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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Participants

Department of State

Secretary Dulles
Gerard C. Smith, Asst Secretary-Policy Planning

Department of Defense

Secretary McElroy
Donald A. Quarles, Deputy Secretary
Mansfield D. Sprague, Assistant Secretary
Wilbur M. Brucker, Secretary of the Army
Thomas S. Gates, Jr., Secretary of the Navy
James H. Douglas, Secretary of the Air Force
General N. F. Twining, Chairman, JCS
Admiral Arleigh Burke, Chief of Naval Operations
General Maxwell D. Taylor
General T. D. White
Admiral Charles O. Triebel

General Cutler
General Goodpaster

Secretary Dulles said he wanted to raise for consideration whether our basic strategic concept is retaining the confidence of our allies and continuing to create sufficient fear in the enemy to deter aggression. He said he also wanted to ask some questions about the significance of the present strategic formula.

Secretary Dulles recalled having originated the concept of "massive retaliation" in 1950 when it was realized that it was impossible for the

Free World to match the conventional strength of the Soviet Union. The opposing concept at that time had been enunciated by former President Hoover, who urged a "fortress America" strategic doctrine.

Secretary Dulles said his idea had been intermediate to the two extremes of recreating large-scale conventional forces and withdrawing to "fortress America". The striking power of the force behind the massive deterrent, while protecting the United States, would protect many other nations. That doctrine of deterrent has worked over the past eight years and only with reluctance did the Secretary now express the opinion that in the future, although the doctrine would not become invalid, its application would be limited.

Since 1950, the destructive power of nuclear weapons had immensely increased. The Soviet Union has developed a very large nuclear weapons capability. A nuclear exchange between the US and the USSR could result not only in destruction of the Soviet Union and the US but could make all of the Northern Hemisphere uninhabitable or, in any event, risky to inhabit. The Secretary questioned whether massive use of nuclear weapons could be consistent with the survival of the US.

Secretary Dulles said our allies are coming to feel that the US would not in fact inaugurate general nuclear war in the event of a limited attack by the Soviet Union and that our only way to help them will increasingly be a purely theoretical thing.

Secretary Dulles expressed concern about the problem of US reaction to ambiguous Soviet aggressive moves. He spoke of the awful responsibility that would devolve on the President

and his successors in office if a basis for decision arrived. Even if there was no doubt in the minds of US officials as to their determination to open up general nuclear war with the Soviet Union if our allies are attacked in force, Secretary Dulles said that our allies are beginning to have doubts that the US would so enlarge the conflict as to bring about its own destruction. Probably present European governments go along with our strategic doctrine. The United Kingdom seems to be placing more dependence on it, even more than we. Owing to their fiscal exigencies, the Exchequer is writing their strategic doctrine. But the Tories seem now to be a minority government and if a Labor government succeeds they may well take a different view of things. They may feel that the United Kingdom's security is not compatible with a US doctrine of general nuclear war and nothing else in the event of an attack on Europe.

Adenauer cannot survive forever. There are presently fairly stout governments in France and Italy, but there is a rising tide of opposition to our strategic concept. The tide is still submerged because of the existence of governments favoring our policy -- governments which "grew up" with this policy. But the Secretary queried if new governments will not be more skeptical.

Secretary Dulles also expressed concern as to how our strategic concept would work, assuming a Soviet attack on Germany, Turkey or Iran, in which in the first instance US forces were not involved. Would we rush forces into the hostilities and thus establish the US-Soviet forces clash required by our doctrine or would we stay clear of the fight? The Secretary reported the concern of Iran at the Baghdad Pact meeting in January that we would not rush forces in.

Mr. Quarles at this point recalled that the President at the Paris NATO meeting had flatly told the Turks that we would come immediately to their defense in the event of an attack.

Secretary Dulles asked if, since the massive retaliation doctrine was first conceived, weapons developments had not occurred which would permit the US to begin to consider an "area defense" concept. He recalled that the massive retaliation doctrine had been based on the fact that area defense possibilities did not exist. The US family of nuclear weapons had not then been developed. Perhaps they were not sufficiently developed now, but would not this be the case shortly. Could we not consider a doctrine permitting of local defense against local attack? He recalled that in Korea we believe that the use of nuclear artillery would add greatly to defense capabilities, and the same situation may exist in Italy and Iran.

Secretary Dulles asked if the doctrine that any overt hostilities between the US and USSR signified all-out war means that the Department of Defense development and production of weapons is limited to the implementation of such strategy, or is the Department of Defense producing weapons to reflect possible new strategic concepts which different kinds of weapons would permit? Are we becoming prisoners of our strategic concept and caught in a vicious circle?

Secretary Dulles then summed up by saying in 1950 and succeeding years the concept of massive retaliation was imperative because it was a practical concept. He feels now that the strength of the deterrent derived from that strategy will rapidly deteriorate as the consequences of putting the doctrine into action become so appalling. Also our present strategic concept may not continue to be the only practical one as tactical and clean nuclear weapons become available.

Secretary Dulles spoke of the large political responsibility which the Secretary of State bears. Under present strategic doctrine, perhaps we can hold our NATO allies in line for one or two years, but not much longer than that. He does not challenge the validity of our strategic doctrine if it is just for today or tomorrow. He does challenge it if we are prisoners of this doctrine and if our weapons production planning reflects the rigidity of this doctrine. He believes that urgent efforts should be made to find strategic variants which will be more credible than our present doctrine.

Secretary McElroy opened by saying that the questions raised by Secretary Dulles were appropriate and timely. The developing destructive capability of nuclear weapons raises the question of whether nuclear weapons will in fact be unuseable in war, as proved to be the case with chemical warfare weapons. In response to Secretary Dulles' question, he agreed that weapons design and production reflect strategic doctrine. If our strategic doctrine is to change, there will have to be consequential changes in the weapons.

Secretary Dulles interjected the point that he was not suggesting giving up a massive retaliatory capability, but he was urging that the US develop more flexibility.

Secretary McElroy said that some knowledgeable people doubt if tactical nuclear weapons could be used in war without bringing about the use of very large yield weapons. The enemy has a great conventional preponderance, and we must find ways to match this fact.

General Twining said that we are not rigid. We are beginning to approach sufficiency in large yield weapons and small yield weapons are being developed and produced at a good rate. He said if the Soviets attack Turkey, we cannot save Turkey unless we use the deterrent. The allies would have no more confidence that we would help them out in a limited way than in a very large way by the use of massive retaliation. He felt that by moving away from the massive retaliation doctrine we might lose the alliance.

Secretary McElroy acknowledged that there has been a change in the balance of force. He cited the case of Berlin. The Soviets could take it faster than Turkey.

Secretary McElroy said that the conditions for use of tactical nuclear weapons had not been spelled out nor has our will to use them in peripheral situations been established or disclosed. For example, would we use them if the Korean hostilities were renewed? We need a doctrine covering the interim situation between the use of conventional weapons and of massive retaliation. We hope we can use tactical nuclear weapons in limited war without bringing on all-out nuclear war. The matter is certainly worth studying. Perhaps we can come up with some doctrine governing the use of clean tactical weapons.

Admiral Burke said we now have a massive retaliation capability and we should keep it for the all-out situations. The next step to consider would be a big war not necessarily involving the USSR and the US. We are now producing nuclear weapons for that type of situation. Then there are smaller instances which we can handle with conventional weapons. There are also in-between situations in which we would perhaps use nuclear

weapons and perhaps we would not. But we must move fast in all situations. We are not banking on massive retaliation for all situations.

Secretary Dulles said he was very encouraged to know this and recalled that Churchill had said some time ago that nuclear weapons had saved Europe from aggression. He doubted that Churchill would say the same for the situation over the next ten years.

General Taylor said he agreed entirely with Secretary Dulles' analysis of the strategic situation. Certainly we can deter a big war. Our military posture is oriented in the right direction now, but our hearts are not entirely in the job of developing limited tactical weapons systems. By 1960-61 we can have nuclear weapons deliverable by recoilless-type weapons and with a yield of 10 tons (1-1/100th of a kiloton). With such weapons, "area defense" is entirely possible if we work hard at it.

Secretary Dulles pointed out that the world works not unlike a small community. He pointed out that policemen didn't have machine guns. The London police for years used only sticks. He acknowledged that circumstances had forced us to depend on a strategic concept which was quite limited and one that won't work in the coming years. Fortunately, future circumstances may no longer require the doctrine as an exclusive one.

Mr. Quarles stated that he saw the need for re-examination of the concept, but he felt that the logic which had led to the concept had a certain inevitability about it and he thought a re-examination would endorse the doctrine. Area defense would be possible if the US had a monopoly of nuclear weapons, but since the Soviet Union has them in

large numbers and has great manpower superiority, there would be the same imbalance as had led to the enunciation of the massive retaliation doctrine in the first place. An attempt to set up area defense around the Sino-Soviet bloc would lead, as Secretary Dulles had said in 1950, to no gain in defense and bankruptcy for all. During recent years technological developments have not favored the defense. The opposite has been the case. Our best defense is in a strong offense at places of our choosing. Therefore, the argument for new strategy breaks down if the Soviet Union is the enemy. If you are considering hostilities against a third power which does not have nuclear weapons and the Soviet Union keeps out of the fight then certainly we should have more flexible strategic doctrine.

Secretary Dulles said that perhaps a re-examination would lead to the same result, but in that case are we not wasting money testing to develop "clean" and small nuclear and atomic weapons if we have no strategy for their use?

Secretary McElroy said he thought that Mr. Quarles' views were not inconsistent with a re-examination of our strategic concept. There was no doubt of the appropriate reaction in the event of an all-out US-USSR attack. He was concerned about situations, such as Indonesia.

Secretary Dulles said that he was not happy about Indonesia.

General White said that we were not dependent entirely on large weapons and that the percentage of low yield weapons in stockpiles was increasing.

Secretary Dulles again pointed out that we have no strategy for using these smaller scale weapons. He contrasted the academic pastime of

developing strategic theories with the bitter choice that a President would have to make authorizing all-out nuclear war. Secretary Dulles emphasized the great risk of placing the security of the US on the assumption that the President -- Mr. Eisenhower or his successors -- would decide for all-out nuclear war. He emphasized the responsibility "before one's God" of taking this action and the risk of a policy of putting so grave responsibility on the President.

Mr. Quarles recalled that each time this issue had been put to the President during the past three years he had given the guidance that we should plan on the use of nuclear weapons when required by national security considerations and that he would authorize their use.

General Taylor said it was difficult to find a good use for tactical nuclear weapons since even these involved tremendous battle field destruction.

Secretary Dulles spoke of the awesome decision that faced President Truman in 1945, and said that the situation today would be immensely more difficult. What the President thinks he will do in a contingent situation is one thing; what he actually would do when faced with an ambiguous Soviet attack or probing operation in Europe is another. In Secretary Dulles' judgment, the President would not order strategic bombardment of the Soviet Union if the Soviet attack in Europe was not a clear-cut, all-out attack.

Mr. Gates pointed out that there are very large differences in the national resources required for different types of strategic bombardment -- that is, whether cities were targets or whether other targets were to be hit.

General Cutler said he had talked to the President about this matter referred to by Mr. Gates and said he would send a memorandum to the Secretaries of State and Defense regarding the specific nature of our deterrent and our strategic bombing aims. We could go to a different deterrent involving lesser resources if that was considered desirable.

Secretary McElroy said that the purpose of the meeting this morning had been merely to lay out the problem. He proposed that his people get up a paper on what approach should be made to the re-examination. He suggested that Secretary Dulles might want to designate someone "to think along with us".

Secretary Dulles pointed out that the considerations involved in the restudy were of first importance and the factors were quite well known. Therefore, he felt that the study should be at a very high level.

Mr. Quarles said that certainly there was lots to be done, but that there was more "in the record" than had been referred to at the meeting today.

Secretary Dulles said that what we needed cannot be kept in the record -- in the background. We must have a publicly "salable" policy, or we would lose our allies.

General White, reverting to the point made by Mr. Gates and General Cutler as reported above, asked if the US would be satisfied with a deterrent limited to knocking out one hundred Russian cities and letting the Soviets know in advance.