



OPERATIONAL TEST
AND EVALUATION

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
1700 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1700

SEP 02 2015

The Honorable William M. "Mac" Thornberry
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-6035

Dear Mr. Chairman:

(U) I have enclosed the Early Fielding Report on the *Virginia* class Block III submarine, required by Section 2399, Title 10, United States Code. This Early Fielding Report is submitted because the Navy deployed the first *Virginia* class BKIII submarine, USS *North Dakota* (SSN 784), on a specialized, two-month mission prior to completing Developmental Testing (DT) and Follow-on Operational Test and Evaluation (FOT&E).

(U) The *Virginia* class BKIII submarine differs from its predecessor by incorporating several cost-saving design changes, principally, the replacement of the legacy, bow-mounted, Spherical Array (SA), which is the safety-of-ship sonar array, with a new conformal Large Aperture Bow (LAB) array; and the replacement of the 12 Vertical Launch System (VLS) tubes with two, re-configurable Virginia Payload Tubes (VPTs). These significant changes prompted the Navy to re-assess *Virginia's* performance in the mission areas of Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW), Anti-Surface Warfare (ASuW), Strike Warfare (STW), and Intelligence (INT) while operating in a High-Density Contact Management (HDCM) region, with FOT&E currently scheduled for fiscal year 2016.

(U) In the report I conclude the following:

- (U) Data obtained from early DT, additional special testing focused on sonar performance, and at-sea observations, indicate the differences in the *Virginia* class BKIII submarine should not degrade ASW, ASuW, Naval Special Warfare (NSW), and INT mission capabilities relative to the *Virginia* class BKI/BKII variants. In particular, the new LAB array has the potential to perform as an adequate replacement for the legacy SA.

(U) Section 2399 provides that the Secretary of Defense may submit separate comments on my report, if he so desires. I have sent copies to him; the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics; the Secretary of the Navy; the Vice Chairman of the



[REDACTED]

Joint Chiefs of Staff; and the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the Congressional defense committees.


J. Michael Gilmore
Director

Enclosure:
As stated

cc:
The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member



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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
1700 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1700

SEP 02 2015

The Honorable Rodney P. Frelinghuysen
Chairman, Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-6015

Dear Mr. Chairman:

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Joint Chiefs of Staff; and the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the Congressional defense committees.


J. Michael Gilmore
Director

Enclosure:
As stated

cc:
The Honorable Peter J. Visclosky
Ranking Member



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SEP 02 2015

The Honorable John McCain
Chairman
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-6050

Dear Mr. Chairman:

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Joint Chiefs of Staff; and the Chairmen and Ranking Members of the Congressional defense committees.


J. Michael Gilmore
Director

Enclosure:
As stated

cc:
The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member



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WASHINGTON, DC 20301-1700

SEP 02 2015

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman, Subcommittee on Defense
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510-6025

Dear Mr. Chairman:

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Director

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As stated

cc:
The Honorable Richard J. Durbin
Vice Chairman