



31 JAN 1986

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: Choosing a Response to the Gorbachev Proposal (U)

(U) John Poindexter asked that I provide you with my thoughts on how you should respond to Gorbachev's most recent arms control proposal. The following represents my assessment of this proposal and my recommendations about the options described in the OWL 20 and 21 papers.

(TS) In my view, far from "adding to the momentum" from the Geneva summit, Gorbachev's proposal is a rather transparent attempt to divert the energy imparted to the Nuclear and Space Talks (NST) by your Joint Statement in Geneva. In committing both sides to a focussed effort to make early progress in these negotiations in areas of common ground, you charted a course with real promise for reaching agreement on sound arms control accords. The striking feature of this commitment was its explicit reference to our two agenda items: 50% reductions appropriately applied in START, and an interim INF agreement. In short, your Joint Statement undercut the Soviet insistence on linkage of such steps to the abortion of SDI.

(TS) I do not see the Gorbachev initiative as putting us on the defensive. Quite to the contrary, it is a defensive action on his part. (Incidentally, I do not sense that there has been anything resembling world opinion rushing to support, much less acclaim, the Gorbachev proposals. He has not "seized the high ground" by pushing these essentially warmed-over Soviet ideas.)

(TS) In reasserting his insistence on killing SDI and encumbering the negotiating agenda with some new -- and in some ways patently unacceptable -- proposals, Gorbachev clearly wants to divert us from the most promising tasks at hand and minimize the prospects for progress. We should not make it easier for him to do so. For this reason, I would support a modified Option 1 approach.

(TS) Under such an approach, we would respond to the Soviets' latest maneuver by reemphasizing the agenda you agreed with Gorbachev. To this end, we should seek Soviet responses to the proposals you tabled in November. Thus far, we have had no meaningful reaction from the Soviet negotiators to the moves we made a month-and-a-half ago. I believe it would be inappropriate and undesirable for us to make yet another fundamental change in our positions under such circumstances -- especially as a response to a largely unhelpful and propagandistic posture struck by Mr. Gorbachev. This is

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the strategy they always try: they refuse to respond to our proposals; instead, they put forward their own plans, hoping to lead us to make responses to their agenda and, thus, abandon our initiatives.

(TS) While with Option 1 we would not offer new modifications to the substance of our proposals, this should not be confused with "standing pat" or negotiating inflexibility. To the contrary, we would make it clear that we are ready to engage the Soviets at Geneva (and in the other, relevant negotiating fora) for the purpose of exploring the real significance of the few, new and "at-first-glance-attractive" elements in their initiative. If, contrary to our present expectations, these negotiations demonstrate Soviet willingness to give substance to Gorbachev's "early progress/common ground" pledge at the Summit -- manifested, among other things, by dropping the obvious non-starters in their latest proposals -- we could readily respond with new positions of our own, as appropriate.

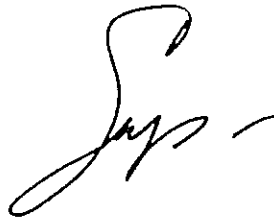
(TS) Option 2 -- allowing, as it does for the first time, the Soviets to keep SS-20's (in the Eastern USSR) while denying us the right to retain any LRINF weapons in Western Europe -- would entail, in my view, not only an extremely significant departure from our longstanding and principled commitment to address on a world-wide and equitable basis the SS-20 menace. It would also be a dangerous and unwarranted concession. Under the best of circumstances, the effect of this proposal would be to leave the Soviets with at least 85 LRINF missiles (with some 255 warheads) nominally based in the Eastern Soviet Union but with the inherent mobility to threaten all European targets within a matter of hours or days. Of course, such a force would also continue to pose a large threat to our Asian allies -- a threat they are, properly, extremely concerned about.

(TS) We must expect, moreover, that as the negotiations proceed we will face strong pressure from the Soviets and even some of our European allies to fall-off our insistence on reductions in Eastern SS-20's. Consequently, I think this new negotiating stance would be not only unjustified but quite tenuous, as well. In addition, were we to table Option 2, it may give rise to the perception that the only major, remaining obstacle to completing a European LRINF accord is the determination of our British and French allies to modernize their obsolescent national deterrents. We must not give the Soviets such a powerful tool for sundering our alliance.

(TS) I feel we must also exercise great care in the way we respond to the Soviets' "framework" or mechanism for realizing the elimination of all nuclear weapons. In particular, the appearance of U.S.-Soviet convergence on the terms and conditions under which we hope to reach our stated, shared goal is calculated by the Soviets to increase the pressure on us to put this objective at the forefront of our negotiating agenda. Thus, while I endorse

the view ascribed to Option 2 that we should reject the Soviet framework, I think it will be most difficult, simultaneously to reject their approach and to "agree with the general goal of moving to the total elimination of nuclear weapons when possible consistent with overall security and stability" (as proposed by Option 2) without helping the Soviets to divert public attention and the negotiating focus away from our agenda and pursuit of common ground on START and INF. Consequently, I would recommend using our response in the nuclear arena solely to put the ball squarely back in Gorbachev's court: to press him to work, as he pledged to do, for near-term progress in the "common ground" of START and INF. There will be plenty of time later for work on and discussions of other, longer-term and even more difficult tasks.

(TS) Even more damaging to U.S. interests in general, and SDI in particular, would be the Option 3 proposals. Option 3's proposed commitment not to seek amendment of the ABM Treaty during the first phase of offensive arms reduction would be extremely prejudicial to future SDI options. Another proposal, the idea of junking the ban on unverifiable mobile ICBMs we tabled in the START talks barely six weeks ago, has the double liability of making us look weak and irresolute, and legitimizing the Soviet effort to acquire the means to circumvent the sharp reductions agreements we seek on offensive nuclear arms.



The J.C.S. Concur in the above.

