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October 30, 1957

MEMORANDUM OF CONFERENCE WITH THE PRESIDENT  
October 29, 1957

Others present:	Dr. Rabi
	Admiral Strauss
	General Cutler
	Mr. Gordon Gray
	General Goodpaster



Mr. Gray said the purpose of the meeting was to enable Dr. Rabi to present some findings of the Scientific Advisory Committee, regarding an emergency defense against the Soviet ICBM to the President. The essence of the recommendation was that, in view of a defect our scientists feel exists in the Soviet atomic weapon for their ICBM, we should proceed at once to develop an anti-ICBM system, particularly for the safeguarding of SAC, and should give consideration to discontinuing atomic tests at once, before the Soviets achieve the thing they are now lacking in their weapon.

Dr. Rabi said the Soviets must be expected to have an ICBM in the fairly near future, and to have a warhead for it. The warhead may be expected to have the same weakness our earlier ones had. By exploding a 100 KT weapon at an altitude over 100,000 feet, within several miles of the incoming Soviet weapon, pre-initiation of the Soviet weapon, with a low order explosion, would be induced. To safeguard SAC there should be initiated the construction of long-range radar for this defensive system, and this radar is estimated to cost about \$10 million per site. He added that if the Soviets continue development and testing they seem certain to discover the feature that they now lack.

The President pointed out that if we were to discontinue testing, we should be making a complete, sudden reversal in our position. It is hard to see how we could do this in terms of our public opinion, and the opinion of our allies. He recalled that Mr. Stassen had

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suggested accepting an early cessation and we rejected his proposal. To do this now would require great skill of presentation and explanation. Dr. Rabi said he thought it was a tragedy that we did not stop our tests before the Soviets tested their thermonuclear warhead in their last series. The President recalled that he had often said that if we are ahead of the Soviets in these matters, we should agree to stop in order to freeze our advantage. Dr. Rabi said that if we continue to conduct tests we will get better weapons, but relatively the Soviets will catch up with us.

Admiral Strauss said that he is inclined to question some of the assumptions and conclusions of the study, and General Cutler suggested that as a next step the scientists holding various points of view should get together. With regard to the cessation of the testing, Admiral Strauss brought out that the Soviets can always "steal our secrets" and I raised the point as to assurance against the possibility that tests would be conducted without our knowledge.

The President said that, in addition to the scientists, it is necessary to have the Secretary of State and others study this proposal, because we would be changing our international position. We would also have to take care to bring our NATO allies along. He would, however, like the group to bring together AEC's scientists and others concerned to resolve a common view. Then he would have to consider what to do, if the change is made, in order to retain the confidence of our allies and our own people.

During the discussion Dr. Rabi indicated it had been a great mistake for the President to accept the views of Drs. Teller and Lawrence. The President recalled that he had seen them because of a request by the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy. He added that he thought they were eminent in their field (as all agreed they were). He asked Dr. Rabi if there was mutual respect between the various groups. Dr. Rabi responded in a manner which tended to indicate that there was, although his statement was simply that they had known each other for twenty years or more.

With regard to the thermonuclear weapon, the President said he had always felt that the delay could have been fatal to us. He retains some question, however, as to whether the Soviets did not get the secret from us. General Cutler said that Dr. Bohr had indicated he thought that the Soviets had developed the weapon on their own but had checked their line of development against the data they obtained from us.