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August 24, 1960

Memorandum of Conversation, 'Nuclear Sharing'

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Summary:

Secretary of Defense Gates, Acting-Secretary of State Dillon and the Atomic Energy Commissions' McCone discuss nuclear sharing with France. The French had offered full cooperation and participation in NATO in return for US Polaris submarine-launched missiles (without warhead).

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

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S/P:GCSmith:sg

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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Memorandum of Conversation

10107
Atomic Energy

DATE: August 24, 1960

SUBJECT: Nuclear Sharing

PARTICIPANTS: Department of Defense
Secretary Gates

Department of State
Acting Secretary Dillon
Mr. Smith

Atomic Energy Commission
Mr. McCone
Admiral Starbird

COPIES TO:

The Secretary
Mr. Merchant
S/P - Mr. Smith

S/AE - Mr. Farley
EUR - Mr. Kohler

Secretary Gates said that the Joint Chiefs had some weeks ago sent him a paper taking a firm line that we should change present US policy against nuclear weapons sharing with selected allies. Thereupon, Secretary Gates had instructed his people to prepare a paper proposing a reversal of policy for the purpose of getting a clear focus on the issue.

He mentioned the recent visit of General Beaufre who had indicated that General de Gaulle would offer full cooperation to NATO if the United States would supply France with some POLARIS missiles without warheads. General Beaufre's thesis was that all General de Gaulle wanted was to be in a position whereby he could offer his missiles to NATO.

Secretary Gates then spoke of the intense feeling that General Morstad had in opposition to nuclear sharing with the French. Secretary Gates said that General Morstad's conversation with him had shook him and thereafter he had asked his people

to prepare

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to prepare the paper in a way that would show no sharp splits with the Department of State position. He did not want to have a row with State.

Secretary Gates feels that the present paper reflects little or no difference between State and Defense. Mr. McCone and Mr. Dillon pointed out that there seemed to be a flat difference in that the Defense language states that there is a need for the President to have authority to transfer nuclear weapons to selected allies. The State and AEC language says there is no need.

Secretary Gates then talked about the possibility of interpreting the present law by making a finding that the French had made substantial progress and thus permitting nuclear sharing without legislation. Mr. Dillon asked Secretary Gates if he had in mind actually transferring nuclear warheads to the French. Secretary Gates said he did not know--perhaps the two-key arrangement for the missiles would be enough.

There was then some discussion of General Beaufre's visit. He said that he would return shortly after Labor Day, after having taken up the matter with General de Gaulle. Mr. Smith pointed out that all the evidence we had was contrary to the General Beaufre theory that General de Gaulle would offer full cooperation to NATO in return for such a small consideration. Secretary Gates said that General Beaufre had told him that the French would be willing to let the US keep custody of the warheads. Mr. Dillon pointed out his belief that the French in any event would want to keep national control over some ballistic missiles if we made them available.

Secretary Gates pointed out General Norstad's idea of having a recapture clause in a possible program for making submarines available to NATO countries. Under this, if the subs were no longer allocated to SACEUR, the US could recapture them.

There was some discussion about the possibility of stepping up the POLARIS submarine rate so that General Norstad's initial MRBM requirement could be met in this way. Mr. McCone said that Admirals Rickover and Rayburn had gotten together and it was Mr. McCone's belief that we could get five more subs by 1963 if we wanted to.

Mr. Smith

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Mr. Smith pointed out that Mr. Bowie's study was going to propose a multilateral water-borne missile force and that General Norstad and Mr. Bowie were going to meet with the President early in September. Secretary Gates asked if he could have a copy of the Bowie report. Mr. Dillon said it had not yet been received.

Mr. McCone pointed out that sharing weapons with the French had profound implications since it would raise the pressures from the Germans. The Chinese would press the Russians, as would the East Germans. If nuclear sharing is necessary, he inclines toward a multilateral rather than a bilateral arrangement.

Mr. Dillon said that he had been struck by General Norstad's argument that it would be bad policy to reward General de Gaulle by nuclear sharing with him after his continuous non-cooperation with NATO. Mr. Dillon went on to say that the circumstances would be different if General de Gaulle made a proposition to the United States.

It was noted that General Norstad was urging the US Government to bring pressure on the North Atlantic Council to take up the MRBM matter in September.

Mr. Dillon stated that he preferred the Defense language to that of the AEC/State for paragraph B of the committee report of August 23. Mr. McCone concurred.

In regard to submarine cooperation, Mr. Dillon pointed out that he did not think there was any issue of substance between the Agencies, but he wanted to avoid any language that would suggest we would start the negotiations with the Dutch and then give the Joint Committee some opportunity to hold up the negotiations until they had a further chance to intervene. It was the consensus that we should establish with the Dutch at the start whether or not they agreed to the two-year delay clause. Mr. Dillon felt that the AEC formulation would permit the Joint Committee to hold up the negotiations until January.

Mr. McCone said he felt that the two-year delay would not suit the Dutch. They want to get as much information as soon as possible for use in their own peaceful uses programs and for component manufacture in Holland.

Mr. McCone

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Mr. McCone felt that it was unwise for us to offer this cooperation to the Dutch. Their military expenditures for NATO are very much below MC-70 requirements. This was not a sensible use of their resources. Mr. Smith pointed out that the President had made a commitment in NATO and that we had little choice except to cooperate or welfsh. There was some discussion as to the Soviet capability in the ballistic missile submarine field. Secretary Gates said that the intelligence he had indicated that the Soviets will in a relatively short while have a capability to produce ten submarines.

Mr. McCone pointed out the unique reactor technology in the Nautilus-type submarine. Nothing that we have learned indicated the Soviets have it.

The conversation then returned to the nuclear weapons matter and Secretary Gates listed the arguments of the Joint Chiefs (all of which appeared to be political).

It was concluded that no decision would be reached at the Council meeting on August 25. Mr. Dillon said he felt that we ought to take a position that the policy certainly should be restudied and we should either reaffirm it, modify it, or abolish it. Secretary Gates said he felt that there was a need for a decision on this matter before the end of the Administration.

General Starbird pointed out that experience with the UK showed that limited cooperation is difficult. One may intend at the start to cooperate on relatively unadvanced weapons design but one soon gets into the latest techniques.

Mr. Smith pointed out the danger of leaks, indicating that there was already some public knowledge that this matter was under consideration and that State and Defense were split on the issue. Mr. Smith pointed out that if the French became aware that there was some prospect of change in US policy, there was little prospect of cooperation from them along the lines we are presently pushing.

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