Response to Admiral Boorda's Remarks Regarding US Navy Unwillingness to Sacrifice Functions to Attain Efficiency

Colonel Robert M. Johnston, USAF, Director, Airpower Research Institute

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Recently, Admiral Jeremy Boorda, chief of naval operations (CNO), provided reporters a brief review of his 20 Sep 94 presentation to the Commission on Roles and Missions of the Armed Forces. He was later quoted in Aerospace Daily [Vol 172, No 12, 19 Oct 94, pp 89-90]. However, during this recent "replay", instead of addressing roles, functions, and missions within the context of improving static efficiency or dynamic effectiveness, he elected instead to lobby for the theater ballistic missile defense (TMD) as a primary function for the Department of the Navy. He also chose to subordinate the capabilities of bombers and land-based air to carrier aviation. This uncharacteristic presentation by the senior naval office warrants a reply.

Laying US Navy claim to primary functional responsibility for TMD, ADM Boorda asserted the US Navy possesses not just a certain amount of capability, but the only capability for the latter part of this decade. This is a stretch. In compliance with DoD Directive 5100.1, each Service has invested heavily in TMD research and development and force structure as part of this shared responsibility. These investments, however, have generated joint doctrinal problems. By splitting responsibility for TMD and theater air defense (TAD) in response to surface-oriented boundaries, commanders have had to accept degraded unity of effort and joint doctrine compromises. Rather than sustain these dangerous accommodations for this shared functional area, the Air Force proposes an integrated air and missile defense architecture.

As DoD Executive Agent for TAD battle management and command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence (BMC4I), the Air Force has led the way in battle management and provided the lion's share of C4I infrastructure. In the future, as we progress ever more toward true TAD integration, the Air Force's far-reaching contributions will benefit every commander. At the same time, we must be able to benefit from air- and space-based cueing in TAD or even TMD. Exploitation will be the product of off-board cueing by aircraft and satellites, a broad theater-wide perspective, and responsive, integrated BMC4I. Unfortunately, a surface commander's narrower perspective and the resulting legacy of a fragmented theater air and missile defense architecture have spawned a bias toward surface-to-air missile (SAM) acquisitions. This is the capability to which the CNO refers.

The overwhelming evidence suggests that the best protection from missile attack is to destroy them prior to launch. Technologies are emerging which expand active defense opportunities and significantly enhance combat effectiveness of launch- or boost-phase interception. Current funding profiles emphasize development of land-based terminal and mid-phase SAM systems which are neither deployable nor able to exploit boost-phase intercept advantages. Neither deployable nor launch-preventing, these SAM systems are poor choices. What this nation needs are rapidly deployable aircraft and missile defense systems for launch- or boost-phase intercept.

As combatant commanders are well aware, US Navy investments in improved Standard missiles and vertical launch systems for Aegis destroyers, however capable, address only a part of the overall TMD problems. Until the US Navy can provide the commander's theater-wide perspective, the responsive and integrated BMC4I capability, and the off-board cueing of airborne and satellite systems for launch- or boost-phase intercepts, the CNO's arguments for primary functional responsibility for TMD falter. Conversely, Air Force capability and its 47-year legacy of meeting TAD responsibilities are more attractive.

Suggesting the scarcity of land-based aircraft for regional contingencies will be exacerbated by denial of basing rights and time delays in outfitting these bases, ADM Boorda said that US Navy and Marine Corps aviation represent the only US resource capable of independent military action without relying upon a host nation. You have to wonder, "Under what circumstances would no host nation be available, even if it were the United States?" It is within the realm of possibility that access to suitable airfields can be attained, albeit with effective diplomacy or some kind of forced entry. On the other hand, even without airfield access, long-range bombers can reach any spot on earth and deliver awesome devastation in support of strategic objectives. Additionally, it is entirely possible that operational factors, such as weather, sailing time or an impenetrable littoral area, will make forces afloat no more responsive nor more useful than land-based airpower. Thus, these perspectives simply do not account for the time-tested and proven versatility of integrated air and space power.

We're experiencing a revolution in military affairs in which emerging technologies, military concepts of operation, and information warfare are transforming our approach to warfare. As Desert Storm suggested to us, the high-quality and rapid response time of our current land-based aircraft inventory produce additional leverage in precision, lethality, and stealth. Overhead systems also provide national command authorities and theater commanders exciting new capabilities. The resultant combination is so versatile, so influential, and so powerful that national leaders consider integrated air and space power the nation's military instrument of choice and its guarantor of security.

I take for granted the Admiral used a US Navy study whose methodology, modeling, assumptions, or other factors differ from those the Air Force relies upon. The CNO assailed inadequate response time, lift, support, sortie generation, and multirole limitations of land-based aviation as compared to those afloat in carrier battle groups. Air Force studies indicate that in terms of war fighting effectiveness, carrier air makes a lesser contribution in sustained air campaigns than does land-based TACAIR due to performance compromises, deck cycle times, sortie rates, and sustainability factors. In terms of static efficiencies, carrier-based aircraft are somewhat more expensive to procure and three to four times as expensive to operate if carrier costs are included. This suggests more than a different perspective.

In response to Gen McPeak's suggestion that the US Navy would benefit from reassignment of Marine Corps' F/A-18s to meet demands of the deep battlespace, ADM Boorda replied that the budget reductions had already taken five squadrons of planes from the Marine Corps, as though that counted as the Department's fair share of the contribution to increased efficiency. In reality, Gen McPeak's proposal was based upon evidence of excessive TACAIR inventories and

opportunities to rely more upon each Armed Service's core competencies. This would permit better management of battlespace seams and more efficient distribution of TACAIR.

Finally, with an answer for which there was no question, ADM Boorda asserted the continuing need for Marine Corps aviation assets. As pointed out in Aerospace Daily, no one--and particularly not Gen McPeak--had made that suggestion. This troubling deflection, however, seems merely to highlight further the apparent legitimacy of Gen McPeak's argument that in the close battlespace the Marine Corps should rely heavily upon rotor-wing and fixed-wing aviation, like the AV-8B Harriers which are optimized for close air support, and should divest its multirole and longer range F/A-18s to resolve the US Navy's five-squadron shortfall in carrier air wings.

The CNO's statement reflects the pressures the US Navy senses as it searches for acceptable offsets to current force structure and ongoing acquisitions. At the same time, though, the discourse took on a higher pitch, not serving well the nation's interests. As Commission Chairman John White has recently suggested, the eventual report should not offer binary findings in which there are Service winners and losers, but rather deliberate nudges which exploit timely opportunities to improve static efficiency while preserving dynamic effectiveness. It is those efforts that those of us in uniform should champion.
