Dirk U. Stikker Oral History Interview—JFK #1, 4/10/1965
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Dirk U. Stikker (1887-1979) was the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1948 to 1952, and the Secretary-General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) from 1961 to 1964. This interview focuses on Stikker's perceptions of John F. Kennedy (JFK) as a leader, the debate within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) regarding guidelines for nuclear weapons, and JFK's views on decolonization, among other issues.

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Dirk U. Stikker

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Oral History Interview

with

DIRK U. STIKKER

April 10, 1965
Menaggio, Italy

By John Getz

For the John F. Kennedy Library

GETZ: This is an interview conducted by Mr. John Getz with Mr. Dirk U. Stikker, former Secretary General of NATO from 1961 until 1964. The interview is conducted at Mr. Stikker's home in Menaggio, Italy, on April 10, 1965. Mr. Stikker, I wonder if you would care to begin by telling us something of your personal knowledge of President Kennedy, when you first met him, and

something about your succeeding meetings with him?

STIKKER: I think the first time that I met Mr. Kennedy, as he was then, was in 1951. I was Chairman of the OEEC, the Organization for European Economic Cooperation. We were starting to make the European Payments Union, and I'd been asked to come over to the United States and talk on this subject with a great many people. One evening there was a dinner at the Netherlands Embassy; it was there that I met for the first time Mr. Kennedy, who, I think, at that time was a Congressman. At the dinner, my wife was sitting next to him. When I asked after dinner, "How did you get on with your neighbors?" she said, "Mr. Kennedy is a very nice man, keenly interested in what is going on

in Europe and is himself, also, a most interesting man." I think there you have the picture of the man: keenly

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interested in all things; himself, a most interesting character, also.

Naturally, later on, when he had become President and I became Secretary General, I saw him on many occasions. It is the custom for a Secretary General to pay visits to all governments regularly. I think the first time I met him as President was when he came on his first visit to Europe, also to the Council -- the Council of NATO. It struck me that when he spoke to the Council, he did so completely without any documents in front of him; very open, very frank, very positive. That has been, in the following years, always the case when I met with him personally -- for instance, in June '61, in February '62, in March '63. I think after the Council meeting in Ottawa, we went on a trip all over the United States to visit certain military installations; the

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whole Council was there. At the end of that trip, the Council was received by President Kennedy in the White House. It happened to be his birthday, so I congratulated him on his birthday at that time on behalf of the Council and thanked him for all we had seen. I had later another meeting with him in '63.

GETZ: Mr. Stikker, I wonder if you could say a few words about how you saw President Kennedy through the eyes of a European. What did he mean to Europe? What were his good qualities and, possibly, his failings, if you think he had some, from the European standpoint?

STIKKER: I think I could best explain my feelings about President Kennedy when I tell you how, in the course of the years that I have been in foreign politics, I have known fairly well four of your Presidents. In '50 and '51, I had meetings with President Truman [Harry S. Truman], a very keen man himself, but he gave the

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impression that he was, perhaps, more interested in domestic policy than in foreign policy. I've always admired the courage of President Truman, for instance, on the Korean issue and on the Marshall aid. But still he was a little bit far off from the European point of view. Then I met, several times, General Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] when he was in Paris as Supreme Allied Commander, SHAPE, and I got to know him. We had, for instance, quite some discussions at that time on the creation of the European Defense Community. He had asked to give advice to the group of ministers who were meeting and trying to find the right terminology and system for a European Defense Community. But it always struck me that

when I asked General Eisenhower at that time questions, he could be rather evasive, and he never

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gave a very direct reply to questions. While he tried to push European ministers to create the Defense Community, I asked him, for instance, "You advised, now, some ministers here in Europe, but what kind of advice would you give to your President at this moment about the maintenance of American forces in Europe?" He was more evasive than I have ever seen a man being evasive. Then, when Eisenhower was President, I had not the opportunity to meet often with him because I was at that time only Ambassador in London, but in any case I knew him. I had, also, the feeling that Eisenhower was very much interested to find solutions with Russia -- on Korea, for instance, to bring the boys home; that was something that went on in his mind, very much so -- and that he looked at these matters from the

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American point of view and not so much from what Europeans might think about all these matters. So, when President Kennedy became President, I found there was quite a change -- change because, with his knowledge of European history and with that quality I described already -- that he was keenly interested in many things; he asked questions, and when he had heard the replies to his questions, he took up the different points and was willing to go into the most complicated details. I thought, "This is a completely different man from what I've seen up to now in Truman and in Eisenhower."

You asked me, also, "Were there any failings?" I think that when there were failings, it was more or less inherent in the function because when I came there to see him as Secretary General of NATO,

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I went to Washington as a sort of multi-lateralized diplomat who had to have always in the back of his mind, "What is going to be the impact on the Alliance -- on each member of the Alliance?" When the President of the United States had to give his opinion, naturally his thinking would be largely, "What is the impact of all these problems on my own country and on the position of the President with Congress?"

Keeping in mind this natural problem which exists when a President has to talk to other people, it was also natural that there was in the beginning a sort of desire to prove that his predecessors had been wrong. That is a normal thing for anybody in politics after you have been fighting a campaign; you have been telling the people that you can do it much better

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than the other man; and, naturally, later you have to prove that you are right and that the other man was wrong. So, it is quite normal that in the beginning there will be an inclination to change everything, to overhaul everything. There, sometimes, people go too far because in an alliance like NATO it's not only the President of the United States who decides, but all countries together decide on what is the best system for all of them. So a certain thing may be wrong from the point of view of the United States, but you can't change an organization, or the philosophy of an organization overnight just because there is a new President coming in. Therefore, in the beginning there were quite some problems, difficulties. I wouldn't say clashes, but it was not an easy situation in the beginning. For

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instance, to be more specific, the main difficulty at that time was the Alliance strategy -- our philosophy on strategy; how should the forces be balanced and divided -- on the one hand conventional, and on the other hand the strategic nuclear forces. I'll go back to this problem later on when I talk a little bit about some of the meetings which I have had. But this was at that time one of the issues. Naturally, it's not the President who can by himself decide all these matters. He needs a staff; he must have all his advisers around him. I believe that Kennedy had a right kind of feeling that he was not only the President of the United States but that he should be in a leading position for the whole Alliance and that he should show leadership for the whole; but the

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shaping of the policy he would like to follow and the execution of this policy on which his whole staff and all the people who are connected with it will have to act depends, to a large extent, on the choice of the people who are going to do that. Some of these men -- I think, for instance, a man like Rusk -- has also that sense of leadership for the whole Alliance, a sense of world leadership. He has that general leadership always in the back of his mind, and he's not so keenly interested in the immediate problems as some of the others, for instance, McNamara, who has in the back of his mind, "I have got to reorganize all the forces which are at the present moment available in the U.S. I've got to reorganize everything also in Europe." Then, it becomes much more difficult. So, I wouldn't say

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that there have been failings, but this is one of the aspects which always should be taken into account when you talk about the impact in the very beginning of President Kennedy on the European theater.

Perhaps I may add at this moment a few words about the relations among the different governments and, specifically, that of the United States with the Secretary General of NATO. The Secretary General, who is the chairman of the Council, has no staff outside the building in Paris. He himself doesn't get any reports from Ambassadors of his own; he has to rely on the information others are willing to give him. You can read a lot of papers, but the

background, the reality of foreign policy as it develops can only be found if you have access to the information from governments themselves. So when I

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was Foreign Secretary myself for several years in Holland and later ambassador in London and then ambassador to NATO. I had for those years always available the background coming in from all the different embassies of the Netherlands. But when I became Secretary General, I was suddenly cut off from that source of information and was at a complete loss. You don't know what is happening anymore. So, one of the first things I did at that time was to have a discussion in the United States to see whether the US could help me out of this difficulty. There is a basis for help from governments. When the report of the Committee of Three in 1956 was accepted -- the NATO report of the "Three Wise Men" who underlined strongly the need to improve the system of consultation in NATO, one of the

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proposals which was accepted by the Council was that each country should keep the Secretary General informed about its policy. On the basis of that Council decision I approached the American Administration and asked them, "Can't you do something to help me out?" My first suggestion was that perhaps I might have a representative in the United States who at the same time could be in a way a representative with the State Department and could be a representative with the NATO Standing Group. Discussing this problem in the State Department, there was understanding for the difficulty which I faced and a willingness to do something about it. There was not great willingness to help me out in the difficulties with the Standing Group. There was, also, a good deal of hesitation that the

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Secretary General should have a personal representative in one of the capitals.

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Finally, it was agreed that there should be developed a system whereby the United States delegation in Paris would give me access to a good deal of the information it received from Washington. This arrangement was later developed so that in my private office we appointed an American Foreign Service officer who had as one of his tasks to read, early in the morning, information which had come in from Washington and to make a choice of the documents which might be of sufficient interest for a Secretary General so that he would know what was going on and, also, so that he would know what the

policy of the United States on these matters. This was of great importance to me during that period. It was on that basis that I was always able to follow the thinking of the State Department on foreign policy, and to know how the President would like matters to be handled.

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I would like to add that in my experience --

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because, naturally, I tried to develop, also, a system with several other governments -- it was specifically the United States which was extremely helpful to me in this way. On the other hand, it gave me, also, the opportunity to see at an early moment already developments in the United States' opinions. When I thought they were wrong, I could make some noises about it and make some suggestions -- "Well, is it wise to do it at this moment?" We developed a sort of two-way traffic. When I received information, naturally I could use it in discussions on such problems and, without quoting any specific country, in any case make it clear that I had information about what repercussions might be in other countries. In a way, the Secretary General, when he gets

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information about the thinking of the President and the State Department and the Pentagon, and known what is going on in other countries, can be a link, can sometimes be helpful in avoiding difficulties. As the Secretary General has, also, the right of initiative, sometimes he can bring about some solutions which otherwise might have been difficult to find.

Now, coming back to one of the first questions you asked me, I think one of them was, "What was in my experience the impact of President Kennedy on Europe?" I think that Kennedy was, by hi character, by his knowledge of history, and by the many times that he had been in Europe, a man who was much nearer to the thinking of a great many statesmen in Europe than other

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Presidents before him had been. Thus there was an opening for many other statesmen in Europe to talk frankly and freely with him about their difficulties. He had keen interest and understanding of European problems. He was not a man who, himself, wanted to impose his opinions on others; he was willing to listen and then try to explain how, perhaps, difficulties could be solved. I think, therefore, that, although there were difficulties in the beginning, Kennedy had great influence on the shaping of policy in the Western World.

GETZ: Mr. Stikker, you spoke just now of President Kennedy's relations with European statesmen and some of the influence he may have had on them through his understanding and inquiring approach to intergovernmental relations.

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I wonder if you think that he had any impression on General de Gaulle [Charles de Gaulle]?

STIKKER: During all the discussions I had with President Kennedy, we covered a wide range of problems, like consultation, Cuba, the Far East, Berlin, and the relations with Russia. But often, also, the problem came up of what other statesmen might think about certain problems. There is one aspect which perhaps I should explain: naturally, private discussions between the leading statesmen in the world are of great importance. But, when these discussions become too private and when there are only two people present -- perhaps an interpreter also, that may lead to quite a substantial amount of misunderstanding. I know this to be true, because I've seen reports about confidential conversations

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between two of the leading statesmen of the world. I've seen such reports from both sides. Now, of course I can't reveal the details. But, the two reports about the same discussion, which I saw a couple of days after the discussion took place, were in complete contradiction. When two men, with nobody else present, have a discussion, I think they should be very careful what they say. They should be very precise in their expressions. To be very precise in his wording is not very much in the character of *le General* de Gaulle; de Gaulle likes to speak in rather vague terms which can be explained in many ways. At one of my discussions with Kennedy on rather broad subjects, the President asked me in the beginning, "Well, do you know what de Gaulle is thinking about?" That is

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something I always find difficult because, when I really know what he thinks, then I've heard it in confidence, and I shouldn't pass it on to others. It's a question which should be handled not through an intermediary. I can only inform others when I have the permission of either a President or *le General* de Gaulle or Prime Minister Macmillan [Harold Macmillan] if they allowed me to repeat what they have said to me. The Secretary General shouldn't go further. When I was a little bit evasive at that moment on this specific point, President Kennedy asked me at a certain moment, "What do you think about de Gaulle?" I thought that I couldn't do better than to repeat to him that not so very long ago General de Gaulle had asked me, "What do you think about President Kennedy?" I

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explained to President Kennedy that I had made it rather clear to de Gaulle that I was somewhat disturbed that I should express an opinion to one leader of a country what my thoughts were about another leader of one of the members of the Alliance. So I answered in some very nice words. I repeated to President Kennedy what I had said to de Gaulle. When I went on talking and talking about what I thought about Kennedy, finally, de Gaulle, when he felt that he hadn't got what he wanted, interrupted my story, and said, "*En tous cas, c'est un homme responsible."* I was just about to explain this to President Kennedy when he interrupted me and said, "Is my French all right that the translation of '*en tous cas, c'est un homme responsible,'* is 'I may be a son of a bitch, but in any case I am a son of a bitch with some kind of responsibility.'" I answered to Kennedy that his knowledge of French was quite right and that this was a very fair translation. On the other hand, I explained to him that, in these words of being a man of responsibility, there was much more than appeared on the surface. After my interview with de Gaulle, I had asked Guy Mollet, one of the leaders of the Socialist Party in France who had been with de Gaulle in the beginning when he came back in '58 and who had helped de Gaulle on the amendments to the French Constitution, "Can you explain to me the meaning of those words? I can't follow what it means to say that in any case he's a man of responsibility." Guy Mollet said, "Well, there is much more behind it. When I was with him in the French Cabinet --

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he was then Prime Minister, not President -- he agreed to be Prime Minister on the basis that there should be a change in the French Constitution. When he asked me to help in the drafting of that constitution, he wanted to have a special clause in the French Constitution, which you'll now find in Article Sixteen of the French Constitution. He wanted to have a special clause which gave to the President of France in extreme situations -- either in relation to French internal problems or when there were problems outside -- special powers so that he should have in his hands the full responsibility for whatever might happen." Guy Mollet went on explaining this to me. He had asked, "Is that absolutely necessary? Shouldn't there be several checks on that power? The power the President has obtained under this new

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Article Sixteen of the Constitution is now practically without any check." De Gaulle said, "Well, we should remember what happened in 1940 after the debacle of France and after the Germans had overrun Holland and Belgium and Norway. When I compare what happened in France with, for instance, what happened in Holland, at that time nobody in France was able to take any decision -- not Lebrun [Albert Lebrun], who was the President, not Reynaud [Paul Reynaud], who was Prime Minister. There was just hesitation; nobody had any responsibility, and that is the real reason why we had to be in that difficult position during the War. When you compare it with what happened in Holland where Queen Wilhelmina left the country and took with her the full responsibility for her country in her

own hands to London, there you have what I need. That's what I want because that is the only way to be able to do something in critical circumstances." There you see what I explained to President Kennedy. There you see what he really meant when he talked about a man of responsibility; it's the man who really can decide at critical moments what is necessary for the country. In a way, it also proves that he was rather jealous of the power which rests under the American Constitution in the hands of the President, although there are checks, and he wanted at least similar powers. Therefore, he always had in his mind that the responsibility of the man who is in charge is of the greatest importance.

GETZ: Mr. Stikker, a few moments ago you mentioned Kennedy policies in the Far East

and other parts of the world. I wonder if you could say a few words on how you saw those policies, for example, with regard to New Guinea and Angola, and how they affected NATO?

STIKKER: This is a very serious question. This is the problem of the colonial issue, and I think this problem has often bedeviled the working of NATO. If I have to explain that, I have to go a little bit in detail about the period before Kennedy was there and say, for instance, what my own attitude was on the transfer of sovereignty over Indonesia.

When I became Foreign Secretary in '48, I had been fighting, as chairman of the Liberal Party, on a platform that we should change the Constitution of the Netherlands. This change of the Constitution was necessary in order to transfer sovereignty

over Indonesia. I had come, myself, to the conclusion that this transfer should take place, but I had also come to the conclusion that it only could take place if it was done on a rather orderly basis so that a consequence of the transfer would be no revolution, no Communism, but would be for peace and justice and for the well-being of the country. Naturally, as the Netherlands had been in Indonesia for more than 300 years in 1948, they had some experience of the country. They knew the people. I had been there, myself, at least twenty times in my life. We felt that we knew what was the best way to handle it. Anybody who had followed the election campaigns in that time might expect that, by accepting a change in the Constitution, there was a clear willingness to find a

reasonable way to transfer sovereignty. A few days after I came in the office, without having talked to anybody, the United States representative in Indonesia published a statement and gave it to the Netherlands and to the Indonesian leaders at that time about the way in which the United States thought this transfer should take place. We had received, before this publication, a definite promise that there would be no interference without prior consultation. And there we were faced with a paper in which there were many points with which we could agree but where there were also points on which we could not agree. The government decided that we must know what the position of the United States was. I went over to the United States -- I think about three weeks after I'd come

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in the office -- General Marshall [George C. Marshall] was at that time Secretary of State. When I saw General Marshall and complained about this publication of the text, he replied -- I don't want to take too long now on a problem about which I am going to write later -- "Well, Mr. Stikker, we have now for about three months had people on the spot. We have consults; we have military advisers; we have a member on the committee for Indonesia; and they all have come to the same conclusion that this is the best way to handle it." Then I said, "That means to say that you have now had experience for three months. Does it mean anything to you that we have experience for about three hundred years?" -- which was a clear indication that I was not feeling very agreeable. He said, "Well, these

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things have to be done. It's just like Marshall Aid; these things are not popular." I didn't agree because I thought Marshall Aid was easily accepted in '48 by Congress. He went on, "This had to be done. This is also a case where things which have to be done can be done. It's a problem of the right kind of presentation to your Parliament." I think that this discussion was finally the reason why there was conflict of opinion between the United States and the Netherlands on how to handle the problem of a transfer, under the right conditions, of sovereignty over Indonesia to Indonesian leaders. This also was the reason why there was conflict there and why we started what was called a "second police action," which, to my mind, could have been avoided. But the

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United States had so definitely made up its mind that this was the way to handle the problem that there was no chance to do it on the right basis. Well, we can see the consequences now. I don't know whether Indonesia is a very happy country at the present moment. I don't think that the relations between the United States and Sukarno [Achmed Sukarno] are very bright and brilliant at the present time. I don't believe there is any gratitude for what the United States did at that time to transfer power, finally, to Sukarno and his people. But these are the kind of issues which can create so much difficulty in relations between the United States and

some of the European countries who have had to deal with the colonial problem. It has never affected my personal feelings

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of the friendship I have had always for the United States, of appreciation for the Marshall Aid, and of the need to work together in an Alliance. It has never in any way affected my position on all these matters, but it's a fact. Now, this is one of the issues on which I have my own private, personal experience, and I wouldn't like to express any opinion on experience which other countries might have because you must know all the details, and you must have lived with the problem for a long time to express an opinion.

But, this kind of thing affects a great many people. It was the same with the Suez affair. I was mixed up in it because I was Ambassador in London, and I was Vice Chairman of that strange organization, the Suez Canal Users Association. I attended all those

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conferences and meetings, and there I also believe there were mistakes. Now, mistakes are never only on one side; there are always mistakes on both sides, so don't think at the present moment that I want to say that the United States has always been wrong. But these matters cause problems.

I had discussions, coming back to your question, on New Guinea and on Angola with President Kennedy. I once raised the problem of New Guinea with him and asked him to show more understanding not only for the internal domestic politics of his allies but also for future developments in these areas which the allies might expect. I made similar remarks about the Angola problem, and I talked several times to a great many problem at length about the Angola problem because

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all the Allies need to be extremely careful that such issues do not disturb the unity of the Alliance; that there should never be rigid positions where only one is right. I know that one of the foreign secretaries has sometimes complained to me on these matters. He used the expression that sometimes when you meet that "holier than thou" attitude, it just encourages situations which are wrong for the Alliance because people just cannot accept it; they are basically convinced that their opinions are justified by the circumstances and by the moral basis under which they are defending their interests. So, when they meet that feeling, "Well, we know better" and "This has to be done," it creates a dangerous situation. I could always have completely frank and free discussions on these matters with Kennedy,

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but I do not think that I influenced in any way his policy on such matters.

GETZ: Mr. Stikker, I know from experience your intense interest in the development of political consultation in NATO, even to the point of your saying that, if the member nations would live up entirely to the report of the "Three Wise Men,' which, after all, they did approve, this would solve most of the problems of the Alliance. Could you give us a few words on what you and President Kennedy talked about with regard to this subject?

STIKKER: In the discussions I have had with President Kennedy on the system of political consultation, I have indeed, as you said, always held the view that the existing system and the theory of consultation is quite sufficient and that it depends more on the will of the different

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countries to consult than on a better organization of consultation. The report of the "Three Wise Men" and the flexibility of the treaty makes the organization of the work of the Council completely open. There is complete flexibility. I do not believe that there is any need for a change of the treaty or the organization itself. It depends on the will of the members. I think, on this issue, there was no disagreement -- there has never been any disagreement -- between President Kennedy and myself.

When you look at the practice of consultation in the last years, I think there are new developments in NATO. Sometimes ministers of foreign affairs come to the Council on issues which they consider to be of such importance that they would like to explain their

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views, their standpoints, to the other members of the Alliance; they are willing to do so even if only the permanent representatives of the other countries are present. They want to explain their position. I think that has been especially the case with Belgium. My predecessor Spaak [Paul-Henri Spaak], who knows the Alliance so well, at the present moment gives the best example of how consultation should take place. Also, from the side of the United States this has often been the case. I say very often because sometimes there have been exceptions. The handling of consultation in the Council makes the discussion sometimes difficult when not all ambassadors or all ministers take part in the discussion of a certain subject, and just kept silent. There you have one of the great issues:

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What is the meaning of the ambassadorial silence? Does it mean to say they agree with the man who has opened the discussion? Does it mean to say they do not agree with his views? Does it mean they would prefer to keep out of the difficulty and not be committed in any way? I must say that, sometimes, the United States has not taken part fully in discussions when, to my mind, it was necessary that they should have done so, or, perhaps I might be a little bit more precise, that they should have done so at an earlier stage.

It is quite natural that on very grave issues consultation is difficult. I think, for instance, about Cuba. I was ill, myself, at that time so I can't say definitely that my opinion, which I give now, is right because I was not in the Council, I was in the hospital. The consultation on Cuba, just before the

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decisions were taken and published, could not have come earlier because there must always be an element of surprise in this kind of action. It's just impossible to do anything else. I think on the whole that everybody -- all members of the Alliance -- had full understanding for the action decided by President Kennedy. I, personally, admired the way he handled it so that without making it impossible for Russia to withdraw, he still made them come back to earlier positions. It was a masterful way of handling a very difficult position.

This type of problem can also be handled in such a way that, in any case, the Secretary General is aware of it so that he can know whether it will be necessary to have immediate consultation.

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There are also situations like the landing in Lebanon. I was at that time still ambassador to NATO. There was enough information available so that anybody with understanding of what was going on could see what was coming. If people do no express an opinion even when they are in doubt what the real meaning is, it's not the responsibility of those who have given the indication that something might happen; it's the fault of those who later on might complain about action; it's the fault of those who have not asked for further clarification, and who probably would have got it.

On the whole, I think that the United States has consulted in such a way that there are a few causes for complaint. Sometimes documents which

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had to be handed out arrived too late. There have been moments, as in certain discussions between Ambassador Thompson [Llewellyn E. Thompson] and Gromyko [Andrei A. Gromyko]. I once complained to President Kennedy that we were informed, perhaps, too late, and that other countries would have preferred much earlier information. But, in general again, I believe that there was full agreement between President Kennedy and me, as representative of the Alliance, that it depends only on the will of the countries to turn this NATO system from theory into reality. The United States often has sent a man like Under Secretary Ball [George W. Ball] over to the Council who can explain the position on Vietnam as he has done a short while ago, I think, from what I saw in the press. This arrangement was

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developed in Kennedy's time, and Kennedy had a full understanding of the need for this open discussion on the most serious problems.

On the other hand, I still have in mind some occasions when the United States kept silent and when it would have been better to have spoken out, or where the US was a little bit late in giving the information which was needed. Sometimes there were discussions in the United States that there might be a completely different body which should talk on long-term and short-term policy, but I'm very happy that there was always full agreement between President Kennedy and me, as Secretary General at that time, that for all these problems of consultation it was only the NATO Council which was the right place; there you could have

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a free exchange of views between those who represented their governments. On the whole, on consultation I've had complaints in my time about other governments, but I don't think that it can be said that the United States did not consult in time -- not of a serious character in any case.

GETZ: Mr. Stikker, your references to Cuba and President Kennedy's handling of that subject and, then, relating this to the role of the Council in consultation between the member governments recalls to me a reference in one of the records of your conversation with President Kennedy before the Athens Ministerial Council meeting in 1962. You discussed with President Kennedy guidelines for the use of nuclear weapons. You were using the term "guidelines" even before

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it became, shall we say, official in the sense of being adopted by the Council. I wonder if you would expand on this a little bit in relation to your conversation with President Kennedy?

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STIKKER: I think when I talk about strategy and President Kennedy, I should go back to the beginning when he took office as President and the situation as it then existed and developed later on. I think the documents on which the Alliance has based its policy -- the strategic concept and the political directive -- were decided in '56 or '57. For many years there has been a conviction that since that time we had a definite strategy -- forward strategy and immediate retaliation. Anybody who looked that the records of that time -- '56 and '57 when these decisions were taken -- would find that there is nothing very definite about it. When the political directive and the strategic concept were discussed in the

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Council, the representative of one of the countries stated that this problem of immediate retaliation when too far and that he couldn't agree. (It was not the United States at that time.) So, he suggested that there should be a change in the words. Then Lord Ismay -- so it must have been in '56, I think -- in that Council meeting said, "Let us then take note of this document which has been prepared by our military authorities. They express in that document an opinion. Now, when you take note of an opinion expressed by military authorities, it does not necessarily mean that you approve it." This went even too far for that country, and he said, 'All right. If that is the reading of this document, that we only take note of an opinion expressed by military authorities, then I won't object, provided that my ideas that immediate retaliation is wrong are also being written down in the records and that every word which has been said in this Council meeting is part of the decision."

END LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

There you have, already, the vagueness

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of these decisions. Therefore, all those who in 1961 said, "Well now, here is going to be a definite change" or "we must change it", have been wrong right from the beginning. When the Kennedy Administration came in with the idea that many things had to be changed and, certainly, the NATO strategy, I always felt "Well, you are talking about philosophy and theory, but, for heaven's sake, if we start talking about philosophy and theory, you'll get lost, and you'll do a lot of harm to the credibility of the Alliance." That coincided with difficulties on Berlin. When the problem was raised that there should be a "threshold" -- or a "pause", or all these terms which were then being used -- and that Europe had no need for nuclear

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weapons because all the targets which were essential to Europe could be covered from somewhere else, and that there was only need for a build-up of conventional forces, I got more and more worried, and I thought, "What impact is this going to have on the ideas of the Russians about the unity in our Alliance?" So I suggested to President Kennedy in one of my earlier discussions, I think it was in'61, that we should not start long discussions on theory. For heaven's sake, I said, let's try to find some system which gives more information to the European members, which gives guarantees to European members, and where we can talk about certain guidelines. Let's, at the same time, look at the facts, whether we can do something more to build up the

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conventional forces. Most probably, I was too early and did not take into account at that time that it was a new President who had come into office after a campaign in which NATO

strategy was quite an important issue although, naturally, in the United States, as in most countries, domestic issues are of more importance than foreign issues. But, at that time there was little reaction, specifically, also, because McNamara, in charge of the reorganization of the whole US defense system, wanted to go ahead and do whatever he could. Sometimes, he made statements which to my mind went a little bit too far. The timing was bad because in that period in '61 we had a Berlin crisis. It was a serious situation. In that period I was, sometimes, sitting with General

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Norstad [Lauris Norstad] the whole day listening to the telephone where news came in every three minutes about what happened on the Autostrada between Helmstedt and Berlin and what should be done. Should we take action because armed forces of the United States were being held up for hour after hour? There was quite a serious situation that time. We started to discuss already certain measures so that the Russians could see that there were movements going on and that we just were not going to sit down and accept as a *fait accompli* that we could not pass along the road. Now, to introduce in that period complications on a philosophy which would not have any influence on the military situation as it existed at that time but which might have an impact after a

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couple of years, I've always believed was wrong.

[END OF TAPE -- SIDE I]

GETZ: Mr. Stikker, I wonder if you think that President Kennedy, personally, had a real grasp of these strategic questions beyond that which was provided to him by his advisors.

STIKKER: Without a doubt. Every time I talked about strategy with President Kennedy he fully grasped all the details, all the aspects of it, all the problems of resources and requirements, all the problems of targeting, all the problems of veto and the McMahon Act -- he was fully aware of all these problems. Therefore, it was not only interesting to talk about these matters with him, but I'd say that I learned a lot in these discussions and that it always

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surprised me that Kennedy had a very open mind on such matters and never started from the principle that what he felt was the only way and that was the end of it. It was a frank discussion; it was an exchange of views. That was the most revealing and the most agreeable part of these discussions -- more so than I've encountered in many other countries.

However, that may be, the fact that the emphasis in the US turned to conventional forces at that time created quite some concern in the Alliance -- concern which was even more complicated because at that time the military advice we had received from General Norstad was that there was a need in NATO for at least six or eight hundred medium-range ballistic missiles. The opinion of the new Administration was that there was no

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need for them; perhaps they might develop a missile "X" to meet the need; we never knew exactly what it was going to be; but the full emphasis, for the time being, was on an increase in the conventional forces in Europe. Now, the combination of this difference of opinion between the Administration and SACEUR, the 1961 crisis around Berlin, and that wide field of problems which we had to go into about the need and, if so, finding a new type of NATO strategy, I think, harmed the credibility of our unity and of our whole defense system at that time.

Basically, naturally, Russia has always known about the enormous nuclear potential of the United States. Basically, I am convinced, Russia has always accepted, more than some European leaders

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have sometimes indicated, that the United States would be quite ready to use the bomb in case Europe really was going to be attacked. So, basically, I am convinced that SAC [Strategic Air Command] and all the weapons available there have provided the protection for the whole Alliance. But, nevertheless, these psychological difficulties did harm, and it would have been better to avoid them. I have always tried to avoid probing NATO strategy and philosophy -- and theology, I even called it once in a meeting -- and tried to move forward step by step.

The first things which to my mind needed to be done -- and easily could be done without changing in any way systems -- was that the United States should give its Allies much more information on

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the handling of nuclear affairs. In the second place, the US should guarantee that the targets which were essential to us -- to Europe -- were covered. And, thirdly, there should be consultation on the use of the bomb anywhere in the world. I discussed these matters several times with President Kennedy, and also the Pentagon in the end, I think it was a good thing that in essence we could agree on guidelines; first of all, we agreed on the information, then on the guarantee, then on the consultation, and finally also on certain guidelines for the use of the bomb. I think the text of the guidelines are generally known. It was a setback that France considered these guidelines of no importance. France was content to receive information, to receive a guarantee,

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and to listen when consultation on the bomb took place. That created difficulties in the Council, but we found a formula for it so that the others, in any case, went ahead.

When I talk about these matters, then it becomes clear that the Secretary General, when he has the right information, under his right of initiative can perhaps sometimes achieve some results. I am still of the opinion that the Athens meeting give some results and gave some assurance to European countries who were getting nervous about all these matters. Where we could not come to any result was on the problem of the political decision to use the bomb. There you are right in the middle of the McMahon Act. There you are in the problem of the veto. We discussed this problem at length, and

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there have been changes in attitudes. It was clear that in the Council the countries were not willing to agree to delegate the power to the President of the United States. It also was clear that they could not accept a majority decision. It also was clear that they could not accept a system of weighted votes. So, there was nothing left but to try and work out some general guidelines. This problem is still with us; it's unsolved.

Equally with us is the problem of the medium-range ballistic missiles. When, to the regret of many Europeans, General Norstad left us, he was succeeded by General Lemnitzer [Lyman L. Lemnitzer]. Contrary to what many Europeans expected, General Lemnitzer, instead of saying that he did not need MRBM's increased the original number of MRBM's needed according to the opinion of General Norstad. So, these matters,

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because they are unsolved, have their impact on the cohesion, the unity, of the Alliance.

Lack of cohesion is also a point I sometimes raised with President Kennedy; the fact that there is one of our members -- France -- which likes to play on certain situations and, when there is disunity, certainly does nothing to restore unity. To the contrary, it likes this position. When you see in Germany at the present moment the beginning of a certain amount of national interest -- nationalistic interest -- in nuclear weapons…. as, for instance, shown by Strauss [Franz Joseph Strauss] or Guttenberg [Baron Karl Theodor von Guttenberg]. Gutenberg in one of his books, for instance, writes about a more aggressive policy from the West against Russia, in his book, "If the

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West only wanted…." he gives as an example of this aggressive policy that, if there have to be new discussions with Russia on non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, the best thing would be to start with some real proliferation. That means to say that Germany, in his mind, I believe, should get the bomb, and then see how it could use the situation as a weapon to try to achieve some positive results with Russia. I believe this is the sort of "brinkmanship"

which we should not risk. Such matters were quite frankly discussed between President Kennedy and me, and how we could handle the situation. Most problems had many aspects. For example the problem of the medium-range ballistic missiles was not only mixed up with the attitudes of France and Germany; it

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involved also the opinions of Macmillan and the Nassau agreement. The Nassau agreement was, as we all know, followed by the French veto on the entry of the United Kingdom into the Common Market. It was involved, also, with the problem of whether we should have MRBM's and what is now called the Multilateral Force. You can have these medium-range ballistic missiles land-based or sea-based. If sea-based, you can have them on subs or on the surface.

All these matters were related to each other. After the press conference where de Gaulle vetoed UK entry, I always held the view and defended it with the President -- and I think he agreed with me at that time -- that we never should stop trying to make more progress in the Common Market because

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there was a veto; that we should never stop trying to make progress in what is now called the Kennedy Round; that these two concepts are stronger than de Gaulle himself, and in the Common Market we a long time ago reached the point of no return. France cannot come back on it, or it would do tremendous harm to its own industry and its own economy. Often there are people who say, "Well, we have to try and find something to give way to make a compromise with de Gaulle." I never believed in these compromises with de Gaulle, and I explained that very clearly. I think, also, the President agreed. Under the NATO system we do not have to accept that there is a rule of unanimity in NATO. I've always held the view that,

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as we can see in Article 3 and Article 5 of the Treaty, individual or collective measures are provided for. In Article 5 on mutual support it is said that each country, individually or collectively, does what it "deems necessary to do."... That gives complete freedom of action under these articles for each country or for a combination of countries to do what they wish. The only time that you find in the Treaty the word "unanimously" is on the admission of a new member -- that's in Article 11. Otherwise, it's nowhere mentioned that there is a need for unanimity. When you combine this aspect -- that there is no rule of unanimity in NATO -- with the development, for instance, of a great many NATO production and logistic organizations composed of a certain number of members -- they have their own rules;

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they have their own budget; they have their own staff -- there is nothing which prescribes that there should always be unanimity. In some cases unanimity is needed, but we should never hold back other allies from going ahead if, for instance, France or the United States or the United Kingdom would not like to join in a certain action -- in a joint action. Naturally, it's always much better to be together in every new enterprise we are going into, but in principle it's not necessary.

For that reason, when discussions were starting after the Nassau agreement -- the Nassau Communique -- on what was called at that time the Inter-Allied Nuclear Force and the Multilateral Force, I always felt that, whatever the attitude of France might be, the others had complete liberty to go on wherever they wanted to go. The Nassau Communique mentioned these two aspects: the Inter-Allied

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Nuclear Force and the Multilateral Force. I had always hoped that, in any case, working on the theory of going forward step by step, if something could be done, we should do it straightaway because it's better to have some movement instead of having one aspect waiting on the other. The system agreed upon in Nassau was that there should be parallel examination of the MLF and the MRBM ideas. I've often tried to persuade the United States not to be too strict about it and that we could achieve results in one aspect and later on, perhaps, in the other. After long discussions with McNamara, who had similar views to my own on this point, finally the President agreed. That is the reason why now another step forward has been taken -- that there has been created an Inter-Allied Nuclear Force. This, again, gives more information to a group of European officers who are working at the

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present in SAC and are aware of what is going on there. It has led to a change in the staff of SACEUR. For these ideas in the discussions I had with President Kennedy I always got his full support. I think we can be grateful that he took these decisions because you have to move on; standing still is wrong for an organization like the Alliance.

On the other hand, where I never completely agreed was on the procedure under which the problem of the Multilateral Force has been handled. I've nothing against a multilateral force, but it should never be handled in such a way that, on purpose, members are excluded from being present. Anything which is under discussion in NATO should be open; it should be free; anybody should be present, even if you know that some of the countries do not like a certain system. I think it was even worse when it went so far that the

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eight countries who were in the beginning talking about the MLF, willing to accept the presence of the Secretary General as a person, during their discussions, were not willing to accept French members of the NATO International Staff to be present to help me on legal issues or on military issues. There, I think that a mistake was made, specifically, by the

United States because it was mainly responsible, I think, for the decision that members of the International Staff could not take part in the discussion because of their nationality. That affected the whole aspect of the International Staff, and was unacceptable point. So, I was never present and refused to be present from that moment in any of the discussions on MLF, and I don't know exactly how it has developed and what the results have been. I explained that once to President Kennedy,

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but, as I did not take part in the discussions on MFL, our discussions were inconclusive.

Still, I am of the opinion that President Kennedy fully agreed that it was better to forget for the time being about a philosophy of the strategy and to concentrate on the facts: what forces are needed; what resources are available. When these two are compared, then, finally, what should be a reconciliation? If the forces are not sufficient for a certain strategy, then you have to develop another kind of strategy. But at the present moment progress is slow in that direction. But there is some progress.

On the other hand, the International Staff always got full support from the United States in these matters. I think there is a reason for this support because, originally, going back to the beginning of NATO, when Europe was economically weak, when the Marshall aid

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had not yet had its impact -- specifically, in the time when Marshall aid was changed in the Military Defense Assistance program, when a good deal of military aid was given -- then, when these decisions were accepted by Congress, and the first billion dollars were made available for European members of the Alliance…. At that time Congress said, "We can agree, but the President must agree on the plans of the European countries." That's the time when the so-called "Master Defense Plan" was developed, and Truman could declare at that time that he agreed to the Master Defense Plan. Making that declaration on the Master Defense Plan, he also accepted a certain amount of responsibility for what was being done in Europe. A great deal of responsibility for the whole system of the defense -- that means also to say not only for the forces but also for the

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strategy -- rests with the United States more than with any of the other countries because it was responsible for the whole original planning system for the Master Defense Plan.

What I sometimes worried about, and what I explained often to McNamara and, also to the President, was that most of these systems had specific historical origins -- there were certain forces available, countries could do certain things -- but there was never a thorough study of what should be the best way to balance these forces so that each contribution would fit into the over all picture. I think this is basically now also the theory of the whole McNamara strategy. I would hope that in the end these ideas, which, naturally, were

developed with the full consent of President Kennedy, could also be a future concept by which European countries could work.

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GETZ: Mr. Stikker, in your various discussions with President Kennedy did you ever take up the subject of a reorganization of NATO -- a subject which is written about and spoken about so often?

STIKKER: Well, we spoke several times of the need to reorganize the NATO organization. I expressed some views to Kennedy on this matter, in response to his questions, and then in the end of the discussion he gave some of his ideas. My views have mainly been that with the flexibility as it exists in the treaty at the present moment, with the theory developed in the basic documents -- like the "Three Wise Men" report of 1956 -- the Council has every possibility to move ahead, and that it only depends on the will of the members of the Alliance whether we achieve results. That will has been often very strong; sometimes it's weak; and sometimes

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it becomes stronger when there is tension. I've often said that under certain circumstances our best ally has been Mr. Khrushchev [Nikita S. Khrushchev] because the moment he increased tension members of the Alliance were willing to move ahead much faster than otherwise. Now, this problem of the will of countries…. I do not believe there is anything that you could put on paper which could increase that will. It's something which exists in a country, which exists in the mind of statesmen. It's the whole business of international law -- international law and order. You will have international law if the countries are willing to cooperate; at the present moment there are some countries which attach such importance to their independence that the will to cooperate in an Alliance is far less than it used to be. I've always seen NATO, just as the United Nations

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organization, as one of the ways in which we might try better to organize international law because it's only when we have a sound basis for international law that we can have peace and freedom and justice. The United Nations is in difficulty -- serious difficulty -- and nobody can yet say if a solution can be found for it. Now what we should do -- all of us -- is to prevent NATO from getting in difficulty. If we were to start discussions on amending the treaty or changing the organization, I think we would get into deep water. We know that General de Gaulle would like to have a triumvirate, and, when he made his declaration -- or his statement -- to the United States and to the United Kingdom in '58, he indicated that only in case his wishes for the creation of a triumvirate were met would he be willing to continue to cooperate fully in NATO. As a matter

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of fact, he made that cooperation dependent on the fulfillment of his wishes for the creation of a triumvirate. This has been a point which I discussed several times with President Kennedy. I think he also had the opinion that a triumvirate would not solve the problem because, also, in a triumvirate you depend again on the will to cooperate. When you can't find a solution with fourteen or others, why should it be possible to find a solution with three when the opinions are completely different on basic problems? On the other hand, also the creation of a triumvirate might shy away a good man of the members who were not in that triumvirate; they would not know what was happening; and it might slow down the will to try to find solutions or to do something for the common defense. Basically, the principle of NATO is that

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states are equal -- equal sovereign powers -- and I believe that should not be changed. In one of my discussions with President Kennedy he told me that he certainly agreed with that point of view.

The problem is, naturally, how we can move ahead in the future with a situation where France has different views. I explained earlier that there is no principle of a rule of unanimity in the Alliance. Therefore, I believe that we should not try to force the hand of France; neither should France try to force the hand of all the others. Accepting that there are differences of opinion, I think we should always work on a basis of mutual respect. It is not necessary that we are always right, and the other is always wrong -- but it works vice versa. If there is no agreement, let's mutually respect the different opinions. Why couldn't we

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work on a basis of mutual forbearance? I think those are the terms on which we should look to the future on this very difficult matter. It would naturally become much more difficult if other members of the Alliance were to follow the example of France. The impression many people have at the present moment is that, wherever there is a problem, France tries to find a way to express an opinion in a different way from that of the United States -- always to make it clear that France wants to be independent and to show her independence, sometimes even when she must be fully aware that she is not right; she tries to show independence by saying something in which she can't really believe. These are the problems I often discussed with President Kennedy, and I think this idea of mutual respect and mutual forbearance is

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the best way to handle it. Nobody will live forever as de Gaulle himself said some time ago at one of his press conferences. Perhaps there will be again a change in the attitudes in French politics. Nobody can say; it has changed before. You see all sorts of changes in the

world; there is nothing permanent. Let's only hope that NATO, itself, will be permanent and that we can maintain the unity of NATO.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

~~SECRET~~

ADDRESS OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS TO
THE SECRETARY OF STATE
WASHINGTON 25, D. C.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
WASHINGTON

Private file
Shows some
deletions/remarks
added to
the report

SECRET - INFORMAL - OFFICIAL

Dear George:

There is attached the Memorandum of Conversation which we promised to make available to Mr. Stikker during his visit. While this draft has not received final approval, I have been authorized to send it to you as an uncleared Memorandum of Conversation. I should point out that a Memorandum of Conversation was done only for the main part of the meeting with the President.

Sincerely yours,

Foy

Foy D. Kohler
Assistant Secretary

Enclosure:

As stated.

George S. Vest, Esquire,
Special Assistant to
the NATO Secretary-General,
USRO,
Paris.

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Washington, October 16, 1963

Memorandum of conversation with President Kennedy

Present with the Secretary General: Ambassador Finletter
Mr. Schaetzel
Mr. Getz
Mr. van Hollen

The Secretary General met with the President at 10 o'clock for about one hour.

After some preliminary conversation, the Secretary General took up the subjects of:

1. NATO Force Planning

The Secretary General reviewed for the President the history of the force planning exercise as it had developed in the Council and in the corridors and outlined for him what he considered to be the advantages and disadvantages of the present solution.

This led to a discussion of France's rôle in NATO and the Secretary General stated that neither he nor any of the members of the Alliance should engage in open conflict with the French. They should rather develop a system of mutual forbearance. He recounted for the President, in stating his views on de Gaulle's thinking, his conversation with de Gaulle which was followed by a meeting with Guy Mollet and the latter's elaboration of de Gaulle's attitudes on independence and the President's responsibility as reflected in the present French constitution.

The Secretary General continued that de Gaulle will not change and that NATO's work must go on; de Gaulle should be persuaded to permit the other nations to develop the degree of integration they desire without attempting to interfere. The problem is how to get this understanding across to de Gaulle. The Secretary General said that he simply does not exist to de Gaulle, Pompidou and Couve de Murville as Secretary General of NATO and suggested that this could only be brought home to de Gaulle at the very highest level.

In reply to the President's question as to the advantages de Gaulle might see in the Secretary General's proposal, the latter replied that naturally de Gaulle is not happy about the attacks by other countries on the French force de frappe and other French leaders are unhappy about what they see as French isolation from the other allies.

The President then asked why de Gaulle is displeased with the force planning exercise, to which the Secretary General replied that according to French thinking this exercise would in effect sit in judgment on French military policy and planning. The President then asked if the force planning document could not be reworded so as to be less offensive to de Gaulle. The Secretary General replied that in such a case the French might agree to broad principles but would still frustrate the implementation of the plan.

The President then asked if we could not go ahead without the French and the Secretary General explained difficulties by pointing out that we presently have, e.g. a problem with the French in the Standing Group, reflecting the French desire to get their views on strategy fixed at an early stage in the operation and this would frustrate the entire exercise.

The President then asked if we did not indeed want just such a study undertaken, i.e. to study and determine the strategy which would then be a basis for developing forces.

At this point, since the President had apparently not been thoroughly briefed on the concept of the force planning exercise, the reconciliation of strategy, requirements and resources, Ambassador Finletter intervened to attempt to clarify the matter.

The Secretary General then continued to explain the manner in which he and Mr. McNamara hope to proceed, starting with an instruction by McNamara to the American representative in the Standing Group with regard to directives to the Major NATO Commanders.

He then pointed out the kind of result he hoped to see from this exercise and used as an illustration the figures recently developed by the International Staff regarding the number of divisions obtained for a certain expenditure of money in Europe as compared to the US. This raised the whole question of quantity as opposed to quality and demonstrated the necessity for going ahead with the studies.

When the President then asked what would follow the strategic appraisal, the Secretary General said that the three factors of strategy, requirements and resources must be reconciled during the whole exercise and noted that the International Staff is e.g. already working on resources data.

Ambassador Finletter added that it was important in the US interest to proceed with this, since there was high political importance in attempting to diminish or eliminate American complaints of European performance and European criticism of the US. Such an improvement could be the product of the entire exercise.

2. MLF

The Secretary General began by saying that he wished to make two points: the first was that the thinking on the control of the MLF still seemed to be centered on the concept of the veto for each participant. After referring in some detail to his preoccupations about political trends in Italy and also acknowledging that the US cannot give up its veto, he asked if this subject could not be treated on a partnership basis; the US could then maintain its veto, but the European participants as a group could also have the same authority; basically he was arguing that each individual European country should not be able to veto.

The Secretary General's second point was to ask if the MLF would not meet to a large extent SACEUR's desire for MRBMs. At this point the Secretary General went through his "numbers game" on MRBMs for the President and then pointed out how unlikely it is that a European country would in any event accept the installation of these weapons on their territories. He mentioned that he would be speaking to Chancellor Erhard on this subject. The President questioned what we would do if the Chancellor said Yes. The Secretary General pointed out that saying yes to him would not create a problem, but if he said yes in response to an American question the US would be in difficulty. The President pommented that in any event the targets with which SACEUR is concerned are covered by weapons outside SACEUR's command and that it was partly a question of symbolism.

Reverting to the question of the veto, he asked how the formula should be developed. Ambassador Finletter suggested that the Secretary General and one or more co-operative European countries should float the idea.

The President then asked the Secretary General how much real interest there is in the MLF. The Secretary General replied that the Germans have an undoubted interest in it and then reviewed the status of interest of the remaining countries.

Mr. Schaetzel added that in a recent meeting in England he had found British leaders, who arrived at the meeting prejudiced against the force, turning to a much more understanding attitude after hearing its possibilities elaborated by the Americans.

There was then a brief discussion on the experimental use of an American guided missile destroyer and a supply ship to determine the effectiveness of the MLF formula.

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MEMORANDUM

Van: Mr. D. U. Stikker

Washington, June 16, 1961.

~~Aan~~: Conversation with President Kennedy.

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At the discussion with President Kennedy, which lasted for more than one hour, there were also present Mr Acheson, Mr Kohler, Mr Nitze, Ambassador Finletter and several of their assistants.

During this meeting we only discussed NATO strategy, the Berlin situation and the attitude v.à.v. NATO of General de Gaulle, with whom President Kennedy had had a discussion on this subject during his visit to Paris. There was no time available to enter into problems like Angola, which was sufficiently discussed with Mr Rusk himself at the dinner at Blair House, where a great many more people were present.

The President asked me to introduce the subjects I would like to discuss with him.

I started by expressing my concern about the confusion which might become apparent in the near future with regard to the different plans for force requirements which were now being discussed by SACEUR and SACLANT with Ministers of Defense and the new force requirements which would appear in the new U.S. memorandum on July 25th, 1961, in which the principles of the paper introduced on April 26 by Ambassador Finletter to the Council would now be translated into requirements and be given to NATO members. I explained to the President that the basic differences between the requirements might be the following:

Document MC/70 was based on a balance between conventional and nuclear armament, these last e.g. of the cruise-type, and the MC/96 requirements were based on a similar balance, but that the cruise-type missiles as obsolete would be replaced by MRBM's. The new memorandum of July 25th would probably emphasize only an increase in effectiveness of conventional weapons without giving an indication of the balance which had to be found in a new still to be developed nuclear weapons system.

I told the President that I fully subscribed to the necessity of increasing conventional weapons, but the only approach to this problem was to stop talking about theory and philosophy and to translate the new thinking of the U.S. Administration into a breakdown of new requirements for all the countries concerned. This was to be done in the new memorandum of July 25th. However, a realistic assessment of the possible attitudes of the different member countries indicated that only three of the major powers might be capable and willing to increase their conventional forces. These countries were France, in the case the Algerian war would come to an end, Germany that

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certainly should do more, and also, Italy, which perhaps might do more. It was only in the case that these three countries would take action for an increase in conventional forces that perhaps a few of the smaller countries, and with even less chance the U.K., could be persuaded to follow that example. The three countries I mentioned, however, were each keenly interested in having the right balance with nuclear weapons and unless they obtained an assurance, be it only in principle, that the still to be chosen new nuclear weapons system would become available, I had little hope of obtaining a positive response from these three countries. The new memorandum of the 25th of July would certainly have to be studied by each government before reactions could be given in the Council and, as during the month of August most government officials in Europe were normally on leave, it could not be hoped that serious discussions in the Council could take place before mid-September. It might well be that in that same period the crisis around Berlin would have to be fought out and the position of the Alliance will be very weak indeed if at that same time the European countries would have to declare that they could not agree with the new American conception on strategy. Such a situation would decrease still more the credibility of the will and of the power of the Alliance to resist Russian aggression. I indicated that if such a situation really would arise it would be better to drop the further study of military requirements, as such a study would only have an academic character against the grim background of the possibility of an immediate nuclear war with Russia.

Ambassador Finletter intervened and said that he fully agreed that we should stop talking theory, but that nevertheless it might be useful to continue as far as possible our discussions on the realistic approach of the Memorandum of the 25th of July. He also remarked that no decision that no nuclear weapons system would become available had as yet been taken.

President Kennedy underlined this statement and asked for further information about the differences between Maces, Matadors against MRBM's. He asked me whether there still existed the feeling in Europe that it was uncertain that the U.S. would ever use nuclear weapons for a war in Europe and he wanted to confirm, although he had done so already repeatedly, that in case of war he would not hesitate to use nuclear weapons on behalf of Europe.

On the other hand he acknowledged that in his discussions two days earlier with Prime-Minister Fanfani, in his talks of some weeks ago with Minister Strauss and from communications he had received from Chancellor Adenauer the difference of opinion I mentioned had become apparent and that my fears about the attitude of these countries might well be justified.

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At this moment Mr Acheson made a statement in which he subscribed to my concern about the Berlin situation. He had been instructed by the President to prepare a document on the policy to be followed on the Berlin crisis, which had to be submitted to the President, but already now he expressed as his personal opinion that the credibilityof the deterrent had to be increased in the very near future if we wanted Mr Khrushchev to reconsider his aggressive attitude. It might be necessary to increase already in the coming fortnight the state of readiness of American forces. Preparations for mobilisation might be made and if in the course of the coming months Mr Khrushchev were to increase the tension, it might also be necessary that we from our side should follow suit and increase the tension a little more by deciding upon the state of alert, to mobilise and to transport U.S. divisions to Europe, together with a great quantity of military equipment. Mr Acheson agreed that if such measures were going to be taken there was no sense in the continuation of the academic studies of military requirements. He asked me, however, if I could give any indication of the attitude of the Allies on Berlin.

At this moment President Kennedy asked my opinion what he should do at this moment. After some further discussion I replied to these questions in the following sense:

I had had no official discussions with any of the governments concerned, but I believed that the populations of many countries would not understand that the West could risk a nuclear war if this had to be done because, instead of a stamp on documents for access to Berlin by Russian authorities, these stamps had to be given by East-German authorities. The populations of the European countries would probably not be able to understand that the acceptance of this change of stamp would really imply that the West recognised sovereign rights of East-Germany of all access routes to West-Berlin.

A different problem would be if it were really true, as had been suggested by Mr Ullbricht, that refugee-camps in West-Berlin had to disappear, the airfield of Tempelhof had to be closed down and that all air-traffic to West-Berlin had to be shipped to East-Germany. It was, however, clear that not only in some European countries, but also in the United States (and I referred to the statement made by Senator Mansfield the day before) there was hesitation. Perhaps other countries would insist on negotiations, but the key to this problem was in the hands of Chancellor Adenauer, because only he could decide what might be the ultimate concessions which hewould be willing to make. I had received information from some of the immediate collaborators of the Chancellor that perhaps he might be willing to make concessions at the last moment and it might well be at a certain moment an awkward position for the President of the United

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States if he were to start mobilisation and many other measures, if later on he were let down even by Germany.

In this connection I told the President that I had received the day before a visit from Ambassador Grewe and that I had asked him to send a cable to Bonn, asking for the possibility that during my visit on the 26th and 27th of June I could have a private talk with Chancellor Adenauer, with nobody else present. In case at this discussion with the Chancellor I could obtain an indication of his attitude, I would ask the Chancellor to permit me to inform the President.

On the question of the document of the 25th of July I replied that it would be better if such a document could be ready at an earlier moment and in case the crisis around Berlin had then already come out into the open, these studies had better be dropped. However, in case the studies could continue, I urgently asked that again this document might be supplemented by a statement that no decision on the new nuclear weapons system had yet been taken and that the United States'Government was entirely open for discussion of this matter.

I had the impression from his rather lengthy replies that the President agreed in general with the statements made by Mr Acheson and myself.

After this discussion of strategy and Berlin, I asked the President whether he felt free to give me any indication of the attitude of President de Gaulle on NATO and its organisation.

President Kennedy told me that he had had a discussion with President de Gaulle on this matter and that his position towards NATO had not changed. General de Gaulle had indicated that in case the negotiations with the F.L.N. on Algeria were successful already in the fall of this year French troops would be withdrawn from Algeria to France. At the time when this takes place General de Gaulle will ask for the reorganisation of NATO and probably along the same lines as he had indicated in 1958. He had, however, promised the President at his request that such a reorganisation would not be asked for if at that time there were to be a crisis round Berlin.

The President's own feeling was that when General de Gaulle were to ask for the reorganisation, there would be ~~lit~~ little reason for the other 14 members of NATO to accept such a reorganisation and that it would be perhaps better to try and continue with the work in the Alliance under the present system in the best possible way.

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2 copies only.
Paris, Febr.20, 1962

Van: Mr. D. U. Stikker

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Note for the file.

ADDENDUM to the memorandum of conversation with President Kennedy.

1. At the end of the conversation, when Mr Finletter had left, I gave the President some more detailed information about the statements made by Minister Strauss during his last visit. I quoted from the report of this conversation, prepared by Böker.

2. The President asked me whether I could give an evaluation of the new attitude of the Russians as regards Berlin.

   Having no more information available than what I could read in the press or hear from Ambassadors, I could only guess and naturally my thoughts turned to the difficulties with China and the internal difficulties in Russia about economic affairs. I doubted whether Khrushchev really wanted to arrive at an open clash with NATO over Berlin, but, nevertheless, miscalculations were possible.

   In case of a very serious crisis I suggested that the President should, in a dramatic way, make one final effort in a bilateral meeting between the two K's to prevent a war.

   My second suggestion was that perhaps it would not be a bad idea to let the Germans have a private talk with Khrushchev. Up till now the German attitude was uncertain about military measures (Adenauer does not believe in limited wars and wants to prevent nuclear wars). On the other hand Germany sided often with France in following a very strong line during discussions. These two attitudes were not compatible and perhaps Germany might become more realistic when it had to face up to reality during private discussions. I could not see any danger in these discussions as long as Adenauer is in control.

   Kennedy did not express any strong feelings about the two suggestions I made.

3. President Kennedy then turned to the difficulties with France in NATO.

   I pointed out that de Gaulle accepts NATO as an essential element of his policy, but that he refuses to cooperate

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unless the organisation be changed. This created difficulties but we should give France the opportunity to solve the Algerian problem. It might well be possible that the generation which comes after de Gaulle would become more European and Atlantic minded.

Kennedy agreed with this view and expressed himself strongly against the setting up of a control by a triumvirate in NATO.

4. Finally, we exchanged some views on Portugal and the Azores, and on New-Guinea.

I expressed my concern about the reactions the U.S. attitude on the Angola problem and New-Guinea might have on the solidarity in the Alliance. On the other hand I acknowledged that it was difficult to support completely Portugal or the Netherlands in their respective policies. I do not believe that these statements will affect in any way the attitude of President Kennedy v.à.v. these two countries.

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