



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
 OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
 WASHINGTON, D. C. 20350
 11 November 1977

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Subj: Draft Issue Paper on Naval Forces - INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

I am most appreciative of your consideration in affording me the opportunity to review and comment on OMB's issue paper. As you suggested, I am working with Russ on the response, and more detailed comments than contained herein have been passed to him. The attachment is a talking paper on the subject that I think you will find useful.

My initial reaction to the paper was to question its purpose. My impression is that OMB is concerned with the budget at hand, whereas the paper concerns itself more with outyear programming issues, principally those relating to carriers. The FY 79 budget is even now undergoing review, and the Decision Package Sets are being processed in full coordination with OMB. If the paper's purpose is to address carriers in the context of the FY 79 budget, the DPS process would seem to me to be a more appropriate vehicle. It is one thing to trim a budget; it is another to restructure the Navy after exhaustive OSD review. There is, however, little money in the FY 79 budget for carriers. The total consists of \$75M for long lead materials and \$32M for the carrier service life extension program. The issue then is related more to outyear force structure than budget year review.

If the purpose of the issue paper is to affect consideration of the FY 80 budget, I question its timing. The paper correctly notes that the Navy has undertaken two significant efforts, both of which will contribute to the understanding of the carrier issue. One, the Assessment of Sea Based Air Platforms, is being conducted at the request of the Congress, and will array relative costs and effectiveness of a variety of air capable platforms. Contrary to the assertion in the paper, the Navy fully expects to meet the Congressional deadline of 1 February. The other, the Naval Force Planning Study, will incorporate and expand on the

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results of the Sea Based Air Assessment, and should have preliminary results available in January, not May as stated in the issue paper. Thus, the President will have ample opportunity--and information--to address the carrier issue well in time to affect the FY 80 budget should he choose to do so.

If the purpose of the issue paper is to illuminate the carrier issue, then I have serious reservations as to its thesis and conclusions. The paper's thrust is that certain roles and missions performed by carriers can be assumed by a combination of land-based aircraft and reduced numbers of carriers, at lower costs, and with no attendant diminution in the security of the United States or its allies. I consider that unilaterally and arbitrarily reducing the number of carriers to eight has dangerous political and foreign policy implications. Little need be said concerning the critical reaction that would follow a decision to reduce capability, under the guise of cost savings, when faced with a formidable threat in an increasingly unsettled world. My reservations extend beyond that, however, in that such a decision stemming from the issue paper would be based on an imperfect understanding of the issue. Let me comment on some of the assertions made. (OMB assertions underlined.)

- The carrier is vulnerable. The issue paper assumes that the carrier (and by implication all surface vessels) is becoming relatively more vulnerable to conventional weapons with each passing year. This is a popular theory not supported by facts. Given the sciences and skills upon which naval combat depends, there is no technological determinism which favors the Soviet offense over the U.S. defense. If anything, the opposite is true, particularly since the defense of our carrier task force is, in tactical terms, entirely offensive. In this regard, the presence of a carrier would be critical to the survival of other naval forces operating in its proximity.
- Alternative ship types could substitute for carriers in the presence role. This is a rather cavalier treatment of a sensitive variable. Much of a ship's usefulness in a peacetime presence role depends on the credibility of its combat capability. LHAs, LPHs and the like simply do not compare with the strike potential of the modern carrier. Further,

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there is no consideration given to the disposition of the embarked Marine units and the primary mission for which the ships were designed. The foreign policy implications of having not four but two CVs forward deployed deserves more serious treatment.

- Force sizing criterion. The issue paper is couched in terms of a NATO war of 30 days duration. I am uncomfortable with this criterion as the basis for naval force planning. A ninety day war is the current approved criterion, and while OSD has initiated a Sustainability Study to address this issue, no prudent planner can accept an arbitrary cut off point--he must take a long war into consideration.
- Bases required to support land-based air will be available. The overseas bases necessary to support land-based aircraft are becoming expensive, both economically and politically. Political instability (Portugal, Spain) or conflicting national interests (Iceland) may cause the U.S. to lose a degree of control over the size and employment of forces based in foreign countries. Excessive reliance on aircraft based on foreign soil should be avoided when possible.
- Land air bases are militarily defensible. Long range aviation, cruise missiles and precision guided munitions all combine to make fixed bases increasingly vulnerable to attack. Accordingly, the continued effectiveness of land-based aircraft depends on an uncertain ability to defend their bases successfully from a sophisticated threat.
- Land-based air alternatives will provide cost savings over carrier air. The substitution of significant numbers of new design, land-based aircraft for carriers will be a costly and time consuming initiative. No cost data whatsoever are offered to indicate that such a program would provide savings.
- Soviets will allow a permissive air environment for employment of U.S. land-based air. Long range, land-based aircraft of the sort required to perform sea control are inherently vulnerable to attack by missiles and fighters. Thus, the survival of U.S. land-based air in an expanded sea control role is contingent upon the questionable availability of a permissive environment within which to operate.

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With these considerations as prologue, suppose we did only protect a SLOC in Europe by reducing carrier levels and basing more aircraft in Iceland? When the war concluded, however that might happen, the Soviet fleet might be relatively intact. Would that be a satisfactory conclusion? Despite the paper's assertions about surface ship vulnerability, the Soviets have good reason to be concerned about the offensive capabilities of our carrier strike groups and SSBNs. The loss of their navy, and perhaps more, is a price they might very well have to pay for aggression in Europe. The paper also acknowledges that with one third fewer carriers the sea lines to Japan would be severed. Where does that leave Japan, our foremost Asian ally with the world's third largest GNP, at war's end? Let me put forward one very interesting perspective not even a part of the paper's framework. Our intelligence community is in basic agreement that the Soviets will pursue in the future a more global and opportunistic foreign policy. Outside the Eurasian land mass--most of the world--where U.S. and Soviet interests conflict, our naval forces will be deployed in future crises. The Soviets are building towards 8-12 VSTOL carriers. The Navy is investigating region by region future U.S./Soviet surge deployments in a crisis to analyze which side would have clear force superiority. They are doing this under two parameters--superiority at sea, and superiority if land-based air is employed by both sides. The latter variant is considered as an escalatory step, since both sides would prefer not to have to involve use of their homelands or an ally's permission in order to gain superiority. We wish to determine if there are scenarios in which the President would be foreclosed from preferred options or forced to escalate due to a lack of confidence in U.S. military capabilities. Such crises are not beyond the pale, as the Sixth Fleet Commander's experience in the Mid East War of 1973 attests.

Our preliminary analyses indicate that, depending upon the severity of the Soviet naval buildup and the proximity and numbers of Soviet naval air (especially the Backfire), three and perhaps four carrier task forces would have to be surged to assure us of regional superiority. The issue paper acknowledges that such crises, especially in the Mid East, are possible and that we might use land-based air in Israel or Iran; or that, with only a few carriers available to surge from an eight carrier base, we might have to admit such operations are "risky." Well, given the

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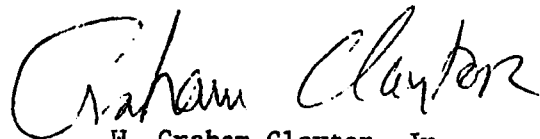
overall volatility of the international environment over the next quarter century, the pressures OPEC might exert over our allies in a crisis, and the threat the Soviets would pose to the nation from which our land-based air was to fly, I do not believe we can assume away the issue of Soviet/U.S. naval interaction as a lesser included case of NATO SLOC protection. In terms of the types of forces most useful and the nature of their employment, SLOC protection and crisis management are not generically the same.

But to get back to some specifics outside the context of the carrier issue, I am uncertain as to the impetus for inclusion in the issue paper of the CGN 42, the cable layer, and two destroyer tenders. Even though the last three are non combatants which the paper purports to address, their deletion from the FY 79 budget is proposed in an offhand manner with little by way of supporting rationale. Again, I would expect an issue of this sort to be treated as part of the budget process, such as with the current Program Decision Sets.

In summary, three questions were asked in the forwarding memo. In reply:

- The analysis is neither accurate nor adequate.
- ~~The options are not appropriate, and~~
- ~~The President should be afforded the opportunity to review the findings of the Naval Force Planning Study.~~

While acknowledging that the carrier force structure is a policy issue that should be discussed with the President, I recommend doing so in February or March, at which time the results of our analysis will be available.



W. Graham Claytor, Jr.
Secretary of the Navy

Attachment

5 U.S.C. § 552
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