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#16

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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INFORMATION

December 23, 1980  
*12/31 w/c [unclear] Pres. [unclear]*

MEMORANDUM FOR WILLIAM P. CLARK

THROUGH: RICHARD T. BOVERIE *(See attached note. [unclear])*  
FROM: ROBERT W. HELM *H*  
SUBJECT: FY 84 Defense Spending

One very relevant point comes out of the meeting you had with the Reform Caucus Congressmen: the President runs the risk of totally losing control of the FY 84 defense debate if he forwards a budget proposal that is regarded as unrealistic or unjustified. Realism relates to the dollar value -- is the program affordable (in a political and economic sense) and subtainable given other budgetary realities? Justification deals with our ability to illustrate the threat we are countering and how the President's program addresses our policy goals in that respect.

A number of ways of dealing with this situation could be considered but all must deal with the fact that we are short on time. The budget must go to Congress by the end of January. We cannot gracefully change our mind after we have sent a proposal to the Hill.

Three actions could be considered in this regard:

1. Establish, in the White House, a Defense Budget Information Group, something like the arms control information group that exists, to drive the preparation of the official line justifying the defense request. This would have representatives from the entire national security community and be chaired by NSC.
2. Work to eliminate a chronic complaint that needed information about the threat is not made public. This is getting to be too common an excuse for people not supporting the defense program. The Intelligence Group should lead on this action.
3. Convene a meeting with the President immediately after the New Year with Weinberger, Thayer and their assistants to discuss funding for defense and legislative implications. Rather drastic measures designed to regain the high ground on defense spending (like cutting some large and controversial programs) should be fair game for discussion.

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