



DEPARTMENT OF STATE
ACTION MEMORANDUM

S/S

SECRET (Entire Text)
NODIS

March 15, 1979

TO: The Secretary

FROM: S/P - Anthony W. Lake *TL*
EA - Roger W. Sullivan *RS*
PM - Leslie H. Gelb *LHG*

Technical Assistance to China for
Underground Nuclear Testing

You asked that we consider what to do next about the President's offer to Deng Xiaoping. You indicated, in response to Tony Lake's note, that you agree this offer could pose a number of serious political/military questions. (Attached is Tony's note. Les also makes the point that any cooperation would legally require an umbrella agreement subject to Congressional review and certain publicity. To get this the Administration might have to declare China's nuclear weapons program in our security interest.)

We see two immediate problems:

- the Chinese may come back soon to pursue this possibility with us;
- someone in the USG may follow-up with the Chinese. (We have some indication -- an NSC request to CIA for data on China's underground testing capabilities -- that groundwork is being laid already for this.)

We propose that at the next VBB meeting you outline the issues we would have to think through, and seek agreement from Harold and Zbig that before we say anything further to the Chinese -- or respond if they come back to us -- we will want to have answers on these and possibly other problems. We suggest that you propose that McGiffert, Gelb, Aaron and Frank Press get together to explore the security, proliferation, and other issues that a positive

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Chinese response would raise, and report back to the three of you.

FYI: In case we can't avoid undertaking some form of cooperation pursuant to the President's offer, but decide that effective technical assistance is too dangerous, we will also be thinking quietly about some way to respond to the Chinese in as benign and innocuous a fashion as possible. This might consist of unclassified assistance in basic seismology, geology or meteorology, not specifically related to nuclear weapons testing but relevant to it.

Attachment:

Note from Tony Lake

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

S/S

Feb. 26, 1979

SECRET/NODIS (Entire Text)

TO: The Secretary

FROM: S/P - Anthony Lake

Technical Assistance to China for
Underground Nuclear Testing

*Your points
are well taken -
This does present
real problems.*

I understand that during the visit of Chinese Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping, the President offered to help the Chinese with underground nuclear testing techniques, insofar as the law permits, to enable China to stop testing in the atmosphere. Deng said the Chinese would consider the offer.

Given the possibility that the Chinese may accept in the near future, we should begin now to consider the issues that a favorable Chinese reply would raise. Beyond the question of what the legal constraints are, we need a technical review of the Chinese requirements, and what kinds of assistance we would be prepared to make available. In addition, we should think through some of the broader foreign policy considerations, e.g.:

- We would need to implement the offer in a way that minimized perceptions on the part of the Chinese political and scientific leadership that we were, in effect, collaborating in their nuclear weapons development program.
- We would need to examine how we reconcile technical assistance for Chinese underground testing with our objective of a Comprehensive Test Ban. Giving China the means to conduct more effective underground weapons tests may be seen to conflict with renunciation of all testing by the US, UK, and USSR. We (and the British) may wish to consider whether linkage is possible, i.e. whether assistance to China could be made conditional upon Chinese adherence to a CTB at a specified time in the future.

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At the same time, we need to think through carefully the effects of such assistance when it became known to the Soviets, other governments, and in the US. We would need to be prepared to minimize damage in the following areas:

- Soviet perceptions. Given Soviet paranoia about China and US-China relations, Soviet hardliners could well portray this step as part of a US effort to build up Chinese nuclear capabilities against the USSR. Moscow might even use it as a pretext to abrogate arms control agreements, or break off negotiations on CTB, unless we were able to put it in the context of a broader non-proliferation framework.
- Japanese perceptions. Knowledge of nuclear testing assistance to China, even if it were limited to relatively unsophisticated techniques, could be seen as a threat to Japan's security, and could cause a fundamental reevaluation of the non-nuclear consensus in Japan.
- Global nonproliferation policies. Apparent US assistance to a nuclear weapons state -- especially one that is not an ally -- could raise fundamental objections to the gamut of our non-proliferation policies among the non-nuclear-weapons states, especially those on or near the threshold. India would pose a special problem, in light of our strong stance on Indian safeguards and India's continuing concern about the threat from China. It will also raise concerns in Congress and careful prior consultation would be necessary before we committed ourselves unequivocally to provide China with any specific assistance.
- Security concerns of other countries. Korea could be strongly tempted to resume its nuclear weapons program if the ROK knew we were providing any form of testing assistance to China. Similarly, advocates of the nuclear option in Taiwan would be strengthened. For different reasons,

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Authority RC246

By KJ NARA Date 02/23/10

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Pakistan might pay even less heed to our arguments. We will need to have contingency plans for dealing with these perceptions if China accepts our offer.

MJB
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Clearance: S/P:PKreisberg *MJB*

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