



OFFICE OF THE HISTORIAN

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

213. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski) to President Carter¹

Washington, October 2, 1980

SUBJECT

Emergency Procedures for Presidential Succession

On John Macy's report of the exercise NINE LIVES last May,² you commented that you would like a "summary of procedures" and that "FEMA inform at least the top five in the chain of succession" about the improved system known as Operation TREETOP. He has responded in a letter at Tab A. The Summary of the Procedures is at Tab B. (S)

No action by you is required. The important points for you to know are:

- John Macy has briefed the top five officials in the line of succession below the Vice President. They have a copy of Macy's letter to you and are aware that you have asked them to be briefed.
- On procedures, you may disperse, whenever you determine that the strategic situation is precarious, five potential successors with small support teams. This allows you to reduce greatly our vulnerability to a surgical strike against the National Command Authority.
- This capability, Operation TREETOP, is only an intermediate step toward the new continuity of government system directed by PD-58.³ (S)

Tab A

Memorandum From the Director of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (Macy) to President Carter⁴

Washington, August 19, 1980

Dear Mr. President:

(U) On June 4, I sent an initial report⁵ to you on Exercise NINE LIVES which was conducted during the period May 6–8, 1980, at your request and in close coordination with the Department of Defense. In your written comment on that report,⁶ [Page 891] you asked that following our review, we provide you with a "summary of procedure" and that we "inform at least the top five in the chain of succession." Our review is now nearing completion and we have progressed sufficiently in our post exercise critique to comply with your request at this time.

(S) The exercise tested several of our contingency plans for national security emergencies including, primarily, those for the dispersal and support of Presidential successors. Surrogates were used for the principals involved and communications security was a paramount consideration. Enclosed is a brief description of the plans which were tested and the procedures associated with each.

(U) With respect to your request to inform at least the top five in the chain, you are advised that all officials in the line of succession, below the level of the Vice President, are briefed by me and my staff on the plans and procedures for emergency dispersal and support shortly after assuming office. I intend to provide each of them with copies of this letter and our final review of the NINE LIVES Exercise.

(S) In general, the exercise was very profitable from the viewpoint of lessons learned. The principal problem areas which deserve our continued attention and near term solutions include:

- Clarification of legal interpretation associated with details of succession to the Presidency. These are being investigated by the Department of Justice.
- Need for greater communications support at various dispersal locations. The Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Department of Defense are investigating means to improve this capability.
- Need for more effective procedures for decisionmaking with respect to timing, successor selection, and dispersal. This is being addressed by the National Security Council, the Department of Defense, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.
- Need for more adequate support of successors when dispersed. The Federal Emergency Management Agency is expanding current plans to provide such support.
- Need to re-evaluate helicopter support for the emergency dispersal of successors during crises periods. This problem is under study by the Department of Defense and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

(U) I considered the exercise to be very successful and feel that this kind of joint civil/military exercise greatly enhances our continuity of government capabilities. With your continued support and in coordination with the White House [Page 892] Military Office, the Department of Defense, and the new Joint Program Office on Continuity of Government, I will conduct similar exercises at least semiannually.

(U) The Secretary of Defense has seen this letter and concurs.

Respectfully,

John W. Macy, Jr.

Tab B

Paper Prepared in the Federal Emergency Management Agency

Washington, undated

[Secret. 8 pages not declassified]

1. Source: Carter Library, National Security Council, Institutional Files, Box 23, PD/NSC–58 [2]. Secret. Sent for action. Drafted by Odom. Carter initialed the upper right corner of the memorandum.↵

2. Not found.↵

3. See Document 201.↵

4. Secret.↵

5. Not found.↵

6. Not found.↵