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HISTORY
OF THE
STRATEGIC AIR COMMAND

HISTORICAL STUDY #73A
SAC TARGETING CONCEPTS (U)

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SAC Targeting Concepts (u)

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(U) The SAC force available for strategic air operations constituted the nation's and the free world's main deterrent to war. As long as this command maintained its powerful force ready to react quickly in case of attack, it deterred the potential aggressor who would have to accept destruction of major portions of his own homeland should he initiate World War III.

(U) Knowing that current national policy would never permit a launch of the SAC force except in a retaliatory role, this command's main efforts were directed towards assuring the survival of a major portion of SAC's strike capability, based on the premise that the enemy would deliver the first blow. A great deal of energy expended by the command went into the accomplishment of the alert concept, a plan whereby the command maintained a portion of its strategic offensive force in a high state of readiness from which it could react rapidly upon receipt of tactical warning. ^(u) SAC's goal was

[] of the strike force capable of reacting 15 minutes after receiving tactical warning. The alert system insured the survival of at least a portion of SAC's strike force regardless of how unexpected or devastating the attack launched against it

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might be. Also, SAC continued to expand its base structure in order to disperse the heavy bomb force. Dispersal would limit the number of B-52 aircraft concentrated on any one base to [] and thereby increase the targeting problems of any attacking force²

(U) SAC aircraft were deployed around the world, to Guam, Alaska, Canada, Labrador, Greenland, Great Britain, Spain, and North Africa. SAC's concept for using these increasingly vulnerable forward bases no longer featured rotating an entire wing to an overseas base for an extended stay. Portions of various SAC bomb wings were placed on TDY and maintained in a quick reaction status for short periods of time. Within minutes after receiving warning these REFLEX ACTION aircraft would be airborne and flying toward their assigned targets.³

(U) SAC was firmly convinced that its value as a deterrent force depended primarily on its ability to deliver a devastating retaliatory attack, regardless of time, place, or weather. In order to assure the constant readiness of its force the command developed detailed war plans which incorporated proven procedures.

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1. See Alert Concept, pp 25-66, Hist of SAC, Jan-Jun 1958, filed in OIH, Hq SAC.
 2. See Dispersal Concept, pp 9-25, Hist of SAC, Jan-Jun 1958, filed in OIH, Hq SAC.
 3. See REFLEX ACTION, pp 33-50, Hist of SAC, Jan-Jun 1958, filed in OIH, Hq SAC.

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 (U) The Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan (JSCP),^{*} is the directive which governs the development of SAC Emergency War Plans. SAC plans were related to the overall JSCP. Since allocation of weapons, budgetary considerations, and base operating rights were established on an annual cycle, effective at the beginning of the fiscal year and kept current during the fiscal year, SAC's war plan was determined also on a fiscal year basis. In October of the previous year SAC planners began collecting data for the next fiscal year's plan. After receipt of numbered air force and overseas air division recommendations, the initial plan was prepared in December. During January the headquarters staff and the CINC were briefed. A major planning conference was held in February with the Directors of Operations of the numbered air forces and overseas air divisions and their staffs in attendance. By March the final SAC war plan was published and distributed. In April the numbered air forces published their plans, and the units completed theirs in May. The month of June was devoted to target study by individual crews. Study included a written and oral

* This plan set down the broad objectives of the U. S. in general war.



examination. All crews were certified proficient by their wing commander by 1 July and the plan went into effect on that date.

(U) In order to test the capability of SAC units to accomplish their assigned portion of the war plan, the SAC Inspector General carried out "no notice" inspections during the life of the plan. A selected unit was ordered, with no advance warning, to execute their detailed war plan up to the point of actual take off. Then aircraft were inspected for combat readiness and each crew was interrogated on all phases of their mission. The unit then flew a simulated combat profile mission which completed the test. All during the test the inspection team evaluated the unit's capability to execute its assigned EWP mission.

(U) In addition to "no notice" inspections, during the fiscal year each unit was required to fly several Unit Simulated Combat Missions (USCMs). These missions approximated as closely as peacetime conditions allowed, the unit's wartime mission. Also, within 30 days after the war plan became effective SAC conducted a command post exercise. During this test various task force commanders

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and their staffs actually took up positions which they would occupy in case of hostilities.

(U) SAC strike plans were predicated on the amount of warning time the command could expect to receive of impending attack. These plans were completed only after consideration and study of such variables as in-commission rates, abort rates due to enemy action and accidents, loss of bases, etc. The completed strike plan insured the optimum use of weapons available under any condition of hostilities. SAC had one target system and one strike plan, but a multitude of timing variations or options to fit any condition that might arise. There were two basic modes of execution. One plan was based on the assumption that [

The SAC force would [

4. Pres, Maj Gen R. H. Terrill, Dir of Ops, Hq SAC, to WWCC, Washington, D. C., 29 Oct 1956, filed in Missions Br, Ops Plans Div, D/Ops, Hq SAC.

5. (U) This time was constantly diminishing. In response to a SAC request in December 1957 for estimated warning times this command could expect to receive, Air Defense Command replied in part that under many conditions no warning could be guaranteed to any SAC base. Of course this was the worst possible situation, but it represented a serious enemy capability if achieved, and presented "a grave picture" to General Power. (Info from Ltr, Gen T. S. Power, CINCSAC, to Gen T. D. White, CofS, USAF, 23 Dec 1957 (B-64157); Ltr, Lt Gen J. H. Atkinson, Comdr, ADC to CINCSAC, "SAC Alert Warning Times," 24 Oct 1957, (B-63429), filed in OIH, Hq SAC).

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(S) [] the main target would be []
[] The other plan was based
on the assumption that []
would then [] SAC
[] aircraft, []
[]

(U) As recently as 1956 SAC's warning time was reckoned in hours. Given the strategic warning alternative (any warning of 24 hours or more), the command was prepared to progress from normal training to a launch of the first wave of bombers within 24 hours. Succeeding waves would follow at 12 hour intervals. In developing the strategic warning plan, SAC strived to throw a heavy and concentrated effort into its initial attack. The benefits of mass and saturation were achieved in this way. Mass was created by numbers and use of electronic countermeasures (ECM) to create the effect of mass. The concentration of aircraft against specific areas created saturation in those areas and handicapped the enemy's weapons.

(S) In determining targets for [] SAC allocated
weapons to the highest priority []

[] strikes were scheduled against those targets that posed

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(8)

the greatest threat to [

] were targeted to [

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(U) A number of initial strikes were assigned each medium and heavy bomb wing. As a secondary assignment, each unit was given a number of targets for recycle or special contingency strikes. Under the strategic warning plan all aircraft were to post strike from overseas bases to the ZI for subsequent strikes.

(U) In the tactical warning plan for 1956 SAC assumed that an enemy attack against the United States had been launched prior to initial warning. It scheduled the first tactical take-offs at E plus six hours, E hour being the time of first notification. The entire initial strike would be airborne by E plus 12 hours. Targeting plans for the tactical warning situation called for attacking approximately 210 targets with three weapons per target in order to stop further attacks against the United States.

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6. Pres, Maj Gen R. H. Terrill, Dir of Ops, Hq SAC, to WWCC, Washington, D. C., 29 Oct 1956, filed in Missions Br, Ops Plans Div, D/Ops, Hq SAC; DF, Col G. W. Thorpe, Acting Dir of Intell, Hq SAC, to Hist Div, OI, "Review of SAC History," 10 Feb 1959, filed in OIH, Hq SAC.

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(U) Major General R. H. Terrill, SAC's Director of Operations, in his presentation of SAC's 1956 strike plans to the World-Wide Coordination Conference in October 1956, noted the ever increasing problem of compressed reaction time:⁷

(U) In the future, as the enemy attains an effective ICBM capability and the warning times we may logically expect are reduced, our alert requirements will become progressively more stringent until an ultimate goal of one-third of the total force on a 15 minutes alert is reached.

(U) By fiscal year 1958 emphasis was still on strategic warning, but growing Soviet long range bomber and missile capability dictated that SAC give increased attention to the tactical situation. The command needed a quick reaction capability, simultaneous launch of aircraft, and all overseas bases on alert. ~~No~~ forces would be dependent on deployment; bombers would strike from home bases, refueling enroute. A small peacetime alert force (REFLEX ACTION) was positioned overseas in order to retaliate in the shortest time possible. ~~Initial~~ strikes would be directed against []

* See Alert Concept and REFLEX ACTION, Hist of SAC, Jan-Jun 1958, filed in OIH, Hq SAC.

7. Ibid.

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(S)
[] Aircraft would
use the []
[] The attack
was planned so that []
[] Wherever possible the attack []

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[]

(U) Strike plans for fiscal year 1959 emphasized primarily the tactical warning situation to take advantage of the alert force. Although this force was a fairly small one when spread over the enemy target system, it did give SAC early retaliatory capability. With additional warning the alert force was immediately augmented. For example, during the Lebanon Crisis (July 1958) SAC had over 400 bombers and crews poised for launch under positive control and an additional 800 to back up that force. In order to generate target bound bombers as fast as possible, the "Leap Frog" method of using tankers would be used. If the United States were attacked, alert tankers from various northern ZI bases,

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8. Briefing of SAC Operations Order 50-58, 1 July 1957, briefing slides in Missions Br, Ops Plans Div, D/Ops, Hq SAC.

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for example, Bunker Hill AFB, Indiana, Lockbourne AFB, Ohio, and Plattsburgh AFB, New York, would take off simultaneously with bombers from southern bases. The Bunker Hill and Lockbourne tankers would offload fuel in the refueling area and land at Plattsburgh for subsequent refueling. Meanwhile, tankers from Plattsburgh would have accomplished their refueling and landed at Goose AB, Labrador. This "Leap-Frog" method enabled SAC to send more bombers toward the target faster than if time was needed to deploy tankers to a forward operating base.⁹

[18] Generally, SAC would use the B-52 [] and the B-47 []

[] When the situation permitted,

[] In routing aircraft to the target []

9. Pres, Col. E. W. Holstrom, Ch, Ops Plans Div, D/Ops, "SAC Strike Plans for FY-59," at WWCC, 28 Jul-7 Aug 1958, filed in Missions Br, Ops Plans Div, D/Ops, Hq SAC.

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] ¹⁰ Use of the SAC Alert Force depended on how
the war started. [

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of To get aircraft to the target was the paramount concern of
SAC operations planners, but the problem of retrieving post-
strike aircraft, the recovery phase of the EWP, was not
disregarded. All post strike SAC aircraft [

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10. Ibid.

11. Memo for Record, Col E. W. Holstrom, Ch, Ops Plans Div, D/Ops,
"Gen Power's Comments," 4 Feb 1958, filed in OIH, Hq SAC; DF,
Col G. W. Thorpe, Acting Dir of Intell, Hq SAC, to Hist Div,
OI, "Review of SAC History," 10 Feb 1959, filed in OIH, Hq
SAC.

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* Foreign governments were not informed of SAC's JACK POT investigation.

12. Briefing, JACK POT Recovery Plan, forward dated 4 Nov 1957. This briefing has been reduced in size and placed in a notebook on file in Missions Br, Ops Plans Div, D/Ops, Hq SAC; Interview, Robert Kipp, Historian, with Maj R. T. Carrington, Missions Br, Ops Plans Div, D/Ops, Hq SAC, 17 Feb 1959.

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