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CRITIQUE OF OPERATION ALERT 1956

For Wilson
DECLASSIFIED IN FULL

Authority: EO 13526

Chief, Records & Declass Div, WHS

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Operation Alert 1956, so far as the Office of the Secretary of Defense is concerned, has revealed many courses of action that must be considered for future tests and more importantly - for the real test if it should ever come.

Last year we operated for less than three days with a token force and amidst the crowded rock real estate of the JCS.

This year we came out with a larger force and began a full-scale operation in our own relocation center and for a period of seven days.

Administratively we were weak as follows:

1. Communications were again subject to heavy loads and unsatisfactory delivery lags.
2. Transportation schedules collapsed under adverse weather conditions.
3. Personnel arrived in reverse order of utility.
4. Operations ceased in one place prior to our having a "going" organization in a distant place.
5. We were guilty of over-organization, over-processing in several minor administrative areas.

On the other hand, we were administratively strong -- and greatly improved over last year -- on such matters as:

1. Official and personal facilities at the relocation site.
2. Available equipment in place and on hand.
3. Security provisions.
4. Pre-arrangements for quick handling of essential documentation (legislative, executive orders and the like).

All in all, a great deal of credit is due the U.S. Army and the arrangements and communications facilities they provided at the "Rock" and at Climax. Special thanks are also accorded the Office of Domestic Programs and the OSD Office of Administrative Services for the long hours and days they have spent for many months in planning and working for this event.

Substantially, we operated under wraps on strictly military matters and the strategic concept of this war game was not established

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nor fully coordinated. Additionally, that area of the exercise in which Defense was to give a large-scale aiding hand to FCDA and the American population was not capitalized on by all concerned. Largely as a result of this situation, the press engaged itself in playing up several Defense negatives -- instead of the positive Defense contribution to the disaster conditions which offered itself for constructive news coverage.

Now, what should we do?

Here are some suggestions for your consideration and approval and, if we can develop and perfect these in the future, we, at the planning level, think Operation Alert 1956 will have paid its way.

Points to Consider

In doing this, we must remember that OSD at the Pentagon is an organization that runs on letters, memoranda, phone calls, and meetings. At our Climax Relocation Center we move to rapid means of communications and action, and the cable room and the hot wire supplants the memorandum and the leisurely visit.

All of this imposes new techniques and procedures, and the 24-hour days means a dramatic revision of our methods of conducting the business of Defense.

More importantly the way an Assistant Secretary or an OSD office operates today will be entirely altered once we stand on the alert or a bomb explodes somewhere. Past experience has shown that many duties and staff concepts will be changed and many functions and activities will take on a different significance in the conduct of a war with their roles altered -- likewise many new responsibilities and ways of doing business will be acquired overnight.

These problems have not been fully thought out to date and require careful and serious consideration in our continued planning.

What is the proper role of a Defense or Service Assistant Secretary in an emergency when time is of the essence?

Does he act as a staff advisor to the Secretary or should he act for the Department in his functional field when representing it on Government-wide committees?

Does he become a claimant and an operator in specified areas both inside and outside Defense?

How closely should military and civilian activities and relationships be tied together? Eliminated?

Does the chairmanship by an Assistant Secretary of War of the Combined Civil Affairs Committee of the Combined Chiefs of Staff during World War II provide a precedent for future cooperation between civilian and military officials?

Since answers to these and similar questions will be a matter of urgency in time of war, they should be fully explored before the event.

In the administrative field, we face more concrete problems which lend themselves to more immediate improvement. At this time, I would like to discuss three of such problems, dealing first with transportation, secondly communications, and thirdly with personnel training and location.

OSD Transportation

As we mentioned, adverse weather conditions proved that our Alert transportation arrangements won't work and dictate that a more simplified and flexible plan be established.

A plan that we have started to perfect would be to have several transportation points nearby the Pentagon. Each point would be equipped with as many modes of transportation as possible -- helicopter, bus, truck and car. Each OSD office would be informed as to the point they can go for transportation. If instead they desire to utilize their own personal car this will be permitted -- provided each agrees to try to arrive at the alternate site within three hours of their office's departure time.

Our proposed travel plan assumes that an advance action cadre is already at work at the site. More will be said about this before we conclude.

Additionally the travel plan provides for

- our offices to be set up for transportation as integrated work groups and will move or arrive in that approximate order. It eliminates our past practice of transportation arrangements for individuals and by their rank and places OSD offices at the point of action on a get-to-work basis. These arrivals should also be staggered over a period of days or weeks.
- elimination of fixed wing aircraft travel and the inefficient complications this form of transportation poses for both departure and arrival at this particular relocation center.

The plan under consideration will make fixed wing aircraft travel available to others that can use it, places dependence on no weather bound type of conveyance and gathers office work groups together for travel rather than assembling individuals by rank, only to be unable to get about their business at their sites until others arrive at later times and by devious routes.

Additionally, when personnel arrive at the Relocation Center, we will plan that they should no longer be routed to a stand-in-line processing center. They would have had their identification badges assigned in advance along with the assignment of their building and desk numbers.

Upon arrival here they would go direct to their desks and at that point receive further information about billets, food, etc.

Communications - 1956

As for communications, we started the exercise without adequate organization and procedures for handling the flood of messages sent and received during the first days of the emergency. We did not properly screen messages for OSD and there were many delays in transmitting essential priority messages to OSD action officials. Our duty officer system was decentralized and not designed to give economic use of our people or to follow the straight line system of staff work.

OSD did not participate in the "screening-out" of OSD messages, and as a result others dumped everything at our doorstep and we in turn dumped unneeded messages into every OSD office. Additionally, inadequate procedures existed for assigning action responsibility. Only a slow courier service was available for transmitting messages from the "Rock" to the Relocation Site. Under these cumbersome procedures, urgent action messages took on the average of two hours for transmittal and, due to reproduction delays, eight to ten hours for information copies and routine messages.

From this unworkable situation, we took emergency action to remedy existing defects to the maximum extent possible during this exercise.

We installed three teleprinters to provide direct electrical transmission between the "Rock" and the Relocation Site thereby reducing transmittal time for important messages from thirty to three minutes. Within the OSD site, distribution procedures were substantially improved by enlarging and reorganizing the OSD message center. Action officials were identified. Duplicating responsibilities were eliminated. Delivery speeded up.

However, these emergency actions provided only emergency solutions. More permanent solutions are needed.

Alert Communications - For the Future

Our experience suggests that the following steps would greatly assist in preventing future recurrence of recent and current difficulties.

In the first place, OSD should join Army, Navy, Air Force, and JCS components in the handling of messages in the Joint Staff Communications at the underground site. This control responsibility should be assigned to the Secretary of Defense's Administrative Secretary, who would set up "action officers" to handle the screening of messages, assignment of action, maintenance of a log, and a follow-up system.

Messages acted upon by the "action officer" would be processed at the OSD Staff Message Branch, which would also receive directly

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messages from High Point, the Bomb Damage Assessment Center and the FODA. It reproduces the necessary required number of copies, and assures rapid distribution.

These action officers would be designated from the offices of Assistant Secretaries and would be men who can act on their own and who have a good knowledge of OSD activities. We would think that it will take about ten in number to cover the shifts and to cover both the OSD message control at the "Rock" and the branch operation here at Climax.

These men could be assigned from office divisions or functions not having an immediate relocation designation and by their transfer to the Administrative Secretary they would greatly facilitate the proper functioning of all OSD offices under alert and relocation conditions.

During duty hours, this flow of messages would go directly to the action and information offices --- with an automatic copy to the Situation Room.

The Executive Duty Officer

During off-duty hours, action messages would go directly to an Executive Duty Officer situated in the OSD night Command Post. This duty officer would initiate whatever actions are necessary.

The establishment of this position would eliminate the waste in manpower inherent in the 24-hour duty shifts established in most major branches of OSD for these exercises. Acting for the entire OSD organization at the Relocation Site, the Executive Duty Officer must be a man of judgment and experience, and it would probably be best if he were chosen from a roster of Deputy Assistant Secretaries and principal Office Directors. Staff Duty Officers would be on-call in the quarters prepared for them in the office of their respective organizations.

The Executive Duty Officer would carefully watch the overall situation as it develops during off-hours; look over the more important messages; handle important visitors, night telephone calls to the Secretary of Defense and Deputy Secretary of Defense, and the courier service; see to it that actions are not delayed; maintain contact with the Situation Room; and summarize the major events for the Secretary on his return.

OSD Message Control, Night Command Post and Situation Room

To give best effect to all of this, we need to locate the Secretary's Administrative Secretary, his branch message control activity, the Night Executive Duty Officer, and the OSD Situation Room in a proper floor plan arrangement.

This diagram shows a way to do this, and we have the space for these operations nearby the Deputy Secretary's office. The proposed location lends itself to expansion should that day come.

During the day the activities would function in normal relationships with each of the OSD offices and in the evening this area would become the OSD Night Command Post under the general supervision of the Executive Duty Officer with all facilities nearby to carry out these important functions in easy and accessible sequence.

Alert Cadre

A third area requiring improved organization -- in addition to transportation and communications -- is the time factor involved in starting operations at the relocation site after an alert. Only adequate preparations will assure that an office of the size of OSD can move without serious interruptions in operations.

To facilitate the OSD move, we should establish an Alert Cadre composed of personnel, selected especially for manning the most essential emergency posts at the relocation site.

This group should include the "action officers" for the message control functions, one or two key staff officers from the OSD offices most directly involved in an emergency, and an advanced staff message control component.

This group should visit the relocation site periodically for one or two-day periods, inspect equipment and facilities, undertake minor drills, and by these means assure their ability to carry out their vital functions effectively whenever called upon.

In the event of a serious deterioration in international relations, this group would be moved as a precautionary measure and remain at the relocation site until the world situation improves. Similarly, they should be moved into position in advance of another Alert exercise.

This type of organization would reduce the relocation interruption to a minimum and improve the overall efficiency of OSD emergency operations, and would eliminate the impossibility of stopping a big operation in one place and starting it some hours later in another place. It can't be done this way without serious penalty when it counts.

Future Considerations

Only by taking fullest advantage in the months ahead of the lessons learned will we justify the time, effort, and cost that has been devoted to Operation Alert 1956. This self-examination and analysis will be the responsibility of every agency in OSD, but especially of the Emergency Planning Committee and its task forces.

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The EPC will have to examine whether greater benefits can be derived from a surprise war game as contrasted to the carefully-planned exercise of the last few days. It will most probably challenge the concept of a six to seven-day operation, calling for some kind of proof to justify the effort and the cost of an exercise lasting more than three or four days. //

In line with the major long-range problems encountered, the EPC will establish two new task forces - one, to look at the basic questions raised by the OSD relocation, and, the other, to examine OSD wartime organization.

The OSD Relocation Task Force will have to devise ways and means to remove the processing bottleneck that created major delays at the start of the operation.

It should also examine whether or not the present site has by now proved its suitability for OSD operations sufficiently to justify making it a permanent, rather than an interim, relocation site --- in other words, the official OSD Command Headquarters. |

In addition, this Task Force should make a thorough study of the advantages and disadvantages to be derived from having support and maintenance services provided by civilians rather than combat troops. A civilian solution in this matter might point the way to other agencies that are leaning toward the use of combat troops for the management of their relocation sites. |

The OSD Wartime Organization Task Force will have to deal with the most difficult problem of what current OSD and Service Secretary activities are essential in the first days of the war effort and what new responsibilities are created by such an emergency.

War will inevitably bring some changes in OSD and Service Secretaries' functions, and it is in line with these changes that the OSD and Service Command Headquarters should be staffed. Unnecessary personnel at the relocation site creates confusion and interferes with operations. The present exercise has given all OSD organizations additional background in evaluating their role in an emergency, and more realistic plans can now be developed in the light of the experience gained.

Additionally and importantly we at OSD should consider ways and means of immediately returning professional combat officers assigned to us to the military services and replace them with members from the OSD Executive Reserve (civilians from throughout the country) and the OSD Joint Reserve Unit (military reserves from Washington area and made up of men and women not in Pentagon jobs).

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These two complementary reserve groups are now in process of organization and later training. We might well make their utilization a part of the next exercise. Under certain conditions members of the Executive Reserve might well get to this site ahead of those from the Washington zone. Members of both groups might well also serve on our action cadre.

As stated earlier, Operation Alert 1956 will have paid its way if we can capitalize on the lessons learned.

This, of course, is based on the fact that we all -- from Mr. Wilson on down -- agree and assume that:

- we live in a time of atomic danger to this Nation of ours, and that
- there is a necessity for a major organization like OSD and its military counterparts not to place all of its organizational eggs in a single Pentagon basket.

This further assumes that, in order for a relocation site to be effective, it must be tested, and that an organization that has national responsibilities must also be willing to test itself as well as its plans on convenient and appropriate occasions.

We, in the Department of Defense, make more people plan and train than any other organization in existence and, as I have heard the President say in the past, those who make others plan and train might well plan and train themselves once in a while.

In any event, let's never carry out another of these exercises during the frantic last days of an active Congress. ||

OSD Relocation Center
24 July 1956

Office of the Secretary of Defense
Chief, RDD, ESD, WHS

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