

GENERAL : MAS D. WHITE
CHIEF OF STAFF, U S A F

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DATE 30 Mar 59

MEMORANDUM TO: General White

Here is a copy of Admiral Burke's letter referred to by Colonel Jennison in his briefing at Vandenberg. He does not have a document from which we can quote the Navy's criticizing the Air Force ~~for~~ its planned inhuman and indiscriminate bombing of cities and populations. I have asked the Secretary's office of Research and Analysis to come up with such a quote if possible from the Ops 23 work in the B-36 controversy of 1949.

GSB

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DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.
30 July 1958

CNO PERSONAL LETTER NO. 5

TO: Retired Flag Officers

SUBJECT: Pertinent Information

SUMMARY OF MAJOR STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE 1960-70 ERA

The loss of the U. S. monopoly on high yield nuclear weapons, coupled with Russian advance in long-range delivery systems, has created a new situation in which the classical goals and concepts of military power require modification.

Military superiority in unlimited war no longer connotes ability to "win" -- nobody wins a suicide pact. Thus all-out war is obsolete as an instrument of national policy.

Nevertheless, such a war can occur, either through an irrational act, or through rational miscalculation. This possibility preempts the first consideration of all who are concerned with the survival of free societies.

The 'solution' that has received most widespread attention is that of disarmament. In the past, general disarmament has never promised the world anything better than an unstable power vacuum. From the apparent Soviet eagerness to embrace it, disarmament now seems to represent World Communism's chosen quickest route to its standing objective, world domination.

The West has urgent need to discover a less-illusory solution, which accepts the facts of Soviet capability and hostile intent, yet leads to a mutual deterrence of all-out war sufficiently stable to survive occasional periods of tension. Such a solution must involve a posture of strength, if we are to concede no political objectives. Yet common sense requires that it not commit us to a never-ending arms race. Is it possible, consistent with this requirement, to stabilize and strengthen nuclear deterrence against the possibility of Soviet miscalculation by unilateral action on our part? If so, what should that action be?

To answer these questions we must analyze some of the dangers and weaknesses of our present position. The salient features of our current strategic retaliatory forces are (1) their substantial size, (2) their vulnerability.

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There are good historical reasons for both features. In the pre-ICBM era it made some sense to provide ourselves with generous forces (additional to the modest forces needed to deter all-out attack by threatening major Soviet cities) specifically for disarming our opponent, or for 'blunting' his attack, by striking at his known airfields. Also, while we held an atomic monopoly we had no cause for concern about our own vulnerability.

But the coming advent of Russian nuclear-warhead ICBM's, sited in locations we can only guess at, will render the U. S. 'blunting' or disarming mission impossible and hence meaningless. Unfortunately this does not work both ways, since we cannot keep secret the locations of our strategic manned bomber bases and first-generation ICBM sites. The vulnerability of these makes it entirely feasible for the Russians to plan a surprise 'blunting' or disarming mission against us.

As a result we shall soon find ourselves in the new uncomfortable position of relying largely on the size of our striking forces to offset their vulnerability.

Such a state of affairs is obviously a prescription for an arms race, and also an invitation to the enemy for preventive-war adventurism. For how can we be sure that his calculation of our residual strength after his attack will agree with ours well enough to deter him? The possibility of all-out war through miscalculation is all too evident.

The trouble here is rooted in the vulnerability of our deterrent forces to surprise attack. A first order of business, therefore, is to provide ourselves with striking power as nearly secure against surprise as possible. When this has been done, the invitation to preventive war will be withdrawn. The need will vanish for huge U. S. strategic forces, either to offset vulnerability or to disarm the opponent (shown above to be a largely futile objective in the coming era).

As perhaps the most important pay-off from making our future strategic forces proof against surprise attack, we shall also gain time to think in periods of tension. The commander of a vulnerable retaliatory system has only minutes from the first radar indication of a possible missile attack to the time when all his installations may be obliterated. The indication may be false -- but every minute he delays in trying to evaluate it increases the chance that he may never be able to fire. But if our retaliatory forces are invulnerable, retaliation will lose this night-marish semi-automatic, 'hair-trigger' quality. The constant pressure to strike first in order to avoid being disarmed, the most dangerous feature of vulnerable striking systems, will be eliminated.

The flexibility of our retaliatory strategy will also be improved, in that we can elect to retaliate gradually instead of instantly. We can then apply political coercion, if we like, to gain national objectives more advantageous than simple revenge.

Moreover, as increasing numbers of nations come into possession of nuclear weapons, the ability to withhold retaliation until we are sure of the identity of our opponent will, in the possible event of anonymous attack, reduce the chance of mistaken retaliation. Such a chance will always exist if we must retaliate 'instantly', or else risk not being able to retaliate at all.

Security of our strategic forces against surprise attack is for all these reasons a necessary objective; but we must be careful in the way we go about seeking it. There are two ways, one of which can do as much harm as good.

The "fortress concept" of invulnerability to a pre-supposed level of attack involves 'hardening' and active defense of fixed installations; that is to say, burying them in concrete deep under ground, and surrounding them with anti-missile batteries, both at tremendous expense. This concept merely promotes an arms race. It challenges the enemy in an area (endless mass-production of higher-yield, more-accurate missiles) where he is ready and able to respond impressively. Fortress-busting is always possible, since any fixed defenses, including all foreseeable anti-ICBM defenses, can be overwhelmed by numbers. Once embarked on this course, we will be committed to build installations and defenses faster than the enemy can build missiles to knock them out.

By contrast, security against surprise, when achieved through mobility and concealment, discourages an arms race. This concept challenges the enemy in an area (military intelligence) where he can clearly be frustrated, e.g., by submarine or mobile land-based missile systems. Numbers of missiles will avail the enemy nothing, if he does not know the location of his target. We in effect take an initiative which he can overcome only by maintaining hour-to-hour fine-comb surveillance of all our land areas and the vast oceans.

To the extent that we rely on the fortress concept to achieve security against surprise, we commit ourselves to an eternal, strength-sapping race in which the Soviets have a head start. But we can get off the arms-race treadmill at the start. We can decisively lessen the chance of all-out war through enemy miscalculation. We can do so by adopting for our next-generation retaliatory systems not merely the broad requirement of 'invulnerability', but through mobility and concealment.

To avoid needless the provocative over-inflation of our strategic forces, their size should be set by an objective of generous adequacy for deterrence alone (i.e., for an ability to destroy major urban areas), not by the false goal of adequacy for "winning."

When this has been done, Soviet recognition of the resulting thermonuclear stalemate can be expected to induce them to vent their aggressions only at lower levels of conflict than all-out war. As a result U. S. military capabilities for wars of limited objectives and means (in the Indo-China, Suez, or Korean pattern) will become more rather than less, essential in the age of absolute weapons — if we are to avoid being "nibbled to death." The sizeable reductions in strategic forces permitted by their security against attack, if we elect to procure secure forces of the type discussed above, should in time free funds to build up these badly-needed capabilities for deterring limited wars, and also for competing with the Soviets in other areas, such as political and economic warfare, space travel, etc., where we now offer them a less-than-maximum challenge.

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