

Cato Institute Policy Analysis No. 195: The Cold War Navy in the Post War World

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Executive Summary

The U.S. Navy should be downsized and reconfigured to play a security role appropriate to the post-Cold War era. It is important that U.S. policymakers not cut the size of the Navy without also reassessing America's global military commitments and eliminating those that are no longer necessary. A failure to adopt a more realistic U.S. security posture risks strategic overextension and a "hollow fleet" incapable of performing its missions effectively.

Given the collapse of the Soviet Union, there is no credible naval challenger on the horizon. The United States is, therefore, afforded the luxury in its long-term planning of maintaining the quality of superior forces already in place and simultaneously reducing the total number of ships in service by decommissioning aging vessels.

The new Navy should de-emphasize the role of aircraft carriers, which are relics of a Cold War strategy based on countering Soviet power, and abandon the expensive and unnecessary doctrine of forward presence. Instead, the United States should design its naval forces to serve as a "ready fleet"--one based close to home but capable of responding rapidly to crises that might threaten vital American interests.

If the United States were to devolve regional security responsibilities to other countries in the international system and restrict its armed forces to defending vital American interests, it would be possible to reduce the Navy to 275 ships.

The Navy: Looking for a Mission

The U.S. Navy is a force in search of a mission, struggling to hold onto the budgetary and institutional gains made during the 1980s. For years it organized itself around the Maritime Strategy, developed in 1986 to counter the potent Soviet naval fleet. Now the Maritime Strategy is outdated. It was designed for the Cold War--a global confrontation that has been over for several years. The strategy and tactics of that era are now valuable only as material for military historians.

"... From the Sea": A Cautious First Step

A new strategy, promulgated in October 1992, addressed only some of the changed conditions. In a white paper released jointly by the secretary of the Navy, the chief of naval operations, and the commandant of the Marine Corps, the services articulated their vision of strategy and tactics for the coming years. The paper, "... From the Sea," candidly recognized that the old Maritime Strategy's focus on the Soviet Union was no longer relevant. It completely failed, however, to contemplate major changes and reductions in force structure. The authors instead stated an amorphous goal of focusing "our procurement strategy on systems that best support the unique capabilities of the Navy and Marine Corps."^[1]

The underlying U.S. security strategy, as interpreted by the three military leaders, is equally vague, shifting from "a focus on a global threat" to a focus on "regional challenges and opportunities." [2] The Navy's mission, in their view, should be to "help to shape the future in ways favorable to our interests by underpinning our alliances, precluding threats, and helping to preserve the strategic position we won with the end of the Cold War." [3] Instead of the Soviet threat, the new enemy appears to be "uncertainty" in any region deemed important to America's national interest.

Because the threat environment has changed, the force structure of the Navy should be changed and adapted. To date, few specifics have been put forward about how the numbers and types of ships built and operated by the Navy will support a new overall strategy. Instead, when asked to propose additional cuts in naval forces, military leaders have recommended cutting only those ships already nearing the end of their serviceable lives, with no thought of how that action relates to the new mission. More serious thinking is needed. Naval policy planners must now be willing to dismantle some of the very cornerstones on which the Maritime Strategy was built. At the very least, they must consider how a smaller U.S. Navy could accomplish the service's mission, something the white paper failed to do. Even more important, the nation's political leaders must adopt a new post-Cold War security strategy that includes a more limited, realistic role for the Navy.

Some Crucial Principles

Four basic principles should guide the development of a new naval force structure. First, downsizing the Navy is possible and desirable because of the dramatic geopolitical changes that have taken place in the past five years. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, there is no longer a large-scale, monolithic threat to American security. Although the post-Cold War world will assuredly be a disorderly place, aggressive powers that might wish America ill will be far smaller and less capable militarily than was the Soviet Union. Moreover, the United States possesses the most technologically advanced, well-trained and well-maintained navy in the world. The vast strength advantage of the U.S. Navy, relative to that of any competing naval force, would not be significantly eroded by major reductions in manpower and equipment. As force reductions are made, the post-Cold War Navy should be structured around far fewer aircraft carrier battle groups.

The second principle that should guide the change in force structure, then, is that the Navy should be composed primarily of smaller, less expensive multimission cruisers, destroyers, and frigates.

Third, the Navy's long-term strategy should virtually eliminate the practice of maintaining a forward presence in a particular geopolitical region (e.g., the Western Pacific, the Mediterranean, or the Arabian Gulf). The vague new strategy put forward in ". . . From the Sea" failed to do that. The authors refused to recognize that the Navy's ability and readiness to respond to threats to vital U.S. interests, wherever they emerge, would not be hindered by stationing forces and conducting naval exercises close to home.

Finally, and most important, cuts in our naval forces must be accompanied by a new national security strategy. The scope of military missions should be sharply restricted and various overseas commitments eliminated. The rules of conduct guiding the use of force must include a careful appraisal of America's vital interests by the nation's political leaders. If force reductions are made, but the current practice of responding to myriad threats throughout the world remains unchanged, serious problems will arise. As fewer and fewer naval assets are stretched to the limit to cover excessive global commitments, and as deployments and time away from home and family grow longer and longer, the erosion of morale will create a frustrated and weakened "hollow force."

An 800-Pound Gorilla: The U.S. Navy vs. the World

The overwhelming strength of the U.S. Navy relative to that of the navy of any other world power is readily apparent. Regional infighting and a disintegrating military infrastructure have debilitated the once-powerful Soviet navy. The Soviet fleet has been largely divided among the successor republics of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and it is probable that further reductions and divisions will continue to degrade its overall capabilities. The actual sizes of the "new" CIS fleets are subject to considerable debate; Russia, however, possesses the bulk of the remaining force.

Although the number of vessels in the various Russian fleets remains reasonably impressive, the readiness of those

fleets has been deteriorating steadily. Many ships sit idle in port, lacking spare parts and, sometimes, even adequately trained crews. The financially beleaguered government in Moscow frequently lacks the funds to pay for routine maintenance, to say nothing of operating expenses.

In the final analysis, Russia possesses neither the resources nor the will to maintain a large blue-water, or open-ocean, navy in the face of the daunting political and economic challenges at home. If the former Soviet fleet no longer poses a credible challenge to U.S. security, it is even more difficult to visualize such a challenge from any other country. The next largest 10 navies in the world (Table 1) cannot even approach the United States in numbers and technology. For example, the United States has 50 percent more aircraft carriers than do all of those navies, except that of Russia, combined. The U.S. Navy holds a virtual monopoly on guided-missile cruisers; has twice as many attack submarines as the nearest competitor, China; and has more than twice as many ballistic-missile submarines as the navies of all those nations combined.

Table 1
Leading Naval Powers

Country	Carriers	Cruisers	Destroyers	(FFG/FF)	Escorts	(SS/SSN/SSBN)
U.K.	2/0	--	12	24/0	--	5/13/4
Japan	--	--	42	20/0	--	15/0/0
France	2/0	--	15	24/0	--	8/5/5
Germany	--	--	6	8/3	3	20/0/0
China	--	--	16	39/0	--	30/5/1
Spain	1/0	--	--	15/4	4	8/0/0
Italy	1/0	1	4	14/9	9	8/0/0
India	2/0	--	5	15/18	18	14/0/0
Russia	4/0	23a	36	134/129	129	104/92/54b
Brazil	1/0	--	6	13/0	--	4/0/0
U.S.	6/6	50a	38	35/0	--	0/87/21

Source: Jane's Fighting Ships, 1993-1994 (Alexandria, Va.: Jane's Information Group, 1993).

Note:

CV = conventional fixed-wing aircraft carrier

CVN = nuclear fixed-wing aircraft carrier

FFG = fast frigate, guided missile

FF = fast frigate

SS = diesel-powered attack submarine

SSN = nuclear-powered attack submarine

SSBN = ballistic-missile submarine

(a)U.S. and Russian cruiser totals include both nuclear and conventional vessels.

(b)Russian submarine totals include guided-missile, nuclear, vessels as SSN and guided-missile, diesel, vessels as SS. Auxiliary submarines are not listed.

". . . From the Sea" concurs with that assessment, stating candidly that "with the demise of the Soviet Union, the free nations of the world claim preeminent control of the seas and ensure freedom of commercial maritime passage. As a result, our national maritime policies can afford to deemphasize efforts in some naval warfare areas." [4] The document fails, however, to state specifically how such a de-emphasis of warfare areas can be translated into major force reductions under a new strategy.

Numerical superiority, meanwhile, tells only half the story. The U.S. Navy not only has more ships and submarines, but better equipment, better trained personnel, and better support services as well. The billions of dollars spent during the 1980s have purchased, for at least the next 30 years, one of the strongest and most capable naval forces in history.

Given the overwhelming strength of the U.S. Navy, and the absence of a major challenger to U.S. security, the United States is now afforded the considerable luxury in its longterm planning of merely maintaining the quality of superior forces already in place and simultaneously reducing the total number of ships in service by decommissioning aging and obsolescent platforms. The ships kept in service should be capable of high-tempo operations for the next 30 years. Vessels that are unable to meet that requirement should be eliminated. In any case, the vast quantitative and qualitative disparity between the U.S. Navy and any potential rivals means that we can make sizable reductions now and still maintain an ample margin of safety for many years to come.

Beyond the Carrier Battle Group

For many years the Navy has designed its tactics around the aircraft carrier battle group (CVBG), using that element as the principal measure of the service's size and strength. A carrier battle group, centered around a conventional or nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, typically consists of approximately 15 ships, including at least one Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser, two or three supply and auxiliary support ships, and one or two fast-attack submarines. The groups typically include from 10,000 to 15,000 sailors and Marines.

Static Thinking

For years, senior military officials and various cold-warriors regarded the CVBG as sacrosanct. Reductions in carrier forces, they argued, would reduce the United States to second-class military status. But with the end of the Cold War, the need for a navy centered around the aircraft carrier has disappeared. Most proposals to reduce the size of the Navy fail to acknowledge that change. Although some reform initiatives may recommend fewer carriers, they still typically envision a navy built around the carrier battle group. For example, a proposal put forth by the Navy in May 1993 recommended cutting 117 ships from the U.S. fleet between 1993 and 1999 but still called for retaining 12 active aircraft carriers, the same number proposed by the Bush administration the year before.[5] Even Secretary of Defense Les Aspin's alternative proposal (made when he was chairman of the House Armed Services Committee) for further cuts (a base force of 290 ships, including 8 CVBGs, and a reduction in manpower levels from approximately 750,000 men and women to 430,000 in fiscal year 1997) did not alter the focus of a carrier-centered navy.

Without a reassessment of the national strategy that governs the use of naval assets--including de-emphasizing the importance of carriers--we are unlikely to see the types of reductions contemplated in Aspin's proposal, much less deeper cuts. The authors of ". . . From the Sea" simply refused to confront the crucial issue of carriers. The aircraft carrier, central to the Maritime Strategy's emphasis on confronting a huge Soviet fleet in the open ocean, should no longer be regarded as the central element of U.S. naval strategy.

Moreover, parochial political factors are undermining attempts to implement reductions in force that are anything more than marginal. Domestic political pressures may, in fact, force the continued construction of some new ships and aircraft deemed no longer essential even by members of the defense establishment.[6] For now, the construction of the USS John Stennis (CVN-74) and the USS United States (CVN-75) is funded through FY96 at a tremendous cost to taxpayers. In FY93 the Navy allocated \$832 million to the purchase of long-lead-time materials for CVN-76.[7] That represents a mere fraction of the total cost of such a vessel, estimated at over \$10 billion. Those construction programs were initiated during the Cold War and justified by the Maritime Strategy. With the end of the Cold War, and within the framework of a new strategy, they are no longer needed.

Admiral Miller's Reform Proposals

There are, to be sure, a few hints of new thinking among some senior naval planners about altering the current CVBG deployment strategy. In an April 1992 article, Adm. Paul D. Miller (commander in chief, U.S. Atlantic Command/Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic) expressed confidence in the new-generation Aegis-class cruisers and destroyers that are being delivered to the fleet to replace aging and obsolete steam-powered ships.[8] Miller also

discussed the prospect of using alternative platforms, equipped with Tomahawk land-attack cruise missiles, for missions once assigned to aircraft carriers and battleships.

Although Miller's enthusiasm for innovation and change was mildly encouraging, his philosophical attachment to the supposed superiority of the aircraft carrier demonstrates just how far naval planning will have to go before it catches up with the political, social, and economic realities of the 1990s and beyond--including the likelihood of a less threatening geostrategic environment. Discussions of possible substitutes for the carrier battle group are useful, Miller conceded, but "while every mission does not require an aircraft carrier, when a carrier is needed, there is no substitute." [9] More recently, Miller has endorsed the use of aircraft carriers to support Marines ashore, a policy in tune with the warfare philosophy of ". . . From the Sea." Resistance to such ideas, however, remains strong as some within the Navy have openly criticized Miller for his enthusiasm. "This is being received in a large circle of sycophants as brilliant and innovative just because it's different," one admiral was quoted as saying. [10]

In general, the debate within the Navy concerns the apparent shift from a blue-water navy to a "brown-water" navy operating largely in support of ground missions. The role of the aircraft carrier is at the center of the debate. As a number of experts have shown, there are viable alternatives to the CVBG. Most recently, the Navy has experimented in the Mediterranean with a maritime action group made up of two surface ships, a nuclear attack submarine, and maritime patrol aircraft. [11]

Military planners are not ignorant of the dramatic changes that have taken place in the world. Indeed, they have sometimes been ahead of many civilian leaders in accepting (even proposing) force reductions. [12] Nevertheless, they are still wedded to the assumptions of the Cold War era--that forward presence of American forces is necessary, that maintaining large numbers of CVBGs is important, and that the United States must bear the lion's share of global security burdens. Those assumptions do not reflect the new geostrategic environment or adjustments to the long-term probability (because of fiscal pressures created by chronic federal budget deficits) that the United States will have a smaller fleet with which to protect its security interests. Far more dramatic "new thinking" must take place.

Forward Presence: An Idea Whose Time Has Come (and Gone)

The policy of pre-positioning American naval forces in various regions around the world consumes valuable assets and costs billions of dollars yearly. Yet ". . . From the Sea" completely failed to confront that critical fact. Instead, its authors reiterated the determination of the Navy and the Marine Corps to maintain a forward presence and stated, "As the U.S. withdraws from overseas bases, Naval Forces will become even more relevant in meeting American forward presence requirements." [13]

Obsolete Assumptions

In spite of the significant geopolitical changes acknowledged in the new strategy, the Navy and the Marine Corps insist on maintaining sizable forces in the Mediterranean, the Western Pacific, and the Arabian Gulf, as though the Cold War menace still existed. (Even the Army seems more attuned to the realities of the post-Cold War world. It withdrew over 85,000 men and women from Europe in 1992 alone.)

The need to support continued CVBG deployments overseas forms the foundation of the Pentagon's current shipbuilding and conversion plan. Planners with the Joint Chiefs of Staff have estimated that six carriers are required to support a full-time U.S. presence in the Arabian Gulf region, five to support a presence in the Mediterranean region, and one to maintain a U.S. presence in the Western Pacific. [14]

Such plans invariably fail to consider whether the United States still needs to maintain its array of security commitments in those regions. If the commitments are unnecessary, then there is certainly no need to maintain a navy of the size and characteristics outlined by the Navy's latest proposal--or even the slimmed-down version suggested by Aspin in 1992. The timing is right for a major policy change. Increasingly, regional powers are capable of performing security roles once reserved exclusively for the United States. In the absence of the threat posed by a would-be global hegemon such as the Soviet Union, regional powers can usually form the first line of defense against threats arising from small or medium-sized expansionist states.

To achieve significant force reductions without stretching available naval assets to the breaking point, the United States must discontinue its policy of forward presence. It is neither feasible nor desirable to maintain the current deployment strategy, given the fiscal and geopolitical realities of the day. Forward presence was largely designed to thwart the threat posed by Soviet forces, poised for an invasion of Western Europe or East Asia. With the departure of Soviet forces, the need for forward presence is essentially eliminated, and that development affords an opportunity for huge financial savings. It has been estimated that the withdrawal of forces from the Arabian Gulf alone would render unnecessary the commitment of five or six CVBGs yearly.[15] Similarly, the withdrawal of forward-deployed units from the Western Pacific, Japan, and the Mediterranean would cost the United States nothing in terms of military preparedness. Yet it would enable the Navy to significantly reduce the number of active surface vessels without adversely affecting operational tempo[16] and save billions of dollars yearly.

An Alternative to Forward Presence

In place of forward presence, the United States should design its naval forces of the 21st century to serve as a "ready fleet," capable of responding in two to three weeks to relevant threats that might emerge. American naval forces would operate near the continental United States and in the Central Pacific when not responding to crises.[17] Should naval power projection or limited amphibious operations in a given crisis be called for, and should friendly regional powers be unable to take sufficient action, U.S. naval units would be available and capable of responding long before the situation got out of hand. Washington's strategy for the 21st century should be to use naval forces on new and existing platforms to support crisis response and a more concerted defense of the oceanic approaches to the American homeland. Limited multinational exercises; extended operations in the Caribbean, North Atlantic, and Central Pacific; and a modified maintenance and training cycle would sustain the new strategy.

The Ready Fleet

The Navy and Marine Corps provide the United States with an effective shock force, capable of responding quickly and efficiently to threats. The ships of today's fleet have an unprecedented array of offensive and defensive capabilities. Ships as small as the Arleigh Burke-class destroyers and Los Angeles-class submarines are capable of carrying Tomahawk cruise missiles and are routinely assigned the task of performing the force-projection missions once assigned to aircraft carriers and battleships. Many Spruance-class destroyers, originally designed to counter the once-potent Soviet submarine threat, have been fitted with Tomahawks so as to be able to assume force-projection missions. The effectiveness of those weapons was dramatically displayed during the Persian Gulf War. In the near future, ships with the Aegis weapon system and Terrier Standard missiles may provide defense against theater ballistic missiles such as those employed during the Gulf war.[18]

In the unlikely event that ground forces were needed to neutralize a crisis that threatened vital U.S. interests, the Navy and Marine Corps would remain a central element. ". . . From the Sea" specifically addresses the critical mission of sealift.[19] It is clear that a new emphasis has been placed on the use of naval assets for the delivery of personnel and equipment ashore in a regional crisis. If extensive use were made of land-based aircraft for military transport (the preferred method today), Army ground troops and Air Force support personnel could be delivered to forward staging areas in two to three weeks. Naval forces, including sailors and Marines, would be capable of deploying on short notice and being on- station to support a ground buildup within a comparable time frame.[20] Again, there is no need to perpetually maintain a forward military presence.

Another argument once used to support the policy of forward presence is also increasingly irrelevant. In the early 1980s considerable value was assigned to training in an environment populated by the "threat"--namely Soviet naval forces. Today, however, too much time and effort are spent creating elaborate scenarios using U.S. and NATO forces to simulate a nonexistent Soviet adversary. Realistic training, in support of limited crisis response, could be achieved by smaller periodic exercises in the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean, the Central Pacific, or the North Atlantic.

In place of the traditional six-month CVBG deployment, cruises of two to four months by Surface Action Groups, composed of two or three cruisers or destroyers, two or three frigates, and one or two support vessels, might be required to protect vital American interests such as Guam, the Marshall and Mariana islands, and the Caribbean. In addition, exercises with other friendly nations could continue, but not on the scale of the current regularly scheduled

Team Work and Team Spirit exercises. The Navy would continue to show the flag through its participation in multilateral exercises, even if the total number of ships involved at any given time were significantly smaller.

Limited Control of Sea Lanes

Other missions, too, could be supported by a smaller number of ships based close to home. For example, the control of vital sea lanes of communication (SLOCs), considered central to the Maritime Strategy of the early 1980s, may still be relevant in the coming decades. Whereas sea-lane control was once intended as an offensive measure, to prevent certain geographic "choke points" from falling into the hands of hostile forces, sea-lane control in the 1990s and beyond would be intended to ensure the free flow of goods and would be primarily defensive in nature. That mission could be supported by the "small boys" of the fleet--cruisers, destroyers, and frigates. In the unlikely event that a regional conflict threatened to close a strategic choke point or threatened U.S. economic interests, naval forces would be able to respond.

The Navy has focused its strategic and tactical planning on controlling SLOCs for over a decade, but that focus should be reevaluated because some formerly crucial choke points have receded in importance now that the threat from the Soviet submarine and surface fleet has disappeared. Monitoring movement across the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom gap, to use just one example, no longer requires the level of vigilance and the number of assets that it did in the "hot" years of the early 1980s, when scores of Soviet ships and submarines poured into the Atlantic on surveillance and ballistic-missile patrols. Some other important potential choke points with relation to international trade are the Strait of Gibraltar, the Suez Canal, the Strait of Bab-El-Mendeb (at the southern end of the Red Sea), the Strait of Malacca (between Malaysia and Indonesia), and the Panama Canal. As trade with the republics of the CIS and Eastern Europe expands, the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, at the entrance to the Black Sea, may gain strategic prominence. The Baltic region is expected to remain a vital trading area, and new ports should open there as the newly independent Baltic states expand their economies.

Shifting Burdens in a Multipolar World

It is important to emphasize that threats to the various SLOCs are purely theoretical. Few aggressive regional powers have the air and naval assets to make a bid for control. Those regional powers that do have the requisite assets are primarily capitalist democracies that would have no incentive to disrupt international commerce. Indeed, they would probably be the front-line guardians of vulnerable choke points.

In today's multipolar international system, regional powers should be primarily concerned with maintaining security within their own sphere of influence. Although few countries currently have the naval assets to influence events far outside their sphere of influence, virtually all countries maintain coastal defense forces that could work in conjunction with larger navies should hostilities threaten to close a vital choke point. Further, the United States ought to encourage those countries that do possess a limited blue-water capability to assume a greater role in their respective spheres of influence. For example, Japan and Australia should be expected to assume a larger burden in the Western Pacific; and Great Britain, France, and Germany should be expected to do the same in the Eastern Atlantic, the North Sea, the Baltic Sea, and the Mediterranean.

The United States can afford the luxury of a two-tiered naval strategy. For minor crises, Washington has the opportunity to rely on the security efforts of front-line states (a reversal of the situation throughout the Cold War when America's European and East Asian allies relied, and in some cases became dependent, on the U.S. security guarantee). If a more serious threat to the SLOCs emerged--one that could jeopardize vital American interests--the United States would be prepared to cooperate with like-minded powers to repel an aggressor. Limited joint training exercises and the establishment of joint action plans should be sufficient to coordinate policies for such purposes.

World Trade and Global Instability: Keeping Crises in Perspective

We should remember, too, that the closing of a single choke point would not halt, or even seriously restrict, the free flow of goods. There are always alternative routes, and alternative means of transport, to keep goods moving. In fact, if war completely cut off trade with a given country or region, it would not necessarily mean an economic catastrophe

for the United States. Alternative sources of raw materials could be developed and alternative markets opened. Although disruptions might cause certain hardships for American consumers and manufacturers, it would be rare that such hardships, by themselves, would warrant committing U.S. military assets and risking the lives of American military personnel.

The Navy will be the most important part of any military effort to guarantee the free flow of goods, because a vast majority of U.S. imports and exports are delivered via sea-going vessels. The Navy is uniquely qualified and trained to protect merchant vessels. Frigates, especially, are excellent escort vessels. Although all of the older Knox-class, steam-powered frigates have been either decommissioned or transferred to the reserve fleet, the newer, more versatile Perry-class guided-missile frigates are sufficient to continue that mission well into the next century.

Support for international trade does not require that U.S. naval forces be permanently stationed in any particular region. The greatest distance to be traveled among the regions mentioned above could be covered in less than 30 days.[21] Because today's naval vessels are capable of covering such distances in a relatively short period of time, the need for maintaining ships in forward ports is eliminated. Smaller ships, moreover, can better provide SLOC control than can aircraft carriers, which further limits the relative value of those enormous, expensive relics of the Cold War era.

Avoiding a Shadow Fleet

A new political consensus is rapidly developing that the size of the Navy should be significantly reduced. In February President Clinton asked the services to propose additional defense cuts, beyond those made by the outgoing Bush administration, totaling over \$13 billion. More than \$3 billion of those cuts was to be in the Navy and Marine Corps.[22] A recent study conducted by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology proposed an additional \$38 billion in cuts for FY94 through FY98.[23] In the present cost-cutting environment, the greatest danger to U.S. security arises from the creation of a so-called shadow or hollow force. A shadow force--characterized by inadequate equipment, insufficient funding, and too many missions for too few ships--is incapable of performing its assigned mission. Long deployments, infrequent periods at home with families, and insufficient time allotted to maintenance and training would result in the disillusionment of dedicated military professionals who would be repeatedly called on to respond to too many crises all over the world. Faced with that prospect, many of those professionals, dedicated though they might be, would leave the service prematurely, taking valuable skills with them at a tremendous cost to American taxpayers.

Clinton's Mixed Signals

In his address to Congress on February 17, 1993, President Clinton expressed his commitment to the men and women serving in the armed forces. He stated his determination to provide them with the technology and the tools necessary to continue their mission.[24] The critical question that remains to be answered, however, is how Clinton will choose to use the forces at his disposal. If he intends to use U.S. forces in a manner similar to that of his predecessors; if he commits the United States to defend peripheral interests, or the interests of other nations; if he directs Congress and the Pentagon to purchase weapon systems that will garner him political support, but not a strong military, then his words represent nothing more than a rhetorical flourish.

His address to Congress did little to assuage the concerns of many experienced personnel. His call for a freeze on all cost-of-living increases for a period of one year, and additional reductions for the next four years, awakened memories of the military pay scales of the late 1970s, when men on board Navy ships were drawing food stamps to supplement their meager incomes.[25] The pay-freeze proposal raised concerns within the military community about the commander in chief's commitment to the well-being of the men and women in uniform. Although it is necessary and desirable to reduce the number of military personnel, it is crucial that those who remain in the services be appropriately compensated. History shows us that failure to maintain a balance between military and civilian pay scales has a direct and detrimental effect on retention. In 1971 the reenlistment rate stood at 77 percent. By 1980, following nine consecutive years of cutbacks and neglect, that number had fallen to only 53 percent.[26]

Remembering the Mistakes of the 1970s

Pay is not the only factor in maintaining the quality of the force. In a broader sense, we can predict how deep cuts in

the military, without associated cuts in American commitments, will affect the morale of our troops. U.S. military commitments have exceeded available assets before. In the late 1970s, as Washington's worldwide commitments expanded and new ship construction failed to keep pace, some ships suffered through eight- or nine-month deployments and abbreviated repair and training cycles. Too often, another extended deployment followed close thereafter. An article in U.S. News & World Report at the time summarized the sentiments of the men and women in uniform. They felt that the force had been stretched too thin in the attempt to patrol the Indian Ocean, as well as the Pacific, the Atlantic, and the Mediterranean. In the words of one sailor, "You can't cover four oceans with a Navy designed to cover 1 1/2." [27]

To avoid a repetition of that undesirable situation, naval force reductions must be made in conjunction with fundamental changes in naval strategy and national security policy. In short, if the nation is determined to reduce its naval capabilities, then it must also restrict the way naval power is used. We must reappraise our worldwide commitments and gain a firm and thorough understanding of our vital interests, then tailor our military forces accordingly. [28]

The Clinton Administration's Fondness for Global Meddling

For now, such a dramatic change in political emphasis seems unlikely. Instead, President Clinton appears to be prepared to maintain all the commitments of the Bush administration and to add new ones. He has perpetuated the U.S. commitment in the Arabian Gulf and kept troops stationed in Somalia. The developing political and diplomatic crisis in the former Yugoslavia has been a constant source of embarrassment and anguish for the president and his senior advisers. Although no precise policy has yet been adopted, it seems clear that the president is determined to expand the U.S. military role. He has used U.S. aircraft to enforce a "no-fly" zone over Bosnia--and more recently sent 300 troops to Macedonia as part of a UN peacekeeping force.

Further evidence that the Clinton administration is refusing to accept realistic limits on the use of military power was provided on May 25, 1993. At a meeting with reporters, Under Secretary of State Peter Tarnoff candidly stated that, with the end of the Cold War and the continuing economic problems at home, the United States must "define the extent of its commitments" in the international system. He went on to say that the United States does not have the leverage, the influence, or the inclination to use military force to solve every crisis that might arise. [29]

Within hours, Secretary of State Warren Christopher and other senior administration officials rushed to disavow Tarnoff's statements. "There is no derogation of our powers and our responsibility to lead," Christopher said. [30] Later Christopher elaborated on that theme, asserting not only that the United States would be an enthusiastic participant in multilateral security ventures, but that "when it is necessary, we will act unilaterally to protect our interests." [31] It seems clear that the Clinton administration is unwilling to accept the realities of the post-Cold War era and to encourage regional powers to assume greater responsibility for maintaining order in the world.

The Political Realities of the 21st Century

The Navy is already getting smaller. Naval and Marine Corps personnel levels were reduced approximately 5 percent from January 1991 to January 1992. By FY97, the Bush administration had proposed to reduce total naval personnel an additional 25 percent--to a force of approximately 580,000 men and women. The Clinton administration has gone one step further, asking for a reduction of \$3.5 billion from the FY94 budget and an additional 5 percent reduction in naval personnel. Throughout the sea services, numerous administrative and staff positions are being eliminated, and ship decommissionings are continuing at a rapid pace. A total of 68 ships and submarines were decommissioned in 1991. By 1992 the Navy was decommissioning ships at a rate of two every three weeks. [32] Nevertheless, deeper cuts are warranted and can be made-- provided we are more selective about the interests that must be defended by U.S. military forces.

A New Force Structure

A reasonable proposal for reductions in naval forces should take into account the expected life spans of the newest and most capable ships of the fleet. Particular emphasis should be placed on retaining the newest cruisers and destroyers. A capable and effective naval force composed of 6 active aircraft carriers and approximately 275 other ships can be

created from existing assets. The post-Cold War Navy should retain seven Nimitz-class nuclear aircraft carriers in active service, including one in rotating maintenance. The USS Enterprise (CVN-65) should be retained as a training carrier. The remainder of the surface force would include 25 Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruisers, 21 Arleigh Burke-class and 4 Kidd-class guided-missile destroyers, 25 Spruance-class destroyers, and 40 Oliver Hazard Perry-class guided-missile frigates.[33] Submarine forces would include 10 Ohio-class ballistic-missile submarines and 45 to 50 Los Angeles-class attack submarines. Finally, our amphibious forces should include 3 Wasp-class amphibious assault ships, 6 Whidbey Island-class dock-landing ships, and 6 tank-landing ships. Supply and auxiliary support ships, mine sweepers, and special-mission hydrofoils and patrol craft would round out the 275-ship Navy.[34] Such a configuration of forces would maximize our available assets and capitalize on the tremendous technological advantage that the U.S. Navy enjoys over other naval forces. The ships of the future should be designed with an emphasis on speed and endurance to ensure that the Navy, based in U.S. territory, has the flexibility to respond to threats to our vital interests, if they arise, elsewhere in the world.

Defending Legitimate American Security Interests

Significant reductions in the armed forces are necessary, given today's fiscal crisis. The American public will no longer support a Cold War-sized defense establishment, nor should it be expected to do so. But it is unrealistic to believe that the Navy and Marine Corps of the 21st century will never be called on to respond to threats. By carefully defining our vital security interests, we can significantly reduce the occasions on which action is required. Further, by training a "new" Navy and Marine Corps as the shock troops of the U.S. defense establishment, and by outfitting them with state-of-the-art technology, we will enable our forces to accomplish essential missions quickly and efficiently.

The new naval strategy embodied in ". . . From the Sea" is an important step in the evolution of naval strategy from the Cold War to the next century. It does not go far enough, however, in recognizing how substantial force reductions can, and should, be made. New emphasis should be placed on discarding the policy of forward presence, and a new procurement strategy should have an appreciation for how smaller, less expensive vessels can better support the missions of the Navy and Marine Corps. Obsolete U.S. commitments should be handed off to regional powers. Unilateral action in defense of other nations' interests should be avoided at all costs.

The U.S. Navy will remain strong, and its personnel dedicated, in spite of cutbacks, as long as it is not called on to perform too many missions at one time, and as long as the men and women who remain in the Navy and Marine Corps are properly compensated for their service. By curtailing Washington's worldwide obligations and simultaneously reducing the size of the fleet, we can avoid the creation of a "shadow fleet" and can retain our position as the world's preeminent naval power--one fully capable of defending legitimate American security interests--for many years to come.

Notes

[1] Sean O'Keefe, Frank B. Kelso II, and Carl E. Mundy, Jr., ". . . From the Sea: Preparing the Naval Service for the 21st Century," reprinted in U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, November 1992, p. 96. The authors are, respectively, secretary of the Navy, chief of naval operations, and commandant of the Marine Corps.

[2] Ibid., p. 93.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] John Lancaster, "Navy Plans Cutback of 117 Ships," Washington Post, May 8, 1993, p. A1.

[6] See Jeffrey R. Gerlach's discussion of the construction of the Seawolf submarine in "Politics and the National Defense: The 1993 Defense Bill," Cato Institute Foreign Policy Briefing no. 22, January 20, 1993, pp. 3-4. See also the debate over construction of CVN-76 and the V-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft. Former defense secretary Cheney summarized his frustration with political pressures during testimony before a Senate panel in 1992: Congress has "squabbled and bickered and horse-traded and ended up forcing me to spend money on weapons systems that just don't fill a vital

need in these times." "Top Pentagon Officials Defend Need to Retain Large Military," Washington Post, February 1, 1992, p. A4.

[7] Scott Truver, "Tomorrow's Fleet," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, June 1992, p. 47.

[8] Paul David Miller, "Doing the Job with a Smaller Fleet," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, April 1992, p. 56.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Barton Gellman, "Mud Soldiers Take to the Sea," Washington Post, April 4, 1993, p. A23.

[11] Robert O. Crawshaw, "What Is a Maritime Action Group?" U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, January 1993, pp. 28-31. For further discussion of an alternative to the carrier-based Maritime Strategy, see Stan Weeks, "Crafting a New Maritime Strategy," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, January 1991, pp. 30-37.

[12] The new ideas emanating from the Pentagon range from the decision to develop and build as many as 15 small coastal craft; to recommendations for the elimination of several popular weapons programs (including the Osprey, the A-10 advanced tactical fighter, the Seawolf attack submarine, and all four Iowa-class battleships); to significant reductions in personnel levels.

[13] O'Keefe et al., p. 94.

[14] Truver, p. 46.

[15] See Earl C. Ravenal, *Designing Defense for a New World Order: The Military Budget in 1992 and Beyond* (Washington: Cato Institute, 1991), pp. 44-57.

[16] Optimal operational tempo (OPTEMPO) has been established by the chief of naval operations as 6-month deployments with no more than one 6-month deployment in any 24-month period. Revisions to current OPTEMPO envision a reduction in the overall cycle to 20 months, but plans for extending deployments past the 6-month limit have not been discussed.

[17] Admiral Miller actually stated that forces in the Ready Fleet, designated for deployment within the next 6 months, could be dispatched to crisis areas in only 4 to 10 days. See Miller, p. 59. That seems unreasonable, but the point is clear and it demonstrates that naval policy planners are open to the idea.

[18] For an interesting and in-depth discussion of this program, see Rodney P. Rempt, "Killing Scuds from the Sea," U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, June 1993, pp. 52-58.

[19] The authors state: "Sealift is an enduring mission for the Navy. Our nation must remain capable of delivering heavy equipment and resupplying major ground and air combat power forward in crisis. Sealift is the key to force sustainment for joint operations, and we are committed to a strong national sealift capability." O'Keefe et al., p. 94.

[20] During the buildup to the Persian Gulf War, from August 1990 to January 1991, ships sent from Norfolk, Virginia, and the other major bases on the eastern seaboard were on station in approximately 20 days.

[21] For example, a crisis in either the southern Red Sea region (Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia, Yemen) or the northern Red Sea-Suez Canal region (Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Algeria, Ethiopia) could threaten to close those trade routes. Essentially, those regions are on the opposite side of the world from most U.S. Navy bases: approximately 11,400 nautical miles from Pearl Harbor, Hawaii; 14,400 nautical miles from West Coast bases (San Diego, Long Beach, and San Francisco, California; or Bremerton, Washington); and 9,500 nautical miles from East Coast bases (Norfolk, Virginia; Charleston, South Carolina; Mayport, Florida; Staten Island, New York; and Newport, Rhode Island). Given an estimated speed of advance of 20 knots, or 480 nautical miles per day, units from each of those U.S. bases could make the transit in no more than 30 days (U.S. East Coast, 20 days; Hawaii, 24 days; U.S. West Coast, 30 days). Allowing 7 to 10 days for supply, refit, and manning for short-notice deployments, the prospects for that choke point's

remaining closed for longer than a month are remote.

[22] Eric Schmitt, "Clinton Seeking \$14 Billion Cut by the Military," *New York Times*, February 4, 1993, p. A1.

[23] Jerome Wiesner and Kosta Tsipis, "7 Percent Pentagon Solution," *New York Times*, March 4, 1993, p. 25.

[24] "State of the Union: President Clinton's Address," *Washington Post*, February 18, 1993.

[25] "Low Pay on the High Seas," *Fortune*, November 3, 1980, pp. 67-69.

[26] Orr Kelly, "A Firsthand Look at What Ails the Navy," *U.S. News & World Report*, September 22, 1980, p. 38.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] For an in-depth discussion of national interests, see Ted Galen Carpenter, *A Search for Enemies: America's Alliances after the Cold War* (Washington: Cato Institute, 1992), pp. 139-65.

[29] Daniel Williams and John M. Goshko, "Reduced U.S. World Role Outlined but Soon Altered," *Washington Post*, May 26, 1993, p. A1.

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] J. F. O. McAllister, "Secretary of Shhhhh!" *Time*, June 7, 1993, p. 32.

[32] See *Jane's Fighting Ships*, 1992-1993, p. 726.

[33] We should continue the Destroyer Variant program, which is meant to develop a low-cost alternative to the original Arleigh Burke destroyer. Once developed, those ships could replace the Kidd- and Spruance-class ships as they neared the end of their service lives, beginning in fiscal year 2005.

[34] Amphibious landing craft, both Utility and Air Cushion, are not included in the 275-ship total. Both types of craft are essential to the success of the ". . . From the Sea" strategy. Their numbers should be contingent on the number of support ships capable of carrying them.