

TOP SECRET
Date: 28 JUL 1955
Last Name: *Redacted*

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26 July 1955

Major General Frank A. Armstrong, Jr.
Commander
Second Air Force
Barksdale Air Force Base
Louisiana

DECLASSIFIED
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Dear Frank:

Your letter of 18 July represents a lot of searching thought and is appreciated. I and my top staff have taken several days to give it the thorough consideration I feel it deserves. I will comment in some detail to demonstrate the background for my decisions and present point of view. (UNCL)

I consider victory in the air battle will determine the decision in any future war. All offensive air power must be effectively employed against the air battle objectives to win this victory as quickly and decisively as possible. (CONFIDENTIAL)

I am concerned about the low level of the theaters' offensive air force potential for contributing to our major task of destroying the enemy capability to deliver high yield weapons against the United States and her allies. The forces in the advanced areas are also extremely vulnerable to Soviet attack. I consider SAC to be a backup force for the limited theater capability with the probability SAC will conduct a great majority of the active operations in winning the air battle. (TOP SECRET)

It is obvious that we must plan for the effective employment of the B-47 and KC-97 force for the next few years. During this period we will be dependent upon intermediate bases to support the tankers and/or bombers and your point on vulnerability of these bases is well taken. This is a source of constant concern of the entire command. Loss of overseas bases will correspondingly reduce the scale of our offensive effort and increase the time required to produce a given number of effective strikes. Assuming the loss of the island bases and a major portion of our prepared bases in the North African-Spanish-Mediterranean area, the late production models of the B-47 will still have the capability of taking off from or staging through Hunter Air Force Base or several

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bases in the northeast areas, and fly non-stop to such bases as may be available in Spain or North Africa. Employing a "fullhouse" type staging operating through these advanced bases, it seems probable we could strike the Soviet target system. (TOP SECRET)

This type operation, of course, requires bases with a minimum support capability in Spain, North Africa, and the Mediterranean area. The present total number of programmed bases in this area we both recognize as being inadequate. The 5th Air Division briefed me on the proposal to survey additional bases in their overseas area of responsibility when I visited French Morocco last April. I was receptive to the proposal at that time. Colonel Thorpe discussed this subject with you and your staff and later presented certain proposals to my staff on the 9th of June. The acquisition of additional minimum support bases throughout the area would greatly increase our operational flexibility and the probability of placing more effective weapons on assigned targets. Unfortunately, information from the Air Force as our Executive Agent indicates it will not be possible for us to get base rights in most countries under active consideration within the near future. We cannot plan on an immediate survey within those countries. There are also actions under way which prohibit the survey of additional bases in Spain at this time. If more survey data is required on bases or base locations in French Morocco and you can get the concurrence of 17th Air Force in the conduct of these surveys, you are encouraged to gather the required information. (TOP SECRET)

Past experience has conclusively proved that after a unit is placed overseas it very quickly begins to lose its effective combat potential, and by the end of the first year, I am convinced, the combat potential would be degraded to the point that the loss of the two wings from our relatively high ZI potential would make this movement unprofitable. In addition, the overall support required for overseas deployment is in excess of what the Air Force can afford. North African bases will be especially vulnerable to attack if ninety B-47's are permanently stationed there. (SECRET)

The choice I must make is between the probable loss of this combat capability if located on the North African base complex and the probability of having the ninety B-47's intact in the United States with a questionable capability of effectively employing them against the assigned Soviet objectives. This is not an easy decision. I choose to retain the force in the United States with a probability of employing them at the earliest possible time in the war. (TOP SECRET)

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We must develop a true intercontinental bombing capability as quickly as possible. Although we continually press for an increase in the production of B-52's and supporting jet tankers, it will be several years before we can possibly realize even the minimum level in the SAC inventory that I consider necessary. Looking even further into the future, we must realize a follow-on strategic bomber to the B-52 which will not be limited in range. It must have better performance, greater bombing accuracy, and the best possible penetration capability. (SECRET)

I am hopeful that the word "aggression" will be redefined and accepted by the United Nations. The new definition, in my opinion, must recognize that we are now living in an age when it can no longer be an issue of morality that a nation must receive the first physical blow before it can respond with force; in fact, the first blow can now signal the end of a conflict rather than a beginning. Therefore, certain enemy actions short of war should constitute sufficient threat to the non-aggressor nation that it would be justified in launching direct attack, at least on enemy strategic air power, to forestall its own disaster. If this new philosophy can be accepted, it might well give us the solution to many of our current problems. (SECRET)

Sincerely,

CURTIS E. LEMAY
General, USAF
Commander in Chief

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