

By KW NARA, Date 7-17-03

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS:

President Nixon  
William P. Rogers, Secretary of State  
Melvin Laird, Secretary of Defense  
George A. Lincoln, Director, Office of  
Emergency Preparedness  
David M. Kennedy, Secretary of the Treasury  
John N. Mitchell, Attorney General  
Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, Chairman,  
Joint Chiefs of Staff  
Richard Helms, Director of Central Intelligence  
George P. Schultz, Director, Office of Management  
and Budget  
Amb. Robert F. Ellsworth, U. S. Permanent  
Representative to NATO  
Gen. Andrew J. Goodpaster, Supreme Allied  
Commander, Europe  
David Packard, Deputy Secretary of Defense  
John N. Irwin II, Under Secretary of State  
Philip J. Farley, Acting Director, Arms Control  
and Disarmament Agency  
George S. Springsteen, Deputy Assistant Secretary  
of State for European Affairs  
Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the President  
for National Security Affairs  
Dr. Edward David, Science Advisor to the President  
Col. Richard T. Kennedy, NSC Staff  
Dr. K. Wayne Smith, NSC Staff  
Mr. Helmut Sonnenfeldt, NSC Staff

DATE AND TIME:

Thursday - November 19, 1970  
10:00 am

PLACE:

The Cabinet Room  
The White House

SUBJECT:

NSC Meeting: NATO & MBFR

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[The meeting began with a briefing by Director Helms on the NATO/Warsaw Pact military balance in Europe.]

President Nixon: The assumption used to be that any war in the NATO area would escalate automatically into general nuclear war. That was the view in the old McNamara period. Is there an estimate now in the NATO area that there is less chance of escalation to nuclear war?

General Goodpaster: The estimates are much more qualified now.

President Nixon: I really don't see why. It seems more likely that they might use nuclear weapons now.

General Goodpaster: Our capability for assured destruction against the Soviets is very high.

President Nixon: But what about the risks we would take if we do that?

General Goodpaster: The Soviet attitude seems to be this. Since the Cuban missile crisis, they have a much more sobered view of the risks to them of a high-intensity provocation of the U.S. The same is true in Europe; They have shown more inhibition than before. The Europeans are convinced of this; they see the U.S. assured destruction capability as inhibiting the Soviet use of their MRBM's or IRBM's against Europe.

President Nixon: But Americans are more afraid than previously.

[Director Helms resumes his briefing with a discussion of MBFR.]

President Nixon: Are there any questions of Director Helms?

Director Lincoln: What is the view of the NATO countries on the results of a nuclear exchange?

General Goodpaster: They haven't any positive views. They are sensitive to the location of our nuclear weapons in our forward bases, particularly those countries where our forward-based Tac Air are located.

Acting Director Farley: The Soviets are concerned in SALT about our forward-based aircraft. They want to limit them in the agreement.

Secretary Laird: Only a few of them can reach the Soviet Union. The F-111's will increase the number, however.

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Admiral Moorer: The Soviets don't distinguish between tac-nucs and strategic weapons if they are landing in the USSR.

President Nixon: Henry? Could you review the issues?

Dr. Kissinger: I want to emphasize two basic points:

First, at the height of the period of American nuclear superiority, the Europeans always asked us for a tangible guarantee of our commitment. They wanted U.S. forces to be stationed in areas we considered vital. Thus even during the period of the massive retaliation doctrine, we had large American conventional forces in areas where a nuclear thrust was most plausible. Thus, secondly, we were trying to give our forces a military role and our allies wanted them to have a political role -- for them it was not so much a military role as a role in eliminating the threat of general nuclear war.

The problem now is to work out what objectives we seek and can achieve with these forces. We want to avoid any actions which would lead our allies in the direction of neutralism but we also want to avoid a situation in which our forces exist there but without any viable strategy.

Thus we did a comprehensive study and we found the following:

-- NATO is within reach of a capability to defend against large-scale Soviet conventional attacks.

-- They -- the Soviets -- have a faster capability for mobilization than NATO.

-- There is a serious supply imbalance.

-- An important consideration is our intelligence capability and our military ability to make quick political decisions. If they get a two-week warning jump, they have a big advantage.

-- Whether NATO wants to close the gap is a question.

-- There is also the fact that we know more about what goes on in East Germany than in Western Russia, and that is a problem.

-- If we can get warning and can react quickly, we can do reasonably well.

-- The best-equipped of our forces are deployed in the Southern NATO/area, whereas this is not the likely major attack route.

That is also the location of our major supply backup.

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If the President wants the Alliance to have a substantial European conventional capability in Europe, it is within reach. The Allies can and should move. If the gaps are not closed, then we should look at other alternatives which would make the forces we have there relevant.

We have large tactical nuclear weapons storage in Europe. How would they be used? Would it help in defense? Would it be an irrevocable move toward strategic war? We have improved our command and control procedures. But the study we did could not develop a clear picture of the use of tactical nuclear weapons. Against this background we looked at MBFR. Tactical nuclear forces have an important bearing in this area.

The tentative conclusions of the MBFR study are the following:

Symmetrical reductions favor the Warsaw Pact, unless they are so small as to be purely symbolic.

Ideally, reductions should favor the defense over the offense in order to reduce the incentive for attack.

Thus we should look at asymmetrical reductions. We are now doing so, in order to develop trade-off packages. These analyses are not yet sufficiently advanced to make recommendations.

The basic guidance needed is what strategy you wish to pursue. If we depend on our strategic nuclear forces, then the question of American forces in Europe is not so relevant. But if our forces are geared to an intermediate objective, we need a doctrine for the use of theater nuclear weapons. If we think the nuclear threat is diminishing or if we want our forces on the continent for political reasons, we still need a strategy which makes them militarily relevant if their continued deployment is to be supported by the American people, the Congress and our allies. We need then to make the improvements that we have discussed.

Our approach to MBFR is then cast in the light of our decisions.

**Secretary Rogers:** The word, "balanced" in MBFR means they have to be balanced. That is the key. Balanced does not mean symmetrical. Secondly we must not negotiate under time pressure. It is clear that the Soviets

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are not thinking about negotiations. It's a convenient way to delay a European Security Conference which we don't want. And we should not move to unilateral reductions. We have to decide whether we want to reduce unilaterally -- I am against it. Our policy of keeping them there is sound. Our forces are essential to the security arrangements in Europe and to the credibility of our policy. Unilateral reductions would concern our allies and lead them to seek deals with the USSR that would be harmful to our security.

We should not decide anything on MBFR now. We should continue to study it. But we should give a clear signal to our allies that we intend to keep our forces there and will not unilaterally reduce them. But we should make clear that they need to do more; that is important for our Congressional attitudes.

Secretary Laird: The primary objective of our military strategy is to give the President a choice other than between losing Western Europe and going to an all-out strategic exchange. Our strategy has to give us more than a few days of conventional defense. We need a conventional force which is a major deterrent -- and that involves a tactical nuclear capability.

We have to depend more on our allies' contribution if we are going to have this posture. The allies don't want to recognize this. Their assumption is that the U.S. has a sufficient deterrent so that any conventional attack means an inevitable strategic exchange. This idea has permeated allied thinking. We must get the allies to see that things have changed. They can afford it and so can we. Their GNP is a third greater than the Pact's; their manpower is equal to that of the Pact and the USSR. We have to provide for sufficient forces to assure a conventional deterrent.

I don't think the paper faces up to the manpower, fiscal and political problems that we face in the United States. NATO problems are fortunately handled by the right Congressional Committees; we have these commitments before the Armed Services Committees which are favorable to the Administration.

It is important to talk about capabilities, not specific numbers. We should talk not about specific numbers of personnel or items of equipment -- we should talk about capabilities. The allies have the ball in their court; they are for the first time discussing ways in which they can share the burden and increase their own forces. They admit they are not sharing the burden properly. Schmidt is discussing in the UK now; Carrington will be here next week. They are pressing each other. Our contribution has increased annually over the last ten years, and this is not the case for most of the allies.

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Ambassador Ellsworth: The trend of the thinking in the NAC ministers' meeting is this: There is increased awareness by the allies of the changed nature of the strategic balance. There is increased awareness of the need for a local conventional balance. The Allied study (AD 70) has got them thinking of the need for improved and increased efforts in specific areas to make meaningful a viable conventional strategy. The trend of their thinking, therefore, is toward a real conventional defense strategy, and the defense ministries want to support this.

Secretary Rogers: There must be follow-up both in NATO and in governments. We need a shift of focus in the NATO organizations and in governments toward conventional forces and the related budgets. This should be the glamour side now, not the nuclear side.

Secretary Laird: Our presentation must be that US force levels are tied to our strategy. I hope all of us will relate to the basic questions of our strategic objective and to the political facts, rather than to our own budget process.

President Nixon: Are you selling the Senators? [to Ambassador Ellsworth]

Ambassador Ellsworth: I'm not sure they've been sold but I'm making strong efforts.

Secretary Laird: There have been many statements by the Parliamentarians. They unanimously favored financial assistance to ease the US burden of keeping our forces there. Rivers brought them along. Vinson has been pressing Armed Services on the grounds that because the Germans are agreeing with the USSR, we should make substantial reductions.

President Nixon: The key to what we do is what effect does it have on Germany. Isn't it possible that reductions could result in the opposite reaction by the Germans? Some Europeans would think to move toward the Russians because they are uneasy about more US reductions. Will we reassure them if we retain our forces, or will we shock them into doing more by reducing ourselves?

Ambassador Ellsworth: I agree that reductions would push them toward the Russians.

Secretary Rogers: I agree with Ellsworth.

General Goodpaster: Brandt will accelerate his policy if we reduce. If the other party comes in, it would be unpredictable.

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Secretary Rogers: Some in the German government would want to move more toward the USSR, and a move on our part to reduce our forces would play into their hands. If we stay firm we can keep Brandt firm; otherwise we can't.

Can we setup a group like the NPG for conventional forces?

Secretary Laird: It's being discussed by the DPC.

Secretary Rogers: Can we move faster?

Ambassador Ellsworth: We need to set up machinery to follow up on the AD-70 study.

Secretary Laird: We will do this at the next meeting.

Secretary Rogers: Unilateral reductions would be wrong.

Secretary Laird: The manpower problem has a serious effect on our strategy. The FRG has a short-term draft and is moving in the direction of a shorter term of service. This has a bad effect on readiness.

President Nixon: Andy, how do you see the problem?

General Goodpaster: Mr. President, the work we have done is substantial. It's ten years since we have had a real NATO policy. There is promise now that the Europeans see they need to take on more of the burden and improve their own forces. This has gotten to the political levels now.

Much of the ammunition and POL is common. They know we have stocks and they have planned to use them. We should press them to increase their own stocks. Given our assumptions about the length of a war, it would be unsound to make the decision not to provide uninterrupted support for our forces. Reserve stocks of Soviets remains a major question. We don't know what they have beyond 30 days even though their facilities exist far beyond this. 60 days is not a finite limit. You would ration to extend this on both sides in practice, but this means the forces are less than fully effective.

We shouldn't forget that there is a normal process of adjustment of forces. New systems come in and make some forces redundant and permit some reductions.

Let me say something about the strategy question we've been discussing and the role of nuclear weapons. Our strategy is more concrete than just a doctrine

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of flexible response. It is based primarily on the deterrent but it cannot be divorced from our actual defense capability. It is a strong deterrent based on a limited defense capability, at medium risk and medium cost. A full conventional defense capability would be a low-risk/high-cost strategy. A high-risk/low-cost strategy would be the tripwire approach.

A limited defense capability means the following: At present, we have a high prospect of success against small-scale or limited attacks. That is important.

Against a full-scale sustained attack, we have a limited capability in time. We just can't say how long we could hold exactly but we expect we could hold for a significant period but not indefinitely. But we are not even certain of that. The crucial factors are not assessable -- like leadership, the direction of attack, etc.

What about the tactical nuclear option? We have a near full capability, probably superior to the Pact's. But the outcomes are rather murky; our requirements are based on the premise of destroying the enemy order of battle. Escalation is always possible but perhaps unlikely because of the strategic deterrent. Soviet officers have an acute sense of the importance of protection of the homeland. Assured destruction is always the back-up which supports the other elements of the strategy.

We have some problems. One is redeployments. A change of boundaries to the north would probably result in having fewer Belgians forward. On tactical nuclear weapons, there are divisive problems here. The Europeans want to see nuclears used but on the Green Belt theory, i. e., on territory that is not their own. On the question of theater use of nuclear weapons, the first concept is selective use to meet the local situation with the maximum possible constraint. Many of the above aspects of this strategy would be the subject of debate if we wanted to make them more explicit.

We need to hold firm.

The consensus seems to be that we must keep our conventional forces in SACEUR. The fact that the Russians are looking both ways -- they have even more division on the Chinese border -- adds validity to this imperative.

Director Lincoln: We would have less of a danger of having to use tactical nuclear weapons if our conventional force are stronger.

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President Nixon: It is clear from the discussion that any strategy without a credible deterrent would mean the Soviet domination of Europe. In the 1950s massive retaliation and the tripwire approach were valid. When in the 1960s we accepted nuclear parity, it became no longer credible that a conventional force attack would result in a tactical or strategic nuclear attack -- but at the same time it is not now credible that a conventional attack could be met with a purely conventional response. Under these circumstances, if the deterrent is credible we must have nuclear parity and also a significant conventional capability in which we are an important part. If we are without that capability, the Soviets could move.

This discussion must center on the effect on the Germans of what we do. Their response will not necessarily be rational; probably it will be emotional. They are a vigorous people, denied the use of their own weapons, who will make a deal with whoever is Number One. If they reach the conclusion that the U.S. is withdrawing, they will go into a psychological frenzy.

It is not insignificant that the Russians always emphasize that they think they are superior to the US in nuclear forces. They say this to get France, the UK, Germany and Japan to have doubts about the credibility of the US nuclear deterrent and also to show who is Number One. We lose leverage as Number Two. We know the facts but we want to emphasize them to those who don't know them. So no one should concede that the USSR is ahead. We should point out, as we do, that they are moving ahead with SS-9s and nuclear subs -- but we should stress that our overall strength is sufficient. Otherwise we are in a dangerous position with the Japanese and our NATO allies, particularly the FRG.

We need to rethink our whole NATO strategy. We never will use the tactical nuclears, but we let the USSR see them there. Without a credible conventional force that can hold for 90 days or more, the Russians could be tempted.

General Goodpaster: This is why we should press on making improvements and not debate about reductions. Confidence and standing firm is the keynote. The note of readiness to act and to act affirmatively is important to our allies.

Mr. Packard: We can't do this with lower budgets.

President Nixon: I know that.

[The meeting adjourned.]

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