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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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Memorandum of Conversation

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DATE: Jan 3 1959
FILE

SUBJECT: U.S. Position in Geneva Nuclear Test Negotiations

APPROVED *DEB*
2/6/59

PARTICIPANTS: The Secretary
S/AE - Mr. Ronald I. Spiers

Mr. John A. McCone, Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission

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Mr. McCone said that he had asked to see the Secretary in order to explain again the position of the AEC with respect to the Geneva nuclear test negotiations and to leave with the Secretary a letter setting out this position. Mr. McCone, referring to the Berkner report, said that the improvements which might be worked out and incorporated in the Geneva System to compensate for the difficulties disclosed by the new data from HARDTACK II were theoretical and must be tested experimentally before they could be relied upon. Mr. McCone noted that the report itself was highly qualified in its conclusions. It pointed out a very important point: That we had no experimental data on the detection of nuclear explosions detonated in geological environments other than that in which the few underground tests to date have been conducted. We were basing our entire approach in the Geneva negotiations on a disturbing paucity of data. The AEC was unanimous in the view that we should change our approach in the negotiations and attempt to secure an agreement banning atmospheric tests with a provision for the ending of underground tests when further experimentation had cast more light on the problem.

Mr. McCone said that the AEC recognized that the responsibility for how the U.S. position was played out in the current negotiations lay with the Department of State. The new Hardtack data placed the U.S. in an awkward position and he could understand the reluctance of the Secretary to consider a shift in our position at this point. He wished to emphasize, however, that

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there was a deep and serious split among the scientists, who were lining up in a way that they did during the great debate over the development of the H-bomb. If and when agreement was reached with the Soviet Union and it was presented to Congress for consent to its ratification there would be a bitter argument that could be extremely damaging to this country. He added that the AEC was not putting forth its ideas simply with the objective of continuing nuclear testing. They were perfectly ready to end atmospheric tests. This would give us some measure, although modest, of penetration in the Soviet Union. A year or two later, after more experiments had been conducted, it might be possible to agree on a system of detection of underground tests with which everyone would be satisfied. Accordingly it was the strong view of the AEC that if there was an opportunity in the negotiations to change our directions we should take advantage of it.

The Secretary said that he did not doubt that there would be an opportunity to change our direction. He felt that there was not one chance in a hundred that the Soviets would agree to the controls that we think are necessary to police the agreement we had in mind. He enumerated the problems that related to the veto, to the nationality of staffs and to the problem of mobility of inspection teams. He did not feel that the alternative was either of calling off the negotiations or proceeding on a fresh basis. If the 100 to one chance were to come about, and it appeared that the Soviets would accept our control requirements there would still be an opportunity to consider whether our approach should be changed. However, if the chance were so small that we would have to change our position, why do it? Such a change would allow the Russians to break off the negotiations with the United States bearing the entire blame for their failure. It was in some degree for public relations reasons that we had undertaken these negotiations in the first place, since we were losing a great deal throughout the world as a consequence of our position on nuclear testing. We do not want to be back where we started. The Secretary mentioned that he had just had a meeting with his panel of disarmament advisers and that this subject had been discussed. The advisers appeared to agree unanimously that the tactics that we were pursuing were proper. Accordingly, he felt that the State Department needed leeway to work out the best tactics in dealing with the problem. He felt that the press treatment that had been given to the controversy over the course of the negotiations was most regrettable and was quite damaging to our position. The Russians were harping on these articles, claiming that they proved we were looking for a way to break the negotiations off. Mr. McCone agreed that the press treatment was unfortunate and said that he had been advised by one representative of the press that the State Department had been the source of information.

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