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August 22, 1977

MEMORANDUM FOR:

THE PRESIDENT

FROM:

ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI

SUBJECT:

Information Items

Assessment of South African Intentions to Test a Nuclear Device: An assessment by working-level representatives of Intelligence Community agencies of the non-technical factors bearing on a South African decision to test a nuclear weapon has concluded:

--The South African government plans to proceed through the various stages of a nuclear weapons program, including the eventual testing of a weapon.

--There are no discernible overriding pressures on South African leaders to rush to test a weapon in the immediate future. Vorster might be persuaded to delay a test for a short time if there were indications that a major turnaround in U.S. policy toward South Africa was possible or if he judged that a test could undermine sensitive ongoing negotiations, e.g., on Namibia.

--Nonetheless, there are no foreseeable circumstances that would lead to a termination of South Africa's long-standing program to develop a nuclear weapon; and no foreseeable credible threat from the West which would be sufficient to deter the South Africans from carrying out a test once they had made up their mind to do so.

The assessment points out that, because of uncertainties regarding the state of South Africa's test readiness and the availability of South African-processed fissionable material for a test, the foregoing conclusions are necessarily based on certain assumptions about South Africa's nuclear program. In particular, it was assumed that the South Africans, without specific additional foreign assistance or consent, could conduct a nuclear test within a matter of weeks and that they could continue nuclear weapons development thereafter without foreign assistance.

DOE and DOS review(s)

NLC review for NSC equities

completed.

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