

5. STUDY OF THE HUMAN EFFECTS OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS
(NSC Action No. 1430-p; Memo for NSC from Executive Secretary,
same subject, dated September 26, 1955; NSC Action No. 1448)

At this point in the meeting, Mr. Anderson reminded the President that he had wished to say a word to the Council about the project for a study of the human effects of thermonuclear weapons. The President said that indeed he wished to say something on this subject. When we began to talk about this kind of war, the President said, he invariably began to wonder just how much of such a war the run of people would be willing and able to take. The worst of it was that the President knew no way to make a sound estimate of the popular reaction, since we had had no prior experience to form any basis for judgment. Nevertheless, the President was sure the matter should be studied, because as we push ahead with these so-called horror weapons we may unwittingly pass the point of human endurance. The President stressed the fact that he did not want a lot of long-haired professors to undertake such a study, but rather some down-to-earth knowledgeable people. Continuing, the President said we must pause and think where we are going in the field of these weapons. We may well reach a point where we will have passed the limits of what human beings can endure. What was going to happen then? This is what the President wished to look into. Of one thing he was dead sure: No one was going to be the winner in such a nuclear war. The destruction might be such that we might have ultimately to go back to bows and arrows.

Mr. Anderson pointed out that the Planning Board had already drawn up terms of reference for such a study, and that these had been shown to the President at Denver and approved by him for presentation to the National Security Council. Furthermore, a number of names of those capable of making such a study had been submitted to Mr. Anderson by members of the Council.

The President expressed his satisfaction, but observed that he wanted this study not to be conducted in the open. He thought that perhaps Val Peterson was the best choice he could make of an individual within the Government to guide the preparation of the study. He again stressed that the study should be made on a fairly confidential basis, and indicated that he wished to have Mr. Anderson ask Governor Peterson to undertake the study after Governor Peterson returned to Washington.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Mr. Allen Dulles said that a Congressional committee had requested him to give a classified briefing on the Soviet guided missile program, and he would like the President's reaction to this proposal. The President told Mr. Dulles not to give such a briefing,

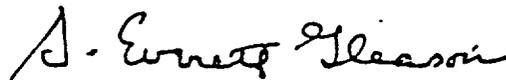
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..... Mr. Dulles, said the President, should state to the members of Congress that such a briefing would be contrary to the interests of the national security at this time.

The National Security Council:

Noted the President's statement that he planned to ask Val Peterson to arrange for the study described in paragraph 1 of the enclosure to the reference memorandum.

NOTE: The above action, as approved by the President, subsequently transmitted to Mr. Peterson.



S. Everett Gleason

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