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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

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Friday, January 6, 1967

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Meeting with the President, January 4, 1967

OFFICE OF THE  
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

Present: Secretary McNamara  
Gen. Wheeler  
Gen. Harold K. Johnson  
Adm. David McDonald  
Gen. John McConnell  
Cyrus Vance  
Gen. Alfred Gruenther  
Dr. James R. Killian  
Dr. Jerome Wiesner  
Herbert F. York

The Vice President  
John Foster  
Secretary Harold Brown  
Secretary Stanley Resor  
Lt. Gen. Harold Mangrum  
Dr. Donald Hornig  
Dr. George Kistiakowsky  
Mr. Robert Kintner  
Mr. Bill Moyers  
Mr. Walt Rostow

SUBJECT: ABM's

The President thanked those who had come from out of town for attending, and asked Secy. McNamara to pose the issue.

Secy. McNamara stated, in accordance with a draft paper which had been distributed, that we faced essentially this choice with respect to an ABM system:

-- do nothing;

-- set up a limited so-called "thin" system with a capability: to protect against Chicom missiles; accidentally launched missiles; nuclear blackmail; and to furnish additional protection for our MINUTEMAN;

-- install a system capable of protecting our population against heavy sophisticated Soviet attack.

He stated that he would now solicit the views of the JCS, the Science Advisors to the President, and others.

He turned to Gen. Wheeler, who spoke for the JCS. Gen. Wheeler proposed, as the JCS had in the Austin meeting with the President, that we install a Nike-X system on a scale capable of protecting 25 major population centers. This would provide a damage-limiting capability; introduce uncertainties about Soviet capabilities which would make them more cautious at a time of crisis; stabilize the nuclear balance; demonstrate that the U.S. was not first-strike minded; and deny the Soviet Union a first-strike capability.

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The proposed Nike-X deployment could not cope with all attacks upon us, but it would provide substantial population protection. It would also provide the four benefits cited for the limited "thin" system.

In short, the JCS reaffirmed its previous position of support for Nike-X deployment to protect 25 population centers.

The views of the Science Advisors were then solicited by seniority, beginning with Dr. Killian.

Dr. Killian stated that he had addressed himself to this important matter, putting political considerations aside, although he was aware that they were extremely important. He was not persuaded about the need for the minimum first-step in the form of a limited system. Beyond the first step an ABM system would be "extremely dangerous." If politics required the first step, the thin system of Secy. McNamara was the most sensible. He hoped it would not be necessary. He recognized that it might, however, be an advantage to have committed ourselves to the first step in negotiating with the Soviet Union.

Dr. Kistiakowsky stated the issue was of very great importance. He agreed completely with the arguments of those who were against massive deployment of an ABM. The argument was complex, but in essence it was this: our system of deterrence is designed now to prevent a nuclear war. The mounting of an ABM system constitutes preparation for nuclear war. It would lead to a radical acceleration of the arms race, in which "all hope would be lost" for arms control agreements.

He felt the same arguments applied to a limited "first step." The international effects would be the same; but they would be stretched out over time. The pressure for expansion of the system would be great and irresistible.

Moreover, he did not believe it would even be effective against Chicom nuclear blackmail. They would prove ingenious and could turn, for example, to submarine-launched delivery systems, or to a dirty bomb exploded, say, 50 miles off shore.

He also doubted that the thin system was the optimum for protecting MINUTEMAN against Soviet attack.

Therefore, he recommended against deployment while we undertook a major diplomatic effort to persuade the Soviet Union to stand down. Conceivably, we might put into the budget certain long lead time items for an ABM system to increase our bargaining leverage.

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Dr. Wiesner stated that he supported the arguments presented by his two predecessors. An ABM system cannot buy defense against Soviet attack. He stated that U. S. and Soviet decisions to deploy ABM's would lead to greater casualties in a nuclear war, not less. There is a built-in tendency to overbuild in compensation for the erection of a defensive system. The history of Soviet anti-aircraft in relation to the expansion of our own Strategic Air Command illustrate this tendency. It is inherent in an offensive-defensive race.

With respect to Communist China, there is no need for an ABM system. We can rely on normal deterrence. The Chinese Communists are extremely vulnerable to nuclear attack. Forty 10-megaton weapons could cause between 150 and 200 million Chinese casualties. They could be delivered by 4% of our B-52 force. Moreover, the first generation of Chinese Communist missiles would be soft; their location would be known; and they could be taken out in a pre-emptive attack if we believed they were about to be launched.

The Chinese already have missile-carrying submarines, and our ABM's would provide no protection against them.

Finally, Dr. Wiesner said that the introduction of an ABM race would lead to great uncertainty and destabilize the arms race. We shall certainly overbuild in response to the Soviet ABM's. He noted that he had spent a great deal of his mature life working on defensive systems: first, anti-aircraft, then ABM's. He is now convinced that in the game of nuclear deterrence, defense doesn't work. The offense will always overcome. He noted the irony of his present position in opposition to the JCS since, at an earlier time, the JCS had strongly opposed him when he was supporting an air defense system. (General Wheeler noted that it was a different JCS.)

Dr. Hornig concurred with what had been said by his predecessors. He noted the issue had been reviewed by three Science Advisory panels. He concluded that it was not feasible to have an effective defense against missiles. The facts were that the Soviet Union had taken steps to deploy a limited system around Moscow. It was a poor system and penetrable. His own people believe the second system now being deployed in the Soviet Union is not ABM but air defense. Against this background and the problems of escalation inherent in an ABM deployment, he believed it unwise to take the major step recommended by the JCS.

As for a thin system, he believed that the balance vis-a-vis the Chinese was such that we did not require an ABM system for that purpose; although a thin system could help against an accidentally launched missile; against an Nth country with nuclear capability stirring up trouble; and it could provide some additional protection to our MINUTEMAN.

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If it were believed that it would help in our negotiations with the USSR for an ABM-missile freeze, he would tend to support a limited thin system. He would, however, proceed slower than the thin system proposed by Secy. McNamara until we had a definitive response from the Soviet Union.

Gen. Gruenther stated that he subscribed to the limited thin system outlined by Secy. McNamara. He would support this light deployment for the four purposes sketched by the Secretary.

He wished to underline the disagreement in the intelligence community about the functions of the TALLINN system; all hands did not agree that it was strictly anti-aircraft. He said that we should not put excessive hopes in diplomatic negotiations on this question. In saying that, he wanted it understood that he believed in arms control as the right solution to the security problem in a nuclear age; he was a member of Mr. John McCloy's advisory committee to ACDA. He was, simply, not optimistic about negotiating prospects.

Dr. York, former Director of Research and Engineering in the Department of Defense, stated his agreement with the science advisors. He supported a policy of: "Let's do nothing now." He said the case against full-scale deployment of Nike-X had been understated. The workings of the system could lead to an increase in casualties in a nuclear war. The most that might be said is that casualties might be cut.

What is certain, he said, is that the arms race would accelerate, and the net result would be, in the future, as in the past, that more American lives would be at risk each year. If the installation of our defensive system were the last move in the arms race, then, of course, less lives would be at risk. But that would not be the last move, and in the end, more U. S. lives would be in jeopardy.

As for the Soviet system, in his judgment, it is so ineffective that we can afford to defer a decision. He repeated: we should do nothing at this time.

We have a very vigorous R&D effort going forward. It creates a better potential ABM system each year. We should maintain that vigorous effort.

The President then asked Secy. McNamara to summarize. He said our choices are:

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1. Do nothing.

2. The thin system with its four limited functions. It was estimated to cost \$4.2 billion. We must count on the actual cost being 25 to 50% higher than that. It would cost \$250 million a year to operate.

3. Installing Nike-X to protect the population in substantial numbers in 25 cities. This system is now estimated to cost \$13 billion to build. We must expand that realistically to \$20 billion. In fact, his estimate is that it would cost \$40 billion in 10 years.

The argument against deployment was that the Soviet Union must build a system which will survive a potential U. S. first strike and have enough striking power left to inflict such casualties on the U. S. that we would not strike the Soviet Union in the first place. An ABM system is not capable of reducing U. S. casualties to the point where the Soviet Union would not be able to carry out its policy in this matter.

The counter-argument is that we could try and protect our population to some degree. His view is that the effort to protect would lead to an offensive increase in the Soviet Union which would more than offset our initial effort to protect our population.

As for the limited thin system, it might play some role in pushing the Soviet Union into negotiations, but we could not guarantee that. It offered some protection against a Chicom attack. He said that he would be more concerned than he now is, with our policy of bombing North Vietnam, if the Chicom had ICBM's. A thin system could protect us against the kind of missile accident that, statistically, might happen with the passage of time and the multiplication of missiles. He referred to the Mace incident of January 4. It might also provide some protection against nuclear blackmail.

He felt the decision about a limited thin system was "marginal."

As for the case for doing nothing, the President had heard the pros and cons.

The President asked Secy. McNamara for his recommendation. He said he would prefer to withhold judgment now and present his view to the President later.

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The President then summarized: the Chiefs wish to go all the way; the scientists say No; but if we go we should go with a thin system because it might help our negotiations with the Soviet Union.

Secy. McNamara said it was his judgment that it would help; that the argument has some merit. There has been some evidence in the past 3 - 4 weeks. But the ABM problem is extremely difficult: once you start you are pregnant. It will be virtually impossible to stop.

The President then asked for a summary of intelligence on the Soviet system.

Secy. McNamara, asking Gen. Wheeler to correct him if he disagreed, stated that the assessment of Nov. 17, 1966, based on July information, showed disagreement in the intelligence community. The majority agreed that a limited ABM system was being deployed around Moscow which was penetrable by heavy U. S. attack or through POLARIS missiles. In addition, a wide-scale system was being deployed which might contain as many as 240 missiles by 1971. There was some evidence that this so-called TALLINN system was solely designed against aircraft; but others believed it was an ABM system, or dual purpose. In December we acquired new evidence that it is more probably anti-aircraft, since some units are not linked to the radar which is required to track missiles.

Secy. McNamara concluded by stating that, in his view, it made no difference. No defensive system could be effective. He recalled that when he became Secretary of Defense he first investigated the ability of SAC to penetrate the Soviet Union. To his surprise he found that the best estimates indicated that 90-95% of the aircraft could get through. At the very outside, the defensive system might shoot down 15%. The Soviet Union has spent 2-1/2 times as much as the U. S. on defense and has not gotten any serious protection for those expenditures. The Soviets have an irrational bias towards defensive systems. Their present deployments around Moscow are not militarily justifiable, but represent an instinctive, almost theological desire to protect Moscow as the center of Russian life.

The President again thanked those present. He stated he would take their views into account. He was particularly grateful for those outside the government who again showed their willingness to serve. When he came to make his decision he would do so with greater confidence because they had come. He had talked with others about this matter, including General Eisenhower.

W. Rostow

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