



OFFICE OF THE HISTORIAN

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

6. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski) to President Carter¹

Washington, undated

SUBJECT

JCS Briefings: NSC Action Implications

This memorandum is a summary of my reaction to the JCS briefing.² It is not urgent but, depending on your comments, it could lead to some important reviews. I have tried to reduce my concern to nine basic points which now follow:

1. *Rigidity of SIOP*. I was struck by the relative rigidity of the SIOP options and by the limited choice that they leave you in the event of a major conflict. You are, in effect, left with the option of initiating a response which, irrespective of the version, amounts to at least the first phase of a massive central war. I am also struck that there seems to be limited integration between the SIOP and the proposed LNO's (limited nuclear options) and RNO's (regional nuclear options). Moreover, unless I misunderstood, retargeting for effective LNO or RNO responses would take a certain amount of time. And planning [Page 28] for your advance understanding and timely selection of LNO's is non-existent.³

2. *Deterrence and Parity*. I am also struck by the fact that the SIOP provides no explicit option [7 lines not declassified].

[1 paragraph (17 lines) not declassified]

Accordingly, I would favor encouraging the Defense Department at least to evaluate the strategic consequences of adding such an additional option to the SIOP.

3. *Crisis Communication*. I was struck by the question you raised concerning our ability to make the Soviets understand the more limited character of an eventual nuclear response by us. An assessment of our ability to communicate effectively with the Soviets in the context of a crisis should be undertaken, and consideration should also be given to the possibility of a broader mutual notification of missile test firings.⁴

4. *Planning Integration and Innovation*. I was left with the impression from the briefing that regional command plans, as well as perhaps service plans, are not adequately integrated in relationship to possible crises. For example, the inter-relationship between our Atlantic war planning and our Central European war planning seems to me to be inadequate, on the basis of the evidence provided in the briefing. I also did not sense that there has been significant adjustment in our war planning and deployment because of the termination of our involvement in the Southeast Asian conflict.⁵

5. [1 paragraph (7 lines) not declassified]

6. *Length of Decision-Procedures*. I wonder whether the short decision-time available (only about 5 minutes) in the event of a Soviet depressed trajectory attack on D.C. would permit you and others to follow the requisite decision-procedures.⁶

7. *Deterrence of Lower Strategic Levels*. I was impressed by your emphasis on the need to scale down the deterrence levels in the US–Soviet strategic relationship. You were very explicit in urging an aggressive attitude towards this issue, and I feel that a review of the inter–relationship between effective deterrence and lower strategic levels should be urgently undertaken.⁷

8. *Impact of New Weaponry*. You also stressed the need for a long–term assessment of defense expenditures, and [Page 29] particularly of the trade–offs between new weapons and their possible consequences on the strategic as well as conventional US–Soviet equation.⁸

The above are simply my initial reactions. *Perhaps you could indicate on the margins whether you wish me to pursue any of them in a more systematic fashion. I would then propose NSC initiatives for your approval.*

9. Attached you will find additional material which was left out of the JCS briefing.⁹ It was forwarded to you by Harold Brown.

1. Source: Reagan Library, National Security Council, Intelligence Directorate Files, Box WI–22, Mahley Box, FRG Nuclear Control. Secret. Sent for information. Carter initialed the memorandum in the upper right–hand corner. An unknown hand wrote “2/22/77” next to the heading.↵
2. On February 11, Carter and Brzezinski flew from Andrews Air Force Base to Warner–Robins Air Force Base aboard the National Emergency Airborne Command Post (NEACP); onboard, they participated in a briefing with Brigadier General A.W. Atkinson of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. (Carter Library, Presidential Materials, President’s Daily Diary). No minutes of the briefing were found.↵
3. Carter wrote in the right margin next to this paragraph: “Work on this. Keep me informed.”↵
4. Carter wrote in the right margin next to this sentence: “Pursue this.”↵
5. Carter wrote in the right margin next to this paragraph: “This is true. Set up with Brown a schedule of 2–hour briefings for me.”↵
6. Carter wrote in the right margin next to this sentence: “Alternative?”↵
7. Carter wrote in the right margin next to this paragraph: “ok. An *early* brief analysis is needed—(2 or 3 days).”↵
8. Carter wrote in the right margin next to this sentence: “Proceed—CM’s, B1, MX, etc.”↵
9. Not attached.↵