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Authority WNO 96900

By SL NARA Date 2/11/97

DEF 15 Greenland - 45

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OUTGOING TELEGRAM Department of State

INDICATE: ☐ COLLECT
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Origin

ACTION: Amembassy COPENHAGEN

Info

JOINT STATE/DEFENSE MESSAGE

EXCLUSIVE FOR AMBASSADOR WHITE AND MR. BLANKENSHIP

SUBJECT: Thule BMEWS Site

1. Further to your recent conversation in Copenhagen with Dr. Walske and Gen. Glasser, during which you posed several questions concerning our BMEWS site at Thule, the following is provided for your background information only.

a. Although there are three BMEWS sites, one each located in Alaska, Greenland and England, Thule's central location provides primary coverage of the most logical approach route for Soviet ICBMs and covers a gap which exists between the other two sites except at relatively high altitude and extreme range.

b. The over-the-horizon radar system (OTH) which is currently in limited operation, has a missile-launch detection but not a missile tracking capability. As such, it supplements, but does not ~~fully~~ fully replace BMEWS. The combination of the OTH radar and BMEWS increases the reliability of ballistic-missile attack warning.

Prepared by: ATSD(AE) Capt. McMullen

Tel. No.

Telegraphic transmission and classification approved by:

EUR/SCAN - Mr. McKillop

Air Force - MGen Glasser
JCS - Adm. McClendon
DDRSE - Mr. Sargent
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EUR/SCAN - Mr. Tucker
DOD/ISA - Gen. Wheelock
DOD/SA - Dr. Selin

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Page 2 of telegram to

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c. We will require the Thule site until we can consider replacement with more advanced systems now under development. Two of the more promising developments are a satellite system capable of missile launch detection, which could be ~~operationally~~ operational by mid-1972, and the SENTINEL system (ABM) perimeter acquisition radars, all of which should be in operation by early 1974.

2. Even if the satellite and the ABM radar systems fulfill their design objectives under actual operational conditions, each system will still have inherent limitations. Specifically, the satellite system could be vulnerable to countermeasures and, except for an Alaskan site, the ABM radar will suffer a geographical disadvantage compared with the more northern location of Thule. These factors would have to be seriously ~~might~~ weighed in any decision to phase out the Thule BMEWS in favor of new capabilities.

3. In view of the foregoing, the issues involving nuclear storage and overflights of Greenland must not be permitted to overshadow our need for the Thule BMEWS site. While it is possible to confirm this need until the early 1970's, it may extend well beyond this time.

4. Accordingly, it is our firm policy to support our requirement for the BMEWS site at Thule, not only for the immediate future, but, in fact, until such time in the indefinite future that proven BMEWS replacement systems are deployed.

KATZENBACH

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