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NLS 102-010 #19

By hjt, NARA, Date 10/25/05

~~TOP SECRET~~

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

October 16, 1986

~~TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE~~

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: JOHN M. POINDEXTER

SUBJECT: Why We Can't Commit to Eliminating All Nuclear Weapons Within 10 Years

Purpose. Mr. President, my purpose in this note is to strongly recommend that you step back from any discussion of eliminating all nuclear weapons in 10 years, and focus attention on the proposals that you handed over to General Secretary Gorbachev in writing in Iceland which were focused on the elimination of all offensive ballistic missiles in 10 years. Further, I would recommend that you make no further public comment endorsing the idea of the total elimination of all nuclear weapons in 10 years as something discussed and agreed with the General Secretary. If asked, I would recommend that you stand firm by your long-term commitment to the ultimate goal of the total elimination of all nuclear weapons, but always cast this in terms of a long-term goal which will require the correction of existing conventional force imbalances and other conditions that require us to have the nuclear weapons in the first place.

Eliminating Ballistic Missiles. The idea of calling for the total elimination of all offensive ballistic missiles is not a new one. And although we had not previously considered suggesting that this be accomplished by 1996 (in 10 short years), it is a concept that we have studied carefully.

As you will remember, the idea of calling for the total elimination of all offensive ballistic missiles grew out of a proposal initially made by Cap Weinberger. He made it to you as we were working your last arms control letter to General Secretary Gorbachev. Cap suggested that it be coupled with the idea of sharing the benefits of advanced defenses.

The logic of this idea is simple and direct. Cap argued that it would make no sense to commit to share the benefits of advanced defenses with the Soviets if they insisted on continuing to possess large numbers of offensive ballistic missiles which would attempt to defeat our defenses. In short, why share the benefits of our research unless the Soviets showed a willingness to join us in making the transition to a more defense reliant world by reducing and ultimately eliminating offensive ballistic missiles.

The call for the elimination of all offensive ballistic missiles was also consistent with what we were trying to do both in START

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and in INF, and also with the fundamental goal that you specifically set for the SDI program.

With respect to START, the call for the total elimination of all ballistic missiles is a logical extension of the position we have taken in the START negotiations that we must reduce and eliminate the unique threat posed by ballistic missiles. Our position has long been that while each side may need nuclear forces for some time to deter conflict and underwrite its security, neither side needs fast-flying, non-recallable offensive ballistic missiles for this purpose. From the very first, in START, we have been trying to draw a clear distinction between fast-flying ballistic systems, which are uniquely suited for an attempted first-strike by an aggressor, and slow-flying systems which are better suited for retaliation (less so for aggression). As a result, we have been attempting to focus on reductions in ballistic missile warheads as the heart of the issue to be resolved -- and have treated slow-flying bombers largely to meet Soviet concerns.

In INF, we have taken a similar position. We have kept the focus on missiles, and avoided discussion of dual-capable, tactical aircraft. We proposed the zero-zero solution for the LRINF missile problem. We have called for the similar reduction and elimination of shorter-range ballistic missiles, missiles that pose as direct a threat to our Allies as Soviet ICBMs do to the United States.

With respect to SDI, your specific, stated goal was to make ballistic missiles obsolete, not to make all nuclear weapons obsolete. Here, again, your focus was on promptly eliminating the threat posed by these fast-flying missiles. You did discuss the total elimination of all nuclear weapons, but you made it very clear that this step could only be taken if either the conventional balance of forces were corrected, or if the conditions of the world changed sufficiently so that the conventional force imbalance was not as a direct a threat as it is today and our requirements for nuclear weapons were removed.

After study and discussion, you incorporated the idea of proposing the total elimination of all offensive ballistic missiles into your letter to the General Secretary. We then consulted our Allies about this idea, and gained their support for it.

In Iceland, at the critical point of finding a response to Soviet concerns which neither compromised our principles or our security, we recommended that you draw upon this previous consensus and adapt this element (a call for the elimination of all offensive ballistic missiles) into your response to the Soviet call for a 10 year period of non-withdrawal from the ABM Treaty. By doing so, we undercut any Soviet objection to our having the right to deploy defenses as insurance, since we would

have committed to wait until all offensive ballistic missiles of the two superpowers should have been eliminated anyway. By calling for the elimination of missiles of all ranges, we also, in one step, solved the problem of getting rid of both the last 100 Soviet SS-20 warheads in Asia (a concern of our Asian allies) and the remaining shorter-range INF missiles that still would threaten our European allies (a particular concern of Kohl).

It was for these reasons that we recommended to you, and you agreed and passed to the Soviets, the proposal calling for the total elimination of all offensive ballistic missiles in 10 years attached at Tab A. It was also for these reasons that we recommended to you, and you agreed and passed to the Soviets, a rejection of their attempt to alter this to a proposal for the elimination of all strategic forces (Tab B) -- and instead went back to them with a second proposal that was altered in certain language but firm on the call for the elimination of all offensive ballistic missiles (Tab C).

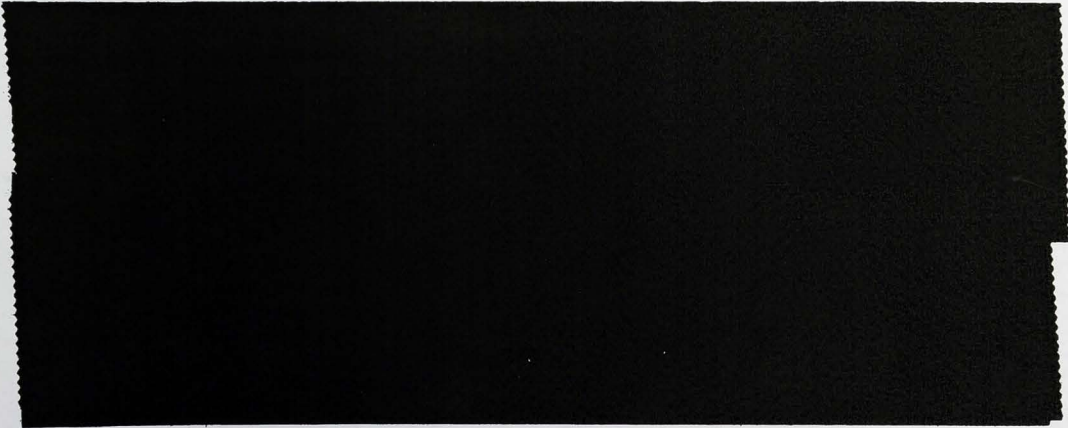
Under the recommended proposals, at the end of 10 years, when no offensive ballistic missiles exist, the US and the Soviet Union would still have up to 50% of today's strategic nuclear offensive force levels, although they would now be concentrated in slow-flying systems (bombers and cruise missiles). This would provide a modest strategic retaliatory force to deter attack on the US and conventional aggression against our allies throughout the world until our conventional forces could be upgraded and our air defenses put in place. It would keep a US nuclear umbrella, although a quite smaller one, over NATO. We would also still have some nuclear weapons in battlefield systems like artillery and in our dual-capable fighter aircraft that could hold Soviet tank concentrations at risk. Thus, keeping some nuclear forces would offset the great Soviet advantage in conventional forces that exists threatening NATO. These were the very significant reasons behind our recommendations to you that you reject any Soviet attempts to shift the proposal from the elimination of all offensive ballistic missiles to either the elimination of all strategic forces or the total elimination of nuclear weapons in 10 years.

Eliminating All Nuclear Weapons. In your speech announcing the SDI program in March, 1983, you called for a future nuclear free world. Prior to finalizing that speech, as you will recall, we had a series of discussions about the fact that until regional conventional force imbalances could be corrected, such a step was simply not possible -- and, therefore, the main thrust of the SDI program announced in your speech, and the specific objective given to that program by you was not to make nuclear weapons obsolete, but to make ballistic missiles obsolete.

In January, 1986, General Secretary Gorbachev proposed a plan for the total elimination of all nuclear weapons by the year 2000. You will remember that we very carefully studied the plan, and

reached the conclusion that while we agreed with the ultimate goal, that such a step could only be taken if we were confident that we had other means to offset Soviet conventional force advantages. You responded to the General Secretary's proposal along these lines. Nothing has changed since that time.

The Conventional Imbalance. Given the differences in the size of conventional forces that exist today, and the military requirements we face, it is very unlikely that we could take the actions to improve our conventional force capabilities needed to permit us to do without some nuclear weapons within the next ten years. Our allies face the same problem, and many have made it clear that they do not support any move in this direction for this very practical reason. Thus, both US and Allied security require at least some nuclear weapons be retained for the foreseeable future.



The Impact on US/Allied Military Strategy. If we could put aside for the moment the nuclear forces of the UK, France and China -- and others who could become nuclear powers like India, Israel, Pakistan, South Africa, etc. -- we should also consider the situation we would face if the types of proposals discussed above were implemented.

Eliminating all offensive ballistic missiles would push us back to a condition similar to that which we faced in the 1950s. A limited number of nuclear weapons would exist, largely deliverable by aircraft.

In terms of military tactics, the existence of these remaining nuclear weapons would mean that an aggressor could not mass his forces in any one place in the hope of breaking through conventional defenses because he could not be sure that nuclear weapons would not be used to destroy these forces when they are massed. The fact that the threat of nuclear attack prevents an aggressor from massing his conventional forces without risk makes

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As Amended  
Sec. 1.4(h)(1)

modern conventional weapons more effective, giving them the chance to handle the threat they face since the existence of nuclear weapons means that the aggressor can't simply mass forces and overwhelm positions with force of numbers.

In terms of strategy, the existence of these weapons (too slow to be used to surprise and defeat retaliatory forces, but still well suited for a retaliatory mission) would still raise the price of aggression to a level high enough that it could help deter aggression.

Eliminating all nuclear weapons (once again ignoring the forces of the UK, France, China and others for simplicity) would push us back to a situation that existed on the eve of WW II -- with the peace dependent upon the assessment of an aggressor of the relative strength of his conventional forces alone. However, instead of the Panzer divisions that Hitler had at his disposal, we would face the challenge posed by the combined arms capability of the Soviet army. It simply is not clear that we can take the steps necessary to upgrade our own and NATO's conventional defenses sufficiently to have our security rest on conventional forces alone within 10 years. If we cannot, then the Soviet ability to coerce our allies -- to Finlandize other nations -- will increase, and our security decrease, as a result of the premature elimination of all nuclear weapons.

While our allies certainly are not happy having their security tied to the use of nuclear weapons to offset conventional forces, and the prospect of nuclear war in Europe is unacceptable to them, so is the alternative if they are faced with added expense for conventional forces and all they get as a result of that added expense is the replacement of the potential for nuclear war in Europe with the potential of an equally devastating high-tech replay of WW II.

Verification. Finally, we can't ignore that others have nuclear weapons. The elimination of all offensive ballistic missiles will be difficult to verify, but it is likely to be child's play compared to verifying the elimination of all nuclear weapons. In addition, the need for verification will be enormous since if we believe we are living in a nuclear free world and suddenly someone demonstrates that they have a covert nuclear stockpile, their ability to coerce this great nation would be immense. This, alone, is a fundamental reason for moving much more slowly on the path towards an agreement now on the total elimination of all nuclear weapons.

Bottom Line. All this being so, the main point of this memorandum is simply that neither our military experts or our allies would support the idea of moving to the total elimination of all nuclear weapons within 10 years.

They can likely support a goal of the elimination of all ballistic missiles in that period. The elimination of offensive ballistic missiles would remove not only the nuclear threat posed by such weapons, but the chemical threat as well. It would also enhance our conventional capability by removing the direct threat of rocket attack against our conventional forces, our airfields, the sites where we store the tanks and vehicles that our troops coming from the US in a crisis which would reinforce NATO reinforcements coming from the US would need in a crisis. It would make the planning of a quick disarming first strike by a conventional aggressor much more difficult.

Recommendations. Based on all of the above, Mr. President, I would strongly recommend that:

(1) you step back from any discussion of eliminating all nuclear weapons in 10 years, and focus attention on the proposals that you handed over to General Secretary Gorbachev in writing in Iceland which were focused on the elimination of all offensive ballistic missiles in 10 years;

(2) you make no further public comment endorsing the idea of the total elimination of all nuclear weapons in 10 years as something discussed and agreed with the General Secretary; and

(3) if asked about such discussions or your position on this, I would recommend that you stand firm by your long-term commitment to the ultimate goal of the total elimination of all nuclear weapons, but always cast this in terms of a long-term goal which will require the correction of existing conventional force imbalances and other conditions that require us to have the nuclear weapons in the first place.

We have a good, consistent position in our proposal to reduce by 50% the existing strategic nuclear arsenals and then to totally eliminate all offensive ballistic missiles. We can be reasonably assured that our military can support this, that our allies can support this, and that our security requirements can support this. We have adjusted your recent report to the nation to reflect this approach, and it was well received. We have explained this position to the Congress, our allies, and the American people -- and it was well received.

I recognize that I am asking you to step back from an idea that did come up in Iceland. I also recognize that you may feel that you have committed to supporting this idea. However, I strongly feel that you should step back -- and do so now.

Once you have read this memorandum, I am prepared to discuss this with you in whatever detail that you desire. I would ask that if you disagree with the recommendations I have made, that you give me the opportunity to explain them in person to you before you address this subject publicly.

AD REF

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Both sides would agree to confine itself to research devel and testing which is permitted by the ABM Treaty, for a period of 5 years, through 1991, during which time a 50% reduction of ~~new~~ strategic nuclear arsenals would be achieved. This being done, both sides will continue the pace of reductions <sup>ALL REMAINING OFFENSIVE</sup> ~~of the remaining~~ ballistic missiles with the goal of the total elimination of all offensive ballistic missiles by the end of a second 5-year period. As long as these reductions continue at the appropriate pace, the same restrictions will continue to apply. At the end of the 10 year period, with all offensive ballistic missiles eliminated, either side would be free to deploy whatever defenses.

exercise its rights under the  
ABM Treaty

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NLS MOZ-016 #20BY LOT, NARA, DATE 10/25/05

The Initial US Offer on October 12

Both sides would agree to confine itself to research, development and testing, which is permitted by the ABM Treaty, for a period of 5 years, through 1991, during which time a 50% reduction of strategic nuclear arsenals would be achieved. This being done, both sides will continue the pace of reductions with respect to all remaining offensive ballistic missiles with the goal of the total elimination of all offensive ballistic missiles by the end of the second 5 year period. As long as these reductions continue at the appropriate pace, the same restrictions will continue to apply. At the end of the 10 year period, with all offensive ballistic missiles eliminated, either side would be free to deploy defenses.

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NLS MOZ-016#21

BY WDT, NARA, DATE 10/25/05



The USSR and the United States undertake for ten years not to exercise their existing right of withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, which is of unlimited duration, and during that period strictly to observe all its provisions. ~~[The testing in space of all space components of missile defense is prohibited, except research and testing conducted in laboratories.]~~ Within the first five years of the ten-year period (and thus through 1991), the strategic offensive arms of the two sides shall be reduced by 50 percent. During the following five years of that period, <sup>ALL</sup> ~~the~~ remaining <sup>OFFENSIVE BALLISTIC MISSILES</sup> ~~50 percent~~ of the two sides' ~~strategic offensive arms~~ shall be reduced. Thus by the end of 1996, <sup>ALL OFFENSIVE BALLISTIC MISSILES</sup> ~~the strategic offensive arms~~ of the USSR and the United States will have been totally eliminated.

ALT 1: AT THE END OF THE 10 YEAR PERIOD, EITHER SIDE COULD CHOOSE TO DEPLOY DEFENSES IF IT SO CHOSE UNLESS THE PARTIES AGREE OTHERWISE.

ALT 2: END WITH TYPED TEXT. NOTE WE WOULD ASSERT OUR RIGHT TO DEPLOY AT THAT POINT BUT WOULD NOT ASK THEM FOR THIS IN THIS AGREEMENT. BUT WE WOULD REQUIRE AN ASSURANCE OF NOT BE CHALLENGED ON THAT POINT.

ALT 3: AT THE END OF THE 10 YEAR PERIOD, IF EITHER SIDE DECIDES TO DEPLOY DEFENSE BOTH SIDES WILL ENTER INTO NEGOTIATIONS ON THE TERMS OF DEPLOYMENT. IF MUTUAL AGREEMENT ON THOSE TERMS IS NOT REACHED <sup>WITHIN</sup> 2 YEARS, EITHER SIDE WOULD BE FREE TO DEPLOY.

Defenses,

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NLS MOZ-016 #22

BY LWS, NARA, DATE 10/25/05

The Soviet Counter-offer on October 12

The USSR and the United States undertake for ten years not to exercise their existing right of withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, which is of unlimited duration, and during that period strictly to observe all its provisions. The testing in space of all space components of missile defense is prohibited, except research and testing conducted in laboratories. Within the first five years of the ten-year period (and thus through 1991), the strategic offensive arms of the two sides shall be reduced by 50 percent. During the following five years of that period, the remaining 50 percent of the two sides strategic offensive arms shall be reduced. Thus by the end of 1996, the strategic offensive arms of the USSR and the United States will have been totally eliminated.

*Handwritten note:*  
which continues research development and testing, which is permitted by the Treaty  
1991

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NLS MOZ-016 #23

BY LDT, NARA, DATE 10/25/05

The USSR and the United States undertake for ten years not to exercise their existing right of withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, which is of unlimited duration, and ~~in the conduct of work on strategic defense~~, during that period strictly to observe all its provisions. Within the first five years of the ten-year period (and thus through 1991), the strategic offensive arms of the two sides shall be reduced by 50 percent. During the following five years of that period, all remaining offensive ballistic missiles of the two sides shall be reduced. Thus by the end of 1996, all offensive ballistic missiles of the USSR and the United States will have been totally eliminated. At the end of the ten year period, either side could deploy defenses if it so chose unless the parties agree otherwise.

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is permitted by  
the Treaty.  
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NLS MOZ-016 #24

BY LOS, NARA, DATE 10/25/05

The US Counter-counter Offer on October 12

The USSR and the United States undertake for ten years not to exercise their existing right of withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, which is of unlimited duration, and during that period strictly to observe all its provisions while continuing research, development and testing, which are permitted by the ABM Treaty. Within the first five years of the ten-year period (and thus through 1991), the strategic offensive arms of the two sides shall be reduced by 50 percent. During the following five years of that period, the remaining offensive ballistic missiles of the two sides shall be reduced. Thus by the end of 1996, all offensive ballistic missiles of the USSR and the United States will have been totally eliminated. At the end of the ten year period, either side could deploy defenses if it so chose unless the parties agree otherwise.

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NLS MOZ016 #25

BY hvj, NARA, DATE 10/25/05

# WITHDRAWAL SHEET

## Ronald Reagan Library

Collection: KEEL, ALTON J.: Files

Archivist: dlb

File Folder: Reykjavik Briefing: Memo re: Eliminating Nuclear  
 Box 91636 <sup>(4 of 5)</sup> RAC Box 3

Date: 8/17/00  
 Goss F99-060/1

DOCUMENT NO. AND TYPE	SUBJECT/TITLE	DATE	RESTRICTION
1. Memo	William Cockell to John Poindexter, re: Eliminating Nuclear Weapons, 3 p.	10/17/86	P1/F1
2. Memo	Poindexter to Reagan, re: Eliminating Nuclear Weapons, 6 p. PART. 10/25/05 MOZ-016#19	10/16/86	P1/F1
<del>3. Paper</del>	<del>US Offer October 12 (handwritten), 1 p.</del>	<del>n.d.</del>	<del>P1/F1</del>
<del>4. Paper</del>	<del>US Offer on October 12, 1 p.</del>	<del>n.d.</del>	<del>P1/F1</del>
<del>5. Paper</del>	<del>US Remark of Soviet Counter, with notations, 1 p.</del>	<del>n.d.</del>	<del>P1/F1</del>
<del>6. Paper</del>	<del>The Soviet Counter offer on October 12, 1 p.</del>	<del>n.d.</del>	<del>P1/F1</del>
<del>7. Paper</del>	<del>US Counter counter Offer on October 12, with notations, 1 p.</del>	<del>n.d.</del>	<del>P1/F1</del>
<del>8. Paper</del>	<del>US Counter-counter Offer on October 12, 1 p.</del>	<del>n.d.</del>	<del>P1/F1</del>
<del>9. Paper</del>	<del>Iceland Chronology (Draft), 11 p.</del>	<del>10/14/86</del>	<del>P1/F1</del>
<del>10. Paper</del>	<del>Agreements, 3 p.</del>	<del>n.d.</del>	<del>P1/F1</del>
<del>11. Memo</del>	<del>Bob Linhard to Poindexter, re: Nuclear weapons, 1 p.</del>	<del>10/16/86</del>	<del>P1/F1</del>
<del>12. Memo</del>	<del>Copy of Item #2, (with edits), 6 p.</del>	<del>n.d.</del>	<del>P1/F1</del>
<del>13. Paper</del>	<del>Copy of Item #3, 1 p.</del>	<del>n.d.</del>	<del>P1/F1</del>
<del>14. Paper</del>	<del>Copy of Item #4, 1 p.</del>	<del>n.d.</del>	<del>P1/F1</del>
<del>15. Paper</del>	<del>Copy of Item #5, 1 p.</del>	<del>n.d.</del>	<del>P1/F1</del>
<del>16. Paper</del>	<del>Copy of Item #6, 1 p.</del>	<del>n.d.</del>	<del>P1/F1</del>
<del>17. Paper</del>	<del>Copy of Item #7, 1 p.</del>	<del>n.d.</del>	<del>P1/F1</del>

R " " #24 "

RESTRICTION CODES

- Presidential Records Act - [44 U.S.C. 2204(a)]
- P-1 National security classified information [(a)(1) of the PRA].
  - P-2 Relating to appointment to Federal office [(a)(2) of the PRA].
  - P-3 Release would violate a Federal statute [(a)(3) of the PRA].
  - P-4 Release would disclose trade secrets or confidential commercial or financial information [(a)(4) of the PRA].
  - P-5 Release would disclose confidential advice between the President and his advisors, or between such advisors [(a)(5) of the PRA].
  - P-6 Release would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy [(a)(6) of the PRA].

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- Freedom of Information Act - [5 U.S.C. 552(b)]
- F-1 National security classified information [(b)(1) of the FOIA].
  - F-2 Release could disclose internal personnel rules and practices of an agency [(b)(2) of the FOIA].
  - F-3 Release would violate a Federal statute [(b)(3) of the FOIA].
  - F-4 Release would disclose trade secrets or confidential commercial or financial information [(b)(4) of the FOIA].
  - F-5 Release would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy [(b)(6) of the FOIA].
  - F-7 Release would disclose information compiled for law enforcement purposes [(b)(7) of the FOIA].
  - F-8 Release would disclose information concerning the regulation of financial institutions [(b)(8) of the FOIA].
  - F-9 Release would disclose geological or geophysical information concerning wells [(b)(9) of the FOIA].