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OPERATIONS COORDINATING BOARD
Washington 25, D. C.

March 2, 1955

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. James S. Lay, Jr.
Executive Secretary
National Security Council

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SUBJECT: Overseas Reaction to the AEC Report on the Effects of
High-Yield Nuclear Explosions.

The attached Operations Coordinating Board report was prepared in response to NSC Action No. 1320-b, approved by the President on February 5, 1955. On March 2, 1955, the Operations Coordinating Board concurred in the report for transmittal to the National Security Council.

The Board noted that the report is limited to short-term overseas reactions to a specific AEC information release dealing with the effects of high-yield thermonuclear explosions, and does not attempt to cover the entire range of foreign attitudes towards thermonuclear weapons and their use in offensive and defensive war.

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Elmer P. Staats
Elmer P. Staats
Executive Secretary

Attachment:

Report on above subject
dated 3/2/55.

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E.O. 12356, SEC. 3.4(b)
Agency Case NSC E88-1470
NLE Case MR 88-387 #5
By huc NLE Date 4/1/82

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March 2, 1955

OVERSEAS REACTION TO THE AEC REPORT ON THE EFFECTS OF HIGH-YIELD NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS

(Prepared Pursuant to NSC Action No. 1320(b);
approved by the President, February 5, 1955)

A. SUMMARY.

1. In general, reaction to the AEC announcement was surprisingly mild. Most Free World countries accepted it soberly and without much comment. The only country which showed alarm was Japan, which is always particularly sensitive to atomic matters.

2. The announcement did not create editorial reaction in Western Europe, as it might have, against the West European defense system or the rearming of West Germany, although one of the chief Communist propaganda lines has been that this defense system will lead to a war in which Western Europe would be an atomic battleground.

3. There also was little reaction in India, although in a few outstanding exceptions the United States was sharply criticised for conducting tests which are admittedly dangerous, for pursuing an arms race which could lead to a totally destructive war and for using the threat of atomic and hydrogen weapons as a tool of power politics.

4. The only Soviet Bloc mention of the report was from East Germany. The rest of the Bloc, including the Soviet Union and Communist China pointedly refrained from mentioning the announcement but continued to stress thermonuclear matters in their public statements, mostly in terms of Soviet progress in peaceful development of atomic energy, the Soviet proposal for banning nuclear weapons and limiting conventional armaments, and the WPC signature campaign to ban atomic weapons.

5. One significant feature of Soviet Bloc propaganda was its deliberate avoidance of admitting U.S. might in atomic weapons, and its repeated inference that it is not world civilization but capitalist civilization which would be destroyed in an atomic war. Annex "A" details the press and radio treatment as of Tuesday, March 1.

B. CONCLUSIONS.

6. Firm conclusions as to the significance of the mild overseas reaction thus far noted will have to await additional data which might reflect a more long-range build-up of public opinion by commentators and officials utilizing the technical facts made public in the AEC Report. In view of this it would be unwise to assume that any lack of editorial attention given the Report signifies public indifference to the over-all phenomena of thermo-nuclear weapons and their use in offensive or defensive war.

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7. Among the factors bearing on the generally moderate reaction thus far observed, except in Japan, the following appear to be significant:

(a) The statement was written in an effort to dispel, not cause, hysteria, and to inform rather than to shock.

(b) The basic elements of the Report had previously been indicated in official statements or speculated on by U.S. and foreign commentators, and no startling new factors were revealed.

(c) The public imagination and the speculations of commentators ran so far ahead of fact regarding the long-range effects of radiation fall-out that this section of the Report was in the nature of an anti-climax.

(d) Other international developments crowded the story from immediate public attention: notably the seizure by anti-Communists of the Rumanian Legation in Switzerland, the U.K. announcement of a plan to build twelve atomic power reactors, the U.K. decision to construct the H-bomb, and the continuing French political crisis. In Japan, a Yokohama fire and Soviet-Japanese talks pre-empted top play in the newspapers.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS.

8. Based on foreign reactions thus far reported, the following actions are recommended:

(a) The continued deferment of public announcements on nuclear weapons effects necessary for the information of the U.S. public and Congress is not required. This is the question specifically posed by NSC 1320(b).

(b) In light of the unsettled nature of foreign public opinion, the manner and timing of release of statements developed under (a) above should continue to be coordinated in the light of overseas climate of opinion factors. Such coordination should also cover public release of any new data on thermonuclear effects.

(c) In the event of further U.S. public disclosures concerning the effects of thermonuclear weapons, special consideration should be given to lifting the restricted data category from the information sufficiently in advance of its public release so that prior notification and guidance can be furnished to

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missions abroad and certain foreign governments where appropriate.

(d) In order to place statements of nuclear weapons in perspective, high-level statements and guidance should (1) continue to emphasize U.S. dedication to establishing the conditions of an enduring peace, including the adoption of genuine safeguarded disarmament, (2) stress U.S. determination, pending reduction in international tensions, to keep its armed strength, including nuclear weapons, at a level sufficient to deter any would-be aggressor, (3) point out that our nuclear weapons, together with those of our Allies, have rightly been called the defense shield of the free world, and (4) emphasize the substantive elements of U.S. peaceful uses of atomic energy programs.

(e) While additional U.S. public statements specifically designed to counter unfavorable trends are not required at this time, the problem should be kept under continuous review by the Operations Coordinating Board, and a further report should be furnished the National Security Council at the end of ninety days. Special attention should be paid to the emergence of any neutralist trends which may be traceable to greater public awareness of the effects of thermonuclear explosions.

Attachment:

Annex "A", Foreign Press and Radio
Reaction to the AEC Report on the
Effects of High-Yield Nuclear
Explosions.



FOREIGN PRESS AND RADIO REACTION TO THE AEC REPORT ON THE
EFFECTS OF HIGH-YIELD NUCLEAR EXPLOSIONS

WESTERN EUROPE

1. En-land. In England the report was given straight news coverage without editorial comment side by side the simultaneous British Government announcement that it would construct atomic power plants. When the British announced on the 17th that they would construct the H-bomb there was no mention of the AEC report. The Associated Press reported from Britain that "the jittery tone sounded in the British press following the Bikini tests eleven months ago was almost completely absent."

The London Daily Worker stressed the terror of the fall-out aspects of the report and used it to support its continued "Ban the H-bomb" campaign.

2. France. French press reaction was one of interest in the details of the report, but not of alarm. In fact, the report was overshadowed by the British White Papers announcing that Britain will construct atomic power stations and produce the H-bomb.

The French Atomic Energy Commission regarded the report as containing a great deal of useful and valuable information which the French public should have.

The French Communist paper Humanite used the report as a peg to attack the United States for the damage it is doing in tests. It revived the case of the Japanese fishermen, saying: "The report did not say that one Japanese fisherman is dead as a result of American experiments and that dozens of others are in agony." Of interest is the fact that Humanite had not used the report in connection with its current treatment of the alleged dangers of German rearmament.

3. West Germany. The AEC report received negligible coverage in the German Press, being largely overshadowed by the British White Papers. Those non-Communist papers which commented discussed primarily the devastating effects of the hydrogen bomb on human life, and concluded that "the United States will halt experiments only when a workable international plan is drafted to end the threat of atomic war". One pro-SPD paper said that the reported effects show clearly "the futility of raising an army in West Germany".

One West German Communist paper called the report a "demonstration of contempt for human life".

4. Austria. The report was given straight news coverage in the Austrian press, but received so little comment that one Socialist paper in Graz commented "a really significant event passed unnoticed by Austrian public and press".

The only Communist reaction was a brief item pointing out the extent of contamination during H-bomb experiments in the Pacific last year and stating that had this area been populated all human life would have been destroyed.

5. Belgium. The report was given wide coverage in the Belgian press but received no editorial comment.

6. Greece. The report was covered extensively by the Greek press, but there was no editorial comment and little public reaction except expressions of approval at the release and a feeling that the report cleared up many obscure points.

7. Other Western European Countries. In all other Western European countries the report received little coverage and no editorial comment.

LATIN AMERICA, CANADA AND AUSTRALIA

8. Latin America. In Latin America, there was little coverage of the announcement and no editorial comment.

9. Canada. The Canadian press gave fairly extensive news treatment to the AEC statement. In Ottawa press comments were in three categories: (a) impossibility of carrying on total war with thermonuclear weapons; (b) the need for new and better civil defense plans; (c) the hopelessness of civil defense.

10. Australia. The Australian press took a very sober and rational view of the announcement. Of the editorial comments reported, one points out that the H-bomb is a weapon of race suicide, while another comments that every rational being should make every effort to prevent the use of weapons of mass destruction. One paper points out that the announcement was a propaganda device to call the bluff of the Communists who have been boasting of successes in the field of nuclear fission.

MIDDLE EAST

11. India. Summaries of the report were carried in the Indian press but given little prominence in contrast with the subsequent UK decision to produce the H-bomb and the Soviet disarmament call of 17 February. However, there were two outstanding reactions against the report and the tests which preceded it. Rajagopalachari, a member of the working committee of the Congress Party who has a history of being anti-Communist, rather violently attacked the United States for conducting dangerous nuclear tests and for using the threat of nuclear weapons as a mechanism of power politics. In the same vein an editorial in the Hindustan Standard was highly critical of the United States for conducting tests in the face of the effects outlined in the report. This was followed by two editorials in the same paper, one attacking the Peterson statement that atomic attack would not mean the end of the world and the other appealing to the Western Powers to stop the atomic arms race.

Without referring directly to the AEC announcement, India's President Hajendra Prasad told his Parliament on February 21 that he hoped that "the fearful nature of these weapons will lead not only to the total banning of their production but also to the realization that war itself should be abolished as a means of settling any problem."

12. Other Countries in the Middle East. In other Middle Eastern countries there was little news coverage and no editorial comment.

FAR EAST

13. Japan. The Tokyo press received the report with alarm headlines and maps of the potential fall-out area centered in Tokyo. Mainichi of Sunday 20 February carried the only anti-American report noted -- a feature summary of the announcement with scathing comments by three left-wing university professors who were particularly critical that the report did not mention the injuries of the Fukuryu Maru fishermen and the Rongelap natives. The pro-US Nippon Times recognized the need for continued testing by the United States, and the same paper recalled Bulganin's remark to the effect the USSR will not limit experiments in atomic weapons.

14. Hong Kong and Taipeh. In both Hong-Kong and Taipei the announcement was given minor news coverage with no editorial comment.

15. Other Far East Countries. There was little reportage and no editorial comment in other countries in the Far East.

SOVIET BLOC

16. Soviet Union. In line with the Soviet policy of minimizing if not altogether disregarding tangible evidence of US progress in atomic research, the Soviet press and radio has made no mention of the AEC announcement. However, atomic energy matters continue to get heavy play with emphasis on Soviet advances in the chaining of atomic energy for industrial purposes, and on the Soviet proposals for abolition of atomic weapons and limitation of conventional armaments. Also, on 26 February Pravda reprinted an article entitled "The Hopes and Failures of the American Policy from a Position of Strength" which points out that the West does not have superiority in nuclear weapons and that unless the West goes along with the Soviet proposals for limitation of armaments and banning of atomic weapons the Western system is doomed for destruction.

17. East Germany. The announcement was given limited coverage in East Berlin. Four East Berlin newspapers carried Communist ADN agency stories, combining the delay on Nevada experiments with Strauss' "admission" of "certain risk" to civilians.

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on 16 February the East German Home Service briefly outlined the mass destructive effects of the bombs as described in the announcement, coupled this with commentary on the total destructive effect of cobalt bombs, and used the total as a peg for propaganda against West German ratification of the Paris Accords, pointing out that ratification would bring on a war in which Germany would be an atomic battleground.

18. Communist China. While there is considerable discussion of atomic matters over Communist Chinese radio there is no mention of the AEC report. However, there have been charges that the United States Government is whipping up an A-bomb scare in the United States to create acceptance of atomic warfare as an inevitability. In line with this, the tenor of commentary is that China has little to fear from atomic or nuclear warfare, that only the highly industrialized Western countries would be devastated.

19. Other Bloc Countries. No mention was made of the report in other countries of the Communist bloc.

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Annex "A", Foreign Press and Radio Reaction to the AEC Report on the Effects of High-Yield Nuclear Explosions.