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STUDY S-467

THE EVOLUTION OF U.S. STRATEGIC
COMMAND AND CONTROL AND WARNING,
1945-1972 (U)

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June 1975

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Per Director DARP (S&IO)
15 Sep 1992

The work reported in this document was conducted under Contract DAHC15 73C 0200 for the Department of Defense. The publication of this IDA Study does not indicate endorsement by the Department of Defense, nor should the contents be construed as reflecting the official position of that agency.



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Contract DAHC15 73C 0200
Task T-111

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Committee to the AEC (of which Oppenheimer was a member) on 6 April 1949. Truman said he had received the day before a letter from Senator Tydings in which the Senator recommended military custody and military control of weapon production. The President told the General Advisory Committee explicitly that he had decided both of those questions and that they would stay decided that way so long as he had anything to do with it. He stated that he firmly believed in civilian control and had no reason to believe he would change his mind.¹⁰

(U) Truman's attitude on the custody issue may well have been adversely affected by the swirl of interservice controversy that marked the first two years after the 1947 Defense reorganization legislation. A revealing episode was reported to Lilienthal by Director of the Budget James Webb. On 25 May 1948, Webb had attended a White House meeting with the President, Forrestal, and the Joint Chiefs. The President had previously given instructions that Forrestal apparently had been unable to enforce on the Chiefs and so Truman had called them in and given each Chief written instructions containing a reprimand. Webb found the situation very disturbing and said to Lilienthal, "with that kind of situation, the idea of turning over custody of atomic bombs to these competing, jealous, insubordinate Services, fighting for position with each other, is a terrible prospect."¹¹

B. LATER DEVELOPMENTS: OVERSEAS DEPLOYMENT OF ATOMIC WEAPONS AND THE DIVISION OF CUSTODY

(v) (s) In these years, all atomic weapons were of the capsule ball type in which the nuclear component was separate from the nonnuclear component and mating was necessary before use. This technological feature actually was the key to the ultimate resolution of the custody issue, in that it permitted the problem to be divided and to be resolved on a more gradual basis.

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(U) (S) The following tabulation illustrates the slow growth of custody-sharing in terms of nuclear weapons in possession of the AEC and the DoD:

	<u>AEC</u>	<u>DoD</u> ^{2 3}
1947	13	0
1948	56	0
1949	169	0
1950	298	0
1951	429	9
1952	823	9
1953	1,152	9
1954	1,463	167
1955	1,499	781
1956	2,262	1,358
1957	3,578	2,250
1958	3,385	4,017
1959	3,968	8,337

(U) (C) Despite the advances made in the custody situation in regard to overseas deployments, there still remained problems in regard to the main AEC stockpile within the United States. In March 1953, the Secretary of the NSC, Robert Cutler, forwarded to Secretary of Defense Wilson the AEC's "Plan for Action by the AEC for Emergency Transfer of Atomic Weapons to the Department of Defense." Cutler reported discussing the plan and the transmittal letter from the Chairman of the AEC with the President. Cutler was clearly concerned over what seemed an AEC optimism about the responsiveness of the transfer system:

I have been informed that the AEC advises that it takes twelve minutes from the time the President acts until the order to transfer arrives at the storage plant and that the mechanics of the plant are regularly tested. I assume the President would like to have the opinion of the Department of Defense as to whether in an emergency this plan would successfully operate or whether some other plan or modification of this plan would be better.^{2 4}

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(U) (S) Until the spring of 1950, both nuclear and nonnuclear components remained under AEC custody, except for short periods of maneuvers or training. By this time, however, there was no longer any doubt about the technical competence of the military in surveillance, inspection, and maintenance activities because the military were in fact already performing the three functions. They carried out most of these functions as a demonstration of competence at the storage sites. The AFSWP by then had 1,500 trained personnel. Consequently, in March 1950 the AEC proposed that it turn over to the DoD custody of the stockpile of nonnuclear components, and on 14 June 1950, 90 nonnuclear components of the Mark 4 bomb were transferred to the DoD for training purposes.¹²

(U) (S) At this time the question arose of overseas deployment of weapons. The first step in this direction had really occurred in July 1946 when General Spaatz had arranged with the Royal Air Force to have two airfields in Britain equipped for the storage of special weapons.¹³ After the outbreak of the Korean war, the DoD requested and received presidential authority to receive nonnuclear components from the AEC for storage at overseas bases. The deployment of medium bomber wings to overseas bases logically imposed a requirement that the largest element in the bomb, the nonnuclear component, be immediately available. By authorizing the transfer, a partial forward step had solved a most difficult logistical problem.¹⁴

(U) (S) The nonnuclear components were transferred to DoD and from there to specific services for custody. The nuclear components for them remained under AEC authority within the continental United States and were to be flown to the overseas bases when needed. By the end of July 1950, 89 sets of nonnuclear components were in place in Britain to support SAC units there, and the following month 15 sets were sent to the aircraft carrier USS *Coral Sea*. The JCS recommended this action in September for the vessel bound for the Mediterranean.

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The Air Force had concurred reluctantly in this action and expressed opposition to further storage aboard carriers unless they were placed under the control of SAC.¹⁵ However, non-nuclear components were authorized also for storage aboard the carriers USS *Franklin Delano Roosevelt* in May 1951 and the USS *Midway* in December of that year.¹⁶ Following a request by the JCS in November 1951, the President in January 1952 also authorized the storage of nonnuclear components at the SAC bases in French Morocco.¹⁷ (The French were not to be informed of the move.)

(U) (S) The first transfer of complete bombs--nine in number--was authorized by the President on 6 April 1951 under unusual circumstances. The weapons were assigned personally to General Vandenberg, who was designated the personal representative of the President for custody of the weapons, acting as executive agent of the JCS.¹⁸

(U) (S) By this time, the custody issue had become quite clouded, to the extent that the Chairman of the AEC stated at an AEC-Military Liaison Committee meeting in March 1951 that the concept of AEC custody was empty since the military were already doing so much in the custody area. He felt that the real issue remaining was the proper division of responsibility in view of existing realities.

(U) (S) The next month the AEC and Military Liaison Committee jointly proposed the transfer to DoD of nuclear components in numbers to match the nonnuclear components already under DoD custody. However, the JCS--without explanation--disapproved the proposal as untimely.¹⁹

(U) (S) In December 1951, after the Chairman of the JCS had reopened the custody issue with the Chairman of the Military Liaison Committee by recommending an effort to delineate more clearly the responsibilities of the AEC and the DoD, the JCS put forth their views to the Secretary of Defense. In a memorandum of 11 December 1951, they expressed the view that the

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current system of divided responsibility was not in the best interests of the nation, and that the Armed Services should have a sufficient number of atomic bombs in their custody to assure operational flexibility and military readiness.

(U) (S) The proposal was forwarded to the President, who in turn requested a study by the NSC's Special Committee for Atomic Energy. The study, entitled "Agreed Concepts Regarding Atomic Weapons," was approved by the President on 10 September 1952. The new guidelines provided that DoD would have custody of any stocks of atomic weapons outside the continental limits of the United States and of any such numbers of weapons within the continental United States "as might be required to assure operational flexibility and military readiness." The rest of the stockpile was to remain under the custody of the AEC.²⁰

(U) (S) The matter of overseas deployment of nuclear components was first raised by the Navy in January 1952 and led to a lengthy JCS dispute. By October 1952, the JCS agreed it was an essential step and on 8 May 1953 they recommended to the President that nuclear components be deployed along with non-nuclear sets to overseas locations where the decision to deploy rested solely with the United States. After consideration by the NSC's Special Committee for Atomic Energy, the proposal was approved by President Eisenhower on 20 June 1953. Nuclear components equal in number to the nonnuclear sets abroad would be deployed and would be transferred to the custody of the DoD. The President's approval meant that nuclear components went to Guam and to carriers, the only locations that met the prescribed restrictions and where storage facilities were available.²¹

(U) (S) Authority to deploy complete weapons to Britain and Morocco was obtained in April 1954, and storage of both nuclear and nonnuclear components was approved for West Germany two months later. Only nonnuclear components, however, were authorized for Japan.²² By mid-1954, half the authorized 183 weapons had been dispersed abroad.

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