

Downgraded to SECRET
NARA CASE NND 941757
NARA: HR-M (DRP 2-7-00)

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TO : The Secretary
THROUGH: G - Mr. Johnson
S/S -
FROM : EUR - William R. Tyler
SUBJECT: Confirmation of existing U.S. commitment to consult with the UK before the use of nuclear weapons

We expect that the British Prime Minister will shortly ask the President to confirm our existing commitments to consult with the UK before the use of nuclear weapons. The subject may come up at any time, quite possibly in the course of your forthcoming talks with the Prime Minister and Mr. Butler. While the initiative should come from the British side, we believe it would be desirable for you to be in a position to agree to the confirmation of the existing commitments, the specific language to be worked out in due course.

There are two general types of commitments. The first provides that "the President and the Prime Minister will reach a joint decision by speaking personally with each other before certain forces equipped with U.S. nuclear weapons and operating from bases in the UK will use nuclear weapons." (See attachment to letter of February 6, 1961 of President Kennedy to Prime Minister Macmillan.) The forces now affected are:

SAC, operating from British bases;

British Bomber Command, excluding aircraft of such Command equipped with British nuclear weapons;

U.S. nuclear forces assigned to a NATO commander and based in the UK;

British SACBUR-assigned forces in the UK equipped with U.S. nuclear weapons;

U.S. Polaris submarines in British territorial waters.

(The IRBM (Thor) force set up under the Anglo-United States agreement of February 22, 1958 is no longer operational.)

The basic

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DEPT OF STATE APPEALS REVIEW PANEL (ARP)

FOIA/PA

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() Excise

() Deny

Mandatory Review

() Declassify

() Declassify in Part

() Class. Rev/Renew

Exemptions

ARP Action Cert

Date 04/12/00

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The basic understanding is contained in a communique of January 9, 1952, covering the Truman-Churchill talks: "Under arrangements made for the common defense, the U.S. has the use of certain bases in the UK. We confirm 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 circumstances prevailing at the time." Procedures for carrying out this understanding were agreed upon in the Murphy-Dean Agreement approved by the President and the Prime Minister on June 9, 1958.

The second type of commitment is the more general understanding that we will consult with the UK before using nuclear weapons anywhere, if possible. The basic understanding on this point is contained in a memorandum of conversation of a meeting between President Eisenhower and Foreign Minister Eden on March 9, 1953. "He (the President) said that the U.S. would, of course, in the event of increased tension or the threat of war, take every possible step to consult with the British and our other Allies."

It should also be noted that the United States and the United Kingdom informed NATO in May 1962 that "... it is the intention of the U.S. and the UK Governments to consult with the North Atlantic Council, if time permits, concerning the use of nuclear weapons, anywhere in the world."

The two basic existing commitments were confirmed by President Kennedy in a letter to Prime Minister Macmillan on February 6, 1961. This correspondence is attached to the accompanying memorandum to the President.

Recommendation:

That you sign the attached memorandum to the President requesting authorization to agree to confirmation of our existing commitments to the UK on the use of nuclear weapons.

Attachment:
Memorandum to the President.

Clearances: Defense - Mr. Bundy
L - Mr. Meeker

BNA - Mr. Armstrong
EUR - Mr. Burdett
L - Mr. Trippe
G/PM - Mr. Orwick
Mr. Mackay
RPM - Mr. Popper

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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Subject: Confirmation of existing U.S. commitments to consult with the UK prior to the use of nuclear weapons

I will be meeting with the British Prime Minister on December 19 and with the Foreign Secretary a few days earlier. They may ask if you are willing to confirm the commitments we have with the British to consult with them prior to the use of nuclear weapons. I would like to be able to tell them that you are agreeable to confirmation of the commitments and that an appropriate exchange of correspondence may take place.

There are two general types of commitments. The first requires a joint decision by the President and the Prime Minister before certain forces equipped with U.S. nuclear weapons and operating from bases in the UK will use nuclear weapons. The basic commitment was made by President Truman to Prime Minister Churchill on January 9, 1952.

The second type of commitment is a general one to consult if possible with the UK and our other allies prior to using nuclear weapons anywhere. The basic understanding on this point is contained in the memorandum of a conversation between President Eisenhower and Foreign Minister Eden on March 9, 1953. An additional commitment of this nature was made by both the U.S. and the UK when they declared in May 1962 their intention to consult with the NAC on the use of nuclear weapons, time permitting, anywhere in the world.

The two basic existing commitments were confirmed by President Kennedy in a letter to Prime Minister Macmillan on February 6, 1961. The correspondence is enclosed.

Dean Rusk

Enclosure:

Correspondence,
as stated.

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January 26, 1961.

I have been asked to pass to you the enclosed personal message from the Prime Minister about the continuance of Anglo-United States Understandings concerning consultation before the use of nuclear weapons, and the use of bases in the United Kingdom.

/s/ HAROLD CACCIA

The President

of the United States of America.

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TEXT OF MESSAGE

January 26, 1961.

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Dear Mr. President,

I was very glad to receive your recent message, sent through Mr. Rusk, about the continuance of Anglo-United States Understandings concerning consultation before the use of nuclear weapons, and the use of bases in the United Kingdom. I am now writing in response to your suggestion that we should communicate with each other about these Understandings immediately after your Inauguration.

These Understandings have their origin in war-time collaboration for production of the atomic bomb and for the liberation of Europe. They have been developed by successive United States Administrations, and now form an essential part of the whole network of Anglo-United States joint defense arrangements which underlie Britain's defense policy and planning. We therefore attach great importance to them. I hope very much that you and your Administration will accept these arrangements and Understandings, and the broad principles upon which they are based, and that, in particular, you will feel able to renew in your own name the personal assurances on these matters given by President Eisenhower and President Truman.

Yours sincerely,

Harold Macmillan.

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February 6, 1961

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

On January 26th you will recall that you sent me a message through your Ambassador concerning the continuance of Anglo-United States Understandings with regard to consultation before the use of nuclear weapons and the use of bases in the United Kingdom. Meanwhile, Mr. Rusk has received from Sir Harold confirmation that in general the memorandum on this subject handed him on January 9, 1961 correctly represents your understanding of the position, subject, however, to three points of clarification which do not involve substance.

I am writing now to tell you that these three points of clarification are entirely acceptable to me and reflect our own interpretation of these Understandings. I am happy, therefore, to confirm to you that these Understandings reflect the agreements in force between our two Governments. In order that they be set down in identical form in each of our records, I enclose the memorandum on the subject given Sir Harold on January 9, 1961 footnoted to reflect the three points of clarification which were requested.

Needless to say, I welcome this continuing evidence of the intimacy with which our two countries work together in all matters of the common defense as well as in other aspects of our relationship.

Sincerely,

The Right Honorable
Harold Macmillan, M.P.
Prime Minister,
London.

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Understandings with the British on the Use
of British Bases and Nuclear Weapons

1. Our understanding on the use of British bases is that the President and Prime Minister will reach a joint decision by speaking personally with each other before certain forces equipped with U.S. nuclear weapons and operating from bases in the United Kingdom will use nuclear weapons, namely SAC, British Bomber Command*, and SACEUR-assigned forces in the U.K. (U.S. Polaris submarines in British territorial waters should now be added to this list.) The basic understanding is contained in the communique of January 9, 1952 covering the Truman-Churchill talks:

"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 circumstances prevailing at the time."

Procedures for carrying out this basic understanding were agreed upon in the Murphy-Dean Agreement of June 7, 1958, which was approved by the President and the Prime Minister. The covering document, the Report to the President and the Prime Minister, repeats almost literally the language of the Truman-Churchill communique:

"2. The basic understanding between the United Kingdom and United States Governments, regarding the use of bases in the United Kingdom by United States forces, provides that such use in an emergency shall be a matter for joint decision by the two Governments in the light of the circumstances at the time."

2. There is a second, more general understanding with the British that we will consult with them before using nuclear weapons anywhere, if possible. The basic understanding on this point is contained in a memorandum of conversation of a meeting between the President and Eden on March 9, 1953. Eden had asked for an assurance of consultation by the President with the Prime Minister prior to U.S. use of any nuclear weapons.

*Excluding aircraft of such Command equipped with British nuclear weapons but including the IRBM (Thor) force set up under the Anglo-United States Agreement of February 22, 1953.

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"He (the President) said that the United States would, of course, in the event of increased tension or the threat of war, take every possible step to consult with Britain and our other allies."

The President reaffirmed this understanding when he wrote to the Prime Minister on October 27, 1960, in connection with the Holy Loch berthing:

"With reference to the launching of missiles from U.S. Polaris submarines, I give you the following assurance, which of course is not intended to be used publicly. In the event of an emergency, such as increased tension or the threat of war, the U.S. will take every possible step to consult with Britain and other Allies. This reaffirms the assurance I gave Foreign Secretary Eden on March 9, 1953."

3. It should be noted that the agreement for joint decision by the President and the Prime Minister does not extend to all U.S. forces under SACEUR and SACLANT but only covers those SACEUR-assigned forces (strike squadrons) based in the U.K.** The other U.S. nuclear forces under SACEUR and SACLANT would only be covered by the more general understanding to consult if time permits.

**This should not be taken to exclude U.S. nuclear forces based in the U.K. which might be assigned to a NATO commander in the future. In such event such forces would be brought within the terms of the Murphy-Dean Report by appropriate amendment of that Report.

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