

SECRET

THIS DOCUMENT IS THE PROPERTY OF HER BRITANNIC MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

Printed for the Cabinet. May 1963

C. (63) 96

Copy No. 52

28th May, 1963

CABINET

NATO NUCLEAR FORCE: MIXED-MANNED COMPONENT

MEMORANDUM BY THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE

1. The Foreign Secretary's memorandum deals with the political case for a mixed-manned component of the nuclear force of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). This memorandum is concerned primarily with the military, financial and technical aspects. These are grave and difficult matters in which the arguments are by no means all one way, and I hope that my colleagues will weigh them carefully and not come to any hasty decision. Whatever we decide is likely to have far-reaching consequences for our military and foreign policy.

The Military Value of the Force

2. The force would be of no significant military value to NATO. The additional nuclear power which it would provide would add nothing to the deterrent and would be superfluous to the military nuclear power that already exists.

3. Moreover, the resources required for the force could only be provided at the expense, at least to some extent, of the resources required for conventional forces in which NATO is deficient. The net result of creating the force would therefore almost certainly be to weaken rather than strengthen Western defence.

4. If the force is to fulfil any political requirement, its contributors would need to be satisfied that it was militarily effective, even though superfluous. Navy-to-Navy talks between ourselves and the United States are going on, but so far the Naval Staff have not changed their view that the United States have under-estimated the vulnerability of a surface ship force.

Cost to the United Kingdom

5. The United States have suggested that we might contribute about 10 per cent of the cost, which they estimate to average \$600 million a year over 10 years. This would mean an average United Kingdom contribution of about £15 million or £20 million a year. All experience shows that these estimates will in fact be exceeded, and no one can foresee the cost of modernising and keeping up the force in the longer term.

6. However much the United States might be willing to ease our financial part in the force, any participation as a full contributor must mean a substantial and open-ended addition to the Defence Budget.

7. I have warned my colleagues that it will be impossible to maintain our present defence programme and commitments within an expenditure of 7 per cent of the G.N.P. The latest information reinforces this warning. The Defence Estimates for 1965-66 are now expected to exceed by some £175 million the target of £1,850 million agreed by the Defence Committee last summer. This makes no allowance for a contribution to the mixed-manned force.

Possible Form of United Kingdom Contribution

8. The United States have suggested that an acceptable United Kingdom contribution in kind for the mixed-manned force would be the provision of United Kingdom warheads. The provision of warheads raises some complicated and potentially very expensive problems. We should be deluding ourselves if we

SECRET

supposed that, by providing warheads, we should have found a cheap way of contributing to this force without cost to the United Kingdom taxpayer. Nor could we expect that this would exempt us from other forms of contribution including manpower.

Conclusion on the Military Case

9. My conclusion must be that there is no military case for providing this force, and that any United Kingdom contribution to it would have to be justified and publicly presented on political grounds. I wish to make a few comments on these for the consideration of my colleagues.

Comments on Political Aspects

10. The essential question is whether the creation of the force may be expected to increase or decrease the unity and security of the Atlantic Alliance. The claim is that the force would prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons by giving West Germany a part in the nuclear defence of the Alliance in a way that would satisfy her without the risk of her gaining effective control over any significant nuclear capability. It is by this claim that the proposal must be judged.

11. I have grave doubts whether the force would achieve even this purpose. The proposal is said to be that the force should be controlled by a committee which would act by unanimity and that any change in its rules should be by unanimous decision. There is positive evidence that the Germans envisage that the principle of unanimity should be adopted for a transitional period only and that a system of decision by a majority should be introduced after several years. We also know that Mr. Livingston Merchant, the President's special Ambassador, has stated that the United States Government would be prepared after a few years to review the system of unanimous decision. It appears to be common to all solutions that, apart from the United States, Germany would be far and away the most substantial shareholder. The conclusion is that any plan in which Germany would be willing to take part would carry a risk amounting even to a probability that after a period it would give Western Germany effective control over a significant nuclear capability. We have reason to suppose that the thoughts of the German General Staff are moving on these lines.

12. Apart from this political risk, there is the question whether the rule of unanimity, while it lasted, could be made physically effective by "permissive links". This is a technical question, but even if experts were to provide what they believed to be a satisfactory answer, the Russians are unlikely to be persuaded, and our own public might also be sceptical after the assurances we have given them about the absence of permissive links in United Kingdom POLARIS weapons.

13. There are two dangers in a plan which might put effective nuclear power into the hands of the Germans. First, there is widespread and persistent fear about the reliability of the Germans themselves. Second, the reaction of the Russians, who would certainly see the risk as a real and grave one. One consequence must be a sharp increase in tension between East and West and probably the abandonment of any hope of a *détente* with the USSR for a long time to come. The Russians might well be provoked into creating a similar force themselves, and might feel driven towards the proliferation of nuclear weapons among their own associates including the Chinese. Moreover, the very nature of a nuclear force of surface ships, mobile and apparent over a wide area of the world, is likely to increase tension and apprehension everywhere.

14. It may be argued that if we do not give West Germany a part in nuclear defence by this means, she is likely to gain it by means that would be even more dangerous—for example, in collaboration with France or on her own. It is, however, by no manner of means certain that she would or could do so. She is bound by Treaty not to manufacture such weapons. The breach of that Treaty would have far-reaching effects upon the obligations of her allies and we have no reason to suppose that France is anxious to provide Germany with nuclear weapons.

15. A further point is that to create such a force under the control of a few members of the Alliance would be, in effect, to create a new Alliance separate from NATO. This would weaken the unity of the Atlantic Alliance.

16. My own conclusion is, therefore, that a mixed-manned force is more likely to bring about proliferation of nuclear weapons than to prevent it, and to decrease rather than increase the unity and security of the Atlantic Alliance. I believe, therefore, that we ought to seek to bring about the abandonment of the plan. We are not at present committed to this plan and we ought not to drift into a position in which we are so committed.

17. We ought therefore to decide our attitude to the project as a whole before agreeing to take part in any discussions with the United States about how the force might be created. It is unlikely in such discussions that, having got thus far, the United States would allow considerations of cost or military practicability to frustrate their proposal. The United States themselves take the view that the worst of all possible outcomes would be if we joined the Drafting Group and then at the last moment were unable to sign whatever treaty or agreement was drafted.

18. I am well aware of the problems which must arise if we tell the United States that we cannot proceed further with them upon the basis which they propose. Nevertheless, we must consider our attitude with the utmost care before we proceed with proposals for which the military case is non-existent and the political case both doubtful and controversial.

19. Should we decide not to proceed, there remains the question how best to handle the matter. My inclination would be to say publicly that our defence resources were already fully stretched, that this new weapons system could not be defended on military grounds and was bound to be costly, and that in these circumstances we could not see our way to proceeding with it. We could in addition say privately to the United States that we had grave doubts arising from the known German intentions in the matter and the fact that such an alliance would have a divisive effect upon NATO.

P. T.

*Ministry of Defence, S.W. 1,
27th May, 1963.*

