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MEMORANDUM TO: Gerard C. Smith
Department of State

SUBJECT: ATOMIC POWER PLANT FOR UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS

Reference is made to your memo of February 15, 1956 requesting AEC's comment on a suggestion of Ambassador Lodge that the United States present the United Nations with an atomic power plant to heat and light the New York Headquarters. This is to supplement our preliminary comments of March 13 based on the revised data that have been furnished on steam consumption for the United Nations Headquarters.

There is no question that it is technically feasible for a reactor to be built to supply the assumed loads. On the assumption that the peak steam and electric loads are twice the reported highest monthly average for 1955, it appears that a reactor of about 50 MW thermal capacity would be required.

The most serious problem to be resolved, however, is that of reactor safety. The requirement for steam would make it necessary for the reactor to be located quite close to the United Nations Headquarters in Manhattan. Even if the basic determination could be made that the risks of locating such a reactor in New York City were acceptable, the acquisition of a suitable site and the extra expense required to reduce the hazards of a reactor in the proposed location to an acceptable level might make the project inadvisable or prohibitive costwise. For example, we estimate that a reactor delivering 50 MW of thermal energy could be constructed for about four million dollars plus an additional one million dollars to cover the cost of electric generating equipment. It is conceivable that providing acceptable safeguards might result in doubling the previous estimate of a suitable reactor, although it is not presently known that any amount of money could guarantee complete safety.

National Defense Information affecting the National Defense of the United States within the meaning of the espionage laws, 18 U.S.C., Secs. 793 and 794, transmission or revelation of which in any manner to an unauthorized person is prohibited by law.

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From a public relations viewpoint such an operating reactor will have limited usefulness as an exhibit since

(a) the protective features will considerably restrict visitor access.

(b) the economic costs including capital and operating costs may not compare favorably with more conventional plants, and

(c) there may be skepticism that reactor safeguards are really adequate.

In the above we have not considered legal requirements created by the extraterritoriality of the United Nations, Congressional approval, insurance, indemnity, etc.

If after review of the above information the Department is still interested in this project, a feasibility study should be undertaken with particular emphasis on the hazard and safety problems. This should be done by a qualified contractor based on a conceptual design which the contractor might also provide. Such a study will, of course, require some time and expense.

Paul F. Foster
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cc: Civilian Application
Div. of International Affairs
Reactor Development
Paul F. Foster/AGM-IA

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