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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Paper for NSC Discussion

As agreed by Bud McFarlane's Senior Arms Control Policy Group, I am forwarding a paper, prepared at my request, to form the basis of Tuesday's NSC discussion. It should elicit a spirited exchange. It is deliberately straightforward. I believe it important that this issue not be obscured by the tendency to produce a watered-down consensus.

Scp

Office of the Secretary of Defense

Chief, RDD, ESD, WHS

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THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Arms Control Strategy

In the last eleven months of his Administration, President Carter abruptly changed his policy towards the Soviet Union, withdrawing the SALT II Treaty from Senate consideration, instituting sanctions in response to the invasion of Afghanistan and proposing 5% real growth in defense spending. But the change came too late to regain the confidence of the American people: the voters in large numbers ignored the new policy by voting against the old. Indeed, Carter's shift seemed to vindicate the criticism that led up to it: by abandoning his established policies and appearing to embrace new and contradictory ones, Carter himself seemed to acknowledge that he had been weak in the face of Soviet strength. Candidate Reagan's steadiness of purpose stood in sharp and winning contrast.

There now remain fewer than five months until the party conventions and only eight before the election. Strategic decisions bearing on our conduct of East-West relations, especially arms control negotiations with the Soviets, must be made soon if President Reagan is to appeal to the electorate on the basis of a clear, coherent philosophy of arms and arms control.

Between now and November it must be a central element of Administration strategy to convey in a consistent manner a sense of the President's approach to East-West relations -- an approach based on the strength of our re-armament coupled with a continuing search for militarily significant, balanced and verifiable arms reduction agreements that diminish the threat to our security and that of our allies.

This Administration has rightly rejected Soviet proposals that would codify their monopoly of intermediate missiles, freeze U.S. forces in urgent need of modernization, and permit the continued growth of Soviet strategic forces. And while we must continue to probe the attitude of the new Soviet leader toward arms control (and his ability to shape Soviet policies), we must not abandon the properly demanding standard for agreement that has distinguished the approach of this administration from that of its predecessors. Above all, we must not permit the merit of our security policy to be tested by whether we achieve

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an arms control agreement or bring the Soviets back to the bargaining table. For try as we might, the Soviet leaders may well seek to deny President Reagan a fair agreement, precisely so that his "failure" to achieve one will damage his re-election prospects and bring into office a Democratic administration, ready to agree to terms more favorable to the Soviets and certain to slow the rebuilding of our defenses.

After all, it is only this President's strategic modernization program that promises to restore America's strategic strength and dissuade the Soviet leadership from the attempt to reach decisive superiority. Opposition to that program has become a central theme of Soviet diplomacy and propaganda. And opposition to much of our modernization program and arms reduction philosophy, together with support for SALT II, the freeze and other arms control measures rejected by the President, has already become a campaign theme of the Democratic Party and its leading candidates. While an agreement manifestly tilted in the Soviets' favor might lure them from their current intransigence, it is most likely that Moscow will do nothing that might help re-elect a President who has mounted the most effective challenge to Soviet power in more than a decade: "Better to wait -- and hope -- for Mondale or Hart."

The Soviets are tough bargainers, even in adversity. If they sense that the Administration is negotiating with one eye on the ballot box (and there will be plenty of commentators to suggest that we are) they will be tougher still. They have shown no sign of letting up on the demand that we remove (or at least halt) INF deployment in Europe as a precondition for a return to the START/INF talks. (In recent days they have repeated this demand to Senators Cohen and Biden, to Brent Scowcroft and the Dartmouth group, and to SPD leader Vogel). Even if they were to return to Geneva, or agree to a summit, it would be risky in the extreme to take such a tactical move as a softening of their basic unyielding position. An acrimonious summit, or an October breakdown of renewed talks might well figure in a Soviet strategy to undermine the President's re-election. (Even Khomeini, who had every reason to believe he had Carter over a barrel, preferred to hold the hostages until Inauguration Day).

It is important for the Administration to make an early judgment as to whether the Soviet government under Chernenko is likely to be more accommodating between now and the election than it has been since President Reagan took office. Our strategy since January has been predicated on the assumption that there is at least a fair chance for an improvement in the U.S.-Soviet relationship, including an arms control agreement on terms that the Reagan Administration could defend. Private diplomatic activity, public pronouncements and our approach to the compliance issue have all been aimed at coaxing the Soviets along a path of accommodation. The result has been disappointing. And while we must explore any genuinely promising opening, we must not drift toward November in the hope that a late break-through will obviate

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, the need for a re-assertion of this Administration's record and philosophy.*

If we judge that there is little prospect that the Soviets will become more tractable in coming months, we should develop now a strategy reflecting that judgement. And, far from using a muffled voice on the need for firmness and perseverance in dealing with the Soviet Union, the President should stress the continuing validity of his rearmament program and his approach to arms control. With respect to arms reductions, we should elaborate the themes that have guided our policy for the last three years: insistence on sharp reductions, the need for full verification (especially in light of Soviet non-compliance with existing agreements), the flexibility inherent in our willingness to "build down" and to "trade off" our advantages against theirs, and dissatisfaction with the past approach to arms control in which agreements like SALT I and II actually led to a startling increase in nuclear weapons. We also should be more assertive (although moderate, almost clinical in tone) on the issue of Soviet violations and their walk-out from the Geneva talks.

The Administration's handling of two important issues illustrates the dilemma of the policy choice the President now faces. Until now the Administration has deliberately down-played the Soviet walk-out from Geneva and the Soviet record on compliance. In both cases we have, for the last four months, taken pains to encourage the Soviets to return to the negotiating process by withholding criticism of their actions. "Not justified" is about the strongest comment we have made on the Soviet withdrawal from the Geneva talks. And a dispassionate sotto voce bill of particulars has been the extent of our comment on the Soviet record of non-compliance, with the single exception of our wholly justified, two-year long attack on "yellow rain."

It is now time to ask whether this policy of restraint, which has been met by an unrelenting Soviet attack on the President and his policies, will achieve its intended effect of eliciting an improvement in the U.S.-Soviet relationship. If we conclude that it is unlikely to move the Soviets to constructive negotiations, then it is fair to ask whether we are wise to forfeit a more assertive argument centered on the facts and merits of these two issues.

These are not only issues on which the Soviets are vulnerable; they are also issues the American people can understand.

Every poll conducted on the subject confirms that the American people believe that the Soviets will, if given an opportunity, cheat on their international obligations. The fact

* Needless to say, we must be prepared, on short notice, to engage the Soviets in negotiations should they resume. Our current approach to START - and in particular, our willingness to "trade-off" reductions in our potential advantages for reductions in theirs - is broad enough to permit rapid negotiations should they be willing. It is unlikely, however, that we could achieve closure on a complete draft treaty before November.

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of their record of violating SALT II, the ABM Treaty and other agreements could be profitably amplified to support the President and diminish the weight of the Mondale/Hart appeal for new "quick fix" agreements even less verifiable than the present ones -- the freeze, the threshold test-ban, ASAT, and the like.

The same holds true of the Soviet walk-out. With the Democratic National Committee running television spots that portray Ronald Reagan as the first President since John Kennedy who is not presiding over a nuclear arms negotiation, surely we can begin to drive home the point that the Soviets have broken off the Geneva talks because we would not accept a Soviet monopoly in INF missiles. However conscious we in Washington may be of the Soviet walk-out and their compliance record, they'll forget it in Kansas if we continue to be inaudible on the subject.

It may be argued that we can go on with our current strategy, watching and waiting, adopting neither an approach that is appropriate to Soviet recalcitrance and stalling through November, nor one that assumes a breakthrough before the election. The trouble with this view is that time is passing - days and weeks are going by in which we are not mounting a defense of the President's three-year record in the conduct of East-West arms control - with all the ammunition at our disposal. As we approach the national conventions there is a risk that we shall lose the initiative - that vigorous explanation of our policies mounted in the aftermath of the Democratic attack on them will sound defensive and thus unpersuasive.

A more assertive defense of our record and philosophy need not - indeed should not - sound strident, hostile, or pessimistic. Nor would it rule out a continuing private effort, through the President's correspondence with Chernenko or the Shultz-Dobrynin channel, to probe for signs of Soviet flexibility. We have a good story to tell, an admirable record to explain and defend, and we should get on with it.

In the nearly 15 years since the SALT I negotiations began in Helsinki, the Soviets have added some 7,950 medium and long-range nuclear missile warheads to their arsenal - an increase of 515%. Fully 3,850 of these warheads, an increase of almost 65%, have been added since the SALT II agreement was signed in 1979. And despite the permissive terms of the agreements between us, the Soviets have resorted to circumvention and violation to sustain a fifteen year strategic build-up of unprecedented proportions.

This dismal history would be reason enough for a new President to try a different approach. And Candidate Reagan's criticism of SALT II, echoed by the Senate Committee on Armed Services which declared it contrary to our national security interests, set the stage for this Administration's effort to obtain sharp reductions, better verification and, in general, agreements that, while more difficult to negotiate, would yield results of military significance.

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The "zero option" was one such proposal. And while it was unacceptable to the Soviets, its embrace by the President turned a tide of opinion that had been running against us and helped to sustain a successful U.S. INF deployment. Above all it was a concrete expression of our desire for an agreement that offered the reality, and not merely the appearance, of a significant and understandable reduction in nuclear arms.

Similarly, our proposal for START, which departed in fundamental ways from SALT II, was - and remains - a sound expression of the arms control objectives that this Administration has put forward as an alternative to the cosmetic results of its predecessors. The 10 major changes that we have subsequently made to the 1982 START proposal, including the "build down" and the offer to balance U.S. against Soviet advantages in the reductions process, has positioned us well to argue that we have been fair, flexible and responsible. We have negotiated on a broad front, adjusting the elements of our position to encourage the give and take of negotiation. At the same time, and it is this that distinguishes the President from his critics, we have properly refused to travel the path of the Soviet approach - an approach that would allow a 45% increase in ballistic missile warheads and that is structured along the lines of SALT II.

For some weeks a number of experts drawn from the departments have been exploring new "frameworks" that might be put to the Soviets in the hope of advancing towards a resumption of negotiations and possible agreement. Adoption of a new "framework" or "structure" that parallels SALT II would almost certainly entail abandonment of this Administration's attempt to break out of the SALT II mold. And since it is only prudent to assume that any such framework we might table would form the basis for further negotiation, it is likely that, in due course, we would find ourselves negotiating largely within the SALT II structure. Were this to happen, we could face the election with something like the SALT II Treaty on the table in Geneva.

Given the history of the conduct of the negotiations thus far, the Soviet walk-out, the broad Congressional support that our current position has attracted (particularly the build down feature) and the flexibility inherent in the President's willingness to trade off U.S. for Soviet reductions, it is fair to ask whether a new "framework" at this stage would serve our interest. It would certainly create confusion. It would almost certainly run counter to the underlying logic of the position we have taken from the beginning. And it would diminish the clarity of the President's position as we enter a period in which the defense of that position will be crucial to our domestic politics.

The Soviets have recently adopted a strategy of pressing for concessions on arms control issues other than START or INF. Most of these - chemical weapons, anti-satellite weapons and nuclear testing - entail multilateral negotiations, under United Nations auspices, where serious negotiation is difficult and

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the opportunity for propaganda is great. Moreover, all are complicated by extreme, if not insurmountable, verification problems. And taken together, this new Soviet agenda seems aimed at obscuring their Geneva walkout.

The urgent requirement before us is to settle on a working assumption about likely Soviet arms control strategy and to fashion an appropriate response. Given the risks of basing a U.S. strategy on unfounded optimism, a policy of defending the President's record and philosophy, while remaining poised to move if the Soviets desire, should form the keystone of our public policy. We should move quickly to put such a policy in place, and to develop a broad strategy for its implementation.

With all of the above being said, it is still desirable, I believe, to try to secure Soviet agreement at least to consider some or all of the following:

- (a) Renegotiation of the TTBT with effective verification;
- (b) A ban on chemical weapons with full rights to on-site inspection for purpose of verification;
- (c) Notification to the other side of all ballistic missile tests;
- (d) Agreement not to encrypt test parameters;
- (e) Notification of all major military exercises.

Some or all of the above, even though it is not "arms reduction," might help us hold the Aspin-Dicks types who voted for MX last year "if we would be more forthcoming on arms reduction," and could help us with the public opinion of the world, and would not hurt us if the Soviets agreed. It might put them on the defensive -- or they might agree to talk with us. Either result would be good.

I'd be glad to develop further details if you wish.

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