

# U.S. in '50s Had Plan For Strike on Soviets

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The United States had a strategic plan if war broke out with the Soviet Union during the 1950s to strike a single, massive blow that would leave the communist nation a "smoking, radiating ruin at the end of two hours," declassified secret documents show.

The documents were released recently under the Freedom of Information Act to author David Alan Rosenberg, who reproduced them in the current issue of "International Security," a foreign affairs quarterly published by Harvard University.

Another current issue of a scholarly review, "Air University Review," the professional journal of the U.S. Air Force, also gives a glimpse into U.S. nuclear thinking in the 1950s. It said the prototype of the main U.S. nuclear bomber, the B58 Hustler, had an obvious fault—it could take off with a nuclear bomb in its external weapon pod but could not land with it.

In order to land safely, the prototype would have had to drop the bomb somewhere.

The deficiency was corrected by the time the B58 went into production.

The declassified document about nuclear war strategy consists of notes taken by U.S. Navy Capt. W. B. Moore during a top-secret briefing by officers of the Strategic Air Command in 1954, including its commander, Gen. Curtis E. LeMay.

According to Rosenberg, LeMay reviewed Moore's notes, once they were declassified, and pronounced them generally accurate.

In the notes the SAC briefer said, "The exact manner in which SAC will fight the war [with the Soviets] is known only to Gen. LeMay and he will decide at the moment, depend-

ing on the existing conditions."

This was clarified to mean that the basic decision to drop a nuclear bomb would be the president's. But the manner in which a nuclear war would be fought would be LeMay's, and his alone.

The documents said the U.S. war plan "would be to strike the entire [Soviet] target list in a single, massive blow, thus enabling all the bombers to enter and leave Soviet air space as rapidly as possible."

The objective would be to leave the Soviet Union "a smoking, radiating ruin at the end of two hours."

The declassified report said 735 B47 and B36 bombers would have been used in the massive strike.

The SAC target list, according to Moore, included 1,700 "Designated Ground Zeros" including 409 Soviet airfields and a large number of industrial and petroleum installations.

In 1954 LeMay believed the war would have lasted only 30 days, the documents indicated.

Although the Soviet Union had nuclear weapons at the time of the 1954 briefing, it had a bomber force that was vastly inferior to the United States and possessed no missiles capable of reaching this country.

One question that is unclear is whether the United States would have struck first with nuclear weapons in case of a conventional war with the Soviets.

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Asked by an officer how his strat-



1958 Photo

GEN. CURTIS E. LeMAY

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egy fit into the publicly stated doctrine that the United States would never strike the first blow, he answered:

"I have heard this thought stated many times and it sounds just fine. However, it is not in keeping with U.S. history. Just look back and note who started the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Indian Wars and the Spanish-American War.

"I want to make it clear that I am not advocating a preventive war; however, I believe that if the United States is pushed in the corner far enough we would not hesitate to strike first."