

*Sent to White House  
10/31/61*

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: NATO Nuclear Safeguards

Attached is a preliminary answer to the August 31 memorandum you sent Secretary McNamara, asking that General Partridge's National Command and Control Task Force give urgent attention to measures to strengthen control over nuclear weapons in NATO Europe during the Berlin crisis. Your memorandum referred to possible measures in respect of (i) custody, (ii) deployment, and (iii) command and communications facilities. The report's conclusions in respect of each of these types of measures follow:

1. Custody. The report states that safeguards against accidental nuclear detonation and against unfriendly seizure of weapons earmarked for US forces are adequate. It recommends a number of measures to strengthen US custodial procedures in order to safeguard against seizure of weapons earmarked for non-US NATO units.

2. Deployment. This subject is treated in the following sentence: "From our limited inspections, I (General Partridge) consider General Norstad's NATO weapons deployment to be appropriate to the situation and to the necessity for retaining weapons control." This sentence was not in the first draft of the report, and was inserted when it was pointed out that this draft did not cover one of the major points in your memorandum of 31 August. Members of the Task Force have indicated that it did not focus on this question during its recent trip to Europe.

It may be useful to encourage DOD to give this subject further study. You will recall that General Norstad referred during his meeting with you to his desire to

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avoid making nuclear weapons available to front line units, which might be impelled to use them in order to avoid destruction or seizure by the enemy. At other times he has spoken of the possibility of deploying nuclear weapons to special units attached to the highest command level consistent with their operational effectiveness, and has mentioned the "corps artillery" analogy.

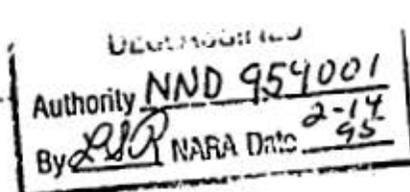
Members of the Task Force are unaware of any action - actual or planned - to implement either of these possibilities. Mr. Acheson's report to you concerning NATO recommended that both of these possibilities be studied, "so as to reduce the risk of unauthorized use of nuclear weapons in the NATO area without subjecting them to such complex and unwidely procedures as would unduly reduce their operational effectiveness." Mr. Acheson had argued that our ability to avoid automatic escalation from non-nuclear hostilities into nuclear war and to undertake selective and limited use of nuclear weapons would be compromised by lack of effective safeguards. You will recall the Joint Congressional Committee's concern in this general area.

3. Command and Communications. The report makes two points here:

(a) It states that commanders of US nuclear-capable field units have been directed not to fire (or to make final preparations for firing) nuclear weapons without specific authority emanating from CINCEUR. - It points out that the effectiveness of controls against such unauthorized use will be further improved when the "permissive link" is at hand. It urges that development and production of this device, which will take a number of months, be afforded priority in AEC and DOD so that its availability can be expedited. (The "permissive link" is a combination lock which the Secretary of Defense has directed be developed, and which would need to be opened to permit firing of the warhead; the combination for the lock would only be communicated to custodians at the moment firing was authorized.)

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(b) The Task Force fears that command, control, and communication facilities in NATO Europe are so vulnerable that nuclear weapons there might be destroyed before firing could be authorized with due regard to present safety, security, and release procedures. Suggestions for strengthening command and communication facilities will, it states, be made at the earliest practicable date.

4. Recommendation. A proposed letter is attached for your signature, thanking Secretary McNamara for this report and indicating your continuing interest in some of the issues indicated above.

Attachment:

Proposed letter to  
Secretary McNamara

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UNCLASSIFIED  
Authority NND 954001  
By RLA NARA Date 2-14-95

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Dear Bob:

I am grateful for your letter of October 7 forwarding a preliminary Task Force report on "Safety Measures Relating to the Use of Nuclear Weapons in NATO."

I welcome the indication that measures will be taken (i) to strengthen US custodial safeguards against unauthorized use of nuclear weapons by non-US NATO units, and (ii) to hasten development and production of the "permissive link", by according it priority in both the DOD and AEC. I hope that these measures will be pressed vigorously, so that they will be more likely to take effect during the Berlin crisis.

I also welcome the indication that measures to strengthen command, control, and communications facilities in NATO Europe will be considered in the Task Force's next report.

I hope that the question of nuclear weapons deployment, which was referred to in my memorandum of August 31 and which is briefly mentioned in this report, can also receive continuing attention. It would be interesting to know what action General Norstad had in mind when he spoke, in our recent meeting, of ensuring that weapons were not available to front line units. Would this have any effect on deployment to NATO forces (at least before the permissive link is available) of weapons, such as the Davy Crockett, whose effectiveness depends on their being in the hands of front line forces? I should be grateful if this whole range of issues could

be subjected

The Honorable  
Robert S. McNamara,  
Secretary of Defense.

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be subjected to continuing review, with periodic reports being submitted to me as to the conclusions which you reach.

Would you please express my appreciation to those who prepared this report for the time and care which they devoted to this important task. I believe that their work and resulting improved safeguards will make a direct contribution to our national security.

Sincerely,

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