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NATIONAL SECURITY DECISION  
DIRECTIVE NUMBER 13

16/19/81

NUCLEAR WEAPONS EMPLOYMENT POLICY

The President has directed that the following will be US policy governing the deployment and employment of our nuclear forces and their acquisition.

The most fundamental national security objective is to deter direct attack--particularly nuclear attack--on the United States and its Allies. Should nuclear attack nonetheless occur, the United States and its Allies must prevail. Our nuclear forces are of crucial importance both in the prevention of nuclear attack and in protecting our national interests at any level of nuclear conflict.

Deterrence can best be achieved if our defense posture makes Soviet assessments of war outcomes, under any contingency, so uncertain and dangerous as to remove any incentive for initiating attack. This requires that we be convincingly capable of responding in such a way that the Soviets or other adversary would be denied their political and military objectives. Stated otherwise, we must be prepared to wage war successfully. Our nuclear forces (both the strategic Triad and theater forces), in conjunction with general purpose forces, must hold at risk the full range of enemy military capabilities that threaten the United States and its Allies.

If deterrence fails, the employment of nuclear forces must be effectively related to the operations of our general purpose forces. Our doctrine for the use of forces in nuclear conflict must ensure that we can pursue specific objectives selected by the National Command Authority (NCA) at any given time, from general guidelines established in advance.

These imperatives constitute the basis for the development of our nuclear forces and plans for their employment. We must effect substantial improvements in our forces and their supporting command, control and intelligence systems (C<sup>3</sup>I) to ensure requisite flexibility, endurance, and effectiveness in a nuclear war of indefinite duration. Our nuclear weapons employment policies and plans must evolve in parallel with the improvement of our force capabilities. The principles and goals hereunder should guide efforts in both areas.

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The United States must be able to deny the Soviet Union a military victory at any level of conflict and force it to seek earliest termination of hostilities on terms favorable to the United States. To this end, we must have the capability to attack the widest range of targets in a way that serves our national interests, even when retaliating to a massive strike received without strategic warning; and, if necessary, to cripple the capability of the Soviet Union and its allies to conduct effective military operations. Plans for the employment of strategic nuclear forces must be integrated with employment planning for theater nuclear and other general purpose forces.

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... damage consistent with the accomplishment of the attack objective. (U) Reproduced at the Ronald Reagan Library  
overall plans should include the option of withholds to limit  
such collateral damage.

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### Implementation

The policies described herein shall be implemented in accordance with a Master Plan developed by the Secretary of Defense. In addition to ensuring compatibility of acquisition and employment policies, it will provide for consistency with the revitalized Continuity of Government and Civil Defense programs. The plan should also outline provisions for conducting frequent exercises (including semi-annual participation by the National Command Authority) to evaluate employment doctrine and force and planning capabilities. The plan shall be completed and forwarded for the President's review by February 1, 1982.

A report will be provided to the President at least annually on our employment plans, including, but not limited to, the size and capability of the Secure Reserve Force, the degree of employment flexibility available, and the status of improvement programs.

PD-59 is superseded by this directive.

*Ronald Reagan*

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[REDACTED]

## Relationship of Acquisition Policy to Employment Policy

Our nuclear force and C<sup>3</sup>I acquisition programs must support the employment policy established by this directive. The criteria used in evaluating acquisition of nuclear forces must recognize that each element of our force posture possesses inherent attributes that are better for some conflict situations but are of lesser importance for others. Programs will be designed to achieve:

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- More effective capability for [REDACTED] in the context of a rapidly changing conflict situation.
  - The capacity to assess battle damage and the disposition of remaining forces and weapon systems.

Greater emphasis will be placed on [REDACTED] to strengthen the overall warfighting capability of our nuclear forces. This [REDACTED] complicates Soviet defense and attack planning, strengthens mutual reinforcement among the nuclear and conventional force elements in our own attack planning and execution, and hedges against unforeseen degradation of individual elements of our nuclear forces.

## Related Defense Activities

Active and passive defenses can contribute significantly to a credible deterrent. The damage-limiting capacity of an effective strategic defense reduces the likelihood of coercion and increased prospects for postwar recovery of the United States. Specific guidance for defensive measures will be provided in separate documents.

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