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LAUNCHING OF NUCLEAR REPRISAL

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If Western nuclear retaliation is to be successful, there must be a procedure for ordering the retaliatory forces into action with the minimum delay.

2. The nuclear retaliatory forces located in the United Kingdom at present comprise:-

(a) The Royal Air Force Medium Bomber Force

This force is under the sole control of the United Kingdom Government.

(b) Units of the United States Strategic Air Command (SAC)

The understanding between the United Kingdom Government and the United States Government requires that the use of these forces in an emergency shall be a matter for joint decision by the two Governments in the light of the circumstances at that time.

3. In addition, there are certain United States and United Kingdom tactical bomber forces, both with a nuclear capability, assigned to SACEUR. It is believed that SACEUR, who is also Commander-in-Chief of all United States forces in Europe, has in this latter capacity the authority of a commander in the field to use United States forces under his command to repel an attack upon them. His use in such circumstances of United States tactical bombers located in the United Kingdom would, however, be "a matter for joint decision" by the Governments of the United States and United Kingdom as in the case of the S.A.C. forces.

General Assumptions

4. If the need to use nuclear retaliatory forces springs /from

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from a situation in which Russian or satellite forces have launched an attack using only conventional or tactical nuclear weapons - in other words, if the West decides to use strategic nuclear retaliation first - there will be time for the normal procedure of consultation between governments. The need for special procedure arises when the Soviets themselves have launched their attack with strategic nuclear forces or when there is reason to believe that they intend to do so.

5. In these circumstances the procedure to be followed is largely governed by the amount of warning of a Soviet intention to attack which is likely to be received. For the present, it has been assumed -

- (a) that the main threat of aerial attack is from manned bombers;
- (b) that "a bolt from the blue" attack by the Soviet Union on this country is unlikely and that there will, therefore, be some advance intelligence information of Soviet intentions;
- (c) that, even so, the final decision to launch the nuclear retaliatory forces will not be taken until there is confirmation that an attack has been launched by the Soviet Union.

6. On these assumptions, there are therefore two stages in the procedure:-

- (a) action to be taken on an Intelligence alert; and
- (b) action to be taken on a warning of impending attack, e.g. radar warning.

Sources of information about Soviet intentions

7. Indications that the Soviet Union are preparing for an attack should be obtained through Intelligence channels.

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Arrangements have recently been agreed with the United States and Canadian Governments for the exchange of Intelligence information about Soviet intentions. As soon as the necessary communication facilities have been established evidence of any Soviet hostile intentions obtained by one Government will speedily be available to the other two. Information obtained through this Intelligence network will first be received in this country by the Joint Intelligence Committee.

8. Since SACEUR relies in the main for his advance Intelligence information on the Intelligence organisations of the member countries of N.A.T.O., it seems unlikely that he would receive any Intelligence indications of an impending Soviet attack before similar evidence was available to the United States or United Kingdom Governments.

Sources of radar information

9. The early warning radar network round the United Kingdom feeds into the Headquarters of Fighter Command at Stanmore, which will also receive information from any Allied radar networks in Europe which are linked with the United Kingdom radar system. Indications from this source of an impending attack may allow as little as forty minutes for the necessary decision to be taken about the launching of nuclear retaliatory forces.

10. It cannot be taken for granted that advance Intelligence information will significantly increase the time available for this decision. It is therefore only

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prudent to ensure that the procedural arrangements enable the decision to be taken within the expected period of radar warning.

11. When ballistic missiles constitute the main threat and the period of radar warning is shorter than ever, different arrangements will of course be needed.

SUGGESTED PROCEDURE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Intelligence Alert

12. (1) On receipt by the Joint Intelligence Committee of Intelligence information which indicates that the Soviet Union is likely to launch an attack, certain designated United Kingdom Ministers, the Chiefs of Staff and the United States Intelligence authorities will be informed.

(ii) The Chief of the Air Staff will immediately order all possible unobtrusive measures to bring the Royal Air Force to a state of operational readiness. Further measures which would inevitably involve publicity would be considered by the Cabinet under (iv) below. The Air Ministry will inform the Commander of S.A.C. units in this country of the action that is being taken to improve the state of readiness of the medium bomber force.

(iii) A meeting of the Cabinet will be summoned at which the Chiefs of Staff will also be present.

(iv) The Cabinet will decide, in the light of the Intelligence information, what further preparatory measures should be taken.

Warning of impending attack

13. If, even in the absence of an Intelligence alert,
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the Air Officer, Commanding-in-Chief Fighter Command receives information from any source which leads him to believe that an attack is imminent, the following action will automatically be taken:-

- (i) Air Officer, Commanding-in-Chief Fighter Command will immediately inform -
 - (a) the Air Ministry
 - (b) Bomber Command
 - (c) Seventh Air Division, Strategic Air Command.

- (ii) The Chief of the Air Staff will order the medium bomber force to immediate readiness for take off. He will, at his discretion, order the aircraft into the air, if he considers this necessary to avoid them being attacked on the ground. In the latter case, captains of aircraft will be ordered to proceed on their pre-arranged routes to targets, but not to pass beyond a specified line without further definite instructions.

- (iii) The Chief of the Air Staff will immediately inform the Prime Minister, certain other designated Ministers, and the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff of the action he has taken and will indicate the time by which the aircraft will reach the specified stop line. The Commander of S.A.C. units in the United Kingdom and SACEUR will be informed of this action.

- (iv) The designated United Kingdom Ministers and Chiefs of Staff will proceed immediately to a meeting with the Prime Minister.

- (v) Arrangements will be made for the Prime Minister to speak personally to the President of the United States.

BRITISH EMBASSY,
WASHINGTON, D.C.

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