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EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
WASHINGTON

407370

COPY NO. 1

June 19, 1957

MEMORANDUM FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

SUBJECT: Human Effects of Nuclear Weapons Development

REFERENCES: A. NSC Actions Nos. 1430-p, 1448 and 1502
B. NIE 100-5-55
C. Memo for NSC from Executive Secretary,
same subject, dated January 29, 1957
D. NSC Action No. 1665

The enclosed report, prepared by the Federal Civil Defense Administrator pursuant to NSC Action No. 1665-b, and the Administrator's recommendations on the suggestions of the Panel on the Human Effects of Nuclear Weapons Development, are transmitted herewith for consideration by the National Security Council.

The enclosures are being referred to the NSC Planning Board for comment and recommendations prior to scheduling on the Council agenda.

Appendix A, referred to in the enclosure, will be circulated at a later date.



James S. Lay, Jr.
JAMES S. LAY, JR.
Executive Secretary

cc: The Secretary of the Treasury
The Attorney General
The Director, Bureau of the Budget
The Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission
The Federal Civil Defense Administrator
The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
The Director of Central Intelligence

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J. H. H. H.
REVIEWED BY

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E.O. 12333, SEC. 3.4 (b)

MR 85-174

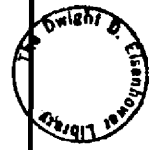
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REPORT TO THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL BY
THE FEDERAL CIVIL DEFENSE ADMINISTRATOR
ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PANEL ON THE
HUMAN EFFECTS OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS DEVELOPMENT



1. On February 8, 1957, the President approved NSC Action No. 1665, dealing with the Panel report on the above subject. Subparagraph b of the Action is quoted:

"b. Requested the Federal Civil Defense Administrator, with the assistance of other Government departments and agencies, to study the matter further and make recommendations to the Council within three months (1) as to whether a program of public education and action should be undertaken in this field, and (2) if such a program is to be undertaken, what should be its specific content and proposed limits. In making the study and recommendations, the Federal Civil Defense Administrator should take account of the possible difficulties involved in such a program, including those which are set forth in paragraph 6 of the reference memorandum of January 29, 1957 (Memo for NSC from Executive Secretary)."

2. Paragraph 6 of the reference memorandum is also quoted for convenient reference:

"6. Certain aspects of the Panel's proposal for a 'program of psychological defense' have caused the Planning Board very considerable concern:

"a. The Panel acknowledges that such a program may produce certain negative reactions by the American public as temporary or minority phenomena (pp. 13, 17, 19). It is quite possible, however, that such negative results as apathy or hysteria, growth of preventive-war or peace-at-any-price sentiment, and other difficulties for the Government, may be much more significant than estimated.

"b. Such a program, in itself, without extensive supplementary programs, is estimated to have little effect upon the physical destructiveness of an attack (p. 14). The limited nature of the civil defense program so far, and the changing bases on which it has operated, have not been conducive to providing reassurance. The Panel points out that the strengthening of the civil defense program is an essential supplement to its proposal (p. 13). If such strengthening is to occur, it should probably be firmly committed before initiation of the 'program of psychological defense' contemplated by the Panel. Even with an adequate civil defense program, there is a limit to what individuals can do, and therefore, to the 'involvement' and reassurance provided.

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"c. Such a program would entail emphasizing to the American public more or less suddenly that the situation is far worse than they have hitherto realized. It is not clear what justification the President would give for the initiation of the 'monumental effort in the field of public enlightenment.' If such an effort were conducted in a low key, it might not yield the desired results. Moreover, there is no assurance that it could be kept in a low key.

"d. Such a program might be interpreted as a 'gimmick solution'. A program of public education should be a normal aspect of governmental leadership.

"e. The Panel did not estimate foreign reaction to such a program, which might, for example, imply to the rest of the world that we have suddenly become frightened of an attack by the USSR, or might lead the USSR and others to believe that we are preparing to attack the Soviet Union, and accordingly are preparing our own people against counter-attack."

Discussion of Possible Difficulties

3. Before proceeding to the recommendations called for by NSC Action No. 1665-b, I propose to discuss the possible difficulties set forth above.

Paragraph 6-a: The possible extent of negative effects resulting from widespread group discussions of the kind recommended by the Panel is, of course, a matter of judgment and opinion until after such discussions have taken place. I cannot advance too strongly my own view, which coincides generally with that of the Panel, that full and free discussion is a healthy thing, and that fears and negative attitudes flourish more freely with respect to matters that are little or imperfectly understood. I believe very firmly that nuclear weapons effects will be increasingly discussed, regardless of the attitude of the Government, and that we need to fear the results of such discussions only if they have an uninformed base, or are conducted under auspices that are trying to sell a point of view. The desirability of encouraging more complete knowledge and understanding, under leadership which is dedicated to that goal, seems beyond debate.

Paragraph 6-b: I believe that the Panel, in a perfectly proper attempt not to claim too much for its idea, has actually underestimated the contribution that fuller knowledge can make in reducing casualties. While it is true that understanding of nuclear bomb phenomena will, by itself, have little effect on the scale of physical destruction resulting from blast and heat, there is a great lifesaving potential in real understanding of fallout. (To a much more limited extent, knowledge of what to do will prevent death and injury even from blast and heat.)

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In the case of residual radioactivity--fallout--an understanding of how radiation results in injury and death, what constitutes effective shielding against it, how it decays, how it may be safely removed from an area, and similar matters can mean the difference between life and death, or sickness and health, for a very considerable number of people. This would be true over considerable areas and could make a significant difference for some millions of people in large-scale attack, even without the special provision of shelters.*

With respect to the point that "the strengthening of the civil defense program is an essential supplement" to the Panel's proposal, a careful reading of the report reveals that the Panel's chief concern is that "there must be independent evidence that the Federal, State and local governments are preparing themselves" (p. 13). The Panel then goes on to cite, as illustrative preparations, a number of steps in civil defense which are likely to be taken as significant indices of the seriousness with which the several levels of government view the situation.



I disagree completely with the notion that an elaborate program of strengthening civil defense must precede the effective enlightenment of the people on nuclear weapons effects, on military and non-military defense, on problems of foreign policy, disarmament, etc.. Aside from the fact that much educational and informational effort is now being devoted to these objectives, it is clear that in a democracy a substantial degree of understanding must precede the accomplishment of almost every important program goal. The requisite degree of such understanding does not now exist, in my opinion, with respect to nuclear weapons effects and civil defense. The same group discussions that contribute to the psychological preparation of the participants for a post-attack situation can be expected to make a substantial contribution to an understanding of the difficult problems and decisions involved in the field of non-military defense.

Paragraph 6-c: A "monumental effort in the field of public enlightenment" might well be justified in order to correct misinformation and "slanted" points of view that have recently received widespread publicity as a result of the Congressional hearings on radiation. Actually, the program might result in an understanding that the prospect is not as bad as it has recently been painted.

* As a case in point, it is unlikely that any serious effects would have been suffered by the fishermen on The Fortunate Dragon in March 1954 if they had recognized that the fine ash that settled on the ship was radioactive and had immediately undertaken to flush it over the side. Instead, they were curious about it, and according to reports at the time, one man even collected a small bag of the ash as a souvenir and slept with it under his pillow, thus insuring a close and concentrated source of radiation!

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However, I have some reservations with respect to the desirability of a dramatic "crash" program, as will appear below under the heading "Recommendations".

Paragraph 6-d: I maintained at the time of the submission of the memorandum of January 29, and still feel, that this paragraph has no place in a catalogue of issues that "have caused the Planning Board very considerable concern". Surely the employment of one of the most effective and well-established techniques in education--that of group discussion--can hardly be fairly interpreted as a "gimmick solution".

Paragraph 6-e: The foreign reaction to such a program will probably be influenced less by the fact that such a program is conducted than by the manner of its organization and conduct. An overdramatized launching of such a program might possibly indicate to the rest of the world that we anticipate an early attack by the USSR (rather than that "we have suddenly become frightened" of one). A sober effort to increase public understanding of nuclear weapons effects would, however, be likely to give the impression that we are prepared to risk such an attack instead of surrendering without a struggle the fundamental liberties of the Free World.

I cannot believe that such a discussion program would give rise to the serious belief "that we are preparing to attack the Soviet Union, and accordingly are preparing our own people against counter-attack." It is far more likely that our weapons development programs, our military build-up, and our well-publicized Operation Alert exercises (all of which I heartily endorse, I hasten to add) would have such an effect.

Discussion of Panel's Recommendations

4. In considering the above issues, I have been unable to free myself of the suspicion that the Panel's recommendations have been to some extent misunderstood. I am therefore undertaking to state my own understanding of them, distinguishing between firm recommendations and suggestions.

5. The Panel's basic recommendation for improving the psychological preparation of the people is that they become involved in the issues of national security in the nuclear age by participating in group discussions. The manner in which such group discussions are organized is of less importance, although the Panel does offer the suggestion of utilizing national voluntary associations.

6. The subject matter of discussion, and the emphasis given to the various discussion items is of vital importance. On this point, the Panel is clearly advising a very broad approach. It refers to "maximum citizen participation and involvement in the crucial issues raised by the development of nuclear weapons" (p. 12), the need for the basic subject matter "to be as broad as national security itself" (p. 12), and discussion "in an atmosphere

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of calm deliberation" (p. 13). The intent here is clearly not to emphasize out of proper proportion the stark estimates of post-attack chaos, but rather to present such estimates in a manner that will achieve both the desired result of knowledge and understanding of weapons effects, and a balanced background for the discussion of other national security issues.

7. In order to present a more concrete outline of the recommended subject matter for discussion, we have consulted the transcript of the Panel's discussion, which suggests that something like the following range of topics was intended:

- a. The basic rights and freedoms that are a part of our national heritage;
- b. The risks to those rights and freedoms posed by the Soviet program;
- c. The role of foreign aid, alliances, diplomatic negotiations and the maintenance of a strong military and civil defense posture as elements of a national bulwark against the threat;
- d. The disarmament effort in its true, safeguarded perspective;
- e. The strengths and weaknesses of the United Nations as a force for peace, as well as
- f. The effects of nuclear weapons and the effectiveness (and limit of effectiveness) of various countermeasures available to the individual.

8. The Panel expresses the belief that the program would be more successful if the President and other leaders in the Federal Government were to lend their weight to the stimulation of such group discussions. It is suggested further that all informational media elements be enlisted in the educational effort. These are, however, suggestions from the Panel which are certainly susceptible to critical judgment, depending on the amount of emphasis desired. If there are good reasons for a lesser emphasis, such a course would not nullify the value of the basic recommendation--that group discussion techniques be employed to involve people in these important issues.

Recommendations

9. After further study of the matter, as requested in NSC Action No. 1665-b, I have satisfied myself that the basic reasoning of the Panel is sound, and that the central idea of involvement by group discussion suggested by the Panel is sound, and should be encouraged. For a variety of reasons I believe that:

- a. The discussions should be broad in scope, with the major part of the discussions being devoted to national security issues other than nuclear weapons effects, as outlined in paragraph 7 above.



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b. The discussion groups should be organized and encouraged under private auspices, with the Government confining its activities to (1) initial stimulation of private agency interest and (2) the subsequent development of the normal public information material with a view to its suitability for use by discussion groups.

c. No attempt should be made to achieve a dramatic initiation of a nationwide program; on the contrary, major emphasis should be on the gradual, solid encouragement of discussion groups, in phase with the amount of real interest it is possible to stimulate.

d. The discussion groups should be organized in local communities primarily around nuclei of people interested in joining in such discussions, rather than in the local meetings of our national voluntary associations (the latter, however, would be excellent places in which to stimulate individuals to join in such discussion groups, and the cooperation of the national voluntary associations to this end should be sought).

10. There was inaugurated in 1956 a program of group discussions which comes very close to meeting the specifications I have suggested above--the "Decisions -- USA" program of the Foreign Policy Association. The concept of the program is set forth in the 1956 Report to the President of the Foreign Policy Association:

".....Each year, with the advice of many interested citizens across the country and with the help of a committee of experts, the Foreign Policy Association selects six to ten of the most pressing problems of U. S. foreign policy which will demand the attention of the American public. We then provide a wide variety of coordinated materials and services to illuminate public discussion of each selected issue. Finally and most important, whole communities are invited to enlist the participation of their local newspapers, radio and television stations, schools and civic organizations from service clubs to youth groups, in a campaign to stimulate widespread discussion of one selected subject each week."

Samples of the coordinated materials are shown in Appendix A.

11. In 1957, group discussions of the "Decisions -- USA" program were held in more than 200 communities, the number of groups in each community ranging from one in some cities to 152 such groups meeting concurrently in the City of Baltimore.

12. It is my recommendation that an attempt be made to induce the Foreign Policy Association to develop a body of discussion materials on our national heritage, nuclear weapons effects, and non-military defense, to supplement the materials already prepared to stimulate discussions of foreign policy and military strategy. It is my conviction that these areas are most closely related, that the effects of nuclear weapons require as never before in history that our conduct of international affairs and the development of our foreign policy be skillfully handled in order to protect and build on our basic national heritage without resort to war.

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13. Even with the fullest cooperation, it may not be possible to incorporate our suggestions into the "Decisions -- USA" program until early 1959. In that event, I recommend that we try to achieve an experimental beginning in 1958 by asking the American Assembly to prepare materials and conduct such discussions as will contribute to the success of the ultimate program.

14. If this approach is followed, the question of "specific content and proposed limits" does not arise. The materials for discussion will necessarily be drawn from available unclassified sources, and the Government will not be responsible for the development of such materials. It is worth noting, however, that the Foreign Policy Association enjoys an excellent reputation for factual, impartial treatment of discussion materials.

Summary of Recommendations

15. It is recommended that:

a. Efforts be made to stimulate group discussions of the topics detailed in paragraph 7 and related matters under private auspices;

b. The gradual, developmental approach in organization of discussion groups be favored over the dramatic, nationwide approach;

c. The Foreign Policy Association and the American Assembly, as appropriate, be encouraged to take the lead in the matter; and

d. The cognizant agencies of the Federal Government cooperate in making unclassified information available in a form designed to facilitate group discussion.



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