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AIRCRAFT CARRIER REQUIREMENTS AND STRATEGY

1977 – 2001

Ryan A. Peeks

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AIRCRAFT CARRIER REQUIREMENTS AND STRATEGY

1977 – 2001

Introduction

This book looks at aircraft carrier requirements in the U.S. Navy between 1977 and 2001, covering the Carter, Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and Clinton presidential administrations.[1] Technically speaking, in 2020, "requirements" refers to a specific process in the Department of Defense's (DOD) acquisition system, whereby the Joint Requirements Oversight Council ensures that acquisition programs align with the National Defense Strategy and "roles, functions, and missions in current or future operations," but the word is used here in a more informal manner.[2] Instead, this book examines the process by which the Navy, the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), the Joint Staff, Congress, and presidential administrations determined how many aircraft carriers the Navy needed, how to pay for and build those carriers, and what to do with those vessels once they were in service. Taking this wider view of defense resourcing and planning will allow readers to see how the Navy fit in the wider national security picture.

Why aircraft carriers? Simply put, aircraft carriers provide a way to look at Navy policy in a manageable package. Over the 1977–2001 period, the Navy never possessed more than 16 aircraft carriers and never had more than two under consideration in a single budget cycle. However, these relatively small numbers are the primary determinant of the size of the entire Navy. The number of aircraft carriers helps to set the number of cruisers and destroyers that escort them, the logistics vessels that supply them and their consorts, and the aircraft that fly from their decks. Furthermore, the capabilities provided by aircraft carriers have underpinned most aspects of the Navy's strategy across the spectrum of conflict, from potential global war with the Soviet Union down to peacetime forward presence and crisis response.

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[1] A companion publication, covering the years 1945–76, is in production at NHHC.

[2] Joint Staff, "Charter of the Joint Requirements Oversight Council (JROC) and Implementation of the Joint Capabilities Integration and Development System (JCIDS)," Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 5123.01H, 31 August 2018, pp. A-1, A-2, GL-7. JROC was initially established in 1984 as the toothless Joint Requirements and Management Board before being given expanded responsibilities and its current name in 1986. Gordon Nathaniel Lederman, *Reorganizing the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 93–96.

Since the carrier fleet is necessarily small, we can examine it in detail within reasonable space constraints. During the study period, the Navy began construction on six aircraft carriers (CVN-71 through -76) and received funding for a seventh, and we can trace the development, rationale, and funding of each vessel in this manuscript. This allows detailed investigation of the Navy's strategy and budgetary policy, and how each changed over three decades. While both shifted a great deal between 1977 and 2001, aircraft carriers remained at the center of the service's conception of warfare and force structure.

The acquisition cost of aircraft carriers themselves (the newest, *Gerald R. Ford* [CVN-78], cost approximately $13 billion in 2019 dollars), not to mention their expensive air wings, ensured that senior policymakers were intimately involved in decisions made about the aircraft carrier fleet.[3] This widens the aperture of the study beyond the Navy and the Department of Defense to encompass the country's entire national security decision-making apparatus. Through aircraft carriers, we can see how shifts in national strategy affected the Navy and gain a deeper appreciation of how Congress exercises oversight over the military.

To the extent that this manuscript has an overarching argument, it is that, at any given point, the Navy's uniformed leadership, frequently backed by the Department of the Navy (DON) Secretariat, attempted to secure approval for the largest carrier fleet that could be accommodated in the DON budget. This was done even at the cost of deferring modernization or sustainment of other important parts of the Navy's force structure. Regardless of the service's role in national security policy (which, at the very least, changed in 1981, 1990–1992, and again in 1993), the Navy has always argued that aircraft carrier battle groups are the best tool for fulfilling that mission, given the flexibility provided by the carrier's multifunctional air group. As a result, when carrier force targets dropped over the 1977–2001 period, it was always the result of explicit guidance or financial pressure from above, never a voluntary adaptation to changing circumstances from the Navy. This force structure preference often overrode other considerations in developing wider naval strategy and policy. Naval policy makers appear to have started from the assumption that an aircraft carrier–centered fleet was the best way to organize the U.S. Navy, and tailored the service's strategic and budgetary

[3] Ronald O'Rourke, "Navy Ford (CVN-78) Class Aircraft Carrier Program: Background and Issues for Congress," Updated 7 March 2019, Congressional Research Service Report RS20643, Summary [p. i]. Comparing the costs of carrier construction across eras is tricky, and *Ford* is an outlier on cost due to the incorporation of expensive and unproven technology in its design. By way of comparison, in 2019 dollars, *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN-71), procured in FY 1980, cost approximately $7.4 billion, about average for *Nimitz*-class CVNs.

concerns accordingly. Focusing on carriers, then, also allows us to explore how the Navy intended to use its forces in peace and war.

Readers new to the subject may be surprised to learn that the peacetime employment of aircraft carriers has attracted at least as much controversy as their wartime role. Since the late 1940s, without going too far into the subtleties that will be covered below, the primary peacetime employment of American naval forces has been in the rotational forward deployment of aircraft carrier battle groups and, to a lesser extent, groups of amphibious ships. Since the 1970s, these deployments have been concentrated in three "hubs": the Mediterranean Sea, the western Pacific Ocean, and the Arabian Sea. These forces have served many purposes from conventional and nuclear deterrence, to crisis response, to humanitarian assistance.[4] Critically, the Navy has always maintained the importance of *combat-credible* forward forces; since carrier battle groups have the ability to complete the full spectrum of warfare tasks, they are the service's forward deployment force of choice, and major contribution to national policy.[5]

Since many of the issues surrounding aircraft carrier force structure intersect with national-level policies, the most natural division of the subject has been by presidential administration. With their high visibility and great costs, the acquisition of single aircraft carriers and overall carrier requirements have often been the subject of political arguments among the White House, Congress, various elements of the Department of Defense, and within the Department of the Navy. Naturally, changes in presidential administration recast those debates. Indeed, these power shifts often serve as major inflection points in the story of the Navy's aircraft carrier fleet.

This manuscript starts by looking at the Carter administration's four-year struggle with the Navy about the future shape of the fleet. The incoming administration wished for the Navy to prepare for protecting Atlantic sea lines of communication (SLOCs) as an adjunct to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) ground forces in Germany in a war with the Soviet Union, obviating the need for new super-carrier construction. Instead, the administration proposed building smaller carriers (CVVs) sufficient for the Navy's secondary mission. Aghast at this diminution of responsibilities, the Navy Department, aided by a sympathetic Congress, successfully fought to secure funding for a large nuclear-powered carrier instead.

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[4] Peter M. Swartz, "Sea Changes: Transforming U.S. Navy Deployment Strategy: 1775–2002" (Alexandria, VA: CNA, 21 July 2002, unpublished manuscript review draft), 11, 48–49.

[5] Ibid., 1. I am grateful to Peter Swartz for highlighting the criticality of combat credibility in comments to an earlier draft of this manuscript.

The Navy's argument rested on a more expansive concept of operations. Since any war against the Soviet Union would, inevitably, be global in scale, naval forces were necessary to support NATO's northern and southern flanks as well as U.S. allies in East Asia. These forward operations would have the added effect of keeping the Soviet Navy busy in home waters—far from vital SLOCs. At the same time, the Navy's case was bolstered by a demonstration of the utility of carrier battle groups (CVBGs) in peacetime as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian Revolution's deposition of the Shah led to a permanent carrier presence in the Persian Gulf/Arabian Sea region.

After Carter, President Reagan came into office with a mandate to increase defense spending and push back against Soviet adventurism and military expansion. Along with new intelligence suggesting that the Soviet Navy would adopt a very defensive role in wartime, this shift gave the Navy a chance to institute an expansive "Maritime Strategy," which posited an aggressive role for a fleet centered on large aircraft carriers in peace and war.[6] This period is also noticeable for the term of Navy Secretary John Lehman, a strong advocate for the Maritime Strategy and a proponent of a 600-ship fleet—about 70 hulls larger than the fleet at the end of the Carter administration. Under Lehman, the Navy also pursued a novel approach to carrier acquisition, twice receiving money from Congress for two carriers in the same fiscal year (CVN-72 and -73 in FY 1983 and CVN-74 and -75 in FY 1988).

Unlike its predecessor, President George H. W. Bush's administration presided over a shrinking of the American military establishment after the end of the Cold War. In this, he was aided by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) General Colin Powell, who developed a plan, the "Base Force," for the military drawdown. Caught flat-footed by the end of the Soviet Union, and largely shut out of the Base Force process, the Navy spent most of the Bush years scrambling for a rationale that allowed for the maintenance of a large carrier fleet. While four aircraft carriers were decommissioned during, or in the immediate aftermath of, the Bush years, the Navy developed a vision of combat-credible forward presence and power projection in regional conflicts that served to protect the carrier fleet against the worst of the major budget cuts imposed between 1989 and 1993.

The book ends by considering the Clinton years. Refining its post–Cold War message, the Navy justified the utility of a large carrier fleet on the basis of "forward presence," the notion that CVBGs patrolling certain regions served as both a deterrent

[6] For more on the shift in intelligence assessments of Soviet strategy see Lieutenant Commander Christopher A. Ford, USNR, with Captain David A. Rosenberg, USNR, *The Admiral's Advantage: U.S. Navy Operational Intelligence in World War II and the Cold War* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2005), 77–108.

against conflict and an on-station option for immediate military responses in the event of war. Successful as a force-sizing metric, forward presence came to dominate the Navy's vision. By the late 1990s, the service was willing to trade readiness and construction of new surface vessels in order to maintain a 12-carrier force.

Although elements of this history have been told in a variety of places, this work provides the first in-depth treatment of carrier acquisition and requirements over the last decades of the 20th century. Surprisingly few works have tried to tackle the long-term history of U.S. Navy carriers. Though dated, the strongest remains Norman Friedman's *U.S. Aircraft Carriers: An Illustrated Design History* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, first edition 1983), which provides valuable information up through its original publication date, but, as the title suggests, is mostly concerned with specifics of design. Likewise, Norman Polmar's *Aircraft Carriers: A History of Carrier Aviation and Its Influence on World Events* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2008) focuses on the operational side of the ledger. More recently, Barrett Tillman's *On Wave and Wing* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2017), provides a mixture of operational narrative and personal anecdotes.

On the other hand, the historiography of the U.S. Navy in general over these years is somewhat better, especially when examining changes in naval strategy. The clear standout book-length work of modern U.S. Navy history is Peter Haynes's *Toward a New Maritime Strategy* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2015), which covers the structural and organizational factors retarding the development of a comprehensive U.S. naval strategy after the Cold War. Taking a somewhat higher-level view of naval strategy is Sebastian Bruns's *U.S. Naval Strategy and National Security* (Abingdon, NY: Routledge, 2018). The most exceptional resource, however, is Peter Swartz's *U.S. Navy Capstone Strategies and Concepts* (Alexandria, VA: CNA, 2011–2012), a series of 14 reports detailing the development of the Navy's strategy documents from 1970 through 2010.

Turning to narrower works, the 1980s is well represented with book like Frederick Hartmann's rather pro-Navy *Naval Renaissance* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1990) and Gregory Vistica's explicitly anti-Navy and sensationalist *Fall From Glory* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995) on the 1980s. Vistica's lurid reporting, and occasional unfamiliarity with the Department of the Navy's structure and culture led to a great deal of controversy at the time of publication. Despite these major issues, Vistica's book retains some utility for the modern-day scholar when used judiciously. John Hattendorf's *The Evolution of the U.S. Navy's Maritime Strategy, 1977–1986* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2004, originally written in 1989) provides an excellent overview of the most important naval development of the decade.

Realistically, though, most readers interested in the programmatic sides of naval policy have had to look at the general defense literature for dribs and drabs of information about the Navy. General works include Charles Stevenson's *SECDEF* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2006) and Steven Rearden's *Council of War: A History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff 1942–1991* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press for the Joint History Office, 2012). For the early portions of the project, works that flowed from the "Defense Reform" movement give a good sense of the tenor of national security debates. These include James Fallows's *National Defense* (New York: Random House, 1981) and James Burton's *The Pentagon Wars* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1993), which both sought to expose what these authors saw as inefficiencies in the administration of the Defense Department.

Rather more has been written on the Reagan administration's defense policy. Among the most comprehensive are Daniel Wirls's *Buildup: The Politics of Defense in the Reagan Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992) and the essay collection *Defense Policy in the Reagan Administration* (eds. William P. Snyder and James Brown, Washington, DC: NDU Press, 1988). There is also a lively literature around 1986's landmark Goldwater-Nichols Act, including James Locher's hagiographic, though detailed, *Victory on the Potomac* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2002).

The 1990s have not been the subject of the same depth of defense-related work. The book that provides the best high-level context on national security is Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier's *America Between the Wars* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008), published soon before Chollet entered the Pentagon as Assistant Secretary of Defense (International Security Affairs). Looking more narrowly at budgeting and resource allocation, Richard Lacquement's *Shaping American Capabilities After the Cold War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), and *Defense Planning in a Decade of Change* (Santa Monica: RAND/ Project AIR FORCE, 2001) by Eric Larson, David Orletsky, and Kristin Leuschner, provide detailed accounts of the decade's myriad of panels, reviews, and commissions. The third chapter in Dima Adamsky's *The Culture of Military Innovation* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010) provides an excellent overview of the U.S. military's framing of, and response to, the "Revolution in Military Affairs."

Another major source base for this project has the work of DOD's internal historical offices, although they have yet to deal with the 1980s and 1990s in (releasable) detail. Two works worth mentioning here are Edward Keefer's *Harold Brown: Offsetting the Soviet Military Challenge* (Washington, DC: Historical Office of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2017), and Steven Rearden and Kenneth R. Foulks's *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1977–1980* (Washington, DC: Office of Joint History, 2015), which provide detailed information on the Carter years. This work's

George H. W. Bush chapter would have been very difficult to write without Lorna Jaffe's superlative *The Development of the Base Force, 1989–1992* (Washington, DC: Joint History Office, 1993).

DOD activities tend to attract shorter analytical pieces as well, ranging from reports written by government watchdog agencies and think tanks to newspaper reports. Among the former, the reports produced by the Government Accountability Office (GAO), Congressional Budget Office (CBO), and Congressional Research Service (CRS) formed a significant part of my research. The U.S. Naval Institute's (USNI) *Proceedings* journal was also a major help, especially its annual "Naval Review" issues in May, which provide an overview of the previous year's activities and are often the only way to discover which senior officers were in which billets at a given time. Newspaper coverage of DOD can be uneven, but the *Washington Post*'s defense coverage was very useful, especially during the period when George Wilson served as the *Post*'s lead defense reporter. Through the mid-1990s, the annual editions of the *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* are a useful source for information on how defense authorization and appropriation bills fared on Capitol Hill.

Usable primary sources for this period have been more difficult to find. Professor John Hattendorf of the Naval War College has edited three collections of U.S. Navy strategy documents for the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press; 2007, 2008, 2006). Beyond those, USNI and the Naval Historical Foundation have produced an exceptional series of Navy-related oral histories, mostly conducted with retired admirals. Likewise, OSD History has released some of their interviews with senior military and defense officials. Some participants in the events discussed below have published books about their experiences, most notably Secretary Lehman's *Aircraft Carriers: The Real Choices* (Beverly Hills and London, SAGE, 1978; written after, and based on his work as a DoN consultant), *Command of the Seas* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988), and *Oceans Ventured* (New York: Norton, 2018). Other books written by participants include Admiral William Crowe's *The Line of Fire: From Washington to the Gulf, the Politics and Battles of the New Military* (with David Chanoff, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993) and Admiral William Owens's *High Seas* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1995) and *Lifting the Fog of War* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2000).

The heart of the study, however, lies in the records in the Naval History and Heritage Command's Operational Archives, especially the "00" files of material from the immediate office of the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO). More than records *of* the CNO, the files also include material prepared by, and highlighting the relationship among, the Navy, other elements of DOD, Congress, and administration policy mak-

ers. Other useful records at NHHC include similar records from the Vice Chief of Naval Operations's (VCNO) office, a gargantuan collection of JCS reports and memoranda sent to the CNO through the early 1980s, and a smaller collection of official papers from John Lehman's tenure as Secretary of the Navy (SECNAV).

The archival documents used in this manuscript are either unclassified or declassified. Many of the documents I would have liked to use, particularly in the Bush and Clinton chapters, remain classified, especially sources explicitly detailing the linkages between national security policy, force structure, and defense budgeting. In that sense, this project represents something of a first draft of the full history. However, enough usable sources remain to provide new information to researchers and analysts in the naval field, and to draw some conclusions about the Navy's aircraft carrier program in the years 1977–2001. Still, given the sourcing issues mentioned above, this text is hardly the last word. That would require, at the very least, extensive research in presidential libraries, the records of key representatives and senators, and a detailed study of closed records held by other agencies.

A few final notes about nomenclature and money will help readers unfamiliar with the subject. Like all U.S. Navy vessels, aircraft carriers have both a name and hull number (e.g. *Nimitz,* CVN-68). It is often more effective to refer to aircraft carriers by their hull number, to emphasize sequential trends or to mirror language used in internal documents. This is especially true when discussing budgeting (e.g. "the Carter Administration vetoed funds for CVN-71.") and future construction plans (e.g. "the Defense Department planned to procure CVN-77 in FY 2001."), in which the hull number stands in for a ship that may or may not be built, or a funded carrier that has not yet received a name.

Determining the size of the U.S. Navy is more difficult than one might think. In recent decades, the official count has fluctuated based on how vessels outside of the service's oceangoing warships are accounted. Within that category, aircraft carriers present special difficulties. At times, the Navy has refrained from counting its training carriers and ships undergoing long-term overhauls as "active." Unless specifically noted, this work uses the size of the Navy's entire force of carriers capable of conducting combat operations, including carriers undergoing overhauls, to standardize carrier counts across eras. In practice, this means that my figures do not include the venerable training carrier *Lexington* (AVT-16), but do include *Forrestal* (CV-59) and *John F. Kennedy* (CV-67) for the brief periods during which they were used in a training role.

This manuscript necessarily delves into the world of DOD budgeting, which may confuse some readers. Put simply, Congress funds the government one fiscal year at a time, which lasts from 1 October of one calendar year to 30 September of the next.

Fiscal years are referred to by the calendar year of their end, so FY 2000, for example, started on 1 October 1999, and ended on 30 September 2000. Two pieces of annual legislation govern DOD spending: the *authorization* act developed by the House and Senate Armed Services committees, which governs DOD's activities, including what DOD can spend money on, and the *appropriations* act, developed by the defense subcommittees of the House and Senate appropriations committees, which gives DOD the money to spend. The administration's preferred defense program is contained in the President's Budget, which is usually submitted to Congress early in a calendar year for the subsequent fiscal year. Each service's input into the President's Budget is contained in its Program Objective Memorandum (POM), which is then modified by OSD and the White House before being integrated into the President's Budget. When I refer to the Navy's internal budgeting, I am almost always referring to the POM.

Finally, adjustments for inflation are necessary to make most financial figures intelligible to present-day readers. Throughout, figures have been adjusted for inflation using the Consumer Price Index (CPI) as calculated by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, specifically the CPI-U figure used in its inflation calculator (https://www.bls.gov/data/#calculators). Using that measure, one dollar at the start of President Carter's administration would be worth about $4.30 in February 2019. In recent years, the Navy has argued, with good reason, that inflation in shipbuilding costs tends to run ahead of CPI.[7] While CPI is still the best method for comparing costs across decades, this caveat should be kept in mind with the figures used below.[8]

[7] For more on this issue, see Eric J. Labs, "Inflation in the Costs of Building Aircraft Carriers," CBO Report, April 2016.

[8] Further, BLS's CPI-U figure is calculated on a month-by-month basis. During years with high inflation, that can lead to wildly different inflation-adjusted figures depending, for example, on whether one measures acquisition costs when budgets were introduced early in the year or passed later in the year.

1

The Carter Administration

1977–81

When President Jimmy Carter, a 1946 graduate of the Naval Academy and former submariner, entered office in January 1977, the U.S. Navy possessed 13 carriers, which can be placed in three major categories. The three oldest carriers (CV-41, -42, and -43), *Midway, Franklin D. Roosevelt,* and *Coral Sea* were designed during World War II. Though modernized for jet aircraft in the 1950s, these ships, displacing approximately 70,000 tons, were too small to field effectively the newest aircraft coming on line in the Navy's inventory, the anti-submarine S-3 aircraft, and the F-14 fighter. Uniquely, *Midway* was the Navy's only forward-based carrier, homeported in Yokosuka, Japan. In 1977, these vessels were assumed to be nearing retirement and, indeed, *Roosevelt,* in the poorest condition of the three, was on its way to an October 1977 decommissioning.[1]

Next oldest were the eight conventional "super-carriers" (CV-59–64, -66, and -67), the backbone of the Navy's carrier fleet. Though technically consisting of three classes (*Forrestal*, *Kitty Hawk*, and *Kennedy*) that entered service between 1955 and 1968, these ships shared broad similarities in terms of size (~80,000 tons) and capability. Designed from the keel up specifically to handle the large jets needed to deliver early nuclear weapons, these vessels could handle the Navy's entire range of carrier aircraft.

The newest carriers were the Navy's nuclear CVNs, displacing approximately 100,000 tons, and built with nuclear power for effectively unlimited steaming endurance and the ability to carry more fuel and weapons for their embarked air wings.

[1] Displacement figures cited for these ships vary. The numbers used here are taken from the Naval Vessel Register (https://www.nvr.navy.mil).

The first, *Enterprise* (CVN-65), was commissioned in 1961, and not joined by another CVN until *Nimitz* (CVN-68) in 1975. In January 1977, the Navy had two further *Nimitz*-class ships under construction: *Dwight D. Eisenhower* (CVN-69), which commissioned in October 1977, and *Carl Vinson* (CVN-70), which entered service in 1982. For the Navy's leadership, the *Nimitz* class was the *ne plus ultra* of carrier design and the clearly desired pattern for all future construction.

This approach was complicated by a powerful strain of naval thinking in the 1970s best exemplified by CNO Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr. (1970–74). Contrary to many naval leaders, the unorthodox Zumwalt argued that the U.S. Navy was no longer in a position to achieve command of the seas in the face of the expanding Soviet Navy, the prospect of shrinking budgets, and the need to replace the Navy's aging World War II–era ships. Instead, he argued, the U.S. Navy needed to increase the priority it gave to "sea con-

This 1982 photo shows *Midway* (CV-41—left) and *Enterprise* (CVN-65) underway with escorts. Note the size difference between *Midway* and the larger *Enterprise.* Also note that *Enterprise* carries F-14s (most visible as the triangular shapes near its stern); by the late 1970s, *Midway* and *Coral Sea* (CV-43) could no longer support the full array of U.S. Navy carrier aircraft, including F-14s and S-3s (Defense Imagery Management Operations Center/DN-SC-85-07447).

A 1967 photo of USS *Forrestal* (CV-59), the first of the post–World War II "super-carriers" (National Archives/330-CFD-DN-SC-04-09140/ PHC H. L. Wise).

This 1979 photo shows two A-7E Corsair IIs flying over *Nimitz* (CVN-68) in the Mediterranean Sea (DIMOC/DN-SC-85-01958).

trol," described by one of Zumwalt's protégés as the ability to "exert, air, submarine, and surface control temporarily in an area while moving ships into position to project power ashore or to resupply overseas forces."[2]

Here, Zumwalt was responding to a shift in national strategy, away from the Vietnam War and toward a focus on nuclear deterrence, and, if that failed, a NATO–Warsaw Pact war in Europe. In such a conflict, the Navy would be responsible for securing the flow of goods across the Atlantic and power projection on NATO's flanks. While the Navy's power-projection forces were maintained during the Vietnam War, sea-control capabilities had not kept pace. The Navy's key need, argued Zumwalt (the first non-aviator CNO since Admiral Arleigh Burke had retired in 1961), was innovation, modernization, and funding for the Navy's sea-control forces, without which carrier battle groups would be unable to perform their missions in wartime.

Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., in 1970. As Chief of Naval Operations, Zumwalt tried to reorient the U.S. Navy toward sea control and confronting the Soviet Navy (NHHC/NH 97205).

[2] Vice Admiral Stansfield Turner, "Missions of the U.S. Navy," reprinted in *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1970s: Selected Documents*, ed. John B. Hattendorf (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2007), 39.

This shift in strategy, Zumwalt argued, required a shift in force structure. Instead of the U.S. Navy's plans build a fleet of expensive multi-mission ships, the Navy needed a "high-low mix" that combined some of those vessels with "moderate cost, moderate-performance ships that could be turned out in relatively large numbers."[3] Among the ships proposed was the "Sea Control Ship," (SCS) smaller and cheaper than full-size aircraft carriers, but able to provide helicopter and vertical/short takeoff and landing (VSTOL) aircraft for the sea-control anti-submarine warfare (ASW) role, freeing up funds that would otherwise go to traditional carriers.[4]

Zumwalt's preferred policies can be caricatured, especially in light of subsequent naval policy. Zumwalt was on record as calling for a force level of between 12 and 16 large carriers—too few for many naval aviation advocates on the low end, but hardly a carrier-free Navy.[5] That number only seems small when compared to the late 1960s, when the Navy's carrier force numbered in the low twenties. However, many of these ships were World War II *Essex*-class carriers used primarily in an anti-submarine role and designated CVS, as opposed to the larger CVA attack carriers.[6] Under Zumwalt, the Navy retired the CVS hulls and added ASW capacity to the attack carriers, re-designating them as CVs. This approach "improve[d]" the Navy's "ability to employ a reduced force" and allowed Zumwalt to attempt to replace the CVS fleet with the smaller and cheaper Sea Control Ship.[7]

Zumwalt's strategic vision was modified by his successor, James L. Holloway III (1974–78). A carrier aviator, unlike his surface Navy predecessor, Holloway, like most senior Navy officers, believed in the value of a high-end fleet organized around large aircraft carriers.[8] In 1975, for example, Holloway laid out a plan for a 600-ship fleet:

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[3] Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., *On Watch: A Memoir* (New York: Quadrangle, 1976), 72. "High-end" Navy warship programs under development when Zumwalt took office included *Nimitz*-class aircraft carriers, *Tarawa*-class LHAs, *Los Angeles*–class attack submarines, *Spruance*-class destroyers, as well as *California*- and *Virginia*-class nuclear-powered cruisers

[4] Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., "CNO's Project SIXTY Presentation to SECDEF," 9 September 1970, Folder 8, Box 323, Elmo Zumwalt Papers, Operational Archives, NHHC, 6–14; Rear Admiral W.H. Bagley, "Memorandum: Project SIXTY," 25 September 1970, Folder 3, Box 23, Zumwalt Papers, NHHC OA. In the Vietnam era, the U.S. Navy retired its single-mission anti-submarine carriers in favor of placing ASW aircraft on attack carriers.

[5] Elmo R. Zumwalt, "Introduction," in ed. John F. Lehman, Jr., *Aircraft Carriers: The Real Choices* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1978), 6.

[6] Under the specific circumstances of the Vietnam War, light attack aircraft flew off CVS carriers to strike land targets on several deployments.

[7] Captain H. S. Sellers, "CV Concept Briefing for [CNO Executive Panel] Meeting," 21 July 1971, Box 22, Aviation Studies Collection, NHHC.

[8] Peter D. Haynes, *Towards a New Maritime Strategy: American Naval Thinking in the Post–Cold War Era* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2015), 29.

One of Zumwalt's most controversial ideas was the "Sea Control Ship," an ASW-oriented aviation platform that would leverage the capabilities of helicopters and VSTOL aircraft to provide sea control at a lower cost than CVs or CVSs, shown here in an artist's rendering from the 1970s. Note the AV-8A Harrier (or Harrier-like aircraft) off the bow. One of the issues with VSTOL-oriented aviation ships proposed in the 1970s was the relatively poor performance achieved by early VSTOL aircraft, which were hampered by severe payload and range restrictions (NHHC/K-93010).

While it included eight Zumwaltian VSTOL Support Ships (VSS; similar to large SCSs), the heart of the force structure was 14 (active) aircraft carriers—hardly a case of using VSTOL to reduce carrier construction.[9] Holloway's tremendously expensive plan, however, failed to convince policymakers.

In 1977, then, the Carter administration inherited a seven-year-old debate about the shape of the Navy's carrier fleet. The immediate spark was the Ford administration's plan to build a new, cheaper type of aircraft carrier called the CVV, a successor to Zumwalt's Sea Control Ship and the mid-1970s VSS.[10] Intended to capitalize on advances in VSTOL aircraft technology, CVVs would be about half the size of nucle-

[9] Chief of Naval Information, "What the '600-Ship Navy' is all about," 30 October 1975, quoted in Alva M. Bowen, Jr., "U.S. Naval Expansion Program: An Analysis of the Cost of Expanding the Navy from 500 to 600 Ships," CRS Report, 7 April 1976, 4.

[10] While the VSS was never built, the Spanish Navy bought the plans for the SCS and built its *Principe de Asturias* to substantially the same design. Friedman, *Carriers*, 354.

This 1991 photo, showing four aviation ships from three navies, gives some sense of how the Sea Control Ship would have compared to traditional aircraft carriers at sea. From front to back, the ships pictured are the Spanish ASW carrier *Principe de Asturias*, the amphibious assault ship USS *Wasp* (LHD-1), USS *Forrestal,* and the British ASW carrier HMS *Invincible. Principe de Asturias* was built using the U.S. Navy's Sea Control Ship blueprints, though modified with the addition of a "ski-jump" ramp at the bow to improve the performance of its Harrier II VSTOL aircraft (NARA/330-CFD-DN-ST-92-01129/PH2 R. C. Witham)

ar-powered aircraft carriers, 40–50,000 tons. They would come equipped with catapults, but no arrestor gear, making them unable to operate the Navy's current stock of fixed-wing carrier aircraft.[11] Building these ships, the outgoing administration argued, obviated the need for expensive nuclear carrier construction.[12]

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[11] Donald H. Rumsfeld, *Report of Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld to the Congress on the FY 1978 Budget, FY 1979 Authorization Request and FY 1978–82 Defense Program* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 17 January 1977), 194.

[12] Rumsfeld, *FY 1978 Report*, 219. Norman Friedman, *U.S. Aircraft Carriers: An Illustrated Design History* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, first edition, 1983), 333. There exists some confusion over the provision of arrestor gear for the CVVs. The initial idea was for a small conventional carrier specially designed to efficiently launch and recover VSTOL aircraft as well as supporting conventional aircraft. In Secretary Rumsfeld's FY 1978 report, the CVV would be built without arrestor gear (making it compatible only with VSTOL airplanes and helicopters), but with catapults, to enable VSTOL aircraft to launch with greater payloads. The final version of the CVV proposal, as put forth by the Carter administration, was again for a ship with catapults and arrestor gear. See Friedman, *Carriers*, 323–33, for more detail on the design history of the CVV.

The carrier and VSTOL debates, among others, were proxies for differing visions of naval strategy, pitting the Carter administration's SLOC-focused policy against the Navy (and DON) hierarchy, which tried to explicate a more aggressive strategy that privileged the power- projection capabilities of large-deck aircraft carriers. This strategy required both a more effective and expensive carrier air wing, and the construction of more costly high-capability escorts for the Navy's carriers than the Carter administration would have preferred.

Carter's only Secretary of Defense, Harold Brown, came into the job with two major goals, one strategic and one technological. Strategically, Brown was concerned about the conventional balance of power in Central Europe between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. On the technology front, Brown sought to use American advances in communication and computer technology to offset Soviet numerical superiority in Europe.

This approach did not leave much room for the Navy. Under Brown's Europe-first strategy, the Navy's main role would be SLOC protection, shepherding convoys of soldiers and equipment to Europe in the event of a NATO war. This defensive rationale required a smaller fleet than CNO Holloway's 600-ship fleet, and a different mix of ships than the CNO's 14 CV/8 VSS force structure.[13] With no requirement for offensive carrier warfare in high-intensity environments (as opposed to the sort of carrier operations experienced during the Vietnam and Korean wars), the Carter strategy suggested a shift away from big-deck aircraft carriers toward smaller ASW-focused aviation ships.

The means to counter Soviet power would come from leveraging Western technological advantages over the Soviet bloc. A physicist and former Director of Defense Research and Engineering (1961–65), Brown looked for technological solutions to strategic dilemmas. In the late 1970s, he saw no larger dilemma than finding conventional means to stem Soviet advances in West Germany in the event of a NATO–Warsaw Pact war, and perhaps deter that war in the first place. To solve that problem, Brown and his Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering, William Perry, turned to the potential of microprocessors, which offered the possibility of placing "smart" weapons in all parts of the U.S. military from autonomous stand-off weapons to an infantryman's anti-tank missile.

Brown was hardly the first Secretary of Defense to focus on technology as an American advantage, but Brown's Defense Department reified this technological gap into an "Offset Strategy": the increased lethality of American munitions would "offset"

[13] (Navy) Chief of Information (CHINFO), "What the '600-Ship Navy' is all about."

quantitative shortcomings and allow an outmanned NATO to prevail by dramatically increasing the effectiveness of platforms and systems. These "force multipliers" would give "both existing and new conventional weapons a "competitive edge by combining them with modern digital electronics" and "force the Soviet Union to compete in areas of technology where it was weak."[14]

However, the Navy, and the NATO and Pacific flanks were largely left out of this strategy. While development continued on high-technology Navy initiatives like AEGIS, Tomahawk, vertical launch systems, nuclear attack submarines (SSNs), and improvements to the Harpoon missile that fit with Brown's ethos, the Offset Strategy itself was a product of "Brown, Perry, the Air Force, the Army, and defense contractors," narrowly focused on a NATO–Warsaw Pact war's Central Front.[15] At the same time, these weapons, especially cruise missiles—extant on the Soviet side and in development on the American—threatened the Navy's carrier-centric force structure. Defensively, questions were raised about the ability of carrier battle groups to defend themselves against massed subsurface- and air-launched missiles. Offensively, weapons like Tomahawk could potentially "substitute for both the fighter supremacy [by destroying aircraft on the ground] and the strike functions of the carrier," reducing carrier requirements and, thus, the programmed size of the Navy.[16]

Ironically, the Navy used logic similar to Brown's to argue in favor of a proactive naval strategy that contradicted the Secretary's strategic vision. Essentially, the Navy's uniformed and civilian leadership argued that new and forthcoming technologies would dramatically improve the fleet's operational effectiveness vis-à-vis its Soviet adversary. Instead of passively fighting off a mass cruise missile attack from Soviet submarines and aircraft, the Navy's leadership argued that a layered defense of new F-14 interceptors armed with the long-range AIM-54 Phoenix missile could destroy most Soviet bombers before they launched their missiles. Any missiles launched from surviving attackers would be destroyed by escort ships fitted with the new AEGIS combat system. At the same time, advances in processing power would help detect Soviet submarines at longer ranges, allowing them to be engaged before coming into

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[14] Edward C. Keefer, *Harold Brown: Offsetting the Soviet Military Challenge, 1977–1981* (Washington, DC, Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2017. Secretaries of Defense Historical Series: Volume IX), 575–76.

[15] Ibid., 576.

[16] "Michael MccGwire, "The Tomahawk and General Purpose Naval Forces," in Richard K. Betts, ed., *Cruise Missiles: Technology, Strategy, Politics* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1981), 253–54. See Gregory A. Engel's "Cruise Missiles and the Tomahawk," in *The Politics of Naval Innovation*, Captain Brad C. Hayes and Commander Douglas V. Smith, USN, eds. (Newport, RI: Naval War College Strategic Research Department, 1994), 16–41.

missile or torpedo range. All of this allowed the Navy to operate near and project power into the Soviet Union.[17]

These capabilities, as exciting as they were, worked against service leadership's attempts to increase the size of the fleet. In replacing the large group of World War II–era ships facing retirement, the Navy opted to go against Zumwalt's policy and concentrate on capable, but expensive vessels, like *Spruance*-class destroyers, *Ticonderoga* (AEGIS) cruisers, and *Los Angeles*–class attack submarines (at Zumwalt's insistence, the Navy also built the relatively austere *Oliver Hazard Perry*–class frigates for the ASW/escort mission). Though designed to be qualitatively superior to their Soviet analogues, their expense in a period of tight budgets forced the fleet to shrink at a time when the Navy desperately wanted to expand.[18]

With its strategic concept and building plans under attack, the Navy made its case forcefully under Carter, though with only mixed success. In the earlier 1970s, Zumwalt tried to push the Navy toward enhancing its sea control role, with the full support of the Secretary of the Navy and the eventual support of the Secretary of Defense. In the late 1970s, the Office of the Chief of Naval Operations (OPNAV) and the Navy Secretariat reversed course and made a concerted effort to alter guidance from OSD and the administration concerning the future of the Navy. Aircraft carriers played a central role in these debates between the Navy, OSD, the administration, and Congress. Although the Navy's leadership came out of the Carter years disappointed, their agitation played a role in forcing the administration into funding an aircraft carrier in FY 1980, a success under the circumstances.

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The starting point for the Carter administration's defense policy was the Ford administration's FY 1978 budget. Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld initially preferred a CVN—in late 1976 the administration requested money for a fourth *Nimitz*-class carrier in an FY 1977 supplemental. In the end, though, he came down on the side of building smaller conventional carriers (CVVs)—one in FY 1979 and one in FY 1981—combined with a vigorous program of Service Life Extension Program (SLEP)

[17] Norman Friedman, *Fighters over the Fleet: Naval Air Defence from Biplanes to the Cold War* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2016), 383.

[18] Norman Friedman, *U.S. Destroyers: An Illustrated Design History*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, revised edition, 2004), 369–85.

refits for *Forrestal* and its follow-ons. This program, scheduled to start in FY 1980, would add another 15 years to each ship's designed 30-year service life, while only costing one-fourth as much as a new carrier, and push back the timeline of replacement for the large conventional carriers from the 1980s into the 1990s.[19] Combined with the decommissioning of *Coral Sea* and *Midway* after the CVVs were completed, this plan would allow the retention of at least 12 available carriers into the 1990s (with the one carrier at a time in SLEP not counted as "available").[20]

However, this confirmed fears that pro-carrier elements in the Navy and Congress had incubated since Zumwalt's Sea Control Ship. The SCS and the VSS had always been portrayed as supplements to the big-deck carrier fleet, but suspicions remained that they were intended to replace some part of the requirement for standard carriers. By counting the CVV as a "normal" carrier, the outgoing Ford administration seemed to suggest that it was not interested in replacing the *Midway*s with ships that matched the capability of the post–World War II carriers. In Rumsfeld's vision, the CVV would have catapults, but no arresting gear, optimizing them for as-yet-undeveloped VSTOL aircraft and making them incapable of carrying conventional fixed-wing aircraft.[21]

This plan decoupled CVV development from the timeline of the Navy's extant VSTOL program. The FY 1979 CVV was projected to commission by 1985, while the Navy estimated that its general-purpose "Type A" VSTOL would not be operational until 1990, "several years" before the "Type B" high-performance VSTOL airframe. Before that time, the only available aircraft would be helicopters and the Marine Corps' AV-8A Harrier, which a January 1977 OPNAV staff paper correctly described as "not capable of performing the full spectrum of sea control and power projection tasks."[22]

According to Rumsfeld and President Ford, the decision to build two CVVs in place of one CVN was based on a recently concluded National Security Council (NSC) study on future Navy shipbuilding.[23] Initially, the study pointed in the direction of

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[19] First proposed by CNO Holloway in the mid-1970s and approved by Congress in 1977, SLEP was the only way to maintain anything near the Navy's desired carrier levels. When *Forrestal* was built, three shipyards could build full-size carriers, but by the 1970s, only Newport News Shipbuilding had that capability. *Naval Engineering and American Seapower*, Rear Admiral Randolph W. King, USN (ret.), ed. (Baltimore, MD: The Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company of America, 1989), 340–41.

[20] Donald H. Rumsfeld, *Report of Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld to the Congress on the FY 1978 Budget, FY 1979 Authorization Request and FY 1978–1982 Defense Programs* (Washington, DC: GPO, 17 January 1977), 178–94. If the plan had been carried out, by the late 1980s, the Navy would have possessed 12 large carriers (CV/CVN 59–70) and two CVVs, taking the place of *Midway* and *Coral Sea.*

[21] Friedman, *Carriers*, 333.

[22] "Back Up for Sen. Stennis Call," OPNAV staff paper, 24 January 1977, Folder 1, Box 48, 1977 00 Files, Operational Archives, NHHC, 15.

[23] Lehman, *Aircraft Carriers*, 8–9; Rumsfeld, "FY 1978 DoD Annual Report," 219.

building a fourth *Nimitz*-class carrier, and the administration requested lead funding for that ship as a supplement to the FY 1977 budget.[24] However, by January, Ford and Rumsfeld decided to press ahead with the CVV, and the version of the NSC report forwarded to Congress in early 1977 carried the FY 1978 budget plan's recommendation for two CVVs in place of CVN-71 in the five-year shipbuilding plan, with construction of the first to start in FY 1979.[25] The Carter administration concurred, but decided that the CVV would be given arrestor gear as well as catapults in order to handle the Navy's full complement of conventional carrier aircraft as a hedge against the uncertain developmental prospects of VSTOL, making the CVV more of a *Midway* equivalent as opposed to a complete venture into the unknown.[26]

The NSC report made a critical intervention in favor of the Navy's desired force structure. Firstly, it asserted a continuing need for 12 carriers—not as big as the Navy wanted, but larger than some ideas bandied about at the time. More importantly, it supported the 12-carrier force structure primarily on the basis of peacetime forward presence requirements, a change from previous analyses that sized requirements based on wartime needs.[27] Indeed, the NSC report affirmed the need to maintain the Navy's prevailing policy of keeping two carriers in the Mediterranean and two in the Western Pacific at all times. Combined with the Navy's 18-month deployment cycle for carriers, forward presence justified the carrier force levels on its own.[28] This rationale provided high-level justification for the presence argument that the Navy had advanced in the past without full support from OSD or prior administrations.

On the other hand, its conclusions on the wartime role of the carrier force offered less support for DON. The NSC study maintained that the Navy's primary role in war remained sea control, *not* power projection. Although the study asserted the value of carriers in power projection, it "define[d] no major sea control role for the carrier in a NATO conflict . . . it may have only a limited contribution to the Navy's primary task."[29] While carriers remained the strongest option for naval power

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[24] "Back Up for Sen. Stennis Call," 8.

[25] Comptroller General Elmer B. Staabs, "Implications of the National Security Council Study 'U.S. Maritime Strategy and Naval Force Requirements' on the Future Ship Force," GAO study PSAD-78-61, 7 March 1978, 11. It seems likely that, as Lehman claimed (*Aircraft Carriers*, 8), the outgoing Ford administration suppressed the pro-CVN sections of the report when communicating its findings to Congress.

[26] House Armed Services Committee, *Full Committee Consideration of the CVV Program*, 95th Congress, First Session, 24 May 1977, HASC No. 95-25, 2.

[27] Staabs, "Implications," 11, 15.

[28] "Back up for Sen. Stennis Call," 8.

[29] Staabs, "Implications," 16.

Artist's rendering of the Carter administration's version of the CVV—a replacement for the *Midway*-class carriers, capable of fielding VSTOL and conventional aircraft (NHHC/NH-88035).

projection, it raised the question of devoting such a disproportionate share of Navy resources to a secondary mission.

The early posture of the new administration was, if anything, less friendly to large carriers than Ford's. In addition to canceling funding for another nuclear cruiser and reducing procurement of frigates and SSNs in the revised FY 1978 budget, the Carter administration quickly pursued rescission of the CVN funding passed in late 1976.[30] Secretary Brown informed Congress of the proposed rescission in February 1977, stating that he was opposed to the further construction of large carriers, citing the unit cost of $2.3 billion (approximately $9.8 billion in 2019) as an insurmountable obstacle. The new Secretary of the Navy, W. Graham Claytor, Jr., also favored a cessation of super-carrier construction over fixing other issues with the force structure, especially carrier aircraft.[31]

[30] Keefer, *Brown*, 36–37.

[31] Frederick H. Hartmann, *Naval Renaissance: The U.S. Navy in the 1980s* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1990), 22–24.

The new administration faced bipartisan opposition to its carrier policy. In early March, Secretary Brown faced a grilling on the carrier issue in front of the House Armed Services Committee (HASC), led by Representatives Charles Bennett (D-FL) and Bob Wilson (R-CA). Citing earlier testimony from CNO Holloway and the Deputy Chief of Naval Operations (DCNO) (Air) in favor of a fourth *Nimitz*, Bennett intimated that the Ford and Carter administrations had suppressed evidence in favor of CVNs in an attempt to shift funding toward CVVs. For his part, Brown answered that the CVV decision was made on a financial and strategic basis: Another *Nimitz* would be ideal "[u]nder the circumstances of plentiful funds," but under the current circumstances "increasing the number of platforms that we can buy with a given amount of money . . . enhance[s] the fleet's capability and survivability."[32] The proposed rescissions narrowly passed the House Appropriations Committee, though they easily passed the full House and Senate.[33]

Large carrier advocates in the House continued their grumbling through the spring. In late May, HASC held a special hearing specifically on the CVV program. There, Brown dropped his fiscal argument, and focused entirely on the strategic rationale for the smaller ships, noting that the new administration placed "a higher priority on the sea-control mission than on power projection," and the two CVVs proposed in the five-year program offered more geographic coverage than one *Nimitz* at a similar cost.[34] Secretary Claytor was less effusive, telling the committee that developmental funding for the CVV's design was essential "to have a genuine option in 1979 to evaluate the CVN against the CVV."[35] Opponents of the CVV brought up its conventional propulsion in light of President Carter's recent statements on oil shortages; Representative Samuel Stratton (D-NY) called proposals for conventional carriers "idiotic" under the circumstances.[36]

At the end of that May session, HASC declined to authorize funding for CVV development.[37] The final defense authorization bill passed by Congress in late July echoed this stance. Rather than authorizing money for the CVV, Congress instead authorized money for research and development work on the CVV and other VSTOL

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[32] House Armed Services Committee, *Hearings on Military Posture and H.R. 5068, Part I* (Testimony of Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, 2 March 1977), HASC No. 95-4, 239–42.

[33] Keefer, *Brown*, 38.

[34] HASC, *CVV Program,* 2-5.

[35] Ibid., 5-6.

[36] Ibid., 11. Stratton's district included Knolls Atomic Power Laboratory, which helped to design and test Navy reactors.

[37] Ibid., 28–29.

aviation ships. However, this R&D was only allowed in the context of preparing "studies of the cost and combat effectiveness of sea based aircraft platforms." These studies were mandated to include comparisons of the CVV and VSS against nuclear carriers and modernization of existing carriers.[38] Furthermore, the FY 1978 Defense Appropriation Act nearly included $81 million to start construction on CVN-71 before its deletion at the end of conference negotiations.[39] Taking both defense bills together, it is clear that Congress remained *very* skeptical of the CVV and fully expected the mandated studies to provide evidence in favor of another CVN—as the unexpurgated NSC paper apparently did.

Congress's decision merely confirmed the verdict of practical experience. After Zumwalt's term as CNO, Naval Air Systems Command dragged its feet in the development of a VSTOL fighter prototype first started in 1971. This aircraft, the XFV-12A, was ready in August 1977. Initial testing demonstrated that, far from providing acceptable fighter performance, the aircraft's innovative design did not provide sufficient power to leave the ground, suggesting that the Carter administration was wise to add arresting gear to the CVV.[40]

Though embarrassing for advocates of naval VSTOL, this failure did not dissuade the Carter administration, which continued to agitate for a smaller Navy oriented toward sea-lane protection. Soon after taking office, the administration directed OSD and NSC to produce Presidential Review Memorandum 10 (PRM-10), a wide-ranging review of national security threats and military force structure. The process itself, a bureaucratic knife fight that finally petered out in the summer, produced no actionable results, but its approach and recommendations revealed the gap between the White House and DOD, especially the Navy.[41] The study was based on a matrix of five potential scenarios and seven "Alternative Integrated Military Strategies" (AIMS), but the strategies for the most important scenario, a NATO–Warsaw Pact war centered in Germany, determined the forces available for each of the four remaining scenarios in a given AIMS.[42]

With the focus on a NATO war, the Navy received short shrift in PRM-10. According to the final report, the role of maritime forces in NATO was "primarily in order

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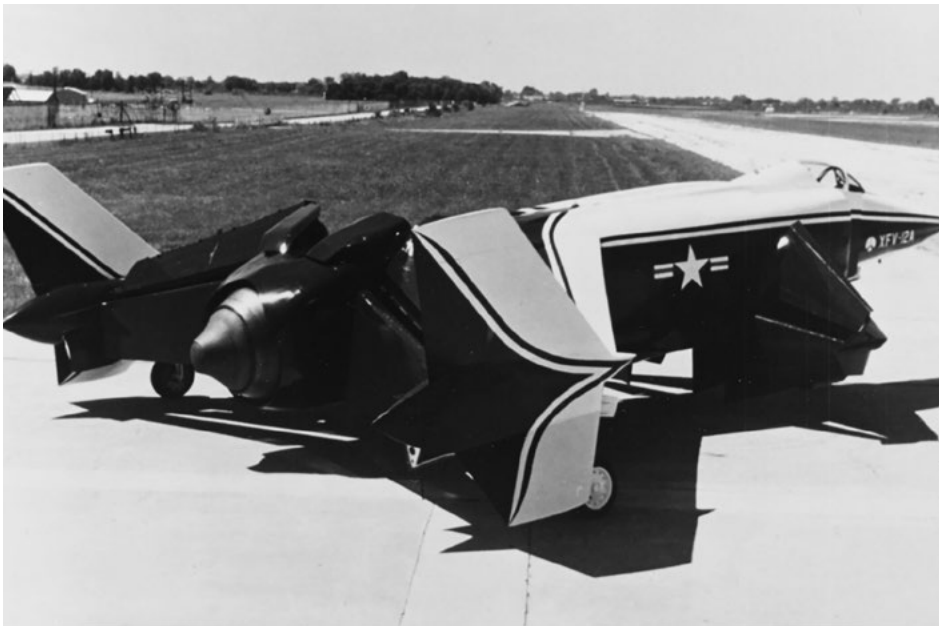
[38] "Public Law 95-79 (Department of Defense Appropriation Authorization Act, [FY] 1978)," 30 July 1977, 2.

[39] Congressional Record, 9 September 1977, S28440.

[40] Friedman, *Fighters over the Fleet,* 370–71.

[41] See Keefer, *Brown,* 120–37, for the most recent treatment of the PRM-10 process.

[42] Keefer, *Brown*, 120–23.



A 1977 photo of the prototype XFV-12A VSTOL fighter aircraft. Testing showed that the plane could not lift itself off the ground, let alone provide acceptable operational performance (NHHC/K-120886).

to ensure that military and economic resupply cargoes can be moved to Europe to sustain NATO combat capability" by creating an air and ASW barrier in the Greenland–Iceland–United Kingdom (GIUK) gap in the North Atlantic.[43] While some of the AIMS considered providing forces for offensive action on NATO's flanks or "power projection into Soviet littorals," in the Far East, those options were irreconcilable with the administration's desire to curb deficit spending.[44] Nothing in PRM-10 moved Secretary Brown from his stance that offensive action against the Soviet Union was a waste of finite resources.[45]

Instead of accepting PRM-10, both the Secretariat and OPNAV bristled at the study's dismissal of sea power and the Navy's ability to operate proactively. The ill-feeling left by PRM-10 led Secretary Claytor to request—and receive—permission to

[43] [National Security Council Staff], "PRM/NSC-10 Military Strategy and Force Posture Review: Final Report" [6 July 1977], 9, II-3, https://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/assets/documents/memorandums/prm10.pdf.

[44] [NSC], "Final Report," pp. III-37, IV-13.

[45] Keefer, *Brown*, 129.

pursue a separate DON-only review process. That review, which started soon after PRM-10, eventually led to Sea Plan 2000, discussed below.[46]

In fact, no stakeholders in DOD were pleased with PRM-10, "an object lesson in how not to generate consensus on national security policy." While the Navy stewed about its sea power conclusions, the JCS and senior OSD officials savaged its methodologies, one Assistant Secretary of Defense comparing the AIMS packages to "choices in a Chinese restaurant . . . an orgy of option generation," while JCS recommended against sending the report to the President's desk due to major "inadequacies and shortcomings."[47] PRM-10 was also poorly received by the National Security Council, and as a result, NSC's first official statement of the new administration's security policy, Presidential Directive 18 of 24 August 1977, was short on military specifics.[48]

Although PRM-10 did not lead to a formal shift in defense policy, it laid bare the administration's view of the Navy going into the FY 1979 budgeting process—a "referendum on the Navy's future," according to one recent historian.[49] Coming into the budget, Carter and Brown both eyed severe reductions in the Navy's shipbuilding program, with the exception of ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) construction and refitting.[50] In support of that effort, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) drafted an explosive paper on future Navy shipbuilding requirements. This tried to explain how cutting the number of carriers "could . . . yield significant reductions in Defense costs without any adverse impact on the security of the United States or its allies" through the use of "alternative means" facilitated by new technology and a reorganization of presence and projection priorities.[51] The paper presented a set of six options ranging from 8 carriers up to 13, but clearly favored the lower end of its estimates.

Acknowledging that forward presence was the real driver of carrier force levels, the OMB paper suggested using the Navy's "visually impressive" LHA and LPH amphibious assault ships in lieu of carriers for some presence functions.[52] Turning toward the Navy's wartime missions, the analysis determined that the fleet could fulfil its sea-con-

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[46] John B. Hattendorf, *The Evolution of the U.S. Navy's Maritime Strategy, 1977–1986* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2004), 13–14.

[47] Keefer, *Brown*, 125–26.

[48] Ibid., 135–37.

[49] Ibid., 217.

[50] Ibid., 215-6.

[51] Office of Management and Budget, "Navy Roles, Missions, and Related Combatant Ship Requirements," 3 November 1977, Folder 3, Box 26, 1977 00 Files, NHHC OA, 1.

[52] Ibid., 15–16.

trol role and non-NATO projection roles with eight carriers, 470 ships, and land-based aircraft playing a larger role. A larger carrier force was only necessary if the administration wished to provide a capacity for offensive power projection in a NATO war, which was judged as being of "minimal" value over the Central Front and of "none" with regard to strikes on the Soviet Union itself. Regardless, carriers themselves were becoming increasingly vulnerable to attack, lessening their combat utility.[53]

The paper was forwarded for comments to an incandescent Secretary Claytor, who responded with a full-throated denunciation of OMB's right to discuss "outyear programming issues," as well as the quality of its analysis. Fundamentally, Claytor, supported by detailed analysis from OPNAV, which called OMB's work "nothing more than empty assertion using intellectually corrupt practices to present a façade of analysis," took exception at everything in the OMB paper. His two most substantive complaints took issue with OMB's stance on forward deployment and sea control.[54]

According to the OPNAV response, OMB fundamentally misunderstood the "principal peacetime function of the Navy." Rather than "showing the flag," forward-deployed forces existed to "be in place and ready to fight in case war erupts, whether it be a minor crisis or general war." In other words, OMB's suggestion of using amphibious assault ships to serve a presence role missed the point: However "visually impressive" these ships were, the OPNAV analysis argued that they lacked the ability to intervene decisively in a crisis or fight the opening stages of a war. Without the capability to intervene effectively, the amphibious ships could not facilitate the second-order diplomatic effects created by forward-deployed carriers.[55]

On the sea-control issue, OMB argued for an increase of land-based aircraft in key areas like Iceland to supplement or replace carrier-based aircraft for that mission. As the OPNAV analysis noted, fixed land bases were more vulnerable to cruise missile attack than mobile carriers were. Furthermore, the analysis argued, "[l]and-based aircraft can only combat bomber missile and surface ship threats at their operating radius from land bases"; successful interception of Soviet aircraft and missiles in mid-ocean required massed aircraft on the scene, which could only be supplied by a carrier's air wing.[56]

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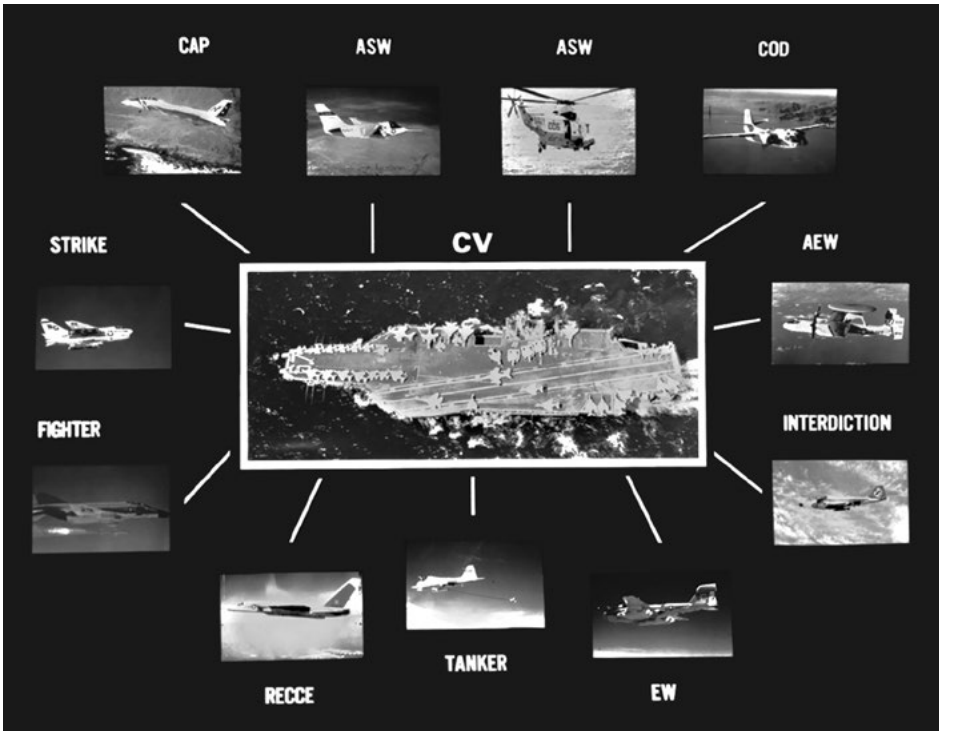
[53] Ibid., 13–28.

[54] Secretary of the Navy W. Graham Claytor, Memorandum for Deputy Secretary of Defense Charles W. Duncan, Jr., 11 November 1977, Folder 3, Box 26, 1977 00 Files, NHHC OA, 1; CDRs N. G. Mosher and G. C. Riggle, "Comments on OMB Paper Navy Roles, Missions and Combatant Ship Requirements," 11 November 1977, Folder 3, Box 26, 1977 00 Files, NHHC OA, 4.

[55] Mosher and Riggle, "Comments on OMB Paper," 5–9.

[56] Ibid., 10–11. Of course, land-based aircraft, like carrier aircraft, could use in-air refueling to extend their range



Composite photo of *John F. Kennedy* (CV-67) and its late-1970s air wing, showing the variety of types carried: F-14 ("CAP"—combat air patrol), S-3A ("ASW"—antisubmarine warfare), SH-3G ("ASW"), C-1 ("COD"—carrier onboard delivery), E-2C ("AEW"—airborne early warning), A-6E ("Interdiction"), EA-6B ("EW"—electronic warfare), KA-6A ("Tanker"), RA-5C ("Recce"—reconnaissance), F-4 ("Fighter"), A-7E ("Strike"). During the Carter administration, the Navy argued that only full-size aircraft carriers carried the varied aircraft needed for a high-end fight (NHHC/USN-1173094).

In the end, the Carter administration's FY 1979 Defense budget did not radically slash carrier requirements as OMB wished. Instead, the administration simply declined to request any carrier funding, citing the ongoing congressionally mandated review of carrier options. Following the conclusion of that review, in March 1978, the administration indicated its intention to request a CVV for FY 1980.[57] While the administration ostensibly retained the 13 total carriers/12 active carriers force structure of its predecessor, the wording of this policy suggested that the "real" target was 11.

[57] Richard P. Cronin, "The FY 1979 Defense Budget," CRS Report, 10 May 1978, 47.

Secretary Brown's annual report, released in early 1978, asserted that the administration intended to "maintain 12 active Navy carrier air wings and 13 carriers in FY 1979, citing forward presence needs. However, one of the carriers, *Coral Sea*, which lacked the ability to field F-14s and S-3s, would be used for training. Instead of regular deployments, *Coral Sea* would "be operated in a special status [which would] permit the conduct of student pilot training and improve the readiness of naval reserve air wings, while also retaining the capability to deploy with either Marine Corps or mobilized Naval Reserve air units."[58]

This standard was slightly different from the final Ford budget, which also called for 13 carriers. In the Ford plan, 13 carriers would give 12 active carriers and one big-deck conventional carrier at a time undergoing SLEP. Under the Carter plan, 13 carriers gave a real total of 11 active carriers, with one conventional carrier in SLEP at any one time and *Coral Sea* as a permanent trainer (this did not count *Enterprise's* extended overhaul from January 1979 to February 1982).[59] With the standard now effectively 11, the Navy's goal of maintaining four forward-deployed carriers at all times was endangered.[60]

Brown also signaled that the administration remained in favor of a limited role for the Navy. In the annual report, he asserted that the Navy's requirements were based foremost on "maintaining control of necessary sea lanes and conducting land and air operations as may be essential to the prosecution of a naval campaign . . . concurrent with a NATO war," suggesting a very much secondary mission for the Navy in the country's most important wartime scenario.[61] Indeed, in March 1978, Brown indicated that the Navy's main role was no longer general sea control, as proposed by Zumwalt and Holloway, but merely the defense of the specific sea lane from Norfolk to the English Channel, which required even fewer resources.[62]

To that end, Brown officially repudiated the Navy's desire for a 600-ship fleet, suggesting that the end goal of the Carter administration was merely keeping the fleet above 500 ships through 2000.[63] The budget submission cut Navy shipbuilding to 15 ships, as compared to the 29 projected in the last Ford budget. Though somewhat sympathetic to the Navy's concerns, Brown pointed out that the unit cost of Navy ships

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[58] Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, *Department of Defense Annual Report Fiscal Year 1979*, (Washington, DC: GPO, 2 February 1978), 213.

[59] "Enterprise VIII (CVAN-65) 1976-1980" and "Enterprise VIII (CVAN-65) 1981-1985," *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs.html.

[60] Brown, *1979 Annual Report*, 213–14.

[61] Ibid., 164.

[62] Alva M. Bowen, Jr., and Ray Frank Bessette, "Aircraft Carrier Force Levels," CRS Report, 28 April 1978, 2.

[63] Cronin, "1979 Defense Budget," 49.

and airplanes was rising faster than the defense budget. Thus, keeping to the Ford administration's shipbuilding plan imperiled the Carter administration's emphasis on bolstering forces in Europe.[64]

Unhappy with the alleged short shrift given to naval issues in the budget, Navy officials began to lobby Congress for increased funding behind the scenes, to a much greater level than before, exasperating Brown.[65] In this particular case, the Navy was backed up by the requirements generated by the JCS and Joint Staff. The latter's January 1978 Joint Strategic Objectives Plan called for a force of 14 carriers in FY 1983 and an 18 carrier/9 CVV force by FY 1987.[66] According to the Congressional Research Service, the warfighting "requirements" generated by the combatant commanders and filtered through the Joint Staff added up to 25 carriers at a "minimal risk" level and 16 at a "prudent risk" level.[67]

Pleas for a larger fleet found a receptive audience in Congress, where the House Armed Services Committee inserted funding for CVN-71 and a nuclear-powered AEGIS cruiser, deemed necessary to protect carrier groups in high-threat environments.[68] For their part, the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) added CVN-71 funding, but declined to add the cruiser. Facing opposition in Congress, the administration tried to craft a deal whereby Congress would give up support for a CVN in exchange for moving the first CVV into FY 1979. These efforts failed, and the funding for CVN-71 easily made it through the House, Senate, and the conference process.[69]

Unwilling to build a CVN, Carter vetoed the bill, citing the funding for aircraft carriers as the cause:

> Our Navy has for a decade been moving in the direction of larger and larger, more-and-more-costly ships, and fewer of them. . . . We need a fleet that includes more vessels that can perform our Navy's mission but that are not, as this one would be, so designed as to be prohibitively expensive to build. The Navy does not need a fifth nuclear-powered aircraft carrier. It can maintain a twelve-carrier fleet and maintain the fighting capability it needs from a

[64] Steven L. Rearden, with Kenneth R. Foulks, Jr., *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1977–1980* (Washington, DC: Office of Joint History, 2015. History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Volume XII), 257.

[65] Keefer, *Brown*, 233.

[66] Rearden with Foulks, *JCS and Policy, 1977–1980*, 273.

[67] Alva M. Bowen, Jr., and Ray Frank Bessette, "Aircraft Carrier Force Levels," CRS Report, 28 April 1978, 7.

[68] Richard P. Cronin, "The FY 1979 Defense Budget," CRS Report, 10 May 1978, 50.

[69] Keefer, *Brown*, 235–39.

> conventionally powered carrier [a CVV], which I shall request in my budget for next year, at a saving of $1 billion for that single ship.[70]

In the end, the House failed to override Carter's veto, leaving the Navy with no carriers in the FY 1979 Defense budget.

* * *

Well before the fight over the carrier in the FY 1979 budget, Navy Department leadership had lost faith—if it existed in the first place—in the administration's commitment to increasing the size of the fleet. On the uniformed side, senior leaders barely concealed their strong preference for a CVN from the earliest days of the Carter administration. As we have seen, CNO Holloway and the DCNO (Air) had discussed their preference for *Nimitz* CVNs over CVVs in testimony about the FY 1978 Defense budget. Holloway may also have privately lobbied Congress for a nuclear carrier. A collection of memoranda compiled to prepare Holloway for a 24 January 1977 call with Senator John C. Stennis (D-MS), conceded that two CVVs would "provide us with a flexibility of response" not granted by a CVN, but only after laying out a long list of CVN benefits, including strike efficacy, fleet air defense, sortie generation, less vulnerability to disabling combat damage, safety margin, speed, and overall cost.[71]

This disquiet extended to the Secretariat. Soon after taking office, Secretary Claytor and his Under Secretary, R. James Woolsey, "found difficulty in accepting the naval portion of Presidential Review Memorandum-10," which, they thought, "reflected incoherence in structure and assumptions as well as disagreements about difference approaches and different naval force levels to implement strategy." Instead of accepting PRM-10, Claytor asked permission for the Navy Department to run its own naval strategy study, which was granted on 1 August 1977.[72]

The resulting study, "Sea Plan 2000," was run out of the Secretariat under Francis J. "Bing" West, Jr., from the Naval War College. West, who would later serve as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs in the Reagan

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[70] Jimmy Carter: "Message to the House of Representatives Returning H.R. 10929 Without Approval," August 17, 1978. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=31195.

[71] "Back Up for Sen. Stennis Call," 3–5.

[72] Hattendorf, *Maritime Strategy*, 13–14.

administration, was chosen to head the study after a meeting with Under Secretary Woolsey and future Secretary of the Navy John Lehman, who was then working as a Navy Department consultant.[73] West led a team of 12 officers, ten from the Navy, and two from the Marines, which produced a final report in March 1978, in the heart of the FY 1979 budget season.[74]

Sea Plan 2000 argued for the utility of naval forces across the entire spectrum of warfare. Most important under the circumstances, though, were its defense of peacetime forward presence and its assertion of an *offensive* role in a NATO–Warsaw Pact war. Both missions, of course, were intimately connected with the carrier force structure. Ostensibly, the plan was agnostic on future carrier options ("for CV one can substitute CVV, or VSS, etc."), but its strategic framework clearly advocated maintaining, or even expanding, the CV/CVN force.[75]

The value of forward presence, which the Navy considered a first-order mission—as did the 1976 NSC study—was deprecated in PRM-10, which asserted a need for only 10 carrier groups in pursuit of a sea control mission.[76] Against that, Sea Plan 2000 argued that "the tempo of naval operations is driven by the pattern of forward deployments. . . . U.S. national security rests upon a forward strategy which links our forces to those of allies around the globe," and predicted dire consequences if the four-carrier forward deployment standard was interfered with. Not only would it rob the United States of a valuable diplomatic lever and projection capabilities in the event of a sudden crisis, but it would contribute to the damaging "perception that the Soviets could deny the U.S. control of the seas."[77]

More radically, given the political climate, Sea Plan 2000 tried to shift from the defensive-minded strategies of earlier in the decade, and argued that the Navy's carriers had an offensive mission in any scenario up to and including a Soviet war. Not only could carriers blunt Soviet air attacks and bolster allies at the southern and northern flanks of NATO, but, Sea Plan 2000 argued, the Pacific Fleet could "open up a sec-

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[73] *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1970s: Selected Documents,* ed. John B. Hattendorf, (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2007), 103–104.

[74] Peter M. Swartz, with Karin Duggan, "U.S. Navy Capstone Strategies and Concepts (1970–1980)" (Alexandria, VA: CNA, December 2011), 63–64.

[75] "Sea Plan 2000 Naval Force Planning Study: Unclassified Executive Summary," March 1978, Folder 5, Box 10, John F. Lehman, Jr., Papers, NHHC OA, 19.

[76] Hartmann, *Naval Renaissance,* 26.

[77] "Sea Plan 2000," 9–11.

ond front in the event of Soviet attack in Europe. . . [posing] an implicit threat to the U.S.S.R., tying down major Soviet assets."[78]

This newfound confidence, ironically enough, sprang from the technology underpinning Secretary Brown's land-focused Offset Strategy. "Computer-driven systems" starting to enter service, like the F-14/Phoenix missile system and AEGIS combat system, could not just provide a layered defense against Soviet cruise missiles. With the F-14's extreme range (in theory a combat air patrol of two to four F-14s could, with tanking support, take up station as much as 600 nautical miles from their carrier), shoot down Soviet bombers before they could launch their missiles. This would go beyond raid defense, allowing the United States to inflict unsustainable attrition on the Soviet naval bomber force and operate with more certainly in near-Soviet waters. Similar advances in undersea detection and targeting, it was thought, would play a similar role in blunting the submarine challenge.[79]

Befitting Sea Plan 2000's optimistic view of the Navy's utility in war, the plan suggested a correspondingly robust force structure, and offered three cases: one based on President Carter's pledge for 3 percent per year real growth in security spending (535 active ships and 13 carriers); one with a 1 percent growth rate (439 and 11); and one with an optimistic 4 percent growth rate (585 and 15). Respectively, Sea Plan 2000 assessed the plans as "minimum acceptable risk," "high risk," and "lower risk."[80] "Risk" was never comprehensively defined, but appears to have been based on the Navy's capacity to conduct offensive operations.

Fig. 1: Sea Plan 2000 vs. Previous Force-Sizing Targets[81]

	Aircraft Carriers	VSS	Cruisers and Destroyers	Frigates	Submarines	Amphibious ships	Active Ships	Total
Holloway's 600-ship Navy (1975)	14/15	8	102	133	136	68	N/A	600

[78] Ibid., 15–16.

[79] Friedman, *Fighters over the Fleet*, 383–86.

[80] "Sea Plan 2000," 18–19. The numbers given in the report's tables, which do not include carriers in SLEP, are 10, 12, and 14.

[81] The end strength comparisons are unavoidably imprecise. The three sources for this chart use different (and unexplained) methods for counting the Navy's non-combat and sealift ships. The "active ships" column, which uses Sea Plan 2000's definition, is approximately what would later be called "battle force ships." However, Sea Plan 2000 counts some number of supply and support ships in its active force total.

	Aircraft Carriers	VSS	Cruisers and Destroyers	Frigates	Submarines	Amphibious ships	Active Ships	Total
SP2000: High Risk	11	0	84	136	105	52	439	474
Minimum Acceptable Risk	13	0	124	152	119	66	535	579
Low Risk	15	0	142	158	123	78	585	631
Actual Navy Fleet (30 SEP 1978)	13	0	123	65	122	67	N/A	531

As discussed above, Sea Plan 2000 anticipated using carriers, escorted by the AEGIS-equipped ships needed for anti-air escort in high-threat areas, to provide a "second front option" in the event of war with the Soviet Union.[82] As the report's framers were well aware, the administration had never budged from its defensive naval strategy, and saw no need for a "second front" in a NATO war. While the administration committed itself to a 3 percent real spending growth target in defense, this increase was never intended as an across-the-board rise: ground and tactical air forces in Europe were the intended beneficiaries. Indeed, the 11-CV "high-risk" option most nearly matched Brown's own naval force sizing objectives of 450–500 ships.[83] The plan, then, had much more to do with codifying the Navy's belief that war with the Soviets would be global, and require forward operations on the USSR's flanks at sea, than pressing for an expanded naval role in the Carter administration's prevailing strategy.

This focus on offensive operations dovetailed with new plans in development under Admiral Thomas B. Hayward in the Pacific Fleet. On becoming Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet (CINCPACFLT) in 1977, Hayward expressed concern that the fleet had no real operational plans for conventional war in the Pacific against an increasingly large Soviet naval presence; just a commitment to release most of the fleet's carrier strength to NATO as soon as war broke out against the Soviets. Not only were there no specific plans on what to do with those carriers once they arrived, but Hayward

[82] "Sea Plan 2000," 20.

[83] Hattendorf, *Maritime Strategy*, 9.

worried about the effect this "abandonment" would have on U.S. allies in the region and on China, a potential counterweight against Soviet military strength in East Asia.[84]

These factors, argued Hayward, mandated a Pacific use for Pacific forces, and he set his staff to the task of identifying targets for "prompt offensive action" soon after the outbreak of war.[85] Later christened "Sea Strike," these plans eventually took the form of a four-carrier battle group striking Soviet naval forces at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, Vladivostok, and the Kuril Islands. These strikes, it was argued, "could make

Pictured here in 1977 as Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet, Admiral Thomas Hayward's sponsorship of "Sea Strike" helped push the Navy toward an offensive strategy against the Soviet Union in the 1980s (NHHC/K-115807).

[84] James M. Patton, "Dawn of the Maritime Strategy," USNI *Proceedings* (May 2009), 57–58.

[85] Hattendorf, *Maritime Strategy,* 17–18; Hartmann, *Naval Renaissance*, 27–28; Patton, "Dawn of the Maritime Strategy," 58–59.

a strategic difference by preventing the move of Soviet Forces to Europe," as well as influencing China and Japan to take a pro-American stance (American policymakers were unclear whether Japan would allow the U.S. military to use bases on Japanese soil for offensive operations against the Soviet Far East in the event of a European war). Relatedly, it also served the bureaucratic function of making a case for PACFLT to retain control of its peacetime assets instead of sending them to the Atlantic (the "swing strategy"), where they would potentially arrive after the key battles had already been fought.[86] This argument convinced the JCS, which, by early 1978, suggested that the Pacific Fleet keep its carriers in war, though this was spiked by Secretary Brown, who cited intra-NATO politics.[87]

The influence of Sea Strike on its "first cousin," Sea Plan 2000, was obvious, but neither initiative had much basis in prevailing political realities.[88] Both efforts represented a conscious revolt against the Carter administration's defense strategy by the uniformed and Secretariat wings of the Navy Department. Their conclusion that "the service should strive for superiority at sea against the Soviets . . . in terms of forward, offensive operations" may have conformed to some long-held strategic views of the Navy, but it was unsupported by financial or strategic buy-in from administration policymakers.[89] Nevertheless, the plans give a sense of what the Navy wanted to do if offered strategic freedom.

Sea Strike also had the effect of bolstering Hayward's influence, no mean feat given Sea Strike's incompatibility with the Carter administration's strategic priorities. Hayward briefed Sea Strike to Senator Sam Nunn (D-GA) while he was inspecting U.S. forces in the Pacific, making a very positive impression. Nunn's subsequent advocacy convinced Claytor and Brown to visit Pacific Fleet headquarters, where they came away equally impressed (in Brown's case, presumably with the thought behind Sea Strike rather than the plans themselves).[90] This led directly to Admiral Hayward's appointment as CNO in mid-1978. The decision placed a prominent advocate of offensive carrier operations at the top of the service. As he noted in a later interview, Hayward entered the Pentagon ready to "argue the global mission of the Navy" and its offensive aspects regardless of official

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[86] Hattendorf, *Maritime Strategy*, 19.

[87] Rearden with Foulks, *JCS and Policy*, 236–37. Specifically, Brown worried that reclassifying the Pacific carriers from "assigned" to the Atlantic to the less-urgent category of "earmarked" would stoke fears that the United States was abandoning its NATO allies.

[88] Hartmann, *Naval Renaissance*, 30.

[89] Hattendorf, *Maritime Strategy*, 20–21.

[90] Patton, "Dawn of the Maritime Strategy," 60.

defense policy.[91] This placed him directly at odds with Secretary Brown and his staff, who remained unconvinced by the arguments made by Sea Plan 2000 and Sea Strike.

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The natural flashpoint for these incompatible views was the President's pledge to place a CVV in the FY 1980 Defense budget in place of the CVN he had vetoed. For Hayward, this issue came up even before he was appointed. As he recalled, when meeting with Harold Brown before his appointment, the secretary:

> made it clear that I had to agree with him to build smaller carriers. It was an implied condition of being selected. I told him I wouldn't do that. I said, "I'll do it under one condition. You all say that three small carriers are as good as, or better than, one big one? Okay, you give me three small ones, and I'll give up a big one. But Mr. Secretary, you can't guarantee me that; you can only guarantee me one small one. So you expect me to give up a big carrier for a small carrier? Because I'll never get the second small one, because it won't work. I'll never get three for one!"[92]

Luckily for Hayward, Brown did not act on this implied threat; Hayward consistently declined to support CVVs at the levels Brown wanted to build.

As Hayward predicted, three CVVs were not forthcoming, and the Navy agitated for placing a CVN in the FY 1980 budget. One study produced for OP-55 (Director, Aircraft Carrier Programs), which mirrored wider Navy thinking, argued that the CVV was only cost-effective when built in large numbers. Since the USN only needed one new carrier in the near-term to reach the administration's 12-carrier target, "the United States should buy the most capable and survivable carrier currently available: the NIMITZ-class CVN."[93]

In the FY 1980 DOD annual report, Brown reinforced Carter's promise to maintain a 12-carrier target after the veto. Rather than the "soft" 12-carrier cap mooted the prior year, Brown pledged to maintain "twelve active, *deployable*, carriers through the turn of the century while the life extension program for existing carriers is being

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[91] Thomas B. Hayward, *The Reminiscences of Admiral Thomas B. Hayward, U.S. Navy (Retired).* Interviewed by Paul Stillwell (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute, 2009), 376–78.

[92] Hayward, *Reminiscences,* 293-4.

[93] "OP-55 Briefing Point Paper: The Nimitz-Class Carrier & the CVV Concept," 1 September 1978, in *Handbook of U.S. Aircraft Carrier Programs*, Tab 15, Box 20, Aviation Studies Collection, NHHC, 3.

carried out" [emphasis added]. The CVV was the keystone of this plan and counted as a full carrier in its own right instead of a fraction of a big-deck carrier.[94] The CVV was now described as "equivalent in size and a far more capable ship than the one it replaces—the U.S.S. *Midway,*" which would "permit the United States to maintain an inventory of 12 active carriers through the turn of the century." The budget only projected one CVV started between FY 1980 and FY 1984, leaving the new carrier as a one-off, reminiscent of *Ranger* and *Wasp* in the 1930s.[95]

Clearly, this was not the three-CVV package Hayward claimed he would support. However, the nascent strategy fight brewing between the administration and a newly aggressive Navy was overtaken by international events that buried their differences under new funding. First among these was the Iranian Revolution, which began with protests in early 1978, and eventually deposed Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in February 1979. These events created a new set of security dilemmas for the United States in the oil-rich Persian Gulf region. With other nations in the region hostile, or wary of hosting American troops, powerful naval deployments became the only way for the country to maintain a significant local presence.

In late 1978 and early 1979, the new CNO "petitioned his JCS colleagues to join with him in urging a more assertive posture" in the Middle East, starting with moving a carrier battle group from the Western Pacific to the region.[96] He got his wish, starting with the redeployment of *Constellation* (CV-64) to the area in March 1979. Ostensibly there to monitor North and South Yemen, *Constellation* was replaced by *Midway* in April, which remained in the area until June.[97] Furthermore, the President and his advisors were considering a response plan that beefed up the U.S. naval presence in the region, including the regular rotation of two carrier battle groups and "one or two [amphibious] Marine air-ground task forces."[98]

The expansion of American naval forces in the Persian Gulf region was cemented by two major events in late 1979. First came the seizure of the American embassy in

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[94] Readers will recall that the Carter administration decided that CVVs would have a full set of arrestor gear in addition to their catapults, allowing them to operate the Navy's full suite of carrier aircraft.

[95] Brown, *Report of Secretary of Defense Harold Brown to the Congress on the FY 1980 Budget, FY 1981 Authorization Request and FY 1980–1984 Defense Programs* (Washington, DC: GPO, 25 January 1979), 162–63. *Ranger* (CV-4) and *Wasp* (CV-7) were—for slightly different rationales—designed for an unusually small displacement so as not to conflict with the aircraft carrier tonnage restrictions of the Washington Naval Treaty. Neither were considered terribly successful warships, and no further ships were built to either design.

[96] Rearden with Foulks, *JCS and Policy, 1977–1980*, 22.

[97] Mark L. Evans and Roy A. Grossnick, *United States Naval Aviation 1910–2010,* Volume I: *Chronology* (Washington, DC: Naval History and Heritage Command, 2015), 424–25.

[98] Keefer, *Brown*, 335.

Tehran on 4 November and the capture of many of its diplomats. Shortly thereafter, *Midway* (already in the Indian Ocean) and *Kitty Hawk* (CV-63—replaced by *Nimitz* in January) were sent to the area, the first two-carrier deployment to the Middle East. In late December, the Soviet Union sent 5,000 soldiers into Afghanistan and installed a new government. The combination of the two situations convinced the government to keep both carriers in the Arabian Sea indefinitely.[99]

As described by Admiral Harry D. Train II, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Atlantic Command, Carter asked the Navy for a "dominant maritime presence in the Indian Ocean . . . to react some way to both the hostage crisis and the Afghanistan aggravation." Train and Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Pacific Command (CINCPAC), Admiral Robert Long, determined "that the dominant maritime presence was two carrier battle groups and an amphibious task group," which required taking a carrier off station in the Mediterranean and the Western Pacific. This new deployment pattern "was hell . . . eating us alive," because supply costs and deployment lengths soared in the Middle East, inconvenient for both East and West Coast–based carriers to reach.[100]

Understandably, Iran and Afghanistan dominated President Carter's 1980 State of the Union speech, where he unveiled a policy that has come to be known as the "Carter Doctrine:"

> An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.[101]

The Navy was effectively the guarantor of the President's commitments. In keeping with the new policy, Carter soon announced that *Coral Sea* would replace *Midway* in the Indian Ocean, maintaining two carrier groups in the region, which continued for the remainder of the administration.[102] These deployments reinforced the importance of combat-credible presence as a first-order aircraft carrier mission, which elements in the administration had tried to downgrade.

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[99] Evans and Grossnick, *Naval Aviation,* 1:428.

[100] Harry D. Train II, *The Reminiscences of Admiral Harry D. Train II, U.S. Navy (Retired).* Interviewed by Paul Stillwell (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute, 1997), 454–56.

[101] Jimmy Carter, "The State of the Union Address Delivered Before a Joint Session of the Congress," 23 January 1980. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=33079.

[102] Keefer, *Brown*, 338.

Photo showing *Midway* and escorts during either *Midway*'s 1979–80 or 1980–81 cruise in the Indian Ocean/Arabian Sea during the Iran Hostage Crisis. Admiral Harry Train, commander in chief, U.S. Atlantic Fleet, described increased deployments to the Middle East as "hell . . . eating us alive" (NHHC/K-130033).

The Iranian Revolution also resolved the debate over the fate of Pacific Fleet's carriers in the event of war. With the creation of the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force in December, DOD was forced to consider the prospect of a major war in the Persian Gulf area for the first time. In doing so, the fight over the wartime use of PACOM's carriers was recast.[103] In May 1980, the JCS again urged Brown to shift the status of three of PACOM's carriers and a number of other warships from "assigned" to NATO to "earmarked," a change that would let NATO planners know that they could not necessarily count on those vessels in their war planning. Instead, these ships would be available both for Persian Gulf contingencies and PACFLT's plans for strikes on the Soviet Far East in conjunction with a NATO war.[104]

Even before the twin shocks of the hostage crisis and Afghanistan, the Middle Eastern situation affected the defense budgeting process. The Iranian Revolution made it difficult for the administration to resist congressional attempts to upgrade the CVV in the FY 1980 budget. Soon after the President's Budget was released, the

[103] Before the creation of Central Command in 1983, the entire Indian Ocean, including the Persian Gulf, was part of the PACOM area of responsibility.

[104] Rearden with Foulks, *JCS and Policy*, 239.

House Armed Services Committee substituted a CVN for the CVV in its version of the authorization bill. SASC, equally skeptical of the CVV, placed a large conventional carrier similar to CV-67 in their version instead. The CV option was the one presented in Brown's initial budget submission to OMB and, the Secretary hoped, a compromise between the CVV and calls for an expensive CVN.[105]

Although the administration hoped the House would yield to the Senate, the final conference report on defense authorization called for a CVN instead of a CV. While President Carter appears to have briefly considered another veto, "[t]he mood of Congress and the people had changed" since Carter's previous veto of a defense bill, and any action stood a good chance of being overturned in both houses of Congress. Instead, in early October, Carter relented perhaps, according to reporting in the *Washington Post*, in exchange for an end to congressional attempts to undermine the administration's policies in present-day Zimbabwe.[106]

The authorization of full funding for CVN-71, the future *Theodore Roosevelt*, which began construction in 1981, drew some of the sting out of the carrier debates of the Carter years. In his FY 1981 annual report, Brown maintained the announced 12 deployable carrier standard and, while he did not request another CVV, noted that "battle groups formed today around less capable ships such as the MIDWAY or CORAL SEA, still would be useful for some important missions in a NATO war. Similarly, future battle groups formed around . . . the recently proposed CVV class, would be fully adequate for certain operations during a NATO contingency."[107]

The last major issue was Admiral Hayward's suggestion to "bring out two of the old . . . carriers [and] refurbish them, so we'd have more flexibility to meet the overseas requirement."[108] Reactivation, starting in FY 1981, would give the Navy extra capacity to meet the new requirements for Middle Eastern presence. Although Carter and Brown refused to place reactivation in the budget submission, the idea was resurrected by the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, which authorized the reactivation of *Oriskany* (CV-34), mothballed in 1976, and the battleship *New Jersey* (BB-62). However, no money was marked for the reactivations in the appropriation process.[109]

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[105] Keefer, *Brown*, 364–66.

[106] Wilson, "Carter Gives Up on Blocking New Navy Nuclear Carrier," *Washington Post*, 2 October 1979.

[107] Brown, *Report of Secretary of Defense Harold Brown to the Congress on the FY 1981 Budget, FY 1982 Authorization Request and FY 1981–1985 Defense Programs* (Washington, DC: GPO, 29 January 1980), 168.

[108] Hayward, *Reminiscences*, 435.

[109] Keefer, *Brown*, 562–64.

On the way out, Brown's FY 1982 report, released the day before the inauguration of Ronald Reagan, tinkered with carrier deployment requirements. In keeping with the administration's wider shift toward the Persian Gulf region, the forward presence standard of two carriers each in the Mediterranean and Pacific was shifted to one in each in the Mediterranean and Pacific, and two in the Indian Ocean.[110] To that end, the administration reversed course on its plans to turn *Coral Sea* into a training carrier. Instead, the ship would be kept as an active carrier "[t]o maintain a sustained presence in the Indian Ocean" for as long as events warranted.[111]

* * *

Despite the back and forth over most of the Carter administration, very little changed in the Navy's carrier force structure. When the administration entered office, the Navy had 13 carriers, and when it left, the Navy had the same number. The only changes were the retirement of the *Midway*-class *Franklin D. Roosevelt* and its replacement by the nuclear *Dwight D. Eisenhower* in 1977, as well as the forthcoming construction of *Theodore Roosevelt*. Given the challenges swirling around the Navy's carrier fleet—a renewed focus on NATO, the supposed threat of Soviet cruise missiles, and the increasing cost of CVNs—standing pat in terms of hulls, while adding a much more capable replacement, was a victory for the service. Despite pressure from the White House and Secretary Brown, the Secretariat and OPNAV stood firm in their opposition to the CVV, and were rewarded when events in the Middle East created a set of requirements that left the administration unable to overcome Congress's preference for CVNs.

In the final reckoning, the most important carrier-related legacy of the Carter administration may be the attempted codification of presence-based carrier requirements over warfighting-based requirements. Ironically, the administration entered office with plans to deemphasize carriers in order to meet the warfighting requirements of a NATO war in Europe. By building CVVs optimized for SLOC protection instead of CVs or CVNs optimized for power projection, the administration tried to provide a greater level of SLOC coverage at a lower price. In turn, this would free up funding

[110] Brown, *Report of Secretary of Defense Harold Brown to the Congress on the FY 1982 Budget, FY 1983 Authorization Request and FY 1982–1986 Defense Programs* (Washington, DC: GPO, 19 January 1981), 173.

[111] Ibid., 153.

for an audacious program of high-technology force multipliers to offset numerical inferiority on NATO's Central Front.

This shift did not go unchallenged. Neither OPNAV nor the Secretariat were willing to accept the implications of this strategy for the Navy. Efforts like Sea Strike and Sea Plan 2000 tried to explain and assert an offensive role for the Navy. Powerful blocs in both houses of Congress also tried to maintain the Navy's CV-based force structure. The Navy also aggressively defended the peacetime forward presence mission against administration efforts like PRM-10 or OMB's November 1977 force structure study that deprecated the value of forward presence with big-deck carrier-based battle groups.

The Navy's efforts were partially successful, mostly because events overcame the Europe-first strategy. Having come into office with a laser-like focus on NATO's Central Front, Carter's security team ended up paying a great deal of attention on the Middle East, especially after the beginning of the Iranian Revolution. In that part of the world, with little in the way of U.S. basing infrastructure, the Navy Department's carrier battle groups and amphibious Marine Air-Ground Task Forces (MAGTFs) were the obvious tools for demonstrating U.S. interest. As a result, by the end of the Carter administration, Secretary Brown rhetorically justified the carrier force structure in terms of presence, asserting a need for 12 carriers in order to maintain forward-deployed carriers in the Mediterranean, the Pacific, and the Middle East, although this was never an official rationale in the formal requirements process.

This still left the Navy without an independent offensive warfighting mission relating to the Soviet Union in Carter's policy. Despite the best efforts of Sea Strike and Sea Plan 2000, the Navy's official role in a major war scenario remained limited to protecting sea lanes to Europe. The Navy continued to believe that carrier battle groups could operate in waters near the Soviet Union with some success, but that was never enshrined in official administration policy. Without clear administration support for a major role in a NATO war, the Navy could never claim its desired draft on limited resources, curbing its preferred expansion plans and forcing compromises on issues like carrier air wing composition and the potential of nuclear-powered AEGIS escorts.

2

The Reagan Administration

1981–89

In contrast to the Carter years, the Navy found itself at the head of the line for the financial and strategic largesse of the new administration.[1] This was due to several factors, but the most important was the Navy Department's successful explication of its missions across the conflict spectrum inside of DOD, to Congress, and to the public through advocacy of its "Maritime Strategy" and the 600-ship fleet deemed necessary to execute it. As a result, the Navy saw its carrier requirement raised from 13 at the end of the Carter administration to 15 soon after Reagan took office, a number that remained constant through his term. This new requirement was supported by a commitment to new construction. By the end of the administration in 1989, Congress had appropriated funds for four aircraft carriers: *Abraham Lincoln* (CVN-72) and *George Washington* (CVN-73) in the FY 1983 budget, followed by *John C. Stennis* (CVN-74) and *Harry S. Truman* (CVN-75) in FY 1988.

Critical to these budgetary successes was Reagan's first Secretary of the Navy, John F. Lehman, Jr. A reserve naval aviator and former National Security Council staffer under Henry Kissinger, Lehman had a deep background in defense affairs. After leaving the NSC, Lehman was an active participant in the carrier battles of the Carter years, serving as an outside consultant to the Sea Plan 2000 study and publishing a short book, *Aircraft Carriers*: *The Real Choices,* in 1978, which suggested a carrier force level as high as 22.[2] After advising future Vice President George H. W. Bush

[1] Steven L. Rearden, *Council of War: A History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1942–1991* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press for the Joint History Office, 2012), 428.

[2] John F. Lehman, Jr., *Aircraft Carriers: The Real Choices* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1978), 47.

during the primary campaign, Lehman was tapped by Reagan to become Secretary of the Navy, with Bush's firm support.

One of Lehman's assistant secretaries, Chase Untermeyer, captured some of his personality in a 1985 journal entry:

> [A] fascinating man who can be the smiling . . . altar boy and the disdainful Cambridge don; who can bring forward men of competence to reshape the US Navy and yet prefer the company of shills and toadies. . . . Through his attention to detail and his push for greater competition in buying ships, planes and weapons, he saves the taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. . . . If I had to decide upon it now, I would simply say that John Lehman is a brilliant, self-centered man who shall either succeed mightily or fall into obscurity.[3]

Naval officers were rather less complimentary. While they appreciated his commitment to a large Navy, Lehman's aggressive personal style and input into affairs traditionally deemed the province of uniformed leaders often caused tensions with many admirals. Ironically, Lehman's service in the Naval Reserve probably exacerbated these tensions: admirals willing to defer to a purely civilian Secretary may not have been so willing to do so with a mid-grade reservist. Lehman himself discussed with clear bitterness the "resistance, rudeness, controversy, and downright insubordination" he faced from the Navy's uniformed leadership at the end of his term in office.[4]

Lehman's tenure was dominated by his insistence on building a "600-ship Navy," compared with the approximately 530-ship fleet that existed at the end of the Carter administration.[5] Unlike previous force level targets, this one had the status of political mandate. After developing the concept while he was working on Bush's primary campaign, Lehman was able to make the 600-ship fleet party policy through his work on the Republican Party's Platform Committee at the 1980 convention.[6] With the "pledge to reverse Mr. Carter's

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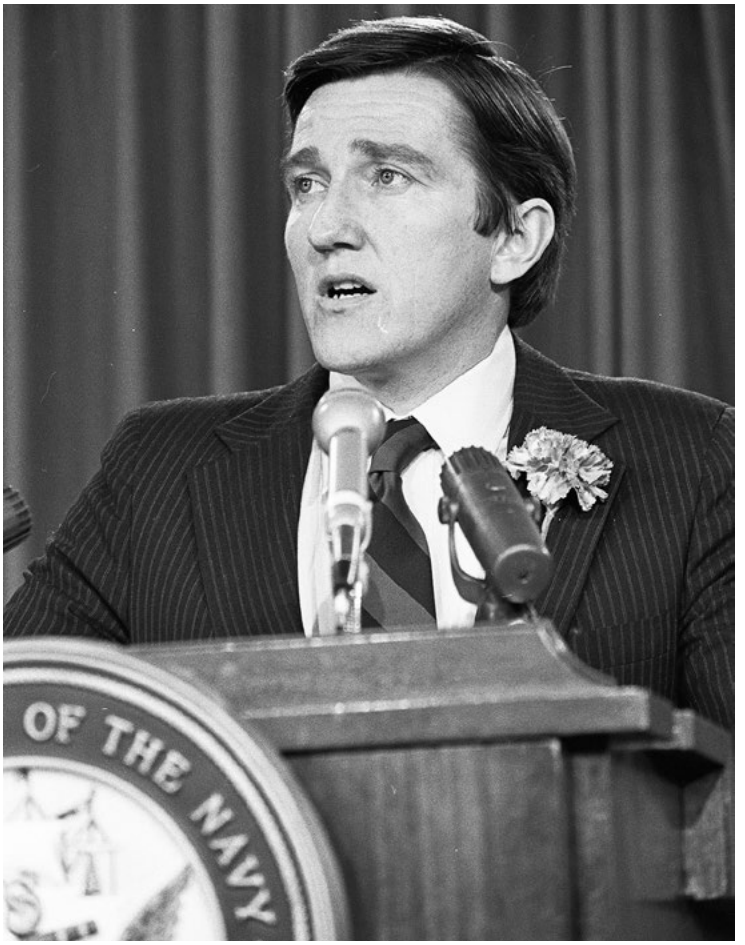
[3] Chase Untermeyer, *Inside Reagan's Navy: The Pentagon Journals* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2015), 135–36.

[4] John F. Lehman, Jr., *Command of the Seas* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1988), 36–38, 418.

[5] Ship counting is, to say the least, a politically fraught exercise. Here, I am using NHHC's figures, which account for ship levels from 1886 to the present, https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/us-ship-force-levels.html

[6] Lehman, *Command of the Seas*, 101–102.



"A brilliant . . . man who shall either succeed mightily or fall into obscurity." Secretary of the Navy John Lehman, shown giving a briefing at the Pentagon, 17 March 1981 (DIMOC/DD-SC-14-00608/Robert D. Ward).

dismantling of U.S. naval and Marine forces" a matter of official party—and soon, administration—policy, the Secretary had a potent weapon to use in budget debates.[7]

To be clear, Lehman argued that the 600-ship target was based on the Navy's geographical responsibilities, and not, as critics alleged, merely a force-sizing political gimmick. According to an early 1981 DON policy paper, the international situation

[7] Republican National Committee, "Republican Platform: Family, Neighborhood, Work, Peace, Freedom," 14 July 1980, quoted in Joseph B. Gorman, "A Survey of Policy Positions Supported by the 1980 Republican National Convention that Would Require Congressional Action for Implementation," CRS Report, 6 January 1981, 22.

"warrant[ed] forward deployment of five carrier battle groups in three vital ocean areas [Mediterranean, Indian Ocean/Persian Gulf, and Western Pacific]."[8] Thus, to sustain those geographic commitments, the 3-to-1 standard for carrier deployments called for 15 *deployable* aircraft carriers, a number that did not include carriers undergoing SLEP. As Lehman explained it, "600 ships was a minimum, to support the 15 carriers," added to other commitments like deterrence, and amphibious sealift.[9] It must be said as well that the 600-ship number was hardly a creation of Lehman alone. It bears a great similarity to the 585-ship option spelled out in Sea Plan 2000 and, of course, echoes Admiral Holloway's 600-ship plan from 1975, although the earlier plans did not anticipate bringing battleships out of mothballs to increase the number of available battle groups as Lehman's (at the strong urging of Hayward) did.[10]

Fig. 2: Selected Force Structure for the "600-Ship Navy"

	Carriers	Battleships	Cruisers/ Destroyers	Frigates	SSNs
600-ship Navy (February 1981)[11]	16	4	137	101	100
SP 2000: Min. Acceptable Risk	13	0	124	152	94
Low Risk	15	0	142	158	98
U.S. Navy fleet (30 SEP 1981)	13	0	118	78	87

[8] OP-090 (OPNAV Navy Program Planning), "Aircraft Carrier Force Planning," April 1981, Box 9, Folder 6, John F. Lehman, Jr., Papers, NHHC OA.

[9] John B. Hattendorf, *The Evolution of the U.S. Navy's Maritime Strategy, 1977–1986* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2004), 50.

[10] "Sea Plan 2000 Naval Force Planning Study: Unclassified Executive Summary," March 1978, Folder 5, Box 10, John F. Lehman, Jr., Papers, NHHC OA, 18; Chief of Naval Information, "What the '600-Ship Navy' is all about," 30 October 1975, quoted in Alva M. Bowen, Jr., "U.S. Naval Expansion Program: An Analysis of the Cost of Expanding the Navy from 500 to 600 Ships," CRS Report, 7 April 1976, 4.

[11] House Armed Services Committee Seapower and Strategic and Critical Materials Subcommittee, *Hearings on Military Posture and H.R. 2970 [H.R. 3519] and H.R. 2614 Before the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives* (Statement of VADM W.H. Rowden, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations, Surface Warfare, 26 March 1981), 97th Congress, First Session, HASC No 97-6, 448.

Whatever its origin, the 600-ship target remained for Lehman's entire six-year tenure as secretary, providing, along with the Maritime Strategy, a fixed point of reference for planning. Admiral William J. Crowe, Jr., who served in a succession of four-star billets during the Reagan years, later recollected that Lehman:

> [C]oncluded before he was appointed secretary that the United States should have a 600-ship Navy, and by God we were going to have a 600-ship Navy. It was a simple vision . . . in that political environment it was right on target. . . . From the day John Lehman came in till the day he left, the 600-ship Navy was his theme.[12]

Combined with the generous budgets of the period, especially in the early 1980s, this single-minded focus avoided internecine struggles about the ideal size of the fleet within DON, and gave the impression that the Navy's yearly budget submissions were based on a solid, long-term plan.

Inseparable from the 600-ship target was the Navy's Maritime Strategy, developed in a series of secret documents from 1982, and eventually publically released in a 1986 pamphlet.[13] It provided a linkage between the Navy Department's desired end strength and national security, showing how those extra ships would be used in wartime. In a deliberate repudiation of Carter-era policy, the Maritime Strategy posited an offensive role for the Navy based on operating far forward in wartime, using carrier battle groups to combat Soviet forces on the NATO flanks and in the Pacific, threaten Soviet bases, while attack submarines penetrated protected "bastions" for Soviet ballistic missile submarines in northern waters.

The Maritime Strategy's creation is a matter of some debate. For his part, Secretary Lehman claimed that his efforts to shake up a "navy headquarters [where] . . . conceptual thinking and strategy simply had no place" led to the Maritime Strategy.[14] In his telling, Lehman was especially concerned about the supine reaction of an audience of naval officers to a "condescending attack" from Carter's assistant OMB director, Randy Jayne, in 1978: "I was amazed to find that instead of gritted teeth and

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[12] William J. Crowe, Jr., with David Chanoff, *The Line of Fire: From Washington to the Gulf, the Politics and Battles of the New Military* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 240.

[13] Various iterations of the Maritime Strategy, including the classified 1982 briefing and 1984 publication, and the publically released 1986 USNIP insert are republished in *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1980s*, John B. Hattendorf and Peter M. Swartz, eds. (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2008). Internally, at least, the Maritime Strategy was not static, as it represented a method for employing *current* forces, not just an idealized picture of strategy for war at sea.

[14] Lehman, *Command of the Seas*, 128–29.

clenched fists, I saw heads nodding in agreement . . . here was a collapse of spirit; this crew was really whipped."[15] Lehman's desire for a strategy to take before Congress prompted the first Maritime Strategy briefing, written to "set up the POM, and get the Secretary off OPNAV's back."[16]

However, most participants and subsequent analyses depart from Secretary Lehman's claim that he played the key role in *formulating* that strategy.[17] Instead, pride of place is often given to Admiral Hayward (CNO 1978–82); arguing that the Maritime Strategy flowed out of his "Sea Strike" initiative from his time commanding the Pacific Fleet and his efforts to improve Navy strategy development while CNO.[18] Peter Swartz, who wrote much of the 1984 Maritime Strategy while assigned to OPNAV as a commander, also notes that members of the first Strategic Studies Group (SSG) at the Naval War College in 1981–82 would "all tell you that the seat of discussion of the Maritime Strategy was in the SSG."[19] Likewise, "[y]ears later, I got to sit down with alumni of the old . . . Advanced Technology Panel—super secret—they knew *they* were the Maritime Strategy, and what we were doing . . . was fiction. 'What we're doing with the new intel . . . that's the Maritime Strategy.'"[20]

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[15] Ibid., 100.

[16] Captain Peter M. Swartz, USN (Ret.), interviewed by Drs. Justin Blanton and Ryan Peeks, July 2019, Naval History and Heritage Command.

[17] Lehman, *Command of the Seas*, 115–16.

[18] Hattendorf, *Maritime Strategy*, 37-57; Frederick H. Hartmann, *Naval Renaissance: The U.S. Navy in the 1980s* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1990), 201–202; Peter D. Haynes, *Toward a New Maritime Strategy: American Naval Thinking in the Post–Cold War Era* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2015), 31–33; Harry D. Train, *The Reminiscences of Admiral Harry D. Train II, U.S. Navy (Retired)*. Interviewed by Paul Stillwell (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 434–35; John Allen Williams, "The US Navy Under the Reagan Administration and Global Forward Strategy," in *Defense Policy in the Reagan Administration*, William P. Snyder and James Brown, eds. (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1988), 277–78. Lehman and Hayward had a relationship that can be described charitably as "fraught," which may explain Lehman's refusal to acknowledge Hayward's critical role in the Maritime Strategy's development. Lehman was far more willing to grant credit to his second CNO, Admiral James Watkins (1982–86), who was in office by the time the earliest version of the Maritime Strategy was briefed inside the Pentagon. However, in his recent *Oceans Ventured: Winning the Cold War at Sea* (New York: Norton, 2018), Lehman praises Hayward for his strategic vision.

[19] Admiral Hayward set up the first SSG, consisting of eight handpicked O-5 and O-6 officers from the Navy and Marine Corps who were on the path to higher command (among the members of that first SSG were then-Commanders Arthur K. Cebrowski and William A. Owens, who went on to play a major role in U.S. Navy policy in the 1990s). This group, in Hayward's words, "a small but impressive cell . . . a group of the best and brighter of our military officers," reported directly to the CNO on major issues of strategy. It was also assumed that SSG members would take those insights with them to their next commands in the active forces. During their time in the SSG and afterward, members of the groups played a major role in translating the Navy's new offensive strategy into operational art. Hattendorf, *Maritime Strategy*, 45–48; Dr. Steven Wills, email communication with the author, 1 October 2019.

[20] Swartz, interviewed by Blanton and Peeks, July 2019, NHHC.

Regardless of its provenance, the Maritime Strategy put flesh on the bones of the 600-ship navy. As Admiral Harry D. Train II, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Atlantic Command (CINCLANT) in the early 1980s, recalled, the Maritime Strategy "was . . . a useful marketing tool in persuading the distributors of public funds to vote" for naval expansion.[21] Although neither Secretary Lehman nor the Chief of Naval Operations was in a position to draft war plans, their insistence upon an offensive, forward mission for the fleet bolstered the Navy's budgetary case. In Swartz's words, Lehman went to policymakers with the new strategy in hand and said, "'this is what we're going to do against the Soviets. And I need more ships now, and I need more money now, and I'm going to save you money by the way in which I procure those ships and aircraft.' And that was his message: strategy, 600 ships, and affordability."[22]

The capabilities of the Navy's carrier battle groups were the critical enabling factor for this strategy. Lehman derived his 600-ship target from a 15-carrier goal, and the Maritime Strategy rested on naval confidence that carriers could successfully operate offensively in and around Soviet home waters.[23] In contrast to 1970s-era concerns within and outside of the Navy about the susceptibility of carriers to cruise missile attack, the service of the 1980s assumed that carriers could operate forward. To Swartz in the Pentagon, the Maritime Strategy "was an approach on how you use the U.S. Navy's offensive power . . . I've got this aircraft carrier. It's loaded with all these airplanes—new airplanes . . . and new weapons. . . . I'm not going to let the Soviets get anywhere close to an aircraft carrier with that. And therefore, the A-6s are going to [hit] anything that we want."[24] Indeed, just by existing inside of Soviet defense zones, carrier battle groups could fulfill an offensive role by destroying Soviet anti-ship assets.

The force structure and the strategy also asserted peacetime forward presence as a driver of carrier requirements (though neither OSD nor the Joint Staff ever adopted this rationale). Although scenarios of carrier strikes from off Norway's North Cape generated the most debate, Lehman accorded equal prominence to forward presence.[25] By the end of the Carter administration, Navy leaders in and out of uni-

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[21] Train, *Reminiscences,*434–35.

[22] Swartz, interviewed by Blanton and Peeks, July 2019, NHHC.

[23] HASC Seapower and Strategic and Critical Materials Subcommittee, *Hearings on Military Posture* (Statement of John F. Lehman, Jr., Secretary of the Navy, 2 April 1981), HASC No. 97-6, 571.

[24] Swartz, interviewed by Blanton and Peeks, July 2019, NHHC. John Lehman's recent *Oceans Ventured* is in large part about this assumption and its implications, though very much subject to the caveats about the birth of the Maritime Strategy discussed above.

[25] Lehman, *Command of the Seas*, 142–43.

form felt that the fleet was overstretched with presence deployments, trying to put too few ships in too many places.[26] At the time of President Reagan's inauguration in January 1981, the Navy had a fleet of 13 carriers (two *Midway* CVs, 8 big-deck CVs, *Enterprise*, and the two *Nimitz* CVNs), but only 11 available (the SLEP for *Saratoga* [CV-60], the first in the program, began in 1980, while *Enterprise* was in the midst of a years-long refit).

With those forces, the Navy was committed, according to the final Carter strategy, to maintaining a carrier each in the Mediterranean and Western Pacific, and another two in the Indian Ocean, the latter placing extreme strain on a Navy increasingly organized around potential wars and crises in East Asia and the Atlantic.[27] Deployments to the Indian Ocean were notorious for the long intervals between ports. For example, during their 1980 deployments, CVN-69 and -68 spent, respectively, 153 and 145 days in a row at sea. In addition to any mechanical strain placed on ships, these deployments created severe retention and morale issues.[28] Instead of a desired ratio of 2 months in home waters for every month deployed, the Navy's carrier force was operating at a ratio of 1.7:1 and risked falling to "1.58 to 1 or less over the next five years" absent action to add carriers or reduce commitments.[29]

Another input to the development of the Maritime Strategy and the 600-ship target was the essential unreality of the medium-term plans drawn up by the Joint Staff, with input from the combatant command CINCs. During the Carter–Reagan transition, the Joint Staff produced the Joint Strategic Planning Document (JSPD) for FYs 1983–90. JSPD 83-90 called for a much larger military than the force proposed in the final Carter Future Years Defense Plan (FYDP, which laid out spending projections beyond the present budget year). Although the JSPD force structure was *prima facie* infeasible and unaffordable, it gives a sense of how the services and Joint Staff viewed Navy "requirements" in early 1981.[30]

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[26] Train, *Reminiscences,* 461.

[27] Harold Brown, *Report of Secretary of Defense Harold Brown to the Congress on the FY 1982 Budget, FY 1983 Authorization Request and FY 1982–1986 Defense Programs* (Washington: GPO, 19 January 1981), 173.

[28] Christopher C. Wright, "U.S. Naval Operations in 1982," USNI *Proceedings*, May 1983, 52.

[29] OP-090, "Aircraft Carrier Force Planning."

[30] The following discussion is based on Navy staff discussions about an advanced draft of JSPD 83–90. However, the draft's carrier requirements were unchanged in the final version: 16 carrier battle groups, and 6 "CVX" (CVV) battle groups. "DoD Program Review, FY-83–87: Policy and Risk Assessment Issue Book—For Comment Draft," compiled by Defense Resources Board Executive Secretary Vincent Puritano, 20 July 1981, Box 912, Folder 19, Records of the Secretary to the Chief of Naval Operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff Matters (OP-004), NHHC OA, 14.

In contrast to Secretary Brown's final annual report, which called for "12 modern carriers in active status through the turn of the century," the JSPD, based on regional CINC war plans, called for 16 carrier battle groups and 6 "BG (X)" organized around CVVs.[31] The idealized peacetime deployments and wartime commitments would be as follows:

Fig. 3: JSPD 83–90 U.S. Navy Force Structure[32]

	Peacetime BGs	Wartime CVBGs	Wartime [CVV] BGs
Atlantic	2	5	2
Mediterranean	2	4	0
Pacific	2	5	2
Indian Ocean	1	0	2

These forces would be used in accordance with the Navy's aggressive desires. Carriers would hold a high line in the North Atlantic, facilitating attacks on the Kola Peninsula, while Pacific carriers would attack Soviet bases and ships in the Northwest Pacific.[33]

Unsurprisingly, the Army waged a spirited rearguard action against the size of the Navy's planning force. Interestingly, they cited Sea Plan 2000 as proof that the 16 CV/6 CV(X) force was unnecessarily large. Sea Plan 2000 put forth 15 aircraft carriers as its "lower risk" force, and the Army Chief of Staff argued here that the Navy's own analysis supported that force as "capable of maintaining maritime superiority for the next 15 to 20 years."[34] The Navy's response, which apparently proved convincing, was that the Army's approach only worked "if maritime campaigns are strictly defensive in nature," implying that the new administration's offensive strategy required a larger force.[35]

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[31] Brown, *FY 1982 Annual Report,* 153; Commander J. W. Bailey and Captain J. Daigenault, OP-605, "Point Paper: Subj. Navy Planning BG Force Level," 12 January 1981, TAB A: "Navy Planning Force ([Joint Strategic Planning Document Strategic Annex] extract)," Box 915, Folder 35, OP-004 Records, NHHC OA, III-30.

[32] Bailey and Daigenault, "BG Force Level," TAB A, III-30-34. While the peacetime figures just refer to "BGs," the number must include CV(X)s as well to match the JSPDSA's claim that its peacetime deployment plan keeps "about 30 percent of the active operating force" deployed.

[33] Bailey and Daigenault, "BG Force Level," TAB A, III-35-36.

[34] Ibid., TAB B, "CSA Views on Navy General Purpose Forces," E-10.

[35] Ibid., 3.

There was only one problem with the JSPD planning force: like all Joint Staff planning forces, it was entirely unrealistic, running well past even the defense budget increases proposed by the incoming administration.[36] While the Reagan buildup did briefly result in a 16 carrier/15 active carrier fleet in 1989, there was no appetite for the long-term support of 16 big carriers and another 6 smaller flattops. Because the JSPD was, by design, explicitly "fiscally unconstrained," such a document could have little real planning utility.[37] As one acerbic critic noted, this system, centered "on a Panglossian vision of the future unconstrained by reality," allowed the services to procure whatever force they wanted while still keeping within the bounds of Joint Staff "guidance."[38] While the Navy may have appreciated the support for a large fleet, using 13 carriers to fulfill requirements intended for 22 was impossible.[39]

In response to this mismatch, Admiral Hayward requested a study of "the attainability of the JSPD planning force" in April 1981.[40] More importantly, the disconnect between plans and reality became a key driver behind what would eventually become the Maritime Strategy: how best to use the Navy's *actual* fleet in the event of war. Indeed, Hattendorf notes that the earliest versions of the strategy "began as an internal OPNAV effort to state clearly the strategic background upon which naval force planning and budget decisions should be made."[41] In other words, the Maritime Strategy provided an opportunity to demonstrate plans based on current forces, or even the politically realistic 15-carrier target instead of the Joint Chiefs of Staff's fantasy fleet.

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President Reagan ran for office, in part, on a pledge to increase defense spending, and his administration announced plans for supplemental funding within a month of taking office. This was a 12.5 percent increase in a supplemental bill for the already-passed FY 1981 budget and an additional 12 percent increase over Carter's proposed 1982

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[36] Prior to Goldwater-Nichols, the service chiefs and their staffs provided the primary inputs in the JSPD process.

[37] Bailey and Daigenault, "BG Force Level," 3.

[38] Lieutenant Colonel John M. Vann, "The Forgotten Forces," *Military Review,* vol. 67 (August 1987), 4–9, quoted in Richard K. Betts, *Military Readiness: Concepts, Choices, Consequences* (Washington, DC: Brookings, 1995), 123–24.

[39] Hattendorf, *Maritime Strategy*, 71.

[40] Colonel F. J. McConville, "Terms of Reference for a JCS Planning Force Attainability Study," 21 July 1981, Box 808, Folder 7, OP-004 Records, NHHC OA.

[41] Hattendorf, *Maritime Strategy*, 73.

budget, totaling $32.6 billion in 1981 money (approximately $91.5 billion today). The shocked services, "compelled to find programs to justify the increase," quickly proposed items from their wish lists.[42]

With only 12 carriers counted as "deployable" when the Reagan administration took office, Lehman sought to increase the Navy's end strength.[43] To use a phrase often deployed by DON and Navy officials at the time, the service had "a one-and-a-half ocean fleet [and] a three-ocean commitment," with the then-new commitment to maintaining carrier presence in the Indian Ocean.[44] In the long term, the answer to this problem was building up to 15 carriers, but, as a stopgap, the Navy turned to Admiral Hayward's plans to reactivate the carrier *Oriskany* and *Iowa*-class battleships after briefly considering homeporting a second carrier abroad.[45]

In addition, the Navy Department proposed delaying the planned decommissioning of *Coral Sea,* placing funds for a new *Nimitz*-class aircraft carrier in the FY 82 bill, and starting another in 1984. In Lehman's words, this plan "would have allowed us to go to fourteen carriers within two years . . . and to fifteen by 1987 with the commissioning of [CVN-71]," set to start construction later in 1981.[46] As it happened, the new CVN was never added to the FY 82 budget, and Congress, though generally supportive of the administration's defense budget boosts, was rather skeptical of the reactivations, especially *Oriskany*.

Hayward argued that reactivating these older ships would give the Navy "more flexibility to meet the overseas requirement" for more battle groups in more places quickly and without the costs of new construction.[47] New battle groups organized around these older ships would be especially useful in lower-threat environments, freeing the larger carriers to patrol higher-threat areas and spend more time training for combat in home waters. At an initial estimate of $305 million (approximately $870 million in 2019), *Oriskany's* reactivation was estimated at about a tenth of the cost of building a new CVN.[48]

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[42] Daniel Wirls, *Buildup: The Politics of Defense in the Reagan Era* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 35.

[43] OP-090, "Aircraft Carrier Force Planning." By the Navy's reckoning, 12 of its 13 carriers were "deployable" in early 1981. *Saratoga*, undergoing a SLEP refit, was not counted in the total. However, *Enterprise*, two years into a three-year overhaul that would not end until February 1982 was, for some reason, marked as deployable.

[44] OP-090, "CV/BB Reactivation," April 1981, Box 9, Folder 6, John F. Lehman, Jr., Papers, NHHC OA.

[45] OP-090, "Overseas Homeporting for Carriers," 21 April 1981, Box 9, Folder 6, John F. Lehman, Jr., Papers, NHHC OA.

[46] Lehman, *Command of the Seas*, 174.

[47] Hayward, *Reminiscences*, 435.

[48] General Accounting Office, "Update of the Issues Concerning the Proposed Reactivation of the Iowa Class Battleships and the Aircraft Carrier Oriskany," 20 April 1981, 11; Douglas D. Mitchell, "Shipbuilding Costs for General Purpose Forces in a 600-Ship Navy," GAO Report, 16 February 1982, 19.

However, cheap reactivation came at a cost. *Oriskany*, a heavily modified *Essex*-class carrier, lacked the ability to field the newest aircraft in the Navy's arsenal, even some of those that could use the antiquated *Midway*s. Instead of a traditional air wing, the Navy planned to use one composed of three squadrons of Marine Corps light attack A-4Ms—aircraft originally designed in the early 1950s for a carrier originally laid down in World War II—hardly the sort of air wing for a high-end fight against the Soviet Union. The reactivated carrier's missions would tend toward operations in concert with larger carriers in support of amphibious groups. While *Oriskany*'s combat power would be minimal, Lehman conceded to a House Armed Services subcommittee, "I can tell you that a 40,000-ton aircraft carrier is better than a zero ton carrier. . . . We need another attack carrier."[49]

Though Congress proved accommodating to most of the Defense Department's FY 1981/1982 wish list, the *Oriskany* reactivation proved difficult. This was partly due to its spiraling cost—by early April the estimate had climbed from $305 million to somewhere north of $500 million (approximately $1.4 billion in 2019), but senators and representatives also raised concerns about *Oriskany*'s utility in the modern battlespace. In the end, the House Armed Services Committee was willing to authorize funds for the reactivation, but its counterpart in the Senate refused, as did the full upper house, perhaps emboldened by Lehman's clearly lukewarm support for the carrier. However, funds were authorized and appropriated for the reactivation of the battleship *New Jersey*, and *Coral Sea*'s deactivation was pushed back to the early 1990s.[50]

While the Navy received the prospect of medium-term relief with the reactivation of *New Jersey* and, eventually, the other three *Iowas*, the mismatch between perceived carrier requirements and carrier capacity remained. Adding *Oriskany* and a new *Nimitz* to the FY 1982 budget amendment failed, but there was still the prospect of placing new carrier construction in the FY 1983 budget, the first the new administration controlled from the start. This budget was critical for Lehman's 600-ship plan: the already-authorized CVN-70 and -71 would bring the Navy up to 15 total carriers, absent any retirements However, reaching 15 *deployable* carriers required new construction, as did sufficient numbers to retire the superannuated *Midway* and *Coral Sea*. As the Secretary, correctly, understood

[49] "HASC Seapower and Strategic and Critical Materials Subcommittee," *Hearings on Military Posture* (Statement of Secretary Lehman, 2 April 1981), 648–49.

[50] George C. Wilson, "Senate Unit Rebuffs Navy on Activating Old Carrier," *Washington Post*, 2 April 1981, A2; Associated Press, "House Unit Approves Refitting of Carrier," *Washington Post*, 8 April 1981, A5; Wilson, "Record Peacetime Defense Budget Clears First Hill Hurdle," *Washington Post*, 29 April 1981, A2; Associated Press, "$136 Billion Arms Bill is Approved by Senate," *Washington Post*, 15 May 1981, A1.

it, Congress's willingness to support a large Navy budget was finite, meaning that new construction needed to be frontloaded early in the administration's term.[51]

To that end, the Navy Department adopted an audacious plan to boost carrier strength in the FY 1983 budget, based on a suggestion from George Sawyer, the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Shipbuilding and Logistics. At a budget meeting in the summer of 1981, Sawyer told Lehman and Hayward that it might be possible to put two aircraft carriers into the FY 1983 budget, so long as those were built to the pattern of the 13-year old *Nimitz* design, with no substantial modifications. As Sawyer noted, the politics would be tricky, but the financial math could be made to work.[52]

To be clear, this plan was not floated to give the U.S. Navy *more* carriers than previously planned—two new carriers were planned for the first five fiscal years of the new administration regardless. Indeed, a June 1981 draft of the Navy's FY 1983 POM contained funding for new carriers in the FY 1984 and 1986 budgets.[53] Sawyer's suggestion to fund the carriers in FY 1983 did not mean that they would both be laid down in 1983, which was beyond the capacity of the Newport News shipyard.

Instead, putting the funding for CVN-72 and -73 in the FY 1983 budget served financial and political purposes. On the financial side, Sawyer's plan would allow the Navy to "negotiat[e] one package for both of the Nimitz class carriers in the five-year plan, renegotiate[e] the *Theodore Roosevelt* [CVN-71] contract, and combin[e] them in one package. This, he promised, would yield huge cost savings by contracting for three sets of equipment at once," saving money through economies of scale for equipment like reactors, catapults, arresting gear, and the like, as well as "stabilizing the work loading at Newport News."[54]

On the political side, the two-carrier buy, though risky, held out the potential of cementing the gains from Congress's pro-defense mood. As everyone in the Navy Department understood, Congress's willingness to spend large sums of money on the defense budget could not be counted on indefinitely. By funding both carriers, and beginning to buy equipment for the second even before the first was laid down, the FY

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[51] Friedman, *Fighters over the Fleet*, 386; Gregory L. Vistica, *Fall from Glory: The Men Who Sank the U.S. Navy*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995),61.

[52] Vistica, *Fall from Glory*, 113. Vistica's account is primarily based on an interview with Sawyer. For another perspective on the plan, see Lehman, *Command of the Seas*, 174, which tells substantially the same story.

[53] VADM [M. Staser] Holcomb, "Navy Program Objectives Memorandum (POM-83) Overview," Briefing for the JCS, 10 June 1981, Box 891, Folder 35, OP-004 Records, NHHC OA. Oddly, the Navy brief in front of the JCS in June still included plans for reactivating an *Essex* in the FY 1982 budget as well as a second in FY 1987, a month after the Senate firmly declined to spend money to take *Oriskany* out of mothballs.

[54] Lehman, *Command of the Seas*, 174–75.

1983 budget would make it very difficult for a subsequent Congress to cancel CVN-73 without eating the sunk costs of equipment already procured for the new carrier.

The first hurdle to be cleared was internal to DOD. Authorizing and appropriating funds for multiple carriers in the same fiscal year was highly unusual. More to the point, doing so required permission to go through agreed-upon DON spending caps for FY 1983. In negotiations with Deputy Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci, Lehman agreed that, in exchange for an $8 billion boost to Navy funding in the FY 1983 budget, the Navy would take a proportional hit in FY 1984.[55] When the agreements received the blessing of Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger, it was inoculated against any challenges from the other services or the OSD staff.[56]

The second hurdle was Congress, where the plan ran up against stronger congressional attempts to shrink the size of the administration's defense budget than faced in 1981.[57] In the Senate, this effort was led by Gary Hart (D-CO), who resurrected the CVV idea. He proposed amended legislation that would strip both CVNs out of the authorization bill, replace one carrier with two 44,000-ton carriers, and bank $3.69 billion (approximately $9.8 billion in 2019) in savings compared to the President's budget. However, in May 1982, both proposals failed by wide margins: 63–32 on deleting one carrier, and 72–19 on replacing the other with smaller vessels.[58]

In the House, the carriers were threatened as part of a contentious appropriations process that lasted well into the 1983 fiscal year. The authorization bill, which included the two carriers, was about $10 billion above the caps set in Congress's original budget resolution. Indeed, the chairman of the Defense Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, Joseph Addabbo (D-NY), told the press that the administration wanted to keep the two carriers, but his subcommittee was "looking for zero carriers" in the final appropriations bill.[59] After a bruising series of negotiations and a threat-

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[55] While overall defense budget authority (BA) increased from FY 1983 to FY 1984, DON's BA decreased from $89.5 billion to $85.8 billion, when measured in FY 1985 dollars (current dollars, misleadingly, show a slight increase). Caspar W. Weinberger, "Report of the Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger to the Congress on the FY 1985 Budget, FY 1986 Authorization Request and FY 1985–89 Defense Programs," 1 February 1984, 279.

[56] Vistica, *Fall from Glory*, 113; Lehman, *Command of the Seas*, 174–75.

[57] The Navy Department was so concerned about the congressional response that the DON Office of Legislative Affairs developed a "rating system" for representatives and senators to gauge their friendliness to the Navy's policy aims in early 1982. When the ratings' existence became public in mid-1982 during budget negotiations, it caused a minor political scandal. Charles Bowsher, "Report to the Chairman, Committee on Government Operations, House of Representatives: Compiling Numerical Ratings for Members of the Congress by the Department of Defense," GAO, 20 June 1983.

[58] "Senate Votes to Buy Used 747s, Not Build New C5s," *Washington Post*, 14 May 1982, A4.

[59] Wilson, "Clock Runs on Arms Budget Increase," *Washington Post*, 23 August 1982, A1.

ened government shutdown, the final version of the FY 1983 defense budget kept the carriers, but deleted money from two missile programs, MX and Pershing II.[60]

Even after Congress approved the two-carrier buy, the Navy faced opposition from the new Deputy Secretary of Defense, W. Paul Thayer, who replaced Carlucci in January 1983 and had not been involved in the development of the recently passed FY 1983 budget. Thayer, a former chairman of the LTV Corporation, came to the Pentagon intent on decreasing the Navy's share of the already-passed 1983 budget. Through his position as head of the powerful Defense Resources Board (DRB), Thayer arguably had the authority to do so, absent specific guidance from the Secretary.[61]

Specifically, Thayer looked askance at the two-carrier buy in FY 1983, both in terms of the attack capabilities of the carrier and its air wing compared to its cost, and in terms of the Navy's outsized share of the 1983 budget. Indeed, Thayer expressed skepticism about the wisdom of the 600-ship fleet to Weinberger, arguing that the Army could use more money for its modernization, and that Lehman's grandiose plans were starting to run up against a wall of congressional opposition, even from members of the President's own party.[62]

Thayer eventually directed Lehman to change the carrier requirement from 15 to 14 and to cancel one of the FY 1983 carriers, which Lehman refused, going around Thayer to receive confirmation of the 600-ship target and the FY 1983 carrier buy from Weinberger. Matters came to a head at a DRB meeting on 11 August 1983, at which Thayer ordered Lehman to make cuts to the Navy's construction program.[63] As Lehman refused, the atmosphere grew heated, until Weinberger indicated that he supported Lehman's unit cost figures for ships, but accepted the need for cuts. Evidently emboldened, Thayer again attempted to force a cut in the carrier requirement number.[64]

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[60] Juan Williams, "Funding Measure Signed," *Washington Post*, 22 December 1982, A1.

[61] Vistica, *Fall from Glory,* 169; Lehman, *Command of the Seas*, 192–93. All sources agree that Thayer came into office with an axe to grind with the Navy Department. According to Vistica, Thayer's problem with DON was based on the Navy picking the future F/A-18 instead of a General Dynamics/LTV navalized F-16 for production in the late 1970s. According to Lehman, it was based on a personal dislike of Lehman due to the Secretary opposing an LTV attempt to take over Grumman in 1981. Regardless of which rationale is correct, Thayer and Lehman developed a fierce rivalry and intense personal enmity during Thayer's one-year stint as Deputy Secretary of Defense before legal issues forced his resignation.

[62] Vistica, *Fall from Glory*, 170.

[63] That is, cuts to future construction authorized and appropriated by August 1983, but not yet laid down.

[64] Vistica, *Fall from Glory*, 175–76; Lehman, *Command of the Seas*, 193–94. Vistica and Lehman, who hardly see eye to eye on anything, are in general agreement about the course of the 11 August DRB meeting, down to the specific language in Lehman and Thayer's encounter. Lehman's account is, of course, based on his own recollection, while Vistica based his on interviews with two other men who were in the room, as well as an oral history of Thayer conducted by the OSD Historical Office.

Thayer's attempts were foiled, however, by a press release issued by the White House later that day:

> The President has approved Secretary of the Navy John Lehman's recommendation to name the Navy's two new carriers Abraham Lincoln (CVN-72) and George Washington (CVN-73). . . .When completed, these ships will bring the Navy's deployable carrier strength to 15.[65]

While the precise timing of the press release may have been a fortuitous coincidence, Lehman had been working his contacts at the White House (including his brother, a political aide to President Reagan) to issue some kind of public statement to bolster the 15-carrier, 600-ship Navy against Thayer's plans.[66] By having the President officially name the two FY 1983 carriers, Lehman squelched any chance of Thayer cutting one of the ships. Furthermore, the press release reaffirmed Lehman's goal of 15 *deployable* carriers, granting him the political cover to carry on agitating for his expansion plan.

In the end, Sawyer's plan to put two aircraft carriers into the FY 1983 budget proved prescient: Congress was losing patience with the administration's ever-rising defense budget submissions. By 1983, Secretary Weinberger "had lost credibility on Capitol Hill," even with pro-defense hawks. In concert with that loss of trust, Congress took an increasingly assertive attitude toward the administration's defense budgets, trimming the 1983, 1984, and 1985 budget requests by an average of 7.4 percent. The FY 1986 budget was then cut severely enough that it represented an inflation-adjusted decline in total defense spending (outlays, the actual amount of money spent by DOD, continued to rise into the late 1980s as funds appropriated earlier in the decade continued to be spent).[67] Against that background, it is unlikely that an attempt to appropriate money for CVN-73 in 1986, the year of its keel laying, would have sailed through Congress as easily as the FY 1983 two-ship buy.

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[65] Ronald Reagan: "Announcement on the Naming of Two Naval Aircraft Carriers," 11 August 1983. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=41703.

[66] Lehman, *Command of the Seas*, 194; Vistica, *Fall from Glory*, 176; Untermeyer, *Inside Reagan's Navy*, 208.

[67] Charles A. Stevenson, *SECDEF: The Nearly Impossible Job of Secretary of Defense* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2006), 65–68.

One of the two carriers authorized in the FY 1983 budget, the future *Abraham Lincoln* (CVN-72), is shown here under construction at Newport News Shipbuilding in 1985 (DIMOC/DN-ST-91-02856).

While Lehman wanted to have 15 carriers to provide a forward-deployed strength of five, this was impossible until the new CVNs reached the fleet. In the meantime, DON sought to change the status quo. Speaking before Congress in February 1981, Admiral Hayward painted a dark picture of the Navy's situation, repeating his earlier insistence that the Navy was

> trying to meet a three-ocean requirement with a one-and-a-half ocean Navy. Our forces—already heavily taxed—have continued to be spread thin in an effort to meet a variety of expanding commitments. In addition to our longstanding presence in the Mediterranean and the Western Pacific, we have added requirements to maintain a major force in the Indian Ocean and to increase our presence in the Caribbean, while continuing our large NATO force contributions in the North Atlantic and Norwegian Sea, maintaining our periodic presence along the African and South American littorals, and increasing the frequency of our visits to the South Pacific. . . . All of the commitments are important and serve vital American interests. But the net result is that . . . for the first time in anyone's recollection, the U.S. Navy is unable

> fully to meet its peacetime commitments. . . . Not since World War II have we experienced such arduous operating tempos for deployed units.[68]

In the long term, the 600-ship Navy posited a solution to this problem. To reiterate an earlier point, Lehman appears to have conceptualized and justified his 600-ship target as the force structure necessary to provide adequate CVBG coverage in the Indian Ocean, Mediterranean, and Pacific, even if the formal DOD requirements process focused on combat scenarios. However, in the meantime, carrier deployment patterns needed modification.

At first, the Navy tried to meet the demands for carrier coverage in the three major forward deployment zones. In February 1981, the administration opted to maintain the Carter administration's two-carrier standard for the Indian Ocean.[69] Eventually, the Indian Ocean commitment was lessened not due to crew fatigue and maintenance issues, but due to crisis response elsewhere, especially the worsening situation in Lebanon. In early 1983, Secretary Weinberger's annual report, bending to reality, announced a shift to a one-carrier standard in the Indian Ocean, while reinstituting a two-carrier standard in the Mediterranean and Western Pacific.[70]

The shift away from the Indian Ocean was part of a new Navy policy known as "Flexible Operations" (FLEXOPS), developed by Lehman, Hayward, and Hayward's successor, James Watkins. In Lehman's words:

> [W]e have completely reordered our method of peacetime deployment of naval forces to add much more realistic multi-carrier operations, greater flexibility for theater commanders and far more realistic training, while at the same time reducing the ratio of time out of home port for our Navy and Marine Corps personnel. This new method of deployment, called "FLEXOPS" has resulted in multiple carrier exercises in the Norwegian Sea, the Eastern

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[68] Hayward, "Department of Defense Authorization Appropriations for Fiscal Year 1982, Hearings Before the Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate," 9th Congress, First Session, Part II, 5 February 1981 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1981), 849.

[69] Evans and Grossnick, *Naval Aviation,* 1:434

[70] Caspar W. Weinberger, *Report of the Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger to the Congress on the FY 1984 Budget, FY 1985 Authorization Request and FY 1984–88 Defense Programs*, (Washington, DC: GPO, 1 February 1983), 141.

> Mediterranean, the Caribbean and the Aleutians. It has significantly enhanced the readiness, morale, and diplomatic flexibility of our naval forces.[71]

In theory, FLEXOPS would, at the cost of some forward presence, increase the warfighting effectiveness of the fleet. Instead of a single-minded focus on showing the flag in distant waters, the fleet would have more time to train in the United States–based Third and Second Fleets. Critically, much of this training would come in the multi-carrier formations the Navy intended to use for war, as opposed to the single-CV deployments that were the norm for peacetime deployments.[72] Additionally, the fleet would have the opportunity to steam through areas like the Caribbean or the Aleutians that rarely saw American carriers.[73]

FLEXOPS was likely influenced by the highly successful example of the large-scale Ocean Venture '81, which combined a number of exercises into an Atlantic-wide warfighting scenario, including elements of the Caribbean-focused UNITAS and exercises in the Mediterranean.[74] Not only did this emphasize DON's argument that any future war with the Soviets would be global in scale, but, according to Lehman, President Reagan approved it with the intent of highlighting his campaign's promise of "naval rearmament and maritime superiority."[75]

The centerpiece of Ocean Venture '81 was a headline-grabbing sortie into the Arctic Ocean (also known as Ocean Safari '81) by the Second Fleet, led by Vice Admiral James "Ace" Lyons, whose strategic ideas were in congruence with Lehman's. In that section of the exercises, Lyons took the bulk of Second Fleet's strength, including the carrier *Eisenhower,* into the Norwegian Sea, where they operated for some time undetected by Soviet forces—a few surface ships even sortied into the Barents Sea, just north of major Soviet naval bases on the Kola Peninsula.[76]

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[71] House Armed Services Committee, *Defense Department Authorization and Oversight: Hearings on H.R. 2287, Department of Defense Authorization of Appropriations for Fiscal Year 1984 and Oversight of Previously Authorized Programs* (Statement of John Lehman, ADM James Watkins, and Gen. Robert Barrow, 17 February 1983), 98th Congress, First Session, HASC No. 98-6, 888–89.

[72] While single-carrier deployments were standard peacetime operating procedure, war plans envisioned using battle groups containing at least two carriers, the minimum number to provide around-the-clock CAP and strike coverage in a high-intensity combat scenario.

[73] See, for example, Christopher C. Wright's "U.S. Naval Operations" reviews in the May 1983, 1984, and 1985 issues of USNI *Proceedings*, which discuss U.S. Navy deployments and exercises in depth.

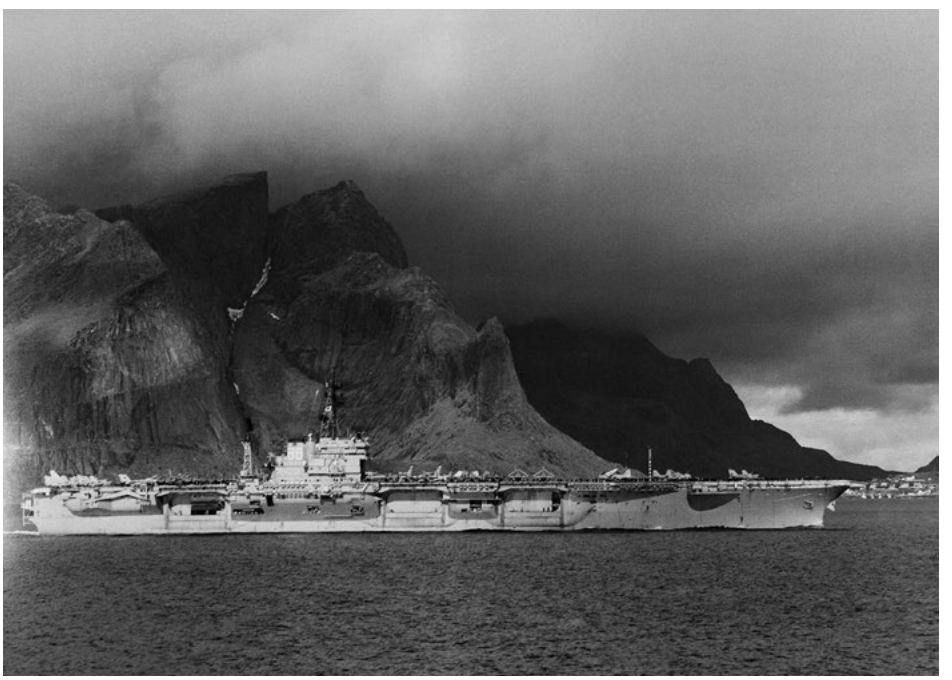
[74] Wright, "U.S. Naval Operations in 1982," USNI *Proceedings*, May 1983, 63.

[75] John Lehman, *Oceans Ventured: Winning the Cold War at Sea* (New York: Norton, 2018), 65.

[76] Hartmann, *Naval Renaissance*, 346; Vistica, *Fall from Glory,* 129–33. Lehman's *Oceans Ventured* contains a detailed description of the exercises on pages 65–88.

Ocean Venture '81 provided political and operational advantages. Operationally, the Norwegian Sea sortie provided the ideal training environment—what scenario could be more realistic than training against the actual Soviet Navy in their home waters? Politically, Lehman quickly moved to use the exercises as evidence for the soundness of the nascent Maritime Strategy and the Navy's ability to "take two aircraft carrier battle groups to the vicinity of the North Cape and bomb the Soviet Northern Fleet into the stone age."[77]

As instituted, FLEXOPS led to other spectacular exercises (e.g., two carriers operating near the Aleutians in autumn 1982), but it failed to rationalize the deployment schedule to the extent hoped by its framers. In part, FLEXOPS was overtaken by events. As Admiral Watkins conceded in 1983 testimony, FLEXOPS only worked "'up to a point,' but we have had so many contingency operations heaped on us . . . that it is hard to keep up with them."[78] Over the first years of the Reagan administration,



A key part of the Navy's offensive strategy in the 1980s was exercising battle tactics in northern waters. Here, *America* (CV-66) is shown off the Norwegian coast during Exercise Ocean Safari 1985 (DIMOC/DN-SC-86-03144/Phan Meore).

[77] Train, *Reminiscences*, 435.

[78] Watkins, *Hearings on H.R. 2287*, 1004–1005.

the Navy was tasked with showing the flag and responding to crises including unrest in Lebanon, an antagonistic Libya, the invasion of Grenada (Operation Urgent Fury), continued tension in the Persian Gulf, and new mandates for occasional presence in the Caribbean and Central America.

By mid-1985, FLEXOPS's alleged operational tempo savings proved illusory. According to figures in Lehman's papers, the length of time between port visits *increased* for carrier deployments between 1983 and 1985, while operational tempo (OPTEMPO) remained far in excess of the pre-1979 baseline.[79] In early 1985, the Secretary conceded that, despite FLEXOPS, the Navy had "been unable to make an appreciable reduction in OPTEMPO and the excessive time that naval personnel must spend away from their families."[80] FLEXOPS was quietly set aside in 1985/1986 in favor of less-ambitious policies designed to limit operational and personnel tempo (PERSTEMPO) within the bounds of the traditional deployment pattern.[81] For the remainder of the administration, the Navy's carrier deployments were less adventurous and mostly confined to providing forward presence in traditional operating areas. Subsequent analysis from 1991 noted that the new OPTEMPO/PERSTEMPO targets significantly reduced the number of extended (180+ days) deployments to a manageable 9 percent from 1985–90 as opposed to 82 percent from 1975–85.[82]

More fundamentally, the Navy Department's efforts to make major changes to carrier deployment patterns were stymied by a fundamental reorganization of the relationship among the services, the combatant commands, and the Joint Staff with the passage of the Goldwater-Nichols Act (GNA) in 1986. Much ink has been spilled about GNA's effects on the defense establishment, which will be discussed in subsequent chapters as appropriate. Put simply, though, the act strengthened the authority of the

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[79] Navy Secretariat [?], "Carrier Battle Group Deployment Optempo," [mid-1985], Box 9, Folder 8, John F. Lehman, Jr., Papers, NHHC OA.

[80] Senate Armed Services Committee, *Department of Defense Authorization for Appropriations for Fiscal Year 1986, Part 2: Army Programs, Navy-Marine Corps Programs, Air Force Programs* (Statement of John Lehman, 6 February 1985), 99th Congress, First Session, S. Hrg. 99-58, pt. 2, 811.

[81] To be specific, OPTEMPO was defined as "[t]he percentage of time that ships, not undergoing major maintenance, are funded to be underway during any given fiscal quarter." By 1991, OPTEMPO averaged 29 days per quarter for non-deployed ships, and 50.5 days per quarter for deployed ships. PERSTEMPO was defined as "[t]he percentage of time between overhauls that ships spend in homeport." By 1991, the PERSTEMPO goal was "50 percent (or more) time in homeport between overhauls (5 years)," based on a target of six-month deployments and "two months non-deployed for every month forward deployed." It follows that the PERSTEMPO goals anticipated ships spending about a quarter of their non-deployed time at sea for training/qualifications, etc. OP-06, "SASC/HASC Reports on Naval Forces," 2 April 1991, Box 13, Folder 2, 1991 00 Files, NHHC OA, 3–4.

[82] "SASC/HASC Reports on Naval Forces," 12.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the combatant commanders at the expense of the services and the service chiefs.[83]

Prior to GNA, the Navy Department had historically played a major role in setting tasking and deployments for the fleet, especially its carrier battle groups. While the Navy Department had technically been in the position of a "force provider" to combatant commands for some time, in practice, the commanders of the Atlantic and Pacific Fleets (and the commanders of Atlantic and Pacific Commands, billets traditionally held by admirals) determined the carrier deployment schedule in concert with the CNO and SECNAV. However, GNA successfully cut the last links between service chiefs and secretaries and operational command.

Admiral Frank B. Kelso, CINCLANTFLT when GNA passed, described the situation as follows:

> [U]p until that time [1986] the CNO was somewhat the operator of the Navy. . . . So the CNO was always involved pretty much in what the Navy operations were. Now with Goldwater-Nichols it's clear that I had two bosses. One was CincLant and the other was CNO. The CNO was in the administrative and logistics chain, but CinCLant was clearly the operator. So when you went to write carrier schedules you were writing a schedule that was satisfactory to the CinCs, CinCLant and CinCPac, not to the CNO anymore. For example, the idea of how the carrier schedule was written now had just changed amazingly. The CNO was not negotiating the carrier schedule anymore. You were negotiating the carrier schedule with CinCLant. CinCLant was then negotiating the carrier schedule with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. And those kinds of ships have that kind of visibility. They are scheduled by the unified commanders and in some cases much higher up the chain of unified command [i.e., by the Secretary of Defense or the President].
>
> When we have a shortage of carriers and cannot have one everywhere that some people might like them to be all the time, somebody has to decide the priority as to where to deploy. So when the carriers' schedules were prepared by CinCLantFlt, they were really the schedule that CinCLant wanted and CinCPac wanted. So they had to work together to come up with a carrier schedule that suited the both of them. . . . The carrier schedules in years past had been written in the old OP-06 organization [DCNO for Plans, Policy, and Operations; in OPNAV]. They had the liaison with LantFlt and PacFlt as to

[83] Rearden, *Council of War*, 454–57.

> what the carrier schedule was going to be. Now the carrier schedule's being written in CinCPac and CinCLant, and [OPNAV is] supporting that.[84]

Although the details of scheduling were still under the guidance of four-star naval officers (CINCPAC and CINCLANT), they had significantly different incentives and perspectives than the CNO, being focused on their regions instead of the Navy as a whole. More importantly, GNA made it easier for other combatant commanders and, ultimately, the Joint Staff, to dominate the carrier scheduling process.

The immediate consequences of this shift were few for carrier scheduling. The CJCS, Admiral William J. Crowe, Jr., was a naval officer and resolved to "move gradually" in asserting the CJCS's newfound authority.[85] However, as Kelso noted, the combatant commanders, CJCS, and Joint Staff played a larger role in the process. Over time, these new powers would come to constrain the Navy's ability to control the deployment pattern for carriers, and set targets for metrics like OPTEMPO and deployment length.

* * *

As Lehman and his advisors intended, the two-carrier buy in the FY 1983 budget put the issue of carrier construction to bed for a number of years, as the service concentrated on finishing *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN-71, commissioned 1985) and the construction of *Abraham Lincoln* (CVN-72, laid down in 1984) and *George Washington* (CVN-73, laid down in 1986). These three ships put the Navy on course of its 15-deployable carrier goal, achieved in 1989, with the commissioning of *Lincoln*. However, the need to replace aging carriers remained. *Coral Sea* was accounted for with CVN-73, but replacements were needed for *Midway* and the *Forrestal*- and *Kitty Hawk*-class carriers, six of which had entered service in the years 1955–61. This threatened a wave of decommissionings starting in the year 1998, when *Saratoga* reached the end of its SLEPed lifespan.[86]

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[84] Frank B. Kelso, II, *The Reminiscences of Admiral Frank B. Kelso II, U.S. Navy (Retired)*. Interviewed by Paul Stillwell (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 460–61.

[85] Crowe, *Line of Fire*, 160.

[86] Lehman, *DoD Authorization for FY 1986*, 822. The Navy commonly presented the SLEP program as extending the service life of its large conventional carriers to 45 years from an initial 30. To be more precise, the SLEP program was judged to give a carrier 15 years of service life remaining at the end of the refit. For example, *Saratoga* was due for retirement in 1998, 15 years after its SLEP finished in February 1983, as opposed to counting 45 years from its 1956 commissioning, which would place its retirement in 2001.

To that end, the Secretariat resurrected the idea of a two-carrier buy for the FY 1988/FY 1989 budget while it was under development in mid-1986. This was something of an unexpected change. In early 1985, Lehman told both the House and Senate Armed Services Committees "there are no aircraft carriers in . . . the five year [FY 1986–90] projection, and no new construction carriers are needed until the early 90's."[87] Likewise, the Department's proposed FY 1987 budget made no mention of imminent carrier construction, with the FY 1987 Secretary's Report merely noting that "the Navy will have to order replacements for some of its . . . carriers in the early 1990s." Likewise, the FY 1987–91 Shipbuilding Program, included in the FY 1987 report, had no planned carrier starts over its five-year time frame.[88]

Instead, the Navy had programmed its next carrier (CVN-74) for a start in FY 1994, with advance procurement (AP) to start in FY 1992, about when CVN-73's construction costs would come off the books.[89] While the service would certainly have preferred an earlier buy, the political environment had hardened against increased defense spending since the FY 1983 budget. In addition to an increasing mistrust of Secretary Weinberger on Capitol Hill, "[b]illons of dollars in appropriations made in long-term contracts during earlier years were coming due as outlays . . . budget deficits are measured in outlays, not appropriations," making increased spending politically untenable.[90] As a result, the Navy was forced to balance its desire for new carriers, against the need to fund other big-ticket programs like the SSN-21 attack submarine and the troubled A-12 attack plane.

Opinions began to shift in the summer of 1986, starting with an intervention from Vice Admiral Edward H. Martin, the DCNO (Air), who pointed out that the coming wave of carrier retirements suggested that "there is good reason to reconsider the start date for CVN 74 in order to maintain our CVBG force levels beyond 2000." Instead of waiting for an FY 1994 carrier that might not be ready by the time *Saratoga* was due for retirement in 1998, Martin argued that the carrier should be pushed up to FY 1992 with $465 million of advanced procurement programmed for the FY 1989

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[87] Lehman, *DoD Authorization for FY 1986*, 822; House Armed Services Committee, *Defense Department Authorization and Oversight: Hearings on H.R. 1872, Department of Defense Authorization of Appropriations for Fiscal Year 1986 and Oversight of Previously Authorized Programs,* 99th Congress, First Session, (Statement of John Lehman, 7 February 1985), HASC No. 99-2, 803–804.

[88] Caspar W. Weinberger, "Report of the Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger to the Congress on the FY 1987 Budget, FY 1988 Authorization Request and FY 1987-91 Defense Programs," 1 February 1986, 181–82, 194.

[89] Vice Admiral David E. Jeremiah to Lehman, "Strategy for CVN 74 Construction," 28 July 1986, Box 12, Folder 9, John F. Lehman, Jr., Papers, NHHC OA.

[90] Wirls, *Buildup*, 207; Stevenson, *SECDEF*, 68.

budget (with the advent of biennial budgeting, an integral part of the budget due to be submitted in early 1987).[91]

Vice Admiral David E. Jeremiah, the Navy's director of Program Planning, vigorously challenged Martin's proposal. In a follow-on memo, Jeremiah pointed out that a FY 1989 long lead funding start had already been considered and rejected earlier in the POM cycle, noting that "FY-89 is our 'tightest' year in the current [shipbuilding] plan and is also the year of the initial SSN-21 procurement." However, he did not shut the door on two-year long lead funding for an FY 1992 carrier starting in FY 1990. In an endorsement on Jeremiah's memo, the new CNO, Admiral Carlisle Trost, concurred.[92]

In a subsequent memo, Everett Pyatt, Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Shipbuilding and Logistics (ASN S&L), agreed with Martin that CVN-74's construction should be moved up. However, he sided with Jeremiah and Trost in arguing for CVN-74's advanced procurement to begin in FY 1990, the next clean budget under the new biennial approach. Pyatt also pointed out that the extant carrier construction policy could not sustain the carrier force:

> [W]e need an early start on the next carriers. . . . [I]f we assume a 45 year service life for carriers, the average sustaining construction rate for a 15 carrier force level would be one carrier every three years. If we achieve only one carrier every four years, the average age would have to be 60 years to sustain a 15 carrier force.
>
> Even at the one carrier per three year rate, assuming CVN-74 is an FY 92 ship and that all carriers serve 45 years, our analysis indicates that carrier force levels will dip below 15 around 2000, fall to 11 or 12 for over a decade, and would not then reach a sustaining level of 15 until about 2040.[93]

Pyatt went on to suggest that the success of the FY 1983 program suggested that the Navy should "consider two carriers for FY 92."[94]

The critical intervention appears to have come from a DON Secretariat civilian, Charles Nemfakos, in late August. According to Untermeyer, who was present for the meeting, Nemfakos convinced Lehman to:

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[91] Vice Admiral Edward H. Martin to Lehman, "Strategy for CVN 74 Construction," 15 July 1986, Box 12, Folder 9, John F. Lehman, Jr., Papers, NHHC OA.

[92] Jeremiah, "CVN 74."

[93] Everett Pyatt to Lehman, "Strategy for CVN-74 Construction," 13 August 1986, Box 12, Folder 9, John F. Lehman, Jr., Papers, NHHC OA.

[94] Pyatt, "CVN-74."

> [F]ocus . . . on successors to *George Washington*, the last Nimitz-class carrier currently planned. Charles and his gnomes found some $700 million in various accounts to fund the initial year of a two-carrier buy. His argument was political: Unless DOD commits to pursuing the carriers next year, the chance may be lost, for Congress probably would take no action in a presidential election year, and there may be a hostile administration in office in 1989…. There's no question Lehman wants the ships, but he fears that if he goes to Weinberger and [Deputy Secretary of Defense William H.] Taft [IV] saying that he has $700 million set aside to start construction on two carriers, they will turn him down and take the money away.[95]

In the end, Lehman opted for Nemfakos's approach, placing $644 million (approximately $1.5 billion in 2019) of advanced procurement funding into the Navy's budget proposal for two carriers, one to start construction in FY 1990 and another in FY 1992.[96]

With DON's leadership on board, the issue moved to the wider DOD budget process. Judging from staff memoranda left in Lehman's personal papers, the Navy's argument rested on two major points: financial savings and political necessity. On the financial side, the Navy argued that the carriers, which would add about $6.2 billion to the five-year POM, could be offset by cuts and delays to other programs like DDG-51, restricting CV SLEPs (unnecessary, in at least one case, if quickly replaced by new construction), and more than $2 billion in cuts to "other procurement," making the ships essentially spending neutral over the course of the POM.[97] At the same time, the Navy claimed, the overall two-carrier buy, much like the FY 1983 version, would save money overall. The combination of economies of scale from a two- carrier buy and pushing up CVN-74 to prevent Newport News's production line from going "cold" was estimated to take approximately $3 billion dollars off the $9.4 billion cost projected for starting carriers in FY 1994 and FY 1996.[98]

Politically, DON argued that the new program would cement the naval legacy of the administration, the 600-ship fleet organized around 15 CVBGs. While the Navy was on approximate course to fulfill the 600-ship target, one staff paper argued, "the future has to be protected otherwise what this Administration has accomplished will quickly

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[95] Untermeyer, *Inside Reagan's Navy*, 208.

[96] "Department of the Navy FY 1988/FY 1989 Budget Review Special Interest Areas: Aircraft Carrier Acquisition Program," [Summer/Fall 1986], Box 12, Folder 9, John F. Lehman, Jr., Papers, NHHC OA.

[97] "Program Adjustments to Fund the CVN's," [Summer/Fall 1986], Box 12, Folder 9, John F. Lehman, Jr., Papers, NHHC OA.

[98] "Aircraft Carrier Acquisition Program."

dissipate. . . . If we don't, we have spent tens of billions for naval revitalization and in ten years we will have lost the advantages gained." Echoing Nemfakos's argument, the paper went on to claim that "[o]nly this Administration can pull this off and FY1988 is our only opportunity from both a political as well as [a] business viewpoint."[99]

There is some evidence to suggest that the political argument convinced Weinberger. In a response to criticisms leveled at the plan from the Joint Staff, the Office of Program Analysis & Evaluation, and the new Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition), Lehman's response played up the political angle. Alongside point-by-point rebuttals of opponents' financial and strategic critiques, Lehman made an emotional appeal to Weinberger's support of the President's agenda:

> Unless we are prepared to give up on the Administration's goal of a 600 ship/15 Carrier Battle Group Navy, and unless we have a different way of meeting commitments, carrier replacement will have to occur. Indeed, even if some future misguided administration returns to Carter's small Navy, it will be the oldest that should go, not the cancellation of new ones. . . . We must sustain the momentum we have created, a key element of this is the 15 Carrier Battle Group [sic]. This proposal does that with minimum resource exposure in FY 1988/89 with a clear signal that we are not backing down.[100]

The Navy Department's argument proved convincing to Secretary Weinberger, and the DOD budget submission for FY 1988/1989 "include[ed] $1.4 billion in long-lead funding for two carriers, one to be requested in FY 1990 and the other planned for FY 1993." This was a slight change from the Navy's desired 1992 start for the second carrier, but otherwise identical to its original proposal.[101]

In Congress, the plan faced two main critiques. Most interesting was a charge of dishonesty leveled against Weinberger, who, critics alleged, misled Congress on the Navy's carrier plans. In his report on the 1987 DOD budget, Weinberger claimed that "the Navy will have to order replacements for some of its . . . carriers in the early 1990s"; however, the FY 1987–91 Shipbuilding Program attached to the report had no new carrier starts through FY 1991.[102] Senator Carl Levin (D-MI) grilled Weinberger

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[99] Ibid.

[100] Lehman to Weinberger, "Replacement of Aircraft Carriers," [1 October] 1986, Box 12, Folder 9, John F. Lehman, Jr., Papers, NHHC OA.

[101] Caspar W. Weinberger, *Report of the Secretary of Defense Caspar W. Weinberger to the Congress on the FY 1988/FY 1989 Budget, and FY 1988–91 Defense Programs* (Washington, DC: GPO, 12 January 1987), 171–72.

[102] Weinberger, *FY 1987 Report,* 181–82, 194.

during SASC testimony in mid-January, accusing the Secretary of breaking an implicit promise not to request new aircraft carrier funding.[103]

Although that line of attack soon quieted, concerns over cost proved more enduring. As the newly Democratic Senate looked to trim several billion dollars from the President's Budget, the carriers appeared as a tempting target. Senators Levin and Edward Kennedy (D-MA), both SASC subcommittee chairmen, indicated that they were loath to authorize two ships that could muscle other priorities out of the defense budget.[104] In response to such criticism, the Navy embarked on a major lobbying effort centered on a "50-page document," written by Newport News Shipbuilding's parent company, Tenneco, "showing how much each congressional district would receive" if Congress kept the two carriers in the budget.[105]

In the final reckoning, however, the carriers proved to be a relatively minor part of the political struggles over the 1988 defense budget, which focused more on Democratic attacks on the administration's arms control policies, nuclear testing, and the "Star Wars" missile defense program.[106] The FY 1988 budget process for the entire government was a grueling fight between Democrats in Congress and the President, and, while the carriers were not specifically targeted after March, their final approval was delayed until the late passage of the defense authorization bill in late November and the defense-related elements of an omnibus spending bill on 22 December.[107]

Even before the 1988 budget passed Congress, Lehman and Weinberger were both out of office, the former replaced by Assistant Secretary of Defense (Reserve Affairs) James Webb, and the latter by National Security Advisor and ex–Deputy Secretary Frank Carlucci.[108] Although the Reagan administration had more than a year left in office, there was no further movement on the carrier front, Secretary Carlucci merely confirming in early 1988 that the Defense Department intended to stay with the two-carrier program passed in 1987.[109]

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[103] George C. Wilson, "Weinberger Damns the Torpedoes," *Washington Post*, 13 January 1987, A21. Weinberger claimed that a carrier slated for construction in 1990 counted as the "early 1990s," even if it was not in the FY 1987–91 shipbuilding plan, as this was a tentative, "rolling" document, at least in the out years.

[104] Wilson, "Hill Chairmen Skeptical of Navy Carrier Request," *Washington Post*, 13 March 1987, A22.

[105] Wilson, "Navy Lobbies to Add 2 Carriers: Report Details Monetary Benefit by State, Congressional District," *Washington Post*, 29 March 1987, A5.

[106] Edward Walsh, "House Approves $289 Billion Defense Bill," *Washington Post*, 21 May 1987, A1.

[107] "Provisions of the Bills," *Washington Post*, 23 December 1987, A6.

[108] *Department of Defense Key Officials, September 1947–March 2015* (Washington, DC: Historical Office of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2015), 13, 23. Webb resigned in February 1988, to be replaced by William L. Ball, III.

[109] Frank C. Carlucci, *Report of the Secretary of Defense Frank C. Carlucci to the Congress on the Amended FY 1988/FY 1989 Biennial Budget* (Washington, DC: GPO, 18 February 1988), 194.

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While Lehman's 600-ship Navy and the related Maritime Strategy were a constant source of controversy during the Reagan administration, the stratagem of pursuing two carriers in a single budget bore fruit. Though both the FY 1983 and 1988 DON budgets, especially the first, engendered dissent, the tactic prevented every year's budget from becoming, in part, a referendum on the Navy's carrier fleet, a fate that affected the Carter administration's defense budgets. Instead, the FY 1983 budget put the carrier issue to bed for five fiscal years, while FY 1988 effectively locked the next administration into carrier construction. Even if the Navy's combat fleet never quite reached 600 ships, Lehman was able to secure what he saw as its most important element, 15 deployable carrier battle groups, which was achieved in 1989, after Reagan left office, with 15 active carriers and one, *Kitty Hawk*, undergoing a SLEP.

However, aircraft carriers, as we have seen, take a long time to build. Even though President Reagan served two terms, and carriers were placed in the administration's first clean-sheet budget in FY 1983, the first of those ships, *Abraham Lincoln*, did not

Four of the Atlantic Fleet's carriers, (from left) *America*, *Kennedy*, *Nimitz*, and *Eisenhower* pierside at Naval Station Norfolk, 1985. Under the Maritime Strategy, these ships were the linchpin of naval operations, and the Navy Department spent immense political capital to procure four aircraft carriers (DIMOC/DN-SC-86-02406/PH1 D. E. Erickson).

commission until the after Reagan left office. In the meantime, the carrier fleet was augmented by the additions of *Carl Vinson* (CVN-70) and *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN-71), which were welcome additions to the fleet, but still did not bring the Navy up to the 15 deployable carrier standard desired before Reagan left office.[110]

Anticipating this issue, Lehman and Admiral Hayward aggressively pushed for the reactivation of *Oriskany* and, perhaps, a second *Essex* early in the administration, to give the Navy the forces necessary to meet its deployment commitments without placing undue strain on the fleet or its sailors. Understandably, Congress balked at reactivating carriers that the Navy and associated advocates—including Lehman before entering office—had derided as superannuated relics. Perhaps the Navy's pro-nuclear carrier lobbying efforts in the 1970s worked too well in this case.

The *Oriskany* saga highlights the inability of Lehman and his CNOs to come to grips with the forward presence issue. When the Reagan administration took office, the operative standard was for one carrier each in the Mediterranean and Western Pacific and two in the Indian Ocean. Theoretically, that required 12 carriers, but the transit distances between CONUS and the Indian Ocean suggested something more than the standard 3:1 ratio (that is, three hulls needed to provide one carrier's worth of permanent forward presence) was needed. In reality, the Navy entered 1981 with only 11 deployable carriers. Although *Vinson's* commissioning in 1982 allowed the Navy to stay at or above 12 deployable carriers for the remainder of Reagan's term, forward presence needs continued to drive carrier deployments.

The short-lived FLEXOPS, introduced in 1983, attempted to privilege training and war preparation over peacetime presence. While the program was notably successful in giving the Navy the chance to regularly train with multi-carrier operations in potential theaters of war, it was overtaken by events. The sheer number of crises and brushfires that warranted a carrier group's presence prevented FLEXOPS from smoothly functioning and it was set aside by 1986.

Clearly, then, the most important impact of the Reagan years on carrier requirements was the successful attempt to promulgate a 15-carrier requirement, which deserves pride of place over the more famous "600-ship Navy" slogan. Unlike some of the requirements generated by the Joint Staff, 15 carriers, though ambitious, was—barely—politically feasible. Indeed, Lehman's strong support from Secretary Weinberger and President Reagan enabled him to best internal and external challenges to the 15-carrier plan.

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[110] During the Reagan administration, the closest the Navy came were the 14 deployable carriers active at the end of calendar year 1988 out of a total of 15 (*Kitty Hawk* was undergoing a SLEP).

3

The Bush Administration

1989–93

As former carrier aviator George H. W. Bush prepared to enter the White House in early 1989, the U.S. Navy was perhaps at the zenith of its post-1945 power. As has been shown, defense budgets shrank over the last years of the Reagan administration, which prevented the fulfillment of the 600-ship fleet, but did not get in the way of Secretary Lehman's goal of 15 carrier battle groups. With the November commissioning of USS *Abraham Lincoln*, the Navy would, for the first time in more than a decade, have "enough" carriers to meet its self-defined targets, meaning that arguments over the carrier fleet revolved around maintaining numbers instead of adding hulls. DON's successful attempts to place two aircraft carriers in the FY 1988 budget meant that the size of the carrier fleet was set for the foreseeable future. Though it had taken brickbats from skeptics in Congress and the Pentagon, the Maritime Strategy provided the framework for both the expansion of the carrier fleet and its aggressive employment in a prospective war against the Soviet Union.

At the end of Bush's term four years later, the size of the carrier fleet, its mission, and its strategic underpinnings were all unmoored, swept away by a whirlwind of events, ranging from domestic concerns over budget deficits to the rapid collapse of the Soviet Union and its alliance structure. By January 1993, the Navy had decommissioned two aircraft carriers, was preparing to decommission three more over the next 18 months, and was fighting tooth and nail to preserve a carrier force structure target of 12. The Maritime Strategy was clearly inadequate for the moment, but had not been replaced by any similar overarching service strategy. In June 1990, incoming

CNO Admiral Frank B. Kelso even said that the Maritime Strategy was "on the shelf" until the Navy faced a new peer competitor.[1]

The Navy was hardly alone in its confusion. President Bush and his only Secretary of Defense, Richard B. (Dick) Cheney, entered office determined to curb defense spending, which remained high even with the defense budget reductions that came after FY 1985. Regardless of curbs in budget authority, outlays in FY 1989 were still 40 percent higher than those at the start of Reagan's presidency in 1981. However, the administration's initial cuts were solely based on political and financial concerns over growing budget deficits. From the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, the rationale shifted toward what became known as the "peace dividend," the belief that the end of the Soviet Union's strategic threat allowed national interests to be served by a smaller and cheaper military.[2]

As the diminution and dissolution of the Soviet Union continued apace, so did budget reductions, which "accelerated with each succeeding year's budget."[3] With a lack of consistent planning and budgeting from year to year, cuts to the Navy's carrier fleet came quickly, and often surprisingly, harming any attempts to create a stable deployment schedule or plan SLEPs in advance. In the four years of the Bush administration, the Navy went through at least three separate plans to retire older ships, forego SLEPs on some deemed surplus to retirements, and preserve at least one CV to serve as a dedicated training ship.

The one attempt at managing the decline that demonstrated the most success, JCS Chairman General Colin L. Powell's Base Force, had the opposite effect within the Navy. While Powell's plan helped to stabilize the topline DOD budget somewhat, and gave policymakers a framework on which to create a new national strategy, Powell's vision was developed within the Joint Staff, and in conversation with OSD, leaving the services unsure of their role, or even their projected force strength. Admiral Kelso, CNO from mid-1990, later related that he had "absolutely no input. . . you would think that the CNO might have had some idea what the base force's floor level was going to be for ships, but until it was announced I don't remember having any idea what it was going to be."[4]

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[1] Senate Armed Services Committee, *Nominations Before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Second Session, 101st Congress,* (Statement of ADM Frank B. Kelso II, 14 June 1990), S. Hrg. 101-909, 344.

[2] Daniel Wirls, *Irrational Security: The Politics of Defense from Reagan to Obama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 19–22.

[3] Eric V. Larson, David T. Orletsky, and Kristin Leuschner, *Defense Planning in a Decade of Changes* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND/Project AIR FORCE, 2001), 28.

[4] Frank B. Kelso, II, *The Reminiscences of Admiral Frank B. Kelso II, U.S. Navy (Retired)*. Interviewed by Paul Stillwell (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2009), 595.

Despite these challenges, the Navy's carrier force emerged from the Bush administration in better shape than could have been expected. On one hand, the carrier force was set to decline by about 20 percent, close to the administration's plan for approximately 25 percent cuts in force structure. However, the Bush cuts resulted in "deeper cuts in modernization accounts than had originally been anticipated," which the Navy mostly avoided.[5] Apart from a cancelled SLEP for *Ranger* (CV-61), made unnecessary by the ship's accelerated decommissioning in 1993, the Navy maintained something like its preferred carrier construction schedule, dulling the impact of budget cuts. CVN-74 and -75 were already funded through the FY 1988 appropriations, but even in the straitened fiscal circumstances of the early 1990s, the Navy retained support from OSD and the White House for another *Nimitz*-class ship, CVN-76, with advance procurement funds requested in the last Bush budget.[6]

The biggest changes came on the strategy end. The period 1989–93 marked the death of the Maritime Strategy and the Soviet threat. As exemplified by 1991's Operation Desert Storm, the Navy was orienting itself toward projecting power ashore against foes with negligible or absent blue water forces. Earlier chapters have discussed the tensions between the carrier's roles in high-end naval combat and crisis management. With the end of the Cold War, the second mission clearly took precedence.

The Navy's leadership, both in the Secretariat and OPNAV, expended a great deal of energy between 1989 and 1993, ensuring that the changes to the global balance of power and American security concerns impacted as little as possible within the service. From 1991, halfhearted attempts were made to fundamentally change Navy strategy, but they never amounted to very much. Regardless of those attempts, the bulk of the Navy's conventional forces remained committed to lengthy forward deployments to the Mediterranean, Middle East, and East Asia, organized in carrier battle groups.

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Immediately after Bush's election in late 1988, the Navy's carrier fears had more to do with Congress than the President-elect. During consideration of the FY 1989 authorization bill, Senators Kennedy and Levin tried to mandate retirement of "two older carriers in the 1990s" (unnamed, but almost certainly *Midway* and *Coral Sea,* the

[5] Larson, Orletsky, and Leuschner, *Defense Planning in a Decade of Change*, 28.

[6] Sean O'Keefe, "Report of the Secretary of the Navy," in Dick Cheney, *Report of the Secretary of Defense to the President and the Congress* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1993), 131.

latter of which had first been targeted for decommissioning by the Carter administration), keeping the Navy at its 1988 level of 14 deployable aircraft carriers. By doing so, they argued, the Navy could use the cost savings in operations and maintenance (O&M) and procurement for the two ships and their air wings, and instead "alleviate the substantial shortfalls" in escort ships and new carrier aircraft for the CVBGs already in service.[7]

Despite support from Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Sam Nunn, Kennedy and Levin's attempt failed, but the Navy's Office of Legislative Affairs was convinced that they would try again with the FY 1990 defense bills, necessitating a response from the Navy. In a letter for the CNO, the Navy's Chief of Legislative Affairs, Rear Admiral T. C. Lynch, suggested a full-court press on the SASC members, as well as getting OPNAV to prepare a "Debate Book that provides fresh, straightforward arguments of fact" to rebut concerns about the size and expense of the carrier fleet. Without an effective argument, Lynch feared, the Navy was in for a rough time in Congress in the debates over the FY 1990 appropriation and authorization bills. While "constituent interest in Virginia . . . as well as some 40 plus states doing contract work" on CVN-74 and -75 would probably save the carriers appropriated in FY 1988, focus would shift "to the retirement of the older carriers," which "ha[d] no such constituency."[8]

Lynch's concern over "fresh" arguments was paramount. A rundown of potential answers to anticipated "Hard CV Questions" developed by his staff in late 1988 highlights the difficulties the Navy was beginning to encounter on Capitol Hill with regard to shortfalls in aircraft procurement and construction of escort ships. Most of the questions were, even for the Office of Legislative Affairs (OLA), difficult to respond to, garnering potential responses like "No good answer?" "Weak answer," and "[c]an be answered . . . but requires going back on previous testimony."[9] Especially concerning was OLA's assessment of the Maritime Strategy, which had provided a rationale for Navy force structure and strategy since 1981. "Hard Questions" argued that the Navy needed a new argument for its 15-carrier target: "Good case can be made [for 15 carriers], but don't use old maritime strategy stuff. Need a fresh look. . ."[10]

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[7] Senators Edward M. Kennedy and Carl M. Levin, "Dear Colleague," 10 May 1988, Enclosure 1, Rear Admiral T. C. Lynch to CNO Trost, "Early Retirement of Aircraft Carriers," Box 14, Folder 3, 1989 00 Files, NHHC.

[8] Lynch to Trost, "Early Retirement."

[9] [Navy] Office of Legislative Affairs, "Hard CV Questions," 5 December 1988, Enclosure III, Lynch to Trost, "Early Retirement."

[10] OLA, "Hard CV Questions."

A "fresh look" was a step too far for the CNO, Admiral Carlisle Trost. Although Trost had had a difficult relationship with Secretary Lehman, he believed the Maritime Strategy was an essentially correct way of looking at the U.S. Navy's roles, missions, and required force structure.[11] He also looked askance at the Soviet Navy's construction plans and was skeptical that the Soviet threat had disappeared. In a handwritten note on Lynch's memo, Trost wrote "let's not get caught up in 'don't give us the old stuff—need new rationale' argument. We have solid rationale—need to continue to stress the

"Solid rationale . . . right answers." Admiral Carlisle Trost, CNO 1986–90. An advocate of the 600-ship Navy and Maritime Strategy, Trost was caught flat-footed by the end of the Cold War (DIMOC/DN-SC-90-08460/Dave Wilson).

[11] Vistica, *Fall from Glory*, 223–25, 247–51, 298; Peter Swartz, interviewed by Blanton and Peeks, August 2019, NHHC.

right answers."[12]As events would soon show, Trost's faith in the Maritime Strategy was misplaced. Although he (like its framers) saw it as a guide to U.S. Navy policy across the spectrum of conflict, Congress and the public increasingly viewed it merely as a post hoc rationale for the service's longtime preference for a large fleet, unmoored from the specific strategic issues facing the country. This, of course, was not helped by DON leadership's insistence on a 600-ship fleet, which only solidified the impression that the Maritime Strategy was essentially a public relations document.[13]

When Bush took office on 20 January 1989, it was assumed that he would continue his predecessor's policies. Indeed, during the election campaign, Bush had expressed support for the Reagan buildup and gave every indication that he would provide spending continuity.[14] In reality, the incoming administration viewed part of its job as, in the words of a Bush aide, "cleaning up the Reagan mess." The main part of this "mess" consisted of a "budgetary crisis of deficits and debt," with defense spending as a major accelerant.[15] Bush, whose economic views never meshed with those of the administration he had served, quickly moved to make his mark on the budget.

As then-Lieutenant James F. McCarthy, Jr., working on the DON budget in OP-08, recalled, "[w]e had just finished doing Reagan's budget, so I'm thinking [the] new administration . . . will just take that budget forward. Not so fast . . . As soon as he took over, we threw out that budget and rebuilt a budget again."[16] Like McCarthy, the rest of DON likely assumed President Bush's defense plans would hew closely to the Reagan administration's last budget, released in early January 1989, and centered on a 2 percent real increase in DOD budget authority each year in the five-year defense plan. For FY 1990 this meant a request of $305.6 billion (approximately $642 billion in 2019), as opposed to 299.3 billion ($628 billion) in FY 1989.[17]

The Reagan administration's 2 percent increase came in accordance with budget recommendations made by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. On the other hand, Bush's director of the Office of Management and Budget, Richard Darman, pressed for cuts

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[12] Trost, "CNO Comment Sheet: Early Retirement of Aircraft Carriers," 17 January 1989, Box 14, Folder 3, 1989 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[13] Haynes, *Toward a New Maritime Strategy*, 41–42.

[14] Dennis S. Ippolito, *Blunting the Sword: Budget Policy and the Future of Defense* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1994), 39.

[15] Wirls, *Irrational Defense*, 21–22.

[16] Captain James F. McCarthy, Jr, USN (Ret.), Assistant Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Integration of Capabilities and Resources (N8B), interviewed by Dr. Ryan Peeks and Dr. Jon Middaugh, 8 September 2017.

[17] Frank C. Carlucci, *Report of the Secretary of Defense Frank C. Carlucci to the Congress on the FY 1990/FY 1991 Biennial Budget and FY 1990–94 Defense Programs* (Washington, DC: GPO, 17 January 1989), 83.

to the defense budget to help reduce a federal deficit that had reached $153 billion (approximately $321 billion in 2019) in FY 1989.[18] Faced with those two options, the new President elected to split the difference. In a 9 February address to a joint session of Congress, Bush announced his intention to pursue a single-year freeze in defense spending to facilitate a comprehensive spending agreement with Congress as well as a review of security and defense policies to "ensure that our capabilities and resources meet our commitments and strategies."[19] The resulting defense budget plan called for a 1.2 percent increase over the course the FY 1990–94 program "with the expectation that . . . defense needs would be clearer in a year's time."[20]

As it happened, the draft booklet on carrier force levels Rear Admiral Lynch requested in January was completed at about the same time as Bush's speech before Congress, highlighting just how uncoordinated the service was with the new administration's goals. As Lynch asked, the booklet attempted to make the case for "a strong Navy centered around 15 Aircraft Carrier Battle Groups."[21] In a nod to the changes wrought by Goldwater-Nichols, the booklet noted that only 15 carriers could "Meet the Unified Commanders-in-Chief Global Operational Requirements at a 'Prudent' Level of Risk [which] . . . call for a Minimum Essential Force of 15 Deployable Carrier Battle Groups."[22] After a discussion of potentially lengthening deployments and gapping maintenance with a smaller carrier force, the booklet ended by declaring that reducing the Navy's strength below 15 carriers "would be a most costly misreading of history."[23]

A more realistic appraisal came from a white paper produced by the CNO's Executive Panel on force level requirements. Later published in the May 1989 *Proceedings* as "Requirements Drive Navy Force Levels," the paper argued that Navy force levels, especially for carrier and battleship battle groups, were set by "our worldwide commitments," not the Soviet Union—an argument that reflected the Navy's wishes rather than reality. Cutting Navy force structure in response to the thawing Cold War

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[18] Larson, Orletsky, and Leuschner, *Defense Planning in a Decade of Change*, 8; Ippolito, *Blunting the Sword*, 43.

[19] George H. W. Bush, "Address on Administration Goals Before a Joint Session of Congress," February 9, 1989. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=16660.

[20] Larson, Orletsky, and Leuschner, *Defense Planning in a Decade of Change*, 8.

[21] OP-55, "America's Aircraft Carrier Battle Groups," enclosure, Vice Admiral Robert F. Dunn to CNO Trost, "15 CVBG Booklet," 10 February 1989, Box 41, Folder 1, 1989 00 Files, NHHC OA, 1.

[22] OP-55, "Carrier Battle Groups," 8. Although NHHC's copies of the relevant JCS documents from 1989 have not been declassified, the language used here matches that used by the JCS's series of plans, documents, and memoranda intended to inform the development of the yearly DOD budget.

[23] OP-55, "Carrier Battle Groups," 23

would, the paper argued, endanger "our fundamental security obligations in peacetime" where the Navy played the major role in responding to events and crises.[24]

Of special interest is the section on the "current fiscal environment." As originally written before President Bush's 9 February speech, the section argued against any cuts to the Reagan FY 1990 budget, and hinted that more money might be needed to maintain the Navy's ability to fulfill its requirements and a 15 CVBG/4 BBBG force structure.[25] This section was reworked in late February to reflect Bush's pledges:

> Recent and future budget reductions portend changes to our existing force structure and readiness. . . . The FY-90/91 amended budget levels of 0% [real program growth] in FY-90 and 1% RPG in FY-91 for DOD require the Navy to cut $22 billion from the initial January 1989 FYDP [$46 billion in 2019] . . . These decrements from the original January 1989 FYDP cannot be accommodated without impact. . . . The implications of a continued trend of negative or near zero real program growth, in view of an increasingly capable Soviet Union and unimpeded transfer of high tech weapons to the Third World, require difficult decisions . . .[26]

Apparently none of these hard choices affected the carrier force. Although the new budget levels definitively precluded achievement of the 600-ship navy, the white paper blithely assumed that the Navy could maintain 15 CVBGs and 4 BBBGs, force levels that remained "a national policy imperative."[27]

Despite the Navy's internal and external politicking for a 15-carrier fleet, the "difficult decisions" sparked by Bush's budget announcement quickly encompassed decommissioning aircraft carriers. On 16 February, a week after Bush's speech, Vice Admiral Robert F. Dunn, the DCNO for air (OP-05), wrote Trost an impassioned letter in response to preliminary plans to decommission *Coral Sea* earlier than its planned 1992 retirement (timed to coincide with the activation of CVN-73). According to Dunn, doing so would "have a serious, deleterious effect on our warfighting capability, our ability to satisfy the requirements of the Unified Commanders and serious compromise our ability to prevail in the coming carrier battle on Capitol Hill. By offering up an aircraft carrier we state to those who would reduce our carrier force levels that other

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[24] OP-00K, "Navy Force Level Requirements," 10 February 1989, Box 10, Folder 3, 1989 00 Files, NHHC OA, 1-7.

[25] Ibid.,7-8.

[26] [OP-00K?], edits to "Requirements," 21 February 1989.

[27] [OP-00K?], edits to "Requirements." Readers will recall that the 600-ship target was derived from, among other factors, the number of surface vessels needed to support 15 CVBGs.

units are more important than aircraft carriers." Instead, Dunn suggested, the Navy should "offer up battleships" before reducing carrier strength.[28]

The eventual cuts for the Bush program, finalized in May 1989, took aim at the Navy's oldest carriers, as Dunn feared, in part because decommissioning a carrier and dissolving its expensive air wing saved rather more money than decommissioning a battleship. *Coral Sea*'s decommissioning was accelerated from FY 1992 to FY 1990, with the ship to be abruptly recalled early from a planned Mediterranean deployment in September 1989. Likewise, *Midway*'s retirement date was pushed forward from FY 1997 to FY 1992.[29] Peering farther into the future, the new plan called for the retirement of *Ranger* in 1998, and delayed the retirement of *Saratoga* by one year, from FY 1999 to FY 2000, to maintain a long-term end strength of 14 deployable CVBGs.[30]

The crew of *Coral Sea* mans the rails as tugs move the carrier to Naval Station Norfolk for decommissioning, 19 April 1990. *Coral Sea* was the first of five carriers decommissioned between 1990 and 1994 as collapse of the Soviet Union forced fiscal retrenchment on the Department of Defense (DIMOC/DN-SC-93-00774/PH2 Rick Stamm).

[28] Vice Admiral Robert F. Dunn to CNO, "Coral Sea," 16 February 1989, Box 14, Folder 2, 1989 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[29] "Highlights of the Amended FY 1990/1991 Department of the Navy Biennial Budget," May 1989, Box 38, Folder 2, 1989 00 Files, NHHC OA, 7.

[30] Rear Admiral S. F. Loftus to Secretary of the Navy William L. Ball, III, "SECDEF decisions on DON Major Issues," 21 April 1989, Box 38, Folder 2, 1989 00 Files, NHHC OA.

Although these cuts were technically the result of plans that DON submitted to meet budget targets negotiated by the administration and Congress, the covering memorandum highlights that they were made at gunpoint. As the memo acerbically noted, "[a]ccomodating such reductions in force will require either an increase in PERSTEMPO/OPTEMPO, which would likely result in driving out trained personnel as occurred in the late 1970s, or a reduction of commitments."[31] Clearly, this was a major change from the Reagan administration, which, even when forced to curb defense spending by a hostile Congress, used its political capital to secure as much funding as it could.

Proceeding alongside the budget adjustments was the President's promised review of national security, dubbed NSR-12. Like the cuts to the budget, DON leadership took a skeptical approach to the review that, at least in its earliest iterations, looked askance at much of the Cold War status quo. A draft from March, for example, speculated that "adjustments" could be made to the Navy's carrier deployments, "mov[ing] from fixed deployment commitments to greater flexibility in . . . carrier operating patterns (flexops) . . . "[32] Under the circumstances, the mention of "flexibility," which the Navy itself valued, sounded less like a reprieve, and more like a threat to cut the carrier force.

As the NSR-12 process neared completion, the Navy's concerns remained. In late April, Vice Admiral Charles R. Larson, the DCNO for Plans, Policy, and Operations (OP-06), warned that "a lot of the . . . rationale for our global deployment pattern and force structure appears to have been lost." Instead, he claimed, the document, written with heavy input from OSD's Program Analysis & Evaluation office, was "heavily programmatic," focused on justifying the recent budget decisions following the President's February speech.[33] An attached analysis from a member of Larson's staff noted that NSR-12's discussion of forward deployment was "too focused on saving money as opposed to addressing impacts on strategy [and] unbalanced with regard to discussion of forward presence."[34]

NSR-12 was developed under the assumption that DOD spending would decrease, perhaps precipitously.[35] While it did not set policy, it highlighted the lengths President

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[31] "Highlights," 1.

[32] Office of the Secretary of Defense, "NSR-12: Section II: U.S. Defense Objectives and Strategies for the 1990s and Beyond (draft)," 20 March 1989, Box 13, Folder 2, 1989 00 Files, NHHC OA, 18.

[33] Vice Admiral Charles R. Larson (OP-06) to CNO, "NSR-12 Status Update," 26 April 1989, Box 11, Folder 2, 1989 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[34] Lieutenant Commander D. H. Pistochini (OP-603F), "NSR-12 Stratus Report," 26 April 1989, Box 11, Folder 2, 1989 00 Files, NHHC OA, 3.

[35] Larson, Orletsky, and Leuschner, *Defense Planning in a Decade of Change*, 9.

Bush went to change the military status quo even before the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. Indeed, the Bush administration moved so fast that its policy changes occurred before its defense team was in place. Secretary Cheney was not confirmed until 21 March, well after the budget cuts were announced and NSR-12 was underway. Key positions like Deputy Secretary of Defense, DOD comptroller, and the Under Secretaries of Defense for Acquisition and Policy were likewise unfilled until the late spring. The new Secretary of the Navy, H. Lawrence Garrett III, was not confirmed until 15 May.[36] Likewise, CJCS Powell—perhaps the most important voice in shaping defense cuts—began his term in October 1989.

Once installed, the Bush team continued to tighten the screws on defense spending. By January 1990, when Cheney's first annual report was released, the administration's spending targets had adjusted downward again. In February 1989, President Bush called for a defense spending freeze in FY 1990, followed by modest growth in future years. Now, Cheney anticipated "real budget reductions," over the FY 1992–97 period, subject to continued signs of decline from the Soviet Union.[37] The proposed 1991 budget itself called for $297.3 billion in TOA, an increase over the FY 1990 budget when calculated in current dollars ($292.3 billion), but a modest decline when adjusted for inflation ($303.9 billion).[38]

The only specific cut to carrier force structure mentioned in the report was the already-approved decommissioning of *Coral Sea*, set for April 1990, placing deployable carrier strength at 14.[39] However, when unveiling the FY 1991 budget, Secretary Cheney announced that the administration intended to retire the battleships *Iowa* and *New Jersey* in FY 1991 as well.[40] A November 1989 memo intended for Secretary Cheney from DON indicated that the FY 1991–94 budget levels under discussion included the loss of "3–5 carrier/battleship battle groups," over the next four years, and objected that these cuts would "[risk] our ability to provide stabilizing global forward presence and response."[41]

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[36] For specifics, see *Department of Defense Key Officials, September 1947–March 2015* (Washington, DC: Historical Office of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2015), also available online at http://history.defense.gov.

[37] Dick Cheney, *Report of the Secretary of Defense to the President and Congress* (Washington, DC: GPO, January 1990), i–vi.

[38] Ibid., 10.

[39] Ibid., 62.

[40] John F. Morton, "The U.S. Navy in 1989," USNI *Proceedings*, May 1990, 166.

[41] Secretary of the Navy H. Lawrence Garrett to Cheney, "Additional Fiscal Year 1991–Fiscal Year 1994 Program Budget Adjustment Proposals," 17 November 1989, Box 73, Folder 1, 1989 00 Files, NHHC OA, 4.

The forward presence argument carried over into a disastrous DON performance in front of Congress in early 1990. Secretary Garrett and Admiral Trost made the by-now standard argument that Navy force structure was based on forward presence commitments, not just the Soviet threat, and argued that the Navy's inherent flexibility and low footprint made it more useful for the coming era than the Army and Air Force's heavy, fixed overseas presences. Given that, DON's leaders argued that any defense spending cuts should fall primarily on the land-based services, allowing the Navy to preserve the capabilities it built in the previous decade.[42]

Garrett and Trost went one step further, however, arguing that the ongoing collapse of the Soviet bloc warranted no changes to the fleet, but instead required that the Navy receive a larger slice of the budgetary pie to preserve the Cold War's force structure. This stance, in the words of one analyst:

> contributed to a perception that the Department of the Navy was unwilling to recognize and respond to changing times. . . . Naval leaders in effect argued that the changed international security environment called for a shift in the composition of U.S. defense spending towards naval forces, while at the same time they maintained that this changed environment called for no shift in the composition of the Navy's own budget. This appeared to be an argument of convenience intended to exempt the Navy from difficult decisions…[43]

Making matters worse, the force structure that DON leadership touted was not the 15-CVBG fleet that had been the Navy's target since 1981, but the 14-carrier force structure imposed on the Navy by the President's decision to freeze the defense budget in February 1989.[44]

Finally, while sticking to the 14-carrier force structure, the testimony of DON leadership recast the terms of forward presence. In a departure from decades of claims that three carriers were needed to provide one forward-deployed carrier, testimony revealed:

> for the first time, the real numbers concerning the number of aircraft carriers needed to keep one continuously deployed…. That rule ["3 for 1"], it turned out, was never correct, because it failed to take transit time and periodic long-term overhauls into account. . . . For carriers based in the United

[42] Ronald O'Rourke, "Congressional Watch," USNI *Proceedings*, May 1991, 168.

[43] Ibid., 169.

[44] The reader will recall that as late as February 1989, the Navy was preparing to defend a 15-carrier fleet as the *only* way to meet national-level and CINC requirements.

> States, it turns out that five carriers must be in the inventory to keep one forward-deployed in the Mediterranean, five or six must be in the inventory to keep one forward-deployed in the Western Pacific, and seven or eight must be in the inventory to keep one forward-deployed in the Indian Ocean. Because of the economies of homeporting a carrier in Japan, where it can be counted as forward-deployed in the Western Pacific, even when it is tied up at the pier, the requirement for maintaining a carrier in the Western Pacific can be reduced to fewer than two ships, and the total requirement for keeping one carrier forward-deployed in each of these three operating areas accordingly comes to about 14 hulls.[45]

The truth of these numbers was not new to the Navy. Indeed, one of the answers to the "Hard CV Questions" developed by OLA in late 1988 noted that the actual ratio of non-deployed to deployed carriers, though based on "tricky" math, was something like "4 or 5 to 1," when accounting for SLEPs and deployments to the distant Persian Gulf, but the truth would require "going back on previous testimony."[46]

As welcome as the truth was, the timing could not possibly have been worse. Rather than viewing the Navy's new carrier math as a breath of fresh air, Congress seems to have viewed it as a cynical attempt to preserve the current force structure in the face of pressure for cuts. On the whole, then, DON leadership's performance during testimony hurt their cause, making it "an almost foregone conclusion that the Navy in future years would be reduced to 12 deployable carriers."[47]

In the end, Secretary Cheney convinced Congress not to make major changes to the FY 1991 budget, arguing that DOD had insufficient time to respond to the ongoing collapse of the Soviet bloc in Europe, which had taken place after the shape of DOD's budget submission was set. Instead, DOD would use the FY 1992 budget process to reflect the changing global environment. Part of his success was based on his presentation of DOD's own plan for a post–Cold War force structure to Congress in June. Known as the "Base Force," the new plan promised an orderly drawdown of the Cold War military, avoiding the so-called "hollow force" of the late 1970s. Shepherded by CJCS Powell, the Base Force dominated the DOD budget debate for the second half of President Bush's term.

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[45] O'Rourke, "Congressional Watch," 172.

[46] OLA, "Hard CV Questions."

[47] O'Rourke, "Congressional Watch," 172.

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General Colin Powell's outsize role in the Bush administration has already been mentioned. More so than previous JCS chairmen, Powell played a central role in the development of government defense policy. He accomplished this by not just modifying initiatives from above, but crafting his own, most notably his Base Force scheme for post–Cold War downsizing, which had a major impact on the Navy's carrier force levels. His influence can be credited to three factors: his Washington experience, his maximalist interpretation of the CJCS's new responsibilities, and his relatively early conversion to the viewpoint that the Soviet Union was on the verge of collapse in the late 1980s.

When Secretary Cheney tapped Powell for the CJCS job in 1989, he picked an officer who had amassed a wealth of experience with Washington politics, including time as National Security Advisor in the Reagan administration. The upshot of this experience as a "political general" was a liberal interpretation of the relationship between military officers and policymakers. In a 1998 oral history interview, Powell described the military side of the relationship as providing

> military advice for the purpose of solving a political problem. So I had to understand the politics of the situation and try to understand all the pressures working against the president and the secretary of defense, who was also a political figure. I had to not just sit there . . . and not worry about what the right wing of the Republican party was going to say about this or that policy, or how the president would be attacked from the Democratic left. . . . That's not crossing the line, that's just being useful. . . . Any general at that level who doesn't understand politics shouldn't be at that level.[48]

As suggested by his viewpoint, when the time came, Powell was more than willing to pitch his retrenchment program as a solution to political problems facing the Bush White House.

Powell's willingness to engage in politics was reflected in an expansive view of the powers of his new office. The Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 primarily aimed to strengthen joint functions of DOD at the expense of the services, and this very much included the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who was tasked with providing

[48] General Colin L. Powell, interviewed by Alfred Goldberg and Stuart Rochester, OSD Historical Office Oral History Program, Washington, DC, 11 February 1998, 32.

"Any general at that level who doesn't understand politics shouldn't be at that level." Between the Goldwater-Nichols Act and his own Washington experience, General Colin Powell played a larger role in the policy-making process than previous JCS chairmen. Here, Powell is pictured with President George H. W. Bush and senior administration national security officials discussing the Gulf War in the White House on 15 January 1991 (NARA/NLB-WHPC-A-P18879(06A)/White House Photo Office).

an "independent military perspective to policymakers." In addition to making the CJCS—not the corporate JCS—the primary military advisor to the President and Secretary of Defense, GNA also gave CJCS "six new resource-related duties," including the power to "recommend alternative programs and budgets" without consulting other stakeholders.[49] The incumbent CJCS at the time of GNA, Admiral William J. Crowe, though supportive of the reforms, preferred to manage the JCS along its old collaborative lines. His successor, however, was more willing to take control. As Powell put it, "[t]here was no reason to vote [on issues before the JCS]. I solicited options, and then I did what the law said, give my recommendation to the secretary, as the principal military advisor."[50]

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[49] James R. Locher III, *Victory on the Potomac: The Goldwater-Nichols Act Unifies the Pentagon* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 443.

[50] Powell, interviewed by Goldberg and Rochester, 21.

Powell's willingness to use his office's power and his political instincts contributed to his success in planning for the end of the Cold War, a top priority of his upon assuming the role in October 1989 and one that faced opposition from stakeholders in and outside of the Pentagon, even after the events of that November. Due in part to his interactions with Soviet officials during his time as President Reagan's National Security Advisor, Powell believed that Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms were "fundamental" and likely to ease tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. In that changed environment, changes to the military's force structure and downward pressure on the budget were inevitable.[51]

Powell had lived through a previous round of postwar cuts after Vietnam, and the "hollow force" of the 1970s clearly affected his approach to the end of the Cold War. As described by Swartz, his naval aide from 1991–93, Powell believed that "he needed a new clear vision, and that the services . . . were going to fail" to provide that vision. Instead, "only strong leadership by him," enabled by the GNA reforms, "could pull this off . . . [the military was] going to get big budget cuts, and if we, the military, did not control those cuts, [Congress was] going to control the budget cuts," and haphazardly slash military spending without an overarching plan.[52]

In this, Powell was helped by previously ignored work from J-8 (the force structure, resources, and budgeting directorate of the Joint Staff), which, based on discussions with congressional staffers starting in late 1988, projected a gradual 25 percent cut in the defense budget over the next five years.[53] Armed with J-8's figures, Powell and a small team of officers from J-8 and J-5 (strategic planning) refined their thinking and developed a briefing, "A View to the 90s," which laid out the Chairman's strategic vision and the need for the military to make that 25 percent cut before Congress could do it for them.

Specific force structure requirements did not make it into to the briefing—though manpower figures were present—but Powell's preference at the time was to reduce the Navy to 400 ships and 12 carriers from its 1989 strength of 551 ships and 15 car-

[51] Lorna S. Jaffe, *The Development of the Base Force, 1989–1992* (Washington, DC: Joint History Office, 1993), 10–11.

[52] Swartz, interviewed by Blanton and Peeks, July 2019, NHHC.

[53] Jaffe, *Base Force*, 9–13.

riers.[54] Starting in November, Powell briefed "A View to the 90s" to President Bush, Secretary Cheney, and the CinCs. Finally, on 22 November, he met with the other members of the JCS. While he did not formally brief the presentation, he "informed the Service Chiefs . . . that they must accept force cuts."[55] The Chiefs and combatant commanders received a full brief on Powell's plans in February.

Trost had an interlocking set of concerns with Powell's approach. On a process level, he was annoyed that Powell had run roughshod over both the JCS's tradition of collective decision-making and the Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System. On the practical side, Trost also believed that Powell's initial 400-ship Navy lacked the size to perform its posited forward presence responsibilities. CNO Trost did not immediately air his full set of grievances, an approach shared by Secretary Garrett.[56] Instead, DON's response to Powell's initial overtures can be found in the Department's January 1990 draft of its Consolidated Planning and Programming Guidance (DNCPPG, an early step of the FY 1992 budget process), followed by Trost's "Maritime Strategy for the 1990s," an article published in the May 1990 issue of *Proceedings*.[57] In both documents, Navy leadership signaled their dissatisfaction with Powell's vision. While they acknowledged the need for change, both documents argued that the Navy could serve a new national strategy without making significant cuts to the Cold War force structure.

Though not an explicit repudiation of Powell's approach, the draft DNCPPG suggested that the Navy could best prepare for the future by not making major force structure cuts. Foreshadowing the closure of overseas bases, the draft noted that the country would need "military strength that is . . . operated independently of restrictions to basing and access," attributes that only readily applied to Navy CVBGs and

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[54] As discussed below, it is unclear which definition of "12 carriers" Powell intended at this early stage. Depending on how SLEP/RCOH ships and the training carrier were counted, it could take as many as 14 hulls to provide 12 "deployable" carriers. Likewise, the numbers presented here for the Navy's strength highlight the difficulty in counting ships. The figures in this sentence come from Jaffe, *Base Force*, 15, which, presumably, uses the same counting method used to reach a projected strength of 400 ships and 12 carriers. NHHC's figures on the Navy's strength in 1989 show 592 active ships, and 14 carriers on 30 September 1989 (https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/us-ship-force-levels.html#1986), while my detailed count of aircraft carrier strength over time shows 16 carriers at the end of 1989, with *Coral Sea* on the way to an April 1990 decommissioning, and *Kitty Hawk* in the middle of a SLEP overhaul, presumably matching NHHC's 14-carrier count.

[55] Jaffe, *Base Force*, 14–17.

[56] Haynes, *Maritime Strategy*, 37–38; Steven Wills, "The Effect of the Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 On Naval Strategy, 1987–94," *Naval War College Review* (Spring 2016), 28.

[57] Haynes's analysis suggests that the article was written in late 1989. However, the May issue of *Proceedings*, which always contains a major package of articles reviewing the previous calendar year would have been the most appropriate place to publish Trost's thoughts.

Marine Expeditionary Forces, with their ability to project power from the sea, and facilities concentrated (though not exclusively) on U.S. soil. While the Army and Air Force downsized their massive footprint in Europe to reflect the diminished threat from the Warsaw Pact, the sea services would provide "a sustained world-wide presence and the flexibility necessary to respond to regional threats."[58]

Whatever cuts the DON needed to make would come through the aggressive decommissioning of older manpower- and maintenance-intensive systems, reducing shore-based infrastructure, and scaling back on some future acquisition programs—but not the Navy's aircraft carriers. Instead, the Navy would maintain 14 deployable carriers (that is, the Navy's carrier strength at the end of 1989, less the decommissioning *Coral Sea* and a projected decommissioning for *Midway*), a number that Navy leadership had derided as wholly inadequate less than a year earlier.[59] While other elements of the Navy's long-term construction priorities would go unmet or curtailed, the DNCPPG also called for a new carrier in FY 1996 (with AP to start in FY 1994), and identified the troubled, expensive, A-12 carrier attack aircraft as the "priority aircraft procurement" for the Department.[60]

Alongside the DNCPPG, Admiral Trost's "Maritime Strategy for the 1990s" was another attempt to argue that the Navy must, in his words "change . . . but guard against changing too quickly" to meet new challenges. Indeed, Trost maintained that the Soviet Navy remained a major threat.[61] Though tensions were cooling, Soviet capability remained and, since warships take years to build, the United States would be best served by keeping a naval force on hand sufficient to guarantee defeat of its Soviet counterpart. This force, larger than what the Navy might be expected to maintain, would be kept busy during peacetime through forward presence ("represent[ing] the commitment and resolve of the United States") and crisis response ("Naval forces . . . the military force of choice . . . in more than 50 crises in the last decade"). It is unclear what changes Trost anticipated beyond, perhaps, a shift of focus from Europe to Southwest and East Asia.[62]

Part of the familiarity of Trost's argument stemmed from his insistence on basing the article on the Maritime Strategy, which, in his words, "provide[d] a solid founda-

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[58] DON, "Draft POM-92 DNCPPG: Memorandum for the Distribution List," 10 January 1990, Box 47, 1990 00 Files, NHHC OA, 1–4.

[59] Draft DNCPPG Memorandum, 6–8.

[60] DoN, "Draft POM-92 DNCPPG: Planning and Programming Guidance," 10 January 1990, Box 47, 1990 00 Files, NHHC OA, 1–2.

[61] Swartz, interviewed by Blanton and Peeks, July 2019, NHHC.

[62] Carlisle A. H. Trost, "Maritime Strategy for the 1990s," USNI *Proceedings* (May 1990), 92–100.

tion for the future."[63] Indeed, Trost asserted that the rudiments of the Maritime Strategy predated Secretary Lehman, and provided a comprehensive naval strategy for the United States rather than a simple blueprint for a Soviet war. While Trost was more or less correct about its origins and its intended applicability across the conflict spectrum, he erred in nailing his colors to the Maritime Strategy, which, outside of the Navy, was widely seen as either a narrow anti-Soviet strategy or a transparent attempt to validate the 600-ship target, which even Lehman had given up on by 1990.[64]

These arguments, identical to DON's highly unsuccessful FY 1991 testimony to Congress, produced a similar result inside of the Pentagon. Powell, "a genius, and a wonderful man, but . . . an Army officer," was unreceptive to Trost's arguments, which went against both his desire for reasonably equitable cuts across the services and his belief in joint operations.[65] For his part, Trost also declined to engage with Powell. Over the winter and spring of 1990, as Powell was putting the finishing touches on the Base Force (which received its name in February), the Navy held itself aloof from the process. For example, when Powell briefed the full Base Force to the Chiefs for the first time in February, Trost "did not comment, not responding even to the deliberately provocative question of defining the capital ship of the twenty-first century," or, evidently, to Powell's projection of a 450-ship Navy (up from an earlier 400)—about 100 less than the "battle force" ships in commission in 1990.[66]

This attitude continued until halted by the development of the FY 1992 POM. As demonstrated by the DNCPPG and Trost's article, the Navy approached the POM with the blithe assumption that the bulk of cuts would come from the Army and Air Force, leaving the Navy free to maintain its Cold War force structure into a new era. Unlike the DNCPPG, however, the POM was based on *orders* from above, not just "guidelines." Looking through the Navy's POM, it is clear that the service's force structure arguments failed to sway OSD. Although the force levels and bud-

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[63] Readers will recall that OLA had told Trost in early 1989 that the Navy needed a "fresh look" that went beyond the Maritime Strategy to make the service's case in front of Congress.

[64] Patrick E. Tyler, "Navy Urged to Bring Ships Home to Cut Costs: Ex-Secretary Says U.S. Should Rely More on Reservists, Hold the Line on Carriers, Battleships," *Washington Post*, 28 March 1990, A6. Haynes (*Maritime Strategy*, 42–44) argues that Trost supported a more comprehensive view of the Maritime Strategy than the ex-Secretary, who used it "only in terms of the Soviet threat." As we have seen, Lehman held an equally comprehensive view of the Navy's mission while SECNAV, but, like many other DON leaders, found it difficult to win budgetary debates by touting the Navy's forward presence and crisis response. Regardless, Trost's use of the Maritime Strategy was a public relations debacle.

[65] Swartz, interviewed by Blanton and Peeks, July 2019, NHHC.

[66] Jaffe, *Base Force*, 23. The question was "provocative" because it implied that carriers were not the long-term answer; Peter M. Swartz with Karin Duggan, *The U.S. Navy in the World (1981–90): Context for U.S. Navy Capstone Strategies and Concepts* (Alexandria, VA: CNA, 2011), slide 60.

gets did not reflect Powell's Base Force initiative, they nevertheless pointed toward a future of retrenchment.

After reducing the FY 1992 baseline 5.1 percent below the proposed FY 1991 budget, the POM also called for 2 percent real decreases in defense spending each year.[67] Although Secretary Garrett's preface to the Navy's POM declared that "the naval structure best suited to perform . . . our enduring missions . . . is centered on 14 aircraft carrier battlegroups," he acknowledged that spending targets imposed by OSD forced the Navy to reduce its deployable carrier target from 14 to 12.[68] To accomplish this, POM-92 accelerated the retirements of *America, Ranger,* and the training carrier *Lexington* (AVT-16). *Lexington* was to be replaced by *Forrestal,* which would maintain a limited ability to embark an operational air wing.[69]

In addition to what the Navy saw as an unfavorable outcome from the POM process, the spring of 1990 also saw Powell's Base Force move toward becoming official DOD policy. The initial catalyst was an increasing belief in Congress that the Defense Department had failed to plan for the future. This viewpoint was most forcefully expressed by SASC Chairman Sam Nunn, who called the administration budget submission a "1991 budget based on a 1988 threat and a 1988 strategy."[70] Instead, he announced plans to provide his own alternative budget and security strategy.[71]

This, of course, was precisely the situation that Powell had tried to avoid by developing the Base Force, and he countered by publically unveiling elements of his proposal in March and April. He also switched tack inside the Pentagon, turning from the other JCS members to Secretary Cheney and his aides, especially Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Paul Wolfowitz. Powell's shift was evidently prompted by the FY 1992 service POMs, which cut money and force structure, but did not try to fundamentally reshape the services for the post–Cold War era. Though the JCS Chairman could take unilateral suggestions and plans to the Secretary and President, he had no authority over the services. Absent specific guidance from above, POM-92 suggested that the services would never voluntarily adjust their force structure and budgets to meet those of the CJCS.[72]

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[67] The final FY 1991 defense budget would not be settled until well after the 30 April date of the POM.

[68] Garrett to Cheney via DEPSECDEF Donald Atwood, "Department of the Navy Program Objectives Memorandum," [30 April 1990], Box 72, 1990 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[69] DON, "Program Objectives Memorandum: FY 1992–1997," [30 April 1990], Box 72, 1990 00 Files, NHHC OA, 19. Previous discussions of total carrier strength in this manuscript have ignored *Lexington*, which was not in a state to contribute to the Navy's combat strength. With its replacement by *Forrestal* and, later, *Kennedy*, the carrier assigned to the training mission was worth considering as a potentially deployable asset.

[70] *1990 Congressional Quarterly Almanac* (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1991), 675.

[71] Jaffe, *Base Force*, 28–29.

[72] Ibid., 31–34.

Although OSD leadership was initially skeptical of Powell's assumption of terminal Soviet decline—Cheney cited concerns about the "enormous uncertainty" surrounding the Soviet Union—the political fight over the budget forced the Secretary to embrace the Base Force.[73] Disagreements between the White House and the opposition-controlled Congress over how much money to spend led to a "budget summit" to hammer out a compromise national budget.[74] During these meetings, which ran from May to September, Cheney presented Powell's Base Force as DOD's plan for the future in an attempt to rebut critics like Senator Nunn, who claimed that the department had no post–Cold War strategy.[75] Specifically, Cheney used the Base Force to demonstrate how the military could cut manpower by 25 percent and its budget by 10 percent while maintaining its ability to protect U.S. interests. In conjunction with the budget summit negotiations, on 26 June Cheney, Powell, and Wolfowitz briefed the President on the Base Force. President Bush accepted their recommendations and outlined the Base Force in a 2 August speech in Aspen, Colorado. In the speech—rather overshadowed by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait the previous day—he announced that "by 1995 our security needs can be met by an active force 25 percent smaller than today's. . . . The United States would be ill served by forces that represent nothing more than a scaled-back or shrunken-down version of the forces that we possess right now. What we need are not merely reductions but restructuring."[76] Although the Base Force was not quite official policy, public buy-in from the Secretary of Defense and President showed which way the winds were blowing.

As the Base Force was gaining acceptance with OSD and the White House, the Navy received a new CNO, Admiral Frank B. Kelso, a submariner who had recently served as CINCLANT. Unlike Trost, who had become CNO during the Reagan buildup and only grudgingly accepted the Base Force under extreme duress before leaving office in late June 1990, Kelso entered the assignment with a more realistic assessment of the national mood. Instead of fighting cuts, it was "very clear" to Kelso "that whether we liked it or not this was going to be a period of time of reduction in the armed forces."[77] Kelso, like Powell, focused on how best to achieve those reductions while avoiding a hollow force. At least one of Kelso's staff, Captain Richard Diamond, head of OP-603, warned that

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[73] *1990 CQ Almanac*, 672.

[74] Ibid., 129–31.

[75] Jaffe, *Base Force*, 35.

[76] George Bush: "Remarks at the Aspen Institute Symposium in Aspen, Colorado," 2 August 1990. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=18731.

[77] Kelso, *Reminiscences*, 571.

the Navy needed a new "strategic rationale" to avoid a "budget train wreck," but Kelso, in part overwhelmed by pressing issues elsewhere in the Navy, opted to deemphasize strategy.[78] Where Powell tried—with mixed success—to marry his force structure to a strategy, Kelso explicitly retired the Maritime Strategy—put it "on the shelf," in his words—and, instead, focused on force structure.[79]

Soon after he became CNO, Kelso and a handful of aides attempted to lay out the future size of the Navy. As Kelso related:

> The size of the carrier force was already headed down to 12, and there were organizations like *The New York Times* that were talking about six. So the size of the carrier force that I could foresee during my time as CNO was well up in the air. And, believe it or not, we came up with 450 ships. . . . That was

Secretary of the Navy H. Lawrence Garrett III and Admiral Frank B. Kelso at Kelso's installation as CNO, 30 June 1990. Both men's tenures were marked by bruising political fights over the future size of the Navy and the years-long fallout of highly publicized misbehavior by naval aviators at the 1991 meeting of the Tailhook Association (NARA/330-CFD-DN-ST-90-11169/PH1 Jeff Elliott).

[78] Wills, "Naval Strategy," 35.

[79] Haynes, *Maritime Strategy*, 48–49.

> the number of ships that we felt we needed to be able to do the Navy's job, assuming that we were going to continue to be a forward-deployed force. . . . So we looked at having to reduce in size, but retaining an adequate number of ships to do the job expected of the Navy.[80]

As it happened, 450 ships was the number adopted for Powell's Base Force, which was developed independently of the services. This can certainly be presented as a virtue—Lorna Jaffe's detailed history of the Base Force lauds Powell's belief that it was his responsibility to "provide programming direction to the Services [without building] bureaucratic consensus through staff work or corporate consensus through JCS meetings."[81] On the other hand, even 19 years later, Kelso was irritated that:

> General Powell came up with what was known as the base force. And the base force was 450 ships. You know, I had absolutely no input to the 450 ships. I don't know how . . . they got the 450. But it was the same number [as Kelso and his aides reached]. . . . Now, you would think that the CNO might have had some idea what the base force's floor level was going to be for ships, but until it was announced I don't remember having any idea what it was going to be.[82]

Nevertheless, Kelso also ended up tentatively supporting the Base Force as a potential floor against force structure cuts and as a realistic response to imminent budget cuts.

Although he acquiesced to the Base Force, Kelso attempted to create the most favorable possible definition of "12 carriers" by exploiting Powell's lack of specificity on Navy force structure.[83] Counting carriers has always been more art than science, and there were at least three ways to arrive at 12:

- 14 hulls: 12 "deployable" carriers, 1 carrier in SLEP, and the training carrier *Lexington* (the preferred Navy count).
- 13 hulls: 11 "deployable," 1 SLEP, and the training carrier (12 hulls with the ability to embark a full carrier air wing with the replacement of *Lexington* by *Forrestal*).
- 12 hulls: 10 "deployable," 1 SLEP, and the training carrier (the simplest definition of 12 carriers).

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[80] Kelso, *Reminiscences*, 571–72.

[81] Jaffe, *Base Force,* 49–50.

[82] Kelso, *Reminiscences*, 595.

[83] Remember that at this time the Base Force was not yet official DOD policy, and unsupported by detailed financial analysis from OSD or the services.

These numbers mattered a great deal, because they helped set the size of the entire Navy. The difference between 10 "deployable" carriers and 12 was hundreds of aircraft, dozens of vessels, and tens of thousands of sailors.

Recognizing the importance of maximizing "deployable" carriers, OPNAV moved to refine its definition in the late summer. With the SLEP program drawing to an end (by the end of 1990, six of eight eligible carriers had at least started SLEP and, with carrier numbers going down, it was unclear if they would be needed for *Kennedy* and *Ranger*), the Navy looked to the CVN Refueling and Complex Overhaul (RCOH) process as a substitute for SLEP in carrier counting.[84] After all, unlike SLEPs, nuclear refueling could hardly be delayed or canceled if the ship were to remain in service. In addition to *Enterprise*, which started a four-year RCOH period in late 1990, the *Nimitz*-class carriers were scheduled for their own RCOHs starting in 1998, providing a long-term rationale for an "extra" carrier. As Kelso noted in a letter to Secretary Garrett, it was illogical that a CVN in a multi-year refueling was counted as "deployable" according to the standards introduced in the early 1980s. Instead, he recommended that RCOH ships count as "non-deployed," a decision that Garrett signed off on.[85]

As it happened, the carrier counting issue proved a major point of contention between the Navy, the Joint Staff, and OSD. An October staff memorandum for Kelso noted that J-8 and the Navy, while in agreement on a 450-ship fleet, differed on the make-up of the future fleet. Most of the difference came as a result of the carrier force: the Joint Staff wanted 11 active carriers, one non-deployable (SLEP/RCOH) carrier, and a training carrier, while the Navy wanted 12 active carriers, one non-deployable carrier, and a training carrier. This difference led the Navy to request one more active carrier air wing and 16 more surface combatants than the Joint Staff plan, which gave the Navy more logistic and oceanic surveillance ships than the service desired. The different plans worked out to approximately $1.3 billion in operating costs and $7 billion in procurement costs, significant numbers in a time of fiscal belt tightening.[86]

Even Goldwater-Nichols did not give the CJCS or the Joint Staff the ability to overrule the services on force structure and budget issues, so the carrier question

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[84] At this point, the only carrier to undergo a nuclear refueling was *Enterprise*, which had undergone a refueling in the 1960s, and a full-bore RCOH starting in October 1990, soon after the memorandum cited below. Although *Enterprise*'s one-off design made its RCOH process atypical, a more standardized RCOH process for the *Nimitz*-class ships started in 1998. Since then, the RCOH schedule has left one *Nimitz*-class CVN out of service at any given time as each ship goes through its three-or-more-years-long RCOH.

[85] Kelso to Garrett, "Deployable/Non-Deployable Classification of Aircraft Carriers," 18 September 1990, Box 7, Folder 2, 1990 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[86] OPNAV memorandum for Kelso, October 1990, Box 7, Folder 2, 1990 00 Files, NHHC OA.

ended up in front of Secretary Cheney. Despite his support for the Base Force, he did not formally endorse it as DOD policy until a 29 November meeting of DOD's Executive Committee, where he formally instructed the services to adhere to the Base Force. Though the Secretary's announcement came rather late in the budgeting process, the force structure proposed in the FY 1992/1993 budget, according to the Base Force's best historian, reflected Powell's Base Force, subject to a few "adjustments" requested by the services.[87]

Looking at Cheney's FY 1992 report to Congress, it is clear that the Joint Staff version of the carrier force won out. The report, released in early 1991, called for "reduc[ing] aircraft carrier force levels from 16 (including a training carrier) in FY 1990 to our long-term objective of 13 (including a training carrier) in FY 1995." This was in keeping with the Joint Staff's "11-1-1" interpretation of Powell's 12-carrier target. Additionally, it is clear that the Navy's attempt to redefine "deployable" did not take. Rather than parsing the difference between deployable and non-deployable carriers, the FY 1992 report unambiguously referred to 12 carriers and a trainer.[88]

In a more detailed submission to HASC and SASC, OPNAV laid out the future plans for the carrier fleet as they stood in early 1991. Out of the Navy's 16 carriers (15 "regular carriers, and the trainer), the fleet would retain a "12 deployable carrier force" by FY 1993:

- The training carrier *Lexington* would "commence inactivation" in April 1991, to be replaced by *Forrestal*, which would start as the trainer in January 1992. Unlike *Lexington*, *Forrestal* would "retain her operational configuration to enable her to resume the combatant role within nine months."
- *Independence* (CV-62) was set to replace *Midway* as the forward-deployed carrier based in Yokosuka, Japan, in August 1991. *Midway* would return to the United States for decommissioning in September 1991, but would "be retained as a mobilization asset" in case *Forrestal* needed replacing in the training mission.
- *Enterprise* was undergoing RCOH, which started in October 1990, and was set to end in April 1994.
- *Constellation*, which started SLEP in July, was set to return to the fleet in late FY 1992; *Constellation's* refit was scheduled to be the end of the SLEP program; the FY 1991 budget contained funding to SLEP *Kennedy* after *Constellation*.

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[87] Jaffe, *Base Force*, 44.

[88] Dick Cheney, *Report to the Secretary of Defense to the President and Congress* (Washington, DC: GPO, January 1991), 66–69.

- In lieu of a projected SLEP, *Ranger* would start decommissioning in FY 1993, to be "retained as a mobilization asset" ready to resume active service after a year of refurbishment if necessary.[89]
- (Not included in the submission to Congress) *Saratoga* was scheduled for deactivation in FY 1995, leaving approximately three years of programmed post-SLEP life on the table.[90]

All told, then, *Forrestal*, *Midway,* and *Ranger* were set to decommission, or leave the active carrier force by FY 1993, with *Saratoga* to follow in FY 1995. This would be partially counteracted by the projected commissioning of *George Washington* in calendar year 1992, and *John C. Stennis* in 1995. While the Navy's internal documents referred to 12 deployable carriers, the new fleet would have a practical limit of 11 deployable carriers once the rolling RCOH program for the *Nimitz*-class CVNs started in the late 1990s.

The Navy's continued usage of "deployable" carriers highlighted a debate still ongoing inside of DOD on how to count carriers, which continued to simmer after Cheney's presentation of the budget in January without the word "deployable." A February 1991 memorandum from Assistant Secretary of Defense for Program Analysis and Evaluation David S. C. Chu directed the Navy to place its carrier counting system in harmony with DOD's:

> [The Navy] should count all carriers, including those in SLEP and nuclear refueling, and should maintain a total of 13 carriers through the end of [FY 2000]. The count should include the training carrier as part of the ship battle forces. Furthermore, we should drop using the term 'deployable,' in order to avoid confusion.
>
> At the moment, the Navy . . . shows the carrier force varying between 12 and 13 units between FY 1991 and 2000. This count drops the SLEP carrier from the force but includes the CVNs undergoing refueling overhauls.[91] It does not count the training carrier in the total ship battle forces. In contrast the DOD Annual Report, which embodies the Secretary's decision to count total carriers, shows 16 carriers in FY 1990, dropping to 13 by FY 1995.

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[89] Vice Admiral Robert J. Kelly (OP-06) to Garrett, "SASC/HASC Reports on Naval Forces," 4 January 1991, Box 13, Folder 3, 1991 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[90] Kelso to Garrett, "USS RANGER (CV-61) AS BACKUP AVT TO USS FORRESTAL (AVT-59), 24 April 1990, Box 15, Folder 1, 1991 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[91] The Navy staff memorandum quoted below claims that the Navy removed RCOH carriers in keeping with Garrett and Kelso's decision to stop counting RCOH carriers as deployable toward the end of 1990.

> Consistently, we reduce the number of carrier air wings to 13 (11 active/2 reserve). Clearly we must maintain consistency between the projected carrier force and the number of air wings supporting it.[92]

Here, Chu may have been considering the political impact of carrier figures. Counting both the training carrier and any ships in SLEP/RCOH gave a somewhat false picture of what forces were available for deployment, as carriers in years-long refits could not deploy and *Forrestal*'s conversion to a training unit was anticipated to remove much of its combat capacity.

Memoranda from OPNAV acquiesced to counting SLEP/RCOH carriers to "avoid future debate with OSD and Congress regarding "'deployable' . . . ships," but balked at counting the training carrier. There were, the memoranda noted, "no plans to maintain the AVT [training carrier] as a modernized CV . . . the Navy does not expect to have the resources required to maintain the AVT in a condition that would allow her to be deployable on short notice." This did not directly contradict, but certainly recast, the Navy's claim to Congress that *Forrestal* would be able to return to full and active service after nine months of refitting. Keeping the AVT in the battle force count would, consequently, "artificially inflate the Navy's true combat capability."[93] Unsurprisingly, the OSD position won out, and in the FY 1993 DOD annual report, the carrier count included "[a]ll aircraft carriers, including ships in extended overhaul and the training carrier."[94]

The carrier-counting dispute, though not the most serious issue facing the service, shows the general tenor of the Navy's lack of bureaucratic successes inside of the Pentagon in 1990–91. Overall, the Navy got very little of what it wanted out of the immediate post–Cold War period. Admiral Trost and Secretary Garrett argued—with self-serving, though reasonably sound logic—that the post-Soviet environment pointed toward a comparatively large investment in the Navy and Marine Corps and a comparatively small investment in the Army and Air Force. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact diminished the utility of the land services' infrastructure in Western Europe and, presumably, increased the importance of the sea services' inherent mobility.

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[92] ASD (PA&E) David S. C. Chu to Garrett, "Counting Aircraft Carriers," 27 February 1991, Box 13, Folder 2, 1991 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[93] OPNAV to Garrett "Counting Aircraft Carriers," and "[Draft] Memorandum for the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Program Analysis & Evaluation): Counting Aircraft Carriers," [March] 1991, Box 13, Folder 2, 1991 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[94] Cheney, *Annual Report to the President and the Congress*, 75.

Cuts, Trost and Garrett argued, were inevitable, but should fall lightly on DON. Indeed, the Navy refused to recommend any cuts to its carrier force structure. President Bush's February 1989 budget freeze, which pushed the Navy from 15 deployable carriers to 14, the 12 deployable carriers in the FY 1992 POM, and, finally, the effective 11 deployable carrier target in the FY 1992/1993 budget: all were fought tooth and nail by the Department of the Navy, which vociferously argued for maintaining whatever its current carrier force structure happened to be.

* * *

The issue of the FY 1992/1993 budget was overshadowed in the Pentagon by Operation Desert Shield, the buildup of forces in the Persian Gulf region after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. In early 1991, Desert Shield evolved into Desert Storm, the successful offensive to eject Iraq's military from Kuwait. Notable for the heavy losses inflicted against few suffered by the U.S.-led coalition, Desert Storm highlighted the successes of DOD's embrace of precision-guided munitions (PGMs), intensive training, and sophisticated battle networks begun in the 1970s. In the wake of Desert Storm, especially its spectacular air campaign, breathless commentators alleged that the U.S. military had created a new style of warfare, a "Revolution in Military Affairs" (RMA) that left potential rivals far behind.

Although the Navy made a large contribution to the success of Desert Shield/Storm, most notably through logistical support, airstrikes, and cruise missiles (the last two closely connected with the RMA concept), the operations also highlighted troubling gaps in the Navy's performance that suggested the service was not as ready for the future environment as it claimed. At sea, the Navy's minesweepers proved unable to prevent damage to *Princeton* (CG-53) and *Tripoli* (LPH-10) from simple Iraqi mines. Though the combat debut of the Navy's Tomahawk cruise missiles succeeded, naval aviation was plagued by shortages in air-dropped PGMs and a lack of connectivity with other services. The Navy/Marine Corps amphibious assets in theater were used for deception, but never seriously considered for a sea-based assault on Iraqi positions.[95]

On the other hand, the Army and Air Force were afforded the opportunity to pursue their Cold War doctrines and operational concepts in rather easier conditions

[95] For a fuller assessment of U.S. Navy performance in Desert Shield/Desert Storm, see Edward J. Marolda and Robert J. Schneller, Jr., *Shield and Sword: The United States Navy and the Persian Gulf War* (Washington, DC:: Naval Historical Center, 1998), 355–85.

Sailors examine GBU-10E/B Paveway II laser-guided bombs aboard *John F. Kennedy* on 16 January 1991, the day before the start of Operation Desert Storm. During the conflict, Navy aviation was hamstrung by a shortage of precision-guided munitions (DIMOC/DN-SC-92-01989).

than they had trained under or prepared for. In most of its particulars, Desert Storm matched the Army's "AirLand Battle" doctrine originally designed to counteract a Warsaw Pact offensive in Germany. Likewise, the air campaign allowed the Air Force, as usual, to tout the efficacy of strategic bombing and interdiction strikes. As a result, both the Air Force and Army came out of Desert Storm able to claim that their extant doctrines were essentially sound and, while manpower and budget cuts were inevitable, that the structure of their forces were well-adapted to the post–Cold War period.

Things were very different in the Department of the Navy. As described later by Admiral William A. Owens, one of Kelso's key allies, the Navy returned from the Gulf "with deep questions about the efficacy of its operational doctrine in the post–Cold War era. . . . The Army and Air Force had a doctrinal cushion upon entering the new era. . . . The Navy did not."[96] This disquiet extended to the realm of service strategy. The Maritime Strategy had been focused on the challenges posed by the Soviet Union and its allies. Absent the Soviet threat, the Navy had to radically change its strategy and force

[96] Admiral William Owens, *High Seas: The Naval Passage to an Uncharted World* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1995), 121–22.

structure. Rightly or wrongly (Desert Storm benefited from an unexpectedly passive enemy in the face of months of massive logistical build-up in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf), Desert Shield/Storm negated the Navy's claims that it was the clear national instrument of choice in regional conflicts in subsequent fights over budgets and strategy.

Just as bad, Desert Storm showed how ill prepared the Navy was for post-GNA joint operations. As per joint doctrine, the responsible combatant commander, Army General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, Jr., ran the conflict from a command post in Riyadh. In keeping with standard naval practice, his major naval subordinates (dual-hatted as commander of the Japan based–Seventh Fleet and Naval Forces Central Command), Vice Admiral Henry H. Mauz, Jr. (to 1 December 1990) and Vice Admiral Stanley R. Arthur, remained aboard the flagship *Blue Ridge* (LCC-19) rather than joining Schwarzkopf in his command center.[97] In addition to giving the impression of a service unconcerned with joint operations, this limited the Navy's influence over events at the combatant command level.

Three aircraft carriers (from left to right: *America, Saratoga,* and *Kennedy*) and escorts photographed in the Red Sea during Desert Storm, 2 February 1991. Six Navy aircraft carriers participated in the operation (DIMOC/DN-ST-91-04916).

[97] Marolda and Schneller, *Shield and Sword*, 366–67. According to this source, Arthur wished to put NAVCENT on a joint footing, including shifting his headquarters ashore, but felt, with combat imminent, that he could not afford to move in the midst of fighting.

Famously, the Navy's command-and-control systems could not interface with the systems used at Central Command's (CENTCOM) Riyadh headquarters to plan air operations. As a result, the massive Air Tasking Order laying out the sortie schedule for the entire Coalition's air component had to be printed and flown to each carrier in the area every day. Further, the Navy played a very small role in the development of operational plans: the Navy and Marine Corps sent approximately 250 personnel to the Riyadh headquarters, compared to nearly 3,000 from the Air Force.[98] In Swartz's words:

> Desert Storm, Desert Shield: holy cow. Goldwater-Nichols kicks in. . . . [Powell and Schwarzkopf] say 'Joint doctrine rules. Joint doctrine wins. And you know what, Navy? If you can't play by joint rules, which you have signed off on, but totally ignored . . . we'll do it without you.' So the Navy got to be part of a doctrinal system it had not practiced or it had not thought about, except to resist when it was busy being written and had ignored after it was written. . . . [The] Navy comes out of Desert Storm saying 'what . . . happened?'[99]

Taken together, the problems unmasked by Desert Storm helped to place the Navy in a firmly reactive role for the remainder of the Bush administration.[100]

One manifestation of the Navy's newly reactive stance was Kelso's first attempt at a policy white paper, "The Way Ahead," written in the winter of 1990–91. Rather than a Navy-only effort, the paper was written under a byline shared by Kelso, Garrett, and Marine Commandant General Alfred M. Gray.[101] Described as an "unstructured, multipurpose, and consensus-driven article that sought to represent the various agendas of its many authors," the paper fizzled due to its poor timing—written before Desert Storm, it was finally published in April and failed to account for any of the alleged lessons of the conflict.[102]

More importantly, "The Way Ahead" functioned mostly as another attempt to argue that naval forces would be "the primary means of preserving U.S. regional influence" after the Cold War, though with more acceptance of reality than Trost's "Maritime Strategy for the 1990s" from the previous year. Instead of focusing on preparing

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[98] "Naval Air Operations: Interservice Cooperation Needs Direction from the Top," GAO Report NSIAD-93-141, May 1993, 16–22.

[99] Swartz, interviewed by Blanton and Peeks, August 2019, NHHC.

[100] Of course, this is arguably the proper role for military departments in DOD, especially after the centralizing reforms of GNA. It was, however, a major change for the Navy, which was accustomed to making a proactive case for its claims for fiscal resources.

[101] Haynes, *Maritime Strategy*, 56–57.

[102] Ibid., 57–59.

"Joint doctrine wins." Powell speaking to sailors aboard *Wisconsin* (BB-64) during Desert Shield, September 1990. Navy leaders came out of Desert Shield/Desert Storm frustrated at the Navy's comparably peripheral role in the conflict compared to those of the Army and the Air Force. This was partially due to the Navy's unwillingness to abide by post–Goldwater-Nichols norms. (DIMOC/DN-SN-93-05003/PH1[AC] Scott Allen)

for high-end naval conflict, "The Way Ahead" turned to "naval power-projection capabilities" as the major mission for U.S. naval forces, backstopped by robust forward presence. Essentially, the article tried to explain how the Navy could operate inside the new national security construct hinted at by President Bush's Aspen speech.[103]

Although it was unsuccessful—"it didn't go anywhere or do anything"—"The Way Ahead" made a radical, if unacknowledged, suggestion regarding forward presence.[104] Among the document's concessions to the end of the Cold War was an acknowledgment that previous patterns of forward presence might not be sustainable with a smaller fleet. Instead of maintaining combat-credible forces in forward hubs, "The Way Ahead" suggested "focused forward presence and *credible surge capability*—more than historical deployment patterns—will dictate peacetime employment of naval forces" (emphasis added).[105] In other words, the Navy was considering abandoning its post–World War II deployment policy of having combat-credible forces overseas in deployment hubs at all times.[106] This future never came to pass, not least because combatant commander demand drove the continuation of a CVBG-based deployment schedule, but "The Way Ahead" provides us a tantalizing hint of alternative deployment patterns that may have eased stress on the fleet during the 1990s.

Peter Haynes has noted that, in the absence of offering a realistic role in fighting foes at sea, this document had the effect of the Navy yoking itself to the Marine Corps' traditional focus on affecting events on land.[107]At any rate, "The Way Ahead" failed to sway Congress. One congressional staffer called the article "an incoherent piece of mush . . . Congress wanted to hear the lessons of Desert Storm." More substantively, the Navy's "forward-station stuff" was losing its purchase on Capitol Hill, affecting the Navy's ability to press for a force structure sized to provide robust forward presence around the world.[108]

A rare piece of positive carrier news for the service in early 1991 came with the submission of DOD's FY 1992/1993 budget, which included $852 million (approximately $1.6 billion in 2019) in advance procurement funding for CVN-76 in FY 1993,

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[103] Garrett, Kelso, and Gray, "The Way Ahead," USNI *Proceedings* (April 1991), 36–47.

[104] Swartz, interviewed by Blanton and Peeks, July 2019, Naval History and Heritage Command.

[105] Garrett, Kelso, and Gray "The Way Ahead," 41.

[106] I am grateful to Peter Swartz for highlighting this facet of "The Way Ahead" in his review of a draft of this manuscript.

[107] Haynes, *Maritime Strategy*, 61–62.

[108] Stan Zimmerman, "Congressional Watch," USNI *Proceedings* (May 1992), 183–84.

with plans to officially procure the carrier in FY 1995.[109] This was a marker that OSD and the White House were committed not just to cutting the carrier force, but also to adding new vessels, gradually increasing the capability of the carrier fleet on a ship-by-ship basis. Importantly, the funding also suggested that the administration took preservation of the carrier industrial base seriously. Otherwise, after CVN-75, already set for construction in 1993, the base would shrivel without another hull on the way.

Even with the $852 million dollars in the prospective FY 1993 budget, the Navy's carrier force was mostly ignored in the congressional debates over the FY 1992/1993 budget, both houses tending to accept the proposed cuts made in DOD's initial budget submission. One assessment of the authorization process concluded that "Congress made no significant reduction" to the administration's request, accepting the Base Force almost in toto.[110] Similarly, DOD's appropriations bill, though facing some resistance about differences between it and the authorization bill, was easily passed.[111]

One issue that did come up, however, was the overhaul for *Kennedy*. In the FY 1991 budget, the Navy requested funds for a planned SLEP of *Kennedy* to start in 1993 at the Philadelphia Navy Yard. Enthusiastic appropriators from the Philadelphia area ended up giving the Navy far more than it asked for to try and secure the yard's future against post–Cold War base closures.[112] In the 1992 budget process, DOD only requested enough funding for a standard overhaul, good for another five years, citing plans to cut down the carrier fleet. Undeterred, Philadelphia-area representatives and Senator Arlen Spector (R-PA) used the appropriations bill to mandate a full SLEP to keep *Kennedy* in service through 2010—and, of course, provide more jobs in the Philadelphia Navy Yard.[113]

With Congress quiescent, and the Base Force in place, the Navy could turn to the issue of service strategy/policy. Having lost all of its internal battles against the Base Force and carrier decommissionings, a new approach was needed to finally replace the Maritime Strategy, which, regardless of its merits, lacked credibility with Congress and the rest of DOD. In the spring of 1991, a group of officers in OP-06 convinced CNO

[109] Raymond Hall, "Selected Weapons Costs from the President's 1992/1993 Program," Congressional Budget Office, 13 May 1991.

[110] *1991 Congressional Quarterly Almanac* (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1992), 393.

[111] Ibid., 621.

[112] Ibid., 818, 825–26.

[113] Ibid., 637.

Kelso that the Navy needed to focus, with the Marine Corps, on "expeditionary warfare in the littoral environment and [serving] as the nation's crisis-response force."[114]

This did not signal a change in the Navy's reliance on carriers, merely a shift in their primary mission. As OPNAV informed Congress in early April, "deployed carrier battle groups are the principal power projection force available to . . . protect American lives and national interests. By routinely operating forward, these forces act as a visible symbol of the United States' commitment to regional stability."[115] Those sentiments were, of course, standard Navy boilerplate on the utility of carriers up and down the spectrum of conflict. New, however, was the absence of any other missions: sea control, ASW, and the like. Now, aircraft carriers were simply floating airbases for regional (as opposed to global) influence and conflicts, especially useful when local nations denied the United States access to bases ashore.

In that spirit, the Navy began changing its plans for the makeup of the carrier air wing. According to Kelso, returning Desert Storm aviators argued that "the Navy should never buy another pure fighter airplane . . . because in the Gulf War they were sitting on deck in [F-14s] doing nothing, because there wasn't anything to fight, and they couldn't drop bombs on the ground."[116] As it happened, Desert Shield/Storm coincided with the cancellation of the troubled A-12 stealth attack aircraft on 7 January 1991. Overweight, over budget, and over schedule, Secretary Cheney could no longer justify the cost of an airplane with a mission—deep strike in the face of advanced Soviet defenses—no longer in the cards.[117]

Instead of designing a new stealthy attack platform, or specialized fleet defense fighter, DOD opted to start development on a multirole strike fighter, the F/A-18 E/F "Super Hornet" that eventually filled all of the fighter, attack, refueling, and electronic warfare roles on carrier decks.[118] The longer-term history of the program is beyond the scope of this study, but it is telling that the impetus for its development came out of this moment. While the Super Hornet is not as well-suited for its missions as pur-

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[114] Haynes, *Maritime Strategy*, 67. Despite a new focus on Marine Corps cooperation and the littorals, the Navy was in the process of decommissioning its battleships, reactivated in part to provide fire support for amphibious operations. The last, *Missouri* (BB-63), decommissioned in early 1992.

[115] OP-06, "SASC/HASC Reports on Naval Forces," 2 April 1991, Box 13, Folder 2, 1991 00 Files, NHHC.

[116] Kelso, *Reminiscences*, 598–99.

[117] James P. Stevenson, *The $5 Billion Misunderstanding: The Collapse of the Navy's A-12 Stealth Bomber Program* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2001), 320.

[118] Initially, Super Hornet coexisted with a joint Air Force-Navy "AX" program to replace the A-12. When that program was canceled in 1993, the Super Hornet was the only option for recapitalization of the Navy's carrier-based attack fleet. [Thomas Hone?], "Major Aircraft Programs: Chronology (through April 2000)," Author's Files.

pose-built attack or fighter aircraft, and lacks range compared to its predecessors in the carrier air group, it was deemed "good enough" for meeting the level of threats anticipated for power projection against regional actors, given that the Navy's carrier force was no longer seen as needing to project power into heavily contested battlespaces.[119] Depending on one's viewpoint, this effort could be proof of either the adaptability of aircraft carriers, able to carry whatever mix of aircraft the Navy needs to fulfill a given strategic niche, or the Navy's irresponsible failure to maintain the variegated carrier air wing needed to confront future threats.[120]

Aside from these semi-voluntary changes to the future air wing, the Navy's attempt at rebranding manifested itself in two ways in 1991: attempts to fight off disagreeable policies from elsewhere in DOD, and the Navy Department's own Force Capabilities Planning Effort (FCPE), which began in October 1991. Chastened by the alleged failures of Desert Shield/Storm, the small FCPE team was given the remit to look at the Navy and Marine Corps from the "bottom-up . . . Nothing was sacred." Although the FCPE could not come up with an alternative force structure before it ended in March 1992—ostensibly the entire point of the effort—its members exited the process convinced that the United States was at least 20 years from the rise of a new potential superpower with the ability to challenge the United States at sea. In the meantime, the FCPE's final report concluded, American naval forces needed to "concentrate on littoral warfare—*a major shift from 'blue water' to shallow water*" (emphasis in original). In other words, the FCPE suggested that the Navy's force structure cuts were not enough; a smaller version of the Cold War fleet was not sufficient for the 1990s.[121]

Whatever its wisdom, this line of thought was entirely impractical. In the fall of 1990, Admiral Kelso noted that the Navy would design no new ships during his tenure as CNO, presumably because of the tremendous costs associated with designing, testing, and building a new class of warship.[122] The Navy continued to build ships, both to keep its specialized industrial base above water, and because the money for some of them had been appropriated and their contracts signed, in the 1980s. These, however, were vessels designed for a blue water, Cold War context.

Regardless of intent, then, the Navy was bound to maintain something like a smaller version of its Cold War fleet well into the 1990s, built around aircraft carriers and

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[119] Jerry Hendrix, "Retreat from Range: The Rise and Fall of Carrier Aviation" (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, 2015), 45–46.

[120] Hendrix's "Retreat from Range" is the standout recent example of the latter position.

[121] Haynes, *Maritime Strategy*, 67–78.

[122] Jaffe, *Base Force*, 39–40.

their escorts. When interviewed years later, Kelso noted that CVBG deployments maintained their centrality to U.S. Navy operations. Perhaps the Navy, the Joint Staff, and the CINCs could cut down on round-the-clock presence requirements or "if a carrier had required nine ships around it historically . . . we could now deploy one with five ships," but the carrier and its escorts remained the building block of the service.[123]

In many ways, the Navy's approach seemed at odds with the Joint Staff's vision for future roles and missions. Staffers from OP-06 spent a great deal of the summer arguing back and forth with the Joint Staff over the latter's drafts of the National Military Strategy (NMS), set for publication in early 1992. Despite Powell's enthusiastic lobbying for the Base Force since late 1989, the 1992 NMS would provide him with the first opportunity to lay out the Base Force in public, on his own terms, and with implicit backing from the President and Secretary. As such, the NMS was, in a sense, more high stakes than such policy documents usually are.

As with every other Base Force–related effort, the Navy took a dim view of the NMS which, OPNAV argued, privileged Air Force and Army concerns over those of the sea services. Over the summer of 1991, the Navy took issue with a draft version of the document that portrayed responding to crises as a "principal" factor in determining force structure. This, according to an OPNAV analysis, "minimiz[ed] the important deterrent contributions of forward presence and peacetime engagement" and, more importantly, ignored forward presence as a force-sizing metric.[124]

This last point was critical to the Navy. The service based its ideal force structure on the forces necessary to maintain some number of forward deployments (e.g., one CVBG in the Mediterranean, one in the Western Pacific (WESTPAC), and two in the Indian Ocean). However, at the OSD/OMB level, the Navy's force structure was, in the words of Admiral Kelso, based on "'how much do you need when you're going to fight?' And that had been large enough to take care of the forward deployment base. But as you get smaller and smaller that is no longer large enough."[125] While the Base Force called for 12 aircraft carriers, the logic behind the Base Force—a focus on smaller, "regional," conflicts—suggested that the Navy could get by with many fewer. After all, only six Navy carriers had been involved in Desert Storm. As it happened, the 1992 NMS

[123] Kelso, *Reminiscences*, 668–69.

[124] Captain Vance Morrison (OP-605K), "Navy Divergent Views on J-5A 02963-91/National Military Strategy," 29 July 1991, Box 16, Folder 2, 1991 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[125] Kelso, *Reminiscences*, 689–90.

was modified to discuss forward presence, but it still reflected Powell's land-centric view of warfare.[126]

More concrete than the NMS was the FY 1993 budget, with its projected $852 million in advance procurement funding for a FY 1995 start on CVN-76. In December 1991, as the FY 1993 budget submission was being finalized, OSD and/or OMB attempted to remove that funding, "on the basis that carriers that recently underwent SLEP [e.g., *Forrestal*] are being retired prematurely."[127] Instead, they proposed removing the AP funding in FY 1993, and the full procurement in FY 1995 in favor of $1.14 billion of AP funding in FY 1997 for a FY 1999 start on the vessel.[128] This was, of course, unacceptable to the Navy, both for the potential effect on the Newport News shipyard—the only yard capable of building CVNs—and the disruption of the Navy's plans to move toward a smaller, but all-nuclear, carrier fleet. Understandably, it set off a flurry of counter-proposals from DON.

In the end, the Navy received something like half of a loaf in the President's Budget. Instead of cancelling the AP funding, and shifting the procurement of CVN-76 to FY 1999, the budget reduced the Navy's AP request form $850 million to $832 million and, though no final decision was stated, DOD announced its intention to shift procurement later than FY 1995.[129] While the Navy certainly preferred a 1995 start, as DON officials knew, the $832 million in AP funding for FY 1993 was the key figure; if Congress approved the funding in the FY 1993 authorization/appropriation process, they were unlikely to cancel CVN-76 after nearly a billion dollars had been spent on acquiring material for the carrier.

Amid significant fights over the Navy's *Seawolf* (SSN-21) program, a replacement for the A-12, and the ballooning cost of the Air Force's B-2 bomber, the $832 million request for aircraft carrier advanced procurement funding proved relatively uncontroversial in Congress. The Senate versions of the appropriations and authorization bills called for $350 million, attempting to push full procurement from FY 1995 to FY 1996, but both houses of Congress firmly supported the need for some AP for CVN-76 and its eventual construction. As it happened, the House voted for the full $832

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[126] Colin L. Powell, "National Military Strategy of the United States," January 1992, 7, 20, 22.

[127] Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Financial Management) Robert O. McCormack to Garrett, "Program Budget Decisions (PBDs) and Defense Management Report Decisions (DMRDs)—OSD/OMB Review of the FY 1993 Budget Adjustment Submission," 20 December 1991, Box 37, Folder 1, 1991 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[128] McCormack to Garrett; Garrett to Comptroller of the Department of Defense Sean O'Keefe, "Major Budget Issues," 12 December 1991, Box 37, Folder 1, 1991 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[129] John F. Morton, "The U.S. Navy in 1991," USNI *Proceedings* (May 1992), 143–44.

million and, after conference negotiations, the final versions of the authorization and appropriations acts mirrored the House version.[130]

While keeping a close eye on the budget process, DON's leadership spent much of 1992 trying to hammer out a new strategy, following on from 1991–92's Force Capabilities Planning Effort.[131] The result, ". . . From the Sea," marked the Navy's capitulation to the vision of the post–Cold War world envisioned by the Base Force and the 1992 National Military Strategy. Rather than articulating a "maritime strategy" of some sort, ". . . From the Sea" laid out "how U.S. naval forces provided the regional CINCs with a greater range of options than could the other U.S. military services." [132]

In other words, rather than viewing the Navy's role as securing control and exploitation of the seas, the service committed itself to "a fundamental shift away from open-ocean warfighting *on* the sea toward joint operations conducted *from* the sea" into the littoral region.[133] Accordingly, this required a wholesale rethink of the Navy: "Mastery of the littoral should not be presumed. It does not derive directly from command of the high seas. It is an objective which requires our focused skills and resources."[134]

More substantively, ". . . From the Sea" focused on the sea services' ability to contribute to high-end fights like Desert Storm. Peter Haynes characterized this rhetorical shift as playing defense against claims of strategic obsolescence: "Undoubtedly [new SECNAV Sean] O'Keefe and Kelso worried that defining the Navy in terms other than major combat operations was politically dangerous."[135] Along those lines, ". . . From the Sea" anticipated future naval combat dominated by power projection: "high intensity, precise offensive power at the time and location [of the Navy and Marine Corps'] choosing under any weather conditions," mostly provided by "the ability to generate high-intensity power projection from the decks of our carriers and expeditionary airfields."[136]

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[130] *1992 Congressional Quarterly Almanac* (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1993), 594, 603.

[131] DON leadership spent far more of its time dealing with the fallout from serious allegations of misconduct leveled at naval aviators in the wake of the September 1991 Tailhook Association Symposium. The "Tailhook Scandal," which lies beyond the scope of this study, left a cloud over the Navy, with many senior leaders, including Kelso and Garrett, accused of overlooking misconduct, or sabotaging subsequent investigations. The highest-profile casualty from the scandal was Secretary Garrett, who resigned under duress in June 1992, to be replaced by Department of Defense Comptroller Sean O'Keefe.

[132] Haynes, *Maritime Strategy*, 80–81.

[133] "Littoral" was defined here as both "[t]he area from the open ocean to the shore (the usual definition) [as well as] "the area inland from shore that can be supported and defended directly from sea."

[134] Sean O'Keefe, Frank B. Kelso, II, and Carl E. Mundy, Jr., ". . . From the Sea: Preparing the Naval Service for the 21st Century," USNI *Proceedings* (November 1992, originally 29 September 1992), 93–94.

[135] Haynes, *Maritime Strategy*, 80.

[136] O'Keefe, Kelso, and Mundy, ". . . From the Sea," 95.

Still, for all the talk of a "fundamental shift" in naval policy, ". . . From the Sea" and concrete reforms relied on the same aircraft carrier battlegroups that had been at the heart of the Navy since 1942, but with changes to the air wing reflecting a lower-threat operating environment. In one sense, this was all the Navy had left. Dating back to the Bush administration's initial attempts to curb the defense budget, OPNAV and the Navy Secretariat consciously determined to maintain as many aircraft carriers as could be fit in the budget—and sometimes more. Even if the service had been so minded, there was no money or appetite for "fundamental" changes to the Navy's way of doing business. Instead, the Navy of the 1990s would be a smaller version of the 1980s fleet, albeit with a lesser ratio of surface vessels to carriers.

This shift was exemplified by changes to the makeup of the standard CVBG. Although ". . . From the Sea" highlighted the allegedly grave threats posed by regional powers in the littorals, CNO Kelso authorized a change in the size of carrier battle groups, from 9 escorting ships to 5, reflecting both the capabilities of newer AEGIS-equipped escorts, and the realities of fielding 12 aircraft carriers on a much smaller budget.[137]At the same time, the primary role of the carrier itself changed from sea control to power projection against overmatched regional powers, which allowed the service to focus on "reliability and sortie generation capabilities" in the carrier air wing over range and payload.[138] In other words, carriers were now viewed as floating airfields in a relatively permissive offshore environment intended to project power ashore.

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From the moment the Bush administration entered office in January 1989, the Navy was caught off guard by its fiscal policies, and spent the next four years trying to escape from a cycle of reaction. These efforts were, to say the least, unsuccessful, culminating in ". . . From the Sea," which tried to define the service's post–Cold War mission, after one had already been imposed on it by OSD and the Joint Staff. Between 1989 and 1993, the U.S. Navy was never able to articulate a forward-looking explication of its future mission and force structure in a manner that proved convincing to policymakers. This was hardly a unique failing, but was exacerbated by the Navy's initial hostility

[137] Kelso, *Reminiscences*, 668–69. This requirement was recently changed to "five to seven air and missile defense-capable large surface combatant ships," in OPNAVINST 3501.316C (10 November 2017), reflecting changes in the threat environments back toward great power competition.

[138] Hendrix, *Retreat from Range*, 46.

to General Powell's more-or-less successful Base Force initiative, which eventually imposed some stability on DOD planning.

The rapid collapse of Soviet power clearly deserves the lion's share of the blame for the Navy's inability to get in front of events, but the Navy's strategic and policy apparatus failed to proactively generate a post-Soviet raison d'être. Admiral Trost's "Maritime Strategy for the 1990s" was the most notable hiccup, simultaneously a narrowly correct application of themes from the Navy's 1980s strategic renaissance, and a woefully inept piece of public messaging. Although the next CNO wisely ditched the Maritime Strategy's framing of the situation, Admiral Kelso's relative disinterest in strategy was highlighted by "The Way Ahead" and ". . . From the Sea," which yoked the Navy to the Marine Corps' amphibious strategy.

It appears that the Navy's leadership blithely assumed that the sea services would receive a larger share of a shrinking Defense pie compared to the Air Force and Army, which had spent the past decades preparing for Armageddon in the Fulda Gap. In the absence of the fixed Soviet threat, the thinking went, it was only natural that the land services would dismantle their costly infrastructure in Western Europe and retrench in the United States, allowing the Navy–Marine Corps team to use its inherent mobility to intervene in brushfire wars elsewhere.

This line of thinking, though logical, failed to account for the predictable forces of interservice rivalry and the unpredictable impact of Desert Shield/Storm. The former, of course, is an evergreen problem in defense affairs. Even assuming that the Navy's stance was a matter of fact, neither the Air Force nor the Army were of a mind to allow themselves to be neutralized, and they busily set about crafting missions for themselves in the post–Cold War world. In this, they were aided by the Gulf War, which "proved" that the Army and Air Force had a role to play in regional conflicts—conveniently ignoring several months of unmolested build-up in Saudi Arabia—and ostensibly validated their late–Cold War doctrines for the future. When combined with the Navy's underwhelming performance in the conflict (mostly, it should be said, due to the service's grudging attitude toward joint operations), the empirical evidence appeared to rebut the Navy's claim of special utility in regional conflicts.

Just as important, General Powell tended to ignore Navy concerns while framing the Base Force. Though ecumenical for a senior military leader, he lacked a detailed understanding of the maritime sphere. The Base Force may not have been, in the words of Rear Admiral J. C. Wylie, a "power grab" by the land-based services intent on trying to "rob [the Navy] blind," but it is clear that Powell suffered from a sort of "sea blindness" in developing his proposals, which earlier Navy engagement may have

ameliorated.[139] Instead, the Navy was left to respond to Powell's proposals from a position of weakness, unable to secure, as the Marine Corps did, partial relief from his force structure caps.

Rather than explicating a specific strategy or force structure, Navy resourcing and programming efforts during the Bush administration revolved around the preservation of a certain *type* of force structure, a fleet built around as many aircraft carriers as OSD, Congress, and the White House were willing to sanction. At times the inputs were at odds—over the space of four years the Navy claimed 15, then, 14, then 13, then 12 "deployable" carriers as the bare minimum required—but the flailing eventually worked. Secretary Cheney's last annual report projected a carrier fleet strength of 13 in 1999, down from 15 in 1987. Over the same period, the attack submarine fleet was projected to shrink from 102 hulls to 70 and surface combatants from 209 to 147.[140]

Two sailors salute during the retirement ceremony for *Midway*, 11 April 1992. The second aircraft carrier decommissioned during the Bush administration, it would be followed by three more in the next two years (DIMOC/DN-ST-96-00432/PHCM Terry Mitchell).

[139] J. C. Wylie, "Heads Up, Navy," USNI *Proceedings*, May 1991, 17–18.
[140] Cheney, *FY 1994 Annual Report*, 82.

Indeed, the plans for the Navy's carrier force included construction of CVN-76 in or near FY 1995, and continued support for construction of CVN-75 in 1993, offsetting the "early" retirement of *Ranger* and *Saratoga* along with the planned conversion of *Forrestal* to training duty. Based on raw force structure and construction, no single part of the Navy's fleet came out of the Bush administration in better shape than its carriers.[141] Unlike other parts of the fleet, the aircraft carriers also came out of the Bush years with a mission. The place of, say, *Los Angeles*–class attack submarines or *Ticonderoga*-class cruisers designed for specific missions in a Soviet war were up in the air. On the other hand, the new power-projection primary mission for the Navy's carriers was essentially stable.

How, then, can we assess 1989–1993 from the vantage point of carrier requirements? From the perspective of programmers in the Secretariat or OPNAV, these were four years of unremitting failure. From the perspective of strategists, as ably captured by Peter Haynes, the Maritime Strategy collapsed, without a similarly comprehensive vision. On the other hand, Navy leadership successfully preserved their vision of a carrier-defined fleet, where CVBGs remained the preeminent tool of naval power. Given the Navy's lack of a firm strategic vision during these years, merely retaining a large carrier fleet was probably the best possible outcome for the service.

[141] There was a major decline in the number of ballistic missile submarines, from 37 in 1987 to 18 in 1999, but that reflected the aging out of older boats, which were replaced by newer boats with more and better missiles.

4

The Clinton Administration

1993–2001

In contrast to his predecessor, William J. Clinton came to the White House with little experience or, seemingly, interest in national security affairs. Although Clinton attacked his predecessor's foreign policy record during the campaign, deriding it as insufficiently dynamic, it was hardly his major focus. In the wake of Operation Desert Storm, the Clinton campaign shied away from those issues, considered strengths of President Bush, and focused on the domestic matters—"It's the economy, stupid"—that led to electoral success in November 1992.[1] During the early years of the administration, Clinton and his advisors charted a delicate course between their stated goals of reducing defense spending and, as the 1992 party platform put it, "projecting power wherever our vital national interests are threatened."[2] In practice, the Clinton administration took a generous view of "vital national interests," and the years between 1993 and 2001 were filled with interventions and crisis response around the world, including the Persian Gulf, the former Yugoslavia, Haiti, and Somalia. More often than not, naval forces formed a major component of U.S. forces on the scene.

This proved to be a double-edged sword for the Navy. On one hand, the Navy's role in these interventions was valued by the executive, which, for the first time, explicitly codified crisis response and forward presence as drivers of force structure in the 1993 Bottom-Up Review. On the other hand, this acknowledged utility did not prevent the

[1] For a discussion of Clinton's foreign policy in the 1992 campaign, see Derek Chollet and James Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars from 11/9 to 9/11: The Misunderstood Years Between the Fall of the Berlin Wall and the Start of the War on Terror* (New York: Public Affairs, 2008), 29–52.

[2] Democratic National Committee, *1992 Democratic Party Platform*, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project,* https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/273264.

Navy from taking significant cuts in sailors (from 510,000 to 373,000 between 1993 and 2000), ships (from 435 to 318 in the battle force), and a reduced, though still significant, budget hit (from approximately $159 billion in FY 1993 to $138 billion in FY 2000, measured in 2019 dollars) during the Clinton years. Taken together, these cuts made it difficult for the Navy to balance enduring obligations, recapitalization, and maintenance with crisis response.[3]

Perhaps the best symbol of this paradigm was the Global Naval Force Presence Policy (GNFPP), an annual Joint Staff–drafted document that, essentially, set the schedule and location for Navy CVBG and ARG deployment in line with combatant command requests and national policy. However, GNFPP, "established to provide peacetime distribution of Naval resources to support geographic combatant commander's [sic] requirements [for forward presence]," privileged the perceived needs of combatant commanders over Navy concerns surrounding maintenance and OPTEMPO. Though in theory taking advantage of the flexibility of naval forces, in practice, GNFPP handcuffed Navy assets to particular geographic areas for particular periods of time during the year.[4]

Though the GNFPP started in 1991, during the Clinton years it took on increasing prominence as funding and ship counts dropped, and GNFPP-mandated deployments absorbed more and more of the Navy's end strength. As early as 1993, one senior admiral argued that, although the GNFPP was originally premised on the idea that the Navy "could not meet existing commitments with 12 CV's [sic]," the requirements for naval presence had continued to rise, especially in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, to a point that was difficult for the service to sustain in the long term.[5] While the Navy's leadership remained firmly behind the forward presence mission, which, after all, provided a secure niche in the Clinton administration's defense strategy, they continued to argue that the mission required more resources than OSD, the White House, and Congress were willing to provide.

Due in part to the new focus on forward presence, the Navy's carrier force weathered the Clinton years quite well in terms of raw numbers. In all, the Navy lost ap-

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[3] Peter M. Swartz with Karin Duggan, *The U.S. Navy in the World (1991–2000): Context for U.S. Navy Capstone Strategies and Concepts* (Alexandria, VA: CNA, December 2011), slide 70.

[4] Commander Raymond F. Keledei, "Naval Forward Presence," 23 October 2006, https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a463587.pdf, 5. Unfortunately, the GNFPP documents themselves remain classified.

[5] Vice Admiral Leighton W. Smith, N3/N5, to VCNO Admiral Stanley R. Arthur, "CVBG Presence," 5 March 1993, Box 4, Folder N-3051 to N-3100, 1993 VCNO Files, NHHC OA. Readers will recall that a similar commitment to carrier presence in the northern Arabian Sea/Persian Gulf in the late 1970s and early 1980s placed tremendous strain on the Navy and its sailors.

proximately 27 percent of its battle force ships between 1993 and 2000, compared to a 20 percent drop in carriers, from 15 to 12 (the drop, of course, is more precipitous if we use the end of the Cold War as the starting point). Compared to the 20 percent drop in carriers, a nearly 40 percent drop in attack submarines (88 to 56) and a nearly 50 percent drop in auxiliary vessels (oilers, tenders, replenishment ships, etc.—110 to 57) occurred over the same period. Although the Navy's own ship counts should be treated with extreme caution, as categorization and counting rules change over time, these figures give a sense of the magnitude of the changes experienced.[6]

Even those raw numbers obscure the story somewhat, since they include the July 1993 retirement of *Ranger*, put in motion by the outgoing Bush administration. More important, though, is the nature of the changes to the carrier fleet. Five carriers were decommissioned between 1993 and 2000: the four oldest carriers in the fleet, plus *America* in 1996. Four of these carriers were retired with a handful of post-SLEP service years remaining, but they were clearly on their last legs (the fifth, *Ranger*, never received a SLEP overhaul). On the other hand, the Navy commissioned two new carriers, in 1995 and 1998, with another under construction and plans for an advanced new class of carriers when President Clinton left office, mitigating the drop in hulls with ships that were, in theory, more capable.

Beyond the drop in carrier hulls, significant changes also occurred in the composition of the carrier air wing. Due to a combination of cost cutting, a focus on power projection, aging airframes, and the failure of the A-12 program, the size of the carrier air wing shrank and tilted away from specialized ASW, fighter, and attack aircraft toward variants of the F/A-18 Hornet. Looking just at tactical (fighter and attack) aircraft, the standard carrier air wing shifted from 60 aircraft (20 F-14, 24 F/A-18, 16 A-6) to the "littoral" air wing of 14 F-14s and 36 Hornets, with no real replacement for the long range and heavy payload of the A-6.[7] As Jerry Hendrix has noted, these changes showed that "the short-ranged, light attack mission [had] crowded out other capabilities" once provided by the air wing.[8]

The Clinton years also brought about a change in how carriers were discussed by Congress and the executive. While aircraft carrier construction had been a major part of the economy of Hampton Roads since World War II, prior discussions of carrier

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[6] NHHC, "U.S. Ship Force Levels," https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/us-ship-force-levels.html.

[7] Les Aspin, *Annual Report to the President and the Congress* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1994), 182–83; William J. Perry, *Annual Report to the President and the Congress* (Washington, DC: GPO, February 1995), 202.

[8] Hendrix, *Retreat from Range*, 47.

requirements tended to be couched in the language of national defense strategies and the balance of power. This is not, of course, to say that Virginia's senators and the region's representatives lacked a keen appreciation of their constituents' interest in carrier production. However, the tenor of debate changed. The requirement to build CVN-76, the only carrier fully appropriated and contracted during the 1993–2000 period (a second, CVN-77, was appropriated in the last Clinton budget and contracted in early 2001), was couched as part of an industrial policy designed to reduce disruption to Newport News Shipbuilding. In explaining the decision to pursue funding for CVN-76, for example, the administration's Bottom-Up Review of DOD explicitly noted that delaying construction "would be a high risk for the shipbuilder [that] would threaten the shipbuilder's viability."[9]

Carrier requirements were also affected by DOD's embrace of the "Revolution in Military Affairs" (RMA). While advanced technology had always played a major role in Cold War defense policy, starting with the 1970s "Offset Strategy," the U.S. military increasingly portrayed technological advances as providing a unique, asymmetrical, *conventional* advantage over the Soviet Union's larger military. After Desert Storm, advocates went even further with a "profoundly technological view . . . that seemed to beckon the Armed Forces into a new golden age of enhanced effectiveness."[10] Advanced technology was itself "a powerful instrument of foreign and security policy. . . .The U.S. technological edge can pay off in deterrence, particularly with respect to regional predators."[11] At the same time, the force multiplier effect of technology held out the potential of retaining the military's effectiveness even with a reduced force structure.

What did this mean for the Navy? In 1995, Admiral William Owens, then VCJCS, described a

> move toward a more modern, capable force as we reduce the number of active-duty ships, even if that means decommissioning some ships that have considerable service life left. We will do this within the constraints of a

[9] Les Aspin, "Report on the Bottom-Up Review," October 1993, 52–53.

[10] Dima Adamsky, *The Culture of Military Innovation: The Impact of Cultural Factors on the Revolution in Military Affairs in Russia, the US, and Israel* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 75. The full story, as always, is rather more complicated. As Adamsky lays out, the U.S. military developed the enabling technologies for the RMA without conceptualizing the new capabilities as a revolutionary. That frame of reference was first posited by Soviet military intellectuals and exported to the United States through the Pentagon's Office of Net Assessment. Through ONA's advocacy, DOD eventually adopted some, though by no means all, of the Soviet theorists' precepts as influential organizing principles behind defense policy in the 1990s.

[11] Admiral William Owens, *High Seas: The Naval Passage to an Uncharted World* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1995), 51–52.

> declining budget because we will decommission more ships than we build . . . The recapitalization will feature a technological drive towards omniscience, synergistic integration, immune power projection, and support for the ground battlefield. . . . [A]n important metamorphosis will be under way by the end of the decade.[12]

This new force would have increased ability to put precision weapons on target, coordinate with other services, and operate in the littorals, backstopped by a dramatic growth in communications capacity. While the role of aircraft carriers would seem precarious in this vision of the future, the Navy's civilian and military leadership continued to view them as the fundamental building block of American naval power.

While the RMA would have an impact on everything the U.S. military did in the Clinton years, its main effect for Navy carrier requirements and acquisition came with two ships whose construction fall outside the scope of this project: the future *George H. W. Bush* (CVN-77) and *Gerald R. Ford* (CVN-78). However, the designs of these ships, started in earnest in the mid-1990s as part of the CVX program, forced the Navy to consider just how much transformation was desirable or affordable in new designs.

Although the Clinton years featured few of the brawls over carrier funding that marked previous administrations, critical decisions were taken during the years 1993–2001 that continue to shape the Navy's carrier force. It was during this period that the changes mooted in 1991 were turned into enduring policy, moving the Navy away from sea command toward exercising power "from the sea." Likewise, the mid–late 1990s saw the elevation of the carrier force's forward presence mission over other capabilities. The preservation of a relatively large carrier fleet came at the cost of readiness and force structure elsewhere in the Navy.

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When President Clinton entered office on 20 January 1993, the carrier force stood at 15 hulls, with major changes on the way. The future *John C. Stennis* (CVN-74) was nearing completion and the future *Harry S. Truman* (CVN-75) was ten months from keel laying at Newport News. Both ships had passed through the gauntlet of President Bush's defense cuts, a testament of sorts to Secretary Lehman's decision to press for two carriers in the FY 88 Defense budget—with construction contracts in place on 30

[12] Owens, *High Seas*, 145–46.

June 1988, cancelling them would have been an expensive fight.[13] Previously scheduled cuts to the active carrier force included *Ranger*, which had already started the decommissioning process, and *Saratoga*, slated for deactivation in FY 1995. *Forrestal*, designated as the new training carrier, was several months into a refit to optimize it for its new role at the Philadelphia Navy Yard.[14] The most immediate carrier issue was the fate of CVN-76. AP funding had been passed as part of the FY 1993 budget, but the bulk of funding for the ship had yet to be appropriated.

Some elements of Clinton's campaign prompted concern within the Navy about the future of the carrier force. On the campaign trail, Clinton focused on domestic issues, chastising President Bush for focusing on global affairs to the detriment of the American economy, while at the same time eschewing a concrete national security program. At one point, he intimated that the Navy's ideal carrier strength was 10 hulls, although he also announced support for construction of CVN-76.[15] To the extent that Clinton and the Democrats had a coherent foreign policy vision, it focused on providing economic and diplomatic support to emerging democracies, downplaying the use of hard power.[16]

Faced with this uncertainty, the Navy was unsurprisingly concerned about what the next administration had in store. During the Bush-Clinton transition, a memorandum signed by the DCNO for Resources, Warfare Requirements, and Assessment (N8), Vice Admiral William Owens, suggested that the service should try and align "Naval Forces employment policy with State Department foreign policy efforts to create a coordinated security program [which] can do much . . . to reinforce the importance of the Navy/Marine team," which would have had the effect of putting the Navy closer to

[13] Naval Vessel Register, "USS JOHN C STENNIS (CVN 74)," https://www.nvr.navy.mil/shipdetails/shipsdetail_cvn_74.html and "USS HARRY S TRUMAN (CVN 75)," https://www.nvr.navy.mil/shipdetails/shipsdetail_cvn_75.html. Originally set to be named *United States*, CVN-75's final name was a poignant irony for those who remembered that its new namesake canceled the "super-carrier" *United States* in 1949.

[14] Mark L. Evans, "*Forrestal* (CVA-59)," 2 August 2007, *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/f/forrestal-cva-59.html.

[15] Scott C. Truver, "Tomorrow's Fleet," USNI *Proceedings*, May 1993, 226.

[16] Chollet and Goldgeier, *America Between the Wars*, 37–43.

the incoming administration's stated instincts.[17] Far more concerning, of course, was Clinton's campaign pledge to cut $60 billion (approximately $107 billion in 2019) from Bush's final five-year spending plan.[18]

As previously mentioned, President Clinton entered office with a hands-off attitude toward managing national security affairs, and the driving force behind the administration's initial defense policy was Clinton's first Secretary of Defense, Leslie "Les" Aspin, Jr., who brought with him a deep knowledge of defense affairs. Previously a representative from Wisconsin and chair of the House Armed Services Committee, Aspin had a reputation for knowledgeable oversight of Pentagon spending. Prior to entering Congress, Aspin had served in the Army during the Vietnam War, working in Secretary McNamara's OSD.[19]

Although Aspin entered the Pentagon with a mandate to make further defense cuts, the Navy had some cause for cheer. As HASC Chairman during the development of Bush's Base Force, Aspin pursued a proactive strategy, developing his own cheaper alternatives to the Base Force's structure, eventually presenting four options ("Forces A–D") in February 1992. For carriers, these options ranged from a low of 6 in "Force A" to a high of 15 in "Force D" (though, interestingly, his 15-carrier Navy still had fewer ships than the Base Force: 430 as opposed to 450).[20] Of those alternatives, his preferred option, "Force C" "ha[d] a distinctly nautical flavor," maintaining 12 carriers and 12 big-deck amphibious assault ships.[21]

Assuming he still maintained those views after the election, this endpoint was about the best the Navy could expect on the carrier front. However, instead of moving to implement his plans upon taking office, Aspin opted to hold off on immediate

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[17] Vice Admiral William Owens to CNO, "Major Department of the Navy Issues and Actions Likely to Require Attention During Jan–Jun 93," 28 December 1992, Folder 1, Subject Files 7000-13000 DCN Jan-Mar, 1993 00 Files, NHHC OA. One of Kelso's signature initiatives as CNO was a 1992 reorganization of OPNAV. In addition to replacing the old "OP" codes with "N' codes in harmony with Joint Staff "J" codes, the reorganization aimed to reduce the influence of the over-mighty three-star "platform barons," who controlled acquisition and budgeting in the air, surface, and underwater domains. Those three roles, now downgraded to two-star posts, were initially placed under N8 (initially Vice Admiral William Owens, a fellow submariner), who "had the staff authority to establish requirements for future naval forces, allocate money among those requirements, and judge the implications and effectiveness of the allocations." With the ability to align strategy and resources, N8 became very much *primus inter pares* inside of OPNAV. Owens, *High Seas*, 125–26.

[18] Haynes, *Maritime Strategy*, 90.

[19] Charles A. Stevenson, *SECDEF: The Nearly Impossible Job of Secretary of Defense* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2006), 91–92.

[20] Mark A. Gunziger, "Beyond the Bottom-Up Review," (Individual Research Project, National Defense University, 1996), https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a430015.pdf, 5.

[21] Ned Hogan, "Clinton, Congress . . . Confusion," USNI *Proceedings*, May 1993.

changes. In a move characteristic of his term in office, the new SECDEF decided to conduct a wide-ranging "Bottom-Up Review" (BUR) of "the nation's defense strategy, force structure, modernization, infrastructure, and foundations," which would set the agenda for the administration's long-term defense plans.[22]

The BUR finished in October 1993, but, in the meantime, the Clinton administration, like its predecessor, demanded cuts to the Defense budget prepared immediately before it entered office. On 28 January, OSD told the military departments to prepare cuts in the FY 1994 budget, with about $2-3 billion to come out the Navy Department's accounts. These cuts were initially due to OSD on 8 February, giving the services no more than seven working days to hit the target.[23]

These cuts worked out to about 3.5 percent of the Navy's $82 billion FY 1994 budget. Navy leadership had already acknowledged that the post–Cold War world required a new force structure and made up most of the cuts by accelerating the retirement of ships and aviation units while also reducing the number of sailors. More importantly for our purposes, the projected Navy cuts also included two carriers: *Saratoga* and *Forrestal*.[24]

The *Saratoga* decision simply moved its decommissioning date from FY 1995 to FY 1994, but the *Forrestal* decision was rather more major. The Bush administration had decided to make *Forrestal* the Navy's new training carrier, replacing the elderly *Lexington* (AVT-16, first commissioned in 1943). Unlike *Lexington*, *Forrestal* could also embark a full air wing if events demanded, giving the Navy the theoretical ability to provide 12 carriers for a major war.[25] Decommissioning *Forrestal* also incurred major sunk costs; the ship had been at Philadelphia Navy Yard since 14 September 1992 undergoing a refit to prepare the ship better for the training mission.[26]

Arguably, the *Forrestal* decision marked an inflection point for the Navy's carrier force. Prior cuts had hastened the retirement of superannuated ships, but *Forrestal,* on the basis of *Lexington*'s career, could have had a long life as a training ship. *Coral Sea* and *Midway*, decommissioned in 1990 and 1992 respectively, were World War

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[22] Aspin, "Report on the Bottom-Up Review," iii.

[23] Acting Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Financial Management) Albert V. Conte to Acting Secretary of the Navy Admiral Frank B. Kelso, "FY94 Budget Adjustments," 28 January 1993 and Acting Department of Defense Comptroller Donald B. Shycroft, "FY 1994 Defense Budget Adjustments," 28 January 1993, Folder 1, Subject Files 7000-13000 DCN Jan–Mar, 1993 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[24] [OPNAV?] Draft Memorandum to Secretary Aspin, "FY 1994 Budget Adjustments," 6 February 1993, Folder 1, Subject Files 7000-13000 DCN Jan–Mar, 1993 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[25] Vice Admiral Robert J. Kelly (OP-06) to Secretary of the Navy Garrett, "SASC/HASC Reports on Naval Forces," 4 January 1991, Box 13, Folder 3, 1991 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[26] Evans, "*Forrestal.*"

Saratoga being scrapped at the Sparrows Point yard in Baltimore. It was one of five carriers decommissioned during the Clinton administration as plans made in 1989–93 took effect (DIMOC/DN-SC-94-01460/Marty Goppert).

II–era ships clearly on their last legs. *Ranger*, though newer, had never undergone a SLEP. *Saratoga* had been the first carrier to go through a SLEP refit and so its retirement left only a few years of post-SLEP life on the table. Even setting aside the money already spent on *Forrestal*, its prospective decommissioning left the Navy without a dedicated training ship, forcing the Navy to use an active carrier to certify new aviators and refresh reservists. Given the Navy's already tight schedule of forward presence deployments, it was an added commitment the service could ill afford.

Even with these changes to the FY 1994 budget, Aspin's ongoing Bottom-Up Review still loomed over the services. Inside of OPNAV, the N8, Vice Admiral William Owens, decided to avoid another round of last-minute budget realignment by trying to anticipate the Navy's future shape in a resource-constrained environment. In a move that probably came a few years too late, Owens elected to get ahead of BUR by developing a plan, "Force 2001," that attempted to show how the Navy could weather

Clinton's promised $60 billon cuts and deploy a force capable of fulfilling the tenets of ". . . From the Sea."[27]

In the end, Force 2001 hardly matched the ambition of ". . .From the Sea." Instead of shifting the Navy's force structure toward littoral combat, Force 2001 presented a smaller fleet that kept the Cold War's relative distribution of resources mostly intact, save for steep cuts in the submarine force. Unsurprisingly, the category of warship least affected were the aircraft carriers, where Owens did not anticipate any force structure cuts beyond the already-mentioned decommissionings of *Ranger*, *Saratoga*, and *Forrestal*.[28] The number of amphibious lift ships, ostensibly critical to the new strategy's littoral focus, was actually anticipated to fall under Force 2001. Still, it is instructive to note that Owens and the Navy—like Powell in 1990—received praise from Congress and OSD for putting forth their own cuts.[29]

Contrary to criticisms of the Navy's plans in 1989–1992, policymakers evidently did not want to see a new Navy strategy so much as they wanted to see a cheaper fleet—the composition of the fleet could be left to the service. As one senior OPNAV admiral admitted, Owens's Force 2001 was "motivated in part by the *need* to protect the twelve-carrier fleet [emphasis added]."[30] This target, as before, still included new construction. Alongside Force 2001's cuts, the Navy still intended to secure full funding for CVN-76 in the FY 1995 budget.[31]

Previously derided by the Navy's leadership as insufficient, 12 carriers had quickly become the central tenet of Navy force structure planning, with the service not just planning to keep 12 previously built carriers in service, but continuing to build them at the expense of other warships. This tenet was shared by the entire organization, regardless of warfare community. In a 1998 interview, Kelso credited this unanimity for the Navy's eventual success in obtaining an eventual 12-carrier commitment from the White House and OSD.[32]

To sound as joint as possible, this target was often couched in the language of combatant commander requests as mediated through the GNFPP. As Navy comments on a February 1993 GAO report noted, "[c]ombatant commanders continue to demand continuous carrier presence in flashpoint regions of the world," going on to note that the

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[27] Owens, *High Seas*, 158, and Haynes, *Maritime Strategy*, 90–91.

[28] Owens, *High Seas*, 144.

[29] Haynes, *Maritime Strategy*, 90–91.

[30] Ibid., 91.

[31] [DON], "Department of the Navy FY 1994/1995 Budget Presentation to the Deputy Secretary of Defense," 12 May 1993, Folder 7000, Apr–June, 5000-7000 DCN, Apr–Jun, 1993 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[32] Tom Hone, notes from interview with Admiral Kelso, 7 April 1998, author's files, 5.

budget adjustments made in February had already "reduce[d] our operational flexibility to meet [National Command Authority] and CINC established requirements for overseas presence." In other words, further cuts to the Navy's carrier force would not just harm the Navy, but also the ability of joint commanders to protect *national* interests abroad."[33]

The real test of the desired 12-carrier standard, however, was Aspin's BUR. As with Powell's Base Force, the Navy was somewhat left out in the cold in its deliberations. While, naturally, naval officers were involved in the review, it appears that the BUR's decision-making, seated in OSD, remained somewhat opaque to the Navy. At one point in June, Navy leaders resorted to examining articles in *Aviation News* to try to figure out the shape of the BUR's future force.[34]

As it happened, the BUR provided as much good news for the Navy as was possible in the 1993 fiscal and strategic environment. Building on the success of Desert Storm, the BUR committed the United States to "win two major regional conflicts (MRCs) that occur nearly simultaneously."[35] To do that, the nation required, among other things, 4–5 carrier battle groups per major conflict.[36] In addition to the forces needed for the MRCs, the BUR emphasized the need to provide forces specifically for forward presence, in this case an 11th active aircraft carrier. Finally, the BUR also allowed for a 12th reserve/training carrier, *John F. Kennedy*, with the capability for "occasional forward presence operations."[37]

It is worth noting here that the Navy's vision for the reserve/training carrier was far more robust than the role of the venerable *Lexington* or the role mooted for *Forrestal* before its decommissioning. While *Lexington* was a pure trainer, and *Forrestal* was to be capable of embarking an air wing in extremis, *Kennedy* was "not a replacement for the AVT," but instead "an operational asset . . . provid[ing] a readily available surge capability," as well as periodic forward deployments.[38]

More importantly, the forward presence requirement was a godsend for the Navy. While the service and the Navy Department had long recognized forward presence demands as a driver of force structure—recall that Secretary Lehman's 15-carrier fleet

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[33] Vice Admiral Smith to VCNO Arthur, "Weaknesses and Deficiencies in GAO Report to the Congress 'Navy Carrier Battle Groups [:] The Structure and Affordability of the Future Force,'" 7 April 1993," Folder N-3051 to N-3100, Box 4, 1993 VCNO Files, NHHC OA, 1–3.

[34] Vice Admiral Smith to CNO Kelso, "Read-Ahead for Saturday 'Bottom-Up' Review Session," 11 June 1993, Folder 3, Subject Files 1000-3000 DCN Apr–Jun, 1993 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[35] Aspin, "Report on the Bottom-Up Review," October 1993, 7.

[36] Ibid., 19.

[37] Ibid., 51.

[38] Kelso, "Removal of H.R. 2401 Language Concerning the Aviation Training Carrier," Memorandum for the Record, 30 September 1993, Box 11, Folder 1, 1993 00 Files, NHHC OA.

was explicitly sized to support the forward deployment of five CVBGs—this argument had never been accepted by OSD as a formal force-sizing metric. Instead, the Navy was expected to fulfill its forward presence mission from a force structure developed to fight a major war.[39] This was no longer possible with a wartime need for 8–10 carriers, which would only provide full-time presence in one region, and 50 percent presence in two others.[40]

Also welcome to the Navy was the BUR's decision on carrier construction. While the option of delaying CVN-76 from FY 1995 to FY 2000 was examined, that option was declined based on the risk to Newport News Shipbuilding. According to the BUR, that delay "would threaten the shipbuilder's viability by 1997," and potentially force the acquisition of several carriers in the FY 2000–2008 period to replace aged-out CVs. Instead, the BUR stuck with the Bush administration's plans to procure CVN-76 in FY 1995, while delaying the very preliminary plans to start AP funding for CVN-77 in FY 1999.[41]

While the BUR shrank the Navy's target end strength from the Base Force's 450 to 346, it certified the Navy's 12-carrier target and, even better, validated the Navy's long-standing belief that forward presence demanded consideration as a force-sizing metric. Peter Haynes has argued that the BUR shows the success of the Navy's attempts to reorient itself post–Cold War, forging a "relationship between the Navy, foreign presence, and Clinton's foreign policy goals. . . . The Navy's success raised the ire of the Air Force and the Army, which were jealous of the Navy's ability to demonstrate its relevance across the spectrum of conflict by emphasizing the flexibility of naval forces."[42] Further, by providing administration support for CVN-76 (appropriations, of course, were Congress's business), it strongly implied that the Navy's carrier battle group–based force structure was secured for the foreseeable future.

Overall, the BUR was undergirded by Aspin's initial assertion that the military could fulfill the missions of the Base Force with less money and a smaller force compared to the Base Force. Where the Base Force cut budgets 10 percent and force structure 25 percent from their highs in the mid-1980s, the BUR went to 40 and 33 percent, respectively. This, as an uncomplimentary assessment of the BUR noted, was a dangerous assumption:

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[39] Kelso, *Reminiscences*, 689-90.

[40] Aspin, "Report on the Bottom-Up Review," 51–54.

[41] Ibid., 51-3.

[42] Haynes, *Maritime Strategy*, 102.

Secretary of Defense Les Aspin aboard *Theodore Roosevelt* (CVN-71) on 12 March 1993. In his brief time as SECDEF, Aspin cemented the post–Cold War cuts started in the Bush administration, with his Bottom-Up Review of the Department of Defense. From the Navy's perspective, Aspin was most notable for formally validating forward presence as a driver of aircraft carrier force structure (DIMOC/DN-SC-93-03264/PH1 Bob McRoy).

> In short, BUR policymakers stated their aim to accomplish with a smaller force what the Base Force would do only with great difficulty, and placing it near its breaking point—providing a capability to fight two nearly simultaneous major conflicts. Furthermore, this force would also be employed in peace, humanitarian, and other non-warfighting operations to a much greater degree than had been envisions in the Base Force and was said to require $104 billion less than the Bush baseline had provided for the Base Force. This tenuous balance between strategy, forces, and resources struck in the BUR would set the stage for many of the problems encountered over the years that followed.[43]

Indeed, despite getting what it wanted from the BUR, the Navy would discover that its mission set and funding profile placed major strain on the entire fleet.

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[43] Eric V. Larson, David T. Orletsky, and Kristin Leuschner, *Defense Planning in a Decade of Changes* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001), 55.

Beyond the BUR, there was still the matter of the FY 1994 Defense budget, which came at an awkward time. Primarily developed by the outgoing Bush administration, the Clinton administration could do little more than mandate cuts from the services (as discussed above) before sending it to Congress. At the same time, the BUR held out the opportunity of major shifts in strategy and budgeting, but not until the FY 1995 cycle. Still, the congressional debate over DOD authorizations and appropriations featured lively discussion about funding for CVN-76. At its heart was an attempt in the Senate Appropriations Committee to fund CVN-76 to the tune of $3.4 billion in FY 1994. For its part, the House Appropriations Committee attempted to add $1 billion in AP funding for the carrier. This would allow "the Navy and the Newport News Shipyard to negotiate with subcontractors and be in a position to begin bending metal at 12:01 am on 1 October 1994," according to a staffer from the office of Hampton Roads–area Representative Norman Sisisky (D-VA).[44]

These attempts raised the ire of Representative Ronald V. Dellums (D-CA), the chair of the House Armed Services Committee, who argued that both SAC's $3.4 billion and HAC's $1 billion were inappropriate. Since no such provisions would be forthcoming in the defense authorization bill, DOD could not spend the appropriated money, losing funding that could be spent on authorized R&D, procurement, and O&M programs. For its part, DOD made it known "that, while we are not at all asking for a CVN, we could accept one if Congress desires, with no harm to the President's Budget or BUR."[45] In the end, Congress decided to satisfy both sides of the carrier debate. In accordance with Representative Dellums's wishes, neither AP nor full funding was included in DOD appropriations, but they included a $1.5 billion pot of money for new sealift vessels, with the provision that $1.2 billion could be shifted from the fund to other programs if approved by a subsequent authorization bill.[46]

Efforts to turn the BUR into specific policies started in earnest in early 1994, with the release of Aspin's first Annual Report, which provided more detail on how the BUR would affect force structure and budget going forward. As a start, the annual report further reduced the projected end strength of the Navy, proposing a 330-ship target instead of the BUR's 346. It also laid out a more complete schedule for maintaining the carrier fleet, currently at 13, at a long-term level of 12. On one side of the

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[44] Barry [Zulauf?] to Navy Office of Legislative Affairs, "Navy Issues in the FY 1994 Defense Authorization Bill," 29 September 1993, Box 3, Folder 3, 1993 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[45] Rear Admiral W. A. Earner (DON Comptroller's office) to N8, "HAC/SAC Actions on FY 1994 Defense Appropriation Bill," 6 October 1993, Box 7, 1993 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[46] *1993 Congressional Quarterly Almanac* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1994), 577.

ledger, the decommissionings: *Saratoga* in 1994, *America* in 1996, *Independence* in 1998, *Kitty Hawk* in 2002, and *Constellation* in 2008.[47] On the other side, they would be replaced by the under-construction CVN-74 and -75, as well as CVN-76, which was slated for full funding in FY 1995 and completion in 2002. Presumably, a carrier would be built to replace *Constellation* as well, but that was beyond the horizon of current budget planning. This report also laid out plans to shrink the size of the carrier air wing from 60 tactical aircraft to a 50-airframe mix of F-14s and F/A-18s.[48]

As it happened, this was also Aspin's last annual report. Late in 1993, in the wake of heavy casualties taken during peacekeeping operations in Somalia—the "Black Hawk Down" engagement—Aspin was forced to resign.[49] He was replaced by his deputy, William J. Perry, who came to the job with extensive experience in industry, as well as four years in Harold Brown's Pentagon as Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering.[50] There, he played a key role in shepherding the development of the advanced weapons systems that would be used to good effect in Desert Storm. Unlike his predecessor, Perry was not of a mind to make major changes to force structure and policy, mostly leaving broader issues to the side as he focused his attention on improving the acquisition process and quality-of-life issues for service members. In essence, then, Perry's arrival as Secretary locked in the essential elements of the BUR.[51]

Aspin's last budget was based on what the *Congressional Quarterly Almanac* called a "complex budgetary gamble," assuming that "inflation would boost future Pentagon expenses more slowly than forecast." At the same time. acquisition and managerial reforms, combined with shuttering unneeded installations, would free up funding for future procurement to fully align the military with the RMA, starting around FY 1998.[52] Optimistically, this approach would allow for the desired recapitalization of the military without a major pulse of funding for the development and acquisition of new capabilities.

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[47] In 1996, the decision was made to swap the decommissioning of *Kitty Hawk* and *Constellation* due to *Kitty Hawk's* superior material condition. Vice Admiral D.L. Pilling (N3/N5) to CNO and VCNO, "CV 63/CV 64 Swap—Action Memorandum," Box 315, Folder 1, 1996 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[48] Aspin, *Annual Report to the President and the Congress* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1994), 167–68, 182.

[49] David Halberstam, *War in a Time of Peace: Bush, Clinton, and the Generals* (New York: Scribner, 2001), 265.

[50] Previously Director of Defense Research and Engineering, which was elevated to a USD position on 21 October 1977. *Department of Defense Key Officials, September 1947–March 2015* (Washington, DC: Historical Office of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2015), 33.

[51] Stevenson, *SECDEF,* 147–58.

[52] *1994 Congressional Quarterly Almanac* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1995), 421–22.

For the Navy's part, the President's FY 1995 budget fully funded CVN-76, with $1.2 billion from FY 1994's sealift fund and approximately $2.5 billion in new spending. Somewhat surprisingly, given the issues of the previous year, carrier funding sailed through the authorization and appropriations process with minimal difficulty, partially due to a "full-court press" mounted by DON to secure funding.[53] Under DOD's prevailing plans, this was to be the only carrier procured until the 2000s; once the CVN-76 contract was signed in December 1994, the carrier issue was very much placed on Congress's backburner for the rest of the Clinton years.[54]

It is worth noting here CVN-76's somewhat unique construction profile. Though procured in fiscal year 1995, its keel was not laid until early 1998, a gap of nearly three years, even though construction space was available at Newport News after the launch of CVN-75 in September 1996 (however, prefabrication work was underway before CVN-76's keel was laid). Assuming approximately five calendar years to build a *Nimitz*-class carrier, the rough standard from CVN-71 on, CVN-76 could have been ready in 2001, rather than on its 2003 delivery date. It appears that this shift had the effect of guaranteeing steady work for the shipyard over a longer period of time and allowing a delay of the consideration of funding for the presumptive CVN-77.[55]

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Even as Congress validated the BUR's decision to pursue carrier procurement, cracks were starting to appear in its operational framework. 1994 was a busy year for the Navy. Wrapping up the year in the U.S. Naval Institute's *Proceedings*, Scott Truver noted that in 1994:

> [E]stablished guidelines for operational and personnel tempo were strained and in some cases, especially in the Atlantic-Mediterranean . . . violated. The post–Cold War 350-ship fleet cannot reasonably meet the same, if not greater, peacetime presence and contingency-response commitments as the Cold War 600-ship fleet. . . . [The Navy and Marine Corps] operated in practically

[53] Scott C. Truver, "The U.S. Navy in Review," USNI *Proceedings* (May 1995), 125.

[54] Naval Vessel Register, "USS Harry S. Truman (CVN-76)," https://www.nvr.navy.mil/shipdetails/shipsdetail_cvn_76.html.

[55] Raymond Hall, "Annual Weapons List," Congressional Budget Office Memorandum for the Record, 9 August 1993, p. N-5; Hall and Victoria Fraider, "Selected Weapons Costs for the President's 1995 Program." CBO Report, 31 May 1994, N-4.

every world region at a tempo that at times approached that of serval "lesser regional contingencies" combined.[56]

The reference volume *United States Naval Aviation 1910–2010* confirms that 1994 was a busier-than-normal year, counting eight "major overseas deployments" from seven carriers for 1994, compared to six for 1993 and five for 1995. Outside of standard forward presence missions, *Saratoga* deployed to the Mediterranean to enforce the no-fly zone over Bosnia-Herzegovina; *America* and *Eisenhower* deployed to Haiti with Army soldiers embarked; and *George Washington* deployed to the Persian Gulf in response to Iraqi saber rattling.[57]

This punishing schedule placed the Navy's leadership in a bind. On one hand, the fleet was in danger of being run ragged. On the other, it was being run ragged with precisely

Sailors and 10th Mountain Division soldiers man the rails as *Dwight D. Eisenhower* (CVN-69) leaves Norfolk bound for Haiti carrying 1,800 soldiers and their UH-60 Black Hawk helicopters in lieu of its normal air wing. Frequent crisis response deployments, when added to the normal forward deployment rotation, placed enormous strain on the Navy's carrier force in the mid–late 1990s (DIMOC/DN-SC-95-01156/PH2 Steve Enfield).

[56] Truver "U.S. Navy in Review," 123–25.

[57] Evans and Grossnick, *Naval Aviation,* 1:385–86; Evans and Grossnick, *United States Naval Aviation 1910–2010,* 2:505–10.

the presence and crisis response missions the Navy Department had staked out as its domain. Only the forward presence mission gave the Navy cover from OSD to maintain its 12-carrier force structure. Squaring this circle was the job of Secretary of the Navy John Dalton (1993–98) and the new CNO, Admiral Jeremy "Mike" Boorda (1994–96).

Boorda was an unusual choice for the CNO billet. Both the first non-USNA graduate and first former enlisted sailor to become CNO, the charismatic Boorda—universally described as a "a sailor's sailor"—came to the job with deep experience in personnel policy from several tours in the Bureau of Personnel, rather than from a background in strategy or programming. Just before becoming CNO, he had a successful tour commanding U.S. Naval Forces Europe/Allied Forces Southern Europe in NATO, where he managed the early stages of the Bosnian crisis, giving him experience in the sort of post–Cold War missions ". . . From the Sea" had claimed for the Navy. Finally, Boorda, appointed in part to erase the stain of the 1991 Tailhook

Admiral Jeremy M. Boorda (center) with JCS Chairman General John Shalikashvili (right) at a UN peacekeepers' base near Zagreb, Croatia, in March 1994 during Operation Provide Promise. Boorda, Commander U.S. Naval Forces Europe/Allied Forces Southern Europe at the time, was also in charge of Provide Promise. Soon after this photo was taken, Boorda was elevated to CNO, in part because of his experience handling these sorts of low-intensity missions (NARA/330-CFD-DF-ST-96-00667/SGT Yvette Walden).

scandal, was the first surface warfare officer to serve as CNO since Elmo Zumwalt in the early 1970s.[58]

Upon Boorda's ascension in April 1994, Dalton tasked him, Marine Corps Commandant General Carl E. Mundy, Jr., and Under Secretary of the Navy Richard J. Danzig to create a new strategy that modified " . . . From the Sea" to align with the Clinton administration's national security strategy. Here, Dalton seems to have had two aims in mind. The first was to create a Navy strategy for the Clinton administration, unconnected with Republican antecedents, which he could sell to members of his own party. As well, the Secretary desired a stronger focus on forward presence, as opposed to the earlier document's concentration on power projection. With the BUR confirming presence as the Navy's meal ticket, the Navy needed a strategy that mentioned it as explicitly as possible to stave off challenges from the other services.[59]

As the Navy's leadership was working on further embedding forward presence into the Navy's core missions, concerns continued to mount over the summer of 1994 about the demand signal for the Navy's aircraft carriers. In June, for example, the office of the DCNO for Operations, Plans, and Strategy (N3/N5) noted with satisfaction that the Joint Staff appeared to understand these concerns, pointing to a memorandum that posited a modification of the GNFPP schedule in order to "increase the size and length of overseas naval force presence gaps, and fill those gaps with packages made up of forces from the other Services and naval forces other than CVBGs and ARGs . . . avoiding unsustainable operating tempos."[60]

The most ominous sign of nascent over commitment, however, came from the Atlantic Fleet. In mid-July, the fleet's commander, Admiral H. H. Mauz, Jr., wrote to Boorda, complaining that the Navy's projected FY 1996/1997 budget declined to fund Selected Restricted Availability (SRA) maintenance periods for three Atlantic Fleet carriers over the next three years due to a lack of O&M funds. A handwritten note from Boorda on the letter ominously noted, "[i]f [Mauz] is correct (and we've had similar dire predictions from [CINCPACFLT]) then we are headed for real trouble and the hollow force."[61]

Against this background, it is a sign of the importance of presence to the Navy's rationale for resources that the service's subsequent policy document, "Forward . . .

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[58] Haynes, *Maritime Strategy*, 95–96.

[59] Ibid., 94–98.

[60] [Joint Staff] to Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, "Roles and Missions Action Item on Adaptive Joint Force Package," Draft Memorandum, June 1994, Box 20, Folder 1, 1994 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[61] Admiral H. H. Mauz to CNO, "FY 1996/1997 Budget Estimates," 18 July 1994, Box 22, Folder 4, 1994 00 Files, NHHC OA.

From the Sea," released in late 1994, leaned into the same forward presence mission that placed extra strain on the service—recall that earlier testimony from Navy leaders suggested that about 14 carriers were needed just to provide routine coverage in the Mediterranean, Arabian Sea, and Western Pacific. Arguably, the explicit forward presence focus was the *only* major change from its predecessor.[62] Heavily used in speeches and congressional testimony, "Forward" "had significant influence in underscoring forward presence as one of the Navy's main missions."[63] The forward presence defended by the document remained centered on carrier battle groups and amphibious ready groups, "highly flexible naval formations . . .valued by the [combatant] commanders precisely because they provide the necessary capabilities forward." Indeed, "Forward" made a virtue of the pace of operations over the past year, nothing that "naval expeditionary forces have never been in higher demand . . . as evidenced by operations in Somalia, Haiti, Cuba, and Bosnia, as well as . . . Iraq." [64]

Together with the BUR, "Forward" cemented the Navy's mission for the remainder of the 1990s. Forward presence had "replaced the Maritime Strategy," as the organizing principle of American naval policy. Of course, forward presence was a mission set, not a strategy. [65] Instead, "Forward" attempted to provide a "credible rationale for the Navy's renewed emphasis on forward deployment, supporting the budgetary requests that would be necessary to develop naval forces for this role."[66] Alert readers will have grasped the circular logic here: a focus on forward presence would give the Navy the resources it needed to keep forces forward. If we accept that forward presence provided the best rationale for a large fleet, the question of that fleet's strategic utility remained unasked.

Viewing "Forward" in context, it is clear that its framers saw the Navy's carrier force structure as under threat in 1994, despite the BUR's assurances. Among these concerns was the Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces, a blue ribbon panel mandated by the FY 1994 NDAA to examine possible duplication of capabilities across the services and streamline the provision of effectively trained forces for joint

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[62] Haynes, *Maritime Strategy*, 96.

[63] John B. Hattendorf, ed., *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1990s: Selected Documents*, Naval War College Newport Papers No. 27 (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2006), 15–16.

[64] Jeremy M. Boorda, John H. Dalton, and Carl E. Mundy, Jr., "Forward . . . From the Sea," 9 November 1994, in *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1990s*, 151–53.

[65] Swartz, interviewed by Blanton and Peeks, August 2019, NHHC.

[66] [John B. Hattendorf] "Introduction to 'Forward . . . From the Sea,'" in *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1990s*, 149.

operations.[67] After getting what they wanted out of the BUR, the Navy's senior leadership viewed the commission with skepticism, if not outright hostility, and desired nothing from it but a confirmation of the BUR's policies.

In August, for example, Boorda's draft response to a list of Navy issues with the commission's work to date almost reads as a list of demands. According to the CNO, the commission should "assign the Navy and Marine corps [sic] primary functions in providing combat ready forces forward for deterrence of conflict . . . and to enable the deployment of heavier CONUS-based force. . . reaffirming the value of 'forward presence' to the success . . . of the United States."[68] In other words, Boorda argued not only that the Navy and Marine Corps were the primary providers of forward presence, but also that forward presence was *not* the province of "heavier" Army and Air Force units. An enclosure to Boorda's memorandum went so far as to assert that forward presence "is the principle *role* of naval forces," going a step further than "Forward," which merely indicated that forward presence was an important mission for the Navy under the circumstances prevailing in 1994.[69]

With Boorda setting such a maximalist target, it is not clear what the commission could have realistically produced to allay the Navy's concerns about its remit. In any event, its final report did nothing of the sort, declaring that "[e]ach Service is a major contributor to achieving the objectives of peacetime overseas presence," running counter to the Navy Department's claim that overseas presence was a special function of the fleet and Marine Corps. Further, the Commission suggested that CINCs consider "alternative methods and mixes of forces to adequately achieve presence objectives," an obvious shot against the use of full carrier and amphibious groups for routine presence missions.[70] As the officer in charge of the Navy's Roles and Missions working group noted, the final report "blur[red] the definition of presence in way that . . . undervalue[d] the unique contributions of Naval forces," presumably in ignoring the

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[67] Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces, *Directions of Defense: Report of the Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 24 May 1995), ES-1.

[68] Boorda to Dalton, "Draft Reply to the Roles and Missions Commission—Information Memorandum," 26 August 1994, Box 19, Folder 4, 1994 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[69] [OPNAV?], "Functions of the Navy and Marine Corps: Peace, Crisis, and War," [August 1994?], Box 19, Folder 4, 1994 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[70] Commission on Roles and Missions, *Directions for Defense* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, May 1995), 221, and 2–22.

deterrent effect of CVBGs. In other words, the report failed to meet Boorda's goal of ring-fencing forward presence for the naval services.[71]

Although the commission's recommendations were nonbinding and, in the case of presence, not meaningfully acted upon, they highlighted the dilemma facing the Navy's leadership in the mid-1990s.[72] Using the metric of presence—not combat-credible presence—it was clear that many routine missions required neither a full CVBG nor a reinforced battalion of Marines aboard amphibious warships, and "alternative" (smaller) mixes of forces would reduce the number of ships underway at any given time and, thus, the stress on the fleet. On the other hand, the Navy, and to a lesser extent, the Marines, had staked their force structure and resource allocation on the ability to maintain CVBGs and ARGs in potential trouble spots to provide combat-credible presence. If the need for combat-credible forces was removed from the equation, there was no requirement for 12 carriers, and the Navy only needed the 8–10 for the two-MRC scenario.[73]

This came at a particularly delicate time for the Navy, which may explain the vehemence of Lynch and Boorda's reaction to the commission's milquetoast final report. By early 1995, the Navy was starting to lay the budgetary framework for its next aircraft carrier, CVN-77, which was tentatively scheduled for procurement in FY 2002. In addition to standard complaints about the size of the carrier fleet, there was also talk of building the next carrier without nuclear power to save money, clearly anathema to the Navy, which viewed nuclear propulsion as a must for all new carriers.

In February, for example, William Lynn, Director of Program Analysis and Evaluation in OSD, told Navy officials at a future budget meeting that his office viewed the Navy's long-term carrier requirement at 11, not 12 (specifically, 11 active carriers and 1 reserve/training carrier). The Navy, Lynn argued, had described *Kennedy*, the reserve/training carrier, "as an experiment only." This obviated the need for the Navy to build

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[71] Rear Admiral T. C. Lynch (N3E/N5E) to CNO, "Comments on Commissions on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces Final Report—ACTION MEMORANDUM," 1 June 1995, Box 236, Folder 7, 1995 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[72] One of the few long-lasting changes induced by the commission was its successful advocacy for DOD to conduct a BUR-style review of force structure and strategy every four years. Congress acted upon this suggestion and, in the FY 1997 budget, mandated that DOD conduct "quadrennial defense reviews" starting in 1997. Richard A. Lacquement, Jr., *Shaping American Military Capabilities After the Cold War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003), 100.

[73] Readers should also keep in mind that the 12-carrier standard itself was based on an uncertain analytical basis. With the effectiveness of forward presence impossible to quantify, the best the Navy could do was point to its ability to maintain CVBGs and ARGs in certain theaters, which substituted input for output. See Adam B. Siegel's "To Deter, Compel, and Reassure in International Crises: The Role of U.S. Naval Forces" (Alexandria, VA: CNA, 1995), and Linton Brook's *Peacetime Influence Through Forward Naval Presence* (Alexandria, VA: CNA, 1993) for contemporaneous attempts to assess the value of forward deployments.

a new carrier in FY 2002 to replace *Constellation* (then scheduled for a 2008 retirement). The experiment could be ended, and *Kennedy* restored to the normal carrier rotation, giving an "11+0" force structure.[74] Instead, the money saved could be used for the R&D work for a potentially conventional carrier before 2010. Unsurprisingly, the Navy disagreed, arguing that *Kennedy* was needed for training and reserve work through its projected FY 2018 decommissioning and that there was no time to design anything but a modified *Nimitz* for construction in FY 2002.[75] The very next month, Secretary of Defense Perry also expressed skepticism about the Navy's insistence on an all-nuclear carrier force, citing issues of cost and construction time. The Navy provided a position paper with its well-worn arguments about the advantages of nuclear propulsion in aircraft carriers, which seemed to carry the day.[76]

Despite these blips, CVN-77 was not challenged in earnest until 1996. At that point, CVN-77 became intertwined with the two issues that would take the carrier debate through the end of the Clinton administration: the shape of the Navy's next class of carrier, CV(X), and the 1997 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), a congressionally mandated review of defense force structure and strategy intended to replicate the BUR process. These two issues sparked a contentious discussion about how many aircraft carriers the Navy needed, how they should be built, and how best to integrate new technologies into the Navy's carrier fleet while staying within the budget.

At the end of February 1996, Secretary Dalton wrote to Secretary Perry and Deputy Secretary of Defense John White asking for extra money in future budgets to pay for CVN-77. According to Dalton, the Navy had reached the limits of what could be funded from transferring money from decommissioned Cold War–era ships toward new construction. Between that and the Navy's high operational tempo, "funding difficulties" endangered CVN-77. Even cutting 13 ships from the FY 1998–2003 shipbuilding plan only provided $2.1 billion out of the $4.8 billion needed to fund CVN-77 in FY 2002.[77]

Dalton's letter embodied the dilemma in which the focus on combat-credible forward presence placed the service. Dalton justified this request for extra funding by pointing to the ability of aircraft carriers to provide the "forward presence and crisis response capability upon which the National Command Authority routinely depends."

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[74] In effect, "10+0," Lynn's plan made no mention of the rolling RCOHs for *Nimitz*-class carriers starting in the late 1990s.

[75] Rear Admiral Donald L. Pilling (N80) to Vice Admiral Thomas J. Lopez (N8), "Carrier Force Structure," 24 February 1995, Box 264, Folder 1, 1995 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[76] "CNO Executive Assistant to N8A," 24 March 1995, Box 258, Folder 3, 1995 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[77] SECNAV Dalton to SECDEF Perry and DEPSECDEF White, "Fiscal Guidance for POM-98—INFORMATION MEMORANDUM," 28 February 1996, Box 338, Folder 2, 1996 00 Files, NHHC OA.

Providing that forward presence, though, exacted a steep toll. Not only was forward presence the source of many of the "emerging requirements" that partially necessitated the letter in the first place, but the Navy's leadership was willing to forgo construction of 13 other vessels, which would eventually result in higher maintenance costs for other vessels, as fewer ships attempted to meet the same presence guidelines.[78]

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In early 1996, planning started in earnest for the Navy's next class of aircraft carrier, CV(X), with the approval of its Mission Need Statement by the Joint Requirements Oversight Council, which pushed the program into the acquisition pipeline.[79] As expected for an update of the then-30-year-old *Nimitz* design, part of the plan for CV(X) was to modernize its C^4 suite to account for changes in information technology and to facilitate upgrades. As expected for a program in the cash-strapped 1990s, another major selling point was "improving affordability and reducing life cycle ownership costs" by, among other things, "a special emphasis on reducing manning."[80] This, of course, struck at two issues, the shrinking pool of trained sailors and personnel expenses, a major driver of life cycle costs in carriers.[81]

While the detailed design and construction of CV(X), the future *Gerald R. Ford,* lies outside of the scope of this study, it had a tremendous impact on the future shape of CVN-77. At issue was how "revolutionary" or "evolutionary" to make the transition from the *Nimitz* class to its successor. One school of thought held that CVN-77 should be kept as close to the *Nimitz* pattern as possible to save costs and allow for the development of revolutionary new technologies for CV(X), while the other argued for gradual change: adding some new features to CVN-77 to lessen the technological risk for CV(X)'s design and construction.

More immediately, the QDR loomed large between its genesis in the FY 1997 NDAA (signed in September 1996), and its release in May 1997. During this process,

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[78] Dalton, "Fiscal Guidance."

[79] *Resource Allocation: The Formal Process*, CDR Raymond E. Sullivan, Jr., ed. (Newport, RI: National Security Decision Making Department Naval War College, 2002), 4-3 through 4-20.

[80] Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Research, Development, and Acquisition John W. Douglass, "Navy Program Decision Memorandum for the 21st Century Tactical Aviation Sea-Based Platform," 30 January 1996, Box 309, Folder 6, 1996 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[81] Government Accountability Office, "Navy Aircraft Carriers: Cost-Effectiveness of Conventionally and Nuclear-Powered Carriers," August 1998, GAO/NSIAD-98-1, 80–81.

Secretary of Defense Perry made his long-planned resignation, to be replaced by Senator William Cohen (R-ME), who was forced to get up to speed as DOD's chief executive while preparing the QDR (Deputy Secretary of Defense John White was in place for the entire process). According to then–Air Force Chief of Staff General Ronald Fogleman, this transition placed the QDR "into suspended animation . . . because no one wanted to get out in front of the new boss. He arrived with a very limited amount of time to deliver the QDR to the Hill."[82]

The QDR process was also affected by JCS Chairman General John Shalikashvili who, in lieu of strong leadership from the Secretary level, imposed his own ideas on the process. According to Fogleman, the CJCS let the service chiefs know in early fall 1996 that he wanted "to work hard to try and maintain as close to the status quo as we can" in the QDR.[83] This, of course, suited the Navy, which entered the process with the goal of preserving its force structure and forward presence mission. As the new CNO, Admiral Jay Johnson, put it in a November message to Navy flag officers, "we are ideally suited to continue to be the force for many likely contingencies . . . we do not need to reinvent the Navy in response to the QDR."[84]

In contrast to Fogleman, who saw the Perry-Cohen interregnum as a period of stasis, Navy leadership viewed a threat to Navy force structure and missions by the turn of the year. In early January 1997, Rear Admiral James B. Hinkle, the head of the Navy's QDR office, noted that while "SecDef and CJCS initially said US military forces were 'sized about right' and that QDR was only going to look for savings in infrastructure," Deputy Secretary White "has said 'everything is on the table' and that we may have to develop a leaner force structure to help fund modernization." Specifically, Hinkle noted that the QDR team was turning its eyes to the Super Hornet aircraft program and the aircraft carrier fleet.[85]

Hinkle's letter also suggested that the Navy could preserve its 12-carrier fleet "on the basis of forward presence, as long as the CINCs continue to maintain current requirements."[86] This became the key Navy argument during the QDR process. Indeed, it started even before 1997, when Navy and Marine Corps leadership jointly

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[82] Richard H. Kohn, "The Early Retirement of General Ronald R. Fogleman, Chief of Staff, United States Air Force," *Aerospace Power Journal* (Spring 2001), 11–12; quoted. in Larson, Orletsky, and Leuschner, *Defense Planning*, 91–93.

[83] Ibid., quoted. in Larson, Orletsky, and Leuschner, *Defense Planning*, 92.

[84] Admiral Jay Johnson to all Navy flag officers, 15 November 1996, Box 317, Folder 1, 1996 00 Files, NHHC OA. Johnson, the previous VCNO, became CNO upon Admiral Boorda's suicide in May 1996.

[85] Rear Admiral James B. Hinkle, N8C to N8, 3 January 1997, Box 354, Folder 36, 1997 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[86] Hinkle to N8, 3 January 1997.

wrote an article tentatively titled "Do Americans Understand Forward Presence?" in November 1996 to advance their positions on the QDR.[87] This article, published in the *Washington Times*, and picked up by other newspapers, made the public case for what the Navy Department had argued since the BUR: forward presence was key element of *national* policy that only the Navy and Marine Corps were equipped to provide.[88] In other words, the Navy and Marine Corps did not want to keep their CVBGs and ARGs for petty service politics reasons, but to fulfill a specific demand signal from national leadership.

Inside of DOD, the Navy's involvement in the QDR process continued to focus on demand from the CINCs. At about the same time as Hinkle's letter, CNO Johnson wrote to the Navy's flag officers with talking points to deploy. In response to suggestions that the Navy should "fall off" its CVBG/ARG focus, Johnson pointed out that it was the

> [U]nified CINCs who have clearly and repeatedly requested CVBGs and ARGs. Based on what the CINCs have identified as their requirements [more on this below], the Navy is already smaller than we should be for peacetime operations. For wartime . . . the key to success in a conflict is twelve CVBGs and twelve ARGs to ensure that two or three of each are always forward deployed and available to response rapidly in crisis. If you want early arriving forces, unconstrained by access and political restrictions, which can deter and provide significant warfighting capabilities, then naval forces should be a core force. . . . The CVBG is a national asset.[89]

Johnson's rhetoric here partially collapsed the difference between combat-credible presence and warfighting. As laid out in the BUR, fighting two MRCs required 8–10 carriers. The 12-carrier standard was put in place to allow for the regular forward deployment of CVBGs, which, unlike other forward presence forces, provided prompt combat capability on the scene in the event of a crisis or war.

Johnson went on to reiterate that only CVBGs could provide the right amount of force in a crisis, noting that "'expeditionary' alternatives" would require an "airfield . . . tankers, command and control aircraft, surveillance aircraft, etc. We know what a CVBG provides and costs, and must endeavor to make our political leaders aware that 'cheaper

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[87] Vice Admiral J. P. Reason (N3/N5), "Draft Wall Street Journal Article: 'Do Americans Understand Forward Presence?'—Action Memorandum," 13 November 1996, Box 317, Folder 1, 1996 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[88] Charles C. Krulak and Jay L. Johnson, "A 'Forward Presence' in a Violent World," *Washington Times*, 25 November 1996, A19.

[89] Admiral Jay Johnson to all Navy flag officers, "Quadrennial Defense Review—The Facts," 2 January 1997, Box 350, Folder 20, 1997 00 Files, NHHC OA.

alternatives' may be seductive but perhaps more costly and less flexible."[90] Obviously, the "alternative" in this case was the Air Force. Here, Johnson was acting in accordance with a widespread Navy belief that both the QDR and Shalikashvili's *Joint Vision 2010* (July 1996) "were both all too clearly an extension of the Air Force's recently revitalized conception of strategic airpower [allegedly] rendered more effective and precise by the same technologies the navy was claiming as its own."[91] This is somewhat contradicted by General Fogleman's contention that he "lost all hope" in the QDR process after Perry set his retirement date—surely the Air Force Chief of Staff would have been heartened by a QDR based on his service's strategic vision.[92]

At about this time, Johnson put forth a new argument: 12 aircraft carriers was not the "real" requirement. In fact, the Navy actually needed 14 carriers to meet the CINCs' demands for forward presence, a target the service had unsuccessfully argued for in 1990. Obviously, Navy leadership was not making a serious case for a 14-carrier force, but instead trying to make the 12-carrier target look more reasonable. This gambit met with some success. Johnson's message noted that it came after discussions between himself, White, Dalton, and Marine Corps Commandant Krulak on the QDR, so the argument was at least reaching the right ears.[93]

Further, Cohen's first annual report, released before QDR was finalized, used nearly identical language to Johnson's to defend the current force structure: "Maintaining a continuous CVBG and ARG presence in each of three theaters would require a force of 14 carriers and 13 ARGs [but it is possible to accomplish] the forward presence mission with 11 active carriers . . . and nine ARGs." Instead of having continuous carrier presence in the required theaters, DOD would shift to "tethered presence," a CVBG or ARG would be "within a few days' transit time of the region" when neither was directly present.[94]

Despite this rhetorical success, OPNAV's response to the QDR process was marked by a grim resignation to further force structure cuts as the price for maintaining the carrier force. In March, Vice Admiral Donald Pilling, the N8, suggested that Admiral Johnson release a message on the QDR's "end game" focusing on "hard choices about

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[90] Ibid.

[91] Haynes, *Maritime Strategy*, 126.

[92] Kohn, "Fogleman," quoted in Larson, Orletsky, and Leuschner, *Defense Planning*, 92.

[93] Admiral Johnson to all Navy flag officers, "Quadrennial Defense Review" [DRAFT], 25 January 1997, Box 357, Folder 23, 1997 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[94] William S. Cohen, *Annual Report to the President and the Congress* (Washington, DC: GPO, April 1997), 165.

"The Navy we'll need in the 21st century." In the 1997 QDR process, the Navy deliberately traded readiness and current force structure in order to fund modernization programs like the Super Hornet. Shown here is the first carrier landing of an F/A-18F, aboard *John C. Stennis* (CVN-74) in January 1997. Variants of the Super Hornet have replaced the F-14, A-6, KA-6, and E-A6 aircraft in the carrier air wing (DIMOC/970118-N-GL610-001/PO3 Leah L. Kanak).

the Navy we'll need now, versus the Navy we'll need in the twenty-first century."[95] A 9 April memorandum from Rear Admiral Hinkle to Johnson laid out those choices. In short, the "Navy focused on defense of carriers, offering 'equivalencies' [that is, cuts elsewhere] in lieu [of] CV cuts." While the Navy maintained 12 carriers and 12 ARGs, this came "at a price."[96]

A further message from Johnson to Navy flag officers laid out that price in stark terms:

[95] Vice Admiral Donald Pilling (N8) to CNO, "Quadrennial Defense Review Update," March 1997, Box 372, Folder 12, 1997 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[96] Hinkle to CNO, "Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) Update," 9 April 1997, Box 373, Folder 31, 1997 00 Files, NHHC OA.

> [T]here just isn't enough money to maintain our high operational readiness, our commitments to our people, fully fund priority modernization programs and pay our daily cost of operating bills. To help pay our bills and live within our means in the future, we are looking at: laying up some older, less capable platforms . . . [and] accelerating the phase-out of several . . . aircraft. . . . The QDR is a timely opportunity to analyze where we are today and set the course to shape a leaner, more capable and better Navy for the 21st century. [97]

In short, Navy leadership decided (or, more precisely, was "encouraged" by OSD) to cut present forces to pave the way for a smaller, more capable force in the near future by using the savings to fund "refueling overhauls, CVN-77, the [*Virginia*-class] attack submarine, the new surface combatant (SC-21), the Super Hornet, and other priority modernization programs."[98] This was in keeping with the QDR's overall focus on "recapitalization of the force through increased procurement funding," purchased at the cost of immediate force structure.[99]

The final QDR report more or less reflected the predictions and concerns of Hinkle, Pilling, and Johnson. The QDR supported a 12 CVBG/12 ARG fleet, though only 11 carrier air wings.[100] Preserving even this carrier strength came at the cost of reducing the surface combatant end strength target from 128 to 116, ostensibly "offset by newer and more capable systems now coming online." The overall force level target for Navy warships dropped from the BUR's 346 to 305–310.[101] The Super Hornet program was preserved, but the QDR cut its projected buy from 1,000 aircraft to 548.[102]

By its curious support for 12 carrier *battle groups* rather than carriers, the QDR implicitly endorsed treating *Kennedy* as a deployable asset, and not just a vessel that *could* deploy if needed, which is presumably the point the battle group target was intended to drive home. After all, the training mission did not necessarily require a full-on battle group. As late as in the day as 21 April, this was apparently in doubt, with PA&E arguing that the Navy only required 11 operational carriers. However, the Navy was able to convince Secretary Cohen that "[s]upporting CINC requirements

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[97] Johnson to all Navy Flag Officers, "Quadrennial Defense Review Update," 22 April 1997, Box 374, Folder 33, 1997 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[98] Johnson to all Navy flag officers, "Quadrennial Defense Review Update" [DRAFT]," 16 April 1997, Box 374, Folder 33, 1997 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[99] Lacquement, *Military Capabilities*, 118.

[100] This 12-CVBG target seemingly did not take into account the RCOH schedule for *Nimitz*-class carriers, with one carrier constantly in the yard from 1998 through the foreseeable future.

[101] Swartz with Duggin, "The U.S. Navy In the World (1991–2000), slide 72.

[102] William S. Cohen, *Report of the Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington, DC: GPO, May 1997), vii.

[requires] 11+ CVs."[103] In a sense, this decision merely reflected reality. *Kennedy's* first operational deployment in its new "operational reserve" role started in April, and must have been in the works prior to the QDR's final report.[104]

Kennedy's 1997 cruise was, in keeping with its "operational reserve" role intended to ease pressure on the rest of the carrier force by contributing to ongoing operations over Bosnia and Iraq, but the Navy soon took steps to "normalize" its role. In the summer, *Kennedy* was formally added to the deployment rotation, in keeping with the QDR's 12-CVBG target. The stated rationale behind the move is worth considering. According to the action memo that enacted the shift, placing *Kennedy* in the rotation would not "provide increased presence"; instead, it would allow the Navy to meet both its GNFPP commitments and follow its maintenance and PERSTEMPO goals for the carrier force as a whole, easing some of strain that forward presence placed on the carrier fleet.[105] Of course, this move did nothing for the other elements of the Navy expected to support the same number of deployments with fewer surface vessels, supply ships, and submarines. For the rest of its career, *Kennedy* served as a regularly deploying ship.[106]

The Quadrennial Defense Review settled all debates over the size of the carrier force for the remainder of the Clinton administration, though perhaps not where the Navy desired it. In July correspondence with Representative Norm Dicks (D-WA), Johnson somewhat petulantly noted that the "real" carrier requirement was 15 hulls (that is, the force necessary to meet CINC demand for 100 percent coverage in the Mediterranean, Middle East, and WESTPAC), but "budget realities" had forced the size of the fleet down to 12. For his part, Johnson told Dicks, "I agree with the QDR assessment and the underpinning recommendation to maintain the current force of *at least* 12 carriers" (emphasis added).[107]

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[103] Hinkle to N8 (prepared by Commander King Dietrich), "OSD/Navy Divergent Views on QDR—Information Memorandum," 21 April 1997, Box 376, Folder 25, 1997 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[104] Scott C. Truver, "The U.S. Navy In Review," USNI *Proceedings*, May 1998, https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/1998-05/us-navy-review; Robert J. Cressman, "*John F. Kennedy* (CVA-67), *Dictionary of American Naval Fighting Ships*, 26 February 2018, https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/j/john-f-kennedy-cva-67.html.

[105] Vice Admiral J. O. Ellis (N3/N5) to CNO and VCNO (Prepared by Commander Mike Shewchuk, N312C1), "Operational Reserve Carrier (ORC)—Decision Memorandum," 24 June 1997, Box 388, Folder 38, 1997 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[106] Evans and Grossnick, *Naval Aviation, Volume II*, 387–89.

[107] Admiral Johnson to Representative Norm Dicks, 1 July 1997, Box 385, Folder 20, 1997 00 Files, NHHC OA.

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In the wake of the QDR, the last carrier issue on the table during the 1990s was the shape of the future force, in the shape of CVN-77 and CV(X). The two vessels were linked financially and technologically. With the size of the carrier force set, the issue was, to put it crudely, "how much carrier" could be afforded in subsequent construction and the best way to get from the *Nimitz* class to its successor. As discussed above, the Navy had already cut its subsequent construction programs to the bone to pay for future carrier construction, and could not afford to run into major cost overruns. At the same time, the new technologies proposed for CV(X) held out the possibility of dramatically cutting life-cycle costs for future carriers, giving the Navy much-needed financial flexibility.

By early 1997, these strands had coalesced into a "dual-track recapitalization philosophy," which attempted to develop technologies for CV(X) while also ensuring that CVN-77 entered service in time to replace *Kitty Hawk* for its scheduled retirement in 2008, and CV(X) in time for *Enterprise's* in 2013, all while keeping within budgetary restraints. Accordingly, CVN-77 would be built to a newer technological standard than CVN-76 in order to, as CNO Johnson put it, "teach us how to truly revolutionize with CVX . . . the single step from [a CVN-76 repeat] CVN-77 to a revolutionary CVX is not affordable."[108] The funding plan put forth by N88 (at the time, the Air Warfare directorate in OPNAV, now N98) for POM-98 proposed a total of $5.48 billion for carrier construction: $695 million of AP funding in FY 2000, followed by $4.79 billion in FY 2002 (approximately $7.5 billion in 2019), mostly for CVN-77, but also including $300 million in "smart transition" money to prime the pump for CV(X). Upon review, N8 removed the $300 million, a change that was reflected in the FY 1998 President's Budget.[109]

At this point, matters were somewhat derailed by an unsolicited proposal from Newport News Shipbuilding in March 1997. The shipyard, which had yet to lay the keel for CVN-76, or deliver CVN-75 to the Navy, proposed spreading out the funding for CVN-77 between FY 1998 and FY 2002, as opposed to the government's proposal of AP funding in FY 2000 and full funding in FY 2002. According to NNS, spreading out the funding would allow them to build the ship for $600 million less than the government plan, $5.2 billion vs. $4.6 billion. Some of the savings would come in avoiding inflation by spending money sooner, but much of them would come through

[108] Admiral Johnson to ASN (R,D&A), DCNO (N8), and Commander, Naval Sea Systems Command, "CVX," 2 June 1998, Box 15, CV/CVN Folder, 1998 VCNO Files, NHHC OA.

[109] [N8?], "CVN-77 Program History," unsigned slide deck, [February?] 1998, Box 15, CV/CVN Folder, 1998 VCNO Files, NHHC OA, 1–6.

"avoidance of shipyard labor inefficiencies," that is, costs incurred by NNS's plan to lay off 3,000 workers in the two-year gap between "basic construction work" on the two carriers. With their "Smart Buy" proposal, NNS thought it could save $300 million in "training- and productivity-related costs associated with newly hired workers," and its suppliers would save an additional $150 million.[110]

Smart Buy's timing was, to say the least, inauspicious. NNS's proposal—released after the President's Budget for FY 1998—called for $345 million of spending in FY 1998. The challenge of where, precisely, to free up that much money in the defense budget was left to Congress. Here, Smart Buy found a powerful advocate in the form of Senator John Warner (R-VA), chairman of the SASC Seapower Subcommittee, former Secretary of the Navy, and, coincidentally, NNS's home-state senator. On 27 March, he wrote Admiral Johnson, extolling Smart Buy as giving "substantial savings to the Navy, while at the same time ensuring the technological advances which will make CVN-77 a true 'transition carrier,'" positing that the savings from Smart Buy could be ploughed into a more aggressive program of modernization for the ship.[111]

Subsequent review of Smart Buy by DON found that NNS's proposal did indeed save money, though not quite as much as the shipyard claimed: something on the order of $400–$500 million. On the other hand, the new plan placed a great deal of stress on Navy budgets: NNS proposed spending more than the FYDP in FYs 1998–2001, in exchange for $1.43 billion savings in FY 2002. Still, noting the potential freedom granted by $1.43 billion in free space in FY 2002, DON's initial analysis proposed supporting the plan "as it makes a substantial [shipbuilding] amount available in FY02 to fund transition technologies and other ship programs."[112]

Armed with its own analysis, the Navy came out cautiously in favor of Smart Buy, at least until the Clinton administration firmly repudiated it in mid-June, with OMB announcing that the White House "is committed to building CVN-77 [but] opposes incremental funding of procurement programs."[113] In Congress, Senator Warner heavily pushed Smart Buy in the Senate, and fellow Virginian Herbert Bateman (R-Newport News), with rather less success, in the House. In the end, Warner was able to get $345

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[110] Ronald O'Rourke, "Navy Aircraft Carrier Procurement: CVN-77 'Smart Buy' Proposal," CRS Report 97-720 F, 21 July 1997, 2–3.

[111] Senator John Warner to ADM Johnson, 27 March 1997, Box 371, Folder 12, 1997 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[112] Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Navy (Ships) [?] to SECNAV Dalton, "CVN 77 Advance Construction Proposal," 16 April 1997, Box 375, Folder 16, 1997 00 Files, NHHC OA.

[113] Office of Management and Budget, "Statement of Administration Policy: S. 936—National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1998," 19 June 1997 in Rear Admiral N. R. Ryan, Jr. (Chief of Legislative Affairs) to CNO Johnson, "Statement of Administration Policy," 26 June 1997," Box 9, "Budget (FY 98)" Folder, 1998 VCNO Files, NHHC OA.

million of Smart Buy funding into the Senate version of the defense appropriations bill, where it was removed in conference.[114]

Ultimately, Congress gave the Navy $50 million of funding for CVN-77 in FY 1998, while also granting DON the authority to reprogram FY 1998 spending for the rest of the Smart Buy money. Additionally, Congress mandated that, whatever decision was made with regards to Smart Buy, CVN-77 could not cost more than $4.6 billion, NNS's claimed price for the carrier. This cap, however, did exclude costs "attributable to new technology" not present in CVN-76.[115] This approach effectively killed Smart Buy, at least as NNS envisioned it, since the Navy was never of a mind to reprogram $300 million in FY 1998 to fund it.

Even with Smart Buy itself effectively dead, the Navy—or at least the air warfare directorate in N8—entered 1998 looking for a way to accelerate construction of CVN-77, specifically an attempt to get the ship procured and funding in FY 2001 rather than FY 2002. Part of the reason may have been the late 1997 report of the National Defense Panel, a body set up by Congress to review the findings of the QDR. Though non-binding, the NDP came out strongly against CVN-77, arguing that the Navy should instead "look closely at accelerating the transformation to the CVX," which, the panel argued, should be optimized for VSTOL and unmanned aircraft, a far cry from the full-size CVN the Navy clearly expected at the end of the CVX development process.[116]

By mid-December, Smart Buy had turned into the "CVN-77 Acceleration" plan. Instead of procuring CVN-77 in FY 2002, as Smart Buy and the extant plan did, N8 now wanted to procure CVN-77 in FY 2001, to help "fill [an] employment valley" at NNS. Alongside speeding up procurement, N8 wanted advance funding for the carrier over three years (FYs 1998–2000) instead of the standard single pulse of AP funding two years before full procurement. While N8's plan projected staying within the $4.6 billion cap (with allowances for the permitted sources of overruns), it required modifications to the rest of the shipbuilding budget to accommodate advance funding, specifically the deletion of an *Arleigh Burke*–class destroyer from the FY 2001 budget.[117]

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[114] *1997 Congressional Quarterly Almanac* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1998), 8–5 to 8–8, 9–23.

[115] U.S. Congress, "Public Law 105-85: National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1998," 18 November, 1997, Sec. 122.

[116] National Defense Panel, "Transforming Defense: National Security in the 21st Century," December 1997, 47, 49

[117] [N8?], "CVN-77 Acceleration," Slide Deck, 11 December 1997, Box 15, "CV/CVN" Folder, 1998 VCNO Files, NHHC OA.

Fig. 4: CVN-77 Funding Plans as of 31 January 1998[118]

(costs in $M)	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00	FY 01	FY 02	Total
FY 98 PB	-	-	695	-	4,485	5,180
Smart Buy	345	170	875	135	3,075	4,600
Acceleration	50	140	787	3,635	-	4,612

At the same time, PEO (Program Executive Office) Aircraft Carriers was finalizing its desired approach for CVX development. The plan, as laid out in a 21 January 1998 brief to the Secretary of the Navy came down solidly on the evolutionary side of the "evolution vs. revolution" debate. The reason was twofold. To begin with, it was necessary to commission CVN-77 and the first CVX in time to replace, respectively, *Kitty Hawk* (2008) and *Enterprise* (2013) in order to maintain a 12-carrier fleet, pointing toward a lower-risk approach to acquisition. Second, even if the revolutionary approach were possible, practical concerns intervened: in addition to budgetary concerns, the brief noted that there were not enough ship designers in the country to plan a clean-sheet design for CVX-1.[119]

Instead, the brief laid out a gradual transition from CVN-77 to CVX-2. As discussed above, CVN-77 would be designed with some number of bridge technologies for inclusion in follow-on carriers. After that, CVX-1 would have a new nuclear power plant and electromagnetic catapults on the *Nimitz* hull form. Finally, CVX-2 would be built on a new hull, with electromagnetic arresting gear, and other improvements.[120] This slow and steady approach would both limit technological risk (and thus cost), while giving the Navy the best possible chance to have carrier replacements in time for scheduled retirements.

This plan ran counter to the desires of N885, the OPNAV carrier office. In late April or early May, its head, Rear Admiral R. L. Christenson, suggested that the evolutionary approach, though cheaper in the FYDP window, was more expensive in the

[118] [N8?], "CVN-77 Program History," [February] 1998, Box 15, "CV/CVN" Folder, 1998 VCNO Files, NHHC OA.

[119] PEO Aircraft Carriers, "Brief to the Secretary of the Navy," 21 January 1998, Box 15, "CV/CVN" Folder, 1998 VCNO Files, NHHC OA. The document uses "CVNX-1" instead of CVX-1. Technically, though, nuclear power for CVX was not formally approved until certified by Jacques Gansler, Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics) in October.

[120] PEO Aircraft Carriers, "Brief to the Secretary of the Navy."

long run, urging the "largest bite of technology and design possible for CVX 78." Naturally, the quick transition to the personnel-saving innovations planned for the full CVX program saved a great deal of money on life-cycle costs. Interestingly enough, however, N885's analysis suggested that the revolutionary approach would also save on *development* costs. By designing two new ships (CVN-77, followed by CVX-1 and -2 built to the same pattern), the Navy could save about $1.1 billion in development costs, though it would be almost $2 billion more expensive in the FYDP.[121]

By that point, Christenson was swimming upstream. In late April, Christenson's superior, Rear Admiral D. V. McGinn, in charge of the entire N88 enterprise, recommended the evolutionary approach in an action memorandum for CNO Johnson. Focusing on "affordability/risk," McGinn argued that the evolutionary approach would still "attack the highest Nimitz [sic] class cost drivers" by pursuing manpower-reducing innovations for CVN-77 and CVX-1.[122] Though Johnson's signature is missing on this copy of the memorandum, he clearly signed off on McGinn's course of action, writing in June that the CVX program would move "at an affordable pace, over three hulls beginning with CVN-77."[123]

It appears that much of the support for the evolutionary approach was driven by concerns over the FY 1999 President's Budget, and the tentative FY 2000 POM, which, as usual, did not give the service what it saw as adequate funding. While the administration's FY 1999 budget echoed the Navy's acceleration plan in pushing for a FY 2001 procurement of CVN-77 and actually gave the Navy more than its plan called for in FY 1999 spending ($124.5 million in AP and $38.5 million in R&D, compared to the Navy's $140 million), N885 argued that the projected spending in future years was insufficient. According to them, there was a $1.085 billion difference between what the Navy wanted to spend on CVN-77 and the amount POM-99 funded, leading to "a ship less capable than CVN-74." Matters were somewhat better in the tentative 2000 POM; there was only a $791 million shortfall between the tentative POM and the amount needed to fund CVN-77 as a bridge to CVX (though only a $161 million shortfall if the goal was to build CVN-77 as a repeat of CVN-76). At the same time, N885 argued that

[121] Rear Admiral R. L. Christenson, "Aircraft Carrier Strategy," Slide Deck, [Late April/Early May?] 1998, Box 15, "CV/CVN" Folder, 1998 VCNO Files, NHHC OA.

[122] Rear Admiral D. V. McGinn to CNO, "CVX Program—Action Memorandum," 24 April 1998, Box 15, "CV/CVN" Folder, 1998 VCNO Files, NHHC OA.

[123] Admiral Johnson to ASN (R,D&A), DCNO (N8), and Commander, Naval Sea Systems Command, "CVX," 2 June 1998, Box 15, "CV/CVN" Folder, 1998 VCNO Files, NHHC OA.

the CVX funding, though "executable," failed to support the R&D necessary to ensure that CVX-78 put the Navy on course for a revolutionary CVX-79. [124]

Secretary Dalton made a similar point, with a bit more tact, to Secretary Cohen and Deputy Secretary John Hamre in a May 1998 memo on the Navy's POM. According to Dalton, the Navy's POM "protects the operational readiness of the Naval Service," at the cost of "our long term strategy to both modernize and recapitalize our naval forces." Among the casualties was the CVN-77/CVX transition, which "has been adjusted to a less aggressive approach, which matches technological improvements with the funding available," some $912 million less than the Navy desired for the two carriers.[125] According to a presentation from Christensen in July, fitting the carriers into the POM included a decision to push the electromagnetic catapult from CVX-1 to CVX-2.[126]

In its essentials, this plan lasted the rest of the Clinton administration. CVN-77, *George H. W. Bush*, which was appropriated in FY 2001, was indeed built with technologies intended to serve as a bridge to a new class of aircraft carriers, with special focus on changes to reduce manning and, thus, operational costs.[127] Targeted for a 2008 completion date to replace *Kitty Hawk*, both its commissioning, and the older carrier's decommissioning were delayed until 2009.

The story of CVX—properly known as CVNX from October 1998—is rather more complicated.[128] Secretary Cohen's final annual report, from January 2001, laid out the following plans for CVNX-1 (CVN-78) and CVNX-2 (CVN-79):

> CVNX-1 . . . will retain the existing Nimitz [sic] hull, while adding a new nuclear power plant and an improved electrical generation and distribution system . . . [to] facilitate the integration of other capability improvements. For example, a new Electromagnetic Aircraft Launch System is planned for CVNX-1 [a change from the policy set out above]. A new hull design and other, more substantial system changes are being considered for CVNX-2.

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[124] Captain Mark Caren (N885E) "Aircraft Carrier Strategy [DRAFT," Brief for VCNO, 13 May 1998, Box 15, "CV/CVN" Folder, 1998 VCNO Files, NHHC OA.

[125] SECNAV Dalton to SECDEF and DEPSECDEF, "Department of the Navy Program Objective Memorandum 2000–2005—INFORMATION MEMORANDUM," May 1998, Box 38, "POM 00" Folder, 1998 VCNO Files, NHHC OA.

[126] Rear Admiral Christenson, "Aircraft Carrier Funding Review for Admiral D. L. Pilling, VCNO," Slide Deck, 23 July 1998, Box 71, "N88" Folder, 1998 VCNO Files, NHHC OA, 6–7.

[127] Rear Admiral John Nathman (N88), "Aircraft Carrier Strategy," Brief for SECNAV, 30 December 1998, Box 15, "CV/CVN" Folder, 1998 VCNO Files, NHHC OA, 6–7; Ronald O'Rourke, "Navy CVNX Aircraft Carrier Program: Background and Issues for Congress," CRS Report # RS20643, 9 December 2002, 2.

[128] USD (A,T&L) Jacques Gansler to SECNAV, "Acquisition Decision Memorandum for the Navy's Future Aircraft Carrier Program," 5 October 1998, Box 15, "CV/CVN" Folder, 1998 VCNO Files, NHHC OA.

> . . . Through this evolutionary approach, the Navy seeks to develop a class of carriers that will provide improved warfighting capabilities at affordable acquisition and reduced longer-term ownership costs.[129]

The full scope of CVN-78's fate lies beyond the scope of this study, but, suffice it to say, these plans were dramatically altered by the incoming George W. Bush administration. By the time of FY 2004 budget, the evolutionary proposal had been scrapped in favor of "CVN-21," a plan to put all of the developments slated for CVNX-1 and -2 into a clean-sheet CVN-78 design.[130] This design philosophy is the basis for the current iteration of CVN-78, the recently commissioned *Gerald R. Ford*.

* * *

It has become *de rigueur* in naval circles to look back on the 1990s as a period of decline, as the Navy tried to perform its missions with less money, fewer ships, and fewer sailors than needed. As the Navy's own 2017 "Strategic Readiness Review" put it, this placed the service on a "long road to degraded readiness," that culminated in the deadly *Fitzgerald* (DDG-62) and *John S. McCain* (DDG-56) collisions in 2017. Among the long-term factors mentioned were the increasing percentage of the fleet deployed at any given time, "short-term tradeoffs to training, manning, and maintenance," as well as "the rapid increase in new overhead governance structures created in response" to Goldwater-Nichols.[131] Peter Haynes makes a similar point more lucidly, arguing that Goldwater-Nichols pushed the services toward viewing their role in terms of supplying combatant commanders rather than developing strategy. Although there was pushback against this view within the Navy, post–Cold War budgetary realities eventually forced it to accede to "OSD's and the geographic combatant commanders' focus on warfighting, regional conflict, jointness, and strike warfare, which shifted the Navy's operational

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[129] William S. Cohen, *Annual Report to the President and the Congress* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2001), 77.

[130] Congressional Budget Office, "Budget Options," March 2003, 21; Thomas Hone, "Fixing Navy Acquisition," U.S. Naval Institute Blog, 29 April 2016, https://blog.usni.org/posts/2016/04/29/fixing-navy-acquisition.

[131] Michael Bayer and Gary Roughead, eds., "Strategic Readiness Review," 3 December 2017, 2–3, 9–12. In the interest of full disclosure, the author of this present study, which is at odds with some of the review's conclusions, was involved in the research for the historical summary on pp. 9–14 of the review.

outlook—not toward global and systemic requirements, but rather toward the problems of warfighting on land."[132]

None of the criticism cited above is exactly untrue, but it skirts the full truth by placing the onus on the Navy's attempts to meet expectations imposed from above. Forward presence as a force-sizing tool, for example, has a long history inside the Navy—recall the fights between the Navy Department and the Carter White House on the utility of forward presence in the late 1970s. If the Navy's longstanding arguments finally met with official favor in 1993, that was hardly the service aligning itself with OSD, but rather the opposite. Degraded readiness and strategic confusion were not simply things that happened *to* the Navy, but were in part self-inflicted, as the service made deliberate budgetary choices, the 12-carrier fleet foremost among them. Throughout the 1993–2001 period, when faced with straitened financial circumstances and high OPTEMPO, the Navy's leadership echelon elected to preserve the carrier force at the expense of other programs, believing that carriers provided superior effectiveness across the spectrum of maritime conflict. Recall, for example, CNO Johnson's admission that the Navy maintained 12 CVBGs and 12 ARGs "at a price" in the 1997 QDR.[133]

This carrier force was primarily used to provide combat-credible forward presence and crisis response in the Mediterranean, Middle East, and Western Pacific, as governed by the GNFPP, another frequent target of present-day opprobrium when compared to the new "Dynamic Force Employment" model of carrier deployments.[134] As we have seen, Navy leadership during the 1990s was keenly aware of the problems with essentially placing the carrier deployment cycle under the supervision of the combatant CINCs and the Joint Staff. However, the forward presence mission was one assiduously cultivated—if not invented as a force-sizing tool—by OPNAV and DON leadership, which saw it as a way to secure a larger carrier fleet than needed for warfighting during the BUR process.

Despite the obvious strain this focus placed on the Navy, Boorda, Johnson, and their staffs went to the mat to defend forward presence as the *primary* mission for the Navy, and jealously guarded it from Air Force and Army attempts to claim that their services could fulfill it. Further, they claimed that the combat-credible forward presence mission was one that could only be accomplished by CVBGs and, to a less-

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[132] Haynes, *Maritime Strategy*, 244.

[133] Hinkle to CNO, "Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) Update," 9 April 1997.

[134] Megan Eckstein, "Navy Leaders Say 'Dynamic Force Employment' Proving Successful in Truman Deployment," *USNI News*, 22 November 2018, https://news.usni.org/2018/11/22/navy-leaders-say-dynamic-force-employment-proving-successful-truman-deployment.

er extent, amphibious groups, not alternative mixes of naval forces. In other words, opportunities existed for the Navy to trade a carrier or carriers in order to free up resources for maintenance, modernization, or construction of new warships, but leadership claimed that only carrier battle groups were fit for purpose. Since the effectiveness of forward presence is difficult, perhaps impossible, to quantify, and combatant commanders enjoyed access to CVBGs, this assertion was not seriously challenged within DOD.[135] Rather than being victimized by "new overhead governance structures," the Navy's leadership utilized those structures to make its case for maintaining a fleet with twelve aircraft carriers.

Both in the yearly budget drill and during special reviews like BUR, CORM, and QDR, the Navy expended vast bureaucratic effort to demonstrate the advantages of naval forward presence as performed by carrier battle groups. Navy leaders rightly bemoaned the punishing deployment schedules imposed by combatant commanders and the Joint Staff, but also embraced those demands, lauding carrier battle groups as "valued by the [combatant] commanders precisely because they provide the necessary capabilities forward," in "Forward . . . From the Sea."[136] Abandoning combat-credible deployments for mere presence that did not require a full-on CVBG or ARG risked undercutting the bureaucratic justification for maintaining them. The Navy was not merely parroting OSD's talking points when it pushed for a large carrier fleet. The service's leadership spent great amounts of political capital to make sure that OSD accepted the Navy's argument on the utility and necessity of naval forward presence conducted by CVBGs. Forward presence was also a *choice* the Navy made, not just a reflection of decisions made at the policymaking level.

In short, the Navy was in part caught in a dilemma of its own making. While the Navy budget declined about 13 percent from FY 1993 to FY 2000, the service's leadership put an ever-increasing piece of that declining budget into as large a carrier force as OSD, the White House, and Congress were willing to support. From 1993 to 2000, the Navy's force level goal dropped from the 346 of the Bottom-Up Review, to approximately 305.[137] Over the same period, the carrier target remained at 12. Depending on how one classifies the reserve/training carrier provided for in the BUR, the Navy's carrier target can be said to have *increased* during the Clinton years. At various points

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[135] Rear Admiral Philip A. Dur's "Presence, Forward, Ready, Engaged" (USNI *Proceedings*, June 1994, 41–44), makes the case that it is possible to measure the effects of forward presence, often by examining the negative effects of its absence.

[136] Jeremy M. Boorda, John H. Dalton, and Carl E. Mundy, Jr., "Forward . . . From the Sea," 9 November 1994, in *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1990s*, 151–53.

[137] Swartz with Duggin, "The U.S. Navy in the World (1991–2001)," slides 70–72.

in the decade, to pay for this carrier fleet, the Navy chose to shrink the size of the carrier battle group and the carrier air wing, and the future makeup of the air wing, all the while holding up carrier battle groups as the *ne plus ultra* of combat-credible forward presence. This was all in keeping with the strategic and budgetary wish lists this study has covered going back to the Ford administration.

Given this history, it is hard not to call the Navy's carrier requirements policy narrowly successful between 1993 and 2001, certainly when compared with the Navy's lack of influence over the previous administration's Base Force process. From the beginning of the Clinton administration, maintaining 12 carriers was spoken of as a *need*, not a desire inside of OPNAV.[138] Despite oblique suggestions in the mid-1990s that the Navy's real carrier requirement was 14, 12 remained the target through the end of the administration. Judged along those lines, the Navy got precisely what it wanted: a 12-carrier fleet with new construction (CVN-76 and -77) to offset retirements, and even a firm commitment from OSD for a new class of carriers, starting with CVN-78.

[138] Haynes, *Maritime Strategy*, 91.

5

Conclusion

Viewed from a certain perspective, the preceding chapters tell a story of something approaching stasis. The Navy possessed 13 aircraft carriers when President Carter entered office and 12 when President Clinton departed. In between, the number of carriers was never greater than 15 or less than 12. All of this suggests that Admiral Arleigh Burke was remarkably prescient in 1958, when he called for a fleet based on "12 Modern Attack Carriers."[1] While the post–World War II Navy has at times possessed many more than 12 carriers (as high as 26 in 1962, if we count ASW-focused CVS hulls, which Burke would not have classified as "attack carriers"), those figures relied on hulls built under the special fiscal circumstances of World War II.[2] Between the end of that conflict and 2001, the Navy started construction on 18 "modern attack carriers." From *Forrestal* to *Reagan*, this constituted an average of one every three years, with no more than 15 of those postwar carriers in service at any one time (at the end of 1992, prior to the decommissioning of three carriers in the following two years).[3]

If there is one theme unifying this study, it is that at any given time between 1977 and 2001, the Navy Department desired as many carriers as it could receive permission to operate. Readers will look in vain for an instance of OPNAV or Secretariat leaders opting to retire a carrier early or forgo CVN construction to fund other prior-

[1] CNO Admiral Arleigh Burke, "The Navy of the 1970 Era," 13 January 1958, Box 136, Folder 2, 1958 00 Files, NHHC OA, 11.

[2] NHHC, "US Ship Force Levels: 1886–Present," https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/us-ship-force-levels.html.

[3] The comparison is not exact. After the *Essex* CVS hulls were decommissioned, the Navy had no "attack carriers" per se, as CV/Ns absorbed their antisubmarine functions. However, in terms of size and construction costs, the carriers built from *Forrestal* onward were what Burke had in mind when speaking of attack carriers.

ities. When these decisions were made, as in the early 1990s, they were forced upon an unwilling service by organizations higher in the food chain. The evidence above suggests that there was a limit on how much carrier construction policymakers were willing to sanction.

The Navy was also very consistent on what sort of aircraft carrier it desired. Without fail, the service advocated for large (~100,000 tons), nuclear-powered vessels with the full suite of equipment needed to launch conventional take-off and landing aircraft from their decks. While Admiral Hayward was more tolerant of VSTOL and small carriers than most admirals, even he was unwilling to back down from building large carriers.[4] As a result, all seven carriers appropriated between 1977 and 2001 were built to the pattern established by *Nimitz*'s design in the late 1960s, despite occasionally intense pressure from OSD and elsewhere to examine smaller or nonnuclear carriers.

The reason for this consistency was simple: Navy leaders argued, with good reason, that aircraft carriers alone possessed the flexibility and capability to handle any

Aircraft carriers remain a critical part of the Navy's force structure and strategy. Shown here are (from top to bottom) *Theodore Roosevelt, Ronald Reagan,* and *Nimitz* exercising in the Western Pacific on 12 November 2017 (U.S. Navy photo by LTJG James Griffin).

[4] Hayward, *Reminiscences*, 291–94.

potential naval mission set, making them worth the large investment. Here, it is worth consulting Admiral Holloway's May 1978 "Strategic Concepts of the U.S. Navy." In it, Holloway laid out 22 "warfare tasks" that the Navy would need to perform in wartime. Of those 22, he judged carriers capable of performing 18, far more than any other type of warship.[5] As the Navy's experience in the 1990s showed, a carrier could be optimized for a new mission set simply by changing its air wing, providing valuable flexibility in a resource-constrained environment.

Outside of operational employment, it is worth taking a special look at combat-credible forward presence, the carriers' main peacetime mission and a continuous point of contention between the Navy and senior policymakers. Although not formally acknowledged by OSD until the early 1990s, even in the Carter administration, the Navy's leaders argued that maintaining carrier battle groups on station in strategically important regions served a valuable strategic purpose. Moreover, this value, though unmeasurable, was high enough to make this presence an important force-sizing metric. Though senior admirals often grumbled about the strain particular forward presence deployments placed on their ships and sailors, none seem to have doubted the overall importance of that presence.

Despite occasional hiccups, the Navy could hold fast to its course in part because of assured support from wide majorities in both houses of Congress for large aircraft carrier construction. Representatives and senators may not have always agreed on funding levels or whether or not the Navy needed new aircraft carriers, but, during the period under consideration, Congress as a whole never tried to force the Navy to build smaller carriers, despite some agitation from reform-minded members like Senator Gary Hart. Indeed, as we have seen, in the 1970s, congressional support of the Navy's position prevented the Carter administration from forcing the service to build CVVs, instead forcing the administration to build a *Nimitz*. This reflected both the influence of Congressional leaders with a stake in carrier construction and the internalization of the Navy's own decades-long maintenance of a CVBG-based force structure.

The upper bounds for carrier strength are not set by the political or strategic climate, but issues of funding and capacity. Aircraft carriers are expensive to build, crew, and operate, especially once the cost of a carrier's air wing is added to the total. While the Navy has been willing to starve other elements of the service to maintain carrier strength, it has never gone as far as, for example, halting surface ship or submarine

[5] Admiral James L. Holloway III, "Naval Warfare Publication 1: Strategic Concepts of the U.S. Navy," (May 1978), reprinted in *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1970s: Selected Documents*, John B. Hattendorf, ed. (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2007), 80.

construction. DON leadership has been willing to sacrifice a lot for aircraft carriers, but not everything.

At the same time, the capacity of the industrial base also provides something of a ceiling on carrier construction. There is only one shipyard that is equipped to build large aircraft carriers, Newport News, which can build two carriers at a time: after one carrier has been launched, but not completed, a second can be started in the slip vacated by the first. With little political will or money available to stand up a second carrier-capable shipyard, the Navy is restricted to, at most, starting one carrier every two years. In practice, during the study period, the average time between keels laid at Newport News (going from CVN-71 in 1981 to CVN-76 in 1998) was closer to three and a half years.

The switch to nuclear power has also made it much harder for big-navy advocates to make their marks. While Secretary, John Lehman grew the carrier fleet from 13 to 15 hulls, which had nothing to do with the four aircraft carriers he shepherded through Congress (the first, *Abraham Lincoln,* entered service two years after he left office). Instead, the rise in carrier strength was achieved through the previously authorized *Vinson* and *Roosevelt,* continuing the Carter administration's SLEP policy, and extending the service life of the ancient *Coral Sea*. This, of course, is an untenable option for nuclear carriers, whose service life is determined by the iron laws of nuclear refueling. Keeping a CVN in service even a year or two past its projected retirement would require a lengthy and expensive refueling.

On the other side of the ledger, very little headway has been made by those attempting to shrink the carrier force. When the carrier force has shrunk through retirement, those vessels have been at, or near the end of, their programmed service lives. Even when five carriers were decommissioned in five years (1990–94) after the end of the Cold War, those vessels were retired with, at most, six years of SLEP-added life remaining (although all were retired well after their originally designed service lives), and new construction sufficed to keep the carrier fleet at a strength of twelve hulls.

Advocates for fewer than 11 carriers have been mostly absent from this account because, apart from a handful of senators, they have had a minimal impact on concrete policy measures. Somewhat surprisingly, this even extends to OPNAV. While the Navy is often portrayed as a set of squabbling warfare communities, support for a large carrier fleet has cut across community boundaries. During the post–Cold War drawdown, for example, CNOs Trost and Kelso, both submariners, defended aircraft carrier force structure with an industriousness that did not apply to their equally vehement critiques of cuts to attack submarine force levels.

The realities of the aircraft carrier industrial base discussed above also militate against dramatic cuts to carrier end strength. With only one yard capable of building aircraft carriers, DON/DOD, Congress, and the White House have recognized the importance of maintaining the capability to build carriers. This point was made most starkly in 1993, when the Bottom-Up Review explicitly justified the construction of CVN-76 (and, for that matter, SSN-23) on the grounds of industrial policy, concluding that delaying or cancelling the carrier would "threaten the shipbuilder's viability."[6] Recall also the solicitousness with which Congress and DON dealt with Newport News's untimely—and uninvited—Smart Buy proposal in 1997.

The relationship between the shipbuilder, the Navy, and Congress can, of course, be viewed cynically—the "iron triangle" of American politics in action. As we have seen, the loudest voices in Congress for carrier construction have often come from Virginia senators and Hampton Roads–area congressmen; a far cry from Representative Carl Vinson's (D-GA) full-throated support for a large fleet from his landlocked district.[7] From the perspective of the Navy, however, protecting the carrier industrial base is simple common sense, ensuring that someone can build the service's future carriers. At any rate, these pressures have ensured that, for the entirety of the 1977–2001 period, Newport News has always had at least one active carrier contract.

Thus, the U.S. Navy's carrier force is funded, constructed, and maintained in a manner that tends to moderate efforts to rapidly increase or reduce capacity. What has changed is the rationale for their employment, perhaps proving Carl Builder's argument that "[t]he history of the Navy since World War II has been a search for a strategic concept to justify naval power in the form judged desirable by the Navy as an institution."[8] Beyond any doubt, that desirable form has remained naval power exercised by CVBGs. Indeed, this service consensus has lasted a great deal longer than the previous one held by the "gun club" of battleship advocates (approximately 1890–1942), and may last for some time—the carriers under construction now are set to retire sometime in the 2070s.

In the mid-late 1970s, the major naval strategy debates revolved around juggling declining resources, a rising Soviet threat, and policymakers with an essentially defen-

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[6] Aspin, "Report on the Bottom-Up Review," 49–57.

[7] Vinson, the namesake of CVN-70, chair of the House Naval Affairs Committee in the 1930s and 1940s, was the driving force behind three major naval construction bills in 1934, 1938, and 1940. Collectively, these bills authorized the construction of many of the ships the U.S. Navy fought with in World War II, including the first *Essex*-class aircraft carriers.

[8] Carl H. Builder, *The Masks of War: American Military Styles in Strategy and Analysis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 80.

sive view of seapower. Somewhat inaccurately, this view has become indelibly linked to Admiral Zumwalt and his plans for an ASW-focused Sea Control Ship. While Zumwalt supported CVN construction, the Ford and Carter administrations latched onto the SCS, and proposed variants (VSS, and later CVV), which would have replaced traditional carrier construction.

In response to these and other controversial naval policies, Admiral Holloway advocated for a 600-ship Navy, while the DON secretariat initiated the Sea Plan 2000 study, which built on Admiral Hayward's "Sea Strike" and argued, among other things, that the Navy's proper role in a Soviet war was global and offensive. Naturally, taking the global offensive required further CVN construction, placing DON at odds with Carter administration policy to place a CVV in the FY 1980 budget. With support from Congress, the Navy's preference won out over Secretary of Defense Brown's preference for a CV and the White House's for a CVV, leading to the construction of CVN-71, *Theodore Roosevelt*.

Both Sea Plan 2000 and Sea Strike came close to prefiguring the Maritime Strategy of the Reagan years. Though controversial outside of the Navy, the Maritime Strategy as promulgated by Secretary Lehman and senior admirals provided a sense that the Navy knew what it would do with a larger fleet. During this period, the Navy's preferences aligned with the administration's (or, perhaps the other way around) and, despite occasional friction, the Navy Department, the Secretary of Defense, and the White House were in alignment on the 15-carrier target and the funding for the four carriers authorized and appropriated during President Reagan's term.

During the Bush administration, the Navy was caught wrong-footed both by the end of the Cold War and DOD's response to it, effectively run by General Powell, the CJCS. As a result, the Navy found itself strategically adrift. Although DON leadership tried to preserve as much carrier strength as possible, the service met with difficulty in explicating a mission set for a larger carrier fleet that the administration and Congress were willing to accept. Although Operation Desert Storm was considered a rousing success, and the template for future interventions, it hardly posited a unique role for naval aviation that demanded a large carrier fleet.

The Navy's strategic confusion came to an end during the Clinton administration, with the service's successful advocacy of the forward presence mission as a force-sizing measure. As we have seen, the Navy always considered forward presence as an important mission, as evidenced by Zumwalt's policies, Sea Plan 2000 and the Maritime Strategy, all of which highlighted presence as a uniquely naval mission. In this particular case, the service successfully made the case in the run up to the BUR that forward

presence was important enough to determine the size of the carrier force, not just something that could be done with carriers while they waited for a major war.

Ironically, combat-credible forward presence has proven something of a poisoned chalice over the period of this study. The Navy's largest OPTEMPO/PERSTEMPO issues have come when national leadership takes the Navy's claims about the value of forward presence seriously. The major commitment to the Persian Gulf region in the wake of Sea Plan 2000's discussion of forward presence caused a myriad of issues as carrier battle groups operated almost as far as possible from their major CONUS and Japanese bases. Likewise, in the mid-1990s, the pace of crisis response and forward presence missions brought forth dark warnings of a "hollow force" after Secretary Aspin's BUR formalized forward presence as a driver of force structure.

As one recent study puts it, the Navy's "end strength may wax and wane [but] ships take time to build, so design, procurement, and construction must therefore begin well in advance of any particular contingency."[9] The Navy's history with aircraft carriers contextualizes that statement. Unlike other classes of ship (e.g., the decline

The future: An F-35C Lightning II launches from *Lincoln* during operational testing on 28 August 2018 (DIMOC/180828-N-FK070-1077/MC1 Brian M. Wilbur).

[9] Colin Roberts, "The Navy," in S. Rebecca Zimmerman, Kimberly Jackson, Natasha Lander, Colin Roberts, Dan Madden, and Rebecca Orrie, *Movement and Maneuver: Culture and the Competition for Influence Among the U.S. Military Services* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2019), 57.

in attack submarine numbers after the Cold War), the service's leadership has consistently, through word and deed, shown that they believe aircraft carriers to be suited to any and all significant contingencies. As this study was being written, the Navy was transitioning again toward great power conflict in which carriers—with new aircraft like the F-35C and an unmanned tanker—are again considered critical sea control and strike assets against peer and near-peer competitors.

As a result of this versatility, SECNAVs, CNOs, and their staffs have consistently sought to secure funding and approval for as many aircraft carriers as they can, trusting that they will retain utility over their lengthy service lives. USS *Midway,* built at the tail end of World War II stayed in service long enough to launch airstrikes during Operation Desert Storm in 1991. If properly maintained and refueled, the aircraft carriers under construction when this study was written, CVN-79 and -80, will remain in service into the 2070s. Considering the money it takes to construct, crew, and equip a CVN over its service life—estimated by GAO at $22.22 billion in 1998 (approximately $35.8 billion in 2019) without considering the cost of the air wing—the Navy has placed an incredible amount of faith in the ability of aircraft carriers to serve as capital ships in the future battlespace.[10]

The future: An F/A-18F flies over *Gerald R. Ford* (CVN-78) on 10 April 2017. Properly maintained, *Ford* will remain in service into the 2060s (DIMOC/170410-N-ZE240-0068/MC3 Catherine Campbell).

[10] GAO, "Navy Aircraft Carriers: Cost-Effectiveness of Conventionally and Nuclear Powered Carriers," August 1998, 9–10.

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ARG: Amphibious Ready Group
ASD: Assistant Secretary of Defense
ASN: Assistant Secretary of the Navy
ASW: Antisubmarine Warfare
BUR: Bottom-Up Review
CENTCOM: U.S. Central Command
CG: Guided Missile Cruiser
CJCS: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
CNO: Chief of Naval Operations
COCOM: Combatant Command/Combatant Commander
CONUS: Continental United States
CTOL: Conventional take-off and landing aircraft.
CV: Aircraft Carrier
CVBG: Aircraft Carrier Battle Group
CVN: Nuclear-powered aircraft carrier
CVS: Anti-submarine aircraft carrier
CVV: Proposed small conventional aircraft carrier variant.
DCNO: Deputy Chief of Naval Operations
DDG: Guided Missile Destroyer
DEPSECDEF: Deputy Secretary of Defense
DOD: Department of Defense
DON: Department of the Navy
DRB: Defense Resources Board
ESG: Expeditionary Strike Group
FY: Fiscal Year
FYDP: Future Years Defense Program
GNA: Goldwater-Nichols Act
GNFPP: Global Naval Force Presence Policy
HASC: House Armed Services Committee
JCS: Joint Chiefs of Staff

JSPD: Joint Strategic Planning Document
LANTFLT: United States Atlantic Fleet
LHA: General-purpose amphibious assault ship
LPH: Helicopter amphibious assault ship
MAGTF: Marine Air-Ground Task Force
NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDAA: National Defense Authorization Act
NSC: National Security Council
O&M: Operations and Maintenance funding
OLA: Navy Office of Legislative Affairs
OMB: White House Office of Management and Budget
OPNAV: Office of the Chief of Naval Operations; Navy Staff
OSD: Office of the Secretary of Defense
PACFLT: United States Pacific Fleet
PACOM: United States Pacific Command
POM: Program Objective Memorandum
QDR: Quadrennial Defense Review
RCOH: Refueling and Complex Overhaul
SASC: Senate Armed Services Committee
SCS: Sea Control Ship
SECDEF: Secretary of Defense
SECNAV: Secretary of the Navy
SLEP: Service Life Extension Program
SLOC: Sea Line of Communication
SSN: Nuclear-powered attack submarine
USD: Under Secretary of Defense
USN: United States Navy
VCNO: Vice Chief of Naval Operations
VSS: VSTOL Support Ship
VSTOL: Vertical/short take-off and landing aircraft
WESTPAC: Western Pacific

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