



OFFICE OF THE HISTORIAN

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

50. Memorandum From William Odom of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski)¹

Washington, January 28, 1978

SUBJECT

Items of Interest from the NMCC Visit²

First, I could not hear all of the conversations but the following points emerged from what I did monitor. I put them down for our record and possible follow-up.

- The President seems not to have been aware of some of the vulnerabilities of our warning satellites (DSP). This also relates to Soviet laser R and D, as I understood this part of the discussion.
- Your question about varied Soviet attack strategies raises many questions about our command and control which have concerned me for a long time. The President responded, as I understood him, with a desire to do something about command and control as well as the vulnerability of our warning systems (doing something of course requires a large step over a number of years; it also requires a change in some of our doctrinal assumptions.)
- Harold Brown seems extremely reluctant either to announce a launch on warning policy or to allow the impression to emerge that we might have such policy. I missed other interlocutors' responses.
- I will get you some better information on the operational significance of DEFCON levels.
- Harold Brown's mention of changing Soviet strategic doctrine about limiting use of nuclear weapons raises a key issue in which we will possibly see major revisions in the next year or two. The intelligence community has a lot of work yet to be done. [3 lines not declassified] I have the impression that the President's view on this is taking a rigid shape. He is justified in this view, [less than 1 line not declassified], but it is conceivable that they will change.
- Your question on the chances of a false warning from the various systems is being researched in the JCS. An answer will be forthcoming shortly. In this connection, I do not believe it was made clear that the DSP systems are not simply waiting for a Soviet launch. They record launches almost everyday, ours, the Soviets, and others world-wide. Thus, we have a vast experience with their reliability and sensitivities.
- Finally, the "feedback" has been very positive. General Rogers observed that had we had to go to war at this level a few years ago, things would have worked rather poorly. The IVORY ITEM series has altered that situation remarkably. [Page 227]

1. Source: Carter Library, National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material, Agency File, Box 4, Defense Department: 12/77–1/78. Top Secret; Sensitive. Outside the System. Brzezinski initialed the top right corner of the memorandum and wrote "good." e

2. Reference is to Carter's visit to the National Military Command Center on January 28. (Carter Library, Presidential Materials, President's Daily Diary) No record of the meeting was found.↵