

MOHE ON PROBABILITIES FOR 1970

After generally laying out for both my own staff and my seniors the way in which I intended to put probabilities on prospective outcomes in war in which the Navy was involved, and receiving general concurrence with this way to go, we went to work to try to ascertain what these probabilities would be. On June 26, 1970, I actually did a memo indicating that based on a conversation with the Joint Staff it was clear that Mr. Packard was proceeding with force level planning for the budget in a way consistent with seeking to estimate the risks involved. After coming up with the general conclusion that our probabilities for a reasonable range of assumptions was about 55% at the moment of my taking over, but that with budget levels currently being discussed they would probably go down to 30%, I then received advice from my staff that numbers like these would be so unpopular that I probably ought not to use them less they interfere with my ability to get things done at least, and with my tenure at worst. The Secretary of the Navy, John Chafee, urged that I stay away from probabilities. Initially, Mr. Packard was quite upset by them,

however, after I explained the rationale of their development in a memorandum to him (dictation on this already in the tapes), he seemed inclined to accept them. I gave the exact replica of the briefing I would give Mr. Nixon to Mr. Laird before I went over and he found no problem with both my present and estimated probabilities.

Following the briefings in the White House, I received word through several different members of the White House staff that the President, the Vice President, and Dr. Kissinger, had all been impressed with the briefing and with the method of putting probabilities on the risks, and that in significant measure as a result of this briefing the decision had been made that the Navy needed some budget help, as a result of which a significant number of ships (about 50, as I recall, of the 106 that were scheduled for reduction) were restored to the Navy budget. These probabilities I began to use in my classified discussions with key members of the Congress in connection with the budget being discussed in the Fall of 1970, that is, the fiscal year '72 budget.

R.           Were these probabilities always classified material and unavailable for public consension?

Z.           These percentages which I continue to use remained classified until the last year of my tenure, by which time I became convinced that the situation was so dangerous that one had to begin to make more than just the senior leadership in the Executive and Congressional branches aware of them. They were not used as specific numbers as I recall, but rather as such statements as "the odds are very high" that we will not be able to win a war at sea or prevail in a NATO war, et cetera.