

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING

Doc # 295

June 4, 1979

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(13)

Time and Place: 3:00-4:20 p.m., The Cabinet Room

(14)

Subject: US Strategic Arms Policy and US Soviet Relations

Participants:

Office of the Secretary of Defense  
Chief, RDD, ESD, WHS  
Date: 23 Nov 2015 Authority: EO 13526  
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Reason: \_\_\_\_\_  
MDR: 15 -M- 0497

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The President

The Vice President

State

OSD

Cyrus Vance

Harold Brown  
Charles Duncan  
Deputy Secretary

JCS

DCI

General David Jones

Admiral Stansfield Turner

OMB

ACDA

James McIntyre

George Seignious

OSTP

White House

Frank Press

Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski  
David Aaron  
Hamilton Jordan  
Jody Powell

NSC

Victor Utgoff

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SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

The meeting began with a summary by Dr. Brzezinski of seven key conclusions concerning the overall strategic balance that he had drawn from the Comprehensive Net Assessment - 78 study, and the recent PRC meeting on the DOD Consolidated Guidance. These conclusions are:

- 1) The US continues to enjoy non-military advantages, some of which are growing. 2) The US offsets Soviet military power only with help of our allies; therefore,

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~~Review June 4, 1999~~

~~Classified by Z. Brzezinski~~

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Western alliance cohesion cannot be jeopardized. 3) Regional military balances are unsteady; trends outside NATO are uncertain-to-adverse. 4) Trends in the strategic nuclear area are distinctly adverse. 5) We shall face a period of "apparent insufficiency" in strategic power in the early 1980s. 6) The strategic gap of the early 1980s could produce damaging political perceptions and encourage assertive Soviet behavior, and 7) These trends need to be reversed in order to a) deter assertive Soviet behavior in the 1980s, b) provide the US a position for stable crisis bargaining, and c) give the US the survivable and enduring capabilities necessary to maintain control of strategic war should deterrence fail. (TS)

The principals then commented on these conclusions starting with Secretary Vance who agreed with all of them with two exceptions. First, he said that he would characterize trends outside NATO as only uncertain. Second, he thought that our strategic power in the early 80's should be characterized as roughly equivalent to that of the Soviet Union, and that characterizing ourselves as inferior would be damaging and dangerous. (TS)

Secretary Brown said that while CNA was in some cases pessimistic, specifically in the strategic forces area, he thought the assessment was too optimistic overall. He discounted our growing popularity with other nations as a marginal advantage by noting that the Soviets may win concessions by playing on the fears others have of them. He also noted that comparing the resources and gross military efforts of the U.S. and its allies to those of the Soviets and their allies could be misleading since our column includes countries such as Iran and China and since the various countries military capabilities don't add together in an operational sense. He further stated that as a result of the long standing greater investment effort made by the Soviets, by 1985 they will have greater strength than the U.S. in almost every military category, and that we should prepare ourselves to live with this. Finally, Secretary Brown remarked that there are some bright spots in the technology balance though we must contend with the possibility that the Soviets large R&D efforts might result in some revolutionary capability. (TS)

General Jones noted the dilemma involved in trying not to talk down our strength while still expressing the real concerns that he and the other Chiefs had about where we are going. He commented that he has never seen his fellow chiefs or the allies so concerned and that the latest NIE's sound pessimistic, which is worrisome given their record of

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being proven optimistic. General Jones said that the Soviets may be more assertive in the early 80's and that he expects this period to be less stable. He stated his belief that the Soviets could probably win a conventional victory in Europe, they just can't be certain of it. He also commented on our greater vulnerabilities, particularly given our dependence on foreign oil. Finally, General Jones remarked that his colleagues have told him that he is incapable of expressing their concerns strongly enough. (TS)

George Seignious remarked that perceptions of Soviet superiority must be handled carefully or they will have a major impact on our arms control efforts, and Admiral Turner stated that he supports Secretary Brown's assessment of Dr. Brzezinski's seven conclusions. (TS)

The President remarked that much of the perceptions problem mentioned was created by people in the room. He noted that a group of deep thinkers he had assembled to look at the question of perceptions, as well as a group of 11 members of the house he had met with recently, agreed that we are creating a problem with excessive concentration on our weaknesses. He remarked that, however DOD may testify on the hill, the stories resulting in the press are overly pessimistic. He suggested that we should do what we can to let people know we have a strong and permanent government, and we should keep sight of Soviet weaknesses such as multiple adversaries -- a situation we don't face. (TS)

Dr. Brzezinski proposed that the discussions of the TNF issue and the early 80's imbalance problem be put off until another meeting in late June or early July. He recommended that Secretary Brown prepare specific TNF options and specific short term fixes for the early 80's for discussion in that meeting, which was agreed. (TS)

The President stated that he has decided to notify our allies that we are ready to take a leadership role on TNF, and that we have told them that we will try to accommodate their political needs and attempt to get them to support each other on this issue. He also remarked that he will support moving forward on this issue when Chancellor Schmidt makes his upcoming visit. (TS)

In his opening comments on the strategic modernization issues, the President expressed concern about the fact that the various options were compared to each other primarily in terms of their counterforce capability. He suggested that we should pay more attention to the capabilities of bombers and ALCM's, and commented that the group did not appear to share sufficiently his concerns about the possible effects on SALT. (TS)

Secretary Brown said that the President should try to make these decisions before the summit and introduced the two broad options defining the first decision -- Option A -- which reestablishes a survivable land based missile force to create a fully survivable Triad -- and Option B -- which increases the sizes of all three legs of the Triad, but depends upon the larger capabilities of the SLBM and bomber forces to deter attacks on a vulnerable ICBM force. He noted that Option A would allow later decisions on the production levels which would be compatible with future SALT reductions, and that Option B would be less compatible since it requires more force building. (TS)

Dr. Brzezinski noted the importance of announcing any decision in favor of B before the summit in order to avoid any impression that it had resulted from discussions with the Soviets, and he also noted that the missile decision can be made. (TS)

The President responded that the missile decision was relatively easy -- it was the basing mode decision that was difficult. He then said that he had not heard of the covered trench concept until late the previous night. He expressed great skepticism about its verifiability -- a point which Secretary Vance supported -- and stated that he had recently written to President Brezhnev assuring him that the U.S. would not deploy a mobile system that was not verifiable. (TS)

Secretary Brown described several features of the covered trench that should make it verifiable. He also stated that an open trench variant deployed on DOD land was possible though it would pose some special problems such as requiring the trenches to be fenced off, and wouldn't be quite so good militarily. The open trench could ultimately be covered if expansion of the Soviet threat were to occur. (TS)

The President suggested that this concept sounded more reasonable and then noted that the broad options Secretary Brown has presented pose a number of decisions that he isn't prepared to make. For example, he doesn't yet know how many Trident subs we might want, or whether we should proceed with the Trident II missile. He also remarked that the \$75-80B costs Secretary Brown is quoting are going to come as a big shock to the Congress, particularly when the numbers discussed so far in public have been more like \$25B. Secretary Brown responded by noting that purchases of a number of systems over a number of years were being discussed, and that some of our domestic programs would sound very expensive if they were similarly aggregated. He also compared the

costs in 1980 dollars of the original Minuteman and Polaris forces to the corresponding programs being considered today to demonstrate that today's programs are not unreasonably expensive. (TS)

Dr. Brzezinski then commented that the whole problem cannot be solved in this meeting, and asked if the President was prepared to make the missile decision. (U)

The President responded that giving up on land based systems would be a serious political blow to the country that would be worth a great deal of effort to avoid. He also stated that cancellation of the MX would be a similar blow given the mystique that had been built up over it during the past several years. He said that he was not ready to decide the entire mix issue however, and that while he liked the open trench concept, the basing question is complex and he must analyze it further. He also noted that the environmental questions are going to be very tough. He then summed up his position by saying that he was ready to make a preliminary decision in favor of maintaining the Triad, and proceeding with one of the larger MX missiles. (TS) ✓

Jim McIntyre then made several comments to the effect that he was concerned about cost and schedule uncertainties with some elements of the Option A mix, and that he saw serious environmental problems with the trench concept. (TS)

The President said that we should prepare a fall back position on the basing issue to hedge against the possibility of insurmountable difficulties. He also remarked that he hoped that scare tactics would not be used to sell the program to the Congress, and he reminded the principals that we must work to solve the perceptions problem. (TS)

Secretary Vance responded to this last point by suggesting that we attack our SALT critics head on. Dr. Brzezinski warned that while we must say we are strong, we can't close our eyes to the possibilities 6 years from now. Mr. Powell remarked that he sees an overall unease and that we must give the people an honest and frank assessment of the problems we see. (TS)

A second meeting to continue the discussion was scheduled for 6:00 p.m. on June 5th. (U)

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*No summary of conclusions  
was written for that evening  
meeting - see detailed minutes*