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October 2, 1953

MEMORANDUM TO MR. COLE

FROM: J. KENNETH MANSFIELD

SUBJECT: Possible steps to be taken in the thermonuclear field.

DECLASSIFIED  
AUTHORITY: MNS 902010  
BY: FVW/HANARA, DDM 2/25/97

You asked me to list some affirmative steps which might be taken in connection with the thermonuclear program.

1. If you can fit it into your busy schedule, I think it might be very profitable for the two of us to spend several hours during the next week or two reviewing the current issues in this field and the way they developed historically. This is a very complicated business--not so much technically--as from the standpoint of the evolution of thermonuclear policy, and although you are of course familiar with all the important items, it might be useful to review once more in a systematic and chronological fashion the salient documents and reports bearing on this matter.

2. The hydrogen chronology. The history of our H-bomb program is not merely a history of some opportunities overlooked and some time lost--it is a history of the grossest sort of dereliction, a history which might well make investigations into other areas of governmental activities look like peanuts if the facts became generally known.

But because of compartmentalization and security--necessary though these of course are--not even people in the very heart of the atomic program have even begun to be aware of the shabby--the incredibly shabby--nature of our past record in this program.

To the best of my knowledge, there is only one document in existence which sets forth this story, and that is our hydrogen bomb chronology.

I therefore wonder whether it might not be possible to give this document wider circulation in the Executive Branch, always subject, of course, to necessary security safeguards. The document does contain very sensitive material--though nearly not so sensitive as was suggested in some quarters during the Wheeler fracas.

On the other hand, lacking the kind of information which is contained only in this chronology, our present policy-makers can simply have no idea of how our hydrogen program lagged until very recently, and of how much lost ground we have to regain. My own feeling is that, on balance, the gains in possibly wiser policy decisions that might derive from a wider circulation of the chronology outweigh the admitted security danger involved in giving it broader, but still limited, circulation.

CONTAINS DEPT. OF ENERGY  
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BY: S. O'BRIEN, DATE:

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3. When, after review of the history of this issue, you have formed your own estimate of whether or not we missed the boat, and whether or not even our present effort is far from adequate, you may wish to consider a very strong letter to the President, or to the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the AEC, and the civilian secretaries of the armed services.

4. You will recall that two months ago, you asked the Secretaries of Defense and Mr. Strauss to prepare a series of alternative requirements and cost estimates for thermonuclear weapons based on varying predictions concerning the outcome of the CASTLE test series. This report is due on November 1.

I would recommend a full-fledged, major series of hearings on the thermonuclear issue early in November. This may well be the most important single issue facing our country and the free world today, and I do not think it would be imposing on the time of the highest officials in the Executive Branch to take their testimony on this. My thought is that we might have as witnesses Mr. Wilson, the Secretaries for Army, Navy, and Air, all the Joint Chiefs, Mr. LeBaron, Mr. Strauss and the Commissioners, and Messrs Teller, Bradbury, Bethe, Wheeler, Von Neumann, and Rabi.

5. The theme of these hearings would of course be the question, "What can we do to step up the rate and scale of our thermonuclear effort?" When the hearings were over and the Committee came to a considered judgment on this, I would hope it would see fit to incorporate its findings in a report which would be transmitted to the ranking governmental officials concerned with this problem.

Budget requests are now being firmed up, so time would be of the essence in getting out such a report. Hence my recommendation that these hearings take place next month, rather than when the Congress reconvenes.

6. This is one which is admittedly delicate, but--if the Executive Branch fails to come through with a program that meets with Committee approval--there could possibly be a case made for a very brief public Committee resolution, saying that it is the sense of the Committee that our thermonuclear effort is inadequate.

On the basis of what I assume are thoroughly patriotic motives, the general public has been deceived--rather badly deceived--concerning where we and the Russians are in thermonuclear energy. This is a rather strong statement, but it can easily be documented by a perusal of our files.

I cite just one item in this connection. You will remember that when President Truman issued his go-ahead directive in January 1950, there was both a public and classified version of this directive. The only point of difference between the two was that the public directive used the phrase "continued" work in thermonuclear energy, whereas the classified directive did not. In other words--and for very understandable reasons--

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