

Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee
Subcommittee on Seapower and Projection Forces

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July 16, 2014

All testimony herein represents the personal views of Bryan McGrath

Thank you Chairman Forbes and Ranking Member McIntyre and all the members of the Seapower and Projection Forces subcommittee for the opportunity to testify and to submit this written statement for the record.

I am a defense consultant by trade, specializing in naval strategy. Additionally, I recently joined with Seth Cropsey of the Hudson Institute to found a think tank devoted to Seapower, known as the Hudson Center for American Seapower. All of my adult life has been spent either in the Navy or working on matters of naval operations and strategy.

On active duty, I commanded a destroyer, and I was the team leader and primary author of the 2007 USN/USMC/USCG maritime strategy known as “A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower. Since leaving active duty in 2008, I have written and spoken widely about preponderant American Seapower as the element of our military power most that most effectively and efficiently promotes and sustains America’s prosperity, security, and role as a world leader.

I am concerned that there is insufficient understanding among the American people and its leaders of the relationship between preponderant Seapower and our national greatness. I am concerned that there is insufficient attention being paid by the American people and many of its leaders to the dramatic and potentially irreversible impact of recent budget cuts on American Seapower. I am concerned that the Obama Administration has not backed up the strategic aspirations embodied in its “rebalance” to the Pacific with rational resource planning and tough strategic choices. Mostly, I am concerned about rising Chinese power and the threat it poses to the global order from which we in the United States benefit greatly (and truth be told, for which we pay disproportionately).

Others on this panel will eloquently describe the nature of the Chinese threat. There has been no shortage of discussion in the various defense journals of “Anti-Access/Area Denial Threats” and the clear desire of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) to execute a counter-intervention strategy that seeks to deny the United States the ability to project significant military power. Chinese modernization trends clearly stress the desire to create conditions under which our access and influence in the region are diminished. While some focus on the means of this strategy, I would emphasize the ends, which are to undermine our alliance system in the Asia Pacific region. The United States MUST contest this strategy. It must not cede significant portions of the earth’s surface because other powers develop weapons that increase risk to our forces. We must lean forward by capitalizing on one of our most important competitive

advantages, by which I mean our research and development base and our ability to change strategic conversations with the power of our ideas and the output of our industrial base.

Which brings us to the subject of today's hearing, the Navy's Unmanned Carrier Launched Surveillance and Strike System, hereafter referred to as UCLASS. Much has been made in the press about the Navy's plans for this system and, because the exact requirements remain justifiably classified, we cannot know with certainty the direction the acquisition will take.

But there have been troubling reports that lead me to believe that the specifications for the system vastly over-privilege surveillance at the cost of capable strike in contested electromagnetic and surface-to-air missile environments. I believe some members of this Sub-committee agree with me. This is not a small point. As a matter of fact, it is a very significant one. It is potentially the beginning of "the beginning of the end" of America's preponderance at sea.

The centerpiece of America's forward deployed power projection capability is the aircraft carrier strike group, or CSG. The CSG should be thought of as a sea-based combat system for the command and control of battle-space (specifically, the seas and skies in which it operates) and the projection of power ashore. This largely self-sufficient unit of American military power has contributed to the proper functioning of the global system of trade and finance for over sixty years by ensuring that no nation has the capability threaten the freedom of the sea commons. At the heart of this capability is the nuclear powered aircraft carrier, an instrument of remarkable flexibility and adaptability that has deterred conflict and assured allies and friends for decades, even as critics routinely (re)raise notions of its obsolescence. It is the ultimate expression of our interest in the region and our ability to influence friends.

The secret to the aircraft carrier's centrality in American defense planning has been the simple fact that, to a large extent, the platform is agnostic to the weapons it wields. No other element of America's arsenal has so thoroughly adapted with the times, as aerospace technologies provided for ever increasing capability. Over the years, the "main battery" of the aircraft carrier – known as the "Carrier Air Wing" (henceforth, CVW) – has continuously evolved to ensure the U.S. Navy operates with a comfortable margin of superiority over all potential adversaries.

History has not reached its end and, for the U.S. Navy to continue to exercise preponderant Seapower in the 21st Century, the CVW must continue to evolve to reflect the state of technology and the viability of the threat. The importance of CVW

evolution is precisely why Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus' early prioritization of unmanned surveillance and strike capability on a U.S. carrier was such a clear and powerful statement of purpose, notable from an Administration that has thus far not shown a grasp of the importance of American Seapower.

Simply put, if America does not devote itself to fielding unmanned, autonomous strike platforms capable of operating in contested environments, we may in fact reach the point where six decades of predictions finally come true – that the aircraft carrier will have reached its point of obsolescence, taking with it billions of dollars of taxpayer investment and prudent operational planning, simply because we did not have the courage and foresight to field the capability required to sustain our Navy's ability to operate where it matters, when it matters. Put another way, if we do not insist that the Navy put the UCLASS acquisition on a path to creating a future air wing of manned and unmanned platforms capable of operating as a system to counter adversary strategies in contested environments, we are likely to see the dominance of the American Navy wane and, with it, the network of alliances and friendships that has underpinned American security and global prosperity for decades.

Why Seapower? American Seapower is the most flexible of the various instruments of military power, and the one uniquely able to accommodate our desire for a peaceful and prosperous world. Even more, it is an essential element of an effective grand strategy, along with a strong economy and useful alliances. As policy-makers begin to think seriously about an appropriate grand strategy for the Post War on Terror world, American Seapower should occupy a central position. Several obvious US national security imperatives are made possible by preponderant American Seapower.

Seapower Enables the Homeland Defense "Away Game". Naval forces operate for extended periods far from US shores without the permission of any sovereign government; this translates into the extension of America's homeland "defensive perimeter". The ability to gather information, perform surveillance of seaborne and airborne threats, interdict suspected WMD carriers and disrupt terrorist networks without a large shoreward "footprint" is critical in a world of denied access and decreasing acceptance of American troops stationed abroad. Dealing with these threats as far from our shores as possible gains decision space and time for political and engagement opportunities.

Seapower Bolsters Critical Security Balances. Preponderant American Seapower underwrites East Asian security by demonstrating to Allies and friends American resolve to maintain regional stability. Additionally, the overwhelming advantage enjoyed by US naval forces in sea control and striking power is, in and of itself, an

inducement to maintaining security. Absent such preponderance, a nascent Asian naval arms race has the potential to intensify, with predictably deleterious effects for the United States and our Allies. In the Arabian Gulf and Indian Ocean, sustained preponderant US naval combat power serves to assure allies of the nation's resolve to maintain stability in the face of an unpredictable regime in Iran.

Seapower Provides an Effective Conventional Deterrent. The visible presence of American Seapower operating freely in the maritime commons provides an effective conventional deterrent to those who would seek to threaten regional security and stability. First, the capabilities and capacities of preponderant naval power are arrayed in a manner that causes an adversary to question the effectiveness of a pre-emptive attack (deterrence by denial). Such capabilities include sea-based ballistic missile defense (BMD) and the striking power of carrier-based airpower armed with precision guided munitions. Second, the likelihood of a prompt and painful counter-attack from the sea raises the costs associated with military adventurism (punishment). In either case, recent scholarship in the study of conventional deterrence indicates that *overall* US conventional superiority is less likely to provide an effective deterrence than is the *local regional balance of power*. This suggests that in order to deter effectively, the US must be "present" – and no form of military power can be as consistently present in as many critical places at once as Seapower.

Seapower Enables Diplomacy, Development and Defense. American Seapower is the global guarantor of freedom of commerce on the world's oceans, thereby promoting American economic stability and growth. This role has been played before in history by the Portuguese, the Dutch and the British, but never before has it been played by a nation without imperial or colonial aspirations. American guarantees to the global commons do not come with a colonial "tax" on other nations. The overwhelming majority of world trade (by weight and by value) travels across the world's oceans, to the benefit of all trading nations. Additionally, America's diplomatic power is increasingly enabled by its Seapower, a symbiotic relationship reminiscent of US foreign policy conduct throughout much of its pre-World War II history. American Seapower provides its statesmen and diplomats with new options for flexibly engaging Allies, partners, friends and others. This close relationship between America's naval forces and its diplomatic arm will be essential to promoting good governance in ungoverned spaces and building partnership capacity in nations facing critical security threats.

Seapower Provides for Modulated Military Response. The world is an increasingly disordered and untidy place, with regional instability a constant feature of the strategic landscape. Should deterrence fail (as it sometimes does), already present, combat ready

naval forces are prepared to conduct prompt and sustained operations. These operations range from shows of force, raids and demonstrations, strikes and special operations, all the way to the forcible entry of land power from the sea. This menu of choices is a primary feature of American Seapower, and it provides the President with unmatched flexibility to respond, escalate, and de-escalate without having to deploy additional forces from the United States. Should the nation find it necessary to transition to a punishing land war, American Seapower provides the means for assuring the entry of follow-on forces, as well as providing considerable combat power in support of ongoing land operations.

Seapower Provides America's Survivable Nuclear Deterrent. The Navy's fleet of 14 ballistic missile submarines (SSBN) -- each equipped with Multiple Independent Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV) armed Trident Submarine Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs) -- is our most survivable method of providing strategic nuclear deterrence. With Russia increasing its reliance on nuclear weapons and China upgrading its own nuclear stockpile -- in addition to the nuclear mischief of North Korea and Iran -- the US must continue to upgrade its SSBN force even as it considers new and novel ways to employ them.

Seapower Shows the Best Face of America. The purpose of American military power is to protect the United States by fighting and winning wars, and American Seapower is no exception. That said, the staggering cost of military power demands a premium be placed on those forces with *peacetime missions* that *also* advance the national security of the United States. No nation on earth is as quick to provide humanitarian assistance in the wake of natural and humanitarian disasters as the US, and no element of American power is as critical to prompt and sustained recovery efforts as American Seapower. Whether it is the direct provision of food, water and shelter; emergency medical care; or security in a chaotic environment, it is American Seapower that answers the nation's call when its considerable sympathy moves it to act.

Why is UCLASS Critical to Sustaining American Seapower?

When the Berlin Wall fell, the United States was left as the sole superpower, able to project power from the sea wherever it needed without serious fear either of opposition or reprisal. America's Navy was ascendant, and its ability to control the seas (the necessary precondition to project power from the sea) was unquestioned. As a result, the CVW evolved from its Cold-War era instantiation which included longer range strike assets and sea control aircraft (both of which were necessary to contest a near peer in the Soviet Navy) to one which featured much shorter range strike aircraft

capable of higher sortie rates, leveraging the precision guided weapons revolution. Sea control aircraft – which prosecuted enemy surface ships and submarines – were largely removed from the air wing, with the strike/fighter squadrons assuming greater sea control responsibilities.

This arrangement was sufficient so long as no one contested America's ability to control the seas. That salutary condition began to wane in the 21st century, as China worked to assemble a family of capabilities designed to ensure that American forces would not be capable of operating close enough to its shores (or more to the point, to Taiwan's shores) for it to be able to generate the massive amount of power projection necessary to achieve major military objectives. Keep the Americans outside the combat range of their power projection platforms, and America loses its competitive advantage. Chief among the strategies for accomplishing this goal was the development of a series of "anti-access/area denial" measures designed specifically to target the aircraft carrier, which the PLA rightly identified as the lynchpin of American forward combat power.

It must be remembered that the U.S. Navy made a conscious decision to alter the makeup of its carrier air wings after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, trading range for sortie generation, a luxury afforded it by a lack of any real threat. Again, the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier itself did not fundamentally change; the weapons system it projected did. China has created a series of weapons (missiles -- both ballistic and cruise -- long range bombers and submarines) designed to increase the threat to the carriers which (by their logic) would cause us to operate them well-outside the effective combat range of their air wings. If our air wings do not evolve to once again "buy back combat range," then the Chinese strategy will have succeeded.

In addition to a whole host of countermeasures designed to attack China's ability to find, fix, target the aircraft carrier in the first place, the Navy must evolve its air wings to conduct strike operations at longer ranges in non-permissive environments. When UCLASS was first announced, it was assumed by many that it would be the first step in fielding an unmanned capability that would operate side by side with manned aircraft on the carrier decks to accomplish this goal. As the Joint Strike Fighter begins to populate carrier decks, providing fifth generation capabilities and increased strike range, UCLASS would evolve to eventually replace the F/A-18 E/F Super Hornet fleet with an unmanned, autonomous platform capable of operations in a contested environment, including complex electromagnetic and air defense threats. This long-range vision of manned and unmanned strike vehicles extending the useful operational range of the aircraft carrier dramatically above its current striking distance reinforced

the centrality of the aircraft carrier in America's forward deployed power projection scheme.

This ability to generate combat power at greater distances directly counters China's A2AD regime, and serves as a defining capability to what has come to be called "Air Sea Battle". Much has been made of Air Sea Battle in the open press, and much of that has been overheated and wrongheaded. What has received insufficient attention in the Air Sea Battle debate is the deterrent value gained by ensuring the PLA knows that its A2AD regime can be effectively countered. A carrier air wing capable of striking targets from outside the likely operational range of China's A2AD complex provides a powerful incentive to Chinese leaders NOT to incite conflict that they know would bring a swift and powerful reprisal. Additionally, a U.S. capability to effectively counter China's A2AD complex provides assurance to our Allies and friends in the region that we will not be ejected from the Western Pacific, removing the temptation for them to pursue separate accommodations with the Chinese.

Ensuring that UCLASS requirements account for appropriate levels of stealth, autonomy, range and lethality that enable it to operate in contested environments will ensure that the carrier air wing continues to evolve in a manner that leverages the mobility and flexibility of the nuclear powered aircraft carrier. This is critical to sustaining American Seapower, which I believe is critical to sustaining our security, prosperity, and global leadership.

What is Wrong with a UCLASS that Privileges Surveillance and Precludes Strike?

The primary problem with a UCLASS that overly privileges surveillance at the cost of strike operations in a contested environment is that, in a time of tight budgets, we can ill afford to build and field yet another ISR system that cannot penetrate and attack. The Navy is already purchasing 68 MQ-4C Triton UAV's and in excess of 100 P-8 manned MPRA aircraft; therefore, a carrier based, non-stealthy UAV that stresses mission duration over stealth and strike is largely duplicative to these two more capable systems. That a non-stealthy ISR heavy UCLASS might have some limited capability for strike in a permissive environment will not justify even the first dollar that would be spent on it.

The opportunity costs associated with pursuing a surveillance-heavy UCLASS are immense, not the least of which could be the potential for realizing the six-decade old predictions of the end of the aircraft carrier. It is not my intention to advocate for a stealthy, strike UCLASS in order to "save the aircraft carrier". It is my intention to advocate for a stealthy, strike UCLASS because I fear that if we do not move in this

direction, the PLA anti-intervention strategy will largely succeed, and the preponderant Navy that we enjoy today will become a thing of the past. Unless and until something comes along that enables the United States to deter and assure from the sea with the success of the aircraft carrier and its embarked air wing, we must continue to evolve the air wing to ensure that the utility and flexibility of the carrier will continue to be manifest.

Why Would the Navy Proceed with a Surveillance-heavy UCLASS?

The simple answer is resources. Clearly, a non-stealthy, surveillance privileged platform with limited or zero autonomy and without the ability for in-flight refueling would represent considerably less acquisition risk than a stealthy, autonomous, in flight refuelable platform. Were cost the only (or even the main) consideration, such a path would be worth considering.

But acquisition cost is not the only – or even the main – consideration; or at least it should not be. The main consideration of this program should be to ensure a future path to manned and unmanned carrier air wings capable of operations within an enemy’s desired “keep out” zone, thereby contributing to the continuation of preponderant American Seapower. Allocating considerable resources to a UCLASS that does not advance THIS goal may be less expensive in the short run, but it is MORE wasteful than pursuing the (admittedly) more challenging and expensive goal of stealthy, autonomous, strike in a contested environment

Critics of my view strike me as being in a hurry to get an admittedly limited system fielded as soon as possible, with the goal of making enhancements as the program progresses. This is often a path that I advocate, but in this instance, the significant differences in platform and associated propulsion options needed to support the more challenging strike missions strongly suggest that a surveillance privileged UCLASS simply could never evolve to meet more stringent, contested environment requirements. And so rather than move forward in a direction that largely duplicates existing Navy ISR capability while offering no enhancements to the carrier air wing versus a complex A2AD environment, I recommend continuing to work to ensure that the Navy’s UCLASS requirements effectively addresses the operational problems posed by China’s A2AD complex.

Additionally, I urge this Sub-committee to closely monitor the Navy’s ongoing plans for its two X-47B UCAS platforms, the UAV that captured the country’s imagination last summer by taking off and landing on an aircraft carrier autonomously. Reports in the July 7 “Inside the Navy” indicate that the Northrop Grumman program manager claims

to be prepared to execute aerial refueling capability during upcoming shipboard testing aboard USS THEODORE ROOSEVELT (CVN 71). The contract under which this testing will occur reportedly contains an option to demonstrate autonomous in-flight refueling, and the Navy's unmanned carrier aviation program manager was quoted in the story as stating that such testing would proceed, "...if resources allow..." In-flight refueling will be key to extending the range of a stealthy, strike platform, and the Navy should move mountains to ensure that resources will allow such testing.

Finally, I urge this subcommittee to query the Secretary of the Navy as to why – if unmanned capability is such a high priority of his – the Navy has downgraded the position of Resource Sponsor for Unmanned Systems from a Rear Admiral to a Captain. Keep in mind, this person is the resource sponsor for the overwhelming number of unmanned systems in the Navy, to include undersea, aerial, and surface systems. Each of the major platform sponsors (air, surface, and submarines) remains a 2-star officer. This downgrade was made ostensibly in response to DoD-wide direction to cut flag billet numbers, but it clearly sends the wrong message and it seems antithetical to the Secretary's vision for advancing unmanned systems.