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September 24, 1959

MEMORANDUM OF CONFERENCE WITH THE PRESIDENT  
September 22, 1959

Others present: Secretary Dillon, Mr. Farley, Mr. Allen Dulles, Secretary Gates, Admiral Burke, Mr. McCone, Dr. Kistiakowsky, Mr. Gordon Gray, General Persons, General Goodpaster

Dr. Kistiakowsky began by presenting to the President the results of the work of the panel appointed to consider nuclear test requirements from the standpoint of the progress of our own military technology. He stressed that it was not a study of the comparative positions and needs of the United States and the Soviets. He said that the panel was drawn from representatives of interested agencies. He then read the conclusions of the panel's work, accompanying this with a commentary of his own views.

In scope, the study covered weapons improvement and proof firing, one point safety considerations, questions of new concepts and new devices, high altitude effect shots, and effects of low altitude and undersea shots. The ensuing discussion focused on the one point safety questions.

Mr. Gates said in this regard that Defense would like to see a decision to proceed with one point safety experimentation by the "creep" method. Initial firings would involve no nuclear reaction. Subsequent firings would increase the likelihood of nuclear reaction and permit it to occur up to a determined point, such as a yield equivalent to that of an explosion of one pound of TNT. Mr. McCone said he was not certain that the control could be quite that accurate but thought it could be held to a few pounds. Mr. Gates commented that this could be a series of high explosive experiments, involving an accidental one-pound nuclear yield at the very end.

Mr. Dillon commented on two points. First, public reaction in the UK might be very difficult if it were to become publicly known that

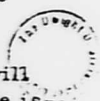


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we were worried regarding the safety of our weapons. The second question is the effect on our statement that we will not conduct nuclear weapons tests before the first of the year. If we can make it stick that these are experiments rather than tests, he saw no problem. Also, if they are conducted at Los Alamos he saw no problem, whereas if they are conducted at Nevada, they seemed likely to become weapons tests. The Soviets would then charge bad faith. We must not call them safety tests, since this name would alarm world opinion. He was aware that there are technical questions regarding preparations and the speed of conducting the firings that are of importance.



Mr. McCone said he thought that a certain amount of attention will be attracted to the firings at either place. At Los Alamos there is one point of concern. We will be putting a sizeable number of kilograms of plutonium into the ground. It is conceivable that a fissure might occur such that a leaching of plutonium into the water table would introduce a degree of poison over a large area. This is not true in Nevada, since the sub-surface water is trapped there. He said the AEC could start quickly at either place. If a decision were made to wait for the first firing until after the first of the year, he would want to go ahead with advance preparations now. He agreed on the "creep" method, commenting that 25-30 experiments will be required. He thought there would be less publicity from use of Los Alamos than from use of Nevada. It has, however, the one possible bad feature that he mentioned. There is ~~an~~ further possible source of difficulty -- involving a special kind of ignition in the pit, but he felt that could be dealt with by precautionary measures.

The President said the question in his mind is whether we are making laboratory experiments or are testing. If the former is the case, this goes along all the time and he saw no need to make a big fuss about it. It was clear to him that the nuclear effect, if any, would be so extremely slight that we should avoid the use of the word "tests" at all. Mr. Dillon added that we should avoid any reference to "weapons" in any press release. Mr. Gates thought that the firings could be very clearly justified on the basis of experimental research. Dr. Kistiakowsky concurred that it would be intellectually honest to do so, providing there is a strong injunction

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to design the experiments so as to avoid any possibility of explosion. Mr. Dillon thought that if this is too fine a line we should make preparations now and conduct the firings after January first. The President thought that it is not too difficult to make the distinction Dr. Kistiakowsky was speaking of. Mr. Gates pointed out that we could conduct the first few firings since these would have no chance whatsoever of any nuclear contribution. Admiral Burke added that by having a few of these now, we are not making an abrupt change after January first. The President said that the words "weapons" and "tests" should be avoided. Dr. Kistiakowsky said that it seemed desirable not to have a public statement. The President said that these experiments are going on all the time, and he saw no need for a public statement. He did not believe that the experiments should be conducted in Nevada. Mr. Gates said that most of the AEC people seemed unconcerned about the remote possibility of contaminating the water table.



The President said he is convinced of one thing and that is that no free country can go back to atmospheric testing. World opinion -- the adverse effect of alienating free world countries -- would stop it. However, he could not see why we could not conduct experiments underground for safety purposes. He recognized that firing large weapons out 500 miles or more would be a different question from atmospheric testing.

Dr. Kistiakowsky asked if these HE firings could be conducted in the big steel ball that he understands is at Los Alamos. Mr. McCone said too many shots are required, and too much time is needed between shots to decontaminate the ball. The President thought that, with each shot, we should find out a good deal more about the probability of any accidental explosion. Mr. Dillon observed that even if we start now to prepare for and conduct the experiments, none involving nuclear release would occur until after January first.

Mr. Dillon said that the next subject the group wished to take up had to do with the application of the Netherlands for an agreement for atomic cooperation involving a nuclear submarine. They wished to purchase the nuclear elements thereof. This question started

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with the Heads of Government meeting in Paris in December 1957. Secretary Dulles and Admiral Strauss made the statement that the U. S. would seek legislation to make possible such cooperation. Subsequently, we got the legislation, and the Dutch asked for this cooperation on two submarines they are building for SACLANT's anti-submarine force. We have checked the Dutch fund estimates, and their security system, and they are qualified on all counts. We have stalled on this, but feel that we are really committed. Defense, State and SACLANT support the proposal, but the AEC does not want to extend cooperation in nuclear submarines to anyone beyond the United Kingdom and Canada. It appears that Admiral Strauss did not have Commission approval to offer cooperation, and now the AEC does not want to recommend it. The President said the controlling point is that we said we would seek to arrange for such cooperation, and subsequently obtain the necessary legislation.



Mr. McCone said that the AEC must certify to the President that the proposed cooperation will promote and not constitute a risk to the common defense. He doubts whether the Dutch proposal would promote the common defense, but recognizes this is a problem for Defense to determine. The real point in his mind is that the more widely we extend this information, the wider is the risk of its compromise. Admiral Rickover, on his recent trip to Russia, concluded that the Soviets will not have a successful submarine for some time to come. The AEC feels that the best interest of the United States would be served by keeping this information close. They feel that if the Dutch obtain it, other countries will approach us for it -- other countries where security is not so tight.

The President said that the North Atlantic countries are a coalition trying to develop weapon systems and doctrine for common defense. Indeed it is hard to ask the Dutch to put their effort into building anti-submarine forces on an outmoded type. He asked whether we are going to do everything that is technically advanced and further whether we are going to break up the alliance. These are the choices, he feels. The real question is what is the importance of secrecy in relation to the importance of our alliance. The only argument that has weight in his opinion is that other countries will press us in ways we find hard to resist and that we have less confidence in the security of these other countries.

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Mr. Dillon said that each country must be considered by itself. The French, Italians and Germans have asked for this cooperation. The French, whose atomic activity is penetrated by Communists, now say they will transfer this project to their Navy, which is secure. However, their lack of cooperation in NATO affairs led us to inform them that we could not go ahead on this project -- that the Congress would not approve. As to Germany, they can build only 350-ton submarines under the Brussels Treaty, so the question does not arise for the present. The Italians have asked for preliminary talks but they do not have an appreciation of costs and technical operating requirements. They are not thinking of paying for a submarine and since we do not intend to give them one, we have a good "out."

Mr. McCone recalled that we have given enriched uranium to the French for a land-based prototype. Perhaps a year from now the Russians will have a nuclear submarine system. At present we have an apparent lead. The President recalled that Khrushchev had said he is stopping the building of cruisers while continuing the construction of submarines and mine sweepers. Admiral Burke added that they are building destroyers and PT boats also.



Mr. Dillon recalled that Foreign Minister Luns of the Netherlands is here now. He saw Mr. McElroy a few days ago and will see Mr. Herter shortly. He is making a big point of the nuclear submarine. Mr. Dillon feels we cannot go back on our previous statements. Admiral Burke said that the Dutch will assign this ship to SACLANT once it is built. He said they are very desirous of keeping up a good Navy.

The President said that personally he thought we should do what the Dutch ask. He didn't know about the AEC view, but thought that Mr. McCone should talk to his colleagues. If we have allies we must treat them like allies. He recalled how the U. S. broke faith with the British on atomic agreements after we got what they had to offer. Mr. McCone recognized that, in the final analysis, the determination is the President's to make. AEC simply recommends. The President said that he recognized that there is risk, but pointed out that there is risk in everything we do. He did not

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think the risk in giving secrets to the Dutch is very great. Mr. Allen Dulles confirmed that Dutch security is as good as any in Europe. Admiral Burke said that a nuclear submarine costs twice as much to build as a conventional ship and requires an extra year of construction. The President asked Mr. McCone to see the AEC people and tell them his views. We do not want nuclear submarines spread all over the world, but we talked this matter over in NATO and took our decision very deliberately. The President said he doubted the Dutch would get all of the secrets right away in any event. Mr. McCone said we could tell them we would build a submarine for them. However, he realized that the Dutch would like to build as much themselves as they can in order to hold the cost down.

Finally, Mr. Dillon said he wanted to mention the matter of the proposal for exchange of atomic reactor information with the Soviets. The President asked whether this type of exchange is not what the IAEA was created for. Mr. McCone said there was need for guidance for himself and others participating in the discussions, both as to the exchange of information and as to exchange of visits. Yemel'yanov has asked Mr. McCone to visit the Soviet Union, and Yemel'yanov would then want to return the visit, inspecting our "peaceful use" reactors and our fusion experiments. Mr. McCone agreed that the exchanges should be under the aegis of the IAEA and said that he thought Mr. Yemel'yanov shared this view. Mr. Yemel'yanov has stressed how expensive the Soviets are finding the use of atomic energy for power, and has also stated that neither country can afford wasteful duplication of the other's efforts in this field. Mr. Yemel'yanov also apparently proposed to Dr. Teller the building of a joint scientific facility -- probably a nuclear laboratory -- in Vienna. With regard to thermonuclear fusion experiments, Yemel'yanov's suggestion was that the Russians put twenty to thirty scientists in our laboratories and we put twenty to thirty in theirs. The whole area of high energy physics is a promising one for such joint inquiry.

The President asked if we had this kind of cooperation with the British. Mr. McCone said we have a complete exchange of information with them in these fields. The President suggested that our participants in these discussions should chiefly do a lot of listening. Mr. Dillon asked that the discussions be kept within the framework




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of the IAEA or the Lacy-Zarubin agreement. The President said he saw no reason why this cannot be done through the IAEA. At the same time he thought we should take a close look at what information we make available. The Russian scientist wants to see our plants, and have us see his. The President wondered whether the Russians could hold out their more advanced activities. Mr. McCone said that they could, in contrast to us, since our program is public knowledge. He had no doubt they would hold out anything that we have not achieved. Mr. McCone stated that we of course would give them only unclassified information, although they would see some advances in materials which they have not yet achieved.

The President asked whether the people in the AEC think this type of exchange is a good thing. Mr. McCone said that they did, more so in fact than he did. Mr. Dillon commented that whatever we see is a gain.

Mr. Allen Dulles said that the Soviets have shown some embarrassment over their program, since it has been cut back so drastically from their earlier, unrealistic goals. Admiral Burke commented that we should not fraternize too closely with them. Our allies will think we are weakening with regard to the Communist threat.

Summing up, the President said he saw no objection to our talking with the Russians and getting a clearer idea of just what they have in mind. He was not sure Khrushchev would want to talk about this question at Camp David. The President said he is afraid that Khrushchev will occupy the time at Camp David in unproductive haranguing. He is more likely to do so in a large group. The President would like to limit the group to Khrushchev and Gromyko in addition to Herter and himself, but supposed this would not be possible. He would like to exclude Menshikov, who seems to be "bad news" and is untrustworthy. He thought we must bring out that the Russian itinerary, and schedule of events, were worked up strictly by the Russians, and they have the responsibility for what was on or not on the schedule during his travels around the country.

  
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