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By JW NARA Date 6-7 ON (F)

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Dear Henry:

After the VP meeting yesterday I continued to think about various ideas and arguments put forward at the meeting and have come to the conclusion that I wish to change the view I took and to support the position taken by the Delegation and by ACDA.

Although perhaps applicable to either side of the discussion, there are three premises from which I start.

First, it is important to proceed expeditiously under the May 20th understanding and to seek positive movement toward an agreement. The May 20th agreement, as I understand it, envisaged an agreement limiting ABMs and a temporary freeze on offensive weapons while a more comprehensive agreement was being negotiated. It successfully moved the negotiations away from an FBS impasse and accepted the possibility of each nation choosing a different location for its ABM deployment under a general concept of equality. A choice by the United States of either Safeguard or zero ABM seems to fall within the May 20th agreement.

Second, under the May 20th understanding an ABM agreement would be conditioned upon reaching an initial freeze on offensive weapons and a follow-on agreement providing more comprehensive limitations on offensive weapons.

The Honorable  
Henry A. Kissinger  
Assistant to the President  
for National Security Affairs  
The White House

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Third, starting with the forces existing on both sides today, I believe that a zero ABM agreement combined with an agreement limiting offensive weapons, leading to a later agreement, hopefully, providing for a phased reduction in offensive weapons, would be a significant move towards stability, and would be my preference over an agreement permitting some deployment of ABMs combined with an agreement limiting offensive weapons.

Among the arguments against a zero ABM yesterday were:

1. The United States would be giving away bargaining leverage which it might later use to trade for reduction in offensive systems.

A deployment of Safeguard limited to three or two sites is at best limited leverage. My view is that the USSR might be willing to trade Soviet ABMs for US ABMs, but would trade Soviet offensive weapons only for US offensive weapons.

On offensive weapons, therefore, I believe our leverage would flow more from our offensive development potential, e.g. ULMs and B-1, than from a three or two site Safeguard.

2. The Congress might refuse to fund a limited Safeguard program if we proposed zero ABM.

I believe we can cope with this as we have done in the past. Under the premise of the May 20th understanding, we would accept zero ABM only in the context of a formal agreement which

(a) carried an offensive freeze with it;  
(b) committed both sides to seek more complete offensive limitations or reductions; and (c) if such limitations or reductions were not achieved within an agreed period of years, would allow either party to withdraw. Thus we would be able to argue to Congress that until the further follow-on agreement was concluded, appropriate funding for Safeguard would still be needed.

3. The pursuance of the zero ABM proposal would prolong unduly the negotiations.

Although some additional time might be required, it seems unlikely that negotiations would be unduly prolonged. Indeed, it could well take less time to negotiate zero ABM than to negotiate out the complications of our three site/one site proposal. Any extra time as may be necessary I believe is justified to avoid having to withdraw from a proposal we broached anew at Helsinki, and in which, for the first time, the Soviet Government showed a serious interest. While this interest may disappear when we make clear what we mean, at least the record will show that it was the Soviets who once again turned it down, rather than the U.S. cooling towards its own initiative. Although this point was not dwelt on yesterday, I believe we must recognize that the political costs could be considerable.

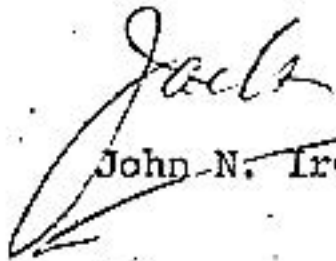
With respect to the "pros" of presenting a zero ABM proposal, I generally agree with those set forth by Gerry Smith in cables. If we can get the Soviets to accept zero, and tear down the Moscow system, I believe our net interests (security, political, and long-term SALT interests) will be better served than

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leaving each side with a limited system which we can modernize competitively. This in itself will provide the strongest example for follow-on offensive reductions, and would represent the first post-war arms control agreement which actually involved reductions. I refer above to "the arguments against a zero ABM" because of my comments at the meeting yesterday.

  
John N. Irwin II

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