



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

March 20, 1978

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SEAPLAN 2000
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MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Subj: SEAPLAN 2000 - INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

I am pleased to forward SEAPLAN 2000, the Naval Force Planning Study. I am extremely gratified by the outcome. The Study is not a universal solvent for all naval problems -- no study can be -- but I believe that it provides a well stated and constructed framework within which to address our problems. To my mind it satisfies in a most constructive way the intent of the Study expressed in my memoranda of 14 July and 5 August 1977, and in the Deputy Secretary of Defense memorandum of 1 August 1977. I would like at the outset to express my appreciation to those members of your staff who served on and contributed so effectively through the Policy Review Group.

The Study set out to examine the most probable range of tasks for Navy and Marine Corps forces for the balance of this century, and how well we would be able to perform these tasks with forces sized on reasonable funding assumptions. In so doing the Study linked policy objectives with warfighting capability. By matching naval tasks with the capabilities of the forces we are likely to have to undertake them, the study set forth for you and the President its views of what the country may expect of naval forces now and in the future. While the Study Group admits the difficulty of predicting the outcomes of wars we have not fought, I believe the insights it contains are substantial, balanced, and will serve you well. Some insights that struck me as valuable are as follows:

First, the ability of naval forces to carry out their mission now and in the next 30 years is far more constrained than that to which this country has become accustomed over the past 30 years. The Navy faces a capable opponent at sea in the Soviet Navy. The Navy and Marine Corps will increasingly have to face these forces, as well as those of third countries, when they are called upon.

Second, it is evident that surface ships will become increasingly survivable through the 1980's, largely through the introduction of AEGIS and other new active and passive ship ASMD and ASW systems that are the fruits of earlier developmental investments. This is the time to make those investments pay off. Yet the study also indicates that we must pursue actions now to counter the impressive potential air threat that will likely beset us in the 1990's.

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Third, the Study illustrates well the importance of having naval forces that are flexible and in balance for a wide range of demands. The value of maintaining an offensive option against the Soviets is evident, for it retains for the nation at least one means short of a nuclear exchange of carrying the war to them. An effective offensive threat will also help protect U.S. and allied sea lanes by keeping the Soviets in a defensive frame of mind, with the high probability of tying up forces that would otherwise be given over to an offense against our sea lanes and airways, or against our friends and even our neighbors.

Finally, and of no less importance, is an increased awareness of the way that naval forces permit the President to respond to crises flexibly and to the degree appropriate to our aims and policies. In coping with those situations -- which are deemed more likely than major war with the Soviets -- the graduated presence or application of carrier and amphibious task forces is the best reassurance for our friends and deterrence for would-be enemies.

I would like to point out that SEAPLAN 2000 is complemented by the Sea Based Air Platform Study, forwarded on 17 February. SEAPLAN 2000 omits the details of individual platform variations. The Study makes no judgments on CVNs, CVVs, VSSs, or other sea based air platforms, nor the developmental track of future aircraft. It does not attempt to work out how tactical cruise missiles will be worked in to complement the sustained strike effect of aircraft. What it does is describe the tasks of Navy and Marine Corps forces with an offensive punch and the ability to go in harm's way.

I believe SEAPLAN 2000 merits close attention from you, the NSC, and the President.

W. Graham Claytor, Jr.
W. Graham Claytor, Jr.
Secretary of the Navy

Attachment

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SEA PLAN 2000
NAVAL FORCE PLANNING STUDY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION (U)

(U) SEA PLAN 2000 explores the rationale for general purpose naval forces. It addresses two sets of questions. First, what can a policymaker expect of naval forces? How do they contribute to U.S. interests? What is the connection between naval missions and U.S. national security objectives? Second, how capable are our naval forces of carrying out their missions? In assessing naval capabilities, three time frames were used: 1978, the late 1980s, and the 1990s.

The Difficulty of Naval Planning (U)

(U) It can take up to ten years for a new ship to go through the planning process, be authorized by Congress and built before it is introduced into the fleet. Further, ships remain in the fleet for 20 to 30 years unless they undergo service life extension programs in lieu of new procurement, in which case another ten years can be added to their useful service life. The naval forces serving this Administration exist today in the fleet or are already under construction. The ships that are procured--or not procured--will affect the latitude available to policymakers and thus American security interests decades

hence. Force elements with shorter lead times or shorter lifetimes can be planned to accommodate a specific scenario or an immediately pressing problem. But a near-term planning horizon is inappropriate for naval forces.

(U) For a variety of reasons it is necessary now to develop long range naval plans: this Administration is interested in and has a sense of responsibility with regard to the future; even in the near term, U.S. longer range policy planning has an important politico-military impact on allies, on potential aggressors and on the U.S. public; and finally, there is, in a real sense, a continuity between the present and the future. Recognizing these realities this Administration has directed that a study be undertaken of U.S. naval posture for the year 2000 and beyond. It is to that directive that this study responds. It does so by relating naval forces to national security objectives on the one hand and to military capabilities on the other.

(U) SEA PLAN 2000, through a series of policy and feasibility analyses, seeks to provide the policymaker with a framework for understanding the utility of naval forces. With this framework in hand, program decisions regarding the size and structure of the Navy can be made with more confidence and surety.

Past Uses of Naval Forces (U)

(U) The traditional naval functions of control of the seas and projection of power ashore have in the past included a broad range of actual missions. Judging from historical use, a primary mission, or "business," of naval force is the projection of American influence in situations where military means are appropriate. A second "business" is emerging, where the past is not prologue: that of countering Soviet influence which seriously threatens U.S. interest. A third "business" of naval forces is in support of land forces in a major war. Table A illustrates some past uses of naval forces in those businesses.

TABLE A (U)
HOW U.S. NAVAL FORCES HAVE BEEN USED

Projecting Influence

- Reassuring friends and allies (6th/7th Fleets)
- Lebanon (1958)
- Vietnam (Linebacker, etc.)
- Jordanian crisis (1970)
- Indo-Pakistani war (1971)
- Resupply of Israel (1973)
- Mayaguez (1975)
- Kenya-Uganda (1976)

Countering Soviet Projection

- Cuban missile crisis (1962)
- Cienfuegos (1970)
- Mideast war (1973)
- Horn of Africa (1978)

Supporting Land-Based Ground Power

- World War II: Battle of the North Atlantic/Pacific
- Korea (1950-53): Inchon
- Vietnam (supply lines, etc.)

(U) The point is that, given past uses of naval forces and the uncertainty of the future environment, naval planning should focus upon capabilities, not scenarios, and upon a range of measures, not a dominant force sizing criterion.

(U) There is no reason to believe that in the future the basic American security objectives will be substantially modified. A primary goal is the deterrence of nuclear threats or war against the U.S. and its allies. This study addresses the relationship between general purpose naval forces and three primary national security objectives:

- The maintenance of stability. Routine forward deployments are intended to reassure allies and strategic friends. Further, this use of naval forces serves to deter crises and constrain potential Soviet adventurism.
- The containment of crises. Critical to this is the ability to deal not only with low order crises, but also with those where the Soviets may choose to challenge U.S. capability and resolve.
- The deterrence of major war. The main elements of naval contribution to this deterrence include: a survivable SSBN force; protection for any SLOC in support of land campaigns; supporting allies, even if in proximity to the USSR; the capability to operate in forward areas and increase the risks for Soviet naval forces and capabilities; the capability to open a second front, especially in the Pacific, and possessing sufficient combat potential to hedge against the uncertainty of where and how a war of this magnitude would occur.

(U) During the course of this study, a series of measures of naval capabilities were identified. They should enable the policymaker to judge the worth of naval forces as measured against those three basic U.S. security objectives. The measures take into account the past uses, or "businesses" of naval forces. They are shown in Table B.

TABLE B (U)
POLICY-RELATED MEASURES OF NAVAL CAPABILITIES

Maintain Stability

- Forward deployments
- Perceptions of naval power

Contain Crises

- Capability to affect outcome ashore
- Superiority at sea versus Soviets

Deter Global War

- Protection of sea lanes
- Reinforce allies
- Pressure upon the Soviets
- Hedges against uncertainties

THE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT (U)

(U) In evaluating the worth of naval forces in meeting national security objectives, it was necessary to determine the environment in which they would operate.

(U) Overall, the trends do not indicate that the world will be more receptive toward American interests. The awesome American economic and military power which undergirded the stability of the democratic West in the first two decades after World War II has waned. The dollar is frequently under pressure on world money markets. The tragedy of Southeast Asia raised questions about the extent of U.S. military power, wisdom and foreign policy consensus. The alliances of the West have become less cohesive and overseas base rights are more limited. The Soviet Union has emerged as the world's second superpower whose international influence is basically derived from its steady and determined increase in nuclear and conventional military power, to which it continues to devote an unprecedented level of resources despite the inadequacies of its economic structure.

(U) The most certain aspect of the environment will be its uncertainty and volatility. There is no reason to believe that ethnic or national rivalries or irredentist claims, many of which predate this country's existence, will be amicably resolved in the next 20-30 years. The acquisition by Third World nations of sophisticated military capability (including nuclear technology) is not encouraging. Nor is the expanding world population and increasing demand on scarce resources needed for survival and national development.

(U) As the world has become more interdependent, the distinction between U.S. "vital" interests and "peripheral" interests has

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blurred. The period when the U.S. was self-sufficient in natural resources and protected by a 3,000 mile wide moat has long since past. Its economic, political and military interests are, for better or for worse, intimately related to what happens elsewhere in the world. What happens in one region affects another. The West may choose to ignore Soviet or other disruptive actions on other continents; but the consequences of those actions cannot be avoided.

(S) The military capabilities of nations in areas where the West has both vital and peripheral interests are growing. As regards naval forces alone, antiship precision-guided munitions (PGMs) are in the hands of 30 nations, excluding the NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The main threat, the USSR, continues its steady naval growth in terms of blue water (at-sea sustainability) capabilities, ocean surveillance, and antiship missile improvements. The projections are that, over the next two decades, the Soviets will double their nuclear attack submarine fleet, move to an all-Backfire naval aviation (SNA) strike force, and deploy up to eight V/STOL carriers of 40,000-60,000 tons.

(C) In doctrinal terms, the Soviets have been a sea-denial force whose maritime strategy centered around checking the nuclear-delivery potential of the carrier and the SSBN. Increasing Soviet involvement in crises worldwide, however, indicates that their doctrine accommodates to ambitions and capabilities. Today Soviet maritime strategy includes the concept of force projection, although not in mirror-image fashion to U.S. projection capabilities.

(C) While the Soviets are manifesting a more ambitious worldwide involvement, the U.S. is no longer able to offset Soviet adventurism by reliance on nuclear superiority. Moreover the alliances of the West have become less cohesive and as a part thereof, base rights are more

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restrictive. The central national security problem for the future will be effectively to control Soviet expansion of influence, hopefully without engaging in hostilities. To accomplish this will require a mix of political, economic and military means, one important portion of which will be our naval capabilities.

(U) The future will not be more secure for U.S. interests than the past.

BASIC STUDY FINDINGS AND TRENDS (U)

(S) What does the future promise in terms of U.S. naval capabilities? Basically, in terms of technology U.S. naval capabilities are improving relative to the projected threat. Naval science is dependent upon areas of expertise -- microelectronics, computers, nuclear physics, etc. -- where the United States holds considerable relative advantages over potential adversaries. ^{Five} ~~Six~~ points deserve mention.

World Environment and Military Capabilities (U)

(U) Given an unstable world environment extending well into the future, the U.S. will require a variety of military capabilities. Trends indicate the world environment will not be more stable or more secure for U.S. interests in the future than in the past. The U.S. will face adversaries overseas, great (Soviet Union) and small (e.g., Libya); the U.S. must keep secure links to overseas allies (NATO, Japan, and others) and secure access to resources (e.g., Persian Gulf oil). The U.S. will require substantial military capabilities to maintain stability, contain crises and deter worldwide war. Because uncertainty increases as we look further into the future, military capabilities must be balanced and flexible to deal with a range of possible world environments. Primary among these capabilities will be

versatile naval forces, the centerpiece of which will continue to be carriers because they contribute heavily both to control of the seas in high threat areas and to the outcome of battles ashore.

(U) Aside from force projection, other naval missions of high priority will involve the projection of U.S. influence to reassure friends and allies and counter Soviet influence projection, the latter likely to be a growing threat.

Soviet Missile Threat (U)

(S) Soviet torpedoes are the primary threat to allied convoys in a major war. But Soviet missiles, launched from either bombers, submarines or surface combatants, are the principal threat to U.S. surface forces operating either during a serious crisis such as the 1973 Mideast War or during a major war. The Soviets currently have 100 submarines and surface ships equipped with antiship missiles; they are projected to have 150 by the mid-80s. They are moving towards a force of about 300 Backfire bombers, each of which can carry two large antiship missiles 2000 miles to sea around the rim of the Eurasian land mass.

U.S. naval forces must be able to cope successfully with that threat. National security is based on a forward strategy which links the U.S. with allies on both flanks of the Soviet Union. Contrary to popular opinion, properly employed carrier task forces are not highly vulnerable. They can, of course, be damaged. But they are not easy to put out of action and are even more difficult to sink. Detailed analyses are presented in the DoN Sea-Based Air Platforms Assessment as well as SEA PLAN 2000. Technology has not made U.S. surface forces the horse cavalry of the 1980s. This trend is due to

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Antisubmarine Warfare/SLOC Defense (U)

(S) In antisubmarine warfare (ASW), systems of proven capability such as passive acoustic arrays and automatic data processing of acoustic signals are entering the fleet today. The analysis in this study indicates the defense of SLOCs (sea lanes of communication), especially in the North Atlantic, appears to be improving markedly. This is in part due to the new ASW systems. It is also due to revised intelligence estimates which substantially downgrade Soviet torpedo loads. Finally, SLOC protection is aided by allied naval capabilities to operate offensively in a major war, thereby forcing the Soviets to allocate to defense a substantial portion of their forces. Figure B illustrates the trends in SLOC protection of allied shipping in a major war.

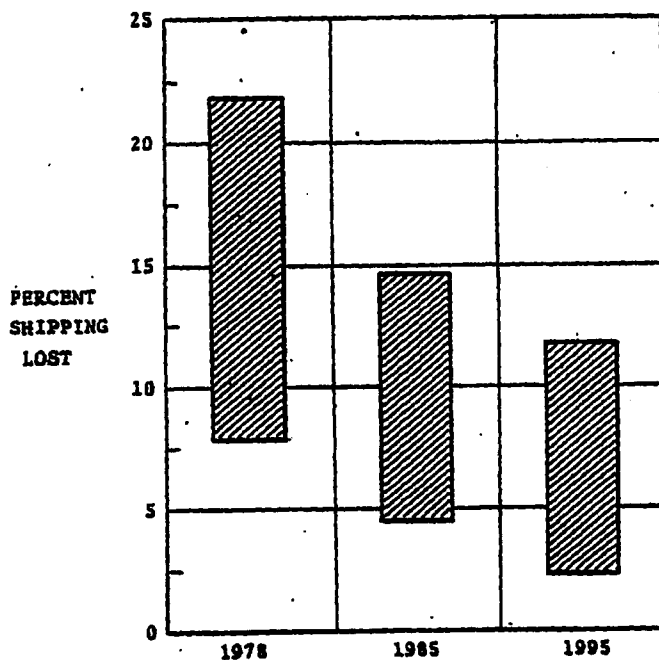


FIGURE B (S)

ATLANTIC SLOC SHIPPING LOSSES TO SUBMARINES

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a combination of fighter aircraft protection, area and point antimissile defenses (especially the new AEGIS air defense system), electronic warfare plus cover and deception tactics. Figure A illustrates this trend.

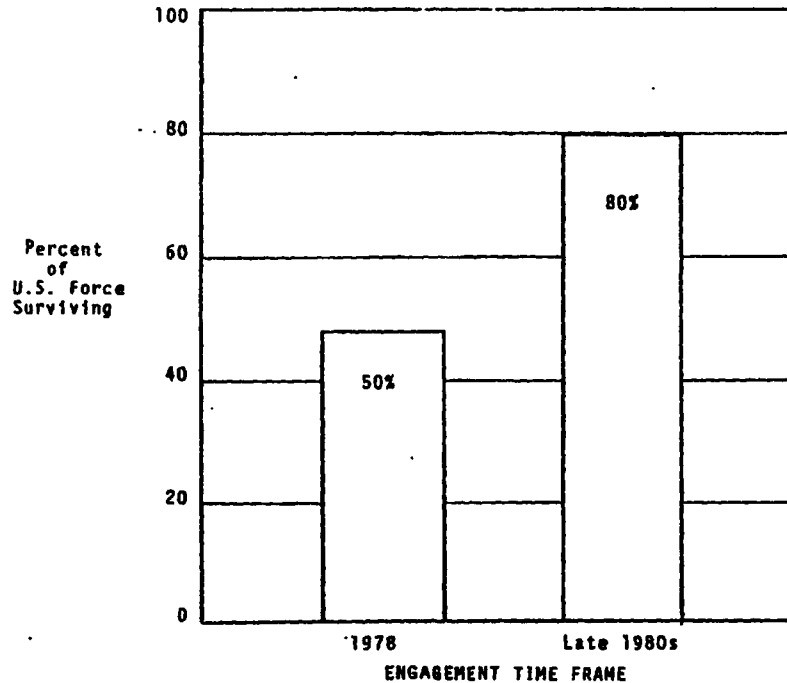


FIGURE A (S)
CARRIER FORCE SURVIVABILITY TREND
(4-5 CARRIER FORCE VS REPEATED SOVIET BOMBER
AND SUBMARINE ATTACKS)

(S) While a worldwide war is extremely unlikely, the massive Soviet buildup of strategic, theater nuclear and general purpose forces will require a high level of U.S. preparedness. [REDACTED]

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Exerting Pressure on the Soviets (U)

(5) Naval forces may have unique capabilities for assisting the flanks of NATO where otherwise the West is highly vulnerable. Analyses of forward operations in a global war indicate high uncertainty as to their success in 1978. The risks would be grave even with allied land-based air. By the late 80s, however, the U.S. capability to deal with the air/surface missile will have improved considerably, as previously shown in Figure A.

(6) Offensive naval air strikes may prove highly valuable, especially against the Soviets in the Pacific in tying down large Soviet forces which might otherwise be employed in Europe and in bolstering PRC and Japanese willingness not to accommodate to Soviet threats.

(7) The threat of opening a second front would help relieve pressure against the SLOC, complicate Soviet planning and give the Soviets pause before the initiation of hostilities. The policy worth of such operations probably resides more in their effects upon Soviet behavior in crises and upon the equilibrium of the worldwide power balance than in their employment in the remote possibility of a global war.

(8) In any major war, the destruction of the Soviet fleet and denial to the Soviets of access to any ocean is a basic objective. This requires the close coordination of surface, submarine and sea-based air assets in an aggressive naval campaign. Denying the Soviets access to the oceans provides the allies with post-hostility negotiation leverage. The ability to achieve this objective has a significant impact on the attainment of other important objectives, e.g., maintenance of important SLOCs and support for allies.

~~(S)~~ Thus, naval capabilities, in conjunction with allies and land-based air, provide for the maintenance of maritime superiority in relation to the most powerful potential adversary, the Soviet Union -- a fleet which can prevail over Soviet naval forces in the key strategic areas of the world; the North Atlantic and NATO Flanks, the North Pacific and the Persian Gulf. Forward naval operations can have a decisive effect on the outcome of a land war in Europe by ensuring firmness of NATO flank states; relieving pressure on the SLOCs ensuring reinforcement and stiffening the will to resist ^{of} various NATO states; face the Soviets with the real possibility of truly unacceptable losses in Kola and their Pacific coast; and ensure that Japan remains a U.S. ally and the PRC does not ally with the Soviets in such a war.

Dealing with Crises (U)

(U) Most likely, however, serious military challenges to U.S. interests will come not in the industrialized heartland of the West but in other geographic areas where, despite U.S. preference, military force and violence are frequently the primary means of resolving policy disputes.

~~(C)~~ The Soviets can currently target U.S. crisis response forces anywhere in the world. Further, should the U.S. draw down its forward deployments (e.g., in the western Pacific in response to a crisis in the Persian Gulf) this action could leave the USSR as the dominant naval power in the vacated region. As the Soviets perfect their V/STOL carriers, their ability to influence events ashore, psychologically as well as physically, will increase. It can be expected they will use this influence and gradually shed their image of a reactive navy and an autarkic, continental power.

Criticality of Fleet Size (U)

(e) Even with favorable technological trends, the overall fleet size is threatening to decline below the threshold of critical mass necessary for the containment of serious crises and the retention of flexible options for the deterrence of major war. Numbers are important. U.S. naval forward deployments are stretched taut. Further reduction in U.S. capital ships, when contrasted with the growing numbers of Soviet anti-ship missile combatants, is a matter for concern. In the 1980s, a serious crisis involving Soviet naval forces could occur to which U.S. naval forces would not respond effectively without withdrawing from sensitive areas such as in the Mediterranean or near Japan. As part of the deterrent to a major war, the credibility of naval force options to reinforce allies on the Soviet flanks or to hem in Soviet naval forces again depends upon massing sufficient numbers.

(cc) Major reductions in carrier levels, the heart of U.S. naval capabilities, will reduce the ability of a President to respond rapidly to crises. Indeed, if levels fall below 12, removal of a carrier will be required from forward deployment in either the Mediterranean or the Pacific, with attendant high political costs.

Choices for the Future (U)

(cc) The costs, on the other hand, to maintain a balanced naval capability, one which can project U.S. influence, counter Soviet influence and, if required, fight and prevail in worldwide war, can be met within a 3% real budgetary growth. New technologies will affect the naval capabilities on both sides but there is no basis to conclude that in balance they adversely affect U.S. interests. To the

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contrary, the potential of the cruise missile, V/STOL, AEGIS, etc., if vigorously pursued, should open new opportunities for retaining U.S. dominance of the seas.

Summary (U)

(U) So, for naval force planning, the future offers both an opportunity and a challenge. The opportunity relates to the positive trends in technology. The challenge relates to the negative trends in the numerical size and the mission flexibility of the fleet. The issue is how to exploit the promise of technology and to procure the numbers of platforms at an affordable cost.

U.S. SECURITY OBJECTIVES: GENERAL (U)

(U) A primary goal is and will be the deterrence of nuclear threats or war against the U.S. and its allies. This study does not address forces for nuclear warfighting. It does, however, address the relationship between general purpose naval forces and the three primary national security objectives described earlier:

- Maintain stability
- Contain crises
- Deter worldwide war

(U) Since World War II, the U.S. has actively pursued the goal of worldwide stability. A principal means has been a forward strategy, linking U.S. forces and security to those of friends and allies across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. A second objective has been the containment of crises, even in regions not in themselves vital to U.S. interests. The purpose has been to avoid the unraveling of stability

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Date: AUG 08 2016

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-- a disintegrating process which would impact critical U.S. interests. A third objective has been the deterrence of another world war in this century. This goal requires not just strong allies, strong forces in place in Europe and the assurance of timely reinforcement. It also demands skill in containing crises and supporting orderly global change, for a world war would most likely stem from the failure of the West to respond appropriately to lesser conflict.

SECURITY OBJECTIVE: MAINTENANCE OF STABILITY (U)

Forward Deployments (U)

(U) A stable world order in which the nation states favor international cooperation rather than conflict is a reasonable national security objective. Naval forward deployments in sensitive areas are intended, as is U.S. troop commitment in Europe, to maintain stability and to deter serious conflicts in sensitive areas from arising.

(U) Since 1945, policymakers in successive Administrations have seized upon sea-based power as a means of affecting the behavior of decision-makers in other nations. On a daily basis, this influence is projected by naval forward deployments whose presence in a region is intended to reassure allies, deter enemies, ensure quick response, and demonstrate U.S. interest and resolve in the region. In a phrase: to undergird stability and to foster relationships favorable to U.S. interests.

(U) Except in war, the tempo of naval operations is driven by the pattern of forward deployments. These deployments center on the amphibious ships and the carriers, for they represent the ability of America to influence events ashore.

(U) The Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean, with its two battle groups,* and one Marine Amphibious Unit (MAU), is not only the pivotal power reassuring U.S. allies on the Southern Flank. The Sixth Fleet is the single most powerful entity, American or otherwise, in a maritime region of 17 nations and 300 million people. Many of those states, while not within the NATO alliance, look to the United States for reassurance and support -- states such as Spain, Morocco, Tunisia, Israel, Egypt and Jordan. The Sixth Fleet symbolizes American steadfastness in that region of the globe where the Soviets keep most of their forward deployed naval power. In the face of the improving Soviet Navy, it would be difficult to withdraw one of the two U.S. battle groups and believe the stability and the power balance of the region would not be affected.

(U) On the other side of the globe, geography renders the vast Pacific a naval region. One battle group operates in the area of Japan, the PRC and the Soviet Far East. Another battle group operates sometimes in joint support near Korea, sometimes in the South China Sea, sometimes in the Indian Ocean. One objective of the Soviet Union in the Indian Ocean negotiations is to exclude this battle group from that body of water. This is the naval force most likely to be dispatched into a crisis in the Persian Gulf or East Africa, where, as in Northeast Asia, not all nations share the U.S.'s pursuit of stability. In recognition of the fact that friends and potential adversaries alike are watching U.S. actions in the Pacific following the announced withdrawal from Korea, the President has directed that there be no further force reductions. The Seventh Fleet remains the most significant manifestation of U.S. presence.

* A battle group presently contains a carrier, four to eight surface combatants, from zero to two SSNs, and an underway replenishment ship.