

Air Force to Practice Limited A-War

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U.S. Air Force bomber crews have been ordered to start training for fighting a limited nuclear war in case the United States should want to exercise that option.

Many crews, under the top-secret orders which have added a number of wartime missions to the Strategic Air Command, already have received new "mission folders" explaining their new tasks.

These instructions represent another big step in the Ford administration's controversial decision to prepare the nation for a small nuclear war, where destruction might be controlled, as well as for a war of massive destruction.

Critics of the administration decision contend that there can be no such thing as a small nuclear war—that once nuclear weapons are used, doomsday will follow.

But the new orders to Air Force crews testify that President Ford and Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger have firmly rejected those arguments.

Joseph Laitin, assistant secretary of defense for public affairs, said last night that he could not comment on the specifics of such military planning.

He added, however, that Schlesinger "has enunciated the change in nuclear strategy and it would therefore be a natural follow for the military to start revising our plans."

Schlesinger for two years has cham-

pioned a more flexible nuclear strategy—one that would enable the United States to respond in kind to a nuclear attack on a few targets as distinguished from massive destruction of cities and the people in them.

Strategies for trying to control the destruction in a nuclear war have been advanced before—such as the "counterforce" concept advocated strongly in the 1950s under which the United States and the Soviet Union might concentrate their fire on the other's nuclear weapons.

But the Kennedy and Johnson administrations adopted a mutual deterrence strategy of "assured destruction" for the 1960s—one in which American

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and Soviet cities have been held hostage to each other.

The new instructions for bombers and plans for a practice run by B-52s are part of what is being called LNO in military circles for Limited Nuclear Option. The Air Force training for LNO is supposed to be completed by Jan. 1, 1976, under present planning unless the Joint Chiefs of Staff decide otherwise in the meantime.

Pushing the limited nuclear war concept into Air Force tactics is expected to provoke fresh concern in Congress, where opponents have argued that to make nuclear war look tolerable is to invite it.

Schlesinger, in countering such arguments, has told Congress that the United States must adopt a nuclear strategy that gives the nation more than the option of incinerating the opponent's cities in retaliation for a nuclear attack.

"We face a wide range of possible actions involving nuclear weapons," Schlesinger told Congress this year,

"and no single response is appropriate to them all . . . Our objective remains deterrence, but modern deterrence across the spectrum of the nuclear threat . . ."

"To believe that the development of contingency plans [which is what the search for options is all about] will increase the probability of nuclear use is to underestimate seriously the gravity of the decision to go to war, especially nuclear war," Schlesinger added.

The order to get cracking on training bomber crews for small nuclear wars went out to military commanders in the form of a written revision to what the Pentagon calls SIOP—Single Integrated Operational Plan, the blueprint to follow if the United States went to war.

This new addition to SIOP means that Strategic Air Command pilots and their crews will have to prepare for a lot more missions. The situations for firing a nuclear-tipped missile from a B-52 bomber have become more complicated.

For example, sources said, instead of preparing for less than half a

dozen types of missions for firing nuclear weapons, the limited war requirement adds about 20 more complicated options.

Not all military officials are enthusiastic about taking on these extra nuclear missions. Some said it increases the chance of error in what is already a Strangelovian business—firing nuclear weapons at the right target at the right second.

Under the Schlesinger strategy, Air Force crews are training for what is called the optimum small option—hitting targets as small as an oil refinery or one missile base.

The theory is that the United States and the Soviet Union might find themselves in the position where they might want to limit their nuclear attacks on each other to such targets as refineries and missile bases—putting cities off limits.

The Limited Nuclear Option training covered in the mission folders now under study goes all the way from hitting only a few Soviet facilities such as refineries and factories to destroying 80 per cent of the facilities in various categories.