

DECLASSIFIED	
Authority	NWD 979524
By	OP NARA Date 11/18

*Chron*Copy # 2B

September 26, 1964

SECRETMEMORANDUM

TO: *OC* The Secretary

THROUGH: S/S

FROM: S/P - W. W. Rostow

SUBJECT: The Handling of a Possible Chinese Communist Nuclear Test

Following up on our conversation yesterday, I convened a meeting yesterday afternoon of representatives of FE, G/PM, INR and M to consider what further actions were necessary to prepare for the possibility that the Chinese Communists may test a nuclear device on or about October 1. The following actions were agreed upon and are submitted for your consideration:

1. Some time in the next two or three days, there will be included in a speech by a high-level official a statement along the lines of Tab A which will make clear that we are anticipating the possibility of a Chinese Communist nuclear test. The present possibilities are a speech to be given by Governor Harriman on the Far East on Monday or a speech by Senator Humphrey. We are rather inclined toward the latter possibility. This statement

would be

GROUP 3

Downgraded at 12-year intervals;
not automatically declassified

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED	
Authority	NND 979524
By	OP NARA Date 11/18

SECRET

2

would be followed up by press backgrounding which would not predict a test on October 1, but would point to the fact that there is always a possibility that the Chinese might choose this anniversary of the revolution to make their first test. (We have chosen this device in order to avoid getting too far out on a limb in predicting any particular time for a test.) Bill Jorden is taking responsibility for action.

Approve _____

Disapprove _____

2. We propose to send out a new circular telegram to appropriate posts requesting our missions to point out to host governments the fact that the October 1 anniversary would be a logical time for a Chinese Communist nuclear test and seeking information as to specific plans of governments for reaction in such an event. Posts would restate the U.S. views on the significance of a Chinese Communist nuclear test and nuclear capability on the basis of previous guidance furnished to them on this subject and would outline briefly the general character of the planned U.S. reaction to a first test. A draft of such a circular telegram is attached as Tab B. This telegram will require further clearance. We ask only for your general concurrence in this proposed course of action and to the general line to be taken in the guidance. As noted below, we may have some difficulty with the Pentagon on this.

Approve _____

Disapprove _____

3. The draft standby statement prepared for issuance at the time of a Chinese Communist nuclear test (Tab C)

will be

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority NND 979524By OP NARA Date 11/18SECRET

3

will be reviewed and re-cleared urgently on an inter-agency basis. This statement was cleared in substance in October 1963 and again in May 1964 by the Interdepartmental Psychological-Political Group, chaired by "M" (Bill Jordan and Rollie White). We would appreciate your concurrence in substance to the text of this draft.

Approve _____

Disapprove _____

4. One of the most important possible dangers with respect to reaction to a Chinese Communist nuclear test arises within our own government. There is some real danger that the various agencies of the government will describe the implications of a Chinese Communist test and nuclear capability in a divergent manner. This danger has increased as a result of views that have recently been developing in the Pentagon (see below). In order to reduce this likelihood it is important that the different agencies talk from the same basic script in dealing with newsmen, foreign officials, etc., after a ChiCom test. The interdepartmental committee that has been working on the problem of the implications of a ChiCom nuclear capability has prepared and cleared at staff level (including DOD) a summary statement of Major Conclusions which is attached as Tab D. I have just sent this statement to Mac Bundy as a part of the basic paper of the interdepartmental committee. I recommend that Bundy be asked to obtain appropriate high-level clearance of these Major Conclusions ahead of the rest of the report and that they be disseminated inside the Executive Branch and to posts abroad as guidance in discussing the implications of a Chinese Communist nuclear capability.

Approve _____

Disapprove _____

DiscussionSECRET

DECLASSIFIED	
Authority	NND 979524
By	OP NARA Date 11/18

SECRET

4

Discussion of Possible Differences of View

One of the important objectives of the interdepartmental committee under S/P chairmanship has been to achieve a common view within the government as to the implications of a Chinese Communist nuclear capability. As long ago as last fall a large degree of success seemed to have been achieved with respect to this objective. More recently, however, there has been a growing view in DOD/ISA that the prior analysis understated the purely military significance of a ChiCom capability. This ISA view seems to be disputed even within the Pentagon itself by the JCS organization. We have attempted to come to grips with this new view both within the interdepartmental committee itself and in the Planning Group.

The ISA view is reflected, for example, in a letter John McNaughton has just sent to Ambassador Thompson. In it he expresses disagreement with the information guidance which has been going to our posts abroad for more than a year on this subject. He proposes a draft cable in which all embassies and principal military commanders would be told to give a "calm and reasoned appraisal" in response to private governmental inquiries which would include the assessment that "A growing Chinese stockpile of atomic weapons will present an ever-increasing threat to the freedom and security of all nations" and which would include an FYI: "While we wish to restrain or limit the immediate impact, we fully recognize the major significance of Chinese acquisition of nuclear weapons."

These are greatly overstated and over-simplified propositions. They would produce the very reactions we wish to avoid if used abroad. In our work we have recognized that a ChiCom nuclear test and capability could certainly create problems for us of a politico-military kind. In some Asian countries the reaction to the first test may be one of some alarm, though we believe that the Pentagon tends to overstate the extent of alarm in Asia as a whole. The ChiComs may test the utility of a nuclear capability as an umbrella for limited military probing operations. An imme-

diate

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED	
Authority	NND 979524
By	OP NARA Date 11/18

SECRET

5

diate danger in this regard is the possibility that the Chinese Communists may exploit their nuclear test, if it occurs now, to create the impression that their new "capability" is a major factor in deterring the U.S. from acting in the present Southeast Asian situation. Over the longer term, pressures may be created on U.S. bases as a result of this and other factors and it may become more difficult to manifest the U.S. military presence in the area.

However, the great and continuing disproportion between U.S. and ChiCom nuclear capabilities and vulnerabilities makes Chinese first-use of nuclear weapons highly unlikely except if Communist China's survival were threatened. This is a fundamental fact and will be a basic determinant limiting severely the direct military significance of a Chinese Communist nuclear capability. This view is reflected in the statement at Tab D of "Major Conclusions". Since this statement reflects the outcome of a considerable debate on the issues raised by DOD, it seems to us to provide the best basis for guidance for background discussion both here and abroad.

Clearances:

FE - Mr. Green
G/PM - Mr. Garthoff
INR - Mr. Whiting

Copy to: M - Governor Harriman
G - Ambassador Thompson
FE - Mr. Green
INR - Mr. Hughes
M - Mr. Jordan/Mr. White

*A - Post Statement
B - circ 554
C - Post-det State.
D - May. Concl*

SECRET

**NATIONAL
SECURITY
ARCHIVE**

This document is from the holdings of:

The National Security Archive

Suite 701, Gelman Library, The George Washington University

2130 H Street, NW, Washington, D.C., 20037

Phone: 202/994-7000, Fax: 202/994-7005, nsarchiv@gwu.edu