

30. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) to President Nixon¹

Washington, undated.

SUBJECT

Nuclear Policy

The Verification Panel of the National Security Council has been examining our nuclear policies, both for strategic warfare and for theater use, with the objective of providing you a more flexible nuclear employment policy.² The initial results of this effort are contained in the draft National Security Decision Memorandum at Tab A.³

The draft NSDM is a major first step in providing comprehensive Presidential guidance for consideration of the basic elements of nuclear policy:

—*Strategic Objectives.* It reiterates the deterrence objectives of U.S. nuclear strategy along the lines of your annual foreign policy report.⁴

—*Employment Policy.* It provides Presidential guidance for development of more flexible war plans for the use of available U.S. forces against specific target systems under limited as well as general war scenarios.

—*Declaratory Policy.* The Department of State is to prepare recommendations on how and to what extent the U.S. explains its nuclear policies to other countries, both friend and foe.

The draft NSDM provides the first comprehensive national framework for coordinating each of these aspects of our nuclear policy. As such, it will be helpful in streamlining our nuclear posture, making it more effective and responsive to Presidential direction. It also will provide a conceptual basis which should strengthen the justification for our nuclear arms programs before the Congress.

Equally important, the draft NSDM would establish a dynamic process of review, analysis and evaluation of our nuclear policies and

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-202, Study Memorandums, NSSM 191 [2 of 2]. Top Secret; Sensitive. Lodal forwarded this memorandum to Kissinger under a covering memorandum of December 29, 1973 and recommended that Kissinger send it to the President. Lodal's memorandum also recommended issuing two directives on nuclear policy—a NSDM on employment and a NSSM on acquisition—as the response to NSSM 169 had left unresolved "serious ambiguities" pertaining to the latter issue. (Ibid., NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H-242, Policy Papers, NSDM 242 1 of 2 [2 of 2])

² See Document 22.

³ The revised NSDM, as signed, is Document 31.

⁴ See footnote 4, Document 17.

their practical consequences. This will assist coordination and refinement of our plans and policies and insure that proposals for implementing actions are carefully considered within the NSC system.

Employment Policy

Until now there has been no Presidential guidance on how the U.S. should plan for a nuclear conflict. The only options at the national level were developed by the JCS. This was done at a time when we had massive nuclear superiority. As a result, the only planned options we have in response to aggression require major attack on the Soviet Union despite the fact that there is now approximate nuclear parity between the two countries.

The concept that we could “win” a war through virtually unlimited nuclear exchanges has become increasingly irrational as the Soviets acquired the capability to destroy the United States—even if the U.S. were to strike first. This has resulted in concern that such a strategy is no longer credible and that it detracts from our overall deterrent.

To overcome these shortcomings, the proposed NSDM sets forth employment policy which:

(1) Provides for the development of a broad range of limited options aimed at terminating war on terms acceptable to the U.S. at the lowest level of conflict feasible. To do this, the options must control escalation by setting clear boundaries on the scale of the attack. Both strategic and theater nuclear forces are covered in this guidance.

(2) Maintains the major SIOP-type options in the event that escalation cannot be controlled. However, instead of wholesale destruction of Soviet military forces, people and industry, these options are to aim at:

—Inhibiting the early return of the Soviet Union to major power status by systematic attacks on Soviet military, economic and political structures.

—Limiting damage to the U.S. to the extent feasible.

—Maintaining a survivable strategic reserve force for continued protection of the U.S. after a major conflict.

NSC Review Process

The proposed policy guidance could, in time, bring about far-reaching changes in our nuclear posture. Therefore, it was considered prudent to establish a process for examination and review within the NSC of the practical consequences of the policy before significant changes are made in our nuclear postures. Specifically, the draft NSDM calls for:

—The first set of limited options to be submitted to you for approval within three months and thereafter a quarterly review of the available and proposed nuclear employment options.

—An evaluation by Defense of the capabilities, limitations, and risks associated with the new major attack plans and procedures.

In addition, there will be a requirement that agencies concerned review their crisis management procedures. At the same time, the Defense Department is instructed to develop for your consideration, recommendations on a senior level staff organization to provide you advice in a crisis.

Political Considerations

The Verification Panel has also considered the political aspects of the new policy guidance.

—Our allies tend to see any changes whatsoever in U.S. nuclear policy as an attempt to decouple our strategic forces from the deterrence of local aggression in Europe and Asia. However, we believe they will come to realize that the proposed policy is designed to have the opposite effect.

—The Soviet Union and the PRC of course cannot be expected to respond favorably, but neither is the new policy likely to harm our improving relations with either country.

—The Congressional reaction in the main, will be focused on the impact of the policy on new weapons expenditures and on our arms control efforts. We believe the new NSDM will strengthen our ability to argue the case for sound weapons programs and our arms control posture.

The draft NSDM deals with these concerns in two additional ways:

—First, the Departments concerned are instructed to treat the new guidance as an evolution and refinement of US policy and not as a sharp new departure in strategy. The Presidential guidance would not be made public.

—Second, the need to inform our allies and the reaction of the USSR and the PRC will be examined by State and CIA. Their conclusions and recommendations will be made available to you through the NSC system.

These steps should enable us to moderate and maintain the political impact of the new policy guidance.

Acquisition Policy

At present, Presidential guidance for nuclear forces is contained in NSDM 16⁵ issued in June 1969. It established criteria for the acquisition of strategic nuclear forces but does not cover their employment. The ac-

⁵ See footnote 2, Document 4.

quisition guidance in NSDM 16⁶ is no longer adequate, and new guidance is needed in light of Soviet nuclear advances, the SALT agreements, and the need for greater flexibility in options for the possible use of nuclear forces.

While some work has been done, further work is needed before I can recommend to you a proposed policy for future acquisition of nuclear systems. Attached at Tab B⁷ is a draft NSSM which would direct a study of U.S. policy for the acquisition of nuclear forces. The study will develop recommended acquisition policy guidelines to support the deterrent and employment objectives set forth in the proposed NSDM on employment policy. In addition, the study will take into account such issues as:

- U.S. ability to respond to projected threats to strategic offensive forces;
- Future counterforce capabilities for strategic missiles;
- Realignments of forward nuclear deployments in Asia;
- Modernizing nuclear forces deployed in NATO.

The study also directs ACDA to assess the impact of the draft NSDM and of the recommended acquisition policy upon our arms control positions. This is intended to ensure that the U.S. position on various arms control issues advances our basic security needs.

The results of this study will allow us to establish criteria for acquisition of U.S. nuclear forces, which take into account both their deterrent role and the need for flexibility in the employment of these forces should deterrence fail.

Summary

The draft NSDM:

- (1) Provides more realistic, unified, encompassing nuclear policy than we now have.
- (2) Requires the development of limited nuclear options for your review and approval.
- (3) Gives guidance to review our major attack options to orient them toward enhancing the relative post-war position of the U.S. and less toward wholesale destruction of potential opponents.

⁶ NSDM 16 contains four acquisition criteria: (1) maintain high confidence in US second strike capability; (2) insure Soviet Union would have no incentive to strike the US first; (3) maintain capability to deny Soviets ability to inflict more deaths and industrial damage on US than Soviets suffer; and, (4) deploy defenses which limit damage from small attacks or accidental launches. [Footnote in the source text.]

⁷ Not found attached. The NSSM, as signed, is Document 32.

(4) Calls for the necessary command, control and communication systems and crisis management arrangements to support a more flexible nuclear posture.

(5) Establishes a dynamic process for the review of the practical results of the new guidance and of the guidance itself to ensure it meets our policy needs.

The draft NSSM will allow us to establish criteria for acquisition of U.S. nuclear forces, which take into account both their deterrent role and the need for flexibility in the employment of these forces should deterrence fail.

RECOMMENDATION

That you authorize me to sign the NSDM at Tab A.

That you authorize me to sign the NSSM at Tab B.⁸

⁸ The President initialed his approval of both recommendations, circled the phrases “me to sign,” and wrote, “RN will sign.”

31. National Security Decision Memorandum 242¹

Washington, January 17, 1974.

TO

Secretary of State
Secretary of Defense
Director, Central Intelligence Agency
Director, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency

SUBJECT

Policy for Planning the Employment of Nuclear Weapons

Based on a review of the study conducted in response to NSSM 169² and discussions by the Verification Panel,³ I have reached the following decisions on United States policy regarding planning for nuclear weapons employment. These decisions do not constitute a major

¹ Source: National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, NSC Files, Box 364, Subject Files, NSDMs 145–264. Top Secret; Sensitive. Copies were sent to Ray and Moorer.

² See Document 17.

³ See Document 22.