

1970

## The Barometer

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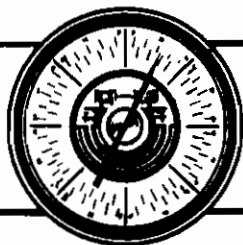
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# THE BAROMETER

As a student at the German Command and Staff College, Hamburg, Germany, I read with much interest the article in the "New Horizons" section of the November 1969 *Review* entitled: "A Concept for Carrier Air Capability in the Standing Naval Force Atlantic."

The concept of the committee has, in my view, considerable merit—especially in regard to its emphasis on the northern flank of NATO. This area is too large to be sufficiently protected by the naval forces presently available. Norway, which comprises the entire land area of the northern flank, has a rather small navy and air force, both of which are committed to the defense of their own land and coastal areas; the Danish and German forces (with the exception of Commander German Naval Forces, North Sea Subarea) are committed to the BALTOP area; the Dutch and Belgian Navies are primarily committed to the BENELUX area, with their air forces assigned to SACEUR for mostly overland tasks; and British forces, although considerably stronger than the aforementioned forces, cannot sufficiently cover the entire EASTLANT area in order to effectively counter a Soviet threat. As noted by the committee, U.S. forces are also over-committed and cannot provide a standing presence in the EASTLANT area.

While concurring with the authors that SNFL has been most successful during its existence, I must point out that SNFL is only an ASW Group. Adding a CVA or two to this group would not provide the complete fast-reaction offensive capability the authors

claim. Granted, the aircraft of the CVA could attack enemy ships armed with surface-to-surface missiles and enemy aircraft, but there is good reason to believe that other enemy aircraft could get through to attack the group. What then? Would it not be better to compose SNFL of DEG/DDG types that could provide both AAW and ASW protections? The carrier aircraft cannot—despite the best arguments—provide complete AAW protection.

Additionally, if two CVAs were provided on a rotational basis, would it not be necessary to have two separate escort groups? Assuming a "yes" answer, would the funding and personnel situations in the NATO navies allow this? To this last question, a cursory investigation would reveal that all NATO navies which would be involved in the committee's plan are, or will soon be, suffering personnel shortages and also receive the smallest percentage of military appropriations—this definitely includes the U.S. Navy.

Would it not be better as a solution for NATO to underwrite the cost of entirely British-manned carriers—including embarked air groups? In this way, a new crew and new pilots would not have to be trained "from scratch," thus saving a substantial amount of time and money. Further, present British carrier-borne aircraft could be utilized, without waiting for a new multirole combat aircraft (MRCA), which will undoubtedly not be on a production basis for quite a few years.

Regarding operation areas: would SNFL (with CVA) operate in the entire

EASTLANT area or would it confine its operations to the sea area between Norway and Iceland and north of the United Kingdom? Would any operations be conducted in the North Sea and, if so, how far south? Would the force be employed for protection of convoys or would it be used primarily for operations against enemy surface combatant forces? To what extent, i.e., how far inland, would this force support land operations in the northern, central, and southern NATO areas?

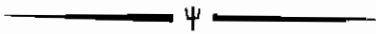
One final question: what consideration has been given by the committee to

the employment of French naval forces, in the event France resumes an active part in NATO and NATO commitments?

The foregoing questions have been posed since I am sure not all the deliberations of the committee have been published, and since all documents and publications necessary for a complete investigation of this problem are not available to me.

\* \* \* \* \*

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Freedom of navigation is an important objective of American foreign policy.

*Cavendish W. Cannon: Speech while American Ambassador, Belgrade, 18 August 1948 (rejecting Russian-dictated treaty intended to control the Danube)*