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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

August 7, 1980

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MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT

FROM: ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI *ZB.*

SUBJECT: NSC Weekly Report #149

1. OpinionForeign Policy and the Elections

Foreign policy should offer you the greatest opportunity for the exercise of Presidential leadership, in a manner that could significantly influence the outcome of the elections. Despite the constraints on Presidential power, foreign affairs is the area in which you have the greatest discretion and, thus -- at least in theory -- the most opportunity for demonstrating effective leadership, for taking dramatic action, and for mobilizing national support. Indeed, I have already heard from a number of well-informed sources that the Republicans are very much concerned that you will stage some sort of a foreign policy coup or undertake some bold initiative, or cut some significant deal in the area of foreign affairs shortly before the elections.

Unfortunately, the present international situation simply does not lend itself to some sudden and dramatic stroke -- unless we are confronted by a crisis. (In that event, a very strong and firm response, even involving military action, is likely to be quite popular. Moreover, I have confidence in our crisis-management machinery, and I believe that our performance would be good.) But short of that, I cannot offer a prescription for a major Presidential initiative of a type that would have significant electoral effect. Something like Eisenhower's "I would go to Korea" does not seem to be available, and we must be careful not to initiate some move in the Middle East or regarding the Soviets that will appear contrived.

In any case, whatever happens, we need to do much better than we have done so far in making the country understand both the constructive character of your foreign policy and the dangers inherent in Reagan's approach.

Accordingly, in this memorandum I plan to address myself as briefly and concisely as I can to four broad themes that deal with foreign affairs:

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Review on August 7, 1986

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- I. The distinctive character of the Carter foreign policy;
- II. Public criticism of Reagan's approach;
- III. Crises that we might confront;
- IV. Initiatives that we might take.

I. The distinctive character of the Carter foreign policy:

I think the most distinctive hallmark of your foreign policy is that you have blended together two elements that traditionally have been seen in America as being in conflict: concern for moral principle and recognition of the importance of American power. In recent years, McGovern and later Kennedy have stood for the former, while Nixon and Kissinger have stood for the latter.

In contrast, you have managed to combine the two in order to shape a foreign policy that has been both moral and realistic. It can be best summarized by the following themes:

- (1) Restoring America's military and economic strength for the long-term.
- (2) Recognition of global complexity.
- (3) Progress toward a genuine partnership both with Western Europe and the Far East.
- (4) On the basis of renewed strength, Allied cooperation, and diplomatic firmness we can also seek accommodation with the Soviet Union.
- (5) Importance of the Third World.
- (6) Human rights is a dominant idea of our times.

Finally, we neither run the world nor can run away from it. We cannot be guided by nostalgia for the fifties (U.S. preponderance) or by the partial isolationism of the early 1970s. The many tangible accomplishments of your term (Panama, Camp David, China normalization, etc.) are the consequence of this approach. They demonstrate how responsible use of American power and influence can contribute to global peace and human progress.

I believe the above summarizes the themes of your Administration's foreign policy, and that in time it will become clear that this was the proper course for the nation at this time: a building presidency, not a flamboyant, "fire-fighting" one. However, many of these themes -- and even some specific actions, like the

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Panama Canal treaties -- are clearly not popular politically. To be sure, there is merit in an "educational campaign"; but the direct electoral benefits of discussing all the central themes of your foreign policy are less obvious. "Complexity" and "change," for example -- however real in today's world -- are a source of anxiety, not political approbation.

It is possible to group these themes in more politically attractive ways, however, around two primary themes and two secondary ones:

Primary:

- American strength (defense, economic, energy, alliances); and
- peace.

Secondary:

- morality (human rights, Third World); and
- building for the future (alliances, economic summits, Third World).

In my judgment, you are in fact on strong grounds on national strength -- where the Republicans are trying to make you look weak -- and on peace. In the former area, you have reversed nearly a decade's (Republican) decline in our spending, are increasing the defense budget by 3-4% in real terms, buying the right modern weapons, and creating a capacity to protect (through deterrence, not conflict) Western vital interests in the Persian Gulf. There is the NATO 3% commitment, the Long-Term Defense Program, and the TNF decision. There is the energy program -- for the first time beginning to reduce our national vulnerability to decisions taken by other countries in this area. MTN directly helps U.S. businessmen, farmers, workers and consumers. And the economic summits (plus your building efforts in the U.S. economy) are also contributing directly to U.S. strength in the world.

These are facts; but another fact is that we have not publicized our successes as we need to do -- and, for that and other reasons, thus do not get the credit that you and your Administration justly deserve. We can be assertive -- not defensive -- in this area.

With regard to peace, the record is clear: despite the anxieties and difficulties of various crises (like Iran), no U.S. soldier has died in combat. This is the first four-year term since Eisenhower's second when that has been true; and in fact you are the first President since Hoover (!) to have no combat losses. You also did the "impossible" in bringing Egypt-Israel peace and the end of the Rhodesia-Zimbabwe race war. ]

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Strength and peace are two excellent themes. And combining them also brings in arms control, the effort to reduce the risks of conflict from a position of strength, and the balanced, mature approach to the Soviet Union. ]

The morality issue has primarily a selective audience -- e.g. ethnic-Americans on CSCE; the "Humphrey wing" of the party on developing-country problems. But there is also a general sense in the country of the importance of "standing for something" -- a theme you used in good effect in 1976.

Finally, there is value in emphasizing how your policies build for the future, beginning with national strength, but also in strengthening our alliances (where, of course, there will be considerable press/public skepticism); dealing with economic and energy realities; and creating openings to the new poor centers of the future. Put in this sense -- not as adjusting to "complexity" or "change" -- I believe most Americans would welcome straight talk from their President, as opposed to the simplicities of a Reagan. Americans are also responsive to challenge, provided at the same time they are told what to do about it -- as we have been doing, though often without the clarity and persistence that is needed. ]

## II. Public criticism of Reagan's approach:

In contrast, Reagan's approach can be attacked head-on for being both escapist and dangerous. In brief:

-- The Reagan Platform is an escape from reality. The Platform and Reagan's own statements seem to view the world only in terms of the U.S.-Soviet struggle and by over-simplifying virtually every world problem. There is no recognition of the new forces in the world nor of the need for the United States to give historical change a positive direction. (Reagan also calls for massive defense increases, while also promising a tax cut.)

-- Reagan is nostalgic for the past, especially in his dangerous hankering for strategic superiority which would produce a massive arms race, as well as the general nostalgia for the world of the 1950s, when American military and economic preponderance were the consequences of the collapse of Europe and Japan in World War II.

-- The Reagan Platform is a repudiation of even the limited achievements of past Republican foreign policy. This comes across most strongly in Reagan's skepticism regarding arms control. Given his objection to SALT II, is Reagan for or against Nixon-Kissinger's arms control centerpiece, SALT I?

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-- The Reagan Platform is an endorsement for what Carter has been doing. In its few positive parts, the Reagan Platform in effect endorses what the Carter Administration has been doing on the Middle East (though the words "Camp David" are never mentioned), your efforts to enhance NATO and defense capabilities, your tough response to the Soviets on Afghanistan (though it undercuts the latter by recent expedient statements on the grain embargo).

-- Moreover, Reagan's approach is woefully inadequate on arms control, which it slights, and in regard to the Third World, which it largely ignores. It could also jeopardize the expanding U.S.-Chinese relationship by inflaming the Taiwan issue (with the emphasis on the U.S.-Taiwan military connection).

In brief, his foreign policy is unrealistic, simplistic, and indifferent to moral issues. It is historically antiquated and potentially dangerous. It is easy to slide from over-simplification into extremism, and Reagan's foreign policy would take America on such a slide.

### III. Dangers that we might confront:

Public debate over foreign policy aside, this coming fall could be punctuated by a series of crises, the handling of which could decisively affect the outcome of the elections. Such a crisis might include any of the following:

(1) A tragic hostage development: Some of our hostages could be put on trial, or one or more of them could die, or we might simply learn that some of them have disappeared. Khomeini appears determined to embarrass you in whatever way possible.

(2) Break-up in Iran: Khomeini's death and the collapse of public order could prompt the disintegration of Iran and the outbreak of civil war, precipitating even a Soviet intervention. At the present moment, we have relatively few means of influencing the outcome of such a civil war, while we do know that the Soviets have started training for military operations directed at Iran.

(3) A Soviet peace offensive, or a new military offensive in Afghanistan, or (most probably) both: The Soviets will most likely intensify their efforts to woo Western Europe and perhaps even the United States through arms control initiatives, while maintaining their assertive posture in Afghanistan. Their objective will be to achieve Western acquiescence while splitting the West even further.

(4) A crisis in the Middle East: Some violent act (West Bank, Syria, Lebanon) could occur, sparking a new cycle of emotion and retaliation, or -- less likely -- there could be some upheaval in either Saudi Arabia or Egypt jeopardizing the stability of the region.

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(5) A confrontation with Cuba: The Cubans could launch a new refugee wave, in order to embarrass you and to hurt you politically.

(6) Caribbean instability: There could be even more violence and instability -- perhaps another "Nicaragua."

At the same time, all of the above could also offer opportunities for decisive leadership. Such a reaction could galvanize national support and cause a patriotic upsurge. Thus, on the hostage issue we should at least have the option to take prompt military action, either through a blockade or (perhaps) the seizure of Kharg Island. I believe you should ask Harold Brown to take some quiet steps to make sure that prompt military action could be initiated in the event of such crisis. We will not be able to wait for days to react.

The break-up of Iran would pose serious dilemmas, and our reaction would have to be calibrated to any Soviet initiative. In any case, we would want to act here in concert with some of the key regional countries, as well as our Allies, although again the adoption of a very firm posture could have a very positive effect.

Insofar as the Soviets are concerned, we should keep reiterating that Afghanistan is the litmus test of Soviet intentions -- though without putting ourselves in the position of emphasizing Soviet failure to respond. If the Soviet Union wishes accommodation, we are ready for the solution of the Afghanistan problem, which combines transitional security arrangements with a total Soviet withdrawal. In any case, we cannot afford any zig-zags in our policy toward the Soviet Union, and a tough public posture by you and by Muskie is essential, especially if we are at the same time to be able to argue credibly that we are prepared to seek arms control arrangements with the Soviets as a matter of mature realism.

With respect to Cuba, it seems to me that renewed provocations by Castro should be very firmly rebuffed; and the forcible deportation to Cuba, through the use of the U.S. Navy, of some Cuban criminals might be an appropriately dramatic step, designed to signal Castro that there are limits beyond which the U.S. cannot be pushed. In the Caribbean, we need to be able to act promptly and credibly, without the appearance of indecisiveness with which we are (unfairly) charged over Nicaragua.

#### IV. Initiatives that we might take:

There are some initiatives that you could take that might be helpful in demonstrating effective Presidential leadership in the area of foreign affairs. The following come to mind and you may wish to indicate here (by marginal notes) as well as above, whether you want me to develop any of these further:

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(1) The hostage crisis: I think we should think about a more aggressive strategy -- though recognizing the political liabilities of an effort that does not work. We might explore the possibility through our various intermediaries of a meeting between Muskie and some responsible Iranian official, if anyone emerges in the next three months. Indeed such a meeting, if held in October, could have significant impact even if it did not lead to the immediate release of the hostages -- provided, of course, that a legitimate and realistic process toward resolutions is the result. There are undoubtedly some other ideas; but the problem is that without some initiative we will surely be accused of permitting the crisis to have become routine.

(2) We might explore secretly with the Soviets the possibility of some major withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan just prior to the elections. Though such an eventuality is not likely, it is conceivable that the Soviets might reach the conclusion that Reagan will be too dangerous, especially given his repudiation of arms control. One must be extremely careful how one undertakes any such probes because they could contribute to the impression of zig-zagging. That is why they should not be undertaken formally in the Muskie-Gromyko channel but more by indirection and quiet hints (for example, in some of my informal talks with Dobrynin and especially with the Poles, who are anxious to promote a peaceful resolution of the Afghanistan problem).

(3) Though the political benefit of U.S.-Soviet TNP talks would not be great, it probably would be useful to have some exploratory discussions no later than October. That would demonstrate that your personal interest in nuclear arms control can be promoted alongside the policy of firmness on Afghanistan. Indeed, such discussions would demonstrate that the kind of mature and two-track policy that we wish to pursue with the Soviets is a more viable alternative to Reagan's extremism. We would need to judge the value of this somewhat later, in terms of Soviet behavior in Afghanistan and the effectiveness of Reagan's attacks on our Afghan policy.

(4) If the Soviets continue to be beastly on Afghanistan, and if the Bush visit to China goes reasonably well, you might consider having me visit Beijing for consultations, in late September or early October, thereby underscoring your special accomplishment in expanding the U.S.-Chinese relationship.

(5) A summit meeting with Begin and Sadat would probably not produce any results between now and November. In any event, we need to try inducing Sadat and Begin to help infuse new life in the Camp David process. The downside is that Begin probably will not wish to be helpful. Yet we should in any case seek to restart the talks, and have Sol go to the area for a sustained period of time. A September trip by Muskie could also be helpful, both for the negotiations and for reasserting our commitment to Israel.

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(6) You might contemplate convening a summit meeting on East-West relations with our principal Allies (or, alternatively, a Schmidt meeting here in September). With the Olympics behind us, it might be timely to hold a 1-2 day meeting of the Guadeloupe type, but including also the Italians and Japanese in order to discuss where do we go from here on the Soviet strategic threat posed through the Afghanistan invasion. There happens to be a real need for such a meeting, but it should not be convened unless we are certain that it would prompt some tangible steps going beyond the Venice Communique. Nonetheless, this could be an effective demonstration of leadership, and perhaps by early fall our friends might be inclined to go along because of increasing concern over what foreign policy Reagan might pursue, plus their increasing awareness of the common challenge in the Persian Gulf.

(7) There are also a series of specific military-defense initiatives that you could take, showing that there is bite to your emphasis on enhanced defense capabilities, both generally and in regard to the new Soviet strategic challenge in West Asia. These could include:

(a) Altering our carrier deployments, reducing our presence in the Mediterranean and enhancing our presence in the Indian Ocean;

(b) Creating a Middle East/Persian Gulf unified command, taking this territory out of the regional responsibilities of PACOM and EUCOM and underlining the seriousness of the Carter doctrine;

(c) Announcing the production of ERWs, to be stored in the United States for rapid deployment to Europe when needed;

(d) Adopting some of the Steadman study recommendations and streamlining and upgrading the JCS. This could move us toward the general (not joint) staff system, and could be justified by a need to streamline the JCS as an outgrowth of the Iranian raid experience;

(e) Further, sustained exposition of our Southwest Asia strategy and the specific steps we are taking through a major strategic speech.

None of the above are major steps, but cumulatively they could underline the seriousness of your commitment to enhance defense, without at the same time requiring major budgetary reprogramming.

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In general, I believe that the best posture in this area is assertiveness in expounding what we have done in the past three and a half years. It is a creditable record -- in defense, arms control, peacemaking, peace itself, energy, human rights, and international economics. As I indicated above, our biggest problem is not with the charges the Republicans will level against us, but the need to get our story out more forcefully and effectively.

For the past few years, there has been merit in a low-key approach in presenting our case -- and it has worked, in terms of taking the nation beyond the phobias of Vietnam and Watergate, which so weakened our capacity to have an effective or assertive foreign policy. In my judgment, we can now move towards a greater highlighting of our purposes, achievements, and challenges to the nation for further action -- and gain a good public response. The themes of strength and peace do not need to be elaborate; but only if we constantly pound them home, in a series of statements, speeches, etc., we are finally going to get some of the credit we deserve. This, after all, was the central tactic of your recent rip to Europe, where each speech and statement reinforced all the others -- and eventually it got through to the media, which saw this as a highly effective foreign policy effort. The message also got through to our Allies, and their response also played well here. This can, in my view, be repeated in the campaign here this fall -- starting with your acceptance speech.

Owen Paper

I attach a thoughtful paper by Henry Owen.

2. FactMuskie, Brown, Brzezinski Meeting

Ed, Harold and I reached the following decisions at our meeting this week:

-- On building a constituency for foreign aid, we will pursue Anne Wexler's suggestion of a working group and hold Harold's blue ribbon panel idea until after November. As a first step, Ed will identify those on the Hill you should meet with on pending aid legislation.

-- Harold briefed Ed on PD-59 and will carry out other key briefings during the remainder of this week (i.e., Stan Turner and key members of the Congress).

Implementing Your InstructionsJuly 30

-- On Ed's Evening Report item on Japanese defense spending you noted, "Speak forcefully -- they should at least match our present increase for defense."

- Ed will convey this message to Ambassador Okawara in New York, if possible next week.

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