

2 September 1958

MEMORANDUM FOR THE ACTING DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Probable Free World Reactions to Various US Military Courses of Action with Respect to the Chin-mens and the Matsus

1. The attached memorandum is a somewhat shortened revision of the Staff draft of 31 August, incorporating suggestions offered by yourself, the Board, and OCI.

2. In paragraph 11 of the attached memorandum it will be noted that the Board has retained the original wording "...the adverse consequences for the US might be irreparable," rather than your suggested change, "would be serious," the former being the language of SNIE 100-7-58 (paragraph 36).

3. Knight McMahan of OCI suggested that the memorandum might discuss reactions in the event the US brought the question of Chinese Communist aggression against the offshore islands to the UN. He noted that, while Undersecretary of State Herter was pessimistic about the utility of a US appeal to the UN (State cable to London 2314), it still might offer a possible way out. We have not treated this problem, believing it to be outside the scope of the memorandum. You may, however, wish to raise such a question in the discussion at the OCB.

SHERMAN KENT
Assistant Director
National Estimates

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE ACTING DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Probable Free World Reactions to Various US Military Courses of Action with Respect to the Chia-mens and the Matsus*

I. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. Whatever course of action the US may pursue with respect to the Chia-mens and the Matsus, non-Communist reactions will be strongly conditioned by the very widespread belief in other countries of the Free World that the offshore islands rightfully belong to Communist China, that Nationalist control of these islands represents a constant and unnecessary threat to peace, and that the US would be at fault should war come in the Far East over this issue.

2. Many countries sympathize with the US commitment to defend Taiwan, but, except among a small minority of Free World opinion, there is virtually no acceptance of the argument that defense of the offshore islands is related to the defense of Taiwan.

* See SNIE 100-9-58: "Probable Developments in the Taiwan Strait Area," (26 August 1958); NIE 100-4-55: "Communist Capabilities and Intentions with Respect to the Offshore Islands and Taiwan through 1955 and Communist and Non-Communist Reactions with Respect to the Defense of Taiwan," (16 March 1955); and NIE 100-4/1-55: "Morale on Taiwan" (16 April 1955). See also SNIE 100-7-58 (Limited Distribution).

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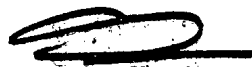
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3. To date, expressions of Free World opinion to the present crisis have been somewhat limited, except in Japan, the UK, Egypt, and India.* The general tendency has been to ascribe essentially political purposes to Communist China's military pressures. There has been criticism of Communist China's aggressive measures, though more dominant has been the expression of dissociation with US actions and lack of sympathy with US aims. It is our judgment that even among most Far Eastern governments, concern over the steadfastness of US commitments is presently outweighed by fear of war and by a belief that the offshore islands are far less a test of US commitments than is Taiwan. This is not true, of course, of the GRC and the ROK.

II. FREE WORLD REACTIONS TO US NON-NUCLEAR INTERVENTION

4. US provision of naval and air escorts to convoys supplying the offshore islands would be generally considered as involving an increased risk of major clashes between US and Chinese Communist forces. It might lead to increased public pressures in Japan to deny use of US military facilities on its territory and otherwise dissociate

* See Annex, Summary of Reactions to Date.



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itself from the US action. However, such US escort actions would probably not of themselves cause any critical hardening of opposition to US policies on the part of other Free World countries. Should such limited US intervention succeed quickly in persuading the Chinese Communists to desist from their present campaign of military pressure against the offshore islands, the US would probably gain some credit, even among many of those now most vociferous in opposition to US policies, for having achieved its goals without reckless commitment of its forces against the Chinese Communists.

5. Free World opposition to the US would be far more serious if its action extended to air and naval attacks on concentrations of Chinese Communist artillery, shipping and troops now directly confronting the offshore islands. By stimulating fears that the US was deliberately confronting Communist China with an all-or-nothing decision, such US attacks would make it likely that Japan would seek to restrict and possibly to deny military facilities to the US, and that the UK and other key US allies, if unable to restrain the US through direct diplomatic means, would join with neutralists like India and the Arab states in efforts to bring the matter to the UN.

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6. These adverse reactions would be only partially mitigated in the event that US attacks on mainland targets were in direct response to an actual invasion attempt rather than preventive in nature. However, if such US attacks on immediate mainland military targets were quickly successful in discouraging further Chinese Communist military pressure against the offshore islands, the unfavorable reactions would probably subside in time.

7. Popular and official fears of war would be greatly increased in the event that the US attacked a broad range of mainland targets beyond the immediate area of the offshore islands, not only because of the increased likelihood of major Chinese Communist retaliatory action, but also because of widespread belief that the US, having gravely committed its prestige by such extended attacks, might be eventually confronted with a choice between resort to nuclear weapons or acceptance of a humiliating defeat. There would be some respect for the US if its non-nuclear attacks succeeded in checking the Chinese Communists, though more dominant would be a widespread residual belief that the US had taken excessive risks.

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III. FREE WORLD REACTIONS TO US NUCLEAR INTERVENTION

8. No general distinction has as yet been made in world opinion between various types of nuclear weapons. Thus, whatever the type of weapon and target, the predominant immediate Free World reaction to the US use of nuclear weapons in defense of the offshore islands would be highly adverse.

9. Most of our allies, including those in NATO, would probably shun any responsibility for, or connection with, US use of nuclear weapons. Adverse reactions would be particularly strong throughout most of Asia, where US use of nuclear weapons would tend to be looked upon as callous white indifference to the lives of Asians. Only a few Asian countries, notably the GRC and the ROK, would be encouraged by the vigor of the US action.

10. These initially adverse reactions would tend to be modified in time if all of the following conditions applied: (a) the US action had been taken against an actual Chinese Communist invasion of the major offshore islands; (b) the US had restricted its actions to attacks with low-yield weapons on military targets in the immediate vicinity of the offshore islands; and (c) the US actions had brought the hostilities to an early and successful end without

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heavy civilian casualties. Under these conditions, even some Asian countries would probably come to have greater confidence in the ability of the US to defend them against Communist aggression.

11. Conversely, if the conflict were prolonged, if the US had made nuclear strikes on targets beyond the immediate vicinity of the offshore islands, and especially if large-scale casualties had been inflicted on Chinese civilians, the adverse consequences for the US might be irreparable, particularly in Asia. We might be forced to withdraw from our bases in Japan, and Japanese pressure for our withdrawal from Okinawa would increase. Our influence in most other Asian countries would be seriously under mined. In Western Europe fears of general nuclear war and popular pressures on governments would almost certainly attempt vigorously to bring about a prompt end to hostilities.

12. The adverse reactions to initial US use of nuclear weapons might be mitigated to a limited extent if the Communists in turn employed nuclear weapons, but the US would still incur the odium of having used them first.

IV. FREE WORLD REACTIONS TO US NON-INTERVENTION

13. The dominant Free World reaction would probably be one

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of relief that a serious source of friction between Communist China and the US had finally been liquidated and that the US had apparently accepted the view that the offshore islands were not worth serious risk of war. This reaction would be tempered, nonetheless, by loss of face for the US, some concern in the Far East over Communist China's growing strength, deep distress in the GRC, and a widespread belief that there would not have been a crisis in the first place had it not been for previous US policies.

14. We do not believe that the adverse effects of US failure to defend the offshore islands would be critical in the case of most of those Middle East and Asian countries which now look to the US for protection against Communist aggression. It would be necessary for the US to demonstrate to these countries its continuing readiness to honor its commitments to defend Taiwan as well as its treaty obligations to them, especially if Communist China followed up its takeover of the offshore islands with increased military and psychological pressures against Taiwan itself. There would be considerable sympathy in the Free World for a renewed US commitment to defend Taiwan. Even though there had been an increased linking of the offshore islands with the defense of Taiwan, it would be generally

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believed in the Free World that US interests and prestige were far more deeply committed in the case of Taiwan than in that of the offshore islands.

15. The most serious consequence of the loss of the offshore islands would be the resulting effect on Nationalist morale. This effect would be severe, whatever the circumstances of the loss of the Chin-mens and Matsus. The impact of such a loss would be of the greatest severity if the US withheld its support and the Chinese Nationalist troops stationed on the islands were defeated by a Chinese Communist assault. The impact of the loss would be of less severity if the troops were evacuated with US assistance and these important Chinese Nationalist resources were preserved. In any case, the Nationalist government, if it is to survive, would require new and convincing demonstrations that the US was still determined to protect Taiwan and to preserve the GRC's international position. Given such demonstrations, we believe that the Nationalists would not fold up.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

**SHERMAN KENT
Assistant Director
National Estimates**

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ANNEX

SUMMARY OF REACTIONS TO DATE

1. Official and editorial reactions throughout the world to growing tension in the Taiwan Straits area so far has been limited, except in the UK, Japan, India, and Egypt. Probably few comments have been made because the situation has not yet reached a climax. Also it is possible that some leaders and journalists, while content to point out the consequences of further US involvement in the area are still reluctant to believe that either the US or the Chinese Communists is likely to push matters to the point of open hostilities. While the Free World comment that is available tends to regard Chinese Communist maneuvering as a rather unsubtle attempt to assert Communist strength, and perhaps to force entrance into the UN, there is little public sympathy expressed for what is generally viewed as an over-extended US commitment. Comment elsewhere in the world follows predictable lines.

2. The strongest reaction has come from the UK, where overwhelming editorial opinion tends to look askance at US policy as being too deeply involved in areas where defensive positions could quickly become untenable. The government's position has not been formally determined, but a high foreign office official told the US Embassy on 29 August that it was still sticking to its policy as enunciated in 1955 that Quemoy and Matsu were regarded as part of the territory of the Chinese People's Republic. Probably the best the US could expect from the MacMillan Government if it became militarily involved, would be a statement condemning the use of force by the Chinese Communists.

3. The Japanese press is covering developments with thoroughness and expresses deep concern that the conflict may spread to Japan. The possible use of US bases in Japan in support of any active intervention has alarmed some political figures and even pro-American newspapers who fear retaliation against Japan. The Socialist Party and the Labor Confederation have already called for an immediate end to both US "intervention" and Chinese military action.

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4. The Cairo press and radio have concentrated on factual coverage of the events to date, with editorial comment that blames the US for encouraging the ambitions of Chiang by supplying arms to the Chinese Nationalists. The official Indian reaction tends to be non-committal, although the press generally favors the Chinese Communists.