

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
MINORITY (202) 225-5051
<https://oversight.house.gov>

March 13, 2025

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

Dear Secretary Hegseth:

The Subcommittee on Military and Foreign Affairs is investigating the U.S. military's use of airspace in the National Capital Region. On January 29, 2025, a U.S. Army UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter and American Airlines flight 5342 collided near Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA), resulting in the deaths of sixty-seven people.¹ The Subcommittee seeks a Member-level briefing on the circumstances surrounding the incident, and steps that the Department of Defense (DoD) is taking to ensure that this type of accident does not happen again.

According to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), there have been thirty near-midair collisions since 1987 around DCA, with one third of those incidents involving military aircraft and seven including helicopters.² Washington, D.C.'s airspace is among the most complex and heavily regulated in the nation. DCA operates within the tightly controlled Flight Restricted Zone (FRZ), making it one of the busiest and most sensitive airspaces in the country.³ DoD plays a critical role in managing and securing this airspace, with military aircraft frequently conducting operations in and around the National Capital Region. Missions range from routine training and transport to air defense and emergency response, all of which require precise coordination with civilian aviation authorities to ensure safety and operational effectiveness.

Initial reports of the crash indicated a potential miscommunication between DCA air traffic control (ATC) and pilots of the UH-60 when they were instructed to avoid the incoming Canadair Regional Jet 700 (CRJ).⁴ Additionally, the crew of the UH-60 reportedly were wearing night vision goggles which may have impaired the pilots' peripheral vision.⁵ The use of night vision goggles, while critical for military operations, can reduce depth perception and situational awareness,

¹ Samantha Gilstrap, *NTSB Provides Update on DCA Crash Investigation Involving Black Hawk Helicopter and Plane*, WUSA9 (February 26, 2025).

² Kathleen Wong, *Rate of near-midair collisions are high around DCA. What does that mean for travelers?* USA TODAY (Feb. 4, 2025).

³ *Restricted Airspace*, FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION, available at <https://www.faa.gov/newsroom/restricted-airspace-0>

⁴ *Supra* n. 1.

⁵ *Id.*

The Honorable Pete Hegseth

March 13, 2025

Page 2 of 2

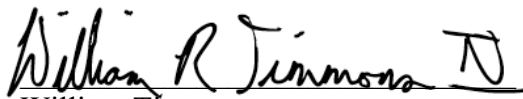
potentially delaying the pilots' ability to recognize and react to the approaching aircraft. As authorities continue to assess the circumstances of the incident, it will be critical to identify any contributing factors and ensure mitigation measures are implemented to enhance future airspace safety.

To assist with the Committee's oversight of this matter, we request a Member-level briefing as soon as possible but no later than April 1, 2025, covering, at a minimum, the following information:

1. A list of known or suspected failures in operational procedures that led to the incident;
2. Any potential security risks identified by DoD relating to the high amount of air traffic in and around the National Capital Region;
3. Any procedural or regulatory issues that may have contributed to the crash;
4. Existing risk mitigation measures for military flights near DCA; and
5. Steps DoD is taking to ensure military operations do not interfere with the safety of American air travel and steps to prevent this incident from reoccurring including but not limited to any changes to flight protocols, training, or airspace usage following the incident.

The Committee on Oversight and Government Reform is the principal oversight committee in the U.S. House of Representatives and has broad authority to investigate "any matter" at "any time" under House Rule X. To schedule the briefing or to ask any related follow up questions, please contact the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform Majority staff at (202) 225-5074. Thank you for your attention to this request.

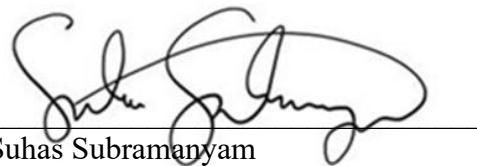
Sincerely,



William Timmons

Chairman

Subcommittee on the Military and
Foreign Affairs



Suhas Subramanyam

Ranking Member

Subcommittee on the Military and
Foreign Affairs