

Washington, D.C. — Today, in response to recent comments by President Obama on the size of the U.S. Naval Fleet, U.S. Congressman Duncan Hunter cited an exchange with Vice Admiral John Terence Blake, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Integration of Capabilities and Resources during a March 29, 2012, House Armed Services Committee hearing. Responding to questions from Hunter, Blake acknowledged that a Navy in excess of **500 ships** would be needed to meet full Combatant Commander (COCOM) requirements.

“Determining the appropriate size and composition of America’s Navy is a critical issue that should not be trivialized,” said Hunter. “In the debate over the growing mission demands of the U.S. Navy, there’s a long-held belief that the naval fleet is undersized and improperly balanced. It was not long ago that a bipartisan QDR panel determined that a 346-ship Navy is needed. And for the day-to-day forward deployed mission of the Navy, as Admiral Blake said, more than 500 ships would be needed to meet full global requirements. Meeting one hundred percent of all demands may not be an attainable goal, but this estimate alone should ignite a more thorough and substantive discussion on why we need a larger Navy to project force worldwide and exactly what type of ships should make up the fleet. It’s important that we look forward and determine a future for the Navy that is based on mission needs and both existing and foreseeable threats.”

According to the Congressional Research Service, Blake’s measure of 500 ships is the first time the Navy has gone on record with such an estimate.

The following is a transcript of the Hunter-Blake exchange during the March 29, 2012, hearing on Navy shipbuilding programs before the Seapower and Projection Forces subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee:

REPRESENTATIVE DUNCAN HUNTER:

If you were to build the amphibs [i.e., amphibious ships] where would you prioritize? I mean, where would you take money out of to be able to get the Marine Corps to where they need to be?

VICE ADMIRAL JOHN TERENCE BLAKE, DEPUTY CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS FOR INTEGRATION OF CAPABILITIES AND RESOURCES:

Here's the issue we deal with: I don't have the luxury of dealing with any single issue in isolation; I have to deal with it across the entire...

HUNTER:

Well, we can. That's why I'm asking.

BLAKE:

Well, we have to deal with it, though, across the entire portfolio.

HUNTER:

Sure.

BLAKE:

And so what we have to do is we have to balance the requirement for amphibians, the requirement for surface combatants, the requirement for the carriers, the submarines—every category of ships that we have.

And so when we do that we have to say, all right, as we balance across that are we going to be able to assume more risk? And that's how we—that's how we end up where we are.

HUNTER:

So you're saying there is less risk in the Marine Corps being short on amphibians than there are in the other—the rest of the picture?

BLAKE:

No. I'm saying that we have assumed risk in all areas. The best example I can give you: It was only a short time ago, if we tried to fill all the COCOM needs we said the number was around

400 ships we'd need in the fleet. Today—and we abatement in that commitment or the...

HUNTER:

No (inaudible) signal.

BLAKE:

Today we look at it and we see that we would—if we wanted to hit 100 percent of all the COCOM requirements we'd need in excess of 500 ships. So what we end up having to do is we go through the—the global management process and we look at it and we say, here are our highest priorities, these are how we are going to address them, and then we—we have those units available and we push that...

HUNTER:

I understand.

I'm going to yield back in just one second. So I would take from your statement, then, that you did go through a prioritization process and the amphibs are not at the top of that list. And second, when you say that you assume risk all the way around I would argue that when you do your risk assessment and you prioritize your needs the fact that the COCOMs wanted more ships and needed more ships due to the international environment and where we find ourselves with the world today, going down is probably—its going the wrong way.

We all know that, but I would argue that your prioritization—I would like to see that, if you don't mind, the—the way that you analyzed this and the—and the way that you said, hey, we're going to—we're going to keep them there to make sure that we have this over here. That's all I'm asking for.

BLAKE:

OK. When we put it together we do it across the entire spectrum; we don't—and by that I mean, as we look at the entire requirement we say, that is what we need to do in order to be able to meet the COCOM demand signal.