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SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT OF

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U.S. NAVY

CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS

BEFORE THE

SENATE COMMITTEE ON

ARMED SERVICES

ON THE

RECENT U.S. NAVY INCIDENTS AT SEA

SEPTEMBER 19, 2017

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Chairman McCain, Ranking Member Reed, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the recent U.S. Navy incidents at sea. To begin, I want to express my deep condolences to the families of the 17 Sailors who served their country with honor and distinction and lost their lives in USS FITZGERALD and USS JOHN S. MCCAIN. In both of these tragic incidents our Sailors acted heroically to save their ships as they combatted flooding and the loss of critical systems. Care and support to the families of these Sailors is our top priority. I have committed to them that we will learn everything we can from these tragic events to prevent another accident. We will always stand with these families.

What we do is inherently dangerous. It is a leadership responsibility to ensure we provide the right oversight and training to keep our team at their operational peak. We are taking immediate actions to prevent another mishap.

- I directed a pause across the Navy, both ashore and afloat, to review our fundamentals to ensure safe and effective operations, and to correct any areas that require immediate attention. This pause has been completed, with commanders incorporating deliberate processes in their operations to better manage risk.
- We have commenced Readiness for Sea Assessments (RFSA) for all ships assigned to Japan, to inspect and assess watchstander proficiency and material readiness to ensure ships are able to safely navigate, communicate and operate. Immediate remediation will be conducted for ships found deficient, and they will not be assigned for operational tasking until they are certified to be ready.
- We have taken measures to ensure our Sailors get sufficient sleep in all shipboard routines to address fatigue concerns.
- All material problems involving ship control have been given increased priority for repair.
- To ensure SEVENTH Fleet ships are properly certified, the Pacific Fleet Commander is standing up Naval Surface Group Western Pacific (NSGWP) to consolidate authorities to oversee the training and certification of forward-deployed ships based in Japan.

- We have commenced a review of certifications of each ship, to include developing a plan for each to regain currency and proficiency across all certification areas. All waivers for ships whose certification has expired will now be approved by the Pacific Fleet Commander.
- We have increased focus across the force on open communication and thorough debriefing and assessment of operations and evolutions through instilling the practice of “Plan, Brief, Execute, Debrief” across commands. Other cultural changes include increasing unit-level operational pauses, increasing access to lessons learned, and encouraging time for repercussion-free self-assessments.

In addition to these actions, the pause yielded results across all communities to promote a renewed focus on safety, communication and professionalism in the execution of “routine” operations. Leaders at every level addressed fighting against over-confidence, inattention, and complacency through emphasis on adherence to procedures and on applying sound operational risk management procedures. We will continue to enhance our safety culture in which each Sailor is empowered to act to control hazards before they become a mishap.

We are not stopping there. In addition to the investigations into the specific incidents on USS FITZGERALD and USS JOHN S. MCCAIN, the Vice Chief of Naval Operations directed a Comprehensive Review to examine for more systemic problems. Led by Admiral Phil Davidson, Commander, U.S. Fleet Forces Command, this effort will review individual training and professional development, to include seamanship, navigation, voyage planning, leader development and all aspects of tactical training. The review will also address unit level and operational performance, to include oversight and risk management at all levels of the chain of command. The development and certification of deployed operational and mission standards – force generation – will be reviewed, with an emphasis on Forward Deployed Naval Forces. It will also include a review of the material readiness of our ships, and the systems required to operate them, to include navigation, propulsion, steering, combat systems and material availability. The review team includes experts from within the Navy and outside experts from other services, academia, and the civilian sector. This approach will help ensure we don’t

have any blind spots as we look hard at every aspect of our operations. We will be transparent with the results of these reviews and our actions.

I have testified several times about the “triple whammy” - the corrosive confluence of high operational tempo constrained funding levels, and budget uncertainty. 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, and the Navy is feeling the strains of consistently high operational tempo. Added to this challenge, eight years of continuing resolutions and the Budget Control Act have impacted the ability to plan and schedule training, ship maintenance, and modernization. With the \$2.8B in funding approved in Fiscal Year 17, we are plugging the most urgent readiness holes in the fleet. Our Fiscal Year 18 request sustains the readiness progress, increases end strength, modernizes our current platforms, and purchases future platforms and capabilities needed to sustain the advantage over our adversaries. While we have prioritized our maintenance and readiness dollars, the positive effects of funding will not remove this deficit overnight; it will take time with stable resources to sustain the upward trend.

While these factors exert a negative force on the challenges we face, make no mistake: at the core, this issue is about command. No matter what the situation, those charged with command must hold the standard that ensures our forces are trained and certified to safely and effectively conduct assigned operations. We must remain vigilant to meeting this standard, fighting against every pressure to erode it. We must look at our “can do” culture and ensure it is also a culture that promotes a clear-eyed view of safety and readiness.

We have been subject to

- budget pressures to "do more with less"
- operational pressures to put busy forces on station more quickly and more often
- schedule pressures to make adjustments to training and maintenance plans.

None of these can excuse our commanders from adherence to the absolute standard to develop safe and effective teams. And when we fall short of the ideal, we must make a thoughtful assessment of the results, and where necessary put mitigations in place. If

the situation becomes untenable and we cannot meet the standard, we must not deploy until we're ready. It is the diligence and leadership of our commanding officers at every level that will implement the changes needed to ensure our Navy remains the world's most capable Navy.

These incidents demand our full attention to provide our Sailors the necessary resources and training to execute their assigned missions. I own this problem. I am accountable for the safe and effective operations of our Navy, and we will fix this. I am confident that our Navy will identify the root causes and correct them, and that we'll be better in the end. I look forward to your questions.