



DEPARTMENT

Authority NND 991511
By JA NARA Date 1/7/02

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

S/S /s/ Theodore L. Elliot, Jr.

July 19, 1971

SECRET/SENSITIVE

To: The Secretary

From: S/PC - Seymour Weiss *SW*

Prohibiting Future ABM Systems

1. In connection with the PM memo of July 17 it seems to me inadvisable to write the ABM prohibition in such a way as to prohibit all future ABM "systems" as contrasted to prohibiting, or limiting, specific components of existing systems:

a) We do not know what the strategic consequences of future ABM systems, such as those employing lasers, might be. It is wrong to allege that they would necessarily be "destabilizing" (an over-used, under comprehended word). It is possible that future ABMs could produce a far more stable strategic environment than now exists or is ever likely to exist under the threat of mutual genocide. How really stable is the balance if one may be confronted by a dictator determined to achieve his end or by just plain lunatics? Hitler frequently said, "One of us has to be sensible, and it isn't going to be me." After the war, speaking of the nuclear deterrent, Churchill said, "I must make one admission, and any admission is formidable. The deterrent does not cover the case of lunatics or dictators in the mood of Hitler when he found himself in his final dugout." And what was that mood? Hitler said, "We will never capitulate, never . . . We might be destroyed, perhaps, but we will drag the world with us, the world in flames."

SECRET/SENSITIVE

It is, in my view, an absurdity to believe that the balance of terror is necessarily stable or that other future defensive systems must necessarily make the balance less so.

b) Since we cannot know whether deployment of a future system will add or detract from stability, we should hold open the option of both development and deployment. To argue that permitting R&D on future ABMs systems such as lasers, while prohibiting deployment, keeps our options open without serious disadvantage is wrong:

(i) If once developed a system is judged to contribute to instability, amending an agreement to include its prohibition should be relatively simple. Conversely, however, even if developed and found stabilizing, seeking to amend an agreement which initially prohibited deployment would be politically difficult.

(ii) Lasers already exist, and are used for fire control and guidance on current weapons. They could be used as weapons of destruction. A laser has already been used by the Air Force to destroy an aircraft, and the Navy is only somewhat behind in its development program. The Soviets are also working on lasers, but their precise progress is unknown. If we or they develop lasers as weapons, how can either side have confidence that such weapons aren't, or can't be rapidly developed into ABM lasers? Conversely, to prohibit all lasers may neither be feasible from a verification standpoint (the whole question of verification has simply not been examined) nor desirable in terms of our military interests.

(iii) Even more serious, as a practical political matter, will we be permitted to continue R&D on ABM lasers (or perhaps any lasers) if SALT prohibits development of all ABM systems? In the present Congressional anti-military, anti-Defense budget atmosphere, bolstered as it most certainly would be by the conclusion of a SALT agreement

SECRET/SENSITIVE

SECRET

Authority NND 981511

By JA NARA Date 1/7/02

3.

(especially one prohibiting ABM "systems"), there is precious little likelihood of the Congress voting large R&D appropriations for ABM R&D including ones employing lasers. The Soviets are unlikely to have a similar problem.

2. To sum up: We know little about the effect of future ABM systems such as those employing lasers, they could be major contributors to strategic stability. We know little about verifying a prohibition of systems which we cannot describe. Permitting development but prohibiting deployment may effectively prohibit the U.S. from doing both, but not the USSR.

3. Our confusion in this matter stems from the erroneous notion that the objective of SALT is to limit or preclude arms deployment. It is not. Rather, it is, or should be, a means towards the end of gaining equal or greater security for the U.S. It is premature to say whether prohibiting deployment of future ABM systems contributes to this objective.

SECRET/SENSITIVE

Drafted: S/PC:SWeiss:afh
x28980 7/16/71