

~~TOP SECRET SENSITIVE~~

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THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

1 2 NOV 1985

MEMORANDUM FOR THE COMMANDER IN CHIEF, STRATEGIC AIR COMMAND

SUBJECT: SIOP Planning (U)

(U) I am particularly appreciative of your recent quarterly report. The thoughts of the Commanders of our operating forces are absolutely essential in making judgements on the programs we need.

~~(TS)~~ You expressed concern about appreciation of the necessity for a prompt retaliatory launch in response to a major Soviet attack. I agree that the ability of our forces to execute promptly is essential to deterrence. The Soviets must believe that our response can be swift. A prompt response would improve SIOP effectiveness against certain targets and would deny the Soviets additional time to complete an attack prior to the impact of our response. The failure to launch promptly would result in the destruction of many U.S. forces; a prompt retaliation would avoid this weakening of the U.S. response.

~~(TS)~~ It is important, however, to distinguish between these advantages of a capability to launch promptly and our ability to guarantee we will be successful in launching early. We cannot, of course, make such a guarantee. Further, Presidential guidance, as expressed in NSDD-13, requires us "not to rely on launching our nuclear forces in an irrevocable manner upon warning that a Soviet missile attack has begun." Given the uncertainties sure to accompany the onset of war, it is not prudent to rely absolutely -- without any back-up -- upon perfect functioning of our warning, command and control, and communications, and it is not our policy to do so. Our nuclear planning must prudently account for -- and hedge against -- the possibility that, for whatever reason, our forces may not be executed before the Soviet attack arrives. I have asked the JCS to address this issue as expeditiously as possible.

~~(TS)~~ These considerations are, of course, fully consistent with the Strategic Modernization Program and we continue to give this Program our full support. I am responsible, however, to ensure that the President has the most effective response available in any conceivable emergency.

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Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff

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