

AF Manual Drops 'First Strike' Idea

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The Air Force said yesterday it will immediately revise one of its manuals which instructs nuclear planners to devise programs so the U.S. could launch a nuclear attack without being attacked first.

Acknowledging its nuclear planning manual conflicts with White House policy, the Air Force said it will purge the manual of a requirement that target planners provide the President with a "first strike" nuclear option.

Air Force officials said this requirement apparently was written into Air Force manual 2-11, titled "Strategic Aerospace Operations," in 1965 so a surprise nuclear raid could be carried out if a President ever chose to order one.

Since then, President Nixon has specifically ruled out nuclear first strikes as a U.S. policy.

"The reference to a first strike option was contained in an Air Force manual designed for use as a doctrinal guide," an Air Force spokesman told UPI.

"In the process of revising the manual, this reference should have been deleted since President Nixon has made it clear that the policy

of this nation will be to use our military forces only in retaliation for an attack. We are now deleting the reference from the manual."

The latest revision of the Air Force manual 2-11, which contained the instructions that target selection must "ensure that National Command Authority has a choice of retaliatory or first strike options," was issued last month.

One Air Force official said this part of the manual must have been "overlooked" when the revision was made. He said that "normally when things are revised, people just glance through them very quickly."

Officials said apparently the requirement for first strike target planning originated seven years ago, even though no president in history has ever expressed a desire to be able to carry out a first strike aside from the two atomic bombs dropped on Japan in World War II.

"We traced it back to 1965," one official said. "That's the first reference we have been able to find. Before then there was a document dating from 1954, under a different title . . ."