

Authority NND 989528
By JPM NARA Date 7/7/98

file

This document consists of 2 pages
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March 16, 1955

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE FILE

weapons effects

SUBJECT: Discussion with the Secretary--

The Secretary at his press conference on March 15 made certain remarks about the effects of small-scale atomic weapons and commented that if tactical weapons became more efficient, strategic bombardment would perhaps become unnecessary in the event of war. I immediately pointed out to him that one could not say that there would be no fall-out problem in connection with small weapons use, especially if they were used as the Secretary had suggested in his press conference to "crater" airfields. I pointed out that any surface burst of a nuclear weapon, even a small one, would create some local fall-out problem.

I also pointed out to the Secretary my understanding that Air Force thinking was directly contra to his suggestion about strategic bombardment becoming unnecessary. I pointed out that the destruction of specific military targets such as airfields by megaton weapons would cause tremendous destruction of life and property in the surrounding areas. The Secretary said "I don't know where you get your information from but I have been advised differently." Because there were several non-"Q" cleared people present I limited my reply to stating that I felt that this matter should be clarified for the Secretary. I gathered that he agreed. I will prepare a note to the Secretary suggesting that he be briefed by the military on the score.

On March 16 I cleared with the Secretary the proposed reply to the Soviet atomic energy note of November 29.

Then I gave him A-weapons information that Gen. Loper had given me earlier in the day about atomic capabilities in the Western Pacific. Then I told him that I had not pursued the previous day the matter of the possible effects of the SAC bombing plan because of the presence of non-"Q" cleared people.

I advised the Secretary that he ought to be briefed by the military on the problem "Effects of the SAC Strikes on Russia" since his opinion expressed on March 15 differed so radically from my impression of the situation. I told him that everything I had learned over the past years, including what was described at our recent trip to Omaha, indicated that if the SAC strikes were successful most major Russian cities would be destroyed and Russian casualties would be in the tens of millions. The Secretary then asked Bowie if that was his understanding and Bowie confirmed that it was and reminded the Secretary of the special briefing which Gen. LeMay had given a few members of the Secretary's party at Omaha in January. I mentioned to the Secretary that I believed the megatonnage of explosive energy proposed to be dropped on Soviet targets, if divided into the total area of Russia, would result in substantial over-pressure over the whole area. I pointed out that the SAC briefing was notably shy of facts on effects.

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The Secretary then said that although he wanted to get the facts he was very conscious of the inability or great difficulty of this country's maintaining two weapons systems--both conventional and atomic. I believe that here he was leaving the specific subject we had just been talking about and was going back to the reason for his statement the previous day about tactical atomic weapons.

I then stated my agreement with his conclusion but urged that we avoid the dangers of "over-compensation" leading to the belief that nuclear warfare could be conducted without tremendous destruction to civilians. At this point we were interrupted by the arrival of Eric Johnson and Gov. Stassen.

NOTE: Just as we were leaving the Secretary said to Bowie--you had me read that recent U.S. News and World Report story indicating that Russia could be immobilized without resort to destruction of its cities. Apparently the Secretary assumed that this plan by Col. Leghorn corresponds with SAC doctrine. Mr. Bowie tried to clear up this point.

S/AE:GCSmith:jd

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