

S/P-58231-3A

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August 13, 1958

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. HERTER

Subject: August 14 Discussion of Taiwan Straits

The question of a review of US policy on the Offshore Islands was raised yesterday in the Planning Board. After this meeting, I was shown a copy of the memorandum of your meeting on this subject with the Secretary and others on August 8, at which the Secretary indicated that it may be desirable to make a clearer public statement of our intentions.

It may be useful for you to have the following points in mind during tomorrow's NSC discussion:

1. It is our understanding that current JCS war plans call for the defense of Quemoy and Matsu by nuclear strikes deep into Communist China, including military targets in the Shanghai-Hangchow-Nanking and Canton complexes where population density is extremely high.
2. The attached excerpts from the recent "Limited War" study are pertinent [Tab A]. During this study we were advised by representatives of the Joint Chiefs that military planning contained therein was based on the existing contingent war plan.
3. While nuclear strikes would be with "low yield" weapons, this would include weapons having a yield comparable to 20 KT weapons dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It is my judgment that before such hostilities were over there would be millions of non-combatant casualties.

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4. Mr. Robertson's comments on the political implications of our military planning for limited war hostilities in the Far East, as reflected by the recent "Limited War" study, are attached at Tab B.

5. The President recently directed the preparation of a National Intelligence Estimate on Sino-Soviet and Free World Reactions to US Use of Nuclear Weapons in Limited Wars in the Far East [Tab C]. It concludes that if our present military planning was carried out Peiping and its Soviet ally would probably feel compelled to react with nuclear attacks at least on Taiwan and on the Seventh Fleet. Under our present strategic concept, this would be the signal for general nuclear war between the US and the USSR.

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6. I doubt that Congressional leaders are aware of the implications of exercising the authority under the resolution of January 29, 1955, by the method planned by the JCS. If a decision is taken to issue a clarifying statement, it may be desirable to consult with key Congressional leaders.

In the light of the above considerations, it seems to me that the US does not have a politically feasible capability to defend Quemoy and Matsu. I question whether, in the event of an attack on Quemoy and Matsu, we should or will run the very grave risk of general nuclear war attendant on our present military planning. If the vital security interests of the US require us to defend these islands, we should, on an urgent basis, develop an alternative military capability based on a local defense of these islands which would give some hope of limiting the hostilities. Until we are within sight of such a local defense capability, I question the wisdom of any public clarification of our commitment in regard to Quemoy and Matsu.

Gerard C. Smith

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Tab A

The following excerpts from the "Limited War" study are pertinent to any decision as to a statement concerning Quemoy and Matsu:

Page 12

"In the cases of aggression against Quemoy and Matsu, Taiwan or the ROK, this would require air strikes deep into Chinese Communist territory. Despite careful and selective use of nuclear weapons, numerous civilian casualties would result."

Page C-13

\*Targets to be attacked are in general those within a radius of approximately 500 miles from the scene of action, plus those targets, wherever located, which are being used to stage attacks. Although this area includes many airfields and other targets in locations where population is relatively light, it also includes the Shanghai-Hangchow-Nanking and Canton complexes where population density is extremely high."

Page C-18

"...the Chinese Communists would almost certainly attack Taiwan and the U.S. forces and bases immediately involved."

Page B-11 states that, in the event of an attack on Taiwan, "it will be necessary to make nuclear attacks throughout mainland China, since it is expected that practically the entire CHICOM warmaking capability will be employed in their offensive operations."