BRAC Commission

Executive Correspondence
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Dear Chairman Principi,

I am writing in comment on the recommendation to close Submarine Base New London. I believe this is unthoughtful. The submarine force level study used to support the recommendation is not defendable and no consideration was given to the impact on the cost of building submarines at Electric Boat.

This naval administration has indicated that we have the wrong Navy - they prefer smaller, swifter surface ships rather than aircraft carriers and submarines. While not subjecting the matter to open discussion, they have taken many actions to advance this premise. The recommendation to close the Submarine Base is the most unthoughtful of the lot.

The attack submarine force level has undergone some 14 studies in the past 12 years. The current Navy study came up with the lowest number. It had essentially no submariner input, no input from the Fleet Commanders and inadequate peer review. This contrasts with the Office of the Secretary of Defense (PA&E) study of one year earlier. This study included submariner input, Fleet Commander input and was properly peer reviewed. It reached a number some 20% higher. I have some experience with such studies. The Navy study does not meet professional standards and is not defendable.

Another matter in which I have some experience is the cost of submarines. The Navy has been pressing Electric Boat to reduce the cost of new construction submarines. Some progress has been made. In the 90s, I encouraged Electric Boat to take over the maintenance activities at the Submarine Base. It has worked well and reduced overhead at Electric Boat some $50M per year. If the Submarine Base closes, this advantage is lost and the cost of new construction submarines will rise. I have trouble believing the Navy considered this long term impact on the industrial base.

Other less quantifiable issues revolve around synergies. The Submarine Force is small with only some 30,000 submariners in the Navy. Driven by the exigencies of the platform they have always been a compact organization with relatively low overhead.. Support groups reside near the waterfront to better reflect the realities of the boats. This closure would scatter these groups, removing some from direct contact with the waterfront.

The Submarine Force is important to the defense of our national interests. It has the only truly stealthy platforms in our armed services and is the heart of our strategic nuclear deterrent. It has adapted to the changing nature of naval warfare for over 100 years. It is a rare asset and sets our Navy apart. The closure of the Submarine Base will not mean the end of the Submarine Force but it will start many years of unnecessary churn. The recommendation to close the Submarine Base is not well founded and should be overturned.

Thank you for your consideration.

Bruce DeMars
Admiral, U.S. Navy (Retired)