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AFN - Mr. Witman, II

August 4, 1961

AFN - Richard St. F. Post

Coverage of French Underground Tests

I attended a meeting today in the office of the Special Assistant for Atomic Energy and Outer Space (S/AE) to explore the possibility of locating three stations of the U. S. Atomic Energy Detection System in areas close to Algeria to cover French underground atomic tests which, according to a reliable intelligence source, will be taking place from October 1961 through March 1962.

Col. L. B. Williams of S/AE opened the meeting by outlining the importance of the proposal, which is expected to yield information and data concerning the effectiveness of our underground detection facilities. He also gave a description of the types of equipment needed for the detection sites. Mr. William Jones of UNF expressed in rather forceful terms IO's view that should any U. S. connection with French tests become known, we would be open to the charge, particularly from the Russians, that we were in fact using the French tests as a device for securing information on nuclear blasts, and have therefore not lived up to our self-imposed ban on nuclear testing. Mr. Robert Foulon, speaking for AF, noted also the vehement reaction we would get from African states in general, since they publicly committed to having Africa be a nuclear-free zone. Mr. Jesse M. Macknight and Mr. Foulon then proceeded to point out that two of the proposed sites for the detection stations, Mali and Niger, must be excluded for political reasons: not only would it be almost impossible to conceal such activities from the French in these two countries, but also it would appear to be necessary to secure the approval of these two governments before proceeding, and such approval is likely to be withheld.

Mr. Foulon then asked me to describe the possibilities that might exist for this type of operation in Libya (Mr. Jones of UNF had to leave the meeting as I was beginning my exposition). I said that there seemed to me to be certain factors in the Libyan situation which might allow the location of such detection stations. Two possible "covers" suggested themselves: (1) the 64th Engineer Battalion is now engaged in a mapping survey project in precisely the area where the sites proposed for Libya would be located, the Ghat-Sebha-Ghadames triangle. From Col. Williams description of the equipment required, it would appear possible that it could be introduced into Libya as part of an Engineer survey team without raising suspicions; (2) Most of the area in question is covered by oil concession land, most of it rented to American oil companies. The detection equipment is quite similar to and would be indistinguishable except by an expert from the type of equipment used by oil exploration teams. I added that it is even conceivable that

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either one or both of these covers could be used without having to inform the Libyan Government or the King, although this is a point on which our Ambassador's comments would obviously be required. And, of course, the whole scheme would have to be discussed with the Ambassador at an early stage.

The consensus of the meeting was: (1) if the detection plan is to be implemented at all, it would have to be done in Libya; (2) we would have to be absolutely certain of having an air-tight cover as is humanly possible; (3) Col. Williams would initiate action to bring the detection people together with the Engineers to see what the possibilities would be for utilizing the Engineer detachment in Libya as a cover; (4) in the near future, he would schedule a meeting with Defense, ISA, AFTAC (Air Force Technical Applications Center), and State to consider the matter further and determine if the stage has been reached for an approach to the Ambassador on the subject. Mr. Foulon stressed that AF has, of course, not committed itself to anything except to consider the proposal further.

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