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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

SUBJECT: Meeting with FRG MOD von Hassel, Washington, 3 December 1963

Participants:

German Side

- Minister of Defense Kai-Uwe von Hassel
- Lieutenant General Heinz Trettner
- Major General Gerhard Wessel (Joined after Intelligence Discussions)
- Brigadier General Helmuth Bertram
- Brigadier General Heinz Huekelheim (Joined after Intelligence Discussions)
- Captain Rolf Thomsen
- Commander Herbert Trebesch (Recorder)
- Mr. Karl Freudenstein (Interpreter)

United States Side

- Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara
- Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell Gilpatric
- Secretary of the Army Cyrus Vance
- General Maxwell Taylor, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
- Assistant Secretary of Defense (ISA) William Bundy
- Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Jeffrey Kitchen
- Military Assistant to the Secretary of Defense Colonel Ernest Hardin
- Assistant for Central Europe (ISA) Colonel Kurt G. Radtke (Recorder)

Time: 0845 - 1230, 3 December 1963

Place: Secretary McNamara's Dining Room, 3E 912, Pentagon

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ATTACHMENT

Military Strategy for NATO  
(Distributed separately on a  
need-to-know basis)

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I. STRATEGIC AND INTELLIGENCE ISSUES

A. Report of Discussions between Generals Taylor and Foertsch

1. General Taylor summarized his discussions with General Foertsch, pointing out that the meetings between the military chiefs of staff covered four major areas. These were intelligence, tactical nuclear weapons, MC100/1 and French attitudes toward MC100/1, and reserve forces and stocks. General Taylor then called upon a member of the Joint Staff to repeat the intelligence briefing which had been presented at the Joint Chiefs' meetings with General Foertsch on 22 November.

B. Intelligence Briefing:

2. The briefing reflected that the U.S. and German estimates of Soviet ground forces are essentially compatible. There are, however, differences in the national estimates concerning total number of available divisions. The current FRG estimate lists 160 divisions, whereas the U.S. estimate totals 145.

3. In commenting on the factors affecting the size of forces which might be employed against NATO, the briefing officer listed four factors. These were the extent of Soviet determination, surprise, satellite forces, and Soviet forces which might be employed in other theaters.

4. In connection with mobilization time requirements, it was noted that the current estimate was that the Soviets would require 30 days to mobilize a striking force of 60 divisions with 25 divisions in reserve. It was also noted that, as to the time of warning, the Soviets themselves thought such a mobilization could not long go undetected.

5. The briefing officer concluded his presentation by pointing out that the U.S. is now making an exhaustive study of Soviet ground forces. The tentative findings of this study place Soviet divisions in the order of magnitude of 115 to 135, which includes cadre divisions. Of this number, the study group places 58 to 75 divisions in a Category I status.

6. General Taylor then commented further on major differences between the U.S. estimates and current German estimates. He pointed out that the German estimates give the Soviet forces a somewhat higher level of readiness and the FRG award greater reliability to satellite divisions. Both sides recognize the deviations between the estimates. There is agreement that the Soviets do have formidable ground power, the possibility of a surprise attack

is estimated to be less likely now than it was believed to be a number of years ago, and the slight variation in the U.S. and German estimates does not affect NATO strategy.

C. Strategy Discussions:

7. Secretary McNamara then invited Minister von Hassel to exchange views on strategy. Minister von Hassel explained that he could not account for the differences between the U.S. and German estimates. Nevertheless, there was a large area of agreement. He then posed two questions: (1) When will the special study referred to by the briefing officer be finished; and (2) what might be the consequences if Soviet strength was not what we thought it was? (He acknowledged this was primarily a political question. However, he raised it in the context of what the U.S. Congress and European Parliaments might do concerning future defense budgets.)

8. Secretary McNamara answered that the study would not be finished for many months. He felt that Minister von Hassel's second question was similar to the missile gap issue which the U.S. had faced earlier. He then pointed out that our early estimates of Soviet missile strength were based on the total use of Soviet resources, men, science, uranium, etc. This resulted in a high estimate of the Soviet capability. The result was the U.S. reacted to close the missile gap and consequently did not support adequate conventional forces.

9. In 1961, the U.S. made a new analysis of total Soviet strategic power. This resulted in a lowered estimate. Nevertheless the U.S. increased its defense budget by \$8 billion, a portion of which continued the strategic buildup and the remainder increased the conventional forces' capability. Secretary McNamara also emphasized that he was not trying to "doctor 'intelligence' "; he was seeking, however, the most reliable estimate in order to adjust forces accordingly.

10. The Secretary said that the estimates might lead either way, but that he naturally hoped they would lead to an upward force adjustment. He also noted that if we really got adequate forces, we would have created a situation from which we could be more demanding on the Soviets in all negotiations.

11. General Taylor commented that the exhaustive intelligence study now under way was examining evidence piece by piece, similar to a lawyer preparing for a trial. He added that we must not overlook that the Soviets still pose a formidable ground threat. Secretary McNamara added that the Soviet Union is not capable of doing all things which the U.S. estimates give them credit for. He cited as examples expanding fertilizer production, development

of an effective antiballistic missile system, space conquests and the like. To do all of these things would be beyond Soviet capabilities.

12. Minister von Hassel then commented that it was vital that the free world make realistic estimates of Soviet strength. It was especially important in Europe because of psychological consequences. If, for example, estimates reflected overwhelming Soviet strength, the free European reaction would be, "What's the use?" If estimates showed a lesser threat, particularly the smaller countries such as Norway, Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands would relax their defense efforts. The Dutch Defense Minister had recently informed von Hassel that the Dutch Socialists were accusing him of insisting upon too great a defense effort, pointing out that the Belgians were not doing as much.

13. Min. von Hassel then commented that the Moscow October parade included a missile which the Soviets claimed was an antiballistic missile. Von Hassel believed the Soviets were bluffing. However, he requested U.S. evaluation of this missile.

14. Secretary McNamara replied that the U.S. was not sure; however, we thought it was a primitive system comparable to our NIKE ZEUS. The U.S. is testing the NIKE ZEUS on Kwajalein and we have had ten successful intercepts of missiles fired from Vandenberg Air Force Base. We are currently experiencing 70-80% success. Secretary McNamara did not believe that the Soviets had advanced beyond the NIKE ZEUS state of the art. Secretary McNamara had decided not to produce and deploy NIKE ZEUS, because of the high cost, it does not afford real protection and our offensive missile systems can destroy the ZEUS system.

15. Secretary McNamara continued, saying the U.S. has under development a more advanced antiballistic missile system, the NIKE X. During FY 1964, the U.S. would spend \$400 million for development and planned to spend an additional \$400 million in FY 1965. Whether the superiority of this system will warrant its deployment still remains to be seen.

16. General Taylor commented that the U.S. had analyzed the photographs of the Soviet missile displayed in the parade and we considered it comparable to NIKE ZEUS.

17. Secretary McNamara added that the real problem in the antiballistic missile system is to distinguish between a nuclear warhead and a decoy. The ZEUS system makes this distinction after the object

enters the atmosphere and at that point it is too late. Mr. Gilpatric added that a primitive system of this nature can be saturated by offensive missiles.

18. Secretary McNamara said the U.S. had considered three studies which covered (1) increasing the U.S. strategic offensive forces to destroy Soviet strategic forces; (2) introducing greater civil defense effort, especially through construction of fallout shelters; and (3) establishing an active antimissile defense system. In concluding the discussion of this subject, Secretary McNamara pointed out that Western Europe would also face a difficult question, should the NIKE X system warrant deployment. To deploy NIKE X in the U.S. would cost an estimated \$15 billion. Would Western Europe wish to do the same, particularly since the current NADGE concept would be cheap by comparison? NIKE X also involved problems for Europe in finding adequate space for its deployment.

D. Tactical Nuclear Weapons:

19. General Taylor continued, stating the Joint Chiefs and General Foertsch had devoted most of their discussions to the tactical employment of nuclear weapons. They had covered the importance of tactical nuclear weapons, pointing out that they vary in yield from a few thousand tons to megatons and in range of delivery systems from the DAVY CROCKETT to tactical air delivered weapons.

20. He added the U.S. had made many studies; the results showed there was a requirement for a wide range and a large number of weapons. He cited as an example that hundreds were required on a corps front. U.S. studies also showed that employment of tactical nuclear weapons involved leadership problems. The commander always faced the requirement to keep his command dispersed as a passive protective measure, but nevertheless he must mass in order to defend or to attack or to produce massed targets for nuclear attack.

21. Another U.S. study conclusion showed that conventional warfare and employment of tactical nuclear weapons cannot be separated. Tactical nuclear weapons might be employed in one sector whereas conventional weapons might be employed in another. The U.S. and FRG agreed that non-nuclear operations would continue even after nuclear escalation had occurred, with the nuclear battle in effect superimposed on the non-nuclear battle.

22. Conventional forces are still required to fix the location of the enemy such as in a reconnaissance in force operation and to protect the nuclear base of fire and logistical installations.

Tactical nuclear warfare means greater dispersion resulting in a porous battlefield which in turn requires depth in conventional forces to prevent infiltration. Finally, tactical nuclear warfare means heavy losses and a manpower replacement problem. The overall conclusion reached by the U.S. is that employment of tactical nuclear weapons does not reduce requirement for conventional forces.

23. Referring to the question of when to use nuclear weapons, General Taylor pointed out that his discussions with General Foertsch disclose that the FRG feels U.S. concepts reflect undue delay before employment whereas the U.S. feels the FRG concept would employ tactical nuclear weapons too soon. In his own opinion, he felt both reactions were wrong and that tactical nuclear weapons should be used at any time to preserve the integrity of the front.

24. In expanding on the preceding statement, General Taylor added a non-nuclear phase must gauge the scale and intention of enemy aggression in considering a nuclear phase, targets must be remunerative and employment of nuclear weapons is too dangerous if our forces are too interlocked with the enemy.

25. General Taylor expressed the following possible scenario for employment of tactical nuclear weapons: Conventional forces must be employed first, somewhat in the manner of a reconnaissance in force in order to identify the true magnitude of the threat. Following that, there might be delivery of battlefield weapons by tube artillery and HONEST JOHN type missiles to restore the situation.

26. Turning next to air action, General Taylor reported some areas of US/FRG disagreement in the employment of tactical air. The U.S. and the Germans are in agreement on requirements for reconnaissance, for close tactical support using conventional weapons, and for air defense. With respect to attack of air fields, the U.S. believes that early strikes against enemy air bases, first with non-nuclear weapons, is essential to accompany the battlefield employment of tactical nuclear weapons. He reported there was US/German agreement that escalation following battlefield employment of nuclear weapons is not inevitable. He also pointed out that the U.S. and the Germans agreed there was a need within NATO for ample tactical nuclear weapons, that troops must be well trained with modern equipment, that there would be a continuing requirement for trained manpower and that there was a need for a non-nuclear phase prior to employment of battlefield nuclear weapons. General Taylor felt perhaps General Foertsch was disappointed that we did not have all the answers to the questions raised. There was, however, always a gamble on escalation, although the U.S. intends to use nuclear weapons, if required.

27. General Trettner commented that he agreed with General Taylor's summary of the discussion. However, he wished to clarify one point. There was a political aspect to the German concept for early use of battlefield weapons lest the Russians miscalculate NATO determination to use battlefield weapons early. If it were made unmistakably clear to the Soviets that NATO would employ battlefield weapons early, a desirable political effect could be created which would affect Soviet plans and influence their further military decisions.

28. General Bertram then noted several points in the German concept: first, the conviction that the employment of battlefield weapons does not necessarily lead to escalation; second, battlefield nuclear weapons could not be decisive; third, any phase of battlefield employment of nuclear weapons will be of short duration - employment will either result in escalation or the enemy will break off the engagement.

29. Minister von Hassel commented that he considered the military chiefs' discussions had been most useful. He agreed that the concept of battlefield nuclear use did not mean a reduction in conventional strategic requirements, and that both were required. He felt further discussions would be useful, particularly a study to determine how rapidly the military commanders could obtain the political decision to employ battlefield and tactical nuclear weapons. Secretary McNamara responded that this was a NATO problem which included survivable and reliable communications as well as rapid political decision. However, he agreed that both staffs should study this problem.

30. The Secretary then listed the following conclusions concerning the report of General Taylor: Neither staff knows as much as it would like to know concerning employment of tactical weapons. He added that the U.S. planned a Strike Command exercise during the first half of 1964 which would be conducted by General Adams. He asked whether the FRG would wish to designate an observer. There could, of course, be no publicity nor wide discussions concerning German observer participation. He suggested that General Trettner keep in touch with General Taylor on this matter.

31. Next, Secretary McNamara expressed the personal conviction that current NATO plans are not adequate. The existing R-hour plan envisages almost simultaneous launch of large-scale nuclear air strikes and missiles of the MACE type. This concept borders on strategic nuclear war, and the R-hour concept must be thought of in Strategic Air Command terms. (At this point Minister von Hassel interrupted and requested that the remainder of the Secretary's remarks be translated into German.) Secretary McNamara repeated



that the present R-hour plan approaches a strategic nuclear war plan and does not follow the battlefield nuclear strategy concept outlined by Generals Taylor and Foertsch. He added that this is a major deficiency in NATO contingency planning.

32. Minister von Hassel replied that this would rapidly lead to a problem with the French concerning MC100/1 and employment of nuclear weapons. He suggested the postponement of any NATO discussions or discussions with the French along these lines until after the next US/FRG military staff discussions. Secretary McNamara agreed that this concept could not be discussed in NATO now.

33. General Taylor quickly pointed out that NATO needs the R-hour plan but also needs other options. Secretary McNamara immediately replied that he had not intended to suggest that the existing R-hour plan be abandoned. He had intended to point out the requirement for a battlefield nuclear contingency plan. He added that once we have an agreed strategy and a plan, we must then develop weapons to support the plan. He cited as an example that DAVY CROCKETT had been a disappointment; production of the system would be terminated. The warhead had been satisfactory; however, the delivery system left much to be desired. It would perhaps be replaced by a tube artillery system. He added that he hoped that the FRG would join with the U.S. in weapons planning to support the strategy.

E. Overall Strategy:

34. Secretary McNamara then distributed a draft JCS paper which gave U.S. concepts of a total strategy (including the employment of battlefield nuclear weapons). Prior to discussing the paper, Secretary McNamara repeated that he would wish to discuss the uniformity of equipping US/FRG forces but he felt we must develop a mutual strategic concept and then translate this concept into weapons system requirements (Attachment A). With this introduction, he asked that General Taylor read the paper.

35. Prior to reading the paper General Taylor repeated that this was a draft that had been agreed to by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but did not constitute a U.S. position paper.

36. Minister von Hassel expressed disappointment that he could not retain the draft. Secretary McNamara stated the only reason the paper must be returned was that it was still in draft form and the U.S. would send a copy to the FRG when the draft had been finalized into a U.S. position paper.