

9th - Friday - Agha Shahi
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FOR
CLEARANCE

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NODIS

NEXT STEPS: SOUTH AFRICA--POSSIBLE SCENARIOS

Given the lack of any corroborating evidence to support the initial satellite indications of a possible nuclear event in the area of South Africa, we remain where we were on September 22. It is already quite unlikely that US intelligence sources will develop additional information confirming the event or its nature; by the end of the month, the chances of additional confirmatory information will be vanishingly small. By that time, at the latest, therefore, we will need to deal with the situation--most probably on the basis of the information now available. Our basic rationale for holding this information closely--the hope that it will be supplemented by fresh intelligence--will accordingly become less persuasive as time passes. A leak could, of course, occur at any time.

However, the lack of corroborating US information gives additional credibility to the premise that the satellite data was in error, as does the fact that none of our allies or the Soviets (who we know to have been on the alert) have further substantiated our own report. This situation lends particular urgency to the findings

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Approved
to go to
Soviet/public

Agreed
report in
writing 2

No
uncertainty
factor

N.T.M.
improvements

Possible
resolution
of TBI

CV -
OK a
parallel
demand
for him
to sign

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of the independent panel of experts which began work on October 9. If they conclude, independently, that the chance of satellite error is miniscule, that conclusion will present us with one situation; on the other hand, findings that satellite malfunction or other explanations might have explained the reported event (even, say, in the 15-30 percent range) would create quite another. We should accordingly withhold further action until the panel has reported--and we should push for as urgent a report as possible.

Depending on the panel's reports, and the other on-going intelligence collection efforts, we will in the very near future be faced with one of the following contingencies for dealing with the South Africans.

1. We know no more than we know now about the nature of the suspected event. In the next several days to weeks a leak may or may not occur. In either case, our problem is much the same unless new information surfaces.

Option A: Pursue our current nuclear negotiating strategy urgently but as if nothing else had happened. Pending further information, make no reference to the

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suspected event. (Also pursue further intelligence collection and evaluation with utmost urgency.)

Pros:

- Avoids rocking the boat while we await further data.
- Gives us a chance to refine our options.
- Keeps South Africans and others in the dark re our concern.
- Avoids (temporarily) jeopardizing our other initiatives in the area--Rhodesia, Namibia.
- Keeps our nuclear negotiations (which are urgent anyway) on track.

Cons:

- Absent new data becomes less tenable as time passes.
- Opens us to cover-up charges.
- Risks danger or unannounced leak which, once it occurred, would lessen our leverage with the South Africans.

Option B: Take the question up with the SAG as urgently as possible. This could be the subject of a special high-level demarche, or could be done in a more low-key manner in our next exchange on nuclear matters. We would notify them that we have satellite indications

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of a possible nuclear explosion in the region, that we intend to make a non-accusatory public statement in the near future (see Option C below), but that we desired to raise it privately with them first, giving enough time for them to reply. This approach would be non-confrontational but we would request a reiteration of the 1077 assurances, and confirmation that no South African test had occurred. We would need to stress the necessity of a rapid and categorical South African response.

Pros:

- A confidential approach would avoid public diplomacy and maximize likelihood of a responsible South African response.
- Would not involve any accusations we couldn't back up.
- Might elicit useful information; even if not, it underlines the need for South African cooperation with US.
- Sends them a message whether guilty or not.

Cons:

- Increases chance of a leak even in absence of new info.

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- Not likely to elicit new info.
- Could adversely affect our dealings on other issues (Namibia, Rhodesia) though not as much as unannounced public disclosure.
- SAG could portray intended public statement as blackmail attempt.
- Would raise tough questions: who else has US told? Have we singled SAG out as prime suspect? Does this (and how does this) affect US policy on the issue? Is our position on nuclear cooperation as before, or even tougher?

Option C: Make a volunteered public low-key announcement in very near future (not waiting for a leak) and telling the South Africans at the same time (or just prior to) the announcement. The statement would be along the lines of the contingency language already prepared, would contain the basic information, note our intention to continue investigating the possible event, and eschew finger-pointing. To the extent that such statements would be factually sustained, mention would be made of possibilities such as natural events and equipment malfunction. We would give the SAG a courtesy copy shortly before, but would not immediately ask for comment or reaction.

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Pros:

- Would preempt leaks and at least initially keep us in control of situation.
- Would allow us to argue to SAG that we were not singling them out as prime suspects.
- Commits us to no immediate action.
- Credible short-term course of action, re Africans and UN.

Cons:

- Regardless of caveats, would have the effect of pointing finger at South Africa and triggering chain of events at UN and elsewhere.
- South Africans would recognize this, and would criticize us for not having told them privately well in advance.
- Commits us to report further--even though no more evidence may come to light.
- Makes us less credible negotiators on nuclear and other issues with SAG if we later conclude SA didn't test.

II. We conclude on the basis of further evidence that there is substantial confirmation of a South African test.

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Option A: Approach the SAG at a high level, privately, with our information and conclusions, describe the implications as we see them (including for the play of events at the UN, the LTBT, and our broader relations), but provide South Africa the opportunity to convince us that it has not tested.

Pros:

- Might give us cause to re-evaluate our conclusions (in the knowledge that it is impossible to prove that a nuclear explosion did not occur) but recognizing also our inability to prove with certainty that South Africa was responsible for the event.
- Would maximize remaining chances to salvage our nuclear dialogue.
- Would be a publicly defensible action, positioning us well for whatever further action deemed necessary.
- Might elicit admission that SAG tested.
- To extent that there is anything to be salvaged in short-term bilateral relations, would be less likely to impact on other issues (Rhodesia, Namibia) than Option II. B.

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Cons:

- Likely to produce SAG denial; then what?
- Gives SAG additional time to marshal its forces and devise strategy to confuse the issue.
- Would open us to (probably unavoidable) charges of blackmail.

Option B: Without advance consultations with the SAG, and with only the very briefest of advance warning, if any, we would move the issue into the public domain with a statement summarizing the facts as we know them and our conclusion that the facts are best explained by a South African test. Although we could not state unequivocally that the SAG did test, it would be on them to prove the contrary.

Pros:

- Keeps the initiative with us; gives the SAG no option to develop a counter strategy.
- Assuming we're right, is an appropriate response to the situation.
- A plus in our relations with the Africans, and shows we're serious about non-proliferation (at least in this case).

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Cons:

- The consequences of being wrong are great, and there is no offsetting advantage if we are.
- Commits us to action at the UN and probably elsewhere, which almost certainly cannot be limited to nuclear field.
- Nuclear questions aside, lack of advance warning would be seen as evidence that we don't want to deal seriously with them on this or other issues.

(NOTE: The foregoing addresses the question of when and how to go to the South Africans. It does not deal with when and how to approach the Soviets, which is the subject of a separate paper being prepared by S/AS. Obviously, these two questions will need to be considered jointly, along with aspects such as briefing the Congress and other steps depending on the option and timing chosen. Presumably, however, we would not approach the Soviets prior to taking the issue up with the South Africans.)

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OES:LNosenzo

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