

May 16, 1960

MEMORANDUM OF CONFERENCE WITH THE PRESIDENT
4:30 PM, May 15, 1960

Others present: Secretary Herter, Mr. Bohlen,
Ambassador Thompson, Mr. Merchant,
Mr. Kohler, General Goodpaster

During lunch I had a call from Mr. Achilles, who was then in Couve de Murville's office, reporting that Khrushchev's meeting with de Gaulle had been entirely devoted to a six-page statement, the key part of which was a statement that unless the United States is ready to condemn such actions as the U-2 flight with respect to the Soviet Union, renounce such acts in the future, and punish those responsible, the Soviet Government would not take part in this summit conference.



This was discussed during the four-power Western session at 2:30, and was expected to be the main subject of conversation in Mr. Macmillan's meeting with Khrushchev scheduled at four o'clock.

Mr. Herter, in referring to this, said that we are confronted with Mr. Khrushchev's threat to withdraw from the summit conference. The President said we must consider whether it would be better to break the conference off ourselves. Ambassador Thompson stated that we need a better posture on which to break it off than the matter of spy flights.

Mr. Merchant said de Gaulle had told Khrushchev he did not think he should bring this matter into the summit conference but should take it up with the Americans. He went on to say that all countries conduct espionage, including Russia and France. He added that if this matter were to come to war, he wanted Mr. Khrushchev to know that France as an ally would stand with the United States. Mr. Merchant added that the press already seems to have some

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knowledge of this. To a question by Mr. Herter, Mr. Kohler stated that there had been no approach whatsoever by the Soviets. The President commented that Khrushchev is trying to see how our allies react to this pressure.

The President asked for the ideas of the group as to why Khrushchev had not done this five days ago. Mr. Herter asked Mr. Bohlen whether he thought Khrushchev had come here simply to break off the summit conference. Mr. Bohlen said that, considering the content of the document, and the fact that it was delivered in writing, he felt the Soviets had in fact made a decision to break off the conference. Mr. Merchant said that brings us back to the question of choice whether the President should break it off, or Khrushchev. Mr. Bohlen went on to say that since the demarche is in writing, it is clear that Khrushchev plans to put this on the table. He certainly is aware that the President could not accept it, and therefore really intends to break off the conference.

Mr. Thompson came back to the point that Khrushchev may be taking a reading with our allies to test their resolution on this. He said that Khrushchev is vulnerable at home over his impulsiveness, and that we should say that we could not negotiate with a man who uses language of this kind in a serious conference.

The President said that if the Soviets simply want a four-power statement that we deplore and denounce espionage, he would have no objection to this. We will not go beyond that to foreswear specific activities unilaterally, however.

Mr. Merchant said that all things considered, it would be better to have Mr. Khrushchev walk out of the conference than the President. Mr. Herter suggested that, in the morning, if Khrushchev raises this question, the President should invite him over for discussions. Mr. Bohlen said that if this is our intention, we should get word to the Russians at once, letting them know that we have received knowledge of this demarche, that we cannot consider it as presented, and that if they present it the United States will have to stand behind its past operations.

The President said that the intelligence people, he thought, had failed to recognize the emotional, even pathological, reaction of the Russians regarding their frontiers. Mr. Bohlen said he felt the intelligence people had been aware of this but thought the pilot would never be taken alive by the Soviets.

Mr. Bohlen said there seems to be a need to have a statement ready for the President to give if required. The President said he thought it could be quite simple. Everybody knows there has been espionage throughout history. For the Russians to demand that we forswear espionage while knowing that we are the victim of their espionage is completely unacceptable. Mr. Thompson suggested that we add that we are prepared to discuss overflights and espionage in general. Mr. Merchant interjected that we must not do anything to compromise the Samos. The President said that, in the right circumstances, he would be quite willing to renounce the use of the U-2, whose use is at an end so far as he is concerned. Mr. Bohlen said that if this is the case, we might state in such a statement after a break-up of the conference that indeed we were ready to discontinue the use of the U-2. He thought we should bring in the matter of the UN, proposing that the Security Council of the UN undertake the flights to guard against surprise attack. The essential points are two -- first, that we could not respond to a threat, and second, what might have been done had there been serious consideration of this at the conference. Mr. Bohlen thought that the Russians are trying to get us to "grovel" or to assert a legal right to overfly (which they will challenge as untenable.)

The President said that espionage is simply a practice that has been carried on throughout history. It is up to the affronted country to defeat spies attempting to operate against them.


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