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THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON

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John K. Harbath 10/7/75
REVIEWED BY DATE

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: United States Air Operations Over the United Kingdom

Prime Minister Macmillan has suggested that the procedures for United States flights over the United Kingdom and U. K. flights over the U. S. with hazardous cargo aboard involving nuclear materials be standardized for both countries. For such U. K. flights over U. S. territory as have been arranged in the past, the U. S. has required that the British:



- (1) Provide advance notification and clearance of the flight.
- (2) State the general nature of the hazardous cargo.
- (3) Make arrangements so that the immediate nature of the cargo could be furnished the U. S. authorities in case of an accident.
- (4) Provide assurances that any hazardous materials aboard are packaged in accordance with international standards.

These arrangements from the British and the United States point of view, considering the nature of their operation which involves transport of weapon material or test components and not complete weapons to and from their Christmas Island tests, are satisfactory.

Comprehensive details on the safety aspects of the U. S. transport of atomic weapons have been afforded the British in a series of discussions between both military and diplomatic representatives. The U. S. military, therefore, with the above understanding has not insisted on similar safety conferences concerning U. K. operations over U. S. territory. Therefore, with the exception of the identification of which U. S. aircraft are carrying hazardous cargo, the procedures are reasonably similar.

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To date, United States air operations over United Kingdom territory, which flights involve transport of hazardous material, concern:

- (1) Large scale SAC operational support exercises;
- (2) Individual aircraft or SAC unit rotation;
- (3) Atomic stockpiling operations involving transport aircraft. This includes strategic as well as NATO units located in Great Britain.



The approved procedures for conduct of large scale SAC operations requires your approval, notification to the British Government, via the U. S. Ambassador, and the coordination of flight operations by Air Force elements (7th Air Division) to the appropriate elements of the U. K. Air Defense Command. The U. S. aircraft are then cleared through the British Air Defense system avoiding populated areas and a minimum of publicity has resulted. The safety assurances that have accompanied these exercises, e. g., the bombers must land before they can arm their weapons, and the weapons are in a ferry configuration, have been provided in advance. No other specification of cargo has been made.

Individual or unit rotation of SAC aircraft has not involved the complete weapons, i. e., the non-nuclear portion of the weapon and nuclear capsule in the same aircraft. These airplanes are routinely cleared in and out of the United Kingdom over prescribed and approved flight paths. No specification of cargo has been made.

In the case of stockpiling operations, the nuclear and non-nuclear components have been brought in by separate transport aircraft. These flights are routinely cleared and follow prescribed flight paths. The contents of the aircraft are not specified as dangerous cargo.

Safety talks initiated at the British request late last fall established that U. S. safety rules were quite similar to those of the U. K. These talks, held in the U. K. between the Royal Air Force and the U. S. Air Force, were proceeding in the direction of providing the British with equivalent information except for the

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assurances that the hazardous material was packaged according to international standards. However, the discussions ended on 6 February 1958, and the British have not requested additional information in that channel.

Subsequently, a technical team visited the United States on 26 - 27 March for the purpose of discussion of the issuance of instructions to the military and to civil defense personnel on the safety aspects of nuclear weapons. One of the points raised by the British was the consistency of U. S. public statements and information previously given them at safety conferences. We believe the United Kingdom representatives were reasonably satisfied with the outcome of the conference.

In conclusion, to make the procedures for transport of hazardous cargoes consistent between the United States and the United Kingdom, it appears appropriate and possible in peacetime that:



(1) The USAF identify to the RAF when any aircraft carrying dangerous cargo, i. e., nuclear material or high explosive or both, is to be cleared to either depart or enter U. K. controlled air space, including seeking approval for the routes used;

(2) Appropriate elements of the USAF would identify for the British how long and under what conditions fire-fighting and crew rescue operations should proceed;

(3) Types and quantities of material aboard would not be specified, other than that such materials are packaged in accordance with the same standards and procedures used when flying the same type cargoes over U. S. territory.

With your approval, I will promulgate the necessary instructions, including the above, to the Secretary of the Air Force, after the British have agreed on the manner and channels of communication.

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I have attached for whatever use you may desire a suggested draft letter in reply to Mr. Macmillan's letter on this subject. The State Department concurs in making a reply as indicated in the attached suggested letter to the Prime Minister, and the Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission, has been provided copies of this correspondence for his information.

Donald A. Quarles

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As indicated

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