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MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

SUBJECT: The MBFR Negotiations--A Status Report

*See SecDef memo  
on p. 47*

*background 1/27*  
*What is B class  
schedule for  
back to Vienna  
I'd like to see  
how long it  
will*

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1. The East-West talks on possible ways mutually to reduce and limit the levels of general purpose forces in Central Europe resume in Vienna on 3 February. These talks began in October 1973. This status report surveys the talks with emphasis on general factors applicable to an understanding of the problems of the talks as a whole rather than on specific immediate negotiating problems. I intend the paper as a background to future consideration of day-to-day issues. I welcome the opportunity to discuss this report and the subject of MBFR generally with you.

Current Situation

2. MBFR is a multilateral negotiation between two military alliances. In all, 19 nations are engaging directly in the talks in Vienna. The so-called Direct Participants--that is, those countries with forces in the delineated area of Central Europe--are

NATO - 7

- West Germany
- Belgium
- Luxembourg
- The Netherlands
- United Kingdom\*
- Canada\*
- United States\*

Warsaw Pact - 4

- East Germany
- Poland
- Czechoslovakia
- USSR\*

(\* has forces stationed in the delineated area)

The Special Participants are those other alliance members taking part in the talks but without forces in the area and whose forces would not be affected by an agreement. These include, for NATO, Norway, Denmark, Italy, Greece, and Turkey, and for the Pact, Hungary, Rumania, and Bulgaria.

3. France is opposed to the talks and does not take part in them in Vienna. The French have recently been active in Brussels, however, interceding to oppose any NATO action in MBFR that appeared to implicate French forces in West Germany in any ultimate East-West agreement.

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4. The multilateral character of the talks gives them their special quality so far as the NATO negotiators are concerned. NATO early recognized the potential of these talks for divisiveness, either as a deliberate Eastern tactic or as an outgrowth of divergent Western aims and objectives. From the outset, US representatives have given Allied cohesion and unity first place in their negotiating considerations. Out of the talks NATO has derived a sense of purpose in meeting and coping with a common adversary. In talking with Al Haig about this aspect of MBFR at the December 1976 DPC, he spoke of NATO's MBFR experience as "a settling, consolidating, unifying process."

5. One point of East-West agreement in the talks is that they concern the forces--indigenous and stationed--found on the territory of West Germany and the Benelux, East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. This is the so-called "area of reductions." I say "so-called" because this common term is a misnomer and tends to mask (as does the phrase "Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions" itself) an important truth about the negotiations. The talks are not about reductions of forces as such alone or even primarily. The talks are in fact primarily concerned with the limitations on forces in the delineated area that will result from any agreement. There could, for example, be an agreement to limit forces without reducing them (this would be a "freeze" such as the East has in fact proposed). There cannot be any meaningful agreement to reduce forces that does not thereby result in limitations.

6. Negotiating proposals. Both sides have set forth detailed proposals for how to proceed toward agreement. To characterize them briefly, the Western approach is an incremental one, seeking to achieve agreement in more restricted contexts before pushing on to broader ones; the Eastern (i.e., Soviet) approach is maximalist in concept, designed to achieve as broad and comprehensive a range of reductions and limitations regarding Western (read, West German) forces as possible, all wrapped up in one omnibus negotiation.

7. To recap the Western position: The West has asked the East to remove a Soviet tank army of 5 divisions, including 68,000 soldiers and 1,700 tanks, from Central Europe in the first phase of a two-phase negotiation. The second phase would involve the Poles, Czechs, and East Germans as well and would result in Warsaw Pact ground force manpower in the area decreasing to, say, 700,000 men. For its part, the West would remove 29,000 US soldiers in the first phase, with the remainder of the NATO direct participants joining in second-phase reductions leading to a collective ceiling on NATO ground force manpower at the same level as the Pact.

8. In December 1975, NATO proposed to add 1,000 US tactical nuclear warheads, 54 US nuclear-capable F-4 aircraft, and 36 US Pershing launchers, to its reductions in the first phase. This was meant as inducement to Eastern

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agreement to reduce the Soviet tank army and to establish a common, collective ceiling on the ground and air force manpower of each side in the delineated area. This ceiling could be 900,000 ground and air force personnel on each side. Only the armaments whose reductions had been specifically negotiated (US aircraft, SSMs, and warheads, and Soviet tanks) would be limited by an agreement.

9. To recap the Eastern position: In a single agreement, the East would reduce all ground, air, and air defense forces, including their combat arms and equipment, in the area by 17 percent. This equal-percentage cut would be taken in three stages, to be completed in three years' time. All direct participants would participate equally and simultaneously in the reductions and each would be individually limited.

10. The East introduced some modifications in February 1976. They appeared to accept the proposition that US and Soviet reductions should go before others in the area. They also identified and specified the number of certain armaments to be reduced in equal amounts (e.g., 300 US tanks, 300 Soviet tanks) by the US and the USSR in the first stage.

#### Sec Def Stakes in the Talks

11. US policy towards NATO has in the last few years had two main objectives. One is to increase NATO's confidence in its capacity to deter Soviet aggression (or Soviet efforts to use the Pact's military forces in the forward area to threaten Western Europe) at the conventional level. The second is corollary to the first: to diminish the degree of NATO's dependence on an early resort to tactical nuclear weapons. The present Western MBFR approach has been designed to contribute to the accomplishment of both of these objectives.

12. The Western proposal for the removal of a Soviet tank army of 5 divisions, including 68,000 troops and 1,700 tanks, and a common ceiling on ground and air manpower would, if achieved, put the two sides essentially at parity in military manpower in the area. Given NATO's technological abilities, this should provide NATO with greater confidence in its conventional capabilities relative to those of the Pact in the area. The reductions of and limitations on US tactical nuclear capabilities are in line with the de-emphasis being sought in this area and were offered to help justify the substantially greater Eastern reductions in manpower that will be required to reach common manpower levels.

13. MBFR is only one of the potential contributors to the accomplishment of these two objectives. Its unique role lies in its potential to affect the size--and to some degree--the composition of the Pact forces

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facing NATO in ways advantageous to the NATO position. Through internal NATO programs (such as standardization and interoperability), the NATO Allies can of their own volition decide to strengthen and improve NATO forces; only through MBFR can the Allies cause the Warsaw Pact forces confronting NATO to become smaller. The rub, of course, is what it costs in NATO forces to bring about the diminution of Pact forces, and whether the deal is worth it.

14. In this connection, let us note that any MBFR agreement will affect the two categories of direct participants--those resident in the delineated area, and those with troops stationed in the area--in fundamentally different ways: stationed forces redeploy; indigenous forces disarm.

a. When the forces of the USSR, the US, the UK, and Canada are withdrawn, there will be no obligation either to reduce or to limit them in their respective homelands. This means the Soviets can keep ground and air forces of any size, without limit, in the Soviet Union immediately bordering Poland.

b. By contrast, when the forces of West Germany and the Benelux, and Poland, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany are reduced, they must be in some manner demobilized and the entire ground and air forces will be limited at the residual levels.

c. In short, any agreement to reduce and limit military personnel (no matter how small the reduction) in the delineated area will result in some contractual limit on all ground and air force manpower of West Germany and the Benelux, while at the same time Soviet forces in the USSR are free to increase.

15. An MBFR agreement that resulted in the withdrawal of substantial numbers of Soviet forces from Central Europe could diminish the Pact's ability confidently to plan and execute an attack with little warning and increase NATO's potential for timely detection of possible Pact attack. Withdrawal of 68,000 Soviets and 1,700 tanks from Central Europe would decrease Soviet ground force and tank strength opposite NATO by about 15 percent. It is the Soviet forces in East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, which constitute about half of the Pact's active-duty ground forces in the area, that most directly pose the threat of sudden attack on NATO. A 15 percent cut in their present size would lessen whatever confidence the Soviets now have in the ability of the remaining forces--without augmentation--successfully to launch and exploit a sudden attack. Furthermore, any effort to augment these forces once reduced (either through activation of indigenous reserves within the delineated area or by movement of units from the USSR) would generate detectable activity in advance of an attack.

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16. This said, let me note some of the problems raised by the negotiations and the possibility of an East-West agreement to reduce and limit general purpose forces in Central Europe.

a. The lengthy negotiations, together with the uncertainty as to the timing and nature of the outcome (or even if there will be an outcome), are complicating US and NATO future force planning. In particular, the decision to offer reductions and limits on US nuclear armaments complicates the planning process. For example, some US Army manpower and resources are tied up in [redacted] that are no longer needed but have thus far been retained in Europe to avoid dropping the level of warheads from which the US would reduce if the East accepts the offer. For another example, the question whether to give later production models of the F-15 a nuclear capability runs into the US offer to reduce and limit nuclear-capable aircraft in the area. For these and other reasons, some have questioned whether NATO should put a time limit on its December 1975 nuclear offer to the East.

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b. There is concern (expressed, for example, by Senator Bartlett) that an MBFR agreement might produce a "euphoria" about the state of East-West relations that would inhibit or undercut the willingness of the West Europeans to support their defense efforts at the proper level. This concern is tied to the feeling that the Allies have the resources to do more on behalf of NATO's conventional capabilities than they are now doing.

c. For various political and military reasons, the significant unit of account in MBFR is the individual soldier. Aggregated, he becomes "active-duty military manpower." The West proposes the withdrawal of 29,000 US troops and 68,000 Soviets and the East proposes the reduction of 17 percent of NATO and Pact forces; limitations would result in either case. But there is no national technical means available to either side that will enable it directly to count either the number of men who go or the number who remain. In short, verification in MBFR is not at all like the SALT I problems of counting deployed ICBM silos or ABM launchers at Moscow. Solutions are possible, but they will probably require acceptance of lower orders of confidence than we would prefer and they will almost certainly involve arrangements between East and West to cooperate (such as providing lists of units leaving, entering, and remaining in the area).

d. "Active-duty military manpower" has proved an elusive quantity to define. The East has seized on this to argue that NATO's definition is unfair to the East. Their major argument is that the East has military manpower performing functions (mostly rear area support) that are done by civilians in the West. After considerable prodding by the West, the East tabled

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manpower data in June 1976. The East's figures--805,000 ground forces and 987,000 ground plus air--are at variance with Western estimates--about 950,000 and 1,150,000 respectively. At this stage we do not know the reasons for these discrepancies, but we suspect they may be due in part to an Eastern application of the "civilian" argument. The next round may provide an opportunity to explore this problem in depth with the East.

The Eastern View of the Talks

17. MBFR began in 1973 essentially because the US and other allies, faced with the prospect of unilateral cuts in European force levels, insisted that the East would have to discuss mutual force reductions if the West was to participate in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Faced with this demand, the East came to Vienna, but with no intention of letting anything happen in MBFR until CSCE was wrapped up. It didn't. Reductions were the name of the game, the Soviets thought, and why should they be asked to pay for the reductions in NATO forces that, by waiting for Congress and parliaments to act, they could get for free.

18. But a number of things have happened since the talks began in 1973. For one thing, the Soviets have come to recognize that limitations are the major value to be gained from an agreement, that reductions are secondary, and that they can only get limitations through an agreement. In August 1975, the Helsinki Accords were signed, putting an end (at least temporarily) to Soviet preoccupation with CSCE and facilitating a new Soviet focus on results in MBFR. On the other side of the equation, Angola and the US withdrawal from Vietnam occurred and Western interest in military detente waned. Moreover, in the US, Congressional pressure for unilateral cuts in US troop levels in Europe declined greatly.

19. To sum up, Soviet interest in an affirmative outcome to the MBFR talks has undergone a transformation since the time the talks began. Soviet interest has been on a rising curve, particularly since the summer of 1975, while Western interest has tended to decline. I believe it is true that the level of Soviet interest in pushing the talks through to an outcome now is greater than the Western interest in an outcome. This means, among other things, that the Allies, having agreed in December 1975 to tabling the proposal to reduce and limit US nuclear elements, are not likely to be interested in taking any significant new steps until the East is seen clearly to have made a substantive move in the West's direction. It also means that the East--impelled by its interest--may act to take such a move. Already we have the example of the East tabling data on its own forces in response to a Western demand, despite historical Soviet resistance to such a step.

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20. While I think it is important to recognize the degree of interest that the Soviets now bring to the talks, I don't mean to suggest that this interest necessarily will suffice to make early agreement along the lines of the Western approach possible. As seen by the East, the Western approach results in a formidable list of obstacles to agreement:

- a. Western insistence on disproportionate reductions in manpower;
- b. Western failure to provide assurances as to the size and timing of reductions by the other Western direct participants in the second phase; *46  
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- c. Western exclusion from reductions of air force manpower and of other armaments, including all armaments held by the other Western direct participants;
- d. Western demands for a collective ceiling for Western participants while requiring the Soviets to accept a national ceiling;
- e. Western proposal that the US would reduce by individuals without their armaments but the Soviets would reduce a tank army with all its armaments; and
- f. Western demands for flexibility that would permit the US to introduce nuclear delivery vehicles other than nuclear-capable aircraft and SSMs (for example, cruise missiles) into the area, and would enable the Allies to increase the number of their nuclear delivery systems.

Assessment of Talks to Present

21. What have the talks accomplished so far? Well, for one thing, they have helped to stabilize NATO force levels in the delineated area since 1973. The force levels of all the NATO direct participants in the area have remained pretty much the same since the talks began. The forces of NATO members not directly participating have been more susceptible to cuts (for example, the Italian ground forces).

22. The talks have also given the US a better idea of what is of concern to the Allies as well as to the East. We understand, for example, much better than before the depth of Allied opposition to any limitation on armaments and combat equipment that might result from an agreement. And on the Eastern side, we understand the intensity of Eastern interest in achieving some limitation on the forces of West Germany. In addition, a great deal of the necessary work preliminary to drafting an agreement has been done. More is in prospect in the round beginning in February 1977 when the two sides start to address in earnest the definition of the forces in the area

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and the data relevant to them. In sum, the participants are in position to begin real bargaining to hammer out an agreement when the basic political decision to do so is made by each side.

23. So far, I would submit, neither side has made that political decision. Clearly the Allies have not. In Tula on 18 January 1977, Brezhnev said, "We would like to reach an early agreement on the reduction of armed forces and armaments in Central Europe." We may see whether that means the East has made such a decision when the talks reconvene in February.

24. The subject matter of MBFR--the general purpose forces of NATO and the Warsaw Pact in Central Europe--is at the core of each participating nation's sense of survival. This is particularly true of the Western European participants as they consider the implications of entering into a contract to reduce and limit their forces, with a Soviet Union whose forces in the USSR would not be either reduced or limited.

25. The Allies probably believe that military power in Central Europe is fairly evenly shared at present and that, taken all in all, neither side has a preponderance. But this Allied belief--and the willingness to act on it--is critically dependent on a continued US military presence in Western Europe and active US involvement in its defense. The West Europeans live in perpetual anxiety over the fact that, however unlikely it may now seem, the US nevertheless could leave the area taking its forces with it, but the Soviet Union will be there always.

26. For the countries of both sides, the stakes involved in any serious agreement are high and the readiness of these countries to enter into contractual relationships is correspondingly low. The potential benefits of an agreement are still not seen by either side clearly to outweigh the potential disadvantages (although, as I have suggested above, I think the East is closer to having this view than the West). There is little prospect for an agreement in the near term. Our experience to date suggests, however, that an acceptable agreement is possible, if the US and its allies decide they want to have one.

*Bruce C. Clarke, Jr.*

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