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January 20, 1960

MEMORANDUM OF CONFERENCE WITH THE PRESIDENT
November 18, 1959 - Augusta

Others present: General Twining, General White, General Lemnitzer, Admiral Burke, General Pate, General Goodpaster



The President said he had wanted to talk with the Chiefs on the problems of the coming year and specifically on the military program. What he had in mind was an exchange of ideas with them. He commented that he was deeply disappointed in General Taylor's action in putting out a book, but was not going to let that keep him from speaking frankly and meeting both formally and informally with the Chiefs whenever there seemed to be reason to do so.

General Twining said Secretary McElroy had had the Chiefs and the Service Secretaries in to meet with him on his return to Washington the previous Monday. He said the main concern in the Chiefs is that expenditures are increasing for many things that do not give a return in combat capability today. The President said he realized this but felt that our military leaders must from time to time take a new look at things that have become simply a matter of habit. He had two or three specific items in mind. The first of these is the 6th Fleet in the Mediterranean.

Admiral Burke said that there would be some advantage to putting the 6th Fleet under SACLANT and deploying it in the Atlantic. There is need, however, to stabilize the situation in Greece, Italy and Turkey, and the 6th Fleet makes a great contribution in this regard. He felt that the fleet units had to be kept fairly well forward so that, when needed for an emergency, we could move them fairly fast into the troubled area. He cited the wholly unsatisfactory British experience and performance at the time of the Suez operation. He added that the fleet does not involve much drain on our dollar reserves.

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- 2 -



The President said he is getting extremely annoyed with the Europeans who are tending to lean much too heavily on us. In fact, everyone is relying on us around the world. The British, for example, want us to maintain their interest in Kuwait. He said he saw the use for carriers in peacetime but thought they had no real value in an all-out war. They would be hit in port. Admiral Burke commented that the carriers are moved at odd times, on no fixed schedule, so that an enemy could never be sure where they were. The President said it would be a simple matter to reconnoiter them.

He went on to say that when we put our forces in Europe in 1951 we said they were being put there temporarily. Since that time, however, our government has taken the stand that we must not pull anything back, that the shock to the Europeans would be too great. Admiral Burke commented that the 6th Fleet also has amphibious lift, which is very expensive to maintain. No one else has it. The British capability is nothing short of pitiful when one considers that this is a type of force they particularly need. The President said the French, Germans and British are all steadily increasing their gold reserves. Their budgets are not being overstrained. In 1951 and 1952 we made sacrifices. It is hard for him to see why they do not now pick up a fair share of the burden. He thought there is no reason we could not cut down the number of our carriers on station. What troubled the President is that, in America's anxiety to make the free world safe, we make ourselves vulnerable to our allies taking advantage of us. There is, of course, no possibility of doing anything suddenly. The Europeans have told their people too long that their safety depends on the U. S. He recalled that de Gaulle said he was unhappy with regard to command arrangements and thought these should be more on a national basis than at present. The President told him that there would then be no reason for U. S. forces to be in Europe. Admiral Burke said he had been meeting with Admiral Lambe of Britain and Admiral Nomy of France. Nomy is in an extremely embarrassing position because he recognizes the logic of collective defense as against the de Gaulle proposals. The President said he had told Admiral Lambe when he saw him that he was asking our people to restudy our naval position in the Mediterranean. Admiral Burke commented that the French naval people want to work closely with us. The President said he is trying to save something in annual costs and simply wanted to know if we had to pull down somewhere what we would then do with the 6th Fleet. He wants the other countries to pick up responsibilities.

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