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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

DIRECTOR OF NET ASSESSMENT

6 December 1975

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT: Key Military Balances

Attached are very brief statements of my assessment of the four military balances we discussed yesterday:

- Strategic balance
- Central front balance
- Naval balance
- Comparative capability to project military power into political crisis areas.

I have focused upon what my best assessment is, but in a fuller treatment of these balances I believe that one should also **include**:
(1) judgments as to how the Soviets and our allies (or other third parties) see the particular balances, and **(2)** an assessment of the capabilities of the U.S. and Soviet Union to continue the military competition in that area.

A. W. Marshall
A. W. MARSHALL

See Enclosure

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STRATEGIC BALANCE

BASIC ASSESSMENT

There is an adequate balance in the size and capabilities of the U.S. and Soviet strategic forces. The Soviets have the more vigorous development program and are strongly motivated to further improve their forces. We have adequate hedges prepared, if we are allowed to act in time to implement them.

The key trends in technology that will impact on the strategic balance in the next decade are:

- Much improved guidance systems that will make **CEPs** small enough to provide hard target and/or very discriminating weapons.
- Improved ASW detection and localization systems that will make the problems of protecting sea-based systems much more complex.

SALT does not effectively control these critical factors of technological change. The result may be that sea-based and fixed land-based systems will both become more vulnerable, especially the latter. We may have to live with a somewhat higher level of risk; the period we have just lived through may have been unusual in that high levels of protection were easy and cheap. Both we and the Soviets are likely to face the questions of what to do about our silo-based ICBM forces in the early 80s. The Soviets potentially have a bigger problem than we do because a **much larger** part of their total throw weight is contained in their ICBM force. Land mobile systems, some form of site defense, or some form of launch on warning are likely options.

MAJOR UNCERTAINTIES

The rate at which **CEPs** will decrease is uncertain. Some argue that Soviet **CEPs** are already as good as ours, and with their larger yield weapons this already gives them a substantial hard target kill capability. There is also some real uncertainty about the yield of Soviet nuclear weapons. They have followed different design lines than we have. As a result we may have assumed an advantage we do not possess. There are also major uncertainties in our ability to estimate the hardness of Soviet silos.

In addition to these technical uncertainties, there are the more encompassing problems of perceptions, not only of force capability,

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but of national will and the willingness to use force. U.S. and Soviet perceptions are critical to deterrence, while third party perceptions determine the influence of the respective strategic capabilities as forces in being.

KEY ASYMMETRIES

U.S. leads in:

- Accuracy **of missiles**, especially in the potential for a major quantum improvement.
- Combined high accuracy, low yield weapons for discriminating use if we choose to develop them.
- Bomber force capabilities and tradition.
- Current, but perhaps eroding base system near Soviets that allows efficient use of bombers and the last ditch use of tactical aircraft for strategic missions.

Soviets lead in:

- Air defense against bombers.
- Civil defense preparations to protect population and industry.
- Development of land-mobile missile systems, and the methods of operating such systems effectively; e.g., camouflage, deception.
- Momentum of current programs.

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CENTRAL FRONT BALANCE

BASIC ASSESSMENT

The balance has two major dimensions. In terms of current forces and practices NATO appears strong overall in matching the Pact; but at the operational level it faces major problems in organization and coordination which distinctly favor the Pact. In terms of the long range trend in the balance, **NATO's** situation is precarious.

Comparisons of the strengths of the two sides reflect a general equality between them in many important areas, especially considering NATO's advantage in a defensive mission. While the Pact is superior in tanks, NATO is favored in other ground weapons, ground manpower and tactical air. Moreover, German forces have been improving, U.S. forces have been undergoing healthy changes, and more attention is focusing on how to specifically defeat an attack.

However, the long run trends are adverse. NATO allies have managed to maintain their contributions to the alliance in recent years, and overall force strength has remained relatively unchanged. But the conventional forces and supplies to really implement MC **14/3** are lacking. Meanwhile the Soviets have substantially increased the strength and improved the quality of their forces:

- Soviet forces facing Western Europe have increased by more than 100,000 men during the past decade.
- In the area facing NATO the Soviets have introduced **self-propelled artillery** into their divisions, increased tank strength, and deployed advanced attack aircraft, new infantry combat vehicles, modern munitions and mobile field army air defenses.
- Indications are that Soviet design practices have changed radically. Recent new Soviet land armaments are substantially more complex than the weapons they replaced, and many are new designs rather than improved versions **of earlier** weapons as had been their past practice.
- These weapon systems include innovations such as automatic loading and protective systems for chemical, biological and radiological warfare.
- Examples are the **BMP** infantry combat vehicle, **ZSU-23/4** self-propelled anti-aircraft gun, and the SA-6 and SA-9 surface to air missiles.

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-- The foregoing factors are of even greater significance in that there is less certainty than in the past concerning our presumed qualitative advantages in such areas as training, readiness and logistics.

MAJOR UNCERTAINTIES

The NATO/Warsaw Pact balance on the central front is especially difficult to assess. Major areas of uncertainty are:

- The appropriate crisis or war initiation scenario. We have to some extent concentrated on some of the least likely ones in most official assessments.
- The performance of both alliances in a crisis and the early days of a war are very uncertain and dependent upon the scenarios.
- The impact of surprise, initiative in the attack, logistics, tactics, and command and control are difficult to assess in the best of cases, but our intelligence on Soviet logistics, training, and other areas is poor.
- And for the future the impact of precision guided weapons and a new generation of tactical nuclear weapons is unclear.

KEY ASYMMETRIES

Factors favoring NATO:

- Defensive mission with advantages and familiar terrain, interior lines and capabilities to hold off a superior force if employed well.
- Leadership in tactical air, especially in technology and in the experience and training of the U.S. component.
- More anti-tank weapons, armored personnel carriers and armed helicopters.
- More nuclear warheads and delivery systems.

Factors favoring Warsaw Pact:

- Offensive mission with choice as to timing, size, direction and **nature of attack**.

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- More tactical aircraft.
- More tanks and artillery.
- Better command and control.
- Better mobilization systems.

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NAVAL BALANCE

BASIC ASSESSMENT

Geographic, political and economic factors have dictated different missions for the U.S. and Soviet navies, and such asymmetries in missions make meaningful comparisons difficult. U.S. interests and commitments are separated by the seas. Therefore, U.S. naval forces must be able to exercise sea control and projection of power ashore. The Soviet Union is basically a land power. Therefore, Soviet naval forces need only exercise sea denial.

From both an observation of recent trends in multiple surrogate measures of **the** naval balance (such as production rates, offensive systems per target, offensive systems per defensive system, etc.), and an examination of qualitative factors which cannot be simply quantified (such as command and control, maintenance and training, etc.), the following conclusions concerning the naval balance can be drawn:

1. The simultaneous decline of our own naval force levels and the rising capability of the Soviet Navy have clearly caused and are continuing to cause an adverse shift in the naval balance.
2. However, as of today, the U.S. Navy should be able to fulfill its assigned tasks, although not without heavy losses in certain situations.

The decline in U.S. naval forces is well documented. During the same period, the Soviets have developed:

- A naval shipbuilding capability which has produced over four times as many ships as the U.S. since 1962.
- A stand-off offensive capability that resides in 12 times as many platforms.
- A surface fleet which has greatly extended range.
- A submarine fleet which is increasingly nuclear powered.
- A land-based aviation arm whose range is being extended.
- A small series of overseas facilities and airfields for Soviet naval use.

Figures 1 and 2 provide comparison data on the static balance and on naval ship production.

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We know something of how the Soviets view the naval balance. They have great admiration for our aircraft carriers, and openly state that they lag us in this area. They also acknowledge that they lag us in logistics and amphibious capabilities, and they recognize our technological leads in ASW and submarine quieting. Similarly, we acknowledge that the Soviets lead us in the areas of deployed **anti-**ship cruise missiles, ocean surveillance, and command, control and communication links, and mine warfare capability.

MAJOR UNCERTAINTIES

A clear resolution of the naval balance issue would require detailed analysis of all probable conflict scenarios under various **feasible** assumptions. Since such a set of analyses would be almost impossible to perform, conclusions concerning the balance are often made from a small sample set of analyses -- thus, the uncertainty and debate. The following is a representative list of major uncertainties.

1. Although most will agree that the balance between the two navies has shifted markedly from a position of clear U.S. superiority to one where the Soviets compete favorably in many areas, great uncertainty exists concerning Soviet intentions as contrasted to Soviet capabilities. For instance, if it is assumed that the Soviets will strike first, and with little warning, then the U.S. Navy's position in many important theater areas would be precarious. Alternatively, if there is sufficient warning or if the expected conflict is a sustained war, then the Soviet Navy would be at a disadvantage since it is a distinctive competence of the U.S. Navy to fight a sustained, conventional war.
2. While the U.S. Navy has many qualitative advantages over the Soviets (e.g., submarine quieting, ASW, sea-based tactical air power), the point at which the Soviet quantitative advantages swamp out our qualitative leads due to sheer numbers is both highly uncertain, and is often an underlying issue in honest debate.
3. The previous discussion has focused on the U.S./Soviet Naval Balance. If one includes allies, then the U.S. is augmented far more than are the Soviets. Therefore, some would suggest **that the** issue is one of Allies/Warsaw Pact naval balance and not U.S./Soviet balance. Besides the uncertainties involved in the availability and effectiveness of allied naval forces, the debate also involves the issue as to how much decisions concerning U.S. naval capabilities should be affected by allied contributions.

4. Besides these more macro issues discussed above, great uncertainty and debate exists concerning such issues as: (1) aircraft carrier vulnerability, (2) Soviet employment of submarines against carriers rather than against merchant shipping, (3) the expected use of amphibious forces, (4) the developing Soviet force projection mission, and (5) the possibility of technological breakthrough in submarine detection.

KEY ASYMMETRIES

U.S. leads:

- Numbers of aircraft carriers
- Number of operational aircraft
- Logistics support
- Amphibious warfare
- Anti-submarine warfare
- Submarine quieting
- Underwater surveillance

Soviet Union leads:

- Deployed anti-ship cruise missiles
- Numbers of mine countermeasure units
- Numbers of attack submarines
- Numbers of stand-off offensive weapon platforms
- Ocean surveillance
- Secure command, control and communications links



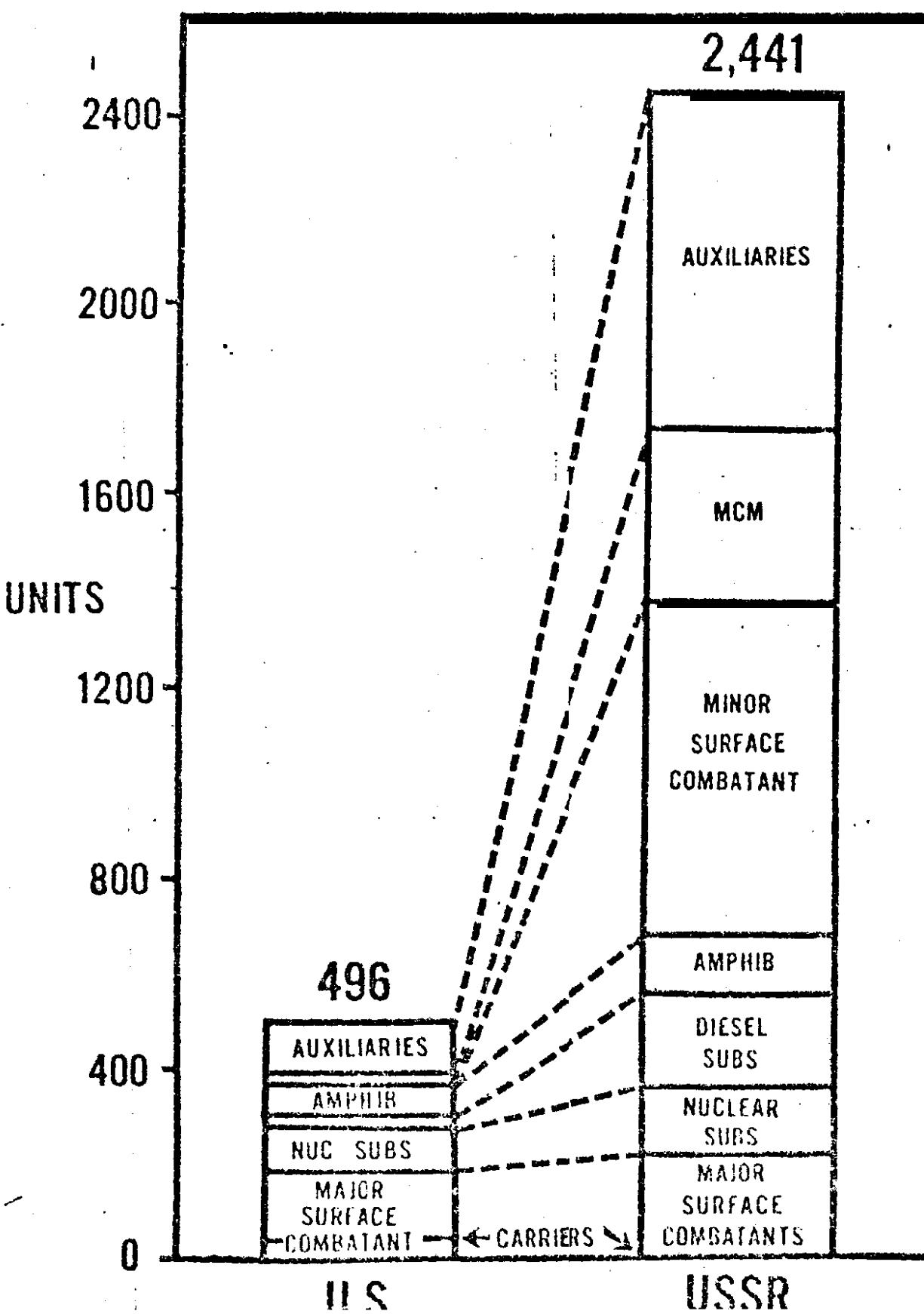
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U.S. AND USSR NAVAL SHIPS

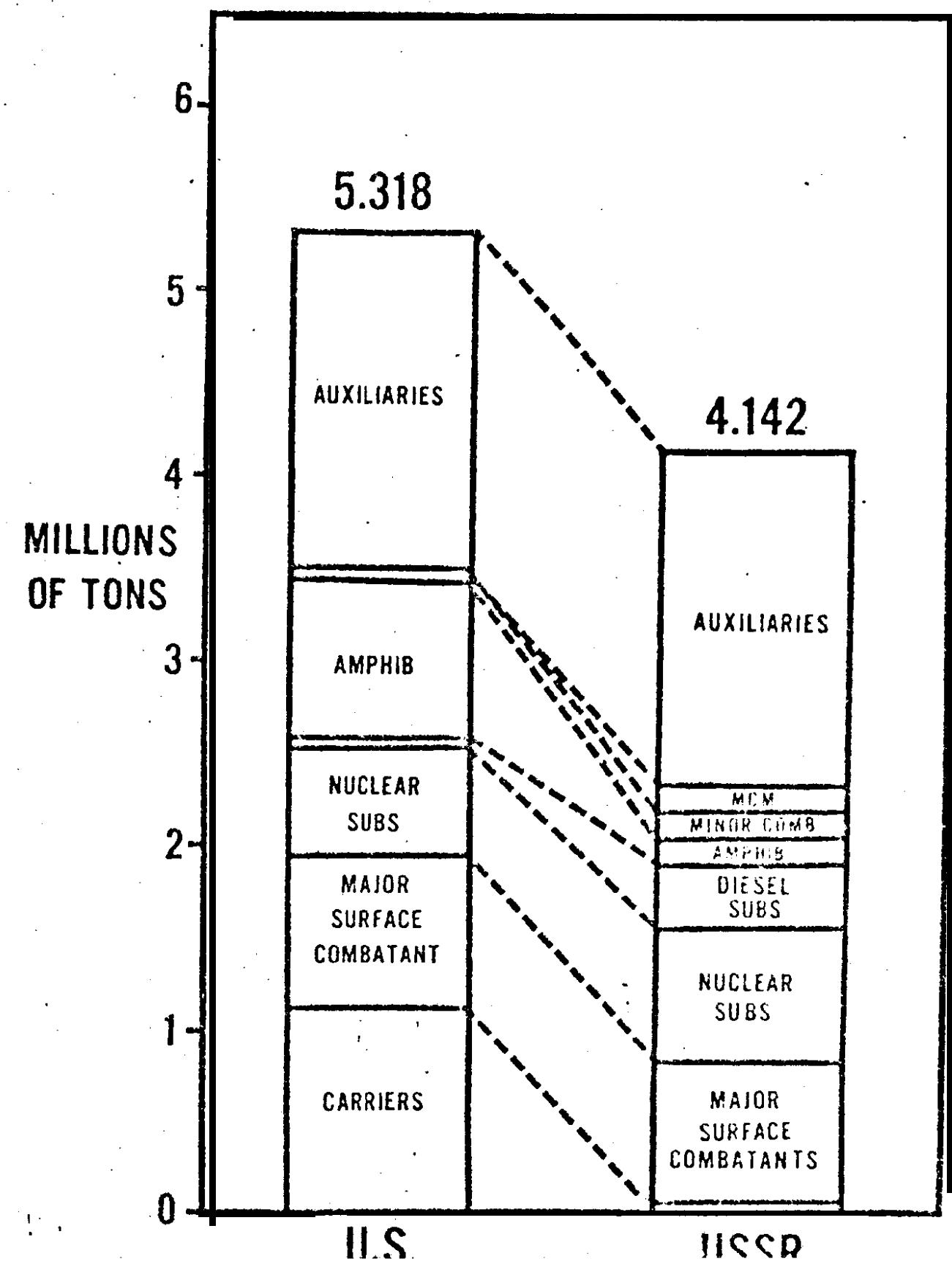
FIGURE 1

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NUMBER OF SHIPS



FULL LOAD DISPLACEMENT



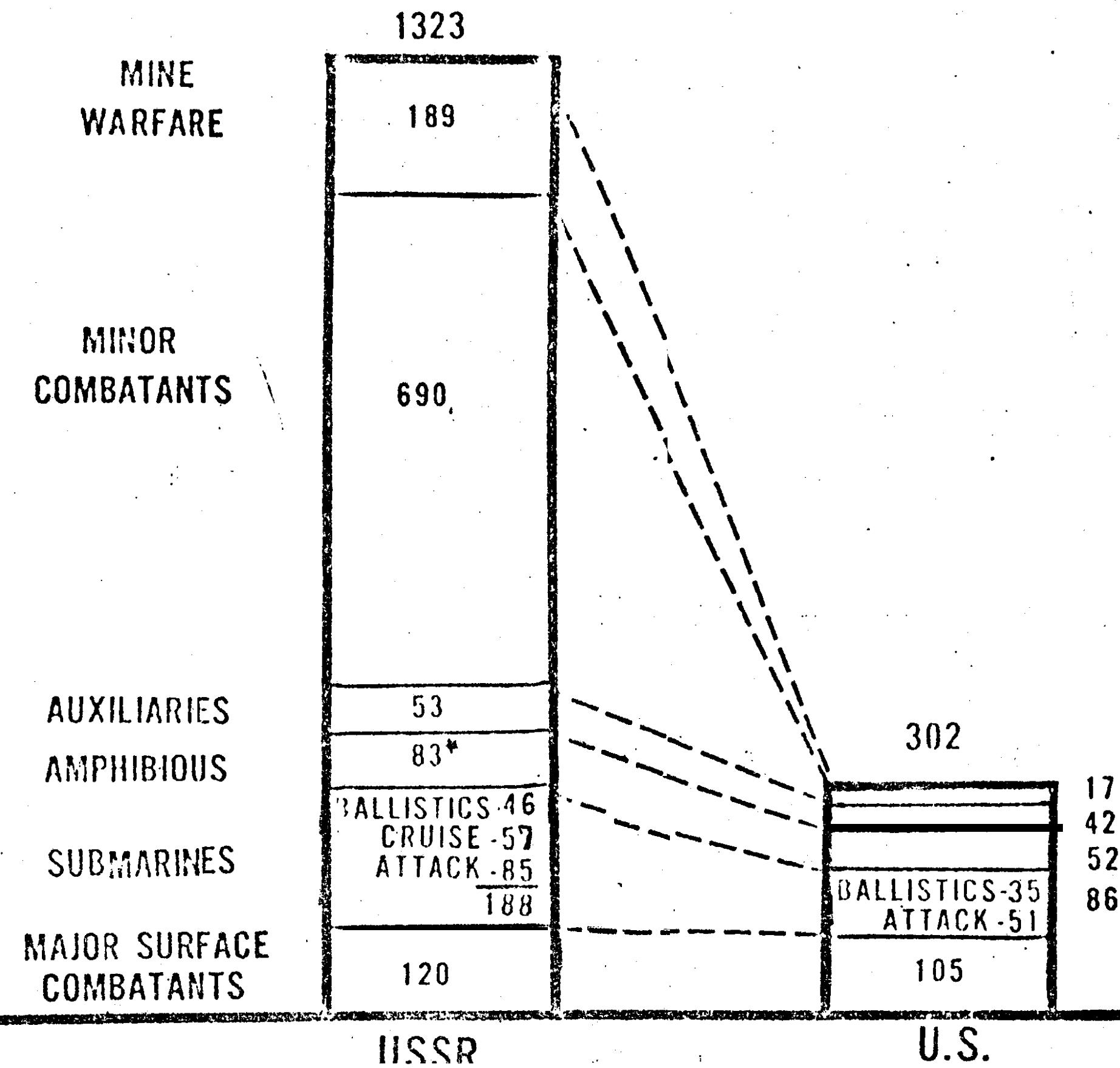
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NAVAL SHIP CONSTRUCTION 1962-1974

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COMPARATIVE CAPABILITY TO PROJECT
MILITARY POWER INTO POLITICAL CRISIS AREAS

BASIC ASSESSMENT

This is an area of strong U.S. advantage. The U.S. came out of World War II with a **strong** Navy and an experienced Marine Corps and has also developed the appropriate strategic airlift capabilities that together provide it with good capabilities to deploy and supply substantial military forces at long distances from our shores. Until relatively recently the Soviet Union was entirely a continental power. It still has problems of assured access to the open seas and has limited capabilities to deploy and operate forces at a distance.

The Soviet capabilities in this area are in embryo, but developing. They are acquiring a few foreign bases and acquiring a blue water **navy**. Improved airlift capabilities appear to be developing, but there is no sign yet of a wide-bodied jet aircraft needed for large equipment.

It seems likely, however, that the Soviets will not **try** to match us in capabilities for cross-beach assault operations, or large scale military operations at a distance. They are likely to see their missions as:

- Increasingly denying us the use of our capabilities through interposition of their naval forces or threats to our operations.
- Intervention with Soviet Airborne forces or Naval Infantry in Angola-type situations, the quick grab of a port or key pieces of geography before we can intervene.

MAJOR UNCERTAINTIES

- Soviet definition of the mission of its forces in this area.
- Trends in erosion of U.S. overseas bases and increase in Soviet bases and ability to use them in military operations.

KEY ASYMMETRIES

U.S. leads in:

- Appropriate Naval and **Marine Corps** forces, including assault ships, carrier air power, etc.
- Strategic airlift.

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-- Longer ranged tactical aircraft which with refueling can be flown directly to area of conflict.

-- Overseas bases.

-- Tradition and organization for large-scale operations at a distance.

Soviet advantage is:

-- Most likely crisis areas are closer to Soviets than to U.S.

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