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J.C.S. 2019/238

15 August 1957

Pages 1195 - 1203, incl.

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NOTE BY THE SECRETARIES

to the

JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

on

IMPLEMENTING INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE
EXPENDITURE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS (S)

Reference: J.C.S. 2019/225

The enclosed memorandum by the Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force, CSAFM 194-57, dated 13 August 1957, together with its attachments (Appendix and Annex), is referred hereby to the Joint Strategic Plans Committee for consideration in connection with the study directed by J.C.S. 2019/225.

R. D. WENTWORTH,
H. L. HILLYARD,
Joint Secretariat.

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E N C L O S U R E

MEMORANDUM BY THE CHIEF OF STAFF, U.S. AIR FORCE

for the

JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

on

IMPLEMENTING INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE
EXPENDITURE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS (S)

CSAFM 194-57

13 August 1957

The attached memorandum* by the Commander in Chief, Strategic Air Command, dated 10 August 1957, is submitted herewith in accordance with paragraph 4, SM-509-57.

* Appendix hereto

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UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
OFFUTT AIR FORCE BASE, NEBRASKA

10 August 1957

SUBJECT: (Secret) Implementing Instructions for the Expenditure
of Nuclear WeaponsTO: Director of Plans
Headquarters USAF
Washington 25, D C.

1. Reference is made to your letter* AFXPD, dated 17 July 1957, subject as above. The draft proposal for advance Presidential authorization for the employment of atomic weapons represents a natural and desirable consequence of the accomplished fact that through weapons evolution, nuclear weapons have displaced high explosives as the conventional firepower of U.S. armed forces. (Top Secret)

2. The comments of this command upon the proposed JCS implementing instructions are attached as Inclosure 1.** Based upon those comments, the following recommendations are furnished for the implementing instructions: (Uncl)

a. They should emphasize the primacy of the judgment of authorized commanders in decisions to resort to expenditure authority. (Secret)

b. They should emphasize that use of appropriate weapons, irrespective of type, is inherent in the normal military responsibility of a commander to react in defense of his force in an emergency. (Secret)

c. They should emphasize the basic defensive nature of attacks against the source of hostile blows, and identify retaliation as the primary and normal defensive action of any offensive military force. (Secret)

* Not on file in Joint Secretariat
** Annex hereto

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d. They should be responsive to reaction to enemy surprise missile attack, against either the United States or U.S. forces overseas. (Secret)

e. They should permit JCS commanders to delegate authorization as low as numbered air force level. (Secret)

3. This letter is classified TOP SECRET in accordance with paragraph 30a(2)(d), AFR 205-1.*

FOR THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF:

/s/ L. E. LYLE
Col. USAF
Deputy D/Plans

* On file in Joint Secretariat - *(see Military Press.)*

~~TOP SECRET~~A N N E X(SECRET) COMMENTS ON IMPLEMENTING INSTRUCTIONS
FOR THE EXPENDITURE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS1. General: (Uncl)

a. It is neither practical nor desirable for the Joint Chiefs of Staff to attempt to devise implementing instructions so specific and detailed that a ready guide to action in every possible emergency situation is available to authorized commanders. (Secret)

b. The basic mandate is premised upon the inability of the authorized commander to contact higher authority at a time when survival depends upon immediate action. This is made adequately clear in the assumed statement of authorization itself. (Secret)

c. The implementing instructions should make it equally clear that once that situation comes about, the decisions which follow must properly and understandably be left to the judgment of the military commander who may be forced to avail himself of the authority. (Confidential)

d. In the last analysis, the authorized commander must determine the point in time beyond which inaction is fatal; whether the portion of his force under attack constitutes a major organized unit of the essential military strength of the United States; whether the attack is a major or a minor one; whether the possible damage would constitute an immediate and vital military threat to U.S. security and whether he has correctly identified the enemy responsible for the attack. These are decisions he must make in the absence of communications to higher authority -- the very communications which might be his sole reliable source for confirmation of the possible global scope of the attack and the identity of its source. By the basic premise of

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the "statement of authorization" he must decide quickly, perhaps in response to complete surprise, or to surprise missile attack. Finally, his decision must take into account the trend of events leading up to the attack, and the degree to which his reaction to it should be balanced between decisive action to preserve his force and U.S. security on the one hand, without risking avoidable expansion of hostilities into general war (if indeed general war has not already eventuated) on the other. (Secret)

e. These are matters which no amount of wording can place anywhere but within the realm of the mature judgment of the commander. The implementing instructions should frankly so admit. They should be equally frank to admit that authorized commanders' judgment will not be infallible, but that in any case the decision to act swiftly and effectively without arbitrary weapon handicaps will always be more successful in preserving our forces and deterring expansion or repetition than would the decision not to act! Greater danger to our survival lies along the road of inaction, with its consequent emasculation of deterrence, than along the road of action, with its consequent demonstration that we will not tolerate aggression against our interests. (Secret)

2. Scope: (Uncl)

a. The "statement of authorization" makes it clear, by its own terms, that its purpose is to provide authority for use of nuclear weapons in certain defensive and retaliatory actions. It is believed that the implementing instructions should unify the authority by making it equally clear that whenever any defensive or retaliatory military action must be taken by authorized commanders, nuclear weapons may be used in executing that action. (Top Secret)

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b. It is and always has been the normal and continuing duty of any military commander to take immediate and effective action in defense of his forces, or of U.S. territory, when they are brought under hostile attack and time and circumstances do not permit decisions by higher authority. The implementing action should make it clear that this inherent military duty is in no way limited by the current action. All that is now provided is that when certain authorized commanders are forced by hostile attack to execute emergency defensive actions, such actions may be executed using any weapons best suited to the objective, without distinction as to nuclear or high explosive except as dictated by the effects of either type upon friendly personnel and facilities. (Top Secret)

3. Nature of Defense: (Uncl)

a. The assumed statement of authorization addresses itself to two basic conditions of reaction to enemy attack, i.e., "defense" and "retaliation." While it is believed inadvisable to incorporate inflexible specifics and details into the implementing instructions, as discussed in paragraph 1 above, some further clarification of these two terms is mandatory. (Secret)

b. The clear line of demarcation between defensive and retaliatory military actions, and indeed between defensive and offensive actions, has been overtaken by weapon systems developments and the resulting compression of time during hostilities. (Confidential)

(1) "Air defense" no longer means interception and kill after an enemy bomber has destroyed its target. Engagement and kill follow identification of probable hostile intent before consummation of the attacker's offensive blow. (Confidential)

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Annex

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(2) Pending possible future availability of anti-ballistic missile weapons, what is the defensive action in response to IREM attack? (Secret)

(3) SAC, the strategic air offensive force, has as its primary task destruction of the capability of an enemy to launch weapons of mass destruction against the United States and its allies. This is the core of our defensive posture. (Top Secret)

(4) Similarly, other JCS commanders are charged with responsibility for maintaining the security of their respective geographic areas, and of protecting the United States from attack through those areas. The war plans of those commands, issued in implementation of the JSCP and approved by the JCS, provide for air atomic attacks against enemy control centers, airfields, naval harbors, etc., in defense of their forces and areas. (Top Secret)

c. It is apparent from the above that defensive actions cannot be described by reference solely to actions directly against aircraft "in the air," missiles "in trajectory," armies "on the march," and naval vessels "under way." Neither can the terms "defense" and "retaliation" be differentiated by attempting to limit "defensive" actions to those aimed at "self-preservation." The primary defensive action of an offensive force is to strike at the source of the attacker's blows. Since it obviously is not the intent of the "statement of authorization" to permit defensive actions only by Fighter Interceptor Wings and Antiaircraft units, the nature of defense, and of the plans formulated for defense under the JSCP must be recognized in the implementing instructions. (Top Secret)

d. The implementing instructions should state that defensive action by authorized commanders employing nuclear weapons should be limited to attacks against the hostile force itself, when the security of the force and of the United

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States can be so achieved. However, when the nature or source of the attack, or the composition of the force attacked necessitates, defensive action may be addressed to the source of the attacks. (Top Secret)

e. In the same context, since the premise of the statement of authorization is a major hostile attack against a major vital element of U.S. strength, authorized commanders should be empowered to assume that when the premise applies, the Sino-Soviet Bloc is the source of the attack. (Top Secret)

4. Authority: (Uncl)

This command concurs in the authorization for delegation of expenditure authority down to the levels of numbered air forces, fleets, and armies. In addition, provision should be made for the corresponding levels of command in the USAF Air Defense Command, which is not organized along numbered air force lines. (Confidential)

5. This document is classified TOP SECRET in accordance with paragraph 30a(2)(d), AFR 205-1.*

* On file in Joint Secretariat

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Annex

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