

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

~~TOP SECRET~~/SENSITIVE

ACTION
August 10, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: Phil Odeen *PO*

SUBJECT: Senator Brooke Letter on First Strike Policy

Senator Brooke has written the President asking him to reiterate that it is not U.S. policy to seek hard target kill capabilities (Tab A). The request was prompted by news reports that we have changed our strategy and are developing hard target counterforce capabilities.

These stories have created a considerable stir. We understand Brooke plans to amend the Jackson SALT reservation to put the Congress on record against either side developing counterforce capabilities. The prospect is for a Senate debate, a possible delay on the interim agreements (and hence the ABM Treaty) and the possibility that this could become an issue in the campaign.

The origin of the furor was Laird's preemptory move, after the SALT Agreements were signed, in requesting \$20M additional funding for improved RVs for MM III and Poseidon. (This was done without asking clearance or even informing the White House.) Basically these funds are to be used to "weaponise" [redacted] warheads for MM III and [redacted] warheads for Poseidon. (They are now respectively [redacted] AEC has already done the necessary development work on the nuclear device.

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There are three issues: per sec. 6.2(a)

-- Substantively, do we need or want this capability and if so, how far do we want to press to get it?

-- How will this affect our relationship with the Soviets, SALT II, etc.?

-- How should we handle the Brooke letter and the likely Congressional debate.

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DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 13526, Section 3.5
NLN 05-36/20 per sec. 3.3(b)(1)
and 6.2(a); ltr. 2-2-11
By: MLH, NARA; Date: 7/12/2011
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DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY DECLASSIFICATION REVIEW	
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1. CLASSIFICATION RETAINED	2. CLASSIFICATION CHANGED TO: FRD
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Previous U.S. Policy Statements

The Administration is on the public record with several statements on this issue (a more comprehensive record is attached at Tab D).

-- In a letter to Senator Brooke, 29 December 1969, the President stated, "There is no current program to develop a so-called hard target MIRV capability."

-- In a letter to Senator Brooke, 5 November 1970, Laird stated, "We have not developed and are not seeking to develop a weapon system having, or which could reasonably be construed as having a first strike potential."

-- A DOD "position paper," read by Senator Stennis on the floor of the Senate, 5 October 1971 concerning a Buckley amendment to the defense appropriation bill which would have provided more money for improving MM III and Poseidon warheads "in connection with providing counterforce capabilities." It said: "The Defense Department cannot support the proposed amendments. It is the position of the United States to not develop a weapons system whose deployment could be reasonably construed by the Soviets as having a first-strike capability. Such a deployment might provide an incentive for the Soviets to strike first."

Current Public Affairs Line

White House press spokesmen have dodged questions based on the press stories. However, Jerry Freidheim yesterday spent his entire press briefing on this issue. His basic line was:

-- We are accelerating R&D on improved accuracies and yield-to-weight ratios for our ICBMs and SLBMs in order to maintain our technological superiority in these fields.

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-- We have not decided to deploy these systems. We are several years away from a deployment decision, but the program would give us the option in the future to deploy a hard target kill capability.

-- Our strategy has not changed and we are not planning a first strike force in any sense.

-- This insures a strong position for SALT II and a hedge against failure of follow-on SALT.

-- We may need this capability to deal with the enemy's hardened command and control facilities and nuclear storage sites.

The Reasons for New Warhead

Despite the variety of reasons given, the main purpose of the program is to develop a silo kill capability. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] In OSD the argument is that Soviet development of a severe threat to Minuteman is likely and we should have the same capability so as to not be in an asymmetrical position that could have adverse political and psychological consequences.

We have never gotten a detailed explanation of DOD proposed program, but basically it will:

-- increase MM III yields from [REDACTED]

-- provide for accuracy improvements, through hardware and software improvements, from the present [REDACTED]

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per sec. 6.2(a)

If these improvements are made on the entire Minuteman force the effect on the 1600 ICBM Soviet force (assuming very hard silos) will be:

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USSR Silos Surviving

1000 MM III, with high accuracy



115

1000 MM III, with high accuracy



35

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per sec. 6.2(a)

Without such capabilities today we can destroy more than 50 percent of the Soviet ICBM force and with currently programmed improvements almost 70 percent of the Soviet ICBM force in 1975.

As you know I have serious doubts about the value of this program to increase the yield of our RVs. I don't see what real value we get beyond that of our current programs to increase accuracy and numbers of RVs. A brief summary of the considerations - for and against - are at Tab E.

In addition there is the need for consideration of the impact on the Soviets; how it may affect their programs (particularly their counterforce programs), how it will impact on SALT (whether it will serve as a bargaining chip if there is no practical way to control counterforce) and how it will affect the fragile new relationship of mutual restraint we are seeking to hold with the USSR.

Our Options

At this stage, our immediate problem is how to respond to Senator Brooke in a way that will protect the President, minimize debate, and avoid repudiating either the President's earlier position or Laird's program. We have three alternatives:

1. The President can send a bland reply to Senator Brooke reaffirming that our strategy is unchanged.
2. In addition the President can say that he has asked Laird to reply more fully.
3. We can ask Laird to reply on behalf of the President.

Draft texts reflecting these three approaches are attached at Tab B.

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If Laird is to play a role, we should make sure that he emphasizes that our strategy is unchanged and that his reply on the warhead program is not argumentative so as to avoid stimulating further debate. We also have a draft reply for the President prepared by OSD (Tab C). It appears inappropriate for either the President or Laird.

Next Steps

Prepare memorandum to the President recommending:

- Option 1 _____
- Option 2 _____
- Option 3 _____
- Other _____

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Sonnenfeldt and Lehman concur.

Basic Issues in Acquiring More U.S. Hard Target Counterforce

The strategic arguments against acquiring greater capabilities have been threefold:

-- First, a well hedged urban industrial capability provides sufficient forces for most hard targets (e.g., C-3 facilities and weapons storage facilities) as well as a considerable capability against silos.

-- Second, there seemed to be little advantage to a silo attack; we could not significantly limit damage to the U.S. should the Soviets retaliate against our cities (they will have a major SLBM force by 1975).

-- Third, causing the Soviet ICBM force to be extremely vulnerable could undermine stability in a severe crisis.

Other Factors

There are several other factors that need to be considered in weighing the requirement for the Laird program.

-- Our need for a capability to destroy hardened military facilities such as command and control installations and nuclear storage depots. In situations other than an all out response it would be desirable not to strike command and control facilities so that we do not provide automatic pre-programmed responses. It would be essential that the Soviet Government maintains positive control over their forces if there is to be a chance of deterring escalation to an all out exchange. As for attacks on nuclear storage this is an important but not a critical target system.

-- Is there a need for hard target capability to have adequate flexible response options? While there are hard targets that we may want to include in limited strike options, we understand that the OSD targeting study casts considerable doubt on the viability of an attack on Soviet ICBMs as "limited" strike option. It does not support a requirement for major hard target capabilities, and as Johnny Foster said in his briefing the real need is for better command and control. Under the new policy concept, the counterforce task has the lowest priority in retaliation on the sensible ground that we would be largely shooting at empty holes. In preemption the concept is to try to avoid escalation and not put either side in a "use or lose" position with respect to their forces. A limited attack on a portion of Soviet ICBM silos which demonstrated a clear U.S. hard target capability would create such a situation. A full scale attack on Soviet silos (even if it left only 35 survivors) would be a major attack (2000 + weapons) and would probably invite a Soviet retaliation. Even if we could reduce their surviving ICBMs a handful, the surviving Soviet SLBMs and Bombers could inflict unacceptable damage to U.S. cities and industry as well as provide options to attack a wide variety of other U.S. military targets.

-- There is a large measure of inevitability in the acquisition of counterforce capabilities on both sides particularly as a result of marginal accuracy improvements on our side and large throw weight on their side. Thus all that SALT can do is postpone the day that ICBMs become marginally survivable or phase them out on a reciprocal basis.

-- Does an improved hard target capability provide a hedge against Soviet counterforce capabilities? This frankly makes no sense militarily. Survivability is the response to counterforce, not more counterforce.

Impact on the Soviets

An important part of the problem is the Soviet reaction to this program. They are undoubtedly aware that counterforce technology is within our grasp and that accuracy improvements alone will lead to increasing Soviet vulnerability.

We need to consider three questions:

1. Will it spur their counterforce capability? It may not, but it certainly won't encourage restraint.

2. Is it a bargaining chip? Will it cause them to negotiate more seriously in SALT? The Soviets respond better to the stick than the carrot; they are likely to have greater incentive to negotiate limits on counterforce if they perceive a growing counterforce threat on our side. However, they already will have substantial incentives to try to limit or mitigate the possibility of ICBM vulnerability. The problem is that there may not be any negotiable, verifiable and acceptable qualitative arms control measures to limit counterforce capabilities.

3. Most importantly, how will this program affect the fragile new relationship of mutual restraint we are seeking to build upon? If it raises questions about our intentions it could undermine this relationship. On the other hand, if the Soviets build such a capability they can hardly expect us to refrain out of concern for their sensitivities.