

September 6, 1963

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I had a chance to ask Admiral Ricketts (VCNO), a wise old salt I know slightly, a few questions about Indian Ocean proposition.

Navy of course is strong for it. If allowed to keep 15 carriers, Ricketts strongly favors diverting one from West Pacific to permanent Indian Ocean station. If Navy is cut, then what they want to do is rotate one of CINCPAC carriers into Indian Ocean area for periodic three month visits. To him, this doesn't meet the real need but might be a good interim measure.

If we use existing assets, added cost of redeploying one carrier plus associated gunk would be peanuts--only \$200, 000 per quarter. It really costs no more to keep a task force in Indian Ocean than any place else. Of course, same would hold true if Navy had only 12-13 carriers (but I didn't get into McNamara's business). \$900 million figure Nitze and Rowen throw around is capital cost of a new carrier plus planes plus destroyers, etc. In examining relative cost/effectiveness of carriers vs. other options, the proper comparison may be less between what a new task force vs. other new options would cost than between the cost of other new options (pre-stockage, etc.) vs. the saving from scrapping an existing carrier task force.

in any cost/effectiveness comparison, we should turn gimlet eye on what we get for what we spend. Carrier task force is always ready to go, includes its own defense and base structure, and can intervene simultaneously with arrival. Ground and air forces need build-up period before becoming combat effective. Ricketts claims Navy study shows that carrier fighter can be maintained overseas for same cost as tactical air force fighter (even excluding associated army costs of defending latter's bases).

Ricketts strongly agrees that ASW and counter-air threat to carriers in Indian Ocean would be marginal. So carrier might need only two destroyers instead of four, for example. This could bring cost way down.

He naturally stresses the great flexibility carrier task force gives, as opposed to shore-based air. Former buys us credibility in Red Sea, Persian Gulf, Iran, Pakistan, India, Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia—all for one price.

Rule of thumb that 3 carriers needed to keep one on station is based more on personnel rotation need than carrier overhaul. Carrier crews are now allowed spend 70 days a year at US home port. If carrier kept out longer,



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nobody gets home. Navy has explored shipping dependents to overseas home ports, but GOLD FLOW gets in way (they're petrified by this term). Rotating crews also difficult because 4500 men on a big carrier alone.

Pre-stockage is rather limited in multi-purpose use if stored on land; if floating base used, you get more flexibility but then have to maintain expensive crews constantly on ships. As to base problem, Ricketts says Navy could make do with no more than a communications facility (\$15 million) which is needed anyway, plus an air strip (\$5 million). Of course Navy would like more.

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As I see it, our problem may be how to ride two horses simultaneously: (1) cut total carriers as McNamara wants; (2) move one of remaining carriers where we want. If carrier force costs about the same wherever stationed, then issue becomes one of whether keeping so many carriers in Pacific and Atlantic/Mediterranean areas is more useful than shifting one or two. Even if we cut to 13 carriers, I'd argue that NATO and Pacific theaters are both so much closer to US that quick reaction forces from US are more suitable than in case of Indian Ocean area, which is so much the farthest from the US.

One final thought--when and if Chicom get nuclear weapons, we may want some residual tactical nuclear power readily available in Indian Ocean (not just Pacific) to counter Chicom psychological exploitation. It would be hard to base this onshore.

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