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AFW - Mr. Witsen, II

August 4, 1961

AFW - Richard St. F. Post

Coverage of French Underground Tests

I attended a meeting today in the office of the Special Assistant for Atomic Energy and Outer Space (S/AE) to explore the possibility of locating three stations of the U. S. Atomic Energy Detection System in areas close to Algeria to cover French underground atomic tests which, according to a reliable intelligence source, will be taking place from October 1961 through March 1962.

Col. L. B. Williams of S/AE opened the meeting by outlining the importance of the proposal, which is expected to yield information and data concerning the effectiveness of our underground detection facilities. He also gave a description of the types of equipment needed for the detection sites. Mr. William Jones of UNP expressed in rather forceful terms IO's view that should any U. S. connection with French tests become known, we would be open to the charge, particularly from the Russians, that we were in fact using the French tests as a device for securing information on nuclear blasts, and have therefore not lived up to our self-imposed ban on nuclear testing. Mr. Robert Foulon, speaking for AF, noted also the vehement reaction we would get from African states in general, since they ^{are} publicly committed to having Africa be a nuclear-free zone. Mr. Jesse M. Macknight and Mr. Foulon then proceeded to point out that two of the proposed sites for the detection stations, Mali and Niger, must be excluded for political reasons: not only would it be almost impossible to conceal such activities from the French in these two countries, but also it would appear to be necessary to secure the approval of these two governments before proceeding, and such approval is likely to be withheld.

Mr. Foulon then asked me to describe the possibilities that might exist for this type of operation in Libya (Mr. Jones of UNP had to leave the meeting as I was beginning my exposition). I said that there seemed to me to be certain factors in the Libyan situation which might allow the location of such detection stations. Two possible "covers" suggested themselves: (1) the 64th Engineer Battalion is now engaged in a mapping survey project in precisely the area where the sites proposed for Libya would be located, the Ghat-Sabha-Ghadames triangle. From Col. Williams description of the equipment required, it would appear possible that it could be introduced into Libya as part of an Engineer survey team without raising suspicions; (2) Most of the area in question is covered by oil concession land, most of it rented to American oil companies. The detection equipment is quite similar to and would be indistinguishable except by an expert from the type of equipment used by oil exploration teams. I added that it is even conceivable that

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either one or both of these covers could be used without having to inform the Libyan Government or the King, although this is a point on which our Ambassador's comments would obviously be required. And, of course, the whole scheme would have to be discussed with the Ambassador at an early stage.

The concensus of the meeting was: (1) if the detection plan is to be implemented at all, it would have to be done in Libya; (2) we would have to be absolutely certain of having as air-tight a cover as is humanly possible; (3) Col. Williams would initiate action to bring the detection people together with the Engineers to see what the possibilities would be for utilizing the Engineer detachment in Libya as a cover; (4) in the near future, he would schedule a meeting with Defense, ISA, AFTAC (Air Force Technical Applications Center), and State to consider the matter further and determine if the stage has been reached for an approach to the Ambassador on the subject. Mr. Foulon stressed that AF has, of course, not committed itself to anything except to consider the proposal further.

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Authority NND 991671By AB NARA Date 10/27/02Number 1 consists of 3 pages
Copies, Series 11.*of late French Tests*
S/AE FILE COPY *Abb*

August 15, 1961

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Dear General Rodenhauser:

I refer to your letter of July 26, 1961, subject, "French Underground Tests".

The Department is clearly aware of the desirability of monitoring these tests for the purposes described in your letter. It is necessary, nevertheless, to weigh carefully the anticipated technical gains against possible risks involved. Preliminary examination by the Department indicates that:

1. Mali, with a government somewhat oriented toward the Soviet Bloc and now utilizing the services of a number of Bloc technicians, would appear to be totally unsuitable for the operation. Not only is it unlikely that the Government of Mali would approve the project (and the project could not be carried out without the government's cooperation), but discovery by Bloc personnel is likely and it is a virtual certainty that the French would be aware of the operation.

2. Niger, while presenting less chance of discovery by Bloc personnel, is heavily dependent on French technicians without whose knowledge a project of this sort could not be effected. Furthermore, Niger is committed to a policy of a "nuclear-free" Africa and it is unlikely that the leaders of Niger would be willing to accept the risks to their political futures which discovery of their part in this operation would entail.

Major Gen. J. F. Rodenhauser, USAF,
Chief, AF Technical Applications Center,
DCE/Operations,
Department of the Air Force,
Washington 25, D. C.

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In any case, there is no existing operation in either Mali or Niger to lend itself as a cover for the project.

3. Libya, alternatively appears to offer certain possibilities for suitably carrying out the project. Mapping surveys are now being conducted by the Corps of Engineers in the Ghaz-Sabha-Ghadames area, where also a number of private U.S. oil companies are prospecting for petroleum. Either or both of these may present opportunities for secure monitoring of the French tests, and it is suggested that you explore them to determine whether a suitable operational plan can be developed in connection with them. If it is necessary to direct inquiries to military units in the field, the Department will be happy to coordinate them with our Ambassador in Benghazi.

Meanwhile, the Department is attempting to weigh the foreign policy implications of the proposal, and our Ambassador in Libya has been requested to comment promptly on the possibilities for conducting such an operation in Libya and on whether or not an approach to Libyan authorities would be feasible. You are aware, of course, discovery of any U.S. connection with French nuclear tests, whatever our purpose, might subject us to accusations of having hypocritically condoned if not encouraged the French tests in order to gather data we are unable otherwise to acquire because of our self-imposed test ban. Our position in Africa in particular, and among "uncommitted" nations in general, would be damaged, and we would be placed at a psychological disadvantage in future disarmament and test-ban talks.

Thus, while the Department is willing to explore every possibility for accommodating the detection teams, final decision must await the results of further study. Clearly,

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a major factor in this decision will be the extent to which the risks can be minimized by the development of a secure cover plan.

We will keep you informed on any further developments concerning this subject.

Sincerely yours,

Howard Furnas
Acting

Clearances:

- AFN - Mr. ^{Root}Witman (Indraft) *Jeff Jones*
- AFW - Mr. Ferguson (")
- AF - Mr. MacKnight (")
- IO/UNP - Mr. Jones (")
- INR - Mr. McAfee (")
- G - Mr. Newman (")
- D - Mr. Pickering (")
- EUR - Mr. Davis (")

cc: Asst. Sec Def., Int. Sec. Affairs (DOD/ISA)
General Counsel, Dept. of the Air Force (SAFGC)

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(R.F.P. indraft)
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