

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

~~TOP SECRET~~/SENSITIVE - XGDS

2864

INFORMATION
September 4, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR:

BRENT SCOWCROFT

FROM:

JAN M. LODAL *JML*

SUBJECT:

DOD Comments on the President's
Letter to Senator Brooke Concerning
"First Use/First Strike"

B

General Wickham has sent you a memo (Tab A) criticizing the language of the President's July 25th letter to Senator Brooke concerning the use of nuclear weapons (Tab B). We have discussed the matter informally with Dr. Bill Kaufmann (a key adviser to Secretary Schlesinger) and believe he understands the rationale for the language used in the President's letter. While that settles the immediate issue, we can probably expect further public controversy to arise over strategic nuclear policy. The Brooke case as well as earlier Defense statements indicates the importance of prior coordination of statements intended to articulate that policy.

Background

On June 26, Senator Brooke requested the President to clarify remarks made at his June 25 press conference concerning the use of nuclear weapons. A response drafted by DOD at our request (Tab C) went beyond the assurances sought by Brooke, opened up details unnecessary to address, and contained statements which might have focused public, congressional, and Soviet criticism on the President. We prepared an alternative draft and forwarded both versions to the President. He chose to reply in accordance with the NSC draft.

General Wickham's Memo

General Wickham's memo complains that the President's letter:

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BY AUTHORITY OF GENERAL SCOWCROFT



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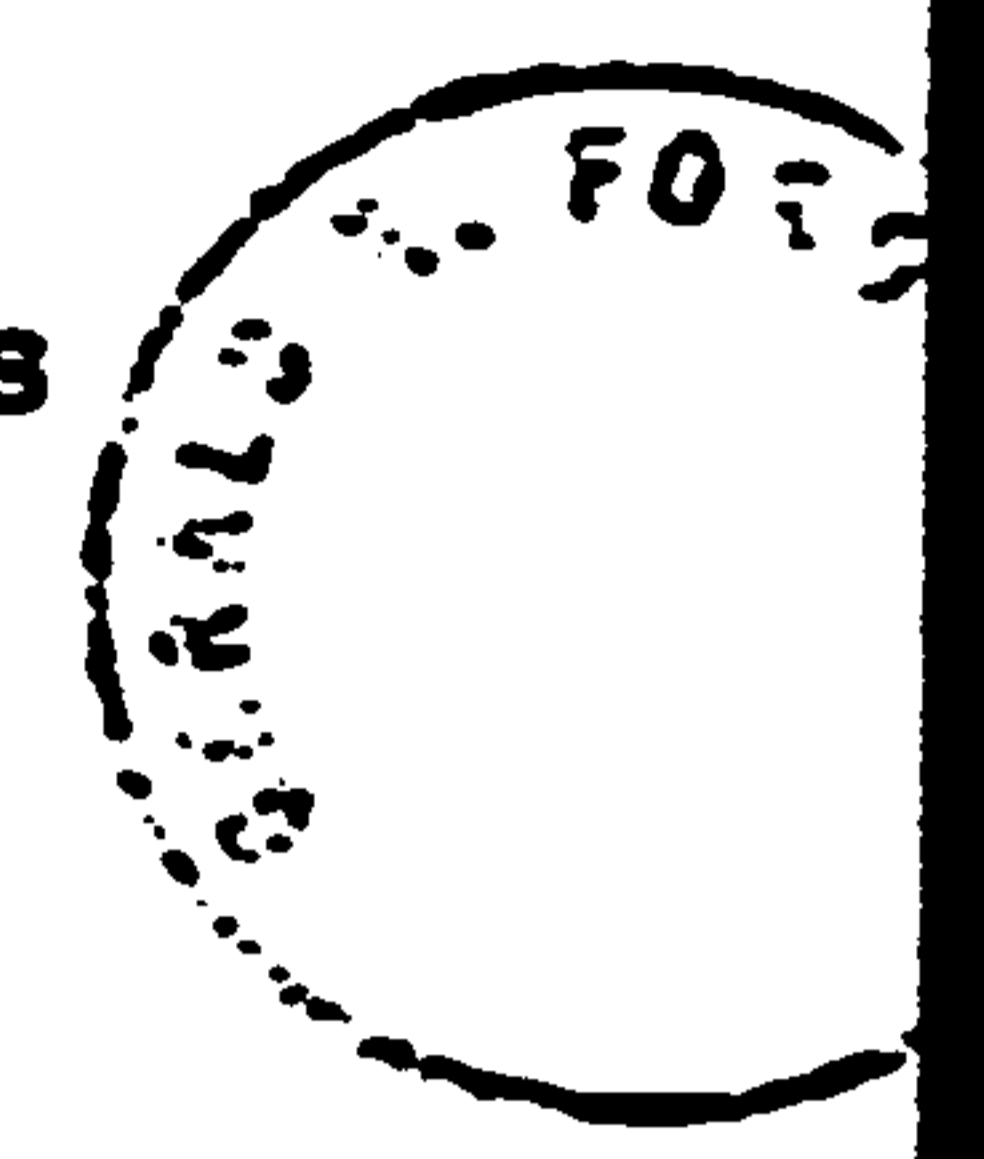
by Bill NARA Date 2/7/94

-- Fails to distinguish the term "first-strike" from the term "disarming first-strike,"

-- Implies incorrectly that previous administrations have consistently rejected the disarming option;

-- Risks upsetting the NATO allies by minimizing the likelihood of a nuclear first-use in response to conventional aggression; and

-- Gives aid and comfort to opponents of the Administration's program of strategic force improvement.



First-Strike versus Disarming First-Strike

This issue is partly semantic. Historically, the term "first-strike" has been used in contrast to "second-strike" to mean an attempt to deprive the opponent of his basic retaliatory capability by pre-emptive attack on his strategic nuclear forces. This is also the public interpretation of the term, and the focus of most of the controversy surrounding recent remarks by the President and Secretary Schlesinger. The reply to Brooke uses "first-strike" in this sense when it assures Brooke that we have no such doctrine and seek no such capability.

.....

..... While the reply to Brooke mentions our commitment to flexibility, we felt it unnecessary and inappropriate to go more deeply into the nature of the targeting options which might be available to the President in various contingencies. The Brooke letter was intended to lay to rest the immediate issue of disarming potential, and in this it has apparently succeeded.

Past US Policy

Although the US may have considered a disarming option at one time, the past three administrations have consistently rejected such an option, and that rejection is a matter of public record.

First-Use in Response to Conventional Aggression

While acknowledging the possibility of a first tactical use of nuclear weapons, the reply to Brooke discounts the likelihood of such use on the grounds that conventional forces constitute our primary defense against conventional attack. This formulation is consistent with NSDM 242 (Policy for Planning the Employment of Nuclear Weapons), and

reflects Secretary Schlesinger's own repeated calls for a stalwart conventional defense and a high nuclear threshold. Notwithstanding DOD's fears, the Brooke letter has apparently produced no adverse reaction from the NATO allies.

Strategic Force Improvement

Most of the opposition to current strategic programs like improved missile accuracies and yield-to-weight ratios focuses on their disarming potential. The Brooke letter should therefore moderate rather than intensify such opposition.

Other Comments

It is important that public discussion of nuclear policy not be confused by semantic inconsistencies in the articulation of that policy. We therefore plan to work closely with Defense and State to iron out such inconsistencies before they become a source of public debate.

It is possible, however, that the disagreement over the meaning of "first-strike" is not entirely semantic. Instead, it may reflect a DOD interpretation of NSDM 242 different from that which was intended -- particularly concerning the desirability of seeking a major hard-target-kill capability. Secretary Kissinger has asked us to arrange a briefing on the revised SIOP (SIOP 5) before it goes into effect on January 1, 1976. If a divergence in interpretation does exist, it should surface at this briefing.

RECOMMENDATION

That no further action be taken with respect to General Wickham's memo.



Jan Lodal of the NSC analyzes DOD comments on the President's letter to Senator Brooke concerning "First Use/First Strike.". National Security Council, 4 Sept. 1975. U.S. Declassified Documents Online, tinyurl.galegroup.com/tinyurl/4PgNKX. Accessed 19 Feb. 2017.