

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

TOP SECRET

August 24, 1977

Presidential Directive/NSC-18

TO: The Vice President
The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense

ALSO: The Director, Office of Management and Budget
The Assistant to the President for National
Security Affairs.
The Director, Arms Control and Disarmament
Agency
The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
The Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: U. S. National Strategy (U)

I have reviewed the PRM/NSC conclusions and the discussion of the Special Coordination Committee. It is clear that in the foreseeable future, US-Soviet relations will continue to be characterized by both competition and cooperation, with the attendant risk of conflict as well as the opportunity for stabilizing US-Soviet relations.

In that competition, military aspects aside, the United States continues to enjoy a number of critical advantages: it has a more creative technological and economic system, its political structure can adapt more easily to popular demands and relies on freely given popular support, and it is supported internationally by allies and friends who genuinely share similar aspirations. In contrast, though successfully acquiring military power matching that of the United States, the Soviet Union continues to face major internal economic and national difficulties, and externally it has few genuinely committed allies while lately suffering setbacks in its relations with China, parts of Africa, and India.

In this situation I direct that US national strategy will be to take advantage of our relative advantages in economic strength, technological superiority and popular political support to:

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- Counterbalance, together with our allies and friends, by a combination of military forces, political efforts, and economic programs, Soviet military power and adverse influence in key areas, particularly Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia.
- Compete politically with the Soviet Union by pursuing the basic American commitment to human rights and national independence.
- Seek Soviet cooperation in resolving regional conflicts and reducing areas of tension that could lead to confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union.
- Advance American security interests through negotiations with the Soviet Union of adequately verifiable arms control and disarmament agreements that enhance stability and curb arms competition.
- Seek to involve the Soviet Union constructively in global activities, such as economic and social developments and peaceful non-strategic trade.

To fulfill this national strategy, the United States will maintain an overall balance of military power between the United States and its allies on the one hand and the Soviet Union and its allies on the other at least as favorable as that that now exists. In this connection, the United States will fulfill its commitment to its NATO allies to raise the level of defense spending by approximately three percent per year in real terms along with our allies.

To carry out US national strategy, I am also providing the following initial guidance regarding US military strategy, programs and policies.

Strategic Force Objectives

The purpose of US strategic forces is to deter a nuclear attack on the United States, upon our forces, our allies and others whose security is important to the United States and, if deterrence fails, to inflict appropriate retaliatory response on the Soviet Union. In conjunction with general purpose and theater nuclear forces, it is the further purpose of our strategic forces to enhance deterrence of non-nuclear aggression against NATO and our Asian allies.

Strategic Programs

The United States will maintain a strategic posture of essential equivalence with the Soviet Union so as to insure that the Soviet Union cannot use strategic forces for political leverage and coercion and so that the strategic balance will not deter the United States from taking conventional military action where its interests dictate.

Essential equivalence will require that advantages in strategic force characteristics enjoyed by the Soviet Union must be offset by United States advantages in strategic forces. The United States will not accept a strategic posture inferior to that of the Soviet Union.

The United States will not seek a capability for a disarming first strategic nuclear strike against Soviet strategic forces so long as the Soviet Union does not do so against us. Our posture should be designed to promote nuclear stability particularly in a crisis and to the extent possible reduce any Soviet incentive to use nuclear weapons. The US force posture should be capable of inflicting an unacceptable level of damage on the Soviet Union following a Soviet first strike.

The United States will maintain adequate command and control capability and forces to execute limited strategic employment options.

The United States will maintain the capability to provide timely strategic attack warning and assessment and to insure adequate surveillance and control of US airspace. The United States research and development efforts on active strategic defenses should be sufficient to assess and respond to Soviet strategic programs as appropriate.

Strategic Targeting Policy

If deterrence should fail and nuclear conflict occurs, US targeting plans should provide options for limited retaliatory responses designed to control escalation and flexibly respond to aggression. If control of escalation fails, US target plans should seek to limit damage to the United States and its allies to the extent possible, and to inflict unacceptable levels of damage on the Soviet Union (subject to a separate targeting review), so that the conflict terminates on the most favorable terms possible.

US target plans should provide for the maintenance of a secure reserve force to be withheld for possible use subsequent to a major nuclear exchange.

General Purpose Forces

The conventional forces take on increasing relevance to the defense of US security interests under conditions of strategic nuclear equivalence. Planning for US general purpose forces will focus on dealing with the Soviet threat to Europe but will also provide capabilities for use in the defense of major US and allied interests outside of Europe. US planning for NATO and for global contingencies must take into account the heightened significance of conventional capability in the setting of strategic nuclear equivalence.

NATO

The US reaffirms NATO strategy as expressed in MC-14/3. Deterrence and defense in the NATO areas will continue to rely on a combination of conventional, theater nuclear, and strategic nuclear forces. To this end it is necessary in the light of advances in the military posture of the Warsaw Pact to emphasize the strengthening of NATO's conventional forces for deterrence and defense.

Consonant with present NATO strategy, including forward defense, the US is committed to having the capability, in conjunction with its allies, to stop a Warsaw Pact attack with minimum loss of territory and ultimately to restore prewar boundaries. To this end priority should be given to initial combat capabilities.

In this connection, the United States together with its allies shall maintain capabilities adequate to protect the lines of communication and access to raw materials that are vital to the economies of the United States and its allies in the event of a NATO Warsaw Pact war.

Global Contingencies

In addition, the United States will maintain a deployment force of light divisions with strategic mobility independent of overseas bases and logistical support, which includes moderate naval and tactical air forces, and limited land combat forces. These forces will be designed for use against both local forces and forces projected by the USSR based on analyses of requirements in the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, or Korea, taking into account the contribution of our friends and allies in these regions. US planning should provide that these requirements may be met by a combination of the light deployment forces, supplemented

by forces in the United States, primarily oriented toward NATO defense. The 2nd Division will be oriented toward deployment in Asia but available for global contingencies as described above.

Asia

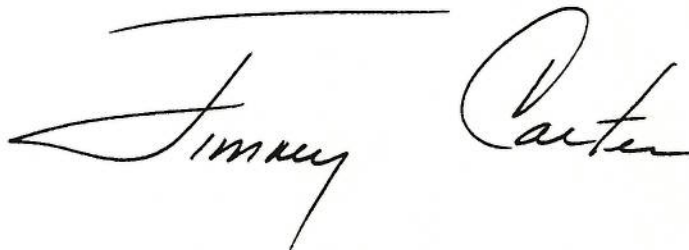
With the exception of withdrawals from Korea directed under PD/NSC-12, the United States will maintain the current level of combat forces deployed in the Western Pacific in order to preserve regional stability, to deter aggression in Korea and elsewhere, and to protect US interests and meet treaty commitments in the event of aggression.

Additional Studies

The Secretary of Defense will undertake, subject to separate instructions, a review of US targeting policy, as well as other studies; recommendations on the appropriate level of US capability to sustain a worldwide conventional war against the Soviet Union and its allies should be coordinated by the National Security Council for my decision, as per additional instructions.

Pending the conclusion of the targeting review, the US will continue to employ its strategic forces according to NSDM 242.

Otherwise, this Directive supersedes NSDM 242.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jimmy Carter". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the page.