

Gramm-Rudman cuts in Navy would turn the oceans into Soviet lakes

by Bob Greenberg

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"I am here today to tell you that, despite remarkable advances in the state of national defense readiness over the past five years, pulling the rug out now, as some cavalierly call for, can only give aid and great comfort to Soviet strategists along with those of Warsaw Pact and other surrogates. Not one analyst that I know of has yet proven that either Soviet military leadership or their arms-laden surrogates are deterred from military adventurism by the new Gramm-Rudman-Hollings 'weapon system.'"

This was the frank warning by former Chief of Naval Operations James D. Watkins, in a speech given to the Kiwanis Club of San Diego on March 17, 1986. Since March, Admiral Watkins has used every opportunity made available to him to warn that the projected defense budget cuts for Fiscal Year 1987 would devastate national defense, and destroy U.S. naval operations.

In that same speech Admiral Watkins, after reviewing the significant strides toward rebuilding a competent naval capability after the dark Carter years, bluntly stated: "While things are going well in the Navy—it can all be very quickly shattered in one irresponsible act of misguided budget heavy-handedness, if we're not on our toes . . . nearly all the good accomplished over the last six years will be lost quickly."

Admiral Watkins's dire warnings were taken up by his successor as Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Carlisle Trost. In his inaugural speech, Admiral Trost gave the same blunt warnings, ending with the words, "I will not preside over the destruction of the U.S. Navy."

A repeat of the Carter-era debacle?

The United States, as noted by Admiral Watkins, is a maritime power not by choice, but by necessity. Free access to the seas and oceans is an absolute necessity for trade during peacetime, and mobility during war. Yet in the face of enormous advances made by the Soviet naval forces over recent years, enabling them to have an active global deployment as never before, such access is threatened by the cuts in the defense budget.

Over the last two decades, the Soviets have successfully evolved from a defensive to an offensive global maritime

power, significantly adding to Soviet strategic superiority. The Soviets, unhampered by any budget constraints, have over those two decades aggressively developed the full spectrum of naval capabilities necessary for global deployment in either wartime or peacetime.

Of the approximately 1,800 ships in their fleet, about 1,400 of these are direct combatants for use in time of war, the others being auxiliary ships such as tankers, merchant fleet, and intelligence collection vessels. Not only do the Soviets outnumber the United States in all principal forms of combatants, but they are constantly introducing improvements. For example, not only do the Soviets have the largest submarine force in the world, but since 1975 they have introduced 13 new classes of submarines, three in the last two years alone. During the same period the United States has only introduced two new classes.

Similar consistent improvements have taken place in all other areas of the Soviet combatant force, be they cruisers, carriers, destroyers, or frigates. Soviet ships carry modern and capable anti-air and anti-submarine warfare systems to add to their strong suit of anti-surface warfare. Recent additions to their maritime force have also paid greater attention to the need for greater range and endurance.

The result is that the global reach and deployment of the Soviet Navy has significantly increased. Since 1975, for instance, the Soviet Pacific fleet has more than doubled its operating time out of home waters, and its major surface combatants and submarines have increased by more than 20%, making this the largest of their four fleets. The Soviets are increasingly able to launch sustained naval operations over greater distances.

This has also been aided through their gaining access to air and naval facilities near vital sea lines of communications through firming up relations with various allies such as South Yemen, Ethiopia, Angola, and Vietnam. The Soviet base at Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam is their first fully developed over-seas facility, supporting a large contingent of ships and submarines, as well as aircraft.

The consistently expanding and improving maritime capability poses a serious threat to Western security. Soviet submarines are operating directly off the coasts of the United States, with Victor-class nuclear submarines operating around U.S. naval ports. Soviet surface combatants are regularly

deploying to the key chokepoints and sea lanes, through which most of the West's international trade passes.

Their ability to deploy large-scale forces for long periods of time was clearly demonstrated last year by two mid-1985 exercises, one involving the Northern and Baltic fleets, and one involving their Pacific fleet. In both cases about three-quarters of their ships and submarines were deployed, along with aircraft, directed against simulated NATO battlegroups. The Soviets' most advanced surface combatants, such as the Kiev aircraft carrier and the Kirov nuclear-powered battle cruiser, were deployed in these exercises, while anti-carrier, anti-submarine and reconnaissance aircraft flew around the clock.

During the same period that the Soviet Navy was massively built up, the U.S. Navy was nearly dismantled. In the 1970s, with major budgetary cuts accompanying the winding down of the Vietnam war, the Navy budget was cut about 22%, creating major vulnerabilities in U.S. maritime posture, which reached its low point in the Carter years. The U.S. fleet rapidly shrank from 950 to 479 ships, a figure in itself deceiving, since many of those ships were old and lacked the maintenance or manpower to sail.

The cuts also forced a closing of many naval bases and ports, making our shrinking fleet an easier target. Even this smaller fleet was manned at only 91%, meaning that some of the ships could not deploy on schedule. And, if they had the required number of people to sail, often because of cutbacks

in training, they couldn't leave port anyway.

While lack of personnel was a major problem, drastic cuts in the Operations and Maintenance budget, which provides for spare parts, overhauls, ship and aircraft fuel, ammunition stockpiles, and other support functions, just as often prevented ships from leaving port. In many cases ships would sail without the right number of missiles or spare parts. Cross decking, whereby a homeward bound ship would transfer weapons and materials to a ship headed toward sea, became a common practice. There were not even sufficient stocks of ammunition to load the 479-ship fleet fully. There was less than one week's supply of air defense munitions.

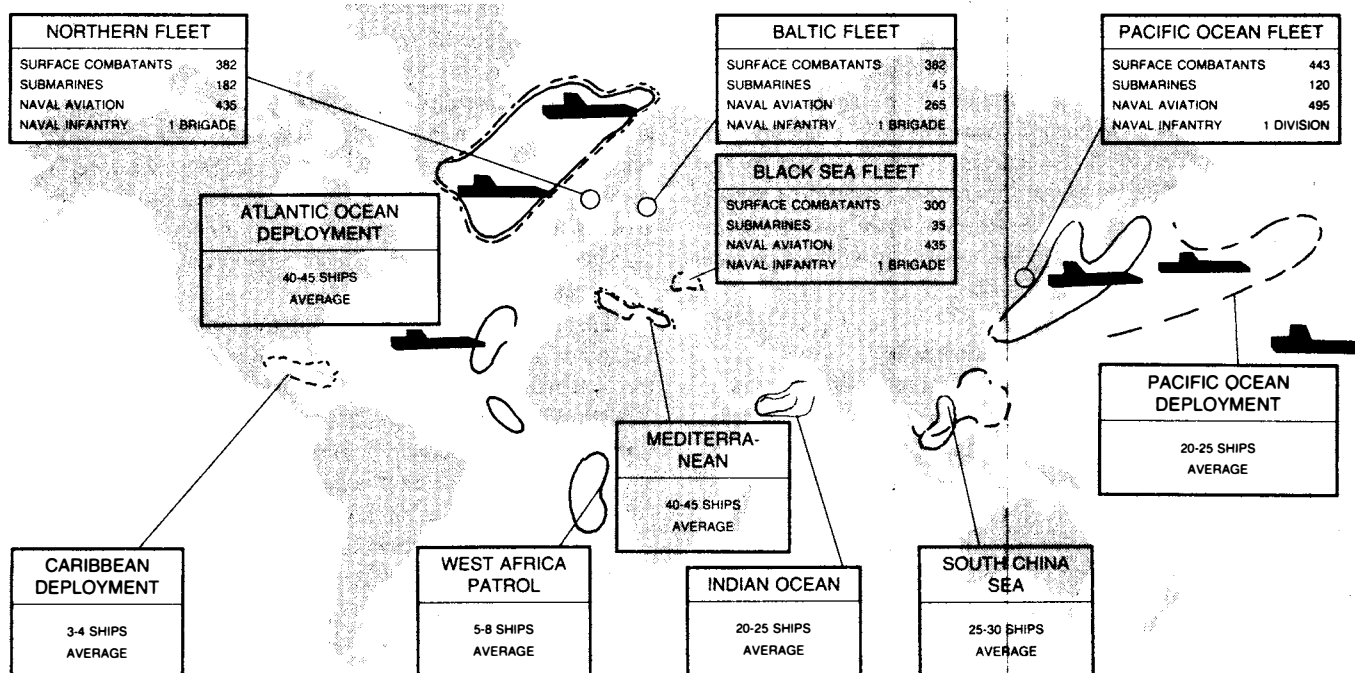
If the ships did sail, it would be for shorter time periods than required. During one 1976 NATO exercise, 10% of the Second Fleet ships assigned to sail, could never leave home port because of maintenance problems that lacked the means to be fixed.

At a time of increasing dangers posed from the Soviets in all the oceans of the world (see Figure 1 for Soviet deployment) we were, in the words of former Chief of Naval Operations Thomas Hayward, operating a one-and-a-half-ocean navy in a three-ocean world.

Back to a three-ocean navy

It was this that has only begun to be corrected over the last six years. The fleet has grown from 479 to 546 ships, 70% either new or modernized. With the ships under con-

FIGURE 1
Soviet Navy active global peacetime posture
FY 85



struction, we are on our way to a 600-ship fleet. As the quality of personnel is key to the effectiveness of any fighting force, the Navy has over the years placed personnel readiness at the top of its spending priorities. The increased fleet is now nearly 100% manned, with that personnel better trained and equipped than before.

The Navy is better maintained than previously, so that spare parts, munitions, and fuel availability have increased substantially. About twice as many ships are now listed as combat-ready, with four times as many aircraft squadrons at readiness level. Supplies of surface-to-air missiles have increased by 40%; torpedo supplies are up 30%. Overall weapons stocks have doubled since 1980 and will, at present budgetary requests, double again by 1990. Cross decking no longer occurs.

Spare parts availability is up by 35% with an equal percentage reduction in the time it takes to obtain repair parts for major casualties. The effects of the ships being more sea-ready have also decreased mission degrading casualties per surface combatant from 58% of the time in 1981, to 43% and falling in 1985.

The result is that sea time has increased, allowing for increased training. We are no longer a one-and-a-half-ocean navy, but a three-ocean navy. This is not a luxury, but a stark necessity. How much so is indicated by the fact that in 1985 the Navy logged more sea time than during the entire Vietnam War. Why? Because in order to at least stay on top of what the Soviets are doing, the Navy has to deploy to the same ocean and sea routes. Given the Soviets' increased global reach, the U.S. Navy has no choice but to attempt to match that global reach.

From this standpoint, as Admiral Watkins and others have made clear, even the improvements in our naval capabilities are not enough. Since the Navy's operating tempo is not decreasing, but increasing, we require a constantly expanding rate of improvement in our naval capabilities.

What is needed now

Thus with all these improvements, the Navy is not yet, by its own specifications, up to where it needs to be to meet the increased Soviet threat, nor can these improvements be looked at in a fixed manner. For example, merely to maintain a 600-ship Navy requires building 20 new ships each year, as an average ship has a lifespan of about 30 years. And the personnel, while close to 100% for a 546-ship fleet, are not enough for a 600-ship fleet.

Moreover, the Soviet operating tempo never decreases. Their Pacific fleet alone is as large as the entire U.S. fleet; they continue to grow, and their quality is improving at a surprising rate. They are fielding things now that most naval analysts didn't think they would be capable of for another decade. Recent reports from NATO intelligence sources indicate that Soviet ability to field submarine-based ballistic missile systems has improved to such an extent that they can even reduce their land-based intercontinental ballistic mis-

siles with no loss in strategic capability at all.

Thus, as Soviet capabilities and varieties of low-intensity warfare deployment increase, the mission requirements of the U.S. Navy increase as well. This means constant modernization, and sustainability for increased forward deployments.

To accomplish and maintain this requires an increasing budget line. But instead, with the cuts mandated by Gramm-Rudman for 1986 and 1987, we are rapidly going the other way. The 4.9% cuts mandated by Congress for FY1986, while not yet disastrous have already had a serious impact. While military personnel funds were generally exempted in 1986 due to the cuts being ordered late in the year, \$62 million in cuts were made, mostly resulting in stretchouts of tours of duty, early discharges to save money, and cutbacks in reserve training and education. Such cuts obviously affect readiness, and if continued will result in a reversal of the Navy's personnel achievements.

However, it is in the areas of operations and maintenance, and procurement that the effects are most serious. The O&M budget was cut by \$1.3 billion, resulting in proportionate cutbacks in the funding to operate ships and aircraft, and well as reduction in depot maintenance and the maintenance of real property. These cuts also mean that present stocks of ammunition and spare parts are being eaten up, with less ability to maintain a decent stockpile.

The reductions in the procurement areas totaled \$2.6 billion and the research, development, testing, and evaluation (RDT&E) \$514 million. As emphasized by Rear Admiral William Smith, the Director of the Navy Budget Office, in his testimony before the House Armed Services Committee, aside from the obvious delays and stretchouts of much-needed procurements and research, the impact of these cuts may not be felt for years.

The example given by Rear Admiral Smith is the case of the much-needed Trident submarine program, which for FY1986 is comprised of one sub appropriated for \$1.4 billion. Since there is only one sub being built, a 4.9% reduction would require only building 95% of the submarine. This is an obvious absurdity, and so the question is whether or not the sub can be built with 4.9% fewer dollars, something that cannot even be judged for four years down the road. The affect on RDT&E is similar.

Where does this leave the Navy, facing the prospects of even bigger cuts for 1987? To quote Admiral Watkins: "In Fiscal Year 1987, if sequestering of requested funds to the extent some defense critics are forecasting is directed, nearly all the good accomplished over the past six years will be lost quickly. . . . If this happens, our nation for the first time, will also see the unraveling of any logic to justify a military budget. Why? Because the military strategy will be decoupled in an uncontrolled way by the vagaries of the bill's formula—decoupled from the real threats we meet. Many hailed last year's defense cuts as a great victory, but a few more victories such as this could be our undoing."