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January 16, 2026

The Honorable John Phelan
Office of the Secretary of the Navy
1000 Navy Pentagon
Washington, DC 20350
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Subj: Recommendation in GAO Report GAO-25-108781 Navy Vessel Testing

Dear Hon. Secretary of the Navy Phelan:

This letter augments my letter, Subj: SON Phelan's Commitments at Senate Appropriations Committee Hearing, date June 25, 2026. At the hearing, you committed to leveraging technology to drive smarter decision-making. The letter included my recommendation to:
    Institutionalize iterative development and the digital engineering (DE) ecosystem including digital threads, digital twins, and Minimum Viable Products.

GAO Report GAO-26-108781 *Navy Vessel Testing* included a similar recommendation that you should:
    Establish a cohesive plan for investing in the development and sustainment of digital infrastructure (A.K.A. digital thread) that will support the Navy's ability to expand the use of enterprise-wide digital test assets for operational test and evaluation of Navy vessels. (Recommendation 3)

GAO found that the Navy does not have a cohesive action plan for investing in and developing digital testing capabilities, including infrastructure improvements to support a common digital source of test information for the shipbuilding enterprise. Such an information source— referred to as a digital thread in our prior work—could improve access to current test data, increasing its usefulness to Navy stakeholders across acquisition, test, and fleet organizations throughout a program's life cycle.

You concurred with Recommendation 3.

The GAO report included the following benefits of having a digital thread:

- Maintaining a digital thread that captures digital records of all states of a product throughout development and testing enables stakeholders to predict performance and optimize their product. It also provides real-time, reliable information to users that can be used to identify areas where the product's design can provide the most value.

- Having a digital thread as an authoritative source for test data would be beneficial to operational test and evaluation and shipbuilding programs in general.

GAO Report GAO-26-107009 Weapon Systems Testing included similar recommendations for the Secretaries of the Army and Air Force, the Secretary of Defense, the Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering, and the Director of Operational Test and Evaluation.

Please incorporate the recommendations in my white papers and *Defense Acquisition Magazine* articles on DE when establishing your plan.

Yours truly,

Paul Solomon

CC:
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Hon. Mike Rogers, HASC	Hon. David Norquist NDIA
Hon. Roger Wicker, SASC	Hon. Michael Duffey, USD
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