

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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September 13, 1979

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT
FROM: ZBIGNIEW BRZEZINSKI *ZB*
SUBJECT: NSC Weekly Report #109

1. Opinion - Acquiescence vs. Assertiveness

I think all of us in this Administration should think through two questions, which are both perplexing and troublesome:

1. Why is the public not giving this Administration, and particularly the President, due credit for genuinely substantive foreign policy accomplishments -- accomplishments which no other Administration in recent years has matched in a comparable period of time?
2. Why is public opinion in the world at large, notably in allied countries, viewing this Administration as perhaps the most timid since World War II?

The easy answer to these questions is that the U.S. public is simply misinformed, because of the excessively critical and even prejudiced views of the Washington press corps; and that this jaundiced perspective, echoed by a mindless foreign press, then shaped the stereotypes with which we are now saddled.

There is doubtless some truth in that answer, and perhaps even a great deal of truth. However, it is certainly not the entire truth. I think that to find a more complete explanation one has to take a closer look at the increasingly pervasive feeling in the country and abroad that in the U.S.-Soviet relationship the Soviet side increasingly is the assertive party and the U.S. side is the more acquiescent. This is seen as true in terms of arms competition, though you are the first President in a decade and a half to reverse the trends; this is seen as especially true in terms of international behavior, particularly in relationship to the various trouble spots. For better or for worse, we were passive in Iran; the Soviets are far from passive in Afghanistan. We pursued a diplomatically

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amiable policy in Africa; the Soviets relied on Cuban arms, not without some effect. In Latin America, and particularly in Central America, revolutionary fervor is on the rise, and we have not been able to give those who want to rely on us a sense of security.

To be sure we have gained notable diplomatic successes -- China normalization, India, and elsewhere -- but these do not obviate the impression of assertiveness on the one side and acquiescence on the other -- despite Soviet internal weaknesses, bureaucratic stagnation, and the dramatic drop in Soviet ideological appeal.

Moreover, those decisions which you took and which were not only the right decisions but the tough decisions -- on such matters as China, the MX, the defense budget, or even arms to Yemen -- have been interpreted as primarily motivated by the desire either to compensate for past weaknesses (e.g., Yemen vs. passivity on Ethiopia) or to obtain some other desired result (e.g., to obtain SALT ratification).

These perceptions, you and I know, are not correct -- but they are part of the political reality which provides part of the answer to the two questions with which I opened. In addition, the neutron bomb debacle certainly did lasting damage in Europe and today much of the world is watching to see how we will behave on the Soviet/Cuban issue.

None of the above is designed to suggest that we should somehow adopt a reckless policy of confrontationism, nor is it meant to hint that our policy has been one of appeasement. But it is meant to suggest that both in tone and occasionally in substance, we have been excessively acquiescent,* and that the country craves, and our national security needs, both a more assertive tone and a more assertive substance to our foreign policy. I believe that both for international reasons as well as for domestic political reasons you ought to deliberately toughen both the tone and the substance of our foreign policy. The country associates assertiveness with leadership, and the world at large expects American leadership insofar as the Soviet challenge is concerned. That challenge is real, and a recognition of it does not mean that we have to abandon such positive objectives as arms control and notably SALT II. We should be mature enough to be able to seek, all at the same time, SALT II; and more defense efforts; and pursue a more assertive foreign policy.

*See Tab A.

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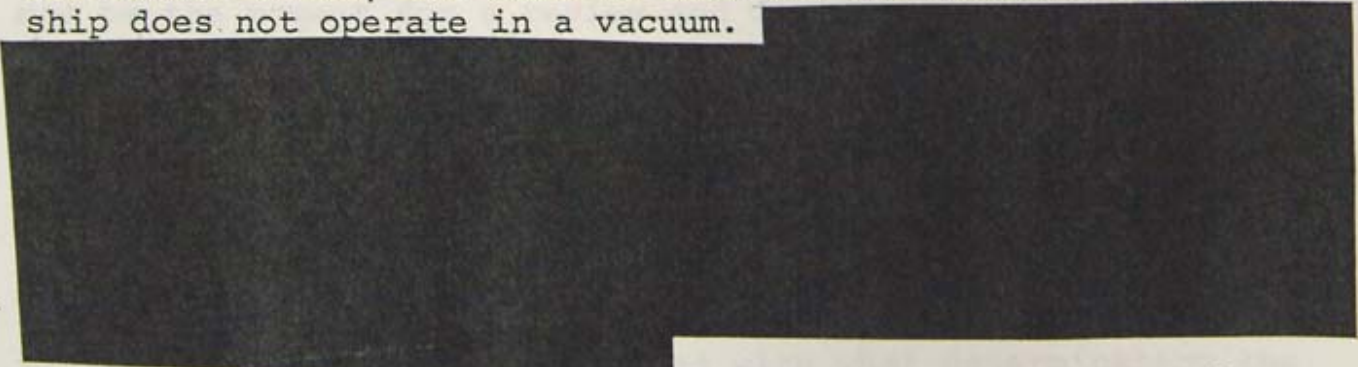
What would a more assertive foreign policy mean? As I said earlier, it does not mean confrontation or war. It does mean, however, the following:

1. We are now beginning to do what needs to be done in defense, but we should keep stressing that this is being done on its own merits and is not simply a means of buying SALT. In doing more for defense, as you have done, we ought to stress publicly what you have often said privately: that this is your prime responsibility and that you are the first President in 15 years to reverse the downward trends.

2. Less hesitation in explicitly condemning Soviet/Cuban exploitation of Third World turbulence. This means occasionally a very toughminded remark by you and your instructions to the Secretary of State, to me, and to others at least to echo or perhaps to go a touch beyond you. I have had no difficulty in selling SALT (ask Anne Wexler) in the context of a tough pitch. Thus toughening our rhetoric will not hurt SALT but probably help it, while projecting a firmer image. The French have a saying: "c'est le ton qui fait la chanson" (it's the tone that makes the song). And our tone has been somewhat opaque; at least, that is the way the country hears it, and what the country thinks it hears we have to recognize as part of our reality.

3. We should adopt a forceful policy of ostracizing Cuba, of maximizing Cuban economic difficulties by urging others to refrain from providing economic assistance, by sharing massively all our intelligence on Cuban activities and on the Soviet build-up of Cuban power-projection capability.

4. While our relationship with China has to stand on its own feet and we cannot use China merely as a "card" against the Soviet Union, the fact is that the U.S.-Chinese relationship does not operate in a vacuum.



5. Radio Liberty/Voice of America should be instructed to step up their broadcasts to Soviet national minorities, notably the Moslems and Ukrainians. I see no reason why

the Soviets should be free to agitate against us in Puerto Rico as well as throughout the world but we should somehow remain intimidated by the fact that Moscow is sensitive to the problem of its national minorities.

6. We should resume our talks with the Soviets on the issues that you raised with Brezhnev in Vienna: the need for reciprocal restraint. In so doing, we should not hesitate to convey to them that we are prepared to take steps they do not like, and after two and a half years of making that point we should actually take some such steps (as suggested above). Moreover, I really wonder whether State can convey credibly to the Soviets the proposition that we are prepared to retaliate.

7. There are also other things we could do -- e.g., Afghanistan, etc. -- but the above indicates a range of possible reactions.

I know that the above is going to trouble you, and perhaps even irritate you. However, the need to review our approach is now particularly timely because of the Cuban problem. I do not see the issue of the Soviet brigade in Cuba as posing a challenge of the 1962 type, and therefore I do not advocate extreme solutions for it. But failure to cope with it firmly can have the effect of vitiating your foreign accomplishments and conclusively stamping this Administration as weak, and that is why I feel that in general the time has come to adopt a more assertive posture.*

Adopting such a posture will require some specific decisions, thereby prodding those parts of the government which have contributed so much to the image of an acquiescent Administration. You may wish to use one of the Friday morning breakfasts to discuss this larger issue. We all want to follow as closely as possible the direction and the tone that you set, and now may be the moment for a review and for some appropriate signals.

Finally, there is no doubt in my mind that the country will rally behind the President as he responds firmly to a foreign challenge. Truman gained enormously from being perceived as tough and assertive -- and undercutting a President engaged in a vigorous assertion of national security is usually seen as unpatriotic and divisive.

*I also feel uneasy about how and with what determination the brigade issue is now being negotiated. Only last Tuesday we presented our position to the Soviets, indicating that the best outcome would be withdrawal, though hinting that perhaps some other outcome could eventually be considered; by Thursday the State Department was leaking that the Soviet force may be in fact on a training mission and suggesting that withdrawal was no longer an issue (see the authoritative leaks on Thursday morning in both The Washington Post and The New York Times), hardly a way of indicating to the Soviets that the issue is of grave concern to us and that we are approaching the matter with resolve!

2. Vance-Brown-Brzezinski Meeting

The following decisions were reached at our meeting Thursday afternoon:

-- Indian Ocean Deployment: Announcement of Indian Ocean deployment decision implementation will be made on September 30.

-- Soviet ASAT Tests: Cy will toughen the proposed demarche, but we agreed that I will not deliver it until Harold makes certain that our sensitive gains will not be thereby compromised.

-- Land Attack SLCMs: Harold will acquiesce in its elimination in the course of the DOD budget review.

-- Weizman Visit: Harold will tell Weizman that we will look at his proposals and respond in a couple of months, including guidelines for possible discussion with contractors. Harold will not make any other commitments and will raise the Lebanon issue.

-- Interim Forces in the Sinai (UNTSO): A civilian will be designated for UNTSO; [REDACTED]

-- Western Sahara: A PRC to be scheduled; an options paper is to be ready for late next week.

-- Trade and Technology Transfer to the USSR and PRC: A senior informal working group from NSC, State, Defense and OSTP will examine whether a separate list in COCOM for China is feasible and desirable.

-- Iran: Cy will be pursuing the question of a new Ambassador with you.

-- Soviet Nuclear Testing: Frank Press will be asked to analyze the issue of Soviet testing at and over the threshold test ban limit of 150 KT and the US response.

-- Soviet Brigade in Cuba: Harold and I will review the talking points State will use on this issue.

-- Brown's Trip to China: Harold's trip to the PRC, which you previously approved, is being reclaimed by Cy. You will receive memos presenting the conflicting views.

-- Security Assistance to Egypt: A PRC is to be scheduled.

-- Southeast Asia: The talking points used by the Vice President, and previously approved by you, will be sent to pertinent Far Eastern and Southeast Asian posts as a statement of the U.S. position.

3. National Security Affairs Calendar (Tab B)

Some examples from the past, not meant to carp but to highlight the larger strategic problem, include the following:

1. After weeks of effort, we are still unable to get out of State a paper to you recommending firm measures directed at isolating Cuba and making its international activities less cost-free;
2. Normalization with China and the development of a deeper relationship with China was undertaken under your leadership, but only after overcoming a great deal of misgivings and in some cases opposition within the State Department;
3. Technology transfer to the Soviet Union continues unimpeded because of State/Commerce reluctance to control it;
4. We have pointlessly courted Vietnam, and some of our spokesmen were needlessly eloquent, to the point of sounding fearful, when the Chinese did to the Vietnamese what the Vietnamese, in far greater doses and with Soviet support, did to the Cambodians;
5. There was absolutely no follow-up to our expressions of concern to the Soviets over their basing in Vietnam;
6. MFN to China was opposed until the very end out of fear of offending the Soviets, and it was only thanks to the Vice President's efforts, and your own toughmindedness on this issue, that we finally made a pledge to the Chinese to move by November 1;

7.



8. We are unable to give assurances to Salvador or Honduras that their efforts at reform will be protected against external subversion, if necessary by U.S. support.