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THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

Doc #133

19

8 NOV 1977

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Getting Something for the Neutron Bomb: ER for SS-20?

The purpose of this memorandum is to argue that if the U.S. decides to make an arms control initiative involving ER weapons, it should not be to "put ER into MBFR" for 600 tanks or anything else, but instead the U.S. should state that we will not deploy ER weapons (to Europe or anywhere else) so long as the USSR does not deploy the SS-X-20.

(By the way of background, we estimate that the SS-20 is in series production and that several bases are under construction--4 in the Western USSR and 3 near China--but that none are deployed yet. We would be able to detect initial deployment of missiles to bases within a short period, though there would be continuing uncertainties as to the number deployed. Given a decision this month to produce the ER warhead for Lance, production could begin in October 1978 and NATO deployment several months later.)

This approach has several advantages.

- It is good arms control. It would dramatize your commitment to far-reaching but solidly mutual arms control--and to avoid both unreciprocated unilateralism and mindless deployment of every available new weapon. In particular, it invites each side to forego deployment of a type of theater nuclear weapon that has received wide public attention, that represents a technological step forward from existing capabilities, and that has assumed a political importance out of proportion to its military significance.

- It is simple. So long as the Soviets don't deploy the SS-20 (which we would detect promptly), we won't deploy ER weapons. Strictly speaking, no verbal agreement by the Soviets is needed, merely that they refrain from action.

- It offers, by contrast to introducing ER weapons into MBFR, a timely arms control aspect to our ER position. NATO agreement on any MBFR position inevitably takes a long time. Moreover, the chronic motionlessness of MBFR means that to deploy ER weapons but offer to withdraw them later by MBFR agreement is effectively the same as deciding to deploy them with all the political problems attendant thereto. On the other hand, if we delay deploying ER until some

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resolution of an MBFR offer including them, we would in effect have decided not to deploy them. The no-ER-if-no-SS-20 offer by contrast is immediately effective. Moreover, it seeks a Soviet price proportionate to the furor over "neutron bombs." If ER is only worth moving 600 tanks from East Germany to the Soviet frontier, it's hardly worth deploying at all.

- It would break the link between production of ER weapons (a unilateral US choice) and their deployment (a NATO issue). If the Soviets (or the Europeans) raise the issue of barring production, we could expand our offer to cover barring production of both ER weapons and SS-20s--though this would require explicit agreement and present certain verification uncertainties. (We have already sought in SALT a ban on production of SS-16 components.) I recognize that this severability of the link could cause the Europeans to press us to produce ER weapons without their publicly advocating deployment, thus shifting all the heat to us (that is, you). However, it seems to me that in the context of this offer (ER for SS-20) the heat is shared with the Soviets instead, a preferable situation. The following point is also relevant to this question.

- It would be attractive to the Allies. It would put a viable arms control option into the ER debate which might ease their way to endorsing deployment if the Soviets refuse--and it would advance an arms control means of dealing with the SS-20, the exclusion of which from SALT has been a source of NATO criticism.

- It would pose an awkward dilemma to the Soviets. They have mounted a world-wide propaganda denunciation of the "neutron bomb." If they fail to accept a U.S. offer to forego its deployment, they undermine their credibility. If they argue that barring ER weapons deployment is too small a U.S. step to offset no SS-20 deployment, they weaken the argument that the "neutron bomb" is a quantitatively new horror in nuclear weapons. If the Soviets claim lack of reciprocity, we could offer to make the limits fully reciprocal, i.e., no Soviet ER weapon and no U.S. mobile IRBMs--while noting that to trade (avowedly) nonexistent Soviet ER weapons for our ongoing ER program would be as unbalanced as a US "trade" of a nonexistent mobile IRBM for the on-going Soviet SS-20. If (as is more likely) they argue that the SS-20 is a less dangerous weapon which should not be linked to the "horrible" neutron bomb, they lay themselves open to us pointing out that the MIRV warheads of the SS-20 are far more effective than ER weapons at destroying both people and buildings--and, for that matter, tanks. If the Soviets claim our offer is not verifiable by NTM, we can offer to consider any verification proposal they wish--applied to SS-20s (and Soviet ER) as well as our ER weapons.

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In short, a dramatic initiative of this kind would be good arms control if accepted and may offer a way out of our current ER stalemate, by giving the allies a politically viable way to support deployment if the sovlets reject the offer. Therefore, I suggest that, as we consider arms control aspects of our ER problems, we focus on this more far-reaching and, I believe, sounder proposal.

Harold Brown

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ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

THRU: THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE (ISA) *02*

SUBJECT: Getting Something for the Neutron Bomb: ER for SS-20? -
Action Memorandum

Attached, as you requested, is a memo for the President proposing that if we are to make an arms control proposal respecting ER weapons, it be to trade not deploying them for no deployment of the SS-20, as opposed to placing ER into the morass of MBFR. (You may wish to discuss this with Bill Perry, Don Cotter, and General Brown, but I believe speed in raising this project is important if we are to broaden the focus of the analysis.)

Attachment

Walter Slocombe

Walter Slocombe
Director, DoD SALT Task Force

A.B. A very interesting idea.

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