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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON

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March 7, 1953

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

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SUBJECT: The Eden Visit: Use of Atomic Weapons

EO 12958, 25X
IPS/CR/IR by [Signature] Date: 6.29.99

Mr. Eden asked me yesterday to confirm the understanding previously given by the Truman Administration concerning the use of American bases in the United Kingdom. I agreed to do so, Defense having concurred. Attachment A is the language to be incorporated on this point in the communique.

Mr. Eden also raised with me the question of our consultation with the United Kingdom on a decision to use atomic weapons anywhere. He said he would wish to ask you on Monday whether you would give a personal assurance to Prime Minister Churchill (as Truman had done with Attlee and Churchill) that you would consult with him before making such decision. I stated that this, of course, was a matter which you alone could decide and that I would present the matter to you.

As I said to you on the telephone, I doubt the advisability of giving the personal commitment requested. To do so might run us into serious difficulties with the Congress,

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John Foster Dulles
Sec of State

would single out this particular weapon for special treatment and thus tend to strengthen the stigma of distinctive immorality erroneously associated with it.

I recommend that you take the following position with Mr. Eden:

The United States considers the United Kingdom to be its strongest ally and would rely on its support in the event of war. I would not intend to take any action which would endanger the United Kingdom, the exposed position of which we recognize. I cannot give you, officially or personally, a commitment to consult on a decision to use atomic weapons, but I can tell you that we intend to consult with you, as in the past, on developments in the world situation which might endanger either of us through general war.

Pertinent background information is attached as Annex I and discussion thereof as Annex II.



John Foster Dulles

Excerpt from Communiqué

Under arrangements made for the common defense the United States has the use of certain bases in the United Kingdom. We confirmed the prior understanding that the use of these bases in an emergency would be a matter for joint decision by Her Majesty's Government and the United States Government in the light of the circumstances prevailing at the time.

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ANNEX I

February 25, 1953

FACTS BEARING ON THE PROBLEM

1. The Quebec Agreement entered into by Prime Minister Churchill and President Roosevelt on August 19, 1943, which set forth the arrangements to govern United States-United Kingdom wartime cooperation in the atomic energy field contained among its provisions the following:

"It is agreed between us

"First, that we will never use this agency the atomic bomb against each other.

"Secondly, that we will not use it the atomic bomb against third parties without each other's consent."

2. Atomic bombing of Japan was authorized by the President with British consent.

3. Under the provisions of the Atomic Energy Act of 1946, the power and responsibility to decide on the use of atomic weapons rests with the President. Section 6(a) of the Act states in part: "the President from time to time may direct the Commission (1) to deliver such quantities of fissionable materials or weapons to the armed forces for such use as he deems necessary in the interest of national defense." underscoring supplied.

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4. After the war and with the passage of the Atomic Energy Act of 1946, it was clearly necessary to work out different arrangements to govern United States-United Kingdom relations in the atomic energy field. Negotiations with the Attlee Government, begun toward the end of 1947, culminated in the modus vivendi of January 7, 1948. This instrument superseded in toto the Quebec Agreement and abrogated the above quoted provisions.

5. The United States has the use of a number of air bases in the United Kingdom from which to launch an atomic offensive in the event of war. To this end, special storage facilities have been built, suitable aircraft have been flown in, and non-nuclear components of atomic weapons have been stored. These activities have been taking place with the knowledge of the appropriate United Kingdom authorities.

6. In the course of his visit to Washington in December of 1950, Prime Minister Attlee raised the question concerning consultation on the use of atomic weapons. The communique issued at the end of the talks December 8, 1950, stated as follows:

"The President stated that it was his hope that world conditions would never call for the use of the atomic bomb. The President told the Prime Minister that it was also his desire to keep the Prime Minister at all times informed of developments which might bring about a change in the situation."

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7. In March 1951, Senator McMahon asked the Secretary of State to "make a statement indicating whether or not any commitment to any other nation might bring about delay in the employment of American atomic weapons beyond the point in time at which, in the absence of the commitment, the President would cause this use." The Secretary responded that "no such commitment exists."

8. In September 1951, Mr. Herbert Morrison raised with the Secretary of State both the question of the use of United Kingdom bases for atomic strikes and the question of consultation on a decision to use atomic weapons. He wished to know what the Prime Minister might say on this question in answer to queries that might be put in Parliament. On October 17, 1951, the British were informed that the United States would be prepared to have the Prime Minister reply to such questions along the following lines:

"His Majesty's Government originally made available to the United States Air Force certain bases and facilities in the United Kingdom at the time of the Berlin Airlift. Subsequently it was decided that the United States Air Forces should continue to have the use of bases and facilities in the United Kingdom in the interest of the common defense of the United Kingdom and the parties to the North Atlantic Treaty. The arrangement whereby these bases and facilities are made available to the United States depends upon no formal agreement but is being continued as a mutually satisfactory arrangement. The question of their use in an emergency naturally remains a matter for joint decision in the light of the circumstances at the time."

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9. On November 21, 1951 the following question was put in the House of Commons:

"To ask the Prime Minister if he will now take steps to terminate the arrangement by which United States atom bombers are based in this country in view of the dangers of retaliatory bombing to the people living in the crowded cities of Britain."

Prime Minister Churchill replied as follows:

"Certain bases and facilities in the United Kingdom were made available by the late Government to the United States Air Forces for the common defense of the United Kingdom and other countries who are parties to the North Atlantic Treaty. This arrangement will continue so long as it is needed in the general interest of world peace and security."

10. On December 7, 1951 another question was put in the Parliament by Mr. Sydney Silverman (Labour):

"Whether the agreement under which United States atom bomb forces are permitted to use bases in this country contains the usual provision for their withdrawal in the case the United States of America became involved in any war in which the United Kingdom did not wish to be involved."

Prime Minister Churchill replied as follows:

"The use of these bases in an emergency would be a matter for joint decision by His Majesty's Government and the United States Government in the light of the circumstances prevailing at the time."

11. Several talks were held during the course of 1951 by representatives of the Department of State and the Joint Chiefs of Staff with the British Ambassador to exchange views on developments in the world situation which might or might not lead to general war and the consequent use of

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atomic weapons. These talks were completely without commitment. The views of the United States and the United Kingdom on this matter were found to be quite similar. The British recognized that general war would inevitably mean the use of atomic weapons and their views as to developments in the world situation which would thrust general war on the West closely paralleled those of the United States. It was recognized, moreover, that situations might arise in which the use of atomic weapons might be decided upon in local situations, as, for example, in the event of Soviet or satellite attack on Yugoslavia. In other words, while the general equation was that general war equals use of atomic weapons there also existed the possibility that atomic weapons might be used in situations short of general war.

12. The joint communique issued at the end of the Truman-Churchill talks on January 9, 1952 stated as follows:

"Under arrangements made for the common defense, the United States has the use of certain bases in the United Kingdom. We reaffirm the understanding that the use of these bases in an emergency would be a matter for joint decision by His Majesty's Government and the United States Government in the light of the circumstances prevailing at the time.

"We share the hope and the determination that war, with all its modern weapons, shall not again be visited on mankind. We will remain in close consultation on the developments which might increase danger to the maintenance of world peace."

13. Parallel with the developments outlined above, similar arrangements have been made with Canada both as regards the use of Goose Bay in the event of war and as regards periodic exchanges of view concerning developments in the world situation. No similar arrangements have been made with any other country. Among the other NATO countries, only France has raised any question concerning this general problem. The French have asked for and received assurances that atomic weapons will not be introduced into metropolitan France without consultation. However, they have not asked for any assurances concerning (a) consultations on the general question of the use of atomic weapons or (b) consultations on the use of bases in metropolitan France for atomic strikes in the event of war.

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ANNEX II

DISCUSSION

1. In view of the very close cooperation in the atomic energy field that existed during the war between the United States and the United Kingdom (with Canada participating to a lesser extent) and in view of the uncertainty as to the nature of the weapon that might ultimately be produced, it is understandable that the wartime Quebec Agreement would provide that neither party should use the atomic weapon without the consent of the other. After the war and the passage of the Atomic Energy Act of 1946, cooperation between the United States and the United Kingdom in the atomic energy field was drastically reduced. This development led to a feeling of considerable bitterness on the part of the United Kingdom which in turn made it difficult to work out any rational terms of cooperation within the narrow limits imposed by the Atomic Energy Act of 1946. However, at the time the modus vivendi was agreed to, no objection was raised by the British to the abrogation of the consent provision of the Quebec Agreement.

2. With the outbreak of the Korean war and growing speculation as to actions which might be taken in conducting

that war, British apprehensions on the question of the use of atomic weapons were greatly heightened.

3. The assurance given the British on the use of United Kingdom bases is deliberately couched in general terms: while it includes atomic weapons it does not single them out. It is axiomatic that the United States cannot use the territory of another country for military operations without that country's consent. The general assurance given, therefore, in no way changes the de facto situation. It is important, however, that such assurances not highlight atomic weapons thereby giving the impression that these weapons require special permission in the matter of using the territory of another country.

4. On the broader question of committing the United States to secure the agreement of, or to consult with, the United Kingdom or any other government before using atomic weapons, it is clear that the United States should not so limit its freedom of action. To do so would be tantamount to giving the United Kingdom a veto on our ability effectively to wage war.

5. However, on the ground that a common appreciation of common danger should lead to common action, it is in the United States interest to engage with its closest allies-- the United Kingdom and Canada--in talks designed to bring

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about a common appreciation of world situations which might or might not give rise to general war and the consequent use of atomic weapons, as well as a common appreciation of those situations where atomic weapons might be employed in a local conflict, provided always:

(a) that such talks are without commitment, expressed or implied;

(b) that it is understood that the views expressed are tentative and subject to change; and

(c) that it is understood that the United States is not even committed to a continuance of such talks but will hope to continue to do so to the extent they are found to be mutually helpful.

6. The British should be brought to realize that reaffirmation of assurances given on such talks constitutes the nub of the matter and that further public statements on this subject would appear neither necessary nor desirable. For security reasons, the United States would be loathe to extend the habit of conducting such conversations to other members of NATO. Should other countries seek specific assurances as to consultation on the use of atomic weapons, the United States will of course have to deal with such requests as they arise, but there is no point in whetting the appetites of other NATO countries in this regard.

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