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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING
September 5, 1979

Time and Place: 2:00 P.M., White House Cabinet Room

Subject: M-X Basing

Participants:

The President
The Vice President

State
Warren Christopher

Defense
Harold Brown

JCS
General David Jones

DCI
Admiral Stansfield Turner

OMB
James McIntyre

ADCA
George Seignious

OSTP
Frank Press

White House
Hamilton Jordan
Zbigniew Brzezinski
David Aaron

NSC
Victor Utgoff

Office of the Secretary of Defense
Chief, RDD, ESD, WHS

Date: 20 SEP 2016 Authority: EO 13526 + 5 U.S.C. §552

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Reason: _____

MDR: 15 -M- 1626

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Chief, Records & Declass Div, WHS
Date: SEP 20 2016

Detailed Minutes

The President opened the meeting by stating that the agenda would consist of two topics -- M-X basing, and a short discussion of the question of Soviet troops in Cuba. Dr. Brzezinski added that another NSC meeting would be held soon on the related subjects of C3I, targeting, and theater nuclear forces. Dr. Brzezinski then asked Harold Brown to explain his recommendations on M-X basing. (S)

After the President's comment that he had read all the background memoranda he had received on M-X, Harold Brown summarized the main features of his preferred basing system, referring to a model of it

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on the table. Harold's main points were:

- the basing system would maintain uncertainty about the location of the missiles by rotating them among shelters every several months;
- given this uncertainty, the Soviets would have to attack all the M-X shelters;
- the number of shelters had been chosen to make attack of the M-X system by the projected Soviet threat very disadvantageous, if not impossible;
- there were a number of alternatives for responding to expansion of the Soviet threat;
- that he believes we can stay ahead of the threat, though this will be more difficult without the limitations on the Soviet threat contained in the SALT II Treaty;
- that the Soviets would find competing with us (to make M-X vulnerable against our efforts to keep it survivable) an unattractive proposition, particularly because the only way they could expand their threat at a cost comparable to the offsetting efforts we could make, would be through further investment in vulnerable silo based forces, and finally;
- that the disadvantages the Soviets would see in such a competition would deter it. (C)

Finally, Harold noted that Stan Turner has a different view as to how the Soviets might view this competition. (C)

The President noted that Jim McIntyre had told him that the overall cost estimated by DOD for M-X is 20% too low. The President also questioned the need for the proposed dash capability, and for shelters hardened to 600 psi. He asked whether we could maintain options for these features but not commit ourselves to them at the outset. (C)

Jim McIntyre added that he was skeptical about the feasibility of quick movement of so large a vehicle as the M-X transporter, and particularly, of stopping it quickly once it got moving. Jim said he was prepared to discuss the cost question, but suggested that Harold open that discussion. (C)

Harold Brown said that \$33 billion is his estimate -- which is slightly above the \$30 billion cost estimated by the Air Force. Both these costs are in 1980 dollars. Harold noted that while these amounts are large, they should be compared to the roughly \$40 billion it would cost to replicate the POSEIDON or MINUTEMAN forces today. Harold admitted that, historically, costs for major systems have risen as the programs have progressed from their initial stages to deployment.

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Generally, however, most of these cost increases are associated with add-ons that become attractive as the system development progresses. (U)

In response to McIntyre's comments on the feasibility of building so large and agile a transporter, Harold noted that its horsepower was only twice that of the M-X tank, and stated his conviction that construction of this vehicle is feasible. He stated that he was very much against leaving out the dash capability -- that it would deter Soviet efforts to develop means for discovering which shelters contain missiles. (U)

The President asked if we would want to move the M-X missiles upon detection of a Soviet attack. Dr. Brzezinski answered that this would depend on how you want to respond. Secretary Brown added that suspiciously small attacks might suggest that the missiles should be moved (a point that Stan Turner supported). (U)

The Vice President noted that without the dash capability, you would not be able to shift missile locations if you wanted to, upon warning of a Soviet attack. He noted that the ability to quickly shift positions of the missiles is one of the best arguments on the Hill for adopting this particular basing scheme. (U)

The President asked if there is a comparable ground vehicle in existence. Harold Brown answered the proposed vehicle is similar to a locomotive. The President responded that Harold Brown's response suggests that he doesn't know the answer. Harold responded that he did indeed know that comparable tracked vehicles exist. The President added that strip mining equipment is somewhat comparable. (U)

Jim McIntyre noted that OMB had presented the President with an alternative basing plan that he thought would be a safer choice for the President. He noted that we will need good answers now for the questions raised about Harold's proposal, or we will be in trouble later on the Hill. Harold Brown asked what particular questions McIntyre was referring to. (U)

Jim McIntyre said that he was skeptical about whether a million pound vehicle could run on gravel. He added that Harold's figure of \$2.1 billion for 10,000 miles of gravel road seemed optimistic, and that these roads would cost more to maintain than Harold had assumed. Finally Jim said that his staff believes that some shelters had not counted in Harold's costing. (U)

Harold Brown argued that Jim's cost figures reflect add-ons that DOD did not see as necessary, and that OMB was costing the system for a larger number of shelters than DOD believes is necessary in view of the projected threat. Jim McIntyre countered that even the basic system that DOD was talking about was priced \$5 billion too low. Harold asked whether this was a "not to exceed" figure -- Jim responded that it was a best estimate. (U)

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The President asked Jim McIntyre if OMB had developed independent estimates of shelters and road costs. Jim McIntyre responded that they had not, and that their cost estimates were based on comparing various components of M-X to similar but not identical things. The President then said that even if we assume Jim McIntyre's figures of \$41 billion is correct, what can we do about it? Jim McIntyre stated that \$5 billion should be added to DOD's figures in order to achieve a realistic figure for the Hill -- \$3 billion of this figure is required for mass simulators, and the rest to achieve the postulated dash capability. Harold Brown asked what advantage there was to stating such an estimate? (U)

The President commented to Jim McIntyre that he presumed the Defense Department had made a detailed cost estimate and what he is hearing now is that OMB has not done this. Jim McIntyre responded that DOD cost group is the source for his estimates. (U)

Harold Brown said that there may be some honest differences in judgment, but that he does not believe that the DOD figure is low. He argued that the costing has been more honest and careful than say that done for Trident, and in addition these costs are based on some testing. (U)

Dr. Brzezinski noted that there is no real alternative to M-X even at \$38 billion. The President agreed, and stated that the question is: "do we hurt our credibility by being either lower or higher than our best estimate"? Dr. Brzezinski suggested that we should take a further look at this question. (U)

Harold Brown remarked that we are going to simply have to admit to some uncertainty in our estimates of the cost of the system. The President said that perhaps we should simply say that the DOD estimate is \$33 billion, and some say the cost may end up being somewhat more. General Jones remarked that the incentives of the involved bureaucracies suggest that we should start with the lowest reasonable number. He pointed out the problems inherent in discussions of costs in constant dollars, and suggested that we don't overemphasize the confidence we have in the cost estimates. (U)

The President remarked that if a low figure is used, DOD may assume that more money will be available for other types of forces, which will lead to problems. He suggested that the appropriate course of action would be to go with the best estimate, but recognize the degree of uncertainty we have about it. Jim McIntyre proposed that OMB and DOD take another look at the systems costs. He noted that he was not interested in signing up for another program with significantly higher costs than originally estimated, such as we had done with the program of action associated with the Panama Canal Treaty. (U)

The President then said, setting aside the question of its exact cost, this basing mode looks better than those proposed previously. He suggested that the discussion turn to the question of basing mode compatibility with SALT, particularly with respect to verifiability, and system expandability if SALT breaks down. (U)

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Dr. Brzezinski suggested that Stan Turner and George Seignious comment on the question of verification. Admiral Turner responded by summarizing the main points on verification that he had made in the background paper he had submitted for the meeting. In making these points, Admiral Turner argued that 1) given the appropriate verification provisions, limits on the numbers of M-X type missiles in the system would be adequately verifiable by the Soviets, or by us, if they were to build the same system, and 2) while the Soviets might be able to covertly deploy extra smaller ICBM's in such a basing system, they are not likely to view this possibility as an attractive option. (S)

The President said that we need to understand how much notice DOD would want for opening the shelter systems for verification. He said that he wanted to avoid being at odds with DOD in future negotiations with Brezhnev. (S)

Harold Brown said that the verification plugs could be pulled in a day, and that this length of time should be acceptable, if the system clearly has no cross country capability. He noted that there was the question of how many shelters should be opened simultaneously. He thought that the appropriate thing to do would be to open all the shelters in any given cluster. (U)

The President then asked if the sort of thing DOD had in mind was perhaps a capability to open 10% of all the M-X shelters with 24 hours notice, and keep them open for say 48 hours? Harold Brown responded that opening a total of 5% at any given time was more what he had in mind. General Jones said that he thought it was important that we be able to simultaneously open all the shelters in any valley. The President asked if he could count on a capability to open 10% within 24 hours for a period of 48 hours. Both General Jones and Harold Brown agreed to give the system this capability. (C)

Admiral Turner said that the length of time we would want the shelters open in a similar Soviet basing scheme would depend on cloud cover conditions. He noted that in his view, the ideal way to cheat with this system, would be to build extra small missiles. The President said that whatever we would demand from the Soviets in the way of verification provisions in this kind of system we must make sure to provide to them. George Seignious said that cooperative verification arrangements are clearly needed for this system, and we will have to tell the Soviets what we will be doing to insure verification. Admiral Turner added that we would have to carefully time our challenges against any similar Soviet missile basing system if we expect to meet our exact verification requirements, and we will have to watch for phony excuses for not meeting our challenges. (S)

The President said: "I may have a different concept of how this is done, but I thought the idea was to open all the shelters in a given area within say 24 hours notice for a period of perhaps 48 hours. If we are prepared to do this kind of thing, then we can demand the same of them." He then asked DOD, "can you open all the shelters in a valley in such a simultaneous manner?" Harold Brown answered that

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this should clearly be possible with enough cranes. Admiral Turner said that CIA estimated that the proposed system would allow opening all the shelters in a valley within a day. David Aaron noted that Stan appeared to be arguing for a quick challenge to avoid the possibility of slipping missiles out of the cluster of shelters to be examined and into others. (S)

Frank Press asked why Soviets would see an advantage in placing extra small missiles within this kind of basing system if they were to build one? Admiral Turner responded that missiles need supporting infrastructure which could be found there. The President then asked Admiral Turner the key question: "Do you want to change anything in DOD's design?" Admiral Turner responded no -- he just wants to arrange proper challenge procedures. Dr. Brzezinski then asked why the Soviets would spend the equivalent of \$40 billion to build a system of this kind, which so obviously takes great care to minimize the potential for cheating, if their purpose were to cheat? (S).

The President then turned to the question of the ability of the system to expand to counter; larger Soviet threats. He noted that if we made no effort to build a survivable replacement for Minuteman, we would be worse off than if we ended up in a race to keep M-X survivable against an expanded Soviet threat. He noted that the question would seem to be: Is there an alternative basing scheme that is better from the point of view of our ability to stay ahead of expanded Soviet threats? (U)

George Seignious noted the danger inherent in thinking of this basing system as "sponge" for Soviet warheads. He also said that we should not exaggerate the survivability of the system. Finally, he argued that a Trident II missile should be pursued as a hedge against the possibility that the M-X program would not work out as currently conceived. (S)

The President said "I think the Soviets have thought they could win the strategic arms race. In my view, M-X, plus other improvements we are making will convince them otherwise -- will make them more willing to negotiate. Without M-X, the Soviets will whip [us] -- something the US has been slow to realize". (U)

Harold Brown said we are not just building up a force of 2,000 warheads, what we are doing is decoupling the numbers of warheads on our side from their survivability. The key to understanding the potential for a race between Soviet efforts to expand their capability to target M-X and our efforts to maintain M-X survivability is that, unless the Soviets go mobile, they will have to worry about survivability themselves. For that matter, if they push too hard, we can conceivably put M-X's in silos ourselves. (S)

George Seignious noted that the prospect of this system will change the context of the SALT negotiations in 1982. We will be moving toward a system that will be able to destroy the Soviet's missile silos. (S)

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Harold Brown noted that if the Soviets build 20,000 RVs, that implies no SALT, and that we should consider ballistic missile defense

systems for M-X. We should also realize that we will have the option of expanding our ongoing cruise missile programs. (C)

George Seignious said that, in view of the uncertainty of the situation we are looking at, we should not lock ourselves too tightly into the idea of exactly 4600 M-X shelters, it might be more, and it might be less. (Presumably in response to Seignious' remark about the possibility of fewer than 4600 shelters), the President said that it would be a mistake to view M-X as a bargaining chip. (C)

The President then remarked that he was prepared to go ahead with the system. Dr. Brzezinski then asked how the President's decision ought to be announced? (C)

The President asked if, setting aside the cost uncertainty, and assuming that suitable arrangements for cooperative verification can be negotiated, and that we are satisfied concerning the possibility of a dramatic expansion of the Soviet threat, whether anyone saw any other issues that seemed to suggest a need for a different basing alternative? (U)

Admiral Turner responded that the Soviets may make us pay heavily for the continuation of the implicit limits on numbers of RVs that is embodied in SALT II. He went on to say that a strong US commitment to this system could thus be particularly expensive. The President asked if the costs to each side of competing (in terms of an expanded threat and the adjustments to M-X required to meet this expansion) are comparable? Stan Turner responded yes. (C)

The Vice President asked if Harold Brown hadn't said that the Soviets would pay more than us to run such a race? Harold Brown responded that the real drawback with the Soviets in running their cheapest race would be that they would be investing further in vulnerable silo-based missiles. (U)

Admiral Turner noted that with this step we are entering the world of mobile ICBM's, which he believes in the long run will not be verifiable. The President countered that it was his understanding that the system being proposed would be verifiable given provisions costing a tiny fraction of the overall cost of the system. Harold Brown added that the verification provisions embodied in the system add no more than \$3 to \$4 billion to the overall system cost. He then noted that while Admiral Turner's point was a good one, he derived a different conclusion. Specifically, the inevitable vulnerability of fixed silo based systems implies a need to go mobile. But if mobile strategic missiles are going to be introduced, we should set the standard for verification of such systems. The President noted that we have committed ourselves to making mobiles verifiable. He noted his letter to Brezhnev on this subject, and Brezhnev's reply. (C)

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The President then said he accepts this basing mode but requires that any declaration concerning its costs, verifiability, or ability to cope with expanded Soviet threats must be reviewed by the involved agencies and approved by him personally. He said that they must all agree on a single position on each of these issues, and that Harold should take the lead in developing each position. (S)

Dr. Brzezinski said that we need background material for explaining this decision, including appropriate Q&As, by Friday. The President noted that we probably can't explore the cost question by Friday, but should develop tentative positions on the issues as rapidly as possible. Dr. Brzezinski noted that, in view of the closeness of the Summit with Brezhnev, we really need to have this material in hand by COB Thursday, September 6. Admiral Turner remarked that the group really didn't have major differences bearing on the appropriateness of proceeding with this basing system. Dr. Brzezinski said that we will have an announcement worked out by Friday. The President stated that he would make the announcement, and suggested that it be done at the Pentagon. (S)

Jim McIntyre asked if the need for mass simulators would be resolved by Dr. Brzezinski and the others. The President responded that this system need not include mass simulators initially. (S)

General Jones noted the skepticism on the Hill, to the effect that the President is going ahead for M-X strictly to develop adequate support for SALT. He noted that we should probably ask for legislation to get around unreasonable opposition to the system based on uncertainties or exaggerations of its possible environmental impact. He also remarked that asking for multi-year funding for M-X would improve perceptions of the President's seriousness in seeing this system through. (S)

General Jones also noted that he had been called by Senator Nunn concerning remarks Nunn said were coming from the White House, to the effect that DOD could not effectively spend additional funds over and above the 3% increase the President was already committed to. General Jones remarked that comments of this kind from the White House hurt perceptions of the President's support for an improved defense. (S)

The President responded that to his knowledge the White House was not making statements of the kind Nunn reports, and that he personally had no doubt that DOD could spend more money usefully. (S)

Jim McIntyre remarked that General Jones had raised some good points. He added that we must guard against supporting the notion that is being voiced in some quarters that M-X will never be built. The President responded that you can quote me concerning my determination to see this through. Harold Brown added that as we proceed with this system, we must make certain that people understand that our intention is not to violate the laws protecting the environment. (S)

The President then opened a brief discussion of the question of Soviet troops in Cuba. He said to Admiral Turner that he

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needed a written document laying out our best estimate of how Soviet presence in Cuba had evolved. He said that we need to understand this, and that if there is no data, Admiral Turner should say so. The President went on to remark that he was concerned that the only option identified for responding to the Soviet presence was a gesture toward China. He wondered what a single trip to China by the Secretary of Defense would imply. Harold Brown supported this point by remarking that it would be good if we can add other options. Dr. Brzezinski said that he would feel uncomfortable in making some sort of general vacuous threat to the Soviets. (S)

The President remarked again that he did not want to be in a position where China was the only option. He noted the burden this would put on China, and again called for a broadened set of options. Dr. Brzezinski said that we should work up other options by Friday. Secretary Brown said that we have already tried to identify others, but have not been able to find anything reasonable. Dr. Brzezinski asked if there were some possibility for some direct action against Cuba? The President again reaffirmed the necessity of having other options. (S)

Warren Christopher then remarked that communicating our concerns to the Soviets was complicated by the fact that Dobrinin's father has just died, which would reduce his availability. He noted that Vasev was coming in, but he did not know for what purpose. The President said that "you should tell Vasev that we are deeply concerned, that we have held a NSC meeting on the question of Soviet presence in Cuba, that he should look to a serious response by the US, and that the President was personally involved." (S)

Finally the president said that he approved the PRC's recommendations concerning this issue, and he asked Dr. Brzezinski to expand the specifics in the 4th paragraph of the proposed demarche and that he wanted the demarche toughened up. The meeting was then adjourned. (S)

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