

DECLASSIFIED

Authority **NN0979525**
By **MS/NARA** Date **2-23-05**

15589

O/TM

SEP 29 1965

TOP SECRET**RESTRICTED****TO :** The Secretary**THROUGH:** O/TM**FROM :** O - Llewellyn H. Thompson
SAC - John W. Liddy**SUBJECT:** Letters from Prime Minister Wilson on Nuclear
Weapons Arrangements

The two letters suggested for Tuesday luncheon discussion (Tab B) stem from the President's recent approval of the SALT II nuclear weapons disposal plan which is the subject of the attached State-UK correspondence (Tab C). In brief, this plan calls for the storage in the UK of nuclear depth charges, intended for anti-submarine use by U.S., U.S., and Netherlands forces which would be operating pursuant to NATO planning and under SALT II control.

The UK has no objection to the SALT II plan as such, but wishes to clear up two questions satisfactorily before the storage provisions of the plan are implemented. These questions were addressed in two letters rather than one because there is no real connection apart from the tie-relationship suggested. The proposals are these:

1. The first letter proposes that the long-standing US-UK Memorandum of Understanding be amended to show accurately that NATO-commanded US and UK forces are to come within its terms.

2. The second letter proposes a US-UK understanding to the effect that nuclear weapons will be released to the Netherlands forces only at such time as they are also being released to UK forces.

This matter**TOP SECRET**

DECLASSIFIED

Authority **NN0979525**
By **MS**NARA Date **2-23-05**TOP SECRET

- 2 -

This matter was discussed extensively within the Department, with the Department of Defense and the White House staff, and with the British Embassy prior to the sending of the letters. It is our view that the President should accept the proposals made, replying to the Prime Minister with separate letters of assent. We believe also that action should be taken concurrently to inform the Netherlands Embassy of certain conditions governing release of weapons, i.e. (1) there is to be no alert landing of any aircraft under the SACLANE plan; U.S. custodial requirements are such that weapons can be released to the Netherlands aircraft carrier only upon granting of Presidential release of U.S. weapons for NATO use and (2) in terms of the SACLANE plan, this means that weapons will be released for Netherlands use only when they are also being released for UK use. This action could in our view best be taken by the Department after consulting the British Embassy. The background and reasons for these recommendations are set forth in the annex at Tab A.

Recommendation:

That you take the foregoing line when the matter is discussed with the President.

Approve /s/ GEORGE BALL

OCT 1 1965

Disapprove _____

Attachments:

a/s

Comments:

L/SIA - Mr. Tripp
LHM - Mr. Baker
LMA - Mr. Judd

a/MS: [unclear] 10/20/65

TOP SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

 Authority **NN0979525**
 By **MS** NARA Date **2-23-05**
TOP SECRETUS-UK Understandings Concerning Use of UK Nuclear Weapons1. First Letter: Proposal to Amend Memorandum

The proposed amendments to the US-UK Memorandum of Understanding are non-controversial in nature and are clearly required if the document is to be kept current. Similar wording adjustments have been made in the past, as for example when the three ICBMs were first put into and then removed from the UK.

In the present case, the suggestion is that the language be broadened to reflect the fact that certain SACLANI-commanded as well as SACRUR-commanded forces will come in future within the scope of the US-UK understandings. The proposed language is of a general nature and would obviate the necessity of further amendment if other specific U.S. or U.K. NATO-commanded units should become so equipped and based as to come within these understandings.

As the incoming letter states, the footnote is no longer relevant. There is no objection to deleting it, and some advantage in doing so, since it makes specific reference to amending the Murphy-Jean report. This report, which was agreed in 1958 and amended in 1959, is essentially a set of implementing procedures for the US-UK Memorandum of Understanding. The British have suggested amending it from time to time, and we have always resisted these suggestions, partly because we could foresee major problems in trying to make the procedural arrangements any more precise, but principally because a major British purpose seemed to be that of attempting via this means to broaden the scope of our consultative-joint decision arrangements generally.

2. A brief letter of assent by the President would be adequate; the only point of additional clarification desirable would be to state that the suggested amending language can of course be considered as applying only to U.S. and UK forces based in the UK.

TOP SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

 Authority **NN0979525**
 By **MSNARA** Date **2-23-05**
TOP SECRET

- 2 -

2. Second letter: Proposal Concerning Netherlands

The proposal made in the second letter is more questionable, certainly at first glance, since it seems to smack of secrecy and bilateral collusion with one ally at the expense of another. There is obviously a bilateral understanding involved, but when the whole matter is viewed in context, the problem raised is not as serious as it might appear, and we believe the UK suggestion is the best of the alternatives available to us.

It must be remembered that these warheads are to be stored on British territory, and that all arrangements must therefore be satisfactory to the British before the storage can take place. The UK Government has exercised the greatest care in ensuring insofar as possible that foreign forces based in the UK would not go to war from these bases, thereby involving the UK, without British consent. In the present case, while the Netherlands unit would not be based in the UK, since it consists of aircraft and helicopters operating from a Dutch carrier, it would draw nuclear weapons from a UK storage site. It is conceivable, although a very remote possibility, that the US and Netherlands, acting in collusion, could in effect send the Netherlands unit into battle from a UK base against UK wishes, and this remote possibility is the underlying reason for the UK suggestion.

In a similar way, and for a similar reason, we understand that British forces subject to NATO command authority, wherever they may be, are under standing instructions to check with NSC before obeying orders emanating from SACMEX or SACLANE, although the British have stated that they would be willing to remove this hold order upon receipt of written assurance from SACMEX and SACLANE that they would secure NSC approval prior to issuance of orders to British units. In essence, while the British have been perhaps another

TOP SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority **NN0979525**
By **MSNARA** Date **2-23-05****TOP SECRET**

- 3 -

in their handling of this issue than the French, they are not necessarily more willing than the French to relinquish the right of unilateral decision as to use of their forces or of bases in their country.

The original British inclination in this case was to approach the Dutch directly, seeking from them essentially the same sort of consultative-joint decision arrangements they have with the U.S. Upon further reflection, they decided this was inadvisable, partly because it would be a cumbersome and unnecessary impediment, but mostly because they felt such an approach would almost certainly point to and perhaps cause the Dutch to inquire into the nature of the US-UK bilateral understanding on bases and nuclear weapons. There is a general awareness and there have been occasional public references to the fact that there is some sort of understanding between us on bases, but its exact nature has been very closely held, and the British considered it would be too much of a risk to get into this subject with the Dutch.

This has been our feeling also, since we could easily envisage, were Dutch interest in the subject aroused, that they might want specific bilateral understandings with us about nuclear-armed Dutch forces not only in the UK, but anywhere else, including Germany. This sort of question has never been raised by the Germans, incidentally, but it could well be, and it is not something we would wish to encourage by bilateral discussions with any core allies that are absolutely necessary. We have very extensive third-country storage arrangements in Germany, and are planning such arrangements in Italy, as well as the U.S. The general subject of understandings and procedures as to release of nuclear weapons may well be something we will want or need to discuss in the Select Committee, on a carefully-prepared basis, but we have or wish to spread further the explicit commitment to the personal President-Prime Minister consultation which lies at the heart of the U.S.-U.K. Memorandum of Understanding, and this is the basic reason for steering away from intensive bilateral discussions on the subject.

TOP SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority **NN0979525**
By **MS** NARA Date **2-23-05**TOP SECRET

- 4 -

The suggestion made in the second UK letter would obviate the need for any real bilateral approach to the Dutch by either the British or ourselves. We do not believe that accepting it would be unduly risky in terms of our NATO obligations or our relationships with the Dutch, for the following reasons:

The weapons are to be stored in the UK pursuant to NATO planning and are intended for use only in accordance with that planning, i.e. ALLIANCE has a coordinated plan under which U.S., U.K. and Netherlands units would all draw their weapons from the same UK storage site and use them under ALLIANCE command authority. ALLIANCE has already been told that release to the Netherlands carrier would be made only upon granting of fundamental release of U.S. weapons for NATO use, and that there can be no direct loading of any aircraft under the plan (this means that the weapons will be loaded only when the decision to use them has been made). The only other NATO users under this particular plan are the U.S. and U.K. Seen from this point of view, what the U.K. is asking us to consider bilaterally is that we would release weapons to the Dutch only in accordance with that plan, i.e. only when we are also releasing to the British, the only other non-U.S. users. Since this is the whole rationale and raison d'être for the storage arrangements, a modification of this intention should give us no difficulty.

It is true that if the NATO planning and arrangements broke down, and the UK for instance declared itself out of a war in which the U.S. and Netherlands were engaged, the understanding with respect to release of these particular weapons to the Netherlands would be a theoretical impediment to our freedom of action. However, in such event we would have to be discouraging ourselves from so many things with the UK that this particular problem would be too inconsequential to bother with, and it is certainly an eventuality we can do little in advance to try to prepare ourselves for.

TOP SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority **NO979525**
By **MS**NARA Date **2-23-05**TOP SECRET

- 3 -

It should be remembered in this connection, of course, that these are U.S. weapons, under U.S. custody, and that we are free to move them out of this as any other storage site, provided they are not being moved out for actual use from those sites. In the very unlikely circumstance that the situation worsened, and it looked as if the U.K. were going to opt out of a possible war, we would presumably wish to take our weapons out of that country, and the British would presumably not object to our doing so, if their object were to avoid any UK involvement. In such a situation, which would amount to a scrapping of NATO planning as far as the UK is concerned, the U.S. and the Netherlands would be free to make whatever disposition of weapons might be mutually agreeable, once they were physically out of the U.K.

Assuming we accept the UK suggestion, there is the question of what if anything either we or the British should tell the Dutch. Our understanding is that the British intention has been to say nothing to them, but only to notify NATO that the UK is ready to proceed with the plan, when they have received the requested confirmation from the U.S. It seems to us that there is little actual risk in the U.S. also saying nothing, and that the less said the better, for the reasons given above. On the other hand, arrangements of this sort sometimes leak, there could be Dutch suspicion of some mysterious US-UK deal involving Dutch interests without Dutch knowledge, and it is probably better on balance for something to be said specifically to the Dutch about the conditions on which the US and UK are entering into the storage arrangements. Our own custodial and loading requirements would seem to offer a good possibility for doing this, without having to go at all deeply into the US-UK understanding aspect of the matter.

As indicated above, McLANE has already been told that release to the Netherlands carrier would be made only upon granting of Presidential release of U.S. weapons for NATO use. This was one of the conditions on which the President

TOP SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority **NN0979525**
By **MSNARA** Date **2-23-05**TOP SECRET

- 4 -

approved the SAILANT plan, and was necessitated by the fact that U.S. custodial requirements make it impossible to put weapons aboard a non-American vessel in peacetime. It would be quite in order for this to be explained to the Dutch by ourselves, after consulting the British. We could go on to say that that this means in practical terms is that weapons would be released for use by the Royal Marines units only at such time as the SANTO plan is to be implemented, i.e. as weapons are being released to the U.K. as the other SANTO ones, and that it is desirable for all three of us to have a clear understanding of the matter, particularly since our custodial requirements dovetail with the natural UK concern that bases and nuclear weapons in that country be employed in war only with UK consent. The alert landing requirement could be usefully explained at the same time, since it has been made known to SAILANT and helps ensure that only fully coordinated use will be possible.

As to the method of apprising the Dutch, it would be best to do it in Washington, by talking first to the British prior to the President's response to the UK letters and then to British and Dutch Embassy representatives together. There is in our view no need to make this a high-level matter, and low-key routine handling by department representatives with the two Embassies would seem preferable.

TOP SECRET
 DIVISION
 SERVICE