



OFFICE OF THE HISTORIAN

FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1977–1980, VOLUME IV, NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY

185. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski) to President Carter¹

Washington, May 22, 1980

SUBJECT

Nuclear Employment Policy (C)

The basic strategy document of your Administration, PD–18,² called for a follow-on review of our nuclear employment policy. Two major studies, one on targeting and one on secure reserve forces, were completed in 1978 and presented to the SCC in April 1979.³ Although the SCC accepted most of the recommendations, it also called for additional work. (S)

At the same time, Harold Brown began implementing the SCC accepted recommendations. In January, 1979, as part of his annual Defense Report, Harold laid out publicly the rationale for our evolving employment policy and gave it a name, “countervailing strategy.” Together with the Joint Chiefs, Harold has been working out a detailed implementation directive that he would issue. In the past few weeks, the few outstanding issues have been resolved. (S)

Harold and I have discussed next steps, and we believe that it is wise to codify these changes in a Presidential Directive as originally intended by PD–18. The text of such a directive, which would replace the extant NSDM–242, is at Tab A.⁴ Harold has edited it personally and has discussed it with the Joint Chiefs of Staff because it largely concerns military contingency planning. (S)

The directive marks a significant step in employment doctrine. Its main features are:

- Maintenance of a strong thread of continuity with our past deterrence doctrine to include nuclear support for our allies.
- New emphasis on flexibility, which will make us better able to adjust to any surprises that growing Soviet capabilities could present us in operations. This is to be achieved through better staffing capabilities, a gradual increase in reserve forces, and better targeting of mobile and soft military targets as well as C3I.
- Renewed emphasis on C3I as a more and more critical element of an effective deterrent capability.
- A requirement for exercises to validate and improve our doctrine and capabilities. Your participation in IVORY ITEM exercises in 1978 gave a much needed check of our plans. The new directive calls for two exercises annually. (TS)

In addition to the requirements for an integrating directive on employment policy within the military services and the intelligence community, there are two other compelling reasons for this document. (S)

First, Harold can use references to it in public and private statements which are intended to complicate Soviet planning and to convince them, and our allies, that we will not be paralyzed in a crisis between cataclysmic options and capitulation. This is particularly critical for the next few years while a number of our strategic programs are not yet fully deployed. (S)

Second, it may help blunt sharp criticism that we are not dealing adequately with the changing requirements for deterrence in the face of growing Soviet forces and capabilities. (S)

As for interagency handling, Harold prefers no further discussion. (See his memo at Tab B). I agree and suggest that we treat it the same way we do the SIOP. It is, after all, sensitive military contingency planning. Furthermore, it contains references to [less than 1 line not declassified] Cuba, SRV, and North Korea as well as the Soviet Union, and how they relate to the SIOP, information not known in such explicitness outside the DOD and the White House. Harold suggests that we discuss the PD with Ed Muskie and work out an approach for presenting the substance to the allies. (TS)

I propose two alternatives. First, that you sign the PD and instruct Harold to prepare a version for use with both Ed Muskie and Stan Turner. From that version we can develop the briefing approach to the allies. Second, you can hold a short NSC meeting on the sanitized version and then sign the PD. The approach to briefing the allies would be the same. (TS)

RECOMMENDATION

Sign the directive at Tab A and instruct the Secretary of Defense to prepare a sanitized version for interagency use,

OR

Convene a NSC meeting⁵

[Page 811]

Tab B

Memorandum From Secretary of Defense Brown to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski)⁶

Washington, May 20, 1980

SUBJECT

PD on Nuclear Weapons Employment Policy

With your April 22 draft, modified as recorded in Walter Slocombe's May 2 memo for General Welch,² we have, I believe, a text for a good directive on our nuclear employment policy. I think the next step should be for the two of us to discuss it with Ed, given the obvious foreign policy and alliance implications of the issue. I do not, however, think any further interagency discussion is necessary or appropriate, given the nature of the subject and the prior interagency discussion of the underlying issues.

When we discuss the PD itself with Ed, we should also talk about how best to present it to the Allies. One possibility would be a presentation at the forthcoming NPG. We will also need to discuss what (if any) public statement should be made about it.

Harold

1. Source: Carter Library, National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material, General Odom File, Box 37, PD-59: 5-8/80. Top Secret; Sensitive. Sent for action. The date is handwritten. Carter wrote next to it: "Zbig J."↵

2. See [Document 31](#).↵

3. See [Document 118](#).↵

4. Printed as Document 208.↵

5. Carter struck-through “NSC” and wrote after “meeting:” “to brief me & VP on what is changed re targeting, flexibility, C3I, etc & proposals for briefing others & guidelines for public statements.”↵

6. Top Secret; Sensitive; Eyes Only.↵

7. Not found.↵