

October 2, 1957

**Memorandum by Frank Aiken [on an Interview with
Scott McCleod and the Taoiseach]**

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Summary:

Aiken made an immediate impression on his arrival in the Twelfth Session of the UN General Assembly in September 1957. He adopted an impartial posture of assessing each issue on its merits and campaigning to remodel international politics around self-determination, humanitarianism, and peace. His exhortation was that only the UN had the moral authority and political legitimacy to put forward global solutions. While he did not propose nuclear disarmament measures specifically, his intent was signaled by his recommendation for a mutual drawback of foreign forces (including their nuclear weapons) in central Europe and his endorsement of a proposal to discuss the representation of China in the United Nations. The Eisenhower administration was hostile to Aiken's course as outlined in the U.S. ambassador's audience with Taoiseach Eamon de Valera and Aiken in Dublin on 2 October. The record underlines the Irish concerns about accidental nuclear war due to the proximity of opposing U.S. and Soviet forces in central Europe.

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Mr. Scott McLeod called at Government Buildings at 12 noon today to see the Taoiseach - the interview had been arranged before it was known when I was due to return.

I was with the Taoiseach when Mr. McLeod arrived and went to the ante-room and brought him in.

Mr. McLeod at first made points which he had noted on a page and a half of typed foolscap and then read out three notes which he had on three typewritten cards about 6" x 5". The gist of the points on the foolscap sheets was that heretofore Americans had counted on our automatic support in the United Nations as an anti-communist and pro free world country, and had relied on our discussing with them ahead of time all points on the Agenda. During the course of the present Session, however, we had made propositions regarding the drawback in Western Europe and regarding Algeria without consulting them. We had also voted to have the question of Chinese representation discussed. The American Government recognised that we did not want to join with any block; but they wanted to know where we stood and whether the understanding, as they saw it, heretofore governing our relations at United Nations was to be abandoned.

I intervened at one point in Mr. McLeod's remarks and said that perhaps it would be better if he made his complete statement rather than taking up the points he had to make one by one. Having finished with his preliminary remarks from the foolscap sheet Mr. McLeod read to us the rather lengthy observations on each of the proposals regarding Central Europe, Algeria and China. He made no reference at any time to the Middle East or to the proposal regarding a diplomatic drawing-back in that region.

On the Western European situation he said that the Russians had sixty divisions quartered in East Germany and Poland. That America had four divisions in West Germany and that they felt that the presence of these divisions vitally strengthened the position of the various Governments in Europe; that any withdrawal might be taken by them as a first step towards abandoning Europe altogether; that the presence of these divisions, therefore, was a very vital factor in supporting European Governments.

In regard to Algeria, he said that the Americans hoped that a more vigorous Resolution than last year's would be passed urging France to make peace, and indicated that the American Government did not want the United Nations to go any further at this point.

Referring to China, he said that the American Government felt that it should not be discussed in a formal and separate debate at this time. Otherwise it would give opportunity to the Russian block to make a great deal of propaganda and to influence some of the "non-committed nations".

When Mr. McLeod finished with his points the Taoiseach opened on the Western European situation, and said that the proximity of the forces in that area was very dangerous; that if there could be an agreement made along the lines I had suggested for a drawing-back of even 100 kilometers on either side it would help; and, if having reached agreement on such a drawing-back it might be found possible to get the Russians completely out of the countries on the condition that the American forces withdrew an equal number of kilometers on the other side.

After the Taoiseach had opened the discussion I took up the running. I pointed out that first of all it was quite apparent that the American Government had made up its mind some years ago not to

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have a preventive war. That a number of Americans had publicly advocated that course while America still had the monopoly of the bomb, but that it had been rejected. The position now was as far as I could find out that all Americans were convinced that they could defeat Russia should war come but they could not do so without getting hurt themselves.

Mr. McLeod interjected that this was the position for the first time.

I said that the reason for the United States troops remaining in Western Germany and building up facilities there, such as air fields and fighters and light bombers, was to prevent Russian divisions rolling over the rest of Europe. That objective had been achieved, but recently the fundamental military position had changed with the development of the atomic weapons by Russia and of the short range missile with an atomic war-head both by America and Russia. That while the development and mass production of the inter-continental missile was still some years in the future, and while the United States had still the power to blot out Russia without being totally destroyed herself, everything possible should be done to see whether a real peace could not be made which would take the Russians out of Europe and allow the captive countries - Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Bulgaria to evolve into the position of Austria with her neutrality. I pointed out that the geographic position of Yugoslavia had already enabled her to shake off Russian domination and that Mr. Dulles had said that he would have no objection to the Russian captive nations becoming neutral if they so desired.

Dealing with the military situation I pointed out that our proposals if fully accepted would mean that the American would still be in 15/16ths of France and 19/20ths of Italy. It would also mean that the forty or sixty Russian divisions which were hanging over western Europe would be withdrawn back over the worst system of road and rail communications in Europe, making it difficult for them to plunge forward again, while the few American divisions would be drawing back over the most highly developed system of road and rail communications in Western Europe.

I pointed out that military personnel at all times tended to be very conservative and that it would be worth America's while having a fresh look at the situation and seeing if there was any advantage to be gained by having fighter air fields and their few divisions in Western Germany when the Russians had the short range missile mounted behind their present line of occupation they could smother every air field and communication centre in Western Germany, Belgium and Holland. I pointed out that the 'massive retaliation' bases in North Africa, Spain and Britain, the threat from which had stopped the Russians moving forward, and which would be important for some time yet, were completely outside the zone from which the Americans would retire under my proposals.

I also pointed out that the few American divisions had created an idea in Germany that they could leave the job of defending Europe to the Americans and that the Germans had busily engaged themselves in building up their trade, amassing a surplus of a billion and a half dollars in a very short time. This surplus indicated that they were not building up their military forces to the strength which they could afford and the continuance of the American divisions in Western Germany would tempt them to continue that policy.

Coming to the Algerian situation I said I had told the French that they were quite unrealistic in attempting to hold on to Algeria

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and that they were doing a great disservice to western civilisation by denying self-determination to Algeria, which would have to be ceded sooner or later. There were four hundred million Moslems who keenly resented the position in Algeria; there were certain Frenchmen who realised the validity of the criticisms I had voiced, and it was necessary to voice them where they would be heard by the French people whose support would be necessary to enable the French Government to change its line.

Before turning to the Chinese question I said that I had considered advising the American Government of our proposals for Western Europe but had decided against as it was of the utmost importance to be able to say, as I had said, that they were put forward on my own responsibility without having consulted any other Government. There was just a chance that the Russian Government now thought that Stalin was foolish when he grabbed the captive countries in Western Europe, and might be prepared to withdraw if they could save their faces while doing so. It was of the utmost importance that the idea should be put to them without the least suspicion that I was doing it as a 'stooge' of the American Government.

Turning to China, I said that I had come home determined to see Mr. McLeod. That while I did not inform the American representatives of the proposition I intended to make regarding Western Europe and Algeria, I gave them two clear days' notice of how I intended to vote on the question of whether Chinese affairs should be discussed. I had instructed Mr. Boland to inform Mr. Lodge. Mr. Lodge had expressed surprise and some little resentment, and Mr. Boland, as per previous instructions, had asked him to see me on the matter. Mr. Lodge, however, did not do so then or during the two following days, although I made it my business at the various functions and in the lobby to give him the opportunity by going up to him and talking to him about other matters. Instead of talking to me a demarche was made to the Irish Ambassador in Washington objecting to the line I proposed to take. What was worse, and what I resented still more deeply was that they had attempted to use Cardinal Spellman to force us to change our vote without any discussion of the matter, or attempting to take advantage of any of the opportunities I had made for them to discuss it. I resented the attempted use of pressure not from a personal point of view but because it was the wrong way to do business, and I asked him to inform his Government that that was not the way to do business with an Irish representative.

On two or three occasions in our talk I emphasised this point and pointed out that the essential strength of democracy was the opportunity it gave to put forward ideas in a reasonable fashion and even if these ideas were not acceptable they might touch-off better ones. It was also important that the United Nations platform should be used not merely for making set speeches directed to the home front and other zones but that it should be used in a reasonable way to endeavour to de-freeze the present situation which if it lasted would inevitably lead to war.

On the Chinese question I pointed out that the question was whether we should discuss the matter affecting a quarter of the world's population and particularly the question of Korea. As I saw it, it would be a very big improvement in the world situation if the Chinese could be induced to withdraw pari passu with the withdrawal of the American forces and allow free elections, to be supervised by the United Nations, which would set up an independent State in all Korea with inspection by the United Nations to see that it was kept.

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Turning to the military situation in Korea I said that it seemed to me to be quite foolish for America to keep considerable forces in that area now that Russia had the bomb and medium range missiles. Following the outbreak of war they would be blown into the sea unless America made its main effort in that area. I pointed out that America at the time of the Korean war had refused to commit herself to all out war against the Chinese; that they previously had supported Chiang Kai-Shek with all the arms and money necessary for him to win out if he had the ability or the support to do so.

I said that I did not believe that the Americans would be so foolish as to fight a two front war and that they would make their main effort in the west and not in the east, along the lines that they had so wisely adopted in the last war. The maintenance of American forces in Korea was an irritant to the whole East and was driving China into the arms of Russia and tempted the Japanese to depend upon America for their protection, and so reduced their effort to build up their own forces to a point where they could protect themselves.

Before we concluded our talk I turned to the Middle East and said I had spoken to many representatives of Arab countries and to Israelites. In my discussions with the Arabs I had admitted quite candidly that the worst bequest Lloyd George made was the installation of the Jews in Palestine, but that they had to be realistic and recognise that they could not now be driven into the sea. I found in my conversations with the Arabs that what they feared most was Israelite expansionism, and I felt that the Arab States could be persuaded to accept a Jewish State within the present lines provided that the Jews bound themselves to the United Nations to keep within it and that the Agreement would be enforceable by the United Nations. The negotiation of such an Agreement would of course depend on the settlement of the Arab refugee problem, which I had discussed with both the Arabs and the Jews. My conviction following these conversations was that a settlement could be made, that the Jews could be persuaded to accept a couple of hundred thousand Arabs back into Palestine provided the other eight hundred thousand could be settled in other countries. I thought that the Arabs could be persuaded to accept the balance of the refugees if they came with capital provided by the United Nations to enable them to make a home in the country accepting them. There was no linguistic or racial obstacle to this course and the amount of money involved would be less than the cost of a three minute's war with modern weapons.

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At some point in the discussion the Taoiseach said that one of the most important things was to secure the reunification of Germany and that if the Russians got out of Eastern Germany he had no doubt that it would come about. Mr. McLeod said that Eastern Germany had very much greater armed forces than the Western Germans. At this point I said that the Hungarian forces to a man joined the Revolution and that my information was that at least nine to one of the East German people wanted to get the Russians out and end German partition, that if the Russians were once off their backs the East German forces would probably deal very quickly with the few officers or Commissars who might want to back the Russians.

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