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MEMORANDUM

April 22, 1964

TO: White House - Mr. Bundy

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E.O. 13292, Sec. 3.5

NLJ 04-283

FROM: S/P - *WR* W. Rostow

By *isl*, NARA, Date 10-5-06

SUBJECT: The Bases for Direct Action Against Chinese  
Communist Nuclear Facilities

The attached paper on the possibilities of direct action against the Chinese Communist nuclear capability was prepared by Robert Johnson of the Policy Planning Council. It benefited from informal comments of offices in State, CIA and DOD and was discussed at an interdepartmental meeting in February which I chaired. The agencies and offices represented at that meeting included State (FE, INR, G/PM, S/P), ACDA, DOD (ISA and JCS) and CIA. It has been revised in the light of that discussion and represents, I believe, the broad consensus of the group that discussed it.

I am sending it to you for your information. It was agreed that it should be a part of the background for any subsequent consideration that might be given to this subject - for example, in connection with any further consideration of covert action.

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
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An Exploration of the Possible Bases for Action  
Against the Chinese Communist Nuclear Facilities

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April 14, 1964

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Against the Chinese Communist Nuclear Facilities

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An Exploration of the Possible Bases for Action  
Against the Chinese Communist Nuclear Facilities

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I. Conclusions

1. It is evident on the basis of analysis in this paper and the basic paper on the implications of a ChiCom nuclear capability\* that the significance of such a capability is not such as to justify the undertaking of actions which would involve great political costs or high military risks.

2. Direct action against the Chinese Communist nuclear facilities would, at best, put them out of operation for a few years (perhaps four to five).

3. A general threat of overt U.S. action to destroy the ChiCom nuclear production facilities in the event of major Chinese aggression would probably not be desirable. Threat of action in response to a specific instance of actual or threatened Chinese aggression would be preferable to a general threat, but would also have significant disadvantages. Whether it would be desirable would depend a good deal upon  
the circumstances

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\*See Draft Policy Planning Statement on "A Chinese Communist Nuclear Detonation and Nuclear Capability", October 15, 1963

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the circumstances surrounding a particular situation. If, for example, the ChiComs were threatening nuclear action, a threatened response limited initially to nuclear production facilities might be desirable.

4. Action against the ChiCom nuclear facilities which was incidental to other military actions taken against Communist China in response to Chinese aggression would generally be preferable to actions directed against nuclear facilities alone. Similarly, threats designed to deter ChiCom action should probably not be directed solely against nuclear facilities. (However, as stated in par. 3 there may be circumstances in which action limited to nuclear facilities may be preferred.)

5. It seems most unlikely that we can develop, through negotiations in the arms control field, a politically viable basis for action against the ChiCom nuclear facilities. The USSR is also most unlikely to agree explicitly or implicitly to U.S. action against ChiCom facilities or to cooperate in helping lay the political basis for such action. But arms control negotiations can further isolate the Chinese on this issue and can thus help prepare the way for possible action taken in other

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taken in other ways and on other grounds against the ChiCom facilities.

6. Covert action seems to offer the politically most feasible form of action. Such action would present least problems if undertaken as part of a reaction to Chinese Communist aggression. Political costs of action in the absence of ChiCom aggression are difficult to estimate. They could be considerable if Peiping reacts strongly; small, if it does not. Assuming that the Chinese Nationalists were involved we would also have to be prepared to take the limited risks of some kind of ChiCom retaliation against Taiwan. Technical feasibility continues to be a real question and requires continued analysis.

7. There are a number of technical and technical-related questions which would require an answer before a decision for any of the possible forms of action were made. These include the following:

- a. It is doubtful whether, even with completion of initial photographic coverage of the mainland, we will have anything like complete assurance that we will have identified all significant nuclear installations

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installations. Thus, even "successful" action may not necessarily prevent the ChiComs from detonating a nuclear device in the next few years. If an attack should be made, some installations are missed and Communist China subsequently demonstrates that it is continuing to produce nuclear weapons, what is likely to be the reaction to the half-finished U.S. effort?

- b. It seems to be the case that a relatively heavy non-nuclear air attack would be required to put installations "permanently" out of business (i.e., destroy them so completely that any rebuilding effort would have to start virtually from scratch). If complete destruction is unattainable without a large attack, how effective a job could be done with various alternative levels of attack?
- c. Could the U.S. mount an effective counterforce operation, should that prove necessary, without employing nuclear weapons?

## II. Alternative Modes of Action and General U.S. Capabilities

This paper explores the possible bases for military  
action

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action against the Chinese Communist nuclear facilities, discussing the problems and advantages of each. It examines what appear to be the principal alternative modes of action, but is not an exhaustive study. Drafts of this paper have benefited from informal comments of offices in State, CIA and DOD and the paper represents the broad consensus of the views of representatives of those agencies and of ACDA.

Broadly speaking, three possible modes of action against the Chinese Communist nuclear facilities are conceivable:

- (a) overt U.S. action (preceded by threat of action) in response to potential or actual Chinese Communist aggression;
- (b) overt U.S. action which is justified by the development of a case against nuclear weapons production and testing by actions in the disarmament field; and
- (c) covert action by the U.S. or the Republic of China.

In defining these modes of action it has been assumed that overt action must be based upon some form of political justification. Action that was simply a power play by either the U.S. alone or by the U.S. jointly with the USSR (assuming cooperation would be possible) is ruled out as being too costly politically.

Action

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Action against the Chinese nuclear facilities might be undertaken either in advance of the first Chinese nuclear test or after such a test. After a test, however, Communist China will tend increasingly to be viewed as a legitimate holder of nuclear power and this will complicate the problem of justification of action, particularly in the absence of overt Chinese aggression.

It is assumed that the U.S. would have the capability to launch an air attack which could put out of action the nuclear production sites known to it without using nuclear weapons (i.e., at present, the plutonium production reactor at Pao-T'ou and the incomplete gaseous diffusion plant at Lan-Chou). There may, moreover, be other facilities which we have so far not identified. (There are, for example, two other areas in Communist China that very possibly may contain, or be related to, plutonium facilities.) It is therefore impossible to assume at present that the U.S. could knock out all nuclear material production. Within a year or less, we should have completed analysis of photos covering all of Communist China and should have somewhat greater assurance that we will have identified Communist China's nuclear installations. However, even then

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even then we will not have recent coverage of all areas and the identification of facilities as small as plutonium reactors will continue to present significant difficulty. We will therefore continue to be uncertain that we have identified all facilities.

Once the Chinese Communists have a stockpile of nuclear weapons it would also be impossible to assume that all of these would be destroyed. In this situation probably the only tactic that would offer assurance of destruction of most of the Chinese capability for nuclear retaliation would be a full counterforce operation which attacked Communist Chinese delivery means - airfields, any surface-to-surface missile sites, etc. From this point of view early action is to be preferred over later action. As noted just above, it will also become difficult to justify action against Communist China's nuclear facilities as the evolution of its capability makes it an increasingly "accepted" holder of nuclear power. At the same time, however, as the argument below suggests, it may be some time, if ever, before we are provided with a politically acceptable basis for direct action.

Any action against the Chinese Communist nuclear facilities would, at best, put them out of operation for a few years

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years (perhaps four to five years). Unless we could use the interim period thus provided to produce basic changes in the environment we would be faced by the question of whether we should repeat our attack under less favorable circumstances once the facilities had been rebuilt. It is not obvious what kinds of action might promise such basic change. We might, perhaps, hope to so strengthen the non-Communist forces in Asia in the interim as to reduce the political dangers involved in ChiCom exploitation of their nuclear capability. Perhaps actions in the disarmament field could put Communist China more clearly on the political defensive in the interim, although it is difficult to see how such actions could by themselves preclude Chinese acquisition of nuclear weapons. In order to have a more permanent effect upon Communist China's ability to become a nuclear power we would have to somehow destroy Chinese research facilities and probably also her relevant research and engineering personnel. Identification of research facilities, which do not necessarily have any distinguishing physical characteristics, is impossible through photographic means. Direct action against such facilities and personnel would, even if possible, be obviously even more difficult

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cult to justify politically than action against nuclear production facilities.

III. Overt U.S. Action Related to ChiCom Aggression

A. Assumed Situation and Tactics

Alternative One. A non-Communist Asian country is under the threat or actuality of major Communist Chinese attack and the U.S. comes to the country's defense.\* As a deterrent

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\*The situation envisaged is one of major Communist Chinese border-crossing aggression such as a general attack along the 38th parallel in Korea, a major attack on the Sino-Indian border or attack upon Taiwan. It does not include ChiCom support for guerrilla warfare in Southeast Asia, and probably not an attack upon the offshores. The situations dealt with are, of course, the least likely forms of Communist Chinese military action. If the U.S. were to embark upon a program of military pressures against North Vietnam, it would face very serious problems of justifying such pressures in a way which avoided a broad-scale adverse international political reaction. To take action against the ChiCom nuclear facilities as part of such a program of military pressures would greatly complicate an already difficult problem by broadening the area of action and thus clouding further the rationale for the primary U.S. actions against the DRV as well as arousing additional fears of escalation. Present evidence of ChiCom support of the war in South Vietnam would be far from adequate to support such a response. If action were taken against ChiCom facilities in the event of overt Chinese military intervention following U.S. action against NVN, the discussion below would apply.

deterrent to further Communist Chinese military action, the U.S. threatens non-nuclear attack against Communist China's nuclear production facilities. The U.S. threat could be made explicit or it might take the form of an official "leak".

Alternative Two. The U.S. might make known by similar means, in advance of any specific ChiCom threat to a particular country its intent to take such action in the event of major Chinese Communist aggression. If the threat of U.S. action were made well in advance of any ChiCom aggressive action (perhaps as a part of the U.S. reaction to the first Chinese nuclear test), it would be difficult to define officially and publicly the circumstances in which we might consider such action. This consideration and others would tend to favor a "leak" rather than an official statement as the mode of approach.

A general difficulty with the "leak" approach is that it would immediately raise questions to which an official response of some kind would have to be made. It is not therefore necessarily a true substitute for an official statement.

Alternative Three. A third possibility, which would not have the potential deterrent advantage but which would result in the destruction of nuclear facilities, would be  
incidental

incidental, perhaps "accidental", attack on those facilities as a part of general conventional air attacks against Communist China in response to Chinese aggression.

B. Assumed Advantages

If deterrence succeeded, Chinese aggression would be stopped or prevented at minimum cost. If deterrence failed and an attack were necessary, the ChiCom ability to produce nuclear weapons might be destroyed for some time to come.

C. General Problems of Justification of Action Under All Alternatives

Broadly speaking, ultimate U.S. interests are consistent with the interests of other countries of the area. Both we and they would much prefer that Communist China not become a nuclear power. On the other hand, in view of our estimates of the probable limited utility of a nuclear capability to the ChiComs, we face the problem of whether we can justify to ourselves and others the initiation of military action against ChiCom nuclear production facilities. The other Asian countries (and European nations as well) will weigh their interest in not having Communist China become a nuclear power against their interest in avoiding actions which will threaten the possibility of broadened hostilities in Asia.

If Peiping

If Peiping were actually brandishing its nuclear capability, the relationship between the U.S. deterrent threat (and, if it became necessary; U.S. military action) and the ChiCom threat would be evident and the problem of justification would be less than if the Chinese nuclear threat were implicit. (If the Chinese had not yet even detonated a device, the problem of justification would, of course, be still more difficult.) However, its concern with the possibility of attack on the mainland will generally cause Communist China, in situations where its action might otherwise provoke such a response, to avoid explicit threat of nuclear attack on other nations.

Action, or the threat of action, of this kind by the U.S. will be particularly difficult to justify if the Chinese not only avoid explicit nuclear threats but if the U.S. had also, up to then, been de-emphasizing the significance of a Chinese Communist nuclear capability. We are already engaged in an effort to do just that and that effort would be further strengthened if actions proposed in the basic paper on the subject are approved and implemented. The reasons why we realistically can and should minimize the significance of the ChiCom capability are developed in that paper.

It may

It may be argued that this inconsistency will be less if the action is justified to ourselves and others in terms of the longer-term problems we shall face if Communist China goes on to develop a major nuclear capability. But what are those problems? A limited intercontinental capability would, in hypothesis, put the U.S. under more serious threat of nuclear attack by Communist China. The Chinese might consider that such a capability would have greater deterrent value than a non-intercontinental capability because of the possible unwillingness of the U.S. to accept even the marginal risks, on issues of marginal importance, of the absolute level of damage the ChiComs could inflict. However, the relative ability of the U.S. to devastate Communist China in a second strike would be very much greater than that of Communist China to devastate the U.S. in a first-strike. Communist China would continue to be unwilling to accept its destruction and therefore most unlikely to engage in first-use of nuclear weapons. This unlikelihood would greatly weaken the credibility of the ChiCom deterrent.

To become a Class A nuclear power with an effective pre-emptive counterforce capability or second-strike capability against all possible hostile nuclear powers, Communist  
China

China would have to become a major industrial power. Even such industrial development will not assure Class A nuclear status since such status is defined in relative terms and Communist China begins the advanced weapons race far behind the U.S. and the USSR. Moreover, when it achieves major industrial status, its interest in avoiding attack upon itself, which is already great, should further increase.

While the more general approach of Alternative Two would avoid some of the particular problems of justification, it would not avoid inconsistency with the general arguments we will be developing with respect to the limited significance of the ChiCom capability and its irrelevance to real military situations that might develop in Asia. While we might more successfully justify such a general threat in punitive and deterrent terms, a general warning of this sort could play into the hands of the Chinese by lending credence to the picture they will attempt to paint of the U.S. as aggressive and warlike and predisposed to military action against Communist China. The painting of such a picture will be part of their own effort to justify their development of a nuclear capability. The ChiComs may, in fact, follow their first nuclear test with a general "peace" campaign. They may also be expected to emphasize the "racialist" character of the U.S. threat.

Warnings

Warnings of either a general or specific sort which threatened a specific form of retaliation for ChiCom aggression would have the disadvantage of limiting our freedom of action. They would suggest that we intended action only against nuclear installations whereas a threat that was either broad enough to include both nuclear installations and other industrial facilities or one which was limited only to the latter might be both more desirable politically and more effective as a deterrent in particular situations. This would be a particular problem in the case of Alternative Two. A general advance warning would appear to cover cases where we would find it difficult to follow through because of problems of justification that would be posed or for other reasons (e.g., a ChiCom attack on the offshore islands). Finally, either general or specific warnings would certainly lead to Chinese action to provide air defense for their nuclear facilities, thus increasing greatly the problem of making a successful attack.

D. Specific Problems of Alternative One

Asian and Other International Reaction. Reactions would depend in part upon the characteristics of the particular situation. Since such action by the U.S. in a crisis situation

ation would represent a basic change in the character of the conflict and would project the U.S. into direct confrontation with Communist China, it would raise the possibility of escalation and Soviet involvement as well as the possibility of stopping the Chinese aggression ("de-escalation"). There would be increased concern in Asia and elsewhere that the U.S. action would lead to spreading the conflict. There would be political pressures on both the U.S. and Communist China but these are likely to be much greater on us than on the Chinese. Whether the net effect of these pressures would be beneficial to U.S. interests would depend upon the total situation, including the extent, if any, of the ChiCom military advance. If the U.S. threat were made in response to ChiCom threat, preservation of the status quo would be in the U.S. interest, but action which leads to pressures for an end to actual hostilities without restoration of the status quo ante would generally not be in our interests except where the military situation was deteriorating very seriously.

Communist Chinese Reaction. A threat of attack against its nuclear production facilities is likely to increase ChiCom caution in the prosecution of aggression against which the U.S. warning is addressed. At the same time the ChiComs  
may be

may be expected to mount a major propaganda and diplomatic campaign designed to convince the world of the dangers of the U.S. action (including the implicit threat of ChiCom nuclear retaliation) and to shift responsibility to the U.S. for creating a dangerous situation.

Whether the ChiComs would persist in their military course would depend importantly on Soviet reaction but also upon their estimate of the extent to which they believed that their diplomatic and propaganda campaign had reduced the possibility of U.S. action. However, there would be a strong possibility that the warning would serve its immediate purpose of causing the Chinese to stop their military action. It is probably unlikely, however, that they would consider it necessary to return to the status quo ante.

If the U.S. should actually attack the ChiCom nuclear production facilities when Communist China had a limited nuclear capability, the Chinese would be exceedingly unlikely to retaliate against U.S. forces with nuclear weapons for a non-nuclear attack. It would probably see retention of its nuclear capability as a deterrent to further, more extensive, attacks. It might, however, search for military responses of a non-nuclear sort which would create parallel destruction  
on the

on the non-Communist side, hoping that its nuclear capability would serve as a deterrent to extensive counter-retaliation (e.g., attack on an Indian nuclear reactor in a Sino-Indian conflict situation?). However, the most probable reaction would be to stop its aggression and to mount a political campaign against the U.S., also perhaps calling publicly for Soviet help. Peiping might also claim that the U.S. had not destroyed Communist China's ability to produce nuclear weapons, seeking to demonstrate the futility as well as the riskiness of the U.S. action.

E. Specific Problems of Alternative Two

Chinese Communist Reaction. The Chinese would see such gratuitous U.S. warnings as further evidence of unwavering U.S. hostility to Communist China and perhaps of an intent to destroy Communist China if an opportunity were afforded. It is in U.S. long-term interests that we make evident to the leadership in Peiping that, in appropriate circumstances, we would be prepared to see an improvement in U.S.-Communist Chinese relations. A warning of this kind would have the effect of appearing to the Chinese leadership to foreclose such a possibility indefinitely. Moreover, as noted above,

the ChiComs

the ChiComs would use such a U.S. warning to justify their development of a ChiCom nuclear capability as a defensive measure and to argue the dangers of a continued U.S. nuclear presence in Asia.

The ChiComs would probably, even without an explicit warning, estimate that there was some danger of such U.S. action in a military crisis. The warning would have the effect of underlining existing ChiCom military caution. The Chinese would consider it even more important that they disperse and protect their nuclear weapons stockpile and delivery capability as it develops in order to make them less vulnerable to attack and more likely to survive as a deterrent to further U.S. attacks following upon U.S. action against nuclear production facilities.

Asian Reaction. Asian reaction would be likely to be a mixture of public concern about the dangers of the U.S. course and some private satisfaction that the U.S. warning would reduce the prospects for major ChiCom aggression. There would probably be some confusion between the nuclear objective and the non-nuclear means and therefore a tendency to assume that, contrary to actual U.S. intent, we planned  
to use

to use nuclear weapons. Accordingly, there would probably be some accentuation of the fear created by a ChiCom nuclear test that future wars on Asian soil would become nuclear.

As the ChiComs move toward even a modest nuclear weapons stockpile it would become evident to other Asian governments that action against production facilities would not eliminate all threat of Chinese Communist nuclear retaliation. In fact, there might be concern that action against production facilities would have to be accompanied by action against the Chinese stockpile through attacks on airfields, missile sites, etc., with resulting increased danger of escalation including ChiCom nuclear response.

F. Specific Problems of Alternative Three

A general air attack against Communist China, to which an attack upon its nuclear installations would be "incidental" would in most circumstances be at least as difficult to justify as attacks directed specifically against its nuclear installations. However, a more selective, very limited, attack, which included nuclear and non-nuclear industrial installations would avoid the problems of justification for an attack directed solely against nuclear installations.

The fact

The fact that nuclear production facilities are located in the interior of China would, however, make it difficult to relate such attacks to action against local mainland targets which were nearby and related to the immediate theater of operations. It would be difficult to present such an attack as an incidental or accidental aspect of local operations. The attack, even if selective, would therefore have to involve other interior targets if it was to be presented as a general response to ChiCom aggression rather than as an action directed primarily against nuclear production facilities.

G. Soviet Reaction.

While the Soviets would probably react strongly on the propaganda plane to a general and official U.S. warning, they might let "leaked" warnings pass without specific comment. In either case they would perhaps take some private satisfaction from the U.S. action on the grounds that it would reduce the possibility of ChiCom miscalculation leading to possible Soviet involvement. In a conflict situation (Alternatives One or Three), the Soviets might feel compelled to threaten retaliation for U.S. implementation of its warning, particularly if North Vietnam or North Korea was also involved in the conflict on the Communist side. It is very unlikely that the USSR would retaliate against U.S. forces or bases

or bases for a U.S. non-nuclear attack confined to ChiCom nuclear production facilities, though the USSR would certainly react politically and would probably threaten Soviet response to more extensive U.S. attacks. The Soviet response to actual U.S. attack would depend so much upon the circumstances at the time, however, that prediction is most difficult. It would obviously be desirable, in order to minimize danger of Soviet misunderstanding, that the attacking forces keep as far as possible from Soviet borders.

IV. Overt Action Based Upon a Disarmament Case

The essence of such a strategy would be an effort to create an explicit or implicit presumption that no nation which is not now a nuclear power has a right to become one. On the basis of this presumption, which we would seek to establish through international agreements on nuclear weapons, sanctions would be applied to countries which nonetheless went ahead and developed a nuclear capability.

While the principal objective of such a strategy would perhaps be the justification of action against Communist China, it would have broader non-proliferation objectives as well. It is presumably based upon the estimate that, while additional nuclear powers, including Communist China, are most unlikely to engage in first-use of nuclear weapons or to initiate

or to initiate significantly more aggressive policies because they possess a limited nuclear capability and while proliferation is not likely to lead to escalation of local conflicts or to result in nuclear accidents which would produce a nuclear exchange among the major nuclear powers, proliferation will introduce a new element of uncertainty into international calculations on all such questions.\*

The diplomatic track designed to establish the basis for such action might include, in addition to the test-ban treaty, at least three aspects of the U.S. proposals submitted to the Geneva Conference: (a) a non-dissemination agreement which would also include self-denying provisions with respect to production or acceptance of nuclear weapons under national control by present non-nuclear powers; (b) an inspected agreement to cease production of nuclear material for weapons purposes; and (c) tighter controls by donors and recipients over transfers of nuclear materials and equipment to ensure their use for peaceful purposes. The last of these elements is of somewhat less direct importance for present purposes than the first two. It is also likely to encounter the same difficulties as similar past efforts through IAEA.

The proposed

\*See NIE 4-63 (28 June 1963) "Likelihood and consequences of a Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons Systems", pars. 47-53.

The proposed freeze on strategic delivery vehicles could also be relevant if U.S. denial efforts were extended to Chinese delivery capabilities as well as to nuclear production and if the definition of "strategic" vehicles is such as to cover Chinese delivery vehicles, including in particular, missiles of the range most likely to be developed by the ChiComs (600-1000 n.m.).

Assuming we can overcome the considerable present obstacles to an agreement on non-dissemination involving the present nuclear powers (or alternatively, a non-acquisition agreement involving only the non-nuclear powers)\*, such an agreement would in itself hardly provide the basis for action against Communist China if we and the other nuclear powers continued production of nuclear weapons material.

A verified cut-off of the production of fissionable materials for weapons purposes - difficult to achieve at best -  
is unlikely

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\*An agreement limited to the present non-nuclear powers would certainly provide less of a basis for action against Communist China than one that included the nuclear powers. U.S. action would then be even more open to the charge that it represented an effort by an "imperialist" white nation to keep the underdeveloped non-white nations in a state of permanent military inferiority.

is unlikely if the French do not participate. Obtaining French adherence to a non-production agreement will probably be even harder to achieve than obtaining their adherence to a non-dissemination agreement although some believe that the French could be persuaded through the offer of U.S. nuclear assistance. It would, however, be difficult to justify proliferation to France in order to prevent proliferation to Communist China. Recent French movement toward Communist China further reduces the possibility that France would be disposed to accept such international agreements if a principal objective is to provide the basis for action against Communist China. An agreement which did not include the French would probably not be accepted by the USSR, and would hardly in any event provide a basis for action against Communist China alone.

Present proposals on non-dissemination, non-production, and transfers contain no provision for sanctions. International agreement on military sanctions against non-participant powers for non-compliance seems impossible. Assuming that the other obstacles to agreement might be surmounted, it is just possible, though still unlikely, that agreement might

might be achieved on economic sanctions.

But even if the unlikely occurred and agreement were achieved on all of these steps, up to and including economic sanctions, there would still be a very wide logical, legal and political gap between this agreement and sanction for unilateral U.S. military enforcement action against a non-participant Communist China. It is most unlikely that such agreements would be accepted internationally as justifying such unilateral U.S. action. Indeed, an agreement to impose economic sanctions would even create strong presumptions against the undertaking of military action.

It seems unlikely that the U.S. will succeed in negotiating the necessary agreements before the ChiComs have detonated a first device and produced several weapons. By that time Communist China will probably be accepted as being, like France, an existing nuclear power. This will make action more difficult on political grounds and long-term military effects will be less certain. It would still be desirable to ensure that Communist China remained a minor nuclear power. The Chinese would, however, have mastered the nuclear art and would be in a position to rebuild their nuclear facilities.

Actual

Actual U.S. non-nuclear action against nuclear installations in circumstances where international support was weak or altogether lacking might very well provoke ChiCom non-nuclear retaliation against, e.g., Taiwan. The U.S. would then be placed in a very difficult dilemma. Should it counterattack and take further political damage or should it react only politically with probable great cost to its relationship to the GRC?

A major question about this strategy is, of course, the probable Soviet reaction. Since the Soviets would anticipate that actual U.S. military action would place them in a difficult dilemma within the international Communist movement, they would be likely to attempt to head off a development of U.S. policy which was clearly directed toward such action against Communist China. This they could do, for example, by refusing to enter into the necessary agreements on non-diffusion and non-production, or by accepting such agreements while making clear that military action was unacceptable or that the Sino-Soviet alliance would apply in the event of U.S. military action. At a minimum, the U.S. would require, as a condition to action, quite clear indications that the Soviets would stand aside if we took action.

Despite

Despite the fact that, in the event of actual U.S. attack, the USSR would be unlikely to undertake major military reaction, the Soviets are very unlikely to give clear advance indication of such intent.

Many considerations not relating to Communist China are involved in such proposals. They cannot be discussed here. The basic question in the present context is whether the limited consequences of a ChiCom nuclear capability justify acceptance of the probable political costs of such a strategy. In my view they certainly do not.

#### V. Covert Action

Covert action against the ChiCom facilities might be undertaken either without specific reference to other developments or as part of a response to Chinese aggression. Covert action on the ground seems out of the question because of the lack of covert assets on the ground. Unattributed bombing by GRC planes and crews would be most difficult to disassociate from the U.S. and is therefore ruled out on political grounds. It would have the disadvantages of overt U.S. action without the support of an overt political case. The GRC presently lacks any significant aerial bombardment capability

capability. A bombing attack by the GRC would therefore be a clear indication of direct U.S. complicity.

The belief that the U.S. would have approved any GRC military action against the ChiCom facilities makes any such action difficult to disassociate more than formally from the U.S. But GRC action which was within present GRC capabilities would minimize this problem. The one possibility that seems worth considering is the air drop of sabotage teams. This possibility is, in fact, receiving serious analysis. The discussion here can only suggest the problems.

The Chinese Communist reaction to covert action is a matter requiring careful examination before a decision is made to undertake such action. The Chinese Communists might prefer not to acknowledge a successful attack involving an air-dropped team. Their objective might be to leave us in doubt as to the effect of our action; they might even make superficial repairs which would make it difficult to determine on the basis of photographic follow-up whether a reactor had been put out of action.

At the other extreme they might choose to undertake retaliatory attack upon Taiwan. While this would be less likely than if the GRC launched an overt or nominally covert bombing

bombing attack, it would be a possibility. If such retaliation were strictly limited in character, perhaps we would, in the end, be prepared to accept the damage without further riposte, but such retaliation by Communist China would certainly face us with a difficult dilemma. The possibility of retaliation as well as the general difficulty of dissociating the U.S. from the enterprise would argue in favor of undertaking such action only in response to ChiCom aggression. It seems probable that the ChiComs would, at a minimum, react to covert attack by mounting a major propaganda campaign.

For the Soviets, action of this kind would present the fewest problems. While they would probably give some support to a ChiCom political campaign against the action, they would be most unlikely to feel compelled to take other action. They would, however, be concerned with the possibilities of escalation growing out of any ChiCom retaliation against Taiwan.

A principal question is that of feasibility. As noted, the question is being examined. While there is no certainty about such matters, it is considered possible that a one-hundred man team could temporarily overwhelm the security forces at a ChiCom nuclear installation and take some kind of destructive action before itself being destroyed. GRC landing

teams

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teams customarily undertake missions where chances of survival are next to nil. Nuclear facilities constitute a more useful objective than the usual objectives of these landing teams.

An airborne team would have great difficulty completely destroying a nuclear installation. It could only put key elements out of commission. Because of their built-in safeguard devices, it is not easy to knock out such nuclear facilities. If, upon examination, it should appear necessary to destroy the ChiCom ability to manufacture nuclear weapons, it would presumably be necessary to launch simultaneous attacks since the initial reaction to an attack would obviously include greatly expanded security measures at remaining facilities.

Lesser covert or semi-covert actions with lesser objectives are also conceivable. These would include the forecasting of possible future action for deterrent effect by letting the ChiComs become aware of the fact that GRC pilots were being trained for a bombing mission against nuclear

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nuclear facilities. It may also be possible to inhibit the ongoing ChiCom nuclear effort through economic warfare actions that would require only limited forms of foreign cooperation. Study of such possibilities is going forward.

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To sum up briefly, any political "justification" the U.S. might develop for overt action against the Chinese Communist nuclear production facilities in the absence of major ChiCom aggression, is likely to appear very inadequate to ourselves and others. The Chinese are unlikely to undertake aggression of a level which would provide justification for such a response. In the absence of such a basis for action, U.S. attack is likely to be viewed as provocative and dangerous and will play into the hands of efforts by Peiping to picture U.S. hostility to Communist China as the source of tensions and the principal threat to the peace in Asia. It is also likely to be viewed, with the help of Peiping's propaganda, as a racialist effort by the U.S. to keep non-white countries in a state of permanent military inferiority. Covert action would not entirely avoid such difficulties since it will be viewed as U.S.-inspired and supported. It would therefore be easier to undertake as part of a response to ChiCom aggression.

S/P:RHJohnson  
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