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133. Minutes of Meeting

Washington, April 16, 1962, 10:30 a.m.

PRESENT

The President, Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, and Mr. McGeorge Bundy

The meeting opened with discussion of the question of possibility of assistance to the French in nuclear and missile fields.

Secretary Rusk explained that this is not essentially a matter of our having a special policy toward the French. We have rather a standing policy which de Gaulle is now trying to get us to change, although neither he nor his Foreign Minister has ever asked for nuclear help.

Secretary Rusk believed that centrally de Gaulle is in favor of a *Directoire*—the U.S., U.K., and France. In his pursuit of this objective he was standing alone among the six in Europe, and in NATO he had been 1 against 14 on negotiation with the Soviets, as he was now 1 against 14 on guidelines for the use of nuclear weapons. He had gone so far as to hold up the installation of tropospheric scatter facilities for US/NATO communications through France.

The Secretary believed we must recognize that if we go in de Gaulle's direction in these matters we will have very great difficulties with our other Allies. The Germans would not like it in the long run; the Italians would be strongly opposed, as would others, such as Canada. Moreover, we must consider this matter in the light of our overwhelming problems with the Soviet Union. We now have a chance of dealing with the USSR, and nuclear help to the French would run against this effort.

At the same time the Secretary believed that our existing policy should be carefully delineated. He had restrained some of his own people who wished to extend a policy of non-cooperation beyond its relevance to French nuclear delivery systems. In particular, the Secretary hoped there might be means of cooperation in outer space activities.

As for consultation, the Secretary felt that de Gaulle consulted only on matters that were of primary interest to others. There had been no consultation on such matters in his own sphere as Bizerte or Algeria. In Southeast Asia he wished consultation without responsibility, since de Gaulle himself had explained to the President that there would be no French troops in that part of the world.

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings with the President. Top Secret.

In summary, the Secretary believed that France was not de Gaulle, and that we could not and should not treat this country with the trust and confidence that we show toward the United Kingdom.

Secretary McNamara, after remarking that he agreed that changing our attitude on nuclear weapons would not change de Gaulle, advanced his position in terms of what he called a "narrow military view." The Defense Department believed that France is capable of having a nuclear force and will have one. By 1965 she will have an effective fission-bomb aircraft force, and by 1970 she can be expected to have thermonuclear weapons with a missile delivery system. She will do this with or without de Gaulle.

At the same time, the French posture has three disadvantages from the point of view of the Department of Defense. First, there is a persisting weakness in French conventional forces which they will not be able to remedy as long as the burden of their nuclear effort is not lightened. Second, the French have failed to help in the balance of payments problem created by American forces in France. Third, the French have refused to cooperate on NATO nuclear guidelines and on the NATO MRBM problem. Secretary McNamara did not know how much the French might change these three policies in return for nuclear help, but he thought that they might and that we should find out.

There followed some discussion of what the Germans and British might think. The President's attention was called to Adenauer's recent expression of concern to Stikker about any help to France, and the President himself remarked that he doubted if the British Government could face the political consequences of nuclear assistance to the French.

Secretary Rusk reiterated his view that de Gaulle's basic purpose was the development of an independent capability, so that it was most unlikely that he could accept a real commitment to NATO. Mr. McNamara then stated in essence the position presented in the Defense paper of April 11¹ on this point and repeated his view that the present situation is unsatisfactory and that the French could be expected to proceed and develop a force of their own whether or not we help them. To this the Secretary replied that costs are the one great barrier to nuclear diffusion. If we should now be willing to help the French we should be blackmailed into helping others when they reach the point of heavy financial pressure, and in effect we should be reducing the price of entry into the nuclear field. The Secretary's view was that we should instead seek a way to reduce our special nuclear relation to the British. The reestablishing of such nuclear sharing with the British in 1958 had been a mistake.

¹ Not found.

The Secretary of Defense asked if we could not undertake a probing discussion to see what we might obtain. The Secretary felt that it would be disastrous to do this bilaterally since it would have a very heavy impact on our other allies.

The President indicated his own belief that it was wrong to move on this matter now. In the light of these conflicting considerations he was not prepared to authorize any change in our policy. He thought the only thing we could be sure of getting from the French was money. He believed therefore that it was in our interest to have public speculation die down and he asked that guidelines be prepared accordingly.

The discussion then turned to the problem of MRBM policy. The Secretary of State, in urging adoption of the proposed policy, agreed with Mr. McNamara that NATO would not be able to settle on any other controlling agent than the President. He then briefly discussed the guidelines stated in the paper² and indicated his belief that from a political point of view it was most important to go through the exercise of ways and means of controlling such a force and to find out that there is no one but the President. The Secretary also thought multilateral manning was of great importance, especially as it might prevent a row with the Soviet Union over German activity in this field. He also emphasized his conviction (not shared by all his colleagues) that the Europeans should pay the bulk of the price for this force. The President energetically agreed with this last sentiment.

Secretary McNamara registered four points:

1. The Joint Chiefs of Staff strongly disagree with this paper.
2. He himself would disagree if there were to be a NATO control separate from the President.
3. He believed that we must indeed get off dead center in discussion of these issues.
4. There was a danger that in following this policy Europeans might come to take nuclear weapons as a substitute for necessary conventional forces.

Secretary McNamara believed for himself that there is no military requirement for such an MRBM force, but he pointed out that the Joint Chiefs and General Norstad disagree strongly. As to the cost of such a force, he thought it might run to about 2 billion dollars. The U.S. might contribute 600 million dollars, and the Germans 400 million dollars, but he could not see who would pay for the other billion. Nevertheless, he was very enthusiastic about submitting the proposal for its political values.

Secretary McNamara then expressed his own preference for an American-manned and American-financed force which would be a

² See the attachment to Document 135.

genuine part of the American strategic deterrent. He thought such a force would be more justifiable in economic and military terms, and he believed that it might in the end meet the European political requirement too.

At the President's request, Mr. McNamara detailed the opposition of the Chiefs as follows:

1. The Chiefs object to the transfer of information. Mr. McNamara strongly disagreed and believed that it was important to communicate views and figures which would show that a nuclear war would be indivisible, that it would be catastrophic, and that the deterrent power of the U.S. is and will remain overwhelming.

2. The Chiefs deny the notion that there was no military requirement for MRBM's..

3. The Chiefs strongly object to any notion of multilateral control of Polaris.

On this third point, Secretary McNamara agreed with the Chiefs, and with Secretary Rusk's concurrence the decision was made not to approve this paragraph 2 d. of the document.

The President indicated that any greater degree to NATO control would be hard to accept. He further believed that as much as possible we should state the matter in such a way that the Europeans would come to us with their ideas. We must not seem to be proposing a flat American position.

It was agreed that each Secretary would explain these matters to his own subordinates, and later the President approved the attached guidelines as guidance for all concerned.

McG. B.³

³ Printed from a copy that bears these typed initials.

134. Telegram From the Department of State to the Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and European Regional Organizations

Washington, April 16, 1962, 8:31 p.m.

Topol 1579. Subject: Multilateral MRBM Force. You are authorized make following statement at earliest opportunity to NAC, which should

Source: Department of State, Central Files, 375/4-1662. Secret; Priority; Limit Distribution; Verbatim Text. Drafted by Fessenden and Kranich; cleared with Nitze, Seymour Weiss, and Owen; and approved by Kohler. Repeated to Bonn, Brussels, and London.