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MEMORANDUM TO: The Secretary
THROUGH: S/S
FROM: The Under Secretary
SUBJECT: DPRC Meeting of Survivability,
March 17 - INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

The DPRC met on Wednesday, March 17 to discuss issues with respect to the future survivability of our strategic forces. Henry Kissinger explained that he did not feel we had a chance to address these issues in depth during the recent Verification Panel meetings on SALT. It was obvious that there were differences on the matter and he suggested the desirability of identifying more clearly what these differences were and what measures, if any, should be taken to reduce strategic force vulnerability.

The main points to emerge at the meeting were:

a. Minuteman Vulnerability. There are two questions with respect to Minuteman vulnerability. First, how soon will it occur and second what are the implications? It is worth noting that there is general agreement to the fact that it is clearly within the Soviet capability to deploy forces which could make Minuteman vulnerable. However, the various agencies make different estimates of the future Soviet MIRV threat and the time in which this will develop. As a result, there are different estimates as to when Minuteman might become vulnerable. In general, OSD concerns itself with "worse case assumptions" and thus concludes that

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Minuteman could become vulnerable by the mid-1970s. The intelligence community using "more likely" threats concludes that this is not likely to occur until the late 1970s or early 1980s. The key issues are when can the Soviets put six or more MIRVs on an SS-9 and when can they achieve accuracies of one-quarter of a mile or better? There remain differences of view on these questions.

b. Bombers. There are also two questions here: (1) how many bombers would survive an attack and (2) how many of those that did survive could penetrate Soviet defenses? The main survivability threat comes from Soviet SLBMs. To achieve a major threat they would have to adopt tactics (i.e., depressed trajectory firings) which they have not yet demonstrated. We can take counter-measures such as dispersal of bombers, and probably accomplish this well before the threat emerges. As to penetration, the Soviets have extensive air defenses and might improve them in the future (they are not precluded from doing so in SALT). Again, we have counter-measures such as air launched missiles, low altitude penetrations and electronic counter-measures. Dave Packard seemed confident that for the foreseeable future sufficient bombers can survive and penetrate to targets to destroy 25% of the Soviet population.

c. Submarines. There is at present no serious threat to the US Polaris force. There are potential threats in the latter part of this decade which would be serious but Defense believes that for all the threats we can now postulate, the US can devise counter-measures. Nevertheless, there remains considerable uncertainty about the direction of ASW technology in the latter part of this decade and precisely what threats we might have to meet.

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d. Implications of Strategic Force Vulnerability.

The implications of the situation described above depend to a considerable extent on what we want our strategic forces to do. If their sole or principal objective is Assured Destruction, growing Soviet capabilities pose little threat even if they emerge sooner rather than later, i.e., US forces remaining after a Soviet first strike could still destroy many Soviet cities. If the objectives of our strategic forces extend beyond Assured Destruction the implications of vulnerability are less clear. For example, the discussion touched on such considerations as crisis stability, i.e., how would US political leadership react in a crisis if a significant portion of US force was considered vulnerable; and extension of deterrence to our allies. Differences remain as to the implications of the vulnerability problem for meeting these objectives and indeed the role of strategic forces in meeting them.

e. Future Work. Henry Kissinger asked the DPRC Working Group to develop a tabular presentation comparing the various threat assessments, the counter-measures that we might take and the timing of the threat in relation to our ability to respond to it. He also suggested that the group meet again once this analysis was completed to address the following conceptual questions:

1. Do we need an independent capability for Assured Destruction in each element of the strategic forces (i.e., SLBMs, ICBMs and bombers)?

2. What is the relationship between the objectives of strategic forces as set forth in the current Presidentially approved sufficiency criteria and our projected capabilities? What criteria should we apply to crisis stability and relative damage? What capabilities do we need to extend deterrence to our allies?

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3. To what extent can vulnerability problems be fixed by improvements to command and control and retargeting? (This latter matter is to be taken up in a restricted group. Admiral Moorer offered to give the briefing on this matter.)

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