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Authority NND 949671By MB NARA Date 10/27/88 consists of 3 pages
Number 1 Copies, Series 11.*after French Tests*
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August 15, 1961

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Dear General Rodenhauser:

I refer to your letter of July 26, 1961, subject, "French Underground Tests".

The Department is clearly aware of the desirability of monitoring these tests for the purposes described in your letter. It is necessary, nevertheless, to weigh carefully the anticipated technical gains against possible risks involved. Preliminary examination by the Department indicates that:

1. Mali, with a government somewhat oriented toward the Soviet Bloc and now utilizing the services of a number of Bloc technicians, would appear to be totally unsuitable for the operation. Not only is it unlikely that the Government of Mali would approve the project (and the project could not be carried out without the government's cooperation), but discovery by Bloc personnel is likely and it is a virtual certainty that the French would be aware of the operation.
2. Niger, while presenting less chance of discovery by Bloc personnel, is heavily dependent on French technicians without whose knowledge a project of this sort could not be effected. Furthermore, Niger is committed to a policy of a "nuclear-free" Africa and it is unlikely that the leaders of Niger would be willing to accept the risks to their political futures which discovery of their part in this operation would entail.

Maj. Gen. J. F. Rodenhauser, USAF,
Chief, AF Technical Applications Center,
DCS/Operations,
Department of the Air Force,
Washington 25, D. C.

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In any case, there is no existing operation in either Mali or Niger to lead itself as a cover for the project.

3. Libya, alternatively appears to offer certain possibilities for suitably carrying out the project. Mapping surveys are now being conducted by the Corps of Engineers in the Ghat-Sabha-Ghadames area, where also a number of private U.S. oil companies are prospecting for petroleum. Either or both of these may present opportunities for secure monitoring of the French tests, and it is suggested that you explore them to determine whether a suitable operational plan can be developed in connection with them. If it is necessary to direct inquiries to military units in the field, the Department will be happy to coordinate them with our Ambassador in Benghazi.

Meanwhile, the Department is attempting to weigh the foreign policy implications of the proposal, and our Ambassador in Libya has been requested to comment promptly on the possibilities for conducting such an operation in Libya and on whether or not an approach to Libyan authorities would be feasible. You are aware, of course, discovery of any U.S. connection with French nuclear tests, whatever our purpose, might subject us to accusations of having hypocritically condoned if not encouraged the French tests in order to gather data we are unable otherwise to acquire because of our self-imposed test ban. Our position in Africa in particular, and among "uncommitted" nations in general, would be damaged, and we would be placed at a psychological disadvantage in future disarmament and test-ban talks.

Thus, while the Department is willing to explore every possibility for accommodating the detection teams, final decision must await the results of further study. Clearly,

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a major factor in this decision will be the extent to which the risks can be minimized by the development of a secure cover plan.

We will keep you informed on any further developments concerning this subject.

Sincerely yours,

Howard Furness
Acting

Clearances:

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cc: Asst. Sec Def., Int. Sec. Affairs (DOD/ISA)
General Counsel, Dept. of the Air Force (SAFGC)

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