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**BOTTOM UP REVIEW, CARRIER FORCE LEVELS AND THE
BUREAUCRATIC PROCESS**

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THE NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY PROCESS

SEMINAR I

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Introduction

On 1 September 1993, Secretary of Defense Les Aspin published the *Bottom Up Review*, an assessment of the United States military's post-Cold War overall force structure requirements. Citing an "era of new dangers" which included the continued threat of weapons of mass destruction, regional "bad actors," threats to new democracies and economic dangers, this review outlined the strategy, force structure, modernization programs, industrial base and infrastructure needed to meet the changing threat.¹ A principle force structure recommendation made by the *Bottom Up Review* was sizing the Navy's aircraft carrier fleet at 12 -- a fleet that stood at 15 plus one training carrier in 1990, and at 13 in 1993.² The study highlighted two separate requirements which drove this number. First, from a warfighting perspective, four to five carriers were needed for each of two major regional contingencies (MRCs). Second, the Navy's continuing overseas presence mission imposed additional deployment requirements for aircraft carriers which exceeded the total number needed to win two MRCs.³ Not mentioned as a factor influencing the carrier decision was the desire to preserve the nuclear carrier industrial base, represented by a single private sector shipyard -- Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Co. Preservation of this critical industrial base was also a key consideration affecting the carrier force decision.

The bureaucratic politics approach provides a way of developing a fuller appreciation for the dynamics involved in the U.S. national security process and defense policymaking.⁴ To explore the carrier "industrial base" thesis and to gain a better understanding for this particular defense policy issue, the bureaucratic politics model developed by Graham T. Allison was used. His basic unit of analysis is that policy is a political outcome -- the decisions and actions of governments are intra-national political outcomes. These outcomes are not the "choice solutions" for problems. Instead, they result from compromise, coalition, competition and confusion among government officials who see the different faces of an issue.⁵ This paper highlights key elements and players of the carrier force level decision process and uses them as examples to explain

various aspects of Allison's model. Following this analysis, concluding comments addressing the validity of the industrial base argument and general observations are provided.

High Stakes Games Influence the Players' Roster

A Nimitz-class nuclear aircraft carrier costs approximately \$5 billion dollars to build, and millions more to man, operate and maintain. Depending on your position, this opportunity cost is viewed as either a savings, a waste of resources, a profit or an investment. Not surprisingly, this kind of big ticket defense item draws keen attention and scrutiny. As noted by Allison, individuals become players in the national security policy game by occupying critical positions in an administration.⁶ The key players in the carrier force structure decision were President Clinton, Secretary Aspin, General Powell (CJCS), the Navy, the Air Force, the State Department, Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Co. and various members of Congress representing both the liberal and conservative side of the institution. The policy bargaining "process" surrounding this decision began in 1989 and continued through the 1994 budgetary process.

The debate over carrier force levels was re-opened in earnest in 1989 by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Colin Powell. As part of his development of the *Base Force*, General Powell, laid the preliminary groundwork for a re-visit of carrier force levels. In November 1989, he suggested to his immediate staff that a lower number of carriers (12 vice 15) was sufficient. Powell's rationale was both threat based and budget driven. First, he believed that the major changes taking place in the Soviet Union, and the impact these changes would have on the Soviet's military posture, would dictate changes in U.S. military strategy and force structure. Second, his experience in Vietnam reminded him that without a significant reduction of overall force levels, the downward, deficit-driven pressure on the budget could again "hollow the force," by dictating unacceptable reductions in training and support funding.⁷ While noting that he had made some early converts to his "Base Force," he (Powell) was "astonished" by the death grip of old ideas on some (Navy) military minds.⁸ From the Navy's perspective, 12 vice 15 carriers meant that unless deployments were extended well beyond the advertised six month length, the Navy would be unable to maintain a continuous presence in the three critical forward deployed

areas -- the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific. As important, the aircraft carrier is the center piece of the Navy's force -- as carrier requirements change, so do the number of surface combatants, support forces and carrier air wings. Any change in carrier numbers would drive numerical changes in other portions of the force, and the Navy's share of available defense resource dollars.

Where You Stand is Where You Sit

Allison writes "for large classes of issues, e.g., budgets and procurement decisions, the stance of a particular player can be predicted with high reliability from information concerning his seat."⁹ As the carrier numbers/defense industrial base debate began to unfold, various opponents and proponents stepped forward to make their cases. The beginning of concern over the defense industrial base was expressed in general terms in 1991 by Edward McGaffigan, Legislative Director to Senator Bingaman, a member of the House Appropriations Committee. Noting the dramatic decline of overall procurement accounts in a report accompanying the 1992 defense bill, the committee's concerns were twofold -- the industrial base and the ability to support modernization programs.¹⁰ Faced with the dilemma that the affect of lower defense spending had on the industrial base, Les Aspin, then Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, provided his own plan to preserve critical defense industry skills. He emphasized selective upgrading of weapons systems, low-rate procurements, successive-prototyping to mature new technologies and selective procurement of weapons systems using revolutionary technologies such as the F-117 as ways of preserving critical portions of the industry.¹¹ Conversely, using the rationale provided by President Bush that the U.S. won the cold war, Senators Kennedy and Levin questioned the need for the force structure earmarked in the 1993 defense budget. Kennedy noted that in constant dollars, the FY 1997 budget was the same as the 1980 budget. Levin complained that the 1995 Base Force level was the same as the previous year's budget, despite the disappearance of the Soviet threat.¹² Despite these arguments, no serious inroads were made on the Navy's aircraft carrier force levels or the plan to procure CVN-76 that year. However, the public debate continued in interesting, predictable ways.

In 1992, a key player in the 1993 bargaining circle entered the picture -- Bill Clinton, the Democratic candidate for President. Although his campaign platform emphasized that the U S economy was his top priority, his position on the size of the nation's post-Cold War era military force was not radically different from that of President Bush. While Senator Dole stated Clinton's plan would gut defense, the reality was that Clinton's plan would reduce Bush's spending targets by only about four percent (approximately \$60 billion). The significant areas of difference centered around overall troop levels (1.4 million vice 1.6 million) and the Navy's carrier force levels -- candidate Clinton was suggesting ten.¹³ Following his successful election President Clinton named Les Aspin as his Secretary of Defense. Faced with the mismatch between projected fiscal resources, existing and programmed force levels and new procurement programs supported by President Clinton (Seawolf, V-22, B-2), Secretary Aspin announced in March 1993, his plan to perform a complete review of force level requirements -- the product being the *Bottom Up Review*.

As Secretary of Defense (a different seat), Les Aspin acknowledged the requirement to maintain a continuous carrier presence in both the Mediterranean and Western Pacific, and an even more important need for at least one carrier at all times in Southwest Asia. However, a generally accepted rule of thumb used during the Cold War was the 3-1 rule -- a minimum of three ships in the active fleet to keep one ship forward-deployed. As Ron O'Rourke, a national defense analyst for the Congressional Research Service (CRS) states, this rule was okay when the threat was the Soviet Union and the deployment goal was 1-2 carriers in the Med and 1 or two more deployed to the Western Pacific, but it doesn't work in a world of regional threats which continue to drive a presence mission.¹⁴

Without question, the Navy was a key player throughout the time frame leading up to and beyond this decision. In congressional testimony given on 29 June 1993, Admiral Kelso, Chief of Naval Operations was careful to point out that on that particular day, 195 Navy ships, or 29 percent of the total active force was at sea including five aircraft carriers and five large deck

amphibious ships ¹⁵ Also, Kelso's testimony emphasized the key role aircraft carriers played in *Desert Shield Storm*, by quoting Norm Schwarzkopf who said

" the Navy was the first military force to respond to the (Iraqi) invasion, establishing immediate sea superiority, and was also the first air power on the scene Both of these first deterred -- indeed stopped -- Iraq from marching into Saudi Arabia " ¹⁶

Kelso also highlighted the increased importance of carriers, as the United States continues to leave key overseas bases Other Navy officials informed Congress that with a force of only 10 carriers, as some members of Congress had urged and Aspin had said was being looked at as part of the *Bottom Up Review*, there would be a four-month gap in the Mediterranean and the gap in the Western Pacific would be more than four months ¹⁷

Another Navy voice in this process was Vice Admiral Bill Owens, the newly-created Deputy Chief of Naval Operations (DCNO) for Resources and Requirements Admiral Owens continually emphasized the Navy's reorganization efforts and the shift from a "Maritime Strategy" to a new strategy " From the Sea " This new strategy focused on the Navy-Marine Corps as a power projection, enabling force in the littoral environment vice blue-water naval engagements Owens, a submariner, also drove the crafting of *Force 2001*, the Navy's plan to cut force structure from 457 ships to 320 ships by 1999 Central to the carrier debate, this plan favored carriers and large-deck amphibious ships over submarines ¹⁸ Supporting Owens' vision was Rear Admiral Dave Oliver, head of the Navy's Programming Division who commented "if you watch intelligence traffic in the Pentagon, what you see is a constant need for flexible, air-capable platforms " Owens' emphasis on a smaller, re-organized Navy, armed with a new strategy relevant to the kinds of threats identified by Powell and others, was the signal that the Navy could and was changing However, he (Owens) continually emphasized that the carrier remained the centerpiece of the force

Interests, Stakes and Power

Bureaucratic bargaining takes place to determine specific outcomes, with these outcomes advancing or impeding each player's conception of the national interest, his commitment to

specific programs, the welfare of his friends and his personal interests. These overlapping interests constitute a player's stake in the game. Also, the ability to play the game successfully adds to one's power.¹⁹ Candidate Clinton had a strong interest in this game as his views on defense and the defense industry would need to be in balance with his desire to shift resources to traditional democratic programs. While Clinton advocated further cuts in carrier force levels (ten vice 12), he was careful to ensure that he stayed within the budgetary framework outlined by Les Aspin and Senator Nunn, Aspin's counterpart in the Senate.²⁰ Candidate Clinton also supported completing at least two of the three SSN-21 Seawolf submarines, under construction at Electric Boat, Groton, Conn. Additionally, he supported continued development and procurement of the V-22 Osprey, to be built in Texas and Pennsylvania -- two Electoral College strongholds.²¹ Given the bigger game of the Presidential election, Clinton was careful to maintain his political Democratic "roots" while attempting to allay the fears of a widely-dispersed defense industry. Ultimately, his support for a New England-centered submarine industrial base would influence his position on carrier force levels in 1993, as the *Bottom Up Review* was being shaped. In 1993, President Clinton appeared to soften his stance on aircraft carrier force levels. In a March 1993 speech on the nation's military requirements, he made a statement that warmed the hearts of carrier backers:

"When word of a crisis breaks out in Washington, it's no accident that the first question that comes from everyone's lips is 'Where is the nearest carrier?'"²²

Another player with a vital interest in the outcome of the *Bottom Up Review* and the carrier numbers debate was the Air Force. With defense dollars decreasing, Air Force Vice Chief of Staff, General Michael P. Carns commissioned RAND researchers to conduct a study of future air power needs. This study, which analyzed airpower's changing role in joint theater campaigns (MRCs), recommended buying more F-15Es, more airlift, fewer F-22s, ending F-16 production and to "trade a portion of the U.S. joint force structure for selective modernization." The RAND study also specifically commented on the roles and contributions of the aircraft carrier, saying that while a carrier force can make valuable early contributions, "the limited numbers of fighters

provided by carriers mean that they can only play a limited role in theater warfare " The study went on to say that in the early hours of a conflict, the U S would depend on smart munitions and to increase "up front punch" -- the B-2 bomber ²³ Like the Navy, who held a large stake in the outcome of the *Bottom Up Review*, the Air Force's share of the defense pie would be affected by Navy force level decisions

As various force level options were being considered by Aspin, with Aspin leaning towards less than 12 carriers, another player entered the game for a brief period of time -- the State Department Aspin's principle force level concerns centered over 10 or 12 Air Force wings, 10 or 12 Army divisions and whether to keep 10, 11 or 12 carriers Aspin was also advocating a win-hold-win strategy -- a strategy that would mass the winning force in one theater while attempting to hold ground in the other theater until forces could be shifted This strategy upset the South Koreans -- therefore it upset the State Department For basic political reasons, Aspin's strategy was a non-starter in the eyes of the Koreans/State Department, because of the vulnerable security position South Korea could fall into, should a Southwest Asia MRC erupt Effectively, the debate over major force level options was re-opened ²⁴ As one Pentagon official reported "it was settled and then it wasn't " It is also worth mentioning the opinion expressed in some circles that Secretary of State Christopher was ahead of Aspin in the administration's "opinion polls " Although Aspin met the President's timetable on the gays in the military issue, this issue focused his attention away from other critical events Also, Aspin's stock may have lost value after making a statement questioning the Bosnia policy and then announcing that he (Aspin) would insist on several strict conditions before allowing U S troops to enter Bosnia Both of these statements were contrary to Clinton's (Christopher's) Bosnian policy ²⁵

A player in this process, not yet discussed was Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Company With Clinton's administration supporting the Seawolf program and rejecting arguments that all nuclear shipbuilding should be concentrated at Newport News, the parent company of Newport News, Tennaco, stated that the shipyard "may as well close up shop" without the income from a carrier ²⁶ They were also quick to point out that even with the carrier business, its

payrolls were being halved from a peak of 30,000 in 1980 to about 15,000 in 1996. Additionally, they emphasized the diverse sub-contracting business spread among companies located in 42 states which supported about 120,000 additional jobs -- a sizable slice of the industrial base ²⁷

Action Channels: The Process Continues

With the results of the *Bottom Up Review* official, and a carrier force of 12 (11 plus a reserve training carrier) recommended, the bureaucratic process continued to influence the decision. In defense policymaking process action channels -- regularized ways of producing action concerning types of issues, structure the game, select the major players, determine their points of entrance into the game and distribute certain advantages and disadvantages for each game. Weapons procurement decisions are made within the annual budgeting process ²⁸. As an early footnote to this (carrier) decision, an article published on 6 September, just days after the release of the review, reported on the new, innovative ways carriers were being employed. The example cited was the carrier *Theodore Roosevelt*, returning to Norfolk from a six month deployment to both the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf. With a 600 man, 10 helicopter Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTAF) embarked for the duration of the cruise, *Roosevelt's* Commanding Officer quickly pointed out the carrier's expanding role, and the ability to embark "Adaptive Force Packages" tailored to support more aspects of the littoral "brown water" mission ²⁹

Beginning in 1994, Congressional proponents and opponents of the *Bottom Up Review* re-entered the game through budgetary oversight positions they occupied on various Congressional committees. On 22 March 1994 the Military Forces and Personnel Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee began hearings addressing the impact of the *Bottom Up Review*. The subcommittee Chairman, Representative Ike Skelton, expressed concern over the military's ability to fight two wars at the same time with the force structure outlined in the review. Testifying at these hearings was Vice Admiral Joseph Lopez, Admiral Owens' successor as DCNO for Resources and Requirements. Lopez was quick to point out that on that particular day 21 percent of the Navy was forward-deployed and 45 percent was underway ³⁰. However, as an advocate of

the President's budget, he supported the force levels, particularly the carrier numbers outlined in the *Bottom Up Review*, saying they were adequate to handle two MRCs

Opponents of President Clinton's defense plan, centered around the *Bottom Up Review*, continued their attempts to cut the plan, vis-a-vis the defense budgetary process. Items targeted by opponents included procurement of CVN-76.³¹ In a letter to President Clinton, Representative Barney Frank and five other liberal Democrats reminded the President that the previous year's budget resolution required Congress to cut total discretionary spending by \$19/22 billion in authority and outlays respectively. They went on to say that "we assume that at least some of these cuts will be allocated to the defense area, since defense accounts for half of all discretionary spending."³² From New Jersey Congressman Andrews, who represented a district adjacent to the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard, the argument was made to overhaul (SLEP) a conventional carrier, vice new construction, to save procurement dollars.

Key Congressional carrier proponents, occupying powerful defense oversight positions, were quick to continue their strong advocacy for both a 12 carrier force and CVN-76. Newport News Shipbuilding and Drydock Co. is located in an area which encompasses the congressional districts of Representatives Herbert H. Bateman, Norman Sisisky and Owen Pickett, and in the state of Senators John Warner and Charles Robb. During the House committee's markup of the defense authorization bill in May 1994, Chairman Ron Dellums, who tried to block CVN-76 funding, was easily overridden by a committee whose membership included Bateman, Sisisky and Pickett.³³ Robb and Warner would do the same in the Senate. Bottom line: today the Navy's carrier fleet numbers 12 and CVN-76 support is as strong as ever.

Conclusions

Government decisions are made and actions emerge neither as the calculated choice of a unified group nor as a formal summary of a leader's preferences. Rather, the context of shared power but separate judgments concerning important choices determines that politics is the mechanism of choice.³⁴ The players in the carrier force level game occupied civilian and military positions in the executive and legislative branches of the government, and the private sector.

With 15 as the top number and 10 or below as the bottom number, a "political" consensus was reached at 12 -- political from the standpoint that each of the players could rationalize and accept the decision while not appearing to be a "loser " Allison also writes that men share power As each of these individuals attempt to pull the group towards their respective viewpoint, what emerges is a decision which appears to differ from the position that any of the players wanted Ironically, in the carrier force level decision the only player who saw the process output equal his input was Colin Powell

With respect to the thesis that the Bottom Up Review established carrier force levels at 12 to preserve the defense industrial base, the answer is yes, but there were also other equally valid reasons such as real world mission requirements, and a genuine concern for keeping deployment cycles and operational tempos within reasonable boundaries However, the broad, 42 state contractor and sub-contractor base equating to 135,000 plus jobs (prime plus sub-contractors), coupled with a single-yard nuclear carrier technical base, made the decision outcome very palatable for all domestic 'jobs', economy and technology advocates

A final comment relates to the "permanency" of Pentagon decisions Chris Jefferies observes that "no issue is decided once and for all in bureaucratic politics " In his article, one of the specific examples he cites is the number and utility of aircraft carriers³⁵ To continue in this vein, a personal observation is that as the dollar value increases so does the interest and the controversy The advocate's fundamental responsibilities are (1) ensuring that the policy process is carefully worked to highlight the contributory value(s) of the item, program or system and (2) understanding that bureaucratic decisionmaking is a series of battles in a long-running war To assume otherwise -- that a decision is final -- is to be completely surprised when your program is subjected to future risks, scrutiny, criticism or cancellation as the budgetary process continues

Endnotes

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