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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

National Security Council Meeting

November 30, 1983, 11:00 a.m., Cabinet Room

SUBJECT: Strategic Defense Initiative

PARTICIPANTS:

The President

The Vice President

Admiral Daniel J. Murphy, Chief of Staff, Vice President's Office

State:

Secretary George P. Shultz

Admiral Jonathan Howe, Director, Bureau of Political-Military
Affairs

Defense:

Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger

Deputy Secretary W. Paul Thayer

Dr. Fred C. Ikle, Under Secretary for Policy

Dr. Richard D. DeLauer, Under Secretary of Defense Research
and Engineering

Energy:

Secretary P. Hodel

Dr. Louis Montulli, Staff Assistant to the Secretary

OMB:

Dr. Alton Keel, Associate Director, National Security and
International Affairs

JCS:

General John W. Vessey, Jr.

Admiral Arthur S. Moreau, Assistant to the Chairman

CIA:

Mr. William J. Casey

USUN:

Ambassador Jeane J. Kirkpatrick

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As Amended
Sec. 1.4(c)

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By hst, NARA, Date 12/21/05

PARTICIPANTS: (continued)

ACDA:

Mr. Kenneth L. Adelman
Mr. David Emery, Deputy Director

NASA:

Mr. James M. Beggs
Dr. Hans Mark, Deputy Administrator

OSTP:

Dr. George Keyworth
Mr. Michael Havey, Senior Policy Analyst

White House:

Mr. Edwin Meese, III
Mr. Robert C. McFarlane
Mr. Richard G. Darman
Admiral John M. Poindexter
Mr. Craig Fuller

NSC:

Mr. Robert M. Kimmitt
Mr. Ronald Lehman
Mr. Robert Helm
Mr. Ray Pollock
Mr. Chris Lehman

Minutes

Mr. McFarlane opened by saying that the meeting was for the purpose of reporting the activities since the March 23 speech. In March, the President expressed hope that emerging technologies could allow a shift from sole reliance on strategic offensive forces to defensive capabilities. Studies directed in the wake of the speech examined relevant technologies and policy dimensions of a defense against ballistic missiles (DABM). These studies involved a broad spectrum of the defense community. Secretary Weinberger would next describe the studies and make his recommendations.

Secretary Weinberger began his briefing by displaying a chart that compared US and Soviet defensive forces and illustrated how the US has come to disregard defense. We have no BMD system, very little air defense, and essentially no civil defense, but instead base deterrence entirely on M.A.D. with offensive forces. The Soviets, in contrast, have 9,400 deployed SAMs, 2,400 interceptors, one BMD deployed and being improved, and a new, probably treaty-prohibited radar installation. This is

in addition to very large offensive forces. The Secretary then characterized the Reagan Program as comprised of Arms Control, Strategic Modernization, and Strategic Defense. He then summarized the Reagan modernization program. He pointed out that the DABM program calls for the development of a multi-layered defense system that would be much more reliable than the defenses envisioned in earlier R&D efforts.

Secretary Weinberger listed several considerations relevant to strategic defense: the program will need strong bipartisan support; it is technically daring; we must avoid adverse impact on the budget; the ultimate DABM program should give increased security over the years. He recommended that the President should address DABM in the State of the Union speech. Turning to policy issues, Secretary Weinberger believes the development of DABM would increase stability and would present no treaty problem for the time being. Acknowledging the existence of uncertainties, we will also need defense against cruise missiles and other threats, and must continue with strategic modernization and improved conventional forces. He concluded that an effective defense is feasible for deployment in the late 1990s to 2000. We already have some building blocks, but others, such as large computational capability to deal with big threats, are yet to be developed. He noted that rather than deploy the full DABM system all at once, earlier deployment of a partial defense should be possible. The Secretary reiterated the need to continue with strategic and conventional modernization, and said we must make it clear to NATO, as he will do in addressing NATO defense ministers next week, that a U.S. DABM initiative does not mean we will let these other programs slide.

Secretary Weinberger then said that of the four options put forward by the SIG-DP, he recommended Option 2, which would proceed with R&D as fast as technology would allow but hold open any commitment to deployment for at least a year. Emphasizing the importance of boost-phase intercept, he said that the change in direction was more significant than the increased costs, which were not enormous. DABM will not shake the 1985 budget badly; resources would be for the most part derived by reprogramming now in progress under Paul Thayer.

The Secretary concluded his presentation by stating that this initiative runs against conventional Mutual Assured Destruction and will need work on Capitol Hill. There will be doubters who will say a DABM program will frighten Europe, or not be technically do-able, or unwise for lots of other reasons. But it must be done, because it offers hope, and because it would be disastrous if the Soviets were to develop effective missile defenses and we did not.

Mr. McFarlane commented that, recognizing the instinctive fear of the unknown, we must take into account Soviet, Allied, and Congressional reactions. He asked for Secretary Shultz' thinking.

Secretary Shultz stated his support for the program Secretary Weinberger described, but has no opinion on technologies, or costs. R&D is needed, but at the same time we must carefully take only steps that strengthen our alliances. The Secretary cautioned that we go easy on throwing out a deterrence strategy that has worked well in favor of something new and immature. Military history teaches that the best defense is a good offense; we should not become confident that we can develop a defense that could not be countered.

The proposed program can go over well with Allies, and the Soviets, if it is handled carefully and appears prudent and gives reassurance that we are willing to spend resources responsibly. But the U.S. should not send the message that we think our current strategy is wrong; to do so would be disastrous.

Mr. Weinberger responded that we were not junking but modernizing deterrence. In his view the thing that will allow us to survive will be the best defense; offense only may lead to the end of our world. Therefore, we must work hard and publicly to achieve defensive systems, while at the same time sustaining and modernizing our offense. The Soviets, after all, are doing no less.

The President agreed with Secretary Shultz that we are charting a new road. To take an optimistic view, if the U.S. is first to have both offense and defense, we could put the nuclear genie back into the bottle by volunteering to eliminate offensive weapons. The pessimistic view is that a meeting similar to this NSC is now underway in the Kremlin; if the Soviets get new defenses first, we can expect nuclear blackmail. Therefore, we do need to handle this initiative as carefully and sensibly as possible, but hope and pray we get there first and can make the offer the Soviets would never make.

Mr. Weinberger pointed out that we have no intention of handling this carelessly.

Mr. Shultz said that too much hoopla would be careless.

The President said that he had no desire to see hoopla. He made the announcement of his intentions earlier, and now we were going into the second phase.

Ambassador Kirkpatrick stated that she had recently talked with French non-government defense specialists, and half of the discussion had centered on an independent European BMD.

ACDA Director Adelman expressed support for the proposed program, but saw three paradoxes. The first had to do with stability: in the long run, successful BMD relied on deep reductions in offenses, but in the short run the Soviets would need to proliferate offense to penetrate a U.S. BMD.

The President said he assumed that a continuation of our missile program has to go along with the DABM program. The message to the Soviets is that if they want an arms race, the U.S. will not let them get ahead. Their choice is to break their backs to keep up, or to agree to reductions.

Director Adelman gave his second paradox: the most appealing objective of a defense is to defend populations, but the most likely outcome is to defend offensive weapons and command centers. And the third paradox is that the subject of ballistic missile defense inherently leads to exaggerations and to very sensitive subjects: arms control, alliance viability, militarization of space, strategic doctrine. He called this a nest of controversial subjects and observed that an M-X-like debate would not be useful in 1984.

Chairman Vessey pointed out that the objective of DABM is not just to defend missiles and command centers. The boost-phase intercept has a large population protection significance.

Dr. Keyworth observed that the DABM initiative keeps up front the theme of hope the President expressed on March 23. The recent movie "The Day After" had the opposite theme of hopelessness. Over the last nine months he has faced many of the arguments against defense made so strongly in 1968-72. We are now in an entirely different era of technology. There is great advantage in boost-phase intercept--not possible in 1968. The Fletcher Panel started out pessimistic, but most of its members wound up optimistic. The message in the Weinberger/Keyworth letter urging the President to speak soon on this subject is the importance of raising the spirit of hope through a long-term DABM program.

Mr. Weinberger said that hope is not hype.

The President noted that the proper time for him to make another address may be on the anniversary of his March 23 speech.

Mr. McFarlane asked if the degree of current alarm over the prospect for space war did not argue against putting nuclear weapons in space.

Mr. Weinberger said we wanted the means to do reliable boost-phase intercept. While lasers to do this may need nuclear power, we want to accomplish this mission without using nuclear weapons if we can. (No one dissented.) He added that confirming public hope was very important.

The Vice President asked Dr. Keyworth if the Fletcher group had developed confidence that the defensive technologies could be made immune to countermeasures.

Dr. Keyworth explained that the Fletcher study had addressed technologies designed to counter a responsive Soviet threat--one that was designed to defeat the defense--rather than the current Soviet threat. This had provided confidence in their conclusions that a robust defense could be developed.

Mr. Adelman observed that defense of defensive systems is enormously important.

Deputy Secretary Thayer, commenting on the Vice President's question, stated that several years' work would be needed before the technology had developed far enough to allow it to be viewed as a defense system. Things not yet conceived of could arise. It will take some time to get to any decision point. Mr. Thayer added that, while we will be challenged on the resources needed for this program along with everything else, the current estimate is that DABM will add only about \$8 billion to the five-year plan. The \$8 billion figure is only an approximation and may not be right; costs will be clearer after a year or two of work.

Responding to Mr. Adelman's observation, Mr. Weinberger noted that independent of the DABM initiative, we must work to develop ASAT and satellite defense capability because of the Soviet capability.

The President then observed that we are not alone, and the Soviets really make this decision for us. How are we to face the day when they have both offensive weapons and an effective defense?

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Mr. Shultz announced that he saw no differences of opinion on what we ought to do; the differences were over how we sell it. This should not be done by selling short the concept that has worked.

Mr. Weinberger said that if that argument is taken to its limit, there is no need to do anything different. We must make the case for hope (with the DABM initiative), while continuing with established deterrents.

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The President stated that we must make Congress understand the risk. Make it clear that we are not alone, that the Soviets have been at it longer, and ask if we are to sit and do nothing.

Mr. Shultz agreed. He added that ballistic missiles are not the only threat; there are others we already know to defend against. The Soviets have done so, not in violation of any treaties; we are asleep at the switch. But he again cautioned that, if handled right, the DABM initiative can be a great plus; if handled wrong, it can blow up in our face.

Mr. McFarlane agreed that we need great care in preparing and conducting public, Congressional, and Allied relations, and that this would be worked on next. He asked the President if he wished to take the DABM decision under advisement while these actions are carried out.

The President agreed.

The meeting adjourned at 12:04 p.m.

Prepared by
Ray Pollock