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September 15, 1955

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Discussion at the 258th Meeting of the National Security Council, Thursday, September 8, 1955

Present at the 258th Council meeting were the Vice President of the United States, presiding; the Acting Secretary of State; the Acting Secretary of Defense; and the Director, Office of Defense Mobilization. Also present were the Secretary of the Treasury; Mr. William F. Tompkins for the Attorney General (for Items 3 and 4); the Acting Director, Bureau of the Budget; the Special Assistant to the President on Disarmament; Dr. John von Neumann for the Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission (for Item 2); the Director, U. S. Information Agency; the Secretary of the Air Force (for Item 2); General Twining for the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; the Acting Director of Central Intelligence; Mr. Dillon Anderson, Special Assistant to the President; Brig. Gen. Theodore W. Parker for Mr. Nelson A. Rockefeller, Special Assistant to the President; the Deputy Assistant to the President; the Executive Secretary, NSC; and the Deputy Executive Secretary, NSC.

There follows a summary of the discussion at the meeting and the main points taken.

2. INTERCONTINENTAL BALLISTIC MISSILES PROGRAM (NSC Action No. 1430-b; Report to the President by the Technological Capabilities Panel of the Science Advisory Committee, ODM, dated February 14, 1955; NSC 5522; Memo for NSC from Acting Executive Secretary, same subject, dated August 30, 1955)

Mr. Anderson briefed the National Security Council on the background of the ICBM program, in the course of which he read the Council action recommended by the NSC Planning Board and amended by the President at Denver on September 5. He then suggested that the Vice President, as Chairman, might wish to invite questions and comments.

Secretary Humphrey indicated that there were two questions he would like to ask. First, he would like to ask General Twining how really superior the ICBM was to airplane delivery of nuclear weapons in the event of U. S. retaliation, on the assumption that the Russians had a 5000-mile missile with a considerable degree of accuracy as to the point of delivery. Secondly, he would like to inquire, from the point of view of the United States and with the world situation as it was today, how much advantage there was in the possession of a 5000-mile missile as compared with a 1500-mile missile.

Secretary Quarles undertook to answer Secretary Humphrey's two questions. He said that, in the first place, it was most desirable to place the ICBM in its proper perspective. It was not in itself a single entity, but rather part of a program, which program of the Department of Defense contained two other significant missiles programs, though admittedly these other programs did not have the potentialities of the ICBM. The first of these two was the "Navajo" project, which Secretary Quarles briefly described. He thereafter pointed out that the Navajo weapon would be of great help to us if we came out second-best to the Soviets in achieving the ICBM. He said he also wished to emphasize that of course our manned aircraft capability was still the most important single capability in this field.

Secretary Humphrey then asked a further question, as to the significance of the difference in capabilities between the ICBM and the manned aircraft. Secretary Quarles replied that the manned aircraft was superior to the ICBM, both in accuracy and weight of destructive force. He added that the appraisal of the importance of the ICBM set forth in the Council action proposed by the Planning Board constituted an exactly correct appraisal. However, this appraisal needed to be viewed in the context of the whole problem, in which case the ICBM would appear as a back-up weapon rather than as the prime weapon.

The Vice President and Governor Stassen concurrently raised the question of the terrific speed of the ICBM. Did not this speed carry with it the danger that the Soviets would be able to destroy U. S. retaliatory capabilities with the ICBM? To Governor Stassen this seemed the crucial aspect of the problem. Secretary Quarles replied that this would certainly be true if the Soviets were able to achieve a sufficient number of ICBM's with the necessary degree of accuracy in delivery. But that they should be able to do so required a very great stretch of the imagination. Moreover, the fears that Governor Stassen had expressed applied more cogently to our overseas bases than to our bases on the American continent. Secretary Quarles expressed the opinion that the Russians were not likely to achieve the requisite number of ICBM's with the requisite degree of accuracy in the period up to 1960.

Governor Stassen then said that the accuracy of the ICBM and its devastating effects would of course depend on Soviet achievement of thermonuclear warheads for their ICBM. Secretary Quarles replied that this was likely.

Secretary Humphrey then stated to the Council that it was his judgment that we ought to make the ICBM program a program of continuous development but not something which must be attained next year.

Secretary Quarles commented that the ICBM program possessed all the priority and importance which the proposed NSC action confers on it. He believed that we should give the ICBM program all of the backing which we can practicably.

Dr. Flemming then inquired as to the meaning of the term "a program of highest priority² as contained in subparagraph c of the proposed NSC action. Did, for example, the term "highest priority² indicate an overriding priority? Secretary Quarles replied that ascribing to the ICBM the highest priority, as was done in the proposed NSC action, would put the Secretary of Defense in the position of being able to issue a directive to get ahead with the prosecution of the ICBM program in such fashion that no other priority program would interfere with it. This priority prevailed against all other priorities unless it was the judgment of the Secretary of Defense that it was desirable to modify this course of action. Dr. Flemming said he understood that in effect there were two or three programs in this top priority category which from time to time might have to be maneuvered. Secretary Quarles confirmed that such was his understanding.

Dr. Flemming then said that it was his understanding that if the proposed action were accepted, the National Security Council would get its first report on the development of the ICBM program next December. Mr. Dillon Anderson confirmed Dr. Flemming's understanding, and indicated the likelihood that the report on the ICBM program would be given to the National Security Council at approximately the same time (December) that the Department of Defense would report on the progress made in achieving the 1500-mile missile.

The Vice President said that he understood that no warning system would operate against an ICBM. Secretary Quarles replied that it was the belief of the Defense Department that we could perhaps attain at least a 15-minute warning of the approach of an ICBM. He pointed out that once such a missile enters the upper atmosphere it is committed to a certain course. Accordingly, we would know where it would land, and this knowledge gave hope of providing 15 minutes for people to take cover before the strike occurred.

The Vice President then turned to Dr. von Neumann and asked him whether, in his judgment, the proposed NSC action on the ICBM program "went far enough². In responding, Dr. von Neumann emphasized that he was speaking for himself only and not for the Chairman, AEC. He then went on to say that while he might be accused of merely playing with words, it seemed to him desirable to change the wording in subparagraph d to read that the program would be prosecuted "with all possible speed² rather than as written, "with all practicable speed². Such a change would probably make no substantial difference in the actual prosecution of the program, but it might be useful. Dr. von Neumann then went on to comment that the task of intercepting an ICBM was horribly difficult. Once it was launched, all that we would know is what city it was going to hit. Moreover, the ICBM would be able to take at least some slight evasive action. Only a very heavy atomic missile could possibly intercept it.

Secretary Humphrey then inquired how much an ICBM would cost. Dr. von Neumann said that this was a difficult question to answer, but that he would guess that after several of the missiles had actually been manufactured, the cost would be about \$1 million apiece. Secretary Humphrey said in short, that would be "relatively cheap², and Dr. von Neumann said yes.

Governor Stassen then inquired of Dr. von Neumann as to the accuracy characteristics of the ICBM. Dr. von Neumann

replied, and concluded with a statement that we have no evidence at this point that the Russians actually have a thermonuclear warhead for their ballistic missiles. On the other hand, we must certainly assume that they would have such a warhead in a matter of two or three years.

Secretary Humphrey then asked whether there was a tremendous gap between the difficulties of making a 1500-mile ballistic missile and a 5500-mile missile. Dr. von Neumann replied that it was a matter of extension rather than of difference in kind. Things that looked highly feasible in a 1500-mile missile looked much more difficult when applied to a 5500-mile missile. We know, for example, that every one of the 1500-mile missiles will actually work. Nevertheless the achievement of a 1500-mile missile would follow along the same path as would lead to success with a 5500-mile missile.

Dr. Flemming then raised the domestic political implications of the ICBM program, and pointed out that a lot of questions about this program would inevitably be asked on Capitol Hill. Since this was the case, he believed that it would be wiser to have the directive read that the Secretary of Defense would prosecute the program with all "possible speed² rather than with all "practicable speed². Secretary Quarles commented that the difference in wording was quite academic so far as it concerned the actual course of action in the prosecution of the ICBM program. This program was in any event a multi-billion program. For his conservative blood, said Secretary Quarles, that was enough, and he was opposed to providing any stronger basis than already existed for individuals who felt that there were all kinds of other alternative possibilities in the prosecution of the program and wanted another billion or so in order to try out such possibilities. Secretary Quarles emphasized that we would probably not have a real solution to the ICBM earlier than 1959, and again stressed his view that the ICBM was not "a replacement weapon². The background of our strategic force, he said, was still the manned aircraft. In adopting the proposed NSC action, the Department of Defense would contemplate a billion-dollar bulge in its budget for the Fiscal Year 1957 or 1958.

The Vice President said that as he saw it, the adjective "practicable" meant that you would spend about all the money on this program that you practicably could. Secretary Humphrey said he believed that the phrase "all practicable speed² was the proper one to use. It was essential that you know what you are spending your money for.

The Vice President then pointed out that what he was trying to do in part was to anticipate the domestic political problem to which Dr. Flemming had just alluded. For this reason, the Vice President said, he would again like to repeat his question as to the meaning of the phrase "all practicable speed². Secretary Quarles replied that it was a very difficult question to answer. The research people on the ICBM project were constantly perceiving marginal possibilities for carrying it through which are not now actually in the program. Beyond these marginal possibilities there were several alternative approaches to the problem. Accordingly, it became very difficult to define the precise meaning of such phrases as "all practicable speed² and "all possible speed². He said that he rather liked the adjective "practicable², but the phrase "all possible speed² was not objectionable to him.

Secretary Hoover said that he had one comment to make at this point. He explained that he was speaking as an individual with an engineering background, and that he was addressing himself to the problem of the ICBM on the context of our foreign relations. If the Soviets were to demonstrate to the world that they actually had an ICBM before we had such a weapon, the result would have the most devastating effect on the foreign relations of the United States of anything that could possibly happen. Secretary Hoover pointed out that the Western coalition was held together essentially by the knowledge of the members of the coalition of the ability of the United States to protect them. If this umbrella of protection were removed, neutralism would advance tremendously throughout the free world. From a developmental point of view, continued Secretary Hoover, we in the State Department view the ICBM project as in very much the same category as the Manhattan Project during World War II. All possible avenues to success should be tried, and we should not confine ourselves only to those which seemed most likely to produce results. In the State Department it was understood that there were some 100 projects in the Defense Department in the category of "highest priority². The State Department believed that the ICBM project should be at the very top of this priority, even if to put it there inevitably meant going down certain unproductive avenues. Accordingly, it seemed to Secretary Hoover that the difference between the phrases "all practicable speed² and "all possible speed² was not a mere verbal difference, but constituted the very essence of the problem.

Secretary Humphrey said that he still thought that the difference between these two phrases was largely academic. What you actually should do was to spend all the money you could that would be productive of results in achieving this

capability. You should follow all reasonable avenues of approach to success. Essentially the difference in the two sets of words was the difference between a sensible approach to a solution of the problem and a crash approach.

Secretary Hoover replied by stating that when you absolutely have to get a job done, you have to take something of the shotgun approach. There are a number of very difficult decisions which those who directly manage the ICBM program are obliged to take. In making such decisions these project managers should feel free of restraints. Secretary Hoover added that he would strongly recommend that we make the most complete use of all our resources to achieve this objective, even if in so doing waste was involved. The stakes were too high to permit any other course of action.

Governor Stassen said he wished strongly to support these views of Secretary Hoover, and asked Secretary Humphrey whether he would not agree to the use of the words "all possible speed² provided additional language were inserted as a safeguard--for example, a statement that the Department of Defense would check back with the National Security Council if vast additional sums should be involved.

Secretary Humphrey did not reply directly to Governor Stassen's inquiry, but himself put the question as to whether the reports by the Department of Defense to the National Security Council on the progress of the ICBM program would not contain cost estimates and therefore act as or constitute a kind of check on it.

Secretary Quarles suggested that regardless of the choice of words, whether "all possible speed², or "all practicable speed², the Science Advisory group should be asked to report to the National Security Council as to whether there were any areas of scientific progress toward the achievement of an ICBM which were not being adequately explored in the current ICBM program. Secretary Quarles believed that reporting such information was much more significant than the issue of the words to be selected.

Secretary Hoover said he had yet another observation to make. This was to call the attention of the Council to the fact that the earth satellite exercise had gone a long way to help the peoples of the free world realize that we were forging ahead in our technological capabilities.

Mr. Dillon Anderson stated his understanding that the language of the proposed directive, as modified and approved by the President, would produce a situation in which no other project within the Department of Defense would enjoy a priority as high as the ICBM program. As the President understood the proposed NSC action and directive, the ICBM would certainly not be one of 180 top priority projects.

The Vice President then referred to the letter which Senators Anderson and Jackson had written to the President, urging a crash program for the achievement of an ICBM. On this point the Vice President said that when he and Mr. Dillon Anderson had talked to the President at Denver on September 5, the President had indicated that he did not favor a crash program for the ICBM of the Manhattan type. Dr. Flemming said that nevertheless we ought to avoid any possibility that the ICBM program should be merely one of 100 other top priority programs.

General Twining observed that no other project within the Air Force had a priority as high as the ICBM. He said that he was greatly impressed with Dr. von Neumann's idea of a report to the National Security Council on what avenues of approach to achieving an ICBM were not actually being explored. He then went on to point out his view that it was essential that all parts of the ICBM program go forward together, so that the end result would be a complete weapon capability with the ICBM ready to be used. He was therefore opposed to a Manhattan-type project.

Dr. Flemming said he now understood that no other project enjoyed so high a priority in the Air Force as did the ICBM; but would this proposed directive assure that no project throughout the entire Department of Defense would enjoy as high a priority as the ICBM? Secretary Quarles replied by stating that the ICBM project under this directive would enjoy a special priority and would, alone among all the projects, be given special treatment in the Department of Defense.

Governor Stassen then suggested that, after the statement that the U. S. ICBM program is therefore a program of the highest priority, the words "above all others² should be inserted. Secretary Quarles replied that he still preferred the existing language without Governor Stassen's addition, because the existing language would assure the Defense Department of greater flexibility.

Dr. von Neumann commented that the question of these different phrases was more or less academic as far as the National Security Council was concerned. The members of the Council actually knew what was intended by these words. However, the precise choice of words became much more important the further down the line you went and the further you got away from the clear understanding of the words in the National Security Council.

Mr. Dillon Anderson then said he thought it desirable to add one or two facts bearing on the domestic political aspects of the problem. He summarized the President's proposed response to the letter sent him by Senators Anderson and Jackson. This response would indicate that the President did not like a Manhattan type of project for the ICBM program. The President had expressed the thought that if we went beyond the priority assigned to the ICBM by the presently proposed NSC action, the result would be to destroy the flexibility which was required by the responsible department and might actually delay development. In sum, the President believed that the language of the present directive went as far as one could go without getting into a panicky or frantic state of mind.

Secretary Humphrey then suggested that subparagraph c might be amended to read "The U. S. ICBM program is therefore a program of the highest priority above all others, except as directed by the President."

Secretary Robertson said that of course this entire matter had been discussed at the greatest length in the Defense Department. He could assure the Vice President and the National Security Council that the ICBM program was enjoying the very highest priority not only in the Air Force but in the entire Defense Department. All internal pressure will be directed by the Department of Defense along this line, and questions of judgment as to practicability will be answered in terms of this kind of priority.

Governor Stassen said that he not only seconded the suggested revision of subparagraph c made by Secretary Humphrey, but would also add the suggestion made earlier that the Department of Defense report to the National Security Council on avenues of approach to the achievement of an ICBM which were not being currently used in the ICBM program.

Dr. Flemming again warned the Council that this whole ICBM program could flare up into an intensely emotional political issue. Hence, he would resolve all doubts by choosing to use the strongest possible words as to the manner in which the program would be prosecuted. He would therefore still recommend "all possible speed² rather than "all practicable speed². Secretary Humphrey said he still preferred the term "all practicable speed² because the use of the term "all possible speed" would expose the ICBM program to all kinds of difficulties.

The Vice President said he had been very greatly impressed by Secretary Hoover's earlier argument that the important thing is not merely the achievement of a developed weapons capability in the ICBM field, but, from the point of view of foreign relations, that the peoples of the free world believe that you have achieved an ICBM. Accordingly, it seemed of the utmost importance to the Vice President that the United States get an experimental ICBM missile and not wait for the final and developed weapon which General Twining desired from the military point of view.

At this point Mr. Dillon Anderson placed before the Council the three proposed revisions which had been suggested in the course of the discussion. Before these issues could be decided, Secretary Hoover said he had one more question to put to Dr. von Neumann with respect to the latter's argument that the language adopted by the Council, while quite clear in its meaning to the Council itself, might be such less clear to those on the firing line who were intimately engaged in the prosecution of the ICBM program. Would the language "to be prosecuted with all possible speed² have a clearer meaning to these people than the term "all practicable speed²? Secretary Hoover said he believed it would, and Dr. von Neumann agreed with him.

Secretary Robertson then referred to Secretary Hoover's earlier reference to the foreign policy aspects of these weapons developments, and raised the question as to the foreign policy implication of the possibility that the United States would develop a 1500-mile ballistic missile prior to the achievement by the USSR of a 5500-mile missile. Would prior achievement of a 1500-mile missile in effect counter somewhat the achievement by the Russians of a 1500-mile missile prior to the U. S.? In short, should we make a particular try for the 1500-mile missile? Secretary Robertson thought that some study should be given to the foreign policy implications which he had raised.

Secretary Hoover expressed interest in such a proposed study, and pointed out first that most of America's allies were within the range of a Soviet 1500-mile weapon. Furthermore, he questioned whether our allies would permit us to use

overseas bases on their territory from which to launch 1500-mile missiles.

Governor Stassen said there was yet another subject which ought to be studied. Will we not soon have to assume that the Soviets will beat us out in the race to achieve an ICBM, and should we not therefore consider what moves we will make if this indeed becomes a fact? Governor Stassen then inquired whether the Russians would feel it necessary to make tests of an ICBM before being assured that they have actually achieved an ICBM capability. Dr. von Neumann answered in the affirmative, and said that a number of tests would in all probability be made by the Russians, who thought much as we did with regard to the necessity of tests. He pointed out, however, that the tests might be made by sending the missile straight up into the air rather than directing it across a stretch of 5500 miles.

Secretary Humphrey explained that he was not yet quite clear on this difference between the problems presented by the development of the long-range and the medium-range ballistic missiles. Does work on these two weapons go along together, or do they develop along separate courses? Secretary Quarles replied that the technology of the long-range weapon was very similar to the technology of the shorter range weapon. If you perfected the technology of the ICBM, you would be perfecting the technology of the shorter range missile. On the other hand, if you concentrated on the 1500-mile missile you would be likely to get it earlier. General Twining added that of course the British were pushing hard for the development of a 1500-mile missile, and we were giving them all the help we could.

As Mr. Anderson was about to sum up the consensus of the Council as to changes in the proposed directive, the Acting Director of the Budget, Mr. Brundage, said he had one other concern, which had been called to his attention by the Budget member of the NSC Planning Board. Could the language in subparagraph d of the proposed action, to the effect that "all other Executive departments and agencies will assist the Department of Defense as required", give the Secretary of Defense authority over other Executive departments and agencies? Dr. Flemming pointed out that the President was the source of the Secretary of Defense's authority here, and Governor Stassen said that he supposed this language was inserted in order to avoid delays which might be caused by resort to regular budgetary review. Mr. Anderson said that if any dispute arose in this area it would presumably go to the President to be resolved. Dr. Flemming added that so far as his interpretation was concerned, he believed that this language meant that the ODM would give the requirements of the Secretary of Defense an overriding priority in ODM and would assure the Secretary of Defense that he could get anything from ODM that he required.

At this point Mr. Dillon Anderson presented to the Council the three revisions in the proposed directive which had been suggested in the course of the discussion. The Council decided to revise subparagraph c by inclusion of the words "above all others, except as directed by the President."² It also accepted the amendment to subparagraph d which inserted the phrase "including avenues not explored". The Council rejected the proposal that the phrase "all practicable speed", in subparagraph d, be replaced by the phrase "all possible speed".

The National Security Council:

a. Agreed that:

(1) There would be the gravest repercussions on the national security and on the cohesion of the free world, should the USSR achieve an operational capability with the ICBM substantially in advance of the U. S.

(2) In view of known Soviet progress in this field, the development by the U. S. of an operational capability with the ICBM is a matter of great urgency.

(3) The U. S. ICBM program is therefore a program of the highest priority above all others, except as directed by the President.

(4) The Secretary of Defense will prosecute the program with all practicable speed, and all other Executive departments and agencies will assist the Department of Defense as required. The Secretary of Defense will report promptly to the NSC any significant developments or causes of delay in this program (including avenues not explored), and additionally will give the Council a special briefing at least once a year, normally in December, on the status of progress and the major problems involved, including a statement of what could be done in the direction of setting an earlier target date for operational capability and the arguments for and against such a proposal.

b. Requested the Department of State to report to the Council, not later than December 1, 1955, on the foreign policy implications of a demonstration by the USSR that it had developed an intercontinental or a 1500-mile ballistic missile prior to the U. S., and an estimate of the extent to which U. S. achievement of a 1500-mile missile would counter the implications of Soviet achievement of an ICBM or a 1500-mile missile.

Note: The action in a above subsequently approved by the President, subject to the following amendments

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