



DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

S/S

October 31, 1980

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TO : The Secretary

FROM : PM - Reginald Bartholomew
S/P - Anthony Lake *TLA*
EA - Michael H. Armacost, Acting *MHA*

Assistance to China's Underground Nuclear
Testing Program - INFORMATION

SUMMARY: Last year we tentatively offered the Chinese limited assistance to encourage them to carry out nuclear explosive tests underground rather than in the atmosphere. The Chinese have not yet taken up this specific offer, but have reiterated an interest in U.S. assistance. We should review our position on helping China achieve this capability.

ANALYSIS OF ISSUES

Background

China is now the only nuclear power testing in the atmosphere. While the present low rate of Chinese atmospheric testing probably has a very limited health impact on a global basis, there is almost certainly some adverse impact which we would like to halt. Our representation to the PRC on its October 16 atmospheric nuclear test elicited once again the response that China would continue atmospheric testing until such time as underground tests were feasible. The Chinese also reiterated that with US assistance they could possibly accelerate their schedule for beginning underground tests, which would obviate the need for atmospheric tests. Our information indicates that the Chinese lack both the drilling technology and the diagnostic equipment needed to conduct underground tests. Relying on their own resources, the Chinese would probably need five to ten years to move a significant number of their tests underground. However, there is no evidence that they are moving in this direction on their own.

In a January 1979 conversation that touched on Chinese atmospheric nuclear tests, the President suggested to Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping that Chinese experts meet with Dr. Frank Press to discuss "how it might be made easier

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for you to do your testing underground." Deng agreed, adding that American technical help would be useful, too. The President subsequently decided that if the Chinese asked us for assistance, we should proceed cautiously, offering help to obtain drilling equipment applicable to oil production or mining, and furnishing unclassified PNE-related reports. Assistant Secretary of Defense Gerald Dinneen, when asked during Secretary Brown's visit to China last January whether China might be permitted to send technicians to the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory to learn more about conducting underground tests, renewed the offer of unclassified data. The Chinese have yet to take up our offer. It is clear that China will continue atmospheric tests until it is capable of conducting underground tests. However, it is not clear whether the Chinese are ready to limit themselves to underground tests; they may still have some large warheads which could not be tested underground.

Policy Considerations

While it is clearly in our interest that China join the other nuclear weapons states in limiting its tests to the underground, there are potentially serious drawbacks to our helping bring this about:

-- U.S. assistance, if revealed, could expose us to foreign and domestic criticism that we were aiding China's nuclear weapons program. (We have not informed the Congress of our offer of limited assistance.)

-- It could aggravate our relations with the USSR. The Soviets are likely to focus on weapons assistance rather than on the incentive to abandon atmospheric testing, possibly jeopardizing prospects for a CTB and other future negotiations on nuclear matters with the Soviets.

-- Although we would not be in violation of our NPT obligations, U.S. assistance could intensify Third World complaints of a "double standard" of cooperation in nuclear weaponry among the nuclear powers, possibly damaging the non-proliferation regime, even though the transition to underground testing advances our test ban objectives.

-- Underground testing could give the Chinese better data on weapons effects, while making it more difficult for us to monitor their nuclear tests. Given the Chinese capability of reaching the US with their new ICBMs, we have a long-term concern over facilitating Chinese warhead development.

If we were to provide more than unclassified data, secrecy would be difficult because we would probably have to consult with Congress and because the equipment involved is COCOM-controlled.

Current U.S. policy does not allow the export to China of equipment used in nuclear tests. The unclassified information we have offered the Chinese might help them to accelerate their underground test program somewhat, but the real bottleneck in the Chinese program is the lack of drilling hardware and diagnostic instrumentation. The FRG, the UK and France probably have the drilling technology; France has the instrumentation.

POSSIBLE FUTURE COURSES OF ACTION

We may choose from among five courses of action:

- (1) We can do nothing.
- (2) We can remind the Chinese of our previous offer and leave it to them to take a further initiative.
- (3) We can provide the Chinese the unclassified information we have offered already, without awaiting a more formal request.
- (4) We can tell the Chinese where to look elsewhere for equipment needed to build underground test facilities and monitor test results.
- (5) We can amend our export control guidelines to permit export of equipment involved in underground testing.

There is no need for any action at this time. In due course, as we review our overall security relationship with China, we propose to examine this issue as well and present you with recommendations for possible interagency discussion.

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