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SECURE RESERVE FORCE

TARGET ACQUISITION STUDY

FINAL REPORT

[Omitted here is a cover sheet, a table of contents, a list of tables, and a glossary of acronyms and abbreviations.]

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS (U)

I. Introduction

(TS) National Security Decision Memorandum Number 242, with its call for the discriminate and controlled use of nuclear weapons, first advanced the concept of a secure reserve force—a survivable, strategic force held in reserve for “protection and coercion during and after nuclear conflict.”² In addition, PD/NSC–18 directed that “U.S. target plans should provide for the maintenance of a secure reserve force to be withheld for possible use subsequent to a major nuclear exchange.”³

(TS) The “strategic reserve” forces presently consist of: (1) the Secure Reserve Force, (2) withheld forces, (3) residual forces, and (4) recovered and reconstituted forces. This study deals only with the Secure Reserve Force (SRF).

(TS) Specific planning guidance for the employment of reserved forces, including the Secure Reserve Force, is not contained in NUWEP (with the exception of the injunction that such forces must not be essential to meeting SIOP objectives), or [\[Page 401\]](#) any other national-level policy document.

(TS) In the absence of specific guidance on how to translate the idea of Secure Reserve Forces into actual nuclear attack plans, preplanned packages have been developed for the current SRF. These preplanned packages include a combination of the unique (Eastern European economic) and the strategic after-thought (e.g., low priority USSR economic SIOP “seconds”) with no definition as to when, where and under what conditions the forces would actually be used, except that it would be after a major nuclear exchange. The SRF weapons are available for use in *ad hoc* employment options—they are *not committed* to any specific preplanned target package or employment strategy.

(S) Lack of attention at the policy level to Secure Reserve Force employment concepts is in part rooted in the persistence of the view that if deterrence fails a nuclear war will not only be massive but brief. In such a scenario there would be a role for a reserve force; but only for a force that is modest in size, and intended for use only in protection of the U.S. against coercion by a recovering Soviet Union, or from intimidation by a third party.

(S) What has not been satisfactorily addressed is the role that a Secure Reserve Force would or should play if a nuclear war were prolonged, and involved a series of exchanges.

(C) The task assigned the SRF Study Group was to assess the capabilities of the SRF in its present composition, particularly the capabilities for target acquisition, under two different employment strategies; preplanned targeting and *ad hoc* targeting for the SRF as it is currently composed (B–52s, POSEIDON/POLARIS and MINUTEMAN III). The study assessed the four basic requirements central to the use and control of the SRF against a range of time, C3I, and reconnaissance variables and constraints: (1) survival of the SRF; (2) survival of the decision-maker; (3) information requirements for the employment of the Secure Reserve Force and the availability of that information (survivability of intelligence and communications assets); and (4) the ability of the NCA to command and control and retarget/reprogram U.S. military forces and to communicate with allies, enemies, and neutrals.

(U) Two scenarios were developed for use in the study. In both scenarios, it was assumed that there was a major nuclear exchange between the Soviet Union and the United States. The first scenario assumes that the Soviets initiate an attack on the United States and its allies with U.S. forces in a day-to-day alert posture. The second scenario assumes that the Soviet Union initiates an attack against the United States and its allies with U.S. forces in a generated posture.

II. Findings

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(TS) On the Survivability of the SRF

In the absence of specific guidance as to what number and kinds of weapons we want to survive, for how long and for what purpose, it is not obvious what an analysis of SRF survivability should concentrate on. What can be said, however, is that:

- The TRIAD approach, with its programmatic hedges, has been applied to the composition of the SRF. [2 lines not declassified]
- At least a portion of the SRF TRIAD is expected to survive and remain available [less than 1 line not declassified] after an initial nuclear exchange.
- The endurance of the SRF is the product of two factors: its ability to survive the initial enemy attack (“initial SRF survivability”) and its ability to surmount problems in post-attack system support and maintenance (“long-term SRF endurance”).
- Estimates of initial SRF survivability were based upon individual system survivability and SNDV alert status. These estimates indicate that a militarily-useful portion of the SRF can survive a massive Soviet attack, under both the “surprise attack” and “attack with warning” scenarios. The initial force drawdown was found to be primarily the result of (1) the fact that, whatever standard is applied, Minuteman survivability is decreasing rapidly, (2) the loss of non-alert bombers, and (3) the loss of a non-alert SSBN in the surprise attack scenario.
- Long-term SRF endurance is estimated to be sufficient to provide militarily-useful SRF capabilities [less than 1 line not declassified] following the initial attack. [4 lines not declassified]
- In addition, the temporary non-availability of some weapons is expected, due to SSBN replenishment cycles and bomber recovery operations.

These survivability/endurability estimates were based upon the damage expected to result from a single massive Soviet attack. Additional Soviet or third country attacks could reduce SRF survival/endurance. The assumption of a single-wave attack makes the force endurance problem more manageable but does not understate the problem.

(TS) On NCA Survivability

- Current policy looks to emergency plans developed by the Federal Preparedness Agency [2 lines not declassified] There are 14 statutory successors to the President and 32 statutory successors to the Secretary of Defense.
- The adequacy of some of the current evacuation plans appear questionable. Furthermore, we cannot definitely conclude that they will work properly, since these plans are not realistically exercised [2 lines not declassified]

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- We also find that only the President, Vice President, and Secretary of Defense are briefed on nuclear weapons control and release procedures. Other successors are not familiar with SIOP or SRF procedures or options; however, military advisors will be available to assist an NCA successor.

(TS) On Information Availability

- The information “needs” of a national decision maker could range across the following competence or ability levels for decision-making and force management:
 - Level I— “Blind.” Has minimum knowledge of status of U.S. forces, inferred from launch orders given and known weapons systems characteristics. Capable of launching preplanned SRF options.
 - Level II— “Informed.” Has access to a reasonable amount of information about U.S. status but does not have comparable information on enemies or neutrals. This allows the NCA to reprogram forces against preplanned options to make up for force drawdowns.
 - Level III— “Intelligent.” Has access to status of enemy, neutral and U.S. forces, and an assessment of the results of the SIOP laydown. Can do effective force reprogramming and retargeting against the preplanned options (including all withholds)—that is, a limited *ad hoc* employment capability, for response to enemy attempts at coercion or “peripheral pillage.”
 - Level IV— “Ideal.” Knows the status of enemy, friendly and neutral forces; the extent of damage to the enemy (both economic and military); the rate and status of U.S. and enemy recovery efforts; international political situation; extent of damage to the U.S.; and has sufficient information and control of assets that he can sustain near-real-time battle management, including reprogramming, retargeting, and reconstitution.
- NSDM 242 requires that the SRF be available for use for protection and coercion during and after a major nuclear exchange. This implies a need for both SRF flexibility and responsiveness to rapidly changing real-world situations, and also an “Intelligent” decision-maker. Hence, the study used Level III information requirements and command abilities as the standard against which needs and abilities were assessed.
- *Information Availability—U.S. Status*
 - Assuming that they survive, the ABNCPs will be able to monitor and update the status of most of the surviving military communications/intelligence/reconnaissance assets, as well as monitoring the status of the SRF and of other [\[Page 404\]](#) surviving forces with “high” likelihood, except [*less than 1 line not declassified*]
 - The primary U.S. status information deficiency is the limited information expected to be available on nuclear operations (launches, NUDETS), [*3 lines not declassified*]
- *Information Availability—Enemy Status*
 - The ability to locate enemy residual strategic forces, elements of the command structure, strategic and intelligence/reconnaissance assets, or tactical forces will be severely limited by loss of intelligence assets due to enemy action or (in some cases) collateral damage.
 - The most significant enemy information deficiency will be the inability to determine the mission and alert status of residual enemy forces.
 - Determination of the extent of economic damage in enemy territories will be difficult without imagery data. SIGINT also is expected to be inadequate; hence, a “low” assessment of the availability of enemy status information, [*less than 1 line not declassified*]

(TS) On the ability of the NCA to Command and Control, Communicate, and Retarget U.S. Military Forces

- The principal RF communications sites, satellite terminals and common-user facilities are expected to be destroyed in a major nuclear exchange.
- [1 paragraph (5 lines) not declassified]
- [1 paragraph (5 lines) not declassified]
- [4 lines not declassified] and the forces and information sources that survive.

III. Conclusions

(TS) The primary conclusions drawn from the assessments made by this study are:

(1) We cannot offer a confident judgment on the survivability of the NCA. We did not have full access to evacuation/reconstitution plans and successful evacuation is highly situation-dependent (ranging from a surprise attack during a Presidential inaugural or State of the Union address, to attack after a prolonged crisis). [2 lines not declassified]

[1 paragraph (4 lines) not declassified]

(2) At least a portion of each leg of the SRF TRIAD is expected to survive and remain available [less than 1 line not declassified]

The rapidly decreasing survivability of the Minuteman [2 lines not declassified] The hard target capability and control responsiveness of the Minuteman argues, however, for retaining even a small MM element in the SRF. At the same [Page 405] time, it is not clear that sufficient SRF forces will be available to support a wide range of possible preplanned and *ad hoc* options. [2 lines not declassified] That is, existing national guidance on SRF employment is not specific enough to permit detailed assessment of the adequacy of the number of weapons assigned to the SRF.

Even considering only the current preplanned SRF packages, it is important that the decision maker note that execution of any one package would have an effect on the weapons available for remaining packages. [2 lines not declassified]

(3) Assuming the survivability of and durability of airborne command centers, we now have the capacity (i.e., adequate communications) in the post-SIOP period to execute the SRF forces. This capacity is neither scenario-dependent, nor [less than 1 line not declassified] time-dependent, [less than 1 line not declassified]

(4) [1 paragraph (6 lines) not declassified]

- [3 lines not declassified]
- [1 line not declassified]
- [1 line not declassified]
- [less than 1 line not declassified]

The principal reasons for this “low” capability are:

- Lack of enemy status and activities information:
 - Due to loss of fixed ground facilities and non-alert reconnaissance aircraft or aircraft support.
 - [1 paragraph (4 lines) not declassified]
- Limited capabilities of surviving centers:
 - To process, integrate, and assess information.
 - To support decision-making.
 - Primarily due to loss of fixed facilities, data bases and personnel.

- Aircraft endurance and potential EMP problems exacerbate the situation.
- [1 paragraph (2 lines) not declassified]
 - Due to loss of fixed ground facilities and enemy jamming.
 - [1 line not declassified]
 - [1 line not declassified]
- Limited pre-war planning and preparation:
 - Incomplete repositioning of data bases, equipment and supplies.
 - Limited procedures, tasking, and training.

[1 paragraph (14 lines) not declassified]

IV. Possible Improvements

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(TS) We did not explore all possible remedies to the present deficiencies. What follows are suggestions which are not fully staffed as to priorities, costs, or even technical and practical possibilities. It should be noted, however, that these suggested improvements range from virtually cost-free procedural changes to major (and possibly costly) improvements in or additions to SRF capability. That is, if we wish to improve our ability to employ the SRF in a protracted nuclear war, we are *not* faced with the choice of benign indifference or massive expenditures—there is a rather extensive “middle ground.”

A. On Force Improvements

Problem: [1 line not declassified]

Suggested Improvements:

[9 lines not declassified]

B. On Communications Improvements

Primary Shortfall: Limited Communications to [less than 1 line not declassified]

Problem: [less than 1 line not declassified]

Suggested Improvements:

[16 lines not declassified]

Problem: [less than 1 line not declassified]

Suggested Improvements:

[6 lines not declassified]

C. On Sensor and Information Source Improvements

Primary Shortfall: [less than 1 line not declassified]

Problem: [2 lines not declassified]

Suggested Improvements:

[10 lines not declassified]

Problem: Vulnerability of [less than 1 line not declassified] Ground Support and Control Interfaces to direct attack.

*Suggested Improvements**[16 lines not declassified]**Problem: [1 line not declassified]**Suggested Improvements:**[5 lines not declassified]**Problem: [2 lines not declassified]**Suggested Improvements:**[2 lines not declassified]**D. On Center Improvements**Primary Shortfall: [less than 1 line not declassified]**Problem: [1 line not declassified]*[Page 407]*Suggested Improvements:**[15 lines not declassified]**E. Other Improvements**Problem: [less than 1 line not declassified]**Suggested Improvements:**[7 lines not declassified]**V. Recommendations for Follow-On Study*

A. Alternative strategic reserve force employment strategies and SRF force compositions should be explored at the earliest possible date. Particular attention should be given to the following:

1. Employment strategies

- a. Identify specific targeting objectives and packages (i.e., high priority targets such as national leadership installations, national military headquarters, and attack assessment installations) that can be preplanned, assuming the perceptions and problems of a “blind” NCA, but which are deliberately withheld from the initial attack, to be attacked by a “second strike” force.
- b. Identify broad targeting objectives which can form a framework for *ad hoc* attacks, assuming an “informed” NCA with access to various levels of information.

2. Force composition

- a. Examine the survivability and endurance of the SRF triad, including the issue of hedging against uncertainty (e.g., an SRF composed of bombers and SSBNs, SSBNs alone, MX/MAP alone, MX and SSBNs, etc.).
- b. Identify the pros and cons of a force structure much larger than the current SRF (i.e., *[less than 1 line not declassified]* of the present SIOP figures).

B. The possible improvements suggested by the SRF study should be subjected to a cost-effectiveness analysis. Particular attention should be given to the following:

1. Development of an investment strategy which addresses the issue of allocating funds for modifications to the C3I infrastructure [2 lines not declassified]
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1. Source: Carter Library, National Security Affairs, Staff Material, Defense/Security, Ermarth, Box 3, Defense (Items in the System: 9–12/78). Top Secret; Codeword.↵
2. See [footnote 2, Document 82](#).↵
3. See [Document 31](#).↵