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HEADQUARTERS STRATEGIC AIR COMMAND
Offutt Air Force Base
Nebraska

2 10CT 1957

General Thomas D. White
Chief of Staff
United States Air Force
Washington, D. C.

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THE AIR FORCE

Dear Tommy:

I am taking this opportunity to explain to you this command's capability as it pertains to an alert force and some of the things we are doing to improve this capability, both in size of the force and reaction time. In addition, I am also pointing out items that are impeding our progress today and items I visualize becoming obstacles in the future. (UNCL)

This command went on alert on 1 October 1957 with 129 bomber aircraft loaded with 138 weapons. This alert force includes B-47s, B-36s, B-52s and KC-97s both in the United States and at overseas locations. Reaction time varies depending on location. In the United States the last aircraft is airborne within two hours and overseas the first aircraft is airborne within thirty minutes. The number of aircraft and the manner that they get to the target is as follows: 26 B-47s stage; 33 B-47s proceed with one or two air refuelings; and 70 aircraft (10 B-47s ZI; 42 B-47s overseas; 12 B-36s and 6 B-52s) proceed non-stop, non-refueled. (TOP SECRET)

On 7 January 1958, the size of the alert force increases to 157 aircraft with 174 weapons. Reaction time remains the same as outlined above but there is one improvement, other than the size of the force, and that is the elimination of the 26 B-47s staging. The breakdown of the 7 January force is: 140 aircraft (31 B-47s ZI; 83 B-47s overseas; 12 B-36s ZI; and 14 B-52s ZI) proceed to the target non-stop, non-refueled; and 17 B-47s in the ZI proceed non-stop with one or two air refuelings. (TOP SECRET)

These efforts are invalidated to a substantial degree by the following:

- a. The thirty minute alert capability in the overseas areas will not measurably reduce the vulnerability of those forces if it takes two hours for me to get a decision to expend the weapons or to launch them on a recall basis. If the full deterrent potential

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of our alert posture, today and in the future, is to be realized, the reaction of this force to a hostile act must be essentially automatic. (TOP SECRET)

b. Today, I have no authority to expend weapons regardless of the situation. If I gambled and evacuated my weapons toward their targets under "dispersal emergency" I could well find myself worse off than had I held them on the ground. (TOP SECRET)

My staff has briefed me on the status of the "implementing instructions for automatic expenditure" paper in the JCS. Some of the restrictions being considered for commanders of retaliatory forces are contradictory to common sense. If the paper is issued in anything approaching its form of two weeks ago, it will do little but make scapegoats of the operational commanders in the event of a modern Pearl Harbor. (TOP SECRET)

The logical progression of improvement in the alert capability is to increase the size of the alert force and to decrease the reaction time to a point that we have one third of the force on alert capable of becoming airborne within fifteen minutes. Several items hinder this progression. Some of these are: alert facilities; insufficient aircraft capable of reaching the target non-stop and non-refueled; insufficient high performance tankers to support southern located bombers and to provide an intercontinental capability; and mallocation of our present day KC-97 squadrons at southern bases. (SECRET)

The majority of these items have been the subject of various pieces of correspondence in the past and I believe that progress is slowly being made to eliminate them as obstacles. One of these factors, the size of the alert force, is something that I can influence and I would like to explain some of the things that govern this. (UNCL)

The size of the alert force in being today and the immediate future is determined by three factors which are the location of the B-47 units, the number of tankers available to provide required air refueling support and the number of B-52 wings available. There are very few B-47 units located in a position that they can strike a target without one and sometimes two air refuelings. This is partly overcome by deployment and "REFLEX" operations at a number of overseas bases. The number of tanker units available in the proper location are very few and they are used to the best advantage to support those B-47 units on alert that could not be deployed or "REFLEXED." The combination of these two factors dictated the number of B-47s in the alert force and, until the KC-135 enters the inventory in appreciable quantity and some of the KC-97 units are moved from



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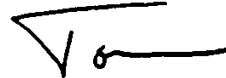
the south, there can be no material change in this number. This means that the only immediate relief in increasing the size of the alert force is the B-52 conversion program. (SECRET)

You will notice that a comparison of the forces on alert on 1 October and the forces of 7 January reveals that the number of B-52s have more than doubled in number. Although the total number is quite small in comparison with the number of B-47s, it is subject to fairly rapid improvement as more of the B-36 wings convert to B-52s. Unfortunately, the recent cuts in production have delayed this conversion beyond the time originally planned but we have made all necessary adjustments and I believe that the current programmed production will fulfill the minimum requirement. (SECRET)

The entrance of the KC-135 in the inventory in quantity will help increase the number of B-52s and B-47s in the alert force, particularly since the first units will be located on northern bases. Here again, it is a case of too few too late but, like the B-52, we have come to accept current programmed production rates as a minimum and believe that they will be satisfactory. I must stress, however, that these production rates are the minimum acceptable and any further reduction will have a very definite adverse effect on SAC's alert capability. (SECRET)

I have outlined our current and forecast capability for SAC's alert force. As you can see, there are problems that will require solution before we can realize our goal of one third of the force on alert and off the ground in fifteen minutes. I am resolving as many of these as is possible within this command.

Sincerely,



THOMAS S. POWER
General, USAF
Commander-in-Chief

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XDC for purp of reply
OOC info.
JSS.

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