DEPARTMEN

Washington, D.C. 20520

TOP SECRET/NODIS/SENSITIVE

October 7, 1970

TO : U - Mr. Irwin
J - Mr. Johnson

FROM : S/PC - Seymour Weiss

SUBJECT : Luncheon Conversation October 2 with Paul Nitze on SALT

On Substance. Paul started by saying he thought that SALT had "gone about as well as it could" all things considered. It soon became clear, however, that from a strategic point of view Paul has considerable misgivings concerning the effect of the current SALT agreement. The explanation is that as currently projected the agreement would permit the Soviets to develop a first strike capability against US land-based missiles and bombers and, moreover, to do so without violating the agreement. This could come about if, as expected, the Soviets MIRV even the 250 SS-9s allotted to them by the agreement and, in addition, if they were to improve the accuracy of the approximately 1000 SS-11s. In the meantime, the agreement would preclude the US from deploying an ABM defense of US ICBMs and bombers, of making the land-based missiles mobile, or of hardening to withstand a first strike attack.

He argues that it will, however, take some time for the Soviets to accomplish these capabilities, i.e., MIRVing of the 9 and improving the accuracy of the 11, and that we will have the option for taking offsetting actions. He sees three possibilities for offsetting actions:

1. We might develop an effective first strike capability of our own. This could come about if the US took a combination of actions. One would be to deploy 250 missiles equivalent to the SS-9 (the agreement would permit this), however, Nitze doubts that within existing financial constraints we are likely to do this. Such a capability might also be reached if the accuracy of MINUTEMAN III can be improved beyond design targets. In this connection he tells me that recent studies

in the Pentagon suggest that the MINUTEMAN III MIRV is turning out to be an even more accurate warhead than anticipated and that accuracy down to .1 mile appears to be entirely feasible. With such accuracy the present MINUTEMAN III warhead (175 kt) would have a 90% kill probability against a hardened Soviet missile. Obviously Nitze feels that going the first strike route is a dangerous option for us to follow. However, he feels that this is somewhat less dangerous than a second alternative.

2. We might change our doctrine to one of "launch on warning." This has always been contrary to US strategic doctrine, but he acknowledges we could be forced into adoption of such a policy if our land force becomes as vulnerable to a first strike as seems at least theoretically possible. Both this doctrine and the development of a US first strike capability are of course extremely unstable and, in time of intense crisis, could be inexcusably dangerous.

3. We could abandon all land-based forces and move entirely to sea. This would presumably be Nitze's preferred option. Though he acknowledges, he probably heavily discounts, the arguments against this approach, namely that this would result in putting all our eggs in one basket where a technological breakthrough (such as in ASW) could make us highly vulnerable. This option also, of course, presents serious cost problems since it presumably involves building additional Poseidon submarines or ULMS.

I indicated that there were, of course, some in Washington who were disturbed by this prospective vulnerability of our forces, but that we had been surprised that we had had little or no indication of concern on this from our SALT Delegation. Paul's response to this was that he felt that ACDA had largely written off the MINUTEMAN, and, accordingly, felt that some other solution to that problem would have to be found whether or not SALT existed. He also noted that even though it was possible to persuade one's self that the Soviets might be capable of building a highly effective first strike capability against our land-based forces, it was difficult to devise a persuasive scenario under which they would actually use such a capability. However, he does feel that it is not immaterial as to what numbers we stick on in the agreement. (There have been rumors

that some in the government are arguing that the 250 SS-9 limit is not important since as suggested above even with 250 the Soviets could develop a first strike capability.) The larger the absolute number of strategic vehicles, the greater the first strike potential. Moreover, Paul would argue that the Soviet ability to gain political advantage by persuading others that the US was inhibited from taking effective action because of Soviet absolute superiority, and first strike capability might well be enhanced by the greater disparity in numbers between ourselves and the Soviets.

On Procedure. While I never received an entirely satisfactory answer to the question of why it was that neither Paul nor General Allison, the JCS Representative, did not point up the inherent strategic danger in the current SALT proposal, the answer seemed to imply that the reason was to be found in the procedural arrangements within the Delegation. Paul went to some pains to make it clear that he felt his relationships with Gerry Smith were very good and that on a very large part of the proposals formulated by the Delegation he was in complete agreement with Gerry. At the same time he was equally candid in stating that on those few occasions where he sharply diverged, Gerry appeared to turn the issue into a vote of confidence. Paul felt that it was obviously impossible for the President to support him against the head of the Delegation, nor did he want to place either Gerry, or more importantly the President, in that awkward position. As a result he said that he had attempted thereafter to work out "the best compromise possible" on issues where he disagreed. He implied that he was generally satisfied with the resulting arrangements, but I did not press him on the point. He did say that when on a couple of occasions he had communicated directly with DOD, indicating some personal divergence of view, that Gerry took serious issue with him. (I was, of course, familiar with the exchange on this subject which you may recall terminated in a meeting between Gerry Smith and Laird in Brussels, which resulted in a cable from Laird indicating that all problems had been resolved.)

Comment: It is extremely difficult from this distance, and on the basis of this one discussion, to tell how serious a substantive and procedural problem exists. We have, of

course, been aware to some extent that both did exist. Yet it is clear that insofar as they do the points have tended to be submerged under the pressure for a SALT agreement. On the substantive side, even if one accepts the strategic instability inherent in the pending SALT proposal, it is by no means self-apparent that in the absence of a SALT agreement we would be any better off. In fact, a case can be made that while a SALT agreement of the sort currently projected carries with it the danger of the development of a first strike capability by the Soviets, it may place some restraints on Soviet capabilities which would otherwise not exist in the absence of an agreement. (General Vogt, Director of the Joint Staff, and a keen observer of US strategic programs, essentially takes this position.) The other side of the coin is that it is unwise to enter into an agreement inherently unsound and that with an agreement enormous political pressures will be generated not to break it even if the Soviets begin to develop the first strike capability which some fear. In short, Paul seems resigned to the fact that SALT is about as good as we can get, and is prepared to await future developments before deciding (a) whether the US will be faced with the necessity of having to protect against a first strike capability by the Soviets, and (b) if it is, deciding at that time what are the available options. On the procedural side Paul appears to accept present arrangements. Yet surely everything does not seem as it should be. Surely the fact that we have never once received an analysis from our Delegation pointing up the obvious danger of the agreement embodying the potential for development of a Soviet first strike capability, is disturbing. So too is the implication (and I should underline this is my interpretation, and I may be wrong) that a senior member of the Delegation feels constrained from explicitly stating a non-concurrence in specific and important features of the negotiations.

<u>For obvious reasons this memorandum must be held in strictest confidence</u>.