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Notes on visit with General Curtis E. LeMay, Newport Beach, California, December 30, 1984.

A. Selected background experiences before C/S, 1947-1961

1. National Security Act of 1947

LeMay favored it but Air Force did not really get its independence. "We got three air forces (army, navy, air), instead of one," but it was a step in the right direction.

2. Commander, SAC, 1948-57

LeMay recalled that he entered ROTC at Ohio State and got appointment to National Guard flying school in 1930s. He later trained with 35 pilots with 3 B-17s and no materiel. The bombardiers never dropped a bomb in their lives, never flew over the ocean. The gunners never fired a gun. The crews never flew formation until they arrived in England. Terrible weather. Three attempts at flying formations and "we went to war." He was determined to prevent any American from doing anything like that again. He wanted readiness for war (materiel and training). Combat ready crews were needed.

When he took over SAC, it had not a single combat ready crew. He built up its combat readiness.

LeMay had little dealing with OSD in connection with overflights. He said that he cleared with nobody. ["I didn't clear anything much with anybody."] Orders came from JCS on overflights. Not many overflights were done. LeMay had suggested that Air Force, not CIA (Dulles) do the overflights. LeMay lost out to CIA. Allen Dulles came

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to seek help for overflights from me. I furnished the people and they built U-2. Pilots and mechanics were hired by CIA after being thrown out by Air Force. SAC did some intelligence work for CIA. (Later, at the time of the Cuban missile crisis, SAC rather than CIA did the overflights.) SAC did reconnaissance around outskirts of Russian borders--not often violated Russian air space.

The Administration became worried about buildup in Vladivostok. President Eisenhower authorized overflight--a one-shot affair. LeMay ran every reconnaissance plane he had over Vladivostok. American planes criss-crossed it, took pictures of military buildup, and reported seeing Russian fighters. Russian fighters were sent up but there were no interceptions. The overflight was "well planned and well executed."

First war plan as SAC he got was his own.

He started public relations campaign for support of SAC. He enlisted the help of US Steel, oil executives, etc., to support SAC build-up.

3. Massive Retaliation

He had no discussion as V/C about massive retaliation with Eisenhower or Dulles. There is a misconception. No atomic massive retaliation was meant but use whatever force would be necessary to do the job.

4. Bay of Pigs

In early 1961, LeMay as Vice Chief sat in on JCS for Gen. White, C/S. He was told by a civilian briefer that 700 men would be involved

in the landings in Cuba. Briefer said that it was none of his business to ask why only 700. LeMay was not cleared to receive information. Sometime later he was told that a special meeting of JCS was being held on Cuba at 8 a.m. and went to it. The landing had already taken place. He found out that the landing had occurred but that Dean Rusk had called off air cover. "Rusk had cut throat of everybody on beach." McNamara was supposed to come down to the meeting but his Deputy [Gilpatric] came down in his place. LeMay told him the invasion would fail—it had not knocked out the Cuban air office. LeMay later sat in at meeting at State Department where a critique of the operation was held. Gen. Cabell, Dep. Director CIA, went to see Rusk when he learned of the calling off of the air cover. Rusk told him that the decision had already been made and to see the President for any changes. Kennedy was going to a party. LeMay criticized Cabell for not going to see Kennedy but couldn't blame him. Critique at State Dept. Rusk, rest of JCS, and either Dep or Sec/Def were at the State Dept. meeting. Rusk said nobody told him how important the air cover was.

B. C/S Air Force, 1961-65

The appointment. When he became Air Force C/S, he did not really know Kennedy or McNamara. McNamara had worked for LeMay at Guam. He knew Zuckert somewhat. No conditions were asserted by him or asked of him at the time of his appointment and he received no previous briefing. He recalled meeting with Bobby Kennedy, Attorney General, at which Sec/Air Force Zuckert was present, on the Selma operation to register negro

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voters. "He wanted me to tell city fathers that we would cancel our contracts from the AF base if they didn't knuckle under to negro demands." Zuckert sat there saying nothing. Kennedy wanted base commander to tell city fathers there if they didn't let negroes register, the town would be off limits to base personnel. No money would be spent there, etc. The base commander was to call for registration of negroes or the base would be closed. LaMay wanted a written order first. The base stayed.

Relations with OSD - Sec/Def McNamara was not interested in military views. He would sometimes come down to a meeting with JCS. He did not really consult with JCS. Gen. Taylor was the contact man with the White House and was not close with JCS.

IFI - movement came from Air Force and Navy and the proposal was brought to McNamara. "We needed a new airplane and this was an effort to get one that all services could agree on." Air Force evaluated the contractors--Boeing won over Consolidated (General Dynamics) in Air Force view. OSD said that this a mistake and told Air Force to do it over. The Air Force made three separate evaluations and spent 600,000 manhours on this problem. But the Air Force was told to give the contract to General Dynamics. Nobody will ever convince LaMay that the Air Force was wrong. He thinks that a political decision was made to give it to Henry Crown, head of General Dynamics in Texas, and a heavy contributor to Democratic Party. It was not a sound military decision. The Navy got disgusted and said that it wouldn't buy the plane, that it was too heavy. McNamara would not give in.

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Zuckert was not a strong Air Force Secretary. He said that he made the decision to give the contract to General Dynamics. According to LeMay, everybody knew that he was lying. It was not Zuckert's decision but McNamara's. McNamara ran Defense and listened to nobody.

JCS

Nearly all of LeMay's time was spent on JCS business. LeMay tried to give the President military advice but he didn't want it. Congress wasn't getting military advice.

Reappointment

LeMay didn't get reappointed in his view because he spoke his mind. Zuckert stopped him in the hall of the Pentagon to say that he [LeMay] didn't get along well with the third floor and would not be reappointed. Pres. Johnson at a NATO birthday party asked LeMay if he wanted an ambassadorship. LeMay said that he didn't know about that kind of activity. He wanted LeMay to sell F-5s to countries bordering the iron curtain but LeMay said he couldn't do that.

Test Ban Treaty - The JCS agreed with it, but LeMay did not see any valid military reason for it. He said that he could see no military advantages. "All the other Joint Chiefs argued about great political gains but I disagreed."

Re Kennedy's injunction to JCS to give advice transcending purely military considerations, LeMay thought it proper advice. He welcomed guidance from the President. He felt that Kennedy thought that military people were stupid.

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Departure of Gen. Fred Smith, Vice Chief of Air Force. LeMay had no strong opinion about the Vice Chief position. Zuckert had recommended Smith, and LeMay accepted him. LeMay was not happy with him, and Gen. Smith was not happy with the position. Another job came up and Smith left for it.

Strategic Planning. There was no strategy except that made by President Johnson and Mr. McNamara. They dictated the targets in Vietnam. In connection with flexible response, LeMay believed in using whatever was necessary to get the job done. That would be about four times as much force as Gen. Taylor would use. Taylor in Vietnam meant just hold off N. Vietnam until it came to its senses. LeMay never saw the point of renouncing the use of nuclear weapons. He never saw a situation in Korea or Vietnam where nuclear weapons were needed or desirable and never recommended them.

None of the military had any influence over strategy in the McNamara period. The military were never asked about such matters. The Whiz Kids in the Pentagon thought that they had all the answers to run the country.

RAND. LeMay had raised the proposal in 1946 in R&D about putting up a satellite but the country had no boosters. The Air Force wanted R&D work. Gen. Arnold started RAND for that purpose. LeMay implemented setting it up after the war. LeMay wrote the charter. Air Force got its money's worth out of RAND, he thinks. RAND investigated sex life of a polyp. As Vice Chief, LeMay found RAND doing research on it and objected. There were pluses and minuses about RAND for the Air Force.

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NATO. LeMay stated that he "started NATO." As Air Commander in Europe in 1948, he rounded up supplies from all over Europe and shipped them to France and Belgium with men in civilian clothes or uniforms. He informed Gen. Clay about what he had done. He also told Lovett of the need for a more formal defense. Two years later NATO was born.

Cuban Missile Crisis - Oct 1962

Overflights over Cuba were given to SAC. SAC found the Soviet missiles and the information was given to LeMay. He believed that invasion was the only answer. He had thought that the Monroe Doctrine should have been invoked when Castro took over. He thought action during the missile crisis had to be taken right away. Information was leaking out. He was sitting in his office one morning when he saw a wire from Khrushchev that had come to his desk by mistake. "We could have gotten Communists as well as missiles out of Cuba," in LeMay's view. He recalled only one meeting with Kennedy during the crisis. He was not asked for advice or opinions on the crisis except "Can you destroy all the missiles in Cuba?" He said that he didn't know if all could be found. "I said that I can't guarantee that--I don't know."

He did not think that this crisis was better handled than Bay of Pigs. He felt that the problem should have been solved and that Kennedy

US had absolute strategic superiority and Russians knew it.

LeMay ordered the Air Force to get ready for invasion of Cuba or whatever was necessary.

OSD
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Southeast Asia.

In connection with the struggle in Indochina, he believed in the domino theory. The US was following the Truman Doctrine. The Air Force helped with Jungle Jim operations.

We didn't know whether we were in a war or out. LeMay believes that the war in Vietnam could have been won in ten days to two weeks with the proper application of naval and air power. He thinks that the United States lost the war. It was a failure of national policy and will. We were at war but there was no military policy in Vietnam in his view. He pointed out that the administration had unilaterally made decision to disarm in cutting the Defense budget.

OSD Organization and Management

Changes are needed. He is all for civilian control but how much civilian control is needed? Plumbers are making the decisions. The first duty is to provide for national security. Soldiers ought to be in the decision-making process but are not in it. In LeMay's day they were not in it. President and Congress were not getting military advice.

McNamara, McElroy, and Wilson--none of these Secs/Def knew about leading men.

Gates would have done the best job had he stayed as Sec/Def.

Radford was a thief, responsible for the B-36 controversy, and was caught red-handed.

Twining was honest. LeMay did not trust Burke. LeMay, Burke, and Sharp argued about target lists. LeMay wanted to hit targets in N.

Vietnam. Burke or [Adm] Sharp may have leaked to the press that LeMay favored using atomic bomb on Hanoi.

Kennedy was a fine looking young man with a good sense of humor but LeMay wouldn't trust him with a dime.

President Johnson was a puzzle. It was common knowledge in Washington that Vice President Johnson would be dropped. LeMay's relations with him were "pretty good."

Major achievements as Air Force C/S

He regarded himself a complete failure as C/S. Nothing was done. Air Force went down hill. He attributed the blame to McNamara and the White House.