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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
Washington 25, D. C.

December 18, 1956

Dear Mr. Strauss:

Within the next month nuclear air defense weapons will come into the U.S. atomic stockpile. The weapons will be deployed in increasing numbers to air defense installations during 1957 and succeeding years. Initially, the capability will be in the form of a high velocity air-to-air rocket designed for use with interceptor aircraft; later, the capability will be incorporated in ground-to-air systems. As the time approaches for the actual deployment and the chances of inadvertent news leaks become more probable, it now appears appropriate to consider a public announcement of this new capability, and to determine its contents and timing.

It is now agreed within the Department that a public announcement should be made. The principal reasons in support of this conclusion are:

(a) With widespread deployment of nuclear air defense weapons in close proximity to the civil populace of the United States, public knowledge and understanding of such deployment becomes a matter of major importance. The fact that these new weapons do provide a more effective defense against enemy nuclear attack and can be safely deployed on a nation-wide scale should have a positive effect on national morale and lessen apprehension resulting from lack of knowledge and exaggerated estimates of enemy capabilities.

(b) Unofficial disclosure of the deployment of air defense weapons in American communities and uninformed speculation as to their possible effects upon such communities would seriously undermine public confidence and understanding. Lack of such public confidence and understanding could easily result in lack of public support and undue restrictions on the employment of these weapons to the detriment of national defense.

(c) The possibility of unofficial disclosure in the event that the Government did not make advance announcement is possible because:

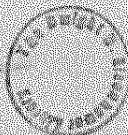
(1) The fact that the United States has been developing such weapons has been publicized in the announcements concerning nuclear weapons tests so that their incorporation in the air defense system is already anticipated. In fact, speculation about these weapons has already appeared in the press.

(2) The necessary increase in security measures at air defense installations will, in itself, increase public awareness.

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(3) A ground accident or air crash involving these weapons is always possible.

An information plan, a press release, and a series of questions and answers have been prepared. These are designed to announce the capability, and answer many of the more obvious questions that may arise. The question and answer sheets are scheduled for dissemination to air defense installations for their use in case of questions being raised at the base level.

Timeliness of the public release is of the greatest importance and expedited handling of the further processing will be required to be coincident with the introduction of the MB-1 into operational units. This expedited processing will be required on an interdepartmental level in accordance with NSC Action No. 1631 (current revision of NSC 1360). Assuming approval is received from this coordination, the matter should be presented to the President for final decision. As you will note, the press release indicates that the President has seen and approved.

Prior to the public announcement the Canadians will be consulted on the information plan and its attachments.

You will note that the proposed press release does not include your statement as yet. It was felt advisable to leave this to your discretion although it is proposed that the release be made jointly.

The attached information plan with Annexes "A" and "B" are hereby forwarded for your clearance and further coordination with the Central Intelligence Agency and the Operations Coordinating Board in accordance with NSC Action No. 1631.

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) Herbert B. Loper

Herbert B. Loper
Assistant to the Secretary
of Defense (Atomic Energy)

1 Inclosure
Information Plan with
Annexes "A" and "B"

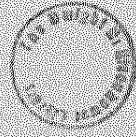
Honorable Lewis L. Strauss
Chairman,
U.S. Atomic Energy Commission

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INFORMATION PLAN

"NUCLEAR AIR DEFENSE WEAPONS"



I. PURPOSE:

To establish policies and procedures for the dissemination of information to the public concerning the deployment of nuclear weapons within the United States for air defense purposes.

II. DISCUSSION:

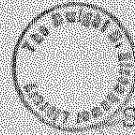
A. The first nuclear air defense weapons will be available in January 1957. These weapons will be deployed in increasing numbers to air defense installations during 1957 and succeeding years. The nuclear capability will be available first in the form of a high velocity air-to-air rocket designed for use with interceptor aircraft. Later, the capability will be incorporated in ground-to-air systems.

B. With widespread deployment of nuclear air defense weapons in close proximity to the civil populace of the United States, public knowledge and understanding of such deployment becomes a matter of major importance.

C. It is considered to be in the national interest that the public be informed in advance through official government channels of the deployment of these weapons and of such other factual information as can be provided within the limits of military security. This information should emphasize that the addition of these nuclear weapons to our air defense system greatly enhances our air defense capabilities, is essential to our air defense program, and is being done to provide maximum security for the

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American people. It should point out that elaborate safety precautions have been taken in the design of these weapons and that they can be deployed throughout the United States without danger to the civilian populace. The fact that these new weapons do provide a more effective defense against enemy nuclear attack and can be safely deployed on a nationwide scale should have a positive effect on national morale and lessen apprehension resulting from lack of knowledge and exaggerated estimates of enemy capabilities.

D. Unofficial disclosure of the deployment of air defense weapons in American communities and uninformed speculation as to their possible effects upon such communities would seriously undermine public confidence and understanding. Lack of such public confidence and understanding could easily result in lack of public support and undue restrictions on the employment of these weapons to the detriment of national defense.

E. The possibility of unofficial disclosure in the event that the government did not make advance announcement is possible because:

1. The fact that the United States has been developing such weapons has been publicized in the announcements concerning nuclear weapons tests so that their incorporation in the air defense system is already anticipated. In fact, speculation about these weapons has already appeared in the press.

2. The necessary increase in security measures at air defense installations will, in itself, increase public awareness.

3. A ground accident or air crash involving these weapons is always possible.

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III. RESPONSIBILITIES:

A. The responsibility for the preparation of public information materials on this subject rests with the Department of Defense in coordination with the Atomic Energy Commission.

B. Any information on this subject not previously made public will be checked with the Atomic Energy Commission who will coordinate with the Central Intelligence Agency and the Operations Coordinating Board. Consultations on this plan and its annexes will be made with the Government of Canada.

C. Implementation through public releases, speeches and interviews will be made by the President or officials of the DoD, AEC, and FCDA. Insofar as time permits, steps should be taken to condition the American people to the fact that they are faced with the proposition of living with atomic weapons for some time. This should be done in statements by the President or other appropriate government officials.

IV. ORGANIZATION AND PROCEDURES:

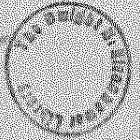
A. These procedures are designed to prepare:

1. As much information as can be made available in an initial press release when the first of the nuclear air defense weapons are deployed.

2. A mechanism for continuing public releases on this subject based on reactions and developments of public opinion in the U.S. and abroad.

B. The detailed information considered desirable for release at this time is included in Annexes "A" and "B". Annex "A" is a proposed

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initial press release. Annex "B" is a question-answer type fact sheet for use by the Department of Defense and the Atomic Energy Commission in responding to queries from the press and the public which will be forthcoming following the initial announcement.

C. Should additional facts need to be released, these would be cleared separately as prescribed in Par. III.B. above. The Department of Defense will, on a continuing basis, evaluate the public response and initiate additional releases for clearance when necessary.

D. In order to insure complete understanding by all concerned, every effort will be made to disseminate the Information Plan down to the unit level in both the Department of Defense and the Atomic Energy Commission prior to the initial announcement.

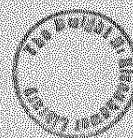
V. SECURITY OF INFORMATION:

A. Under no circumstance will classified defense information be made available to the public under this plan. Declassification of Restricted Data information will require the joint approval of the Atomic Energy Commission and the Department of Defense.

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OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
Washington 25, D. C.

7 December 1956

ANNEX "A" (INFORMATION PLAN ON NUCLEAR AIR DEFENSE WEAPONS)

PROPOSED INITIAL PRESS RELEASE

The Department of Defense shortly will begin deployment of nuclear weapons within the United States for air defense purposes, it was announced today.

The announcement was made jointly by Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson and Atomic Energy Commission Chairman Lewis L. Strauss with the approval of President Eisenhower.

"The continuous improvement of our air defense system to keep ahead of potential enemy forces is essential to our national survival," Secretary Wilson said. "Nuclear air defense weapons now have been developed which provide by far the most effective form of defense against air attack. It is essential to our national security that we incorporate these new weapons into our air defense system. This is being done."

Chairman Strauss stated that (statement to be prepared by AEG).

The first of these nuclear weapons to be introduced into our air defense system will be the MB-1, an air-to-air rocket launched from interceptor-type aircraft. The MB-1 will be available in the Air Defense Command in the immediate future. Secretary Wilson said that interceptor aircraft will carry these weapons aloft only in time of emergency.

Nuclear capability will also be incorporated into our surface-to-air defense systems, including Nike-Hercules and Talos.

Secretary Wilson pointed out that because of the altitude at which these weapons would be used in actual combat, the effect on ground population from blast, heat and radiation would be negligible.

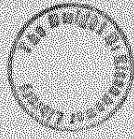
The precise schedule under which these air defense weapons systems will be deployed at individual bases or installations will not be announced for reasons of military security, nor will such installations be identified.

Secretary Wilson and Chairman Strauss emphasized that elaborate safety precautions have been taken in the design of these air defense weapons. Tests conducted by the Atomic Energy Commission confirm that the possibility of any nuclear explosion occurring as a result of an accident -- involving either impact or fire -- is virtually non-existent.

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They further stated that as stored and carried, these weapons emit no harmful radiation and present no radiation hazard to persons living near or passing by locations where they are deployed. They pointed out that military personnel work in the vicinity of nuclear weapons daily.

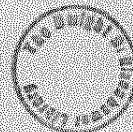
The Congress, through the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, has been informed of all phases of the development of these weapons and their planned deployment. Consultations concerning these weapons and their deployment also have been carried out with the Government of Canada.

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Washington 25, D. C.



7 December 1956

ANNEX B (INFORMATION PLAN ON NUCLEAR AIR DEFENSE WEAPONS)

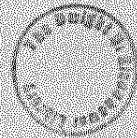
Question and Answer Fact Sheet

- I. Q - Where will these weapons be deployed?
A - Anywhere within the continental limits of the United States where required for our air defense.
- II. Q - Who has custody of the deployed weapons?
A - The Department of Defense.
- III. Q - Where will they be stored?
A - They will be stored in areas immediately adjacent to the operational units.
- IV. Q - Is the use of these nuclear weapons actually necessary over the continental U.S.
A - It is absolutely essential to our national survival that we continue to improve our air defense system to keep ahead of potential enemy offensive forces.
- V. Q - How effective are our weapons as compared with conventional explosives?
A - These weapons are more effective than comparable ones with conventional warheads.
- VI. Q - What is the yield of these weapons?
A - This information is classified.
- VII. Q - What will be the effect on ground population from blast, heat, and radiation when such weapons are actually employed in combat?
A - The altitude at which these weapons will be used will result in negligible effects to the ground population. The possibility of attack at lower altitude cannot be ignored and effective weapons are available to be used at lower altitude.

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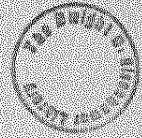


- Q - What is the fall-out hazard?
- A - Fall-out from the more likely high altitude detonations of air defense weapons would be negligible.
- IX. Q - What are the chances of an accidental explosion on the ground and what would be the effects?
- A - Elaborate precautions have been taken in the design of these air defense weapons to minimize harmful effects resulting from accidents either on the ground or in the air. Atomic weapons tests conducted by the Atomic Energy Commission have confirmed that the possibility of any nuclear explosion occurring as a result of an accident involving either impact or fire is virtually non-existent.
- X. Q - What is the description and approximate size of these weapons, and will photographs be permitted or made available?
- A - At present, the description and size of these weapons can not be released nor can photographs be released or permitted for reasons of military security.
- XI. Q - Will local officials be informed when deployed?
- A - It is not normal policy to inform the local governments that certain types of munitions are stored at Department of Defense facilities in their vicinity. The Department of Defense does not contemplate any exception to the above, especially since this information would be of great value to an attacking force.
- XII. Q - How often can a crash with these weapons aboard occur?
- A - It is impossible to predict frequency of aircraft accidents.
- XIII. Q - In the case of a crash, will these weapons explode?
- A - The possibility of a nuclear explosion is virtually non-existent.
- XIV. Q - Is there any danger from radiation to those living or passing near where these weapons are stored.
- A - These weapons as stored and carried emit no harmful radiation.
- XV. Q - What is general quantity and type of weapons now and eventually to be employed.
- A - Quantities and details as to type of weapons are not releasable for security reasons.

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Q - Would these weapons be used over urban populations?

A - Our Air Defense system is designed to intercept and destroy enemy aircraft as far from urban population centers as possible. However, should an enemy bomber penetrate our defense it would be of paramount importance that the bomber be destroyed before bomb release.

XVII. Q - What is the general appearance of a high altitude burst?

A - A high altitude burst would appear as an intense flash of light followed by the appearance of a white cloud. The mushroom shaped cloud commonly associated with nuclear detonations would not form, as the mushroom stem results from the interaction of strong vertical air currents with surface materials.

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