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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

SYSTEM II  
90793

September 4, 1985

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NATIONAL SECURITY DECISION  
DIRECTIVE NUMBER 186

INSTALLATION AND OPERATION OF THE DIRECT COMMUNICATIONS  
LINK (DCL) / "HOTLINE" BETWEEN WASHINGTON AND MOSCOW (U)

Policy

It is national policy that the Direct Communications Link (DCL) / "Hotline" be established and maintained as a modern communication link between the President of the United States and the leadership of the USSR. The purpose of the DCL is to provide a permanent, rapid, reliable, and private means by which the Heads of the U.S. and Soviet governments may communicate directly to reduce the risk or outbreak of nuclear war and to preclude delays, misunderstandings, and misinterpretations by either side which might lead to hostilities between the two countries. (C)

Background

On June 20, 1963, the U.S. and the USSR entered into the first Memo of Understanding regarding the establishment of a DCL. Specifically, that agreement called for: (1) two telegraph-teleprinter terminal points -- one in the U.S. and one in the USSR -- between which communications could be directly exchanged; (2) one full-time duplex wire circuit between the U.S. and the USSR for exchanging messages; (3) one full-time duplex radio-telegraph "orderwire" circuit between the U.S. and the USSR; (4) terminal points to be arranged to provide for transmission and reception of messages from Moscow to Washington; (5) each side to receive text in the other side's language; and (6) the two terminal points to be equipped with encoding equipment. (U)

On September 30, 1971, the U.S. and the USSR entered into an agreement on measures to improve the DCL: (1) two additional circuits between the U.S. and the USSR were added to increase the reliability of the DCL and the original radio teletype circuit was disestablished; (2) one circuit was installed by the U.S. via the Intelsat Satellite System and one circuit was installed by the Soviets on their Molniya II Satellite; (3) the number of

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terminals was increased on each side to a system of terminals, i.e., "more than one," with locations unspecified (on the U.S. side, terminals were installed in the National Military Command Center (NMCC), Alternate National Military Command Center (ANMCC), and White House); and (4) Article 2 of the Agreement specified that any messages received via the DCL would be communicated to the "head of government." (C)

On July 17, 1984, the U.S. and USSR reached agreement, codified in an exchange of notes, to upgrade the DCL by the addition of facsimile communications capability and to hold future reviews as necessary concerning improvement of the DCL and its technical maintenance. The technical upgrade involved: (1) the addition of facsimile communication to the DCL teletype link; (2) the use of three transmission links, employing Intelsat, the Soviet Synchronous Stationary Satellite and cable technology; (3) communications circuits with a data transmission capability of 4800 bits per second; and (4) information security through U.S. provided microprocessors. (U)

#### Policy Principles

In fulfilling national policy and in recognition of the long and continuing efforts of the U.S. and the USSR to establish the DCL, the following policy principles are established:

The DCL will be designed, operated, and maintained as a modern, reliable, physically secure, and encoded communications link capable of operation under all conditions including crisis situations. (U)

There will be a continuing review of the DCL to ensure that modern technology is being utilized and its operational procedures are consistent with international agreements and current national security policy. (U)

The DCL will be reserved for the exclusive use of the President of the United States and others as he specifically designates. (C)

The NMCC is designated as the primary DCL terminal. The NMCC is responsible for routine testing of the DCL, and receipt, transmission, and translation of DCL messages by highly qualified translators. (C)

The ANMCC DCL terminal will have the capability to serve as an alternate center for originating and receiving messages. The ANMCC terminal will be manned and operated by NMCC personnel. The NMCC shall be responsible for the periodic testing of the ANMCC terminal. (C)

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The White House DCL terminal will also have the capability to originate and receive messages and will have additional privacy and override features which will allow it to "lock out" other DCL terminals. The White House DCL terminal will be manned and operated by White House personnel. Translator personnel from the NMCC will be directed to augment the White House terminal upon request by the White House. The White House shall be responsible for the periodic testing of the White House DCL terminal. (C)

At the sole discretion of the President, additional locations for DCL access may be established. The existence of these sites will be classified secret and their specific locations will be classified according to security needs. (S)

Technically, messages may be originated at any DCL terminal; however, except for test and service messages, all official exchanges of messages will be via the NMCC DCL terminal unless the President or other users he has specifically designated direct otherwise or have activated the White House privacy and override features. (C)

Release of messages originated at any DCL terminal must receive Presidential authorization either directly from the President or other users he has specifically designated. (C)

Two man rule operational procedures will be established at all DCL operating locations to ensure against inadvertent release of DCL messages. (C)

Incoming messages will be translated and delivered to the White House by the fastest secure means available. Cyrillic text will also be forwarded to the White House as quickly as possible. Distribution of messages will be made in accordance with White House instructions. (C)

Records of DCL messages will only be maintained in the official files of the President, other DCL users he has specifically designated, and at DCL terminals. Content of messages will never be released without explicit approval of the President. Public release of information concerning the fact that the DCL has been used is the sole prerogative of the President. (S)

Implementation

Responsibility for maintaining the currency of DCL technical capabilities and the related operational procedures and protocols require functional assignment of responsibilities in three areas: (U)

The National Security Council is responsible for deciding whether and when to seek future consultations with the USSR relating to

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the DCL. If negotiations are undertaken, the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs will appoint a delegation and issue negotiating instructions. (U)

Overall operational supervision of the DCL and the continuing review of its technical parameters and operational procedures are the responsibility of the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. A senior DCL Operational Oversight Committee is hereby established for this purpose, chaired by the NSC Senior Director for Crisis Management and composed of the NSC Director, National Security Telecommunications, the Director of the White House Situation Room, the Deputy Director, White House Military Office, Commander, White House Communications Agency, and the Deputy Director for Operations, Military Command System (J-3) of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This Committee will periodically review and update procedures for authentication and release of DCL messages, standardize operating procedures at all DCL operating locations, and establish procedures for handling incoming messages to the President. (U)

Funding and implementation responsibility for approved upgrades to the DCL resides with the Secretary of Defense in his capacity as Executive Agent, National Communications System. A Standing Subcommittee On Upgrades is established to oversee this effort. The Subcommittee membership and chair shall be determined by the Executive Agent. The Subcommittee's function is to convene as necessary to set technical parameters and establish overall milestone schedules for upgrade enhancements consistent with U.S./USSR negotiated positions and national security policy, to assign engineering and procurement responsibility, and to review milestone achievements. The Secretary of Defense is responsible for annual recurring costs of the installed DCL system. (U)

National Security Action Memorandum No. 255, July 30, 1963 and National Security Decision Memorandum 295, May 14, 1975, are hereby superseded and cancelled. (U)

*Ronald Reagan*

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