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

105. Memorandum From Secretary of Defense Brown to President Carter¹

Washington, November 28, 1978

SUBJECT

Nuclear Targeting Policy Review (U)

I am forwarding to you our recently completed review of nuclear targeting policy that you requested in August 1977 as one of a number of follow-up actions in PD-18. The study outlines several broad policy alternatives and also makes a number of specific recommendations with respect to nuclear weapons employment policy. It suggests some major changes both in the thrust of current policy and in the procedures for planning SIOP and non-SIOP options. Some issues will require further study and several of the broader policy issues should be the basis for interagency discussion. In the meantime, I plan to initiate action within DoD on those matters noted below that are within the framework of current policy, and which I believe can be acted on now.

The basic theme of the study is that employment policy will make its maximum contribution to deterrence—our basic strategic objective—if our employment policies make a Soviet victory, as seen through Soviet eyes, as improbable as we can make it, independent of Soviet employment policy and of any particular scenario. These plans should include targeting options against Soviet military forces, command and control, and military support that would maximize the threats to the objective targets, while minimizing collateral damage. We should also have a capability to threaten escalation. To lend credibility to a US threat to escalate, we need employment options and supporting capabilities which the Soviets might perceive to be advantageous to us. Such options require greater flexibility and endurance than we now have in our nuclear posture.

As you will note, the study makes a number of specific recommendations to these ends. In particular, it proposes specific measures to improve our capabilities to target and attack Soviet forces, C3 and [less than 1 line not declassified] It also suggests that we develop both plans and capabilities that will permit us to withhold attacks on [less than 1 line not declassified] targets as a means of coercion if a nuclear war is prolonged; and in general, that we focus our plans and our capability on the possibility of an extended exchange, rather than (as now) principally on an essentially instantaneous all-out spasm exchange. [Page 4,69] It also proposes measures to strengthen the strategic reserve forces. These measures are designed to enhance deterrence by posing to the Soviets the prospect that they would not only suffer severe damage in a nuclear war, but be unable to achieve their military objectives or gain any other advantage. The proposals also would provide a broader range of options should deterrence fail.

The study places considerable emphasis on enhancing the *flexibility* of the SIOP through the development of more discrete building blocks of like targets. By breaking down the present target base into smaller increments, the President would have a broader range of options should we ever have to consider SIOP-type attacks. A number of practical problems must be resolved, however, before deciding precisely how to implement the concept. The SIOP probably cannot be put together by taking an arbitrary linear combination of building blocks; the interactions need to be considered.

Endurance is another issue of considerable importance, not only in forces, but also in command, control, communications and intelligence. Very few of the objectives listed above in terms of an extended exchange, withholds, etc. can be achieved without endurance, both in forces and in C3I. We need to consider the kind of endurance we need and the rate at which we should proceed in acquiring a more enduring strategic posture. Inasmuch as some of these issues relate to acquisition policy, I have recently initiated studies designed to identify the problems and lead to specific development and procurement actions. In the meantime, we should take care to assure that adjustments in targeting policy are phased to match improvements in endurance.

We have also attempted to deal with the guidelines for targeting the Soviet nuclear threat—more effective targeting of Soviet military and war-sustaining capacity, and targeting to threaten [*less than 1 line not declassified*]

The study also addresses non-SIOP options (LNOs and RNOs) and suggests strengthening procedures to assure that both political and military considerations are brought to bear in the development of these options, and in any consideration of their use.

In all these cases—but especially endurance and flexibility—there are some initial steps that can be taken with the existing establishment, but to realize the concepts fully will require acquisition decisions. In other cases, some concepts appear promising, but require more analysis before we can decide on concrete actions. One example of an interesting idea where feasibility has not been determined is a “regionalizing” strategy, to threaten continued central control of the USSR by isolating its constituents from each other through a retaliatory nuclear strike.

I believe that the study (whose Executive Summary I hope you have time to read) makes it clear that, while we have made substantial progress over the past year in defining issues and proposing specific solutions, much remains to be done to follow up on this report. Among those matters that we intend to move on promptly within DoD are the development of the following: [[Page 4.70](#)]

- More discrete building blocks which would provide increased flexibility in the SIOP.
- An improved intelligence data base, particularly for command and control targets and other military forces.
- A launch-under-attack option for our land-based ballistic missile force, which will become vulnerable in the early 1980s and remain so to a substantial degree for a number of years even though we take prompt steps to deploy it in a less vulnerable form.
- [*less than 1 line not declassified*]
- Possible alternative criteria for the targeting of Soviet [*less than 1 line not declassified*]
- Specific program proposals to enhance endurance of strategic C3I.
- More detailed guidelines for the Secure Reserve Force.
- Exercises that will test and provide the basis for refinement of non-SIOP options.

We also plan to develop a program of additional studies. These will explore such issues as how we might target Soviet general purpose forces more effectively, [*2 lines not declassified*]

In addition, there are some issues that are broader in scope and, therefore, should receive NSC consideration. Among the most important of these is identifying and electing a broad and coherent set of policy objectives that will give focus to our nuclear weapons employment plans and related acquisition policies. This report identifies four such broad policy options. It is my view that we should adopt, at a minimum, alternative b, described on page ix of the Executive Summary, and that we should consider moving some distance toward alternative c, insofar as budgetary constraints allow.

We also should review in the NSC the extent to which we should adjust our targeting policy with respect to Soviet industry which now focuses on “impeding recovery.” The study suggests modification in light of our evaluation of deterrence requirements and our limited understanding of the recovery process itself, as distinct from simply targeting industrial capacity.

Another important unresolved issue, also addressed in the separate ICBM Modernization Study,² relates to counterforce capabilities; the range of capabilities we require and the extent to which we should develop quick reaction hard target capabilities. The issue of future ICBM requirements and Hard Target Capability have also been the subject of recent [Page 4.71] DoD studies. Neither this report nor any of the other studies provide a tidy answer to the issue of future ICBM requirements and Hard Target Capabilities. This is an issue that we will clearly have to come to grips with in the review of these studies and as our strategic modernization program takes shape.

Targeting population is still another issue that is appropriate for high level discussion. We have not in recent years targeted population *per se*, nor do we propose to do so now. Should the Soviets proceed further with plans to shelter and evacuate population, we must consider whether targeting some specific part of population should become an explicit objective and, if so, how much of our resources would we want to devote to that objective as compared with other targeting objectives. Meanwhile, the NSC should reaffirm current policy.

Another important policy issue that merits attention is the development of revised targeting plans for China. This study recommends that we alter our targeting plans for the PRC by handling China targeting through non-SIOP options and the Secure Reserve Force. I will proceed to implement such a policy if you wish to direct it now; such a decision seems appropriate.

A number of these issues should receive interagency consideration. To that end, I propose one or more meetings of the PRC and/or SCC, prior to an NSC meeting with you, to review this study as well as the related ones concerning ICBM Modernization and the Secure Reserve Force.

Harold Brown

Attachment

Paper Prepared in the Department of Defense³

Washington, November 1, 1978

[Omitted here are the cover page and table of contents.]

NUCLEAR TARGETING POLICY REVIEW

Summary of Major Findings and Recommendations

A. Purpose

The purpose of this review was to evaluate nuclear employment policy—that is, the policy guidelines and procedures for the targeting of nuclear weapons—and to identify alternatives to current policies. In conducting this evaluation, we [Page 4.72] focused particularly on the relationship between our stated policy (as set forth in PD-18 and NSDM-24.2) and the targeting plans designed to carry out that policy. We have also reviewed, where appropriate, the relationship between employment plans and the capabilities of forces and supporting command, control, communications and intelligence. The evaluation that follows

uses as its framework the principal objectives of nuclear employment policy, namely: deterrence and essential equivalence; escalation control and war termination; and the four general war targeting objectives described below. We also have evaluated the Secure Reserve Force (SRF) concept, Launch Under Attack (LUA) targeting and targeting policy for China.

B. Major Findings

1. *Deterrence.* Our deterrence objectives are to deter nuclear attack on the United States; to deter attacks on U.S. forces abroad and on our allies; and to impede coercion by unfriendly nuclear powers of the US, its allies and other friendly nations. Nuclear weapons play a major role in meeting these deterrence objectives, but they are not expected to do this task alone.

While we are not sure what deters the Soviets, there is fairly broad consensus in the US intelligence community and among a number of Soviet experts that the Soviets seriously plan to face the problems of fighting and surviving a nuclear war should it occur, and of winning, in the sense of having military forces capable of dominating the post-war world. Their emphasis on planning for nuclear war and on damage limiting measures, including civil defense and civil emergency preparedness testifies to this overall thrust in Soviet policy. This does not mean that the Soviet leadership is unaware of (or indifferent to) the destructive consequences of a nuclear conflict. Indeed, there are many statements by Soviet leaders which attest to their desire to avoid nuclear war and to their recognition of its potential destruction. However, the Soviets appear to have prepared themselves militarily and psychologically for the possibility that a nuclear war could occur and within the limits of their resources, they have prepared plans and developed capabilities which would permit them to do as well as possible in surviving a nuclear conflict and in defeating the military forces of their adversaries. It is clear that they are continuing substantial efforts to improve their own strategic posture. The effect is to pose new obstacles to achievement of our strategic objectives. We do not argue that the US concentration on deterrence is wrong, or that the Soviet idea that nuclear wars are winnable is right, but rather that carrying out a policy of deterrence cannot ignore these Soviet attitudes.

Our deterrent appears adequate in normal circumstances to prevent the Soviets either from attacking us or our [Page 4.73] allies deliberately or from pursuing a recklessly aggressive policy carrying with it a high risk of war. But it is in a severe crisis that our ability to impede coercion and extend deterrence to other nations would be most severely tested. Should such a crisis occur, we would want to avoid war (or terminate a war at the lowest possible level of violence) while simultaneously preventing the Soviets from coercing us or our Allies. In such a case, deterrence requires that the Soviets must never be confident that escalation would be to their advantage; also they must never be certain that the U.S. is unwilling or unable to respond effectively to any attack.

Deterrence will be influenced primarily by Soviet perceptions of our capabilities and will, rather than our plans. However, to the extent that our plans are known to the Soviets, these plans say something about our capabilities and will. Employment policy also has an impact both on the Soviet perception of the risks and advantages if they escalate, and on our confidence which in turn affects the Soviet perception of the likelihood that we may escalate.

Since the Soviets appear to have a concept of military victory, even in nuclear war, we should seek employment policies that would make a Soviet victory as seen through Soviet eyes, as improbable as we can make it in any contingency. Thus, we should develop plans and capabilities that minimize Soviet hopes of military success. These should include targeting options against Soviet military forces, command and control, and military support that would maximize the threats to the objective targets while minimizing collateral damage. We should also have a capability to threaten escalation ourselves. This threat to escalate if and as necessary is at the heart of NATO's flexible response strategy. It is likely to be especially effective if it threatens Soviet ability to maintain effective military forces in the field.

It is sufficient for purposes of deterrence if the Soviets perceive that there be a reasonable likelihood that we could (and would) escalate or respond successfully; it is not necessary that we have *highest confidence* that escalation control will work, or, still less that we can win the war. However, to lend credibility to a U.S. threat to escalate, we need employment options and

supporting capabilities which the Soviets might perceive to be advantageous to us. Such options require greater flexibility and endurance than we now have in our nuclear posture.

2. *Escalation Control.* There are and will inevitably always be great uncertainties about our ability to control escalation and terminate conflict on terms acceptable to us and our allies. Nevertheless, we conclude that it remains in the U.S. interest to have plans and capabilities that could limit damage by controlling escalation and terminating a conflict before it can extend to all-out nuclear war. Thus, we reaffirm the desirability of a policy of escalation control based on a range of SIOP and [Page 474.] non-SIOP options. We find, however, that there are serious deficiencies in current plans and capabilities to carry out a strategy of escalation control. There has been inadequate political input into the planning of nuclear options, particularly non-SIOP options. There are deficiencies in the integration of limited nuclear options with non-nuclear plans, and an absence of political, economic and psychological plans to complement non-SIOP options. Further, the plans for limited use of nuclear weapons have not been sufficiently exercised with the participation of high level political and military leaders. The vulnerability of forces and Command, Control, Communications and Intelligence (C3I) also limits the effectiveness of an escalation control strategy. As a result, the US Government may not be adequately prepared to deal with a crisis which could involve nuclear weapons, should it occur. Dealing with a nuclear crisis in the multilateral framework of NATO would be even more difficult.

3. *General War Plans.* Our general war plans are designed to meet the following principal objectives, the last three of which are to be accomplished “to the extent practicable:” (1) impede recovery of the Soviet Union both in the short term and the long term; (2) destroy Soviet national political and military leadership and command and control; (3) destroy Soviet nuclear forces, and (4) destroy Soviet non-nuclear forces.

Although targeting to impede recovery receives highest priority [less than 1 line not declassified] it is not clear that threatening to impede recovery by destroying large amounts of Soviet population and industry is the most effective deterrent, particularly in situations less than general war. Nor is it clear that our current targeting would, in effect, subsequently impede recovery, in the long-term (as distinct from reducing Soviet GNP sharply, which it clearly would do). Furthermore, we have no confidence that our present targeting plans would prolong Soviet recovery more than our own if massive attacks were launched by both sides. While planning contemplates the possibility of withholding attacks on recovery targets if substantial US urban/industrial assets survive an initial attack (and this is appropriate in our view), the endurance and survivability of our forces and their supporting command, control, communications and intelligence are not sufficient to support such a strategy.

In all large scale attacks on Soviet recovery targets (and indeed on military forces) there would be substantial Soviet population losses (at least tens of millions). But, if Soviet civil defense plans are successfully implemented, these levels could be significantly reduced. If the Soviets or the US could effectively shelter and thereby protect a significant portion of their labor force, this should have an important bearing on recovery, for the surviving skilled labor force will be an important [Page 475.] element in achieving recovery.

[13 lines not declassified] Under present plans the attack on political leadership would involve substantial collateral damage to the general population assuming that the population is unsheltered and unevacuated.

[1 paragraph (10 lines) not declassified]

The U.S. targets the Soviet nuclear threat to achieve two objectives: the first is limiting damage both to the U.S. and our allies; the second is to prevent the emergence of a post-war nuclear balance that would facilitate coercion by the Soviet Union. It also is apparent that the criterion for destruction of Soviet nuclear capabilities, i.e., “to the extent practicable with available allocated nuclear forces” is extremely general—hardly a precise guideline for target planners. Moreover, there are substantial uncertainties associated with this objective (as with others). [5 lines not declassified] One fact is clear, however. The proliferation and hardening of Soviet missile systems have substantially eroded our counterforce capabilities over the past decade. We have found no plausible changes to targeting policy or force structure in the course of this study that give any

promise of restoring the relative capabilities we enjoyed in the early 1960's. This does not mean, of course, that we can or should do nothing to improve the present or prospective balance. Cruise missiles will put Soviet land based missile systems and other hard targets at risk again, but this will not give us a prompt capability; MX and TRIDENT II will, however.

With respect to the damage limiting objective, today there are two distinct views as indeed there have been for some time. One view holds that since we cannot expect to limit to low levels the damage resulting from a large scale nuclear attack, that it is no longer a meaningful objective and should be abandoned or at least given a low priority in employment policy. A central concern is that continuance of damage limiting as a major objective of U.S. policy could lead to increased arms competition without any resulting improvements in U.S. security and could divert forces from more promising objectives. The opposing view is that we must continue to do the best that we can to protect the U.S. from the consequences of a nuclear war if deterrence fails. Given the uncertainties of nuclear war, and the wide range of possible scenarios, there might well be situations where the capability to reduce damage by perhaps tens of millions of American lives would be far from futile. This view also stresses the potential effects on deterrence and crisis management in situations short of nuclear war if U.S. society were to become far more vulnerable than the Soviet Union.

With respect to the objective of preventing an unfavorable postwar nuclear force balance, the debate turns on what [Page 476] *constitutes a balance and on the best means for achieving it.* Recent changes in the strategic balance pose us with a dilemma—how much of our force should we use in an effort to erode the Soviet nuclear threat and how much do we hold in reserve to secure a post-war balance? A substantial portion of the forces available for SIOP [less than 1 line not declassified] is used for the counter-nuclear mission even though relatively low damage expectancies are anticipated. Allocating additional weapons with current capabilities would not be productive. Indeed a considerable number of the weapons now used are SLBMs which have low DEs [less than 1 line not declassified] against hard Soviet missile silos. Furthermore, as ICBMs, which have a better hard target capability, become more vulnerable to attack, withholding them for use in other missions may only result in their loss. Some argue that we should allocate only weapons with the best hard target capability to the nuclear threat and not allocate SLBM weapons with low DEs to hard targets. Others argue that the present scheme of cross-targeting is a hedge against failure of one leg of the TRIAD, and that given uncertainties as to what actually would kill a silo (or interfere with reload and force reconstitution), we should continue to allocate [less than 1 line not declassified] to each silo, (even if some have low DEs against the silo itself) at least as long as we have sufficient weapons.

Because a substantial portion of the Soviet nuclear threat is hard, a major issue is how much and what kind of capability is required for this targeting objective. This is an area in which programmed force changes—and acquisition decisions—and employment policy are closely linked. For example, the large ALCM force that will be available by the mid-80's will have the accuracy for a considerable counter-silo potential if ALCM penetrability is high. The US also faces basic decisions about the characteristics of future ICBM and SLBM forces in which the requirement for Quick Reaction Hard Target Capability (QRHTC) is a driving factor.

From the standpoint of targeting it seems clear that we ought to retain a substantial hard target capability. Such a capability is required not only to be able to attack Soviet ICBM silos effectively, but also for the growing number of hardened C3 facilities and some other hardened installations. Improved HTC would enable us to reallocate weapons with low DEs against hard targets to other missions. Whether a substantial portion of our HTC needs to have a rapid response capability cannot be determined on targeting considerations alone. The targeting requirements for rapid responses are very scenario dependent. For example, if Soviet forces are alert when the US launches a counterforce attack the probability of their preemption or launch under attack is high, and the difference in response time between a few hours and a few minutes may be [Page 477] inconsequential. On the other hand, given the many uncertainties noted above, a quick hard target capability might well improve the outcome of a nuclear exchange from our standpoint or complicate Soviet calculations of the outcome and thereby help to strengthen deterrence.

We have also found that with current plans, attacks against Soviet non-nuclear military forces are likely to be ineffective in many scenarios. The current set of targets attacked in the other military targets category, includes only fixed installations. Our knowledge of Soviet war plans suggests that with plausible amounts of warning, both forces and stocks would be dispersed rapidly away from these fixed installations. Thus, much of this attack, unless the US achieves total surprise, is likely to go on empty or partially empty kasernes and other bases, and the Soviets would be left with substantial military power to coerce other nations, to seize valuable industrial resources in Western Europe and the Middle East and to assist them in post-war bargaining with the United States. On the other hand, there are clearly a number of fixed military installations that will remain valuable in supporting the Soviet war effort, regardless of warning. For example, secondary airfields, transportation centers, etc. Current planning does not give these targets high priority in relation to facilities that are likely to be evacuated with warning. We believe future planning should take this into account. For the longer run, priority should be given to capabilities to attack dispersed military forces. Trans-attack reconnaissance and responsive targeting are needed to do this.

With regard to the strategic reserve force we find that the force and its supporting command, control, communications and intelligence (C3I) may need to survive for weeks or even months after an initial nuclear attack. These elements lack sufficient endurance today to meet such an objective. If the SRF is to meet its stated objectives, the principal criteria for composition and sizing should be its endurance and its relative capabilities in relationship to Soviet plans for secure reserve forces. Indeed, many of our requirements for more flexible and discrete targeting at lower levels also imply larger reserve forces. The force mix in the Secure Reserve Force also needs reexamination to assure that it has maximum endurance. C3I supporting the reserved forces also needs greater endurance. Furthermore, the current provisional target sets for the Secure Reserve Force (primarily low-priority economic targets) do not contribute significantly to the objective of post-war coercion.

In relation to NATO our deterrence and escalation control objectives require an effective NATO employment policy. Allied concerns about our ability to deter aggression against NATO have grown as Soviet capabilities have grown. More effective plans for targeting the Warsaw Pact threat to NATO with strategic weapons and closer coordination of US and NATO [\[Page 4.78\]](#) planning could help to alleviate these concerns. However, to make such plans effective requires more responsive and survivable C3 and intelligence, and even closer integration of employment planning and crisis management between the U.S. and its allies at both the military and civilian levels. For the longer run, the availability to SACEUR of an option to target a full range of threats to Allied Command Europe (ACE) without invoking the SIOP would also strengthen deterrence and the confidence of our allies.

There is no plan at present for launch under attack of only the ICBM force. If the ICBMs were launched against their current SIOP targets there would be substantial collateral damage to Soviet population and this would likely invite retaliation against US urban/industrial assets. In any event, the set of targets for our ICBM force is not in itself planned to meet any specific objective. We ought to have an option to launch only our land-based ballistic missiles against a target set which would serve some defined objective while minimizing collateral damage, thereby reducing the prospect of retaliation against a broad US urban/industrial target set. The launch under attack doctrine should not be seen as a solution to the problem of ICBM vulnerability. In many situations, LUA, would, in effect, rule out a real choice by the President. The President should not be forced to make a “use or lose” choice if there are other options available. Reliance on LUA increases the risk of an accidental war and thus would increase instability in a Soviet-US crisis. However, we do believe that targeting plans should include a LUA option for ICBM forces only that is less escalatory than current plans.

The current SIOP targeting policy for China is out of date. It was based on a period when China was seen as a threat comparable to the Soviet Union. We believe that our China targeting policy should be reformulated to bring it more into line with current political and military realities. China poses no strategic nuclear threat to the US today and will only have a minimal capability within the next several years at least. At present, US-Chinese relations are improving, and the PRC is clearly more menacing to our adversaries than to our allies. Political relations could change, but we would likely have a good deal of warning. In any case, while it is not clear what will deter China, it seems unlikely that a primarily agrarian society with a small industrial base will be deterred from regional aggression against its neighbors by the threat of massive attacks on industry. We not only do not

understand the recovery process as it relates to China, but we are quite arbitrary in assigning value to those targets we select. The current requirement to program at least one weapon on an industrial facility in the top 125 urban areas in the PRC, drives, to a large extent, the high weapons requirements for China targeting even though over 50 percent of China's industry is located in 25 cities.

C. Major Policy Alternatives

[Page 4.79]

We have developed several alternative employment policies that we believe, on the basis of our study, to be representative of the choices facing national leaders with respect to future employment policy. The identification and assessment of major policy alternatives is a somewhat artificial exercise. If precedent is any guide, policy is more likely to be determined incrementally by a series of discrete decisions about what to procure and when, how to phrase a given policy statement, what to include in an arms control proposal, etc. Thus, there are, in actuality, a number of choices that could be made. Nevertheless, it can be useful to identify and assess broad policy as a framework for making more specific decisions. And such decisions should, if possible, be made with some set of overall objectives in mind.

There are several factors that are likely to dominate the choice of alternatives. Most important are assessments of Soviet views and objectives with respect to the role of nuclear weapons; and in light of these Soviet views and objectives, judgments as to what actions we should seek to deter with nuclear forces, and how best to do so. In this connection we also need to consider: (a) what flexibility in our nuclear posture (i.e., how broad a range of options) is desired and what is feasible and how much we should spend on it; (b) how much endurance do our forces require and how much is possible; (c) how much damage limiting capability is considered necessary and how much is possible; and (d) the costs of achieving these capabilities. One alternative, of course, is to continue current policy as described above. We offer below four broad alternatives to current policy.

All of the following options will meet the current objectives of nuclear policy to some degree. However, they differ in their relative emphasis on flexibility, endurance and counterforce; and as a result could have substantially different cost implications. However, each contains at a minimum, an assured destruction capability.

a. *One alternative is to strengthen current policy, particularly by improving the flexibility of plans and the endurance of forces and their related command, control and intelligence.* Under such a policy, an assured capability to destroy industrial targets of value to the Soviet Union would remain the backbone of deterrence, and would receive emphasis in declaratory policy. However, the goal of "impeding recovery" would be redefined to focus [2 lines not declassified] The forces and related C3I to accomplish this mission should be given additional endurance over time so that attacks on industrial targets can be withheld so long as substantial U.S. industrial value remains undamaged. Added emphasis would be given both in planning and declaratory policy to a more effective means of targeting Soviet conventional forces and command and control as a supplement to assured destruction of industry. Counterforce objectives would deemphasize damage limiting and focus targeting on preventing the [Page 4.80] emergence of marked asymmetries in US and Soviet capabilities that could be exploited by the Soviet Union to coerce us or our allies following a nuclear attack; or which, if perceived as an advantage by the Soviets, could affect crisis bargaining short of nuclear war. This policy would also retain non-SIOP options, but strengthen the procedures to integrate non-SIOP nuclear options with other military and political measures. This policy would involve alteration of current targeting plans and declaratory policy in order to take into account what we know of Soviet views of nuclear strategy, in particular their sensitivities to losing control over their society, and the deterrent effect that we might achieve by planning to attempt to deny the Soviet Union a war winning capability. Some believe such changes to current policy represent the minimum necessary to strengthen deterrence in light of what we know of Soviet objectives and their growing military power. Others believe that changes to current policy are not necessary to strengthen deterrence and would be provocative and costly.

b. *A further departure from current policy would be to focus both employment and declaratory policy more heavily on denying the Soviets any confidence of achieving a favorable war outcome.* A high priority effort would have to be put on developing greater endurance and on improved targeting of [less than 1 line not declassified] New capabilities would be required to support such a targeting policy, particularly more survivable C3I. Countervalue targeting would (as in a.) focus on Soviet [1 line not declassified]

However, these attacks would be designed to be withheld for [less than 1 line not declassified] as part of an expanded reserve force concept. Targeting population or targeting industry to impede long-term recovery would not be a specific SIOP objective, but an assured destruction capability (to be withheld so long as the Soviets spared U.S. cities and industries) should be maintained. Targeting of both Soviet nuclear and conventional forces would be designed principally to assure that they could not expect to achieve a favorable nuclear or military balance following a counterforce exchange. However, damage limiting to the extent feasible would also be retained as an objective of counterforce targeting. Non-SIOP option planning would be improved as in a. above. Declaratory policy would stress that the overall objective of our nuclear policy is to deny to the Soviet Union a favorable outcome from a nuclear war. Some argue that this policy could help to convince the Soviets that the US was seeking serious war-winning objectives (as some maintain the Soviets do) and thus, would be a far more effective strategy in extending deterrence and preventing coercion, and that it would give the U.S. more reasonable war objectives if deterrence fails. Others argue that by reducing emphasis on the prospect of massive retaliation and by implying that the U.S. was more prepared to fight a nuclear war than we have been in the past, we would weaken deterrence and decrease stability. [Page 481] This policy could prove more costly than Option a., but whether it would be substantially more costly is not certain.

c. *Still a further departure from current policy would add a higher confidence capability to limit damage.* This would require not only greater capability against Soviet nuclear forces than in Option b. above, but also substantial improvements in defenses. Under this policy, we might return to the targeting objectives of the earlier SIOPs. For example, we might attempt to achieve something like [1 line not declassified] threatening the U.S. and our allies under all circumstances of war initiation. Obviously, the forces required for such a strategy would be substantial and would have to be acquired over a period of years. Thus, this could not be a short-term objective of U.S. policy. Some would argue that a damage limiting capability at least comparable to that of the Soviet Union is the *sine qua non* of essential equivalence and a necessary requirement to make a strategy of escalation control credible. Without the ability to deter escalation at the higher levels the U.S. could not count on controlling escalation at lower levels. Others argue that the achievement of such a damage limiting capability would be highly destabilizing and would hardly be feasible given the Soviet capability to respond to whatever measures the United States might take. It seems clear that this option would be more costly than current policy or either of the two prior options.

d. *Finally, the U.S. might choose to move to the other direction from current policy and rely more heavily on assured destruction defined in either terms of industry, population or cities.* This would avoid the need, perhaps quite costly, to improve current deficiencies in flexibility and endurance. Moving in this direction would imply a judgment that the post-war nuclear force balance is not a meaningful measure of “victory” and that the prospect of massive destruction is a credible deterrent for large scale attacks including those aimed at nuclear forces. A continued capability to execute a wide range of limited attacks would be possible with the forces provided by this approach, but, in general, the approach assumes that any nuclear exchange is likely to escalate very rapidly to all-out countervalue exchanges. Indeed, it depends on that prospect for its deterrent effect. The argument against this approach is that it would narrow the scope of deterrence. In particular, such a policy would have an adverse impact on extended deterrence and thus on alliance relationships, and might suggest opportunities in the future for the Soviets to utilize their nuclear forces for coercion of the US and our allies. It would provide the US with a very narrow range of options should deterrence fail.

D. Major Recommendations

[Page 482]

1. *Greater flexibility should be built into the SIOP through the development of more discrete building blocks* which could break down the present target base into smaller increments and thereby give the President a broader range of options if he should ever have to consider SIOP type attacks. Each building block should have distinct targeting criteria which take into account not only the timing and damage requirements for attacking the objective target but also collateral damage to other target sets. Given the planning complexities, the development of building blocks requires an evolutionary approach with close interaction between policy levels and planners. Care must be taken to insure that a balance is struck between the quantity of useful options desired and the need to maintain a relatively simple and responsive execution process. (See Issue #1)⁴

2. *The requirement for endurance should be considered a high priority requirement in the future planning of US forces, command, control communications and intelligence assets.* Endurance—the ability of strategic nuclear forces not only to survive the initial attacks but to remain an effective military force for a prolonged period afterwards—is a key element in any strategy that pays attention to post-exchange balances and/or the possibility of a drawn-out series of exchanges. Specific recommendations for endurance measures involve acquisition policy, and thus are beyond the scope of this study. However, we can say that to carry out current employment policy effectively, much less the more demanding alternatives outlined above, the endurance of command, control, communications and intelligence assets need to be improved substantially so as to make it possible to support the concept of a Secure Reserve Force and withhold attacks (e.g., on Soviet non-military industry) so long as substantial US urban/industrial assets remain undamaged. It is important that modifications in employment policy and plans that rely on greater endurance proceed in phase with the improvements in our force posture and supporting C3I that are necessary for endurance. (See Issue #2)⁵

3. *We should target Soviet nuclear forces and develop our own forces so as to maintain roughly equal counterforce capabilities. In particular, counter-nuclear targeting should be designed primarily so as to assure that the Soviets are unable to shift the balance of nuclear power drastically by attacking our forces, and so that it is clearly perceived they cannot.* This objective cannot be achieved solely by attacking Soviet forces and thus is not solely a function of targeting policy. It also requires that we be able to hold in reserve forces comparable to reserved Soviet forces, so as to prevent post-war coercion and thus protect these [Page 483] forces and their related C3I. While we lack the ability to limit damage to the US society meaningfully in a large scale Soviet attack, we are reluctant wholly to eliminate this as an objective of US policy, particularly because to do so explicitly would appear to confirm a major asymmetry between US and Soviet policy and would ignore important uncertainties about the effectiveness of a damage limiting strategy. However, if we focus on avoiding asymmetries in nuclear power in developing targeting plans, we are also likely to do as well as we can expect to do in limiting damage.

We recommend the following specific guidance for targeting the Soviet nuclear threat to the US and our allies. First, we should, for reasons of alliance solidarity, continue to give equal priority to targeting threats to the US and to our NATO allies. Second, when forces are fully generated and there are sufficient weapons available to meet other targeting objectives adequately, including the maintenance of a Secure Reserve Force, we should continue to plan to place at least one weapon on each target that constitutes a nuclear threat to the US or our allies, using the most effective weapon for each type of target and taking into account the desirability of promptly using forces with less endurance. For the longer run we should have sufficient weapons with hard target capabilities to meet this objective without utilizing weapons with low PK. Third, in the retaliatory case, priority should be given (among nuclear threat targets) to [6 lines not declassified] It will be important in the longer run to improve the US capability to acquire information rapidly on the status of Soviet strategic forces following an attack. (See Issue #3)⁶

4. *New priorities should be established for targeting Soviet non-nuclear forces* taking into account the probability that Soviet forces will be dispersed upon warning. Any victory-denial approach should pay close attention to the ability of nuclear weapons to affect the post-exchange balance of military forces, broadly defined, not just nuclear forces. This will require a special effort to identify the [1 line not declassified] does not decrease greatly with warning, to include [1 line not declassified] The target value system would be adjusted to assure the destruction of these targets and to give [1 line not declassified] For the longer run, we should initiate a high priority special study on the feasibility of targeting [1 line not declassified] requirements for accomplishing this. Particular attention should be given to how strategic forces might be utilized more effectively in support of NATO. A target package should be developed to [1 line not declassified] (See Issue #4)⁷

5. *Targeting of the Soviet* [5 lines not declassified] A high priority effort should be undertaken to identify and target [3 [Page 484] lines not declassified] We should continue to have an option to withhold attacks [4 lines not declassified] should receive further study on a high priority basis along with [less than 1 line not declassified] (See Issue #5)⁸

6. *Targeting of Soviet* [2 lines not declassified] This attack should be designed so as to minimize collateral damage to population [less than 1 line not declassified] consistent with achievement of the attack objective. It should be possible to carry out this attack [1 line not declassified]

Second, [4 lines not declassified] by the US during and after the war.

We recommend that the US continue current policy with respect to the targeting of population, in which population, as such, is not an objective target. At the same time, we recommend continuing to plan. [2 lines not declassified] Unless Soviet civil defense becomes far more effective than presently estimated, there will be substantial population at risk in any such large scale attack, as is the case now. We find no reason to believe that targeting population *per se*, would be a more effective deterrent or a more useful objective in general war than targeting the specific economic objectives suggested above along with the control apparatus and military power which the Soviets appear to consider of high value. Furthermore, targeting population would require substantial additional allocation of weapons if we assume that the Soviet civil defense is implemented and effective, and therefore would divert weapons from other objectives. However, estimates of population fatalities will continue to be an important criterion for any decision maker contemplating the use of nuclear weapons. Our data and methodology for making such estimates should continue to be improved. We should also keep under continuous examination the feasibility and the implications for other targeting objectives of adjusting our targeting so as to be able to attack some defined portion of Soviet population even if it is evacuated and/or sheltered. Whether we should have a specific target set for use in such a case remains an unresolved issue.

7. *We should continue to plan a Secure Reserve Force (SRF) as part of the strategic reserved forces.* Our long run objectives should be to assure that reserve forces in a prolonged nuclear war at any stage of that conflict would be superior or at least comparable in capability to the forces of the Soviet Union. A principal objective of the Strategic Reserve Force would be to deny the Soviet Union the possibility of changing the correlation of forces. We need to consider the role of theater-based forces in a secure reserve concept and the possibilities for augmenting forces during a crisis or after a limited attack. We need to develop capabilities that would permit flexible retargeting of the reserve force for we see no way in which this force can be [Page 485] realistically pretargeted prior to a nuclear engagement.

For the short run, we recommend that the composition of the Secure Reserve Force be based heavily on the probability of survival and endurance in its components. Given this concept, the principal objective of the Secure Reserve Force should be to achieve enduring survivability. What it is targeted against is less important than its ability to survive and endure. However, during the period when we lack an enduring intelligence and retargeting capability, the Secure Reserve Force should continue to have tentative targets likely to have high continuing value even after an initial attack, e.g., bomber bases. This would permit, under worst circumstances, follow-up strikes to be executed “in the blind” against targets likely to have continuing value to the Soviet Union. (See Issue #7)²

8. *In addition to developing more discrete SIOP options, the process for the planning and use of non-SIOP options should be improved.* The only way to develop realistic political/military contingency plans is through a continuing interactive process between the planner and the policy/decision maker. It is in the nature of limited nuclear options that there will be a high political input into any consideration of the use of such options. And, if they are to achieve their stated objectives, the other associated military and political measures must be closely integrated with the use of limited and regional nuclear options. We, therefore, recommend that the current planning process be modified to include regular interaction between the JCS and OSD, including selective representatives from the State Department, the NSC staff and the Intelligence Community. Planning should include periodic exercises to test both the feasibility of implementing the plan and to expose policy/decision makers to the plans and give them an opportunity to evaluate them under as realistic conditions as possible. While DoD cannot organize the crisis management machinery of the US Government unilaterally, the SecDef should recommend to the President’s National Security Advisor the development of a national crisis management mechanism based on the planning procedures described above. (See Issue #8)¹⁰

9. *Closer coordination of nuclear planning between US and NATO planning staffs should be undertaken.* In particular, USCINCEUR and CINCLANT should be encouraged to develop additional US employment options in support of SEPs. Closer integration of nuclear planning between US and NATO planning staffs is needed, particularly in the development of target plans which integrate theater and strategic nuclear forces in striking the Warsaw Pact nuclear and conventional military threat [Page 486] to NATO. Should further analysis suggest that more effective ways can be found to target the Soviet/Warsaw Pact threat to NATO, these should be the basis for discussion with our allies under the aegis of the NPG. The opportunity should be seized to involve the allies in a more meaningful way in the development of alliance nuclear employment policy. Improvements in the vulnerable and outdated NATO C3 system clearly are needed, along with better means for rapid processing of intelligence. We need to take steps that assure that both NATO Selective Employment Plans (SEPs) and SACEUR's Nuclear Operations Plan (NOP) are consistent with our own; that if current LNOs or SAOs are employed there will be corresponding NATO plans that are complementary rather than conflicting. (See Issue #9)¹¹

10. *The JCS should develop a launch under attack package for ICBMs only that will be directed at a range of military and defense production targets but will result in minimum collateral damage consistent with achievement of its targeting objective.* This launch under attack package should be ready for use beginning in the 1981–82 period and should include a broad set of nuclear and non-nuclear targets and command and control. It should also include such targets as the Soviet ASAT launch facilities and Soviet ASW bases which might support attacks which could reduce US endurance. The attack should be designed so as to minimize collateral damage to population consistent with achievement of the attack objective. We do not see LUA as a solution to the problem of ICBM vulnerability, but believe such an option should, nevertheless, be available to the NCA. (See Issue #10)¹²

11. *Employment policy for China should not require the extensive planning process which is devoted to the Soviet Union.* We should, of course, recognize that China does pose a threat to some US interests in the Far East and that the PRC might attempt to coerce US friends or gain assets of interest to us, particularly in the aftermath of a US–Soviet exchange. We would assume that if China's posture substantially changed, we would be sensitive to this and could accommodate modifications in our targeting policy accordingly. Implicit in this recommendation is the belief that U.S. and Allied conventional and U.S. theater nuclear forces (using non-SIOP options) are sufficient to deter the likely range of Chinese threats in peacetime and that the SRF, available for protection and coercion worldwide could be used to deter China in a trans- and post-attack environment. (See Issue #11)¹³

12. *The data base for targeting needs to be revised and expanded.* It is evident from past experience that the design and [Page 487] maintenance of a responsive target intelligence data base is very complex and any change in policy portends significant modifications in data. For these reasons, we recommend JCS evaluation of the impact that the targeting policies contained in this report will have on the ability to produce and maintain an adequate, comprehensive, responsive target intelligence data base. The JCS should provide a plan, with appropriate milestones and resource requirements, to provide a flexible data base.

13. *The development of nuclear employment policy is an ongoing process that requires continuing interaction between policy makers and planners.* Presently, there is no mechanism or arrangement that could assure that our employment policy is developed on this basis. The Secretary of Defense should create within OSD a mechanism to conduct the necessary follow-on work and assure its continuity.

[Omitted here is the body of the report.]

1. Source: Carter Library, National Security Affairs, Brzezinski Material, General Odom File, Box 35, Nuclear Targeting Policy Review: 11–12/78. Top Secret; Sensitive.↵

2. See [Document 102](#).↵

3. Top Secret.↵

4. Issue #1 in the report is titled “Flexibility.”↵

5. Issue #2 in the report is titled “Endurance.”↵
6. Issue #3 in the report is titled “Targeting the Nuclear Threat.”↵
7. Issue #4 in the report is titled “Targeting Soviet Theater Forces.”↵
8. Issue #5 in the report is titled “Targeting Soviet Control Apparatus.”↵
9. Issue #7 in the report is titled “The Strategic Reserve Force.”↵
10. Issue #8 in the report is titled “Planning in Support of Escalation Control.”↵
11. Issue #9 in the report is titled “The Policy Interface with NATO.”↵
12. Issue #10 in the report is titled “Launch Under Attack.”↵
13. Issue #11 in the report is titled “Employment Policy for China.”↵