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UNITED STATES EUROPEAN COMMAND

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Office of the Political Adviser,
Headquarters, U.S. European Command,
I.G. Farben Building,
Frankfurt am Main, Germany

March 29, 1954

Dear Gordon:

I attended the Tenth Session of the NATO Senior Officers Course on Special Weapons (Atomic) which was conducted at Oberammergau, March 9 through 12. This course is conducted by the U.S. Army in Europe. I enclose a list of those attending, with their positions and countries.

I found the course not only instructive, but it seems to me that the approach of the Admirals and Generals from our NATO allies to the problem of the atom was most interesting. I thought you might find it so as well.

Our class was fortunate in having as students Major General J.H. Harper, who is the Commanding Officer of the Fourth Division in Germany, and Major General R.C. Partridge, who is Commanding General of the 43rd Infantry Division, also in Germany. Both of these men have studied and practiced in recent maneuvers the theoretical use of atomic weapons for tactical purposes, and were able to contribute a great deal to the course. Because of their rank and experience, they made a strong and favorable impression on the other members of the class.

I think that perhaps the fact that most impressed our allied friends was the strong and flat conclusion by the class and instructors, up-held by the American

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officers in it, that the wide-spread use of atomic weapons, both strategically and tactically, would definitely not mean that armed forces could be decreased. I think this answered one of the main questions in the minds of the foreign students. I believe they well understood, of course, that U.S. armed forces might be reduced in the future for economic or political reasons, but they were reassured that U.S. military strategy at least did not consider that A-bombs could or would replace man-power. The war games part of the course, assuming that the estimates of the damage a 20 KT bomb will do under given conditions are correct, seemed to me, and I think the others, to reinforce the conclusion that you would need just as many soldiers as before the atomic era, if not more.

It was interesting to me, but not particularly surprising, that the European officers tended constantly to think of the atomic weapons as a defensive measure, and were quite naturally concerned with what they would do to their cities and civilian populations. The ability of soldiers in the field to disperse so that they seldom, if ever, presented a lucrative atomic target was brought out. It was equally clear that while soldiers under discipline and field conditions could be dispersed, civilians in cities could not, so that concentrations of civilians became relatively a more tempting target for atomic weapons than was the case with conventional weapons. Of course, the instructors assured the class that there were no intentions on our side of using the weapons against civilians, but I am quite sure that the basic fact of the high relative vulnerability of civilians compared to troops was not lost on the class.

It was clearly demonstrated, and I think generally agreed, that in most cases atomic weapons favor the aggressor. Since this is the case, there is less likelihood, they thought, of waiting for the other side to be the first to use them. The students were also greatly interested in the concept, as it developed in our war game, that you would use the weapons tactically and attack against the strongest point of the enemy, rather than the weakest, as has heretofore been military practice.

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Since enemy strong-points and targets are constantly shifting and the ability of soldiers to disperse great, the need for accurate and fast intelligence was considered to be more vital than for conventional weapons.

Under present field conditions, and as proved by recent maneuvers in Germany, it takes between five hours and forty-five minutes and seven hours and a half to get the final O.K. to expend an A-bomb, after a field commander decides to use one. All hands agreed that in view of the short time a tactical target would remain a target, this time lag would have to be shortened. This, of course, led into a consideration of the non-military, political, psychological, and other factors involved in the use of atomic weapons. It was felt, however, that once it was agreed or customary to use the weapons tactically, the commanders would have to be, and would be, given some discretion themselves in their use.

To be able to decide whether a target was suitable for an A-bomb, the commander would also have to have some idea of how many the total stock-pile was, or at least the stock-pile in the theater.

I feel sure that the course was greatly appreciated by the foreign officers attending it. The instructors parried with finesse questions which for legislative reasons they could not answer. Also, the students did not persist in questions they could see could not be answered.

I wonder whether what is being done on the military level could not be done to a limited extent on the political or governmental level. Even though many of the officers in the course had probably been engaged at SHAPE in one form or another in military planning based on atomic weapons, it was clear to me that many of them had many misconceptions of what the weapons would and would not do, particularly in the radiation field. If this is true in

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the military, it must be more true in Foreign Offices, Members of Parliaments, and leading government figures. The thought occurred to me, therefore, that the course be expanded to include selected civilians from NATO countries, or better that we operate an additional course, appropriately modified, for them. What do you think?

Sincerely,

L. Satterthwaite
Livingston Satterthwaite

CC: Ben Moore, EUR/RA
Frederick Reinhardt, Paris

Enclosure: One attendance list.

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