

WOK 22 Strategic Plans folder: emergence

In reply refer to Initials and No.

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OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS

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8 November 1948

MEMORANDUM FOR OP-03:
VIA OP-30:

In the evening of 5 November I attended a dinner at Mr. Forrestal's house. The only other guests were Mr. Sullivan, Mr. Symington and General LeMay.

After dinner Mr. Forrestal directed several questions to General LeMay having to do with the actual ability of the Strategic Air Command to drive home attacks on targets in Russia. General LeMay, in his replies, several times emphasized that he was basing his statements on the present situation, and I gathered that he considered that the strength of the Russian defense against air attack would increase markedly in a period of weeks following the opening of hostilities. LeMay cited the mistake made by the U. S. Air Force in World War II when small numbers (50) B17's were sent over Germany before the Air Force was ready to strike with decisive numbers. It was LeMay's opinion that if the United States could strike immediately (in a matter of several days) on the opening of hostilities, with about 80 percent of the atomic stockpile, these attacks would find the defenses so uncoordinated that we might come off unscathed, and certainly should not suffer heavy losses. He indicated that the resistance to be expected will be a perimeter defense employing radar network, and then no defense until important targets are approached. He indicated that the Germans had obtained excellent air photographs of all important targets in Russia up to the Ural Mountains and that we are in possession of all of the German material descriptive of these Russian targets.

In view of LeMay's World War II experience in Europe and the Pacific, his reputation, and the fact that he now has the Strategic Air Command, I did not feel that it was appropriate for me to take issue with him in statements which would immediately raise a question as to the efficiency of his command. I did raise the point that attacks under the conditions he had outlined require letter-perfect navigational performance under combat conditions, from crews who either have had no combat training or whose combat experience is several years in

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the past. LeMay's reply was that the present crews are better than the ones who hit Japan from the Marianas. I agreed as to the average, but reminded him that the lead crews and the ones I flew with had successfully completed twenty to fifty missions over Europe and the Pacific.

I regret that I did not raise another point, namely, that combat operations of B29's or B50's from a newly established base cannot, in my opinion, be carried out with any degree of reliability or punch for a period between three weeks and three months from the arrival of the airplanes and maintenance, etc., at the base. In this case, by airplanes, I mean airplanes of the same general type, not necessarily the actual airplanes to be used in the delivery operation.

I think that atomic bomb delivery operations should be considered in three phases:

Phase 1. Begins with the decision to make the delivery aircraft operational from a given airbase, and ends when the actual airplanes to be used in the delivery have proved operational from that base.

Phase 2, which may overlap the latter part of Phase 1, begins with the decision to move non-nuclear components and atomic weapon assembly crews to the above base. It ends when the ability to assemble these non-nuclear components at the above base has been established. During Phase 2 the hazard exists that an airplane carrying a bomb assembled except for nuclear components will crash or have a forced landing with possible international repercussions. However, in reality, Phase 2 can be carried out without finally committing the United States to using atomic bombs.

Phase 3. Begins with the President's decision to be finally ready to strike with atomic bombs, and ends when the bombs, assembled with nuclear components, are ready for takeoff in the delivery aircraft. Assuming that Phases 1 and 2 have been satisfactorily carried out, Phase 3 could last a matter of hours or could overlap the final days of Phase 2.

The above discussion of phases was not mentioned in the conversation with LeMay.