

## CHAPTER 6

### THE ORIGINS AND DESIGN OF PRESIDENTIAL DECISION-59: A MEMOIR

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When President James Carter issued Presidential Decision (PD)-59 in the late summer of 1980, it marked the culmination of a series of PDs—41, 53, 57, and 58—that effectively transformed U.S. strategy for the use of nuclear weapons. It retained the principle of assured retaliation with a large preplanned strike in the event the United States was attacked, but it fundamentally altered the options for using nuclear weapons in the event of a major North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)-Warsaw Pact war.

The change, of course, was only on paper and never fully implemented in force structure and doctrine. Programmatic and operational adaptations could not be carried out in the last half-year of the Carter administration, and the incoming Ronald Reagan administration was both slow to grasp what President Carter had directed and ill-disposed to admitting it. PD-59 was rewritten as a Reagan directive, National Security Decision Directive (NSDD)-13, carrying the general thrust of PD-59 but with less comprehension of what was needed. The result was a period of stalemate and stalling in the Defense Department. In fact, little or nothing of consequence was done to pursue this doctrinal change, yet a great deal of money was spent in programs intended to carry out parts of it, e.g., for “continuity of government,” but was simply wasted. By the end of the 1980s, as the Soviet Union began to disintegrate, little had changed beyond shrill rhetoric against “mutual assured destruction (MAD).”

### THE ANTECEDENTS OF CHANGE

By the time Strategic Arms Limitations Talks (SALT) I were signed in 1972, Soviet strategic nuclear weapons programs were beginning to exceed the levels that Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara had led policy circles in the United States to expect.

Introducing the concept of “assured destruction” as a metric for deciding how much U.S. nuclear capability should be maintained, he capped U.S. forces programs, declaring that preplanned nuclear targeting with the forces on hand effectively made the Soviet Union no longer a functioning political or military entity, and rendered it unable to continue a war in Europe or the Far East. Percentages of roughly classified target sets, e.g., command and control, war supporting industries, and population, were the measures for achieving “assured destruction.”

This metric soon became a dogma: MAD, i.e., “mutual assured destruction.” Most U.S. officials believed that no defense against such an attack was possible. Thus, U.S. strategic defense programs, such as civil defense and antiballistic missiles, made no sense and should be discontinued. Most of the tactical nuclear forces deployed in Europe and the Far East in the 1950s for battlefield use were slowly decreased and withdrawn during the 1960s and 1970s. No country, insisted McNamara and a growing chorus of lay strategists, could escape the logic of this proposition. The Soviet Union inevitably would recognize it and see the pointlessness of building ever-larger nuclear forces, not just for strategic operations but also for tactical and theater operations. Even before SALT I was signed, however, U.S. intelligence assessments recognized that Soviet nuclear weapons programs were not stopping at levels required for “assured destruction” of the United States. As a result, at least two problems arose in the minds of U.S. defense officials. First, in the event of another crisis like the one over Soviet missiles in Cuba in 1962, would an American president feel sufficient confidence to try to compel a Soviet leader to retreat? Would he be credible if he threatened to initiate a large preplanned nuclear attack on the Soviet Union, knowing that a large Soviet retaliation was inevitable? Second, was the U.S. commitment of a nuclear umbrella for Europe still credible? That is, was the United States willing to respond to a Soviet conventional attack on Western Europe with nuclear weapons if NATO conventional forces were unable to stop it? Some leaders in Europe expressed doubts.

Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger tried to adjust U.S. weapons employment doctrine to deal with the growing Soviet forces. In addition to the large preplanned option, known as the

Single Integrated Operations Plan (SIOP), which could be delivered as one huge strike in about 6 hours time (30 minutes for intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and sea launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) but longer for strategic bombers), he called for "Limited Nuclear Options" (LNOs). That was the substance of National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM)-242, issued in 1974. These much smaller strikes were supposed to be more "credible," reassuring the NATO allies that the United States would not flinch from nuclear weapons first-use in the face of a defeat in a ground war in Europe. And they presumably would shore up the president's courage in any future variant of the Cuban missile crisis.

NSDM-242 also called for "Regional Nuclear Options" (RNOs). They were meant to support regional military operations in the event of war. Leon Sloss, who helped prepare NSDM-242, has said RNOs were not meant to address a different problem: the use of nuclear weapons in support of the two military theaters where U.S. forces were deployed, Europe and Northeast Asia. In this respect NSDM-242 anticipated PD-59, but LNOs did not. RNOs never gained the attention that LNOs did. Moreover, if RNOs for Europe had been emphasized, they would have created problems for "extended deterrence," that is, the U.S. nuclear guarantee for Europe that it would treat a Soviet attack only in Europe as if it had also been an attack on the United States. The so-called "nuclear coupling" of Europe with the United States was a sensitive matter for Europe. Issues around coupling arose during the Carter administration in connection with Soviet SS-20 forces. These were intermediate range nuclear forces that Germany in particular believed were tilting the Euro-strategic balance against NATO. In any event, RNOs were receiving even less planning attention than LNOs when I began investigating the White House procedures for nuclear weapons command and control in the spring of 1977.

Precisely how LNOs were to work was never made clear. Judging from the rhetoric at the time, both from the Defense Department and outside analysts, LNOs were to provide the president with choices having less devastating consequences than launching the entire SIOP. By responding in a crisis with a limited nuclear strike, a very small one, it hoped that a halt could be negotiated before things escalated to the SIOP level. The rhetoric of the time was "escalation control."

With the Carter administration, Soviet nuclear weapons began to exceed U.S. capabilities in “megatonnage” of explosive power and numbers of warheads. Soviet civil defense also was expanding. Air defenses were increasing against low flying bombers and cruise missiles, and the antiballistic missile (ABM) system around Moscow was growing apace. The forecasts were grim enough to prompt Secretary of Defense Harold Brown to support three initiatives: a study of Soviet civil defense; the B-2 bomber program in place of the B-1 bomber (as a counter to the surprisingly effective Soviet low altitude air defenses); and the deployment of another U.S. ICBM, the so-called “MX.” Brown came to his post an avowed proponent of the assured destruction school of strategic thought, but when he learned what Soviet force builders were actually doing and how they were conducting practice exercises, he began to rethink his assumptions.

In late February 1977, Presidential Review Memorandum (PRM)-10 was issued. It called for a comprehensive net assessment of how the United States was doing vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, not just in the military area but also in all categories of power and in all regions of the world. It also directed a military force structure review. Thus two studies emerged, PRM-10 Comprehensive Net Assessment (a lineal descendant of National Security Council (NSC)-68 and NSC-162) conducted by the NSC, and PRM-10 Force Posture Review conducted in the Defense Department. Based on these studies, PD-18 was approved in August 1977. It outlined a comprehensive national strategy and military capabilities required to support it. A few items, however, were left undecided for further analysis. Strategic nuclear weapons employment doctrine was one of them because there was no consensus about how to deal with the issues that prompted the NSDM-242 policy in the early 1970s. Thus, PD-18 left the big nuclear issues to be decided later. Arms control played a key role in how the issue would be decided, and how much cooperation Moscow would offer in that arena was still an open question. Also, disputes over intelligence assessments of Soviet military programs needed to be resolved before deciding whether or not to change U.S. nuclear employment doctrine.

These are the major antecedents that led to the changes in policy that President Carter would make; however, other contributing factors also had emerged in the first year of his presidency.

## COMMANDING AND CONTROLLING U.S. NUCLEAR FORCES: FANTASY VERSUS REALITY

In 1977, a number of events impacted the thinking at the White House and the NSC staff about nuclear weapons employment doctrine. The first was a test of the president's command and control system for responding to an imminent nuclear attack. The White House Military Office handles the president's physical movements and assures the availability of his "Black Book" for directing the use of nuclear weapons. In February 1977, the president's assistant for national security affairs, Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski, tested this system one evening about 9 p.m. He called in the Director of the Military Office and told him to assume that an attack was in progress and to execute the White House Emergency Procedures (WHEP). Things did not go well. As a result, he directed me, his military assistant on the NSC staff, to review the WHEP, including the command and control links from the Pentagon to the Strategic Air Command (SAC), that controlled all of the strategic nuclear forces.

Over the next year, I explored the system, tracking the lines of communication and control to the J-3 of the Joint Spectrum Center (JSC) Staff in the Pentagon and on to SAC in Omaha, Nebraska. This led to other issues, namely transportation and protection of the president during a nuclear attack, the survivability of the military command and control structure for all U.S. forces, not just nuclear forces, and securing the survival and continuity of U.S. Government operations on the civil front in the event of a nuclear attack. Four results from this exploration are noteworthy.

First, the communications link to the president from the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD) and SAC was reliable. The commander of SAC expressed grave doubts that he could "get to the president in a crisis." This proved less a technical problem than an expression of his disappointment that Hugh Carter, the President's cousin, was placed in charge of the White House Military Office rather than an air force officer. The episode did, however, clear up in my mind the realities of the communications from NORAD to the J-3/JSC, SAC, and the White House. They were excellent, although not secure from foreign intelligence interception. Moreover, American

Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T) provided and managed them for the Pentagon. They were only marginally under the control of the Defense Department. In the 1950s, when such communications were being arranged in anticipation of growing Soviet nuclear forces, AT&T hardened many of its switching centers, putting them in deep underground bunkers, and creating a highly redundant and, therefore robust, nation-wide telecommunications network. Neutralizing it posed a very complex and large targeting problem for an enemy.

Second, SAC and the Air Force began expressing doubts about Carter's interest, accessibility, and willingness to address issues of nuclear weapons. Charges were made to me that SAC was being neglected. They wanted their "command and control people to fix the problems in the White House" because no one else could do it, certainly not an army officer. This prompted me to focus White House attention to SAC, which it probably did not want. Dr. Brzezinski accepted my suggestion to visit SAC and become more familiar with SAC's war plans. This allowed him to understand in much greater depth how the system worked. To be sure, he attended all of the presidential briefings on nuclear weapons control before the president assumed the office and several presented after his inauguration. Moreover, I talked to him frequently as a result of my continuing review of the system. But in light of the problems I was uncovering, a "hands on" experience was essential for him to view my memoranda as credible. At times I simply could not believe what I was being shown and told, causing me to doubt my own comprehension. It was an unnerving experience for me personally, and made me feel very diffident about my analysis and conclusions.

In the list of questions I prepared for him to ask at SAC, the most important one was "Now that I have heard your war plan for D-Day, what is your plan for D+10, D+30, and longer?" The SAC commander and his staff had no answers. They talked about a "secure reserve force"—which did not exist—and a few other things, such as "damage assessment," but it became obvious to Brzezinski that they had no effective plans beyond executing the SIOP. Things would just cease in their world about 6 to 10 hours after they received the order to execute the SIOP. What Brzezinski reported

to the president about this experience I do not know, but its impact on Brzezinski was palpable. Apparently it inspired him to get the president directly involved.

The third result soon followed. President Carter decided to participate in an exercise simulating a massive nuclear attack on the United States. The Pentagon and SAC scrambled to arrange secure telephone lines for the exercise because they did not want to risk exposing what might be said in the conference call to hostile intelligence. Thus an impetus was created for secure communication. More immediately, as I listened to the exercise, I realized that all the unified commanders with nuclear weapons that would be used in the SIOP were nervous and impressed that the President was engaging them with questions. The SIOP and strategic nuclear weapons had always been more an academic than a real operational responsibility in the minds of all but the SAC commander.

Fourth, the so-called "Black Book," which provides the president a written and graphic view of his alternatives for executing the SIOP, was thoroughly redesigned. No president before him practiced these emergency procedures, and therefore, no president had ever given the J-3 in the Pentagon guidance as to what the president desired. The J-3 had for years simply guessed what he might want. President Carter found the Black Book too complex and confusing. The simplifications and clarity introduced thereafter were a significant improvement.

Some time later, the president participated in a second exercise to verify that the changes he directed had been made and to assure himself of being able to handle his own responsibilities no matter what time of the day or night.

By late spring 1977, I discovered that the Limited Nuclear Option issue was not just a policy matter, but also an operational one. The J-3 staff officers responsible for nuclear weapons complained that they could not get "political guidance" for designing LNOs. Thus they picked out six to eight small target sets requiring six or eight or a dozen weapons to destroy, and developed the preplanning information so that SAC could program them for execution. I asked myself what "political guidance" would look like. Pondering this question for only a short time will make any sensible person wonder how such an absurd task could ever be taken seriously. How could

launching a dozen nuclear weapons at any place in the Soviet Union provoke anything but a quick and massive retaliatory strike? This was the very thing it was supposed to prevent. Was I in a house for the mad? (The pun unintended.)

This discovery was the zenith of many awakenings I was experiencing as I reviewed the entire nuclear command and control system. The first was the idea of deciding to go to war in 10-12 minutes based on NORAD warnings of incoming missiles. I had heard much about “deterrence theory” as a student at Columbia University, but I quickly dismissed it as nonsense because of my earlier training as a tactical nuclear targeting officer at the Armored School in Fort Knox, Kentucky. There I learned detailed information about nuclear weapons testing results against armor-protected and entrenched infantry troops. I learned enough nuclear physics at West Point to recognize both the gravity of nuclear effects and how they could be mitigated. I served in the first Pentomic division formed in Germany in the 1950s. I knew that destroying the entire world with nuclear weapons was not feasible with the arsenal the United States possessed, although staggering damage would occur. There would be a “day after,” and millions of Americans would be around to face the post-strike realities. To pretend that the U.S. Government could simply ignore addressing this responsibility was inconceivable. Yet the command and control system and the SIOP did not include any consideration of post-strike realities.

Having reviewed everything available in open Soviet sources about nuclear weapons, I had seen nothing to suggest that the Soviet General Staff saw nuclear weapons the way SAC or the academic deterrence theorists did. In 1964, Marshal V. D. Sokolovskii’s edited volume, *Voennaya strategiiia* (Moscow, 1963), struck me as a sober and realistic assessment of what nuclear weapons meant for modern warfare. These Soviet military officers addressed nuclear weapons within the intellectual context of Clausewitz’s philosophy of war: that war is a political phenomenon with all the uncertainties, friction, and psychological dimensions of human conflict. Nuclear weapons do not rule out war. They complicate it. Wars still can only be understood as political phenomena, fought with politically chosen war aims to achieve political purposes.

Looking at the SIOP and its executive plan, I realized that this was a war plan that did not allow for choosing specific war aims at the time and in the context of the outbreak of hostilities. It was just a huge mechanical war plan aimed at creating maximum damage without regard to the political context. I concluded that the United States had surrendered political control over nuclear weapons to a deterministic theory of war that depoliticized the phenomenon outright and ensured an unprecedented devastation of both the Soviet Union and the United States. Not even a finger would be raised to allow more Americans to survive; a highly immoral act in my view. And the president would be left with two or three meaningless choices that he might have to make within 10 minutes after he was awakened from a deep sleep late some night.

This disturbing discovery caused me to investigate NSDM-242 and LNOs with new curiosity. Was there a way out of the absurd SIOP approach to war? My discussions at staff levels in the Pentagon yielded more confusion rather than clarity. Frustrated, I sent Brzezinski a memorandum for his signature, addressed to the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). The memorandum asked them to come to the White House and personally explain to the president how LNOs worked, not in theoretical terms but in the most practical sense. For example, where should the president be when he directed the launch of an LNO? Should he be in the White House, his airplane, or perhaps in an underground bunker? What about press guidance and communications with Moscow, and so on?

My hope was that a conversation among the principals responsible for making decisions would bring some sense to this Alice in Wonderland planning world. Brzezinski sent the memorandum, but the invitation was ignored. In its place, a long, confusing memorandum was sent explaining that LNOs were meant to increase U.S. credibility since the size of Soviet forces made it less attractive to threaten to execute the SIOP in a crisis. I was puzzled. Why would a half-dozen nuclear weapons launched at any target in the Soviet Union be less likely to provoke a large retaliatory nuclear response if coupled with a Soviet invasion of Western Europe? I tried to imagine President Carter sending Brezhnev a message over the Washington-Moscow Hotline, telling him that an LNO would

soon be coming, and not to panic because it consisted of only six weapons and was intended to underscore U.S. credibility and lead to deescalation. And suppose Brezhnev responded, "I understand. I recognize your 'credibility' problem, but now I have a credibility problem. So I am launching only four nuclear weapons at Seattle. Do not panic. Additional strikes will not follow before we begin to negotiate." What could the president do at this point? What guidance would he give his press secretary for explaining this nuclear exchange to the White House press corps? Would the press secretary ask the rest of the country to pray for those people in Seattle? How would he explain to the large surviving public that it had no civil defense capability? Polling at the time indicated that a large majority of Americans believed that as much as \$6 billion was spent annually on civil defense. Was I in a MAD house? (The pun intended.)

This may sound like a caricature of the situation at the time, but I do not believe it is. On the contrary, it understates the realities. Not only was there no civil defense that supported programs for disasters other than natural ones, e.g., hurricanes and tornados, but there was no assurance that telecommunications could survive more accurate Soviet warheads. "Continuity of government" operations in crises had been allowed to deteriorate after President Richard Nixon dismantled the Office of Emergency Preparedness in 1972. The Pentagon ran a war game requiring mobilization of manpower and industry a couple of years later. It produced deeply disturbing results and showed how unprepared both the military and the defense industrial sector were.

The sense of unreality was difficult to exaggerate. If the SIOP was no more than a bluff, a plan that would never be executed, then why had SAC been allowed to keep it finely honed and ready to launch without any of the other critical capabilities for World War III? Why was the President practicing the execution procedures? The SAC and other nuclear commands seemed to believe it was a genuine option.

## **THE TARGETING AND C<sup>3</sup>I STUDIES**

When PD-18 postponed dealing with nuclear employment doctrine, at least two studies were initiated in the Pentagon. In the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), Leon Sloss led a

nuclear targeting study, ably assisted by Colonel Joachim Schulz. In addition, William Bader managed a review of C<sup>3</sup>I capabilities, emphasizing the “intelligence” part of C<sup>3</sup>I. By 1978 these studies were either completed or reaching some preliminary conclusions.

The C<sup>3</sup>I study caught my attention because one of my duties on the National Security Council (NSC) staff was to over see the White House Situation Room and its connections to the Intelligence Community. I became reasonably well-acquainted with our technical surveillance capabilities that penetrated the Soviet Union as well the rest of the world. I also became familiar with the Defense Intelligence Agency’s (DIA) support of SAC’s targeting efforts. Imagery intelligence was most important because it provided precise location data for aiming nuclear warheads. Signals intelligence and human intelligence helped but seldom did they provide adequate geo-location coordinates.

Thinking about alternatives to the SIOP and ways to escape the predicament in which it placed the president, I considered how to lessen our dependency on locating all targets before a conflict. With preplanned targeting, once a war broke out, no adjustment for changing target sets was possible because “real time” imagery over the Soviet Union was assumed not to exist. Technological advances, however, were beginning to change that. The shift from silver nitrate film, which requires recovery from a satellite and then development and printing—a lengthy process—to electro-optical imagery, which can be transmitted in digital form directly from a satellite and printed almost instantly, made rapid discovery of new targets possible anywhere inside Warsaw Pact territory.

The implications were exciting. Nuclear weapons were considered useless for striking mobile military forces once they deployed into field positions because precise locations were difficult to determine and could change significantly over a few hours. When it became possible to look for targets and provide precise location data to SAC in an hour or two, perhaps less, and then to strike those targets with ICBMs in less than an hour, this radically changed possible targets. Conventional military forces already deployed to invade Western Europe could be hit with enough precision to cripple them and dramatically slow their offensive operations.

The destruction of traditional SIOP target sets, such as high-level command and control, population, and war-supporting industry,

would not hinder the movement of large Warsaw Pact armored forces attacking westward into Germany, the BENELUX, and France. If a war broke out, the SIOP could do vast damage to the Soviet Union, but it could not stop a Soviet ground offensive from reaching the Atlantic coast. We could lose Europe as we wreaked massive destruction on the Soviet homeland. Would that be a favorable outcome? In the long recovery period following, Soviet forces might be able to rule Western Europe and the United States unable to take it back.

If nuclear weapons were used, I asked myself repeatedly, why should they not be used to affect the outcome of the war favorably for the United States? How does the SIOP contribute to that? I could see no way that it did and began to believe that it could make the situation highly unfavorable to the United States. Critics, of course, would accuse me of pure fantasy analysis because they believe that life would essentially cease to exist as we know it after a large U.S.-Soviet nuclear exchange. Moreover, they do not believe it would happen because "mutual assured destruction" makes it impossible for a war to start. Perhaps, but as long as human beings have a degree of "free will," we cannot assume that all leaders will be deterred. As long as that prospect is possible, even if highly improbable, military officers and their commander-in-chief, the president, must consider their alternatives if deterrence fails. Are they not morally bound, as well as legally responsible, to plan for that contingency? The critics, of course, retort that such plans make nuclear war more likely because leaders will begin to believe they can fight and win nuclear wars.

Obviously this debate cannot be resolved because critics do not accept new evidence that undercuts the assumption that a major nuclear war will not end human existence. Acceptance would compel them to admit that prudent planning for the failure of nuclear deterrence is justified. We will never resolve this debate because this is a matter of faith, not of evidence. We must make a choice as to which course is more prudent.

Because massive use of nuclear weapons is horrible to contemplate, I have never had difficulty in choosing to prepare for the failure of nuclear deterrence. How far to carry such preparations, of course, is the next most important question, and the

economic impact of such programs certainly has to be considered. That, however, is qualitatively a different kind of question. Cost-effectiveness comparisons between civil defense and counterforce targeting on Soviet nuclear forces showed that a dollar spent on civil defense bought much more damage limitation than a dollar spent on offensive nuclear forces. Some mix of passive defense and offensive nuclear forces, therefore, makes a lot more sense than total dependence on the latter.

In any event, technological advances in intelligence collection systems convinced me that a nuclear weapons employment policy based entirely on preplanned targeting was no longer essential and that a flexible targeting system analogous to that for artillery and tactical air support was possible. This amounted to a basic paradigm shift, not unlike the one Copernicus caused by shifting from Ptolemy's geocentric view of the solar system to a heliocentric view. Deterrence theorists defined nuclear war in a way that removed it from the realm of politics, and, apparently, rendered Clausewitz's instrumental philosophy of war irrelevant.

Yet Clausewitz also considered "absolute war." In theory, he argued, any war should logically escalate to the "absolute" level, but in practice, "friction" slows down operations and prevents escalation from reaching "absolute war." Deterrence theorists never addressed the prospect that what Clausewitz identified as friction could limit the effects of large preplanned nuclear attacks, such as described in SIOP. Soviet writings on the subject always struck me as implicitly embracing the role of friction in wars involving nuclear weapons. In fact, it always seemed unlikely to me that the Soviet General Staff would risk launching several thousand nuclear weapons at once. What if a large number did not work? Would it be better to try a few and observe the success rates for different delivery systems? After all, flawless technical performance was never a Soviet trademark.

In any event, new technology brought the use of nuclear weapons back into the realm of real war, where it could be an instrument of policy to impose one's will on an enemy by disarming him, by destroying his military forces. SAC's ICBMs, bombers, and SLBMs could be used to support theater campaigns in Europe and East Asia, not just to smash cities and factories deep inside the Soviet Union.

Moreover, attacking military forces inside of such civil and economic targets made a lot more sense from the viewpoint of winning a war rather than simply preventing the enemy from winning.

What were the implications for “counterforce” targeting? The idea of a disarming nuclear strike at an opponent’s strategic nuclear forces, a strike powerful enough to destroy all or most of the enemy’s delivery systems, always enjoyed a central place in theoretical debates about deterrence. The Soviet buildup coupled with hardening and dispersal of mobile capabilities, especially in submarines, made such a strike highly problematic if not downright fanciful. The logic of MAD converted invulnerability of nuclear forces into a desirable condition as long as both sides had it. By that logic, acquiring a counterforce striking capability was destabilizing. Thus, accurate ICBM warheads that could destroy silo-based nuclear-armed missiles were not desirable to possess.

My view on this issue was both simpler and more complex. As Clausewitz said, “war is a gamble.” It is imprudent to bet on achieving a fully disarming counterforce strike in the emerging conditions of a war, but that does not mean that all counterforce targeting should be discontinued. The question is how much and in what priority vis-à-vis other targeting, especially in light of the deployment of conventional forces in Europe or East Asia. Targeting silos made sense only if they had missiles in them. A large strike at a missile silo field might hit only empty silos. The Soviet military, however, built reusable silos, so their destruction could be useful in any event. Still, counterforce strikes could not be the only thing of importance, even in a first strike. They had to be combined within an overall campaign plan dealing with the realities and political aims of a nation’s commitment to war. Flexible reconnaissance and targeting of strategic nuclear forces is essential for any effective campaign plan.

My discussions with Leon Sloss about his study revealed that I was not alone in such speculations and suspicions about the wisdom of the SIOP and LNOs. If the president resorts to nuclear weapons, why not commit them to support the theater of conflict in conventional military campaigns? Why adapt targeting and harness it to the political aims of the war? Why should the president have only nuclear options that are unconnected to war aims for the conflict

at hand? At the time, Sloss was not as ready to break fully with large preplanned nuclear options as I was, but he did not discourage the line of reasoning that events had driven me to follow.

If new intelligence capabilities permitted real-time location of military forces in the field, targeting could be dictated by traditional military criteria: to destroy the enemy's armed forces instead of cities and factories and civilian population.

## **FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY AND PDs— 41, 53, 57, AND 58**

The implications, of course, were far wider than nuclear targeting policy. Any attempt to give the president less than catastrophic and politically meaningless options (the SIOP) required addressing several other large issues. When one considers the U.S. Government's responsibilities once nuclear weapons are used, civil defense immediately comes to mind. So, too, does the survival and continuity of government operations—civil and military. If military forces are deployed worldwide as well as within state and local governments in the United States, the survival of telecommunications within the United States is essential. And in the longer run—not just weeks but months after the use of nuclear weapons—industrial mobilization for war production is also essential.

In the year after the issuance of PD-18, two developments occurred that addressed some of these implications. The NSC launched an interagency study (PRM-32) to investigate civil defense and to make recommendations for changes to U.S. civil defense policy. The civil defense program had dwindled to about \$120 million annually, enough money to keep alive the thinly staffed Defense Civil Preparedness Agency located within the Department of the Army. (President Nixon had disbanded the Office of Emergency Preparedness (OEP) in about 1972.) Another part of OEP, responsible for "continuity of government," was parked inside the General Services Administration (GSA). A third part, responsible for disaster assistance, was put in the Commerce Department. All three sets of responsibilities were given very low priority and left to decay. This was the organizational context in which the review of civil defense took place.

In August 1978, the results from the civil defense review prompted the issuance of PD-41, setting a new civil defense policy, stating that both defensive and offensive capabilities were part of the overall strategic balance with the Soviet Union. As a policy document, PD-41 specified neither a particular funding level, nor a specific strategy for civil defense (e.g., shelters in place versus population dispersion in emergencies). Its main purpose was to legitimize civil defense and other forms of strategic defense in principle. Only a modest increase in civil defense was sought thereafter, but the important change was that Civil Defense went from neglect to serious attention.

Somewhat fortuitously, President Carter's "Presidential Reorganization Project" addressed a reform that would create the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). I noticed a draft bill from the House of Representatives that directed restoration of the three parts of OEP. State and local governments preferred to deal with one federal agency on programs split among the three pieces of the former OEP. The draft law would effectively recreate OEP. And OEP was the last vestige of the war mobilization bureaucracy from World War II. Believers in MAD saw no need for it. That was probably one of the reasons it was disbanded. MAD was certainly logically consistent with disbanding OEP.

Seeing a strong national security need to restore OEP, I took the draft law to the staff members of the President's Reorganization Project (PRP) and suggested that they support it, listing several security reasons for doing so. They gave me a hearing but showed no enthusiasm for the project. A month or so later, they appeared in my office, asking me to repeat the national security arguments that favored reorganization. They felt political pressures from members of the Congress to support the reorganization. Their attitude changed from indifference to serious interest. The coincidental joining of parochial political pressures and public national security interests was apparent. The PRP soon made it one of its projects, and FEMA was the outcome.

Not only did FEMA provide a better home for a national civil defense program, but its existence emphasized the importance of continuity in government (COG) programs. I started an interagency review of COG which, a year later lead to the issuance of PD-58.

Parallel to PD-41 and 58, Colonel Charles Stebbins, a member of the NSC staff, chaired an interagency working group on military industrial stockpiling and wartime mobilization plans. FEMA, of course, had these responsibilities as well. PD-57 resulted from his working group's proposals.

The missing piece in this set of new policy directions was communications. The complexity of the issue is more than this chapter can describe, but entangled in the telecommunications deregulations policy debate was how funding for Defense Department communications would be handled. Absent in the debate was a "requirement," set at the national level, for how much and what kind of telecommunications were needed for military and COG purposes. Was a level capable of controlling conventional military operations in a non-nuclear environment adequate? Or was it essential to control forces in the event of nuclear war? And if it was the latter, was it enough to enable the president only to launch the SIOP? Or should he be able to retain control through initial attacks and for longer periods of weeks and months thereafter? When the Carter administration disbanded the Office of Telecommunications Policy, putting most of its function in the Commerce Department, it discovered that the 1934 telecommunications law made "crisis management" of the electromagnetic spectrum a responsibility of the White House. This was a responsibility that could not be pushed off on a cabinet department. Thus "national security telecommunications policy," the euphemism for allocating frequencies in a crisis, was given to the NSC staff. When staff members of the PRP came to discuss this option with me, I was puzzled at first but realized that having this responsibility might be an advantage in setting communications requirements in the event of a nuclear attack. Brzezinski agreed, and the PRP shifted the task of telecommunications management to the Special Coordination Committee of the NSC because it was designated to deal with "crisis management."

As I surmised, putting emergency management of the electromagnetic spectrum into the NSC Staff was advantageous. As the Commerce Department pushed for deregulation and the break up of the AT&T monopoly, I began to understand that the military did not operate its own communications above the level of tactical

units. Rather it “outsourced” its communications needs to AT&T, which spent large sums hardening its switching centers and creating a robust network. Most of the costs of these features were defrayed by spreading the cost among all customers, including those in the private sectors. Deregulation would remove AT&T’s power to cover the costs in this manner. To improve the national network to meet the challenge of Soviet nuclear weapons capabilities would cost large sums that would have to be appropriated by Congress.

Initially, Commerce Department officials understood this better than I did, but a very able Army captain, Thomas Laney, with a graduate degree in economics from Harvard University, worked for me as an intern during the summer of 1979. He investigated telecommunications issues and sorted things out quickly. Based on his analysis, I decided that we should separate the cost issue from the policy issue. We tried to get consensus on a presidential directive from several agencies, including Defense, State, and Central Intelligence. The Directive established a standing “requirement” for adequate communications to support the president’s command and control. The cost issue was separate and could be handled either by keeping AT&T as a monopoly or by proceeding with deregulation and seeking the money from Congress. I suspected that the actual costs to AT&T were much less than if they had to be appropriated by Congress. The transaction costs could be much higher through the appropriations route. AT&T officials, however, refused my several requests for comparisons based on their internal figures. Thus I could not produce analyses to help defend it against deregulation, but I was able to secure interagency support for a presidential directive. PD-53, signed in 1979, included very demanding requirements for management of military forces and the country for months after an attack by hostile nuclear forces.

By late 1979 and early 1980, directives and guidance were in place on all of the key fronts that had to be addressed if the United States was serious about dealing with the advent of the failure of nuclear deterrence. No one working on these issues, as far as I could tell, suffered illusions about fighting and winning a nuclear war. No one seemed to take that as the primary aim. In my case, the rationale was plain. A modicum of effort was necessary in order to prepare for failure of deterrence. This was the barest minimum a responsible president could afford to do.

By 1980, the Carter administration was wholly absorbed with the hostage crisis in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Finishing PD-18, a nuclear employment policy, seemed unlikely. In the summer of 1980, however, Dr. Brzezinski directed me to begin a dialogue with the Defense Department on a presidential directive to set this policy.

I suspected that Brzezinski and I would soon be in a deadlock with the Pentagon on the draft, given the earlier views of Harold Brown and his primary aide, Walter Slocombe, on nuclear weapons issues. Brown's views alternated, depending on accumulated intelligence on Soviet capabilities, nuclear exercises, and other evidence of their policy for use of nuclear weapons. His change on the civil defense issue was the first major shift that I noticed.

In the event, the dialogue went quickly. My initial draft was revised beyond recognition. I responded with a compromised version, explaining the need for commanders to have the capability of launching nuclear weapons attacks on conventional forces. I removed the apparent misunderstanding that I favored a "counterforce" strategy of destroying Soviet strategic forces before they could be launched against the United States. To me, this was not feasible and, at best, a very high-risk tactic. Prevailing in our defense of Western Europe ought to come first. If Slocombe accepted this notion of flexible and limited use of nuclear weapons, I would not try to eliminate the SIOP entirely, as my first draft did.

Brown not only accepted this, but he also accepted linking procurement policy to employment policy, which had never been done in directives on nuclear employment policy. Thus the design of our nuclear forces and C3I for managing them was locked into paths created by procurement agencies. Past changes in employment policy had no affect on procurement, effectively making them irrelevant.

Brown also added an important description of the purpose of PD-59. He described it as a "countervailing" strategy. In fact, that is precisely its rationale. And his term was a brilliant way to convey publicly that the United States was committed to blunting and defeating any attack in Europe or East Asia. At the same time, it was

ambiguous, giving no details on just how strategic nuclear forces could be used to help NATO “countervail.”

This concept was also consistent with President Carter’s emphasis in NATO on increasing conventional military capabilities to counter the Warsaw Pact’s continuing buildup that reached disturbing levels by the late 1970s. At the NATO summit in May 1978, he persuaded the allies to commit to 3 percent annual increases in defense spending. He also reversed 10 years of declining U.S. defense spending, which began in 1968 and totaled 38 percent by 1977. In August 1980, the president signed PD-59.

## CONCLUSION

A major question arises from this account. What did President Carter really think of this series of PDs on nuclear weapons issues? I do not know his real views because Brzezinski dealt directly with him on all of these issues. I just know that the President read the rationales for each PD and that he signed them. I suspect that his reaction to the experience of participating in SIOP drills was not unlike my own: “launch on tactical warning” or even an immediate retaliatory strike is an absurd and irresponsible way to go to war. He gave no hint in those drills of how he might act if an attack were real. I suspect that he realized the choices given him made no political sense. I also suspect that he would not have directed the execution of the SIOP in a crisis. By the time those drills took place, I had already learned enough about the system and the attack options to conclude that implementing the SIOP would be the height of folly.

If that were true, then the question was what options should replace the SIOP alternatives? There was no way to escape terrible consequences, but if one were going to use nuclear weapons, it made more sense to aim them at military forces engaged in offensive operations against NATO forces or U.S. and allied forces in the Far East than to attack empty Soviet ICBM silos, cities, leadership facilities, and factories. Perhaps this far more limited use—less than a dozen weapons in a single strike—would be answered by massive attacks against the United States, but it would at least allow one more chance for the Soviet side to reconsider and not escalate. From my study of Soviet military thinking, I thought the United States should

avoid resorting to massive attacks. Everything in Soviet nuclear weapons policy reflected a lack of understanding and interest in western deterrence theory. I also doubted that Soviet nuclear forces commands had adequate computer power to organize and deconflict massive targeting of the kind required for the U.S. SIOP. Finally, many years later, when I interviewed Soviet officers about their doctrine of nuclear weapons employment, I learned that they gravitated towards limiting nuclear use to the European theater and avoiding nuclear attacks on the other's homeland. This approach held primacy beginning in the late 1970s as Soviet strategic forces gained rough equivalence to U.S. forces.<sup>1</sup> In other words, under PD-59 the targeting of Soviet forces in East Europe probably would not have prompted an immediate Soviet strike on the United States. For the general staff, Europe was an accepted nuclear battleground after 1979.

On the official record, President Carter consistently supported reducing the numbers of nuclear weapons and doing everything possible to control or totally eliminate them. This image is at odds with the image one gains from seeing his signature on all of the PDs. I do not see the two images as incompatible. The PDs, including PD-59, offered a way to avoid a SIOP decision on short notice. Perhaps it was not much better than the choice to launch the SIOP, but it certainly was a responsible attempt to make massive nuclear exchanges of thousands of nuclear warheads less probable. Moreover, with what we have learned after the fact about Soviet high-level military views of nuclear use after 1978, PD-59 options look far more credible than the awful choices presented by the SIOP.

Public reaction to PD-59, when word of its promulgation leaked out, was disapproving. The Directive was described as a new "counterforce" doctrine aimed at killing virtually all of Soviet strategic forces before they could be launched. This, of course, was absolutely untrue. It also was described as a "nuclear warfighting" doctrine, which in a sense it was. But the purpose was not primarily to fight and win nuclear wars. It was created as a last resort if deterrence failed. This resort was designed to limit the geographic areas of nuclear use and to make their use support theater military operations to "countervail" in the two major theaters of war where U.S. and Soviet forces could conceivably go to war against one another.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the emergence of unipolarity in the international balance of power, the PD-59 approach makes as much, and probably more, sense than it did during the U.S.-Soviet Cold War stand off. If nuclear weapons capabilities are retained in the U.S. military arsenal, they should not be dedicated to large preplanned nuclear options but rather designed for limited targeting to support regional military operations. That includes primarily small yield and particularized nuclear warheads and delivery means, target acquisition means for near real time operations, and staff capabilities in the unified commands that can develop targeting missions in support of regional military operations. Even in this role, it is difficult to conceive of scenarios where nuclear weapons are essential. Other advanced weapons and technologies are likely to prove far more desirable for use in war.

## **ENDNOTES - CHAPTER 6**

1. William. E. Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998, pp. 69-70.