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Honorable William J. Porter
Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs
Washington, D. C. 20520

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Authority: EO 13526
Chief, Records & Declass Div, WHS
Date: MAY 24 2018

Dear Bill:

(U) In response to both former Secretary of State Rogers' letter of 31 July to the Secretary of Defense and your 11 June letter to me, the following information relative to Phase II of the Athens homeporting initiative is provided to assist your department in its continuing review of the program.

~~(S)~~ Our naval presence in the Mediterranean contributes significantly to the overall stability in that vital area. The Sixth Fleet is there not only because of our commitments to NATO but because of other U.S. foreign policy interests that go well beyond NATO. Homeporting carriers both in Greece and Japan will enable us to continue maintaining two carriers in the Mediterranean and three carriers in the Far East, while at the same time achieving a reasonable and fleet-wide balanced deployment regimen for our carriers and their crews.

~~(S)~~ Admittedly, there have always been political costs, both domestic and international, associated with pursuing the Athens homeporting initiative. On the other hand, if we are unable to continue to meet our naval commitments in the Mediterranean the political as well as strategic costs could be even greater.

~~(S)~~ In addition to the strategic considerations, we must assure, in this era of the all-volunteer force, acceptable living standards for our service families wherever they may be stationed. One of the primary objectives of the overseas homeporting program is to increase enlistments and retention by enhancing the quality of Navy life experienced by Navy personnel and their dependents. While the program is designed to ease the burdens currently faced by married personnel, it also demonstrates the compatibility of service and family life to the younger unmarried Navy men. We are, therefore, most interested in, and have been aware of, the problems that have arisen in Athens, including those cited in the State Department staff survey report. In this regard, a copy of the

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Secretary of the Navy's comments on that staff report is enclosed to assist in your department's continuing review of the Athens program. It is considered that the Navy's comments adequately respond to the questions raised in that report. The Phase II implementation plan was designed to correct residual Phase I problems as well as preclude the occurrence of other foreseeable problems. State Department approval of Phase II is a necessary step toward the enhancement of the support facilities in Athens.

(S) My 26 June letter to Secretary of State stressed the requirement for an early and favorable State Department endorsement of Phase II subsequent to the receipt of the requisite Congressional approvals. This requirement is still valid. Since the necessary Congressional approvals may be obtained in the relatively near future our staffs should work closely to resolve any remaining differences of opinion in order to clear the way for early State Department approval of this important program.

Sincerely,

Bill Clements

Enclosure
a/s

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