

December 7, 1964

**Memorandum of Conversation between President
Johnson and Prime Minister Harold Wilson**

Citation:

"Memorandum of Conversation between President Johnson and Prime Minister Harold Wilson", December 7, 1964, Wilson Center Digital Archive, NARA, RG 59, Presidential Memoranda of Conversations, 1958-1964, box 3, Pres M of C Nov.-Dec. 1964.
Contributed to NPIHP by Bill Burr.
<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/177773>

Summary:

In this conversation, President Johnson and Prime Minister Wilson discuss the MLF and the proposed ANF--the "Atlantic Nuclear Force," a British proposal as an alternative to the MLF. The two leaders weighed the pros and cons of both proposals, with President Johnson ultimately deciding to give a positive response to the ANF, leaving it up to the British to see if Bonn could be enlisted.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY)

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

PRESIDENT MEMCON

DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 13526, Sec. 3.
NW 37300
By LV/DM, NARA, Date 2/8/2012

17359
DEPARTMENT SYSTEMATIC REVIEW
X ☒ class'n ☐ Change/classify to
class'fy with concurrence of
12958, 25X 6
Declassify by, 1964/100 Date: 11/2/91
Declassify after 20/10
Drawal No. 1-3

~~SECRET~~

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Participants:

The President
The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense
The Under Secretary of State
Ambassador David K. E. Bruce
McGeorge Bundy
William R. Tyler
Richard E. Neustadt

The British Prime Minister
The Foreign Secretary
The Defense Secretary
Lord Harlech
Sir Burke Trend
Sir Harold Caccia
Sir Solly Zuckerman

Place:

The Cabinet Room, December 7, 1964, 5:00 p.m.

(The principals were absent when the meeting began. The President and the Prime Minister joined the group at 6:10 p.m.)

In the absence of the principals Secretary Rusk opened the meeting by turning to the subject of Minutemen and the problems of mixed-manning them. He said many looked across the Pacific and therefore NATO should not become involved.

British Defense Minister Healey observed that such a force, at best, would only be a fraction of the U.S. total capacity. And Gordon Walker added that one wing of mixed-manned Minutemen could not control the remainder.

Mr. Ball said that he did not believe the Germans had an interest in participating in a mixed-manned weapons setup in continental U.S. They wanted something in the European area and not anything clearly in the physical control of the U.S. Psychologically, that was a most important factor.

Replying, Healey said the Dutch and the Norwegians preferred to be mixed up with the U.S., and it was his understanding that the German Socialists wanted this, too. Those who insisted on having the weapons in Europe were generally looking to the ultimate release of a U.S. veto.

~~SECRET~~

- 2 -

~~SECRET~~

Secretary McNamara said this was a difficult problem. Not only was mixed-manning with greater weapons dangerous. The fact was that the U.S. was redesigning the Minuteman and wanted to keep this fact from the USSR. With mixed-manning, it would be difficult to keep. This information was under tight control.

Gordon Walker granted that the Secretary's argument on security was powerful, and then turned to the subject of equality with the Germans. He asserted that essentially equality was control and not in the manning arrangements. The system of vetoes proposed by the British took this into account.

Healey then asked what the U.S. had in mind at Nassau when it agreed to assign part of its strategic forces under paragraph 6 and include Polaris submarines in the multilateral force. Mr. McNamara assumed that the undertakings involved a mixed-manned seaborne force in which British and U.S. Polaris would be included.

Healey observed that the details were not spelled out in the communique, and as he read the agreement, it called for equal participation of U.S. and UK forces without reference to mixed-manning.

Secretary Ball agreed that the British Government never agreed to join the mixed-manned force but it had clearly agreed to give that concept a free wind.

This gave Healey the opportunity to talk about Nassau and particularly about the performance of the Tory leaders. He said the Labor Government was just catching up with the Nassau record, and was impressed by how much more correct Kennedy was about France than Macmillan. In fact "the UK performance was disgraceful." He also thought it was unfortunate that the points of agreement at the meeting were not laid down more specifically. It was unclear to Healey how the national and mixed-manning concepts could have become so confused.

Mr. Ball explained that the terminology was straightened out after Nassau and the terms "multilateral" and "multinational" were used to define the separate concepts. Mr. McNamara added, however, the presumption always was that the seaborne force would be mixed-manned.

~~SECRET~~

- 3 -

~~SECRET~~

Healey then asked if the British contributed their Polaris submarines and V-bombers to the force, what would the U.S. contribution consist of.

Mr. McNamara said it was entirely possible to think about putting in B-47s, 52s and 58s, although he wanted to ponder this more carefully and know more about mix-manning bombers.

Gordon Walker commented that the NATO working group had already said that the mixed-manned bombers were feasible.

Healey then remarked that the real aim was to produce a control system satisfactory to the non-nuclear powers and bring them into the operation so that they would familiarize themselves with the nature and the problems of the strategic forces. Physical contact with missiles alone did not seem to produce the necessary understanding -- witness the example of the French. It was important to get down to the hard problems of nuclear strategy before this understanding was achieved. In other words, the most important point of the exercise was its educational value. And Healey doubted that its effectiveness was determined by the existence of mixed-manned surface ships. As far as he could tell, the power of the atom could even be learned from Pershings.

Secretary McNamara disagreed and said the problem was far bigger. Moreover, there was a German public to be considered.

Continuing on this same point, Healey wondered how much of the German problem was related to a misunderstanding of the U.S. willingness to drop its veto. He said he thought the Germans saw the mixed-manned fleet as one which the German element could come to dominate. Therefore, they were not prepared to accept anything less promising. By the same token, the British felt the persistence of the U.S. veto was an important factor and this had to be made clear to the Germans.

Secretary Ball said he could not believe there was such a misunderstanding. The Germans knew the U.S. veto was a fact of life. And as for its relinquishment, he felt certain that they understood this could only be considered when and if Europe was unified under a single executive. Then there clearly would be a new situation and all would be obliged to take a new look at the agreement.

~~SECRET~~

- 3 -

~~SECRET~~

Healey then asked if the British contributed their Polaris submarines and V-bombers to the force, what would the U.S. contribution consist of.

Mr. McNamara said it was entirely possible to think about putting in B-47s, 52s and 58s, although he wanted to ponder this more carefully and know more about mix-manning bombers.

Gordon Walker commented that the NATO working group had already said that the mixed-manned bombers were feasible.

Healey then remarked that the real aim was to produce a control system satisfactory to the non-nuclear powers and bring them into the operation so that they would familiarize themselves with the nature and the problems of the strategic forces. Physical contact with missiles alone did not seem to produce the necessary understanding -- witness the example of the French. It was important to get down to the hard problems of nuclear strategy before this understanding was achieved. In other words, the most important point of the exercise was its educational value. And Healey doubted that its effectiveness was determined by the existence of mixed-manned surface ships. As far as he could tell, the power of the atom could even be learned from Pershings.

Secretary McNamara disagreed and said the problem was far bigger. Moreover, there was a German public to be considered.

Continuing on this same point, Healey wondered how much of the German problem was related to a misunderstanding of the U.S. willingness to drop its veto. He said he thought the Germans saw the mixed-manned fleet as one which the German element could come to dominate. Therefore, they were not prepared to accept anything less promising. By the same token, the British felt the persistence of the U.S. veto was an important factor and this had to be made clear to the Germans.

Secretary Ball said he could not believe there was such a misunderstanding. The Germans knew the U.S. veto was a fact of life. And as for its relinquishment, he felt certain that they understood this could only be considered when and if Europe was unified under a single executive. Then there clearly would be a new situation and all would be obliged to take a new look at the agreement.

~~SECRET~~

- 3 -

~~SECRET~~

Healey then asked if the British contributed their Polaris submarines and V-bombers to the force, what would the U.S. contribution consist of.

Mr. McNamara said it was entirely possible to think about putting in B-47s, 52s and 58s, although he wanted to ponder this more carefully and know more about mix-manning bombers.

Gordon Walker commented that the NATO working group had already said that the mixed-manned bombers were feasible.

Healey then remarked that the real aim was to produce a control system satisfactory to the non-nuclear powers and bring them into the operation so that they would familiarize themselves with the nature and the problems of the strategic forces. Physical contact with missiles alone did not seem to produce the necessary understanding -- witness the example of the French. It was important to get down to the hard problems of nuclear strategy before this understanding was achieved. In other words, the most important point of the exercise was its educational value. And Healey doubted that its effectiveness was determined by the existence of mixed-manned surface ships. As far as he could tell, the power of the atom could even be learned from Pershings.

Secretary McNamara disagreed and said the problem was far bigger. Moreover, there was a German public to be considered.

Continuing on this same point, Healey wondered how much of the German problem was related to a misunderstanding of the U.S. willingness to drop its veto. He said he thought the Germans saw the mixed-manned fleet as one which the German element could come to dominate. Therefore, they were not prepared to accept anything less promising. By the same token, the British felt the persistence of the U.S. veto was an important factor and this had to be made clear to the Germans.

Secretary Ball said he could not believe there was such a misunderstanding. The Germans knew the U.S. veto was a fact of life. And as for its relinquishment, he felt certain that they understood this could only be considered when and if Europe was unified under a single executive. Then there clearly would be a new situation and all would be obliged to take a new look at the agreement.

~~SECRET~~

- 4 -

~~SECRET~~

Mr. McNamara said he had told Von Hassel quite categorically that the U.S. did not intend to give up the veto. Others could not trigger SAC. The U.S. could not be part of a force in which it did not have a veto.

Healey insisted this was precisely the problem. The Germans saw in the McNamara-Ball statements reason to believe they might be on their way to a European deterrent without U.S. interference. He therefore felt strongly that the U.S. position in this matter had to be made as clear to the Germans as it had already been made to the UK and the USSR.

Although Mr. Ball asserted the Germans understood this, Healey insisted that the European unification formula could spell the end of non-proliferation. Nuclear weapons then would be turned over under certain circumstances to present non-nuclear European powers. And the concept of a unified Europe was in itself an equivocation.

The Secretary of State said he could not see the British point because in his mind he could not envisage a Europe that did not at least have a France and/or a Britain.

The discussion then went back to the mixed-manned surface force with Healey contending that the Germans saw in this element a half-way measure to a European force without a U.S. veto.

When Mr. Ball pointed out that Great Britain would in any event have its veto, Gordon Walker insisted there was a point beyond which one nation could not hold out against the others. Greater protection was needed and this would have to be a clear U.S. statement of its intention to retain its veto.

Mr. Ball said that the U.S. did not want to take a position which said the U.S. would not give up its veto under any circumstances and thereby play right into the hands of the Gaullists. And Gordon Walker replied, "But if you don't, you raise hopes that should not have been raised."

Secretary McNamara wondered which Germans the British were talking about. Responsible German leaders (e.g. Von Hassel) with whom he talked clearly understood that the U.S. was not going to give up the veto and accepted this. The Secretary of State added that the Germans

~~SECRET~~

- 5 -

~~SECRET~~

in fact had said quite frankly they saw the multilateral force as an element tying the U.S. more closely to Europe.

Healey said there were at least two forces in Germany -- those who wanted closer ties with the U.S. and those who wanted to separate Europe from the U.S. for whatever reasons. And the latter saw in the MLF potential bargaining power for themselves in bargaining with the USSR.

When Secretary McNamara denied this was a position of responsible Germans, Gordon Walker retorted that one German who felt this way was Hallstein, who saw the multilateral force as the beginning of a European force which in turn would be an important element of a politically unified Europe.

Mr. Ball thought it would be disastrous to let the impression get around that the Anglo-Saxons were trying to prevent a political Europe.

Gordon Walker said he could see the problem of wanting to hedge the veto commitment for the political reasons stated. But the fact was that it would be difficult for Britain to join the force unless the U.S. position on the veto was clear.

Mr. Ball said it was his feeling we were really talking about words and not substance. It was important to get the language correct and this the U.S. would try to do.

Healey expressed concern about the attitudes of Germans conducting the multilateral force negotiations. They seemed to find it difficult to look at anything other than the original multilateral force proposals, and there was some fuzziness about controls. The danger was that if there was misunderstanding all around, strains within the alliance would be increased with all that that implied.

Secretary McNamara described his conversation on this subject with Von Hassel. He said he told the German Defense Minister that the multilateral force would be a substitute for and not an add-on to the U.S. nuclear strength with the Germans paying for something the Americans had been financing hitherto. Moreover, the U.S. would retain its veto. He also told Von Hassel the Germans had to assume responsibility for selling the concept to the Germans -- that the

~~SECRET~~

- 6 -

~~SECRET~~

Americans were only interested if the Europeans wanted it. The Americans would not do the selling job. (At this point Healey asked whether the American effort over the past months could be described as anything less than a selling effort.)

Mr. McNamara went on to say that in reply Von Hassel told him categorically that the German Government was afraid of its own people. It was concerned that if Germany did not have a role in the multilateral mixed-manned force, elements within Germany would be pushing for more. In addition, Von Hassel expressed the Germans' concern about possible U.S. isolationism. They did not want to be left alone and felt the multilateral force would serve to tie the U.S. to Europe for a long time.

Mr. McNamara felt certain there was no misunderstanding about this in Von Hassel's mind.

Gordon Walker observed that he did not see a great rush of the allies going forward in a tremendous force to join the multilateral force.

To this Mr. Ball replied that very few things are done by acclamation. The idea seemed good to us. The Germans felt it was important. The German problem is difficult and it was only prudent to consider the matter very carefully.

Responding to Healey and Gordon Walker's assertions that the British proposals in fact called for German-UK equality by bringing Germany in the nuclear club, Mr. Ball reiterated that equality of Germany with the other Europeans was most important. This was the reason for the mixed-manned proposal. And redoing the concept now would be difficult.

Gordon Walker thought the Germans would be very equal if the British put in the weapons they were proposing and agreed to share control. After all, control rather than manning was the measure of equality.

At this point Secretary Rusk said he thought that over-emphasis on the veto seemed to throw the entire concept out of kilter. More than one nation would make the decision and the U.S. will be participating in the decision-making process.

~~SECRET~~

- 7 -

~~SECRET~~

Gordon Walker then said he did not mind this at all if the U.S. would say it would always participate in the force.

Mr. Ball then reminded the British that the prestige of the German Government was tied to the mixed-manned concept. If Great Britain stood aside, an unequal situation would be created. No matter what the British contributed to the force the important point was that they had to participate in mixed-manning.

Healey wondered why the U.S. was pushing the British and not the Germans so hard. After all, the UK was offering to provide one-third of the power of the force which included a mixed-manned element. This was a higher share than was contemplated for the British in the first place.

Sir Solly Zuckerman then intervened to raise the question of participation. He pointed out that any one element could trigger the rest. Command therefore was most important. If participation were subdivided there could not be command.

Gordon Walker pointed out that in the British view they were making a great concession by giving the Germans control over what they put into the force. But Mr. Ball argued that if the British followed through on what they were suggesting they would be avoiding participation in something in which everyone else joined.

Healey denied this again, enumerating the proposed British contribution of 4 submarines and 5 to 6 squadrons of mixed-manned V-bombers. Not everyone need mix in the fleet and in the V-bombers. Equality in effect -- repeating Gordon Walker's earlier point -- was not established by mixed-manning; equality was derived from control.

As the President and the Prime Minister rejoined the group, Mr. Ball ended this phase of the discussion by emphasizing that there was a need to give the Germans full participation and this could only be accomplished by avoiding special participation arrangements for the British and others.

~~SECRET~~

DISTRIBUTION FOR THE THREE PART WILSON - PRESIDENT MEMCON DATED
DECEMBER 10th

cc: S
U
EUR-Tyler 2
EUR-Spiers
INR-Hughes
G/PM-Kitchen
S/MF-Amb. Smith
S/S-deMartino
S/S-S:Conf Chron leach
CIA-McCone
DOD-McNamara
L-Meeker-Shown to him and to be returned

EXDIS TO THE FOLLOWING:

AmEmbassies	LONDON	17358, 59, 60	# 618007	12/14/64
	BONN	17358, 59, 60	# 618069	12/14/64
	PARIS	17358, 59, 60	# 618006	12/14/64
	ROME	17358, 59, 60	# 618008	12/14/64