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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

*Memorandum of Conversation*

*Military & Naval  
1-OS Policy  
(app. by Herter  
and shown by hand  
to Dillon & Murph:*

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DATE: July 2, 1959 2-S/P  
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SUBJECT: Military Paragraphs of Basic National Security Policy 3- *Bureau*

PARTICIPANTS: The White House Defense Department  
The President Secretary McElroy 4- *9/30/51*  
Gordon Gray Deputy Secretary 5- *H(1)*  
General Goodpaster Thomas S. Gates, Jr.

COPIES TO: State Department Admiral Arthur W. Radford  
Secretary Herter  
Gerard C. Smith

The President looked at the statement of issues which had been prepared by Gordon Gray, a copy of which is attached. He said it is almost impossible to define general war and limited war. One cannot plan out these things precisely in advance.

Secretary Herter said that just last year Mr. Dulles in going along with the military paragraphs of the Basic National Security Policy paper had urged a restudy because of the State Department's concern that nuclear weapons were to be considered conventional, that any engagement between Soviet and American forces would be total war, and that we

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that we seemed to have no leeway in the matter of fighting small engagements without using nuclear weapons.

The President recalled that he, Admiral Radford, and General Taylor had had a long discussion of this matter sometime ago. The President pointed out that the Japanese and Russians in the 30's had had large-scale military engagements without any formal declaration of war. The President speculated that it might be possible for us to have something like three battalions engaged in Iran against Soviet forces without general war. He said, however, if our vital interests became involved, we certainly should use nuclear weapons. Secretary Horter agreed.

The President said that he had tried to find language to meet this problem which he seemed to equate to the problem of how much authority should be delegated to field commanders to use nuclear weapons.

The President said that the crux of the matter was that we just could not deploy ground forces all over the world. Main reliance would have to be placed on nuclear weapons and mobile forces.

The Secretary

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The Secretary pointed out the possibility that sometime in the future we might have to introduce forces into Africa, at which time we would not want to use nuclear weapons. He also cited the Lebanon example, where the military had wanted to go ashore with nuclear weapons, but the State Department urged against it.

The President referred to Khrushchev's statement to Harriman recently that if the Chinese tried to take Formosa the Russians would assist them, and that the Russians had already made rockets available to the Chinese which could strike Formosa.

The President speculated that the Soviets are wrestling with the same problem that we are considering this morning.

Returning to the question of when nuclear weapons should be resorted to, the President expressed some puzzlement. He said certainly they should not be resorted to carelessly, but if substantial American troops were involved they should have nuclear weapons handy.

Secretary McElroy

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Secretary McElroy then pointed out that General Twining agreed with him (McElroy) that the present policy should be retained. Unless we could use nuclear weapons, we could not participate in limited wars.

The President recalled that during the last war American troops had had available, if necessary, mustard gas, but that it had never been used. He wondered at what point in the spectrum between harassment and limited war we should resort to nuclear weapons. Secretary McElroy then said there were significant budget considerations in the proposed policy changes.

The President then referred to the impossibility of our stationing garrisons all over the world. The President said that Secretary McElroy's point of view was our present policy and it was being implemented. He recalled that when we reduced our forces in Korea, we beefed up the remaining forces with nuclear capability.

Admiral Radford then said that the State Department wanted the military to fight with conventional weapons until it was decided to go to nuclear weapons. "We

are past

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are past that point", he said. In 1953, we took a crucial decision to convert our present forces to nuclear weapons capability. The fact that they are nuclear capable permits us to use small scale units to do a job which otherwise could only be done with much larger forces.

There was then a discussion about the question of delegation of authority to employ nuclear weapons. The President expressed some concern about the possibility of poor judgment by some local commander.

Secretary Herter referred to the possibility of using tactical weapons in excess of 1 megaton, as reported at last Tuesday's briefing by Admiral Parker. Admiral Radford then said that Parker's briefing was not very good. He recalled that we are concentrating on small weapons. He said that General Lemnitzer and Admiral Burke had told him that there was no real difference between the State and the Defense language, but that they preferred the State language. Admiral Radford said that the State language would require a US capability to fight a limited war with or without nuclear weapons. He pointed out that the earlier policy on nuclear weapons had already been watered down.

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down. Their use now is only authorized to meet national objectives and not military objectives. He said this change fuzzed up the issue.

The President then speculated about what type of force one would have to employ, say, if our intervention in Cuba was requested. He later concluded that no nuclear capability would be required in such case. The President said that he thought we were having difficulty because we were trying to find generalized language to cover a multitude of contingencies.

The President said we need plans to guide the various levels of the military. Certainly our forces need to have nuclear weapons. The real problem was when would the weapons be used.

Admiral Radford said that if there was any chance that our forces would have to fight without nuclear weapons, a whole different force structure would be required.

The President said that he had seen studies indicating that the availability of nuclear weapons does not result in a saving of manpower.

Admiral Radford

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Admiral Radford then went back to the 1953 decision on the "new look".

The President recalled that the pre-Korea military budget had gone down to about \$11 or \$12 billion and that was where he and Louis Johnson differed.

The Secretary then reverted to the Cuban discussion and agreed with the President's conclusions.

The President said that we have no lack of conventional weapons. Secretary McElroy pointed out that nuclear weapons were not useful for close-in fighting. It was generally agreed that the Latin American area offered no problem.

The President said what we needed was a meeting of the minds and not fixed slogans. He said all agreed that one should not use a sledge hammer to drive tacks.

Secretary McElroy said that the present language suited him and that any changes would be misinterpreted to suit the preconceptions of various people. He said that unless a policy change was to be made, we should not change the language.

Secretary Gates

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Secretary Gates pointed out that a real policy change is being urged. He would not say that the State Department was urging a new policy change, but some people were.\*

The President then reviewed the history of the deployment of nuclear weapons to American forces abroad. He felt that no large forces should be deployed without nuclear weapons. Secretary Herter stated that he had no objection to this conclusion. There was further discussion about the delegation of authority matter.

Secretary Herter then raised the question about the non-nuclear capability our forces would have. He was glad to hear what Secretary McElroy had said that we were continuing to develop better conventional weapons.

The President said that perhaps some slight change in words was needed, but he did not know. He repeated that "formed units" must have defensive nuclear capability.

Both Secretary

\* At a meeting after the President's meeting between : : McElroy, Radford, Gates, Gray and Smith, Smith made it quite plain that the State Department was proposing a real change.

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Both Secretary McElroy and Admiral Radford jumped in to make sure by "defensive" the President did not mean to rule out weapons systems to take out strike bases deep in China.

Mr. Gray said that the State Department wanted to increase our limited war capability. The President stated his understanding that we had a good conventional capability. Secretary McElroy said that that was true in cases involving ranges up to 2,000 yards. In the case of 15 - 20 miles, we will lack conventional fire power. The President asked him if we had thrown away all of our artillery. Secretary McElroy indicated that this would be the case soon. The President expressed some doubt as to the wisdom of this course. The President pointed out that we may be called on for aid by the OAS. He felt that with one present-day American division with its conventional arms, it could handle any Western Hemisphere problem. He recognized that we are in a transitional stage, pointing out that the day of very small nuclear weapons was not very far away. When one gets down to .02 kiloton weapons, the distinction we are talking about now would no longer have reality.

Mr. Gray

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Mr. Gray said that the proponents of a policy change wanted to change the emphasis somewhat away from strategic bombing capability. The President expressed the belief that our military units should be given good training in conventional weapons. He stated that it had taken years for the cross-bow to become obsolete. We should organize our forces to use the weapons we have.

There was more discussion of the delegation problem.

Secretary Herter then read an excerpt from the Summary Statement of Foreign Policy Requirements which proposes that nuclear weapons should be used in limited hostilities, but only as a last resort. The President expressed the opinion that State was perhaps over-cautious. He also felt that the matter of word changes in Basic Policy was not important.

The question was raised as to the possibility of limited war in Europe. Mr. Gray suggested that there was some opinion in the State Department that this was possible. Secretary Herter said, "yes, that only recently Mr. Murphy had said that he thought there could be limited hostilities over Berlin with the

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matter being referred to the UN. The President said that that would only be a barroom brawl. There was then some discussion as to whether there could be a limited war with China.

Secretary Gates then said some people were concerned that the emphasis on strategic retaliatory forces would squeeze out funds for and interest in conventional weapons.

Admiral Radford pointed out that never before in peace time did we have such large forces for Latin America type of operations.

The President pointed out that if the Soviets wanted to take Europe they would have to blast out positions with nuclear weapons, in which event the size of our forces there would not make much difference.

Secretary McElroy said that his discussions with the military commanders indicated that they feared that nuclear weapons would not be used.

The President then gave an analogy of the use of a pistol in retaliation for an attack by a hoodlum in the street. One is justified in using the pistol if one's life is really endangered, but not if the circumstances indicate that no such danger exists.

The President

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The President said we cannot organize now for the situations that may take place in 1965. We should go carefully and wisely. We should try to use the necessary degree of force without starting a war.

Secretary Herter said that he agreed that if it was essential we should use nuclear weapons. He pointed out, however, how fearful world opinion was of any use of nuclear weapons. The President expressed the view that world opinion was wrong.

The President then speculated that a very low yield nuclear weapon would not be worth its cost and that if we used nuclear weapons we should use large enough ones to do the job.

Mr. Smith then pointed out that one matter had not been mentioned. All of our assumptions about the use of nuclear weapons in limited war start with the proposition that they will not be used against us. Admiral Radford and Secretary McElroy denied this with some heat. It was pointed out that the limited war study of 1958 had made this assumption and that the Joint Chiefs had refused to study limited war with the State Department on any other basis. Mr. Gordon Gray confirmed accuracy of this. Admiral

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Radford

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Radford said the military actually were prepared for two way use of nuclear weapons in limited war. There was some discussion about the 1958 assumptions and no clear conclusion as to their validity. Certainly SAC would have to be kept on a complete alert during any such period. The meeting then broke up without any conclusion.