

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING

December 18, 1981

Time and Place: 1:55 to 2:40 P.M., White House Cabinet Room  
Subject: Peacetime Draft Registration

Participants

The President

State

Secretary Alexander M. Haig, Jr.  
Deputy Secretary William P. Clark

OSC

Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger  
Deputy Secretary Frank C. Carlucci  
Mr. Lawrence Korb (Assistant Secretary, Manpower, Reserve Affairs,  
and Logistics)

Justice

Deputy Attorney General Edward Schmultz

DCI

Director William J. Casey

OMB

Mr. William Schneider, Jr. (Associate Director, National Security  
and International Affairs)

USUN

Ambassador Jeane J. Kirkpatrick

JCS

Admiral Thomas B. Hayward

CEA

Mr. Murray Weidenbaum

Selective Service

General Thomas Turnage (Director)

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Review on December 18, 1987  
Classified by James W. Nance

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BY WJ, NARA, DATE 12/21/05



White House

Mr. Edwin Meese III  
Admiral James W. Nance  
Mr. Martin Anderson  
Mr. Jim Jenkins  
Ms. Janet Colson

The Vice President's Office

Admiral Daniel J. Murphy

NSC

Lt Col Allan A. Myer

Mr. Meese opened the meeting and noted that there was only a short amount of time to discuss the issue and therefore each side would be given 8-10 minutes to make the case for each option.

The President stated that he had read the package, noted that the Task Force members had voted for either Option A (continue draft registration) or Option D (stop draft registration; then develop plans to resume registration quickly in an emergency). Therefore, it is only necessary to discuss these two options. The President stated that during the campaign he stated his opposition to both the draft and draft registration. He pointed out that he remains firmly opposed to the draft. However, the President noted that his opposition to registration was the result of being guided by figures that were false. Consequently, he was open to the issue at hand.

Secretary Weinberger said that the draft and draft registration were two separate and distinct issues. He remained opposed to the draft. The Secretary stated that he was pleased with the All-Volunteer Forces recruiting figures. We are meeting our goals and are getting better quality people. The trend is definitely up and it is gratifying. Our programs are working.

The President noted that patriotism is also playing a part in these numbers.

Secretary Weinberger mentioned that the Administration's strong stance on defense is playing a very positive role on recruiting. The Secretary then explained the limited nature and process of registration: a simple process of registering at a local post office, little paperwork, and that's it; not a lot to ask of our young men. Then Secretary Weinberger examined Option D: an alternative that would try to speed up the process in the midst



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of increased tensions. The overwhelming problem is that Option D assumes unambiguous warning. The Secretary then related the current events in North Korea and the ambiguity involved. Is it the largest exercise ever held in North Korea or is it mobilization. If we were operating under Option D, what would we do? Do we register, and then if it is an exercise, do we then cancel? Secretary Weinberger then pointed out that we are getting 70-80 per cent compliance right now without a registration campaign and with uncertainty as to the future of registration. With a firm decision and an appropriate campaign and publicity, compliance rates will top 90 per cent. Secretary Weinberger closed his presentation by noting that registration is not a fiscal issue; the total cost being \$20-24 million.

The President noted that when you are at the White House, \$20-24 million begins to be viewed as "nothing."

Mr. Meese then asked Mr. Anderson to state the case for Option D.

Mr. Anderson began his presentation by observing that the real issue is military preparedness. Mr. Anderson made the following points: The possible savings of 3-4 weeks is not the issue. In the first place, that time savings would not be felt until 3-4 months had passed after mobilization. The real issue is the reserve forces. They are significantly undermanned and the ability to improve military preparedness depends on improving the manning levels of the Reserves, not from the marginal gains that would be achieved through registration. Additionally, peacetime draft registration is a largely social, symbolic issue. There are symbolic values involved. In the end, we face a trade-off; some marginal improvement in preparedness for the perceived lessening of our commitment to no draft. While it is a judgement call, a clear case can be made for stopping registration.

Mr. Weidenbaum stated that if we get just 70 per cent of the Pearl Harbor volunteer rate, the training base would be filled. If there is an emergency, we could induct all 20 year olds. Mr. Weidenbaum also observed that peacetime draft registration is an infringement on personal liberty.

The President noted that he sees no relation between the issue of reserve forces and peacetime draft registration. Reserve units, National Guard units, and ROTC present different problems and should not figure into this issue. The President observed that when the peacetime draft registration first developed, there was confusion over what it was and what it wasn't. It is not a draft;

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it is not a preliminary step toward a draft. The President then observed that, though he was not yet an advocate of peacetime registration, it did appear that to stop registration would be to send the wrong message at the wrong time.

Mr. Weinberger noted that stopping registration would indeed send a bad signal. Furthermore, two weeks savings of time could make a real difference in an emergency.

The President noted that, in any case, people would not be inducted all at once. Inductees would be needed over time. If the decision is Option A, then it would be appropriate to give a message to the nation by the President. The President stated that the message should include the following points: Peacetime registration is a service that young men give to their nation that serves notice that national security is of prime importance. We should appeal to patriotism but clearly point out that registration is not related to the draft. Finally, the President observed that it would be inappropriate to refer back to Pearl Harbor volunteer rates. When Roosevelt called for a draft, the world war was already two years old and yet the draft was passed by Congress by a single vote.

Secretary Haig stated that he can live with whatever is decided. The Secretary said that he was 100 per cent for Option A. Europe, except for the UK, has conscription. Our European Allies viewed registration as a step toward the draft. It is not, but there is no reason to so tell our Allies. Secretary Haig stated that he is very persuaded that if we had stopped registration, and then in a moment of tension, decide to reinstitute registration, it is likely to be seen as a step in mobilization. As a result, the Secretary observed, we are likely to incur the war we would be trying to avert. Finally, if we should decide to stop registration, today is not the time to do it. Secretary Haig concluded by noting that, in view of today's events, we cannot announce a decision to stop registration.

Admiral Hayward noted that he was speaking for the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The JCS was firmly for Option A. Continuing registration would be a positive statement at a time when we need a positive statement. The Reserves are in bad shape. The Army is short more than 170,000 in the Reserves; and registration is basically an Army problem. Admiral Hayward said that our manpower situation demands registration.

The President stated that a risk of Option D is that the leadership is left with always having to make a decision about what constitutes an emergency. What if we reinstitute registration and then the emergency blows over? The President asked whether we would then cancel the registration decision? How many times could we do that?



Secretary Weinberger noted that Option D is like the concept of "launch on warning." The Secretary then brought up the North Korea case again to illustrate the dilemma.

Mr. Anderson noted that the United States has a philosophic base that is different than Europe. Furthermore, by making a decision to continue registration, the mark of Ronald Reagan would replace the mark of Jimmy Carter. Mr. Anderson then observed that Option A could be seen as a move toward the draft.

Mr. Meese said that today is not the time to announce a change.

The President said that when an announcement is made, he would make it. The President stated that we must pick the right time and make it flatly clear that it is not a step toward the draft.

Secretary Weinberger stated that there is an appropriate place to make the announcement in the State of the Union Address.

The President observed that there may be some future time when we could stop registration.

Mr. Meese noted that the window for an announcement is 3-24 hours since the press undoubtedly knows that registration is on the NSC agenda.

Secretary Haig stated that we are now in a crisis and we must be very careful. The minimum position right now should be that no change is contemplated.

The President noted that there is one other option -- no decision right now. The President then discussed his displeasure over leaks and the need to take actions to put a stop to leaks.

Secretary Haig said that the State Department had a leak and found the guilty party, yet could not fire the woman who leaked the story to the press. Such was the state of affairs in rules and regulations.

Admiral Nance noted that one thing that can be done is to withdraw security clearances. At that point, it would be very difficult for a person to hold a meaningful government position.

Mr. Schneider stated that the budget process required a decision on registration. Paperwork is nearly complete and there are budget implications with regard to registration. Time is running short.



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The President told Mr. Schneider to hold a blank space for registration.

Secretary Weinberger said that it was critically important to find a way to stop leaks. The Secretary then noted Aviation Week and Space Technology magazine's use of an unretouched satellite photograph.

Mr. Meese stated that a decision on whether to prosecute non-registrants is also pending. Therefore, there are three options to consider: go ahead and prosecute, announce a decision, or reserve the decision.

Mr. Schmultz, in response to the President's question on the status of registration enforcement, stated that there are 150 cases that have been forwarded by the Selective Service, that 108 cases are ready for prosecution, and 6-10 cases are ready for indictment. Mr. Schmultz noted that these are felony cases.

Secretary Weinberger observed that there may have been a lack of clarity on the question of registration, up to this point. The Secretary stated that a possible option is to make an announcement and give time for non-registrants to register prior to prosecution.

Mr. Schmultz noted that there should be no lack of clarity on the part of non-registrants who face prosecution. Each individual has received three warning letters and the FBI has talked to each one.

The President asked when the first non-registrants have to be prosecuted.

Mr. Schmultz stated that there are a number of cases that are ready and prosecution can begin as soon as the decision to do so is made. However, there is no deadline.

The President stated that we will wait until after the holidays to make the prosecution decision.

Mr. Meese directed that this issue (peacetime draft registration and the associated prosecution issue) is to be put on the NSC agenda in early January for Presidential decision.

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