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6 June 1955

MEMORANDUM FOR GENERAL TWINING ON THE ABILITY OF AIRCRAFT CARRIERS  
TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE SAC OFFENSIVE

In a war with Russia we would be faced with many high priority tasks, but none are more important than these two: The defense against the enemy air attack and the conduct of our counter-air strike designed to destroy the enemy's means to launch renewed attacks.

I am confident that none of the Joint Chiefs of Staff disagree with this assessment of importance. On the contrary, they agree that success in these two tasks would be vital to our survival.

Any delay in carrying out these tasks must be weighed against the grim prospect of more enemy nuclear weapons dropped on our people and on our installations, particularly, on air bases, designed to protect our people.

As you know, the first enemy targets that would have to be destroyed are the bases of the Soviet long-range air force. Destruction of these targets is the number one task of the Strategic Air Command. The Air Force, and through it, SAC, has been assigned conduct of the strategic air offensive as a primary mission.

Almost all of the home bases of the Soviet long-range air force lie deep within the borders of the Soviet Union, and deep within their air defenses.

Because they are deep-in, hard-to-reach targets, we must rely on long-range delivery means to destroy them.

This means that range is an essential requirement of the delivery system. A second essential involves timing, the need to insure there is no delay in our counter-attacks. The sooner these targets are destroyed,

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the fewer enemy weapons dropped against us.

A third essential is the ability to penetrate the enemy defenses. Speed, range, and altitude of delivery vehicles are important characteristics in such a penetration.

Awareness of these essentials was one reason that I made, in part, this response to a Senatorial query about what carrier aircraft could contribute to the strategic air offensive.

" . . . . we must be realistic about such factors as the probable location of the carriers, as well as the amount of striking power they could contribute to the strategic offensive, which is small."

It should be understood that any assistance in the strategic air offensive is a secondary, or corollary, mission of the Navy.

In general, carrier aircraft performance is less than land-based counterparts. This is understandable, for they are primarily designed for naval missions, not for missions of the type I have just described.

Naval aircraft have a relatively short range. For example, their fighters could penetrate enemy coastlines about 600 miles, their attack bombers only about 1000 miles.

This obviously prevents them from penetrating deep into enemy territory. Almost seventy percent of their total aircraft force is range-limited to targets on the coast, or quite near the coast of an enemy.

A second reason for characterizing the relative magnitude of carrier attack capability as "small" is based on the weapon load

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carrier-based aircraft can carry and the total number of aircraft they could devote to the strategic air task in the opening stage of a war.

Our studies of weapons effects convinces us that weapons with yields upwards of 70 KT would have to be used to assure positive destruction of the primary airfields of an enemy.

Only the heavy attack bombers of the Navy can carry these higher yield weapons. They have in their whole force, less than a hundred heavy attack bombers that can operate from carriers.

By comparison, the Strategic Air Command has 1590 aircraft capable of delivering high yield weapons.

Another measure of strategic air capabilities is the weight of destructive power that can be delivered in a given time period.

Studies we have made show that one B-52 wing could deliver almost twice as many megatons of bombs, as the whole carrier attack bomber force the Navy could have in position in the event of war.

Joint Chiefs of Staff recognition of a relative capability of this order of magnitude is reflected in Joint Chiefs of Staff decisions on the allocation of high yield weapons -- decisions that are based on a complete analysis by the Joint Chiefs of Staff of tasks, delivery capability, enemy threat and command requirements.

For Fiscal Year 1956 the Joint Chiefs of Staff decision on high yield weapons available to Commander-in-Chief, Strategic Air Command, Commander-in-Chief, Atlantic and Commander-in-Chief, Pacific, was this:

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CINCSAC -- 93%, CINCLANT and CINCPAC together -- only 7%. This same ratio was again made by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in their decision on Fiscal Year 1957 allocations.

Despite press comment that has implied the existence of controversy, there is no disagreement within the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the question of tasks and contributions of land-based and carrier-based air.

I can assure you that I agree with Admiral Burke's recent statements on the mission of Naval airpower, and his views that Navy's plans are, "well coordinated with those of the Air Force, through the Joint Chiefs of Staff." He said, "The Navy's concept of air attack is to launch it from far out at sea."

Admiral Burke stated that the primary role of the Navy is to maintain control of the sea and he emphasized that the tasks the Navy must perform beyond all doubt is to destroy those threats which threaten Navy control of the sea. He went on to say that for that reason the Navy has developed and will continue to develop the capability of striking the sources of their threats. In discussing types of targets, the Chief of Naval Operations listed submarine pens, bases, and airfields from which planes are launched which threaten control of the sea.

The Air Force has never refused assistance, either from the Navy or from our allies, in what we know would be a difficult, costly, but vital task -- knocking out enemy airpower. And we will never reject such assistance.

However, we know that there must be firm, positive plans backed

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by definite commitments of forces to this job. This is not just a matter of making forces potentially available nor of general instructions. Every one of these targets that have been selected by the Joint Chiefs of Staff must be on the "destroy list" of a proven crew, fully trained and instantly ready to man their aircraft to perform their assigned mission.