

May 29, 1963
State Department Telegram 6389 to US Embassy
United Kingdom

Citation:

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Summary:

In this telegram, President Kennedy encourages Prime Minister Macmillan to take a positive interest in the MLF project, in which the British had little interest because of financial reasons and their doubts about the German role. Kennedy also expressed concern about the future of German nuclear efforts.

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Origin

ACTION: Amembassy LONDON 63897 PRIORITY

Info

EYES ONLY

text of

Following for your information is/letter dated May 28

from the President to Prime Minister, which was transmitted through a White House channels.

QUOTE

Dear Friend:

Thank you for your interim answer to my message about the MLF. I have now heard also from Dean Rusk about his in Ottawa conversations/with Alec Home and Peter Thorneycroft. We appreciate the frankness with which they have conveyed some of their preoccupations with the course we are urging, as well as their recognition of its major political advantages.

Let me begin by saying that I think strictly military preoccupations can and should be dealt with by the technical people. The military case for the MLF is a good one and can be fairly represented as such. Our own conviction of the quality of the surface force is so clear that we expect if this force is agreed on, to be able to make substantial

Received by

from White House:mj
5/29/63

Telegraphic transmission and classification approved by:

[Signature]
S/S - Mr. Little

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savings in the provision of additional US strategic striking forces which might otherwise be needed to cover the same targets. This Government would not consent to the very substantial investment which it is now willing to make for this force, except on the basis of a clear conviction of its first-rate quality. So we are glad that further arrangements have been made for Admiral Ricketts and his staff to talk with your people in London. Any improvements that emerge from these conversations in the basic military design can only be of advantage to all of us.

Meanwhile, every day that passes makes it plainer that a clear move from the United Kingdom toward participation in the MLF will be a major forward step in our joint effort to bind the alliance safely and strongly together, in the face of General de Gaulle's opposite course. The Germans are the heart of the problem, and I simply cannot escape the conclusion that of the courses available to us in dealing with them, the MLF is the only safe one. If it fails, the Germans are bound to move in much more dangerous directions; in the long run even toward some partly clandestine arrangement with the French or, if this should not work, toward an independent nuclear effort in Germany -- not now but in time. The more immediate alternative would be a heavy demand for a new bilateral relation with us

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-- probably with land-based strategic missiles in Germany, and I am sure you will agree that such a bilateral arrangement would be attractive to either of us only by comparison with a Franco/German or strictly German effort.

I see no other course for the Germans if the MLF fails. All of our experience with them, after both wars, makes it clear that they will not accept a permanently and passively subordinate status in the MLF. The nuclear restraint which has been one of Adenauer's great personal contributions will be impossible for a successor faced with competing political pressures from men of whom Strauss is only the most notable current example. I am sending separately a report of a recent interview by von Hassel which shows how difficult it would be for German politicians to defend a policy of nuclear restraint without the political answer of German partnership in the MLF.

I believe that our two countries must go ahead on this. Just the same, I recognize that you have a political problem of timing. What seems to us essential is that we should go forward in such a way as to maintain continuous momentum. It is not critical that definite agreements should be announced during my European trip,

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but we do think it important to have the work completed in 1963 so that Parliaments and our Congress can act early in the new year. In our own case, political attention will necessarily begin to turn toward the nominating conventions and the election campaign well before summer next year, and Congressional action should come as early as possible in next year's session.

I believe that one good way of meeting these goals and taking account of your own problem of timing would be to begin the treaty negotiations in a less formal manner than we previously had in mind. Instead of setting up now a formal Drafting Group that would doubtless result in some fanfare, we and the other interested countries could pursue discussions, technical talks, and negotiations at this stage by using space at NATO headquarters in Paris, and using normal diplomatic channels as necessary. By this process, we could move forward toward reaching a detailed consensus and reducing it to the written terms appropriate for a treaty. Given the necessary energy and political determination, a sufficient consensus could in this way probably be developed by August or September to justify convening a multilateral drafting group at that time to put the treaty into final form.

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As I see it, the indispensable ingredient of the process I have outlined is a firm political will to come into it with the object of creating a multilateral MRBM force along the lines we have been discussing and to join and support such an MLF if a satisfactory treaty emerges.

I understand that your Cabinet will consider the MLF matter this week and I hope that you will decide that this procedure is within the bounds of your already expressed policy favoring the MLF. Decision by the participants now to join in this next phase will permit final adherence to be reserved until each country has a chance to review the Charter, but it will also maintain our momentum toward an agreement.

With warm personal regards,

Sincerely,

John F. Kennedy.

UNQUOTE

Included as attachment to message to Prime Minister was text of interview on May 24 with von Hassel by Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, which we assume you have or can obtain from other sources.

SCP-2

RUSK

END

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