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U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-6035

ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS

February 18, 2014

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ROBERT L. SIMMONS, II, STAFF DIRECTOR

The Honorable Ray Mabus  
Secretary of the Navy  
2000 Navy Pentagon  
Washington, DC 20350

Dear Secretary Mabus:

I am writing to reiterate my appreciation of your efforts to integrate unmanned carrier-launched combat aircraft into the Carrier Air Wing (CVW), and also to continue our dialogue on both the requirements and acquisition strategy for the Unmanned Carrier-Launched Airborne Surveillance-Strike (UCLASS) system.

In your January 21st commentary, "Future Platforms: Unmanned Naval Operations," you reaffirmed that UCLASS will be a true "warfighting machine" capable of performing a broad range of missions in contested environments, including precision strike and intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR). As you know, I share this far-reaching vision for UCLASS with you, and believe its realization is critical for enhancing the CVW's role in the sea-based United States power projection mission.

It is my understanding that your Department will soon release a Draft Request for Proposal (DRFP) for the UCLASS Technology Demonstration (TD) program. Understanding that a DRFP is designed to articulate system requirements and acquisition strategy to potential competitors, I view this document as significant in launching the first steps of a new acquisition program. In short, the UCLASS platform must ensure long-term utility to warrant full funding amidst severe defense budget constraints. Therefore, as you assess Navy preparedness to release a DRFP for the UCLASS TD program, I request that you pay special attention to requirements already defined in the UCLASS Capability Development Document such as aerial refueling, survivability, lethality, and payload.

Aerial refueling is essential for providing UCLASS, and thus the CVW, with enduring utility in the power projection mission area. Only through in-flight refueling can a UAS sized for carrier basing achieve sortie endurances required for both responding globally to short-warning aggression irrespective of carrier positioning and, once in-theater, staging ISR and strike operations from outside the lethal envelope of an adversary's longest-range threats.

As for survivability and lethality, years of government and industry analysis has shown that radar cross-section reduction throughout the threat frequency spectrum is required for survivability navigating and operating among advanced integrated air defense systems. As the Navy's sole contribution to the joint family of unmanned strike systems, UCLASS should have the capability to survive in contested threat air environments. Finally, with UCLASS being the Navy's only currently planned, unmanned strike aircraft, I place a premium on optimizing internal payload carriage capacity and versatility to support the simultaneous needs of both the carrier-strike group commander and the geographical combatant commander.

I thank you again for your service and the dedicated professionals assembling the UCLASS acquisition strategy, and remain committed to working with you to realize our shared vision of UCLASS.

Sincerely,



J. RANDY FORBES

Chairman

Subcommittee on Seapower and Projection Forces

JRF:hb