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ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE
READINESS SUBCOMMITTEE
AND
SEAPOWERS AND EXPEDITIONARY FORCES SUBCOMMITTEE
OF THE
HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
ON
FLEET READINESS
28 JULY 2010

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INTRODUCTION

Chairman Ortiz, Chairman Taylor, Representative Forbes, Representative Akin, and members of the Readiness Subcommittee and Seapower and Expeditionary Forces Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you to discuss the readiness of our Fleet.

Providing forces ready for tasking to Combatant Commanders requires the Navy to generate forces that can perform the missions or functions for which they are organized or designed to perform in combat. As an expeditionary force, we reset each inter-deployment period to ensure we can sustain the required level of operational activity required by our Combatant Commanders into the future. Reset is a maintenance investment that restores the material health of our ships, aircraft, submarines and equipment following the rigors of an operational deployment. This investment maximizes service life, which is fundamental to building the future capacity required to remain a ready, responsive and relevant Navy. Reset is also an investment in our people – it provides them with the training and time needed to redeploy with confidence in their ability to accomplish the missions assigned, which is fundamental to retaining high-quality people. We develop confident and competent Sailors when we have sufficient numbers of high-quality people, well-maintained equipment performing to design specifications, units that are properly supplied, and effective training programs. Keeping this foundation strong requires steady investment - and it is this steady investment that allows the Navy to develop and retain the high-quality people we need to make the Navy ready, responsive, and relevant today, and "unlock" the future capabilities funded in the rest of our Navy program.

Institutional risk to your Navy is moderate trending to significant – high operational tempo as a result of growing operational requirements is consuming the Fleet at higher than planned rates – but there is no doubt we are ready today. Operation UNIFIED RESPONSE (OUR), the Haitian earthquake relief effort, highlighted the readiness of your Fleet to respond to a significant, no-notice tasking. While OUR was not combat operations, the Fleet's response was also not the hallmark of an unready force: forces ordered to prepare to deploy within 24 hours; the USS CARL VINSON diverted while underway and loaded with a tailored support package that included 19 helicopters, emergency supplies and trained personnel within 48 hours; a no-notice surge deployment of 11 additional ships, including the BATAAN ARG (in post-deployment leave and upkeep) and the NASSAU ARG (preparing to deploy to the Central Command region), each with a Marine Expeditionary Unit embarked; and a variety of Navy Expeditionary Combat Command units resulting in a total of 15,000 Sailors and Marines in and around Haiti. Although, the Haitian relief operations did not significantly impact the rotational deployment of forces previously committed to other Combatant Commanders, it will result in longer deployments, shorter dwell time in homeport, and increased stress on our Sailors

It is our overall readiness trends, however, that have brought me here today because they remain in the wrong direction. We leaned out manning, training, and maintenance investments over the last two decades, particularly in our Surface Force, to invest in recapitalization in order to build the capacity demanded by our Combatant Commanders. Although our submarine, air and expeditionary communities have their challenges, their operational and material health trends have not degraded as significantly as the Surface Force – highlighted by Board of Inspection and Survey (INSURV) Unsatisfactory/Degraded trends.

Surface Force trends will impact our ability to sustain the high level of operational activity required by our Combatant Commanders into the future. To reverse these trends required the identification and confirmation of root causes to ensure our corrective actions addressed systemic issues and not just individual problems.

FLEET REVIEW PANEL

Accordingly, Admiral Willard, then Commander, Pacific Fleet, and I commissioned the Fleet Review Panel last September to look broadly at the potential contributors to negative trends we were observing in the material and operational health of our Surface Force. As a result of our investigation of the increase in unsatisfactory INSURV inspections in 2008/2009, we hypothesized that reductions to ship manning, ship maintenance capability and capacity, training programs, maintenance funding, and assessment and inspection programs - the cumulative impacts of cost-cutting decisions made over the last two decades - had begun to degrade Surface Force readiness and potentially shorten the expected service life of our ships. The Fleet Review Panel's findings confirmed our hypothesis.

USS SAN ANTONIO INVESTIGATION

A constant undercurrent within the negative trend lines of our Surface Force readiness was the unreliable performance of USS SAN ANTONIO's propulsion plant since delivery. In order to establish a clear understanding of the facts regarding USS SAN ANTONIO's recurring Main Propulsion Diesel Engine (MPDE) problems and to determine accountability, I directed Commander, Expeditionary Strike Group TWO to conduct an investigation last November in accordance with the manual of the Judge Advocate General (JAGMAN). The investigation found numerous, unacceptable conditions that came together aboard USS SAN ANTONIO to produce the significant problems she was experiencing in her engineering plant. These conditions included poor work quality during new construction and maintenance periods resulting in contamination of the ship's lubricating oil system; failures in quality control by both contractors and the Navy; shortcomings in ship design, systems integration, training, and ship's force management of critical engineering programs; and a ship's manning plan based on automated engineering control and monitoring systems that did not perform to design specifications.

ESSENTIAL OUTCOMES / CORRECTIVE ACTIONS

The root issues found by the Fleet Review Panel and in the USS SAN ANTONIO Investigation are the same: failure to hold the line on time-tested, combat proven standards for how we operate, maintain, inspect, and certify our forces. Standards, like specifications, are based on fact and do not change with the availability of resources. Although operational readiness and material health will change over time based on a unit's position relative to its deployment period, neither measure can be allowed to fall below the minimum standard required for safe operations or to achieve the expected service life of our ships. In our Surface Force and on SAN ANTONIO, we allowed Commanders to operate and maintain our ships below established standards.

Admiral Walsh and I directed Commander, Naval Surface Force Atlantic and Commander, Naval Surface Force Pacific to achieve the following essential outcomes to address the root causes behind negative Surface Force operational and material health trends. The actions required to achieve these essential outcomes complement the actions identified by the Navy to the Readiness Subcommittee at the March 25, 2009 hearing on "Readiness and

Sustainment of the Navy's Surface Fleet", and in the 2008 and 2009 Annual INSURV Report briefings provided to your staffs.

Chain of Command: Clear lines of authority and accountability for ship man, train, equip and maintain issues. Specific corrective actions include establishing clear and unambiguous Type Commander accountability for ship man, train, equip and maintain issues and standing down CLASSRONs and transferring manpower/functions to a "Readiness ISIC", Afloat Training Group and Type Commander as appropriate.

Organization: Intermediate-level maintenance capacity and capability on the waterfront and responsive to commanders with a single, technical agent responsible for establishing and enforcing class maintenance standards over a ship's life cycle. Specific corrective actions include accelerating the transition from the Surface Ship Life Cycle Management Activity (SSLCMA) to a Surface Maintenance Engineering, Planning and Procurement Activity (SURFMEPP) that mirrors the highly successful submarine model (SUBMEP) and selectively restoring manning on optimally manned ships

Technical Training: Reestablish a material readiness training continuum that builds knowledge/capability over time, increases training opportunities, enables self-assessment, and certifies achievement at each step in the continuum. Specific corrective actions include improving sea-shore flow by developing more shore-based technical billets to develop master craftsmen, increasing training adequacy and realism by changing officer and enlisted training pipelines, and increasing "hands-on" training opportunities.

Culture: Ship ownership and accountability for its own material health with the ability to see and document material health problems, fix material health problems within their capacity, and ability to hold external organizations responsible for quality work. Specific corrective actions include reestablishing appropriate third party and self assessments to foster a culture of continuous improvement and reestablishing third party inspections on a standard schedule implemented on a timeline that allows ship to properly prepare.

SUMMARY

Providing forces ready for tasking is not only a commitment to the Combatant Commanders, but also a promise to our Sailors who see their entry into deployment marking the best material condition their unit will ever achieve, their overcoming the challenges of deployment to achieve mission success as the likely highlight of their careers, and the sustainment of high readiness on deployment as a significant contributor to our culture and ethos. So I strongly believe that matching the reality our Sailors will face to their expectations for deployed readiness is critical to retaining high-quality people and remaining a truly global and relevant force, regardless of the fiscal environment.

With the completion of the Fleet Review Panel Report and SAN ANTONIO Investigation, we now have a clear sight picture of the root causes behind the negative readiness trends observed in our Surface Force. These trends were twenty years in the making and will take constant pressure over time to resolve. I recognize we still have much work to do, but we have a clear path ahead to reverse negative readiness trends, assure the future readiness of the Surface Force, and uphold our commitment to the nation and our Sailors.