OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
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by
DOD for
direct reply

SYSTEMS ANALYSIS
(Strategic Programs)

11 November 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. JOHN IRWIN

SUBJECT: NSSM 69

In order to clarify some of the NSSM 69 nuclear strategy issues for principals within the Department of Defense, we have prepared the attached paper, which Gardiner asked me to send you.

Archie L. Wood
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense

Enclosure

(b)(1) [redacted] Nuclear Strategy Issue Paper

In addressing our (b)(1) [redacted] nuclear strategy, certain fundamental issues must be resolved:

(b)(1) [redacted]

The Disarming Strike

(b)(1) [redacted]

(b)(1)

(b)(1)

Beyond this, however, there is the more serious question as to whether a (b)(1) will be feasible throughout the 1970s.

(b)(1)

In addition, there are three important technical problems that must be considered in evaluating the merits of a (b)(1)

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The second problem arises because the (b)(1) is expected to develop and deploy SSBNs in the latter half of the 1970s. (b)(1)

The third technical problem is the possibility of a (b)(1) launch-on-warning capability. Although the (b)(1) (b)(1) Nevertheless, they could develop a less reliable system before the end of the 1970s. (b)(1) Others, however, believe the probability of the (b)(1)

Further complicating the preceding factors is the considerable uncertainty in regard to the (b)(1) threat. Under the most likely assumptions the (b)(1) could have a first generation ICBM capable of reaching cities in the United States by about 1974 or 1975. By 1978, in the most likely estimate, approximately 60-85 ICBMs could be deployed, and also there could be about 32-64 missiles aboard SSBNs. (b)(1) indicate that with an "all-out" PRC effort as many as 250 ICBMs and 90-160 SLBMs could be deployed in the 1978-80 time period; however, this "all-out" projection is considered unlikely. ...

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These improvements could be made by the later 1970s at a ten year cost of $300-700 million. Such improvements, however, may be inconsistent with the spirit of a SAL

agreement and might lead to new initiatives by the Soviets, who might interpret counterforce improvements in our (b)(1) d forces as intended for them as well. On the other hand, if the counterforce improvements were confined to SSBNs deployed in the Pacific, the Soviet Union might not perceive a major threat to their nuclear deterrent.

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Even a small number of surviving missiles could cause very significant civilian casualties and damage in the United States or in allied countries. (b)(1)

This reasoning, however, assumes that the (b)(1) would react in the same fashion to any type of nuclear attack and ignores the risks the (b)(1) would face if they escalated a nuclear conflict beyond the battlefield. But, it is very possible that the (b)(1), faced with the threat of (b)(1)

A further point in this context remains to be considered. (b)(1) Depending on decisions regarding the roles of conventional and (b)(1)

In summary, any analysis which links the use of (b)(1)

Reliance on Tactical (Air-Delivered) vs. Strategic Nuclear Weapons

Air-delivered tactical nuclear weapons in the (b)(1) might be relied upon more heavily to deter (b)(nuclear attacks. They can supplement, and in many cases replace, (b)(1) (b)(1)

The advantages of these weapons for strategic missions are that they would not be constrained by a SAL agreement limiting the number of available delivery systems and that an increased emphasis on tactical nuclear weapons in the (b)(1) may not lead to Soviet charges that the United States is seeking to circumvent a SAL agreement. Moreover, strategic nuclear weapons could be reserved for fulfilling targeting requirements in the Soviet Union, for those targets in the (b) not within range of the tactical weapons, and for time-urgent targets.

In addition, it can be argued that theater-based tactical nuclear weapons have a greater deterrent value because of their visible deployment (b)(1) Visibility is also important to some allied perceptions of the U.S. commitment to their defense.

(b)(1)

On the other hand, U.S. allies in (b)(1) may interpret an increased emp on our tactical nuclear posture as an attempt to de-couple our strategic [illegible] theater, thus reinforcing a possible [illegible] is not fully committed to their defense. [illegible] would argue that, if nuclear conflict should break out, the fighting would occur only on allied territory. The potential consequences of this allied perception might include nuclear proliferation and a political accommodation with the (b) or the Soviet Union.

Other disadvantages of relying more heavily on air-delivered tactical nuclear weapons to play strategic roles include the fact that forward deployed tactical nuclear weapons require foreign bases which are subject to political fluctuations not under the control of the United States (b)(1) Foreign bases therefore have a built-in element of potential unreliability. In addition, forward-basing could work against a U.S. policy of detente with the PRC.

A further disadvantage of relying on air-delivered tactical nuclear weapons for deterrence of (b)(1) is that our alert aircraft (b)(1) are (b)(1)

Role of Nuclear Weapons in Deterrence

There is agreement that nuclear weapons can contribute to deterrence of both conventional and nuclear aggression, but there is no reliable way of determining the degree of contribution and, in fact, there may be no good reason for attempting precise measurements. While there is some interagency disagreement as to whether tactical nuclear weapons can be relied on alone to deter conventional aggression, there appears to be a consensus in OSD that such a policy would be risky in the extreme. This is because of the risk that the nuclear conflict would escalate beyond the battlefield, the moral and political inhibitions the United States might have on first use of nuclear weapons in defense of an Asian ally if U.S. troops were not directly involved, and the large collateral damage that could result in the country being defended. In combination with conventional forces, however, tactical nuclear weapons give us a spectrum of credible responses with which to deter both nuclear and conventional aggression.

While it is agreed that tactical nuclear weapons help deter conventional aggression, there is disagreement on the relationship of forward deployment of nuclear weapons to the nuclear deterrent. Forward deployments are based upon a wide range of factors which include (but are not limited to) (a) our estimated capability to move nuclear weapons forward rapidly in time of crisis, (b) the political benefits of forward deployed weapons to reassure our Asian allies, and (c) the importance of visibility to the maintenance of deterrence.

On the other hand, there seems to be general agreement in OSD that some visible forward deployment of tactical nuclear weapons (e.g., Army missiles) and theater delivery systems (e.g., carrier-based aircraft) (b)(1) is necessary to establish credible U.S. responses to a variety of conceivable contingencies. Such a capability can, in concert with conventional and strategic forces, contribute to deterrence against Chinese conventional attacks, tactical nuclear attack, theater nuclear attack against U.S. bases or allies, and possibly nuclear blackmail against U.S. allies.

The Role of Tactical Nuclear Weapons and Conventional Forces in Military Operations

A central issue in the NSSM 69 study is whether tactical nuclear weapons can be substituted for conventional forces (especially ground forces in military operations). Some participants in the NSSM 69 study believe such substitution is not only feasible, (b)(1) (b)(1) Most OSD analysts, however, believe than no precise measure of trade-off between tactical nuclear weapons and conventional manpower requirements can be found that takes into account all relevant factors and that relying on tactical nuclear weapons as a substitute for conventional forces is a high risk strategy for the reasons cited above (risk of escalation, moral and political inhibitions on first use, risk of high collateral damage to the country being defended).

On the other hand, some believe that the likelihood of Chinese retaliation to some limited U.S. battlefield use of tactical nuclear weapons is low because (b)(1) will want to protect her limited nuclear stockpile for possible strategic requirements. Thus, in the absence of a (b)(battlefield nuclear capability, limited battlefield use of nuclear weapons can offer a means for augmenting our conventional firepower. This enhancement of firepower advantage would be degraded, however, if the (b) developed battlefield nuclear capability. Moreover, China could use theater weapons (e.g., TU-16s or even MREMs) in the battlefield, even though they would not be efficient weapons, by U.S. standards, for this purpose.

Notwithstanding the possible increase in battlefield firepower, any use of nuclear weapons involves the risk of undesired collateral damage on civilian population and possibly on friendly troops. Some believe that collateral damage would be excessive enough to argue against relying too heavily on tactical nuclear weapons, either as a [illegible] of conventional forces. Moreover, some [illegible] political considerations would inhibit the United States from first use of nuclear weapons in defense of an (b)(1) ally

and that these inhibitions would call into the question the credibility of increased reliance on tactical nuclear weapons vice conventional forces. Finally, the specific tactical circumstances of a conflict involving nuclear weapons are uncertain and, while there may be some trade-off between U.S. divisions and tactical nuclear weapons (provided the (b)(1) did not employ nuclear weapons themselves), there is no agreement on the extent to which manpower reductions would be possible.

Tactical Nuclear Deployments -

Two reasons for forward deployment of tactical nuclear weapons have already been discussed in this paper: to establish a visible deterrent and to provide options for use of air-delivered weapons against (b)(1) strategic targets. There are two additional reasons for forward deployment that also warrant mention: one military, one political.

(b)(1)

Politically, the presence of tactical nuclear weapons in the theater contributes significantly to the confidence of certain allies (b)(1) in the U.S. determination to honor its commitments. Others, such as (b)(1), are more ambivalent, but all our (b)(1) allies would probably take the complete withdrawal of nuclear weapons from forward deployment as a sign the United States was pulling back the nuclear shield. For this reason too, some forward deployment will probably continue to be desirable.

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