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TELNO 1438

OF 280145Z MAY 86

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MY TELNO 1425: SALT LIMITS

SUMMARY

1. THE US FORMALLY ABANDONS THE SALT LIMITS AS A FACTOR IN STRATEGIC FORCE PLANNING. SALT CONSIDERATIONS DISMISSED AS IRRELEVANT TO THE DECISIONS (A) TO MAINTAIN COMPLIANCE NOW, BUT, (B) PROVISIONALLY, NOT IN NOVEMBER. THE PROVISOS FOR NOVEMBER ARE TO RELATE TO SOVIET PERFORMANCE, BUT ARE NOT PRECISELY DEFINED. INITIAL DOMESTIC REACTIONS MUTED AND CONFUSED.

DETAIL.

2. THE PRESIDENT'S TWO BASIC DECISIONS ANNOUNCED ON 27 MAY ARE (A) TO START TO DISMANTLE TWO POSEIDON SUBMARINES AS THE EIGHTH OHIO-CLASS SUBMARINE BEGINS SEA TRIALS ON 28 MAY, BUT (B) TO CONTINUE DEPLOYMENT OF ALCM-CARRYING B52 HEAVY BOMBERS BEYOND THE 131ST AIRCRAFT (LIKELY TO BE DEPLOYED IN NOVEMBER/DECEMBER) WITHOUT ANY FURTHER COMPENSATING REDUCTION, AND SO BREACH THE SALT II SUB-CEILING (1320 SYSTEMS) ON MIRVED MISSILES AND ALCM CARRYING BOMBERS, UNLESS THE SOVIET UNION HAS BY THEN TAKEN QUOTE THE CONSTRUCTIVE STEPS NECESSARY TO ALTER THE CURRENT SITUATION UNQUOTE. THE PRESIDENT HAS ALSO COMMISSIONED A DOD REPORT BEFORE NOVEMBER ON THE FUTURE US ICBM PROGRAMME, AND HAS DIRECTED THAT THE ADVANCED CRUISE MISSILES PROGRAMME BE ACCELERATED.

3. THE RATIONALE FOR THESE DECISIONS IS ENCAPSULATED IN THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT THAT "THE UNITED STATES MUST BASE DECISIONS REGARDING ITS STRATEGIC FORCE STRUCTURE ON THE NATURE AND MAGNITUDE OF THE THREAT POSED BY SOVIET STRATEGIC FORCES, AND NOT ON STANDARDS CONTAINED IN THE SALT STRUCTURE WHICH HAS BEEN UNDERMINED BY SOVIET NON-COMPLIANCE, AND ESPECIALLY IN A FLAWED SALT II TREATY WHICH WAS NEVER RATIFIED, WOULD HAVE EXPIRED IF IT HAD BEEN RATIFIED, AND HAS BEEN VIOLATED BY THE SOVIET UNION." IN OTHER WORDS, THE CRITERIA FOR THIS AND FUTURE DECISIONS ARE NOT SALT-RELATED, BUT WILL REFLECT NEW AND CONTINUING ASSESSMENTS OF SOVIET ACTIONS AND US NATIONAL SECURITY INTERESTS. THUS DECISION (A) IS BEING PRESENTED AS IN NO WAY REFLECTING ARMS CONTROL CONSIDERATIONS, BUT ONLY THE FACT THAT TO REFIT AND RUN THE TWO POSEIDON SUBMARINES WOULD HAVE BEEN COSTLY (DOLLARS 136 MILLION PER SUBMARINE), AND NOT COST-EFFECTIVE (THIS WAS INDEED THE JCS VIEW).

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4. AS FOR WHAT MIGHT CONSTITUTE THE SOVIET 'CONSTRUCTIVE STEPS' WHICH MIGHT LEAD TO RECONSIDERATION OF DECISION (B), THE WHITE HOUSE SPOKESMAN REFERRED TO (A) SOVIET PERFORMANCE ON NON-COMPLIANCE, (B) SOVIET BEHAVIOUR AT THE NEGOTIATING TABLE IN GENEVA, AND (C) A SLOW-DOWN IN THE SOVIET MILITARY BUILD-UP (WHICH SPEAKES LATER DEFINED IN TERMS OF DEPLOYMENT OF SOVIET STRATEGIC NUCLEAR SYSTEMS). OUR ADMINISTRATION CONTACTS CANNOT OFFER ANY MORE DETAILED DEFINITIONS.

5. ON THE FACE OF IT, IT WOULD BE HARD FOR THE RUSSIANS TO PASS IN THE AUTUMN THE TEST THE PRESIDENT HAS SET THEM. BUT SOME OF OUR CONTACTS IN STATE ARGUE THAT SIX MONTHS IS A LONG TIME, THAT THE AUTUMN ELECTIONS WILL AFFECT WHITE HOUSE PERCEPTIONS, THAT IF, BY NOVEMBER A SUMMIT IS IMMINENT THE PRESIDENT HIMSELF MAY WANT TO FIND THE SOVIET PERFORMANCE IMPROVING, AND THAT THE IMPRECISE DEFINITION OF THE TEST MAY THEN PROVE CONVENIENT.

6. THE PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT MAKES CLEAR THAT THE PROCESS OF WITHDRAWING OBSOLESCENT SYSTEMS WILL CONTINUE, AND THAT NO APPRECIABLE NUMERICAL GROWTH IN US STRATEGIC OFFENSIVE FORCES IS FORESEEN. IT ADDS THAT 'ASSUMING NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN THE THREAT WE FACE, THE UNITED STATES WILL NOT DEPLOY MORE STRATEGIC NUCLEAR DELIVERY VEHICLES THAN DOES THE SOVIET UNION . . .

OR MORE STRATEGIC BALLISTIC MISSILE WARHEADS THAN DOES THE SOVIET UNION.' WHILE THIS IMPLIES SOME CONTINUING US RESTRAINT TO MATCH ANY SOVIET RESTRAINT, BOMBER-DELIVERED WEAPONS APPEAR TO BE EXCLUDED, THUS LEAVING NO SUCH RESTRAINT ON US ALCM DEPLOYMENT.

7. THE WHITE HOUSE FACT SHEET ISSUED WITH THE 27 MAY STATEMENT (COPIES BY BAG, NOT TO ALL)

DISTINGUISHES BETWEEN THE (EXPIRED) SALT TREATIES AND THE ABM TREATY, ACKNOWLEDGES THAT 'OUR OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE ABM TREATY REMAIN UNCHANGED . . . AND THAT US PROGRAMMES ARE, AND WILL CONTINUE TO BE, IN COMPLIANCE WITH OUR ABMT OBLIGATIONS, AND REAFFIRMS THAT IT REMAINS A PRIORITY OBJECTIVE TO HAVE THE SOVIET UNION RETURN TO COMPLIANCE WITH THEIR OBLIGATIONS UNDER THIS TREATY'. THE ISSUE OF THE RESTRICTIVE/PERMISSIVE INTERPRETATIONS OF THE ABMT IS NOT ADDRESSED, AND THEREFORE HAS NOT, FOR THE PRESENT, BEEN RE-OPENED.

8. IN BRIEFING REPRESENTATIVES OF NATO EMBASSIES, (SOME OF WHOM WERE CLEARLY TAKEN BY SURPRISE BY DECISION (B)), HOLMES (ASSISTANT SECRETARY, POL-MIL/STATE) SAID ON 28 MAY THAT, ALTHOUGH JUDGEMENTS WOULD HAVE TO BE MADE ABOUT SOVIET BEHAVIOUR BEFORE DEPLOYMENT OF THE 131ST ALCM CARRYING BOMBER AT THE END OF THE YEAR, NO NEW FORMAL PRESIDENTIAL DECISIONS WOULD BE NEEDED BEFORE THEN. EQUALLY, WHILE US CONSULTATIONS WITH ALLIES ON ALL ISSUES WOULD NO DOUBT CONTINUE, NO FURTHER CONSULTATIONS WITH ALLIES ON THIS SPECIFIC ISSUE WERE AT PRESENT ENVISAGED BEFORE THE END OF THE YEAR.

9. THE US PRESS HAS REACTED UNCERTAINLY TO THE PRESIDENT'S ANNOUNCEMENT, WITH MOST CORRESPONDENTS CONCENTRATING ON DECISION (A), AND PLAYING DOWN DECISION (B). SOME PAPERS QUOTE

ADMINISTRATION SOURCES AS ARGUING THAT ANY BREACH OF THE SALT II

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1320 LIMIT MIGHT BE BRIEF, AS TWO FURTHER POSEIDON SUBMARINES WILL BE DUE FOR WITHDRAWAL AND REFIT (? NOT COST EFFECTIVE?) IN 1987, WHILE THE NINTH NEW OHIO-CLASS SUCCESSOR SUBMARINE WILL NOT START SEA-TRIALS UNTIL 1988. THE POTENTIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE REJECTION OF THE SALT LIMITS PER SE AS A FACTOR IN FUTURE US FORCE PLANNING IS HARDLY DISCUSSED AT ALL.

10. WITH CONGRESS IN RECESS, THERE HAS ALSO BEEN AN UNCERTAIN FIRST REACTION ON THE HILL. BUT CRITICISM (FROM THE RIGHT) OF DECISION (A) SO FAR EXCEEDS CRITICISM (FROM THE LEFT) OF DECISION (B). DOLE HAS DESCRIBED (A) AS SENDING THE WRONG SIGNAL TO THE KREMLIN, WHILE KENNEDY HAS COMMENTED ONLY THAT DECISION (B) IS REALLY 'NOT FOR SIX MONTHS, AND I HOPE IT WILL COME AFTER A SUCCESSFUL SUMMIT'. BUT ONE POSSIBILITY ALREADY BEING CONSIDERED BY DEMOCRATIC STAFFERS IS THE INSERTION OF LANGUAGE IN THE DEFENCE AUTHORISATIONS BILL CONSTRAINING THE PRESIDENT FROM BREAKING THE SALT LIMITS.

11. PRESS AND CONGRESSIONAL REACTIONS ARE LIKELY TO ESCALATE IN RESPONSE TO REPORTS OF ALLIED COMMENTS, EG IN HALIFAX.

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