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SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT OF

SECRETARY RICHARD V SPENCER

U.S. NAVY

SECRETARY OF THE NAVY

BEFORE THE
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

ON THE
RECENT U.S. NAVY INDICENTS 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 current state of the Department of the Navy. The issues of safety and training and their impact on readiness are of vital importance to the security of our Nation, and are at the forefront of every decision we make.

As you are well aware, the USS FITZGERALD and USS JOHN S. MCCAIN were recently involved in two separate collisions that resulted in the loss of 17 U.S. Sailors. These Sailors served with honor and pride and we, as a Service, a Department, and a Nation, deeply mourn this great loss, alongside their families. These Sailors will not be forgotten, and our Navy stands in solidarity in support of these families and crewmembers. These Sailors were not just Navy crewmen but sons, brothers, husbands, fiancés, uncles, and friends. The stories from surviving members' actions taken to save these ships are a direct testament to the heroism and dedication of our Sailors. I appear before you today committed to understanding exactly what happened, why it happened, and how we prevent it from happening in the future. Most important is what we learn from these tragic events. You have my pledge that I will work diligently and tirelessly to examine, listen, and put in place the appropriate adjustments in operations and policy to reestablish a culture of safety and training across our Fleet, a commitment that I know is fully and equally shared by Admiral Richardson and the rest of the Navy leadership.

The Navy has had an increase in surface fleet incidents within the past eight months that has resulted in significant loss of life and injury. Three of the ships involved — the USS FITZGERALD (DDG 62) and USS JOHN S. MCCAIN (DDG 56), and the USS ANTIETAM (CG 54), which ran aground in on shoals just outside the Yokosuka Naval Base, were homeported in Yokosuka, Japan. Additionally, during this same time period, there was the collision between USS LAKE CHAMPLAIN (CG 57) and a South Korean fishing vessel. As we mourn the loss of our Sailors, we must look forward, learn, and improve upon the ways we operate. As Secretary of the Navy, I am responsible for ensuring we find out how and why this happened and put the necessary controls and procedures in place to prevent this in the future.

Make no mistake; we have a problem. Investigations have been initiated. We have completed a commander stand down to start the discussions addressing items of concern and points of friction. Additionally, both the Service and the Department have started reviews. We have taken immediate steps through the start of these investigations and reviews to examine root causes in order to address systemic issues.

While the formal investigations into each event are underway, the CNO and I have called for two additional reviews. Admiral Philip Davidson, Commander of Fleet Forces Command, is leading a 60-day Comprehensive Review. This Comprehensive Review will examine individual training and professional development, unit level training and operational performance, development and certification of deployed operational and mission standards, deployed operational employment and risk management, material readiness, and utility of current navigation equipment and combat systems, and will include recommendations on corrective actions.

In addition to the Comprehensive Review, I have commissioned a Strategic Readiness Review, assembling a team of outside experts with a deep knowledge of operational and organizational risk management. This group will look at longer term trends and bring their expertise to my review of the recommendations that result from the Comprehensive Review's efforts. Additionally, the team will review appropriate accountability mechanisms across the Department of the Navy, identify any deficiencies, and offer recommendations to reduce the potential for such tragic events in the future. Together, these reviews will provide the appropriate depth, criticality, and completeness demanded and deserved by our Nation and service members in the wake of recent trends. It will provide the construct from which we will learn and make course corrections for the way forward.

While theories about causal factors for the recent events abound, I believe it is in the best interest of the Service and the Nation to resist the temptation to jump to conclusions, speculate on causes, continue to assess responsibility, and articulate solutions until we have completed all investigations and reviews. Our investigations and reviews will be fact-based, informed by experts, and supported by evidence and data. It is our obligation to ensure the highest integrity of these investigations and reviews, and

we will protect the process at all costs. That includes the responsibility to be fully transparent about that process, transparency to which the Department and I are committed. When the investigations and reviews are complete, I look forward to sharing their results with you and the American people.

As we examine the systemic issues associated with these tragic incidents, we look to Congress to assist us in our path forward. Once I have received and reviewed the recommendations made by the review teams, I will act to the limits of my authority to change processes, acquire any needed capabilities, and protect our people. We will address any cultural shifts that might be called for, so we may chart a path that ensures we operate and train in an environment that is based upon a culture of safety.

All of these efforts rest on a foundation of sufficient and predictable funding to sustain our readiness. As I stated in my confirmation hearing, the Navy-Marine Corps team, their families, and their civilian teammates have never failed our Nation, and they never will. However, I believe that we are failing them through such actions as the Budget Control Act and repeated continuing resolutions. This imbalance must be rectified.

I appear before you today with a plan, as well as with a sense of urgency, to renew a culture focused on safety and training across the Fleet. I commit to you that we will not just look forward, but will lean forward to take the lessons from these terrible events and incorporate them into the operations of this enterprise. I appreciate the opportunity to share our efforts and continue to work together to find ways to support our Navy, and I look forward to your questions.