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THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF
Washington 25, D.C.

SM-833-59
25 August 1959
(Revised 3 January 1961)

MEMORANDUM FOR: Chief of Staff, U.S. Army
Chief of Naval Operations
Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force
Commandant of the Marine Corps
Commander in Chief, Alaska
Commander in Chief, Atlantic
Commander in Chief, Caribbean
Commander in Chief, Continental
Air Defense Command
U.S. Commander in Chief, Europe
Commander in Chief, Pacific
Commander in Chief, U.S. Naval Forces,
Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean
Commander in Chief, Strategic Air Command

Subject: Uniform Readiness Conditions (U)

1. A uniform system of progressive readiness conditions is 1
essential in insuring timely, accurate and clear direction of 2
commands subordinate to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and in 3
achieving greater effectiveness of U.S. forces in preparation 4
for execution of contingency or emergency war plans. It will 5
also assist in more rapid interpretation and evaluation of the 6
readiness posture of the unified and specified commands. 7

2. The Joint Chiefs of Staff have approved the uniform 8
readiness conditions format in the Appendix hereto for use 9
between the Joint Chiefs of Staff and commanders of unified 10
and specified commands. The level of command to which the 11
uniform readiness conditions are made effective within the 12
unified and specified commands is a matter for determination 13
by the commander. It is intended that these conditions be 14
employed within the Services to the extent required to insure 15
the capability to provide to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the 16

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(Revised by 2nd Note to Holders - 3 January 1961)

FOR BY: IDENTIFICATION BRANCH
21 Jan 1960

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commanders of unified and specified commands the support for 1
which each Service has unilateral responsibility. Some Service 2
support elements located in a unified or specified command area 3
and serving and responsive to that command are also responsive 4
to their Service headquarters which may be located outside the 5
unified or specified command area. Such Service support elements 6
are required to respond to Defense Readiness Conditions (DEPCONS) 7
declared by the commander of the unified or specified command 8
and by their Service headquarters. These Service support 9
elements will respond to the declaration requiring the higher 10
degree of readiness. 11

3. It is recognized that commanders of some unified commands 12
must be responsive to, and have adopted, the readiness condi- 13
tions prescribed by commanders of international commands; and 14
that other commanders may wish to retain their present readi- 15
ness conditions for use within their commands. In these 16
instances, commanders may "key" their present readiness 17
conditions to the uniform readiness conditions. Thus, all 18
communications concerning readiness conditions between the Joint 19
Chiefs of Staff and commanders of unified and specified commands 20
will make use of the terminology and conditions prescribed herein. 21

4. The format consists of five (5) CONDITIONS, or DEPCONS 22
with DEPCON 5 being normal and DEPCON 1 being maximum readiness. 23
The brief definition accompanying each DEPCON is a general 24
indication of the type of action that a commander may take, or 25
higher authority may direct, to bring the command's readiness 26
posture into consonance with the general description of circum- 27
stances appearing under the heading "SITUATION." Measures to 28
be taken in each condition should not be considered absolute, 29
since competent authority may decide to apply certain measures 30
in a condition earlier or later than planned. 31

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(Revised by 2nd Note to Holders - 3 January 1961)

5. a. The "DECLARATION AUTHORITY" is self-explanatory. 1
Declarations to effect increased readiness of forces will 2
be guided by the following considerations: 3

(1) When prior consultation is practicable and 4
time permits, each commander of a unified or specified 5
command will seek authorization from the Joint Chiefs 6
of Staff before changing the DEPCON of his command to 7
DEPCONs 3, 2, or 1. 8

(2) In circumstances which preclude prior consulta- 9
tion with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, each commander of 10
a unified or specified command is authorized to advance 11
the readiness of the forces of his command. He must, 12
however, advise the Joint Chiefs of Staff of such action 13
in the most expeditious manner possible in order that 14
they may take appropriate action in the light of all 15
considerations known to them. When declaring DEPCON 16
3, the declaring authority's initial directive should 17
contain guidance on whether the DEPCON is expected to 18
be achieved without public notice. As a general guide, 19
it is not contemplated that actions above DEPCON 3 can 20
be accomplished without public notice. 21

(3) Upon declaration of DEPCON 1 by a commander, the 22
Joint Chiefs of Staff or their representative will 23
request that the President join a conference with the 24
Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to 25
review the situation and to consider recommendations 26
regarding immediate actions to be taken, including the 27
relocation of the National Command Authorities. This 28
discussion may take the form of a telephone conference 29
including the commanders of the unified and specified 30
commands. 31

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(4) In the circumstance wherein the Joint Chiefs of Staff issue an execution order in accordance with a plan which has received prior approval, the execution order will automatically authorize the declaring CINC to specify DEPCONs as required. 1
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(5) In the circumstance wherein the Joint Chiefs of Staff direct a CINC to take actions for which there are no approved plans, the Joint Chiefs of Staff execution order constitutes the authority for the CINC to declare the readiness condition necessary to comply with that order. 6
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(6) To insure the fastest possible notification of readiness status, the terms DEPCON 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1, together with the date time group and the declaring command, may be transmitted in the clear over non-secure circuits. No reference will be made to the fact that an actual change in readiness posture is taking place; this remains classified information. During tests, exercises or drills, DEPCON exercise terms will be used, i.e., DOUBLE TAKE, ROUNDHOUSE, etc. The fact that tests, exercises or drills are being conducted is not considered classified information. 12
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b. The relationship between the Single Integrated Operations Plan (SIOP) and DEPCONs is as follows: 23
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(1) SIOP tasks are first priority commitments for SIOP committed forces unless otherwise directed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. 25
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(2) Normally, SIOP committed forces will be prepared to execute PGL AA under DEPCONs 5, 4 or 3, unless otherwise directed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

(3) The declaration of DEPCON 3, 2 or 1 will automatically convene an emergency conference by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to consider, inter alia, the establishment of an "A" hour and other appropriate action.

(4) Regardless of the DEPCON, all SIOP forces will be generated in accordance with the SIOP schedule upon declaration of "A" hour unless otherwise directed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

6. Each commander of unified or specified command will be required under the heading "COMMAND READINESS ACTION/INSTRUCTIONS", the actions or instructions that he deems necessary to bring his command to a readiness posture in consonance with the declared condition. These actions/instructions will be listed, using alphabetical subheadings to provide a ready means of reference. Forces of unified or specified commands committed to the SIOP will be shown ready to execute PGL AA under DEPCONs 5, 4 and 3. When a commander initiates or is directed to assume a certain condition of readiness, this may automatically trigger supporting actions by other commands or Services or require supplementary decisions by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Such items may be listed under the heading "SIGNIFICANT SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIONS AND/OR DECISIONS REQUIRED OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF OR OTHER COMMANDS". This provides a means for the commander to indicate to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and to lateral and subordinate commanders the supporting actions that must be taken by others or supplementary decisions required of the Joint Chiefs of Staff when his command assumes that specific condition of readiness. This becomes particularly important to

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the Joint Chiefs of Staff, since they must be aware of the full 1
significance of any condition which is declared or which they 2
may direct. These items should be a continuation of the alpha 3
alphabetical subheadings for that condition. 4

7. The readiness conditions do not have to be declared in 5
sequence. A declaration of any condition from 5 to 1 can be 6
made, if the situation warrants it. Whenever this occurs, the 7
actions of all intervening conditions are included automatically 8
in the declaration of a higher readiness condition. 9

B. When the formats on uniform readiness conditions of the 10
unified and specified commands have been accomplished, using 11
the enclosed format as a guide, commanders will send twenty (20) 12
copies to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, five (5) copies to each 13
Service, and three (3) copies to each commander of a unified or 14
specified command. As a basis for improvement and to achieve 15
the best possible uniform readiness conditions and procedures, 16
the commander of each unified and specified command may submit 17
comments and/or recommendations together with his uniform 18
readiness conditions. 19

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(Page revised by 3rd Mate to Holders - 14 February 1961)
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9. With respect to CINCONAD, the provisions of this memorandum 1
apply to those forces over which he has operational command in ac- 2
cordance with his Terms of Reference, and which are not under the 3
operational control of CINCNORAD. In complying with paragraph 8, 4
it is desirable, if CINCNORAD concurs, that the readiness condi- 5
tions be accomplished in coordination with CINCNORAD and distrib- 6
uted as COMAD/NORAD READINESS CONDITIONS, since both commands 7
use the conditions prescribed in NORAD Regulation 55-3. 8

10. An information copy of this memorandum with its Appendix, 9
has been furnished to the Commander in Chief, North American Air 10
Defense Command; US Representative to the North Atlantic Military
Committee and Standing Group; US National Military Representative
to SHAPE; US Liaison Officer, Supreme Allied Command, Atlantic; 13
and the US Liaison Officer, United Nations Command. Enclosure A 14
with its Appendix is not releasable into NATO channels. 15

11. Uniform readiness conditions, as prescribed herein, for all 16
unified and specified commands will be submitted to the Joint 17
Chiefs of Staff within sixty (60) days of the date of this memo- 18
randum. These conditions will become effective, for use between 19
the Joint Chiefs of Staff and a commander of a unified or 20
specified command, when the Joint Chiefs of Staff acknowledge 21
their receipt. 22

12. To facilitate the conduct of exercises involving these 23
readiness conditions the following exercise terms are assigned: 24

DEFCON 5 - Exercise Term "FADE OUT". 25

DEFCON 4 - Exercise Term "DOUBLE TAKE". 26

DEFCON 3 - Exercise Term "ROUND HOUSE". 27

DEFCON 2 - Exercise Term "FAST PACE". 28

DEFCON 1 - Exercise Term "COCKED PISTOL". 29

13. When commanders of unified or specified commands or the 30
Military Services conduct DEFCON exercises which involve notice- 31
able movement or unusual physical activity of their forces, they 32
will make appropriate recommendations to the Joint Chiefs of 33
Staff as to whether other countries should be notified of the 34
exercise. 35

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(Page revised by 5th Note to Holders - 23 October 1962)

APPENDIX

(COMMAND NAME)

DEFENSE READINESS CONDITIONS (DEPCON)

DEPCON 5

(Exercise Term "FADE OUT")

A normal readiness posture which can be sustained indefinitely and which represents an optimum balance between the requirements of readiness and the routine training and equipping of forces for their primary mission. Unified and Specified command forces committed to the Single Integrated Operations Plan (SIOP) will be prepared to execute OPTION 1.

SITUATION

Cold War Norm.

DECLARATION AUTHORITY

CINC _____ or higher authority.

COMMAND READINESS ACTIONS/INSTRUCTIONS

DEPCON 4

(Exercise Term "DOUBLE TAKE")

A readiness posture requiring increased intelligence watch and a continuing analysis of the political/military situation in the area of tension; review contingency plans for the area concerned and, based on the above analysis, make modifications or formulate new plans, as required; take actions to increase security and anti-sabotage measures, etc., if considered necessary; keep appropriate commanders informed of the developing situation. During this condition no measures will be taken which could be considered provocative or which might disclose operational plans. Every effort should be made to insure that measures taken do not cause public speculation. Unified and Specified command forces committed to the Single Integrated Operations Plan (SIOP) will be prepared to execute OPTION 1.

SITUATION

Regional tensions requiring greater military vigilance. No U.S. forces involved.

DECLARATION AUTHORITY

CINC _____ or higher authority.

COMMAND READINESS ACTIONS/INSTRUCTIONS

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Appendix

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DEFCON 1

(Exercise Term "ROUND HOUSE")

A readiness posture that requires certain portions of the assigned forces to assume an increased readiness posture above that of normal readiness. Generally, in this condition, all forces and resources will come from within the command. Plans of the next higher condition are reviewed and readied. During this condition no measures will be taken which could be considered provocative or which might disclose operational plans. In assuming this condition, and unless otherwise directed, commanders should time-phase action in a manner to avoid public speculation, if possible. Unified and Specified command forces committed to the Single Integrated Operations Plan (SIOP) will be prepared to execute OPTION 1.

SITUATION

Regional tensions increasingly susceptible to communist exploitation or other regional tensions which may have serious adverse effects on U.S. national interests. Possible U.S. force involvement.

DECLARATION AUTHORITY

CINC _____ or higher authority.

COMMAND READINESS ACTIONS/INSTRUCTIONS

SIGNIFICANT SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIONS AND/OR DECISIONS
REQUIRED OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF OR OTHER COMMANDERS

DEFCON 2

(Exercise Term "FAST PACE")

A readiness posture requiring a further increase in military force readiness which is less than maximum readiness; certain military deployments and selected civil actions may be necessary in consonance with the command's mission; resources may be made available from outside the command; preliminary measures are taken to permit the most rapid transition to maximum readiness, if necessary. Upon declaration of this DEFCON, an emergency JCS conference will be automatically convened to consider the establishment of "A-Hour" for SIOP Forces or other appropriate action.

SITUATION

Situations exist that are directly susceptible to communist exploitation by hostile action, or other situations susceptible to hostile exploitation, either of which could seriously threaten U.S. forces overseas, U.S. allies or areas vital to U.S. national interests.

DECLARATION AUTHORITY

CINC _____ or higher authority.

COMMAND READINESS ACTIONS/INSTRUCTIONS

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Appendix

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SIGNIFICANT SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIONS AND/OR DECISIONS
REQUIRED OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF OR OTHER COMMANDERS

DEPCON 1

(Exercise Code: "ROCKET FISTOL")

A maximum readiness posture requiring the highest state of preparedness to execute war plans. Upon declaration of this DEPCON, an emergency JCS conference will be automatically convened to consider the establishment of "A-Hour" for SIOP Forces or other appropriate action.

SITUATION

International relations have deteriorated to such a degree that measures must be taken to achieve maximum readiness. Significant strategic and/or tactical indications of hostilities against U.S. forces overseas, U.S. allies, and/or the continental United States or its possessions. War is imminent and may occur momentarily.

DECLARATION AUTHORITY

CINC _____ or higher authority.

COMMAND READINESS ACTIONS/INSTRUCTIONS

SIGNIFICANT SUPPLEMENTARY ACTIONS AND/OR DECISIONS
REQUIRED OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF OR OTHER COMMANDERS

- NOTES: (1) Conditions should be prepared on 8 x 10 1/2 inch paper to facilitate compilation of all commands' readiness conditions into ready reference files.
- (2) The commander of each command will determine the classification of his completed readiness conditions.

Appendix

(Page provided by 3rd Note to Holders - 14 February 1961)

Efficient 10/2/1961