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Authority RC246

By KJ NARA Date 12/23/10

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
ACTION MEMORANDUM

S/S

August 22, 1977

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TO: Warren Christopher, Acting Secretary
THRU: T - Lucy Wilson Benson LWB
FROM: T/D - Joseph Nye JSN
AF - William Harrop, Acting W.H.
S/P - Paul Kreisberg PK by GEH
SUBJECT: South African Nuclear Issue

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C/N.R.O.N.*

Issue for Decision:

Whether or not to initial a memorandum to the President concerning the current South African nuclear situation and next steps we can take.

Essential Factors:

As we promised, we have cleared the attached memorandum to the President with all the interested bureaus. We request that you initial the memorandum to the President at this time. We will prepare a longer options paper prior to the PRC meeting which the NSC plans to call on this subject Wednesday or Thursday, August 24th or 25th.

Recommendation:

That you initial the attached memorandum to the President.

Clearances:

S/AS - Mr. Farley DF PM - Mr. Locke DL
IO - Mr. Maynes DM AF - Mr. Edmondson ED
OES - Mr. Devine DL ACDA - Mr. Van Doren VD
EUR - Mr. Garrison EG S/P - Mr. Kahan DK

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By KJ NARA Date 02/23/10

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON

SECRET/NODIS

MEMORANDUM FOR: The President

FROM: Warren Christopher, Acting

SUBJECT: South African Nuclear Issue

South Africa's acceptance of the three assurances you requested represents an important first step in dealing with the nuclear issue. We have a basis for responding on an interim basis to political problems likely to arise in connection with the Lagos Conference. Nevertheless, South Africa will continue to have an unsafeguarded capability to produce and possibly test nuclear materials which leave it poised on the weapons threshold. Thus if our diplomacy stops with these private assurances, we will be in a dangerously vulnerable position as unilateral guarantor of a state with the capability to launch an explosion at extremely short notice.

-- Despite the private SAG assurance, the purpose of the Kalahari site remains unresolved and we continue to have impressive evidence that the facility is a probable nuclear test site. We will face the possible danger that South Africa can at some point contravene its assurance and quickly explode a device. Our bilateral relations with South Africa will remain strained due to nagging doubts about the bona fides of the SAG's assurance regarding the Kalahari facility. In these circumstances, we would have difficulty continuing the peaceful nuclear cooperation that gives us our rationale for making otherwise intrusive requests. South Africa adherence to the NPT would not apply external inspection to the Kalahari facility, since there are no

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declared or derivative fissionable materials related to peaceful uses acknowledged there. Moreover, the normal 18-month delay in implementing NPT safeguards would allow the SAG to produce significant quantities of HEU in its pilot enrichment plant for stockpiling near a test site before international controls begin.

-- Probable public awareness that the US had independently verified the plausibility of the Tass statement, but only settled for South African assurances regarding the Kalahari site, may create serious political problems. The fact that the US has privately accepted verbal assurances may open the US to charges of complicity as well as a lack of genuine concern over proliferation. African states may be unsatisfied and can move at any time to initiate Security Council action. Potentially disruptive Soviet action would be particularly likely, given Moscow's special interest and its ability to monitor the Kalahari site. Even if we could induce South Africa to publicize its Kalahari assurances, this would leave the credibility problem largely unchanged.

-- There will be negative consequences for our worldwide non-proliferation efforts. Assuming eventual publicity about the Kalahari, so long as this facility remains intact as a suspect nuclear test site, potential nuclear-weapons states may conclude that the South African outcome is a precedent that will enable them to build test facilities (perhaps disguised as "military installations"). They may believe they can take other actions short of an explosion (including fabricating nuclear devices) as long as safeguards and other non-proliferation obligations are legally fulfilled. More generally, perceptions that the US had not dealt strongly enough with South Africa would weaken the credibility of our global efforts to stop the spread of nuclear weapons.

To avoid these dangers, we are exploring further measures that could make our progress to date more effective and credible. These measures are aimed at backing the SAG away from the nuclear threshold through (1) early NPT ratification; (2) dismantlement (or international inspection) of the Kalahari site; and (3) rapid imposition of safeguards on the Valindhaba enrichment plant. In considering ways of consolidating the present position while developing a more durable solution,

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we are formulating detailed diplomatic options for approaching the SAG as well as consulting the USSR, major Western suppliers, and Israel. We will also prepare a strategy for dealing with possible problems in the UN and on the Hill.

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