



Nineteen-Gun salute



Case Studies of Operational, Strategic, and Diplomatic
Naval Leadership during the 20th and Early 21st Centuries

Edited by John B. Hattendorf and Bruce A. Elleman

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Arleigh Albert Burke

Admiral Arleigh A. Burke (right) shaking the hand of Admiral Robert B. Carney at the U.S. Naval Academy on 17 August 1955. Secretary of the Navy Charles Thomas (center) replaced Chief of Naval Operations Carney with Burke (then a Rear Admiral) in expectation that Burke would be more open with the Secretary and would move more rapidly to adopt new technology.

Photo courtesy of Naval History and Heritage Command, Photo # 80-G-66974

Visionary yet Realistic

Arleigh Albert Burke (1901–1996)

By David Alan Rosenberg

ADMIRAL Arleigh Burke took office as the nation's fifteenth Chief of Naval Operation (CNO) on 17 August 1955. Although famous as an aggressive and innovative World War II destroyer squadron commander, Burke's importance as a strategic leader can best be understood in terms of the remarkable range of initiatives he put forward during his tour as CNO. One of his most important actions was also one of his first: the decision to push forward with development of a Fleet Ballistic Missile (FBM).²⁷³ Burke's predecessor as CNO, and long time friend and mentor, Admiral Robert "Mick" Carney, had not considered development of a seaborne ballistic missile system a high priority. There were serious technical difficulties involved in designing an intermediate range ballistic missile (IRBM) suitable for shipboard use, and the Navy's senior leadership felt it would be prudent to resolve these before making any commitment to a development program. Since the Air Force and Army were working to develop their own long range ballistic missiles, Carney argued, the Navy could always piggyback on those programs when it was ready and he ordered the Navy's Bureau of Aeronautics to desist from any advocacy work on behalf of the IRBM.

Rescinding this restriction was one of Burke's first acts as CNO. An mobile seaborne nuclear deterrent would have advantages over fixed land-based missiles and Burke believed from his own background in chemical engineering and from briefings by General Electric scientists in July that the solid fuel and guidance problems could be overcome. The "piggybacking" idea did not appeal to him. He knew that "the first service that demonstrates a capability for this is very likely to continue the project and the others may very well drop out."²⁷⁴

If the Navy wanted its own IRBM, it would have to get ahead of the other services, not follow them. "I do believe we have been too conservative," he wrote in October 1955:

I think that we can go faster in the gamble on new weapons and new equipment and in their installation aboard ship than we have in the past. I also believe that the only way that we can speed up getting new equipment into the fleet is to put

273 Much of the material in this chapter is based on this author's published studies of Admiral Burke, "Arleigh Albert Burke" in Robert W. Love, Jr., (Ed.), *The Chiefs of Naval Operations* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1980) 262–319, 417–429; and "Arleigh Burke: The Last CNO" in James C. Bradford, (Ed.), *Quarterdeck and Bridge, Two Centuries of American Naval Leaders* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1996) 360–393; and the author's unpublished manuscript, "Arleigh Burke: Portrait of the Sailor and Commander in His Own Words."

274 Memo, Burke to Rear Admiral Clark (Op-51), Rear Admiral Raborn (Office of the Secretary of the Navy), No Serial, Subj: ICBM – IRBM, 2 December 1955, in OF-CNO, Sept. 1955 – March 1956, AAB-CNO, NHHC.

the requirements down and demand performance, and this I intend to do. . . . People without responsibility, either personal or financial, are quite free with suggestions but I know that when a man lays his reputation or the reputation of his company on the line for producing a piece of equipment, he usually produces it.²⁷⁵

On 19 October Burke recommended to Secretary of the Navy Charles Thomas that the Navy initiate an IRBM development program, and Thomas approved. In early November, Burke and Army Chief of Staff General Maxwell Taylor agreed to collaborate on the IRBM project, codenamed Jupiter, through a Joint Army-Navy Ballistic Missile Committee. On 17 November, Burke recommended, and Thomas approved, the appointment of Rear Admiral William “Red” Raborn to head a special projects office to oversee the Navy’s part in this collaborative effort.

On 2 December 1955, Burke gave “Red” Raborn a “hunting license.” “It is quite evident” he wrote to Raborn and Rear Admiral John Clark, head of the Guided Missiles Division in Burke’s office, “that we must move fast on this fleet ballistic missile and that our present schedules for shipboard launching are not good enough.” If it was necessary to pull resources from other projects to achieve that objective, he was willing to do it:

If Rear Admiral Raborn runs into any difficulty with which I can help, I will want to know about it at once along with his recommended course of action for me to take. If more money is needed, we will get it. If he needs more people, those people will be ordered in. If there is anything that slows this project up beyond the capacity of the Navy Department we will immediately take it to the highest level and not work our way up through several days. In taking this type of action we must be reasonably sure we are right and at least know the possible consequences of being wrong because we will be disrupting many other programs in order to make achievement in this one if we are not careful. That is all right if we really make an achievement.²⁷⁶

Raborn proved up to the challenge. By the fall of 1956, a number of key technical difficulties had been resolved, and the Navy was confident that it could produce a solid-fueled propellant system and a 600 pound nuclear warhead suitable for surface and submarine use. The Joint Army/Navy Ballistic Missile Committee survived little more than a year. In December 1956, a Navy Ballistic Missile Committee was established, and Special Projects, under Rear Admiral Raborn, was put in charge of the Fleet Ballistic Missile program, now codenamed Polaris.

Burke’s order delegating enormous initiative and responsibility to Raborn in pursuit of the ambitious goals he himself had established was typical of his leadership

275 Letter, Burke to Henry H. Porter, Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory, 26 September 1955, CNO Personal File Letters (hereafter CNO-PF), AAB-CNO, NHHC.

276 Memo, Burke to Clark, Raborn, 2 December 1955.

style. “We believe in command not staff,” Burke wrote to old friend and Bureau of Ordnance shipmate Rear Admiral Walter Schindler laying out his views on the essential aspects of naval leadership in May 1958:

We believe we have “real” things to do. The Navy believes in putting a man in a position with a job to do, and let him do it—give him hell if he does not perform—but to be a man in his own name. We decentralize and capitalize on the capabilities of our individual people rather than centralize and make automatons of them. This builds that essential pride of service and sense of accomplishment. If it results in a certain amount of cockiness, I am for it. But this is the direction in which we should move.²⁷⁷

To Burke the emphasis always had to be on “real” things—the nitty-gritty of technology, manpower, tactics, ships, fleets, real world challenges and achievements—rather than on studies, reports, and theoretical constructs without immediate or clear links to genuine capabilities or requirements. Burke believed that bureaucracy should never become an end in itself enhancing the power or stature of its participants, but must always support the creative dynamic of individual initiative and individual responsibility and the larger cause of the service or nation. The greatest asset of the Navy, and the nation, Burke believed, was the determination, inventiveness, and “cockiness” of the officers and enlisted personnel who served it. No centralized authority could possibly duplicate what could be achieved by encouraging and building on individual initiative.

In the same letter to Schindler, Burke also laid out his views on how the Navy should play its role in national security:

We have to work hard to maintain the Navy as a viable instrument of power—power which is needed by the United States, which is understood, and which can grow and change. We have to maintain in ourselves, and imbue our juniors with an ardor to keep our country and our Navy in front. We must pass along a willingness to think hard—to seek new answers—to chance mistakes—and to “mix it up” freely in the forums and activities around us that promote knowledge. From that knowledge we can inspire our country to have faith in us—not because the organization of the military forces is the only place to put our national faith, but because we have discharged our responsibilities in such a manner that we have justified confidence in the effective manner in which we operate.²⁷⁸

This aggressive faith in the service underlay his willingness to take risks in the interest of the Navy and the nation.

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277 Letter, Burke to Rear Admiral Walter G. Schindler, 14 May 1958, Walter G. Schindler Folder, Incoming and Outgoing Letters as CNO (hereafter cited as CNO Letters), Arleigh Burke Papers as CNO (hereafter cited as AAB-CNO), Operational Archives, U.S. Naval History and Heritage Command (hereafter cited as NHHHC).

278 Ibid.

There were many factors that contributed to Burke's success as a leader and an innovator. Born 19 October 1901 on a farm three miles east of Boulder, Colorado, Burke never completed high school as a result of the 1918 flu epidemic but gained admission to the U.S. Naval Academy and graduated in the top fifth of the class of 1923. Throughout his long life (he died 1 January 1996) Burke had an abundance of energy, both physical and mental. He thrived on hard work and on challenges others found daunting. He was curious about a wide range of things, from the intricacies of mechanical systems, to the lessons of history, to the dynamics of staff work. He appears to have had a remarkable ability to absorb and remember information, and an even more remarkable ability to see how things might fit together in new ways. He was far less interested in abstract theory than in practical applications.

In the Navy Burke found a way of life that suited him perfectly. He liked being in an organization where, as he described it, the rules were "strict, known and observed."²⁷⁹ He liked the principle of loyalty to comrades, to service, and to country. He liked how the Navy viewed individual initiative and personal responsibility as essential elements of leadership. He liked the challenge to achieve more than seemed humanly possible. He was exhilarated by command at sea, particularly in time of war, and he never tired of the ocean.

From an early age, Burke was fascinated by technology. As a junior officer he had the opportunity to master the steam turbines and 14 inch guns on battleship USS *Arizona* (BB-39), the 8 inch main battery of heavy cruiser *Chester* (CA-27), and the analog computer that made up *Arizona's* fire control system. He did postgraduate work in ordnance concentrating on explosives, and earned a Masters' Degree in Chemical Engineering from the University of Michigan in 1931, giving him a good foundation for his later advocacy of solid fuel rocket propulsion. His tour as Assistant and Officer-in-Charge of the Fleet Base Force Camera Party in 1933-1935 photographing and analyzing target practice led him to master motion picture photography and entrusted him with assessing one of the interwar Navy's most secret measures of capability, the accuracy of their guns.

He had considerable first hand experience in working with defense industries, unusual at that time for a line officer. As head of the Bureau of Ordnance ammunition section in 1935-1937, and anti-aircraft and broadside gun-mount inspector at the Naval Gun Factory at the Washington Navy Yard in 1940-1943, he traveled to production plants across the country. He followed up on many of these contacts and added more as the first post-war head of Bureau of Ordnance Research and Development, where he became one of the first naval officers not associated with the wartime Manhattan Project to travel to Los Alamos to be briefed on the atomic bomb. The breadth and depth of Burke's familiarity with industrial and production

279 Memorandum, Arleigh Burke to the author, January 1973, 43.

processes proved highly useful when, as CNO, he drove the often intractable Bureaus that contracted with the corporations engaged in supplying the manifold needs of the Navy.

Burke's experience in command at sea, where he proved to be an outstanding leader and ship handler, gave him an understanding of what was needed to bring power to bear in an environment that was hostile and unpredictable. He relished inspiring and training a crew so they would perform at their absolute peak and took great pride in his sailors. His first command in 1939–1940, USS *Mugford* (DD-389), achieved an unprecedented perfect score in short range battle practice, winning the U.S. Fleet's annual destroyer gunnery trophy.

Burke's service in the Pacific from March 1943 through June 1945 made him the most combat-experienced officer ever to serve as CNO. As the Navy's most original and persistent tactical innovator in South Pacific destroyers in 1943–1944, he created and employed successful doctrine for night destroyer operations that helped secure the American victory at Vella Gulf in July 1943. Relying on speed, delegation of command, and individual initiative, his improvements to this doctrine made possible Burke's own triumphs in the littoral night actions at Empress Augusta Bay and Cape St. George in November and marked him as one of the service's premier surface warfare combat leaders.

He next served as Vice Admiral Marc Mitscher's Chief of Staff in Fast Carrier Task Force 58 in the New Guinea, Marianas, Palaus, Leyte, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa campaigns in 1944–1945. Immersion in naval air power broadened his base of combat experience, gave him some claim to membership in the Navy's air arm, and forced him to reluctantly master the demands of war time staff work. His experience in combat crystallized the strategic precepts that would serve him the rest of his life: the importance of quick decision and quick action, the critical importance of communication to ensure that those who needed information had it immediately available, and the necessity of fostering individual initiative within the context of clear and explicit statements of tactical and operational doctrine.

Arleigh Burke spent more of his career as a staff officer than he spent in command at sea. He had 13 years in staff jobs, including the Fleet Base Force and the Bureau of Ordnance in the interwar period; the Naval Gun Factory and Task Force 58 during World War II; the Atlantic Fleet and the General Board in the Navy Secretariat after World War II; the Commander, Naval Forces, Far East (COMNAVFE) staff in the first year of the Korean War; and the Office of the CNO in the late 1940s and early 1950s. This compared to a total of barely four years in command at sea, in two ships (*Mugford* and the light cruiser USS *Huntington* [CL-107] in 1948), two destroyer divisions and two destroyer squadrons in 1943–1944, two cruiser divisions in the early 1950s and the Atlantic Fleet Destroyer Force in 1955.

He proved himself to be a superb staff officer, in part because of his lifelong hatred of unnecessary paperwork. He wrote clearly, rapidly, and unselfconsciously. He kept his plans and directives simple, and studied how to make every operation he was involved in run efficiently to keep wasted time and energy to a minimum. He thought deeply about the role of training and communications in increasing efficiency, and constantly emphasized the need to delegate responsibility for decisions to the person in the best position to know what was going on. He never lost sight of the purpose of staff work: to get the best out of his people and make sure that the Navy was able to do the “real things” as well and as quickly as they could possibly be done.

Burke had more first-hand experience with sensitive Navy and national intelligence than the great majority of line officers and was one of its strongest advocates. He worked closely with intelligence and counter-intelligence officers during his duty on the Fleet Base Force Staff. During his service in the South Pacific, he was an avid consumer of intelligence, who brought onto his small staff a volunteer intelligence officer, the former Rhodes Scholar and All American football player and future U.S. Supreme Court Justice Byron R. White. In Task Force 58, Burke was exposed to intelligence at every level from detailed strategic analyses from the Joint Intelligence Center Pacific Ocean Areas (JICPOA), to daily ULTRA radio intelligence updates on operational matters, to tactical communications intelligence provided by mobile radio intercept units in the fast carriers. After the war, he remained one of the few officers regularly cleared for communications intelligence. Further, he personally experienced how submarines operated as intelligence collection platforms on a 48 hour mission from Hokkaido to La Perouse Strait to assess surveillance of Soviet Pacific Fleet movements on USS *Tilefish* (SS-307) in January–February 1951.²⁸⁰

Burke received a baptism of fire as a strategic planner and advocate for the Navy in the immediate postwar years. In 1947–1948, he served on the General Board, which advised the Secretary of the Navy on matters of high policy, where he designed and drafted a report on “The National Security and Navy Contributions Thereto For The Next Ten Years,” based on hundreds of letters and interviews with active and retired flag and general officers and civilian experts. As head of the CNO’s Organizational Research and Policy Division (Op-23) in 1948–1949, he took the lead in preparing and presenting the Navy’s case during the Congressional hearings on Unification and Strategy and the Air Force’s B-36 bomber, that became known as the “Admirals’ Revolt”. His work as Deputy Chief of Staff to COMNAVFE in

280 Commanding Officer, USS *Tilefish* (SS-307) Report of Second War Patrol, SS307/A16-6, Serial 001, 15 February 1951, Post-1946 Command File, NHHC; Letter, Rear Admiral Herman J. Kossler, USN (Ret.) to the author, 24 January 1986; Letter, Arleigh Burke to Roberta Gorsuch Burke, 5 February 1951, Arleigh Burke-Roberta Gorsuch Burke Letters Collection, Burke Papers, NHHC; Other information on Burke and naval intelligence was derived from the author’s interviews with Byron R. White, Washington, DC, 9 July 1984; E. Calvert Cheston, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 26 September 1986; and with retired naval intelligence Rear Admirals Donald Mac Shower and Sumner Shapiro, 10 June 2005.

1950–51, and a later stint as director of the Strategic Plans Division of the Office of CNO (Op-30) from 1952 to 1954 further honed his planning skills and as an advocate for sea power and the Navy’s philosophy of command.

He also had an unusual amount of contact with prior and current enemies. While serving on the COMNAVFE staff in Japan, he met in person Japanese naval commanders he had met previously in battle, and discovered the strong bond they shared as naval officers. He was instrumental in establishing the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force, and formed lifelong friendships with Japanese Admirals Kichisaburo Nomura and Zenshiro Hoshina. Serving on the first delegation to the United Nations Korean truce negotiating team in 1951, he directly confronted post-war Communist power, and was deeply angered by the willingness of the North Koreans and Chinese to spin out the negotiations while men died on the battlefield. The lesson he took away was that the confrontation with communism was likely to be long and bitter, and the United States would have to be prepared to beat back every challenge. “The only thing the Communists understand,” he wrote, “is power.”²⁸¹

Burke had always been drawn to the study and practice of strategy. The Naval War College strategy and tactics correspondence course he completed in 1926–1929 exposed him to the strategic process demanded by Rear Admiral William Ledyard Rodgers’ “Estimate of the Situation” as well as the 1920s classified tactical doctrine and war orders. It was an intense introduction for a lieutenant (junior grade) into how not just ships such as battleship *Arizona* but also the fleet would fight. His strong interest in history, fostered at an early age by his mother and his teachers, was carried on through a lifetime of reading. After World War II, he sought out foreign policy intellectuals, such as Leo Pasvolksy of the Brookings Institution, to provide advice and analysis, and formed strong connections with the nascent think tank effort in Washington during his 1949 Op-23 and 1952–1954 Op-30 tours.

Burke’s passion for the Navy, his vast capacity for hard work, his sense of humor, and his plain spoken leadership style that shunned arrogance or pretension inspired his seniors and subordinates. He combined a remarkable ability to master complex systems, from torpedoes and early analog fire control computers in *Arizona*, to the first Naval Tactical Data System as CNO, with a breadth of operational experience and knowledge and strategic vision. He was remarkably well prepared to provide strategic leadership to the Cold War Navy.

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Arleigh Burke was the most junior flag officer ever appointed Chief of Naval Operations, having been promoted over 92 more senior active duty Admirals. His

281 Letter, Arleigh Burke to Captain C.D. Griffin, 8 October 1951, Pre-CNO Personal File, Burke Papers, NHHC.

mandate from Secretary of the Navy Charles Thomas was to bring younger men into leadership positions and make real changes, while keeping the civilian leadership fully informed. Burke followed and expanded on Thomas's charter. Knowing that no post-World War II CNO had served more than two years, and expecting that he also would be a one-term CNO, he wasted no time in launching a remarkable number of major initiatives. The decisions he made during his first two years in office from 1955 to 1957, including the one that launched Polaris, had a lasting impact on the service and the nation.

He began his efforts at both ends of the Navy's chain of command. First, he directly took on his top civilian superiors on a critical matter of manpower needs. During his first month as CNO in August 1955, Burke decided that the Navy would have to go to the draft for the first time since World War II. Secretary of the Navy Thomas and Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson were unwilling to propose this to President Eisenhower, who had only recently announced that the draft would not be reinstated. Burke insisted on appealing directly to the President in his capacity as Senior Naval Adviser to the Commander-in-Chief and won his case, although Eisenhower warned him never to cause such embarrassment again and treated him with cool formality for many months afterwards.

Burke also sought advice from a group of junior officers stationed in the Office of the CNO on what steps might be taken to improve the Navy. The group of 11 lieutenants led by Stansfield Turner (later Admiral and CIA Director) produced an extensive report with 32 recommendations that looked at how to utilize leadership more effectively, increase emphasis on operational readiness, and demonstrate greater interest in individuals. Burke explicitly agreed with a third of these recommendations, expected some action should be taken on most of the rest and passed the paper to the Vice CNO and Deputy CNOs for action, with the intent of publishing the report describing the action taken or explaining what could or could not be done and why.²⁸²

Burke next acted to accelerate the introduction of nuclear power into the Navy. Between September and November 1955, after going to sea on the first nuclear submarine, USS *Nautilus* (SSN-571), and studying the costs and capabilities of future designs, he ordered that all new attack submarines would be nuclear powered, with a single propeller, incorporating the revolutionary streamlined underwater hull shape of the experimental diesel-electric submarine USS *Albacore* (AGSS-569).²⁸³ By late

282 Memorandum from Chair, Special Committee of Lieutenants (Lieutenant Stansfield Turner) to the Chief of Naval Operations, no date but ca. October–November 1955, Subj: Special Report on Improving the Navy, and Burke, Memorandum for Admiral Duncan, no serial, 9 December 1955, Subj: Special Report for the CNO on Methods to Improve the Navy, all in Originator's File, Burke Papers as CNO (hereafter OF-CNO), NHHHC.

283 Richard G. Hewlett and Francis Duncan, *Nuclear Navy, 1946–1962* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 265–267; and Letter, Burke to Admiral of the Fleet Louis Mountbatten, 30 December 1955, Mountbatten, Admiral, First Sea Lord, (Years 1955–1956) Folder, CNO Letters, AAB-CNO, NHHHC.

1955, he had approved a shipbuilding program including a nuclear-powered guided missile light cruiser, and in May 1956 personally drafted characteristics for what would become the USS *Long Beach* (CGN-9).²⁸⁴

Burke further supported major changes in operational concepts, as well as new ships and weapons. In December 1955, he embraced the Marine Corps' new concept of vertical envelopment which would employ ship-based helicopters for amphibious assault operations, and began to put in place plans and programs to build the helicopter carrying amphibious fleet necessary to implement it.²⁸⁵ The next fall, after reviewing studies of future strike aircraft, he decided to move forward with development of what would become the Grumman all-weather A2F (later A-6) Intruder, whose attack capabilities would serve the fleet through the 1990s and whose air frame was the basis of U.S. airborne electronic attack capability into the 21st century.²⁸⁶ He pushed for the continuing procurement of *Forrestal* class aircraft carriers, and moved rapidly on surface-to-air guided missile programs for installation on converted cruisers and a dozen new destroyer types in the Fiscal 1957 budget. He also championed a jet seaplane atomic striking force based on the Martin P6M Seamaster, until a series of crashes and development problems forced him to cancel the program.²⁸⁷

In the fall of 1956, with increased Soviet submarine deployments in the Arctic, Atlantic, European, and Pacific waters indicating a growing worldwide threat from the Soviet fleet, Burke moved to expand the U.S. submarine force. He increased the force from 100 to 110 by recommissioning additional diesel submarines in order to maintain steady observation of the Soviet fleet in its home waters. In doing so he established a long term commitment to submarine surveillance for U.S. intelligence gathering on the Soviet Navy.²⁸⁸

284 Hewlett and Duncan, *Nuclear Navy*, 266–267; Burke, Memorandum for Rear Admiral Withington and Rear Mumma, Serial Op-00/rw, 22 May 1956, Subj: Attached Correspondence [on Characteristics for a Nuclear Powered Guided Missile Light Cruiser in 1957 Budget], Folder A1-1, 1 Jan–30 June 1956, Box 1, Chief of Naval Operations Official Papers (hereafter cited as Op 00), 1956, NHHC.

285 Memorandum, Chief of Naval Operations to Commandant of the Marine Corps, Serial Op-343/pr, Ser 00435P34, 8 December 1955, Subj: Concept of Future Amphibious Assault Operations, Copy obtained by Naval History and Heritage Command Operational Archives from Marine Corps Historical Center.

286 Burke, Memorandum for Op-03 and Op-05, Serial Op-002/rw, 26 November 1956, Subj: Operational Requirements for Naval Attack Aircraft; OEG Summary Report No. 2, Originators File (hereafter cited as OF-CNO), Nov 1956 Folder, AAB-CNO, NHHC.

287 William F. Trimble, *Attack From the Sea, A History of the U.S. Navy's Seaplane Striking Force* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2005) 91, 109–111.

288 Memorandum, Burke to OP-03 and OP-06, Op-00/jjb, 18 August 1956, Subj: Buildup of Submarine Forces in the U.S. Atlantic and Pacific Fleets, Folder A3-1, Strength of Distribution (Assimilated Vessels) Op-00, 1956, Box 2; see also Memorandum, Burke to the Secretary of State et. al, Op-022Y2F/jcr, Ser: 000582P92, 22 September 1956, Subj: Marked Increase Noted in Soviet Submarine Operations away from Home Waters, CJCS 091 Russia 1956, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff Files, Record Group 218, Records of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, US National Archives; and Burke, Memorandum for Admiral Radford, Op-00/rw, 7 November 1956, Subj: Submarine Patrols, OF-CNO, November 1956, AAB-CNO.

Burke continued to press for improved capability for conducting operations at sea. By July 1957, he had decided to press the Bureau of Ships to redefine the basic concept of mobile logistic support for the fleet by developing faster means to conduct underway replenishment at sea in all weather. That directive led to a call to create an entirely new class of replenishment ship which became the AOE, the Fast Combat Support Ship. The AOE would combine improved technology for conducting refueling and resupply at sea with increased capacity to provide fuel, ammunition, and provisions simultaneously to multiple ships at once and would serve as a mainstay of Navy logistics for fifty years.²⁸⁹

Burke also redefined the role of the U.S. Navy as an ally. In his first two years as CNO he personally hosted Washington meetings with 24 foreign heads of allied and friendly navies in order to build direct personal ties with his counterparts and build a continuing relationship between his staff and theirs.²⁹⁰ By early 1956, he had begun exploring the possibility of building expanded professional links with Latin American navies to improve antisubmarine warfare capability. This initiative led to the creation of the annual UNITAS cruise by U.S. naval forces around South America in 1959.²⁹¹ In early fall of 1955, as the question of courses for foreign officers at command and staff schools, technical schools, and war colleges was being considered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Office of the CNO initiated a study of “the possibilities of some sort of a course for foreign naval officers at the Naval War College.” By the next spring the study was far enough along that the Chief of the Bureau of Naval Personnel presented a proposal to establish a Foreign Naval Command and Staff Course at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. Burke declared that there were unspecified but “over-riding reasons making it mandatory that the course be located at the Naval War College. Accordingly he so directs.”²⁹² Twenty three navies accepted Burke’s invitation to assign officers to the first class that began in August 1956 in what became the Naval Command College, which celebrated a half century of professional naval interchange in 2006.

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289 Thomas Wildenberg, *Grey Steel and Black Oil, Fast Tankers and Replenishment at Sea in the U.S. Navy, 1912–1992* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1996), 229–232.

290 See the folders on foreign CNO visits in the Trip and CNO Guest Files for Admiral Burke, 1955–1961, AAB-CNO, NHHC.

291 Top Secret Memorandum for Admiral Jerauld Wright, no serial, 14 February 1956, Subj: Hemispheric Defense Plans with South American Nations, Wright, Adm. Jerauld (1955–1956) Folder, AAB-CNO, NHHC.

292 Memorandum, Burke to the Chief of Naval Personnel, no serial, 7 April 1956, Subj: Foreign Naval Command and Staff Course; Considerations for establishment of, Folder P11, Education and Training, 1956, Box 10, Op-00, 1956, NHHC. See also Burke, Memorandum for Vice Admiral Gardner, no serial, 28 September 1955, Subj: Schools for foreigners, OF-CNO, Sept 1955 – March 1956. AAB-CNO, NHHC.

One of Burke's most important policy decisions during his first term, on a par with his advocacy for Polaris, effectively blocked a re-formulation of Navy roles and missions around nuclear delivery capability. In a period when national security policy emphasized the massive power of nuclear weapons in an all-out general war, Burke believed in maintaining a Navy capable of deterring or fighting any kind of war that might confront the nation. He had produced numerous studies and papers advocating that view while serving on the General Board and directing Op-23 in 1949 and the CNO Strategic Plans Division in 1952–1954. His overall vision was to provide the Navy with the capability both to contribute to the deterrent mission, and to successfully handle a range of crises short of nuclear war.

Burke had long been concerned that a general nuclear war would almost certainly be devastating to both the United States and the Soviet Union. In June 1956 he prepared a remarkable set of observations on national strategy for his own use, laying out the suicidal nature of all-out nuclear war, and concluding that it was extremely unlikely that either the United States or the Soviet Union would ever choose to initiate such a war. Using scarce resources to prepare for such a war could not be justified, he concluded, if it meant neglecting preparations for the limited and local conflicts which would inevitably occur in the Cold War world. He then directed the Navy staff to investigate a “minimal target system, the threat of destruction of which would deter the USSR.”²⁹³

World events in the summer and fall of 1956 reinforced Burke's conviction that the Navy must maintain balanced and flexible forces in order to defend U.S. interests around the world. Egyptian President Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal in June, followed by the Anglo/French/Israeli invasion in November, threatened to become a major confrontation if not contained. Burke ordered the Sixth Fleet to the eastern Mediterranean immediately to discourage escalation, and placed much of the Navy on a general war posture in the Atlantic and Pacific following Soviet threats of intervention in the Suez affair. Being able to respond quickly at many levels, using a variety of forces, was possible because the CNO still had operational control of the fleets, and the fleets were not totally oriented toward general nuclear war. Burke was convinced that both strengthened the defense of the nation.

Nevertheless, Burke was always willing to “mix it up” and consider other points of view, encouraging his subordinates to suggest alternatives. Captain John T. “Chick” Hayward, an old friend and adviser who commanded the Navy's first nuclear attack squadron, responded to Burke's request for ideas with a carefully argued proposal detailing how aircraft carriers armed with nuclear weapons could play a major

293 Vice Admiral R.E. Libby, Memorandum to Op-00, Subject: Proposals Relative to Atomic Operation Concept, Serial BM00043-57, 1 May 1957, File A16-10, Atomic Warfare Operations, Box 8, Op-00, 1957, and statement dictated by Admiral Burke, 25 July 1956, no classification markings, OF-CNO, July 1956, both NHHHC.

role in the nuclear strike force which was at that time the centerpiece of national military strategy. Although this proposal ran counter to his thinking, Burke circulated it among the top leadership in the office of the CNO, and received a variety of comments on all sides.²⁹⁴

After reviewing what his top advisors had to say on Hayward's proposal, Burke ruled in early December 1956 that carrier air would not be redefined as a nuclear striking force. The lure of new technology would not be allowed to distract the Navy from what Burke believed to be its essential role in national defense:

Therefore, I believe we should not take drastic steps [to re-evaluate the 'retaliation' concept] under the present circumstances. Rather, we should attempt to build up our own balanced capabilities to fight any kind of war. We should oppose increasing the size and costs of present types of retaliation forces as being unnecessary and very expensive. We should have our thoughts and our papers lined up so that we can move as slowly or as fast as we desire in the event that increasing the rate of evolution becomes desirable.²⁹⁵

For the remainder of his term, Burke consistently opposed any further increase in land-based U.S. nuclear strike capability, on the grounds that resources would be better spent preparing for limited and local conflicts.

Polaris itself became part of the Navy's campaign to control the size of the nuclear strike force. At its inception, the Fleet Ballistic Missile was designated for use only against targets of naval interest, such as Soviet submarine bases and naval airfields, according to existing agreements about service roles and missions. But Burke soon decided that the time had come to set a new course. In January 1957 he approved the following initial force level objectives and concept for Polaris:

- a. The SSG(N) (FBM) [later SSBN] is the optimum launching vehicle in terms of survival and economy of force.
- b. The mission of the FBM system should be expressed as a deterrent capability and as a contribution to the national requirement for this capability, rather than the broader mission of the more flexible and accurate aerodynamic surface-to-surface Navy missile.

294 Letter, Captain John T. Hayward to Burke, Secret, no serial, 12 September 1956, with the various comments and analyses of Hayward's proposals by Rear Admiral Wallace M. Beakley, Director of the Strategic Plans Division, Vice Admiral Ruthven E. Libby, Deputy CNO for Plans and Policy, Rear Admiral Edwin N. Parker, Special Assistant to Libby, Rear Admiral Roy L. Johnson, Director of the CNO Long Range Objectives Group, Jacinto Steinhardt, Director of the Operations Evaluation Group, Morris L. Ernst, Director of the Naval Warfare Analysis Group, and the cover memo from Admiral H.D. Felt, the Vice CNO, to Burke, Op-09/fek, Serial 0053P09 of 29 November 1956. All correspondence in Folder "Strategic Concept 09Ser 0053P09" in A1, Plans, Box 1, Op-00, 1956, NHHC.

295 Burke, undated Memorandum for Op-09, Subj: Strategic Concept, undated (but dated "12/3/56" in OF-CNO), *Ibid.*

- c. The initial force requirements for SSG(N) (FBM) should be modest, with a 1965 objective of six such submarines in inventory. Acceptance of this program will require modification of the current five-year shipbuilding program.²⁹⁶

A relatively small number of Polaris submarines, mobile, hidden, and largely invulnerable, would serve to deter general war, Burke would later argue in 1958–1960, and this would greatly reduce the cost of maintaining an adequate national deterrent. The funds saved in this way could be channeled into preparations for local and limited conflicts, and in particular into building a balanced, flexible Navy, capable of protecting U.S. interests around the globe.

Arleigh Burke was the last Chief of Naval Operations invested with the power “under the direction of the Secretary of the Navy,” to command “the operating forces and... [be] responsible to the Secretary of the Navy for their use, including their training, readiness, and preparation for war, and plans therefor.” Burke exercised full strategic and operational leadership over the United States Navy.²⁹⁷ His authority to command the fleets deployed across the globe was matched by his power to decide on and direct major changes in the service’s plans and programs, without interference from bureaucracies external to the Navy Department. This authority ended 1 January 1959, when the National Security Amendments of 1958 which had inspired his passionate declaration to Walter Schindler, transferred “full operational command” to the unified and specified combatant commanders and enhanced the powers of the Secretary of Defense in policy, programming, and budgeting.

Burke’s efforts to reshape national strategy and define requirements for nuclear weapons downward based on the deterrent capabilities of Polaris were ultimately unsuccessful. The Navy never benefited from the savings he envisioned, but the weapon system itself lived up to Burke’s vision. In 1960, USS *George Washington* (SSBN-598) put to sea on the first Polaris deterrent patrol. Polaris excited the public imagination as no Navy program had in a generation. And, as Burke had envisioned when he first set out to bring the FBM into being, it proved a remarkably secure, flexible, nuclear deterrent system.²⁹⁸

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296 Secret memorandum from Chief of Naval Operations to Distribution List, Op-03B:rmf, Ser: 0011P03, January 1957, Subj: Introduction of the Fleet Ballistic Missile into Service, Ballistic Missiles Folder, 1957, Box 74, Guided Missiles Division Papers, Accession No. 38-76-81, Washington National Records Center, Suitland, Maryland.

297 CNO statutory responsibilities from the National Security Act of 1947 and how they were changed by the Defense Reorganization Act of 1958 are documented in Alice C. Cole, et. al., eds., *The Department of Defense: Documents on Establishment and Organization, 1944–1978* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1978), 208–211.

298 Detailed assessments of Arleigh Burke’s role in the making of nuclear and national strategy is contained in this author’s essays, “The Origins of Overkill: Nuclear Weapons and American Strategy, 1945–1960,” *International Security*, 7, Spring 1983, 3–71, and “Process: The Realities of Formulating Modern Naval Strategy” in James Goldrick and John B. Hattendorf, eds., *Mahan Is Not Enough: The Proceedings of a Conference on the Works of Sir Julian Corbett and Admiral Sir Herbert Richmond* (Newport, R.I.: Naval War College Press, 1993), 141–175.

Burke's first term as CNO was remarkable for the breadth of issues he addressed and the coherence of his actions. His decisions transformed the Navy, not on the level of theory, but on the level of practical consequences. Burke made no public or radical restatements of national or naval strategy or policy, nor did he require the staff of the CNO to produce one. Although he championed the need for Navy long-range planning, he was not interested in planning as an intellectual exercise. Concepts were not enough. Further, he had no desire to put his personal stamp on the Navy or pass on to future generations a "Burke doctrine."

Arleigh Burke sought to prepare the Navy for the future by building on the lessons of the past, his own experience and that of his fellow flag and senior officers, and the promise of technology as he conceived it. He used his own great energy, deep technical knowledge, war and battle-tested leadership skills, and networks and loyalties developed over a lifetime to invigorate a Navy that was adjusting to the challenge of a long Cold War.

While Burke could envision alternate approaches to national strategy and was articulate enough to advocate them as needed in debates in the Pentagon, White House, and Congress, he understood that creating real capability would do more for the service than articulating strategies that national policy was not ready to accommodate, and that the Navy was not yet ready to implement. His second and third terms as CNO were filled with frustrations in funding, legislation, strategy, and foreign policy. Burke's first term stands as his most tangible monument, both in terms of the lasting changes he initiated and the philosophy of "command not staff" he advocated—a philosophy that can still serve to guide a Navy and lead it forward today.