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MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

File 8888m

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When With Attachment

May 1, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: Larry Lynn *LL*

SUBJECT: Talking Paper on "Firing on Warning" Issue

Alex Butterfield indicated that the President wants you to talk to a few prominent news columnists, such as Joe Alsop, about the issue of firing our offensive missiles on early warning as a way of protecting them from attack. As I recall, this issue came up several weeks ago during hearings conducted by Senator Fulbright, and both Fulbright and Gore said they thought that launching our ICBMs on warning would be a better protection for them than building an ABM.

Enclosed are talking points you can use in such discussions. Paragraph 2 has Top Secret information in it.

I don't think that very many serious opponents of the ABM believe that the "firing on warning" doctrine should really be adopted by the President. The fact that the idea has attracted any interest at all indicates the irrationality of much of the ABM opposition. The high sense of responsibility the President showed in his ABM decision is in sharp contrast to those who will go to such lengths as to suggest firing on warning as an alternative.

Enclosure

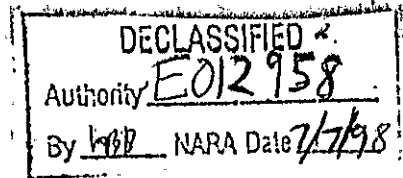
Tab A - Talking  
Paper

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TALKING PAPER ON "FIRING ON WARNING"

1. (U) A doctrine of firing our ICBMs on warning would be dangerous and irresponsible. We would be launching unrecallable missiles at China or the Soviet Union on the basis of totally inadequate information and with a very real possibility of disastrous mistakes.
2. (TS) Some of our present early warning systems have a significant "false alarm" or false report rate. For example, 50% of the initial reports from our Over-the-Horizon radars are false. After 10 minutes of additional processing, 10% of the reports are still false. Our Ballistic Missile Early Warning System (BMEWS) produces 40-50 false reports per year. Moreover, it does not cover all of China. Our new early warning satellite may produce one false alarm per year.
3. (U) Thus, the possibility of a disastrous mistake -- launching an attack on Russia or China because geese or sunspots trigger a false alarm -- is a very real one. Defending our long-range missiles by putting a hair trigger on them would significantly increase the probability of nuclear war and reduce our security.
4. (U) Even with fool proof warning systems, no President could launch U.S. missiles at Russia or China without determining as fully as possible how many missiles were in the attack, where they were launched from, where they were likely to hit the U.S., whether or not the attack was deliberate, and what would be the most appropriate U.S. response. Launching on warning would allow no thought or no positive control, only a spasm reaction.
5. (U) The President chose Safeguard precisely because it has the opposite effects. He can take positive action to defend against an attack without unleashing a holocaust. He can protect our deterrent while preserving a maximum number of options for a measured and appropriate response. He has more than all-or-nothing choices. Even a mistaken launch of an ABM missile would not be disastrous because it could not reach Russia or China.

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6. (U) It is paradoxical that people who oppose a defensive system because it is provocative could advocate instead a doctrine which is so obviously dangerous.

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