

12. National Security Study Memorandum 177¹

Washington, March 16, 1973.

TO

The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense
The Director, Central Intelligence

SUBJECT

Military Mission's Involving Naval Forces

The President has directed a review of U.S. capability to support existing strategy in Europe and Asia against the threat posed by the Soviet navy.

The purpose of the study should be to: (a) consider the likely future development and current military and diplomatic significance of the Soviet naval threat; (b) assess the future adequacy of currently planned U.S. forces to carry out missions which involve naval forces; and, (c) consider the diplomatic value of our naval force presence and ways in which naval forces could be used to enhance U.S. negotiating positions.

In pursuit of these broad objectives, the review should provide as a minimum:

(1) Analysis of the Soviet naval threat and other forces capable of attacking U.S. naval forces at sea including:

- past and current trends in Soviet shipbuilding and fleet composition and their implications for Soviet naval strategy;
- projections of future Soviet capabilities under alternative assumptions regarding Soviet intentions and economic capabilities;
- trends and projections of Soviet naval deployments, including an assessment of the diplomatic significance of these deployments.

(2) Based on this assessment of the Soviet naval threat, the review should evaluate our ability to support existing strategy in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East including, as a minimum, the following kinds of military missions:

- unilateral military intervention in support of U.S. policies and interests in a limited contingency (e.g., Middle East and elsewhere);
- protection of the Atlantic sea lanes of communication in support of a NATO conflict;

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 365, Subject Files, NSSMs Nos. 104–206. Secret. A copy was sent to Moorer.

—a conflict at sea with the Soviets, including the implications of possible Soviet involvement in the Pacific in support of a conflict in Europe or in Asia;

—a war in Asia involving the PRC or assistance to Allies against non-PRC threats;

—peacetime presence including the diplomatic and political value of maintaining current types and levels of naval force deployments.

Particular attention should be given to the role of the attack aircraft carrier: its value in a limited war, all-out war with the Soviets and its diplomatic and political value in peacetime.

The analysis should take into account possible Allied contributions in support of these missions in both Europe and Asia.

(3) Based on the above analysis, alternative means of supporting national strategic objectives should be developed along with alternative force postures for each of the major missions.

The study will be prepared by an ad hoc committee composed of the addresses and NSC staff and chaired by a representative of the Department of Defense. The study should be completed by June 30, 1973, for review by the Defense Program Review Committee prior to its consideration by the President.

NSSM 50² is hereby rescinded.

Henry A. Kissinger

² NSSM 50, April 26, 1969, entitled "A Review of U.S. Naval Forces," is Document 27 in *Foreign Relations, 1969–1976*, Vol. XXXIV, National Security Policy, 1969–1972.