

REMARKS OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
AT THE CHRISTENING OF THE U.S.S. PROVIDENCE
GROTON, CONNECTICUT
AUGUST 4, 1984

There are many reasons I am pleased to be here today, not least of which is that I served in the Navy and that I am an admirer of ships. In just a few minutes we will have the privilege of watching a nuclear-powered attack submarine ease into the waters of the Thames River. And what a remarkable ship she is.

She can move at very high speeds while making very little noise. Her sensitivity to sound is such that she can hear movements occurring for miles around. She can fire a torpedo that searches for its target and, if it misses, execute multiple reattacks.

This submarine will be able to fire the vertically launched TOMAHAWK cruise missile from launch tubes in the bow. She will be the first of our submarines ever to be able to do that. She will thus have the ability to carry a weapon load significantly greater than that of any previous nuclear-powered attack submarine.

This is truly an awesome weapons system. But let us bear in mind that this ship is designed not for offensive but defensive purposes. This submarine is a keeper of the peace, a surety of liberty for Americans and indeed for men and women throughout the free world.

Some of you here today built this splendid ship, and you merit our gratitude for a job well done. You know the submarine from one end to the other -- all 360 feet. You know where the torpedoes go, where the crew eats and sleeps, where the battery is, where the control room is. You know how to put the myriad parts together and make them work properly. You know your way around the engine room and you know everything there is to know about the propulsion and auxiliary machinery.

Some of you here today have a special understanding of this submarine's place in the U.S. Navy. You know this ship's specific mission -- to destroy enemy ships, primarily submarines, in order to prohibit the employment of such forces against the United States, or any of our allies. And you know precisely how this submarine can accomplish its mission -- through the use

of the MK-48 torpedos, the HARPOON anti-surface ship cruise missiles, and the TOMAHAWK cruise missiles.

In technical terms, this submarine is a member of the SSN 688 Class. She is also, more simply, referred to as a member of the Los Angeles Class, a name I like since I call Los Angeles home. In comparison with other ships of her class, this submarine is quieter, faster, and militarily more capable. She represents the state of the art in nuclear-powered submarines, the top of the line.

This is the 32nd such submarine in her class. She will join such sister ships as the Groton, La Jolla, Boston, and Norfolk. And she will be called, proudly, the Providence.

Now that is a name for a ship. The Providence before us is named after the city of Providence, Rhode Island -- a seaport city on the coast of a seafaring state. And Providence itself is named in thanksgiving for God's guidance and care. The name Providence thus is a form of prayer -- a prayer of hope and trust.

Since the founding of the nation more than 200 years ago, four American vessels -- two frigates, a gunboat and a light cruiser -- have sailed under the good name Providence. Today will be christened the fifth Providence -- this remarkable submarine.

This is a naval event, a shipbuilders' event, a Groton event, a Providence event. It is these events, and yet more. For the Providence is one more sign of the recent change in our nation's course. The Providence is a sign of our military renewal and recommitment, a sign that we Americans realize that peace must be achieved and maintained through sufficient military strength.

Once this nation was strong -- demonstrably so. Barely more than two decades ago -- it seems another age -- there occurred the Cuban missile crisis. American superiority in not only nuclear weaponry but also naval forces persuaded the Soviet Union to back down.

But during the balance of the Sixties, we began to lose that military edge. After the Cuban missile crisis, the Soviets embarked on a build-up in every category of military force -- nuclear as well as conventional, on land, in the air and particularly at sea. Then mainly a coastal force, the Soviet Union went to sea and began building a blue-water navy that today

has awesome capabilities. All in all, the Soviet military build-up has turned out to be the greatest in the peacetime history of the world.

As the Soviets began the race to catch us militarily, we meanwhile began to lose the will to use our enormous power, and even the desire to maintain our strength. This happened as we fought and eventually lost the war in Vietnam.

We didn't lose that war because of our men, however. The Vietnam War was the first our men were truly prepared to fight. And fight they did -- the United States won every major battle in the war. We lost the war in Washington. America suffered a failure of leadership at the highest levels of government. Our leaders were unwilling to frame a decisive strategy for winning the war and to provide the means toward that end.

The United States reaped the whirlwind of this failure of leadership. Vietnam demolished the clarity that marked foreign policy for some time after the second World War. And during Vietnam our own confidence in our abilities -- in our power -- gradually withered.

President Kennedy once said: "Let every nation know whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe, to ensure the survival and the success of liberty." The self-confidence of those words from the early Sixties gave way by the end of that decade to self-doubt and self-disgust on the part of many.

New policies were fashioned to fit the changing sentiments. It was decided that America should withdraw from Vietnam gradually enough to permit a build-up of South Vietnamese power that could replace American forces. This policy in Vietnam was generalized -- it was to apply throughout the world. Henceforth, we would depend on local surrogates rather than on our own military power to deter or contain any Soviet-sponsored aggression.

During the early Seventies, many of our leaders -- including politicians, journalists, and intellectuals -- began recommending dramatic cutbacks in military spending at a time when the Soviets were in the midst of their unprecedented military build-up. Our spending began a steady decline. And in 1973 legislation was passed that seriously limits the ability of the executive to project effectively our military strength.

The policy of trying to contain communism through local surrogates meanwhile failed. South Vietnam fell, and Communist Vietnam, allied with the Soviet Union against China, then extended its rule over the whole of Indochina. The old domino theory -- said then by so many to be discredited -- was ultimately vindicated, and not just in Indochina.

Soviet proxies -- Cuban troops -- went to Angola. The Ford administration appealed to Congress for aid to the pro-West faction in Angola. But the mood among many American leaders was that, as one analyst put it, Washington "should not begin messy involvements in the Third World if there is any danger that they cannot be concluded without considerable sacrifice." Congress said "no" and also reduced the ability of the CIA to provide covert assistance to the anti-communist forces. During the rest of the Seventies, five more countries including Laos, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Cambodia were taken over by factions supported by and loyal to the Soviet Union.

The president elected in 1976 ran on a platform promising further cuts in the defense budget. Jimmy Carter congratulated the American people for having overcome what he called our "inordinate fear of Communism." He exercised unilateral "restraint" both in the maintenance and deployment of American power. He said the East-West conflict had been replaced by a North-South conflict, and that historical forces that we could not hope to control were at work throughout the world. To many outside the United States, we appeared impotent.

It was not surprising that in November 1979 the American embassy in Iran was captured, and 53 Americans were taken hostage. The Iranian episode confronted us with an image of our weakness so concrete and so vivid that denial or euphemism or obfuscation became impossible.

At the end of that year, the Soviets savagely invaded Afghanistan. The Persian Gulf was clearly threatened; the Soviets were embarked on a new expansionist stage.

In 1980, Ronald Reagan was elected President. Aware that during the Seventies the Soviet Union spent three times as much as the United States on defense, President Reagan took office in 1981 determined to reestablish American might and to use it intelligently and without fear -- just as we did, almost a year ago, in the Caribbean Sea.

At the heart of the administration's defense program are new conventional weapons and forces designed for combat outside Europe, in places including the Persian Gulf. Strengthening the Navy is a crucial part of this program. The Navy this administration inherited had only 482 ships. It was, as the saying goes, an "ocean-and-a-half Navy" -- it could cover only one ocean, and half of another. The goal of this administration goal is a navy capable of covering three oceans -- a navy with at least 600 ships.

The new ships we are building include amphibious assault ships, nuclear-powered aircraft carriers, Aegis guided-missile cruisers -- and, of course, nuclear-powered attack submarines.

The focus on the Navy is appropriate. The emergence of the United States as a world power dates from the decision of President Theodore Roosevelt to sail the American fleet around the world. According to historian Samuel Eliot Morison, "This gesture convinced the world that the United States was no longer a power to be trifled with." We must maintain and strengthen our navy if we are to continue to be a power not to be trifled with. We must have a navy that can prevail against any adversary that might attempt to interfere with our vital interests.

There is another reason we must have a strong navy. We are an island nation, separated from allies and resources by water. And we cannot be merely equal to the Soviet Union on the seas -- we must be superior. We must have a navy second to none.

The Providence represents a reassertion of American power. It represents the determination of the American people to achieve peace through strength. There is no other way.

We live in a dangerous world. And in a dangerous world we must have vessels such as the Providence. The first three Providences served in our first war -- the Revolutionary War. The fourth, a light cruiser, served during World War II, the Korean War, and Vietnam. All four of these ships performed heroic deeds. Their legacy of greatness is this vessel's special promise.

The first Providence was lucky enough to be captained by one of America's greatest sailors, John Paul Jones. He once said: "I intend to go in harm's way." His

Providence did, and so did the next ones, and so will this one. That is why we have ships and submarines. And only through a willingness to go in harm's way will America be able to maintain peace in a dangerous world.