

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

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Meeting of the National Security Council

May 18, 1983, 1:25 p.m., Cabinet Room

SUBJECT: Mutual and Balanced Force Reductions (MBFR)

PARTICIPANTS

The President

State

Secretary Shultz  
Deputy Secretary Dam  
Ambassador Abramowitz  
Admiral Howe

ACDA

Director Adelman

White House

William P. Clark  
Richard Darman

OSD

Secretary Weinberger  
Under Secretary Ikle

Vice President's Office

Donald Gregg

CIA

Director Casey

NSC

Robert Kimmitt  
Dennis Blair

JCS

General Vessey

OMB

Alton Keel

MINUTES

William P. Clark noted that the MBFR talks had dragged on for many years, and that the Soviet Union had not agreed to the verification measures proposed by the West. The Eastern side had 235,000 more troops than it admitted, and the West had insisted that this data discrepancy be resolved before any agreement. At the opening of the last round of negotiations the President had sent a message to General Secretary Andropov through Ambassador Abramowitz that he was serious about an MBFR agreement. A response had been received through Ambassador Dobrynin. As a result of interagency study, options had been developed. The first option was to hold fast with the current position which was a good solid position and there were some risks involved in moving from it. The second option was to explore more aggressively the hints that Soviet officials had been making and to test Soviet flexibility. There was a risk in this option in that expectations would be raised only to be disappointed. Options 3, 4, and 5 were more extensive changes to the current position; all of them included dropping the requirement for data before a treaty would be signed. In

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conclusion, Judge Clark said that the basic decision was whether to hold fast to the current Alliance position or to conduct a probe with or without one of the more ambitious options.

Secretary Shultz said that Amb. Abramowitz should be authorized to conduct an intensive probe of the Soviet Union to see if there would be a genuine response. If an agreement could be worked out on verification measures, there were several advantages: first, the Soviet Union would set a precedent for other arms control negotiations by accepting more intrusive verification measures than they ever had before. This would have benefits in other arms control negotiations; second, the picture of the Soviet Union withdrawing substantial numbers of troops from Eastern Europe would be a reassuring symbol; third, an agreement in MBFR at the 700,000/900,000 level would set a floor for U.S. manpower as well as a ceiling, and would make it more difficult for Congress to carry out its threats to reduce manpower in Europe. In summary, Secretary Shultz contended that it was worth probing the Soviet position and that the United States should be willing to change its stance to do so. The Soviets had said that if the U.S. dropped the data issue the Warsaw Pact may be willing to accept verification measures. If the West were assured of the verification measures, it could calculate the numbers of Soviet troops. The Secretary acknowledged that there were problems with verification, and doubts that the Soviet Union would ever reduce to the numbers to which they agreed. The Secretary felt that the Soviets would carry out such an agreement if they signed it. Therefore his recommendation was first that the United States make a move; second, that we say to the Soviets that we would stop talking about data if the Soviets would begin to talk about verification. This, said the Secretary, is the essence of option 2. If the Soviets prove to be serious then their current proposal for asymmetrical US-Soviet reductions might be a good place to start. But that decision did not have to be made yet. The first step was to see if the Soviets would be willing to discuss verification. A subsidiary question was whether to conduct a probe bilaterally or to involve the allies. The Secretary said he favored the use of the Dobrynin channel followed by consultation with the allies, possibly at Williamsburg or later during personal visits to other capitals by Amb. Abramowitz.

Secretary Weinberger stated that a modified option 2 was a good option. The objective was to see if the Soviets will accept real verification measures. This was important. Although, as Secretary Shultz had said, the picture of the Soviet troops leaving Eastern Europe would be a good symbol, it was also necessary to check them coming back in through re-entry points. The United States needed to have the full package of verification measures including unannounced visits and data

exchange. There were basic asymmetries between East and West in the MBFR area. First, the Soviets had more troops; second, however, there was asymmetry in reinforcement potential. It is difficult for the United States to reintroduce troops clandestinely, and difficult to obtain congressional approval for raising troop levels at all. The Soviets on the other hand can clandestinely reenter the guidelines area relatively easily. Secretary Weinberger pointed out the PLO this year had marched out of Beirut with flags flying and had then clandestinely reentered Lebanon. The Secretary felt it would be useful and fruitful to inquire about Soviet seriousness. Amb. Abramowitz could conduct a probe to see how serious they were and what the limits were of their flexibility were. He could find out if the Soviets were willing to go to the lengths which the United States considered essential for verification. The whole NATO military strategy depended on warning time. If there were ambiguity in the warning time the United States would lose valuable time, therefore rigorous verification was necessary. In closing, the Secretary mentioned another political reason for being very careful in the approach to the Soviet Union. The MBFR talks had been deadlocked for 10 years, well before President Reagan had taken office, but if this probe resulted in another deadlock it would become a deadlock brought about by the Reagan administration in the public perception. To avoid this, it was necessary to conduct the probe under option 2 very carefully. It was absolutely essential to receive adequate verification measures, especially those which would be used to check reinfiltration. Therefore the Secretary favored a modified option 2, with a very heavy emphasis on verification.

General Vessey said that the view of the Joint Chiefs of Staff was essentially the same as Secretary Weinberger. It made sense to probe the Soviet position. It was possible to modify the current Western position although it was a very solid one. It was necessary to inform the Allies as we were doing this. Gen. Vessey also had the same concerns as did Secretary Weinberger. As the probe was conducted it was necessary to protect the right of the United States to reinforce its troops and to ensure that verification measures were adequate. In conclusion, however, the General stated it was very much in the American interest to reduce the Soviet manpower in Central Europe.

Director Casey stated that verification measures would definitely be of help to the United States. Without the verification measures proposed by the West, as Secretary Weinberger had said, it would not be possible to monitor the number of Eastern forces. The intelligence community knew that the Eastern forces were understated by over 200,000 men. We knew that the Soviets were lying. The Agency would be able to detect any increases which would pose a military threat to NATO.

It would be necessary to have designated re-entry points and on-site inspections in the verification measures.

Secretary Shultz interjected that this MBFR negotiation was beginning to remind him of the negotiation to end the fighting in Lebanon.

Director Adelman pointed out that the origin of MBFR was in the effort to counteract Sen. Mansfield's attempts to reduce American troop levels in Europe. MBFR was an example of arms control negotiations which were successful even though they had not produced agreement. Director Adelman said that attainment of the verification measures in the MBFR negotiations would be beneficial both in increasing Western ability to detect an attack and in terms of setting precedents for other negotiations. For example, the idea of fixed entry and exit points could help in the monitoring of mobile missiles in other negotiations. Director Adelman's final point was that the options listed in the basic paper as 3, 4 and 5 all involved signature of an arms control agreement without a fully worked out understanding of what it contained. The Director said there were already too many signed unratified agreements which were causing problems and one more should not be added.

Amb. Abramowitz said that he did not know if the Soviets would agree to the verification measures which the United States needed. He was sure that nothing would happen if the United States insisted on data agreement prior to signature. If the United States wished there to be no progress in MBFR then it should stay with its current position. However, if there were possible benefits from an MBFR agreement then the way to find out was to talk quietly and seriously with the Soviet Union. The way to accomplish this was for the United States to say that it needed to have Soviet acceptance of verification measures including on-site inspection. The United States would have to indicate that it would be willing to be flexible on the data issue. In effect the United States would say "if you are willing to give us verification measures, especially on-site inspection, we would be willing to do without initial data agreement."

In response to a question from the President, Amb. Abramowitz explained that "prior agreed data" referred to the issue of the 235,000-man discrepancy between Western and Eastern figures concerning Eastern forces. The Soviet Union was not willing to admit that it had been giving false information on Eastern troop levels. If the United States insisted on resolving this data discrepancy, the negotiations would go nowhere. What the United States wanted were the reductions. It should try for the more important objectives - verification measures and large

asymmetric reductions - rather than resolution of the data discrepancy per se. If the Soviet Union was willing to agree to these verification measures, and it was by no means sure that they would, then it was possible to see the outlines of an eventual MBFR agreement. It was simply impossible to gauge Soviet seriousness without testing it. They were making insinuations, but no one knew how serious they were.

In response to a question from the President, Amb. Abramowitz explained that the 235,000 men discrepancy was made up of a number of Polish troops and a number of Soviet troops in the GDR.

Secretary Weinberger said that there was no doubt that a verifiable MBFR agreement would be an enormous advantage to the West. It would bring down Soviet forces and it would provide important verification measures. However, there were dangers from departing from the present approach.

The President said that the United States should find out just how serious the Soviets were, but that there could be no agreement without verification measures.

William P. Clark asked Amb. Abramowitz to sum up the instructions that he would receive under the consensus that seemed to be emerging from the current discussion.

Amb. Abramowitz said that those instructions would be to conduct a quiet intensive probe of the Soviets willingness to agree to intrusive verification measures including on-site inspection and their willingness to take sizable asymmetric reductions in exchange for the West dropping data, that is, modifying its need for prior agreed data. This sort of trade-off would provide a possible basis for an eventual agreement. Amb. Abramowitz said the instructions would also include consultations with the Allies.

Secretary Weinberger said that he would like to see the final draft of these instructions.

The President said that the United States would conduct this probe to see if agreement could be reached, and if not, the United States would have to decide whether it was worthwhile to continue these negotiations.

Amb. Abramowitz said that he was skeptical about the chances of success in this approach, but it was important to try.

Secretary Shultz said that one encouraging sign had been the quick reply from Andropov to the oral message which the President had sent through Ambassador Abramowitz.

William P. Clark said that the meeting had resulted in a consensus. Instructions would be drawn up to Amb. Abramowitz. After Secretary Weinberger and Secretary Shultz had approved them, they would be submitted to the President for his signature.

The President approved this procedure and said it was a start on progress in these negotiations, but it was important not to return to old habits in arms control negotiations which involved taking an agreement just for the sake of an agreement.

The meeting ended at 2:05 p.m.

Instructions to Ambassador Abramowitz were subsequently drafted by the Department of State, approved interagency, and finally approved by the President.