

Exhibit 2-a

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Office of the President

December 20, 1948

Hon. James Forrestal  
Secretary of Defense  
Washington 25, D. C.



**BEST COPY AVAILABLE**

Dear Mr. Secretary:

You have asked my comments regarding release of the Bikini Report. This is a very complex question, and it is put in a new phase by reason of the article by Bradley Dewey in The Atlantic. But it is only a part of a very much larger question.

On the release of the report itself, I have never seen any harm in letting it out, and I see some good. Some time ago the State Department, I believe, felt that its release just at the moment would be untimely, but I think this time is now past. Certainly with the deletions that have been made it has been thoroughly screened from a security standpoint. There are still being made a certain number of wild statements about atomic bombs and a factual statement would help in this regard. Hence from this standpoint alone I see no objection to release.

On the other hand, for the President to order release just at this moment would appear to be making a release under pressure, in the light of Dewey's article. Now I think I know the President's mind well enough to realize that he would not hesitate for a moment to take any step whatever if he thought it an important one in the public interest, whether it placed him in an apparently unfavorable light or not. But this is not a crucial matter, and I also believe that if I were in his place I would hence hesitate to order release just when this type of pressure had been applied. I think, however, that I see a way out of the matter and I will outline it in this letter.

A statement of public policy in regard to new weapons would, I think, be highly salutary if carefully and deliberately made. But I would not confine this to atomic bombs, I would include also the subject of biological warfare and indeed chemical warfare and radiological warfare as well. There are two angles to a public statement and both of them I think are important. In the first place, there is a good deal of unreasoning fear in this country and we are likely to do strange things when we are fearful. I believe that a factual statement about the possibilities and limitations of these weapons would tend to quiet fears rather than otherwise, would tend in fact to replace unreasoning terror with a calm determination to face unpleasant facts. I think the American public generally is now in the frame of mind where it would do just that, if given the authoritative factual basis for so doing. As you and I know, none of these weapons is determining in the sense that it is overwhelming. If a war occurred tomorrow of world wide scope it would be a terrible war, but I have no

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reason to believe that it would be more fearful than the last one in its over-all consequences. I see no indication after long study that warfare is likely to wipe out civilization or anything of the sort. There are new elements and the techniques are vastly changed, and out of this comes a much greater importance of civil defense, and also undoubtedly an acceleration of the pace of war, but I do not myself believe that any of the new agencies will be so overwhelming that it alone would be the determining means for imposing our will on the enemy, nor do I believe that the set-back that civilization would receive from a war in the near future would be greater than it received in the two great wars of the immediate past. I believe that if the people of this country, the sound, common sense people everywhere, had the reasoned factual basis for understanding this matter they would face the future with confidence and determination. This is certainly an objective of great moment.

There is, however, the second aspect of the subject, and this is the very important task of clarifying national policy in regard to the use of new instrumentalities. There is not the slightest question in my mind that if we were attacked, or if freedom-loving peoples elsewhere were attacked by a powerful aggressor and we came to their support, we would use atomic bombs. We would do so reluctantly, and primarily against military targets, but we would use them. The danger is that we might hesitate, use them only in extremis, and use them too late. I rather believe that the American people are now ready to stand behind a policy that says if it is necessary to preserve our freedoms we will employ them. I believe that if this were known to be our position, and if it were known that this had the full support of the American people, it would greatly aid to preserve the peace of the world. When it comes to other methods, such as chemical warfare and its new adjuncts biological and radiological warfare, I believe our public policy should be the same as it has been in the past. We did not join the convention against the use of war gases, but on the other hand we did not use them. We have studied and kept thoroughly apprised of progress. We will certainly be prepared to use such methods of retaliation if used by an enemy. We would not undertake to use any means of warfare aimed at wiping out the population of an enemy, rather we would attack him by means calculated to destroy his military might directly. I believe that the relationship of weapons of this type to our military thinking is fairly clearly shown by the relative positions which they occupy with respect to the entire military research and development program. They are adjuncts and not central features in the present military program. We propose to keep alert, informed, and ready, but we do not propose to go all out on any such methods.

Now these are only personal thoughts, they are rough indeed, they need to be viewed from all angles and very carefully formulated. But I believe that a statement of public policy along these lines is now timely and that it could be of enormous benefit to the world in the preservation of peace and in the uniting of the thought of the American people. The question is how could such a statement be made.

My recommendation would be that a small group be asked to gather without fanfare to examine all of the pertinent technical information

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and the like and to prepare in consultation with government officials a document to be presented to the President of the United States summarizing this whole situation for his benefit. In the announcement I would state no more than this, except that I would add that the Bikini Report would of course be turned over to them and that if they so advised it would also be released. But privately I would inform this group that if their statement was sufficiently wise and so regarded by the President of the United States, he might use it for other purposes than merely for his own enlightenment. In fact he might use it well in one of several ways. He might allow it to be released to the public merely in order to search out the extent of public support. Further than this, if he found it to be a fully sound document with which he was in full accord, he might transmit it to the Congress with his endorsement. Finally he might base upon it his own statement of policy, and state that he proposed to follow that policy as Commander-in-Chief. I do not regard this group as being one that would stand at a distance, prepare a document, and submit it. Rather I think of it as a group that would work in close consultation with yourself and Secretary Marshall, that would confer with the President, and that would attempt to prepare for his use exactly what would be their mature judgment, so expressed as to be most useful to him, however the affair might develop.

Personally I would not constitute a large group for this purpose, and personally I would ask James Bryant Conant to head it, for I believe there is no better qualified man from the standpoint of sound judgment. With him I would be inclined to join such men as Mr. Baruch, if his vigor is still equal to another task, probably Karl Compton, and one or two others to give a reasonable cross-section of American approach to the subject. But I would not make it one of these great representative bodies such as so admirably prepared the document on universal military service, for I think that the subject matter is altogether too inflammable for more than five or six well trusted individuals.

As to timing, I think that the early announcement that such a study is being formulated for the President's review would be salutary in itself. When another step should be taken depends upon the conditions at the time. As international affairs now stand I would feel that the sooner such a matter could be done the better, but of course the international situation may change, and accordingly I would place no timetable on the accomplishment.

I have not consulted with others in writing this letter. It has only my first thoughts and I certainly feel that modification in the details at least would occur as soon as an able group were gathered together. My principal point, however, is that while I do not regard the release of the Bikini Report as a matter of crucial immediacy, I nevertheless feel that it is a part of a much larger subject well worth pursuing and of far-reaching consequences.



Cordially yours,

/s/ V. Bush

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