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June 23, 1954

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Discussion at the 203rd Meeting of the National Security Council, Wednesday, June 23, 1954

The following were present at the 203rd meeting of the Council: The President of the United States, presiding; the Vice President of the United States; the Secretary of State; the Secretary of Defense; the Director, Foreign Operations Administration; and the Director, Office of Defense Mobilization. Also present were the Secretary of the Treasury; the Director, Bureau of the Budget; the Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission; the Acting Federal Civil Defense Administrator; the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; the Director of Central Intelligence; the Assistant to the President; Robert Cutler, Special Assistant to the President; the Deputy Assistant to the President; Robert R. Bowie, Department of State; the White House Staff Secretary; Bryce Harlow, Administrative Assistant to the President; the Executive Secretary, NSC; and the Deputy Executive Secretary, NSC.

Following is a summary of the discussion at the meeting and the main points taken.

1. PROPOSAL FOR AN INTERNATIONAL MORATORIUM ON FUTURE TESTS OF ATOMIC WEAPONS
(Memos for NSC from Executive Secretary, same subject, dated May 17, 25 and 26, 1954; NSC Actions Nos. 899-c and 1106-h; NSC 112)

Mr. Cutler revieved prior Council action on this item and noted the reference memoranda on the subject, including the latest one by the Secretary of State, which was distributed to the members of the Council by Mr. Lay. Mr. Cutler then called on Secretary Dulles to make his report.

Secretary Dulles said that he had attempted to present a unanimous report and he may indeed actually have succeeded, although there had not been sufficient time to obtain the formal concurrence of the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman, AEC. He believed, however, that both these other members of the committee did concur in the conclusions reached by the Secretary of State's report, which was negative with respect to the proposed moratorium. Secretary Dulles went on to state that these conclusions illustrated the power of



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reason against the power of will, since all members of the committee had desired to reach a different conclusion but could not succeed in so doing. Secretary Dulles also noted that the conclusion was predicated on two basic assumptions. If these assumptions were ever to be reconsidered, different conclusions could result. The first of these assumptions was that the United States continued to oppose total abolition of atomic weapons save as a part of an effective general disarmament program. The committee felt, said Secretary Dulles, that as long as the United States continued to oppose special treatment for the category of atomic weapons, it would virtually be forced to avoid taking any position which would in effect set these weapons apart from other weapons as morally bad.

The second assumption was that while a moratorium lasting until January 1956 would be advantageous to the United States from a technical point of view, it would be disadvantageous if it was to last any longer. The technical reasons for this, said Secretary Dulles, he would leave for Admiral Strauss to explain. But he pointed out that the Soviets would probably conduct nuclear tests this summer, and a moratorium in the short term would put them at a disadvantage. On the other hand, if the United States were to set the duration of the moratorium for the period up to but not beyond January 1956, and if the United States were also to insist that explosions under 100 kilotons were exempted from the moratorium, the Soviets would quickly grasp the fact that the United States was advocating a position which had been tailored to its own advantage. This would put us in an awkward propaganda position. Accordingly, to sum up, Secretary Dulles said that the committee had virtually been forced to the negative conclusions.

The President stated with great emphasis that he thoroughly agreed with the conclusions reached by the committee, but that he would strongly challenge the first of the two assumptions on which the conclusions had been reached--namely, that the United States continues to oppose abolition of atomic weapons except as part of a general disarmament program. The President said that if he knew any way to abolish atomic weapons which would ensure the certainty that they would be abolished, he would be the very first to endorse it, regardless of any general disarmament. He explained that he was certain that with its great resources the United States would surely be able to whip the Soviet Union in any kind of war that had been fought in the past or any other kind of war than an atomic war. Unfortunately, the President said, he could see no way at present to secure an agreement which would really abolish atomic weapons. Thanks to the element of surprise in the enemy's hands, the United States, for the first time in its history, was frightened at the prospect of an atomic war.

Secretary Dulles reminded the President of the point he had made earlier, that if we were to reconsider these assumptions we might well come out with changed conclusions. But, said the President, he

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wanted to emphasize that he would go along a hundred percent with the present conclusions until someone invented a really foolproof system to ensure the abolition of atomic weapons. Let no one make the mistake, however, of imagining that if such a system were devised the President would not go along with it. The matter of the morality of the use of these weapons was of no significance. The real thing was that the advantage of surprise almost seemed the decisive factor in an atomic war, and we should do anything we could to remove this factor.

Secretary Dulles said that the President's comments were profoundly important and had a great bearing on our national strategy and subsidiary decisions in the light of that strategy. Secretary Dulles said that he did not entirely rule out the possibility of achieving the effective abolition of atomic weapons. He thought that the USSR might agree to cease activity in the nuclear area, where they know the United States now has superiority, and go back to an area of conventional armaments where they have superiority. The President interjected that the Secretary meant where they have initial superiority. Secretary Dulles agreed with the correction, and went on to point out how much the abolition of atomic weapons would help us in our problems with our allies and in the United Nations. Secretary Dulles stated his agreement that there ought to be a reappraisal of the basic situation with respect to disarmament. On the other hand, unless and until new conclusions had been reached on this basic situation, we could not agree to the abolition of atomic weapons alone.

The President agreed, but restated his position that there was no way in which the United States could be licked by any enemy in a protracted war of exhaustion unless we were the victims of surprise atomic attack.

Mr. Cutler then asked Admiral Strauss if he would comment on the technical considerations which had moved the committee to reach its conclusions.

At the outset, Admiral Strauss expressed his agreement with the conclusions. He pointed out that the best advice available indicated that it seemed possible to conceal tests of weapons of a size up to fifty thousand tons of TNT equivalent, so that even if the Soviets agreed to a moratorium they could continue to stage tests of weapons of fifty thousand tons or less. Admiral Strauss also pointed out the large margin of error involved in the long-range detection process. He then indicated the reasons why it was of such importance that the United States again conduct atomic tests after January 1956. We required a small megaton weapon for defense against hostile aircraft. Work on such a weapon was still in a primitive stage and would not be ready for a test until 1956. But, according to the Joint Chiefs of Staff, testing such a weapon and adding it to our present family of weapons was almost indispensable. This accounts for our unwillingness to extend the moratorium beyond January 1956.

Speaking personally, continued Admiral Strauss, he believed that there was something essentially illusory in offering to the peoples of the world a moratorium on atomic tests when at the same time both the United States and the Soviet Union would go on manufacturing nuclear weapons. The real fallacy in this whole business, however, was the unenforceability of any agreement on the subject with the Russians. These views, said Admiral Strauss, he had forwarded to Secretary Dulles (copy in the minutes of the meeting).

At the conclusion of Admiral Strauss' statement, the President inquired of Admiral Radford whether attacking Soviet aircraft would fly in formation in an atomic attack on the U. S. or whether they would send single planes to attack each target. Admiral Radford replied that they would probably come over with a number of planes over each target in order to confuse the defenders.

The President said that if and when we succeeded in getting the small megaton weapon against aircraft, to which Admiral Strauss had just alluded, how high would such a weapon have to be exploded in order to destroy the hostile aircraft but not the city beneath? Admiral Strauss said that if the defensive weapon were exploded at a distance of ten miles or more above the city, the city would not be seriously damaged, even by the fall-out from the explosion.

The President then said that in any event we were not going to stop conducting tests of atomic weapons, and that there was no reason to do so until some new alternative was in sight.

Mr. Cutler then called on Mr. Allen Dulles for his views.

Mr. Dulles said that the CIA was inclined to be a little more optimistic than Admiral Strauss on the possibilities of detecting Soviet violations of a moratorium. With respect to the propaganda issue, Mr. Dulles said he would very much like to see the United States take a position which was somewhat more affirmative than the negative conclusions reached by the committee. He had, however, nothing specific to propose, except to suggest the insertion of the words "at this time" in the recommendation that the United States would not agree to a testing moratorium. He thought that the negative character of our position might also be softened a little if we added a third recommendation to indicate that we were continuing to review our policies with respect to disarmament.

Mr. Dulles then noted that the proposed amendment to the Atomic Energy Act of 1946 would, if passed, greatly facilitate the exchange of intelligence information in the atomic field with our allies. This would meet some of the British complaints on this score. The President replied that he had a great deal of sympathy with the British position, and that their complaints were legitimate. The 1946 law ought to be modified, and he was willing to do all that he could to obtain the modification.

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Admiral Strauss commented that there seemed to be very little opposition in the Joint Atomic Energy Committee to the proposed amendment to the Atomic Energy Act.

The National Security Council:

a. Discussed the subject on the basis of the reference memoranda and a memorandum by the Secretary of State, presented at the meeting, the conclusions of which were concurred in by the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission.

b. Adopted the position that the United States should not agree at this time to a testing moratorium.

c. Agreed that the review of the current policy with respect to the regulation, limitation and balanced reduction of armed forces and armaments (NSC 112) should be continued and expedited by the Special Committee created pursuant to NSC Action No. 899-c.

NOTE: The actions in b and c above, as approved by the President, subsequently transmitted to the Secretaries of State and Defense and the Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission.

S. Everett Gleason

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