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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6050

CHRISTIAN D. BROSE, STAFF DIRECTOR
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February 5, 2016

The Honorable Raymond E. Mabus, Jr.
Secretary of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon, Room 4E686
Washington, DC 20350-1000

Admiral John M. Richardson, USN
Chief of Naval Operations
2000 Navy Pentagon, Room 4E662
Washington, DC 20350-1000

Dear Secretary Mabus and Admiral Richardson:

Last week, we received the annual report from the Department of Defense's Director of Operational Test and Evaluation (DOT&E). The report raised troubling questions about the Pentagon's ability to develop and procure weapon systems in an effective, timely, and affordable manner.

We are particularly concerned with the report's assessment of the Navy's Littoral Combat Ship (LCS) and its associated mission packages. More than seven years after the first LCS was delivered, the report makes clear the program remains mired in testing delays with an unclear path ahead.

Yet, we seldom hear from Navy leaders about these challenges and the path to achieving full operational capability. Instead, Navy leaders seem to be promoting the warfighting capabilities of the LCS, such as at the Surface Navy Association national symposium three weeks ago, where Secretary Mabus said in his prepared remarks, "because [LCS] can deploy with a carrier strike group, because they have such robust anti-mine and anti-submarine capabilities ... we're re-designating them as frigates ... a group of small surface ships like LCS is still capable of putting the enemy fleet on the bottom of the ocean. Now that's the success story..."

Based on the detailed program information presented by the Navy and DOT&E to us, this statement and similar statements do not appear to reflect the reality of the LCS program. Rather, this is our understanding of the LCS program:

- First, we are unaware of a plan to deploy LCS with carrier strike groups or a requirement for doing so. It is also unclear how LCS would keep up with a carrier strike group. The LCS has an endurance requirement of 3,500 nautical miles at a speed of 14 knots. However, demonstrated performance on one of the variants is less than 2,000 miles at this speed. The range of other carrier strike group escorts is more than twice that,

which means an LCS would need to refuel at least twice as frequently as the other ships in a carrier strike group.

- Second, due to LCS seaframe failures and system reliability shortfalls, the Navy has postponed the start of initial operational testing for the mine countermeasures package. In September, following a letter from us expressing concern, the Navy began an independent review of this mission package to determine if changes are needed to meet requirements. We are awaiting the outcome of this review and the Navy's proposed way ahead.

In any case, LCS has not reached an initial operational capability (IOC) in any elements of mine countermeasures today and the timeline for achieving a proven mine countermeasures capability remains unclear. Since 2009, the IOC for this package has been delayed by over four years. Meanwhile, legacy mine countermeasures platforms, including *Avenger*-class ships, *Osprey*-class ships, and *Sea Dragon* helicopters, have reached, are approaching, or have been extended beyond the end of their service lives.

- Third, regarding "robust ... anti-submarine capabilities" on LCS, the Navy does not plan to test these capabilities in an operational environment until 2017. We are still years from an LCS anti-submarine warfare IOC, which along with systems testing will also require the Navy to reduce the weight of these systems by up to 25 percent to fit on LCS and complete shipboard integration. Since 2009, the IOC for this package has been delayed by three years.
- Fourth, the only way for LCS to put the "enemy fleet on the bottom of the ocean" is the surface warfare package, which includes the only LCS systems that have reached IOC (despite significant unresolved deficiencies noted by DOT&E) and the IOC came more than two years late. The package's guns and yet-to-be-integrated missiles have a maximum effective range of only about 5 miles. Meanwhile, potential enemies' small combatants carry guns with ranges in excess of 7 miles and missiles that can reach more than 100 miles. While the Navy plans to put longer range anti-ship missiles on LCS, it has yet to do so and will likely only be able to accommodate a small number, which could be consumed by a single ship target. Unless the enemy fleet consists of a small number of lightly armed boats at extremely short range, we fail to see how the LCS reality is consistent with the Secretary's remarks.

Given the state of LCS mission package development, we are concerned with the volume and complexity of LCS mission package testing that remains. The Navy's decision to increase the permanent LCS presence in Singapore from one LCS today, to two later this year, to four by 2018 appears to exacerbate testing challenges. With practically no LCS mission package capabilities proven and only six LCS delivered, we urge you to reevaluate the deployment strategy to ensure deploying a greater number of these ships does not come at the expense of completing the integration and testing necessary to give LCS combat capability to meet the already delayed schedule.

America's Navy needs a capable small surface combatant able to assure allies, deter adversaries, perform critical warfighting missions, and respond to crisis. However, we are concerned that Navy leaders are overstating LCS capabilities while understating the current state of the program and the challenging path to achieving the promised capability. To the extent the Navy has a plan to achieve the LCS full operational capabilities, that plan has significant design, testing, integration, and deployment challenges that must be overcome before the promised warfighting capability is realized. And the recent history of the Navy's turning "LCS plans" into "LCS reality" is not encouraging. We expect Navy leaders to acknowledge and close the chasm between aspirations and reality for the LCS.

Sincerely,



Jack Reed
Ranking Member



John McCain
Chairman