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ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION

MEETING NO. 1190

2:15 p.m., Wednesday, April 4, 1956

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Present

Lewis L. Strauss  
W. F. Libby  
Harold S. Vance

K. E. Fields  
R. W. Cook  
William Mitchell

W. B. McCool  
James E. Ammons

Also Present

Harry S. Traynor  
Paul F. Foster  
Brig. Gen. Alfred D. Starbird  
Capt. John W. Gannon  
Maj. James J. Cobb  
Capt. Harry Hahn  
Lt. Col. Eugene A. Blue  
Col. Carey L. O'Bryan, Jr.  
Charles L. Marshall  
C. A. Rolander, Jr.  
Morse Salisbury  
Shelby Thompson  
Rodney L. Southwick  
Charter Heslep  
Robert L. Corsbie  
W. Kenneth Davis  
Dr. Walter D. Claus

Harold A. Knapp  
John H. Stumpf  
George F. Quinn  
Frank P. Baranowski  
Curtis A. Nelson  
Donald F. Musser  
J. A. Hall  
Max Isenbergh  
Edward R. Gardner  
Wilber A. Strauser  
Paul C. Fine  
Comdr. John W. Crawford  
Everett Holles  
George G. Manov  
Manuel Dupkin II  
Comdr. Charles E. Nelson  
Richard V. Willit

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1. Executive Session\*
    - a. Procedures for Custody and Transfer of Weapons
    - b. Personnel Appointment
    - c. MURA Project
  
  2. AEC 787/26 - Special Observer Program for Operation REDWING

General Starbird reviewed with the Commissioners proposed arrangements for the attendance of news media observers at a large shot during Operation REDWING. Mr. Strauss asked why AEC should pay the cost of installing and removing communications equipment from the ship which would carry newsmen to Operation REDWING. Mr. Salisbury pointed out that this division of costs had been established at the time of Operation CROSSROADS.

After further discussion, the Commission:

a. Approved the general plan for a News Media/FCDA Observer Program for Operation REDWING, as outlined in Appendix "A" to AEC 787/26;

b. Determined that the information listed in paragraph 8 of AEC 787/26 may be published without constituting an undue risk to the common defense and security;

c. Authorized the establishment of a Joint Office of Test Information for the News Media/FCDA Observer Program, to be under the direction of the Commander JTF-7 in the forward area;

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\*Separate minutes for this part of the meeting have been circulated

**[REDACTED]**

d. Noted that the DOD has concurred in the feasibility of a special observer program, and that DOD comments with respect to b above as well as to assistance in finalizing the details of the program will be requested by letter such as Appendix "B" to AEC 787/26, as revised;

e. Noted that the JCAE has been advised of plans to have a special observer program; and

f. Noted that a security plan will be prepared jointly by AEC, DOD and JTF-7.

3. AEC 141/32 - Special Reactor Test Site

General Starbird reviewed AEC 141/32 which recommended that the Commission request the DOD to transfer to AEC about 500 square miles of land now under Air Force jurisdiction, adjacent to the Nevada Test Site. He said that the area would be used for ground testing of stationary prototypes of rocket propulsion reactors. The Commissioners then discussed with General Starbird the transfer of this land and the cost of installations to be constructed on it.

The Commission:

a. Approved the establishment of a Special Reactor Test Site by expanding the Nevada Test Site to include 309,196.8 acres west of the Nevada Test Site as shown on the map attached as Appendix "B" to AEC 141/32 and further described in the annex to Appendix "B";

b. Noted that the facilities planned for construction at the Special Reactor Test Site are for static tests of reactors suitable for rocket propulsion units and do not encompass flight testing;

c. Noted that these test facilities will be located in both the NTS and the area to be acquired from the DOD;

d. Noted that a letter such as Appendix "D" to AEC 141/32 be transmitted to the Secretary of Defense;

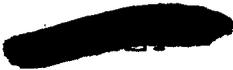
e. Noted that upon receipt of advice from the DOD that action has been initiated to release the land required by the AEC, the Department of the Interior will be requested to withdraw the land from the public domain for the exclusive use of the AEC; and

f. Noted that the JCAE and the Nevada Congressional delegation will be informed of this action and that appropriate press notices will be released after right of entry is obtained from the Secretary of Defense.

4. AEC 278/10 - Classification of Certain Information on the Amount of Radioactivity in the Stratosphere

Mr. Marshall pointed out that AEC 278/10 recommended the declassification of certain information relating to fall-out so that this information might be included in an unclassified technical paper on fall-out which Mr. Libby will present at a meeting of the American Philosophical Society at Philadelphia on April 20. Mr. Marshall added that release of this information was necessary in order to provide a meaningful survey of the fall-out problem. Mr. Libby observed that release of the information would not compromise technology. He said he believed that the Commission's policy of releasing full information on fall-out had contributed to an attitude on the part of non-communist nations that they are not opposed to weapons tests such as Operation REDWING.

After discussion, the Commission:



a. Determined that the Project Sunshine data on the mean residence time and the rate of deposition of radiostrontium activity from the stratosphere which permit the inference that the total fission yield of all the megaton devices tested to date is at least twenty-four megatons may be published without undue risk to the common defense and security; and

b. Noted that the Military Liaison Committee, the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy and the General Advisory Committee will be advised of this action by letter, such as that attached as an Appendix to AEC 278/10.

5. AEC 27/117 - Meeting of U.S., U.K. and Canadian Declassification Representatives

Mr. Marshall commented on the proposed terms of reference for U.S. delegates to the Eighth International Declassification Conference and on the proposed declassification guide which the conferees would discuss. He said that after the Conference, recommendations for declassification and reclassification based on discussion of the proposed guide would be submitted. Mr. Libby pointed out that the guide which the conferees would consider provided for, in general:

a. the declassification of information on power reactors except for technology relating to military propulsion and production reactors;

b. the declassification of absolute methods of isotope separation; such as, electromagnetic and liquid thermal diffusion;

c. the declassification of heavy water production technology;

d. the declassification of about one-half of the technology concerning the metallurgy of plutonium and its processing;

e. the declassification of the technology of zirconium-hafnium separation; and

f. the downgrading of the present classification of gaseous diffusion plant technology.

Mr. Libby said he believed it would be appropriate to consider the declassification of technology relating to power reactors, particularly in the chemical processing field.

The Commissioners then briefly discussed the advantages and disadvantages of declassifying information on obsolete methods of isotope separation.

With regard to the possibility of declassification of heavy water plant technology, Mr. Libby observed that other countries might soon be competing with the U.S. in the sale of heavy water if this information were declassified. Mr. Davis said he believed that even if the technology were declassified, other countries would still find it cheaper to buy heavy water from the U.S. because of the large scale production of the U.S. plants and their low power costs. Mr. Marshall pointed out that information on the process used by the U.S. for making heavy water has already been published and that only the detailed technology remains classified. He observed that continued classification of this information would not prevent other countries from making heavy water but only prevent them from making it as cheaply as does the U.S. Mr. Fields and Mr. Mitchell pointed out that the Atomic Energy Act provided for continued classification of information only when its publication would be an undue risk to the common defense and security. Mr. Marshall added that unnecessary classification of information tends to decrease the over-all effectiveness of the classification program.

**[REDACTED]**

Mr. Fine referred to the fact that deuterium, which is made from heavy water, is an essential ingredient of thermonuclear weapons and pointed out that when the U.S. sells heavy water to other countries, these countries agree to use it only for peaceful purposes. He observed, however, that if U.S. heavy water technology were declassified, the U.S. would have no control over the use of this information by other countries. Mr. Strauss said he believed that for this reason the technology of heavy water plants should remain classified. With regard to the declassification of zirconium-hafnium separation technology, the Commissioners indicated that they would consider favorably such a recommendation.

The Commissioners then considered the possibility of downgrading the classification of gaseous diffusion plant technology. Mr. Libby said he did not believe that the downgrading of the classification of this information would make a substantial contribution to basic engineering knowledge in other fields. He also indicated that he believed private industry would find it too expensive to construct and operate a gaseous diffusion plant. For these reasons and because he considered gaseous diffusion technology related to weapons production, Mr. Libby said he could find no justification for downgrading the information.

Mr. Marshall said that most of the gaseous diffusion plant technology, now recommended for downgrading, was already being treated as "Confidential" rather than "Secret" since the classification guide in use at the time of the Paducah expansion had not distinguished between "Secret" and "Confidential". However, according to the most recently approved classification guide, the same information should be classified "Secret". Therefore, Mr. Marshall, said, in order for diffusion plant operations to be brought into conformity with the new guide, it is necessary either to upgrade many of the documents concerning diffusion plant technology to "Secret" or formally downgrading the technology to "Confidential" and thereby permit continued handling of the documents on a "Confidential" basis. Mr. Marshall pointed out that upgrading this information to "Secret" in accordance with the new guide would entail a large expenditure of time and money

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in upgrading documents and in future accountability and other security practices. The Commissioners then discussed this question at length. Mr. Libby said he believed that it would be unwise to declassify diffusion plant technology before the forthcoming Conference. The Commissioners indicated that when the recommendation on this question was formally submitted, additional information on the effects of classifying the information "Secret" should also be submitted.

After further discussion, the Commission:

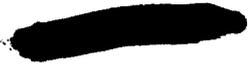
a. Authorized the United States delegates listed in paragraph 3 of AEC 27/117 to participate in the Eighth International Declassification Conference in accordance with the terms of reference in Appendix "B" to AEC 27/117 and to proceed on the basis outlined in paragraph 4 of AEC 27/117 and paragraphs 7-26 of Appendix "A", as revised, of AEC 27/117;

b. Noted that the Military Liaison Committee would be advised of the purpose and nature of the Commission by letter such as that in Appendix "C" to AEC 27/117; and

c. Noted that the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy would be notified of the purpose and nature of the Conference by letter such as that in Appendix "D" to AEC 27/117.

6. AEC 764/23 - Release of Information to NATO

General Starbird reviewed the recommendation of AEC 764/23 that the Commission determine that certain fission weapon information could be transmitted to NATO under the DOD's bilateral agreement. He pointed out that this information would be used in briefing the NATO officers on the staff of the Supreme Allied Commander, Atlantic Fleet. In answer to a question by Mr. Libby, General Starbird said that no thermonuclear weapons information would be included, nor would the information reveal the utility of boosting fission weapons.



After further discussion, the Commission:

a. Determined that the weapon design and fabrication information contained in the instructional material to be used in a NATO Atomic Weapons Information Course (Appendix "A" to AEC 764/23) does not reveal important information concerning the design or fabrication of the nuclear components of an atomic weapon;

b. Noted that the Chairman, MLC, will be advised of the determination in a. above by a letter such as Appendix "B" to AEC 764/23, which will request that it be made clear that the lesson plan applied to fission weapons only;

c. Noted that the JCAE will be notified of the above actions by an appropriate letter after coordinating with the DOD.

d. Noted that the President will be informed by letter of the above and related decisions.

Mr. Strauss requested that a letter to the President be prepared informing him of this Commission decision. He also asked to be provided a copy of the instruction course and related material so that during his visit to NATO Headquarters, he might discuss this decision with General Gruenther.

7. Discussion of Proposed International Atomic Energy Agency

Mr. Hall reviewed with the Commissioners the recent Twelve Nation Meeting in Washington to draft a statute for the proposed International Atomic Energy Agency. He said the conference, with one important reservation, had agreed to a draft statute. The remaining question concerned the composition and selection of the Board of Governors of IAEA. Mr. Hall indicated that future meetings had been postponed for a few weeks in hopes of resolving the problem during the intervening time.

[REDACTED]

Mr. Hall said he would recommend location of the permanent headquarters for IAEA in the U.S. and as a second choice, Geneva. The Commissioners indicated that they agreed with this position.

After further discussion, the Commission:

Requested that a letter be sent to the Department of State setting forth the Commission's position that the headquarters of the International Atomic Energy Agency should be located in the U.S.

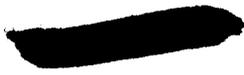
8. Discussion of OEEC

Mr. Hall reported on a recent meeting of a committee of the Organization for European Economic Cooperation which had been established to study the possibilities of cooperation in the field of nuclear power. He pointed out that OEEC had originally been established by seventeen European countries to coordinate Marshall Plan aid and later had been made a permanent organization with the U.K. and U.S. as associate members. For the past four or five years a special committee of OEEC has been concerned with the development of conventional power, and recently OEEC had agreed to establish a special committee to investigate the possibilities of cooperation in the field of nuclear power.

At this point Mr. Vance left the meeting.

9. London Disarmament Conference

Mr. Gardner reported on a U.K. - French disarmament proposal and also on a plan presented to the London Disarmament Conference by Mr. Stassen on April 3. Mr. Foster referred to a cable outlining the disarmament plan presented by Mr. Stassen and said that the AEC's comments on parts of the plan had been invited. Mr. Foster said that he recommended that the Commission indicate to the President's Special Disarmament Committee, AEC's general concurrence in the Stassen proposal.



Mr. Strauss observed that since a quorum of the Commissioners was not presented no decision could be made. He suggested that the Commissioners be contacted individually to determine their views. He added that a Commission meeting to consider Mr. Stassen's proposal might be held on April 6, provided that the President's Special Disarmament Committee had not met prior to that time.

Mr. Foster called the Commission's attention to the proposed transfer to IAEA of fissionable material from past production in addition to committing all future production to peaceful purposes. He observed that this language differed from the Commission sponsored language in the President's letter to Premier Bulganin which had stated that future production would not be used to increase the stockpile of explosive weapons. Mr. Strauss said that this difference should be called to Mr. Stassen's attention.

W. B. McCool

Secretary

Approved by the Commission: Meeting 1213, July 10, 1956