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**173. Summary Record of NSC Executive Committee Meeting  
No. 41**

Washington, February 12, 1963, 10 a.m.

**MULTILATERAL NUCLEAR FORCE**

The President said he wished to discuss the question of a multilateral nuclear force for NATO. We first needed to agree on what it is we will propose to NATO, how soon we should initiate these discussions, and how much success we expect to achieve in the political area as a result of our offer. He asked Ambassador Merchant, who is to be the chief negotiator, to state his views on this problem.

Ambassador Merchant said he approved in general of the basic document. (A copy of the document entitled "Integrated Seaborne Polaris Force" is attached.)<sup>1</sup> He said he believed that the sooner he began discussions with the NATO powers in Europe the better. He acknowledged that further guidance was needed on two questions: (a) control of the multilateral force, and (b) whether the force should consist of submarines or surface ships. Personally, he recommended that the President stand by a statement made by U.S. officials to NATO on October 22nd to the effect that the U.S. would consider any proposal for control of this force suggested by the Europeans, including the possibility of no U.S. veto over the firing of the missiles of this force.<sup>2</sup> He urged that this offer be left open-ended.

With respect to the choice between submarines and surface ships, he said he favored giving the Europeans an option to choose surface ships if they so desired.

Describing his forthcoming European trip as a reconnaissance in force, Ambassador Merchant requested latitude in discussing both the control and subs vs. surface ship questions.

The President summarized his recent conversation with Admiral Rickover<sup>3</sup> who opposed our offering to put Polaris subs in a multilateral force because:

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Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Executive Committee Meetings. Top Secret.

<sup>1</sup> Not printed.

<sup>2</sup> On October 22, 1962, Acheson had briefed the North Atlantic Council on the Cuban situation. A report on this meeting was transmitted in Polto 502 from Paris, October 23. (Department of State, Central Files, 611.3122/10-2362)

<sup>3</sup> The meeting with Rickover took place February 11 (Kennedy Library, President's Appointment Book), but no other record of it has been found.

1. The Polaris submarine is a dangerous instrument which requires highly trained crews. We have had several close escapes even with U.S. crews.

2. There is a grave danger of compromising our nuclear reactor technology. We are ahead of the Russians in this field and cannot afford to take the risk of losing our secrets by offering to allow the Polaris submarines to be operated by mixed European crews.

The President recalled the opposition of the Joint Atomic Energy Committee to our offer of Skipjack to the French. He felt that the Committee might strongly oppose our offering Polaris submarines to the Europeans. He did not wish to get into a position of making a proposal to the Europeans on which we could not deliver because of Congressional opposition. He felt that the problem of security could be dramatized by opponents of a multilateral NATO Polaris force.

Secretary McNamara said he favored proposing a NATO surface force for the following reasons:

1. A submarine force would cost almost twice as much as a surface force.

2. The survivability of a surface ship is one-half to two-thirds that of a submarine.

3. Admiral Mountbatten has stated to General Taylor his belief that a mixed crew could not operate a Polaris submarine efficiently, although Admiral Anderson has said, in opposition to Admiral Rickover, that a mixed crew could be trained to operate a Polaris submarine.

4. The attraction of a surface force could be increased by offering the new MRBM missile now under development which is expected to be better and cheaper than the Polaris.

Secretary McNamara concluded that in his view we should lay out all the arguments in favor of a surface force and seek to present the subject in such a way that the Europeans will choose a surface force.

Secretary Rusk said that we must support a multilateral force in order to avoid the development of national nuclear capabilities. Political as well as security reasons require us to seek some form of multilateral force acceptable to the Europeans.

The President pointed out that Congress felt it had practically invented the Polaris. If we did decide to offer the Europeans a surface force, we would have greater latitude than if we had to ask Congress to make Polaris submarines available to NATO.

Secretary McNamara reflected his deep concern about current Republican efforts to dictate military policy to the Administration. He said he had originally opposed the surface force concept, but he had now come to the conclusion that we should offer the Europeans a surface force rather than take on a major fight with the Republicans who would be quick to exploit a proposal to share Polaris submarines with European members of NATO. He doubted that it would be possible to sell

Congress on a NATO Polaris multilateral force. He recounted his unsuccessful effort to convince a Republican Congressman that our present nuclear strategy was not a “no win” policy or an “underdog” strategy.

Mr. Bundy said another additional advantage of proposing a surface force now is that we can have an operational surface force much faster than a submarine force.

The President concluded the discussion of this question by saying we should limit our offer to that of a surface force.

Mr. Bundy said the next question involved the control of this force. Everyone agreed that the U.S. must retain an authoritative voice in the control of the force, but there were differing views as to whether we should support a European force without a veto or an Atlantic force with or without a veto.

The President recalled that de Gaulle had told someone that one way to deal with the problem of control would be to give the Germans control of nuclear weapons upon the outbreak of war. The President asked what we could offer the Europeans to convince them that they had a substantially increased voice in the control of nuclear weapons.

Ambassador Merchant said we would be offering the Germans the following:

1. Reassurance that the U.S. was staying on the European Continent.
2. Participation in the control of nuclear force. Possession of nuclear weapons has become the touchstone of political power and greatly overemphasized.
3. An alternative to de Gaulle’s plan for Franco-German cooperation.

Ambassador Merchant said he believes that the multilateral force would have strong appeal for the Europeans. We would be able to make more nuclear knowledge available to them at the same time as we were giving them a sense of participation in the nuclear field. In the course of this activity, the European leaders would face some of the problems of nuclear warfare which are not now understood by them. It is possible when they see the price tag and all of the problems involved in a multilateral nuclear force, they may lose interest in it.

Secretary Acheson agreed with Ambassador Merchant’s statement that the problem of controlling a nuclear force had been blown up by the Europeans out of all proportion to its importance. He said the discussion of a “voice” in the use of nuclear weapons had become a catch phrase. The question was a “voice” in what? The “voice” that is meaningful involves the question of whether or not to go to war, not whether or not to use a specific weapon. He stated that in his view a nuclear force without a U.S. veto on the use of that force made no sense. He believed we should tell the Europeans that if they contributed to the nuclear force

they would be given a "voice" in decisions involving its use. He urged that we avoid discussion of ultimates and start immediately to get Europe mixed up in the process of learning the facts about nuclear war. He urged that we tell the Europeans we had concluded that a surface force was the best and that we were prepared to start training their nationals to participate in the operation of such a force at once. During this process, their military officers would learn the facts of nuclear war. We could also tell the Europeans, if they insisted on discussing the question of control, that control would depend on what they put into the nuclear force, i.e. if their contribution buys 2% of the force they would have a 2% voice in deciding when it would be used.

Secretary Acheson's view was that our offer of a nuclear surface force would be meaningful to the Europeans because de Gaulle had no alternative to offer, i.e. his proposal would not be realized for a long period of time.

Secretary Rusk pointed out that in his view, when the Europeans learned the facts of nuclear warfare, they will discover that it makes no sense for them to launch nuclear weapons without the U.S. In addition, he believed that the Russians would be reassured if we insisted on a veto over the use of a nuclear NATO force because the Russians have an overriding fear that the Germans will somehow manage to obtain control of nuclear weapons which they can fire on their own decision. For these reasons, Secretary Rusk said he opposed a European force in which we would not have a veto.

Ambassador Bruce pointed out that if the Europeans actually come to the conclusion that nuclear war is indivisible and that it makes no sense for them to think of a force which could be used independently of the U.S. force, he believed that the Europeans would then say there was no point in paying for a multilateral force. Possibly we should not go down the road of a multilateral force but place our emphasis instead on the Paragraph 6<sup>4</sup> or "first" phase force.

General Taylor reported that both the Germans and the British military wanted to talk about Paragraph 6 forces immediately. The Germans appeared ready to put into Paragraph 6 forces their F-104s and their Mace missiles. Firing of this force would be done under the same rules which now apply to NATO forces, i.e. SACEUR. A Deputy SACEUR nuclear commander would control the multilateral nuclear force. All participants would thus be brought into training and planning activity quickly in Omaha and in the SACEUR staff.

Secretary Ball said that the State Department sees the political problem first while the military stresses the practical aspects of the military

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<sup>4</sup>Reference is to paragraph 6 of the Nassau Agreement.

force. He said he believed that Paragraph 6 forces would probably satisfy military officers, but he did not believe that it would satisfy the politicians to a degree which would prompt them to oppose de Gaulle's plan.

The President reminded the group that more than a year ago we had asked the Europeans to come forward with their proposal for the control of nuclear forces. We now have to take the initiative because the Europeans did not come forward and de Gaulle has forced us to advocate a particular plan. He repeated his question as to what the Germans will see in the force control proposal being discussed.

Ambassador Dowling said the Germans will see these advantages:

1. The answer to de Gaulle's allegations that the U.S. will leave the European Continent.
2. Equal status in the nuclear field with the British and the French.
3. Participation in a nuclear force which will meet the immediate need because the Germans do not yet expect to share in controlling the trigger.
4. The appearance of immediate movement toward participation in a multilateral force.

He added that the multilateral force proposal provided for mixing Atlantic nationals together promptly in the development of a NATO system based on nuclear warfare.

Mr. Murrow, citing Secretary McNamara's comment that the surface system would in effect be a second-rate system, expressed his view that a surface system would not give the Europeans a true sense of participation. They would feel that we were below the water with the real weapon and they were on the surface with a facade weapon. He feared the Soviets would exploit this situation.

Secretary McNamara replied by saying we could offset such reactions by stressing to the Europeans the new missile which they would use in the surface force. We have \$800 million in the FY '64 budget to develop this missile, which will be more accurate than the Polaris, and, when in production, will cost less per missile.

Ambassador Dowling said he did not feel that the surface force would be unsaleable to the Germans.

Mr. Bundy said that if the British support a surface force, the Europeans would be more favorable toward it. In addition, he said the true test would be whether we were buying the weapon. The reason Skybolt was unsatisfactory was because the Europeans knew we did not think enough of this weapon to purchase it for our own forces.

Secretary Rusk said we may have been overestimating the Europeans' desire to share in the control of the nuclear force. In his view, the Europeans did not expect equality with the U.S., but they did want

equality with their neighbors. He hoped that our emphasizing Paragraph 6 forces might take the steam out of their desire to participate in the control of a multilateral force.

General Taylor hoped that Ambassador Merchant could relate the Paragraph 6 forces to the second-phase forces in such a way as to encourage the Europeans to accept a surface force.

The President asked whether we could respond to the fear of the Europeans that the U.S. will withdraw from Europe by making an agreement with them that if we do withdraw we would not do so before we had assisted them in developing their own nuclear force. In addition, he wondered whether we could not satisfy the Germans by agreeing to reduce the time between the use of non-nuclear forces and the firing of nuclear missiles. We could overcome their doubt that we would fire nuclear missiles by making clear now when we would resort to nuclear warfare in a given situation.

Secretary Rusk expressed his doubt that the Europeans would ever support a purely European nuclear force.

Secretary Acheson expressed his view that it was hopeless for the Europeans to have a nuclear force without the U.S. He said we must get additional conventional forces in Europe within the next five years because it made no sense whatsoever for the U.S. itself to attempt to defend Europe on the ground. Our purpose, he said, was to increase allied power, not divide it. He urged again that we offer to the Europeans a surface force which is soon realizable—as soon as the Europeans are trained to participate in its manning. As to the use of the force and its control, he said we should tell the Europeans it will be used as any other weapon now in the NATO combined force. The Europeans know that the use of any weapons, even rifles, makes no sense unless we too are involved.

The President asked Secretary Acheson how we would avoid the European reaction if what we are proposing is not a real force but merely a facade.

Secretary Acheson repeated his earlier statement that the concept of a “voice” in the use of the force is merely an illusion—the question is one of going to war, not the use of nuclear weapons. He repeated again his view that we must consider the use of nuclear weapons the same as non-nuclear weapons now under NATO control. He pointed out that what we were offering was something meaningful while de Gaulle has nothing to shoot now and only a hope of getting something later.

Secretary Rusk said the Europeans do not really understand what nuclear war means. The idea that de Gaulle wants a nuclear force for the purpose of triggering our nuclear force is silly because it means that de Gaulle’s use of nuclear weapons would result in the total destruction of

France. Hence, what they are really talking about is destroying all of France to get the U.S. into a nuclear war.

Ambassador Dowling felt that our present proposal should go only as far as is necessary to answer the questions which the Europeans now have in their minds. As they learn about nuclear warfare, we can go forward with plans which would be more acceptable to them because of their acquired knowledge.

In response to the President's request for his views, Governor Herter made the following points:

1. We are committed to discuss a multilateral force with the Europeans, even if our hope is that the Europeans would not accept it.
2. We should initiate consultation with the Europeans and bring them in to participate in nuclear force planning in every way we can.
3. We should consult with them on how we can add to a nuclear force.

Ambassador Bruce said it was most important for Ambassador Merchant to know what type of a nuclear force he is to offer to the Europeans. It is only fair that the Europeans know what we are asking them to join. If it is our view that we are not going to offer them Polaris submarines, then we should tell them now so that they cannot in the future say that we promised something which we did not carry out. The President thought that one way of moving from a submarine to surface force would be to have the British and the German military officers consider which force was preferable and, if, as we anticipate, they would conclude that a surface force is preferable, then politically it would be easier for us to tell the Europeans that we favored a surface force. Convincing the Germans would be the key to this situation. The Italians have already discussed the use of the Garibaldi in a surface force.

In response to his question, Secretary Acheson was informed that the security factor with respect to the nuclear reactor would disappear after four or five years, even though Admiral Rickover believed it would always be with us.

Ambassador Merchant said we might get the military to say that mixed manning of submarines was impossible and dangerous. However, we must avoid the Europeans then asking for Polaris submarines nationally manned. He felt that if we think we cannot deliver Polaris submarines because of Congressional opposition, we ought to tell the Europeans so.

Secretary Rusk cautioned that we must move off the submarine offer with great care.

Secretary Ball said we should advance the reasons why a surface force is preferable, i.e. we can get it faster, it costs less, and it will have new missiles. This would appeal to the Europeans who want something fairly fast.



In response to the President's question, Mr. Bundy said no legal problem was involved in offering a surface nuclear force if the U.S. keeps custody of the nuclear warheads. If the Europeans ask for control of the weapons, then we could not give this to them without changing the existing law or by a treaty.

Ambassador Bruce doubted that there would be any difficulty in Europe because the British would have the Polaris missile and no other Europeans would. He said the Europeans realized that they would never be able to build up sufficient nuclear forces to ask for control of the firing of NATO weapons because we will always have overwhelming military power. Our problem is to figure out some way to make it possible for the Europeans to live with this fact, [1 line of source text not declassified]. We must find a way of giving them a means, even a façade, of answering de Gaulle's argument. What we are seeking is a political solution, not a military answer. No solution will be perfect. No solution can allow the Germans to gain possession of nuclear weapons. What we are trying to do is to overcome the present political uneasiness about the nuclear force problem in the hope that the uneasiness will vanish within five years. Everyone in Europe knows that Europe is not going to be able to build a huge nuclear force. Ambassador Merchant should not leave for Europe until he has our full answer to this existing situation.

The President repeated his view that if military officers, including Germans and Italians, would tell us we should go for a surface force instead of submarines, it would be much easier to change our offer.

Secretary McNamara suggested that State and Defense work out the tactics before Ambassador Merchant leaves for Europe. In his view he said we must decide whether we do or do not want a multilateral force. If we do, we may well have to help Europe pay for the cost of this force. If we decide to pay the cost, then we ought to draw up a package offer which is truly attractive to the Europeans.

Secretary Rusk expressed his doubt that security problems raised by Admiral Rickover and Congress should control our policy.

Secretary McNamara said it was not the security problem which had prompted him to shift from favoring a submarine force to favoring a surface force, but rather the domestic political problems which he had encountered so forcibly during Congressional hearings in the past week.

The President asked that a brief of the advantages of a surface force be drafted by Defense. He believed that we must, with great caution, shift from the submarine offer to a surface ship offer, primarily because of the ease with which the submarine offer could be attacked in Congress.

Secretary Acheson suggested that we tell the Europeans now we are prepared to support a surface force and that we will talk to them about submarines later.

The President hoped that the surface force decision could be held very tightly so that when we do make the offer we do so in a clean fashion.

Mr. Bundy said the problem for consideration by the group at its next meeting would be that of the control of the Paragraph 6 forces.

Bromley Smith<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Printed from a copy that bears this typed signature.

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#### 174. Memorandum of Conversation

Washington, February 18, 1963, 4 p.m.

##### PRESENT

The President  
Secretary Rusk  
Ambassador Bruce  
Ambassador Merchant  
Mr. Walt Rostow  
Mr. Gerard Smith  
Mr. Jeffrey Kitchen  
Admiral John Lee  
Mr. John McNaughton  
Mr. McGeorge Bundy  
Mr. Carl Kaysen

##### SUBJECT

The Merchant Mission and the Multilateral Force

The President opened the discussion by expressing his deep concern about the multilateral force project, and particularly the fact that the United States might be tying itself too closely to a project that might fail. He said it was his impression that the British were not for it; the French were clearly against it; and the Italians did not have a deep-seated interest in it. The Germans reportedly were interested, but once they realized how little they were getting for their money, they might look at it differently. Moreover, he wondered whether the multilateral

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Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings with the President. Secret. No drafting information appears on the source text. The meeting was held in the President's office.