

Riverine Command Boat Investigation
Press Remarks

-As Prepared-

CNO: Good morning and thank you for being here.

- Today we are releasing the results of the investigation into the seizure of two Riverine Command Boats on January 12th of this year by Iranian forces in the vicinity of Farsi Island and the subsequent detention of 10 Sailors.
- The goal of this investigation was to conduct a thorough review of what US Navy actions may have contributed to this incident. We conduct these investigations to learn what we can in order to prevent similar events from occurring; and where necessary to hold our people accountable where they failed to follow procedures and meet expectations.

- Now before we get into additional detail, I want to address the question of international law. As I've said before, those boats and crewmembers had every right to be where they were that day. The investigation concluded that Iran violated international law by impeding the boats' innocent passage transit, and they violated our sovereign immunity by boarding, searching, and seizing the boats, and by photographing and video recording the crew.
- Having said that, the bulk of the investigation concentrated on our own lessons learned and corrective actions to prevent this from recurring in the future.

- With respect to the review of the boats' actions, the investigation looked in depth at both chains of command. You should be aware that there were two chains of command: one back in the US, and one in theater. On the administrative side, one chain of command mans, trains, equips, and certifies our forces for deployment, and then sends them forward to deploy. Once deployed to Bahrain, the operational chain of command, 5th Fleet, employs them.
- We began the investigation with the operational chain of command, when the Commander of the U.S. Fifth Fleet in Bahrain appointed an investigating officer to determine the facts and circumstances surrounding the incident.

- During review of the investigation, the Vice Chief of Naval Operations appointed the Deputy Commander of Fleet Forces Command to conduct a supplemental inquiry to focus on command and control at all levels, including the 5th fleet, and to incorporate a formal legal opinion from the Judge Advocate General on U.S. and Iranian compliance with international law.
- The Vice Chief also expanded the investigation's scope to include the 4-star fleet commanders in the US, the administrative commanders, in Fleet Forces and Pacific Fleet, to ensure all aspects of the boat crews' pre-deployment training and preparation were addressed.

- The command investigation and supplemental inquiry ensured we had a complete and objective examination of the incident from the Riverine boat crews up through the Fleet commander, as well as of the administrative chain of command that prepares them to deploy.
- The investigation reviewed seven areas:
 - manning,
 - training,
 - material readiness,
 - command and control,
 - adherence to procedures in theater,
 - Rules of Engagement and Code of Conduct, and
 - International law.

- Admiral Aquilino, my Deputy, will provide additional details about the root causes in each area and actions that are underway to address them.
- As I mentioned during recent testimony and in conversations with many of you, my intent is to be as transparent as possible. Hopefully, you have had the opportunity to review the documentation that we have already distributed. We can address any additional questions you might have at the end of the brief.

- Today, though, we will not cover specific individual accountability actions. That process is conducted separately from the investigation and is ongoing. As you all know, I can't bias that action in any way and so can't comment on the potential outcome of those proceedings.
- To walk you through the details of the investigation and corrective actions, I will turn the podium over to Vice Admiral Aquilino, my Deputy for Operations, Plans, and Strategy.

N3N5:

- Good morning.
- Let me provide you an overview of the incident itself, and then talk about issues revealed by the investigation and the corrections implemented to ensure this event is not repeated.
All time references will be in local Bahrain time.
- Coastal Riverine Squadron 3 deployed to the Fifth Fleet area of operations in August 2015.
- The Riverine Command Boats operated from Bahrain conducting escort of high-value assets in and out of port.
- In October, 2015, the boats deployed from Bahrain to Kuwait to conduct operations in the Northern Arabian Gulf.
- On January 11, 2016, 2 boats were directed to transit to Bahrain in support of a mission tasked in the Central Arabian Gulf. Riverine boats operate in pairs for mutual support.
- They planned to follow a standard navigation route used routinely between Kuwait and Bahrain.

- Because of the distance, the boats planned to meet up with another ship for fuel about mid-way through the transit.
- On 12 January 2016, two boats departed Kuwait on a 259 nautical mile transit to Bahrain, the longest transit the crews had ever executed.
- The boats departed about four hours later than planned and immediately deviated from their planned route in an attempt to make up time.
- The crews' unplanned deviation caused them to transit unknowingly through Saudi Arabian territorial seas and then through Iranian territorial seas off the coast of Farsi Island.
- Approximately a mile and a half south of Farsi Island, one of the two boats suffered an engine problem at 4:11 PM.
- Both boats stopped, one to conduct engine repairs, the second boat to provide support.

- At 4:20, two Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) patrol craft approached at high speed, with weapons uncovered.
- The crews attempted to communicate with the Iranians, informing them they had an engine issue.
- Shortly thereafter, the engine was repaired and the crews attempted to evade.
- One boat was physically blocked preventing it from departing the area, when two larger IRGCN vessels arrived.
- The boats, assessing that they were overmatched, were then forced to reposition to Farsi Island where the crews were held overnight and interrogated.
- After learning the crews were detained, Commander, Fifth Fleet directed a robust military response.
- As a result of these efforts and diplomatic negotiations, the crews were released the next morning.

Conclusions:

- As described earlier, the investigation reviewed seven focus areas.
- The CNO has already addressed international law, but I will now describe the conclusions reached by investigators regarding the remaining six areas, as well as the corrective actions taken or in progress.
- Some of those corrective actions are in the operational chain of command under fifth fleet while others are in the administrative chain of command under the direction of Navy Expeditionary Combat Command, as expeditionary force-wide changes.
- *Manning.* The report validated that the squadron was adequately manned when they deployed to the FIFTH Fleet area of operations in August 2015.
 - No corrective actions are anticipated with regard to manning.

- *Training.* The report validated that pre-deployment training and certification was adequate and appropriate for the expected missions.
- However, the investigation found that once deployed, sustainment training, including navigation, weapons, and rules of engagement training, was not conducted.
- Operationally, Fifth Fleet conducted reviews of their training and readiness programs and provided additional training to personnel in theater.
- To address this, the administrative chain of command has made a number of changes to its training programs, including navigation, operational risk management, and increased simulator training.
- Ongoing corrective actions include:
 - Monthly training assessments of in-theater forces,
 - Enhanced pre-deployment training, and
 - Greater fleet training certification requirements

- *Materiel readiness.* Materiel readiness within the squadron declined during deployment due to lack of command involvement and oversight.
 - Of note, the boats were inspected during turnover in August and found to be in good condition, but their readiness degraded during their time in Kuwait.
- In response to these findings, the administrative chain of command
 - Formalized requirements for materiel readiness programs and implemented no-notice inspections of all deployed units
- *Command and control.* The investigation found a lack of leadership, and disregard for risk management processes and proper mission planning standards.
 - It is important to note, the investigation found that if the guidance provided by Fifth Fleet had been followed, this incident could have been prevented.

- A lack of leadership for geographically distributed forces resulted in degraded maintenance, poor morale, and declining standards.
- The investigation also found poor coordination and communication between units and operations centers at all levels of command.
- Operationally, Fifth Fleet has
 - Refocused training and leadership for its Maritime Operations Center and subordinate operations centers
- Ongoing actions include
 - Revising the Fifth Fleet operations order governing Riverine Command Boat operations, to include overwatch of coastal riverine forces,
 - Greater oversight and leadership involvement for geographically distributed forces
- *Procedural adherence.* Leadership did not enforce proper navigation practices, prepare a concept of the operation brief,

a communications plan, or mission pre-briefs, or have their weapons correctly postured.

- Specifically, once underway, the boat crews failed to report deviation from their planned route, unexpected land sightings, or the engine casualty.
- In order to prevent recurrence, Fifth Fleet as the operational commander directed an indoctrination and assessment period during turnover for riverine forces.
- The administrative chain of command, the Naval Expeditionary Combat Command, has
 - Implemented formal requirements for commanders of units to continually and personally update the readiness of their deployed forces, with reports back to higher headquarters.
- *Rules of Engagement/ Code of Conduct.* The investigation determined that the Rules of Engagement were adequate, but were not understood by the boat crews.

- The investigation additionally found that some crewmembers did not meet Code of Conduct standards while in Iranian custody.
- In addition to the changes to training programs previously described,
 - The administrative chain of command has increased the training required by adding in-person Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape training for all Coastal Riverine personnel.
- In conclusion, the investigation looked at all of the seven areas of concern, and we are taking actions at all levels of the chain of command to prevent this type of incident from ever happening again.

CNO Closing

- Thank you, Admiral Aquilino. Before we get to questions, let me conclude by saying that across the navy, around the globe, hundreds of commanding officers and hundreds of thousands of US Sailors are making tough decisions and performing their duties in a way that should make every American proud, and strike fear into anybody who would want to take us on. Those Sailors also clearly know our actions in this incident did not live up to our expectations of our Navy.
- We are a Navy that learns. In order to maintain the bonds of trust and confidence amongst ourselves, and with the American people, we have an obligation to continuously examine our personal and professional conduct to ensure we always execute our mission and behave with integrity, accountability, initiative, and toughness.
- I'll now take your questions.