

115472 | ~~8412~~

UNCLASSIFIED

COMPTROLLER GENERAL'S REPORT
TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON DEFENSE
COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE
NAVY'S MINE WARFARE
MISSION

D I G E S T

Mine warfare, a relatively inexpensive and effective method of conducting naval warfare, consists of the control or denial of sea or harbor areas through the laying of minefields and countering enemy mine warfare by destroying or neutralizing their minefields. GAO found that the Navy would find it hard to conduct even the most limited type of mining or mine countermeasures operation.

The Navy's ability to perform offensive mining missions is limited in several areas and is inadequate in light of the potential threat. Several new mine programs are in development or in limited production which, according to the Navy, should alleviate a number of these weaknesses and provide an effective mining capability against the projected threat. It will take time, however, before the effects of these improvements can be seen. (See p. 9.)



115472

MINE COUNTERMEASURES--AIRBORNE

The Navy uses both airborne and surface ship platforms to perform mine countermeasures operations. (See p. 2.) The airborne mine countermeasures forces are much more mobile than the surface ship and can be on location quicker, but they suffer from lack of aircraft, spare parts, and a shortage of personnel. Furthermore, helicopters are primarily restricted to certain areas of water in which they can operate and in their ability to locate and counter certain types of mines. (See pp. 19 to 24.)

Airborne mine countermeasures should see considerable improvement by the mid-1980s. These improvements should provide the helicopter with a much broader capability than it currently has. Furthermore, the Navy recently decided to increase the force levels for airborne mine countermeasures and buy 32 MH-53E helicopters. However, no funds have been

017198

UNCLASSIFIED

programed for these new helicopters. (See pp. 27 and 28.)

MINE COUNTERMEASURES-- SURFACE SHIPS

The Navy's surface mine countermeasures forces are plagued with maintenance and spare parts problems. The force is further degraded by inadequate numbers of ships, their age and deteriorating condition, and lack of experienced mine countermeasures personnel.

Although the Navy's new mine countermeasures ships and equipment should improve surface mine countermeasures capabilities, certain limitations still will exist. (See p. 29.)

As a result of recent decisions, the Navy now has a force level objective to work toward. Large amounts of money--currently not programed--will be needed in future years to fund this new equipment. GAO believes the Navy should determine whether they are going to give mine warfare a high enough priority in the budget process to compete with other Navy programs; a priority which mine warfare has not had in the past. (See pp. 19 and 37.)

There were conflicting views within the Department of Defense as to the severity of the Soviet mining threat to the United States--especially East Coast and Gulf Coast ports. Defense officials admit that one of the problems is that for years mine warfare has had a very low priority. GAO believes that actions should be taken by Defense which will better define the severity of the mining threat to the United States. (See pp. 6 and 7.)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since most of the mine countermeasures improvements will not be available until the mid-1980s or later, the Secretary of Defense should, in the interim, take actions to increase the readiness of surface ship and airborne mine countermeasures units. Specifically, actions should address personnel deficiencies, platform shortcomings, and equipment deficiencies.

UNCLASSIFIED

Also, the Secretary of Defense should require that steps be taken to obtain information necessary to provide a better understanding of Soviet mine warfare intentions. As this data is obtained, mine countermeasures force level objectives should be adjusted accordingly. (See pp. 45 and 46.)

AGENCY COMMENTS

Because of a tight reporting deadline, the Department of Defense was provided 15 days to comment on this report. Defense was unable to provide official comments in the time allotted. Official comments were obtained from the Department of State and have been incorporated. (See p. 43 and app. VII.)