power competition at sea. Russia and China have a growing arsenal of high-end warfighting capabilities, engage in coercion and competition and have global reach. Provocation from Iran and North Korea continue to create instability in the Middle East and the Western Pacific. Terrorist organizations such as ISIS remain a significant threat to U.S. interests, our allies and the homeland. Domestically, we are operating in a resource-constrained environment, under an uncertain and unpredictable budget process.

In these conditions, all of us share a duty to make our Fleet, and the Sailors who serve, ready to fight and win, both today and in the future. Powered by the exceptional Sailors and Civilian Professionals I am proud to represent here today, your Navy is the world's finest, and we are committed to retaining our margin of advantage over our adversaries, but that margin could be lost if we do not achieve stable budgets and make deliberate investments in future readiness. We will only maintain our status as the world's greatest Navy if we are vigilant around the globe and dedicated to restoring our future readiness and capability. My testimony today will focus on the current readiness of your Navy aviation force, as well as some of the key challenges we face in delivering future readiness.

### **Current Maritime Operations**

The demand for naval assets by Geographic Combatant Commanders (GCCs) remains high, and Navy continues to provide the maximum sustainable global presence it can generate to support a diverse array of GCC missions. Today, we have four aircraft carriers forward deployed – *John C Stennis* and *Ronald Reagan* in the Pacific, and *Dwight D Eisenhower* and *Harry S Truman* in the Mediterranean and Middle East. This is the first year since 2009 that Navy has been able to provide a CSG to U.S. Pacific Command while the forward-deployed CSG was in maintenance. Further, our operations in the Mediterranean reflect our commitment to counter extremism in the Middle East while reassuring our alliance with the European Union

of states. Over the past twelve months, three CSGs conducted strike missions against ISIS in support of Operation INHERENT RESOLVE. Four Amphibious Readiness Groups (ARGs), with embarked Marine Expeditionary Units (MEUs), supported a wide range of missions including maritime security operations, strike missions against ISIS, and maritime interdiction support off the coast of Yemen as part of Operation RESTORE HOPE. Across the globe, the Navy supported other critical GCC missions such as theater security cooperation, counter-piracy, counter-drug, ballistic missile defense, freedom of navigation, strategic deterrence patrols, and Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance missions. These missions not only demonstrate our responsiveness and warfighting prowess, but also maintain our Sailor proficiency, a key aspect of readiness bought only with time at sea.

The Optimized Fleet Response Plan (OFRP), in conjunction with ongoing Fleet material condition reset efforts, is designed to support Navy's overall readiness recovery goals and maximize the employability of our operational units for both presence and contingency response. To date, three CSGs and four ARGs have been inducted into OFRP. The *Eisenhower* CSG was the first to deploy under the OFRP construct. Fleet implementation of OFRP for CSGs is scheduled to be complete in Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 with the deployment of the *Gerald R Ford* CSG. While it is difficult to pinpoint an exact readiness recovery timeframe for each of our force elements given the array of factors involved, we predict CSG readiness recovery will occur at the end of the FY 2017 Future Year Defense Program (FYDP). ARG recovery will remain constrained until we complete modernization of our large deck amphibious ships to include the capability to operate the F-35B. Key to our success is operating the battle force at a sustainable level over the long term. Readiness recovery requires a commitment to protect the time needed to properly maintain and modernize our capital-intensive force and to conduct full-spectrum training. Achieving full readiness also requires us to restore capacity and throughput at our public shipyards and aviation depots, primarily through hiring and workforce development, and successful efforts in meeting hiring goals have been largely achieved.

OFRP has to do three things for the Fleet to be ready to fight and win: (1) it has to ready Fleet units for routine deployments, (2) it has to surge much of the Fleet in times of war or significant crisis and then reset it in stride after that crisis, (3) it has to maintain and modernize Fleet units so they are viable until the end of their planned service lives. And it has to do all three of these things within the resources that the nation provides. After more than a decade of

high operational tempo, sequestration, and workforce challenges, we are aggressively addressing the resultant maintenance and modernization backlog through this evolutionary process.

### **Future Readiness Challenge**

As you have heard in recent testimony from the former Vice Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Michelle Howard, the Navy maintenance budget requests are built upon independently certified models, reflecting engineered maintenance plans for each ship class and aviation type/model/series. Furthermore, recent testimony from Fleet Commanders reaffirmed that our shipyards and aviation depots have been challenged by emergent work beyond that expected amidst a decade of high tempo operations which has caused additional wear on our hardware.

Resetting our surface ships and aircraft carriers after more than a decade of war led to significant growth in public and private shipyard workload. The Navy baseline budget request funds 70% of the ship maintenance requirement across the force, addressing both depot and intermediate level maintenance for aircraft carriers, submarines and surface ships. Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO) funding provides the remaining 30% of the baseline requirement and allows for the continued reduction of surface ship life-cycle maintenance backlogs. Of note, the Navy traditionally funds 80% of the ship maintenance requirement in the base budget and the remaining 20% in OCO. But, for the second year, the additional OCO request to support Navy's maintenance reset (\$625M) includes funding for aircraft carriers in addition to other specific surface Fleet assets, to address increased wear and tear outside of the propulsion plant. Since much of this reset work can only be accomplished in a drydock, the maintenance schedule needs to be closely managed, as reset is expected to continue across the FYDP.

The Fleet Readiness Centers (FRCs) and Navy's aviation depots have been challenged to recover full productivity after hiring freezes, furloughs, and previous restrictions on overtime. The workforce behind our public and private depots is no longer sufficient for emergent projects and is in the midst of rebuilding and training new workers. Through a concerted hiring effort with the support of congressional budgetary increases, the recovery in maintenance capacity is in progress. However, the FRCs face a significant backlog of work, particularly for the service life extension of our legacy F/A-18 Hornets. FRC hiring continues to improve the end-strength of the depot-level workforce to ultimately meet the workload demand. In an effort to improve throughput, FRCs are increasing engineering expertise to address the work required to reach as

high as 10,000 hours of service life on select F/A-18A-D aircraft, reallocating some of the existing workforce, and contracting additional private sector support. Navy has increased the number of in-Service Repair (ISR) field teams deployed to tactical aircraft bases to improve flight line readiness posture and ensure there is a clear understanding of the material condition of airframes heading to the depots.

The Aircraft Depot Maintenance program is funded to 76% in baseline and increased to 85% funding level using OCO funds for work planned for FY 2017. This funding level reflects the estimated executable funding level given the aviation depot capacity projections. The President's Budget request of \$1.1B supports repairs for 583 airframes and 1,684 engines/engine modules in FY 2017, constrained by aviation depot capacity. Currently, approximately 50% of our F/A-18A-D aircraft inventory is out of reporting due to needed depot level maintenance. This is an improvement from FY 2015. The Department has seen a 44% improvement in FY 2015 F/A-18A-D depot production due to process improvements implemented in 2014. Depots are currently funded to capacity in FY 2016, and the 2017 baseline budget funding levels anticipate continued improvement across the FYDP to reach annual production requirements in FY 2019.

Following midyear analysis of overall Navy FY 2016 funding execution and requirements, the Navy identified unfunded readiness requirements totaling \$848M, 2% of the enacted readiness accounts (\$46B). Root causes for the shortfall include FY 2016 Bipartisan Budget Act fiscal pressure resulting in a \$400M reduction in readiness buying power; unbudgeted cost growth in the resetting of ships following sustained wartime operational tempo and in funding cyber programs to address an evolving threat; plus extending the deployment of the *Truman* CSG.

The Navy will closely manage the shortfall throughout the remainder of FY 2016, be prepared to execute additional funds should they become available, and be prepared to remain within enacted funding levels as necessary. The \$848M shortfall will have no impact to our forces currently deployed, but deferring depot and continuous ship maintenance availabilities would likely delay a number of deployments in the coming years.

## **Today's Readiness Challenge**

Navy aviation readiness is in a precarious position today as we continue to meet deployed readiness requirements, albeit at the expense of non-deployed force training. Navy aviation uniquely operates under a phase-based, tiered-readiness generation model. This Fleet Readiness Training Plan (FRTTP) achieves readiness at the right level, at the right time to meet Global Force Management demand. More specifically, the number of aircraft and aircrew proficiency required increases during a unit's work up cycle, culminating in peak combat readiness in preparation for deployment. This tiered readiness generation model affords us the opportunity to tailor the readiness structure to account for maintenance and material challenges. Essentially, this is how Navy aviation continues to meet requirements while managing strike fighter inventory.

As we reset in stride, we continue to face challenges associated with increased costs and effort in sustaining legacy aircraft – rotary, fixed wing, and trainers. Our legacy fleet of aircraft is being demanded more than anticipated and retained longer than planned, while some of their intended replacements have not yet arrived. Furthermore, fiscal constraints force difficult trades in capacity and readiness for capability improvements. Simply, the Navy is challenged to modernize our fleet while also sustaining an aging force. Accordingly, with the FY 2017 President's Budget request Navy aviation has harmonized readiness enablers to achieve readiness objectives while concurrently supporting modernization. In this process, the Department has reduced baseline funding in the flight hour program, which is currently limited by aircraft availability, and moved those funds across other aviation readiness accounts. This readiness harmonization effort invests in material condition improvement to provide more aircraft to the Fleet. This, in turn, will enable force generation earlier in the FRTTP cycle and improve the overall force readiness posture and surge capacity.

## **Conclusion**

We are still paying down the readiness debt we accrued over the last decade of combat operations, and those effects have been compounded by the cumulative effect of budget reductions and four consecutive years of continuing resolutions and sequestration. The Navy continues readiness recovery through the implementation of OFRP, but continued shortfalls in ship and shore facilities sustainment coupled with aging aircraft inventory will eventually have

negative effects on our long-term readiness. Failing to plan for these necessary investments will hinder our future recovery.

The Navy and Marine Corps aviation team is an agile maritime strike and amphibious power projection force in readiness. Such agility requires that the aviation arm of our naval strike and expeditionary forces remain strong. Today we face a readiness challenge in sustaining our legacy fleet while supporting modernization to pace future threats. Mr. Chairman, and distinguished committee members, I welcome your continued support as we overcome these challenges to build and sustain the preeminent force of the future. Thank your for your commitment to Naval Aviation. I look forward to your questions.