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THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

SECRET

August 12, 1971

Dear Gerry:

You will be receiving my decision concerning a complete ban on ABM systems, but I wanted to provide you, personally, with the considerations underlying this decision.

At this point in our negotiations with the USSR I am persuaded we are within reach of an equitable agreement if we can reinforce the momentum created by the joint decision of May 20. Two years ago, we had all hoped that the Soviet side could be brought around to a comprehensive arms control agreement. The Soviets were aware of our interest in a complete ban on ABM systems and reductions in offensive systems. Our record on these issues is clear. But in matters affecting so directly their vital interests it is understandable that the Soviet leaders have preferred to move to an initial agreement of limited scope.

Thus, the understanding of the May 20 agreement was that we would now make a major effort to agree this year on some limitations on ABMs together with some limitations on offensive systems while deferring some issues for a second stage. That decision, I believe, represented a major political commitment by the Soviet leaders and was based on a general understanding that both sides could not expect to achieve all of their objectives in one agreement.

In reviewing the record leading to that agreement and taking into account your most recent contacts, it is my conclusion that pressing for a complete ban on ABMs would risk jeopardizing the understanding already achieved with the USSR. This is all the more true because if we went to a zero ABM proposal we would have to ask for more sweeping offensive limitations than seem immediately negotiable. Our objective should be to consolidate gains we have made, and translate our mutual commitment into a viable agreement.

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U.S. ARMS CONTROL AND DISARMAMENT AGENCY  
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Accordingly, I have decided that we should continue within the framework of the May 20 understanding that the USSR will not be required to dismantle its ABM system in order to reach an agreement. Similarly, the Soviets should also recognize that we will not dismantle our system, as long as the agreement envisaged is to be limited to only a part of our offensive arsenals.

This mutual recognition of current realities forms the basis for an agreement. The latest Soviet offer, while not yet acceptable, does indicate some movement from their rigid formulas for a Washington-Moscow defense. It encourages me to believe that hard bargaining on the key issues will lead to a breakthrough.

Thus, I am very reluctant to introduce a complete ban as our preferred solution and thereby move the negotiations back into the realm of comprehensive agreements. Nor do I want to create any pretext for the USSR to reopen the question of a completely separate ABM agreement.

Your Soviet counterparts, however, should be made aware of the seriousness with which we consider the second stage of these negotiations. If we can take a major step now, we can create the mutual confidence that is a prerequisite to broader arms control. It is in this light that I hope you will impress on the Soviet negotiators that in the second phase of negotiations, we will set as our goal a ban on ABMs and a reduction in offensive systems. The crucial step toward this goal is the agreement you are now negotiating.

Sincerely,



The Honorable Gerard Smith  
Chairman, U. S. SALT Delegation  
Helsinki

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