

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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ACTION  
March 29, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM:

Phil Odeen *POD*

SUBJECT:

JCS Opposition to Comprehensive Nuclear  
Test Ban

Secretary Laird has forwarded to the President -- without comment -- the JCS views opposing a comprehensive nuclear test ban (Tab B).

The JCS paper is a highly charged, emotional document. It mixes genuine implications and uncertainties concerning a nuclear test ban with unsubstantiated assertions, irrelevancies and debatable assumptions.

As you know, the NSSM 128 study is trying to cut through the emotion and rigidly-held opinions that characterize the views both of proponents and opponents of CTB. A summary paper is currently being completed and the tentative meeting schedule has a Verification Panel meeting on the CTB study just prior to the Canada trip.

Attached at Tab A is a self-explanatory memorandum to the President that presents the relevant points of the JCS position with some tempering comments derived from the ongoing NSSM 128 analysis. If you wish to send the JCS views to the President, I believe it is important to his understanding of the issues that they be presented objectively.

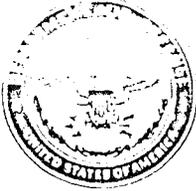
RECOMMENDATION

That you sign the memorandum at Tab A forwarding the JCS paper to the President.

Concurrence: Dick Kennedy/Hal Sonnenfeldt *B*

*DK*

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THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

JCSM-109-72  
14 March 1972

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PA/HO, Department of State  
E.O. 12958, as amended  
Date: 8/6/07

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Subject: Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (U)

1. (TS) The current policy of the United States regarding support for a comprehensive ban on nuclear testing within the context of an adequately verified agreement has recently been reiterated by the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. Also, the Joint Chiefs of Staff recognize that official statements regarding a comprehensive test ban must conform to the US position. However, as directed by National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) 128, a review of US nuclear test ban policy continues. It is, therefore, appropriate that the Joint Chiefs of Staff submit their views and military advice on this subject as this time.

2. (TS) The Joint Chiefs of Staff are concerned that continued international and domestic demands, plus recently publicized but misleading information regarding the capability of the United States to detect low-yield underground nuclear tests, may create considerable pressure for early US acceptance of a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in the absence of an adequate verification.

3. (TS) While recognizing that preambular treaty commitments to seek the achievement of a comprehensive test ban have existed since signing the Limited Test Ban Treaty (LTBT) in 1963, the Joint Chiefs of Staff would point out that these commitments were made at a time when the United States was in a position of strategic superiority. Today, US strategic missile superiority has disappeared, and the erosion of US technological superiority has been constrained only through the intensive efforts of its nuclear weapon designers and laboratories and through underground test programs.

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4. (TS) The Joint Chiefs of Staff have consistently emphasized the essentiality of testing all weapon systems. The US Armed Forces are committed to maintain a deterrent and warfighting capability across the spectrum of warfare, ranging from strategic nuclear offensive and defensive operations through tactical nuclear, conventional, and unconventional operations. Although it is highly preferred to test a system in its anticipated operational environment, the retention of the underground testing capability of the LTBT has provided the US Armed Forces with weapon systems upon which they can realistically rely. Although this effort has alarmed some elements of US society, there have been no significant adverse ecological effects to life or property resulting from the testing allowed under the LTBT. By retaining a strong technological capability and maintaining a viable underground test program, the United States has continued the development of sophisticated, cost-effective, and reliable nuclear weapon systems. Additionally, testing can assure the reliability of nuclear weapons which have been stockpiled over prolonged periods of time. Without the present underground testing capability, the US Armed Forces could not confidently exploit advanced nuclear weapons technology which offers many design improvements, such as tailored outputs, selectable yields, reduced size, reduced cost and more efficient use of nuclear material, reduced maintenance, increased safety and reliability, and improved command and control devices. For the foreseeable future, underground nuclear testing will continue to be mandatory, as weapon systems dependability can be confirmed only through such testing. Untested weaponry would erode confidence in US deterrent forces, thereby seriously jeopardizing national survival.

5. [REDACTED]

These weapon systems and programs are required to meet current and forecast military threats. Testing programs have permitted in the past--and will permit in the future--verification of theoretical analysis. [REDACTED]

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6. (S) Lacking the challenge of advanced design and testing opportunities, serious consequences can be anticipated in the field of nuclear technology. The highly talented scientists who have contributed so much to the advanced weapons technology of the United States would be displaced to more attractive and stimulating endeavors, and qualified replacements could not be enticed to replace them in a stagnant field; the nuclear research laboratories, such as Lawrence Livermore Laboratory, Sandia Corporation, and Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory, would atrophy; and the US underground nuclear test facilities would lose their capabilities even in caretaker status. Remobilization of this expertise and materiel would be time-consuming, expensive, and ineffective in a crisis situation.

7. (TS) It has been argued that a comprehensive test ban serves the national security interests by placing equal constraints upon weapons development by all parties. These constraints are real only as long as all parties adhere to the treaty. The opportunity exists under a CTBT for potential enemies to gain significant and unpredictable advantages (particularly by clandestine testing) which would be impossible to assess if the United States were not permitted to test.

a. Should potential enemies pursue a policy of clandestine testing, current and foreseeable technology does not provide a positive means of detecting low-yield nuclear detonations. The principal detection system of the United States is dependent upon seismic disturbance. Currently, seismic discrimination between nuclear detonation and natural earth disturbance phenomena cannot be achieved with high confidence below 4.0 to 4.5 seismic magnitude. Even this verification capability is vulnerable because most of the Atomic Energy Detection Stations are located in foreign countries and are subject to foreign expulsion. The loss of a key station at any time could, at least temporarily, reduce already limited confidence levels significantly. Valuable military gains, especially in the areas of weapons effects test, hardness assurance, and warhead/device development, can be achieved by tests conducted below the seismic detection threshold.

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b. An assessment of the potential impact of a CTBT must include the Peaceful Nuclear Explosion Program, granted by the Nonproliferation Treaty and monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency. The Peaceful Nuclear Explosion Program obviates the usual clandestine testing scenarios involving complex subterfuges as well as sophisticated seismic detection schemes. For example, a current Soviet PLOWSHARE project will require 250 nuclear detonations totaling 36 megatons, with a single maximum yield of 500 kilotons. The problems involved in policing such a mammoth project to insure that none of the devices being tested represents weapons development, e.g., the development of a "clean" atomic demolition munition, are of staggering proportion. There seems to be no reasonable way that the United States, by national means, or the International Atomic Energy Agency, by onsite inspections, could assure that a peaceful nuclear explosion was not masking or, in some way, serving weapons development.

c. If the United States agreed to cease all nuclear testing, public opinion and national priorities would ultimately dictate a decrease in both funds available for and level of effort in nuclear research and development. On the other hand, the Soviet Union or the PRC could sign a CTBT without making concomitant reductions in nuclear research and development efforts. Continuation of nuclear research and testing, even if not for the purpose of weapon development, would provide the Soviets or the PRC continuity in training of personnel, handling of devices, weapons effects, development of technical literature and professional interest, and other collateral benefits which would certainly enhance their nuclear weapon development capabilities. This would be facilitated by the closed, regimented nature of their societies. The logical result of this situation would be a disadvantageous imbalance of nuclear capabilities which would undoubtedly be prejudicial to the security of the United States.

8. (TS) Consideration must also be given to the collateral relationship of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks. Any strategic arms limitation agreement will reduce US strategic flexibility and increase the importance of qualitative improvements to weapon systems. Of particular consequence is the Soviet advantage in missile throw-weight, which may permit the Soviets more flexibility than the United States in further improving their systems without requiring nuclear testing. Also, in view of possible Soviet abrogation of proposed strategic arms limitation agreements, ongoing weapons research and development programs, as well as testing, would become increasingly important. These programs are also of added significance in light of the consistent refusal of France and the PRC to participate in any test ban negotiations.

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9. (TS) The Joint Chiefs of Staff believe that the strategic situation today is significantly different from that which existed when US current policy on a comprehensive test ban was formulated and that fundamental US national security interests would be compromised by such a ban on nuclear testing in view of the fact that adequate verification behind the Iron Curtain is not achievable. Uncertainty inherent in future military threats also dictates that the United States should not surrender the freedom to conduct nuclear testing. In summary, the United States will be able to meet military threats only if it continues to test and develop the weapon systems deemed essential to its national survival. Consequently, the Joint Chiefs of Staff reaffirm their previous views that a CTBT is not in the national security interests of the United States.

10. (S) The Joint Chiefs of Staff request that you support their position against initiatives to negotiate a CTBT and that you express these views to the President, preferably as an agreed DOD position.

For the Joint Chiefs of Staff:



T. H. MOORER  
Chairman  
Joint Chiefs of Staff

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