



## OFFICE OF THE HISTORIAN

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

## 125. Minutes of a Special Coordination Committee Meeting<sup>1</sup>

Washington, April 26, 1979, 4–5:30 p.m.

### SUBJECT

Strategic Forces Employment Policy

### PARTICIPANTS

#### State

Warren Christopher Deputy Secretary

David Gompert Deputy Director for Politico–Military Affairs

#### JCS

General David Jones

Lt General William Smith Assistant to the Chairman

#### ACDA

George Seignious

Spurgen Keeny Deputy Director

#### White House

Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski

David Aaron

#### OSD

Harold Brown

Admiral Daniel Murphy Deputy Under Secretary for Policy

Walter Slocombe Secretary for International Security Affairs

#### DCI

Admiral Stansfield Turner

Howard Stoertz NIO for Strategic Policy

#### NSC

Victor Utgoff

Fritz Ermarth

*Detailed Minutes*

*Dr. Brzezinski* opened the meeting with a reminder on where we are headed. He cited the five topics to be discussed today, and said that Harold Brown will summarize the backup papers<sup>2</sup> that have been prepared in order to start the discussion of each topic. He noted that we will have another SCC meeting to discuss the remaining topics and will then have an NSC meeting with the President to discuss the SCC's recommendations with respect to strategic forces employment policy. He noted that the end objective of the entire process would be a new PD.

He then recalled the three questions he had posed in the first SCC meeting on this overall issue—what are the requirements of (1) effective nuclear war management for defined political purposes, (2) crisis bargaining stability, and (3) stable [Page 574.] deterrence at different levels.<sup>3</sup> He suggested that to avoid getting bogged down, we should discuss the various issues in these terms. He noted that the message he got from the previous day's briefs was that there are many weaknesses in our C3 system that imply a very poor capability to manage a nuclear war today. He noted that these weaknesses imply a weak bargaining position for us in a crisis, and this in turn implies a weakening of deterrence. Thus, the three questions are related.

*Admiral Turner* questioned whether the connection between war management, crisis stability and deterrence stability was one that existed in reality or we created ourselves.

*Dr. Brzezinski* noted that while one could think of this problem in many ways, the connection between war management, bargaining in a crisis and deterrence exists, and the Soviets must realize that. He also said that moreover they may have an incentive in a crisis to exploit this connection.

*Mr. Aaron* observed that a bounding case was presented by the ability of one side to completely defeat or destroy the forces of the other. In this situation we would be unable to bargain successfully in a crisis and the Soviets would not be deterred. At this sort of extreme the connection must exist. Short of this extremes, we must weigh the tradeoffs involved in improving war management capabilities and how such improvements will affect crisis management and deterrent stability.

*Secretary Brown* observed that weighing the role of war management capabilities is a matter of judgment and that he personally places little stock in many controlled war scenarios. He did feel, however, that large asymmetries in enduring war management capability could affect crisis bargaining and conflict outcomes. In any case, the side that perceived itself inferior in this respect would be extremely nervous in a crisis.

*Dr. Brzezinski* commented that in democratic societies such nervousness would spill out into the public with obvious political effects.

The discussion then turned to the first agenda item: China in the SIOP.

*Secretary Brown* summarized the DOD point paper noting that at present there are [4 lines not declassified] *Secretary Brown* judged that the current US/Soviet strategic balance argued that SIOP weapons now allocated to China would be better used against Soviet targets, but he asked whether the military gain from such a shift, should it become public, would be worth the possible political problems created.

*Dr. Brzezinski* asked about the security of such information.

*General Seignious* asked whether such information had ever leaked, and who knew now whether or not China was in [Page 575.] the SIOP.

*Dr. Brzezinski* questioned whether this was a change of great magnitude and asked what it would take to accomplish it.

*Secretary Brown* commented that taking China out of the SIOP could be accomplished quite simply in the preparation of the next SIOP revision. Approximately a hundred people would have significant knowledge of the change effected, but many more could be aware that a change had taken place.

*Dr. Brzezinski* asked if we must say that China had been taken out of the SIOP.

*Secretary Brown* answered we could ask for an RNO against China and simply retarget the current SIOP weapons used against China. He noted that this would be useful, but that if it came out it would still raise political problems. For example, as in the matter of arms transfers, would not removal of China from the SIOP *per se* imply some change in our “even handedness” toward Moscow and Peking?

*Dr. Brzezinski* favored making the move and proposed a further question—should Cuba be in the SIOP?

*General Jones* pointed out that at present [2 lines not declassified]

*Dr. Brzezinski* responded by noting that Cuba’s absence from the “black book” would require someone to remind the National Command Authority that military targets in Cuba might have to be attacked; for example, general purpose forces with possible strategic implications.

*Secretary Brown* said we could put a Cuban option in the black book simply by inserting a page.

*Dr. Brzezinski* asked whether China and Cuba could be treated in a like manner, [less than 1 line not declassified]

*General Jones* observed that China is in any case covered by [less than 1 line not declassified] attack options [less than 1 line not declassified]

*Secretary Brown* proposed to structure a decision paper for the President in which the option for attacking China would be changed [1 line not declassified] and the current SIOP weapons targeted against China would be retargeted against the Soviet Union.

*Deputy Secretary Christopher* questioned the assumption made in the background paper that removing China from the SIOP, if it became public, would not have a lasting effect on US/Soviet relations.

*Secretary Brown* noted his agreement with *Christopher* and that he had not repeated this statement in his summary of the paper. He observed further that if the Soviets became upset over major US exercises, one should expect them to be disturbed over a change of China’s status in our strategic targeting.

*Dr. Brzezinski* thought it absurd that Soviet peacetime sensitivities should be allowed to influence our deliberations [Page 576] on war plans toward the Soviet Union in this way. He believed that we, like the Soviets, should shape war plans for maximum military effect.

*Secretary Brown* then noted that treating China and Cuba in an equivalent manner undermines any arguments that this change in targeting plans implies that we are forming some sort of alliance with China.

*Secretary Brown* noted that we could simply take [2 lines not declassified]

*Mr. Aaron* asked whether the systems thus directed against China would be as capable and survivable as those currently used.

*Secretary Brown* responded that the change would in the main mean retargeting some bomber weapons.

*Deputy Secretary Christopher* asked how China’s current status in the SIOP had come about, noting that China had only recently begun to acquire ICBMs; why should we reduce China’s status in the SIOP now, and why had we put China in the SIOP in the first place?

*Secretary Brown* replied while China had been weaker in the past, US/China relations had also been more hostile.

*Deputy Secretary Christopher* asked the group to imagine the public reaction should some reduction of strategic targeting against China be revealed.

*Dr. Brzezinski* commented that the strategic balance between the US and USSR was shifting unfavorably and we should alter our war plans to make the best of the situation. Should this leak and upset the Soviets, too bad.

*Secretary Brown* observed that the question was not whether to make a sensible move in targeting plans, but how to explain the change if it had to be explained.

*Dr. Brzezinski* thought we should design the best plans and then worry about how to explain them if need be.

*Secretary Brown* repeated that it looked like the best approach would be to put most of the [less than 1 line not declassified] SIOOP weapons now targeted on China against Soviet targets while covering China targets [less than 1 line not declassified]

*General Smith* asserted it would still be appropriate to [1 line not declassified]

*Dr. Brzezinski* called for a decision paper to lay out a plan and its possible political implications for the President.

The discussion then turned to the second agenda item: asymmetries in population fatalities and leadership targeting.

*Secretary Brown* summarized the DOD point paper on population targeting by noting the great uncertainties that [Page 577] would exist in the event the population were dispersed, and how those uncertainties about the real location of the Soviet population could cause gross misallocations of weapons. He noted that DOD had studies underway to reduce uncertainties as to population location specifically, on how and at what times it might be targetable, but these studies are not yet complete.

*Dr. Brzezinski* asked how the logic of targeting Soviet population would be affected by the presence or the absence of US population dispersal.

*Admiral Murphy* noted that DOD studies were not looking at US population dispersal.

*Secretary Brown* commented that question here was how to target Soviet population in the presence of uncertainty as to where it would be located.

*Dr. Brzezinski* said that our approach to targeting Soviet population should be influenced by any asymmetries in the vulnerability of the respective populations.

*Secretary Brown* noted that the not yet existing FEMA was now custodian of the US side of the problem, but that DOD would have to do the evaluation looking at both sides.

*Mr. Slocombe* promised to report back with a schedule and an outline for a study of relative population vulnerabilities and their relation to targeting.

*Spurgeon Keeny* reminded the group that much data was available from earlier Civil Defense studies.

*Mr. Slocombe* pointed out that those studies contain artificial assumptions about the actual locations of Soviet evacuated population.

*Secretary Brown* called attention to a recent Soviet Civil Defense CPX that revealed some information on CD planning for Petropavlovsk. He noted that some 16% of the population covered by that paper exercise had been expected to become casualties.

*Dr. Brzezinski* reaffirmed the need for an outline and a target date for a study of this issue.

*Secretary Brown* then introduced the discussion of targeting leadership: Our basic problem is we don't know how the Soviet leadership would function and where in fact it would be in a war. We now target their peacetime locations and known bunkers, but they have many bunkers (all of which we can't be sure we know about) and elaborate hardened communications. This is one reason, he said, why accurate missile warheads are useful. He observed that the US leadership structure appeared much more vulnerable in this respect and our problem here was mainly to fix our vulnerabilities.

*Admiral Turner* questioned whether the Soviet leadership was really a lot less vulnerable than the US. [Page 578]

*Secretary Brown* judged that the US leadership was substantially more vulnerable; it would not have the kind of hardened C3 the Soviets have. He also noted that we rely much more heavily on airborne assets.

*Mr. Stoertz* observed that we are continually discovering new aspects of Soviet leadership protection, and noted that the Soviets are giving increased attention to mobile, especially airborne, facilities.

*David Aaron* asked if we are primarily discovering new facilities or rather newly discovering facilities that had existed for some time. *Stoertz* answered—mostly the latter.

*General Jones* commented that from a war management point of view, a key issue for US targeting against Soviet leadership was how the Soviets arranged for the devolution of top authority down the chain of command.

*Admiral Turner* repeated his judgment that leadership and C3 would probably prove highly fragile in both countries.

*Secretary Brown* agreed and observed that we needed more study to determine how to fix our vulnerabilities and exploit those of the Soviet Union.

*Director Seignious* commented that attack timing was crucial; Soviet SLBMs could reach US leadership targets very quickly.

*Secretary Brown* noted that US ICBMs could reach Soviet targets in [less than 1 line not declassified]

*Director Seignious* repeated that the difference between SLBM flight times to US leadership targets and ICBM flight times to Soviet leadership targets could be extremely important.

*Secretary Brown* commented that it was most important to reduce our vulnerabilities in this respect and to develop counter-C3 -leadership targeting options against the Soviet Union.

*Dr. Brzezinski* asked what Presidential decisions were involved here: a separate leadership targeting package? Budgets for C3 improvements?

*Mr. Aaron* asked what are the implications of targeting Soviet leadership and C3 assets. Would it be wise to destroy Soviet ability to withhold and control strategic forces from the center?

*Secretary Brown* responded that this depended on how one viewed various conflict scenarios which he thought intrinsically implausible, for example, would an initial Soviet attack leave a large Soviet reserve force? A US counter-C3 strike could reduce Soviet ability to use that reserve efficiently.

*Mr. Aaron* commented that the value of such strikes depends on whether you believe strikes by withheld Soviet forces would simply become automatic if the Soviets' top leadership disappeared.

*Mr. Slocombe* commented that one could make distinctions between military C3 and national political leadership. [Page 579]

*Dr. Brzezinski* observed that a crisis or conflict bargaining advantage could go to the side whose leadership and C3 system could endure over time. This might give the Soviets incentives to protract a conflict scenario.

*Mr. Aaron* observed that our vulnerabilities sprang from failures to pay sufficient attention to this problem in the past, but asked whether we would not be in rather good shape if we succeeded in getting our leadership and C3 assets airborne.

*Secretary Brown* responded that a protracted conflict with strategic strikes over time would tax the endurance of our airborne assets.

*Dr. Brzezinski* expressed doubt as to whether an airborne US leadership could maintain political control during a war.

*General Jones* noted that current plans contain leadership targeting options which can be used or withheld. The question is whether the intended targets will actually contain the Soviets leaders when the weapons arrive.

*Dr. Brzezinski* asked whether the current options for targeting leadership and C3 are adequate.

*General Jones* said that the options need improvements but that the kinds of improvements needed aren't really political issues.

*Secretary Brown* observed that our ability to successfully attack Soviet leadership and related C3 appears to require very early strikes in a conflict.

*General Jones* noted that many strategic war games and exchange analyses were very misleading because they did not take into account the affects on each side of strikes on its C3 . This is particularly important in assessing retaliatory capabilities.

*Secretary Brown* noted that DOD is moving forward on these issues.

Regionalization was then discussed.

*Secretary Brown* observed that we had acquired only the poorest insight into the political aspects of this issue. We simply would not know what effects various approaches to targeting would have on the unity of the Soviet State. Would they fly apart or rally round the flag? If we spared certain regions in the hopes they would split off from central Soviet authority and they failed to do so, would we not in effect spare Soviet resources for continuing and recovering from the conflict? Would disclosure of a "regionalization strategy" cause the Soviets to tighten peacetime control in the provinces? *Secretary Brown* summed up by noting that the matter remained somewhat academic until we get a better handle on how such a strategy could be implemented.

*Dr. Brzezinski* commented that we should forget the political effects for the time being and first look at how in [Page 580] practice one could implement a targeting strategy that inflicts higher levels of damage on the great Russians, and creates fears that the Soviet Union would dissolve.

*Mr. Aaron* recommended that a special look should be taken at strikes by theater forces against Eastern Europe in the light of the potential of those countries to break away from Soviet authority. He also noted that we should examine counter declaratory strategy too.

*Dr. Brzezinski* observed that strategic war is still political and that we had to exploit any possible advantages since our margins of strategic strength had narrowed. More discriminating targeting may be of considerable value.

*Secretary Brown* observed that however one approached "regionalization," it seemed to imply the capabilities for very discriminating use of our weapons.

Targeting industry was then discussed.

*Secretary Brown* began by noting that he believes that there would be little practical distinction between targeting economic recovery resources and a general urban industrial target set.

*Mr. Slocombe* said that war supporting industry should be a war option and would be narrower than the current package for attacking Soviet industry. He went on to explain that out of some [less than one line not declassified] economic facilities, DOD had attempted to identify [less than one line not declassified] key installations that would be directly supportive of a general war effort, [4 lines not declassified]

*Secretary Brown* observed that such a war supporting industry attack would cause far fewer fatalities than a general urban industrial attack. Fatalities could be reduced further by evacuation on the Soviet side and by careful targeting by the US.

*Deputy Secretary Christopher* asked if population would be targeted.

*Secretary Brown* answered that targeting population would not be the objective. *Secretary Brown* went on to say that war supporting industry could be distinguished from general economic targets, the latter would be included in the general urban industrial target set.

*Dr. Brzezinski* noted that one could attack war supporting industry along with strategic and general purpose force targets.

*General Smith* asked how war supporting industry would be defined.

*Secretary Brown* replied that our target data base has such a category.

*Dr. Brzezinski* commented that attacks on war supporting industry might make sense in a limited but sustained conflict not involving general strikes against each other's economic targets.

*Secretary Brown* observed that we were then talking about two distinguishable target sets: (a) war-supporting industry, a relatively small set which could be attacked with or without special efforts to reduce collateral fatalities, and (b) an urban industrial or general economic target set, very large and practically indistinguishable from what is targeted under the criterion of suppressing economic recovery, which could be withheld to counter coercion and perhaps terminate the conflict. [Page 581]

*Dr. Brzezinski* observed that while the utility of discretely targeting war supporting industry might not easily be measured, it was likely to be positive.

*Mr. Aaron* thought it would nevertheless be useful to attempt to measure the potential effects of such a targeting package including the expected levels of collateral fatalities and the potential effect on the Soviets capability to wage war.

*Secretary Brown* noted that collateral fatalities from targeting war supporting industry could be quite low.

*Mr. Slocombe* observed that such targeting might involve 10–15 million fatalities if no care were taken to avoid them.

*Warren Christopher* asked if we are simply discussing possibilities or proposing to recommend some specific action.

*Secretary Brown* proposed that a war supporting industry package for inclusion the SIOP be prepared for Presidential decision.

*Dr. Brzezinski* said that this should be developed along with measures of the utility of such a targeting option.

*Secretary Brown* observed that the utility of targeting war supporting industry would be scenario dependent, for example, whether Soviet general purpose forces were engaged and could be degraded by the loss to those industries.

*Mr. Slocombe* then noted that, setting aside war supporting industry, the practical difference between targeting against recovery and general urban industrial targets could not be usefully measured.

*Dr. Brzezinski* observed that the distinction was not too useful for deterrence.

*Mr. Keeny* concluded on this agenda topic with the observation that the threat to urban industrial targets overall was most important for deterrence.

The discussion then turned to the topic of hard-target capability.

*Secretary Brown* observed that over the years US planners had worried a great deal about the potentially adverse implications for arms control and stability of US threats to Soviet silo-based forces. The Soviets on the other hand showed no signs of reciprocating this concern at all. He noted that in our own programs the accuracy improvements that enhanced our [Page 582]

capability to attack hard targets came fairly naturally and at low cost with improving technology. Our ICBMs had improved steadily in accuracy, SLBMs were coming along behind them. The basic questions remain: what advantages would we derive from improved hard-target capabilities? And how destabilizing might they be?

Secretary Brown observed that, should the Soviets not believe their silos to be threatened, they derive a large cost saving because they can retain their present capability in silos for about a third of what it would cost them to buy and operate an equivalent capability in a mobile mode. On the other hand, they probably already believe that Mark 12A, and Trident will constitute effective hard target threats to which they will have to react somehow. It would appear that we are debating with ourselves about the stability issue aspects and hard target capabilities.

Secretary Brown commented that the President's latest speech containing remarks about the large fraction of Soviet capability in potentially vulnerable silos may have misconstrued the issue. With  $\frac{3}{4}$ 's of their capability in silos, should they double that capability, they would have  $\frac{7}{8}$ 's of their vastly increased total capability in potentially vulnerable silos, but the invulnerable portion of their forces would remain the same in absolute size. He wondered which side would worry most about such a situation and speculated that we would.

*Deputy Secretary Christopher* commented that stability remained the central issue.

*Secretary Brown* put the question as to whether two hair trigger capabilities were more dangerous than one, if our increasing vulnerabilities made us more likely to preempt, and stated that he didn't think so.

*Director Seignious* noted that the Congress showed a lot of concern about the dangers of US hard target capability.

*Secretary Brown* commented that the vulnerability of our ICBM force could in a crisis increase our incentives to go first [2 lines not declassified] or effecting concentrated attack on Soviet SS-18s.

*Mr. Slocombe* added that targeting all our Mark 12A warheads on the SS-18 force would be quite effective and a strong incentive for our preempting.

*Mr. Aaron* asked Stan Turner whether the Soviets showed any sign of sensitivity to our debates about stability.

*Director Turner* replied that the Soviets seemed quite unconcerned about stability in a two-sided sense. They appear to believe in war-fighting for meaningful military objectives, were concerned about the size of their residual force after an exchange, and seemed unconcerned that such a pursuit of an improved sense of security for themselves produces insecurity for their opponent.

*Director Seignious* asked whether any Soviets perceive any meaningful advantage to be gained from any form of nuclear conflict. [Page 583]

*Secretary Brown* replied that some Soviet military believe war should be fought to win and try to plan accordingly.

*Mr. Stoertz* observed that in Soviet eyes, this does not mean that they would commit willful aggression, but rather that beleaguered capitalist states would precipitate a war in which they might want to preempt.

*Secretary Brown* voiced the opinion that concern about destabilizing implications of US hard target capability was probably misplaced, but that this was nonetheless a matter of concern on the Hill. Some people in Congress suggest that we should make M-X inaccurate to preserve crisis stability and to leave the Soviet Union more confident of the survivability of their strategic forces. He voiced the fear, however, that such Soviet confidence coexisting with a Soviet ability to threaten US forces could lead to adventuresome Soviet actions. And we, being on the low end of this asymmetry, might be either deterred from responding to Soviet challenges or compelled to preempt with our vulnerable strategic forces.

*Mr. Aaron* commented that this situation was a recipe for miscalculations.



*Secretary Brown* commented that if we had effective hard target capabilities, it would be appropriate to target them against silos.

*Mr. Aaron* asked whether we couldn't get hard target capabilities in SLBMs, preferably because they are invulnerable.

*Secretary Brown* responded that while SLBMs can in time become accurate enough to kill silos, C3 problems may not allow them to be launched quickly enough.

*Mr. Utgoff* noted that good communications to SSBN's close to the U.S. were possible and that this is one of the reasons that a long range SLBM was important.

*Dr. Brzezinski* asked how was this an issue for the President, what must he decide?

*Secretary Brown* responded that we are going to have some improvement in hard target capabilities if we modernize our forces. ICBMs are going to be more accurate, and SLBMs will follow close behind. The key issue is that we need less vulnerable quick response hard target capabilities.

*Dr. Brzezinski* asked if one could say that we need an improved hard target kill capability because the Soviets have closed the gap in overall strategic forces capabilities?

*Mr. Aaron* asked whether we could achieve the needed hard target capabilities with cruise missiles.

*Secretary Brown* expressed doubts on the basis that the Soviets could possibly reload their silos faster than cruise missiles could arrive. He argued that the Soviets might be able to reload their silos in as little as 12 hours. [Page 584]

*Mr. Stoertz* disputed this point by observing that it would take a couple of days for the Soviets to reload silos *during a conflict*.

*Mr. Aaron* disagreed with Harold's opinion that the stability aspects of US hard target capability had become moot. He observed that the respective vulnerabilities of the two sides' forces would be a much more important variable in determining whether a crisis led to war than the other aspects of employment policy so far debated. He called for a much better paper that treated the stability issues, the need for quick as opposed to slow hard target capability and the merits of SLBMs vs ICBMs as potential hard target weapons.

*Dr. Brzezinski* asked that the next SCC on targeting return to the question of hard target capability and that in the meantime a careful paper be written on this issue. This paper should be organized in terms of the 3 questions he had originally posed and should consider the impact of the changing strategic balance. The next SCC would also take up the remaining agenda items as well as the questions of targeting moving general purpose forces and the size and role of the secure reserve force.

*Deputy Secretary Christopher* endorsed David Aaron's observations on the importance of the hard target issue and recommended that DOD's paper be done on an interagency basis.

*Director Seignious* questioned whether the President should be obliged to deal personally with the hard target stability issue at all before SALT II is ratified.

*Secretary Brown* commented that the President must make a decision on M-X and therefore its implications for hard target capability cannot be avoided.

*Director Seignious* repeated the fact that Presidential decisions on this specific issue of hard target capability prior to SALT II ratification would be dangerous.

*Mr. Aaron* repeated his call for a thorough examination of the strategic risks and advantages of improved hard target capability.

*Dr. Brzezinski* called for DOD to lead in the preparation of the appropriate paper and to have an interagency group review the paper to insure that all the important points of view are considered. At this point, the meeting was adjourned.

1. Source: Carter Library, National Security Affairs, Staff Material, Defense/Security, Russell, Box 117, Security Analysis Chron #24–36, 4/79. Top Secret. The meeting took place in the White House Situation Room. Brzezinski forwarded the Summary of Conclusions of this meeting, along with the Summary of Conclusions of the April 25 meeting (see [Document 124](#).) under cover of a May 1 memorandum to Carter, who wrote: “Insist on DOD & others maintaining secrecy—J.” (Ibid.)↵
2. Not found.↵
3. See [Document 118](#).↵