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By NA NARA Date 10/8/11

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EYES ONLY FOR THE PRESIDENT

Notes on Meeting with the President in Austin, Texas, December 6, 1966
with Secretary McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Those present were: The President
Secretary McNamara
Deputy Secretary Vance
General Wheeler
General Johnson
Admiral McDonald
General McConnell
General Greene
W. W. Rostow

Secretary McNamara reported that agreement had been reached between the Secretary of Defense, the Under Secretary, and Members of the Joint Chiefs on all but five major issues: the ABM defense system; advance strategic bomber; advanced ICBM; the Army force structure; and the appropriate number of nuclear fleet escort ships.

The latest Defense budget figures for submission to the President were these:

FY 1967 Vietnam Supplemental, \$14.7 billion (NOA)

Overall Defense budget FY 1968 - \$77.7 billion (NOA)

Overall expenditures Fiscal 1967 - \$68.3

Overall expenditures Fiscal 1968 - \$74.6

The President asked if the Joint Chiefs confirmed Secretary McNamara's statement. The Chairman so stated, and Admiral David McDonald added that in his experience the Secretary and the Chiefs have never been "so close together," except on the five specified issues.

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General Wheeler then stated the case for the deployment of an ABM system. He said two new facts had to be taken into account: (1) the USSR was deploying an ABM system around Moscow, and they were deploying a system widely throughout the USSR which might have ABM capabilities; (2) they were installing at an accelerated rate hardened ICBM's, the S-11, a city buster. By 1971 they might have between 800-1100 ICBM's.

We do not know the objective of Soviet nuclear policy: whether it is parity with the U. S. or superiority. But, taken together, their new program could reduce our assured destruction capability; complicate our targeting; reduce confidence in our ability to penetrate; reduce our first-strike capability; and improve the Soviet capability to pursue aims short of nuclear war.

The Chairman then quoted from Secretary McNamara's paper the latter's key judgment:

"After studying the subject exhaustively, Mr. Vance and I have concluded we should not initiate ABM deployment at this time for any of these purposes. We believe that:

"1. The Soviet Union would be forced to react to a U. S. ABM deployment by increasing its offensive nuclear force with the result that:

a. The risk of a Soviet nuclear attack on the U. S. would not be further decreased.

b. The damage to the U. S. from a Soviet nuclear attack, in the event deterrence failed, would not be reduced in any meaningful sense.

The foundation of our security is the deterrence of a Soviet nuclear attack. We believe such an attack can be prevented if it is understood by the Soviets that we possess strategic nuclear forces so powerful as to be capable of absorbing a Soviet first strike and surviving with sufficient strength to impose unacceptable damage on them (e. g., destruction by blast and radiation alone of approximately 20%-30% of their people and 50% of their industry). We have such power today. We must maintain it in the future, adjusting our forces to offset actual or potential changes in theirs."

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General Wheeler expressed disagreement with this judgment.

He said we cannot predict confidently how the Soviet Union would react to counter our deployment of an ABM system. The costs would constitute an important diversion of resources. The development of multiple warheads would reduce the kilotonnage of their nuclear payloads; they would face grave uncertainties in targeting against our ABM's. He said deterrence was not only technology, it was a state of mind. Our having an ABM system would increase our deterrence capability no matter what they did.

On the other hand, a lack of a deployed ABM might increase the possibilities of war by accident; create an imbalance or a sense of imbalance between the U. S. and USSR; suggests that we are interested only in the offense; suggests also that the U. S. was not willing to pay to maintain its present nuclear superiority.

We would be denying to many of our own people a chance to survive a nuclear exchange: 30-50 million lives might be saved by NIKE-X.

Therefore, the JCS recommends to the President that we initiate deployment of the NIKE-X system in order to maintain the present overall favorable nuclear balance and give to us some or all of the following advantages:

- damage limiting capability;
- the imposition of new uncertainties should the Soviets contemplate initiating nuclear war;
- to demonstrate that we are not first-strike minded;
- and to maintain the kind of favorable power environment which helped us during the Cuba missile crisis.

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Specifically the JCS recommends that we immediately decide to develop Option A to protect 25 U. S. cities. The cost in Fiscal 1968 would be \$800 million; for the period Fiscal 67-76, \$10 billion.

The President asked if there was any difference between the JCS and Secretary McNamara concerning the costs. Secretary McNamara said "No."

The President then asked if our position would be better if the Soviet Union did not react to our deployment. The Secretary agreed that our position would be better; but that it was "inconceivable" that the Soviet Union would not react to counter our deployment of an ABM system.

The President then asked what determined the difference in judgment between the Secretary and the JCS.

Secretary McNamara replied that the difference lay less in rational calculation than in the inherently emotional nature of the issue. It was extremely hard to make the case for a policy which appeared to be denying protection to our people, when the Soviet Union was willing to employ large resources to protect its people. He said he was fully aware that if the President decided against deploying an ABM system he would face a most difficult time politically and psychologically. Why, then, does he recommend against?

First, the Soviet Union has been wrong in its nuclear defense policy for a decade. They have systematically spent 2 or 3 times what we have on defense. It has not been worth it. Their defenses are not worth a damn. We still can impose unacceptable losses on them even after a first strike.

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Because they are making an error in deploying ABM's is no reason we should also make that error.

Second, we must be clear why it would be an error for us. If we go ahead with the \$10 billion ABM program and they did not react if the U. S. struck first, they would lose 70 million of their population, and we would lose only 15 million of ours. Therefore, they would have to do something about it. Their security would depend on their doing something about it. They would have to bring back their assured damage capability to something like 80 million U. S. fatalities under their planning case, which is U. S. strikes first. As they did so, we could not hold to our initial \$10 billion ABM system. We would have to expand in response to what they did, both our ABM and our offensive systems.

Secretary McNamara concluded that we would ^{be} launching ourselves and the Soviet Union into two decades of escalatory action in the nuclear field in which the costs on each side would prove to be of the order of \$30-40 billion. We would each end up no better off than we are at present.

Secretary McNamara then said there are certain rational roles for a limited ABM system, in particular these four:

- to protect our offensive force, notably our Minutemen;
- to protect in the time frame 1975-85 against a CHICOM ICBM capability;
- to protect against an accidental firing of a single missile;
- to protect against a small blackmail Soviet attack.

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In the face of the terrible dilemma faced by the President, Secretary McNamara is inclined to recommend, as a fallback from his judgment against the ABM system, a limited system with these four capabilities. On the basis of that system we could explore whether the Soviet Union was willing to negotiate a freeze acceptable to us.

The President then asked, "Is there any middle ground in this debate?" Secretary McNamara said that the emotionalism attaching to the ABM issue made middle ground hard to find.

The President asked what would the view be in the Congress?

Secretary McNamara said about 25% of the Congress -- the Liberals -- would oppose the ABM. Senators Russell, Stennis, etc., would strongly favor it, and they would have about 40% of the Congress with them. The balance of 35% would remain in the middle and be subject to persuasion. The President asked who might be on that middle ground. Secretary McNamara replied Senators like Keuchel and Javits.

He pointed out further that the Congress had been interesting itself in this matter for a long time. Last year they voted \$165 million for ABM's, and when he inquired what they had in mind, they didn't know: they merely wanted to move in that direction.

The President asked again, "What is a middle alternative?"

Secretary McNamara pointed out that we did not have to make a final decision one way or the other right now. For example, we had important technical problems to overcome with respect to the warheads for the Olympia ABM. We had to

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install at Kwajalein a quite revolutionary system for '69 tests of the ABM. It is quite risky in fact to start building plant for the ABM system before those tests are complete. In short, there are technical reasons to go slow.

With these unsolved technical problems as a background, we could move forward with a limited system to get the four objectives Secretary McNamara had earlier stated. As for the fifth objective -- population protection -- we would not be able to walk away from that forever, but we would have some time to see if anything could be worked out with the Soviet Union to avoid the interacting escalation in the nuclear arms race that was otherwise inevitable.

Deputy Secretary Vance then added that he did not believe we could stand for long with Posture A, which promised to protect 25 cities. Under pressure from other cities and regions, the Congress would go for a full program. It would be wiser to face from the beginning that if we started down the road to population protection, it is really Posture B that we were undertaking -- a \$20 billion rather than a \$10 billion program.

General Wheeler said that, given the lead time, we ought to begin to build factories now for certain of the components about which we are technically sure. We do not have that capability and it should not be delayed.

Secretary McNamara came back again to the point that a decision not to deploy would create emotional and political problems in the country, and that a decision to deploy merely to protect offensive forces would face the

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same emotional problem. There would be a strong impulse to protect people, not missiles. As for the factories, he said the components are complex; there are many parts to be tested.

Our experience is that the system will prove more expensive than we presently calculated.

General Johnson said the critical question was U. S. casualties. An ABM system would cut our casualties in a nuclear exchange. Secretary McNamara replied that he completely disagreed because the USSR would react to re-establish its assured damage capability.

General Johnson said that there were constraints on their ability if they did react. Secretary McNamara replied that both an Air Force study and an NIE had indicated that the Soviet Union could not afford not to react.

The President wondered if the best opportunity for agreement among us would not be a decision to move ahead on a limited basis and to see what we can negotiate with the Soviet Union. Admiral McDonald said the Soviet Union was now moving ahead both with ABM's and to increase its offensive nuclear force. Secretary McNamara said that their defensive effort was wasted.

General McConnell said that their defensive effort was not wholly wasted. They had imposed ~~many~~ heavy additional costs on the U. S. to assure our continued penetration ability.

Secretary McNamara said we have over-reacted. We have more than insured that we can still maintain our assured damage capability. The Soviet AEM's have not saved Soviet lives.

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General McConnell said he can't forget that we are dealing with the descendants of Genghis Khan. They only understand force.

Secretary McNamara agreed and said that is why, at whatever cost, we must maintain our assured second-strike damage capability. Deputy Secretary Vance added that that is why we have gone ahead with POSEIDON and other means to assure our ability to penetrate an ABM system.

Secretary McNamara asked if the JCS would wish to express any views if there were a press conference. The members of the JCS replied that none of them desired to meet the press.

The subject then turned to the second item in which there was disagreement; that is, the advanced strategic bomber (AMSA).

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