

DECLASSIFIED
Authority NND 969 050
By JE NARA Date 4-22

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April 7, 1973 I agree with your plan

Mr. Sneider

MR. SNEIDER HAS SEEN

SUBJECT: Reported ROC Nuclear Weapons Development Program

4/7/73

Summary. In conversations Friday afternoon with SCI and INR, the consensus of opinion was that the ROC is probably a long time away from being able to construct a test nuclear weapon. (Both discounted the report of a Japanese nuclear weapons factory.) Following a suggestion of SCI, INR will arrange for CIA to brief you on this point next week. SCI regards the two recent reports about possible ROC intentions in this area as sensational and is doubtful about the urgency or even the need for a team to visit Taiwan. INR believes that a mission would be useful, has obtained a list of installations that the team should visit, will request CIA for a list of personalities the team should meet, and will consider nuclear scientists from the academic world who might go. INR will also request CIA to check out the reliability of the sources of the recent reports and give us an evaluation ~~of~~ at the briefing. If you have no objection, we will delay asking Embassy Taipei for an assessment of the second report until we have met with CIA.
End summary.

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SCI Views. Dan Brewster in SCI/AE describes the reports as the work of a "kook"; his boss, Dr. Webber, agrees. They argue that the ROC now has only one nuclear reactor in operation, the 40-MW Canadian-built research reactor. If the ROC wanted to obtain plutonium from the reactor as quickly as possible, it would run it constantly at full capacity and would frequently remove used fuel cores for reprocessing. At this maximum pace, the reactor would take a year to produce enough plutonium to construct one test weapon -- assuming that the ROC had reprocessing facilities available and the necessary knowledge. It is unlikely that the ROC could maintain secrecy about a weapons program if it operated on this schedule. If the ROC were running the reactor for research, it would be at full capacity for a few hours at a time and might often not be operating at all. Under these circumstances, the ROC would wait a long time before it had enough plutonium for a weapon. SCI believes that the original core loading remains in the reactor, which has only recently gone critical for the first time.

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SCI concedes the difficulty of negative proofs: the absence of hard evidence does not prove the absence of a weapons intention. It suggests, however, that if such a program were to be approved in Taiwan, we could look for evidence of it abroad. We could ask the Canadians for any information they might have about ROC plans for using the reactor. We could determine reloading frequency and ROC reprocessing requirements. We could check the records of the IAEA safeguards inspection in Taiwan last fall ~~xw~~ and in future inspections. We could remain alert to the possibility of continued ROC interest in acquiring a reprocessing plant or bits and pieces of the hardware from which it could build one.

INR Views. Lawrence Finch in INR/RSG also believes that the ROC is several years away from being able to make a nuclear weapon. However, he thinks that the visit of a U.S. team to Taiwan at this time would be useful. He agrees with SCI that AEC might not want to send people there, because a determined hard-headed examination might appear inconsistent with AEC's partnership relationship with the ROC under the US/ROC Agreement for Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Atomic Energy. He thought there would be no problem in finding well-qualified people from the academic world to take on the task.

Mr. Finch will arrange for CIA to brief us next week on the time-frame within which the ROC would necessarily be working. John St. Peter, not long back from visiting nuclear facilities on Taiwan, will probably be the briefing officer. Finch will also ask CIA to check before the briefing the reliability of the sources of the two reports and of a third report in the same series, now on its way to the Department; this one says that ROC scientists have visited nuclear high-explosives facilities in Israel. At INR's request, CIA has already provided us with a list of the facilities on Taiwan that our team should visit. Finch will ask CIA to give us at the meeting a list of personalities with whom the team should talk.

Cable to Taipei. If you have no objection, we will not send a cable to Embassy Taipei asking for an assessment of the ~~xwxxxx~~ last report until CIA has evaluated it and given us a clearer understanding of the problem we may be dealing with.

Mell
Mary E. McDonnell
EA/ROC x-21321