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March 23, 1959

MEMORANDUM OF CONFERENCE WITH THE PRESIDENT
March 20, 1959, 7 PM

Others present: Prime Minister Macmillan, Mr. Selwyn
Lloyd, Sir Frederick Hoyer Millar, Sir Norman Brook
Ambassador Caccia, Mr. Bishop, Secretary Herter,
Ambassador Whitney, Mr. Merchant, General Goodpaster

There was an informal discussion before dinner, at which there was consideration of drafts prepared by the Foreign Office and the State Department relating to the portion of the response to the Soviets concerned with terms of agreement to hold a Summit Meeting. The American draft called for prior developments, in the context of a Foreign Ministers meeting, justifying such a Summit Meeting. The British draft spelled out the purposes of the Foreign Ministers meeting and indicated that if the Soviets shared this view of the purpose we would agree to holding a Summit Meeting on a certain date.

The point was strongly argued by the President and the Prime Minister, who expressed themselves most powerfully.

The Prime Minister said that the British people will not go to war over this matter without having had a prior Summit Meeting. They feel that they are under great threat. Eight thermonuclear weapons, which they believe the Soviets could now deliver against England, would destroy their country and kill 20 million people. He said that even if we reach no agreement, such a meeting was a necessary step. At another point, however, he said that if the Soviets were to take unilateral action or threaten us with the launching of an attack against us, he would not agree to go to the Summit.

The President said the American people must also be considered in this matter. They too, have strong views. He had put the matter to them on the basis of going to a Summit Meeting only if developments


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so justify and he did not intend to change this position. We also are aware, through specific studies, that we might have casualties in war of the order of 70 million people. While others could talk about going to a Summit Meeting under threat of attack by the Soviets, he for one would not attend and they could hold their Summit Meeting without him. Mr. Macmillan spoke with great emotion over the fact that, at a time when World War I might have been prevented through a summit meeting, Sir Edward Gray went fishing in order to avoid just such a meeting. The President countered by saying that prior to World War II Neville Chamberlain went to such a meeting and it is not the kind of meeting with which he intends to be associated.

After further exchange, the two agreed to think about the matter further over dinner, sleep on it, and have their diplomatic advisers study the question further.

While the statements were made with great firmness and sharpness, there was no evidence of personal animosity -- in fact just the opposite.


A. J. Goodpaster
Brigadier General, USA

