



## **ANA BLUE STRIPE**

**#9**

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Back in October Blue Stripe 7 reported a current and growing aircraft shortfall in Naval Aviation. Since then, if anything, things have gotten worse, exacerbated by ongoing attacks in the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill.

The president unveiled his 2010 budget to the public back in February but that was only a broad outline of proposed spending. The Department of Defense is now refining those top lines into specific programs. There is a tight veil of secrecy surrounding this exercise and no one outside the lifelines really knows what's going on within the Pentagon, but there has been enough information to know that there is cause for concern.

With heavy emphasis on ground forces the Navy and the air force will be called upon to be the bill payers. For example, even though the National Strategy calls for an aircraft carrier force of eleven, and the Congress has mandated twelve, there's high probability that the Navy will be unable to afford more than ten. If the Navy is forced to give up a carrier there will go with it at least one air wing's worth of aircraft, a battle group's worth of helicopters and a commensurate number of patrol and logistics aircraft. While this will be bad for the Navy, the real problem is what it will take away from the Nation. As a current example, even today aircraft carriers and their air wings are supporting Central Command by flying 46 percent of the reconnaissance and close air support sorties in Iraq and Afghanistan, 75 percent of electronic attack missions in Iraq and 100 percent in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, because of this and other combatant commander requirements all aircraft are being over-utilized. At the current rate, given no further procurement, the Navy will be as many as 150, perhaps as many as 200, strike fighters short of what's needed within five years, and that's with the most optimistic projection of JSF production. At the same time the procurement of the E2D Hawkeye has been placed in jeopardy and with it the fleet's best anti-ship missile defense system. Add to that the fact that because the air force has failed to include any tactical electronic warfare aircraft in its plans demands for Growlers outside Navy needs can be most certainly anticipated, further exacerbating shortfalls on the carrier decks. If the decks don't get filled, then why not lay up a carrier or two, and all the ships and helicopters that go with it in the battle group as well? After all, what's a carrier without an air wing?

Even now, carrier air wings are transferring strike fighters from deck to deck to ensure deployments with a full inventory. This in itself sends operating costs up and wears out what strike fighters we do have that much faster. If the new Hawkeye is similarly delayed the same problem will be manifested. What's so sad is that solutions are at hand.

Each of the Block II F/A-18E/F Super Hornet, Growler E2D programs are under cost, with production lines open and capable of early delivery. It's only that for whatever reasons certain minds are made up. It will take more than Navy analysis and pleas to change those minds. It will take the sum total of the voices of concerned citizens from around the country in support of the Navy to make the situation known to bureaucrats, the Administration and legislators of both parties.

Only one thing remains certain in these uncertain times, U.S. Navy carrier based aviation provides a relevant, capable and unconstrained force for the combatant commanders around the globe. They must be protected, preserved, and promoted. Now is the time to turn on our transmitters and get this message to the highest levels in the Pentagon and on the Hill!

I encourage each of you to offer your support – both publicly and privately – for acquisition of these necessary aircraft. Our Naval Aviation warfighters need our full support to achieve a solution to this crisis and will greatly appreciate your individual and collective efforts. In the end, it's the Nation that will benefit.

Robert F. Dunn  
Acting Chairman and President