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File F-108

DECLASSIFIED  
Authority NND 984462  
By JK NARA Date 10-27-09

29 JUN 1958

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As your committee makes its final review of the military appropriations for FY-60, I consider it important to add to my previous statement regarding air defense of the United States. The information to follow is supplemental to that which my staff has previously provided.

Since our presentation to your committee in January on weapon systems, we have reviewed our emphasis in air defense measures against the Soviet manned bomber force. It has been stated repeatedly that too much of our defense budget has been programmed into what appears to be a fading threat; i. e., the manned bomber. I feel it would be useful for you to know that we have, in fact, reduced our goals for manned interceptors drastically. Specifically, in 1957 we were planning on 5200 fighter interceptors for 1963; in consecutive adjustments we have cut from this figure to 2000 in 1963, with further reductions by 1970. For the foreseeable future, however, it appears that there will continue to be, in significant degree, a Soviet bomber threat against this nation, with estimated performance up to 65,000 feet altitude and at speeds of Mach 2.0 - 2.5. Accordingly, there will continue to be the requirement for a modern manned interceptor to perform those air defense operations beyond the capability of the air defense missile, and to provide flexibility which will allow us to concentrate fire power in areas where defensive missiles have been expended.

What is perhaps not clearly understood is that the F-108 represents a complete departure from contemporary aircraft design. It is constructed to cruise at 2000 MPH (to its full range). By new techniques we are able to make this high performance aircraft behave properly at lower speeds for safe take-off and landing. Of special interest to you, I believe, is that the basic design of the F-108 permits its use as an offensive weapons as well as an exceptionally versatile defense fighter. In the offense role it can carry the recently developed family of small, high yield weapons, or modern reconnaissance devices. Its missile bay is equal in size to one of the two bomb bays in a B-47 bomber. Here we have additional application to the problem of limited war. The range and speed of the F-108 permits its deployment to Formosa, for example, in 5.5 hours.

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You will note there are no funds in our FY-60 program for con-temporary interceptors. FY-59 bought out the last of the F-106 and F-101 series. We are placing dependence on the F-108 to meet the requirements for a multi-purpose fighter aircraft for the future. Our funding requested in our FY-60 program provides for development of this aircraft as a long-range interceptor and air defense missile launcher. Its ability to cruise out or patrol far beyond fixed defenses and challenge marauders far from our borders is in consonance with the Air Force approach to air defense in depth. The advanced performance of the F-108 from both military and technical standpoints is also consistent with the vital need for the U. S. to maintain an optimum balance and effective relationship between offensive and defensive air capabilities. In short, the battle against Soviet nuclear offensive forces threatening the West, whether manned aircraft or missiles, should start in Soviet territory not ours.

My staff has only recently completed an examination of this aircraft in the offensive role. In my opinion, the offensive flexibility of the F-108 should be considered by your committee with the hope that this too will be of use to you in your final deliberations on the FY-60 Air Force program.

In consideration of all of the above factors and with special emphasis on the facts that the F-108 represents the only manned weapon system contemplated for future inventory in both the fighter interceptor and fighter bomber categories and moreover is the sole long range air defensive weapon in view, it seems to me its continuation is vital.

Sincerely yours,

signed

THOMAS D. WHITE  
Chief of Staff

Honorable Dennis Chavez  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Department of Defense  
Committee on Appropriations  
United States Senate

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