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By OP NARA Date 11/20/97DEPARTMENT OF STATE
POLICY PLANNING COUNCILSECRETMEMORANDUM

June 1, 1964

TO: All Members of S/P

FROM: S/P - Robert H. Johnson *RHJ*

SUBJECT: The Chinese Communist Nuclear Capability and Some "Unorthodox" Approaches to the Problem of Nuclear Proliferation

An S/P meeting on Wednesday, June 3, at 2:30 p.m. will be devoted to discussion of the attached paper. This discussion is intended as a follow-up of the discussion on May 22 of Howard Wriggins' memo on how to deal with the probability of the development by India of a national nuclear capability.

As I indicated in that discussion, the possibility of development of additional national nuclear capabilities has been one of the central concerns of our interdepartmental Chinese nuclear exercise because of the general possibility that Asian nations might be tempted in this direction and because of the more specific evidence that India was, at least, developing the option for such a capability. In the course of the discussion in our interdepartmental group, various approaches were offered to the twin problems of general reassurance of Asian countries in the wake of a ChiCom nuclear test and reducing the likelihood of further nuclear proliferation.

The latest version of the paper incorporates a number of what might be called "orthodox" attempts to deal with the proliferation problem. These include: (a) general U.S.

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public assurance of response to any ChiCom nuclear attack upon an Asian nation (including draft text of such an assurance); (b) a proposal to offer, as necessary, to allies specific assurances under existing security treaties and to neutrals a U.S. commitment to "consult" if it comes under threat of nuclear attack (a commitment which, in fact, would not differ a great deal from our alliance commitments); (c) deployment of the "Concord Squadron" (Indian Ocean Task Force) for a majority of the time in the area; (d) offers (including advance offers where desirable) to deploy nuclear weapons in a threatened area in response to request to deter threatened ChiCom use; and (e) offers of advance consultation and planning for defense and retaliation against nuclear attack.

In addition, several less orthodox approaches were discussed and, I regret to say, rejected, even for study. The pros and cons of these are summarized in Section II of the attached paper. As an independent exercise I also wrote a paper which examined the feasibility and desirability of pre-emptive action against the ChiCom nuclear facilities. It was discussed and generally concurred in by a more limited interdepartmental group. The argument of that paper is summarized in Section I of the attached. If you would like to read either the current draft of the general "program of action" covering the orthodox measures or the TS paper on pre-emptive action, they can be obtained from my secretary.

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Some "Unorthodox" Approaches to the Problem of
Nuclear Proliferation

Two general approaches to the problem of proliferation are discussed below. The first would reduce (but not wholly eliminate) the incentive of Asian countries - and to a much lesser extent nations outside Asia - to develop national nuclear capabilities by preventing the Chinese Communists from developing such a capability. The second type of approach would operate primarily on the incentive systems of potential nuclear powers by reducing the value of a nuclear capability to Communist China and to other potential nuclear powers. In fact, as the discussion below illustrates, the two approaches overlap.

I. Direct Action Against the Communist Chinese Nuclear Facilities

Direct non-nuclear pre-emptive action against Chinese Communist nuclear facilities might be undertaken (a) overtly without any specific justification; (b) covertly without specific justification; (c) overtly in response to, and justified as a part of the U.S. reaction to, ChiCom aggression; and (d) overtly on the basis of a justification provided by actions in the arms control field. The advantages and disadvantages of each are developed at some length in a separate paper on this subject. The argument of that paper has been summarized and restated below.

A. General Advantage of All Approaches. The elimination of the ChiCom nuclear capability would greatly reduce (though not wholly eliminate) the immediate incentive and justification for Indian development of nuclear weapons and the possible subsequent movement of Japan in the same direction. It would thus eliminate an important source of a possible chain reaction leading to further nuclear proliferation. It would

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also deprive the ChiComs of the political-psychological and military-defense advantages of a nuclear capability. It would eliminate the need for U.S. consideration, in responding to Communist aggression, of even the marginal possibility of ChiCom use of nuclear weapons in the event of a U.S. attack upon mainland China.

B. General Disadvantages of All Approaches. The U.S. cannot have full assurance that its action will have eliminated the ChiCom capability. Its assurance will be greater now before the ChiComs have tested a device and begun actual production of weapons, but we have no certainty, even now, that we have identified all nuclear production facilities. Military estimates indicate that a quite heavy conventional attack, involving a large number of sorties, would be required to provide one hundred per cent assurance of destruction.

Moreover, even with complete destruction, the Chinese could, assuming that they have mastered the nuclear art, reconstruct their nuclear production capability in, say, four or five years. While the attack upon their facilities would be a disincentive to such Chinese action, there would also be significant incentives (including, probably, a heightened sense of threat of future U.S. attack). In reconstructing the facilities they would be likely to take measures such as underground construction and extensive air defense which would make a new attack physically much more difficult. The political problems involved in a second round of U.S. attacks would also probably make it significantly more difficult for the U.S. to decide to make such further attacks. Thus, the U.S. would, at most, buy some time. Whether such time could be put to good use would depend upon the likelihood of obtaining international action, perhaps along the lines discussed in Section II below, which would offer some assurance of a more lasting solution.

The possibility of military retaliation by Communist China or the USSR is very difficult to estimate because it would depend in some significant measure upon the particular circumstances in which the U.S. action was taken. However,

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some kind of ChiCom retaliation (e.g., an attack on the bases in Taiwan or elsewhere from which the U.S. attack was launched) cannot be ruled out. Retaliation by the USSR seems unlikely unless the U.S. were simultaneously undertaking other action which appeared to threaten the very existence of the Chinese regime or, perhaps, the regimes in North Vietnam or North Korea.

In general, action against Communist Chinese facilities is subject, in varying degree, to the following kinds of adverse international political reaction: (a) it is an illustration of the U.S. unwillingness to accept the existence of Communist China as a major world actor; (b) it conflicts with U.S. efforts to argue the limited military significance of ChiCom nuclear capability; (c) it is an action with strong racialist overtones - the white man (including the French) can develop the bomb, but it is not considered safe for colored people to possess them; (d) it is highly dangerous, involving grave risk of precipitating war (or escalation of existing conflict) in Asia and even of bringing the Soviets to the support of the Chinese; and (e) it is another illustration of the U.S. preoccupation with military considerations.

Action with no justification other than a general argument that the U.S. was seeking to preserve the peace of the world through depriving a potential aggressor of nuclear weapons would be subject to all of the above reactions. The principal variations in advantages and disadvantages of other approaches to direct action are based upon the differing degrees to which they would be likely to precipitate such political reactions as these.

C. A Disarmament Approach. From a political point of view the best situation would be one where there was international agreement on various measures designed to eliminate further nuclear proliferation and upon military sanctions against non-participants who disregarded the agreements. Such international agreement might include, in addition to the existing test-ban treaty, such elements of present U.S.

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proposals as: (a) a non-dissemination agreement with non-acquisition and non-production clauses binding present non-nuclear powers; (b) inspected agreement to stop production of nuclear materials; and (c) tighter controls over transfers of nuclear materials and equipment for peaceful purposes.

Difficulties with this approach include the likelihood that, at best, it will take a very long time to achieve agreement and that meanwhile the Chinese are likely to have detonated a device and to have become accepted as being, like France, an "existing" nuclear power. If the first Chinese test occurs before agreement is reached, other potential nuclear powers like India are likely to lose interest in participating. In any event, France is unlikely to accept the full range of necessary agreements and we would be unwilling to agree to direct action against French facilities. Without French adherence the Soviets are most unlikely to agree. Agreement on economic sanctions would be very difficult; on military sanctions, probably impossible. Unilateral U.S. action to enforce international agreements would certainly cast us in a politically difficult role. There would be a very wide logical, legal and political gap between international agreement on the above proposals and unilateral U.S. military enforcement measures against a non-participant Communist China.

D. Action in Response to Aggression. Action which was a part of a U.S. response to ChiCom aggression would be less difficult to justify, provided the Chinese were very clearly and quite substantially involved on the Communist side. Their present very limited degree of direct, identifiable involvement in Laos and Vietnam would make it difficult for us to use the situations there to justify such action even if we should become involved in direct military action against the Communist side. Of course, such U.S. military action in Southeast Asia might precipitate a Chinese Communist military response and thus provide a better basis for U.S. action against nuclear facilities.

A general problem is created by the fact that the principal relevant ChiCom facilities are far in the interior of mainland China and action against them would require deep penetration bombing. Since it would also require, for full effectiveness, a very substantial bomber force, the action

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would be somewhat difficult to relate to a limited war action and could be readily mis-interpreted by Peiping, Moscow and/or non-Communist countries as a preface to broad-scale military action against the mainland. Political reaction could therefore be severe and the possibility of retaliatory action could not be ruled out. In a Southeast Asia situation, it might precipitate a Communist response on the ground.

If the Chinese were actually brandishing their nuclear capability the political problems of justifying an attack would be least. Such an opportunity is probably unlikely to arise. General advance warnings of a U.S. intent to attack nuclear facilities in the event of ChiCom aggression would be undesirable.

E. Covert Action. The principal apparent advantage of covert action is, of course, that it reduces or eliminates the need for specific justification of U.S. action. The principal questions about covert action are the usual ones: (a) Can it be kept truly covert? and (b) How effective is it likely to be? Proponents believe that forms of attack which were plausibly within the capabilities of the Nationalist Chinese could be kept sufficiently disassociated from the U.S. as to avoid many of the disadvantages of direct U.S. action including the commitment of U.S. prestige to the success of the effort. (See pp. 27-28 of TS paper for general discussion of the forms of action.)

Proponents also believe that it is possible that the one known plutonium reactor could be put out of action indefinitely by an attack that is within the capabilities of the ChiNats. If we concluded that action against other facilities was necessary (e.g., the incomplete and possibly incompleteable gaseous diffusion plant), the problem would be more complicated. Near-simultaneous attacks would be necessary and perhaps difficult to manage. It is just possible that the ChiComs might not acknowledge a successful covert attack. On the other hand, they might use it as an excuse for launching retaliatory political and military attacks upon the ChiNats.

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military retaliation for covert attack, while improbable, could put the U.S. in a very difficult international position. (It is, in fact, for this reason that such an attack might appear attractive to the ChiComs.)

F. Conclusions. At best, direct action is likely to give us a breathing spell of a few years and we cannot have full assurance that we will have knocked out all ChiCom facilities. Overt action against ChiCom nuclear facilities would be most feasible in the event of major ChiCom aggression. However, such an opportunity is probably unlikely to occur. If, upon further examination, covert action seems to offer real prospect of success, it provides the best approach. Even covert action would be a good deal easier to undertake in a situation in which we are responding to ChiCom aggression in Asia.

II. Actions Designed to Affect National Incentives to Development of National Nuclear Capabilities.

A. Broad U.S.-Soviet Defense Guarantees

The U.S. and the USSR might, either by joint or by parallel declarations, offer assurances of retaliation against nuclear attack upon any Asian state. The U.K. might possibly be associated with such a guarantee.

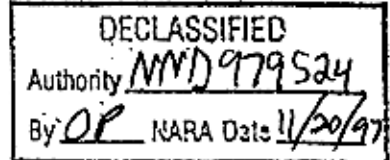
Arguments Pro

1. Such a broad guarantee from the two principal nuclear powers, who share a common interest in this respect, might effectively sterilize the Chinese Communist nuclear capability. That capability would be shown up for what it is - a militarily unusable capability (except in a strictly defensive role).

2. It would provide a form of guarantee which would be more acceptable and reassuring to neutrals, including India.

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3. It would accordingly reduce the incentive to the development of national nuclear capabilities by offering assurance of deterrence by both of the major nuclear powers.

Arguments Con

1. Would be difficult to get Soviet agreement at best and probably impossible to get agreement to assurance of defense against ChiCom nuclear attacks only. Yet a broader assurance of retaliation against any use of nuclear weapons in Asia would sterilize the U.S. nuclear capability in Asia. It would, in effect, create a nuclear free zone as to use, rather than as to deployment. Possible ways around this difficulty would be to make the guarantee apply only to use of nuclear weapons by any other nation or to permit exception for use of nuclear weapons by defending forces faced by massive conventional attack. Either formulation would be likely to make declaration less acceptable to Soviets.)

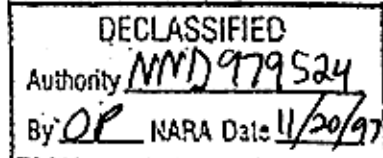
2. Would not avoid fundamental problem that Asian nations would be dependent upon others for nuclear deterrence. Also, unlikely that assurance would be iron-clad. In fact, a declaration applicable to all of Asia would have to have some loopholes.

B. U.S. Soviet Defense Guarantees Applicable only to India.

Guarantees of retaliation for India alone would preserve the advantages cited above for India, though not for other Asian countries, and would avoid the dilemma discussed in par 1 under "con" argument above. It would not avoid problem of "con" argument in par 2 above and would pose the additional difficulty of appearing to offer more to a neutral than to U.S. allies. (Perhaps this problem might be met by following U.S.-Soviet declarations with a unilateral U.S. declaration of the same kind for its allies in Asia, or even for all

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Asian nations. Again there might be a question as to whether such a general declaration would not have to be quite generally stated.)

C. U.S.-Soviet Declaration of Not Assisting Third Powers That Use Nuclear Weapons

Arguments Pro

1. This would operate directly upon the incentives of India (and others) to develop national nuclear capabilities by making it clear that use of such capabilities would mean forfeit of U.S. and Soviet defense assistance.

2. It would clearly remove the Soviet nuclear umbrella from Communist China (and the U.S. umbrella from France) thus depreciating the value of its nuclear capability.

3. It could be presented as a great peace initiative, further putting the ChiComs on the defensive on the "peace issue".

Arguments Con

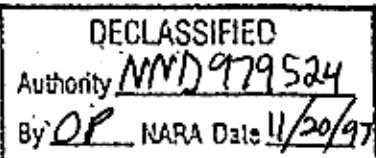
1. India (and some of the others that may be tempted to develop nuclear capabilities) will see its nuclear capability in strictly defensive-deterrent terms. Since it will not actually plan to use its nuclear weapons it may not feel affected by the U.S.-Soviet declaration. Meanwhile it would see a real value in a token nuclear capability as a deterrent to attack which would always be available regardless of the actions of the U.S. and the USSR.

2. The Soviet nuclear umbrella has largely been removed from the ChiComs already. Thus the principal effect of the declaration would be to eliminate any chance that French use of nuclear weapons could bring us to France's aid. This will certainly produce loud and disruptive reaction from de Gaulle.

3. Insofar as European acceptance of the MLF is based

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upon the hope that it can develop into an independent European deterrent, the argument for it may be undermined by such a declaration unless special provision were made for the MLF (and this would certainly be difficult to obtain from the Soviets).

D. Guarantee by Britain of India's (and Pakistan's) Nuclear Defense

The British alone might offer to India and Pakistan, within the framework of Commonwealth defense relationships, a guarantee of retaliation against nuclear attacks upon them.

Arguments Pro

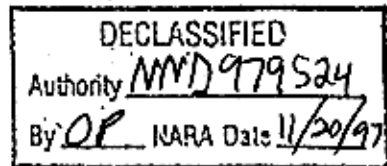
1. Might be a way around India's dilemma of how to obtain a reassuring guarantee while preserving non-alignment.
2. Might be a politically useful employment of otherwise depreciating UK nuclear capabilities.
3. Would provide a logically justifiable way to single out India and Pakistan from other Asian countries and treat them in even-handed fashion. (Paks might reject offer if clearly directed against Communist China, but the offer would help undercut any Pak claim that India was getting special treatment.)

Arguments Con

1. Indians are likely to view British commitment as less reassuring than even a more general U.S. declaration because of skepticism as to whether Brits would ever actually use or threaten use of nuclear weapons.
2. U.K. is unlikely to be willing to provide such assurance in view of its sensitivity to dangers to Hong Kong of taking explicitly anti-Chinese actions.
3. It would provide some ex post facto justification

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for an independent British nuclear force, strengthen political forces in the UK favoring retention of such a force and, by analogy, be used by the French as a justification for their national nuclear force.

E. An Asian Nuclear Free Zone

The U.S. might take the initiative to advocate a nuclear free zone for Asia which would call for (a) U.S. nuclear withdrawal from Western Pacific as far as Hawaii, but retaining existing conventional forces and bases; (b) denuclearization of mainland Asia and Soviet Siberia to the Urals; (c) prohibitions on manufacturing or introducing nuclear weapons in the defined area; (d) the right of dual capable delivery systems to remain in the area (but without nuclear components).

Arguments Pro

1. If the proposal were accepted it would offer the possibility of preventing development of a ChiCom nuclear capability (or of providing a basis for later taking pre-emptive action against it, if the agreement were broken).

2. Agreement by India and others (which they would be hard put to refuse if the ChiComs accepted) would stop Indian efforts to develop a national nuclear capability.

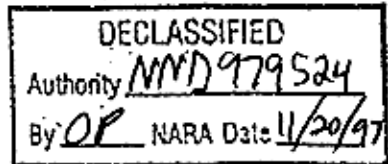
3. Even if the proposal were not accepted, U.S. sponsorship of it would put the ChiComs on the defensive with respect to development of a nuclear capability, particularly since such development is being justified in defensive terms.

4. It is, in fact, highly unlikely that the U.S. will ever make the decision to initiate nuclear weapons use in the Far East. And if it should, in an emergency, have to use nuclear weapons, there would be little difficulty in getting them back quickly into the area.

5. The U.S. ability to retain its Asian bases for its conventional forces would tend to be strengthened politically.

Arguments Con

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Arguments Con

1. Though such a zone may appear to involve considerable military costs to the U.S., it will involve a very great cost to Communist China - deprivation of its ability to acquire or retain nuclear weapons. ChiCom agreement is therefore most unlikely.

2. U.S. acceptance of the idea will tend, even in the absence of agreement, to put pressure on the existing U.S. nuclear presence in the area. Asian countries - even those basically opposed to the idea of U.S. nuclear withdrawal - may be hard put to resist popular pressures for ChiCom counter-proposals unacceptable to us.

3. Even though the real military costs may be low because of our ability to move nuclear forces back into the area, it may appear that the balance of military power has changed because of massive ChiCom military manpower. Psychological effects could be adverse.

4. Particularly if it is not negotiated until after a first ChiCom test, an NFZ would require effective inspection which would be difficult to devise and harder to get accepted.

5. Finally there is the argument, largely discounted above, that massive Chinese military manpower does in fact require a nuclear counter in the immediate area if the ChiComs are to be deterred from overrunning much of Asia.

S/P:R.H.Johnson
May 28, 1964

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