

HEADQUARTERS STRATEGIC AIR COMMAND
Office of the Commander in Chief
Offutt Air Force Base
Nebraska

9 November 1957

MEMORANDUM TO: Each Member of the SAC Alert Force

As a member of SAC's Alert Force, you are contributing to an operation which is of the utmost importance to the security and welfare of this nation and its allies in the free world. The purpose of this memorandum is to discuss with you some aspects of this operation and the importance of your part in it. For you must fully understand the reasons for the establishment of the Alert Force in order to believe in what you are doing and, consequently, do it with all your heart and to the best of your ability.

When SAC was organized, less than twelve years ago, its long-range bombers and stores of atom bombs were unmatched throughout the world and, therefore, represented an effective deterrent to aggression. Initiation of hostile action against this country would have been the signal to launch SAC's strike forces for the counterattack within a few days, and little could have prevented these forces from inflicting unacceptable damage upon any aggressor.

But while SAC's basic mission has not changed, there have been radical changes in the factors which affect the manner in which we must accomplish that mission. We no longer have a monopoly in nuclear weapons and long-range bombers. Many of the rapid advances in military technology which are reflected in our weapon systems are also utilized by the Soviets, permitting them to attack us with greater speed, firepower, and accuracy. Our own strike forces are no longer immune to destruction before they can be launched, and continuous improvements in the Soviet's aerial defenses make successful counterattacks more difficult.

None of these problems is insurmountable but we must devote a great deal of effort and talent toward their solution. I am confident that we can cope with them because SAC is not based on any particular weapon system but on an organization of experienced men like you, flexible enough to be readily adaptable to any new weapon system or technique, no matter how revolutionary. This applies, in particular, to the problems posed by the limitations of warning time.

As most of you know, we deal with two types of warning--"Strategic Warning" and "Tactical Warning." Strategic Warning is defined as that kind of long-range warning which gives the field commander enough time to move into fighting position and configuration. Tactical Warning means there is so little advance warning of an impending attack that the commander must fight from his present position and configuration.

We received a form of strategic warning of communist aggression as early as 1848 when Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published the "Communist Manifesto." Ever since, all the top men of the communist hierarchy--from Lenin and Stalin to Khrushchev--have made it clear that the ultimate goal of communism is the liquidation of the capitalist countries and, primarily, of the United States.

As for the Tactical Warning, we can expect the Soviets to use the oldest and most successful military stratagem--surprise, because they surely would want to exploit our weaknesses, not our strengths. Therefore, we cannot count on any warning of overt hostile action against this country until after such action has been initiated. This would give us only a few hours to launch SAC's strike forces for the counterattack. And, once ballistic missiles become operational, the tactical warning period would shrink further to a mere fraction of an hour.

It stands to reason that the brunt of the initial attack would be directed against SAC because the Soviets know only too well that the price they would have to pay for aggression would be unacceptable to them unless they succeed in preventing SAC's strike forces from being launched. We can gain a certain degree of protection against overt and covert actions, designed to immobilize our forces, by appropriate means to deal with sabotage attempts, by a limited amount of base hardening, by dispersal, and by similar defensive measures. However, the only way of insuring the survival of some of SAC's combat capability, even in case of the most unexpected and massive attack, is our Alert Force.

As long as the Soviets know that, no matter what means they may employ to stop it, a sizeable percentage of SAC's strike force will be in the air for the counterattack within minutes after they have initiated aggression, they will think twice before undertaking such aggression. For this reason, it is my considered opinion that a combat-ready Alert Force of adequate size is the very backbone of our deterrent posture.

To achieve our goal of maintaining as much as one-third of our strike forces on continuous alert will not be easy, but it can and must be done. I realize that this will entail personal inconvenience and sacrifices to you and your families. But you can be sure that I will do everything possible to ease this aspect of your alert duties. The success of this system depends on you, and I count on you to insure that the Alert Force will always be ready to achieve its vital objectives.

/s/ THOMAS S. POWER
General, USAF
Commander in Chief