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By JWNARA Date 11-20-02P
Y #1UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
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MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE
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T.S. CONT. #
D.I. HQ USAF

29 April 1950

General Hoyt S. Vandenberg
Chief of Staff, United States Air Force
Washington, D. C.

Dear Van:

Here are a few observations from the Commanders Conference of April 25-27, 1950, that I want to pass on to you for consideration. Some of them may be included in the stenographic notes taken at that time but others were not brought out due to lack of time for complete discussion.

A. INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE.

I think that, in general, Cabell's presentation was an excellent one and gave us a picture that we all needed. However, I am not satisfied with the figures on Russian aircraft strength or the forecast on Russian atomic bomb production. The figure of 1200 Russian type B-29s by July 1, 1952 is one that I believe can be reached sooner. If the Russians feel that they need more than 1200 by the middle of 1952, my estimate is that the number could be easily 1500 by that time. The Russian strength in the Far East, which is estimated to be approximately seven times that of the Far East Air Force, may be open to question. I don't know what the sources of information were upon which the estimate of Russian strength was based, but the figures seemed to me to be much too high and I doubt that the Russian anti-aircraft strength is anywhere near as great as would appear from the figures submitted by Picher in his Far East Air Force presentation. When a question came up at conference, Picher stated that his figures came from Washington. The estimated numbers of atomic bombs that Russia will possess in 1950, 1951, 1952 and for two or three years thereafter I am afraid are too small. It is almost certain that Russia is and has been for nearly a year operating two atomic piles. It is possible that two others either are at present in operation or may be in the near future. Even if we assume that the Russian rate of production is only half of ours per atomic pile, the figures given by Cabell are much too low. I believe that there is a possibility that by mid 1952 Russia will possess as many as 300 atomic bombs; and I believe that in our planning we must deal with possibilities. Her probable stockpile at that time may be much lower; but we can not afford to gamble on anything less than possibilities in this game. Remember that we

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underestimated Japanese air and naval strength prior to World War II and as a consequence had a much harder job on our hands than we had anticipated. If we underestimate the next time, the consequences will be far more serious.

B. PLAN "OFFTACKLE".

It was quite evident to all the conferees that Plan "Off-tackle" was decidedly unrealistic. The one conclusion that almost everyone seemed to reach was that if we waited until Russia hit us, Europe, very probably included the United Kingdom, would be lost to us. To repeat the Normandy Beach operation is something that is almost inconceivable. The problem of gaining air superiority over the beachhead two or three years after the shooting war started and after Russia had organized her defenses against such an invasion, the overcoming of the submarine menace in order to embark the huge number of troops and supplies for such a landing, and all the other complications in the face of atomic weapons or even conventional air operations, would seem to rule this type of warfare into the realm of impracticability. The holding of the line of the Elbe or the Rhine or any other river against the power that Russia can put into play does not seem to make sense. Even if between now and mid 1952 fifty Allied divisions could be armed and trained, it would be necessary to have a supporting air force of probably 5,000 fighters and 2500 light bombers to counter the air strength that Russia could use to support her ground advance. It is inconceivable to me that our European allies would operate such a force even if we gave them the equipment. They might produce a large number of pilots, but we would have to supply the mechanics, pay for the construction of landing fields, underground fuel storage, communications systems, radar warning services, and furnish a large part of the command and supervisory personnel. Even if our present air appropriations were doubled, the maintenance of a supporting air force of this size in Europe does not appear feasible.

That part of the plan which envisages the use of bases in North Africa and Middle East is also open to serious question. The logistics are far more complicated than they would be in case of operations from European bases. The aircontrol over North Africa and over the Mediterranean, to allow shipping to enter North African ports, is also difficult to visualize. Agreements with Middle East governments involve many complications, including those with the United Nations. The ink would hardly be dry on any agreement of this kind before the Russians would protest it before the Security Council just as strenuously as we would protest an agreement entered into between the Russians and Mexico, as an example. While there is no doubt but what we could land in North Africa and eventually extend our bases all the way to Suez, it would be a matter of years and by that time the decision of the war would probably have been

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reached. Unfortunately that decision might very well be one in favor of Russia instead of us.

If we credit the Russians with any real intelligence, we must visualize that they will initiate airborne operations very shortly after the outbreak of war to gain control of the situation in the Persian Gulf, the Suez area, and Tripoli.

I believe that any plan looking toward July 1, 1952 as the probable D-Day of a third World War should visualize that we will have no holdings on the other side of the Atlantic. Our primary move will be made by the Strategic Air Command against targets in Russia itself. If our air defense is good enough to prevent the Russian A-bomb attacks from knocking us out of the war and the attacks of our Strategic Air Command are powerful enough to bring Russia to terms, we will win. If not, we will either lose the war or get into a long-drawn-out contest that we certainly will not win and which will probably result in a stalemate with both sides exhausted and civilization as we now know it a thing of the past.

The value of Iceland in this picture does not seem to have been given enough attention. Our present agreement with the Icelandic government should be revised. There is no real reason why we should have the right to build, operate and garrison a field in Bermuda and not have similar rights and privileges in Iceland. If in addition to the field at Keflavik we were able to build three or four others in Iceland and give them garrisons of modest strength, we could not only hold this position but would have a base more valuable for operations against Russia than the United Kingdom. The supply line would be shorter, it is too far away from Russian V-1 and V-2 launching points, and would be much easier to defend against Russian bombing attacks than would be the case in United Kingdom. If air supply became necessary on account of the submarine menace, such an operation could be practical in the case of Iceland. It would be decidedly impracticable in the case of the United Kingdom, especially if we allowed Iceland to fall into the hands of Russia or be taken over by the fairly large Communist element now in Iceland.

C. AIR DEFENSE OF THE UNITED STATES.

Within the probable limitation of the budget as we can foresee them now, the air defense of the United States and Alaska by mid 1952 will be insufficient to effectively counter Russian bombing attacks. If the opening attack came as a surprise, it is doubtful that we would intercept any of the first wave. While I do not believe that we should detract from the strength of our long-range striking force, I do believe that the present "business as usual" rate of setting up our alert warning systems must be speeded up. Our fighters are insufficient in strength and are not properly located at the present time. After the war has started it will be too late to

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move fighters into position and organize a defensive system. Only those units which are in place and on an alert status 24 hours a day 365 days a year will be effective against the initial attack. If that initial attack is powerful enough and the majority of the enemy bombers get through to their targets, it is doubtful that the United States could survive. It is certainly probable that Russia will have gained the decisive phase in such an event, even though we elected to keep on fighting a sort of hopeless guerrilla warfare until the people of this country decided that further military effort was useless.

If we are to have a defense system of any real efficiency by mid 1952, some more money will have to be pumped into the program and the whole process speeded up.

D. ALASKAN AIR COMMAND PRESENTATION.

I thoroughly agree with the recommendation that a bombardment group be added to the Alaskan Air Command in addition to the fighter strength of two groups recommended. If our bases in Alaska are to be held, two fighter groups is the minimum required. Over in northeastern Siberia, Russia possesses several airdromes that we don't know too much about. It is quite conceivable, however, that during the summertime several of these airdromes could be used as B-29 take-off points. We suspect that they are already well stocked with fuel for topping off purposes. One bombardment group based in the Fairbanks area and escorted by fighters from Nome should be dispatched on the outbreak of hostilities to burn up these gasoline supplies and pit the runways so that the Russians could not use them for take-off points. By the use of Napalm and a few heavy demolition type TNT bombs, this should not be too hard a job. If the Russian B-29s happen to be on the airdromes at the time of the attack, all the better; but even if the airdromes were empty, the damage would take a long time to repair and the replacement of the gasoline stocks would be a matter of months. Such an operation might give us the respite that we would need to prevent our being knocked out of the war by an initial attack.

While this subject dealt only with the air defense of the United States and Alaska, it did not seem to me that sufficient provision was made for defense of our Strategic Air Command take-off points in the event of war. While I know that such arrangements are going to be difficult, nevertheless we can not afford to leave the airdromes in Labrador and Newfoundland unprotected. Our bombers there will be exceedingly vulnerable while refueling and arming. One atomic bomb at Goose Bay would make a tremendous difference in the success of our intercontinental bombing operations. If we plan on operations from United Kingdom bases, they too will have to have fighter protection. This protection will not be given by the Royal

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Air Force; they will be too busy trying to defend London to pay any attention to our Strategic Air Command bases.

E. STRATEGIC AIR COMMAND PRESENTATION.

The only remarks I have on this subject are concerned with protection against sabotage of our bases at the time of or just prior to the outbreak of hostilities. I believe that this constitutes a real danger that we are not paying enough attention to. The airplanes themselves and our fuel supplies are vulnerable to operations of this type unless far greater precautions are taken than at present. The key personnel of Strategic Air Command themselves are vulnerable. In this connection, as recently as last January leaders of the Communist Party in this country boasted that in the event of war between the United States and Russia our bombers would not take the air nor would they find a place to land. Foster has already publicly stated that in time of war the Communist Party in this country would support Russia. I do not believe that these threats are idle ones, and I would like to see our restrictions, particularly on Strategic Air Command bases, tightened up. At the present time it is fairly easy for almost anyone to visit any of our bases, and we know that we have a certain number of Communists or Communist sympathizers already in uniform in the Air Force.

F. AIR FORCE PERSONNEL SITUATION.

While our current and projected personnel situation was presented to the conferees, there are certain aspects of this problem which were not discussed but which I feel call for immediate remedial action. I mentioned to you at that time one factor dealing with the rendering of efficiency reports which I believe is seriously affecting morale. This is the fact that in many cases officers, by virtue of temporary rank, are reporting on the efficiency and value to the service of other officers who are senior to them on the regular promotion list. In principle this is wrong, as it offers an incentive to the reporting officer to better his own prospects for promotion by knocking down the record of the officer senior to him on the regular list. While it is not a pleasant thing to accuse any Air Force officer of such practices, we must realize that human nature is not always infallible. I strongly urge that in all such cases you insist that efficiency reports be rendered by officers senior on the regular promotion list to those they are rating.

Throughout the service there has grown up the belief, particularly among junior officers, that when promotion boards meet the names of those eligible for consideration are divided into two categories; (1) Officers who have never been reprimanded, have nothing derogatory on their records, and whose efficiency throughout their careers is a straight record of excellent or superior; (2) Officers who have something derogatory on their records or have at least one efficiency report below excellent.

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According to this belief or rumor, the promotion boards then consider only those officers in category (1) in filling vacancies for promotion purposes. While I can not believe that these rumors are true, I feel that you could with benefit issue instructions for everyone to read, setting forth the ground rules that boards are to follow. Among other things these rules should specify that all promotion board members will be required to certify that they have personally examined the complete records of all officers eligible for consideration at the time, and that the present record of officers will be given more weight than any instance of minor derelictions dating several years back at the beginning of the subject officer's career.

Quite often we find that the aggressive, leader type of young officer gets in trouble with a superior who believes that pattern behavior is a primary military virtue. Napoleon once said that he never promoted anyone who did not have at least a touch of insubordination. I believe that we must take all precautions to keep the alert, aggressive, independent-thinking, leader type of officer under control and at the same time guide him up the promotion ladder. If our system tends to eliminate this type of young officer, there is something wrong with it. When the cold war gets hot, we will need a lot of them.

G.

I believe that we have got to do something about the conception that we must wait until Russia hits us before we can start shooting. I realize that this is a matter beyond your control, but perhaps something can be done about educating the public or at least preventing them from becoming too apathetic about the situation, which in the final analysis is a question of survival. If we ignore the warnings of Lenin and Stalin and the public statements continually made by Communists all over the world and allow a new and far greater Pearl Harbor to overtake us, there is a good probability that we will lose the hot war as well as the cold war. I believe that something can be done to bring it home to the people of this country and to their representatives in Congress that we are now actually at war. By all previous definitions, we are now in a state of war with Russia. Whether we call it a cold war or apply any other term, we are not winning. We are not seriously mobilizing to start winning or to undertake the offensive between now and mid-summer 1952. When a state of war exists, it is not necessary to tell our opponent what our next move is going to be. It seems to me that almost any analysis of the situation shows that the only way that we can be certain of winning is to take the offensive as soon as possible and hit Russia hard enough to at least prevent her from taking over Europe. If we plan and execute the operation properly, the weight of our attack in the early stages may be sufficient to compel Russia to accept our terms for a real peace.

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I am worried about the time elapsing from the day that the whistle is blown before we can launch our first atomic strike. If the enemy attack should come without warning, as we all believe it will, and that attack is repeated day after day for a week, and such a series of attacks is preceded by well planned sabotage, I seriously doubt our capability of continuing hostilities. It is quite conceivable that the people of this country would be unwilling to accept further casualties and destruction and would demand that the government ask for terms. It is going to be so difficult to shorten the time before we can start effective retaliation that this in itself constitutes another argument for reexamining our national attitude toward fighting what has been wrongly termed a preventive war. It would not be a preventive war, because we are already at war.

Sincerely,

/s/George Kenney

GEORGE C. KENNEY
General, USAF
Commanding