



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY  
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS  
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

IN REPLY REFER TO

Op-60/jmk  
13 November 1959

**Top Secret**

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD:

Subj: Readiness of attack aircraft carriers for general war (U)

1. Comments concerning Navy attack aircraft carriers have recently been made which are not based on fact. The comments may be characterized by, "We never know where the carriers are--you can't count on the carriers doing their job." The purpose of this memorandum is to address these comments.

2. The tremendous job the carriers have done since World War II is clear to everyone, including the critics of aircraft carriers. Their performances in Korea, the Matsus, Lebanon, and Quemoy are a few examples which are now history. They had a job to do and they did it. This is fact, not speculation. Since the role of the carrier in these limited war situations is so manifest that it cannot be questioned, there is no purpose in pursuing it further in this analysis. Accordingly, the remainder of this memorandum will be concerned with the general war situation.

3. A brief survey of the current situation regarding the attack carriers deployed to forward areas would be appropriate and useful.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Average Number</u>		<u>Average Number</u>		<u>Average Number</u>	
	<u>Med</u>	<u>WestPac</u>	<u>Med</u>	<u>WestPac</u>	<u>6thFlt</u>	<u>7thFlt</u>
1958	2	3-	72(22)*	93(24)*	71	156
1959	2	2.5	91(14)*	84(15)*	72	152

\* All weather aircraft

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In addition to the initial phase primary targets indicated above and targets of opportunity which may arise, the SIXTH and SEVENTH Fleets have the following targets assigned for attack in subsequent phases of general war:

6th Fleet 37  
7th Fleet 215

4. In addition to the above, CINCLANT (SACLANT) assigns responsibility to the U. S. SECOND Fleet for attack on all his assigned targets for atomic attack (167 currently assigned). The timing of these attacks will depend on the nature of the warning of the enemy attack. If strategic warning is received, the Fleet will be in position for immediate strike. In event of surprise attack the Fleet will move rapidly from the Western Atlantic to launch positions in the Norwegian Sea.

5. Certain points in connection with the above summary are pertinent:

a. 213 attack aircraft are now deployed in advanced areas ready to strike assigned targets on instant notice.

b. Being relatively close to their assigned targets, the results of their efforts will be felt in short order.

c. These aircraft are based on moving bases, and are no targets for ballistic missiles.

d. Their precise geographic location is indeed not known (to the enemy). There is no necessity for them to be in a predetermined position in order to hit assigned targets.

e. The Fleets have accepted responsibility for hitting assigned targets and have guaranteed that this will be done.

f. Under all weather conditions, the job will still be done--it merely takes a few hours longer to do it and even so the targets will usually be hit quicker than can be done by other aircraft.

g. Carriers are in an alert status whether in port or at sea. Obviously, the higher or full alert status prevails at sea.

h. With regard to sub-paragraph b. above, the inevitableness of response is more important than quickness of response.

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i. Inevitableness of response is guaranteed by the built-in mobility characteristics of attack aircraft carriers. No expensive hardening, digging of holes in the ground, or airborne alerts are required.

6. Atomic missions and tasks for European command strike forces are assigned by the U.S. Element SHAPE. Effective 1 June 1959, SACEUR accorded first priority to the attack of eleven control centers (7 in USSR, 4 in East Germany) and scheduled them for immediate, automatic attack when the President orders our retaliatory forces into action. The U.S. SIXTH Fleet is responsible for attacking five of these, all in the USSR.

7. The foregoing is a factual summary of the major aspects of Navy attack carrier readiness, principally in those units deployed to forward areas. It should be emphasized that attack carriers have no predetermined launch positions which must be reached before commencing attacks, nor are such positions desired. Even the optimum positions are variable and flexible due to weather and enemy dispositions. This compounds the enemy's task and avoids rigidity of planning, a most desirable goal. Deployed attack carriers are ready to launch wherever they are and the "Time over Targets" (TOTS) information furnished the Joint Control Centers reflect this capability. Present catapults permit launching some strike aircraft at anchor, alongside a dock or even in dry dock under most circumstances, and when they cannot, strike plans are changed accordingly.

8. Another important facet of atomic readiness is that of delivery techniques. Several years ago, the Navy noted the rapidly increasing effectiveness of anti-aircraft defenses against the high flying bomber. Accordingly, the Navy developed new techniques which permitted the safe delivery of atomic munitions from low flying aircraft. Techniques such as toss, loft and over-the-shoulder bombing have now been adopted by other Services, and aircraft are being converted to permit use of these techniques. Further to increase the effectiveness of low level atomic attack, the Navy requested development of a laydown weapon. This has been done and the Navy and Marine Corps have the only U.S. capability for this type attack at the present time.

9. In summary:

a. Unified Commanders depend to a major degree on atomic strikes to be conducted from Navy attack aircraft carriers.

b. The Fleet Commanders have accepted primary responsibility for a large number of important enemy targets and will accomplish their tasks.

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c. Complete plans for atomic strikes by carrier aircraft are pre-positioned in the Joint Control Centers in Europe and Hawaii, and are in the possession of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Unified and Specified Commanders concerned.

d. Carrier Force strike plans reflect the flexibility and mobility of naval strike forces and avoid the false confidence of rigid plans.



ARLEIGH BURKE

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