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STATEMENT OF HONORABLE DUNCAN HUNTER CHAIRMAN, MILITARY PROCUREMENT SUBCOMMITTEE NEW ATTACK SUBMARINE HEARING

March 18, 1997

This afternoon's hearing will be the third one the subcommittee has held in the last two years on what was probably the single most controversial procurement issue in the last Congress and may be in this Congress as well—the Navy's New Attack Submarine (NAS). The previous two hearings formed the basis for developing and pushing through enactment a rather complex provision in the FY 96 National Defense Authorization Act. The provision was agreed to not only by the House and the Senate, but also the Secretary of the Navy, the former Chief of Naval Operations, and the Comptroller of the Defense Department, who were all present when House and Senate conferees struck the deal to include it in the Act. However, it seems the Administration's FY 98 budget request includes a proposal which, in effect, totally negates what Congress has directed. This proposal is what we're here to deliberate for the next few hours.

Two years ago the Navy was poised to charge full-speed-ahead on the NAS and produce the entire 30-ship class at Electric Boat Division of General Dynamics in Groton, Connecticut. Congress stepped in, however, and rejected this plan on both counts. Not only did it direct that the NAS design would NOT be serially produced as a class but also that the both of the nation's nuclear-capable shipyards would be involved in future submarine construction. This was done for two reasons:

First, the NAS was conceived in the late 80s/early 90s as the Navy came to grips with the fact that its predecessor, the Seawolf, faced certain termination. Not only was there an urgency to quickly develop a follow-on platform in order to maintain the submarine industrial base, but there was concomitant pressure as well to reduce the NAS's production costs substantially below those of the Seawolf. The result was a low-risk design that will have less capability than the Seawolf in several key areas—slower maximum speed, smaller weapons payload, less robust combat system—while at best maintaining Seawolf's acoustic quieting. In other words, the same Department which proposes to build the revolutionary F-22 to replace the F-15; the revolutionary Joint Strike Fighter to replace the F-14, the F-16, and the AV-8B; and the revolutionary V-22 to replace the CH-46 and CH-53 proposes to build a next-generation submarine which appears to be anything but

next-generation. Yet, the Navy acknowledges that the current top-of-the-line Russian sub—the Akula II—is quieter than anything in our operational fleet until the Seawolf is delivered. The Navy also states that fourth-generation quieting technologies were designed specifically for the next-generation Russian sub, the Severodvinsk, whose keel was laid in 1993, to ensure its radiated noise levels are even lower than the Akula II.

The second reason is directly related to the first. Since the committee was neither interested in having the NAS design serially produced and nor interested in facing the prospects of another unaffordable next-generation submarine, it directed that both nuclear-capable shipyards—Newport News Shipbuilding as well as Electric Boat—continue to produce nuclear subs. The committee reasoned that eventual competition between the two yards would not only result in technological innovation but achieve savings as well.

The results of the committee’s actions, as I noted earlier, were enacted into law in the FY 96 National Defense Authorization Act. Section 131 of the Act replaced the Administration’s plan with one that set forth a series of four submarines, beginning construction in each of fiscal years 1998 through 2001, which use the NAS design as a baseline and successively incorporate new technologies. The first and third of these vessels were to be built at Electric Boat; the second and fourth were to be built at Newport News. The Congressional plan was aimed toward competing the best designs from each shipyard for serial production of a new class of next-generation submarines not earlier than 2002.

Even though the Navy has yet to follow Congressional direction on future submarine construction, it did convene its own panel of outside experts to provide an independent evaluation of available and future submarine technologies. As a direct result of the panel’s work, an additional \$98 million was authorized and \$60 million was appropriated in FY 97 to pursue the incorporation of certain of these technologies into the four submarines Congress directed.

Also to its credit, the Department established a submarine technology management process, including representatives from industry, to review technology programs and develop investment recommendations. The process is headed by an oversight council, chaired jointly by Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Technology, Paul Kaminski, and our principal Navy witness this afternoon, Assistant Secretary John Douglass.

Having given credit where credit is due, let me focus for a moment on the Navy’s new plan to build four NASs. Notwithstanding its previously-signed Memorandum of Agreement with Electric Boat and Newport News to lay the groundwork for having both yards produce attack submarines, in January the Navy announced its intention to have the two yards “team” to build these boats. This teaming arrangement, together with the authority to contract for all four submarines in FY 98, would, according to the Navy, save \$600 million “over the current plan.”

I must say that if future competition is abandoned, I’m not sure I see the need to incur the extra expense to keep both yards in the submarine-producing business. Maybe we should just go back to the Bottom Up Review’s plan to have Electric Boat build submarines and Newport News build aircraft carriers. Consequently, I consider this hearing extremely important in determining whether we move forward, stand still, or move backward. To help address this issue we have a distinguished panel of witnesses:

Honorable John W. Douglass
Assistant Secretary of the Navy
Research, Development, and Acquisition

Vice Admiral Donald L. Pilling
Deputy Chief of Naval Operations
Resources, Requirements, and Assessments

Dr. John S. Foster, Jr.
Private Consultant
Former Director, Defense Research and Engineering
Current Member of the Defense Science Board

Dr. Lowell Wood
Visiting Fellow
Hoover Institution
Stanford University

Mr. Tony Battista
Private Consultant
Former Professional Staff Member
House Armed Services Committee

Mr. Norman Polmar
Naval Analyst, Author/Columnist, and Lecturer

Mr. Ronald O'Rourke
Specialist in National Defense
Congressional Research Service
The Library of Congress

Thank you all for coming, especially those who have made a transcontinental journey just to be here. I hold each of you in high regard and therefore look forward to your testimony. Before we begin, however, let me call on my good friend Ike Skelton, the subcommittee's ranking Democrat, for any remarks he may have.