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By: ST NARA Date: 6/30/08

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

This document consists of 5 pages

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Memorandum of Conversation

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**SECURITY INFORMATION**

DATE: March 6, 1953

SUBJECT: Use of United Kingdom Bases and Consultation with the United Kingdom on the Use of Atomic Weapons

PARTICIPANTS: United Kingdom  
Foreign Minister Eden  
Ambassador Sir Roger Makins  
Sir Pierson Dixon

United States  
Secretary of State Dulles  
Mr. Arneson  
Mr. O'Connor

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Speaking to the general problem of atomic weapons, Secretary Dulles said we should not allow a taboo to be put on inventiveness. In his view it was wrong to attach the stigma of immorality to any particular weapon. Doubtless the first wild animal that was killed by man armed with whatever weapon, be it club or stone, felt that man had taken unfair advantage of it. One could not stop inventiveness nor the improvement of weapons. The problem was how to deal with these improvements and how to use them if necessary. Immorality attached to the launching of aggressive war, not to the means that might be used for waging it. As to the general problem of casus belli, war would occur whether the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Moscow or ten block busters. Mr. Dulles felt that the problem to be considered was whether the United States and the United Kingdom should consult together on the

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question of going to war or not, rather than on the question of the use of atomic weapons as such.

Foreign Minister Eden said that as regards the use of United Kingdom bases it was recognized that the commitment for prior agreement should be in general terms without singling out atomic weapons. He recalled the pertinent text of the Truman-Churchill communique of January 9, 1952, which dealt with this point.

∟The cited language is as follows:

"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 the circumstances prevailing at the time."<sup>7</sup>

Mr. Eden stated that what the United Kingdom wanted on this aspect of the matter was simply a reaffirmation by the new Administration of the understanding quoted above. He hoped that the President and the Secretary would consider whether it might be possible to give this reassurance publicly. The United Kingdom Government attached great importance to having this assurance reaffirmed by the new Administration. (Mr. Dulles inquired of Mr. Arneson whether it would be necessary to take this point up with the National Security Council. Mr. Arneson responded that this position had already received the concurrence of the Department of Defense,

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the other agency most vitally concerned, and that the Secretary could give his agreement to the insertion of this language without further checking.) Mr. Dulles stated that he was prepared to agree to have language along the lines quoted inserted in the communique, and that the text as contained in the Truman-Churchill communique seemed about right to him. Minor drafting changes would be desirable, principally to substitute "confirm" for "reaffirm." This being agreeable to Mr. Eden, it was left that Mr. Arneson should prepare the draft language to be inserted in the communique which it was expected would be issued the following day.

Mr. Eden said that the other matter which the Prime Minister had asked him to take up was the question whether President Eisenhower would be prepared to give Prime Minister Churchill a private, personal assurance--as Truman had done with Attlee and Churchill--that the President would not decide on the use of atomic weapons without consultation with the United Kingdom. Mr. Eden stressed that the United Kingdom did not want any publicity on this assurance, if given, nor would they intend that this assurance should constitute a power of veto by the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom considered itself in a very exposed position in the event of war and had a vital concern about possible use of atomic weapons. Ambassador Makins recalled that under the Quebec Agreement the United Kingdom had a veto on the use of atomic weapons--this veto had been abrogated by subsequent negotiations, namely those leading to the modus vivendi of January 7, 1948. The personal assurances given by

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Mr. Truman to Attlee in 1950 and Churchill in 1952 had been most helpful. The United Kingdom hoped that such private assurances could again be given by President Eisenhower. Mr. Dulles asked Mr. Arneson what we knew about these prior personal commitments. Mr. Arneson stated that while no such assurances had been officially given, it was understood that Truman had talked privately with Mr. Attlee about his own personal intention to consult with him in the event a decision to use atomic weapons had to be taken. The official governmental position on this matter was as reflected in the joint communique issued on December 8, 1950 and the joint communique of the Truman-Churchill talks dated January 9, 1952. The private assurances given Attlee by Truman could not be considered binding on the United States Government, either at the time or subsequently. At most, such assurances were personal in nature.

Mr. Eden agreed that there was no official governmental commitment involved in the private assurances referred to and the United Kingdom was not asking for a governmental assurance. What they did hope for was a personal and private commitment from President Eisenhower to Prime Minister Churchill that the President would consult with the Prime Minister prior to taking a decision to use atomic weapons.

Mr. Dulles said that the United States looked upon the United Kingdom as its major ally and would hope for its full support in the event of war. The United States clearly did not want to take any action which would endanger the safety of the United Kingdom. To the extent that time and circumstances permitted, the United States would of course wish

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to consult with the United Kingdom on situations that may arise which might lead to general war. We would also want to consult together as to the means best calculated to deal with the situation. He felt that this was the more useful approach to adopt. As to the question of a personal commitment from the President, this of course was a matter which could be decided only by the President himself. Mr. Dulles undertook to bring the matter to the President's attention noting that Mr. Eden intended to raise this point with the President on Monday, March 9. In commenting on the nature of the requested personal assurance, Mr. Dulles said it was obvious that President Eisenhower, if he chose to give such assurance to Prime Minister Churchill, could give it only for himself and to Churchill personally. Such assurances clearly could not be binding on others. Mr. Eden commented that this was indeed so. He felt certain, however, that should a new Prime Minister come into office in the United Kingdom he too would be most anxious to have such assurance.

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(After the meeting broke up, Mr. Arneson prepared the draft language to be incorporated in the communique on the question of the use of United Kingdom bases and also a memorandum for the President from the Secretary suggesting the position that should be taken on the question of giving a personal assurance to Churchill. After some editing, this memorandum was signed by Secretary Dulles and dispatched to the White House prior to the Secretary's departure for the General Assembly in New York Saturday afternoon, March 7, 1953.)

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