

January 16, 1963

Memorandum of Conversation between Amintore Fanfani, Prime Minister of the Italian Republic, and the President [John F. Kennedy], 'Modernization of Nuclear Missiles in Italy and the Mediterranean'

Citation:

"Memorandum of Conversation between Amintore Fanfani, Prime Minister of the Italian Republic, and the President [John F. Kennedy], 'Modernization of Nuclear Missiles in Italy and the Mediterranean'", January 16, 1963, Wilson Center Digital Archive, National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group 84, Rome Embassy Classified General Records 1946-1964, box 125, 430.1 Italy and IRBM and NATO 1962 1963 1964. Contributed by Bill Burr and Leopoldo Nuti.
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/300387>

Summary:

Prime Minister Amintore Fanfani's visit to the U.S. was an opportunity for he and President Kennedy to reach "a meeting of the minds" on the Jupiter-Polaris problem. The two had several conversations during the next two days on East-West relations, NATO nuclear issues, and the developing world, among other topics. During this conversation, with only the U.S. translator present, Kennedy explained to Fanfani that Polaris/Sergeant missiles as a replacement for Jupiter/Corporals, along with Italian participation in an eventual MLF, should be announced as "whole package" rather than to have "the different points of decision simply leak out, without coherence and possibly at the wrong moment." He believed that the main elements of the agreement would find "general approval" among most political groupings in Italy. When Fanfani brought up the possibility of announcing the U.S. request on Jupiters and Polaris and then taking it to his government, Kennedy emphasized the need for quick action, adding that it would "not be desirable to allow for prolonged discussion" of the package.

At Fanfani's request, Kennedy explained the arrangements for Polaris missions in the Mediterranean, which operated out of a base in the Iberian Peninsula (Rota, Spain), and the various options for an MLF, either surface or submarine ships. Such an approach, Kennedy believed, was a way to improve the "position of the West." Accepting Kennedy's assertions about the dangers of the Jupiter missiles, Fanfani nevertheless saw a "psychological" problem involving the "prestige and strength" of Italy's armed forces. Kennedy "indicated lively interest" in Fanfani's question as to whether the Jupiter bases could be used for "cooperative peaceful space efforts."

At the meeting's conclusion, Kennedy "stressed that by the following morning they should be able to combine four or five points into a proposal that would strengthen the

Italian and American position within the framework of the Alliance, thus making this meeting a gain in its cohesiveness and hence political strength.”

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DATE: January 16, 1963
THE WHITE HOUSE
(11:30a.m. - 1:00 p.m.)

UNITED STATES

President

Neil A. Seidenman - LS
(Interpreter)
McGeorge Bundy (last few min
of the meeting)

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The President suggested that nothing final should be stated before the Prime Minister had conferred with Secretary McNamara, since this was a complex question of defense, of special interest for our two countries, as well as for other

countries

Approved by the White House
1/29/63

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

13

DATE: January 16, 1963
THE WHITE HOUSE
(11:30a.m. - 1:00 p.m.)

SUBJECT: Modernization of Nuclear Missiles in Italy and
the Mediterranean

PARTICIPANTS: ITALY

UNITED STATES

Aminore Fanfani, Prime Minister
of the Italian Republic

The President

Mr. Neil A. Seidenman - LS
(Interpreter)

Mr. McGeorge Bundy (last few min
of the meeting)

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The President indicated his willingness to discuss any of a number of topics under the headings of political, economic, and defense problems and deferred to the Prime Minister as to which should be their main topic of discussion.

The Prime Minister chose to talk about nuclear weapons and the missile bases in Italy. He also thought that attention should be given to what should and what should not be included in the communique, and to the timing of an announcement of agreement.

The President, noting that the Prime Minister was still scheduled to see the Secretary of Defense, pointed out that the Jupiter missile should be replaced, since, like the Thor missile, it was only a "first-strike" weapon, and that a much more modern weapon should replace it. The Corporal missile was also dated and should be replaced by the Sergeant. The Jupiter should be replaced by the Polaris, which could be fired from a surface vessel, such as the Garibaldi, or from submarines. Another point to consider would be the question of what course to follow in regards to the use of U.S. Polaris submarines in the Mediterranean, and also the setting up of a multi-lateral nuclear force. Should emphasis be given to undersea or to fixed surface systems?

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countries, and of the greatest significance after the Nassau talks. But the President stressed that the two leaders indeed should achieve a meeting of minds in Washington at this time, and ensure that there would be no loose ends remaining.

The two leaders therefore decided that it would facilitate their exchanges to set the appointment with Secretary McNamara after the meeting with Secretary Rusk, on the same day, to be able to arrive at definite conclusions in their second talk on the following day.

The Prime Minister pointed to what he termed a political problem; namely, the question whether or not a solution relating to the "termination" of the Jupiters was near. This, he said, would have to be announced.

The President hereupon expressed the position that the approach should preferably be in terms of a package. We would say that the Jupiter should be replaced, in order to modernize our missiles and defense, replacing the Jupiter with the Polaris and Corporal with Sergeant. We would be saying that we are in agreement in favor of continuing work toward a multi-lateral force. And if we can agree to this, there would be further exchanges on a technical level in regard to details and specific roles; surface or sub-surface deployment; and the part to be played by Italy. Also, the U.S. would have Polaris submarines in the Mediterranean, for 1963-1964. We would also be talking about an improvement in the political control of European defense over the European nuclear force --- in which Italy would have an important part. If there is agreement on such a package basis, the meeting would end in decisions for the strengthening and modernization of our forces, and better political control over these weapons. But it should be given out, whenever an announcement were to be made, as a whole package. We certainly would not wish to have the different points of decision simply leak out, without coherence and possibly at the wrong moment.

Prime Minister Fanfani said that he had discussed the proposal with the President of the Republic, the Minister of Defense, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and all three posed the objection that to announce it before the elections might unleash a grand scale debate. This would appear to suggest the conclusion that it would be better to wait until after the elections.

The President replied that he could not know the intricacies of the Italian political scene as closely as the Prime Minister, as to the various political forces at work and the different stands. He did emphasize, however, that in his opinion our approach could be enhanced at this time, since the basic content of the package would seem to offer comfort to most political groups. It aims at the setting up of a multi-lateral force in which Italy would participate. Hence it strengthens Italy militarily and gives Italy more significant voice in the control of European policies. It provides for the presence of American Polaris submarines in the Mediterranean, which means greater security for the southern European area and hence for Italy as well. It would call for a "multi-nationally manned" nuclear force, in which Italy would take part with surface weapons and perhaps with the Garibaldi to the further strengthening of Italy. It would also call for taking out the Jupiters, which may not be entirely pleasing to all, but the

package

*It may be of interest to note that Prime Minister Fanfani himself did at no point in the discussion make mention of, or allude to the Garibaldi, nor even express himself in any way in response to the President's mention of its possible use.

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package on the whole should meet with general approval within most groups. There could be some objection on the left (sic) to the part about the Jupiters, but certainly the Right would be pleased with the prospect of continuing U.S. - Italian cooperation with the newer Sergeant missile; with the strengthening of both nuclear and conventional forces for Italy in the multi-lateral set-up; with the Garibaldi, and especially with the fact of a formal agreement for Italian-American cooperation.

An important aspect of the decision, of course, would be to ensure that it was taken as a compact unit and presented as such at the appropriate time, and not to allow it to become a matter of public domain, piece-meal, through the Italian newspapers, subjected to varying interpretations according to the political affiliations of the press. Indicating his receptiveness to the Prime Minister's views on the matter of timing, against the background of Italian internal politics, the President stated his conviction that in the course of these meetings, five or six points should be formulated and brought together to form a decision in which each aspect would be cast in its proper light. This would constitute a real advance in our mutual cooperation, and would avoid having each point come out in isolated fashion, by dribble. With all of the points bound together as a unit and thus presented, our mutual positions would be much strengthened.

The Prime Minister agreed with the President's reasoning for ensuring the effectiveness of decisions taken by them. But there were two possible avenues of procedure: 1) to make a decisive announcement at the appropriate time, or 2) to announce that he had accepted the request made by the U.S., that he would submit the proposal to the Government, and that the terms of the proposal would be subsequently announced. He added, however, that there would be a need to define certain elements of the understanding.

The President replied that in his view it would not be desirable to allow for prolonged discussion over these things. It would be better to try to conclude an agreement on the various aspects of the proposal as one piece, and to act upon it quickly. If we make a suggestion and this were submitted to debate, it might take far too long. If four or five points could be brought together into a complete proposal, rather than submitting this to a debate at the risk of losing too much time, it would be better to take a decision quickly and that would be all. To submit it to Parliament, even as a unit, would make it vulnerable; some may not like certain parts of it. Some may not go along with the multi-lateral idea; others may be opposed to Polaris; and still others may have doubts about letting go of the Jupiters at all.

The British, the President pointed out, had the Thor missile after Jupiter, and now they've apparently decided that manned bombers will do the job better than the Thor until 1970; and after all the British have been in the nuclear business for some years now. So that if we are to increase the strength of the West, now is the time to decide. We have the Atomic Energy Committee Weapons Analysis Report from January, 1961, which said at that time that the Jupiter was unsatisfactory. The President again recognized that the Prime Minister undoubtedly knew the Political problems of his country better than anyone else, but re-emphasized the significance of the British decision on the even more efficient Thor missile, in relations to the concept of "strengthening and modernizing", forces as soon as possible.

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The Prime Minister, indicating his concurrence, asked the President to define what the point relating to submarines in the Mediterranean would consist of.

The President explained that this would involve patrol missions by United States Polaris submarines in the Mediterranean, equivalent to those presently carried out in northern waters. A submarine station similar to the one at Holyloch is being constructed in the Iberian Peninsula, and the submarines will be supplied from Holyloch until completion of the other station. Meanwhile, the submarines would run their missions in the Mediterranean, each mission lasting 45 days, where they would gain access to additional targets and offset the present range limitations of the Polaris. This would begin in 1963. But in addition the question of the multi-lateral force would be taken up, and the determination made as to whether this would be primarily surface or sub-surface.

The Prime Minister said he would act in favor of supporting the multi-lateral force decision at the next meeting of the Atlantic Council. He mentioned that at the January 11 meeting the Italian NATO delegation declared its concurrence with this approach. The next step would be that of taking decisions pertinent to the formation of the NATO Committee on the multi-lateral force, and there seemed to be increasing difficulty in these decisions.

The President observed that beyond the problem of the Jupiter, which could no longer be considered as a deterrent weapon but simply a target for the Soviets, there was in addition the need to give attention to other points: 1) There should be a mobile force. A land-based force would pose a given set of problems; it would be hard to imagine hauling these weapons through the streets of Italian or French cities, which goes back to the proposal once put forward by General Norstad. This would also entail potential political as well as military risks. 2) If the mobile force is sea-based, then it must be determined whether it is to be sub-surface or surface. A "multi-nationally manned" submarine is of course a complex matter. If it is to be surface, this would be costly and also complex; it would require very complicated firing mechanisms. However, it can be done. It may not be simple, but it certainly can be done by the European countries. But, the President assured, we are ready to consider either way.

We definitely feel, the President continued, that this is the best time to act, when attention to these matters is made easier by the present period of relative relaxation between East and West. At this time we see the need for change and improvement of the position of the West, and this is the way to do so. We shouldn't forget the decision made by the British, who think the manned bomber is better than Thor, when Thor was better than Jupiter --- and now Polaris is better than all three!

The Prime Minister said that there was no disagreement as to the status of Jupiter. There were only certain problems on his mind of a psychological nature. The people in Italy feel bound up in this question, which also involves the

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prestige and strength of the Italian armed forces. The Prime Minister asked whether or not the President could for example conceive of announcing that these bases, presently to be used to launch Jupiter missiles in case of war, could be subsequently used for cooperative peaceful space efforts. The President indicated lively interest in this idea. The Prime Minister added that it would seem a shame to allow all that had been built up so far at these bases to fall to ruin.

The President responded reassuringly that the idea might well be an asset to this proposal as a whole, which by all means should be clearly seen as a source of strength for Italy. So that with these different points joined to form a whole unit, the proposal would be more satisfactory. Then as to the mode of presentation, this should also be agreed upon between the two leaders, for if it were revealed as anything less than a joint decision, there would be political difficulties, with some in favor and some against, for one reason or another. This is why it would be far better to present it as a joint proposal formulated by both governments on a level of equality, thus giving it the maximum degree of force--- with both parties in agreement, tying it together and wrapping it up so that it could contribute toward the strength of Italy.

Prime Minister Fanfani recalled that attention should also be given to the element of timeliness.

The President fully agreed. But he again stressed the view that any combination of decisions to be outlined in the proposal taken as a matter of joint interest --- towards modernization of weapons, the use of the Sergeant missile, the multi-lateral force, joint space efforts --- should clearly point to a strengthening of Italy's position. Meanwhile, the President recommended that they should continue to think about the "package", until the following day, after the Prime Minister had consulted with the Secretary of Defense, and of course to the question of maintaining a balance of interests in Italy against the background of political problems at home, which the President again conceded were more familiar to the Prime Minister.

The President showed the Prime Minister the page of the Atomic Energy Committee report from early 1961, containing three paragraphs concerning the inadequacy of the Jupiter missile, which the President encouraged the Prime Minister to read. The Prime Minister did so, and in concurrence with the point made in the text pointed out that this had been the conclusion of Italy's Chief of Staff as well. The President commented in passing that the Italian Chief of Staff was indeed recognized as a knowledgeable man on the subject of missiles.

The President again stressed that by the following morning they should be able to combine four or five points into a proposal that would strengthen the Italian and American position within the framework of the Alliance, thus making this meeting a gain in its cohesiveness and hence political strength. Not to accomplish this now and to leave the announcement for another future occasion, with the coming elections in May or June, when our position would not be as strong as it can be at the present moment would be wrong. This is a very important factor from the political as well as the military standpoint.

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Prime Minister

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Prime Minister Fanfani expressed agreement with the views of the President, and thanking him for his clarifying statements, he promised to bear them in mind for his talks with Secretary McLamara, and to give special thought to the problems involved in this approach, notably the matters of substituting a future formal agreement; mode of presentation; and timing of the announcement.

The President called Mr. McGeorge Bundy into the room during the last few minutes of the talk.

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

Approved by the White House 1/29/63

DATE: January 16, 1963

THE WHITE HOUSE

(11:30a.m.-1:00p.m.)

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PARTICIPANTS:

Italy

Amintore Fanfani, Prime Minister of the Italian Republic

United States

The President

Mr. Neil A. Seidenman—LS (Interpreter)

Mr. McGeorge Bundy (for last few minutes of the meeting)

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The President suggested that nothing final should be stated before the Prime Minister had conferred with Secretary McNamara, since this was a complex question of defense, of special interest for our two countries, as well as for other countries, and of the greatest significance after the Nassau talks. But the President stressed that the two leaders indeed should achieve a meeting of minds in Washington at this time, and ensure that there would be no loose ends remaining.

The two leaders therefore decided that it would facilitate their exchanges to set the appointment with Secretary McNamara after the meeting with Secretary Rusk, on the same day, to be able to arrive at definite conclusions in their second talk on the following day.

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The President observed that beyond the problem of the Jupiter, which could no longer be considered as a deterrent weapon but simply a target for the Soviets, there was in addition the need to give attention to other points: 1) There should be a mobile force. A land-based force would pose a given set of problems; it would be hard to imagine hauling these weapons through the streets of Italian or French cities, which goes back to the proposal once put forward by General Norstad. This would also entail potential political as well as military risks. 2) If the mobile force is sea-based, then it must be determined whether it is to be subsurface or surface. A "multi-nationally manned" submarine is of course a complex matter. If it is to be surface, this would be costly and also complex; it would require very complicated firing mechanisms. However, it can be done. It may not be simple, but it certainly can be done by the European countries. But, the President assured, we are ready to consider either way.

We definitely feel, the President continued, that this is the best time to act, when attention to these matters is made easier by the present period of relative relaxation between East and West. At this time we see the need for change and improvement of the position of the West, and this is the way to do so. We shouldn't forget the decision made by the British, who think the manned bomber is better than Thor, when Thor was better than Jupiter—and now Polaris is better than all three!

The Prime Minister said that there was no disagreement as to the status of Jupiter. There were only certain problems on his mind of a psychological nature. The people in Italy feel bound up in this question, which also involves the prestige and strength of the Italian armed forces. The Prime Minister asked whether or not the President could for example conceive of announcing that these bases, presently to be used to launch Jupiter missiles in case of war, could be subsequently used for cooperative peaceful space efforts. The President indicated lively interest in this idea. The Prime

Minister added that it would seem a shame to allow all that had been built up so far at these bases to fall to ruin.

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The President fully agreed. But he again stressed the view that any combination of decisions to be outlined in the proposal taken as a matter of joint interest—towards modernization of weapons, the use of the Sergeant missile, the multi-lateral force, joint space efforts—should clearly point to a strengthening of Italy's position. Meanwhile, the President recommended that they should continue to think about the "package", until the following day, after the Prime Minister had consulted with the Secretary of Defense, and of course to the question of maintaining a balance of interests in Italy against the background of political problems at home, which the President again conceded were more familiar to the Prime Minister.

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Prime Minister Fanfani expressed agreement with the views of the President, and, thanking him for his clarifying statements, he promised to bear them in mind for his talks with Secretary McNamara, and to give special thought to the problems involved in this approach, notably the matters of substituting a future formal agreement; mode of presentation; and timing of the announcement.⁴

The President called Mr. McGeorge Bundy into the room during the last few minutes of the talk.