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National Security and
International Affairs Division

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April 21, 1995

The Honorable Stephen Horn
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Horn:

On December 30, 1994, and in subsequent meetings, you requested that we provide information related to the possible homeporting of up to three Nimitz-class nuclear aircraft carriers at the North Island Naval Air Station, San Diego, California; the Long Beach Naval Shipyard, California; or both. On April 6, 1995, we briefed you on the information we had gathered. You asked us to provide a summary of our briefing, even though some aspects of our work had not been completed, and update our information where possible to present the most recent data available. This letter responds to your request.

Enclosure 1 provides information on the Navy's homeporting plans and policies for aircraft carriers and their relation to ship maintenance requirements and quality-of-life issues. Enclosure 2 discusses the inclusion of the Long Beach Naval Shipyard in the San Diego homeport area. Enclosure 3 presents the Navy's cost estimates for the various homeporting options. Enclosure 4 discusses major cost items and the assumptions on which the cost estimates were based. Enclosure 5 identifies the advantages and disadvantages associated with homeporting carriers in San Diego or Long Beach. Enclosure 6 discusses the Navy's draft environmental impact statement relating to the relocation of one nuclear aircraft carrier from the Alameda Naval Air Station, California, to North Island. Enclosure 7 discusses the need for a Nimitz-class aircraft carrier-capable drydock at North Island and the status of the Navy's plans to move a floating drydock capable of accommodating big-deck amphibious ships to San Diego.

To obtain this information, we interviewed officials from the Chief of Naval Operations, Pacific and Atlantic Fleets, and the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for

Research, Development, and Acquisition. We also met with officials from the Naval Facilities Engineering Command, Naval Sea Systems Command, Long Beach Naval Shipyard, city of Long Beach, and port authority of Long Beach.

In addition, at our request, the Navy conducted studies on the (1) infrastructure and recurring annual costs for facilities needed to homeport the three Nimitz-class carriers and (2) the advantages and disadvantages of homeporting the carriers at North Island versus Long Beach. We used the information in these studies in our work; however, we were not able to verify the accuracy of the information because the studies were only recently received.

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If you have any questions, please contact me on (202) 512-8412. Major contributors to this letter are George Jahnigen, Edwin Soniat, Willie Cheely, and Patricia Blowe.

Sincerely yours,

David R. Warren

David R. Warren
Director, Defense Management
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Enclosures - 7

ENCLOSURE 1

THE NAVY'S HOMEPORTING PLANS AND POLICIES FOR AIRCRAFT CARRIERS

PLANS

The Navy has designated San Diego as a major homeport and plans to concentrate a major portion of its Pacific Fleet ships in that area. As of November 1994, San Diego was the homeport to 70 of the 101 Navy ships located on the West Coast. Two of the 70 ships were conventional aircraft carriers. Long Beach was the homeport to five ships at that time, but none of them were carriers. As a result of a 1991 Base Closure and Realignment Commission decision to close the Long Beach Naval Station, Long Beach will no longer be a Navy homeport after the three ships currently assigned to the homeport leave.

The Chief of Naval Operations approved a proposal in May 1994 that called for the retention of six aircraft carriers in the Pacific. Three of the carriers were to be homeported at the North Island Naval Air Station, San Diego, California; one in Everett, Washington; one in Bremerton, Washington; and one in Yokosuka, Japan. By the year 2005 all of these carriers--except for the one homeported in Japan--will be Nimitz-class nuclear aircraft carriers. According to the Navy, the approved carrier homeporting plan considers ship deployment schedules, facility modernization plans, ship maintenance requirements, and quality-of-life issues.

POLICIES

To minimize the amount of time military personnel are separated from their homes and families, the Navy started a program in 1985 to eliminate excessive operating tempo, as well as achieve long-standing personnel tempo of operations (PERSTEMPO) limits. To accomplish this, the Navy established three PERSTEMPO goals:

-- The length of any deployment, including transit time, will not exceed 6 months (180 days).

-- Before beginning a new deployment, ship personnel will spend a minimum of 2 months in their homeport for every month the ship is deployed.

-- A ship and its crew will spend a minimum of 50 percent of the time over a 5-year period in their homeport.

A ship is considered in violation of the PERSTEMPO goals when these criteria are not met.

The Commanders-in-Chief of the Pacific and Atlantic Fleets assign ships to a homeport, subject to approval by the Chief of Naval Operations, and establish homeport clusters (i.e., a grouping of ports where proximity permits an individual to be at home overnight rather than aboard a ship). Any ship away from its designated homeport or homeport cluster for more than 8 weeks is considered deployed.

To meet the PERSTEMPO requirements, the Navy has a policy to perform maintenance on ships in the ship's designated homeport, if a ship's planned maintenance period is for 6 months or less. If the maintenance period is planned for more than 6 months, the ship will be assigned to a naval shipyard or private sector yard. If a ship's maintenance is performed at a ship maintenance or repair activity other than the ship's homeport, the new shipyard or activity becomes the ship's new homeport while the maintenance is being performed. About every 6 years, aircraft carriers homeported in San Diego would be homeported (on a staggered basis) at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard in Bremerton, Washington, for about 10-1/2 months for major maintenance action, called a "drydocking phased incremental availability."

Naming a new homeport when ships are repaired out of their normal homeport conforms with the Navy's PERSTEMPO instruction, but for sailors with families this practice is inconsistent with the program's goals. In these cases, sailors go to a new homeport while their families may still remain at the old homeport in anticipation of the ship's return. Quality-of-life improvements would be derived if a ship were repaired at a facility closer to the original homeport. For example, if a San Diego based-carrier were repaired at the Long Beach rather than the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, crew members could go home more easily.

Another difficulty in complying with the PERSTEMPO program goals was created during the 1980s when the Secretary of the Navy directed the expansion of three homeport areas--Norfolk, Virginia; New York, New York; and Seattle, Washington--for short-term maintenance actions (i.e., less than 6 months). The Navy said this action was taken to ensure adequate competition among ship repair activities in the private sector. Under this arrangement, Norfolk was to include all repair activities up to and including Baltimore, Maryland; New York was to include all activities down to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Seattle was to include all activities down to Portland, Oregon. Expansion of the San Diego homeport area to include Long Beach was not considered because the Navy believed private sector competition in the San Diego area was adequate.

The Navy recognizes that, under the expanded homeport policy, it cannot always meet the PERSTEMPO policy goals when maintenance work is being done at shipyards within the clusters. For example, in 1994, the Secretary of the Navy proposed a new policy called the "sequential bid area" that would make the definition of a homeport area consistent throughout the Navy. Under this new proposed policy, the expanded homeport areas would be abolished, and the definition of homeport bidding areas would be aligned with the fleet commander's definition for homeport areas for PERSTEMPO requirements. This proposal is being reviewed within the Navy.

ENCLOSURE 2

LONG BEACH COULD BE INCLUDED IN SAN DIEGO'S HOMEPORT AREA

The Navy could decide to expand San Diego's homeport area to include Long Beach. However, it has not chosen to do so. The fleet commanders have determined that the primary factor that should be considered when determining a homeport area or cluster is a sailor's ability to spend the night at home. However, they have not established specific criteria, such as distance or commute time, for doing so. However, fleet officials have informally made such determinations. They believe that a commuting time of about 1 hour each way is reasonable and consistent with the spirit of the Navy's PERSTEMPO goals. Since the average commute time between San Diego and Long Beach is about 2 hours each way, the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet has declined to include Long Beach in the San Diego homeport area or cluster.

On April 17, 1995, the Navy provided us with a document that stated that the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet had recently approved a new policy that "homeport clusters shall be established for ports that are within a 75-mile radius and less than 1-1/2 hours one-way travel time using normal modes of travel for the region." We are uncertain whether the policy is currently in effect.

The document also showed that, in March 1992, the Commander of the Naval Surface Forces in the Pacific requested specifically that Long Beach and San Diego be in the same homeport cluster, but the request was disapproved by Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet. The Commander believed such an action would have an adverse impact on the quality-of-life of the ships' crews. The Secretary of the Navy supported the Commander's decision. A similar request had previously been made by the 1991 Base Closure and Realignment Commission in its report to the President that recommended the closure of the Long Beach Naval Station.

ENCLOSURE 3

COST COMPARISON OF HOMEPORTING OPTIONS FOR NIMITZ-CLASS AIRCRAFT CARRIERS

To respond to your request, we asked the Navy to conduct a study that developed and compared infrastructure and recurring costs for facilities needed to homeport up to three Nimitz-class nuclear aircraft carriers at the Long Beach Naval Shipyard, the North Island Naval Air Station or both. To accomplish this, facility and other requirements for homeporting the nuclear carriers were defined. Cost estimates were developed by comparing baseline facility standards, as set forth in various Navy documents, to what currently exists or would be required at each installation. Costs associated with ship maintenance and fleet operations were not addressed.

According to the study, the Navy's current plan to homeport all three nuclear carriers at North Island is the lowest cost option, and homeporting three nuclear carriers at Long Beach is the highest cost option. The costs associated with each option, expressed in terms of infrastructure and recurring annual operating costs, as well as the cost difference from the lowest cost option, are shown in table 3.1. Annual operating costs include shore support staffing, crew training and lost time, and base operating support costs.

Table 3.1: Costs of Homeporting Options

Dollars in millions

Number of carriers		Infra-structure cost	Difference from baseline	Recurring annual costs	Difference from baseline
Long Beach	North Island				
0	3	$546.1	0	$0.3	0
1	2	706.2	$160.1	25.4	$25.1
2	1	739.2	193.1	27.7	27.4
3	0	828.6	282.5	29.7	29.4

Source: Navy

COST ISSUES

There are a number of assumptions made in the Navy's study that affect the associated cost results. For a number of these areas, we have not seen sufficient support to enable us to make a judgment on their reasonableness or validity. We focused our analysis on the hypothetical three carrier option at Long Beach, because this was the option where we had the greatest number of unresolved questions.

TRANSIENT SHIP/INTERIM HOMEPORTING REQUIREMENTS

The Navy estimated it would cost about $137 million for dredging, upgrading an existing transient aircraft carrier berth, and constructing a new berth capable of accommodating Nimitz-class aircraft carriers at San Diego, even if all three nuclear carriers were homeported in Long Beach. The Navy believes that these actions are necessary because, after closure of the Naval Air Station Alameda, California, North Island will be the only West Coast aircraft carrier homeport with a collocated airfield which, it believes, is necessary to offload disabled aircraft. The Navy also believes that the same facilities will be needed on an interim basis to homeport the U.S.S. Stennis when it arrives on the West Coast in 1998, because appropriate carrier berthing facilities at Long Beach will not likely be ready at that time.

We asked the Navy for any studies and/or statistics that supported their position. While the Navy provided us with a document that highlighted the benefits of having a port with a collocated airfield, it could not provide any statistics on the number of disabled aircraft offloaded over the last few years. In lieu of such information, we held discussions with Pacific and Atlantic Fleet officials. These officials said that, typically, very few disabled planes were offloaded after deployments. One Atlantic Fleet official estimated that, on the average, one plane was offloaded over three deployments. Furthermore, we were told that there are other alternatives for getting disabled aircraft to an aircraft maintenance depot. For example, a disabled aircraft could be trucked (with the wings folded up), airlifted by helicopter, or barged to the maintenance depot.

Regarding the interim homeporting requirement, the Navy identified two possible options: the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard or San Diego. The Navy rejected the shipyard option based on projected port loading at the shipyard during and after the arrival of the U.S.S. Stennis and the likelihood that new base support facilities would have to be constructed. The Navy stated that a more detailed study would be required to firm up the basis for the rejection.

We asked the Navy for details supporting its reasoning that the facilities at Long Beach could not be made ready in time to support the homeporting of the U.S.S. Stennis and that the Puget Sound Shipyard option was not likely to be viable. The Navy has not yet provided the requested information.

FAMILY HOUSING REQUIREMENTS

The Navy study estimated an additional 1,708 units would have to be constructed at a total estimated cost of about $258 million to meet housing needs at Long Beach. Other information suggests that some of these costs could be avoided. According to the Navy study, the homeporting of three Nimitz-class aircraft carriers would increase the housing demand in Long Beach by the year 2000 by an estimated 7,500 units--from a projected total of about 1,250 units to 8,750 units. Available housing for the Long Beach area was estimated to be 7,042 units, of which 1,042 units are currently controlled by the Long Beach Shipyard. The Navy's expected share of private sector housing for rent within a one hour commuting distance that was assumed to be adequate and affordable, was projected to be about 6,000 units based on 1988 data.

A 1995 study conducted by a public accounting firm shows that over 27,000 housing units that meet the Navy's criteria are currently available in the Long Beach area. The study stressed that units in high-crime areas were not included in this total.

Also, as a result of a 1993 base closure decision, military family housing at the El Toro Marine Corps Air Station could possibly be made available to satisfy the projected Long Beach housing shortfall. However, use of the El Toro housing units would require a reversal of the prior Base Closure and Realignment Commission decision as well as an adjustment of any projected savings associated with the decision. El Toro is located about 30 miles south of Long Beach and, based on our own driving tests, within a one-hour drive from the shipyard during rush hour. Data we obtained show that there are currently 1,188 units of housing at the El Toro Marine Corps Air Station. At present most of these units are occupied, but with the closure of the Air Station the units should become available for other uses beginning in July 1998. Two hundred and sixteen of the units are classified as substandard because they do not contain the required number of square feet. An additional 119 units are being screened for lead paint and asbestos contamination.

BASE SUPPORT COSTS OTHER THAN FAMILY HOUSING

According to the Navy, adequate supporting facilities are required to maintain a reasonable level of service to the nuclear carriers and their crews. Facilities required range from cafeterias and

officers clubs to theaters, child care centers, and parking facilities. For the homeporting options considered, total costs ranged from a low of about $167 million for the North Island option to a high of about $224 million for the Long Beach option.

Documents provided by the Navy raised certain questions about the reasonableness of these costs.

-- The Navy study states a need for a $38 million, 4,000 vehicle parking structure to satisfy parking needs associated with the three Long Beach homeported carrier option. However, information provided by the shipyard shows that there are currently over 4,500 empty parking spaces in the yard, primarily because of major reductions in the number of ships and military and civilian personnel since 1991. At that time, there were 35 ships and over 22,800 military and civilian personnel assigned to the shipyard. Currently, there are three ships homeported in Long Beach and the number of military and civilian personnel assigned is about 5,800. We have not verified the shipyard's number, however, based on our observations there is a large amount of unused parking space at the shipyard.

-- The Navy study estimated it would take about $52 million to construct new facilities or upgrade existing facilities up to standards mainly in four base support areas--medical and dental space; administrative office space; enlisted dining space; and enlisted bachelor quarters. We have not validated the Long Beach data or the data in the cost comparison study. According to shipyard data, the cost to bring these facilities up to standard, however, would be only about $3.6 million. Most of this amount is to bring the administrative space up to compliance with current seismic codes. The remaining cost is for installing fire sprinkler systems in the affected buildings.

DISPOSAL OF DREDGED MATERIAL

Dredging costs may be overstated to some extent. According to the Navy study, about 2.5 million cubic yards of dredging would be required at Long Beach to deepen the berthing area and create an acceptable turning basin for NIMITZ-class aircraft carriers. The Navy, based on experience at other Naval activities in Southern California, assumed that about 702,000 cubic yards of that total would be unsuitable for off-shore disposal and that the cost of inland disposal would be about $100 per cubic yard. The normal off-shore disposal cost is $5 per cubic yard. Using these estimates, the additional cost of dredging disposal would be about $67 million. The Navy study states, however, that this cost may not have to be incurred if the unsuitable material could be safely used in nearby projects.

We discussed the reasonableness of the Navy's disposal cost figures with officials from the Long Beach Port Authority and the Army Corps of Engineers. They told us that it would be highly unusual for unsuitable dredge material to be disposed of inland. They stated that, when they faced similar situations, they made every effort to dispose of such material in nearby contained fill areas. Such fill areas are often available due to periodic dredging and fill projects by the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles.

INTERMEDIATE MAINTENANCE FACILITY

The study states that a new 6,000 square feet valve repair facility would have to be constructed to support any aircraft carriers homeported in Long Beach. This is because of the closure of a shore intermediate maintenance activity as part of the closure of the Long Beach Naval Station. Total cost of the facility is estimated at about $7.4 million. The North Island option does not incur this cost, it has such a facility on a barge that is moored adjacent to the ships.

Under the three carrier option for Long Beach, there appears to be no need for the valve repair facility at North Island. It seems reasonable that the barge could be moved to Long Beach and, therefore, no costs for such a facility would have to be incurred.

OTHER COST ISSUES

The Navy's desire to do as much maintenance as possible in the homeport has led to a proposal to establish new depot maintenance capacity at the North Island in San Diego, while drawing down excess capacity in shipyards.

Data we obtained showed that the Navy is planning three military construction projects valued at about $112 million over a 3-year period starting in fiscal year 1996. These projects involve constructing and equipping depot maintenance facilities for the repair and maintenance of nuclear and non-nuclear propulsion plant systems and components. The Navy projects to accomplish the maintenance work with up to 900 Puget Sound Naval Shipyard workers on temporary duty. The Navy is also studying the feasibility of placing similar facilities at other nuclear carrier homeports in Mayport, Florida, and Everett, Washington.

HOMEPORTING IN SAN DIEGO VERSUS LONG BEACH

We asked the Navy to provide us with the pros and cons of homeporting in San Diego versus Long Beach. The information provided is summarized below.

ADVANTAGES OF SAN DIEGO

The Navy sees three major advantages of homeporting carriers at the North Island Naval Air Station: the existence of San Diego as a "megaport," maintenance advantages, and quality of life considerations. Regarding the first, the Navy cites the significant infrastructure at San Diego that provides (1) ready access to a nearby fleet training center; (2) cross-training opportunities for sailors while in North Island; and (3) coordinated, centralized logistics support. In addition, the Navy said that North Island is a proven homeport for Pacific Fleet aircraft carriers; has an operational airfield that can support air wing logistics and aircraft on- and offloadings; contains an extensive and efficient transportation network; and is adjacent to the southern California training area.

Regarding the maintenance advantage, the Navy believes the San Diego area offers great opportunities for implementation of its proposed regional maintenance initiative. The proposed depot maintenance facility for nuclear carriers' propulsion systems and components will be ready to service the U.S.S. Stennis when it arrives in 1998; and extensive ship and aircraft intermediate maintenance capability is available at North Island.

Finally, the Navy believes that the quality of life for the sailors is excellent in the San Diego area because of its extensive infrastructure--hospitals, commissaries, exchanges, recreational facilities, and family service centers. Also, the Navy believes there is plenty of affordable housing in good neighborhoods.

DISADVANTAGES OF SAN DIEGO

The Navy recognized two disadvantages of homeporting at San Diego. First, it noted that ships would need to be homeported at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard, located about 1,300 miles away, for about 10.5 months every 6 years for maintenance that requires a drydock. This would have an adverse impact on the quality-of-life of the sailors, since they would be unable to return very often to San Diego. Second, although the Navy states that the San Diego area offers affordable housing in good areas, it also states that there is a long waiting list for government-furnished housing.

ADVANTAGES OF LONG BEACH

The Navy states that it would have easy access to the open ocean from Long Beach. Also, Long Beach has an existing industrial infrastructure that can support Nimitz-class carrier maintenance. Furthermore, the Navy states that carriers could be drydocked at Long Beach, which would eliminate the need for a homeport change every 6 years as would be the case if the carriers were homeported at North Island. Using available Navy budget data, we determined that the Navy could save $20 million in permanent change of station costs for each carrier drydocking.

DISADVANTAGES OF LONG BEACH

The Navy pointed out three problems to homeporting the carriers at Long Beach. First, several prior Base Closure and Realignment Commission decisions would have to be reversed, and some or all of the cost savings associated with these decisions would not be realized. These cost savings are significant. For example, projected annual cost savings amounting to about $266 million could be lost if the proposed and prior Commission actions involving Long Beach are not implemented. In addition, revising these decisions would create excess carrier berthing capacity that would be difficult to support in an era of reduced defense budgets.

Second, the Navy believes that the dredging work and radiological maintenance facilities needed to support carrier homeporting would not be ready in time to support the U.S.S. Stennis if it arrives as scheduled in 1998, necessitating temporary homeporting elsewhere. The Navy states that Long Beach does not provide easy access to training facilities.

Third, the Navy does not believe a shipyard industrial environment is a desirable atmosphere for homeporting a ship and its crew because of noise, dirt, poor air quality, and traffic congestion. One quality-of-life factor cited by the Navy for Long Beach was not consistent with other data we obtained. To illustrate, the Navy states that it costs more for housing in Long Beach than in San Diego. However, according to a national cost-of-living index, housing costs in Long Beach are 48 percent above the national average, and in San Diego they are 71 percent above the national average.

ENCLOSURE 6

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

You also asked our view on whether the Navy's draft Environmental Impact Statement is in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Under this act, the Navy's Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) must address the foreseeable environmental impacts, including cumulative impacts, of the Navy's actions. The Navy's draft EIS, which is subject to future modifications, addresses the impact caused by the relocation of one nuclear carrier (CVN) to North Island and the cumulative impact of homeporting two additional carriers at that same location. As to the two additional carriers, the draft EIS notes that "if the Navy makes a proposal to homeport CVNs at North Island (Naval Air Station), the appropriate NEPA analysis will be prepared. Modification to existing facilities and infrastructure would be needed to accommodate the additional two CVNs."

This statement suggests a "tiering" of EISs regarding the stationing of additional carriers at North Island. Tiering is encouraged by the Council on Environmental Quality regulation 40 C.F.R. 1502.20 and is authorized by OPNAVINST 5090.1B. for Navy use in situations involving "the planning for the use of long-term staged construction for the establishment of a new installation to homeport and operate a class of vessels with a subsequent tiered analysis as each stage is programmed and proposed...."

In summary, because the draft EIS does address the cumulative impact of homeporting two additional carriers at North Island, there seems to be no basis for concluding that the NEPA impact statement requirement is not being properly addressed.

NEED FOR LARGE DRYDOCK IN SAN DIEGO

According to the official position of the Navy, it does not need to construct a nuclear carrier-capable drydock at San Diego. Further, the Navy did not need to construct one in the past and will not need to in the foreseeable future. Navy officials state that the planned carrier maintenance periods that require drydocking will be conducted at the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard.

In early 1994, the Commander of the Pacific Fleet received an unsolicited proposal from Pacific Shipbuilding and the San Diego Chamber of Commerce Proactive Stance Committee officials to build carrier-capable drydock at the North Island Naval Air Station. The proposal indicated that private sector sources would provide the upfront financing for the project and that the government would be expected to lease back the facility.

Although fleet officials believed at that time that a carrier-capable drydock would be desirable and possibly even essential if Long Beach closed and drydock 1 were no longer available, they were concerned about the cost of the proposed drydock. They questioned whether the Navy could pay the estimated $25 million to $50 million annual cost of the proposed lease-back arrangement. We have not yet determined the ultimate disposition of the proposal.

The Commander of the Pacific Fleet also studied the possibility of moving a floating drydock, capable of handling big-deck amphibious ships, from Pearl Harbor to San Diego. The reason for the study was the fleet's concern about the possible closure of the Long Beach Shipyard and its large drydock. The cost to move the drydock (called the Machinist), renovate it, and install it in San Diego was estimated at over $60 million. The Fleet decided not to proceed with the project because of this cost and instead, to rely on available private and public sector facilities to drydock these ships.

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