

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
MINORITY (202) 225-6051
<https://oversight.house.gov>

December 21, 2023

The Honorable Lloyd Austin
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Austin:

The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is investigating long-term problems regarding the reliability of the V-22 Osprey tiltrotor military aircraft (Osprey). Considering the recent Osprey crash off the shore of Yakushima, Japan, in addition to other crashes during the lifetime of this airframe, the Committee remains concerned about safety and performance issues surrounding the Osprey program.¹ Further concern is warranted because the Department of Defense (DoD) grounded its entire fleet of Ospreys to mitigate risks.² It is crucial for the safety of our servicemembers to ensure transparency, accountability, and a thorough understanding of the steps DoD is taking to mitigate any further mechanical risks. The Committee is requesting documents and information to better understand the Osprey program's performance, safety, and oversight.

Since 1992, there have been over a dozen Osprey crashes that have killed over fifty servicemembers.³ According to the Department of Defense Inspector General (DoD IG), the Osprey has been plagued with reduced visibility and engine failure.⁴ There have also been several Osprey crashes due to faulty gearboxes.⁵ Over nine years of attempts to redesign the U.S. Navy's version of the aircraft to prevent engine failure, crash casualties continue.⁶ The DoD IG also claimed that Osprey redesign may not, "correct long-standing problems with the V-22."⁷ And while, statistically, the Osprey is not considered as dangerous as some other military

¹ Press Briefing, Dep't of Defense, Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Ms. Sabrina Singh Holds a Press Briefing (Nov. 30, 2023).

² Haley Britzky, *US military grounds Osprey fleet after crash off coast of Japan kills 8 US airmen*, CNN (Dec. 6, 2023).

³ Oren Libermann, Heather Chen, Brad Lendon, Angus Watson and Tara Subramaniam, *US Marines Identify 3 killed in Osprey aircraft crash in Australia*, CNN (Aug. 28, 2023).

⁴ U.S. DEP'T OF DEFENSE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GEN., DODIG-2020-006, EVALUATION OF THE V-22 ENGINE AIR PARTICLE SEPARATOR, 3 (Nov. 7, 2019).

⁵ Matthew Adams, *Faulty Clutch Caused 2022 Osprey Crash that Killed 5 Marines, Investigation Finds*, AVIATION PROS (July 24, 2023).

⁶ *Supra* n. 4 at Title Page.

⁷ *Id.*

aircraft, the Committee remains alarmed that most fatalities involving the aircraft have happened during training exercises, not combat operations.⁸

The American taxpayer has invested heavily in the Osprey program. Each unit cost approximately \$120 million to procure, and DoD has purchased over 450 Ospreys, spending billions of dollars in sustainment, operations, and maintenance.⁹ The Committee is keen to understand the rationale behind such a significant expenditure and how DoD balances these costs while ensuring military capabilities and readiness.

The Committee has done extensive examination of the Osprey program in the past.¹⁰ In 2009, the Committee held a hearing on the future of the Osprey program.¹¹ Prior to the hearing DoD failed to provide substantial documents and information and stonewalled the Committee's oversight.¹² In the years since that hearing, additional reports from government watchdogs revealed problems in the Osprey program,¹³ yet our servicemembers remain in harm's way without resolution of known mechanical issues.

The Committee recognizes the significant advantages the Osprey can bring to combat. The Osprey's turboshafts can rotate ninety degrees, switching from a helicopter-like flight mode to a horizontal airplane-like configuration, and can carry twenty-four combat troops twice as fast and five times farther than previous helicopters.¹⁴ We also recognize the economic impact of the Osprey program, consisting of more than 500 U.S.-based suppliers, employing over 27,000 people across 44 states.¹⁵ However, if the same tiltrotor technology is planned for use in civilian aircraft¹⁶ or in future military aircraft,¹⁷ additional oversight is needed to ensure public safety.

Given the gravity of the loss of servicemembers' lives, increasing costs, and the future economic impact and innovative applications of Osprey program technology, the Committee requests documents and information to shed light on aspects of the program's safety and performance. Please provide the following documents and information as soon as possible, but no later than January 4, 2024:

⁸ *Supra* n. 3.

⁹ DEP'T OF DEFENSE, DD-A&T(Q&A)823-212, V-22 OSPREY JOINT SERVICES ADVANCED VERTICAL LIFT AIRCRAFT (V-22), 15 (Dec. 2019).

¹⁰ Press Release, H. Comm. On Oversight and Gov't Reform, Towns, Issa Postpone Hearing on the Future of the V-22 Osprey (May 21, 2009).

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Supra* n. 4; GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE, GAO-09-692T, V-22 OSPREY AIRCRAFT: ASSESSMENTS NEEDED TO ADDRESS OPERATIONAL COST CONCERNS AND DEFINE FUTURE INVESTMENTS, (June 23, 2009).

¹⁴ See MV-22 Osprey available at <https://www.military.com/equipment/mv-22-osprey>

¹⁵ See *22 Fast Facts on the Bell Boeing V-22 Osprey*, BOEING (June 30, 2023) available at <https://www.boeing.com/features/2023/06/22-fast-facts-on-the-bell-boeing-v-22-osprey.page>

¹⁶ Jeremy Bogaisky, *After 24 Years, The Civilian Version of the Marines' V-22 Osprey Tiltrotor is Finally Nearing Takeoff*, FORBES (Mar. 9, 2020).

¹⁷ See Bell V-280 Valor available at <https://www.bellflight.com/products/bell-v-280>

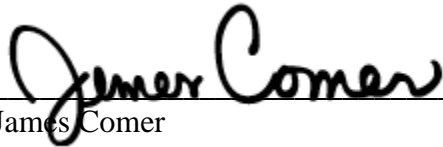
1. All documents and communications detailing safety records specific to the Osprey program, including but not limited to incident reports, accident investigations, and any corrective actions taken by DoD in response to safety concerns;
2. All documents and communications related to the maintenance and reliability of Osprey aircraft, including but not limited to maintenance logs, reports on component failures, and measures taken to address reliability issues;
3. All documents regarding the training and professional development protocols for Osprey pilots and maintenance crews;
4. All documents and communications detailing incidents or accidents involving Osprey aircraft, including but not limited to information on the circumstances of the incident or accident, findings of investigations, and actions taken to prevent similar incidents;
5. All documents and communications detailing the performance evaluations of Osprey aircraft including assessments of its capabilities, limitations, and any modifications or upgrades made to improve performance;
6. Any independent assessment or review conducted by a third party since 2009 in DoD's possession;
7. All documents detailing the costs associated with the Osprey program, including but not limited to acquisition costs, maintenance expenses, and any budgetary considerations; and
8. All documents and communications regarding DoD's plans for the future of the Osprey program, including but not limited to any planned upgrades, modifications, or changes in operational use.

To arrange for the delivery of responsive documents or ask any related follow-up questions, please contact the Committee on Oversight and Accountability Majority staff at (202) 225-5074. Attached are instructions for producing the documents and information to the Committee. The Committee on Oversight and Accountability is the principal oversight committee of the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate "any matter" at "any time" under House Rule X.

Thank you in advance for cooperating with this inquiry.

The Honorable Lloyd Austin
December 21, 2023
Page 4 of 4

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James Comer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "J" and "C".

James Comer
Chairman
Committee on Oversight and Accountability

cc: The Honorable Jamie Raskin, Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Accountability