

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

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KJC NARA. Date 4/21/93

for the

JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

on

LAUNCHING OF THE STRATEGIC AIR COMMAND ALERT FORCE (U)

CSAFM-72-58

10 March 1958

1. I am concerned over the vulnerability of the Strategic Air Command alert force under current operational policies and consider that the U.S. deterrent capability is invalidated to a substantial degree by:

- a. NORAD's marginal capability for providing early warning.
- b. The lack of a rapid decision-making process.
- c. The lack of authority to launch the alert force.

2. In recognition of these weaknesses, the Air Force has developed a "Fail Safe" concept designed to establish a capability to launch the alert force with positive assurance that it would not continue to the target unless specifically instructed to do so. This is accomplished by prebriefing the air crews prior to launching, to "fail safe" and return to home base at a given point along the EWP route if the "go" word is not received. During the past few months we have tested our capability to direct the force, once airborne, to continue on the mission. To date we have achieved success in passing the "go" word to 95% of the mission aircraft tested. Through the development of better communications facilities and procedures, we expect to approach 100% effectiveness in the near future. This concept insures the entire force will, as the name depicts, FAIL SAFE if authority is not received to continue to the target. At the same time, as our tests have proved, it guarantees a large portion of the force will receive the "go" word if execution is directed by higher authority after the force is airborne. Obviously, this type of operation would materially improve our deterrent posture.

3. It is apparent that as we and the Russians progress further into the missile era this problem becomes even more acute. The

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terrific speeds with which we must cope in the missile era and the limitations of our air defense systems reduce the time available to implement the procedures now established to obtain an effective strike decision. Our future early warning radars will undoubtedly be susceptible to false targets which would initially preclude positive identification of a missile attack against the United States. Under these circumstances, we most certainly would not want to launch our own missiles which could not be turned back if the alert were a false alarm. Launching our manned bomber alert force, however, under the "Fail Safe" concept would be most appropriate in this circumstance, providing us positive assurance of having a part of our retaliatory power airborne without the slightest risk should the alert prove to be false.

4. Accordingly, the Joint Chiefs of Staff are hereby informed that on 1 March 1958, I instructed CINCSAC in the event of a defense emergency to automatically launch his alert force under the "Fail Safe" concept.

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Enclosure

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