

March 23, 1957

Memorandum of Conversation between John Foster Dulles and Selwyn Lloyd, 'Atomic Energy Items: (1) French Request (2) Test Limitation'

Citation:

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Summary:

US-UK discussion of French nuclear weapons potential and efforts that could be undertaken to hinder or advance the their program. The French request for technical assistance from these two governments was also covered.

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English

Contents:

Original Scan

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UNITED STATES DELEGATION
 to the
 BERMUDA MEETING
 March 21-23, 1957

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

DATE: March 23, 1957

TIME: 11:05 A.M.

PLACE: Mid-Ocean Club

Participants:

United States
 Secretary Dulles
 Adm. Strauss
 Mr. Quarles
 Mr. Murphy
 Mr. Elbrick
 Amb. Whitney
 Senator George
 Col. Goodpaster
 Mr. Hagerty
 Mr. Gerard Smith
 Mr. Macomber

United Kingdom
 Selwyn Lloyd
 Amb. Caccia
 Sir Frederick Hoyer-Millar
 Pat Dean
 William Strath

Subject: Atomic Energy Items: (1) French Request
 (2) Test Limitation

Copies To: G, W, S/P, C, EUR, S/AE, IO, P, USUN, CIA (Dulles),
 Defense (Wilson), AEC (Strauss), London (Whitney) Paris (Yost).

1. French Request for Help in Developing Nuclear Weapon Program

Mr. Lloyd stated that the French had made an approach recently to the U.K. for assistance in developing their nuclear weapons program. The French are also counting on some cooperation from Germany. This raised in urgent

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form the question of so-called fourth nations developing nuclear weapons. He stated that three courses of action seemed open to the U.K. and the U.S.: (a) to attempt to stop the French/German or any other fourth-nation weapon development; (b) to associate with the French/German development in an effort to influence it; and (c) to remain "neutral". He recognized that the third course of "vast inactivity" would not be a very courageous one. He would very much like to have U.S. thinking on this problem.

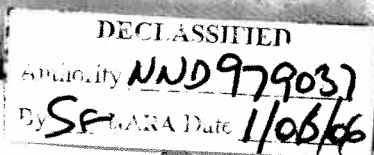
Secretary Dulles reported that Guy Mollet had recently told him that he personally was not in favor of a French nuclear weapons program and did not expect that much would be done along these lines in France in the near future. He asked if the French approach to the U.K. had been official.

Mr. Lloyd replied that Defense Minister Bourges-Maunoury had made the request. Mr. Lloyd hazarded the guess that it would take the French five years to develop a weapons program if left to themselves.

Admiral Strauss reminded the meeting that our estimates of time required for the Russians to develop a weapons capacity had been very inaccurate. It would depend on the availability of uranium to the French and their facilities for testing. He thought that the French would need uranium from U.S. or U.K. controlled sources. He believed that France does not have sufficient uranium for a large weapons program, but does have enough for a few weapons. He had wondered where the French would be able to conduct tests. Admiral Strauss expressed the belief that the French could make a primitive weapon, the technology for which is in the open literature, and in the construction of which there are no insuperable

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obstacles within one year and perhaps within a few months. He took a very dim view of any fourth country developing a weapons capacity.

Mr. Lloyd asked how the French could be stopped and concluded that a limited French program could not be stopped. He believed that the French had available some 1,000 tons of uranium a year which would be enough for a small program. The only sanction he could see was to block off the French from imports of natural uranium for their civil program.

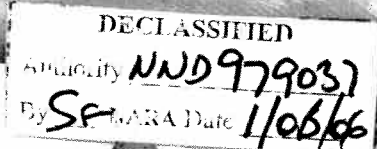
Admiral Strauss agreed and said that France would need to import uranium from sources presently controlled by the U.S. and the U.K.

Admiral Strauss said that the Combined Development Agency (U.S.-U.K.) has released some uranium to Belgium for their civil program. He assumed that the Belgians would be as unhappy as the U.S.-U.K. about the prospect of a French weapons program using Belgian material.

Mr. Lloyd threw out the possible sanction of refusing to supply EURATOM with any material if some EURATOM material went for weapons. The British believe that a French weapons program would cost some 200 million pounds sterling a year, but this included the capital cost of building a gaseous diffusion plant. Mr. Lloyd said the Germans seemed to have plenty of money. He said that on a number of occasions Jules Moch had said that although he personally was opposed to a French weapons program, it was bound to happen. Mr. Lloyd also thought that Pineau had said the same to him.

Sir Richard Powell stated that just before the U.K. Delegation had left for Bermuda they had been advised by the French that they were determined to get on with a weapons program.

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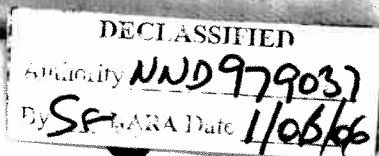
Mr. Lloyd expressed the thought that the French might develop a small program, but if they tried to develop a big program, EURATOM external uranium supplies would suffer.

Secretary Dulles expressed U.S. regret that the EURATOM Treaty permits members of the Community to develop nuclear weapons. He recognized, however, that this accommodation to the French had been necessary in order to get their agreement to the EURATOM Treaty. He said that the U.S. was not disposed to assist the French in a weapons program. If they wanted to produce nuclear weapons, they must do it on their own. Any U.S. uranium supplied to France would have to be used for peaceful purposes only. He added that this would certainly continue to be our policy as long as hopes existed for a comprehensive worldwide disarmament system. U.S.-U.K. policy should try to slow down the French weapons development. He was not sure that open opposition to a French weapons program was the best way. This would arouse nationalistic emotions which might speed the French program. He speculated that some minimal association with the French in this area conducted with appropriate "dragging of feet" might be the best solution.

Sir Richard Powell said that the specific French requests to the U.K. had been (a) for French participation at Aldermaston; (b) U.K. assistance in the construction of a French gaseous diffusion plant; (c) U.K. supply of U-235 to France; and (d) French observers to attend U.K. tests in the Pacific for indoctrination in the procedures of conducting tests.

Secretary Dulles expressed the hope that the U.K. would take the same negative position as the U.S. would take in this matter.

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Mr. Lloyd asked if a U.K. affirmative reply to the French would affect U.S.-U.K. relations in this field.

Admiral Strauss expressed the opinion that it would in view of the fact that we hold restricted weapons data in common, going back to World War II, and that we have transmitted some weapons information under our 1946 Agreement with the U.K. which it could not transmit to the French under the terms of this agreement.

Mr. Lloyd stated that open opposition to the French appeared to be diplomatically dangerous. He agreed that the thing to do was to "drag our feet" and that it was important that the U.S. and the U.K. maintain the same position vis-a-vis the French. He asked if the French had requested any such assistance from the U.S.

Secretary Dulles stated that the French had made no formal approach to the U.S. for similar assistance.

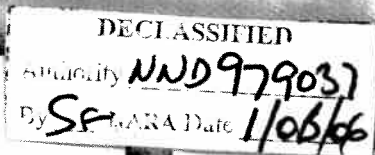
Mr. Smith reported that the French had asked for military cooperation in the nuclear submarine field which present U.S. statutory law prevented.

Mr. Quarles said that on several occasions very informal approaches had been made to the Department of Defense by the French, but in each case the French had been told that U.S. law prevented weapons development cooperation.

Mr. Lloyd said he had on occasion thought of the possibility of turning the WEU into a "nuclear power" but the problem of possible compromise of security information would prevent this.

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Sir Richard Powell said he did not understand how the French request for assistance for a French diffusion plant fitted into the plan now being discussed for a European diffusion plant. He said that the French had pressed hardest on the question of diffusion plant assistance and that would be the easiest of the four forms of assistance for the British to render since it did not involve important weapons data.

Secretary Dulles suggested that, in view of the close U.S.-U.K. relations in these matters, it might be appropriate for the British not to be forthcoming to the French request. He noted that the French must be aware of our hopes for control of the fourth nation problem in the disarmament context.

Mr. Lloyd acknowledged that Jules Moch was anxious to get on with the disarmament agreement and would like to see the French weapons aspirations stopped.

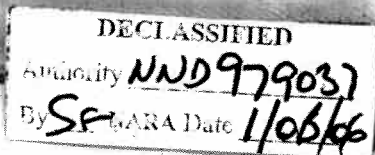
Secretary Dulles expressed the thought that it would be an expensive venture for the French.

Admiral Strauss pointed out that for a simple "gun-type" weapon the cost might not be very high. He explained what he meant by a "gun-type" weapon.

Discussion of this item was concluded by an agreement that the U.S. and the U.K. would keep in touch with developments on this item through regular diplomatic channels and that we would advise the U.K. if the French asked us for such assistance.

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2. Test Restraint Declaration

The U.K. Delegation had not received comments from London on the preliminary draft cabled March 22. They expressed hope that they would have such comments by lunchtime.

Secretary Dulles reported that he had talked to Gov. Stassen on the possible relationship of such an announcement to the disarmament negotiations in London and that Mr. Stassen's comments had already been taken into account ⁱⁿ drafts subsequent to that cabled to Gov. Stassen.

Mr. Strath asked if there could not be included in the declaration some reference to advances being made in reducing the amount of fission yield from large-scale explosions.

Admiral Strauss pointed out that this would be awkward since there was no public evidence that the U.K. was pursuing this development.

Mr. Strath then asked if it would be possible to have a unilateral U.S. statement on this point and it was agreed that this would be considered.

Mr. Dean pointed out the great pressures in the House of Commons on the British Government in connection with this testing matter.

Admiral Strauss said great care was needed in any wording about reducing fall-out because of the physical fact that in war an appropriate use of fall-out might be necessary to deny ground to the enemy and testing of weapons with large fall-out might be necessary. He said that certainly we are cutting down the total amount of fission product being produced in tests. He raised the question of the timing of the proposed announcement.

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It seemed generally agreed that it would probably not be issuable before Sunday, although it was Mr. Hagerly's opinion that it would be useful to get it out Saturday if possible.

Mr. Strath raised the question of introducing the idea of U.S.-U.K. willingness to register with the United Nations their testing plans with an estimate of the fission product yield to be followed by estimates of actual yields after the tests had occurred. These figures might then be taken into consideration by the Radiation Committee of the United Nations studying the fall-out question. He felt that this would relieve the pressure which Canada and other nations had put on the U.K. with regard to this issue. He felt at least a reference to this registration matter might be useful in connection with the London discussions.

Admiral Strauss said that this was a matter that he thought should be taken up later; that it was very difficult to predict expected fission yield, and that often changes took place in the tests which altered planning formed up before the tests. In addition, estimates of fission output could only be made months after tests had occurred.

Mr. Strath then suggested that perhaps a maximum figure for fission yield might be estimated and registered with the United Nations.

Mr. Quarles felt that this would be undesirable since we would not trust the information submitted by the USSR. We would need an independent evaluation. The U.S.-U.K. would be honest in the information it submitted. Security information would be involved. One would expect that if a limitation agreement was entered into, the international organization monitoring

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it would have its own instrumentation or else it would be ineffective. He concluded by urging that we not "box" ourselves in by the suggestion that Mr. Strath had proposed.

Mr. Lloyd said the U.K. problem was one of "political fall-out" from things which it had said in the past. It was pledged to seek agreement for test limitation and it was seeking for a "posture" to permit the making of proposals which would not be "dangerous" but would put the U.K. in the position of proposing something. He wondered if we could not take a position that after a nuclear control agreement was reached tests would stop-- in the meantime they would be conducted with restraint.

Admiral Strauss pointed out that under present U.S. disarmament policy even after the preliminary nuclear control agreement was reached, tests would not stop; they would merely be limited. He felt that the proposed testing statement went far to create the posture the U.K. was seeking.

Mr. Lloyd said that the draft proposal regarding testing seemed to have lost the "quantifying" aspect that the President seemed to be reaching for. Admiral Strauss said that any criteria of quantity would not be practical. He said that attempting to use any quantity measure would result only in useless debates.

Secretary Dulles then urged that the matter be remitted to the experts as it was not practical to get a statement out today.

Mr. Lloyd said that his Delegation was "very grateful" for the U.S. initiative in proposing a statement regarding testing. He urged that the U.S. Delegation check Mr. Strath's ideas for additions to the statement.

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He urged that the wording "small fraction" be substituted for the wording "well below." Mr. Lloyd then said that he understood that the U.S.-U.K. would not mind if the Soviets agreed to a similar restraint.

Admiral Strauss stated that we would not want to enter into a paper agreement with the Soviets on this type of self-restraint.

Mr. Lloyd then said but of course there would be an agreement between the U.K. and U.S. on this, and it was agreed that this would be the case.

The meeting closed with Mr. Lloyd's statement that the proposed testing announcement had possibilities and that his Delegation was most grateful.

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