

## **March 1975**

# **Memorandum, Lt-General Raymond Fullarton Armstrong, US Department of Defense, Israel-South Africa**

### **Citation:**

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### **Summary:**

A memorandum written by Chief of the Defense Staff Lt-General Raymond Fullarton Armstrong describes South Africa's nuclear weapons systems needs and outlines the rationale for having a nuclear deterrent.

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ISRAEL AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN BOMB

APPENDIX 1

MEMORANDUM OF MARCH 1975

(Armstrong memorandum)

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31 March 1975

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE  
MEMORANDUM

From: C8 To: C8 SADF

**THE JERICHO MISSILE SYSTEM**

**Introduction**

1. In considering the merits of a weapon system such as that offered, certain assumptions have been made:

- a. That the missiles will be armed with nuclear warheads manufactured in the RSA or acquired elsewhere.
- b. That the missiles have an acceptable rank life so that they will remain stable and operational while in storage for a considerable number of years.

**The need for a nuclear deterrent**

2. In a recent study made by the Director of Strategy Studies the conclusion was reached that a direct and indirect nuclear threat against the RSA has developed to the point of being a real danger. This fact demands a reappraisal of our strategic policy and the threat must be seen as a real one in the relatively short term. This conclusion is based on the following factors:

- a. Although the open use of nuclear weapons against the RSA by those powers which possess such weapons and the potential to deliver them can be disregarded for the foreseeable future, we must accept that there is a danger that an enemy assuming an African identity such as terrorist organisations, or a DAU "liberation army" could acquire and launch against us a tactical nuclear weapon. China appears to be the most likely nuclear power to associate herself with such an adversary.
- b. The Director of the United States Arms Control Agency maintains that nuclear weapons will become available to sub-national groups such as terrorist organisations within the next ten years.
- c. Western anti-communism is no longer a significant force in global tensions.

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- d. Confrontation between the free world and the Socialist Block has been replaced by consultation, thus lessening the danger of nuclear escalation.
- e. The bi-polar conformation in world conflict has broken up into a multi-polar order.
- f. Western solidarity has been shattered by recent events and by divergent interests and political systems.
- g. The proliferation of nuclear weapons and the potential capability for their manufacture by smaller nations has rendered a super-power strategy irrelevant in respect of localised conflict.
- h. Therefore the limited and localised use of nuclear weapons need not inevitably escalate to a general nuclear war.
- j. Therefore the limited and local employment of nuclear weapons has once again become conceivable at the present point in time.
- k. Therefore the threat of the use of nuclear weapons against the RSA cannot be disregarded.
- l. The psychology underlying terrorism, modern revolutionary theory and Red Chinese doctrine would not preclude the use of nuclear weapons against the RSA.
- m. Therefore our defense strategy must take into account a potential nuclear threat.

#### Deterrent Action

3. Should it become generally known that the RSA possesses a nuclear weapon and that we would use it if we were subjected to nuclear attack, such a deterrent strategy could be used as a positive weapon in our defence.

#### Alternative methods of delivering a nuclear weapon

4. The South African Air Force has aircraft in service which would be capable of delivering a nuclear weapon should we acquire one.

5. However, although our potential enemies in Southern Africa have not yet acquired highly sophisticated air defence systems to protect their vital installations, we cannot ignore the real possibility that the Russians or the Chinese may provide them with such systems, as they have done in the case of certain Arab and other states such as North Vietnam.

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6. Once modern air defence systems have been deployed around vital installations, the high attrition rate makes conventional attack by aircraft a limiting factor in defence strategy. This was amply proven in the Yom Kippur war of October 1973, and is even more valid in the case of the RSA because we do not have a ready source of replacement for our attack aircraft.

7. Alternatives are either stand-off Television-guided bombs or surface-to-surface missiles. We possess neither and we would be well advised to add these very expensive but highly efficient weapons to our armoury. The deterrent effect and additional flexibility which they offer, apart from the reduction in losses of vital aircraft, will greatly add to our departmental strategic posture.

#### Strike Capability with aircraft and JERICHO

8. Attached are two maps on which are shown targets which could be reached by Buccaneer aircraft and by JERICHO missile from RSA territory and from Rhodesia. In the case of the radius of action shown for Buccaneer aircraft, this has been calculated on the assumption that a bomb load of 8 X 1,000 lb bombs is being carried and that no air to air refuelling takes place.

#### No effective defence against JERICHO

9. Once the missile has been launched there is no effective defence against such a weapon. The accuracy indicated by the supplier is acceptable if the missile is armed with a nuclear warhead (500m at 500km).

#### Additional considerations

10. Should it be decided to acquire the JERICHO weapon system, financial provision will have to be made for the following additional requirements over and above the quotation given:

- a. personnel
- b. base and storage facilities
- c. workshops
- d. maximum security system

#### Conclusion

11. In spite of the considerable cost involved in acquiring even a limited number of missiles with the JERICHO weapon system, in view of the potential threat which faces the RSA in the foreseeable future, the possession of such a system will greatly add to our ability to negotiate from a position of strength.

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