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THE WHITE HOUSE

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SECRET

March 31, 1984

NATIONAL SECURITY DECISION
DIRECTIVE NUMBER 137

US Nuclear Arms Control Strategy for 1984 (U)

After giving the matter considerable thought, I have reached the following conclusions concerning how we should deal with the Soviet Union on nuclear arms control during this year. (C)

First of all, I believe that we have the opportunity to deal with the Soviet Union from more of a position of strength than in previous years. This is due to the progress that we have made over the last three years in a number of areas. Perhaps of greatest importance is that we have established the basis for a national, bi-partisan consensus in support of our strategic modernization program. Based on this consensus, this critical modernization program is now moving from the discussion stage, where it had been stalled for a number of years, to the deployment of fielded capability. (C)

With the continued help of all those involved, steady progress in implementing our strategic modernization program will help us gradually to reverse the existing adverse trends in certain key indicators of the strategic nuclear balance. In doing so, it will provide us the basic leverage we need to do more than simply negotiate arms control agreements. It will, over time, generate the incentives to the Soviet Union needed to put us in a position to negotiate meaningful and effectively verifiable agreements, agreements that both enhance world stability and our security, and that permit significant reductions in the nuclear arsenals of both the U.S. and the Soviet Union. (C)

In addition, over the past year it has become clear that the Soviet Union has failed in its attempt to drive a wedge in the linkage between the United States and our NATO allies. Over the last few years, we have had nearly continuous, intensive consultations with our NATO partners. This process has also added to our strength. Our allies have not only stood squarely by us as we implemented the negotiation track of the 1979 NATO "dual track" decision. They have also sustained the NATO LRINF modernization decision and deployments are currently in progress in the United Kingdom, Italy, and the Federal Republic of Germany. (C)

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As a result of this Soviet failure, the Soviet Union is now in the difficult position of seeking means to avoid their clear responsibility for walking away from both the START and INF negotiations. However, no matter what they now choose to do, the legacy of their actions will continue to haunt them and the mantle of responsibility will sit heavy on their shoulders. (S)

Given this situation, I believe that the United States should stay firmly on the high road that it has traveled thus far in pursuit of meaningful, equitable, verifiable arms control involving significant reductions in nuclear arsenals. This means that we will not compromise our principles by chasing expedient agreement. We will not entertain proposals which involve preemptive concessions to attempt to entice the Soviets back into negotiations before they sincerely wish to sit with us and solve problems. And, we will not reward Soviet intransigence, thus turning their policy failure into victory and dissipating the strength we have accumulated due to the principled, yet flexible stance that we have taken over the last three years. (S)

On the other hand, maintaining the high road does mean that, while we avoid the pitfalls cited above, we will continue vigorously to conduct a sincere, positive effort to reach agreement with the Soviet Union. While encouraging the Soviets to return to the START and INF tables in Geneva, we will remain ready to talk at any time and in any place without preconditions. We will take every appropriate opportunity to explain patiently the virtue of our sound, flexible positions in both START and INF. We will use every appropriate avenue to explore ways of finding appropriate ways to bridge the distance between the requirements of our principled positions and the legitimate concerns of the Soviet Union. We will remain prepared to discuss means of trading areas of U.S. advantage of concern to the Soviet Union for areas of Soviet advantage of concern to the United States and our Allies. And, we will make full use of time during which we wait for a positive Soviet response to fully prepare ourselves to exploit opportunities that may present themselves for making progress towards meaningful agreements that meet our criteria. (S)

Toward this goal, the Senior Arms Control Policy Group (SACPG) will complete, on a priority basis, its current efforts toward identifying and evaluating for me the full range of potential U.S. options in the START and INF areas under likely alternative scenarios. This work should address options which flesh out and enhance our current position. However, it should also identify the key differences between the U.S. and Soviet positions, and identify options that could, under certain conditions, bridge those differences. I do not intend nor will I permit us to repeat the mistakes made by previous arms control agreements. However, if elements of previous agreements put in the right context meet our needs, we should not ignore them. Finally, the SACPG work should also address likely Soviet initiatives and prepare us to appropriately respond to them. (S)

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This SACPG activity should serve as the primary clearing house for the various ideas that have been suggested about these topics. This work will have the priority support of all agencies and should be completed with a report submitted to me by May 5.

(S)

It is essential that the task given to the Senior Arms Control Policy Group be accomplished promptly, thoroughly, and on a close-hold basis and without the unauthorized disclosure of the nature of the work or the various options being studied. Taken out of the proper context, the unauthorized disclosure of this task could be misinterpreted with severe consequences to the fundamental interests of the United States. The National Security Advisor will clear in advance any statements used in Congressional testimony, in consultations with our Allies, made on the record or on background with the press, and made publicly as related to this task of the Senior Policy Group. (S)

We will exploit opportunities as they present themselves to provide the Soviet Union further information about the flexibility that is inherent in the U.S. START and INF positions. To this end, I would like a letter drafted for my signature to the leader of the Soviet Union. This letter should note that I recognize that the United States and the Soviet Union do hold opposite views on who is threatened. It should explain fully the basis for the U.S. concern, citing Soviet statements threatening to the U.S. and the record of Soviet arms build-up. It should note the history of U.S. initiatives aimed at reducing tensions. It should make clear the continued, sincere U.S. interest in meaningful, equitable and effectively verifiable agreements which would reduce the size of nuclear arsenals. It should highlight the flexibility in the current U.S. positions and our readiness to find appropriate ways for trading U.S. areas of advantage that are of concern to the Soviet Union for Soviet areas of advantage that are of concern for the U.S. and its allies. Finally, it should make clear the readiness of the U.S. to resume both the START and INF negotiations and should encourage the Soviets to reopen a constructive dialogue with us on these matters. (S)

A draft of this letter should be available for my review by April 7. (S)

We will move forward in those other areas in which there may be prospects for progress toward meaningful agreements. For example, the U.S. draft Chemical Warfare Treaty will be tabled before the end of the current session of the Conference on Disarmament. (S)

Ongoing work on the full range of the U.S. arms control agenda (to include additional confidence building measures, nuclear testing, and space related issues) should be reviewed by the Senior Arms Control Policy Group. This work should be brought to a timely conclusion. (S)

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In addition to these actions, we will intensify our efforts to explain publicly the principled positions we have taken in the various nuclear arms control negotiations over the last three years. We have established a record about which we should be proud. We must ensure that that record is known and understood. (S)

A detailed plan for accomplishing the task of publicly explaining our positions in START and INF should be developed. This plan should outline the major themes to be stressed and the mechanism for most effectively presenting these themes. This plan will be prepared and submitted for my approval by April 14. (S)

Finally, as we implement the steps I have directed, it is essential that clarity and coherence of this Administration's position on arms control be maintained. To that end, the Secretary of State will serve as the Administration's chief spokesman on arms control. Congressional testimony and all major statements on arms control will be cleared in advance through the National Security Advisor. (S)

Ronald Reagan

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