

OPTIONAL FORM 99 (7-90)

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May 28, 1954

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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Discussion at the 199th Meeting
of the National Security Council,
Thursday, May 27, 1954

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Present at the 199th meeting of the Council were the President of the United States, presiding; the Vice President of the United States; the Secretary of State; the Acting Secretary of Defense; the Director, Foreign Operations Administration; and the Director, Office of Defense Mobilization. Also present were the Secretary of the Treasury; the Attorney General (for Items 1 through 6); the Director, Bureau of the Budget; the Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission (for Items 5 and 8); Assistants Attorney General Barnes and Rankin; Mr. Herbert Hoover, Jr., Department of State (for Item 2); the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; the Director of Central Intelligence; Mr. Robert Cutler, Special Assistant to the President; the Deputy Assistant to the President; Mr. Robert Amory, Jr., Central Intelligence Agency; the White House Staff Secretary; Mr. Bryce Harlow, Administrative Assistant to the President; the Executive Secretary, NSC; and the Deputy Executive Secretary, NSC.

There follows a summary of the discussion at the meeting and the chief points taken.

1. SAUDI ARABIAN-BRITISH TERRITORIAL DISPUTE OVER BURAIMI OASIS

Mr. Allen Dulles pointed out how far back the dispute over the boundaries between the sheikdoms and Saudi Arabia went. The dispute had now become acute because of the discovery of oil in the area in sufficient quantities to be commercially profitable. The sheikdoms remained under British influence, and the Saudi Arabians have now turned to Aramco and insisted that it send in teams to prospect and drill in the disputed area, where British teams have already begun their operations. Anxious to avoid a squeeze, the American oil companies have appealed to the State Department to forbid their teams from going into the disputed area. This was substantially the way things now stood.

Secretary Dulles inquired whether it was not a fact that the pending arbitration proceedings for settling the territorial dispute would proceed to a conclusion if the British would agree to suspend well drilling in the disputed area. It is because the British will not stop their own drilling that the Saudis insist that Aramco

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8. PROPOSAL FOR AN INTERNATIONAL MORATORIUM ON FUTURE TESTS OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

(Memos for NSC from Executive Secretary, same subject, dated May 17, 25 and 26, 1954; NSC Action No. 1106-h; NSC 112)

Mr. Cutler reminded the Council that the Secretary of State, as chairman of a committee, would report on the question of United States agreement to a moratorium on further tests of nuclear weapons. He pointed out that the Council had before it three reports on the subject; one from the Department of Defense opposing U. S. agreement to the moratorium, one from CIA, and one from the Federal Civil Defense Administration. No written report had come from the Department of State, but Secretary Dulles had some remarks to make on the subject.

Secretary Dulles said that he and his committee had been studying this problem intensively over the last two weeks. He had talked as recently as yesterday with Admiral Strauss, and as a result of these conversations, three or four significant questions had been posed. The subject needed further study before the committee could present its recommendations to the National Security Council. One of the problems which had particularly concerned him, said Secretary Dulles, is how the United States could secure the propaganda advantage it sought from accepting a moratorium without at the same time setting the lower limit to the moratorium at weapons of 100 KT yield. He said that hitherto we had assumed that we would continue to be free to test weapons of this or lower yield, but if we propose the 100 KT as the lower limit, the Soviets might well come back with a proposal to ban tests of all weapons yielding more than 50 KT. In the process of bargaining they might even try to get an absolute ban, since there was no clear criterion which we could invoke. Accordingly, the more he studied the problem the more clearly he perceived that the propaganda ball might well be stolen from the U. S. by the USSR.

The second important question stemmed from the fact that we do not have very accurate methods of measuring the size of nuclear explosions in the Soviet Union. This would make it extremely difficult to police a moratorium and to assure ourselves that the Soviets were not evading their commitments. Nevertheless, the proposal for a moratorium was now before the UN, and while we have asked that the subject be deferred, we will presently have to decide whether to reject this proposal flatly or to offer some sort of counter-proposal. Secretary Dulles concluded his statement with a promise to put the varying opinions together and to present a comprehensive report at next week's Council meeting.

Turning to Admiral Strauss, the President inquired as to the degree of accuracy on the size of Soviet explosions which the AEC obtained after it had put together all the results of its investigations. Admiral Strauss replied that there was always a considerable difference of opinion and of debate after the Russians had tested one

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of their nuclear weapons. It sometimes took as long as a year to achieve final agreement as to the yield of the weapon.

Secretary Dulles inquired whether it wasn't a fact that the estimate of the yield of a weapon consisted of a composite of a number of estimates which varied greatly among themselves. Admiral Strauss replied that the divergence was not quite as wide as Secretary Dulles suggested, but there were certainly differences as great as 10% in the initial stages of an appraisal of the magnitude of any given explosion.

Mr. Allen Dulles pointed out in this connection that Lord Cherwell had stated that the British initially estimated the yield of the first Soviet thermonuclear explosion at approximately 50% more than the United States had estimated the yield. He understood that since then the British estimate had been revised downward.

The President expressed the desirability of thorough study by the United States of the British calculations as to the character of each Soviet weapon test. Admiral Strauss said he thought that the British were very much less thorough than we were in efforts to appraise these tests. He was not inclined to place high value on the British calculations.

The President then inquired what would be the largest size weapon the Soviets could set off without our knowing about it. Admiral Strauss replied that we would know of any explosion which yielded more than 10 KT equivalent, unless the Soviets took the most extraordinary precautions to prevent us from learning about a test. He pointed out, however, that the Soviets were due for a new series of weapons tests this summer. Accordingly, it behooved us to reach a decision soon if we proposed to gain any advantage from agreeing to a moratorium on further tests.

The President reiterated the view he had expressed at previous meetings of the Council, that he could perceive no final answer to the problem of nuclear warfare if both sides simply went ahead making bigger and better nuclear weapons. While, of course, he did not want the Soviets to gain a lead on us in this field, it was nevertheless a matter of despair to look ahead to a future which contained nothing but more and more bombs. He therefore believed it wrong for the United States merely to take a negative view of this terrible problem. We must try to find some positive answer, and to do so would require more imaginative thinking than was going on at present in this Government. Soon, said the President, even little countries will have a stockpile of these bombs, and then we will be in a mess.

Admiral Strauss observed that it would be quite a long time before the little countries were in a position to manufacture nuclear weapons.