

**September 19, 1962**

**Ministry of Defence, 'Notes on Talks During the  
Minister of Defence's Visit to the United States,  
September 1962, Nuclear Problems in Europe'**

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**Summary:**

In September 1962, British Defence Minister Peter Thorneycroft traveled to Washington for discussion on defense cooperation. During a flight with President Kennedy and Secretary of Defense McNamara, they discussed the French nuclear program and the possibility of French-German nuclear cooperation.

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## MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

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NOTES ON TALKS DURING THE MINISTER OF  
DEFENCE'S VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES,  
SEPTEMBER, 1962.

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NUCLEAR PROBLEMS IN EUROPE

The President invited the Minister of Defence to accompany him on 11th September on a visit to the Redstone Laboratories at Huntsville, Alabama, and to Cape Canaveral in Florida. As soon as the plane left Washington, the Secretary of Defense invited Mr. Thorneycroft to outline to the President the British attitude towards French nuclear planning and French/German collaboration in the nuclear field.

2. Mr. Thorneycroft thought it was premature to come to any hard and fast conclusions about these issues till the outcome of the Common Market discussions could be forecast more clearly. Meanwhile, the fact had to be accepted that France was developing a nuclear capacity. He was inclined to discount the reports of German ambitions in this direction or of Franco/German collaboration in this field.

3. The President and Mr. McNamara were resentful and distrustful of both French and German intentions. The President said that if the Germans embarked on work in the nuclear sphere which constituted a breach of the 1954 Agreement, the United States would have to reconsider her own guarantees to station forces in Europe. They might even have to "haul out". Mr. McNamara did not consider that it would be a sufficient safeguard to apply the existing British pattern to France. In the case of Britain, independent political control coupled with integrated targeting was tolerable to the United States because of basic identity of political outlook and aims and because we understood each other well. These could not be taken for granted by the United States in the case of France.

4. The immediate question for decision was how to respond to Dr. Stikker's recent proposals for discussion of nuclear policy within NATO. Both sides agreed that there was danger in these proposals and that it was premature to consider discussion of the strategical and political issues involved. Both agreed, however, that there was advantage in continuing to educate the NATO Nuclear Committee about the nature and effects of nuclear weapons, Mr. McNamara remarking that, whilst it might have been arguable, when the West had had a monopoly

of tactical nuclear weapons, that they could be regarded as a substitute for manpower, this was no longer valid. The Soviets knew how they would respond to Western use of tactical nuclear weapons and they knew how the Americans would appraise that response. Dr. Adenauer did not. He was looking to the deterrent value of tactical nuclears, not to the fighting and operational implications.

5. The question of M.R.B.M.s for NATO was discussed. Mr. McNamara suggested that there might be a case for an ad hoc group apart from the NATO Council to discuss the military and technical implications of a NATO M.R.B.M. force, whilst Mr. Thorneycroft drew attention to the weakness of the case for a NATO M.R.B.M. force on both military and political grounds, as well as the practical and financial difficulties.

6. Mr. McNamara said that they were developing a new medium-range missile which could be launched from the sea, from under the sea, or from land. The United States Joint Chiefs of Staff had been given definite instructions:

- (a) there was no military advantage in having both a new American force equipped with this new missile and also a NATO M.R.B.M. force;
- (b) a choice must therefore be made between one or the other;
- (c) politically, there might be advantage in setting up a NATO M.R.B.M. force in preference to a new American force;
- (d) there would also be financial advantage for the United States if the new missile were used in this way as the costs would then have to be shared.

7. He agreed that from the purely military point of view, the case was weak and that the possibility suggested would not add to the military strength of NATC. Politically, however, there might be a case for a NATO system, on the grounds that it might satisfy some pressures in NATO prompted not only by motives of prestige but by a desire to have a safeguard against the remote risk of America standing aside. On the other hand, a NATO system which met this demand would have to be a system free from American veto, and a European system without an American veto might well give rise to different but serious risks in other directions.

8. Mr. McNamara had serious doubts about the wisdom of a separate NATO nuclear command system to control all nuclear weapons in the hands of NATO ground forces. He thought this would have very bad effects on the morale of Army Commanders and their troops as they might lack confidence in the weapons being available for use when required if they were under separate command.

9. He took a poor view of NATO strategy, which he described as "airy fairy" and irresponsible from the beginning. The three elements of policy, forces, and resources, had to be considered together. Otherwise, a resultant strategy was apt to be nonsense. NATO had never considered all three together. This was one of the many things wrong with NATO, and it had to

be put right.

10. Apart from this discussion in the President's 'plane (at which Mr. Paul Nitze and Sir Robert Scott were also present) the subject of a European nuclear force was brought up at a luncheon in the State Department on 13th September, given by Mr. Rostow for Mr. Thorneycroft. A record of this has been prepared by H.M. Embassy in Washington. There was a discrepancy between the cautious approach of the President and Mr. McNamara and the views put forward by the State Department, who envisaged a European nuclear force system independent of American control.

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE, S.W.1.  
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