

**Statement of the Honorable John Garamendi
Ranking Member, Readiness Subcommittee
“Military Readiness for FY27”**

April 15, 2026

Thank you, Chairman Bergman, and thank you to the witnesses for your service and participation today. Before I begin, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the men and women we have lost since the beginning of Epic Fury. I also want to acknowledge those who have been injured, actively in harm's way, serving on extended deployments, or on their way to the Middle East without knowing when they'll be home. Their families carry that burden too — the missed birthdays, the empty seats at the dinner table, the funerals they couldn't attend together — this subcommittee sees and honors their sacrifice.

This is one of the most consequential hearings we have each year — and this year, the stakes feel especially high. We are convening today with service members actively engaged in the Middle East, with CENTCOM executing a maritime blockade of Iranian ports. Our forces have been stretched from SOUTHCOM to CENTCOM to EUCOM — even as we prepare for the possibility of a near-peer conflict in the Indo-Pacific. Regardless of where any of us stand on the strategic decisions that brought us here — we share a fundamental obligation: ensuring that our service members have the equipment, training, and infrastructure they need to succeed in their mission.

Let me start with Operation Epic Fury and our tanker force. We lost six airmen in a KC-135 crash over Iraq on March 12— we mourn their loss and extend

our condolences to their families. The fleet further sustained damage at Prince Sultan Air Base and in Israel, straining a fleet that was already under pressure.

I have previously raised concerns about air refueling capacity, especially given the ongoing delays with the KC-46 program. Earlier last month, one of our witnesses, Vice Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General Lamontagne, stated that the Air Force would not contract for an additional seventy-five KC-46s until existing technical deficiencies were resolved. I am encouraged to see the Air Force prioritizing the resolution of capability gaps over speed of acquisition, and I view this pause as an important opportunity to ensure that investments made to date translate into a mission-ready, sustainable asset. I look forward to working with the Air Force as these deficiencies are addressed.

Now I want to shift to the Navy. Deployments typically last six months and while extensions have occurred in times of crisis, the USS Ford is likely to enter its eleventh month of deployment—a record-breaking commitment. The carrier which first deployed to EUCCOM, then to SOUTHCOM, and finally to CENTCOM, dealt with mechanical issues with the sewage system, and then a laundry fire aboard the ship, which led to over 200 sailors needing medical attention and over 600 losing their beds. I understand there is an ongoing investigation of the fire, and I would like to be kept apprised of the results. Through all of that, the sailors were focused on their mission.

Extended deployments like Ford's do not just strain the crew — they create maintenance backlogs that reverberate across the entire fleet, limiting our options for future contingencies and throwing carrier availability plans out of balance. While our forces deploy based on the needs of the COCOMs, I want to be direct: we need transparent accounting of the cascading effects these extended deployments are having on maintenance schedules, on readiness, on quality of life, and on retention.

These same pressures are not confined to the carrier fleet. For the Marine Corps, persistent amphibious ship shortages — driven by maintenance delays and years of underinvestment — are directly constraining our ability to deploy Marines on schedule and at full capability. That has real consequences for crisis response and deterrence. If amphibious readiness continues to lag, we are not just accepting risk — we are narrowing the set of options available to combatant commanders. I want to acknowledge the Amphibious Force Review Board as a constructive step toward improving readiness, and I expect to see measurable progress as its work moves forward.

We have many readiness challenges to deal with today. The Space Force lost a significant portion of its civilian workforce due to personnel reductions and is operating in aging infrastructure that was never designed to support the "employed in place" model upon which our Guardians depend. I am cautiously optimistic that

the Fiscal Year 2027 budget reflects a genuine commitment to address Space Force infrastructure needs, but this subcommittee will be watching closely to ensure those resources are executable — not just a number in a document.

Finally, one of the most persistent and frustrating readiness problems facing the entire force is the lack of access to the technical data our maintainers need to repair the equipment we own. This is not a new problem, but it is an urgent one — and it is the direct result of sustainment being treated as an afterthought in the acquisition process. Last year's NDAA made meaningful progress by requiring life-cycle sustainment to be considered in acquisition decisions. As the Department works to implement these reforms, we will be watching closely to see how they translate into real acquisition decisions.

However, this cannot only be a forward-looking fix. We must look back to our legacy and current platforms and determine how best to equip our maintainers with the technical packages needed to perform maintenance on government-owned assets. I know the Army has been moving forward on right to repair, and I am eager to hear of your efforts.

I thank each of our witnesses for being here. I look forward to your testimony, and I look forward to working with all of you on the vital work ahead. I yield back to the Chairman.