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OPERATIONS COORDINATING BOARD  
Washington 25, D. C.

February 21, 1955



MEMORANDUM FOR THE OPERATIONS COORDINATING BOARD

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

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A preliminary report on the above subject, prepared by the Operations Coordinating Board Working Group on Nuclear Energy Projects and Related Information Programs, is attached for consideration by the Board at its meeting of February 23. A final report for the National Security Council in response to NSC Action 1320(b) will be available for Board consideration March 2.

The conclusions and recommendations set forth in this report are of a tentative nature, based on information received as of February 21. These are subject to reexamination in the light of additional reports from the field. Special attention will be paid to consideration of any neutralist trends that may emerge.

*Elmer B. Staats*  
Elmer B. Staats  
Executive Officer

Enclosure:  
Preliminary report.

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*RS*

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E.O. 12356, SEC. 3.4(b)  
Agency Case NSC 68-1480  
NLE Case 100-88-307-43  
By h NLE Date 4/1/92

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

Summary

1. As of Monday, 21 February, there was little reported reaction in the foreign press and radio to the AEC announcement of 15 February. No comment had been reported from the Soviet Union. In the Soviet Bloc the only direct mention of the announcement was over the East German Home Service. England was the only Western European country which gave substantial coverage. The story was blanketed by the British Government decision to produce H-Bombs. The only sign of widespread press interest was in Japan. Annex "A" summarizes the press treatment as of Monday, February 21.

Analysis of Reactions to Date

2. Among the factors bearing on the moderate international public reaction thus far observed, except for Japan, are:

a. The statement was designed to dispel, not to cause hysteria, and to inform rather than to shock. It apparently achieved the purpose for which it was designed.

b. The basic elements of the report had previously been indicated in official statements or speculated on by United States and foreign commentators, and no new factors calculated to cause public dismay were revealed.

c. The public imagination and the speculations of commentators ran so far ahead of fact regarding the long-range effects of radiation

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fall-out that the report was in the nature of an anti-climax.

d. Other international developments crowded the story from 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.

Conclusions and Recommendations

3. Conclusions and recommendations based on reported foreign reactions which are under study by the Working Group include:

a. Additional U.S. public statements specifically designed to counter unfavorable trends are not required at this time.

b. 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).

c. In light of the unsettled nature of foreign public opinion, the manner and timing of release of statements developed under (b) 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.

d. In the event of further U.S. public disclosures concerning the effects of thermonuclear weapons, special consideration should be given to timing the release so that advance notification and guidance can be furnished to missions abroad.

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e. In order to place statements of nuclear weapons in perspective, high-level statements and guidance should (a) continue to emphasize U.S. dedication to establishing the conditions of an enduring peace, including the adoption of genuine safeguarded disarmament, (b) 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, and (c) should point out that our nuclear weapons, together with those of our Allies, have rightly been called the defense shield of the free world, and (d) emphasize the substantive elements of U.S. peaceful uses of atomic energy programs.

Attachment:

Annex "A".

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ANNEX "A"

SPECIFIC TREATMENT OF THE FALL-OUT ANNOUNCEMENT AND THE  
GENERAL TOPIC OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS AS OF FEBRUARY 21, 1955

SOVIET BLOC

East Germany. The East German Home Service on 16 February briefly outlined the mass destructive effects of atomic (sic) bombs as described in the announcement, coupled it with commentary on the total destructive effect of cobalt bombs, alluded to the fact that the Soviet Union also has atomic 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.

Communist China. There was no comment on the report itself, though there were charges the U.S. Government is whipping up an A-Bomb scare in the United States to create acceptance of atomic warfare as an inevitability. This was contrasted with the Chinese Communist signature campaign to ban atomic weapons. A series of eight broadcasts on atomic energy, with emphasis on peaceful uses was announced.

FREE WORLD

There was a surprising absence of reaction reported in Western Europe, with the exception of England, and in most of the free world. The only widespread press coverage was in Japan, where all matters of atomic warfare are regarded with special interest, conditioned by Japanese experiences.

Japan. The Tokyo press received the report with alarm headlines and maps of the potential fall-out area centered on Tokyo. However, there were no reports of an anti-American reaction in the press; one pro-American paper recalled Bulganin's remark to the effect the USSR will not limit experiments in atomic weapons.

By the 21st, although discussions of a Yokohama fire and Soviet-Japanese talks pre-empted top play, atomic developments continued in the fore of Japanese news. Sunday Mainichi featured a summary Washington AEC announcement with scathing comments by three left-wing University professors. The fact that injuries to the Fukuryu Maru fishermen and Rongelap natives were not mentioned was particularly criticized.

Yomiuri reported Radio Moscow as denying possibility Soviet atomic experiments would cause dangerous radioactivity this country. All papers carried news over weekend of the Soviet disarmament proposals as well as British proposals for H-Bomb.

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England. British reaction was sober not hysterical. In the face of the realities outlined in the announcement the press received the British Government's decision to produce the hydrogen bomb (announced 17 February) as a grim but necessary deterrent to war. 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".

Australia. The Australian press took a sober rational view of the announcement. Of three editorial comments reported, one points out that the H-Bomb is a weapon of race suicide, while another lauds Churchill's 15 February announcement that Britain will build atomic power stations as a note of sanity in an insane world of atomic bombs. One paper speculates that the AEC announcement was a propaganda device to call the bluff of the Soviets, because they have been boasting of successes in the field of nuclear fission.

Stockholm. As of February 17, no Swedish comments or even news coverage of AEC report, despite wide USIS dissemination February 16 of text and Swedish interest in general subject.

Cairo. As of February 18, limited coverage and no editorial comment in Egyptian press. No government reaction and no Communist exploitation.

Buenos Aires. As of February 18, no reaction press or otherwise noted.

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